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# Texas Agriculture

March 4, 2022

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## Uncertain Outlook Input costs outpace farmer optimism

Pages 16-17



# Answering agriculture's critics in the media and online

I'm a big believer in taking the high road. When media present inaccurate or incomplete portrayals of U.S. agriculture, my job and the job of Farm Bureau is to help them understand where they went wrong and to set the record straight. We had our work cut out for us with a recent *New York Times* opinion video. It was so disappointing to see a respected media outlet present a distorted picture of agriculture without so much as acknowledging that farmers play an essential role in stocking America's pantries.



**By Zippy Duvall**  
AFBF President

AFBF jumped into action. We drafted a response and had a productive conversation with decisionmakers there, but unfortunately, they declined to accept my guest essay, which provides a more complete and honest picture of agriculture. What a disservice to their readers and to the disappearing tradition of honest debate.

So, here's the rest of the story. American agriculture leads the world in climate-smart farming, making up just 10% of greenhouse gas emissions, much lower than transportation, electricity generation and industry. It's not by chance

that America has made progress quicker than our international counterparts. Through public and private partnerships and investments in innovative technologies, America's farmers and ranchers have been able to reduce per-unit emissions of livestock over the past 30 years by 8-26%, depending on the species. We are able to grow more food using fewer resources than ever before.

Advances have been made in carbon sequestration, as well. 140 million acres are enrolled in voluntary conservation programs.

To put that in perspective, there are more privately owned acres reserved for conservation than the size of California and New York combined. The use of no-till or low-till planting methods, which means the top soil is disturbed as little as possible, is now used on more than half of the corn, cotton, soybeans and wheat planted across the nation. That's more than 200 million acres. And the use of cover crops continues to grow, increasing 50% between 2012 and 2017. These practices not only reduce the amount of water, fertilizer and pesticides needed for crops, they help keep carbon trapped

in the soil and out of the atmosphere.

The beef industry, which has become a target in the environmental debate, is also making great strides. Beef production accounts for just 2% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, much lower than the global average. Almost half of all farm acres are used as permanent pastureland. Those lands are good for raising cattle, and the soil remains undisturbed, which ensures it can continue retaining carbon. It's estimated that the land cattle graze contains 10-30% of the carbon stored in soil, making them crucial for carbon sequestration.

These advances are being made in all 50 states and Puerto Rico by families on both large and small farms. Critics like to point the finger at so-called "factory farms," but the reality is, of the just more than 2 million farms in America, almost all of them are family owned and 1.9 million of them are classified by the government as small family farms. We need operations of all sizes if we are to feed a country that is about to surpass a population of 330 million people and a world that will soon pass the 8 billion mark.

We will meet the challenges ahead while protecting the environment by working together. It's one of the reasons AFBF was a founding member

of the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance (FACA). The group, now more than 80 member organizations strong, consists of agriculture, food, forestry, sportsmen and environmental groups. Naysayers might claim Farm Bureau and groups like the Environmental Defense Fund and The Nature Conservancy don't have anything in common, but we all saw the need to break through historical barriers to find solutions to our environmental challenges. Together, FACA came up with more than 40 recommendations that are having a real impact, helping to shape the Growing Climate Solutions Act, which passed in the Senate with bipartisan support, and USDA's new Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities pilot programs, which are a direct outcome of FACA's work, according to Secretary Vilsack. Both respect the role of farmers.

Together, we can be proud of the advancements we have made in climate-smart practices and our commitment to continuous improvement. Can we do more? Absolutely. But it will take all of us, not just the farmers and ranchers, to create a better world. That doesn't happen by mandates or by perpetuating a false narrative. It will happen through honest dialogue about investments in innovation and partnerships with farmers.



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# Ag groups call for action on ocean shipping legislation

More than 100 organizations representing various aspects of agriculture are urging the Senate to act on a bill to address unreasonable ocean carrier practices that are undermining U.S. export competitiveness. The House in December overwhelmingly passed similar legislation.

“The transportation crisis for U.S. agriculture products has become increasingly dire. Many agriculture products produced in the U.S. experience significant competition from other countries. If we cannot deliver our products dependably, our foreign customers will find alternatives to our exports,” the American Farm Bureau Federation and the other organizations warned in a recent letter to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

The letter pointed to a survey conducted by the Agriculture Transportation Coalition that found, on average, 22% of U.S. agriculture foreign sales could not be completed because of ocean carrier practices like exorbitant freight rates, declined booking requests, failure to communicate schedules in a timely manner and several others.

The groups said they strongly support legislative initiatives to gain reasonable and fair ocean carrier practices consistent with the Federal Maritime Commission’s excellent, but still unenforced, Interpretive Rule on Demurrage and Detention.

Specific to the legislation from Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Tom Thune (R-S.D.), the coalition asked that the Senate bill, like the House bill, establish an obligation for carriers to self-police compliance with the FMC rule.

The groups requested swift action in the Senate, so lawmakers from both chambers can produce a single bill for President Biden’s signature.

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## AFBF asks for update on meatpacker investigation

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) sent a letter in February to Attorney General Merrick Garland, asking the Department of Justice (DOJ) to provide an update on its investigation into the meatpacking industry.

“With over 80% of the fed cattle market controlled by only four major packing companies, we are concerned about the control these firms have,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall wrote. “With unprecedented volatility in the cattle markets in 2020 stemming from the Tyson plant fire in Holcomb, Kansas, we seek a written update on the department’s investigation surrounding the role the major packing companies played

surrounding this volatility.”

Packers faced heightened scrutiny amid the COVID-19 pandemic as shutdowns rocked the industry. The pandemic came on the heels of a fire at a Tyson Foods facility in 2019, which closed operations for several months and impacted live cattle and wholesale beef prices in a similar manner.

After plant shutdowns across the nation and a record increase in the boxed beef cutout in 2020, a bipartisan group of attorneys general wrote to the DOJ to investigate “potential anticompetitive practices by the meatpackers in the cattle industry.”

The DOJ began the investigation and issued civil investigative de-

mands, similar to subpoenas, to Tyson Foods Inc., JBS SA, Cargill Inc. and National Beef Inc.

“While we understand the COVID-19 pandemic caused supply chain and labor issues within the meatpacking sector, the volatility in the markets during this time caused extreme uncertainty for our country’s cattle producers,” Duvall wrote. “We look forward to hearing from the Department of Justice regarding their investigation, so we can update Farm Bureau members and assure them that adequate government oversight is being conducted in the nation’s cattle markets and that the markets remain fair for businesses, farmers and all American families.”

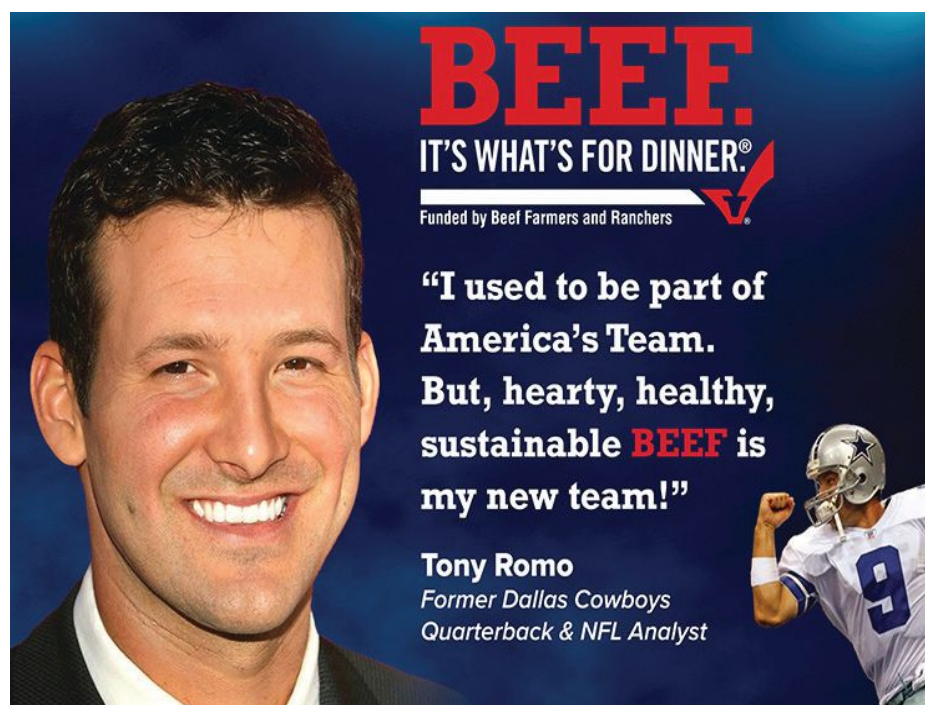
## Tony Romo new spokesperson for national beef campaign

The iconic *Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner.* brand, managed by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and funded by the National Beef Checkoff, announced a new partnership with celebrity athlete and former football star Tony Romo at the 2022 Cattle Industry Convention last month.

“Kicking off this partnership in early 2022 is the perfect time to gear up for summer nutrition and grilling, spending time with friends and family and, of course, tailgating,” said Sarah Reece, senior executive director of Brand Marketing. “From his nutrition expertise to his love of beef and family, Romo is the perfect spokesperson for the brand.”

The partnership, which will last one year and tap into Romo’s vast fanbase, will promote all things beef—from beef nutrition, to how beef is raised and beef’s great taste.

“I’m really excited to be your new spokesperson,” Romo said. “Me, my wife and the kids eat beef all the time, and I think we’re going to eat it even more if that’s even possible at this point. Hearty and sustain-



**Tony Romo will be featured promoting beef in advertisements on media platforms for the Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner. brand. Courtesy photo.**

able beef is my new team.”

