

Tim Akers - #2
TALL XIX
Session #5 – Houston/Gulf Coast
July 7-11, 2025

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As always, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those involved, not only with this session but also with the entire program. My hats off to Dr. Jim and Jennifer for the untold amount of time devoted to this and every session.

Monday afternoon 7/11

Our first afternoon began like multiple others in a hotel conference room. We opened with three ladies giving us an in-depth overview of HEB. While more focused on product development and the process that revolves around, they also were able to talk in detail about several aspects of their company. It was great to learn the employees of HEB are treated as owners and empowered to act accordingly.

Our next speaker was Houston City Council member, Mary Nan Huffman. Mrs. Huffman was an engaging speaker with vast realms of knowledge to disseminate to us. I enjoyed learning from her about the innovative use of traffic cameras to fight crimes across the state as well as the forward-thinking the council is implementing to control flooding in a large metropolitan area.

After a short break, we carpooled to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo where we were greeted by Oscar and Denise Taylor who happily provided us with a wonderful meal and great hospitality. The highlight of the night was the presentation by Dr. Chris Boleman. Dr. Boleman's insight into the behind-the-scenes interactions with various other sports organizations, city events and the HLSR volunteers brings full circle the reach, involvement, and enrichment that agriculture can play in a large community. Chris' knowledge and concern of the livestock industry as well as our youth throughout

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the state was thoroughly evidenced at every turn during the night. I am honored to count Chris as a personal friend.

Tuesday 7/8

The day started early, with a quick hotel breakfast and a return to the conference room; Gary Joiner, Texas Farm Bureau's director of communications led our entire morning. Gary provided us with an overview of the good and bad of necessary communication via radio, television, and even podcast interviews. To ensure we were prepared, he supplied us with protocols and websites to help us make qualified decisions regarding anyone asking to interview us, as well as sites to get a "whole" news perspective. Having previously attended a similar engagement training course with Mr. Joiner, I was still excited to do so again and as always, learned something new. This is a very valuable piece of this particular session in my opinion. The engagement basics he gives you will serve you well in multiple areas of your career/life and allow you to be a better communicator and a more knowledgeable person. While it made for a long morning in a somewhat uncomfortable classroom, this was extremely beneficial to all those present, even if they don't fully realize it at the moment.

After a quick lunch in the conference room, we had the opportunity to hear from Mr. Robert Hogden, President & CEO of King Ranch Enterprises. This sheer scale of the King Ranch itself is amazing, but it is also notable how vast their different business interests are yet still intertwined. They have a business focus that is highly dependent on values and culture, not what you would expect when you hear the King Ranch. Mr. Hogden, while not what you would picture when you think of the King Ranch, brings a well-rounded and detailed knowledge base to his leadership position at King Ranch. His "let managers" decided approach should yield results and ensure buy-in to the company's values and increase their culture.

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After several tense minutes of waiting for the bus, we boarded for the first of many stops this week. We arrived at Goya foods after a traffic-filled drive to Katy and warmly greeted by the team at Goya. They offered us a history of the company and walked us through the process from start to finish of their operation. We went to the lab to inspect their quality control, although we didn't get to see any of their operations in play we had a good working knowledge of their entire process. Before we adjourned, they led us to the test kitchen so we might sample some of their quality products. The plantain chips were a hit.

On the bus again west bound for a guided tour of the San Felipe de Austin Museum, While I really enjoy Texas history, I must admit I did not have a lot of knowledge about San Felipe de Austin. Our tour guide was very well studied, and you could tell this was a huge passion for him personally. After the tour we had the privilege of listening to our fellow cohort member, Rep. Briscoe Cain and his accomplice, Rep. Mike Schofield, captivate us with their brutally honest review of the 89th Texas Legislative Session. Rep. Schofield's humorist approach serves him well as an engaging and dynamic speaker. I will definitely use his "I was born in New Jersey, but that is no longer a felony so we can talk about it" quote in some form or fashion in the future. I applaud both men for their service to their constituents and the state of Texas. It was informative to hear their no-holds barred, behind the scenes account of what the truth in Texas politics is. We ended the night with a quick stop for Polish "soda waters" and a bus ride back to the hotel.

Wednesday 7/9

An early morning start was made complete with homemade kolaches and fresh fruit at Glueck's Family nursery. The hosts were most gracious, and the food was top notch; it brought back great memories of my grandmother's breakfast as a child. The Glueck's told the history and evolution of their farm, and we discussed the unique business structure that makes this business successful for them. This is one stop I would like to

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have been able to dive into the production aspect a little more. With the increased urbanization, small scale tress/shrub production could possibly be a viable option for diversification for many producers near growth areas. We loaded this buses for a quick drive through tour and then switched brothers to discuss another local farming operation, Rice farming. He described the process Rice Tec uses to develop their rice hybrids and the benefits of location in this particular area. We toured the headquarters on the bus and were amazed at our bus driver's skills as he navigated the six helicopters staged in the small parking lot. Our next stop was Gertson Farm Partnership and Lissee flying service. Hearing how they use helicopters to pollinate the rice was enriched by seeing how the ag tractor crop dusters helped the commercial growers. The stop revolved around the multigenerational partnership and discussions around how the partnership uses their differences to create a synergy while still maintaining two diverse levels of production and emphasis.

