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Texas Agriculture

December 2, 2022

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Pecan Passion **Growing a Texas favorite**

Pages 16-17



Staying active in political processes for ag's benefit

Texas farmers and ranchers, as they have consistently done in the past, actively participated in the recent election cycle.

Texas Farm Bureau congratulates all who were elected in November. We look forward to working with those returning to public office, as well as those serving for the first time.

Our organization's structure is designed to develop relationships and to work cooperatively with those who are elected to serve. And that's exactly what we will do. Our mission as the Voice of Texas Agriculture remains constant, regardless of election results.

Advocacy in Farm Bureau has a common goal. That goal is securing a bright future for providers of food, fiber and fuel—and the Lone Star State—for generations to come.

We'll continue to actively participate in our political process, and together, we'll make sure the Voice of Texas Agriculture is heard.

Texas Farm Bureau AGFUND is our political action committee. It is a terrific tool for our members and organization.

You likely saw the list of AGFUND-endorsed candidates for the general

election in this publication in October.



By Russell Boening
TFB President

Please know each candidate is evaluated on his or her own merits. Farm Bureau leaders make the decisions for endorsements.

We determine if an incumbent candidate voted for Farm Bureau policy positions or if a non-incumbent expresses support for Farm Bureau policy

positions.

Determinations for endorsement are made strictly on an individual basis—not on a political party basis.

It supports candidates for office who understand agriculture and are supportive of the policies and ideas of farm and ranch families.

Overall, AGFUND-endorsed candidates finished the general election with 134 wins and five losses, giving the Farm Bureau PAC a winning percentage of 96%.

All 28 candidates endorsed by AGFUND in congressional races were successful, as were the 20 candidates in Texas Senate races.

In the Texas House races, endorsed candidates won 72 races and lost one. In the Court of Appeals

races, endorsed candidates won five races and lost four.

The Lone Star State grows increasingly urban each year. That's

why it's so important to have elected officials who recognize the contributions of farmers, ranchers and rural areas to our state.

Your Texas Agriculture Minute

'Essential Americans' describes Texas farmers and ranchers

By Gary Joiner
Publisher

U.S. Congressman Glenn "GT" Thompson smiles when using the term "essential Americans" to describe farmers and ranchers.

Thompson represents a rural district in western Pennsylvania. He's the ranking member on the House Agriculture Committee.

Thompson used the term on a recent swing through Texas to discuss the next farm bill.

The "essential" description is a good one for Texas farmers and ranchers.

Texas agriculture produced \$24.9 billion in cash receipts last year. That's about 5.7% of the national total and fourth highest among all states, according to the state Comptroller's office.

The economic footprint of the Texas food and fiber system is huge. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service estimates the system contributed \$159.3 billion or about 8.6% of the state's total gross domestic product in 2019.

Agriculture is a job creator. One in seven Texans has a job related to agriculture.

Texas has more farms (247,000) and more acres of farmland (126 million) than any state.

It's amazing that only 1.5% of our nation's population grows food, fiber and fuel so everybody else doesn't have to worry about it.

"Essential" is the right word at the right time. Let's not forget it as agricultural policy and our national food security are discussed in the coming months.



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TFB achieves 22 years of membership growth

The foundation of Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) is strong, and it shows as the organization once again achieved a membership gain, marking 22 years of continuous growth.

TFB gained 2,450 members for a total of 538,064 member-families. Out of 205 organized county Farm Bureaus across Texas, 142 counties gained members during the year, and a statewide retention rate of 88.11% was achieved.

“Farm Bureau continues to grow because of the value and impact our organization provides to member-families, communities and the state,” TFB President Russell Boening said. “But achieving membership growth takes all of us—members, county leaders, TFB board of directors, staff and others. We could not have achieved our gain without the work and dedication of everyone involved.”

Achieving membership goals each year is a priority for the organization, as well as providing member benefits and services to help member-families save time and money, Boening noted.