In addition to the general consumer appeal associated with celebrity spokespeople, Romo will be featured promoting beef in photo and video advertisements on digital and traditional media platforms. So-

cial media content also will be developed for organic and promoted posts across the *Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner.* social channels and on Romo’s personal pages.

More information is available at [BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com](http://BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com).

## Enroll in ARC, PLC programs by March 15

Farmers who have not yet enrolled in the safety net programs—Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC)—for the 2022 crop year have until March 15 to sign a contract.

Farmers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County or PLC, which are both crop-by-crop, or ARC-Individual, which is for the entire farm. Although election changes for 2022 are optional, farmers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a farmer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2022, it will be necessary to sign a new contract.

If an election is not submitted by the March 15, 2022, deadline, the election remains the same as the 2021 election for crops on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the crop.

Farmers who do not complete enrollment by the deadline will not be enrolled in ARC or PLC for the 2022 crop year and will not receive a payment if triggered.

Farmers are eligible to enroll farms with base acres for the following commodities: barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

For more information on ARC and PLC, farmers can visit [fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services](http://fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services) or contact their local USDA Service Center.

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5

# Texas Farm Bureau Presidents' Conference focuses on team building

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Being passionate, building a strong team and equipping leaders with information were on the agenda for the 2022 Presidents' Conference, which was held Feb. 16-17 at the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Conference and Training Center in Waco.

"We host the Presidents' Conference every other year. It's a great chance to visit about goals, ideas and purpose activities," TFB President Russell Boening said. "This conference helped equip our leaders with the tools their county Farm Bureaus need to be successful. It does take a team, and we know that their success as county Farm Bureau presidents depends largely on the team that surrounds them."

Guest speakers and several breakout sessions helped county presidents learn more about purpose activities and how county leaders utilize various TFB resources.

Ellis County Farm Bureau Presi-

dent Scott Born, TFB Director of Communications Gary Joiner and TFB Associate Director of Government Affairs Billy Howe discussed communications and political advocacy.

The panel covered how TFB staff can assist county Farm Bureaus with communications efforts, as well as agricultural and political advocacy. TFB's Communications Division aims to add volume, reach and depth to the Voice of Texas Agriculture mission when communicating with various audiences. In the Government Affairs Division, the Legislative staff pursue and implement policy, and the Commodity and Regulatory staff help address and navigate complex issues and requirements.

Together, those divisions and county Farm Bureaus can amplify and elevate stories that highlight the sustainability of Texas agriculture.

Another panel consisting of a county president and TFB staff focused on education and urban out-



*County Farm Bureau presidents shared ideas and fellowship during the 2022 TFB Presidents' Conference.*

reach efforts and leadership development.

Deaf Smith/Oldham County Farm Bureau President Landon Friemel discussed how he's utilized TFB's agriculture in the classroom resources

and talked about his role on the Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee.

TFB Director of Organization Whit Weems and TFB Field Representative Jessica Nemir also shared



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information on how county presidents and leaders can grow leadership skills and a greater awareness of agriculture in local schools and communities.

TFB's Organization Division encompasses leader development, youth outreach and educational outreach. Leader development programs help sow the seeds of TFB's future, growing leadership skills and an understanding of agricultural advocacy. The division also strives to increase agricultural literacy and awareness in schools and communities through various educational and interactive programs.

TFB's Field Operations Division serves as a liaison between the state office and county Farm Bureaus. Field representatives assist county Farm Bureaus in developing a plan of work and budget, as well as executing activities and promoting membership.

County presidents also heard from leadership experts Jay Mathis and Rachel Woods on how to empower their teams and delegate responsibilities.

"This conference was all about exceptionalism. We wanted to give county presidents and their teams ev-



***Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Glenn Hegar discussed the state of the Texas economy with the group.***

ery opportunity to excel by highlighting some of the staff, resources and information available to them from TFB, as well as give them a chance to discuss and share ideas with one another," Boening said. "Whether it be an entire program of work or just a few priority activities, I'm confident our county Farm Bureaus will have



***Deaf Smith/Oldham County Farm Bureau President Landon Friemel (right) discussed agriculture in the classroom efforts with TFB Director of Organization Whit Weems and TFB Field Representative Jessica Nemir.***

another exceptional year."

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Glenn Hegar also addressed the county leaders during the Presidents' Conference, saying agriculture's impact and what they do is important to Texas.

"I want to say thank you for all you do for engaging in issues impor-

tant to agriculture and rural Texas," he said.

Hegar shared three things that concern him regarding the economy—inflation, supply chain issues and lack of available labor.

"All of those are playing into our economy," he said. "Texas exports 19% of all the product out of the United States. We are very connected to the global economy. Agriculture is a big part of this. Can there be a drag, something that happens around the world? Yes. But Texas is poised to continue to grow at a much greater rate than the rest of the nation."

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.

"The activities and involvement from our county presidents, county leaders and members help TFB continue to be a strong voice for Texas agriculture in our communities and in Austin and Washington, D.C.," Boening said. "Together, we bring awareness to the value and impact of Farm Bureau to agriculture, rural communities and everyone connected to the production of our food, fiber and fuel."



***Ellis County Farm Bureau President Scott Born (left), TFB Associate Director of Government Affairs Billy Howe (center) and TFB Communications Director Gary Joiner (right) served on a panel in a breakout session to discuss communications and government affairs activities at the state and county levels.***

# USDA funds are now available for agriculture infrastructure repairs along U.S.-Mexico border

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Financial assistance is available to Texas farmers and ranchers along the U.S.-Mexico border who are currently impacted by damage to fields and farming infrastructure, including fencing and water structures.

The funds are made available through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits.

"Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) thanks USDA for releasing the EQIP Border Restoration Initiative to assist farmers and ranchers suffering devastating losses due to illegal immigration," TFB President Russell Boening said. "We also appreciate Congressional leaders, especially Congressmen August Pfluger, Henry Cuellar, Tony Gonzales, Vicente Gonzalez and Michael Cloud, who have all worked on similar legislative solutions."

Eligible counties in Texas include: Brewster, Brooks, Cameron, Crockett, Culberson, Dimmit, Duval, Edwards, El Paso, Frio, Hidalgo, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kinney, Kleberg, La Salle, Live Oak, Maverick, McMullen, Pecos, Presidio, Reeves, Starr, Sutton, Terrell, Uvalde, Val Verde, Webb, Willacy, Zapata and Zavala.

Farmers and ranchers can use the funds to repair eligible practices such as fencing, watering facility, range planting, livestock pipeline and more.

"We understand that the field and farming infrastructure damages along the border are costly and have a negative impact on our natural resources that our farm-



***Texas farmers and ranchers along the U.S.-Mexico border who are currently impacted by damage to fields and agricultural infrastructure can apply for financial assistance through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentive Program. Courtesy photos.***

***Eligible counties include: Brewster, Brooks, Cameron, Crockett, Culberson, Dimmit, Duval, Edwards, El Paso, Frio, Hidalgo, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kinney, Kleberg, La Salle, Live Oak, Maverick, McMullen, Pecos, Presidio, Reeves, Starr, Sutton, Terrell, Uvalde, Val Verde, Webb, Willacy, Zapata and Zavala.***

ers and ranchers work hard to conserve," Kristy Oates, NRCS state conservationist in Texas, said. "Our field offices are ready to assist eligible producers with technical and financial assistance."

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but farmers, ranchers and landowners should apply by July 5 to be considered for this year's funding.

Applications for this enrollment opportunity will be selected for funding by Aug. 5.

NRCS is allowing early start waivers and a shorter enrollment period.

To apply for EQIP assistance, farmers and ranchers should contact their local USDA Service Center.

But TFB noted Texas families living along the southern border will continue to suffer losses and

damages caused by immigrants attempting to illegally cross into the U.S. until the border is secured.

"Many hardworking farm and ranch families continue sharing examples of property damages, which are costly to repair. As the border crisis continues, we recognize short-term solutions, like the EQIP funding program, are needed," Boening said. "We hope USDA will continue to work with Texas farmers and ranchers to ensure this program meets their unique needs. However, we cannot stress enough the critical importance of acting on a long-term solution. Action is needed now to secure the border, first and foremost. That is the only way this crisis can truly be addressed."

For more information on this assistance program and other border crisis information, visit [texasfarm-bureau.org/border-crisis-impacts](https://texasfarm-bureau.org/border-crisis-impacts).

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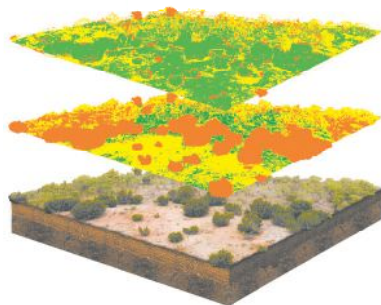


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# Texas Farm Bureau asks EPA to withdraw proposed WOTUS rule

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

The state's largest farm and ranch organization submitted comments to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on the agency's plan to write a new Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule.

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) recommended the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers withdraw the proposed rule, citing jurisdictional issues and lack of stakeholder engagement.

"Texas is an extremely diverse state, and conservation strategies vary greatly," TFB said in its comments. "For generations, Texas farmers and ranchers have improved their lands to better utilize available resources, minimize erosion and maximize production efficiency."

TFB noted the regulation of low spots on farmlands and pastures as jurisdictional "waters" means that any activity on those lands that moves dirt or applies any product to that land could be subject to regulation.

