

TX Agriculturalist
Stregare Baking
Company is focused
on feeding people and
feeding them well.



Food & Nutrition Staff develop resources for new meal-service models in Texas schools.



TDA UpdatesDivision updates from
Consumer Protection,
GO TEXAN and more.



Your monthly connection to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

Volume 1 Issue 8 August 2020



Welcome to the Texas Agriculture Matters newsletter, your monthly connection to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

We are closely watching the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members at TDA have transitioned to working remotely for the time being. Rest assured we are hard at work everyday to support farmers, ranchers and Texans with their agriculture endeavors.

Our operations will continue to serve you and we have plenty of opportunities available. Whether you're a young farmer, want to learn how to get a hemp license or need to read something that brings you joy, this newsletter will serve you well.

Remember friends, Texas Agriculture Matters!

Sid Miller Texas Agriculture Commissioner National Farmers Market Week

elebrate National Farmers ■Market Week August 2-8 with us! When you consider how much Texas Agriculture Matters, you can't help but think about the impact that local farmers markets have on our communities. In the midst of a global pandemic, farmers markets have been finding ways to continue operations for the farmers and communities that depend on them. More than ever before. National Farmers Market Week is an opportunity to showcase the value of farmers markets and their impact on our lives.

When conventional food supply chains failed at the start of the pandemic, farmers markets and local food systems clearly displayed the resiliency of short supply chains and interest in local foods spiked nationwide. As health and safety situations continued to deteriorate around us, many of our farmers



markets became more innovative and found ways to continue providing fresh options with drive through markets, curbside pickup and online ordering. These new practices and the open-air availability for social distancing have allowed farmers markets to prove the fact that they are essential.



Farmers markets support Texas's small and diversified farms and circulate money back into our local economies. Each year, tens of thousands of farmers sell directly to consumers at farmers markets nationwide, generating \$2.4 billion revenue according to a recent estimate by local food researchers based on 2017 USDA Ag Census Data. At a time when many restaurant sales and other outlets for farmers are down, the income farmers receive at farmers markets is a lifeline.

Celebrate National Farmers Market Week! Visit a farmers market, or two in your community and support your local economy. To find a farmers market near you, use the search located at http://www.

gotexan.org/LocateGOTEXAN/ CertifiedFarmersMarkets.aspx Many farmers market locations accept SNAP, Farmers Market Nutrition Program WIC vouchers and Double-Up Food Bucks. You can also shop the Texas Department of Agriculture is Direct From Texas Facebook group. "This is like agriculture used to be," Miller said. "A farmer or rancher has a great product and they sell it directly to their neighbor. Today, that neighbor can be around the corner or across the globe. Direct from Texas provides our ag producers another avenue to reach customers until Texas finally reopens. And consumers get fresh, Texas-made products. That's what I call a Texas 'twofer'—everybody wins." Join the group today to start shopping here.



TEXAS AGRICULTURE Matters!



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Produced by the Office of Communications Editor, Katlyn Gast

www.TexasAgriculture.gov (800) TELL-TDA







ABOUT COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

Sid Miller is an eighth generation farmer and rancher and the 12th Commissioner of Agriculture for the great State of Texas. Commissioner Miller has devoted his life to the agriculture industry, and supporting Texas producers and the communities they call home. He is a businessman, rancher, community leader, former ag teacher and former school board member. Commissioner Miller is a rodeo cowboy and holds 12 world championship titles. He is an honors graduate of Tarleton State University in Stephenville, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Vocational Agriculture Education.

What's In Season?



You can download a Texas produce availability chart and shop for your favorite produce at a local farmers market near you. Click here to download today!



The Texas Department of Agriculture is committed to providing the same high level of service to our customers during the COVID-19 emergency as they've come to expect. Whether we're helping Texas farmers and ranchers continue to provide a safe and dependable food supply, ensuring Texas school children continue to have access to regular, healthy meals or supporting our vital rural hospitals and clinics, the Texas Department of Agriculture is here for Texans.

