

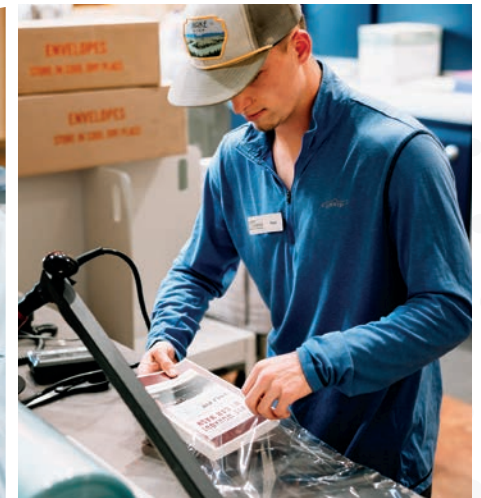
AGRILEADER

Volume 21 Issue 1, Fall 2021



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Letter From The Editors

Howdy!

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of the AgriLeader. We hope that as you read, it is worth your while to learn about new businesses to support and some interesting things happening around campus.

As a team, we decided early on to try and highlight as many small businesses as possible. It was easy to see that highlighting businesses was important to the team, as we saw the ups and downs they faced throughout the shutdown. We see the importance of business and hope you do too, which is why the majority of stories tie into a business.

With the push to make informed decisions and purchasing from small businesses rather than billion-dollar companies, we wanted to play a part in showcasing the owners and behind-the-scenes of businesses throughout the area.



In this, we have bookmarks indicating two different types of stories. To find longer stories, look for maroon bookmarks. For shorter stories, stick to the brown. These indicate feature and spotlight pieces respectively.

Happy reading, we hope you find some potential swaps to your normal purchases and learn more about what happens around campus!

Sincerely,
Your Fall 2021 Editorial Team

WHAT'S INSIDE

Volume 21 Issue 1, Fall 2021



10

Newfound Success for the Aggie Anglers Promises a Bright Future

By: Braedon Metzgar

14

Operations Collide to Educate

By: Harley Sargent

16

From Backdrop to Business

By: Kate James

20

A Modern Day Look Into Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

By: Amy Neal

24

Honey, Homesteading and Heaven

By: Cheyenne Byrer

Creative. Dreamer. Learner. Thinker.

By: Emily Grace Myers

29

Milking it For All it's Worth

By: Kayla Seale

32

Evolving Entrepreneurs

By: Kennedy Dorskocil

36

Sinkule is On The Rise!

By: Kennedy Dorskocil

39

**Behind The Scenes: Campus
Communications**

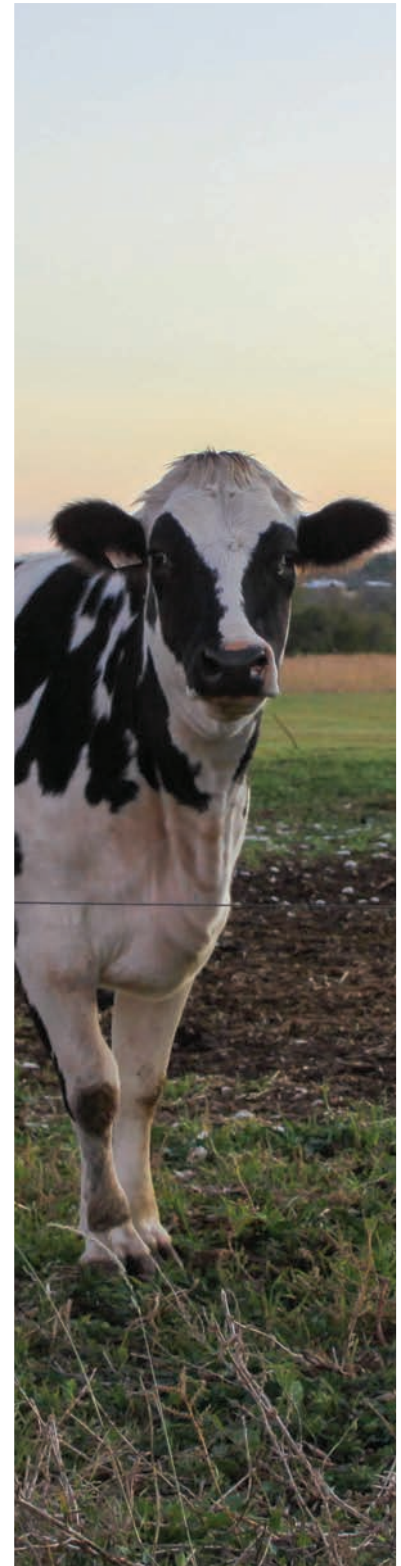
By: Ryan Davis

42

Transfer Students are Aggies Too

By: Benjamin Whitaker

45



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Capturing The Special Moments

By: Kennedy Duskocil

“When I wanted to buy my camera to start my business, I really didn’t have the money for it, I bought it anyway.”

Lauren Provost, a senior agricultural communications and journalism student was simply on the hunt to build her portfolio when she started a photography business in 2019. She invested in a camera and started taking pictures for friends.

“NEVER GIVE UP AND UNDERSTAND THERE’S A LOT OF ASPECTS TO WHATEVER YOU’RE DOING.”

I booked my first client in 2019 and had no idea how to navigate my business and on top of that I was navigating a pandemic, according to Provost. There were many things I learned, but things like this was experience no one was going to teach me.

“I really consider myself to be my biggest influence. I try not to look at others for inspiration, because I’m running my own race and it shouldn’t be compared to others,” Provost said.

From the ground up, Lauren created Lauren Provost Photography, it started as a way to build a portfolio for school and has now grown into a creative outlet to capture memories and grow a business.

“I drove myself to be better each day because I had to make money with my camera,” Provost said. “My situation was very sink or swim, I had



invested all my finances into purchasing my camera.”

Provost strives for her work to be individual and unique. She gives a majority of her growth credit to her focusing on her own work and how to grow it in her own creative mindset.

“It was not the right timing when I started my business,” Provost said. “I was, however, super determined.”

Provost worked through the pandemic to build her business and provide an income for herself, she is now a full-time photographer and student. She focuses her photography on lifestyle and portraits but has goals of transitioning into weddings for the future.

“Never give up and understand there’s a lot of aspects to whatever you’re doing,” Provost said. “Every step of the way you’re learning and building more, and that’s going to make your business and you better.”



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Photo by Braedon Metzgar

Newfound success for the Aggie Anglers promises a bright future

By: Braedon Metzgar

Established in 2004, the Aggie Anglers became an official club at Texas A&M University that began competing in bass fishing tournaments around the country. It is no surprise that at a top school in the state of Texas, a club would form dedicated to the sport of bass fishing. The Aggie Anglers brought home two national championship titles in 2007 and 2015. Currently, the club averages around 40 members each year, with hopes to continue to grow that number. Over the years, members and officers have worked hard to cultivate the club and recruit more skilled anglers who can help the team grow and continue to find success in competitive fishing. The ultimate goal as a club is to bring home more national championship titles, as well as consistently finish toward the top in school-of-the-year rankings.

Placing in a tournament is determined by the total weight of your five biggest bass. Some lakes have different rules, but usually in order to weigh in a bass it must be 14 inches in length or longer, depending on what species the lake has to offer.

Anglers are allowed to weigh in largemouth, spotted and smallmouth bass. Collegiate bass fishing offers several different trails to compete in, those being Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS), Major League Fishing (MLF), and Collegiate Bass Fishing Series. Many schools will compete in all three trails, while some will opt to only compete in BASS, the most popular trail offered. Teams within a club are made up by the total weight of your five biggest bass. Some lakes have different rules, but usually in order to weigh in a bass it must be 14 inches in length or longer, depending on what species the lake has to offer. Anglers are allowed to weigh in largemouth, spotted and smallmouth bass. Collegiate bass fishing offers several different trails to compete in, those being Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS), Major League Fishing (MLF), and Collegiate Bass Fishing Series. Many schools will compete in all three trails, while some will opt to only compete in BASS, the most popular trail offered. Teams within a club are made up of two anglers fishing out of the same boat. Clubs are



Photo by Braedon Metzgar

Club member Braedon Metzgar holds up his personal best largemouth bass.

allowed to send as many teams as they would like to a tournament. Larger clubs often times will send more than 10 boats, while smaller clubs may only send one or two boats. These tournament trails typically have four to five stops at different lakes per division throughout the country.

Divisions are somewhat different for each trail, but are typically broken up into central, northern, southeastern, southern and western conferences. The ultimate goal for every team is to qualify for the national championship. In order to qualify, you must finish in the top 10 percent at any given tournament. On average that number could range from the top 10-25 teams depending on how many total teams compete.

