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2023 JOURNAL



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From the President

Watching Buffalo TV

Howdy Texas Bison Association members and fellow bison enthusiasts!

Today as I write this letter to you, I am sitting on my back patio watching my small bison herd graze on green grass as the sun shines above. I am humbled by the beauty God has created and thankful that He has blessed me to achieve my dream of becoming a bison rancher.

I am incredibly proud to be associated with the Texas Bison Association (TBA). I speak from experience when I say, the TBA plays a very important role in helping people achieve their dream of raising bison. The TBA may not offer funding for people to start a bison ranch, but the knowledge we share and the relationships we generate, provides people the confidence to start a bison ranch. The TBA provides an incredible support system that allows bison ranchers the ability to continuously increase their knowledge and build lifelong relationships. I am a product of this support system. If it were not for what I learned by attending conferences and forming friendships at these conferences, I am confident I would not be raising bison today. For that reason, along with many others, I have tremendous respect and appreciation for those that made the choice to raise bison before the TBA was created. We all owe a great amount of appreciation for the bison ranchers that had the wisdom to start the TBA 29 years ago.


The TBA board has focused our past conferences on topics that you said you were most interested in discussing. For the past 2 years we focused on raising healthy bison, tax implications of ranching, requirements of selling meat from your ranch, toured two meat processors, discussed bison DNA, and we visited 3 different bison ranches.

We continue to listen to your feedback and for the 2023 Spring Conference we will have a workshop discussing the TBA potentially hosting a bison auction to help members get their bison to market more easily. This interactive workshop, with conference attendees,

will be led by international auction expert Jud Seaman. Another way to help get your live bison and meat to market is by creating awareness of your ranch. To help accomplish this awareness we will have a discussion and demonstration on why and how to create a ranch website. An additional requested topic includes the information and the processes for having healthy pastures and water sources for your bison. Once again, we will kick off the spring conference Friday by visiting a bison ranch. Friday afternoon will include an event containing interactive learning that includes identifying grasses, weeds and determining stocking rates. We would like to send a warm thank you to our hosts, Bill and Peggy Johnson for opening up their beautiful ranch to the TBA. After visiting the Johnson bison ranch, we will have a relaxing evening at Coach's BBQ in downtown Waco, eating great BBQ, making new friends and catching up with some TBA legends.

During the 2023 Spring Conference we will be holding board elections. If you have a passion for the TBA, serving its members, providing value to our sponsors, being an advocate for bison, and you have time to invest, please consider serving on the board. The TBA board must remain focused on our members, our sponsors, and of course the well-being of the American Bison.

We look forward to visiting with you at the Spring Conference in Waco on June 9th and 10th. And of course, we will be listening to you about ways to improve the TBA and which topics you want discussed at future conferences. Until then, we are all blessed to live in the United States of America, the last hope of freedom in the world. For those of us that live in Texas, we represent the last hope of freedom in America.

Cheers,
Ed Mountain
President, Texas Bison Association 



The Texas Bison Association

works to promote and preserve Texas bison through leadership, education and building public awareness for the bison ranching and meat industry. Founded in 1994, the Texas Bison Association provides assistance in raising and producing bison among our membership. TBA also promotes the

nutritional health aspects of the North American Bison to consumers. The TBA welcomes anyone with an interest in the preservation, promotion and production of the North American Bison.

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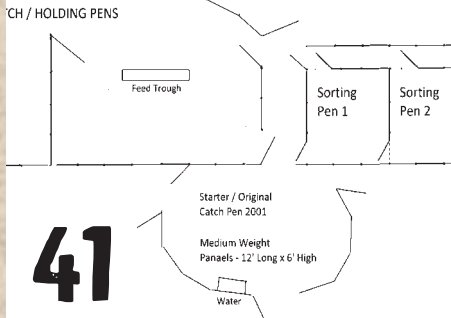
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THE STORY OF THUNDER AND THE WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HERDSMEN

Dr. Logan Burleson

Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Sciences, Herdsmen Faculty Advisor, West Texas A&M University, Canyon, TX

The year of 2023 follows years of changing climate and culture surrounding American academics. There is a nationwide decline in college enrollment, as more and more students place other priorities above attaining a college degree. Overwhelmingly, many students who do achieve a college degree state the college experience was as meaningful as the degree itself. The question for many universities across the nation becomes one of what makes for impactful college experiences? One answer for the few, but special universities like WTAMU (West Texas A&M University), may be a live animal mascot.

Live animal mascots are becoming a faded memory from many college campuses in the United States. The story of WT's live bison mascot begins in 1921. At a meeting of the school's student body, a heated debate commenced about what animal should serve as the school's mascot. Animals such as the badger, coyote, rattlesnake, and prairie dog were all nominated as potential mascots. Finally, a cowboy for the Colonel Charles Goodnight T-Anchor Ranch named L. "Parson" Gough began to speak. He told of an 1892 story where himself and another cowboy had roped two buffalo calves in the same spot where the current school administration building stood. He nominated the buffalo to serve as the school mascot and was met with a cheerful agreement by the student body. The student newspaper later printed: "*Now, since the*



WT Herdsmen and Thunder XIV during the 2022 Football Season




Buffalo is to be our mascot, what qualities are we to think of when we see him gracing all our insignia? First of all, he is strong and sturdy. And his virtues are as prominent as his physical qualities. He always fights a clean fight, and he was never known to sneak away from his foe on the field of battle or to betray his friend. His broad shoulders tell you that he can endure physically, and his sincere eyes bespeak the soul which supports his physical power."

After the buffalo became the school mascot, two bison calves were purchased from the Goodnight's T-Anchor Ranch in 1922. This purchase gives WT the distinction of having the oldest live bison mascot history in the country, with only one other American university (Colorado State University) currently having a live bison mascot. The calves were named "Charlie" and "Mary Ann" after Colonel Charles and Molly Goodnight (Mary Ann being Molly's given name). Charlie served as live mascot for 13 years until his passing. For many years following Charlie's passing, the WT use of a live mascot was sporadic. It was not until the fall of 1977 when a group of students saw a need for more enthusiasm at athletic events and began searching for a way to bring back the live buffalo to campus. The students got in contact with Mr. R. J. Lee, owner of the Big Texan Steak Ranch, who agreed to donate and house a yearling female bison calf to the school. With the addition of the new bison "Lollipop", the WT Herdsmen were formed.

The Herdsmen was the name chosen by the group of original founding members who would care for

and manage the live bison at campus events. Training of the bison calf "Lollipop" soon began but the Herdsmen felt the name would not bring the student spirit they anticipated. A campus-wide contest was held to name the new mascot, with the winning title of "Thunder" given to the bison. Thunder made its first public appearance at the university homecoming parade on October 15th, 1977. Later that evening, Thunder ran across the stadium at the homecoming football game and began a tradition of school pride and spirit that is continued today.

Currently, Thunder is a two-year-old male bison who was donated to the university by families of Joe & Jay Graham (TBA members) of College Station, TX as a four-day-old calf in 2021. Today, 12 students serve as WT Herdsmen, providing daily care and management of Thunder XIV. Along with Thunder XIV, they lead the Buff football team into the stadium at home games and also represent WT at various off-campus, educational community events. The WT Herdsmen continue to provide one of the most treasured and distinctive services to West Texas A&M University, and the job that they do is valued by thousands of students, alumni, and community members who lovingly look at Thunder as a source of tremendous pride and history at WT. Just as the American Bison's story of resiliency carries on, the tradition of a live bison mascot at WT has also stood the test of time. If you would like more information about Thunder or the WT Herdsmen, please email Thunder@wtamu.edu. 




The Herdsmen hosted the TBA 2022 Fall Conference on the campus of West Texas A&M

2022 TBA Fall Conference Summary

by Ed Mountain & Tom Stamp


November 4th & 5th we held our 2022 Fall Conference on the campus of West Texas A&M (WTAMU). The TBA Board would like to thank all the members that attended and were so actively engaged, y'all made the conference a big success! The weather was great and the hospitality we received from the folks at WTAMU was outstanding. We would like to give special recognition to Dr. Logan Burleson and the Herdsmen, Sheriff Shawn Burns (WTAMU Police Department),

Rebekah Bachman (Assistant Dean of the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences), the great folks from Panhandle Meat Processing and of course, Sidney Blankenship for allowing members to visit his bison ranch. We would like to thank TBA legend, Cecil Miskin, for arranging visits to the Charles & Mary Ann Goodnight home and the Herdwear store. The meat on the bone was the "Requirements of Selling Bison Meat From Your Ranch" presentation given by Chris Pogue. Sorry for the bad pun, I couldn't help myself; thank you Chris for the great information and fielding questions





TBA Fall Conference

November 4th – 6th



Nov 4, 2022 3:00 – 4:00pm 4:00 – 4:45pm 7:00 – ? pm	Location and Topics Charles & Mary Ann Goodnight Home visit Herd Wear Buffalo Store visit Pizza & Beverage Social Event at WTAMU Football Stadium
Nov 5, 2022 8:15 – 9:00am 9:15 – 9:30am. 9:30 – 11:45am 11:45 – 12:00pm. 12:00 – 1:15pm 1:30 – 3:00pm 3:15 – 4:15pm 4:15 – 5:30pm 5:30 – 6:30pm 7:00 – 10:00pm.	Location and Topics Breakfast on your own (provided by hotel) & Conference check-in Travel to Meat Processor Panhandle Meat Processor Travel to WTAMU Herdsmen Barn Lunch at West Texas A&M Herdsmen Barn Selling Bison Meat - Sales Requirements Travel to Sidney Blankenship's Bison Ranch Visit Sidney Blankenship's Bison Ranch Travel to WTAMU Ag Building for Dinner Dinner and Socialization (Beer & Wine served)
Nov 6, 2022 On Your Own	Location and Topic Visit Caprock Canyon & Texas Bison Herd (safe travels home)

We'll See You In The Beautiful Texas Panhandle





from everyone. We would also like to thank Donald Beard for his efforts in getting beer donated for the conference.

Friday evening, we had a pizza, beer and soft drink social in a luxury suite located in Buffalo Stadium on the West Texas A&M campus. The social events are some of the most rewarding times as they provide an opportunity for new people and seasoned members to

build relationships. We would like to send a sincere appreciation to WTAMU Police Chief, Shawn Burns, for hosting us and allowing the TBA members to use this great venue. Chief Burns shares our affection for bison and for many years he was the WTAMU Herdsmen leader. The awesome Herdsmen tradition now continues under the watch of Dr. Logan Burleson.




We started Saturday with a visit to Panhandle Processors and got a live demonstration of how a carcass is broken down into steaks, roasts, ground and trim. A butcher is truly an artist, and when it comes to maximizing the best cuts (and profit) of an animal, the guy holding the knife can make or break an operation. We want to thank the great folks at Panhandle Meat Processors for hosting us. When it is time to process one or more of your bison, you may want to give these folks an opportunity to earn your business.

After the meat processing visit, we all met at the Herdsmen Barn on the campus of WTAMU. With November 5th being National Bison Day, we could not think of a better time to hold this conference and enjoy bison burgers for lunch, cooked by TBA VP Ron Miskin. We would also like to thank Chief Burns for allowing the TBA to use his professional grade smoker for cooking the burgers. At the conclusion of lunch, we were treated to a terrific “Selling Bison Meat – Sales Requirements” presentation by TBA member / Bison Rancher / Meat Producer, Chris Pogue, with assistance from his wife Theda. Chris and Theda did an excellent job educating attendees on the state and federal requirements of selling bison meat from their ranch. Attendees appeared to really

enjoy this topic and had lots of questions for Chris & Theda.