As the day began to heat up, we stopped by Hlavinka Equipment to hear from brothers Terry and Kenneth and their unique operation. The brothers told a history of the business and how they each have evolved into distinct roles to complement the business as well as how diversiation has helped them not only maintain but grow their business. Terry disclosed how by a stroke of luck and a local farmer with ambition, they became one of the few Case IH dealers that actively ship and service products in sub-Saharan Africa and India. This was a fascinating discussion and provoked lots of thought and questions for later dialogue. The size of their operation and willingness to be the forerunners to adapt to new and unique situations is something we can all learn from. We then proceeded to Hungerford for a visit with the one of the premier Brahman breeding families in the state, JD Hudgins, and their respective divisions. The Goudeau and Locke families hosted us for a BBQ lunch and conveyed to us the nontraditional way they have kept their partnership active for those family members interested but still let them have their own distinctive spin for each family. After lunch and hearing from Coleman and John Locke along with Michael Godeau, we drove through the sales pens

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and viewed some of the quality breeding cattle they had for private treaty sale. We then made a quick stop at the JD Hudgins office for a quick picture with Manso, the Brahman bull that started the business for not only the Hudgins family but most other Brahman breeders in the US. The winnings from shows for generations were on display everywhere along with the multiple family histories that are actively involved to this day, a very impressive collection that you could tell was earned with hard work and pride and held in esteem. Unfortunately, the weather started to bless us with some rain as we headed to our stop at the fish farm and hampered our ability to fully assimilate the complexities of this distinctive operation, Homegrown seafood. It was great to hear that any catfish you buy at HEB comes directly from their plant. The amount of protein they raise each year was mind boggling, as well as the feed they run through. I am proud to say they are one of Westway's customers. They utilize the sugars in our molasses to help mitigate the nitrogen build up in the ponds as well as feed a beneficial algae that benefits the growing fish population.

We ended our tours this day with a stop at Prasek's smokehouse, always a favorite stop of mine when I am in the area. I was impressed with the behind the counter production here. As a former TAMU meats judging team member and meat lab employee, it revived lots of good memories and made me realize how I enjoyed my time in the meat lab. It was refreshing to see they still use some of the same processes but have improved on others. Of course, the scale is much larger, however the technology and equipment is still relatively the same. I was impressed with the numbers of products and customers that Prasek's does custom work for, Perry's pork chops are always a hit and now I know why! The dedication this family has to their trade would make anyone a fan, and hanging towards the back end of the tour group with the father proved beneficial when he pulled their new Mexican style beef jerky directly from the smokehouse room for us to sample. Prasek's provided us with several sample packs for the bus ride back the hotel and made sure to stock up on the Polish "soda water" for the trip home. Upon our return, we decided to meet at the soon to be world famous, Capt.

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Benny's (The Boat) seafood restaurant to indulge in their delicious oysters and cold drinks. An enjoyable time for all in attendance.

Thursday 7/10

After a restful night by some and a night of revealing by others, we boarded the bus for our last day of tours. We began with a welcomed batch of kolaches, this time provided by Briscoe, for everyone to enjoy or recuperate. We headed across town and arrived at the Port of Houston, Bayport. It was a unanimous opinion how efficient and seemingly stress free the traffic of trucks going and coming into the facility could be compared to all the traffic we had been in to get across town. Even though this particular port deals mainly with container ships, it was still easy to see the benefit it has to agriculture and our state economy as well. The sheer size and scope of this facility left a lasting impression on all. The capacity within the port system was nothing short of amazing. After an overview of the economic impact and staggering number of products that move in and out of this container port, we gained access to see the control room and listen in with the ladies that keep the trucks flowing within the staging lines, an inspiring feat indeed. We split into several smaller groups and went on a van tour of the start to finish journey of a container as it arrives at the port. The people working here showed true joy for their business and customers, it helped that there were a large number of Aggie graduates.

Everyone was beginning to show the mental and physical drain from the prior days and settled in for our last few facility tours. While waiting on the train to enter Cargill/Tempco, the back of the bus realized our air conditioner was not quite up to par for the heat and humidity of the Texas Gulf Coast. After a brief tour showing us the process to load an ocean vessel quickly and efficiently to the brim with grain, we headed out to meet Mr. Jeffery Blair with the Greater Houston Partnership. He provided us with the economic impact the city has on the state and national economy, as well as the importance of foreign trade. Houston is the top energy area and a world leader in the

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medical sector, yet still have a below average cost of living, which entices new business to relocate weekly. Our last speaker for the afternoon was Roman O'Malley. His topic was remarkably interesting, and his level of knowledge was tremendous. The vast information he has concerning Russia, and their troubles/attitudes was extraordinary, and you could tell he had plenty more that he did not convey. We loaded the bus and wondered how we would all stay up most of the night for our HPD ride along. Following a brief rest, we assembled at HPD headquarters building to await our assigned officers. We had a brief welcome and introduction to the HPD and split up with our cop for the night. My ride started out slow but ended with a high-speed chase. We made several traffic stops, one arrest, two break in calls, a stop at a local Montrose bar for an assault call and then ended at 100mph chase around 610 to end the night. What started as a question of how we would be able to stay awake ended with how will we go to sleep now! This was an unexpected eye-opening event. For the most part our cohort is rural based and most time we do not engage with the people we saw very regularly. We were able to see a side of people that we can use to broaden our knowledge base and gain an understanding of people that we are still trying to provide agriculture products for. We also got to spend some time with officers who risk their lives on a day-to-day basis for the good of the community and this allowed us to educate them in a comparable way we became educated about their daily activities.

On to the next adventure, see you in the Cali!

