

WEST TEXAS Country Trader

The West Texas Country Trader is a Supplement of:

Abernathy
Weekly Review
The Canyon News

The Castro County News
The Clarendon News

The Lorenzo
EXAMINER
HEREFORD BRAND

Plainview Daily Herald
Ralls Reporter-News

Thursday, June 15, 1994

The Slatonite
The Tulla Herald

High Tech Spray Rig

Agribusiness Profile...

By GORDON ZEIGLER
AgReview Writer

The same earth-ho-
vering satellites that kept
the military on target in
Operation Desert Storm
are guiding some ag
spray pilots on a
straighter path down the
crop rows.

The resulting efficien-
cy has
already
created
a reduc-
tion in
m a n -

See SPRAY, Page 5

**Satellite
guidance
gives spray
pilot
straighter
path across
the field**



Gordon Zeigler/AgReview

Rick Beck, who flies for Horan Spraying of Plainview, shows interior controls of a Global Positioning System, installed on an Ag Tractor 502, that allows more accurate flight paths across fields than with conventional flagging.

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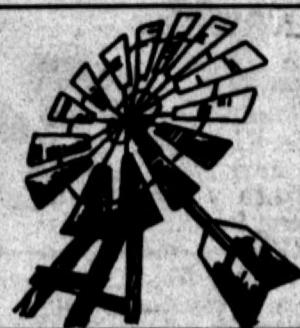
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AgReview



In praise of 'Palo Duro'

CANYON — When Spanish Conquistadors entered Palo Duro canyon 450 years ago, they were the first white men ever to see it. Coronado gets credit for naming the canyon.

Palo means wood, duro means hard. He called it the canyon of hard woods. About one hundred years ago Charles Goodnight rode through the area, chased thousands of buffalo out of Palo Duro canyon and brought in over a thousand head of high grade cattle.

In 1876 Armstrong county was plotted, even though it only had 31 residents, most of them employees of the Goodnight ranch. Charles and Ann Goodnight became known as "Father and Mother of the Panhandle," since they established the first homestead and ranch in the area. The county seat of Armstrong county is Claude, named for a train engineer who pulled the first train into town. He asked that the town be named for him, since residents hadn't bothered to name the place before Claude arrived. At his request, he was brought back from his home in California to be buried in the Claude cemetery.

The first Post Office in Claude was established in 1888, with E. H. Trice as postmaster. Claude's main street is named in his honor. Several small communities sprang up in the county: Wayside, Washburn, Mulberry Flats, Fairview, Llano and Mount Pleasant. In 1965 Hollywood came to



Tumbleweed Smith

Claude to film the movie "Hud." Paramount Pictures opened an office near the Claude News and people from the county went there to apply for work as extras in the film. The town was called Vernal in the movie, which starred Paul Newman, Patricia Neal, Melvyn Douglass and Brandon DeWilde. In 1977 Hollywood came to Claude again to film "Christmas Sunshine." Perhaps the prettiest part of the Palo Duro is around Claude. The Tom Christian ranch provides a Cowboy Breakfast during the summer. For a small fee, you ride out to the canyon rim in a horse drawn wagon and enjoy the views while cowboys prepare eggs, meat and biscuits from a chuck wagon. Then you have as big a breakfast as you can eat.

Some visitors experience Claude and the cowboy breakfast while on their trip to attend the production of

See SMITH, Page 5

Foliar regulator in cotton tests

■ Natural spray said boosting cotton yields

By RON GOBLE

Freelance Writer

PLAINVIEW — A group of cotton farmers on the High Plains of Texas have been using a foliar spray

that produces claimed yield increases up to 30 percent and improvements in quality that brings them up to 5 cents more per pound for their lint.

The ability to hold the early squares set is a critical element of cotton growing in the High Plains region.

The cotton season here is just barely long enough to get a crop up and harvested before the season is over.

