



Ag News

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Heath Lusty, BS, MS
County Agent Agriculture & Natural Resources.

35th Annual TSCRA Trade Show

Source: *CattleNetwork.com*

More than 200 exhibitors will showcase their products and services to cattle producers across the state at the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA) 35th Annual Trade Show during the cattle raiser convention March 19-21 in Ft Worth.

"The TSCRA Trade Show is all about making connections between buyers and sellers, between companies and clients, and most of all between friends," TSCRA President Dave Scott said. "Our trade show is one of the premier agricultural trade shows in the Southwest. At least 80 percent of our exhibitors come back every year to reach our members. They come ready to do business with cattle raisers."

Exhibitors will be on-hand at the Trade Show to showcase the latest in ranch equipment and management tools, western wear and jewelry. Attendees can also learn more about different products and services including animal health products, animal identification, herd management, real estate, veterinary services, seed products and much much more.

"The TSCRA Trade Show is one of the best shows we attend each year," said returning exhibitor Jim Calhoun with Calhoun Custom Leather. "It is a great place to network and to talk face-to-face with cattle producers about our latest products."

Trade show hours will be from noon to 6 p.m. on March 19 and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on March 20. For more information visit www.texascattleraisers.org/convention.

The Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association is a 133-year-old trade organization. As the largest livestock association in Texas, TSCRA represents more than 15,000 beef cattle produc-

ers, ranching families and businesses who manage approximately 4 million head of cattle on 51.5 million acres of range and pasture land, primarily in Texas and Oklahoma. TSCRA provides law enforcement and livestock inspection services, legislative and regulatory advocacy, industry news and information, insurance services and educational opportunities for its members and the industry.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 2/16 Prescribed Burn Workshop (Part 1)
Jacksboro
- 2/23 Prescribed Burn Workshop (Part 2)
Jacksboro
- 3/11-3/12 Wichita Falls Ranch & Farm Expo
Wichita Falls
- 3/18-3/20 TSCRA Annual Convention
Ft Worth
- 3/24 Hay, Beef, & Forage Day
Graham

TCEQ completes study on air emissions in Barnett Shale



The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has announced the results of its study of air quality in the Barnett Shale area of North Texas. A total of 94 oil and gas monitoring sites were surveyed. At a majority of the monitoring sites, chemicals were either not detected or were detected below levels of health concern. However, two monitoring sites had relatively high

levels of benzene. In addition, 19 monitoring sites registered benzene concentrations higher than the TCEQ would like to see.

The study analyzed more than a hundred volatile organic compounds (VOCs), but mainly focused on benzene, which is a human carcinogen. Although the results are complex, it is clear that gas production facilities can, and in some cases do, emit contaminants in amounts that could be deemed unsafe for life-time (70 years) or long-term exposure. However, at only two monitoring sites were benzene levels found that would trigger immediate actions to reduce emissions.

At one monitoring site, the Targa North Texas LP Bryan Compressor Station (monitoring site 8), instantaneous benzene samples were collected at levels up to 1,100 parts per billion (ppb) approximately 200 yards from two residences. Although these levels are less than the lowest levels shown to cause adverse health effects in short-term human and animal studies, the levels are of potential concern due to their contribution to long-term cumulative exposure levels. The TCEQ provided the monitoring results to Targa and the company reported that repairs had been completed. In testing done the week of Jan. 18, VOC levels were below short-term effects screening levels (ESLs), and benzene was at normal background levels, about 0.25 ppb.

In another measurement at a Devon Energy natural gas well (monitoring site 7), a sample was collected with a benzene concentration of 15,000 ppb. Although this sample was collected at the well-head and the general public would not be expected to be exposed to these levels, it clearly demonstrates that gas operations can contribute to benzene concentrations in ambient air. The TCEQ provided the monitoring results to Devon and the company reported that repairs had been completed. Like monitoring site 8, testing done the week of Jan. 18 showed VOC levels at the well-head and at the fence line were below short-term effects screening levels, and benzene was at normal background levels, about 0.25 ppb.

The study also found elevated levels of other VOCs, including carbon disulfide, ethane, 1,2-dibromoethane, and isopentane, but none at levels that would be expected to cause adverse health effects. In addition, several other compounds that can cause odors were detected.

NEXT STEPS:

- The TCEQ has already instituted new complaint and investigation guidelines for oil and gas production areas that will see citizen complaints investigated within 12 hours. Investigations can result in

enforcement actions against entities responsible for excessive emissions.

