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ON THE COVER

Mike and Aimee Christian, of Gainesville, turned their dream of self-sufficiency into a thriving farm and honor-system country store that supports their family and local small businesses. (Photo by Savannah Magoteaux)



letter from the editor

Spring has fully arrived, and with it comes a renewed sense of life and growth all around us. The pastures are turning green, the trees are budding, and the days are stretching longer with the promise of warmer weather. It's a season of renewal and hope. Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us, *"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."* Spring is a time of planting, of preparing, and of nurturing new beginnings, whether in the soil, in our communities, or in our hearts.

This spirit of renewal and growth is reflected in our feature story this month, highlighting Mike and Aimee Christian of Gainesville. At Christian Family Farms, they not only cultivate their own land but also foster the success of others. Their Country Store is more than just a place to shop—it's a hub where local vendors and small businesses come together, supporting one another and strengthening the agricultural community. The Christians have created something special, a place where hard work and faith go hand in hand to provide for families and neighbors alike.

Beyond this inspiring story, this month's issue is packed with articles designed to help you navigate the many aspects of farm and ranch life. Whether you're looking for solutions to common farm challenges, tips for keeping your horses healthy, or advice on planting the perfect spring flowers, we have something for you. As always, our goal is to provide valuable, practical information that helps you make the most of your land, livestock, and lifestyle.

We love hearing from our readers, and we encourage you to reach out with any article ideas or topics you'd like to see covered. You can connect with us via email or on social media—we're always happy to listen and share the stories that matter most to our community.

Here's to a season of growth, renewal, and the steadfast spirit of agriculture. Happy spring!

Savannah Magoteaux
Savannah Magoteaux, Editor
editor@ntfronline.com



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Man's Best Friend

If you've got a farm dog, or any dog, really, you need to know what items can be toxic to them.

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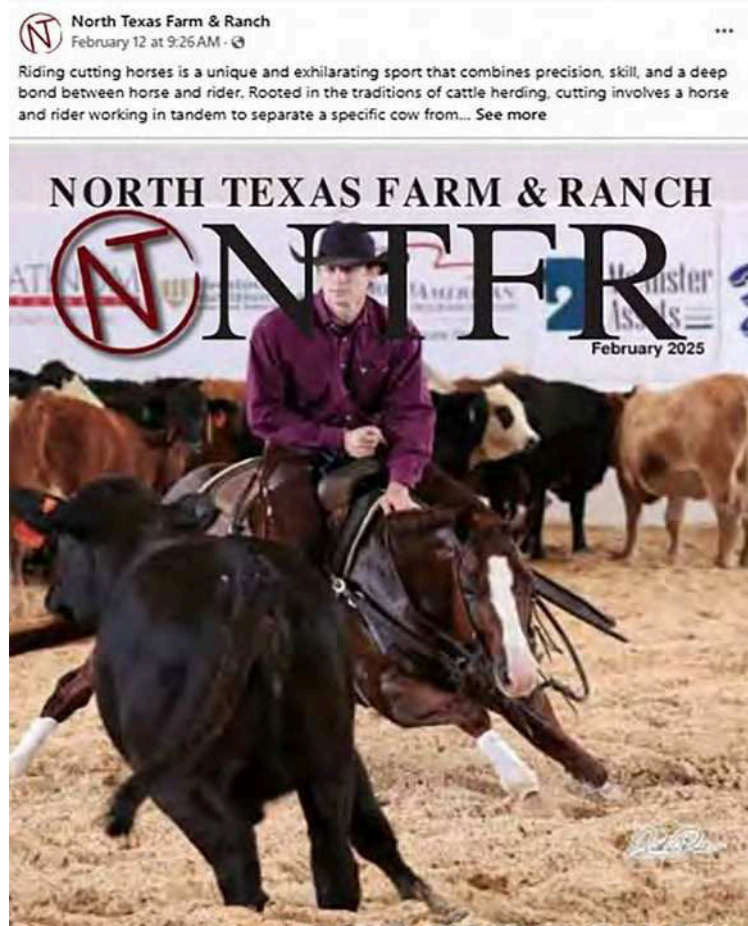
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Applejack

By Bryce Angell

Applejack surprised us when he showed up one summer morn'. We weren't aware of any appaloosa to be born.

We raised him from a colt. He was tough as a rhino's hide. He could pack a half an elk all day and never break his stride.

He had the best of qualities; I'd say except for one. 'Cuz when you put a shoe on him that horse would come undone.

To think you would control him was a notion without hope. He'd unravel faster than a brand new cheap five-dollar rope.

Given the choice of shoeing, Applejack and pounding in my brain, I'd choose nailing apple jelly to a runaway train.

The last cowboy who'd shod the horse still wore his right arm sling and looked like he'd gone 15 with Mike Tyson in the ring.

So, when Applejack was needing shoes I hoped that he'd give in. But when I looked into his eyes, I saw the devil's kin.

I picked up Applejack's right foot. He didn't move an inch. I wondered if this was the time. Would this shoeing be a cinch?

But then he jerked his hoof and gave the halter rope a fling. Applejack was madder than a rooster on caffeine.

He was blowing snot. His eyes were wide and just plain rude. Applejack was proving his tornado attitude.

He reared up too far backward, then fell down and hit his head. I swear I heard my brother say, "Let's hope that horse is dead!"

He wasn't dead, just plumb knocked out. I thought, "Good time to shoe." I tried to grab his leg again, then Applejack came to.

He struggled, then he stood right up and looked like he was lost. His expression was so bewildered, 'cuz both his eyes were crossed.

I picked up Applejack's hind leg and nailed a brand-new shoe. The other three went on so fast, he didn't have a clue.

For three whole hours old Applejack just stood and stared ahead. I'm sure he must have felt like his poor head was made of lead.

Now, I'm not recommending how to shoe an ornery cuss. But when a horse tips over, then it might just be a plus.

And if you're wondering, did the headache cure old Applejack? It didn't help a doggone bit. That old devil came right back. (N)

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Feel free to drop us a line at
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on our social media pages. You might even
see your name in the next issue!



Invasive Species on the Range

By Reanna Santos

Each year, National Invasive Species Awareness Week highlights the impact invasive plants and animals have on ecosystems, farms, and ranches.

This year, the event ran from February 24–28, serving as a reminder that invasive species not only harm the environment but also reduce agricultural productivity, disrupt grazing lands, and affect livestock operations. For North Texas ranchers, managing these species is an ongoing challenge, but with increased awareness and effective control methods, meaningful progress is possible.

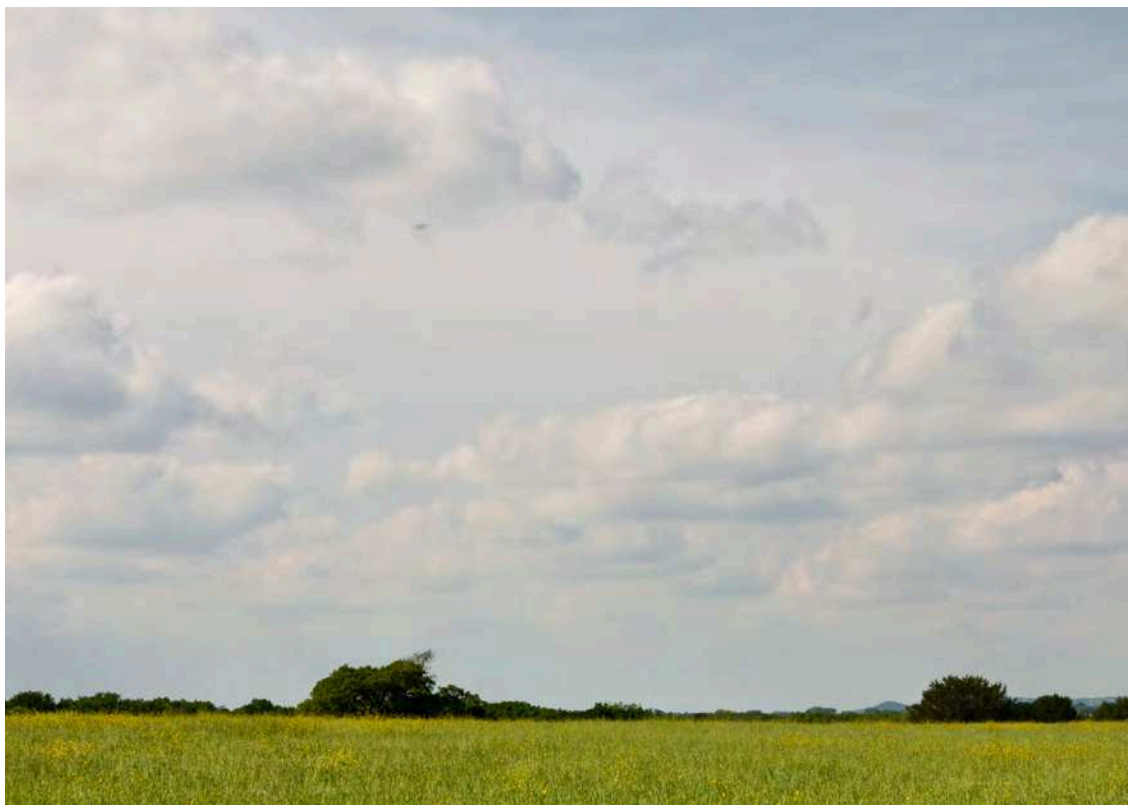
An invasive species is any plant, animal, or microorganism introduced to an area where it spreads aggressively and causes harm.

Invasive plants, in particular, outcompete native species, reduce biodiversity, and degrade soil health.

While not all introduced plants become invasive, those that do often thrive in new environments due to a lack of natural predators, allowing them to dominate pastures and roadsides. These species can have significant economic and ecological consequences.

Human activities such as urbanization, overgrazing, fire suppression, and the unintentional spread of invasive species have created conditions that allow these plants to flourish in Texas. Common invasive species in North Texas include King Ranch Bluestem (*Bothriochloa ischaemum*), Johnsongrass (*Sorghum halepense*), and Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*).

- King Ranch Bluestem was introduced for forage and erosion control but has since crowded out native grasses. It is often seen along highways in late summer



An invasive species is any plant, animal, or microorganism introduced to an area where it spreads aggressively and causes harm. (Courtesy photo)

and early fall, identified by its purple seedhead.

- Johnsongrass, another species initially introduced for forage, becomes a significant threat during environmental stress, when it produces prussic acid, a toxin harmful to livestock. This tall grass is easily recognized by its long leaves and distinct white midrib.

- Musk Thistle, believed to have been introduced accidentally, spreads rapidly. It features spiny, rosette-shaped leaves and distinctive purple, bulb-like flowers, reducing available grazing land and creating challenges for landowners.

Complete eradication of invasive species is often unrealistic, but effective management is possible with consistent strategies tailored to landowner goals. Some

proven management techniques include prescribed grazing, herbicide treatments, mechanical removal, and the reintroduction of native grasses.

- Prescribed grazing encourages livestock to graze on invasive species while allowing native plants to recover.


- Targeted herbicide treatments can control invasive plants without harming native species, but proper timing and application methods are essential for success.

- Mechanical removal, such as mowing, can help suppress invasive species, especially when done regularly.

- Replanting native grasses restores ecological balance, improves soil health, and provides better forage for livestock.