It wouldn't be a fall conference without a visit to a bison ranch. At the conclusion of the Meat Sales presentation, the conference attendees visited the ranch of longtime TBA member and legend, Sidney Blankenship. Sidney has a well-established herd of approximately 150 bison with plenty of land on which to graze. Attendees had the opportunity to view Sidney's handling equipment and corrals and learn more about Sidney's approach to bison health and management. We would like to thank Sidney for opening his ranch to us.

It was also a treat to see the Herdsmen run Thunder, their bison mascot, onto the football field during their last home game of the season. Thunder is a fine-looking bull that was donated by TBA member, Joe Graham.

Based on the survey responses, the Fall Conference received a score of 4.67 out of 5. We look forward to seeing you at 2023 Spring Conference in Waco June 9th & 10th. We always welcome input from you on which topics you want discussed at future conferences and which destinations you would like conferences to be held. 



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SWITCHING TO BISON SAVED THEIR RANCH

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By Mitch Kezar

Shaggy beasts file nose to tail on prairie high ground, stark figures against a dark morning sky. Their hooves pillow dust as their silhouettes one by one merge into the blood-red rising sun.

Monster bulls in rut belch out guttural pronouncements as they lumber beside bison cows and scampering calves. It is breeding season on the South Dakota prairie, and this herd of 1,000 buffalo is intent on one thing – following a rumbling feed truck that creeps along in the shadow of Slim Buttes.

Rancher Sandy Limpert's big hands dwarf the steering wheel of the feed truck as his head, topped with a black cowboy hat, swings left then right, eyes watching carefully in the dim light. With gears grumbling in low range, the truck crawls among the scattering herd.

Limpert ranches buffalo with his wife Jackie, his son, Brody, and his daughter-in-law, Samantha. He's betting that in time his four grandchildren will become

buffalo ranchers as well.

"It's a wonderful time to be in the bison industry," says Sandy. "The demand is huge, and we raise a quality product that people want. It's a fun business."

He wrenches the big truck around for another slow crawl through the herd. The Limperts used to raise beef and sheep on this vast stretch of ground. But no more.

"Selling cattle and sheep when they were priced high, and going into buffalo when they were low was a bit of a scary thing," Sandy admits. "But Jackie and I knew what we were doing was not sustainable."

At that time, the Limperts did custom farming, custom haying, sheep, and cattle. "I felt like I was 60 years old when I was 25," says Sandy. "I knew we couldn't keep doing it. I knew the ranch wasn't making money, and if we wanted our kids to stay here and be part of the operation we couldn't afford to keep doing the sheep and cattle thing."

When they switched to bison 30 years ago, the market wasn't developed yet, says Sandy. Not much





was being spent on marketing and promotion of the meat. “Over the years, that has completely changed, and now there’s demand like we’ve never seen.”

Bison are hardy animals that, given good grazing resources, reproduce well, says Sandy. He has noticed that bison cows will calve ahead of a storm or wait until one blows through. “Somehow, through evolution, buffalo figured out how to quit calving when the weather’s not nice,” he says. “When that storm breaks, the herd will have 100 calves in a day. Buffalo have a way of adapting to the harshest environments.”

He does not provide man-made shelters. “Bison will not drift with a storm,” he explains. “They’ll bed down on a windswept slope and face into the wind, and they’ll be there right through a storm. The cold does not bother them. When it’s 30 below zero

they’ll be out here playing. They love the cold because they’re built for it. They’re a tremendous animal. We fell in love with them a long time ago and I’m sure they’ll be here forever.”

Holistic grass management practices run the place. Bouncing along next to his dad in the front seat of the feed truck, Brody elaborates. “The most innovative thing we’ve done here on the ranch is to convert to holistic management. It was a really hard thing to buy into at first. You have to change your thought process.”

Brody shares his favorite line: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always have what you’ve always had.”

The family buys in. “Doing things differently worked well for us,” says Brody.

The first time Sandy went to a holistic resource



grazing management meeting, he didn't listen well. "I literally walked out because I didn't think it could work here where we get such a limited amount of moisture," says Sandy. The ideas eventually sunk in. "In retrospect, I think every banker should insist that young people borrowing money go to these classes. It changes your whole mindset, your whole thought process."

It's not about how much moisture you get, it's how much you can utilize, he explains. "We get plenty of moisture, but with wrong pasture management, most of that moisture runs down the creek."

While Jackie and Sandy took their time with the new ideas, Brody and Samantha bought into it right away. "We didn't have to fight each other on the acceptance of the philosophy," says Sandy. "It is life-changing. It's almost like having another ranch for free. It's incredible what you can do, and I can't wait for the years to come to see how much better it can get."

Sandy offers up a little business history as he drives, "One of the main forces that drove us to get into the bison industry was imports from other countries of sheep and cattle. We had no control over our market. Our vision was to get into something that can't be overproduced, can't be imported, and with bison, we have that."

There's a limited amount of bison available for the meat market, he says. "The average consumption of bison is less than 1 pound per year, so that gives you an idea the growth potential we have," says Sandy.

"Everybody likes to talk about bison, so it's a natural draw. It has so much upside potential."

He drives over the rocky terrain of Slim Buttes. "We can be doing this for many generations and improve the land, improve the water, and improve the resources," says Sandy. "By improving the soil we improve the grass. By improving the grass, the bison love it and the bison treat us well."

The Limpert bison are grass-fed and grain-fed. "A good combination of the two makes for some of the best meat in the world," says Brody.

To entice the animals closer to the truck, Brody offers a range cube cake pellet that is about 20% protein. "Essentially it's a management tool for moving the animals to pasture to pasture," he explains. "It's a treat for them." In drier years, they give more of the cake pellets to supplement the grass. It also helps to flush the cows.

Out on the prairie, hundreds of bison dotted the landscape, walking in scraggly strings, headed for late-morning water.

In the winter months, the bison are rotated back through pastures that are dormant. "They will eat some of the funniest stuff that cattle won't touch when it's dormant," says Sandy. "You'll see them even chewing on sagebrush. They'll eat cheap crested wheatgrass when it's fully mature and nothing else will eat it. It's in their nature to take less calories in the winter months. Winter maintenance is easy. That's one of the reasons we fell in love with the animal. They take very little manpower."

The family brings in the cow herd once a year to wean the calves and pregnancy test the cows. The cows return to pasture. "We turn the water tanks on ahead of them coming to a pasture and drain them






when they leave; it's a pretty simple system," says Sandy.

The NRCS helped the Limperts with water management and pasture cross fencing. "It's very expensive to run these pipelines and set the tanks and do all that work, but with the assistance of NRCS, it became possible," says Sandy.

After years of rotational grazing, the pastures have yet to reach their potential, he says. He cites a statistic that for every 1% of organic matter improvement, the soil will hold a gallon and a half more water. "We are seeing more warm-season grasses that are higher in production coming in."

The wildlife habitat on the ranch has improved, too. The mule deer are now down lower on the grassland. "I think that's due to water resources that we've developed, as well as the grazing practices," says Brody. "We have a lot of leftover grass every year."

Leaning on the truck, Sandy sums it all up. "I wanted to raise buffalo so I could just sit on a hill and watch them graze. There has been a little work getting us there, but it's so great seeing those animals fat and happy out in the pasture, moving to a new smorgasbord every few days. You open the gate, and we've moved that whole herd in five minutes. It's a fun business to be in!" 



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WHAT ARE MEMBERS SAYING?

"We joined the National Bison Association and we've gotten a lot out of it. One of the most important benefits is the ability to network with other people who have gone through the same thing we are experiencing as new producers. We go to the conferences which allows us to learn new things and new styles of doing things."

Stacy Nofzinger

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2022 TBA Spring Conference Summary

By Ed Mountain & Tom Stamp

The 2022 Spring Conference was hosted by the Flying L Ranch in the “Cowboy Capital of the World” Bandera, Texas. Our agenda was packed full of insights from industry experts that ranged from bison health to the financial health of ranching.

The conference got off to a wonderful start at the A&R Bison Ranch with the warm and gracious hospitality of our hosts, Ann and Russell Hevenor. The food, the conversation, and the relaxing atmosphere were the perfect ingredients to kick off a great weekend.

Kaylee Kipp of the Texas A&M (TAMU) Parasitology Lab provided an excellent presentation on bison parasites, parasite testing, as well as her bison studies at TAMU. While all the presentations and presenters received great feedback, the presentation by Kaylee appeared to be the most engaging conversation of the day. After all, how often does a presenter on the topic of bison parasites receive

a survey score of 4.98? ☺ Great job Kaylee and TAMU Parasitology Lab.

Chris Williams, CPA from the firm of Williams, Steinert, Mask, spoke about optimum tax practices for the ranching business. Topics included depreciation, record keeping, tips to avoid IRA audits, and how to work with the IRS if you are audited. Chris comes from a ranching family, and we greatly appreciate him sharing his expertise with us.

We also heard from two TBA legends, Donnis Baggett and Joe Adams, on the best practices for corral design. Donnis and Joe shared both their negative and positive experiences with corral designs and lessons learned along the way. Joe emphasized the investment protection and flexibility advantages he believes portable corrals bring when working bison.

It is always a highlight to hear from our fellow bison ranchers via a panel discussion. This Spring we had the pleasure of hearing TBA members Steve Unger (TBA board member), Tony Braddock (TBA board member), Beverly Brown (TBA founder) and



Thank you to our awesome Spring Conference Sponsors, we appreciate your support!



Thank you to Ann & Russell Hevenor for hosting the Friday night welcome reception



Thank you to Gail Ahnert for her continued partnership

Jim Matheson (NBA Executive Director) speak about getting started in the bison ranching business. Beverly has been raising bison for almost 30 years and has helped many of us get started in the bison business.-

Jim Matheson provided an update on the NBA initiatives. Jim spoke on the current meat and live animal prices being brought by the NBA's efforts to increase bison meat consumption. Jim also spoke



Russell moving his John Deere tractor out of his barn

about current challenges such as drought conditions and supply chain issues.

As highlighted in the 2022 edition of the Bison Journal, Donald Beard delivered an update on the Caprock Canyon bison herd, which is the official bison herd of Texas. Tag teaming with Donald in presenting information on the Caprock herd was Lauren Dobson (TBA Treasurer). Lauren did a masterful job of explaining the DNA research she and others from Texas A&M have been conducting on the Caprock herd. Through the efforts of Dr. Jim Derr, Lauren, Donald and others, the Caprock herd has gone from being a small one at risk of extinction due to inbreeding and disease to being a healthy one of about 350 bison.

Through the generosity of the TBA conference attendees, the Fundraising Auction raised approximately \$11,500 for the TBA. Congratulations to TBA Member, Brian Austin, for being the winning bidder of the Caprock Canyon Bull #40. We are excited for Brian and pleased that #40 will be remaining in Texas. With the money raised, the TBA Board plans to further invest in educating TBA members on how to raise healthy bison, providing an increased focus on-the marketing of bison and bison meat, and continuing to work on attracting more students from Texas A&M that are engaged in bison

studies. Just to name a few of the initiatives we have underway.

