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April 2, 2021

# Texas Agriculture

Published by Texas Commercial farmers and ranchers

**Farmers, ranchers evaluate  
losses after winter storm**

Pages 16-21



# Immigration reform: Now is the time to get it right for agriculture

We are long overdue for immigration reform that fixes our guest-worker visa system and provides stability for those currently working in agriculture.

In every region of the country I visit, I hear from farmers who are facing shortages and delays in hiring skilled employees to help keep up with the demand for safe, sustainable American-grown food, fiber and renewable fuel.

Workforce shortages have been one of the greatest limiting factors for growth in U.S. agriculture, and it's time we find a solution that works for all.

It's good to see renewed energy and enthusiasm from the administration around addressing this complex issue.

Farm Bureau has long called for immigration reform that addresses the needs of our current farm employees while ensuring agriculture can continue to fill its workforce needs.

It's been about 35 years since Congress last passed a comprehensive reform bill, and a lot has changed in agriculture over that time. Responsible immigration reform will take all of us working together to get it right.

A robust agriculture industry is essential to our economy, national security and environmental sustainability. We must work together to ensure U.S. agriculture has the resources it needs to continue to provide and fill these essential farm jobs.

While advances in robotics have replaced some farm jobs, we need skilled employees to manage that equipment.

Other farm jobs like tending livestock and pruning or picking fresh produce still require a human touch. Farmers pay competitive wages, in addition to added benefits under the H-2A program, but it's a constant challenge to recruit and retain employees.

I've met with farmers who have even added benefits such as on-site cafeterias and health clinics for employees to promote well-being and increase employee retention, and they still face workforce shortages.

We also recognize not all growers are able to undertake these initiatives to attract new employees. Other smaller-sized farms have built long-term relationships with their

employees as they work side-by-side building the business together. Yet, staffing remains a challenge.

Even with competitive wages and added benefits, there is less interest in farm jobs as folks leave rural areas and are more removed from the farm. Meanwhile, the current farm workforce is aging, and farmers are struggling to keep up with filling positions.

Margins are slim even in the best seasons on the farm, and farmers can find it hard to stay competitive with other industries and lower-priced agricultural imports.

Demand in the H-2A program has grown significantly in recent years, and there's no sign of that slowing down. The number of certified H-2A positions has increased more than three times compared to 10 years ago, according to U.S. Department of Labor data. But the program falls short in giving the flexibility employers and employees need.

Delays in processing applications have often left farmers without the workers they need in time for harvest, even before the pandemic. Crops shouldn't be left to rot while paperwork sits in an agency inbox.

U.S. agriculture needs a flexible guestworker program that allows contract and at-will employment

options that work for both seasonal and year-round needs on the farm. We also need to make sure wage requirements take into account the economic conditions of the agriculture industry and enable farms to remain viable.

The American Farm Bureau is ready to work with the administration and Congress to bring these long overdue reforms to our guest-worker program to help provide long-term security to our employees, farm businesses and the rural economy.

There's no question that farm work is tough. Everyone puts in a full day's work when it comes to tending and harvesting crops and caring for animals. Farmers know how hard this work is because we have invested our sweat and tears in the soil, often for generations. It's time we find a solution that provides farmers, our employees and our families the stability we all need to keep America's farms growing.

*Zippy Duvall has served as president of the American Farm Bureau Federation since 2016. He is a third-generation farmer from Georgia. He owns a beef cow herd, raises broiler chickens and grows his own hay, all while continuing to restore the land he inherited.*



By Zippy Duvall  
AFBF President



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## Chronic Wasting Disease found in Lubbock-area deer

State wildlife and animal health officials are working to protect Texas deer while also trying to determine how an 8.5-year-old free-ranging mule deer near Lubbock contracted Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).

CWD is a fatal, neurological disease that affects deer, elk, moose and other members of the cervid family. It commonly leads to altered behavior in infected animals because of microscopic changes in the brain of infected animals.

The infected mule deer was found east of Lubbock in the Buffalo Springs area. After exhibiting symptoms of CWD, the deer was

humanely euthanized and tested for the disease.

As a result of the discovery, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and Texas Animal Health Commission are working together to determine if CWD has been established in the environment where the deer had been browsing.

Containment and surveillance zones have not been delineated for the area yet. When they are established, they come with rules for landowners and hunters to ensure CWD does not spread to unaffected areas of Texas.

Surveillance zones act as a buffer

where surveillance is done to provide assurance the disease hasn't spread outside of the containment zone.

CWD is spread through the natural movements and transportation of infected animals and carcass parts.

According to TAHC, prions are shed from infected animals in saliva, urine, blood, soft antler material, feces or from the decomposition of an infected animal.

The prions then stay in that environment and can infect susceptible animals.

Maps of the CWD zones, along with other information, are available in TPWD's Outdoor Annual.

## FCC creates task force to improve U.S. broadband data

A new agency task force to implement improvements to agency broadband data and mapping tools was established by Acting Chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Jessica Rosenworcel.

The group is charged with developing updated and more detailed maps showing high-speed internet availability in the U.S. This is an important step in determining current broadband access deficiencies and identifying areas that need more or updated infrastructure.

"The Broadband Data Task Force will lead a cross-agency effort to collect detailed data and develop more precise maps about broadband availability," Rosenworcel said. "It's no secret that the FCC's existing broadband maps leave a lot to be desired. We can do better, and we will."

The task force was created in response to Congressional directives in the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability (DATA) Act. In the bill, Congress asked FCC to "collect and disseminate granular broadband service availability data (broadband maps)."

The Broadband DATA Act was passed by Congress in 2019 but not



funded until the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 was signed into law in December 2020.

The maps may prove useful in phase two of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF).

RDOF is part of FCC's signature initiative to bridge the rural-urban digital divide. Through the program, FCC will disburse \$9.2 billion over 10 years to expand broadband in unserved areas across the U.S.

During phase one, FCC awarded funds to bring broadband to over 5 million homes and businesses in census blocks that were unserved by voice and broadband with download

speeds of at least 25 Mbps.

Phase two will cover locations in census blocks that are partially served and locations not funded in phase one.

The Broadband Data Task Force will closely coordinate FCC's broadband mapping and data collection efforts across various agency teams, including the Office of Economics and Analytics, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, Wireline Competition Bureau, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, International Bureau, Office of Engineering and Technology and Office of the Managing Director.

## Senate confirms Tai as U.S. Trade Representative

The Senate voted unanimously in mid-March to approve the nomination of Katherine Tai to be the next U.S. Trade Representative.

The 98-0 vote reflects broad bipartisan support for Tai.

According to *Politico*, Tai is the first trade representative since the George W. Bush administration to be approved unanimously by the Senate, though the nominees from Presidents Obama and Trump were also approved by wide margins.

She will succeed Robert Lighthizer for the top trade negotiator position.

Tai will play a key role in the White House's review of Trump's trade policies, including the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), phase one trade deal with China and more.

She pledged to pursue a "worker-centered" agenda that will build on environmental and labor protections she helped include in the recently negotiated USMCA trade deal when she served as the chief trade lawyer on the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee.

Tai will also be an important influence on the administration's decision whether to reopen Asia-Pacific talks on a trade deal to replace the Trans-Pacific Partnership, from which Trump withdrew U.S. participation.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) expressed support for Tai's confirmation.

"Ms. Tai's ability to build bipartisan support for policies and her experience with enforcing fair-trade rules will help America's farmers and ranchers compete internationally and continue putting food on tables around the world," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said.

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# USDA publishes final rule on industrial hemp

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) completed its review of the final rule establishing the U.S. Domestic Hemp Production Program.

Two years after the 2018 Farm Bill legalized the cultivation of industrial hemp, the final rule went into effect March 22.

When hemp was removed from the list of controlled substances, interest in the crop grew in Texas and across the country.

“Here in Texas, we’ve been in the hemp business for almost a year, and we’re busy building the Texas ‘hempire.’ We’ve issued over 1,150 producer licenses, permitted over 5,000 acres of hemp in the ground and over 15 million square feet of hemp in greenhouses,” Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said. “I still believe hemp offers Texas farmers a great opportunity, and I look forward to continuing to improve our program here in the Lone Star State.”

USDA outlined key provisions in the final rule, including how to handle non-compliant plants, testing and timing of sample collection. The rule takes into account public comments and industry comments, including those submitted by Texas Farm Bureau and the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The final rule gives states and tribes the flexibility to adopt a performance-based approach to sampling in the plan submitted to USDA for approval. Texas’ hemp plan was approved in January 2020.

The THC sampling timeframe prior to harvest was extended to 30 days to ease the burden that hemp farmers faced from the originally proposed 15-day timeframe.

Under the original rule, USDA required testing to be completed by an approved Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-registered laboratory using reliable methodology for testing the THC level. According to USDA Agricultural Marketing Ser-

vice data, there are only eight DEA labs in Texas.

Since the testing backlog remains, USDA extended the delay in DEA-approved labs through Dec. 31, 2022.

The final rule also sets a higher negligence threshold for producers at 1 percent THC and limits the maximum number of negligent violations a farmer can receive in a growing season to one.

If a farmer receives more than three negligent violations in a five-year period, they will be ineligible to participate in the program for five years.

The final rule also outlines easier guidelines to dispose of hot plants. New approved disposal methods include plowing the crop under, mulching, composting, disking, mowing, burning and burying at a depth of at least 12 inches.

These methods are more economical and preferred by farmers over the stricter requirements of the DEA or another entity authorized

to handle marijuana under the Controlled Substances Act to dictate the process for disposal that were outlined in the previous rule.

“The final hemp program rule includes several improvements that Farm Bureau and many Texas farmers requested during the comment periods. The longer window of time between crop testing and harvesting, better sampling methods and a higher threshold for negligent violations are among the beneficial changes,” Brant Wilbourn, Texas Farm Bureau associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service also created short video presentations to address the major issues facing Texas hemp farmers, including the basics of hemp production and crop insurance.

The videos are available online at <https://agecoext.tamu.edu>.

For more information on growing hemp in Texas, visit TDA’s hemp production page at [www.texasagriculture.gov](http://www.texasagriculture.gov).

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# with Speaker of the Texas House Dade Phelan

Representative Dade Phelan (Beaumont) is the 76th Speaker of the Texas House and is currently serving his fourth term as State Representative for District 21.

Prior to serving as Speaker, he served as Chair of the House Committee on State Affairs, as Vice-Chair of the Natural Resources Committee, as a member of the Calendars, Appropriations, and Elections Committees, as well as the Select Committee on Ports, Innovation and Infrastructure.

