

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
STARTER
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Plainview Daily Herald
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The Slatonite
The Tulla Herald

Thursday, September 1, 1994

Fall ag scene

Corn: Harvest kicks off

Cotton picking not far away . . .

By GORDON ZEIGLER
AgReview Writer

Harvest will hit a crescendo in the weeks ahead on

AgReview

the High Plains, and corn cutting will be the target of the first wave of crop gathering activity.

The South Plains cotton crop — that portion of it on irrigated acres — has been given a clean bill of health with expectations of good yields and quality.

And in the midst of this flurry of harvest fervor, farmers will soon be treated to some annual farm and ranch trade shows — including the Farmer Stockman Show in Lubbock and the annual Farm and Ranch gathering at the Amarillo Civic Center.



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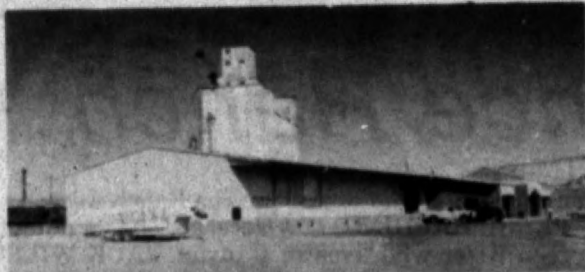
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AgReview



South Plains

Ag
News

Sept. 7
HALE FARM MUSEUM LABOR DAY BBQ — The annual fundraiser event for the Hale County Farm and Ranch Museum features a brisket dinner from 5l to 7 p.m. at \$5 for adults and \$3 for children. Tours of the museum collections will be provided.

Sept. 17-18
GOLDEN SPREAD ANTIQUE EQUIPMENT SHOW — Donald Sell Farm in Perryton will be the site of the original old tractor show of the Texas Panhandle.

Sept. 20-22
SECOND ANNUAL SEMINOLE TRACTOR SHOW — Event will be held in connection with the Farm and Oil Celebration.

Sept. 23
LEVELLAND HARVEST FESTIVAL — Big celebration including displays of old tractors.

Farm museum slates Labor Day barbecue

The annual fundraiser barbecue for the Hale County Farm and Ranch Museum just south of Hale Center on Interstate 27 is set for Labor Day.

The museum will have open house from 9 a.m. until dark.

The brisket dinner will be served from 5 to 7 p.m. at a cost of \$5 for adults and \$3 for children, payable at the site.

Volunteers will be available to give tours of the museum collections all day.

Keepin' old tractor era alive

By SCOTT LUCE

ABERNATHY — Poppin' Johnnies are a fascination area men who seem almost as caught up in with big tractors as kids are with theirs.

"Little boys with big toys" was one interpretation of the first gathering of the Plains Chapter of the Texas Two Cylinder Club several years ago at Jimmie and Gale Davis' house.

Eighteen tractors - vintages 1934 to 1992 - were brought to the Davises home on the south edge of Abernathy for a day of fellowship and, in general, stories of problems and triumphs during restoration.

All the tractors were John Deere except for Eugene Crumpler's 1951 Oliver Standard 70.

"He takes care of the north side of Abernathy and I take care of the south," Jimmie said about Crumpler's collection north of Abernathy.

Some of the enthusiasts came from as far away as Amarillo and Ira. The more seasoned owners all talked about growing up working farms with the same type tractors that they were now displaying.

The tractors were in various states of restoration. Some were immaculate, glowing green with bright yellow trim. Others were up to snuff mechanically but not yet painted and detailed.

"The reason people like John Deere is because they're easy to work on and easy to restore," Jimmie said.

It was only a partial gathering for the group which met Aug. 18. At that meeting the group voted to affiliate with the Two-Cylinder International Club. Gale had copies of a proposed charter offered by the international club available for the new club members.

Don Sarchet, of Amarillo, master of ceremonies, announced to the group that suggestions were being taken for a name for the club.

Sarchet has traveled extensively through America attending various tractor and antique farm equipment shows.

"We enjoy getting together and swapping stories about restoring tractors and using the tractors as kids," Sarchet said.

Sarchet was once one of those "kids" that drove tractors on farms.



