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March 6, 2020

Texas Agriculture

Sweet Success

Hawkins FFA
members create
national buzz

Pages 28-29



Agriculture headlines media stories, social media posts

It's only March, but agriculture has already seen our fair share of highs and lows in the media.

We had positive announcements about trade agreements. President Donald Trump visited Texas for the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention, and the new Navigable Waters Protection Rule replaced the controversial Waters of the U.S. rule (WOTUS).

It was a lot of alphabet soup when it comes to the acronyms for the many trade agreements, water rules and other regulatory changes, but definitely a good "bite" of news for farmers and ranchers.

In Hollywood, however, agriculture was the punching bag.

The award season this year, as in previous years, included a string of black-tie dinners. The actors and actresses enjoyed expensive meals wearing shiny dresses and fancy suits.

The winners each had a few minutes on stage after accepting their awards to champion their favorite cause.

Let's talk about one of those Oscar speech moments. Joaquin Phoenix spoke about the disconnect we

have from the natural world.

And I believe, in many cases, he's right about that. Folks are disconnected from agriculture, from the land and from our food.

But I disagree with him putting animals and their rights on the same level as humans and for degrading the dairy industry.



By Julie Tomascik
Editor

His beef with dairy flows from misinformation and a lack of understanding, because we've steered away from agriculture over the years.

Farms have grown and diversified, leaving others the freedom to pursue a career off the farm. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, actors—we can be

anything we want, because people have the freedom of not having to farm.

And often many individuals take that freedom and our food for granted.

Less than 2 percent of our nation's population do what you do—actively farm and ranch.

The efficiencies of U.S. agriculture have given us a luxury. Not everyone has to grow their food. Someone else can, and does so safely.

Farmers and ranchers have been sustainable and "green" long before

it was a Hollywood trend and buzzword. Because in agriculture, the natural world Phoenix referenced

is the place we call home, the place families grow old together, the place where our food is grown.

Your Texas Agriculture Minute

Farmers breathe new life into Texas soil

There's a lot of talk these days about sustainability on the farm.

Zack Yanta of Runge in Karnes County is practicing it, and he's telling others about his experience on his family's farm and ranch.

He's using no-till, cover crops and diverse species and rotations to improve soil health. He says improving soil health has increased the farm's resiliency and productivity.

A two- to three-inch rainfall used to leave water standing in the field puddled for about a week or longer. Last year, a similar rain yielded a noticeable difference—there was hardly any mud on his boots and on the tires of his truck.

In just a few years, he's already seeing an increase in life below ground, in the form of earthworms,

and an abundance of life above it in deer and other wildlife.

His cattle also benefit. The cover crops have resulted in greater production. Managed grazing, rotations and species, such as Klein grass and triticale, have helped double carrying capacity.

Yanta urges farmers not to focus on how much soil health measures will cost them.

Instead, he says they should ask themselves what it will cost them not to employ soil health-building principles.

He has a "let's make it better" stewardship ethic. That's a quality that's shared among farmers and ranchers in Texas and across the country. Taking care of the land so it can be passed on to future generations. Sustainable—both environmentally and economically.



By Gary Joiner
Publisher



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Warmer, drier weather forecast

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

A La Niña is already emerging near the equator, and meteorologists say the weather pattern will bring warmer, drier conditions to Texas this summer.

“If you look off the coast of California and South America, we’ve started to develop some very cold water off the coasts. That is a precursor then to rapid development of La Niña,” Dr. Art Douglas, professor emeritus at Creighton University, said at the Cattle Industry Convention in San Antonio last month.

Although the full strength of La Niña isn’t expected until July, Douglas said vegetation across much of Texas already shows signs of stress.

“Texas is the main area that’s really started to dry out in terms of the vegetation index,” Douglas said. “There’s also drying in Southern California and Arizona recently, compared to last year. Again, these are all typical changes we’d expect with La Niña developing.”

Douglas attributed Texas’ roller-coaster-like weather in February to El Niño fading into neutral conditions and a strengthening La Niña.

He forecasts above-normal temperatures for most of Texas under La Niña. The exceptions are North and East Texas, which are expected to see average temperatures.

Above-average rainfall is expected for Northeast Texas this spring, with below-normal rainfall for the rest of the state.

El Niño is the periodic warming in sea-surface temperatures across the central and east-central equatorial pacific, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

La Niña is the periodic cooling of the same area. NOAA reports it occurs about every three to five years.

According to NOAA, the northern hemisphere is currently El Niño-neutral and will remain neutral through the spring.

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EPA issues report that glyphosate is not a carcinogen

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) completed its regulatory review of popular weed killer glyphosate and concluded it poses no risk to human health when used according to label directions.

It is not a carcinogen, the EPA concluded.

“These findings on human health risk are consistent with the conclusions of science reviews by many other countries and other federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Canadian Pest Management Regulatory Agency, the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority, the European Food Safety Authority and the German Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health,” the EPA website reads.

EPA initially announced its findings in 2019, and then opened the public comment process on proposed

changes to EPA’s label. Those changes would require spray drift management to reduce off-site exposure to wildlife.

In September 2019, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler discussed EPA’s position on USDA Radio.

“For glyphosate, we took one of the most comprehensive looks at that chemical, that pesticide ever, by any regulatory body anywhere in the world. Our conclusions are that it is not a carcinogen, and those conclusions match regulatory bodies around the world,” Wheeler said.

Glyphosate is the most widely-used weed killer in the United States. It’s used on crops, lawns and golf courses.

EPA reviews the registration of pesticides every 15 years to ensure they perform as intended without unreasonable adverse effects on human health or the environment.

Over the past few years, use of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup, has come under fire as thousands of lawsuits allege its use has led to non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

To date, three juries in California have sided with plaintiffs’ claims and have awarded multi-million-dollar settlements.

Bayer, which purchased Monsanto for \$63 billion in 2018, is appealing those verdicts.

The lawsuits and claims have led other countries, like Vietnam, to ban glyphosate use.

U.S. Agricultural Trade Negotiator Gregg Doud told USDA Radio the anti-glyphosate wave could have profound effects on production and trade of crops around the world.

“I think this is something all of us in agriculture need to keep a very close eye on,” Doud said.

Vaccinate for West Nile, Eastern Equine Encephalitis viruses

With spring around the corner, Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL) wants to prepare your horses for West Nile virus and Equine Encephalitis virus.

Last year, TVMDL documented fewer cases of West Nile virus than in previous years.

The number of positive cases of West Nile virus in horses seen at TVMDL fluctuates from year to year, which is common with mosquito-borne diseases. In 2019, the agency reported only four positive cases in horses, none of which came from Texas.

But as West Nile cases went down, the agency saw a slight increase in another prominent mosquito-borne disease: Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV).

TVMDL reported 16 cases of EEEV in 2019, with four of those positive cases coming from Texas. More than 98 percent of the cases involving ei-

ther of these mosquito-transmitted diseases were in non-vaccinated or under-vaccinated horses.

Clinical signs for West Nile Virus and EEEV are similar and include: fever, muscle twitching, weakness in legs and depression.

Diagnosis for each virus cannot be made solely based on clinical signs. Several other equine diseases share similar signs, and making diagnostic testing the only method to determine the cause of illness.

Aside from practicing mosquito control around your barn, stable and home environment, the primary method of reducing risk in horses for both viruses is vaccination, as the vaccines available for both of these diseases have proven to be very effective.

TVMDL currently offers three tests that may be of assistance when trying to detect West Nile virus and EEEV.



To learn more about test options, visit tvmdl.tamu.edu or call the College Station laboratory at 888-646-5623 or the Amarillo laboratory at 888-646-5624.

Ordering a dozen oysters may soon include the option for a Texas A&M-branded variety.

“We could even make a maroon one, if we wanted to,” Dr. Joe Fox said.

Fox, who is the chair for Marine Resource Development at the Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi and a jointly-appointed research scientist with Texas A&M Agri-Life Research, worked with other industry leaders and state representatives to pass legislation legalizing commercial oyster farming along the Texas Gulf Coast.

Overfishing, hurricanes and varying levels of salinity in Texas bays reduced traditional oyster harvests in the state by 43 percent over the last four years.

Developing a new variety that works well in aquaculture farms could help the Texas oyster industry, according to Fox.

“By spawning oysters in the lab from different bays, we can produce seedstock that are ultimately grown out in cages, yielding a consistently attractive and high-quality oyster for you to enjoy at the raw bar,” he said.

Oyster farming advocates say raising mollusks in off-bottom cages is more ecologically sustainable, because it doesn’t destroy fragile oyster reefs, which are important habitats for other marine species.

Researchers led by Fox are working to develop a breeding program to improve salinity tolerance, disease resistance and other traits desirable in oysters, such as appearance and flavor.

Texas was the last gulf state to create laws legalizing commercial oyster aquaculture. Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and other states bring in more than \$200 million annually through oyster farming off the Gulf Coast.

NRCS debuts new ‘Conservation at Work’ video series

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) unveiled a new video series, *Conservation at Work*, in February.

The series consists of short, 90-second videos that highlight common conservation practices.

The videos shine the spotlight on farmers, ranchers and forestland owners from across the United States who share their own conservation stories and how conservation practices help them protect and improve resources, as well as save time and money.

“By sharing the conservation successes of our customers, we hope the videos will help educate our customers and the general public and motivate more farmers and landowners to consider conservation,” Matt Lohr, NRCS chief, said.

Video topics include high tunnels, micro irrigation, waste storage, nutrient management, rotational grazing, sprinkler systems, waste storage facilities, cover crops and wetland restoration, among others.

The *Conservation at Work* video series can be found at farmers.gov/conserve/conservationatwork.

There are currently 15 videos available.

NRCS plans to continue adding videos to the catalog to eventually have more than 30 conservation practices available to farmers and ranchers in the *Conservation at Work* video series library.

NRCS is a federal agency that works with the people of Texas to improve and protect their soil, water and other natural resources.

For decades, private landowners have voluntarily worked with NRCS specialists to prevent erosion, improve water quality and promote sustainable agriculture.

More information on additional NRCS programs can be found online at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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Coronavirus may lead to more trade aid

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

The U.S. government may step in again to help farmers if Chinese buyers are unable to keep their commitments made in the phase one trade agreement due to the coronavirus, COVID-19, outbreak.

“If our [formerly] targeted farmers need additional aid until such time as the trade deals with China, Mexico, Canada and others kick in, that aid will be provided by the federal government, paid for out of the massive tariff money coming into the USA!” President Donald Trump tweeted on Friday, Feb. 21.

The announcement came a day after an unnamed U.S. official told *Reuters* China will hold its commitments to buy millions in U.S. agricultural commodities.

As of Feb. 21, there were 75,400 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on mainland China.

The virus, which causes a flu-like illness that may lead to pneumonia,



has caused 2,236 deaths in China.

Cases have also been reported in Northern Italy, South Korea, Lebanon, Iran and aboard a cruise ship isolated and docked near Japan for weeks in an attempt to contain the virus.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue told reporters in early February the phase one trade deal with China didn't account for a pandemic like COVID-19.

“We really wanted to limit contingencies because we wanted hard numbers there that we could expect

the Chinese to live up to, to which they agreed, with enforceability provisions after a short period of adjudication,” Perdue said at the Cattle Industry Convention in San Antonio Feb. 5.

The COVID-19 outbreaks have kept many Chinese consumers and workers at home, delaying food sales and the unloading of ships at docks.

“If we don't see them going other places and trying to fulfill those needs other places, if they're really trying and it just blows the economy out of the water, then I think we would be understanding in that,” Perdue explained.

Shipments of refrigerated poultry from the U.S. were re-routed to ports in Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam in mid-February due to a shortage of places to store refrigerated containers at Chinese ports.

Reuters reported items that were not a priority were not being allowed into some ports due to the shortage.

