

HONORING OUR PIONEERS

CLASS OF 2023 TEXAS FARM BUREAU PIONEER AWARD WINNERS

They give everything to their farm, ranch, communities and consumers. For that, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) recognizes them for what they are: pioneers in Texas agriculture.

Each year, 13 Texas farmers and ranchers and one retired professional staff member are honored with the Texas Farm Bureau Pioneer Award. They are selected for their contributions to agriculture and the organization, both through service and leadership.



District 1

Phil Haaland | Dallam-Hartley County Farm Bureau

Phil Haaland is a longtime Farm Bureau member, first joining Minnesota Farm Bureau in 1965. After moving to Texas, he became a member of Dallam-Hartley County Farm Bureau in 1970.

Haaland was a board member of the Dallam-Hartley County Farm Bureau board for 24 years. He served as president for four years and as secretary for four years. He represented the county Farm Bureau for 20 years as a voting delegate at the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) annual meeting. He served as chairman of the TFB Feed Grains Commodity Advisory Committee for six years, and he represented TFB on the American Farm Bureau Federation Feed Grains Advisory Committee for

four years. He also served on the TFB Resolutions Committee.

He was a member of the county Farm Bureau Membership and Livestock Show committees.

He has continued to serve and volunteer his time promoting agriculture and Farm Bureau. Haaland is a member of the Dalhart Lutheran Church and was chairman of its Building Committee.



District 2

The late Seab Washington | Motley County Farm Bureau

The late Seab Washington was born into a farming and ranching family in Motley County, and he had continued that tradition with a lifelong commitment and devotion to agriculture.

Washington was a Farm Bureau member for over 50 years. He served Motley County Farm Bureau many of those years as president and as a board member. Washington also served on the TFB State Resolutions Committee.

His farming and ranching operation included sheep, cattle, hogs, wheat, grain sorghum, hay, cotton, peanuts and onions. At one time, he and his wife Dianne even had a few emus, not as a commercial venture, but just because they were “fun to watch.”

Washington served on the local Farm Service Agency Committee and on the Motley County FFA Committee for over 20 years where he shared his knowledge and commitment with numerous young farmers and ranchers. He was Fire Chief of the Flomot Volunteer Fire Department.



District 3
The late Ben Buerger | Archer County Farm Bureau

The late Ben Buerger joined Farm Bureau in 1966 and was a board member for more than 35 years. He served in the offices of vice president and president.

Buerger served on the Beef Cattle, Wheat and Youth Activities committees. He was active in the state legislative process throughout the years, building relationships with various political leaders to help protect the interests and livelihood of farmers and ranchers.

He was elected county commissioner, serving his community for 20 years. Buerger also served as a board member of the Archer County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Archer County Livestock Show. He was involved in the development of the Archer County Veterans Memorial and was a dedicated volunteer fireman for 20 years.

Buerger was a custom wheat harvester for 54 years. He drove his first combine at the age of eight.

Buerger resided in Archer City and had three children, seven grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.



District 4
Ben F. Wible | Grayson County Farm Bureau

Ben F. Wible is a fourth-generation farmer and rancher. He has farmed over 60 years and operates a 3,400-acre farm near Sherman growing wheat, grain sorghum and hay and raising cattle.

He joined Farm Bureau in 1970 and later became a director of Grayson County Farm Bureau, where he remains an active leader today. Wible has served multiple-terms as president, vice president and secretary-treasurer and has been involved in the Budget, Executive, Nominations, National Affairs, AGFUND, Beef Cattle and Policy Development committees. He served twice on the TFB Resolutions Committee, promoted farm bill reform in Washington, D.C., attended nine

AFBF annual meetings, and is a senior-level cabinet member of TFB AGFUND. Wible was elected to the Texas Farm Bureau board of directors in 2012, serving six years.

While a county director, Wible supported Grayson County youth. He helped with the first annual Ag Day event, enjoys exhibiting the Mobile Learning Barn, was a buyer at county livestock shows and mentored students in TFB contests. He attended numerous meetings, activities, including trips to both Austin and Washington, D.C. Wible has given countless media interviews promoting and highlighting agriculture and agricultural issues and helped demonstrate a combine simulator at the Texas State Fair.

Wible served in the Texas Army National Guard achieving the rank of staff sergeant.

He was married for 41 years to Monette. They had two children, Brian and Romana.