Managing invasive species


is a long-term commitment essential for maintaining the health and productivity of rangelands. Ranchers and landowners play a critical role in preventing their spread. Participating in National Invasive Species Awareness Week keeps the conversation going and encourages action. By staying informed and using effective management techniques, ranchers can protect their land, ensure sustainable productivity, and preserve the native ecosystems that make North Texas unique. Understanding invasive species equips us to manage them effectively, ensuring our lands continue to thrive for future generations.

For more information on invasive species, visit the USDA National Invasive Species Information Center website. 

AG *elsewhere* MONTANA

PHOTO | DESCRIPTION BY LINDSEY MONK



Calving season is going for a lot of folks yet, bull sales are happening all over and green grass is thinking about making an appearance. 

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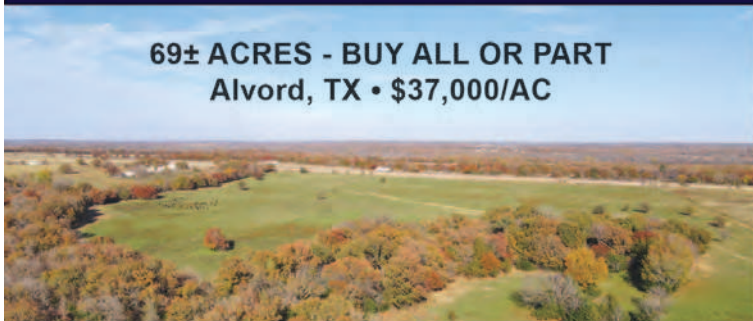
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Land Market Report

By Jared Groce

Beginning this month, Jack and Clay Counties are being added to the detailed report of land sales for the month. These two counties are an important part of our market area, and there is now enough detailed information available to allow for an accurate report to be made. Hopefully, these additions will be valuable to you as well.

There is a hint of the change of the seasons in the air, with a little more daylight every day, more southern breezes, and warmer temperatures. I am starting to see a few of the early budding trees develop small blooms in their hope for warmer weather and more rain. Birds are begging their mating calls and rituals, and calves are on the ground. With the change of seasons comes a change in attitude for wildlife and for humans alike, as we adjust to the change and have high hopes for a better tomorrow. 

County	Area	Acres	\$/Acre	List \$	Sold \$	Sale/List	DOM
Clay	Henrietta	17.5	\$24,286	\$425,000	\$425,000	100%	7
Clay	Byers	225	\$3,070	\$787,500	\$690,810	87.7%	29
	AVG	121.25	\$13,678	\$606,250	\$557,905	93.9%	18
Collin	Farmersville	10	\$44,000	\$475,000	\$440,000	92.6%	23
Collin	Anna	10.2	\$67,647	\$1,009,800	\$690,000	68.3%	228
Collin	Celina	14.72	\$144,990	\$2,300,000	\$2,134,000	92.8%	64
Collin	Celina	91.15	\$115,192	\$13,672,800	\$10,500,000	76.8%	87
Collin	Celina	130.53	\$191,257	\$32,625,000	\$25,000,000	76.6%	16
	AVG	51.32	\$112,671	\$10,016,520	\$7,752,880	81.4%	84
Cooke	Gainesville	11	\$31,736	\$349,100	\$349,100	100%	447
Cooke	Muenster	28.13	\$19,551	\$549,999	\$549,999	100%	57
Cooke	Gainesville	25	\$26,665	\$750,000	\$666,630	\$88.9%	311
Cooke	Muenster	125.7	\$16,976	\$2,500,000	\$2,133,900	85.4%	94
	AVG	47.46	\$23,732	\$1,037,275	\$924,883	93.6%	227
Denton	Aubrey	15	\$74,880	\$1,125,000	\$1,123,200	99.8%	262
Denton	Ponder	21.11	\$66,234	\$1,477,700	\$1,398,203	94.6%	41
Denton	Double Oak	14.62	\$290,638	\$4,500,000	\$4,250,000	94.4%	60
Denton	Pilot Point	61.52	\$94,924	\$6,767,530	\$5,840,000	86.3%	112
Denton	Aubrey	188.6	\$65,317	\$13,200,000	\$12,325,000	93.4%	231
	AVG	60.19	\$118,399	\$5,414,046	\$4,987,281	93.7	141
Grayson	Sadler	12.41	\$25,000	\$375,000	\$310,325	82.8%	101
Grayson	Van Alstyne	12	\$28,750	\$360,000	\$345,000	95.8%	442
Grayson	Sherman	12	\$31,250	\$389,000	\$375,000	96.4%	149
Grayson	Sadler	123.5	\$6,640	\$1,200,000	\$820,089	68.3%	185
Grayson	Sherman	47	\$37,024	\$2,000,000	\$1,740,000	87%	108
Grayson	Howe	45.48	\$41,667	\$2,100,000	\$1,895,000	90.2%	138
Grayson	Gordonville	115.85	\$28,489	\$3,450,000	\$3,300,510	95.7%	377
	AVG	52.61	\$28,403	\$1,410,571	\$1,255,132	88%	214
Jack	Joplin	26	\$12,500	\$335,400	\$325,000	86.8%	231
Jack	Jacksboro	70	\$8,250	\$665,000	\$577,500	80.8%	304
Jack	Bowie	108.16	\$8,395	\$959,000	\$908,000	94.7%	95
	AVG	68.05	\$9,715	\$653,133	\$603,500	92.8%	210
Montague	Sunset	11.18	\$19,678	\$249,000	\$220,000	88%	214
	AVG	11.18	\$19,678	\$249,000	\$220,000	88%	214
Wise	Sunset	15.03	\$13,307	\$200,000	\$200,000	100%	7
Wise	Paradise	10.01	\$23,976	\$245,000	\$240,000	98%	557
Wise	Decatur	20	\$25,750	\$569,000	\$515,000	90.5%	125
Wise	Chico	136	\$10,583	\$1,496,000	\$1,439,240	96.2%	6
Wise	Springtown	153.21	\$13,054	\$2,500,000	\$2,000,000	80%	312
	AVG	66.85	\$17,334	\$1,002,000	\$878,848	92.9%	201

Gopher Gassers Inexpensive but Expensive To Let Loose

By Nicholas Waters



(Courtesy photo)

Where there's smoke, there's fire—or an errant gopher gasser.

Three times within the past decade, once in the past 11 months, a combustible cartridge used to exterminate pocket gophers through fumigation has led to unintended blazes.

"This product is not necessarily wrong to use," said Nicholas A. Waters, owner of Gentlemen Gopher Solutions LLC based in Oklahoma, "it does pose a greater risk for accidents though among

home remedy extermination practices because an open flame is involved."

A fire caused by a gopher gasser burned a backyard, and privacy fence in Oklahoma City in February 2024; a carport and adjoining home burned near Redding, California, in 2022; over 20-acres and \$20,000 in damage was caused in Benton County, Washington, in 2018; and another gasser-caused blaze consumed 500-acres before being contained in Vista, Califor-

nia, in 2012.


"We recommend trapping, and we even train to trap, versus using anything requiring a fire," Waters added, "and poison baits possess their own risks for harming non-target species."

Per the writing of this article, a package of gopher gasser cartridges can be bought online or from a retail store for less than \$20.

"Of course, that's cheaper than the cost of a licensed professional coming to your home to treat a

year-round gopher problem," Waters said.

According to the Wildlife Animal Control website, nuisance wildlife removal can range in price from \$100 to \$175, with administrative costs and fees causing some rates to in-crease.

"Whatever a homeowner or business owner chooses to do—considering the options and risks is key," Waters concluded, "and no choice should be made out of fear." 

Raising Chickens for Beginners

A Step-by-Step Guide

By Savannah Magoteaux



(Courtesy photo)

Raising chickens can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience, whether you're a homesteader looking to become more self-sufficient or a backyard enthusiast seeking fresh eggs for your family. Chickens are relatively low-maintenance animals, making them an excellent choice for beginners in the world of poultry farming. In this step-by-step guide, we will walk you through the essentials of raising chickens, from choosing the right breed to ensuring their

health and happiness.

Selecting the Right Breed

Before diving into chicken-raising, it's crucial to choose the right breed that suits your goals and environment. Different breeds have characteristics, including egg-laying capacity, temperament, and adaptability. Here are some popular options for beginners:

Rhode Island Red: Known for their excellent egg production and hardiness.

Plymouth Rock: Friendly birds that lay brown eggs and adapt well to various climates.

Australorp: Record-holders for egg-laying, known for their docile nature.

Silkie: Unique and fluffy birds often kept as pets; they lay smaller eggs but are adorable companions.

Research the specific breeds available in your area and consider factors like climate and available space when making your selection.

Coop and Run Setup

Before bringing your chickens home, you'll need to set up a safe and comfortable living space for them. A coop and run are essential components of your chicken-keeping setup:

Coop: The coop is where your chickens will sleep at night and lay their eggs. It should be well-insulated, predator-proof, and provide at least two to three square feet of space per chicken.

Run: The run is an outdoor area

continued from page 15

where your chickens can roam during the day. It should be fenced and covered to protect your birds from predators and provide shade.

Make sure to include roosting bars, nesting boxes, and adequate ventilation in your coop for a healthy environment.

Feeding Your Chickens

Chickens need a balanced diet to stay healthy and lay eggs regularly. You can feed them commercial chicken feed, which comes in various forms:

Starter Feed: For chicks up to six weeks old.

Grower Feed: For chicks aged six weeks to 20 weeks.

Layer Feed: For hens producing eggs.

Additionally, you can supplement their diet with kitchen scraps, vegetables, and grains. Ensure they have access to clean, fresh water at all times.

Care and Health

Regular care and monitoring are essential to keeping your chickens healthy. Here are some key aspects of chicken care:

Regular Health Checks: Inspect your chickens for signs of illness or injury daily.

Common issues include mites, respiratory infections, and injuries from pecking.

Disease Prevention: Vaccinate your chickens against common diseases to keep your flock healthy.

Egg Collection: Collect eggs daily to ensure they remain clean and prevent hens from brooding.

Clean Coop: Regularly clean the coop to prevent the buildup of waste and odors, which can attract pests.

Handling and Socializing

Chickens can be friendly and enjoy human interaction when handled gently. Spend time with

your chickens, hand-feeding them treats to build trust. Avoid sudden movements or loud noises, which can startle them.

Understanding Egg Production

Egg production varies by breed and age. Hens typically start laying eggs at around five to six months old. The amount of daylight, diet, and stress can affect egg production.

You can use artificial lighting to simulate longer daylight hours, which can encourage consistent egg-laying.

Dealing with Challenges

Chickens, like any animal, come with their challenges. Here are a few common issues and how to address them:

Predators: Invest in a secure coop and run, and consider adding motion-activated lights or alarms to deter nighttime predators.


Broodiness: Some hens may

become broody and stop laying eggs. You can break this behavior by isolating them in a separate enclosure or providing them with dummy eggs to sit on.

Feather Pecking: Chickens can sometimes develop a habit of pecking at each other's feathers. Ensure they have enough space and distractions to prevent this behavior.

Raising chickens can be a delightful and educational journey.

By selecting the right breed, setting up a proper coop and run, providing a balanced diet, and offering care and attention, you can enjoy the rewards of fresh eggs and the companionship of these feathered friends.

Remember that every chicken has its unique personality, so get ready to be charmed by your new flock as you embark on this fulfilling adventure in poultry farming. Happy chicken-keeping! 