As of Feb. 21, Chinese officials had not asked the U.S. for aid or flexibility in the enforcement of the phase one trade pact.

“We don't know how long will go on,” Perdue said. “I think it's pretty scary out there right now with it kind of outpacing SARS. We hope and pray that it can be contained very quickly.”

Treasury of the Secretary Steven Mnuchin told the Senate Finance Committee Feb. 14 U.S. officials are monitoring the situation and will have a better grasp of the effect it will have on the Chinese economy in several weeks.

“There is no question it's having a significant impact in China,”

Mnuchin said.

In the meantime, Mnuchin said he and U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer are moving forward.

“Our biggest focus is implementing phase one. That, to a certain extent, has slowed down given the virus, as expected,” Mnuchin said. “The good news is Ambassador Lighthizer and I have the entire phase two chapters dealt with.”

Instead of releasing U.S. priorities for a phase two trade deal all at once, Mnuchin and Lighthizer may instead release details in segments.

China has started exempting some U.S. exports from its retaliatory tariffs to make meeting phase one trade commitments easier.

If China is unable to increase its purchases of U.S. agricultural commodities, it's unclear if the U.S. Department of Agriculture will be able to issue more Market Facilitation Payments (MFP) payments as expected.

According to *Agri-Pulse*, U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson said in mid-February USDA may not have the funding authority to issue more payments.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has launched an investigation into whether USDA fairly distributed MFP payments in 2019 and whether the department accurately estimated damages from China's retaliatory tariffs.

According to *Politico*, the investigation began at the request of U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow.

Her analysis her official requested reportedly found southern farmers were overcompensated for their trade war losses.

Stabenow asked the GAO to determine how USDA would have distributed trade aid payments had the department abided by 2018 Farm Bill regulations.

The 2018 Farm Bill sets payment limits at \$125,000 per person or legal entity.

The GAO will also look into measures USDA took to prevent MFP fraud.

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Fees to support new deer program biologists

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

A program that offers liberal bag limits, an extended deer hunting season and valuable opportunities will soon cost Texas landowners \$30 or \$300, depending upon their program selection.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission has approved a fee structure for its Managed Lands Deer (MLD) Program.

"We'll use the revenue generated from the fee to fund biologist positions," Alan Cain, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) white-tailed deer program leader, said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "There was a rider associated with some legislation this past session that directs that money to be used specifically for MLD."

Participation in MLD is currently free.

Under the new fee structure, cost is \$30 per management unit for

those enrolled under the harvest option.

"The harvest option is the automated self-serve option," Cain said. "It doesn't require as much assistance from our Parks and Wildlife biologists."

For those enrolled in the conservation program, cost is \$300 per management unit within a property that's enrolled.

Cost is \$300 for the first unit within a multi-unit ranch and then \$30 for each additional unit.

"If you're a ranch that has multiple high-fence pastures, it'd be \$300 for the first pasture, and then \$30 for each additional pasture," Cain said. "Under the conservation option for aggregate properties, it would just be a flat \$300 fee."

About 83 percent of properties enrolled in MLD are under the conservation option, which provides customized one-on-one assistance from TPWD staff.

"If you're under the conservation

option, and you're a member of the wildlife management cooperative or association, it's just a \$30 fee for each management unit that a landowner has," Cain said.

The conservation option includes tag issuances for each property.

Landowners must have a wildlife habitat plan, conduct population surveys and improve wildlife habitat.

The program began in the late 1990s and has grown since then, sparking the need for additional biologists to serve those involved in the conservation option.

"Back in 1998, we had about 800 properties and three million acres enrolled in MLD," Cain said. "Fast forward to 2019, we have over 12,000 tracts of land and 28 million acres enrolled in MLD."

Since 2000, the department has not created any new biologist positions or hired additional biologists to address the workload created by MLD's growing popularity. An advisory committee suggested the fee

structure to pay for new biologists.

"Our biologists will spend time with anybody, regardless of what option you're on as far as MLD or even if you're not in the MLD program," Cain said. "We provide technical guidance services free of charge, but folks under the conservation option receive customized harvest recommendations and habitat management recommendations from our staff."

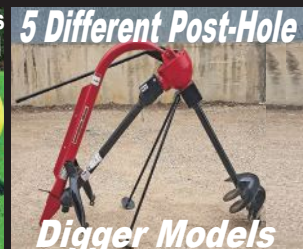
The primary intent of MLD is to foster and support sound management and stewardship of native wildlife and wildlife habitat on private lands in Texas.

"Ultimately, when you're looking at habitat management on 28 million acres of land out there, it certainly benefits the wildlife and those landowners who have those properties, but it also benefits everybody in the state," Cain said.

TPWD will begin collecting MLD fees in April 2021.

Current MLD participants who have questions about the fees for their management unit are encouraged to reach out to their TPWD biologist.

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TFB Presidents' Conference focuses on engaging audiences

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) leaders left farms, ranches and businesses for Waco last month to discuss ways to make their county Farm Bureaus the best place to turn for factual, correct information on agriculture.

Advocating for agriculture, tips for growing TFB membership and a preview of next year's state legislative session priority issues were on the program at the 2020 TFB Presidents' Conference, which took place Feb. 26-27 at the TFB Training and Conference Center.

"This year's conference featured a new agenda and format," TFB President Russell Boening said. "The ideas for these changes originated with county Farm Bureau leaders. We brought in some outside folks like our keynote speaker Matt Rush, who talked about advocating for agriculture, which we often talk about amongst ourselves. But bringing in some outside people puts more emphasis on it and gives us new ideas."

It's easy for individuals to get misled or confused about agriculture, Boening told the crowd of more than 100 county Farm Bureau leaders. In the age of "instant communication," misinformation is everywhere, all the time.

But ensuring communities understand what Farm Bureau is and why the organization exists can foster a relationship between farmers and ranchers and consumers who are hungry for the truth about agriculture.

Advocating for agriculture is stressed by organizations and individuals, keynote speaker Matt Rush said, but it's not always easy to do in an effective manner.

"Is it important for people to know who we are and why we do what we do?" Rush asked the audience. "Of course, it is. But it's more important for people to know why it matters to them and their families."

By refocusing on consumer needs and not our own, Rush said, farm-



More than 100 county leaders attended the two-day Presidents' Conference at TFB's Conference and Training Center.

ers and ranchers can build more effective relationships and become trusted advisors when it comes to food facts.

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick addressed the county leaders, saying agriculture's impact is significant in

Texas.

"I appreciate how hard you work and what you do," Patrick said.

He also stressed the importance of rural representation and encouraged everyone to exercise the right to vote. Elected officials who support

rural values and understand the role of agriculture in the state are key to helping pass Farm Bureau priority issues, such as eminent domain reform, during the next legislative session.

State Rep. DeWayne Burns, a member of the Johnson County Farm Bureau board of directors who championed eminent domain reform last session in Austin, also met with county leaders during the two-day event.

Burns vowed to continue the fight in 2021. He noted TFB leaders have remained dedicated to reforming state eminent domain laws and that their commitment and integrity during the 2019 session had been noticed by legislators.

The conference concluded with breakout sessions where leaders heard from TFB staff, Rush and fellow county presidents on ways to engage different audiences, host effective county events and promote agriculture in their communities.

Boening urged those in attendance to take back the information and share it with their board members and county Farm Bureau offices and to continue the exchange of ideas throughout the year.

"It was a great conference. I think county presidents get a lot out of this and we, as state board leaders and state staff, get a lot out of it, as well," Boening said. "It's just a good mutual meeting where we can share ideas."



Texas Farm Bureau Secretary-Treasurer Val Stephens, President Russell Boening, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Vice President Zack Yanta pose for a photo during the conference.



State Rep. DeWayne Burns said although eminent domain reform wasn't accomplished during the 86th Texas Legislative Session, lawmakers took note of TFB leaders' professionalism and dedication to the issue.

Hidalgo County student wins TFB Free Enterprise Speech Contest



Cooper Ford of Hidalgo County (left) and Morgan McKinzie of Erath County were named winner and runner-up, respectively, of TFB's Free Enterprise Speech Contest. TFB President Russell Boening presented the awards.

**By Julie Tomascik
Editor**

A high school junior from Hidalgo County took first place and a \$6,000 scholarship as winner of the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Free Enterprise Speech Contest held during the TFB Presidents' Conference in late February.

Cooper Ford, son of Cleve and Miriam Ford of Weslaco, topped 12 other speakers from across Texas in the annual contest.

At Weslaco High School, Ford is a member of the National Honor Society and Weslaco FFA Chapter, where he serves as an officer and competes in speaking events. He is also a member of the Texas 4-H Council. Ford exhibits market steers and market and breeding swine at local and major livestock shows through 4-H and FFA.

Ford leads community service efforts at the Rio Grande Valley Livestock Show.

He plans to attend Texas A&M University and major in agricultural business or agricultural economics.

Runner-up in the competition and winner of a \$3,000 scholarship was Morgan McKinzie, a high

school senior from Stephenville. She is the daughter of Marty and Kelli McKinzie.

At Stephenville High School, she is involved in several organizations, including the National Honor Society, Workforce in Technology

and serves as the Student Council vice president. She is also an active member of Stephenville FFA, where she participates in speaking contests, meats judging, agriscience fair, chapter conducting contests and is the Area IV vice president.

McKinzie also assists with community activities, visits nursing homes and works in the concession stands.

She plans to attend Texas A&M University or Texas Tech University and major in animal science.

Four other finalists and winners of \$2,000 scholarships were Bethany Martinek of Grayson County, Carter Neil of Carson County, Elijah Russell of Cherokee County and Cole Wheeler of Lampasas County.

The winner, runner-up and four finalists will receive an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., to visit elected officials, observe Congress in session and visit historical sites.

Other contestants and winners of \$1,500 scholarships were Kathryn Gwosdz of Dewitt County, Ryan Heitschmidt of Swisher County,

Jett Henefey of Medina County, John Dain Copeland of Coke County, Kyndal King of Harrison County, Gabby Eskew of Austin County and Aaron Harmonson of Jack County.

"These students successfully delivered speeches detailing what the free enterprise system means to them and how it benefits our country," TFB President Russell Boening said. "It's inspiring to see young people passionate about our economy, our government and our organization."

To compete in the Free Enterprise Speech Contest, contestants must have attended the 2019 TFB Youth Leadership Conference.

Through the competition, students are asked to share what they learned at the Youth Leadership Conference, about constitutional government or the free enterprise system with their friends, family and community.

More details about the contest and other youth opportunities are available online at <https://texasfarmbureau.org/youth/youth-opportunities>.



The 13 district winners competed in the state Free Enterprise Speech Contest during the TFB Presidents' Conference.

Farmers, ranchers focus on sustainability

Farmers and ranchers have a strong story to tell regarding sustainability and climate-friendly practices, according to Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) President Russell Boening.

“Agriculture is part of the foundation of sustainability,” he said. “We are producing 270 percent more with the same amount of inputs compared to 50 years ago. That’s all tied to innovative practices and efforts farmers and ranchers have implemented.”

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. agriculture combined accounts for only 9 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Other sectors—including commercial and residential, industry, transportation and electricity—make up the remaining 91 percent of emissions in the U.S.

Texas farmers and ranchers implement sustainable practices in many ways, helping to minimize their impact on the environment.

“Farmers and ranchers have em-

braced and implemented innovative technologies that reduce emissions and increase efficiency. Agriculture is eager to be part of the solution,” Boening said. “As farmers, we play a leading role in promoting soil health, enhancing wildlife habitat and conserving water and natural resources as we grow our crops and raise livestock.”

Boening noted farmers are leading the way by reducing their relatively small footprint through management practices that sequester carbon dioxide, such as no-till farming, planting cover crops and other practices that trap excess carbon.

It’s important, Boening said, for farmers and ranchers to be part of the sustainability conversation.

