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Texas A&M University
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

SPRING 2024

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This edition of the AGRILEADER was produced by the students in the Spring 2024 AGCJ 405 Agricultural Design and Publication in Agriculture and Life Sciences course.

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ABOUT THE COVER:

Each year, students from across the country decide to call Texas A&M University “home.” The cover represents those students joining in unity for an education they share a passion for. With the “A” in Texas A&M standing for agriculture, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is one of the most prestigious colleges in the university. The people who pass through the halls learn and grow into leaders within their field, all while making longstanding friendships. This is what makes the AGLS building a cherished place for those who enter its doors. Cover photo by Brooke Blackshear.

LETTER *from the* EDITOR



As I creep into the last month of my time at Texas A&M University, I cannot help but think of the impact this University and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has had on me. Before coming to Texas A&M, it was hard for me to understand what being an Aggie meant. However, the traditions and community helped me realize just how special this university is. Being a transfer student, my time at Texas A&M spans just four semesters. In those four short semesters, I have experienced an immense amount of growth.

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has pushed me out of my comfort zone and toward success throughout my time here and made me into a better woman today. As I embark on my journey post-graduation, the memories and lessons learned are something I will always cherish.

As managing editor of the Spring 2024 edition of the AGRILEADER magazine, I have had the pleasure of working alongside a fantastic team for this year's magazine. Throughout the production process, our team has been blessed with invaluable experiences and cherished opportunities that shine through in our

stories. Creating a magazine presents its challenges, yet every student on our team rose to the occasion, transforming the process into an enriching experience.

Our team would also like to thank our professor, Clint Saunders, whose steadfast support and guidance were instrumental in shaping this magazine. Without his mentorship, our publication would not have reached its current form.

As we present this publication to you, we hope you are enlightened and inspired by our stories and dedication.

THANKS & GIG'EM

Peyton West

PEYTON WEST '24

MEET THE *team*

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from Campus to the Capitol

AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND THE POWER OF THE AGGIE NETWORK

by PRESLEY WIREBAUGH '24

A typical day in Harlea Hoelscher's life begins with checking news for current events before heading to work as a legislative assistant for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture in Washington, D.C.

In this role, Hoelscher handles commodity policy, crop insurance and credit-related issues. She also conducts meetings with interest groups and farmers to understand their needs and reflect the goals of the Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Rep. Glenn Thompson.

Hoelscher is originally from Whitharral, Texas, a small town 35 miles west of Lubbock. She saw attending Texas A&M University as an adventure.

During her time at Texas A&M, Hoelscher joined several student organizations, including the Agricultural Economics Society and the College of

Agriculture and Life Sciences Student Council. She learned networking skills and gained the ability to lead while considering the viewpoints of others, both critical skills for a career in policy.

Hoelscher grew up in a farming family. The impact of the 2014 Farm Bill as well as the 2011 to 2012 Texas drought peaked her interest in agricultural policy during high school.

“Seeing the policies that came from the 2014 Farm Bill, I wanted to know how those in Washington, D.C., could truly understand what everyone in Texas was experiencing, specifically in terms of devastation,” Hoelscher said.

The most meaningful component of her job is “working with policy that is useful and impactful to farmers, and people back home whom I know and love,” she said.



Hoelscher briefing U.S. House Committee on Agriculture members, Reps. Cammack (right) and Miller (left).



Hoelscher on the balcony of the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture, overlooking the U.S. Capitol grounds.


In December 2020, Hoelscher earned degrees in both agricultural economics and agricultural communications and journalism from Texas A&M University. She pursued a master’s degree in agricultural economics under Dr. Joe Outlaw, working with the Agricultural and Food Policy Center. After interning for the committee in the fall of 2022, she then earned a full-time position.

Hoelscher has seen many historical moments, such as being a part of the 2023 Farm Bill, and the first time the role of Speaker of the House had been vacated. She encourages students interested in agricultural policy to take advantage of opportunities at Texas A&M, such as the Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Internship Program. It gives students the experience to, “test drive what it is like to live and work on Capitol Hill,” Hoelscher said.



Hoelscher with former U.S. House Committee on Agriculture Chair Mike Conaway.

In addition to Hoelscher, five other Texas A&M University graduates are on staff at the House Committee on Agriculture.

“The impact of the Aggie Network during my time in Washington, D.C., has been phenomenal,” she said. “I think that connection speaks volumes on how amazing the Aggie Network is and how Aggies have proved that they are influential in agricultural policy.” 

photos courtesy of U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

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CULTIVATING SEEDS OF *Excellence*

by HAYDEN JAY '25

The Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has reached the largest reported class size of incoming freshmen in history, with 1,400 students in the fall of 2023.

“We have benefited from planting and cultivating seeds of excellence,” Jeffrey Savell, Ph.D., vice chancellor and dean for agriculture and life sciences, said. “Our goal is to plant more seeds for the future because flourishing students and former students are the fastest and most impactful ways to make a positive impact in our world, and agriculture and life sciences.”

1,400
students

COALS welcomed the largest class of incoming freshman in history in the fall of 2023.



40%
growth

The class of 2027 exceeded the number of freshmen at this time last year by 40%.



photos courtesy of Michael Miller/Texas A&M AgriLife Marketing and Communications

15
*different
departments*

300
*faculty
experts*

90
*degree
plans*

60
*student
organizations*



2024 OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AND OUTSTANDING EARLY CAREER ALUMNI

OUTSTANDING EARLY CAREER ALUMNI AWARD WINNERS



Matthew Berg, Ph.D. '03



Myriah Johnson, Ph.D. '11



Keefer Patterson '18



Henry "Hank" Dres '74



Marcus Hill '71

OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD WINNERS



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
College of Agriculture
& Life Sciences



Gary Smith, Ph.D. '68



Michael Strand, Ph.D. '80



T.D. Tanksley, Jr., Ph.D. '46
Posthumous



photo by JD Taylor

by KATE DARSEY '24

With a current student population of 70,000 at Texas A&M University, more than 8,000 in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and 1,400 in the incoming freshman class, navigating the campus can feel intimidating at first.

To combat this challenge, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Freshman Experience, or COALS FX, began in fall of 2023.

COALS FX provides students with hands-on experiences beyond the classroom, opportunities to volunteer within the College and mentors to assist with shifting to their new home.

Robert Sturdivant, the adviser for COALS FX, was instrumental in its creation. He recognized the need for a strong freshman organization in the College and seized the opportunity.

“We knew if we created an organization where freshmen were a part of our College more, there would be more of a sense of belonging,” Sturdivant said.

The fall 2023 freshman class reached the largest number yet, and as the College aims to increase enrollment each year, organizations will have to adjust to the growth.

With 140 applicants for COALS FX, the College invited 61 freshmen instead of the intended 40.

“These are the best of the best from our College, and these students are going to do incredible things,” Sturdivant said. “What I love is it’s college kids, sophomores and juniors, who are mentors pouring into this family atmosphere, pouring into a group of freshmen.”


The freshmen members were divided into six “families,” each consisting of two mentors to assist and provide guidance. Twelve sophomores and juniors within the College were carefully selected to fill these mentor positions.

“One of the best things COALS FX does is having peer mentors,” Zoe Meeks, a freshman majoring in agricultural economics from Dalhart, Texas, said. “So in each group, there are two peer mentors, and mine are Charlie and Kyle. They are always willing to lend a helping hand and check up on us.”

COALS FX is unique from other organizations as it strives to bring together students from all departments in the College, each with various passions, ideas and backgrounds.

“A really cool aspect of the College is it is not just the College of Agriculture,” Meeks said. “It is the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, so you have a lot of unique majors.”

Serving as a launching pad, students can invest the skills, knowledge and leadership they acquire through COALS FX into other organizations, and ultimately, real life.

“You are here for four years, what is the impact you can make at this institution?” Sturdivant said. “If we can get that in a freshman’s mind, then their trajectory of where they are going will look a lot different because their purpose of why they do it is different.” 



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by HAYDEN JAY '24

WE *Live* HUNTING & FISHING

Billy Gerke's journey began Dec. 11, 1997. As a business owner with more debt than assets, he embarked on an adventure without guarantee of success, and his hunting and fishing product company, ForEverlast, was born.

photos by Hayden Jay

Gerke graduated from Texas A&M University in 1996 with a degree in agricultural economics. With minimal experience in the real world and trying to navigate his future, he took a bold step.

“Writing that first check to explore the potential of a patent set me on a path that, looking back 25 years, has both blessed and humbled me as to what it really means to own a business, employ others and provide our customers with the best products on the market for their outdoor adventures,” Gerke said.

He fell in love with hunting and fishing at a very young age, and he realized there were products missing from the industry that he could develop. He ran with his ideas and has since created more than 60 products for the hunting and fishing industry.

FAMILY OVER EVERYTHING

Kenny Chesney’s song, “I Didn’t Get Here Alone,” has played an essential role in Gerke’s path to success. He uses these lyrics as a reminder of who made it possible.

“So many people along the way who helped, advised, supported, motivated and doubted have enabled this dream to become a reality,” Gerke said.

Gerke credits his family's contribution in the journey of growing the business. His wife, Amy, and their two sons, Ty, 21, and Layne, 17, were his biggest motivations throughout his 25 years of business.

STARTING FROM THE BOTTOM

From a tiny closet in their first home, Billy and Amy became a team and have worked together since the



Fishing is life for Billy Gerke (middle) and his sons, Ty (right) and Layne (left).

