

**Darci Luensmann (#15)**  
**TALL XIX**  
**Session 2 – Lubbock / Amarillo**  
**October 21-25, 2024**

Step back non-believers: if there was ever a doubt who holds the reins in Texas agriculture, all naysayers were silenced after our last TALL session! Our trip through the Texas Panhandle was one for the record books in efficiency and content quality.

Monday evening, we rolled into a Lubbock cotton field owned by Dan & Linda Taylor to witness a convoy of strippers running full steam ahead. It is peak season for the harvest, so they have a team working 24/7. Most fun was teasing the non-local cohort members how a cotton stripper works in agriculture. A brief stop at Buster's Gin, also owned by the Taylors, and off to the museum in their backyard, quite literally. Dan and Linda are huge advocates for production agriculture, and it is empowering to listen to their story and learn from their ways. After a delicious chuckwagon dinner, we headed to the hotel to turn in for the night, as we had a full week ahead!



Tuesday kicked off at the new Bayer Facility in Lubbock. Built in 2018, this facility boasts state-of-the-art equipment making a dirty job much cleaner. It is amazing the amount of technology that goes into plants. Here, I learned that EVERY seed gets its picture taken as it is processed! I was also impressed with the back-end brain of the operation. Every gadget and spicket was under constant surveillance – even the machine that once served as a Skittles sprayer!



Our next stop was another cotton field where we met up with growers and a few folks from Texas AgriLife Research Extension Center. These individuals are the salt of the earth, and I was tickled to learn more about the anatomy of a cotton plant. One can judge the weather and elements a plant has endured simply by looking at the number of bulbs and areas of no bulb growth. In harsh environments, the plant will not produce fruit and try to sustain itself. During drier conditions, you will see more stems and taller stalks. As it receives more moisture, the boll starts to thicken. The boll is made of carbon and as it grows, it lays down multiple layers of fibers. Mills want strong, fine fibers and staple length. Cotton is a compensatory crop and has been modified to grow well in the Texas panhandle. The men spoke highly of “manual” and said he was a good guy who worked better than

the high-tech machinery when it comes to managing irrigation. “*More crop per drop*” makes one outstanding in a field.

The Lubbock Cotton Classing Office gave a glimpse into the back side, and often overlooked, portion of the chain. The standards implemented are strictly adhered to when it comes to deciding what cotton is suitable for each use. Farmers do not get to decide how their cotton is classed, but it is a vital step in the process of ensuring a consistent product for the consumer.

We took a lunch break at the National Ranching Heritage Center. This beautiful facility has grown into the premier establishment for ranching education. The Center worked with John Erickson, author of *Hank the Cowdog*, to develop interactive displays and visual learning guides to encourage animal husbandry and conservation. This facility is exactly what our society needs to empower the next generation of agriculturalists.



During lunch, we learned from representatives from Plains Cotton Growers, Texas Corn Producers, National Sorghum Producers and the Texas Tech University MILE Program. I was most interested in how the MILE Program is designed after the TALL Program - for college students. The interaction with those students at the FiberMax Center for Discovery during the evening's activities only cemented my admiration for the MILE Program. They look you in the eye, shake your hand and mean it!

My dinner hosts were Kody Bessnet & Burt Heinrich. I was tickled to learn Kody met his mother-in-law through TALL, who is Burt's wife. The collaboration and overlap of individuals through this program cannot be overstated. We talked about the importance of resilience and staying true to your roots.



Wednesday, we packed the bus and headed north to the Continental Dairy Milk Plant. Talk about automation - very little hands-on happens here. Much of the product is not seen by a human until received by the end user. I was interested to learn that one of their largest customers is Nestle who purchases their powdered milk. They do offer a Majestic butter line, which is packaged into other brands, as well. Due to its proprietary nature, we were unable to take pictures, but every time I slice a pad of butter, I will remember how it was formed into those cute

little rectangles and wrapped so neatly – 60,000-72,000 pounds a day! I liked the fact they use “cow milk” which is the leftover water from the milk once the cream has been removed, as a water alternative. This provides a huge reduction in water usage. I have never washed my hands so many times in one hour!