District 5
Brian Cummins | Van Zandt County Farm Bureau

Brian Cummins has been in ag education all of his life and holds Farm Bureau with high regard. He always volunteers to teach youth and adults about agriculture, the benefits of Farm Bureau and their important connection.

He joined Farm Bureau in 1996. Cummins continues to serve on the Van Zandt County Farm Bureau board of directors and has served six terms as president and two terms as vice president. He served on the county Beef, Swine, Poultry, Environment, Policy Development and Public Relations committees. Cummins served on the Texas Farm Bureau Resolutions Committee.

He organized the county's first Ag Day and has chaired the committee six years, is a member of the scholarship selection committee and is an auctioneer at scholarship auctions. Cummins conducted meet-the-candidate forums and served on the evaluation committee for the 5th Congressional District election in 2018. He coordinated the county-sponsored Drought Management Program and soil test campaigns.

Cummins is a member of the Texas Beef Council and in 2014 coordinated activities for six counties in the passage of the Texas Beef Checkoff program. He is a board member and advisor of the Van Zandt County Fair Association, established and chaired its county-wide Spelling Bee contest, and was assistant superintendent of the Open Beef Cattle Show.



District 6 **Val Stephens | Dawson County Farm Bureau**

Val Stephens, a proud native of Lamesa, Texas, has led a life deeply embedded with agriculture and a strong commitment to community service. As a third-generation farmer, Val and his father Jesse are the second father-son to hold the honor of the Texas Farm Bureau Pioneer Award, with Jesse receiving the award posthumously in 2004.

Val's upbringing in Patricia, 15 miles from Lamesa, Texas, instilled in him a profound appreciation for rural life and the values of hard work and community. He attended Klondike High School, where he showcased his athletic prowess as a promising basketball player. Val continued his academic and athletic pursuits at South Plains Junior College as a member of the 1973 conference champions.

Returning to his roots, Val has been farming and a member of Texas Farm Bureau for over 50 years. He served at the county level on the Dawson County Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee and as the Dawson County Membership Chairman, and was the first County President to contribute to the Senior Level Ag Fund.

From 2014 to 2020, he served as the State Director for District 6, advocating for the interests of farmers and ranchers across the largest Farm Bureau district in the state. Stephens served three terms as State Resolution Committee member, as Secretary/Treasurer of the State Board 2019-2020, and represented TFB on trips to Canada, the Midwest, the Northwest and the Great Lakes. He also traveled with the National Affairs team in Washington, D.C. to lobby Congress on agricultural policies. His leadership and insights helped shape policies that benefited the agricultural community.

Val has not only been dedicated to farming but also committed to improving the lives of those around him. As a founding board member of the Northridge Retirement Center from 1980 to 1995, he played a vital role in ensuring a comfortable and fulfilling life for the elderly. He served as a local school board member from 1982-1985, contributing to the development of educational opportunities in his community. Furthering his commitment to community service, Val served on the board of directors for RockHouse in Midland, Texas, where his guidance contributed to the success of this essential community organization for those with special needs - a passion that he has embraced as a dedicated parent to his youngest son, Matthew Creg. He is a faithful member of the Friendship Baptist Church where he plays an active role in the men's group.

In addition to his accomplishments on the farm and in the community, Val pursued higher education and graduated from Wayland Baptist University. His commitment to learning and dedication to his craft earned him the distinction of being named a Distinguished Alumnus of the University in 2022, further solidifying his legacy as a role model and leader.

Val's life is not only defined by his professional and community achievements but also by his loving family. He has been married to his wife, Patricia Stephens for 48 years, and together they have raised three children and been blessed with five grandchildren. In 2024, the Stephens family farm will be eligible for designation in the Family Land Heritage Program by the Texas Department of Agriculture, honoring families who have owned and run a continuous agricultural operation for 100 years or more. From his roots in Patricia, Texas, he has exemplified what it means to be a dedicated farmer and a passionate advocate for agriculture.



District 7 **The late Tommy Dale "Tom" Watson | Mills County Farm Bureau**

The late Tommy Dale "Tom" Watson joined Mills County Farm Bureau over 40 years ago and was elected a director in 2011. Active in all Farm Bureau programs and meetings, he also served as president and vice president. He was a member of the Finance, Officer Nominating and Scholarship committees until his death in 2020.

Watson thrived at all youth-related events held at each of the county school campuses. He was active at local stock shows, rodeos and FFA gatherings, always encouraging future farmers and ranchers. If it involved youth, Watson would volunteer his time. And he was always first to volunteer for Farm Bureau's youth-related activities, including Ag Days, Heritage Days and youth stock shows.

