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ON THE COVER

Hailey Jo Hall, a longtime Texas resident and professional breakaway roper, made history as the first Breakaway Roping Showcase champion at The Run For A Million. (Photo courtesy of Hailey Jo Hall)



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

October brings county fairs, rodeos, football games, pump-kin patches, livestock shows and plenty of weekends spent somewhere other than home. For those involved in agriculture, it can also mean long days of harvest, fall cattle work, getting winter pasture established and watching the weather a little more closely than usual. It is one of those months when there is always something going on, and somehow we still find time to enjoy it.

That mix of work and competition seems fitting for this month's cover story on Hailey Jo Hall.

Many of our readers may recognize Hailey Jo from her win in the Breakaway Roping Showcase at The Run For A Million in Las Vegas, but there is much more to her story than one big night in the arena. A longtime Texas resident, Hailey Jo has built her career through years of competing, working and taking advantage of opportunities as they came. Her involvement with Premier Women's Rodeo has helped take her to some of the biggest stages in the sport, while her life outside the arena remains every bit as important.

Her story is also a good reminder of how much the sport of breakaway roping has changed in a relatively short amount of time. Events that once offered limited opportunities for women ropers are now putting them in front of national audiences and offering payouts that would have been difficult to imagine just a few years ago. Hailey Jo has had a front-row seat to that growth, and she has earned her place in it.

Elsewhere in this issue, we have plenty to carry you through the season. As temperatures begin to drop, we are looking at subjects that matter around the farm, ranch and home, from preparing animals and property for cooler weather to some of the traditions and practical knowledge that seem to return every fall.

That is one of the things I enjoy most about putting together North Texas Farm & Ranch. Agriculture is always changing, but so much of rural life still runs on familiar seasons and routines. There are new ideas, new technology and new opportunities, but there is also value in the things that have worked for generations.

I hope you find something useful in these pages, learn something you did not know and maybe find a story that makes you want to slow down and read just a little longer.

Thanks, as always, for reading North Texas Farm & Ranch.

Savannah Magoteaux

Savannah Magoteaux, Editor
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Worthless Horse

By Bryce Angell

Some time ago I had a horse, a kind of dapple gray. His father was Arabian; his mother, who can say?

His real name was India, we never called him that. We named him Indie just for short. We should have called him Brat!

His body was magnificent. He walked with head held high. Yet he was scared of his own shadow, and we never found out why.

One day while riding on the trail, that horse thought he'd skedaddle. He whirled around and took a leap with me still in the saddle.

Thank heaven for that big pine tree that stopped us in the air. If it wasn't for that conifer, we might have died right there.

Well, Indie made it back again without a single scratch. I lost my coat and saddlebags. That horse was quite a catch!

The other riders said to me, "You should let Indie go. The next time that you're riding him, he'll stomp you, don't you know?"

I said I'd give him one more try. Each horse deserves a chance. I'd see if he would come around. I had to take that stance.

It wasn't but a day or two, a doctor friend and I were riding



Saying goodbye will be one of the hardest things to do. (Courtesy photo)

on the river's edge. Who knew my time was nigh?

Well, all at once a deer jumped out. Old Indie leaped up high. I came down on the saddle horn. I tried hard not to cry.

My doctor friend rode up and said, "Hey, Bryce, are you all right?" I said, "I'll sing soprano if I make it through the night."

He checked me over, spoke

again, "I have some stuff for pain." I moaned, "No thanks, just shoot me now before I cuss in vain!"

Well, Indie's gone. I made a deal, gave him away for free. The deal was to keep that psycho horse away from me.

Goodbye old horse. Good riddance. Your owner's been informed. Although you are

a beauty, your mind must be deformed.

A skittish one like Indie, you don't forget, of course. And I wonder how they're doing—new owner and old horse.

So I check the papers every day. The obits I peruse. And thank the Lord that neither one has made the daily news currently. 

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Noble Learning:

Profitability in Practice: Rethinking Your Enterprises

By Laura Brenner

At the end of a long day cutting and raking hay in Oregon's high desert region, ranch hands run some numbers in their heads and pencil them down on a scrap of paper or a well-used NCBA Redbook, if they have one.

Withers Ranch grows and harvests hay to feed its cattle over the winter. And the Withers family relies on a cadre of local help to get the job done, so their full-time ranch staff can continue to care for and move cattle on other parts of the ranch.

But the end of the day doesn't mean the end of work for everyone. Colleen Withers still needs to track down all of those paper scraps and Redbooks to record hours worked, pounds harvested and bales made to keep track of the season's hay enterprise.

Colleen, and her husband, Matt, are the seventh generation on the ranch. Like many up-and-comers, they're looking to make a few changes to the operation. Making their own hay is the way the Withers' family has always done things. But they've never tracked expenses closely enough to know the profitability of the endeavor year-over-year.

"There are some years where [making hay] probably pays great because we raised so much hay," says Colleen. "Then there are some years, like probably this type of year, where it won't pay because we're going to hire the same amount of people and



The seventh generation on Withers Ranch in Paisley, Oregon, continues the legacy of careful land management in their fragile, arid ecosystem while finding buy-in to reshape the family's philosophy on record-keeping and profitability tracking. (Photo courtesy of Noble Research Institute)

run the same equipment for not very much hay."

Keeping track of expenses and income is a challenge on many ranches. Ranching, consulting for a local watershed council and raising kids don't leave Colleen with much time to do more than get bills paid.

While there never seems to be a right time, a strong market and a mindset shift are shaping a new approach to help Colleen pin down enterprise profitability on the ranch.

Reframing ranch goals

Profitability is always on the forefront of a rancher's mind.

But being able to track expenses and income to know for sure which years the ranch was in the black is a different story.

"When I first took over the books, I was so excited. I was like, 'I am going to break out our fuel bill by each enterprise,'" recalls Colleen. "And I'm sure a lot of people do that. But I quickly realized it wasn't sustainable for me. Sometimes you just have to shove bills out the door and just go log into the bank account to make sure you have enough to cover them."

But her goal to reorganize the books didn't end there. It was

simply lying in wait for the right opportunity.

In 2025, the time was right to dial in recordkeeping and expenses.

The cattle market was, and is still, at an all-time high. Colleen wanted to make the best of a good situation. She and Matt attended the Noble Profitability Essentials course in Pendleton, Oregon.

"Noble really challenges ranchers to recognize that you can survive the tough times, you can thrive even in hard times," says Colleen. "And that's the direction we're trying to go. I

want to really have this dialed in. To make good decisions with the quality profit that hopefully a lot of ranchers are experiencing right now. Then look back on it and be really proud and think, 'Oh, thank goodness we did that.'"

Colleen got started right away when she returned home. Using her current accounting software, she set up a tagging system for bills.

"I've worked pretty hard to try to focus on the finances, but it still gets away from us at times," Colleen admits. "That paradigm of prioritizing your recordkeeping and tracking and setting up sustainable systems that make it really easy to go peek at your profitability when it matters is key."

She says it's not perfect, but a step toward being able to track expenses and pull reports when needed.

To make hay, or not to make hay

The first place Colleen is prioritizing tracking expenses is this season's hay enterprise. And she's holding herself accountable for this goal with the help of Steven Smith, a consultant with Noble.

The two connected at the Profitability course in Pendleton and continued working together during Colleen's first consultation session, included with the cost of the course.

"We did a lot of hypothetical things in the course, then ultimately that one-on-one consultation with Steven, where we were working with our real numbers and our stuff and our unique situation and things like that, I just thought, 'This is exactly what we've been needing,'" says Colleen.

This ranch-specific conversation helped Colleen get answers

to some questions she had about profitability on the ranch. But it also helped her stick to a plan for her recordkeeping goals and the smaller steps it would take to reach them.

"Steven and I go back and forth all the time about raising our own hay," says Colleen. "That's one thing that Noble really challenged us to do, is to look closely at our haying operation. What does it cost for us, as cattle ranchers, to put up our own hay?"

At the time, it was a question she didn't have an answer to. But she worked with Smith to develop a plan of action. It included finding a way to track expenses by enterprise or even by activity, like making hay.

Collecting handwritten slips of paper from the hay crew can feel tedious. But, in the end, she feels it will be worth the effort.

"It's probably the biggest

challenge we had from Noble, and it's been really eye-opening," says Colleen. "The next time Steven asked me, 'What's your hay costing you?' I don't have to spend four days trying to sleuth it out."

With a new system in place this summer, Colleen is hopeful that she'll have a much better idea of what hay really costs at Withers Ranch. "Matt and I want to look back when we're in our 60's and say, 'Remember when we got \$4 for these calves on the Western Video Market? And then remember when we took that money? That's when we went to that Noble course and we started tracking things,'" says Colleen.

"I want to look back on this time and realize that we did something really good with this good time because it probably won't stay this way, and we know that," expressed Colleen. 

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Old Farm Wisdom

By NTFR Staff



There are plenty of farm rules that persist. Some were built from years of careful observation, while others survived because they were memorable, if not particularly accurate.

Farm country has never been short on rules that begin with, “My granddad always said.” Some were built from years of careful observation. Others survived because they were memorable, even if they were never particularly accurate. Fall is a good time to sort a few of them out.

Take the old advice to feed livestock before bad weather.

There is real sense behind it, especially when cold, wind and moisture increase an animal’s energy needs. For cattle and horses, good-quality forage also creates heat through digestion.

The useful part of the old saying is that animals going into cold stress need water, forage, shelter and adequate energy available before conditions deteriorate, not that a full belly

somehow protects them from a storm.

Then there is the belief that animals can predict the weather. Cattle lying down do not reliably forecast rain. Horses running the pasture are not a dependable sign that a front will arrive.

Animals do respond to changes in temperature, wind, insects and barometric pressure, and experienced stockmen often no-

tice behavior before they notice the weather. That is different from a proven forecast.

Persimmon seeds are another favorite. Split the seed and, according to folklore, a spoon-shaped kernel means heavy snow, a knife means cutting cold and a fork predicts a mild winter. It is a fun tradition, but the shape inside a persimmon seed is the developing plant embryo,

not a seasonal weather model.

The same goes for woolly worms. People have long used the width of the brown band on woolly bear caterpillars to predict the severity of winter. Entomologists have not found evidence that the color pattern can forecast months of weather. The band can vary with the insect's age, species and growing conditions.

Other old advice has held up much better. "Don't turn hungry cattle onto lush pasture" remains sound management. Hungry animals eat rapidly and are more likely to overconsume unfamiliar or risky forage.

Gradual transitions are still recommended when cattle move to high-quality forage, grain or pastures where bloat or plant toxicity is a concern.

"Make hay while the sun shines" also deserves its reputation. Hay quality depends heavily



Have you heard "Make hay while the sun shines?" (Courtesy photos)

on curing conditions. Rain after cutting can leach nutrients, shatter leaves and increase the chance of mold when hay is baled too wet. Modern equipment has changed how quickly

hay can be made, but it has not eliminated the need for a good weather window.

One of the most useful pieces of old farm wisdom is simply to watch what is normal. A cow that

hangs back, a horse that leaves feed, a water trough that empties faster than usual or a patch of pasture that cattle suddenly avoid can all be early clues.

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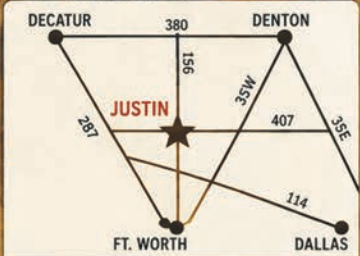
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Continued from page 13

Producers who work with the same animals and ground every day build a baseline that no phone app can replace.

The problem comes when observation turns into certainty. A red sunrise may signal moisture and weather patterns under some conditions, but it is not a guarantee. A big acorn crop does not prove a hard winter is coming. Livestock lying down does not mean rain is imminent.

The best old farm wisdom usually has a practical reason hiding underneath it. Keep animals fed before a storm. Pay attention to sudden behavior changes.

Do not rush grazing transitions. Make hay when conditions are right. Those lessons lasted because they were useful. The persimmon seed can stay, too, as long as nobody mistakes it for the National Weather Service.

Another old rule worth keeping is to fix small problems before weather makes them big. A loose gate hinge in September becomes a gate on the ground during a north wind. A slow water leak becomes an ice problem.

A thin cow that looks acceptable in warm weather may lose condition quickly once maintenance requirements rise.

None of that is folklore. It is simply the advantage of doing work while conditions are still forgiving.

Some sayings are based on real natural signals but are too broad to use literally. "When the leaves turn early, winter will be hard" confuses plant stress with forecasting.

