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February 5, 2021

Texas Agriculture

Published by Texas Farm Bureau for commercial farmers and ranchers

**Biden administration ushers
in new policy priorities**

Pages 8-9



Proud of TFB program accomplishments, Pinnacle Award

Success at Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) is measured in a number of ways. We have several internal processes to help us evaluate whether we've accomplished our program goals in a given year.

One example is the annual TFB Program of Work that is approved by the TFB board of directors. The Program of Work is reviewed and updated regularly to keep track of our progress.

There are also external evaluations that help us measure success.

One of the best external evaluations is the State Awards of Excellence from the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

Each year, TFB submits applications to AFBF to gauge whether we're hitting the mark in program categories such as membership value, advocacy, leadership and business development, and engagement and outreach. It's an important tool to help us better serve you as a member.

I'm proud to report we hit our mark in 2020 in all State Awards of Excellence categories!

In fact, TFB received the Pinnacle Award from AFBF. The award is the highest honor a state can receive from AFBF for membership and

program achievement. AFBF announced the award on Jan. 11 during its virtual convention.

It is the second year in a row for AFBF to recognize TFB with the Pinnacle Award. The successive awards are unprecedented for our organization.



By Russell Boening
President

State Farm Bureaus compete annually for the Pinnacle Award against other state Farm Bureaus of the same-sized membership. Of the five membership categories, Texas is in the group with the largest state memberships in the nation.

To earn this award, TFB first had to receive Awards of Excellence in the four program areas.

I think TFB stood out in 2020 because of its work on education and leadership development, as well as our continued advocacy efforts to represent farmers, ranchers and rural communities in Austin and Washington, D.C. Our membership provides value and impact, which is why our organization has continued to grow for 20 consecutive years. These efforts were highlighted in our State Awards of Excellence applications to AFBF.

It's gratifying to have a panel of

outside judges recognize our program and membership achievements. Many of these achievements were the result of adjustments and new approaches that we developed because of COVID-19 safety protocols and challenges. We pursued our mission, and we worked to connect with members and consumers

through virtual events.

I'm proud of TFB's accomplishments and the Pinnacle Award it received. And we're proud you're a member of TFB.

We can't rest on past success, though. Our commitment to membership and program excellence is stronger than ever in 2021.

Your Texas Agriculture Minute

Fewer Texas, U.S. cotton acres estimated

By Gary Joiner
Publisher

How much cotton will be planted? Several surveys and reports do their best to project planting intentions.

Cotton Grower magazine recently released the findings of its annual survey. The survey was conducted in November and early December. Survey responses came from farmers, ginners, consultants and affiliated industry sources.

The survey indicates U.S. cotton farmers will plant fewer acres of cotton this year compared to last year.

The same is expected in Texas. The survey estimated 6.5 million acres of cotton will be planted in our state. That's about a two-percent

decrease from 2020's final planting numbers.

Drought in areas of the state will be a big influence on planting decisions by farmers.

The survey pegged the national figure at 11.61 million acres of cotton planned for this year. That figure is 574,000 acres less than the U.S. Department of Agriculture's acreage report in June.

Cotton prices are a concern. Decreased demand for cotton worldwide is partially due to the ongoing pandemic. Other factors impacting demand include reduced mill capacity, high carryover cotton stocks domestically and internationally and continued competition with India and Brazil.



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Winter storm brings snow to Lone Star State in January



Many areas of Texas received varying amounts of snow in mid-January. Some Texans saw up to nine inches of snow, according to news reports. The moisture was much-needed across the state, where drought conditions have continued to linger into 2021.

Mexico bans GMO corn, plans to phase out imports by 2024

Texas' biggest trading partner, Mexico, is set to phase out genetically modified corn for human consumption by the beginning of 2024.

That's according to a draft decree released Dec. 9 by Mexico's National Commission for Regulatory Improvement.

Under the proposal, the Mexican government would revoke existing and future permits for the cultivation of genetically modified corn and the use of GMO corn in human consumption phased out no later than Jan. 31, 2024.

This would also mandate the phase-out of GMO corn imports into the country by 2024, a move that has both domestic and foreign stakeholders concerned.

"The lack of access to production options puts us at a disadvantage compared to our competitors, such as corn farmers in the United States," Laura Tamayo, a spokeswoman for Mexico's National Farm Council, told *Reuters*. "On the other hand, the import of genetically modified grain from the U.S. is essential for many products in the agri-food chain."

Currently, there is no GMO corn



grown in Mexico.

For the 2018/2019 crop marketing year, Mexico was the largest importer of U.S.-grown corn, according to the U.S. Grains Council.

A report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Ag Service (FAS) shows the U.S. exported \$2.7 billion worth of corn to Mexico in 2019, mostly for livestock feed.

Texas corn farmers exported \$226 million in corn in 2017, the latest year for which data was available, according to USDA's Economic Research Service.

A report published by the Center for North American Studies at Texas A&M University the same year

showed corn was the fourth-largest agricultural export to Mexico from Texas, valued at \$62.4 million.

While Mexico grows most of its own white corn for tortillas, FAS noted imported corn from the U.S. is used in the food processing sector to make cereals, starches and other processed products. It is not clear if the proposed decree would phase out imported GMO corn for livestock use or only corn for human consumption.

In addition to GMO corn cultivation, the decree proposes to phase out the use of glyphosate by 2024, adding glyphosate will not be used in any government-sponsored program during the transition period.

AgriLife to host virtual auxin-specific certification trainings

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is offering producers several opportunities to complete their Auxin-Specific Certification Training for the 2021 growing season.

Trainings will take place on the second Friday of the month—Feb. 12, March 12, April 9 and May 14.

All trainings will start at 9 a.m. and last one hour.

This is an annual training and certifies attendees to use approved auxin formulations for the 2021 growing season, said Peter Dotray, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Research weed scientist in Lubbock.

One Texas Department of Agriculture continuing education unit will be provided in the laws and regulations category.

To participate in one of these trainings, everyone must register in advance. Instructions to access the online training will be emailed one hour before the training begins.

AgriLife Extension will post more information on an online module training on the AgriLife Online Courses website at agrilifelearn.tamu.edu.

Dicamba products continue to be restricted-use pesticides, in addition to being state limited-use, and also require auxin-specific applicator training annually prior to use by certified applicators only.

All of these trainings will satisfy both the Environmental Protection Agency requirement for mandatory dicamba training, as well as the Texas Department of Agriculture requirement for approved dicamba and 2,4-D formulations.

For more information, call 806-834-3685.

Paycheck Protection Program applications open through March

The latest COVID-19 relief package announced late last year included updates to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

The improvements to the program benefit farmers and ranchers.

The program provides forgivable loans to small businesses, including agriculture, to keep employees on the payroll.

The legislation provides \$284 billion in funding for a second round of PPP loans and several improvements for which Farm Bureau advocated.

Among them is a clarification that allowable expenses that had been paid for with forgiven PPP loans may be taken as a business deduction for income tax purposes without limitation. This is an important distinction for farmers, because the Treasury Department's 2020 regulations denied PPP participants the ability to deduct these expenses, going against the intent of Congress.

The bill also cut in half the qualifying reduction in gross revenue—dropping it from 50 percent to 25 percent—between comparable quarters in 2019 and 2020. This much-needed change for farmers and ranchers who suffered multiple years of losses expands the number of farm and ranch families who can qualify to participate.

The bill's switch to gross income from net farm income for the loan requirement calculation for farmers and ranchers who file as sole proprietors will allow many more producers to participate. The previous net-farm-income-based method for establishing loans left many self-employed farmers ineligible because they had reported losses.

Also, farmers and ranchers applying for loan forgiveness through the program for loans under \$150,000 will have a new streamlined process.

The loan application deadline for the second round of PPP loans is March 31 or until funds are exhausted.



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RFID ear tags now available through TAHC

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) announced the agency has a limited supply of no-cost radio frequency identification (RFID) ear tags available for accredited veterinarians and ranchers for use in replacement breeding cattle.

The tags are available thanks to a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service program.

Currently, cattle are identified with either a silver metal Brite tag bearing an identification number or an orange metal Official Calfhood Vaccination (OCV) tag indicating the animal has been vaccinated against brucellosis.

The next-generation RFID tags will not only indicate vaccination status but allow ranchers and others in the cattle industry to scan and identify individual animals quickly and easily.

“The TAHC is pleased to have received these RFID tags through the

USDA’s no-cost program,” said Andy Schwartz, DVM, TAHC executive director and state veterinarian. “We believe this program will help offset the costs of switching to this type of tag, while also helping our state respond to potential disease events more quickly and efficiently.”

There is a limited supply of RFID tags available to veterinarians and ranchers.

Two types of tags are available to order: white “840” button tags and orange “840” OCV button tags. Both RFID tags are low-frequency tags.

Veterinarians may receive both white and orange tags, but ranchers may only order white tags.

“The big change these tags present is the ability to be read with an electronic reader. So, the RFID system will not only be easier because it’s a quick scan versus trying to read the tag manually, but the information is also brought up instantly and always available,” Tracy Tomascik, Texas Farm Bureau associate di-

rector of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said. “These tags are for use on replacement breeding cattle. The tags already on older cows don’t need to be switched out, and ranchers who don’t ship cattle out of state don’t need these tags. However, if you do ship cattle out of state, you will need the tags because they are now required by USDA.”

