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Texas Agriculture

June 4, 2021

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Dairy Good

Farm family builds new
facility, bottles milk

Pages 16-18



Putting your heart and soul into what you love each day

I'm proud to be part of the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) program.

My husband, Travis, and I were introduced to the program nine years ago. We have a cow-calf operation in Florence. We also have a small flock of Dorper sheep, grow sudan and coastal Bermudagrass for hay and have a custom hay baling business. We have two children who keep us busy, too!

The contests sponsored by the YF&R program led us to TFB. We quickly discovered, however, the program offered so much more than just contests.

We began attending the TFB YF&R Conference and the YF&R Fall Tour. Travis joined the Williamson County Farm Bureau board of directors, and we became more involved with TFB legislative efforts by attending events at the State Capitol and meetings with our legislators.

We were honored three years ago to be appointed to the TFB YF&R Advisory Committee. This experience allowed us to travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with members

of Congress. We learned about the influence young producers can have in legislative settings.

I am honored to currently serve as chair of the TFB YF&R Advisory Committee. I truly have a passion for agriculture and the heart to better it along the way. This role has allowed me to use my strengths and put my heart and soul into what I love.

The YF&R program is structured for TFB members and potential TFB members who are 18-35 years old. Program members are farmers and ranchers, those who work in the broader agricultural community and participants who just have an interest in agriculture. The YF&R program has an advisory committee comprised of an individual or couple from each of the 13 TFB districts. This committee plans and helps facilitate the program's events and contests.

Our program must have events that are enticing to the younger generation to help draw them into our organization. We know this group is the future of agriculture, and it is so important we captivate them and

get them engaged now.

Our YF&R contests are a great way to attract young producers. I know it worked for Travis and me! Our Fall Tour in Granbury, set for Sept. 10-12, is another upcoming opportunity to learn more about YF&R.

Our program has momentum. The YF&R Conference in Round Rock in April had the highest number of attendees in the history of the conference. We're excited about the future!

TFB is the Voice of Texas Agri-

culture. That voice is stronger and more influential when the newest generation of leaders steps forward.

Fueled by passion and hunger for knowledge and leadership, young farmers and ranchers are cultivating the future. And TFB's YF&R program strengthens our impact.

Together, young producers and those more experienced, are making a difference and leaving our mark on Texas agriculture. I'm proud to play a part in that.



By Kaylin Isbell
TFB YF&R Advisory Committee Chair



Travis and Kaylin Isbell raise cattle and Dorper sheep in Williamson County with their two children, Trigg and Kyndall. Courtesy photo.



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TFB members now get discounts on American, Texas flags

A new member benefit is available to help Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) members showcase their pride in America and Texas.

Through the Fly the Flag program, TFB members receive discounts on purchases of American and Texas flags.

“The Fly the Flag program gives county Farm Bureaus and members the chance to demonstrate their patriotism by purchasing and displaying American and Texas flags,” Whitney Richter, TFB Member Benefits marketing coordinator, said. “As Americans and Texans, we have a strong heritage of patriotism and pride in our country and in our state. This is grounded by our faith and rural values, and it is supported by our organization’s grassroots policy.”

TFB members get discounts from two Texas vendors: Dixie Flag and Banner Company and Kronberg’s Flags and Flagpoles.

At Dixie Flag and Banner Company in San Antonio, orders may only be placed by phone at 210-227-5039. Use code TXFB10 for a 10% discount. For more product information and selection, visit www.dixieflag.com.

TFB members get a 15% discount at Kronberg’s Flags and Flagpoles in Houston. Orders may only be placed by phone at 713-661-9222. Use code TXAG15 for a 15% discount. For more product information and selection, visit www.kronbergsflagsandflagpoles.com.

“These companies have been in business a minimum of 40 years, and each is offering a discount for our members,” Richter said. “With the Fourth of July around the corner, now is the time to secure your flags and fly them in support of Texas and our nation.”

If you have questions, contact Richter at wrichter@txfb.org or 254-751-2644.



The full list of TFB member benefits and services is available at texasfarmbureau.org/memberbenefits.

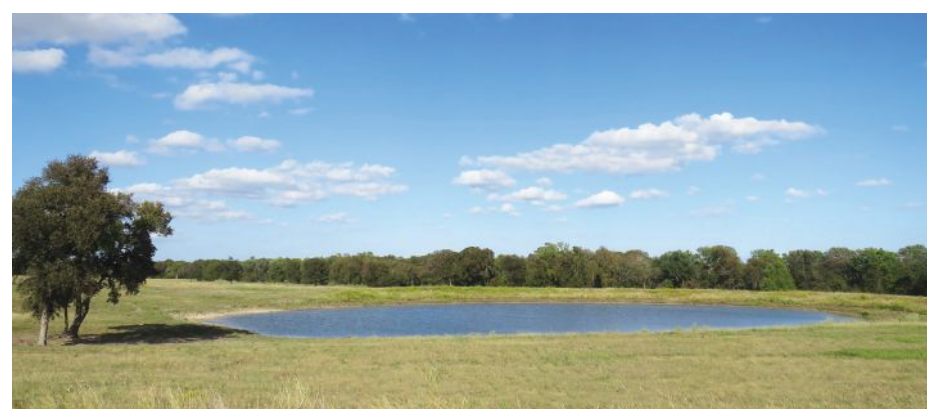
Rural land market ‘explosion’ brings record high prices

Booming rural land sales that marked the third and fourth quarters of last year were just a prelude to what’s happened so far in 2021, according to the Texas Real Estate Research Center at Texas A&M University.

“In the aftermath of the COVID-induced economic lockdown, 2021 Texas rural land markets have exploded in a burst of activity,” said Dr. Charles Gilliland, a research economist and rural land expert for the Texas Real Estate Research Center.

He noted first quarter 2021 sales of large acreage grew more than 50% in West Texas and 37% statewide compared to 2020.

“First quarter activity exceeded the remarkable levels seen in the third and fourth quarter of 2020



in most areas,” Gilliland said. “This vigorous demand has sent the statewide price 9.5% higher than 2020 prices to a record high at \$3,251 per acre. This unprecedented sales volume confirms reports of buyers flocking to rural environments during these uncertain times.”

In the first quarter of 2021, the Texas rural land industry posted a

record annualized total dollar volume of \$1.99 billion, up more than 38% with 612,699 acres changing hands.

“These developments mark one of the most active times in the history of Texas land markets as urban-based buyers seek out rural retreats,” he said.

For more information on land trends, visit www.recenter.tamu.edu.

Federal appeals court upholds Roundup verdict

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit upheld a district court’s judgement and trial verdict in favor of a California resident who alleged the use of Roundup caused him to contract non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

In 2019, a jury awarded Edwin Hardeman \$5 million in compensatory damages and \$75 million in punitive damages, which the district court later reduced to \$20 million.

Bayer AG, which bought Roundup manufacturer Monsanto in 2018, appealed the \$25 million award shortly after the judgement was made.

The U.S. court rejected Bayer’s appeal, ruling 2-1 that the \$20 million in punitive damages was constitutional.

Bayer said it was disappointed with the court’s decision because the verdict was not supported by evidence at trial or the law.

“In particular, we believe the 9th Circuit decision is wrong on the issue of federal preemption as it is not possible for Monsanto to comply with federal law under which [the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)] has determined that a cancer warning is unwarranted and improper and also comply with state law failure-to-warn claims seeking the very cancer warning EPA forbids,” the company said.

The company added it will pursue all legal options, including petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court to review the case.

Bayer continues “to stand strongly behind the safety of Roundup, a position supported by four decades of extensive science and the assessments of leading health regulators worldwide that support its safe use.”