Early color can result from drought, disease, heat or local conditions. Likewise, unusually thick coats on horses or cattle may reflect genetics, photo-period, age and health rather than an animal preparing for a specific winter.

Bird and insect behavior inspires plenty of predictions, too.



Large flocks, low-flying birds or busy squirrels may coincide with changing weather because animals respond to current conditions. They are not evidence that wildlife can predict the whole winter months in advance. The useful lesson is to pay attention to what animals are doing now, not to make a seasonal forecast from it.

The strongest farm sayings tend to be the least magical. "Never let the water tank go dry." "Buy the best hay you can afford, then waste as little as possible." "A good fence is cheaper than a bad neighbor." They survive because they point toward management, not prophecy.

There is value in keeping the folklore anyway. Weather signs and sayings are part of rural culture, and they often lead to conversations about how people once watched seasons before radar apps and seven-day forecasts. The trick is knowing which sayings belong in the toolbox and which belong around the coffee pot.

There is another reason some



Top: The best old farm wisdom usually has a practical reason hiding underneath it.

Bottom: An old rule worth keeping is to fix small problems before weather makes them big problems. (Photoss by?????)

old advice survives: it was built for a world with less margin for error. If the well failed, there was no automatic delivery truck coming with water.

If hay spoiled, winter feed could not always be replaced with a phone call. The habit of preparing early was risk management, not a quaint tradition.

That part still translates. Technology gives producers better forecasts, better diagnostics and faster communication, but none of it makes a broken water line fix itself during an ice storm.

The old rule worth keeping may be the simplest one of all: pay attention early enough that you still have choices. 

Land Market Report

By Jared Groce

The late summer has been brutal on our livestock, grasses, and the rural land market in North Texas. We currently have an astounding 42 months of inventory on hand in our report area, and the properties that are selling are only the ones that are properly priced. Properties that are overpriced are not even getting looked at, much less receiving offers, so having your property priced correctly is more important than ever right now. Many sellers are still visioning the daily price increases we saw in 2020-2023, but those days are behind us now, and agents need to be more realistic in their listing prices in order to get any activity for their clients. Hopefully rains will come soon and bring more land buyers with it this fall, but right now it is still very much a buyers market. No one knows how long this dry spell will last, but it will likely be a flood that ends it.... Same is true with the weather!

It is said that the best time to plant a tree OR buy land was twenty years ago, and the second best time is today. 

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DENTON	AUBREY	74.09	\$57,684	\$4,815,525	\$4,273,550	88.70%	302
	AVG	100.22	\$52,170	\$2,916,131	\$2,533,138	89.20%	429
GRAYSON	COLLINSVILLE	11.61	\$46,516	\$600,000	\$540,000	90.00%	280
GRAYSON	VAN ALSTYNE	18.8	\$58,511	\$1,175,000	\$1,100,000	93.60%	280
GRAYSON	WHITESBORO	30	\$37,984	\$1,170,000	\$1,139,506	97.40%	277
	AVG	20.14	\$47,670	\$981,667	\$926,502	93.70%	237
JACK	N/A	0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.00%	0
	AVG	0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.00%	0
MONTAGUE	MONTAGUE	485	N/A	\$5,566,000	N/A	N/A	333
MONTAGUE	BOWIE	26	\$12,244	\$323,500	\$318,352	98.40%	743
MONTAGUE	MONTAGUE	37.3	\$10,327	\$428,950	\$385,195	89.80%	1
MONTAGUE	SAINT JO	1185	\$7,764	\$10,000,000	\$9,199,829	92.00%	19
	AVG	433.33	\$10,112	\$4,079,613	\$3,301,125	93.40%	274
WISE	SUNSET	12	\$19,027	\$234,000	\$228,320	97.60%	16
WISE	SUNSET	12	\$19,027	\$234,000	\$228,320	97.60%	14
WISE	CHICO	11.44	\$24,476	\$299,000	\$280,000	93.60%	24
WISE	CHICO	10.25	\$29,265	\$315,000	\$300,000	95.20%	12
	AVG	11.42	\$22,949	\$270,000	\$259,160	96.00%	17

Grazing North Texas

By Tony Dean, tonydean.tx1@gmail.com

Buffalograss



Buffalograss reproduces by seed and also by runners called stolons. Stolons grow along the soil surface and can root down at the nodes. One of the ways that Buffalograss can be identified is the presence of many stolons growing from both the male and female plants. Stolons produced by the male plants are also male, and stolons produced by the female plants are female.

Buffalograss is sometimes confused with another grass called Curly Mesquite. Curly mesquite can be identified prior to flowering by pulling up a stolon and running the area between the nodes between your lips. If the stolon is rough like sandpaper, it is curly mesquite. If it is smooth, it is Buffalograss. The presence of stolons gives Buffalograss added erosion control capabilities. It is considered a sod-forming grass. (Photos courtesy of Tony Dean)

One of the historically important grasses of the plains is Buffalograss. It is adapted to a wide area of the central US from

Texas to Montana and was an important source of grazing for the vast herds of bison that roamed the plains. It is still today an

important forage resource for cattle and other grazing species.

Buffalograss is a low-growing, warm season perennial. It is

adapted to clay and loamy soils and grows best in the 15" to 30" rainfall belt. In Texas it is rarely seen in extreme East Texas or



Buffalograss is one of the few native grasses that produces male and female plants separately. These small seed heads (flags) indicate that these are male plants. Buffalograss sometimes develops small colonies of plants that are a few square feet in size and are dominated by either male or female plants. The seed, a hard bur, is produced by the female plants and is located low among the leaves near the ground.

on deep sandy soils. During the growing season it has a soft grayish-green color then turns to a straw color if dormant.

Buffalograss can grow in large areas as a virtually solid stand or can blend with other grasses if conditions allow. Associated species in Texas normally include Blue grama, Hairy grama, Texas grama, and possibly Sideoats grama.

It doesn't produce a lot of volume, growing no more than 5" to 8" tall, but it is very preferred by cattle. Crude protein during the summer months runs 10 to 12 percent and it cures out well during the winter dormant season.

Cattle will prefer this grass in most pastures, but usually not overgraze it heavily due to its short growth form. It maintains its vitality if grazed no shorter than 2" to 3".

In addition to its importance as a forage grass, Buffalograss is often used in lawns designed to be drought tolerant. If it

receives irrigation and fertilizer, it doesn't get much taller, but develops a more dense sod and turns darker green. During drought, it turns to a lighter straw color but can survive extended dry periods if it has a healthy root system. It is not particularly shade tolerant and does not do well in high traffic areas.

Seed is available for planting and treated seed will usually germinate more readily than non-treated seed. Soil temperatures in May normally favor germination, but germination will not occur until adequate moisture is available.

Buffalograss is sometimes confused with curly mesquite, another low-growing grass.

Curly mesquite can be identified prior to flowering by pulling up a stolon and running the area between the nodes between your lips. If the stolon is rough like sandpaper, it is curly mesquite. If it is smooth, it is Buffalograss. 

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Forage Needs in the Fall

By Savannah Magoteaux



Crude protein is the number most people recognize. It estimates protein based on the nitrogen content of the forage. Higher is not automatically better.

Two bales can look almost identical and feed very differently. Color, smell and leafiness tell part of the story, but a forage test tells producers what cattle are actually being offered. For anyone buying hay by the ton or trying to stretch winter feed, that little laboratory sheet can be one of the cheapest management tools on the place.

The first number to understand is dry matter. Hay contains water, and laboratories report nutrients either on an “as fed” basis or a dry-matter basis. Comparing two feeds is easiest on a dry-matter basis because it removes moisture from the comparison. Hay that is 90 percent dry matter is about 10 percent water.

Crude protein, usually abbreviated CP, is the number most people recognize. It estimates protein based on the nitrogen content of the forage. Higher is not automatically better. The goal is to match the hay to the animal. A dry, mature cow in mid-gestation does not have the same protein requirement as a lactating cow, a growing replacement heifer or a young calf.

Energy is just as important. In beef-cattle forage reports, Total Digestible Nutrients, or TDN, is commonly used as an estimate of energy value.

Low-TDN hay may fill a cow up before it supplies enough energy, particularly when requirements rise late in gestation or during lactation. That is when a producer may need better forage, an energy supplement or a different feeding plan.

Fiber numbers explain why some hay looks coarse and why animals may not be able to eat enough of it. Neutral Detergent Fiber, or NDF, is closely associated with intake. As NDF climbs,

cattle generally consume less because the forage takes longer to move through the digestive tract.

Acid Detergent Fiber, or ADF, is associated with digestibility. Higher ADF generally means lower digestibility.

Some reports also include Relative Feed Value or Relative Forage Quality. These indexes are useful for comparing lots of forage, particularly alfalfa and mixed hay, but they are not a complete ration. They do not replace looking at protein, en-

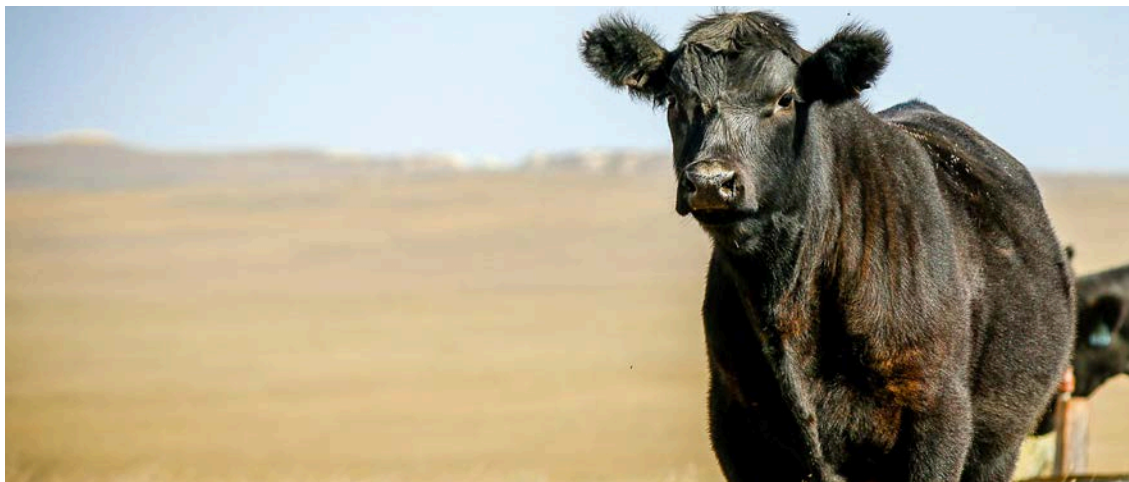
ergy, minerals, animal class and expected intake.

Then come the numbers producers hope are boring. Nitrate testing matters when forage has been stressed by drought, heavy nitrogen fertilization, cloudy weather or other conditions that

can cause nitrate accumulation. Sorghum-type forages, johnsongrass, corn and some weeds deserve particular attention. Nitrates remain in hay after it is cut and baled, so a risky crop does not become safe simply because it dried.

A hay test is only as good as the sample. Pulling a handful from the outside of one convenient bale does not represent a stack of 100 bales. Texas A&M AgriLife recommends using a hay probe and collecting cores from multiple bales in a lot. The cores are combined into one representative sample. Different cuttings, fields or hay types should be tested separately.

The most useful way to read the report is backward from the cattle: what class of animal will eat this hay, at what stage of production, and how much is she likely to consume? The laboratory numbers begin to mean



A forage test does something more practical than making poor hay better. It tells a producer where the gaps are before cattle show them through lost condition or lower performance.

something once those questions have answers.

A forage test does something more practical than making poor hay better: it tells a producer where the gaps are before cattle show them through lost condition or lower performance.

Minerals deserve a look, but this is where a hay report can become harder to interpret. Calcium, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and other minerals may be listed, yet a complete mineral program depends on water, other feeds and local

conditions. A high number is not always an advantage. For example, excessive potassium can interfere with magnesium utilization under some circumstances. Producers who are balancing a ration for high-risk

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Continued from page 19

animals should work with a nutritionist or Extension specialist rather than treating the laboratory sheet as a stand-alone mineral prescription.

Moisture tells another story. Hay baled too wet is at greater risk of heating and mold. Very wet hay can become a fire hazard as microbial activity raises internal temperature. A laboratory test taken months later cannot reconstruct every storage problem, so the stack still deserves inspection. Musty odor, visible mold, unusual heat and dark discoloration are reasons to investigate.

