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Texas Agriculture

April 1, 2022

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Shear Success

Angora goats are a staple for Texas ranch family

Pages 16-17

Higher production costs squeeze profit margins for agriculture

There's a lot of attention right now on rising commodity prices and increased demand both domestically and globally.

Market upticks are beneficial. Higher prices help generate much-needed revenue to add to a hopeful bottom-line.

But this year, there's a strong counterbalance to the improved commodity market—high production costs.

In fact, a new Market Intel report by the American Farm Bureau Federation says the cost of growing crops could outpace revenue for many farmers in 2022.

Farm production costs are likely to increase 6% in 2022, which follows a 12% increase in 2021. This continues a trend stretching back several years.

Since 2013, farmers have seen almost all production expenses increase. For example, livestock and poultry expenses have gone up 46%, and marketing, storage and transportation costs have increased 59%.

Texas farmers and ranchers are experiencing many production cost increases. We're paying more for fertilizer, seed and crop protection chemicals. These inputs now make

up to 17.5% of on-farm expenditures.

Our rising fuel and energy costs have been exacerbated by uncertainty due to the Russia invasion of Ukraine. There are increased costs of labor for both farms and ranches and those agribusinesses serving them. Then, there is the COVID-19 disruption of labor markets and production.

We're also paying more at the grocery store, just like everyone else.

The price for groceries jumped 1.4% in February and 8.6% over the past year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

The monthly increase was the largest in about two years, but the 12-month increase was the biggest since the period ending April 1981.

The common assumption is that we, as farmers and ranchers, must be benefitting from the higher prices at the grocery store. You and I both know that's not happening.

For every dollar American consumers spend on food, U.S. farmers and ranchers earn just 14.3 cents.

The increase in food prices we're seeing now at the grocery store are reflections of higher expenses in the food supply chain beyond the farm

and ranch gate. The increased costs range from energy to labor to raw materials.

We know that entities beyond the farm and ranch can pass their higher costs of business to the consumer, but we cannot.

The higher costs for fuel, fertilizer, water, equipment, seed and crop protection chemicals being paid by the farmer and rancher are absorbed by the farmer and rancher. The slim margins of profit shrink as each price increase is absorbed.

The quote from President John F.

Kennedy still holds true nearly 60 years later, "The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways."

It's a perilous time for U.S. agriculture.

As an agricultural economics graduate of Texas A&M University, I understand the financial dynamics and risks of modern agriculture. It doesn't make it any easier, though, to withstand the headwinds of today's economy.



By Russell Boening
President

Your Texas Agriculture Minute

There's hot demand for rural Texas land

By Gary Joiner
Publisher

Statewide rural land sales were up almost 18% in 2021, according to the Texas Real Estate Research Center at Texas A&M University.

More than 846,000 acres of rural Texas changed hands last year. That's an increase of 53% from 2020.

Researchers say it's the most active period in Texas land market history, and Texas farmers and ranchers see the land rush and impact on

production agriculture every day.

The typical rural Texas tract size sold in 2021 was more than 1,300 acres. And prices last year were higher—up 29% to \$3,954 per acre statewide. But some land has sold for even more—upwards of \$10,000 per acre.

More folks are coming to Texas, too. That puts farms and ranches and their acres in high demand. Once farm and ranch land is developed, it leaves production agriculture forever.



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Enhanced biosecurity recommended with avian flu concerns

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) strongly encourages Texas poultry owners and producers to take steps to protect their flocks from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), as cases rise across the United States.

In January 2022, HPAI was first detected in a wild bird in South Carolina. Since that time, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) confirmed HPAI in commercial poultry, backyard fowl or wild bird populations in 22 states.

HPAI is a highly contagious, viral disease that can infect chickens, turkeys and other birds and can cause

severe illness and/or sudden death.

"While avian influenza has not been detected in Texas, we see the disease as a potential and real threat to Texas poultry," Dr. Andy Schwartz, TAHC executive director and state veterinarian, said. "Our best defense is for all poultry owners to join together in the effort to prevent disease by following strict biosecurity practices."

Biosecurity refers to practices that prevent possible contamination or disease spread. For poultry, biosecurity practices include:

- preventing contact with wild birds, especially wild waterfowl
- restricting unauthorized people and vehicles

- covering and enclosing outdoor feeding areas and covering stored feed

- cleaning and disinfecting any vehicle tires or equipment that has been on other farms or other locations where there is poultry or wild birds

- wearing clean clothing, boots and shoes when in contact with your flock and

- isolating new birds.

If symptoms are observed in your birds, immediately contact your veterinarian. If you do not have a regular veterinarian, contact TAHC at 1-800-550-8242.

For more information, visit tahc.texas.gov/animal_health/poultry.

Doorways to Ag on display at Wichita Falls Home & Garden Show

Conversations about modern agriculture were held during the Home & Garden Show in Wichita Falls.

Baylor County farmers and ranchers, along with 4-H and FFA students, shared more about farming and ranching with attendees who visited Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) Doorways to Agriculture exhibit.

A walk-through trailer full of displays and games that encourage visitors of all ages to learn about where their food, fiber and more comes from is part of the exhibit.

"I think it's important that we continue to engage with consumers," said Josh Kouns, Baylor County Farm Bureau board member and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agent. "To get the young kids involved to help communicate the stories and information of Texas agriculture to consumers is even better, I think."

The exhibit shows how modern agriculture is outfitted with technology to be more efficient and productive. It highlights stories of farmers and ranchers and helps consumers



Baylor County FFA and 4-H members helped local farmers and ranchers share more about modern agriculture at the Wichita Falls Home & Garden Show.

connect with the families behind the products they use every day.

Doorways to Agriculture also offers tactile learning experiences to make it interesting to all ages and learning styles.

There were over 7,000 attendees at the Home & Garden Show, many of whom made a trip through the Doorways to Agriculture exhibit.

"We hear about the disconnect between agriculture and consumers, but this exhibit and this event helped

initiate conversations that can lead to a better understanding of what farmers and ranchers do and where our food and fiber come from," Kouns said.

The interactive exhibit is part of TFB's efforts to bring information about modern agriculture to adults and children in a fun and exciting way.

For more information on TFB's Doorways to Agriculture exhibit, visit texasfarmbureau.org/youth/ag-in-the-community.

U.S. Congress passes bill to overhaul USPS

Congress passed legislation last month that would reform the funding and operation of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

The Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 passed the U.S. Senate with a 79-19 vote in March. The U.S. House passed the bill with a 342-92 vote in February.

The bill will offer a buffer to USPS' mounting losses and will mandate that mail delivery service is carried out six days a week in the U.S., except in the case of federal holidays, natural disasters and a few other situations.

It also includes a requirement for USPS to create an online "dashboard" to update customers with delivery time data. It would be searchable by zip code to show how long it takes to deliver letters and packages.

Other provisions in the \$106 billion package include allowing state, local and tribal governments to partner with USPS to deliver non-postal goods on behalf of those governments.

The bill also includes provisions for improving service in rural America. To help ensure rural newspaper sustainability, the bill will increase the number of copies a subscription publication can send to non-subscribers at a reduced rate to 50% from 10%.

Postage sales and other services were supposed to sustain USPS, but it has suffered 14 years of losses, which are attributed to a decline in mail volume and growing costs for workers' compensation and benefits.

The bill outlines that future postal worker retirees will be required to enroll in Medicare.

Lawmakers believe the bill will help reform USPS and improve service and operations.

It now heads to the president for his signature.

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Russian invasion of Ukraine impacting U.S., Texas agriculture

Texas farmers and ranchers are experiencing the impacts of Russia's invasion of Ukraine financially with both increased costs for production inputs and higher commodity prices resulting from the war.

Ukraine is the world's fourth-largest exporter of barley and corn, and it's the fifth-largest exporter of wheat. Ukraine is the world's largest producer and exporter of sunflower seed and its products, responsible for 47% of global exports in the 2020/21 trade year.

Not only will an ongoing war likely lead to fewer planted acres, but it is also likely to change the mix of crops that will be planted and harvested.

The availability and price of fertilizer has been a top concern of farmers around the world for months. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has only complicated already challenging global fertilizer markets.

Western sanctions and Russia's retaliatory export ban have taken Russia, a significant producer and exporter of fertilizer, out of many

countries' markets.

Russia is a major global player in all three nutrients that compose fertilizer: nitrogen, phosphate and potassium.

"I think the biggest thing is this war needs to come to an end, but I think in terms of our U.S. agriculture, we need to be cognizant of what's happening around the world and be as nimble as we can be in reacting to these changes," Dr. Darren Hudson, director of the International Center for Agricultural Competitiveness at Texas Tech University, told the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "Producers are going to have to make a lot of tough decisions this spring about what they can and can't do, what they can afford and not afford to do, and that's going to have implications for the way we go forward over the next six to 12 months."