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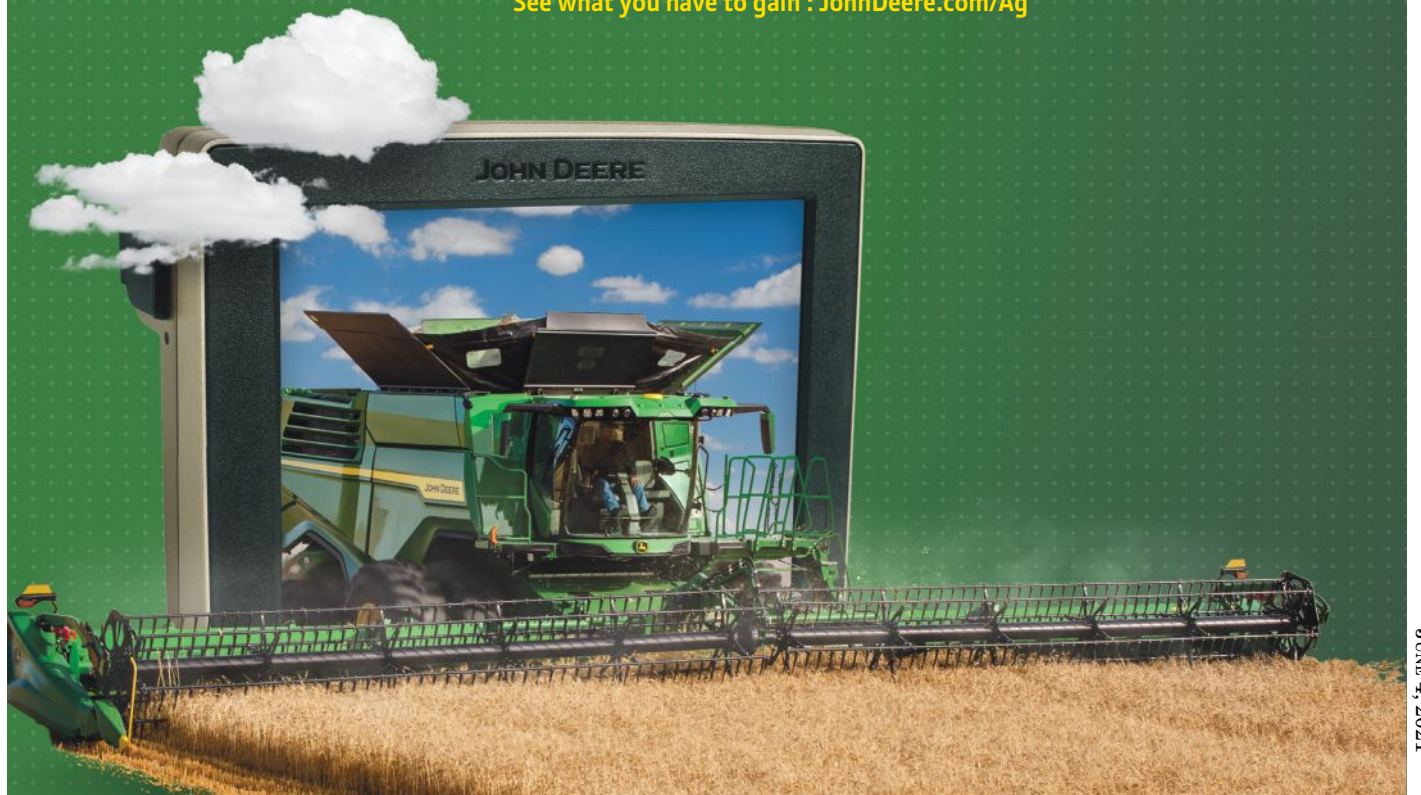
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Progress after 87th Texas Legislature convenes

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

The 87th Texas Legislature regular session ended on May 31, and significant progress was made on some of Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB's) priority issues.

Eminent domain

Eminent domain reform got a boost in Texas with the passage of HB 2730.

The bill represents a key victory in the ongoing fight for eminent domain reform.

HB 2730, authored by House Land and Resource Management Committee Chairman Joe Deshotel and co-authored by longtime eminent domain reform champion Rep. DeWayne Burns, includes several key concepts supported by Texas Farm Bureau (TFB).

The new legislation requires the landowner to receive an initial offer that is clear as to whether damages to the remainder are included in the offer. It requires the landowner to receive an easement agreement with standard terms that protect private property rights, as well as improves the landowner bill of rights landowners receive with or before the initial offer. HB 2730 also creates a penalty for land agents that act unethically and make lowball offers to



Significant progress was made on several Texas Farm Bureau priority issues during the 87th Texas Legislature.

landowners.

If the bill is not vetoed or is signed by Gov. Greg Abbott, the landowner's bill of rights must be added to the Texas attorney general's website by Jan. 1, while other portions of the bill go into effect in September or must be enacted no later than Dec. 1.

Another bill relating to eminent domain reform, SB 721, was signed by Abbott and will become law on Sept. 1.

The bill requires the condemner using eminent domain authority to disclose any appraisal reports to be used in a special commissioners' court hearing three days in advance of the

hearing. Currently, Texas statutes require landowners to disclose appraisal reports but not condemnors.

Feral hog control

A rider in the state budget would allow Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to collaborate on a two-year experimental use program evaluating the efficacy of warfarin as a feral hog control method.

The rider was adopted and included in the TDA budget pattern. It allows TDA to register Kaput® Feral Hog Bait on the second anniversary of its limited use authorization for research purposes. However, that

could happen earlier pending delivery of a positive research report from AgriLife to TDA.

Also included in the rider is a \$250,000 per year allocation from the general revenue fund for AgriLife to conduct the two-year study. The funding becomes available on Sept. 1.

Farm animal liability

New attention was brought to Texas' Farm Animal Liability Act (FALA) after a divided ruling was issued last year by the Texas Supreme Court in a case where a bull harmed and killed a ranch hand. The longtime ranchers named in the suit appealed a lower court's decision awarding damages to the ranch hand's heirs, saying FALA applies to ranching—working farm animals for a living or profit.

But the court said the rule did not apply to Texas farmers and ranchers. In response, State Rep. Andrew Murr filed HB 365 this session amending FALA to include all instances of handling livestock.

HB 365 was sent to Abbott's desk on May 22. As long as the governor does not veto the bill, it will go into effect Sept. 1.

Additional coverage

Additional details from the legislative session will be covered online at texasfarmbureau.org and in the July issue of *Texas Agriculture*.



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TFB members save on Beef Cattle Short Course registration

Annual beef cattle educational event set for Aug. 2-4, College Station

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Registration is underway for the 67th annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course in College Station, and this year, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) members will receive a discount on registration.

“This is the first time for Texas Farm Bureau to collaborate with the Beef Cattle Short Course to offer a discount code at registration,” TFB President Russell Boening said. “We hope Farm Bureau members will take advantage of the savings, educational material and networking opportunities provided through the short course. This is a one-of-a-kind educational event that provides important information to ranchers—regardless of ranch size and experience.”

The short course, which is set for Aug. 2-4, 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. Six live demonstrations and a trade show exhibit with an estimated 140 exhibitors, 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 ex-

hibitors are expected to attend this year’s event, but a virtual option will also be available.

On the agenda

Educational sessions will address forage and beef cattle management, health, nutrition and reproduction, record-keeping, genetics, purebred cattle and more. Outlooks on weather and markets, as well as an overview on land values and increasing urban sprawl, are also on the agenda.

“We are excited to invite everyone back to the Texas A&M campus to join us for this year’s event,” said Dr. Jason Cleere, conference coordinator and AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist in the Department of Animal Science. “Not only are we going to be able to serve up our traditional Texas Aggie Prime Rib Dinner, but we’ll also be offering all our live demonstrations for participants for all to see.”

Demonstrations will cover live cattle handling, chute-side calf working, brush management, tractor safety and beef carcass value determination.

“We want to help producers focus on efficiencies in their operation,” Cleere said. “Many expenses are going through the roof, so they need to focus on where to invest and where to possibly cut some corners. That



Texas Farm Bureau members receive \$20 off registration for the annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course set for Aug. 2-4 in College Station.

will be highlighted throughout the short course.”

TFB member discount

The fee is \$210 for those attending in person and \$160 online. The prices go up to \$250 and \$200, respectively, after July 27.

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

“We’re excited our members will be able to save on the registration fee for the Beef Cattle Short Course,” Boening said. “Texas Farm Bureau is constantly evaluating ways we can offer our members beneficial information and savings, and we think we combined both of those through this affiliation with the short course.”

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.

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

Contact Tracy Tomascik, TFB associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Affairs, at ttomascik@txfb.org or 254-751-2266 with questions regarding the TFB member discount.

Livestock, farm groups discuss cattle market transparency issues

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

A group of farm and livestock organizations met in May to discuss the current state of the cattle market and find ways to improve cattle market transparency.

Member leaders from American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, National Farmers Union, R-CALF USA and the United States Cattlemen’s Association met in Phoenix, Arizona.

They discussed packer concentration, price transparency and discov-

ery, packer oversight, level of captive supply, packer capacity and the enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act.

The member leaders agreed to take issues back to their respective organizations for consideration.

Among those issues was expediting the renewal of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Livestock Mandatory Reporting, including formula base prices subject to the same reporting requirements as negotiated cash, and the creation of a contract library.

Other action items include en-

couraging investment in, and development of, new independent, local and regional packers and demanding the Department of Justice (DOJ) issue a public investigation status report, as well as conduct joint DOJ and USDA oversight of packer activity moving forward as warranted.

“We want to continue the dialogue to pursue a fair and transparent livestock marketing system,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall, who attended the meeting. “And, we also, as individual groups with members that set policy, want to make sure that we take our discussion back to our

respective organizations so that we can continue to work for our farmers and ranchers across America.”

In a joint press release published following the meeting, the groups said, “Attending organization representatives were pleased to have reached consensus on many issues and are committed to the ultimate goal of achieving a fair and transparent finished cattle marketing system.”

The groups met May 10 at the request of the Livestock Marketing Association to discuss challenges involved in marketing finished cattle.

Eliminating stepped-up basis could end family farm legacies

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

Tax proposals announced by the Biden administration would repeal the stepped-up basis, increase the capital gains tax rate and make it more difficult for farmers to use like-kind exchanges.