"Everyday activities such as plowing, planting or fence building in or near ephemeral drainages, ditches or low spots could trigger the Clean Water Act's (CWA) harsh civil or

even criminal penalties unless a permit is obtained," TFB said. "The tens of thousands of additional costs for federal permitting of ordinary farming activities, however, is beyond the means of many family or small business farming or ranching owners. Even those farmers and ranchers who can afford it should not be forced to wait months, or even years, for a federal permit to plow, plant, fertilize or carry out any of the other ordinary farming and ranching activities on their lands."

The organization, which has been engaged on the WOTUS rule-making proceedings for several years, also expressed concerns with the agencies' "significant nexus test" that would be a radical expansion of the agencies' jurisdiction as compared with the NWPR.

"Farmers and ranchers across Texas are disappointed by the agencies' proposed rule," TFB said. "We feel strongly that the NWPR was a clear, defensible rule that appropriately balanced the objective, goals and politics of the Clean Water Act. The agencies should keep the NWPR in place, rather than revert to definitions of WOTUS that test the limits of federal authority under the



**Texas Farm Bureau submitted comments to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers on the plans to withdraw the current Navigable Waters Protection Rule and to replace it with a newly-defined Waters of the U.S. rule.**

Commerce Clause and are not necessary to protect the nation's water resources."

TFB's concerns with the new proposed rule include the affect it will have on everyday farming and ranching activities through increased permitting requirements.

The organization noted the unclear rules could lead to potentially unlimited jurisdiction, including the unconstitutionally vague significant nexus test.

In addition, the expansion of federal jurisdiction exceeds limitations

set by Congress, and the proposed rule exceeds the scope of the federal government's authority.

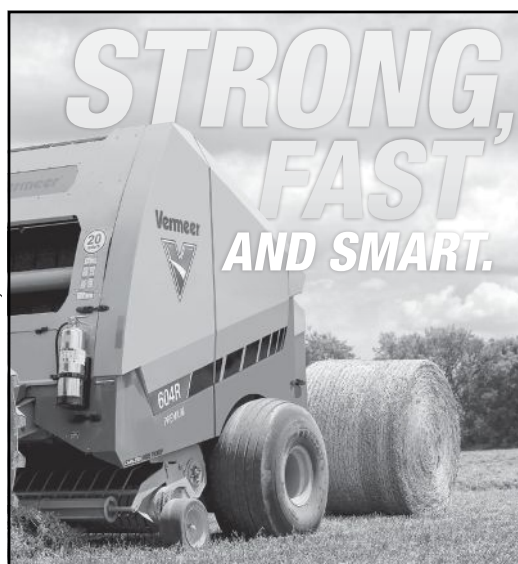
Given the Supreme Court's recent decision to revisit the agencies' proper scope of jurisdiction under the CWA, TFB believes the agencies should pause the rule making until after the court rules in *Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency*.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, as well as individual TFB members, also submitted comments asking the agencies to withdraw the proposed WOTUS rule.

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# Bayer warns retailers glyphosate supply could be disrupted

Glyphosate was already in short supply heading into the 2022 planting season, but another black swan event is putting an even tighter squeeze on supplies.

Bayer AG may not be able to fill some glyphosate contracts this spring due to a supplier's manufacturing problem.

The agrichemical giant alerted retail partners that it had declared a "force majeure" event, which typically suspends a supplier's contractual liabilities in the wake of disruptions beyond its control.

"As a result of this force majeure

event, Bayer's ability to supply its customers with glyphosate or glyphosate-containing products as agreed upon in certain agreements or under accepted purchase orders has been impacted," the company said in a statement.

This concerns some Texas farmers who are waiting for glyphosate deliveries.

In a letter announcing the force majeure event in mid-February, Bayer stated an undisclosed supplier of a raw key material for glyphosate production experienced a "mechanical failure," leading to a "substantial

reduction in production rates."

The letter was signed by Udo Schneider, global head of active ingredient manufacturing for Bayer.

The company noted repairs of this production line are expected to take about three months.

"Our supplier is on track to restore production, (and) we've sourced additional materials and made other mitigation efforts to help best manage this situation," according to Bayer. "We expect any impact to be marginal in terms of our annual glyphosate production."

Glyphosate is a key ingredient in

Bayer's Roundup and RangerPro.

The news comes at a time when farmers are already experiencing tight supply and increasing costs for agricultural chemicals.

A newly released *Farm Journal* survey found even before the latest announcement, 57% of farmers say they had difficulty sourcing inputs for the 2022 season. Of those who had trouble booking inputs, 86% say herbicides were the issue.

Of those experiencing issues securing herbicides, 90% reported glyphosate is in the shortest supply for 2022.

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# Farm production expenses up, net farm income forecast down

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) most recent Farm Sector Income Forecast, released Feb. 4, anticipates a slight decline in net farm income for 2022.

U.S. net farm income, a broad measure of farm profitability, is currently forecast at \$113.7 billion, down 4.5%, or \$5.4 billion, from 2021's \$119.1 billion.

If realized, this would represent the first drop in net farm income after two consecutive years of gains. However, the expected net farm income for 2022 would be 82% higher than the decade low of \$62 billion in 2016 and 15.2% above the 2001-2020 average of \$98.7 billion when adjusted for inflation.

## Net farm income breakdown

A significant portion of the decline in net farm income is linked to an expected dramatic decrease in federal support to producers assuming much less pandemic-related disaster assistance.

Direct government payments are forecast to decrease by \$15.5 billion, a whopping 57%, between 2021 and 2022.

The decrease corresponds to reductions in both USDA pandemic assistance, which includes payments from the Coronavirus Food Assistance Programs and other pandemic assistance to producers, and non-USDA pandemic assistance programs, such as funds from the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program.

From 2021 to 2022, federal payments though USDA's pandemic assistance initiatives are expected to drop \$4.4 billion, from \$7.8 billion to \$3.4 billion, or 56%, and non-USDA pandemic assistance is expected to disappear completely at a difference of \$8.73 billion from 2021.

In addition to the reduced pandemic-related payments, the Market Facilitation Program, which provided a series of direct payments to farmers and ranchers impacted by trade retaliation, ended in 2021 and will not be part of net farm income

going forward.

The "other supplemental and ad hoc disaster assistance" category includes payments from the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program (WHIP+), Quality Loss Adjustment Program and other farm bill designated-disaster programs. These programs are expected to remain steady moving forward since they are separate from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total commodity insurance indemnities, which are triggered in the event of revenue or yield loss for growers who have purchased crop insurance, are not direct government payments but are included for comparison.

Commodity insurance indemnities are expected to increase in 2022 by 49%, or \$5.5 billion, moving from \$11.3 billion to \$16.8 billion. This increase is perhaps a result of increased crop insurance enrollment by those who received a WHIP+ payment who must purchase crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program coverage (when crop insurance is not available) for the next two available crop years under program requirements.

An analysis of additional pieces of the net farm income statement reveals that cash receipts for sales of agricultural commodities like

crops and livestock are expected to increase by \$29.3 billion, an increase of 6.8% from 2021, reaching \$461.9 billion in 2022.

This includes a \$12 billion, or 5.1%, increase in additional cash returns for crops and an additional \$17.4 billion, or 8.9%, for livestock products.

On the cost side, production expenses, including operator dwelling expenses, are forecast to increase by \$20.1 billion, or 5.1%, reaching \$411.6 billion in 2022, the highest production costs farmers have ever faced.

This includes increases in costs like cumulative feed, which is expected to increase nearly \$4 billion, or 6.1%, to \$68.9 billion. Fertilizer, lime and soil conditioner costs are expected to increase \$3.4 billion, or 12%, from \$28.5 billion to \$31.9 billion. Typically, fertilizers represent about 15% of a crop farmer's costs and an increase of this magnitude could be crushing for some producers without the substantial increases in revenue.

Other increased production costs in the manufactured inputs category include pesticides, which are expected up \$308 million, or 2%, from \$16.9 billion to \$17.2 billion. Fuels and oils are also expected up 2%, or \$329 million, from \$15.9 billion to \$16.2 billion.

Farmers and ranchers are facing

the same challenges other Americans are facing with the increased cost of electricity, which is expected to increase \$433 million, or 5.4%, for producers, from \$6.1 billion to nearly \$6.6 billion.

Other farm-related income, which includes income from custom work, machine hire, commodity insurance indemnities and rent received by operator landlords, is estimated to increase by \$6.2 billion, or 18%, from \$32.7 billion to \$38.9 billion in 2022.

When all these factors are accounted for, the resulting decrease in projected net farm income becomes more apparent.

## Other financial indicators

USDA's Farm Sector Income Forecast also provides expectations of farm financial indicators that can give insight into the overall financial health of the farm economy.

