

He Gave Us the Stars

In 1926 a bachelor banker died in Paris, Texas - a rich bachelor banker, that is. His estate was worth \$1.2 million. Today that would be about \$17.6 million. In his will the banker left 90% of his money to the University of Texas to buy a telescope and build an observatory.

The banker's name was William Johnson McDonald (no connection to the famous hamburger chain).

McDonald's relatives didn't like him leaving all that money for a telescope. They believed that anyone who would do such a thing must not have all the pickets in his fence, so they sued to keep the money in the family. Fortunately for UT, McDonald had shared his telescope dream with his barber, telling him that astronomy was a young science. He told the barber he hoped that "one day a telescope would be built that would allow astronomers to see the gold-plated streets of heaven."

McDonald was also known to be an amateur scientist. Consequently, a jury had little trouble believing that his bequest was the product of a sane mind. Upon appeal, his relatives received more than they were given originally, but UT still ended up with about \$800,000 - \$11.8 million today.

Once the university had the money, it had to go shopping for a mountain on which to build an observatory. That must have been fun. Mountain shopping has got to be something you get to do only once or twice in a lifetime. Luckily the university's representatives were able to shop in the Davis Mountains, which harbored some of the finest stargazing potential in North

America.

After driving several thousand miles around the region, inspecting numerous sites for altitude, dark skies, cloudless nights and poor prospects for rain, they found what they were looking for. It had no official name, but the locals called it Flat Top Mountain. It was part of a ranch perfectly named for West Texas: The U Up and U Down Ranch.

University of Texas President Harry Benedict wrote a letter to Violet Locke McIvor, owner of that mountain. He told her of McDonald's gift and of the university's great need for a mountain to put an observatory on. Benedict informed McIvor that her mountain was ideally suited for such a facility and that "optical tests already made showed that the Davis Mountains region was the best in Texas, perhaps the best in the United States, for astronomical purposes." He asked her if she might consider giving her mountain to science.

McIvor might have surprised Benedict when she agreed. She wrote back almost immediately and gave UT 200 acres, the entire top of the mountain, which was renamed Mount Locke in honor of McIvor's grandfather, G.S. Locke, who founded the ranch. She also gave the university enough land to build a road to the summit. The resulting highway, Spur 78, is still the highest highway in Texas.

Today UT's McDonald Observatory sits majestically atop Mount Locke. It is one of the world's leading centers for astronomical research. As William McDonald predicted, his gift has given us the heavens

themselves.

W.F. Strong is a professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and first wrote this story for Texas Standard. It was also published in Texas Co-op Power magazine.

Retail beef market 'meats' changing demands

By Jennifer Dorsett
Texas Farm Bureau Field Editor
In the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, limited availability and fewer variety choices had many consumers trying new or different beef cuts. And while consumers may have been hesitant to purchase these new offerings at first, their value and flavorful eating experience may make these new cuts mainstays in the meat case of the future.

Newer retail cuts largely come from four primal cuts: the chuck roll, rib section, loin section and round, according to Davey Griffin, Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension meat specialist.

Breaking down a carcass results in about one-third trimmable fat and bone and another 20-25 percent trimmings for products like ground beef and pizza toppings. The middle meats, where higher-value cuts like steaks come from, make up 10-12 percent of the carcass, but account for nearly a full third of its value.

"The rest of it is the other muscles, and those are the ones we are trying to utilize more - enhance the value because they

are the lower-cost muscles that still provide an excellent quality beef cut for consumers," he said. "Enhancing the value of cuts from the chuck and round not only helps consumers have a great moderately priced eating experience, it also increases the overall value of the carcass. That also has potential to add to the value of live cattle."

But it wasn't just the pandemic that spurred the exploration of new muscle cuts.

Changing family sizes and consumers spending less time in the kitchen have been trending for more than a decade.

"We know these cuts are changing to meet the changes of consumers," Griffin said. "They aren't cooking a great big roast or porterhouse steak anymore."

Now, the chuck is being processed differently, providing new cuts for different cooking and eating experiences. That's providing more value to the beef industry.

"The second most tender muscle in the beef carcass comes from the chuck and is now being merchandized as a mid-priced flat iron steak," he said. "It was just in a chuck roast. Now, we've pulled it out, and it's a menu item at restaurants. It has enhanced the whole value of the carcass and provided the consumer an affordable eating experience."

Other newer cuts include the petite shoulder tender, ranch steak, ribeye filet, ribeye cap steak and sirloin cap.

Griffin noted the ranch steak

has a nutritional profile similar to that of boneless, skinless chicken breast.

In the past, retailers had difficulty marketing the newer cuts to consumers.

"Now, with newer customers trying new things, they are starting to get movement, and customers are having good experiences and are willing to try them again," Griffin said.

Knowing where these newer cuts come from can help demystify the steps in processing, he said.