Cassidy Nemec (#18)

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Session 5 — Houston, TX / Gulf Coast

July 7-11, 2025

Introduction

I'll be honest. I was nervous about this session after having lost my ag publishing job when our owners retired and didn't sell the magazines. I was worried I would feel unqualified to be with the group, but I was reminded yet again how wonderful the TALL family is between all the recommendations and contacts I was given. I am so grateful to have a cohort that understands the passion we all have for this industry and the desire to stay in it. Throughout the week, I was able to see amazing work people are doing throughout the industry, and I was continually inspired to do more for agriculture however I am able.

Day 1 – Monday, July 7

We got off to a quick start with an overview of HEB's product development sector. Two product development managers, Amanda Smith and Blythe Kubin, along with Own Brands manager Makenzie Supak, spoke to us on the variety of brands marketed by HEB (hint – it's a lot!) and even shared some tasty samples. It was impressive to me to think how far HEB has come since its origin in Kerrville, Texas, back in 1905. It has now grown to a well-deserved, massive operation with locations all throughout Texas and Mexico. I am a loyal HEB shopper and proud to be one.

After a quick break to go check into our rooms, we were honored with the presence of Councilwoman Mary Nan Huffman. She discussed current issues and priorities for the City of Houston, including the water leakage crisis where they've discovered over three billion gallons of water lost in the city is due to leaking pipes underground. That is obviously a significant infrastructural undertaking to fix, but they are working on it. She mentioned the efficient new flock cameras. These cameras are taking instantaneous pictures of stolen vehicle license plates and remarkably reducing the amount of time for crimes to be solved for the city.

We ended the evening with a visit to the boardroom at NRG Center to hear from Dr. Chris Boleman, President and CEO of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, and Bonfire restaurant owners Oscar and Denise Taylor. Aside from the boardroom itself being so nice, the speakers were even better. Dr. Boleman shared how much it takes to put on a 20-day event the size of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo. He compared it to the Houston Texans having seven home games a year all spaced apart, providing ample time to fix issues. With there being no breaks in between the 20 nights of HLSR, the more than 36,000



volunteers make even more of a difference in helping operations run smoothly for everyone working and in attendance. I thought it was neat how Dr. Boleman stays in touch with the other presidents and CEOs for the Houston sports teams (especially the Texans with them sharing the land/venue for their events). He ended by emphasizing how important agriculture is to him and how critical it is to be involved, whether as a volunteer or on a board where everyone can bring a different perspective. The Taylors, including Mr. Oscar's sweet mother, were so sweet and shared their business story from being so close to franchising as a Wing Stop to deciding they could do it better and sketch out their own path. I look forward to eating at one of their restaurants again soon. ☺

Day 2 – Tuesday, July 8

Tuesday began bright and early with a media training session from Mr. Gary Joiner, Director of Communications at Texas Farm Bureau. He had impeccable insight on the world of media as we know it today. I really enjoyed this session because a good portion of it brought me back to a Law & Ethics of Journalism course I took in undergrad years ago. I don't believe we have a truly unbiased source of news, but I am always fascinated by where others go and the tools they have today to show both perspectives on issues. Mr. Joiner found out very quickly that I prefer being on the other side of the camera as a storyteller, but he pushed me out of my comfort zone to have a mock interview (with lights and everything!) anyway. Though I of course forgot everything I intended to say when going up there, I do feel like I would be much better prepared next time should I ever encounter an interview like that again.

Lunch was followed by a presentation from the President and CEO of King Ranch Mr. Robert Hodgen. Aside from the stunning span of assets, business divisions, and partnerships he oversees for the company and brand, he spoke extensively on building culture in an organization and how critical that is for both employees and the organization itself. He emphasized that culture eats strategy for breakfast. If you miss culture, you miss everything.

Tuesday afternoon was the start of our time on the bus! We rode out to Goya Foods, a tad west of Houston in Brookshire. Ms. Mayte Sere Weitzman, Goya's Texas Public Relations Director, and Ms. Luz Rosario, General Manager for Goya Goods Manufacturing, discussed the brand and products of Goya, and we were treated to a great tour complete with samples and goody bags they'd prepared for us.

We ended the day at the historic site of San Felipe de Austin. We had an excellent tour guide who explained so much of the history of the area around the time of independence for Texas from Spain and then Mexico. They've done a great job collecting all the artifacts and preserving the history of the area.

The night capped off with dinner and discussion with our very own Briscoe Cain, along with House of Representatives Member Mike Schofield, on the 89th Texas Legislative Session. They were, of



course, both a wealth of knowledge on topics covered during the session. I am always fascinated by the policy side of things since I know so much trickles down to all of us, even if a certain bill, etc. isn't directly tied to our household or industry — policy affects everyone.

Day 3 – Wednesday, July 9

Day 3 was packed full of great people and places. We started at Gleuck's Nursery where I'm fairly certain Mrs. Gleuck became everyone's favorite person for the day. Her kolaches and klobasnikis were a hit, and it was nice to sit outside and hear all about their family and operation's history. From corn to now growing about 100 acres of varying trees every year, the Gleucks have a fine-tuned business that still touches the entire family.



Mr. Chris Gleuck (TALL XI) gave a great overview of hybrid rice and answered many questions about the crop as we drove by RiceTec's nearby cleaning and processing facility. I hadn't been to this area since getting a story back in February, so it was nice to be around some rice again.

