



Our
Earliest
Members

Demonstration farm has
a generous past and cutting-edge future

THE LULING FOUNDATION

80th
ANNIVERSARY

BLUEBONNET MEMBER SINCE 1939

Bluebonnet is celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2019 by visiting some of the cooperative's earliest commercial members. They joined 'when the lights came on' and are still doing business. This month we feature the non-profit Luling Foundation, an agriculture demonstration farm that has been operating for 92 years in Caldwell County.

By Clayton Stromberger

*A*s you drive down quiet, tree-lined Mulberry Avenue out on the southwestern edge of Luling, just past the high school football stadium, you come to an unadorned metal archway that reads, "The Luling Foundation," and below that, "Est. 1927." Passing under the arch, you're simultaneously going backward and forward in time.

This area of gently rolling land nestled above the winding San Marcos River is both a historical site with a unique role in Caldwell County's past and a working farm of tomorrow where cutting-edge practices are shared with the next generation of

Continued on page 21

'More people were introduced to the farm over the years by making ice cream in a bag here in third grade than I can count.'

— Bonnie Dredla
THE LULING FOUNDATION

Bonnie Dredla, left, office manager at the Luling Foundation, stands with some of the demonstration farm's registered black Angus herd (*Sarah Beal photo*). Upper left, an undated photo from the farm's early days. Below left, a group of young men, ages 17-22, who took part in the farm's training school established in March of 1934. The one-year program taught hands-on classes in poultry, dairy, livestock and general farming. *Historic photos courtesy of the Luling Foundation*



Q&A

with *Bonnie Dredla*



Sarah Beal photo

The Luling Foundation is her home and holds her heart. Office manager Bonnie Dredla lives on the property with her family and has worked there 15 years. She is constantly reinvigorated by the beauty of the place and its important mission.

What's one thing that folks might not know about the Luling Foundation?

People are so surprised about how many global visitors have been here. I have a map on the wall with colored pins showing all the places people have come from around the world. We've had people from Indonesia, Pakistan, Italy, Russia, Latvia, Mexico, Canada and England. We've had several exchange students from Poland. The most recent group was from Brazil. A mayor from China tried his first beef jerky here in the office.

What are your big annual events, and how many people visit each year?

We have about 1,500 visitors each year. Our Field Day has been going from the beginning, and it's the third Thursday of May every year. We have vendor booths, specialists, demonstrations and tours. We serve a big barbecue dinner and peach cobbler. We've had a Progressive Ag Safety Day for fifth-graders the last seven years, and that will continue this spring as Ag Literacy Day. Bluebonnet Electric

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lulingfoundation.org
 830-875-2438
 523 S. Mulberry Ave.
 Luling, TX 78648

Open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.
 (Closed from noon to 1 p.m.)

has been a sponsor and advocate of the event since it started in 2011.

Education has been an integral part of the foundation from its beginning. What knowledge do you hope young visitors will leave with after seeing the farm?

A lot of it is just changing their perspective of what they think agriculture is, because often they think you have to have a chicken in the back yard, or it has to do with a tractor. They think you have to be in 4H or FFA (Future Farmers of America.) We're all involved in agriculture. If you work at H-E-B, you're in agriculture. When you put your clothes on, you're in agriculture.

If Edgar B. Davis were able to drop by and see what the foundation is doing today, what would he think?

I think he'd be proud that it's still going on,

that his vision is still being fulfilled. One of the beautiful things I get to see in this job is all of the kids who have come through here. More people were introduced to the farm over the years by making ice cream in a bag here in third grade than I can count. I think that seeing the students do things that are outside, that are hands-on, that are tangible, and give them knowledge they can take away from here, that's what I think he'd be most proud of.

What can you tell us about your electric use?

We reinsulated the demonstration barn several years ago. The 92-year-old office building has energy efficient windows on the outside. We also have four solar panels to operate a water well.

What has the longtime connection with Bluebonnet meant to the foundation?

We've gotten high-quality service from Bluebonnet, and thanks to its community grants, we've been able to make some wonderful improvements to our facilities. We received one grant for \$30,000 in 2016 for a new workshop, and we've gotten three Community Development Partnership Program grants from the LCRA and Bluebonnet over the years. It's a relationship where both parties are able to fulfill a mission in providing a service to the community.