Rising fuel and energy prices, largely driven by uncertainty due to the Russian invasion, are being experienced by farmers and ranchers



Ukraine is a market mover in the crops and countries in which it trades, so disruptions in the Ukrainian market are having ripple effects across the world and impacting U.S. agriculture.

both directly and in products produced with petroleum.

"The rising prices for fuel, fertilizer and other supplies create an unwelcome counterforce to higher commodity prices," American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall said. "Higher prices for crops are getting a lot of

attention right now and, of course, help farmers balance the books, but when expenses are rising just as quickly or even outpacing revenue, the financial gains evaporate. Right now, there are serious concerns about whether farmers will be able to access the supplies they need to put a crop in the ground."

Supply chain complications, disruptions still difficult to untangle

The supply chain and shipping are major areas of concern right now for both consumers and farmers and ranchers. The global bottlenecks are significantly impacting the economy, said American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Chief Economist Dr. Roger Cryan.

The issues began when COVID-19 shut down dining and entertainment and changed consumer spending habits.

"All our demand shifted to stuff, and that demand for a lot of stuff clogged up ocean shipping, which we're still dealing with," he said.

"That's created problems at the ports, shortages of containers, and our ag exporters have had a hard time moving product back across to Asia. Our farmers have had a hard time getting inputs, and our equipment manufacturers have had a hard time getting inputs. There's all kinds of things that are hard to get."



Buyers and sellers of ag products carried between continents on container vessels should expect little relief from high prices in 2022.

Cryan said, unfortunately, the supply problems are here to stay for a while.

"Again, we've pumped up the economy so much, pumped up demand so much, that it's going to take time for supply to catch up, and that's going to take time and investment," Cryan said. "Congress passed

an infrastructure bill that should help the U.S. check off a lot of those overdue projects that will help the economy grow. The economy cooling off a little bit will be important to really getting things sort of straight again."

These supply chain issues are also impacting inflation, he noted.

"Well, inflation is too much money chasing too little supply. The economy is running hot again. There's a lot of demand," he said. "Given the scale of the oversupply of money right now, the only practical solution for inflation is for the Federal Reserve Bank to rein in their lending."

Farm Bureau urges Biden to increase domestic energy production

The price Americans pay at the pump for fuel climbed to a record high last month.

Over the past 15 months, oil prices have increased by 130% to more than \$120 per barrel.

American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall sent a letter to U.S. President Joe Biden asking him to take the necessary steps to address high energy costs impacting all Americans.

“On behalf of our nearly six million Farm Bureau member-families, I am writing to encourage you and your administration to work with partners in the public and private sectors and Congress to address high energy costs impacting all Americans,” Duvall wrote. “As Russia’s harmful actions in Ukraine continue and further sanctions are imposed against Russia, oil prices will likely

continue to rise, creating even higher consumer costs and threatening U.S. energy and economic security.”

AFBF is asking the administration to remove barriers to domestic energy production, including increasing the production of biofuels, which have reduced America’s dependence on foreign crude oil and created jobs in rural America.

“Expanding the volume of American-made ethanol in the U.S. fuel supply can help alleviate some of these issues, as ethanol is currently priced 70-80 cents per gallon lower than gasoline,” Duvall wrote last month. “By displacing imported petroleum, increased biofuel use and domestic energy production will enhance U.S. security and independence while supporting America’s farmers and rural economies.”

Achieving domestic energy inde-



There’s pain at the pump for farmers, ranchers and all American drivers as U.S. fuel prices soared to record highs last month.

pendence through comprehensive sources remains a priority issue for Farm Bureau. AFBF is committed

to working with the administration and leaders in Congress to address the issue.



2022 Texas Farm Bureau

PHOTO CONTEST

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

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

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

FIRST PLACE
\$250 cash prize

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\$200 cash prize

2 HONORABLE MENTIONS
\$100 cash prize each

Visit texasfarmbureau.org/photo-contest for complete contest rules.

ENTRY DEADLINE: JUNE 1, 2022

South Texas landowner warns about leaking DC voltage issues

When a submerged water well pump went out on his property in April 2020, Webb County Farm Bureau member Buddy Earles chalked it up to routine wear and tear.

After the well company pulled the pump for replacement, they said it looked like a lightning strike. He shrugged it off as just one of those things that happens and thought nothing more of it.

Until the same thing happened again in a matter of weeks. And then again. And then again, over and over.

Nineteen months and 12 pumps later, the mystery has been solved. The culprit? Leaking direct current (DC) voltage from a nearby pipeline.

“The odds of lightning striking 12 times in my semi-arid region with no rain was very, very slim. The odds of lightning striking the same place 12 times are...well, even slimmer than that,” he said. “But when we finally figured it out, you could’ve blown me over with a feather. The source was just totally unexpected. I’d have never thought of any DC leakage whatsoever.”

Those 19 months were an exercise in frustration and expense as Earles and a series of electricians and ex-

perts attempted to trace the cause.

After the second pump failed, Earles called his electric cooperative to check for any power surges from their lines. Finding none, he turned to replacing different sections of the electric system. But when a new meter, breaker box, timer, controller and about 500 feet of power cable failed to fix the problem, he and the electric company were at their wits’ end.

Without the careful investigation of a master electrician, the issue may never have been discovered.

“He found an article written by the manufacturer of the water pump that mentioned DC leakage coming from pipelines, cell towers and power lines. The companies run DC through the casing around the lines to keep the equipment from corroding,” Earles said. “And according to this article, all you need is 400 millivolts or higher of voltage leaking to start doing damage to the well pump.”

The DC voltage reading at the wellhead was 1.5 volts, the voltage of an AA battery.

The pipeline has been on the property since the couple bought

the place in 2008, and his research shows it’s been there since at least 1953.

So, the idea the pipeline could somehow be causing the electric issues would normally seem far-fetched. Except he remembered the month before the shorts began, in about March 2020, the pipeline company had uncovered some of the pipe to resurface it.

He contacted the pipeline company, who agreed to come investigate. About a mile-and-a-half away, one of the rectifiers had shorted out, spreading electricity to the ground and into the well pump motor.

The extra voltage reaching the well’s electric system caused each new motor to burn out. Earles noted when the pumps were pulled, they looked like they’d been in service for years.

At a minimum of \$1,000 in costs per replacement, it was an expensive puzzle to solve. Thankfully, once the root of the problem was uncovered, the pipeline company has offered to pay for the damages.

“Even though the well company was replacing the pumps under warranty, there was still labor each time

they came out. And of course, there was the cost of replacing all the system components when we thought it might not be grounded properly or something else was malfunctioning,” he said. “That doesn’t include all the stress of not knowing whether that pump was working and if I’d have water for my cattle, my time going out there to check the pump and just the worry and thought I put into this for that time.”

By sharing his story, Earles hopes to raise awareness among other landowners of the potential for electricity issues when easements are nearby.

“A cell phone tower, electric line, transmission pipeline or even an electric fence could be two or three miles away and still affect you if there’s any DC leakage. I hope getting this out there may help save somebody else the headaches, the concern and the stress of worrying why their pump went out all of a sudden,” he said. “It can be very expensive trying to figure things out, and it was just a simple fix. I just wanted to give other farmers and ranchers a warning in case it happens to them.”

Report shows hunting-related accidents in Texas at all-time low

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) reports hunting-related accidents in Texas are at an all-time low since hunter education became mandatory in 1988.

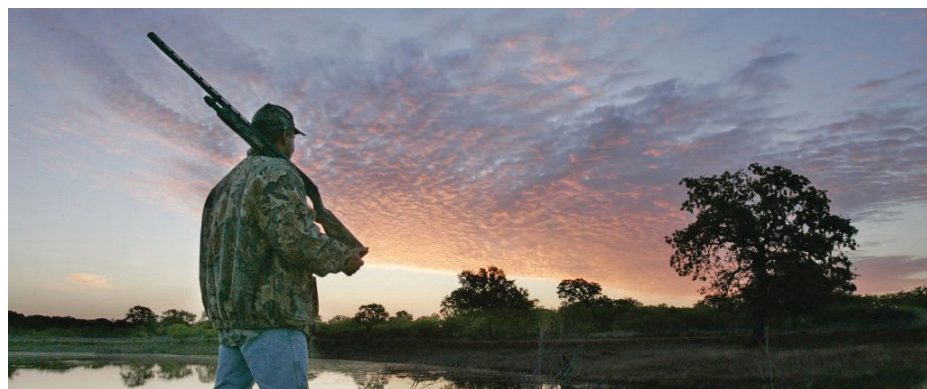
TPWD’s 2021 Texas Hunting Accident Report said of more than 49,000 hunter education certifications in 2021, Texas experienced only one fatality and 11 accidents statewide.

