

Lance Gilliland #9

Session # 7

January 17 – January 21, 2022

EAST TEXAS AGRICULTURE

“PRODUCTION, PRODUCERS, PROGRESS”

Well, we all meet again, this time in a new year but in a different place, East Texas. It's a little hard to believe that we have already passed two new years as a TALL cohort. We all will be a TALL alumnus before long. It has been a great two years even though it was a challenge because of the covid pandemic. Thankful the covid is now over and we can get on like normal.

This session started off no different than the last six, a reunion of sorts, visiting with our fellow cohorts since the last time most of us have seen each other since the California trip. After we all checked in to the hotel in Tyler, Texas, we gathered and we car-pooled to Rozell Manufacturing, owned, and operated by TALL XII Alumnus, Darren Rozell. Daren is also the immediate past chairman of BET, Build East Texas. Upon arriving, we were welcomed by several folks to include TALL Alumni, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension/Research faculty, and East Texas Agricultural leaders from the area. As we visited over a few drinks, it was time for the group to sit down and enjoy an awesome ribeye steak dinner, might have been one of the best steaks I had ever eaten. As we ate, Daren shared a little about his business and his role in the Agricultural industry. Rozell Manufacturing was started by Daren's family and Daren took over the role as owner and operator. They are specialized in manufacturing spray rigs to handle any size of operation. In addition, they sell all fertilizers and chemicals such as round-up and other herbicides. Before ending the evening, we listened to a few more speakers who talked about their respective careers or how they are involved with agriculture.

A good night's sleep is exactly what everyone needed to endure the rest of the week's itinerary.

On Tuesday morning, we met in the lobby for breakfast and to load the bus. Our first stop of the day was to Cavender's corporate office. Cavender's is a family-owned western store, currently with 93 stores across Texas. Joe, Mike, and Clay Cavender, brothers, each share a role in operating the day-to-day operations of the family business. All their wives also play a very important role of the operation as well. Although, all the Cavender's were out on business, we still had a very important gentleman speak to us about the Cavender's corporation. Mr. Larry Waterman, COO of the company gave us a very enlightening overview of the company; where they have been, where they are going, and where they want to go. Not only are they heavily

invested in the western wear business, they also own Cavender Family Ranches, which is a seedstock and commercial cow/calf operation. I didn't catch the number of acres they operate on, but it must cover a very large area. Their cattle inventory consists of 600 registered Brangus cattle, 150 registered Charolais cattle, and approximately 2000 head of commercial cattle, majority of these being Brangus sprinkled with a few F-1 tiger stripes. Cavender Family Ranches is a big-time operation that stays on the very top of the cattle industry in all aspects, registered and commercial.

While this was a very interesting stop, it was time to move on to the next stop, The Tyler Rose Garden. We unloaded the bus and walked into the garden to meet the head gardener; I believe he has a formal title, but I will call him the master gardener. The Tyler Horticulture Industry is a big industry. Most of all the plants we all see in the Home Depot and Lowes stores come from out in the East Texas area. Greg Grant, master gardener and Smith County Horticulturist for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is an expert of all plants. We toured the Rose Garden and listened to Greg while he gave us a good lesson about Horticulture. The Rose Garden appears to be a pretty place especially in the spring when all the roses and other plants are in full bloom.

Got to keep moving so we don't get behind schedule, we loaded the bus and traveled to John Soules Foods. It was also lunch time, so we gathered in the conference room for sandwiches and a presentation about John Soules Foods. Lance Young (must be an outstanding gentleman with a name like Lance) has been the head of research and development for 16 years. Lance is also a formally trained chef having worked as a chef before starting at John Soules Foods. Here at John Soules Foods, they specialize in grilled fajitas, both chicken and beef as well as breaded beef and chicken products like steak fingers and chicken tenders. After we finished up our sandwich lunch, Chad the plant manager and another employee took us on a tour of the facility in two groups. We were able to see the beginning to the end of the manufacturing process of beef and chicken fajitas. The breaded lines are at other facilities. It was very interesting to see this production and to know that some of the finished products are delivered to major grocery stores and restaurants like Chili's and On the Border. We went back to the conference room where we met Tom Ellis who serves as the COO of John Soules Foods. I was surprised to learn that the company began in 1975 and is family owned started by John Soules, Sr. As John's sons, John Soules Jr. and Mark Soules were old enough they began learning the family trade to eventually take it over and run it. The Tyler plant was original constructed in 1996 and currently employs about 1000 people. In 2014, they opened the Georgia plant and the Alabama plant in 2021.

