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September 4, 2020

Texas Agriculture

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U.S. beef maps road ahead Page 23

Representing agriculture in a positive, factual light

It can be frustrating to see efforts by some that are aimed at undermining the American consumer's confidence in the food we grow for them. America's farmers and ranchers feed this country, and we are proud to do it.

It's important that we represent agriculture in a positive, factual light. We must continue to tell our story. The facts are on our side. And Texas Farm Bureau is designed to be a vehicle to help you and I share the story of Texas agriculture. The mission of our organization is to be the Voice of Texas Agriculture.

The challenges for Texas farmers and ranchers are many. It is up to each of us to make sure those outside of agriculture understand these challenges and what all of us are doing to respond while, at the same time, feeding our nation.

Environmental activists continually target our use of modern production tools such as crop protection chemicals and synthetic fertilizers. They ignore the science. They fail to mention that use of these tools continues to decline and are applied today with precision using modern technology. We can't feed the world,

much less our country, with outdated methods and technology.

There is certainly room and a place for all agricultural production models. We welcome those who are innovative and cater to individual consumer desires. However, we must have a food system that can efficiently feed more than 330 million people in our country. Every month, every week, every day of the year.



By Russell Boening
President

"Sustainability" is the rallying cry most often used to criticize modern agriculture. Farming and ranching models espoused by those without a need for profitability are not the solution. A family farm and ranch, regardless of size, must be profitable to be sustainable.

There is the everyday threat of financial reality. Low commodity prices and global economic pressures squeeze most farmers and ranchers out of business. You can't grow yourself out of debt when the cost of production is below breakeven. Volume won't turn the bottom line black.

Farmers and ranchers willingly adopt and invest in new practices. It's extremely expensive, though. The cost of inputs has increased as-

tronomically in the past 20 years, but the price we receive for our commodities has not. Scale and efficiency are the only areas we can affect for survival.

Activists paint livestock owners with a brush colored with accusations of widespread industry abuse. It's simply not true. But the regulations and mandates that spring in reaction to those claims add more costs to our business.

Let's not forget Mother Nature. She's unpredictable and unforgiving. But don't point at agriculture as a major contributor to climate change. The evidence isn't there. Today's modern farm and ranch practices are more climate friendly. There is more efficient use of natural resources. It's a positive story of success and innovation.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, greenhouse gas from beef cattle only represents 2 percent of emissions in the U.S. All of agriculture, including beef production, accounts for about 9 percent of total U.S. emissions.

By contrast, transportation accounts for 29 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, and electricity is nearly 28 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

Beef cattle production, including the production of animal feed, is responsible for only 3.7 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

U.S. agriculture is part of the climate solution, not the problem.

That's a good story to tell. And we should tell that story with pride. Texas Farm Bureau is designed to add volume and reach to your voice.



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Publisher

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Cindy Wennin
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TFB announces 2020 Clover Cash grant recipients

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) awarded \$20,000 to 25 county, district and state 4-H programs and activities through the Clover Cash Grant Program.

Launched this year, the grant program was established to fund hands-on activities that grow students' knowledge of food, fiber and fuel.

Programs funded by the Clover Cash grants also strive to help students understand the importance of agricultural advocacy.

"Activities through 4-H are a great opportunity for students of all ages to connect and engage with agriculture," Mia Balko, TFB director of Youth Outreach, said. "The proposed projects help expand students' knowledge of agriculture and agricultural advocacy in ways that are meaningful and memorable."

Programs that received county-level grants include: Baylor County 4-H, Bexar County 4-H, Brazos County 4-H, Cass County 4-H, Cherokee County 4-H, Clay County 4-H, Coryell County 4-H, Guadalupe County



4-H, Hale County–Abernathy 4-H, Hartley County 4-H, Hidalgo County–Borderline 4-H, Kerr County 4-H, Lubbock County 4-H, Lynn County 4-H, Montgomery County 4-H, Navarro County 4-H, Refugio County 4-H, Washington County 4-H and Williamson County 4-H.

Programs that received district-level grants include: District 1, Dis-

trict 2 and District 8.

Programs that received state-level grants include the 4-H Water Ambassadors Program and Texas 4-H Council.

For more information about the Clover Cash grant program, visit texasfarmbureau.org/youth/youth-opportunities or contact Balko at mbalko@txfb.org.

Texas Panhandle cattleman to chair EPA advisory committee

A Texas Panhandle cattleman was recently selected to serve as the chair of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) newly-revived Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Advisory Committee.

Hartley County Farm Bureau member Tom McDonald will serve as chair of the 33-member committee.

"I'm sure the goal of every production agriculture representative on the committee is to protect against excessive regulations, but I think the bigger objective in my mind is to put a face to agriculture," McDonald said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

He wants to show EPA that the agricultural community is a friend,

not a foe.

"What I would like for them to see is the way agriculture really is," he said. "We're leaders in the world for producing safe, wholesome food at an affordable price, and we take our natural resource management very seriously."

A key issue he plans to address is the incorrect notion that agriculture contributes greatly to U.S. sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As a longtime leader in the cattle feedyard sector, McDonald said he has faced this issue many times.

But multiple studies, including a recent EPA report, show agriculture only contributes 9.9 percent of all GHG emissions in the U.S. That number is far below transportation,

energy and industrial use.

In fact, McDonald noted U.S. agriculture provides many positive impacts on GHG emissions due to plants and row crops removing carbon dioxide from the environment.

"We all know from our high school biology class that plants take up CO₂ and give off oxygen, and that CO₂ is coming from the greenhouse gas emissions that are in the atmosphere," he said.

McDonald is the senior vice president of Environmental Affairs & Sustainability at Five Rivers Cattle Feeding Company, which is headquartered in Johnstown, Colorado. His office is at XIT Feeders in Dalhart, one of 11 feedyards owned by Five Rivers.

Researchers developing new anthrax vaccine

There may soon be a new weapon in the centuries-old battle against anthrax in wildlife, thanks to groundbreaking work at the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences.

Anthrax, a disease caused by a bacterium called *Bacillus anthracis*, contaminates surface soil and grasses, where it may be ingested or inhaled by livestock or grazing wildlife. This is especially common in the western Texas Hill Country, where each year the disease kills livestock and wildlife.

There is already a vaccine for anthrax, which many livestock owners administer annually. Unfortunately, it can only be administered with an injection that is time consuming for livestock and not feasible for wildlife.

Researchers went to work to attempt to create a formulation to deliver the vaccine orally, which would allow for potential distribution to wildlife.

If successful, it will be the first effective oral vaccine against anthrax for wildlife.

Anthrax is among the oldest enemies of microbiologists, and the current vaccination method—using what's known as the Sterne strain—is basically the same as it was 85 years ago when Max Sterne developed it. So, an oral vaccine has been a goal for some time.

The main issue with an oral vaccine is the ability to keep the bacteria alive in the gastrointestinal tract long enough and in the right amount to produce the desired immune activity in the animal. To that end, other efforts have been made with different strains of the bacteria and other mediums, but have thus far not proven effective.

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House Ag leaders ask USDA to investigate packers

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture asked U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to launch a full-scale investigation of the beef packing sector.

In a letter to Perdue in early August, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-Minnesota) and Ranking Member Mike Conaway (R-Texas) said there are concerns about the vulnerability of the nation's beef supply chain and the level of concentration in the industry.

The congressmen said Perdue has the authority to use policy research centers to investigate these issues.

"We are writing to request that the Office of the Chief Economist engage the policy research centers to address current issues and trends in cattle markets, including structure of the industry, price discovery and methods to address deficiencies, price reporting, purchasing man-

dates and barriers to entry in the packing sector," the letter said.

Peterson and Conaway also asked that policy research centers provide an "in-depth description of today's beef packing sector," including answers to questions about how the sector became so concentrated, whether the current capacity is sufficient for growth and if policy options are available to increase price discovery.

In an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Radio Network, Conaway said he and other lawmakers, as well as their constituents, would like to have more information on the issue surrounding beef packers.

"There is a lot of turmoil in the market, a lot of suspicions and a lot of information that may or may not be accurate. We want to try to get as many facts on the table as we can. Having some experts look into things seems like a good idea to help address some of these issues,"

Conaway said. "Whether there's anything going on that should not be going on, or if it's just normal supply-and-demand reactions that are going on, the idea is to help all packers and producers and everyone to have a level playing field in terms of what's happening."

Ranchers across Texas and the U.S. were hit hard by COVID-19 this spring. Slowdowns and shutdowns at meat processing plants led to bottlenecks at feedyards and packing houses, drastically decreasing cattle prices as boxed beef prices rose to unprecedented levels.