Existing metal tag stock can be used until 2023.

Eligible veterinarians and ranchers are encouraged to order the new RFID tags from TAHC while they’re available.

Texas accredited veterinarians and ranchers interested in ordering RFID tags at no cost may submit their request to the TAHC Animal Disease Traceability (ADT) Department.

Tags are ordered in bags of 100 and will be made available for pick up at TAHC region offices. RFID tag inventory may include more than one brand of tag. A specific brand cannot be requested.



Currently, ultra-high frequency tags are not available through this program.

To place your order, contact the TAHC ADT Department at 512-719-0733 or animal_id@tahc.texas.gov.

There is no indication additional tags will be provided once the Texas tag allotment is depleted. TAHC has the most current information on availability and distribution of tags at tahc.texas.gov/adtd.

Ranchers can also purchase RFID tags by contacting any of the companies approved to manufacture official identification RFID tags.

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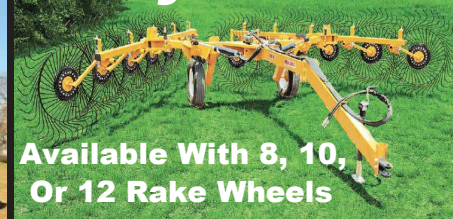
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Farming under the Biden administration, new 117th Congress

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

It's a new year, a new Congress and a new administration. Each of those brings challenges and opportunities for Texas farmers and ranchers.

"We're still facing the uncertainty and unprecedented challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic," Regan Beck, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Government Affairs director, said. "But the coronavirus is just the latest in a line of issues like trade disputes and weather that have plagued farmers and ranchers."

And what changes will the Biden administration bring for agriculture?

That will depend, in part, on who is nominated or appointed to fill key roles in the various federal agencies, the U.S. Trade Representative and U.S. House and Senate Agriculture Committees.

"The need to work in a bipartisan fashion is always important, but even more so now," Beck said. "We are ready to work with Democrats and Republicans in both chambers and the new administration to ensure legislation doesn't have unintended negative consequences for agriculture."

For Farm Bureau, the priorities include expanding trade and market access to compete in a fair global marketplace.

"Trade is vital to agriculture," Beck said. "We appreciated the effort by the previous administration to try to correct some of the unfairness in trade with China. But at the same time, it's been difficult for farmers, because trade accounts for a large percentage of the profit margin."

Under the Trump administration, several global trade agreements were renegotiated, which led to improved trade access for agriculture.

"Keeping our farmers and ranchers in business is a national security issue so that we produce our food here in the U.S., and someone else doesn't control our food supply," he said. "Working with the new administration on the importance of agri-

culture and why we need to make sure it remains viable is a priority."

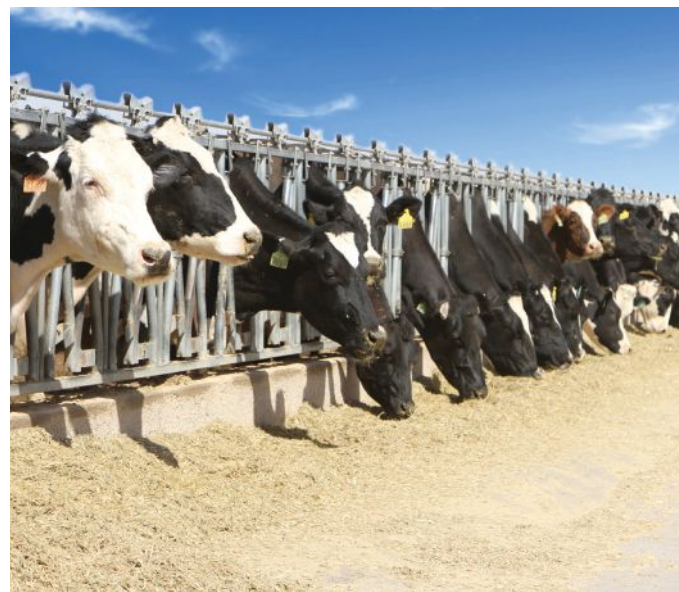
More emphasis on climate policy is expected.

Biden's executive order on Jan. 27 calls for the establishment of a new Climate Conservation Corps Initiative to put a new generation of Americans to work conserving and restoring public lands and waters, increasing reforestation, increasing carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protecting biodiversity, improving access to recreation and addressing the changing climate.

"One thing we will be looking at is trying to make sure those climate policies are not detrimental to agriculture and also creating them so they can be beneficial to farmers and ranchers," Beck said. "So instead of just getting more regulations in terms of climate policies, farmers and ranchers can receive incentives for climate-smart practices."

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) is a member and co-chair of the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance that was formed in February 2020. The alliance represents farmers, ranchers, forest owners, the food sector, state governments and environmental advocates.

The group developed more than 40 recommendations that cover six key areas: soil health, livestock and dairy, forests and wood products, energy, research and food loss and waste.



Those recommendations include providing voluntary, incentive-based tools and additional technical assistance to sequester carbon, as well as increasing federal investments in agriculture, forestry and food-related research.

"We need to have a seat at the table in climate discussions, so we can share how agriculture is part of the solution and not the problem," Beck said. "With AFBF involved in these ongoing discussions and the additional leverage from the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance, American agriculture will have strong representation."

Farmers and ranchers have reduced per-unit greenhouse gas emissions and continue to care for natural resources while growing crops and raising livestock.

"Our focus will be on building on

the great strides we've already made in climate-smart farming," Beck said. "Those efforts will require collaboration with Biden's team and the new Congress to expand research opportunities and navigate the changing landscape."

But agriculture faces a labor crisis.

Farmers and ranchers need a reliable, legal workforce, and updated legislation that addresses both farmer and worker concerns would provide certainty and job security in rural Texas. Certain sectors of Texas agriculture, like dairies, need year-round laborers. The current H-2A program doesn't have any provisions for year-round jobs.

"Texas agriculture needs an updated agricultural labor program," Beck said. "The current H-2A program is flawed, and it has a lot of bureaucratic red tape."



Rural connectivity has expanded some in recent years, but much of rural Texas and rural America still face a lack of broadband access and cell service. Data from the Federal Communications Commission show that 26.4 percent of rural Americans lack access to broadband, compared to only 1 percent of urban Americans.

“To put it simply, it’s time to bring rural Texas up to speed and complete the grid. Rural communities, farms and families are at a disadvantage without broadband access,” Beck said. “Farmers and ranchers embrace technology that allows their businesses to be more efficient, economical and environmentally-friendly. Access to broadband is key to the technology benefit.”

Several regulatory burdens were lifted during the Trump administration, including the Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule.

In 2020, the Trump administration announced the new Navigable Waters Protection Rule under the Clean Water Act. The rule was

championed by agriculture for the balance it offered between federal, state and local authority of water management.

“Texas farmers and ranchers are committed to clean water,” Beck said. “Repealing and replacing the flawed 2015 WOTUS rule was a big win for agriculture, and we will

monitor this issue, as well as others, to prevent any rollbacks to overreaching regulations.”

Although challenges may be ahead, farmers, ranchers and Farm Bureau face the future with optimism.

“President Biden’s term marks another new chapter in our his-

tory,” Beck said. “We must continue to build on the advancements we’ve made toward regulatory reform and focus on future opportunities. Farm Bureau stands ready to work with our elected leaders to ensure Texas farmers and ranchers can continue to provide a viable long-term, domestic source of food, fiber and fuel.”

Biden names key agency staff appointments

President Biden continues to nominate and appoint individuals to key staff positions within federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Among those appointments is Tom Vilsack. He was the former U.S. secretary of agriculture under the Obama administration for eight years and has been tapped for the position again. For the past four years, Vilsack has served as president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

Biden picked U.S. House Ways and Means Committee trade law-

yer Katherine Tai as the next U.S. trade representative. This position is tasked with enforcing U.S. import rules, as well as negotiating trade terms with other countries.

Other USDA appointments made at press time include Stacy Dean as the deputy undersecretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. Prior to joining USDA, Dean served as vice president for Food Assistance Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, D.C.

Justin Maxson was named deputy undersecretary for Rural

Development. Maxson served as the CEO of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, an organization that works toward poverty alleviation and economic justice in southern states.

The deputy undersecretary of Marketing and Regulatory Programs will be Mae Wu. Prior to joining USDA, Wu served as a senior director at the Natural Resource Defense Council, helping to lead the organization’s health and food work.

Biden’s appointments and nominations must still be confirmed.



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TFB, county Farm Bureaus provide direct support to communities

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

The impacts of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic are felt in local communities across the Lone Star State. As food banks and other food-relief entities struggle to keep up with the increased demand and restaurants struggled with closures or reduced dining capacity, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) and county Farm Bureaus provided assistance through food and monetary donations.

“As the effects of COVID-19 linger across our state and nation, charitable organizations are being stretched to the limit. The need for assistance has never been greater, nor has our opportunity to make an impact,” TFB President Russell Boening said.

And the impact was substantial. County Farm Bureaus donated \$379,241 directly to food-relief and community organizations in 2020. TFB matched \$174,557 of the amount, increasing the impact of the county donations.