Thank you to the conference attendees for being so engaged and active during the conference. You made the conference so much more valuable and enjoyable.

Thank you to our Conference sponsors: Harper Cattle, John Deere, Chris Batten Agency, PNEU-DART, Vital Wildlife, Quality Auction Services, and Buffalo Wool Company. Without their partnership it would be hard to hold fun educational events like this conference.

Thank you to the conference presenters for their time and expertise. It was evident that each speaker invested a great deal of time preparing for their presentation. We also want to give a shout-out to Kathlyn Cunningham of the Flying L Ranch for her professionalism and her attention to detail. She was great to work with and she was determined to make sure TBA attendees had a great experience.

The conference concluded on Sunday with a TBA update and board elections. The board members and their positions remained unchanged.

Based on the verbal and written survey feedback from the attendees, the TBA Spring Conference in Bandera was very valuable and enjoyable. The survey evaluated the Friday social, presentations, registration process, auction, and meals. With scoring opportunities ranging from 1 for poor to 5 for great, the conference received an overall score of 4.77. Attendees shared positive feedback on the Flying L Ranch & Resort and the town of Bandera, with many requesting we return again in the future.

We look forward to seeing you at 2023 Spring Conference in Waco June 9 & 10. We always welcome input from you on which topics you want discussed and where you would like conferences to be held. TBA Members are AWESOME! 🦬



Lauren Dobson discussing the Reassessment of the Caprock Canyon Bison Herd



We had a great “Getting Started in Bison Ranching” Panel



Getting the conference started in Bandera



Auctioning the Caprock Bull, Auctioning Services Performed By The Legendary, Jud Seaman

2022 Spring Conference Survey Results

Scoring based on 1 star to 5 star (5 being best)

Presentations / Topics	Average
A&R Ranch Visit - Friday Night Social Event	5.00
Conference Check-in	4.83
Video: Native - The Prodigies of an Icon	4.86
Welcome & Open Remarks	4.81
TBA Tribe Overview	4.77
Texas A&M Diagnostic Parasitology Lab	4.98
Tax Implications of Bison Business Operations	4.70
Corral Design and Fencing	4.53
Closing Comments and Guidance for Lunch	4.79
Lunch (Tex Mex by Flying L Ranch)	4.76
Bison Ranchers Panel Discussion	4.81
National Bison Association Update	4.62
Caprock Canyon Herd Historical Overview	4.78
Caprock Bull #40 Update	4.66
Reassessment of the Caprock Genetics	4.65
TBA FUNdraiser Auction	4.75
Overall Conference Score	4.77

Thank You To Our Texas Bison Association Partners



Getting Started With Bison Ranching

Article reprinted from South Dakota State University Extension:
<https://extension.sdstate.edu/getting-started-bison-ranching>.

*Written collaboratively by Jeff M. Martin,
South Dakota State University (SDSU) Center
of Excellence for Bison Studies and Chase Brooke,
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.*

SUMMARY

North American bison (*Bison bison*) are an attractive, high-value livestock species that is growing in number and popularity across the United States. While bison ranching has some similarities with cattle ranching, there are significant differences that must be

accounted for to ensure long-term sustainability and profitability. Bison are a hardy species that tolerate hot climates of southern Texas and cold climates of northern Canada, utilize a wide variety of native forages and forbs that may not be as palatable to cattle and require less handling than cattle. Furthermore, bison are not domesticated, and therefore they are more wild, larger and stronger than cattle, and they should be managed as such.

A few things to consider when starting with or converting to bison ranching: 1) bison largely remain a wild and undomesticated species—treat them as



*Bison are native to South Dakota and are North American bison (*Bison bison*) extremely well adapted to our climate, topography and native forages.*

dangerous wildlife, 2) precipitation and drought will affect summer growth and gains—more drought will reduce growth rates and 3) mind your genetics, avoid inbreeding.

INTRODUCTION

Bison are a pillar of North American natural history—appearing on flags, official governmental seals and history books across North America, particularly in the United States. While bison are not domesticated like cattle, they make for an attractive alternative species for landowners across the Great Plains and surrounding regions. They are hardy and integrate well into native rangeland restoration and tolerate Texas summers and Canadian winters alike (Figure 1). Accordingly, private herd sizes have continued to increase over the years as markets and

consumer demand grow, making bison ranching financially attractive ([Bison Economics Tool](#)). Getting started in raising a bison herd requires adequate preparation along with the right management approach. A landowner should not expect bison to handle like cattle, and bison require a robustness of fencing, equipment and facilities that exceed typical cattle requirements. Once these topics are accounted for, bison can be readily reintroduced to the Great Plains and prairie landscapes they once ranged freely. Prior to 1868, between 30–60 million bison ranged across North America (Figure 1). Their populations were rapidly reduced to less than 1,000 remaining animals 20 years later. Recent reintroduction of bison for meat production has brought back herd numbers and has helped diversify livestock operations across the Great Plains.

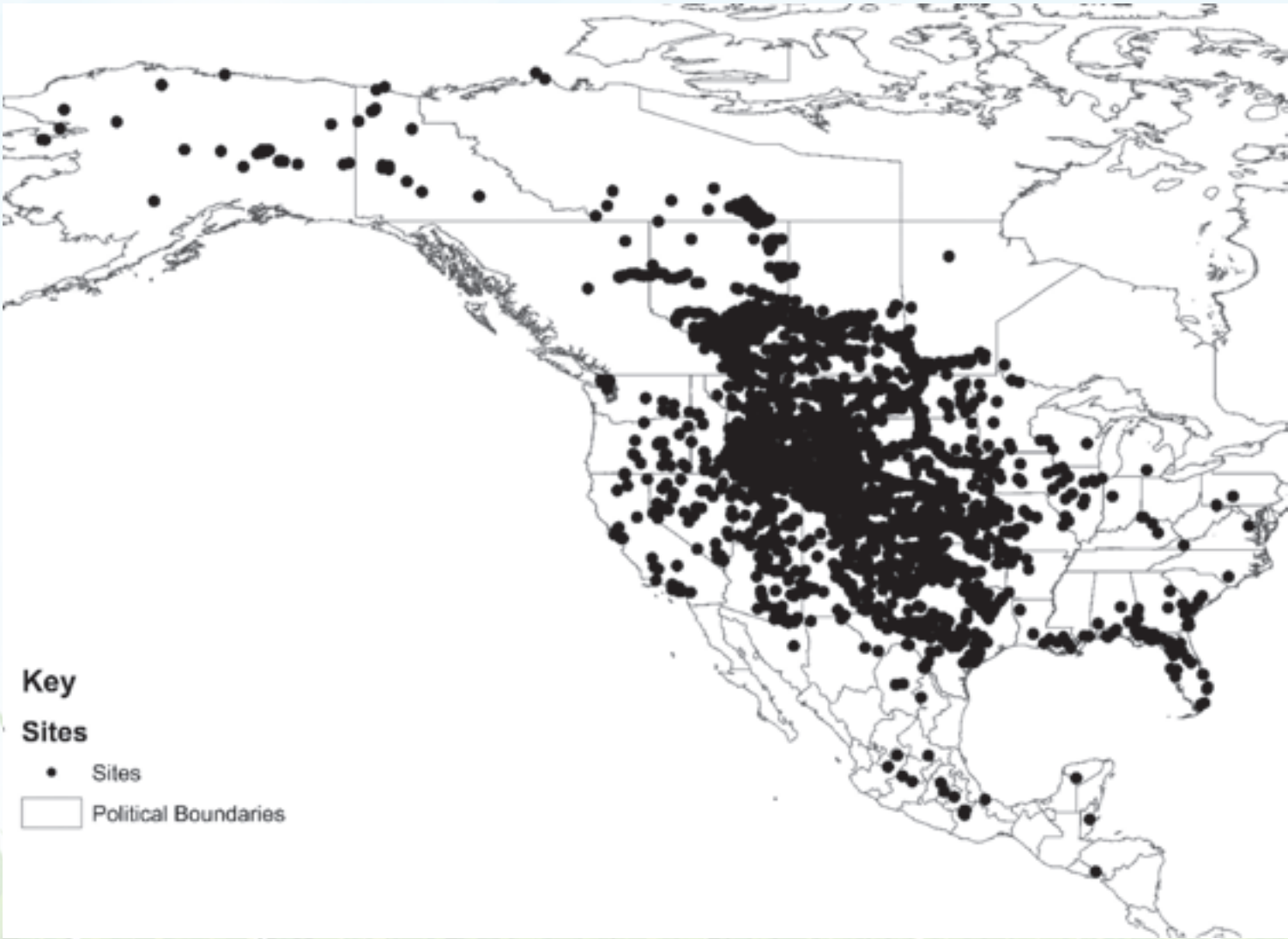


Figure 1. Historic and prehistoric distribution range of North American bison (*Bison bison*) across Canada, United States, Mexico, Belize and El Salvador over the last ~40,000 years (n = 4,713 observations; Martin et al., in prep).

BISON BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR

Individual Behavior

In general, the internal workings of bison are similar to cattle, insofar as they are both ruminants with a four-chambered stomach. Bison retain many wild traits lost in cattle that include large flight-zone distances, short tempers and overall minimal domestication traits. As a general rule, expect bison to behave more like wildlife than domesticated livestock. As such, low-stress, low-pressure stockmanship and ensuring that handling facilities are built to reduce animal stress will reduce the chance of injury to the animal and the handler. Bison are extremely sensitive to stress, which can lead to reduced animal performance at best and animal death at worst. In the field recognizing these elevated stress and defensiveness levels is critical and may be identified by the following: panting, raising of tail, or in extreme circumstances laying down, passing out and cessation of breathing (ultimately dying). Defensiveness (also stress-related) is exhibited by snorting, bellowing, tails straight up, pawing the ground, bluff charges, attack charges and trampling. However, bison are more resistant than cattle to extreme weather events, such as blizzards and heat waves.

Given adequate nutrition, bison cows will produce calves annually after two years-of-age and live to be 20–30 years-of-age. This longevity comes with a tradeoff in that bison grow more slowly than typical beef cattle due to a lower and more variable metabolic rate. This slower growth results in a prolonged market turn around (20–30 months) compared to beef cattle (~18 months).

Herd Behavior

Bison herd behavior is dictated by both size of herd and seasonal cycles. Small herds (fewer than 30 individuals) behave as a cohesive nuclear unit, led by the dominant hierarchy of elder matriarchal cows. The other members of the herd maintain a hierarchy of less-dominant females, such as betas who operate as herd sentries that monitor nearby threats and safety, as well as rank-and-file, sub-adult individuals, twolings, yearlings and calves. Satellite bachelor groups of young males (two-to-five years old) will form and the older males (greater than six years old) will often be solitary for most of the year. During rut (July–September), the males will regroup with the

main herd for competition and breeding. Heightened herd aggressiveness is also exhibited during calving season, when cows are particularly defensive for their newborns. Anecdotally, total herd sizes greater than 30 individuals remain more calm than smaller herds.