"Every producer out there believes the packers have an advantage over them in the marketplace, and getting the broad study that we want done will help answer some of those questions," Conaway said. "And if that's the case, then we'll take steps. If it's not, is there competition available in the packer industry that is currently not there? Are there barriers to that new competition coming in that we



could address, as well? There may not be anything wrong at all other than that you just haven't had anybody who wants to invest in packing plants, but there may be something going on. We think that this study will answer those questions."

Many ranchers in Texas with those same questions are eager to see this study on beef packers move forward, according to TFB National Legislative Director Laramie Adams.

"Texas Farm Bureau has had discussions with our Congressional leaders about beef industry issues, especially lately since some of those issues were highlighted through the pandemic," Adams said. "We'll keep pressing to try to find some solutions for Texas ranchers who were tremendously affected by the impact COVID-19 had on the beef supply chain."

Adams noted TFB is also a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation cattle working group, which is exploring some of those issues on a national scale.

"Our members were severely impacted by having to sell their livestock at very low prices or the complete inability to sell their livestock due to the pandemic," he said. "We're working with our lawmakers and other industry representatives to see what can be done to help in the future. Americans depend on the entire supply chain for that safe, reliable food supply, but it starts on farms and ranches across the nation."

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Texas Farm Bureau members discuss policy for coming year

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Groundwater and surface water use interaction, property tax reform and pipeline surface remediation were among the topics discussed at Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Policy Development meetings across the state.

Policy Development meetings are an integral part of creating the organizational road map for the following year, giving members the opportunity to surface and discuss potential policy updates.

“Texas Farm Bureau is founded on grassroots advocacy, and while our meetings looked a little different this year with COVID-19, we’re committed to making sure our policies still come from that grassroots, boots-on-the-ground membership base,” Brant Wilbourn, TFB associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said. “We utilized technology to make sure our member’s voices are heard, and as always, the topics discussed at these Policy Development meetings will help our members as they create policies that will be discussed at the annual meeting.”

Wilbourn noted 2020 brought about a record number of property tax valuation protests in Texas, partially because of COVID-19’s economic impact.

In Texas, properties must be appraised by Jan. 1, and appraisal notices are mailed out in April and May. But this year, March brought a global pandemic, forcing many businesses to close their doors and significantly increasing unemployment numbers.

Property owners find it difficult that property values have increased so much when many are struggling, Wilbourn said.

“Property taxes were brought up at nearly every district meeting,” he said. “Many landowners have issues with the way appraisal districts handle land valuations. A high tax burden may force some property owners to sell off their land, which only exacerbates urban encroachment and other issues.”

During the meetings, it was apparent agricultural water use continues to come under attack.

“Conflicts between groundwater users and surface water right-holders is not a new issue,” Wilbourn said. “But groundwater is private property, and landowners have a right to use that property. That’s the law in Texas.”

There have been discussions of implementing incentive-based strategies to reduce groundwater usage, such as compensating groundwater users for reducing pumping, he said.

TFB members must decide whether to support those strategies.

Eminent domain reform, particularly surface remediation after development, remains a top issue faced by rural landowners.

“Often, entities with eminent domain authority fail to restore the easement area to its original condition,” Wilbourn said. “Some companies come in, dig down and install a pipeline, and leave a mess when they’re done. That’s unacceptable to the landowner, and that’s unaccept-

able to us as an organization supporting private property rights.”

Landowners can negotiate language in easement contracts requiring payments for damages not restored, but the path to receive remediation or cleanup is costly and time-consuming litigation.

TFB has policy to support utility companies carrying performance bonds to restore a landowner’s property to its previous state or as close to its previous state as reasonably possible, Wilbourn noted. But the organization does not currently have policy supporting the same treatment from major condemnors like common carrier pipelines.

Water use and water rights, issues in the cattle market and beef processing sector and COVID-19’s impact on agriculture were also discussed across the state.

Districts along the U.S.-Mexico border expressed concerns that Mexico is still not holding up its end of a long-standing water share agreement between the two nations, placing farmers there in a precari-

ous position.

COVID-19 highlighted sources of tension in the U.S. beef supply chain, and members discussed concerns about price fixing and collusion, lack of competition and business practices among major meat packers. Members also discussed potential TFB policy to protect and encourage the continued operation of small and medium-sized processing facilities.

“We’ve heard some of these concerns before, but COVID-19 really highlighted some of those problems cattle ranchers, in particular, have faced in the supply chain,” he said.

County Farm Bureaus must submit policy resolutions that were adopted at their annual meeting to the state office by Oct. 23.

TFB policy proposals approved by county Farm Bureaus will be considered by the TFB Resolutions Committee in early November.

The committee’s recommendations will then be forwarded to the TFB Annual Meeting in December for consideration by the voting delegates.

Winners announced in TFB’s Lesson Plan Challenge

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Creating engaging lessons about agriculture earned five teachers recognition from Texas Farm Bureau (TFB).

The Lesson Plan Challenge provided a unique opportunity to grow curriculum resources for Texas teachers who want to increase agricultural literacy and awareness across all grades and subject areas.

“Agriculture can fit into any subject and in any grade,” Jordan Walker, TFB director of Education Outreach, said. “We wanted this challenge to inspire Texas teachers to create interactive lessons that involve accurate agricultural information, and they did. We received outstanding lesson plans that will help bridge the gap between stu-

dents and agriculture.”

Marsha Hammack, a fifth-grade ELAR and science teacher from Taylor County, was awarded first place in the Grades 3-5 Category for her “It’s All in a Day’s Work” lesson.

Shelly Renfro, fifth-grade science teacher from Denton County, was awarded second place in the Grades 3-5 Category for her “Processed vs. Unprocessed Foods” lesson.

In the category for Grades 6-8, Jennifer Pesky, a seventh-grade science teacher from Austin County, won first place for her lesson titled “Select ‘R’ Us.”

Myles Hammack, a high school Spanish and English teacher in Dickens County, received first place for his “La Importancia de

la Agricultura Mi Leccion de Agricultura Para El Español 3” lesson in the Grades 9-12 Category.

In that same category, Mary Beth Bauer, a high school environmental science teacher from Kerr County, was awarded second place for her “Go ‘O’ or No? Organic or Traditional Food Production?” lesson.

The winners received one digital microscope for use in the classroom and \$300 to purchase classroom supplies. The first-place winners will also receive an all-expense paid trip to the 2021 National Ag in the Classroom Annual Conference.

Each teacher who submitted a lesson plan received a classroom garden kit that includes a 32-cell starter tray, 32 soil pucks and 10 packs of seeds, as well as an accurate ag book.

TPWD forecasts favorable white-tailed deer season

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

Well-distributed and timely rains across much of the state, combined with positive long-term growth in the white-tailed deer population, will lead to a favorable white-tailed deer season for Texas hunters this year.

“We had, for most of Texas, good rains in late April, May and early June. As a result of that, we had an abundance of good native forage growing out there. So, those bucks were able to start off on a good foot, so to speak, with antler growth,” Alan Cain, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) white-tailed deer program leader, said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

Early fawn recruitment numbers were looking good, and Cain said, hopefully, those will carry on through the hunting season.

“Right now, in talking to the landowners and hunters who are starting to check on their deer lease and set

up cameras and looking at deer, they’re excited,” Cain said.

TPWD estimates the state white-tailed deer population at 5.5 million deer.

That’s a population density of 49.25 deer per 1,000 acres. Density is not uniform across the state. Those areas with better habitat tend to support higher deer populations.

“The trends suggest that population is going to be staying about the same for this upcoming season,” Cain said. “Fawn recruitment looks good this year, so I expect that population to at least be stable, which we have a lot of deer in the landscape and a lot of opportunities for hunters.”

From a statewide perspective,



hunters might expect to see a higher proportion of bucks in the 6.5- to 8.5-year age classes due to above-average fawn crops in previous years.

Other age classes are expected to reflect a more even distribution.

“While doe harvest has been down slightly in the last couple of years, which is likely contributing to a widening ratio of does to bucks, the good news for hunters is that there should be plenty of carryover from previous years,” Cain said.

General white-tailed deer season for the north zone runs Nov. 7-Jan. 3. The special late season is Jan. 4-17.

General season for the south zone is Nov. 7-Jan. 17. The special late season follows Jan. 18-31.

Archery season for white-tailed deer is Oct. 3-Nov. 6.

The youth-only early season is Oct. 31 and Nov. 1. The youth-only late season runs Jan. 4-17.

Muzzleloader season is Jan. 4-17.