TFB also donated \$25,000 to Meals on Wheels Waco, working in cooperation with area restaurants, bringing the total Farm Bureau contribution in 2020 to \$578,799.

Those donations were made



Polk CFB used the Farm Bureau Feeding Texas programs to provide funds to Center of Hope, an emergency food and supplies provider that partners with the county during natural disasters.



Bell CFB made a donation to Feed My Sheep Temple, a ministry that provides meals to those in need.



To help local residents in the community, Victoria CFB made a donation to Meals on Wheels.

through two co-op contribution programs—Farm Bureau Feeding Texas and Farm Bureau Feeding the Need.

“These programs put the decision of how best to make an impact in the hands of county Farm Bureaus to maximize the co-op contribution


from the state organization,” Boening said. “And our county organizations and local leaders stepped up, helping to provide assistance in a time of great demand and lack of funds for many food-relief entities.”

Several county Farm Bureaus


made donations to Meals on Wheels through cooperation with local restaurants, while others donated to food pantries and the Salvation Army, among other community and charitable groups.

“These programs were a joint effort between the state organization and county Farm Bureaus. The goal was to help those who are in need of food, as well as those organizations that provide the food,” Boening said. “And they really did help, especially during the holiday season when families were feeling the extreme impacts of the pandemic.”

Donations came in all shapes, sizes and amounts, including donating beef raised by a local ranch.




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County leaders also contributed their time and coordinated logistics for donations.

“We’ve seen Farm Bureau leaders step up many times during a disaster or crisis but especially during the COVID-19 pandemic,” Boening said. “Farm Bureau has been there for farmers and ranchers during this challenging time, and we’ve given back to our local communities. The kindness and compassion shown by our Farm Bureau family is just what we do. We help each other.”

Across the nation, other state Farm Bureaus and county Farm Bureaus also contributed to local communities, donating more than \$5.4 million and 1.4 million pounds of food to local food banks, food pantries and pandemic relief programs.

And during all of this, TFB accomplished many efforts to help ensure farmers and ranchers had the support and resources needed to continue operating.

This included working with Congressional leaders on securing more than \$36 billion through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program and other aid, as well as ensuring agriculture was able to participate in the Small Business Administration’s Paycheck Protection Program. TFB also advocated for action to assist meat processing plants in safely operating to avoid a further crisis for livestock producers and to protect the meat supply for U.S. consumers.

“Farm Bureau’s commitment to agriculture and our communities has never wavered during this ongoing pandemic,” Boening said. “Our mission is to be the Voice of Texas Agriculture and to benefit all Texans through the promotion of a prosperous agriculture. We will continue to work on behalf of all our members.”

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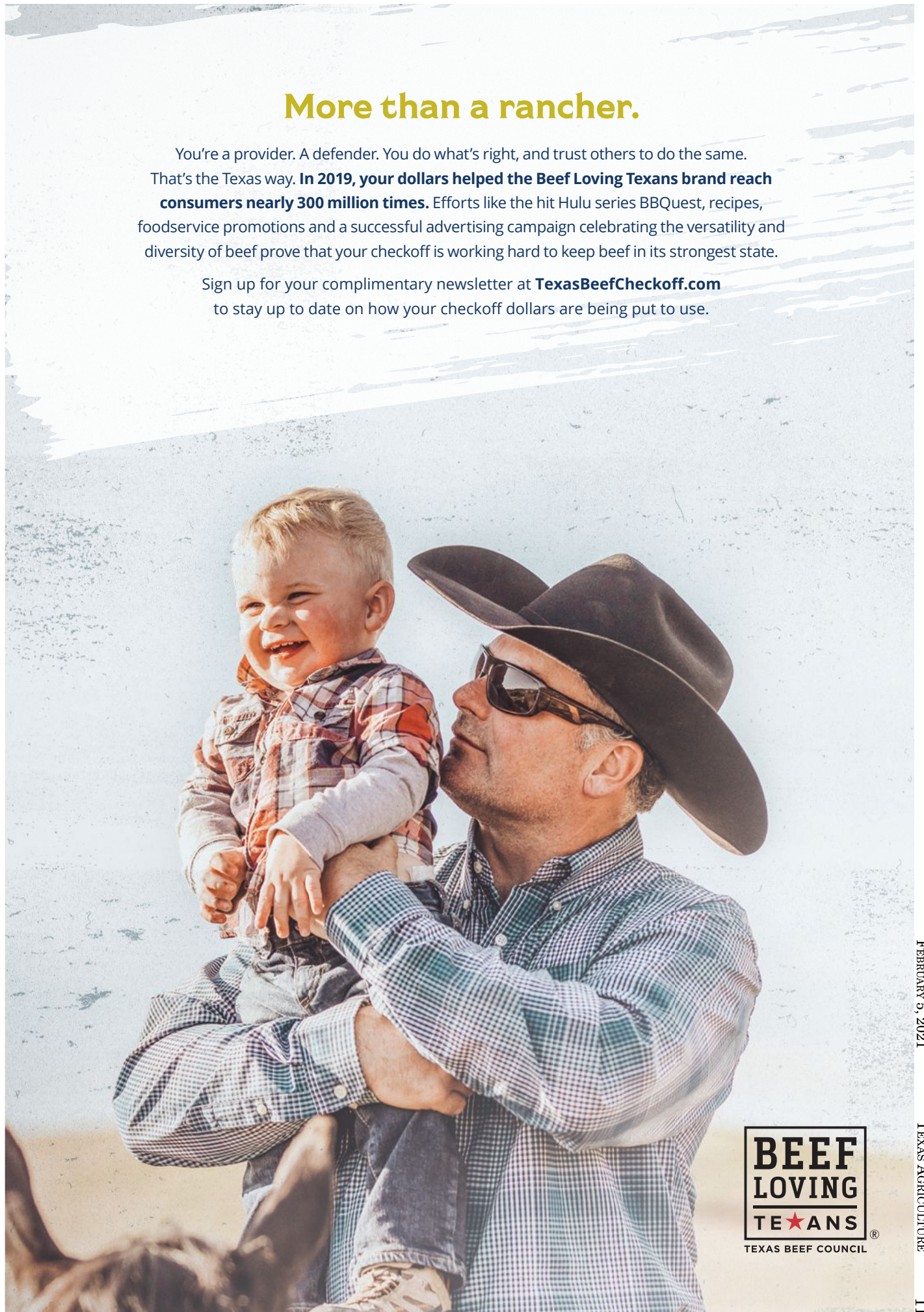
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New crop insurance options for farmers in 2021

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has new crop insurance coverage options this year designed to accommodate the wide variety of crops and cultivation practices across the United States.

Beginning with the 2020 crop year, farmers that double-crop some of their soybeans—but not the entire soybean crop—can purchase separate policies, depending on how those crops are cultivated. Wheat farmers now have similar options, as well.

In Texas, one of the changes with the most potential impact is the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO). For the first time, many farmers will be able to buy an endorsement covering a portion of their deductible.

The new option must be purchased as an endorsement to Yield Protection, Revenue Protection, Revenue Protection with Harvest Price Exclusion, Actual Production His-



tory or Yield-Based Dollar Amount of Insurance policies.

ECO offers farmers a choice of 90- or 95-percent trigger levels, meaning the percentage of expected yield or revenue at which a loss becomes payable.

Although ECO premiums may be more expensive, it's a cost that some farmers will find worthwhile.

"ECO provides coverage on a portion of your deductible where losses are more frequent, so your premium

will reflect that higher risk," according to USDA's Risk Management Agency's (RMA) online factsheet.

Thirty-one crops, including cotton, wheat, corn, peanuts and grain sorghum, will be available under ECO starting with the 2021 crop year. Additional crops will be added in the future based on producer interest and data availability, according to RMA.

Also new this year are enhancements to Livestock Risk Protection (LRP) insurance.

Improvements to LRP include increasing livestock head limits for feeder and fed cattle to 6,000 head per endorsement and 12,000 head annually. The old limits were 2,000 head per endorsement and 4,000 head per year.

For swine, the new limits are 40,000 head per endorsement and 150,000 head annually. The old limits were 10,000 hogs per endorsement and 32,000 per year. The endorsement length for swine also is

being extended to 52 weeks.

RMA modified the requirement to own insured livestock until the last 60 days of the endorsement and is creating new feeder cattle and swine classifications to allow for unborn livestock to be insured.

"We've seen a lot of fluctuation in the livestock sector from the pandemic and various repercussions throughout the industry from situations with meatpacking plants," Brant Wilbourn, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said. "We are pleased to see RMA making these improvements to their products, so farmers and ranchers can better manage their risks."

These moves follow the agency's announcement late last year that hemp would be eligible for Multi-Peril Crop Insurance.

Wilbourn said the new products and increased flexibilities are a sign the agency is closely listening to farmers' and ranchers' concerns and addressing them when developing the next year's program.

"We're encouraged to see insurance available for farmers who grow such a new crop like hemp," he said. "Texas farmers need more crop options, and it's beneficial to have a safety net, especially when growing a new crop, in case something happens to the crop that year. RMA has made big strides in addressing farmers' and ranchers' needs in crop and livestock insurance products."

USDA is also considering changes for the Pasture, Rangeland, Forage (Rainfall) Insurance program in 2022.

