May/June 2017

WARD COUNTY AG REPORT

A bi-monthly publication of the Ward County Extension Office

AGENT'S NOTE

Well folks, I'm sad to say this will be the last newsletter you receive from me as Ag Agent. I've accepted an offer for a position in the midstream industry, and I've decided to accept. My last day on duty will be June 9th. I want to thank you all for your support and cooperation over the past four years.

I'll still be running cows north of town so I'll still see ya'll around.

Regards,

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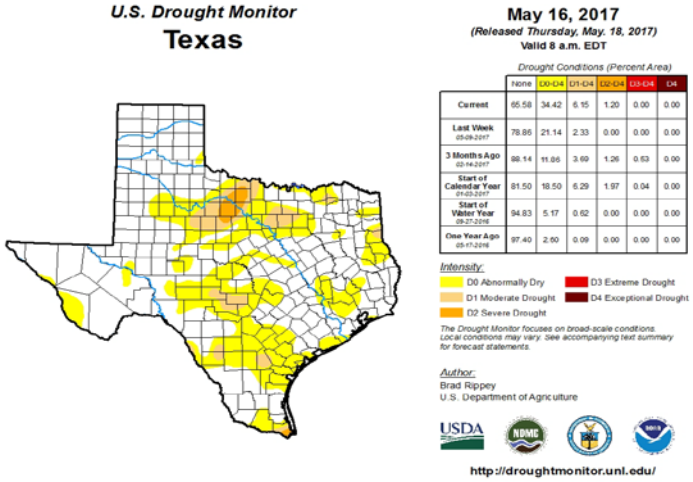
DEMONSTRATION CORNER

AgriLIFE EXTENSION Texas A&M System
Agricultural Demonstration and Applied Research Project

RANGE MONITORING ON COX RANCH

We'll be going out to the Cox Ranch on May 24th to take the spring 2017 pictures for the ongoing range monitoring demonstration.

DROUGHT OUTLOOK



- *Courtesy of the National Drought Mitigation Center*

LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS SHOULD BE AWARE OF SMALL-HEADED SNEEZEWEED

BY: Kay Ledbetter

One plant currently flowering across different parts of the state is poisonous and should be of concern to ranchers, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

Small-headed sneezeweed, which falls in the sunflower family, is a native, warm-season annual that grows statewide except for the East Texas Piney Woods and extends into northern Mexico, said Dr. Barron Rector, AgriLife Extension range specialist in College Station.

"Be aware that small-headed sneezeweed is very poisonous in the flowering stage to mainly sheep, but cattle, goats, mules and horses are also susceptible," Rector said.

Dr. Cat Barr, Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab's toxicologist in College Station, agreed.

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"I was taught this plant causes 'spewing sickness,'" Barr said. "Ruminants technically regurgitate from abomasum backward into the rumen, but this plant irritates the gastrointestinal tract so much that even cattle will vomit plant material and have green slobber and nasal discharge. You can imagine how a horse would colic, as well."

Sneezeweed consumption by grazing animals produces signs of illness including weakness, staggering, diarrhea, vomiting, salivation, bloating, groaning and grinding of teeth, sticky non-pelleted feces and gastroenteritis, Rector said. Poisoned animals can have forced and fast respiration and a nasal discharge. Signs of illness will appear within a few hours after the consumption of sneezeweed, and animals may convulse prior to death, Barr said.

"Not much else causes an illness that looks like this," she said, "but if you need confirmation, our laboratory can examine the rumen content or stomach content microscopically and identify the plant material. We're here to assist your veterinarian with a diagnosis."

Rector said earlier feeding studies with this plant have shown that consumption of as little as one-quarter of a percent of an animal's body weight produced acute poisoning and death, with the mature plants being more toxic than the seedlings. The plant, also commonly called "small sneezeweed" and "sneezeweed," commonly occurs in small localized areas on moist habitats of silty, clay loam and sandy soils around ponds, tanks, bar ditches and especially in ephemeral or dry creek bottoms, he said.

Rector said wet falls followed by wet springs usually assure a good crop of seedlings. He said in the past two weeks he's seen a lot of the plants growing from Sonora to Wichita Falls. "This spring, the small-headed sneezeweed can be found growing abundantly in creek bottoms that are drying out from Junction and Sonora northward to the Rolling Plains," he said.