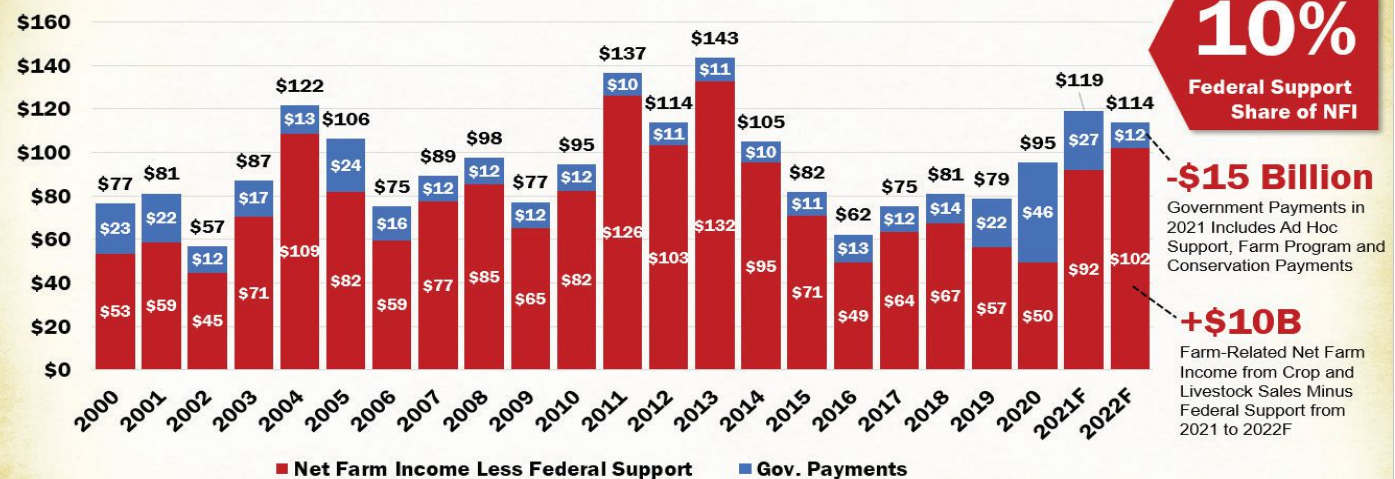
During 2022, U.S. farm sector debt is projected to increase \$13.05 billion, or nearly 3%, to a record \$467.4 billion. Nearly 67% of farm debt is in the form of real estate debt for the land to grow crops and raise livestock.

Real estate debt is projected to increase \$10.2 billion to a record-high \$311.9 billion, largely due to an increase in land values across

**FIGURE 1: NET FARM INCOME**

With and without Federal Support

U.S. Farm Sector Net Farm Income, Billion Dollars



the country. Non-real estate debt, or debt for purchases of things like equipment, machinery, feed and livestock, is projected to increase only slightly to \$155.4 billion.

The value of the farm assets that are purchased via farm debt, including farmland, animals, machinery and vehicles and crops in inventory, is projected to reach \$3.31 trillion, \$42.2 billion higher than 2021.

Most of this increase, \$26.8 billion, is also attributed to higher farmland values. It's important to note that the value of assets being purchased with debt is rising, and it will continue to be important for farmers and ranchers to pay down debt and cover interest in order to maintain a healthy balance sheet.

Based on 2022 debt and asset levels, USDA expects the debt-to-asset ratio to be over 14% for 2022, which would be the highest since 2002, meaning farmers have increased their borrowing. Every year since 2012, aside from 2021, during which they marginally decreased, debt-to-asset levels have climbed higher.

Working capital, which takes into consideration current assets and liabilities, is the amount of cash and cash-convertible assets minus amounts due to creditors within 12 months.

In 2022, working capital is projected to fall by \$3.1 billion, or 3.3%, to \$93 billion, which is the first decline since 2016, and remains 30% below levels in 2014, when farmers and ranchers held \$121 billion in working capital. Lower levels of working capital would suggest that many U.S. farmers have just enough capital to service their short-term debt, as long as interest rates remain stagnant.

Another metric that highlights the concern about farmer profitability in 2022 is the rate of return on assets. For 2022, the rate of return on assets is projected at less than 3.5%.

The rate of return in agriculture has been less than 6% for eight consecutive years.

This means farmers and ranchers are seeing smaller revenues or returns for investments made in the cost of production and in assets used to produce a farm product.

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# Input costs up, farmer optimism down slightly for the year

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

In early 2022, commodity prices are looking up, but farmer optimism hasn't quite followed.

Uncertainty instead reigns across Texas agriculture as farmers and ranchers worry the higher prices won't stick around long enough to offset soaring input costs for the 2022 crop year.

## South Plains

*Steven Walker: cotton,  
grain sorghum and wheat;  
Crosby County*

The region known as the South Plains is the largest cotton-growing area in the world. But worsening drought has cotton farmers concerned as they prepare to sow their crops in the dusty fields.

For Crosby County Farm Bureau (CFB) board member Steven Walker, the drought is an old foe paired with new worries.

"I'm feeling a little anxious. We aren't getting much rain, so that's the most crucial concern. But we have a while before planting, and I've been in this situation more than once. That's something we've faced before," he said. "But something that we haven't faced is these high input prices. The volatility of it all makes things very nerve-wracking. It's making me be very critical of every input and where I'll be marketing my crops."

Farmers have seen increases from fertilizer to crop protection and fuel to equipment repairs.

Fertilizer has risen to the point that it costs nearly triple what it did in 2021. Herbicides and pesticides are double. Fuel has almost doubled, and economists warn that cost is nowhere near its highest point as inflation sets in. Walker estimated parts to repair equipment, when they're even available, are up about 20%.

The only bright spot is better commodity prices. Walker grows cotton, grain sorghum and wheat, which have all seen strong gains in recent



years. Wheat has even crossed the \$8 per bushel threshold, a price that hasn't been seen in about a decade.

But he's worried commodity prices will fall after spending more money to grow the crops.

Farming is always a gamble, though.

"We as farmers may be nervous, but at the same time, this is what we do. This is the occupation we chose, and I'm ready to make another crop," Walker said. "I'm excited to see the next year. That's neat to be part of a high market, but I'm still a bit leery of what I'm willing to put in until we get some more moisture."

## North Texas

*Jay Davis: corn, hay and wheat,  
agricultural and freight  
hauling and beef cattle;  
Johnson County*

It's not quite as dry in North Texas as the South Plains, but that doesn't mean area farmers aren't concerned.

Wheat in the area started off in fairly good shape but is showing signs of stress, according to Johnson County farmer and rancher Jay Davis.

Despite "spoon-feeding" nitrogen to his wheat crop, he said it probably won't turn out too well without more moisture, and soon.

His diversified farming operation means he doesn't rely too heav-

ily on any one crop. Although high inputs will affect his bottom line, where he's really feeling the pinch right now is in the cost of fuel for his trucking operation.

"These fuel prices just keep squeezing tighter and tighter. That's really putting a crunch on what it takes to move grains, feed ingredients, fertilizers and things of that nature around the state and nation," Davis said. "I think everyone's really starting to prepare for the reality of \$4 diesel here this spring."

Davis shared concerns about the availability of crop protection tools and necessary equipment parts, too.

"When you have equipment that goes down, trying to get the replacement parts is becoming a big deal. Whether you're talking about farm equipment, the trucks on the road or the pickup I drive to the farm and back every day, parts are getting harder and harder to find," he said.

And the high commodity prices only buoy his outlook so much. A 50-60% increase in a commodity's price only goes so far when paired against 200-300% increases in the cost of inputs, he noted.

For a dryland farmer like himself, the current situation feels like somewhere between a rock and a hard place.

"I'm not in an area where I can

turn a sprinkler on or run it down the furrow. If it doesn't come down from the sky, we'll be in full planting season short on soil moisture. And that's not a good place to be," he said.

## Central Texas

*Bryan Morris: corn, cotton,  
hay and beef cattle;  
Comanche County*

Central Texas is also slipping further into drought. Comanche County farmer and rancher Bryan Morris is watching fertilizer prices go up, up and up as the land gets drier and drier. The prospect of a profitable year seems to be dissipating right along with it.

Normally, he would be spraying glyphosate on row crop fields and an indaziflam product, Rezilon, on his coastal Bermuda hayfields to control broadleaf weeds and prevent grass burrs. But it's been so dry, there's really nothing to spray.

This year, in lieu of planting more corn acreage, Morris plans to only plant enough irrigated corn to make silage for his cattle pre-conditioning yard. It's too dry to make that gamble pay off, he said.

Despite the drought, the hay market is fairly weak right now, according to Morris. Much of the hay available is being consumed by livestock, but farmers and ranchers entered the year with good stocks because



of above-average moisture received throughout the spring and summer last year.

He expects that situation to change as drought is expected to continue into the summer. Morris also noted higher wheat grain prices are putting pressure on wheat for grazing, which will contribute to tighter hay supplies.

The dramatic increase in fertilizer prices concerns Morris, who relies heavily on nitrogen fertilizers to produce hay for about 20 feed stores throughout West Texas and Eastern New Mexico.

“These fertilizer prices are just too high. I can’t roll enough of a price increase into my product to offset that fertilizer price without pricing myself out of the business,” he said. “We do sell a lot of alfalfa, and it’s gone up \$3 a bale since this summer. Feed stores are starting to see people pull back because everything is getting so expensive.”

When input costs are high, Morris noted the only thing a farmer can really do is the same thing when faced with a weak commodity price—out-produce it.

“From my standpoint, I have to supply hay to these feed stores. The best way for me to profit out of this situation is to get the hay growing and create as high of yields as possible. And the only way I know to do that is to keep doing what I’ve been doing and applying fertilizer and

taking good care of my fields,” he said. “I may pull back a little on the dryland, but we’re not going to stop or give up.”

### South Texas

*Tryne Mengers: corn, cotton, grain sorghum, sesame and wheat; Bee County*

Farmers in the Coastal Bend and South Texas already have corn crops in the ground. Tryne Mengers of Bee County is hopeful adequate soil moisture and higher commodity prices stay put long enough to get through 2022 in good shape.

“Corn and cotton prices are higher than they’ve been in a long time. That’s the only reason people are halfway excited about growing a crop this year,” Mengers said. “With fertilizer being two-and-a-half times as expensive as it was last year, those prices have to hold up for us to turn a profit. But it’s way more than just fertilizer. That’s just the tip of the iceberg. Fertilizer had a drastic increase in cost, but there are a lot of other things that affect us, too.”