- Two new long-term auto-GC monitors (these monitors perform continuous, near-real-time VOC monitoring) will be installed at DISH and Eagle Mountain Lake to get a better understanding of long-term ambient air conditions, and to help assess the effectiveness of the TCEQ's actions, and to provide information on how to focus future efforts.

- The TCEQ will continue reconnaissance investigations in the area, using both ground and air-based monitoring assets, and conduct a special emissions inventory of sources including an actual gas analysis from each site.

- The TCEQ will investigate sources for proper permit authorizations and require testing of sites with continued excessive emissions.

- The TCEQ has undertaken a review of permitting rules that apply to oil and gas operations. The review will ensure that authorizations and permits are enforceable and protective of public health, and that they properly regulate all operations located at an oil and gas site.

The TCEQ will continue to provide compliance assistance to small operators, focused initially on condensate producers.

BACKGROUND OF SURVEY:

The TCEQ's mobile monitoring organization conducted three surveys, one each in August, October, and November 2009 in Denton, Wise, Parker, Hood, Johnson and Tarrant counties. The surveys measured air emissions around a wide variety of natural gas and natural gas-related production facilities.

Monitoring staff made every effort to collect emissions measurements downwind of the sources, moving around to stay in the plume where emissions would be most concentrated. Monitoring staff used hand-held VOC monitors, gas chromatographic monitors mounted in specialized TCEQ vehicles, infrared cameras that detect VOC emissions invisible to the naked eye, and instantaneous VOC canisters that take samples that are later analyzed in the laboratory with high levels of accuracy.

Another survey is scheduled for the same area during the spring.

MORE INFORMATION AND DATA:

More information and data from this study, including the toxicology department memo and the monitoring report, are posted on the [TCEQ's Barnett Shale Web site](#).

OTHER SURVEYS:

In December, the TCEQ conducted an air monitoring survey around 126 gas production sites in the city of Fort Worth. This monitoring survey found no levels of concern for any compounds. This survey was unrelated to the larger Barnett Shale study.

Options vary when marketing cattle

Source: *Country World*



Livestock producers have many options when it comes to selling cattle, but Texas AgriLife Extension Beef Cattle Specialist Jason Cleere suggests that producers start at the beginning, by producing a good animal. "You don't have a lot of options if you don't first produce a quality animal," he said. "Once you get a good animal, then you can look at the next step."

That next step is marketing, and producers today are faced with an array of choices when it comes time to sell. The local auction barn is always an option, but producers can also sell their animals directly from their farm or ranch, or through video or Internet marketing. They can retain ownership all the way through the feedyard, or they can grow cattle for a specific consumer market -- such as natural, organic or grassfed beef.

Even with all the new options, the local livestock auction barn is the most convenient and popular way for producers to sell cattle, Cleere said. "You get paid the same day you take the cattle to the auction," Cleere said. "The marketing is done right there. You will get paid for the cattle. The people at the auction barn work for you. There is a commission charge, but they are doing the marketing for you. "One of the drawbacks might be that you don't get fully paid for the genetics of your cows, and you may not be utilizing the benefits you get from high-marbling bulls."

Cleere said that those producers might want to look at direct sales, which means the buyer buys the animals directly off the farm or ranch. That might mean a better price for higher-quality animals, but the producer has to handle the marketing aspect. "You generally have to sell truckload lots," he said. "You have to be big enough to sell that many animals. Plus, you have to collect the money yourself. It might take longer than it would at the auction barn."

With co-mingled sales, producers sell their cattle along with other pre-sorted cattle in order to put together a bigger truckload of cattle. "Most are tied to preconditioning calves," Cleere said. "They are brought in, evaluated, weighed and sold as part of a lot. You get paid for that, and you can get paid a premium. The main thing is to make sure you have somebody sorting the cattle that knows how to sort cattle. If you have good cattle and they get mixed in with bad cattle, you're going to lose money."

Sellers who choose to retain ownership of the animal all the way through the feedyard process will get paid for the animal's genetics and meat quality, but the money will be tied up for a longer time, Cleere said.

"Of course, the most recent buzz you hear today is for natural or

organic meat," Cleere said. "That's going to include natural or organic beef, grown with no antibiotics or artificial hormones. A part of the consumer market believes this kind of beef is better for you. Science says it's not, but there is that perception out there and people who believe it are willing to pay two or three times as much as they will for conventional beef." Cleere said the flip side of the higher prices includes higher input costs and more paperwork in order to be certified organic, natural or grassfed.