Sampling technique is the part most likely to ruin a good analysis. Round bales are not uniform from the outside to the center, and one bale may not represent the entire cutting.

A coring probe reaches through layers of the bale and gives the laboratory a much better cross-section. Samples from separate fields or cuttings should not be blended just to save the cost of one test if they will be fed as separate lots.

Once results arrive, compare them with the right animal requirement. A mature dry cow in good body condition can often use lower-quality forage than a first-calf heifer nursing a calf. Young cattle need nutrients for growth in addition to maintenance.

Cold stress raises energy demand. A hay test becomes valuable when it is paired with those real-world differences.

Finally, remember that price per bale is not the same as price per unit of nutrition. A cheaper bale with very low energy and protein may require expensive supplementation.

Better hay can sometimes be the lower-cost feed once waste and supplements are counted. The test gives producers enough information to make that comparison with numbers instead of



Remember that price per bale is not the same as price per unit of nutrition. A cheaper bale with very low energy and protein may require expensive supplementation. (Courtesy photos)

guesswork.

A useful exercise is to put two hay reports side by side before buying. Compare dry matter, crude protein, TDN and fiber first.

Then add delivered cost and likely feeding waste. A heavier, denser bale is not automatically more economical, and a greener

bale is not automatically more nutritious. Numbers make the comparison fairer.

Testing is especially valuable when weather has been difficult. Drought hay may be lower in yield and higher in nitrate risk. Mature, rain-damaged hay may test lower in protein and energy than its appearance suggests.

Hay cut from a fertilized field after stress may deserve a safety screen before it ever reaches a feeder.

One report cannot answer every feeding question, but it replaces several guesses with measurements. That is enough to make winter nutrition planning much more accurate. 

The First Frost and Forage

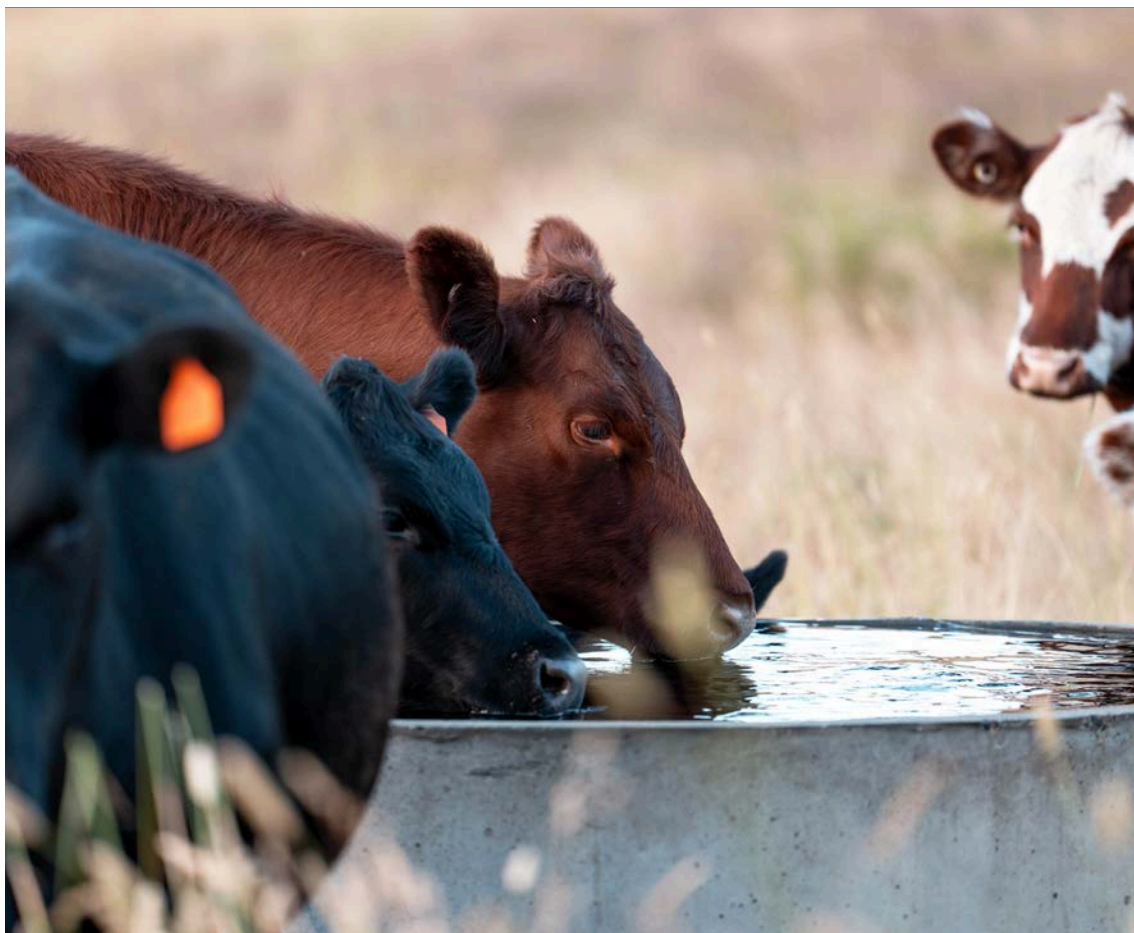
By NTFR Staff

The first frost feels like a clean break between seasons, but for cattle producers it can create a short window when familiar forage deserves a second look. Frost can change plant chemistry, end active growth and alter grazing plans almost overnight. The bigger concern is what frost does to certain plants, particularly members of the sorghum family.

Johnsongrass, forage sorghum, sorghum-sudangrass hybrids and related plants can contain compounds that release hydrogen cyanide, commonly called prussic acid, when plant tissue is damaged. Drought stress can raise the risk, and frost can make it worse. After a frost, plant cells rupture and the compounds that form prussic acid come into contact, creating a forage that can be dangerous even though it may still look green and palatable.

Prussic acid acts quickly. In the rumen it is released and absorbed into the bloodstream, where it prevents cells from properly using oxygen. Signs may include rapid breathing, muscle tremors, salivation, staggering, convulsions and collapse. In severe cases, producers may find a dead animal before they have seen obvious symptoms.

That is why Oklahoma State University recommends keeping cattle off frost-damaged susceptible forage for at least seven days after a killing frost, and until the plants are completely dried and brown. A light frost can be trickier. If the plant survives, new shoots or tillers may emerge, and that young regrowth can be especially high in prussic acid. Cattle should not be turned back in simply because a few warm afternoons followed the frost.



Cooler weather may reduce visible drinking, but cattle still need ready access to clean water. (Courtesy photo)

The practical question is always the same: is this field actually risky? Species identification matters. Johnsongrass and sorghum-type forages deserve attention. Pearl millet and foxtail millet, by comparison, have much lower prussic-acid potential. A producer who is unsure what is growing in a field should identify it before making a grazing decision.

Another important distinction is nitrate toxicity. Producers sometimes lump nitrates and prussic acid together because both are associated with stressed forage, but they behave differently. Prussic acid can dissipate as forage dries. Nitrates do not simply disappear

after frost, wilting or baling. In fact, nitrate can remain in hay and other stored forage. When drought, heavy nitrogen fertilization, cloudy weather or other stresses have raised concerns, laboratory testing is the safest way to know what cattle are being offered.

The first frost also changes ordinary pasture management. Warm-season grasses stop producing meaningful new growth, and what is standing becomes a finite supply. Cattle that have spent months selecting the best leaves may begin taking lower-quality stems and previously ignored plants. This is a good time to reassess body condition, available forage and whether

supplementation should begin. Waiting until cows lose condition makes the correction more expensive.

Water deserves attention, too. Cooler weather may reduce visible drinking, but cattle still need ready access to clean water. A sudden cold snap can expose leaking floats, weak heaters or water systems that have not been checked since last winter.

The simplest first-frost plan is to walk the pasture before moving cattle. Identify sorghum-type plants and Johnsongrass. Look for patches that were already drought-stressed. Check whether a light frost has trig-

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gered new growth. If there is any doubt, keep cattle out and have suspect forage tested through a qualified laboratory or Extension office.

October weather in Oklahoma rarely changes in a straight line. A frost may be followed by warm afternoons, then another cold front. That makes the calendar less useful than the plants themselves. When susceptible forage is involved, give frost-damaged plants time to cure and remember that new growth can restart the clock.

Frost also changes how a producer should think about haying or baling suspect forage. Prussic acid is volatile and can dissipate during proper curing, which means well-cured hay from a sorghum-type crop is generally a different risk than freshly frost-damaged grazing.

Nitrates are the opposite

problem. They remain in the forage after baling, so a nitrate test can be more important than appearance. Ensiling can reduce nitrate concentration to some degree, but it does not guarantee safety. Testing is still the better decision.

The location of toxins inside the plant differs, too. Prussic acid potential is often greatest in young leaves and new growth. Nitrate tends to accumulate more heavily in the lower stem. That distinction matters when producers are deciding whether to graze, cut high, bale or sample a field. A laboratory result is only useful if the sample actually represents the forage cattle will consume.

A killing frost can also improve access to plants cattle previously ignored. Leaves drop, stems become brittle and cattle may reach lower areas along fence rows or ditches. If john-

songrass has been growing unnoticed at the edge of a pasture, frost is a good reason to notice it now. The same is true for volunteer sorghum in crop residue or waterways.

For cow-calf producers, the first frost is also a convenient management checkpoint. Fall-calving cows may be entering peak nutritional demand. Spring-calving cows may be in mid-gestation and easier to maintain, but thin cows still need time to gain condition before winter. A forage inventory, body-condition check and water-system inspection done now can prevent emergency feeding later.

The most dangerous part of first-frost management is assuming that cold weather solved a forage problem. Prussic acid responds to time and curing. Nitrates do not go away on their own, and ordinary pasture qual-

ity keeps declining even when plenty of standing material remains. Frost marks the start of a new management season, not the end of pasture decisions.

Producers should also resist using color as a safety test. A plant can look dry while nitrate remains, and a green plant is not automatically high in prussic acid.

Species, recent stress and laboratory testing carry more weight than appearance. When the forage has enough value to justify grazing or feeding, a test is cheap compared with losing cattle.

The best first-frost habit is simply to slow down before opening a gate. A few minutes spent identifying plants and thinking through the previous week's weather can prevent a problem that develops in minutes once hungry cattle begin grazing. 



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What Does a Horse Really See?

By Savannah Magoteaux



The first difference in how horses see things compared to humans is obvious when you look at their heads. A horse's eyes sit on the sides, giving them an enormous field of view. The trade off is that not all of that view is binocular. (Courtesy photos)

Anyone who has ridden long enough has had a horse notice something that seemed invisible to the rider, then apparently fail to see the object sitting directly in front of him. It makes more sense once we stop assuming a horse sees the world the way we do.

The first difference is obvious when you look at the head. A horse's eyes sit on the sides, giving the animal an enormous field of view. That is useful for a prey species that survived by detecting movement before a predator got close. Horses can

see much of the area around their bodies without moving their heads very far.

The trade off is that not all of that view is binocular. Much of what a horse sees is monocular, meaning one eye is viewing an object independently. The area where both eyes overlap gives binocular vision and better depth perception. A horse may turn or raise its head when trying to bring something into that zone and study it more closely.

There are blind spots, too. One is directly behind the horse. Another small area exists imme-

diately in front of the face. That is one reason a horse may need to move its head to inspect an object close to its nose. It is also a good reason to speak when approaching from behind rather than appearing suddenly inside a blind area.

Color is different as well. Humans with typical color vision have three types of cone cells. Horses have two. Research describes equine vision as dichromatic. They can distinguish colors, but not the same range humans do. Their color world is often compared loosely with

human red-green color deficiency. Blues and yellows generally stand out better, while reds, oranges and some greens can be harder to distinguish from backgrounds when brightness is similar.

That difference has practical implications. Research on racing obstacles found that traditional orange markings did not provide horses the same contrast they provided human eyes. Bright blue, white and fluorescent yellow were more conspicuous against many backgrounds

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and influenced how horses approached jumps.

Horses are also well equipped for low-light conditions. Their eyes contain a high proportion of rods, the photoreceptors used in dim light, and a reflective structure called the tapetum lucidum helps make better use of available light. Horses can function in much darker conditions than people can. The tradeoff is that their eyes do not adjust instantly. Moving from a bright outdoor area into a dark trailer or barn can require time.