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Dairy book named Farm Bureau's 'Book of the Year'

The American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture presented its 14th Book of the Year Award to Viola Butler for *Tales of the Dairy Godmother: Chuck's Ice Cream Wish*.

In this "dairy tale," a young boy named Chuck wishes for all the ice cream he can eat, prompting his "Dairy Godmother" to show up to grant his wish with a dairy farm. On the farm, he gets a firsthand look at the hard work and care that goes into producing his favorite treat.

Just like young Chuck, readers can learn more about the real work of a dairy farm.

Chuck's Ice Cream Wish is Butler's first published book. She works in education and lives in the suburbs with her family.

"I'm so grateful for this award. I hope the story can help young readers understand the hard work that goes into making our meals possible," Butler said.

Ward Jenkins, an illustrator and storyboard artist from the Atlanta, Georgia, area, illustrated the book. His illustrated picture books include *Chicks Run Wild* and *Rock Shoes*. He also has served as storyboard artist for several animated TV series such as *My Little Pony* and *Bing*.

The Book of the Year Award springs from the foundation's effort to identify accurate ag books, a collection of nearly 500 books for children, teenagers and adults that accurately cover agricultural topics. Book of the Year selections are educational, help to create positive public perceptions about agriculture, inspire readers to learn more and touch their readers' lives, as well as tell the farmer's story.

The Accurate Ag Books database is available at www.agfoundation.org/recommended-pubs.

To accompany *Chuck's Ice Cream Wish*, the foundation has created an educator's guide, which is available at www.agfoundation.org.



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Schwertners to serve on AFBF YF&R Committee

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) recently made eight appointments, including Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) members Eric and Alisha Schwertner of Runnels County, to the organization's Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R) Committee.

"Continuing to engage with consumers to build trust and share the story of agriculture is an important part of national program committee work, especially now as farmers and ranchers are still farming during the pandemic," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. "We applaud the commitment of these newly appointed Farm Bureau members."

The YF&R Committee is comprised of 16 positions representing all regions of the U.S.

An individual or couple may hold each committee appointment. Committee members are responsible for program planning, including the coordination of YF&R competitive events during AFBF's convention each January, and the Harvest for All program.

Duvall announced the appointment of the following members to the YF&R Committee for the 2021-



2023 term, which begins in March: Jarad Plair, Florida; Kyle and Jessica Wade, Idaho; Drew DeSutter, Illinois; Justin and Allison McKain, Indiana; Brenda Sisung, Michigan; Tanner and Kerre Clark, Missouri; Charlie and Casey Ellington, Ohio; and the Schwertners.

Eric and Alisha Schwertner farm and ranch in Runnels County, located between San Angelo and Abilene. They grow irrigated and dryland cotton, silage corn, grain sorghum and wheat. They grow hay for their cow-calf herd, and Eric owns and operates a custom cotton harvesting business. The couple has twin boys, Lane and Caleb.

An Indiana native, Alisha grew up riding tractors at both of her grandparents' farms and watching her dad work in agriculture. She majored in agricultural economics and agronomy at Purdue University and took a job after graduation with Agrian, a farm software and technology company.

Eric grew up in Runnels County and continues the family farm legacy. After graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering from Texas Tech University, Eric worked for a fertilizer manufacturer for a few years before coming back to the family farm.

When the opportunity arose for

them to move back to Runnels County, the young couple jumped at the chance. They first became interested in TFB's YF&R programs after attending a fall tour in Amarillo about five years ago.

"I became involved in the county Farm Bureau board, and after that first fall tour, we hit it off with a lot of people we met on that trip and had a lot of fun," Alisha said. "We decided this was something we wanted to continue to be involved with, so we kept going to events over the years and that led us to being on the state YF&R committee."

The Schwertners currently serve as ex-officio members of TFB's YF&R Advisory Committee. The couple was also the 2020 District 7 Outstanding YF&R contest winner.

Serving on the AFBF committee is an honor and another example the Schwertners want to set for their children regarding the importance of agriculture.

"We have two little boys we're very proud of, and we're excited to raise on the farm," Eric said. "That's part of why we do what we do, is because in them, we see the future of agriculture, and we want to continue that."

National committee members are nominated by their respective state Farm Bureaus.

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CFAP now includes support for contract poultry, livestock producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to provide relief to more farmers and ranchers.

The updated program includes expanded eligibility for certain commodities and farmers established in the recently passed relief package. The expansion includes contract growers of broilers and hogs.

“The biggest one is going to be contract broiler producers, as well as contract hog producers,” American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Economist Michael Nepveux said. “These folks were left out of the original, because there was a provision that required ownership of the commodity. Because of the nature of raising an animal under contract for somebody else, they happened to be left out of that. They also specified things like turf grass sod, as well as included some additional top-up payments for swine producers.”

Farmers have until Feb. 26 to submit new applications or modify existing applications if they have participated in the program already.

Updated Payment Calculations for CFAP 2 and CFAP 1

Along with the additional assistance, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) adjusted the payment calculation to use the 2019 calendar year sales and 2019 crop insurance in-

demnities, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity-Plus payments, multiplied by the applicable payment rate for sales commodities.

In the CFAP 2 program, the sales commodities included specialty crops, aquaculture, tobacco, specialty livestock, nursery crops and floriculture.

FSA also adjusted the CFAP 2 payment calculation for certain row crops, addressing an issue that existed for farmers who had crop insurance coverage but did not have a 2020 Actual Production History (APH)-approved yield. Now, when APH is not available, FSA will use 100 percent of the 2019 Agriculture Risk Coverage-County benchmark yield to calculate payments instead of the 85 percent the earlier CFAP 2 calculations required. This change only covers farmers with crop insurance coverage who grow barley, corn, sorghum, soybeans, sunflowers, upland cotton and wheat.

Swine producers who participated in CFAP 1 will be receiving an automatic “top-up” payment of \$17 per head, increasing the total CFAP 1 inventory payment to \$34 per head. Payment rates for swine are increasing from 25 percent to 50 percent of the estimated total economic loss. This top-up payment aims to rectify large differences between first quarter sales loss rates

Newly-eligible farmers who need to submit a CFAP 2 application or farmers who need to modify an existing one can do so until Feb. 26, 2021.

and inventory payment rates for CFAP 1 payments, which were based on expected sales in the second and third quarters. There is no action required by producers to receive these additional payments. Producers who did not submit an approved CFAP 1 application are not eligible.

Newly-Eligible Commodities and Producers

Many producers were left out of the CARES Act and subsequent CFAP programs because farmers who raise animals under a contract for another entity that owns the animals could not participate. Poultry, in particular, was left out of the CARES Act, largely due to the structure of the industry and how the relationship between the farmer and integrator operates.

Typically, a broiler farmer raises and cares for the birds, but the integrator maintains ownership of them. However, these farmers saw their income significantly reduced as many of their barns, which they financed the construction of and still were required to service the debt on, remained empty due to supply chain disruptions earlier in the pandemic.

The impacts to contract growers could arise from a variety of conditions, including: delayed delivery of young poultry and hogs to contract producers, decreased housing densities, additional costs for keeping animals longer than typical durations and damage caused by animals too large for housing.

USDA clarified that contract farmers of broilers, turkeys, chicken eggs, laying hens and hogs who suffered a drop in revenue in 2020 due to the pandemic are eligible for assistance.

Payments are based on eligible revenue for Jan. 1, 2020, through Dec. 27, 2020, minus eligible revenue for Jan. 1, 2019, through Dec. 27,

2019, multiplied by up to 80 percent, subject to availability of funds.

Farmers of pullets and turfgrass sod are also now eligible for CFAP payments. These commodities were not explicitly included in the original CFAP 2 rule, but their payment structure will be similar to sales commodities. The payment rate will vary based on their overall sales.

Individual farmers who can show that they suffered a decline in revenue from 2019 to 2020 are eligible and should apply for the program.

Of the \$2.3 billion in additional CFAP support, USDA’s cost-benefit analysis estimates that contract poultry farmers will receive about \$1.5 billion in CFAP support. Following poultry, contract hog farmers are expected to receive \$479 million, and top-up inventory payments for swine farmers are expected to total \$150 million.

Combined, contract poultry, contract hog and swine inventory payments are expected to total nearly \$2.1 billion, about 91 percent of these new additional resources.

How to Apply

CFAP is currently under review by the Biden administration. Processing and payments have been stopped while the Biden administration evaluates the program. However, applications are still being accepted.

Newly-eligible farmers who need to submit a CFAP 2 application or farmers who need to modify an existing one can do so until Feb. 26, 2021.

Farmers who are modifying their applications should contact their local USDA Service Center for assistance. Farmers who are filing new applications should contact their Service Center or call 877-508-8364 for one-on-one support.

Additional information can be found on farmers.gov/cfap.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture updated the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program in January to include assistance for contract poultry growers and livestock producers.

American Farm Bureau Virtual Convention Highlights

Livestock issues top concerns at annual AFBF policy meeting

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) delegates weighed in on livestock market issues, crop insurance and feral hogs, among other issues, during the business session of the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) virtual convention on Jan. 14.

The Holcomb fire and the coronavirus pandemic led to an increase in retail meat prices, while the price paid to ranchers fell significantly. It was a topic that led to much discussion among the delegates, which resulted in new policy to help provide stability in markets.

