



TX Agriculturalist

John and Molly Pantalone are on a mission to provide grass-fed meats to their community.



Young Farmer Grant

Leo is a 2019 YFG recipient diversifying his cattle operation and including hunting game onto his ranch.



TDA Updates

Farm Fresh Challenge is starting, new GO TEXAN partners and more!



TEXAS AGRICULTURE Matters!

Your monthly connection to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

Volume 2
Issue 4
April 2021



Howdy Neighbors!

Welcome to the Texas Agriculture Matters newsletter, your monthly connection to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

We are closely watching the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members at TDA have transitioned to working remotely for the time being. Rest assured we are hard at work everyday to support farmers, ranchers and Texans with their agriculture endeavors.

Our operations will continue to serve you and we have plenty of opportunities available. Whether you're a young farmer, want to learn how to get a hemp license or need to read something that brings you joy, this newsletter will serve you well.

Remember friends, Texas Agriculture Matters!

Sid Miller

Texas Agriculture Commissioner



THE COMMISSIONER'S CROP: TEXAS HEMP

It's been about a year since the Texas Department of Agriculture and Commissioner Sid Miller implemented the Texas Industrial Hemp Program. Despite the COVID-19 Pandemic disrupting day-to-day operations and normalcy of life, hopeful Texas hemp farmers hit the ground running in 2020, and they continue to build the 'hempire' here in Texas. Since its inception, the Texas Department of Agriculture has issued over 1150 producer licenses, permitted over 5,000 acres of hemp in the ground and recorded over 15 million square feet of hemp planted in greenhouses. Included in this group of farmers, Commissioner Sid Miller began with 11,000 hemp plants on just a few acres.



...continued on page 2

Hemp in Texas is a new crop that most farmers were not familiar with growing. Being the Commissioner of Agriculture, Commissioner Miller knew if he was going to promote this program to farmers in Texas, he was going to need experience growing hemp. "As the Commissioner, I farm a lot of different crops and I've raised a wide variety of livestock but something I hadn't farmed was hemp. I wanted the educational experience and to help me get a good understanding of the industry," said Commissioner

Miller. He cleared a field and installed drip irrigation for two varieties, a CBD and CBG, and because no pesticides had been labeled for hemp yet, organic practices had to be implemented. This was one of his biggest challenges he says, "We had some moths that infected it [the crop] and caused worms and they ate the buds. We also had no herbicides to use so it was all hand labor and mechanical cultivation to control the weeds." Regardless of the challenges, Commissioner's CBD crop variety was successful,

and his first harvest is being made into a tincture retail product.

Hemp is a great rotational crop because it cleanses the soil of heavy metals and promotes soil remediation. "It's a plus to have hemp in your field for a few years and then rotate it out," says Commissioner. We asked Commissioner Miller if he had any advice for farmers in Texas who want to grow hemp, here's what he said, "Go to our hemp webpage and watch a few of the instructional videos, one of them is mandatory