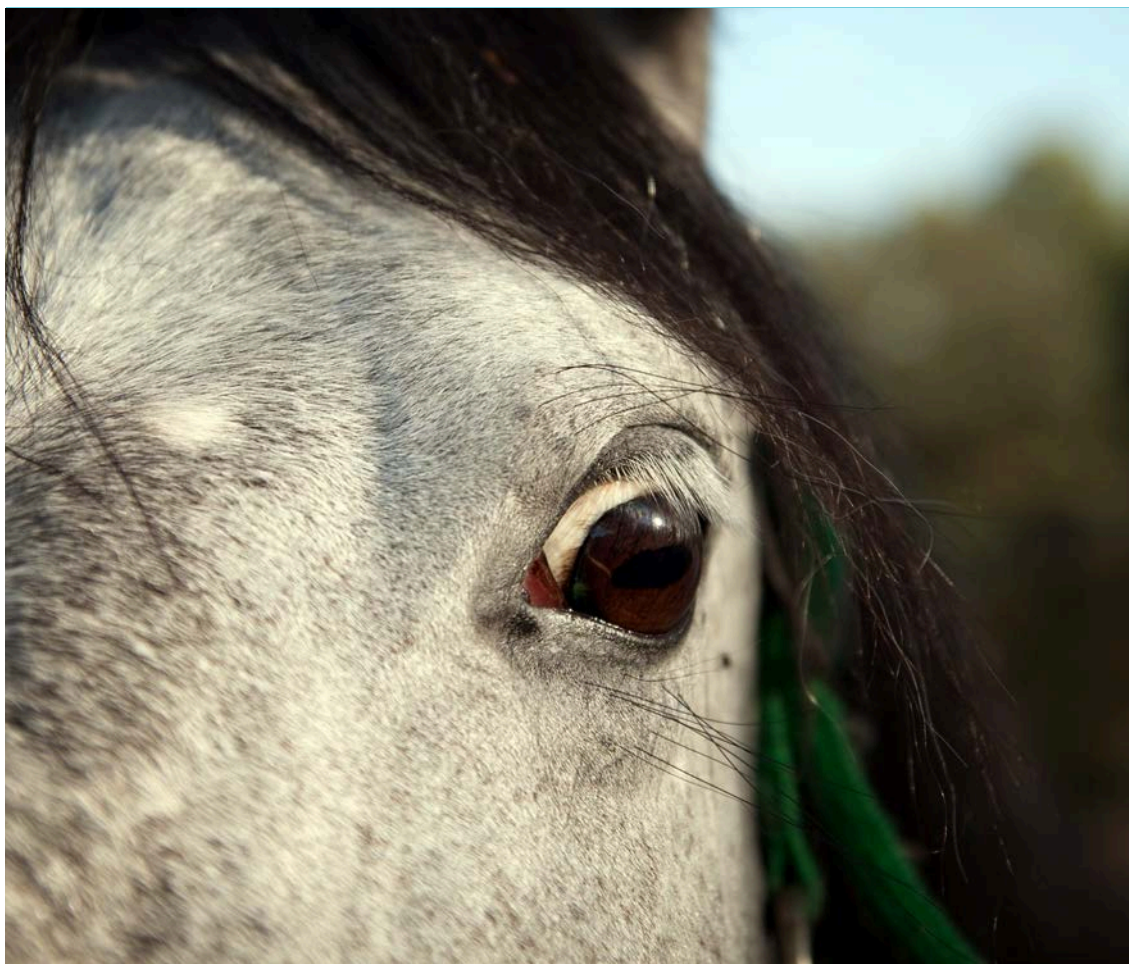
Visual acuity is another difference. A horse's panoramic view is excellent for noticing motion, but fine detail is not its greatest strength. That flapping feed sack at the far end of the arena may be detected immediately as movement without being clearly identified as a harmless feed sack.

This helps explain some ordinary training problems. A banner approached from the left is not necessarily the same visual experience when approached from the right. An object can also look different against a new background or in different light. Giving a horse a moment to look gives the animal time to gather better information rather than indulging bad behavior.

None of this means every spook is caused by eyesight. Horses learn, remember, anticipate and react for many reasons. But understanding their visual system helps explain why "he has seen that a hundred times" does not always settle the matter.

A horse sees a wide world built for detecting motion, functioning in dim light and keeping track of what is happening around him. It is a very good system for a horse. It is simply not a human one.

Head position matters more than many riders realize. Horses have a horizontal visual streak in



Horses learn, remember, anticipate, and react for many reasons, but understanding their visual system helps explain why "he has seen that a hundred times" does not always settle the matter.

the retina that helps them scan the horizon. Raising or lowering the head changes which part of the visual field is used. A horse approaching an unfamiliar ditch may raise its head to inspect the scene, then lower it to judge footing closer to the body. Restricting the head at the wrong moment can make the task harder.

Depth perception is strongest in the binocular area, but horses are fully capable of moving at speed through complex environments. What they lack is the broad binocular field humans take for granted. When a horse turns its head to look at a jump standard or cow, it may be bringing the object into a more useful viewing zone rather than simply losing attention.

Light transitions deserve patience. A horse led from bright

sun into a dark trailer may hesitate because its eyes need time to adapt. The same can happen at an indoor arena doorway or shadowed creek crossing. A rider who interprets every pause as refusal can turn a vision problem into a training fight.

Contrast is often more important than the color name printed on a product. A bright red cone may pop against green grass to us but offer less useful contrast to a horse. White, blue or yellow objects can be easier to see in some settings. That does not mean barns need to be repainted, but it is worth considering when designing obstacles, fencing markers or trailer interiors.

Finally, eyesight changes with age and disease. Cataracts, uveitis and other eye problems can alter behavior gradually. New

spooking, head tilting, hesitation in dim light, tearing or a cloudy eye deserve veterinary attention. Understanding normal equine vision is useful partly because it makes abnormal vision easier to notice.

Handlers can use this knowledge on the ground, too. Approach a horse where it can see you, speak before stepping directly behind it and let it investigate new objects from a comfortable distance. At a trailer, improve lighting inside instead of assuming the horse is refusing to enter a black hole. In an arena, remember that shadows can alter contrast and make a familiar object look different.

None of these adjustments replace training. They make training fairer by asking the horse to process the same environment we show it. 

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RRR LAF Showdown R9255	10/30/25	21594111	N/A	Galaxy Showdown L401	5	3.1	99	172	1.1	1.73	11.3	26	109	1.47	1.42	111	275	468
RRR GMC Prohibition R2425	11/20/25	21502312	N/A	Linz Prohibition 2004	17	-1.2	84	149	0.6	2.81	9.9	27	106	1.81	1.39	73	298	460
RRR GMC Headstart L296	03/08/25	21343120	N/A	Baldridge Headstart	7	1.8	84	145	0.5	3.36	11.4	34	83	1.80	1.13	107	268	455
RRR GMC Breakthrough R0085	02/20/25	21268498	34	Beal Breakthrough	14	0.0	92	164	0.9	0.56	8.2	39	104	1.48	1.69	78	272	431
RRR Congress R0355	02/27/25	21268450	33	Crouch Congress	8	0.6	79	142	0.3	-1.50	11.4	32	86	1.53	1.14	81	258	416
RRR GMC Yours Truly R8175	01/29/25	21294079	40	Rhoades Yours Truly 2013	12	-0.2	90	157	0.6	1.76	12.8	24	87	1.58	1.01	90	248	412
RRR GMC Landmark R1425	06/21/25	21383716	39	Mason Landmark 2313	9	1.7	86	148	0.3	2.86	8.7	35	84	1.73	0.83	78	244	394
RRR Headstart R0315	02/26/25	21268356	40	Baldridge Headstart	12	0.9	73	129	0.5	1.70	11.2	36	77	1.35	0.88	93	229	390
RRR Grant R0265	02/25/25	21300588	36	Spring Cove Grant 200K	10	0.5	89	155	0.5	-0.72	9.7	23	81	1.38	0.89	101	222	389
RRR GMC R8235	03/08/25	21276511	41	Poss Ultra	13	0.0	97	159	0.4	1.99	14.1	32	86	1.14	0.87	121	203	384

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Hailey Jo Hall

By Savannah Magoteaux, Editor

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DOLLARS

Hailey Jo Hall moved to Texas because she wanted to rope where the competition was toughest. Five years later, after plenty of hard lessons, long hours and a season spent sharpening the details, that decision helped carry her all the way to Las Vegas, where she became the first Breakaway Roping Showcase champion at The Run For A Million. Now splitting her time between Texas and Oklahoma as she stays close to family, Hall is balancing a career in agricultural insurance, a growing breakaway career and a horse that has been part of her family from the beginning.

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THE RUN FOR A MILLION
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TOP TEN

Hall moved to Texas, in 2021 to find out how she stacked up against the best breakaway ropers in the country. For a while, the answer stung. While there were plenty of good ropers and horses from the Northwest where she was from, she learned quickly that the sheer depth of the competition could be overwhelming, and she had nowhere to hide any holes in her game.

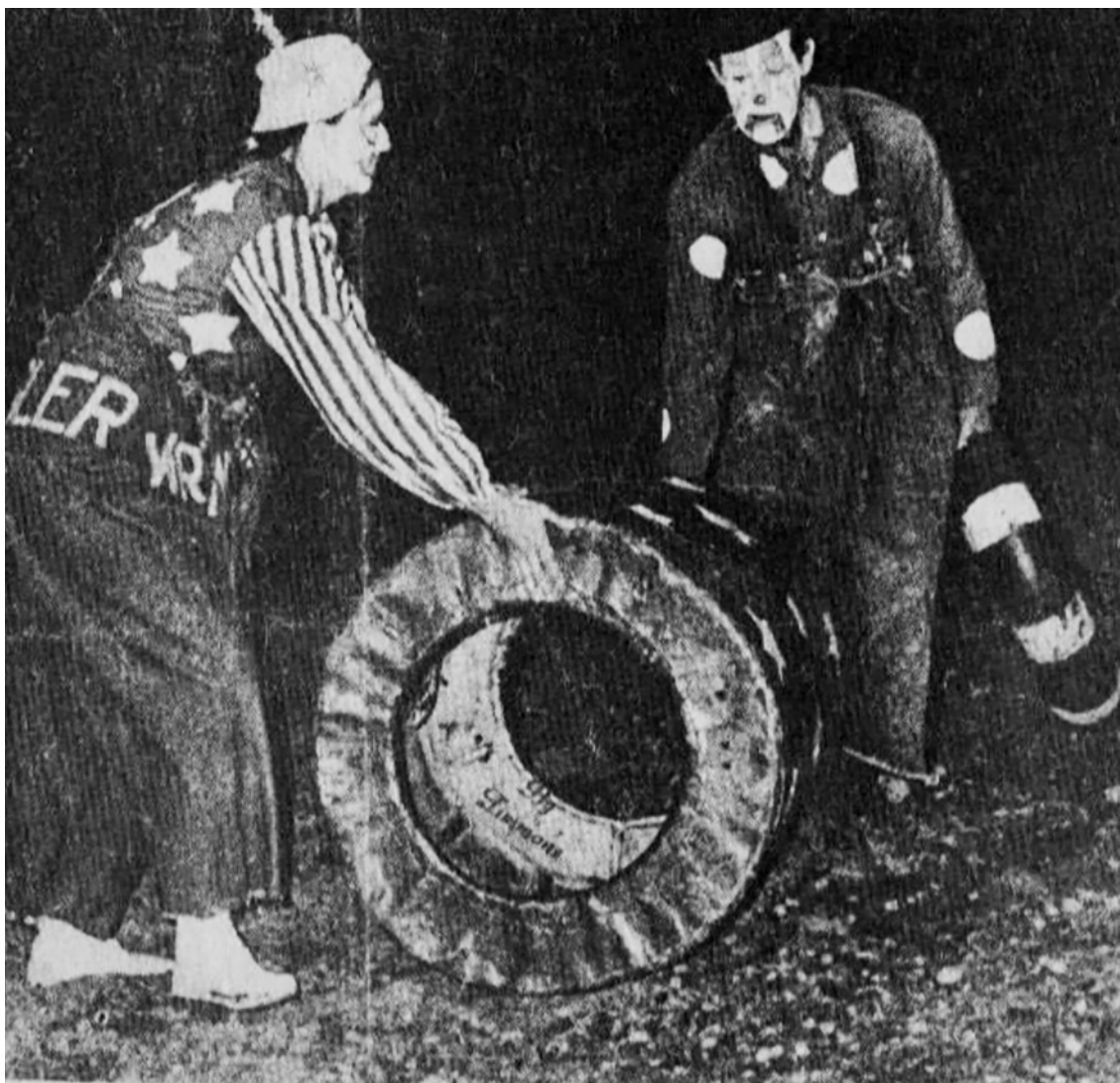
Five years later, the Washington native rode into South Point Arena at The Run For A Million in Las Vegas and left as the event's first Breakaway Roping Showcase champion.