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Grazing North Texas

By Tony Dean, tonydean.tx1@gmail.com

Hairy Grama



Grazing Value of This Plant

Hairy Grama



Hairy grama seems to grow just about everywhere. It is adapted to all areas of Texas, and to a wide swath of the US mainland, even reaching into southern Canada, and into northern Mexico. It is at home in states like Missouri and Minnesota, and also our drier western states.

Hairy grama is capable of growing on most soil types, which gives it a huge advantage over many other grasses. It is a summer perennial, so once it gets established, it can come back from the roots every spring. It is able to withstand drought, and can survive in shallow, rocky soil. In shallow soils, it sometimes doesn't get over eight inches tall,

and it blends in so well with a few other grasses, it's easy to forget it's there. In better soil, and with adequate moisture, it can reach heights of 18 inches.

We seldom find Hairy grama in large areas of a pure stand. It is great at picking partners, and sharing the range with other plants. In the Sandhills of Nebraska, it cohabits with plants like Little bluestem. In the Chihuahu desert of Texas, it lives with Black grama. And in North Texas, it can survive in almost all of our grass lands, but is most at home growing with Blue grama, Sideoats grama, and Buffalograss.

Probably its greatest claim to fame is the role Hairy grama



The small green grass shoots growing at the base of this Hairy grama plant are small Sideoats grama plants. Hair grama likes to grow next to Sideoats and other similar grasses. (Photos courtesy of Tony Dean)


played as part of the short grass prairie in the central US. These prairies were home to much of the US buffalo population. Grasses like Hairy grama,

Blue grama, Sideoats grama and Buffalograss supported these massive herds. Hairy grama is still a part of this ecosystem.

While it is not our best grazing grass, it does have one important attribute, in that it can hold four to five percent protein during winter months, which is more than many other grasses. And, since it is a pe-

rennial and can grow on shallow, fragile soil, it plays a significant role in protecting these soils from erosion.

Hairy grama is considered fair grazing for livestock. It will increase on heavily grazed rangeland, and will replace higher value grasses that are weakened by overgrazing. It is used very little by wildlife, except that turkey sometimes strip the seed heads.

Hairy grama is used in landscaping and is available commercially. 



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By Noble Research Institute Experts



Goats are naturally curious animals that like to explore. If a tree or animal damages your fence and it powers down, you'll find your goats roaming in the neighbor's yard by the next day (Courtesy photo)

Woody brush encroachment on pasture and grazing lands is an ever-present challenge on ranches. Noble's ranch managers are no strangers to this challenge and offer their advice about how adding goats to your operation can reduce encroachment while adding the benefits of multi-species grazing to your ranch.

Here's what they've learned from their experience at Noble's

Oswalt and Red River Ranches in south-central Oklahoma.

Fencing

To add goats, you'll first want to modify your fencing to contain a smaller ruminant. We added three additional lines of barbed wire to bring the exterior fences on Oswalt Ranch to an 8-wire fence.

Maintaining a hot fence around goats is more critical than with cattle. Goats are naturally curi-

ous animals that like to explore. If a tree or animal damages your fence and it powers down, you'll find your goats roaming in the neighbor's yard by the next day. We recommend checking your fence daily and keeping it very hot – somewhere north of 6,000 to 7,000 volts if you can – to discourage meddling.

Goats and sheep on Noble Ranches are protected by guardian

dogs and donkeys.

Guardian Dogs

In our experience, having guardian dogs is non-negotiable with goats. It's important to know that not every dog can be a good guardian dog, however. If you can find a herd that comes with a trained and bonded guard dog, start there when acquiring your goats. Otherwise, use your net-

continued on page 20

continued from page 19

work to find reputable folks who breed and raise proven guardian dogs.

When grazing multiple species together or near each other, dogs and cows will adjust to each other over time, but there may be some tension between them at first. Allow them time to adapt.

Parasite Prevention

Goats are susceptible to parasites, especially when not managed properly. At Oswalt Ranch, we learned that moving the goat herd frequently helped cut down on the instances of common parasites such as barber's pole worms (*Haemonchus contortus*). The grazing rest periods are long enough on this ranch that parasite management isn't a big challenge. But it's important to be aware of parasite lifecycles when rotating goats back into sections of pasture.

Multi-species grazing helps break the parasite life cycle, too.

Goats and cattle do not share the same parasites, which means goat parasites cannot survive in cattle. Another important part of parasite prevention is keeping a mineral supplement available to the herd to support balanced nutrition.

Rotation Plan

We tested a few ways of grazing goats and cattle on our Oswalt Ranch. The best scenario for both the livestock and grazing management occurred when goats grazed a section first, followed by cattle. The goats thinned out the woody stemmed forages and forbs, leaving the more desirable forages for the cattle.

While goats prefer brush, they will eat forbs and grass, too. If the goal is to leave grass for cattle, the goats need to be rotated to new pastures before their preferred foodstuff runs out. The goats also stayed healthier when they moved faster than the cows. This rotation pace allowed the goats to return



to a section of pasture to graze new leaves on the refoliated brush and continue stunting it before regrowth got too far along

A Long-Term Mindset

At our ranches, we found that using goats worked best when large brush and trees were cleared mechanically first. Goats that are brought in after trees are pushed up and burned help clean up the

re-emerging forbs and allow the desired grasses to return.

No two ranches will respond to brush control in the same way. It's important to take the time to observe what the goats are doing and how their presence influences your pastures. Goats are not an overnight fix to brush encroachment; be patient enough to see the plan through. ^(N)

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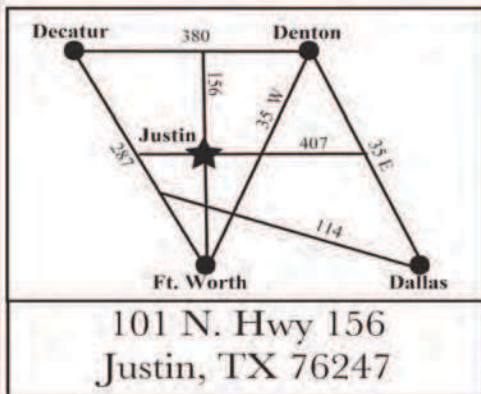
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Fencing Failures

When Good Fences Go Bad

By Ann Asher

I saw the loose wire. I even made a mental note to come back and tighten it up. But, like a lot of things on the ranch, it got pushed down the list.

By the time I finally got around to checking that stretch of fence, the damage was done—and my cattle were gone.

It's funny how a few inches of slack can turn into a full-blown escape mission for a herd that normally acts like moving five feet is a chore.

The next morning, I got the call from a neighbor—my cattle were grazing in his hay meadow like they'd been invited.

What should have been a five-minute fix had now become a multi-hour roundup, a frustrated neighbor, and a few busted fence posts where they'd decided to go through instead of back the way they came.

The Domino Effect of a Small Problem

That wasn't the first time I learned this lesson the hard way. A few years earlier, I lost a young heifer to a fencing failure, but that one wasn't a loose wire—it was a downed tree I didn't know about.

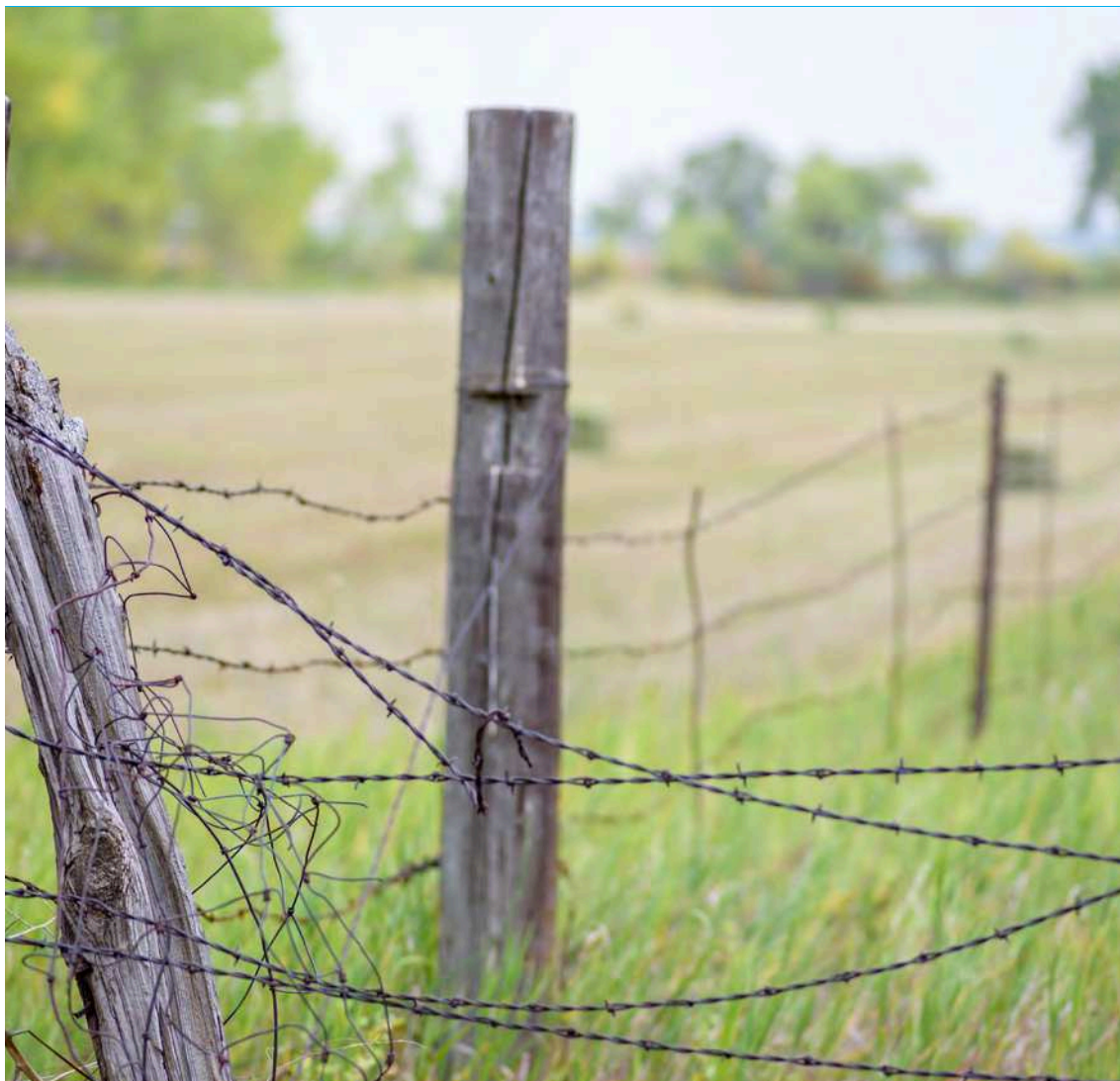
The fence had looked solid the last time I rode the perimeter, but one strong Texas storm later, a mesquite limb had taken out three strands of barbed wire.

By the time I realized it, the heifer had wandered onto a county road, and I found her too late.

Fixing the Fence and the Habit

I used to think of fencing as a set-it-and-forget-it part of ranching. Now, I know better. Here's what I do differently:

1. Weekly Fence Checks – Even if it's just a quick ride or drive along the fence line, I check



It's funny how a few inches of slack can turn into a full-blown escape mission for a herd that normally acts like moving five feet is a chore. (Courtesy photo)

for loose wires, broken posts, or fresh signs of animal pressure.