“There’s no new changes as far as deer harvest regulations. Obviously, the season dates will change with the calendar progression, as they do every year, but there’s been no changes for the deer season or limits in any of the counties,” Cain said.

Hunters who harvest antlerless

deer during archery, youth-only, muzzleloader or the four-day doe days in the general season in select counties must report their harvest on the MyHuntHarvest app.

“I will remind hunters in a group of 21 counties in kind-of that Southern Post Oak area between San Antonio and Houston that we still have mandatory harvest reporting for antlerless deer that are harvested and tagged with a hunting license tag,” Cain said. “This’ll be the second year going into that with that regulation.”

The following counties are in the antlerless deer reporting area: Austin, Bastrop, Caldwell, Colorado, Dewitt, Fayette, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Karnes, Lavaca, Lee, Waller, Washington and Wilson.

Areas of Goliad, Jackson, Victoria and Wharton counties north of U.S. Highway 59 and Comal, Hays and Travis counties east of IH-35 are also included.

Harvests must be reported within 24 hours of taking an animal via the free MyHuntHarvest app.

To protect the state’s deer population, there are additional regulations for hunters in Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) containment and surveillance zones.

“CWD regulations are still in effect in the CWD zones that we have established in the state. There’s one in the Panhandle, one in the Trans-Pecos out towards the El Paso area, one in a portion of Val Verde County around Del Rio, the South Central Texas zone in that Medina/Uvalde County area,” Cain said. “Also, we have a new zone that’s established this year in Kimble County, and it’s just east at Junction, around that Segovia area.”

Within those zones, the requirements remain the same as last year.

“There’s mandatory carcass movement restrictions for moving carcass parts out of the zone, and then also mandatory sampling of hunter harvested deer in those zones,” Cain said.

Details on those requirements are available at tpwd.texas.gov, in the online Outdoor Annual and the Outdoor Annual app.

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Exports under China trade deal closely watched

An American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Market Intel analysis shows China is buying more U.S. commodities for the upcoming marketing year, starting in September.

“So far, soybeans, sorghum and cotton have quite a lot of advanced new-crop sales, greater than what they’ve been the last few years. Corn sales, a little bit slower. Even though we are seeing reports of big sales by volume, when you look at those sales as a share of total production that’s expected this year, those sales are still pretty moderate,” Veronica Nigh, AFBF economist, said.

Large new-crop sales kick-start exports for the new marketing year, but don’t necessarily lead to greater total exports. Nigh said current data show China is behind its phase one commitments, which were finalized in January.

Nigh noted there are many factors that can influence trade with China.

“There’s a lot of dynamics going on—those that are market driven and those that are politically driven,” she said.

New-crop sales of soybeans, sorghum and cotton are significant and exceed the share of recent years’ projected production. But the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service says “strong early season sales do not necessarily lead to greater total exports as numerous variables influence trade dynamics throughout the year. However, large early season sales do give a kickstart to exports in the coming year.”

The full analysis is available at fb.org/market-intel.

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BQA earns compliance with animal welfare standards

The checkoff-funded Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program is now recognized as an industry-leading animal welfare program.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has reviewed and certified that the BQA program complies with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Animal Welfare Management/General Requirements and Guidance for Organizations in the Food Supply Chain.

The ISO specification was developed in 2016 to provide a path for programs to show they are aligned with the principles of the World Organization of Animal Health (OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code and ensures the welfare of farm animals across the supply chain.

The BQA program, which is managed by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), received the recognition in late July.

"USDA's affirmation that the program complies with ISO speci-



fications is an important recognition of U.S. cattle producers' continued commitment to delivering a safe, high-quality beef supply while maintaining the highest animal welfare standards," Dr. Julia Herman, beef cattle specialist veterinarian for NCBA, said.

Developed more than 30 years ago, the BQA program has become

the industry standard for delivering education and resources to cattlemen and women.

More than 85 percent of the U.S. beef supply today is managed by BQA-certified farmers and ranchers, according to the National BQA Database.

By partnering with state programs across the country, BQA

reaches ranchers on operations of all sizes, in all corners of the nation, with digital and in-person training and certification.

To earn certification with the animal welfare standards, the BQA program underwent a thorough audit process that evaluated the program's principles, guidelines and standards across its many resources, including the BQA National Manual and Self-Assessments.

This recognition will mean the BQA program is listed on USDA's Quality Assessment Division website as being compliant with the ISO specification.

"BQA's recognition by USDA of ISO compliance clearly shows that animal welfare is a top priority for America's cattle producers, and global consumers can rest assured that the American beef they consume is produced in accordance with the highest animal welfare standards in the world," Kent Bacus, NCBA senior director of International Trade and Market Access, said.

Peanut farmers strikeout this Major League Baseball season

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

There's nothing like the sharp crack of wood hitting the ball followed by the roar of the home crowd, with the smell of peanuts wafting through the air. It's an experience many baseball fans will be missing this year as Minor League Baseball remains shuttered and Major League Baseball (MLB) set a shortened season in front of empty stands.

It's weighing heavily on the minds of peanut farmers in Texas, which is the fourth-largest peanut-growing state in the U.S., according to Texas Peanut Producers Board Executive Director Shelly Nutt.

Because Texas peanuts are mainly grown using irrigation, Nutt said they are usually of a consistent quality, making them a sought-after commodity.

Texas is the only state to grow all four types of peanuts: Runner, Spanish, Valencia and Virginia. Although peanut butter sales have significant-

ly increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia peanuts are not suited for that purpose.

"Those Virginia peanuts are a higher-quality peanut, since they're grown to be harvested and used in-shell. They're protected from the time the seed goes into the ground until they're harvested. Farmers are doing everything they can to make sure the shell quality is good, that it doesn't get too dark, that it doesn't get rained on, and they also get paid more for it. And in 2019, we had a great crop of Virginias," Nutt said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

But the high-quality crop is currently going uneaten.

"They were already bagged up, cleaned, roasted, salted, packaged into bags and ready to go to baseball games. Now, after the pandemic, we have all of 2019 sitting in warehouses bagged and ready to go," she said. "And we have the 2020 crop already in the ground and growing. So, we

have to figure out how to move those peanuts out of the warehouses, and get them into consumers' hands."

To help, the National Peanut Board has developed a new campaign encouraging consumers to eat in-shell peanuts at home while watching sports.

"We'll soon start seeing some commercials on Fox Sports stations basically encouraging consumers to eat in-shell peanuts while you're at home watching baseball games or football games, whatever sports we get to have. Buy peanuts and eat them in your living room and just help out our peanut farmers," she said. "We know they're a healthy snack, and maybe it'll bring back a little bit of nostalgia. Hopefully, it'll help with that oversupply."

Most peanut farmers receive contracts on the crop prior to planting, so while 2020 won't be a bad year to sell peanuts, it's 2021 that has farmers like Gaines County Farm Bureau member Otis Johnson uneasy.

"Luckily, like most people in West Texas, our peanuts are contracted early in the year. I already have my contract set for Virginias for this year, so the price is actually pretty good. What happens down the road for next year is what's going to be interesting to see," Johnson said.

In a normal year, the National Peanut Board estimates about four million bags of peanuts are sold at MLB games. So, those empty stands will create a huge surplus, possibly crashing peanut prices.

But Johnson said the increase in peanut butter consumption will help use some of the surplus created by the lack of ballpark sales. He noted exports to China are up 40 percent, too.

"Even though we're not selling a lot of peanuts at ball games, we're exporting more and we're converting a lot more," Johnson said. "People are staying home, and evidently, they're eating more peanut butter. So, it's not all bad."

CFAP deadline extended to Sept. 11, more commodities eligible

The deadline to apply for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) is extended to Sept. 11, and farmers and ranchers with approved applications will receive their final payment.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also announced additional commodities that are eligible for CFAP. The commodities were added in response to public comments and data.

After reviewing over 1,700 responses, even more farmers and ranchers will have the opportunity for assistance to help keep operations afloat during these tough times.

“President Trump is standing with America’s farmers and ranchers to ensure they get through this pandemic and continue to produce enough food and fiber to feed America and the world. That is why he authorized this \$16 billion of direct support in the CFAP program, and we are pleased to add additional commodities eligible to receive much-needed assistance,” U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said. “CFAP is just one of the many ways USDA is helping producers weather the impacts of the pandemic. From deferring payments on loans to adding flexibilities to crop insurance and reporting deadlines, USDA has been leveraging many tools to help producers.”

A full list of eligible commodities is available at farmers.gov/cfap.