"Two applications of Symspray, a natural plant growth regulator material from Agro-K Corp., of Minneapolis, Minn., has certainly given my cotton crop a much needed boost in performance," said Cecil Richardson of Hale Center.

"Symspray stimulates the plant during normal periods of stress and gives foliage a dark green appearance after application. The material actually retards the breakdown of chlorophyll during periods of stress," reports Dr. Harry Rajamannan, president of Agro-K. "This allows for acceleration of nutrient absorption and aids the timely translocation of nutri-

See FOLIAR, Pg 4



Jerry Settle will begin applying Symspray soon. So far, he says his 1994 cotton crop looks great.

South Plains

Ag News

June 17-18

EARTH RODEO — Annual event will also coincide with celebration of Earth's 70th birthday. Information is available by calling Noel Pittman or Jaci Garner at 257-2111 or 257-3365.

LEVELLAND CELEBRATION AND TRACTOR PARADE — Parade and celebration including old tractors. For information contact Preston Reeves. Day of celebrating and downtown parade.

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June 26-30

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Uncle Henry TEXAS

A profile of Dennis McMenemy . . .

By PHILLIP L. HAMILTON

Plainview Daily Herald

CANYON — In his role as Uncle Henry in the 29th season of the outdoor musical drama "TEXAS," Dennis McMenemy has some big boots to fill.

This is the second year McMenemy, who has lived in Plainview for several years, has played the principal role of Uncle Henry and the 11th year the actor/musician has been involved with the production playing nightly except Sundays through Aug. 20 at Palo Duro Canyon.

Dressed in sandals, shorts, a loose summer shirt and a pith helmet before a recent performance, the 39-year-old actor didn't look anything like his character — a stately cattle baron.

But as the sun began to go down, transforming the brilliant colors of the 600-foot canyon wall, McMenemy underwent a transformation too.

And by the time the music started and the six flags of Texas were flying over center stage — the equivalent of the curtain going up on a traditional stage — the actor had become Uncle Henry from his western-cut suit to his tall white cowboy hat and big boots.

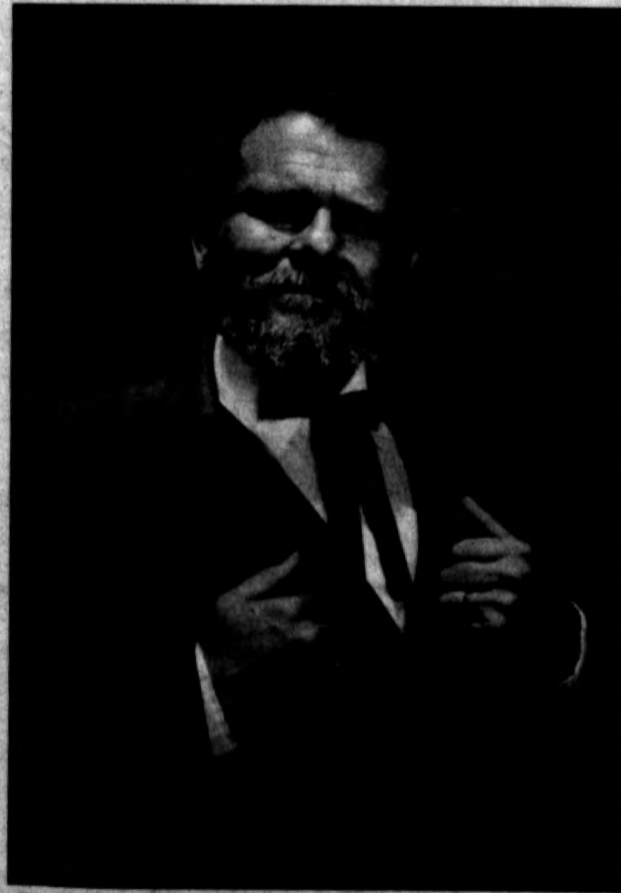
"My boots are the biggest you have ever seen," McMenemy said. "The director has this thing about me being taller than Aunt Anna, so I have to wear these huge boots. They are like elevator boots."

