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# Texas Agriculture

January 7, 2022

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# A photo reminds me why ranching traditions, Farm Bureau are important

By Si Cook

COO/Executive Director

Nov. 21, 2021, marked 50 years since I owned my first cow. I can remember this date only because I snapped a black-and-white photo of that cow the day we brought her home to my grandpa's farm.

A picture of that cow, my Grandpa in his prime on horseback and another of me on horseback when I was about the same age hangs in my office to remind me constantly of where I come from and why I am doing what I do.

Those pictures represent the passing down of a love for the land and raising livestock that spans more than a century between us.

Grandpa was an old-time cattleman from Fayette County, and I can remember him telling me, "Son, I think it's time for you to get in the cow business." So, at 11 years old, that's exactly what I did. And I have never stopped or paused since.

For most of those 50 years, I had to really want to be in the "cow business," because it had to be done with leased land and borrowed money.

Those of you who have gone that route know the challenges involved. The point is you have to love it and want it. Anyone who has raised livestock for more than a few years understands the variables, challenges and complications that are thrown at you

each and every year. The years where everything comes together—weather, herd health and prices—are few and far between, but they are the ones that keep you going.

There are many variables that influence the livestock business that weather and those old cows have nothing to do with, however. Regulations, taxes, false information, trade agreements, supply chain issues and a host of other things that happen outside of the ranch gate have as much to do with your financial viability and being able to carry on and pass down a tradition.

That's the purpose of Farm Bureau. There are things we have no control over, and as farmers and ranchers, we accept that. We do have the ability, together, to influence some of the regulations that affect our business from outside the farm gate. It is sometimes a messier job than slogging through a winter cow pen to feed, but just as necessary.

Grandpa would have a hard time understanding all the "new age" problems that we face today as farmers and ranchers. But then again, not many producers today remember farming through the Depression or

the drought of the '50s.

The point is we must get up every day and face the many issues put before us if we intend to leave a viable industry to those who want to follow in our footsteps.

I look up at that picture in my office at least once a week. It reminds me of why I still raise cattle and why I spend most of my time in an office and not on the back of a horse or on a tractor.

I hope Grandpa knows that I'm doing my part to help folks continue traditions worth preserving. Farm Bureau is about leaders across the state choosing to spend some time doing the

same thing.

That level of commitment was on full display at our recent annual meeting in Corpus Christi. More than 750 Farm Bureau leaders took time to attend and participate in this important meeting. Some of these same leaders are attending the American Farm Bureau Federation annual meeting this month in Atlanta, Georgia, ensuring the Farm Bureau grassroots voice from Texas is heard at the national level.

Individually, we can do little, but collectively we can help ensure that those who choose the road less traveled are able to do so.



*These photos hang in TFB Executive Director Si Cook's office to serve as a reminder of his agricultural roots and why he works for farmers and ranchers.*



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## Texas Beef Council releases 2021 program evaluations

The Texas Beef Council (TBC) approved and released its fiscal year 2021 program evaluations, giving Texas beef producers the opportunity to see how their beef checkoff dollars were used to stimulate beef demand throughout that 12-month period.

“Texas producers deserve and expect full transparency about the activities and initiatives their beef checkoff dollars are funding,” said Molly McAdams, TBC’s executive vice president. “We want to get that information to producers as quickly as possible. By reviewing these program evaluations, they can learn about last year’s beef checkoff investment results now, then see our full annual report and financials when they become available in early 2022.”

Significant achievements include generating 74 million views and 1.6 million clicks from *BBQuest* and “For All Plates of Life” advertising campaigns.

TBC executed retail promotions that targeted over 1,600 retail stores and distributed over 275,000 coupons.

The Beef Loving Chefs influencer database grew by 68% to include 2,500 foodservice professionals, 900 Instagram followers and 2,200



*Texas Beef Council released program evaluations detailing key successes to stimulate beef demand and positive beef promotion in fiscal year 2021.*

monthly newsletter recipients.

TBC used direct messaging to reach over 550 doctors, 500 nurses and 230 nurse practitioners and physician assistants in 650 medical offices in Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio and Houston.

TBC also worked with USMEF, a contractor to the beef checkoff, to conduct training seminars, virtual cooking classes, U.S. beef showcases and festivals, retail and foodservice promotions, BBQ competitions in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong/China, the Greater Russian Region, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

Additional successes and complete

TBC program evaluations are available at [texasbeefcheckoff.com/your-checkoff/annual-reports](https://texasbeefcheckoff.com/your-checkoff/annual-reports).

“TBC continues to work hard at promoting beef across this great state,” McAdams said. “We’ve taken steps to continuously improve our engagement and outreach efforts, from foodservice, medical professionals and retail to consumer advertising and promotion and everything in between. We hope Texas producers are proud of our work this past year, and we want them to know we’re always seeking out new, innovative ways to grow beef demand.”

For more information, visit [TexasBeefCheckoff.com](https://TexasBeefCheckoff.com).

## USDA begins classification survey ahead of 2022 Ag Census

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) mailed the National Agricultural Classification Survey (NACS) in December to more than a million potential U.S. farmers and ranchers, in preparation for the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

The NACS will ask survey recipients if they are involved in agricultural activities and for basic farm information.

Response to the NACS is re-

quired by law for all who receive the questionnaire, even if the recipient is not an active farmer or rancher.

Questionnaires can be completed online or by mail.

The response deadline is Jan. 24.

USDA defines a farm as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products are produced and sold, or are normally sold, during the year. This definition was first used for the 1974 Census of Agriculture and is now consistent across USDA surveys.

The Census of Agriculture dataset is used by local and federal governments, educators, researchers, agribusinesses, media and many more.

Data collection for the 2022 Census of Agriculture will begin in November.

All information reported to NASS is kept confidential and protected by federal law.

To learn more about NACS and the upcoming 2022 Census of Agriculture, visit [nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](https://nass.usda.gov/AgCensus).

## Dates set for 2022 landowner workshops

Many state and federal laws regarding land ownership can be complicated, but a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service course helps make the content more accessible to landowners.

*Owning Your Piece of Texas: Key Laws Texas Landowners Need to Know*, a workshop and handbook by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, covers key laws that may impact rural landowners and agricultural operations, including water law, fence law, landowner liability, eminent domain, special use tax valuation and more.

The 2022 workshops will be held Feb. 7 in Conroe, March 14 in Fort Worth, April 8 in Burnet and Sept. 12 in Fredericksburg.

“From landowner liability to eminent domain, special use tax valuation to fence law, we address practical issues in a way that makes them understandable to Texans. I will be joined by several guest speakers who are experts in these areas of the law,” said Tiffany Dowell Lashmet, AgriLife Extension agricultural law specialist.

The cost to attend is \$75 and participants will receive a hard copy of the *Owning Your Piece of Texas* handbook and a catered lunch.

For those unable to attend the workshops, the program is also available online at [agrilifelearn.tamu.edu](https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu).

The self-paced course takes about eight hours to complete.

Participants can decide to take the entire course for a total cost of \$150 or pay \$20 for individual, shorter courses.

AgriLife Extension staff noted those who register online will have access to the program for two years.

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# TFB sets 2022 national legislative priorities

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Continuing to advocate for farm safety net programs, stronger border security and beneficial free trade agreements top the list of Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) national legislative priorities for 2022.

“These issues are important to our members,” TFB National Legislative Director Laramie Adams said. “Even though it may seem like Capitol Hill is a long way from a field in our state, what happens at a federal level eventually comes back home to roost on Texas farms and ranches.”

The TFB state board of directors names priority issues for the upcoming congressional session after organizational policy is set by county delegates from across the state during the winter annual meeting.

Priority issues identified include the 2023 Farm Bill, border security, trade, taxes, ag labor, food supply chain resiliency, rural connectivity, truth-in-labeling, livestock/crop protection, regulatory reform, climate initiatives and transportation.

“Farmers and ranchers are directly affected by each of the priority items,” Adams said. “Issues important at the county level make their way through our policy development process. They are voted on during the annual meeting and the board of directors determine the top priorities for legislative action based on member feedback and organizational policy.”

## Farm bill

Although not due to be written until 2023, the farm bill has often been a hotly contested package in Congress. Because the bill covers farm safety net programs, crop insurance rules, rural development, nutritional assistance and more, it is vital to supporting and protecting American farmers and ranchers.

“We saw tumultuous farm bill sessions in 2013 and 2018, and I would expect 2023 to be no different. There will be much congressional debate and folks who don’t understand agriculture seeking to strip much-needed

funding from many of the titles aimed at helping agriculture,” Adams said.

Because of those concerns, TFB is laying the groundwork now to be sure Texas farmers’ and ranchers’ concerns are addressed and that an effective safety net is maintained.

## Border security

As the surge of illegal immigrants continues to overwhelm law enforcement agencies along the U.S.-Mexico border, securing that region becomes even more urgent, Adams noted.

“We have many farm and ranch families suffering the direct effects of illegal immigration across their lands,” he said. “Families have losses and damages that are not covered by insurance or any federal program, despite the damages occurring because of federal policy. That’s unacceptable.”

## Taxes

Continuing to advocate for tax provisions that are important to farms, ranches and small businesses may make the difference between families passing on legacies or being forced to sell to pay the taxes, Adams said.

“We narrowly dodged a bullet when legislators finally agreed to drop a proposal to end stepped-

up basis in the ‘Build Back Better’ spending package last year,” he said. “That was a direct result of agricultural and small business organizations like TFB sounding the alarm on the implications for small and family-owned businesses. But there are still some proposals regarding capital gains taxes and other bad tax policy that would have big impacts on farms and ranches. So, this is something we continue to monitor and actively oppose. We are working legislators to ensure those agendas stay off the table.”

## Climate

Mitigating climate change is a banner issue of President Joe Biden’s administration, including initiatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture aimed at encouraging more “climate-smart” farm and ranch practices.

Carbon sequestration markets, greenhouse gas emission-reduction certifications and other “green” industries have surfaced but most are unproven and unregulated.

It’s a complicated issue, which is why Adams noted TFB will closely monitor federal efforts and policy in this area.

Any new regulation, enforcement

or programs developed to support climate initiatives should be accessible to farms and ranches of all sizes and not be burdensome to implement or detrimental to operations, according to TFB policy.

“Some of those ideas would be impractical, wildly expensive to implement and harmful to some farms and ranches, so we plan to stay engaged as these policies are developed,” Adams said.

## Member involvement

TFB staff will work to implement policy at the national level, but Adams noted members’ stories and testimonials are essential.

“It’s important that farmers and ranchers remain engaged with their lawmakers,” he said. “They want to hear from you. They want to know how you’ll be affected by certain bills and policies.”

A National Affairs Awards Trip is also planned for April to allow county Farm Bureau leaders and members to meet with lawmakers.

VoterVoice, a feature available at [texasfarmbureau.org/advocacy/voter-voice](https://texasfarmbureau.org/advocacy/voter-voice), makes it easy to stay in touch with elected officials.

Sign up for alerts, find legislation, look up officials and submit comments on issues when applicable.

