

## WHAT IS VALUABLE?

*Dr. Gary Bates, Director  
UT Beef and Forage Center*

In August my son and I spent a week or so in Louisiana helping my dad and stepmom clean up their house after over four feet of water helped them redecorate. Cleaning up isn't really what we did. Throwing things away and tearing things out is probably a better description. I have seen floods growing up, but nothing ever came close to this. Everywhere you went were houses that were in the same shape as my family's home. There wasn't time for much mourning, because there was a lot of work to be done. My dad just continued to carry things out in the yard to see if they could be saved or if they needed to be thrown away.

The only times I saw him get slightly emotional is when, opening a drawer or cabinet, we came across some pictures of my mom or sister. Losing pictures that held a memory was painful for him. He realized there were no more opportunities to get pictures with them. The furniture, mattresses and sheetrock didn't really matter. Those pictures were valuable to him, however.

As I have come back to Tennessee, it has made me assess what I value. I spend a lot of time working around our house. Either working on it, working in the garden, being on the tractor, and other various things. If every bit of that stuff burned to the ground, in reality it is all still just stuff. The real valuable things in my life are my family and the friends I have.

I love going to baseball games and coaching Jed's baseball team. It isn't because I love baseball as much as I love spending time with him. The opportunity to cook breakfast for my family is a way I spend time to show them I love them. That is one of the best habits I have ever developed. You know why I love my job? It isn't because I know more about forages than anyone else. There are plenty of people in the state and across the nation that know more than I do. My job is rewarding because it allows me to meet people, develop relationships, and invest time and effort into their lives. These are the places where I place value.

One of my goals over the next while is to evaluate how I spend my time and effort, making sure that it is going toward something valuable. I value my relationship with God, my wife, my kids, and my friends. Those are the things that I need to invest in. I would encourage each of you to do the same evaluation. One day you and I won't be around for another picture. I want our time to be used on things of value.

I realize this article has taken sort of a sentimental turn. But know, if you are reading this article, I value you, and want to do what I can to help you in your operation. Now go kill some buttercup and get ready to plant clovers.

**Meeting dates of interest:** 2016 TN Forage and Grassland Council conference. Nov 4, 9 am CT, Ellington Ag Center, Nashville. [gbates@utk.edu](mailto:gbates@utk.edu) for more info.