We visited Caprock Dairy after the milk plant, to prevent cross-contamination. I love how they use AI to generate information about each cow as to when she needs to be bred, etc. Our cohort was blown away to learn the dairy is selling male, day-old calves at \$795/head! Not long ago, it was less than half that. This is due to the popularity of beef on dairy. This dairy is averaging 1.67 pounds of milk per 1 pound of grain which feeds over half a million people!

One of my favorite stops was Bamert Seed. I am thoroughly fascinated with the technology and opportunities that exist to increase pasture forage. Rob Cook demonstrated Seed Spec, a ground-breaking tool that gathers ecological data from your location based on soil type and generates a custom seed blend which can be purchased directly from Bamert. I liked Brett's perspective: "5-10% of your working day, be thinking about what you can do for your industry." It is how they have expanded and become outstanding in their field.



The Cargill Sweet Bran plant was hot and smelly but watching an entire rail car dumped into a bin to be processed for feed underlined the magnitude of the plant! The capacity and automation of the feed world was a surprise. I learned they dye the medicated feed green, so they know what animals are eating it. I asked several of the back of house plant managers about their college major and was fascinated to learn Industrial

Manufacturing kept coming up. They did not want us to take photos in the plant but offered all access. They utilize several levels of quality control to ensure the customer receives a fresh, consistent product every time.

The evening wrapped up at Reed Beverage in Amarillo with a commodity board panel made up of the Texas Cattle Feeders, Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers, Texas Wheat Producers and Texas AgriLife Extension. Learning from each of these groups, we took valuable lessons which can be applied to everyday life on the farm or ranch. The importance of a Political Action Committee cannot be overstated. The Texas Cattle Feeders are huge activists for cattle producers that do not get much credit. They champion accurate food labeling, free trade and conservation programs we all need and oppose governmental overreach. DeDe Jones, Senior Risk Management Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service works within one of the largest cash receipts economies in the world – over \$10.3 billion in the Texas High Plains. This represents a \$17.8 billion state economic impact!



Thursday morning, a great friend of the TALL Program, Trevor Caviness, welcomed us into his family's beef packing plant which processes about 2,800 head of cattle per day. He reiterated the importance of beef on dairy and how yields have since increased drastically. Beef on dairy is possibly the biggest thing to happen to the cattle industry in 70 years. Choice continues to climb, pushing everything else along with it. Cattle are grading better, which provides more dollars back to the producer and a higher quality product to the consumer – a win for all.

At the Hereford Vet Clinic & Hereford Vet Supply, we learned how a humble clinic has turned into the epicenter to access beef cattle medications. We toured their new facilities which rival the Texas Tech Veterinary School. With Hereford being at the heart of the largest agricultural-producing area in the state, it is imperative they stay flexible to the needs of the producers. They are offering full and part time work to kids attending vet school and offer hands-on applications. I was intrigued that they do not deal much with dairy, as it is a different business altogether than beef. Most dairies have their own veterinarian and nutritionist and run their own operation. Many are just renting space at feedlot.

Coat-tailing off the clinic, we visited Joe Richardson at Diamond Cattle Feeders. He has a wealth of knowledge in the industry and talked specifics of cash trade vs. grid trade. He and his team are members of Consolidated Beef Producers. They feed cattle from 400 to 1,200+ pounds, he walked us through what it takes to get them rail ready.

For lunch, we stopped at the Hereford Country Club where a great discussion over Livestock Risk Protection ensued. There was a clear divide between groups of the cohort. Several saw the value of an LRP. Others strictly raise cattle to show a loss. Our group really got into this discussion, as it showed the difference in the mindset of a farmer and a rancher.



The Texas Tech Vet School stop in the afternoon was a hands-on delight! Our very own Briscoe Cain palpated a live cow, while we discovered horse anatomy through props. I am very excited west Texas has a place where the potential to recruit a greater population of large animal veterinarians exists. The demographic is over 75% female! They recruit locally and try to keep them local. They keep

their classes small, and skills training starts on Day 1.

A top favorite of this trip was at the Amarillo Country Club where Andy & Tanya Holloway spoke humbly about their work during the wildfires that raged the plains this spring. Though the loss was devastating, their dedication to the people of the panhandle inspired me to lead from where I am and extend a hand to those less fortunate. At dinner, I was paired with a dear friend and CEO of the Tri State Fair, Brady Ragland and the Fair Board President, Cody Chandler.

