

SPRING 2008
THE MAGAZINE OF
THE OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU

Oklahoma County



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A Son of Oklahoma

Up in Smoke

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A Return to Mali





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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.



Cover Image
Bret Mock proudly displays a hand-made saddle in front of his family's shop near Sand Springs.



BY MIKE SPRADLING
*President,
Oklahoma Farm Bureau*

Springtime in Farm Bureau

Many people think once they get Christmas and New Years behind them they will have time to catch their breath until the springtime activities start.

For Oklahoma Farm Bureau members and staff this is one of the busiest times of the year.

Though the month of January did give us a bit of a break, the month of February got Farm Bureau in high gear. County and state Farm Bureaus around the nation celebrated the efforts of farmers and ranchers by recognizing Food Check Out Week, February 3 – 9. Our State Woman's Committee was very involved with activities at supermarkets and the Ronald McDonald Houses in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

This is also the week the Oklahoma Legislature went into session. Our Public Policy team has been very busy assuring the policies of our members are well represented. They have plenty to do dealing with issues such as trespass legislation, annexation reform, eminent domain, transfer on death deed, OSU Board of Regents, self-distribution for Oklahoma grape growers and agricultural sales tax exemption, just to mention a few.

February and March is the time of year when many of the counties have their annual legislative dinner meetings. This is a very popular exercise where county leaders and their Representatives and Senators visit about issues important to each.

Governor Brad Henry declared February 18-22 Farm Bureau Week in Oklahoma. Farm Bureau Week brings about many activities in our counties, one of which is a membership drive. Membership drives during Farm Bureau Week do bring positive results, but think what results we could have if we treated each week of the year as Farm Bureau week as it relates to membership.

Each of us knows the type of person who would make a valuable member. We, the current leaders of this organization, know better than anyone else what it takes to be an effective member.

What if we took advantage of this knowledge by asking someone we think would make a valuable member to join Oklahoma Farm Bureau?

There is no doubt we are very successful when it comes to our efforts dealing with legislation, but we must not take our success for granted.

Numbers make a difference when our members get involved. There is always room for one more member.

How hard is it to get just one more member? Maybe as easy as just asking. Stop by your county office and ask for a few membership applications, put them in your truck and when you're having coffee or lunch with that someone you think will make a good Farm Bureau member, do your organization, yourself and that someone a favor by asking them to join Oklahoma Farm Bureau today.

Think what our organization's growth could be if each of us signed up just one new member per year. If you haven't signed up someone lately give it a try and feel the pride of belonging to Oklahoma's greatest general farm organization.

Many of our county and state leaders started off the week by attending Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Leadership Conference February 18-19. The conference got underway Monday afternoon with our members hearing from Congresswoman Mary Fallon.

On Monday evening Oklahoma Farm Bureau recognized two legislators for their extraordinary support of our members'

policies. Senator Ron Justice and Representative Gus Blackwell received Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Meritorious Service Award.

Tuesday morning's session started with a presentation from Representative Dan Boren followed by Senator Jim Inhofe. Thanks to all who took time out of their busy schedule to attend the conference.

Our Young Farmers and Ranchers have also been very active. Many of our state's young leaders' attended the 2008 National YF&R Leadership Conference in Baltimore, MD, where they participated in many leadership exercises.

The end of March, many of our county leaders, women's committee and YF&R met in Washington, DC, to help the American Farm Bureau Federation achieve its goals by meeting with our national delegation. This is a very important exercise as well as a great opportunity to visit our nation's capital. If you have not had the opportunity to make this trip, let me invite you to join us on our next trip to Washington, DC.

As you can see, there is a lot going on in Farm Bureau this spring. Things don't just happen, people make things happen, people just like you and that someone you're looking to sign up.

On behalf of our members, staff and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Board of Directors: THANKS FOR BEING INVOLVED.

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— *Rich Robinson*
Holdenville, Okla.

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

Attracting the next generation member

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is a mature organization, with its roots going back in the state's history all the way to 1942 when our "founding fathers" built the foundation for the premier agriculture organization in the Sooner State.

We reflect the farm community demographics when our members assemble for our convention, area meetings and legislative meetings. It's apparent when you look that we're getting a little grayer and have a few more candles added to our birthday cakes.

That is not troublesome because we have great experience, wisdom and knowledge on our side.

