

Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Program
Class XV, John Locke #16
Session 3 Austin, TX
January 17-21, 2017

“Leadership, Legislation, Laws.”

Tuesday January 17th, 2017

Gathering at Camp Mabry in Austin Texas just before noon on Tuesday January 17, it was great to be back in the company of our cohorts. With the two previous TALL sessions under our belts, we have learned that it is no longer a matter of whether or not we will have a great experience, but it is a matter of how much our horizons will be broadened when we are together.

During our first stop at Camp Mabry the old adage that it's not what you know but who you know was proven once again. One of our cohorts, Patrick Dudley, through his involvement with the Texas Department of Agriculture, was able to get us a special meeting with Moses West. Moses is a very interesting entrepreneur adapting an amazing technology to a seemingly imminent problem in the world we live in.

Atmospheric Water Generation were three words few of us had probably ever heard strung together before our Austin session. Moses and his partner Joey Estrada are utilizing patented technology to pull moisture from the very air we breathe and convert it into clean, filtered potable water. Speaking to a group of agricultural advocates such as ourselves, Moses did an outstanding job of relating how his technology can feasibly help solve the problem of an impending lack of water. Moses stated that a certain percentage of the electricity produced in the United States every year virtually goes up in smoke and cannot be utilized. Using only 10 to 15% of that wasted electricity every year to run many of Moses's atmospheric water generation units would produce over 400 trillion gallons of water that can be used for many different things, such as recharging our aquifers. Considering the efficiency of the AWG technology and the scope of its practical use, from aquifer recharging, to providing all potable water needs to a military forward operating base, I am sure that we will continue to see much more of Moses West and his team in the future.

After a nice lunch at camp Mabry, we checked into our hotel and made our way across to our beautiful Texas State Capital building. Our first session entitled “Legislative Overview” was presented by Mr. Joe Cox and Ms. Christina Cornejo, both of Texas A & M Agrilife. Mr. Cox encouraged us to keep in mind that government only works as long as citizens are engaged with those who govern, and that to be productive citizens we must task ourselves with being a part of the process. The beauty and simplicity of our state government is that lawmakers only meet for 142 days every other year, are payed approximately \$6000 per year, and they must have a “real” job where they go home and “keep one foot in the real world” while working for and interacting with their constituents. Our state law requires that a budget be passed every session, and we are one of only 5 states that still has a biannual legislative session. Mr. Cox and Ms. Cornejo provided us with a much better understanding of how Texas State government works and it seemed a very fitting presentation starting session 3 in Austin.

Next, we had the pleasure of hearing from Kyle Kacal, an energetic Texas State Representative from District 12, concerning Agricultural Priorities for the current legislative session. Kyle did a great job of explaining and reinforcing the fact that the huge majority of representatives and

senators not only have no connection to agriculture, but that they also have very little understanding of our industry. Our involvement in advocating for agriculture as well as encouraging others in our industry to tell our stories is paramount due to our voice being so small. One of Kyle's crowning achievements in his short career in the Texas House was the passing HB 2311 which pertains to Animal ID. A great example of how our industry coming together and finding strength to encourage our non-ag counterparts to pass a bill for the protection of animal agriculture, Mr. Kacal shared that lawmakers found it impossible to oppose and even question a bill that was supported by TSCRA, Texas Cattle Feeders, Texas Beef Council, and every other heavy hitting Texas Cattle organization in the state. Mr. Kacal closed out his session with a great question and answer format and discussion about issues facing producers today.

The honorable Ryan Guillen, State Representative District 31, and also a personal friend of cohort Ramon Martinez, started out by telling a great story about Ramon serving as a childhood deer hunting guide entrusted to oversee Ryan shooting a spike. One thing led to another, and due to either a poor quality rifle scope, poor marksmanship, or a combination of both, Ryan managed to shoot a very nice eight pointer. Needless to say, Ramon's deer guiding career took a different trajectory than Ryan's political aspirations.