In 2019, Speaker Phelan was named by *Texas Monthly* as one of the Best Legislators of the 86th legislative session. He has earned numerous additional accolades in recognition of his legislative service, including *Capitol Inside's* Most Valuable Sophomore Member in 2017 and as one of their Most Outstanding Freshmen Legislators in 2015. Phelan has been named Legislative Champion by the Boys and Girls Club of Texas, Legislator of the Year by the Texas Apartment Association, Guardian of Small Business by the National Federation of Independent Business, Most Valuable Legislator by the Texas Association of Community Schools, a Fighter for Free Enterprise by the Texas Association of Business and the 2019 Mental Health Champion by Mental Health America.

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Phelan is the former president and two-time Governor appointee to the Lower Neches Valley Authority. His board service includes the Texas Lyceum, Southeast Texas CASA, Golden Triangle Coastal Conservation Association, The Jefferson Theater, St. Anne Catholic Church and Catholic Charities of Southeast Texas.

In addition to the duties he has as Speaker, Phelan works as a real es-

tate developer at his family's fourth-generation commercial real estate development firm, which owns and manages retail, industrial and office property in Texas and Arkansas.

His wife, Kim, is a solo practitioner attorney and together they have four sons, Ford, Mack, Hank and Luke. He and his family reside together in Southeast Texas, where Speaker Phelan was born and raised. He received his bachelor's degree in Government and Business from The University of Texas at Austin.

**Q. How would you describe your leadership style?**

**A.** I believe that my colleagues in the Texas House know that I am fair and will provide a level playing field for them to advocate on the issues about which they feel passionate. Each state representative has a unique district, and I recognize that the House does not operate well with a one-size-fits-all approach. The needs of rural Texas are vastly different from those of our urban centers, and I recognize that our differences make us stronger. Our team attempts daily to provide an inclusive environment and weighs all perspectives, and I hope that those are the hallmarks of my tenure as Speaker.

**Q. How would you define a successful session this year?**

**A.** Our state faces difficult challenges as we emerge from the aftershocks of the pandemic, and we must meet them head-on to protect our state's footing as an economic beacon and agricultural hub for our nation. We must pass a balanced budget that does not harm taxpayers, we must protect and defend liberties, and we must reform our grid



after the devastation we saw resulting from Winter Storm Uri and the ensuing bureaucratic disaster.

**Q. What influences helped shape your interest in public service?**

**A.** I had an internship in the Texas House when I attended The University of Texas that ignited in me a passion for public service and public policy as a way to improve the lives of our families and allow businesses to thrive. In Texas, we have many rich natural resources, and we need to pass sensible policies so we don't make the same mistakes we've seen in other states that have lost their way due to overtaxing and impeding liberty.

**Q. How can issues important to rural Texas remain competitive with urban/suburban issues in such a growing state?**

**A.** For starters, we need to get rural Texas connected. Those who struggle with internet accessibility face setbacks, no matter the issue. Whether it's educating our kids, building our businesses, connecting to healthcare providers, or advocating for our industries—so much of what it takes these days to provide for our

families and compete for resources hinges on reliable internet access.

To compete with urban and suburban issues, rural Texans need to stay vigilant and engage in all levels of the policymaking process. Involvement with groups like Texas Farm Bureau benefits its members, because the bureau maintains an active presence in both the legislative and regulatory arenas and helps provide lawmakers a unified and clear message. That goes a long way, especially during these tumultuous times.

**Q. How has growing up and living in Southeast Texas impacted your understanding and awareness of agriculture?**

**A.** I've witnessed the dwindling rice farms and land fragmentation in Southeast Texas. The rice farms suffered due to having to compete for resources in the fight for downstream water rights with upstream users. Competing for resources is a common struggle in agriculture and is an issue that becomes more and more complex as our population grows. We need to be thoughtful as we plan our communities and preserve our natural resources in a way that protects our state's farming and ranching heritage.



# Texas lawmakers consider FALA, rural broadband, meat labeling

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

The Texas Legislature is more than halfway through the 87th regular state legislative session.

After a slower start thanks to COVID-19 safety precautions and a massive winter storm, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) State Legislative Director Charlie Leal said there has been much activity on several TFB priority issues, including changes to the state's Farm Animal Liability Act (FALA).

"This session really took off in early March, and we've had some very good progress on a lot of our agenda items already," Leal said.

## Farm Animal Liability Act (FALA)

FALA is an update to the previous Texas Equine Activity Limitation of Liability Act, passed in 1995, which provided horse owners were not liable for participants' injuries due to the inherent risks of interacting with horses.

In 2011, the Equine Act was amended to include bovine animals, sheep, goats, pigs, hogs, ratites, ostriches, rheas, emus, chickens and other fowl. The act was also expanded to cover veterinarians and livestock shows, and the words "handling, loading or unloading" were added to the definition of farm animal activities.

FALA limits liability for injury to a "participant in a farm animal activity or livestock show" that results from "inherent risk" of activities.

New attention was brought to FALA after a ruling by the Texas Supreme Court in a case where a bull harmed and killed a ranch hand. The longtime ranchers argued FALA applies by its plain terms to ranching—working farm animals for a living or profit. But in a divided opinion, the Court said the rule did not apply to Texas farmers and ranchers.

In response, Leal said Texas Reps. Andrew Murr and Brooks Landgraf filed bills this session amending FALA to include all instances of



*Despite a slow start to the legislative session, bills related to Texas Farm Bureau's priority issues are being heard in committee hearings.*

handling livestock.

"It just seemed that having liability protection from injury caused by a show steer but leaving ranchers without protection from that liability was unequal. It's the same animal, whether it's at a livestock show or whether it's on private property," Leal said. "The whole emphasis is to

expand that coverage, to make sure the current law clearly recognizes the inherent risks that livestock pose to those attending or participating in events and livestock shows. Those are similar activities to what happens on private farms and ranches."

*story continued on page 10*

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# Legislative update continued...

*story continued from page 9*

Murr's bill, HB 365, was considered in a public hearing on March 9.

TFB District 8 State Director Mickey Edwards testified before the House Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence Committee. The bill was voted out favorably by the committee on March 17 and is now on the Calendars Committee to be set for consideration on the House floor.

"Since that bill has already moved onto the Calendars Committee, hopefully it can be one of the first bills that is heard on the House

floor, and we can get that over to the Senate and get that done," Leal said.

In early March, Sen. Drew Springer filed a companion bill, SB 1078, in the Texas Senate. Leal expects that bill to move favorably, as well.

## Rural connectivity

Increasing rural broadband access remains high on TFB's agenda, as well as those of several prominent lawmakers, including Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Speaker of the Texas House Dade Phelan.

There is widespread support for Rep. Trent Ashby's HB 5 and companion Senate bill SB 5 by Sen. Rob-

ert Nichols.

"Since it was tagged as a priority by both the governor and lieutenant governor, that should hopefully get moving fairly quickly," Leal said, adding a hearing in the Senate Transportation Committee took place on March 17.

A hearing on the House version took place in the House State Affairs Committee on March 18.

At press time, both bills were left pending in committee.

## Truth in labeling

Another TFB priority issue, truth in labeling of meat products, received consideration after a public hearing March 17 by the House

Public Health Committee regarding Rep. Brad Buckley's HB 316.

"There was strong testimony in support and some in opposition, as well. There will likely be some more work done by Rep. Buckley and the committee looking into this issue," Leal said. "But there were very positive reactions from most of the committee members, so we're hopeful that's something that can also move pretty fast."

More information on TFB priority issues is available each week in the *Austin Newsletter*. To sign up for the *Austin Newsletter*, log in to MyTFB and update contact preferences using the menu on the left side of the screen.

# TFB advocates for more feral hog control tools during hearing

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

The feral hog population is expanding at an alarming rate in the Lone Star State, leaving farmers and ranchers facing thousands of dollars in damages each year. That's what one rancher told a Senate Committee last month, testifying in support of more tools to help control and eradicate the invasive species.

Feral hogs cause Texas agriculture more than \$230 million in losses annually, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey.

"Hunting and trapping alone can't control them," Mickey Edwards, a Lampasas County rancher, said. "We need more tools for this fight."

The Senate Finance Committee hearing was focused on the Texas Department of Agriculture's budget, including a budget rider from 2017 attached to the appropriations bill, SB 1.

The rider prevents the state agency from registering any warfarin toxicant to control feral hogs.

Warfarin underwent a federal review and was approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In the process, EPA updated the label, removing unnecessary restrictions and providing more clarity for applicators.

"The concerns raised about the safety of this product have been



**Feral hogs cause more than \$230 million in agricultural losses in Texas each year, according to a USDA survey.**

shown to be unfounded based on additional university studies," Edwards, who serves as Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) District 8 state director, said.

Toxicant baits like warfarin are a viable next step and effective tool landowners should have the option to use, TFB and other agricultural organizations noted.

With the feral hog population on the rise, the threat to fields, pastures, water sources and livestock



**Texas Farm Bureau District 8 State Director Mickey Edwards testified before the Senate Finance Committee in March. He stressed the need for all tools, including toxicants, to be made available to farmers and ranchers in an attempt to control the feral hog population.**

also increases.

The invasive species can degrade water quality and introduce E. coli, making the water unsafe to drink. They also pose a threat to livestock and wildlife, preying on small animals.

"A budget rider was proposed in the bill patterns for the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service that prohibits the use of warfarin-based feral hog toxicants that

can be used to control the population growth of feral hogs," Texas Farm Bureau Associate Legislative Director Harold Stone said. "But we hope the budget rider will be deleted from the bill patterns of the appropriation bill for these agencies, and that will allow them to spend appropriation money to research and certify these products that can be used for feral hog control by landowners."

The bill was left pending in committee at press time.

# Grants available to help increase ag literacy

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Increasing agricultural literacy in schools and communities is important to help grow informed consumers, and mini-grants available from the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture can help.

County Farm Bureaus may apply for grants of up to \$1,000 for K-12 educational programs through the White-Reinhardt Mini-Grant Program. The grant can be used to initiate new agricultural literacy programs or expand existing programs.

“This grant process serves as an excellent way for county Farm Bureaus and local teachers to collaborate on projects that bring agriculture to life in the classroom,” Jordan Walker, Texas Farm Bureau associate director of Organization division, Educational Outreach, said.

The national grant program was established to fund projects that help students and adults cultivate a better understanding of agriculture.

Grants are available on a competitive basis.

Applications are due by April 15.

Applications must include a timeline and detailed budget with estimated expenses, as well as a summary of the project, goals and anticipated outcomes and the target audience.

The winners will be notified in July. Initial funding will be issued in August, and the balance will be received upon completion of the project and submission of a final report.

Payments cannot be made to individuals or other organizations, only to a county Farm Bureau.

More information about the mini-grant program and the application is available at [www.agfoundation.org/projects/wr-grants-home](http://www.agfoundation.org/projects/wr-grants-home).

Brazos County Farm Bureau and Brazoria-Galveston County Farm Bureau received grants in the last funding cycle.