Due to the Coronavirus emergency, the Texas Department of Agriculture is now working remotely and will continue to do so until directed to return to state offices by agency leadership. As a result, we are asking all constituents, customers, licensees and others to contact TDA by email, as there will be limited staff in the office answering the phones. Additionally, TDA is not accepting external visitors in the office during this time. If you need to make a payment, you may do so online or via USPS.

Please visit our website for updated information or view our COVID-19 Resource Guide for additional resources and information.

ABOUT TDA

The Texas Legislature established the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) in 1907. The agency's key objectives are to promote production agriculture, consumer protection, economic development and healthy living. The agriculture commissioner oversees the agency and is elected every four years. The current commissioner, Sid Miller, was elected in 2014. TDA is a diversified state agency that provides value-added services through our regulatory and marketing and initiatives. TDA is headquartered in Austin and has five regional service offices, two sub-offices, three laboratories and five livestock export facilities.

Mission:

TDA's mission is to partner with all Texans to make Texas the nation's leader in agriculture, fortify our economy, empower rural communities, promote healthy lifestyles, and cultivate winning strategies for rural, suburban and urban Texas through exceptional service and the common threads of agriculture in our daily lives.



STREGARE BAKING COMPANY

usband and wife duo of Stregare Baking Company, Luci Cook-Hildreth and Michael Holcomb, share a passion of feeding people and feeding them well. From rich cheesecakes to juicy homegrown peaches, Stregare Baking Company focuses on quality control and prides themselves on creating delicious baked goods with locally sourced ingredients for weddings, parties, family and everyone between.

Luci and Michael started their baking venture in 2012. Michael was previously a restaurant-owner, but that story has come to a close. Still a chef a heart, the two continued to bake cheesecakes for friends and family. In 2013, the pair broke into the wedding business. "We started



working with brides and doing weddings. This grew to be about 50-70% of our business. It was while working with our wedding clients that we were

asked if our company could create other dessert items so that the brides didn't have to go to multiple vendors. [This] opened the door for all sorts of goodies," says Luci.

In 2015, Luci and Michael invested into their business and bought a farm. Nestled on the quaint 5-acre Stregare Farm in Bastrop, you'll hear the clucking of several varieties of chickens and the bellowing of Spanish goats and Assaf sheep. Peach and pear trees delicately dot the farm. Space for a future greenhouse exists with the purpose of growing lipsmacking strawberries and other fruits. An old barn is currently being transformed into a commercial kitchen that will also serve as a sheep milk processing facility. Luci and Michael hope to have this new facility



functional by the end of 2020 and fully operational by Spring 2021. The pair also hopes to see Stregare Farm offer wedding consultations, farm tours and book private parties on the property.

The delectable creations is sourced from the eggs of their hens, fruit trees, and eventually milk from their goat herd. "We are very focused on the quality of both our desserts and customer service. Feeding people and feeding them well is something that Michael and I both enjoy. That's why we are so picky about where our ingredients come from. We believe that the quality of our product is only as good as what we put into it," says Luci. When ingredients can't be found on the farm, they gather ingredients from other Texas producers – no wonder it's heaven at first bite.









Since their beginning, Stregare Baking Company has expanded their menu to include over 100 flavors of cheesecakes, cheesecake bites, baby cakes and cheesecake bars. Everything they create is original from their own kitchen. They extensively test their recipes and procedures to make sure they provide the best desserts possible. Luci says, "the most common flavor is probably lemon raspberry in the summer months and dark chocolate with caramel sea salt as the temperature cools down." They have traveled all over Texas to

meet other farmers who raise sheep and goats for milk or grow amazing fruit and nut varieties. When they can't use ingredients from the farm, Stregare chooses local producers like a pecan farmer in Merkel, Texas, but look forward to partnering with more Texas producers in the future.