Grazing Behavior

Bison prefer to consume grasses, sedges, some seasonal forbs and may browse woody plants and other plants when preferred forage is unavailable. Like cattle and other bovines, bison only have lower incisor teeth and a hardupper palette. However, unlike cattle, bison have different grazing habits. Whereas cattle will favor an area and heavily utilize it before moving on, bison will instead graze lightly while ranging over a larger area—thereby reducing grazing pressure at individual points relative to the whole pasture, but may also have favorite areas that are revisited more consistently. Additionally, due to their larger body size, bison have increased forage digestion retention time compared to cattle, which allows them to digest poorer forages more efficiently. However, basic stocking rate-based management is still critical—overstocked bison will still overgraze a pasture, just as cattle will.

Wallowing

Another distinctive characteristic of bison is their wallowing behavior. By wallowing, bison expedite the shedding of fur while the dust helps protect their skin from irritation and pests. The shedding, or molting, of winter fur also helps to disperse seeds of both grasses and desirable forbs. These wallows are often found in the middle of a pasture and should be left on the landscape and not be filled in, as they often serve to add plant and animal diversity to rangelands. Should these bison wallows get filled, the bison will simply open a new wallow elsewhere. Thus, these wallows should be considered temporary sacrificial areas when determining stocking rates.

BISON HERD HEALTH MANAGEMENT

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 41% of existing bison operations experience bison death loss or euthanasia due to disease, injury, mishandling or austere weather—these deaths, however, only account for approximately 2% of the bison population. Bison death loss is largely explained by four top factors: 1) 61% are disease and health-related problems, 2) 23% are non-predatory injury and

trauma, 3) 13% are handling-related problems and 4) less than 11% are weather-related. It is interesting to note that calving-related deaths are negligible in bison mortality reports, compared to 17% of beef cattle death losses are calving-related. As such, managing herd health is critical for reducing potential death in the herd.

Bison, like all animals, are susceptible to various pathogens, gastro-intestinal parasites and nutritional deficiencies and toxicities. Common diseases in bison include calf scours, Johne's disease (*Mycobacterium avium paratuberculosis*), bovine respiratory disease complex (BRD; a.k.a. shipping fever), infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), parainfluenza-3 (PI-3), bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), *Mannheimia pneumonia*, *Mycoplasma bovis*, bovine tuberculosis (bTB), listeriosis, brucellosis, bovine virus diarrhea (BVD), internal parasitism (*Cooperia*, *Haemonchus*, *Monezia*, *Nematodirus*, *Oesophagostomum*, *Setaria*, *Trichostrongylus*, *Trichuris*), ostertagiosis, anaplasmosis, coccidiosis, liver flukes, lungworm, *Toxocara vitulorum*, copper and selenium deficiencies, clostridial diseases, blackleg, anthrax, histophilus, malignant catarrhal fever (MCF), pinkeye, bluetongue virus (BTV) and epidemic hemorrhagic disease (EHD). The National Bison Association has an [in-depth guide on bison disease](#) that may be purchased through their online resources.

Common, tell-tale signs of unhealthy bison include emaciation, lethargy, coughing and voluntary seclusion from the herd. One of the field monitoring tools to compare herd and individual health is by using Body Condition Scores (BCS). On a five-point scale with "5" being obese and "1" being emaciated, conservation-oriented herds should strive for an average BCS of 3.1 for the herd, while production-oriented bison herds should strive for an average BCS of 3.8 for the herd. It is important to monitor these behavioral and body condition scores for changes out of normal. As an example, emaciated animals may be indicative of poor nutrition, gastro-intestinal parasite infestation or disease infection and should be used to make management decisions regarding health interventions for those individuals or the herd. Establishing a frequent and regular parasite monitoring program for your herd is important to become proactive, instead of reactive to health problems. Contact your veterinarian or local extension office for labs that can conduct this testing.

As with any animal operation, dealing with animal carcasses is an important consideration. While this is an unfortunate part of operating animal herds, these carcasses are still a wealth of information for your operation. It is often worth conducting a necropsy to learn the cause of death for the animal, because it may provide a deep look into what else might be ailing the rest of your herd. Working with your herd veterinarian is essential to correctly and safely conduct a necropsy. The Center of Excellence for Bison Studies has [resources](#) available to assist you in obtaining pre-assembled necropsy kits that you can purchase as a contingency, and it has a long shelf-life.

MANAGING RANGELANDS AND PASTURE FOR BISON

Historically, bison ranged across almost all of North America and can acclimate to a variety of climates and ecosystems. As with any livestock, maintaining a healthy stocking rate compatible with your local carrying capacity is key for the long-term sustainability of the rangeland or pasture, as well as the herd itself. Overstocking a pasture can lead to degradation in forage quality, increased parasite and health issues and reduced soil productivity.

Determining stocking rate for bison is similar to other livestock species, as it is a function of the total number of animal units (AU) per acre of productive range or pasture. Bison are generally equivalent to cattle in terms of animal unit equivalents (AUE), with a bison cow and calf generally equating to one AUE. Appropriate stocking rates vary depending on forage type, precipitation and a number of other factors (collectively referred to as carrying capacity). For more information on appropriate stocking rates in your region, contact your local extension office. Also use this [grazing calculator webtool](#).

Integrating bison into existing pasture and range management systems may be straightforward. Particularly, bison and prescribed fire are a traditional combination, which integrate well. Both history and research note that bison congregate and graze in recently burned areas, selecting newly sprouted grass shoots and churning the soil surface. This may lead to increased plant species diversity and reduced soil compaction. Average daily gains on bison on rangelands average approximately one pound per day, compared to approximately 1.3–2.4 pounds per day in feedlot conditions.

One important consideration for managers looking

to convert a property to raising bison is that bison perform poorly in digesting coastal bermudagrass and some other introduced forage species. This is primarily a concern in unfertilized monoculture bermudagrass pastures that are found in the southern Great Plains and surrounding regions, but nevertheless may cause severe and chronic issues with animal performance and mortality.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRANSITIONING FROM CATTLE TO BISON RANCHING

Ranching operations running cattle herds are commonly found across the Great Plains and are typically well suited for transitioning to ranching bison. In many aspects, the two species of livestock require similar operational considerations and facilities, though there are notable differences that should be taken into consideration before transitioning. Comparing the economic feasibility of running bison, tracking local market outlets for marketable animals and changing fencing and handling infrastructure is critical for solvency and long-term success.

Economic Feasibility of Bison Ranching Relative to Cattle

The comparative economics of transitioning from cattle ranching to bison is dependent on the revenue prospects from selling higher value animals relative to the increased facility and transportation costs that are required for bison operations.

Overall, the number of bison in the United States has been remaining relatively constant, with recent trends showing an increasing number of bison from 161,917 in 2012 to 183,515 in 2017. Across the Great Plains region, the distribution of these animals has been greatest in the northern states relative to the central or southern ones. Around the same time, wholesale market carcass prices of bison generally outperformed cattle carcass prices from 2009 to 2019 and have outperformed cattle market prices since 2004 ([Bison Economics Tool](#)). However, this increased carcass price is offset by the lack of tax incentives present in the cattle industry, which increases total costs on bison producers.

Converting an existing livestock operation to accommodate bison comes with potentially substantial changes in infrastructure and planning that may impact operational costs. Because of the size and behavior differences relative to domesticated

livestock, fences, handling facilities and loading facilities must be strengthened and renovated to accommodate bison. These conversion costs for equipment and perimeter fences may be limiting for many cattle ranchers to transform their properties for conservation, but costsharing programs, loans and grants via the USDA may offset some costs. Check with your local USDA Service Center to verify which programs may apply.

Separate from ranch infrastructure, ranchers should be aware that there are fewer bison sale and processing facilities in the country. This effectively means that purchasing bison requires more effort or distance than cattle. While many bison are sold via private treaty, national and regional/state bison associations may organize regular or sporadic auctions. Many traditional sale barns are not equipped for bison. Sale to terminal markets and processors also typically involved an individual contract, with the producer being responsible for delivering the animals to the facility. Some companies may be able to contract or facilitate the delivery of the animals.

Converting Facilities to Accommodate Bison

The two areas that require the most significant adaptation to handle bison are fencing and animal handling facilities. Bison are larger, more agile and more skittish compared to cattle.

Their larger size allows them to simply shove their way through fencing, and adult bison can jump up to six feet high. Therefore, they require appropriate facilities and infrastructure that can accommodate those differences.

Fencing

It is important to understand that very few fences will prevent a sufficiently motivated bison from getting through it. Their large size and ability to jump normal-sized fences mean a three-strand, barbed-wire fence good enough for cattle should not be expected to deter or hold bison. Thus, the objective is to utilize fencing and handling techniques designed to reduce the desire for a bison to want to go through the fence and to deter that desire if necessary.

As a rule of thumb, keeping the fence line at the eye level of bison (5–5.5 feet) may deter attempts to cross it. For barbed wire fences, three-to-five strands of high-tensile wire should suffice and may make for straight-forward renovation of existing cattle fencing. For woven wire fencing, 48-inch woven wire topped



Courtesy: USDA NRCS South Dakota

with two-to-three strands of high-tensile barbed wire may contain bison, while deterring access to pastures by predators (however, this may also unintentionally limit pronghorn, elk and deer access). Electric fencing can also be effective given good grounding and adequate charge capacity on the lines.

Handling facilities

Like fencing, handling facilities need to be robust enough to handle bison. Compared to cattle facilities, this requires higher pens, fences and panels, with an average height of at least seven feet. Sorting pens need to be larger; chutes need to be larger, and squeeze chutes must be custom made to accommodate the larger width and weight of bison. Specialty squeeze chutes and other handling equipment is available from several manufacturers or can be custom built.


More so than cattle, planning handling facilities to reduce animal stress is critical for bison herds. Placing chutes, alleys and pens with good forward visibility and blocked visibility of humans will allow bison to progress through the facility readily. Excessive stress during handling and leading can lead to animal and human injury, damage to the facilities and potentially animal death.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Finally, landowners interested in beginning a bison ranch should be aware that bison do not

always qualify for the same incentives and programs that other livestock do. Generally, Bison qualify for USDA Farm Service Agency Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program (WHIP) and Livestock Forage Program (LFP). Within the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, their Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) may be able to aid landowners interested in implementing best management practices. Information on these programs and coverage should be requested from your local USDA Service Center.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & WORKS CITED

- National Bison Association, Official website.
- Center of Excellence for Bison Studies, South Dakota State University.
- Bison Worker and Handling Safety Guidelines, Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020. Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers; All Items in U.S. City Average [CPIAUCSL]. *FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*. [Accessed 19 Mar 2020].
- USDA, 2016. Health and management practices on U.S. ranched-bison operations, 2014. Fort Collins, Colorado.
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- USDA NASS, 2017. 2017 Census of Agriculture, Census Data Query Tool (CDQT).
- USDA NRCS, 2021. South Dakota, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Body Condition Scoring – Bison. 

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WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM

By Shala Gean
Communications Specialist

Majestic and a symbol of American history—bison, commonly known as buffalo, have a unique heritage.

They once numbered up to 120 million head in America, but the herd dwindled dangerously close to extinction in the 1800s. The number of remaining bison fell to less than 1,000.

But through the efforts of Charles Goodnight, ranchers and conservationists, the iconic animal is making a steady comeback. And there are many private herds across the country today. Like on Bill Johnson's ranch in Central Texas.

For the last six years, Johnson—a rancher and business-

man—has raised buffalo on his 1,000-acre ranch in Robinson.

Today, he has a growing herd of around 70 buffalo.

