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Weinheimer family makes valuable contributions to agriculture for 144 years
A look at the history of this Hill Country family and their impact on agriculture for more than a century.
By Martha A. Hollida

Balancing Act
The El Seven Ranch combines rice and cattle to make their bottomline profitable.
By Martha A. Hollida

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Information about apps and how to utilize them in your operation.
By Erika Lyon and Dr. Brian Arnall

Lots of topics on schedule for 68th Annual Texas Beef Cattle Short Course
Here are the details on this annual event in Aggieland.
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4 Strategic steps to a better business
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7:30 A.M. - Cattlemen's Breakfast
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Weinheimer family makes valuable contributions to agriculture for 144 years

By Martha A. Hollida

Success can be measured in many ways and withstanding the test of time is definitely one gauge of success. Weinheimer Ranch in Stonewall, Texas has withstood that test for 144 years and continues to be a viable diversified operation with a rich history and strong family leadership.

The ranch has adapted when needed and the family ownership has remained strong and continuous. Today, it includes the Hill Country ranch, another ranch in Chaves County, New Mexico and leased land in the Madisonville, Texas area for cattle. Over the years the income source has been cattle (both commercial and registered), sheep, goats, grains, orchards and hunting.

Jakob and Theresia Weinheimer and their six children arrived in Fredericksburg, Texas in June of 1846, which was the same year Fredericksburg was founded. They left Germany, traveled to Belgium, sailed for two months to Indianola, Texas and then homesteaded in the Texas Hill Country. Jakob and his two older sons were among signers of a petition that requested the Texas Legislature define the Fredericksburg area and form a new county named Gillespie from the existing counties of Bexar and Travis. The Weinheimer’s first brand was registered in 1851 and they received their citizenship in 1854.

Their son, John would acquire substantial land holdings in the county, including the area now known as Stonewall and headquarters to the present-day Weinheimer Ranch. John’s son, Jacob would actually start the ranch in 1878, as well as be part of the original ownership of the Weinheimer Store, which
continues operation today. In 1880, Jacob and his wife would build the original log home where the main ranch house stands today.

Herman, one of three sons to Jacob, would be gifted the original ranch, while his brother, Hugo was gifted other land and brother Felix would take over ownership of the store. Herman and his wife, Anna, would raise their six children in the original house built by Jacob. Under Herman and Anna’s leadership, the ranch would add registered Herefords and American Quarter Horses, as Herman was an avid polo player. Of their children, three remain alive today, Roy, who is now 97, Joanne, 95 and Clara, 94. The other three included Jake, Tom, and Evelyn. The girls would marry and move. Jake and Tom went to college and then the military. Roy remained and ranched alongside his parents. He and his wife, Bernice, were married in 1950 and moved in with his parents on the ranch. Herman would die suddenly in 1954 at the age of 64 years. Roy, who was 29 at the time, would take over the management and has been at the helm since.

He and Bernice raised their eight children in the home that Jacob built and it has been added on to over the years. Roy has lived only in this house his entire life and it’s the center of operations for the ranch today. Tom served in World War II and worked as an engineer for the U.S. Geological Survey. He returned to the ranch after his dad’s death. He and his wife, Betty, raised their children on the ranch. Tom would pass in 2005.

Anna, who lived to be 103, was very involved in the ranch’s management and was known throughout the Hill (Continued on page 16)
(Continued from page 15)

Country for her hunting and fishing skills. She bagged several deer in her lifetime, including her last two at the ages of 100 and 101.

Under Anna’s ownership, the ranch was incorporated in 1959 with Anna and her six children as shareholders. Daughters, Clara and Joanne, sold their shares back to the ranch and today there are 18 shareholders from the four children of Herman and Anna. Roy’s son, Len is the manager today and his son, Chism is living and working on the New Mexico division.

The Weinheimer history also includes involvement and leadership in many civic, church and agricultural organizations at each generation. Roy was a founding member of the Hill Country Hereford Association and is an honorary member inductee of the Texas Hereford Association.

The ranch grew in acreage as each generation made land purchases and additional land was leased throughout the area. At one time, they leased considerable acreage in Gillespie and surrounding counties, but the population growth in the Hill Country has seen lots of ranchland converted to homes and subdivisions.