Delegates supported policy to increase negotiated sales in fed cattle markets and called for increased transparency in livestock pricing, as well as for an in-house study on the issue of price discovery in the cattle market and other livestock species.

Delegates also approved a TFB resolution supporting legislation and regulation that incentivizes the development of livestock and poultry processing facilities.

"There were several livestock topics of interest, but there were some specific livestock marketing issues that were discussed at length by delegates. These issues include the percentage of negotiated trade, transparency and those types of things. They've been discussed in past business sessions, but it's clear these livestock marketing issues were of high interest to our folks this year," TFB President Russell Boening said.

New AFBF policies on crop insurance include improving hurricane protection coverage under the Risk Management Agency.

The changes would provide protection against both hurricane-force winds and excessive precipitation, both of which Texas farmers and ranchers saw in 2020 with Hurricane Hanna.

Farmer and rancher delegates approved a TFB resolution supporting perimeter fencing, as it refers to feral hog control, as an eligible conservation practice and activity under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources and Conservation Service.

Delegates also updated dairy policy, calling for a re-examination of the 2018 Farm Bill's modification to the milk price formula and improving equity in USDA's Federal Milk Marketing Order revenue sharing pools. They also reaffirmed support for allowing dairy farmers the opportunity to cast an individual and confidential ballot during milk order referendums.

Revising the labor policy was passed by the delegates. New AFBF policy emphasizes the importance of reforming the H-2A program by expanding it to provide visa workers for both season and year-round employment.

TFB delegates gathered in Waco to participate in the virtual convention.

The policies adopted by the delegates will guide AFBF's work in 2021 on agricultural issues impacting farmers, ranchers, rural communities and consumers.

During the business session, Boening was re-elected to another two-year term on the AFBF Board of Directors from the Southern Region.

For the first time in AFBF history, delegates met and voted virtually due to COVID-19.

"Not very much has changed from the way we started adapting in March to all of the pandemic impacts and challenges. We've done a lot of Zoom meetings, taken advantage of the technology to stay connected," Boening said. "No matter what you're doing, you've had to adapt. And I think Farm Bureau has adapted, and I think agriculture

has also adapted to the challenges. Hopefully, as we go forward, we'll get back to what's closer to normal for all of us."



Texas farmers and ranchers helped establish national policy during the American Farm Bureau Federation's virtual annual convention while observing COVID-19 protocols and safety measures at the Texas Farm Bureau Conference and Training Center in Waco.



Texas Farm Bureau voting delegates helped establish national policy for the American Farm Bureau Federation. The policies will help guide the national organization's work in 2021 on issues related to agriculture.

If you registered to attend the virtual convention, you can access the workshops for a limited time at annualconvention.fb.org.

American Farm Bureau Virtual Convention Highlights

Texans compete in American Farm Bureau virtual convention

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) received the Pinnacle Award, which is the highest honor a state can be awarded for membership and program achievement, from the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

AFBF announced the award during the organization's virtual convention Jan. 10-13.

The award recognizes excellence in implementation of outstanding member programs and membership achievement in 2020. (*Read more about the award in TFB President Russell Boening's column on page 2.*)

TFB was also recognized with the Apex and Leader Awards.

The Apex Award is given to state Farm Bureaus that have increased total contributions to the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture by 10 percent or more over the previous year.

The Leader Award recognizes

state Farm Bureaus when each of the board members donates at least \$50 to the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture.

Several TFB members competed in the virtual convention activities.

Matt and Jessica Hanslik of Lavaca County Farm Bureau represented TFB in the Achievement Award competition. This contest recognized the accomplishments of young agricultural leaders between the ages of 18 and 35 who actively earn a living from farming and ranching.

The TFB representative in the Excellence in Agriculture competition was Jessica Rumbaugh of Wharton County Farm Bureau. This contest is designed for young farmers and ranchers ages 18 to 35 who are involved in agriculture but do not earn their primary income from a farm or ranch enterprise.

Rumbaugh advanced to the top 10 in the national contest.

Josh Ritchey of Erath County



Farm Bureau represented TFB in the Young Farmer & Rancher Discussion Meet. Through this contest, Ritchey discussed agricultural issues facing farmers and ranchers and potential solutions to those problems.

TFB members and owners of the startup Parasanti were also in the top 10 semi-finalists for the Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge. They made their live pitch during the convention.

Parasanti is a veteran- and farmer-led company that offers a solution to farmers and ranchers seeking to capture and analyze data without the need for a broadband connection.

A Texas dog competed for the title of Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year. Ajax is a one-eyed border collie that belongs to Alexis Ender from Haskell County Farm Bureau. (*See story on page 18.*)

Conaway recognized with AFBF's Distinguished Service Award

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) presented its highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award, to former U.S. Rep. Mike Conaway of Texas during the national organization's virtual convention.

AFBF established the Distinguished Service Award in 1928 to honor individuals who have devoted their careers to serving the national interest of American agriculture.

Conaway was first elected to represent the 11th Congressional District of Texas in 2004.

He served as chair of the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture from 2015 to 2019 and as ranking member from 2019 to 2021.

He also served on the House Armed Services Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, as well as chairman of the House Committee on Ethics from

2013-2015.

Conaway was a deputy Republican whip, a position he held since the 112th Congress.

"The people who work in production agriculture, and the people who work in oil and gas, are some of the most decent, honest, hardworking, patriotic Americans you could ever imagine," Conaway said. "Going to work on their behalf every day was a real joy."

After 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives, Conaway decided not to run for re-election.

"Chairman Conaway is a true leader for U.S. agriculture," Russell Boening, Texas Farm Bureau president, said. "His success in adding seed cotton back into the farm bill helped cotton growers in Texas and across the nation continue operating during difficult circumstances."

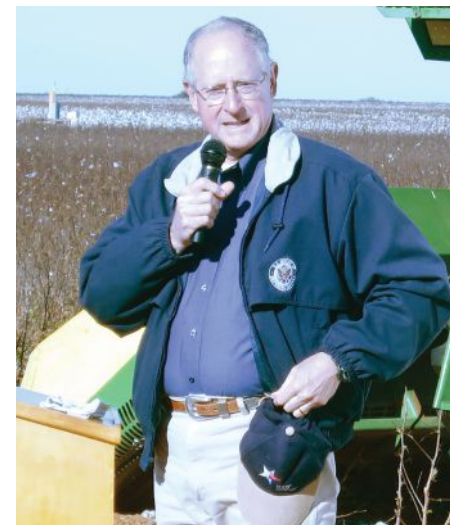
Conaway chaired the U.S. House Agriculture Committee's General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee during the 113th Congress.

In addition, as an important lieutenant to then-Chair Frank Lucas, he played a major role in the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, which benefited farmers and ranchers across the entire country.

Conaway was also a key force in the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, leading a process whereby the concerns of farmers, ranchers and rural America were addressed.

He fought to ensure that all commodities were adequately funded, providing a strong safety net for American agriculture at a time when net income had decreased by 52 percent since 2014.

Conaway was nominated by Texas



Former U.S. Rep. Mike Conaway championed agricultural issues and visited numerous Texas farms while in office.

Farm Bureau for the Distinguished Service Award and selected by a national Farm Bureau committee.

American Farm Bureau Virtual Convention Highlights

Ajax wins recognition at AFBF convention for farm work, dedication

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Haskell County Farm Bureau member Alexis Ender and her 10-year-old Border Collie, Ajax, have been through many life stages together: college, young professional and now married life.

Throughout the decade, they've worked side-by-side, and Ajax is always dedicated to making sure his job is done right.

That dedication to the job earned him the title of Southern Region Runner-up in the 2021 Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year Contest.

The announcement was made during the American Farm Bureau Federation's virtual annual convention in January.

"I got interested in the Texas Sheep Dog Association (TSDA) while I was going to school in Stephenville, because that's where they hold the TSDA Sheepdog Finals every year. I got into sheepdog trials when I got Ajax. I was a sophomore in college, and I'd always wanted a Border Collie," Ender said. "He and I did sheepdog trials, and I had a few sheep he helped me work. Then, when I got a teaching job after college and landed in Stamford, I met my husband and we got married. After he saw how much Ajax helped me with the sheep, he ended up getting his own dog to help him work cattle, too. I've always heard one good working dog can take the place of three to five men working livestock, and I think that's true."

Now, Ajax works hard every day to bring the Enders' 30 head of free-range sheep in from the pasture, lead them to water and helping to pen them when necessary.

And he does this with only one eye after an injury as a pup cost him his sight in the other eye.

"Another dog attacked him when he was only eight weeks old, and unfortunately, we were not able to save

his eye. But that hasn't slowed him down at all," Ender said. "He's awesome at working and helping on the farm, but he's also helped me in the classroom, too."

When she first began teaching, Ender would bring Ajax to her high school agricultural science classroom to give students hands-on illustrations of the canine skeletal system. He's demonstrated some sheepdog work for the kids, too.

Ender now teaches at the elementary school, and while Ajax doesn't come to visit at school as much anymore, he's still a major hand on the farm.

