Raising farm animals is a “Family Affair”

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

As the youngest of three children, Sara Goldammer has been around farming and farm animals for as long as she can remember.

“Growing up on a farm influenced me a lot to work in the industry,” said the 16-year-old sophomore at McAllen Memorial High School. “I have been showing animals for eight years, since I was in third grade. A lot of people ask me if it’s fun, and I always tell them, yes, it’s a lot of fun and I enjoy it.”

Raising farm animals isn’t her only passion. Sara also plays golf for the Mustangs, and she is in competitive cheer as well. This year, Sara is raising eight pigs, two steers, two market goats, two breeding goats, and one Dorper lamb. Their care and feeding, plus her other extracurricular activities, add up to some very long days.

“I usually go to golf practice first,” said Sara. “Then I drive out here to the farm. I’m also in competitive cheer so some days I drive back into town and go to cheer practice, so my day usually starts at 7:00 am and which ends around 10:00. It is difficult, and so you have to prioritize, but it’s well worth it, I think.”

Her biggest awards include a Reserve Grand Championship in market goats, one showmanship award, and several wins in percentages, pure breeds, commercials, and lots of buckles. She has brought home one prize or another almost every year since she started showing animals, she said.

Right now, her favorite animals are the pigs. She’s raising two dark crosses, two spots, a Duroc, a Chester, and a Hampshire.

“We’re new to pigs and so it’s something refreshing to me,” said Sara. “I like working with them. Their personalities are kind of different than goats, which is what I’m used to, so I like working with the pigs.”

Sara says there are many rewards to working with farm animals, but she says what she likes best is getting to spend time with her family while she’s doing it.

“It’s not just me doing it,” said Sara. “It’s my whole family. We go to the shows on the weekends as a family. We spend a lot of time together, and through the shows and the experience, you’re taught many life lessons that I feel like other people don’t get to experience, because they’re not in the same clubs or they don’t show animals.”

Sara hopes to major in agricultural business in college, and although she’s still undecided about her long-term career plans, she says it’ll probably be something ag-related. Her advice to other students who are thinking about farming is to persevere through the disappointments.

“Always keep your head up,” said Sara. “You’re not going to win every show, but there will always be another one that you can do better at.”

New to FFA, but already a champion

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

When you combine the demands of FFA, choir, and swimming, it all adds up to some very long days for McAllen Memorial High School senior, Evie Martinez.

“I wake up super early to come feed all my animals,” said Martinez. “Then I drive to school, and on top of that, my AP classes and all that, I have a ton of homework at night. Then after practice, I come here to the FFA Ag Farm to work with my animals.”

Martinez says she grew up around deer leases, where she and her father enjoyed hunting and fishing. She says being outdoors for much of her early years, she naturally gravitated toward animals. This year, she’s raising a total of six animals – two breeding goats, two dairy goats, a breeding doe, and a heifer.

“I wanted to get involved with FFA sooner,” said Martinez. “Because my friends were in FFA, but unfortunately, I couldn’t at the time, because my mom has been battling with stage 4 metastatic cancer so I’ve been having to help her out. When I started driving, my parents allowed me to join FFA because I could drive myself to the school farm and they don’t have to worry about feeding my animals for me.”

The biggest challenge, according to Martinez, is working with the animals. She says it requires a lot of patience and discipline, but in just two years, she has managed to rack up some impressive awards.

“I actually won Grand Champion (in 2019) with one of my dairy goats,” said Martinez. “It was my first year showing an animal. It was also the first year they introduced dairy goats at RGVLS, so I’m honored to say I was the first winner of that category. I actually got picked Junior of the Year for my FFA chapter and that was really amazing too, and it meant a lot.”

For Evie, FFA is not just about showing animals, it’s also about learning skills that apply in any career field. She has participated in public speaking competitions in Stephenville and Robstown, and attended the FFA national convention in Washington, DC.

“That was a lot of fun and I got to meet a lot of people and learn about leadership,” said Martinez. “Raising an animal is definitely a team effort and a family effort. My dad helps me out a lot and my mom will come out here once in a while to see what it’s all about. The other chapter officers and I are always together and we’re always discussing how to make our chapter better to benefit other people.”

Martinez intends to go to college at Texas A&M – College Station and hopes to be a veterinarian someday. Her advice to younger students: be committed.

“The biggest thing you have to know is that you have to be dedicated,” said Martinez. “These are animals and they have lives and you need to make sure you understand that and treat them right going into it.”
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Raymondville teen says having fun is the best part about showing livestock

By Benjamin Treviño

For Aiden Butler of Raymondville, the farm life started when he was in elementary school, when his parents bought a new family home out in the country.

“My dad showed pigs when he was younger,” said the 17-year-old Junior at Raymondville High School. “So, when I was in the fourth grade, I rode in my house that had property behind it for keeping animals. My dad asked me if I wanted to get into showing livestock. I said yes, and here I am now.