We were fortunate to hear next from Mr. Timothy Gertson of G5 Farms. The Gertsons are big names in Texas and U.S. rice, so I was excited to hear from him and see some of their operation. It was good being able to hear how so many aspects of rice rely on each other. For example, their ability to get water from the Lower Colorado River Authority is based on a couple different trigger levels measured twice a year (this was a great reminder of what I'd previously learned from Tom Kelley, another TALL alum, for an article years ago). There have been many years where these growers did not get the water needed for their rice. That being said, rice farmers do a great job of making sure their rice is grown well, and I recommend everyone learn more about this unique crop!

We made a stop at the East Bernard Hlavinka Equipment location and got to hear from Mr. Terry (TALL XII) and Mr. Kenneth Hlavinka. I was blown away by how widespread and diversified their business is. From hearing about their presence and impact around the world in farming and equipment to seeing how they've begun other ventures like the waterpark and homebuilding businesses, I was impressed with how they keep it all together and keep ag at the forefront of all they do.

Lunch consisted of a rainy stop at JD Hudgins and Goudeau Farms. We were able to learn from Mr. Coleman Locke, Mr. Michael Goudeau (TALL XII), and Mr. John Coleman Locke (TALL XV) while we ate and even got to make a visit to their office area where they have a map showing everywhere their cattle have gone (talk about all around the world!).

The day got even rainier, but we were able to stop at a fish farm nearby where we heard all about how Texas seafood is sourced. We heard from Mr. Matt Merck and Ms. Amanda Corporon on the Homegrown Seafood brand and how pretty much all the redfish and catfish we could

find in HEB comes from them. It was interesting to hear how they feed one to two times per day and go through one million pounds of feed per week.

Prasek's Hilje Smokehouse rounded out our scheduled sessions for the day, and it was incredible! I expected a typical convenience store set up going in and was pleasantly surprised with a behind-the-scenes tour of the whole facility where they make the sausage and jerky, including a trip across the street to the jerky plant right behind a cotton field. ☺ I so appreciate the hospitality and really enjoyed this tour!

Day 4 – Thursday, July 10

Our last main day started at the Port of Houston at their Bayport Administration Building. We were given an overview of their impressive operation before setting out in groups to witness the sheer size of just some of the cargo, cranes, ships, etc. they see on a daily basis. We were able to visit multiple different departments to see how they operate, all culminating with a van ride around the place to get an even more up close and personal look at different areas of the port.

We were able to make a visit to Cargill/TEMCO to hear from Plant Superintendent Sean Ryan before the morning ended. He gave us a good overview of their operation and a tour. Operating since 1968 and having 6.1 million bushels worth of storage over seven commodities is no small feat!

After a quick lunch on the bus, we arrived at Greater Houston Partnership in Downtown Houston where we heard from Mr. Jeffrey Blair and Mr. Ronan O'Malley. Mr. Blair gave us so much information on the economic impact of the Greater Houston region and discussed some international trade and investment partnerships. I am always floored by how much of a key player Houston is in terms of the Texas and U.S. economy. Everything from the Port, entertainment industry, Fortune 500 companies, medical powerhouses, universities, and more, is just touching the surface of Houston's impact on the state, country, and world.



Mr. O'Malley took us back to the early days of Hitler and broke so many things down throughout his life to explain how he got to be in the power seat he is today. I'm always interested in others' perspectives on how different people come to power and the history behind what we're seeing today, and this was no exception.

Conclusion / Day 5 – Friday, July 11

The last part of the trip consisted of a night ride along with the Houston Police Department, so I'm including it in Day 5 since we were out until about 4 a.m. I'm not sure I have all the words to describe how exciting, at times tense, but altogether incredible that experience was. I had a great officer who would teach me what he was doing as he went along with his routine

activities. We saw a variety of scenarios, and I was able to witness so many things I would normally not have seen or known about. I've always respected the police, but this of course brings on a whole new level of appreciation for what they do day in and day out.

I'm pretty sure I talked both my mom and dad's ears off about this Houston and Gulf Coast session after returning to Central Texas. I don't think they minded. 😊

Thank you to everyone who made this session possible! You are more appreciated than you know.



Rachel Hargrove, TALL XIX, #13

Houston/Gulf Coast Session- “Exports, Energy Environment”

July 7–10, 2025

It's been one year since our TALL XIX cohort began, and what a great time it has been so far! Heading into this session, I was especially excited to learn about rice production, visit the fish farm, and hear from Gary Joiner with Texas Farm Bureau during the media training crash course.

Day 1 – July 7, 2025

We kicked off the Houston session at the hotel with an overview of product development at **H-E-B**. **Amanda Smith, Makenzie Supak, and Blythe Kubin** shared the process behind creating new own-brand products and how they make it to store shelves. We got to sample sparkling water, cookies, and test their newest candles and sunscreens—and even took home fresh local peaches.

After our H-E-B taste-testing, we were joined by **Mary Nan Huffman** from the **Houston City Council**. She visited with us about the challenges of managing a city of more than five million people. What really stood out to me was learning that water isn't just a rural or agricultural issue—it's also a massive concern in the fourth-largest city in the country. Houston's 70+ year-old water system loses **34 BILLION gallons of water per year**—enough to supply **900,000 people** (roughly the population of Austin or Fort Worth).

That evening, we headed to NRG Center for dinner with **Oscar and Denise Taylor from Bonfire Restaurants** and **Dr. Chris Boleman**, President & CEO of the **Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo**. With 145 employees, a 20-day show, and 36,000 volunteers, HLSR is considered the best fair and rodeo in the world. Since 1938, it has awarded more than \$630 million in scholarships. Parking and transportation are among its biggest challenges, and as someone who works in event coordination, I found Dr. Boleman's insights on creating experiences that people want to attend and invest in especially valuable.

