

Goat Rancher

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On the cover

Management and breeding decisions that you make today can have a lasting impact on your Boer goat operation. Kansas goat specialist Brian Faris offers decision-making advice beginning on Page 6. *Cover photo courtesy of Luke Vickrey.*

Flood deals blow to goat research

May 2, 2010, is a day that Dr. Richard Browning will never forget. That's the day he nearly died.

Richard is a long-time meat goat researcher at Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tenn. His work with Boers, Kikos and Spanish goats has been facilitated by research on the university's extensive farm on the banks of the normally tranquil Cumberland River.

That tranquility was broken on May 2 when up to 14 inches of rain in some areas of middle Tennessee brought on what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers described as a "1,000-year flood."

Richard, the TSU research farm and hundreds of goats were suddenly caught in Mother Nature's grasp. When it became evident early on that Sunday the Cumberland would be leaving its bank, Richard went to the farm to try and move goats and rescue his research materials. He — nor anyone else in Nashville apparently — knew how fast the waters would rise.

Two weeks after the flood, Richard and his wife, Maria Leite-Browning (also a goat researcher), were able to spend some time with me talking about



*fodder
for
thought*

By Terry Hankins

their flood experience.

Richard said he was attempting to move goats to higher ground when the water began to get deeper and deeper. "All of a sudden I thought 'I'm in trouble' — all I could do was start swimming toward a roll of hay. I had on my boots, a rain coat — I could barely swim."

Richard made it to the hay bale, where he says he collapsed. "I couldn't move. I just laid there. I lost track of time but they later told me that I was there about three hours."

Richard is especially grateful to Mozell Byars, his research project assistant, who initiated efforts to rescue him.

"I know he repeatedly tried going

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out into the flood water with water hoses, water troughs, tractors, and I do not know what else to rescue me," Richard said. "I saw him a couple of times and urged him to go back to dry ground."

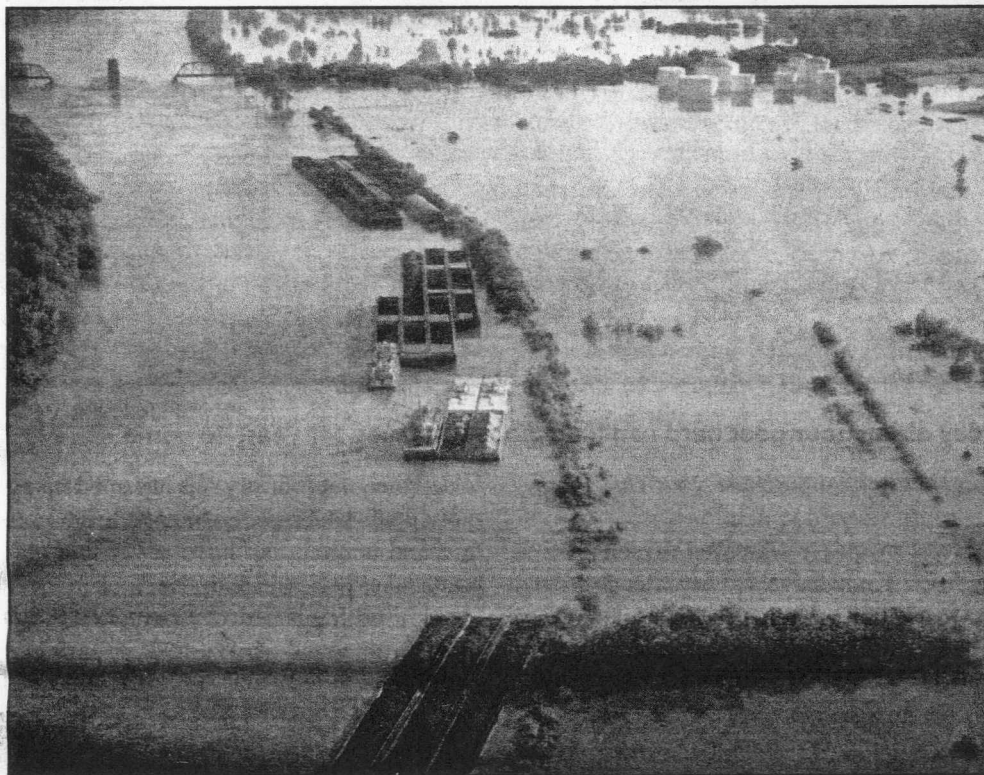
The president of Tennessee State University, Dr. Melvin Johnson, refusing to wait for rescue officials, located a boat. He and Quinton Puckett, a graduate student in Ag Sciences, paddled out to save Richard from the hay bale, which was rocking and threatening to float away. Two livestock guardian dogs also had swum to the hay bale and were rescued as well. Richard was transported to the hospital where he was