HISTORY PRESERVED — Tommy Applewhite drives unusual tractor in an area parade. It is part of the outstanding collection of tractors and implements at the Hale County Farm Museum.

In later life he said he went to a doctor for an ear examination. The doctor told him there was nothing wrong with his ear but he had TDE.

"I had tractor driver he said with a chuckle.

The many years of driving tractors that had no mufflers had diminished his hearing.

The sound of the "Poppin' Johnnies" was still sweet to the people attending. Groups would move from tractor to tractor to watch owners (and sometimes any bystander that wanted to) crank their tractor.

Then they would all step back to listen to the old two-cylinder engines labor through their fire, fuel and compression stages, all the while nodding approval and hollering comments and questions to each other.

The din reached a crescendo when all the tractors were awakened for a mini-parade down Jimmie and Gale's driveway. As each tractor was driven by the gallery, Sarchet would introduce the driver and tractor adding pertinent information about each one.

The John Deere Co. has a slogan, "Nothing runs like a Deere". It was quickly evident that nothing produced now runs like the Deere of old.

"These are antiques because John Deere doesn't make anything like that any more," Jimmie said.

What they do make was dis-

played in the massive 1992 John Deere tractor at the edge of the rows of its predecessors.

The new one was in sharp contrast with its enclosed cab, air conditioner and heater, stereo and a host of levers and digital displays. The only way to get TDE now is to play the radio too loud.

The new ones may have more creature comforts but the old ones are the most beautiful to someone bitten by the antique tractor bug.

The club organized in October, 1991. It was chartered in the state organization's Area 16 with Don Sarchet of Amarillo as its first president. Other officers were Jimmie Davis, Abernathy, vice president; Eddie Earnest, Plains, secretary; and Phil Gunderman, 5716 93rd, Lubbock, 79424, treasurer. Reporter was Gail Davis.

A total of 42 member families joined the club at the initial meeting.

The club is associated with the Two Cylinder Club International of Waterloo, Iowa. It has 20,000 members nationally.

Some members of the club have from one to 15 or 20 old tractors they have collected and are restoring or trading.

Area 16 is not restricted to the South Plains, and includes the 79-zip code area, covering the Texas Panhandle, South Plains and Permian Basin. Information is available from the Davises.

Big 'shindig' Saturday at Nance Ranch

■ Fiddlers music contest, '50s era cowboy reunion spices Canyon weekend

CANYON — While Fiddlers compete for prize money, former cowboys on the Nance Ranch will once again, through echoes in their minds, saddle up and ride across the range land to tend the vast herd of Hereford whiteface cattle on the ranch.

On Saturday Cowboys from the 1940 and 1950 era will gather to relive those days of tending the one-time largest herd of registered Herefords in the world. Forty-one years ago, on September 23, 1953, over 1200 head of these cattle were sold at the dispersal sale on the Nance Ranch. George and Lucille Nance



THE 'COWBOYS' — A 1951 gathering of ex-Nance Ranch cowboys shown above includes Orville Gray (left), Percy Hawthorne, Lowell Hill, Donnie Stroup, Raymond Welch and Jim Riley.

had established the Ranch in the early 1920s and had successfully built the Ranch into a showplace for social gatherings as well as an efficient working ranch employing several cowboys.

Early cowboys

from the 1930s who worked on the Ranch were:

PEARL HARDING, now deceased, has a daughter, Doreen Kiser who lives in Canyon. JACK WILSON, now deceased, has a daughter, Allie Mae Clark who lives in Canyon and a nephew, ROB GROVES, who worked on the ranch while he attended WT. He now works on the Frying Pan Ranch at Bushland. GEORGE SANDERS was the herdsman in 1938. BUD MINOR, now deceased, was one of the early managers of the purebred operation. His wife lives in Canyon and a cousin, Bailey Reece, lives in Canyon.

In the 1940s, HAROLD BYARS who lives in Canyon was the herdsman. RAYMOND, KENNETH, AND WAYNE WELCH, three brothers who live in Amarillo, worked on the Ranch from 1944 to 1953 and

See Nance, Page 3

Fishing reported 'fair' at Texas lakes

Special to AgReview

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department issued the following fishing report late last week:

ARROWHEAD: Water stained, 84 degrees, 2 feet below normal level; black bass fair on plastic worms and topwaters; crappie slow; catfish good to 4 pounds on nightcrawlers and shrimp.

