Top of the Windmill

By: Roy Walston – CEA-Ag/NR

Top of the Windmill News
Winter 2012

Kerr County AgriLife Extension Service
3655 Hwy. 27
Kerrville, TX 78028
(830) 257-6568

Calendar of Events

November 8th-10th - San Antonio International Farm & Ranch Show (CEUs are available)

November 15th - Webinar (online) (CEU available)

December 7th - Pecan Entries Due

December 11th - District Pecan Show

December 12th - South Texas Regional Pecan Show

If you would like to receive the Top of the Windmill via email, please send an email to: kerr@ag.tamu.edu with the Subject title as: Top of the Windmill.

For only three days this year you will have unparalleled access to more than 200 exhibitors showcasing the latest information and supplies every farmer and rancher can't afford to miss.

The third annual San Antonio International Farm and Ranch Show is coming November 8-10, 2012 at Freeman Expo Hall. The show is free to the public and the hours are Thursday from 12pm-7pm, Friday from 9am-7pm and Saturday from 9am-7pm. This year's presenting sponsor is Sta-Tite Fence.

*Simply put, it means to be highly productive for a limited period of time when the opportunity is present. The opportunity? The San Antonio International Farm and Ranch Show.

Continuing-Education Units

Three days of great programs including 15 CEU credit seminars focusing on row crop farming, brush control, feral hog control, cattle and horse seminars.

Private applicators training and testing available on Saturday morning 8:30am to 1pm provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services. Contact Bryan Davis at 210-467-6575.

Visit our web site for more information. www.farmandranchexpo.com

"Wildlife for Lunch Webinar"

Texas Wildlife Association has teamed with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to host a series of webinars covering a wide array of wildlife and land management topics. These **FREE** online webinars are held during the lunch hour (noon – 1 p.m., CST) so that anyone interested may tune in during the work day. The webinar series provides sound, science-based wildlife management information delivered by experts to you in the comfort of your own home or office.

The next webinar, **"Market Based Conservation and Managing for Endangered Species"**, will be held on Thursday, November15th, 2012. This month's expert presenter will be Brian Hays, Extension Program Specialist with the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources. The webinar will cover incentive opportunities for private landowners to manage for ecosystem services and rare and endangered species, habitat identification and management, a review of several Market Based Conservation Projects that are underway in Texas and other states, and more!

CEU Credit Available: 1 hour of General CEU credit for pesticide applicator's license will be awarded to participants of the live webinar.

How to sign on: On the day of the webinar, simply point your browser to https://texas-wildlife.webex.com and click to join the *Wildlife for Lunch* webinar. (Please note: WebEx webinars are not supported on handheld devices such as iPads or iPhones.) Each web based seminar is fully interactive and allows you to engage the experts, make comments, and ask questions during the course of the presentation.

If you cannot make the live webinar: Each webinar is archived and available for viewing following the initial air date at the Texas Wildlife Association website: www.texas-wildlife.org
(Please note - you must attend the live webinar for attendance or CEU credit.)

For more information: Contact Texas Wildlife Association's Courtney Brittain at cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org or call 1-800-839-9453.

Hill Country Pecan Show

With the cooler weather here many homeowners and commercial growers with the best crop in years are anxiously awaiting the Hill Country District Pecan Show, set for December 11th, 2012 at the Kerr County Youth Event Center in Kerrville. Each year pecan growers from the Hill Country area, Bandera, Kendall, Kerr and Real counties collect and enter their pecan entries to compete for awards, recognition and advancement to the South Texas Regional Show.

Growers will compete for ribbons and plaques with the Champion Commercial, Classic and Native all receiving plaques.

Growers from this area may enter one entry of each improved variety and as many native entries as they like. Each entry must consist of 45 nuts of one variety and must be grown by the exhibitor and from this year's crop. What makes a good sample? Good pecan entries are uniform in color, shape and size; free of disease and insect markings with very little discoloration or white at the end of the pecans. Pecans should be free of splits or cracking to insure a good sample. Pecans may not be altered by marking, filing or excessive polishing, which will disqualify the entry. Each entry will be selected based on a random sampling of 10 nuts selected from the entry. The 10 nuts are then weighed in shell, shelled and a kernel weight is then taken. Based on the size of the nuts, percent edible kernel, color and appearance the nuts are placed.