TEXAS AGRICULTURE *Matters!*



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

*Produced by the Office of Communications
Editor, Katlyn Gast*

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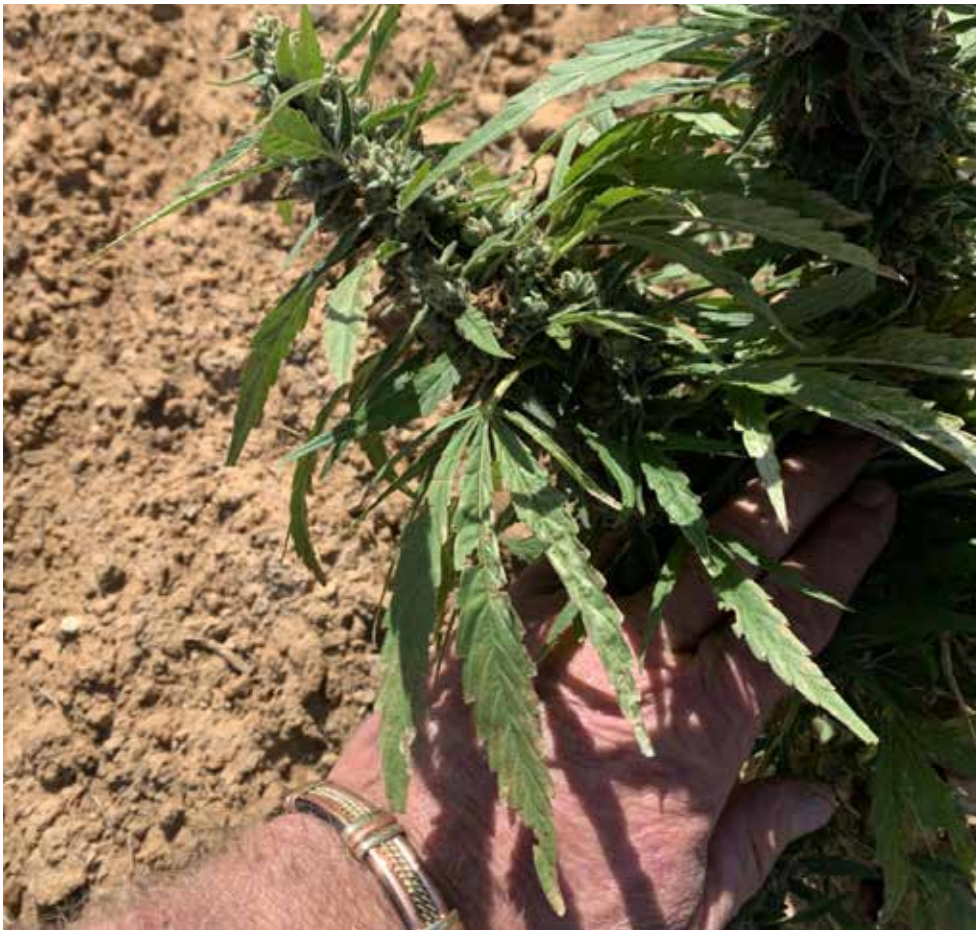
ABOUT COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

Sid Miller is an eighth generation farmer and rancher and the 12th Commissioner of Agriculture for the great State of Texas. Commissioner Miller has devoted his life to the agriculture industry, and supporting Texas producers and the communities they call home. He is a businessman, rancher, community leader, former ag teacher and former school board member. Commissioner Miller is a rodeo cowboy and holds 18 world championship titles. He is an honors graduate of Tarleton State University in Stephenville, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Vocational Agriculture Education.

when applying for a license. We have 13 pages of frequently asked questions on the ins and outs, and negatives and positives of growing hemp.” In addition to learning more about the program, Commissioner Miller suggests starting with a small operation. “...5 acres or less, I started with three.

It’s very labor intensive and can get expensive. That way you can get idea of what you’re doing before you make a big commitment.”

If you’re interested in the Texas Industrial Hemp Program and would like to learn more, visit our website for more information www.texasagriculture.gov 🇺🇸



COVID-19

The Texas Department of Agriculture is committed to providing the same high level of service to our customers during the COVID-19 emergency as they've come to expect. Whether we're helping Texas farmers and ranchers continue to provide a safe and dependable food supply, ensuring Texas school children continue to have access to regular, healthy meals or supporting our vital rural hospitals and clinics, the Texas Department of Agriculture is here for Texans.

Due to the Coronavirus emergency, the Texas Department of Agriculture is working remotely and will continue to do so until directed to return to state offices by agency leadership. As a result, we are asking all constituents, customers, licensees and others to contact TDA by email, as there will be limited staff in the office answering the phones. Additionally, TDA is not accepting external visitors in the office during this time. If you need to make a payment, you may do so online or via USPS.

Please visit our [website](#) for updated information or view our [COVID-19 Resource Guide](#) for additional resources and information.

ABOUT TDA

The Texas Legislature established the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) in 1907. The agency’s key objectives are to promote production agriculture, consumer protection, economic development and healthy living. The agriculture commissioner oversees the agency and is elected every four years. The current commissioner, Sid Miller, was elected in 2014. TDA is a diversified state agency that provides value-added services through our regulatory and marketing and initiatives. TDA is headquartered in Austin and has five regional service offices, two sub-offices, three laboratories and five livestock export facilities.

Mission:

TDA’s mission is to partner with all Texans to make Texas the nation’s leader in agriculture, fortify our economy, empower rural communities, promote healthy lifestyles, and cultivate winning strategies for rural, suburban and urban Texas through exceptional service and the common threads of agriculture in our daily lives.