## 2022 National Legislative Priorities

**Farm Bill:** Participate in the upcoming farm bill to ensure the concerns of Texas agricultural producers are addressed and an effective safety net is maintained.

**Border Security:** Work to help secure the border and assist farm and ranch families experiencing issues with the surge in illegal immigration.

**Trade:** Support trade agreements that benefit agriculture and work to protect farmers and ranchers from retaliatory tariffs and unfair trade practices.

**Taxes:** Preserve key tax provisions important to agriculture.

**Ag Labor:** Secure changes to the agricultural guest worker program to help address the farm labor shortage.

**Food Supply Chain:** Pass legislation to improve resilience in the food supply chain.

**Rural Connectivity:** Expand broadband and cellular access to provide more opportunity in rural areas.

**Truth-in-Labeling:** Protect agricultural commodities from misleading labels and deceptive marketing of imitation products.

**Livestock/Crop Protection:** Maintain funding for control and eradication of invasive species, such as the cattle fever tick and feral swine.

**Regulatory Reform:** Fight federal regulations that could impact farmers’ and ranchers’ ability to operate.

**Climate:** Ensure federal climate initiatives do not negatively impact agriculture.

**Transportation:** Support policies that provide flexibility in hauling ag commodities and livestock, including increasing truck weights.

# Scholarship opportunities help Texas Farm Bureau members

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) continues to invest in youth, devoting large amounts of money and time to help students develop leadership skills and a future in agriculture.

That investment comes through scholarships at the state and county levels. Each year, TFB awards more than \$200,000 in scholarships, and over \$350,000 in scholarships is given through county Farm Bureaus.

And this year, TFB is adding another collegiate scholarship opportunity—the Rural Veterinary Scholarship.

“Our scholarship program continues to grow and adapt to meet the future needs of agriculture and our youth who are furthering their education. High school seniors, enrolled college students and students pursuing technical degrees can apply for a variety of Farm Bureau scholarships,” McKenna Bush, TFB youth coordinator, said. “These scholarships and awards are another way that TFB and county Farm Bureaus invest in the future of our communities, state and agriculture.”

There are three high school scholarships available: Memorial/Honorary District Scholarship, Young Farmer & Rancher Scholarship and the Dick Mitchell Memorial Scholarship.

Enrolled college students can apply for four scholarships: Young Farmer & Rancher Scholarships for Enrolled College Students, S.M. True Jr. Agricultural Scholar Award, Mia Balko Student Teaching Scholarship and the Rural Veterinary Scholarship.

## How to apply

Applicants must create an account and register through the MyTFB Membership portal at [my.texasfarmbureau.org](http://my.texasfarmbureau.org).

Once there, navigate to registration, and select 2022 scholarships from the list.

All scholarships require the student to be part of a TFB member-family to qualify, and membership

must be maintained for the duration of the scholarship.

The deadline to apply and submit a completed application online is March 1 before midnight.

Visit [texasfarmbureau.org/scholarships](http://texasfarmbureau.org/scholarships) for more information and the scholarship application checklist.

Email [youthactivities@txfb.org](mailto:youthactivities@txfb.org) or call 254-751-2258 with questions.

## Scholarships for High School Seniors

### Dick Mitchell Scholarship

This \$1,000 scholarship is awarded to one high school senior who completed the Thrive Experience through TFB’s Student Success Series last summer.

### Young Farmer & Rancher Scholarship

High school seniors pursuing a degree in agriculture are eligible for TFB’s Young Farmer & Rancher scholarship. Each of TFB’s 13 districts will award one \$1,000 scholarship.

### Memorial/Honorary and District Scholarships

In each of the 13 TFB districts, one student will be awarded a \$1,500 scholarship. Three students from each district also will be awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

## Scholarships for Enrolled College Students

### Young Farmer & Rancher Enrolled Scholarship

The Young Farmer & Rancher Enrolled Scholarship is for students already in college pursuing undergraduate degrees. Applicants must have completed a minimum of 45 credit hours and a GPA of 2.5 or higher to qualify. Applicants must also intend to pursue a career in agriculture.

Three \$2,000 Young Farmer & Rancher Enrolled scholarships will be awarded.

### Mia Balko Student Teaching Scholarship

This scholarship was renamed in honor of the late Mia Balko, who was the director of youth outreach and

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scholarship coordinator for TFB. Prior to joining TFB, Balko was an agricultural science teacher for many years.

Four senior agricultural education students will receive the Mia Balko Student Teaching Scholarship each semester.

The scholarships, valued at \$1,500, aim to help students cover expenses during their semester of off-campus student teaching. Students who will be student teaching off-campus in fall 2022 are encouraged to apply.

A second application process will open later this year for those student teaching in spring 2023.

### S.M. True Jr. Agricultural Scholar Award

To acknowledge former TFB President S.M. True Jr., a \$20,000 scholarship was established for college students enrolled in an undergraduate degree program with at least 60 hours of college credit and declared agriculture as their major.

To be eligible for the scholarship, students must be a Farm Bureau member-family for at least three years at the time of application. Applicants must submit a completed application and two letters of recommendation—one from the county Farm Bureau president and one from the dean or head of the agricultural department of the applicant’s

college or university.

Students are encouraged to apply at the end of their sophomore year for TFB’s most prestigious scholarship.

### Rural Veterinary Scholarship

The Rural Veterinary Scholarship is new this year. Four scholarships valued at \$10,000 each will be awarded.

Applicants must be a second- or third-year veterinarian student at Texas A&M University or Texas Tech University with a GPA of 2.5 or higher. The applicant must also plan to enter a rural and/or food animal practice in Texas after graduation.

### TSTC Scholarships

TFB has made scholarship funds available to first-year and enrolled students attending Texas State Technical College (TSTC).

Twenty-five \$1,000 scholarships are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis through the Texan Success Scholarship.

Another \$10,000 is available through the “helping hands” scholarship, which is meant to help students with unexpected costs that are not usually covered by traditional scholarships.

TSTC scholarship applications are available at [tstc.edu/admissions/financial-aid/scholarships/](http://tstc.edu/admissions/financial-aid/scholarships/).

# Farmers, ranchers adjust and expand businesses during COVID-19

## Two years into the pandemic, farmers and ranchers make business changes

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

In January 2020, reports of a mysterious deadly disease began making international headlines. By March, the virus we now know as COVID-19 had made its way to the United States, altering American lives forever.

Overnight, the global economy changed. Markets plunged. Consumers panic-stocked food and household goods, leaving grocery store aisles empty for weeks.

Agriculture wasn't spared. Supply chain issues plagued farmers, and market prices were extremely volatile.

The boxed beef cutout value climbed sharply while the prices ranchers received for livestock fell just as quickly. Cattle feedlots were nearly overflowing as packing lines slowed to adjust to social distancing guidelines and absent workers.

Farmers felt the effects, too. Cotton, corn, soybeans, wheat, sugar and other commodity prices dropped steeply in 2020. Prices have since recovered, but the beginning of the pandemic was fraught with uncertainty.

Now, as the U.S. continues to move forward and operate under a "new normal," farmers and ranchers keep farming and ranching.

### Wade Lowry W & R Farm and Ranch

In Bulverde, the past two years have been busy for fifth-generation rancher Wade Lowry. As the owner and operator of a direct-to-consumer beef business, W & R Farm and Ranch, Lowry has seen sales explode since March 2020, with no signs of slowing down.

"It's been the best thing that's ever happened to us. That run on food in the beginning really opened us up to a lot of consumers who already knew about us but just hadn't ever purchased from us," he said. "Now, we have a lot of new customers that have been really great to us."



**Wade and Regan Lowry own and operate W & R Farm and Ranch in South Texas. They run cattle in LaSalle, Nueces, Live Oak and Real counties and have operated a direct-to-consumer beef business for several years prior to the coronavirus pandemic.**

The family offers three different product lines to the public: grass-fed, "ranch raised" or grain-finished, and Akaushi beef. Because they were already well-established in the direct-to-consumer sector and have plenty of cattle grazing their South Texas ranch, it was fairly easy to ramp up production to meet increased need.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture-inspected custom meat processor the Lowrys use for all their cattle was ready, too.

"They were busy. We were busy. They were happy. We were happy," he said. "It was really just lightning in a bottle, and we contained it. We were able to get it there in the right place at the right time."

The unpredictable Texas weather cooperated, as well. It was a good, wet year yielding plenty of corn and forage.

There were a few growing pains along the way, though.

At first, Lowry sent some cattle to the processor at lighter weights and sooner than he'd like just to keep up with demand.

More beef also equals more storage. The Lowrys wanted to buy a commercial freezer made from a cargo container. But cargo containers are in high demand right now, and the manufacturer couldn't

source one.

The insulated boxes necessary to ship frozen beef, which are already expensive, are in short supply, as well.

So, the family pivoted to using online marketplaces like Facebook to find enough consumer-grade freezers to meet their needs. They also got creative by asking customers to upcycle boxes from meal delivery kit services.

For every insulated shipping box



the Lowrys receive from a customer, they offer a purchase discount or free product.

Overall, his operation and various businesses thrived during this difficult time.

"COVID was the best thing that ever happened, financially, to us. Not only did our beef business grow, we had skid steers and dozers and excavators ready to clear land. People were buying land, so that business is going well, too," Lowry said. "So, we



**The Lowrys' direct-to-consumer beef business expanded during the pandemic. New customers turned to the local ranchers at the beginning of the pandemic and have remained loyal. Courtesy photo.**



just stayed busy, and it's been really nice."

### **Matt Norton Fiddlestick Farms**

Agritourism venues like Fiddlestick Farms in Midland had to make changes to adapt to COVID-19 protocols.

"Things we did in 2019 don't work anymore. Something as simple as how we put out condiments and handle sanitation where the general public sits has had to change to make sure people are safe and feel safe now," said Matt Norton, who owns Fiddlesticks Farms with his wife Jessica.

Because Fiddlestick Farms is an outdoor venue, the pandemic did not hurt their business as badly as others. The eight-acre corn maze, 15-acre pumpkin patch and five-acre sunflower field offer plenty of opportunities to spread out and maintain social distance. So, even in the first fall season, customers showed up in droves for a family outing.

He still faces several challenges, though. He now has to "overstaff" by hiring three times as many people in case multiple employees are sick

or exposed to COVID-19.

"I've had to hire 150 people to ensure 30 people showed up for a shift," Norton said. "Now, I need a full-time sanitation crew to go around cleaning picnic tables and all the other surfaces people touch frequently. We actually had to remove some attractions to justify paying the sanitation crew, because those are employees we otherwise would've utilized to staff those attractions."

A nationwide cash and coin shortage made business difficult, too. A long stretch of time in which quarters were in very short supply had Norton's employees offering half-dollar coins as change, earning some double takes from puzzled customers.

To sidestep the issue, he offered incentives for online ticket purchases like a separate entry bypassing crowds.

Other frustrations followed this year when supply chains began to break down.

Paper goods were difficult to source this season, leading Norton to make repeated small purchases at local grocery stores. It's much more cost-effective to order in bulk for

the seven separate kitchens he operates during the season, but when wholesalers couldn't get him what he needed when he needed it, he had no choice but to pay more.