“It’s just interesting to watch the trends,” Steve Hall, the Hunter Education coordinator for TPWD, told the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. “It was surprising that we didn’t have as many incidences, because during the COVID era, there were actually a few more folks out hunting and spending more time out hunting. We call those hunter days.

That was a nice surprise for us that we had a little bit lower incident rate.”

Hall said three quarters of the incidents in 2021 were what is called “swinging on game outside of a safe zone of fire.”

“It’s a classic dove and quail and pheasant-type of a hunting incident, where somebody swings their gun at a fast-flying bird, and they swing it outside of a safe zone of fire, and they strike pellets into their partners or companions that are nearby. That was a little higher this year,” Hall said. “And two of them were a new phenomenon, and those were hog hunting incidents at night. Those were also swinging on game outside of a safe zone of fire, but they were actually shooting at running hogs with



The 2021 Texas Hunting Accident Report showed hunting-related accidents are at a record low. Photo courtesy Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

their night vision scopes, and, essentially, they struck a bullet into their partner who was standing nearby.”

Hunter education is required for every hunter in Texas, including out-of-state hunters, born on or after Sept. 2, 1971. The minimum age for

certification is nine years of age, and certification is good for life.

Learn more about hunter education, how to sign up for a course and find resources for students on the TPWD website at tpwd.texas.gov/education/hunter-education.

Omnibus includes plans for cattle contract library pilot program

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Congress last month passed and President Joe Biden signed the Fiscal Year 2022 Omnibus Appropriations package, which included funding for several agricultural programs.

Among those were an extension of the Livestock Mandatory Reporting program and continued Electronic Logging Device exemption for livestock haulers. Also included in the package is a cattle contract library pilot program.

“This package will fund the government agencies through the end of the fiscal year, and it includes funding for some important agricultural programs,” TFB National Legislative Director Laramie Adams said.

Of the \$1.5 trillion bill, \$1 million is earmarked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to establish a cattle contract library as a pilot project.

The new program will create a library or catalog of cattle purchasing contracts and will be similar to the swine contract library currently administered by AMS.

Last December, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation authorizing a cattle contract library.

Proponents of the USDA contract library say this would give farmers and ranchers additional data they can use to make better-informed marketing and business decisions.

TFB led efforts to include funding for key agricultural programs that will help Texas farmers and ranchers.

The bill provides \$5 million for feral hog control and report language for a cost-share program for construction and repair of perimeter fencing through USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The report language encourages NRCS, in conjunction with state soil and water conservation agencies, to develop a strategy to exclude feral

hogs from agricultural and urban areas at risk of damage.

The legislation also provides an increase of \$2 million and encourages the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to use available funds for a cost-share program for the construction and repair of livestock or game fencing on private lands.

The report includes language to contain the cattle fever tick quarantine area and the need to reduce the spread of fever ticks with the use of a cost-share fencing program through APHIS.

“The damage caused by feral hogs and the impact of cattle fever ticks on the Texas cattle industry are major areas of concern for Texas farmers and ranchers,” Adams said. “Including funding for programs to help control and eradicate them is a step in the right direction to reduce damages and increase profitability for farmers and ranchers.”

Also included in the bill is \$550

million in additional funding to USDA for rural broadband and \$3.5 billion for agricultural research.

The legislation includes \$783 million for climate-related initiatives and \$834 million for increased purchasing of fruits and vegetables in the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program.

Language aimed at addressing concerns about the increased ownership of American agricultural land by foreign investors also accompanies the omnibus package.

USDA is directed to produce a report “regarding data on foreign-owned agricultural land trends including land owned, or partially owned, by the governments of China, Russia, Iran or North Korea over the past decade and projects for the next decade based off of previous trends, and the potential impacts on the American agricultural sector, food security and rural economies.”

USDA would have 180 days for the study.

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USDA announces \$250 million in fertilizer grants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced it will support additional fertilizer production for American farmers to address rising costs, including the impact of Putin's price hike on farmers, and spur competition. USDA will make available \$250 million through a new grant program this summer to support independent, innovative and sustainable American fertilizer production to supply American farmers.

To address growing competition concerns in the agricultural supply chain, USDA will launch a public inquiry seeking information regarding seeds and agricultural inputs, fertilizer and retail markets.

Fertilizer prices have more than doubled since last year due to many factors, including Putin's price hike, a limited supply of the relevant minerals and high energy costs, high global demand and agricultural commodity prices, reliance on fertilizer imports and lack of competition

in the fertilizer industry.

The United States is a major importer and dependent on foreign fertilizer and is the second or third top importer for each of the three major components of fertilizer. The top producers of the major components of fertilizer include China, Russia, Canada and Morocco, with Belarus also providing a significant share of potash.

USDA will use funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) set aside in September for market disruptions to develop a grant program that provides "gap" financing to bring new, independent domestic production capacity online—similar to the recently announced meat and poultry grants that are designed to promote competition and resilience in that sector.

The new program will support fertilizer production that is independent, made in America, innovative, sustainable and farmer-focused.

Independent is considered out-

side dominant fertilizer suppliers, increasing competition in a concentrated market.

Made in America means the fertilizer is produced in the U.S. by domestic companies, creating good-paying jobs at home and reducing the reliance on potentially unstable or inconsistent foreign supplies.

Innovative includes improvement upon fertilizer production methods to jump start the next generation of fertilizers.

To be considered sustainable, it must reduce the greenhouse gas impact of transportation, production and use through renewable energy sources, feedstocks, formulations and incentivize greater precision in fertilizer use.

Like other CCC investments, a driving factor will be farmer-focused, providing support and opportunities for U.S. agricultural commodity producers.

Details on the application process will be announced in the summer,

and the first awards are expected to be distributed before the end of 2022.

USDA will seek information specifically on fertilizer; seed and agricultural inputs, in particular as they relate to the intellectual property system; and retail, including access to retail through wholesale and distribution markets.

The comment period will be open for 60 days.

USDA will use the comments received to develop reports mandated under the Competition E.O. and to develop policies relating to fair and competitive markets, supply chain resiliency, pandemic response, local and regional food systems and other areas. Subsequent actions may range from new grant and loan programs to additional rules and regulations under the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 and other relevant laws to increase fairness and competition in American agricultural markets.

More information about this request for information is available at ams.usda.gov.

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Bill introduced in Congress to help provide relief on fertilizer tariffs

A bill that would create emergency waivers for duties levied on fertilizers by the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) was introduced in Congress last month.

“Farmers and ranchers in Texas and across the U.S. are already suffering from high fertilizer costs,” TFB National Legislative Director Laramie Adams said. “Tariffs on fertilizer would just drive up the prices for these products even more.”

The Emergency Relief from Duties Act was introduced by two Kansas lawmakers—U.S. Sen. Roger Marshall and U.S. Rep. Tracey Mann.

The bill comes as the ITC levied tariffs against imports of phosphate fertilizer at the request of a U.S. fertilizer company. A petition for additional tariffs on urea ammonium nitrate is also being considered by ITC.

This bill would introduce a way to establish a waiver of countervailing duties or anti-dumping duties for a year if there is an emergency, such as natural disasters, war, epidemics,

labor disputes or major accidents.

Farmers across the nation are suffering from fertilizer shortages and skyrocketing costs as a direct result of these tariffs, Adams noted.

“Fertilizers and other inputs farmers need for growing crops are hard to secure and pay for due to the threats of tariffs. The cost of implementing those tariffs would cause farm input costs to rise even more,” Adams said. “The Emergency Relief from Duties Act would help farmers and ranchers struggling with the ever-increasing costs of fertilizers.”

Projections by the University of Illinois show fertilizer costs will lower net farm income in that state by 34%.

“These tariffs will create a financial hardship for farmers and ranchers,” Adams said.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack also warned suppliers not to take advantage of the current situation between Russia and Ukraine by rising prices.

“Don’t use this situation as an

excuse for doing something which isn’t justified by supply and demand. That’s my biggest and deepest concern, and we’re obviously keeping an eye on that,” he said.

The U.S. Department of Agricul-

ture also recently announced plans for a \$250 million investment to support innovative American-made fertilizer to give U.S. farmers more choices in the marketplace. *See details on page 10.*

Global food prices climb to record high

Global food prices reached a record high in February.

