

## **AgriLife Research Station at Sonora Marks 100 Years With April 23 Celebration**

*Event to include first auction of Super Juniper Eating Goats*

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SONORA – Texas A&M AgriLife Research will mark the 100-year anniversary of the agency’s AgriLife Research Station at Sonora with a full day of events on April 23.

The station is located on State Highway 55 between Sonora and Rocksprings.

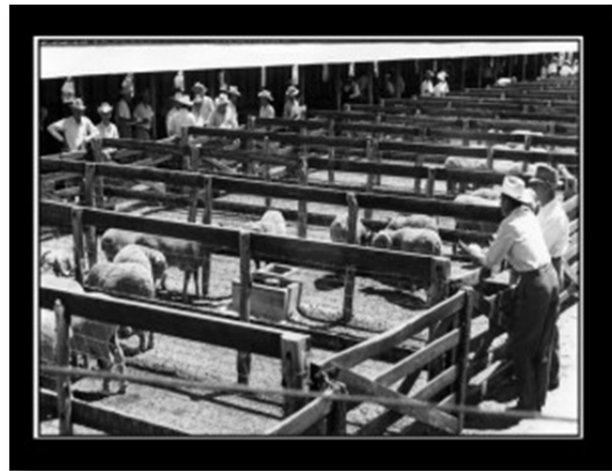
“We’ll start the day with registration from 8:30-9:30 a.m.,” said Dr. John Walker, AgriLife Research resident director of research at San Angelo. “We’ll have different professors from Texas A&M University and other universities who have done research there to talk about the history of the station. We’ll also have field tours of the station, the first-ever auction of 10 of our Super Juniper Eating Goats at 1 p.m. and other educational and social activities throughout the day.”

RSVP to [PBenge@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:PBenge@ag.tamu.edu) by April 8. For more information, call 325-657-7333 or go to <http://sonora.tamu.edu/100-years-of-sonora/>.

“We’ll furnish a free lunch as well as an appreciation dinner and dance at 6:00 p.m.” Walker said. “Case Hardin and the the Day Money Band will be our featured talent.

“In the old days when folks came to field days at the station, they often stayed two or three days, because it took so long for many people to get there. They always had dances and entertainment, so we are going to recreate that; we want people to just have a really good time. I think it’s going to be a fun, educational day and a good chance to meet up with old friends and maybe make some new ones.”

The station, long known as the Sonora/Rocksprings Experiment Station or Sub-Station 14, was founded in 1916 at the request of area ranchers and the then newly formed Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association, Walker said.



*Sheep producers inspect rams during a long ago performance test at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research station at Sonora/Rocksprings. (Texas A&M AgriLife Research photo)*

“The station’s first charge was to find what was causing livestock losses to the condition known as ‘bighead,’” Walker said. “It was later determined to be caused from livestock consuming the flowers and seeds of the native plant sacahuista, although they didn’t understand what it was at the time.”

<https://youtu.be/kILdT2zkiFs>

Walker said initially the station addressed animal diseases, many of which were related to poisonous range plants.

“So early researchers came to understand that range management was an important part of managing these animal diseases,” he said. “From there, the research focus expanded to include grazing management, evaluation of different livestock breeds and the genetic improvement in the predominant breeds of the time. Those breeds, Rambouillet sheep and Angora goats, are the subject of the longest-running central performance tests for these two species of livestock anywhere.”

Today, Walker said the station’s research has branched into a number of areas relating to noxious plant control, profitability of ranching and wildlife management.

“We’re looking at prescribed fire for managing brush encroachment as well as developing goats that have a high preference for consuming juniper, one of the most invasive species in the Edwards Plateau area.”

Walker added that some of the goats produced through the Super Juniper Eating Goat Project will be those auctioned to the public during the anniversary celebration.

“We now have enough excess billy meat-goats that have a high enough genetic potential for juniper consumption to sell, and be comfortable knowing they can pass on that juniper- or cedar-eating trait to their offspring.”

Walker said proceeds from the auction will go toward an endowment with the goal of funding a chaired professorship at the station.

“The main thing though, is that we just want everybody to come out and help us celebrate this historic occasion,” he said.

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