Continued from page 18

farmers and cattle ranchers.

The Luling Foundation exists because of Rafael Rios No. 1, the most famous oil well in the county's history. Thanks to that well, drilled in 1922 after six dry misses, Yankee entrepreneur-turned-wildcatter Edgar B. Davis hit black gold and became even more of a millionaire than he'd been upon making his first two fortunes in the shoe and Indonesian rubber businesses.

Guided by the devout Congregationalist faith of his Massachusetts upbringing, Davis believed that "gracious Providence" had directed him to seek oil near Luling. That same spirit led him to share much of his newfound wealth through philanthropic gifts to the community he'd come to know and care for during his days of searching.

Touched by the plight of area farmers who appeared trapped in a cycle of diminishing returns due to reliance on the single crop of cotton, Davis created the Luling Foundation as an agriculture demonstration farm and endowed it with \$1 million (the equivalent of more than \$14 million today).

Over the decades, the Luling Foundation — which serves Caldwell, Gonzales and Guadalupe counties — has tested and shared best practices for growing row crops, pecans and winter forage crops for livestock, while raising, at various times, goats, dairy cows, turkeys and, since 2000, Angus cattle.

Produce from its gardens have graced many a Luling dinner table, and generations of Texas schoolchildren have enjoyed a daylong taste of farm life on memorable field trips. The foundation gives \$15,000 in scholarships annually to high school students to pursue learning in agriculture, health care and trade/vocational studies.

The 1,100-acre facility is run by manager Michael Kuck and three other full-time staffers. The foundation is led by a seven-member board of directors. Board chair Gary Dickenson of Caldwell County first visited the farm at a 1984 field day, and has been a director since 2000.



Edgar B. Davis



The Luling Foundation's main office today, left, and back in 1930, below, three years after the foundation was created.

Sarah Beal photo



Historical photos courtesy of the Luling Foundation



The milking parlor in the dairy barn, above, which was remodeled in 1928 to meet requirements for production of 'Certified Milk.' Economics and a prolonged drought ended the dairy operation in 1956. Turkeys were also a big part of the farm's early days, right.



Luling Foundation manager Walter W. Cardwell Sr., left, hands out baby chicks in 1935. Cardwell's annual report in 1945 gave advice to every property owner: 'Be flexible enough to make changes as they appear necessary.'

Thank a farmer — celebrate National Ag Day

For the 46th year, the Agriculture Council of America is hosting National Ag Day on March 14, 2019.

It's a good day to reflect on and appreciate the contributions of American farmers, who receive just 14.8 cents, on average, of every food dollar consumers spend throughout the year, according to the National Farmers Union. The remaining 85 percent of food revenue goes to marketing, processing, wholesale, distribution and retail costs.

National Ag Day coincides with the beginning of cotton, corn, sorghum and soybean planting season for many Texas farmers. Think of the wide variety of commodities and products those crops

alone make possible — clothing and other textiles, animal feed, renewable fuels such as ethanol and many convenience foods.

With each U.S. farmer feeding an average of about 165 people in exchange for a modest financial reward and, frequently, a lack of recognition, take a moment to honor the hard work they do for our country's benefit and that of others around the world. Agriculture is America's No. 1 export, a vital contributor to sustaining a healthy economy.

So support your local farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants and spread the word about your favorite local farms.



A home-school group from San Antonio watches Johnny Fenn place an ear tag and ear tattoo while Jason Dredla freeze-brands one of the Luling Foundation's cattle. *Photo courtesy of Bonnie Dredla*

Building a better beef cow

At the Luling Foundation, refining the production of the very best Angus cattle is done by combining detailed research and science's latest tools. Here are a few interesting facts about the work:

□ EPD, or Estimated Progeny Difference, is a detailed analysis of data about a sire and dam that is exact enough for breeders to place a dollar value on a calf destined to produce top-quality beef.

□ At the foundation facility, tanks of liquid nitrogen can hold up to 600 "straws" of valuable semen.

□ Ideally, a bull used to breed heifers should have a genetic trait to sire a low- to moderate-weight calf at birth.

□ The foundation's certified group scale can weigh 8 to 10 feeder-weight calves at a time (up to 10,000 pounds). Weight is important when cattle are loaded onto trucks, where a delicate balance of weight distribution is essential.