Now in his ninth year of showing farm animals, Butler has chosen to raise a Boer goat and a red Brahman for this year’s string of livestock competitions.

“A week ago, I did Tip-o-Tex, which is over there in San Benito,” said Butler. “With this heifer here I’m going to do the Houston Livestock Show. I caught a heifer at the calf scramble, and when you do that, they give you a sponsorship of $1,775 and you get to buy a steer or heifer of your choice. I haven’t won a breed championship even though I’ve been doing it for eight years, but it’s something I’m looking forward to doing, and I have started to reserve a breed drives before but I’ve never been able to win.”

Butler says, “FFA is my life,” and as such, he doesn’t have a lot of time for other extracurricular activities.

“Being gone a lot from school can really have an impact on grades,” Butler said. “So I have to work to keep up with my classes. It’s like the no-pass, no play rule. If you don’t pass your school work, you can’t do this, so it’s important to stay on top of it. For me, training my heifer was the hardest thing. She is a very big animal and she’s a lot stronger than me, so it took a lot out of me.

What excites me is that I’m able to experience this, and whenever I get older I can tell my kids about it and what a great experience it is.”

After high school, Butler hopes to attend Texas State University, or another big school where he can study military science. His aspiration is to become a military analyst, and he believes the foundation for his future is being laid now with the experiences he’s having in livestock showing.

By Benjamin Treviño

Tragedy and disappointment aren’t enough to keep Maya Mata down. The 17-year-old Raymondville High School Junior is in her second year of raising an animal for show, after her first effort in 2019 ended suddenly and tragically.

“I really didn’t get to compete last year, because my animal died right before the show,” said Mata. “But I just kept getting involved in LDEs and stuff like that. LDEs are the FFA Leadership Development Events. We are taught public speaking, decision making, communication, and our knowledge of agriculture and the FFA organization. It reinforces what we’re taught in the agricultural science classrooms.”

Mata is raising two hogs this year, although one, a Hampshire, is not big enough for competition yet. The other is a Duroc that weighs about 200 pounds.

“I like working with pigs, but sometimes they can be stubborn,” said Mata. “It’s challenging getting them to listen. You can pop them with the show whip, but they don’t always respond or listen to your commands. They’ll just do what they want and try to push you out of the way, but you can’t let them win, so you just have to keep pushing back.”

Mata kept pushing ahead after the loss of her show hog last year.
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Learning to work with difficult farm animals is half the battle, according to Delicia Guerra of Raymondville. Luckily, the 16-year-old Raymondville High School junior has experience on her side, which helps.

“When I was eight years old and in third grade I got involved in 4-H,” said Guerra. “I started by showing goats, and I’ve been showing ever since. Once I got into middle school I got into FFA and now that I’m in high school I’m still in it. The hardest part, sometimes, is getting the goat to work with you, because they can be stubborn. I’ve had super stubborn goats in the past and it’s really hard, but you just have to get the hang of it. You just have to be very patient.”

Guerra says the best part of being in FFA is getting to be with her friends, and like-minded teens who enjoy working with animals. The most-challenging thing, however, is balancing her job, her school work, sports (she plays softball), and her love of animals.

“I have a job and I go to school every single day,” said Guerra. “And then with all of my animals, sometimes it’s hard to fit everything into one day. Sometimes, I get home from work and I feel like I’m too tired to work my goats, but you just have to do it no matter how you feel.”

Guerra says she’s not sure what career she wants to pursue after high school, but says she definitely wants to go to college. She’s currently enrolled in a Certified Nurse Assistant program and she feels her FFA skills are helping her prepare for the future.

“It helps a lot with patients,” said Guerra. “Sometimes you just have to be patient, because they might be in pain and there’s nothing you can do about it. Sometimes it’s just a matter of being with them when they would otherwise be alone.”

Guerra’s advice to younger students is to also be patient, and most of all to make sure you want to do it before purchasing an animal.

“You have to work with them every day and you have to be dedicated to it,” said Guerra. “If you don’t work with them, then they don’t develop any muscle, or they walk funny, or they act out whenever you’re showing them. It’s really fun, but it’s not for everybody. Some people don’t have the patience or they don’t have the time to dedicate themselves, but it’s really fun overall. I enjoy it a lot.”
The meaning of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) emblem

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

The national FFA emblem has a total of five symbols in it, and together they represent the history, goals, and future of the organization. Taken as a whole, the emblem is meant to convey the broad spectrum of FFA and agriculture, with each element holding unique significance.

The foundation of the emblem is a cross section of an ear of corn. It was chosen because corn has historically served as the foundation crop of American agriculture. It is also a symbol of unity, because corn is grown in every state of the nation.