Additionally, BASS offers collegiate anglers the chance to compete in the Bassmaster Classic, which is the equivalent of the Super Bowl in bass fishing. At the end of the year, BASS takes the top eight anglers, usually being the top four teams, and puts on a knockout bracket. Each angler will fish by themselves against one other

angler. Whoever has the most weight at the end of the day advances until a winner is crowned. The winner then has the opportunity to fish in the Bassmaster Classic the following year for a chance at \$300,000.

The Texas A&M Aggie Anglers host club meetings to discuss dates and lake locations for club tournaments and events planned for the club this year. Each year they put on a club tournament trail at various lakes across Texas. This gives club members the opportunity to compete in a smaller, friendly but competitive trail.

“Throughout my time within the Aggie Anglers, I have always been focused on bettering myself as an angler and participating in as many team events as I can possible” said Grant Burroughs, 2022 President of the Aggie Anglers. “However, after taking a higher leadership role within the club, I can’t help but want to grow to learn and interact with more members to understand what exactly they hope to achieve in the club. Whether it be success in fishing tournaments or just meeting a group of guys to spend your time in



Photo courtesy of Brian Arabic

Club member and social media director Brian Arabic weighs in smallmouth bass during a BASS event.



Photo courtesy of Grant Burroughs

“Aggie Anglers Vice President Grant Burroughs holds up one of his key fish to victory during a club tournament on Lake Fayette.”

Aggieland with, I hope to cater to every member in whatever way possible. I see tremendous growth for this team in the future and see myself as meeting fellow anglers who share the love for the sport!”

With many veteran club members graduating over the past couple semesters, the Aggie Anglers are full of new members who are eager to help grow this club and compete for a school of the year and national championship title. “High school anglers should come to Texas A&M to fish, because we are one of the only two schools that offer a world class education and a world class fishing team.” said member and social media director Brian Arabie. “Along with this, with some of the changes that are coming to the team, we will be able to assist the development of anglers.”

Young men and women across the country have the opportunity to attend one of the top schools in the country, as well as find a welcoming group of guys in the Aggie Anglers that are determined to have a successful team.

“The Aggie Anglers have big goals for the club over the next five years.” Arabie said, “Our goals

are 1. To begin to assist our anglers more in travel expenses. 2. Begin to compete on the national stage again. 3. Draw more extremely good high school anglers to the program to once again compete in and win national championships.”

A huge part of a collegiate level teams’ success begins with recruiting. Having anglers choose to come to Texas A&M to be on the fishing team is a great step toward a successful future. With the sport of bass fishing growing at a rapid pace, many young individuals are becoming more and more inspired each and every day to get out there and compete.

To anyone out there looking to take their bass fishing journey to the next step, the Aggie Anglers offer a great club experience while getting to meet other men and women who are passionate about the sport of bass fishing.

Some members want to join the club as a casual angler who enjoys bass fishing when they have the time, while others join to compete on a collegiate level at different lakes across the country. Regardless of your level of experience in bass fishing, the Aggie Anglers has a place for anybody who loves the outdoors and wants to meet other likeminded individuals.



Photo by Braedon Metzgar

“Weigh in for Major League Fishing College Series on Lake Somerville.”

Connecting with Shannon Norris, PhD

By: Graysie Myers

Shannon Norris, PhD, grew up on a beef cattle ranch in Southwest New Mexico. Agriculture runs deep in her family's heritage. Growing up, she had the opportunity to be involved in youth organizations such as 4-H and FFA, and she served as a National FFA Officer in 2010–2011 as the National Western Region Vice President. These experiences inspired her to pursue a career in agriculture. She is currently an assistant professor of agricultural communications at New Mexico State University. Home to the other Aggies.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your work and how it motivates you.

A: One of every nine people—nearly 821 million—are undernourished in the world. When I applied to Texas A&M University, nearly 8,000 students would not know where their next meal would come from. Texas A&M taught me that exemplary Aggies do not settle for letting food insecurity win. We can tackle hunger by enabling individuals who have the closest access to the most food insecure and dangerous parts of the world. To address this need, I developed an agricultural assessment framework for my doctoral dissertation at Texas A&M to train soldiers in the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Starting in the Middle East and regions in northern Africa, this training framework will help the U.S. Army special forces understand agricultural practices and the intersection of food systems in communities facing conflict. If we can better prepare American soldiers “here” so no citizen goes hungry in conflict “there,” I believe we can enable the Spirit of Aggieland to save lives “everywhere.” These reasons define me as an Aggie and continue to motivate me to get up every morning.

Q: What are your degrees and where are they from?

A: My doctorate is from Texas A&M University in agricultural leadership, education and communications. I also earned certificates in advanced research methods and homeland security. My Master of Science degree is from Oklahoma State University in agricultural communications, and my Bachelor of Science is from New Mexico State University in agricultural and Extension education.



Shannon Norris stands in front of the giant Aggie Ring statue on Texas A&M campus.

Q: Are you still connected to Texas A&M and what is your relationship to the university?

A: Texas A&M holds a special place in my heart. Not only did I complete my doctoral degree here in August 2020, but my husband holds two degrees from Texas A&M and several of my family members do, as well. It embodies family, community and growth to me, and I am forever grateful to be an Aggie.

Q: How would you describe the university to outsiders or even another Aggie?

A: “A spirit that can ne’er be told” starts with knowing what you bring to Aggieland. Current students—look for ways to serve your community, and you will quickly find the spirit of this place comes to life when you make it your own. For those outside of the Aggie Network—take a trip to Aggieland. The people are inviting and Aggie pride is contagious. You’ll leave wanting to be a part of it.

Q: Word of advice for college students?

A: Take advantage of your time in Aggieland. Get involved. Serve in leadership organizations. Meet new friends and engage with your professors. You and your peers could be future leaders in our country and our communities. Establish your network while you are here and remain grateful to go to school at one of the best universities in the world.



Photo courtesy of Laura McKenzie/Texas A&M AgriLife Marketing & Communications

Operations Collide to Educate

Dr. Jason Cleere speaks on how to put on the Beef Cattle Short Course and how big of an impact it makes.

By: Harley Sargent

The Beef Cattle Short Course is an event where farmers and ranchers all over the world come to learn about the different logistics of beef cattle production. There are over 20 sessions that are performed by the Cattleman's College on a number of topics to better educate the attendees. Each session is designed to benefit beginners and experienced producers.

Another huge attraction at the Beef Cattle Short Course is the number of vendors who attend annually. Over 150 agricultural related businesses and trade show vendors come and set up to advertise their products and educate producers of how they can each benefit from them.

According to the course it is statistically proven that 1,700 people attend with the goal of obtaining information to better their operations. Dr. Jason Cleere PhD knows what it takes to run an event of this magnitude and how it truly has an impact on the whole family. Cleere is the organizer of the Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course. "We want to make sure that the attendees leave with the latest and relative information that they need for what is going on in our industry climate and our country," he said.

Despite difficulties Cleere finds joy in putting on the course. "I find most joy in seeing the representatives from the industry and all of the ranchers collaborate to promote the cattle industry. Also receiving positive feedback from

“WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE ATTENDEES LEAVE WITH THE LATEST AND RELATIVE INFORMATION THAT THEY NEED FOR WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR INDUSTRY CLIMATE AND OUR COUNTRY.”

surveys and the ranchers getting excited about the information given or technology we are showing them it makes it all worth it,” he said.

He hopes that people never leave feeling that they did not receive an abundance of knowledge along with useful products and connections that will better their operation. Because the take away is the biggest part for him and he makes it a huge point for each participant to take away a bag full of paper information and souvenirs that they can further their research after the conclusion of the event.

As soon as one year’s short course ends, the team starts their preparation for the next one to put on an event of that size and keep the information relative to what is going on in the beef cattle industry.

Jason’s wife, said “seeing my husband coordinate the beef cattle short course and my boys grow up working the event each year is very rewarding.” My boys have met so many people in the agriculture industry. Even some attendees from Puerto Rico invited my boys to come see their operation, which we were able to accomplish and gain a lot of information,” Kristi said.

Seeing what an incredible impact the short course has on all that attend and even on the families behind it is incredible and makes you want to be a part of something this great. For those attending the event Kristi encourages people to attend each year, bring their kids, meet people, and take in Aggieland, because there’s no place like it, “you

will truly feel like this is your home for the three days of the event, she added that one of the highlights of the event is the prime rib dinner and she encourages no one to miss that because it will be some of the best steak they will ever eat.”

Overall the short course is truly a place for families and individuals from all over to share their experiences and also learn from others. Kristi concluded that her most cherished memory from all of the events up until now is when Nolan Ryan, who sponsors the prime rib dinner, came to speak. “He talked with my kids and participants like they were old friends. That just shows the good in people in the cattle industry and that is what this event strives the most to recognize.”



View from the auditorium during an educational session.

