

# AGventure Excitement

Elaborate education exhibits educate nearly 2.5 million Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo™ attendees.

Story & photos by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor

If you've ever driven in Houston, you know that there are a lot of people (and vehicles) in that city — 6 million people. It is safe to say, at least statistically, most Houstonians don't have much connection with agriculture. However, for the month of March, they have the opportunity to experience agriculture firsthand.

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo President and CEO Joel Cowley said 2.483 million people attended the 2015 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Those attendees, whether with purchase of a grounds ticket or

a rodeo and concert ticket, have the opportunity to learn about agriculture through the 13 AGventure exhibits in the NRG Center.

Exhibits include the following.

► **Birthing Center** — Animals from Fair Oaks Farms in Fair Oaks, Ind., are brought to Texas each March so rodeo attendees can watch live births of calves, lambs and baby pigs in the Birthing Center. A video explaining the process and what farmers and ranchers do to ensure the baby animals' success shortly after birth shows constantly so attendees can see what happens any time of the day.

► **Breed Row Barn** — Breed Row Barn

shows attendees the differences between breeds in cattle, sheep, swine and goats. Signage explains the history and characteristics of each breed, in addition to how each breed plays into Texas agriculture.

- **Fisheries** — This exhibit highlights commercial fishing and aquaculture.
- **Honeybees** — Attendees can enter a life-size beehive to learn about the honeybee's role in pollination and honey production.
- **Horticulture Exhibit** — The horticulture exhibit is designed to bring the outdoors inside. Attendees learn about soil composition, insects, worms, water and vegetation in urban and rural agriculture.
- **Milking Parlor** — Live demonstrations of milking share information on the equipment used in the whole process, from milking to storage and transportation.
- **Petting Zoo** — The petting zoo includes a

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► **Right:** The people-sized beehive teaches the important role of honeybees in all agriculture, in addition to highlighting the honey-making process.



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► The Tour of Texas showcased agriculture close to home for any Texan. Exhibits showed agricultural specialties from each of the seven regions, including rice, cotton, wine grapes, oranges, cattle and more.





► Breed Row Barn showcases the characteristics of different breeds of cattle, sheep, pigs and goats.



► The poultry exhibit lets children see chicks hatch on their level. Fun facts on poultry and eggs are at eye level for adults.



► Agriculture is showcased throughout the NRG Center, not just within the AGventure section. There are Pasture to Plate and Consumer Guides outside in the main hallway in the NRG Center and near the Main Arena.



► The horticulture exhibit offers hands-on engagement, like planting sunflower seeds.



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large variety of animals that attendees can experience through touch. In addition to “typical” farm animals, a few exotics can be found.

- ▶ **Pony Rides** — A staple of any agriculture event geared for children, it does not disappoint at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.
- ▶ **Poultry** — Attendees can view eggs incubating and chicks hatching within a kid’s-eye-level large glass case. Adult chickens and turkeys can also be seen.
- ▶ **Rabbits** — The “Rabbit Hole” showcases many breeds of rabbit in an exhibit that looks like attendees burrow underground with the rabbits. There are interactive opportunities for children to pet live rabbits.
- ▶ **Rainwater Harvesting** — Attendees can learn more about water conservation through this fully functioning rainwater catch system.
- ▶ **Tour of Texas** — Texas is a big state with varied agriculture. Each of the seven regions of Texas has an area to showcase their agricultural specialties, including rice, cotton, wine grapes, oranges, cattle and more.
- ▶ **We’re Small Y’all Barn** — Miniature livestock breeds are full-grown, but less intimidating to small children. Miniature cattle, pigs and goats are in this exhibit.

Cowley explained that AGventure started in the early 1990s to show farm animals to children growing up in the city. Through this, the event coordinators realized that most parents hadn’t seen these animals either. Since then, the AGventure exhibits have grown exponentially in size and quality.

In total, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo enlists the help of 31,000 volunteers on more than 100 committees. Tessa Roque, from Houston, Texas, volunteers in AGventure through the Ladies’ GoTexan Committee. The committee consists of about 100 women, and 40 people are working each day of the rodeo, which gives flexibility to the volunteers. All volunteers receive training before interacting with the public. Roque says many of the volunteers, her included, have little experience with agriculture, and the training and prevalent signage helps answer questions.

“So many kids in the city are never exposed to this. They might not think about where their food comes from. This is like a wonderland to them,” she notes.



▶ Attendees can see live births of cattle, sheep and pigs if they come at the right time at the Birthing Center.



▶ A video plays explaining birth and the care ranchers give, providing education no matter whether any babies are born during that time of day.



▶ The Birthing Center attracts a lot of attention. Signage explains facts about livestock birth (like farrowing crates, for example).



▶ The Rabbit Hole showcases many of the 48 recognized rabbit breeds.



▶ The Milking Parlor shows the milking process during demonstration times. Additionally, attendees can meet the dairy cows.