treated for hypothermia.

Unfortunately, Maria was unable to join her husband at the hospital; the Nashville neighborhood where they live was cut off on all sides by the floodwaters. It was several days before the couple could be reunited.

The college president's heroic rescue was recounted a couple days later on CNN. Richard said the news network wanted him in the report, but he declined. "They wanted me to get up too early that morning," he laughed.

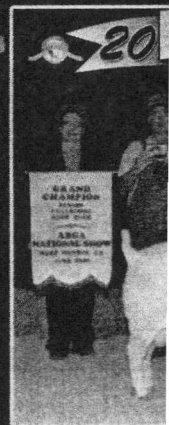
While Richard recuperated, Byars
Please see FLOOD, Page 27



The barges are on the Cumberland River. The flooded Tennessee State University property begins at the tree line just to the right of the barges. This aerial photo was taken by Derial Bivens, a member of the Tennessee Department of Transportation, who also is a local Boer goat producer.

THE BOER

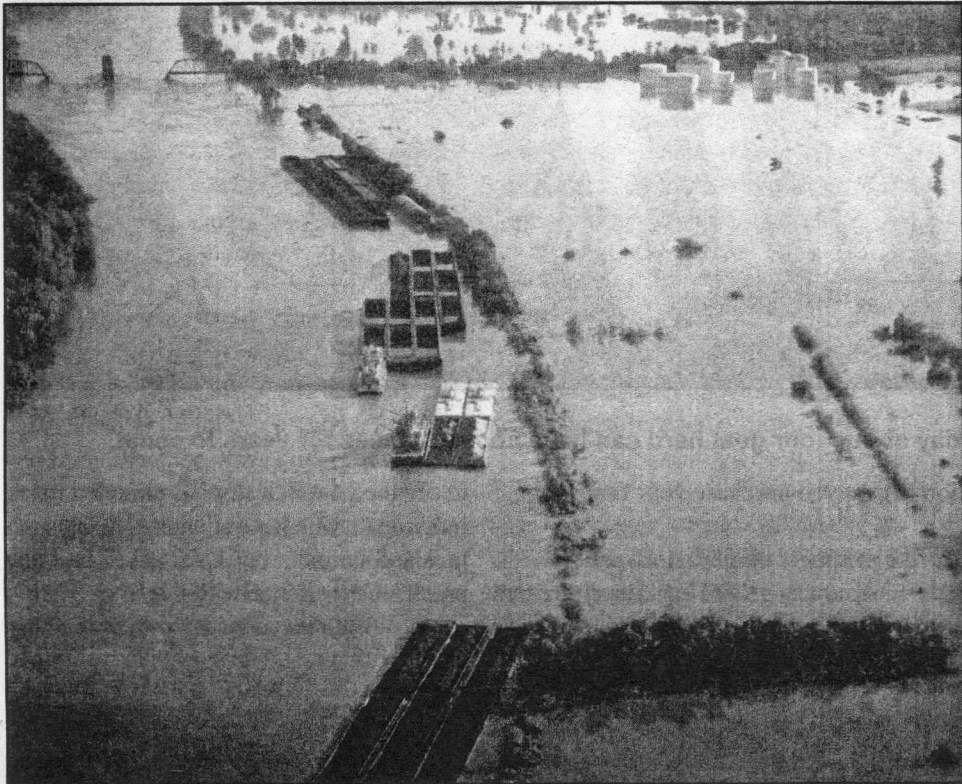
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Selling

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The water was still rising when this photo was taken. The TSU farm was eventually under 15-20 feet of water. The inset photo shows how the farm looked before the flood.