From Backdrop to Business

By: Kate James

As a high school freshman, Ryon Cox's agricultural teacher presented him with the opportunity to participate in the calf scramble at the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. After catching at both scramble events, he selected a purebred Hereford heifer for his project—a decision which set into motion the beginning of a career. Months later, standing at the backdrop with his tenth-place ribbon, he looked at his ag teacher and said, "Give me ten years, and I'll have my own sale."

“I CHOSE THE HEREFORD BREED BECAUSE IT TRANSLATES TO TWO THINGS, HERITAGE AND FUNCTIONALITY.”

Former Texas FFA State President. Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 2018. 2019-2020 National Horned Show Female of the Year.

These are a few of the goals which 25-year-old Cox aspired toward and achieved. Add to the list owning Cox Ranch and launching its Inaugural Online Female Sale which took place, just as he promised, ten years following the exhibition of his first show heifer.

Cox grew up on his family's commercial cow-calf operation in Mount Pleasant, Texas, where he was immersed in production agriculture from a young age. His involvement in the show cattle industry, however, was nonexistent until 2010. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in agricultural science from Texas A&M University in 2018, he returned home to run the family business, Cox Concrete Products, and fine-tune his herd genetics for Cox Ranch.



Ryon Cox, owner of Cox Ranch.

"I chose the Hereford breed because it translates to two things, heritage and functionality," Cox said.

Hereford cattle are docile, maternal and widely known for their fertility, which are breed characteristics Cox appreciates and wants reflected in his herd.

"If I ever decided I did not want to raise purebred cattle, I could take a Hereford cow base and choose basically any breed of bull and still have a valuable calf crop," Cox said. "F1 Hereford offspring are outperforming their contemporaries in the pasture, in the feed yard and on the rail."

Choosing what breed he wanted to be known for was Cox's first and easiest step in achieving his ten-year goal. The next step involved making the right connections, one of which came in the form of Gary and Kathy Buchholz, owners of GKB Cattle Company in Waxahachie, Texas.

"I refer to Gary and Kathy Buchholz as my Hereford parents and first mentors in the industry," Cox said. "When I started, I didn't know anything. They took me under their wing, got me some good heifers and started hauling me across the country to expose me to purebred cattle."

Gary gave Cox a piece of advice that he kept in mind while putting together the twelve purebred Hereford heifers for his inaugural sale, which took place in October 2020.

"Don't take a show heifer and try to make a cow," Gary said. "Take a cow and turn her into a show heifer."

That's exactly what Cox did. First, he created a functional cow herd with structurally correct, wide-based females with the kind of genetics that will consistently produce quality calves year after year. Then, he focused on developing look and bone, two show ring factors that will take a heifer to the top of her class.

Through his connection with the Buchholz, Cox met Dale and Mary Barber, owners of the Barber Ranch in Channing, Texas. Cox spent the spring of 2018 working for the Barber family, who has raised some of the most elite genetics in the Hereford industry.

Cox said anyone wanting to get involved in the show cattle industry will face the same challenges: inconsistent weather, shifting markets and lack of resources, to name a few.

"TO BE IN THIS INDUSTRY, YOU NEED PASSION, EFFORT, DISCIPLINE AND RESPECT."

"Luckily, there are programs through the Farm Service Agency, loans, grants and people out there like Gary and Kathy and Dale and Mary who want to help young producers wanting to break into this industry," Cox said.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age of American agricultural producers is 57.5 years, and most producers have extensive experience prior to operating their own farm or



2019-2020 National Horned Show Female of the Year.

ranch. Cox's inaugural sale was a call for young producers to follow in his footsteps despite the challenges of not being born into the industry.

“I HOPE TO BE A VERY WELL-RESPECTED LIVESTOCK BREEDER, MAINTAIN MY FAITH WITH THE LORD, BE A FAMILY MAN AND GROW THE RANCH AND COX CONCRETE PRODUCTS.”

Cox offered a junior program to the exhibitors who purchased a heifer from his sale to give them the same opportunities his mentors did for him.

The junior program at Cox Ranch provided exhibitors with showmanship, feeding, clipping and hair care guidance so they can take their skills to the next level.

“To be in this industry, you need passion, effort, discipline and respect,” Cox said. “You also need an eye for opportunity, because the only person who is going to make your dreams happen is you.”

In the coming years, Cox hopes to have a live sale where he can sell purebred Hereford seed stock along with the highest quality F1 Hereford commercial females. He not only plans to raise nationally competitive cattle but strives to produce seed stock that will bring success to commercial cattlemen.

“I hope to be a very well-respected livestock breeder, maintain my faith with the Lord, be a family man and grow the ranch and Cox Concrete Products,” Cox said.



Photo courtesy of Ryon Cox

The 12 Hereford females from Cox's inaugural sale.

Beaded Blondes shine bright with Aggie gold

By: Emily Grace Myers

Beaded Blondes is a family owned and operated business in College Station, Texas which makes affordable jewelry to elevate the Aggie Ring.

The company crafts beaded rings, bracelets and necklaces to accentuate and amplify the Aggie Ring. Beaded Blondes is run by the Lindemulder sisters, Lexi and Lauren, and their mother, Lisa Lindemulder.

The Lindemulders recognize the accomplishment of receiving an Aggie Ring. Lauren, an Agricultural Communications and Journalism alumni, class of 2018, is the oldest of the two Lindemulder sisters.

After receiving her ring, Lauren layered homemade beaded rings around her Aggie Ring, Lexi said.

Lauren decided to start an Etsy shop with her sister Lexi, a current Agricultural Communications and Journalism student, due to the ring's high demand and popularity.

The sisters started their Beaded Blondes Etsy shop in December 2020, right in the middle of the Covid-19 outbreak.

"With everyone turning to online shopping and the support of local businesses movement trending, our business grew dramatically despite the pandemic," Lexi said.

They still have products for sale on Etsy, but wanted to grow their brand and become an independent seller through their website. The sisters market to their clients through Instagram and Facebook, with Instagram being their primary form of advertisement, Lexi said.

All products are sourced through wholesale companies locally or nationally, guaranteeing 14 K gold filled jewelry. Packaging and manufacturing are done in the Lindemulder living room.

"I love being in a family business. We are all very close and family-oriented," Lexi said.



The Lauren Beaded Band set in gold from Beaded Blondes.

Their father owns a local automotive center in College Station, Sevcik's Service Center. Lexi's grandfather, Leon Sevcik or "Poppy," opened the auto repair shop in 1972. Sevcik built his company on "quality service, reliable work, long hours, strong friendships, and great generosity," according to the Sevcik Service Center website. The sisters' father took over the business after her grandfather passed away from a Brain Tumor.

To commemorate their grandfather, the sisters named one of their rings the Poppy. With every Poppy Ring purchase, Beaded Blondes gives 25 percent of its profit to the Brain Tumor Association to honor their late grandfather.

In the next five years, Beaded Blondes wants a storefront of their own. Lexi said they want to be the next Kendra Scott. Similar to Kendra Scott's Give Back events, Beaded Blondes host a variety of charity events.

When asked about balancing school and running a business, Lexi said, "I like being in person for class again because it gives me a chance to step away and stop thinking about the business. You won't always succeed, you might need three-to-four trial runs, but eventually one will take off. Lastly, focus on self love and mental health; this is very important to live a balanced life."

A modern day look into Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

How it continues to impact Texans

By: Amy Neal

In 1914, many Texans lived in rural communities that heavily relied on family-owned farms and ranches. At the same time, scholars at the university-level realized that farmers and ranchers could benefit from research that would aid successful production methods.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension was founded because of this realization and the organization still impacts Texans today. While demographics and issues have changed within the state, AgriLife Extension has remained reliable and consistent.

As the needs of Texans have developed, AgriLife Extension has stayed committed to its mission but some people remain unaware of Extension's reach and purpose.

Nevertheless, AgriLife Extension offers service to any and all citizens of the state and provides employees and volunteers with meaningful work.

The Role of AgriLife Extension

Scott Cummings, a Texas A&M University professor and AgriLife Extension specialist, said

“WE TAKE WHAT IS TAUGHT AND RESEARCHED AT THE UNIVERSITY SETTING AND EXTEND IT TO THE PEOPLE. THE EASIEST EXPLANATION IS THAT WE ARE THE OUTREACH ARM OF THE UNIVERSITY.”

that since its establishment, AgriLife Extension has filled a major purpose of the land-grant institution. The service organization has made research and academic knowledge accessible to the everyday citizen.

“We take what is taught and researched at the university setting and extend it to the people,” Cummings said. “The easiest explanation is that we are the outreach arm of the university.”

Reaching a variety of Texans is not an easy task in today's changing world, but extension still works to fearlessly answer the call. Knowledge is largely

Flora Williams, a family and community health extension agent, gives a food preservation demonstration in College Station, Texas. Demonstrations remain a common method of distributing knowledge to local communities and connecting with community members.