BAYLOR: Water clear, 13 feet low, 86 degrees; everything is slow because of the heat.

FORT PHANTOM HILL: Water murky, 85 degrees, 6.5 feet below normal level; everything is slow because of the heat.

FRYER: Water cloudy, 83 degrees, 3 feet below normal level; black bass good to 4 pounds on cranks in shallow water; crappie slow; catfish good to 10 pounds at night on cut shad.

GRANBURY: Water clear, 83 degrees, 6 inches below normal level; black bass good to 4 pounds on red shad plastic worms in 6-18 feet of water; stripers fair to 8 pounds on shad in deep water; sand bass fair on silver spoons, schooling on the lower end; crappie good on small minnows in the trees in 20 feet of water; catfish good on cheese bait.

GREENBELT: Water clear, 80 degrees, 9 feet below normal level; large-

mouth bass fair to 5.5 pounds; smallmouth bass fair; walleye slow; crappie slow; sand bass good early and late trolling with jigs and spoons; catfish good to 25 pounds on rod and reel using liver, minnows and water dogs.

HUBBARD CREEK: Water murky, 5 feet below normal level; black bass fair in shallow water; crappie good on minnows in 12 feet of water and under the bridge; sand bass slow; stripers slow; catfish good on trotlines using perch.

KEMP: Water clear, 5 feet below normal level; everything is slow because of a lack of anglers and the gates being open.

MACKENZIE: Water clear, 82 degrees; largemouth bass fair to 4 pounds on jigs and spinner baits; smallmouth bass slow; crappie good, several limits, on minnows; sand bass slow; hybrid stripers slow; walleye slow; catfish fair on trotlines.

MEREDITH: Water clear, 82 degrees, normal level; largemouth bass slow; smallmouth bass good late on spinner baits, jigs and crawfish-type baits along rocky points in 30 feet of water; sand bass good on slabs 8-25 feet deep; walleye slow, a few stragglers picked up with sand bass; crappie slow; catfish good but small on nightcrawlers and stink bait.

OAK CREEK: Water clear, 84 degrees, 6 feet below normal level; black bass fair to 5 pounds on plastic worms; crappie fair off the docks on minnows; sand bass slow; catfish good on chicken liver.

O.H.IVIE: Water clear, 82 degrees; largemouth bass good on pond weed and algae beds on topwaters and cranks or in 30-40 feet of water off points on plastic worms; smallmouth bass fair mixed with large-mouths; crappie slow; white bass fair in schools on small cranks, spoons, jigs and spinners; walleye slow; catfish fair over baited holes or on trotlines in the evening on brushy flats.

POSSUM KINGDOM: Water clear, 84 degrees, 3 feet below normal level; largemouth bass slow, a few caught in shallow water; smallmouth bass fair on rocky banks; crappie slow, a few caught under docks in 18-20 feet of water; stripers good in schools on small shad-type baits from Broadway down the lake to the dam; sand bass good in schools on the same baits, sometimes mixed with stripers; catfish slow.

PROCTOR: Water murky, slightly below normal level; black bass good on cranks and plastic worms; crappie fair to 1.25 pounds on minnows; hybrid stripers fair to 8 pounds trolling cranks or jigs; cat-

fish slow.

SPENCE: Water clear, 83 degrees, 29 feet below normal level; black bass good on buzz baits and minnows; crappie good on minnows; white bass fair but small on topwaters; stripers good trolling; catfish slow.

STAMFORD: Water stained, 10 feet below normal level; black bass slow; hybrid stripers fair to 8.5 pounds in the fishing barge; crappie slow; catfish good at the hot water outlet in 20-22 feet of water on chicken liver.

TWIN BUTTES: Water clear, 19 feet below normal level; black bass fair on topwaters; white bass good in schools on topwaters and small Rat-L-Traps; catfish fair to 4 pounds on cheese bait.