“It has been a dream of mine to one day take over what my dad has been succeeding at all these years,” Ty Gerke said.

beginning. They started packaging orders themselves on the living room floor, but now deliver to massive retail partners like Academy Sports and Outdoors.

“I was able to develop mental concepts for products into hunting and fishing gear available at the retail level,” Billy said. “The ultimate test of any business is how the consumer reacts, and I can honestly say we have been on many fishing and hunting trips with folks by way of our products. I could not be prouder of the fact that we have improved things in both hunting and fishing for many folks’ outdoor adventures.”


FOLLOWING FOOTSTEPS

Billy’s oldest son, Ty, has been looking up to his dad as long as he could remember.

“My dad is something special,” Ty said. “His dedication to working for our family is amazing to watch. Learning from him is one of my favorite things.”

As a senior at Texas A&M, Ty is working to get a bachelor’s degree in agricultural leadership. He plans to follow in his father’s footsteps by taking over the family business right out of college. The Gerke family cherishes keeping the business in the family and hope to continue to grow and flourish ForEverlast.

“It has been a dream of mine to one day take over what my dad has been succeeding at all these years,” Ty said. “I am confident that our ideas and bouncing off of each other will make something great in hopefully growing the business to something bigger and better.”

New products and new adventures are on the horizon for ForEverlast. “Keep innovating and never become stagnant,” Ty said. “We need to always be ahead of the market.” 



“[My dad’s] dedication to working for our family is amazing to watch,” Ty said. “Learning from him is one of my favorite things.”



“We Live Hunting and Fishing” is not just a catchy marketing phrase, it is who they are and what they do.



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photos courtesy of Texas A&M AgriLife

A TALL Promise

A Program for Developing *Mid-Career Leaders in Texas*

by KINCAID CALLAHAN '25

Within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, countless organizations exist to sharpen students' leadership skills, supplement networking opportunities and prepare them for the professional world. Within the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, however, lies an entirely different, but just as important, educational opportunity.

There is a program that exists not for college students, but rather for mid-career industry leaders in Texas agriculture, whose alumni base includes the definitive who's who of Texas agriculture. It is called the Governor Dolph Briscoe Jr. Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Program, and has a simple mission: to prepare the emerging leaders of Texas agriculture to competently support the state's most important industry for the future.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

TALL is a two-year-long series of 10 sessions, usually five days each. The program functions as a mobile classroom, where participants travel from location to location. During these sessions, they attend seminars with industry leaders, complete tours of the most important agricultural businesses in their respective areas and participate in meetings with some of the most influential leaders in government and industry.

"The program was implemented to educate agricultural leaders to support our most valued national security issue, that being food and fiber," Jim Mazurkiewicz, Ph.D., TALL program director said.

According to Mazurkiewicz, while most sessions take place in Texas, participants will ultimately travel coast to coast and even beyond the borders of the United States by the time they graduate from the program. Upon graduation, participants become a part of the extensive, robust TALL alum base, connecting with some of the most influential members of the Texas agriculture industry.



TALL participants receive hands-on experience with the help of industry and government leaders.

"The TALL Program has been pivotal in my growth as a person and professionally,"
– Cody Harris, Texas State Representative

ALUMNI BASE

While many agricultural education programs in Texas can boast positive benefits for their graduates, TALL is second to none regarding industry impact.

Of all the program's graduates, 90% are in public service, including three members of the Texas State Legislature. TALL also has alums in every state agency and countless in service to their communities through local government.

"The TALL program has been pivotal in my growth as a person and professionally," Texas State Representative Cody Harris, an alumnus of TALL's 15th class, said.

The TALL Alumni Association has played a significant role in continuing its legacy. According to Mazurkiewicz, the alumni are the program's biggest recruiters, regularly networking with prospects and assisting potential participants with questions. Alums also play a major role in fundraising efforts.

"TALL alumni account for the majority of the donations, which helps allow TALL to continue to be 100% self-funded," Mazurkiewicz said.


Many alums participate in the class sessions themselves, offering their services for seminars, tours, and supporting curriculum for the current participants. At the end of the day, TALL continues to thrive partly because of its influential, connected and passionate alumni base.



Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz has been at the helm of the TALL Program since 1998. Since its beginning, the program has graduated 15 classes and placed graduates in every corner of business and government in Texas agriculture.

FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES

While college students may not be able to participate directly in TALL, there is a similar program for them: the TALL Emerging Leaders Program. Participating students study abroad with an agricultural family in Poland for one month at one of the best prices for any study-abroad program on campus.

From its world-class educational experiences, to its vast and influential alum base, the benefits of the TALL Program can be innumerable for its participants, providing practical, real-world education and experience that helps alums and the industry. 



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AGGIE

Nutritionists

ON THE AIRWAVES AND THE FIELD

Two students in the Nutrition Department share their experiences working with the Performance Nutrition Department through Texas A&M Athletics and hosting the Live, Learn, Love Podcast.

HANNAH RAJLICH

by JALEIGH IVY '24

For Illinois native Hannah Rajlich, a move to the South was an easy decision after visiting Texas A&M University's campus as a high school student. When exploring different options to study nutrition out of state, A&M's Department of Nutrition stood out to her.

"I loved all the traditions here and what A&M stands for," Rajlich said. "From the outside, I could see how organized the nutrition department is and how prepared they are going to make us for what was going to come after graduation."

Rajlich's interest in studying nutrition and dietetics began when she competed in high school cross country and track.

"I could see how important my nutrition was in my performance," Rajlich said. "So I got super into my diet and how I could maximize my athletic performance through food."

This interest led Rajlich to join the Texas A&M Athletics Performance Nutrition Department.

This department allows Rajlich to take her classroom skills and apply them to real life. The performance nutrition team works to educate student athletes on nutritional fueling during all types of activities.

Most of this work is done on campus at the Slocum Nutrition Center. The center is a state-of-the-art dining facility that allows athletes to fuel their bodies and focus on nutritional goals. Rajlich assists in putting on cooking demonstrations that show student athletes how to cook healthy, nutritious meals for themselves.

"I've gotten the opportunity to do a lot of different things, which has been so awesome," Rajlich said.

The department has played a vital key role in developing Rajlich's educational and career goals.

"I love the nutrition department here," Rajlich said. "And I think our professors are what make it what it

is. They care so much, and they're continually pushing our education and trying to make it better."

Rajlich graduates in May of 2024, and will be matched with a university to complete her master's degree. As a registered dietitian, Rajlich dreams of working in the NBA, NFL or returning to A&M to continue to work in the Performance Nutrition Department.



"I've gotten the opportunity to do a lot of different things, which has been so awesome," Rajlich said.

BAILEE CHAVEZ

by DAYTON McELYEA '24

The COVID-19 pandemic stopped many things. For senior Texas A&M University nutrition major Bailee Chavez, however, it brought about a new beginning: the Live, Learn, Love Podcast.

The Gilmer, Texas, native's appreciation for the field of nutrition began in middle school. Chavez continues her interest through Texas A&M's program.

At the end of her freshman year, Chavez became president-elect of the Texas Student Dietetics Association and became president the following semester.

"It is a challenge to balance with my schoolwork," Chavez said. "But I get to execute my leadership skills, creativity skills, management skills and plan some fun networking and social events."

In addition, she is also involved in the Registered Dietitians Mentorship Program, the Nutrition and Dietetics Association, Delight Ministries and multiple committees. Chavez has also competed in Student Research Week for the past two years, and alongside her sister, she won her division last year.



SCAN TO LISTEN

In 2020, Chavez was selected as one of 10 FFA Ford Leadership Scholars. Recipients are required to start a community service initiative. With the challenge of the pandemic looming, Chavez started the Live, Learn, Love Podcast.

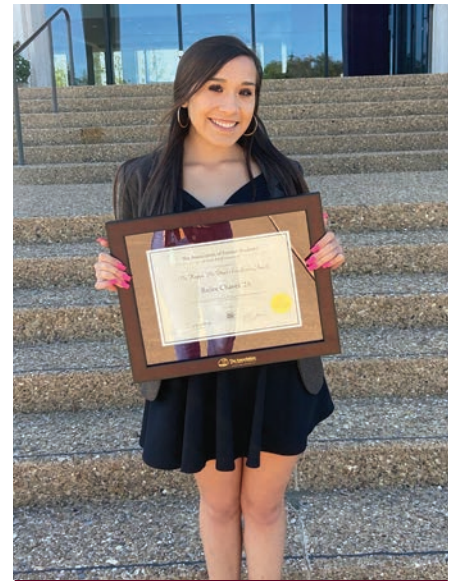
"I came up with a podcast that could serve my community by providing positive content in the midst of the pandemic," Chavez said. "People could listen no matter where they were."

While initially focused on individuals in FFA, the podcast has expanded to other topics, such as faith and dietetics. These individuals range from former FFA officers to dietetic professionals and nutrition students.

"I really just interview people who I think have an inspiring story and who have achieved success," Chavez said. "I really never run out of people to interview because I think we can learn something from everyone's experiences."

The name, "Live, Learn, Love," sheds light on the intention behind the production and lays out the trajectory for the podcast's motto: aspiring growth.