But the boots McMenemy wears with the 80-member cast are even bigger. With the retirement of Jerry Williams at the end of last season after 26 seasons of playing Tucker Yeldell, McMenemy has become the senior cast member.

"Approximately 90 percent of the cast is new this year," the actor said. "We have to show them how it works. We help teach the choreography and show them that they have to project everything they do."

"That's a big space out there," McMenemy said as he looked down into the amphitheater that would soon be filled with people.

"If I say something to another actor on stage, 1,800 people have to be able to see it and hear it. They have to hear back there



Plainview actor as Uncle Henry . . . in the corners. Everything has to be big — bigger than life."

See HENRY, Page 3

HENRY, from Pg

The biggest boots McMenemy has to fill may be with the audience. Uncle Henry is the narrator who tells the story of how the Texas Panhandle was settled. He must seem real with the audience as he takes them back to another time.

In a way it almost seems strange that McMenemy would be playing a role requiring him to wear boots. Before he moved to Texas in 1970, he probably hadn't seen a pair of boots.

"I wasn't born in Texas," he said. "I grew up in St. Louis. I was a city boy. I didn't move to the Panhandle until 1978."

But the boots fit well. McMenemy's interest in theater began as a child. He auditioned for his first part in 1968 - two years before moving to Texas.

"I was 14 years old and it was a junior high school show," he recalled.

The experience increased his desire to be seen on stage.

"I just kept it up through school and then in college," he said. "It's a love first and employment sec-

ond." While attending four different universities, McMenemy began doing dinner theater. He also began playing banjo and guitar in country, bluegrass and gospel band and made his first appearance in "TEXAS."

In the 1980s, the actor was seen in dinner theater production across the nation, but he maintained his local ties to the Panhandle by returning to "TEXAS" every summer.

"I think I've played every role except Calvin," McMenemy said.

After playing an old Indian for several seasons, the actor became the understudy for Williams' role as Tucker Yeldell.

"I always thought someday I'd be playing Tucker, but here I am playing Uncle Henry," he said.

After doing 60-plus performances every summer for a number of years, McMenemy began to experience burnout. Rather than walk away from the show, he decided to do something different.

"In 1990 I ask them to put me in the orchestra playing my banjo,"

he said. So for a couple of years he used his musical ability in "TEXAS" instead of his acting talents.

Last year, McMenemy decided he needed to move on to something new. So, when he was asked to sign on for another year, he declined the invitation.

"I was even thinking about leaving Plainview," he said.

But just a few weeks into the 28th season, Gene Murray, who had played Uncle Henry for years, became ill. The show's producers called on McMenemy to take over the role.

"I decided to do it," he said.

And as he begins his second season as Uncle Henry he's become comfortable in the high-profile role by realizing he doesn't have to be and really shouldn't try to be Murray.

"I have to do it my way and not try to be like him," he said. "When I try to be like him it doesn't work. I have to create Uncle Henry my way."

McMenemy says he enjoys bringing out the human quality in his character.

"He's a kind-hearted

man but it hurts him to see the railroad cutting through his land," he said. "Through the show he softens. And it's a happy ending."

The actor was hard-pressed to answer when asked what he doesn't like about his character.

"That's a good question - a difficult question," he said, giving him time to think. "I guess I don't like his cockiness at the beginning of the show. But it's just an act."

McMenemy stopped to think again.

"I guess there is nothing I don't like about him. He's standing up for what he believes."

And McMenemy is trying to do the same with his own life. What he believes in is the future of theater and he's doing something to help preserve it.

Last year he returned to Wayland Baptist University to secure his teaching certificate. And when "TEXAS" closes in August, he will begin teaching drama in Pampa.

It's a new role for McMenemy, but one he looks forward to with great anticipation.

"I've gone to school and done the practical.

Now I'm ready to settle down and teach," he said. "Most people don't get to do that. They go to school and then start teaching without ever getting that practical experience."

