

Oklahoma Country

FALL 2008

THE MAGAZINE OF
THE OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU



INSIDE:

Oh, Christmas Trees



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Oklahoma Country Contents



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Cover Image
Matt Jarvis stands
by one of the trees
on his farm that will
be ready for
Christmas 2008.



Features

8 – Oh, Christmas Trees!

While you may not have started your Christmas shopping and other preparations, a small group of Oklahomans has been busy since last year's Yuletide with its efforts directed toward December 25, 2008.

By MIKE NICHOLS

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Hidden number worth \$50!

One member family's Oklahoma Farm Bureau membership number is hidden somewhere in this issue of OKLAHOMA COUNTRY, and could earn that member family \$50.

To claim the cash prize, the member family must find its own hidden membership number and contact Mike Nichols before the last day of the month Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to

4 p.m. at 405-523-2300.

The OFB membership number hidden somewhere in *OKLAHOMA COUNTRY* must match the number on the face of your individual OFB membership card for you to claim the cash prize. The membership number that appears on your magazine's mailing label is not the hidden number, but must match the hidden number for you to claim the cash prize.



BY MIKE SPRADLING
*President,
Oklahoma Farm Bureau*

Thinking Ahead and Acting Now

Back in 2003 the American Farm Bureau board of directors was seeing a trend in rural America which was alarming and could have negative effects on U.S. agriculture: the depopulation of people and services in rural America. American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman appointed a committee of 23 Farm Bureau members from across the country representing a wide range of commodities to compile information on the status, economic trends, and domestic and international policies affecting American agriculture and translate that information into a vision for what American agriculture should look like in 2019. It is noteworthy to mention the year of 2019 will be the 100th anniversary of the American Farm Bureau. This committee was named the MAAPP Committee (Making American Agriculture Productive and Profitable).

I won't have the space to give the entire report, but I would like to share some interesting statistics. When the MAAPP committee began its study, it focused on seven key areas of the agriculture sector in the United States today. Some of these key areas may influence the way we think about and develop policy.

The Structure of Agriculture: In 2002, 145,000 farming operations produced \$150 billion, or 75 percent of the value of all agriculture output, just over \$1 million per farm. It took 2 million operations to produce the remaining 25 percent. By 2019, we will be lucky if it takes 100,000 operations to produce that same 75 percent of the value of all agriculture output. In other words, the structure of agriculture is moving away from the middle. Some think we're losing farms daily in the United States, but when you look at the numbers the opposite is true. USDA defines a farm as an operation capable of generating \$1,000 in agriculture sales each year. It has been thought for many years the number of farms and ranches are on a decline but the truth is that farming operations have stabilized in numbers of around 2.1 million since mid-1980s. In fact, the Southern Plains

had stable farm numbers in the 1970s and 1980s and have increased by 10,000 operations over the last 10 years. One fact that becomes clear is the definite movement away from the middle. Or, if you will, the number of operations needed to produce between 25 and 75 percent of the value of agricultural output. This "middle" of farm operations fell almost in half between in 1987 and 2002.

Rural Life: Rural America, and agriculture's role in it is evolving such that now, farming is more dependent on rural communities than rural communities are dependent of farming. Off-farm income is of growing importance to farm families. Averaged across all farms, 89 percent of farm family income comes from off-farm sources. Somebody in the family has a job off the farm, they get Social Security checks, or have some other business income. A healthy rural community is vital to the agriculture sector as the vast majority of farm families do not rely on farming alone to support their families.

The traditional view of the "rural problem" is one of small towns facing a declining, aging population with limited opportunities for growth. That's true in some areas. Over half of the 400 farming-dependent counties were also counties that experienced population declines in the 1980s and 1990s. But rural economic problems are not just one of job creation. In counties adjacent to urban areas, population growth during the last 10 to 15 years has been significant. This creates almost the opposite challenge for production agriculture, namely, urban sprawl and the challenge of people moving into an area who are not familiar with the needs of production agriculture. This is just one of several problems facing rural America. Other problems range from rural healthcare, telecommunications, and transportation that include water, rail, and road.

Trade: Global trade will be a key vehicle for future agricultural profitability as 96 percent of the world population lives outside the borders of the United States. Trade is essential to the U.S. agricultural sector. Agriculture is twice as reliant on overseas markets than the general economy – and this

reliance is continuing to rise. U. S. agriculture export revenues have accounted for 20 to 30 percent of United States farm revenues during the last 15 years. As families in developing countries transition from subsistence living to middle class life, there will be a major impact on the quantity, quality and diversity of food consumption in these countries. Rising incomes increase demand first for more and then better food. This will have an increased effect on production and exports.