Courtesy of: Laura McKenzie/ Texas A&M AgriLife Marketing and Communications





Two women take part in a sewing demonstration given by AgriLife Extension in 1950. Homemakers participated in these presentations to learn new skills for fashioning clothing such as the dress the two ladies are sewing.

Coutsey of: Cushing Memorial Library Archive

extended to the public by local county extension agents who seek to learn the needs of their communities.

Tamara Garza, a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension marketing strategy coordinator, said that she believes these employees are a vital piece to extension's success.

"County agents are servants to the state of Texas," Garza said, "but they are backed by the smartest minds that Texas A&M has to offer."

Garza said that the primary audience extension supports is everyday Texans. However, the organization acknowledges that the broad audience presents a challenge.

"We want to expand our reach and tell a story that resonates with everyone," Garza said. "That's hard, because we know as marketers, you can't be all things to all people. But extension is a unique organization that hopes to achieve that."

Cummings said that the magnitude of issues and people extension works with today has led to growth within the organization.

"Extension has expanded," Cummings said, "but in Texas we have maintained this model of having representation in our county and having that local presence to do the job."

The world changes but the mission stays the same

Although the model has remained consistent, AgriLife Extension has dramatically developed since the early 20th century.

According to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension website, the mission of extension was first implemented through home and field result demonstrations. These programs were often targeted at farmers, ranchers and homemakers. In these demonstrations, extension agents showed everyday citizens the practical implementation of research done at the university.

Many extension agents also devoted time to instilling knowledge and values in the next generation which led to the creation of corn clubs. These clubs would later be known as the beginning of Texas 4-H.

Today, 4-H is the largest youth development organization in Texas. The organization includes many project areas including family and community health, natural resources and agriculture and livestock.

Overall, extension's reach has always focused on more than one group, but the nature of the world today has led the organization to evolve.

"We still work with traditional agriculture production and traditional family issues,"

Two Texas Master Gardeners labor at an urban garden in Garland, Texas. The Texas Master Gardeners is a program offered by AgriLife Extension that provides an opportunity for participants to care for landscapes while connecting with others.

Courtesy of: Laura McKenzie/ Texas A&M AgriLife Marketing and Communications



Cummings said “but as technology and media have developed our work has looked different within communities.”

Garza said extension agents and specialists are applying new methods to accomplish their goals using technology.

“There are programs that are doing a really good job of exploring hybrid delivery where agents can interact with their audiences in-person and bring in the experts via Zoom,” Garza said.

Impact to Texans

Technology has made information more accessible than it has ever been to people across the world. However, the new outlets of knowledge do not guarantee quality information.

Cummings said that AgriLife Extension is working to provide reliable and well-researched resources of information.

“I can turn on my computer and I can Google any subject;” Cummings said. “The problem is that the public does not know if that information is accurate or not.

According to the Pew Research Center, 85 percent of Americans own a smartphone with internet connection capabilities. Now, people can find answers to their questions in seconds, which can lead Americans to value convenience over credibility.

Extension employees realize the dangers behind this subconscious sacrifice. One way, employees are working to remedy this issue is by providing a relation competent to learning.

“No one can dismiss the importance of human contact and county extension agents have relationships with people in their counties,” Garza said.

These relationships give Texans someone they can trust for reliable information. Instead of looking to internet searches, people look toward trained professionals that are supported by specialists.

“We are a lot more concerned with teaching, learning and community engagement which are critical aspects for success in the field,” Cummings said.

Meaningful careers and volunteer opportunities

As a service, extension has a deeply rooted mission that strives to help ordinary people in significant ways. Garza said that the meaningful work that takes place attracts potential employees that want to devote their time to intentional work.

“There’s something very energizing about working with people,” Garza said.

In many cases, extension agents may work outside of the traditional 9-to-5 schedule, but

“I CAN TURN ON MY COMPUTER AND GOOGLE ANYTHING. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE PUBLIC DOES NOT KNOW IF THAT INFORMATION IS ACURATE OR NOT.”

they continue to stay in their position because of the citizens they help and the network they form. “One thing that I have liked about being in extension is that I believe that people still care about each other,” Cummings said. “I may not see an employee that works in West Texas every day, but I can talk to them, and to me they are just as important as someone who is right down the hall.”

While AgriLife Extension is built on the connections of employees, it is also an organization that allows independence.

“Extension is not an organization of micro-managers;” Cummings said. “You are trusted to do your job but there is still accountability.”

Many of these same principles apply to volunteer opportunities as well. AgriLife Extension has

numerous fields of interest and volunteers can choose which area to invest time.

Cummings said all it takes to become involved as a volunteer is a call to a local extension office.

“A person could be an educator and they might be in the front of the crowd doing the presentations, they might be a physician who is consulting with people within a program or it could just be someone who is interested in a particular area,” Cummings said.

The mission of AgriLife Extension would not be possible without the hours of work that volunteers give. In many counties, volunteers help to sustain programs for youth and underprivileged families.

“Last year, 100,000 volunteers contributed a total of 5.5 million hours;” Garza said. “Those are people that want to be aligned with our mission and we love them.”

Through challenges and growth, AgriLife Extension has remained faithful to helping Texans succeed for 107 years. The organization brings people together and produces connections between employees, volunteers and everyday Texans.

A boy involved in Texas 4-H, grooms his steer as his family watches in Mason County, Texas sometime in the 1950s. Livestock projects were popular among many rural 4-H members during this time.

Courtesy of: Cushing Memorial Library Archive



A row of honey jars with hexagonal labels on a wooden surface. The jars are filled with dark honey and have cork stoppers. The labels are dark with a white hexagonal shape in the center. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the jars in the foreground.

Honey, Homesteading and Heaven: The Story of Leeco Honey

By Cheyenne Byrer
Photos courtesy of Meagan Joy



HARVEST
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EST. 2017

LEECO
HONEY

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MADE BY LEECO BEES

In a small town just 50 miles west of Texas A&M University, Lexington, Texas, is home to a famous barbecue joint, a cattle auction house, and Leeco Honey. Meagan Joy '04 and '05, owner and beekeeper at Leeco Honey shares how she turned a love for bees, family, and faith into a business, a brand, and a blog.

Meagan's background in beekeeping started from a young age. Growing up, she remembers checking cows with her dad, while her grandpa took care of his 300 hives. She tells a story of her grandpa driving around with a beehive in his truck to serve as a security system. "He'd never have to worry about anyone stealing his truck," Meagan said.

Her husband, Darren, shares a similar background. His family owned Fain's Honey

in Llano, which was a large operation. Today, Meagan and Darren, with their four daughters, have allowed their family traditions to prosper and grow into their brand, Leeco Honey. In spring 2017, the pair purchased their first two hives to begin their pursuit toward a small side business for their own enjoyment and also as a source of income post-retirement. Since then, Leeco Honey has registered with Real Texas Honey and the Texas Beekeeper Association and grown to a 37-hive operation. Now, Leeco Honey has developed into a business, a blog and a brand.

When asked why she wanted to start Leeco Honey, Meagan said, "Being a part of the agricultural community is incredibly important to me because there is so much encouragement and it's a different breed of people that lift each other



Darren inspects each frame for hive health, the presence of the queen and eggs, as well as signs of bee population loss.



Meagan and Darren raise their four daughters on land that has been in their family since the 1880's.

up and help each other. It's a great way to build community and ours has 100 percent come up behind us."

She also recognizes that Leeco Honey can play a major role in advocating for local agriculture, the protection of bees and educating consumers about where their food comes from.

"With Leeco, we made it our goal not only to start our own apiary farm to carry on a family tradition, but to also make it a point to educate our community on how to care for bees, where their honey comes from, and why it's important to buy from a local beekeeper versus a big grocery store, what the medicinal properties of honey are and helping them to be better critical consumers of their food," Meagan said.

Bees face a number of challenges that have led to a rapid decline in population. According to the United States Department of Agriculture,

the main issues are the use of pesticides, various pests and habitat loss. To combat this, Meagan has worked to educate her community on planting pollinator gardens and how to limit their use of pesticides and herbicides that may be harmful to bees

Meagan aspires for Leeco Honey to be an even bigger and better educational resource for the community in the coming years. She plans to open up the farm to other local businesses and farmers to market their products and she hopes to create an educational center on the property for families to come and learn all about beekeeping and gardening.

In addition to growing the local community, Meagan has also grown her social media community. Using her Instagram page, @leecohoney, Meagan shares her family's agricultural pursuits, honey harvests and the faith that drives it all. She has made friends and grown her community with like-minded people across the country. In a co-op style of living, farmers and small-business owners can connect online and grow their influence farther than ever before.

Meagan said of social media, "We have to be willing to share and give value to the people who come to our page. Our faith is really important to us, so we want to do it in a way to glorify God and not glorify ourselves. Our faith, beekeeping, and family are really important."



An upclose look at Leeco Honey.

