

# TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE

## Walker County Agriculture News Update

March 2016

Greetings from the Walker  
County, Texas A&M AgriLife  
Extension office!

***"Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness."*** - Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington (1787)

### **One of my former Master Gardeners sent me that quote this past week.**

I found the quote very fitting for this newsletter. I received the email while I was at the San Antonio Stock Show. The statement ties into our last newsletter issue and bridges into this set of information exceptionally well. It was a very timely thought.

### **I posted a statement on my personal Facebook page a few months ago:**

It just happened to coincide with bow season, during the one and only time I climbed in a tree with a stick and string. I took the photo and had the thought leading to the comment. I generally seem to have some really deep thoughts when I am up in a tree for some reason. Sometimes I wonder if I should move my desk. Most people who saw the post thought the statement had to do with bow hunting due to the photo but it really didn't. It was about staying on top of things.

***"On the pointed side of life; where being sharp is relevant, staying sharp is essential."***

I find it useful to stay up with changes. Go figure.. Sometimes these changes may not be items we find very appealing. Here is a link to a recent posting from David Schmidt regarding disruptive innovation from his [Animal Agriculture in Changing Climate](#). If you have the time, I would recommend reading the column just to stay up with things. You may be interested in a few new Ag opportunities.

### **Survey Update/Results:**

Your participation in our December 2015 Ag Communications Survey has provided me with some really useful information about your educational preferences. One of the items which developed directly from that project is a revamping of our [Walker County AgriLife \(Ag\) web pages](#). When the results were compiled; you indicated a fairly high preference and effectiveness rating for web site based sources of information. Between you and me, web site maintenance is never a fun project; however, due to the results of the survey I took your comments seriously. I added content to our Ag & Natural Resources pages; cleaned up old links; and worked out a better flow of the pages. I encourage you to take a look as I am sure you will find the updated resources very helpful.

**Additional Web Content:** [Ag Tips by Month](#)  
[Farmers & Ranchers Resource List \(s\)](#)  
[Horticulture – Master Gardeners / LEAF-PRO](#)

One additional comment which I will make at this time: There were a few items in the survey which did not receive high preference ratings. In reviewing the survey data; we were unsure if this may be because of a lack of familiarity with the media. Just to offer a little opportunity for further education on the subject I have added

podcast media to our web site under the Ag Tips by Month and the Master Gardeners/LEAF-PRO pages. Also, over the past year; I have been writing these newsletters in more of a blog type format in hopes of increasing the readability. If you want to see the difference, just go into the Archived Ag Newsletter Page linked off the Ag & Natural Resources pull down menu and take a look.

## **Grapevine Pruning Workshop**

**Thursday, Feb. 25 @ 1pm**

**Bernhardt Winery**

**9043 CR 204**

**Plantersville, TX 77363**

(\*Short Notice on this one –just in TODAY) If you are interested in learning about pruning grapevines; plan on a hands-on participation event following pruning instructions & demonstration. Bring pruning shears and any pruning & season-readiness questions. There is no cost for this workshop. (RSVP not required, but certainly appreciated).

If you have any questions, please contact Fran Pontasch, Extension Program Specialist Viticulture, Gulf Coast p: (979) 458-0131 | c: 254) 977-3641 | f:(979) 845-8906 or [fmPontasch@tamu.edu](mailto:fmPontasch@tamu.edu).