Marketing: Agriculture marketing goals will shift as farmers and ranchers learn to produce what they can sell and not to simply sell what they produce. We must get more involved in what we produce or what we can provide to increase our income, either by selling part of their product at a premium, by eliminating third-party cost or by selling something completely different, like an environmental service.

Environmental Issues: Environmental objectives need to be obtained more by market-driven actions, rather than by government regulation. The relationship between people's income and their interest in a more pristine environment is very important. As a society becomes more affluent, its citizens can afford to become more concerned about environmental issues. When you are poor, you are too worried about finding food and shelter to waste time and energy trying to save the salmon. Because American farmers and ranchers depend of natural resources, we have and will continue to employ innovative and technologically advanced means of protecting the environment.

Research & Technology: It is becoming increasingly clear that the United States is facing rapidly growing competition in agricultural research for new products and efficiency gains. Information flows at an incredible rate of speed today. Research results in one country are well known in another in a matter of days, not the years it used to take.

Government Support: Federal government involvement in the agriculture sector will not exist as it does today. As the population in the United States gets older, more money will be needed for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Big federal deficits mean that we also spend more tax payer dollars in interest cost. Spending on the rest of government, including agriculture, is expected to be flat. So, just keeping the funding that agriculture currently has would be a major victory.

This is a brief summary of what the MAAPP's committee concluded. With the thoughts of what agriculture might look like tomorrow, especially in the year of 2019, we as Farm Bureau leaders might do a better job of developing agriculture policy for today.

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BY MATT WILSON
*Executive Director
Oklahoma Farm Bureau
& Affiliated Companies*

Preparing for Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Biggest Event of the Year

How time flies! It almost seems like it was just last week when Oklahoma Farm Bureau leaders assembled in downtown Oklahoma City for the organization's 66th annual meeting where we focused on the theme of "Celebrating 100 Years of Agriculture."

But looking back, that was Nov. 9-11, 2007, and now we're looking at annual meeting number 67. This year's annual meeting will be in downtown Oklahoma City again, but the 67th version is scheduled for Nov. 14-16 with most activities in the Cox Convention Center.

The annual meeting or convention – whichever one you decide to call it – is Oklahoma Farm Bureau's biggest event of the year and requires countless hours of preparation for the three-day event.

The primary function of the annual meeting is to adopt OFB's policy for the coming year. Policy adopted by the delegates is the "Bible" your paid staff uses in its lobbying efforts throughout the year.

This is "grassroots" at its best. All the resolutions that will be considered come from members who've looked at issues and potential problems and offered their best solutions at their county annual meetings. Every county approves each resolution submitted from their county, and our voting delegates in Oklahoma City will have to take care in their considerations of each one coming before the body.

It is a great process that has proven extremely successful for Oklahoma Farm Bureau since that very first annual meeting way back in 1942.

We've also scheduled some informative sessions for those attending convention as well as the annual trade show.

Thought-provoking columnist Trent Loos is scheduled for our opening session Friday. Scheduled to join him on the stage during that session are Congressman Tom Cole and American Farm Bureau Vice President Barry Bashue.

Break-out sessions follow and will examine agri-terrorism and the outlook for farm commodities in the coming months and year.

Day one also will feature the YF&R's Discussion Meet plus the annual awards and recognition program where our top Farm Bureau members and counties will be honored in front of the entire convention. An ice cream social follows the awards program, with proceeds going to the OFB Legal Foundation.

Day two will be a big day for delegates. They will begin consideration of resolutions at the morning session and finish up in a session that afternoon.

In between the general sessions, there will be caucuses for the YF&R and Women's Committee. Voting delegates in districts 1, 4 and 7 will assemble to select state directors to represent them for the next three years.

The always-popular annual banquet wraps up day two with good food, good fellowship and good entertainment in the form of Grand Ole Opry member Connie Smith.

The meeting concludes with several different breakfast meetings for leaders Sunday morning before everyone assembles for our vespers and memorial service.

