

Other Viewpoints

Beef gets a boost from annual event

Beef has been a driving economic force for generations in southwest Kansas.

A look around the region delivers plenty of proof, from grazing cattle to feedlots and meat-packing plants. And it's all been cause for a grand celebration every year since the late 1960s, with local residents and visitors alike honoring the industry during Beef Empire Days.

The two-week event in Finney County, which kicked into high gear Tuesday, offers an impressive menu of educational and entertaining events for all ages, and helps people understand what happens behind the scenes in beef production.

Another recent event in Kansas brought together key players in the industry who addressed all angles of the beef supply, including production, transportation, processing, marketing, regulation and legislation.

One interesting discussion planned during the International Symposium on Beef Cattle Welfare in Manhattan involved the public's interest in how cattle are raised.

It's not that most consumers are animal rights activists, trying to interfere with the slaughter of cattle. Rather, they want to know where their food comes from.

Not every step along the way in beef production is pleasant. While consumers need to understand why things happen the way they do, they also want to know those involved in the industry are seeking new and improved ways to move beef from pasture to plate.

With that in mind, look for Beef Empire Days demonstrations, events and other information to address innovation and related developments during this year's event, fittingly dubbed "The Future is Beef."

An industry that energizes the southwest Kansas economy with cattle ranches, feedlots, packing plants and related businesses also plays an important role in the state and nation. Kansas ranked third nationwide in commercial cattle processed in 2008, according to the Kansas Livestock Association.

The future of an industry that has done so much to drive the local economy always warrants attention. At the same time, its history shouldn't be overlooked.

Together, the successful past and promising future of beef production in a region known for delivering a quality product will remain cause for celebration. Enjoy this year's offering of Beef Empire Days.

—The Garden City Telegram, via The Associated Press

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Paper prompts gourmet writing dreams

As I sat in the newsroom the other day, re-writing the 15th press release of the day, about diseases in wheat or a museum exhibit somewhere else, or something equally riveting, I got to thinking about writing.

Having always been a fan of the written word, I've also always been reasonably good at expressing myself in writing of all kinds. Reports were no big headache. Creative writing was a challenge.

Even poetry was fun. To this day, I can pop up with bits and pieces of poems I memorized as a child. Sadly, the changing culture makes some of these seem rather politically incorrect. No, the changes are not sad, simply the loss of a rich literary piece. Yet there are many more, and the supply is greater than any one person can really handle, so that's OK.

Anyway, I got to thinking about writing, and about how so much of what is written for the consumption of the newspaper animal — "x number of pages to fill" — is such plain, repetitive text. It's like spreading endless peanut butter sandwiches. These can be good, they are generally healthy and filling and provide a meal, but at some point your inner gourmet cook is going to scream. "Enough peanut butter already! Give me some cordon bleu relief, or a hamburger, or even a carrot stick. No more peanut butter!"

So, I'm think of instituting a quiet rebellion. The minutes of the Rotary Club could read, "Colby Rotary Club / Had a meeting today. / Twenty people showed up / And all had their



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

say...."

Or how about adding a little color to the county commission story: "The commissioners were eager to attack the day's agenda, as they bustled into the meeting room, colorfully decorated with arrangements of yellow legal pads and white photocopies carefully situated at each seat...."

For the sports page — and I understand this has a precedent of sorts in another paper — the editor could write about the television program he's videotaped while waiting for a rain delay to be called. He could call it, "Daydreams on the field of dreams."

Probably, though, such flights of fancy would get old. The fact is, anything gets old when you do it all day every day. When I was a teenager, I loved to cook, and looked for new and interesting recipes to try. When cooking became my job, three meals a day, seven days a week, I began looking for ways to get out of the kitchen. Suddenly, gourmet was less appealing than "15 Meals That Take 15 Minutes to Cook."