The ranch operates under two brands today, a running W and 93 that was first registered in 1887, which has been modified over the years. The 93 is on the Texas A&M University Kleberg Center’s wall of brands and the 93 branding iron was on display at the LBJ State Park Visitor Center when it opened in 1970.

Commercial cattle were part of the ranch from the beginning and in 1921 Herman purchased five registered Hereford heifers. The herd would grow and be strong in Line 1 breeding. The Weinheimers developed a strong market for their bulls throughout the Hill Country and into South Texas.

“Today, we run about 50 registered Herefords but we utilize the Hereford breed in our commercial outfits,” said Len. “We run Tiger Stripes here in the Hill Country and on the Madisonville ranch. These are F-1 Hereford females x Brahman bulls, then crossed with Angus bulls. In New Mexico, our cowherds are predominantly commercial Hereford cows crossed with Angus bulls.”

“We have scaled back our registered operation as the Hill Country has experienced tremendous change over the last 20 or so years,” explained Len. “Urban sprawl is a major factor and many of our bull customers are just not in business anymore. Their land has been purchased for other uses. We used to sell a lot of bulls into South Texas also, and a lot of that land is now home to wildlife rather than cattle.” He added that drought has also been a factor in reducing their registered Hereford numbers.

Annually, they market their bulls by private treaty and have a strong repeat clientele. They also consign to the San Antonio All Breed Bull Sale, where in 2022 they had the second highest grading bull overall and one of the top sellers. They also take bulls to the Independent Cattlemen’s Association Sale in Beaumont where they won the

(Continued on page 32)
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Tiger Stripe females are the cows of choice on the El Seven Ranch and about half of the herd is crossed with Charolais bulls.

Balancing Act

By Martha A. Hollida

The El Seven Ranch runs cattle and raises rice in a harmonious balance that's good for the environment, both end products and the ranch's bottom line.

The Garwood, Texas based operation has history dating back to the early 1900's when William Lehrer established the ranch and the name El Seven was chartered in the late 1930's. William K. Lehrer had two children, William N. Lehrer and Dorothy Lehrer Lewis. Today, the Lehrer and Lewis heirs continue to own the family operation and represent the third generation of the family.

Initially rice was the only crop, but in the early 1920's cattle were added, however rice remained the main commodity. Then about 2016, the switch was made to increase the cattle herd and raise less rice. The cattle and rice coexist very well together, as rice fields are allowed to remain dormant for one year between crops due to the flooding process. They rotate cattle in and out on them, plus have permanent pastures for the cattle. They have over 4,000 acres of rice of which some are contracted to tenant farmers.

Manager Daryl Pieprzyca, a Garwood native, joined the El Seven straight out of college 33 years ago and became manager in 2002.

"About eight years ago, we switched about a third of the rice acreage to permanent pasture to increase our cattle numbers. It's becoming increasingly difficult to raise rice profitably as the foreign markets raise and sell cheaper than we can and our rights to water are being restricted more and more," explained Pieprzyca.

Their 1,250 cows are managed based on the rice growing schedule. Pieprzyca said that the fields that are planted in a particular year for rice are initially plowed and made ready in September and October, then planted in March, harvested in late July or early August, with the ratoon (second) harvest in late October-early November.

"We calve Nov. 15-Feb. 15th. This way, I can get the cows on the rice fields so they can eat the stubble. This works great, as we have a great source of supplemental feed for them during that critical period of raising calves and getting rebred," said Pieprzyca.

The initial cattle added in the 1920s were Herefords, which was very traditional at the time and Pieprzyca said El Seven was one of the first in the area to put a Brahman bull on the red and white faced cows. That resulting cross quickly became their cow. In 2005, the switch was made to Brahman
cows crossed with Hereford bulls, as the Brahman cow fits the environment better. Today, the F-1 Brahman x Hereford Tiger Stripe is still their choice of female. They raise all of their own replacements, as they have a herd of 250 Brahman cows for that purpose. The Tiger Stripe female is crossed with either Charolais or Angus bulls. They do have a small herd of black quarter-blood females that have been retained from the cross with Angus bulls, but the Tiger Stripe is predominant in their pastures and on the rice fields.

