

A Visit with Kerr County Extension Agent Roy Walston

A few weeks ago I wrote about how much I have learned from government agents and A&M professors about the natural world in the Hill Country and how everyone can benefit from their knowledge and experience. I have known Roy Walston for well over 10 years and have always found him friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable.

I sat down with him recently to get his view of his job and to introduce him to the people of Kerr County. Roy has been with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension for 28 years. When asked to describe this job, his first words were “education”, followed by youth development and agriculture and natural resources. AgriLife Extension is part of the Texas A&M University system which was one of the original land-grant colleges established by the Republic of Texas back in 1839.

Roy's list of duties is long, including anything having to do with agriculture and natural resources, new landowner education, range management, management of brush, crops and forage, anything involving helping farmers and ranchers and 4-H kids. 4-H activities are a major part of Roy's job, with 350 4-H kids in Kerr County in 8 different clubs--everything having to do with helping kids and their families select animals, learn to care for and show the animals, and actually showing their animals at stock shows. Roy points out that he couldn't do his job without a great staff and many volunteers.

Whenever any of the 4-H kids are showing their animals at any local or district stock shows (San Antonio, Ft. Worth, Houston, Austin, San Angelo, Dallas), Roy will accompany them and help them in many ways. For instance, there are 45 kids who will be showing their animals at the upcoming San Antonio stock show.

It is important to note that there are many other 4-H activities that do not involve raising or showing animals, such as: clothing/textiles, photography, food & nutrition, wool and mohair judging, shooting sports, veterinary science and leadership. Roy and Koy Coffey, Kerr County 4-H Agent, are deeply involved in all of these activities.

Other duties of the County Extension Agent are to be the advisor and sponsor of the local Master Gardeners chapter and an advisor for the local Texas Master Naturalist chapter.

The Master Gardener Program is a volunteer program designed to increase the availability of horticultural information. Master Gardeners aid AgriLife Extension by conducting school garden projects; answering telephone requests for horticultural information, as well as establishing and maintaining demonstration gardens.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is best described in its mission statement: “To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities”.

When asked about the most fun part of his job, Roy answered without hesitating, “Working with kids and ranchers”.

When asked what changes he has seen in Farming and Ranching in Texas over the course of his career, Roy described the decline in the number of old-time ranchers and more and more new landowners on smaller pieces of property, most with much less experience in managing rural property.

The County Extension Agent’s office is a joint partnership between the county and A&M, with funding coming from both. One thing that Roy wanted to make sure everyone knows is that his office will try to get the answer to any question anyone has about agriculture, land management and natural resources. To do that he can rely on the vast resources of the various departments of Texas A&M as well as their research stations and the experts in those facilities and the literature available from them.

One of the disappointments Roy expressed, and that I and others I know have expressed, is that too few people avail themselves of the knowledge, literature, advice and help they could obtain from the AgriLife office and some of the many educational programs that are put on by that office and others every year. While people who have been ranching or farming for a living for many years are well acquainted with the services of the AgriLife office, many new small landowners, the people who could most use expert advice, frequently are not aware of the service. I urge them to think about doing so. The AgriLife office can be contacted at 830-257-6568 or kerr@ag.tamu.edu.

At one point in our conversation, Roy expressed what I think is the essence of how he approaches his job. He said, “It is not about doing a job, but doing it to make a difference”.

Until next time...

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