The rising sun signifies progress and holds a promise that tomorrow will bring a new day glowing with opportunity.

The plow stands for labor and tillage of the soil, the backbone of agriculture and the historic foundation of America’s strength.

The eagle is a national symbol which serves as a reminder of the freedom and ability to explore new horizons for the future of agriculture.

The owl, long recognized for its wisdom, symbolizes the knowledge required to be successful in the industry of agriculture.

The words “Agricultural Education” and “FFA” are emblazoned in the center to signify the combination of learning and leadership necessary for progressive agriculture.

FFA bills itself as an organization of, by and for its members. Members decide and direct the activities of their own chapter. They hold positions of leadership and conduct all activities. FFA believes the success or failure of chapter activities and programs rests with the membership.

Photo by Benjamin Treviño
Karina Perez of San Isidro rocks an FFA jacket at the Hidalgo County District Ag Show held earlier this year. The jacket is familiar to many, but few know the symbolism behind the logo.
Newcomer takes the hard work of raising animals in stride

By Benjamin Treviño

Staff Writer

Gavin Martinez of Lyford is a relative newcomer to the world of showing animals for competition. The 15 year old sophomore at Lyford high School is only in his second year on the livestock show circuit, so he’s still learning the ropes.

“This is only my second pig and they’ve both been Duroc crosses,” said Martinez. “I just started showing animals last year, and the biggest thing I’ve learned is responsibility. You have to go out there and feed them, be with them, and train them. It’s very time consuming just to make sure they’re good for the show.”

Raising animals isn’t Martinez’s only responsibility. He’s in football, baseball, track, and he’s involved in other extracurricular activities around school. He says all that keeps him going from sun up to sun down.

“It’s a lot of long days,” said Martinez. “I wake up, go to school, practice, come back, work with the pigs, make sure they have plenty of food and water, and then after that, I have to do my homework, shower, and then I go to sleep.”

As a sophomore, Martinez still hasn’t formulated his plans beyond high school, but he’s confident that being in FFA and raising animals will help him regardless of which career he chooses.

“Just going out there is fun,” said Martinez. “It’s not like you’re doing it for nothing, I enjoy it. Some people have mixed opinions on it, but I think it’s pretty fun. Besides that, it teaches you responsibility, just making sure you have to take care of the pigs. It’s like having a dog pretty much. It teaches you a lot of the character traits that you will need in everyday life.”

Martinez’s advice to younger students is be prepared for a lot of commitment before getting into showing animals, but he adds they shouldn’t feel like they have to do everything on their own.

San Perlita teen learns leadership skills raising hogs

By Benjamin Treviño

Staff Writer

Juan Herrera IV loves working with hogs, but like many of his fellow classmates, he has to balance the demands of raising a farm animal with all of his other responsibilities.

“Besides being in FFA, I’m in basketball, cross country, and track,” said the 16 year old sophomore at San Perlita High School. “I’ve been working with animals since 8th grade, so I’ve had some experience doing this before.”

Herrera says he has worked only with hogs for the past three years. This year he’s showing a Duroc, a breed which forms the basis for many mixed-breed commercial hogs. Durocs are generally reddish-brown, large-framed, muscular, and characterized by their partially-drooping ears.

“What I’m going for is size,” said Herrera. “But you don’t want too much weight. I’m also trying to make her look defined. Some judges want to see a certain shape and others want to see the hog’s frame. Sometimes they’ll get sick to where they don’t eat for a while. All they want to do is drink water, and they can get diarrhea, so you have to watch out for that.”

Keeping the animal healthy is the biggest challenge, according to Herrera. He says it can get expensive, but he says his parents are there to help him make ends meet. Being in FFA and working with animals is teaching him about being a leader, and trying to help others.

“To me, being a leader is about being trustworthy,” said Herrera. “You have to be workable in order to get people to work with you. A good leader will take charge, but not for himself, it’s all about making sure the whole team succeeds. He has to inspire the other students so that they will become better at whatever they’re doing.”

After high school, Herrera hopes to attend Texas A&M University, either in College Station or Corpus, where we plans to study to become a marine biologist.

“Whatever comes, I think I’m learning a lot of things here that will help me in any career field,” said Herrera. “My only advice to the younger kids who are thinking about doing this is to have fun. That’s it. Have fun!”

University photographer
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Photo by Benjamin Treviño
Lasara’s Eros Villarreal brings home national championship

Eros Villarreal poses with his market goat at the Willacy County Livestock Show held earlier this year.
Benjamin Trevino photo

One year ago, Eros Villarreal was just beginning to learn to play the guitar. But in only a few short months, this 15 year old sophomore from the tiny town of Lasara found himself on stage, singing and playing in the National FFA Talent Show at the 92nd National FFA Convention and Expo in Indianapolis.