John Chivvis is innovating his classes for the future of communications



By: Benjamin Whitaker

The Department of Agricultural Communications is continually finding new ways to innovate its curriculum. In today's society, media is one of the fastest growing and fastest changing fields in the world. It began with newspapers, and magazines, then on to radio, and TV. We now have podcasts as one of the most popular forms of media.

John Chivvis is one of the leading faculty members teaching students how to use this medium in the department. "I'm always very excited to teach the podcast course," Chivvis said.

Chivvis graduated with a communications degree from Texas A&M University in 1994. He returned for his masters degree in communications in 1996.

"Communications has changed a lot since I was in school," Chivvis said, "but I still love it." According to Chivvis, the world of communications is changing without question. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and its faculty are ready to change with it.

Chivvis has taught some of the classes that focus on the booming types of media, specifically the podcast course, AGCJ 366.

"The first time we had the podcast course, it was supposed to be the regular radio broadcasting course," Chivvis said. "I decided to focus more on podcasts because it was becoming a bigger part of the industry, especially for this younger generation, than traditional radio."

The radio industry, while on the decline, is still a big part of the industry, according to Chivvis. He had the foresight to move the focus of the radio broadcasting course from traditional radio recording to podcasts, which has had a huge increase in relevance over the past decade. "Podcasts weren't very common not too long ago," Chivvis said, "but when popular ones like



John Chivvis, Department of Agricultural Communications faculty teaches students how to create podcasts in AGCJ 366.

Serial came out, the interest levels skyrocketed." Students not only love Chivvis' classes, they love the man himself; many of his former students have called him their favorite professor.

"Chivvis' class was by far my favorite in college so far," Ellie Rau, a former student of Chivvis', said.

"Even if you don't want to be a professional in the industry, it still provides for great experience and another thing to have in your portfolio and on your résumé," Chivvis said. "And who knows? Maybe you fall in love with podcasting." Chivvis emphasized that while he loves communications and seeing how it evolves — and how communicators are adapting with it — he is most passionate about who he teaches. Connecting with his students and seeing them grow is his favorite part about his job.

"Teaching was always what I wanted to do," Chivvis said. "Connecting with the students is what I love, is what I'm truly passionate about. I consider myself lucky that I get to have an impact on their lives.

Creative. Dreamer. Learner. Seeker.

By: Emily Grace Myers

Co-founder of Sunny Hunnys, and co-founder of The Fruit Suit, founder of AlyJo Art Co. and Jo's Good Cheer, AlyJo Chism is an entrepreneur with dreams high and wide.

She is a recent alum from the Agricultural Life and Sciences Department at Texas A&M University with a degree in agricultural communications and journalism.

AlyJo said she chose agricultural communications and journalism as her area of study because she "loves people and wanted to do something creative."

“JOYFULLY SERVE ANYONE, BE FAIR IN EVERYTHING AND POSSESS NO BIAS.”



Photo of Jo's Good Cheer sample menu of a meal for two.



Photo of AlyJo in her wedding dress from Summer 2021.

The department offered hands-on creative courses, while learning to be a great communicator. She said her major perfectly set her up for success and became the building block for starting her entrepreneurship journey.

AlyJo explained how out of "youthful ignorance and pride," she pushed away her ideas. She wanted a full idea developed before sharing with anyone else; she did not know if her dreams were from God or from human desire. AlyJo said she struggled to identify if her passions were worth pursuing.

However, after sharing with a trusted community, her dreams turned into an expansive reality. She partnered with Sam Silver, one of her roommates in college, to create Sunny Honey.

AlyJo and Sam bonded over their love for food, and spent time enjoying a slow meal. They decided to share that time with the people they love, thus Sunny Honey was created. With Sunny Honey, they create a beautiful space and top tier meals for anyone to enjoy.

In the beginning, they created an Instagram account with a Google form in the biography. Anyone in College Station could fill out the form with dietary preferences, the specific occasion and time they wanted food crafted and presented.

“AlyJo and I were sitting on the couch one night just talking through ideas, and suddenly we looked at each other and said, ‘Let’s start this now. What better way to serve our friends and community than doing what we love,’” Sam said.

Sunny Honey is currently run by Sam Silver since AlyJo got married in May of 2021 and moved to Dallas with her husband, Tyler Chism. Chism attended Texas A&M as well. Chism said, “We owe a lot more than just our education to the University.”

AlyJo graduated in December of 2021. Her recent business endeavors include running AlyJo Art Co, Jo’s Good Cheer and co-running the Fruit Suit.

AlyJo Art Co is a collection of custom, handwritten letterings and designs. AlyJo designs birthday cards, save the dates, business cards, wedding invitations, etc. Her repertoire includes personal paintings, embroidery or graphic design help. Her desire to create does not end here.



DESIGN + LETTERING

“WEAKNESS AND HUMILITY SHOW THROUGH COLLABORATION. IT IS OKAY FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO RECEIVE THE CREDIT BECAUSE ONE'S OWN TALENTS MAY INCREASE WITH THE HELP FROM ANOTHER.”

AlyJo crafts a weekly menu for two called Jo’s Good Cheer. This is a downloadable menu with recipes, ingredients, and images for any young couple or companions to cook day-to-day or week-by-week.

“I enjoy sustainability and living a healthy lifestyle. Health encompasses the whole body which includes what you put inside of it. I wanted to share my love of nutrition through my visual skills by making an accessible cookbook to anyone and everyone. Cooking is never exclusive, so everyone can implement small practices like eating a vegetable a day to make a difference in their health,” AlyJo said.

Ava Ratz, another past roommate of AlyJo from college, was inspired by AlyJo’s go-getter attitude. Ratz approached AlyJo with the idea of thrifting clothing to represent each Fruit of the Spirit from the Christian faith.

“I imagined a piece of clothing embodying love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. A woman could walk through her day knowing and reminding her she is love or kindness. How cool is that?” Ratz said.

“I know God created me to create things,” AlyJo said. “It may seem like I do all these things for attention or fame, but I do them because it would be a disservice to not pursue the creativity I was made to do.”

Answering Burning Questions with a Texas Agricultural Science Teacher



By: Cheyenne Byrer

For agricultural science teacher Tori Thornton '16, teaching is more than just her job. For her, it is a passion for growing and shaping the next generation of agriculturists.

Q: What are some of the roles you play in your life and career?

A: It's more than just being a teacher for us. We are counselors, mentors and community and student advocates. In life, I try to do the same. I like being involved in community events, advocating and having a hand in community service.

Q: Did you grow up in the agricultural industry?

A: I didn't. Not as much as most people in my position did. When I was young, we had cattle that we fed out, but that was the extent of it. When I started FFA, I had to beg my dad to let me show turkeys. I came from a program that wasn't super active. I don't know if we just didn't have the same opportunities, but I realized through the years how much more could be done, and that's how I ended up deciding to teach.

Q: What motivated you to choose this path in agricultural education?

A: Mainly realizing all that could come out of it. Even though ag wasn't really my background, I was able to find a passion for it. I wanted to help those students who really don't know what their passion might be, or even the ones who don't have a passion for agriculture and be able to provide them with amazing leadership opportunities. That is my ticket. If I can grab those kids, and I can find their ticket - That's why I'm here. The biggest question from my freshmen is, "What can I do in FFA?" and my response is, "Tell me what you like to do, and I can find something in FFA for you to do. It's that easy."

Q: Does your experience in FFA serve as motivation for how you teach?

A: Absolutely. That's why I give my kids as broad of a spectrum as possible. If one of my kids wants to start a new team, I say, "Cool. let's go." I'm not going to say no. I want to help them figure out what they like and what they'd be good at. It's hands-on activity that's super important, bring animals inside the classroom, get them outside of the classroom, and take them places. You've got to hook these kids. There are so many that don't realize that what they want to do is involved in agriculture.

Q: What advice would you give to current agricultural education majors?

A: Meet people, go to state convention and ag teacher conferences, observe classrooms, and judge contests. Do something where you're around ag teachers. Nothing has helped me more than the connections I've made. Even if I don't know something, I'm a phone call away from someone who does. That's been more of a life saver than anything I learned in school.



Photo courtesy of Tori Thornton

Milking it For All it's Worth

A Local Dairy on A Mission

By: Kayla Seale



Photo by Kayla Seale



LOCAL · SINCE 1941

Since
MILL-KING
Market & Creamery

Unorthodox Production of Milk

Getting ready to go to work is not a task many people enjoy. Between getting ready for the day and getting breakfast ready, a morning could get rather busy. Rhianna is getting ready for another day at work just like anyone else in her family, well almost like everyone else. Since her family owns a dairy operation, a key part of everyone's day is milk consumption and Rhianna gets a headache any time she consumes it. A dairy owner that skips the milk- not exactly usual.

Rhianna is one of the managing partners at Mill-King dairy in McGregor, Texas. Before she started working with the dairy, she could not even drink milk. She explained that whenever she had milk, she would get a headache so she stopped consumption altogether. Later, she heard many people say that raw milk was helpful for them with managing the negative side effects of drinking milk, so she decided to give it a try- and it worked for her.