Mr. Guillen then continued his session by discussing how the state's appropriation process works, and how the state may be facing a \$6 billion shortfall the next biennium. With the possibility of public education dominating this legislative session, Ryan also discussed priorities such as property rights, due in large part to the logistics of possibly building a border wall, bond election reform, dark money reform, and voter ID. Finally, Mr. Guillen finished by educating us on the Hazelwood act and how it relates to fighting crime and border security.

Next, we were very fortunate to hear from Jason Fearneyhough, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture for our great state. Mr. Fearneyhough was very engaging, entertaining, and did a great job of conducting a discussion of current issues facing Ag producers today. It was nice to not only have Jason point out issues that were on TDA's radar, but to have Jason ask for our feedback and feelings on those issues. Guest worker programs, labor issues, regulation and apparent overregulation, challenges and opportunities, were all issues that we discussed in depth. It is easy to see that Mr. Fearneyhough not only has a firm grasp on how our political system works, but he also has a deep understanding of many of the big picture issues facing Agriculture today.

Following Mr. Fearneyhough, we had the honor of learning from the Honorable John Raney, State Representative from District 14. Mr. Raney spoke about Appropriations, Budget Transparency and Reform, Higher Education and Priorities for the 85th Legislative session, sharing very practical views about the way our state government works and ways it should be improved. One point I found interesting was that Mr. Raney felt it was probably a necessary thing at this point for the state to raise taxes, but that the political climate and the opportunity most likely would not allow it at this time. Our country's infrastructure and roadways deserve most of the credit for the movement of goods and services and the growth that we often see in our economy. A common theme that we heard often throughout our time in the capital, also strongly shared by Mr. Raney, was that Texas has not allocated an appropriate amount of money to transportation and infrastructure maintenance and improvement. If something is not done to secure more funding for our transportation system in the near future it may begin to negatively affect commerce.

Representative Raney also compelled us to get involved in the legislative process, building relationships with our congressmen, and being an advocate for our industries. In his words, when it comes to the political process, “if you sit on the sidelines, you get what you deserve”. As individuals, if we had not thought about getting involved and making sure our voices were heard before this trip, we definitely were given plenty of opportunities to consider it during Session 3.

Wrapping up our afternoon sessions, we visited with Mrs. Blair Fitzsimmons and Joey Park with the Texas Agricultural Land Trust. We learned that conservation easements are widely misunderstood by most people, and that while they can be as complicated as a person wishes to make them, they are just one more tool to help Farmers and Ranchers stay on their land and stay in business. There are many land trusts in the country, but we learned that what makes TALT different from most is that it specifically geared towards farming and ranching. Most other land trusts seem to be run by activists, and their idea of preserving land is keeping livestock and farming practices as far away from the property as possible. Independent studies have shown that Texas is losing Agricultural land at one of the fastest rates in the country, up to 2,000,000 acres every ten years. Hopefully the Texas Agricultural Land Trust and entities like it will continue to help ensure that Ag lands are protected for future generations.

To completely close out our first day, a nice dinner was sponsored by Texas Beef Council at Uncle Julio's. Having close ties to the Texas Beef Council and having participated in their “Texas Stories” project, I am familiar with their mission but learned even more about what they do from their Executive Vice President Mr. Richard Wortham. Over supper, Mr. Wortham spoke to us about the Beef Checkoff and the various programs and activities that TBC initiates and oversees promoting Texas Beef. Uncle Julio's and Mr. Wortham were both a nice close to the day, and a prelude to the night time socialization often enjoyed by our cohorts.

We spent the rest of the evening having a few cocktails, telling stories, laughing, and getting to know each other better, retiring in plenty of time (for some) to be well rested for Wednesday's session.

Wednesday January 18th, 2017

Bright eyed and ready to continue our journey learning more about the inner workings of our state government, Representative Trent Ashby kicked things off at 8am. Representing district 57, Mr. Ashby is a member of the appropriations committee as well as the natural resources committee, and he is another rural ally who understands the plight of agriculturalists. Educating us on how the committee process works, Mr. Ashby explained that at the beginning of the session, representatives fill out committee preference cards for which of the 28 total committees they wish to serve on. The number one committee requested is the natural resources committee, which deals with water.