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# Teachers can apply for TFB's Summer Ag Institute

By Julie Tomascik  
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 Ag Institute (SAI) June 14-17 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.

"Teachers really enjoy the SAI experience, because it truly allows them to see agriculture in action and also participate in hands-on activities and opportunities that they can relate to their classroom content," Jordan Walker, TFB associate director of Organization division, Educational Outreach, said. "The environment of SAI encourages teachers to engage in active learning much like

they facilitate in their classrooms."

Regardless of the subject, agriculture has a place in the classroom, Walker noted.

"Agriculture is present in everything we do, and the industry has advanced significantly over the years to include incredible science, technology and growing career opportunities. Increasing agricultural literacy among today's teachers and students expands knowledge of how agriculture is imbedded in the science, social studies, math and so much that students learn each day," she said. "When we increase agricultural literacy, we increase awareness and grow more educated consumers and, ultimately, leaders of the next generation."

Teachers get to see the agricultural concepts demonstrated by educational professionals through SAI. They will also make connections with farmers, ranchers and industry professionals.

And there will be several opportu-

nities for teachers to get their hands dirty.

Teachers will visit area farms, ranches and other agricultural businesses, as well as hear from a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist and a soil expert from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Texas Beef Council also will provide a fun, interactive demonstration to connect the beef process from pasture to plate.

"Many topics will be covered over the four-day institute, but teachers can definitely expect two key takeaways—that agriculture can be incorporated into any subject and there are many resources available to help do just that," Walker said.

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 certified, active K-12 teacher

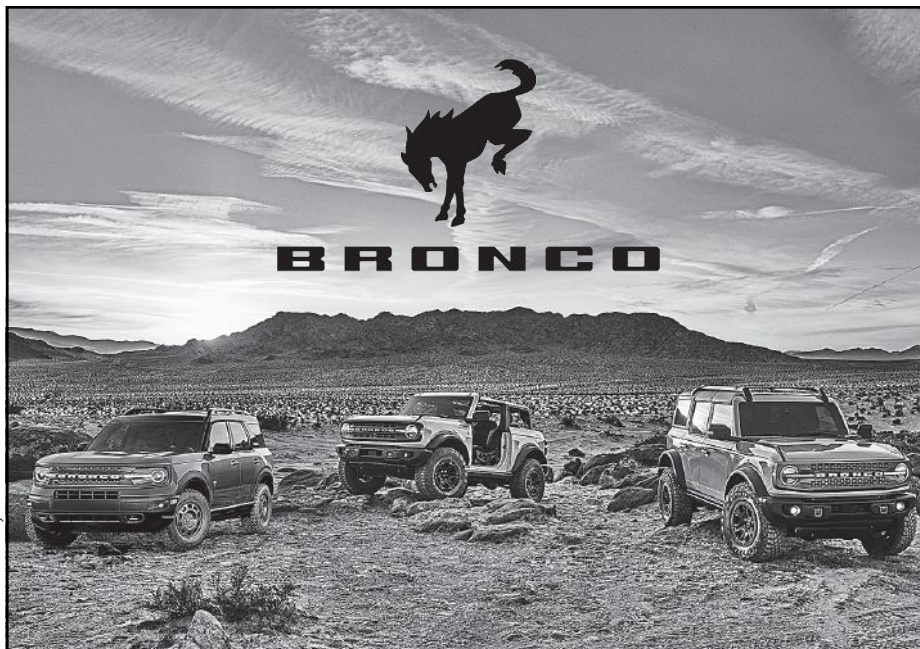


of any subject can register to attend.

The cost is \$375 per person, which includes lodging and some meals, but county Farm Bureaus often offer sponsorships to cover the cost for local teachers. Teachers will be notified of their sponsorship status after registration is complete.

For more information and to register, visit [texasfarmbureau.org/aitc](http://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc) or contact Walker at 254-751-2569 or [edoutreach@txfb.org](mailto:edoutreach@txfb.org).

Regional teacher workshops will be announced on the TFB website later this spring.



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# Estate taxes threaten family farms, ranches

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) is calling on Congress to remove barriers to farm ownership. Bills aimed at eliminating the estate tax were introduced in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House in March.

Both bills are supported by AFBF. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) and 25 cosponsors introduced S 617.

Reps. Jason Smith (R-Mo.) and Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.) introduced HR 1712 with 121 cosponsors.

Both bills would allow for a complete repeal of the estate tax, which, according to AFBF analysis, threatens more than 74,000 family farms across the country and nearly half of all farmland.

“Farmers and ranchers already face unpredictable challenges beyond our control yet persevere to protect our nation’s supply of food, fiber and renewable fuel,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. “The tax code should encourage farm business growth, not add to uncertainty.”

If the estate tax is not eliminated, instead of spending money to improve their operations, farmers and ranchers, along with all small businesses, will be forced to continue to divert resources to pay for estate planning to account for a shifting and unpredictable tax code.

The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act temporarily doubles the estate tax

exemption to \$11 million per person indexed for inflation through 2025. However, without congressional action, the estate tax exemption will revert to \$5.5 million per person in 2026, putting even more farms and ranches at risk.

“Eliminating the estate tax removes another barrier to entry for sons and daughters or other beginning farmers to carry on our agricultural legacy and make farming more accessible to all,” Duvall said. “We appreciate Sen. Thune and Reps. Smith and Bishop for introducing their bills and look forward to working with them to get this important legislation passed.”

The national organization noted

serious consideration should be given to eliminating estate taxes or at the very least making permanent the current inflation-adjusted Tax Cuts and Jobs Act estate tax exemption to preserve family farms and ranches.

“The American Farm Bureau believes that tax laws should protect, not harm the family farms that grow America’s food and fiber and give sons and daughters the ability to follow the agricultural legacy of their parents,” Duvall said.

By eliminating estate taxes or making the current exemptions permanent, farmers and ranchers will be able to avoid, at least partially, liquidating inherited farm assets to meet the death tax’s financial obligations, AFBF said.

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# USDA announces Pandemic Assistance for Producers program

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new federal assistance program, the Pandemic Assistance for Producers.

Through the program, the agency will distribute \$12 billion to assist farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers impacted by COVID-19 market disruptions.

In the announcement, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said the program will reach more farmers and ranchers than previous COVID-19 aid programs.

USDA has dedicated funds for the new program and placed a greater emphasis on reaching small and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, specialty crop and organic farmers and timber harvesters.

The program also provides support for the food supply chain and producers of renewable fuel.

Vilsack shared the details of the new plan during a virtual meeting with state Farm Bureau presidents, including Texas Farm Bureau President Russell Boening, and American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) leadership.

“The pandemic affected all of

agriculture, but many farmers did not benefit from previous rounds of pandemic-related assistance. The Biden-Harris administration is committed to helping as many producers as possible, as equitably as possible,” Vilsack said in a statement. “Our new USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative will help get financial assistance to a broader set of producers, including to socially disadvantaged communities, small and medium sized producers, and farmers and producers of less traditional crops.”

USDA will use \$6 billion to develop new programs or modify existing proposals using remaining discretionary funds from the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Included on the list:

- assistance for dairy farmers will be available through a dairy donation program;
- producers who were forced to euthanize livestock or poultry or grow specialty crops will be eligible for assistance;
- beginning farmers, specialty crop farmers and local, urban and organic farms can apply for assistance, as well as specialty crop and seafood processors and distributors;

- funds can be used for purchasing Personal Protective Equipment and other measures for food and farmworkers;

- biofuels production;
- costs for organic certification or to continue or add conservation activities;
- and timber harvesting and hauling.

USDA will also include assistance for other possible expansion and corrections to the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), such as to support dairy or other livestock producers.

Another \$5.6 billion will be directed to formula payments to cattle producers and eligible flat-rate or price trigger crops. Producers who are eligible will not need to submit new applications.

Included in that funding is:

- an increase in CFAP 1 payment rates for cattle, which USDA estimates will result in an additional \$1.1 billion in payments beginning in April to more than 410,000 farmers and ranchers;
- additional CFAP 2 assistance of \$20 per acre for farmers of eligible flat-rate or price-trigger crops, estimated to be more than \$4.5 billion to more than 560,000 farmers;

- and processing eligible payments for CFAP Additional Assistance (CFAP AA).

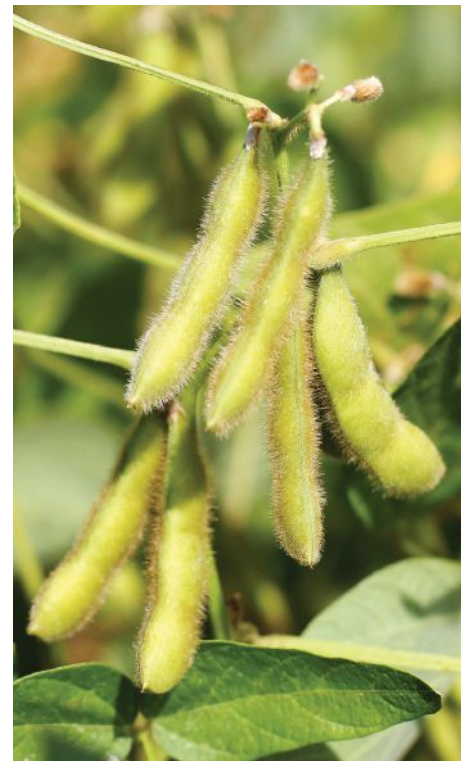
An additional \$500 million of new funding will be added by April 30 to the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, Farmers Opportunities Training and Outreach Program, Local Agricultural Marketing Program, Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, Economic Adjustment Assistance for Textile Mills Program, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agricultural Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

The agency noted additional payments for swine farmers and contract growers under CFAP AA remain on hold and are likely to require modifications to regulations before they can be resumed. However, FSA will continue to accept applications during the ongoing review process.

Sign-up for the new Pandemic Assistance Program will begin April 5.

Sign-up for CFAP 2 will reopen for at least 60 days beginning on April 5, according to the announcement.

Updated and additional information will be available on the Pandemic Assistance Program page at [farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance](https://farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance).



# African Swine Fever cases on the rise in China

The number of cases reported of African Swine Fever (ASF) in China have been on an upswing in recent months.

Contributing to the rise in outbreaks have been new mutant variants of the virus. Two specific strains that have recently been detected are reportedly less virulent than previous strains, which makes them more difficult to detect and thus easier to spread between pigs. Because the disease goes undetected, it is more difficult to control ASF. This is particularly bad for piglets born with weakened immune systems.

In response to shortages in pork in recent years, China's imports of animal protein have surged to try to fill the gap left for consumers. Prior to ASF, China both consumed and produced roughly half of the world's pork.

The hole left in its animal protein supplies spurred domestic consumption of other proteins, as well as imports of pork and other animal proteins into the country.