Things like parts for machinery, for example. Mengers had one tractor in the shop for three months waiting on a part to come in.

Like other farmers across Texas, he’s concerned about the availability of items and goods needed to grow a crop. But thanks to a timely forewarning from his crop protection supplier, Mengers stockpiled the chemicals he thought he would need

this year—a move he said has definitely paid off.

To mitigate fertilizer costs where he can, he cut back on fall applications and plans to side dress as necessary if he gets enough rainfall to make a decent crop.

Marketing his crops in a variety of ways also helps Mengers manage risk in years like this one.

“We’ll hedge ourselves, buy and sell futures to sell our crops, and we do lock in prices and pre-sell some commodities,” he said. “We’ve already sold some corn and grain sorghum this year, and I’ve contracted to grow some sesame, too. If we can maintain those high prices and make a good crop, it could turn out to be a pretty good year.”

### West Texas

*Josh Tunnell: cotton and grain sorghum; Martin County*

Extended dry weather is tempering Josh Tunnell’s expectations, as well.

The young cotton farmer and Martin CFB president hasn’t made any final crop decisions and doesn’t plan to until closer to the area’s planting deadline.

“It’s been so dry, we’re not even sure we’ll be able to have a crop. We haven’t had any measurable rainfall since the end of last September,” Tunnell said. “So, there’s very little fieldwork happening around here, very little money being spent and

not a lot of optimism that we’ll even be able to produce a crop if we don’t start getting some rain.”

In the face of enduring glyphosate shortages, Tunnell is trying to decide how he will manage his fields. He will likely have to rely on more tillage and hood sprayers to get close to the same results as he would using over-the-top applications of glyphosate or other broad-leaf herbicides.

It’s not just glyphosate in short supply, however. Many inputs he relies on to bring a fruitful crop to harvest are harder to come by this year.

“We’ve been told by our crop protection suppliers to make our plans but have a Plan B and even a Plan C, depending on what’s available and what can be allocated,” he said.

Tunnell is keeping a close eye on grain sorghum prices as he formulates those backup plans, and he’s keeping business expenditures to a minimum.

“I think the sentiment in my area is to just sit tight right now. But one thing to remember is that even last year we were in a drought situation right up until the last week we could plant,” he said. “Then, we pretty much made our crops on the rain received in May and June. Our crop prospects turned around in a matter of 10 days. So, it’s a bit early to throw up our hands in despair yet, but optimism is understandably a little low.”



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# Ranchers faced cold temperatures, ice during winter storm

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Snow and ice covered much of the Lone Star State in early February as Winter Storm Landon blew in, leaving Texas ranchers working in below freezing temperatures.

The storm arrived on Wednesday, Feb. 2, for Chris and Leindy Estes who live near Abilene.

“We had some rain. From the rain, it turned to sleet, and then the snow hit,” Leindy said. “I think the sleet is harder to deal with than the snow.”

The couple spent their time feeding and checking cattle, but they also paid close attention to those cows that were calving. They made sure cattle had adequate feed and hay to help them maintain appropriate body temperatures and keep up their energy in the cold.

“Just keeping your eyes open to any little issue that a [cow-calf] pair might be having or just making sure there’s no health issues going on with them is important,” Leindy said. “We just keep an extra eye out for things like that during these conditions.”

But for many across the state, including Chris and Leindy, the ongoing drought added challenges for this year’s cold weather. Pasture and rangeland conditions were below average, leaving livestock with limited grazing before the winter storm hit.

“We don’t have any wheat right now for wheat grazing. So, that’s put us in a bind,” Chris said. “And the fact is cattle have to be fed in these conditions. They can’t find anything on their own when you add in the snow and ice.”

They were already supplementing more feed this year due to the drought, but February’s weather did bring some much-needed moisture.

Drought conditions have steadily expanded this year, with over 75% of the state facing some type of drought. Fisher and Jones counties, where the couple raises cattle, are both experiencing extreme drought levels, according to the Texas Water Development Board.

But thankfully, Chris said, this

year’s winter storm hasn’t been as tough as Winter Storm Uri.

In Ellis County, the Davis family agrees.

James and Chelsea Davis, along with James’ brother, raise cattle south of Waxahachie and Forrester.

“We put out extra hay and tried to make some wind blocks, since our place doesn’t have a lot of tree cover,” James said. “We learned from last year and hauled the trailer out to the field and that seemed to help, as well.”

The challenge, James said, was the rain that fell first.

“We had about an inch of rain while it was about 35 degrees. That’s almost as bad on cattle as anything,” he said. “So, we were keeping them fed and trying to keep their body temperature up. We calved about 30 days prior to the storm, so we were keeping an eye on the calves to make sure they stayed warm, too.”

Last year, their water district lost power, which resulted in a lack of water at the ranch. They were pre-

pared to haul water this year, but it wasn’t needed.

And this year, the temperatures only dropped to around 18 degrees, much warmer compared to the temperatures of last February.

“The temps weren’t as cold. We got down to zero last year,” James said. “We made preparations through the year as best we could, learning from some of the challenges of last year. I think that served us well, but Mother Nature is always throwing something at you.”



**James and Chelsea Davis moved their trailer to the pasture to help create a wind block during February’s winter storm. It was “all hands on deck” for the Davis family as they cared for their livestock in the below freezing temperatures. Photos courtesy Chelsea Davis.**



**Ranchers worked to keep cattle fed and water accessible to livestock and poultry during the storm.**



**Chris and Leindy Estes fed cattle and checked cows in Fisher and Jones counties. Photo courtesy Leindy Estes.**

MARCH 4, 2022

TEXAS AGRICULTURE

19

# Carbon credit brokers contacting Texas farmers, landowners

In the past year, private investment in removing and capturing carbon from the atmosphere has grown exponentially. However, there are few cost-effective ways to accomplish this. One alternative that is being pursued is storing carbon in soils, either as organic soil carbon or plant material.

Texas landowners, farmers, ranchers and forest owners are now being contacted by entities hoping to broker deals for this fast-growing carbon credit market.

The subject was the topic of a recent episode of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's *Ag Law in the Field* podcast. In the podcast, Todd Janzen of Janzen Schroeder Agricultural Law firm described carbon credits as "environmental cryptocurrency."

"Like any cryptocurrency, it's not really a thing. A Bitcoin doesn't actually exist, but it represents one unique unit that can be transferred from person to person," Janzen told podcast host AgriLife Extension Ag

Law Specialist Tiffany Lashmet. "Carbon credits are similar in that a farmer undertakes certain practices on their land, and once it's verified that they've done those, it creates a carbon credit that can then be sold to whomever wants to buy these. Then, for example, an Amazon-sized company can say they're carbon-neutral."

Companies, businesses and individuals seek to purchase the credits to mitigate their carbon footprint or the carbon dioxide emissions produced by various activities such as manufacturing or frequent use of large aircraft.

Lashmet noted the largely as-yet unregulated carbon exchange market is enticing to many farmers and ranchers hoping to make some additional income. But she cautioned landowners, farmers and ranchers to think twice and contact a lawyer before entering into any binding agreement.

"This is new territory, and many

unknowns exist about the carbon market and these carbon agreements. I highly recommend engaging an attorney to review any carbon contract prior to signing," she said in an *AgriLife Today* story.

In the episode of Lashmet's podcast exploring the carbon exchange market, San Antonio attorney Anson Howard said a carbon storage contract typically involves four entities—the landowner, broker, verifier and purchaser.

Contracts generally specify terms such as the duration, when and how the landowner gets paid and protections for each party in the event complications arise, he noted.

The entrance of the group Grassroots Carbon into the Texas marketplace sparked a wave of interest among Texas ranchers, Howard said.

"They were the first group to come in and sign up Texas regenerative grazers. I think, right now, there are about 65,000 acres enrolled in these carbon storage agreements that are now entering the verification process," he said. "There's another group called Ecosystem Market Services Consortium that will be entering the marketplace sometime in 2022. It will be interesting to see with two groups going how much of a continued energy there is for this."

If farmers or ranchers are interested in finding a broker or entering a carbon storage agreement, Janzen advised them to begin looking at companies they have existing relationships with. Many crop protection solution and farm data management companies already have or will soon be introducing carbon exchange platforms.

Something to consider before seeking a contract is how much land can be dedicated to the practice, according to Janzen.

"If you don't have at least 100 acres to dedicate to this, it's probably

not going to be worth your while to sign up because the amount paid per acre just isn't that much," he said. "So, it will probably be more trouble than it's worth if you just have a 10-acre field where you want to implement those practices."

Another consideration is the length of the contract. Land may change hands over the length of a 10- or 15-year contract, which he said is common among carbon contracts he's reviewed. Some of them specify the contract will continue even if the land is sold or gifted.

## What you should know

Understanding some of the basic concepts related to carbon contracts is an important starting place, Lashmet said.

Each contract will likely have specific definitions of terms, so it is critical for landowners, farmers and ranchers to carefully review the definitions in any contract before signing.

Terms like additionality, carbon market, carbon practices, carbon credit, carbon emissions, carbon sequestration, permanence, stacking and verification each have a specific meaning within a contract and must be analyzed and understood.

Lashmet recommends farmers, ranchers and landowners considering a carbon agreement be absolutely sure they understand the document they're signing.

"The most important advice I can offer is to carefully read the entire contract," she said.

## Resources

To find a reputable lawyer with agricultural experience, people may find the American Agricultural Law Association helpful. Another resource is the state bar association.