Currently, capital gains are taxed when an asset is sold. But transfers at death are not treated as a sale, and the capital gain is not taxed. In addition, heirs inheriting farmland may increase the tax basis of the property to fair market value without paying capital gains tax.

The property is “stepped up” to current value so that capital gains taxes would only be paid on appreciation since the property was inherited. The current top capital gains tax rate is 20%.

Biden’s proposal would repeal the step up in basis for gains over \$1 million and collect capital gains at death unless the assets are donated

to charity.

Preserving the step up in basis tax provision is imperative to keeping farms and ranches in the family, said Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) District 1 State Director Pat McDowell.

As a fourth-generation farmer and rancher in the Texas Panhandle, McDowell takes pride in what he and his family built over the past century. There are plans in place to transfer the farm to his niece and her husband after McDowell and his two brothers retire.

The McDowells grow cotton, corn, hay and wheat. They also have a cow-calf and stocker cattle operation. But with water resources growing scarcer, any potential buyer of the land in the future would likely be interested in using it for hunting or recreational use. The value of the land could possibly be much higher for wildlife than for raising cattle, McDowell said.

Under current law, if his niece in-

herited and then decided to sell the property, she would only pay capital gains taxes based on the property’s value at the time of inheritance, rather than on the increase in value since it was initially purchased.

But all that can change if Biden’s proposal passes through Congress as currently written.

“We just see that if the stepped-up basis went away, they’d be taxed on an asset that was purchased so many years ago, and at such an old value, that inflation is going to make their taxes so much higher than what they’d ever bargained for,” he said. “Our ranch has been in our family for such a long time, the land has significantly appreciated in value since it was purchased. It’s not really fair to her, or any future generation, to pay taxes on the full increase in value from when it was purchased 150 years ago or whenever. Taxes shouldn’t drive someone out of business just because they may have to sell some land.”

The brothers are actively speaking with estate advisors to determine if they need to re-evaluate their estate plan should the tax eliminations pass.

“There are really no good options,” he said. “The stepped-up basis was pretty much the cornerstone of all our estate planning. So, if it gets eliminated, that changes everything.”

While eliminating stepped-up basis would be tough for future generations, McDowell said the capital gains tax at death provision would be disastrous for family farms and ranches.

“It could be goodbye ranch, goodbye 100 years,” he said. “All the things that we’ve worked to keep together...if we had to pay taxes at death, that would basically be the end of the operation. That’s it, end of story.”

To combat the administration’s plans to eliminate stepped-up basis and impose capital gains taxes at death, TFB and the American Farm Bureau Federation have been com-

municating with members of Congress.

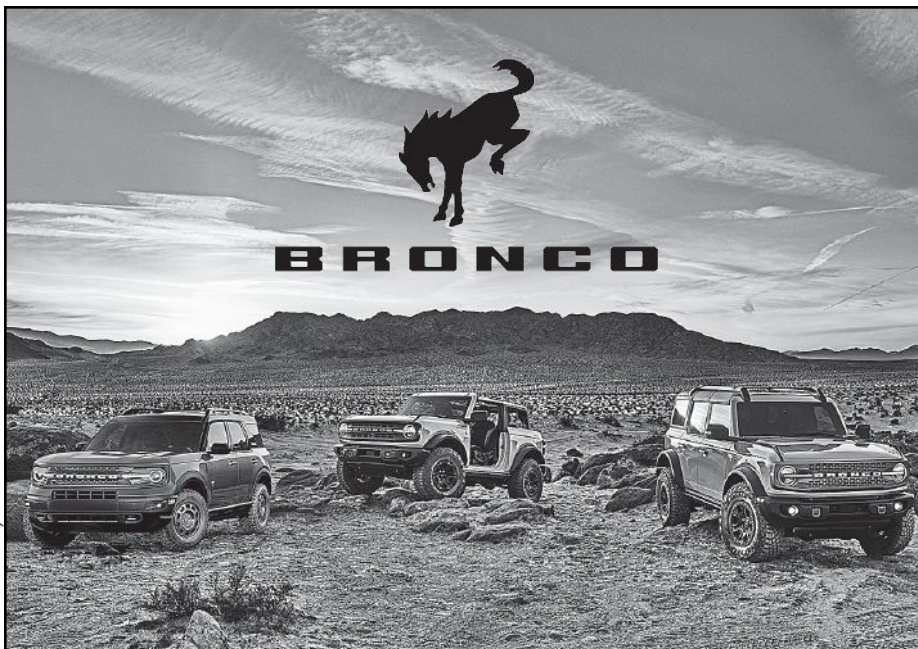
“In 2017, Farm Bureau worked really hard to make sure the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act included some tax reform to make the system more fair and friendly to Texas farm and ranch families,” Laramie Adams, TFB national legislative director, said. “We worked to eliminate the death tax. We ultimately compromised and doubled the estate tax exemption from \$11 million per couple to \$22 million, and that allowed us to keep the stepped-up basis.”

Now, with stepped-up basis under threat, TFB is urging congressional leaders to preserve existing rules for capital gains treatment, including the stepped-up basis.

“This is very important to our members and to agriculture. We’ve talked to our congressional leaders as we conducted farm tours across the entire state, trying to help them understand exactly how detrimental these tax changes could be to everyday Americans,” Adams said. “We’ve expressed how critically important it is that we continue to work to abolish the death tax, but also ensure the stepped-up basis remains in place.”

TFB has hosted over 40 congressional farm tours and visits so far this year and more are planned. TFB is hosting several upcoming tax roundtables for members to share personal stories with congressional leaders.

“Eliminating the stepped-up basis will have very real and negative impacts on family-owned businesses, the U.S. gross domestic product and job creation both immediately and in the long run,” he said. “If these detrimental tax proposals go through, this will effectively tax farmers and ranchers out of business and prevent them from passing the land from one generation to the next. If Congress doesn’t pay attention to this issue and continues to saddle farmers and ranchers with regulations and taxes, we will have a severe national food security issue on our hands when we tax them out of business.”



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Online mental health resource directory available

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) launched a comprehensive, easy-to-use online directory of resources for farmers, ranchers and their families who are experiencing stress and mental health challenges.

The directory is available on the Farm State of Mind website at farm-stateofmind.org.

It features listings for crisis hotlines and support lines, counseling services, training opportunities, podcasts, videos, published articles and other resources in every U.S. state and Puerto Rico. Listings for crisis support, counseling and behavioral health resources that are available nationwide are also included.

“This new online directory of stress and mental health resources in every state gives farmers, ranchers and rural communities a user-friendly, one-stop shop to find services in their area that can help them manage farm stress and find help for mental health concerns,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. “Whether you’re looking for information about how to recognize and manage stress, trying to find counseling services in your area or are in need of crisis support, you can find help here.”


The Farm State of Mind directory lists resources specifically geared toward farmers, ranchers and rural communities in states where these specific services are available, with additional listings for county and statewide mental health and other support services in every state. The listings can be filtered by state and type of resource, including hotlines, counseling services and published information.

AFBF partnered with the University of Georgia School of Social Work to research available resources across the U.S. and Puerto Rico and compile the comprehensive information included in the directory.



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Biden administration releases 30x30 report

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

The Biden administration last month released its much-anticipated Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful Report, also known as the 30x30 report.

It outlines a locally led and voluntary nationwide conservation goal to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and water by 2030.

"The report doesn't have many specifics, but it does recognize the role of farmers and ranchers and the conservation practices already implemented," Jay Bragg, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said.

The effort began with Biden's executive order issued on Jan. 27 that called for conserving and restoring public lands and waters, protecting biodiversity and increasing carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector.

"President Biden has recognized

and honored the leadership role that farmers, ranchers, forest owners and fishers already play in the conservation of the nation's lands, waters and wildlife and has made clear that his administration will support voluntary stewardship efforts that are already underway across the country's lands and waters," the report outlining the America the Beautiful initiative said.

Six areas of early focus and eight principles to guide the initiative are included in the report.

A few of the focus areas include creating more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities and expanding collaborative conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and corridors. It also focuses on incentivizing and rewarding the voluntary conservation efforts of fishers, ranchers, farmers and forest owners.

Some of the principles include honoring private property rights and supporting the voluntary steward-

ship efforts of private landowners and fishers, as well as using science as a guide in implementing the report's strategies.

"There was concern that the 30x30 plan might prioritize programs to establish more federal parks and preserves and/or retire lands from agricultural production, but that doesn't appear to be the case," Bragg said. "The role of working lands was recognized as an integral part to conserving habitats and connecting lands and waters across the country, as well as for growing our food, fiber and fuel."

The America the Beautiful initiative will require increased funding of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack noted.

Currently, more than 140 million acres in the U.S. are enrolled in various USDA conservation programs, and USDA hopes to expand on these efforts.

Last month, USDA opened Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollment with higher payment rates, new incentives and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation.

USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program.