TEXAS AGRICULTURALIST

John and Molly Pantalone

Amber Oaks Ranch

Thrall, Texas



Every day the average Texas consumer becomes a little more mindful about the food they buy, cook and put into their body. They're asking questions about the use of pesticides, or whether their meat comes from animals that are grass

fed, or pasture raised. And, while buying from your local grocery store generally gives you access to locally-grown meat, Texans are increasingly looking to buy directly from farms and ranches for a fresher product. But apart from the meat available at local farmers markets, those connections with local producers can be hard to find for suburban and urban consumers.

That's where John and Molly Pantalone, the owners of Amber

Oaks Ranch, come in. John and Molly currently run a 70-acre "direct to consumer" ranch just south of Thorndale, where they raise beef cattle, broilers and laying hens, hogs, turkeys and sheep.

John and Molly have made ordering pasture raised meats from Amber Oaks Ranch as easy as possible. You can find them at central Texas farmers markets (Taylor, Elgin and Pflugerville), or you can pre-order meats on their website. You can also sign up for their Amber Oaks Meat Buyers Club, an annual meat box subscription.

High school sweethearts, John and Molly married while attending Texas A&M University, and after raising a family, began pursuing their dream of homesteading and raising their own meats. "We just didn't have access to good quality product where we were living so we decided to raise our own," says John. "The more we got into it and learned the benefits of pasture raised meats to both the consumer and the environment the more our passion grew. So, when we scaled up to Amber Oaks Ranch, we did so with the focus on providing the best quality product to our local community."

According to John, the purpose of Amber Oaks is clear, "... to provide a secure future for ourselves and family, to put into practice the regenerative agricultural practices we've learned, and to provide a wholesome experience to our friends and neighbors".



AMBER OAKS RANCH IS PESTICIDE AND CHEMICAL FREE - WHAT ORGANIC PRACTICES ARE IN USE ON THE RANCH?



"While not CERTIFIED organic, we feed the broilers and layers organic grain. Our layers are free-range, and we move the broilers daily to fresh grass. We also practice rotational grazing, moving the animals daily to fresh grass, with the cattle. This allows for better distribution of the waste, decreases parasite load on the animals, and improves root development and soil biology".



WHAT BREEDS OF LIVESTOCK CAN WE FIND ON THE RANCH RIGHT NOW?



"We have a mix of cattle, selecting

for fertility, docility, and gain on grass. Our bull is an Akaushi (Red Wagyu). We will be getting another batch of pigs soon, preferring to purchase Red-Wattle piglets to farrowing our own. Our Midget White turkey poults will be arriving at the end of March, and will have lambs in April. We raise about 1300 Cornish Cross broilers annually and 100 or so laying hens".



ARE THERE FUTURE PLANS FOR AMBER OAKS RANCH? EXPANSION? PUBLIC TOURS?



"As highlighted above, this year we are adding turkeys and lamb to our year-round inventory. Previously we only offered them seasonally. We've offered tours to select groups in the past and planned an open house last year, but Covid got in the way. We're holding



WHERE CAN PEOPLE FIND YOU TO BUY MEATS?



We sell at the Taylor, Elgin, and Pflugerville farmers market. Folks can go to our website and place a pre-order and can schedule a pickup at the ranch as well.



WHY DOES TEXAS AGRICULTURE MATTER TO YOU?



"We've lived in several places across the globe, but Texas has always been our home. No matter where you travel people recognize Texas - and most notably; our agriculture. We wanted to be a part of that legacy. Personally, Texas is home to the people we love, and our passion is to provide high quality, pasture raised meats to our friends and family." 🇺🇸

Click the arrows to view images of Amber Oaks Ranch.

HOW TO FIND US

For more info about Amber Oaks Ranch visit their Facebook & Instagram @amber_oaks_ranch

AMERICAN HERITAGE GARDENS

FARM PROFILE

This month's featured farm is near the Texas-Arkansas border at American Heritage Gardens in Wake Village.

American Heritage Gardens is a young company that mostly grows heirloom tomatoes and red tomatoes. The company was opened not too long ago by William Weitzel, who is more than 80 years old. Running a farm is something Mr. Weitzel always wanted to do and when he finally started, he only had a half-acre of land.

American Heritage Gardens is now able to grow about 13,000 tomatoes using both old-fashioned and newer farming styles, like using a greenhouse. With a small, hard-working staff, American Heritage Gardens grows delicious tomatoes.