“We care for the land, livestock and wildlife. We care about our natural resources, and we want to pass our farms and ranches on to the next generation,” he said. “To keep modern agriculture sustainable, we have to make a living. But when growing food

gets political, it gets tough. We need to continue unleashing innovations through agricultural research, while also making sure policy isn’t enacted that would harm agriculture.”

Texas farmers and ranchers work to be environmentally and economically sustainable. Agricultural research and voluntary stewardship investments and practices, some of which are outlined in the farm bill, have helped farmers strengthen their stewardship efforts.

To share and promote agriculture’s sustainable practices, the American Farm Bureau Federation, along with other agricultural groups, created a coalition—Farmers for a Sustainable Future. The coalition aims to provide a voice for farmers and ranchers in the discussion about climate-smart farming and climate policy.

For more information on the coalition, visit www.sustainablefarming.us.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also announced a new

innovation initiative in late February.

The Agriculture Innovation Agenda is a department-wide initiative to align resources, programs and research to position American agriculture to better meet future global demands.

USDA will stimulate innovation so that American agriculture can achieve the goal of increasing production by 40 percent while cutting the environmental footprint of U.S. agriculture in half by 2050.

“We know we have a challenge facing us: to meet future food, fiber, fuel and feed demands with finite resources. USDA’s Agriculture Innovation Agenda is our opportunity to define American agriculture’s role to feed everyone and do right as a key player in the solution to this challenge,” U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said. “We are committed as ever to the environmental sustainability and continued success, of America’s farmers, ranchers, foresters and producers.”

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Prescribed burning beneficial to Texas lands

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Prescribed burn is one way to fight wildfires with...well, fire.

While controlled burning can rid forested areas of excess leaves and other highly flammable material, it's also a way to improve rangeland, restore prairies and manage wildlife habitat.

More Texans are taking note of the management practice. A recent Texas A&M Forest Service survey showed more than 400,000 acres were treated by prescribed burns in 2018, an increase of nearly 50,000 acres over the previous year.

"Folks are starting to understand that prescribed fire is not just a wildlife tool or a livestock tool, but it's also a fuel-reduction tool," Dr. Morgan Treadwell, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service range specialist, said. "We're seeing agencies increase their acres burned. We're seeing our commercial and certified burn managers increase their acres burned.



Prescribed fires can be a valuable tool to aid in habitat restoration, rangeland restoration and wildfire mitigation across the Lone Star State. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo by Dr. Morgan Treadwell.

Our Prescribed Burn Association in the Panhandle burned over 20,000 acres in 2018, and that's just really incredible."

In nature, wildfire isn't always harmful, Treadwell noted.

"Throughout Texas and the Great Plains—particularly the Southern Great Plains—we live in fire-dominated ecosystems where plants have evolved with frequent fire, and they actually need it to grow and thrive,"

she said. "They need that type of disturbance and those processes to occur in order to be good habitat and support native species."

Prescribed fires achieve specific land management objectives, such as restoring ecosystem health or recycling nutrients.

According to Treadwell, fire is one of the best management tools for invasive plant control, and prescribed burns help manage weeds and lower the risk of wildfires by reducing the amount of flammable fuel in the area. It can also restore nutrients to the soil and encourage healthy plant growth.

The State of Texas Natural Resources Code guarantees every landowner has the right to use prescribed burning to manage private property, unless there is a county burn ban in effect, Treadwell said.

However, in addition to respecting county burn bans, landowners may need to follow additional county regulations, such as obtaining a burn permit or submitting a burn plan to officials.

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But proactive burning is more than lighting a match, tossing it in a field and waiting for the fire to burn out.

Although state law allows for landowners to conduct prescribed burns, Treadwell recommends using a certified and insured prescribed burn manager.

The Texas Prescribed Burning Board consists of representatives from several relevant state agencies and private landowners elected by Texas' agricultural commissioner. The board sets prescribed burn standards and training curriculum for the prescribed burn manager certification program, which is overseen by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA).

"The state of Texas understands prescribed burning provides many benefits for the management of our rangeland, but there still are rules and regulations we need to follow that meet our standards of care and create a positive fire culture," she said. "When someone is lighting a prescribed fire, they come to the table with experience. They come to the table with a crew, with a plan, and they are prepared to execute that prescribed burn efficiently and effectively."

AgriLife Extension has created an online prescribed burn school to

educate interested parties.

"Our online burn school is a really cool idea that has been in the works for several years," Treadwell said. "This course walks you through all of the steps of a prescribed burn and gets you ready to participate in a prescribed burn field day. The cost is \$200, and you can enroll at any time and set your own pace for learning."

Once the course is complete, individuals have one calendar year from that day to participate in a field day and schedule the required certification exam.

"This is an effort to help the rancher or landowner who can't afford to be away from animals or the farm for a week at a time just to participate in a burn school," Treadwell said. "Education is increasing. Opportunities to burn and learn are also increasing, and we're becoming much more open and transparent in this general fire discussion and conversation. It's not just wildfire, and it's not just prescribed fire, but it's learning to live with fire and how to manage fire on these open landscapes."

For more information on prescribed burning, including a free handbook download and details on the new online course, visit <http://agrilife.org/rxburn>.

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Sellers must now disclose cattle PI status

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

The Texas Animal Health Commission has adopted a rule designed to mitigate the risk of uninfected cattle being exposed to bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) virus via a persistently-infected (PI) cow.

Texas State Veterinarian Dr. Andy Schwartz said the new rule requires the seller of a known PI animal to disclose the status in writing prior to or at the time of sale.

“There could be some changes at the livestock market or wherever the sale is taking place,” Schwartz said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. “The question comes up, is there any enforcement mechanism or how is this carried out? Like a number of our other rules, it depends heavily on voluntary compliance.”

The rule does not require a BVD test or disclosure of a positive BVD test result.

“What it does require is disclosure

if the animal is persistently infected,” Schwartz said.

The rule also defines a PI animal.

“That would be an animal that was positive on a BVD test and not re-tested negative or an animal that was positive on an initial BVD test and then was retested again and found to be positive,” Schwartz said. “That would indicate that the animal was persistently infected or infected for its life, rather than transiently infected.”

BVD suppresses the immune system of cattle, creating an opportunity for other diseases to take hold. It can lead to reproductive and respiratory issues.

BVD can show up in different forms.

One form is transient infection.

“That can be an animal of any age that contracts the virus. Depending on the type of animal, you might see respiratory signs, a shipping fever-type syndrome. This virus contributes to shipping fever,” Schwartz

said. “It also depresses the immune system so that the animal’s more susceptible to other infections.”

A transiently-infected cow or bull can recover from the infection and will no longer be a carrier of it.

The second form of BVD occurs when the virus is passed from cow to calf in the womb. These calves are called persistently infected.

“When the calf is 40 to 120 days into gestation, if the dam is exposed or she’s already persistently infected, then the calf gets infected with that virus. The virus becomes part of its makeup, it does not recognize it as a foreign body [and] does not build an immunity against it,” Schwartz said.

When the calf is born and for as long as it lives, it sheds BVD at a thousand times a level that a transiently-infected animal would shed.

“Anywhere it goes, if it comes in contact with other cattle, it poses a risk of introducing BVD to that population,” Schwartz said.

The biggest problem in the spread of BVD are PI cattle.

Schwartz said representatives of the cattle industry asked TAHC to develop a rule to protect them against unknowingly buying PI cattle.

“What several representatives said is when they bought cattle, and they voluntarily tested them for their own purposes, they were finding in certain circumstances a fairly high percentage of positive animals,” Schwartz said.

Those representatives noted many of the PI cattle had ear notches taken out of them, which is a common way to test for BVD.

“The thought is that someone had tested these animals and screened them and were selling the positives on the market. They were being bought by unsuspecting buyers,” Schwartz said. “This rule is intended to be a mechanism to discourage that practice.”

The only way a cattle owner will know if the cow, bull or steer is PI is via testing, which is voluntary.

“Whatever their motivation, if

they’re trying to clean up their herd or reduce production losses or if they’re trying to sell cattle that are BVD free, they would test the cattle. Then, if they get positive results, by the definition in the rule, that animal’s considered persistently-infected, unless they test it again later and find it negative,” Schwartz said.

The new BVD rule went into effect in early February.

Schwartz said there were a few misconceptions about the rule at first.

“Earlier in 2019, we proposed a rule, or the commissioners considered a proposed rule, that would’ve made BVD test positive results reportable, and then had a series of requirements after that,” Schwartz said. “That PI animal would be required to be branded and identified, and the movement of that animal restricted.”

After the rule was proposed, TAHC received feedback from veterinarians and livestock owners who were unhappy with the proposal.

“The commissioners pulled that rule down. It was not adopted,” Schwartz said. “In its place, we put this much more generic version to just require reporting of PI animals, or disclosing of PI animals, at the time of sale. Some folks are confused, because they saw that proposal earlier, and they think there’s a heavy regulatory program associated with this. It’s just not.”

The new BVD rule does include the creation of a BVD program review working group.

The group will meet annually to give cattle owners and veterinarians a chance to weigh in on the program and any changes that might be needed.

“Our commissioners consider that input and then would consider developing, proposing and potentially adopting, any rules that come as recommendations out of that group,” Schwartz said.

More information about BVDV, preventative measures and how the virus can impact your herd is available at BVDVtracker.com.

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Landowners facing eminent domain condemnation have rights

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

At the intersection of a growing state and private property rights lies an important issue—eminent domain.

Landowners across Texas are facing condemnation of their property for pipelines, transmission lines, railroads and other infrastructure projects, both public and private.

“We understand that infrastructure is needed and that the Lone Star State is booming,” Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) President Russell Boening said. “We know that we must have the means to move people, goods and energy across Texas, but private property owners should be treated fairly when forced to give up their property.”

TFB plans to help. The organization is launching a campaign to help provide property owners with more information about the eminent domain process.

“It’s important to be an informed landowner. Know your rights, and know what those entities are allowed to do,” Boening said. “You are your strongest advocate for your property and your rights.”

TFB published *Eminent Domain in Texas: A Landowner’s Guide* to help Texans better understand the condemnation process, the laws re-

garding eminent domain and landowners’ rights.

“Eminent domain, takings, condemnation—these words can spark a wide range of emotions,” Boening said. “You feel angry, confused and even intimidated, and it can be tough to know what decision to make.”

TFB worked with Tiffany Dowell Lashmet, who is an associate professor and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension specialist. Lashmet focuses her work on legal issues affecting Texas farmers, ranchers and landowners on a variety of topics, including agricultural leases, water law, eminent domain, easements and landowner liability.

The handbook details the rights of property owners to just compensation, including fair market value based on the highest and best use of the property, being compensated for damages to remaining property and moving and relocation expenses.

It covers the entire condemnation process from the initial offer to a final settlement for just compensation.

Another important topic in the handbook is the easement negotiation process. The easement agreement between the landowner and the condemning entity is critical, because it defines the relationship between the two parties for the use

of the easement for many years into the future.

The handbook also covers other topics like right of entry permits and selecting an attorney.

In addition to launching the handbook, TFB has updated resources, project maps and news stories on the organization’s website at www.texasfarmbureau.org/eminentdomain.

As part of the campaign, the website will be updated throughout the year to keep landowners informed.

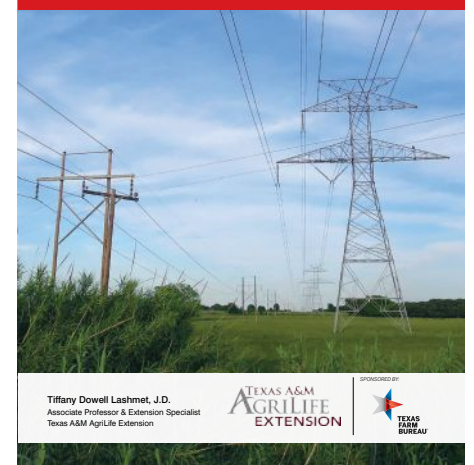
TFB also plans to host meetings across the state to help landowners learn more about eminent domain and their rights.