Applying for CFAP

Farmers and ranchers, especially those who have not worked with FSA previously, are recommended to call 877-508-8364 to begin the application process. An FSA staff member can help farmers and ranchers start their application during the phone call.

Eligibility forms, such as those related to adjusted gross income and payment information, can be downloaded from farmers.gov/cfap. For existing FSA customers, these documents are likely already on file. All USDA Service Centers are

open for business, including some that are open to visitors to conduct business in person by appointment only. All Service Center visitors should call ahead and schedule an appointment.

Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Producers who have applied

To ensure availability of funding,

farmers and ranchers with approved applications initially received 80 percent of their payments.

FSA will automatically issue the remaining 20 percent of the calculated payment to eligible farmers and ranchers.

Going forward, farmers and ranchers who apply for CFAP will receive 100 percent of their total payment, not to exceed the payment limit, when their applications are approved.

More information can be found at

farmers.gov/cfap.

Texans receive CFAP funds

As of Aug. 24, more than 41,750 Texas farmers and ranchers have applied and received CFAP funds totaling over \$544.3 million.

More than 557,590 farmers and ranchers nationwide have received \$9.2 billion of the \$16 billion allotted through the federal program.

Cattle is the commodity that has received the most payments at both the national and state levels.



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How We're Driving Change.

Dairy farmers need a voice in milk pricing policy

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) released its final report on priorities for milk pricing reform, calling for more democracy and a more equitable program for dairy farmers.

Among AFBF's priorities is amending the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act to give dairy farmers an opportunity to directly vote on Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) issues.

Currently, only dairy farmers who are independent and not members of cooperatives may cast individual ballots. Cooperatives may allow their members to vote independently, but then lose their ability to bloc vote on behalf of their non-participating members.

AFBF supports allowing modified bloc-voting, which would allow co-op members to vote independently and confidentially, while allowing cooperatives to cast ballots for farmers who choose not to cast an individual ballot.

A Farm Bureau Federal Milk Marketing Order Working Group, consisting of grassroots dairy farmer members, worked for a year to examine the system and develop recommendations to modernize the current FMMO system. Farm Bureau delegates voted to approve the group's proposals.

"I appreciate all the work our members have done to give individual farmers a stronger voice in the milk pricing and pooling regulations," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. "Farm Bureau has been outspoken on the disparities in the beef and hog markets, and we are just as concerned about the large imbalances in the pricing and pooling of milk, which ultimately cost dairy farmers hundreds of millions of dollars."

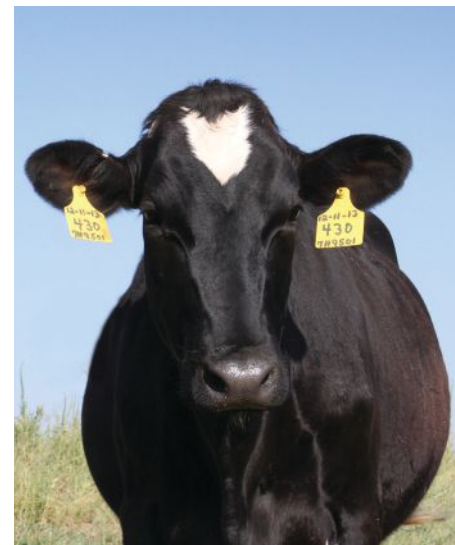
Duvall noted major price swings during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted how important fair systems are to the well-being of America's farmers and ranchers.

"By giving dairy farmers a seat at

the table, we can begin addressing the challenges of the current FMMO system and work toward a more equitable compensation system for the hardworking men and women in the dairy industry," Duvall said.

Although Federal Milk Marketing Orders have been a pillar of the dairy industry for more than 80 years, outside of the 2018 Farm Bill, the program has not undergone substantial change in almost two decades.

"COVID-19 has resulted in unprecedented volatility in agricultural markets, especially milk and dairy commodity prices," AFBF Chief Economist Dr. John Newton said. "The price volatility, a record-large spread between prices for the various milk classes, mass de-pooling and record-large milk check deductions take money out of farmers' pockets at a time when they desperately need it. Moreover, it highlights the urgent need for dairy farmers and the industry to collectively consider ways to modernize the FMMO

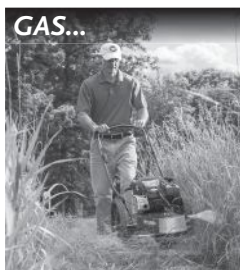


system and improve prices paid to farmers."

Other recommendations in the final report include expanding price discovery and examining alternative ways to price fluid milk and improve risk-sharing between farmers and processors.

For a more in-depth look at recent disruptions to milk prices and record negative producer price differentials, read AFBF's Market Intel at fb.org/market-intel.

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TFB Virtual Collegiate Discussion Meet applications now open

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) will once again offer college students an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills through the Collegiate Discussion Meet.

But this year the contest will be held virtually.

“Although the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way we’re hosting this year’s contest, it’s still a great opportunity for college students to dive into current issues facing agriculture,” Jesse Wieners, TFB Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee chair, said. “It’s also a way to practice presentation skills and critical thinking.”

Eligible contestants must be between the ages of 18 and 35 as of Jan. 31, 2021, must have an interest in agriculture and be pursuing an undergraduate degree in agriculture or an agricultural-related field.

Professional speakers and former

Collegiate Discussion Meet winners are not eligible to compete.

The contest, which is hosted by TFB’s Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee, helps college students better understand issues facing all sectors of agriculture—farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, the food supply chain and more.

“Today’s students are the future of tomorrow. They will help us find the solutions to some of agriculture’s greatest challenges,” Wieners said. “I think this year, more than ever before, will show students how important it is to think outside the box when it comes to providing solutions to issues facing agriculture.”

The Virtual Collegiate Discussion Meet will consist of recorded responses and live Zoom discussions.

The first two rounds in the contest will be recorded individual responses. Two of the five questions will be selected and provided to contestants via email.

Competitors will have 24 hours to submit two videos, not to exceed five minutes each, containing individual discussion. Videos should include a thesis statement, analysis of the agricultural issue, a suggested solution and ways Farm Bureau can be part of that solution.

The clips will be sent to judges for evaluation.

Scores from the video submission will determine who will advance to the Collegiate Discussion Meet rounds held via Zoom.

“We believe the virtual contest will still meet the core competition objective to develop leaders for effective problem solving through group discussion,” Wieners said. “We look forward to hearing the ideas from this year’s contestants.”

And competing has its benefits.

The winner will take home a \$2,500 cash award, a plaque and an expense-paid trip to compete in the American Farm Bureau Federation’s

Collegiate Discussion Meet in 2021.

The runner-up will receive a \$1,500 cash award and a plaque.

The remaining two finalists will each receive a \$750 cash award and plaque.

Register for the Virtual Collegiate Discussion Meet by Oct. 7.

Visit texasfarmbureau.org/YFR for the application and more information on contest eligibility, details and schedule. The five questions will also be available online.

Contact youngfarmers@txfb.org with questions related to the contest or the organization’s YF&R program.

Sign up for updates on YF&R contests, activities and other opportunities through the MyTFB membership portal. Login or create an account at my.texasfarmbureau.org, and select “Contact Preferences” from the left-hand menu. From there, select “Young Farmer & Rancher” to receive email updates throughout the year.

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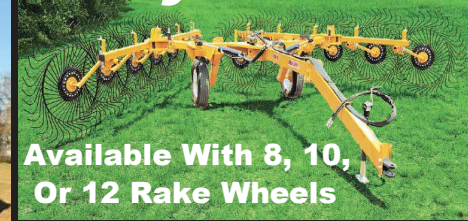
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Family legacy: Giles family works to preserve Hill Country ranch

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

What looks like desolate country to one person may simply be a vision waiting to be realized for another. According to fourth-generation rancher Grant Giles, it just takes hard work, perseverance and long-range planning.

Hillingdon Ranch in Comfort has been in the Giles family for 130 years, and through continued sustainability planning and conservative livestock management, Grant is working to keep it that way.

History

“My great-grandfather, Alfred Giles, came to America from Hillingdon, England,” he said. “He was an architect who designed many courthouses in the Hill Country area, and while he was building the Gillespie County courthouse, he started purchasing land in the area, eventually putting together over 13,000 acres. A lot of the German settlers had already settled the river bottoms and better farmland by then, but he saw value in the hills between the Peder-nales and Guadalupe rivers.”

As part of a big land purchase, Alfred also purchased a cattle brand and any existing cattle associated with that brand. The previous owner said he had 200 head, but when all were rounded up, he had more than 600.