“I was like, ‘Wow, this is no joke,'” Villarreal remembers telling his grandfather. “Everybody’s here for a reason. God has given everybody this gift, and it’s not just me. That’s why these people are here.”

“We all started crying,” said Villarreal’s Ag teacher, Dulce de los Santos. “Everybody was in tears, the students that were with us were crying. I was crying, my mom was crying, his grandparents were crying because we were all so happy and proud of him.”

Villarreal noted, “Not many people realize that FFA has become much more than showing animals. There are so many different events, like speaking, art, and talent, which I got into, thankfully. It’s really been a journey. There are so many amazing people involved, the kind of people we really need in this world.”

De los Santos says Eros has become the pride of Lasara, which has a population of just over 1,000 people. She says the whole county is proud of this native son for casting a positive light on an area that rarely attracts any national attention.

“It’s actually very quiet in class,” said de los Santos. “He’s a great kid. He’s very polite, very well spoken, and he’s just a great kid to represent Lasara and Willacy County. The Willacy County Livestock Show shared the video of his performance to their Facebook page and it has just blown up. I mean, nobody even knew Lasara was a town. Now, people are becoming familiar with the Lasara name!”

Villarreal hopes to sing and play professionally one day, but he’s also pragmatic, which is why he plans to attend Texas A&M-College Station to study business. Villarreal believes the FFA experience has laid a great foundation for the future, whether it’s in music, business, or agriculture.

“If you have a dream, go about always being there for someone else. You should only have one life. Don’t let it slip away. Live your life to the fullest.”

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Lasara’s Eros Villarreal brings home national championship

Eros Villarreal tips his hat to the crowd after performing at the National FFA Talent Show held October 2019 in Indianapolis. Villarreal won the competition over two other national finalists.

Photo courtesy of Future Farmers of America

Eros Villarreal poses with his market goat at the Willacy County Livestock Show held earlier this year.
Benjamin Trevino photo

So I was given a guitar and I just left it there for six months,” Villarreal recalled. “I didn’t even touch it. I did clean it every now and then. It was an instrument so I did take care of it, but then something kind of sparked me and I asked myself, ‘What if I can sing and play this music I’m listening to?’ Which is exactly what I do now and I just love it.”

Villarreal’s rise to the top began when his FFA advisor entered the young phenom in the district FFA talent show last spring. He won district and advanced to the area talent competition in July, performing in Fort Worth in front of about 13,000 people.

“What amazed me so much also was that everybody sang along when I sang ‘Country Roads,'” Villarreal said. “I will never not stop hearing that. It was amazing.”

Following his area win in Fort Worth, Villarreal submitted an audition video and was accepted to compete in the national finals in Indianapolis. Villarreal submitted an audition video and was accepted to compete in the national finals in Indianapolis.

“I performed ‘The Cowboy Rides Away’ by George Strait, and ‘Country Roads' by John Denver,” Villarreal said. “I don’t play much of the newer country, which is what a lot of people would expect. I’m all about the classics: George Jones, George Strait, Alan Jackson, and the older artists. To me, that’s real country music. When they announced that I won, that was crazy.”

Besides being a musician and singer, Villarreal also plays second base for the Lasara Lions. He’s been in FFA since seventh grade. He was persuaded to join the organization by his grandfather who owns a business raising and selling market goats. He didn’t realize at the time that it would lead to national recognition for something other than farming. “FFA has evolved so much,” Villarreal said. “I was like, ‘Wow, this is no joke,'” Villarreal remembers telling his grandfather. “Everybody’s here for a reason. God has given everybody this gift, and it’s not just me. That’s why these people are here.”

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“If you have a dream, go about always being there for someone else. You should only have one life. Don’t let it slip away. Live your life to the fullest.”
Harlingen South student builds network of friends through FFA

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

As a senior at Harlingen High School South, Justin Fox is in his final season of raising and showing livestock. Looking back, he remembers it’s something he had wanted to do ever since the first grade.

“When I was in first grade, my cousin, she showed animals, and so I was brought into it at an early age,” said Fox. “I remember I couldn’t wait until I got into third grade because that’s when you can start. As soon as I got into third grade I started showing. I just love animals and taking care of them.

Fox started off showing rabbits, but has since showed virtually every other farm animal there is. This year, he’s showing two pigs, a goat, and pen of market rabbits, five breeder rabbits, and a Santa Gertrudis heifer.

“It does cut into my social life a little bit,” admitted Fox. “But, I’m willing to sacrifice it, because this is something I love and I’ve been doing it for ten years now and I’ve grown used to it. These animals are my priority. I've learned a lot of responsibility. I’ve learned social skills and people skills. I participated in Career Development Events (CDEs) which prepare you for future careers in fields that you might be interested in. I’ve also done Leadership Development events and all of these will benefit me in the future, I believe.”