Next on the schedule was a stop at Custom Beef and JT2 restaurant. Jason Taylor is the owner of this entity which is a meat market and restaurant combined. Jason was unable to meet with us due to having Covid, but his cattle manager, Cody Cross and general manager of the meat market/restaurant, Peter Wilkerson gave the presentation. Cody gave us the history and the background of Jason Taylor. He has a very strong background in analytics and entrepreneurial ventures. When he started in the cattle industry, he wanted to maximize the most exposure

possible of his cattle as he could, so that's when the idea of taking his annual calf crop all the way to the end-user, farm to fork. He did not see the benefit in selling his calves as weanlings just to let someone else make the money. To get started, he had to buy loads of 6-8 weights to finish out until he had his calf crop old enough to get his own processed. His ranch is 1100 acres where he has about 300 head of adult cows to enable him to keep 200-250 in his feeder operation to finish out. His typical finish weight is 1150 lbs. and will process 2-3 head per week. Jason is targeting both the walk-in traffic at about 1/3 the sales and about 1/2 the sales is on-line. The remainder is sold in his two restaurants. While we were listening to Cody and Peter, we were served samples of the steaks he sells as well as some great appetizers. Very good, too bad we didn't have lunch at this place.

To wrap up the evening, we attended a social and reception honoring the TALL XVII cohort. It was planned and provided by BET "Build East Texas". Such a wonderful reception with a delicious chicken Fried Steak dinner. Several people were presented with achievement awards that were well-deserved. Trey Johnson, Trey Johnson Leadership and Development Ministries, was the key-note speaker. He gave a very inspiring speech with words of wisdom that will stick with me forever. One of his quotes that he said which has stuck in my mind and something that I will always remember and live by is "Value Yesterday, Live Today, Reach for Tomorrow. I plan to find him at one of his conferences to attend. I would recommend anyone to attend one of his events. I can guarantee he will move you, I know I was moved.

It's Wednesday, we made it to the middle of the week, kind of sad in a way because this session is almost over. Before departing from the hotel, we met in the hotel conference room for a presentation about how to manage feral hogs. Dr Jamie Sugg, County Extension Agent for Rusk County. Dr. Suggs gave us a crash course in dealing with pests known as feral hogs. When dealing with hogs, he said you must know the enemy and know the tools necessary to properly trap the hogs. Trapping hogs is the most effective way to get rid of the hogs but it is no easy task. Hogs are smarter than you think and to be successful you must be smarter than your enemy, which is feral hogs. These pigs will eat anything that contains calories and will cause extreme destruction to get it. The battle is far from over due to their reproduction. Males can start breeding sows at 12-18 months of age while the females can breed as early as 6-12 months of age and the gestation of pigs is 115 days or 3 months 3 weeks 3 days. Wild pigs can have several piglets and have 2-3 litters a year. In addition to trapping, chemical control has been developed and some has been approved by the EPA but not yet have a Texas label, so its not on the market to us at this time. These products are Warfarin, Sodium Nitrate, and contraceptives. Hopefully, one of these days soon, these products will become available to the public and we can finally eradicate the destructive pests known as feral hogs.

It was now time to load up in personal vehicles to travel to Nacogdoches with a stop in Troup, Texas to tour Altman Nurseries, Inc. When we arrived to the 63-acre facility, Tom and Braxton welcomed us to begin our tour. Tom is one of four growers that is assigned to a certain area within the facility. Braxton is the technical services manager. Altman Nurseries bring in plants from 42 states to then ship out to their customers. At times, they will ship 30-semi trucks a day loaded with approximately 2300 flats of plants resulting in \$1 billion dollars in sales annually.