Getting there took a family steeped in rodeo, two-hour drives for roping lessons, a career change, a horse few people would have picked and a 2025 season that sent her home with a long list of things to fix.

Hall grew up outside Seattle in Enumclaw, Washington, while her father's family was based in Central Oregon. The Halls spent the school year in Washington and summers in Oregon, and rodeo often set the schedule. Her father, John Hall, won circuit championships and qualified several times for the Dodge National Circuit Finals, now known as the NFR Open.

"When my dad was rodeoing, we did spend some time in the South in Atoka, Oklahoma," Hall said. "We would kind of split our time up during the year. It all worked around the school year, but we traveled quite a bit in the summer. We'd all take off, load up with him and hit the road and go to all the rodeos."

The family's rodeo roots go back further than one generation. On the side of her mother, Jamie Hall, relatives were involved with the King Rodeo Company in Kansas in the early 1900s. According to Hall, they raised bucking stock and helped produce rodeos, including early editions of the professional rodeo in Garden City, Kansas.



Hailey's grandma might be the first-ever barrel-woman.

Jamie later barrel raced and roped, and Hall calls her mother a knowledgeable horsewoman and a big part of her own success.

On her father's side, Hall's grandmother rodeoed in the Northwest decades before women had many of today's opportunities. She served on the Sisters Rodeo court in Oregon and, according to family history, worked around the bullfighting barrel in the 1950s and 1960s before becoming a rodeo queen.

"She always wanted to be a cowgirl," Hall said. "I think that's where I got that from."

Growing up in rodeo country did not guarantee Hall a practice pen full of ropers down the road.

In western Washington, she had to go looking for them.

"When I wanted to learn to rope, my dad would have to drive me two hours after school to go get roping lessons and practice," she said. "It's just not as common up there as it is around Stephenville."

Hall rodeoed in high school in Washington, then attended Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton, Oregon. She graduated in 2013 with an associate degree in general studies and dental training and spent nearly a decade working in dentistry.

In June 2021, Hall joined the long line of contestants who have hauled into Erath County with a horse trailer and a plan.

"Like everybody else, I had the rodeo dream," she said. "When you want to be the best, you go where the best are, so I moved down there and spent a lot of time getting my butt kicked."

She laughs about it now, but the adjustment was real.

"Everybody at home, they roped great," Hall said. "There are just so many people down here that it's a knife fight, and iron sharpens iron. I came down to Stephenville, and I'm so glad I did. It's helped me immensely and put me on a path I never thought I would be on."

Stephenville changed her career, too. Soon after she arrived, Hall arranged to feed-lease a set



Top and Right: Hailey and her grandfather both competed at Ellensburg.

of roping calves from a man who owned an insurance agency. She kept the calves fed and healthy, and in return she had cattle to practice on. Nearly a year later, he called with another offer.

“He just called me kind of out of the blue one day and asked if I wanted to go to work with him,” Hall said. “I jumped at the opportunity, and I’ve been doing that ever since. I have not looked back once.”

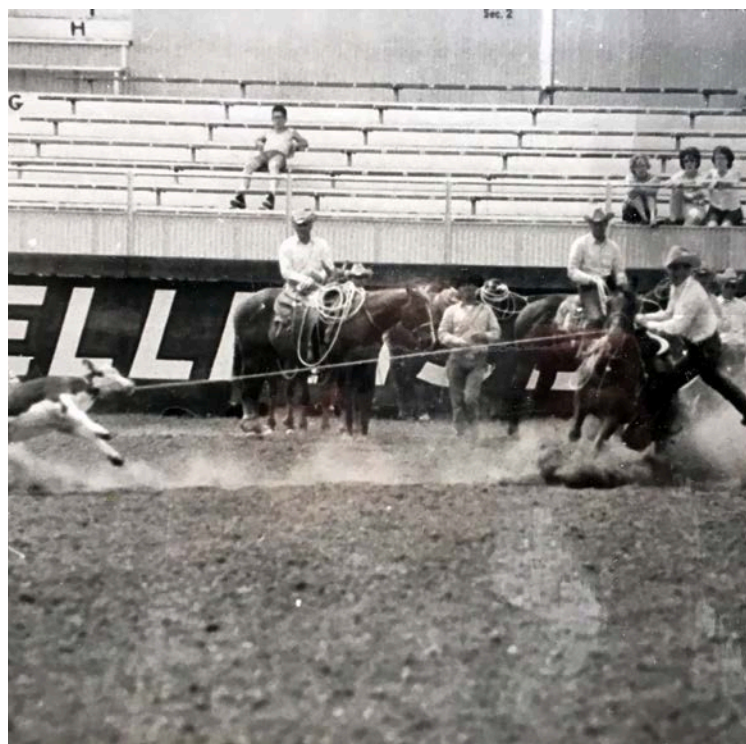
Today Hall works with 4Tag Insurance. She writes equine policies, pasture, rangeland and forage coverage, crop insurance, home and auto, equipment and commercial agricultural coverage. The job took her out of dentistry and into an industry

full of the same people she sees at rodeos and ropings.

“I feel like I’m pretty personable, so I have an easy time visiting with people,” she said. “My granddad actually owned an insurance agency in Oregon for many years, which now I look back and think I should have picked his brain more. But it goes so well with what I do. Every day I get up and rope. I’m either going to a rodeo or going to a ranch to do insurance. My professional breakaway career and my professional career in insurance tie in very well together.”

Hall joined the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association around 2016 or 2017, when

Continue on page 30



Continued from page 29

breakaway roping began gaining ground in the Northwest. She also helped push to bring breakaway roping to the grass at the Pendleton Round-Up. She produced an event with the goal of one day seeing women rope in the famous Pendleton arena.

For most of those years, though, Hall competed mainly at circuit and amateur rodeos. That changed in 2025.

"That was really the first year I ever went out rodeoing very hard during the summer," she said. "I learned a lot of expensive lessons."

She came home in August knowing where she stood.

"I came back with my tail between my legs a little bit after getting my butt handed to me," she said. "I was like, 'All right, I've got a list of things I need to fix,'

from horsemanship to equipment to really the mental game of roping."

Instead of hauling harder in 2026, Hall used the year differently. She still competed, but she put more time into improving at home, getting another horse going and entering Premier Women's Rodeo events closer to home.

"I really just kind of fine-tuned things where I feel like now I'm at a level I can compete to the best of my capabilities," she said.

That shift pointed her toward Las Vegas. Hall had followed the PWR before, but she started paying closer attention after she saw the money paid at the PWR Finals.

"I got online, checked it out and learned the nomination system," she said. "To be honest,

the nominating thing confused me at first."

A conversation with PWR executive Sami Jo Smith cleared it up. Hall could nominate many of the events she already planned to attend, earn PWR points and work toward the PWR Finals and The Run For A Million without rebuilding her schedule.

"When I looked at it, it was almost like, 'I can't believe I haven't been nominating,'" Hall said. "I'm already spending the fuel to go to these places. I'm already entered at them. For a little more, I can nominate it, get the points and open the opportunities like Vegas and The Run For A Million."

Hall estimates she spent about \$1,000 in nomination fees on her way to qualifying for Las Vegas.

"I'll spend that at a good rop-

ing any given weekend," she said. "And I netted \$19,000. That's a pretty good return on investment, in my opinion."

The money mattered less to Hall than the setting. Her qualification put her inside South Point Arena during one of the biggest weeks in western performance sports. The Run For A Million draws top competitors in reining, cutting, reined cow horse and other disciplines, and Hall had only watched most of them online.

"That was the coolest thing I've ever been a part of," she said. "I'd never been to anything really in the reining, cutting or working cow horse industry. I watch it online and stuff, but to be there, and I had guys like Kole Price telling me good job and shaking my hand, and I'm

Continue on page 33





Hailey and her home-bred gelding at the 2027 The Run For A Million.



Hailey moved to Texas so that she could compete against the best in the business.

Continued from page 30
walking the same barn as Golden Coins. That was so cool.”

The welcome from those competitors stood out just as much.

“They were all so welcoming,” she said. “They were out in the warm-up arena the night we were up, telling us good luck.”

Hall arrived happy to be included and left with the title.

“I was just happy being there,” she said. “But to go out there and be the first-ever breakaway champion at The Run For A Million, that’s pretty cool.”

Hall is quick to share the

credit.

Her family bred and raised Dats A Hickory Dude, the 8-year-old gelding she rode in Las Vegas. They owned his dam, still own his sire and handled much of his development. Steven and Katy Duby started him as a 2-year-old before Hall brought him home and began roping calves on him.

He does not look the part.

“He does not really fit the cow horse, calf horse kind of horse you think of when you see rope horses,” Hall said. “He’s pretty tall. He’s about 16 hands, 16.1. He’s got long legs and a long

neck. He’s just a little bit unorthodox for his discipline, but he does the job.”

The long legs help.

“He’s fast,” she said. “I hardly ever get outrun.”

He also made Hall adjust. He stands taller than the horses she had preferred, and his style did not feel natural to her at first.

Some days she wondered whether they were the right match. Her mother never did.

“My mom just kept telling me, ‘I think you should just keep working on him. I think he’s going to be special,’” Hall said. “As it turns out, he is. She was right.”

Her parents also put in plenty of nights no crowd saw.

“My parents have spent many nights out at the arena opening the chutes for me to train this horse,” she said. “I’m just so thankful I get to ride him, and I can count on him at places like that to pull through for me and always do his job.”

At 8, the gelding should have years of work left.

“He’s been with me his whole life,” Hall said. “He’s part of the family. He’s earned his place. It’s nice to have him on the team and know that he’s old faithful and I can count on him no mat-



Hailey with her parents and siblings.

ter what.”

Hall plans to rodeo harder in 2027 and keep nominating PWR events.

She wants another shot at The Run For A Million and a trip to the PWR Finals, and she has a bigger goal in front of her.

“My goal is to make the National Finals Breakaway Roping,” she said. “I feel like I’ve put in the work, and I have the horsepower and the support behind me, from my family to my employers. God’s put this on my heart to do it, and I won’t stop until I do.”

She will chase those goals from two states. Shortly before The Run For A Million, Hall

moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to be closer to her parents and her younger sister, who will soon make her an aunt.

Her insurance business remains in Stephenville, so she expects to spend plenty of time on both sides of the Red River.

“I’ve been in Stephenville for five or six years,” she said. “I live up here and get my mail up here, but my business and everything is based out of Stephenville, so I’m kind of split. I’m down there quite a bit regardless.”

Living in two places is nothing new for Hall. She grew up learning that when the opportunity was somewhere else, you loaded the trailer and went.

She has already made sure her nephew will have the proper wardrobe. After learning her sister was expecting a boy, Hall bought a tiny The Run For A Million onesie in Las Vegas.

“I said, ‘You better be wearing this home from the hospital,’” she said with a laugh.

Nobody knows yet if he’ll pick up a rope.

In this family, he won’t have to look far for someone to teach him.

Hall knows other young women are watching, too. Some grow up surrounded by ropers.

Others are like she was, climbing into a truck after school for a two-hour drive to practice.

“I feel like there are a lot of other girls out there that are like me, that have really big dreams,” she said. “You might not always see a way that you’re going to accomplish them, but just never give up and trust the path God’s put you on. I would have never guessed five years ago that I’d be where I’m at now. I just thank God for the opportunities and the people He’s put in my path, and the ability He’s given me to never quit.”

Five years ago, Hall moved to Stephenville to find out whether she could compete with the best. Plenty of people there made her prove it.

In Las Vegas, she did.

Should You Pull Shoes in the Winter

By NTFR Staff



The decision to pull shoes should start with workload and hoof quality. (Courtesy photos)

Pulling a horse's shoes for winter is one of those traditions that can be an excellent idea for one horse and a poor one for the horse in the next stall.

The argument for going barefoot is simple. A horse that will have a lighter workload may not need the same hoof protection it needed through show or riding season. Bare feet can also provide better traction than ordinary steel shoes on some slick surfaces, and shoes can collect snow and ice in colder climates.

North Texas creates a different set of winter conditions than

northern states. Snow packing is not usually the main problem. Hard, frozen ground, rock, mud and rapid wet-dry cycles may matter more. A thin-soled horse that is comfortable in shoes can become sore when those shoes are pulled and the ground turns hard. A horse that will continue working on abrasive footing may still need protection.

