



THE SPIRIT of DOWN HOME RANCH

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WHO WILL FOLLOW THE LEADERS?

Operation Independence and a Sustainable Future

We must be showing our age. People keep asking us “What changes at Down Home Ranch when Jerry and Judy are no longer in the saddle?” We’re happy to reply, “Not much.”

The Ranch is now a complex organization, governed by a nine-person Board of Directors. We have a competent staff running the Residency Program and Ranch Camp, raising the poinsettias, and overseeing day-to-day operations, ably assisted by our Ranchers — the residents for whom the Ranch was built.

Equally important, the Ranch enjoys a solid base of support by those who have been cheering for and supporting us from the time we moved out to this land, making a gigantic leap of faith that our dream would somehow come true. Since that time we have been working to build a Down Home Ranch that will outlive its founders and not just survive, but thrive.

That’s why we launched Operation Independence last year — to start moving to a higher level of sustainability, by which we don’t mean total independence, but greater levels of interdependence. For that to happen, we need to move in the direction of making the most of our own resources, and gradually reducing our dependence on outside resources.

First, we can and should produce a substantial portion of the food we eat. (With a residential population of 38, we consume over 3,400 meals a month.) We can raise our own beef, pork, goats, and poultry, and to that end we have begun improving old pasture and creating new pastures to produce all our own hay for the cattle, horses and other livestock. Community gardens and orchards will yield vegetables, fruits and berries. With these and other measures, our food supply can largely become the product of our own labor.

We have a commitment from our utility company, [Bluebonnet Electric](#), to work with us to retrofit homes and offices, implement

conservation practices, and employ conventional and renewable energy to greatly reduce our annual utility bills. One of our recent electric bills totaled \$9,387 — numbers like those provide more than ample incentive for us to become net producers of energy through solar production and other efforts.

Income from fees for service from our camp and residential programs covers the basics, but Down Home Ranch is about much more than the basics. We’re committed to the highest standard of living for our residents to, as our mission statement says, “help them imagine their future, realize their potential, and achieve their dreams.” Our Ranchers are not only the reason for our work, they are integral to it. They work the better part of each day right alongside the staff, stacking hay, cleaning the barn, grooming the horses, working in the greenhouses, cleaning the facilities, cooking lunch for the community and much, much more. We depend on them and their work as much as they depend on ours.

And we depend on you. A contribution to Down Home Ranch — money, materials, or a donation of volunteer labor and expertise — is an investment in our future sustainability. We need a community greenhouse, equipment to bale our own hay, good used golf carts, money to build more water storage ponds, a rainwater cistern for our barn, 3000 feet of electric fencing for goats, a new chicken coop, and so much more.

We want to continue to build a ranch that is unlike any other — a great, resourceful community and a model for others to emulate. This is why we ask you to give.

Who will follow the leaders? It will be all those who believe in the mission of Down Home Ranch.

WE’RE STILL HERE!

Find out what we’ve been doing — page 2.

WE'RE STILL HERE!

No, we haven't forgotten you, our faithful readers and supporters. We've just been super busy, adding residents and staff, creating policies and procedures and hanging on, like many Americans, as the economic winds blow and we try to weather the storm.

But, in the midst of all that, we've neglected those who follow and care about our Ranch — you! Our newsletters *The Spirit* and *Reflections* have been neglected, and even fund-raising appeals have been scarce.

However, this is ending, starting with this newsletter, and we promise to keep you in mind as we continue to work hard to build the Down Home Ranch of our dreams. You'll be hearing more from us in the coming weeks and months.

And one of the things we'll be talking about is the fantastic work done by volunteers. They make it possible for us to tackle big projects, and help us create a bigger, better community all year long. Here a few things they did this year:

- Built "rock garden" landscapes for resident homes;
- Erected split-cedar fencing;
- Built a fishing dock for the new pond by the Swim Center;
- Picked gallons and gallons of blackberries, and made juice for DHR jelly;
- Began dismantling the double-wide mobile home that has been the Camp Center since 1996;
- Remodeled the two bunkhouses, making them much more comfortable and attractive;
- Started the process of moving our Community Garden to a new location;
- Poinsettias: planted, pinched, moved, cleaned, packaged and delivered;
- Cut down and made mulch and firewood of over 60 oak and other trees killed by the drought;
- Welcomed Ranchers to five different churches for Sunday worship services;
- Cut brush and other plant materials around homes to increase "defensible space" in case of fire;
- Painted and stained around the Ranch;
- Provided a rock 'n roll concert for DHR Ranchers;
- Helped out at the Golf tournament, Gala, Swim Fest and other special events.