The land was extremely over-grazed. Grass coverage was poor, and brushy growth was heavy.

“But he made lemonade out of lemons by purchasing goats to graze all that brush,” Giles said. “He was probably ahead of his time, but he did something a little out of the ordinary and brought Angora goats into the area in 1890.”

Alfred’s bet that the rocky, brushy country would be suitable for goats paid off. Soon, the ranch was a thriving operation where the Giles family raised Angora goats, sheep and Angus cattle.

“This was actually a Hereford area, but my great-grandfather



Grant Giles, his wife Misty and sons Wade (left) and West (right) are the fourth generation to ranch full-time at Hillingdon Ranch. Courtesy photo.

brought three Angus cows from Scotland,” Grant said. “Now, all of our replacement cows can be traced back to those original three cows. We’ve brought outside bulls in, but the Angus breed and our cows are something we’ve stuck with and tried to improve upon. Not that Angus are any better at this landscape than any other breed, but we can continue to put that pressure on our breeding program and produce animals that are best suited to our environment.”

Today

Now, Alfred’s descendants encompass a sprawling, multi-generational family tree.

“There are multiple families here on the land,” Grant said. “In 2017, we did the 130th anniversary of the ranch, and we have about 350 people who are in some way directly related to this land. Over 600 people attended that ranch gathering. We had color dots for each family, and most people in attendance were related and had something to do with different parcels of land that make up the original 13,000 acres.”

Other descendants own interests in cattle or live on the ranch. But by the 1990s, Grant’s father and Alfred’s grandson, Robin, were the only ones who remained in produc-



The Giles family has been raising Angora goats since 1890. They also raise Angus cattle and sheep, as well as offer hunting leases. The family continues to maintain the diversified ranch using sustainability planning and conservative livestock management. Courtesy photo.

tion agriculture full-time.

“We’re very much dependent on the family overall, and we just hope our activity and operation is benefiting how they want to enjoy their land and enhances that land,” Grant said. “Our stewardship demonstrates the responsibility and how to stay on this land and keep it intact.”

He still raises dual-purpose sheep and goats and Angus cattle, leasing out other parcels of land to support his flocks and herds.

In dry years, the sheep and goats perform exceptionally well.

“This kind of country lends itself to sheep and goats, because it’s definitely not great cow country,” he said. “It’s best to have multiple browsing species. I run around 3,000 head of sheep and goats on somewhere around 10,000 acres, but that’s highly variable.”

Sheep and goats are tougher to count than cattle, he explained.

“Everything has to be sheared in a timely fashion, so that’s when we try to get all of our animals in and get an accurate count,” Grant said. “We try to do as many things at that time as we can, like all the vet treatments. We try to do shearing days right before parturition so some key veterinary tasks can be accom-

plished, like dewormer and that sort of thing.”

Having dual-purpose animals that can be raised for fiber and meat is another way to increase profitability.

“We’re in a time period right now where it’s a little uncertain what the profitability of the fiber animals are, but that’s nothing new,” he said. “The good thing about fiber is that it has a very flexible shelf life. If you can stand the lack of cash flow, you can hold off for a better market.”

Wool in its raw form can be stored for a short while, he said. But by scouring and cleaning the fiber to rid it of the oily lanolin, then compressing it into tight bales using large hydraulic presses, fiber can be stored successfully for years.

Grant noted mohair is a drier fiber that doesn’t have the oiliness which compromises fiber integrity.

“The mohair business has been very up and down in years past,” he said. “It’s one of those commodities that definitely rewards patience.”

Agritourism

While ranching remains profitable, Grant realizes he must keep diversification in mind as part of long-term sustainability goals.

“The recreational value of this land is definitely much higher than

the agricultural value of this land,” he said. “What I pay to lease land for grazing value is not comparable to recreational value that can be obtained, so I have to keep that in mind and work with it. And the hunting revenue could be the difference in being able to hold onto the land or selling it. So, it’s something to work around in the agricultural operation.”

Grant helps other landowners manage hunting leases. The family offers white-tailed deer and exotic species leases across several sections.

“My goal is to help the landowners manage hunting in hopes that we can possibly see all or a portion of the revenue can go back into enhancing usability of the land,” he

said. “Things like keeping roads up, fencing, keeping the invasive brush under control. We can utilize this demand from people wanting to come hunt recreationally to improve the land. The best scenario is to manage hunting for those landowners.”

On average, leases run for a six-month period, with species and bag limits, he said. They charge per hunter to avoid people bringing crowds of hunters with them who may depopulate the wildlife too quickly. The free-roaming herds of axis and sika deer found across the ranch enhance hunting value, he added.

“We’re able to offer a pretty neat experience. We’re close enough to Fredericksburg or San Antonio, so

everyone can go share a nice meal at a restaurant together, but it still feels very rural here on the ranch,” he said.

The future

Alfred’s innovative spirit lives on in Grant, who hopes his management and conservation efforts contribute to keeping the land in his family for another 130 years.

“A lot of people will say, ‘That’s really rough country. That must be hard to raise livestock there,’” he said. “But like my great-grandfather realized, everything is an opportunity in the eye of the beholder. The mindset that you have makes all the difference. Many things like weeds can be a benefit for us, because we have livestock

that can utilize those things.

Negatives can be positives.

“Figure out how to create a revenue source. There are a lot of complaints in the area about so many people moving here and the recreational use of land, but we’ve actually seen many people who really appreciate what we do and want to be involved somehow,” Grant said. “They’re just yearning to be involved in agriculture, and there’s an opportunity there. Many people we lease from just enjoy having livestock on their land. If you have the right attitude and talk to people and foster relationships, you can have everybody on the land, even hunters, be ambassadors for your program.”

U.S., Texas land values hold steady during COVID-19 pandemic

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Even amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the average value of agricultural land across the nation remains essentially unchanged from last year at \$4,100 per acre of cropland and \$1,400 per acre of pasture, according to a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report.

The 2019 average value of cropland was at an all-time high, American Farm Bureau Federation Chief Economist Dr. John Newton noted.

“The stability in agricultural land values and cash rents occurs amid continued pressure on farm income and commodity prices. This stability is likely a result of low interest rates, a low turnover ratio for agricultural cropland and a competitive cash rent market for farmers seeking to capture economies of scale,” Newton wrote in a recent Market Intel report. “Importantly, the cash rental rates were negotiated prior to the impact of COVID-19 on crop prices.”

Cash rental rates for the year were down \$1 per acre from 2019, averaging \$139 per acre. Land rental agreements are usually set in the fall of the previous year, so the prices reported for 2020 were likely made before the pandemic.

Although the decline in commodity prices and increasing trade ten-



sions had many market watchers expecting a correlating dip in land prices, Newton said that scenario generally has not played out across the U.S.

“For years, in the face of a down farm economy and low commodity prices, many had expected to see some downward pressure on land values and cash rental rates. We now know that’s not been the case,” he said. “Low interest rates continue to make agricultural land an attractive investment. In addition to low interest rates and a low turnover of agricultural land, individuals, large-scale investors, estates, trusts and other institutional owners continue to invest in farmland.”

Other factors likely bolstering land values is the Market Facilitation Program (MFP) payments and disaster aid programs that help farmers and ranchers impacted by wildfires, hurricanes and flooding in recent years, Newton said. Farmers receiving this aid are more likely to hold onto cash rental agreements.

In Texas, USDA data show an average 5.2-percent increase in cropland prices and a 1.2-increase in pastureland value in 2020, resulting in a collective 2.4-percent increase in year-over-year agricultural land value.

The 2020 average value of farm real estate in Texas is \$2,170 per acre, according to USDA.

Data collected from the Texas A&M University Real Estate Center show the nominal price for rural land in Texas averaged \$2,929 per acre in the second quarter of 2020, a 1.74-percent increase over the same period in 2019.

But cash rents may decline in the wake of COVID-19, Newton said.

“The relief provided to agricultural producers impacted by COVID-19 will likely contribute to stability in land prices into 2021,” he said. “Beyond 2021, as long as COVID-19 continues to impact demand, without additional support to producers, outside of low interest rates, there will be less to support cash rents—and potentially agricultural land values—at these lofty levels.”

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Farm Bureau launches Hurricane Recovery Resources web page

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

After the storm, the list of things to do can feel overwhelming. The loss of property, crops and livestock can have farmers, ranchers and landowners scrambling for answers or to find appropriate agencies to contact.

That's where Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) comes in. To help landowners, farmers and ranchers in cleanup and recovery efforts, TFB launched the Hurricane Recovery Resources page.