WHITE RIVER: Water clear, 9 feet below normal level; black bass fair to 8 pounds on Rat-L-Traps and spinner baits; crappie slow; walleye slow; catfish fair on stink bait, nightcrawlers and large minnows.

BELTON: Water murky, 89 degrees, normal level; black bass slow, some caught on spinner baits and buzz baits; white bass and hybrids fair on topwaters, jiggling spoons and slabs;

crappie slow; catfish good on perch, nightcrawlers and prepared baits.

BROWNWOOD: Water clear, 68 degrees, normal level; black bass slow, a few caught to 4.5 pounds; white bass good in schools on jigs and spoons; hybrid stripers good trolling with deep running lures; catfish fair to 35 pounds on perch, nightcrawlers and shrimp.

BUCHANAN: Water clear, 85 degrees, 7 feet below normal level; black bass fair in 6-10 feet of water on plastic worms and DB3s; stripers good to 10 pounds on live shad in 48-50 feet of water; crappie fair at docks with structure in 20-25 feet of water on minnows; white bass good around Garrett Island, schooling on top early and late, on Pop Rs and small slabs; catfish fair to 6

pounds on stink bait over baited holes.

CANYON: Water clear, 77 degrees, 1 foot below normal level; black bass fair to 6 pounds on minnows; stripers good to 15 pounds downrigging with spoons; white bass slow; crappie fair on minnows; catfish good on liver and minnows.

COLORADO BEND: Water clear, normal level; everything is slow because of the heat and not many fishermen.

DECKER: Water clear, 87 degrees, normal level; black bass good on jig-and-pigs in the reeds in shallow water; crappie good, several limits, on minnows by the power lines in 23 feet of water; hybrid stripers good early on perch; white bass slow; drum good off the bank on shrimp and crawfish.

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Nance, Pg 2

ORVILLE (RED) GRAY who lives in Canyon worked closely with the Nance herd from 1945 to 1953.

In the early 1950s, BRYANT STROUP,

DECEASED, and sons: DONNIE STROUP AND LARRY STROUP and daughter, GLENDA ANDERSON WHO LIVES IN Canyon all worked for the Nances. JIM RILEY was the manager in 1951. HOWARD

MILLER, who lives near Fort Worth, was manager in 1953. LOWELL HILL lives in Amarillo now. He worked on the Ranch 1952 to 1954. PERCY HAWTHORNE, deceased and whose wife, Reathal, lives in Canyon, worked

in the early 1950s along with his brother, JAMES HAWTHORNE. James lives in Canyon now. TOM HENRY lives at Happy and was working on the Ranch when Mr. Nance died in 1954.

The festivities will begin at 5 pm. The top money-winner Shepard Cunningham Chuckwagon will cater the Bar B Q meal and reservations must be in by Sept. 1. The free

Fiddlers Festival will be inside the air-conditioned barn where visitors will be able to visit with the Cowboys and listen to the music.

(By the Canyon News)

Abilene, Texas, angler recalls bass fishing 'moment'

By DANNY REAGAN
Abilene Reporter-News

ABILENE— All anglers live for moments.

My fishing partner Ron lives to see a huge largemouth hit his buzzbait rippling across the still waters of a secluded cove.

The explosion tickles his soul.

I live to be on a submerged point of land where the white bass are likely to congregate while the sun comes up as a squashed, bright red ball, spilling a crimson stripe along the water.

Where suddenly that water boils all around the boat with shad somersaulting a half foot into the air to escape their pursuers.

It goes back to childhood.

When my grandfather dragged me out of bed at the Possum Kingdom cabin to accompany him while it was still dark to a place he knew "they'd be at."

Where the gulls waited as well, proving him right once again.

Where you could throw any thing at the voracious sandies and they would gobble it up. Where that moment

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Ag biotechnology stirs debate over ethics, controls

By KEITH SCHNEIDER
c. 1994 N.Y. Times News

EAST LANSING, Mich. — A genetically altered tomato and a genetically engineered cow hormone are on the market, each winning federal approval after years of scrutiny.

But other new products are likely to have a much easier journey to the grocery store. The Clinton administration is planning to give the agricultural biotechnology industry broad authority to market most genetically engineered crops without intensive government review.