NEW ADDITIONS

As a part of the transition the Ranch has been undergoing for the past two years, each of the four big residence homes in The Village has had a new bedroom and bathroom added.

The reason was that becoming ICF (Intermediate Care Facilities) compliant meant adding a fourth resident to what were three-bedroom homes. We had been temporarily using the "Retreat Room" at the end of the house where the Resident Assistant (RA) lives, thus reducing his/her space.

We used some money from the Capstone Campaign to add the bedrooms and baths. Everybody is moved in and the additions are a big hit, with each Rancher having a private bedroom, decorated to their tastes.

We used some contributions to Operation Independence to — finally — build and install a heavy, good looking, secure metal gate for the Ranch's entry. It was a long time coming, but it provides a new measure of security, knowing that late night "tourists" will not be able to just drive onto the ranch.



ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE TO PARTNER WITH DHR

Mark Rose is the General Manager of the [Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative](#) (BEC), an electricity provider with over 80,000 meters in 14 Texas counties, covering 3,800 sq. miles, with 11,000 miles of power lines.

A former Austin City Council Member and General Manager of the Lower Colorado River Authority (for about ten years), Mark has been a mover and a shaker for a long time. But now, he's really taking on a big new project — Down Home Ranch.

In *The Sustainable Grid*, Rose proposes a new and exciting way of looking at energy production, distribution and use, including new ways in which consumers can become a part of energy solutions. (Go to <http://www.thesustainablegrid.com/> to get a free copy of *The Sustainable Grid*.)

We are very proud and energized by the decision of the BEC to partner with us and help the Ranch increase energy conservation and production. We look forward to becoming a model for smart energy use, incorporating solar and wind energy as part of our overall infrastructure.

This is a major step forward in the Ranch's Operation Independence program, which is our long-term effort to develop greater self-reliance and resourcefulness, in part by developing a network of interdependent collaborations that can facilitate the Ranch's goal of sustainability. The collaboration with Bluebonnet is a key element of the plan, and we are very excited about the prospects for the future. A big "Thank You!" to Mark and our friends at Bluebonnet.

2009 CHAINSAW MANICURE IS BEST YET

The 3rd Annual Texas Chainsaw Manicure took place Saturday, October 17th — a bright, beautiful fall day with blue skies and a high in the low 70s. It was Texas weather at its best! Our work was blessed with many wonderful friends: [Peace Lutheran](#) (Austin), and [St. Peter's](#) (Coupland), many from Houston, Cedar Park, Round Rock, and the little towns surrounding the Ranch, including Cedar Creek, Paige, McDade, Elgin, Bastrop and Smithville.

The [Texas Forest Service](#) was here! Lexi Maxwell, Jan Fulkerson, and Mark Stinson had come out a few days before to mark trees that needed to come down. Bluebonnet Electric Co-op sent an Asplundh chipper/mulcher truck — a wish come true!

Our good friends from [Southside Market in Elgin](#) catered the bar-b-cue lunch — sausage, brisket and trimmings — and nobody went away hungry. Fifteen Down Home Ranchers

volunteered for the day. Some were swamping while Mike and Mark folded Manicure T-shirts and the gals made cookies.

By the end of the day, workers had felled about 70 trees, mostly ones that didn't make it through the long drought and posed a danger to people and property. The Ranch is neater and safer, and has a good store of firewood for our fire circle. It was an exciting day for the community of Down Home Ranch.

The Texas Chainsaw Manicure is a part of Operation Independence, which includes emergency preparedness items like fire protection and increasing “defensible space,” as well as making the Ranch safer, more accessible and attractive. Plus, our Ranchers that planted trees made a long-term contribution to keeping houses and cabins cooler in summers to come. It was a grand day. Thanks to all who participated.