Johnson said folks often misunderstand these iconic animals, because of their large size. Although they may appear slow, Johnson said they can "turn on a dime" and are "unbelievably quick."

"Buffalo are not pets and should be treated and respected as wild animals," Johnson said. "Respect buffalo and they will respect you. Don't be aggressive in their territory. Respect their presence."

Bison are fairly low maintenance. But they do require custom working chutes and bigger pens made to accommodate

their size, especially buffalo bulls that can weigh up to 2,200 lbs. The custom chutes and pens are also needed because bison aren't as domesticated as cattle.

The rugged animals are a mainstay on Johnson's ranch.

They have a thick, shaggy coat that serves as good insulation in the winter. But during the summer, they shed their thick coat.

When flies and other pests are bad, Johnson prefers to use natural control methods like diatomaceous earth, which is made from the fossilized remains of tiny, aquatic organisms. Once the fly is dusted with diatomaceous earth, it slowly dehydrates and dies.

The demand for bison meat

is rising, according to Johnson. Bison meat can be used in most recipes that call for beef.

"If you ever eat a good buffalo burger or a good buffalo steak, there is nothing like it," Johnson said. "Buffalo are really gaining in the market. There's more demand than supply."

Bison meat is also higher in protein than beef and lower in fat and cholesterol.

"Some of the best meals I've ever had is buffalo. It has a very unique taste," Johnson said.

The American Plains Bison is the largest mammal in North America. Texas has more ranchers growing bison than any other state, raising a part of American history. And Johnson is proud to do his part.



Article courtesy of Texas Farm Bureau.

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NATIVE | The Prodigies of an Icon

Written By Charlie & Shauna Rankin

This Project all started with a really good pair of socks. Seriously, I know that's hard to believe, so here's our back story.

We purchased our ranch in 2015. It took a year and a half to make the late 1800's North Carolina farmhouse habitable for our family. From there our ranch slowly became home to horses, goats, sheep, cows, chickens, ducks, a few dogs, several cats, and even a couple of rabbits.

With all the animal and renovation adventures, our dream for the ranch was ultimately to raise bison. In fact, we named it 'Yanasa Ama Ranch' with Yanasa meaning "Buffalo" or "Bison" in Muskogean,

respecting the presence of those who came before us. The problem we had was infrastructure. A real life 'money pit' story of our farmhouse renovation landed us with a home but little resources for infrastructure to contain bison.

As time went on we continued to fester over our dream of raising bison. We joined the National Bison Association in order to at least learn more about raising bison. It helped tremendously, but did not resolve our hurdles to begin.

We often wonder about the changes and challenges life throws at us, perhaps it's the unexpected ones that make the remarkable parts of this story.





Nobody wants to experience an abrupt career change, however, over the last several years, it would seem many of us have been forced into new directions. Ourselves included! Then when COVID-19 began impacting our communities, we decided to turn portions of our videography business into a nonprofit enabling us to focus on sharing regenerative, sustainable, and humane agrarian practices. We wanted to support our extended community of farmers and ranchers while helping others find resources during times when resources seemed scant.

As Meet My Neighbor Productions began using social media to make an impact, our subscriber base rallied behind our efforts, willing to support us in any way possible.

One subscriber went as far as sending us a pair of socks. A very special pair of socks.

The socks they sent us were some of the

most comfortable socks we'd ever worn and of course, they were made from bison fiber. We were pretty tickled that someone sent us socks, blown away that they were made from bison fiber. We decided to contact these sock people.

The socks came from Ron and Theresa Miskin from the Buffalo Wool Co in Weatherford Texas, about 1200 miles from our little ranch in North Carolina.

Perhaps this was the first lesson we learned about the bison community. No matter who you are or where you are from, if you like bison, they are there for you!

Ron and Charlie got to talking, and he decided to express to Ron our dream of eventually someday creating a documentary on bison. We absolutely love the animal and wanted to do more to support the efforts in restoring its population. Ron simply responded "so do it!". It's amazing, to think back on the first time our little dream started to feel like something more. Ron and Theresa kicked the effort off with a Gold Sponsorship, a few contacts, and a lot of moral support.

With that encouragement we loaded up our family Tahoe, hooked up the popup and headed west to begin filming. "I still cannot shake the feeling of excitement when we first drove into a sizable herd of these majestic animals on the West Bijou Ranch. While bringing that majesty to life in a motion picture sometimes seems nearly impossible, it's a feeling and



experience I certainly hope I can convince more people to seek out and be a part of” says Charlie.

NATIVE | The Prodigies of an Icon is a feature documentary film project about North America’s most iconic mammal, the American Bison (aka Buffalo). The film features people in all facets of the bison community across North America and Native American Territories.



The documentary aims to highlight the history of bison and its relationship with mankind, the regenerative significance bison has on our ecology, and the businesses that have made its comeback both possible and economically sustainable in a modern world.

Together bison ranchers, conservationists, and indigenous people are running one of the largest conservation programs in the world. They have reestablished a species from the brink of extinction while restoring, managing, and protecting grasslands that are essential to our ecosystem all while developing businesses that is contributing to everything from food security to clothing.

The objective of this project is to create a documentary AND social movement that entices viewers to support the bison community through their purchasing and donation decisions and to ultimately help them recognize the role that they can play in repopulating and maintain this incredible keystone species in a modern world.


Connecting the benefits of bison to the ecology is an essential part of the documentary. To illustrate the bison’s environmental impact and accessibility across the continent the film will provide viewers with local and regional resources.

Over the years, documentaries have often fallen victim to special interest narratives. It’s our prerogative to document and share the whole of the truth of today’s bison story.

As our team has ventured down the road of documenting the bison’s story, we’ve discovered another almost mystic hallmark of this extraordinary species. Beyond its naturally regenerative influence on our ecosystem, or its remarkable story of survival against our best efforts to eliminate it. The bison has managed to unite people of varying political, ethnic, cultural, and ecological backgrounds into a single cause they can all get behind even during disruptive social, political, and economic times.

What started as an idea birthing from our own admiration for this mammal, has evolved into being a part of this bigger picture of healing for our land, animals, people, and nations.

NATIVE | The Prodigies of an Icon is a documentary completely narrated and funded by the bison community and its supporters. This entire project is being made possible by your peers and counterparts.

2022 in Texas: We filmed at Caprock Canyon, hung out with Donald Beard and his herd, visited with TBA members at the fall conference, got up close with WTAMU’s very own ‘Thunder and The Herdsmen’, paid our dues at the Goodnight Homestead and enjoyed some long overdue time with the Miskins. In 2023, with your support, we’re covering even more ground where our beloved bison roam! To learn more about this project go to bison.meetmyneighbor.org. 

Texas A&M University—Controlling Parasites through the Management of Bison

Kaylee Kipp, Joe Luksovsky, Dr. Guilherme Verocai

The Parasitology Diagnostic Laboratory of the Department of Veterinary Pathology at the Texas A&M University School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences serves anyone, from the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital to producers, private practitioners, zoos, and government agencies and pharmaceutical industry. The Diagnostic lab has been offering expert knowledge and service for nearly 40 years, providing accurate results in a timely manner. Our mission is to help our clients determine if parasites are a problem for their patients, pets, herds, or flocks. Whether it be companion animals, exotics, livestock, or wildlife, we offer a wide array of tests to diagnose parasite infections and infestations and determine parasite disease potential for the animals in your care. For the last 4 years, the lab has been under the direction of Dr. Gui Verocai, veterinarian, researcher, and a board-certified veterinary parasitologist.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES RELATED TO PARASITE CONTROL

There is little a bison producer can do to truly prevent internal parasites in a herd since all grazing ruminants are going to harbor a number of internal parasites at any given time or season. Therefore, the goal should always be to control the level of parasites, NOT to eliminate them. There are many different management strategies that a bison producer can implement in their herd for controlling internal parasites. Though not all management strategies are practical for every herd, there are some that can be implemented by almost all producers. Some of these include just simply limiting overgrazing and overcrowding of pastures. Three management strategies will be covered, however there are numerous other strategies outside the scope of this article. Unfortunately, all management strategies are based on our knowledge of managing cattle and other ruminants, with some insights from our years of experience providing diagnostic service to the bison community. Therefore, management strategies

specific to bison and how it relates to parasite control needs to be further investigated for us to gain a better understanding of their effectiveness in different scenarios.

PASTURE ROTATION AND MANAGEMENT

There are many reasons a producer could benefit from rotating their herd through different pastures. One of the biggest reasons being allowing forages to regrow and replenish the pasture. However, another reason producers often rotate their pastures is for assisting parasite control. The goal being, if I take the herd off the pasture for a certain amount of time, the parasite eggs and larvae that are present on that pasture will die before I reintroduce the herd back. Therefore, the herd will encounter a “cleaner” pasture, and acquire no or very few parasites while grazing. Though this management strategy seems simple enough, it is actually very complex. There are many factors when deciding when you should rotate, how long to graze, and when to reintroduce into the original pasture again, and even this might not help. Naturally, as big as Texas is and its varied climates it has, this will add further complexity. But, to a producer needs to first understand the lifecycles of the parasites to better understand how long they are on pasture. Most trichostrongyle-type gastrointestinal nematodes (e.g., *Haemonchus*, *Ostertagia*, and *Cooperia* reach their infective stage roughly two weeks after the eggs are passed onto the pasture. Once the larvae develop into their infective stage (L3), most can survive from weeks to months on pasture if environmental conditions are favorable. There are even some larvae, like those of the “brown stomach worm”, *Ostertagia*, that, once it develops into its L3 stage, can survive during the winter on pasture (or ‘overwinter’), reinfecting a herd in the spring. Because of this, it makes it very difficult to know how long to rotate. But there are times of the year that parasites are more often a problem. These being the early parts of the grazing season and early fall. Parasites don’t often do well in extreme

temperatures, whether hot or cold. Though we can find parasites year-round in many parts of Texas, due to our mild winters. In contrast, it is our summer that can have a greater effect on the L3 larvae due to them dying when exposed to the UV light of the sun and the lack of moisture from the heat. A great way to help control parasites on the pasture is to spread the feces, forcing the larvae to be more exposed to the UV light and heat. This method can also help disturb the lifecycle of the horn flies. Controlled burning is also a way to help control parasites on pasture. This management technique is useful when combining it with other management strategies because it focuses on controlling the parasite stages that are free-living on pasture, rather than inside the animal host.

REFUGIA

Refugia is a great management technique because it helps slow the rate of resistance in dewormers as well as saves the producer money and labor! Though refugia has not been studied in bison directly, it has been studied in small ruminants and cattle. Refugia is the management practice in which a dewormer is only administered to a portion of the herd, leaving a proportion of the worm population not exposed to the drug (e.g., those inside the untreated animals). When using refugia-based strategies in a herd (Figure 1) animals not treated with the dewormer will shed eggs onto pasture that will then hatch to produce larvae that are likely susceptible to drugs. Once inside the host they will mate with other worms, picked up by grazing, that are resistant to the dewormer, creating offspring that are susceptible and resistant. Essentially “diluting” the genes that confer resistance against dewormers in the parasite populations. The alternative being whole herd treatment (Figure 2) where parasites that are susceptible to the dewormer are killed, leaving mainly resistant parasites to remain on pasture. Then once inside the host, resistant worms mate with other resistant worms which continues the cycle of breeding drug resistant parasites. An issue not easily mended.