## **Ranch Management University**

**April 4<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**8:00 AM**

**G. Rollie White visitor's Center**

**7707 Raymond Stotzer Pkw., College Station, TX**

**Preregistration through 3/29/16 \$500.00**

**<https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/index.cfm/productDetails/ProductID/1931/>**

The Ranch Management University is an intensive 5-day event targeting new or inexperienced ranchers and landowners and covers the fundamentals of soils and soil fertility, forage establishment, pasture management, and utilization by livestock. Basic livestock management practices such as castrating and vaccinating calves are demonstrated. Grazing management, stocking rate, and body condition scoring are also highlighted. Additionally, several wildlife management topics are covered for those interested in managing white-tailed deer, turkey, quail, feral hogs, and farm ponds. Approximately one-half the workshop involves lectures and discussion, with the remainder consisting of the field demonstrations of various how to methods of soil sampling, planting, calibrating sprayers, and inoculating legume seed. Various forage species, including bermudagrass, small grains, annual ryegrass, and clovers are studied by workshop attendees. Additional demonstrations covers deer necropsy, hog trap management, and pond fisheries management. In addition, all meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks) and an RMU workbook are provided.

## **Feeding Horses**

[Are You Meeting Your Horses' Energy Requirements?](#) Dr. Dennis Sigler, Horse Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service briefly explains how to use the Body Condition Score System to determine if your horse is getting enough to eat relative to their daily activity.

## **Best Olives to Grow in Texas**

This is not an uncommon question which I have received over the past few years. Here is some information for those of you interested in the current list of options for Olive variety selection. Our Texas winters and cold hardiness have been the real issue with selecting olive varieties. [Best Olives to Grow in Texas](#)

\*For more information: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension [Olive Fact Sheet](#)

## Interested in an App for that? [Pond Calculator App](#)

The PondCalc app is a comprehensive tool for recreational pond users as well as aquaculture producers. This app is downloadable on the iTunes App Store. It is a free download.

## Knowing When to Assist At Calving

By Joe Paschal, Extension Beef Specialist

Some of you are or will be calving replacement heifers and I thought it would be a good time to review the process in case you are wondering when you might need to assist. Calving is generally divided into three stages. The first stage is when the mucous plug inside the female's cervix begins to dissolve and the cervix begins to dilate. This may take several hours. The female may wander off to be alone during this time. This stage ends as the calf's nose and feet enter the birth canal.

The second stage is the actual delivery of the calf. The fluid filled "water bags" that surround and cushion the fetus are expelled and the calf is pushed through and out of the birth canal. This usually takes less than an hour in cows and less than two hours in heifers. If the process lasts longer, veterinary assistance may be required. Cows that have had previous calves deliver more quickly, often in 30 minutes or less.

The third and final stage of calving is the expulsion of the placenta or "after birth". This usually occurs within eight to twelve hours after calving. If the placenta is still in the cow after twelve hours it is considered "retained". Do not attempt to remove it by inserting your hand and "unbuttoning" it. Prevention of infection of the uterus is important and veterinary advice is recommended.

Most difficult calving can be avoided by using "easy calving" bulls that have high accuracy and high calving ease Expected Progeny Differences and cows with acceptable pelvic area. Cows that calve easier come back into estrus and rebreed more quickly. For more information on avoiding calving difficulty we recommend a visit with your local veterinarian and county Extension agent.

Suggested additional reading (from beef.tamu.edu)

<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-assisting-difficult-calving.pdf>

<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-avoiding-calving-problems.pdf>

<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-recognizing-handling.pdf> (an oldie but a goodie!).

## Forests In Flux: Educational Series

### TAMU: Horticulture/Forest Science Building

4:00 – 5:00 PM

Working closely with our Extension Specialists has its benefits. The most recent "heads-up" I have received is the following tidbit of information on this upcoming series of talks. The Ecosystem Science & Management department at TAMU will be holding a 2016 Spring Seminar Series on the Texas A&M campus at the HFSB building; room 104 (unless otherwise specified). Remaining presentations in this series are as follows:

Mar. 1 Dr. Heather McCarthy – **Plant biology and ecosystems ecology**  
Department of Microbiology and Plant Biology, University of Oklahoma

Mar. 8 Dr. Matthew Dickinson – **Biophysical fire ecology**  
Research Ecologist, US Forest Service

Mar. 22 **Dyksterhuis Distinguished Lecture** with Dr. Steven Archer (Rudder Tower, room 601)  
School of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of Arizona