The 30x30 report was an inter-agency effort developed by the U.S. Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Commerce, as well as the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

The agencies engaged in the process will continue to develop and implement strategies for the plan.

The American Farm Bureau Federation and TFB continue to work with the administration and USDA to help ensure programs meet the desires of landowners while working toward conservation goals.

The full report is available at www.usda.gov.

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Sloan receives TFB's prestigious S.M. True Jr. Ag Scholar Award

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

A Texas Tech University student with a passion for agriculture received Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) most prestigious scholarship.

Riley Sloan of Rochester is the recipient of the 2021 S.M. True Jr. Agricultural Scholar Award. The \$20,000 scholarship is presented annually to a deserving student in honor of former TFB President S.M. True Jr.

"President True lived an inspiring life and had a passion for agriculture, farmers, ranchers and rural communities. This scholarship recognizes students who share a similar dedication to agriculture and leadership," TFB President Russell Boening said. "Each year, we are impressed with the students who apply, and this year was no exception. We wish Riley Sloan, and all the students who applied, the best in their future endeavors."

Sloan is a junior at Texas Tech University majoring in Animal Science and Business. He grew up on his family's small Brangus cow-calf operation in Rochester.

Throughout his high school and college career, Sloan has devoted himself to learning more about different aspects of agriculture.

In high school, he was active in 4-H and FFA, exhibiting livestock

and competing in various contests. He also participated in youth programs offered by Haskell County Farm Bureau and TFB, attended the Youth Leadership Conference and returned the following year to serve as a junior counselor.

At Texas Tech, Sloan was a member of the 2020 National Champion Meat Judging Team. He is currently on the Meat Animal Evaluation Team, striving for similar successes he had with the meat judging team.

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sloan worked at Raider Red Meats, which is part of Texas Tech's Meat Science Program.

"That position built on what I learned through the meat judging team and taught me a lot about meat production and sales," he said.

He currently works at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Lubbock. In his role with the Other Crops department, he helps plant hemp, cotton, guar and sorghum, as well as records data about the crops.

After completing his undergraduate degree, the Haskell County Farm Bureau member hopes to pursue his master's degree in an ag-related field.

"Being selected to receive this scholarship is humbling and exciting," he said. "Having the support of Texas Farm Bureau, Haskell County

Farm Bureau and so many others helps me to know that I'm on the right path and inspires me to work harder and find more ways to contribute to the agricultural industry."

Four other finalists for the award were Emily Brite, a junior at Texas A&M University from Hood-Somervell County Farm Bureau; Clayton Elbel, a junior at Texas A&M University from Comal County Farm Bureau; Kristen Massingill, a sophomore at Connors State College from Hamilton County Farm Bureau; and Miles Mathis, a junior at Texas A&M University from Kleberg-Kenedy County Farm Bureau.

The finalists each earned a \$1,000 scholarship.

The TFB board of directors established the S.M. True Jr. Agricultural Scholar Award in 2014 to recognize True's commitment to agriculture.

True farmed with his wife, Anna Jean, in Hale County. They raised cattle and grew cotton, wheat and feed grains. True maintained a keen interest in farm and agricultural issues until his death in 2012.

True served as TFB president from 1982 to 1993 and had a passion for improving the lives of his fellow farmers and ranchers. He believed Farm Bureau was the organization that best represented agriculture because of its grassroots orientation.

To be eligible for the scholarship, a



Riley Sloan

student must have at least 60 hours of college credit and be enrolled in a four-year college or university. To receive the full amount, the recipient must continue to major in agriculture, maintain a satisfactory grade point average and maintain TFB membership for the duration of the scholarship.

A list of TFB scholarships and youth opportunities can be found at texasfarmbureau.org/youth/youth-opportunities.

Applications open for TFB's 2021 Clover Cash grant program

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

The Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Clover Cash grant program is back for a second year.

The grants are available to county, district and state 4-H programs to help fund hands-on activities to grow student agricultural knowledge and increase agricultural advocacy efforts.

"We had a tremendous response to Clover Cash last year, and we were able to award \$20,000 to a variety of projects across the state," TFB Associate Director of Organization Divi-

sion, Youth Outreach Mia Balko said. "We saw some 4-H clubs use the funds for cooking classes, hydroponics, rabbit show clinics, vermiculture, remote learning equipment and more. At the state level, we helped fund a leadership retreat and a water awareness outreach project. Texas 4-H leaders have so many creative ideas to get students involved in learning about agriculture and promoting agricultural advocacy. We're proud to bring this second round of funding opportunities to them."

At the county level, four grants up to \$500, four grants up to \$750

and three grants up to \$1,000 will be available.

Four grants up to \$1,500 each will be awarded at the Texas 4-H district level, and three grants up to \$2,000 each will be awarded for state projects.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agents or adult leaders of any county, district or state 4-H program are eligible to apply. The funds will be disbursed by the Texas 4-H Foundation to organizations only, not an individual.

For the application to be considered, students must be directly en-

gaged in the educational component of the project.

A timeline of the project, a list of all community partners and a detailed budget with estimated expenses must also be included in the application.

Applicants are encouraged to be creative in their project proposals and descriptions.

Program guidelines and a Google doc application form are available online at texasfarmbureau.org/youth/youth-opportunities. Applications are due June 30.

Contact Balko at mbalko@txfb.org with questions.



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Severe weather damages crops, helps some drought-stricken areas

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

Wet weather in May had Texas farmers and ranchers simultaneously feeling thankful and concerned, depending on their location.

Rainfall totals ranging from less than an inch to 14 inches were reported last month as days of downpours, flash floods and severe storms washed across the Lone Star State.

Panhandle/South Plains

After suffering from drought for much of the last year, the Texas Panhandle saw rainfall totals for the month of May running well above average in many locations.

In Carson County, Billy Bob Brown, who is in his 49th year of farming, said he hasn't seen this much steady moisture in some time. The rain will be beneficial to his wheat, corn and sorghum crops, but in late May, Brown said he was still waiting to plant his cotton because soil temperatures were too low.

"You really need a temperature of 62 degrees or better consistently before you put it in the ground. And then coupled with this wet weather, premature planting would've really been bad on the seed itself," Brown said.

West Texas/Permian Basin

Rain eluded much of the Far West Texas region, where Culberson, Jefferson Davis and Presidio counties are in the grips of exceptional drought, according to recent U.S. Drought Monitor reports.

In Howard County, Vance Smith said a tornado touched down about eight miles east of his farm.

Although Smith received about 3.5 inches of rain, it unfortunately came with a side of pea- to marble-sized hail. Smith estimates he lost about 200 acres of cotton to hail damage. Some of his other cotton and corn crops were also damaged, but they may recover.

South Texas/Winter Garden

In South Texas, it's quite soggy.

Medina County farmer and cattle rancher Ken Graff said the area received more than 14 inches



Downpours, flash floods and severe storms washed across the Lone Star State, bringing much-needed moisture to some farmers and ranchers and causing frustration among others.

of rain over the past three weeks, sometimes accompanied by severe weather. Hail damaged roofs and structures across the area. Although Graff's crops and those around him are okay, he noted fields south and east of Hondo, where he lives, were shredded badly.

Rio Grande Valley

High winds and flash flooding initially had lower Rio Grande Valley residents on edge, but the rainfall was timely for farmers like Bryce Wilde in Willacy County.

"We received about 5-7 inches of rain over the last couple weeks, which has been great timing for grain and cotton," Wilde said. "Fortunately, we haven't had any crazy wind damage. There's been some minor flooding, but for the most part, we dodged a bullet."

Southeast Texas/Coastal Bend

Some areas of Southeast Texas and the Coastal Bend were parched before May's rains, so farmers there were initially happy with the moisture.

But standing water can lead to plant diseases and an increase in insect pressure on crops and livestock, said Matt Bochat, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent in Victoria

County. Farmers reported receiving up to 14 inches of rain in a matter of days.

"The first few inches soaks directly into the ground and works well for crop growth," he said.

But if left standing in water for days, crops can suffer.

Most farmers and ranchers, however, were thankful for the rain and looking forward to a boost in crop growth.

Up the coast in Matagorda County, Richard Beyer called the rain "extremely excessive."

"The total rainfall for my farms and pastures is above 13 inches, but I have heard some totals above 20 inches were reported several miles west of me in Matagorda County and into Jackson County," he said. "High ends of fields and fields with good drainage should be okay, but others may become unproductive or the crops might die."

Calhoun County farmer Dan Nunley said he received 12 inches of rain over 14 hours the third week of May—the second flood in two weeks.

"The first flood was 6 inches of rain and more upstream," Nunley said. "The cotton was just recovering from the last flood and got hit again.

Cotton is damaged depending on how long it stays under or partially covered by water, and the corn is in varying stages of pollination. It's hard to pollinate in rain or when it's underwater."

East Texas

East Texas did not escape the heavy rainfall, either.

In Palestine, pastures and hay fields were too saturated to enter, so farmers postponed fertilizing, according to Anderson County farmer Ted Britton. Farmers who had already fertilized before the severe weather were left facing prolonged growth periods, losing valuable protein content since they couldn't get the hay cured and cut between periods of rain.