Next stop for the day was the Stephen F. Austin University beef center for lunch and few speakers for the afternoon. Since we were in the middle of poultry country, I guess it was fitting that we were served an outstanding chicken dinner with all the fixings. The meal was provided to us by Texas Farm Credit along with our host Ricky Thompson, Nacogdoches County Extension Agent. As we all finished up lunch and banana pudding, Ricky began giving a brief overview of the county which has three main agriculture avenues: Timber, Broilers, and Cattle. Next was Dr. Joey Bray with the university Department of Agriculture. It was interesting to learn that the SFA University has 6 areas of study. Within the college of Agriculture, they have 3 departments: Agriculture, Environmental Sciences, and Forestry. David Alders stepped up to speak about the poultry industry. David is a timber producer, broiler grower, and a cattle producer. David put together a very impressive power point presentation about the poultry business detailing how it got started, where it is currently and where it is going in the future. I was shocked to learn that the modern chicken business began in Delaware. In 1923, Mrs. Wilmer Steele expanded her existing egg-laying business to include meat chickens. Later in the fifties, the commercial broiler business began, and it escalated from there. Chicken consumption surpassed pork in the U.S. in 1985 and surpassed beef in 1992. To keep up the chicken demand, there was a need for slaughter plants and today 195 of these plants exists in the United States. Nacogdoches county is home to Pilgrim's Pride which produces the larger bird. They employ 1500 workers and process approximately 1.275 million birds a week. Additionally, the county has 81 broiler farms consisting of a combined 485 houses and 12 breeder farms. Our last speakers to hear from is Will Coffin and Ronald Murdock. These two men are partners in the timber business. Will is also the principal and former Ag. Teacher of Martinsville ISD. Will and his family also farm watermelons. Ronald buys tracts of timber and contracts them to the mills. There are ten timber processing facilities around the Nacogdoches area.

Our next stop which was Texas Farm Products was canceled so we all went to the hotel early to visit with the cohort. After freshening up and having a brief social hour, we went to a local restaurant for supper and our next presenter. Rob Hughes, TALL XVI alumni and Executive Director of The Texas Forestry Association, gave a brief overview of the itinerary for the next couple of days. Rob along with our very own Matt Clifton (TALL XVII) coordinated the Nacogdoches portion of the session. The floor was turned over to Wes Moorehead to speak about Forestry in East Texas. Wes is the East Texas Forestry Operations Department Head with Texas A&M Forest Service. Rob Hughes jumped back in to tell the history of TFA and the

programs available within the association. The presentations from both men were very informative. It was a good evening with an excellent meal and good company.

Thursday was the day I was looking forward to the most, out in the timber to see the forestry industry in motion. Our first stop was supposed to be at a sawmill, but it was cancelled due to once again, the COVID. Our coordinators did a wonderful job making calls to fill in the gaps from cancellations. After a short drive, we arrived at ArborGen Nursery. Here they clean seed to send to landowners and tree planters around the world. They also plant different varieties of pine so that they can provide seedlings with healthy lateral root systems and strong survival rates for the process of reforestation to ensure a good financial return.

Moving on, we made our way to an active timber farm. I was excited to see timber harvesting in person rather than a documentary on the television. The owner/operator spoke to us about his company and the processes involved in the daily operations I could have stayed out there all day watching the trees fall by the articulating rubber tire tractor with a circular saw, the skidder grabbing the piles of pine trees, and the big loaders to load the timber on the trucks. We drove to a hunting camp/lodge for a sandwich lunch before continuing our tour of timber farms. After we finished lunch, we drove to another timber farm where it was completely stripped and was re-planted for the next harvest beginning in about fifteen years with thinning the undesirable trees to allow the better pines grow until 25-30 years of age.

This evening we congregated at the local museum for a nice catered supper hosted by the Polk family. While we finished up our fine meal, we were honored to listen to two special rangers with the Texas Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. This was a great end to a very good day of learning about the Forestry industry.

Well, here we are to the last day. A quick trip down to Lufkin, we found ourselves at the infamous Boggy Slough Conservation Area. This area is known for some of the oldest hardwood forest habitats in East Texas and spans for 18 miles along the Neches River. These habitats are under the management of Robert Sanders with additional help from his wife Jenny. The boggy slough hosts many different species of wildlife including two clusters of the endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker. The conservation area is also home to three different species of Texas state champion trees: the largest trees in Texas – Loblolly, Pine, and Longleaf Pine. As we drove around through the area, we were able to see some of the conservation practices such as the clearing out of trees and research plots conducted by Texas A&M Kingsville. The Boggy Slough certainly lived up to its name. Robert and Jenny were very informative in giving us all an overview of this area.