Fox credits his success to the help of family and friends. Without them, he says, he would not have been able to get all of his animals ready for show. After high school, Fox plans to join the Army for at least four years, and then possibly pursue a career in the US Border Patrol.

“This experience has taught me a lot of life lessons, responsibility, and other skills that I will need to know later on,” said Fox. “I’ve met some of my closest friends by being involved in FFA, and raising livestock. FFA has introduced me to a lot of new people and it has expanded my network of friends. We have all enjoyed our time together, because we all decided to just make sure we have fun no matter the outcome. I would definitely encourage the younger kids out there to get involved.”

Photo by Benjamin Treviño

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The meaning of the 4-H emblem

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

The 4-H emblem is in a category similar to that of the Presidential seal and the Olympic emblem. Responsibility and stewardship for the 4-H name and emblem fall under the US Secretary of Agriculture, at the direct request of the US Congress.

The emblem’s green color represents life, growth, and youth. The white lettering and background symbolize purity and high ideals.

The four Hs on the clover leaves stand for head, heart, hands, and health, all of which can be found in the 4-H pledge:

I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living, for my club, my community, my country, and my world.

Head stands for decision making, planning, organizing, problem solving and using knowledge throughout life. Heart stands for strong personal values, positive self-concept, concern for others, cooperation and communication. Hands stands for volunteering, community service, preparing for the world of work, science and technology literacy, and useful skills. Health stands for healthy lifestyles, character, ethics, stress management and disease prevention.

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Donna North student has the life-long love of animals

By Benjamin Treviño
Staff Writer

Donna North High School student Samantha de la Cruz has been around animals for as long as she can remember. The 16-year-old sophomore loves critters so much that she volunteers regularly at the Laurie P. Andrews Paws Center in Edinburg.

“My older sister is more into sports, but I grew up with animals,” said de la Cruz. “Every since I was little I’ve always had a dog, or some type of animal. My uncle has a ranch with pigs, and cows, and so I’ve always been interested in them. It’s been a big part of my life for as long as I can remember.”

This is de la Cruz’s second year of showing animals for competition. Her first year was limited to hogs, but this year she’s showing a hog, a Maine Anjou steer, and soon she’ll begin raising four rabbits for show. She’s already racked up several ribbons, while balancing her academic work with livestock chores and extracurricular activities such as Skills USA and Vet-tech Team.

“Yes, I have very long days,” said de la Cruz. “In the morning, my mom feeds him, because it’s such an amazing experience. You don’t have to show animals. You don’t have to be something with animals. You don’t have to show animals. It doesn’t have to be to be a big-experience project, because there are a lot of other things out there to be done, such as photography, plants, and stuff like that. Even at our school we have a lot of help like sponsors and things. It’s a great opportunity and it teaches you a lot. The hard work is worth it in the end, not because you get prizes or ribbons, but because it’s such an amazing experience.”

Samantha de la Cruz

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

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Samantha de la Cruz
MERCEDES INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Proud Supporter of Our Students at the 81st Annual RIO GRANDE VALLEY LIVESTOCK SHOW

On Behalf of the Mercedes ISD Board of Trustees and Carolyn Mendiola, Superintendent
Sharyland student uses the Ag experience to build her future

Jesmin Peña of Sharyland High School is in so many extracurricular activities that she has trouble remembering them all.

"I'm the senior athletic trainer," said the 16 year old junior, as she cited her list of activities. "I'm in FCCLA. I'm an RGV LEAD regional ambassador. I was a district officer in HOSA. I'm in TAFE so hopefully I can be a teacher's aide for next year and I can help my Ag teacher. I have a calendar, and I mark all my dates and meetings, and which days I have to stay after school. I'm really good with time management, so it does help."

This is Peña's third year raising animals for show and each year she likes to do something different. In her freshman year, it was pigs. She showed a pig and a lamb in her sophomore year, and this year she's showing pigs and a heifer named Dolly.

"She's a Brahman," said Peña. "She's really something. I enjoy working with her. She's super nice. You can walk up from behind, pet her, be at her side, lay with her, and she loves attention so much. She's just a great cow."

Peña says she's still looking into different colleges, but she wants to major in education so she can become an Ag teacher. She believes FFA is helping her develop the skills she'll need, especially when it comes to working with others.

"I'm building so many new friendships," said Peña. "They're all from different schools: Pioneer, Edinburg, Edcouch, everywhere. Some of them have become my best friends, so I'm building lifelong friendships, connections, and a network of contacts. It's just a great thing to be a part of. I love it. I would just tell the younger kids out there to know what they're getting themselves into before raising an animal. Have your schedule prepared. Don't forget to feed and take care of your animal, love it as if it were a baby. So, be mindful of everything."