To the delight of biotechnology executives, President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore are enthusiastic about the technology; they consider it largely harmless but with huge economic potential.

Some scientists, however, including a number here at Michigan State University, one of the nation's leading centers of agricultural research, dissent from that view.

Two Michigan State scientists have called aspects of the government's work on regulating the crops of the 21st century scientifically inadequate.

Dr. Gus A. de Zoeten, the chairman of the botany and plant pathology department, and Dr. Richard Allison, a plant virologist, say that a broad class of the gene-altered crops — those engineered to resist viral diseases — may be more risky than the government believes and should not be exempted from federal oversight, as the Clinton plan proposes.

The Michigan State scientists also say that the government has not supported enough research to assess the risks of genetically engineered plants, and that in the absence of clear scientific data federal agencies are relying too heavily on the opinions of experts.

"Everybody has a stake in this area of plant

research," said de Zoeten. "The companies have billions of dollars invested in new crop varieties. Scientists at the agricultural universities are working closely with these companies, and they have an interest in seeing that the technology is successful. My stake is to have scientists lead the way in doing the research on safety and not just to base their opinions on what they think will happen."

Many consumers, too, are uneasy about the new techniques. In February, a genetically engineered dairy hormone intended to increase milk production in cows went on sale to farmers, prompting protests in New York, Atlanta, Seattle and other cities about the safety of milk.

The significance of the protests was not lost on Calgene Inc., the biotechnology company that won the Food and Drug Administration's approval to sell a tomato engineered to stay on the vine longer for better taste. Calgene voluntarily sought government review to quell public worries about the safety of the tomato and to smooth its path to the market this summer.

The Clinton administration's proposal for overseeing the new crops essentially follows the hands-off approach to plant biotechnology of the Reagan and Bush administrations, but with two important differences.

Since 1987, depending on the plants being tested, the Department of Agriculture has required companies either to submit applications for field trials involving genetically engineered crops or, more recently, to simply notify the government.

Roughly 2,000 field trials have been conducted without incident in 42 states and Puerto Rico on vegetables, fruits, and grains containing genes from species as diverse as chickens, fish, bacteria and viruses.

Where the Clinton plan differs is that after the field-testing stage, the administration proposes to exempt most of the new crops from federal oversight when they are sold to the public. Virtually the only altered crops the administration wants to watch more closely are those containing bacterial genes that produce a natural defense against insects. Under the plan, the marketing of such pesticidal plants will be regulated for the first time by the EPA under the federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, the nation's pesticide control law. The administration is proposing safety tests for such plants, though precisely what sort of tests has not been decided.

Some scientists who support crop-engineering have criticized the proposed rules as unnecessary. They note that classical plant breeding, which produces the bounty that most Americans take for granted, never came under government regulation. They argue that producing new crop varieties through genetic engineering is just as safe as classical breeding and that any regulation at all of plant genetic engineering could squelch innovation.

"Genetic engineering has provided agriculture with the most important set of tools for making plants resistant to diseases and insects ever discovered," said Dr. Susanne Huttner, a molecular neurobiologist and director of the University of California Systemwide Biotechnology Program.

"If the EPA had been around to regulate crop development 50 years ago, we would not have the remarkable variety and quality of fruits, vegetables and grain we enjoy today."

De Zoeten and Allison of Michigan State disagree with that view. They say the administration's regulatory program is not strict enough, especially for the class of new plants engi-

neered to resist viruses. Allison and a colleague, Ann E. Greene, drove the point home in March, when results of their research were published in the journal *Science*.

The idea of such alterations — first performed in 1986 — was to vaccinate plants by inserting into them pieces of genes from plant viruses. Most scientists considered this safe. They also believed it would enable farmers to reduce the use of chemical pesticides to kill the insects that carried the viruses.

Allison's research, which was jointly sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Monsanto Co., showed that the inserted genes can recombine with natural plant viruses and produce wholly new viruses at a rate higher than had been theorized by experts at the EPA and the Department of Agriculture.

The implication of the research, said Allison, was that engineering plants to be resistant to viruses might lead to entirely new types of viruses that could cause widespread damage to American harvests.

