

## TTU TAKES OVER OPERATION OF LARGE CATTLE FARM

Millard Oakley greets a group of TTU ag students who've paid a visit to an 1,800-acre farm owned by Millard and J.J. Oakley. The TTU ag department is now in charge of the farm which is supporting possibly the second largest beef cattle herd in the state.



**TTU** -- For an annual lease rate that's less than the average cost of a steak dinner, Tennessee Tech University's School of Agriculture now has the charge of a farm supporting possibly the second largest beef cattle herd in the state.

The 1,800-acre farm, which is owned by Millard and J.J. Oakley, is located in two tracts -- one around 1,350 acres near Monterey and the other around 450 acres near the Roaring

River in Putnam County -- and has approximately 600 head of brood cows.

And for the annual lease rate of \$10 per year, the farm more than quadruples the agricultural land previously available to TTU students and faculty.

" This farm is a wonderful opportunity to enhance experiential learning for our agriculture students by providing them with real-life, hands-on scenarios," said C. Pat Bagley, dean of TTU's College of Agricultural and Human Sciences. "The Oakleys' vision is that the farm be used to increase educational opportunities and community awareness, and that's a vision we certainly share."

With Tennessee being one of the top beef-producing states in the nation, the sale of calves and cattle is the number one source of agricultural income in Tennessee.

But not only does the farm offer a great opportunity in terms of such agricultural trends. It also provides a great legacy. The Tennessee Historical Society designates it a pioneer century farm.

The Oakley farm earns that distinction because the land in 1792 was granted to an ancestor for his service as a Revolutionary War soldier.

"So it's been a functioning farm longer than Tennessee has been a state. When the land grant was made, this area was still part of the North Carolina Territory," Bagley said.

Because of the constraints of limited space and resources, agriculture departments at many universities must rely on controlled simulations to teach students such concepts as herd management, water quality measures, wildlife development, crop rotation and soil erosion prevention, but the Oakley farm will take the laboratory experience into the real world for TTU agriculture students.

With the farming process already in place before TTU took charge of the Oakley property, Bagley said the previous farm crew continues to work the farm, while a number of TTU agriculture students have joined them -- and more students will be working with the farm crew in the near future.

The student presence will continue to increase so that by next fall, it's projected that the Oakley farm will be helping TTU's agriculture department produce and sell its own Golden Eagle ground beef.

With a long-term vision for the farm that includes the Oakley Sustainable Agriculture Center for campus and community development, the Oakley property complements the 113-acre Waters' organic farm in southern Putnam County of which TTU already has charge.

At the organic Waters farm, TTU agriculture students are already producing crops of organic fruits and

vegetables, such as strawberries, peppers, zucchini and tomatoes, that are sold at either the Farmers' Market located near campus or to Chartwells campus dining services.

Bagley said he hopes the School of Agriculture can establish similar arrangements for the sale of the ground beef.

"Everyone is interested just a little bit more when they know where their food comes from," he said. "It's a great community support program for the university, and buying food produced by TTU agriculture students is a great way for the community to support the university too."

In addition to the Oakley and Waters farms, TTU also has charge of the 300-acre Shipley Farm located west of campus on Highway 290.

In the current economic climate, TTU agriculture students are fortunate to have such incredible learning resources, Bagley said.

"At a time when most agriculture departments are being forced to cut back because they don't have the resources to pay for such facilities, if they have such facilities in the first place, TTU is fortunate to have access to such a tremendous educational showplace because of the generosity of Millard and J.J. Oakley," he said.

Most important, of course, is that students will learn from personal experience about all the skills necessary for establishing and sustaining a healthy and consistent beef cattle herd.

"Our students will be more employable when they graduate because of the broad range of agricultural experiences they will have had at the Oakley farm," Bagley said.

"Reading from a textbook, for instance, gives students the knowledge but not the skill to artificially inseminate a cow or to treat illnesses in livestock. If those students never learned to apply those skills in college, then they have to learn on the job," he continued.

"The Oakley farm will give our students the opportunity to apply those skills, and in the big picture, actual hands-on experience means greater job qualification. A farm manager is just more likely to hire the candidate who's already had the experience," Bagley concluded.

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