The reality is, there are different types of

writing, for different applications. At the newspaper, we write to pass on information. This means using clear language and a vocabulary that nearly everyone will understand. It means using uniform standards for spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, and the like. In case you wonder why your information comes out looking the way it does, that's probably why — so everyone can understand.

As we tell the stories of Thomas County, there will always be repetition. Club meetings and commissioners follow agendas that are pretty similar from week to week, even if the business is new. That's a good thing; the county would be a mess if the commissioners had a book review instead of a landfill update. And if you're really excited about how the meeting room is decorated, you have two choices: go to a meeting or get a subscription to *Decorating County Offices on a Tight Budget*. (Yes, I made that up. This is probably the one page in the newspaper where a writer can get away with a little fiction.)

Meanwhile, our plain, peanut-butter writing will keep on connecting you with what's happening in your community, while I daydream about gourmet writing....

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Farm makes a great classroom

The farm has always been a fertile field for producing crops, but it is also an environment rich with learning experiences.

For generations, children who grow up and work with their parents on the family farm have learned valuable skills about cultivating crops. While they are learning to sow seeds, cultivate weeds and harvest grains, flowers and vegetables, they are also cultivating knowledge.

Lessons learned on the farm include math, social studies and vocabulary and leadership, not to mention cooperation and responsibility.

All those skills acquired in a simple field of soil and vegetation?

Absolutely.

Tucked away in those vast acres of grass and crops, there's a living outdoor classroom, teeming with lessons on life. Children who learn to till the soil come to understand such basics as distance, depth and height. They learn that the bounty of plants that bears our food came from places all over the world — rice from the Far East, wheat from Russia, etc.

They see stems, leaves, flowers and bulbs in their hands instead of in a book — an enduring way to plant words in their vocabulary.

While growing up in a land whipped by the wind, warmed by the sun and cooled under the stars, youngsters learn to respect their environment. They learn that if they for this fertile land, it will in turn care for them.

Such a valuable experience can provide kids with an attitude likely to influence family and friends to respect the land as well, or at least raise their level of awareness. Youngsters also learn that hope is not wishful thinking of harvest success. Rather, hope is the action of planning and planting seeds. There will be those years when harvest may not occur, but the



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

seeds of hope must be planted if there is even the thought of next year's bounty.

Learning outside can be fun. If you don't think so, ask children who've been on a field trip. They appreciate the opportunity to spend a day in a natural classroom where they can trade fluorescent lighting and four walls for blue sky and white clouds overhead.

When given the opportunity to grow grains, flowers and vegetables, youngsters chart the progress of the plant. They invest in the outcome, and that means harvesting their hard work, care and investment.

While encouraging students to consider growing and caring for a small plot with wheat, roasting ears or assorted vegetables, be sure to equip them with youth-sized tools. Remember they are still children and do not possess the strength, knowledge and wisdom of an adult.

Suggest themes for young gardeners. Have them pick out a favorite story character — Peter Rabbit for example.

Try a garden theme that appeals to a child's literal sense, such as an alphabet garden with plants that begin with the letters A to Z. They could also plant a pizza garden and grow tomatoes, peppers and onions.

They could visit a dairy farm to learn about the fundamentals of caring for cows that produce the milk that goes into the cheese on the

pizza. Or maybe a visit to a cattle ranch to experience beef cattle being cared for that ultimately winds up as hamburger on a pizza.

Directing the children and instilling in them that caring for a crop can be an adventure. Have them add excitement to the garden with decorations, maybe scarecrows, painted stumps and tiles and child-sized benches.

Be certain not to put actions children would naturally attempt to do off limits. Encourage them to dig in the soil for earthworms. Tell them to pick the flowers — when they're mature. Have them pick up stones and play in the water on a hot, sticky day.

Above all, make certain the learning experience is fun. Teach the children to make up songs about gardening and sing them together while working. Encourage them to keep a daily journal.

Take pictures of the learning journey in the field and add them to the journal. Yes, there can be an abundance of lessons to be harvested in the soil. Take the opportunity to provide this experience for a child you know.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