"I get a lot of people who ask me for advice on growing organic or grassfed beef and the first thing I ask them is how they are going to market their beef," he said. "Most of them have never thought of that, but they need to have a marketing plan first. "They need to figure the cost of production and marketing against the value in the marketplace. They may find that they're better off raising cattle in the conventional way. It may not be feasible for everyone who wants to do it."

Despite the new means of marketing that have opened, Cleere said most producers are selling cattle in the traditional manner, by taking them to local livestock barn. "In the grand scheme of things, most people are going through the traditional channels of production and marketing," he said. "They are producing a good product. If you want to believe the beef that's marketed as organic, natural or grassfed is better, that's fine. But there's really no difference in the health benefits between the traditional and the natural or grassfed."

What is Earth-Kind Landscaping?

Earth-Kind Landscaping uses research-proven techniques to provide maximum garden and landscape enjoyment while preserving and protecting the environment. The objective of Earth-Kind Landscaping is to combine the best of organic and traditional gardening and landscaping principles to create a horticultural system based on real world effectiveness and environmental responsibility. Earth-Kind Landscaping Encourages:

[Landscape Water conservation](#)

[Reduction of fertilizer and pesticide use](#)

[Landscaping for energy conservation](#)

[Reduction of landscape wastes entering landfills](#)

Individuals using Earth-Kind landscaping principles and practices can create beautiful, easy-care landscapes, while conserving and protecting natural resources and the environment. For more information, please visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/>.

A Systematic Approach To Bull Buying

By Dr. Scott P. Greiner, *Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech*



With the onset of bull buying season, having a systematic approach to finding and identifying the “right” bull is imperative. Bull selection is the most critical factor for genetic improvement in cow-calf herds, as the influence of the bull impacts

both the immediate calf crop as well as future calf crops through the performance (and costs) of his daughters. Consequently, bull selection warrants careful planning and preparation, well in advance of any sale or visit from an AI representative. Consider the following steps to assist in the bull-buying process:

1. Identify Herd Goals- Herd goals serve as the foundation for sire selection and provide guidance as to traits with the most relevance. Defining the production and marketing system, along with management strategies and environment are key factors that warrant consideration:

- * Will the bull be used on heifers, mature cows, or both?
- * Will replacement females be retained in the herd?
- * How will the calf crop be marketed (at weaning?, back-grounded?, retained ownership? sell females?)
- * What are the labor and management resources available?
- * What are the feed resources and environmental conditions of the operation?

2. Assess Herd Strengths and Weaknesses- Fundamental records are necessary to identify herd strengths and weaknesses. Basic performance parameters such as calving percentage, weaning percentage, weaning weights, sale weights, carcass merit, feed usage, etc. are necessary to serve as the basis for assessing areas of strength and those needing attention.

3. Establish Selection Priorities- Concentrate on those factors which stand to have the largest impact on profitability. Remember that income is derived from performance (sale weight, % calf crop weaned, carcass merit, etc.). Performance is a function of both genetics and environment/management. Superior genetics can be negated by poor management, which emphasizes the importance of separating the impact of management (nutrition, health program) from that of genetics when specific priorities for the herd are established. Considering both the genetic and management influences on various traits is important. Focus on the handful of priority traits rather than attempting to change many traits simultaneously. Establishing the few traits to focus on is the key factor.

4. Utilize Selection Tools- Once selection priorities have been established through close examination of herd goals and current status, a number of useful tools are at the disposal of beef producers to assist in making genetic improvement. Genetic differences across breeds have been well established, and utilization of different breeds in a complimentary fashion through structured crossbreeding plans provides the opportunity for improvement

in multiple traits. Most importantly, heterosis attained through crossbreeding has been shown to have significant favorable impacts on traits such as reproductive efficiency and cow longevity which are critical for herd profitability. The limited ability to select for reproductive traits in the form of EPDs further emphasizes the importance of capturing the value of heterosis.

EPDs are available for many traits of economic importance. The introduction of economic indexes which combine several related traits and their economic values into one EPD are available to assist with simultaneous improvement in multiple traits which impact areas such as carcass merit and post-weaning profit. Again, with the large number of EPD tools available, the critical step is to determine the EPDs which are most important and establish benchmarks relative to each.

5. Establish Benchmarks- Several tools can be utilized to assist in the determination of EPD specifications. EPD values for current and past sires can be used as benchmarks. With these benchmarks, EPD specifications can be set to reflect the desired increase or moderation in performance for a particular trait. As an example, establishing a benchmark for milk EPD can be determined through the relationship between previous sires' genetics for milk and the performance of his daughters in the herd.