Pork imports surged over 250 percent from 2018 to 2020, as prices within the country skyrocketed.

The largest beneficiary of this import demand was the European Union, which in 2020 supplied 58 percent of China's 5.6 million metric tons of pork imports.

However, Germany's own struggles with ASF in its wild boar population presents a likely challenge for the country moving forward.

The U.S. follows as the next largest supplier at 17 percent, followed by Canada and Brazil with roughly 9 percent each.

But after two years of significant declines from pre-ASF levels, pork production within China is slated to increase for the first time in three years in 2021.

The uncertainty around the herd recovery leads to questions about U.S. pork exports to the country.



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# WINTER STORM URI LEAVES LASTING DAMAGE

## Winter Storm Uri causes over \$600 million in agricultural losses

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Citrus. Livestock. Vegetables. Winter Storm Uri left virtually no aspect of Texas agriculture untouched, with losses by individual farmers and ranchers across the Lone Star State ranging from mild to extreme.

Cumulatively, the damage to Texas agriculture totals at least \$600 million, with a final number likely coming in much higher, according to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service economists. And the repercussions will last for years.

Citrus crops in the Rio Grande Valley were hit the hardest, with initial losses of at least \$230 million reported.

Rio Grande Valley citrus growers lost nearly all the Valencia orange crop to the late winter freeze, said AgriLife Extension Economist Dr. Luis Ribera. He noted if the storm had come any earlier, the damage to Texas citrus would have been much worse. But since grapefruit harvest was underway, farmers lost about 60 percent instead of the entire crop.

The \$230 million figure includes losses from this year's crop but also includes damage to blooms and buds that were the start of next year's crop, Ribera explained. It does not include the cost of citrus trees that



***Ranchers spent the week providing extra feed and hay to livestock during the freeze. Livestock losses are estimated at \$228 million, according to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Sheep photo courtesy Erika Archie.***

die or are so badly damaged they have to be replaced.

"If they must be replaced, it will be several years before those new citrus trees are able to bear fruit, so the losses could be much more," Ribera said.

Lemon and lime orchards suffered more damage due to the trees' lower cold hardiness, noted AgriLife Horticulturalist Juan Anciso. Nearly 200 acres in South Texas were completely destroyed and will have to be

replanted, wiping out the potential for lemon or lime harvest for at least three to five years.

Vegetable farmers in the Rio Grande Valley and Winter Garden are reeling from Winter Storm Uri's effects, as well, with losses pegged at about \$150 million in the produce sector.

Cool-season crops, including leafy greens, beets, cabbage, celery and broccoli, were lost. So were warm-season crops intended for early harvest like potatoes and melons.

"The main vegetable crop damage we saw was to onions, then leafy greens, including spinach, collard greens and kale, and watermelons. Working with the Texas International Produce Association, we estimated a loss of more than \$42 million in sales of onions, more than \$27 million in sales of leafy greens, more than \$20 million in sales of watermelons and more than \$15 million in sales of cabbage," Dr. Samuel Zapata, an AgriLife economist based out of Weslaco, said. "We also esti-

mated at least another \$42 million in additional vegetable and herb sales losses for these large vegetable crop-producing areas. Of course, producers lost vegetable crops in other areas of the state, as well, so we determined the \$150 million figure to be a minimum."

Zapata noted sugarcane is facing losses, but it's too early to tell how much damage was done to next year's crop.

Nearly all the cane plants were destroyed by the freezing temperatures, forcing farmers to replant or face a drop in yields.

Ranchers are suffering impacts of the extreme cold weather, too. The livestock sector in Texas, which includes cattle, sheep, goats and poultry, is expected to have at least \$228 million in related losses.

Poultry losses encompass loss of birds, damage to housing facilities and increased heating costs, according to AgriLife Livestock Economist Dr. David Anderson.

"Beef cattle losses include es-



***Cabbage sits wilting in fields following a week of freezing and below-freezing temperatures.***



# WINTER STORM URI LEAVES LASTING DAMAGE

estimated value of death losses, additional feed use, lost winter small grain grazing, lost weights and feed efficiency in feedlots, and losses due to delayed marketing,” he said. “Sheep and goat losses include estimated death losses, and dairy losses include cattle death loss, lost milk production and the value of milk dumped due to transportation problems and processing delays.”

Additional costs for extra feed, fuel or electricity to run heaters to keep livestock warm and physical damages to the operation were included in estimates, added Amarillo AgriLife Economist Dr. Justin Benavidez.

“A rancher will typically feed two

or more round bales per cow during winter. So, if hay isn’t available, they still have to purchase some type of supplemental feed, and all this is costly,” Benavidez said.

Because the storm hit during spring calving and lambing season, many newborn animals were lost. Benavidez noted losses would have been far worse if ranchers had not acted quickly and rescued as many of those newborns as possible.

But these losses will extend past just the current livestock generation, he said. The loss of an animal this year impacts subsequent herd size by taking out potential replacement animals.

Losses to the greenhouse and nursery sector are expected to be high from Winter Storm Uri.

Damage to landscape plants, shrubs and trees was severe, noted Dr. Marco Palma, horticultural marketing expert in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University. He said AgriLife and the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association are still awaiting responses from a statewide survey before providing any preliminary estimates.

“It will take some weeks before we get a full picture of the immediate losses, but they will easily be in the tens of millions and probably in

the hundreds of millions of dollars,” Palma said. “The green industry will experience increased labor, fertilizer and other costs as part of the price of replacing the plant material that was lost during the winter storm.”

Damages to fruit and nut orchards, vineyards, grazing crops and major commodity crops like corn and wheat are still being tallied.

AgriLife has compiled data from a variety of sources including farmers, ranchers and other commercial producers, as well as others involved in or supporting production agriculture. The agency is still working to collect information on damages and losses.

## RESTORE Act aims to help Texas ag recover from natural disasters

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Two Texas Congressmen introduced bipartisan legislation aimed at helping Texas agriculture recover from February’s winter storm.

The Rehabilitating Economic Success Through Overcoming Rural Emergencies (RESTORE) Act, HR 1692, would provide disaster assistance to farmers and ranchers. The bill would re-authorize the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildfire Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) to aid farmers and ranchers in recovering from natural disasters in 2020 and 2021.

“I am proud to lead this bipartisan effort for Texas’ agriculture community alongside my colleague, Congressman Cuellar. The historic winter conditions experienced in Texas resulted in over \$600 million of agricultural losses, leaving many crops and dairy products destroyed,” Congressman Ronnie Jackson said. “In Texas, agriculture production is critical for our economy and food supply. The RESTORE Act will go a long way to support our farmers during this tumultuous time as they work on restoring their operations. This bill will also re-stabilize

our food supply, which recent events have proven is not invincible. Texans are resilient, so I know we will get through this together.”

Winter Storm Uri left devastating effects on Texas agriculture, but 2020 was also a difficult year for farmers and ranchers in the Lone Star State.

After several months of drought conditions, Hurricane Hanna slammed the Texas Gulf Coast and Rio Grande Valley. Farmers, ranchers and other agribusinesses in the area suffered major losses from the Category 1 hurricane.

“Texas Farm Bureau is pleased Congressmen Ronny Jackson and Henry Cuellar have introduced the RESTORE Act to provide needed and expanded assistance for farmers and ranchers impacted by extreme weather events. Whether it was the most recent winter storm, hurricanes in 2020 or ongoing drought conditions in other regions of the state, Texas agricultural producers are in desperate need of relief,” Texas Farm Bureau President Russell Boening said. “We thank Congressmen Jackson and Cuellar for working to address these challenges head-on. Texas Farm Bureau is proud to sup-



*Farmers in the Rio Grande Valley who grow watermelons and citrus suffered major losses from the winter storm.*



port this bipartisan legislation and looks forward to working with leaders in Congress to provide relief for hardworking farm and ranch families across the country.”

WHIP+ compensates farmers and ranchers for losses due to natural disasters like many in Texas experienced in 2020 and so far in 2021.

“Texas farmers and ranchers have suffered widespread and catastrophic losses from recent natural disasters. This legislation will provide critical assistance to crop and livestock producers because of droughts, extreme cold and power

outages,” Cuellar said. “As a senior member of the Agricultural Subcommittee on Appropriations, I am committed to delivering support to our agricultural industry who work every day to put food on our tables during this pandemic and beyond.”

WHIP+ previously provided payments to farmers and ranchers to offset losses from drought or excess moisture in 2018 and 2019.

Boening also testified before the Texas Legislature in mid March on the need for assistance to help farmers and ranchers rebuild and recover.

# WINTER STORM URI LEAVES LASTING DAMAGE

## Heartbreak in South Texas as fruit, vegetable crops lie in ruin

By Ed Wolff

Video Services Manager

Gut-wrenching. The Texas citrus crop ruined. Watermelon plants wilted. Broccoli destroyed. Lettuce disintegrated. When Winter Storm Uri hit, it brought more than sub-freezing temperatures, ice and snow. It brought devastation, and Texas farmers and ranchers felt the chill.

“I’ve never experienced anything like this. I mean, this wiped us out completely,” Brandon Laffere, owner of L&L Farms, said.

Brandon’s family has grown vegetables near Uvalde for three generations. This area of Southwest Texas is called the Winter Garden due to its normally mild winters, allowing for a salad bowl of crops to flourish. But this year, Uri ravaged those greens with an arctic blast. Lows in the teens. Days of continuous freezing temperatures and a white blanket of snow and ice. When the ground finally began to thaw, Brandon’s hope for a bountiful harvest melted.

“This is heartbreaking, I guess. I mean, to see all this, see everything that you’ve been living with for 70 to 90 days and then right about harvest and you lose everything,” he said.

Farmers like Brandon were hit hard. Texas vegetable growers across the state took at least a \$150 million hit. Without any kind of crop insurance available to vegetable farmers, there isn’t much to do but plow up the pieces and hope for next year.

About four hours south in the Rio Grande Valley, Mike Helle raises watermelons, honeydew melons, onions and more near Edinburg. His melons were just breaking through the soil when Uri arrived, bringing bone-chilling winds and low temperatures near 20 degrees. The young shoots simply couldn’t withstand the bitter cold.

“That’s heartbreaking. This field was beautiful. The crop had been in



*Brandon Laffere’s vegetable crops were lost to the freeze.*



*Early estimates from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service show more than \$15 million lost in sales of cabbage.*



*Watermelons were one of the crops grown by the Helles that succumbed to the bitter cold of Winter Storm Uri.*



*Farmworkers help the Helle family plant watermelon transplants.*

the ground. It was starting to take off and everything looked wonderful, like a picture,” he said. “It’s pretty tough to go through that. You got knots in your stomach, just thinking what happened, could have happened, or what could you have done. We did all we could.”