“At each meeting, we’ll have eminent domain professionals and our own TFB staff in attendance to discuss the eminent domain process, projects in the area, landowners’ rights and much more,” Boening said. “This is a chance for all landowners, whether or not you are currently facing condemnation, to learn more and ask questions.”

The website will include meeting dates, times and locations. Details will also be made available to county Farm Bureaus to help share the information.

“We hope this handbook, the meetings and additional resources we make available will empower and educate landowners to better

Eminent Domain in Texas: A Landowner’s Guide



The handbook, “Eminent Domain in Texas: A Landowner’s Guide,” is available to help landowners better understand the condemnation process and their rights.

protect their land, their operations and their livelihood,” Boening said.

A database of companies that have eminent domain authority is available on the Texas Comptroller’s website at www.comptroller.texas.gov/transparency.

To download a copy of the eminent domain handbook, visit www.texasfarmbureau.org/eminentdomain.

Additional landowner resources, updates on eminent domain meetings and more will be published on TFB’s website as they are made available.



TFB is making eminent domain resources available to landowners.



A growing state with a strong appetite for new development has put a target on private property in Texas. Many farmers and ranchers are facing condemnation as pipelines, transmission lines or roads come through their property.

MARCH 6, 2020

TEXAS AGRICULTURE

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Beef demand to rise, U.S. herd plateaus

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

The beef cattle industry will split about \$500 a head in profits this year, according to a new forecast from CattleFax.

“That’s one of the best numbers we’ve seen in history,” Randy Blach, CattleFax CEO, told the Cattle Industry Convention in San Antonio. “That goes to a lot of the work that each and every one of you do.”

The number of beef cattle in the U.S. is expected to remain flat in 2020, with higher carcass weights expected to push U.S. beef production to a record high.

“Five years ago, I told you we had the demand to support 31 to 32 million head of beef cows,” Blach said. “We’ve come right back to that number. There’s no surprise in here relative to the industry numbers flattening out.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) forecasts El Niño neutral conditions through the spring.

If a La Niña develops, as some meteorologists predict, the drought could impact cattle numbers.

“I don’t see our inventory numbers



changing very much, unless it ends up being a drought-driven situation where we have to adjust based on our feed availability or water availability,” Blach said. “That’s our greatest risk.”

If there is no drought, Blach does not foresee a decline in cattle numbers based on demand, lack of profitability or lack of money coming into the beef cattle industry, thanks to new trade agreements with Japan and China.

The drought and wildfires in Australia are also likely to drive more U.S. beef purchases.

“Their production levels are going to be off substantially over the next

few years as they start to rebuild those herds,” Blach said. “That’s going to create an opportunity that the U.S. will likely become the number one supplier of protein going into Japan again.”

Japan is currently the U.S.’ largest beef export market.

Blach does not predict a decline in the U.S. cow herd as more cattle are slaughtered to meet growing demand overseas.

“The cow herd would be flat. It would actually potentially increase a little bit here over the next five to seven years as we start to see this export situation improved,” Blach said.

The largest limitation to the beef

cattle industry’s expansion, Blach said, is harvest capacity.

In 2000, the U.S. harvested 30.2 million head of fed cattle.

In 2015, cattle slaughter fell to 23 million.

When that happened, the number of packing plants in the U.S. decreased.

“That’s why we closed those [packing] plants,” Blach said. “We haven’t had new plants come back online.”

He said he would not be surprised if additional packers come online over the next few years, or if current plants expand, to meet growing demand.

“We’re really going to have a difficult time, in my opinion, growing the herd very much more from where it is, with the situation we have,” he said.

CattleFax forecasts an all-fresh retail beef price of \$5.87 a pound, up a nickel.

Composite cutout prices are estimated at \$222 per hundredweight. That’s up \$3.

The average fed steer weight is forecast at \$120 per hundredweight, up \$3.

Utility cows are expected to bring around \$60 per hundredweight. If realized, that’s an increase of \$5.

Bred cows are forecast to stay steady at \$1,500 a head.

Cattle industry weathered several challenges in 2019

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

Retaliatory tariffs, a slaughterhouse fire and wet weather weighed on the U.S. cattle industry in 2019.

Randy Blach, CEO of CattleFax, told the Cattle Industry Convention in San Antonio wet weather for much of the U.S. had a “tremendous” impact on calving and cattle mortality rates in 2019.

“It had a huge influence on performance of cattle in feedyards, as well,” Blach said. “Weights were down significantly. It took tonnage off the market.”

Outbreaks of African swine fever in China, South Korea, Vietnam and other nations across the globe also weighed on cattle markets.

“I remind you we had a \$25 rally in the hog market in March and early April of 2019. That obviously had an influence on the cattle market,” Blach said. “I doubt if that volatility has gone away yet.”

Increasing retaliatory tariffs on U.S. exports as a result of trade tensions with China didn’t help matters. As the price of beef in China rose, the country’s buyers turned to Australia to meet their needs.

But now that trade agreements have been reached with China and Japan, Blach said there will likely be a more positive trade environment.

A fire at a Tyson plant in Holcomb, Kansas, in August shut down production for weeks. The plant handled, on average, 6,000 cattle per

day—5 percent of total U.S. slaughter, according to *Reuters*.

The closure increased packers’ margins and pushed cattle producers’ prices lower. That prompted an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Greg Ibach, undersecretary of Agriculture for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, said USDA was watching markets closely “to make sure that producers are being treated fairly.”

The results of that investigation have not yet been released.

Blach said the shutdown and subsequent actions show that markets work.

He explained the fire and partial plant shutdown had a negative bias

on the beef cattle market, but the industry incentivized the packers with record margins and production increased.

“We estimated there was less than 75,000 head of cattle that were backed up through the entire situation. Had we not incentivized the packers to harvest the cattle that we did, we could easily have had several hundred thousand head of cattle on the front end of this market,” Blach said.

On Jan. 1, the U.S. beef cow inventory was 31.3 million head.

There were 13 million cattle in Texas Jan. 1, unchanged from Jan. 1, 2019.

The beef cow inventory in Texas is 4.57 million head. That’s 2 percent lower than last year.

New WTAMU vet program keeps Panhandle students close to home

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Soon, Texas Panhandle students won't have to leave the area they've always called home to become veterinarians anymore.

That's because the Texas A&M University System is in the final stages of developing an innovative "2+2 program," the result of a partnership between Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences and West Texas A&M University's (WTAMU) Paul Engler College of Agriculture & Natural Sciences.

Through the collaborative Veterinary Education, Research & Outreach (VERO) 2+2 program, students will spend their first two years at the WTAMU campus in Canyon, then transfer to Texas A&M in College Station to complete their education.

It's the culmination of a decade-long project focused on bringing Texas A&M's highly regarded Doc-

tor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program to other areas of the state.

"We started bringing students from the College of Veterinary Medicine to the Panhandle for a production tour in 2008," Dan Posey, DVM, a clinical professor of veterinary science at WTAMU and VERO's academic coordinator, said. "In 2009, we decided that we needed to have boots on the ground up here. So, they hired Dr. Griffin and me to move up here and establish the Veterinary Education, Research and Outreach Center on the West Texas A&M campus."

The Texas Panhandle is home to an estimated 2.5 million head of cattle on feed—around 30 percent of the nation's beef supply. Nearly 90 percent of those animals are raised in just 10 Panhandle counties.

But a shortage of rural veterinarians in the Panhandle and across the state spurred the Texas A&M system to create alternative education pathways focused on meeting

those needs.

"This program is building a food animal veterinarian who will go to a rural practice," Posey said. "Our focus isn't really just on large animals or food animals, but it's on rural practice. We're trying to build rural practitioners in this program, because that's who takes care of the cow-calf side of beef cattle and the beef industry in Texas."

In 2019, WTAMU broke ground on a 22,000-square-foot VERO facility to house the DVM curriculum and externship programs in the Texas Panhandle, as well as the 2+2 program.

The college is focused specifically on recruiting students from rural areas, particularly those from the Panhandle.

"The recruitment base is actually reaching out into the rural communities, working with high schools, junior highs, the veterinary clinics and recruiting that base from the rural area," he said.

Posey travels to campuses in the Panhandle and South Plains to recruit students to the program.

Recruiting the right audience is important, because research shows most wish to return to the area where they grew up after graduation. According to Posey, 60 percent of graduates return to within 100 miles of their hometown.

"The way we solve the rural shortage in Texas is by recruiting in the rural areas," he said. "We get them to college, mentor them through the process, get them to veterinary school and then see the marvelous change in the dynamics in Texas as far as rural service by graduating a different type of veterinarian coming out of the Texas A&M program."

The first cohort of fourth-year veterinary students will begin clinical rotations at WTAMU this summer, and a cohort of first-year veterinary students will begin their DVM education at VERO in the 2021 fall semester.



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TEXAS AGRICULTURE
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USDA issued third round of 2019 MFP payments

The third and final tranche of 2019 Market Facilitation Payments (MFP) was announced last month by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. President Donald Trump.

MFP payments aim to assist farmers suffering from damage due to unjustified trade retaliation by foreign nations.

Payments will be made by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) under the authority of Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act to farmers of alfalfa hay, barley, canola, corn, crambe, dried beans, dry peas, extra-long staple cotton, flaxseed, lentils, long grain and medium grain rice, millet, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, rapeseed, rye, safflower, sesame seed, small and large chickpeas, sorghum, soybeans, sunflower seed, temperate japonica rice, triticale, upland cotton and wheat.

MFP assistance for these non-specialty crops is based on a single county payment rate multiplied by

a farm's total plantings of MFP-eligible crops in aggregate in 2019. Those per-acre payments are not dependent on which of these crops are planted in 2019. A farmer's total payment-eligible plantings cannot exceed total 2018 plantings. County payment rates range from \$15 to \$150 per acre, depending on the impact of unjustified trade retaliation in that county.

Dairy farmers who were in business as of June 1, 2019, will receive a per hundredweight payment on Dairy Margin Coverage production history, and hog farmers will receive a payment based on the number of live hogs owned on a day selected by the producer between April 1 and May 15, 2019.

MFP payments will also be made to producers of almonds, cranberries, cultivated ginseng, fresh grapes, fresh sweet cherries, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts.

Each specialty crop will receive

a payment based on 2019 acres of fruit- or nut-bearing plants, or in the case of ginseng, based on harvested acres in 2019.

Acreage of non-specialty crops and cover crops had to be planted by Aug. 1, 2019, to be considered eligible for MFP payments.

Per-acre non-specialty crop county payment rates, specialty crop payment rates and livestock payment rates are all currently available on farmers.gov.

This is the final of three tranches of MFP payments.

The first tranche was comprised of the higher of either 50 percent of a farmer's calculated payment or \$15 per acre, which may reduce potential payments to be made in tranche three.

The second tranche was 25 percent of the total payment expected, in addition to the 50 percent from the first tranche.

MFP payments are limited to a combined \$250,000 for non-specialty

crops per person or legal entity. MFP payments are also limited to a combined \$250,000 for dairy and hog farmers and a combined \$250,000 for specialty crop farmers.