It also is a noticeable fact – particularly in the past several years – that our organization is welcoming more members who've had a few less birthdays.

This hasn't been totally unexpected. Younger members have to surface and take more active roles in any organization as that organization matures.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau has been actively cultivating our new crop of members over the past several years. The organization always has worked to entice the younger generation to participate through groups like the Young Farmers and Ranchers.

But when I look back over my years here, I'm extremely proud of how our organization is laying the foundation to attract the "next" generation into the fold.

One of our biggest efforts to influence the future of the organization and Oklahoma has been Farm Bureau's involvement with the premium auction at the Oklahoma Youth Expo.

We just completed another premium auction in March, and the auctioneers certainly said "sold to Oklahoma Farm Bureau" many, many times. Farm Bureau has been fortunate over the years to be awarded the volume buyer trophy at that auction.

Rewarding those 4-H and FFA members for their dedication pays dividends for the state and for Farm Bureau. We're helping young people with their futures, giving them a financial boost on their way to adulthood.

They remember who was there to offer

support. Those memories of Farm Bureau many times are translated into active roles in our organization when those youngsters become adults.

We do the same at the Tulsa Fair's premium auction each year, and anyone who's ever been there recognizes the fact that Farm Bureau is the name mentioned most often by the auctioneers.

Speech contests, livestock judging contests and events like the FFA Convention and 4-H Congress we sponsor help introduce many young people to our organization. We're an annual sponsor of a large group of incoming freshman seeking agricultural degrees at Oklahoma State University, funding activities on campus for those leaders-to-be.

Farm Bureau doles out thousands in scholarships each year to youngsters who plan to pursue degrees in agricultural studies.

And, I am proud to say that many of our county Farm Bureaus offer scholarships to deserving youngsters.

While we focus on youngsters with agriculture in their future, we do not ignore those who'll probably never get closer to a farm than a glimpse from their car as they drive down the road.

Our Safety Department reaches thousands upon thousands of youngsters each year with its programs. Home fire prevention and safety programs, DUI prevention and school bus safety are but three of the programs where many youngsters are introduced to Farm Bureau.

We sponsor and participate in athletic events that acquaint many, many others with Farm Bureau. Hundreds of youngsters get to attend football games at Oklahoma and Oklahoma State because we participate in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Game Days at both universities. And Farm Bureau is the prime sponsor of the annual Eight-Man All Star Football Game at Miami as well as the Oklahoma High School Rodeo Association.

Not so many years ago, the theme at our state convention was "Our Future's Bright." It was then, and we're making a concerted effort to guarantee that in the 21st century.

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BY JOE BENTON
*Extension Education,
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Contain yourself

Container gardening has grown immensely in popularity in the last few years. What's the appeal of going potted? Let me count the ways.

First off, container gardening allows you to garden in a small area with or without earth. You may have a nice big deck, a yawning porch, or a tiny apartment balcony. Whatever space you're faced with, no matter if it's shady or sunny, there's room for a pot or two (or 10). Trees, shrubs, flowers, bulbs, ornamental grasses, herbs, vegetables – if it grows, you can grow it in a pot.

Gardening in containers also offers instant gratification, and let's face it, what gardener hasn't picked up a flat of gorgeous little annuals because they were in full bloom, full size, and just waiting to perk up that boring bit of the bed? You buy the plants, you put them in the pot, and they look beautiful right away and keep getting better.

Container gardening allows us to raise plants in the air in hanging baskets. Container gardening can provide you with hours of relaxation and enjoyment. How do you get your container garden started?

Decide on plant purpose. Are you looking to add some color to a lifeless area? Would you like to have some fresh vegetables to add to a salad? Maybe, you want to grow a variety of herbs to add that gourmet touch to your cooking.

Analyze your location. How much sun does the site get? Sun loving plants need at least 6 to 8 hours of full sun. Plants that prefer shade should not receive more than 3 hours of morning sunlight. Is there a lot of reflected heat from sidewalk cement or brick walls? Where there is a high amount of reflected heat, you will need to select a plant that can handle the high temperatures.

Select your container. You will need to match the pot to the plant you have chosen. Larger plants will need a 14- to 24-inch tall pot

and a corresponding width. Smaller plants, such as lettuce or radish, can get by with an 8- to 10-inch deep container.