Mike’s son, also named Mike, has been farming with his dad for about eight years. This isn’t the Rio Grande Valley’s first freeze, but it is

his first time to feel the frigid bite of a frozen crop.

“The first day, we had about 18 hours under freezing. The next day was about 15 hours under freezing. By Friday when the sun came out, we could really tell the damage,” Mike said. “It was time to start thinking about what we needed to do the following week to replant and start over.”

The two Mikes are going to try

again. They were able to find some watermelons from Georgia to replant. They are hoping this time around Mother Nature isn’t as bitter. Many of the workers helping them replant would normally be in the Texas citrus orchards, but the main thing growing on those branches now is uncertainly. This year’s crop is ruined, and some of next year’s is, too.

“We got down to 21 degrees for about four hours straight, and we

# WINTER STORM URI LEAVES LASTING DAMAGE



*Citrus harvest was only about 60 percent complete when the storm hit.*

spent a total of over 53 hours below freezing,” Dale Murden, president of Texas Citrus Mutual, said. “The fruit that you see on the tree doesn’t like it much below 28. Trees don’t typically like it below 26. That night of the freeze, I’d cut open fruit and it was ice inside.”

Once it ices over inside, citrus fruit turns to mush.

“It’ll eventually fall to the ground, and it renders that basically useless,” he said. We’re trying to salvage what we can right now for juice, but it’ll all be on the ground before we can get around to get what’s remaining.”

Only about half of the grapefruits were already harvested. Almost all of the late oranges were still on the trees. The extent of the damage to the



*Dale Murden inspects the remaining fruit on the trees.*

trees isn’t fully known yet. Branches will have to be cut back. Some trees may have to be replaced. It could take up to seven years for citrus growers to recover. Farmers like Dale are hoping customers stick with them.

“I might not be on the shelf for a couple of years, but remember that you liked Texas grapefruit and Texas oranges, and when we get back on the

shelf, just support us,” Dale said.

For one chilling week, Winter Storm Uri held the Lone Star State in an icy embrace. One that will be etched in the memories of Texas growers for years to come. But farmers and ranchers will do what farmers and ranchers always do: Persevere. Moment by moment. Step by step. With a hope and determination that will never freeze.

## Growers face staggering losses to nursery, greenhouse sector

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

This was expected to be a good marketing year for growers of commodities like turgrass, trees, shrubs and nursery plants, according to John Begnaud, a retired Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service horticulturalist in San Angelo.

Then Winter Storm Uri hit.

“There could be some challenges this year for inventory. Wholesale growers usually plan years in advance what kind of plant materials need to be planted and how much,” Begnaud said. “When COVID-19 came along, people switched from going to the office to working and staying home and doing all these home projects, and landscape projects in particular. So, we saw this as one of the best years for the retail nursery industry that we’ve had in years because people are going out shopping and buying plant materials for their homes and gardens.”

But now, Texas growers may be struggling to produce plants for customers this spring.

“If you consider the lag time to reach a five-gallon shrub, you don’t get that in one year’s time. You might plant cuttings, get the cuttings up, and have one-gallon plant material available in a year on some varieties of shrubs,” he said. “But sometimes it’s three to four years before you can get a two- to five-gallon shrub like most people would want to purchase.”

In East Texas, greenhouse and nursery growers were devastated.

Greenhouses collapsed and heat sources were shut off when areas lost electricity. Those who did manage to keep the heaters running are facing massive natural gas bills.

In Cherokee County, where greenhouse and nursery industry sales total about \$65 to \$70 million annually, the situation is dire. Aaron Low, Cherokee County Farm Bureau



president and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service county agent, said the area’s economy is highly dependent on those products and is facing a massive crisis.

Low estimated the county’s greenhouse growers are facing \$15 to \$20 million in plant loss alone, with a conservative \$10 million estimate in structure losses.

Most of the county’s greenhouse and nursery businesses are family-owned and employ thousands of residents who have few other job prospects in the rural area, Low said.

Some growers will recover, while others said they may not be able to come back from such a massive blow.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service economists say it’s still too early to put a number on damages to the nursery and greenhouse industry, but the dollar amount is expected to be astronomical.

AgriLife and the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association collaborated in February and March on a statewide loss assessment survey to help understand the scope of damages.

## Redfish farmers, industry suffer devastating losses after freeze

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

A strong business plan, a leap of faith and a background in raising fish couldn't prepare Brandon Bowers for the unprecedented and unpredictable challenges he'd face in 2020 and 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic and February's winter storm devastated his business.

The two combined into the perfect, yet awful, storm, leaving his

new aquaculture farm to face an uncertain future.

"I started my farm about two-and-a-half years ago, but I've been involved in aquaculture pretty much my entire life," he said. "I grew up in it, and I've always had a passion for it. My wife and I decided we wanted to raise our five kids on the farm, so we started Texas Mariculture."

They're located near Palacios, a small town on the Gulf Coast between Houston and Corpus. They

raise red drum, also known as redfish.

Growing conditions for farm-raised redfish are ideal in the Gulf Coast area. That is until Winter Storm Uri ushered in freezing and below-freezing temperatures for five consecutive days in February.

The impact? Complete devastation.

Many aquaculture farms suffered major fish losses, but redfish farmers like Bowers were severely impacted.

"In an effort to save the fish, we installed heaters into specifically constructed refuge areas, which were built and designed to mitigate losses due to a freeze," Bowers said. "Unfortunately, all efforts and improvements could not overcome the brutal forces of the arctic freeze."

His biggest fear became a reality when he lost his entire crop after two-and-a-half years of hard work.

"My first marketable crop and a new fingerling crop were lost within a matter of days," he said. "I was in shock. You hear about people losing everything, but you don't know what it's like until you're living it. This is my livelihood, and I don't know what to do next."

He's not alone.

Farmers report about 99 percent of the domestic redfish supply was lost to February's freeze.

And in a state that's known as the redfish capital and the largest supplier of redfish in the United States, it's an overwhelming blow to the industry. This species is a premier fresh fish item on the menu at many restaurants in southern states, but supplies will lack this year following the storm.

"Every redfish farmer was impacted, and many aquaculture farmers felt some kind of impact from this freeze," he said.

Farmers and farmworkers have spent the days since the storm cleaning up dead fish from the ponds, but the future is uncertain.

Because of a definition in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP), redfish is not considered an eligible commodity for disaster assistance.

USDA classifies redfish as a fin fish, rather than a game fish, which excludes it from the program.



*Texas is the redfish capital and the largest supplier of redfish in the United States, but the redfish industry experienced a devastating blow from Winter Storm Uri. The unprecedented cold temperatures could total \$50 million worth of lost fish and fingerlings, according to aquaculture groups. Photo courtesy Brandon Bowers.*

# WINTER STORM URI LEAVES LASTING DAMAGE

“The bills don’t stop. They just keep coming in, whether it’s rent, equipment, labor, the hatchery, electric, administrative. Everything still keeps coming,” Bowers said. “Plus, we have to clean up all the dead fish in the ponds, and then also make sure we dispose of them properly and prepare for the next cycle, if there is a next cycle.”

Everything’s at stake for Bowers and many of the few remaining redfish farmers in the state.

The small group came together to advocate for assistance with the help of Texas Farm Bureau and other organizations.

“This is a very demanding industry, and not many of us redfish farmers really talked to each other a lot prior to the storm,” Bowers said. “But now we’ve reached out to one another. We’re working together, and we’ve met with Congressman Cloud. We’ve also reached out to state lawmakers about this situation.”

Without disaster aid, Bowers faces many unknowns.

“We have had many hurdles along the way, as with every new startup, but we were still on track to do well,” he said. “We chose redfish due to the increasing demand for fresh U.S. farm-raised fish and, at the time, felt improvements to freeze protection protocols reduced freeze risks associated with raising redfish. Very little redfish have been lost due to cold temperatures since the freeze of 1989.”

If they were eligible for ELAP, it still wouldn’t make the farmers whole, but it would provide them something to help move forward.

Estimates provided by the redfish farmers show there’s about \$50 million worth of loss of redfish and fingerlings. A devastating blow to farmers and restaurants.

The damage, however, may not have been as severe if social distancing and shelter-in-place orders had not been implemented due to the

coronavirus pandemic.

“That’s what you call a perfect storm because right now, because of COVID-19, our sales were suppressed or almost even stopped since around November. We were forced to sit on an abnormally high inventory, and not only did we sit on those, but we also continued to build as we continued to feed them. We just knew we were going to come out of this,” he said.

Bowers was feeling optimistic that he had made it through December and January, which are usually the worst months for aquaculture when the cold can stress the fish.

“The farm was sitting on and still building inventory at a time when redfish farmers are most vulnerable, but we made it through those months and stayed optimistic. Lent was coming, the COVID vaccine was here and restaurants were increasing in capacity. There was going to be a demand for our fish,” Bowers said. “Then this happened.”

It could take up to two years for redfish farmers to recover.

“COVID really magnified this issue because we sat on so much inventory. And because we lost all of our revenue for three, four months prior, that was when we took the significant hit. Now, without any assistance, the future of the redfish industry may or may not exist. We’re asking for immediate assistance so that we can continue to operate and move forward with the production of fingerlings to start over,” he said. “And in the long term, we’re looking for some kind of assistance for all aquaculture producers so that we can have more young farmers join the industry and get excited about aquaculture.”

For now, Bowers is left treading water as he awaits word from legislators and USDA about possible assistance. The future of Texas Mariculture and the Texas redfish industry remains uncertain.



*The pandemic’s effects on restaurant business lowered the demand for redfish. Photo of harvest-ready redfish courtesy Brandon Bowers.*



*Farmers and their employees work to clean up the dead fish in the farm ponds. Photo courtesy Brandon Bowers.*



*Prior to February’s devastating freeze, Brandon Bowers and one of his five children fed the fish together one evening. Bowers wants his children to inherit the same appreciation for aquaculture as he did. Photo courtesy Brandon Bowers.*



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# Cattle market transparency legislation introduced in Congress

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Ranchers and other members of the beef supply chain have long expressed the need for increased transparency in the beef cattle industry. Recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic and Holcomb meatpacking plant fire strengthened that message to the point where lawmakers are attempting to address those concerns.

A bipartisan U.S. Senate bill, the Cattle Market Transparency Act of 2021, would restore transparency and enhance accountability through establishing regional cash minimums and equipping cattle operations with more pricing information.

“America’s ranchers don’t control the prices they are paid for their products, and those raising livestock have legitimate questions about pricing. When the pandemic hit, meat prices at grocery stores went up while the prices paid to farmers fell through the floor,” American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall said. “This legislation will ensure farmers and ranchers have fair access to markets and are fully informed on pricing, so they can continue to put food on the table in homes across the country.”