With up to 1000 people per day moving to Texas, and most of them moving to urban areas, Trent spoke to us about how necessary it is for the agriculture community to elect leaders who know how to maintain allies on the urban and suburban side of the equation. With that in mind, water again became the focal point of our conversation. Considering our need for water, Mr. Ashby believes management of groundwater, as well as dealing with other problems, are best dealt with on a regional or local level. With the state owning surface water and citizens owning groundwater, and a growing struggle between urban areas and rural areas for water, Representative Ashby also believes that groundwater and technology hold the key to solving our water issues.

With a one hour break between sessions, we were allotted time to visit with our representatives. Unfortunately, my state representative Phil Stephenson, as well as my senator Lois Kolkhurst, were both out of their offices. I took advantage of the opportunity to visit with their staffers and deliver invitations for the night's reception. It was great to make a personal contact with their offices, and I know that this is the reason we were given the opportunity. Simply learning how to navigate the capital and finding our congressmen's offices is a step in the right direction to becoming more involved.

Returning to our State Capital committee room and rejoining the rest of the group, the chair of the Texas Railroad Commission, Mrs. Christy Craddick, gave us a great overview of her job and the role of the commission. With three commissioners and the chair rotating between the three, the Railroad Commission is the second oldest commission in the state. One of the most common questions asked about the commission pertains to its name. During the oil boom of the 1920's, most crude was transported on the railroad, so it was decided that the Railroad Commission should take on the role of regulating the oil and gas industry. When the railroad was deregulated in the 1980s, the railroad left but oil and gas, surface mining, and pipelines stayed. One of the things that left an impression on me the most about Mrs. Craddick's talk, was that contrary to popular belief, a fee based commission with 680 employees, the agency appears to strive to create a favorable environment for the oil and gas industry. We learned about the evolution of new technologies and many challenges facing the commission and the state. With oil and gas making up 30 to 40% of the Texas economy, the importance and necessity of the Railroad Commission is unmistakable.

After a short walk to the First United Methodist Church, we attended the Texas Ag Council meeting. The Ag Council meets every Wednesday during the legislative session, and is made up of representatives from 30+ Ag organizations. The purpose of the council is not to take stances on policy but to educate and provide a forum for open discussions about policy. We had the opportunity to formally introduce ourselves to the group, and as usual Dr. Jim did an outstanding job of speaking about and soliciting support for the TALL program. Lee Chastain was in attendance from TALL XIV, and he showed the video presentation from their international trip to Europe. Lunch with Ag council was another opportunity to network, make new connections, and visit about issues we are all facing these days.

Wednesday afternoon gave us our first opportunity to be a part of TALL Alumni board meeting. I can say that we weren't exactly up to speed on what takes place at an Alumni meeting, but it was a great opportunity to get our feet wet. At the conclusion of the meeting, before it was necessary to get ready for the reception, we visited with many of the alumni and spent some time in the hotel lobby adding to the "laughs" portion of our experience.

Traveling a short distance to the Austin club, hor d'oeuvres, fellowship, the chance to make new connections, and honoring great agriculturalists made for an enjoyable TALL reception Wednesday night. "A Tribute to Texas Leadership" was the theme of the night. After Dr. Jim set the stage for the program, Chancellor John Sharp offered a welcome and great entertainment while introducing State Comptroller Glen Hegar. Mr. Hegar gave the keynote address, highlighting the greatness of our state and the credit Agriculture deserves for our state and our nation's success.

Following Mr. Hegar's remarks, we went through or TALL XV introductions. For many of us, completing introductions and having the chance to publicly thank those in attendance for their support of the TALL program is usually the crowning achievement of the night.

Receiving the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Distinguished Alumnus Award, was Mrs. Jennifer Yezak. She is the chief of staff in the office of the assistant secretary for administration with USDA. With an unwavering dedication to Texas Agriculture, Mrs. Yezak has represented us on the state and national stage for more than 32 years.