Just because he'll be in a new role, don't expect McMenemy to give up acting.

"I'd go crazy in the summer without anything to do," he said. "That's my personality. I have to be doing something."

Does that mean he'll continue to be involved in "TEXAS?"

"It's a possibility," he said. "Toward the end of the season, after doing more than 60 performances, you begin to wonder if you really want to come back and do it again."

He paused to think again.

"I might do Uncle Henry for many years if they will have me," he said.

About an hour later a man in a western-cut suit, cowboy hat and big boots walks to center stage.

It's not McMenemy. It's Uncle Henry.

The actor fills those big boots for the next two hours.

TEXAS Facts

HISTORY - "TEXAS" was the idea of Margaret Harper and Bill and Margaret Moore. In 1966, Harper came across an article in "Reader's Digest" titled "As Big As All Outdoors" about Paul Green and his outdoor dramas. Harper wrote to Green and enticed him to Palo Duro Canyon, where she convinced him to write "TEXAS." Then, she spent the next five years raising funds to construct the theater in the canyon. "TEXAS" opened in 1968 with the Moores serving as the first directors.

PROFITING - The self-supporting show is produced by the non-profit Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation Inc. "TEXAS" revenue comes from ticket, souvenir, barbecue, concession and program sales.

CAST - The 80 colored performers are selected from auditions held each winter in six major cities across the Southwest.

CREW - 60 people are employed as technicians, costumers and hospitality crew members.

AUDIENCE - More than 2.5 million people have seen "TEXAS" since 1968. More than 100,000 visitors travel from every state and more than 100 foreign countries to see the show each season.

WEATHER - Summer nights in the Canyon are usually cool. An average of less than two performances are canceled due to rain each year.

BARBECUE - For an additional charge, dinner is served from 6-8 p.m.

TICKETS - Available at First National Bank of Plainview or by calling 1-800-688-2181. Discounts are available for groups of 20 or more. Prices range from \$5 to \$14 for adults.

CURTAIN TIME - "TEXAS" is presented at 8:30 p.m., Monday-Saturday, through Aug. 20.

PARKING - Paved parking is available in the canyon within a short walking distance from the theater. Handicapped parking is available. Admission to Palo Duro Canyon is free after 5:30 p.m. for person attending "TEXAS."

PATIO ENTERTAINMENT - Two groups take the patio stage from 6-8 p.m. this year. Monday through Thursday, The TR performs, while The Prairie Dogs perform Friday and Saturday.

ABOUT TEXAS:

Palo Duro Canyon, dubbed the Grand Canyon of Texas, is the spectacular backdrop for "TEXAS," a musical drama now in its 29th season.

"TEXAS" is the captivating tale of the men and women who settled the Texas Panhandle in the late 1880s.

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canyon wall with the flags of Texas and the United States to the grand finale featuring the magic of computer-orchestrated pyrotechnic devices exploding overhead, "TEXAS" tells the story of strong-

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FOLIAR, Pg 2
ents throughout the plant."

The foliar treatments must be made when the plants are setting pinhead squares and then again in 10 to 14 days, says Larry Lance of HyTech Fertilizer in Plainview. The second application must be applied no later than 14 days after the first.

"Timing is very important for the material to do what it is supposed to do," Lance said. "The cost per application is only \$5 per acre broadcast, or \$3.33 per acre when banded over the row."

Jerry Settle, 48, an Edmonson farmer, planted Paymaster 145 and HS 26. His Paymaster 145 showed production gains of 17 percent over his non-treated acreage. The HS 26 showed about 5 percent increase when compared to acreage treated with the growth regulator PIX.

Settle, a cotton grower in Texas for more than 25 years, planted two 20-acre blocks of both varieties. Half of

each variety was treated with Symspray and half went untreated.

"Last year was my second season using Symspray," Settle said. "I make two applications, 14 days apart at one gallon per 20 acres. The first application is made when the plants are just beginning to square and when I can see some small blooms beginning to push."