"Three months ago, I had turned the sheep out to graze, and when I took the four-wheeler to round them up, Ajax sent them back up my way. But I was calling him, and he didn't come, which is totally unlike him," Ender said. "He's so well-trained I knew something had to be wrong. So, I went on foot to go see what the problem was. A brand-new lamb, just a few days old, had fallen down and must've been trampled by the other sheep as they ran my way. He knew that his job wasn't over until the last sheep had come in, so he was laying down with this lamb and waiting there for me to come find them. It was one of those storybook or movie moments where you realize just how much these animals understand about their job and their purpose."

Farm Bureau launched the Farm Dog of the Year contest three years ago to celebrate farm dogs that work alongside farmers and ranchers to produce nutritious food for families and their pets across America.

A panel of judges with expertise in the pet care industry, veterinary medicine and communications reviewed 90 nominations to select the 2021 Farm Dog of the Year.

Judging criteria included the dog's helpfulness to the farmer and



Ajax helps bring in sheep and cattle on the Ender's farm in Haskell County. He was named Southern Region Runner-up in the 2021 Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year Contest.

his/her family, playfulness and their role in making life better on and off the farm.

Farm Bureau members submitted written responses to questions, photos and video clips to nominate their dogs for Farm Dog of the Year.

Nestlé Purina PetCare donated prizes for the contest, including \$5,000 in prize money, a trophy plate, a year's supply of dog food and

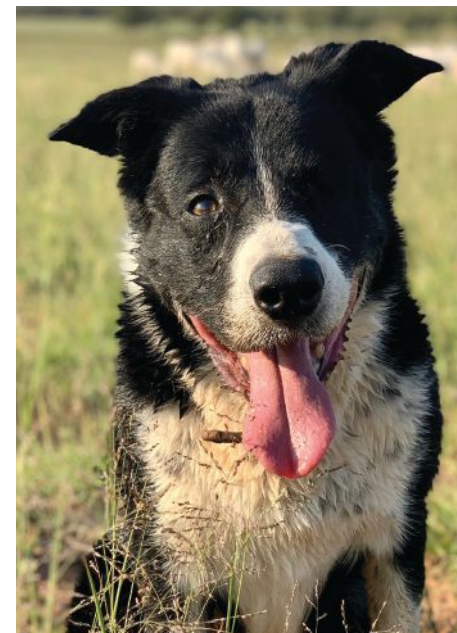
other Purina products for the winner.

Ajax and three other regional runners-up each received \$1,000 in prize money, a trophy plate and Purina products.

The winner of the 2021 Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year award was Bindi, an Australian shepherd owned by New York Farm Bureau member Sonja Galley.



The Ender family with their two farm dogs.



When he was a puppy, Ajax lost his sight in one eye.

New insecticide options for Texas citrus farmers

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Rio Grande Valley citrus farmers now have a new tool in the fight against the devastating citrus greening disease, thanks to developers at Valent USA, an integrated crop protection and pest management company.

Last year brought four new products to the Valent lineup, according to Jesse Rosales, manager of Crop and Brand Strategy.

“It’s been a pretty exciting year for us. With each product launch, we do have specific markets that we’re focusing on,” Rosales said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. “Our new product, Senstar insecticide, is a pre-mix of pyriproxyfen and spirotetramat. That one’s a pretty exciting new insecticide for Texas, because it has excellent control over the various pests farmers might encounter in the citrus industry there.”

The Asian citrus psyllid, which spreads citrus greening, can be controlled by the chemicals in Senstar.

“The reason why it’s particularly exciting and what differentiates it is that the two unique modes of action actually end up offering full life cycle management over the pests,” he said. “So, in terms of having peace of mind and being able to offer growers a full lifecycle management over key pests, Senstar is a pretty great option.”

Rosales noted Valent’s primary guiding focus is improving plant productivity and efficiency, which translates to improved efficiency and sustainability for farmers.

“We’re really focusing on these types of innovations and new active ingredients to really push the limit of plant performance,” he said.

Citrus growers interested in learning more about Senstar can reach out to their Valent sales representative, or more information is available online at valent.com.

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Texas Beef Council releases program evaluations

The Texas Beef Council recently released its evaluations of 2020 programs to help beef producers learn more about how their checkoff dollars helped drive beef demand last year.

“Our staff and board have always recognized the importance of helping Texas producers learn what their checkoff dollars are funding,” Jason Bagley, Texas Beef Council’s vice president of Beef Resources, said. “Rather than waiting until our full annual report is complete with financials in late February, we wanted to let producers know more about the successes that our programs had during FY 2020 as soon as possible. We couldn’t achieve our goals without their support, and their feedback is very important to us.”

Complete 2020 program evaluations are available at texasbeefcheckoff.com/checkoff-resources/annual-report.

Texas Beef Council achieved multiple milestones in fiscal year 2020, including a 24-percent increase in awareness of Beef Loving Texans, which is the organization’s consumer-facing brand.

Other highlights for the year in-



clude 1.6 million visitors and twice as many beef recipe shares at beeflovingtexans.com.

There were 1.3 million views of the *BBQuest* video series featuring renowned chefs and pitmasters

across Texas.

Texas Beef Council ad campaigns For All Plates of Life and *BBQuest* had 361 million impressions, keeping beef top of mind for consumers.

Other efforts included outreach to

5,000 registered dietitians and medical doctors about the benefits of beef in a healthy diet.

More than 2,000 culinary professionals now subscribe to the Beef Loving Chefs monthly newsletter, and 7,000-plus Beef Team appearances helped raise awareness of how beef can fuel athletic performance.

Resources and information were shared with health and fitness professionals, culinary and youth educators, Extension agents and general consumers.

Texas Beef Council reached nearly 1,000 high school culinary educators and students through virtual training conferences and cooking competitions across the state.

“From foodservice, culinary and retail engagement to consumer advertising and outreach, our 2020 programs have made a positive impact on beef demand and overall perception in Texas,” Bagley said. “We’re excited to share this information with the Texas producers who make all these programs possible, and we will continue to find innovative ways to grow beef demand in 2021.”

For more information about Beef Loving Texans and the Texas Beef Council, visit texasbeefcheckoff.com.

Young Farmer & Rancher Conference set for April 9-11, Round Rock

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Registration is underway for Texas Farm Bureau’s (TFB) Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) Conference.

The conference is designed to equip young leaders in agriculture with tools and information needed to increase their agricultural advocacy efforts and help with farm and ranch decisions.

The event is set for April 9-11 at the Austin Marriott North Hotel in Round Rock. Sessions will also be available via Zoom for those who are unable to travel to the event.

“This conference is for any young farmer and rancher across the state,” Kaylin Isbell, TFB’s YF&R Advisory Committee chair, said. “During the conference, we’ll learn more about Texas Farm Bureau, how the orga-

nization operates and the impact it has on agriculture, as well as our own farms and ranches.”

Conference attendees will hear from legislators and learn more about how a bill is drafted and the processes to make it a law. Grassroots advocacy, information about political action committees and the politics of politics are also on the agenda.

“We will learn more about the grassroots process TFB uses to help enact policy changes for the benefit of farmers and ranchers and how the organization works to oppose and stop bills that would negatively impact agriculture,” Isbell said. “The legislative process can be confusing, but this conference will help us learn more about politics and the important role we, as farmers and ranchers, have in the process.”

Other activities include a virtual tour of the Texas Capitol. Keynote speakers are Chet Garner, host of the TV show *The Daytripper*, and Matt Rush, an inspirational speaker from the Texas Panhandle.

“This conference will also be a great opportunity for networking with other farmer and ranchers,” she said. “You’ll be able to talk with other young producers around the state and gain some ideas and tips to apply to your business, as well as establish some new contacts.”

The conference is open to college students and young farmers and ranchers ages 18 to 35.

Additional registration information, including costs, can be found online at <https://texasfarmbureau.org/YFR>.

CDC guidelines, including social distancing, will be followed at the in-person event.

Registration for virtual or in-person participation for the conference closes on March 12.

Login or create an account at my.texasfarmbureau.org to register for the YF&R Conference and Collegiate Discussion Meet.

For questions regarding the conference, contact youngfarmers@txfb.org or call 254-751-2489.

Register for the Young Farmer & Rancher Conference by March 12.

Beef pricing investigations highlight need for risk management

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Over the past 18 months, two federal investigations, one by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the other by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), were launched to discover what led to an increase in the spread between fed cattle prices and boxed beef prices.

And while the USDA has not yet found any wrongdoing, the agency's July 2020 report did note some actions the cattle industry can take to improve leverage, according to Chelsea Good, Livestock Marketing Association vice president of Government and Industry Affairs.

"The USDA investigation started prior to the COVID-19 pandemic after we saw that Holcomb Tyson fire in August 2019," she said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "USDA opened an investigation to look at that pricing spread, the difference in what feedlots were being paid for fed cattle and the really high boxed beef price, because we saw a record spread there. Then, that actually expanded to include new records set during the pandemic."

Several economic issues played into the historic spread, including a large cattle inventory without an increase in meatpacking plant capacity, as well as a lack of smaller, regional packing plants and a need for more risk management for ranchers, she added.

While the DOJ investigation remains ongoing, Good noted the bar for finding wrongdoing in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act is fairly high.

"It requires showing some level of coordination between competitors, whether that's price fixing or a handful of other Sherman Act violations that requires showing that those competitors coordinated with one another," she said. "I think that is a little bit different than just showing that, 'Hey, there are record profits and a huge spread between what's being paid for cattle and what pack-



ers are being paid for meat.' You have to show that coordination component in order to see the Department of Justice move forward with a case."