"It can be extremely difficult to track down credible sources on a normal day, and it's very frustrating to have to search several sites for contacts and information at such a stressful time," TFB Director of Communications Gary Joiner said. "We've put together a list of resources to help people get the information they need quickly, all in one place."

Information for federal and state agencies, a list of local entities conducting hurricane relief efforts and



more will be routinely updated.

"This is not just for those dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Laura, but also for those who went through Hurricane Hanna, too," Joiner said. "TFB has been working with government officials to try to secure additional aid for those who

suffered massive crop losses from Hanna, so there's information on those efforts available here, as well."

All links and information posted on the site have been verified for accuracy, Joiner added.

"We know storm recovery is a day-by-day process," he said. "So, keep

checking back as we update and add more resources to the page. This is an ongoing process, but we want to help provide as much information as we can."

For the latest information, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/hurricaneresources>.

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Texas Farm Bureau, ag groups ask Congress for hurricane aid

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Farmers, ranchers and other agribusinesses in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) and Coastal Bend suffered major losses when Hurricane Hanna slammed into the lower Texas Gulf Coast in late July.

For many, it was the third consecutive year to experience crop losses due to summer floods.

“Three consecutive years of devastation is hard to sustain,” Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) National Legislative Director Laramie Adams said. “Cotton, citrus, sugarcane, sesame seed and grain sorghum were hit hardest. The total amount of damage to crops is staggering.”

Hurricane Hanna brought anywhere from 10-20 inches of rain and 90 mile-per-hour winds, ripping citrus fruit from trees and pulling cotton from the bolls. Other crops were left standing under water or laid over by the high winds.

Direct crop losses in the 32-county area are estimated at \$176.6 million, according to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Cotton farmers were already facing hardships and a much smaller crop due to intense drought during planting. Now, the Cotton and Grain Producers of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Association estimates 85-98 percent of the 2020 cotton crop is a complete loss.

AgriLife estimates show the citrus sector will have more than \$66 million in damages from Hurricane Hanna. The perennial crop was reduced by almost one-third, a loss citrus growers will likely feel for several years.

But TFB and other agricultural and commodity organizations are working to secure federal assistance for those affected.

“We’re doing everything possible to help get these farmers some assistance to keep them in business and be able to keep going,” Adams said. “It’s been a great team effort between agricultural groups in Texas. Some of the organizations supporting these efforts on hurricane recovery did not



Photo courtesy Isaac Sulemana.

have members impacted by the hurricane, but they want the best for Texas agriculture. They want farmers and ranchers of all commodities to stay in business. This support is greatly appreciated.”

TFB and 34 other agricultural organizations sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and members of the Texas Congressional delegation asking for an extension of the 2020 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildfires and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) to help farmers and agribusinesses that incurred losses from Hurricane Hanna.

Extending WHIP+ would assist LRGV and Coastal Bend farmers who make planting and crop insurance decisions on a much different cycle than most American farmers due to the climate and growing seasons of the area.

“Although producers had the op-



Photo courtesy Brooke Prather.



Photo courtesy Brooke Prather.

tion to purchase Hurricane Insurance Program-Wind Index (HIP-WI) policy endorsement for this season, few were aware of the product. The announcement of the HIP-WI policy endorsement came too late in the season for farmers in the LRGV and Coastal Bend area,” the letter stated. “While producers had until April 30 to purchase the endorsement, the sales closing date for spring planted crops in most of South Texas is Jan. 31, and most had already made their crop insurance purchase decisions. While area farmers will possibly utilize this product in the future, assistance is currently needed to help them recover from the devastating losses from Hurricane Hanna.”

The groups also specifically asked lawmakers to include future year losses for multi-year crops, such as citrus and sugarcane, under any WHIP+ extensions.

“TFB is working with members in

the area who were impacted, as well as Secretary Perdue, our Congressional leaders and the governor’s office to take whatever avenue is needed to secure funding for these folks who suffered major losses,” Adams said.

He noted the organizations have also asked for assistance for cotton ginners, the sugarcane mill and other related businesses impacted by the loss of area crops.

Following the storm, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott declared 32 LRGV and Coastal Bend counties as state disaster areas.

Abbott also sent a letter to USDA requesting the agency issue a disaster designation for Brooks, Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, Willacy and Zapata counties, which would make federal assistance like emergency loans available to farmers and ranchers in those areas who suffered losses from Hurricane Hanna.

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TFB to host virtual education event for teachers

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) is hosting a virtual professional development event for Texas teachers to learn more about agriculture.

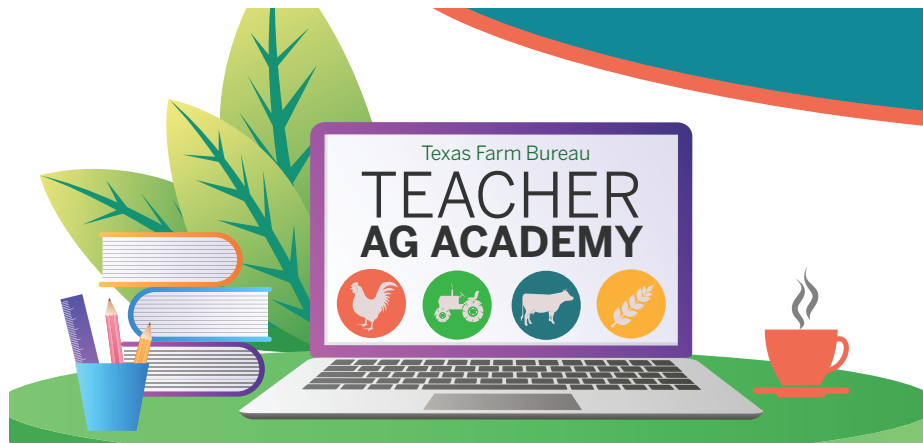
“This opportunity is unique in that it is our first virtual professional development event for teachers, which will allow teachers from across the state a chance to participate when distance or location might have otherwise prevented them from attending,” Jordan Walker, TFB director of Educational Outreach, said.

The Teacher Ag Academy is set for Saturday, Oct. 10, from 8 a.m. to noon.

The free event will include three presentations and a virtual farm tour.

Walker noted teachers will be able to share ideas and engage with presenters via the platform functions.

“Our hope is that we can engage with teachers in a new way that encourages them to increase agricul-



tural literacy in their classrooms and help provide them ideas, resources and interactive activities they can utilize in face-to-face instruction or virtual lessons with students,” she said.

The presentations will include resource information and tips about how to incorporate agriculture in the classroom from a K-4 science teacher and a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist who specializes in connecting education and agriculture.

The virtual farm tour will give teachers an opportunity to see a working family farm.

“Family farms—big or small—are essential to Texas agriculture,” Walker said. “Giving teachers a chance to interact with Texas farmers, to ask questions and see how a farm operates can help them better understand agriculture, which allows them to better incorporate those concepts in their classroom. We hope local farmers and ranch-

ers will encourage teachers in their school districts to participate to learn more about Texas agriculture.”

The event is open to current Texas K-12 teachers from all subject areas and includes public school and private school teachers.

Registration for the event is free and closes at noon on Oct. 2. To register, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc>.

Teachers who register and attend will be entered to win one of three giveaways: a digital microscope, a \$200 gift card to the National Ag in the Classroom store and a Cotton’s Journey “Field Trip in a Box” kit.

Each participant will also receive a special giveaway.

Continuing professional education credits will be available.

For more information about the Teacher Ag Academy, email edoutreach@txfb.org or call 254-751-2569.

For additional Ag in the Classroom resources and lesson plans available from TFB, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc>.

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Beef industry task force releases long-range plan through 2025

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

To ensure its goal of increasing demand for U.S. beef is met, the Beef Industry Long-Range Task Force recently unveiled its plan for 2021 through 2025.

The long-range plan establishes a common set of objectives and priorities to ensure the long-term prosperity of the beef industry.

“We want beef to be the protein of choice, and we want the entire U.S. beef industry to be trusted and respected for its commitment to quality, safety and sustainability,” Kim Brackett, leader of the task force and a rancher from Idaho, said. “The task force invested many hours, discussing the current state of the industry and what we need to accomplish over the next five years. We feel we’ve established some important priorities and strategies, as well as benchmarks for success that will help keep our industry on track through 2025 and beyond.”

One of the four industry objectives in the new plan include growing global demand for U.S. beef by promoting beef’s health and nutritional benefits, satisfying flavor and unparalleled safety.

Other objectives include improving industry-wide profitability by expanding processing capacity and developing improved value-capture models and making traceability a reality in the U.S. beef industry.