2. After Every Storm – If the wind howls or rain comes heavy, I make a pass along the property. A fallen branch or a washed-out post can turn into a livestock escape route overnight.

3. Fix It Now, Not Later – If I see a problem, I handle it right then and there, even if it's just a temporary patch until I can do a


full repair. Waiting never makes it better - only worse.

What I Could Have Done Differently

Looking back, both of those situations were preventable. If I'd checked the fence when I first noticed the loose wire, I could have saved myself the frustration, the time, and the neighbor's side-eye. If I'd been more diligent about post-storm inspections, I might

not have lost that heifer.

Fencing is one of those things that only matters when it fails—but by the time you notice the failure, you're already paying the price.

If you think you'll get to it later, trust me - you won't. And if you let a small issue slide, sooner or later, your cattle (or horses, or goats) will remind you why that was a bad idea. 

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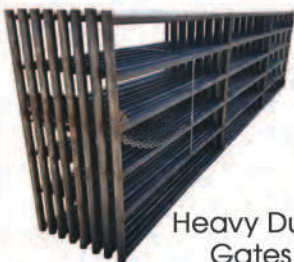
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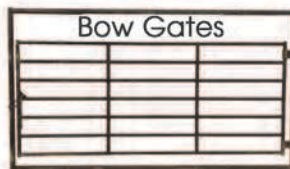
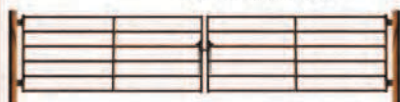
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# The Local Connection

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Top Left: From beef to baked goods, all can be found in the store, and all are paid for by the honor system and a hand-written ledger.

Top Right: The assortment of animals on the farm is as varied as the offerings in the store.

Bottom Right: A sign directs visitors to the store, which is open 24/7. (Photos courtesy of Mike and Aimee Christian)

### Different paths, one purpose

“We didn’t exactly start out thinking we’d be farmers,” Mike admitted. “But looking back, I wouldn’t change a thing.”

Mike and Aimee Christian’s backgrounds couldn’t have been more different, yet they converged in a way that built not just a family, but a thriving agricultural business.

Mike, originally from Santa Fe, Texas, spent his early years around agriculture, and when his family later moved to Ukraine as missionaries, he gained more exposure to small-scale farming. After returning to the U.S., he attended Hardin-Simmons University before joining the Army post-9/11. After his service, he worked for a steel fabrication company before pursuing a law enforcement career, and has now spent more than 14 years with a local police department.

Aimee, also from Santa Fe, had a very different path. She attended

the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor before beginning a career in banking. Although she left the workforce when their first child was born, she eventually began taking online classes through LeTourneau University, and earned her degree. She also took on key role in the farm’s success.

Mike and Aimee’s story came full circle after reconnecting on MySpace - yes, MySpace - and getting married nearly 18 years ago. Their shared dream of owning land and raising animals began to take shape as they moved from city life in Euless to Gainesville, where they found the perfect property to begin their farming journey.

### From hobby to business

“We had no idea what we were doing at first,” Aimee said. “But we learned as we went, and we had a lot of fun figuring it all out.”

Like many first-time farmers, the Christians started small, initially raising animals just to feed





Every day since opening, a customer has walked into the store.  
(Photos courtesy of Mike and Aimee Christian)

their own family. Their first cattle purchase was a bit of an adventure. “We thought we had accidentally bid on a roping steer, and were thinking ‘What did we just do,’ but when it got delivered, it was actually a full-grown heifer, and another calf we had bid on,” Aimee laughed. “We were pleasantly surprised.”

Their operation expanded over the years, incorporating pigs, sheep, goats, donkeys, and chickens. As their livestock grew, so did their desire to provide high-quality, ethically raised meat not just for themselves, but for their community. The challenge, however, was getting their products to people efficiently.

### The Birth of the Country Store

“The store was kind of born out of necessity,” Aimee explained. “People kept asking us about buying meat, and we wanted to find a way to make it easy for them.”

By 2020, Mike and Aimee saw an opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic had shut down craft fairs and farmers’ markets, leaving many local vendors without a place to sell their goods. That’s when they decided to open a store on their farm, stocking it not only with their own meats but also with products from other small businesses.

“Our goal was to find as many

local products as we could to put in our store,” Mike explained. “Not only does it support us, but it also helps other local business owners.”

The store’s honor system model is a rarity in today’s world, but it has proven to be incredibly successful. Customers appreciate the convenience, and despite initial concerns about theft, the system has worked remarkably well, with only minor issues over the years. “People find it really interesting,” Mike said. “They’re like, ‘Wait, you trust people to come in and pay on their own?’ And I tell them, ‘Yes, and it’s worked out really well for us.’”

### A Community-Centered Farm

“One of our favorite things about the store is being able to support other small businesses,” Mike said. “It’s a win-win for everyone involved.”

Beyond just running a store, the Christians are deeply committed to supporting other farmers and artisans. They don’t see similar farm stores as competition but rather as partners in fostering a local food economy. If they’re out of a product, they happily direct customers to other farms that might have what they need.

Aimee plays a key role in the store’s operations, particularly in baking. Their family is gluten-



In 2023, the Christians opened Hummingbird Cottage, an Airbnb, on the property to give guests an up close farm experience.

free, so she has dedicated herself to creating gluten-free baked goods that don’t sacrifice taste or texture. “It’s really important to me that people with dietary restrictions don’t feel left out,” she said. “I spend a lot of time developing recipes that taste just as good as the regular versions.”

Her oatmeal cream pies are a customer favorite, often selling out quickly.

The farm has also expanded beyond just a store. In 2023, they opened Hummingbird Cottage, an Airbnb on the property, giving guests a chance to experience farm life up close. “People love getting to see the animals and enjoy the peace and quiet,” Mike said. “Outside of, you know, animal noises.”

### The Next Generation

“Our kids are learning so much from growing up on the farm,” Aimee said. “They understand where food comes from, and they have responsibilities that make them feel important.”

Mike’s parents, George and Dru Christian, and Aimee’s mom and step-dad, Gary and Kathie Lea Bradfield, have also played a vital role in the farm’s success, having moved to the farm to help with daily operations, assisting with animal care, stocking the store, and supporting the family’s vision. “Having our parents here has

been a huge blessing,” Aimee said. “They help with so much, and it’s great for our kids to grow up with their grandparents involved in this lifestyle.”

Mike and Aimee’s three children - Michael (15), Ethan (12), and Shiloh (10) - are all involved in farm life. “They each have their own jobs,” Aimee said. “They help with feeding animals, gathering eggs, and keeping things running smoothly.”

Their parents’ decision to build this farm was not just about business but about raising their kids with strong values and a deep appreciation for nature and sustainability.

### Looking to the Future

“Every single day, we’re reminded of why we do this,” Mike said. “When customers come in and tell us how much they appreciate what we offer, it makes all the hard work worth it.”

Christian Family Farms has grown from a simple desire for homegrown meat into a trusted local resource for fresh food and a hub for small businesses. Every day since opening, customers have walked through their store’s doors, reinforcing the community’s appreciation for high-quality, ethically sourced products.

Their story is one of faith, perseverance, and a commitment to



doing things the right way. "We try to make sure that the only bad day our animals have is their last day," Mike said. "Until then, they have the best life we can give them."

Whether it's ensuring their animals have the best possible lives, baking goods that bring joy to those with dietary restrictions, or providing a welcoming space for other small businesses to thrive, Mike and Aimee Christian have built something truly special.

The couple added that while creating a unique business has been great, bringing glory and honor to God is by far the most important driving force behind everything they do.

For those in Gainesville and beyond, Christian Family Farms is more than just a farm; it's a testament to what can be achieved when hard work meets a deep sense of purpose. Find them on Facebook at Christian Family Farms - Gainesville.



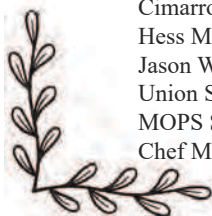
## Supporting Local and Small Businesses



The Christian's goal was to showcase as many local products as they could find in their store, as well as a select group of offerings from some small businesses from further off they have personally visited. The current list of valued vendors for Christian Family Farms Country Store includes:

RJ's Sweets  
Circle N Dairy  
Sweet Pasture Dairy  
Timber Ridge Quail Farm  
Donna D's Delicacies & Delites  
CM Heritage Farms/Swirly Twirly Soaps  
Beth Marie's Ice Cream  
Crumbs to Crust Bakery  
Happy Harvest Kitchen  
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# Stock Horse Events on the Rise in Texas

By Pepper Stewart



Anyone interested in more about stock horse clinics or events should reach out to the local stock horse association. (Photos by Rachel Watts Photography, provided by Pepper Stewart)

We have seen a recent rise in western horse sports, especially in the Stock Horse and Ranch Versatility world.

Stock Horse events are one of the fastest growing western horse sports sliding into an arena new you.

In Texas one of the newer associations that is definitely on the rise is the East Texas Stock Horse Association.

With a fresh start in 2025 The Non-Profit - East Texas Stock Horse Association is now managed by a nine-person board. The board of directors is compiled with horse show industry experts, equestrian business professionals, event producers, and cattlemen. They are committed to providing an educational and competitive environment to aid in developing skills, sportsmanship, and a

greater understanding of stock horse traditions.

ETXSH is creating an environment for all level riders from beginners to industry professionals, there is a place for you in the East Texas Stock Horse arena.

Not only does ETXSH produce competitive events, but they also host many clinics during the year for those looking to learn more or to brush up their skills.

The events / classes you will find are Ranch Riding, Ranch Pleasure, Ranch Trail, Ranch Reining, Ranch Cow Work and Ranch Cutting.

Anyone interested in more about stock horse clinics or events reach out to the local stock horse association and if you find yourself in Northeast Texas drop in to an ETXSH event or clinic near you.



# Henrietta Houck

By Krista Lucas | Copy Editor

Texas hosts some of the largest stock shows and rodeos in the country throughout the winter and into the spring.

With Fort Worth and San Antonio just wrapping up, and Houston and San Angelo kicking off, this winter run has become known as the “Texas Swing.”

These lucrative Texas winter rodeos, sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association and the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association, draw the top cowboys and cowgirls in today’s game to compete in the Lone Star State.

One local North Texas cowboy has been making his way through the rodeos, hoping to hit big.

Hagen Houck is a calf roper from Henrietta, Texas, who as of the end of February sat 24th in the PRCA standings. He joined the PRCA in 2019 and has already collected wins at places like La Fiesta De Los Vaqueros in Tucson, AZ and the Johnson County Sheriff’s Posse Rodeo in Cleburne, Texas and is a two time Prairie Circuit finalist.

His 2025 season is off to his best start since 2020. His story starts from humble beginnings, riding horses and working cattle since he can remember.

“I’ve been on horseback since before I was born,” Houck said. “My dad taught me to rope at a young age. I believe I was five when I roped my first calf. I used to go with him when I wasn’t in school to doctor cattle and ride lots of colts. I’ve been on horses my whole life.”

The 27 year old cowboy learned everything there is to know about roping and training calf horses from his dad, Jamie, and grandfather, Jan.

His dad trained and showed cutting horses in high school and roped, as well. He calf roped full



One local North Texas cowboy has been making his way through the rodeos, hoping to hit big. (Photo courtesy of Hagen Houck)

time in college and at the professional level. Houck’s grandfather passed on his knowledge of breeding horses.