You can order from the Stregare Baking Company online store and schedule a pick-up or delivery of any of their desserts within 24 hours of ordering. They ship most of their baked goods (except cheesecakes) at this time and can ship nationwide. Luci and Micheal are working on nationwide shipping for cheesecakes in time for the holidays this year.

You can also find them on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and read reivews of their desserts on The Knot, Wedding Wire and Yelp. To keep up with Stregare Baking Company and the farm, sign up for their newsletter here.



Commissioner Miller Partners with Cal-Maine Foods for an "Eggcellent" Donation

'exas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller joined Cal-Maine Foods for an egg donation event that provided 140,000 meals to local Texans amidst a global pandemic. Over 280,000 eggs were donated to the Central Texas Food Bank and will offer local communities' essential protein in trying times. This year, Cal-Maine Foods has donated close to a quarter million dozen eggs to organizations within the state and even more nationwide.

"I am honored to be a part of a remarkable donation like this," Commissioner Miller said. "I applaud Cal-Maine Foods and Central Texas Food Bank for their dedication to ensure Texans continue to eat during this difficult time. Our farmers and ranchers produce the food and fiber, but it takes folks like these to help get it to the plate."

Cal-Maine Foods is the largest producer of shell eggs in the country and has catered to Texas for the last 45 years. From the Panhandle

to South Texas, Cal-Maine foods plays a vital role in the state's food supply. As COVID-19 continues to impact communities across the state, agriculture businesses prove the food supply chain in Texas remains strong.

"We are proud to have Commissioner Miller here with us today as we continue our relationship and mission with the Central TX Food Bank to give back to the communities in which we operate," said Todd Walters, Vice-President of Operations at Cal-Maine Foods. "Cal-Maine Foods will continue to be dedicated in serving our fellow Texans with quality protein during these trying times and beyond. We are thankful for what the food bank does as well as what Commissioner Miller continues to do for the state's agriculture community and those in need."

The Central Texas Food Bank works with food donors across the country, financial supporters and volunteers to fill unmet needs in Central Texas. This commitment from private,

government and charitable partners has allowed us to bring 39 million meals to our community last year and into the hands of families and local nonprofits that turn to them for help.

"We are very grateful to our friends at Cal-Maine Foods for this generous donation of fresh eggs, an item we would normally have to purchase," said Derrick Chubbs, President and CEO of the Central Texas Food Bank. "These eggs will be an excellent source of protein for thousands of our neighbors in need and be a great help to the Food Bank at a time when our resources are stretched to the limit."





Unsolicited Seeds From China Make Appearance in Texas

ommissioner Sid Miller is ■urging Texans to take extreme precaution when receiving unsolicited seed packets from China. These packets have been mailed to multiple states, including Texas, falsely labeled as jewelry. Residents are advised not to plant the seeds as they could contain harmful invasive species or be otherwise unsafe.

"I am urging folks to take this matter seriously," Commissioner Miller said. "An invasive plant species might not sound threatening, but these small invaders could destroy Texas agriculture. TDA has been working closely with USDA to analyze these unknown seeds so we can protect Texas residents."

If you receive a foreign package containing seeds do not open it or plant the contents. Keep contents contained in their original sealed package.

An invasive species is an organism that is not native to a particular region. The introduction of this "alien species" can cause economic or environmental harm. In agriculture, an invasive species can destroy native crops, introduce disease to native plants and may be dangerous for livestock.

Please report unsolicited seed packages to SITC.Mail@aphis.usda. gov

More information can be found here.





Images by Kelci Frost, Erath County Breaking News Facebook page

GRAY GARDENS FARM

FARM PROFILE

This month's featured farm is the Gray Gardens vegetable farm in Buda, Texas, not far from Austin. The farm is owned by the Gray family, and Billy Gray, Jonas Jones, Nick Leonard and Sherry Highsmith are the farmers. Gray Gardens has been up and running as a farm for 18 years. If you are ever in the Buda area, give Billy Gray a call and you might find yourself put to work in their Worktrade Program. In this program, volunteers learn gardening skills and are compensated with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Last season, Gray Gardens provided food to 40 families from seven different cities. Many of these families received community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes on a weekly basis. Customers pay ahead of time and reap the rewards later. This way Gray Gardens has money available to pay for their seeds and labor costs.