Giving People a Choice

At Mill-King Dairy in McGregor, Texas, dairymen are taking a different approach than most when it comes to putting milk on the table. The milk produced at this dairy is pasteurized using low temperature pasteurization and is not homogenized.

Production methods affect the final product, and people are given a choice throughout many other products- why isn't cow's milk the same? While the majority of the general public has adapted to the changing production method, there are still stomachs that are sensitive to the changing industry. This is where a large portion of people with milk allergies come into play.

Mill believe that milk should not be heavily altered and stay as natural as possible. In this, many people that typically have negative reactions to milk are able to consume milk from this dairy. This can be seen in a study published by the JAMA Network explaining that while only 10.8% of the people involved in the study were allergic to food, 19% of adults believed that they were.

To fully understand what is going on with types of pasteurization need to be understood first. Unlock Food explains, "pasteurization is a process where certain foods are quickly heated for a short time to kill bacteria that can make you sick." This can occur in a variety of different ways by utilizing different periods of time and temperatures.

Pasteurized milk in grocery stores is typically pasteurized utilizing High Temperature Short Time pasteurization. In this method, milk is heated to 161° F for 15 seconds. On the other hand, Low temperature pasteurization heats milk at 155°F for 30 minutes.

In explaining the reason behind utilizing low temperature pasteurization, Miller explained the method was less harsh on the original product of the raw milk. "Whenever you get real milk from a cow, there are enzymes that naturally occur. We keep as much of the enzyme intact as we possibly can," said Miller.

Low temperature pasteurization is not commonly used in milk production, but some dairies like Mill-King will use that type of pasteurization. This dairy in particular explains that, "It was shortly discovered that there was a significant need for a milk that was a legal option for consumers who could not reach the place of production."



Photo by Kayla Seale

As pictured, here is the milk produced by Mill-King. Milk makes up a large portion of the products sold at the farm store and around the state of Texas.

“WHENEVER YOU GET REAL MILK FROM A COW, THERE ARE ENZYMES THAT NATURALLY OCCUR. WE KEEP AS MUCH OF THE ENZYME INTACT AS WE POSSIBLY CAN.”

Challenging the Typical Process

Another way that Mill-King makes their milk different is through homogenization. Most milk in grocery stores is homogenized, whereas Mill-King chooses to leave their milk non-homogenized. “Homogenization means to mix up permanently. The way they do that is they take the milk and slam it into a stainless steel plate so fast that it shatters the fat globules,” said Miller.

This process makes milk last longer on the shelf and in people’s fridge, but the process can be a little harsh. Miller explained that homogenization “rips apart the protein chains inside.”

However, he continued to explain that people “have evolved to recognize the protein chains inside of it.” While many people have no problem digesting the milk that has been homogenized, there are still some that have trouble.

Since the milk Mill-King produces is not homogenized, the cream rises to the top and it has to be shaken before drinking.

Aiding the Local Community

Mill-King believes that they should utilize all the resources they have left over to help people in the community, and they will often donate over 60 gallons of milk to The McGregor Food Pantry run by Kevin Houchin.

Instead of dumping the excess milk they produce, the dairy will bottle the extra milk. While this holds an extra cost for the dairy of bottling the milk they will not be able to sell, they see the importance of helping the local community.

“Craig Miller comes every month and brings us gallons of milk we can distribute to our patrons,” said Houchin. “To get milk is an exceptional thing for our people.”

Many people explain that they have a better time consuming raw milk compared to the processed and pasteurized milk. Just like Rhianna, others will provide testimony to the benefits of raw milk. Mill-King is just one of the dairies that recognizes the importance of giving people options, which is why they bottle both raw and VAT pasteurized milk for consumption.

Surprisingly enough, low temperature pasteurization was the original type of pasteurization used to make milk safe for consumption, yet it is hard to find in major grocery stores. Small dairies, like Mill-King, are the ones primarily involved in this market.

Most of the success stories using this type of pasteurization are in mild cases. Furthermore, Miller explained that in his experience, people “are actually allergic to the process.” While many people have had success, it is risky to try. Rhianna is just a person that found something that worked for her- through trial and error. The question is- could it work for you too? Could a different type of pasteurization really make a difference in milk consumption?



Photo courtesy of Rhianna Miller

Rhianna and Craig Miller are pictured above.



Evolving Entrepreneurs

Growing businesses and
setting your own path

By: Kennedy Doscocil

Ty and Hayley Sanders saw a desire to set their own paths for life. The two ventured independently into entrepreneur life at young ages and crossed paths where they now work as entrepreneurs together.

The couple both own their own businesses and recently took ownership of The Book of Beautiful Weddings where they are co-owners and publishers.

Hayley is a 2019 graduate of Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications and Journalism. Before attending Texas A&M, she obtained her Associate Degree of Agriculture from Blinn College.

**“I LOVE BEING AN
ENTREPRENEUR BECAUSE, I
HAVE CONTROL OVER MY
OWN DESTINY. YOU JUST FEEL
SO FULFILLED WHEN YOU ARE
SURROUNDED BY LIKE MINDED
PEOPLE.”**

Ty and Hayley Sanders, owners of The Book of Beautiful Weddings bridal publication.

"I do have to give a shout out to Texas A&M, I truly believe my time there played a role in who I am today," Hayley said. "Not even just the professors, but the atmosphere of the agricultural communications major; they don't discourage entrepreneurship and really want you to set your own path."

Owner of Stellar&Co, Ty began his journey of floral design shortly out of high school. Rather than taking a traditional path, he chose to follow his heart and begin his floral company. "I believe that I have this opportunity by taking the risk, being different and being determined to succeed" Ty said.

Hayley said Ty has a raw talent for floral design and that it just comes natural for him to bring a vision to life.

Hayley started a marketing company as a sophomore in college. Hayloft Designs was an agricultural marketing, based company where Hayley's main target audience were farmers, ranchers and the livestock industry.

Utilizing her education from Texas A&M, she was able to rebrand her marketing business into Cultivate Marketing. Her formal education allowed her to carry this business further into her life, rather than it being left behind when she began to run more businesses.

"I have always had that entrepreneur spirit about me from a young age," Hayley said. "I was the girl in school who sold the bracelets, or whatever was on trend. I always wanted that next level deal." In 2018, Hayley started an Etsy shop where she sold t-shirt transfers. From there, it grew into a storefront where she sold the printed design on products. She then began selling her designs at livestock shows.

"Even in college I had the desire to make my own destiny and be the one who has control over what I do." Hayley said "I didn't want to be on someone else's success."

Hayley did not grow up in an entrepreneurial household. She said both her parents worked in

corporate America, but that she wanted more freedom in her work than a 9-5 job.

Through her many years of running businesses, she has set aside advice for others who desire the same freedom and lifestyle she has created for herself.

1. Always challenge yourself.

"Never get comfortable," Hayley said. "When you see yourself stop growing, that's not good, you have to keep moving forward."

As a business owner you'll encounter situations you didn't see coming. Hayley said to always be a leader, even when you aren't technically the leader in that situation.

"The agricultural communications and journalism degree gives you a leg up in the entrepreneur avenue by helping you understand the importance of communication in all aspects of business," Hayley said. "Communication is the foundation of any business."

2. Do work that you care about.

"Every single day you have to get out of bed and be excited about your work or you'll get comfortable and complacent in it," Hayley said. As an entrepreneur, you'll have control over every aspect of your business and get to make it what you want it to be, so make sure it's something you love to do, Hayley explains.

3. Take the risk.

Hayley did not come from that entrepreneur background; it was all new to her and she had to take a leap on her own faith.

"I really just had to go for it and hope it worked out," Hayley said.

She has transitioned and grown over time between businesses. Being passionate about her work and opportunities she has allowed herself to take risks and be persistent during the transitions.



As Pictured, Ty and Hayley after purchasing the publication of The Book of Beautiful Weddings.

4. Do the time.

“This one is important to me and I think about it all the time,” Hayley said. “I feel like everyone thinks entrepreneur life is the perfect life of sleeping in and coffee shops, but it is so not like that.”

Hayley claims it is hard and comes with a lot of boundary setting. Between personal, life and work, Ty and Hayley have to prioritize.

They both agree analyzing where and how they spend their day-to-day time has helped in every aspect of their lives. 5. Set schedules and make it a goal to stick to it.

In the time before a schedule, they claim they did not do anything but run their businesses. The two do understand that they are in an industry that requires deadlines where things have to be done, so they remain passionate about doing their time but making mental health and rest a priority.

“I chose to work 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. four days a week, so I can have that Monday off for myself,” Hayley said.

The couple chooses to take one-day off for personal days. As entrepreneurs, they get to pick their own routine, while still meeting their work goals.