"In life, you're going to have to live through difficult experiences," Chavez said. "You're going to have to learn from them and, ultimately, after you do those two, you can learn to love what you've been



"For me, it's really about being a trailblazer," Bailee Chavez said. photo courtesy of Chavez

through and the challenges you've faced."

As Chavez completes her undergraduate degree and intended career as a registered dietitian, she has goals to continue to grow the podcast and to be a positive role model.

"For me, it's really about being a trailblazer," Chavez said. "I am a first-generation college student. My family before me didn't have the opportunity to go to college, so it is not something that I take for granted." 

LIVE Learn LOVE

*"I came up with a podcast that could serve my community by providing positive content in the midst of the pandemic," Chavez said.
"People could listen no matter where they were."*



THE MODERN DAY COWGIRL

COWGIRL Magazine honors five Aggies in the class of 2024 30 Under 30 individuals.

by DAYTON McELYEA '24

photo courtesy of Madison Brooks

Women haven't always had a place in the Western industry. But times are changing. The COWGIRL 30 Under 30 list honors female trailblazers in the Western industry.

In December 2023, COWGIRL announced the class of 2024 as their fifth class of honorees, including five Aggies who are blazing a trail of their own.

"The aim of COWGIRL 30 Under 30 is to shine a light on this vital and talented workforce while creating a network of individuals who can serve as role models and mentors for future female leaders," Carly Billington, feature writer for COWGIRL, said.

MADISON BROOKS



photo courtesy of Madison Brooks

quickly found her way back as HLSR's business and corporate development manager, giving Brooks the unique opportunity to connect sponsors to the different exhibits and events.

"I get the opportunity to work with some of the biggest brands in the Houston area and across the country," Brooks said. "We are all working toward the mission of educating Texas youth and providing a family-friendly experience that allows people to make memories on our grounds and keep those for years to come."

Brooks grew up following her dad to major stock shows and she followed in her family's footsteps of

attending Texas A&M. Starting as a general communications major, she quickly realized the value of the hands-on curriculum that the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences offered. She graduated in 2019 with a degree in agricultural communications and journalism.

Collaboration and community are a big part of Brooks' career and family legacy. The COWGIRL 30 Under 30 List offered Brooks the opportunity to be recognized for her contributions to the industry, and a group of women she could connect with.

"I really love the opportunity to be connected with a network of women who are all specialists

in their own way,” Brooks said. “It creates a really powerful, collaborative community that can work together to push agriculture and the Western world forward in a variety of ways.”

Brooks’ love for the industry is evident in her dedication to the mission of bridging the gaps between those in and out of the Western industry. She encourages women in agriculture to make every connection possible, to learn from what others have to offer and lean on those people when needed.

“[The agricultural and Western industry] is something I have found myself to fall more in love with over time,” Brooks said. “We learn, every day, the reach that agriculture has and the impact it has on all kinds of industries. It is such a wide and sprawling industry that just continues to grow on you, and you continue to fall more in love with over time. It is all connected, and it is everything.”

HANNAH CRANDALL



photo courtesy of Hannah Crandall

Hannah Crandall comes from a family legacy of rodeo cowboys.

Leaving behind a feeling of regret for not following in their footsteps, she has found her own definition of a cowgirl along the way.

“For a long time, that was my biggest regret: not rodeoing,” Crandall said. “That’s what I thought I should be or what I could’ve been, so I didn’t really think of myself as a cowgirl because I had been surrounded by people who were.”

After graduating from Texas A&M in the spring of 2021 with a degree in agricultural communications and journalism, she found a passion for event production and journalism. This led her to a dual career as the North Texas Fair and Rodeo marketing and media manager and a freelance Western lifestyle writer.

“I discovered that where my heart lied was in writing and sharing those stories,” Crandall said. “I still love producing events and giving other people the opportunity to experience it. I get to combine all of it in what I do now.”

In addition to managing all aspects of media and marketing for the August fair, Crandall writes for several publications, including *Western Horseman*, *Quarter Horse News*, *Cutting Horse Chatter* and *Cowboy Lifestyle Network*. Additionally, she does search engine optimization writing for brands such as Twisted X and Cavender’s.

“My favorite thing that I do is sharing the stories of the people and the animals that make our industry what it is,” Crandall said.

The COWGIRL 30 Under 30 List

has been on Crandall’s radar since it began in 2020. She looked up to the women selected who were doing the things she wanted to do in the industry, ranging from ranching to rodeoing to storytelling.

“It lit a fire under me that I wanted to do that,” Crandall said. “I wanted to be a storyteller and be a part of keeping this way of life alive for generations to come.”

Crandall encourages women in agriculture to follow their passion and be willing to take the steps to get there.

“First, I would say to find your place, even if it’s not where you expect it to be,” Crandall said. “I get to wake up every day, share stories and talk to some of the coolest people. I truly love what I do and it makes all the difference in the world.”

“Second, you have to work your butt off to get there,” Crandall said. “You have to actively seek out those opportunities. As much as I firmly believe that things will fall into place how they’re supposed to, you also have to be willing to seek out those opportunities. It doesn’t just fall into your lap.”

“The aim of COWGIRL 30 Under 30 is to shine a light on this vital and talented workforce while creating a network of individuals who can serve as role models and mentors for future female leaders,” Carly Billington said, feature writer for COWGIRL.

KELLEY RANLY

photo courtesy of Kelley Ranly



Kelley Ranly grew up in Troy, Texas, surrounded by agriculture. As a self-proclaimed “crazy ag kid” raised by two parents in the industry, Ranly showed livestock and rodeoed throughout her youth.

“I grew up in it from a young age and fell in love with [the agricultural industry],” Ranly said. “Obviously, I had some great ag teachers and county agents along the way that helped me to grow my passion for this industry.”

She began her career in 2017 as a Texas 4-H and AgriLife student worker. Childhood experiences and the Texas 4-H Ambassador Short Course set her on a path to her current position as an Extension Program Specialist with Texas 4-H and Texas Youth Livestock and Agriculture associations.

In her current role, Ranly is responsible for leading the leadership and ambassador programs for Texas youth. She is actively involved with the Texas State 4-H Horse Show held each July. During her pursuit of a

bachelor’s in animal science with a minor in business, and later, a master’s in agribusiness at Texas A&M, Ranly was a member of the Ranch Horse team, Saddle and Sirloin, Horsemen’s Club, completed several internships and attended a study abroad trip.

The COWGIRL 30 Under 30 List offered Ranly a unique experience to broaden her personal network.

“It’s [made up] of people all over the world that are intimately intertwined in agriculture,” Ranly said. “They have their own connections that I think I can leverage with my youth programs to get those kids connected and just, personally, try to expand my network and knowledge.”

Ranly offers an adept perspective on women’s emerging place in agriculture. As someone who works to build young leaders in the industry, she encourages women to take every opportunity presented.

“I think it’s a matter of women continuing to show up and work really hard and make it ours, which it kind of already is,” Ranly said.

“Everyone loves a comfort zone,” Ranly said. “But I think we should also step outside of that. Always try to be the hardest working person in the room and the most trustworthy person in the room. You don’t have to be the smartest or the funniest or the prettiest, you just have to be willing to work hard and show up for your people and that will take you pretty far in ag and in life.”

SARAH SCHOBERT

photo courtesy of Sarah Schobert



Sarah Schobert is no stranger to the equine industry. Texas A&M’s current equine lecturer and horse judging team coordinator blazed her own trail through many aspects of the equine and Western industry.

“If you want to be going somewhere with a lot of momentum,” Schobert said, “then, I think you gotta learn to do things a little different than the average person, [you have] to think a little bit outside of the box.”

She earned an associate degree from Blackhawk University, then pursued a bachelor’s and master’s degree in animal science at Oklahoma State University. At Blackhawk, Schobert was a member of the horse judging and equestrian teams. She also coached OSU’s horse judging teams during her graduate program.

Schobert returned to her alma mater, Blackhawk University, to teach in their equine program. She launched the school’s IHSA Hunt Seat Division riding team during her three-year tenure.

In the fall of 2020, Schobert began a new role at Texas A&M and saw a chance to relaunch the college's horse judging program and return to something she was passionate about — coaching.

“The best part of my job is interacting with great students,” Schobert said. “I am constantly impressed by the work ethic, intellectual ability [and] the discipline of the students walking around the college of agriculture.”

Schobert continues to judge professionally, ride personal horses, train horses and teach lessons. She is a carded horse show judge for four breed associations.

According to Schobert, one of the most complex challenges facing women in the Western industry today is learning to be a modern-day woman.

“I think a lot of us want to try to do everything and we want to be good at everything,” Schobert said. “Women in ag have to learn to support each other better through this process.”

Schobert encourages women in the industry to surround themselves with high-achieving individuals, especially those with skill sets outside of their own.

“Make sure that you're gritty,” Schobert says. “Be ready to take direct feedback from people that have achieved the things you want to achieve or have made notable contributions. Don't be afraid to ask for help and don't be afraid for them to give you very blunt advice to make you better.”

TYLER SCHUSTER



photo courtesy of Tyler Schuster

As a fifth-generation rancher, Tyler Schuster is pursuing a legacy in the Western industry that has been preceded by multiple generations of her family.

“Continuing to carry on my grandpa's legacy and my mom's legacy is something that I don't take for granted,” Schuster said.

While Schuster wears many hats — rancher, podcaster and influencer — she currently works as the manager of leadership development for the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. In this role, she oversees the planning and programming for their members under the age of 40.