The decision should start with workload and hoof quality. Horses with good hoof walls, adequate sole depth and modest winter work often transition well. Others rely on shoes for

therapeutic support, correction, protection or traction and should not have them removed simply because it is December.

Timing matters, too. Pulling shoes and aggressively trimming the foot at the same visit can leave some horses tender. A farrier can plan a more conservative transition and watch how the horse wears the foot over the next cycle. Hoof boots can provide temporary protection for riding if the horse is comfortable barefoot in turnout but sensitive on gravel.

Going barefoot does not

mean taking the winter off from hoof care. Hooves continue to grow, even if growth slows with season and management. Regular trimming helps prevent long toes, flares, cracks and uneven wear.

For many horses, a winter without shoes works well. For others, keeping shoes on is the sounder choice. The best answer is less about the calendar and more about the horse's feet, footing and job.

Owners sometimes hope pulling shoes will automatically improve hoof quality. The



outcome depends on why the horse was shod in the first place. A horse with healthy feet that wore shoes mainly for competition may do well barefoot. A horse shod because of thin soles, conformational problems or chronic lameness may lose an important part of its support system.

Environment matters more than the word "winter." A dry North Texas pasture can become rock hard after a freeze, then turn into deep mud after rain. Repeated moisture changes can soften hoof walls and contribute to lost shoes, while frozen uneven ground can bruise a sensitive sole.

Farrier schedules should continue through the season even when the horse is not being ridden.

If shoes stay on, traction should be discussed rather than improvised. Devices that

increase grip can also increase torque on joints and soft tissues. More traction is not automatically safer. The farrier should match the shoeing package to the horse, surface and amount of work.

A successful barefoot winter also depends on transition time. Hoof structures do not strengthen overnight, and a horse that has spent years in shoes may need its workload reduced on hard or rocky surfaces for a period. Hoof boots can bridge that gap for some horses without committing to full-time shoes.

Make the decision before the weather turns rather than after the horse is sore.

A fall appointment gives the owner and farrier time to discuss footing, planned riding and any therapeutic needs.

Winter hoof care works best as a plan, not a seasonal habit applied to every horse. ^(N)



Make the decision to pull shoes before the weather turns.

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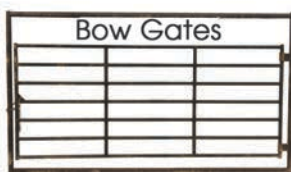
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# WHEN A CITY GIRL *goes country*

By Annette Bridges

## The Pause Before What's Next

There's something about a sunset that makes me stop. Not just glance up, but really stop. Take a deep breath. And linger there a moment longer than I meant to. I've taken more photos of sunsets than I could ever count—on our ranch, on the road, by the water, and even across an ocean. But it isn't really about the picture. It's about the pause. Somehow, at the end of a long day—whether it's been full of hard work, quiet moments, or something in between—the sky seems to say... “You made it through today.”

And I feel it. A quiet sense of satisfaction. A soft exhale. A letting go of whatever the day held. But right alongside that, there's something else. A gentle anticipation. Because as the sun slips away, I'm reminded that another day is already on its way.

Another sunrise.

Another chance.

Another story waiting to unfold.

And lately, that feeling has been settling a little deeper. My husband and I both know we're nearing the end of a long chapter. The ranch that has been his life since he was a boy. The land his parents began. The rhythm of days shaped by cattle, seasons, and responsibility.

I know it's hard for him to imagine closing that chapter. For me, I feel the pull of what's ahead. More time at our lakehouse. Quiet, slow-moving mornings, open skies, and space to create. Painting. Music. Time



There's something about a sunset that makes a person stop. (Courtesy photos)

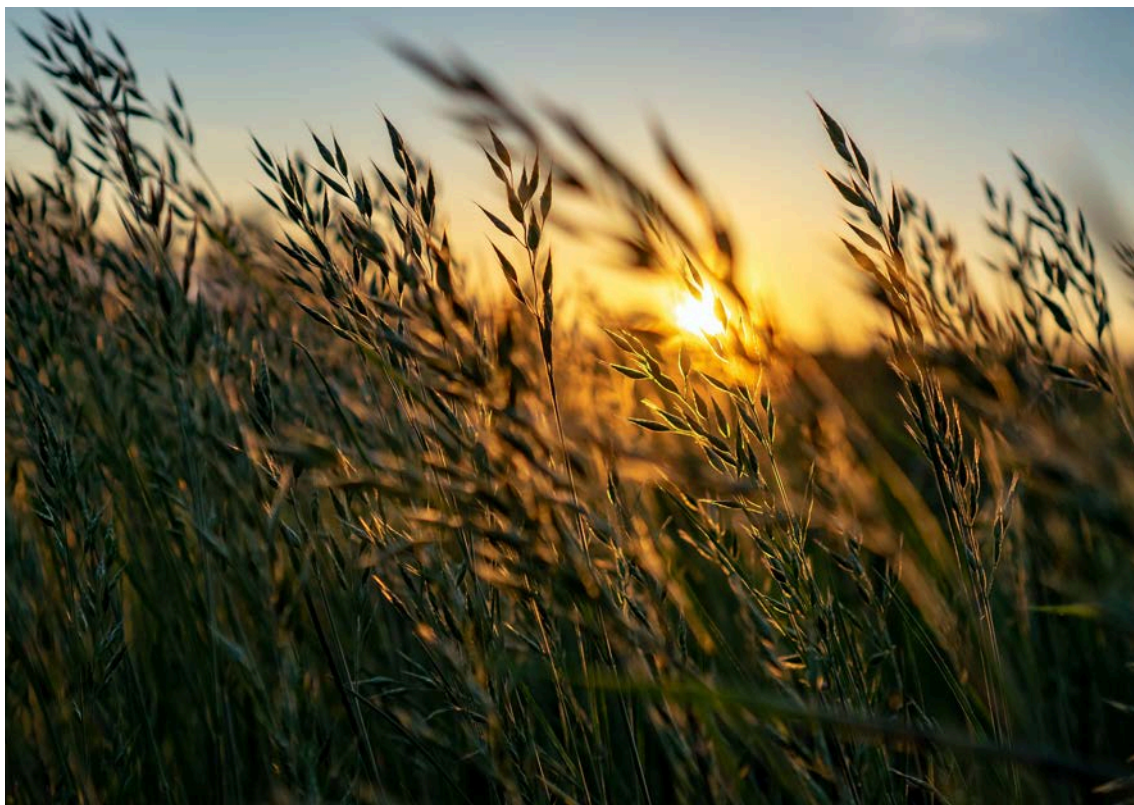




to sit, to breathe, to simply be. For my hubby, it feels different. There's a weight to stepping away from something that has given your days their purpose for so long. A wondering of what comes next. And what it looks like to fill the space that once felt so full.

And somewhere in between his uncertainty and my anticipation, we find ourselves here. In the pause. Maybe that's what a sunset has been trying to teach me all along. That there is a sacred space between what has been and what will be. A moment where we don't have to have all the answers. A moment to breathe deeply. To honor what was. To trust what's coming. Because the sun doesn't rush its setting. And it never forgets to rise again.

So for now, we pause. Together. And wait for the next light to come. (N)



Maybe the sunset has been trying to teach us that there is sacred space between what has been and what will be.

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# What Happened to the Root Cellar?

By NTFR Staff

On older farmsteads, a low door in a bank or a small mound near the house can be the last clue that a family once stored much of its food underground. Before electric refrigeration, the root cellar was one of the most dependable ways to keep a harvest usable through winter.

The idea was simple. Soil changes temperature much more slowly than air.

A room built partly or completely below ground stayed cooler through summer and was protected from the deepest winter cold. Root vegetables, apples, canned goods and other foods could be kept there under conditions that were difficult to maintain inside a heated house.

Root cellars took many forms. Some were dug into hillsides. Others were pits lined with stone, brick or timber and covered with earth. A farm might have a cellar beneath the house, while another family built a separate structure near the garden. In parts of tornado country, the same underground space could double as a storm shelter.

Good storage was not just about being cold. Humidity and ventilation mattered. Many root crops keep best in cold, moist conditions.

Modern Extension guidance still lists roughly 32 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit with high relative humidity as useful storage conditions for many vegetables. Air movement helps remove heat and gases produced by stored produce, because harvested vegetables remain biologically active after they are picked.

Different foods wanted different conditions. Onions and garlic prefer drier storage. Potatoes, carrots and many other root crops tolerate or prefer more moisture.



Root cellars took many forms. Some were dug into hillsides, while others were pits lined with stone, brick, or timber. (Courtesy photos)

Apples release ethylene and strong odors and were often separated from other produce when possible.

So what happened to the root cellar? Rural electrification and household refrigeration changed the equation. By the mid-20th century, refrigerators and freezers gave families more precise, convenient food storage inside the house. Grocery stores,

improved roads and year-round distribution reduced the need to keep an entire winter's supply of produce at home.

The cellar did not become useless. Many were converted to storm shelters, storage rooms or simply abandoned. Today, interest in gardening, homesteading and low-energy food storage has brought the idea back in a small way. A modern root cellar can

still work, but it needs the same things the old ones did: drainage, ventilation, rodent control and temperature management.

An old root cellar tells us how closely the farm household once followed the harvest calendar. Food storage was part of the architecture, not a trip to the freezer.

The best cellars used outside air strategically. Low intake vents





A cellar must be deep and well-insulated enough to avoid simply becoming a warm underground closet.

and higher exhaust vents could encourage natural circulation, bringing in cold night air in fall and releasing warmer air. In very cold climates, vents had to be managed so produce did not freeze. The cellar required attention, just less energy than mechanical refrigeration.

Rodents were constant competition. Doors needed to fit well, vents needed screening and bins had to be built so spoiled produce could be found and removed. One rotten apple truly could encourage trouble nearby because decay organisms and ethylene can accelerate losses.

The arrival of electricity did not erase old storage methods overnight. Rural electrification expanded gradually, and many households used root cellars alongside iceboxes, pressure canners and eventually refrigerators.

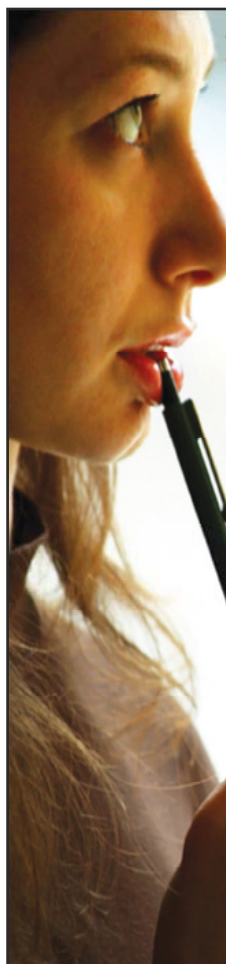
As freezers became larger and grocery access improved, the labor of carrying food in and

out of an underground room made less sense.

In North Texas, heat creates an additional challenge for anyone trying to revive the idea. A cellar must be deep and well-insulated enough to avoid simply becoming a warm underground closet. Drainage is equally important during heavy rain. Historic design principles still apply, but modern builders need to account for local soil, groundwater and building codes.

A cellar also forced families to inspect food regularly. Potatoes sprouted, apples bruised and canned jars could fail. Good storage meant sorting and using produce before spoilage spread. The room was not a place to forget food until spring.

That routine explains why root cellars often sat close to the kitchen or garden rather than at the far edge of a property. Convenience mattered when somebody made the trip every day for potatoes, carrots, apples or canned goods. 



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# Three Ingredient Peanut Butter Cookies

By Sheri Glazier | Dirt Road Dietitian | [DirtRoadDietitian.com](http://DirtRoadDietitian.com)



Go check your pantry for peanut butter, sugar, and eggs, and get to baking! (Photo courtesy of Sherri Glazier, Dirt Road Dietitian)

### Ingredients

- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 egg

### Instructions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F  
 Mix all ingredients together by hand or use a mixer  
 Once dough is formed, form dough in to uniform sized balls & place on to a cookie sheet (covered with parchment paper if you have it).  
 Gently press down with a fork making a criss-cross pattern.  
 Get your bake on! for 7-9 minutes. The texture of these will be a bit more like dough, & if you bake too long will be crumbly - but will still disappear!

### Notes

*The texture of these are a bit more ‘doughy,’ but equally yum in their own way.* 



# The Great American Thermos

By NTFR Staff

Long before insulated tumblers became a fashion accessory, a vacuum bottle rode beside the lunch pail. It went to construction sites, schoolhouses, hunting camps and tractor cabs. On farms and ranches, it carried coffee through a cold morning and cold water through a hot afternoon.

