

Seth Sowder #19

TALL XVI – Houston Gulf Coast Narrative

### **Media Training – Texas Farm Bureau**

We began TALL XVI Session 5 with media training with Gary Joiner and Julie Tomasik from Texas Farm Bureau. This was a much needed exercise for myself and I thought the delivery from both Gary and Julie was great. We practiced a live interview setting, discussed the pros and cons of live vs taped interviews and setting a good location for the interview. We also covered some aspects of the reporter or interviewer's responsibilities and how to be both respectful and knowledgeable when an opportunity for interview arises.

Julie covered most all of the social media platforms and advised us how to best engage others on social media. We discussed different posts and ranked them on effectiveness of delivery. This was one of my favorite parts of the media training because it generated lots of discussion among the cohort and it was good to listen to Julie's interpretation of each post as well.

### **Meal & Chris Boleman – HLSR**

TALL XVI enjoyed a great evening meal at the Armadillo Palace. The weather was not of the typical Houston type which made the outdoor atmosphere very enjoyable. Chris Boleman spoke to us after the meal and offered up some great facts and behind the scenes info about the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, its history, challenges, etc.

Chris shared the history of the show which started in 1932 and has continued every year with the exception of 1937 because the facilities sustained a fire. One of my favorite facts that Chris shared is the story of George Strait subbing in for a sick Eddie Rabbit! With 2.5 million in attendance over twenty days, HLSR is third behind the Super Bowl and the Presidential Inauguration in term of security risks.

HLSR would not be possible without effective management, leadership and a strong volunteer staff. I was shocked to learn that the show has 35000 volunteers every year and operates on only 120 staff. Eighteen Vice Presidents rotate every three years and numerous committees lead the show to continued success.

Chris shared the challenges of time and space as the most difficult to overcome. Whether a challenge or not, Chris shared the balance of maintaining Agriculture as the mission of HLSR but the need of presenting a community event in the very diverse 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the US.

### **Glueck's Nursery**

Kolaches... need I say more?

The Glueck's shared a very in-depth history of their family history and how they had to make tough succession decisions. I would say that I learned that its not always easy or rosy when it comes to family.

The history behind how the nursery came into existence is an interesting one. I started understanding diversification in this area (which continued on a different level once we listened to Terry Hlavinka). The urban sprawl was causing issues with the family operation of corn and peanuts on rented ground. The land was getting scarce and the future looked bleak, so they transitioned to a 100 acre nursery. The position in the market

intrigued me most. By selling in bulk to larger contractors, the business can transact and deliver quickly. The risk of carryover inventory seems low.

And the Kolaches were awesome!

### **Rice Tec**

Chris Glueck shared with us some history of hybrid seed rice and his work with Rice Tec Inc. I did not expect to hear that the Prince of Lichtenstein owns Rice Tec! This was my first opportunity to see rice in the field and learn about their challenges with pollination. I did not expect to see helicopters as an aid for pollination in this crop.

### **Gertson Farms**

As said before, I really enjoyed getting to see rice production. The equipment on hand to harvest Gertson and Rice Tec acres shocked me. I learned more about irrigation and issues that producers in the area have faced in the past. The dependency on aerial application is certainly greater in rice than in other crops. The diversification of Gertson farms to include aerial services seemed like a great move.

### **Hlavinka Equipment**

Terry Hlavinka shared his business with TALL XVI at his East Bernard location - one of seven Case IH sales and service dealerships owned by the family along the Gulf Coast of TX. I was really blown away by the vision and subsequent diversification that this family has invested in to stay in business. From cattle to equipment to water park, the embrace of population and urban sprawl seems to have capitalized the Hlavinka's when some may have given up or buried their head in the sand and watched their business dry up.

### **Goudeau Farms – JD Hudgins Inc.**

Coleman Locke gave the very interesting history of JD Judgins Inc. The family has been in the Brahman cattle business for 111 years. The original family members immigrated from England to Virginia to Mississippi to Hungerford, TX 3 years after the Alamo. In 1933 – the bull Manso was acquired in a trade with Mrs. Gayle from Francitas, TX. Manso expressed some of the best characteristics in the Brahman line and by 1975 it was estimated that over 75% of registered Brahman cattle contained Manso's bloodline.

