

Texans trading city for rural lifestyle

GUEST EDITORIAL

By EDDIE BAGGS

MOST Texans live in the city, but many want to return to a more rural lifestyle.

In 1870, three-fourths of all Americans were farmers, ranchers or residents of small rural communities, who maintained a close relationship with the land.

Over the last 100 years, the country has changed from rural to urban. Now more than half of the population of Texas is located in urban cities like El Paso, Austin, San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth and Dallas, with Denton not far behind as we acquire more residents every day.

A yearn for Texans to get back to the land has created landowners of small tracts (5 to 50 acres) surrounding these urban areas. It is obvious when you drive the outskirts of the county and view the different

land features that each individual brings.

Denton County has 612,416 acres within its borders with 567,680 acres of dryland and three major lakes that make up 44,736 acres.

Land that has filed for agriculture exemptions with the Appraisal District is 433,450 acres, making up 76% of the country's dryland. That leaves 135,907 acres not in agriculture or lakes.

Type of agriculture

What type of agriculture makes up this 76% of Denton County landmass?

We can document 238,500 acres as agriculture production in crops such as wheat at 29,000 acres, livestock at 150,000 acres, hay at 45,000 acres and grain sorghum at 14,500 acres as being the larger-produced commodities.

But what about the remaining 194,950 acres in "agriculture" in the county that makes up the other 34% of the landmass?

We must attribute this to small-land agriculture or alternative agriculture. These acres could be producing a few cows,



Photo courtesy: NRCS

or other livestock, hay, or specialty crops such as pecans, grapes, vegetables and fruit trees.

Many smaller acres in Denton County can be attributed to horse production.

Horses can be raised on smaller tracts, due to confinement areas, and generate large revenues that drive sectors of the county's economy. It is estimated that the horse industry in Denton County alone gen-

erated \$68.5 million last year. Small-land ownership adds to the ethics and personality of Denton County.

As our county grows, more people will look to this "semi-rural" lifestyle and all it has to offer.

These people work in the city but use the land as their principal residence.

Small-land agriculture plays a vital role in our local economy and the Texas agriculture in-

dustry, adding to the need for conservation agriculture and natural resource education to help landowners become better land stewards.

In the words of Stewart Udall: "If you want inner peace find it in solitude — not speed — and if you would find yourself, look to the land from which you came and to which you go."

Baggs is Texas AgriLife Extension Service agent for Denton County.

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