As we all departed our separate ways returning home, I reflected upon the week realizing that East Texas has just as much Agriculture as others prominent areas of this great state. This week

has been great, and we owe that to all the sponsors and presenters that made this another awesome session. As always hate to see it end, but always look forward to the next session that will take us to Washington D.C. and North Carolina. I have really gained a lot from being in this TALL XVII cohort and if there is one thing that I will take through life with me is this, No matter what I am doing in life, I need to be sure to achieve one thing, make an impact on someone!

To close I just want to reiterate the quote by Mr. Trey Johnson; "Value Yesterday, Live Today, Reach for Tomorrow"

Steven R. White
TALL XVII Cohort Member

TALL XVII
Session 7 Narrative – East Texas

Monday, January 17, 2022

Rozell Manufacturing

The TALL XVII session number 7 in East Texas began with a dinner hosted by Darren Rozell at Rozell Manufacturing. Rozell Manufacturing specializes in custom built agricultural sprayers, parts and chemicals. Darren Rozell, who leads the company explained how he got into the business and eventually took it over from the previous owners. Mr. Rozell also discussed his own families' cattle and farming operation.

Mr. Rozell gave a very good description of how the current retail environment is affecting his business. He noted that most all of the parts and supplies needed to fabricate and build his sprayers are not only hard to get, but also more than double and triple original costs. Mr. Rozell also discussed the difficulties he is having finding chemicals his local customers are needing.

During this time, we also heard from Jamie Sugg who is the County Extension Agent for Rusk County as well as Kevin Proctor. Mr. Proctor is a TALL Alumni as well as a local rancher and hay farmer.

This first evening together was a great way to kick off the week and begin to understand what this area of Texas contributes to Texas and United States agriculture.

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

Cavender's Corporate Office

The first full day of the session began at Cavender's corporate offices in Tyler. Cavender's is a chain of western wear stores. Mr. Larry Waterman, COO of Cavernder's spoke to our group for some time about the history of the family and how they grew the business to where it is today.

Today Cavender's operates ninety-three stores throughout the nation. They try to stay on the cutting edge of fashion trends in the western wear world. The Cavender brothers and their wives work daily at the company making sure their families legacy lives on.

After discussing Cavender's western wear business, we discussed the family's ranching interests. Mr. Justin Martika, Ranch Manager for Cavender's ranches spoke to the group about their mostly Brangus cattle operation. They run approximately 2,000 head of cows. They raise some for the beef market as well as some for production and special sales.

Lastly Mr. Waterman gave our group a tour of the corporate office as well as a mock Cavender's western wear store. In this mock store, designers and marketing staff can experiment with how to best situate actual stores to best suit their needs.

Tyler Rose Garden

Our next stop on Tuesday was at the famous Tyler Rose Garden. At the Rose Garden we first heard from Chad Gulley with Shelby Savings Bank. He discussed how important agriculture was to the area and all of the different types of operations Shelby Savings Bank helps to finance.

Mr. Gulley gave a good introduction into the poultry industry and how the big operators, Tyson, Pilgrims and Sanderson Farms all began in the area and still very much operate in the area. He described how chicken farms are typically broken down into four to eight "chicken houses" which will produce either eggs, pullets or broilers.

Next, Mr. Clint Perkins spoke to our group. Mr. Perkins is the County Extension Agent for Smith County.

Here we heard from Mr. Greg Grant. Mr. Grant is the Smith County Agrilife Extension Horticulturist.

Mr. Grant gave our group a great tour of the Rose Garden, which includes much more than roses. He was very well versed in all forms of plants and trees not only in the garden, but also in the East Texas area. Mr. Grant discussed how the big freeze and winter storm in early 2021 effected the garden.

It was explained that 20 years ago there were still quite a bit of roses grown in Smith County for production purposes. Today, production roses are not grown in the area, but they are still shipped there to be processed and made ready for retail. Mr. Grant talked about several diseases that affect area gardens and flowers as well as his involvement in Smith County's Master Gardener program put on through Texas Agrilife Extension.