Day 2 – July 8, 2025

Our second day began with an engagement training led by Texas Farm Bureau's Director of Communications, Gary Joiner. I've known Gary for a few years through my work with county Farm Bureaus and TFB, and I was excited to hear from him. This session was one of the most helpful so far—providing practical tools for how we can share our ag stories and represent our industries more effectively.

After lunch, we heard from **Robert Hodgen**, President and CEO of **King Ranch**. The ranch encompasses 825,000 acres in South Texas and also has land in California and Florida. It hosts 16,000+ visitors each year. In addition to cattle, they prioritize wildlife conservation (quail being the most valuable), raise 225 horses at their home ranch, and farm 75,000 acres of cotton and milo. King Ranch also owns 13 John Deere dealerships, operates 19 sod and turf grass locations, and manages 12,000 acres of citrus, 4,000 acres of almonds, and 2,000 acres of pistachios. All of this is powered by a team of 1,200 employees. Robert emphasized the importance of culture and core values in creating lasting team success.

From there, we visited the Houston-based **GOYA Foods** facility, where they can and process some of the best Latin foods in the industry. A family business for over 90 years, GOYA produces 2,500 products, employs 4,000 people across four countries, and processes around 100,000 pounds of whole canned beans, dry beans, and

enchilada sauces at their Houston plant. We sampled a variety of their products—and I am now officially a fan of their medium salsa verde with plantain chips!

Later that afternoon, we traveled to **San Felipe de Austin** for a guided museum tour and legislative update from Representative **Mike Schofield**. He shared reflections on the 89th Texas Legislative Session and what to expect during the upcoming special session.

Day 3 – July 9, 2025

We started the morning with an incredible family breakfast at **Glueck's Tree Farm & Nursery** with **Mickey & Charles Glueck**, who've lived on the farm since they married in June of 1966. They have 7 children, 30 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren, most of whom live nearby. After a health scare in the 90s, Mr. Glueck transitioned from row-crop farming to tree farming. Of their 120 acres, 66 are weed-barrier acres used for container tree production. They grow around 20,000 acorn starter trees annually and start between 80,000–100,000 baby trees each year. With about 25 employees, most of the work is still done by hand. Though the business has been sold to one of their sons, the family shared candidly about the challenges—and blessings—of working together.

From there, we traveled with **Chris Glueck** to the **RiceTec drying facility** to view rice fields and learn about hybrid rice production. They plant female rice with strips of male seed between, then use helicopters for pollination. It was fascinating to learn how this process creates hybrid varieties.

Tim Gertson joined us on the bus to further explain rice production and show us their flying operation, **Lissie Flying Service**. The Gertson family has been farming in this region since 1909. This area is great for rice, but not ideal for traditional row crops. A typical rice season involves planting in mid-March to April, flooding fields, helicopter pollination for 10 days, then draining the water for 2 weeks before harvest. Rice is such an abrasive crop that it can destroy new equipment within a year, and even “rice packages” from dealers aren't tough enough—so most equipment is retrofitted with stainless steel.

We made a quick stop at **Hlavinka Equipment Company**, where we heard from Terry (a TALL X graduate) and his brother about their four-generation family business. Started in 1938 as a mercantile and Case IH dealer, they're now one of only 1,200 century businesses in Texas.

Lunch took place at **JD Hudgins Ranch**, where we toured with **Michael Goudeau, John Coleman Locke, and Coleman Locke**. The family settled there in 1839 and launched their Brahman cattle operation in 1915. The ranch is structured as one LLC with five family divisions, each operating independently but marketing their cattle together. They also produce small square hay bales and provide roughage to the Houston Zoo. With seventh-generation family members now involved, they're integrating modern technologies like virtual fence collars while holding onto their deep-rooted ranching traditions.

From there, we braved the rain to visit **Homegrown Seafood Farm**, where we learned about fish and shrimp production. The farm includes 2,400 water acres and feeds fish twice daily, using 1 million pounds of feed each week—33% of which is soybean-based. Shrimp grow to harvest size in just 90 days, while catfish take about a year to reach 2.5 pounds. All fish are harvested live and taken to a nearby processing facility.

Our final stop of the day was **Prasek's Smokehouse**, an incredibly impressive—and delicious—facility. We saw their sausage production line, toured the jerky smokehouse, and sampled fresh jerky straight out of the smoker. It was one of the best convenience stop tours I've ever experienced!

Day 4 – July 10, 2025

Our last day began at the **Port of Houston**, where we visited the **Baytown Port**. The Port of Houston is the busiest ship channel in the U.S., handling around 8,000 trucks/day and employing over 20,000 union workers. It supports more than 1.5 million jobs in Texas and 3.3 million nationwide. One of the most fascinating parts of the tour was the behind-the-scenes look at the call center, where incoming truck traffic is actively processed.

We then visited a **Cargill facility**, now part of Temco, where we saw a ship being actively loaded. Built in the late 1960s, this dock can accommodate two ships side-by-side, stores up to 6.1 million bushels, and operates around 5.2 million bushels. With 48 full-time employees, they run 20 hours/day and can load a ship at 140,000 bushels/hour. The biggest bottleneck? Rail logistics. It takes 8 hours to process 115 train cars, and most shipments go to South America and the Middle East. They average 7 ships/month.