THRILL OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING

It's Thursday afternoon and Julia sits at a table in the warehouse, aiming a hammer at the wrong end of a nail sticking out of a weather-beaten board. When asked what she's doing she replies proudly, “We're going to make bird houses!” and knocks the nail cleanly through the wood. She picks the nail up and nimbly flips it into a nearby container.

Mr. Lobo, who is working with Ranchers in Woodcraft, shows Kelly and Rebekah how to safely handle the rough wood, gleaned from a neighbor who tore down an ancient fence on his property. Getting rid of the nails in the wood is the first step toward constructing Purple Martin houses for the Ranch and for sale.

Kelly, Julia, Andrew and Rebekah are participating in the afternoon crafts group and proudly show off their little wooden crates in

which nestle the blackberry jelly Ranchers help make. Other groups are focusing on barn management and animal care, office work, and janitorial skills.

All Ranchers work for pay mornings from 9:00 to noon in their work groups. Over the past year most have become quite skilled in performing their jobs. The Vocational Training Program is designed to allow Ranchers to acquire skills outside their normal work groups and thus be free to explore other employment options.

Visitors can see the future of Down Home Ranch when a Rancher shows off a well-groomed horse, a place mat created on a real loom, or a room with a shining, clean floor. Skills learned today mean better pay for the Ranchers and the chance to play a real and meaningful part in the running of the Ranch.



BUILDING & GROWING...

SWIM FEST 2009 MADE A BIG SPLASH

Hop Aboard the *Carnival Ecstasy* and Join the Fun!

May 12, 2009 passed with little attention this year, but in retrospect I remembered that it was the 20th anniversary of the incorporation of Down Home Ranch.

Yes, on May 12, 1989 I trundled over to the Secretary of State's office, near the state capital, and signed the papers making our fledgling idea a corporation — with the intent to “do anything legal in the State of Texas.”

I've lost a step or two along the way and can't easily toss a square bale any more. My 19 oz. framing hammer is in other, younger hands now, although I still enjoy getting on our old dozer and tending a burn pile.

We are the Down Home Ranch of our dreams now, although a little bit weary for the wear. The demands of the complex organization we have become were not something we waxed lyrically about in our formative years. But, things like policy and procedures, standard operating practices and the like are essential. Not fun, but necessary.

Now we're moving to a new stage, where the phrase “working farm and ranch” becomes the dominant theme — a new mantra.

Our log cabin reminds me daily of the life that Marmaduke Gardner and his family must have confronted in the 1850s. Untamed, challenging land. Often harsh, unpredictable weather. Miles to the nearest mercantile store.

If you wanted eggs you'd better have chickens. If you liked milk, you needed a cow. Water? A well and a windmill to pull it out of the ground. If you loved tomatoes and onions, better tend your garden.

In short, you'd better be resourceful and determined if you want to survive. But we don't want only to survive. We want to prosper and to be agents of our own destiny.

In that regard we're just starting out. But, hey, we're Texans and we've faced a challenge or two. We'll need a little time, and a hand or two, but don't bet against us. We plan to get there.



from the
**DIRECTOR'S
CHAIR**

The Gabriel House guys did it again. They worked together and won the trophy by having the largest amount donated and pledged. A few cheers and tears later, everyone was in the pool having a great time.

Swim Fest is our annual competition to raise money to send the Ranchers on a vacation, and reward them for a hard year's work on the many projects that keep the Ranch running — planting, cooking, cleaning, building and learning all the skills they need to tackle anything that comes their way.

As in years past, the Ranchers have chosen to sail the high seas on their annual vacation. The cruise this year will take place January 29-Feb 1, and you're welcome to join us. Trust us, the Down Home Ranch gang knows how to par-tee! Just call Carnival at 1-800-227-6482, mention “Down Home Ranch” and group booking #72L4D2. You'll even continue to help the Ranch, because we'll get a credit for everyone who books with our group.

Many, many thanks to all who donated to the Swim Fest. We'll send you a post card!



Ready ... set ... go! Residents vie for the swimmer's trophy, sharing the 50 laps needed to make a mile.



Congratulations Gabriel House!

2010 WEEKEND ROUND-UP

Gala April 10 • Golf April 12

Next year, 2010, we're doing the Round-Up Weekend a little different to make it more accessible and “weather-proof,” too!

