AGRICULTURAL DIVISION RESTRUCTURING

5 operations groups support research, farm needs

by Curtis Larson, Shawn Norton, Kevin Pierce, Rodney Pierce and Ronald Trett

Editor’s note: In the past seven issues of Ag News and Views, various managers and researchers have highlighted how the Agricultural Division’s strategic plan has restructured many of the division’s activities. Changes were made to meet the evolving needs of farmers, ranchers and land managers in the Southern Great Plains and beyond. These changes focus on incorporating basic education, producer-driven advocacy and more structured consultation efforts into the producer relations programs. The changes also underscore the formation of four Centers of Excellence that pull together Noble Foundation resources and knowledge in the areas they have the greatest ability to influence. This article is the last in the series and details changes to the agricultural operations groups.

The final piece to the restructuring is in the internal management of our agricultural operations groups. The reorganization within our groups (small-plot and resource services, research ranch and farm management, and equipment maintenance and project construction) involved a shifting of who manages what and opening communication up among our groups.

We carry out the day-to-day activities needed to support the Centers of Excellence research goals. The data accumulated on the farms and plots we manage ultimately supports consultants’ recommendations to farmers and ranchers, as well as adds to the general bank of agricultural knowledge.

Small-plot and Resource Services Manager: Shawn Norton
The Small Plot Core provides services to all divisions through a work order system. These services include irrigation, cultivation, pesticide application, biomass removal, grain removal and several others. We manage all small-plot research fields using a crop rotation program. This provides researchers with small-plot areas that have been well managed. The Ag Services Resource Core continues to provide forage and soil testing services.

Chance Tynes, an agricultural research assistant, drives calves through the cattle handling facility at the Noble Foundation’s Oswalt Road Ranch in Love County, Okla. The calves received vaccinations and were documented using electronic identification (RFID/EID) before being moved to research paddocks.
of the major changes that has come as a result of the strategic plan is that we now offer core sample processing services to researchers in all divisions. The Field Plot Operations Group has implemented a small grains variety trial that allows commercial seed companies to compare their varieties with other commercial varieties. These results are also used by our consultants to help make recommendations to producers.

North Farms – Pasture Demonstration Farm (PDF), McMillan Farm, and cattle activities on Headquarters Farm and Dupy Farm
Manager: Ronald Trett
The majority of the research going on at the north farms is focused on the Forage 365 initiative, which looks at how ranchers can extend their grazing season and use less hay. The research going on at PDF may help with planting, fertilization or cattle stocking recommendations. We are getting ready for a cow-calf study to start this fall, which will tie into the Forage 365 research.

South Farms – Red River Farm, Coffey Ranch and Oswalt Ranch
Manager: Kevin Pierce
A big part of what we do is growing the hay and feed needed for the cattle when they are not on research paddocks. In the past, we have been in charge of managing the pecan orchard at the Red River Farm. Through the restructuring, the Center for Pecan and Specialty Agriculture now manages that orchard. This helps us in a couple different ways: 1) we are able to focus our time and energy to other projects, and 2) people whose training and job responsibilities are more pecan-specific are managing the orchard, which ultimately means the research data will be more precise and helpful to producers.

Oswalt Cattle Facility
Manager: Curtis Larson
We are the first to handle cattle when they come to the Noble Foundation and do the work needed to prepare and transfer them to grazing research paddocks. We also manage the day-to-day feed efficiency research. Ag researchers send us the feed mix rations they want to test, which we carry out.

Equipment Maintenance, Project Construction and Ag Research Operations Administration
Manager: Rodney Pierce
We maintain and repair all of the equipment used on the farms and small plots, and we purchase new equipment when necessary. Sometimes a research project calls for special equipment, so we take care of the fabrication work required to modify it to meet the needs of the project. We also construct working facilities and other infrastructure on all Noble Foundation properties. For example, with the Forage 365 research, we are building new fences. We also help set up for events that bring producers out to the farms to see Noble Foundation research and projects.

Darla Warren provides administrative support to all of the agricultural operations groups. As part of the strategic plan, she is also now the primary contact for Ag HelpLine calls. When you call the HelpLine (580-224-6500) with a question, she will connect you with the appropriate person.

The strategic plan has allowed us to stay focused on our individual responsibilities, capturing our employees’ strengths. At the same time, we are better organized to communicate and plan. We have a bigger window of time to fulfill researchers’ needs, and we are better able to help one another out when one of us needs more labor. We’ve also centralized our purchasing, which makes us more efficient in using our financial resources.

Overall, we feel like the new structure has helped us work better together as a whole system.