In late 2020, Schuster began the Basically Famous Podcast, which interviews women in the Western industries to tell their stories, highlight the events that led them to success and offer advice to others in the industry.

“My podcast is my personal contribution to the industry,” Schuster said. “I have built a really great group of what I call my BFFs,

Basically Famous Friends, who I have met through the podcast.”

Schuster received her bachelor's degree from Tarleton State University in 2020. She then became a third-generation Aggie in pursuit of a master's degree in public service and administration. She also received a certificate from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Schuster, one of two students in the Bush School with an agricultural background at the time, appreciated agriculture even more.

“[My time in the Bush School] reminded me of why I love agriculture,” Schuster said. “I have been called to agriculture. That is who I am. That's what I want to do. My time at the Bush School allowed me to see that.”

Schuster encourages young women in the industry not to let their age keep them from sitting at tables where they want to sit.

“Say yes,” Schuster said. “Take opportunities. Do the grunt work. Do it with a big 'ole smile on your face and do it well because you never know what could come of that.”

“It's finally cool to be a woman in ag,” Schuster said. “Not many women have gone before us and done the things we are now getting to do. So, we are having to create our own path.” 🌱

A LEGACY OF GIVING BACK

Lynda and Tom Curl '70

photos courtesy of Tom Curl

by IDANI CANTU '24



Texas A&M laid Curl's foundation for a lifetime of giving back, but he said he could not have done it without Lynda.

Within the city of Brookfield, Wisconsin, resides Tom and Lynda Curl, a couple whose journey is intertwined with a commitment to education, community and the spirit of giving back. Their story is one of dedication, resilience and a profound sense of gratitude.

Tom began his college career at Pan American College, now called the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley. Surprisingly, Curl's mother was completing her senior year of college that same year.

Following his mother's graduation, Curl transferred to Texas A&M University during his sophomore year.

Curl's decision to attend Texas A&M was driven by a passion for agricultural journalism, a field he discovered later in his academic journey.

"I decided I wanted to go to A&M because I wanted to study agricultural journalism, which I had never even heard of until I probably got to be in the fall semester of my senior year of high school," Curl said.

During his senior year, Curl worked at an agricultural communications office and was offered a position as a writer with extension services after graduation. It was during this time that he met his wife, Lynda.

Tom, a native of San Juan, Texas, and Lynda, from Edcouch Elsa, Texas, found their paths converging at Texas A&M University, where they both embarked on transformative journeys.

Tom has a distinguished background in agricultural journalism. From 1972 to 1994, he held editorial and senior management positions at Southern Progress Corporation/Time Inc.

In the years following, he became an editor at Reiman Publications from 1994 to 1998 before being promoted to president and chief executive officer until 2003.

Like a true Aggie, Curl continues to give back to the institution that gave to him. He is also involved in the Traveling Aggies Group with the Association of Former Students and an Aggie Angel Network investor.

The Curl family has been instrumental in supporting various initiatives within the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications, including the establishment of the Curl Media Lab in the Agriculture and Life Sciences Building.

They also assisted in providing a recording room in the Wildlife, Fisheries and Ecological Sciences Building, a testament to their enduring dedication to education and innovation.

His experiences at Texas A&M laid the foundation for a lifetime of giving back to the institution that shaped his future. Curl said, however, he could not have done it all without Lynda.

“The Media Lab has got my name and Lynda’s name on it, so nothing that I’ve ever done since we met each other was just me,” Curl said.

Curl values the importance of supporting undergraduate teaching and credits the scholarships he earned for supporting him.

“I make no claim to know what’s the best thing for a department,” Curl said, “but former ALEC Department Head Jack Elliot and I were talking and I let him know that Lynda and I wanted to support in some way, particularly related to undergraduate teaching, because that’s where I got my scholarship help years ago.”

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences did not have a recording room for students to create and work on their media skills. He partnered with Leroy Shafer, Marcus Hill and their spouses to provide the room.

Their support helped pave the way for enhanced educational experiences.

Curl’s journey is not just about financial contributions, it’s about imparting invaluable lessons garnered from a lifetime of experiences.

“My advice in terms of looking down the road is to be willing to do something out of your comfort zone,” Curl said. “If you pick the right mentors, it’ll work. If it doesn’t, do something else. Don’t get so narrow in your focus you miss an opportunity.”

In the quiet corners of Brookfield, Tom and Lynda Curl’s legacy continues to unfold, a poignant reminder of the transformative power of education and the enduring impact of generosity.

“It’ll never be enough to repay the university for what I got out of it,” Curl said. 



Tom Curl with Yessinia,
a student he and Lynda sponsor in Guatemala.



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Education has the power to push people across the world in search of new avenues to learn and explore endless possibilities. Students from various corners of the world have chosen to leave their homes and everything familiar to pursue advanced degrees at Texas A&M University.

The influence of diverse cultures, experiences and agricultural practices helps enrich Texas A&M University's graduate programs.

Xinzhou Fan, an international student from China, is pursuing a doctorate in hospitality, hotel management and tourism at Texas A&M University.

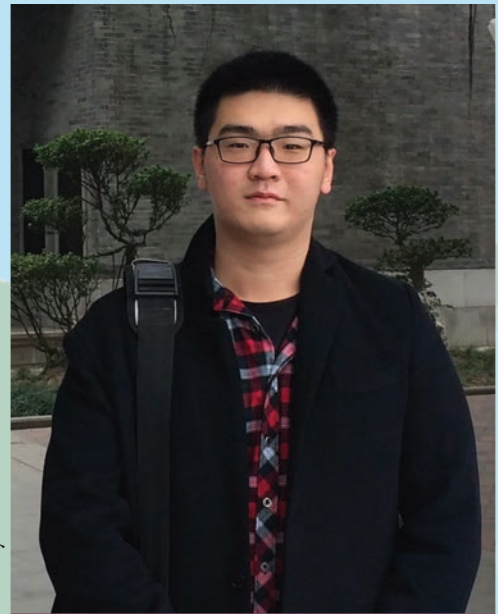
“For my Ph.D., my motivation started when I went to the U.K. for my master's, where I learned about different concepts and material, and I decided I wanted to dive into it as a scholar,” Fan said.

With the world and country to explore, Fan chose Texas A&M University to continue his education due to the educational system and the program's length, allowing him to immerse himself in Texan culture and develop his dissertation.

“In the U.K., their program is mainly three years, so once you begin, you immediately have to start your dissertation,” Fan said. “In the U.S., you have four to five years, which I think is very helpful.”

Academia **ACROSS** *Country Borders*

by KATE DARSEY '24



Xinzhou Fan, from China, pursues his doctorate at Texas A&M University.

Texas has a vibrant culture stemming from its remarkable history and Western way of life. This culture has given rise to certain stereotypes that some Texans identify with, while others do not. Although these stereotypes have spread globally and set specific expectations, there is much more to the Lone Star State than what meets the eye.

“I know Yellowstone is not in Texas, but many people in China watch the TV series, and we think it is like Texas,” Fan said. “I think it is quite interesting that Texas is not just about ranching and cowboys, but also high technology.”

While international students may be engrossed with traditional Texas culture, they are also immersed in the rich Texas A&M lifestyle. Full of traditions and incomparable pride found no where else, the culture is revered by Aggies, but can be overwhelming to understand from the outside.

“My first impression of Texas A&M is the spirit, because I have been to Princeton and Harvard, and I never experienced this kind of spirit there,” Fan said. “I find it quite impressive.”

Moving to a new country can be challenging as internationals have to navigate a different culture, transportation systems and language barrier. The lack of accessible resources, such as international language programs, can add even more complications for students.

“The biggest challenge has been the language because I thought the university might provide some international language program for students, but they don’t,” Clara Sim, a master’s student from South Korea in agribusiness, said. “There are some free courses, but those classes do not fit my schedule to attend.”

The master’s programs offered by the College allow international students to bridge the gap with Americans, which would not be done as efficiently as if they were only state residents.

“From an international student perspective, if I stay with my Chinese friends, we don’t know a lot about Texas or College Station,” Fan said. “When I can connect with my College Station friends, they will give me a lot of native information.”

Although Fan is grateful for this opportunity and the experience he is gaining, a 13-hour flight stands between him and his family. This makes it challenging for Fan to decide to travel for his education and career.

“I would like to work in academics for my future career,” Fan said. “I love both places but worry about my family because my grandparents are older, and I would like to visit them. Also, political issues in the future raise some risks, but I am open to options.”

One important aspect, often overlooked, is the lack of resources when moving to another country. Without a car, many international travelers are forced to pay for public transportation and other facilities that would be accessible to residents.


“Texas A&M has a lot of facilities for students, like the sports recreation center, which is a beneficial part for international students,” Sim said. “Also, they provide a free bus, and I love that part because you don’t have to pay anything.”

Texan undergraduates often choose to stay in Texas or the U.S. to continue their studies in a graduate program. Students from other countries, however, are encouraged to obtain their graduate degrees abroad to gain exposure to varied experiences, ideas and cultures.

“In Korea, it is becoming more popular to get your master’s abroad because getting your education higher and higher is more in demand,” Sim said. “We have a sentence in Korea, ‘Everyone gets a master’s,’ so a master’s is not really different. Even a Ph.D. is becoming more common.”

Differences between Texas A&M University and other universities worldwide extend beyond just academics. These cultural differences also influence social norms and expectations between professors, students and peers.