Norton faced another issue when he attempted to make a routine bulk purchase of apples this fall.

"We have a relationship with a Michigan farmer who grows apples. We purchase his No. 2-grade apples to shoot in our apple cannons, which is a very popular attraction here," Norton said. "But since there was a nationwide apple shortage this year, the trucking industry went up on freight rates because that commodity was in high demand. So, we had to really get creative on how we ordered products, how we got them here and how we kept them stocked to meet our need without spending an arm and a leg to do it."

Preparing for the farm's busy season had its own set of challenges.

Even though his venue is for agritourism, he shares the struggles of a conventional crop farmer when it comes to inputs.

"Even though we're a different kind of farm, we still feel the effects

the same way," he said.

It's harder to keep equipment running, too.

Parts for machinery and farm equipment that are normally readily available take several days to arrive—if they can even be found.

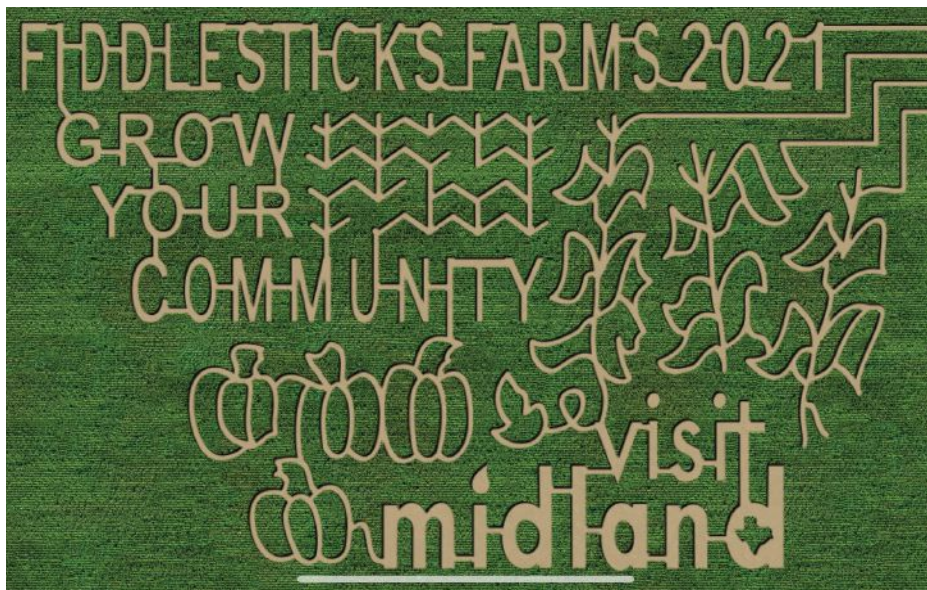
He's concerned about what 2022 will bring as inflation continues to rise. Everyday necessities like food and fuel are costing more while wages remain flat, leading to less disposable income for extras like family outings.

But all he can do is continue to farm and hope.

He's adjusted Fiddlestick Farms the past couple of years as necessary to stay open and create as safe of an environment as possible for their customers.

And that's what he will continue to do.

"What didn't change for us is our core values and our mission. Every year, our goal is for families to come out and make memories," Norton said. "Even though we had to operate differently, that's one thing we still worked hard for, and that's what we'll keep doing as long as we can."



*Matt and Jessica Norton own and operate Fiddlesticks Farms in Midland. Because of the pandemic, the couple has adjusted various aspects of their business. Courtesy photos.*

*Sunflower fields, pumpkin patches, corn mazes and other attractions allow visitors to make memories with family and friends and also learn about agriculture. Courtesy photos.*

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# TFB garden grant recipients can grow ag literacy, awareness

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau named the recipients of the Learning From the Ground Up garden grants for 2022.

Thirty-nine grants were awarded to schools and educational programs across the Lone Star State for their projects that help grow agricultural literacy and awareness.

“Helping students grow an understanding of agriculture and food production while connecting the information to concepts taught in the classroom is a win-win,” said Jordan Bartels, TFB associate director of Organization Division, Educational Outreach. “From the school garden to the farm, Farm Bureau can help students connect with agriculture, because food production and learning truly happens anywhere.”

Projects include establishing or improving school gardens, raised beds, greenhouses and outdoor classrooms that provide students with hands-on experiential learning

about agriculture and food production.

The next application process will open in fall 2022, and Bartels en-

courages schools and educational programs to consider applying for the grants.

For more information about gar-

den grants, other educational opportunities and Ag in the Classroom materials, visit [texasfarmbureau.org/aitc](https://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc) or email [edoutreach@txfb.org](mailto:edoutreach@txfb.org).

## Garden Grant recipients for 2022 include the following:

Dalhart Elementary School

Groom ISD

Caprock

Spur Secondary

Cotton Center Elementary

Primrose School of Lubbock South

Vernon High School

Woodson School

Donna Zimmerer Licensed Daycare, LLC.

Alma Martinez Intermediate School STEM Academy

Coppell High School

Duncanville High School

Alba-Golden Elementary

Mt. Vernon High School

Morris Upchurch Middle School

Roscoe Elementary School

Roscoe Montessori Early Childhood Center

Snyder High School

Clyde Jr. High

Lingleville High School

Brady High School

Caldwell Elementary School

Liberty Hill Middle School

Crestview Elementary School

Elkhart Intermediate

Eastside Elementary

Grapeland Elementary

Comfort Elementary

Bracken Christian School of Bulverde

Lytle Elementary School

James Reese Career and Technical Education Center

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Capt. J. Castro Elementary

Palacios Elementary

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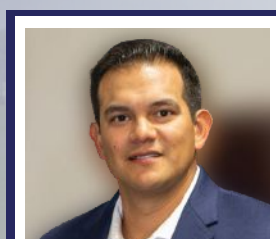
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# Devastating wind storm destroys wheat crop in Texas Panhandle

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Fierce, howling winds ripped through the High Plains and other areas of the state in mid-December, leaving farm families facing devastating losses despite planning and efforts to prepare.

“A lot of the weathermen were saying [the weekend before] that it was going to get really bad on Wednesday and could have anything from 50, 65, 80 mile per hour (mph) winds and to start preparing for that,” Jesse Wieners, who farms in Carson County, said.

So, they did.

“We did what we could. We got all of our [irrigation] pivots faced in a certain direction, and the majority we actually had running trying to keep water on the wheat and keep the soil from blowing by trying to keep it wet,” he said. “We did everything that we could, got everything going, had everything watering.”

Unfortunately, it wasn't enough.

The winds blew into Carson County around noon Wednesday, Dec. 15. Wieners said they had sustained winds at about 60 mph with gusts up to 70 mph.

“We weren't as bad as what they got to the north of us, but it was enough to do damage,” he said. “And then once the wind hit, it didn't stop until right after sunset. So, it was 60 mph wind sustained for roughly five hours. The Northern Panhandle was about 65 to 70 mph sustained with gusts to 100 for a longer period of time, probably six or seven hours.”



*This is how a Carson County wheat field looked following December's wind storm. Photos courtesy Jesse Wieners.*

The devastation was evident the next morning. Wheat fields that were green are now brown, and Wieners' crop is a total loss.

The wind storm coupled with prolonged drought left the wheat crop especially vulnerable. A Dec. 13 winter wheat report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture showed about 53% of winter wheat production was in areas experiencing drought. The Texas Panhandle is one of those areas. Wieners said the Texas Panhandle hadn't received measurable rain in nearly 70 days.

“All the wheat that was out there was in poor shape. It didn't have a root system on it, or if it did, it was very shallow. So, it wasn't established, and it couldn't hold up to a wind like we had,” Wieners said. “The wheat that is still around is ir-



rigated wheat that was planted really early. They had a lot of water on it, and it was established. But even around the edges of the field, the wheat blew out.”

This isn't the first wind storm Wieners has seen, but it is the worst.

“The thing about this storm was how long it lasted,” he said. “I've had no-till cotton blow out before, but that was because of straight-line winds off a thunderstorm. That wind only lasted probably 30 minutes. But as far as a sustained wind this big for this long, I can't think of an event like this, not in my lifetime.”

But to add to the unsettling news of the crop damage, many farmers weren't as lucky as Wieners when it came to their irrigation pivots.

“The 100 mph wind gusts turned over hundreds, if not thousands, of

center pivots across the states with bad weather,” he said. “It's going to take months to get parts in to fix those pivots, and if you wanted to order a new system, it's probably going to be a year out. This one storm is going to be something that's going to have a long term effect, not just on wheat, but possibly on corn and other crops when you start looking at pivot problems.”

The dry conditions, above-normal temperatures and high winds also sparked fires across the Panhandle and North Texas last month when more than 25,000 acres burned.

Despite February's winter storm and December's devastating winds, Wieners remains positive.

“I guess that's why there's only 2% of the population that do this job, because you have to love it to do it,” Wieners said. “What has me optimistic right now is we just had one of the best cotton crops I've ever had, and there were good prices. I've had more bad years than good years, but we had a good summer and a good crop. And I know we're going to have more good years.”

Being a farmer takes faith, hope and love. It's gratitude for the little moments and prayers for a brighter tomorrow.

“There's so much out of our control. Anybody who farms knows that. You really embrace the good years, and you're very thankful for them,” he said. “On the bad years, you thank God that you get to continue doing what you love. That's the only way I can put it.”

## House passes Farm Bureau-backed Ocean Shipping Reform Act

The Ocean Shipping Reform Act (OSRA) is headed to the U.S. Senate after overwhelmingly passing the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 364-60.

The bill would take key steps to resolve maritime supply chain obstacles that are increasing costs for U.S. agricultural exporters and preventing U.S. shippers from capturing export opportunities, according

to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

“Ongoing congestion and related logistical obstacles threaten U.S. farmers' and ranchers' ability to meet much-welcome increases in foreign demand for our products,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall wrote in letter to House lawmakers urging them to support the bill.

The legislation has support from

several other ag and forestry groups.

“Accessibility to export containers has been further limited by record shipping costs and harmful surcharges,” Duvall said. “With these factors combined, the ability for farmers and ranchers to fulfill overseas contracts has been significantly impacted, with some estimations nearing \$1.5 billion in lost agricultural exports.”

The Ocean Shipping Reform Act would revise the Shipping Act to provide new oversight and enforcement authority to the Federal Maritime Commission, expand opportunities for shippers to seek redress from ocean carriers, and increase transparency and accountability among ocean carriers and other parties.

The legislation now goes to the Senate.

## Farmers, ranchers establish policy goals at annual meeting

Texas farmers and ranchers established policy to help guide the agricultural advocacy efforts of Texas Farm Bureau (TFB), the state's largest general farm and ranch organization.

Policies regarding livestock, private property rights and foreign ownership of agricultural land were among the policies approved by the nearly 700 voting delegates gathered at the organization's 88th annual meeting's business session Dec. 5 in Corpus Christi.

"Our business session provides Farm Bureau leaders from across the state an opportunity to set the policy goals of the organization for the coming year," TFB President Russell Boening said.