William Weitzel of American Heritage Gardens



+ STATS

Owner: William Weitzel

Founded: 2016

Location: Wake Village, Texas

Specialty: Heirloom tomatoes



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The purpose of this program is to provide financial assistance in the form of dollar-for-dollar matching grant funds to young agricultural producers that are engaged or will be engaged in creating or expanding an agricultural business in Texas.

The Young Farmer Grant Program aims to:

- ★ Grow and support Texas agriculture
- ★ Help meet a financial need that is otherwise not met
- ★ Help grow an operation that also impacts the community

Past YFG recipient Rebecca Hume.
Photo by Scott David Gordon, The Daily Dirt Farm Blog



YOUNG FARMER GRANT *Recipient*

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Leopoldo Yzaguirre *2019 Recipient*

Leopoldo (Leo) Yzaguirre is a Texas cattle rancher and 2019 recipient of the Young Farmer Grant. When Leo heard about the Young Farmer Grant opportunity TDA provides to young producers, he started his application process right away. He needed it “in order to diversify my operation and also

accelerate the time typically necessary for such growth,” said Leo. He hoped with the Young Farmer Grant he could diversify his fourth-generation cattle herd and incorporate hunting on his ranch.

Although he didn’t secure a grant in his first attempt, he didn’t give up hope. After his second application, Leo was able to secure funds to grow his cattle operation but more importantly, invested in superior whitetail breeding genetics. This allowed his operation to sell guided hunts sooner and was even able to hire an employee to help. Leo says his operation helps his local community, too, “Our local restaurants and retailers also benefitted indirectly as my clients came in a day earlier and stayed in local hotels, ate at the local food places and purchased necessary snacks. It was a win-win for all involved!”

We asked Leo if he had any advice for young farmers and this is what he said, “The learning process never stops! TDA, TAES, and USDA work extremely well

together to provide not only necessary grants and loans, but a wealth of knowledge in their local and regional programs that they host throughout the year, as well as their regularly updated websites. I strongly advise every young producer to become very acquainted with your local, regional, and state representatives, you’ll be glad you did! 🇹🇽



For more information on the grant and how to apply please visit our website, www.texasagriculture.gov

Spring Farm Fresh Challenge Supports

TEXAS AGRICULTURE WITH HEALTHY MEALS AND EDUCATION



The Texas Department of Agriculture will join schools, child care providers, and adult care centers across Texas to celebrate Texas agriculture from April 12 through May 14 with the Spring 2021 Farm Fresh Challenge. The Farm Fresh Challenge was created by Commissioner Sid Miller and the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to encourage the use of fresh, locally-grown foods across Texas.

More than 110 partners in the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) have taken the Spring Farm Fresh Challenge and will introduce thousands of participating Texans to local foods and agriculture. They have pledged to Eat Local, Teach Local and Be Social. These partners will serve Texas products, provide agricultural education, and share their stories on social media. Fulfilling the goals of the Challenge will earn

recognition from TDA, as well as their local communities, for supporting Texas agriculture and providing good nutrition.

Top tier participants earn a “Best of the Bunch” designation by serving three or more Texas Foods representing three unique meal components each week in April. “Prime Participants” serve three or more Texas Foods, representing three unique meal components, anytime during the month. Partners can choose the level of participation that best matches their program.

TDA provides a variety of resources partners can use to successfully complete the challenge. A cookbook, compiled by TDA, features recipes that help partners add seasonal Texas foods to liven up their menus.

Additional educational materials available from TDA can be incorporated into classroom or garden

activities. For example, a Gardening Scavenger Hunt kit just for CACFP makes learning about local food fun for the youngest Texans. TDA also provides partners with the opportunity to order stickers, buttons, and static clings. Other digital media to help spread the word is available for download.

Continuing the Farm Fresh Challenge, even as everyone copes with daunting challenges, recognizes the need to keep working toward a healthy future for the Lone Star State. TDA recognizes that winter storms in Texas may affect the availability of some crops and encourages partners to use these current events in their lessons about the hard work and dedication required to bring food to the table. Learning about healthy lifestyles and Texas agriculture reminds everyone what it means to be a proud Texan and why Texas agriculture matters. 🇺🇸



HARVEST OF THE MONTH
APRIL



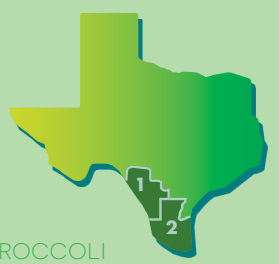
Broccoli belongs to the Cruciferae family, which also includes cauliflower, cabbage, bok choy and Brussels sprouts. Broccoli prefers cool weather. It is often boiled, roasted or steamed, but can also be eaten raw. A head of broccoli is made up of tiny flower buds. If you don't pick it early enough, the head turns into a bunch of yellow flowers. Broccoli is filled with a lot of healthy vitamins and minerals which provide strength to the body and help fight diseases.

