



Plain View

Knowing what works best

At left: Tom Nighswonger vaccinates a calf. Tom owns a cattle-wheat operation west of Alva, OK. He takes care of the wheat. He and his sister, Sally, tend to the cattle. One of Tom's biggest challenges with wheat is joint grass. How do you keep joint grass out of wheat?

By Diane Varner, Update editor, and Jim Rhodes, Woods County Extension Educator

Tom Nighswonger owns a cattle-wheat

operation west of

Alva, OK. His whole family owns stock in the operation, but he takes care of the wheat. He and his sister, Sally, tend to the cattle.

Tom, his wife, Cynthia, and his two sons, Clinton and Tyler, live in a house tucked into the rolling hills of Woods County, OK. Tom graduated from Oklahoma State University, with a degree in general agriculture. Clinton just graduated from high school and may attend Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva. His wife works in the computer services department at Northwestern Oklahoma State, and his son, Tyler, is a sophomore in high school. While his ranching and farming keep him busy, Tom still finds time to be a volunteer firefighter for the Greenleaf Rural Fire Department and treasurer for the Woods County Cattlemen's Association. His family attends the Church of Christ in Alva.

When Tom needs help with his ventures, he said he seeks advice from Jim Rhodes, Woods County extension educator.

"I don't think I've ever been told, 'I don't know,'" he said of Jim. Although Tom stays busy, he said he tries to make time to attend the classes that Jim gives. Jim described Tom as one of the most progressive growers in the county.

Tom attends the wheat variety field days and talks to others, to see which alfalfa varieties work for other growers. Although he uses anhydrous ammonia, choosing fertilizer is a toss-up depending on the price. However, he said he follows soil samples closely and applies what the soil needs. He's interested in trying the nitrogen rich strips, which is a research project at Oklahoma State University, to see if this technology would be helpful. In addition, he said he would like to add canola to his crops.

His operation is comprised of primarily wheat and 200 cows, though he grows alfalfa, native grasses, and other hay. The operation set up as a corporation, of which many of his family members own stock.

While Tom said he enjoys wheat, his real challenge is cattle. He develops heifers for sale, and wheat pasture is excellent for this purpose.

The biggest challenge to his operation is joint grass. How do you keep joint grass out of the wheat? For pasture, Tom said he plants within a reasonable time, when joint grass hasn't begun yet. He turned cattle on about 150 acres of the wheat to graze it out because the infestation was too severe.

"I pulled them off the first week of May and let it come back for a week. We didn't have much rain to help," he said. "It'd work better with a little moisture."

He sprays round-up to get rid of the weeds. The weather offers different challenges from weeds: You never know what will happen. As Will Rogers once said, "If you don't like the weather in Oklahoma, wait a minute and it'll change." About four years ago, he had no wheat due to drought. The next year was a "bin-buster." He said he'd rather have a dry spring and a wet summer. His late-maturing wheat has tended to shrivel, but his early maturing wheat has matured well.

With cattle, he has the opportunity to improve his herd. His cattle are strictly black and red Angus. He said he began with ABS bulls, and that's the service that he stuck with. He began artificial insemination in 1992. "Riding the tractor's not my favorite. It's my least favorite," he said. "But the cattle end of it is a challenge and I like that."

To read more about Tom and his operation, please visit our Web site.



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We are Areawide Pest Management for Wheat, a five-year project developed by the USDA Agricultural Research Service, to demonstrate pest management practices for the Russian wheat aphid and greenbug. Our main goal is to collaborate with wheat producers in evaluating and demonstrating non-chemical pest management techniques, with particular emphasis on the management of the Russian wheat aphid and the greenbug. The elements of our program include:

- *Crop Diversification*
 - *Variety Selection*
 - *Field Monitoring and biocontrol*
 - *Best Management practices for Wheat*

No aphids...No problem

Tom had some greenbugs this year but has never had severe enough of an outbreak to warrant a spray application. He speculated that one possible reason for the lack of severe aphid infestations is that his fields are isolated in the diversified pasture country of Woods County. In his area, he doesn't have one field next to another. To read more about Tom Nighswonger , please visit our website.



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Areawide Pest Management for Wheat
Management of Russian wheat aphids and greenbugs
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