Nebraska Sen. Deb Fischer, a

member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden reintroduced the act after it failed to gain any traction when Fischer first filed it during the 116th Congressional Session last year.

“I am pleased to reintroduce this bill with bipartisan support. It will help facilitate price discovery and provide cattle producers with the information they need to make informed marketing decisions,” Fischer said in a press release. “I am committed to working across the aisle to advance the bill forward this Congress.”

Farm and ranch organizations, including AFBF and Texas Farm Bureau (TFB), are supportive of the new legislation.

The bill aligns with goals set forth last year by the AFBF Cattle Market Working Group.

Ten state Farm Bureau presidents, including TFB President Russell Boening, spent several months investigating factors that led to those major market disruptions and considering solutions and proposals before developing the final report.

“The COVID-19 pandemic clearly disrupted markets and our processing systems, but cattle producers were also affected by the closure of the Tyson beef packing plant in Kan-



sas after a fire in late 2019,” Boening said. “The working group invited input from economists, government staff, university staff and other industry experts to help us better understand these two events and the factors impacting the beef industry and our Farm Bureau members.”

According to Fischer’s press release, in addition to the regional cash thresholds and a public marketing contracts database, the Cattle Market Transparency Act will also prohibit USDA from using confidentiality as a justification for not reporting livestock mandatory reporting from packers. It mandates packers report the number of cattle scheduled to be

delivered for slaughter each day for the next 14 days to USDA on a daily basis.

“Texas is different than other cattle-feeding areas in the country, so having that understanding built into the legislation was important to us,” Tracy Tomascik, TFB associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said. “We look forward to our continued work with leadership in D.C. to find common-sense solutions on issues important to farmers and ranchers.”

Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler of Missouri is expected to introduce companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives soon.

## Industry groups raise the alarm on U.S.-Mexico trade relationship

In late March, 27 leading food and agricultural associations sent a letter communicating growing concerns over the rapid deterioration of the U.S.-Mexico trade relationship to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

The letter calls attention to alarming recent developments with regard to food and agriculture trade relationship with Mexico and urges action to address these significant challenges.

Together, the group of associations represent much of the food and agriculture sector that is responsible for roughly one-fifth of the country’s

economic activity, directly supporting over 23 million jobs—constituting nearly 15 percent of total U.S. employment.

Signers include the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), the American Soybean Association, Corn Refiners Association, International Dairy Foods Association, North American Meat Institute, National Grain & Feed Association and the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

“Mexico is one of America’s most important food and agriculture trade partners. NAFTA has yielded strong benefits to both countries and the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) promises to build

upon those gains. Yet, the food and agriculture trade relationship with Mexico has declined markedly, a trend USMCA’s implementation has not reversed,” the groups said in the letter. “We respectfully urge your attention to this important but quickly deteriorating trade relationship.”

Leading concerns highlighted by the group include a ban on glyphosate and genetically modified corn, increased obstacles to dairy trade and an organic export certification requirement, a state-sponsored campaign disparaging corn sweeteners from the U.S., a cessation of review and approval of biotechnology applications, implications from meat in-

dustry market access and geographical indications, a potato export ban and a new front-of-pack labeling regulation.

These issues, along with a number of investigations on Mexico’s fresh produce exports to the U.S., hamper the competitiveness of U.S. farmers, ranchers and other members of the food and agriculture sector.

“We urge Secretary Vilsack and Ambassador Tai to engage with Mexico and enforce the agreements between our two countries to ensure farmers have a level playing field and continue to lead the world in producing safe, affordable food,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall said.

# Lumber prices soar during COVID-19, but timber prices fall

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact agriculture.

In 2020, home renovation projects and new home sales increased. But many sawmills across the nation were deemed “nonessential businesses” and forced to temporarily shut down for weeks or months.

Increased demand for lumber sent prices skyrocketing to 134 percent over the previous year.

At the same time, timber prices—what landowners and tree growers are paid for the raw product—fell drastically.

In Texas, the November-December 2020 statewide average on hardwood pulp was down 42 percent from 2019 while pine pulpwood prices decreased 7 percent. Pine sawtimber prices and mixed hardwood sawtimber prices were down 9 and 10 percent, respectively, for the same period.



*Forestry has long been an economic contributor to Texas agriculture, and it's yet another industry impacted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.*

Why aren't landowners and timber growers harvesting the same rewards as lumber mills?

In Texas, two main factors are at play, according to Nacogdoches County Farm Bureau member Jim Dawson.

“A decade or so ago, there was competition. We had mills all over the place, but the economy and some changes to tax law shut a lot of them down,” Dawson, a longtime forestry management consultant, said.

Over the years, the construction industry shifted from using solid lumber to a variety of engineered wood products. Now, there's only one mill within range of Nacogdoches that will accept larger logs to cut for high-quality lumber.

“We've transitioned over from big, beautiful logs to these little poles most of the mills now want. Basically they want fiber in tons instead of high-quality lumber. Now, it's a lot of small-diameter sawmills that are very high-tech,” he said. “It doesn't take a lot of people to run them. Logs are basically x-rayed from every direction you can think of, so when they hit the saw, they'll be turned exactly the right way to get the greatest lumber recovery out of them.”

Oriented-strand board (OSB) replaced plywood, according to Dawson.

Pulpwood used to be turned into paper, but now it's chipped and glued back together under heat and pressure to make a panel suitable

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for load-bearing construction. Dawson said it's popular in flooring and walls for new houses and buildings.

The smaller-diameter logs used for OSB and other engineered wood can be grown much quicker than traditional lumber cuts.

The consolidation of the industry, increased efficiency through technology and shift in raw materials to cheaper, smaller, raw products created an imbalance in East Texas timber. It's the opposite of what's happening in the lumber market.

"We have a supply and demand problem here in East Texas. We have more timber than we have mills to process it," he said. "Mills here are pretty much running at capacity. They couldn't use any more logs if you gave them to them. They're not going to pay any more for it than they have to, and as long as they have people standing outside wanting to get their truck across the scales, they don't have to worry about that. And so that's where we are."

The trend first began in the early 2000s and was only exacerbated by the pandemic.

"In Texas, the timber industry

was classified as essential industry from the start. So, we were able to keep working. But the fact that the pandemic shut down so much construction and the market for the wood, that hurt," Dawson said. "So, we have this big supply but no place to sell it."

Hauling timber to mills in other areas doesn't make sense, because higher labor and fuel costs would take more out of already-thin profit margins. The only solution is more mill capacity or more mill locations, Dawson said.

"There are so few mills left here, but we did have a new mill that we can reach come in last summer. They're talking about building some more," he said. "We just haven't had the manufacturing capacity here in East Texas in quite some time. The mills, I don't know what their profit margin is. But somebody between the lumber and the load is making a pretty good profit somewhere, because it's certainly not down here with the landowners."

#### **Timber assistance**

Although commercial timber harvesting and hauling were not initial-

ly eligible for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack recently announced a new initiative that would include assistance for timber harvesting and hauling.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, along with eight other U.S. senators, advocated for timber assistance to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Among the hardest hit, and unfortunately overlooked, agricultural sectors has been timber harvesting and hauling," the senators wrote in a Feb. 3 letter. "Given the severity of the situation, many loggers and haulers are facing hard decisions about whether they can afford to keep on in the industry."

At press time, specific details re-

garding aid for timber harvesting and hauling were not yet available. But the American Loggers Council estimated in 2020, domestic paper mills reduced output or shut down operations altogether resulting in a \$1.83 billion loss in the value of logger-delivered wood, showing that as with other commodities, a dire need existed for federal support.

"Like farmers, our loggers and haulers are an essential part of a much larger economy built around manufacturing the commodity product into value-added goods," the senators said. "In order to keep the broader forest products sector, we must ensure our loggers and haulers make it through this enormously challenging time."



*Haulers are an essential part of the larger economy that manufactures value-added goods from timber. They have also been impacted by the pandemic.*



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*There are 12 million acres of timberland in Texas. The area consists of 43 eastern counties that receive enough rainfall to support commercial forests.*

# TFB launches Lesson Plan Challenge for teachers

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

Texas teachers can plant seeds of agricultural knowledge in classrooms and earn recognition for their efforts through Texas Farm Bureau's annual Lesson Plan Challenge.

This program gives teachers an opportunity to submit existing or newly-developed lesson plans that integrate agriculture in the classroom.

"Along with entering for an opportunity to win prizes, this program offers teachers a chance to showcase the great work they are doing to Texas Farm Bureau, and potentially, if selected as a winner, to other teachers who are looking to incorporate agriculture into their lesson plans, too," Jordan Walker, TFB associate director of Organization division, Educational Outreach, said. "We encourage teachers to participate in the program, because we believe it is a great way for teachers to bring to light the wonderful efforts

they are making to incorporate agriculture into the classroom."

Certified K-12 teachers can submit one completely developed lesson plan that clearly incorporates agriculture in the classroom. Teachers who teach any subject may participate, except for those teaching agricultural courses.

To participate, completed lesson plans must include supporting materials and a citation sheet that includes all sources used.

Lessons will be judged in four categories, and judges will select a first place winner from each category.

"Every student in every Texas classroom is a consumer, and eventually, they will all make their own choices about the food they eat and the products they buy. They will also one day make a career choice. With that, we believe it is necessary to grow agricultural literacy to foster educated and informed students who will become decision-making consumers, employees and maybe

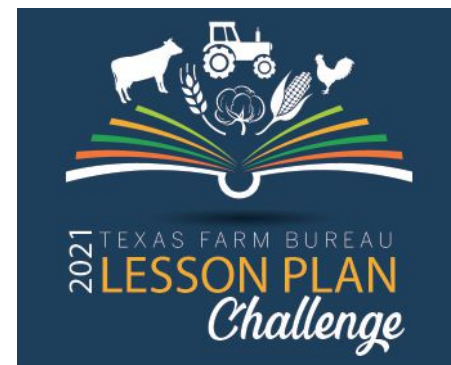
even industry experts in every community across Texas," Walker said. "Our hope is to encourage informed dialogue and education about how agriculture is present in the decisions we make, the science we learn about and nearly every other aspect of our lives and our learning."

Each teacher who submits a complete lesson plan will receive a classroom garden kit that will include a 32-cell starter tray, 32 soil pucks and 10 packs of seeds.

Each teacher will also receive either the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture's book of the year and the educator's guide for the younger grade levels or a higher-level book for teachers of higher-level grades.

All first place winners will have their lesson plans considered for inclusion as a curriculum resource on TFB's website.

Winners will receive one digital microscope for use in the classroom



and \$300 to purchase classroom supplies. The winners will also receive an all-expense paid trip to the 2021 National Ag in the Classroom Annual Conference.

"We encourage Texas farmers and ranchers to promote this opportunity to teachers across the state, so we can increase agricultural literacy and understanding among today's students," Walker said.