Increases in vegetable oil and dairy, as well as higher costs for grains, contributed to the all-time high prices, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

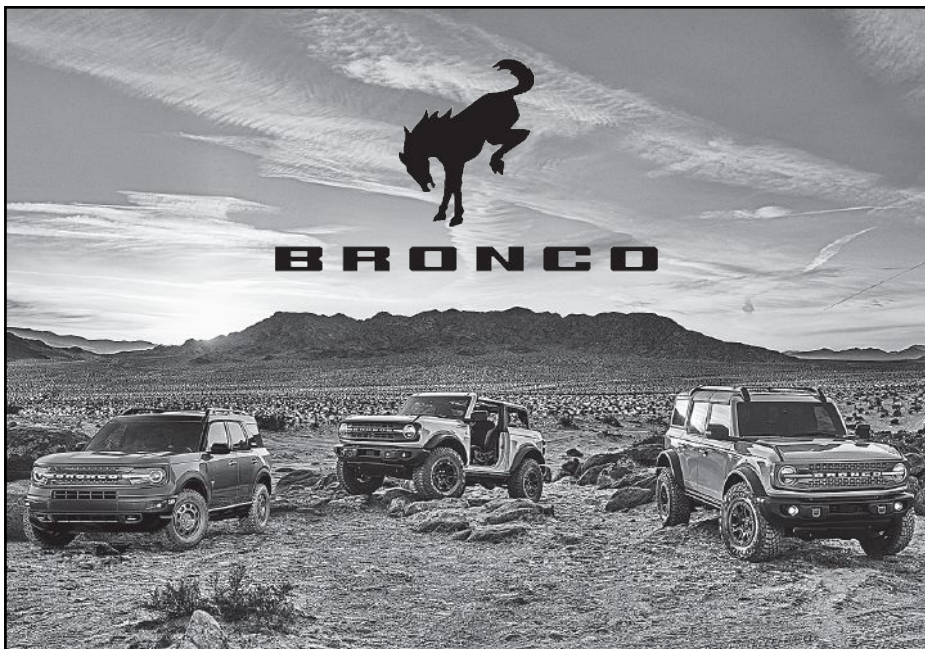
FAO’s Food Price Index averaged 140.7 points in February. That breaks the previous record set in February 2011.

February’s index was up 3.9% from January and 24.1% over the index one year ago.

The Food Price Index tracks the international prices of items such as vegetable oils, dairy products, grains and more.

“Concerns over crop conditions and adequate export availabilities explain only a part of the current global food price increases. A much bigger push for food price inflation comes from outside food production, particularly the energy, fertilizer and feed sectors,” FAO economist Upali Galketi Aratchilage said. “All these factors tend to squeeze profit margins of food producers, discouraging them from investing and expanding production.”

The FAO Food Price Index measures average prices over the month, so the February reading only partly incorporates market effects stemming from the conflict in Ukraine.



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TFB Student Success Series launches for 2022

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) is once again launching the Student Success Series to help students put together the pieces of the leadership puzzle.

“Our students are our future, and we can help them put together the pieces that make up a successful leader through our Student Success Series,” TFB Youth Outreach Coordinator McKenna Bush said. “Through the programs, students can develop a better understanding of advocacy, learn more about Farm Bureau and grow personal and professional skills that they can use in the classroom and in their future careers.”

The Student Success Series is open to students in eighth grade through twelfth grade and features both in-person and virtual programs.

The series does have changes for 2022, Bush noted.



Texas Farm Bureau's **STUDENT SUCCESS SERIES**

Jumpstart

Jumpstart is a free, virtual program open to students in the graduating class of 2027.

Students will become familiar with TFB, learn more information about Texas agriculture and grow leadership skills.

Registration will be available June 1 – Sept. 15.

Online modules must be completed by Oct. 31.

Activate

Activate is a free, virtual program for students in the graduating class of 2026.

Students will be challenged to create a plan for leaving a legacy, learn more about TFB, explore career opportunities and trends and be engaged in personal and professional etiquette.

Registration will be available June 1 – Sept. 15.

Online modules must be completed by Oct. 31.

Engage

Engage is an in-person program for students in the graduating class of 2025 and 2024.

Through the program, students will learn more about TFB, become familiar with entrepreneurship by engaging community leaders in discussion, gain insight into the free enterprise system and learn how to navigate social media and digital environments.

Registration is open through May 1. This in-person event will take place in each of the 13 TFB districts in May and June. Specific information on dates and locations will be made available on the Student Success Series webpage at texasfarmbureau.org/student-success-series.

There is a \$10 registration fee for each district event.

Thrive

Thrive is an in-person event for the graduating class of 2023.

Through this event, students will dive into public speaking, the free enterprise system and the Constitution.

They will hear from a motivational speaker on leadership topics and learn more about using reputable sources for advocacy efforts on social media.

Thrive will be held Aug. 5-7 in Waco at TFB's Conference and Training Center. Registration is first-come, first-served and will be capped at 150 students.

There is an \$80 registration fee.

Program details

For more information and to register for the individual programs, visit texasfarmbureau.org/student-success-series.

Contact Bush at mbush@txfb.org or call 254-399-5037 with questions.

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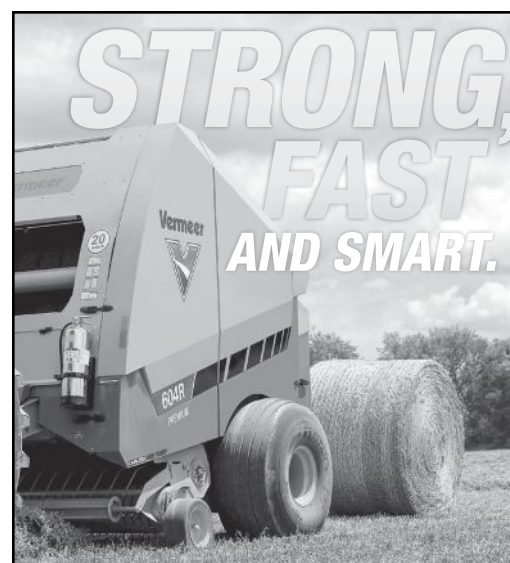
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TFB AGFUND candidates fare well in 2022 primary election

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Candidates endorsed by Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) AGFUND fared well in the primary election.

“Despite redistricting and candidates facing tough new districts, AGFUND candidates still proved successful in the primary election,” Russell Boening, president of TFB and AGFUND, said. “It’s important for rural Texas to have elected officials who bring strong leadership skills and an understanding of agriculture to the legislative arena.”

Overall, on Primary Election Day, AGFUND-endorsed candidates showed 61 wins, 14 runoffs and two losses.

In statewide races, AGFUND-

backed candidates—including Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Comptroller Glenn Hegar—won their races outright. And AGFUND-backed candidates in three statewide races—Ken Paxton, Attorney General, Dawn Buckingham, Land Commissioner and Wayne Christian, Railroad Commissioner—will face runoffs.

“We need leaders who work to improve legislation for farmers, ranchers and landowners in our state, especially as Texas grows increasingly urban,” Boening said. “Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Abbott and Comptroller Glenn Hegar have been friends to agriculture and understand the needs and issues facing rural Texas.”

Out of six Texas Senate races, five

AGFUND-endorsed candidates won their races, and one will face a runoff.

In the Texas House, TFB AGFUND candidates had 36 wins, two losses and four will face runoffs.

AGFUND-endorsed candidates had 17 wins and one will face a runoff in the Congressional races.

Some of TFB’s strongest leaders faced opposition from the newly-formed Defend Texas Liberty PAC, which spent over \$4 million in the Republican Primary—a significant amount of that against TFB’s agricultural leaders. Fortunately, AGFUND was able to provide significant finan-

cial support to help fight off these attacks. AGFUND will continue to serve agriculture by supporting two of those targeted leaders during their runoff campaigns.

“We believe the AGFUND-supported candidates share strong conservative values, a passion for agriculture and a vision for a strong Texas,” Boening said.

TFB is the state’s largest organization of farm, ranch and rural families. AGFUND is the political action committee of TFB and is funded by voluntary donations from TFB members.



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The Kneupper family has been raising Angora goats for generations. Melody (second from left) and Cody (right) are carrying on the tradition.

Shear Success: Angora goats are a staple for Texas ranch family

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Taking a drive through the Hill Country and West Central Texas offers more than beautiful landscapes. It shows a glimpse into the area's unique agricultural commodity—mohair.

This luxurious, strong fiber comes from Angora goats and makes up a significant portion of the agricultural economy in the Edwards Plateau and the Hill Country. The vast majority of the nation's herd of Angora goats is found in these regions of Texas, cared for by farmers and ranchers.

And two of those Texas producers are Kendall County Farm Bureau members Cody and Melody Kneupper.

Cody's family has been raising Angora goats for generations.

Along with the Angoras, Cody and Melody also raise cattle, fine wool

sheep, Boer goats and Spanish goats.

"Angora goats are a special breed of goats," Melody said. "Their hair has a really unique quality that makes it a really strong fiber."

The hair grows about an inch each month, so it's necessary to shear them twice a year—usually in early spring and early fall.