Delegates approved several resolutions related to animal welfare. They supported a resolution that would require livestock health evaluation training for animal control and law enforcement personnel.

Delegates supported a resolution that would establish an assistance program for full or partial reimbursement to landowners for property damages due to illegal bailouts

and chases.

Other resolutions approved by delegates pertained to eminent domain. Delegates supported requirements for companies with easements to install and maintain erosion control methods where the easement crosses a stream, creek, river or other erosion-prone areas identified by the property owner.

Delegates also supported a resolution that opposes the use of eminent domain to acquire private property for renewable energy projects.

Farm Bureau leaders approved policy supporting financial compensation to farmers, ranchers and individuals for contamination of groundwater wells, surface water for nearby farms, livestock and irrigation water sources if a farm or ranch is adversely impacted by hazardous or toxic waste.

On the national level, delegates approved policy supporting the creation and enforcement of a registry of all lands currently owned by foreign interests or foreign individuals. Any future purchases of land would also need to be registered at closing.

State resolutions adopted at the



*Texas Farm Bureau voting delegates considered state and national policy resolutions during the business session of the organization's 88th Annual Meeting in Corpus Christi at the American Bank Center.*

TFB annual meeting become policies that guide the organization in 2022.

National resolutions adopted by the voting delegates are sent to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) for consideration in its reso-

lutions process.

Resolutions approved by AFBF delegates this month provide a roadmap for the national organization.

Coverage from the AFBF annual convention will be in the February issue of *Texas Agriculture*.

## New Texas Farm Bureau officers, one state director elected

During Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) 88th Annual Meeting, new officers and one state director were elected.

Russell Boening was re-elected as president of TFB. He was first elected president of the organization in December 2014.

Pat McDowell of Wheeler County was elected vice president, and Pete Pawelek of Atascosa County was elected secretary-treasurer.

McDowell grows corn and wheat and raises cattle in the Panhandle. He represents TFB on the U.S. Meat Export Federation. McDowell was elected to the TFB board in December 2017.

Pawelek grows hay and cotton

and raises cattle in South Texas. He was elected to the TFB board in December 2018.

Re-elected to two-year terms were McDowell, Mark Daniel of Baylor County, Kevin Wilkerson of Van Zandt County, Sam Snyder of Callahan-Shackelford County, John Griffith of Cherokee County and Allen Kaminski of Austin County.

One new director, Brian Jones of Edcouch, was also elected. He succeeds Scott Frazier to represent District 13.

Jones grows irrigated cotton, corn, grain sorghum and soybeans in Hidalgo County.

He has served several years in numerous roles, including presi-

dent, vice president and secretary-treasurer, on the Hidalgo County Farm Bureau board of directors.

He participated in TFB's leadership program, AgLead, and served on TFB's Feed Grains Advisory Committee. Jones also served as the state Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee chair and represented District 13 on the state advisory committee for three years.

He was a member of TFB's 2020 Vision Committee and participated in the Food Dialogues panels to help foster communication between consumers and farmers.

He and his wife, Lisa, have two grown children and one granddaughter.



**Brian Jones**

Read more about TFB's state directors online at [texasfarmbureau.org/board-members](https://www.texasfarmbureau.org/board-members).

## County Farm Bureaus show membership growth again in 2021

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

County Farm Bureaus across Texas were recognized for membership achievements during Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) 88th Annual Meeting.

"Our great organization embodies the true spirit, resilience and passion of the Lone Star State," TFB President Russell Boening said. "As the state's largest general farm and ranch organization, we work together to ensure agriculture stays strong and the rural way of life remains viable."

TFB gained 1,758 members for a total of 535,614 member-families. Out of 205 organized county Farm Bureaus across Texas, 136 counties gained members during the year, and a statewide retention rate of 88.72% was achieved.

The top 10 county Farm Bureaus in new member acquisition were: Collin County, 1,742 members; McLennan County, 1,570 members; Brazoria-Galveston County, 1,482 members; Ellis County, 1,189 members; Fort Bend County, 1,154 members; Bell County, 1,082 members;

Johnson County, 1,009 members; Grayson County, 997 members; Harris County, 975 members; and Jefferson County, 931 members.

County Farm Bureaus reporting the largest total membership growth include: McLennan County, 476 members; Gregg County, 379 members; Bell County, 295 members; Ellis County, 267 members; Johnson County, 240 members; Smith County, 216 members; Lubbock County, 190 members; Lamar County, 184 members; Nacogdoches County, 180 members; and Grayson County, 175 members.

The highest membership renewal percentages were achieved by the following: Mason County, 94.98%; Knox County, 94.23%; Lavaca County, 93.54%; Kendall County, 93.39%; Kimble County, 93.38%; Hardeman County, 93.13%; Archer County, 93.12%; Nacogdoches County, 93.01%; Lampasas County, 92.85%; and Fisher County, 92.79%.

County Farm Bureaus with the largest membership include the following: Collin County, 13,394; Brazoria-Galveston County, 12,496; McLennan County, 10,574; Fort Bend



*Jarod and Kara Root of Denton County received a TFB gate sign for their efforts in 2021 in encouraging families to join the organization.*

County, 10,325; Ellis County, 9,362; Jefferson County, 8,809; Bell County, 8,201; Grayson County, 7,294; Bexar County, 7,261; and Kaufman County, 7,144.

County Farm Bureaus with the longest continuous growth in membership include: DeWitt County, 72 years; Franklin County, 41 years; Henderson County, 32 years; and the following were recognized for 30 years: Atascosa County, Bell County, Comal County, Gillespie County, Hill

County, Medina County, Navarro County and Tyler County.

"This achievement marks 21 consecutive years of membership growth, and we're very proud of that accomplishment," Boening said. "Our mission is to be the Voice of Texas Agriculture, and our continued membership growth shows the value of Farm Bureau to agriculture, rural communities and everyone connected to the production of our food, fiber and fuel."

## Illustrator signs accurate agriculture book during annual meeting

Jen Betton, the illustrator of the accurate ag book, *Barn At Night*, signed copies in the exhibit area during the Texas Farm Bureau Annual Meeting.

Betton is an award-winning illustrator who lives in Dallas with her two children.

Each member-family in attendance could receive a free copy of the book.

*Barn at Night* is available from Feeding Minds Press, the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture's publishing venture.

"In *Barn at Night*, readers discover the certain magic of a farm in the quiet predawn hours," Foundation for Agriculture Executive Di-

rector Daniel Meloy said. "It is our hope that this book will illustrate the dedication of farmers and ranchers in caring for their animals, day in and day out, long before the rest of the world springs to life."

This true-to-life tale, written by Michelle Houts and illustrated by Betton, invites readers along as a father and daughter go out to the barn on a cold winter night and are welcomed with an enchanting scene. The pair discover who is awake, who is asleep and who is just making their first appearance in the barn.

"Kids are so visual. Books like *Barn at Night* really help young learners understand where their food comes from, who grows it and

how they grow it," Julia Recko, the Foundation's Education Outreach director, said.

To complement the book, Feeding Minds Press created resources, including an activity kit, an in-depth video from the book's illustrator showing her creative process and a blog post from the book's author explaining her inspiration for the book.

The materials are available at [agfoundation.org](http://agfoundation.org).

Feeding Minds Press also offers several free printable books that focus on careers in agriculture. The books are available for purchase directly from Feeding Minds Press, as well as on Amazon and Barnes & Noble online.



# TFB 88TH ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

## Young farmers, ranchers named winners in TFB state contests

Fueled by passion and hunger for knowledge and leadership, young farmers and ranchers are cultivating the future. Texas Farm Bureau's Young Farmer & Rancher program helps them strengthen their impact.

During the 88th Annual Meeting, the winners were named in the three contests—Outstanding Young Farmer & Rancher, Excellence in Agriculture and the Discussion Meet.



### Outstanding Young Farmer & Rancher Travis and Kaylin Isbell

Travis and Kaylin Isbell of Williamson County won the 2021 Outstanding Young Farmer & Rancher competition.

The Isbells raise commercial cattle, stocker cattle and Dorper sheep on their ranch outside of Florence. They grow grass hay and winter oats and have a custom hay business. In addition to their own ranch, Travis manages two other local ranches, and Kaylin is a part-time farm and ranch real estate agent.

As winners of the contest, the Isbells received the title to a 3/4 ton, 4-wheel drive Ford pickup with a diesel engine, sponsored by Texas Farm Bureau Insurance Companies, and a \$5,000 cash award, courtesy of Farm Credit.

Runners-up in the contest were Travis and Bethany Wanoreck of Nueces County and Austen and Rachel White of Wilbarger County.

### Excellence in Agriculture Heston and Stevie McBride

Heston and Stevie McBride of Lampasas County won the 2021 Excellence in Agriculture competition.

The McBrides work alongside each other in their agricultural business venture and cow-calf operation. They are the owners and operators of Agro-Tech, an agricultural service business that provides liquid feed, custom hay services, herbicides, agricultural equipment rentals, dyed diesel and more to farmers and ranchers in the Lampasas area. They also grow hay for their cow-calf herd.

The McBrides received a UTV, courtesy of Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company, and a \$5,000 cash award, courtesy of Farm Credit.

Runners-up in the contest were Chase Brooke of Anna and Jacob and Laura Henson of Lingleville.

### Discussion Meet Isaac Sulemana

Isaac Sulemana, a Hidalgo County Farm Bureau member, won the 2021 Discussion Meet contest.

Sulemana's family raises cattle and grows hay, corn, grain sorghum and cotton. He is the chief of staff for Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez.

As the winner, Sulemana took home an ATV, courtesy of Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company, and a \$5,000 cash award, courtesy of Farm Credit.

The Discussion Meet finalists were Grant Davis of Rusk County, Victor Salazar of Madison County and Ellisa Tiscareno of Erath County.

The Isbells, McBrides and Sulemana will compete at the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention Jan. 7-12 in Georgia.





## Hrabovsky named 'Outstanding Teacher' by Texas Farm Bureau

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

One Texas teacher's passion for agriculture and science has earned him recognition from the state's largest general farm and ranch organization.

Dale Hrabovsky was named Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) 2021 Agriculture in the Classroom Outstanding Teacher award winner. Hrabovsky was recognized during TFB's 88th Annual Meeting Dec. 4 in Corpus Christi.

Hrabovsky teaches biology, IPC, chemistry and animal science at CATS and PACE Academy in Angleton.

Hrabovsky, who has been in the classroom for 21 years, teaches at an alternative campus, where the students are assigned for disciplinary reasons. Although the students are only in his classroom for an average of 25 days, Hrabovsky uses that short

time period to bring agriculture to life through his science lessons.

He was nominated by Brazoria-Galveston County Farm Bureau.

"Mr. Hrabovsky's dedication to his students is something to be honored. His situation is challenging, because the students he teaches are not able to go off campus and are under strict guidelines in every aspect of their school day," Tom Ferguson, Brazoria-Galveston County Farm Bureau president, said. "Mr. Hrabovsky has to constantly be looking for inventive ways to incorporate agricultural concepts into his classroom, but we believe his students need that understanding of agriculture even more and our county Farm Bureau welcomes any opportunity to work with him and his students."