The idea began in a laboratory. Scottish scientist Sir James Dewar developed the vacuum flask in 1892 while working with very cold substances. His design placed one container inside another and removed much of the air between the walls. With less air to carry heat, the contents changed temperature much more slowly.

German glassblower Reinhold Burger and his business partner Albert Aschenbrenner adapted the scientific flask for household use and protected the fragile inner bottle with a metal case. In 1904, a naming contest produced "Thermos," from the Greek word for heat.

The American Thermos Bottle Company was formed in 1907, and the product found an audience that went far beyond laboratories. Early advertisements emphasized travel, work and outdoor use. The screw-on cap doubled as a drinking cup, and the bottle became a natural companion to the metal lunch box.

During World War II, Thermos factories devoted most of their production to bottles for military and specialized uses. By the middle of the century, the vacuum bottle had become an ordinary part of American work life. In 1966, the company introduced its first stainless-steel vacuum bottle, helping move the design away from fragile glass liners.



Technology has changed the container, but not the reason people carry one. Today's bottles may use stainless steel, improved seals, and different shapes, but the basic idea is recognizably connected to Dewar's 19th-century laboratory flask. (Courtesy photo)

The word "thermos" became so common that people began using it generically for almost any insulated bottle. The brand itself has spent decades trying to preserve the distinction.

Technology has changed the container, but not the reason people carry one. Vacuum insulation still works by reducing heat transfer between the contents and the outside environ-

ment. Today's bottles may use stainless steel, improved seals and different shapes, but the basic idea is recognizably connected to Dewar's 19th-century laboratory flask.

For rural America, the Thermos was never just a clever piece of physics. It was part of the workday. If the pickup was going to be miles from the house until dark, lunch and coffee needed to

go with it.

For farm families, the vacuum bottle arrived at the same time transportation was changing. People were traveling farther to school and work, and trucks and tractors kept workers away from the farmhouse for longer stretches. Carrying a hot drink safely became a small convenience with real value.

**Continue on page 42**





Today, the category has expanded into mugs, tumblers, food jars, and giant-handled cups, but the old pint bottle still makes the most sense.

Continued from page 41

Early glass liners were effective but fragile. Anyone who remembers an old bottle remembers the unmistakable rattle when the liner broke. Stainless steel eventually made insulated bottles tougher and better suited to pickup floors, saddle bags and job sites. The physics remains simple. Heat normally moves by conduc-

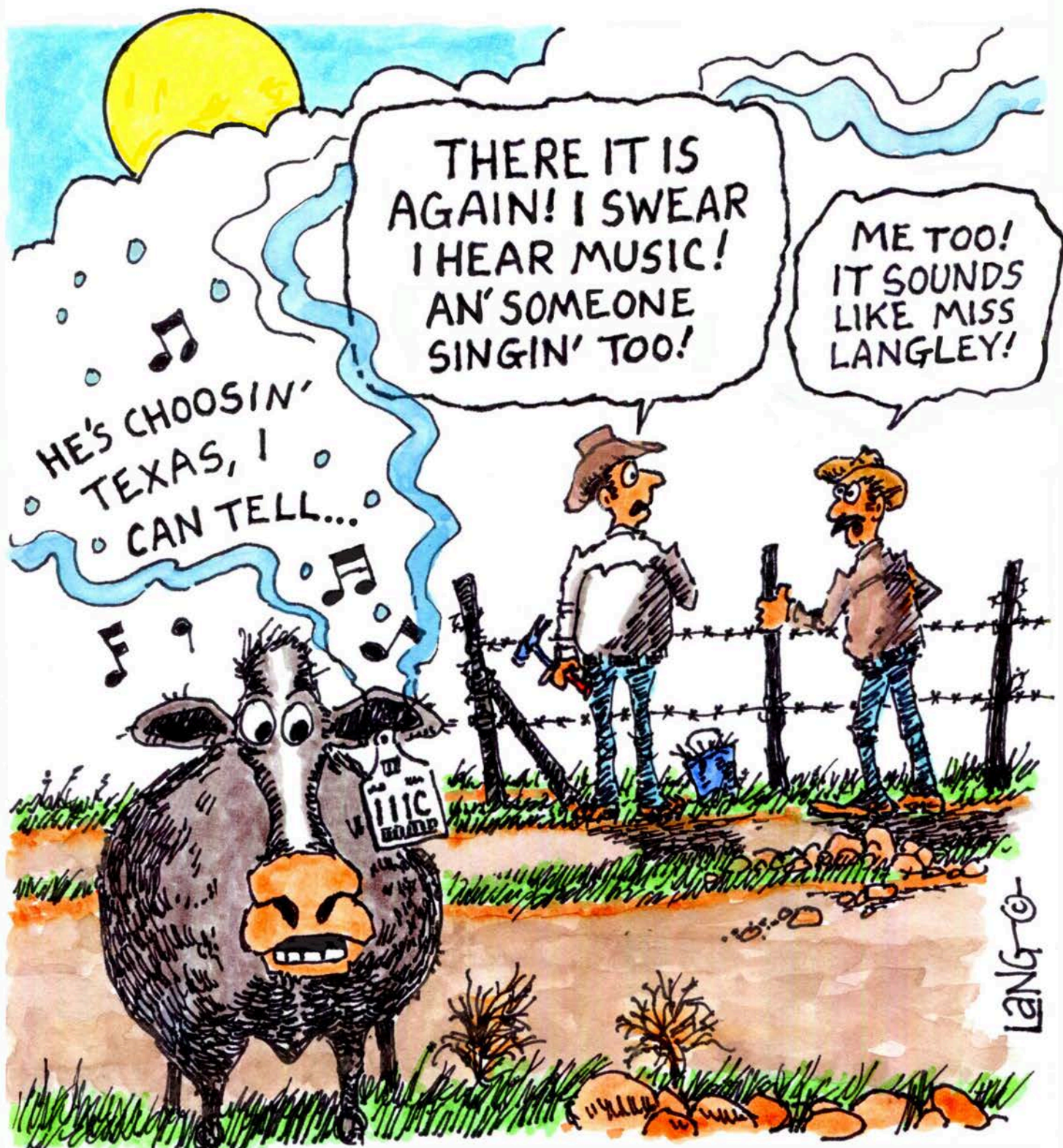
tion, convection and radiation. A vacuum between the inner and outer walls sharply reduces conduction and convection because there are very few molecules available to carry heat across the gap. Reflective surfaces and insulated lids help reduce the remaining transfer. That scientific origin is part of what makes the ordinary work bottle interesting. A de-

vice invented to solve a laboratory problem ended up beside sandwiches wrapped in wax paper and coffee poured before daylight. The cultural image was powerful enough that the vacuum bottle became part of the standard lunch kit. Children carried character lunch boxes with matching bottles. Railroad workers, oilfield crews and ranch

hands carried larger versions built for long days away from a kitchen. Today the category has exploded into mugs, tumblers, food jars and giant handled cups, but the old pint bottle still makes sense. It is compact, refillable and designed around one problem: keeping the temperature inside from becoming the temperature outside. 



# Grub Time



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# Are Acorns Really a Predictor of the Winter to Come?

By Ann Asher

A yard full of acorns always seems to produce the same prediction: “We are going to have a hard winter.” Oaks, unfortunately, do not have access to a seasonal forecast.

Heavy acorn years are called mast years. Oaks can produce enormous crops in some years and very few in others. The pattern is influenced by species, tree health, pollination, weather during flowering and fruit development, and broader biological cycles that scientists are still studying.

The key problem with the winter-weather theory is timing. Acorns begin developing months before winter arrives. The tree cannot know that a February ice storm is coming and deliberately make extra acorns in response.

Weather does influence the crop, just not as a forecast. A late freeze can damage oak flowers and reduce production. Drought can stress trees. Good growing conditions can support development. Different oak groups also mature acorns on different schedules, so the crop under one tree may not match the crop under another.

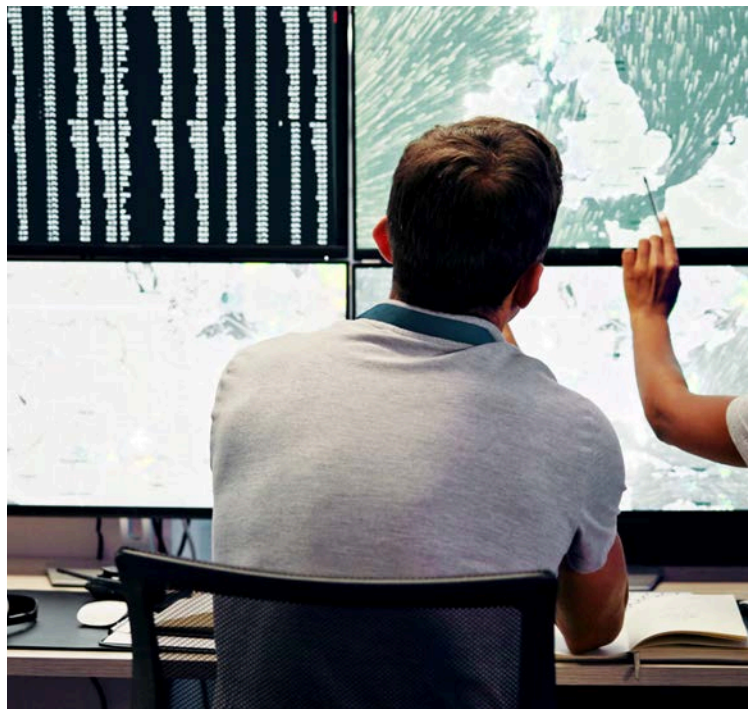
Mast years do have real effects. Deer, squirrels, turkeys and other wildlife take advantage of abundant nuts. When acorns are plentiful, deer may spend less time visiting feeders or food plots because high-energy food is already scattered under the trees. Rodent populations can also respond to abundant mast.

For livestock producers, a bumper crop can be less charming. Cattle eating large quantities of acorns can develop



Heavy acorn years are called mast years. Oaks can produce enormous crops some years, and very few in others. (Courtesy photos)





Weather forecasting has improved because meteorologists use measurements of the atmosphere and oceans, not because anyone found a better acorn.

oak toxicity, particularly when forage is scarce and animals consume acorns heavily.

So enjoy the old weather saying, but do not reorganize the winter feed budget around it. A ground covered in acorns tells us quite a bit about the oaks' recent growing season. It tells us much less about the weather still months away.

One reason the myth feels convincing is that people remember the hits. A huge acorn crop followed by a memorable ice storm becomes a story. A huge crop followed by an ordinary winter is quickly forgotten. That is classic confirmation bias, and weather folklore is full of it.

Oak species also complicate the picture. Members of the white-oak group generally mature acorns in one growing season, while many red-oak species take two seasons from pollination to mature acorn. That means weather affecting this year's crop may have occurred at different stages depending on the oak.

Scientists are interested in mast years for a better reason than forecasting weather. Large synchronized seed crops can overwhelm seed predators, allowing more acorns to survive and germinate. Mast also ripples through wildlife populations by providing a temporary burst of high-energy food.

In North Texas, the most useful thing a landowner can do with a heavy acorn crop is observe who is eating it. Deer patterns may shift toward oak bottoms. Hogs can concentrate where mast is abundant. Cattle may begin consuming acorns if grass is short. Those are immediate management clues, unlike a guess about January temperatures.

Weather forecasting has improved because meteorologists use measurements of the atmosphere and oceans, not because anyone found a better acorn. The oak crop can stay in the category where it belongs: ecology, wildlife food and an enjoyable piece of fall folklore. 

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# Leave the Mess

## Why Wildlife Needs Dead Plants

By Ann Asher

For years, fall garden advice sounded like a cleanup list: cut everything down, rake every leaf, haul off the stems and leave the beds tidy for winter. A neater yard may please people, but it can remove exactly what birds and beneficial insects need.

Standing seed heads are winter food. Coneflowers, sunflowers, native grasses and other plants hold seeds that finches, sparrows, quail and other birds can use long after flowering ends. Hollow or pithy stems can also provide overwintering sites for native bees and other insects.

Leaf litter matters just as much. Beneath a layer of leaves are insect eggs, pupae, spiders and other invertebrates that become food for birds. Some butterflies and moths spend part of winter tucked into leaf litter or attached to dead vegetation. Toads and other small animals also use the insulating layer.