The Gala will be held Saturday night, April 10, in the beautiful new Parish Hall of St. William Catholic Church, Round Rock. It will include a catered dinner, beer and wine, a live auction (100 items with something to please everyone) and wrap up with a dance. On Monday, April 12, we'll enjoy a round of golf and buffet dinner at [Teravista Golf Club](#), also in Round Rock.

Put these events on your calendar now, and invite all your friends to come, too.

OUT AND ABOUT



MILDRED SHELDON

Joe and Mildred Sheldon joined our Board of Directors when Joe was still an Episcopal priest, and they served for many of the early years. At a Board meeting in late 1994, Fr. Joe said in his unforgettable, squeaky voice, "We've just got to start some kind of program out here." More a plea than an injunction, the Hortons took his comment to heart and launched Ranch Camp — which is still going strong after 15 years. Joe passed on a few years ago but Mildred is alive and kicking in San Angelo. Here she is with Judy at her 80th birthday party.



TRIBBLES?

What are they? They're Baa-Baa Bars, soap bars wrapped in deliciously soft virgin wool, for a shower experience that we're sure will be the next big rage.



LOVE THE NEW STADIUM

Thanks to tickets from a loyal DHR supporter, Jerry got to take Michael, Natalie and Alan to see the Dallas Cowboys and the San Francisco 49ers play at the new [Cowboy Stadium](#). Was it cool? Way too much. Ranchers love these experiences, which they wouldn't get without the generosity of folks like David C., who donated the tickets.



WE'RE THE BEST!

Thanks to hundreds of great supporters, not to mention hundreds of campers that really like summer here, Ranch Camp was voted the BEST SPECIAL NEEDS CAMP by voters in [Austin Family Magazine's](#) Readers Poll. The big banner that came with the award was on the fence for Swim Fest. Thanks to Denise and all the staff, counselors and CITs that make Ranch Camp so successful.

GOT ONE IN YOUR GARAGE?

If so, you can do a great kindness and donate it to Down Home Ranch and help a Rancher throw, bake, ride or drive!

- A loom
- An electric kiln
- Tack
- A golf cart

Also, we'd like a pickup truck tailgate, with stoplights. (It can be old but restorable, not rusty and unusable.) Why do we want it? For now it's a secret, but it will be for a project for our Ranchers. We'll send you a picture later.

Last Thursday we had a progressive dinner at the Ranch. I'd heard of them, but never in my 67 years had I actually been to one. All through the Village we heard the Ranchers' excited voices as they walked, ran and biked to the Pavilion, laughing and teasing one another. Jerry and I joined the gang, and everyone piled onto the hay wagon to travel to Joseph House.

Don was waiting with the tractor, hooked up to the flatbed trailer. It took a while to get everyone settled on the hay bales, but soon we were headed for the pecan bottoms.

Lady, our fat black lab, loped proudly alongside the wagon as it lumbered down the trail. We'd had a clear, cool day, and the temperature dropped quickly as the sun fell, darkness surrounding the towering pecan trees.

We pulled up the grassy trail and into the woods separating the main part of the Ranch from the Spur. A group of deer was silhouetted against the evening sky. From there it was a short trip around the pond to Joseph House, where "cocktails" awaited us.

And so it went — Joseph House for mock mojitos, Gabriel for appetizers, Martha for salad, the Pavilion for the entrée, and dessert and after-dinner drinks at Barnabas and Teresa Houses. It was touching to see the Ranchers' pride at welcoming the group to their homes.

By nine we were all tucked into our own homes for the night and beginning evening routines. The dinner was a big hit and the next one, planned for our Christmas party, is eagerly awaited. The Ranchers plan to decorate the hay wagon with jingle bells for the ride.

Jerry and I were wistful when the evening was over. It was so perfect, so much the sort of thing we'd hoped and planned for these past 18 years. It requires a real community of friends, and people like Don, Denise, and the rest of our wonderful staff, who care enough to make it happen. We always said we were working to rebuild the old-fashioned neighborhood we came from as kids, when folks had time for each other. And that's just what it seemed like last Thursday night.

JUDY'S



VIEWS

CAMP 09 — BIGGEST ADVENTURE YET

Ranch Camp went off without a hitch this year, serving 387 campers in eight summer sessions. Campers came from across Texas and fifteen — yes, *fifteen* — other states. We greeted moms, dads and campers from Washington, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Tennessee and locations across the nation — people drawn to Ranch Camp by its great program, terrific staff and ever-improving facilities.