“One difference is the relationship between you and your supervisor,” Fan said. “Especially in East Asian culture, your supervisor is your boss, and you show high respect and obey any instructions. In the United States, it is a more cooperative relationship.”

After completing their studies at Texas A&M University, these students aspire to secure a job in the United States and eventually use the knowledge and experience gained back in their native country. Thanks to educational programs, the world is within reach for students like Fan and Sim who have successfully seized this opportunity. 

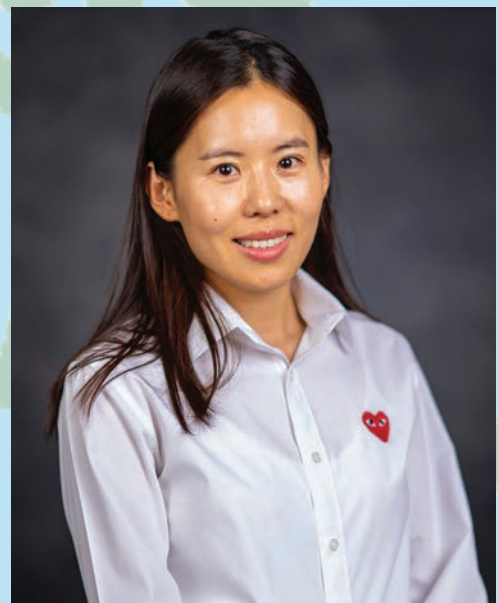


photo courtesy of Clara Sim

Clara Sim, originally from Korea, pursues her master's in agribusiness.



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BEHIND THE CHUTES: *Rodeo Internships*

by MALLORY HALBARDIER '25

Texas A&M University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students understand learning happens in more places than just the classroom. Many students participate in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo™ internship to gain valuable hands-on experience.

WRITING FOR AGRICULTURE

Madison Crick '25, a double major in agricultural communications and journalism and agricultural leadership and development, was drawn to HLSR because of her deep-rooted connection to agriculture. Since childhood, Crick has shown goats and lambs at the HLSR, and her experience eventually led her to a HLSR scholarship and an internship.

The writing internship appealed to Crick, as most of her classes involved writing. Crick knew she had the experience necessary for the internship, and if she wanted to pursue a journalism job in the future, the writing internship would prepare her for it.

Crick gained experience interviewing, editing and writing articles. Additionally, she was tasked with interviewing rodeo athletes and exhibitors for releases that were distributed to news outlets daily.

“This internship set me up to be a better writer in a short amount of time because, sometimes, there was not a lot of time to write up an article or press release before it needed to be sent out,” Crick said.

The internship also instilled confidence in her approach to journalism, as she navigated the challenge of getting quotes from diverse individuals.

“I learned how to be confident as a journalist because I had to walk up to random people and get quotes,” Crick said.

“It provides students with the opportunity to not only improve and grow hard skills, but also to improve soft skills,”
Kelsi Opat, Ph.D., intern supervisor, said.



“Soak up every single moment because it was genuinely one of the best weeks and I wish I had cherished it more,” Crick said.

photos courtesy of
Madison Crick

Crick said that the experience she gained during her internship will significantly impact her future career. The fast-paced nature of the internship equipped her with the skills necessary to excel under pressure, while the exposure to various components of the industry broadened her understanding of agricultural communications.



“Soak up every single moment because it was genuinely one of the best weeks, and I wish I had cherished it more,” Crick said.



ADVOCATING FOR AG: One Conversation at a Time

Lexy Ide '25 has roots in agriculture and a desire to advocate for the industry, making her a perfect match as an HLSR intern. Her affiliation with HLSR dates back well before her internship, having participated in various events over the years.

“I have participated in the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo for as long as I can remember,” Ide said. “Like most ag kids, I started showing cattle and did agricultural mechanics in high school.”

Ide's first internship with HLSR was in the heifer show during her freshman year of college while majoring in animal science. During her sophomore year, she was offered to work in the AgVenture education area.

“When I visited Houston as an exhibitor, I found it fascinating to see college kids talking to the public about agriculture, and that's everything that I want to do,” she said.

As an agricultural leadership and development major, Ide found a connection to the AgVenture internship, viewing it as a platform to bridge the gap between the agricultural community and the wider public.

“When I saw AgVenture, I thought this would be a great way to talk to the public and still get to work with animals,” Ide said.



“It was a really positive experience of a lifetime that I wish every college of agriculture student could experience,” Ide said.

Responsibilities included taking care of animals in the breed row barn and assisting with live births in front of a public audience in the birthing center. The highlight of her internship was having the opportunity to deliver twin ewe lambs alongside a veterinarian.



While working in the Birthing Center, Ide had the opportunity to help deliver twin ewe lambs.

“It was fun to get to talk to the audience through the birthing process,” Ide said.

What made her experience was her encounters with guests, ranging from children to adults. People come to Houston from all over the world, and it was her responsibility to educate the public about the value of agriculture and why it is a positive thing for the public to learn about.

Through engaging in conversations, clearing up misconceptions and sharing her passion for agriculture, Ide embodied what it means to be an advocate. This internship confirmed her calling to support agricultural causes, serving as more than just a stepping stone for her.

“I want to work for a livestock show and rodeo in the future, so having livestock show experience by working in the educational section will definitely help me,” Ide said.

Her advice to aspiring interns is to embrace every opportunity to learn, connect and make a difference.

“It was a really positive experience of a lifetime that I wish every college of agriculture student could experience,” Ide said.

NAVIGATING The Digital Frontier

As a social media intern, Mary Kate Hivnor '25 immersed herself in the world of digital media. Hivnor, an agricultural sciences major, was interested in this unique opportunity to expand her knowledge of digital engagement and grow in professionalism.

Her prior experience in digital communication guided Hivnor's decision to intern.

"I had already had some experience with social media because of my past internships, so that helped get me in the door for this opportunity," Hivnor said.

Hivnor's responsibility was to capture moments at HLSR events that resonated with the rodeo's audience. She would take photos at events and send them to her boss, who would post them to social media as the event was going on.

Throughout her internship, Hivnor navigated new challenges and seized opportunities for growth.

"It was a different experience being at the livestock show and having to ask parents to take pictures of their kids," Hivnor said. "That pushed me out of my comfort zone a lot, but it also helped me grow professionally."

From photographing captivating moments at events to conducting interviews with participants about their 4-H projects, Hivnor played a pivotal role in amplifying HLSR's online media presence.

"We got to interview the participants about their 4-H projects and showcase their project while bringing awareness to what 4-H is," Hivnor said.

She got to explore the rodeo grounds every day to find important events going on that the public wanted to know more about, such as the Texas Longhorn and Zebu Cattle shows.

"One of my favorite moments of interning was getting to cover the Longhorn and Zebu shows because they are not typically shown at rodeos," Hivnor said.



Hivnor got the opportunity to explore the rodeo grounds every day and captured this selfie with a newborn calf.

For Hivnor, the most lasting impacts were the relationships she made with other interns, 4-H leaders and agriculture educators.


"My future career is to be a high school agriculture teacher, so my internship helped me by giving me the opportunity to talk to different leaders, teachers and extension agents," Hivnor said.

The experience broadened her understanding of the misconceptions surrounding agriculture, reinforcing her commitment to bridging the gap between rural practices and urban perceptions.

"My internship also taught me how a lot of people don't understand typical day-to-day agriculture and how important it is to bring agriculture into the community," Hivnor said.

Through digital engagement and personal connections, Hivnor's social media internship exemplifies the impact of hands-on learning within the agricultural industry.

The internships offered by the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo demonstrate the organization's dedication to fostering the development of future agricultural leaders.

Prospective interns are encouraged to seize the opportunity, for within the lively atmosphere of the rodeo grounds are endless opportunities for learning, personal development and impactful contributions. 



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Aggies BEYOND THE Classroom

by JALEIGH IVY '24

Many students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences seek to complete at least one internship during their tenure at Texas A&M University. These internships can be as short as one week or as long as an entire semester.

Completing an internship allows students to gain insight into what the workforce will be like upon graduation. Internships are a great way to try different jobs within your field of study and see what best fits your interests and skills.

Below are the stories of students in the College who have completed internships during their time at Texas A&M.

SYDNEY KURTZ '23

Agricultural Economics

For Sydney Kurtz, the opportunity to complete an internship ultimately led her to full-time employment after graduation. In the spring of her junior year, Kurtz attended the AGLS career fair, where she met with a representative with Capital Farm Credit.



photo courtesy of Sidney Kurtz

Through a series of interviews and a competitive selection process, Kurtz was named one of 12 summer interns for the company. Each intern was assigned a separate office in the state of Texas. Fortunately, Kurtz landed close to her hometown in Round Rock, Texas.

Throughout the 12-week program, Kurtz created a diverse portfolio of projects and travel opportunities.

“During my internship, I traveled across Texas visiting borrowers’ operations,” she said. “Everything from feedlots and dairies to beef packing plants. In the office, I worked alongside credit analysts and was able to see their day-to-day.”

Slow periods for the company due to high interest rates created a challenge for Kurtz during her tenure. Luckily, Capital Farm Credit employees were ready to spring into action so that she could get the most out of her internship.

“When interest rates are high and not favorable for customers, it can deter new loans,” Kurtz said. “With the help of my boss, I was able to reach out to other Capital Farm Credit employees and shadow them to see what their roles looked like during slower times.”