Central Texas

In the heart of Texas, farmers and ranchers were hoping to receive some rain, so it was welcome to McCulloch County farmer Jeff Kaspar.

Rain was good for Kaspar's pastures. He estimated the area received 2-4 inches of rain in one week, with more expected the following week.

In Travis and Williamson counties, Mark Prinz said a hailstorm in early May forced him to replant just over 100 acres of corn. But overall, the wetter weather has been beneficial for his crops.

"The crops are in good growing condition, and the temperature has been really favorable," he said in an interview with Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "Other than that hailstorm, we've been pretty lucky this year."

Drought conditions

At the end of May, the Texas Water Development Board's weekly drought report showed less than 35% of the state suffered from drought conditions.

The most extreme drought areas are in Far West Texas, the western Panhandle and portions of South Texas.

The National Weather Service also declared the end of La Niña conditions, which contributed to increase drought this year.

Texas Farm Bureau lends helping hand following winter storm

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Through the Helping Hands co-op contribution program, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) and county Farm Bureaus donated \$262,197 to community food and emergency relief efforts following February's winter storm.

The Lone Star State faced a tough start to the year when the storm dealt another blow to Texans who were still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Resources were stretched thin, and the list of people and organizations needing assistance after the record-breaking winter storm was long.

The Helping Hands program established by TFB aimed to meet a variety of needs in communities across the state.

"This unprecedented weather event brought new hardships to Texans who were already struggling with loss of employment, fewer resources available and other issues



Hale County Farm Bureau leaders and family helped pack bags as part of its donation to Planview Snack Pak 4 Kids. The group also donated money to help purchase the items included in the snack packs. Courtesy photo.

related to the pandemic," TFB President Russell Boening said. "This program assisted county Farm Bureaus in lending a helping hand to the local communities."



Brazos County Farm Bureau used the Helping Hands program to donate to three local charity organizations that provide food assistance and other forms of aid to Brazos County residents in need. Courtesy photo.

In 2020 and 2021, TFB and county Farm Bureaus contributed a total of \$815,996 in community food and emergency relief efforts. Donations in 2020 were made through Feeding

the Need and Feeding Texas co-op contribution programs.

Through the Helping Hands program, TFB provided a 2-to-1 match for county Farm Bureau contribu-

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tions up to \$750 for any qualified donation. Entities that provide food and shelter or meet other basic needs were a priority, as well as other non-profits that were affected by this historic weather event.

A total of 123 county Farm Bureaus participated in the program, donating \$98,384 directly to local food and emergency relief organizations. TFB matched \$163,813, further increasing the impact of the statewide program.

“This program put the decision of how best to make an impact in the hands of county Farm Bureaus to maximize the co-op contribution from the state organization,” Boening said. “Our county organizations and Farm Bureau members stepped up to help provide assistance in a time of high demand.”

Several county Farm Bureaus made donations to Meals on Wheels, food pantries, volunteer fire departments and a weekend snack program for kids. Others donated to community organizations and charitable groups.

Donations came in all shapes, sizes and amounts. County leaders also contributed their time and coordinated logistics for donations.

“We’re proud our county Farm Bureaus and state organization could lend a hand during these trying times. Farm Bureau considers itself one big family, and we set out to help as many folks as we could during this time of need—just like family would do,” Boening said. “Farm Bureau’s commitment to agriculture and communities has never wavered during a time of need, including Winter Storm Uri and the ongoing pandemic.”

The program ran from Feb. 18 through April 30.



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The Volleman family L-R: Anna (holding Emma), Pax, David, Benjamin, Annette, Frank, Daniel, Andrew (holding Hayes) and Shelby.

A Taste of Home: Vollemans bottle milk, connect with consumers

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

For the Volleman family, dairy farming is a way of life. As far back as 1890, Vollemans have been raising dairy cattle and selling milk.

The family traces its history from Holland to Luxembourg to the U.S., where Frank and Annette moved with their two young sons in 1993.

They put down roots in Gustine and now provide Texans with what they call “a taste of home” through their dairy and new bottling facility, where they process and bottle their own milk in returnable glass bottles.

“When we moved here, Annette and I started milking 50 cows in partnership with my brother, Marcel. Then a couple of years down the road, he started his own dairy, and we continued to expand our facilities to the size we are today. Now, we milk about 5,000 cows and bottle and sell our own milk,” he said.

“Our family has expanded, too, and we now have four sons: Benjamin,

David, Andrew and Daniel.”
New roots run deep

This unique family operation involves two generations, eight family members and a whole lot of love. Love for the land, the farm and, most importantly, for each other.

Each son is responsible for a certain aspect of the operation.

Benjamin grows most of the dairy’s forages, and David manages the day-to-day operations at the dairy. Andrew oversees the bottling plant, and Daniel raises replacement heifers and helps on his uncle’s dairy.

David’s wife, Anna, manages the business office, and Andrew’s wife, Shelby, is the marketing director for the dairy.

Together, the Farm Bureau members are proud to bring Volleman’s glass bottled milk to stores across Central and North Texas, with more stores carrying the products every week.

They hope to continue to grow their family legacy here in Texas, one

bottle of milk at a time.

Farming

At the farm, Benjamin grows corn, sorghum and three varieties of Bermudagrass.

“I’ve been doing this for my family for the last 10 years or so. Before I graduated college, we had grown a little bit of corn, but around the time I graduated, we started focus-

ing on growing our own crops for the dairy,” he said. “We started trying to improve our Bermudagrass and find better varieties to produce better quality feed for our cows, and things just took off from there.”

About 60-70% of the farm’s forages are grown by Benjamin, and the grains are purchased from other farmers and feed mills.



The Vollemans milk 5,000 cows every day on their Comanche County dairy.



At any given time, a portion of the herd is resting on pasture for about three months before returning to milking.



Volleman's is currently sold in grocery and specialty stores throughout Central and North Texas, with more stores carrying their products every week.

Benjamin loves farming, and he loves being able to work with his family every day.

"It's a lot of fun working together in the family business. My brothers and I work together in the fields or on the farm or in an office together all the time," he said. "We each have our own roles, but we can always help each other out if we need help on a certain task. Sometimes it's a little challenging to get along with everybody, but that's the fun part about it. We try to figure out how we can work together and get the job done."

The dairy

Down the road from Benjamin's corn fields, David oversees the day-to-day operations at the dairy.

Twice a day, the cows travel from their cross-ventilated barns to the 72-stall fully automated milking carousel.

Looking after 5,000 Holstein cows and confirming they get milked twice a day is a big job. But it's a challenge David is always up for.

"Even though we are a larger farm, we're still a family farm, and we absolutely care for our cows every day. Our main focus is our cows and the people we work with, ensuring a great quality of life for both," he said. "The barns and all these things we've invested in here on this farm are to really make their life better so that they stay healthy and produce a lot of milk. They take care of us. We take care of them. It's a very symbiotic relationship, and we're always looking to improve."

The milk is collected in tanks where it is instantly chilled to about 35 degrees. It is continually stirred so the cream doesn't rise to the top. After the milk has been tested repeatedly, it is loaded onto tankers for transport to processing facilities.

Anna, David's wife, manages the business office and handles the flow of tankers and customers. He said it's a blessing to be able to work together and alongside the rest of his family.

"I absolutely love raising our fam-



Frank and Annette's eldest son, Benjamin, grows most of the forage fed to the family's dairy cattle.

ily on the farm. Anna was working in town, and I was really happy when she was able to join us out here. Now, when we get done with our main work, we can do things like hop in the truck and drive the kids around while we check on the cattle and do a last round before heading home," he said. "I just really enjoy spending that time with my family on the farm, and it brings some flexibility to our situation. There's an amazing quality of life here we couldn't get anywhere else."

Volleman's bottling facility

About nine months ago, some big dreams finally came true when the family was able to begin bottling and selling milk under the Volleman's brand.

The dream was fully realized with the opening of their own creamery, located just outside the Gustine city limits. The Vollemans currently produce heavy cream and whole, 2%, chocolate and strawberry milk, along with one seasonal milk flavor

that changes throughout the year.

When they opened the creamery, Frank said the timing was right to reintroduce an old concept: returnable glass bottles.

On top of the purchase price of the milk, customers pay a deposit for the bottle. The deposit is returned when the bottle is received back at a retailer, or the customer may choose to have the retailer keep the deposit so they can buy more milk.

"In the beginning, we weren't sure we liked the idea. But the more we dug into it and traveled across the country and saw different operations, we decided there was something there," Frank said. "People love the sustainability aspect of this. They feel good about it, that they're doing something for the environment. And the response has really just been overwhelming."

At the bottling plant, Andrew is responsible for processing, pasteurization and bottling the milk, as well as overseeing sales and distribution.

(continued on page 18)



The glass bottles are returned to the plant, washed and sanitized before moving on a conveyor belt into the bottling area to be refilled.