DID YOU KNOW?

Broccoli is an excellent source of vitamins C and K, and it is a good source of vitamin A and potassium.

FUN FACT

Broccoli has been around for more than 2,000 years and has been grown in the United States for more than 200 years!



BROCCOLI GROWING REGIONS

- 1. Winter Garden
- 2. Rio Grande Valley



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that matters

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WHERE

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Shop the new GO TEXAN online retail store today and find your favorite GO TEXAN partner products. You'll find a variety of items, including wind chimes, soaps, decadent chocolates, pecans and many more Texified products sure to please anyone!

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- ★ [Tejas Chocolate LLC](#)
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- ★ [Cortland Allen Station](#)
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- ★ [Auntie's Foods LLC](#)
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- ★ [RobertBrews](#)
- ★ [Barton Creek Farmers Market](#)
- ★ [Braeswood Farmers Market](#)
- ★ [Trashless](#)

TO VIEW PICTURES OF THE ONLINE MARKET, CLICK THE LEFT AND RIGHT ARROWS

Did You Know?

TDA supports

organizations across the state, serving more than 12.5 million meals a year to elderly and disabled Texans.

TDA certifies milk as organic when it is produced from cows that were not fed or administered antibiotics or growth hormones.

TDA is the lead state agency tasked with regulating the distribution and use of pesticides, as well as monitoring compliance and investigating complaints of pesticide misuse.

TDA conducts field tests to ensure seeds grow as promised on the package. Tests are conducted in fields near the W.H. Pieratt Seed Lab in Giddings.



Texas Ag Stats:

★ Texas leads the nation in number of farms and ranches, with 248,416 farms and ranches covering 127 million acres.

★ For 36% of producers in Texas, farming is their primary occupation.

★ Of 127 million acres in farmland, 7% (176,837 acres) is dedicated to orchards.

★ Texas producers with military service accounted for 50,004 farms and 52,357 producers with an average age of 68.

★ 1 of every 7 working Texans (14%) is in an agriculture-related job.

Recipe of the Month

Lemon Bonbons

Megan Myers | Texas Co-Op Power Magazine

Ingredients:

COOKIES:

1 1/4 cups flour
3/4 cup cornstarch
1/3 cup powdered sugar
1 cup (2 sticks) butter
1 teaspoon almond extract

FROSTING:

1 tablespoon butter, softened
2 cups powdered sugar, divided use
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1-2 teaspoons heavy cream

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

2. **Cookies:** In a large bowl, mix together flour, cornstarch and powdered sugar. Cut in butter using a pastry blender or two butter knives, much like mixing a pie crust. Once mixture resembles coarse sand, sprinkle in almond extract, then continue mixing until dough forms large clumps.

3. Scoop dough into small balls and place on cookie sheets. Bake 10-12 minutes, until edges just begin to brown. Let cookies cool on cookie sheets for 5 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. **Frosting:** Mix softened butter with 1/4 cup powdered sugar, then blend in lemon juice.

Add remaining sugar a little bit at a time, then blend in cream. For a thinner glaze, add more cream until frosting reaches desired consistency. Frost cooled cookies, then let frosting set before serving.



Your Thoughts...

on the battle to eradicate feral hogs ...

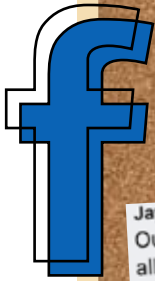


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The battle to eradicate feral hogs

The most popular way to eradicate wild hogs is to shoot them, w...

Tweet



Kendra Luedecke DuBois

I wish the poison had been approved. They are horrible.

Jayme Rudolph

Our neighbor trapped 50, and stopped counting. We allow our friends to come and hunt them.

Matt Scruggs

Would love to help eradicate them, but unfortunately I'm not paying hundreds of dollars to kill an animal that is doing so much damage. If its that big of an issue, you would think people would be happy to have them dead without trying to make money from it.



APRIL 2021

Tell Us... *what are you planting in your spring and summer gardens?*



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