Also honored at the reception was Mr. Bob Stallman, receiving the Texas Agriculture Lifetime Achievement Award. Presented by Mr. Jim Prewitt, TALL Foundation Board chairman, this award was given in honor of Mr. Stallman's many years of service to Texas and American Agriculture. Having led the Farm Bureau federation for 16 years, testifying before the U.S. House and Senate over 40 times in relation to issues facing the agricultural community, and serving as chairman of the board of the American Agricultural Insurance Company, this was not the first time Mr. Stallman has been honored by a distinguished institution or association.

Overall, this "Tribute to Texas Leadership" was a beautiful event, at a first class venue, with many dignified attendees. The opportunity to mingle with the people who attend TALL events and support the program is an opportunity that is not taken lightly. I was impressed that as a result of delivering my state representative an invitation that morning, and visiting with one of his staffers briefly, was enough to entice him to attend the reception and find out more about the TALL program.

Thursday, January 19th, 2017

After breakfast and our now familiar brief walk to the capital building, we kicked off Thursday morning with Mr. Todd Staples, president of the Texas Oil and Gas Association. The Texas Oil and Gas Association is the oldest trade association in the state of Texas. Mr. Staples did a great job of relaying the mission and theory of the O and G association, in that they believe that we should let free markets work and let consumers have the power to choose the products and technology that they support. Mandates usually disrupt markets and do not work. The oil and gas industry also understands the need for regulation but believes that regulation should be science based and applied evenly to all players in a sector.

As someone who is involved in animal agriculture, an interesting point offered by Mr. Staples was that the playbook of the anti-ag crowd is almost the exact same as that employed by the anti-oil and gas activists. Mr. Staples told us that www.txoga.org has a section called Myth vs Fact that lists many of the misconceptions about the industry. In closing, Todd asked us to strive to always do what's right for everyone involved and great things will happen, as well as encouraging us to become involved in our state's transportation policy.

Next, Texas Land Commissioner and son of Jeb Bush, George P. Bush spoke about the General Land Office of Texas. In 1836, all veterans of the Texas War for Independence were deeded a parcel of land, which created the need for the formation of the Texas Land Office. The first time the word "Texas" was actually officially recorded was in the archives of the land board. Overseeing State Lands, administering to Texas veterans, and maintaining the Alamo, all fall under the auspices of the General Land Office. Mr. Bush spoke at length about the challenges of maintaining the Alamo, Texas's number one tourist attraction. Texas's most famous building is in dire need of restoration as well as improving the environment and property surrounding the site, to the tune of approximately \$300 million. No definitive plan to restore the Alamo has been adopted yet, but it is a problem that Mr. Bush and the Land Office will have to address in the very near future.

In almost every session we attended, the recent national election was mentioned as well as what possibly may take place under a Trump presidency. Mr. Eric Opiela shared fascinating data with us concerning the election and Mr. Trump's ascendancy to the presidency in a presentation entitled "Rural America Strikes Back". Mr. Opiela made a great case for how it was rural America making the difference in 2016. One of the most impressive parts of his presentation were visuals he called "skew maps" that distorted the geographic appearance of state's sizes to make them relate to different figures, such as electors, population, etc.

Donald Trump managed to win the presidency because he played to the margins, using stats and data from a marketing guru named Brad Parscale from San Antonio. The wage gap between rural and urban folks is massive, and the fact that rural Americans have been largely ignored by both political parties in recent elections, means that Trump was able to play on rural America's frustrations and garner record turnouts. The final interesting fact shared by Mr. Opiela was that if Texas ever falls to the Democrat party (not completely impossible considering the politics of the 1000 plus people moving to the state every day), it will be impossible for a republican to be elected president. Our class was fascinated with Mr. Opiela's presentation and thankfully he left plenty of time for questions and answers.

Executive director of the Texas Department of Transportation, Mr. James Bass echoed what some of our previous speakers shared about transportation being the backbone of our state economy. Maintaining 53,000 bridges, 3,400 miles of interstate highway, and 195,000 lane miles of highway, TxDOT ensures that our 14 year record of being the number one state in goods exported will stay unchanged in the future. Maintaining a state owned aircraft fleet, a couple of fairies, and general aviation airports also falls under the responsibilities of TxDOT. With 12,000 employees and 25 regional district offices, TxDOT has two main funding sources: State vehicle registration fees, and a state motor fuels tax, which has been 20 cents per gallon since 1991.