There are many factors a producer can think about when deciding which animals they want to treat or leave untreated. This approach is called Targeted Selective Treatment (TST). The producer will treat only those animals that seem to suffer consequences of parasitism, like those that show outward signs of sickness or parasitism. Some of these signs could be rough/dull coat, lowered body condition, and

diarrhea. A producer can make the decision to treat based on body condition once in the chute, or scale weight, by treating those with lower body conditions. However, it should be said that you can’t always assume parasitism just on clinical signs, because bison can show little to no clinical signs while still harboring high levels of infection. Also, not all bison that show these signs are sick with parasites, it could be a bacterial or viral disease, or it could be related to nutritional issues. Therefore, it is still a good idea to regularly check the herd’s Fecal Egg Counts (FEC). There is a saying in livestock parasitology that 80% of the worms are in 20% of the animals. Meaning there are many animals within a herd that harbor low numbers and therefore are not experiencing production loss due to parasites. These are perfect examples of animals that should not be treated. However, this would require you to conduct FEC prior to treatment. For those with a small herd, this might be a practical approach. However, for most, this is time consuming and not necessarily cost effective. Therefore, there are other methods when deciding TST. One of the simplest methods is to treat based on age. As animals mature, they develop an immunity to internal parasites and are most often observed to have low FEC. Because of that, a producer could decide to only deworm bison that are 2 years or less and any adult suspects. A producer could also decide to just deworm a percentage of the herd, leaving 20-30% of the herd untreated. To make it practical in a working setting, it could be decided that every 3rd animal to go through the chute is not dewormed. Implementing refugia-based strategies allows a producer not to have to buy dewormers for treating the entire herd, rather only for the selected group of animals. This will save money, while simultaneously reducing the rate of resistance to the dewormers. Though there are many methods in choosing how to select who to treat or not, not all methods are going to be practical for everyone. It is important for each producer to think about how they manage their animals and what method would best fit their production.

EFFICACY TESTING

Like any drug given to an animal, you want to know if it is working the way it should. Are your dewormers working as well as they should? Do you know? If you have been using the same dewormers for multiple seasons/years, it might be time to test the efficacy. To check the efficacy of the dewormer,

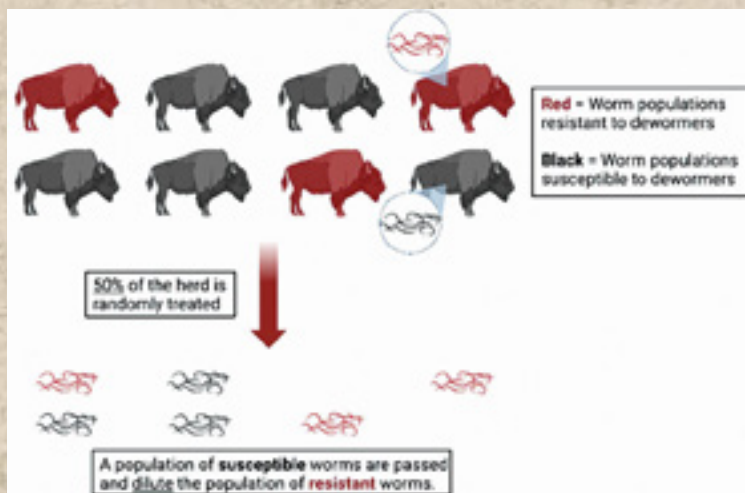


Figure 1. Refugia-based Strategies



Figure 2. Whole Herd Treatment

a Fecal Egg Count Reduction Test (FECRT) must be conducted. This requires comparing the FEC on the day of treatment (day 0) and 2-3 weeks after treatment (day 14-21; Figure 3). A dewormer is considered to be effective if it reduces the parasite burden by 90% after 2-3 weeks post treatment. However, if the FECRT is less than 90% it shouldn't be immediately assumed that there is widespread drug resistance. Other factors could have caused a lowered efficacy such as administration error. Maybe after giving that oral drench the bison spit most of it out or the dart only partially went in, falling out shortly after. We also don't know what the proper dosing is for bison. There are no products that are specifically labeled for bison, so we don't truly know if we are underdosing or overdosing animals. More research needs to be conducted to overcome this issue. There is also not a clear understanding of the status of resistance to dewormers in the bison community, but again, we hope to fill some of these gaps with our ongoing research. Lastly, we must emphasize that different herds/ranches will have different parasite species compositions that may be resistant to different drug classes. This is why livestock parasitology is so complex and all factors have to be carefully considered. Each case is unique and unfortunately there isn't a single superior management plan for everyone. Nevertheless, it is always a good idea to record the type of dewormer given and how often it is being administered for your veterinarian, consultant or parasitologist to get a better picture of what might be happening within a herd.

Figure 3. Fecal Egg Count Reduction Test Formula

$$\frac{\text{pre treatment FEC} - \text{Post treatment FEC}}{\text{Pre treatment FEC}} \times 100 = \text{FECRT}$$

FUTURE BISON PARASITOLOGY STUDY

Kaylee Kipp is a second year Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Science in the Department of Pathobiology, working in Dr. Verocai's Parasitology Research and Diagnostic Lab. Kaylee has been working closely with Joe Luksovsky, furthering her knowledge in parasites affecting bison as well as management strategies unique to bison production.

Kaylee's doctoral research focuses on parasitism in ranches and wild bison. While relatively well-studied in small ruminants and cattle, the information on the impact caused by internal parasites in ranches and wild bison is scarce. This study will encompass many aspects of bison management and parasitism. Some of these objectives will be to assess the prevalence of resistance to dewormers in gastrointestinal worms of ranches bison, and conduct surveys of management practices utilized by bison producers – within Texas and elsewhere in the country. After receiving her Ph.D., Kaylee hopes to work in industry or a diagnostic lab where she can continue helping farmers and producers with monitoring herd health and controlling parasite populations.

If you are a bison producer that is interested in being a part of our projects email kkipp@tamu.edu for more information.

Parasitology Diagnostic Lab Information

For more information about the Parasitology Diagnostic Lab or about how to send a sample, visit our website at <https://vetmed.tamu.edu/parasitology-lab/>

Contact the Lab by phone: 979-845-5180 or by Email: parasitologydx@cvm.tamu.edu

BISON MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Kaylee is currently conducting a bison management questionnaire to all bison producers in the Southern United States. This questionnaire is the 1st step to better understanding the different management strategies being used and how they relate to controlling economically important parasites within a herd as well as assessing the prevalence of resistance to dewormers. If interested, you can either scan the QR code, type the survey link online, or contact Kaylee Kipp (kkipp@tamu.edu) and ask to receive the link though email. Participation in this study is voluntary and should take about 20 minutes to complete. All information will remain confidential in all future published work and conference presentations.

Survey link: https://tamu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ePdZxX3RdduzK6y

QR Code:



OPENING A CAN OF LUNGWORMS

Hannah Danks, Kaylee Kipp, Joe Luksovsky, Dr. Guilherme Verocai

As most bison producers know, in the 1800's the bison in North America were diminished to near extinction. This created a bottleneck for the genetic makeup of the bison, as well as the parasites they carried. While most of us will first think of parasites as agents of disease that can negatively impact health of their animal host, including bison, these creatures also share a long history of co-evolution and co-adaptation with their animal hosts.

Texas A&M Veterinary Parasitology Laboratory and Dr. Verocai's research have been working on parasites of bison for many years, including diagnostic services that will inform treatment decision and also

some basic research, for instance understanding which unique parasites bison still harbor.

In collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Services, our lab has been screening fecal samples of wild bison from different national parks across the country for over 5 years. In addition to the fecal counts for gastrointestinal worms, similar to what we do for many bison producers, we also screen samples for lungworms.

The previous assumption was that the North American bison shared the lungworm, *Dictyocaulus viviparus*, with domestic cattle. This is because their close relationship, long history of co-grazing, and to the fact that many (if not most) gastrointestinal worms of cattle are very common both in ranches and wild bison.

In 2021, Dr. Verocai decided to investigate the actual identity of the bison lungworm looking into the genetic make-up of the worms and comparing it to the cattle lungworm species. Hannah Danks, then a 1st year veterinary student at TAMU with strong interest in parasitology, joined the lab as a summer student through the VMSRT Program. We analyzed dozens of microscopic lungworm larvae collected from feces of wild bison from 5 different states (Iowa, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Montana), and privately-owned bison from Oklahoma and Texas. We also had some cattle lungworm samples from Texas identified in our diagnostic lab for comparison.

"We were very excited about our findings" - said Danks. For our surprise, the bison lungworms did not belong to the same species as the cattle lungworm. In fact, it was found to be a different species of lungworm and could possibly be a unique parasite to bison.

"Our results contradicted the previous assumptions regarding parasite identity" - said Verocai.

"Interestingly, in the 1920's, a Canadian researcher actually thought that the bison lungworm was a separate species, but the scientific community though that there wasn't enough evidence for that claim, and it seem that now we have"

Their findings were published in 2022, in a prestigious, peer-reviewed scientific journal named *"International Journal for Parasitology: Parasites and Wildlife"*. Danks also presented her findings in local, national, and international conferences, including the Annual Conference of the American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists, held in Snowbird, Utah.

Nevertheless, we cannot assume that the species we found, is the same found about 100 years ago



in Canada. Dr. Verocai explains that adult worms need to be recovered from bison lungs and a set of morphological features and measurements must be assessed and carefully compared to the original description of the supposed bison lungworm species. *"We hope to be able to address that in the near future".*

One might think – Why should we care?

Dr. Verocai says that *Dictyocaulus* lungworms generally cause disease, including disease at subclinical level that may not even be perceived, but also can cause clinical disease, with respiratory signs, such as coughing, pneumonia, and difficulty breathing. Kaylee Kipp, a graduate student working on parasites of bison at the Verocai Lab completes – *"Even subclinical disease matters when we consider animal production and conservation of the country's national mammal – subclinical disease can impact weight gain, reproduction, survival of calves"*.

Does this lungworm cause disease in bison?


We do not know yet, but we believe it may cause at least some level of subclinical disease.

There is so much we still don't know, and we would like to pursue in the lab, says Verocai.

We should be able to assess the impact of this parasite in bison health through experimental infection in the lab, but interest from the community and funding are necessary. By doing this, we would also gain better understanding on the life cycle of this parasite, how soon it starts shedding larvae in feces after infection, and for how long. – All these features matter to understand how infection happens in nature, and also if there is any specific season for that to happen.

We still do not know if the bison lungworm can actually infect cattle, and if so, if it also causes disease.

Assuming this lungworm only infects bison, it must have gone through all the challenges bison faced in recent centuries. It must be as resilient as bison itself. It deserves to be studied further [said Verocai]

This is a truly exciting time for all parasitologists, but especially those with such an interest in bison. Though no producer wants to have parasites in their animals, this lungworm might be just as resilient as the bison, also surviving the large-scale population decline in the 20th century. 

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Getting Started – Basic Corral System

By Joe Adams, Double-Nickel Bison Ranch

Once you've decided to raise bison and have secured the land, there are numerous other considerations that need to be addressed prior to bringing in your starter herd. It is often recommended that most new bison ranchers start with younger/smaller animals, and a common age animal for your starter herd is often say, 8 to 12 months. This allows you to get used to the animals and for them to get used to you, before they are 1,000 lbs. each or larger. So, let's look at the most obvious basic requirements you will need - good fencing, a consistent fresh water supply, a bison specific working system with tub, a solid functional corral/sorting system feeding into that tub, and a catch pen.