Hrabovsky started a campus garden to help get students involved in outdoor activities and hands-on lessons. The garden recently received

the Outdoor Program of the Year Award from the Texas Outdoor Education Association.

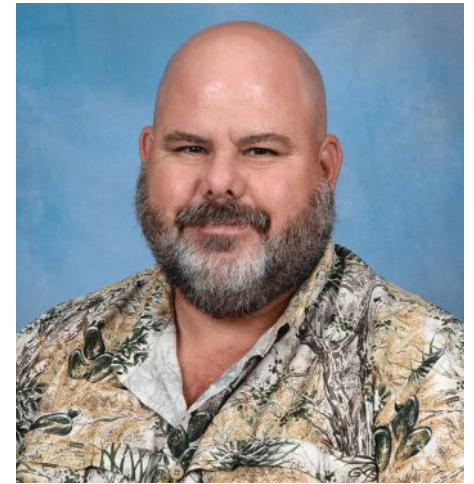
He was also awarded a Scoping Out Ag in the Classroom Microscope Grant and a Learning from the Ground Up Garden Grant from TFB.

"Dale is a great example of the difference a teacher can make in a student's life," TFB President Russell Boening said. "Regardless of the circumstances, Dale aims to bring agricultural experiences and information to his students, helping them make a connection between farmers and ranchers and our food, clothes, fuel and natural resources."

Hrabovsky graduated with a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Ecology from Texas A&M University, where he also received his Secondary Science Teacher Certification.

He and his wife, Traci, have two daughters and live in Friendswood.

In recognition of his accomplish-



ment, Hrabovsky received a \$600 cash award, as well as an expense-paid trip to attend the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference next summer. Brazoria-Galveston County Farm Bureau received a \$400 cash award for the nomination.

Hrabovsky also will be nominated for the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award.

## Texas Farm Bureau recognizes the 2021 media award winners

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Highlighting issues facing rural communities and telling the story of Texas farmers and ranchers earned two media members recognition from Texas Farm Bureau (TFB).

Each year, the state's largest general farm and ranch organization recognizes superior agricultural reporting.

Awards were given in two categories: Excellence in Journalism for markets less than 50,000 and Excellence in Journalism for markets of 50,000 or larger.

"The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain issues have kept agriculture in the news," TFB President Russell Boening said. "Through our awards program, we are able to recognize the efforts of reporters, broadcasters and editors who worked with our farm and ranch

members to tell agriculture's story throughout the year."

### Excellence in Journalism Markets of 50,000 or less

TFB awarded the Excellence in Journalism award for markets of less than 50,000 to Drew Powell, a reporter at KVII-TV.

Powell was nominated by Carson-Armstrong County Farm Bureau for his coverage of farm and ranch issues, attention to detail and bringing agricultural stories to life for viewers.

"Drew has done an excellent job reporting local agricultural issues and interviewing farmers and ranchers, including several of our county Farm Bureau leaders," Carson-Armstrong County Farm Bureau said in the nomination.

### Excellence in Journalism Markets over 50,000

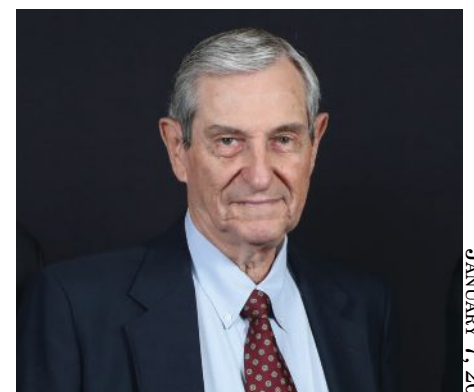
Lynn Farris, broadcaster and



Drew Powell

owner of KNEL 95.3 FM and 1490 AM in Brady, was awarded TFB's Excellence in Journalism award in markets over 50,000.

Farris and his wife, Luci, purchased KNEL AM-FM in 1995. Farris helps his audience learn more about agriculture through various broadcast efforts online and via traditional airwaves.



Lynn Farris

McCulloch County Farm Bureau nominated Farris for the award, citing his desire and dedication to tell the stories of Texas agriculture.

"Lynn can be counted on to keep our community informed of any situation or to pitch in with local events," McCulloch County Farm Bureau President Bobby Pearce said in the nomination form.

# TFB 88TH ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

## HONORING OUR PIONEERS ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ CLASS OF 2021

They give everything to their farm, ranch, communities and consumers. For that, we recognize them for what they are: pioneers in Texas agriculture.

Each year, 13 Texas farmers and ranchers and one retired professional staff member are honored with the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Pioneer Award. They are selected for their contributions to agriculture and TFB,

both through service and leadership.

Members of the 30th class of TFB Pioneers were recognized at the 88th Annual Meeting.

Their photos and names will join the more than 300 previous Pioneer Award winners positioned outside the Walter Hammond Auditorium in the TFB Conference and Training Center in Waco.



### District 1 | Douglas M. (Ken) Harris

Douglas M. (Ken) Harris joined Childress County Farm Bureau in 1974 and continues to be a proud member of the organization. He was elected to the Childress County Farm Bureau board of directors in 1977 and served for 28 years, mostly as president.

Harris also served on the Resolutions Committee, Cotton Advisory Committee and the Wheat Advisory Committee.

He ran for TFB state director in 1987.

Harris continues to farm and ranch in Childress, Cottle and Hardeman counties. He grows cotton, wheat and runs a cow-calf operation.

He and his wife, Brenda, are members of the First Baptist Church of Childress.



### District 4 | Gene Martin

Last year, Gene Martin celebrated 56 years as a Farm Bureau member. Martin was a director of Hunt County Farm Bureau from 1997-2020 and served as president from 2010-2017. He is active in Ag Day events and local FFA and 4-H fundraising efforts and activities and the Hunt County Livestock Association.

Martin represented the county twice as a member of the TFB Resolutions Committee and attended several National Affairs Awards Trips to Washington, D.C.

He is a respected leader in the Hunt County agricultural community. He's also a deacon at First Baptist Church of Celeste.



### District 2 | Weldon Melton

Weldon Melton is a longtime leader of Hale County Farm Bureau after first joining the organization in 1968. He has served as Hale County Farm Bureau president, vice president and as secretary-treasurer.

Melton also served on several Hale County Farm Bureau and TFB committees. He served on the Hale County Farm Bureau Resolutions, Cotton and National Affairs committees.

He served on the TFB Resolutions Committee and on the TFB Soybeans Commodity Advisory Committee.

Melton attended TFB and AFBF leadership training sessions, and he twice attended the TFB National Affairs Awards Trip to Washington, D.C.



### District 5 | C.W. Forsyth, Jr.

C.W. Forsyth, Jr. was 12 when he joined 4-H and ordered pigs and chickens from Sears & Roebuck—the start of a thriving broiler operation.

In 1969, he returned to full-time farming and to his broiler operation, which he gradually increased to raising one million birds per year.

Forsyth joined Titus County Farm Bureau at the same time and became a director in 1986. He served on the county Legislative Committee, the state Poultry Advisory Committee for six years and the state Resolutions Committee twice.

After 49 years of raising poultry, cattle and baling hay, he retired in 2017.



### District 3 | Cecil Dudley Sparkman

The late Cecil Dudley Sparkman joined Clay County Farm Bureau in 1972, became a director in 1981 and served as president and vice president.

Throughout his time as a board member, Sparkman served on all county committees, attended district meetings and state annual meetings. He represented Clay County Farm Bureau at the local livestock show.

Sparkman was also active in the community. He served on the Midway School Board for six years and served one year as president. Sparkman also served as the 83rd president of Clay County Pioneer Reunion.

He was a member of Joy Baptist Church in Henrietta.



### District 6 | Derwood C. Blagrove

Derwood C. Blagrove continues to be an advocate for agriculture. He joined Howard County Farm Bureau in 1953.

He earned a degree in engineering from Texas Tech University in 1959 before serving two years in the U.S. military as an industrial engineer.

Blagrove married Joan Allred in 1955 and began farming in Ackerly while working part-time for 10 years at the USDA Farm Service Agency in Martin County.

He was president of Howard County Farm Bureau from 1965-1972, then continued as a director for many more years. He and Joan attended every state annual meeting.

# TFB 88TH ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

## District 7 | Bobbye Smith Hurd

The late Bobbye Smith Hurd was a third-generation farmer and rancher raised in the East Sweden community of McCulloch County.

Hurd was a veteran, having served in the National Guard. Afterward, he operated a small dairy until 1986 and then moved to a cow-calf operation.

He joined Farm Bureau in 1952 and served on McCulloch County Farm Bureau's board for over 40 years in the offices of secretary-treasurer, vice president and president. He also served on the Dairy and Hay committees. He helped the county's membership grow from 475 to 1,550 members.

Hurd was active on his ranch up until his death at the age of 91.



## District 8 | Durwood Tucker

Durwood Tucker joined Milam County Farm Bureau in 1969. He served as president from 1975-1977 and from 2014-2020. He remains on the county board of directors.

Tucker also worked as a TFB Field Representative. Later, he was named TFB Director of Special Activities, where he worked with the Young Farmer & Rancher Program, coordinated the statewide Citizenship Seminar for high school students and coordinated state annual meetings for the organization.

After being away from TFB for 12 years, Tucker returned in 1989 as TFB Associate Director of State Affairs in Austin.

Tucker served many years as a volunteer leader for the Thorndale 4-H Club.



## District 9 | James (Jim) L. Smith

James (Jim) L. Smith, a rice and hay farmer and beef cattle rancher, has been a Farm Bureau member since 1972.

Smith is currently vice president of Jefferson County Farm Bureau board of directors and has held the offices of secretary-treasurer and president. He served on the Membership, Agriculture in the Classroom, Hay and Forage and National Affairs committees. He was instrumental in the

start-up of Ag Days in Jefferson County public schools.

Smith, a former TFB state director, served on the state Resolutions Committee and chaired the state and national Hay and Forage Committee. He also chaired the Member Benefits and Services Committee.



## District 10 | Eugene Verstuyft

Eugene Verstuyft joined Uvalde County Farm Bureau in 1957. He has served the organization as president and a director for many years.

He was a member of the county Farm Bureau Small Farm, Vegetable, Grain and Cotton committees. He served on the TFB Grain Advisory and Vegetable committees.

He never missed a district or state TFB meeting. He was an active leader of the Uvalde County Farm Bureau Ag in the Classroom program.

The Uvalde County Farm Bureau said Verstuyft provides selfless service to Farm Bureau and agriculture at the local, state and national levels and that he has "applied an unwavering commitment for the last 64 years."



## District 11 | William (Billy) P. Thomas, Jr.

The late William (Billy) P. Thomas, Jr. joined the Grimes County Farm Bureau over 35 years ago and was an active supporter of area agriculture and conservation until his death in 2021.

Thomas farmed with his dad until 2009, when, upon his father's death, he took over the ranch's cattle herd and its 3,000-plus acres of pastures. He also began the seven-acre Grandview Vineyard.

He served on the Navasota Soil and Water Conservation District as secretary and chairman. For 10 years, he served on the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts and on the executive committee at the national level.