Mr. Bass closed out his session discussing possible new technologies we may see in the future that may revolutionize the way we travel and transport goods. Autonomous cars and ideas like the Truck Traffic Freight Shuttle system may have a long way to go to being widely adopted, but there is a good chance these and other technologies will be seen on and around Texas roadways in the future.

Following Mr. Bass, Chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Dr. Brian Shaw visited with us for about 45 minutes. Dr. Shaw relayed that the vision of the TCEQ, the second largest environmental agency in the U.S., is clean air, clean water, and safe disposable waste. Employing 2800 people, 82% of TCEQ's operating income comes from fees with the rest coming from federal funding and the State's general revenue fund. For the most part, the legislature sets fees, and it is still unknown how the new presidential administration will affect environmental policy. According to Dr. Shaw, change in federal policy is not unwelcome, unless it comes with unfunded mandates, which are the enemy of state agencies.

Chief Revenue Estimator for the Comptroller's office, Mr. Tom Currah, delved much deeper into State finances and shared with us how complex and difficult it is to estimate Texas Revenue two years in advance. We spoke about the estimated budget shortfall and how it may affect state agencies and the future budget. There are no doubt many challenges our lawmakers are facing in the near future, but there are many talented individuals involved in guiding us through tough financial times.

The creation of our Texas State Park system dates back to 1923, when avid outdoorsman Pat Neff donated his family ranch to the State on Mother's day, and it was named Mother Neff State Park in honor of Neff's mother. While the State Park System helps steward resources and facilitate outdoor recreation, water seems to be the number one concern of the agency. While most Texans are four or five generations removed from the family farm, data shows that they still deeply care about agriculture and the great outdoors. This is somewhat proven by the fact that 2.5 million people fish Texas waterways every year, 4 million people take part in bird watching activities, and over 8 million people visit State Parks yearly. Texas has a \$16 billion per year outdoor economy, so it is no wonder TPWD employs 3300 people and has a \$450 million annual budget. One of the biggest take-aways of Mr. Carter Smith's overview of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department was that they could not accomplish any of what they do without the cooperation and support of local farmers, ranchers, and land owners. Mr. Smith recognizes that Farmers and Ranchers are the ultimate stewards of the environment.

Before we closed out our sessions in the committee meeting room in the capital, Mary Ludeker of Texas Animal Health Commission relayed the often thankless and very important job that the commission does for Texas Agriculturalists. TAHC exists to insure the marketability of livestock for producers by preventing and managing the spread of diseases that may affect those livestock. In times of crisis or environmental disaster the commission may deal with pets. With a \$22 million budget and 185.2 employees, 13 government appointed commissioners make important decisions on behalf of the commission, and the current chairman of TAHC is none other than my father, Coleman Locke.

The commission currently has many issues that have already had an economic impact on Texas producers with the potential to have a much larger impact. These issues include CWD in deer, and fever ticks in South Texas. Mrs. Ludeker closed out the afternoon with a great question and answer session, and a discussion about how spending cuts from the state and the federal government pose great challenges for agencies like the TAHC that are in place to protect the welfare of our State's citizens.

A fitting close to a very long day, we enjoyed a reception in the Lt. Governor's reception room. Refreshments were provided by the Texas Pork Producers Association and the Texas Poultry federation. After a little good hearted ribbing of each other about being the "other white meat", Mr. James Grimm and Mr. Brandon Gunn both spoke to us about their respective producer organizations. Another fascinating discussion we had the privilege of taking part in was with Mr. Mike Morrissey, Budget Director for the Lt. Governor. Mr. Morrissey is a long time Austin insider who is known as the budget guru.

The final speaker of the night was Mr. Earnest Bailes IV. Participating in his first legislative session during his first term, Mr. Bailes shared with us his journey to becoming a State Representative. Being a TALL alumnus, it was easy to imagine Ernest standing in our shoes a few short years ago and learning about State Government, then throwing his hat in the ring when he heard the calling. After hearing about the process of campaigning, the work that goes into serving, and the time away from family, it is apparent that service to our State and her citizens is not for the faint of heart. Much respect to Mr. Bailes for fighting the good fight and for taking the time to share his experience with us.