Finally, we had somewhat of a surprise visit by Texas State Representative Cole Hefner. Mr. Hefner quickly discussed some of the issues he is seeing politically. Specifically, he addressed recent House redistricting and how it may affect agriculture in East Texas and across the State.

John Soules Foods

Our next stop on Tuesday was at John Soules Foods in Tyler. John Soules Foods makes chicken and beef ready food products. I know them as the pre-cooked fajita provider at Costco and other places. This is the product they make at the Tyler plant. John Soules also has plants in Gainesville, Georgia and Valley, Alabama. The Tyler plant only makes non-breaded products. The Gainesville plant only makes breaded products. Finally, the Valley plant which is the newest and largest makes both types of products.

We took a tour of the Tyler facility and were able to see from start to finish how raw chicken was turned in to pre-cooked frozen products.

After the tour Mr. Tom Ellis, Chief Operating Officer of John Soules Foods gave our group a presentation on the company. He noted that not very long ago, this marked was 95% beef, but it has switched in fairly recent years to 85% chicken for a variety of reasons, cost being not the least of which.

John Souls Foods was started by Mr. John Souls Sr., J.O. Thompson & L.F. Thompson with the name Country Jim's Meats. John Souls Sr. eventually bought out the partner and today two sons of John Souls lead the company.

Today the Tyler plant employs about 1,000 people covering three shifts, those being two production shifts and one sanitation shift every 24 hours. The Valley, AL facility being the largest produces 14,000 pounds of cooked product every hour.

Company-wide beef and chicken fajitas are still the number one product. John Souls products are sold in retail markets in forty-nine us states. They offer thirty different retail products across these markets. John Souls also does a great deal of business selling directly to national restaurant chains.

Taylor Cattle Company

Taylor Cattle Company and JT2 is an area cattle operation that is focusing on how beef is consumed by the end user. They do not just stop thinking about the product when the animal sales in the ring but rather its perception by the final customer.

We heard from Cody Cross, the Ranch Manager for Taylor Cattle Company. He discussed three hundred head operation. Data and analytics drive their processes and decisions.

We also heard from Keeter Wilkerson who manages their restaurant in the town of Tyler. We were able to taste several cuts of meat, all tasting very good.

Build East Texas

On Tuesday evening we were treated to a social and dinner at Hollytree Country Club in Tyler. The event was to promote the Build East Texas program. This is a program that highlights and promotes many industries that East Texas is known for, but mostly agriculture related.

Many of the gentlemen we had been with or heard from throughout the day were in attendance and spoke at this event. Ted Conover who is a TALL Advisory Board member discussed the importance of the Build East Texas initiative. Kevin Proctor a local rancher and TALL alumnus introduced Trey Johnson, the evening's keynote speaker.

Mr. Johnson gave the audience a very spirited talk that revolved around being involved, doing our very best and putting God first in our lives.

Several awards were given out to local businessmen and women. Lastly each of us in the TALL XVII cohort introduced ourselves to the audience.

This was an excellent event and a great way to end the Tyler portion of our week in East Texas.

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Feral Hogs in East Texas

Before leaving the Hotel in Tyler we heard from Jamie Sugg, County Extension Agent for Smith County, on the feral hog issue in the area.

Mr. Sugg noted that he has spent much of his time recently on dealing with and education the public about feral hogs. He relayed to the group how the hog problem spread from the Southeastern portions of the United States into Texas. Today wild or feral hogs cover most all of the southern portions of the entire U.S.

Mr. Sugg explained how they are attempting to manage this problem. From hunting, to poisons to trapping there are many ways to attempt to get rid of these invasive animals. One of the more interesting parts of his discussion was the many techniques there are to trap these hogs.

Mr. Sugg explained that female hogs are able to become pregnant at about six months of age and are able to have two litters of pigs in one year's time. Because of this, one female hog can possibly be responsible for 100 other hogs in one year. This amazing reproductive feat has to be one of the main reasons we have seen feral hog numbers explode over the past two decades.

Altman Nurseries, Inc., Troup, TX

In Troup, Texas we made a stop at Altman Nurseries. This business which has been around for many years, but had recently changed hands, provides wholesale flowers and other greenery to retail stores across the State. We saw acres of buildings with baskets hanging from the roof growing ferns. We also saw acres of many types of flowers being grown for the retail market. We spent quite a bit of time looking at and discussing succulents. Succulents have become very popular, for some reason, lately. Many in our group had several questions about how best to care for these plants.