## District 12 | Jerome Respondek, Jr.

Jerome Respondek, Jr. joined DeWitt County Farm Bureau in the early 1970s.

He has grown sorghum, corn, cotton and peanuts, did custom harvesting with his cousins and now has a productive cow-calf operation. He invested in the local elevator with other farmers to increase storage options.

Respondek served on the DeWitt County Farm Bureau board for many years at various times and has served in the role of vice president.

He was on the Membership, Feed Grains, Cotton, Peanuts and Wheat committees. He served on the local FSA board, is a member of Knights of Columbus and is active in the Holy Cross Catholic Church.



## District 13 | Bobby Nedbalek

Bobby Nedbalek and his wife, Mary Ann, operate a 6,000-acre family farm in San Patricio County. They grow cotton and grain sorghum and raise cattle.

Nedbalek has served on the San Patricio County Farm Bureau board, TFB as vice president and a state director for six years. He served as chair of TFB's Farm Bill Advisory Committee and was a member of the Natural Resources and

Public Affairs committees. He was on the Building Committee at the time the TFB Conference and Training Center was built in Waco.

He also served on several other boards, including the National Grain Sorghum Producers and Southern Farm Bureau Life.



## Staff | Gene Hall

Gene Hall was named Director of TFB Communications in 1990 and retired in 2019 after 42 years of service.

He joined the TFB staff in 1978 as assistant director of Radio/Television before being named director of that division in 1980. Under his leadership, TFB Communications received several national awards.

During his tenure, he oversaw TFB publications, the print shop, digital and social media communications, video services, the TFB Radio Network, newsletter service, graphics services and media relations.

Before coming to TFB, Hall was farm director at radio station KTXO in Sherman and a news reporter and anchor for KFDM-TV in Beaumont.



## Abbott, Patrick address TFB members during general session

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Texas agriculture plays a major role in the state's economy, but regulatory overreach is often an issue that farmers and ranchers face.

The 87th Texas Legislature passed several laws that helped strengthen private property rights and liability protections for ranchers, while also growing an understanding of agriculture.

"The fact is agriculture affects all of us—from the clothes on our backs to the food on our tables, and that's why I'm proud to say that we took action during the session to update the Farm Animal Liability Act to further defend our farmers and ranchers," Gov. Greg Abbott said in his virtual remarks. "This law expands liability protection for Texas ranchers and landowners, and it would not have been possible with-

out the support of Texas Farm Bureau and its members."

Abbott was unable to attend the annual meeting, but his video remarks stressed the importance of agriculture to the state's economy and to all Texans.

"Thank you to our farmers and ranchers across Texas for the role that you play in keeping Texas the greatest state in America," he said. "Remember this, we want you all to succeed. In fact, we need you to succeed. Because when you succeed, Texas succeeds."

And part of success comes from protecting the farm and ranch and maintaining the ability to produce food, fiber and fuel.

In 2021, TFB and landowners achieved meaningful eminent domain reform by passing several bills that will create a more fair and transparent process for landowners.



*Gov. Greg Abbott*

"We made great progress this session on eminent domain. We passed a bill protecting your land in 2015 and '17 and '19. I don't think I've ever spent more hours on any one subject than we did in 2019, particularly, trying to carve out a bill," Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick told the audience.



*Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick*

Other TFB legislative successes include expanding broadband service, establishing non-insurance health plans and authorization of a feral hog toxicant study using warfarin.

"I think it was a very positive session for farmers and rural America and rural Texas," Patrick said.

## Legislators receive S.M. True Agricultural Champion Award

The Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) AGFUND recognized State Sen. Lois Kolkhorst and State Rep. DeWayne Burns for being strong champions for Texas agriculture in the Texas Legislature.

Kolkhorst and Burns were each presented the S.M. True Agricultural Champion Award at a special AGFUND banquet Dec. 4. The award is named in honor of former TFB President S.M. True Jr.

"Sen. Kolkhorst has been one of the greatest champions for private property rights in the Texas Legislature for years. It didn't start with eminent domain. It started with the Trans-Texas Corridor," said TFB AGFUND President Russell Boening in presenting the award to Kolkhorst. "She has passed meaningful eminent domain legislation out of the Texas Senate, not once, not twice, but three times since 2015. Undeterred and unintimidated, she has been relentless."

Boening said accomplishing any major legislative effort means you must have two champions, and Burns is AGFUND's champion in the Texas House of Representatives.

"It's been a tough road with extraordinary challenges faced by few members of the Texas House. He has taken every punch and never quit working to get a meaningful eminent domain bill through the Texas House," said Boening in presenting the award to Burns.

Kolkhorst has represented Senate District 18 since 2014. She said she is honored to receive the award.

"It's really, truly, probably one of the highest honors I've ever received in serving in the Texas Legislature. The Farm Bureau is such a grassroots organization and has great clout not only in our state, but in our nation. And, so, to be honored by the Texas Farm Bureau, it's going to be one of my real highlights of my career," Kolkhorst said.



*Sen. Lois Kolkhorst*

Burns was first elected to represent House District 58 in 2014. He said the award means a tremendous amount to him and his family.

"Agriculture's been a part of who I am for as long as I can remember. And this organization literally helped shape who I am as a young man and has been right there with me every step of the way through



*Rep. DeWayne Burns*

my professional career, and even political career," Burns said. "To be recognized for the work we've done to protect property rights around this state is...I can't put it into words. I appreciate it so much."

The Texas Farm Bureau AGFUND board of directors established the S.M. True Agricultural Champion Award in 2011.



2022 Texas Farm Bureau

# PHOTO CONTEST

It's time once again for the annual Texas Farm Bureau photography contest, when you or someone you know can share your best photo with the entire Lone Star State and maybe even win a cash prize.

The contest is open to Texas Farm Bureau members or an immediate family member (i.e., spouse, child, sibling, or parent).

Rural settings and rural lifestyles are the preferred themes for all submissions, and contestants are limited to one entry per person. Four top winners will be selected and published in the July edition of *Texas Agriculture* and the summer edition of *Texas Neighbors*.

**FIRST PLACE**  
**\$250 cash prize**

**SECOND PLACE**  
**\$200 cash prize**

**2 HONORABLE MENTIONS**  
**\$100 cash prize each**

Visit [texasfarmbureau.org/photo-contest](https://texasfarmbureau.org/photo-contest) for complete contest rules.

**ENTRY DEADLINE: JUNE 1, 2022**

# Apply for TWDB ag water conservation grants

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) is accepting applications for agricultural water conservation grants for fiscal year 2022.

Farmers and ranchers strive to use water responsibly and sustainably, TWDB board member Kathleen Jackson said.

“What we know is that the individual farmer is very efficient in terms of their water usage,” she said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. “Farmers can be up to 98% efficient, so they are great stewards of water resources.”

Jackson noted \$1.2 million in funding through the Agricultural Water Conservation Grants Program is available for projects to help farmers and ranchers save water.

Throughout the program’s 36-year history, more than \$100 million in grants and low-interest loans have been awarded. In the last

five years, the 84 projects funded through TWDB’s agricultural water conservation grants have saved nearly 500,000 acre-feet of water, according to Jackson.

Some previously funded grant projects include demonstrations of conservation practices, educational outreach, purchase and installation of water-use monitoring equipment and irrigation efficiency improvements.

TWDB is looking for projects that quantify water savings through proven technology.

Field days, demonstrations, workshops and other activities that engage farmers and ranchers are also eligible for funding consideration.

The agency is seeking projects that promote the adoption of innovative water conservation practices resulting in improvements to irrigation efficiencies and soil health.

Projects that identify methods to measure and report water conservation performance metrics—such as

water savings, soil, water, holding capacity and infiltration—are also eligible for funding.

Other projects that determine the long-term sustainability, feasibility and profitability of the conservation practices by quantifying returns on investment are also sought, as well as those that build on the success of existing agricultural water conservation efforts.

“This is an opportunity for [farmers and ranchers] to share their expertise, to actually look at innovative technologies and equipment, to be able to enter into and work on demonstration projects where the producer utilizes his own property to go out and actually move forward with a project and then share what he’s learned with other producers,” she said.

The funds are available to Texas state agencies and other eligible political subdivisions, such as groundwater conservation districts, groundwater improvement districts

and regional river authorities.

Applicants may partner with private businesses and individuals on the project if oversight is managed by the eligible entity.

Jackson encouraged farmers and ranchers who are interested in sharing their knowledge or building more agricultural water conservation programs in their area to contact the local political subdivision and begin building out project parameters for a proposal.


The full request for application and instructions on how to apply for the agricultural water conservation grants are on TWDB’s website at [twdb.texas.gov](http://twdb.texas.gov). A list of previously funded projects is also available online.

Interested applicants may contact TWDB agricultural conservation staff at [agconservation@twdb.texas.gov](mailto:agconservation@twdb.texas.gov) with questions and for more information.


Applications are due by 2 p.m. on Feb. 9.

TWDB expects to notify grant recipients in May.

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# Re-register livestock brands, marks, tatoos before Feb. 28

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

The deadline to re-register Texas livestock and equine brands, marks and tatoos is fast approaching. Brand owners have until Feb. 28 to complete the re-registration process.

“Even if the brand has been in your family for generations, it must be re-registered,” Tracy Tomascik, TFB associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said. “It’s important to take care of this re-registration process prior to Feb. 28. The registration is good for 10 years and will expire Aug. 30, 2031.”

Any previously recorded brands, marks and tatoos that have not been re-registered by the deadline will be considered unclaimed and eligible for registration by another.

Brands are registered through the county clerk’s office. Some offices are participating in an online re-registration program. It is best to contact the county clerk to see if the county is participating.



*All brands, marks and tatoos must be re-registered by Feb. 28.*

Brand applications and renewals require a drawing of the brand that notes the location on the animal.

“The brand location is just as important as the brand,” Tomascik said. “The same brand can be registered in the same county, but only if the location on the animal is different. That’s why including the right location on the application is extremely important.”

Although Texas does not have a statewide brand registry database, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers (TSCRA) keeps a centralized database for the association’s law enforcement purposes.

TSCRA Special Rangers investigate thefts of cattle and horses, among other items. They also inspect livestock to determine ownership and prevent theft after a natu-

ral disaster. They help determine the ownership of stray livestock, too.

Brands may be transferred, but this requires a notarized affidavit signed by the current brand holder that relinquishes the title of the brand to the transferee. Brand transfers must be sent to TSCRA.

If the owner passes away and the heir wants to register the brand, the heir must provide proof of will or family agreement along with the death certificate.

It is not mandatory to brand livestock or horses in Texas. However, if livestock are branded, it is mandatory to register the brand with the county clerk. Failure to do so is considered a misdemeanor and is punishable by a fine up to \$500.

Pursuant to the Texas Agricultural Code 144.041, all brands, marks and tatoos expired Aug. 30, 2021.

For more details, visit [tscrabrands.com](http://tscrabrands.com) or call 1-800-242-7820 to speak with the TSCRA Brand and Inspection Department.