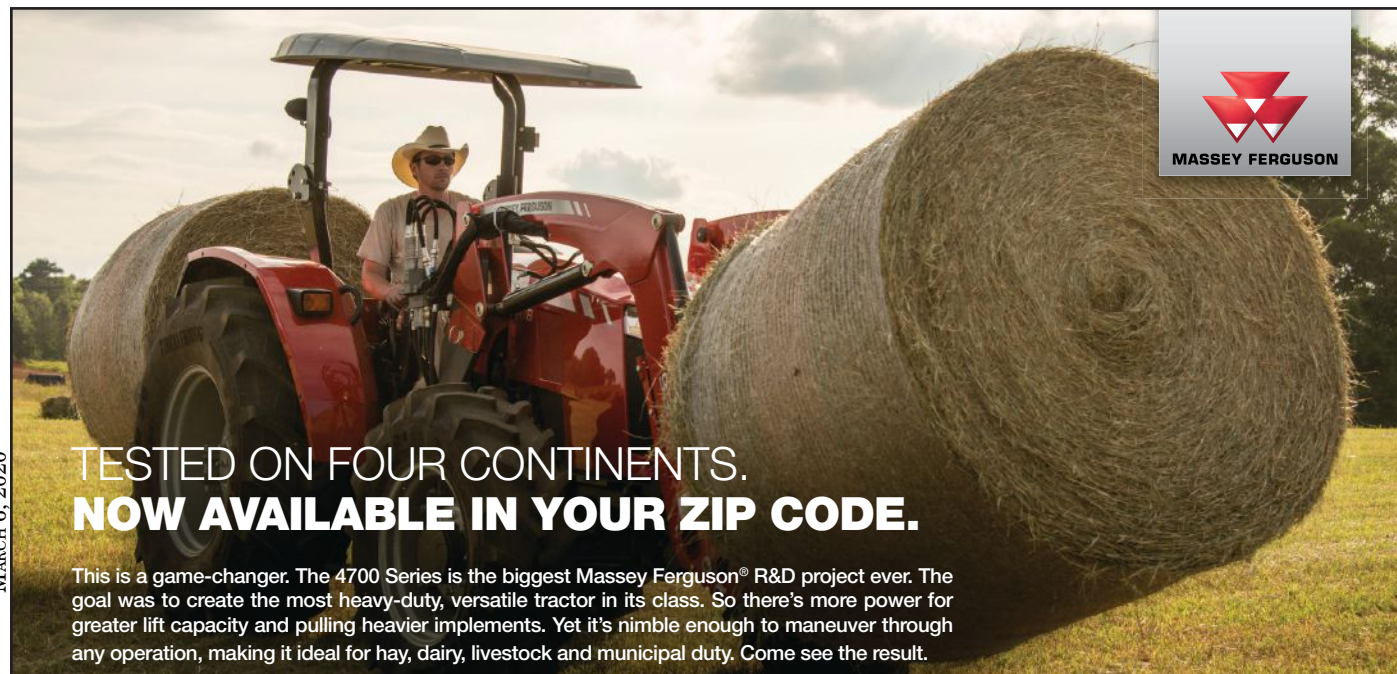
However, no applicant can receive more than \$500,000.

Eligible applicants must also have an average adjusted gross income (AGI) for tax years 2015, 2016 and 2017 of less than \$900,000, unless at least 75 percent of the person's or legal entity's AGI is derived from farming, ranching or forestry related activities. Applicants must also comply with the provisions of the Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation regulations.

Many farmers were affected by natural disasters last spring, such as flooding, that kept them out of the field for extended periods of time.

Farmers who filed a prevented planting claim and planted an FSA-certified cover crop, with the potential to be harvested, qualify for a \$15 per acre payment. Acres that were never planted in 2019 are not eligible for an MFP payment.

For more information on MFP, visit farmers.gov/mfp or contact your local FSA office.



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Black vultures pose increased risk to livestock, producers

Spring brings new life in agriculture, but it also brings black vultures.

“Texas has two species of vultures—the turkey vulture and the black vulture,” Texas Wildlife Services (TWS) State Director Mike Bodenchuk said. “Over the past 20 years, black vultures have expanded their range considerably, and we now have them nearly statewide.”

The distinction between the two species is important.

Turkey vultures have red heads and a longer tail, and they locate their food strictly by smell. They only feed on dead and decaying carcasses, according to Bodenchuk.

Black vultures, which have black heads, use eyesight to locate food, and they will kill newborn livestock, including kid goats, lambs or calves.

Bodenchuk noted vultures are often attracted to livestock birth sites by the presence of afterbirth, and stillborn livestock are quickly consumed.

But increasingly, black vultures are attacking livestock.

“This may be happening because populations are increasing, and there is a lot of competition between vultures for whatever food is available,” he said. “It’s not uncommon to see 30 or 40 black vultures fighting over a dead calf. If a producer isn’t immediately available to run them off, they’ll continue to hunt in the area to find whatever they can eat.”

And that includes newborn livestock.

“Black vultures can attack a calf even while it’s being born and will search out pasture-born kid goats or lambs, which tend to hide for several days following birth,” he said.

Vulnerable livestock are often killed by sharp blows to the head, and frequently, the eyes are pecked out. Calves also have large holes pecked into muscle mass on the hips and ribs, causing them to bleed to death.

Even if not killed outright, young livestock often succumb to infec-

tions, which are common due to the bacteria on the vulture’s beak, Bodenchuk said.

“Once killed, vultures will consume all of a goat or lamb and most of a calf in very short order. Large groups of vultures can eat a calf in a matter of a few hours,” he said.

It’s important for livestock producers to watch livestock giving birth and make sure that birth complications don’t make them more vulnerable to predation.

“Confined birthing is obviously more secure, but the added expenses associated with labor and feed often aren’t affordable. For ranchers who lamb or calve in the pasture, moving them to where you can observe easier may allow you to prevent some losses,” Bodenchuk said. “It’s easier to see your livestock in an open pasture, but it’s also easier for vultures to find them.”

Non-lethal control methods, which can help prevent or reduce losses, include hazing vultures before they start feeding and dispersing any known roost in the livestock pastures.

Vultures roost at night in communal roosts and having one of these in a pasture can be a prescription for trouble. Roosts can be hazed with pyrotechnics and lasers right at dark, according to Bodenchuk. However, vultures have a large feeding area, and the roost that affects your pasture may not be on your property.

TWS is a cooperative state and federal program that deals with wildlife damage.

Those counties with the most damage cooperate with the TWS program by cost-sharing the expense of keeping an employee in the county. In the sheep and goat range, some counties have multiple technicians.

“For cooperating counties, landowners can call on their county trapper to assist with vulture damage. In some cases, we can help haze birds or assist a community level effort to move a roost,” he said.

TWS employees also have a federal permit that allows them to shoot or trap vultures when all other



methods fail.

“Lethal control is a last resort, and even then, it is only to reinforce other methods. With so many vultures in the environment, sometimes we need to shoot a few to move the remainder away from livestock,” Bodenchuk said.

Livestock owners can also obtain a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if they need to use lethal force to reinforce their non-lethal methods.

Permits are necessary before any injurious or lethal take can be conducted.

Vultures, like all migratory birds, are protected by federal and state law. You cannot shoot, trap or harm a vulture without a Federal Migratory Bird Depredation Permit, obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services office in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

To help livestock owners work their way through the multi-agency process, TWS has included the Depredation Permit application form on its website. Livestock owners interested in a permit can visit <https://bit.ly/blackvultures>.

On that web page, a link takes you to the application.

Landowners also need to complete Form 37, which can be obtained from the Wildlife Services district office. An additional “Take Table” must also be included with the application.

Completed forms and a \$100 processing fee should be sent to the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Services office.

The permit, once issued, will be good through March 31 each year. Annual reporting and renewals are required.

According to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department regulations, a state permit is not required, if landowners obtain the federal depredation permit.

Livestock owners suffering from vulture depredations or other federally-protected predators can also receive funding through the Livestock Indemnity Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). “This program will pay for confirmed losses in excess of normal mortality,” he said.

Livestock producers who intend to use this program must document each loss, including the cause for the loss, even if it wasn’t due to vultures. Verification of losses needs to be provided to FSA and an application for payment needs to be submitted.

“Producers suffering excessive losses should go to their county FSA office and make sure they understand the details, including how they need to document verification, timelines for reporting and for filing claims,” Bodenchuk said.

For information on permitting or the location and contact numbers for your district office, contact TWS at 866-4USDA-WS.

Young farmers, ranchers appointed to state advisory committee

Twenty-four young producers were appointed to Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) Advisory Committee.

An individual or a couple from each district serves two years on the committee. The district representatives are named by TFB President Russell Boening.

Committee members are responsible for recommending, promoting

and evaluating programs and activities that encourage young people to become involved in Farm Bureau at the local, state and national levels.

They are also tasked with identifying, evaluating and promoting new or current programs and activities that will develop strong advocates for agriculture, strengthen Farm Bureau membership and assist young producers in Texas with the

operation and management of their farming and ranching businesses.

"The YF&R Advisory Committee is made up of young farmers and ranchers from across all 13 TFB districts," Jesse Wieners, committee chair, said. "We work together as a group to help with issues facing Texas agriculture. The committee also plans events for young farmers and ranchers at local and state levels to provide network-

ing opportunities and to see how other farms operate across the state."

Through the committee, they plan the YF&R Conference, Fall Tour and host district meetings in the spring and summer. They also raise money for scholarships with a live and silent auction at the TFB annual meeting.

For more information on the YF&R program, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/YFR>.

Meet the Texas Farm Bureau Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee



District 1
Jesse and Karri Wieners

Jesse and Karri Wieners grow cotton, wheat, sorghum, alfalfa, wine grapes and produce in Carson, Gray and Donley counties. They custom farm and own a custom baling business. Karri also has a photography business. They have four children.



District 2
Ryan and Cheyanne Colville

Ryan and Cheyanne Colville live and work in Lynn County on their family's commercial cattle ranch. They also own and operate an independent crop consulting company across the South Plains. They provide services in soil health, fertilizer management and precision agriculture technology for cotton, corn, grain sorghum and wheat farmers. The couple has two children.



District 3
Austen and Rachel White

Austen and Rachel White raise cattle and grow wheat and cotton in Wilbarger County with Austen's family. They also have a small hay operation. They have one daughter.



District 4
James and Chelsea Davis

James and Chelsea Davis are first-generation farmers and ranchers who raise registered Maine-Anjou cattle and have a hay operation in Ellis County. They own and operate Davis Brothers' Cattle Company along with James' brother. They also operate a custom farming business that specializes in no-till cover crops and grass

sprigging. James works for a construction company, and Chelsea is a testing coordinator for Life School Elementary. They have one son.



District 5
Garren and Shannon Bellis

Garren and Shannon Bellis live in Van Zandt County. Garren serves as the ranch manager of Gabriel Ranch, an Angus seedstock operation. Shannon owns and operates BoviTrac International, a company that works on genetic analysis for commercial and crossbred cattlemen. They also raise a small herd of Angus cattle. The couple has two sons.



District 6
Slayton and Abby Hoelscher

Slayton and Abby Hoelscher grow cotton, corn, grain sorghum, peanuts and wheat in Tom Green and Haskell counties. They use minimal-till and no-till practices to help conserve biological activity and reduce erosion. They also own Hoelscher Equipment Solutions, LLC, a company where they buy, sell and rent equipment. Abby manages the books for the couple's operation and is a marketing manager at Mueller Metals, LLC and Spring Creek Products.



District 7
Eric and Alisha Schwertner

Eric and Alisha Schwertner farm and ranch in Runnels County. Their operation consists of cotton, corn, sorghum and wheat. They also grow hay for their cow-calf herd, and Eric runs a custom harvest crew in East Texas. Alisha is also a product manager for Agrian, a farm data software company. They have twin boys.



District 8
Travis and Kaylin Isbell

Travis and Kaylin Isbell raise commercial cattle and dorper sheep in Williamson County. They also manage two other local cow herds, grow winter oats, grow Sudan grass for hay production and do custom hay baling. Kaylin is also a farm and ranch real estate agent. They have two children.



District 9
Kelley Anne Hutchinson

Kelley Anne Hutchinson is an agricultural science teacher at Rusk High School. She began teaching at Rusk in 2012 and has worked countless hours to assist students in animal projects, speaking events, leadership development events and career development events. She plans to start a small commercial beef herd in the next five years.