"Before this, everybody assumed there were no or very low risk factors with genetically engineered plants," said Dr. Robert G. Gast, a soil chemist and director of the Agricultural Experiment Station at Michigan State. Dr. de Zoeten, he said, "has had

concerns that this assumption was not necessarily true." Allison's work, he said, "showed specifically it wasn't true."

Allison's paper was disputed in the same issue of *Science* by a team of California researchers, who said he was overestimating the risks. Nevertheless, his conclusions caused a small commotion in the scientific community not only because of the thoroughness of the research but also because of where it occurred.

Dr. Walter R. Fehr, a plant breeder and director of the Biotechnology Program at Iowa State University in Ames is one of a number of top scientists around the country who have expressed support for Michigan State's new spirit of criticism.

"What Michigan State did was a piece of research which allowed them to ask a question that's legitimate," he said. "We are shirking our duty to the public if we do not examine those questions with the

best science we have."

But west of here, in Kalamazoo, Mich., where the Asgrow Seed Company is engineering cucumbers, squash and melons to be viral-resistant, executives worry that the Michigan State paper will prompt the Government to reconsider its view and impose stricter controls on testing and marketing such crops.

"The important question always when you are talking about Government regulation is, What is the danger and what are the consequences of the event if something goes wrong?" said Dr. Hector D. Quemada, a molecular biologist and associate director of vegetable biotechnology at Asgrow, a subsidiary of Upjohn Co.

"The government has looked at the scientific issues connected to viral resistance in plants and concluded they are safe and do not need to be closely regulated. We agree with that assessment."

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Farm-based Grange sees membership dwindle

By BOB BATZ

c. 1994 Cox News Service

DAYTON, Ohio — Virginia Reeder sounds like she's flipping through a family album as she reads aloud the roster of the Community Grange in Centerville.

"This lady has passed away. This man's in a nursing home. This couple has retired to Florida," said Reeder, a Granger since 1922.

For many years, local Granges, with their commitment to farm, family and the flag, played a major role in the annual Montgomery County Fair.

But when this year's 141st fair opens Wednesday at the fairgrounds on South Main Street, members of only one Grange — Community — will be showing their stuff.

The Grange, once America's largest and most influential fraternal farm organization, has fallen on hard times.

Ohio, which boasted 630 Granges with 42,000 members as recently as 1981, now has 441 with about 21,000 members.

During that same span, Montgomery County has gone from nine Granges with 500 members to six with about 225 members.

"It's dying," said Spring Valley's Lewis Northern, deputy master of the Montgomery County Grange.

"And it will continue to go down the hill until we start getting young people enthused about the Grange. There are people out there who don't have the foggiest idea of what the Grange is all about."

Reeder, 84, isn't sure how long her chapter will survive.

"Once, we had more than a hundred active mem-

bers, but now we thank our lucky stars if we get 10 to a meeting," she said.

She was 11 when she joined the youth group of the Community Grange. Members would meet in the Washington Twp. Hall — adults in one room for lectures, children in another singing songs and doing skits.

"It used to be that voices filled the hall, and they were strong, loud voices," Reeder said. "But now our meetings are more like a whimper."

Art Long, a member of the Montgomery County Fair board of directors, blames the decline on the Grange's failure to adjust to changing times.

"The Grange has a program it has never updated, and as a result, few young people are involved because the organization has nothing to offer them," said Long, 82, a member of the Grange for 49 years.

The decline began in the 1970s, when the farming life began to disappear.

Today, Montgomery County has fewer than 900 farms, down from 1,020 in 1989, according to the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

Even though there are 26 Granges in five Miami Valley counties — Montgomery, Darke, Preble, Miami and Greene — some have only a handful of members. Most, having abandoned their Grange halls to cut costs, meet in churches and schools.

In Preble County, still heavily agricultural, five Granges have a combined membership of fewer than 200.

The Bellbrook Grange, one of the more active units in the Dayton area, has 80 members.

The Madison Grange still maintains its hall at 302 W. Main St. in Trotwood.