The plants have a single basal stem that can grow to a height of about 4 feet. The plant is characterized by having stem leaves that are alternate, lanceolate or oblong and are decurrent, running down the somewhat angled stem.

"Generally these plants flower in June and July but with a warm winter and spring, they are flowering in mid-May," Rector said. "The heads have disk flower or central flowers that are tinged pale red to brown. The ray flowers are short and always yellow in color."

Because the plants are usually found in localized areas in a pasture, hand pulling, mowing or burning may be effective management options, he said.

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Fencing livestock away from localized infected areas also can reduce or eliminate potential problems.

Small-headed sneezeweed is susceptible to most broadleaf herbicides recommended for rangeland use. As an annual plant, the most effective treatment with a herbicide is when the plants are 4-6 inches in height and these may be treated with ground broadcast applications before flowering when the plants are actively growing.

Rector said most grazing animals will not eat sneezeweed unless they are in a state of hunger or searching for green material or forage under conditions when grasses have matured and are in short supply.

"Your management and observation are needed to keep this plant from becoming your next problem," he said. "It is a good idea to scout areas where you have seen this plant growing in previous years."

Rector said additional information can be found in the AgriLife Extension publication B-6105, "Toxic Plants of Texas: Integrated Management Strategies to Prevent Livestock Losses," found through the AgriLife Bookstore at https://www.agrilifebookstore.org/.

- *Courtesy of AgriLife Today*

PREGNANCY DETERMINATION: METHODS, POSITIVES & NEGATIVES

BY: Dr. Bruce Carpenter, Associate Professor & Extension Beef Cattle Specialist – Ft. Stockton

There has long been interest in diagnosing pregnancy. Some 4000 years ago, reference is found in Egyptian records to determining pregnancy in women based on changes in skin color and moistness (there were no experimental results reported on accuracy of the method). In beef cattle, the most common method for some time has been rectal palpation of the reproductive tract.

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This information was presented at the Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course comparing three methods for determining pregnancy, and a summary follows:

RECTAL PALPATION

Rectal Palpation is a very quick process requiring little equipment. It does require some training and experience, especially for evaluation in early stages of pregnancy though, in practice, many cattlemen test cows when weaning calves, culling open cows at that time. Cows can be sorted, based on pregnancy determination, right out of the working chute. Direct cost is low, from about $4-10/head. Indirect cost comes from misdiagnosis. An open cow called pregnant can cost up to 8 months of a cow's cost without return.

BLOOD TEST

Blood Tests are highly accurate (≥95%). There are two types. In one (BioPryn® from BioTracking, Inc.), blood samples are sent to a lab for analysis, with a cost of $2. 50-3.00 per sample plus shipping. Results are available within 24 hours of when the laboratory receives them, so cows must be held for that period before management decisions are made to keep or cull at that time. In the other test (Bovine Pregnancy Test from Idexx), available through veterinarians, samples can be analyzed in groups as collected, so cows can be evaluated and management decisions made the same day. Some practitioners prefer to analyze samples in their clinic; cost is usually $4-5 per sample with no shipping required. There are other private laboratories around the country that perform the blood analysis service as well. Cows must be individually identified, with ear tags, etc. Both of these are essentially yes/no tests, so stage of pregnancy is not determined.

Testing can be done as early as 28 days post breeding (i.e., in first-calf heifers). Lactating cows should not be tested until at least 75 days after calving because the protein being measured stays in the system from the previous pregnancy for about 75 days. This is not a problem in herds with controlled breeding/calving seasons of 90 days or less because all cows will have calved and be 75+ days after calving by the end of the breeding season. So, as indicated, just wait the recommended 28 days (or more) from when bulls are removed to bleed and test.

ULTRASOUND

Ultrasound is also highly accurate but does require expensive equipment and training and skill. Besides merely determining pregnancy, ultrasound can be used for such things as determining fetal gender and number and viability of fetuses.

Open cows cost. There are effective and feasible ways to determine pregnancy.