This year, Settle is farming 800 acres all together. About 350 is in cotton and the rest planted to corn, soybeans or wheat. "Normally, we plant cotton in early May. We try to get a head start on fruit set. That's where we find our extra pounds," he said.

Richardson grows 75 acres of cotton. Last year he planted Paymaster 505, Cab CS and Paymaster 200. He saw a 24 percent overall improvement in his cotton. He harvested 2 bales per acre where he treated the plants with the foliar Symspray and 1.5 bales on the acreage that he didn't treat.

"I timed my first

foliar application just as the pinhead squares started coming on. The second application was 14 days later. Both applications were made at rates of 1 gallon per 30 acres," Richardson said.

"Not only did I see good yield increases, but the quality improved as well," said Richardson. "His treated cotton brought a 5-cent per pound bonus at the gin."

John J. Young of Halfway tested Symspray on half of his 100-acre cotton field located about 15 miles west of Plainview. He treated 50 acres of Paymaster 145 and Paymaster HS 200 with Symspray and left 50 acres as a control. At harvest time, the half he had treated produced 250 pounds per acre more than the control.

"I applied my first treatment at first square and the second 14 days later," Young said, who has been farming cotton for 10 years. "My grades and strength were exceptional with premium

mic readings of 3.5 to 4.5 and strength of 29.5."

Royce Carthel is farming about 2,000 acres this year, which includes 500 acres of cotton. "I observed the treated plants produced shorter stalks with more blooms and more fruit. The plants were fuller and yielded 50-60 pounds more per acre," Carthel said.

Last year he had 500 acres of Paymaster 145 and HS 200, short staple, Upland cotton.

"Since we barely have time to make a crop in the High Plains, setting and holding the early fruit is of great importance. The foliar spray helps us do that," the 55-year-old Carthel said. "What we really need is another 10 days of growing season, but being on the northern edge of the cotton-growing region means that we must be more efficient."

These growers believe that timely treatments with Symspray enable them to get the most out of their cotton crop.

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Helium capital worrying about future going up in air

By ROY BRAGG

c. 1994 Houston Chronicle

AMARILLO— Take the Alamo from San Antonio, and it's no longer the Alamo City.

Take the statehouse from Austin, and it's not Texas' Capitol City.

So what happens if there's no helium left in "The Helium Capital of the World?"

That's the worry in Amarillo as Congress eyes legislation to close the 65-year-old, government-run Excell helium refinery and selling off the 32 billion cubic feet of stored helium nearby.

Not surprisingly, it's an unpopular notion — 300 jobs are at stake.

"That's a large number of jobs anywhere, but it'd have a bigger impact here than it

would in Dallas," said Tom Patterson, Amarillo Chamber of Commerce president.

But there's also a civic attachment to the facility.

"We do look to (the helium plant)," said Patterson. "We look with pride to it. It's one of the old fixtures here. It's one of us."

There's even a tourist attraction — a Helium Monument made up of four time capsules — in the middle of town.

But critics call the government helium plant a pork barrel project, saying private refiners can produce the gas more cheaply.

"Those are not competitive jobs," said Carl Johnson, head of the Arlington, Va.-based Helium Advisory

Council, an industry group pushing to end the government's involvement in the business. "You can prop them up for a while, but if it's not economically feasible, the jobs will go. That's what's happening (in Amarillo)."

Legislation pending before the House Energy and Mineral Resources subcommittee goes a step beyond what Johnson would like — it proposes reducing the helium stockpile to 600 million cubic feet by 2015 and using those proceeds to pay off the \$1.3 billion dollar debt incurred in building up the 100-year stockpile of gas.

Rep. Richard Lehman, D-Calif., is the sponsor of the bill.

Supporters of the

Excell helium refinery say that whole idea is nuts — the federal government has finally found something it does well and now it wants to bail out.