It's also possible the plant fire and pandemic could be what are known as "black swan events."

"I personally have been in touch with a lot of people who are really connected to these investigations. I have not seen any clear evidence of coordination between some of these major players. I think we also need to keep in mind we have an industry that's fairly consolidated," she said. "You've got four major packers that make up more than 85 percent of the marketplace. They might not necessarily need to coordinate in order to be able to see what some of their competitors are doing, because it's a small industry."

Risk management is an important topic moving forward, Good said.

Using the futures market to hedge can help ranchers better weather the storm, and changes to USDA's Livestock Risk Protection insurance may make those policies more feasible for ranchers to purchase.

She also has seen an increased interest from ranchers across the nation in bringing back more small or regional meat packing operations.

"I have seen some states working on grant programs with some of their COVID-19 relief funds to encourage small processors to start

or to expand their capacity. There's also been some active pieces of legislation in Congress that could help. Maybe giving some funds or programming to help some small packers that aren't currently USDA-inspected, maybe making it a little easier for them to raise their standards to reach that threshold to sell interstate," Good said. "There's some things that are being looked at, that

I think as an industry, we need to be supportive of—about anything we can do to increase that packing capacity in a healthy way, not just increasing hook space but maybe increase the number of players that are competing for our livestock. In areas where we have multiple major packers plus some regional players competing against one another, prices are higher. Competition works."

Stone joins TFB Government Affairs

Harold Stone joined Texas Farm Bureau's Government Affairs division as an associate legislative director in January.

He works in the legislative office in Austin where he monitors issues and legislation pertaining to wildlife, land use regulation, criminal justice, energy regulation and appropriations.

Stone has more than 30 years of experience working in and around the Texas Legislature.

Prior to joining Farm Bureau, he served as chief of staff for State Sen. Pete Flores.

He began his legislative career in the Texas Senate, although for much of his career, he worked for and managed the intergovernmental affairs office at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Stone was raised on his family's farm in Longview. His father,



Harold Sr., is a recent recipient of Texas Farm Bureau's Pioneer Award.

He is a graduate of Texas State University, with a bachelor's degree in Government Administration and Planning and a master's degree in Public Administration.

Stone resides in the Lake Travis area with his wife, Dara. They have twin sons, Tyler and Tanner, who both reside in College Station.

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AFBF makes #StillFarming merchandise available

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) launched a new effort to address food insecurity while celebrating the strength of the U.S. food supply and commitment of America's farmers and ranchers to keep it strong.

The #StillFarming campaign, which began on social media, expanded to a merchandise line that will benefit food banks and agricultural education.

The COVID-19 pandemic shut-downs in March 2020 caused disruptions to the food supply chain, resulting in empty grocery shelves in parts of the country. When alarmed Americans resorted to panic purchasing, AFBF created the #StillFarming social media campaign to build public confidence in farmers' and ranchers' ability to produce food and reassure consumers of the strength of the U.S. food supply.

#StillFarming has reached nearly 100 million people across the digi-



#StillFarming merchandise will be available for purchase from the American Farm Bureau Federation through June.

tal landscape, building confidence in the U.S. food supply and trust in farmers and ranchers by sharing the challenges they are overcoming to feed America and the world.

Building on its popularity and recognizing the dramatic increase

in hunger in America brought on by the pandemic, AFBF created #StillFarming to Feed America T-shirts and committed to donating all profits. Half will be donated to Feeding America, the country's largest hunger relief organization, and half of the profits will go to the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture.

"Despite all the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, there's never been a question that America's farmers and ranchers would continue supplying healthy, affordable food, and it was important for us to assure the public of that," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. "The success of #StillFarming is a credit to Farm Bureau members across the country who took it and ran with it. It has been inspiring to see their stories from across the country, and I'm pleased to build on the campaign to help address hunger through our partnership with Feeding America."

AFBF first partnered with Feeding America in April, coauthoring a letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) calling for a federal program to help deliver farm-fresh products to food banks facing unprecedented demand.

At the time, many farmers had no destination for their products due to restaurant and food service closures. The letter and subsequent meet-

ings with USDA contributed to the formation of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

The new partnership between AFBF and Feeding America also builds on a long history of partnerships between county and state Farm Bureaus and Feeding America's local and regional food banks. Since the pandemic began, state and county Farm Bureaus across the country have donated \$5.4 million and 1.4 million pounds of food to local food banks, food pantries and pandemic relief programs.

According to Feeding America, one in nine Americans are affected by hunger in the pandemic. This includes 2.2 million rural households.

"COVID-19 presented a perfect storm of increased demand, declines in food donations and overall disruptions to the charitable food system. Food banks across the country are working hard to support their neighbors in need," said Katie Fitzgerald, executive vice president and chief operating officer at Feeding America. "We are grateful to AFBF for their commitment to fighting hunger and for providing everyone with the opportunity to give back."

The pandemic also increased consumer curiosity about how food is produced.

Giving the public a window into agriculture and how food is grown is part of the mission of the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture.

Recognizing that #StillFarming helped tell agriculture's story, it's fitting that profits from #StillFarming to Feed America T-shirts will further that cause.

"The foundation is honored to be a partner with AFBF on this program," AFB Foundation Executive Director Daniel Meloy said. "Funds received through the #StillFarming T-shirts will help us continue to reach kids all across America and help educate them on where their food comes from."

The T-shirts are being sold through AFBF's online shop at [FB.org/StillFarming](https://fb.org/StillFarming) and will be available through June.



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Poll shows COVID-19 taking heavy toll on farmers' mental health

A strong majority of farmers and farmworkers say the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their mental health, and more than half say they are personally experiencing more mental health challenges than they were a year ago, according to a new American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) poll.

The survey of rural adults, farmers and farmworkers explores how the pandemic has affected their mental health personally and in their communities, as well as how attitudes and experiences around mental health have changed in rural and farm communities since AFBF conducted its first rural mental health survey in 2019.

"My takeaway from this survey is that the need for support is real, and we must not allow lack of access or a 'too tough to need help' mentality to stand in the way," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said.

The results of the new poll clearly demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic is having broad-ranging impacts among rural adults, farmers and farmworkers.

Key findings show two in three farmers and farmworkers, 66 percent, say the pandemic has impacted their mental health.

Rural adults who responded to the survey were split on COVID-19's impact. Half of rural adults, 53 percent, say the pandemic has impacted their mental health at least some, while 44 percent say it has not impacted their mental health much or at all.

Younger rural adults were more likely than older rural adults to say the pandemic has impacted their mental health a lot.

Other survey results showed farmers and farmworkers were 10 percent more likely than rural adults as a whole to have experienced feeling nervous, anxious or on edge during the pandemic (65 percent vs. 55 percent).

The percentage of farmers and farmworkers who say social isolation impacts farmers' mental health

increased 22 percent since April 2019, a significant finding given the long hours many farmers often work alone.

Half of rural adults, 52 percent, aged 18-34 say they have thought more about their mental health during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, more than other age groups that responded to the survey.

Three in five rural adults, 61 percent, say the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mental health in rural communities.

Farmers and farmworkers were more likely than rural adults to say COVID-19 has impacted mental health in rural communities a lot (37 percent vs. 22 percent).

The survey of 2,000 rural adults was conducted by Morning Consult in December.

It also identified the main obstacles to seeking help or treatment for a mental health condition, the most trusted sources for information about mental health, impressions of the importance of mental health in rural communities and the importance of reducing stigma surrounding mental health.

"We are stepping up our efforts through our Farm State of Mind campaign, encouraging conversations about stress and mental health and providing free training and resources for farm and ranch families and rural communities," Duvall said. "The pandemic added a mountain of stress to an already difficult year for farmers, and they need to know that sometimes it's okay not to be okay, that people care, and that there's help and hope."

A greater awareness of rural stress and mental health can lead to more solutions, AFBF noted.

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or has concerns about their mental health, visit the Farm State of Mind website at farmstateofmind.org where you can find crisis hotlines, treatment locators, tips for helping someone in emotional pain, ways to start a conversation and resources for manag-



A national poll conducted by the American Farm Bureau Federation found the coronavirus pandemic is taking a heavy toll on farmers' and farmworkers' mental health. The national organization has information regarding mental health and rural stress available on its website at farmstateofmind.org.

ing stress, anxiety or depression.

AFBF is also looking for other ways to offer help regarding mental health and stress for farmers, ranch-

ers and rural communities.

If you have a program or tool that is making a positive difference, email AFBF at ruralstress@fb.org.

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Complete detailed information about TFB's benefits and services is available at www.texasfarmbureau.org

Working group examines USDA-NASS, releases recommendations

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has long been the go-to source for accurate, unbiased crop and livestock reports, but farmer confidence in the reports has waned over the past few years.

Large changes in estimates of planted acreage, crop yields and inventory levels have caused wild swings in the market, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Recent severe weather events like last year's Midwestern derecho have made the issue more pronounced.

Farmers questioned the agency's ability to respond quickly to changing conditions and provide updates in real-time.