6. Find Source- With the above defined, we can now begin to look at individual bulls. There are many sources of bulls that warrant consideration- production sales, test stations, and private treaty sales. Of critical importance is that the bull be from a reputable source which will stand behind their product. It may be necessary to look at several sources in order to find the correct bull.

7. Do Your Homework- The first step to doing so is to evaluate the sale catalog, performance pedigree, and data. By examination of the bull's performance record, determine which bulls meet the EPD and other specifications that have been established (and likewise eliminate those that do not meet the specifications). Be prepared to make trade-offs, as the perfect record may not be attainable. Do not be surprised or alarmed when the bulls you have highlighted appear scattered throughout the sale order. Remember to stick to the selection criteria and qualifications/specifications that have been established. All this can and should be accomplished prior to departing for any sale.

8. Take a Look- Once the list has been narrowed to only bulls which meet the criteria, these bulls can be further evaluated and selection refined. Having a list of suitable bulls prior to arrival at the auction or farm will not only save time, but also assist in making sure the right bull for the situation is purchased. Upon narrowing the potential candidates on paper, the bulls can be evaluated for suitability of phenotypic traits and the potential candidate list shortened even further. Not all relevant traits have EPDs (examples include disposition, foot soundness, fleshing ability, etc.), and therefore must be evaluated visually.

9. Make a Sound Investment- For many cow calf producers, purchasing a new bull is a relatively infrequent occurrence. This emphasizes the importance of selecting the right bull, particularly in single sire herds. The value of the right bull cannot be underestimated. Investments in good genetics will pay dividends both short and long-term through the influence the bull has on each calf crop as well as his daughters that are retained in the herd.

10. Manage the New Bull Properly- Of equal importance is the care and management of the newly acquired bull. Proper management and nutrition are essential for the bull to perform satisfactorily during the breeding season. With most new herd sires purchased as yearling bulls- management prior to, during, and after the first breeding season is particularly important. Plan ahead by acquiring a new yearling bull at least 60 to 90 prior to the breeding season so that ample time is available to allow for adjustment to a new environment, commingling with other bulls, and getting the bull in proper breeding body condition.

Cattle Feeding: Profitable Forage Management Strategies *Source: CattleNetwork.com*



It's okay if your cost of production goes up, claims Texas AgriLife Extension Forage Specialist Larry Redmon, as long as your profit margin increases accordingly. However, too many producers are seeing their profits decline or disappear.

At a 2010 Cattle Industry Convention Cattlemen's College® session, Redmon said a primary reason for reduced profitability is that many ranches are overstocked. "If a rancher is feeding hay in July, it's not a good sign. But I see that happening, particularly in drought-stricken areas," Redmon said. "I would argue that the most important aspect of a forage-based livestock operation is stocking r a t e ."

According to Redmon, one of the reasons that a ranch might be overstocked is increased cattle size. A rancher might be grazing the same number of cattle that Granddad grazed on the same place, but today's cattle are bigger and require more forage than smaller cattle o f t h e p a s t .

Another reason could be that the ranch may be producing less forage due to a lack of soil fertility. This is often true for "improved" grass pastures, Redmon explained. Bermuda grass, for example, was developed to produce a significant volume of forage in response to adequate fertilization. However, as a result of higher fertilizer costs, producers might be using less fertilizer or foregoing fertilization altogether. "A soil test will tell you what you need. Without a soil test, you may under-apply nutrients that are lacking, or you may

over-apply nutrients and waste money," Redmon stated. "And always weigh the cost and benefit. Make sure fertilization will pay."

Redmon said producers may want to consider seeding pastures to alternative forage species that don't require high levels of fertilization. They may not produce the same volume of forage, but input costs will be much lower. Another option for some producers may be to return pastures to native grasses that don't require any fertilization after establishment.

Another reason why ranches may be overstocked is that less grazeable forage is available due to encroachment of weeds and brush. Redmon advised producers to implement control programs noting that such programs still are affordable and cost-effective.

Reminding producers of the adverse effects of overstocking, Redmon said brush and unpalatable species will increase, dominating the plant community, while desirable forage plants decline. Environmental quality is adversely affected, too, as a result of increased rain run-off from severely overgrazed and denuded pastures. Overstocking also reduces drought resistance of range and pasture p l a n t s .

