

FFA convention - fun while learning

By KITTY FRALEY

It has been a tradition for 55 years, and though the faces and names change, the ideas, goals and responsibilities remain the same. High schoolers from every state in the nation were represented at the National Future Farmers of America Convention held in Kansas City, MO the second week of November.

Each year Kansas City is besieged by FFA members for a week, and the city loves it. There are approximately 25,000 visitors associated in some way with the convention, and hotels are booked solid within a 60 mile radius of the city months in advance.

Big-name agricultural leaders were present at this year's show, with United States Secretary of Agriculture John Block giving a key-note address. Dale Evans Rogers, Jesse Helms (senator from North Carolina) and Secretary of Education Terrel Bell also gave addresses to the FFAers.

Throughout the week selected talent winners from across the nation entertained the FFAers. Most of the entertainment was singing, with accompaniment

ranging from the guitar to the accordion.

A record 37 FFA members ran for national officer, and a first in the history of FFA was recorded: a woman was elected national president. Nineteen-year-old Janice Eberly is from Fallbrook, CA, and will lead the 486,000 member organization for the next year.

Besides a national president, four vice-presidents and a secretary were chosen. The four vice-presidents represent the west, east, south and central regions.

Besides pre-convention activities, seven sessions and special entertainment sessions, these things were also part of the convention: educational tours, the American Royal Rodeo, national leadership workshops, the national agricultural career show, organizational exhibits, and the hall of states.

The FFA was founded in Kansas City on Nov. 20, 1928 at the Old Hotel Baltimore. The location is now the site of the new City Center Square Office Complex and has a large bronze commemorative marker designating it as the site of the founding of FFA.

Vacuum packing variety meats can be profitable

By LIZ LaVALLE

In a recent study, Texas A&M University and USDA researchers determined that vacuum packaging is the best way to ship fresh variety meats such as liver, tongues, kidneys and hearts and make a profit.

The study, funded by the USDA, is a continuation of three years of research by the University, said Davey Griffin, a research associate for animal science.

"Texas A&M was awarded the grant because of their reputation and the previous work done on this study," said Dr. Dennis Stiffler, extension meat specialist with the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

The U.S. Meat Export Federation determined that 30 percent of U.S. variety meats was shipped to Europe, Griffin said. All variety meats are shipped to

Europe in frozen containers.

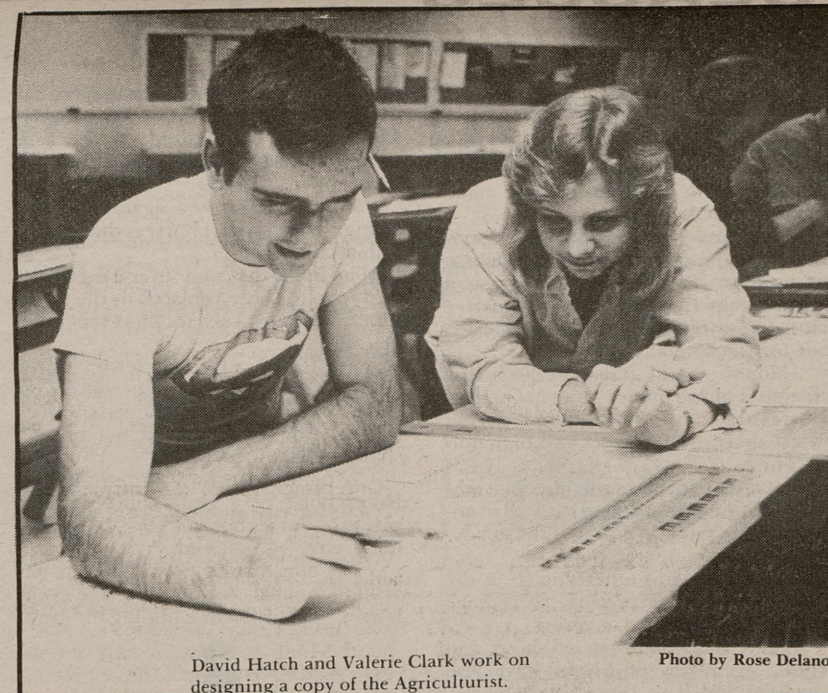
"Since larger slaughter plants work off low margins, a profit could be made off variety meats if the shipping procedures were improved," he said.

"If variety meats could be shipped fresh," Griffin said, "a premium price could be paid for them."

To test the condition of variety meats in different shipping procedures, the meat was frozen or vacuum packed with five or six different chilling treatments and sent to Antwerp, Belgium, Griffin said.

"When the product arrived in Europe, it was 12 to 14 days old," he said. "The frozen meat was spoiled, but the vacuum packed product was in good shape and saleable."

Samples of the vacuum packed product were brought to Texas A&M for lab tests, but the data has not been analyzed.



David Hatch and Valerie Clark work on designing a copy of the Agriculturist.

Photo by Rose Delano

The mystery major

By GRETCHEN RATLIFF

Agricultural journalism is one part of the world of agriculture in which the door of a traditionally male oriented field is opening ever wider for women.

Texas A&M University is one of three colleges in the nation that has an accredited agricultural journalism program. The program combines study in many aspects of agriculture and journalism and prepares students for numerous agricultural communications careers in agribusiness, associations, government agencies and other communications media.

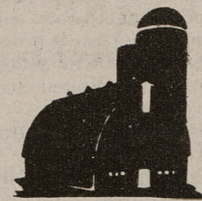
Doyle Gougler, assistant professor of journalism and agricultural journalism student advisor, said there is no problem placing graduates if they perform well while here.

