ALL ABOUT RANCH LIFE LEARNING

*RANCH LIFE LEARNING* is more than a series of books – it is about Agricultural Literacy, with a focus on ranching. You can find more resources at [www.ranchlifelarning.com](http://www.ranchlifelarning.com).

**Why Educate about Agriculture?**

As the importance of agricultural education increases, the National Ranching Heritage Center at Texas Tech University has increased efforts to create innovative tools for learning. In 2014, children's book author John R. Erickson offered a partnership that would help the NRHC to expand the depth and reach of our education programs.

The National Ranching Heritage Center welcomes thousands of guests each year. Visitors include folks from all walks of life – ranchers, college students, families, children, adults – and they come from all over the world! As is true with most modern urban areas, the majority of our visitors do not have an agricultural background and it was their questions and observations that made our staff realize that many of them were unsure of what, exactly, a ranch was.

The world of agriculture has been separated from the everyday lives of most people by 3 to 5 generations. There is a real disconnect for many people when it comes to realizing where the food and fiber at the store comes from and what it takes to get it there. This has a real impact on the industry and on our future.

Agriculture is often mentioned in the news – cuts to farm programs and research, USDA office closings and consolidations, rising costs of inputs and increasing onerous regulations. But in the next breath we hear about a growing world population. Some project that by 2050, there will be 9 billion people on the planet and those people will need to be fed and clothed by agriculture.

The NRHC isn’t the only institution looking into this disconnect from agriculture. An online survey commissioned by the Innovation Center of U.S. Dairy found a low level of “agricultural literacy” among Americans: 16 million people thought that chocolate milk comes from brown cows, 40% of California 4th–6th graders didn’t know that hamburgers come from cows, orange juice was the nation’s most popular “fruit,” and French fries and potato chips were the nation’s most popular “vegetables.”

In 2001, the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance’s Food Dialogues project collected data on opinions, attitudes and questions consumers and farmers and ranchers have about the current and future state of how food is grown and raised in the US. The results revealed that “lack of access to information, as well as no interest or passion for the topic, have divided consumer opinion on the direction of agriculture.” As for the farmers and ranchers, 86% of them responded that “the average consumer has little to no knowledge about modern farming and ranching,” and 50% expressed that “consumers have a completely inaccurate perception of farming and ranching.”

**John R. Erickson:**

John R. Erickson has written and published 90 books and more than 600 articles. He is best known as the author of the Hank the Cowdog series of books, audio-books and stage plays. The Hank the Cowdog series began as a self publishing venture in his garage in 1982 and has endured to become one of the nation’s most popular series for children and families. Though the eyes of Hank the Cowdog, a smelly, smart-aleck Head of Ranch Security, Erickson gives readers a glimpse of daily life on a ranch in the West Texas Panhandle. To date, the series has sold over 10 million copies world-wide.

Erickson offered the National Ranching Heritage Center an opportunity to help publish and distribute a different kind of Hank the Cowdog book, one solely aimed at educating the reader about ranching. The five-book collection is titled the Ranch Life Learning Series. To date the NRHC has published and distributed five books in the series. As each book is published, generous funders help to give away 5,000 copies of each book to area school children and develop
lesson plans to accompany them. Over 20,000 books have been given to area schools since 2015 and over 900 teachers have attended workshops on how to incorporate the books into their curriculum. Another 50,000 ranch Life books have been sold.

RANCH LIFE BOOK 1: LIVESTOCK AND RANCHING
RANCH LIFE BOOK 2: COWBOYS AND HORSES
RANCH LIFE BOOK 3: RANCH WILDLIFE
RANCH LIFE BOOK 4: RANCH WEATHER
RANCH LIFE BOOK 5: PRAIRIE FIRE

Who is Hank the Cowdog?
Hank the Cowdog leads a motley crew of West Texas ranch characters through a series of hilarious adventures. When he's not patrolling the ranch, he spends his time soaking in Emerald Pond (the septic tank) or sleeping on his gunny sack bed under the gas tank. Here, from the very first Hank story ever, Hank tells readers how he thinks of himself and his job:

"When I took this job as Head of Ranch Security, I knew that I was only flesh and blood, four legs, a tail, a couple of ears, a pretty nice kind of nose that the women really go for, two bushels of hair and another half-bushel of Mexican sandburs. You add that all up and you don't get Superman, just me, good old easy-going Hank who works hard, tries to do his job, and gets very little cooperation from anyone else around here."

About the National Ranching Heritage Center
Forty years ago, the doors of the National Ranching Heritage Center opened for the first time. The mission was clear: preserve and bring to life the mystique of early ranch life in the American Southwest. Since the doors opened on July 4, 1976, hundreds of thousands of people have come through our facility. The NRHC is now recognized as the No. 1 visitor attraction in Lubbock.

Over 50 historic structures dot the NRHC landscape, telling the story of ranching from its Spanish roots along the border, through the Republic of Texas era, the trials of the Civil War era, the opportunities of the trail driving days of the 1870s, the growth of the frontier during late Victorian era to the comforts of modern-day operations. Our collection of historic structures was carefully selected, moved and restored in our historical park in chronological order, which gives visitors a chance to truly travel through time.

In addition to the overarching story of ranching, each structure also highlights those who lived and worked in them. Several structures come from well known, still operating today, ranches – the 6666 Ranch, the Pitchfork, the Matador. Others demonstrate a bygone era – a log cabin built by German immigrants from the 1850s, a dugout line camp from the Slaughter Ranch, a one-room schoolhouse and a Queen-Anne Victorian mansion.

In our quest to increase agricultural education efforts and enrich visitors experiences, we have developed an exhibit to enrich the experience of all who walk through our doors. It is called the Cash Family Ranch Life Learning Center.

This center is designed to give an accurate, adult level ranch life educational experience in a format that will absolutely enrich the lives of children of all ages. This information will be communicated through the character and language of a very familiar ranch personality – Hank the Cowdog. Visitors will learn, perhaps for the first time, how beef cattle are the "magic machines that turn grass into beef " as they are guided through how the four-chambered ruminant stomach really works. The Ranch Life Learning Center is an indoor/outdoor comprehensive learning experience. Learn more at www.ranchingheritage.org