"The decline in membership has been a gradual thing," said Glen T. Nelson, Madison's acting master. "If we're to survive, we need more people in the 30-to-50 age group because most of our current members are in their 70s and 80s."

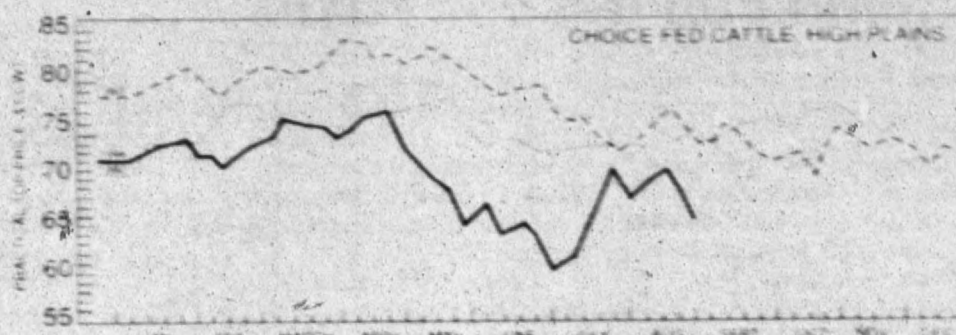
Samantha Mercer, 26, is one of the few exceptions. She joined the Bellbrook Grange when she was 13.

"For our family, the Grange was a way to spend some time with each other," said Mercer, who's in charge of programs for the local organization.

To attract younger participants, the Grange

accepts members who don't have farm backgrounds, according to Howard

Zimmerman, deputy member of the Ohio master of Miami State Grange executive board.



Courtesy Texas Cattle Feeders Association, Amarillo

Choice fed cattle, High Plains

The above report reflects market activity through Apr. 1.

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West Texas:

Some call it 'Lost Texas'

By MIKE COCHRAN
Associated Press Writer

"For all purposes of human habitation — except it might be for a penal colony — those wilds are totally unfit." — U.S. Army explorer W.B. Parker, 1854.

"They show no pictures of my province or even of neighboring provinces," — Author Jim Corder, writing about his childhood home, 1988.

JAYTON, (AP) — A century and a half ago, an Army explorer stumbled onto a hauntingly remote and desolate chunk of Texas prairie and was not much impressed.

W.B. Parker branded the hills and plains "inhospitable" and declared:

"Destitute of soil, timber, water, game, and everything else

that can sustain or make life tolerable, they must remain as they are, uninhabited and uninhabitable."

He vowed never to return, except in memory, "and then in reminiscences too painful far to be pleasant."

A giant, jagged rectangle between the skyscrapers of Dallas to the east and the fertile High Plains of Lubbock to the west, the land Parker visited was eventually settled but rarely boomed.

Bypassed by major highways and only fitfully romanced by King Cotton or Big Oil, it remains today a region with little population or prosperity and even less political clout.

With no name or identity of its own, it often is overlooked or ignored even by other Texans.

"We're really kind of stepchildren here," says Micky Parker, the librarian in Jayton, population 638.

Joy Cave, a Guthrie schoolteacher, put it this way: "We don't belong to anybody. We belong to ourselves."

So where is "here?" Certainly it is well west of Fort Worth, where the West purportedly begins, and north of Interstate 20, which stretches from Fort Worth to Midland-Odessa and beyond.

It's also south of the

Red River that borders Oklahoma and just to the east of the geological phenomenon known as the Caprock that marks the Texas High Plains.

By circumstance, not choice, it is an ill-defined territory, relentlessly raw and decorated by hard-scrabble farms and ranches and small and struggling towns.

To be sure, there are more inhospitable and less populous areas of Texas, such as Big Bend, the Permian Basin or even the Badlands west of the Pecos.

But those places compensate. The Big Bend has mystique, beauty and a national park. The Permian has deep, rich oil fields. And the Badlands has history and Hollywood.

Some will argue that "here" is the Rolling Plains, but that never stuck. A few from "here" might attach themselves to the "Big Country" to the south around Abilene, but that's stretching things a bit.

Worse yet, some folks in the Big Country even want to change that name to the "Texas Midwest."