Entries will need to be in our office (Kerr County Extension, 3655 Hwy. 27) by Friday, December 7th. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. We will be setting up on Monday, December 10th at 1:00 p.m. This will allow us to begin with the processing on Tuesday, December 11th at 9:00 a.m. and begin judging for the District Show at 1:00 p.m. Following the completion of the District judging we will take all non-advancing entries off of the table and set up for the South Texas Regional Show on the 12th. Processing will begin at 9:00 a.m. on the 12th with judging to begin immediately following processing.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the Kerr Extension Office at (830)257-6568.

Big limbs are breaking and falling, AND IT IS ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE!!!

As you will recall in our last newsletter we discussed pecan crop load management. We are now seeing the results of producers and homeowners that can't bare to thin pecans when we have a heavy crop "limb breakage". The reason is far from being clear and in most cases, there can be numerous reasons and, more often than not, is a combination of reasons. Potential reasons for limb fall include: crop load, "breach" of the bark, wind, maybe drought, trapped bark, "shading out" and age.

Age itself does not necessarily make wood more prone to breakage. The strength of the wood is the same, but the stress and rigor from various outside forces are at play on the tree. As a young tree, limbs are vigorous and strong. It is nothing for the tree to carry 50 to 60 pounds of pecans. As the tree ages, it sets and carries more pecans until one day the limit of some of the branches is exceeded. A branch here and there snaps in two which successfully "breaches" the tree's protective mechanism of the outer bark. The ideal thing to do when a limb breaks is to saw the rough, jagged broken area smooth in such a way that water is shed and cannot accumulate in the wound. However, this is a difficult task in large trees. On their own, trees will wall off the damaged area. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible for a tree to completely cover a rough area. So over time water accumulates and soon the heart wood (non-living portion of the tree has begun to rot). Over time this rotted area grows larger and eventually another limb falls.

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Realize we are talking about a cycle which may take over 10 years before the actual breakage occurs. In some cases, the initial breach may have occurred 30 years ago. Pecan has also been accused of having "brittle wood," especially as it gets older. Where the brittle wood theory comes from is probably due to "shading out." Pecan is a sun-loving plant and leaves on branches must receive full sunlight to remain healthy. As trees get larger and branches begin to touch, the lower limbs receive less and less light and over time they die! As a result, it is not uncommon for limbs to come "raining out" of these older trees. So is the wood brittle? Yes, but only because the limbs were already dead.

Trapped bark can be a problem when limbs form "V" crotches (where limbs arise from the trunk of the tree). Over time the bark accumulates in the "V" causing the areas to be weak. A good crop of nuts, leaves or a wind can bring this limb to the ground again breaching the bark.

Realize that breaches in the bark can occur for many reasons. Hail can be especially hard on trees. Most times the wounds heal, but a small hole may remain. Eventually water can make the hole larger, or it can be gnawed on by a squirrel. Woodpeckers also do their share of breaching the bark -- what was a small hole gradually increases in size. Water accumulates in the area and the wood rotting mechanisms are set in place. Over time squirrels hollow out the area and it grows. Some limb loss can be blamed directly on crop load; there is simply a limit as to what a branch can hold. Other losses are from a combination of factors including the wind, but in the end, it is those small, seemingly insignificant breaches in the bark which leads to more limb loss.

THINNING NUTS TO PREVENT BREAKAGE

The goal of growing pecans is to produce quality, well filled kernels. In the past, pecan growers have tried to produce every nut the trees set. However, we have found that most varieties are not capable of filling every nut. Extra fertilizer and water will not allow the trees to fill all of these pecans. There are simply too many pecans to fill, or said another way, too many “mouths” (in this case, pecans) to feed. It takes 6-8 leaves (90-120 leaflets) to fill out one pecan so the greater the number of leaves on a tree, the greater the potential production -- up to a certain point.

The key to uniform production is to get all trees to produce crops every year and not produce a huge crop one year followed by nothing or little the next year. This phenomenon is referred to as alternate bearing and occurs with most fruit and nut trees which retain and ripen fruit late into the season. People always complain that they had a heavy crop of pecans or citrus one year but the following year, they had little or no fruit production. The tree has to “take a year off” from the stress of producing a bumper crop. It has to take a year to get strong enough to produce another good crop.

To determine if a tree’s overloaded, some growers do a visual, subjective rating where 0 = nothing and 5 = overloaded of the trees in May and again in early July. This rating can be obtained by counting the number of terminals (end of the limbs) which have nuts. Count ten terminals on each side of the tree to come up with an average. If all terminals end in pecan clusters then we know the tree is overloaded and must be thinned by removing one-half of all clusters of nuts on terminal growths of branches.

