

People & Places

Group with big vision promotes small-scale ag

Nick Cockrell helps small farm owners learn best practices for raising animals

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

ROCHESTER, Wash. — There are a few main things to know about the Washington State Livestock Coalition. One, despite its name, it’s a small organization with about 60 members, mostly residents of Thurston County in Western Washington. “You have to have a vision,” coalition President Nick Cockrell said. “The vision is, we promote education and opportunities statewide.”

Second, the group was formed in anger. The first meeting in 2009 drew about 100 people upset with what they saw as law enforcement’s heavy-handed response to allegations of animal neglect. One can imagine more popular causes, but rural residents thought sick and aging animals were being reported as mistreated livestock by passing observers.

“Sometimes these things are not as cut-and-dried as people driving by might think,” Cockrell said.

Third, coalition volunteers have helped struggling livestock owners with advice and hay. The group isn’t an animal rescue organization, but twice it has taken and found homes for horses and goats whose owners could no longer handle the responsibility.

Fourth, the organization has expanded its interests. It has organized seminars on farm topics such as animal disease, pasture management and backyard poultry and has ambitions to do more. “I see us as trying to provide help for people interested in agriculture, who want to grow their own food or maintain



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State Livestock Coalition President Nick Cockrell and his wife, Sandra, greet their 2-year-old pinto Picasso at their farm near Rochester, Wash. The coalition organizes seminars on small-scale agricultural practices.

Western Innovator

Nick Cockrell

Age: 67

Location: Rochester, Wash., where he raises horses with his wife, Sandra

Position: Washington State Livestock Coalition president; helped found the organization in 2009.

Background: Retired in 2014 as facilities asset manager for the Washington Department of Enterprise Services; grew up on a dairy in Texas.



a life rooted in farming,” Cockrell said.

Cockrell, 67, and his wife, Sandra, raise and sell Arabian and pinto horses on their farm outside Rochester in rural southern Thurston County.

By the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s generous definition — having the ability to raise \$1,000 worth of a crop — Thurston County has 1,336 farms. That’s more farms than

in Whitman, Adams or Franklin counties — all huge agricultural producing areas in southeast Washington. Measured in dollars, however, Thurston County’s farm output is comparatively small.

Retired veterinarian Everett Macomber witnessed how agriculture changed over four decades of treating large animals in the south Puget Sound. A former member of the Amer-

ican Veterinary Medical Association and charter member of the livestock coalition, Macomber said the small dairies are virtually gone and knowledge about animal husbandry has declined. Rural residents, however, still want horses for pets and cows for eating, he said.

“It’s fine, until there’s a problem,” he said. “A lot of times they don’t have the knowledge to recognize what’s normal from abnormal.”

Problems can arise from livestock owners having too little money and too little experience, Macomber said. Also, there’s the matter of shifting societal attitudes about what constitutes humane livestock treatment.

Back in 2009, Cockrell and others were concerned that such animal owners were being too quickly targeted for felony prosecution, rather than neighborly help. “We felt there were circumstances not being resolved

in a reasonable manner,” he said.

The Stockmen’s Coalition for the Just Treatment of Owners and Livestock was formed. The group changed its name in 2012 to the Washington State Livestock Coalition to reflect interest in sheep, goats and poultry, as well as horses and cows. It has an annual operating budget of \$3,000 to \$5,000, raised from dues and an annual fund-raising horse ride through the Capitol Forest in June.

Cockrell and Macomber agree that concerns about how animal cruelty laws are enforced have eased over the past several years. These days, the coalition is more focused on educating animal owners, including prospective food producers.

In February, the coalition and Thurston County Farm Bureau co-sponsored a seminar in Lacey on raising chickens in an urban environment. The idea for the workshop sprang from a news report on upscale chicken coops in Seattle, Sandra Cockrell said.

“It just blew me away. People were spending \$1,000 on chicken coops that looked liked the Titanic, a biplane or the Taj Mahal,” she said.

About 40 people attended. As a follow-up, the coalition and Farm Bureau will present in June a workshop on “humane methods of chicken processing.”

Thurston County Farm Bureau President Bruce Morgan said the two groups have overlapping membership and complementary roles. While the Farm Bureau works on regulatory affairs, the coalition fills a need to develop new farmers, he said.

“We can have some major synergy working on these educational things,” Morgan said. “I fully anticipate they’ll be able to the same kind of co-sponsored seminars with Lewis and Clark counties and right on through the state.”

Geoduck farming takes off as demand for clams grows in Asia

By PHUONG LE
Associated Press

HARSTINE ISLAND, Wash. — John King plunges his arm up to his shoulder into the mudflats of Puget Sound, roots around and soon pulls from the muck the world’s largest burrowing clam. The mollusk squirts water from its long obscene-looking neck. King dodges the spray, already using a water

hose to loosen sand and harvest the next one.

Within hours, the geoduck — pronounced gooey duck — is packed live on ice at nearby Taylor Shellfish Farms — on its way to be served raw as sashimi or added to hot-pot dishes to satisfy a growing appetite for the unique Pacific Northwest delicacy.

“It’s gained this luxury status. A big driver is the growing middle class in China,” said Gina

Shamshak, an assistant economics professor at Goucher College, who has researched the geoduck market. She added: “They want to consume the higher-valued seafood items, and geoduck is one of them.”

Last year, the U.S. exported \$74 million, or about 11 million pounds, worth of live wild and farmed geoduck, mostly to China and Hong Kong. That’s double the volume and value exported

in 2008. An average clam weighs about 2 pounds and can fetch up to \$100 per pound overseas.