More information on carbon markets is available on Texas Farm Bureau's Climate Issue Resources page at [texasfarmbureau.org/climate](https://texasfarmbureau.org/climate).

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Information on carbon markets and other climate issues is available at [texasfarmbureau.org/climate](https://texasfarmbureau.org/climate).

# U.S. ag exports hit record-high in 2021

Despite a year full of challenges, U.S. agricultural exports hit record numbers in 2021.

A new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report shows exports of U.S. farm and food products totaled \$177 billion, 18% higher than 2020 and nearly 15% higher than the previous record set in 2014.

“Of course, increased commodity prices and rising global inflation contributed to that,” American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Senior Economist Veronica Nigh said. “About two-thirds of that increase can be attributed to increases in price and then about a third attributed to increases in quantity exported. So, certainly a lot of price action but additional product being shipped, as well.”

While it remains to be seen what kind of financial toll recent disruptions at the Canadian border will have on American ag exports, Nigh said it will certainly add up, citing the fact that \$24 million in ag products cross through Detroit each day.

Looking ahead, there’s still untapped potential for exports—as shown by China’s failure to reach its full obligation for U.S. ag purchases under the Phase One trade agreement, which closed at the end of 2021.

“We saw them miss their overall import level by about \$13 billion over the 2020-2021 range,” she said. “So, while we had record exports to that country, they could have been higher, and we see that reflected in the market share data. U.S. market share has yet to recover from the trade dispute that we’ve had with the Chinese.”

While there’s still room for growth, there are also many challenges facing U.S. agriculture, including supply chain issues, port congestion and on-going transportation concerns.

“Hopefully, we’ll continue to have record exports in 2022,” Nigh said. “But there’s still a lot of headwinds for exporters to achieve those goals.”

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# Positive profitability trends forecast for U.S. cattle producers

Workforce shortages, packaging plant slowdowns, feedlot backlogs and supply chain issues plagued the beef cattle industry in 2020 and throughout most of 2021, depressing prices and leaving ranchers and cattle feeders feeling a little lighter in their pocketbooks.

Now, after a brief but intense resurgence of COVID-19 fueled by the latest virus variant, processing plants are mostly back to fully staffed levels and slaughter rates are catching up quickly.

A small contraction of the U.S. herd should support better prices throughout the remainder of 2022 at every level of the supply chain, and fed cattle markets ought to show enough strength this year to keep cattle feeders on steadier ground.

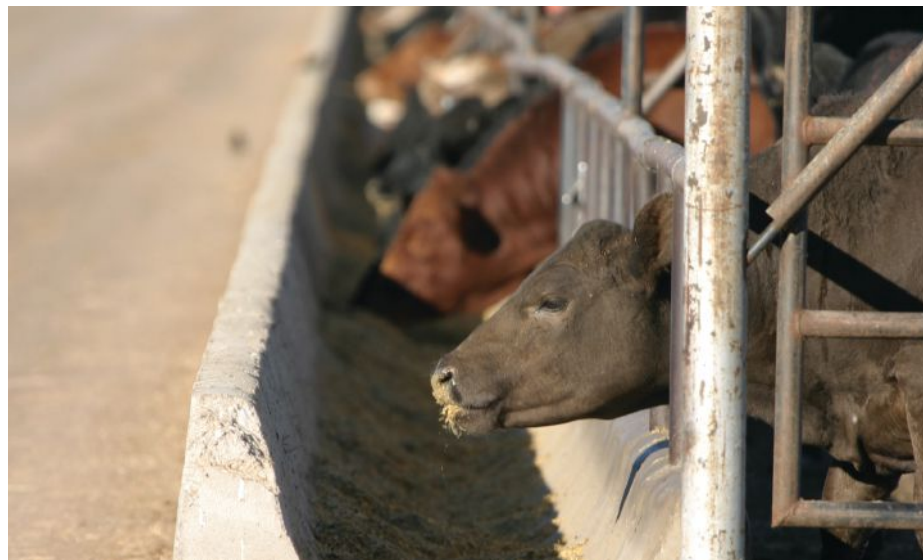
However, the scenario is complicated by rising inflation and creeping drought, according to Texas Cattle Feeders Association's Director of Markets, Membership and Education Brady Miller.

"In the Southern Plains, this year we've been trading fats at anywhere from about \$1.30 to \$1.40 through the middle of February. And at \$1.40, cattle feeders should be profitable," he said. "We expect cattle prices to top out in the \$1.50 range, which isn't the highest we've ever seen, but they're fairly high over the five-year average. But with inflation and the rising price of all our inputs, we're going to have to continue to see that price get higher, or we'll go from being in the black to seeing red pretty quickly."

While the western half of the U.S. experienced major drought last year, forcing ranchers there to cull herds, the market was also struggling with lingering COVID-19 effects, keeping cattle prices somewhat suppressed.

Now that drought has spread east, growing to include the majority of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas.

Since just five states—Texas, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado and Iowa—account for 76% of cattle sold for slaughter in the U.S., increasing



***Cattle price and profitability trends for producers are pointed in the right direction, even as challenges and uncertainty persist with continued disruptions from the pandemic.***

drought in middle America is a major cause for concern.

"The one thing we're going to be watching closely is how deep and how long is this drought we're in. Climatologists tell us we're in for a long haul when it comes to drought and weather in the South and the East," Miller said.

Although ranchers and cattle feeders saw positive pressure on cattle markets in response to the last major drought cycle Texans experienced in 2011 to 2014, he noted it would be better for all involved if Mother Nature provides the parched countryside with more moisture instead.

"Forty percent of cattle in the U.S. could be affected by this drought, which translates to major impacts on our export and domestic markets," he said.

Currently, the beef export market is strong. Last year, the U.S. exported about \$10 billion in beef, which Miller estimated adds about \$400 in value per carcass.

And domestic demand is high, too, with per-capita consumption of beef in the U.S. amounting to about 58 pounds, according to *Beef. It's What's For Dinner*.

Kevin Good, vice president of industry relations and analysis at CattleFax, reported that U.S. beef cow inventories have fallen more than

700,000 head from last year and are off nearly 1.6 million from cycle highs. This year, the beef cowherd will near 30.1 million head.

"Drought, market volatility and processing capacity challenges affected 30-40% of the cowherd over the last year. Without an improvement in weather and profitability, at least 250,000 more head will be liquidated in 2022," Good said. "I think we're going to end up seeing a little bit of a retraction, and some of that is because of inflation and the cost of a good steak or eating beef in general," Miller said. "But that's just that give-and-take—no matter what we do, we have to keep our consumer in mind. Because this all starts and stops with the consumer and how much product they're willing to buy from us."

Ranchers will need to see more

growth in the prices they're being paid to keep up with inflation, he added.

The feeder cattle and calf supply will be 675,000 head smaller than last year, totaling 25.5 million head. Cattle Fax forecasts fed cattle slaughter will decline 400,000 head lower compared to last year, at 25.7 million head. Commercial beef production will contract over the next several years starting with a 2% decline in 2022.

Good forecast the average 2022 fed steer price at \$140/cwt, up \$18/cwt from 2021, with a range of \$130 to \$155/cwt throughout the year. All cattle classes are expected to trade higher, and prices are expected to improve. The 800-lb steer price is expected to average \$172/cwt with a range of \$158 to \$184/cwt, and the 550-lb steer price is expected to average \$205/cwt with a range of \$180 to \$230/cwt.

Good forecast utility cows at an average of \$75/cwt with a range of \$65 to \$85/cwt and bred cows at an average of \$1,850/head with a range of \$1,700 to \$2,000 for load lots of quality, running-age cows.

"Today, ranchers are looking at a 700-pound animal leaving the ranch bringing about \$1,100 to \$1,300 a head. That's a fairly positive number compared to where we were in the past. But we've got to put our blinders on and not look at the past couple of years and think we're doing well because skyrocketing input costs are absolutely going to eat into that profitability," he said.



***Commercial beef production is expected to contract over the next several years starting with a 2% decline in 2022, according to CattleFax.***

# Report provides review of proposed Senate cattle markets bill

A recent report by the Agricultural and Food and Policy Center (AFPC) at Texas A&M University provides an assessment of the proposed Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2021, known as SB 3229, and its potential impact on segments of the beef and cattle supply chain.

The report presents the expected effects in a matrix format, highlighting the anticipated directional impact of each portion of the bill on a set of stakeholder groups and market outcomes, including cattle and beef prices, market transparency, price discovery and data confidentiality.

“The bill proposes to establish a regional mandatory minimum threshold for the percentage of cattle purchased under negotiated grid or negotiated pricing terms,” Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Economist Dr. Justin Benavidez said. “It also proposes the establishment of a cattle contract library and to expand reporting requirements for cattle pricing and slaughter.”

The bill establishes regional mandatory minimum thresholds of negotiated cash and negotiated grid trades based on a region’s 18-month average trade. The National Cattleman’s Beef Association (NCBA) voiced concern with the negotiated minimums portion of the bill, as did Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) and the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

TFB passed a resolution at the annual meeting in December 2021 that opposed government mandates that force any livestock slaughter facility to purchase a set percentage of their live animal supply via cash bids.

The resolution passed at the AFBF annual meeting in January, and similar language was approved by NCBA in early February.

To determine if the minimum and maximum bounds of the bill as proposed impose an economic cost to the cattle market, the authors established an unrestricted forecast of negotiated trade for various cattle-producing regions—Texas-Oklahoma,



*A recent Agricultural and Food Policy Center report assesses the potential impact of the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2021 on aspects of the cattle and beef supply chain.*

New Mexico, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa-Minnesota.