District 10 Brian and Emily King

Brian and Emily King grow, pack and ship onion transplants and cantaloupes in Dimmit County at Dixondale Farms. Brian manages the 2,200-acre farming operation for both onion transplants and cantaloupes. Emily oversees all post-harvest duties at the packinghouse for both crops, including marketing, packing, cooling and shipping.

They also raise a small herd of commercial cattle and oversee the family hunting ranch in Zavala County. They have one child on the way.



District 11 Ben and Jessica Rumbaugh

Ben and Jessica Rumbaugh have a cow-calf operation in Wharton County and also run a grass-fed beef business where they sell some of their beef online and direct-to-consumers. Jessica is a licensed real estate broker and owns Texas Land and Home Real Estate, where Ben works as a realtor for farm and ranch properties. Ben is also a real estate appraiser. They have two children.

They have two children.



District 12 Kenworth Krause

Kenworth Krause is the co-owner and operator of a small trucking company, K5 Trucking, LLC, in Karnes County with his father. They haul grain, hay, fertilizer and rock and provide custom hay baling, shredding and planting. Kenworth also has a small hay operation, grows grain sorghum and manages a small herd of Brahman cattle.



District 13 Clayton and Michelle Martin

Clayton and Michelle Martin farm in Hidalgo County. They grow leafy greens and bulb vegetables, such as mustards, cilantro, methi leaf and kohlrabi. They also grow corn. Clayton is a sales representative for Helena Agri-Enterprises, and Michelle owns and operates an agricultural magazine, the *AgMag*, and the accompanying TV show, *Ag on Wheels*. They have one son.

They have one son.

TFB leaders serve on 2020 AFBF Issues Advisory Committees

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

An understanding of regulatory actions, legislative policies and legal issues are key to strengthening agricultural awareness and perspectives on state and national issues. Participating on the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) Issues Advisory Committees allows Texas farmers and ranchers to provide their expertise on various agricultural issues.

Members of the Issues Advisory Committee—which consists of 13 subcommittees each focused on a specific, high-profile agricultural topic—identify issues and discuss actions and possible solutions.

The Issues Advisory Committees met Feb. 20-21 in Washington, D.C.

Each committee consists of Farm Bureau members with knowledge and direct involvement on particular issues of importance to U.S. farmers and ranchers.

Those members, who were appointed by AFBF President Zippy Duvall, include 11 leaders from Texas.

TFB Secretary-Treasurer and District 6 State Director Val Stephens is a member of the Energy Committee, which concentrates on the Renewable Fuel Standard,

fracking, pipelines, carbon regulations, Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards, renewable energy sources and carbon regulations.

As a member of the Pest and Invasive Species Committee, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) District 13 State Director Scott Frazier works on issues related to quarantines, inspections at ports, research needs for invasive species control, pesticide restriction and exemptions and control and remediation.

TFB District 3 State Director Mark Daniel serves on the Animal Care Committee, which focuses on issues of standards in animal care and health, antibiotic use, processing and the commerce clause.

Pat McDowell, TFB District 1 state director, represents Texas on the Market Structures Committee. Members of this committee discuss checkoff programs, credit markets, retail production standards, commodity markets, futures and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Act.

The Organic and Direct Marketing Committee covers organic production systems, organic checkoff programs, farmers markets, community supported agriculture and agritourism. Jessica Richmond, former TFB state director, serves on the committee.

Bob Reed, Matagorda County

farmer and former TFB state director, is on the Water Committee. This committee studies the Clean Water Act, along with national and regional water storage programs, flood control and Army Corps of Engineers water-related efforts.

As a member of the Budget and Economy Committee, Smith County farmer and former TFB vice president Mark Chamblee tackles issues like tax reforms and codes, appropriations, estate taxes, the federal budget process and the Balanced Budget Amendment.

Dewey Hukill, a Lamb County farmer and former TFB state director, represents Texas on the Technology Committee. This committee focuses on data privacy and control, unmanned aircraft systems, biotechnology, other new breeding techniques and robotics.

The Environmental Regulations Committee covers issues pertaining to the Endangered Species Act, climate change, the Clean Air Act and wildlife and farming interface. Williamson County farmer Bob Avant represents Texas on this committee.

As a member of the Food Safety Committee, Lubbock County farmer Bernie Thiel discusses certification standards, labeling, food safety education, the Food Safety Modernization

Act and federal food safety programs.

Mike Helle, Hidalgo County farmer, serves on the Agricultural Labor Committee, which covers guestworker programs, OSHA regulations, health care and employment taxes.

Outcomes of the committees' deliberations include advice and counsel to the AFBF board of directors on policy-related actions the national organization might be advised to take, recommendations for state Farm Bureau policy development and policy recommendations to the AFBF Resolutions Committee.

"These committees serve as a resource for AFBF," Regan Beck, TFB director of Government Affairs said. "Texas farmers and ranchers with knowledge and expertise on various topics are able to work with Farm Bureau leaders from other states to help the national organization better understand how each issue will impact agriculture."

Committee members may also testify at congressional hearings and communicate with the media.

They will also participate in conference calls and webinars throughout the year to help Farm Bureau staff develop testimonies and write comments on proposed federal regulations.

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Manage pastures, hay fields to control grassburs

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Grassburs aren't just a sharp-tipped menace to kids, outdoor enthusiasts and those in search of the perfect lawn.

They're a thorn in the side of ranchers, too, and for good reason. Grassburs cause a loss in palatability in cattle grazing an infested pasture.

"Grassburs can have a very negative effect on hay quality and substantially reduce forage value," Dr. Vanessa Olson, forage specialist with the Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service in Overton, said.

Grassburs are troublesome in pastures and hay meadows throughout the state, and they spread easily, because most people cannot identify a grassbur until after it has matured and produced the bur seed head, according to Olson.

The bur, commonly called a "sticker," is a specialized floret encapsulating anywhere from one to three



Grassbur is a grass weed that is troublesome in pastures and hay meadows throughout the state. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo.

seeds. The hardy bur protects the seeds and can keep them viable in the soil for years. It absorbs and retains soil moisture until conditions are right for germination, at which point it bursts open and releases the seeds, spreading the prickly plants.

The best method of grassbur control is prevention, but if a pasture or hay field is already infested, cultural suppression is the next-best alternative.

Post-emergent herbicide applications in heavy infestations are most effective when combined with cultural suppression techniques.

And it all starts with a robust forage management program, Olson said.

"Fertilization of bermudagrass is a key part of grassbur control," she said. "The presence of grassburs can be an indication of a weak stand of forage. The plants are more tolerant of acidic, low-fertility soils than many of our warm season forages like bermudagrass."

Fertilization will provide the necessary nutrients to grow bermudagrass. Proper stocking rates will ensure the grass doesn't get too stressed and recovers quickly, with-

out allowing enough time or space for weeds to grow.

Scout hay fields in the fall for grassbur presence to identify those areas where a pre-emergent herbicide may have to be applied in late winter or early spring.

In the spring and throughout the summer, Olson recommends scouting fields for early detection and applying post-emergent treatment in a timely manner.

"There are a few products labeled for grassbur control in pasture and hay meadows," Olson said. "But if you've had grassbur in the past, it's likely you will have it for years to come."

There is currently only one pre-emergent product available on the market. Pendimethalin, commonly sold under the brand name Prowl® H₂O, is labeled only for use in bermudagrass and other warm-season grasses in winter dormancy.

There is a 60-day haying restriction and 45-day grazing restriction.

The three post-emergent treatment options available are glyphosate (Roundup®), Pastora® and Plateau®/Panoramic 2sL. There are various grazing and haying restrictions for each product.

For additional pasture management information, contact your local AgriLife Extension office.

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Voter registration is first step in 2020 primary voting process

This year represents an important election cycle in Texas. Much is at stake in the outcome of the 2020 political races.

Voter turnout will be a key factor in determining the outcome of many elections.

To vote in Texas, you must be registered. There are several voter registration opportunities available.

You can register in person at your county voter registrar's office. In most Texas counties, the tax assessor-collector is also the voter registrar. In some counties, the county clerk or elections administrator registers voters.

You can register by mail by obtaining an application from your county voter registrar's office or pick up applications at libraries, government offices or high schools.

You may fill out a voter registration application online at <https://webservices.sos.state.tx.us/vrapp/index.asp>, print it, sign it and mail it to the voter registrar in your county of residence.

You are not registered until you have filled out the online application, printed it, signed it and mailed it to your local county voter registrar.

Your county's voter registrar will then process your application, and your registration becomes effective 30 days after it is submitted and accepted by the county voter registrar.

The county voter registrar's address can be found at the top of the online outputted voter registration application once you have submitted your information from the fill-in-the-blanks screen.

You are eligible to register to vote if you are a United States citizen, a resident of the county where you submit the application, at least 17 years and 10 months old and are 18 years of age on Election Day, are not a convicted felon (you may be eligible to vote if you have completed your sentence, probation and parole) and have not been declared by a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be either totally mentally incapacitated

ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE?

or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote.

You can confirm your voter registration by calling your voter registrar's office or providing your information on www.votetexas.gov.

"The voter is the most powerful in-

dividual in our democratic processes. Voting is a right, but it is also a privilege," Texas Farm Bureau President Russell Boening said. "I encourage Texas Farm Bureau members to vote, and I hope you'll carefully examine the positions of candidates and com-

pare their positions with yours."

The last day to register to vote for the runoff election is April 27.

Early voting for the runoff elections is set for May 18-22. Election Day is May 26.

"Rural Texas needs representation," Boening said. "That representation can be elected by you when you make your voice heard at the polls."

More election details are available from the Texas Secretary of State's office at www.votetexas.gov.

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Teachers can apply for TFB's Summer Ag Institute

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Teachers can grow their knowledge of agriculture and learn to incorporate agricultural concepts in their classroom with help from Texas Farm Bureau (TFB).

The state's largest farm and ranch organization will host its annual Summer Agricultural Institute (SAI) June 1-4 in Waco at the TFB Conference and Training Center.

Teachers from across the Lone Star State get a first-hand look at agriculture through the professional development event.

"A teacher can go to a professional development workshop and sit in front of folks who are lecturing and presenting slideshows, but we actually take them out into the field to see how farms and ranches operate," TFB Director of Educational Outreach Jordan Walker said. "They also learn how those disciplines relate to science, social studies, math and more."

Regardless of the subject, agriculture has a place in the classroom,



Teachers who attend TFB's Summer Agricultural Institute will make connections with farmers, ranchers and industry professionals to learn more about Texas agriculture.

Walker noted.

"The program gives teachers the tools to help students explore every part of Texas agriculture," she said. "Teachers can ask questions and get more information to be better



equipped to bring agriculture to life in their classroom."

Teachers get to see the agricultural concepts demonstrated by educational professionals through SAI. They'll also make connections with

farmers, ranchers and industry professionals.

And there will be several opportunities for teachers to get their hands dirty.

"It's wonderful because our teachers get hands-on, in-the-field experience," Walker said. "They can take that back to their students fully understanding the concept, because they've seen it in action. It's just a unique view into agriculture that most people don't get to see."

Upon completion, teachers bring home activity ideas, lesson plans and a wealth of resources. Teachers also receive 36 hours of continuing professional education credits as authorized by the Texas Education Agency.

Any active K-12 teacher of any subject can apply to attend.

The cost is \$375 per person, which includes lodging and some meals, but county Farm Bureaus often offer sponsorships to cover the costs for local teachers.

Applications are due April 17.

For more information and to register, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/aic> or contact Walker at 254-751-2569 or jwalker1@txfb.org.



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American Farm Bureau hopeful for infrastructure legislation

The infrastructure in America is in desperate need of upgrades and improvements.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) is hopeful Congress will begin working on legislation that would authorize spending on those needed improvements.