One of the challenges of raising Angoras is finding a crew to shear the goats. The physical labor and the skills needed are reasons why crews are a dying breed.

"Typically, farmers and ranchers don't shear their own goats. They hire shearing crews to come in. There's a few left in this area in Texas, the Edwards Plateau, and a little further out in West Texas, there are a few shearing crews," she said. "There's usually five or six guys at a time that come out, and they set up in a barn or in a covered area on a clean floor."

The shearing process requires

every member of the crew to work quickly, yet carefully.

The crew sets up their equipment, including shearers that, in highly-skilled hands, can shave a mature goat in about two minutes.

One by one, goats with a full coat of mohair are moved to the shearing station.

The pace is fast.

Members of the crew begin shearing. Another person picks up the mohair and puts the product into a sack, aiming to fill the bag with as many pounds as possible.

Then, the sheared goats are turned down the alley to another pen.

"Immediately after they shear the goats, they would either grade the wool right away or send it to a warehouse and grade it there," Melody said. "Then, at the warehouse, it sits and waits until a buyer buys it—maybe a clothing maker, carpet maker or blanket maker. They will then clean

and comb the mohair."

Ranchers, like the Kneppers in Kendalia, help provide about 90% of the mohair grown in the United States.

From clothes to carpets, the silky-smooth fleece is a versatile, all-season fiber, appropriate for the ever-changing weather in Texas. It's even flame-resistant and used as a decorating fabric.

And for Cody and Melody, it's part of their livelihood.

"Shearing the goats is not much different than a cotton farmer harvesting cotton or a grain farmer harvesting grain," Melody said. "It's our source of income."

It benefits the goats, too.

"Shearing doesn't hurt the goats. It's actually a relief to them, especially in August or September when it's really hot," Melody said. "It's not painful. These animals were made to grow hair for us to be able to use,

and they want it shorn off.”

But the Kneuppers closely watch the goats after they are shorn, because that is when they are most susceptible to weather conditions.

“We have to provide them cover or shelter for at least a few weeks in case it rains or gets really cold until they get about a half inch of hair back on them,” Cody said.

But mohair isn’t the only way goats help sustain a productive ranch.

They also help control weeds and brush throughout pastures, which is critical to the long-term health of the land.

“One of the biggest benefits to raising goats on your property is for brush control,” Cody said. “Without us raising goats, we would have to manage the land in a totally different aspect that would be very costly. But these goats can do it for us, and

then we can benefit from that, too.”

They also handle the Texas heat well, which helps them thrive in the dry climate. Even during times of drought, the goats continue to produce a quality product.

But raising sheep and goats comes with additional challenges, namely a constant threat from predators.

Texas is home to numerous species that prey on livestock. Coyotes, bobcats, foxes, cougars and even feral hogs all take their toll on sheep and goats.

Luckily, area farmers and ranchers, in cooperation with state and federal wildlife experts, have been proactively managing the predator population.

“There’s established predator control in this area. They’ve been controlling the coyotes and foxes for many years,” Melody said. “So,

we don’t have as many predators as they do in other places in the state, and the landscape, the weather and vegetation that we have here are all just really great for Angora goats.”

The challenges of raising them are no match for the satisfaction the couple has when each shearing is complete.

“It’s very rewarding being a part of production agriculture and doing our part to help feed and clothe the world,” Cody said.

Their roots are firmly planted in the Hill Country soil, continuing the

tradition of raising livestock and a family on the land.

“We love this lifestyle, and Cody and I are so thankful that we get to raise our kids here on the ranch around animals, teaching them compassion and animal husbandry,” Melody said. “We do not take this opportunity for granted and realize how fortunate we are to be able to raise our children in this environment. It’s days like this working together in the barn or in the pasture and making memories with our family that are just tough to beat.”



Cody and Melody Kneupper raise Angora goats, Boer goats, Spanish goats, fine wool sheep and cattle in the Hill Country with their two daughters. They are expecting a boy later this year.



Angora goats prepare for their first shearing of the year. The goats are sheared in early spring and early fall. They produce mohair, which is a fiber used in luxurious textiles.



Angoras help with pasture management by controlling weeds and brush, which is critical to the long-term health of the land.



A shearing crew removes the mohair from the goats and packs it into storage sacks. It will then be taken to a warehouse to be inspected and graded before textile and manufacturing buyers purchase it.

Black vulture depredation permit program available for Texas

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

It's what ranchers don't want to see—black vultures circling a pasture, especially when livestock are being born. But it's becoming a more common occurrence as black vultures expand their range northward due to warmer weather and man-made roosting and nesting structures.

"There are two types of vultures in Texas—the turkey vulture and the black vulture," Mike Bodenchuk, director of Texas Wildlife Services (TWS), said. "Turkey vultures find their food by their sense of smell, but black vultures find their food through eyesight."

Black vultures can key in on areas where livestock are having their young.

While they provide an essential ecological service by cleaning up carcasses, they also can kill young livestock.

The problem has only worsened over the years. The growth in numbers and range has led to increased black vulture predation on newborn livestock.

"Twenty, thirty years ago, black vultures were largely found in Texas south of I-10, but they've expanded their range considerably up into the South Panhandle and other northern parts of Texas," Bodenchuk said.

Black vultures have a feeding

range of up to 30 miles per day, meaning they will travel far from their nesting area to find a carcass or small animal.

"So, we have a lot more birds. We have them over a lot larger part of the state, and they're very aggressive in terms of competing with each other for food," Bodenchuk said. "There's much more livestock loss today than there was 20 or 30 years ago."

Black vultures, however, are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and livestock producers are limited in how they can keep the birds from attacking their livestock.

To help Texas ranchers who are losing livestock to black vultures, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service granted a permit to the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Association (TWDMA) for black vulture management for the lethal removal of up to 750 vultures. TWDMA is a member of the cooperative TWS.

Ranchers can apply for sub-permits through TWS, which would allow them to remove up to five black vultures each during the year.

The depredation sub-permits allow for the lethal removal of a limited number of vultures to reinforce the non-injurious harassment.

"Landowners who want to use non-injurious methods do not need to participate in this program," Bo-



Black vulture populations have increased over the last decade, leading to a rise in livestock predation.

denchuk said. "The program is only for those who might need to remove a small number of vultures to reinforce the non-lethal hazing."

Those methods include auditory and visual dispersal methods like lasers and propane cannons.

"Landowners and ranchers can go out there and chase birds away from their livestock. They can bring their livestock closer to the house, where they can keep an eye on them giving birth," Bodenchuk said. "Black vultures can be deterred from small pastures with things like effigies, artificial vultures or dead vultures. So that will haze them out of an area for a while. You can use noisemakers, dogs—whatever doesn't injure the bird."

He noted TWS also recommends ranchers hang the dead vultures in a nearby tree because vultures don't like to come near a dead vulture.

"Using a vulture that's shot as an effigy or using an artificial effigy—a body that looks like a vulture with wings and a head, hung upside down in trees around the pasture—can help keep vultures out of those areas," Bodenchuk said. "We recommend one effigy to about five acres. So, you couldn't do this in a large pasture, but if you have a confined area where livestock are giving birth, the effigies are useful as a way of hazing vultures out of the area."

For more information on black vulture depredation management, call TWS at one of the district offices.



Turkey vultures are larger with a distinct red head like the bird on the far left. They ride thermal lifts in the sky in search of the smell of fresh carcasses. Black vultures have a solid, bare black head and a smaller, compact body with broad wings. They find their food by eyesight and have become more aggressive and attack newborn livestock.

TWS DISTRICT OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION

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College Station: 979-599-5070

Kerrville: 830-896-6535

Corpus Christi: 361-299-1176

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TFB members save on Beef Cattle Short Course registration

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Registration opens this month for the 68th annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course in College Station, and once again, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) members will receive a discount on registration.

“This is a one-of-a-kind educational event for ranchers—regardless of ranch size and experience,” Tracy Tomascik, TFB associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said.

TFB members first received the discounted registration price in 2021.

“This discount proved beneficial to our members last year, so we wanted to offer it again,” Tomascik said. “We hope Farm Bureau members take advantage of the savings, educational material and networking opportunities available through this event.”

The short course, which is set for Aug. 1-3, is the largest beef cattle educational event in the U.S.

The three-day event will include more than 20 sessions covering basic practices, new technologies and hot topics. Live demonstrations and a trade show exhibit, as well as the traditional prime rib dinner, will also be part of the short course.

More than 2,000 ranchers, beef industry representatives and exhibitors are expected to attend this year’s event, but a virtual option will also be available.

TFB member discount

The fee is \$240 for those attending in person and \$160 online. The prices go up after July 27.

TFB members will receive \$20 off the in-person and virtual registrations.