Apr. 5 Dr. Harold Burkhart – **Forest biometry**  
Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, Virginia Tech

Apr. 12 Dr. Jianbang Gan – **PINEMAP project**  
Ecosystem Science and Management, TAMU

## ***In This Issue:***

### **ON YOUR MARK, GET READY! GARDEN!!**

#### **Hurry up and..**

Spring in east Texas is always looked forward to. Even though our winter is usually very mild compared to most of the country, we can't wait to get outside and do something, anything really. When the days start to warm and the nighttime temperatures rise a bit; plants start to green up; and gardeners get the urge to dig. Others think about fishing.

I have to admit, I am in the category as being linked to the soil. I like to dig around and plant things. Vegetable gardening and fishing have some similarities in our part of the world. Expect more on that connection later.

The question we have to ask is what should we plant; where; and when do we plant it. Important items and priorities should always come first in our thinking process. It is paramount that we put our plants in the proper place for any hope of production. If you are growing vegetables you will find full sun or places receiving minimum amounts of late afternoon shade are best. A soil that holds adequate moisture but drains well is next. Or is it?

Yes, I think that is the correct order. Those two statements on sunlight and soil are somewhat of a chicken or egg type of thing, but you can more easily amend soil when it's not always possible to clear trees or tear down buildings.

Having the perfect spot to garden with optimum light and great soil isn't something available to everybody. Quite honestly, when most of us bought or built our houses, we probably were not thinking about where we would have the garden located a few years further down the road.

By the way, I work with Master Gardeners so I know there are a few out there who will argue that statement with me. Some of them actually did buy their property to garden, and then decided to build a house; however, that's not the common homeowner.

You have all heard "where there is a will, there is a way". We can work around most garden issues with planning, effort, and money. But this article is not about building garden infrastructure.

#### **On Your Mark, Get Ready! Garden!!**

**By Reggie Lepley, CEA-Ag/NR**

And we are off! Spring has sprung; birds are chirping; insects are buzzing; and the squirrels are starting to eye your peach and plum trees.

It's time to dig. I hope you are watching the weather forecasts regularly by now. It is not a good thing to be caught unprepared for that last cold snap or overnight freeze without garden style thermal protection readily available. You should have already had your soil samples analyzed as well.

“First is first”, let’s make sure the soil is warm enough. Planting seed in cool soil isn’t going to get you the gardener of the year award; even if the seed germinates. Seed that germinated in soil below optimum temperatures often never reaches its potential for a variety of reasons. Don’t jump the gun on this one.

Optimum; no let’s say realistic temperatures, for our popular garden vegetables will vary by plant species. Vegetable gardeners may plant the following species such as onions; cabbage; beets; radish; and potatoes once soil temperature range between 45 and 50 degrees in the early spring. The early season list goes on; turnips do well at 50 degrees; cabbage and chard germinate well at 54 degrees; while tomatoes and corn need 55 degree soils.

So what was that gardening and fishing connection I mentioned earlier? Years ago I heard another County Agent reference the fact that, “It’s time to plant your summer garden, when you see the people fishing on the side of the river; have quit sitting on their buckets and are instead sitting on the ground”.

As I am writing this, I am listening to Tom Leroy discuss vegetable gardening with the Walker County, Master Gardener Class. We all consider Tom the closest thing to a Texas vegetable guru as there is. I think he has groupies that follow him around. Anyway, Tom says that the issue with tomatoes is they need cooler night time temperatures to hold the bloom which will ultimately form the fruit. Sometimes to his thinking; it is well worth the effort to plant tomatoes prior to optimum soil temperature arriving. The thinking is because you can, the gamble may be worth the effort.

This will have your tomatoes producing fruit before it gets “Too hot to fish” in Texas. Just be prepared to protect them from frost.