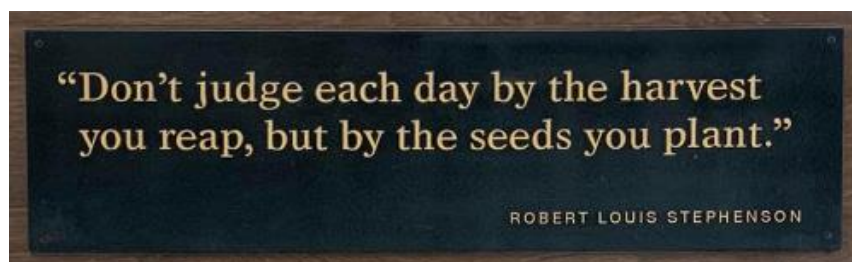


When I saw the agenda for Friday, I could not help but get a little giddy. Dr. Gregg Veneklasen of Timber Creek Veterinary Hospital has been an inspiration of mine since I worked in the rodeo world. Though it took 5 times for him to be accepted into vet school, he persevered and has become world-renowned in both his understanding of epigenetics and its application thereof. His demeanor and personality are magnetizing. I could have stayed for hours learning about show horse babies jumping in their sleep. Before he showed us around some of the most famous (and expensive) bucking horses in the world, he challenged us to consider how the human medical system is flawed and how he hopes veterinary medicine does not become the same – corporations telling veterinarians what medications to sell while not actually fixing the problem. Our interaction with Dr. Veneklasen was an unreal experience and one I will put at the top of my “wow” list for a very long time.



Our last stop was at the West Texas A&M Department of Agriculture and Meat Science Department. They have a lot of new construction thanks to endowments from Paul Engler, who recently passed, in addition to the VERO program, established in 2009. VERO is a partnership between WTAMU College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science and the WTAMU Paul Engler College of Agriculture & Natural Sciences with a goal to bring veterinary education, research and outreach to the Texas Panhandle. They are doing just that by recruiting and retaining many large animal veterinarians and have stats to prove it. We participated in a palatability test and took a tour of the meats lab where we met and interacted with students and professors alike.

This was one of the most educational and productive weeks of my professional career. I am forever grateful for the TALL Alumni who coordinated all the details of this fantastic learning experience, as well as those who live it every day.



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The beginning of the second session of the TALL Program brought the cohort to Lubbock and Amarillo. This session was packed with many amazing people and from many different parts of agriculture. I was able to see many new things that both increased my knowledge and gave me new outlooks on production, conservation and sustainability. I will admit that I always had the sentiment that there wasn't much out that far west, but I was wrong. There were so many things to see and our schedule was as busy as Dr. Jim could get it. Our first stop was Lubbock; cotton country.

The afternoon of day 1 we set out for Dan & Linda Taylor's farm. Their farm consisted of primarily irrigated cotton. When we got there, we were able to see them harvesting the cotton crop behind their house. They were using John Deere stripper-balers. Once we picked up Mr. Taylor, we drove to Buster's Gin; the gin that Mr. Taylor used to own. The gin was immaculate. The ginning process is not a clean operation. It is dusty and there will be stray cotton fibers everywhere. However, this gin was incredibly clean. It was a testament to the care that the owners take of the gin. The gin had incorporated a lot of automation to keep the gin running smoothly. After the gin tour, we went back to the Taylor's house for dinner. At their house, they had a barn that housed many different historical items relating to cotton. It was a small museum that Mr. Taylor had acquired over his many years in the cotton industry. We had a wonderful chuck wagon meal and Jason Coleman from the High Plains Water District spoke to us about the issues surrounding water as it relates to agriculture and the communities. Irrigation is a vital part of the agricultural community in this area of Texas. The available water is continuing to decline and will continue to be a problem that plagues the area unless things drastically change.