Stephen F. Austin Beef Center, Nacogdoches, TX

From Troup, we made our way to Nacogdoches, Texas and really got into East Texas timberland. We stopped at the Stephen F. Austin University Beef Center outside of town. This center, which was recently built due to the old one burning in a fire. This was a great place to meet and hear from several different people from the area.

We first heard from Mr. Ricky Thompson, County Extension Agent for Nacogdoches County. Mr. Thompson gave us a great overview of agricultural and timber industry in the area. Of course, chickens are a large part of the landscape, but so are beef cattle and of course timber.

We next heard from Dr. Bray who is a faculty member at SFA University and oversees the Beef Center, which is officially named the Walter C. Todd Agricultural Research Center.

The Beef Center fosters research and education in cattle, swine, sheep, goats, broilers, poultry and equine sciences.

We spent quite a bit of time talking about the Poultry Center and I found it most interesting since it is so new to those of us not familiar with East Texas. The Poultry Center contains four commercial “houses”, which contain around 25,600 birds in total. There is an instructional lab for use by faculty and research students. This lab and the center fosters and focus on applied commercial research for the East Texas poultry industry. A large portion of the funding for the Poultry Center at SFA University came from the three dominant poultry companies, those being Tyson, Pilgrims Pride and Sanderson Farms.

David Alders is a local poultryman and was the next speaker. He gave a very detailed discussion on the broiler industry in Texas. He noted that in the early days the industry was all about eggs, but has since shifted to protein, the actual chicken meat.

The 1950’s is when the area began seeing a growing amount of vertical integration from the three large poultry companies. They are involved in, not only producing and distribution of the final product, but also in the growing and feeding of chickens until they are ready for slaughter.

In 1934 a typical American citizen consumed less than 1 pound of chicken meat annually. Today a typical American consumes more than one hundred pounds annually. This is an amazing shift in consumption and one that the industry has been able to grow with.

Next, we heard from Mr. Will Cauthen. Mr. Cauthen is a principal and former ag teacher at a local high school, but he is also what is known as a “truck farmer”. Truck farming is the practice of growing vegetables or fruits on a large scale for a profit. Mr. Cauthen discussed how he began growing watermelons to make sure his children learned how to work and to keep them away from video games and the like. He also discussed the ag industry in general and noted that he has seen trends of kids wanting to be more and more involved in agriculture through things like 4-H and FFA.

Finally, we heard from Mr. Ronald Murdock, who happens to be a partner with Mr. Cauthen on his watermelon farming operation. Mr. Murdock’s main profession is in the logging industry. He explained how his company can be hired by local timberland owners to do the actual cutting, sorting and hauling of the logs to the sawmills. He discussed first and second cutting as well as final cutting and re-planting. This was a great lead into the rest of our week in East Texas because now we really begin focusing on the timber industry.

We ended Wednesday with a dinner at Clear Springs Restaurant in Nacogdoches and had a wonderful time. During dinner we heard from Mr. Rob Hughes who is the Executive Director of the Texas Forestry Association (TFA), the state trade association for the timber and forestry industry. Mr. Hughes is also a TALL Alumnus. He gave us an overview of what TFA does for the industry at the State and Federal levels. We also heard from Wes Moorehead, Department Head of the East Texas Forestry Operations at the Texas A&M Forest Service.

Thursday, January 20, 2022

Logging Site Visits

Our first stop on a cold Thursday morning was at a logging site outside of Nacogdoches. Here the loggers were doing a final cut on what looked to be about sixty acres of land. Here we met Craig Teer and his brother Joey. They own the logging operation that we saw. This operation owns the machinery that cuts,

delimbs, sorts and stacks the cut logs. They also own the trucks that haul the timber to the sawmill. Mr. Craig Teer spoke to our group and was a wealth of knowledge about the local industry. He and his family have been logging for multiple generations and are well respected in the industry.

Next, we went to another site that had already been final cut and had been recently replanted with seedling trees. We learned that by far the most common tree grown in East Texas for timber production was the loblolly pine. This tree is native to the area and grows and produces well for what is needed.