“He has raised horses for 50 plus years, and all of my horses come from his broodmares,” Houck said. “He started breeding

in the early 80s and was also a National Cutting Horse Association judge for 20 years.”

Houck carried that knowledge

to college, attending Vernon, Weatherford and Tarleton State University, where he competed in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association before turning pro. Horses are an integral part of being a successful calf roper, and Houck has been building his horse program for eight years.

"I currently have three studs and 10 mares, and I raise all of my own horses," Houck said. "I train a lot of horses, mostly my own, but I ride three to five customer horses every month as well."


Currently, Houck is competing on Max, a five year old gelding he just started hauling, Pancake, a seasoned 16 year old stallion, and Thompson, a seven year old gelding he also raised. Taking care of horses and cattle keeps Houck plenty busy while he is at home, but when he is out on the rodeo road it is all business, too.

"It isn't a nine to five, it is more of a five to nine, and then sometimes drive all night too," Houck

said. "The rodeo is the fun part, but there's a lot of work that goes into being ready to compete on a professional level."

Houck started his 2025 run back in November, in Uvalde, Texas, where he finished 2nd and qualified for the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo. He placed at the Sandhills Stock Show and Rodeo in Odessa, placed in a round at the National Western Stock Show and Rodeo in Denver and split the win at Oklahoma City. He hopes to continue his lucrative winter run and see where this year can take him.

"My plans for the 2025 season is to focus on God's plan for me, be confident in myself and make my first National Finals Rodeo."

The North Texas cowboy will compete at Rodeo Austin in March and San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo the first week of April. Then, he will travel to California to try his luck out west for the month of May. 



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# WHEN A CITY GIRL *goes country*

By Annette Bridges

## The Grand Canyon

I never want to believe it's too late to do something I've always wanted to do.

So what if I have aches and pains? I've always said I can hurt anywhere, so why not enjoy a beautiful view while I hurt? Somehow, my pain always seems to fade when breath-taking scenery captures my full attention.

You've probably heard the old adage: Don't worry about what you can't change—focus on what you can.

I may not be able to stop every pain, but I can keep going in spite of it. I refuse to let pain keep me from living fully. Who's with me?

Thoughts and memories of my dear mamma inspire and encourage me as I walk through this season of life.

She used to say, "Gotta keep going, doing, moving"—whatever action word fit best for what she needed to tell herself.

I still giggle thinking about all the conversations my husband and I had about my mam-ma and her hubby going somewhere every single day, right up until their health finally slowed them down.

He would ask me why they did it, and my answer was always the same: "Because they can!"

I knew my mamma would keep going, doing, and moving as long as she could—and she did!

I visited the Grand Canyon as a young child with my mom, but my husband had never been. It remained high on his bucket list.

As we considered how to celebrate a pretty big milestone—our



(Photo courtesy of Annette Bridges)

43rd wedding anniversary—it only seemed right that a big anniversary needed a grand celebration.

And what could be bigger or grander than the Grand Canyon? At some point, "someday" has to become "today." No more waiting to check off a bucket list dream!

The Grand Canyon did not disappoint.

When I first caught sight of it, "breathtaking" was no exaggeration. Quite literally! My eyes filled with tears as I placed my hand over my heart and exclaimed, "Oh my good-ness!"

We both completely, totally, absolutely believe everyone should experience the Grand Canyon!

It's a view not to be missed, no matter your age or stage in life. Many stunning sights can be seen along the Rim Trail, whether you're walking or even in a wheelchair.

We also took the Grand Canyon tour buses to all the points not accessible on foot, and we drove the east side of the canyon as well—something else we believe should not be missed. Absolutely stunning!

For our anniversary dinner,

we enjoyed an incredible meal at the El Tovar Hotel, perched right on the canyon's rim. It was extra special to me because my grandmother stayed there in its early years.

El Tovar first opened its doors in 1905, and I couldn't help but imagine her walking and dining in the same place all those years ago.

If you haven't been to the Grand Canyon yet—go, go, GO!

Move whatever is on your "someday" list to your "do now" list. It's not too late to chase your dreams, even if you have to move a little slower while doing it.

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# Introduction to Rabbit Breeds

By Landon Moore

To many people, the idea of raising rabbits for food or pleasure is of great interest. Most people have also heard of small county fair rabbit shows. These feature a meat pen and sometimes single fryer show, along with a handful of breeding rabbits. But fewer people know that rabbit raising and exhibition is a worldwide hobby with massive shows attracting thousands of exhibitors and tens of thousands of entries. Raising rabbits can include any degree of involvement from the home meat supplier and annual county fair exhibitor to the professional judge and seedstock breeder.

You should start by deciding what purpose(s) you want to raise rabbits for. For show? For meat? To preserve a heritage breed? Deciding this will allow you to identify which breeds you will be interested in. Research with reliable and modern sources. Rabbit varieties adapt and evolve and in many breeds, the breed of the same name from thirty years ago is almost a different breed today.

Even if you exclusively want to raise rabbits for meat, be sure to buy quality stock. Remember, the higher quality a commercial rabbit is, the better its meat characteristics. Buying cheap culls as your breeding stock is a bad investment. They will yield thin, slow-growing, sickly and aggressive animals. You may as well aim to produce the best quality and butcher anything that falls a little short of the best.

Any discussion of the raising of rabbits must begin with the animals themselves. All domesticated rabbits descend from the European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). These have been bred for hundreds or (depending on the definition of “domesticate”) perhaps thousands of years. There are currently fifty-two breeds rec-



Pictured is a Broken (white and another color in no particular pattern) Black Mini Rex, the most popular rabbit breed in the country right now. (Photos courtesy of Landon Moore)

ognized by the American Rabbit Breeders Association, which is the governing authority for rabbit shows. In general, these breeds fall into three categories of purpose: food, fancy and fiber.

The fiber group is the smallest, being comprised of the Angora breeds which are prized for their constantly growing wool. Although there are dozens of breeds worldwide, only four Angora breeds may be found in the United States. All Angoras descend from Turkish stock dating back to at least the eighteenth century. They are rather difficult to raise in Texas as they need semi-adjusted cages, very stringent grooming and usually require air conditioning. However, very high quality animals may be found and they are frequently on the Best In Show table, despite their low numbers.

Rabbits raised for meat, their original purpose, have been greatly improved in the last few decades, resulting in an extremely

high quality commercial animal. There is often confusion over the difference between meat rabbits and breeding rabbits. The only difference is that meat rabbits develop quickly enough and have the proper body type to be able to compete in special meat shows and are judged on the basis of their use as meat animals. They can still be shown as breeding rabbits and are just as competitive as the “fancy” breeds. All breeds are raised to a standard; the standard of perfection between commercial rabbits and fancy rabbits is different, but no less strict. By far the most common meat breeds are New Zealands and Californians, but there are several other heritage breeds. These include American Chinchillas, Palominos, Cinnamons and Champagne D’Argent, among others.

Fancy breeds were developed for a particular characteristic that might be a certain color, marking, body shape, fur characteristic or

any combination of same. Most modern breeds fall into this category, but also many of the oldest, as their original commercial purpose is now fulfilled by a newer breed. A great many breeds were originally bred for their pelts, but most of these went extinct with the fur industry collapse. A handful remain, several have even become among the most popular breeds.

Aside from the general three purposes, rabbits are also divided by fur type and body profile. The fur types are Wool, Standing, Flyback, Rollback, Rex and Satin. The profiles are Compact, Commercial, Full Arch, Semi-Arch, Cylindrical and Upright Cylindrical. The various fur types range from the velvet Rex to the very shiny Satin. The body profiles are extremely varied in shape and posing from tiny Compact animals to massive Semi-arch and hare-like Full Arch. You will be able to compare all these qualities through the American Rabbit



This is a standard (meaning only one variety) Blue Holicer, the newest recognized breed. They are Upright Cylindricals.

Breeders Association Standard of Perfection. It describes and illustrates the differences between various breeds and how they are judged. You will select breeding stock by how they measure up to the breed standard.

While many breeds have only one variety (color) most have a few and some have numerous. Among all the categories are exceptions. For example, Florida Whites are a smaller, Compact rabbit. Their size means they cannot be used in a meat pen show, but they are excellent home meat rabbits because they have a very high yield due to extremely fine bones.

It is very unlikely you will purchase stock that will immediately give you Best In Shows. It will usually take you a little time to develop your herd to that level. How shows work and breeding strategies are subjects beyond the scope of this article and we will stick with how to select proper breeding stock.

I would generally advise the newcomer to stay away from both

the very popular and the very rare. Both will usually be expensive and it will be hard to find extremely high quality animals. However, I would err on the side of rare breeds because it is very disheartening for a new breeder to learn they have purchased animals that are too low quality to be competitive within extremely popular breeds.

Once you have selected a breed that you are interested in and have a location and cages procured, it is time to purchase stock. Most sales are done at the rabbitry or at shows. I have done both myself, but for a new breeder the latter is probably a better option. Many breeders are unwilling to open their rabbitries to the public for security and/or biosecurity reasons. If you do choose this route, try to find out how the breeders stock performs at shows. Some breeders who were successful at shows twenty years ago try to use that success to sell their current animals that are no longer competitive. As with any group of people, there is a percentage



Here is a Californian doe and her litter. This is a Commercial breed that is very popular for meat pens.


that are dishonest, and though it is thankfully small in the rabbit world, it does still exist.

When selecting stock, look in the animal's ears for signs of ear mites, at the eyes for matted fur, at the teeth for proper alignment (upper incisors in front of bottom incisors), nostrils and front paws for wet and matted fur (nasal discharge), the paws for correct number of toes and nails (four and a dewclaw in front, four in back; all must be the same color), the vent for any signs of disease (both testicles must be descended in senior bucks) and the tail for any bumps or bending (indicating it is broken). A good breeder will not object to these health checks, if they do, steer clear from them. All potential stock should appear alert and healthy. Breeding age females may attempt to hide and/or be aggressive.

What exact qualities to look for will depend on the breed. This is where research comes in, but some knowledge can only be acquired hands-on. If you are at a show,

you should watch the breed being judged and listen to the comments. A breeder should not object to a judge or registrar taking a look at the rabbit, but be sure the latter has the time. Handle the rabbits carefully, which means with a firm and gentle hand.

Pricing will depend heavily on the breed. New breeders usually have an inaccurate estimation one way or the other. In general, a breeding animal will cost \$100 to \$250 depending on quality and popularity of the breed. Very rare and very popular breeds are often expensive. Bucks are usually more expensive than does.

Whether you are raising them for meat, to show or for fun, rabbits have something to offer everyone. With breeds ranging from under two to well over twenty pounds, tiny ears, giant ears, various shapes and numerous colors and patterns, there is a rabbit breed (or several) for everyone. Learn what that breed is for you and you can be part of the fascinating world of rabbits. 



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# Wild Stallion

## The Transformation

By Dal Houston



(Courtesy photo)

As I sit here writing this month's article, I truly feel divinely inspired. I honestly believe today's story may be one of the most powerful I have ever written.

Earlier this morning, I was desperately trying to come up with a topic. Mindlessly scrolling through Instagram—whether for inspiration or just to take my mind off the task at hand—I came across a video dis-cussing how much more sensitive horses are to emotions compared to humans. Oddly, the moment I heard this, my mind

traveled back to my 14-year-old self, helping my grandfather.