Our final classroom-style session was at the **Houston Trade Center**, where we heard from **Jeffrey Blair** and **Ronan O'Malley**. We learned about Houston's role in global trade with its 7.4 million people, status as the #1 U.S. port, and nickname: the "City of Energy." One in four Houstonians is foreign-born, the median age is 35, and the city is home to more Fortune 500 companies than any other U.S. city. It also leads in young population growth (#1 for U-Haul drop-offs) and has one of the top medical centers in the world.

After a quick dinner and change at the hotel, the group headed to the **Houston PD headquarters** for overnight ride-alongs. I sat this one out—as a **seven-month pregnant** woman, HPD, my doctor and husband, all agreed it wasn't the best idea to be on the travel team this evening! But I loved hearing the wild stories from my cohort. Scotta and Lindsay came upon a stolen vehicle with drugs, guns, and a dog inside. Nic witnessed a high-speed chase response. Thomas was first on the scene of a fatal pedestrian accident. Liz and Hunter were involved in a foot chase during a domestic dispute. Several arrests were made that night, and our group had experiences they'll likely never forget.

Closing Thoughts

This was a busy, full, and meaningful week. The weather was surprisingly kind for Houston in July, and we covered an incredible amount of ground—from agriculture and infrastructure to leadership and public safety.

I rejoiced with Jaylen Wallace and Hunter Potts as they welcomed new babies, and we're all excited for Gage Morris as he prepares for his new baby boy. Our entire group was overjoyed to learn that shortly after we returned from the session, Ross Vinson's baby boy was born a month early and is doing well!

I had the opportunity to visit with Cassidy Nemec and Lindsey Baerwald about their job searches and what the future might hold for each of them. I also enjoyed chatting with McCrae's Polish exchange student, Barteck? And learning about his family's farm and his experience in Texas. These are the conversations that remind me how lucky we are to be part of this group.

While away at this session, I received the news that my grandmother passed away following complications from open heart surgery. I also got a call that a faulty hot water heater, flooded part of our new home and shop. Life doesn't pause for anything, but I was grateful for the hugs, kind words, and support from my cohort as I navigated those tough moments.

What's been so special about this experience is not just what we're learning—it's *who* we're learning with. The relationships we're building go beyond this program. We're already encouraging one another in life changes,

job searches, new babies, and unexpected losses. And years from now, when we're in new roles or facing new challenges, I know we'll still be the people who pick up the phone for each other, who offer advice or encouragement when it's needed most.

Though I'll be missing the next two sessions in September and November (hopefully due to welcoming a healthy baby boy!), I can't wait to follow along and cheer on my TALL family as they continue their travels and experiences.

Michael J. Cochran (#7)
TALL XIX Narrative
Session 5 – Houston
July 7th, 2025 – July 11th, 2025

Our fifth session in Houston provided a focused look at the industries and infrastructure that position Houston, and the surrounding area, as a global leader in trade, energy, and commerce. From energy production and agricultural exports to environmental stewardship and public safety, the session highlighted the interconnected systems that power Houston's influence both statewide and around the world.

Monday, July 7th, 2025

The session opened with introductions from several HEB team members involved in product development who shared their roles and the company's history and core values. They discussed HEB's focus on private-label innovation, supported by 14 manufacturing plants and 455 stores, and walked through the product development process, highlighting real-world testing and customer feedback. Examples included 1877 mineral water and Simply Heat bowls, as well as lessons learned from less successful launches. Highlights also included the expansion of Texas Roots, the launch of Kindly Cultivated, and navigating regulatory challenges.

Council Member Mary Nan Huffman then joined us to provide insight on the city of Houston. She was first elected in a 2022 special election and re-elected in 2024. A former prosecutor specializing in internet crimes against children and human trafficking, she later worked with the Houston Police Officers' Union, experiences that shaped her commitment to public safety and supporting first responders. Her decision to run for office was influenced by witnessing resource gaps in law enforcement and the hardships families faced during Hurricane Harvey. Now serving with Mayor John Whitmire, she advocates for stronger infrastructure, modern public safety tools like Flock cameras, and urgently needed upgrades to Houston's aging water and wastewater systems. Despite challenges, she remains optimistic about the city's progress and believes public service extends beyond elected office.

We then drove to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HLSR) grounds and NRG stadium. There Dr. Boleman with the HLSR met and spoke with us over dinner. HLSR is a cornerstone of Houston's cultural and agricultural identity, drawing over 1.4 million visitors on the grounds and 1.3 million in the stadium each year, with 20% of those as first-time attendees. With a mission rooted in promoting agriculture and education, HLSR awards scholarships nationwide and supports vocational programs like welding. Operated by 145

full-time staff across seven departments and powered by 36,000 volunteers, it reflects deep community loyalty and collaboration. Despite \$600 million in deferred maintenance on county-owned facilities, the organization remains committed to accessibility, affordability, and preserving Western heritage while adapting for the future.

Mr. Oscar and Denise Taylor of Bonfire Restaurants graciously provided dinner there at the HLSR and shared the inspiring story behind their family business. Bonfire Wings began with Mr. Taylor's interest in opening a Wingstop, but it was Mrs. Taylor's confidence and the family recipes passed down from Mr. Taylor's mother, who also joined us, that sparked something even greater.