Rep. Bill Sarpalius, D-Amarillo, said the billion-dollar deficit is a mirage and represents only a paper transaction between two government agencies that could be forgiven with no effect on the nation's national debt.

Take it away, and the helium plant, which posts a \$9 million annual profit, could pay off the government's original \$252 million investment in a few years, the congressman said.

The lighter-than-air element is most famous for its use in filling balloons, blimps and dirigibles.

Pranksters also inhale it to alter their voices, although manufacturers say it's a deadly practice since too much can cause asphyxiation.

Because it has a low freezing temperature, it's used in hospitals to super-cool magnetic-resonance imaging equipment, Johnson said. Helium is also used in manufacturing fiber-optic cables, detecting leaks in manufactured products and in arc welding.

In its raw state, it's found mixed with natural gas in vast, underground pockets, said Bill Moore, an official with the government facility.

Unless precautions are made to capture it, helium simply floats away when natural gas is

processed and burned. The gas field that stretches from the Texas Panhandle, through the Oklahoma Panhandle and into southern Kansas is rich in helium, and that's how Amarillo got to be the helium capital.

Helium production here dates back to 1929, when it was a government monopoly. In 1960, Congress enacted a law to buy as much helium as possible and store it for future strategic use in scientific projects and defense research. The same law was also intended to start a private helium industry.

Between 1961 and 1973, the government bought 38 billion cubic feet of helium and stored it in a dormant natural gas field near here.

SPRAY, from Pg 2

power needed in the labor-intensive job of ground flagging, says Roger Horan, among the first spray service owners in the Panhandle to install it.

Other benefits include a continuous computer record kept of flight path for later printout on map overlays.

It is based on the military's Global Positioning System — formerly a secretive setup of satellites which, via triangulation and radio signals, can determine location anywhere on earth to within a foot or two.

The ability to put a plane on a guide path within about two feet of what is called its "A - B Line" across the field is proving its value. In fact, this degree of accuracy is the most impressive feature of the system.

"Now, we don't have to put a man on the ground, expose him to chemicals and wait to fly again until he moves from one field to the next," Horan said.

"Now I can go out to the field, merely as a safety spotter, to check the field and see its clear, or check the area for obstructions to flight."

Relying on the highly accurate positioning system, the pilot is largely on his own now. He simply makes an indexing pass over a square field, even a center pivot field to calibrate the system for almost automatic operation, and lets the system put him on each new flight heading.

Each additional pass is calculated by a computer, allowing the pilot to home in on his next satellite-guided "A-B line" covering an area

exactly the width of his spray pattern (about 73 feet) without overlapping — hence a near perfect spray path.

"I just don't know how we ever got along without it," claims Horan, who has worked in the spraying industry here for 36 years — most of it spraying the old-fashioned way.

"We used to utilize flagmen and hand signals to do the guidance manually," he explained.

Pilots home in on the straight line flight path by watching a bar of LED readouts mounted just outside the windshield on the nose of the plane. Lights show when to correct right or left.

An added bonus for farmers is a permanent record kept on computer disk — down to each individual flight pass across the field.

"At the end of the day, we can print out a record of each spray session, in fact each pass along the field, on a computer disk."

"It shows every field we sprayed," Horan said. "This is furnished to the farmer for his records."

Horan first saw a gps flight system in action a couple of years ago when he was involved in spray contracting for the Boll Weevil Eradication or Diapause program, which protects cotton farmers in the Rolling Plains area off the Caprock.

His lead pilot, Rick Bock, sprayed for that program and became thoroughly familiar with the SatLoc system, which Horan recently

ordered maps for the area, to which the overlays can be applied.

"This will really keep you out of trouble," claims Horan. "If a guy thinks you sprayed his field, and you haven't, the printout will show it."

Bock now uses SatLoc daily. In 1992, Horan's plane was equipped with a prototype of the current system. The system has been upgraded since then, a number of manufacturers have introduced one and the price has become more competitive.