Day 2 started with a tour of the Bayer Facility where they processed cotton seed. The purpose of this very large facility is to take ginned cotton seed and turn it into packaged seed for next year's planting season. This operation requires a process called delinting. This is when they remove the fuzzy part of the seed that is leftover from the

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ginning process. This is done by spraying an acid on the seed and rolling it in a drum. The seed is then sifted and sorted to remove all trash and seeds that may not be viable. They use various different methods for this. The seed is treated, packaged and sold to producers. Afterwards, we took a quick trip to the Texas A&M Agrilife Research Center. There they do experiments with various crops to provide data to producers and help them make informed decisions on the viability of different crops and varieties. The Lubbock Cotton Classing office was the next stop. This operation surprised me a little when I saw how automated everything was and how many samples they process in such a short amount of time. It was very cool to see the “assembly line” running. Next we went to the Ranch Heritage Center. We heard from associations involved with corn, cotton and sorghum. They gave us market updates and news from their associations. We also learned about Texas Tech’s MILE Program. This program was founded by Lindsay Kennedy, a TALL alumni, and mimics the TALL Program in many ways. The goal is to build leaders while still in college, using many of the same principals that TALL uses. After the speakers, we toured the Ranch Heritage Museum. The museum is mostly outdoors. On display are many different ranch houses that were built across Texas in the wild west days. So many of these houses were purpose built for protection from the elements and the dangers of the prairie. A funny side note: The house that I currently live in is older than at least one of the houses on the property! Late that night we had our reception at the Fibermax Center for Discovery. Before the reception, we toured the museum and were able to see the old gin that they are building inside the museum. Mr. Taylor will be donating his personal cotton gin collection from his property to this museum. I hope to one day make it back to the museum once it is finished. That night I went out to eat at the Tech Club with the Huffakers and Clint Robinson. They were wonderful hosts.

Day 3 began our journey to Amarillo with many stops along the way. Our first stop was at Continental Dairy Facilities Milk Plant. This plant was created to process the extra production of milk in the area. However, after a few years of operation, they were at full production and have been ever since. This stop taught me a lot about the many food safety guidelines that have to be followed with a product like milk. This plant

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produced many dairy products but most of the production focused on powdered milk and butter. Once again, the automation in these facilities we visit are amazing. The throughput is mind boggling. We then went to a dairy where the milk is produced. Caprock Dairy was a large operation. Here we learned about the production of mild and some of the advancements that the dairy industry is seeing. The biggest advancement is “beef on dairy”. This means using beef cattle semen (in some cases the semen is sexed) and using IVF to produce a much more marketable calf. This increased the profits of dairies significantly compared to straight dairy breeds such as holstein or jersey. In many cases these “beef on dairy” calves are sought after because they are consistent and predictable. This means you could see uniform gains across a herd of calves in a feeding program due to the genetics being so uniform across the herd. Later we went to Bamert Seed. They are a specialty seed production company. They focus on producing native grass seeds for a variety of applications. They also do custom production for people who want a specific grass that is on their property. We also went to the SweetBran production facility. SweetBran is a cattle feed that is a branch of Cargill. That night we arrived at Reed Beverage for a reception and commodity panel discussion. We heard from Texas Wheat, TCFA, TSCRA and Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. It was a great dinner.

On the morning of Day 4 we toured Caviness Meat Packer. It was a large scale packer that produced meat for many different companies, including McDonalds. Although there was a lot of automation in the plant, much of it is still done by hand. This is due to the varying sizes of cattle that are slaughtered. Next we went to the Hereford Vet Supply and Vet Clinic and toured the property. We then went to Diamond Cattle Feeders, a large feedlot. There they can feed your cattle before sale according to your needs and goals. Each pen can be prescribed a different diet. After lunch at the Hereford Country Club, we went and toured the new Texas Tech Vet School. During the tour, we had the privilege of witnessing the cohort politician, Briscoe Cain, palpate a cow for the first time. Thank you Dr. Koziol for permitting that! Later that night we had another wonderful reception to bring the session to a near close. David and I had a good dinner with our hosts Kodie and Lauren.



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The final activity we had was to tour the West Texas A&M Agriculture Department. It was a lovely campus. My favorite part of the tour was the Meat Science Center. There we were able to taste steaks and grade them as a group. It was a fun and tasty activity where I learned a good bit about meat.