Tuesday, July 8th, 2025

Tuesday began with a morning of media training from Mr. Gary Joiner from Texas Farm Bureau, who provided practical guidance on navigating today's rapidly evolving media landscape. Drawing from decades of experience, he covered interview preparation techniques, message control, and modern journalism. He emphasized the importance of researching reporters, managing risk through vetted responses, and preparing visual assets to guide accurate coverage. The session highlighted how strategic media engagement, including clarity, preparation, and discipline, can protect reputations, clarify key messages, and support long-term goals. The morning concluded with a series of impromptu interviews conducted by Mr. Joiner, offering a valuable and admittedly nerve-racking exercise for the cohort. While the experience highlighted areas where I can continue to improve, it also reinforced important takeaways, such as the value of staying composed under pressure and the reminder from Mr. Joiner that it's perfectly acceptable to pause or remain silent when faced with a difficult question (especially when asked about thoughts on the stock price of Tesla!).

Mr. Robert Hodgen, CEO of King Ranch Enterprises, then gave an insightful presentation on the company's long-term strategy, his leadership philosophy, and operational scale. He emphasized that values drive behavior, and behavior shapes culture, which are principles that guide King Ranch's decentralized leadership model and empower decision-making across its diverse businesses. With operations spanning agriculture, energy, and real estate across multiple states, the company continues to invest in professionalizing its systems, particularly through data management and automation. Mr. Hodgen noted the importance of aligning vision, governance, and culture to maintain trust and focus, especially in a family-owned enterprise that has thrived for over a century. Whether discussing their investment in Cobalt Cattle, quail habitat conservation, or their leadership evaluation process, the message was clear: scale and success come from clarity, culture, and disciplined execution.

Following lunch, we traveled west to Brookshire to tour Goya's impressive food processing facility. Ms. Luz Rosario provided a great overview of the operation, highlighting the wide variety of foods produced on-site (primarily beans) as well as their sourcing and distribution. The scale of production was striking, with approximately 100,000 pounds of beans processed daily at the Brookshire location alone, contributing to Goya's global output across more than 20 facilities in the U.S., Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Spain. What began as a small family business in Manhattan has grown into a multinational company, while remaining true to its focus of delivering authentic Latin cuisine to communities around the world.

Our next stop was the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site that offered a compelling look into early Texas history, with exhibits that include Stephen F. Austin's field desk, an 1830s printing press, and artifacts uncovered through ongoing archaeological work. This was all presented alongside excellent interactive displays that bring the story of the colony to life. During our guided tour, we gained a deeper understanding of the events leading up to Texas' independence and the pivotal role this site played in shaping the state's early identity. Though the museum is relatively new, it's already a standout destination, and it will be exciting to watch its collection grow as additional artifacts are discovered in the surrounding area.

To close out the day, we enjoyed a delicious BBQ dinner at the San Felipe de Austin site with Representative Briscoe Cain, a member of our cohort, and his colleague, Representative Mike Schofield, who represents the Katy area between Brookshire and Houston, and was kind enough to step in for another scheduled speaker. Together, they provided an insightful and detailed overview of the recent Texas legislative session, covering key topics such as school vouchers, property tax relief, water policy, and more. They also offered a preview of the upcoming special session, including anticipated discussions around congressional redistricting and other high-priority issues.

Wednesday, July 9th, 2025

Wednesday morning started with an early departure, but delicious fresh homemade kolaches at our first stop. The Glueck family was kind enough to host us and then share with us the remarkable transition of a multi-generational farming family from rice farming to tree farming, a move initially met with skepticism but ultimately embraced. Starting with 7,500 trees in 1996, the family endured early losses before finding success and eventually selling the farm to their son Jeff in 2016. Today, the operation spans 120 acres and produces container-grown trees (primarily live oaks) with a team of ~30 employees. The farm starts 80,000 trees annually, using well water and controlled-release fertilizers to support sustainable growth. While the business has expanded significantly, challenges

such as labor management and hurricane-related weather impacts remain ongoing. The family's legacy now includes 30 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren, underscoring a deep-rooted commitment to land, family, and resilience.

Mr. Chris Glueck then joined us on the bus on our way from the tree farm to RiceTec and provided a detailed overview of the complexities involved in rice farming. He explained the use of helicopters for seed pollination and the importance of maintaining precise growing conditions to ensure crop success. He also discussed the logistics of seed production, including planting rates, fertilization practices, and the increasing challenges posed by drought-related water scarcity since most of us had never been around rice production.

Upon arriving at RiceTec, Tim Gertson joined us and we drove to the Gertson's farm and airstrip. Mr. Gertson went into detail on the complexities of hybrid rice production, emphasizing the challenges of cross-pollination, genetic testing, and specialized harvesting techniques. Water management again was a key topic, with drought conditions significantly impacting irrigation and contributing to the Texas rice industry's decline. The discussion also highlighted the importance of visual grain quality, the role of aerial application services, and the increasing efficiency of modern farming equipment in maintaining productivity amid evolving challenges.

We then made a short drive to East Bernard to visit Mr. Terry Hlavinka at Hlavinka Equipment. There he and his brother provided an overview of their family business that was established in 1939 and operates six dealerships across the Gulf Coast and exports agricultural equipment globally, with a strong presence in Sub-Saharan Africa. They represent brands such as Case, AGCO, JCB, and Massey Ferguson. Despite facing headwinds from challenging commodity prices, the company has continued to adapt. In addition to equipment sales, they manage a sizable farming operation focused on rice, corn, cotton and cattle, and have strategically diversified into construction and residential development to support long-term growth.