TFB has grown from a small organization in 1933 to the largest and most influential farm and ranch or-



ganization in the Lone Star State.

TFB represents Texas farmers, ranchers, landowners and rural residents at local, state and national levels to influence policy decisions and help keep the state growing for generations to come.

Through educational and urban outreach efforts, TFB actively works to grow a deeper understanding of agriculture in classrooms and communities. The organization also sows the seeds of TFB's future, growing leadership skills and agricultural advocacy through youth opportunities and leader develop-

ment activities.

The organization shares the stories of Texas agriculture and members through social media, publications and broadcast media, adding volume, reach and depth to the Voice of Texas Agriculture when communicating with various publics.

“This achievement marks 22 consecutive years of membership growth, and we're very proud of that accomplishment,” Boening said. “Our mission is to be the Voice of Texas Agriculture, and our continued membership growth shows the value of Farm Bureau.”

New publication to help ranchers manage risks

The Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University (AFPC) released a new publication to help ranchers address potential risks.

“Agricultural producers face a litany of risks, from natural disasters to market forces that are far beyond their control,” Bart Fischer, AgriLife assistant professor and co-director of the AFPC, said.

The new publication, *Where's the Risk? A Livestock Risk Management Handbook*, was authored by Fischer. Co-authors were Justin Benavidez, assistant professor and Texas A&M

AgriLife Extension Service economist at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Amarillo, and Amy Hagerman, assistant professor and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service specialist at Oklahoma State University.

Fischer noted future options, exchange-traded contracts that provide price protection for ranchers, is one risk management option covered in the handbook.

“While use of futures and options by cattle producers continues to be quite low, a number of other risk management tools have been made

available to livestock producers,” Fischer said. “In this handbook, we endeavor to provide an overview of those tools.”

The publication includes information on the futures markets and covers risk management programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The publication also includes a checklist for ranchers to use in evaluating the various options at their disposal.

Download the handbook and other farm and ranch information at afpc.tamu.edu.

High diesel prices put strain on agriculture

While the price of diesel is below the peak in June, the high cost of fuel is still affecting farmers and ranchers.

A ban on U.S. imports of petroleum from Russia, lower domestic production capacity and seasonal demand are all contributing to higher costs. Russia provided 20% of the petroleum imported into the U.S. in 2021, but that was halted after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Beyond the impact of Russia, since 2019, domestic diesel production capacity has dropped by 180,000 barrels per day. Several plants closed during the coronavirus pandemic and are not yet back online.

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall sent a letter to President Biden last month, calling on the administration to bring more domestic supply online, and therefore, reducing costs to all Americans.

“Our nation's food supply is driven by diesel,” Duvall said in the letter. “Every input that arrives on our farms and ranches is transported by a diesel engine, whether that is by boat or barge, rail or truck. Our crops are planted by diesel engines and harvested by diesel engines. High diesel prices are severely impacting our farmers and ranchers, causing increased costs to consumers and adding to food insecurity. While geopolitical challenges, worldwide demand for distillates and seasonality play a role in energy supply and prices, so does public policy.”

National diesel prices are expected to average \$4.86 per gallon through the end of the year, according to government projections, and \$4.29 per gallon in 2023.

Event brings chefs together to learn about beef

By Emmy Powell
Communications Specialist

Texas chefs and foodservice professionals learned more about beef from pasture to plate through the Beef Loving Chefs Summit.

The second-annual summit, held at the Culinary Institute of America in San Antonio, was hosted by Beef Loving Chefs, a program by the Texas Beef Council (TBC).

The event brought chefs together from different sectors of foodservice like restaurants, healthcare, education and hospitality.

“We got the chefs out of the kitchen, out of their comfort zones, and we brought them into the classroom,” Chef Robert Hale, manager of Culinary and Food Services with TBC, said. “We brought in agricultural professionals to come talk about their segments and about the different industry questions that chefs might have about what’s going on in the marketplace and out on the ranch.”