We were treated to lunch at a great little hunting lodge situated on a hill overlooking some beautiful timberland.

Our last stop for the day was at ArborGen Nursery outside of Jasper, Texas. ArborGen supplies tree seedlings to the timber industry. They are a nationwide company and even have a location in Brazil. They focus selecting for and growing seedlings that will be replanted on tree plantations that have been final cut. The manager of the location showed us first how they extract and clean the very small pine tree seeds from the cones. Then we went out to the fields where they are growing trees for seed production. We looked at several different ages of trees and he explained how each type are selected for what the industry is looking for in a production pine tree.

On Thursday evening we were treated to a social hour and dinner sponsored by Polk Land and Cattle. This dinner was held at the forestry and timber museum in Nacogdoches. Here we heard from Mr. Carl Ray Polk who told us about their cattle and timber operations. We also heard from two Texas Rangers with the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. These two men spent some time with our group telling us about some of the more outrageous cases they have worked in their time. They are both stationed in the East Texas area. Their stories were very entertaining.

Friday, January 21, 2022

Boggy Slough Conservation Area

The last stop of the week was on Friday morning at Bobby Slough Conservation Area outside of Lufkin, Texas. Boggy Slough is a conservation area with the purpose of preserving the 19,000 acre property as a center for East Texas ecological research and to promote management and stewardship of the area's natural resources. It is owned by the Temple Foundation.

The manager of Boggy Slough led our group around much of the Southern portion of the property. He showed us how they use prescribed burning to keep the under brush at bay. Next, we went to a logging site where a crew similar to the Teer's operation was working on a first cut. This means they were basically thinning out the trees and leaving the best ones to continue growing which will be cut years later. We also went to a garden type area where local native plants and grasses were being fostered and grown. These plants will be used to know what works best for different areas of the State.

Our last stop at Boggy Slough was an area where the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker is known to roost. This is one of only a few areas in the country known to have any of these birds. Bird houses are built for these birds so that they can be studied and thrive.

Boggy Slough is an amazing and beautiful place and was a great way to end our time in East Texas.

Stephen Erik Loyd #17
TALL XVII
Session 7 - Tyler/East Texas
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Traveling into East Texas and seeing all of the agricultural aspects of that area was a portion of the TALL program I had been looking forward to since I had not spent much time in the area. It did not disappoint.

Dinner and Social hosted by Rozell Manufacturing

The session started off in a unique way with a meeting for dinner at Rozell Manufacturing. I have become familiar with some of the Rozell sprayers and may look into getting one fairly soon. It was good meeting many of the people we would be seeing the rest of the week. Darren Rozell gave an eye-opening talk about the problems with the supply chain and price increases, and, as a sign of things to come, ate one of the best steaks I've ever had.

Cavender's Boot City

After a slight detour and view of the city, we managed to arrive at the headquarters for Cavender's. Larry Waterman gave a brief tour and overview of the Cavcender's operation, which included an extensive cattle operation that I was unaware existed. The tour was short because, as always, we are pressed for time, but we did get some interesting insight into how the Cavender brothers operate and think. I'm also looking forward to getting a hat that was graciously provided to us by the sponsors.

Tyler Rose Garden

It was a chilly start to the tour of the Tyler Rose Garden, but it was led by the master gardeners that kept it moving and interesting. While it definitely was interesting to know that most flowers are not grown in Tyler as much anymore, the layout and the history of the rose garden was pretty amazing. I could imagine what it would look like in full bloom.

Texas Horticulture Industry

Greg Grant, a Smith County Horticulturist, discussed with us the state of the Tyler horticulture industry as well as a brief history of the county agent office in Smith County. I was not aware of the vast horticulture industry within east Texas and in Texas as a whole.

John Soules Foods

Having four kids, we eat a lot of chicken in our household so it was interesting to know that much of what we buy is produced by John Soules Foods at one of their three locations. Lance Youngs and Tom Ellis gave great presentations on the history of the company and where they are headed in the future. The highlight, at least for me, was the tour of the facility and actually getting to get on the production floor, which was a pleasant surprise. They served us a box sandwich lunch, which was good don't get me wrong, but after seeing and being around all of that beef and chicken, felt a little underwhelming

Custom Beef

The visit to the restaurant side of Custom Beef started out a little disappointing because the founder, Jason Taylor, couldn't be there due to Covid. However, Cody Cross and Peter Wilkerson more than made up for his absence. I believe it may have been better due to the fact that we were able to talk to the people making the business work from the production side of things. As a cattle producer, this business model is one we have been looking into branching into so the information presented was very enlightening. They also provided tastings of some of their cuts of beef which was very good.