There are two lines of thought within our industry regarding the "need" for a corral system: (A) The prevailing thought is to doctor your animals if/when needed, give worming shots when called for, tag your offspring, sorting your sold offspring for loadout, and being able to safely and efficiently get them into a livestock trailer, to name a few... thus needing a corral system, or (B) Buy the bison and just let the animals out of the trailer to roam your land, and think that there is no legitimate or worthwhile need for a corral system of any kind.

This article will focus on ideas for your "starter" corral system, for those of you who are in the (A) group outlined above. There are also many within the Bison industry that can offer additional ideas/designs to assist you in this effort. A basic system will get you started and be safe and functional, and can be expanded and/or improved upon as needs, time and funds allow. If time and funding is no object, a rancher can buy most if not all of the components from reputable pre-fab companies, and for a fee you can have it totally installed and set up for you. The starter corral you initially build could serve you well for many years, if done properly on your own or by a third party.

This article is NOT about: what is the best type of squeeze chute/working system, how and when to work your animals, etc., etc. Each of these noted topics are very in-depth discussions on their own.

Premise: New bison rancher acquiring 10-25 head (calves or yearlings). **So, let's get started.**

Where: For those times you need to catch and pen your animals, they will need water. If you already have a windmill or good water well of any kind, situate the corral system (or catch pen) close enough so that you can run a line to a water trough or two (inside the system). This gets the bison used to entering the system without fear, as this is where they will often get their water. It is not uncommon to also put a few heavy-duty feed troughs (steel or concrete) to lure them in with feed vs "waiting" for them to get thirsty, when its time to work the animals. Again, your water source will heavily dictate the placement area of the corral system, but you also want an area with good drainage (not always muddy). You also don't want to pick a spot that is overly rocky. Being adjacent to a grazing pasture works well, and at least adequate tree shade for the animals in those hotter months. Electricity is always a plus, but not required for a starter system. You will need good road access to the system's load out gate, for when you sell offspring... a dirt road is fine but must accommodate a truck with livestock trailer.

What: If you are not buying a pre-fabricated system, your choices are (1) buying lots of raw metal (used oil field pipe is common) and welding (or clamp and bolt) it all up, or (2) buy and connect a lot of portable panels and gates. Portable panels are often a less expensive route and faster to complete, allow for tweaking or moving your system if needed, and are not "permanent". Portable panels can be easily sold if the rancher eventually gets out of the business, or sells the property and relocates. It seems that most of the portable panel companies around Texas sell only lighter weight panels. Many ranchers may opt to use these readily available panels in non-stressful areas of

the system such as the catch pen or watering area, and commission the panel company to build heavy duty panels and gates for the sorting and high stress areas. All panels should be a minimum of 6 ft high in your system. Portable panels can always be re-enforced with a few heavy steel pipes popped in the ground to reinforce panels in “stress” areas if needed. Sliding gates vs swing gates can be very advantageous when strategically placed, and slamming “latch” gates are also quite handy in the right spots, but neither are absolutely required on your starter system. Solid/sheeted sides do aid in calming the animal in the high stress (sorting) areas, and it is common to use welded sheet metal, plywood, re-purposed rubber conveyor belt, etc. These options are long lasting and durable but expensive. Black plastic sheeting (bought in rolls at hardware stores) is sometimes used as a less expensive alternative albeit a less than permanent solution.


If solid sheeting of any kind is used, you will need “cut outs” or open areas as climb outs for your hands and feet, to get out of harms way in a hurry when the situation arises (and it will).

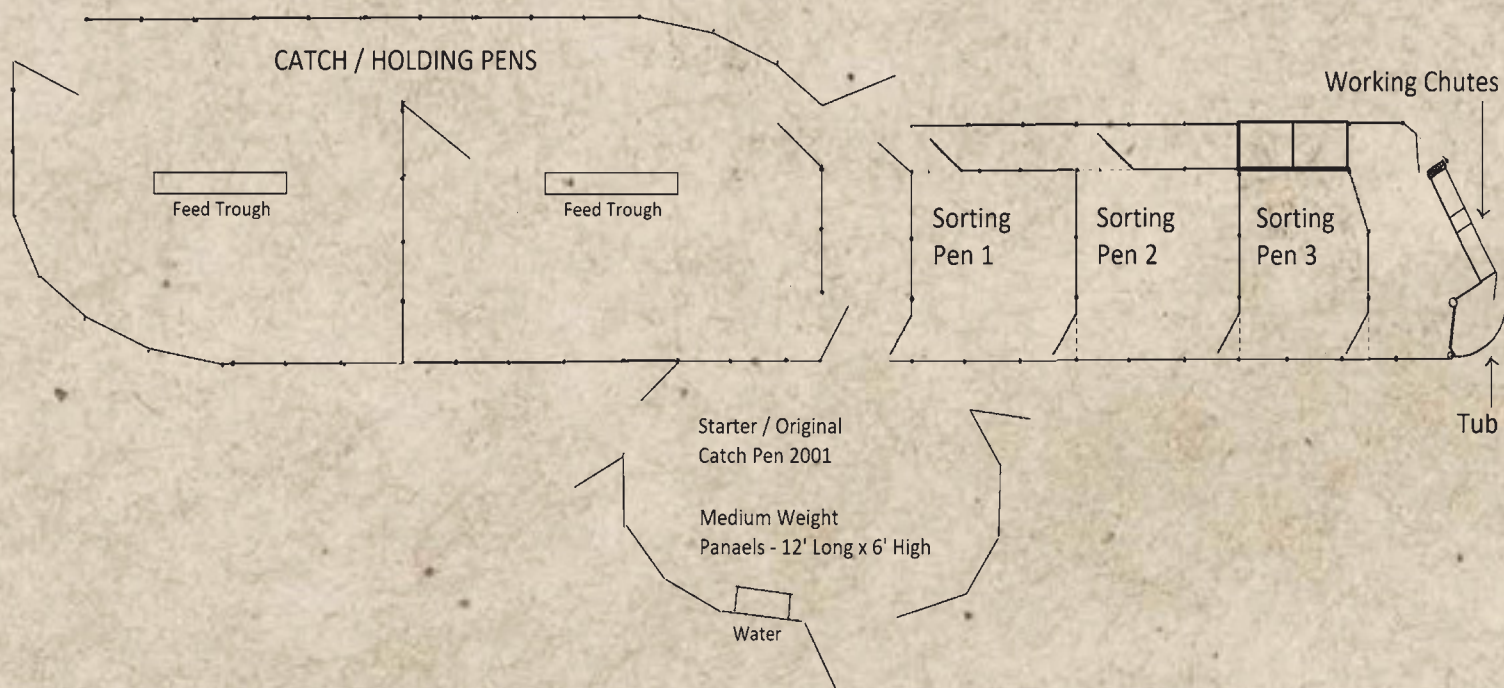
A “catch pen” is a substantially larger area than the corral / sorting area. The bison need to be caught or trapped (i.e.: catch pen) where they will settle in before moving a few at a time into the sorting area. They will by habit walk through the catch pen to get food and/or water, which is adjacent (and connected to) the corral sorting area. Once sorted they are easily funneled into the working tub/chutes, or let back out to graze instead if no work is needed on a particular animal. You should build the catch pen big enough for them to maintain their individual space and not have to worry about the less dominant animals getting injured. For say up to 20 young animals, a catch pen of 40 ft x 60 ft. is adequate. You can always expand the catch pen size later (add more panels) as the animals grow, or if you add count to the herd.

When: The sooner the better. Ideally you will have at least a catch pen (with working fresh water trough) prior to delivery of your starter herd. It is often advised to receive your animals directly to such a pen vs letting them just get out of the trailer and start

running in your largest field... bad things can happen. Receiving them into an adequately sized pen of some kind will help them to acclimate after their road trip, to unfamiliar surroundings. They will have water, and you can feed them hay for 2-3 days and then let them walk out of the pen and explore their new home. Once you are past this initial acclimation and release them, you could bring in the working facility and complete the entire system afterward.

Why: As stated in the opening paragraphs, there are many reasons why you will need to catch and treat your animals throughout their lifetime, which is the primary reason for a corral system. The reasons you want to build it properly is to reduce stress on the bison when those times arise, and to build it plenty tall and stout, secure and efficient to afford a high level of safety to both the animals and the handlers.

How: Assuming you don’t opt for a “turn key” system installed by a third party, you will need a few things to complete this project with your own crew. Lay out your design in advance and put it on paper, marking placement of gates (and which way they swing), avoid building runs with sharp turns. When you have your “custom” bison panels built, make sure that your tractor has clearance to pass thru these needed custom gates as well. If you are able to find some pre-owned bison tough gates and panels, that can be a notable savings. Unless you already have the manpower, hiring a couple guys locally to assist with assembly will be a huge help. If that comes with a large enough piece of machinery to do the heavy lifting, even better. Acknowledging that heavy-duty large portable gates and panels (usually 10-12 ft long each) are *quite* heavy, having a tractor with enough lift height or a skid steer onsite would be advisable during assembly. It took us 2-3 days to assemble the full system, but my wife and I put up the original catch pen (medium weight panels) in probably a day, and it is still attached and feeds into the larger system. Our starter herd was 12 young bison, 10-12 months of age. The larger / expanded system below was completed within a year after receipt of our starter herd in 2001, and although it has received a few “tweaks” it still serves our needs. 



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Bison Ranchers Sharing Their Wisdom—A TBA Member Survey

By Ed Mountain & Ron Miskin

Thank you to the Texas Bison Association (TBA) members that participated in the **Bison Ranchers Sharing Their Wisdom** survey we sent out in the Bison Briefs newsletter. We asked TBA bison ranchers to share some of their joys of raising bison along with their greatest lessons learned and advice they would like to share with folks looking to start raising bison. We received responses from bison ranchers from various parts of Texas. Ranches ranged from having 7 bison to 85 bison and some were fairly new to bison ranching and others have raised them for 20 plus years. Below is a summary of the responses we were able to capture and share with you.

Question: What has been your greatest joy in raising bison?

Responses:

GP Ranch – “Knowing that the animal that I am raising for food, clothing, shelter; it is the same animal that my ancestors used to rely on for their way of life. That I can continue the heritage for the next generation.”

Wildhorse Graham Ranch – “Relationships built with the bison but even greater are the relationships with people in the bison community.”

Central Texas Buffalo Ranch – “Watching them against a beautiful sunset and watching them run and play.”

A&R Bison – “Contributing to restoring the animal. Growing, harvesting, and distributing a healthy food.”

310 Bison Ranch – “I spend time with these magnificent animals every day. Watching and learning how they intermingle with one-another, as well as how they accept my presence, fascinates me to this day. I

believe that I need these animals more than they need me.”

Lucky B Bison – “Observing them in all weather and all situations. I have learned much about the importance of being observant, being in the moment and just enjoying the basics of life...good feed, good water and companionship.”

Swiss Alp Buffalo Company – “Sharing them with guests and grandkids.”

Question: What has been your biggest lesson learned from raising bison (what would you do differently if you could go back in time)?

Responses:

Wildhorse Graham Ranch – “Develop a marketing strategy early in the journey.”

