

# AgReview

Mason County Agriculture Newsletter

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TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI**LIFE  
EXTENSION



## Texas A&M AgriLife Sonora Station Unveils Historical Marker

Marking a century of service to the Edwards Plateau region, a State of Texas historical marker unveiling and dedication ceremony was held Oct. 16 at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research Sonora Station, an arm of the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in San Angelo.

“It was a beautiful Saturday morning for the unveiling and celebration of over 100 years of research, teaching and Extension at the Sonora Research ‘Substation 14’,” said Roel Lopez, Ph.D., head of the Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

“The crew at Sonora and San Angelo put on quite a show and should be commended,” said Lopez, who is also director of the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, Bryan-College Station. “It was great to be part of the 125-plus crowd of local community ranchers at the celebration.”

For more than a century, the Texas A&M AgriLife Sonora Station has been a leader in rangeland and livestock research. The station has attracted scientists and students from across the U.S. and around the globe.

This has resulted in innovations and advancements across the Edwards Plateau that were particularly key to the state and nation’s sheep and goat industries. Researchers at the station have also led key studies related to livestock nutrition, rangeland management and prescribed burns.

“We are blessed to have a dedicated group of Texas A&M AgriLife faculty and staff in Sonora and San Angelo,” said Reid Redden, Ph.D., sheep and goat specialist and Texas A&M AgriLife center director at San Angelo. “The stakeholders in this region have been and continue to be committed to the Sonora Station, as was evident by the turnout to be a part of the historical marker dedication.”

Speakers included Dan Hale, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service associate director and meat specialist, Bryan-College Station; Doug Tolleson, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Research associate professor, Sonora; Redden and Curry Campbell, Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association president, San Angelo.

“It has been an honor to work for the last five years at such an historic location; a location with a century of science and a legacy of learning,” Tolleson said.

### **Historical marker, committee effort**

Historical markers commemorate diverse topics in Texas history, including events that changed the course of local and state history and organizations and individuals who made lasting contributions to the state. The committee of Sonora community residents Bonnie Lou Campbell, Kari Cloudt, Mary Epperson and Erika Campbell campaigned to bring a marker to Sonora and organized the dedication.

“Our committee was phenomenal, moving the event from highway-side to the station pavilion at the very last minute to accommodate the large number of RSVPs,” said Campbell. “We so appreciate the support of neighbors and ranchers from Sonora, Rocksprings, Del Rio, San Angelo and all parts in between. We also appreciate the numerous descendants of the ‘founding fathers of the station’ coming out to this dedication. We feel very blessed to be connected with not only the past, but also with the future of our station.”