With our heads full of much new knowledge and our stomachs full of food and drink, we left the capital for more quality time together and much needed rest for the final two days of our session.

Friday January 20th,2017

At 6:45 am on Friday, the Texas Association of Dairymen sponsored breakfast, and while we ate we learned much more about the dairy industry from one of their members and TALL XII alumnus Mr. Darren Turley. As do many speakers we have the pleasure of listening to, Mr. Turley did an outstanding job of engaging the class and spurring discussions. Cheese has helped grow the Dairy industry substantially the last decade, and the fact that the average American will eat enough pizza in their lives to cover an entire football field has no doubt been a factor in the industry's growth. Dairymen have seen their industry shift geographically recently. Previously having over 400 dairies around the Sulphur Springs area, there are now approximately 400 dairies in the entire state, 80% of which are now based in the Texas Panhandle. It is estimated that over 525 tanker trucks full of milk are on Texas Roadways every day, with whole milk being delivered to a store shelf in as little as two days after it is milked from the cow. With over \$1 billion being invested in their industry, Texas Dairymen have proven that milk is a serious business, and they have a bright future fitting into the agricultural picture of the state.

Following Mr. Turley, Dr. Richard Grant dove into personality type indicators. Administering the Myers Briggs Type Indicator test, Dr. Grant helped us identify our personality preferences, but more importantly we learned about our weaknesses, and how to seek out others who may complement our personalities to help us with problems and completing difficult tasks. It was fascinating how accurate the test seemed to be, even though it was choosing between two answers to 93 questions. Another interesting point was how we should actively work to tailor our presentations to all personality types, to insure that we are not just appealing to a select few in attendance. Naturally, many of the things we learned have an awesome application in the business world, but more importantly to me they can be used to more effectively communicate with our spouses and children.

One of the most interesting parts of the morning was when we were asked to stand in a horseshoe pattern in accordance with what our traits were, and how strong we were for that trait. It was fun to look around the room and see where our cohorts fell in the group, most of them predictably so. When Dr. Grant asked us to group up with those like us and plan events, or describe objects he gave us, it was very interesting to see how the different types completed the tasks and how the level of preferences affected the outcome. Overall, Friday morning was an awesome exercise in getting to know ourselves, but more importantly it should allow us to appreciate more the differences of those around us and how we can more effectively communicate with them.

Upon completing Friday morning's activities, it was lunch on our own and hitting the road for Sonora. We grouped up and traveled together, arriving in town about 5 that evening. The first stop on our West Texas portion of the trip was the Old Sonora Ice House and Ranch Museum. An interesting tribute to the heritage of Sonora, the museum was chock full of interesting artifacts and stories. One of the most noted stories of Sonora's history was the killing of the outlaw Will Carver, a member of Butch Cassidy's wild bunch. Carver was ambushed and killed by Sheriff E.S. Briant and his deputies in the Jack Owens Bakery.

The first highlight of the Sonora trip was dinner at the historic Train Depot and a fascinating keynote speaker in Bob Malone, President and CEO of Sonora Bank and ex executive of BP. Worldly would be a good word to describe Mr. Malone. As a result of his executive experience, Mr. Malone has been in interesting situations and met interesting people throughout his life,

giving him excellent insight into national and world politics. Mr. Malone gave us his honest opinion of “the state of the Union”, and had a candid conversation with us, answering many outstanding questions from our cohorts. From dealing with Vladimir Putin, to sharing the sorts of things he learned about managing, motivating, and communicating with people, Mr. Malone connected with and fascinated each and every one of us. An evening with an esteemed individual such as Mr. Malone in such a quaint setting is an example of something that makes the TALL experience so special.