2010 Sale, Saturday Stillwater



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Down time: Time to clean u

Now that the show season is over in Texas and your pen is empty, it is time for maintenance and upkeep. If some of you are like me, your pens never get a chance to rest and recover as they house animals year round. I am making a conscious effort not to feed any summer goats this year. The break will give me a chance to repair barns and freshen up my pens. This attention to facilities will pay off down the road.

First on the agenda is removing the top layer of soil and manure. This is the most tedious and dirtiest task, but my wife's garden reaps the benefit of the hard work. Once I get down to the subsoil, I let it air out for a couple of days. I mix up a concoction of bleach, pine sol and vinegar. This cleaning solution acts as an astringent and also doubles as a natural fly repellent.



the wether report

By Kurt Henry

I spray the walls, fences, alleys and common areas. Next I bring in a clean sandy loam soil, compliments of my nearest pasture, and spread six inches evenly. Under the barn I usually put down cedar fiber or some type of bedding product where loafing and resting takes place.

West Texas high winds play havoc

on my tin barn. This down time allows me to replace any nails that have strayed and tighten screws back into the purlin. It seems when it rains I find the holes that need plugging, but forget about them when the sun is shining and all is well. Common roofing sealant can be found in my tool shed and on top of my barn. Dry animals in the wetter months will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

During the off-season, my exercise track grows weeds and becomes dormant. I concentrate on any sharp objects or wire that may have become frayed and cause potential vet bills. A little upkeep now will ensure a safe and healthier wether down the road.

Also, the down time allows for time to evaluate pen arrangement. Barns and pens are a big part of the equation. Goats need protection from the elements.

Flood

Continued from Page 5

continued the effort to rescue the goats on the farm. "His efforts on Sunday and Monday resulted in many of the animals being present in the herd today," Richard said. "Since the flood water receded, he has been working hard every day to physically get the goat facility prepared for research activities to resume."

Others that assisted in rescue efforts included Roy Avery, Barry Barlow, Eddie Williams and Athumani Mmbaga.

The biggest blow to the research was the loss of 100+ breeding does — half of the herd. Through the efforts of Byars and others, only one of the 20 herdsires was lost.

"Most of the does had either just kidded or were within 2-3 weeks of kidding" Richard said.

"These were females that had been in the herd for several years generating copious amounts of research data while producing kids annually like clock-work despite the challenging management environment the research protocols call for."

Also lost were daughters of those older females that represented the next phase of the research and continuity of the

foundation lines, Richard said.

"It will take a year or two to get the herd back to a position it was pre-flood in terms of animal fitness documentation and correlated observations," he said.

In addition to the livestock, the flood destroyed feed and hay supplies, computers, medications, tractors, Gators — essentially everything on the farm used in support of herd management and student research.

Within two days of the flood, however, Richard was back at work, coordinating cleanup and enthusiastically making plans to continue his work.

"Many of the does in the herd today will allow the breed evaluation work to move forward," he said. "However, I will still need to somehow acquire a good number of does this summer from various source herds to re-establish the herd at a critical population size to maintain a viable genetic research population.

The breed evaluation project will move forward with a revised plan to account for the change in herd structure, Richard said. "Some of the rescued does have kidded since the flood, so everyone is

happy to see that the herd rebuilding process has already begun."

Putting a good spin on a bad situation, Richard also noted: "One positive to securing more does is that new genetics can now be tested from additional sources, enhancing what has already been documented."

With that attitude, I'm sure Richard and his crew can continue their important research at TSU. Richard's research papers can be seen on the school website at <http://faculty.tnstate.edu/rbrowning/research.htm>.

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