Horan estimates he can already say the SatLoc equipment allows him to do 25 percent more work than before, based on time savings and efficiency.

Horan will be able to print out each flight path to scale on a clear plastic sheet. He has

ordered maps for the area, to which the overlays can be applied.

"This will really keep you out of trouble," claims Horan. "If a guy thinks you sprayed his field, and you haven't, the printout will show it."

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SMITH, from Page 2

"Texas" in the Palo Duro Canyon State Park. This year marks the 29th season for the stage presentation, which is a romantic musical about panhandle history.

It is the most attended outdoor musical in the state. Indians perch on rocks, cowboys ride the range, even a train lumbers across the terrain.

The latest sound and light technologies are used to provide realism in the prairie fire and thunderstorm sequences. The season

runs from June 8 to August 20, nightly except Sundays. Ticket prices range from 3 to 14 dollars. Reservations (806/655-2181) are recommended. When and if you go to the Palo Duro, try not to be in a hurry.

There are some beautiful and fascinating formations to see and the overall views in the 110 mile long canyon make you think about what has gone before.

(Tumbleweed Smith is Big Spring-based writer and broadcaster Bob Lewis.)

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If you were to make a list of the most approachable do-it-yourself home improvement projects, installing an in-ground sprinkler system would probably top the list. Start thinking about it and the problems of layout and machinery seem to get in the way. It all seems a bit overwhelming.

With that in mind, you may be interested to know that some manufacturers are trying to make the idea a good deal more appealing.

Not only will you find all the components for the job at your local home improvement center, but for the price of a stamp you'll get professional help in laying out the system. And if you still have questions, there's often a toll-free phone number to help you along the way.

Now, before we coax you too far down the path of giddy optimism, we should say that the installation is a lot of work. But when it's done, you'll have saved more than 50 percent when compared with a professional installation.

Of course, not every property will accommodate a sprinkler system. If the waterline from the street to the meter is smaller than five-eighths of an inch

(because of mineral deposits), or if your water pressure is down in the 20-psi range, your options are extremely limited.

A heavily landscaped yard, or one with a good deal of concrete or hefty tree roots, will also limit your options and make the job more difficult.

To determine water pressure, you can call your local water company. A more precise method is to measure the pressure at an outside faucet. To help you judge the capacity of your water supply, sprinkler system companies, such as Lawn Genie, offer a worksheet that includes a formula to determine how much water your system delivers in gallons per minute.

No matter what your delivery capacity at the meter, however, it's important to know that friction will reduce the output somewhat. Every fitting, turn and length

of pipe will subtract from the raw total, and you may have to upsize the piping that supplies the sprinkler system to achieve appropriate flow rates.

Plan your sprinkler system to begin inside the house, as near the water meter as possible, and exit the house through the rim joist directly above a basement wall. Just outside, you need a code-approved vacuum breaker to protect the potable water system from contaminants.

From the vacuum breaker, plan a single underground line that connects your water system with the sprinkler system zone valves.

Sprinkler heads are available in several spray patterns. Some will broadcast 360x, oth-

ers only 180x, 90x or 45x areas. Also available are drip heads designed for gardens.

To ensure proper flow at the sprinkler heads and uniform coverage, you can send your layout

worksheet and a scaled drawing of your yard — with the house, driveway, sidewalks, trees and other significant landscape features — to the sprinkler system manufacturer.

You should receive in turn a detailed layout, including pipe sizing, head types and locations, the number of zones and zone valves and the best piping routes to take.

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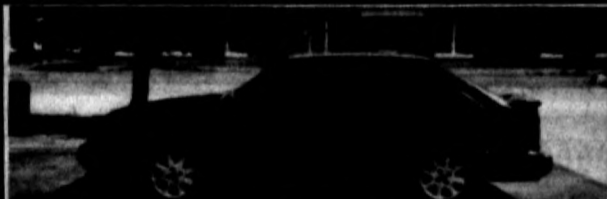
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New ultrasound plan has promise for meat industry

COLLEGE STATION -- The meat industry's constant quest for tenderness could benefit with just a touch, says a Texas Agricultural Experiment Station scientist working with a promising automatic meat-grading technology.