“The Tiger Stripe works great in this area and she has earned her keep here. We keep almost all of the heifers from the Brahman x Hereford cross. We do sell some to 4-H/FFA youth who want them for pen competitions at the fairs and stock shows. We cull the Tiger Stripes based on age and move the younger ones into the herd. We don’t raise our own Brahman replacements, we purchase those each year through South Texas Cattle Marketing’s Labor Day Sale in Nixon, Texas and that has worked very well for us,” said Pieprzyca.

The steer calves, which fall close to 50% Angus and 50% Charolais sired, are sold in the pasture and as one might guess, there are always repeat buyers with the majority being purchased by feed yards through a local broker. Last year, the steer calves averaged 670 lbs.,” he added.

Pieprzyca and one other employee handle all the cattle responsibilities and they hire extra help for the cattle working and weaning days. The rice farming is handled by two employees and Pieprzyca.

While the El Seven operates on a 120 day calving schedule, 90% of the calves are born in the first 60 days.

The cattle are worked in April when the calves receive (Continued on page 24)
their first round of shots, are dehorned if needed, EID tagged, implanted and castrated. They maintain strict vaccination protocols that they have developed through their local veterinarian. In late May to early June, the calves are given a second round of shots so that they are ready to grow for the buyers when sold in August. Most of the calves are sent to a grow yard by the buyers since they are purchased directly off the cows from El Seven Ranch.

Pieprzyca has his first calf heifers and Brahman cows start calving 30 days earlier than the Tiger Stripes, as bulls are turned out accordingly.

“The Charolais bulls are purchased almost exclusively through High Dollar Ranch, in Lockhart, Texas and we used Camp Cooley Angus bulls for many years prior to their dispersal. Now, we buy our Angus bulls through the Luling Foundation Bull Sale, with many coming from the Bodey Langford herd, also in Lockhart. It’s my philosophy that you need to buy the best bulls you can afford, as it will pay off,” he said. The Hereford bulls that are used on the Brahman cows to raise replacements are primarily purchased through the South Texas Hereford Association Annual Bull Sale.

He selects bulls heavily for actual weaning weight and weaning weight EPDs for the older cows, while birth weights are scrutinized for the bulls he plans to put on his heifers. Disposition is also analyzed on the bulls purchased, as well as the females retained. The ranch handles the cattle on horseback for the most part and he says the calm cattle just do better all the way around.

Bulls are expected to cover 25 cows on the average. The carrying capacity of the land is about one cow to 6-7 acres of permanent pasture and one cow to 10 acres on the rice fields.

The Tiger Stripe has been delivering paychecks to this operation for many decades and Pieprzyca is quick to point out her virtues.

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These sales allow us to get our cattle out to a different audience and it expands our customer base. We have also been able to sell females from the registered segment to some of the bull buyers. It’s a good way to advertise Weinheimer raised Herefords,” said Len.

Marketing of the commercial calves varies due to economic and weather conditions. Calves at all the locations have been marketed through private treaty contracts, through Superior Live-stock and some have been retained and fed in Texas feed yards.

A number of breeds of goats and sheep have been raised over the ranch’s history. Today, it’s mainly registered Spanish goats and some hair sheep that are part of the hunting division.

The ranch is involved in some hunting leases and also has guided hunts on some of the land in Texas and New Mexico. Today’s wildlife includes white-tail deer, turkey, dove, ducks, axis deer, black buck antelope and in New Mexico, they have mule deer, pronghorn antelope and some quail.

They also have some peach orchards, which they have leased out to a local peach grower. While Stonewall is known in the region for its annual Peach Festival, its wider claim to fame is the LBJ Ranch, home to President Lyndon Baines Johnson and now part of the national park service.

“LBJ’s ranch was right next to ours. He started ranching and raising Herefords before he was elected president. We developed a strong relationship with his foreman and we owned bulls in partnership with LBJ. He was very open to learning about the cattle industry and enjoyed his Herefords,” recalled Roy.

Len added that the Secret Service agents knew all the Weinheimers, even the kids, as they were allowed to go back and forth in the pastures very freely.

Another milestone in the ranch’s storied history happened in 1975 when Len and his younger brother, Don, captured grand champion steer honors at Weinheimer…

(Continued from page 16)

high grading bull honor in 2022.

