

Southwesterner In Focus
EXHIBITOR IN FIRST LIVESTOCK
SHOW STILL SUPPORTER
OF ANNUAL EVENT
EPT Sundial 2/1/70

Rodeo and Livestock Show week activities always bring a touch of nostalgia to Sam B. Gillett Jr.

Gillett was a part of the very first livestock show held in 1930, and now is vice president for the livestock show division of the annual frontier days festival scheduled Feb. 7-15 in El Paso County Coliseum.

Member of a pioneer family, Gillett was born on his parents' farm near Canutillo on Nov. 28, 1913. Growing up on the farm he naturally developed an early interest in food production, and when he was still in his teens he entered the very first show held in the area. Then it was known as the Southwest Baby Beef Show and, Gillett recalls, the turnout was not as spectacular as it is nowadays.

"There couldn't have been more than 250 animals in that very first show, and I entered some of my stock in the swine division," Gillett says. "I was lucky that first year. My entries were grand champion and reserve champion. After that the show got good breeding and I didn't win any more."

Gillett continued to exhibit in the Southwestern Baby Beef Show for the next four years, and has retained an active interest in 'the show activities ever since.

Depression years, however focused his attention more and more on the family farm, and although he maintained contact with the show and rodeo, he was not officially connected with the show for about 10 years.

BEGAN CANNING

During that time he continued to operate the family farm and, in 1934, began to develop the Old El Paso Canning Co.

"During the depression things were pretty tough for farmers, so we started canning to raise some additional money for the farm," Gillett recalls.



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"We started on a shoestring and canned only tomatoes at first, but the brand caught on so we started canning green peppers, then red chiles and then beans, and as the Mexican food we here in the southwest know became popular, we expanded into a complete line of canned Mexican dishes."

The old El Paso brand was purchased by Mountain Pass Canning Co. in 1955, and later became a part of Pet Foods, Inc.

Gillett remains one of the principal suppliers to the canning firm. He has converted the original Old El Paso canning plant into a dehydration center on his farm, and annually converts two million pounds of red chiles

into dehydrated chile powder for use by the canning company.

While building his farm and canning factory, however, Gillett never lost his interest in the livestock show.

Speaking of the time he was inactive, he describes himself as being "too old to exhibit and too young to make decisions."

In 1947, however, the Chamber of Commerce decided that the very first grand champion hog exhibitor was just the man to serve on the livestock show committee.

Woodrow W. Wilson, city tax assessor-collector was in charge of the rodeo and livestock show for the chamber at that time, and it was his thought that farm and ranch people could handle the livestock show better than anyone. Knowing of Gillett's continuing interest in the show, Wilson approached the Upper Valley farmer and businessman and asked him to serve on the committee to help make the show a success.

GIVES CREDIT

Gillett, despite the pressures of operating a farm and a growing business at the same time, agreed. He still credits much of the present success of the show to Wilson.

"Woody did a tremendous job of recruiting volunteers in those days, and a good many of the men he contacted to serve are still serving. He helped build the organization to its present strength," he says.

He served on the committee for three years, and in 1950 was named vice president of the livestock show and rodeo association in charge of livestock show activities, a position he has held since.

Gillett says the show has changed markedly since he first switched his grand champion hog into the arena in 1930.

"For one thing, the number of animals has grown almost a thousand per cent since the first show," he says. "There were about 250 animals in the first show, and this year we expect about 2400."

Gillett says the type of animal being shown also has changed. The modern trend is toward a meatier animal.

"The fattest animal no longer is necessarily the champion in shows nowadays. Hogs no longer have a belly, steers bulge only where there's meat. These aren't the same animals that were showing ten years ago, and completely different than the kind I exhibited back in 1930," he says.

Another item that has changed drastically is the price paid for animals.

"Price's Creameries bought a steer from me in 1935 and paid ten cents a pound—and that was 100 per cent above the market price in those days," Gillett recalls. "Last year the grand champion steer sold for over 30 cents a pound."

What are the most important factors in the annual livestock show? Gillett feels they are the economic contribution to the city and the good the show does for its young participants.

CITES SURVEY

Speaking on the first, he cited a survey taken by his committee last year concerning expenditures by exhibitors and their families.

"Our survey showed that the 65 per cent of the exhibitors that responded spent something in the neighborhood of \$186,000 in El

Paso during the week they were here, and that does not include expenditures by bull sale participants, rodeo contestants and spectators, visitors and horse show entrants. With a minimum of paid personnel, the rodeo and livestock show generates over a half million dollars into El Paso within a week's time.

Speaking of his own area more specifically, Gillett said he feels the stock show is the focal point for many Future Farmers of America Students and 4-H Club members who spend months of work preparing for the show.

"The time needed to accomplish the end result is so consuming because of its daily nature that these youngsters are charged with—and learn—a great deal of responsibility early in life," he says.

Of course, Gillett adds, the fact that the El Paso show pays higher prices than most others in the area also helps attract top-quality animals and exhibitors, and for this he pays higher prices than most others in the area also helps attract top-quality animals and exhibitors, and for this he expressed his thanks to Peyton Packing Co. and other businesses in the area that buy the exhibitors' animals at the annual junior auction sale.

"The whole idea of the rodeo activities is focused on the stock show. It gets back to those 2500 kids that come every year and show their livestock because they are interested in the responsibility they have learned and want to learn more," he says.

"That's why I remain so active in the livestock show"

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