

Progressive Beef, grass-fed beef and USDA Organic.

Of these many avenues available, she concluded, "As we look to the future, there's a world of opportunity. What is important to cow-calf producers is to start keeping records and document what you do. It may sound difficult at first, but it's like exercise. The first week is tough, but it gets easier."

You can learn more about the services offered through the Saunders' company at <http://wherefoodcomesfrom.com/>.

— Story & photos by Kindra Gordon

Adding Value Through Education

"Growing up as a child, I always wanted to be a farmer," said Jake Carter, president of Southern Belle Farm in McDonough, Ga. Agritourism was his way of continuing his family's farming heritage.

Three producers use agritourism to make their operations more profitable.

Carter, as well as Butch Jensen of Price, Utah, and Gary Price of Blooming Grove, Texas, educated Cattlemen's College attendees on alternative methods of income to supplement a farming or ranching business.

Southern Belle Farm

With Carter's close proximity to Atlanta, the number of questions being asked by members of the surrounding communities became "overwhelming." Instead of keeping



► Instead of closing the gates, Jake Carter and his family opened them to consumers from near-by Atlanta who were eager to learn about farming and rural life.

the gates closed, Carter opened them to consumers who were eager to learn about farming and rural life.

"This was our home, our family," he said. Instead of looking away and selling out, Southern Belle Farm was born.

Originally a dairy, the operation's transition started with a corn maze, moved into educational school tours and now offers pick-your-own strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, peaches and other produce; agricultural activities; and a country store complete with a bakery.

"It all comes down to experience," Carter says. "They come out and they experience firsthand where their food comes from. It's all about spending time with their families and building that bond."

Tavaputs Ranch

Butch and Jeanie Jensen manage the oldest family-run guest ranch and cow-calf operation in Utah. Tavaputs Ranch has been recognized for its land conservation efforts for more than a decade, receiving the Leopold Conservation Award in 2009 and the NCBA Environmental Stewardship Award for Region VI in 2010.



► Today, Tavaputs Ranch plays host to guests hoping to experience the "cowboy" way of life, as well as guided deer and elk hunts, and hiking tours, explained Butch Jensen.

Homesteaded in 1889, the ranch now encompasses more than 200,000 acres of state, private and federal land. Today, the ranch plays host to guests hoping to experience the "cowboy" way of life, as well as guided deer and elk hunts, and hiking tours.

"Firefighting is a way of life in that high country, whether they're controlled burns or wildfires," Jensen said. Often, Tavaputs hosts firemen as they fight to put out the blazes of the high desert. Last summer, the Jensens hosted 140 men for two weeks.

Jensen and his family have adapted to the changing preferences of visitors over the years, adding tours for ATV riders, business retreats and even hosting the Utah Cattlemen's Association convention.

Jensen's grandchildren are the seventh generation on the ranch, and he looks forward to seeing what they can do with it.

"That's what this is all about," he said, "the next generation."

77 Ranch

Gary Price owns and manages 77 Ranch, an Angus-cross, Brahman-influenced cow-calf operation just 50 miles south of Dallas, Texas. Seven million people inhabit the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, and Price recognized the value of a quiet hunting and fishing escape to urban dwellers. A cattleman by trade, Price offers bass fishing, duck hunting and hog hunting at 77 Ranch.



► "With the cow market the way it is, we see this as an opportunity to add income," said Gary Price who offers bass fishing, duck hunting and hog hunting at 77 Ranch.

"With the cow market the way it is, we see this as an opportunity to add income," Price said.

Most of Price's customers are professionals who travel extensively and live in the crowded metroplex, so Price leaves them to themselves after they arrive.

"What we have is proximity to that DFW airbase. They can be down there within an hour or an hour and a half," he said. "They can even have a hunt that morning and get back to work."

In addition to their ranching and hunting enterprises, 77 Ranch works closely with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to capture and release, monitor and record data on the Bobwhite quail.

77 Ranch was presented by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department the statewide

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Long Star Land Steward Award, and has partnerships with Ducks Unlimited and the USDA NRCS.

Of his hunting and conservation endeavors he says, "My only regret is that I didn't start it a little bit earlier."

For more about these ranches, visit their websites at <http://southernbellefarm.com/>, <http://tavaputsranch.com/> and www.txaglandtrust.org/tag/77-ranch/.

— Story & photos by Shelby Mettlen

MANAGED GRAZING

Manage Soil Health on Pasture and Range

It only make sense: For an industry, individual business or any human endeavor to be sustainable, it must be environmentally responsible, socially acceptable and environmentally sound. According to agronomist Steven Shafer, soil health underpins all three of these pillars of sustainability for production agriculture. To some extent, however, soil health has been taken for granted by many agricultural producers, including crop farmers and graziers. That is changing.

Management tips offered to stop taking soil health for granted.

"In recent years, there has been a reawakening to the importance of soil health. It's been an explosion, really, and rightly so," Shafer told cattle producers. During a Cattlemen's College educational session, Shafer, who is chief scientific officer for the Soil Health Institute, was aided by Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Grazing Lands Specialist Dennis Chessman in leading a discussion focused on management of soil health in pasture and range management systems.

"It is the soil's capacity to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals and humans," said Shafer. "If we're even talking about soil 'health,' it means that soil is alive. It is very much a living system. Much of the earth's biodiversity exists in the soil."

Shafer noted how prediction models portend increasing frequency of drought in the coming decades, and the need to increase drought resistance by building



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soil health in cropping systems and grazing lands. He emphasized the value of management strategies that retain and build soil organic matter, which is composed chiefly of carbon, to increase water-holding capacity and increase retention of soil nutrients.

Specific to grazing lands, Shafer and Chessman lauded the value of management systems that foster improved plant health and enhanced growth of root biomass. Chessman emphasized that plant root exudates feed a wide variety of life forms in the soil, including bacteria, fungus, protozoa, nematodes and arthropods, and provide the "glue" that holds soils together.



► Dennis Chessman emphasized four management principles that NRCS has identified as important to promoting soil health.

Chessman emphasized four management principles that NRCS has identified as important to promoting soil health:

1. Minimize disturbance of soil surfaces, giving attention to grazing management utilizing appropriate stock density and stock movement.
2. Keep soil surfaces covered as much as

possible, by leaving sufficient residual above-ground growth.

3. Increase system diversity, moving away from monocultures to diverse plant communities.
4. Maintain and build healthy, deep plant root systems.

"We tend to focus on above-ground growth — what we can see," said Chessman. "We need to think more about what we can't see under the soil surface."

— Story & photos by Troy Smith

Manage Grazing for Sustainability

What is effective grazing management? According to University of California–Davis Extension Range Management Specialist Kenneth Tate, grazing management should satisfy nutrient requirements of grazing animals. At the same time, it should satisfy the needs of forage plants for growth, reproduction and root system growth. Grazing management should also mitigate detrimental effects on soil health.

Stocking rate may be the most important contributor to long-term productivity of land and livestock.

Tate teamed with North Carolina grazier Johnny Rogers, who also coordinates his state's Amazing Grazing Project, to discuss sustainable grazing management concepts, during a Cattlemen's College session hosted at the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

"We must be adaptive grazing managers to be productive and care for the environment," Tate told cattle producers in attendance. "I'm not a proponent of any one strategy. All have a place," he added, emphasizing that he considers neither an intensive nor an extensive approach to be best for the sustainability of all grazing operations.

Tate said whether managers apply intensively managed rotational systems or season-long continuous grazing, stocking rate — the number of animals allocated to a pasture or paddock per unit of time — may be the most important contributor to long-term productivity of land and livestock. Tate estimates that about 75% of ranchers