AFBF economist Megan Nelson highlighted infrastructure priorities for farmers and their rural communities.

“Infrastructure as a whole is extremely important for agriculture, and connecting rural areas to the global economy is of utmost impor-

ance,” Nelson said. “So, in those terms, I would say broadband, ensuring that rural roads and bridges are able to handle agricultural equipment and make sure that we’re still maintaining our competitive advantage when exporting agricultural products.”

Nelson noted infrastructure improvements and upgrades would give U.S. farmers a competitive advantage against countries like Brazil in the world marketplace.

“Being able to ensure that our rural roads and bridges are able to carry certain loads and not break

down and not have to cause extra time and costs—it’ll be really important,” she said. “Additionally, to broadband, there’s an estimated \$65 billion that rural areas could see annually if broadband was available at the demand levels.”

There would be tremendous economic benefits to having new broadband infrastructure in place, according to Nelson.

“We really do think that we could see tremendous benefits with nearly \$13.1 billion in annual benefits to row crops and \$13.3 billion to specialty crops and nearly \$21 billion is



estimated to be benefiting livestock,” she said. “And that’s just with broadband alone. With roads and other connectivity, really it’s pretty limitless.”

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TEXAS AGRICULTURE

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Hawkins FFA apiary business creates national buzz

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The all-female FFA ag mechanics team at Hawkins High School is savoring sweet success after winning reserve champion in showmanship at the 2019 Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, as well as being featured on NBC's *Today Show*.

Their successful beekeeping and honey production business grew from a creative partnership with a national company.

A bee problem

Nestlé Waters North America's Ozarka® bottling facility located just outside of Hawkins had a bee problem. Bees were swarming near the loading docks on the nearly 3,000-acre property.

Their solution? Working with Hawkins FFA to relocate the bees and provide a learning opportunity for students.

"Nestlé is always looking for ways

to create shared value with partners in the community," Cheryl Conway, quality assurance manager, said. "We sponsor scholarships, all kinds of things, and this was a perfect partnership with Hawkins High School."

Byrd and the queen bees

When Hawkins agricultural science teacher Matt Byrd received a phone call from Conway explaining her idea, he recognized the unique opportunity to reach more students. He sought advice from a local beekeeper, and the project was born.

As part of the project, the students designed and built a beehive to enter in the agricultural mechanics competition at the Houston Live-



The 4G Honey Team markets and sells their honey locally and online at etsy.com.

stock Show & Rodeo.

Nestlé provided monetary donations for shop equipment to build the boxes and purchased protective suits and beekeeping equipment for the girls.

With that, the 4G Honey Team

was established.

Brook Goddard, Jessica Henneous, Rachel Parish and Mackenzie Rutherford were the four students on the team. They constructed new homes for the itinerant colony, hoping to get at least one constructed in time for the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo Junior Agricultural Mechanics contest.

Their hive design was submitted to the livestock handling equipment division, where the girls competed against teams who had built equipment like squeeze chutes, gates, panels, feeders and other more traditional livestock handling equipment.

Building the boxes was an educational experience.

"It's a lot of trial and error, especially with Eastern red cedar. It's a very soft wood, and the knots in it makes it crack easily," Goddard, a junior at Hawkins High, said.



The 4G Honey Team at Hawkins High School builds beehives, tends a thriving apiary and harvests and sells honey. Through this project, students are learning about leadership, teamwork, beekeeping, managing a business and more.

The Eastern red cedar lumber makes ideal beehives, because it has some inherent moth- and mite-repellant properties, Goddard explained. But some of the girls had never even held a power tool or tried to build something from wood before.

The girls persevered, and soon established an apiary on the Nestlé property.

Their plan worked. The bees vacated the plant and moved into the students' beehives.

The students, now novice beekeepers, continued to care for the colonies, learning from a local beekeeper about the basics of honey production.

And then it was time for the Houston Stock Show.

The taste of sweet success

Despite the abundance of large-scale cattle handling pieces on display, Byrd knew the 4G Honey Team would still create some buzz.

"They have a showmanship division, and in showmanship, it's based on how well the students know their project," he said. "It's judged on how well they've got the bill of materials down, their project design and how well it's presented. It's a marathon. They're talking to people all day long. There are judges coming through all

day, and they have to be on their toes at all times and really work at that angle."

Each student could explain the beehives' construction and functionality.

On the last day of the agricultural mechanics show, the awards ceremony was held. And the girls had their first taste of sweet success when they were named reserve grand champions in the showmanship category out of 500 schools.

They won \$8,000 in prizes and equipment at the competition. After their victory, the girls planned to return to Hawkins and get back to the business of balancing schoolwork, tending bees and collecting honey.

But the word was out about their unique project.

In the spotlight

Today Show producers visited Hawkins and produced an initial segment. They returned in early December to report live from the Hawkins High School gym.

"I think that was a highlight for our community and school district to be put in the spotlight, to have everyone here early that morning supporting our girls and our program," Byrd said.

The Nestlé leadership team provided \$5,000 scholarships for each of the girls, as well as a \$10,000 grant to Hawkins FFA to help continue and grow the project.

The Texas Department of Agriculture also presented the students with certificates of achievement recognizing their contributions to Texas agriculture.

The Tyler Morning Telegraph extensively documented the girls' journey, and the students have since presented to many local groups, gaining confidence and skills along the way.

Harvesting the rewards

Byrd knew his students would succeed. And while he's proud of their achievement at the show, he's even more proud of their character development and growth.

The girls say they owe it all to FFA.

"FFA is a very diverse organization," Henneous said. "Not very many people get the chance to be able to get a huge sponsorship like we have and build a bee apiary, but it's been a lot of fun and it's a really great experience."

FFA teaches youth about more than just agriculture, Parish noted, and the lessons she's learned will

carry her far.

"I would say before I was brought into FFA and introduced to this project, I was more on the quiet side of things," Parish said. "But after this project, I've opened up a little bit. We've done a lot of presentations and interviews that have definitely helped with our leadership skills and speaking ability."

Entrepreneurship, teamwork and time management are some of the skills Rutherford said she has gained from the experience.

"We didn't just learn beekeeping. We learned how to take care of a kitchen, because the kitchen is our honey headquarters," Rutherford said. "In the kitchen, we learned how to run a company, balance school and be beekeepers."

They couldn't have done it without their teacher, the girls noted.

"Mr. Byrd has been outstanding," Goddard said. "He's led us through everything, and he's the reason we're where we're at today. He's given us a lot of confidence and really helped us a lot."

It's been a sweet success led by an un-bee-lievable partnership between a national company and a youth organization.

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2020 TFB Youth Leadership Conference applications available

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

What sets great leaders apart from everyone else?

Through Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) Youth Leadership Conference (YLC), incoming high school juniors and seniors participate in a variety of activities to help answer that question.

"YLC is one of our organization's most important events each year, because during those three days, we just really focus on the students and work with them to help them reach their full potential," Mia Balko, TFB director of Youth Outreach, said. "It's an invaluable experience for the kids who get to attend."

The weeklong conference, set for June 8-12 at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, focuses on the free enterprise system, constitutional government, patriotism, goal-setting activities and leadership skills.

Through group projects and activities, students gain a deeper understanding of these concepts and de-



Youth Leadership Conference participants work in teams to develop campaigns, leadership skills and public speaking skills.

velop personal skills that put them on the path to future success.

And it's fun.

Attendees experience life on a college campus, establish lifelong friendships with other high school students from around Texas and grow their self-confidence.

"We hear it from the students who've attended over and over,"

Balko said. "So many of them come back to us and say 'YLC changed my life! I used to be so shy, but now I'm not,' or 'I used to be uncomfortable with public speaking, but now I feel prepared and confident.' And we watch it happen over that week. You can see them change throughout the process. Without a doubt, YLC influences our youth to become leaders in

their chosen fields and throughout the rest of their lives."

High school students are selected by county Farm Bureaus. Transportation, rooms, meals and a small tuition fee are financed by the sponsoring county Farm Bureaus.

YLC attendance is the first step for students to participate in the Free Enterprise Speech Contest, in which students compete for scholarships.

YLC applications are now open on the TFB website.

Visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/youth/youth-opportunities/> and scroll down to Youth Leadership Conference. Then, follow the directions to complete the application process.

The deadline to apply is May 1.

Selected students will be notified by their county Farm Bureau.

"I would absolutely recommend every student who's interested to apply as soon as possible," Balko said. "I'd like to wish them all good luck and am looking forward to meeting our next group of future leaders this summer!"

Applications open for 2020 Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) applications for the eight Texas areas designated as having veterinary shortages.

Applications may be submitted through 5 p.m. (ET) on April 2.

The VMLRP is authorized by the National Veterinary Medical Services Act and helps qualified veterinarians offset a significant portion of debt incurred while pursuing their veterinary medicine degree in return for at least three years of service in a designated veterinary shortage area.

The VMLRP will pay up to \$25,000 each year toward qualified educational loans of eligible veterinarians who agree to serve in a National Institute of Food and Agriculture-designated veterinarian shortage situation for a period of three years

To be eligible to apply for the VMLRP, an applicant must have a

degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), or the equivalent, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education.

The applicant must also have qualifying educational loan debt as defined in 7 CFR 3431 Section 3.

Additional requirements include securing an offer of employment or establishing and/or maintaining a practice in a veterinary shortage situation, as determined by the secretary, within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer and providing certifications and verifications in accordance with 7 CFR 3431 Section 16.

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) can provide guidance on how to apply.

More information about the Fiscal Year 2020 VMLRP application process is available at <https://nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-applicants> or contact

Counties highlighted in the map above are included in the designated areas as having veterinary shortages.

rp.applications@usda.gov.

While TAHC does not administer this program, comments or questions

related to the shortage areas may be directed to roger.parker@tahc.texas.gov.

Disaster relief possible for extreme drought areas

Recent passage of a Congressional act may bring relief to farmers who experienced crop losses due to drought in 2018 and 2019.

In December 2019, Congress passed the FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, making crop production losses due to “quality losses of crops, drought and excessive soil moisture” in crop years 2018 and 2019 eligible for Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+).

Assistance could become available to the 202 Texas counties affected. But until the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) releases further information, farmers must wait to sign up for assistance.

“Previous rounds of assistance had focused on a variety of other disasters but didn’t cover drought,” said Bart Fischer, director of the Agricultural Food and Policy Center (AFPC) at Texas A&M University. “But the FY2020 appropriations bill finally addressed that aspect of crop loss, making drought losses eligible for WHIP+.”

Fischer noted since passage of the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress has appropriated very little supplemental disaster assistance for agriculture, but



that changed with the passing of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018.

“In response to hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria and others, as well as wildfires and other natural disasters that occurred in 2017, Congress approved a \$2.36 billion support package, which U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue used, in part, to create the Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program, or WHIP,” he said. “Then after natural disasters occurring in 2018 and 2019, Congress passed the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act of 2019 that included just over \$3 billion. This went toward developing the Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program Plus, or WHIP+.”

Fischer noted the FY2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations

Act also stipulates “losses due to drought shall only be eligible for WHIP+ if any area within the county in which the loss occurs was rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D3 (extreme drought) or higher level of drought intensity during the applicable calendar years.”

Drought severity rankings range from D0, which is abnormally dry, to D4, which is exceptional drought.

The AFPC has developed information on coverage levels, as well as a map of U.S. counties affected by drought and various drought illustration scenarios available at <https://tinyurl.com/DroughtAppropriations2020>.

Fischer also cautioned that, until USDA announces it is time to sign up, the local county Farm Service Agency will not be able to provide any information.

“While we anticipate that WHIP+ will provide meaningful assistance for producers facing D3 or greater levels of drought across the U.S. in crop years 2018 and/or 2019, nothing is official until USDA releases the program details,” he said.