With a willingness to learn and an employer rooting for her success, Kurtz completed her internship on a high note. After graduation in December 2023, Kurtz was offered a full-time position with Capital Farm Credit in the Bryan, Texas, office.

Through this experience, Kurtz has become an advocate for learning opportunities outside of the classroom and networking.

“One thing I would share with others who may be interested in a similar path is to not be afraid to reach out with others to connect,” Kurtz said. “Doing so opens so many doors and creates opportunities you never would have thought you could experience.”

HALEY RUSSELL '25

Forensics and Investigative Sciences

Dedicated to sharpening her skills and standing out on her medical school application, Haley Russell spent four weeks in Fayetteville, Arkansas, as a death investigator intern at the county coroner’s office.



photo courtesy of Haley Russell

Through this internship, Russell gained valuable insight into what a long-term career in forensics and investigative sciences would be like.

“No matter what field you go into, I don’t think you can ever fully understand what you’re going to be doing unless you go and do it,” Russell said.

Throughout the four weeks, Russell gained real-world experience in death investigative sciences and worked alongside the county coroner. Some of these tasks included traveling on-site with the coroner, assisting in processing death scenes, taking crime scene photos and communicating with families and funeral homes.

She participated in a post-mortem blood draw and toxicology certification class, where she was able to observe an autopsy and be trained on fluid withdrawals. She took the skills learned in this class and put them into practice in the field.

Due to the nature of the work, students in the forensics and investigative sciences major primarily learn through pictures and case studies rather than hands-on experiences. For Russell, being in Arkansas and seeing real-life situations solidified that she was on the right career path.

“I feel confident in my career path and journey because I was able to have this experience and understand what I would be doing for the rest of my life,” Russell said.

In addition to her studies, Russell serves as a peer mentor for Hullabaloo U, a class created for incoming freshmen. Here, she can help underclassmen in forensics and investigative sciences and answer their questions about the difficulty of the field of work.

“Honestly, there’s no other way to find out other than just going out and doing,” Russell said. “It’s better to put yourself in that uncomfortable position than to go your entire college career not knowing and then go into the workforce and realize you can’t do it.”

Upon completing her undergraduate degree in May of 2025, Russell plans to spend one year in England at the University of Lincoln to obtain her master’s degree in forensics sciences. After that, she plans to attend medical school with the ultimate goal of becoming a forensic pathologist.

EMILIE HARRELL '24

Plant and Environmental Soil Sciences

Emilie Harrell did not grow up in agriculture, but that did not shy her away from entering the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Thanks to an intro to animal science class in high school and her dad’s love of the Southeastern Conference, she planted herself at Texas A&M University to study agriculture.



photo courtesy of Emilie Harrell

In the summer of 2023, Harrell interned with Corteva Agriscience, a global research and development company. She worked in a subset of the research and development department called crop protection, where she studied the effects of drought on corn.

As a part of the internship program, Harrell relocated to Lubbock, Texas, for the summer months. Originally from Florida and then moving to Houston, Texas, as a child, Harrell had not experienced the dry, desert climate that West Texas offered to her. This provided a unique opportunity to study crops she hadn’t had much exposure to prior.

“I worked with corn, sorghum and cotton over the summer, so I left with a lot more knowledge on important staple crops,” Harrell said.

In addition to West Texas, Harrell traveled to Iowa and Oklahoma to conduct research and study their crop varieties. She met with different plant breeders, statisticians and people who create genetically modified organisms.

Not having a prior background in agriculture challenged Harrell throughout her studies and internship. She faced learning curves through fieldwork and learning to operate heavy equipment.

“The biggest challenge was the complete lack of agricultural knowledge growing up,” Harrell said. “I had to learn to use equipment I had never used before, everything was brand new to me.”

Despite the challenges she faced, Harrell gained hands-on experience that she wasn't able to get in a classroom. The knowledge gained and relationships formed made the internship impactful.

"Don't even think twice about accepting that internship and just do it," Harrell said. "In 20 years, you won't remember the four or five classes you took one semester of your college years, but the skills you'll learn from being in a professional environment will stick with you."

After graduation, she would like to work in soil conservation, helping farmers improve crops through soil science.

AIDAN HOLMAN '24

Entomology

Aidan Holman is a double major in entomology and forensic investigative sciences. Over the summer of 2023, Holman worked as a research fellow for the Cross Border Threat Screening program, a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence led by Texas A&M University.



photo courtesy of Aidan Holman

In his role, Holman conducted and published research using a handheld Raman device to scan tick feces and use it to identify their species. While most of his work was done on Texas A&M's campus, he also got the opportunity to travel to the U.S./Mexico border and visit the lab there.

Holman's experience was unique because this was the first time the Cross Border Threat Screening program was run. Holman was able to experience the growing pains that a new program goes through when conducting research for the first time.


"My first month in the internship was trial and error," Holman said. "It is one of the roughest parts of research because you don't know if your process will work or not."

Despite the challenges, the most valuable part of his experience was conducting and professionally presenting research. This was the first time Holman had the opportunity to be a part of professional research, and it ultimately led him to a job.

"I am still working in the lab I did this internship in," Holman said. "I've got to work on and lead several different research projects in a plethora of different fields and subjects."

Holman's major requires graduates to have credit for an internship or a research project. Through his experience, he learned internships have a lot of value when it comes to finding out what you want to do with your education.

"Anyone considering applying to or accepting an internship should do it," Holman said. "If you don't like what it is you're doing, you've just told yourself, okay, this isn't what I want to go into, and knowing that early on, you can start changing your plan."

Holman plans to get a doctor of philosophy degree in toxicology at Texas A&M after completing his undergraduate degree. 



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BEHIND THE BEADS: *Beaded Blondes*

by BROOKE HUFF '25



Lauren '18 and Lexi '22 Lindemulder
photo courtesy of Beaded Blondes

In the heart of Aggieland, where the rhythm of college life pulses through every street, there is a gold mine. Sisters Lauren and Lexi Lindemulder are the dynamic-duo entrepreneurs behind Beaded Blondes, a fast-growing jewelry business based in College Station, Texas.

The sisters majored in agricultural communications and journalism at Texas A&M University. Lauren was involved in The 12th Man Foundation and worked on the marketing team. It was there that she found a love for marketing. During her senior year, she searched for an affordable alternative to the classic Aggie Ring Wrap. She made a small beaded gold ring that would form the curves of her Aggie Ring.

“I would always be asked where I got it, and when I told them I made it myself, they offered to pay me to make one for them,” Lauren said. “After quite a few asks, I went to Lexi and asked her to see about going into business together making the rings we now call beaded bands.”

The two created an Etsy store to sell the bands, and overnight, they received more than 50 orders. They knew then it was going to be much larger than an Etsy store. Beaded Blondes is now a College Station household name and sold in over 300 stores in the U.S. Recently, Beaded Blondes got its first department store contract with Von Maur in 38 locations.

Being an Aggie-owned business, they strive to keep it in the family. The sisters are now the bosses of 15 employees who all currently attend Texas A&M. The Aggie spirit radiates throughout their warehouse on game days, Ring Days and pop-ups, keeping a positive and fun work environment for everyone involved.


“We both were working in college to fulfill the orders, so we understand how college life and work life can be hectic and unpredictable,” Lexi said. “Our team is very close, and we like to have a flexible schedule to accommodate our girls.”

Growing fast in Aggieland meant growing fast on Instagram. After gaining a lot of traction on the beaded bands, people at other colleges began to reach out and ask for custom color bands for their school rings. They now offer various color options to match any school or sorority.

The beaded bands started an empire with more than 300 pieces to buy, including bracelets, necklaces and rings. Beaded Blondes has differentiated itself from its competitors by staying on top of it all.

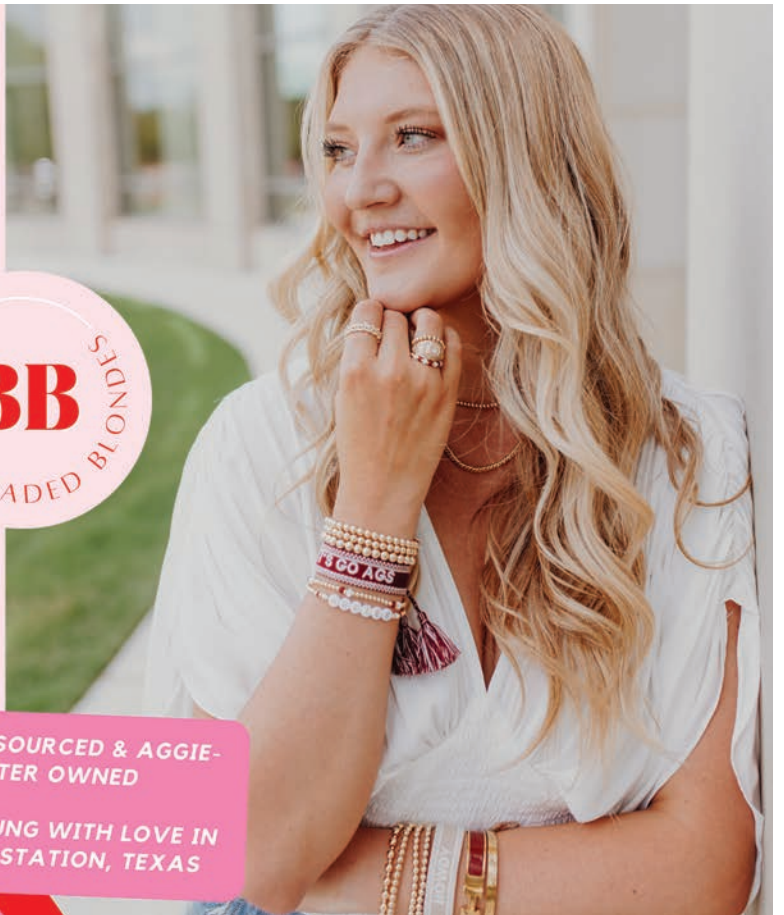
“We launch a new line every month, whether for a holiday or a trend,” Lauren said.