□ The cattle pens were designed by Temple Grandin, a celebrated author and animal science expert who promotes humane, stress-reducing livestock handling and facility design.



Above, a vintage photo of one of the foundation's early champion bulls. Today the foundation strives to keep cattle operations on the cutting edge of industry technology and techniques. Among a number of well-known people who have visited the Luling Foundation's demonstration farm is Temple Grandin, left. She designed livestock handling facilities that are more humane and widely used today. She visited the Luling Foundation to help design its low-stress chute system.

A modern alternative: freeze branding

Rather than fire branding, the Luling Foundation has been marking its cattle with denatured alcohol and dry ice since starting its Angus herd in 2000. This method can reduce the risk of infection that can occur with fire branding. How it works:

□ The technique is only used on cattle with dark hides.

□ The area to be branded is shaved and sprayed with denatured alcohol until soaked.

□ The brand is removed from coolant and placed on the animal for 50 seconds; holding the brand firmly in place is difficult but necessary.

□ A few weeks after branding, the hair loses its pigmentation and hair follicles turn white, creating a distinctive, easily readable brand.

With freeze branding, extreme cold is applied to the hide of the animal, killing the pigmentation in the hair follicles. The technique results in white hair where darker hair would have normally grown, leaving a clear brand. Freeze branding causes less pain and stress to the animal than traditional fire branding and decreases the risk of infection. *Sarah Beal photo*



JOIN THE Party!

80th
ANNIVERSARY

It's a milestone year for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. We're turning 80! Here are some of the ways we'll celebrate.

IN THE PAGES OF TEXAS CO-OP POWER MAGAZINE



Longtime member profiles will introduce you to some of the cooperative's earliest commercial and residential members. Two profile subjects this year:

□ **St. Matthew Lutheran Church**, perched on the gentle rise of Sandy Hill, 10 miles northeast of Brenham, has been welcoming area residents since 1891. It first got electricity in 1939. Like the other Lutheran churches that dot Washington County, St. Matthew was formed to serve the local community of German immigrants, most of them cotton farmers. Its doors are still open today.

□ **SPJST Lodge No. 38**, left, another of the cooperative's first members, joined in 1939. The Czech fraternal order's meeting place was built 13 years earlier, in 1926, in an area once known as Kovar, between Smithville and Flatonia. You can still rent the 72-by-100-foot dance floor today.



IN OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

□ **Contests and giveaways** throughout the year will spotlight our past, test your knowledge and share your stories.

□ **A monthly countdown** of our eight decades. Throughout March, we're looking back at the 1940s.

□ **Video conversations** with longtime members and employees and person-on-the-street pop quizzes for fun prizes.

□ Look for our hashtag, **#bluebonnetturns80**

IN FUTURE ISSUES

□ In April, read about the **history of electric appliances** and enjoy an entertaining timeline of the devices that changed lives.

□ Visit with some of our **former meter readers**, and learn about the history of the meters of yesterday and today.

□ Savor some of our readers' favorite family **heirloom recipes**; selected entries will receive a great cookbook.

□ In August, learn **80 things about Bluebonnet**, the region and your electricity.

□ At the end of the year, we'll offer experts' — and your — **predictions for the next 80 years** about the cooperative, our region and electricity.

AT EVENTS

Attend our **Annual Meeting** on Tuesday, May 14, in Giddings. In addition to a state-of-the-cooperative report and a vote on important Bluebonnet business, you can see a collection of vintage electric appliances like the early hand-held hair dryer below. There will be timeline displays, a history photo booth and more. Get information **on the next page** and in the April and May issues of Texas Co-op Power magazine.

Later this year, join us at **birthday parties** in locations around our service area. These family-friendly events will feature activities, displays, prize drawings, birthday cupcakes and lots of Bluebonnet history. Keep an eye on our pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine and on social media for details.



LOOKING BACK: THE '40s



'Casablanca' starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, won the Best Picture Oscar for 1943.

'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy' was a hit for the Andrews Sisters and became a World War II classic. Bette Midler re-recorded the song and made it a hit again in 1972.

'Oklahoma!' was Rogers & Hammerstein's first collaboration and a Broadway smash hit. It garnered a special Pulitzer Prize in 1944.