(Continued on page 36)
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Cattlemen ... there's an app for that

By Erika Lyon, Ohio State University Extension and Dr. Brian Arnall, Oklahoma State University Extension

If you can imagine it, there’s likely an app for that!

The number of apps available to producers has exploded in the last decade, making tasks such as calculating tank mixes, identifying weeds, record keeping and even calculating gestation/calving dates so much easier. Initially, iOS held a majority of the apps, but today, Android also has about an equal share of the app market. Here are some considerations when selecting apps that will work best for your livestock operation.

Apps can function anywhere from basic calculators (gestation times, tank mixing, prices and profitability, etc.) to identification and educational tools to recordkeeping tools. Be careful of apps that primarily serve as ads. Watch out for the online app reviews as well – check to see if the app company is a client of the company writing the article.

You will have specific needs and interests. Have a checklist or shopping list with the features that you need – if any of those features are not included, trash it!

Be aware of your search terms – searching for wheat apps for example may pull up information on how to live a gluten-free lifestyle.

If you can imagine it, there’s likely an app for that!

(Continued on page 40)
Houston and San Antonio with their home raised Hereford x Simmental steers.

“Don was grand champion in San Antonio and his steer brought $23,600 and mine was grand champion at Houston and brought $50,000,” explained Len.

“We put all that money in a separate account and we were able to pay for all the kids to go to college from it,” said Roy. “It was good for our Hereford program, too,” he added.

Roy, who is now 97, says that he never thought of doing anything else but ranching and being a part of the family operation.

“I don’t know of a better place to have lived. Back in the day, everyone in the Hill Country was involved in agriculture. That is obviously not the case today. The most significant change in my lifetime would have been when we were able to eradicate the screwworm.

(Continued from page 32)

Weinheimer...
(Continued on page 38)
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That made a world of difference, not just in livestock but also wildlife. It greatly increased the deer population and opened up a lot of avenues for income with deer hunting," Roy recalled.

Annually, since 2005, the ranch hosts Camp Cousins in June. Weinheimers near and far return to enjoy the ranch, share their rich heritage, remember their ancestors and acknowledge the family’s contributions to the Hill Country and the agricultural industry.

Roy’s great-grandchildren, who can be found sitting in his lap often are now the ninth generation of Weinheimers on the ranch. Their ancestors, Jakob and Theresia, emigrated from Germany to start a new life and the foundation and principles they established continues to inspire the family to work hard and be a contributing part of American agriculture.

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App...
(Continued from page 34)

common sense but searches can be frustrating – think about what the most descriptive search terms might be. For example, use ‘pasture plant ID’ instead of ‘weeds’ when searching for weed identification apps.

Keep in mind that any app you use should be intuitive. For a vast majority of apps, use the three-minute rule – if you can’t figure out what it offers and what it does within three minutes of opening the app, trash it. For GIS/mapping apps, give five minutes as those are usually data-heavy and do tend to take longer to navigate. If it is taking you an hour to figure out how to use the basics of an app, it likely won’t be of use to you.

Customer reviews can be helpful in some situations – for example, if you find an app with customer comments that are being addressed, that usually indicates that the company is listening and fixing bugs or improving functionality of that app. An app that has a large proportion of negative reviews posted since the latest update will likely have significant bugs that need to be addressed.

Is it worth it to pay for an app? It depends. Some apps that charge are expensive, so make sure it has the features that you are looking for. An app that is pay-to-play should include what you need and do what it does well. Pay structures tend to vary from app to app. Some include a one-time payment, others are subscription-based. Some offer

(Continued on page 42)
WE ARE ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF DATA COLLECTION
SO THAT WE CAN BE YOUR SOURCE FOR GENETICS THAT OFFER SUSTAINABILITY IN THE EVER EVOLVING BEEF INDUSTRY!
free versions with versions that come with additional features for a fee (including removal of ads). Others may charge per head. Look up the website of the company providing the app and do some research before making a purchase. Take advantage of free trials – many companies offer them. If you don’t see a trial period offered, it can be worthwhile to contact the company to see if there is a way to test the app before making the purchase.