He raised sheep, goats and cattle in Mills County and in New Mexico.

Mills County Farm Bureau will always remember his strong love of farming and ranching that motivated him to further the knowledge of youth so agriculture could remain a staple in the American culture for years to come. Each summer, he employed youth to teach land stewardship, the value of hard work, integrity, honesty, and how to handle life's curveballs with a sense of humor.

Watson's father, Elmo Watson, was a longtime Mills County Farm Bureau board member who received the District 7 Pioneer Award in 1998.



District 8
Victor G. Dutschmann | Coryell County Farm Bureau

Victor G. Dutschmann became a member of Farm Bureau in 1975. He was elected in 1979 to the Coryell County Farm Bureau board of directors and continues to serve on the board.

Dutschmann has served in the offices of president (2013-2018), vice president (approximately 30 years) and secretary.

He played an instrumental role, along with fellow board members, to develop plans, sell bonds and guide the construction of the Coryell County Farm Bureau office building in Gatesville that opened in 1981. Dutschmann also assisted the board in locating an office building in Copperas

Cove to allow Coryell County Farm Bureau to expand with a second satellite office to better serve its members.

Dutschmann has served many years on various county committees, including Hay and Forage, Policy Development and Nominations. He continues to be an active member of the Feed Grains Committee. Dutschmann was a member of the Executive Committee and assisted the county with audits and budgeting.

He has represented District 8 on the TFB Resolutions Committee and attended numerous TFB state conventions and summer conferences. Dutschmann has met with elected officials in Austin and Washington, D.C., to promote and protect agriculture and land rights in Texas. He has been active at the Coryell County Youth Fair and has participated in numerous Ag Field Days for fourth graders in the county.

Dutschmann Farm & Ranch has been honored by the Texas Department of Agriculture as a family farm with continuous operation for over 100 years.



District 9
George Whittlesey | Trinity County Farm Bureau

George Whittlesey joined Trinity County Farm Bureau in 1965. He has continuously served the organization as a director for more than 30 years, including multiple years in leadership positions of president or vice president.

He has served and chaired, often multiple terms, on the various Trinity County Farm Bureau committees, including Hay and Forage, Beef Cattle, Forestry, Legislative, Resolutions and Policy Development. He was a member of the Texas Farm Bureau Forestry Committee and the American Farm Bureau Federation Forestry Committee.

Whittlesey was instrumental in initiating Trinity County Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom program in 1987. He continues to be active in the organization's annual ag field day, a representative buyer at county livestock shows and recruiter and supporter of youth scholarships. He was also successful in planning and supervising the first county-wide project show for FFA and 4-H members, which continues to be successful for county youth.

Whittlesey and his son operate a cow-calf and timber operation.



District 10
Clyde Morris Holekamp | Kerr County Farm Bureau

Clyde Morris Holekamp has been involved in agriculture his entire life, growing up on the family farm, 5-H Dairy, in Comfort. He has worked tirelessly to promote agriculture as an instructor, Farm Bureau leader, dairy farmer, and served on many agricultural-related boards and committees.

In 1966, Holekamp became owner of the family dairy and that same year joined Farm Bureau. He has served as a director of Kerr County Farm Bureau for 13 combined years and, since 2016, has served as board secretary-treasurer. Holekamp has been a member of the county National Affairs, Dairy, Membership and Scholarship committees. He believes in Farm Bureau's work to help farmers and ranchers through involvement with the legislative system and is a Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) AGFUND contributor. Holekamp also served on the TFB Dairy Advisory Committee and AFBF Dairy Industry Advisory Committee.

He spent 17 years as a dairy classroom instructor for Southwest Dairy Farmers. He demonstrated cow milking from the mobile milking parlor trailer with a live cow at schools and fairs throughout Texas to share the dairy experience.

Holekamp and his wife, Cheryl, have three daughters and five grandchildren.



District 11

Larry James Winkelmann | Washington County Farm Bureau

Larry James Winkelmann is a dedicated leader of Farm Bureau, who works tirelessly to promote agriculture and its connection with Farm Bureau.

Winkelmann is a longtime member of the Washington County Farm Bureau. He is currently in his 27th year as a director of the board, serving in the roles of secretary-treasurer (2002-2009), vice president (2010-2013) and president (2014-present). Since becoming president, the county has earned the District 11 Most Outstanding County Farm Bureau Award four times and was selected the 2019 County Activities of Excellence state qualifier.