Rio Grande City siblings are “Brothers in Farms”

Bryan and Steven Perez of Rio Grande City High School are a perfect example of how farming brings families together through shared experiences and responsibility. Bryan, age 16, and Steven, age 15, have been doing the stock show circuit since elementary school.

"I'm not sure how I got started," said Bryan. "One day I picked up a rope and it just kind of went from there. My parents were also very involved with FFA, so that was an influence, too. "We've both been doing this since we were little," added Steven. "I think we both started about third or fourth grade, showing Pee Wee goats when we were in elementary school."

The Perez brothers are both showing market goats and heifers this year. "I didn't bring the heifer out today," said Bryan. "But my market goat is looking pretty good. He weighs about 80 pounds. I think he'll do fine. I think he could have put more muscle on his front side, but he looks pretty good anyway."

"We usually get the animals around the start of the school year," said Steven. "And we work with them every day for several months. The heifer is harder to work with. She's bigger and harder to pull around. The goats jump around a little bit, too, so it's hard to say which is more stubborn. They're both very tame, so that helps."

Bryan and Steven are also involved in school sports and in the community and they both agree that time-management skills are essential to a full life.

"We're learning a lot of skills, like leadership," said Bryan. "We're getting involved in the community, helping out wherever we can. We're all working together, which is what life is all about. It's very time consuming, and sometimes I just stay in bed, but I just wish I could wash my face, start walking around, and it gives me the energy to keep going."

"I don't know how I manage my time, honestly," added Steven. "It just sort of falls into place. I somehow find time to do everything. But, I'm learning about dedication, and respect for animals, and other beings on earth, and the environment."

Bryan and Steven both want to attend Texas A&M in College Station, but their career options are still open.
IT’S SHOW TIME!

The San Benito CISD Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Nate Carman would like to wish all of this year’s Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show and Rodeo participants the best of luck!

Shepherd “Sonny” Brazil
May 6, 1933 - September 19, 2008

San Benito CISD is thankful for the amazing legacy of Shepherd “Sonny” Brazil, who served the community as an Agriculture Science teacher at San Benito High School for 33 years.

Brazil is credited with having built the first agricultural school farm with wood that drifted ashore as part of the aftermath of the extremely heavy rains of Hurricane Beulah in September of 1967.

MR. BRAZIL, WE HONOR YOUR LEGACY!
Go all the way or don’t go at all says Edinburg Vela student

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

If you ask Matthew Jasso what advice he would give to kids who are thinking about getting into the stock show life, his main suggestion would be to make sure you’re willing to give it your all. “The responsibility begins from the second you get your animal,” said the 16-year-old junior at Edinburg’s Robert Vela High School. “And it continues for all the months that you have that animal. Every single day you can encounter problems. If you’re willing to put up with the dedication, the everyday work, feeding them in the morning and at night, then go for it. But, if not, then hold back and wait until you know you’re going to be able to dedicate yourself to it.”

Jasso has been showing animals at stock shows for the past five years, having started when he was in the sixth grade. He used to be in other activities such as football and track, but he decided to dedicate the last two years of high school entirely to a profession he feels he was called to do. “I’m looking to go to A&M-Kingsville or A&M,” Jasso said of his future plans. “I want to go into the Ag business. It might be starting a cattle company, but it can be anything having to do with this, because I love it. I loved doing this from the first day I started. I could do this for the rest of my life.”

From public speaking, to leadership skills, to cattle and the environment, Jasso says his FFA and Ag experience have taught him many lessons about life in general. While he emphasizes the hard work involved, he reminds younger kids that they don’t have to do it all on their own. “There are a lot of people who will help you,” said Jasso. “Everybody from your Ag teacher to your classmates, to your parents, to your brother and sister, because if you’re out of town and you can’t go to feed them one day you have to ask someone else to do it. You have to make sure you get opinions from everyone else about how your animals look. It’s not an individual sport. It’s a definitely a group project.”

Twin-City twins are eager to take on the stock show circuit

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

Like most nine year olds, Dominic and Danielle Garcia are young, precocious, and full of energy. But unlike most of their peers, these twin third graders at Edcouch-Elsa’s LBJ Elementary School are taking on adult-sized responsibilities. The siblings are raising market goats for competition, and that means they’re responsible for farm chores, animal care, and maintenance on a daily basis. Danielle and Dominic are well-rounded kids who aren’t afraid to jump in and get dirty as they learn skills that can never be taught in a classroom.

“This is our first year,” said Dominic. “We’re both raising market goats. We have three older sisters and they’re the ones who got us started.”

“My goat is very nice,” added Danielle. “She’s real good, and she likes working with me. She has good ribs, and she has good bone structure.”

Feeding, watering, cleaning, and grooming are just a few of the things that Danielle and Dominic are responsible for each and every day. They’re also learning how important their role is in the production of the food that feeds them, their family, and their friends. The twins are also learning how to build teamwork skills by sharing responsibilities – no matter how large or small.