Growing up around my grandfather on the farm was quite an experience. First, I can say without a doubt that he was the most colorful character I have ever known. Second, there was always something exciting happening. As it applies to today's article, he always had between 50 and 90 horses, and as you can imagine, there was rarely a day without some high-intensity excitement. LOL.

One of my grandfather's horses

was a stallion he had originally gotten from the desert in either Arizona or Nevada. And this horse was everything you would expect from a wild one. Because of his aggressiveness, my grandfather kept him in a special pen that required two gates to be opened at the same time for water and exercise.

While feeding and watering this horse, he would run, bare his teeth, and bite at you, the fence, or any-thing in his way. He would charge at the gate, try to kick you,

and if he ever got the chance, I have no doubt he would have run you over. I can't tell you how many times I had to jump onto the fence to get out of his way. When he ran to the far side of the pen, he would rear up and make the deepest, most guttural sounds I had ever heard from a horse. I don't mean to sound dramatic, but if anything was ever possessed... it was this horse.

As a young boy going with my grandfather, I was always anxious when it came time to feed this stal-



lion. And while my grandfather didn't know the meaning of the word "cautious," I could always sense a more serious tone in him when he was around this horse.

Later, as I got older and Grandad asked me to feed him, I still remember the lump in my throat and the anxiousness in my stomach—wondering to myself if this might be my last day on earth.

To the best of my memory, when I was about 14, Grandad had to go to the hospital for a couple of weeks, and it fell on me to take care of this horse. For the first couple of days, things went just as I had expected—the same biting, rearing, and attempts to put me on the fence.

However, around the third day, I began to notice a change in him. A calmness I had never seen before started to emerge. With each passing day, I watched as a new horse transformed before my eyes. By the end of the second week, the

lunges, kicks, and demonic guttural noises were gone. Slowly, I built up the courage to touch and then pet him—always ready to jump back in case it was all a trick.

After Grandad returned, the old horse never went back to his former, possessed self. A few additional weeks of working with him, and I even put a saddle on him and rode him a little.

Now, please understand—while I train a few horses each year, I am not, nor do I claim to be, a professional horse trainer. To this day, I have no idea what I did—or didn't do—that led to this horse's transformation.

Before you think this is just another interesting horse story, let me tell you—there is something much more profound happening here.

In most cases, training a horse involves intentionally shaping its behavior—teaching it to do or not do something. But in this case,

there was no training on my part. There was just a transformation. I didn't impart anything to this horse. Which means that these traits—the ability to be calm, trusting, and even gentle—were already inside him, just waiting for an opportunity to emerge.

I'm not necessarily comparing horses to people—without a doubt, humans are far more complex—but I have no doubt that if a completely different personality or set of traits can exist deep within a horse, then the same must be true for us.

The obvious question is: What can we do to bring those hidden traits out? And the answer, just like with this stallion, is—I'm not quite sure.

But here's the good news: We're not horses. Unlike them, we have the ability to think rationally, to examine our thoughts, actions, and behaviors. And what's truly powerful is the idea that, deep

within each of us, there may be something greater—something beyond what we are now, beyond what we could even dream of being.

This might sound like just another wild horse story, but it's meant to be much more. It may sound crazy, but I truly believe that every person—no matter how broken, reviled, or seemingly lost—has within them the capacity for goodness, strength, and love. These traits may be buried deep, waiting for the right moment to reveal themselves.

We can only have faith in the mysteries of life and hope that, just like this old stallion, those hidden parts of ourselves will one day come to the surface.

Please Note: Check out video on this article on Instagram: @DalHouston, YouTube: @theecentriccowboy, Facebook: DalHouston, and [www.dalhouston.com](http://www.dalhouston.com).

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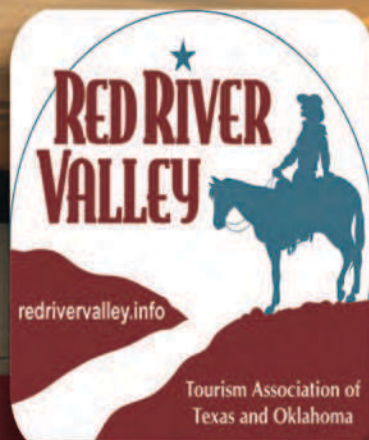
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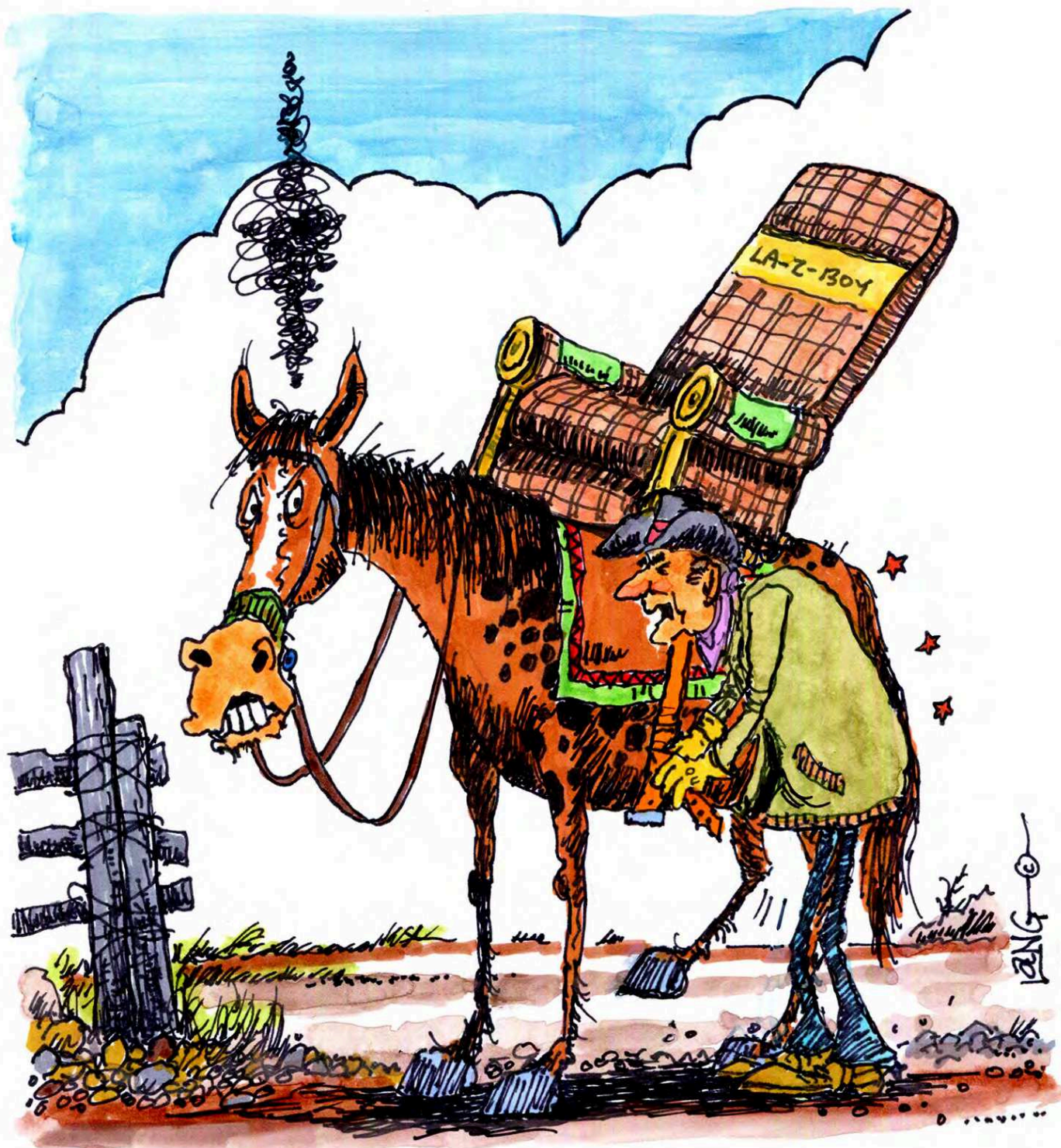
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# Grub Time



"QUIT YER POUTIN'! YOU KNOW DURN WELL MY  
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# Redneck Camping with Harold

By Alec Haigood

A few years ago, my friend Harold invited me to go camping with him at Caprock Canyon State Park. We planned to take our horses and ride the trails through this rugged part of Texas. He assured me that all I needed to bring was warm clothes, food, and a sleeping bag—he'd handle everything else.

When we arrived, I quickly discovered that Harold's idea of a "horse" was actually a mule. I decided to stick with a real horse. As we set up camp, I wanted to get the tent up before dark. Turns out, Harold's definition of a tent wasn't what I had in mind.

A "Harold tent" consists of PVC pipes stuck into the bed rails of a pickup, bent over to form an arch, and covered with a tarp—essentially a covered wagon in the back of a truck. Not exactly what I was expecting, but it would have to do.

That evening, we got a campfire going and were enjoying the crisp fall air when I noticed a raccoon snooping around the picnic table. Before I could react, the little bandit grabbed an entire loaf of bread and took off. Just like that, we had sandwiches with no bread.

I rolled out my sleeping bag in the back of the truck, only to realize that ribbed truck beds are far worse to sleep on than plain old ground. I finally drifted off, but in the middle of the night, I woke up to something crawling into the truck bed.

The raccoon was back - apparently looking for something to go with his stolen bread. I hollered and yelled to scare him off, but Harold never even rolled over. He slept right through it. The next morning, he accused me of having a bad dream. I told him he should be thanking me for saving him from getting worked over by



Until you've camped redneck-style, you haven't really been camping. (Courtesy photo)

a raccoon.

I tried to go back to sleep, but the smell of bacon frying over the fire got my attention. I peeked out from my "tent on wheels" and saw Harold standing there in a red union suit, boots, and a cowboy hat, cooking breakfast. That is a mental image no one should have to wake up to. Suddenly, breakfast wasn't as appealing.

Thankfully, by the time we saddled up for our first ride, Harold had found his Wranglers.

Caprock Canyon is a breathtaking place - red canyon walls, golden cottonwoods, and plenty of wildlife. The Little Red River,


which runs through the bottom of the canyon, was mostly dry, and the trail crossed the creek bed several times. We got into the habit of running our horses (sorry, horse and mule) down the banks and up the other side.

We did this over and over until, on one particular crossing, my horse spooked at something as we came up the far bank. Before I knew it, I was airborne. I hit the ground hard - hard enough to make me nauseous. And where was Harold? Right there, camera in hand, capturing the moment.

He laughed so hard he could barely breathe and even put up

a marker at the spot, naming it Hai-good's Landing. If it hasn't been replaced by an official Texas Historical Marker by now, I'd be surprised.

I was so sore for the next few days I could barely move, but I didn't miss a single ride. And funny enough, after that fall, the ribs in the truck bed didn't seem to bother me as much. I like to think my back problems today trace right back to Haigood's Landing.

These days, most people think of camping as taking an RV to a park, but until you've done it red-neck style, you haven't really been camping. 



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## The North Texas Hill Country

Ask any native Texan for directions to the Hill Country of North Texas, and you might get somewhat of a puzzling look. Fortunately, despite living in the age of social media and cyber world touring websites, the North Texas Hill Country has remained one of our best kept secrets. At least so far that is.