The Lubbock-Amarillo area provided a wonderful session where I gained knowledge in many areas. The sponsors and speakers were truly wonderful. The sense of community and their support of agriculture is astounding. This session was on the go from day one, and so much was packed in. Even so, I know there are parts of this country that we missed. This trip definitely has changed my mind on what is out in west Texas.



## TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

### **Introduction**

As a board member of the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials (NAAMO), I missed Session 1 of the program due to our 2024 Annual Conference coinciding with its dates. Joining the group a bit later was admittedly daunting—most people had already met and had an idea of what to expect. However, I'd been told by previous cohort members that this session was the highlight of the program, and they weren't wrong! The days were full and dynamic, but the schedule felt well-balanced. I'm grateful for all we managed to experience and accomplish throughout the week.

### **Lubbock Sessions**

#### **Day 1:**

Session 2 kicked off in [Dan and Linda Taylor's cotton fields](#), where we observed a cotton stripper in action, harvesting their crop. From there, we headed to [Buster's Gin](#) to watch the fascinating process of separating cotton from the cottonseed. I was intrigued to learn that each cotton bale maintains its identity throughout the entire process and that, once it leaves the gin, it's graded within a single day. After our tour, the Taylors graciously welcomed us into their home for dinner and gave us the opportunity to explore their onsite museum. It was the perfect introduction to our cotton-focused days in Lubbock.

After dinner, we had the opportunity to hear from Jason Coleman, General Manager of [High Plains Underground Water](#), who spoke about Texas's water challenges. Over the past eight years, irrigation across the state has expanded at an unprecedented rate, while the Ogallala Aquifer—a critical water source—recharges very slowly, especially in Texas. This discussion felt especially timely, as my boss, Commissioner Sid Miller, recently issued an executive order to protect water resources in the Rio Grande Valley, another region heavily impacted by drought.



## **Day 2:**

Tuesday morning began with a tour of the [Bayer Facility](#) where we saw the process of delinting cottonseed. It was incredible to see the seeds move rapidly through the machines, each one photographed and sorted with remarkable precision. An interesting fact we learned was that the cottonseed is coated with a blue-tinted treatment—originally used to color Skittles!

After the tour, we made the quick trip over to the [Texas AgriLife Research Extension Center](#), where we listened to Mr. Lege, Mr. Heinrich, and Mr. Fairbanks discuss their cotton research being done in the fields.

Next on our cotton tour, we visited the Agricultural Marketing Service Cotton Classification Complex—my favorite stop related to cotton. These offices are essential to the cotton industry, providing reliable data that directly impacts market value and usability. It was fascinating to see the fiber analysis process firsthand, where each sample is evaluated for length, strength, micronaire, color, and trash content. Observing the blend of automated precision and skilled manual labor gave us valuable insight into how each cotton bale is graded.

Lunch was hosted at the National Ranching Heritage Center, where we heard from several industry groups before touring the facility, including Plains Cotton Growers, Texas Corn Producers, National Sorghum Producers, and the TTU MILE Program. Tim Lust from the [National Sorghum Producers](#) was the first to present, sharing that an impressive 97% of Texas-grown sorghum is exported. I also learned about the diverse uses for sorghum, such as a strong alcohol in China, gluten-free buns at Chick-fil-A, and as a component in infant food due to its low heavy metal content compared to other commodities.

Following Mr. Lust, we heard from Mr. Kody Bessent of [Plains Cotton Growers](#). This nonprofit is dedicated to supporting and advocating for cotton producers across the High Plains region of Texas. Plains Cotton Growers plays a vital role in the industry through several key functions. One of their primary roles is advocacy, working at both state and federal levels to promote policies beneficial to cotton growers. They also prioritize education and outreach, frequently hosting workshops and seminars to keep producers informed on the latest industry practices and regulatory updates.

Next, Ms. Angie Martin from [Texas Corn Producers](#) presented, highlighting the organization's effectiveness through the collaboration of their state and national boards. A major focus of TCP's educational efforts is on youth, as they recognize children as the future of the industry. Angie also introduced us to [CommonGround Texas](#), a program that brings together women from diverse agricultural backgrounds across the state who volunteer to share information about food and farming. One of their recent successful campaigns involved women educating other women directly in grocery stores, fostering meaningful connections and awareness about agriculture.