“I work together with my brother,” said Danielle. “Like, if one of you needs to drink water, the other one takes the goat’s leash and the other one leaves, and like if it’s my turn, he would take my goat so I can go drink water.”

“It’s kind of hard to keep up our grades,” added Dominic. “So, we just make sure we do our homework first, and then we go to feed the goats. I’m learning how to train an animal. It’s teaching me how to be patient and to work with other people. I think this will be a good experience for me.”

Dominic and Danielle got their first chance to step into the arena at the Hidalgo County District Farm Show earlier this year. They say they were a little nervous at first, but they’re ready to take on more shows and get more experience.

“I’m in class two,” said Dominic. “So I’m still waiting to go in the arena. This is my first time, so I’m a little nervous. I like that my goat behaves. He mostly listens to me, but sometimes I have to keep pushing him.”

“It’s kind of easy, to me,” added Danielle. “A few of my friends are doing this too. My goat is very good, too. She’s very nice, and she’s easy to work with. I’m going to do this again next year!”
Best of Luck To All Edcouch - Elsa I.S.D. Students!

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Sharyland Pioneer student exhibits positive mental attitude

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

Jaime Salinas of Sharyland Pioneer High School has a lot of mouths to feed in his third year of raising animals for competition. When we caught up with him at the Hidalgo County District show earlier this year, he was preparing to show three steers and two heifers.

“When I was younger, I always had a passion for animals,” said the 16 year old 11th grader. “I have always enjoyed raising them, and caring for them. My parents were involved in FFA, too. My dad was in workshop and my mom does produce, so I know a little bit about everything in agriculture. I’ve been surrounded by it my whole life.”

Like many of his peers, Salinas says time management skills are the most important thing to learn when one is trying to balance school work, chores, and extracurricular activities. In his case, being on the volleyball team demands a good portion of her attention.

“I do travel volleyball, so it’s pretty hard with the time and everything,” said Salinas. “You just have to time manage everything. Sometimes you just have to split your day, like you work one half of the day with cattle, the other half you’re doing volleyball. If you keep everything balanced you’ll do well at both.”

Salinas is also involved in RGV LEAD, a student leadership organization, and LEO Club, which encourages the spirit of volunteerism. He’s undecided about which college he’ll attend after high school, but he hopes to become either an Ag teacher, or a large-animal veterinarian.

His advice to younger kids is to keep moving regardless of what life throws at you.

“Sometimes there will be ups and downs,” said Salinas. “Hopefully there will be more ups, but if you’re ever struggling, just stay positive, and have fun. It’s a lot of teamwork. I know that I was clueless my freshman year about what to do, but with the help of club officers I was able to learn so much about livestock just talking to others and developing communication skills.”
Mission High School student enjoys rising to the challenge

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

Jose Luis Cortez of Mission is in his second year raising stock show animals, but he says it’s something he’s been wanting to do for as long as he can remember.

“I have always liked animals,” said the 17-year-old 11th grader at Mission High School. “I think it has taught me a lot. I didn’t have a big sense of responsibility before I joined FFA, but I do now. I just love it. It’s something I enjoy doing, so I don’t mind at all.”

As a member of National Honor Society and someone who plays multiple sports (football, baseball, track) Cortez faces many long hours making sure he meets all of his responsibilities.

“I don’t feel pressure,” said Cortez. “I just try to be a role model for my siblings. The little kids in elementary school also look to you for leadership, so I take pride in that. Having my little brother with me just brings me joy, too. I like the challenge that comes with the responsibility.”

Cortez is showing a light cross sow this year – an animal that he says can sometimes test a person’s patience.

“Sometimes I’ll come over and food will be thrown everywhere,” said Cortez. “Last year’s hog was not as stubborn as this one. She took me a while longer to break in, it requires a lot of patience in the ring and making sure they’re not fighting, they’re stressed or overheated. This hog definitely had a problem walking with its head up so it took me about a month to train her to walk correctly, and get her stamina up. All the little things.”

Cortez says it can be difficult to balance school, sports, and agriculture, but he says he gets a lot of help from his family. He plans to pursue a business career, and even though he hasn’t picked out a college yet, he’s confident heading into the future.

“I know that if I apply myself to a career the way I apply myself to raising animals everything will work out,” said Cortez. “Everything is a challenge to me, but that’s the way I like it. The only way to keep improving is to keep challenging yourself.”

Photos by Benjamin Treviño
Aspiring physician learns from success and failure

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

With her high school life nearly complete, 18-year-old Sarita Del Valle has her mind set on attending Texas A&M University and a future career in medicine. She believes her experiences in FFA and 4-H have prepared her for what’s to come, and that includes both the successes and failures.