Always check the update history. Initially, there were a lot of apps on the market, especially by land-grants, but many have since been upended by updates in both iOS and Android systems. Apps that you pay for should have regular updates. And make sure you have enough space and memory on your phone to handle the app – otherwise, you may experience frequent crashes. GIS-based apps, for example, tend to have higher memory usage and storage requirements than other app categories.

Ask, “Who owns the data?” Data collected in apps can be stored directly on your device, in the company’s cloud, on a mainframe, or on all three. Read through service agreements. Most companies don’t want the hassle and will separate themselves from the data. Some will use data for marketing research and to better sell you something. A service agreement should state whether data will be shared or sold.

Don’t use apps as a crux. Know the general math behind calculators and double check plant identifications with a good field guide. Plant photo identification apps have come a long way in the last decade and will usually narrow the search to get you into the correct genus, but identifications by this method are not always 100% accurate.

Lastly, many websites that don’t take up space on your phone can be bookmarked to your home screen, functioning similar to downloadable apps. Universities often have a lot of great information in online databases that can be accessed quickly this way.

Customer reviews can be helpful in some situations – for example, if you find an app with customer comments that are being addressed, that usually indicates that the company is listening and fixing bugs or improving functionality of that app.

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Lots of topics on schedule for the 68th Annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course

By Martha A. Hollida

There will be no shortage of topics at this year’s annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course (TAMBCSC) as ranchers face a lingering drought, record high input costs, rising inflation, herd reductions and an adjusting market.

The event, which will be the 68th annual, will be held Aug. 1-3rd on the campus of Texas A&M University, Bryan-College Station, Texas. It will follow the very successful format of years past, with over 20 concurrent sessions on all aspects of beef cattle production, a general session that addresses industry wide topics and interactive demonstrations and hands-on experiences. The TAMBCSC is recognized as the largest beef cattle conference in the nation and one of the best in terms of quality of education and presenters.

“We are once again looking forward to holding the event in person and we will offer a virtual option for those who would like to attend that way,” said Dr. Jason Cieere, director

The general session will address topics of industry concerns.
This year’s trade show is promising to once again feature more than 120 booths and displays.

and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist.

The concurrent educational classroom style programs will cover a lot of production practices, including nutrition, reproduction, animal health, research, landowner issues and forage management. In addition, there are two sessions that cover ranching basics and are designed for new ranchers, while there are other sessions geared to cow-calf and stocker operators, as well as the seedstock producer.

The general session, which is held the afternoon of the first day, will once again focus on industry wide issues and concerns. Kristin Marshall, a first time speaker at TAMB-SCS, will provide insight into the market trends for cattle and select commodities and provide risk management strategies. Marshall is currently a broker and research analyst with New Frontier Capital Markets and grew up on her family’s ranch in central Texas.

Brian Bledsoe, an agricultural weather expert and columnist for *Southern Livestock Standard* will discuss the drought, the long term weather trends and provide context for decision making in months ahead.

Dr. Ron Gill, Texas A&M professor and Extension livestock specialist and associate department head for Extension, will moderate a panel to conclude the general session. The panel members will include three beef producers who operate ranches of varying sizes from small to large. These producers will discuss their practices and how they are adjusting to the current economic climate in agriculture. Attendees will be able to text in questions for the panel, also.

“The short course places strong emphasis on providing sessions that fit across the beef cattle production spectrum and to the level of experience of our attendees. This panel (Continued on page 46)
will emphasize our efforts to be helpful to all, regardless of cow numbers,” described Cleere.

There will be no shortage of topics at this year’s annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course (TAMBCSC) as ranchers face a lingering drought, record high input costs, rising inflation, herd reductions and an adjusting market.

The final day of the three day event will include a number of interactive demonstrations and hands-on experiences in the areas of fence building, managing brush, cattle handling, working cattle chute side, and a number of...
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4 strategic steps to a better business

By Kindra Gordon

When you flip the calendar from one month to the next or transition from one season to another, are you taking time to reflect on what went well and what could be improved upon? Harnessing that ability to reflect and identify stress points and successes can be a powerful tool within business management, points out ag economists David Widmer and Brent Gloy.

The duo, who together offer services through their company Agricultural Economic Insights, shared their thoughts about strategic business planning with farm and ranch producers via a webinar sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America.