For lunch, we visited the JD Hudgins Ranch near Hungerford, Texas, and heard from Mr. Michael Goudeau, Mr. Coleman Locke, and Mr. John Locke about their long history and forward-looking approach to ranching. Established in 1839, the ranch is known for its Brahman cattle and now operates across multiple family-run divisions. Different divisions have adapted and embraced innovation through virtual fencing, drone applications, and a large-scale hay operation supplying up to 200,000 square bales annually. As urban growth from nearby Sugar Land advances, the family remains focused on adapting while preserving their legacy of land stewardship, livestock excellence, and sustainable growth.

After lunch, we made a stop at one of the Homegrown Seafood locations. There Mr. Matt Merck, who manages their business development, gave us an overview of the sprawling operation. Homegrown Seafood is a large-scale fish farming operation specializing in catfish, shrimp, redfish, and other species. Utilizing black dirt ponds and clean well water, the farm produces approximately 3 million pounds of redfish and 7 million pounds of catfish annually, with HEB as its largest customer. The facility spans 60 ponds across 2,400 water acres and employs advanced water management practices to maintain fish health and product quality. Key challenges include regulating oxygen levels, managing cold sensitivity in redfish, and controlling ammonia for bass.

Our final stop of the day was in El Campo at Prasek's Hillje Smokehouse, where we learned about the family's humble beginnings and how they built a business grounded in quality, hospitality, and strong family values. What began as a small shop offering kolaches and smoked meats has grown into a well-known Texas destination, with locations in El Campo and Sealy featuring over 100 meat products, fresh pastries, a restaurant, and a wide selection of specialty goods. To support growing demand, the family established a dedicated processing facility in El Campo. From their popular beef jerky sold in HEB to the iconic Perry's pork chop processed there, it was impressive to see the care and consistency they bring to every part of their operation.

Thursday, July 10th, 2025

Our last day in Houston began with a bus ride to the Port of Houston. There, several individuals provided an overview of their current operations and long-term growth plans. Last year, the port handled 4.1 million TEUs, with a goal to nearly double that capacity to 8 million by 2030. A key focus is the expansion of the Houston Ship Channel to accommodate larger vessels, supported by major infrastructure investments (\$2.4 billion over the past five years and an additional \$1.9 billion planned). Notable projects include the \$1 billion Project 11, which will widen and deepen the channel, along with the construction of new docks to enhance capacity. The port also emphasized its vital role in driving regional economic growth and job creation, and we had the opportunity to tour a portion of the facility, offering valuable perspective on the scale and impact of its operations.

Just down the road and across a rather large bridge we visited Temco, which is a joint venture between CHS and Cargill, to learn about the operation and history. There Mr. Sean Ryan, plant manager at Temco, provided an overview of the facility's operations and history, and to learn about the handling of seven commodities, including wheat and corn. The facility boasts a storage capacity of 6 million bushels and can load up to 140,000 bushels per hour. With a strong safety record and a dedicated team of ~50 full-time employees, the

operation runs efficiently despite ongoing challenges with rail service, including unloading 100+ rail cars in just seven hours. Even amid shifting trade dynamics and tariff impacts, the facility continues to adapt through innovation and operational excellence.

Our last set of speakers for the afternoon were located in downtown at the Greater Houston Partnership, which is essentially the chamber of commerce for Houston and the surrounding area to drive economic development, expand international trade, and promote Texas. Jeffrey Blair, Senior Director of International Investments, outlined the Partnership's efforts to host international delegations, facilitate trade relationships, and position Houston as a global destination for investment. He emphasized key advantages such as Houston's central location, lack of state income tax, and strong infrastructure. The Partnership is focused on attracting companies across strategic sectors including energy, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, and digital technology.

Next, we heard from Mr. Ronan O'Malley with the World Affairs Council of Greater Houston who provided an overview on the rise and influence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, drawing comparisons to historical figures such as Stalin and Lenin. He outlined Putin's ascent to power during a period of post-Soviet economic and political instability, and how he has strategically leveraged technology and media control to consolidate authority. Mr. O'Malley also reviewed the harsh legacy of Stalin's policies, including the Holodomor, and contrasted Russia's economic recovery under Putin with that of Poland. The presentation concluded with an analysis of the global repercussions of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, particularly its impact on grain markets, fertilizer production, and the broader implications for international trade and agriculture.

After dinner, we gathered at the Houston Police Department for a ride-along, where we were warmly welcomed by Chief Diaz and his team. The chief provided an overview of the challenges facing the Houston area and the complex responsibilities officers manage while serving one of the nation's largest cities. Following the briefing, we were paired with individual officers for a firsthand look at police work. During the ride-along, I observed a range of calls, from routine traffic stops to more "dynamic" situations, and gained a deeper appreciation for the professionalism, quick decision-making, and community engagement required in their roles. The experience underscored the importance of communication, situational awareness, and teamwork in maintaining public safety, offering valuable insight into the everyday realities and demands of law enforcement.

Overall the session was a valuable and enriching experience, offering meaningful first hand into the operations, values, and resilience of successful family and multigenerational businesses and their impact on the broader economy and trade. A consistent theme across visits was a strong commitment to core values, integrity, hard work, innovation, and

stewardship, that guide decision-making across generations. These businesses have adapted to changing markets while preserving their identity and culture. As Mrs. Glueck noted, “not everything goes the way you want it to, but God has His plan,” reflecting the perseverance shared by many families we met. From agriculture to manufacturing and trade, each operation demonstrated that lasting success is built on leadership, vision, and a respect for legacy.