The discount is applied at registration when you use the code TXFB.

Registration details

The short course is hosted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Department of Animal Science at Texas A&M University.



Texas Farm Bureau members receive \$20 off registration for the annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course set for Aug. 1-3 in College Station.

For more details on the Beef Cattle Short Course and to register, visit beefcattleshortcourse.com or call 979-845-6931.

Contact Tomascik at ttomascik@txfb.org or 254-751-2266 with ques-

tions regarding the TFB member discount.

For a full list of benefits and services available to TFB members, visit texasfarmbureau.org/member-benefits.

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Texas Farm Bureau establishes West Texas Wildfire Relief Fund

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Wildfires swept across Central and West Texas last month, burning over 86,000 acres.

As of press time, some wildfires were still not fully contained.

The damage from the burning fires sparked Gov. Greg Abbott to issue a disaster declaration for 11 counties.

Those counties include Brooks, Brown, Coleman, Comanche, Eastland, Grayson, Mason, Potter, Randall, Reynolds and Williamson.

In an effort to help farmers and ranchers impacted, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) established the West Texas Wildfire Relief Fund.

“Although we don’t know the full extent of the damage caused by the fires, we do know the losses will be staggering,” TFB President Russell Boening said. “Farm Bureau members have always stepped up to help their neighbors in need, and this wildfire relief fund will collect tax-deductible donations to meet the needs in affected areas.”

The program will collect and distribute monetary contributions only.

TFB will match 50% of any donation to the West Texas Wildfire Relief Fund made by a county Farm Bureau up to \$2,000.

Other efforts are ongoing by various organizations to collect dona-

tions of hay, feed and fencing supplies for those impacted by the fires.

Burning situation

Fueled by dry, windy conditions, the fires swept across Texas in March.

The Eastland Complex wildfires consisted of seven fires and spanned more than 54,000 acres.

It was considered a Southern Plains Wildfire Outbreak (SPWO) and began on March 17. This event supported rapid growth and extreme fire behavior in Eastland County.

SPWO events, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service, have caused some of the most destructive wildfires in Texas history. While SPWO fires account for 3% of reported wildfires, Texas A&M Forest Service officials noted they account for 49% of the acres burned.

SPWO events are extremely dangerous fire weather phenomenon characterized by an environment of dry vegetation, dry west-southwest winds across an area with low relative humidity, above average surface temperatures, an unstable atmosphere and clear, sunny skies.

Another SPWO fire was the Perryton fire located in the Texas Panhandle in 2017 that burned 318,156 acres.

Fires also burned in West Texas, devouring acres of pastureland and farmland, as well as livestock, homes,

barns and equipment.

Farmers and ranchers sprang into action—moving cattle, packing up families and building fire breaks. They worked alongside state agencies to try to contain the fires.

“During this tragedy, we saw neighbors helping neighbors, lending trailers to haul livestock and housing livestock, horses and pets,” Boening said. “Texas is doing what Texas does best—helping one another, and Farm Bureau is doing its part, too.”

Some rain has since fallen, helping the charred countryside begin to heal. But it will take time, rain and more help from Mother Nature, but Texas farmers and ranchers will rise from the ashes.

How to donate

Credit card donations may be made via PayPal on the TFB website at texasfarmbureau.org/wildfire-relief-fund.

Checks may be made out to the Texas Farm Bureau Agriculture Re-

Donations to the
WEST TEXAS WILDFIRE RELIEF FUND
can be made online at
texasfarmbureau.org/wildfire-relief-fund

Eligible farmers and ranchers can apply for assistance through the relief fund through May 31. Details at texasfarmbureau.org/wildfire-relief-fund.

search and Education Foundation and mailed to: West Texas Wildfire Relief Fund, P.O. Box 2689, Waco, Texas 76702-2689. Include “Attention: Chris Daughtery” on donation envelopes.

The charitable donations are tax-deductible.

How to apply

Farmers and ranchers with unreimbursed agricultural losses are encouraged to apply. The application form is available on the West Texas Wildfire Relief Fund webpage.

Applications are due May 31.

Wildfire updates

For more information on the relief fund and the latest update on supplies needed, visit the West Texas Wildfire Relief Fund webpage at texasfarmbureau.org/wildfire-relief-fund.

To view the Texas A&M Forest Service statewide active fire response map, navigate to public.tfswildfires.com.



Over 86,000 acres burned, leaving behind charred land, dead or injured livestock and burned equipment and barns. Photo courtesy Sam Snyder.



A burned livestock trailer sits in Carbon. The wildfires were fueled by dry, windy conditions in Central and West Texas. Photo courtesy Sam Snyder.

Taking it one acre at a time: Goodwins plant seeds, hope

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Planting seeds deeper in the soil with some extra faith and hope is where you could find Chris and Zac Goodwin in mid-March.

The father-son duo was planting corn around Venus and Alvarado in Johnson County.

Dry weather conditions throughout the fall and winter led to a lack of soil moisture, forcing the farmers to plant the seeds deeper.

“The challenge is how dry we are, but we hope we get some good rains,” Chris said.

It’s an extreme contrast to the weather last year.

Chris said a tremendous amount of rainfall—about 30 inches in May—ruined last year’s corn crop.

But the Goodwins have been very conservative in their approach for this year.

“We’re just trying to conserve what we have, trying to minimize our passes across the field,” Chris said. “We’re approaching this with caution because inputs are up tremendously. Some of the inputs are approaching 200-300% in price increase from last year, plus the fuel cost.”

They’re trying to minimize passes through the field to cut back on fuel and to not disturb the soil.

Uncertainty is the theme of this growing season. They don’t know when the next price increase will hit.

“Financially, this is one of the toughest years we’ve seen because there are too many uncertainties in the market,” Chris said. “We don’t know where this is going. The supply chain is already stressed from COVID.”

But it’s not just the cost that’s a challenge right now. Equipment and parts are difficult to find, too.

The Goodwins ordered parts for their planter last December, and they didn’t come in until late February.

“There’s a lack of parts, and we’re having to plan out farther ahead for purchases to make sure we have enough to cover every aspect of what we’re doing. We try to keep good stock of parts in our barn and plan ahead, but you just never know,” Zac said. “There’s such a supply shortage and getting stuff moved across the country and the world is such a challenge right now.”

Zac came back to the family farm



Zac (left) and Chris Goodwin farm wheat and corn, raise cattle and have a hay operation in Johnson County.

after college. It’s where he enjoys being, despite the struggles that often come with the farming lifestyle.

“I took some internships, traveled the nation, saw differently lifestyles and had different experiences. But at the end of the day, all I wanted to do was come back home,” Zac said. “If I wasn’t farming, I don’t know what I’d do, because this is where my heart lies.”

Together, the Goodwins grow wheat and corn, raise cattle and have a hay operation.

The majority of the corn grown by the Goodwins is sold to feed mills in the area. It is either crushed or flaked for beef and dairy cattle feed.

And the Goodwins then buy their cattle feed from those mills.

“It’s full circle,” Zac said. “We pride ourselves on that.”

And Chris is proud to be farming with his son.

“For me, that’s the ultimate reward. I grew up with my granddad, with my dad,” he said. “But having my son back is the ultimate reward. My wife and I are involved, my son’s involved, and my daughter helps from time to time.”

But the Goodwins are concerned about the profit margin for the family farm. Ongoing drought, production costs and supply chain issues have been a consistent burden.

It’s one that doesn’t look like it will be going away any time soon.

Farming is always a gamble, though, and the variables changing.

But this year, each seed is being planted in uncharted territory. Despite the uncertainty, the Goodwins have faith knowing they are doing all they can.



Farmers are seeing production cost increases for fertilizer, seed, crop protection chemicals and fuel. Those costs could outpace revenue for Texas farmers this growing season.

Production costs outpacing commodity prices, fueling uncertainty

The cost of growing crops could outpace revenue for many farmers in 2022, making it more difficult to break even despite rising commodity prices and increased demand both domestically and globally.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) published a report that shows farm production costs are likely to increase 6% in 2022, which follows a 12% increase in 2021. This continues a trend stretching back several years.

Since 2013, farmers have seen almost all production expenses increase. For example, livestock and poultry expenses have gone up 46%, and marketing, storage and transportation costs have increased 59%.

Farmers are seeing a number of production cost increases, including rising fertilizer, seed and chemical prices, which now make up to 17.5% of on-farm expenditures.

Fuel and energy prices continue to increase, and the situation is made worse by uncertainty due to

the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Increased costs of labor, both on-farm and for agribusinesses serving farms, is also a challenge.

AFBF noted farmers and ranchers are still feeling the impacts of the COVID-19 disruption of labor markets and production.