In anticipating long-range planning for 5 to 10 years – especially after the last few years, Gloy and Widmer encourage producers to take some time for business, financial and personal planning. They suggest this framework of questions for evaluating:

**Step 1: Review.** Consider what went well and what went poorly this past year. Widmer recommends looking at projections versus actual for yields, livestock production, costs, and even government payments. He suggests then considering: How does all of that play into performance? How much of your financial performance was driven by government funds? How did your balance sheet trend (i.e. working capital, debt, etc.)? And ultimately, where does your operation stand?

“These are questions that help reveal the picture ahead,” says Widmer. He adds that regular evaluation of these questions should become a part of business planning during the year. Otherwise, when it is simply an end-of-year chore it does not offer the same decision-making power and insights for producers and managers.

**Step 2: Evaluate goals.** "Why are you doing what you do? What is keeping you awake at night? Where do you want to be in 5-10 years?" Widmer suggests pondering those questions to also help guide future decisions and planning.

And Gloy emphasizes writing your goals down. He says, "If you don’t write them down, it’s a dream. Putting goals onto paper is powerful. It makes them vivid and specific."

Gloy admits putting goals on paper "can feel uncomfortable," but he suggests, “take a baby step and write a couple down.”

**Step 3: Review your network.** “Who influences your thinking,” Widmer asks? He suggests producers do an inventory of their team members, family, friends, trusted advisors, paid consultants, and even consider the marketing or media outlets they utilize for information that influences daily decisions and thinking. From that list, Widmer then suggests considering, “What are the gaps or redundancies?”

Additionally, he suggests looking at your network and your goals to determine if you need to bring new people into your network to help achieve goals. In some situations, it may also reveal that some of the people you’ve relied upon are not providing the feedback you need. Specifically, Widmer says, “Your network should provide honest, actionable feedback to you that helps you pursue your goals.” He points out, that is much different than someone who tells you what (Continued on page 50)
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Strategic steps...
(Continued from page 48)

you want to hear.

Step 4: Be prepared to pivot. Gloy and Widmer both emphasize that those who are willing to quickly change course when factors dictate change is needed tend to recover – or survive – at a higher rate. Widmer advises producers must, “avoid getting caught up in the ‘luck’ narrative.” He expounds that just because you got lucky by doing something one year, does not mean that is going to work every year. “Pivot when things go awry,” he says.

He encourages producers to have a risk management plan, review it, and consider what can be done to improve decision-making progress.

That said, he also encourages producers not to beat themselves up too badly when decisions do not play out as planned. Rather, he advises learning from those situations, and he points to a Winston Churchill quote for perspective: “One must never forget when misfortunes come that it is quite possible, they are saving one from something much worse; or that when you make some great mistake, it may very easily serve you better than the best-advised decision.”

Read weekly insights about the ag economy from Widmer and Gloy at https://aei.ag/weekly-insights/.

Short course...
(Continued from page 46)

reproductive management practices.

A number of pesticide and veterinarian CEU’s are available to attendees, also.

There is a session on Sunday, prior to the kickoff of TAMBCSC on Monday a.m., for horse owners. This will be held at the Thomas G. Hilderbrand, DVM ’56 Equine Complex and will address a wide range of topics to help ranchers keep their horses healthy and available for ranch work. This session is part of the TAMBSCS registration or it can be attended as a stand-alone session for $50.

The short course continues to grow in popularity and acclaim, as it provides a number of ways for networking. Ranchers will once again be able to visit over 120 booths in the trade show and visit with representatives from breed associations, animal health segment, reproductive services, feed and mineral companies, marketing companies and ranch equipment dealers.

Other networking avenues include a breakfast for beef producers who are veterans. This is now in its seventh year and continues to grow. The famous Texas Aggie Prime Rib Dinner will highlight the end of the first day’s program and is always one of the highlights of each year’s event. Cleere shared that the dinner showcases the culinary skills of the Texas A&M Meats Department and features Nolan Ryan Beef.

Registration information, details and in-depth schedule can be found online at www.beefcattleshortcourse.com. The cost is $240 for in-person attendance and $160 for online. The prices go up after July 27. To register, do so online or call 979/845-6931 for more information. There is a special rate for youth and for information and to enroll a youth, please call.