"If you stock your ranch according to the amount of forage produced from average precipitation, you will be overstocked," Redmon stated. "If you stock at 75% of average carrying capacity and graze 40% to 50% of standing forage, you can withstand fluctuations in annual precipitation — except during periods of prolonged drought. "When that happens, it's often wise to consider selling some cattle or moving cattle to someplace where there is adequate grazing. Otherwise, you end up hurting future forage production, and animal performance is adversely affected unless you provide costly supplemental feed."



Free "Ag in Uncertain Times" webinar series to remain available online *Source: TSCRA*



Several hundred people across the nation participated in 17 live online interactive seminars in 2009 on a variety of topics under the theme of "Ag in Uncertain Times." For those who weren't able to participate, or those who would like a refresher, the complete series of webinars and supporting materials will remain available online indefinitely, free of charge. The entire series can be found at <http://www.farmmanagement.org/aginuncertaintimes/>.

John Nelson, an educator with the Washington State University Center for Risk Management Education, encourages both individuals and agriculture-related organizations to take advantage of their free online availability. "We'd really like to see individuals and farm organizations download sessions on topics relevant to them, burn them to disk, and show them at meetings of commodity groups, local granges and other organizations, and share them widely," says Nelson. "Additionally, you'll find numerous invaluable tools in the accompanying Wiki, including information on how to incorporate the information into presentations, and it's all there for the taking."

Jon Newkirk, director of the WSU Center for Risk Management Education in Spokane, says the series offers a wealth of information and tools for those involved in producing food. "We were able to bring together a lineup of presenters with incredible skills and knowledge to address issues facing ag producers in this difficult economy," says Newkirk. "The information is both timely and timeless, and includes the video, audio, presentations, and slides of every presenter."

The series of 90-minute sessions was designed to provide practical information for agricultural producers and other professionals involved with agriculture. It was put together and presented by the Western Extension Committee, an organization of Extension economists from 13 western states, Guam and other Pacific Islands.

Topics covered in each monthly series include operating in the face of uncertain credit, operating in the face of uncertain markets, families facing uncertainty in agriculture, operating in risky environments, and managing ag enterprises in uncertain times. More information and the entire series of webinars are available for viewing and download at <http://www.farmmanagement.org/aginuncertaintimes/>.

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Update on equine piroplasmosis disease investigation *Source: TAHC*

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) continues to investigate the spread of equine piroplasmosis from a South Texas ranch, which was first detected in October 2009. Equine piroplasmosis is a tick-borne protozoal infection of horses. At least one species of tick, *Amblyomma cajennense* has proven capable of transmitting the blood parasite. This species of tick is endemic to South Texas and several other southern states. Further research is underway to determine if there are other tick species capable of transmitting the parasite. The disease may also be spread between horses by unsafe animal husbandry practices such as sharing needles or equipment that is contaminated with blood.

While piroplasmosis can be a fatal disease, many horses may display vague signs of illness, such as fever, no appetite or jaundice. Horse owners are advised to consult a private veterinarian to discuss tick control, management practices, or any concerns about illness. Several states have imposed interstate movement restrictions on horses from Texas, so owners and veterinarians are urged to call the state of destination before moving horses.

"TAHC field personnel are still investigating how many animals may have been exposed or infected with this disease," said Dr. Dee Ellis, Texas' state veterinarian and executive director of the Texas Animal Health Commission, the state's livestock and poultry health regulatory agency. "Twenty-two percent of the 1,728 horses that have been tested are positive," he said. In almost every case, the positive horses disclosed were directly traced to the index ranch or had contact with positive horses from the ranch. Ellis added that because of that fact, there does not appear to be a geographic correlation to the presence of the disease, but rather a correlation to exposure with positive horses. "This is not a widespread south Texas outbreak," Ellis went on to state.

The TAHC and USDA officials continue to trace, identify and test animals on a prioritized basis. The priorities include:

- 1) "direct traces" of horses that lived on the ranch,
- 2) "dangerous contacts" which are horses that visited the ranch, or whose dam was infected, and
- 3) "cohorts" which are horses that have lived with positive animals. At this time, horses living on premises adjacent to the index ranch are being tested on a voluntary basis only, since this does not appear to be a geographic outbreak.

In January, TAHC hosted a meeting with 32 representatives from 20 Texas equine industry groups to discuss the status of piroplasmosis in the state. Risk procedures for positive and exposed horses were discussed, and input sought on how the state should further respond in terms of surveillance, movement requirements, and identification of positive horses. If you would like to receive information from the Texas Animal Health Commission, please contact the public information office at 1-800-550-8242, ext. 734 or leisa.fletcher@tahc.state.tx.us.