In each region, they modeled expected negotiated trade as a function of: the trend in negotiated trade, whether the cattle cycle year saw an increase or decrease in herd size, seasonality of historic negotiated trade, total weekly fed cattle trade and the previous week’s negotiated trade volume.

The criteria also included a dummy variable accounting for the introduction of the industry-led “75% Plan.”

“The difference in the expected amount of unrestricted negotiated trade and the amount of negotiated trade compelled by Senate Bill 3229 provides a measure of the cost of the bill’s negotiated trade provisions,” Benavidez said.

The report contains figures showing the expected unrestricted negotiated trade plotted against the negotiated trade minimums compelled by the bill through December 2026, a five-year outlook.

The authors addressed whether

changes in negotiated volume would have a cost.

“Typically, a move away from alternative marketing arrangements or AMAs results in lost efficiency,” AgriLife Extension Economist Dr. David Anderson said. “This efficiency loss translates directly into increasing the transaction cost of buying and selling cattle.”

Anderson said industry research also shows packers that operate with AMAs tend to have lower marketing costs.

“Reliability of supply is a critical component in operating a large packing plant, and industry research has shown plants with higher AMA volumes have more stable average monthly volumes,” he said. “And the increased costs from a mandated reduction in AMA use would be shouldered by the cattle feeding sector.”

Benavidez noted the report also shows the region that includes Texas would see the greatest negative impact from the imposition of mandatory trade minimums.

The authors of the report conclud-

ed negotiated trade mandates are expected to have negative effects on short-term cattle and calf prices.

“Negotiated trade mandates do provide additional price discovery and market transparency, but more price discovery does not mean that cattle prices will be higher,” Benavidez said. “The mandate will result in lower short-term fed cattle prices due to the increase in the costs of the feeder-packer cattle sale transaction.”

The bill does increase price discovery, but at the cost of lower prices to producer and higher prices to beef consumers, Benavidez said.

“In overall terms of the bill’s impact on various segments of the beef and cattle supply chain, the bottom line is that there would be tradeoffs,” AFPC Co-Director Dr. Bart Fischer said. “While it may be able to achieve greater price discovery and market transparency, forcing the movement away from AMAs via regional mandatory minimums for negotiated purchases will result in lower cattle prices and higher wholesale and retail beef prices.”

# Farmers to plant 12 million acres of cotton in 2022

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Cotton is expected to see an increase in planted acres in 2022, according to a survey released by the National Cotton Council (NCC).

The NCC's 41st Annual Early Season Planting Intentions Survey showed U.S. cotton farmers anticipate planting 12 million acres of cotton this spring, an increase of 7.9% from 2021.

"Planted acreage is just one of the factors that will determine supplies of cotton and cottonseed," Dr. Jody Campiche, NCC's vice president of Economics and Policy Analysis, said. "Ultimately, weather and agronomic conditions are among the factors that play a significant role in determining crop size."

Upland cotton growers intend to plant 11.9 million acres, up 7% from 2021, while extra-long staple (ELS) cotton growers reported a planned increase of 158,000 acres, up 24.8%.

Using the 10-year average abandonment rate for each state, the Cotton Belt harvested area totals 9.8 million acres for 2022 with a U.S. abandonment rate of 18.9%. Using the five-year average state-level yield per harvested acre generates a cotton crop of 17.3 million bales, with 16.8 million upland bales and 438,000 ELS bales, according to NCC.

Southwest growers—which includes Texas, Kansas and Oklahoma—intend to increase cotton acreage by 7% to 7.4 million acres.

NCC noted each of the three states plan to increase cotton acres with Kansas up 15.2%, Oklahoma increasing by 5.6% and Texas calling for a 6.9% increase. Responses indicate a shift from sorghum to cotton, with Texas farmers also planting less wheat.

ELS acreage is expected to increase by 24.8% in 2022 to 158,000 acres. NCC notes the trend is likely

driven by the all-time highs being seen in ELS cotton prices.

Respondents indicated an ELS increase of 30.4% in California, 16.3% in Texas, 11% in New Mexico and 5.9% in Arizona.

"History has shown that U.S. farmers respond to relative prices when making planting decisions," Campiche said. "Relative to the average futures prices during the first quarter of 2021, prices of all commodities are trading significantly higher. However, input costs are also much higher than this time last year."

Surveys were mailed in mid-December 2021 to farmers across the 17-state Cotton Belt, asking farmers for the number of acres intended for cotton and other crops in 2022. Survey responses were collected through mid-January.

The NCC survey is a snapshot of intentions based on market conditions at survey time with actual



**Cotton acreage is expected to increase in Texas and the U.S., according to a national survey.**

plantings influenced by changing market conditions and weather. Farmers will continue to monitor changes in commodity prices and input costs before finalizing their 2022 acreage decisions.

MARCH 4, 2022

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# Applications open for 2022 veterinary loan repayment program

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

Applications may be submitted through April 15 by 5 p.m. (ET).

“Food animal veterinarians are critical to maintaining a healthy, secure and safe food supply,” VMLRP staff said. “Today, there is a critical shortage of food animal veterinarians in both private and public practice, particularly in rural communities, in the United States and insular areas. One cause for this shortage is the high cost of professional veterinary medical education.”

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

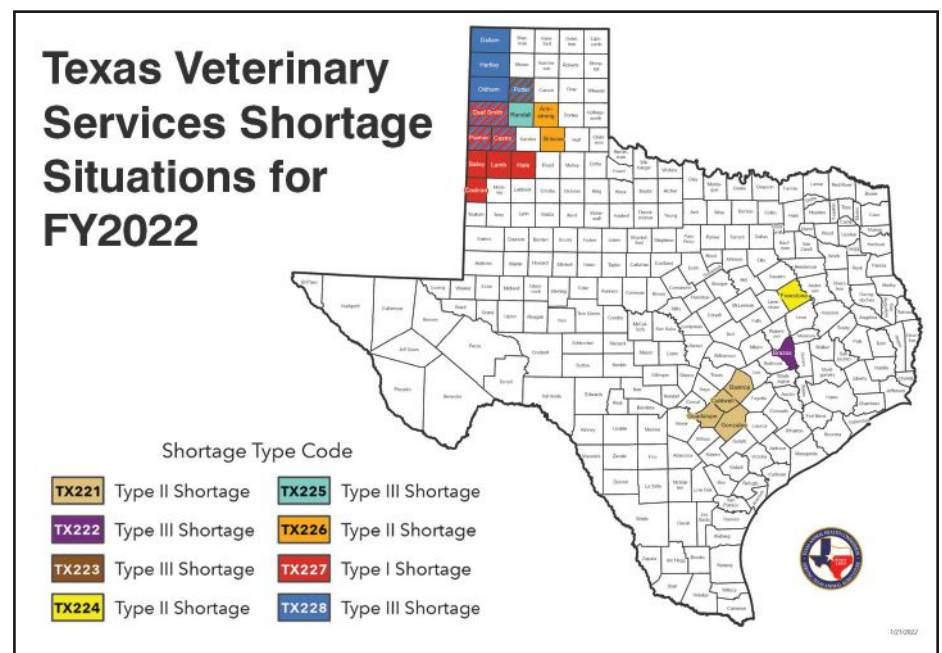
service in a designated veterinary shortage area.

Counties included in the eight Texas areas are: Armstrong, Bailey, Bastrop, Brazos, Briscoe, Castro, Caldwell, Cochran, Dallam, Deaf Smith, Freestone, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Hale, Hartley, Lamb, Oldham, Parmer, Potter and Randall.

To be eligible to apply to the VMLRP, an applicant must have a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, or the equivalent, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the AVMA Council on Education.

Applicants must have qualifying educational loan debt as defined in 7 CFR 3431 Section 3 and provide certifications and verifications in accordance with 7 CFR 3431 Section 16.

Applicants must also secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a veterinary shortage situation, as determined by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, within the time period specified in



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

the VMLRP service agreement offer.

While TAHC does not administer this program, the commission is designated to nominate and certify veterinary shortage situations allo-

cated by USDA.

Questions can be emailed to the VMLRP team at [vmlrp@usda.gov](mailto:vmlrp@usda.gov).

For more information, visit [nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-applicants](https://nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-applicants).

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# USDA announces climate-smart commodity initiative

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) unveiled more details on its Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities.

Through the program, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said the agency will fund pilot projects that create market opportunities for agricultural and forestry products using “climate-smart practices,” including ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas reduction benefits.

The agency noted climate-smart commodities are defined as agricultural commodities produced using agricultural practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon.

“America’s farmers, ranchers and forest owners are leading the way in implementing climate-smart solutions across their operations,” Vilsack said. “Through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, USDA will provide targeted funding

to meet national and global demand and expand market opportunities for climate-smart commodities to increase the competitive advantage of American producers. We want a broad array of agriculture and forestry to see themselves in this effort, including small and historically underserved producers, as well as early adopters.”

USDA committed to distributing \$1 billion in funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) through this new project.

A range of public and private entities are encouraged to apply, including local and state governments, Native American tribal governments and organizations, nonprofit organizations, private and public colleges and universities and small businesses.

USDA also specified “for-profit organizations other than small businesses” in a list of entities that may apply.

There will be two funding pools

with separate application deadlines. Proposals from \$5 million to \$100 million must be submitted by April 8, and proposals from \$250,000 to under \$5 million should be submitted by May 27.

The second funding pool offers opportunities to smaller farm operations and underserved populations, according to Vilsack. USDA’s Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities website states farmers, ranchers and forest owners cannot apply for the program directly but could receive incentives by way of partner group projects.