Nestled along the Red River just east of Gainesville and continuing thru to Nocona, lies a stretch of Texas topography unlike any other. Well, except maybe that little stretch of country just west of Austin in and around

Fredricksburg. Which sadly has lost its innocence and has become a smaller version of "Grownup Disneyland."

I urge you to load up take a weekend drive this spring and enjoy the beauty and magic of The North Texas Hill Country. Feast on great foods and enjoy spectacular views while sipping on award- winning Texas wine. And best of, "The Hills are alive with the Sound of Music." Not the movie, but real Texas style music.

Be sure and check out the music schedule at 4R Ranch just north of St. Jo, and I'll see you there. 

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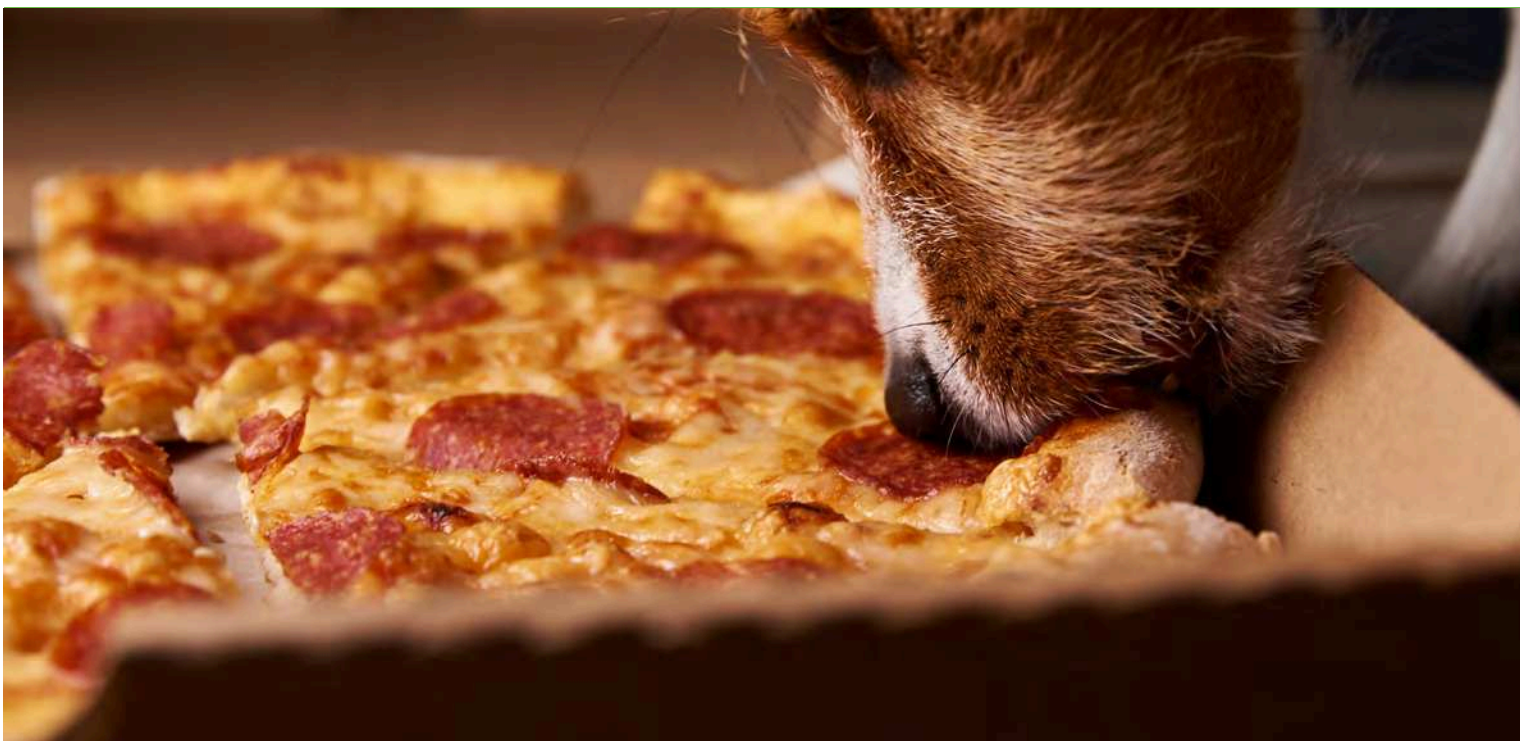
Fortunately, despite living in the age of social media and cyber world-touring websites, the North Texas Hill Country has remained one of our best kept secrets. At least so far, that is.  
(Photos provided by Dave Alexander)



# Farm Dogs & Table Scraps

## What's Safe and What's Not?

By Ann Asher



If you've got a farm dog, or any dog, really, you need to know what items can be toxic to them. (Courtesy photo)

Growing up on a farm, our dogs were tough. They roamed the pastures, slept under the barn, and ate just about anything they could get their paws on—whether we meant for them to or not. I'll admit, I never thought twice when one of our old cow dogs snatched a biscuit off the table or licked up a spill from the barn floor. I've even seen a dog steal a whole rib bone off a plate and trot off like he'd won the lottery. And somehow, they always seemed fine.

But here's the thing—just because they survived doesn't mean it was safe. For every farm dog that lucked out, there's another that wasn't so fortunate. Some human foods can be downright toxic to dogs, and a little bit of bad luck (or a smaller, more sensitive dog) can turn a harmless snack into an

emergency.

### Common toxic foods lying around the farmhouse

If you've got a farm dog—or any dog, really—you need to be aware of the dangers lurking in everyday foods. Some of the biggest culprits include:

**Chocolate** – The darker it is, the worse it is. Even a little can cause vomiting, seizures, or worse.

**Grapes & Raisins** – No one's exactly sure why, but they can cause kidney failure fast.

**Onions & Garlic** – In large enough amounts, these can destroy red blood cells, leading to anemia.

**Xylitol (Found in Sugar-Free Gum & Candy)** – This artificial sweetener can send a dog's blood sugar crashing and cause liver failure.

**Alcohol** – Even small amounts

can be deadly to dogs, affecting their nervous system much more than it does ours.

**Bones from Cooked Meat** – While not necessarily toxic, they can splinter and cause serious internal injuries.

**Macadamia Nuts** – These can lead to weakness, vomiting, and even paralysis in dogs.

### What to do if your dog eats something toxic


First, don't panic—but don't ignore it either. If you know your dog ate something dangerous, call your vet immediately. They can tell you whether to induce vomiting or if it's something that requires urgent care. If it's after hours, contact the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (888-426-4435) or the Pet Poison Helpline (855-764-7661).

Prevention is always the best medicine, so keep toxic foods out of reach. That might mean keeping the trash can secured, making sure kids don't slip the dog a treat under the table, or just being more mindful of what's left on the counter.

Our farm dogs might have been lucky, but luck isn't a great strategy when it comes to their health. A little awareness goes a long way in making sure they stay happy, healthy, and ready for the next day's work.

For more information ASPCA Animal Poison Control: [www.aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control](http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control)

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**215.18 ACRES | WICHITA COUNTY**



**SIMS FARM**

**\$2,395/AC**

Located west of Burkburnett and north of Iowa Park on the south and east side of FM 368. The property consists of approximately 145 acres of farmland with the balance being native mesquite pasture. The topography is level to sloping southeast. Amenities include a stock pond and barbed wire perimeter fence. No minerals are owned.

**150 ACRES | CLAY COUNTY**



**MATASKA RANCH**

**\$3,950/Ac**

Located 11 miles north of Henrietta, corner of N. Oliver and Mathews Rd. Good balance of open pasture and wooded land, 65 acre Klein grass field, 21 acre cultivated field, 64 acres of wooded native pasture, level to rolling topography, several high points offering impressive views or build sites, 2 stock ponds, one stocked bass, livestock pens, water well, electricity meter, fenced, cross fenced, willing to divide with a 50 acres minimum. Great all around ranch offering endless uses.

**300.14 ACRES | WICHITA COUNTY**



**EDSEL FARM**

**\$3,100/Ac**

The Edsel Farm is located less than a half mile north of US HWY 287. Excellent access with frontage on Huntington, Kiel and Wellington Lane. The land consists of 300.139 total acres, 165 acres is tillable farmland, balance being moderate to heavily wooded native pasture. There are partial cross fences, boundary is fenced in average condition. Surface water consists of three ponds, seasonal creek and East Fork Pond Creek, partial floodplain. Electricity and water appear available along Huntington and Kiel.

**63.09 ACRES | ARCHER COUNTY**

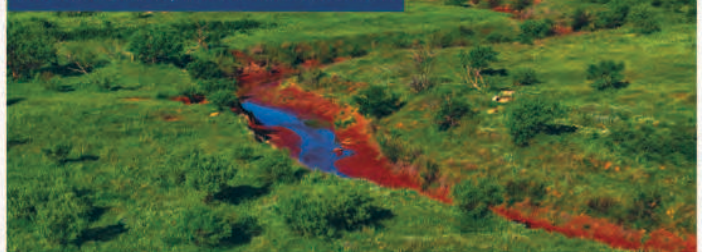


**BEAR DOG RANCH**

**\$6,736/Ac**

Located just east of Holliday, 10 minutes west of Wichita Falls. Turnkey hunting and recreational property with proven wildlife, or could be an ideal spot to build your dream home. The land is all wooded with mesquite, scattered cleared areas, level topography, one stock pond, fenced boundary, good interior road system, furnished cabin, deer blinds and feeders convey. Water available along frontage. One oil well along the west boundary, the seller does not own any minerals.

**470.76 ACRES | WICHITA COUNTY**



**WILDHORSE CREEK RANCH**

**\$1,675/Ac**

Reasonably priced combination ranch located 10 minutes west of Burkburnett, 2 miles south of the Red River. Asphalt road frontage on 3 sides, native pasture with moderate to heavy coverage of mesquite, scattered cleared areas, 61 acres of cultivation, Wildhorse Creek extends through the property, along with other seasonal creeks, rolling topography, 2 stock ponds, good hunting, electricity available. Oil production is on the property, the seller does not own any minerals. Owner Finance Available.

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- Old Man Place – 78.88 Acres – Clay Co - \$4,750/Acre
- Brixey Ranch – 119.39 Acres – Clay Co - \$4,900/Acre
- Maag Tract 3 – 19.45 Acres – Archer Co - \$8,483/Acre
- Maag Tract 4 – 19.32 Acres – Archer Co - \$8,540/Acre
- Decker Farms – 5.03 Acres – Archer Co - \$75,000

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# Don't Hunt Where You Cook

By Andy Anderson

I was about 13 years old, my sister 11 and my little brother nine or so. We lived in a small two-story home, typical small family farm and country living you would expect from such. The stair case started near the dining area next to the doorway to the kitchen.