That does not mean every yard should be abandoned until spring. Diseased plant material should still be removed. Vegetable gardens often benefit from cleanup that reduces pest and disease carryover. Thick mats of leaves should not be allowed to smother turfgrass. The goal is selective cleanup rather than stripping every bed bare.

One approach is to move leaves off the lawn and into flower beds, around shrubs or into a compost pile. Leave healthy perennial stems standing through winter, especially in less formal areas. Brush piles can provide additional cover if local fire and property rules allow them.

Dead wood has value, too.



A wildlife friendly yard in winter will not look like a July garden. (Courtesy photo)

A standing dead tree, or snag, can provide nesting and feeding habitat for woodpeckers and other cavity users, although hazardous trees near houses, roads, fences or utility lines should be removed or reduced by a qualified professional.

Spring cleanup can also be delayed. Cutting hollow stems too early may destroy insects still developing inside. Gardeners who want a tidy look can cut stems and loosely stack them in an out-of-the-way area for a few more weeks.

A wildlife-friendly yard in winter will not look like a July garden. Seed heads turn brown. Leaves collect under shrubs. Stems stay standing. What looks dead to us is often still being used.

This fall, the easiest habitat project may be the one you do

not finish.

Native bees are one of the strongest arguments for waiting. Many species do not live in hives. Solitary stem-nesting bees use hollow or pithy stems, while ground-nesting bees depend on undisturbed soil. Cutting every stalk to the ground and hauling it away can remove next year's pollinators before spring arrives.

Birds use dead vegetation for more than seed. Dense stems break wind and provide cover from predators. Leaf litter supports insects that become food during winter. A yard with several layers of vegetation offers more options than a flat lawn bordered by bare mulch.

For homeowners who worry that a less-clean garden will look neglected, the answer can be design. Keep paths and lawn edges crisp, while allowing the

interior of beds to remain standing. Move leaves into defined planting areas instead of leaving them across sidewalks and turf. Habitat does not require making the whole property look abandoned.

One compromise is to clean in stages. Remove diseased vegetables and obvious problem material in fall, leave ornamental and native stems through winter, then do the larger cut-back after several warm spring days when insects have had a chance to emerge. The exact timing varies, but delayed cleanup is better habitat than a perfectly bare bed in October.

The larger point is simple: a landscape can keep working after the flowers are gone. Winter habitat is often brown, hollow, and covered in leaves. Those are features, not failures. 



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PHOTO | DESCRIPTION BY LINDSEY MONK



 October means the annual paycheck for most ranchers. Frosty mornings gathering cattle to ship calves and are preg testing the cow herds. 



# What's This Old Thing?

## The Hay Knife

By Ann Asher



Before balers packaged hay into uniform bales, much of it was stored loose in stacks or packed into haylofts. (Courtesy photo)

At first glance, an old hay knife can look like a tool designed for something much more dramatic.

The long handle, heavy steel and serrated blade do not resemble anything most producers use around a modern hay barn. A century ago, though, it solved an ordinary feeding problem.

Before balers packaged hay into uniform bales, much of it was stored loose in stacks or packed into haylofts. Under its own weight, cured hay settled

and compressed. Pulling out a feeding portion could turn into a wrestling match of tangled stems.

The hay knife cut a clean section from that compacted mass. Farmers pushed or sawed the blade downward through the stack, then removed the slice for livestock.

Designs varied. Some had straight forged blades. Others used deep serrations, offset handles or footrests that allowed the user to force the blade through dense hay.

The Henry Ford museum has examples dating from the 1840s through the late 1800s. One patented design from the 1870s used offset handles and a serrated blade and became a common form. Other inventors added foot pedals or altered blade shapes in an effort to make the work easier.

The tool faded as hay handling changed. Mechanical balers compressed hay into packages that could be moved and fed without carving pieces from a stack. Modern round and square

bales created their own tools and equipment, but the old hay knife no longer had a daily job.

That is what makes it a good first entry in a series about old farm tools. The object looks strange only because the job around it disappeared.

If you find one in an old barn, look for a long blade, often serrated, attached to handles positioned so a worker could push downward. It may be rusty and dull now, but in a barn full of loose hay, it was once as practical.

**Continue on page 51**





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Continued from page 49

cal as a bale knife is today.

Some hay knives look like oversized bread knives, with a long serrated edge and handles offset from the blade. Others are shorter, curved or built with a foot pedal. That variety makes identification tricky, but the common clue is a cutting surface meant to move vertically through a dense mass of hay.

Loose hay was not fluffy once it had spent months in a loft. Weight compressed stems together, and pulling from the face of a mow could bring down far more hay than a farmer wanted.

Cutting a section kept the feeding face manageable and reduced the amount of loose material that had to be wrestled apart.

Patents from the late 1800s show how important the tool once was. Inventors experimented with serrations, handles and leverage because winter

feeding involved using it every day. When balers changed hay from a packed mass into individual packages, the market for a specialized stack-cutting knife largely disappeared.

For future installments, the same series could tackle a hay carrier, corn sheller, cream separator, hog oiler, dehorning tool or hand-crank fanning mill. Each one tells its story best when we begin with the job it solved.

If you find a hay knife at an auction or antique store, resist the temptation to sharpen and use it before checking condition.

Old steel can be cracked, handles can be loose and rust can hide damage. As an artifact, the safest value may be in what it teaches rather than what it can still cut.

For readers, that is the fun of the series. An old tool is easier to understand once the vanished chore comes back into view. 



Some hay knives look like oversized bread knives with a long-serrated edge and handles offset from the blade.



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# The GARDEN GUY

By Norman Winter | Horticulturist, Author, Speaker

## *Twenty Years Later* Still the most beautiful Pansy mix

In 2006, I wrote about what I thought was the most beautiful mix of pansies ever created, and now, 20 years later, the Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix is still the clear winner.

With all of the pansies, colors and mixes available, I find it amazing that I can pick out this selection while speeding by at 60 or 70 miles per hour.

The fact that it is still in demand today is another testament to its beauty. To be honest, it is also a great statement about the Matrix series of pansies.

Twenty years seems like a long time since this series hit the market, and yet, wherever I go, producers and, in turn, garden centers have made it an integral part of their cool-season inventory.

If you are not familiar with the Matrix series, know that it loads up with large, colorful flowers. For those of you who think bigger is better, especially when it comes to pansies, the Matrix series is for you. It is not the largest pansy, but it is an amazing performer.

Secondly, the plants branch quickly, giving you an even more colorful show because of the sheer number of flowers. Plants reach a height of nearly 8 inches with an equal spread.

Thirdly, they have short stems that are able to support these



The Matrix Morpheus is a dazzling bi-colored variety seen here with the Stock Hot Cakes White and Citrona Yellow wallflower. (Photos courtesy of Norman Winter, the Garden Guy)



large flowers above the plant, creating a terrific landscape display. Fourthly, they are resistant to stretching. This means that as you enter the warm days of spring, Matrix pansies will keep performing.

All of that would certainly make you want to plant Matrix pansies, which come in an abundance of colors and mixes. But when you see the Coastal Sunrise Mix, you may become mesmerized by the colors and beauty.

When you look at a planting of Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix, you will see rich colors that include shades of blue, rose, peach and creamy yellow. You might think, "Sure, give me those colors and I'll put the mix together," but it is not just about mixing the colors. It is also about quantity. Believe me when I say this was done with a true artist's touch.

You will first notice the shades of blue that remind you of that time when you were in a boat and went from clear, shallow water to the deep blue. Then you see the rose that reminds you of the beginning of a new day as night gives way.

Next come the creams and yellows, along with what appears to be a rusty rose reminiscent of the sunrise.

Fertile, well-drained soil is important to your success with pansies, so incorporate 3 to 4 inches of organic matter while preparing the bed. Make sure the bed receives plenty of sunlight. Plant pansies at the same depth they were growing in their containers, and add a layer of mulch to not only conserve moisture but also stabilize winter soil temperatures.

Pansies need regular feeding, about once a month, for the long season ahead.

No matter where you live, you have a season when pansies reign supreme. In my area, pansy-planting time is at hand. In



The Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix may be the most beautiful mix ever created. Now in its 20th year it is still among the most popular.

your area, it might be getting a little late. If so, consider planting from 6-inch containers that have a better-developed root system.

If October is the time to plant pansies where you live, then by all means give the Matrix Coastal Sunrise Mix a look. I also love the

Matrix Ocean Breeze Mix and the bicolored Matrix Morpheus.

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## Do the Ravens Tell On Us?

By Jelly McClellan

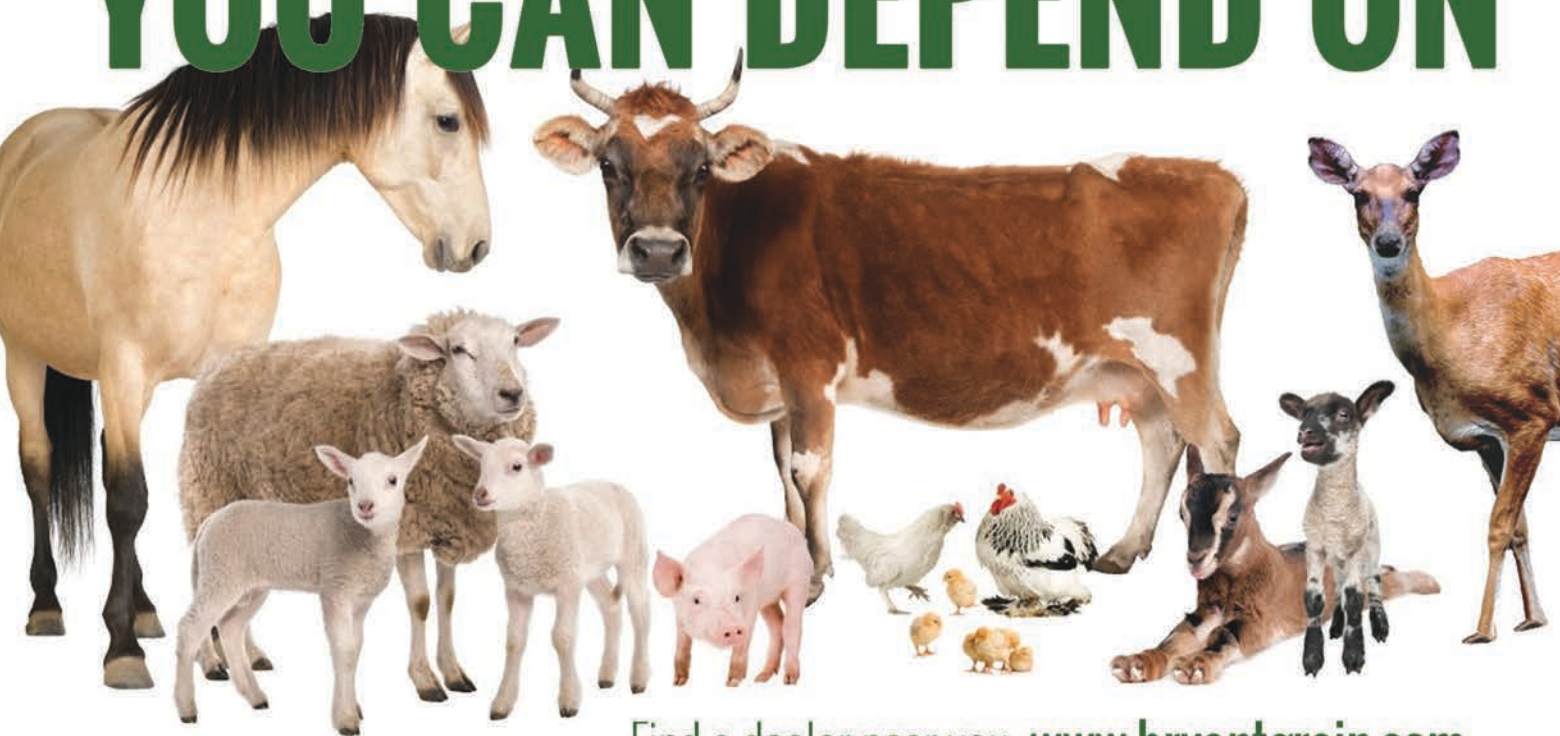
These complex birds have incredible potential for survival against the elements due too the presence of humans. A wandering raven senses the allure from its surroundings - a delightful snack left behind from a recent passerby. Could ravens have trail angels too?

Perhaps.

Is he hopeful for more snacks or simply admiring himself in the reflection of my glasses that guard my eyes from the sun. More than likely, both. Until then, I appreciated the wondering bird that allowed me to capture the incredible detail and beauty that these seemingly black birds showcase. 



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