Lexi and Lauren are thankful for their time at Texas A&M. They hope to be an inspiration to aspiring Aggie entrepreneurs.

“Find your niche and be your own thing,” Lauren said. “At the end of the day, you do not know if you will succeed if you don’t go for it,” Lexi said. 

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A GRAPE WAY TO LEARN ABOUT WINE

by BROOKE BLACKSHEAR '24

Does the idea of wine tasting feel too sophisticated and out of reach? The Texas A&M University Department of Horticultural Sciences is making wine education accessible through an event called Spirited Learning™.

Spirited Learning is a collaborative and interactive experience that brings people together for education and networking. Wine may be what initially gets people in the door, but the event has much more to offer. Spirited Learning allows attendees to experience other horticultural aspects such as floral design, coffee, fruit, nuts and chocolate.

“I think it’s really cool to get to see different aspects of horticulture that people may not think about as being horticulture products,” Maddie Napier, student ambassador for Spirited Learning, said.


The Department of Horticultural Sciences hosts the event and invites anyone and everyone who has an interest in wine. Many students in the university will graduate having never taken an agricultural course.

“Spirited Learning is a platform for them to learn about ag in Texas and experience it firsthand,” Justin Scheiner, Ph.D., associate professor and extension viticulture specialist, said. “Wine is literally one step away from the farm field where the grapes were grown.”

Scheiner teaches HORT 416 Understanding Wine, which is open to all students 21 years or older. The course has served as a pathway for students representing up to 70 different majors to hear about and attend Spirited Learning.

“For someone who didn’t graduate with a horticulture degree, it is just so cool to meet all these wineries and hear their stories,” Sydney Faust, administrative coordinator for the department, said.

While it began as a small departmental event in January of 2022, Spirited Learning has grown to an average of around 500 RSVPs, according to Faust.

Spirited Learning occurs monthly in the Shirley and Joe Swinbank ‘74 AgriLife Center. RSVPs are posted on the AgriLife events calendar. Attending the event is free, but attendees must present a valid ID and be of legal drinking age. 

photos by
Brooke Blackshear



Legacy THROUGH Leadership

by BROOKE BLACKSHEAR '24

Drs. Joe and Chris Townsend continue to leave a lasting legacy in the lives of Texas A&M University students through the Dr. Joe Townsend '67 Leadership Fellows Program.

Joe served as the associate vice president for student development and associate dean for student development for over 30 years. He taught within the College as well.

Chris taught in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications and the Department of Horticultural Sciences. In 2005, she was named the ALEC department head.

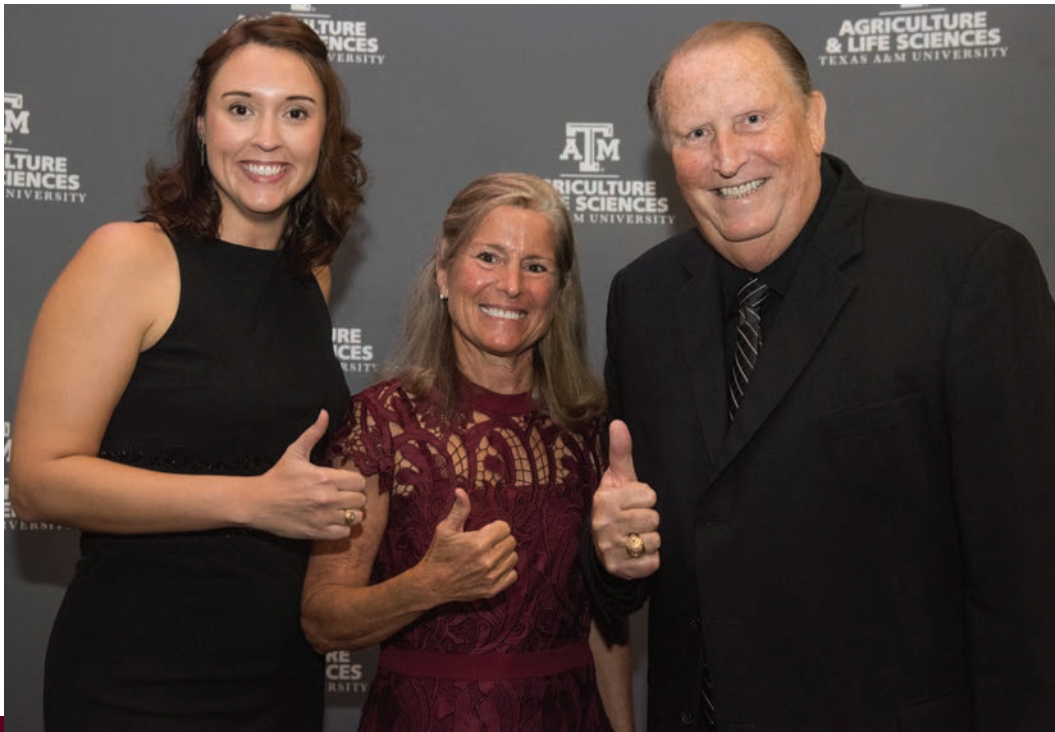
“You couldn’t throw a rock at someone in the State of Texas who Dr. Joe didn’t impact,” Jennifer Strong, Ph.D., said, associate professor and faculty director for the Dr. Joe Townsend '67 Leadership Fellows Program.

Strong met the Townsends in the fall of 1998 during her freshman year at Texas A&M. The first class she walked into was Joe’s AGLS 101 course in Kleberg, and her third class that day was with Chris in Scoates Hall.

“He was the faculty member that students would go to if they needed a hug or they needed a kick in the butt,” Strong said. “He was willing and able to give you what you needed when you needed it.”

The Fellows Program was started in honor of Joe, but Chris is truly the heartbeat behind it. Chris started the Dr. Joe Townsend '67 Leadership Fellows Program in 2009 for college students seeking a high-impact leadership experience similar to the Business Honors Program at the time.

Chris served as the first faculty director in 2009, then passed the torch to Manda Rosser for its second year. Strong was named the faculty director for its third year and has served in the role ever since.



Jennifer Strong, Chris Townsend and Joe Townsend met in the fall of 1998 during Strong's freshman year at Texas A&M.

The Fellows Program began by meeting on Tuesday nights with dinner at a local restaurant with a guest speaker. Over the past 15 years, the program has developed into the integral course Advanced Professional Leadership Development. As of today, 215 students have gone through the program.

The program begins with a needs assessment, during

which incoming students highlight what leadership competencies they want to focus on. This information is combined with “Joe-isms” and used to develop the semester's curriculum.

“A ‘Joe-ism’ is one of his wise and sage quotes he was known for,” Strong said.

The semester includes a fellows retreat, guest speakers, deep dives, relevant theories, impactful leader shadow, field trips and a leaders-are-readers project.

Chris is still heavily involved in the program, interacting with current fellows during their retreat in South Padre Island, Texas, every January. Each fellow truly admires her wisdom, intentionality and adventurous spirit.

Through the Fellows Program, Joe and Chris “built opportunities for students to explore the theory of leadership and put it into practice through different experiences,” Marie Yanchak, second-year student director for the program, said.

Most guest speakers are past fellows themselves. The Fellows Program truly exemplifies what it means to be a part of the Aggie Network.

“Past fellows are always willing to come back and speak to current fellows,” Strong said. “I’ve never had a past fellow tell me no.”

As a student director, Yanchak takes great joy in witnessing current students build these relationships with other students and guest speakers.

Fellows in the program build life-long connections and are challenged to think critically about their leadership impact on the world.

“The legacy of Joe and Chris is seen in the actions of their students who are changing the world in little and big ways every day,” Strong said. “It’s because of the things the Townsends taught them.”

Fellows are encouraged to go out into the world and make a positive impact utilizing the knowledge and skills acquired through the program.



photos courtesy of Marie Yanchak

“Fellows gave me the confidence to pursue niche careers,” Yanchak said. “I learned there are so many pathways to success.”