Lesson plan submissions are due online April 26 at noon.

For more information, the online application, categories and judging criteria, visit [texasfarmbureau.org/aitc](http://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc) or email [edoutreach@txfb.org](mailto:edoutreach@txfb.org).







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# Dicamba spray buffer zones increase for 2021 growing season

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved or extended registration on three dicamba products last fall, the agency also increased control measures like buffer zones to reduce off-site movement of the product, commonly called dicamba drift.

Under the new registrations, the downwind in-field spray drift buffer requirement increased to 240 feet between the last treated row of a field and the closest downwind field edge in the direction in which the wind is blowing.

The buffer may be reduced to 110 feet with the use of a qualified hooded sprayer.

The following areas may be included in the buffer distance calculation when directly adjacent to the treated field edges, according to EPA:

- Roads, paved or gravel surfaces, mowed grassy areas adjacent to

field, and areas of bare ground from recent plowing or grading that are contiguous with the treated field.

- Agricultural fields that have been prepared for planting.

- Planted agricultural fields containing corn, dicamba-tolerant (DT) cotton, DT soybeans, sorghum, proso millet, small grains, sugarcane and other crops approved for post-emergent dicamba use. If the applicator intends to include such crops as DT cotton and/or DT soybeans in the buffer distance calculation, the applicator must confirm the crops are in fact dicamba-tolerant and not conventional cotton or soybeans.

- Areas covered by the footprint of a building, shade house, silo, feed crib, or other man-made structure with walls and/or a roof.

For areas with endangered species concerns, the downwind buffer was expanded to 310 feet downwind and a 57-foot in-field omnidirectional buffer. The buffer may be reduced to

240 feet downwind using a qualified hooded sprayer in DT soybean crops only. The 57-foot omnidirectional in-field buffer remains in place with or without use of a hooded sprayer.

Counties with listed species have tighter parameters for calculating buffers. Only these may be included:

- Roads, paved or gravel surfaces, mowed grassy areas adjacent to field, and areas of bare ground from recent plowing or grading that are contiguous with the treated field.

- Planted agricultural fields containing DT plantings of cotton and soybeans.

- Areas covered by the footprint of a building, silo or other manmade structure with walls and/or a roof.

In a memo supporting the registration decision, EPA said it completed species-specific Endangered Species Act effects determinations for dicamba used in cotton and soybeans prior to issuing the latest registrations.

The agency found no discernable effects to threatened and endangered plants and animals on the federal endangered species list.

In Texas, there are 104 federally-listed endangered or threatened plants and animals found in 10 Pesticide Use Limitation Areas (PULAs) across the state.

To verify if a particular area is subject to the 310-foot downwind in-field and 57-foot omnidirectional in-field buffer restrictions, applicators must check EPA's Bulletins Live! Two prior to making an application.

Once the user has selected the PULA in which he or she intends to apply dicamba and selected the product's active ingredients, an Endangered Species Protection Bulletin will be created with all relevant information. The bulletin may be printed or saved as a digital document.

EPA has more answers to frequently asked dicamba-related questions at [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov).



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# Young farmers, ranchers appointed to TFB advisory committee

Twenty-five 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.

The committee plans the YF&R Conference, Fall Tour and hosts district events. They also raise money for scholarships with a live and silent auction during TFB's annual meeting.

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

## **District 1: Landon and Brianna Friemel**

Landon and Brianna Friemel farm cotton, wheat, corn and sorghum and raise cattle with Landon's brother. Landon and his brother also own a metal fabrication shop and run a custom swathing and manure-spreading business. Brianna runs a home-based jewelry design company and is a partner in an event venue.

## **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 an independent crop consulting company.

## **District 3: Colby and Allison White**

Colby and Allison White are the sixth generation to farm peanuts, wheat and cotton in Wilbarger County.

## **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 also works for a construction company, and Chelsea is a testing coordinator for Life School Elementary.

## **District 5: Patrick and Lacey Williams**

Patrick and Lacey Williams are fourth-generation farmers in East Texas specializing in hay production, liquid fertilization with weed and pest control and sprig cultivation. Patrick works with his father and brothers to manage Williams Farms, and Lacey is a labor and delivery nurse.

## **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 also own Hoelscher Equipment Solutions, LLC, a company where they buy, sell and rent equipment. Abby is a marketing manager at Mueller Metals, LLC and Spring Creek Products.

## **District 7: Jacob and Laura Henson**

Jacob and Laura Henson are part owners in an Angus-cross commercial cattle herd and help operate Laura's family's farm, white-tail deer ranch and silage harvesting business. Jacob works for Infinity Firearms, and Laura is an instructor at Tarleton State University and owns Laura Henson Designs.

## **District 8: Travis and Kaylin Isbell (Committee Chair)**

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.

## **District 9: Preston and Brooke Sturdivant**

Preston and Brooke Sturdivant are aspiring small ranchers in Anderson County. Preston is a county Extension agent for Texas A&M Agri-

Life Extension Service, and Brooke is a dental hygienist in Palestine.

## **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 farming operation for both onion transplants and cantaloupes. Emily oversees all post-harvest duties 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.

## **District 11: Kevin and Jackie Seawright**

Kevin and Jackie Seawright are first-generation swine farmers. They own Right Track Farms, where they breed show and market pigs. Kevin works for Ecolab, and Jackie is a quality assurance and food safety manager at Colorado County Rice Mill, Inc.

## **District 12: Kenworth Krause**

Kenworth Krause is the co-owner and operator of a small truck-

ing 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: Travis and Bethany Wanoreck**

Travis and Bethany Wanoreck are first-generation farmers who grow cotton, grain sorghum and wheat in Bee, Jim Wells and Nueces counties. They also custom sow wheat and custom harvest cotton. Bethany is the district nurse at Orange Grove ISD.

## **AFBF YF&R Committee:**

### **Eric and Alisha Schwertner**

Eric and Alisha Schwertner farm and ranch in Runnels County. Their operation consists of cotton, corn, sorghum and wheat. Eric is also the owner and operator of a custom cotton harvesting business. Alisha is a product manager for Agrian, a farm data software company. The Schwertners serve on the American Farm Bureau Federation YF&R Committee.

## Hall joins TFB's Organization division

Roger Hall is transitioning to a new role as the associate director of the Organization division for Leader Development. Hall currently serves as the Area 8 field representative in TFB's Field Operations division.

In Hall's new position, he is responsible for the Young Farmer & Rancher program and will resume responsibility for all of the organization's leadership development programs. He also will assist in the youth and education areas of the Organization division.

During the transition, Hall will continue working with the counties in Area 8. He serves as the liaison between the state office and county Farm Bureaus, working directly with members and leaders

in Central Texas. He joined TFB's Field Operations division in 2014 as the area coordinator for Area 19, which is south of the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Prior to joining TFB, he was the event marketing coordinator for Texas Beef Council.

For eight years, he traveled across the state, representing the beef council at consumer events, fairs and festivals to promote beef and host grilling demonstrations.

Hall graduated from Texas State University in San Marcos with a bachelor's degree in Applied Arts and Sciences.

He and his wife, Kacey, have two kids, Madison and Hunter. The Halls reside in Lorena.



# Mystery seed shipments solved, APHIS says

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

After a lengthy probe into the thousands of reports from U.S. citizens who received unsolicited packages of mystery seeds in the mail, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) determined the seeds were not sent in an attempt to attack American agriculture.

"There is no correlation between where the seeds were sent and U.S. critical agricultural infrastructure," APHIS said in a statement.

To help combat misinformation and protect U.S. agriculture, the agency released additional guidance that will assist buyers and sellers in complying with U.S. law when importing seeds and live plants from other countries.

"Plants and seeds for planting purchased online from other countries can pose a significant risk to U.S. agriculture and natural re-

sources, because they can carry harmful insects and pathogens," APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine Program Deputy Administrator Dr. Osama El-Lissy said. "We've been working closely with e-commerce companies and other federal partners to stop the flow of illegal plant and seed shipments from entering the country. This new site is a big step forward in our efforts to facilitate the safe trade of plants and seeds through the e-commerce pathway."

The guidance, Buying and Selling Plants and Seeds Online, outlines buyer and seller responsibilities, offers information on plant and seed species that have additional import requirements and provides a list of prohibited plants and seeds for import into the United States. It also lists required documents, such as import permits and phytosanitary certificates.

APHIS published the resources after investigating many reports of

unsolicited seed deliveries that began suddenly in July 2020.

The agency confirmed some seeds were sent to the U.S. unsolicited, but others were seeds ordered by recipients who were unaware they would be coming from a foreign country.

Most of the seed shipments were illegal, because they lacked the necessary permit or phytosanitary certificate.

While there was no evidence of foul play or intent to harm U.S. agriculture, the results could have been far worse if noxious plant species, seeds or pathogens had inadvertently been sent.

"We are thankful to the public for reporting the seeds and getting them to USDA officials so that we could investigate them and avoid introducing foreign pests into our environment," El-Lissey said.

The agency now believes the unsolicited seeds were used in an internet "brushing scam," where e-commerce sellers ship inexpensive items

to increase transactions. As transaction numbers increase, a seller's rating also rises, making them appear more trustworthy and pushing up their products in search result rankings on e-commerce sites.

Investigators are now working with e-commerce companies to remove online sellers who have participated in illegal importation of plants or seeds.

APHIS officials remind people and businesses to comply with all applicable U.S. import requirements when purchasing plants or seeds for planting from another country.

If you or someone in your household receives an unsolicited package containing seeds or plant materials, or if you'd like additional information, contact the agency's Permits Help Desk by phone at 877-770-5990 or email [plantproducts.permits@usda.gov](mailto:plantproducts.permits@usda.gov).

Learn more about buying and selling plants and seeds in APHIS' Buying and Selling Plants and Seeds Online guidance document available at [www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov).



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# Texas A&M student competes in AFBF's Collegiate Discussion Meet

By Julie Tomascik  
Editor

College students from across the nation competed virtually in the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) Collegiate Discussion Meet. Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) was represented by Hannah Followill, a senior at Texas A&M University.

Followill won TFB's Collegiate Discussion Meet in 2020, qualifying her for the national competition.

"Competing against students from across the country on agricultural topics was an amazing experience," Followill said. "We discussed issues and solutions to a variety of challenges facing farmers and ranchers right now."

The Virtual Collegiate Discussion Meet, conducted using web conferencing again this year, is designed to replicate a committee meeting where discussion and active participation are expected from each collegiate participant. College students are judged on their ability to exchange ideas and information on an agricultural topic and find answers

or solutions related to it.

During the first round of the contest, Followill discussed the risks and rewards of big data and smart farming, as well as how to establish new and diverse foreign trading partners and enhancing existing relationships.