Consider the location and what type of pot would best fit the decor. Select a clay pot for a western theme. Covering a plastic pot with a basket will provide an Oriental look. Painted wooden planters add a formal touch. Whatever style you choose, the container must have holes in the bottom for water drainage.

If your plant is going to be out in freezing weather, you can insulate it and protect the pot by double potting. Use a smaller pot inside the decorative pot and separate with a several inches of bark chips or peat moss.

Find a good soil mix. Avoid the temptation to fill the plant container with garden soil. Soil from the garden will pack too tightly in the container excluding water and air. Your best bet is to purchase a standard potting soil mix. Look for a mix with perlite (white, puffy granules) and peat moss. The peat moss should have some

visible fibers. Avoid soilless mixes with a high percentage of fine particles.

You can mix your own soil mix by combining 1/3 garden soil, 1/3 sand or perlite and 1/3 peat moss. You can pasteurize this mix in a 210° F oven for 1 hour, if weed and soil disease organisms are present in the garden soil. Be prepared for an off odor to fill your kitchen during this process.

Purchase transplants or grow your own.

Transplants provide an immediate garden. Peat pellets are a convenient way to start and grow your own transplants.

Water more often. Plants in containers need to be watered more often than when grown in the ground because they have less root area to draw from. Plants in small containers may need to be watered daily. The larger the container the less often it will need to be watered. Check the soil surface and water when the top half-inch of soil becomes dry. Do not water so often you keep the soil soggy.

Fertilize regularly and lightly. Container plants require frequent fertilization at low rates. The best way to fertilize is with a water-soluble fertilizer. Choose one with a balanced blend of nutrients, such as a 10-10-10. For some vegetables, like tomatoes and peppers, use a 15-30-15 water-soluble fertilizer. Follow label directions on amount and timing of applications.

Facing the winter. Perennials and small shrubs can be grown in containers and enjoyed year after year. Since these plants will go through the winter in a container, make sure you choose a container that can help insulate the roots, such as wood, fiberglass or cement. Select more cold tolerant shrubs and perennials, rather than those that are marginally hardy. Make sure you water during the winter. Cold weather can kill a plant in dry soil much easier than when the soil is moist. If you choose to grow cold tender plants, move them indoors during the winter.

See you next time!



Any kind of container can be used for gardening as long as it has the proper drainage.

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THE SADDLE MAKER'S CODE

His grandfather and great uncles started making saddles in 1941. It's a hard way to make a living, but Bret Mock enjoys working with his hands and is part of a dying breed making saddles by hand today.

Story by Sam Knipp • Photos by Dustin Mielke



R

ule number one... don't bleed on the leather! Is Bret Mock goofing with me? I wanted to know how he learned the art of saddle making at the side of his father and grandfather. He answered with the saddle maker's code.

"I only bled once," Mock plainly states, explaining how he accidentally sliced a finger years ago while cutting out a piece of leather. "After dad scolded me, I didn't do that anymore. It ruins the leather."

This is how a conversation about saddle making can quickly spin into tales of well-polished, but often held close-to-the-vest stories around the Mock Brothers Saddle shop. Positioned along highway 412 west of Sand Springs, the road choked with urbanites commuting to their jobs in Tulsa, the shop attracts little attention. Unless of course you need a saddle. Or a pair of chaps. Maybe a set of leather reins.

The ranch-style building has been home for three generations of saddle makers. First located at the Tulsa Stockyards, they established a reputation with the rugged cowboys making a living on the Oklahoma prairie. When the stockyards closed in 1976, they moved to their current location.

"Grandpa and my great uncles started making saddles in 1941 as a way to make ends meet and give them something to do when they weren't cowboying."

It's a hard way to make a living, but an enjoyable one, Mock admits.

"Yeah, I really enjoy working with my hands and meeting all the cowboys and other customers that drop in."

Throughout the shop the musky smell of sweat-stained leather mingles with the pleasant, earthy perfume of new leather.

Previous Page: Bret Mock estimates he and his family comprise a shrinking handful of craftsmen making saddles the old-fashioned way. He is standing among the more than 200 saddles on display in his show room inside his family's shop near Sand Springs.

A hint of sunshine reflects off the in-laid silver tag bearing the Mock brand, displaying the natural, breath-taking beauty of fine art. This new saddle will soon be worn smooth and covered with the debris accompanying a hard day's work on the ranch. If properly cared for this saddle will out-live its owner.