The final speaker of our lunch program was Lindsay Kennedy, a former TALL IV cohort member from Texas Tech University (TTU). Following the model of the TALL program,

Lindsay established the [Matador Institute of Leadership Engagement \(MILE\) Program](#) for TTU students, aimed at preparing them for leadership roles in their future careers and communities. The program spans three semesters, and each session selects around a dozen students to participate.

After the lunch presentations concluded, Lea Ann Lust led us on an extensive and informative tour of the [National Ranching Heritage Center](#). She was hands down the best tour guide I've ever encountered—her passion for her job truly shines through! The center offers an engaging and interactive experience, making learning enjoyable. A delightful bonus was seeing the Happy Toy Maker products showcased in the Hank the Cowdog outdoor exhibit, highlighting their partnership with [GO TEXAN](#).

The day concluded with a TALL XIX reception at the [FiberMax Center for Discovery](#), hosted by industry leaders and former TALL cohort members, including my former colleague Matt Williams. My dinner hosts for the evening were Dan and Linda Taylor, along with their daughter DeLinda Hicklen. I enjoyed the chance to connect with them further about the TALL program and learn more about my fellow cohort member, Ross Vinson, who was paired with them as well.

### **Day 3:**

Our Wednesday began in Lubbock, then we headed to Amarillo to kick off that leg of the Session. Our first stop was the [Continental Dairy Facilities Milk Plant](#) in Littlefield, Texas. This impressive facility employs 164 local residents and boasts an outstanding 99.2% retention rate, with most employees staying at least six years. Fun fact, it used to be a denim mill! Now, the plant processes between 80-90 truckloads of milk each day, which amounts to roughly 4 million pounds. While Continental Dairy primarily exports its finished products, its sister facility in Coopersville, MI, focuses on domestic production. Their brand, Majestic Butter, recently earned a prestigious 1st-place award for salted butter at the World Dairy Expo. The facility's cleanliness measures were remarkable, featuring numerous hand and shoe sanitation stations along the tour route, as well as an air chamber to ensure top-tier hygiene standards.

Our next stop was [Caprock Dairy](#), a family-owned operation with 11,500 Holsteins. They milk the cows twice a day and breed 60-80 cows daily. We had perfect timing, as we got to see newborn calves—some even arriving just as we pulled up. Caprock Dairy is dedicated to sustainable practices, including water conservation, feed efficiency (their custom feed mix yields 1.67 pounds of milk per pound of feed), and waste management, all aimed at reducing environmental impact.

Next stop was [Bamert Seed](#), a well-known provider of native grass seeds and other specialty seeds. Bamert Seed is dedicated to providing high-quality seeds for projects focused on land restoration, conservation, and sustainable agriculture. Bamert offers custom seed blends tailored to the particular environment and goals of each project and recently developed an app, Seed Spec, that is free to use to help build your perfect blend.

After lunch at Bamert Seed, we visited [Cargill Sweet Bran](#) in Bovina, Texas. This facility processed 150-185 loads a day and operates 365 days a year. Sweet Bran is a specialized

feed product developed for finishing beef cattle, commonly used as a part of a Total Mixed Ration in feedlots. During our tour, we watched the process of emptying a rail car—a fascinating operation! One of our group members also asked about the "Hi Macey" message displayed on the Sweet Bran trucks. We learned it honors a local girl who, despite her battle with cancer, always waved at the Sweet Bran trucks as they passed by. The company added this message as a tribute to her memory and community spirit. This visit concluded our tours in Lubbock.

### **Amarillo Sessions**

It was the evening by the time we made it to Amarillo, and our visit kicked off with a dinner and tour of Reed Beverage. The event included an informative commodity panel discussion with representatives from the Texas Cattle Feeders Association, Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Texas Wheat Producers, and Texas AgriLife Extension.

Founded in 1952, [Reed Beverage](#) has built strong local partnerships with retailers, restaurants, and bars across Texas. During our tour of their warehouse, we learned that the inventory we saw represented only a 31-day supply of beverages for their partners—a testament to their extensive distribution network and high demand. Still family-owned, Reed Beverage is a highly respected business, known for its dedication to both its customers and the community.