USDA projections show more planted acres, some price increases for 2020

After a rough 2019 planting season that saw 20 million acres go unplanted, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) outlook projections are calling for a significant bounce back in planted acres.

Corn and soybean acres are projected to increase, while cotton and wheat acres are expected to decline, according to American Farm Bureau Federation’s (AFBF) Chief Economist John Newton.

“Given an expansion in acreage for both corn and soybeans and a bounce back in yields, corn and soybean production are both going to increase in 2020,” he said. “Wheat production is expected to decline slightly in 2020 on the lower acreage and a slight yield reduction. Cotton production is expected to fall slightly based on a decrease in acreage but slightly offset by an improvement in yields this year.”

Newton noted they’re looking for exports, especially in soybeans, to bounce back this year.

“We’re expecting to see exports bounce back a little bit, still below where they were a couple years ago before the trade war started.

We’re going to see soybean supplies tighten up again. That should lead to higher prices,” Newton said. “On the corn side, demand simply is not going to be able to keep up with supply, and thus USDA has corn stocks projected to be at 2.6 billion bushels, a record high and a slight decrease in the corn price for 2020.”

Overall, the livestock sector will see higher prices, according to Newton.

“USDA is expecting record production just about in all livestock categories. Dairy production is expected at 222 billion pounds, but we will see higher milk prices, higher pork prices, higher cattle prices,” he said. “I think the only sector where there is some weakness is going to be in the broiler space—lower prices there, but higher prices for eggs and turkey. Then, on the same side of the coin, lower feed prices for those folks.”

Get more information on farm projections and income, a farmer survey about the economy and more from AFBF’s Market Intel at fb.org/market-intel.

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USDA aims to meet the needs of small meat, poultry processors

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Deputy Undersecretary of Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears is leading a series of stakeholder meetings, reviewing regulations for small and very small meat and poultry processing plants.

Brashears directed the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which she oversees, to partner with Oregon State University. Together, they are conducting a review to ensure smaller processing plants are provided with appropriate resources and assistance by the agency.

“We are committed to making sure we meet the needs of the small and very small processors,” she said. “USDA has jurisdiction over meat, poultry and processed egg products, and there are a lot of regulations the processors have to meet every day to ensure food safety. We just want to make sure we provide all the resources they need in order to meet those and that we’re not putting an unnecessary burden on them.”

The review includes a series of regional stakeholder meetings where Brashears and other agency personnel meet with representatives of small plants to discuss what’s working and what’s not working for their operations.

To kick off the 2020 meetings, Brashears recently visited Texas and met with about 45 meat and poultry processing plant representatives.

“I think a lot of people look at FSIS or any other government entity and say, ‘Oh, the government is making me do X, Y and Z,’” Brashears said. “But I was able to come in from the world of academia where I saw the benefit, because we saw a direct correlation of reduction of salmonella or E. coli in our food after implementing certain regulations. So, regulations really have a very positive food safety benefit. But again, we want to make sure these small and very small processors can meet those and have the benefit in those companies, as well.”

Discussions are focused on helping smaller meat processing plants achieve and maintain regulatory compliance, Brashears said. The agency will also conduct surveys and undertake other activities to gather input from the processors, which will then be turned over to Oregon State.

“We’re cooperating with Oregon State to have a third-party perspective. They’ll come back to us with the final report, and we will take action to enhance the areas where we’re doing a good job, and see what

resources we can dedicate to the areas where we need improvement in order to meet the needs of those small and very small processors,” Brashears said. “We’re always working to get better, and to make our customer service better. That’s really the goal and objective of these roundtables.”

She noted the review is not because of any major mishaps or poor outcomes. It’s just another way FSIS is working to ensure U.S. meat and poultry products remain part of one

of the safest, most reliable food supplies in the world.

“I’ve been to processing plants all over the world, and I can say with confidence that the processing plants in the United States are the cleanest and the safest that I’ve ever been in, and I feel very good about that,” she said. “But we’re always working to get better and move toward fewer illnesses and improvements in public health. So, while I think our plants are all very good, we’re just striving to be better.”

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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 pictures with the entire Lone Star State and maybe even win a cash prize.

The deadline for photo submissions in the 2020 contest is June 1.

The contest is limited to members of the Texas Farm Bureau and their immediate families.

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 will be awarded a \$250 cash prize, second place will receive \$200 and two honorable mentions will receive \$100 each.

As in years past, both digital and printed photographs may be submitted. To enter, follow these simple rules:

Digital entries should be e-mailed to photocontest@txfb.org. For publication purposes, photos must be at least 1024 X 768 pixels or higher.

Print entries may be mailed to Photo Contest, TFB Communications Division, P.O. Box 2689, Waco, TX 76702-2689. A self-addressed, stamped envelope needs to accompany your print photo entry if you want your photograph returned.

Include a brief description regarding the entry, plus the participant's name, address, telephone number and valid Texas Farm Bureau membership number.

More information is available at <https://txfb.us/photocontest20>.

Invasive wild pigs continue to threaten planted fields, pastures

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

You spend months waiting for conditions to be right, days preparing the soil and hours planting, but it can all be gone in a matter of minutes with nothing left but the telltale sign of one of Texas' most destructive animals—the wild pig.

Dr. John Tomecek, wildlife specialist for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, estimates there are now more than five million wild pigs, or feral hogs, in Texas.

With the wild pig population on the rise—by as much as three litters per year, per sow—the threats to fields, pastures and livestock is also increasing.

“Farmers have got it rough. We see hundreds of millions of dollars of damage a year just from pigs in Texas on crops,” Tomecek told the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

Farmers will plant during the day, and by the next morning, the freshly-planted seed is gone.

“Many people have either gotten out of raising certain crops or they've gotten out of the farming business altogether just because of pigs, so that's something that we think about an awful lot,” Tomecek said.

Even treated seeds are no match for hungry wild pigs.

“The labels tell us to be careful handling it, wear proper PPE (personal protective equipment), and yet the pigs eat this stuff and just keep marching on,” Tomecek said. “It's an incredible problem.”

Wild pigs can degrade water quality and introduce E. coli, making the water unsafe to drink.

“If you're a livestock raiser, you work hard to keep your stock out of the creek. Pigs get in there and damage the vegetation and the creek sides. It increases sediment and runoff, and ultimately will degrade that watershed because pigs are in there,” Tomecek said.

Wild pigs are opportunistic and pose a threat to livestock and wildlife.

“They will kill and eat anything they can get ahold of,” Tomecek said. “They'll eat our native wildlife, but then they also just compete for food resources and habitat pretty hard. If you're a livestock raiser, there's a number of diseases that these pigs can transmit to your livestock.”

They'll prey on livestock, especially lambs and kids, because they're small enough for most wild pigs to handle.



Wild pigs destroyed a wheat field in Concho County. The invasive species has been reported in at least 35 states, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Some landowners have resorted to using fencing designed to keep wild pigs out.

Others have tried trapping or hunting to control the invasive species.

“We talk a whole lot about trapping and its various forms, and we always recommend using a large corral style trap—whether that's remotely triggered or just a traditional head gate with some panel and t-posts,” Tomecek said. “There's a million different designs, but that typically is the way we recommend because you catch the entire sounder, that group of pigs, all at once.”

If a landowner doesn't catch all of the sounder at once, it leaves behind the pigs who know what traps are and will know how to avoid them in the future.

“Aside from trapping, you can ground shoot or ground hunt or run dogs, hunt with dogs. Those are low-harvest methods, but they are effective at putting pressure on pigs, so those pigs will avoid an area for a little while because you've put some pressure on them,” Tomecek said. “They do eventually come back. We've seen that in GPS collar stud-

ies of pigs, but it takes them awhile.”

You can also hunt feral hogs from a helicopter.

“This has been very effective in some areas, especially where there's more open ground because you can get several landowners together to sign up to allow a helicopter—whether federal or state like our Wildlife Services agency or private operator—to chase and hunt those pigs where they are instead of the pigs slipping under a fence and getting away,” Tomecek said.

There are currently no toxicant options available in Texas, but research is underway.

The key, Tomecek said, is not to give up once you employ a method to control wild pigs on your property.

“Everybody's busy, and we know that, but you've got to keep after it. Even when you think you've gotten all the pigs, I promise you there are still some there, and we need to keep that pressure on if we're ever going to make a difference,” Tomecek said.

Information on hog trap designs, remote sensing cameras and trapping tips are available at <https://feralhogs.tamu.edu/>.



Feral hogs pig out on crops and private property, causing major damages and losses to agricultural land and equipment.

USDA outlines risk management programs for hemp farmers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the availability of two risk management programs that protect hemp farmers' crops from natural disasters.

A pilot hemp insurance program through Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) provides coverage against loss of yield because of insurable causes of loss for hemp grown for fiber, grain or cannabidiol (CBD) oil.

The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage protects against losses associated with lower yields, destroyed crops or prevented planting where no permanent federal crop insurance program is available.

Farmers may apply now, and the deadline to sign up for both programs is March 16.

"We are pleased to offer these coverages to hemp producers. Hemp offers new economic opportunities for our farmers, and they are anxious for a way to protect their product in the event of a natural disaster,"

Farm Production and Conservation Undersecretary Bill Northey said.

Multi-Peril Crop Insurance Pilot Insurance Program

The MPCI pilot insurance is a new crop insurance option for hemp farmers in select counties of 21 states for the 2020 crop year. The program is available for eligible farmers in certain counties in Alabama, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin. Information on eligible counties is accessible through the USDA Risk Management Agency's Actuarial Information Browser.

Among other requirements, to be eligible for the pilot program, a hemp farmer must have at least one year of history producing the crop and have a contract for the sale of the insured hemp. In addition, the minimum acreage requirement is



five acres for CBD and 20 acres for grain and fiber. Hemp will not qualify for replant payments or prevented plant payments under MPCI.

This pilot insurance coverage is available to hemp growers in addition to revenue protection for hemp offered under the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection plan of insurance.

Also, beginning with the 2021 crop year, hemp will be insurable under the Nursery crop insurance program and the Nursery Value Select pilot crop insurance program.

Under both nursery programs, hemp will be insurable if grown in containers and in accordance with federal regulations, any applicable state or tribal laws and terms of the crop insurance policy.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program

NAP provides coverage against loss for hemp grown for fiber, grain, seed or CBD for the 2020 crop year where no permanent federal crop insurance program is available.

NAP basic 50/55 coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production. Buy-up coverage is available in some cases. The 2018 Farm Bill allows for buy-up levels of NAP coverage from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Premiums apply for buy-up coverage.

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is \$325 per crop or \$825 per farmer per county, not to exceed \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

Eligibility Requirements

Under a regulation authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill and issued in October 2019, all growers must have a license to grow hemp and must comply with applicable state, tribal or federal regulations or operate under a state or university research pilot, as authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Farmers must report hemp acreage to FSA after planting to comply with federal and state law enforcement.

The farm bill defines hemp as containing 0.3 percent or less tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) on a dry-weight basis.

Hemp having THC above the federal statutory compliance level of 0.3 percent is an uninsurable or ineligible cause of loss and will result in the hemp production being ineligible for production history purposes.

For more information on USDA risk management programs for hemp farmers, visit farmers.gov/hemp to read frequently asked questions.

For more information on the U.S. Domestic Hemp Production Program, visit USDA's Agricultural Marketing Services' website at www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/hemp/questions-and-answers.



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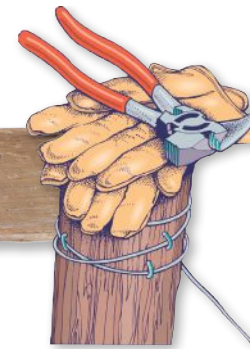
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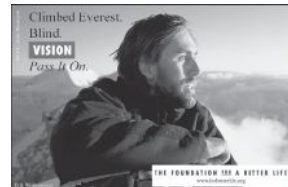
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