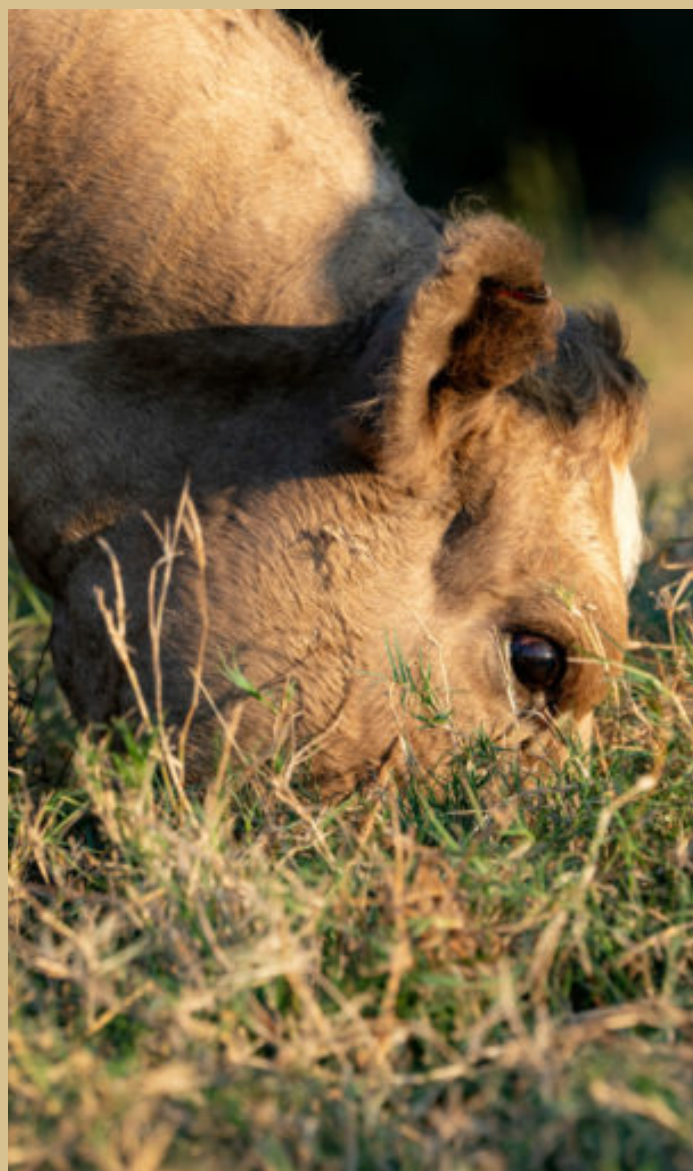
### **Station history**

The idea of a Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, later to be known as Texas A&M University’s Substation No. 14, was hatched during the inaugural convention of the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association in 1915. The association then reached out to and received support from Texas A&M University and the Texas Legislature.

The station was established between Sonora and Rocksprings and was in use by 1916, financed in equal parts by the legislature and area ranchers. The earliest scientists lived in tents on site.

The Sonora Station has published numerous significant papers and research results over the last decade such as “Improvement of Sheep Through the Selection of Performance-Tested and Progeny-Tested Breeding Animals” based on its 1950-51 study.

Today advances in genetics and research make it easier than ever for producers to know and select their best animals to breed to— a testament to the importance of the ongoing work that scientists and researchers continue to do.



## Beef Cattle Faring Well Going Into Fall, Winter

Beef cattle prices and forage conditions have been much improved for Texas producers so far in 2021, according to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts.

Most Texas cattle producers experienced cooler, wetter summer conditions than normal, but weather has turned drier over the past few weeks as they prepare for fall and winter. Prices on most cattle classes have also been higher over the course of 2021 than in previous years.

Joe Paschal, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension livestock specialist, Corpus Christi, and Jason Smith, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist, Amarillo, both in the Department of Animal Science within the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said growing conditions were very similar in their respective regions, but that producers should be planning for a drier winter after weather took a turn for the better this summer.



# Saving the Great Plains with Prescribed Fire, Mixed Grazing

Rangelands in the Great Plains, and the ranchers who depend on them, are losing battles against an invasion of brush and shrubs on historical grasslands.

Ranchers are under increasing stress due to changing environmental conditions and subsequent losses of rangelands to woody plants, but a relatively new management approach shows promise in turning the tide against encroaching brush and shrubs.

Texas A&M AgriLife Research scientist Brad Wilcox is among a group of researchers, extension specialists and educators who hope pyric herbivory will one day become a routine point of conversation in rangeland conservation and wildfire mitigation.

Pyric herbivory utilizes controlled patch burns to promote forage growth. Over thousands of years, fire and mixed animal grazing helped shape the Great Plains, which cover more than 452 million acres across 12 states.



Wilcox, Ph.D., AgriLife Research ecohydrologist in the Department of Ecology and Conservation Biology in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Bryan-College Station, said the invasion by woody plants like cedar and mesquite presents a host of problems for producers, native ecosystems, and properties in both rural and urban areas.

Wilcox is leading a consortium of researchers, extension specialists and educators looking to help ranching operations and landowners prevent and reverse rangeland losses by replicating natural fire and grazing.

This undertaking, the Prairie Project, is a team effort that spans many institutions, agencies and disciplines. The project promotes pyric herbivory, mixed animal grazing and other disturbance regimens on rangelands in the Great Plains to make these areas more resilient to woody plant encroachment, wildfire and extreme heat events.

The Texas A&M University-led project is a collaboration with Oklahoma State University and the University of Nebraska and is funded via a five-year, \$10 million U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant to test and promote pyric herbivory and other replicated natural disturbance regimens.

### **Protecting the Great Plains with fire, grazing**

Native rangelands are the most endangered habitat in the U.S. and globally. Rangelands represent 30% of the land area in the U.S. and 40% of landscapes around the world, but many of these ecosystems are under pressure from encroaching, dense woodlands.

Woody shrubs lead to lost forage volume, which reduces producers' operational capacity and sustainability, especially during increasingly volatile weather associated with climate change, Wilcox said. Woody shrubs also directly contribute to wildfire intensity and potential for loss of life and property.

Pyric herbivory utilizes controlled burns and a mix of grazing animals like goats and cattle to fill the roles naturally occurring fire and native grazers played in protecting prairie grasslands from encroaching woody plant species. This relatively new management approach is designed to help livestock producers reclaim rangelands lost to woody plants.