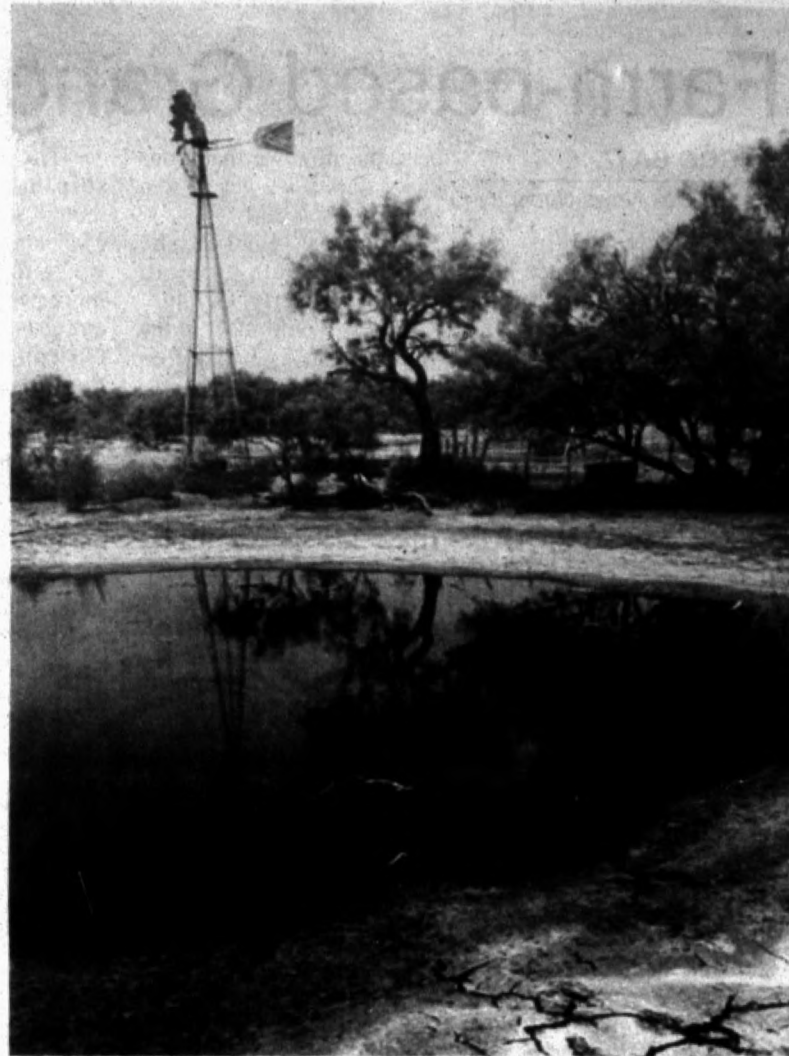
A true map of "here" probably would include all or large parts of Dickens, King, Knox, Kent, Stonewall, Fisher, Foard, Cottle and Motley counties and bits and pieces of Scurry, Jones, Garza, Haskell and Borden.

That's roughly 8,500 square miles, an area larger than the whole of Rhode Island, Delaware and Connecticut.

The largest town is Hamlin, population 2,788. Most are under 1,000.

In all, less than 25,000 people live in this phantom state within a state, many on small farms and larger ranches where the earth yields too few crops and a relative trickle of Texas crude.

"The Big Empty," native son



PURE WEST TEXAS: Windmill provides oasis for cattle on a ranch between Aspermont and Jayton.

Jim Corder jokes.

"I'm always looking for West Texas or my part of it, and not finding it," writes Corder in "Lost in West Texas," a whimsical and charming book that deals largely with his nameless homeland.

"My part of West Texas doesn't show up much in books," thus leaving a "hole" in Texas, he grumbles.

"They miss the strange and lonesome beauty: the view one

sees of the Double Mountains down the Salt Fork from the highway bridge between Swenson and Jayton; the first dramatic drop into the deep of the Croton Breaks..."

An English professor at Texas Christian University, Corder was born near Jayton, but even he cannot pinpoint the boundaries of his province. "It just doesn't have any identity, except in the minds of the people who live there," he told a reporter recently.



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