Right and Below: Bret Mock proudly displays a hand-made saddle in front of his family's shop near Sand Springs.

The residue from many a day's hard work on the Oklahoma prairie is scraped away by the knowing hands of veteran saddle maker and leather worker Robert Miller. Miller has worked in the Mock Brothers Saddle Shop for more than 20 years.

It would be too much of a cliché to say Mock is a dying breed, but most saddles today are machine made in a factory, eschewing the time consuming hand work. What's the difference?

"There's quite a bit of difference," Mock quickly states.

The factories use clicker dyes or press plates to stamp and tool the leather. Assembly line workers put the pieces together, often making 35 saddles in a week. Mock's saddles are made by one person from beginning to end. They might make 35 saddles in a year.

"Our guy is an artist," Mock says. "He measures the (saddle) tree to fit the horse and the cowboy, he tools and hand stamps the leather, covers the horn. It's just him by himself, truly making a custom-fit saddle."

During a demonstration of the hand-made saddle, a hint of sunshine is reflected off the in-laid silver tag bearing the Mock brand, displaying



the natural, breath-taking beauty of fine art.

“Sorta gives a man the feeling he could do anything in this saddle,” Bret proudly states. “Almost makes work seem glamorous and fun, or, at least less painful!”

The age of some of the equipment Mock uses to make saddles exceeds his time spent on earth.

“We have a 1921 Champion harness stitcher we use to stitch the leather,” Mock says. “I believe it came from the famous 101 Ranch in Ponca City.” In the corner sits an antique Singer treadle sewing machine for sewing chaps.

Mock saddles have found their way onto horses owned by country stars

Brooks and Dunn, Reba McEntyre, Bob Wills, and Martina McBride. Professional rodeo cowboys Terry Don West (world champion bull rider), Ben Johnson (actor and champion steer roper), Clem McSpadden (champion roper and politician) and Dan Daily (all around champion) have made a living on Mock saddles.



A

s Mock rubs his dye-stained hands across an old saddle brought in for repair, I wondered aloud, if these saddles could talk, oh, the tales they could weave!

“Yeah, you’d get some pretty good stories...probably get a few people killed too!” Mock proclaims. At the corners of his eyes you can see a hint of mischief, perhaps he knows a story or two?

“No, not gonna share any stories today,” Mocks laughs. Come on, just one?

“Well, there’s been lots of wrecks, lots of good times, especially on the cowboy side of it, getting somebody bucked off, somebody laughing.”

Maybe I’ll ask one of Mock’s long-time employees, Robert Miller. He’s been hand-stitching and tooling the leather for more than 20 years.

“I know everybody that comes in, ranchers, cowboys, everybody,” Miller says. “This is just like a hair dresser’s parlor, you hear all the gossip.”

But that is all I am going to get from Miller. Evidently what is said while using a Mock Brothers saddle, stays in the saddle.

Perhaps the Mock Saddle Shop boys’

reluctance to divulge details is part of the reason customers return year after year, generation after generation. More than likely it’s the quality of work that lasts a lifetime. Just ask one of their customers.

“They’re extremely well-made,” Lotsee Spradling says. She owns several Mock saddles and takes all of her saddles to Mock for repairs. Lotsee and her family own the Flying G Ranch and equestrian center, just across the Arkansas river from Mock.

“The saddles are extremely comfortable and balanced,” Spradling notes as she pulls one off it’s stand. “This is the only new saddle I’ve owned and it’s probably 40 years old.”

Longevity is a Mock trademark. Tom Holcomb, Kellyville, bought his first Mock saddle in 1950 and is using one today he bought in 1965.

“My dad wouldn’t ride anything but a Mock,” Holcomb said. “Dad always said the saddle has to fit the horse first, man second.”

Oh, and the other rules of saddle making as written in the code? Number two – don’t date the customers. Number 3 – don’t date the help.

“That (the code) was handed down from grandpa,” Mock says. “Three rules of wisdom, if you can get along with that, you’ll do alright.”

His two sons, Ethan and Daniel, are busy doing what young men do, chasing life and embracing new adventures. But, they too are learning the craft of saddle making, along with Bret’s two brothers and their children. The legacy of a Mock Brothers saddle is sure to continue for several more generations.