Build East Texas Social and Dinner

The first day ended with a social and dinner sponsored by Build East Texas and it was very well organized and attended. We had the opportunity to speak with multiple leaders in the agriculture industry in east Texas, and I was lucky enough to speak with and have at our table Ted Conover. Trey Johnson gave a great motivational keynote speech and the food was amazing. Build East Texas certainly knows how to put on an event.

Feral Hogs Presentation

If you are pretty much anywhere in Texas, feral hogs are a problem. Jamie Sugg gave a presentation on feral hogs to start the next day off. While there was not a whole lot of new information that I hadn't heard before, he did present it in an interesting way. Also, he shared some interesting ways to help attract the hogs in order to kill them, which I did take note of.

Altman Nurseries

Having the opportunity to walk through a working nursery such as Altman made me aware of the vast size and scope of the nursery business as a whole. Looking at their greenhouses and how the plants go from being planted to shipping was eye opening. It was very loud with the production going on so it was hard to hear what was being said, but the visuals more than made up for that.

Stephen F. Austin University Ag Department

We were greeted at the SFA Ag Department by extension agent Ricky Thompson who provided a great meal to start this portion of the session off on the right foot. Joey Bray, the Department of Agriculture Chair at SFA, spoke of the vast areas that SFA focus on, but mostly regarding the poultry research centers. Being in East Texas, the poultry industry, as well as the forestry industry, are the predominant industries and SFA makes sure to represent these industries in the things they teach. I do wish we could have had the opportunity to tour some of the facilities.

Poultry Production and Consumer Demands

David Alders spoke next about the Poultry Production within the whole country and trends that this is planning to take in the future. It was very informative, and Mr. Alders added a bit of humor into the mix. I had not heard about the new movement towards the NAE or no

antibiotics ever in the production of animals. This is a dangerous trend that could hurt farmers and ranchers in the future.

Truck Farming in East Texas

Will Coffin and Ronald Murdoch spoke last regarding the trucking industry in connection with forestry as well as small businesses in general in East Texas. I feel like those talks could have been presented better on site of their operations. It would have been more impactful; however, these two guys did great and they are very knowledgeable in their respective fields.

Texas Forestry Association Welcome Dinner

The dinner at Clear Springs Restaurant was fantastic. It was in a small room so noise was certainly a factor hearing Rob Hughes and Wes Moorehead speak on the East Texas Forestry Operations. I was able to catch some of the information, but this dinner proved to be a good time to socialize with some in the cohort that I had not had the time to speak to much during our sessions.

Forestry Field Stops

The forestry field stops were cold! Very informative and it was great to see the forestry business from the cutting down to the various stages of replanting and growing. It is a very in depth process. The lunch at the hunting lodge was a beautiful location and allowed for even more socializing.

Polk Land & Cattle and TSCRA Dinner

The final evening was spent with the Polk family having a great steak dinner. We also had the opportunity to listen to a couple Texas Rangers speak about some of the cases they had worked on, and I got the impression they could have spoke all night long. To be honest, if given the chance, I would have listened all night long, as well. The Polks were great hosts, and I enjoyed getting to know them in this short time.

Boggy Slough Conservation Area

The Boggy Slough Conservation Area is a beautiful location. I had to leave after the first couple of stops, but I heard about some of the controlled burning which is interesting, especially doing it without damaging much of the larger trees.

Final Thoughts

I was unsure how much I would like East Texas coming from West Texas where there are very little if any trees. However, it was eye opening. From the forestry business to the poultry and everything in between, all of the sessions were packed full of information. Several things got cancelled or changed last minute, but that has become the norm for this cohort that we have learned to just go with it. For me, I had the opportunity to socialize with several members of our cohort that I had not had the opportunity to do before. On top of all of the great information, the food was top notch all week long. I couldn't have asked for a better session.