Agricultural operations of all sizes and growing any type of commodity are eligible, Vilsack said during a speech at Lincoln University announcing the program.

Farm income has dropped in recent years but implementing climate-smart practices may boost farm share of the food dollar, he theorized.

Many in Congress and agricultur-

al groups, including American Farm Bureau Federation, are in support of the climate-smart initiative.

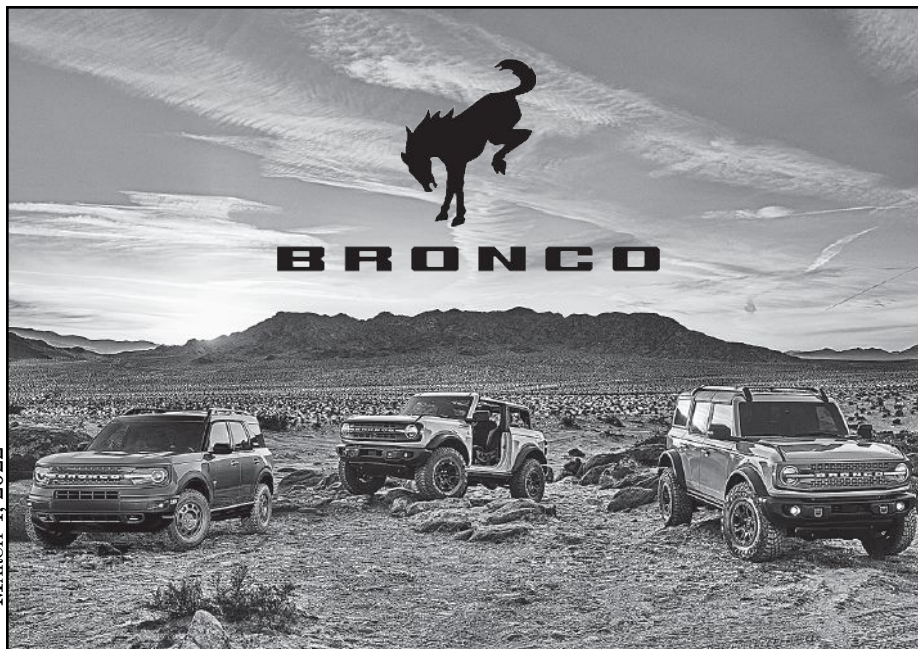
“Farm Bureau commends efforts by USDA to address the challenges farmers and ranchers are facing in their attempts to adopt new and emerging climate-smart practices, as well as participate in developing climate marketing channels,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. “Voluntary, incentive-based pilot projects are a great first step to identify barriers and ensure farmers and ranchers of all sizes can participate no matter where they are located or what they produce. We look forward to working with the administration, Congress and our members to develop bipartisan solutions that provide adequate CCC funding while also ensuring the longevity of programs that build on our longstanding commitment to sustainability.”

More information on the new USDA program, including how to apply, can be found online at [usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities](https://usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities).

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# LED ear tags can help detect sick cattle in feedlots

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Detecting sick cattle can now be easier than ever, thanks to Merck Animal Health's latest addition to its Allflex Livestock Intelligence lineup.

Merck's SenseHub® Feedlot features electronic ear tags with an LED light that illuminate when an animal's behavioral and biometric data indicate it may need attention. Feedlot employees then have an additional visual clue the animal needs to be separated and assessed for signs of illness.

"SenseHub Feedlot offers those who manage and care for cattle an innovative new approach to detecting illness, including bovine respiratory disease (BRD)," Dr. Jason Nickell, director of insights and outcomes at Merck Animal Health, said. "Cattle's defense mechanisms mean they often hide symptoms of illness, making it very challenging for even experienced pen riders to find sick

animals. SenseHub Feedlot assists the pen rider by removing the guesswork. Animals can be pulled and treated more quickly and more accurately."

The ear tag measures body temperature via an infrared thermistor and an accelerometer tracks activity. A set of machine learning algorithms identify animals that vary from herd baselines.

In addition to the illuminated ear tag, livestock owners and managers receive a daily pull list of animals identified for human assessment.

Research conducted at an Oklahoma feedlot showed considerable labor savings when using SenseHub Feedlot. Pen riders relying on visual observation to identify potentially sick or lame animals entered an average of 18 pens per day, compared with just 5.3 pens when using SenseHub Feedlot, a 71% reduction. BRD-related mortality was also lower in a 60-day study.

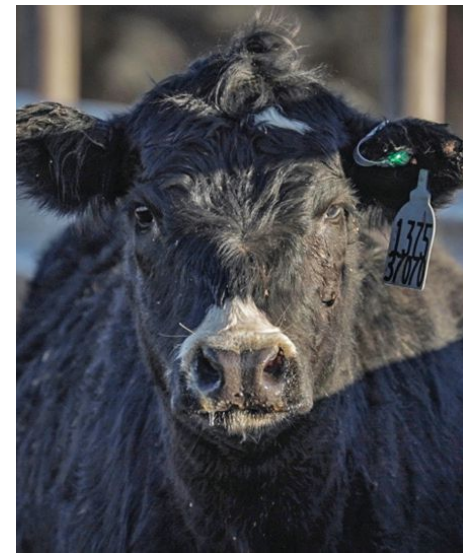
"The technology is like having

another employee monitoring cattle 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even with 'feedlot' in the product name, the product also has application in backgrounding or stocker operations or cow-calf operations retaining calves," Nickell said.

Other users of SenseHub Feedlot have reported lower treatment costs, less mortality overall, less retreatment and improved treatment outcomes.

The ear tags, which are reusable, relay information to antennas, which have a range of up to two miles. A gateway collects, stores and transmits the data.

"This technology is another innovation from Merck Animal Health that enables cattle producers to monitor and gather real-time, actionable data to help them better care for and manage cattle," Paul Koffman, Allflex Livestock Intelligence North America lead, said. "In times when labor supply is short, SenseHub Feedlot is even more helpful as it al-



*Merck's new electronic ear tags feature an LED light that illuminates when an animal's behavioral and biometric data indicate it may need attention. Courtesy photo.*

lows caretakers to more efficiently and accurately assess animal care needs, resulting in better outcomes for cattle and a positive impact to the bottom line for producers."

SenseHub Feedlot currently has limited availability, with an expanded rollout planned for Summer 2022.



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# U.S. hemp crop production valued at \$824 million in 2021

The value of the U.S. industrial hemp crop in 2021 was \$824 million, the National Agricultural Statistics Service said in its first report on the crop.

The survey collected data for hemp grown in the open and hemp under protection. Planted area for industrial hemp grown in the open for all utilizations in the United States totaled 54,152 acres. Area harvested for all utilizations totaled 33,480 acres. The value of U.S. hemp production in the open totaled \$712 million. The value of production for hemp that was grown under protection in the United States totaled \$112 million. Area under protection totaled 15.6 million square feet.

The 2021 Hemp Acreage and Production Survey collected information on the total planted and harvested area, yield, production and value of hemp in the United States. By value, the top utilization for hemp grown in the open was floral at \$623 million. The top utilization for hemp grown under protection was floral at \$64.4 million.

The survey found that 82% of hemp farmers are male and 52% of respondents reported that farming is their primary occupation. The report also contains additional information about hemp farmer characteristics, including years operating a farm, age and race.

Floral hemp production was esti-



mated at 19.7 million pounds, and the utilized production totaled 15.7 million pounds. Area harvested for floral hemp was estimated at 15,980 acres. The average yield for floral hemp was estimated at 1,235 pounds per acre. The value of floral hemp totaled \$623 million.

Hemp grown for grain totaled 4.37 million pounds, and the uti-

lized production totaled 3.96 million pounds. Area harvested for hemp grown for grain was estimated at 8,255 acres. The average yield for hemp grown for grain was estimated at 530 pounds per acre. The value of hemp for grain totaled \$5.99 million.

Hemp grown for fiber was estimated at 33.2 million pounds, and the utilized production totaled 27.6 million pounds. Area harvested for hemp grown for fiber was estimated at 12,690 acres. The average yield for hemp grown for fiber was estimated at 2,620 pounds per acre. The value of hemp grown for fiber totaled \$41.4 million.

Production of hemp grown for seed was estimated at 1.86 million pounds, and the utilized production totaled 1.68 million pounds. Area harvested for hemp grown for seed was estimated at 3,515 acres. The average yield for hemp grown for seed was estimated at 530 pounds per acre. The value of hemp grown for seed totaled \$41.5 million.

Production of hemp for transplants and clones totaled 20.2 million plants, and the utilized production totaled 18.0 million plants. The value of hemp grown under protection for transplants and clones totaled \$23.8 million.

Production of floral hemp was estimated at 310,421 pounds, and the utilized production totaled 256,124 pounds. The value of floral hemp totaled \$64.4 million.

Hemp grown for seed totaled 4,059 pounds, and the utilized production totaled 3,121 pounds. The value of hemp grown for seed totaled \$23.7 million.

Information about the regulations for growing hemp is available at [ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/hemp](https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/hemp).

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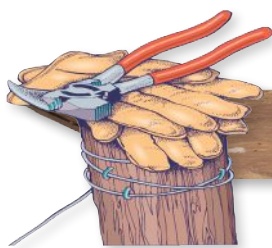
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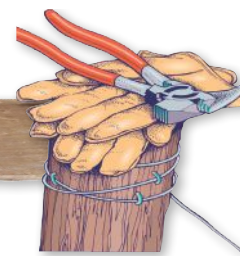
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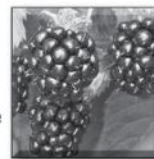
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# Texas Agriculture

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