The chefs learned about the beef lifecycle, ranchers’ commitment to sustainability and animal welfare and how carcass quality is evaluated from beef industry experts.

The summit was interactive, allowing attendees to take part in a beef sensory panel and cutting demonstrations.

Hale noted the importance of agricultural knowledge within kitchens.

Since its inception, Beef Loving Chefs has grown to include 2,500 foodservice professionals and 2,200 monthly newsletter recipients. TBC has developed numerous ways to promote beef to this influential group and has grown the program to offer resources and professional development opportunities, including the educational summit.

To learn more about the Beef Loving Chefs program, visit <https://beeflovingtexas.com/beef-loving-chefs>.



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Complete detailed information about TFB's benefits and services is available at www.texasfarmbureau.org

ARC, PLC enrollment underway, payments going out to farmers

Farmers can now change election and enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs for the 2023 crop year, two key safety net programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Farmers have until March 15, 2023, to enroll in these two programs.

“We recognize that market prices have generally been very good, but if the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, frequent catastrophic weather events and the Ukraine war have taught us anything, it’s that we must prepare for the unexpected,” USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Zach Ducheneaux said. “It’s through programs like ARC and PLC that FSA can provide producers the economic support and security they need to manage market volatility and disasters.”

FSA also started issuing payments totaling more than \$255 million to farmers with 2021 crops that have triggered payments through ARC or PLC.

2023 elections and enrollment

Farmers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm.

Although election changes for 2023 are optional, farmers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a farmer has a multi-year contract on the farm and makes an election change for 2023, they must sign a new contract.

If farmers do not submit their election by the March 15 deadline, their election remains the same as their 2022 election for crops on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the farm.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, ses-



USDA issued ARC and PLC payments to farmers for the 2021 crop year and opened enrollment for 2023.

ame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

Web-based decision tools

In partnership with USDA, the University of Illinois and Texas A&M University offer web-based decision tools to assist farmers in making informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations.

Tools include the ARC and PLC Decision Tool available through Texas A&M. It helps farmers estimate payments and yield updates for 2023. The evaluation tool is available at afpc.tamu.edu.

Another tool, Gardner-farmdoc Payment Calculator, is available through the University of Illinois. It helps estimate payments for farms and counties for ARC-CO and PLC. The calculator can be found online at farmdocdaily.illinois.edu.

Crop insurance considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broad-based safety net provided by USDA, which also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Farmers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop

insurance products.

Farmers on farms with a PLC election have the option of purchasing Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their approved insurance provider. However, farmers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Farmers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

2021 payments and contracts

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. In October, FSA processed payments to farmers enrolled in 2021 ARC-CO, ARC-IC and PLC for covered commodities that triggered for the crop year.

For ARC-CO, farmers can view the 2021 ARC-CO Benchmark Yields

and Revenues online database for payment rates applicable to their county and each covered commodity. For PLC, payments have triggered for rapeseed and peanuts.

For ARC-IC, farmers should contact their local FSA office for additional information pertaining to 2021 payment information, which relies on producer-specific yields for the crop and farm to determine benchmark yields and actual year yields when calculating revenues.

By the numbers

In 2021, farmers signed nearly 1.8 million ARC or PLC contracts, and 251 million out of 273 million base acres were enrolled in the programs. For the 2022 crop year, signed contracts surpassed 1.8 million to be paid in fall 2023, if a payment triggers.

Since ARC and PLC were first authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and reauthorized by the 2018 Farm Bill, these safety-net programs have paid out more than \$34.9 billion to farmers of covered commodities.

More information

For more information and resources on ARC and PLC, visit fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services or contact your local USDA Service Center.

TFB Resolutions Committee discusses issues facing agriculture

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Tax abatements, renewable energy, feral hogs and transportation were among the topics of proposed policy resolutions discussed by the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Resolutions Committee Nov. 7-8 in Waco.

The committee, comprised of 41 TFB members representing Texas agriculture, spent two days reviewing, deliberating and consolidating over 220 resolutions to both state and national policies proposed by county Farm Bureaus across the state.