“The rising prices for fuel, fertilizer and other supplies create an unwelcome counterforce to higher commodity prices,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. “Higher prices for crops are getting a lot of attention right now and, of course, help farmers balance the books, but when expenses are rising just as quickly or even outpacing revenue, the financial gains evaporate.”

AFBF and Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) are working to ensure the administration and Congress understand the severity and potential implications of increased production costs and the limited availability of some supplies.

“Farmers and ranchers have al-

ways had to carefully manage input costs, but the COVID-19 pandemic and now the conflict between Russia and Ukraine have ushered in even more uncertainty and higher costs for inputs,” TFB National Legislative Director Laramie Adams said. “We are in constant communication with elected officials and federal agencies to inform them on how these issues affect farmers, ranchers and rural communities in the Lone Star State.”

The invasion and subsequent sanctions against Russia could further complicate U.S. fertilizer supplies and prices.

Crop protection chemicals and land values have also increased, tightening what could have been above breakeven profit margins.

And ongoing transportation issues are fueling concern and uncertainty, AFBF economists noted.

No part of the transportation sector has been spared supply-chain disruptions, with higher rates and

shipping delays often hitting farmers and ranchers particularly hard.

A continuing shortage of truck drivers has driven freight rates back above their pre-pandemic highs. Rail rates for bulk farm commodities have been, in part, driven up by limited rail terminal capacity.

“Uncertainty fuels volatility, and that’s certainly what we are looking at right now for this crop year,” Adams said. “Then, you add in the drought conditions, wildfires and severe weather that comes with the spring, and farmers are rolling the dice with more odds this growing season.”

The net market return for commodities across the board may exceed that of 2021, but without the pandemic-linked government payments of the last two years, net farm income will likely be down in 2022, according to AFBF.

For more reports and the latest AFBF economic analyses, visit fb.org/market-intel.



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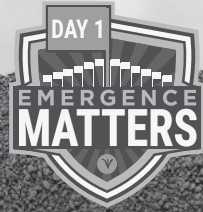
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Study shows deer can contract, spread COVID-19

After SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) was first documented in wild deer populations in 2021, researchers at Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences set out to determine how the disease is transmitted among captive white-tailed deer populations.

Their research points to deer-to-deer transmission as the most likely source of transmission, according to Dr. Sarah Hamer, associate professor of epidemiology and the study's principal investigator.

"At the start of the pandemic, my research team became interested in the potential role of animals in transmission. Since early summer 2020, we've been studying dogs and cats, and I can tell you those types of animal infections are not hard to find," she said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "Determining whether the captive cervid populations could play a role in transmission cycles became of interest to us. Captive cervids are

very important to Texans for economic and recreational reasons, and it sparked our interest."

After studying three independent captive deer breeding facilities in Central and South Texas, the group found more than 90% of the deer at one tested positive for the virus.

That facility's owner and manager was known to have contracted COVID-19, making it an ideal location for the research, said Dr. Walt Cook, Texas A&M clinical associate professor.

"We thought, 'If there's ever going to be deer that get infected, those would be the ones,'" he said. "And 34 out of 36 deer were seropositive for SARS-CoV-2 in this one facility. We don't have direct evidence, but the evidence we do have seems to indicate the virus was transmitted from humans initially and then from deer to deer."

A group of deer at the facility was in close physical contact with infected humans through routine

handling and later tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies. Those deer had only what Cook called "fence-line contact" with other deer not handled by humans, but the second group subsequently also tested positive later, suggesting the disease was transmitted from the deer on the other side of the fence.

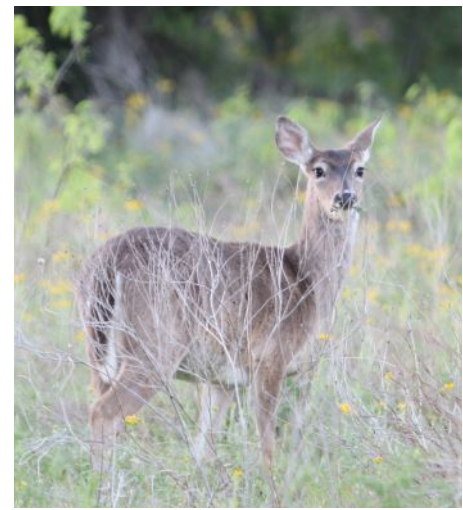
"Not all of the positive deer had direct human contact in the past that could explain their infection, so our story here with these captive cervid facilities in Texas, much like other researchers studying deer across the country, seems to point to deer-to-deer transmission," Hamer said.

Deer infected with COVID-19 show no clinical symptoms or signs of respiratory disease.

Hamer noted they do not yet know if deer can transmit the virus back to humans.

There is much to learn about cross-species transmission of the virus, including whether COVID-19 can be transmitted from one species of animal to another, such as deer to cattle or rodents to medium-sized mammals.

"It's certainly a public health priority to figure out if infected animals can infect people," she said. "I think



our collaborative team at Texas A&M would like to do some longitudinal studies to understand how their level of antibody titers change over time."

There is no evidence the SARS-CoV-2 virus can be transmitted to humans from properly-cooked venison meat, according to Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory Assistant Agency Director Dr. Terry Hensley.

"Venison is a lean, healthy red meat," he said. "The accepted recommendation is that venison be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees for steak and 165 for ground venison. This should destroy any pathogen, so again there is little to no risk of transmission."

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TFB offers educational opportunities for teachers this summer

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas teachers will learn more about agriculture and how to incorporate agricultural concepts in the classroom through educational opportunities from Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) this summer.

The Summer Ag Institute and the Summer Ag Academies give teachers hands-on learning experiences and resources to take home to help grow agricultural literacy in the classroom.

Summer Ag Institute

The Summer Ag Institute is set for June 13-16 in Waco.

“The Summer Ag Institute is a hands-on, immersive experience where teachers truly learn how agriculture is science, math, social studies, technology and so many other subjects they are already teaching in their classrooms,” said Jordan Bartels, TFB associate director of Organization Division, Educational Outreach.

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 opportunities for teachers to get their hands dirty.

Teachers will visit area farms, ranches and other agricultural businesses, as well as hear from experts in agriculture and education.

“Over the four-day institute, teachers will get to take part in many hands-on experiences as we cover numerous topics,” Bartels said. “But there are two key takeaways for teachers—that agriculture can be incorporated into any classroom subject and there are many resources available from Farm Bureau to help do just that.”

Upon completion, teachers bring home activity ideas, lesson plans and a wealth of resources and experiences. 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, but Bartels noted the content does have a focus in science.

The cost is \$375 per person, which includes lodging and most meals, but sponsorships are often available. Teachers will be notified of their sponsorship status after registration is complete.

Registration closes May 18.

Additional information and the

registration link are available at texasfarmbureau.org/aitc.

Summer Ag Academies

Three one-day workshops will be held this summer to help Texas teachers make the connection with agriculture through science and hands-on activities.

TFB’s Summer Ag Academies offer teachers practical experience in agriculture-related concepts, and they can take home free resources to use in their classrooms.

“The Summer Ag Academies are designed to give teachers a hands-on opportunity to learn about agriculture and how it relates to what they are teaching in the classroom,” she said.

These one-day learning opportunities are open to certified, active K-12 Texas teachers and pre-service teachers who are currently enrolled in a college or university education program.

This year’s Summer Ag Academies will be held in Brenham on July 7, Stephenville on July 12 and in Canyon on July 21.

Registration closes two weeks before each event, and there is no cost to attend the academies.

Site visits will also be incorporated into each Summer Ag Academy to help teachers build an understanding of Texas agriculture.

For more than 25 years, TFB has hosted professional development events in the summer to help Texas teachers make the connection with agriculture, providing them innovative techniques to incorporate the subject in their curriculum.

The curriculum provided by TFB is aligned with Texas teaching standards to help teachers better incorporate the material in the classroom.

Teachers also receive continuing education credits in addition to the resource material.

Additional information and registration details are available online at texasfarmbureau.org/aitc.

For more information, contact Bartels at edoutreach@txfb.org or 254-751-2569.

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Entrepreneurs can win \$50,000 in national contest

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), in partnership with Farm Credit, is seeking entrepreneurs to apply online for the 2023 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge. Now in its ninth year, this national business competition showcases U.S. startup companies developing innovative solutions to challenges faced by America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

Farm Bureau is offering \$165,000 in startup funds throughout the course of the competition, which will culminate in the top 10 semi-finalists competing in a live pitch competition in front of Farm Bureau members, investors and industry representatives at the AFBF Convention in January 2023 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

"Innovation is at the heart of everything farmers and ranchers do," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "The Ag Innovation Challenge is an outstanding avenue for identifying and supporting startup businesses

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striving to solve the problems facing rural America. I look forward to seeing the innovative, resourceful and creative solutions that Challenge applicants submit."