(continued from page 17)

His wife, Shelby, also works at the bottling plant where she oversees marketing and branding.

Andrew's background in distribution with the Coca-Cola Company and a dairy products technology program from Cal Poly prepared him for his latest role in the family business.

The family broke ground on the new plant in March 2020 and began producing bottles through a co-packer in June. The plant came online this January, and Volleman's is steadily gaining recognition as they work to increase distribution throughout Texas.

When Andrew began struggling with the amount of work involved in running the bottling facility and handling sales, Daniel stepped in to help.

"I was kind of drowning, trying to do everything at once, and Daniel stepped up to help on the sales side," he said. "He does a lot with talking to stores, maintaining relationships that we built and continues to find new stores, and we work closely together to keep growing into new areas."

He said it's a surreal feeling to have all their hard work pay off.

"I don't know what the right word is, but you get a lot of pride seeing your bottle with your name on it on a shelf in a grocery store. The best feeling is when you walk into a store and there's



The state-of-the-art bottling facility has been online since January.

a line out the door and you can't even get it off the truck, because they're just grabbing it out of the crates," Andrew, who used to do all the deliveries himself, said. "It's just people standing in line for the milk, people you've never met that have no clue who you are, and I get to say 'Yes, that's my milk from my family, from cows we raised and a place we built.' It's just a really cool feeling to have it all come full circle."

Paving the way for the future

Frank is proud of what he and Annette have achieved, and he can't



The bottles are filled by an entirely automated process before being crated and kept in cold storage until they're loaded on trucks for delivery.



Volleman's sells heavy cream and whole, 2%, chocolate and strawberry milk, as well as one seasonal flavor, with more product offerings in the works.

wait to see what else his sons do.

"The challenges when you come to a new country can be big, but I think when you've been instilled with family values, hard work and dedication, it will pay off. We could not have imagined or even dreamed of where we are today," he said. "And our sons are our partners in this business now. They know every morning why they wake up and why the hours are long. That's how we envisioned to build that legacy—for them to be part of it by their labor and by owning a part of it. And we know they'll make it even more successful by working together."

As she looks at her sons and their families, Annette can't help but feel they've achieved their own version of the American dream.

"It was not easy coming over here with two little kids and having no babysitter, trying to milk the cows

ourselves. We did not speak the language well when the oldest two first went to school," she said. "But just being here at the dairy with all the kids and them growing up close to the cows and doing their chores and helping Frank...it was a very, very good feeling."

Now the next generation of Vollemans are learning life lessons in the family venture.

"It is very rewarding to see the boys now become part of our operation, all four working together. And now two of our sons have their little ones and bring them along, too," Annette said. "I think it's awesome to see us all growing as a huge, big family and running a business together. All in little different departments, maybe one with the cows, the other one with the feed, the other one with the milk, and the other one with the heifers and all of that. But still, all growing together."

AgLead-FarmLead tours Southeast Texas agriculture, businesses

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

Members of the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) 2019-2020 AgLead-FarmLead program recently spent a week touring farms, ranches and agriculture-related organizations in Southeast Texas.

The tours gave TFB members a look at the diversity of agriculture in the region.

The program offers ranchers like Charlotte Kneupper—whose family raises Angora, Boer and Spanish goats, as well as sheep, cattle and exotic wildlife in Kendall County—an opportunity to connect with farmers and ranchers in other areas.

“We raise our animals, grow our own hay and do custom cutting, baling and planting for other customers, and many of our neighbors have similar operations,” Kneupper said. “But through AgLead-FarmLead, we’ve seen dairies in West Texas, and all the things we recently saw in Southeast Texas were new to me. We definitely don’t have many of those types of farms and ranches in my area, so it’s really interesting to get out there and see all the different things people in agriculture do.”

The group visited with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service director and toured the Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) Emergency Op-

erations Center in College Station. They learned more about how TFS monitors fire risk and active fires, as well as coordinates firefighting resources across the state.

Other tour stops included a regional wool mill, an egg farm, a u-pick flower farm and produce farms. They also visited a Christmas tree farm and agritourism venues, as well as a rice and crawfish farm.

The weeklong activities wrapped up with a trip to Walker County, where they visited a lumber company and a nursery.

About AgLead-FarmLead

AgLead-FarmLead is an agricultural leadership program that enhances and develops leadership skills and traits in TFB members. Participants take part in seven sessions and travel across Texas, the nation and the globe to discover different aspects of agriculture and leadership.

Over the course of the two-year program, the AgLead-FarmLead members cultivate much more than leadership skills. Communication, public policy, regulatory activities, political advocacy and more are covered in the immersive two-year experience. The goal is to develop well-rounded, capable future leaders of Texas agriculture.

“I wanted to join the program to

experience all the different forms of agriculture we’re not exposed to here in the Hill Country,” Kneupper said. “I just wanted to learn more and how to lead. I have since started an educational foundation to help kids learn more about agriculture, because I now feel confident enough to get out there and do it.”

The 2019-2020 program was extended due to interruptions in the schedule from the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic.

After the current cohort concludes, the program will simply be known as AgLead, completing the merger of two separate age-based programs in past years.

“You don’t know any of these people when you join the program and when you visit their farm or ranch, but you make all these con-

nections, and it’s a wonderful experience,” Kneupper said. “This is such a worthwhile program, and I would encourage anyone who is interested to sign up because it’s definitely worth the time and effort.”

Applications open

TFB is currently accepting applications for the AgLead XV program. A maximum of 20 participants will be selected, 10 between the ages of 25-40 and 10 aged 40 and older. Participants must be a TFB member at time of application and throughout the program, if selected.

Applications and supporting documents are due Sept. 1, and the first session of the new class will be held during November. For more information and how to apply, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/leadership/aglead>.



The Farm Bureau members toured Kieke Egg Farm in Burton. The family-owned shell egg farm sells eggs to H-E-B.



AgLead-FarmLead members learned about growing Christmas trees at Old Time Christmas Tree Farm, an agritourism venue and farm that offers u-pick Christmas trees during the holiday season.



The group posed with the Texas A&M Forest Service in College Station.

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Farmers, ranchers impacted by border crisis share stories online

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas farmers and ranchers who live and work near the southern border say the recent surge of immigrants illegally crossing into the U.S. has significantly increased.

The crisis along the U.S-Mexico border threatens their personal safety, overwhelms local resources and causes serious financial hardship and disruption.

Fences are sometimes cut as illegal immigrants move across farms and ranches. Others are destroyed in bail-outs during high speed chases.

Homes and barns are vandalized. Equipment and vehicles are stolen. Clothes, backpacks, other items and trash are left behind in the “camps” as illegal immigrants move through their property, leaving farmers and ranchers left to clean up the mess. And fear and anxiety are high for families concerned about their safety.

To help bring awareness to the border crisis and the impacts on rural families, Texas farmers and ranchers continue to share their stories online through Texas Farm Bureau’s (TFB) Border Crisis Impacts webpage.

The webpage was launched in

late April to highlight the ongoing struggles of farm and ranch families along the border.

“The impacts of the border crisis are many,” TFB President Russell Boening said. “Farm and ranch families are bearing the brunt of this unprecedented influx. The personal accounts on the webpage are real.”

One South Texas rancher describes how he grew up on the family ranch near the border and how he was accustomed to three to four illegal immigrants crossing the ranch each month. But, now, the situation has changed.

“The situation has changed 100%. We have immigrants coming through the ranch, not three or four a month like in the past,” he said. “Just yesterday, we had 30 immigrants come through the ranch. The day before that, 40 immigrants came through the ranch. I think we had a total last week of about 140.”

In May, five young migrant girls were found alone by Jimmy Hobbs on his ranch near the Rio Grande River as temperatures soared past 100 degrees.

For Stephanie Crisp-Canales, it’s important to share her perspective of the border crisis to raise aware-

ness of the conditions of living near the border.

“Unless you have been here and have lived here, you really have no idea just how bad it is,” she said.

After sharing her story with TFB and on social media, Crisp-Canales has been interviewed by numerous media outlets, including *Fox News*.

“We have had multiple bail-outs a day. We’ve never had that before,” she said. “The landowner isn’t compensated at all. We have to pay to fix our fences, to replace our gates. When this is happening multiple times a day, this is costly.”

But it’s also the extra stress and worry.

“When we go to check our cattle now, if my husband gets out to open a gate, I have to be watching. If I get out and open a gate, he’s watching. There have been numerous ranchers that have been assaulted while they were opening a gate because illegals would come up on them because they want their vehicle,” she said.

Crisp-Canales and her husband raise cattle and have two children.

“When you’re on your own property and you don’t feel safe, it’s really unnerving. It really is. But that’s what we’re dealing with down here,”



she said. “It’s like nothing we have ever seen before. I really hope something can be done.”

TFB believes the U.S. must secure its borders and enforce lawful immigration, and the organization asks federal and state authorities to help mitigate the border problem as soon as possible.

Farmers and ranchers from Arizona and New Mexico are also sharing their stories of financial hardship and disruption on the TFB Border Crisis Impacts webpage.