Demand in Asia is prompting shellfish farmers to grow more of the clams along Washington’s private tidelands. Several new farms have been permitted in recent years, despite challenges from opponents concerned about plastic pollution, aesthetics and potential environmental harm.

And now, backed by new

research showing mostly short-lived, localized environmental effects, the state is preparing for the first time to lease 15 acres of public tidelands for geoduck aquaculture. The native geoduck, which comes from a Native American word meaning “dig deep,” has been dug recreationally in Northwest intertidal areas for decades, and it thrives in the inland waters of Washington, Alaska and British Columbia.

The hills are alive with the sound of children’s music

By RYAN M. TAYLOR
For the Capital Press

TOWNER, N.D. — The hills are alive with the sound of music again this year on the ranch. And, beyond the hills, in the last two weeks, we’ve attended a violin recital, a band concert, a piano recital and a choral performance to test the acoustics of our school gym and two churches.

Our kids have been dressed up in their “good clothes” almost as much as their “ranch clothes” during that time. I have a little mending to do on my good clothes because I keep popping the buttons on my shirts, my chest swelling with pride as I watch our children play and sing.

Musical household

Growing up, we never got

Cowboy Logic

Ryan Taylor



an Atari game system when it came out, and we bought used cars from the classifieds instead of new cars from the showroom floor, but we always had plenty of musical instruments in the house.

It was mostly Mom’s doing, I suppose, since she could play most of them. We had an old upright piano, a couple of fiddles and guitars, a mandolin, a banjo, an old pump organ, a “Hawaiian” lap steel guitar, and as my siblings and I began band in school, they made the investments in a clarinet, a flute and an alto saxophone. I got the alto sax, and played it for seven years.

I’m sure most Ataris have hit the landfill, and those used four-door cars have been crushed and recycled, but we still have those musical instruments. The alto sax has been put back into service in my son’s fifth-grade band, the piano continues to make music in our house, and I play one of Mom’s old fiddles as I help my other son practice his Suzuki violin lessons.

It’s a good thing they last so long. I took a stroll through the music store, and seeing what those instruments cost brand new multiplied my appreciation for our music-making contraptions back home. Of course, I’m sure they seemed expensive when Mom and Dad bought them 30 and 40 years ago, too.

Since we have the instruments, it only seemed right that

we support our school’s music program and invest in the piano lessons and violin lessons, and drive the miles it takes to get to them when our children began to show an interest in music. I believe there is value in it, even if we don’t become professional musicians.

I haven’t played my alto sax a lot since I graduated, but I still can, and I remember how. I only took piano for two years, but I can still play my last recital piece and read music. Those experiences maybe gave me the courage to teach myself how to play guitar later in life, and pick up Mom’s violin and learn “Twinkle, twinkle little star,” along with our 8-year-old.

Brain science

A friend of mine shared a TED-Ed video that talked about

the brain science of music. Scientists say music stimulates more parts of the brain than just about anything else we can do. Listening to music is good, but playing music is exponentially more stimulating to the old gray matter between our ears. Something about exercising our corpus callosum and improving our problem-solving ability, memory and executive skills. There’s more to this “Twinkle, twinkle little star” business than meets the eye.

Whether it’s listening to our daughter sing with my wife in church, watching our middle son step to the stage and confidently play the violin, or seeing my old saxophone in the hands of our son at a band concert, I know it stimulates my brain and pleases my ears, but, most importantly, it warms my heart.

Calendar

Wednesday, May 27

Hyslop Farm Field Day, 8:15 a.m., Oregon State University’s Hyslop Farm, Corvallis, Ore. The Hyslop Farm Field Day includes presentations on winter wheat cultivars, an update on canola and disease management trials, and looks at weed, disease and insect control in Willamette Valley cropping systems. The field day ends with a complimentary lunch served by the OSU Crop and Soil Science Club.

Wednesday, June 3

Frozen Assets: How we can and why we should save the world’s frozen water, 7-9 p.m. Walla Walla Public Library, Walla

Walla, Wash., 509-943-0705. Mountaineer and climate scientist Steven Ghan takes us on a visual journey along the crest of the North Cascades, showing evidence of glacier retreat shares solutions to prevent global ice melt and how to preserve our snowpack.

Wednesday, June 10

Oregon State University Extension Sherman Station Field Day, 7:30 a.m. Sherman County Extension, Moro, 541-565-3230. Twelve speakers are scheduled to talk on topics that include wheat diseases and screening for resistance, soil pH and maximizing yields, soil-borne pathogens and Clearfield wheat trials.

Friday, June 12

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680. This 6-session program will help forest owners understand ecology, silviculture, wildlife and other topics. Register by June 5.

Saturday, June 13

Rickreall Gun Show, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Polk County Fair Grounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-623-3048.

Sheep in the Foothills, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Boise Foothills Learning Center, Boise.

Sunday, June 14

Rickreall Gun Show, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Polk County Fair Grounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-623-3048.

Friday, June 19

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680. This 6-session program will help forest owners understand ecology, silviculture, wildlife and other topics. Register by June 5.

Saturday, June 20

Ketchum Kalf Rodeo, 1-9 p.m. Glenwood, Wash.

Sunday, June 21

Washington Potato and Onion Association Annual Convention, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.

Ketchum Kalf Rodeo, 1-9 p.m. Glenwood, Wash.

Monday, June 22

Washington Potato and Onion Association Annual Convention, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.

Tuesday, June 23

Washington Potato and Onion Association Annual Convention, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.

Friday, June 26

Forestry Shortcourse, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. West Bonner Library, Priest River, Idaho, 208-446-1680. This 6-session program will help forest owners understand ecology, silviculture, wildlife and other topics. Register by June 5.

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