Owner: Billy Gray and the Gray Family Founded: Late 1990s

Location: Buda. Texas

Specialty: Variety of fruits and vegetables

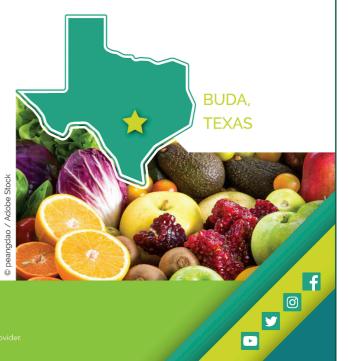






Photo by: Jack Dykinga, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org

MEXICAN FRUIT FLY: TDA BIOSECURITY PROGRAM

he Mexican Fruit Fly (Anastrepha ludens) is a serious pest to various fruits, particularly citrus and mango. Mexican fruit fly was first found in Central Mexico in 1863, and by the early 1950s flies were found along the California-Mexico border. The pest has since been detected in Arizona, California and Texas. A large number of commercially grown crops, including avocado, grapefruit, orange, peach and pear, would be threatened if the Mexican fruit fly became established.

Signs and symptoms

Visible adult flies: larger than a house fly, the body is a pale orange-yellow with two to three whitish stripes along the thorax. The wings are clear with several yellow and brown stripes. The female is distinguished by a long and slender ovipositor, which is used to deposit eggs beneath the skin of the host fruit.

Visible larvae within host fruit: legless, white to yellowish-white, and grows to a length of 0.4 (or 2/5) inches

What Can You Do?

- ★ If you have citrus trees in your yard, pick your fruit and use it, or double bag it and put it in the trash. Don't leave fruit on the tree or on the ground.
- ★ Do not bring or mail fresh fruits, vegetables, plants into your state or another state unless agricultural inspectors have cleared them first.
- ★ When returning from international travel, declare all agricultural products to U.S. customs officials. Learn more at http://www.aphis.usda. gov/t
- ★ Never remove fresh produce from your property if your area is under Mexican fruit fly quarantine.
- ★ Cooperate with all quarantine restrictions or rules that might be imposed.
- * Allow authorized agricultural workers access to property to install and inspect insect-monitoring traps

What Are TDA and USDA Doing?

USDA is developing a \$47 million Fruit Fly Facility at the Moore Airforce Base in the Rio Grande Valley for generating 400 million sterile Mexican fruit fly pupae to eradicate the Mexican Fruit Fly in Texas and bordering Mexican states. TDA contributes \$100,000 and Texas Citrus Pest and Disease Management Corporation contributes \$272,000 to fruit fly trapping and sterile fruit fly releases. USDA requested up to \$250,000 from TDA to be contributed to the working of this facility due to USDA's shortfall.



Photo by: Jeffrey W. Lotz, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bugwood.org



Young Farmer Grant Recipient



Alyssa Dugat Dugat Livestock

ugat Livestock, originally Dugat Ranch, was founded in 1998 in Portland, Texas. Since inheriting the ranch in 2001, the second generation of Dugats have committed their energy to strengthening their family's business.

In 2019, Alyssa Dugat received a Young Farmer Grant to improve, expand and increase profitability of the goat operation, which focuses mainly on registered Boer goats. With the grant funds, she was able to build inside and outside pen systems and shelters. The new areas allowed Alyssa to better segregate their animals to ensure that all animals received the best nutrition possible. With the goal to expand and increase profitability, she planned to add 10 breeding females to their herd. However, she was able to add 26 which ultimately doubled their normal kidding crop.

Alyssa's ultimate goal is to see their goat meat on grocery store shelves across the U.S. and to continue to raise awareness of goat meat as a sustainable meat commodity.