When you have decided to remove some of the nuts, you should remember that by removing the extra pecans on a tree, you actually insure a better quality pecan at harvest. The quality of the nuts on a tree with too many pecans on that tree is very poor and the broken-limb damage to the tree is permanent. When a tree is overloaded with nuts and limbs are obviously severely drooping, remove 50 percent of all the pecan clusters or groups of nuts by cutting the entire clusters off with hand pruners or shears. If the tree is large, use a pole pruner even if you have to rent or borrow one. The sooner this can be done, the more dramatic the results will be and the more limb breakage can be avoided. The nuts will continue to enlarge and get heavier by the day so the sooner you remove this excess crop, the better. These extra nut clusters should be removed before the winds of a storm can do permanent damage.

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Propping over-burden limbs with poles does not help the situation and only delays the inevitable as well as ruining the entire crop. The nuts have to be cut off so the tree can furnish adequate nutrients to the remaining pecans.
The greatest benefits from removing excess nuts are realized when the pecans are removed in early July. This not only improves nut quality but prevents alternate bearing as well. The optimum thinning time is determined by cutting pecans in half. The key is to remove the crop before the trees begin to decline with leaf loss, shuck decline, and/or broken limbs. Once the leaves begin to drop and/or the shucks begin to blacken, it is too late to improve the quality of the remaining pecans.
However, still removing the extra pecans will prevent major tree damage from limb breakage. If enough nuts are removed from the trees, percent kernel will be improved and pre-harvest germination reduced.
Another bit of good news: it is thought the stink bug does not cause major damage to pecan kernels until the nuts have passed the water stage. The water stage is when the pecans should be thinned so after you cut one-half of the nuts from your over-burdened trees, start a spray program for your nut crop using a Malathion or Thiodan (endosulfan) product (organics can use Sabadilla or pyrethrum dust) every 7 days until the shucks (outer green covering of pecan) split.

Texas Animal Health Commission Announces Details of New Cattle Traceability Rule

AUSTIN - A requirement for adult cattle in Texas to have an approved form of permanent identification in place at change of ownership will go into effect January 1, 2013 according to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC). The Commission amended its rules in June of this year to enhance the effective traceability of beef cattle movements in Texas, which is the cornerstone of disease control activities. Implementation of the changes was delayed by the Commission to ensure cattle producers understand the requirements and can prepare for the changes.

The amended rule permanently cancels the brucellosis test requirement for adult cattle at change of ownership, which was unofficially suspended in the summer of 2011. Although testing of adult cattle is no longer required with the rule change, all sexually intact cattle, parturient or post parturient, or 18 months of age and older changing ownership must still be officially identified with Commission approved permanent identification. This change primarily affects beef cattle, as dairy cattle in Texas have had an even more stringent identification requirement in place since 2008.

Before August of 2011, official identification devices such as ear tags were applied automatically at the time a brucellosis test was performed. The inadvertent loss of the identification devices applied to cattle when brucellosis testing stopped has threatened TAHC's ability to effectively trace cattle as part of any ongoing disease investigation.

The TAHC routinely performs cattle health investigations where the identification and location of exposed/infected animals is critical to success. For example, 30 Brucellosis reactors, over 300 Bovine Trichomoniasis affected bulls and 22 bovine tuberculosis cases have been investigated by the TAHC to date in 2012. The new traceability rule will help preserve the TAHC's ability to identify and trace animal movements quickly and effectively, no matter which disease is involved.

A complete list of acceptable identification devices/methods may be found at www.tahc.state.tx.us, but the most commonly used devices include USDA metal tags, brucellosis calfhood vaccination tags, US origin 840 series Radio Frequency Identification tags (RFID), and breed registration tattoos or firebrands. Producers are encouraged to contact their veterinarian or TAHC to determine which method of tagging will be best for their operation.

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Free USDA metal tags, and a limited number of free applicator pliers (dependent on available funding) will be provided by the TAHC to producers wishing to use them. The tags and/or pliers may be obtained by contacting local TAHC field staff and USDA APHIS Veterinary Services representatives. The TAHC is developing tag distribution partnerships with interested veterinary practitioners and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offices. Partner contact information will be published as it becomes available. Producers may locate the closest tag distributor online at www.tahc.state.tx.us .