View all of the stories on texasfarmbureau.org/border-crisis-impacts.

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Texas farmer discusses drought impacts with members of Congress

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Although rains fell across much of the Lone Star State last month, drought is a word Texans know all too well.

Dry conditions persisted across Texas for most of 2020 and well into 2021. Drought categories of D3 and D4 were common across the state.

Heavy downpours in late May brought much-needed relief to the dry, parched ground. But parts of West Texas, the Texas Panhandle and other Western states still need more moisture. And conditions can change quickly during the heat of the summer months.

Republican members of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources held a forum on May 19 to examine the impacts of the growing drought situation across the West, and Texas farmer and rancher Ross Copeland shared his experiences dealing with drought.

U.S. Rep. August Pfluger of San Angelo is a Republican member on the committee. He highlighted the needs of the 11th District of Texas, as well as solutions to water challenges nationwide.

“There have been many factors

over the years making it increasingly difficult to continue farming and ranching,” Copeland told the committee members. “However, severe drought is one of the largest issues we face.”

Copeland is a fifth-generation farmer and rancher from Sterling City. He and his family raise cattle and sheep and grow crops in Coke, Sterling, Scurry and San Saba counties.

He’s no stranger to cracked ground desperate for the next rain.

As part of their farm rotation, Copeland often plants winter wheat in September or October and turns cattle out on the fields to graze in late winter or early spring. But severe drought conditions forced Copeland to reevaluate that plan for the last two years.

“The worsening drought made it impossible for us to grow a wheat crop, causing major disruption to our operation. Due to this, we have been forced to buy feed for cattle and even sell some of our herd to make ends meet,” he said. “Thankfully, there are programs in the farm bill to help keep us in operation, but I want to make this clear. These programs keep us operating. They by no means

make us completely whole. Regardless, we are grateful for the farm bill and have utilized these programs over the years.”

Farm bill programs like the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) help many American farmers like Copeland.

The program provides payments to farmers to offset losses from drought, hurricanes, wildfires and other qualifying natural disasters. An update in February 2020 expanded program eligibility to counties that experienced D3 and D4 drought conditions in 2018 and 2019. But expanded coverage is still needed to include the drought disasters of 2020 and 2021.

“While I would prefer to have stable markets, predictable weather and reasonable input costs to sustain our family and produce the world’s food and fiber, the reality is we must have a farm bill to achieve this goal,” he said. “When disasters like extreme drought occur, we must ensure supplemental assistance is provided. Extension and strengthening of the USDA Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus is crucially needed to cover extreme

weather events, such as the current drought for the 2020 and 2021 crop years.”

Texas Farm Bureau is working with other state Farm Bureaus and congressional leaders to extend WHIP+ to cover 2020 and 2021 crop years and make improvements to the program.

“Ross Copeland represents the next generation of farmers and ranchers, and it was an honor to have him testify on behalf of the 11th District,” Pfluger said. “Congress must immediately reauthorize the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus to cover disasters from 2020 and 2021. It is time to provide the needed relief so West Texas farmers can continue to supply the food and fiber our country depends on.”

Copeland serves as the president of Coke-Sterling County Farm Bureau and testified before the committee members on drought impacts on behalf of Texas Farm Bureau.

A California farmer and a South Dakota Stockgrowers Association representative were also among those who testified during the committee member forum.

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TFB Young Farmer & Rancher contest applications available online

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

The applications for the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) 2021 Outstanding Young Farmer & Rancher (OYF&R) and Excellence in Agriculture (EIA) contests are open.

“Texas has a lot of farms, ranches and businesses that are unique, and this contest is a great way to highlight them,” Kaylin Isbell, TFB YF&R Advisory Committee chair, said. “Every farmer and rancher—regardless of size, commodity or farming practices—has a place in Texas agriculture and Texas Farm Bureau. And this contest recognizes and rewards young farmers.”

The annual contests are a way to highlight the achievements of the younger generation.

Applicants for both contests must be between the ages of 18 and 35 as of Jan. 31, 2022, and be current TFB members in good standing.

Applicants can apply as individuals or married couples.

“Innovative, diverse, dedicated—these are all qualities of young farmers and ranchers in Texas,” said Roger Hall, TFB associate director of Organization division, Leader Development. “On the farm, in the classroom or in the ag business industry, they are doing great things, and this is a unique opportunity to showcase their endeavors and reward them for it.”

But there’s more to the contests.

“Filling out the application is probably the most beneficial part of the process,” Isbell said. “It’s a

time of self-reflection on your business. How did you adapt in the last year or last five years? What did you learn and how can you improve? The self-growth and awareness in all areas of your farm is truly beneficial.”

Both contests serve as a tool to help guide farmers and ranchers in personal and professional growth, Hall said.

Outstanding Young Farmer & Rancher Contest

The Outstanding YF&R Contest recognizes young farmers and ranchers who are actively engaged in farming or ranching.

“This contest highlights and rewards dedication and ingenuity, but it also gives young farmers and ranchers an avenue to promote agriculture, conservation, advocacy efforts and more,” Hall said.

One winner is chosen from each of TFB’s 13 districts. Of those, three finalists are selected after a second round of judging. The judges will then visit each of the three finalists’ farm or ranch to determine the overall winner.

This year’s state winner will receive the title to a ¾-ton diesel pickup, sponsored by Texas Farm Bureau Insurance Companies; a \$5,000 cash award, sponsored by Farm Credit Bank of Texas; and expense-paid trips to both the TFB Annual Meeting and American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Annual Convention.

Two runners-up will receive a \$500 cash award, sponsored by Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company, and expense-paid



Matt and Jessica Hanslik of Hallettsville were the winners of the 2020 Outstanding Young Farmer & Rancher Contest. They took home the title to a new pickup, among other prizes.

trips to the TFB Annual Meeting.

All district winners will receive a \$1,000 cash award from Farm Bureau Bank.

Excellence in Agriculture Contest

The EIA Contest rewards TFB members who are involved in agriculture but don’t make the majority of their income through production agriculture.

Eligible applicants include farm store managers, crop consultants, agricultural educators and those who are employed by an agricultural business or agency.

“Agriculture needs farms and ranches, but it also needs the businesses and industries that support farmers and ranchers,” Hall said. “The EIA Contest recognizes members who are involved in ag-related careers but still make time to be involved in production agriculture.”

The state winner will receive a

UTV, sponsored by Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company; a \$5,000 cash prize, sponsored by Farm Credit Bank of Texas, and expense-paid trips to both the TFB Annual Meeting and AFBF Annual Convention.

The two runners-up will receive a \$1,000 cash award, courtesy of Farm Bureau Bank, a \$500 cash award, sponsored by Southern Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company, and an expense-paid trip to attend the TFB Annual Meeting.

Contest Information

Applications for both contests are due Aug. 2.

Applications, sample questions and instructions are available online at <https://texasfarmbureau.org/YFR>.

For questions about the contest or other young farmer activities, email youngfarmers@txfb.org or call 254-399-5021.

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Texas Farm Bureau program brings the farm to classrooms

By Jennifer Whitlock
Field Editor

This spring, young students across Texas visited farms and ranches from their classrooms and homes, thanks to a new Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) program.

Through Farm From School, students in kindergarten through second grade met virtually with farmers and ranchers once a month using video conferencing technology.

The goal of the program was to provide students more engaging experiences while learning about agriculture and how it relates to content learned in the classroom, according to Jordan Walker, TFB associate director of Educational Outreach, Organization division.

“Many kids were still attending school virtually this spring when we rolled out Farm From School,” she said. “This really brought the farm to the students wherever they were, whether that was in a classroom, on a computer or tablet at home. We heard from many teachers that it was a nice way to bring in an outside speaker in a year when finding avenues to be more interactive was very challenging.”

Teachers from each of TFB’s 13 districts participated in Farm From School this spring. More than 1,065

students from home school, virtual and classroom settings connected with farmers and ranchers each month through the program.

During the monthly video meetings, the students got to know each farmer or rancher, learned about their operations and asked lots of questions along the way.

Jayne Doxsey, a retired school teacher, taught her three grandchildren at home this year. The children—who were in kindergarten, first and third grade—learned virtually through their school district part of the day, then participated in homeschool activities with Doxsey for the remainder of the school day.

The children, who live in TFB’s District 8, connected with Coryell County Farm Bureau members Cody and Erika Archie, who raise Dorper sheep and Angora goats and cattle.

“They have not been to a farm or ranch, so they learned a lot from Cody and Erika while they were shearing a goat in one of their videos,” Doxsey said. “Afterward, we did some research into the animals and talked about how their hair can be used and what role they play on the farm. It’s been such an amazing experience for them.”

Students from Mason Elementary in Cedar Park, who were learn-



Cody and Erika Archie show students how they care for their sheep on their Coryell County ranch. Photo courtesy Erika Archie.

ing virtually this semester, also met with the Archies.