Central Texas Buffalo Ranch – “There will be difficult times, with life there is also death.”

310 Bison Ranch – “I began with 15 buffalo, and suddenly those 15 became 25. Plan on calving when you begin or start with younger animals so you have time to learn as your herd grows.”

Lucky B Bison Ranch – “One word: Patience. They have taken the worst that mankind can throw at them and are still with us. Who am I to hurry them into the other pasture?”

Swiss Alp Buffalo Company – “Be aware of bison isolating themselves. Most likely it is because of weakness due to illness and you need to treat asap. If you wait until a bison looks sick before you start treating, it will most likely die.”

GP Ranch – “The misinformation from the general public. They are not as difficult as everyone thinks they are and a lot better for the land than people think. I would listen to my mentors more and not worry

about the cattle neighbors who try to tell me to raise them like cattle.”

Question: What 3 pieces of advice would you give someone looking to start a bison ranch?

Responses:

Central Texas Buffalo Ranch – “1. do your homework by joining the TBA and NBA 2. visit bison ranchers, they will happily share their wisdom 3. attend the TBA conferences as you will learn a lot and build fantastic relationships.”

A & R Bison – “Have facilities ready before the herd arrives.”

310 Bison Ranch – “1. Have a knowledgeable person available to help and offer guidance when needed. 2. Have a business plan (meat sales or breeding stock) in mind. 3. Don’t underdo fencing, but there isn’t a need for Ft Knox, either.”

Lucky B Bison – “1. Do it because you love it, not because you expect to get rich quickly. 2. Do your homework first. Read and study all the great resources offered by the National Bison Association. Then talk to bison ranchers about your questions. They’ll be happy to help, but your time with them will be much more effective if you’ve done your reading first. 3. Join the TBA and attend two or three TBA conferences to network with others. Have your real estate bought or leased and have good fencing and at least a basic pen system in place before you buy your first animal.”

Swiss Alp Buffalo Company – “a. Join your local/regional bison association and attend meetings and conferences. b. Get a copy of the National Bison Association’s “Bison Breeders Handbook” and read it thoroughly. c. Visit a number of bison ranches/facilities to see what they are doing so you have information for making your own decisions.”

GP Ranch – “1. Visit as many different operations as possible and take good and bad from each one. 2. Don’t be afraid to reach out to other bison ranchers for advice and government agencies that can assist you to make your life easier. 3. Know your land and the quality of animals that you are buying.”

Wildhorse Graham Ranch – “1. Join state and national bison associations and actively participate. 2. Plan and build good facilities infrastructure. 3. Develop a marketing strategy.”

Question: Any additional memories or wisdom you would like to share with TBA?

Responses:

310 Bison Ranch – “Join the Texas Bison Association. There, I met a number of people who were very willing to help me with my endless “how to” questions. I would also recommend membership in the National Bison Association, but local help will be much easier to find within the TBA. To this day I am close with the friends I met early in my bison career. Dan, Tim, Chris, and others are the people I turn to when a question arises or help is needed. Support is a vital part of ranching. Use it.”


Lucky B Bison – “Make time to help newbies. Remember, you were one once yourself!”

GP Ranch – “Get involved with the TBA. Not just coming to the conference, but find ways to help. This is how we build a great foundation for future generations and grow not just in quantity but quality. Don’t forget to collect your data on your animals.”

Wildhorse Graham Ranch – “Enjoy the journey.”

Unidentified Rancher – “Every year, we donate a guided bison tour to the local chamber auction and it brings from \$1,000-2,000 to the community. It is good to show and educate local people about bison.”

Central Texas Buffalo Ranch – “Bison ranching can be hard work and expensive to start, don’t live a life of regrets – go for it!”

We hope you enjoyed reading the memories and advice from the TBA bison ranchers that took the time to participate in our survey. Look for ways to participate in future Bison Journal publications in the future. Special Thank You to the TBA Members that responded to this survey. 

Pasture to Plate: Innovation Down Under

By Ron Miskin
The Buffalo Wool Co.
Texas Bison Association VP

I “met” Jacob Wolki a few months ago on Twitter, he is just a really nice guy who takes a lot of pride in raising quality meat animals, and we have been enjoying watching him build his business and overcome some of the same obstacles we all face in selling direct to consumers. He has done a lot of the hard part, and I think this model might work well for some of our Texas ranches. When I started writing this article, they were only selling their own production.. But before I finished it, he had already started contracting with other local farms. Watching it grow and him help other producers market their meat, I knew then he was on to something big.

WOLKI BUTCHERY – A 24/7 SELF-SERVICE MODEL REVOLUTIONIZING THE FARM-TO- TABLE EXPERIENCE

Recently, a small butcher shop in New South Wales Australia, has been making waves with its innovative 24-hour self-service business model. Wolki Butchery, a part of Wolki Farm, is changing the way people approach food.

Wolki Farm is more than just a butcher shop. The farm is dedicated to fostering a connection between food and consumers by growing local produce and promoting sustainable agriculture. Owner Jacob Wolki started the farm as a response to finding out his family had multiple food intolerances and realizing that their food was coming from hundreds of kilometers away. He wanted to bring food production closer to the consumer and help people reconnect with their food sources.

While Wolki Farm doesn’t raise bison, they do specialize in Nguni Cattle, which I wasn’t familiar with, and they are quite interesting animals, and I had to look them up.

The Nguni cattle are special to southern Africa where they are used for milk and meat production and also used as a draft animal. It is actually a hybrid of different Indian and later European cattle breeds.

The ancestors of these animals were introduced during the migration of Bantu-speaking tribes from northern Africa to southern Africa between 600 and 1400 AD.

What sets Wolki Butchery apart from other shops is its 24/7 self-service model. The shop has no staff, and customers are trusted to pick out their meat, and pay for it themselves via the Butchery’s app. ” This shows that Wolki Farm genuinely trusts their customers and values transparency. There is no pressure to buy anything, and customers are free to browse the variety of meat options available, which mainly consists of beef, pork, lamb, chicken and eggs. They have recently introduced a line of dehydrated chicken pet treats, and some pork tallow soap, just more dedication to “using every part”







“To put somebody out front on minimum wage to sell meat just did not make any sense,” Wolki said.

“I’d be tipping out all of my net profit, plus a bit, just pay a minimum wage earner to sit there in a quiet little butchery. We purely weren’t producing the volume to make it viable.”

HOW DOES MEMBERSHIP WORK?

STEP 1: Become a member of the Wolki Tribe aka Wolki Butchery, for free.

They offer a free farm tour to each prospective member... lets folks see how things are raised and their handling/processing methods.

STEP 2: You’re allocated a unique code to access Wolki Butchery

The store has a double door locking system that prevents unauthorized entry and tracks each user by their entry code, there are also cameras, microphones and a speaker, ensuring communication if necessary and keeping things safe and secure. It is pretty brilliant.

STEP 3: Shop for your products at a time that’s convenient to you

That is 24/7 availability, and no staff to pay!

STEP 4: Checkout and pay via an app on your smartphone Simple and secure, and they also accept Bitcoin!

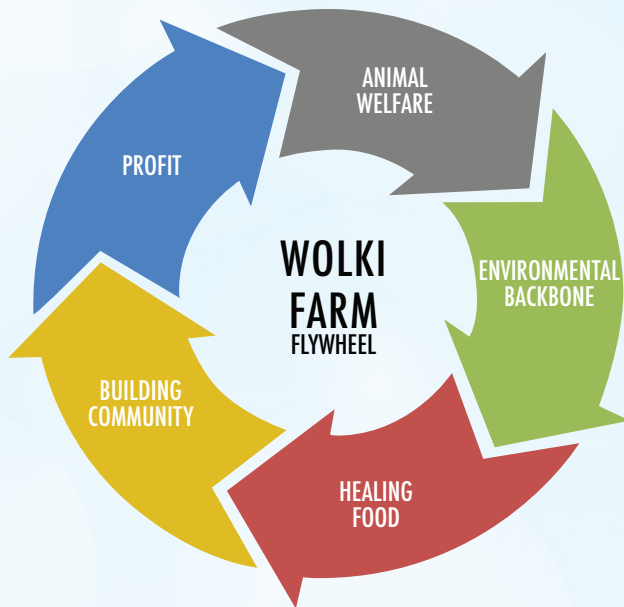
STEP 5: Enjoy tasty, nutritious, ethically produced, local food

The self-service model isn’t the only unique thing about the farm; they also promote sustainable agricultural practices. Wolki Farm uses regenerative farming techniques, which help to build soil fertility, increase biodiversity, and promote carbon sequestration. They also embrace the practice of ethical animal husbandry, which involves raising animals in a stress-free environment and allowing them to graze pasture naturally. It’s easy to

see why the farm has gained a social media following, with people flocking to learn about regenerative agriculture and ethical food practices.

In addition to operating the self-service butchery, Wolki Farm offers various workshops and farm tours for the community. The workshops range from topics like making sourdough bread to preserving foods. They also offer farm tours, which allow visitors to learn about the farm’s operations and see the animals up close. In doing so, Wolki Farm educates the community on the importance of sustainable agriculture, increases support for local produce, and establishes trust between the farmer and consumer.

This self-service and absolute top notch quality has been quite successful, enough so that Jacob is working



with local farmers to help them market meat through the Wolki brand.

From Jacob,

This is what we are cautiously setting out to do.

We are currently working with 3 fantastic grass fed beef producers to get some access to their beef. We also have 1 pork supplier and 1 lamb supplier potentially lined up.

How will it work?

I, Jacob, will audit the farm. I'm not interested in certifications, guarantees and trademark ticks. I am interested in what's under the hood. What drives production. How their systems work. What are their values?

So my guarantee is simple. If I wouldn't feed it to my wife and children, I won't feed it to you.

We will be onboarding suppliers who skip the chemicals, say no to glyphosate, manage in a way that they don't need to drench, respect their animals and nurture their landscape.

These partners will be paid a fair pre-negotiated price 'over the hook' for their efforts.

No 'gambling' at the sale yards.

We will butcher everything in house.

Suppliers will be featured on our website - so everything is transparent. You'll get to virtually meet them, check out their 'why' and understand just how they fit into our program.

The last piece of the puzzle is packaging.

I've received conflicting feedback from our community in how to handle this. Keep us all under



the Wolki Farm brand? Subheadings? Disclaimers? This might sound simple but it's actually a fair amount of work on our back end to handle adjustments and disclaimers so I'm thinking hard as how to address this.

We haven't sorted the whole system out yet but we will be making efforts to keep the process transparent, honest and integrity based.

Long term our intention will always be to supply the bulk of our production and to be the main producer under the label.

We see this as a fantastic opportunity to smooth out seasonal and growth related supply bumps while also supporting other fantastic regenerative producers who don't have the direct to market appetite and capabilities that we have"

Wolki Butchery and Wolki Farm are revolutionizing the farm-to-table experience. By promoting sustainable agriculture, ethical animal husbandry, and community education, the farm has created a unique business model that fosters consumer trust and transparency. Wolki Farm shows that it's possible to connect with the food we eat and establish a relationship with the people who produce it. It's no wonder they're gaining a following on social media; they're doing everything right.

Check them out at www.wolkifarm.com.au

Or on FB @wolkifarm or on Twitter @JakeWolki

Here is a great YouTube Video that shows how the Butchery works. 



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