Frequently asked questions

Q: What age/class of beef cattle must have acceptable permanent identification?
A: Sexually intact adult beef cattle 18 months and up, and Mexican origin event cattle. Nursing calves, steers, spayed heifers, bulls and heifers under 18 months are exempt (unless heifer has calved).

Q: Where can I find the complete listing of all Commission approved permanent identification devices?
A: Producers may access the complete list at www.tahc.state.tx.us or by contacting any TAHC office or personnel.

Q: Do I have to use the free ear tags offered, or can I use other acceptable methods of identification?
A: No, the free metal tags are not required to be used, but they are one low cost option.

Q: Will ear tag pliers be provided at no cost or will I have to purchase them?
A: A limited supply of ear tag pliers is available at no cost. Because of the limited supply, producers are also encouraged to consider purchasing tagging pliers from any Ag supply outlets.

Q: Is this rule a federal rule?
A: No, this is a Texas rule, but it will put the beef industry in compliance with the anticipated USDA Animal Disease Traceability rule for interstate movement expected to be released later this year.

Q: When does this Texas rule go into effect?
A: To ensure that the cattle industry has ample time to understand the changes and prepare, implementation of this rule will not take effect until January 1, 2013.

Q: If my animal already has a silver test tag or orange vaccination tag in its ear, will it need to have a new tag applied if sold at a livestock market?
A: No. Animals presented with approved official Id's at a market will not have to be retagged.

Q: Can I move my cattle directly to slaughter from my farm or ranch without an ID?
A: Yes, ranchers can move an animal directly to slaughter from their premise without an ID. Breeding cattle otherwise changing ownership by private treaty (country sales) must have acceptable identification.

Q: What happens if my cattle are too weak to be safely tagged at market?
A: The TAHC has proposed an amendment allowing the waiver of the rule by a TAHC inspector in consultation with market ownership or management for weak cattle presented at a sale.

Q: Do I need to keep records when I sell my animal(s)?
A: Record keeping is not required when animals are sold, but is strongly encouraged.

Q: Who is responsible for maintaining the information related to ear tag distribution?
A: All official identification numbers assigned will be maintained in a TAHC-managed database. The TAHC will not track individual change of ownership transactions.

For additional ear tag information, including the nearest distributor of free USDA tags, contact the TAHC Traceability Team at 1-800-550-8242 ext. 733, or visit www.tahc.state.tx.us .

Founded in 1893, the Texas Animal Health Commission works to protect the health of all Texas livestock, including: cattle, swine, poultry, sheep, goats, equine animals, and exotic livestock.

Observe Bulls Closely as the Breeding Season Begins

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

The 2012 fall breeding season is nearly here. With the high input costs of keeping each cow, it is vital that a high pregnancy rate occurs during the upcoming breeding season. Obviously, bulls represent one-half of the factory that will produce a calf crop to sell next year.

A good manager keeps an eye on his bulls during the breeding season to make sure that they are getting the cows bred. Occasionally a bull that has passed a breeding soundness exam may have difficulty serving cows in heat, especially after heavy service. Inability to complete normal service and low fertility are more prevalent and therefore more detrimental, than is low libido (failure to seek out and detect cows in heat) to calf crop percent. Such problems can best be detected by observing bulls while they work. **Therefore producers should (if at all possible) watch bulls breed cows during the first part of each breeding season.** Take a thermos of hot coffee at dusk or dawn's early light and watch from the cab of the pickup to see if the bull(s) are doing the job for which they were purchased. If problems are apparent, the bull can be replaced while salvaging the remainder of the breeding season and next year's calf crop. Likewise a small proportion of bulls can wear out from heavy service and lose interest. These, too, will need to be replaced. The greater the number of cows allotted to each bull in the breeding pasture the more critical it is that every bull be ready to work every day of the breeding season.

Injuries to bulls during the breeding season are relatively common. When a bull becomes lame or incapable of breeding, because of an injury to his reproductive tract, he needs to be removed from the breeding pasture and replaced with another bull.

Proper cow to bull ratios are difficult to define. There is tremendous variation among bulls as to their capability to breed large numbers of females. Recommendations for smaller herds that will utilize only one bull per pasture may need to be conservative. **A time honored rule-of-thumb is to place about the same number of cows or heifers with a young bull as his age is in months.** For instance a bull that is 14 months old going into his first breeding season should be expected to breed 14 or 15 cows; whereas as a two-year old bull may be placed with 20 - 25 cows. Mature bulls that have been examined by a veterinarian and have passed a breeding soundness exam can be placed with 25 - 35 cows and normally give good results.