It's important to know that Ranch Camp and the weekend Respite Camps aren't only about fun and fellowship. For many campers, it's their first time away from family. As any parent knows, sending your son or daughter to camp for the first time is a bit anxiety producing — all the more so when the camper has a disability. But our staff is very skilled in handling these cases. (Plus, the campers almost always get over their separation-anxiety in about 10 minutes and fall in love with being at Down Home Ranch.)

We've had campers that learned to tie their shoes at camp, or began learning to swim. Others have had their first experience with leading horses or donkeys and shooting a bow and arrow. It all builds confidence and their fledgling desire to grow up and become more independent. We're proud to facilitate this development.

The schedule has already been set for Ranch Camp 2010, which will be the usual eight one-week camps, serving 400 total campers. But we have a new opportunity next year: two three-day mini camps, designed for people that might prefer a shorter camp experience.

We're already signing 'em up for next year. Go to www.downhomeranch.org to lock in your camper's reservation for adventure in summer 2010.

Questions? Call Denise Churchill, Director of Camps, at 888.926.2253, Extension 255.



SUMMER MEMORIES...



CAST FISHING TRIP A SPLASHING SUCCESS!

CAST stands for “Catch A Special Thrill” and is a non-profit that provides fishing trips for people that are disabled or disadvantaged, provided by a team of fishermen and fisherwomen that have great boats and lots of experience — and are great at volunteering their time, talent and treasure to groups like Down Home Ranch

With the help of Art Pasley, National Program Director, CAST took about a dozen Down Home Ranchers out to Lake Bastrop



to enjoy a day of fishing, a great picnic and a fun awards ceremony. Most caught a bunch of fish, which we photographed and then released back into the lake. Some even got to drive the cool bass boats, with an experienced hand nearby.

Thanks to all the guys and gals that made this a most memorable day. DHR Ranchers are already looking forward to another trip next year.



PARDON MY BLOG

For the first few years of fundraising, communicating with our friends and supporters was done mainly through the Ranch's little MacIntosh computer — sending out letters, cards, newsletters, thank-you notes and all the rest. Then, here came this “Internet” thing, of which it was said, “It’s a mile wide and an inch deep” — not to mention maddening, what with dialing a number, waiting for that funny sound, then, maybe, yes, possibly, “we’re connected!” Voila!

Now, we’re reading our ever-shrinking newspaper while everybody else is twittering, text-messaging, blogging and checking the stock market on their smart phone. We have a website (www.downhomeranch.org), of course, and we even send emails, but we’re a little behind the curve.

We’re aware that print media is, for some, a quaint anachronism and if it isn’t measured in pixels or gigabites “it’s *declass *.” So, wanting to keep up with the times, we’re going modern: Judy and Jerry are going to soon start up a blog (whatever that is). We’ll send out an e-mail once we add “blogger” to our list of accomplishments, so go on our site and sign up for our e-mail list so we can let you know once we get started.

We caught the blogging bug from two recent visitors to the Ranch. A young man, Jeremy Royce, visited us in June and filmed us as part of a documentary he’s working on. He’s traveling around the country to “find the people who are working to better the world.” We’re delighted he chose to include us in the first part of Episode 10 of his series. Watch it at <http://www.youtube.com/user/ExitPictures>.

A few months later, some new friends from England visited the Ranch to observe our program. They are a young couple who, with a few other friends, founded Urban Space in England. A large part of their work is with adults with mental disabilities. There are many fundamental commonalities between their work and the Ranch — including a commitment to the principles so beautifully expressed by Jean Vanier and Henri Nouwen. They were traveling in the U.S. for a couple of months, crisscrossing the nation and meeting with various Christian community outreach programs. After they left, they blogged about their visit to DHR, and the next thing you knew 20 gazillion people could read their stories. If you’d like to see their stories for yourself, go to www.newmonasticism.info, choose the “Journey and Thoughts” link in the left hand column and scroll down.

WITH HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS



PUSH America — a volunteer group that dedicates itself to non-profits serving people with disabilities — sent 40 college men from around the U.S. to DHR for five days this spring. They built shed roofs, erected cedar fencing, started a new fishing dock, and carved their symbol in wood, which we promptly hung in the Pavilion. Great guys doing great “alternative-spring break” service.