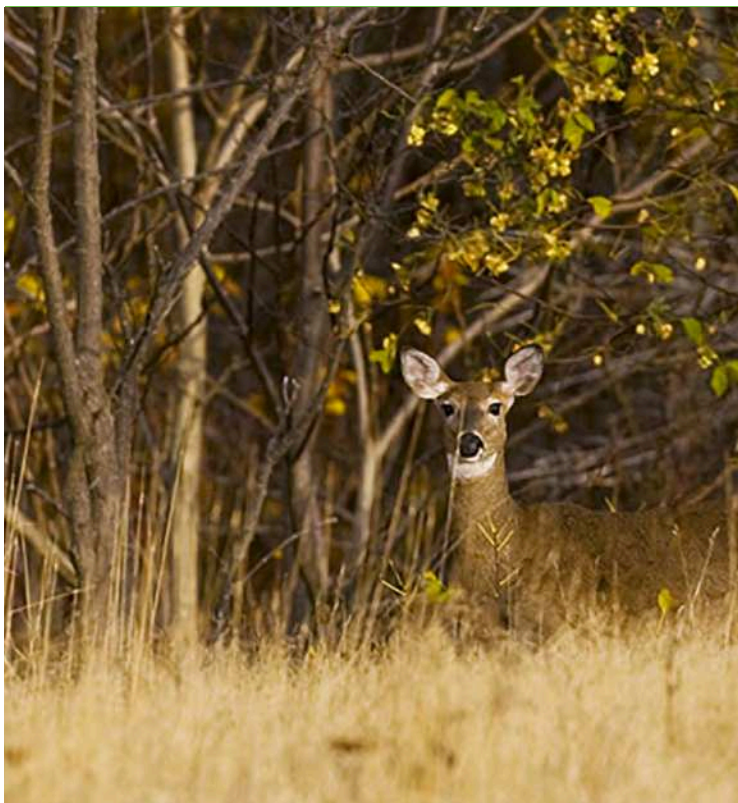
At the top of the stair case was a landing with a window that allowed you to see across the farm. About 275 yards from the window, across the creek was a deer feeder in a small clearing. You could sit up there and see deer coming and going most any day.

One cold evening, as my mom was cooking dinner, my siblings and I finished up homework and began setting the table. My dad had decided he was going to go hunting. But not in the deer stand; it was too cold for that, so he got himself a chair and sat right up there on that landing at the edge of the stairs.

The television was going, my sister and brother were at the table bickering at each other and Mom was yelling at us to stop fighting. It was a typical night really, nothing special. After all, we were all in the house, a place of security and comfort.

Mom was a great cook and had a way of making regular everyday food taste just the best, even Hamburger Helper, which was on the menu this evening. Every now and then I would holler up to Dad asking if he was seeing anything. "No, nothing yet," he'd say.

We rocked on, a typical evening in the Anderson household. My sister was setting the plates, my brother was placing the butter, bread and other condiments on the table and I was placing silverware on the table along with napkins. Mom announced dinner was ready as we were beginning to take our places.



(Courtesy photo)

Mom confirmed with Dad that he knew dinner was about ready. He acknowledged and said he would be right down.

It was beginning to get late, with just enough light outside to faintly see the feeder. Mom was getting ready to bring the skillet of food out and Dad could be heard putting his stuff away preparing to come down and eat.

We sat at a small round kitchen table, my sister on my left, my little brother on the right. My brother had just got a slice of bread and was putting butter on it. Mom announced dinner was coming out. As she was rounding the corner of the doorway carrying a piping hot iron skillet of Hamburger Helper...BOOM!

Without warning, Dad had fired a shot. The skillet of Hamburger Helper went flying, my brother

slung his buttered bread across the room and the knife went behind him. My sister and I tried to take cover and protect ourselves from the flying Hamburger Helper.

As the initial shock set in there was an eerie moment of silence, and for just a fleeting second, we all just remained still in disbelief of what just happened. Mom was standing there, mouth open, iron skillet still in hand, Hamburger Helper dripping from the pan onto the floor and table. We kids just stared at mom at what she would do next; our ears were ringing. My dad screamed out, breaking the silence "I got 'em!"

My mom said a few choice words as she turned around to head back to the kitchen. Hamburger Helper was falling from the ceiling, and down the walls. As I looked around, Dad was hurry-


ing down the stairs, clearly filled with an excitement not shared by everyone else. As he stood at the foot of the stairs taking it all in, Mom was in the kitchen sharing her opinion of his actions in a loud, colorful way that was filled with lots of adjectives.

Dad looked around and asked what happened. No sooner than the words left his mouth, Mom came out of the kitchen with her wooden spoon in hand pointing it right at him with absolute authority. As she lit into him, I noticed my brother's buttered bread stuck firmly on the wall and the knife on the other side of the room leaning perfectly from the floor to the wall, as if it were placed there intentionally.

Dad said he didn't have time to let us know he was about to shoot as the deer was moving fast across the field. After a few minutes of apologizing, Dad instructed me to get my things to help him recover the deer. Mom asked my brother and sister to start cleaning things up. No one dared argued or said a word; we just moved quietly into action as instructed.

As Dad and I loaded up in the truck to get the deer, he was pretty quiet. We retrieved the deer and discussed the amazing shot he made, avoiding his mistake and the pending wrath of my mom.

I think it was good for us to be out and away for a short time. As I entered the house, the smell of Hamburger Helper still lingered in the air. Mom had calmed down, prepared a new dinner and as we were all sitting around the table preparing to eat, my sister let out a snicker that erupted into full-on belly laughter by everyone.

Everyone learned a valuable lesson that night. Don't hunt where you cook. If you do, ya had best let the cook know! 



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# The GARDEN GUY

## Mexican Sunflower Showing Out Now

By Norman Winter | Horticulturist, Author, Speaker



Fiesta del Sol Mexican sunflowers bloom at the entrance to The Garden Guy's home. (Photos courtesy of Norman Winter)

Flaming orange flowers always catch my eye and the old-fashioned Mexican sunflower is still one of the best. They will probably catch your eye as well wherever you see them in North Texas or Oklahoma. There needs

to be a revival with this plant, and you can help light the fire with a pack or two of seeds.

I belong to some Facebook groups dedicated to butterflies and pollinators and it appears the Mexican sunflowers are bringing

them in across the country. It really did my heart good to see so many people growing this flower that I have not even hardly thought about since Fiesta del Sol was chosen as an All-America Selections winner in 2000, 25 years ago.

The Mexican Sunflower is known botanically as *Tithonia rotundifolia* and is indeed from Mexico and South America. Fiesta del Sol is a truly compact version that did very well in our trials with Mississippi State University and at

my home too. At Mississippi State we had it planted with the Mexican bush sage, *Salvia leucantha* and the large African marigolds which are really from Mexico too.

So, after I started watching the reports and photos with butterflies, I decided to scope out plants and see how the pollinators in Georgia liked them. It seems just about almost every species of butterflies love this flower as do bees and hummingbirds. No doubt farms and ranches in Texas and Oklahoma always need more pollinators and added beauty too.

I like the combinations I have been seeing as well. There were partnerships with the icy blue *Evolvulus* flowers and others with the native mistflowers, *Conoclinium greggii*, which is also a butterfly magnet and native to Texas. I promise if you have success with the old-fashioned tall zinnia, you will find success with the Mexican sunflower or *Tithonia*.

It seems they are not as prevalent at the garden center as they used to-be but I mentioned seeds and those are always there, which means we can sow them much like a zinnia. Do plan on giving your finished transplants plenty of room. Crowded conditions with poor air circulation usually-leads to unhappiness, much like it does with every other plant.

As mentioned, *Fiesta del Sol* will reach 2 to 3 feet tall. Torch is a 6-foot plus monster that I still love. It's fun shooting photos of butterflies looking up to flowers on plants taller than you. Sundance is a beautiful variety in name and color and is touted as reaching 4 feet tall. Most gardeners, while they say they love it will also say it too, gets much taller. Goldfinger is reported as compact as is a stunning mix called *Arcadian Blend*.

Your garden center will most likely have a variety of them for planting this spring. Prepare beds by incorporating 3 to 4-inches of organic matter and 2 pounds of a slow release 12-6-6 fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed space. Di-



This Ruby-throated hummingbird has placed the Mexican sunflower high on the menu.

rect-seed or set out transplants that have little to no color showing.

Thin the seedlings to the correct spacing as recommended for your variety for the vigorous growth that is about to occur. The largest ones I have been watching are 3 to 4 feet wide so you may really want a little wider spacing. Mulch when the seedlings are large enough, or after setting out transplants. Side-dress the young

plants in six to eight weeks with light applications of fertilizer.

The Mexican sunflower looks like the quintessential North Texas cottage garden flower especially when partnered with blue salvias and zinnias. The *Fiesta del Sol* variety would also excel artistically as the thriller plant in designer mixed containers.

Whether you choose a named variety or go generic you can

expect Monarchs, Swallowtails, Sulphurs and even the intricate Hairstreaks. You will also have hummingbirds that will make the garden a spectacle of nature. You will be asking yourself how you could have ever forgotten this beloved flower.

Follow me on my Facebook page, @NormanWinterTheGardenGuy for more photos and garden inspiration.



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By Jelly McClellan

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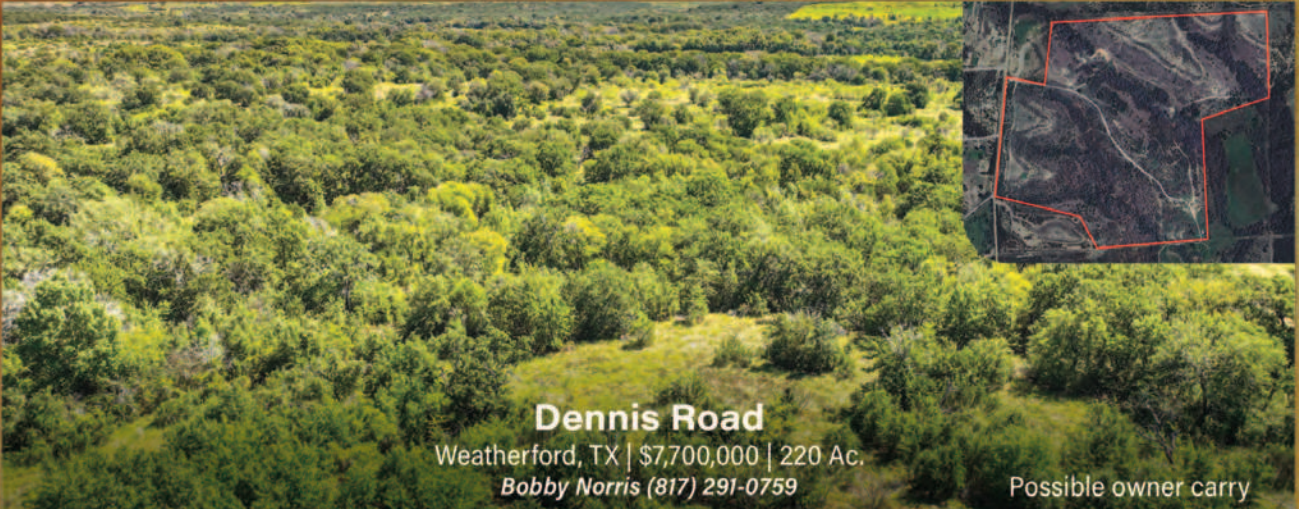
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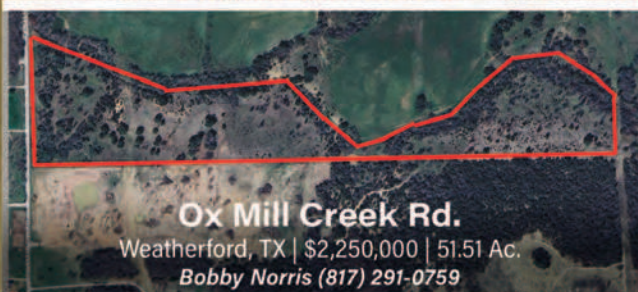


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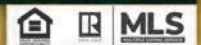


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