

Cattle range research finds potpourri of peculiar facts

Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — Are you curious about the potential of hamsters to breed in the wild?

Do you care about pocket gophers gnawing on electrical cables? Did you ever wonder about the value of acorns in the diet of steers?

If so, you can find the answers in research reports from an experimental cattle range in the Sierra Nevada foothills of central California.

Most recent studies sound highly technical, covering topics such as the effect of nitrogen and sulfur fertilizers on clover yield and the value of point counts in oak and pine woodlands.

But a directory listing studies performed at the San Joaquin Experimental Station since it was founded

in 1934 reflects a time when scientific examination was less rigorous.

A 1959 study of domestic golden hamsters concluded they could become a serious pest if they bred in areas with a good food supply and ground cover, but the prediction hasn't panned out.

Animal diets were the subject of numerous reports.

Ranchers who leave cull potatoes in their pastures for cattle feed were warned to "guard those spuds" in a 1951 report that noted "voracious squirrels show appetite" for them.

A 1946 study on rattlesnake stomach contents showed their penchant for squirrels. Then a 1978 study of squirrel behavior found both those experienced and inexperienced with snakes reacted in similar ways when confronted with the predators.

Ranch maintenance also was a generally accepted practice in a report "in defense of blue oaks."

The ability to withstand the searing summer heat and winter fog of the foothills produced studies on the weathering characteristics of fence posts and 32 types of particle board.

Ranchers were warned against a generally accepted practice in a report "in defense of blue oaks." The thinking that blue oaks were bad for forage was disproven by a researcher who found forage production was almost double under blue oaks and decreased when trees died or were cut down.

A study showed the harsh foothill climate and standard tilling improve growth of California poppies, indicating that protecting the state flower with mulch might not be advisable.

Urbanization

Farms are being stifled by growth, rising land prices

Associated Press

IRVING — It is a picture of contrasts.

A lone tractor sits out beside an archaic gas pump. The barn is filled with farm tools and a pickup truck with a bed full of hay. The house has an old-fashioned style. It is surrounded by acres and acres of land with cows and horses grazing nearby.

Directly in front of the farmhouse, cars whiz by on North Belt Line Road past the DeVry Institute of Technology and the GTE building. Jets from Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport fly overhead and images of the high-rise buildings in Las Colinas can be clearly seen at a distance.

It is one of the stark contrasts that stems from the explosive growth of the last 35 years in Irving. The kind of growth that has turned a largely rural community of 2,600 to a bustling city of more than 140,000.

The farmhouse stands as a testimony to what Irving was once like.

The house and the surrounding

property belong to the estate of W.O. Harrington and only the caretaker Roy Salazar stays there now. He has worked for the Harringtons for more than 28 years.

Just around the corner, on Carbon Road, lives Harrington's brother, R.D. and his wife, Allene. They, too, have a large sprawling house surrounded by several acres of property. It is peaceful and serene.

It is another contrast to the apartments and new homes that border the property.

Allene Harrington said there was not much there when they built their house 22 years ago. Her husband used to farm the land but now they just have a few horses and cattle grazing nearby.

Things are remarkably different now, but she doesn't seem to mind.

"I don't resent anything," she said. "It's a sign of development which is good for the area."

But progress has made what used to be largely undeveloped property, prime real estate.

According to the Irving tax department, the 180 acres that make up the Harrington estate are valued at more than \$25.5 million. The 15 acres belonging to R.D. Harrington are worth more than \$2 million, the tax records show.

Allene Harrington can appreciate the value of the land because she was a Irving real estate broker for several years before retiring. She said her family plans to hold onto the land around the house despite being approached by developers "almost daily."

Part of the Harrington property will be going to the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation when it begins building State Highway 161. The thoroughfare will connect Interstate Highway 635 and Rock Island Road.

The developers don't bother her much either. "We don't have to sell anything we don't want to," Mrs. Harrington said. But she stops short of saying the property will never be sold.

"Never is a long time."

Woman makes living with exotic animals

Associated Press

DALLAS — Whether you're into armadillo weddings, iguana fashion shows or dolphin-finned backyard pools, Chere Hickock almost always has the same speedy reply — "No problem."

The "almost" omits koalas and pandas "because they're virtually impossible to get," says Hickock, founder of Animal Trackers Inc., Dallas' only animal talent agency.

But in words that tumble out non-stop, she says she can find anything else in the animal kingdom — and people have some pretty weird ideas about what that includes — for her clients.

Take iguanas, for example. A Japanese television crew ordered an iguana show, heavy on fashion and light on scales.

So with the help of a local school's home economics class and an iguana-bearing friend, she put on a fashion show that could have made Calvin Klein wince. One of the creatures, appropriately named "Michael," sported a sequined glove and a steel-wool wig.

Hickock, 29, also can try to make your Fido a star: More than 450 people have paid her \$5 to keep their pets' pictures on file in case somebody comes along needing a dancing mutt or a cat that winks.

Bizarre as her job might appear — dressing armadillos in wedding gowns and tuxedos isn't routine for most folks — it's relatively tame when compared to her earlier occupations.

"Among the 70 jobs I've had, I used to castrate pigs," she said, swatting at her pet crow Trammell as it flapped around her head. "I've also driven an 18-wheeler cross-country, broken horses, run a chicken ranch and caught rattlesnakes."

After a year of schooling at a California exotic animal institute, she worked for two years as a Dallas animal cruelty investigator. But in April 1984, she decided to found Animal Trackers.

"I had no idea how to go about doing that, and all I owned was a motorcycle and \$10," she said. "So I opened the Yellow Pages, closed my eyes and picked out a veterinarian."

Dr. Bert Childers, who lay under that fateful thumbprint, turned out to be more than sympathetic and offered to stake her \$10,000. He also gave her some office space, files and a telephone.


Since then, she has booked more than 150 animal acts that have included television ads for Purina, IBM, Texas Instruments and Puma, as well as animals for TV movies such as "Right to Kill" and "Hostage: Dallas."

One of her latest coups is a What-aburger commercial for which her assistant, Suzy Schneider, trained a chicken to wear Groucho glasses and flap its beak as though it is talking to an astonished Mel Tillis.

Her prices vary according to how difficult the act is to procure. Dogs go for about \$75 per hour, while elephants range from \$300 to \$500 per hour.

"But getting a water-skiing elephant (like the one used years ago in the low-budget flick "Honky Tonk Freeway") would cost you a little more," she said.

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