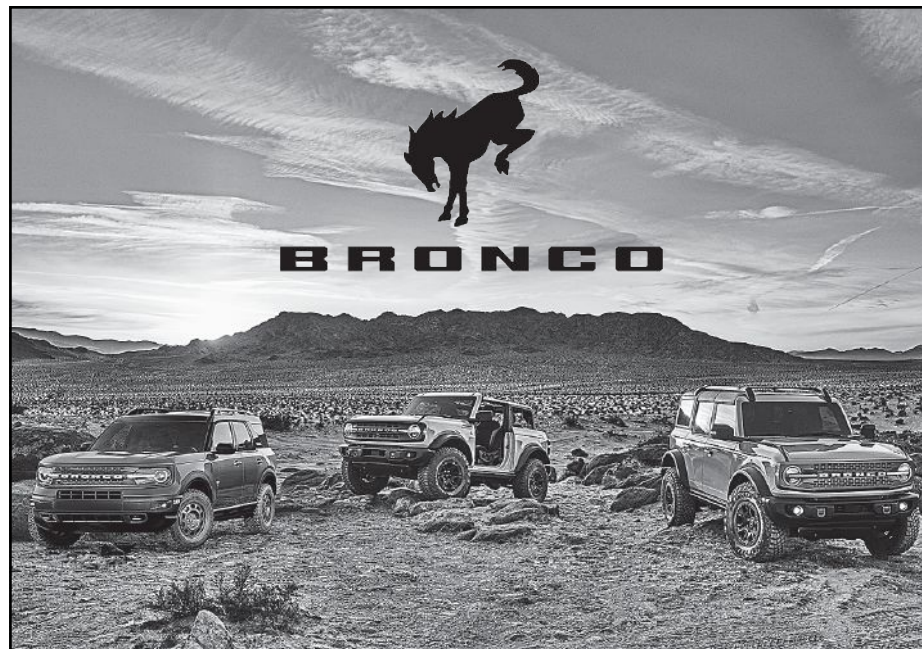
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# RMA makes changes to haying, grazing, prevented planting rules

Farmers and ranchers will have more flexibilities this year after the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Risk Management Agency (RMA) made changes to crop insurance. RMA is making permanent a new provision that allows farmers and ranchers to hay, graze or chop cover crops and still receive a full prevented planting payment.

To accommodate the different farming practices across the country, RMA is also increasing flexibility related to the prevented planting "1 in 4" requirement, as well as aligning crop insurance definitions with USDA's National Organic Program.

## Haying, grazing and chopping cover crops

Last July, RMA announced farmers can hay, graze or chop cover crops for silage, haylage or baleage at any time and still receive 100% of the prevented planting payment. Previously, cover crops could only be hayed, grazed or chopped after Nov. 1. Otherwise, the prevented planting pay-

ment was reduced by 65% if farmers took those actions on the cover crop.

RMA added this flexibility starting with the 2021 crop year as part of a broader effort to encourage farmers and ranchers to use cover crops, an important conservation practice.

Cover crops are especially important on fields prevented from being planted because they cover ground that would otherwise be left bare, which helps reduce soil erosion, boost soil health and increase soil carbon sequestration.

This change builds on the advanced research and identified benefits cover crops have supporting healthy soils and cropland sustainability efforts. Studies also show that cover crops provide increased corn and soybean yields.

While results vary by region and soil type, cover crops are proven to reduce erosion, improve water quality and increase the health and productivity of the soil while building

resilience to climate change. RMA also provided a premium benefit to farmers who planted cover crops through the Pandemic Cover Crop Program to help farmers maintain cover crop systems amid the financially challenging pandemic.

## "1 in 4" requirement flexibilities

For the 2020 crop year, RMA implemented a policy stating that for land to be eligible for prevented planting coverage, the acreage must meet the "1 in 4" requirement, which means the land must be planted, insured and harvested in at least one of the four most recent crop years. Now, RMA is adding flexibilities to recognize different farming practices and crops grown, as well as the availability of risk management options.

New flexibilities allowed in order to meet the "1 in 4" requirement include the annual regrowth for an insured perennial crop, such as alfalfa, red clover or mint, to be considered planted.

The changes also allow a crop covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) to meet the insurability requirement.

If crop insurance or NAP coverage was not available, the changes allow the farmer to prove the acreage was planted and harvested using good farming practices in at least two consecutive years out of the four previous years to meet the insurability requirement.

## Aligning organic terms

RMA is revising four organic definitions to be consistent with USDA's National Organic Program. Consistency across USDA programs is important to eliminate the potential for confusion between the vari-

ous programs. This change builds on other RMA efforts to expand and improve current options for organic farmers.

In September 2021, RMA announced several updates to Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), including increasing farm operation growth limits for organic farmers to the higher of \$500,000 or 35% over the five-year average allowable income, and to allowing a producer to report acreage as certified organic, or as acreage in transition to organic, when the farmer has requested an organic certification by the acreage reporting date.

In addition, RMA announced it will be offering the new Micro Farm policy through WFRP that specifically targets coverage for small, diversified farmers, including organic growers.

## Other changes

RMA made other changes to Common Crop Insurance Policy Basic Provisions, Area Risk Protection Insurance Regulations, Coarse Grains Crop Insurance Provisions and other insurance provisions.

RMA is providing an option for farmers to delay measurement of farm-stored production for 180-days through the Special Provisions, similar to flexibilities already available to grain crop farmers.

RMA added earlage and snaplage as an acceptable method of harvest for coarse grains. During the 2020 derecho, many farmers salvaged their damaged corn crop by harvesting as earlage or snaplage instead of grain or silage.

## More information

For more information about the changes and crop insurance, visit [rma.usda.gov](http://rma.usda.gov).

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# Lawmakers propose compensating farmers, landowners for damage from illegal immigration with unused border wall money

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Farm and ranch families and other property owners along the U.S.-Mexico border continue to suffer losses and damages caused by immigrants attempting to illegally cross into the United States.

Cut fences, polluted water sources, damaged crops, harmed livestock, stolen vehicles and homes being broken into are commonplace. And little is being done by federal government officials to slow illegal immigrants or help those families left dealing with the destruction.

Legislation introduced by U.S. Reps. Tony Gonzales of Texas and Stephanie Bice of Oklahoma seeks to change this.

The Securing American Families from Exploitation at the Border (SAFE Border) Act would transfer \$75 million of unobligated border construction funds, which have gone unused by President Joe Biden's administration, to establish a grant program to reimburse families in border communities for their losses.

"Texas Farm Bureau members continue suffering devastating losses due to the surge in illegal immigration," TFB President Russell Boening said. "Many hardworking farm and ranch families have shared examples of property damage, vandalism, stolen equipment, security concerns and more. We appreciate Congresswoman Bice for visiting the Texas-Mexico border to learn about these issues and introducing the SAFE Border Act to help provide needed assistance to landowners impacted by the border crisis."

Under the bill, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would take the border construction funds to create the Southern Border Landowner Security Grant Program.

American families living in high-risk areas of the U.S.-Mexico border could use those funds to strengthen their physical security against prop-



**Fences, water sources, crops and more are damaged when illegal immigrants pass through private property or bailouts occur. Courtesy photo.**

erty damage, theft or other losses. Landowners who have experienced those types of losses would also be eligible for compensation through the funds.

"Our farmers, ranchers and border communities are consistently fronting the bill for the crisis at our southern border. I hear from folks every day that share with me that the cost of the immigration crisis is only growing," Gonzales said in a statement. "The Biden administration continues to turn a blind eye to the border crisis, and it's causing our communities to bear the brunt of the issue. This legislation will help to ensure that families are no longer having to pay for property repairs out of their own pockets."

Illegal immigrants frequently travel in large caravans led by "coyotes," or human smugglers who charge fees to guide them across Mexico and into the U.S. When they cross private property on foot, the caravans cut fences, trample crops, contaminate or drain vital livestock water sources and leave a trail of trash and discarded clothing and luggage behind.

Sadly, the coyotes often leave the weak and sick behind, too. In sev-

eral heartbreaking instances, TFB members have found unaccompanied children—including infants—and extremely ill or dead immigrants on their lands.

Further damages occur when coyotes being pursued by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents crash vehicles through fences or into buildings as they attempt to get away. Others have held families at gunpoint as they stole vehicles and looted homes.

"Earlier this year, I visited the Del Rio sector of the border and saw with my own eyes the damage illegal border crossings continue to cause

in our southern border communities. Something must be done to protect American citizens who live on or near the border," Bice said. "Since the Biden administration has chosen to halt construction of the wall and refuses to effectively address the border crisis, Congress must find other ways to help people protect their property and this legislation will assist. Illegal border crossings continue to be a major issue in the states that border Mexico. This legislation provides a pathway to help landowners who are at risk or who have already been impacted."

In Texas and other southwestern border states, residents and border enforcement personnel are seeing an unprecedented surge of illegal immigrants.

Encounters by CBP of unaccompanied minors, family units and single adults at the agency's Big Bend, Del Rio, El Paso, Laredo and Rio Grande Valley sectors have grown steadily in recent years.

Last year, TFB spearheaded a national Farm Bureau effort urging top Biden administration officials to recognize the border crisis and take action to help farm and ranch families impacted by the surge of illegal immigration.

For more information on how the ongoing border crisis impacts Texans, visit [texasfarmbureau.org/border-crisis-impacts](https://texasfarmbureau.org/border-crisis-impacts).



**Landowners find clothes, bags and trash left behind by illegal immigrants. Courtesy photo.**

# TFB helps STEM academy students learn, grow

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

When fifth grade STEM Academy students at Alma Martinez Intermediate School in Mansfield were assigned a garden design challenge over the fall semester, they weren't sure where to start.

But some help from farmers and Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) soon had them on their way to creating garden plans for growing nutritious food on a budget.

"We were looking for a problem-based learning project that used relevant problems from today that were kid-friendly," Brooke Stinnett, Martinez STEM Academy fifth grade math designer and teacher, said. "And we thought, 'what could be more relevant than the increase in food prices?'"

The teachers came up with the "Frugal Foodies" project, where each group of students had \$50 to design and implement a garden capable of feeding families. The aim was to find fruit and vegetable crops that would grow large quantities of produce in a small space that are compatible with the region's climate.

Frugal Foodies was intended to be a semester-long project using grade-appropriate skills the students learned in their math, science, language arts and social studies classes.

There was just one small prob-



*Students pitch their garden projects to the class and farmers. Courtesy photo.*

lem. While the teachers are subject area experts, they didn't know much about agriculture or gardening.

That's where TFB could help.

"I had no idea what to expect, and what we asked from Farm Bureau was a lot," Stinnett said. "We asked them to be 'consultants' for our students, and the organization responded with true professionals, everyday farmers and ranchers who are experts in the field—literally."

North Texas farmers met with students and advised them on different aspects of farming and growing crops.

TFB District 4 State Director John Paul Dineen and his wife, Heather, Denton County Farm Bureau members Garrett Spigner and Lewis Trietsch and Hill County Farm Bureau members Rodney and Susan Schronk gave feedback about

each group's plan.

After taking notes and incorporating the advice into their projects, the students presented again to the farmers in what Stinnett called a "Shark Tank-style" pitch using persuasive text and speeches.