I hope you have the opportunity to attend annual meeting number 67 and help us celebrate OFB's Service Through Generations – which just happens to be the theme of this year's convention.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Mike Nichols

OKLAHOMA COUNTRY Editor and Senior Writer

Sam Knipp

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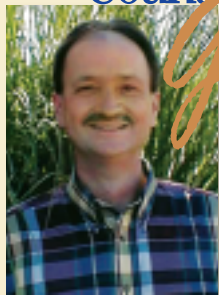
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BY JOE BENTON
Extension Education,
Ag & CED
Pottawatomie County OSU
Extension Service

Fall planting for spring flowers

Although the gardening season will soon be coming to a close, there is still one planting activity to be done: planting bulbs for spring flowers.

While it may seem odd to plant bulbs now, the reason is that spring-flowering bulbs need time to develop a solid root system before winter sets in. For best results, wait until soil temperatures are below 60 degrees F before planting bulbs. That means waiting to plant until October or November in Oklahoma.

You can buy bulbs at most garden centers, or if you have enough time, order them through catalogs. By choosing different varieties, you can enjoy spring flowers from late winter to early summer. For an early glimpse of spring, plant crocuses and snowdrops. Daffodils bloom next, followed by tulips, squill, and grape hyacinth. Indian hyacinths (*Camassia*) are some of the last, along with Summer Snowflakes (*Leucojum*).

When purchasing bulbs, buy only top quality bulbs – ones that are large, firm and of good color. Cheap bulbs will only produce poor, or sometimes even no, flowers.

Choose a site that has good drainage and at least six hours of direct sunlight a day. If the soil is poorly drained, consider raised beds, or planting chequered lilies (*Fritillaria meleagris*). To prepare planting beds, dig up six to eight inches of soil. Add peat moss or other organic matter, then mix in fertilizer containing phosphorus such as rock phosphate, superphosphate, or special bulb fertilizer. If rodents, skunks, or other small mammals are a problem, bone meal will only attract them. You can help avoid digging problems by placing a fine wire mesh over the bulb bed. Or place sharply crushed rocks or shells you can buy for this purpose around bulbs at time of planting. You can find these at complete garden or feed stores.

Plant bulbs in groups or clumps rather than in rows. For a nice show of color, plant bulbs in front of evergreen shrubs or among perennials and other flowering shrubs. Formal tulips look best planted in beds in symmetrical arrangements while daffodils should be planted in “naturalized” or informal plantings. A good method for informally arranging daffodils is to throw them over your shoulder, and plant them where they land!

Plant bulbs upright, pointed ends up, at the recommended depth. As a rule of thumb, bulbs should be planted three times as deep as the bulb's greatest dimension. Use a shovel, trowel, or bulb planter, and space bulbs according to size. Large bulbs such as tulips and daffodils should be placed four to six inches apart while smaller bulbs such as crocus, snowdrops, and squill should be placed one to two inches apart.

When plants emerge in spring, fertilize lightly with bulb fertilizer at least two inches from the plant. Once flower petals fade, use scissors to remove the flower parts and stem before the plant produces seed pods. However, let the leaves remain until they have turned yellow, so the bulbs get plenty of nourishment for the following spring's display. You can camouflage the bulb foliage by carefully planting summer annuals around the bulbs once all danger of frost is past. I often interplant daffodils among my perennials. This provides color before the perennials emerge, and then the new perennial leaves hide the dying daffodil leaves.



Although most spring-flowering bulbs are perennials, you may need to replant tulips and hyacinths each year as these blooms aren't as vigorous the following bloom seasons. Daffodils, scilla, and crocus, on the other hand, are stronger and spread further with

each bloom season, so are best left undisturbed.

If bulbs become overcrowded, with fewer and smaller flowers, they may need dividing. Under ideal conditions this may be every two or three years. The best time is when the foliage

begins to turn yellow. Replant immediately, following the fertilizer and planting recommendations described above.

If you need to move perennial spring-flowering bulbs, it is best to do so after bloom before the foliage dies and you can't find the bulbs! You can pot them, or “heel them in” planting in a group or in a row to allow the leaves to die back normally. To speed up the dying back of daffodil leaves, plus have them less floppy and unsightly, some gardeners double the leaves over and either tie them in a knot or with a rubber band. Just mark where the bulbs are so you can find them later.

One final fall reminder, soil sampling this time of year is very appropriate. Whether it be your flowers, vegetable garden or lawn, the numbers you get back will be used for next season's new growth. Giving phosphorus and potassium some time in the soil before spring green-up is a great idea. Sample now and you won't be rushed next spring, your county Extension Office and other private labs can perform the test.

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