As hectic as being in charge of every aspect of your life can be, the couple couldn't imagine any other work form.

Hayley said they are both big dreamers and they make it a priority to dream those dreams but also put them into actions through hard work and grit.

Ty and Hayley encourage others to take the leaps of faith, whatever your education background or life story may be. The two say dream big and to never stop fighting for the goals you have, because you can and will achieve them if you set your mind on it.



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Sinkule is On the Rise!

By: Graysie Myers

What began as a delicious way to make money to help pay for an engagement ring, has risen to more than Cory Sinkule ever expected. Sinkule is an agriculture science major at Texas A&M University, and is the loudest and proudest member of the fightin' Texas Aggies class of 2023. Whoop!

"I guess you could say I'm a small town kid. I call Abbott, Texas home, but I essentially grew up in the city of West. Like much of my community, I am of Czech heritage and have come to embrace it fully," he said. "I thrive in an environment of polka music, kolbasnik (sausage), and kolaches." West has been recognized as the "Czech Heritage Capital of Texas" and "home of the official Kolache of the Texas Legislature." Travelers from near and far stop in West to get their famous homemade kolaches, and now, Sinkule has brought them to Aggieland.



Growing up in the rural town of West, Sinkule was raised by a family of farmers and ranchers who instilled in him a passion for agriculture. What may have started small, quickly grew, and ultimately led him to Texas A&M.

"TAMU was a great prospect for me to pursue an education in the field of agriculture. I chose this university, because I felt like it embodied my values, had an outstanding network I could



Photo courtesy of Cory Sinkule

benefit from, and would provide me with a world-class education,” he said. Not only has the university given Sinkule a long-lasting network, but he has made one for himself.

On the Rise Kolaches is a kolache business that began in Sinkule’s apartment kitchen at Texas A&M in fall 2020. The summer prior, he spent countless hours with his grandmother and great-aunts learning how to perfectly recreate his great-grandmother’s secret kolache recipe. Instead of simply baking kolaches for the family, as the rest of his family did, Sinkule saw potential in marketing them to pay for his fiances’ engagement ring, and he set out to do just that. He convinced friends to test out his rising business, and named it “On the Rise Kolaches.”

“BALANCE COMES FROM WORKING STRATEGICALLY-- LEARNING PRIORITIES AND MANAGING YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY SO YOU DON'T WEAR YOURSELF TOO THIN.”

Before he knew it, an Aggie mom heard about On the Rise Kolaches, and the Aggie Mom’s Facebook page sparked more sales than he was ready to handle. To his surprise, Sinkule had begun to develop an Aggie Network on his own. After that initial sale, his business was in fact “On the Rise!”

Sinkule’s business offers two tasty treats. “I primarily offer Czech kolaches and cinnamon rolls. Limiting my menu to just two items lets me utilize my time most efficiently and fill more orders per day,” Sinkule said. He currently offers cream cheese, apple, apricot, blueberry, cherry, peach, and strawberry filled kolaches. Aside from baking kolaches, Sinkule ventured out and added cinnamon rolls to his order form. “My cinnamon rolls are made from kolache dough, so having one recipe to follow makes things easier. I would offer more items, but I’d want to use only my great-grandmother’s recipes.

As of now, kolaches and cinnamon rolls are keeping me so busy, I don’t think I would have time to add more to my plate,” he said.

Not only is Sinkule passionate about his Czech heritage, but he also possesses a passion for learning and developing people.

“There are so many opportunities for me to pursue following graduation that it’s really hard for me to decide. I would love to be a high school agriculture science teacher. However, I may put that career on hold, while I chase other prospects such as expanding my kolache business and developing an agritourism site back in my hometown,” he said.

In fact, preserving Czech heritage is one of Sinkule’s driving forces. “There were a few reasons I set out to begin On the Rise Kolaches, and they all center around being able to share my Czech heritage with people. I would like to



Photo courtesy of Cory Sinkule

Sinkule entered his kolaches at the State of Texas Kolache Bake Show, where he brought home many first place prizes.



Photo courtesy of Cory Sinkule

Cinnamon rolls made by On The Rise.

change people's initial thought of a kolache from being a pig-in-a-blanket to an authentic Czech pastry," he said. "In fact, "kola" in Czech means "round" or "wheel," so a kolache is essentially a round pastry with a fruit or cheese filling made of sweetened yeast-risen dough. The more people try my kolaches, the more my Czech heritage will be preserved, and that's something I'm really excited to see."

Is On the Rise Kolaches a business that is here to stay? Sinkule said, "I would love to expand On the Rise Kolaches into a permanent storefront. It definitely has the potential to reach that point, especially with current demand. There have been multiple weeks I've had to close my order form from submissions, because just saying 'SOLD OUT' was not enough to curb people from placing orders on days where I already met my limit. I am hopeful I can find a location in College Station to open a shop with normal business hours."

Until then, he will keep filling orders and kolaches while continuing to grow his customer base. The pressures of being a full-time college student add up to be enough in and of themselves. How does a student successfully run a business in their

home while also being successful academically? Being a full-time college student and business owner requires both a great deal of balance and determination to succeed. Sinkule admitted that wearing both of these hats is not easy.

"It's not easy balancing responsibilities with both school and work, especially if that work includes developing, marketing, and maintaining a personal business," he said. "I've had to learn quickly that you do as much as you can as soon as you can. It is also important to understand your limits. There have been multiple occasions when I overestimated how many orders I could fill in one day, so I had to pull all-nighters to get them all done. Overall, I believe balance comes from working strategically -- learning priorities and managing your time effectively so you don't wear yourself too thin."

Business owner or not, college student or not, Sinkule's business strategies are something we can all relate to. Success does not magically happen; however, Sinkule is proof that hard-work continues to pay off.

Check out On the Rise Kolaches on Facebook or Instagram and give them a try. You will be part of helping Czech heritage and Sinkule's business rise, and you are guaranteed to order again!



Photo courtesy of Cory Sinkule

Aside from homemade fruit-filled kolaches, you can never go wrong with a cream cheese kolache.



Behind the Scenes: Campus Communicators

Behind the scenes picture taken by the multimedia team at a photoshoot.

By: Ryan Davis

Photos courtesy of Texas A&M AgriLife Marketing and Communications

Communication is something that is necessary for everyday life. However, communication is more than face-to-face when it comes to the work campus communicators put in to ensure that the students, faculty and public are being served. One such team is AgriLife Communications at Texas A&M University. Through strategy and experience, these communicators ensure content is informative, educational and visually pleasing.

Marketing Strategy Coordinator, Carrie Baker said that when it comes to agriculture there are a lot of diverse audiences within the industry, but there are also people outside of the industry who are interested in all the things that go into place in agriculture but don't have the greatest understanding of what they do.

“COMMUNICATION IS LIFE; IT IS HOW EVERYDAY PEOPLE GET THINGS DONE.”

“As communicators it is our job to convey the depth of the industry.” Baker said. “Specifically in the academic realm, we try to portray all of

the different strength and opportunities that the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the experts we have in the college hold and the opportunities that we provide.” She added that the importance of the AgriLife marketing team is to make sure that the message is getting to the right audiences in a manner that they will be able to understand.

Multimedia Project Coordinator, Sam Craft revealed the importance of communication by saying, “Communication is life; it is how everyday people get things done.”

Being able to communicate with people to get a task done rather than let things get to the point of no return is something that Craft instills with his team of visual communicators. Craft added, “99.99 percent of the problems that we deal with on a day-to-day basis can be handled by communicating with somebody.” Strategic Marketing Coordinator, Briana Ford, adds that miscommunication can bring chaos.

“Without communication, there is only conflict, because there is no way to equate what you're feeling or equate what you're trying to tell someone and vis versa.”

All three coordinators, face daily difficulties with their many avenues. Ford said the most difficult aspect is balancing staying on brand and being professional while still being on trend. She said, “With students especially, the time frame of trends is so quick, and things move on quickly.”

Craft said the most difficult task is interpreting people’s ideas. He said, “A lot of people come

“**WITHOUT COMMUNICATION, THERE IS ONLY CONFLICT, BECAUSE THERE IS NO WAY TO EQUATE WHAT YOU’RE FEELING OR EQUATE WHAT YOU’RE TRYING TO TELL SOMEONE AND VIS VERSA.**”

to us with ideas of stuff they think is awesome, and visually it ends up not being that way or vis versa. They come in not knowing what they want and leave it up to us to make it look beautiful.” It is about working together to ensure the final piece is as perfect as it can be. As a visual communicator building trust is important to ensure that the project is completed in a way that all parties involved are happy.

Baker emphasized the importance of making sure that everyone is on the same page within her team. She said, “It’s funny because we are communicators, but sometimes our biggest mistake that we can make is that we don’t communicate enough.” Communicating is something that is always being done, that it is sometimes taken for granted she said. Her tip for ensuring there aren’t difficulties during a project, is to make sure that internal communication is taken care of first with her team.