The difference in the students' knowledge and agricultural vocabulary was "night and day" after meeting with the farmers, she noted.

"If we could have had one consultation round and then a judge or two, we would've been totally thrilled. But Farm Bureau went way above and beyond and offered to come in and help launch the project," she said. "That got the kids really excited because these are faces they don't know doing jobs they've never really understood. The kids just really blossomed from there into little experts."

## TFB educational outreach efforts cultivate understanding of ag

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

As schools and events continue to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) stayed active in growing an understanding of agriculture.

In 2021, TFB's Organization Division, which handles education and urban outreach, communicated with teachers, students and communities through a variety of classroom activities, events and workshops.

"Our programs, staff and volunteer leaders helped plant the seeds of agricultural knowledge to grow a

better understanding of what farmers and ranchers do," Whit Weems, TFB director of Organization Division, said.

Through the Summer Agriculture Institute, Summer Ag Academies and virtual teacher workshops, teachers learned ways to incorporate agriculture into their curriculum and took home lesson plans.

The new Farm From School program reached over 440 teachers and 10,600 students. Each month, the students visited with farmers through live sessions to talk about growing pumpkins, peanuts, Christ-

mas trees and raising poultry.

Thousands of adults and children interacted with the new Doorways to Agriculture exhibit, which features interactive, educational displays at fairs and livestock shows across the state.

TFB's mobile learning barns, which are trailers that feature up to seven different crops and livestock, were used to help initiate conversations and teach nearly 47,100 adults and children last year.

Eighth grade students and high school students participated in the virtual Student Success Series to

learn about free enterprise, constitutional government, setting goals and leadership.

After presenting their final garden designs to the farmers, each group of students presented their project to the other groups and a vote was held. At the end of one week, there were eight finalists headed to the final round, which was judged by TFB Associate Director of Organization, Educational Outreach Jordan Bartels, a horticulturist and the farmers.

The top three designs will be used to create the school's first garden this semester, thanks in part to the teachers receiving a TFB Learning From the Ground Up garden grant.

The entire grade will participate in tilling the ground and planting a garden. Talks are ongoing about what to do with their anticipated harvest, including hosting a school farmers market or donating the food to the summer school meals program.

The students plan to grow okra, strawberries, beets, radishes, cantaloupe and bush beans.

"The learning will continue beyond designing a garden, too. It's not just putting seeds in the ground. There's so much that goes into it, and I think maybe our students never knew that and now they will," she said. "I'm really, really happy for them to have that experience. I think it's opening them up to careers that they never knew about before. We could not have brought this to the level that we did without Farm Bureau helping out."

learn about free enterprise, constitutional government, setting goals and leadership.

County Farm Bureau leaders and TFB Field Operations staff also participated in farmers markets, fairs and other venues and hosted Ag Days for elementary students throughout the year.

"We're able to start the dialogue about agriculture, food and farming in a variety of settings," Weems said. "We hope to continue to grow ag literacy and awareness in the coming year and build on top of the foundation we've created."

# USDA opens DMC program signup, expands enrollment coverage

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) opened signup for the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program and expanded the program to allow dairy farmers to better protect their farms by enrolling supplemental production.

This signup period runs through Feb. 18.

Supplemental DMC will provide \$580 million to better help small- and mid-sized dairy farms that have increased production over the years but were not able to enroll the additional production. Now, they will be able to retroactively receive payments for that supplemental production.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) also updated how feed costs are calculated, which will make the program more reflective of actual dairy farmer expenses.

## Supplemental DMC enrollment

Eligible dairy farms with less than 5 million pounds of established production history may enroll supplemental pounds based upon a formula using 2019 actual milk marketings, which will result in additional payments. Farmers will be required to provide FSA with their 2019 Milk Marketing Statement.

Supplemental DMC coverage is applicable to calendar years 2021, 2022 and 2023. Participating dairy farms with supplemental production may receive retroactive supplemental payments for 2021 in addition to payments based on their established production history.

Supplemental DMC will require a revision to a farmer's 2021 DMC contract and must occur before en-

rollment in DMC for the 2022 program year.

Farmers will be able to revise 2021 DMC contracts and then apply for 2022 DMC by contacting their local USDA Service Center.

## DMC 2022 enrollment

After making any revisions to 2021 DMC contracts for Supplemental DMC, farmers can sign up for 2022 coverage. DMC provides eligible dairy farmers with risk management coverage that pays farmers when the difference between the price of milk and the cost of feed falls below a certain level. So far in 2021, payments have triggered for January through October for more than \$1 billion.

For DMC enrollment, farmers must certify with FSA that the operation is commercially marketing milk, sign all required forms and pay the \$100 administrative fee.

The fee is waived for farmers who are considered limited resource, beginning, socially disadvantaged or a military veteran.

To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, farmers can use the online dairy decision tool.

## Updates to feed costs

USDA is also changing the DMC feed cost formula to better reflect the actual cost dairy farmers pay for high-quality alfalfa hay.

FSA will calculate payments using 100% premium alfalfa hay rather than 50%. The amended feed cost formula will make DMC payments more reflective of actual dairy farmer expenses.



*Enrollment is open for the 2022 Dairy Margin Coverage program.*

## Additional dairy assistance

The announcement is part of a broader package to help the dairy industry respond to the pandemic and other challenges.

USDA is also amending Dairy Indemnity Payment Program (DIPP) regulations to add provisions for the indemnification of cows that are likely to be not marketable for longer durations, as a result, for example, of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

FSA also worked closely with USDA's Natural Resources Conser-

vation Service to target assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and other conservation programs.

Other recent dairy announcements include \$350 million through the Pandemic Market Volatility Assistance Program and \$400 million for the Dairy Donation Program.

## More information on DMC

For more information on USDA's DMC program and decision tools available, visit [fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services](https://fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services).

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# Ranchers should prepare now for 2023 animal antibiotic guidelines

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released new guidance pertaining to animal drugs containing medically-important antimicrobials for use in companion and food production animals that are currently approved for over-the-counter (OTC) marketing.

Under the guidance, FDA stated several antibiotics familiar to ranchers and other livestock owners will no longer be available OTC.

The intent of the new guidance is to ensure animal drugs that contain antimicrobials important for humans are not being overused or used incorrectly, said Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Associate Director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities Tracy Tomascik.

“There are many antibiotics used in both human and animal medicine, and there’s concern that overuse or misuse of those medicines can contribute to antimicrobial resistance,” he said. “FDA has been updating its antimicrobial medication guidelines for several years now. This is the latest update in a string of changes to the way ranchers can access medication for livestock use.”

OTC antibiotics used in animal

feed and drinking water moved to Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) or prescription status in 2017, when the FDA first enacted VFDs for closer veterinarian oversight of antimicrobial use in food animals.

But a few antibiotics remained available OTC in the form of injectables, intramammary tubes and boluses, according to Tomascik.

Cephapirin and cephapirin benzathine, gentamicin, lincomycin, oxytetracycline, penicillin G procaine and benzathine, sulfadimethoxine, sulfamethazine and tylosin are currently available mainly as injectables but with a few intramammary tubes and boluses, he said.

By June 11, 2023, labels of those remaining OTC antibiotics will be required to read: “Caution: Federal law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.”

“What this means for ranchers is that they will need a veterinarian-client-patient relationship, or VCPR, in place to access those antibiotics after June 2023,” he said. “That doesn’t mean they’ll have to buy those antibiotics from their veterinarian, but they will need a prescription from the veterinarian to purchase them.”

With a valid VCPR, veterinarians



*In 2023, several antibiotics that are currently available over the counter will require a prescription. This change is part of several updates from the FDA.*

may make medical judgements and prescribe medications, including antimicrobials or antibiotics, for livestock if the veterinarian believes the owner will follow their instructions.

It’s better to be prepared by having an established relationship and not needing to access a veterinarian than to need a veterinarian and not be able to get in touch quickly enough, he noted.

“Although many of us prefer to worry about tomorrow’s troubles to-

morrow, the year 2023 will be here before we know it. So, it’s recommended that ranchers or livestock owners who don’t already have a good relationship with a trusted veterinarian start seeking one out and establish that relationship now,” Tomascik said. “Because you’re going to need that VCPR to make sure you have access to those antibiotics when you need them.”

More information is available at [fda.gov/animal-veterinary](https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary).

## TFB announces the 2021 Free Enterprise Speech district winners

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Eleven students were named district winners and received \$1,500 scholarships as part of the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Free Enterprise Speech Contest. They will now advance to the state competition.

The Free Enterprise Speech Contest was held virtually, and students of TFB member-families delivered a speech about the advantages of the free enterprise system and constitutional government.

“Through this contest, high school students learn more about our economy and our country, as well as how to communicate effectively, even when presenting virtually,” Whit

Weems, TFB director of Organization Division, said.

Contestants are judged on speech organization, language, use of notes, persuasiveness and application of the topic in the speech.

Students must participate in TFB’s annual Thrive experience, part of the new Student Success Series, which was also virtual this year, to be eligible to compete in the statewide Free Enterprise Speech contest.

They will compete in the contest finals, which will be held this year.

Four finalists at the state level will receive additional funding to amount to \$2,000 each, including the district scholarship. The state run-

### The 2021 district winners include:

District 1: Carson Smith, Hall County

District 2: A.J. Kendrick, Lubbock County

District 3: Conner Schroeder, Archer County

District 4: Maggie DeLaCerde, Denton County

District 6: Brock Braden, Midland County

District 7: Benjamin Flanagan, Runnels County

District 8: Bryli Wilson, Lampasas County

District 9: William “Joshua” Jones, Rusk County

District 10: Sydney Blair, Atascosa County

District 12: Logan James, Wilson County

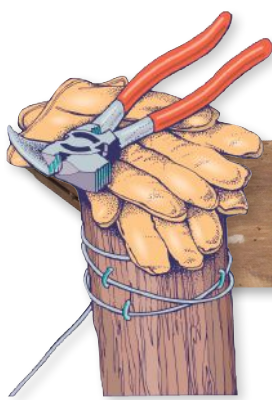
District 13: Lily Ford, Hidalgo County

ner-up’s scholarship will increase to \$3,000, and the state winner’s scholarship is worth \$6,000 total.

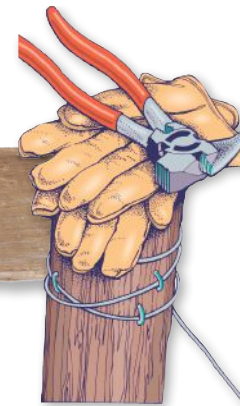
“The founding principles of private property and free enterprise are valued by Farm Bureau, and we want to inspire young people with those same principles,” Weems said.

“The contest builds on these concepts learned in the Thrive experience, helping students learn about leadership and government topics.”

For more information on youth activities and opportunities, visit [texasfarmbureau.org/youth](https://www.texasfarmbureau.org/youth) or email [youthactivities@txfb.org](mailto:youthactivities@txfb.org).



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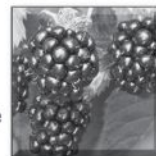
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