Grooming Benefits for Horses
By Amy McLean

The largest organ on an animal's body is its skin or integument. Grooming contributes to social bonds between horses. Mutual grooming allows the horse's partner to reach areas the horse itself could not groom and vice versa. Horses begin grooming one another as early as the first week of life. Grooming behavior will peak between the mare and foal between the second and third month of life. At this point the foal begins to become more independent and invested of its environment. In general grooming bouts between horse partners are around 3 mins long. The frequency of grooming will depend on the season but most grooming within herds is seen between the months of April through July. Females will spend more time grooming one another compared to males. In addition, horses will select a grooming partner that is similar in hierarchy within the heard.

Typically, grooming behavior will begin at the neck, then the withers, shoulders and end at the tail head. Grooming in the wither region (top of the horse’s shoulder) has been shown to show a decrease in heart rate. It's believed that the decrease in heart rate is seen due to a large number of ganglion nerve endings found in this area and likely cause an effect on the sympathetic nervous system causing the heart rate to decrease. We typically associate the sympathetic nervous system with the flight or fight mechanism in horses. So, scratching or grooming your horse in the withers area may actually produce a calming effect. This technique can be used as a primary reinforcer for your horse. Meaning, when your horse performs a task well it's rewarded by scratching its withers.

Although not all horses are alike and not all preferred to be groomed. Areas such as the elbow and front of the shoulder have shown an increase in heart rate when being groomed and are not considered to be preferred areas. Grooming near the flank will also produce similar results. When agonistic behavior is displayed among horses, they typically will bit or kick at these areas of the opposing horse, so keep in mind your good intentions to groom and calm your horse may take effect in various areas more dorsally located versus limbs and the ventral side of your horse.
Winter Feed Cost Challenge

By Scott Lake

This winter may bring cattle producers even more challenges in terms of weather and keeping winter feed costs in check. Hay supplies were pushed this summer and fall as grazable forage was limited in drought-ravaged areas, forcing not only liquidation but feeding of hay earlier than expected.

See full article at: http://www.agweb.com/livestock/beef/article/editors_notebook_winter_feed_cost_challenge/

Sorting cows for more efficient winter supplemental feeding

Cow calf producers in the Southern Plains are searching for every management strategy that will improve the efficiency of the feeding program for their cow herds. Drought-shortened pastures and reduced and/or expensive hay supplies mean that feed wastage must be eliminated.

See full article: http://tscra.org/news_blog/?p=5567#.TrKrTc2S4gN

Beef Industry in 2012 Holds Both Opportunities and Challenges

The future of the beef industry is filled with both opportunities and challenges due to the 2011 drought in the Southern Plains, high price of grains, volatility in the commodity markets and fewer dollars available for research and education.


Cryptosporidiosis

It was an event like so many others hosted each spring all across cow country. Family and neighbors pitched in to vaccinate and brand a new crop of calves. Along with the more seasoned help, the crew included several youngsters anxious to make a hand.

See full article at: http://www.angusjournal.com/ArticlePDF/Crypto%2010_11%20AJ.pdf
Fifty Years of Ram Testing, How Far Have We Come?
By Robert Stobart

In the spring of 1960, a group of Rambouillet breeders and faculty from the Animal Science Department discussed what the best way of identifying rams that had superior genes to better enable them to increase the productivity of the Rambouillet breed in Wyoming. Texas had introduced a central ram test that enabled producers to identify rams that had production characteristics that exceeded the average of the rams on the test. The test allowed the producers to compare their rams to other producers rams in a controlled setting. Until the test was started, it was impossible for producers to evaluate their breeding programs against other purebred Rambouillet breeders in their regions. The Texas test used an index, created by Dr. Maurice Shelton as a means of giving rams credit for the production traits that the Rambouillet Breed Association agreed were of importance to the breed. These traits, average daily gain, wool characters (diameter, clean wool production, staple length) amount of face wool, belly wool and body wrinkles were important and the best way to rank animals was to give them a score which represented the importance of the traits to the overall productivity of the animal. These scores were then totaled to provide a single value, the Index, which accounted for the animals productivity related to those important traits.

The Wyoming Ram Test was started in the fall of 1960 in Torrington, where it resided for a number of years prior to being moved to Laramie, initially located at the site of the current Territorial Prison and then when the new facilities that were built for the College of Agriculture and the Animal Science Department, the test was moved to the new location.

I have included four graphs that illustrate the results of selecting rams on their index and the resulting increase in the ADG seen. The graphs illustrate the average data over the 50 year period as well as the average for the top 30% of the rams on the test.

The first two illustrate the increase in Index over the life of the test, in 1960-61, the average index was 63.4 versus the 2009-10 test average of 111.8. If you look at the top 30% of rams, the index is 77.4 versus 124.5, remembering that the index encompasses all of the traits of interest measured on each ram.

The next graphs illustrate the increase in ADG over the ram tests, 1960-61 was .47#/day, 2009-10 test was .81#/day. The top 30% of rams gained .52#/day in 1960-61 test versus .9#/day for the 09-10 test.

These data indicate that the ram tests have contributed greatly to the increase in performance seen in our modern day Rambouillet rams, it is a tribute to those who advocated for testing of rams.