The long-range plan also includes intensifying efforts in researching, improving and communicating U.S. beef industry sustainability.

“I think of these four objectives as the corner posts for the long-range plan,” Brackett said.

The new plan includes two new strategies and four that are similar to those in the last plan.

Driving growth in beef exports and growing consumer trust in beef production are two of the strategies.

Others include developing and implementing better business models to improve price discovery and value distribution across all segments and



The Beef Industry Long-Range Task Force recently released its plan for 2021-2025, detailing industry objectives and strategies to help ensure the long-term prosperity of the U.S. beef sector.

promoting and capitalizing on the multiple advantages of beef.

The final two strategies are to improve the business and political climate for beef and to safeguard and cultivate investment in beef industry research, marketing and innovation.

“You will notice that this plan includes some strategies the policy division can tackle, some strategies that are in the checkoff wheelhouse and other strategies that will likely need to be championed and led by groups of producers, for-profit companies or other stakeholders,” Brackett said. “Whether you’re a committee member, a producer or an allied industry, as you read through this plan, I’m hoping that you find strategies and initiatives that you can support over the next five years.”

Brackett said the task force feels it has established important priorities and strategies, as well as benchmarks for success that will help keep the beef industry on track through 2025 and beyond.

“We’ll measure the plan’s success by tracking key metrics for each core strategy,” Brackett said. “For example, one of the measures for the core strategy, ‘to drive growth in beef exports,’ will be to grow the value of U.S. beef exports as a percent of total beef value to 21 percent by 2025.”

The long-range plan task force encourages beef industry businesses

and organizations to use the plan as input for their own strategic decision-making processes.

The beef checkoff and its contracting organizations use pieces of the plan as their guidebook for the coming years.

All funding decisions and focus areas of checkoff projects and programs must follow the key areas outlined in the plan that align with checkoff budget categories: promotion, research, consumer information, industry information, producer communication and foreign marketing.

Since 1995, industry leaders have gathered to develop an aligned, comprehensive plan with the goal of increasing consumer demand for beef. These leaders are brought together to study and compile major areas of

opportunity facing beef over the next five years.

To produce the new long-range plan, the task force met several times over the past year, in person and online, to evaluate the previous five year plan and determine, based on industry trends and insights, where the industry should maintain or shift its focus over the next five years.

The task force was made up of representatives from various aspects of the beef industry.

Two Texans were on the task force: Donnell Brown of R.A. Brown Ranch in Throckmorton and Paul Defoor of Cactus Feeders in Amarillo.

To view the complete Beef Industry Long-Range Plan, a plan summary or get more information, visit beeflongrangeplan.com.



The task force’s vision is for beef to be the protein of choice around the world, trusted and respected for commitment to quality, safety and sustainability.

Texas rice legacy continues with Colorado County farm family

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

More than half of the world's population gets most of its nutrition from one tiny, but mighty, grain—rice.

And some of that rice is grown in the Lone Star State by families like the Kellys.

Colorado County Farm Bureau member Tom Kelly has been growing the crop for 18 years.

"I'm a fifth-generation rice farmer. My great-great-grandfather moved here in 1897 from Iowa, where he was most likely farming corn," Kelly said. "He started off in Texas as a well-digger, and when rice entered our area in about 1903, he started farming rice soon thereafter. My brothers and I farm some of the same land he farmed, so that's pretty special."

It's a family legacy he is proud to continue, despite some challenges.

"Rice farming has become far more expensive over the past couple of decades," Kelly said. "The equipment costs more, and water costs much more now. All the inputs have gone up, so there's certainly fewer acres being farmed now than when I first started."

The Colorado River, namesake of the county in which Kelly and his



Rice harvest in Colorado County on the Kelly family farm. Trent, Tim and Tom Kelly are fifth-generation rice farmers in Colorado County. Courtesy photo.

brothers, Tim and Trent, grow rice and raise cattle, flows throughout the countryside, providing irrigation to nourish the water-intensive crop.

Most of the time, anyway.

"We get our water from water wells and the Lower Colorado River Authority," Kelly said. "In 2012 to 2015, we had zero water allocation to 'interruptible water customers,' which is agricultural irrigation cus-

tomers like myself. Crop insurance came in and saved us during that drought, but I honestly think the communities suffered more—parts stores, diesel suppliers, dealerships, tire shops. Everyone was really hurt by those actions, and it put a lot of people out of business."

A lack of water, increased input costs and urban encroachment have all taken their toll. Kelly said Texas farmers used to farm more than 600,000 acres of rice, but he estimates there are now less than 200,000 acres of rice grown annually in the state.

But he and his family have persevered, adapting as necessary to keep the family legacy alive.

Common varieties have changed, and yields have increased as a result, Kelly noted.

"We harvest by barrels and sell by the hundredweight. A barrel, a colloquialism we use, is 162 pounds," he said. "So, 50-barrel yields used to be great, but now 60 barrels is probably the new threshold for a good yield."

Harvested rice is cut, dried and stored in local elevators usually owned by one of the four main buyers in Texas, who then clean and polish the rice before selling to grocery store chains, including H-E-B and

Kroger.

Most Texas-grown rice that's exported goes to Saudi Arabia and Mexico.

And rice prices are better than they have been in a while.

"July futures reached \$22 per hundredweight, but that was for 2019 crops in storage, and no one that I know of had any rice leftover that was unsold at that time," Kelly said. "It sounds really good, but it's a simple case of supply and demand. The reason we hit that number is there was no rice available that had not been sold."

Kelly sold some rice last year for \$13.50/hundredweight, but most of his crop sold at \$12.50-\$13/hundredweight.

"And two years ago, I sold most of my rice for \$10-11 a hundredweight, so the prices we have right now are far better than what they had been," he said.


Like any farmer, Kelly has his concerns and his share of not-so-great days. But all things considered, there's nowhere else he'd rather be.

"I'm proud to say that I'm a fifth-generation farmer farming the same land my great-great-grandfather farmed at the first part of the last century," he said.

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Texas' ShareLunker program helps improve bass fishing in the state

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

Anglers' generosity earlier this year is already helping to create bigger, better bass fishing in Texas through the Toyota ShareLunker program.

This year, four 13-pound or larger largemouth bass were caught on Texas lakes during the spawning period and donated to the program for selective breeding.

One of those lunkers spawned twice, generating more than 28,000 fingerlings.

"A portion of each of those spawns is divided up into the contributing water bodies. For this year, we had (lakes) Alan Henry, Nacogdoches and O.H. Ivie," Kyle Brookshear, Toyota ShareLunker Program coordinator, told the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

Those lakes received the fingerlings because the donated ShareLunkers from this year were caught there.

Another portion of the fingerlings produced this year will be retained at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens.

"Basically, they're grown out to adults, so we can incorporate them into our future broodstock class," Brookshear said.

That's part of an overall goal of converting all the broodstock at the fisheries center to ShareLunker offspring.

"Instead of the traditional bass that we have in our hatchery that produce the millions of offspring each year, we're converting that over to direct offspring from these fish that are loaned," Brookshear said. "It allows us to take these selectively bred offspring and stock them out into lakes in the millions, instead of hundreds of thousands, like we do each year."

This year, more than 14,000 advanced fingerlings from last year's ShareLunkers were released into Gilmer reservoir, Lake Pflugerville, Kurth, Lake Tyler, ponds within the future footprint of Bois d'Ark Lake and Murval.

"You start at a large number. Then as these fish grow, you slowly pare them down to the fish that you need in order to have a brood stock," Brookshear said. "The excess fish that we have, when we pare them down, we stock those into lakes around the state. We had several lakes that our biologists determined would be part of that stocking."

The ShareLunker program runs year-round with the donation period during spawning from January through March.

Largemouth bass weighing 13 pounds or more donated during that window are deemed Legacy Class Lunkers and are used for spawning. Catching one can earn an angler a replica of their fish and entry into a drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree at Bass Pro Shops.

Outside of the spawning window, the program collects catch data from largemouth bass eight pounds or larger, or 24-inches or longer, caught in Texas lakes.

"Every year, we kick off in January with the Legacy class donation, as well as our other classes of fish, eight pounds or larger," Brookshear said. "What that does for those anglers that aren't donating 13-pound fish in the collection season—whether that's closed or they don't catch them that large—they're able to provide their catch and genetic data about those bass by entering it through our website or mobile app."

That data gives the program a set of information for biologists that allows them to better manage the lunker bass population in a given reservoir.