Saturday, January 21st, 2017

Saturday morning started out with an amazing chuck wagon breakfast at the Sonora Agrilife Research Station. Mr. Doug Tolleson, associate professor, was our first speaker. Giving an in depth overview of his journey to Sonora and the work at the research station, gave us an appreciation for the different environment and management practices in that part of the state. The Sonora Research Station was started in 1916 by four ranchers in their quest to research how to best manage the Sacauista plant. The station serves as the central performance test for Ramboulette Rams and Angora Billies, wildlife and watershed management, and disturbance technology research such as herbivory, drought, and fire. Mr. Tolleson’s motto is to do good work, and let people know about it. He believes in using technology and experiential learning, and putting science into the hands of people who will use it.

Next, Mr. James Tolliver, TALL VII alumnus and COO of the Texas Agricultural Land Trust, reinforced much of what we learned from Mrs. Blair Fitzsimmons about the TALT earlier in the week. Mr. Tolliver and his wife have placed an easement on their family ranch which has been in the family for 135 years. In closing, James did a great job of impressing upon us the impact of what we do and how it has an impact on the environment.

During the next few sessions, we learned about the Sutton County Water Conservation District from Jim Polonis, and much about predation and wildlife management from Mr. Alan Armistead and Stan Cottle. Again, it was very interesting to note the differences in management and the environment in Sutton County.

Dr. Erika Campbell, owner of High Cross Vineyard, was an example of a Sutton County producer whose family is using diversity and all of the tools available to them to make a living off of their farm. Dr. Campbell illustrated how multi-species fit into their production system, using Dorper x Barbadoa cross sheep, cattle, goats, and deer, to manage brush, forbes, grasslands, and of course bring in income. Finally, Dr. Campbell discussed their winery and vineyard business. Encouraging us to drink Texas wine and eat Texas beef, while having the courage to be leaders and taking advantage of educational opportunities that come our way, Dr. Campbell turned the stage over to another TALL alumnus, Mr. Stan Meador. Mr. Meador is the owner of X Bar Ranch and Nature retreat, a business he built from the ground up. Stan shared how he marketed the retreat to get started, and the fact that his goal is to make his guests feel like they are the only people on property while enjoying the great outdoors at X Bar Ranch.

We closed out the day at the Research Station with a discussion about sheep and goats and their place in the livestock industry, followed by a tour of the Sonora prescribed burning research area. Out in the field, it was awesome to see the results of different “treatments” used by researchers at the station. For instance, one area of the landscape had been mechanically cleared of cedars and other brush in 1986, while the next had been burned once every 10 to 12 years, and so on until we reached the area that had been burned every year or two. Proving that

fire is a powerful tool in managing landscape, there was a very stark difference between the areas with very dense brush on the area that had had no recent treatment, to becoming progressively more clear of brush as the treatment intervals were closer together. According to Mr. Tolleson, the Sonora area historically was burned often naturally due to lightning strikes meeting excess fuel buildups. It stands to reason that what we can do management wise these days to mimic the way nature took care of grasslands a century ago would be an effective management strategy.

Finding myself eager to get home to my family while simultaneously not wanting the week to end, we were given the opportunity to unwind before we parted ways by visiting the beautiful J Bar L Ranch and Resort. Starting with a tour of the deer breeding facility, moving to the skeet shooting range, experiencing happy hour and a tour of the J Bar L private airport and Challenger Jet, and then ending with a beautiful supper and great fellowship with our cohorts and sponsors, it is hard to imagine a more perfect end to Session 3. I cannot say enough about the generosity and hospitality of the J Bar L staff and everyone else who made our Austin and Sonora trip possible.

One session away from completing the halfway mark of our TALL experience, it has become very evident that the program is one that will leave an impression on us for the rest of our lives. Every lawmaker, executive, or business owner we have met with has closed their sessions with the phrase, "if you are in town stop by and see us." Or, "if there is anything any one of you needs, just let us know". As many times as we all hear those sorts of things from people we interact with, the sincerity that accompanies it every time we hear it in the TALL program is undeniable. This program has already opened doors for many of us that may have never been opened otherwise. When you couple the contacts we have made, the knowledge we are gaining every session, and the special bond we are forming with our cohorts, TALL XV is shaping up to be an experience with no equal.