JD Hudgins Inc. was formed in 1962 as a parent company with 8 underlying divisions which are the grandchildren of Mr. Hudgins. JD Hudgins Inc. serves as sort of a family owned marketing cooperative that serves the family.

John Coleman Locke toured us through the JD Hudgins show barn and grounds where the family can house bulls and females prior to sale. Each family member pays a commission and board for their stock on site. We also got the opportunity to get up close and personal with one of the Brahman bulls prior to leaving Hungerford.

### **Mark Kubecka – Fish Farm**

The Kubecka fish farm was another first experience for me. I was shocked to learn that the Kubecka's raise over 80,000 fish in their operation. Being able to watch the fish feeding was pretty cool. I expected that channel catfish were raised on the farm, I was surprised that they raise an F1 generation of channel and blue catfish cross. I also thought that fish processing would largely be done by hand; instead the process is automated except the belly cut and filet separation. Just like other farm operations, the fish farm sometimes requires constant care, especially during weather extremes.

### **Prasek's Hillje Smokehouse**

TALL XVI had the pleasure of meeting Mike Prasek and tour his facilities. Mike makes some awesome jerky, sausage, and pork tenderloin. Being able to see the different meat processing operations and his own personally designed smokehouse was a real treat.

Prasek's has expanded into grocery markets and also into the cruise market with a recent purchase from Royal Caribbean. The last part of the tour was a free for all in the store, I left with almost one of everything!

### **Port of Houston Authority and Tour**

The Port of Houston is the number 1 port for international waterborne tonnage and also the number 1 port for petroleum, steel and project cargo. The Port represents 20.6% of the GDP for Texas. Over 6000 trucks enter the terminals on a daily basis. Of the 200 terminals in the port of Houston, 9 are owned by Houston Port Authority.

HPA requires the highest level of security – 40 police officers, 3 security officers, 6 port officers and 120 contract security officers as well as 50 firefighters are on staff.

Truck drivers are required to have identification on them to enter the grounds.

The main challenge for the Port of Houston is the channel's depth and width for larger vessels to travel further inland and access more terminals. This is estimated to be a \$1 Billion project to address. Other challenges are dredging, which roughly costs \$281 million per 1 foot of sedimentation removal.

Some markets of interest are fruits and vegetables and developing relationships with Latin American companies to use the port of Houston.

It was really entertaining to watch the containers being loaded onto vessels. Everything seemed so efficient.

### **Sysco Corporation**

TALL XVI met with several VPs of Sysco Corporation, which started in Houston, TX in 1969 as a food service company. The company today is global – reaching to Europe Mexico and Canada just to name a few. Sysco focuses on their customers as the number one priority and they have a "best of the best" "never satisfied" mentality that has helped them expand with their multitude of brands to meet each customer's needs and desires.

### **Greater Houston Partnership**

Jeffrey Blair presented the Greater Houston Partnership and its development and impact on the 11 counties surrounding Houston. Its mission is to make Houston the best place to live, work, and build business. I was surprised that the partnership is privately funded by ranging membership dues and has a 30 year history. Jeffrey shared some interesting facts about Houston that the Partnership has undoubtedly had an impact in helping create or facilitate both foreign and domestic. Houston is home to 90 foreign consulates, 19 foreign banks and 1.3 million corporate jobs. Houston is known as the energy capital of the world and the third coast for life sciences.

### **Cheniere Energy**

Matt Barr, Director of Government and Public Affairs discussed Cheniere Energy and its interesting position in the export Liquid Natural Gas industry. Cheniere was the first company to open an export facility for LNG in the continental US. The process for liquifying natural gas is very interesting. Natural gas undergoes a supercooling process, in which the natural gas shrinks in volume 600 to 1. This also provides a safe state to store and ship natural gas. The LNG undergoes a regasification process once the shipment arrives at its destination. Cheniere has sold 650 cargoes to 32 different countries.

### **Houston Police Department – Ride Along**

The ride along was an awesome experience. Although we didn't get to fight crime quite like I had planned Officer Rashid and I enjoyed our time together. Since the night was a little slow I was able to meet and visit with some of the other officers on the shift. I also learned a few new traffic laws that I was previously unaware of. I have always respected law enforcement personnel, but that respect grew once I actually spent time with an officer on the street. It is truly an experience that I will not forget and I am so glad that TALL afforded me the opportunity.