“We were well represented on the committee. There were many topics discussed, and we went painstakingly through our policy book,” Pat McDowell, TFB vice president and chair of the Resolutions Committee, said. “We talked about tax abatements, solar, renewable energy,

support for ethanol and many other transportation issues and animal health issues. There was a myriad of issues that came through, and they were all discussed at length.”

The committee evaluated several resolutions related to renewable energy and tax abatements.

The committee supported allowing for a 60-day public notice and written notice to all landowners within a two-mile radius and comment period of all applications for tax abatements or appraised value or limitations prior to being sent to the Texas Comptroller’s Office and again upon its return.

Support was expressed for tax abatements being considered and approved at the local level and that projects seeking tax abatements on agricultural lands design their projects in such a way as to maximize

the potential for continued agricultural production where feasible.

In addition, the committee opposed any foreign entity or persons receiving tax credits, abatements, incentives or any other in-kind contribution that affects the taking of agricultural land in the U.S.

During the two-day meeting, the committee discussed support for legalizing new methods to assist in controlling feral hogs.

Other resolutions that received support from the committee regarded drone use. The committee supported establishing a minimum flight altitude to ensure safety of livestock and wildlife. The committee also supported landowners being able to forcefully remove non-military drones in flight over an owner’s land without notice to the operator if the drone is endangering or harassing livestock or wild-

life or endangering landowners or employees working on the property.

Transporting agricultural goods and products is essential for the Texas economy. The committee opposed any state and federal efforts to limit independent, owner-operator truck drivers of agricultural commodities from contracting with carrier companies. They also opposed efforts to mandate conversion from combustion-powered motor vehicles to electric-powered motor vehicles.

On the national level, the committee discussed support for a stock tank clean out assistance program and efforts to allow livestock market owners to invest in ownership of small, very small and regional meat packing and processing facilities.

The committee also supported increasing funding for feral hog control programs and pilot projects in the farm bill.

Carbon markets and credits were among the resolutions discussed. The committee expressed support for voluntary programs, third-party verification for carbon credits and compensating farmers and ranchers for previously existing carbon capturing storage techniques used.

The policy recommendations will be considered by TFB voting delegates during the business session of the organization’s 89th annual meeting Dec. 2-4 in Waco.

State resolutions adopted at the TFB annual meeting become policies that guide the organization. National resolutions, if adopted by voting delegates at the TFB annual meeting, are sent to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Resolutions Committee for consideration.

Resolutions supported by the AFBF Resolutions Committee and approved by AFBF voting delegates in January provide a roadmap for the national organization.

For more details on the annual meeting, visit texasfarmbureau.org/annualmeeting.

Coverage from the annual meeting will be in the January 2022 issue of *Texas Agriculture*.



The 2022 TFB Resolutions Committee met in Waco to review proposed policy resolutions from county Farm Bureaus (CFB) across the state.

Row 1 (left to right): Russell Boening, TFB president; Pat McDowell, TFB vice president and Resolutions Committee chairman; Pete Pawelek, TFB secretary-treasurer; Walt Hagood, TFB District 2 state director; John Paul Dineen III, TFB District 4 state director; Warren Cude, TFB District 6 state director; Mickey Edwards, TFB District 8 state director; Brian Adamek, TFB District 12 state director; and Travis Wanoreck, YF&R Advisory Committee chairman.

Row 2 (left to right): Jesse Wieners, Carson CFB; David Winters, Randall CFB; Jim Gibson, Deaf Smith-Oldham CFB; Jerry Don Glover, Bailey CFB; Tye Mason, Lynn-Garza CFB; Matt Boerner, Cooke CFB; Greg Buenger, DVM, Young CFB; Glenn Thorman, Archer CFB; Garrett Spigner, Denton CFB; and William Armstrong, Navarro CFB.