“The disappointments have taught me what I need to do better and how to fix the mistakes,” said Del Valle. “On the other hand, when I do well at a show it gives me pride in something I did. So, either way, it’s been fun. I’ve learned a lot of life lessons. The experience has helped me to deal with failure. It’s helped me to keep going and I think that’ll help me with my future endeavors.”

Del Valle serves as treasurer of the Harlingen South FFA chapter, and she’s also involved in National Honor Society, student council, Politics Club, and other extracurricular activities. Her full schedule doesn’t leave room for a lot of free time, but Del Valle says it’s worth the sacrifice.

“I just think about the outcome,” said Del Valle. “My best showing was getting first in Mercedes and then I went to the sale and I got $1,500 for my pig. So that was a really awesome win for me. I felt amazing after that, because it represented all the hard work I put into it.”

Del Valle says she got started in FFA at the suggestion of a friend. She began by raising lambs, but now raises pigs, which she says are a lot easier to work with. Del Valle is now recommending the same experience for younger students coming up behind her.

“The biggest thing to keep in mind is, ‘Can you handle this,’” said Del Valle. “It’s a lot of responsibility. For example, I’m at the farm twice a day, cleaning and feeding multiple animals. So, it’s going to be a lot of responsibility, and I think kids really need to think about that before joining. If you budget your time and organize your time, you’ll be able to do it, and at the end of the day regardless of all the time it takes up, it’s really worth it. I think a lot more kids should get into this organization.”

Edinburg Vela student shares secrets of a Grand Champion

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

Jorge Gomez II is hoping to ride his momentum of success into this year’s big competition in Mercedes. The junior at Edinburg Vela High School recently won a Grand Championship at this year’s District Meet with his AOB red steer.

“Thanks to God, we did this,” said Gomez. “He’s just a great steer. He’s great on performance. I love this guy, and hopefully we can do as well as we did today in Mercedes.”

A good market steer, according to Gomez, has a great frame, a powerful look with lots of muscle, and just the right amount of finish (fat). Gomez started raising animals for show in his freshman year with a pig, but he says he now prefers working with steers like this one, which he acquired last May.

“The most difficult thing about this is breaking him in to make perfect stances,” said Gomez. “When you first get the animals, some of them are broken in, but some of them can be a hassle. Last year, I had one that was a big hassle, but this one if one of the easier ones that I’ve had.”

Even though Gomez’s Grand Championship goes down as an individual effort, the young man who hopes to be a federal game warden someday says it was a group effort.

“I have to give all my thanks to all my Ag teachers, my trainer, my helpers, my father, and my mother,” said Gomez. “If it wasn’t for them I wouldn’t be able to do this. It’s a team effort, and without my team I’m nowhere.”

Gomez, who also plays baseball at Vela High School, says raising animals is time consuming and requires a lot of commitment. His advice to younger students is straightforward and to the point.

“Work hard every day,” said Gomez. “That’s what you’re going to need to do. There are no off days. If you’re going to slack, then don’t even do it. You’re not going to succeed that way.”
Rio Hondo Middle schooler is partial to Brahmans

BY BENJAMIN TREVIÑO
Staff Writer

Ryan Matt Simpson showed up at this year’s Cameron County Livestock Show with a lot of cattle in tow – four Brahman heifers, one cross, and one Brahman steer to be exact. Naturally, we asked why he was partial to the Brahman breed.

“First of all, I grew up on a farm, so I’ve been around cattle my entire life,” said the sixth grader at Rio Hondo Middle School. “What interests me about Brahmans is the hump on their backs where they store water. I never saw one until we went to my dad’s friend’s house one day. I asked what kind of cow it was, and they told me it was a Brahman and that’s when I decided that’s the breed I wanted to show.”

Simpson started showing livestock when he was only in the third grade, and he says he’s lost track of all the ribbons and awards he’s won over the past three years. At the most recent TJLA (Texas Junior Livestock Association) Show, he took home prizes for best all-around heifer, the Brahman showmanship, and other awards. What he likes best, however, is making new friendships along the way.

“It’s fun to come to these livestock shows, because you meet new people and they’re just like you,” said Simpson. “They have the same interests. You can find people who have similar interests and you can make new friends. It’s also super fun because I get out of school!”

Simpson says showing animals takes a lot of time, money, and effort, but he says it’s all worth it because of the lessons he’s learned along the way.

“I’ve learned how to take care of things, just by taking care of my animals,” said Simpson. “I’ve learned how it’s a big responsibility to care for other living things. I’m going to be a farmer and rancher like my dad and so I’m going to Texas A&M in College Station. I haven’t decided on my studies, but I think the lessons I’m learning here about leadership and responsibility will help me succeed in whatever I decide to go into.”
Congratulations
and Good Luck!

Matthew Jasso

Lorelai Hill

Eros Villarreal

Santa Del Valle

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