“The kids love seeing what’s happening on their operation. They’ve asked the farmers about manure, the sheep dogs, tools and jobs on the farm, spraying cattle for flies, what skills are needed to care for the animals, all kinds of questions,” first-grade teacher Geeta Erickson said. “The kids had a realistic view because they aren’t just reading the information from a book. Their questions were really appropriate because they saw these things firsthand.”

In East Texas, District 11 students talked to Walker County Farm Bureau member Damon Burris, a forester for Steely Lumber Co. in Huntsville.

He took students from Forest Ridge Elementary in College Station on a journey from seedling to tree to lumber, showing the students the life cycle involved in the Texas forestry sector. And their response was enthusiastic.

“They actually wanted to leave recess early so they could get on the call from the very beginning. That’s how I know they really love it, and they’ve had relevant questions. One of my students asked how many



Elementary students in College Station take a virtual field trip to an East Texas timber farm. Photo courtesy Hillarie Rollins.

jobs Damon’s business provides the area,” Hillarie Rollins, whose class was participating through in-person learning, said. “All of his lessons have really targeted something we’ve learned in class, so we make those connections with what we’re learning. Things like plant life cycles and natural resources are so much clearer to them because they can see it happening in real time.”

After being such a success, Farm From School will be back in the fall with a slight change.

“In the fall, one farmer a month will visit with students from across the entire state,” Walker said. “Even if students are back in the classroom and going on field trips again, many of them will not have the opportunity to visit a farm in person. And this way, students might experience parts of Texas agriculture they’ve never seen before by visiting with farmers and ranchers from different parts of the state. This program can give students experiences they would not otherwise have.”

Details on Farm From School for the 2021-2022 school year will be available later this summer.

Visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc> for the latest announcements on Ag in the Classroom activities.



From farm to sawmill, Damon Burris shows students the various parts of the timber industry and how farmers care for their trees and the environment. Photo courtesy Damon Burris.

Apply for AFBF's Ag Innovation Challenge, win startup funds

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), in partnership with Farm Credit, has opened online applications for the 2022 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge. This national business competition showcases U.S. startup companies that are providing solutions to challenges faced by America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

Farm Bureau will award \$165,000 in startup funds provided by sponsors Farm Credit, Bayer Crop Science, Farm Bureau Bank, Farm Bureau Financial Services, FMC Corporation and John Deere.

Launched in 2015 as the first national competition focused exclusively on rural entrepreneurs, the challenge continues to identify the next ag entrepreneurs to watch and supports innovation essential to Farm Bureau member businesses and communities.

For this eighth year of the competition, Farm Bureau is seeking entrepreneurs who are addressing

either traditional or new and emerging challenges. The 2021 Farm Bureau Entrepreneur of the Year, Riley Clubb with Harvust, addressed traditional challenges by developing a software platform that helps farmers successfully hire, train and communicate with employees. The competition is also open to entrepreneurs tackling new challenges that surfaced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Now, more than ever, we need creative solutions from entrepreneurs to help our farmers, ranchers and rural communities thrive," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said.

For example, 2021 Ag Innovation semi-finalist Butter Meat Co. is a beef supply chain startup based in Western New York that is working to improve the value proposition of retired dairy cows as beef for farmers and consumers. Owners of the business are building a dairy beef brand that increases the farm gate value and offers customers flavorful

beef produced eco-consciously.

Another 2021 Ag Innovation semi-finalist, AgriHoodBaltimore, launched the Urban Farmer Training Resource Institute with a focus on developing the next generation of junior urban farmers.

Farm Bureau and Farm Credit will select 10 startup companies to compete as semi-finalists at the AFBF Convention in January 2022 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The 10 semi-finalist teams will be announced on Oct. 5 and awarded \$10,000 each. These 10 teams will compete to advance to the final round where four teams will receive an additional \$5,000 each and compete live on stage in front of Farm Bureau members, investors and industry representatives.

The final four teams will compete to win Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Winner, for a total of \$50,000 and Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Runner-up, for a total of \$20,000.

The People's Choice Team, which is selected by public vote, will receive an additional \$5,000. All 10 semi-finalist teams compete for this honor.

The top 10 semi-finalist teams will participate in pitch training and mentorship from Cornell University's Dyson School of Applied Economics & Management faculty prior to competing at AFBF's Convention.

In addition, the top 10 semi-finalist teams will have the opportunity to network with industry leaders and venture capital representatives from the Agriculture Department's Rural Business Investment Companies.

Entrepreneurs must be Farm Bureau members to qualify as top 10 semi-finalists.

Detailed eligibility guidelines, the competition timeline, videos and profiles of past winners are available at fb.org/challenge.

Applications must be received by midnight Eastern Daylight Time on Aug. 20.

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ELAP disaster assistance now includes fish raised for food

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas aquaculture producers are now eligible for the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA).

The agency announced a policy change in May that makes food fish and other aquatic species eligible for ELAP payments.

It's welcome news for redfish farmer Brandon Bowers, who lost his redfish crop following February's winter storm.

"We are extremely grateful and relieved," said Bowers, who raises redfish near Palacios. "We didn't know if this was even possible, but we met with our lawmakers and worked with other groups to try to get this accomplished. To see it actually happen is great news for aquaculture producers and other farmers who might want to get into the aquaculture industry."

Previously, only farm-raised game and bait fish were eligible for death-loss ELAP benefits. But through their efforts and help of organizations, including Texas Farm Bureau

(TFB), redfish and catfish farmers now qualify for ELAP.

In March, 14 members of the Texas Congressional delegation sent a letter to FSA asking for redfish farmers to be eligible for ELAP assistance.

"These redfish farms in Texas produce over 95% of domestic farm-raised redfish. Early estimates predict that the total loss will reach 10 million pounds of fish valued at \$50 million. A loss of this magnitude will not only drastically reduce revenue for this season, but it will also leave these farmers with no revenue until they have marketable fish again," the congressional leaders wrote.

TFB communicated with congressional leaders and USDA officials to stress the need for disaster assistance.

"Winter Storm Uri caused Texas redfish farmers to lose basically all of their fish inventory," Laramie Adams, TFB national legislative director, said. "That's tough when you've been in business for years and even tougher for someone like Brandon Bowers who is relatively new to the industry. Working to make redfish farmers eligible for ELAP payments was essential to protecting this part of the agricultural sector and ensur-

ing these farmers can continue to raise fish and provide for their families. We appreciate the congressional leaders who worked with USDA to ensure redfish were covered, especially Congressman Michael Cloud, whose district includes almost all domestic redfish production. Congressman Cloud and his staff did an excellent job leading this effort."

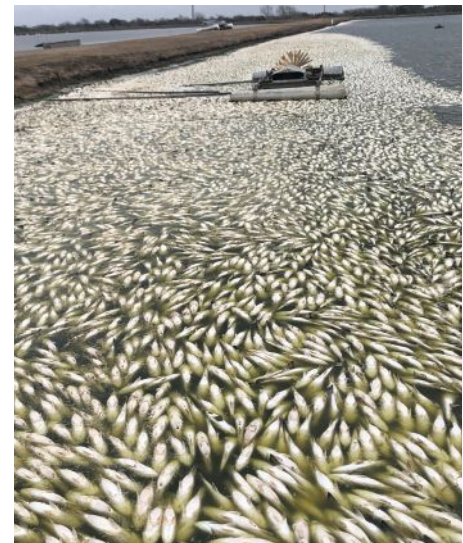
To be eligible, losses must have occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2021.

FSA is waiving the requirement to file a notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent for farm-raised fish and other aquatic species death losses that occurred prior to June 1, 2021.

An aquaculture producer will still need to provide records upon request to document the eligible loss event and demonstrate the beginning and ending inventory.

The deadline to file an application for payment for the 2021 program year is Jan. 31, 2022.

"We want producers of all kinds to know that we're listening. (This) announcement demonstrates that USDA is committed to helping the aquaculture industry recover from losses due to Winter Storm Uri and other disaster events," FSA Admin-



It took about a month to clean up at Brandon Bowers' Matagorda County fish farm after Winter Storm Uri. Photo courtesy Brandon Bowers.

istrator Zach Ducheneaux said.

USDA also announced it will purchase up to \$159.4 million in domestically-produced seafood, fruits, legumes and nuts for distribution to a variety of domestic food assistance programs. The majority of the purchase includes American seafood—the largest single purchase of American seafood in the agency's history.

For more information on applying for ELAP, visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

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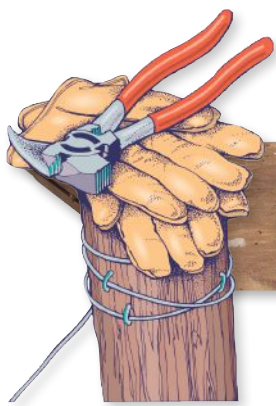
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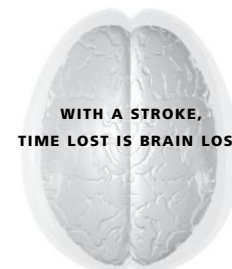
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