Row 3 (left to right): Brian Triplett, Bowie CFB; Kacy Mitchell, Smith CFB; Dustin Rounsavall, Smith CFB; David Strain, Scurry-Stonewall-Kent CFB; Josh Tunnell, Martin CFB; Jay Clark, Brown CFB; Bobby Pearce, McCulloch CFB; Roy Russell, Stephens CFB; Raymond Arldt, Lee-Bastrop CFB; and Michael Skala, Falls CFB.

Row 4 (left to right): Braden McInnis, Anderson CFB; Edwin Buford, Angelina CFB; Larry Joiner, Angelina CFB; Thomas Wallace, Kerr CFB; Larry Salinas, Webb CFB; Bradley Rinn, Austin CFB; Cole Price, Grimes CFB; Travis Elliott, Matagorda CFB; Ivan Jaskinia, Karnes CFB; Lee Kucera, Jackson CFB; Lacho Garza, Hidalgo CFB; Kacy Frazier, Nueces CFB; and Charles Ring, San Patricio CFB.

New USDA survey solicits feedback from farmers, ranchers

Producers can now take a nationwide survey to help the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) improve and increase access to its programs and services for America's farmers, ranchers and forest managers.

The survey includes new and existing customers.

The survey is available online at farmers.gov/survey, and producers should complete it by March 31, 2023.

The survey gathers feedback on programs and services available through USDA's Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Risk Management Agency. These agencies provide critical customer-facing services and are expected to use the survey data to make targeted improvements.

"A robust survey response that includes the perspectives of all of our customers, including underserved producers, will help USDA better understand the unique needs of both existing and prospective customers, while identifying opportunities to enhance government programs and services. Please take the survey, especially if we haven't worked with you before," said Robert Bonnie, USDA undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC). "This survey will provide USDA with critical data to help USDA serve all of agriculture."

USDA encourages all farmers, ranchers and forest managers to take the survey, especially those who have not worked with USDA previously.

In addition to the online survey, the FPAC Business Center, which is administering the survey, will also mail 11,000 printed surveys to various local state stakeholder organizations and farmers markets.

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Commission approves use of drones to aid feral hog hunters

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

Texas landowners will soon have another tool to aid in the control of the ever-growing feral hog population.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission approved a proposal that allows aerial wildlife permit holders to use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, to track feral hogs at night to help hunters on the ground.

“The availability of both UAVs and thermal cameras to the general public has increased significantly over the last few years. The use of these products can be very effective in the control of feral hogs and the damage associated with their depredation, particularly at night when they’re most active,” Stormy King, assistant commander of wildlife enforcement at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), said.

Hunting exotics or wildlife from drones remains illegal at any time.

“The amendments proposed by staff would specifically allow the use of UAVs to locate feral hogs at night for take by gunners on the ground. The amendments would not allow the take from any drone mounted

weapons systems, nor would they apply to any other species,” King said.

Prior to the commission’s Nov. 3 vote, TPWD accepted comments from the public on the proposal.

Of the 65 who commented, 51% were in complete agreement, 37% completely disagreed and 12% disagreed on a specific issue.

“The most common comments in opposition, which were germane to the proposal, mentioned concerns that it would legalize the use of drone mounted weapons systems and that it would increase the likelihood of overflight over others’ property to hunt with drones. In reality, the proposal limits the use of UAVs to the location of feral hogs for take by gunners on the ground and explicitly prohibits any means of take from the UAV itself,” King said.

As to the overflight concerns, King said there are provisions that limit overflight while someone is conducting a permitted activity under an aerial wildlife management permit. There are no such restrictions applicable to UAVs in general.

The department also received several comments addressing concerns with fair chase and hunting ethics.

According to the Texas Administrative Code, TPWD may issue an aerial wildlife management permit to any person if the department finds that management by the use of aircraft, which now includes drones, is necessary to protect land, water, wildlife, livestock, domesticated animals, human life or crops and will not have a harmful effect on indigenous species.

When applying for a permit, the person must submit landowner authorization to use a drone or other aerial device to control wildlife or exotic animals. They must also explain why the permit should be issued.