Cattle only have 13 ribs, which can be cut into several different retail and foodservice cuts. Chuck short ribs are less expensive than the ribs from the plate area but contain the same flavorful muscle.

"The chuck short ribs are used a lot for export, but they are otherwise cheap on the market because of the barbecue influence," Griffin said. "But if you want to receive the plate short ribs, you can't do a tomahawk steak. So, you have to pick one or the other out of a side of beef."

Individuals who raise their own beef and take it to small processors might have to ask to get the different retail cuts.

And processors should be prepared for consumers to ask for those cuts at the meat counter.

"That's how the consumer is eating today," Griffin said. "The muscles haven't changed, but we are using them in smaller, more utilizable pieces for the consumer."

Water Weekly

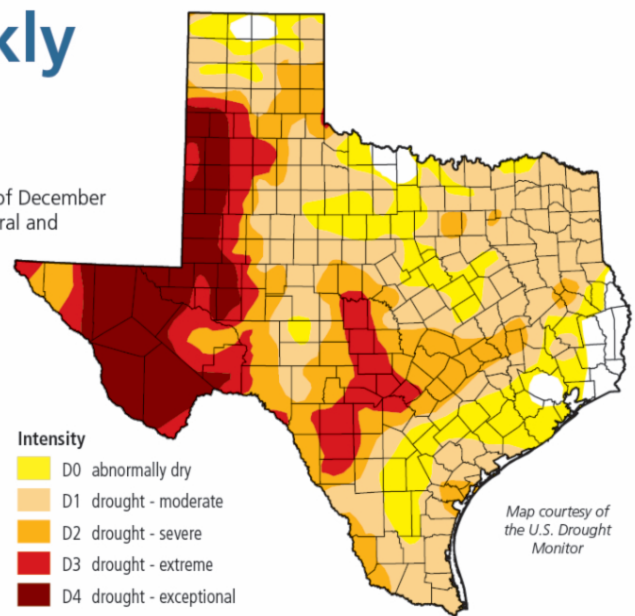
For the week of 12/07/20

Water conditions

The latest drought map for conditions as of December 1 shows some improvement in south central and southeast Texas due to rainfall in those areas over the Thanksgiving weekend. Elsewhere, drought continued to intensify and expand. The area experiencing exceptional drought increased to 13 percent of the state.

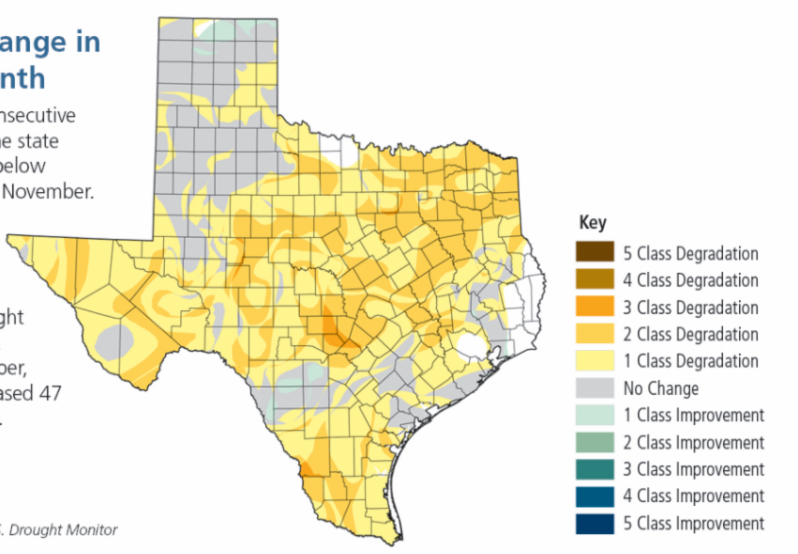
Drought conditions

- ◆ 79% now
- ◆ 84% a week ago
- ◆ 55% three months ago
- ◆ 34% a year ago



Drought change in the last month

For the second consecutive month, most of the state experienced well below average rainfall in November. That led to a 34 percentage point increase in the area of the state impacted by drought during the month. Since late September, drought has increased 47 percentage points.



Written by Dr. Mark Wentzel — Dr. Mark Wentzel is a hydrologist in the TWDB's Office of Water Science and Conservation.

Bryan McMath, Governmental Relations | bryan.mcmath@twdb.texas.gov | 512-463-7850
Sarah Haney, Media Relations | sarah.haney@twdb.texas.gov | 512-463-5129

www.twdb.texas.gov

Stay connected:



Keep your Loved Ones in the Loop next year with a Gift Subscription to The Observer/Enterprise!

Hometown News & Pictures!

THE OBSERVER/ENTERPRISE
Serving Coke County
P.O. Box 1329 Robert Lee, TX 76945

Yearly Subscription Rates:
\$30 in Coke County, \$35 in Texas
\$37 in United States