"Our traditional sampling methods that our biologists implement every year don't collect a significant portion of those fish of that size," Brookshear said. "Getting that information from our anglers, our citizen scientists that are partnering with us to really help management our fisheries for those trophy-sized bass is huge."

Since 1986, the program has been partnering with anglers to promote



Angler donations to the Toyota ShareLunker program earlier this year are already paying off. Photo courtesy Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

and enhance bass fishing in Texas. Each season, which runs Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, anglers have new opportunities to participate in the program and be recognized for their

contributions.

Anglers may submit catch data on the ShareLunker app or on [Tex-asShareLunker.com](https://www.sharelunker.com) for a chance to win one of several prizes.

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Texas Farm Bureau launches daily 'Texas Ag Today' podcast

A new podcast produced by the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network highlights important news and happenings in Texas agriculture every week day.

The state's largest general farm and ranch organization launched the podcast, *Texas Ag Today*, on Aug. 31.

"We're excited about offering this daily podcast to Texas farmers and ranchers and to everyone who has an interest in Texas agriculture," Carey Martin, host of the podcast and Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network manager, said. "We have three-full farm broadcasters at the network, plus reporters from the around the state, who will work to bring listeners the latest in farm and ranch news."

Because wildlife is a part of many Texas farms and ranches, the podcast will include a wildlife report.

A portion of the podcast also will be a recap of the day's livestock, cotton, grain and energy markets.

"We have our hands all over Texas agriculture. We're committed to cover Texas agriculture like no one else," Martin said. "Every week day on *Texas Ag Today*, we'll bring you the stories of everything happening in Texas agriculture. We'll also have the latest news from Washington, D.C., to keep you informed on how the lawmakers and federal agencies there affect us here in Texas."

Martin noted the network prides itself on bringing the Voice of Texas Agriculture to the airwaves.

"Texas is a big state, and we plan on having a big podcast for Texans each and every week day," Martin said. "I believe we have one of the largest agricultural news teams in the state, and we're dedicated

to bringing farm and ranch news, plus the stories of Texas agriculture, to everyone around the Lone Star State."

Other Texas Farm Bureau farm broadcasters contributing reports to the podcast include Tom Nicolette, senior network producer, and Jessica Domel, multimedia reporter.

Together, Farm Bureau broadcasters bring 60 years of experience on air.

"We bring experience and a desire to share the stories impacting Texas agriculture," Martin said. "This is the first podcast for Texas Farm Bureau, and it's the only one like it in the state. We are a trusted source of daily agricultural news for farmers and ranchers, and we plan to build on that reputation with this podcast."

Listeners can subscribe to *Texas Ag Today* at Apple Podcasts, Spotify,

Stitcher and TuneIn.

The podcast can also be found on the Texas Farm Bureau website.

The Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network is the state's number one and most listened-to agricultural radio network. The network features over 90 affiliate stations and rates highest for Texas farmer and rancher all-day listening for the past eight years, according to Ag Media Research Studies.

The Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network has eight daily programs and one 15-minute weekend show called *Farm Bureau Roundup*. It is the longest-running syndicated farm program in the nation, airing every weekend for the past 65 years.

For a complete list of affiliate stations and more information about the radio network, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/radio>.



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Teachers encouraged to apply for TFB's garden grant program

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Teachers can help students grow a lifelong interest in agriculture through the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Learning from the Ground Up Garden Grant Program.

The grant was created to support schools and organizations as they teach students about the sources of their food, fiber and fuel.

"Texas Farm Bureau wanted to help educators connect small-scale gardening to the bigger picture of farming operations, so students can better understand food production," Jordan Walker, TFB director of Educational Outreach, said. "Having a school garden is an excellent way to do that, but we know funds aren't always available for a project like this in a school budget. That's where our grant program can help."

Qualifying projects provide students with hands-on, experiential learning about agriculture through the funding of a new garden project or improvements to an existing garden or greenhouse.

Aquaponic and hydroponic systems are eligible if they are used to teach students about food production.

Teachers are encouraged to use creative ideas and adapt programs to fit the current environment during COVID-19, which could include take-home container gardens and more.

"Food production and learning truly happens here, there and everywhere," Walker said.

Grants may be requested from TFB for up to \$500, and some county Farm Bureaus offer matching funds.

To be eligible, the applicant must be a teacher or administrator of any Texas PK-12 school, either public or private. Parent Teacher Associations or other organizations may apply when the project will directly engage students.

Agricultural concepts must be used in instruction. Preference will be given to projects that directly engage students in a hands-on agricultural experience. The project must be science-based in nature to receive consideration.

If an agricultural science teacher is applying for the grant, the project must incorporate elementary or junior high students (i.e., those not already enrolled in agricultural courses) into the project in some capacity to increase agricultural literacy out-



side of general agricultural courses.

High school educators teaching courses other than agricultural science are eligible to apply.

All applications must include a timeline of the project, a list of community partners and a detailed budget with estimated expenses.

TFB will only accept one grant application per school per grant cycle. For example, an elementary school and a middle school from the same district can each apply, but two applications from the same elementary school cannot be submitted.

Grant checks will be made payable to the school or organization, not to an individual.

Grant recipients will be given half of the awarded funds upon notifica-

tion of selection. The remaining funds will be awarded in the spring.

Grant recipients will be required to share updates and to file a final report electronically, which will be due to TFB by June 1, 2021.

TFB strongly encourages grant recipients to submit photos in electronic form, as well as appropriate photo releases. The organization reserves the right to partially fund grant requests, and a limited number of grants will be awarded.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 23.

The application link and more information is available at <https://texasfarmbureau.org/aitc>.

For questions, contact Walker at 254-751-2569 or edoutreach@txfb.org.



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TEXAS AGRICULTURE

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APHIS accepting public comments on transition to RFID ear tags

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is seeking public comment on a proposal to shift to Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) ear tags as the official method of traceability for use in interstate movement of cattle.

Since 2013, APHIS has required the interstate movement of cattle and bison to identify each animal by an official ear tag, except in certain circumstances.

Currently, both metal and RFID ear tags are allowed, but the proposal would move the system to RFID only.

"We have worked with the beef industry to figure out how we can start taking out some of the manual systems that require auction barns and veterinarians to retag, write down long numbers and those that are visible on those tags, and then be able to share those on health certificates

or official documents as animals move across the United States," Greg Ibach, USDA undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Radio Network.

TFB supports the change.

"Our members have made it clear that we support a national animal identification and disease traceability system where our trading partners have asked for it," TFB Associate Director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities Tracy Tomascik said. "Our members think RFID tags are an effective method of achieving this as long as the cost is reasonable and shared among the government, industry and individuals, and if the system is overseen by a not-for-profit entity, such as each state."

The organization supports subsidization of the program by the federal government, because the public is the primary beneficiary.

"We're also implementing at USDA a program where we will help producers by sharing the costs," Ibach said. "We're giving away a lot of RFID tags in the form of brucellosis vaccination ID tags, as well as non-program or non-vaccination tags that producers can start putting in their replacement heifers."

TFB supports the system only if ranchers and livestock owners may apply the ear tags on their own. Tomascik said requiring veterinary application would be cost- and time-prohibitive and add unnecessary burden to the animal's owner.

APHIS is also seeking comments on a proposed timeline for implementation of an RFID-only system.

The timeline would phase in RFID tags as the only option by Jan. 1, 2023.

The agency said it would "grandfather" in animals that have metal tags already in place by this date, allowing the metal tag to be the animal's official ID through the re-

mainder of its life.

This transition timeline would not alter existing regulations, APHIS said in a press release.

The cattle and bison which must be identified will not change, nor will the option for animal health officials in shipping and receiving states to agree to accept alternate forms of identification, such as brands or tattoos in lieu of ear tags.

"As the nation's leading cattle state, our members have kept a close eye on this issue over the years," Tomascik said. "Farm Bureau members definitely have cattle ranchers' best interests in mind, and that's what led to the development of this policy position."

More information on the RFID tag proposal is available at aphis.usda.gov.

Comments can be submitted online through the Federal Register at federalregister.gov.

Comments will be accepted through Oct. 5.

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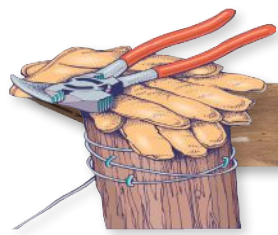
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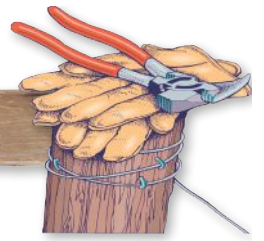


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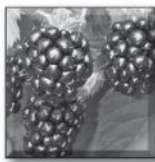
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