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•Sept. 24  Club 1835 Online Sale, Hamilton, Texas
•Sept. 24-25 Synergy XV Sale and Show, Giddings, Texas
•Sept. 30  Southern Jewel Cattle Company’s Precious Gems Sale, Victoria, Texas
•Oct.  1  La Muñeca Cattle Company’s 35th Annual Junior Roundup, Linn, Texas
•Oct.  1  Peach Creek Ranch Online Heifer Sale, Granger, Texas
•Oct.  7  Red River Farms’ Ladies of the Lone Star Sale, Grand Saline, Texas
•Oct.  8  Shipwreck Cattle Co.’s Black Label Event, Grandview, Texas
•Oct. 12  State Fair of Texas Open Simbrah Show, Dallas, Texas
•Oct. 22  State Fair of Texas Junior Simbrah Show, Dallas, Texas
•Oct. 23  State Fair of Texas Open Simmental Show, Dallas, Texas
•Dec.  3  Tom Brothers Ranch Opening Day of Private Treaty Bull Sales, Campbellton, Texas

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10 tips for managing high feed prices

By Dr. Katie VanValin, assistant Extension professor, University of Kentucky

We have all heard the phrase, “it’s the little things”. The saying applies to the beef industry, as well. There is no single management practice, feed ration, or genetic trait that drives profitability. Profitability is really a summation of lots of little things coming together to create a profitable system. Whenever profitability is challenged, whether from greater input prices like we are seeing now, or lower calf prices, I start to get questions about decreasing feed costs. This should come as no surprise, as feed costs are one of the biggest expenses facing beef cattle operations. Below is a list of some of those little things that can really add up.

1) Pregnancy checking: Cows should be working for the operation. Thus, an open cow is one that is not pulling her weight on a cow-calf operation. Today, producers have more options than ever before for pregnancy checking their herds. New chute side blood tests can be completed right on the farm in about 10 minutes. There are also commercial labs that will run blood tests which provide results in just a couple of days. There is also ultrasound, which gives you a real time answer but does depend on scheduling and availability. Culling open cows not only decreases purchased feed costs but can also make our available forage re-

(Continued on page 54)
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2) Buy in bulk: The ability to buy purchased feeds in bulk can allow producers to take advantage of bulk discounts offered by many feed retailers. Also, having the ability to store feed on the farm/ranch can allow producers to purchase feed stuffs at the time that they are most economical as opposed to waiting until it is needed to be fed.

3) Get your hay tested: When talking with cow-calf producers about feed costs, one of the first things I ask them is, “Did you get your hay tested?” Getting hay tested allows cattlemen to make strategic decisions about hay feeding. Cattle’s nutrient requirements fluctuate throughout the year so making sure that hay with the highest energy and protein concentrations is fed to the cattle can go a long way in decreasing supplemental feed costs. For example, hay test results from two different lots of hay are shown in Table 1.

Assuming that we are feeding 1250 lb. cows with a body condition score of 5, Table 2 shows the amount of dried distillers grains that would be required to meet the energy and protein requirements of these cows in either mid-gestation, late gestation, or lactation.

Now, assuming that DDGs cost $280/T, Table 3, shows the cost to supplement 30 cows per day.

These calculations show the importance of feeding the right hay, to the right cow, at the right time. Feeding Hay A during mid-gestation and saving hay B to be fed during lactation can have a drastic impact on the cost of supplementing the cow herd while also maintaining adequate body condition score. This calculation was simple and does not take into consideration things like environmental factors or age that can impact the energy and protein requirements of the cow herd.

4) Compare costs based on nutrients: When comparing feed stuffs, it is critical that comparisons are being made apples to apples. It is not enough to just look at cost per lb. or ton. There are many factors that can impact the cost per lb. or ton of a feed ingredient. One of the biggest things to remember is that feed stuffs can have vastly different moisture contents, so how much of the feedstuff is actually water? To answer that question, we must compare the price of feeds on a cost per lb. of protein or energy basis.

For example, consider dried distiller grains at 90% dry-matter, and 28% crude protein for $280/T. First calculate the lbs. of CP in one ton of dried distiller grains (on a DM basis). 2000 lb. x 0.90 = 1,800 lbs. of DM in a Ton; 1,800 lb DM x 0.28 = 504 lbs. of CP in ton.