We asked Alyssa what her advice is to other young farmers and she said, "Always let your passion for agriculture guide you; raise what you love and love what you raise!"

As Alyssa and her family continue to set goals for Dugat Livestock, we are excited to follow their progress and impact on Texas agriculture. 👆



Applications for the Young Farmer Grant will be available in Fall 2020. For more information on the grant and how to apply please visit our website, www.texasagriculture.gov





TDA WORKS WITH SCHOOL NUTRITION LEADERS TO DEVELOP **Solutions for Meal-Service Challenges**

he Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) initiated a collaborative work group in June as school nutrition teams began looking ahead to a year that would require preparations unlike any they had made before. Working with school nutrition directors in the group and partners at education service centers (ESCs), TDA developed a web page, many fall planning resources and hosted webinars and trainings designed to support schools as they plan for new methods of serving meals this fall.

"The meal-model work group has been a great platform for child nutrition programs as we navigate through the COVID-19 period," said Jenny Arredondo, Senior Executive Director for Child Nutrition Services Operations at San Antonio Independent School District. "It has offered a great network of directors

from across the state to offer up suggestions and recommendations from their respective districts. Everyone has really spoken and expressed their needs and it is obvious our voice is heard as we listen to the biweekly webinars from TDA."

Serving Meals with Safety in Mind

The work group includes 11 child nutrition directors representing urban districts, rural districts and charter school organizations. All the work group members, including TDA





and the ESCs, have explored mealservice models such as meals in the classroom, social distancing in the cafeteria and movable food-service kiosks set up outside classrooms. Models for students learning from home or during a shorter school day include take-home and grab-and-go meals. Some schools will adopt a combination of the meal-service options.

Each model presents unique challenges related to staffing, safety, meal preparation and compliance. Using feedback from the work group, TDA developed webinars to address topics such as serving meals in the classroom, purchasing Texas-grown foods and completing an administrative review during the pandemic. As the new school year approaches, the webinars changed to focus on one child nutrition director and their plans for re-opening school nutrition operations.

Finding New Strength in Collaboration

When the pandemic first upended school meal service in Texas, TDA worked to ensure schools had the resources necessary to implement U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) waivers that allow for mealservice models beyond the traditional cafeteria environment. While TDA has continued its primary role of ensuring schools have the training and resources needed to meet federal regulations, the work group was instrumental in expanding TDA's role in finding solutions to new mealservice challenges.

This collaboration has seen schools and TDA working together in a new way that has further strengthened an already robust partnership. School nutrition teams have the day-to-day operational knowledge that will ensure students get good nutrition when they go back to a changed educational environment. Likewise, TDA has the team members who understand the policies and regulations that govern the school nutrition goals in Texas. The intensified communication platform of the work group bodes well for Texas school nutrition in the coming school year. Click here to see the web page created for schools preparing to serve meals this fall.

The TDA Food and Nutrition team did not set an end date for the collaborative effort when they formed the meal-model work group. The benefits of the work group have

become more apparent as the start of the new school year gets closer. TDA has already continued the work group longer than anticipated and Arredondo sees benefits to maintaining the collaboration.

"I would encourage the continuation of our workgroup due to the everchanging environment," Arredondo said. "It is nice to have a platform in place to network and problem solve issues that arise."









ven though the 2020 State Fair will not go on as we had hoped and planned, GO TEXAN is committed to marketing your product(s) online during this unique time. GO TEXAN is in the process of developing and launching a virtual **GO TEXAN Pavilion** website! This online



experience will highlight those that would've been Sponsors and Exhibitors by giving them space to talk about their company and mission, provide pictures and/or videos, and link back to their website. For our GO TEXAN partners who were sampling and/or selling on a porch or in the GO TEXAN General Store, there will be a mini e-commerce portion to the website. GO TEXAN hopes to launch the virtual pavilion by September 25th. Stay tuned to GO TEXAN's Facebook page for updates!