Applications remain open through April 29, and the 10 semi-finalist teams will be announced Sept. 13.

Each of the semi-finalist teams will be awarded \$10,000 and a chance to compete to advance to the final round where four teams will receive an additional \$5,000 each.

The final four teams will compete to win:

- Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Winner, for a total of \$50,000
- Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Runner-up, for a total of \$20,000
- People's Choice Team selected by public vote, for an additional \$5,000 (all 10 semi-finalist teams compete for this honor).

Prior to the live pitch competi-

tion, the top 10 semi-finalist teams will participate in pitch training and mentorship from Cornell University and network with representatives from the Agriculture Department's Rural Business Investment Companies.

Recent winners of the Ag Innovation Challenge include Grain Weevil Corporation, a grain bin safety and management robot that improves farmer well-being by controlling risks and costs (2022 Ag Innovation Challenge Winner) and Harvust, a software platform that helps farmers successfully hire, train and communicate with employees (2021 Ag Innovation Challenge Winner).

Other examples of successful Ag Innovation Challenge participants, as well as detailed eligibility guidelines and the competition timeline, can be found at fb.org/challenge.

Entrepreneurs must be members of a county Farm Bureau within their state of residence to qualify as top 10 semi-finalists.

Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m. ET on April 29.

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TSTC student always knew he wanted to be a welder

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Easton Womack has been working with his hands for most of his life, building projects for school and helping his dad in the shop.

“My dad is a welder, and I’ve been welding in the shop with him ever since I could hold the rod,” he said.

Now at Texas State Technical College (TSTC), he’s learning to hone his craft and improve the skills he learned at a young age.

He is doing so with financial assistance from Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) as a recipient of a Texan Success Scholarship established specifically for TSTC students.

TFB recognized the need for careers that help build communities and first invested scholarship funds through TSTC in 2017.

“Texas Farm Bureau is proud to support students seeking technical careers,” TFB President Russell Boening said. “These technical skills are a big part of supporting farming, ranching and rural Texas. Individuals trained in technical skills play a vital role in growing and producing our food, fuel and fiber.”

Womack actively participated in ag mechanics projects at the Montague County Youth Fair and through FFA competitions.

“I’ve always liked building stuff. So, in third grade, we decided that I would build a project with just me and my dad as a way to spend time together,” he said. “And then it evolved into building more projects and winning shows.”

The Nocona native has an impressive list of accomplishments that include first in his class in Fort Worth, first in his division in San Antonio and reserve overall winner of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo Ag Mechanics Contest with his team.

He’s built a hay fork for a tractor, a cooker trailer, a truck bed and a water transfer pump for an oilfield company. Some he built by himself, and others were with a team.

“My senior year, I finished it up with a project by myself. I built an



Easton Womack is a Nocona native pursuing an associate degree at TSTC in Waco. Courtesy photo.

all-position pipe roller,” he said. “It was a smaller project, but it was something I built by myself and closed out the season with, and I ended up winning my class in Houston with it, too.”

Welding is an art and seeing his craftsmanship on display at the end of a project brings him a sense of pride.

“I think that’s one of the reasons I like building projects so much. At the end, when everything’s done, you get to step back and look at it,” Womack said. “You can admire it and be proud of the accomplishment and the work you completed.”

But projects don’t always go as planned.

“When something doesn’t go right or it breaks or something like that, all you can do is stop, cut it apart or fix it, and just go on with your day. Getting mad, getting upset isn’t going to fix anything,” he said. “That’s what my dad always taught me.”

It’s good advice for building projects and for life lessons, many of which he’s learning now while living on his own, building on his experience and working toward his associate degree.

He chose TSTC in Waco because



Womack has won numerous individual and team awards for ag mechanics projects through FFA and the county stock show. He received a TFB Texan Success Scholarship to pursue his degree at TSTC. Courtesy photo.

it allowed him to explore the world a little, and he’d heard good things about the programs.

“I get to learn a lot more stuff, in-depth stuff, about welding,” he said. “It’s enjoyable. I thought I knew stuff when I came in, and then I’m learning even more in class. It’s really fine tuning my skills, getting me from that apprentice level to where I want to be when I get out of college and start working.”

After graduation, Womack wants to weld, but he’s keeping his options open.

The demand for skilled technicians makes graduating from a trade school an attractive decision, and Womack is confident there will be career options to choose from.

And wherever the future takes him, Womack will have the skills and experience to weld together a career and legacy all his own.

Details on TFB scholarships offered annually through TSTC

Each year since 2017, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) funds scholarships through Texas State Technical College (TSTC).

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

Another \$10,000 is available through the Helping Hands fund, which is meant to help students with unexpected costs that do not qualify for academic financial aid.

More information on the TFB

scholarship through TSTC is available at texasfarmbureau.org/scholarships.

The TSTC system has 10 campuses across the state, offering degrees in a variety of fields from agricultural technology to biology, culinary arts, diesel equipment and welding.

TSTC campuses are located in Abilene, Breckenridge, Brownwood, Fort Bend County, Harlingen, Marshall, North Texas, Sweetwater, Waco and Williamson County.

AgLead participants tour Rio Grande Valley

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau's AgLead XV class returned home with new connections and fresh perspectives from a four-day trip to the Rio Grande Valley last month.

The trip gave AgLead members a chance to connect and engage with other farmers and ranchers from across the Lone Star State. They discussed issues, ideas and the common challenges they all face, as well as the unique challenges farming in the Valley brings.

"AgLead participants were able to learn a lot about various agribusinesses, shipping commodities and water infrastructure, as well as farming and ranching along the U.S.-Mexico border," said Roger Hall, associate director of Organization, Leader Development.

The Valley offers a unique climate for vegetables to be grown year-round. Farmers in the Valley are also the first in the state and nation to begin planting crops like corn, grain sorghum and cotton.

But it's not just the climate and crops that are special to the area. The water infrastructure in the Valley is also unique. The Rio Grande River is the lifeblood of farmers in that region, and without it, they wouldn't be able to grow crops.

The group was able to see how different irrigation systems work

and toured a farm that uses pumps to water their crops directly from the Rio Grande River. Farmers in that region have to maintain irrigation and plan for how much water they will be allocated to ensure they have enough for their crops.

AgLead members also visited several farms and ranches during the trip, including Rio Farms and England Cattle Company.

"We saw some good cattle at England Cattle Company. They are commercial cattle breeders and also purebred breeders, so that adds a lot of depth and integrity to their program," Clayton Conway, AgLead participant and rancher from Van Zandt County, said.

The group toured the Port of Corpus Christi, the only sugar mill in Texas, a citrus orchard, packing facilities and a juice plant during the trip.

"We toured the facility at Rio Grande Juice Company. They use the entire grapefruit—all the way from making grapefruit juice to cattle feed," Hailey Hayes, an ag teacher and farmer from Calhoun County, said.

Visiting the Valley also allowed the farmers and ranchers to see how agriculture is different in that region of the state than their own operations.

"Down there, they grow crops all year round. They grow some of the fruits and vegetables we see at the

grocery store," Hayes said. "The Valley isn't far from us in Calhoun County—just a few hours away. But it's so much more diverse and such a big part of Texas agriculture."

Hayes plans to take back the information she learned to the students in her classroom.

"I want to show them all the different things that make the Valley unique when it comes to agriculture. Sugarcane—do students know that's how they get sugar? I want them to have a better understanding of the process of food from the field and the steps it goes through before it gets to

our plate," she said.

The Valley's proximity to Mexico and international borders also plays a key role in Texas agriculture.

"We toured the border and had the opportunity to talk to some people who were involved with the problems down there. It's a very serious problem," Conway said. "I have a better understanding of the issue at the border and learned more about ag labor needs, especially in the Rio Grande Valley."

The trip was held Feb. 7-10. The group is scheduled to visit Washington, D.C. later this month.

For more information on AgLead, visit texasfarmbureau.org/aglead.



The group learned more about farming and ranching along the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as the current challenges facing those families.



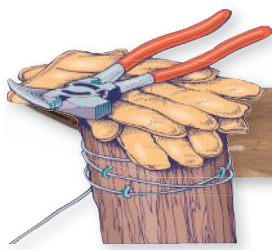
The Rio Grande Juice Company uses the entire grapefruit for a variety of products, including grapefruit juice and cattle feed.



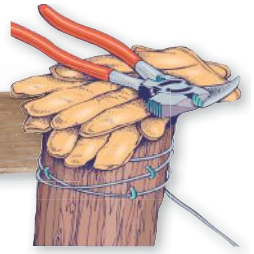
AgLead XV participants visited with the England family in Mercedes about raising commercial cattle and purebred Brahman cattle.



At Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, Inc., the participants learned about sugarcane and the only sugar mill in Texas.



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