Enrollment in agricultural journalism has been steadily declining since 1978. Of the 32 students enrolled in the major at the start of the 1982 fall semester, 29 were women.

Dr. Edward Smith, associate professor and head of the department of communications, is worried that the decline in numbers will pose a threat to the program.

He said a perceived problem concerning the major exists because students have notions of being caught between the college of liberal arts and the college of agriculture, of which the agricultural journalism program is a part.

Becky Dobson, editor of the Independent Cattlemen, said agricultural journalism is becoming more of a woman's field.



"While they can be very kind, sometimes the don't seem to be as sure of a woman as they would be a man," she said.

However, she feels that they tend to open up more with their feelings when talking to a female agricultural journalist about sensitive issues.

Joy Weingimer, advertising director of the Brangus Journal, says a woman can handle her job better than a man.

Advertising customers are less inhibited about expressing their preferences than they would be if she were a man because they don't feel a need to put up a front with her, she explained.

"Sometimes those crusty old farmers and ranchers aren't as crusty towards a woman as they would be to another man," he said.

Dobson says a broad knowledge of agriculture can overcome problems a woman might encounter in relating to ranchers and farmers.

The biggest problem that Barbie Woelfel, assistant editor of the Charolais Journal has is that men have a hard time accepting a woman knowing anything about agriculture.

Susan McGuire, editor of the American Red Angus, said her only drawback was learning more about being a farmer or rancher. Her training was not agricultural and she calls herself a true city girl. However, any questions she might ask a breeder are readily answered.

"From the perspective of a city girl, these farmers and ranchers treat women better than city men do because often their wives and daughters are working right along side them," she pointed out.

She believes they recognize women as assets in the agricultural world.

RESEARCH

Hydroponics: soil of the future?

By SUSAN FLORENCE

Increasing demand for chemical-free vegetable production, has led researchers to develop a way to provide healthy, clean lettuce in large quantities.

The Texas A&M University Horticulture Club is producing winter lettuce through greenhouse hydroponic systems, said Gary Schmidtke, Texas A&M Horticulture Club president and greenhouse manager.

Hydroponics means growing produce in a water and nutrient solution without using soil. The greenhouse system allows temperature control so crops can be produced during the off-season, he said.

Produce can be grown in water

The system — the nutrient flow technique (NFT) — was used by the Horticulture Club from September 1981 to March 1982 to produce lettuce as a club project, Schmidtke said. The club got off to a late start this year, but is expecting to get going within the month.

NFT involves circulating a nutrient solution through pipes holding lettuce transplants. The pipes are mobile and allow more plants to be grown by keeping young plants close together and spacing them as they grow, Schmidtke said.



These growing tomato plants are being fed nutrients as part of hydroponics at TAMU

Photo by Kitty Fraley

The fiberglass pipes used by the club have 2-inch diameter holes where the plants sit and are sloped so the nutrient solution moves with gravity.

"Using the NFT mobile system can increase plant population by 50 percent; therefore, the economic advantages are endless," Schmidtke said.

The system provides a continuous weekly harvest of lettuce and weekly transplanting of seedlings.

Seedlings are grown in flats for three weeks, then moved to the NFT system for six weeks until harvesting.

"It only takes nine weeks to develop a marketable head of lettuce," he said.

Hydroponically grown lettuce needs

the 16 essential elements that field crops require, so the club uses a hydroponic fertilizer that provides the needed nutrients, he said.

Although diseases and insects were not a problem in the 1981-82 crop, insects and diseases that are found in fields are possible in greenhouses, said John Larsen, Extension horticulturalist for the Texas A&M University System.

In fact, Larsen said, insect problems can be twice as bad in a greenhouse because there are no predators to control the insects.

Because of marketing regulations on size, color and tipburn, Schmidtke said, a 25 percent cull rate is average.

The 1981-82 crop cost about 13 cents a head to produce, but sold for about 40 cents a head.

Schmidtke said the club hopes to make enough money to build a greenhouse with the money earned from the crop planted this month.

Money from the 1981-82 crop was used to start a scholarship program that helps pay the greenhouse manager's wages. The rest of the money earned was used for club field trips and special events.

NFT circulates nutrient solution through the pipes and allows the plant to use it

Schmidtke received the 1982 scholarship, and as greenhouse manager, is in charge of rotating crops and taking care of the greenhouses.

"The best thing about this project is that it's operated totally by club volunteers, so it's excellent hands-on experience," he said.

The club is operating one greenhouse and is hydroponically growing lettuce, tomatoes and a few cucumbers, Schmidtke said.

"The market is good for greenhouse vegetables because they are clean, weather-proof and chemical-free, which is a great marketing advantage," he said.

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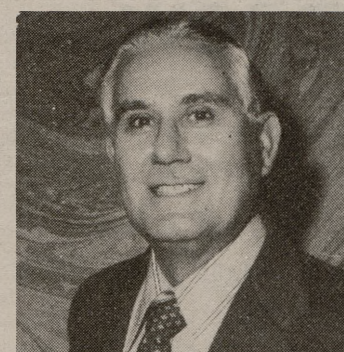
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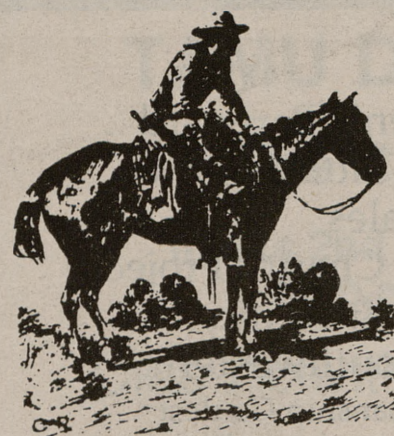


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