Now calculate the cost per lb. of...
nutrient. Divide the cost of the feed by the lbs. of the nutrient in one ton.

$280 ($/Ton)/504 (lbs. of CP/T) = 0.56/lb. CP.

Use this value when comparing feed stuffs to one another. Another important consideration is that sometimes we can’t take full advantage of a feedstuff in a ration. For example, whole cotton seeds are high in protein (~24%), but are also very high in fat (~18%). Working with a nutritionist can be beneficial when evaluating the economics of feed ingredients.

5) Improve record keeping: The best cattle managers are often the best record keepers, and that is not coincidence. We can’t manage what we do not measure. Record keeping allows us to truly track feed costs as it can be a great way to subjectively identify those less efficient cows in the herd. You know the one, she’s had a few calves and she gets rebred, but a closer look at records might show that her calving interval is more like 425 days vs. the goal of 365 days. For example, if we had two 7-year-old cows and one had an average calving interval of 370 days and the other 425 days, the cow with the shorter calving interval would have had 5 calves vs. only 4 calves for the cow with the longer calving interval.

Luckily, technology has made record keeping easier than ever! There are a variety of programs to help producers track performance metrics, that can help to identify those less efficient or productive animals in the herd.

6) Cut the fluff: I’m talking about body condition score (BCS). Body condition score highly correlates to reproductive performance. Cows with a body condition score of less than 5 have a much lower chance of being bred. What about those heavy cows? Each BCS is equal to about 75-100 lbs. of live body weight. When cows’ BCS increase, their maintenance requirements increase, feed intake increases, and even their susceptibility to heat stress increases. Thus, the cost to maintain that cow at a BCS of 7 or 8 will be greater than if she were maintained at BCS 5 or 6. One solution for managing BCS of the cow herd is to sort cows by

BCS. Keep those cows that are thinner or heavier separate from the rest of the herd. This allows us to feed those cattle either more or less energy and protein to increase or moderate their BCS.

7) Prevent feed waste: Feed wastage is just money wasted. Now, understand that we will always have some feed wastage but there are ways to limit it and thus, limit the economic impact it has on the operation. Preventing feed wastage starts long before we start feeding. Storing hay under roof is one of the first things we can do to prevent wastage. For a 5 x 5 bale, 33% of the weight of that bale is found in the outermost 6”. When bales are stored outside and on the ground, we can easily see weathering of that outer 6”. Feed waste can also occur when feeding hay. Using hay rings can help prevent some

(Continued on page 56)

Table 3. Cost to supplement 30 cows per day with DDGS.

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<th>Late-gestation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hay A</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>23.52</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.94</td>
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losses, but not all bale rings are created equal. Designs that have solid metal skirting around the bottom are better than those that are open.

8) Keep back only what you need: Developing heifers can be a pricey undertaking. Keeping back only the number that you need can help to decrease the overall cost of developing heifers on the operation. However, sometimes it can still be advantageous to purchase bred heifers. This is a scenario that might require a little pencil pushing, but I encourage you to consider the costs of developing heifers on your operation vs. purchasing bred heifers. Also remember that especially when input costs are high, keep back only what you need for your operation.

9) Extend the grazing season: Finding ways to extend the grazing season (efficiently), can be a great way to decrease your feed bill.

10) Don’t cut the minerals: Minerals are a required nutrient, just like energy and protein. It can be easy to forget about minerals or cut back on mineral supplementation when feed costs increase. The problem with this is that many feedstuffs are deficient in at least one or more minerals. Minerals are extremely important for optimal reproductive performance and growth. Unfortunately, early mineral deficiencies can be difficult to diagnose. This is because at first, symptoms of mineral deficiency are what we call sub-clinical. This means that we aren’t losing cattle to mineral deficiencies and lab tests are not sensitive enough to detect these sub-clinical deficiencies. However, when herds have sub-clinical mineral deficiencies, we are undoubtedly leaving performance on the table. To avoid, sub-clinical mineral deficiencies provide a good quality complete mineral supplement to the herd 365 days of the year.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of strategies to manage feed costs, but it is a start and should give producers some things to evaluate on their own operation. Remember the small things and manage the things that we can control on our operations to help improve profitability. If you have any questions about these strategies, please reach out to your local county extension office.

SLS
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