Followill advanced to the Sweet 16 round and discussed investments and policy initiatives that can provide reliable broadband access to farmers, ranchers and rural America.

"I didn't grow up in a rural area, but the issue of rural broadband is one that's important," she said. "Expanding or developing new technologies in agriculture stems from broadband access, and rural broadband is part of the way we connect with each other. It is a challenge we need to build upon, and policymakers are really diving into the issue and discussing how to appropriate funds."

Although Followill grew up in Houston, she developed a passion for all things agriculture at a young age. She also has a strong background in

the equine industry.

As a senior at Texas A&M, Followill is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Agribusiness with minors in Spanish and Horticulture.

While at Texas A&M, Followill became interested in agricultural policy. She interned on Capitol Hill, gaining perspective and experience in the policy-making process.

"I'm thankful for the support from Texas Farm Bureau and the Young Farmer & Rancher Committee," Followill said. "I made so many new connections and relationships through this experience, and I was able to learn about many issues facing agriculture."

Twenty-four competitors participated in this year's Virtual Collegiate Discussion Meet. All competitors received a \$150 scholarship courtesy of CHS Foundation in recognition of their efforts and making it to the national level.

Students advancing to the Sweet 16 round received an additional \$250 scholarship.

The national winner was Abigail



*Hannah Followill*

Durheim from the University of Nebraska.

For more information on opportunities for collegiate students and young farmers and ranchers, visit [texasfarmbureau.org/YFR](https://texasfarmbureau.org/YFR).



## 2021 Texas Farm Bureau PHOTO CONTEST

The annual Texas Farm Bureau Photo Contest is an opportunity for members to share their best pictures with the entire Lone Star State and maybe even win a cash prize.

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### **Entries are due June 1.**

Email photos, a brief description, member's name, phone number and valid Texas Farm Bureau membership number to [photocontest@txfb.org](mailto:photocontest@txfb.org).

Complete rules and contest eligibility are available at [texasfarmbureau.org/photo-contest](https://texasfarmbureau.org/photo-contest).

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# Smith ends 46-year farming career on Texas South Plains

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

For Dan Smith, farming isn't just a career. It's a lifestyle he's enjoyed since he was born on the Texas South Plains. One that supported his growing family and provided him with some of the highest highs and the lowest lows.

But most of all, he said, farming was just in his blood.

"I grew up on the family farm, and my wife, Reeda Cay, grew on a farm about six miles away. We've lived in Lockney all our lives, except the years we were in school at Texas Tech," he said. "We graduated college, came back, and we live in the house that I grew up in. This house was built by my grandfather, passed down to my parents, and then we raised our kids here."

The couple always knew they would return to their hometown after graduation. Dan was so eager to farm in Floyd County, he tried to move back home at the end of his first semester of college. But his father wanted Dan to finish college first.

"After my first semester in college, I came home for Christmas and brought everything with me," Dan recalled. "My father said, 'Let's get something straight. I'm not going to help you unless you bring me a college degree.' He was going to Texas

Tech when World War II broke out, and he went into the service. But he never did go back after the war. He just said, 'I didn't get to finish college. So, if you want to come back and farm, you finish school first.'"

During his junior year of college, 140 acres came up for rent around Christmas. Dan's dad told him it was a little earlier than their original agreement, but the land was a good deal.

At the age of 20, Dan started farming. He drove back and forth from Lubbock after school and on the weekends to grow his crops.

## Nearly half a century of farming

After graduating at the age of 23, Dan and Reeda Cay were officially farming full time.

Over the last four decades, the couple saw many changes in agriculture. The changes brought more technology to agriculture and made farming even more efficient.

"My dad saw a lot of advances, but I don't think any generation saw the technology advance like I did," he said. "The technology really cut down on labor and increased productivity. Farms could get bigger, and you could grow more cotton with less labor. We had to. We had to keep getting bigger and bigger to stay in business."

From that first 140-acre rented



Dan poses in front of a John Deere 8300 in January 1995. Courtesy photo.



In 2001, he had a good cotton crop, one of many over the years. Courtesy photo.

farm to farming about 7,000 acres at his biggest point, Dan feels like he's seen it all.

"In farming, I've been on top of the world, and I've been at the bottom of it too many times. In most professions, you work hard, you do a great job, and you advance. Your salary improves. Your lifestyle gets better. The standard of living goes up. But in farming, you can be the best farmer possible and handle all your finances the best you can, and you can still lose your shirt. And it's through no fault of your own," he said. "Weather and markets, especially when they both team up together, that's when it can really, really get you. You don't always have this dependable, steady, guaranteed income source, even though you're doing a great job."

Reflecting on his farming career, Dan said it's still the best choice he could have ever made for himself and his family.

"With all the ups and downs, there are still far more ups than there are downs. It truly is the greatest lifestyle. When you have a bumper crop, there's just no better feeling," he said. "If I had it to do all over again, I'd still do it. I'd like to know everything I know now and go back and redo it, of course. It's the greatest life but also the toughest. You really have to experience it to understand it. I think that's the best thing to say about life on the farm or ranch."

## Texas Farm Bureau involvement

Early on, his farming career took an unexpected turn when a Floyd



Dan and Reeda Cay in August 1986 with a new John Deere 7445 cotton stripper. Courtesy photo.



Dan and Reeda Cay in February 2021. Dan noted he is wearing the same belt buckle in both photos. Courtesy photo.

County Farm Bureau board member asked him to consider serving on the board. This led to a lifetime of other agricultural experiences.

“My dad served on the Floyd County Farm Bureau board when I was growing up,” he said. “I decided it might be interesting to get involved. When I went on the board at the age of 23, everybody called me ‘the kid,’ because most of those guys were old enough to be my father. When I went off the Floyd County board, they were calling me ‘the old man’ because I was old enough to be all the guys’ dad by then. It took a lot of years, but things eventually reversed.”

Dan and Reeda Cay were appointed to the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee in 1984, and Dan was elected District 2 state director in 2012. He’s seen many changes at TFB throughout the years, but he said one thing has never changed: agricultural advocacy led by passionate people.

“Texas Farm Bureau really is a grassroots organization run by the members. We say that because it’s true. The resolutions every year at the state convention are very important, because that’s the road map Farm Bureau’s going to follow that year,” he said. “Texas Farm Bureau

has certainly changed with agriculture as agriculture has changed. If you take the Farm Bureau of the ’70s and the Farm Bureau we have now, the core of it’s the same. But we have changed as times have changed, and it’s always been for the better.”

Representing his district as a state director was important, but it was also beneficial to learn more about other commodities in Texas and hear how farmers and ranchers from other parts of the state manage their operations.

“The interaction with people all over our state is important, because we represent every agricultural commodity. As state directors, we really got to go in-depth and see how the political system works in Austin and Washington. We went to different places all over the world learning about agriculture and how things are done,” he said. “We saw just how complex Farm Bureau as an organization is but also how down-to-earth and grassroots it is. I’d hate to see what things would be like if we didn’t have Texas Farm Bureau or American Farm Bureau. It’s that important. No matter what you grow, we’re all in this together.”

#### Life after retirement

Now, he’s retired. He sold most



**Cotton harvest in 2018. Dan said just one person can operate a John Deere CS690 cotton stripper-baler, replacing what used to be an entire crew. Courtesy photo.**

of his equipment in an auction in February, except for a few older tractors. But he couldn’t quite give up farming forever. A love of the land is rooted in his soul, so Dan kept 900 dryland acres to farm to “stay busy.”

And he wants his grandchildren to have farm experiences, too.

“My daughters, Tikka and Mi-

chelle, both live in cities, but they do care about the farm. They always want to know what’s going on, and the grandkids want to ride the tractor,” he said. “I did keep a couple of tractors, so I can still take them out when they come visit. They made it real clear we better still be able to take tractor rides.”



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# Texas teacher nationally recognized for ag literacy efforts

By Jennifer Whitlock  
Field Editor

Eight educators from across the nation, including one Texas teacher, were selected as the 2021 National Excellence in Teaching About Agriculture award winners.

The award is a partnership between National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization (NAITCO), U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Farm Credit. These organizations bestow this honor each year upon educators who use innovative methods to incorporate agricultural concepts into standard school subjects like reading, writing, science, math and others.

TFB's 2020 Outstanding Agriculture in the Classroom Teacher Martha McLeod of San Patricio County was among the eight recipients.

She teaches science to third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students in a traditional classroom setting at Fulton Learning Center. But she also

brings agriculture to life through an outdoor classroom, small-scale poultry farm and school vegetable garden where students raise chickens, grow vegetables, study pollinators and birds and participate in many other hands-on activities.

"Agriculture is present in every part of life from what we eat to the clothes we wear. However, many students are more removed from the farm than ever before. When we increase agricultural literacy in today's K-12 classrooms, we grow educated consumers and help students understand where their food and fiber come from," Jordan Walker, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) associate director of Organization division, Educational Outreach, said.

McLeod and the other winners will be honored at the 2021 National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference, Fields of Dreams, set for June 28 to July 1 in Des Moines, Iowa.

"It's such a great honor to be named for this award, and I hope I represent

the people and teachers of Texas and Texas Farm Bureau well. Teachers do what we do for the love of kids and to make a difference in their lives," McLeod said. "I go to work every day because I'm on a mission. So, it's really nice to be recognized for something I would be doing anyway. The greatest gift for me is the reward I find in making a difference in a child's life, so I am so excited to attend the conference this summer."

McLeod grew up in Cotulla on a family farm and ranch before graduating from Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in Animal Science. She found her passion for teaching when observing her young daughter at a school function. For 27 years, she has worked diligently to combine her two passions: education and agriculture.

"Martha is a teacher who is so enthusiastic about sharing agriculture with her students," Walker said. "Educators like her are key to growing lifelong learners and perhaps even



future leaders in agriculture."

NAITCO is a non-profit organization representing Agriculture in the Classroom programs in most of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Its mission is to share the importance of agriculture with providing them with web-based materials and workshops that demonstrate how agriculture can be used to effectively teach core subject areas.

To learn more about NAITCO, visit [www.agclassroom.org](http://www.agclassroom.org).



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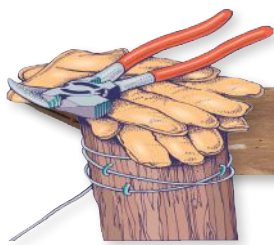
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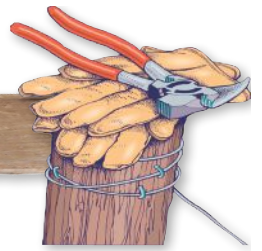
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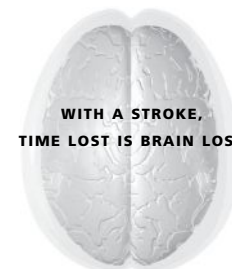


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