The "touch" is elastography, a new form of ultrasonic measurement developed for the medical field. It could also have important implications for beef, pork and poultry producers, according to Dr. Rhonda Miller of Texas A&M University's animal science department.

Elastography compares standard ultrasonic readings with ultrasonic readings taken when meat, or any other tissue, is very slightly compressed. As Miller puts it, "It's very light compression -- really, no more than just a touch."

Miller, a meat science specialist, has been working for a number of years with the use of ultrasound to measure the amount of fat in meat and its relation to tenderness. The beef industry in particular has sought methods to replace human visual evaluation of carcasses because it can be inconsistent and relatively slow. Beef consumer also are demanding leaner products that still have the taste and

texture that fat, especially the intramuscular fat known as marbling, gives to meat.

Ultrasonic waves have been considered because they are useful for identifying the presence of tissues that vary in composition from surrounding tissues. Ultrasonic signals bounce off various meat components -- such as muscle, fat or connective tissue -- at different rates.

However, standard ultrasound technology cannot detect differences in meat components because it is not sensitive enough. Compressing the meat slightly allows for obtaining a second image. By measuring differences between the first and second ultrasound pictures, tissue softness and hardness can be determined. A team of experiment station researchers hopes to find how to automatically determine meat grades and tenderness by using this method, Miller said.

The technology was developed by Jonathan Ophir of the radiology department at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. Ophir invented the technique for such medical purposes as gauging the size of tumors -- which generally are harder than surrounding tissues -- or the extent of liver disease.

Ophir came up with a method by which differential readings from non-compressed and compressed tissues could be mathematically related. The readings can be presented both numerically and as digitized images that reflect proportions of various tissues.

Shortly after developing the 3-year-old technology, Ophir served on a review panel for the National Cattlemen's Association, which was evaluating proposals for automated meat grading systems.

Miller, with fellow researcher Dr. Dale Whittaker and others, had submitted a paper on ultrasound grading. "Jonathan is very interested in having elastography used in an any industry where it can be beneficial, so he called us," Miller said.

Ophir is now one of four principal investigators on the elastographic

meat grading project. The others are Whittaker, who is an associate professor of agricultural engineering at Texas A&M, and Dr. Dan Hale, a meat specialist in animal science with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Miller said the team is still working on which of 14 different mathematical approaches to comparing structure within an elastography image works best in providing a clear picture of where meat is fatty and where it's not, among other things. The team must examine a large number of variables, from levels of meat marbling to how tender the meat is, and from location of connective tissue or tissue injuries that affect meat quality.

Each mathematical approach works differently depending on the size of the area being analyzed ultrasonically.

The researchers must correlate readings from each approach with the size of the area analyzed. They also compare their elastographic data with actual sensory-panel data from human evaluators of the same met, as well as chemical and other evaluations of the meat.

Once they work out which approach or approach provide the most useful and accurate readings, they hope to develop a prototype elastographic machine that can quickly analyze beef quality and tenderness. They envision a machine with arms that grasp and stabilize carcasses on a processing line. An ultrasonic transducer, attached to a plate that compresses the meat, would take readings from the carcass.


The 1 percent compression rate is so light and so fast that both compressed and non-

compressed readings are taken in a fraction of a second, Miller said.

The prototype probably will not be able to handle the standard 400 carcasses per hour that move through a beef plant line, Miller said, but added, "The engineers assure us that will not be a problem later."

The prototype should be finished and on-line by the end of 1994. Major funding for the project comes from the Texas Advanced Technology Program, a state-funded research program that attempts to join public and private research efforts with commercial potential. A private Texas company is also involved in the project.

The potential for elastography is enormous in the meats industry, including poultry and pork processors, Miller said.



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