Past fellows have become educators, lawyers, pastors and CEOs in different areas of society. These individuals will continue to be scattered across the State of Texas and beyond to “bloom where they are planted,” Joe said. 🌱

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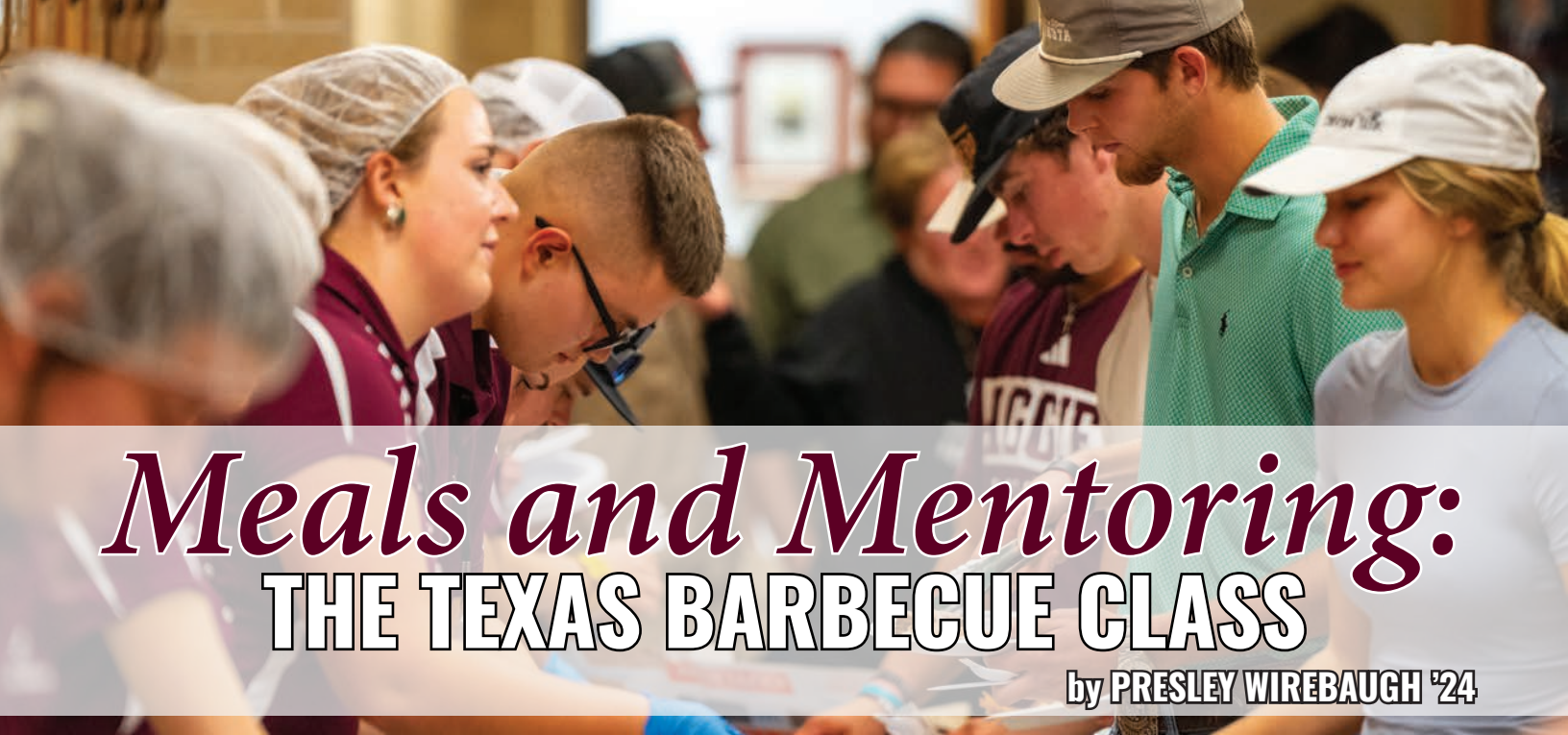


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Meals and Mentoring: **THE TEXAS BARBECUE CLASS**

by **PRESLEY WIREBAUGH '24**

On Friday afternoons in the fall, the smell of barbecue drifts through the air across West Campus. ANSC 117, also known as the Texas Barbecue Class, allows freshmen to learn the components of Texas barbecue, including seasonings, types of smoke and cuts of meat.

After the demonstrations, the students share a meal and conversation with their classmates, finding a common connection in navigating college life.

“Texas Barbecue is so much more than just a class; it is a community,” Nathan Barrett said, a senior animal science major from Normangee, Texas, who serves as a teaching assistant for the course.

The Texas Barbecue class was founded in 2009 by Jeffery Savell, Ph.D., vice chancellor and dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Ray Riley, manager of the Rosenthal Meat Science Center. Each fall, the course hosts about 60 first-semester students with diverse majors and backgrounds.

“This class gives freshmen the opportunity to escape the stress of the new college life each Friday afternoon in the fall semester by providing a network of other freshmen who are all going through the same situations and taking similar classes,” Barrett said.

Students can explore different barbecue flavor profiles, including pork, chicken, ribs, brisket, South

American-inspired cooking methods and even frying a Thanksgiving turkey.

This course, however, could only happen with the heart and hands of teaching assistants and instructors behind it.

“Students who have previously taken the course have the honor and privilege to return as teaching assistants and serve as Snappy Sophomores, Jazzy Juniors or Snazzy Seniors,” Barrett said, referring to the names for the teaching assistants, affectionately given by the course instructors.

“As a teaching assistant, students help prepare and serve food each week, and perhaps the most important part, serve as mentors to the freshmen in the class each fall,” Barrett said.

Instructors select around 60 teaching assistants through an application process. Each week, the teaching assistants have many responsibilities beginning Thursday afternoons before the Friday class. Whether it be greeting the freshmen, baking desserts, setting up demonstrations or serving the 150 students and guests, each teaching assistant plays a crucial role in ensuring the class succeeds.

“It does not matter how your day or even week has gone; when you get to Texas Barbecue class, all the stress and outside noise goes away,” Barrett said.

The impact and importance of the teaching assistants can be felt by the freshmen they serve.

“I am thankful to have been part of this experience and for the positive impact it had on me during the beginning of my educational career at this university,” Miranda Skaggs, a freshman student in the course from Bryan, Texas, majoring in animal science, said.

Skaggs said one of her favorite aspects of the class was the mentorship she received from the upperclassmen.

“They checked on me and shared valuable advice each week, creating a community of support for me as a freshman student,” she said.

Beyond great food and mentorship opportunities, the class has also been featured on the SEC Network’s “Marty & McGee.” The course has hosted various special guests, including Dr. Temple Grandin, an advocate for the humane treatment of livestock, and Arch “Beaver” Aplin, the founder of Buc-ee’s.

“Dr. Savell has passed to his students the idea that as long as there is food, people will come,” Amanda Hoffmann, a first-year teaching assistant, majoring in animal science from Schertz, Texas, said.


“As teaching assistants, we are intentional in getting to know each student that passes through the halls of Rosenthal and do our best to serve them good food

and great advice,” Hoffmann said.

At the end of the course, students share their favorite recipes to be included in a class cookbook, creating a cherished artifact and proof that food can bring people together. The class even has its own merchandise worn by Aggies across campus.

“I wanted to be the type of teaching assistant that the younger students can find approachable and to help build an environment that they want to come back to each week,” Lauren Strittmatter said.

Strittmatter, a senior animal science major from Aubrey, Texas, has been a teaching assistant for the past two years alongside her cousin and brothers. “Even though the class falls on a Friday afternoon when I could be doing something else, I look forward to coming every week,” she said.

Fall 2024 will mark the 15th anniversary of the creation of the Texas Barbecue class, which has impacted countless lives and brought together college students from across Texas A&M University’s campus. No matter the circumstances, the Texas Barbecue class has become a home away from home for students and many to come. 



Instructor and Dean Dr. Jeffery Savell and Teaching Assistant Nathan Barrett demonstrate smoking turkeys.



Miranda Skaggs, Gentry Phillips and Avery Cammack during class.

photos courtesy of Michael Miller,
Texas A&M AgriLife Marketing and Communications

Scholarly Shepherd

by JD TAYLOR '24

TEXAS A&M PROFESSOR OPERATES SHEEP FARM ON THE SIDE

photos courtesy of Bruce Herbert



Twelve years ago, Texas A&M Professor Bruce Herbert purchased 15 acres of land with the hope of starting his own sheep farm. Herbert's wife was the primary influence in getting the farm, as she wished to have one similar to the Maryland farm she grew up on.

"She was actually the 1987 4-H sheep queen from Maryland," Herbert said.

Thus, getting a farm was a natural progression for them.

Initially, they considered raising cattle, but decided on sheep as they are significantly easier to care for, especially the Heritage breed known as Gulf Coast Native.

"They were sheep that were dropped off by the Spanish in the 1500s at the same time Longhorn cattle were introduced to Texas," Herbert said. "During the Depression in the 1930s, an extension in North Carolina rounded up some of the Gulf Coast Natives and started the first ranching herds of the sheep."

Their time in the Texas wilderness left the breed changed forever. The sheep became resistant to a variety of parasites and the Texas heat. They adapted

to eating shrub land, meaning they could survive in leaner times when other sheep breeds would starve.

This works well with Herbert's philosophy for small farms, trying to minimize inputs rather than maximizing outputs.



This ewe gave birth to triplets, which is an extremely rare occurrence for Gulf Coast sheep.



Gulf Coast sheep have the ability to eat grass most sheep cannot.

"We're not trying to make money, we're just trying not to lose money," Herbert said. "One of the ways you cannot lose money is by low-input agriculture."

Despite this philosophy, the Herberts still sell some sheep for meat or breeding. Their sheep farm provides them with the majority of their red meat needs for the year.

At the end of the day, Herbert maintains his sheep farm because he genuinely enjoys it.

"It's a hobby that allows me to have really good barbecues," Herbert said. 🍖



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