Wilcox said research has shown a wide range of benefits from using prescribed fire to minimize wildfire fuel and to create ecologic biodiversity that supports wildlife and agricultural operations. But adding the animal component with grazers and browsers and promoting ungulate species to keep woody plant species in check between burns is where pyric herbivory becomes a winning combination.

“We are trying to spark large-scale public change when it comes to utilization of this disturbance regime that these grasslands evolved under,” he said. “The science is clear about the benefits of using fire, but we are arguing that pyric herbivory and adding browsing animals such as goats and other ungulates to cattle operations is the most effective and efficient way to restore the Great Plains.”

### **The Prairie Project: a public, private partnership**

The project is enormous in span, Wilcox said. It is an extremely collaborative effort between the institutions, the respective facets within them and the people executing the mission to produce research, extension and education elements that support the Prairie Project's goals.

Researchers hope to provide best practice recommendations that make rangeland ecosystems more resilient and productive to support healthier environmental and economic conditions throughout the Great Plains states. Extension specialists and agents will develop ways to demonstrate to producers and the public the benefits of the science-based methods, with an eye toward fostering generational changes in how rangelands are managed.

The educational element will utilize the missions of research and extension to target the wide array of demographics within the Great Plains, from rural producers to urban dwellers and kindergartners to graduate students and future natural resource professionals.

Elements of the consortium are also working with eight participating ranches in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas to gather data on various experiments being conducted by teams of researchers and graduate students. The ranches also provide the Prairie Project with locations to demonstrate pyric herbivory's effectiveness.

“For as broad and big as this project is, it’s been a seamless cooperative effort, and participation with the ranches is critical,” Wilcox said. “They provide us a network of demonstration ranches where we can apply management practices and evaluate how various methods are working. They also provide us a place to apply the extension outreach and education components to showcase the effectiveness of pyric herbivory and related practices.” [Read More](#)

## Fall Armyworms on the March Across Texas

Cooler temperatures and widespread rain events across Texas have forage and crop producers scrambling to fight armyworms, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

Vanessa Corriher-Olson, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension forage specialist, Overton, said inquiries about the pest have inundated her office after dry conditions were followed by a cool front and rain events – ideal conditions for armyworm outbreaks.



Armyworms are extremely destructive, especially when infestations escalate out of control, Corriher-Olson said. Dalton Ludwick, AgriLife Extension entomologist, Corpus Christi, estimated two armyworms per square foot can consume 84 pounds of foliage per acre based on U.S. Department of Agriculture data.

“It’s important to act immediately because if armyworms are left unchecked, they can devastate a forage crop in a matter of hours,” Corriher-Olson said. “I’ve seen entire hay meadows that were consumed overnight.”

### **Be ready, be proactive**

Pesticides are the only way to prevent armyworms from consuming existing stands or new growth post-harvest, Corriher-Olson said, and available products are directed at controlling armyworms in the larvae stage

Corriher-Olson recommends insecticides labeled for armyworm control in pastures and hayfields, including pyrethroids, which are affective in killing the caterpillars. But a combination of pyrethroid and growth inhibitor is recommended.

“The pyrethroid only takes care of the ones that are in the field while the growth inhibitor provides a residual affect that will kill new hatches and any caterpillars that migrate into the field,” she said. Applicators should always follow all label instructions on pesticide use and restrictions, she said.

Corriher-Olson said she was not aware of any pesticide shortages, but suggested producers should have products on hand and be prepared for immediate action when armyworms near threshold.

“I thought there might be short supplies due to trucking or workforce, but I have not heard any complaints from producers or concerns among suppliers regarding product availability,” she said. “But you want to have products on hand and ready. Just follow the proper storage directions and it will be fine.”



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Mason County  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

My name is Sam Spradlin. I am the new Mason County Extension Agent for Ag and Natural Resources/4-H.

I grew up in Granbury, TX. Where I was very involved in both the 4-H and FFA programs growing up. I attended Texas Tech University. Where I received both my Bachelors Degree in Animal Science and my Masters Degree in Agriculture Education.

I am joining Mason County after serving as the Assistant Extension Agent for Ag and Natural Resources/4-H in Burnet County.

I hope this newsletter helps you to stay informed on new and upcoming issues within Texas agriculture. Feel free to stop by the office at any time. I'm looking forward to getting to know everyone and getting started here in Mason County.

## Upcoming Events

**MASON COUNTY RANGELAND WORKSHOP**  
**MASON | TBA**

**TEXAS BEEF & BRUSH - [READ MORE](#)**  
**VIRTUAL | OCTOBER 27, 2021**

**WELL EDUCATED TRAINING - [READ MORE](#)**  
**LAMPASAS | NOVEMBER 2, 2021**