"At our 101st annual convention in early 2020, the voting delegates recommended that the AFBF board of directors convene a Farm Bureau-led coalition of our members to review and make suggested improvements to USDA-NASS's data collection and reporting methodology," Shelby Myers, AFBF economist, said.

A working group of 10 members, including Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) District 13 State Director Scott Frazier, was assembled to study the issue and make recommendations on how to improve farmer confidence. Over the course of several months, the group conducted more than a dozen interviews with NASS staff, trade associations, market analysis firms and land-grant universities.

"Compared to what other countries have, we're light years ahead in terms of offering reliable crop and livestock data," Frazier, a Nueces County farmer and rancher, said. "What we found is just that NASS needs to work on explaining what they do and how they do it."

The survey collection methods, in particular, could use some updating, he noted.

In the report released by AFBF's USDA-NASS Working Group, the organization said only 17 percent of the more than 3 million known and potential farms and ranches in the U.S. responded to the 2017 Census of Agriculture. That's likely because most farmers don't fully understand what NASS plans to do with data collected in both routine and census surveys, Frazier said.

"The farmer interface is not very good. Someone just calls you up and you have 20 or 30 pages of surveys to get through, and there are a lot of extraneous questions that don't apply," he said. "I know personally, when I get one of those surveys in the mail or if one of their surveyors catches me in the field, I'm usually busy, and work takes priority over answering multiple questions."

Increasing transparency and improving communication by conducting town hall meetings across the U.S. will help farmers and ranchers understand the purpose and value of those surveys, the AFBF group said. The group also suggested that NASS begin attending agricultural conventions and trade shows to "tell their

story" and get the word out about the agency's mission.

Coordinating with land-grant universities and other federal agencies could help, too.

"Often, I don't like to give out acreage numbers on these surveys, because I feel like they should already have that data from other sources like [Farm Service Agency] FSA," Frazier said. "I realize there's some data that FSA and the crop insurance folks don't have that NASS may need, and that data is important. But working with other agencies to reduce that duplication of questions would make it more likely that we respond in full to those questionnaires."

Frazier noted working with county Extension agents and crop consultants may be another way NASS could utilize boots-on-the-ground reporters who have a good understanding of regional crops, their planting dates and other information necessary to collect accurate data.

Increased transparency in the statistical methodology used to arrive at NASS estimates and reports also would be beneficial, according to the group.

"We were not impressed with how folks felt the data matched up with what's really going on. Many people we talked to said a report takes 8-10 days to come out after it's completed. Then, something happens in the market, and that's not reflected in real-time," he said. "The derecho of last year was one example. A report came out a week after the storm hit that totally didn't reflect the impact

on the Midwest's crops."

The group recommended NASS accelerate technology adoption, which would give the agency more flexibility to respond in real-time to changing conditions, such as adverse weather.

Remote-sensing data, Landsat data, monitoring and decision-making applications, machine-learning technology and spatial and spectral imaging from satellites and drones could also be used to improve survey accuracy and estimate in-season damage to crops due to natural disasters, the group wrote.

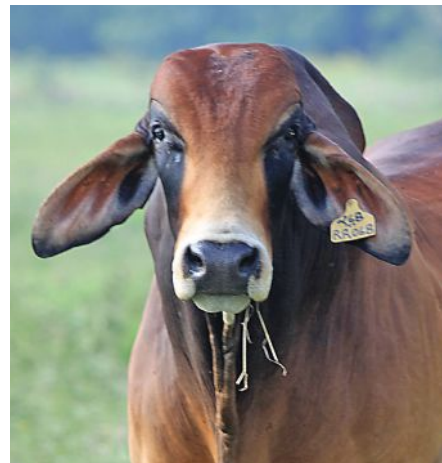
"There's a lot of opportunity to use satellite imagery and drones to get data without relying on an oral or written survey response," Frazier said.

Implementing these recommendations will improve the work already being done by NASS, the report concluded.

AFBF is committed to partnering with NASS to encourage farmer participation in NASS surveys, he said.

"The end users, the people who write newsletters and blogs and use that data to create their own reports on crop conditions and the like, they all seem to be pretty confident in NASS and what they're reporting," he said. "We know the data is there, and the agency is capable of disseminating it. We just need to focus a bit on how it's done and explaining that process to farmers and ranchers to encourage more participation."

The full AFBF USDA-NASS Working Group report is available at [fbf.org](https://www.fbf.org).



TFB member appointed to national task force on ag air quality

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Williamson County Farm Bureau (CFB) President Bob Avant, along with three other Texans, was recently appointed to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Task Force for Agricultural Air Quality Research.

Members of the task force were appointed by outgoing U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to help advise USDA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on air quality issues important to farmers and ranchers.

The task force, housed under the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), was created by the 1996 Farm Bill to promote USDA research efforts and identify cost-effective ways for agriculture to improve air quality.

Task force members have diverse backgrounds and may include, but are not limited to, farmers and ranchers, individuals with expertise in agricultural air quality, rural and urban resi-

dents, health experts and scientists.

"I have a background in environmental regulation, and academically, I'm an agricultural engineer. In fact, I wrote my master's thesis in agricultural air quality," Avant said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "So, I not only have some academic training in the area, but I have the practical background of production agriculture. And that's the perspective that I really bring to the table: Do regulations make sense or not? Are they based on good science? Will they cause as little damage as possible to how we farm and ranch in Texas?"

That role is more important than ever under President Joe Biden's administration, Avant added.

"With the new administration focusing more on environmental and climate change issues, this task force will be important for agriculture's perspective to be represented," he said. "I think we're going to see a whole host of new regulations com-

ing at agriculture, not only from air quality but also water issues and climate change issues. So, it's going to be really important that we have agriculture at the table to make sure that we don't have some draconian regulations that are promulgated by the new administration."

Other areas the task force may provide input include particulate matter's impact on air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration and bioenergy.

"It's really important that Farm Bureau is at the table on all these federal committees, especially with this new administration just starting up, because I think it's obvious to all of us that it's going to be a different ball game in terms of working with the federal government," Avant said. "And we're going to have to do everything we can to make sure that we have commonsense regulations in all areas of agriculture, not just for air."

The new members will serve up to a two-year term ending in 2023.



Bob Avant

The other Texans serving with Avant on the task force are Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Amarillo Director Brent Auvermann, Ph.D., Texas Cotton Ginners Association Director of Technical Services J. Kelley Green, and engineer/owner at Shaw Engineering Bryan Shaw, Ph.D., P.E., retired chair of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

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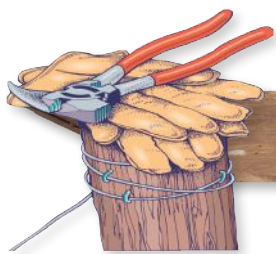
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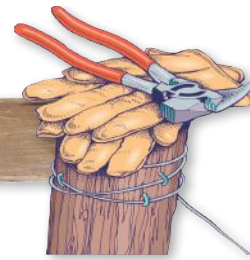
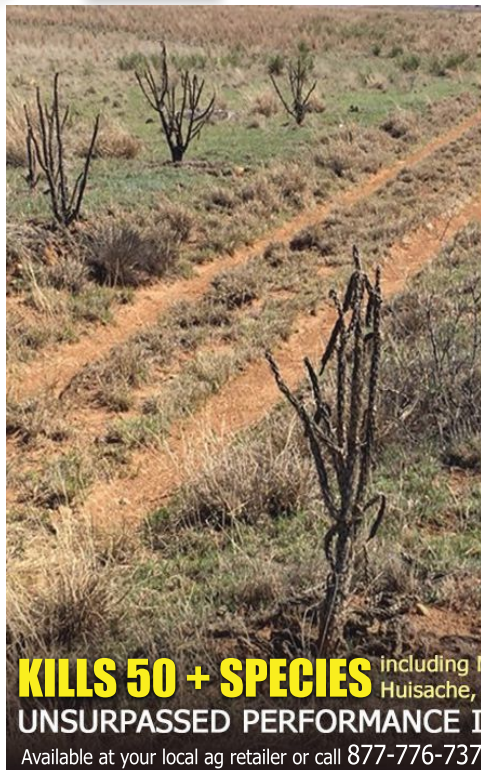
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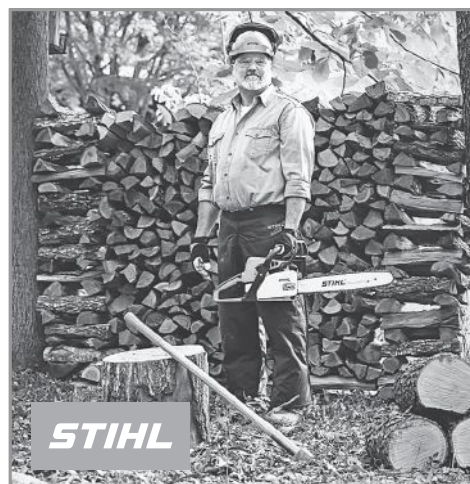


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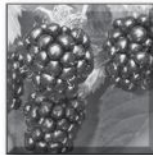
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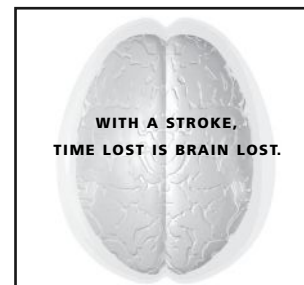
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