TDA FIELD STAFF PRESENTATIONS IN JULY



7/7: Carol Faulkenberry gave a GO TEXAN presentation to the Texas Panhandle Women meeting held in White Deer.

7/8: Larissa Place presented to the Women in Ag Online Series as part of the Small Farm Outreach Program, hosted by Willacy County Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program.

7/12 – 7/15: Carol Faulkenberry, Jami McCool and Cheryl Goswick (TDA) Produce Safety Field Outreach Specialist) worked the TDA booth at the Texas County Agricultural Agents Association Conference in Amarillo.

7/14: Larissa Place gave a TDA presentation to the Texas Midwest Community Network's Newly Elected Officials Seminar which was held virtually.

NEW MEMBERS! GO TEXAN.

- ★ Greenbelt Craft Beverages INC

- ★ Hambone's Redneck Paradise
- **★**Ooha Sol Farm
- ★Friends N Family Healthy Salsa

- ★Hippos and Hashbrowns
- **★**Davila's BBO
- **★**Verdia INC

- ★Sand Dollar Farms and South Texas Cana Source
- **★**Palmers
- ★Mr. G Real Pit Sauce
- ★Breatha Cattle Co LLC
- ★1836 Farms LLC
- ★Hometown Hero MFG
- ★Bluebonnet Coffee CO
- ★Environx Solutions INC
- **★HLC Meats LLC**

Did You Know?

TDA inspects eggs for cracks in shells and interior quality to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

TDA certified farmers markets have a \$30 million impact on the Texas economy.

TDA inspectors climb grain silos as high as 150 feet tall in order to measure the amount of stored grain.

TDA supports organizations across the state, serving more than 12.5 million meals a year to elderly and disabled Texans.

TDA Metrology Lab maintains Texas' primary standards that are traceable to national and international standards, as well as provides certification of weights and measures equipment used by TDA inspectors and service companies.

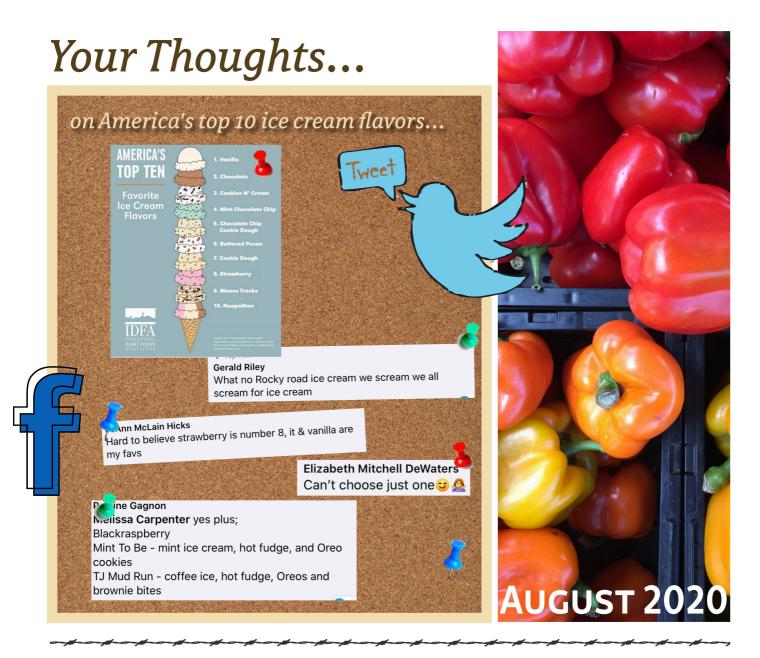




Texas Ag Stats:

- ★ There are 247,000 farming operations in Texas.
- ★ The Texas citrus industry, specifically oranges, generated \$35,538,000 to the Texas economy.
- ★ The average size farm in Texas is 511 acres.
- ★ 1 in every 7 Texans holds an agriculture related job.
- ★ Over 4 million acres of cotton were harvested in 2017.

Recipe of the Month



Tell Us... what are you looking forward to this fall?



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