### **Day 4:**

Thursday began hearing from Trevor Caviness at [Caviness Beef Packers](#) in Hereford, Texas. The company is one of the most prominent beef processors in the United States, serving markets focused on ground beef and other value-added products. Caviness emphasizes efficiency, quality, and food safety, playing a critical role in the beef supply chain. Caviness spends over \$3,000 a month testing their beef. Every 2,000 pounds of ground meat is tested and held for 10 hours until confirmed negative for any pathogens. Anything they do not sell as edible goes to rendering. The facility can process 2,900 head a day and they export to 20 different countries. During the presentation I learned they custom process for two large GO TEXAN partners, 44 Farms and Heartbrand Beef.

Next, we visited Hereford Veterinary Clinic & Hereford Vet Supply. [Hereford Veterinary Clinic](#) is a full-service veterinary practice that specializes in both large and small animal care. With a focus on livestock, particularly cattle, the clinic serves a significant role in the local cattle ranching industry. Just a short walk away is [Hereford Vet Supply](#), a separate entity that complements the clinic by providing a wide range of veterinary supplies, feed, and animal health products. Former TALL alum and Boehringer Ingelheim rep, Brandi Richards did note that veterinary medicines are now requiring more and more prescriptions.

From there, Brandi took us to her and her husband's business, [Diamond Cattle Feeders](#). Diamond Cattle Feeders offers custom feeding programs tailored to meet the specific needs of cattle owners. Currently they serve 50 customers or so and have a permit for

20,000 head. These programs include a carefully managed feeding regimen to ensure cattle achieve optimal weight and conditioning before processing. The feed is often a TMR that balances grain, forage, and supplements to promote healthy growth and efficient weight gain.

Lunch was hosted at the Hereford Country Club and Dr. Amanda Fuller spoke to us about managing your risk getting into the cattle business. She works with Diamond Cattle Feeders as well as [Compass Ag Solutions](#).

Our final tour of the day was of the [Texas Tech Vet School](#). What an incredible learning and teaching facility they have built! It was founded to help meet the growing demand for vets in rural areas, particularly livestock and large animal medicine. The program emphasizes hands-on, practical experience, and students gain early exposure to clinical work, which includes working with livestock and large animals typical of Texas ranching and farming. I was surprised and proud to learn that a majority of the accepted applicants to their program every year are women!

The Amarillo alumni generously hosted an evening reception for us at the Amarillo Country Club, where we had the opportunity to network with numerous TALL alumni from the region. Hemphill County AgriLife Extension Agent Andy Holloway shared powerful accounts of the recent Panhandle fires, highlighting the bravery and resilience of those involved in the response efforts. My dinner host for the evening was Eric Turpen. At the restaurant, I ended up seated near another dinner pair, Clint Robinson and Scotta Faulkenberry, which gave me the opportunity to engage with them further. It was great to connect—especially since I work with Scotta’s mother, and Clint was in my boss’s TALL class. The evening was another meaningful opportunity to deepen these professional connections.

### **Day 5:**

Our final day of Session 2 had arrived, and we were off to [Timber Creek Vet Clinic](#) to start the day. Dr. Gregg Veneklasen works at this facility and is known for his innovative work in large animal medicine, particularly equine care and reproduction. He has become widely recognized for his pioneering contributions to reproductive technology, including AI, embryo transfer and, more recently, cloning. He attracts clients from across the country and many a involved in the performance horse industry, including rodeo and racing where genetics are crucial.

The final stop of the trip was to [West Texas A&M University Ag Department](#), where we learned about the department’s programs and the Veterinary Education, Research, & Outreach (VERO) partnership. While all aspects of the visit were insightful, my favorite part was the blind steak taste test. Despite the lack of seasoning, it was a fun and informative experience, and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that my favorite cut was sirloin.

The time had come to load up the bus and head back to Lubbock and fly home. I’m excited to dive deeper into the many facets of agriculture and leadership that the TALL program offers. The relationships and experiences we’re gaining will surely have a lasting

impact on our careers and contributions to the agricultural community. This session has set an inspiring standard, and I'm already looking forward to welcoming everyone to my part of Texas in January 2025!