Our other warm season vegetables such as melons; beans; and peppers need soil that has warmed into the 60’s as a minimum. With that said, better results will be found with generally warmer soils. Best results have been found planting at; 64 degrees for cucumber; 68 degrees for cantaloupe; 70 degrees for squash; 72 degrees for watermelon; it is found that beans and eggplant germinate well at 72 degrees; okra at 73 degrees; and 75 degrees for pumpkin to round out the a few of the popular species.

If you just have to have a planting reference other than actual soil temperature, you may find our Walker County Vegetable Planting Guide of use. It is posted on the Walker County, Texas AgriLife Extension Ag & Natural Resources, [Horticulture](#) web page. The planting guide will contain links for each species listed that will tell you how to grow and care for that particular plant.

Hold on! Slow down just a bit. Before you start planting those gardens, did you spend any time thinking about which vegetable variety you want to plant?

We can help with those questions also. See the same link above to search the recommended vegetable variety chart. Or if you are interested in Tom LeRoy’s variety list - (I would be) take a look at the [Montgomery Co Recommended Vegetable Varieties](#).

The next item which I will bring up is soil borne disease prevention. This probably won’t be the issue during the first few years of gardening which it could become later on. But it is something to think about. And plan for. Crop rotation has long been recognized as an inexpensive form of plant disease control. This practice prevents the continuous development of disease organisms that would otherwise build up in the soil and attack a plant species. Crop rotation breaks the cycle of organism development and thus helps limit the damage potential when the susceptible crop is grown again.

For our home gardeners, a four family rotation works well. This can be done during a years’ cycle. Common garden type crops which can be rotated are: Mustards (cabbage, broccoli, mustard greens & cauliflower), Nightshades (tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes), Grasses (such as corn), Peas (Blackeye, snap beans, dry beans). This concept can be further expanded with succession planting. Succession cropping permits several plantings of certain well liked vegetables without causing disease buildup. For example, four or five separate crops of lettuce

or two to three separate plantings of beans or squash can be worked into a garden inside a single season by the gardener who plans ahead.

One succession that works well follows like this. In early spring, radishes, kohlrabi and turnip greens (mustard family) are planted. Follow with tomatoes and peppers (nightshade family), and finish out the season with a seeding of beets, spinach and chard (goosefoot family). If you have been reading carefully; you may have noticed that it's a bit late on the tomatoes. Another planting plan could include lettuce in spring, squash in early summer and broccoli in fall. In each case the spring and fall crops are always frost tolerant, cool season vegetables. Another succession planting of three families would include an early spring planting of the mustard family (radish, kohlrabi, turnip greens), followed by early summer planting of nightshades (tomato, pepper, eggplant), and a fall planting of goosefoot family (beets, spinach, chard).

Gardeners also have the opportunity to intercrop specific plantings which can provide a rotation within the rotation. Intercropping involves the simultaneous culture of two or more vegetables or a vegetable with a non-vegetable plant in the same garden space within the same growing season. The important item here is to plant in such a manor to allow each species to receive needed light.

Many vegetable combinations are possible. To keep a rotation sequence in proper order, it is best to intercrop members of the same family whenever possible.

Radish can be sown between rows of transplanted cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. The radishes will be harvested long before its slower maturing companions take up the space. Bibb lettuce or leaf lettuce can be planted between slower growing endive and escarole. The lettuce will be harvested before the endive needs the room.

So it seems there are just a few things to think about as you are digging around in that cool spring soil. Be sure to keep an eye on those squirrels; as you are getting the fishing poles ready to use after the garden is in.

If you have questions or would like more information regarding Extension Educational Programs, call us at (936) 435-2426.

*Reggie Lepley*

Reggie Lepley,  
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Provisions from the American Disability Act will be considered when planning educational programs and activities. Please notify the Walker County Extension Office if you plan on attending an Extension Educational program and need specialized services. Notification of at least three to five days in advance is needed, so that we may have ample time to acquire resources needed to meet your needs.

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