- *Courtesy of the Texas A&M Beef Cattle Browsing Newsletter*

BEEF CATTLE PRODUCERS MUST BE VIGILANT TO MITIGATE HERD HEALTH RISKS

BY: Blair Fannin

Beef cattle producers should be observant when conducting annual health vaccination protocols on their cattle, according to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts.

Though not a statewide threat, the fever tick has resulted in some herds in far South Texas to be subject to a quarantine zone. This topic, as well as proper vaccination protocol and techniques**,** were discussed at the recent Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Convention in San Antonio "Surveillance is key," said Dr. Joe Paschal, AgriLife Extension livestock specialist in Corpus Christi. "We want to enlist veterinarians and ranchers to be more observant of ticks on cattle. These fever ticks tend to prefer soft tissue along the dewlap, brisket, forearm and back in the flank area.

"It's a one-host tick and we can use the cow as a control method. Right now, we can dip or spray the cow. If producers or veterinarians see ticks on cattle that are unusual, even if they are not, they are encouraged to collect those ticks and put them in a little bottle of isopropyl alcohol and send it to Texas Animal Health Commission veterinarians."

Paschal said if they are identified as fever ticks, "we need to know where they are coming from and get a handle on them."

"More than 99 percent of the time they are going to be common ticks, and we are going to know what they are," he said. "There are some things to look for, and they are very easy to take off the animal. They are typically not very deep and not very colorful. When you pull a tick off and put it in your hand, it starts crawling off pretty fast. These ticks do not. They are very slow."

The technical name for Texas cattle fever is bovine babesiosis, which relates to the organisms that infect the red blood cells of cattle. It is their destruction of the red blood cells that results in anemia, fever and death.

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To learn more, AgriLife Extension experts recommend using Tick App, a free smartphone application available at http://tickapp.tamu.edu.

Meanwhile, because of a case in Florida, though now eradicated by animal health officials in that state, screwworm is still something producers should watch for. Dr. Tom Hairgrove, AgriLife Extension program coordinator for food and livestock systems in College Station, said watchfulness is key.

"We still need to be very observant," Hairgrove said. "It's a maggot and will feed on live flesh in animals. If you see maggots in a live animal, take some of those maggots, put them in isopropyl alcohol and send them to TAHC (veterinarians). We want to get ahead of it. With the Florida outbreak, it might have been around a while on some small animals and was missed. It could have been going on a lot longer than most people thought."

Hairgrove said this helps with surveillance and helps keep a record of where the samples are coming from." Hairgrove said he also advises beef cattle producers to develop a relationship with a local veterinarian.

"Sit down with your local practitioner," he said. "Develop a good herd health program. A vaccination is just like insurance. We are just trying to mitigate against risk."

- *Courtesy of AgriLife Today*

BQA TIP-OF-THE-MONTH:

FIREARMS & BEEF

BY: Dr. Jason Banta, Associate Professor & Extension Beef Cattle Specialist – Overton

A core principle of BQA is to implement management practices that prevent the adulteration of beef from foreign objects like bullets, birdshot, and buckshot. Shotguns should never be used to gather cattle and never use a firearm to encourage the neighbor's bull to go back across the fence. Additionally, make sure hunters are educated about this issue and that they are aware of the locations of any livestock during a hunt. For more information about BQA and the dates of upcoming BQA trainings please visit www.texasbeefquality.com .

- *Courtesy of the Texas A&M Beef Cattle Browsing Newsletter*

RANGE PLANT SPOTLIGHT:

Tahoka Daisy

(Machaeranthera tanacetifolia)

Description

Annual, Warm, Native

Also known as Prairie Aster or Tansy Aster, this native wildflower grows can grow to 12" – 18" tall and tends to bloom from spring to mid fall. The plant gets its name from where it was observed in the late 19th century near Tahoka, Texas in the Southern Plains.

Habitat

Tahoka Daisy likes sandy or gravelly disturbed sites and can be found throughout the western Great Plains. Extensive populations of Tahoka Daisy can be sign of overgrazing or other disturbances, such as drought or wildfire.

Wildlife Usage

Moderate

Livestock Usage

Poor

Sources:

Aggie Horticulture
http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu

Native American Seed
www.seedsource.com

If at any time you would like to be removed from our mailing list, call us at (432) 943-2682 or send an email to cleaton@ag.tamu.edu