This isn’t the first year (and we hope it won’t be the last) that men from the Brotherhood of St. Andrew at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church volunteered at Down Home Ranch. This year they worked on the gravel gardens around homes and cabins in The Village.



DHR was proud to welcome a group of over 50 from Sunnybrook Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Volunteers did everything from paint and remodel to work with Ranchers on craft projects, which was a lot of fun!

FATHER ROBERT LEWIS MAHONEY

Jan. 20, 1928 - Sept. 12, 2009

In 1991, when Judy, Kelly and I had moved to the Ranch, Judy took it upon herself to go and visit all the local clergy she could find in Elgin, Taylor, Lexington and elsewhere. Most gave her a little pat on the head, saying something like, "Yes, dear, that's a nice thing you're doing," or "Good luck."

However, when she visited the Catholic church in Elgin and was telling her story to the secretary, she heard a booming, male voice from a back office saying, "Send that woman in here!"

It was Father Robert Mahoney, and he wanted to hear more about this "Down Home Ranch" project Judy was peddling. And as she explained our plans to him, he got more and more excited. "You remind me of some of the crazy things I've done," he said, as he made an appointment to visit the shacks, bad fences and mesquite that was our field of dreams.

After that Father Bob became a regular visitor and volunteer. He'd help chop mesquite, chase donkeys and strategize with us about ways to turn our dreams into reality. Mostly he was a friend and a voice of encouragement when we needed it, which was often. After retirement, he lived at the Ranch for two years, celebrating Mass, counseling and helping out as best he could.

Father Bob, otherwise known as Bullet Bob, the Cowboy Priest, was ordained in 1959 and sent to Washington on the Brazos, a tiny Black Catholic mission near Somerville,

Texas. The Bishop told him his job was to "go and build a church," so he had his marching orders and was ready to do it. However, on his first Sunday, when he found that there was only 32 cents in the collection plate, he knew he had his work cut out for him.

But Father Bob wasn't one to go faint when confronted with a challenge. Instead he found that a few of the very poor members of his little church had some cowboy experience and he decided, then and there, to start a rodeo. Which he did — a cowboy rodeo that grew into a very big event and a financial success.

Each rodeo would start with Bullet Bob, cowboy hat on his head and clerical collar around his neck, coming out of the chute on the back of a raging bull, one hand in the air and holding on for dear life. He rarely made it beyond the open gate before he was sailing through the air.

A few of us went to St. Ann's Church on May 23, 2009, one of the churches he built during his priesthood, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his ordination. He was surrounded by a plethora of diversity — young, old, black, white and brown parishioners that loved this man of the cloth. He loved them in return and served them for five decades. He was a loyal friend and supporter of DHR until his death Sept. 12, 2009.

They broke the mold when they made Father Bob.

Rest in peace, old friend.



HEY! WE GOT HAY!

In 2007 it rained and rained and rained. But, on the few cloudy, rainless days, we managed to cut and bale hay, fertilize and then wait in hope that it'd rain some more. And it did. We got three cuttings of hay that year.

2008 was the opposite. Like most local ranches we cut hay in May, baled, fertilized, and waited for the rain that never came. We knew the equation — no rain, no hay. And, when nobody local is making hay, prices soar and availability declines. We were dependent on Mother Nature and she was being stingy.

So, having launched Operation Independence and gotten a grant from the Justin Paul Foundation we decided to take

matters in our own hands. We had land and we had water stored in our ponds and replenished by well water. So how do we get the water on the hay pasture? A water reel and a pump, which we bought this spring.

We back a diesel tractor up to the pond, hook up the pump to the PTO on the tractor, run the 2" flex hose to the water reel, pull it out 500' or so, start the tractor and away it goes. The water reel will throw water 110' in one direction, pulsate around and throw it 110' in the other direction — the length of one side of one square acre. In a few hours we can irrigate the whole seven acre pasture.

This was our first real (reel?) test for

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Operation Independence, and the results are terrific. We've cut and baled four times this year. Most of our local neighbors only got two cuttings. We're proud and encouraged. We've a long way to go in our determination to be more resourceful and independent, but we're on the way.