He is chair of the Policy Development Committee, co-chair of the Beef Cattle Committee and served on the Budget and Scholarship committees. Winkelmann was on the TFB Beef Cattle Advisory Committee and currently serves on the TFB Feral Hog and Predator Advisory Committee.

He organized and worked many Ag Day events for fourth grade students and helped at several 4-H Summer Farm Tours for county youth. To boost membership, Winkelmann initiated the county hosting a booth at the fairgrounds during Dairy Day and Cow-Calf Clinic events to encourage attendees to join Farm Bureau.

Winkelmann represented the county as a voting delegate at 27 TFB Annual Meetings and as a panel member for Political Advocacy at the 2018 Leadership Conference. He attends many Farm Bureau meetings, including Summer Commodity Conferences, Leadership Conferences, and meeting with Texas lawmakers. He attended a National Affairs Awards Trip to Washington, D.C. and the AFBF Annual Convention in Hawaii.

Before serving on the Washington County board, he was president of Burton Local Farm Bureau.

Winkelmann owns and runs two farm and ranch operations: Bredthauer Ranch and D Bar L Farms.



District 12

The late James N. Owings | Bee County Farm Bureau

The late James N. Owings dedicated his life to promoting and protecting agriculture in South Texas. Owings spent his life in the cattle business and was recognized for the quality commercial cattle he developed through the years.

He joined Bee County Farm Bureau in 1984. While a member, he served as president, vice president and secretary-treasurer.

Owings served on several committees including Young Farmer & Rancher, Economic Services, Environmental-Regulatory, Membership and Budget. He helped with the South Texas Hay Lift program in 1989-1990, wrote countless letters to state congressmen to keep the homestead exempt status in Texas and organized membership drives.

In 1994, Owings was on the committee for organizing a political rally for George W. Bush when Bush ran as the Republican candidate for governor. He also organized meet-the-candidate meeting for all candidates in House District 31 and attended numerous Texas Farm Bureau conventions.

At his resignation in 2004, Bee County Farm Bureau designated Owings as an Honorary Lifetime director of the board. Owings is survived by his wife, Barbara, and his twin daughters: Jane and Jamie.



District 13

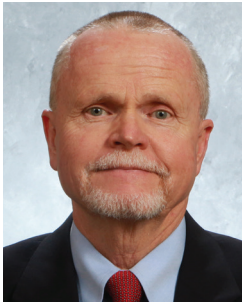
Brent Ocker | Nueces County Farm Bureau

At a very young age, Brent Ocker became mindful of Farm Bureau and the organization's fundamentals. His father, Melvin F. Ocker, was a founding member of the Nueces County Farm Bureau. At 10 years old, Ocker traveled with his family by train to New Jersey to attend the AFBF Annual Convention.

Ocker became a respected leader in his community and in Farm Bureau.

When Ocker and his wife, Walta, began farming on their own in about 1965, he was elected to the board of directors of Nueces County Farm Bureau. Ocker served the board for more than 10 years and was president for three years. He was a member of numerous county committees, including the Policy Development, State Affairs and National Affairs committees. Ocker also chaired several commodity committees.

He helped organize and work county annual Ag Day and Food Connection Day events, as well as farm crop tours. Ocker worked side-by-side with local and state representatives advocating for agriculture and traveled to Austin many times to discuss key issues with legislators. He also served on the TFB Resolutions Committee and attended as a voting delegate many TFB and AFBF annual meetings.



STAFF

Charles Benton | Director of Field Operations, Texas Farm Bureau

Charles Benton was named director of TFB Field Operations in January 2018. He was responsible for a 21-member staff of field representatives and two associate directors, nine Mobile Learning Barns and the organization's membership acquisition and retention.

Prior to being named the division's director, Benton worked as a field representative for 16 years. In 2012, he was promoted to associate director, overseeing 10 field representatives for the southern region. Benton began his career with TFB in 1989 as research assistant in Research, Education and Policy Development, now part of Government Affairs.

Benton served on the McLennan County Youth Activity Association Board and as secretary-treasurer for the Riesel Ag Booster board of directors. He was a 4-H volunteer, Little League coach and director of the local Little League board. Benton was recognized by the Texas FFA Association with the Honorary Lone Star Farmer Degree in 2007.

Benton and his wife, Kathryn, live in Riesel. They have two grown children and six grandchildren.