Craft said his team is fortunate enough to have the creative freedom they need to execute their projects. “We are told ‘hey we need this, this, and this’ and we are able to go out and create our own creative spin on that,” he said. Having experience with journalism, Craft explains that it has helped with the creative work he, and his team do, because they understand how to match

the AgriLife Communications style and define who they are while getting it out properly to the target audience.

Baker said that her team tries to prioritize and meet with anyone who potentially could be involved with the project at hand. “If we are producing something for the college but it is on new research, we will loop in our research marketing strategy team,” she said. Identifying the most impactful angle is the next step for planning a project by meeting as a team and discussing what the main message is. Finally, she said that the execution is the last step of the planning by ensuring that everyone has their pieces taken care of with any given project.

Ford stated that her team does a really good job communicating daily projects and are constantly



Carrie Baker, Marketing Strategy Coordinator at Texas A&M AgriLife

in communication with each other on the projects they are working on. “With student engagement we lean more on trends and the way students are actively engaging and by asking how students want to receive their information,” she said.

There are different difficulties that Briana Ford, Sam Craft, and Carrie Baker must face when dealing with projects, but finding the right balance of communication is key. Ford is a marketing communication specialist and works with the social media team to ensure that news and information is given out via different forms of media in ways everyone can understand. Baker is a marketing strategy coordinator for the AgriLife Communications department where she works to ensure that relationships are built, complex problems are solved and sharing impactful stories gets out to the public. Craft works with the video and photography teams on campus where he, and team members captures moments that will last forever.



Briana Ford, Marketing Communications Strategists at Texas A&M AgriLife



Sam Craft, Multimedia Creator at Texas A&M University having fun out in the field while doing a photoshoot.

Transfer Students are Aggies Too

By: Benjamin Whitaker

It is about the journey, not the destination. Yes, a cliché. Admittedly, a mostly truthful one. In the case of Texas A&M University, however, the destination is just as spectacular as the journey that leads students to their first day of classes, whether that be as a freshman straight out of high school or as a transfer student on their first day of senior year.

If you ask around campus, most people will tell you their story of how they applied to Texas A&M and got accepted right out of high school. They will say things like, “It is my dream school,” or, “It has the perfect degree plan for me.” Everyone has a reason for being here, and they are here because they love it.

It is easy to get swept up in the culture of traditions and football games. It is also easy to forget this is not the culture a lot of students first encountered when entering college.

The environment of Texas A&M can just as easily shove some aside rather than sweep them up. Students who do not immediately enter knowing the traditions and yells can not only feel, but actually get, excluded. This is most prevalent in the lives of transfer students.

In 2019, Texas A&M accepted 3,276 transfer students — not a huge percentage when considering the university’s current enrollment of 72,982 students, but each of those transfer students are Aggies too, and they are often overlooked.

It falls onto the upperclassmen Aggies, the ones who came in as freshmen, to welcome and include these newer, yet older, Aggies, just as we do with freshmen.

Brody Thomas, a senior Agricultural Communications and Journalism major, transferred from the University of North Texas (UNT) in the fall of 2020.

“My experience at UNT started out good,” Thomas said. “The atmosphere is really different from A&M as it is a smaller school. I found it to be very secular and very centered around the arts.”

With well over 1,000 clubs and student organizations, there is a community for everything, so there are always people just as passionate about the things you care about.

“UNT is very centered around a few niche things,” Thomas said, “and if you don’t find yourself in those niches you almost get outcast.”

This feeling of exclusion can be hard on students’ minds and souls, so many flee somewhere else.

“I decided to transfer because I wasn’t happy with how my life and college studies were going at UNT,” Thomas said. “One day my sister, who is an Aggie, came up to visit me. I was able to tell her everything I was going through and how I was contemplating transferring, but that I wasn’t sure it was possible. She helped me see that it was, which led to my decision to transfer.”

Thomas moved to College Station in early spring 2020 while taking online classes from UNT



Photo courtesy of Brody Thomas

Thomas starting his freshman year at University of North Texas.

before beginning the transfer process in May 2020. Thomas made the decision to transfer easily, but the process itself was anything but.

“Transferring was hard,” Thomas said. “It took a lot of meetings and a lot of effort with classes. I had to take a lot of online courses that I needed in order to be allowed to transfer.”

A transfer student needs at least a 2.5 GPA and 25 hours worth of transferable classes. Unlike incoming freshmen, the admittance process for transfer students is made by the department they are transferring into specifically rather than a university-wide admittance committee.

“I recommend meeting with the department before-hand,” Melyssa-Anne Stricklin, an advisor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications, said. “This helps students make decisions on what courses they can take before transferring so they don’t have to take any courses twice.”

According to Stricklin, these earlier meetings can also help an applicant get accepted since a relationship already exists between the students and the department.

“It can be hard,” Stricklin said, “but it is definitely doable if you put in the work.”

After this grueling process, Thomas was elated to finally be a part of the university he had heard so much about. He was not entirely sure what to expect, and was a little worried about finding a community. To his delight, it took no time at all.

“My favorite thing about College Station is how easy it was to get plugged into community, especially a Christian community,” Thomas said.

Thomas could not be happier with his decision to transfer. The loneliness he felt at UNT has been replaced with the belonging that many Aggies feel.

“[The difference] has been day and night,” Thomas said. “I have enjoyed all of the time I have had

here at Texas A&M. I would have to try very hard to not enjoy this university.”

Being a transfer student isn’t always easy though. There were definitely things Thomas had to learn to become a part of the Aggie community.

“At first, it was hard for me to understand why everyone was so crazy about the oddest traditions,” Thomas said, “but as I continued to learn the stories and the ‘why’ it definitely makes more sense. Luckily, I have friends who embody them.”

Thomas struggled to find direction at UNT. He was not very sure of what he wanted to study or what he wanted to do when he graduated. That changed when he came to Texas A&M. He joined the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences as an Agricultural Communications and Journalism major.

“I chose the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences because I have seen the type of workers they produce first hand through one of my sister’s friends who graduated ag comm,” Thomas said. “I chose ag comm over regular communications because I wanted to be more hands-on and less focused on theory, and ag comm provided that.”

Thomas encourages people to transfer if they are not happy with where they are because everyone deserves a place where they feel like they belong, even if that place is not Texas A&M.

“I would tell a transfer student to keep pushing through,” Thomas said. “Things work out in the end if you work hard, even if college didn’t start the way you thought it would.”

Now, Thomas feels just as much an Aggie as any other student, and he proudly wears that title. He has no regrets and couldn’t be happier with his decision to transfer and become a Fightin’ Texas Aggie.

“Texas A&M is a truly amazing university,” Thomas said. “I have never been anywhere else like it, and I am so happy I get to call it my own.”

The 'hidden gem' of West Campus returns after hiatus

By: Amy Neal



A pathway in The Gardens on Texas A&M University campus.

Tucked behind the blockish structure of the Kleberg Animal & Food Sciences Center and the continual commotion of the Wehner building lies a tranquil refuge. The Gardens at Texas A&M University have developed a positive reputation among students of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. In fact, some former students have found employment opportunities working to maintain and grow the cherished haven.

Abbey Whipple graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in Agricultural Economics in 2018. After graduation she began working as an event coordinator for The Gardens and AgriLife Center.

“The whole time I was a student at Texas A&M, all I saw of The Gardens was a construction zone,” Whipple said, “but when I came back to work here, I was excited because I knew I was a part of something new.”

Whipple connects with potential clients and ensures that the AgriLife Center and The Gardens fits specific client needs.

Whipple thinks more people are newly discovering The Gardens as the space offers a quiet getaway to students and faculty.

“We are a hidden gem behind the Agriculture and Life Sciences Building,” Whipple said.

Despite the peaceful environment The Gardens provides, the event space was significantly affected by the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, similarly to other facilities on campus.

Whipple said that the pandemic led her to take on new responsibilities and adjust how she approached her role. Policies also changed as the university moved classes online.

“We wanted to let people know that they could still come out to The Gardens and that we were not closed,” Whipple said.

Whipple and other staff members started using social media and creating unique opportunities for people to engage with The Gardens in small groups.

“We created a scavenger hunt,” Whipple said, “which was something that you could do with your family or close friends without hosting an in-person event.”

The Gardens increased engagement on their Facebook page with a special cocktail series that featured local business owners.

“Every Friday we had a different vendor come out,” Whipple said, “and while they were making their drink, they were able to talk about their business and how COVID-19 had affected them.”

Due to university procedures, The Gardens could not hold sizable events for 11 months. The Gardens held its first event since the start of the pandemic in February 2021. Whipple said that she has steadily been booking more banquets, dinners and other activities for the fall semester.

The Gardens can be enjoyed by the public and booking inquiries can be made at gardens.tamu.edu.

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