Prior to this most recent change, the administrative code only allowed Texans to use hot air balloons and/or helicopters to fatally control feral hogs. King said that’s because drones weren’t as popular or readily available to the public when the code was written.

“Under our state regulations, it’s illegal to conduct take activity under our area wildlife management permit between 30 minutes after sunset and 30 minutes before sunrise. We’re strictly trying to allow folks to be able to use these drones for a good purpose, and it requires a rule

change for it to technically be legal,” King said.

The federal Airborne Hunting Act prohibits shooting, attempting to shoot or intentionally harassing any bird, fish or other animal from an aircraft except for certain specified reasons, including protection of wildlife, livestock and human health, except as is provided by state law. In Texas, TPWD sets regulations for regulating airborne wildlife management. While it may be legal to hunt feral swine from helicopters and hot air balloons, the change approved by the commission only allows drone operators with the aerial wildlife management permit to track feral hogs. It’s up to hunters on the ground to fatally control them.

In Texas, feral hogs are invasive. They root up the soil to find food, and since there are millions of them, cause millions of dollars in damages each year to crops, pastures, golf courses, landscaping and cemeteries.

Transporting live feral hogs remains unlawful unless it is done so in compliance with Texas Animal Health Commission regulations.

The new drone rule is expected to go into effect before the end of the year.



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TFB AGFUND successful in state, congressional election races

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Candidates endorsed by Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) AGFUND fared well in the 2022 General Election.

“We need elected officials who bring strong leadership skills, accountability and an understanding of agriculture to our state and national government,” TFB AGFUND President Russell Boening said. “We are encouraged to see leaders on both sides of the aisle who support agriculture win. We look forward to our continued work with these elected officials in helping farm and ranch families and private property

owners succeed.”

Overall, AGFUND-endorsed candidates finished election night with 134 wins and five losses, giving the Farm Bureau PAC a winning percentage of 96%.

In statewide races, AGFUND-backed candidates—including Gov. Greg Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick—won their races.

All 28 candidates endorsed by AGFUND in congressional races were successful, as were the 20 candidates in Texas Senate races.

In the Texas House races, endorsed candidates won 72 races and lost one. In the Court of Appeals

races, endorsed candidates won five races and lost four.

Boening noted it’s important to have elected officials who understand the needs and issues facing rural Texas.

“The Lone Star State grows increasingly urban each year. That’s why it’s so important to have elected officials who recognize the contributions of farmers, ranchers and rural areas to our state,” he said.

Texas Farm Bureau is the state’s largest general farm and ranch organization. AGFUND is its political action arm funded by voluntary donations from members.

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DECEMBER 2, 2022
TEXAS AGRICULTURE
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County Farm Bureaus execute successful community outreach

By Emmy Powell

Communications Specialist

County Farm Bureaus across the state continue to connect and build relationships in local communities while raising agricultural awareness through various events and programs.

County Farm Bureau leaders successfully hosted unique events and programs to promote Farm Bureau and encourage involvement from community members, youth and

young farmers and ranchers.

This year, Angelina, Cherokee and Montgomery County Farm Bureaus were recognized by Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) for their community outreach efforts in the state County Activities of Excellence (CAE) awards program.

The three counties were also recognized by the American Farm Bureau Federation and will be attending the national convention in January in Puerto Rico. They will

share information with other county leaders about the programs.

“Every year, county Farm Bureaus plan and accomplish activities that help grow agricultural knowledge and establish relationships with community members,” Charles Benton, TFB director of Field Operations, said. “We are proud of the community outreach and educational activities our county Farm Bureaus have facilitated this year. The county leaders have done an outstand-

ing job at helping their communities grow an understanding of agriculture and increase an awareness of what Farm Bureau does for agriculture on the local, state and national levels.”

Each county chose a different approach to connect with their community over agriculture. The programs developed by county Farm Bureaus play a huge role in the overall success of the state and national organizations.

CAE Program Summary

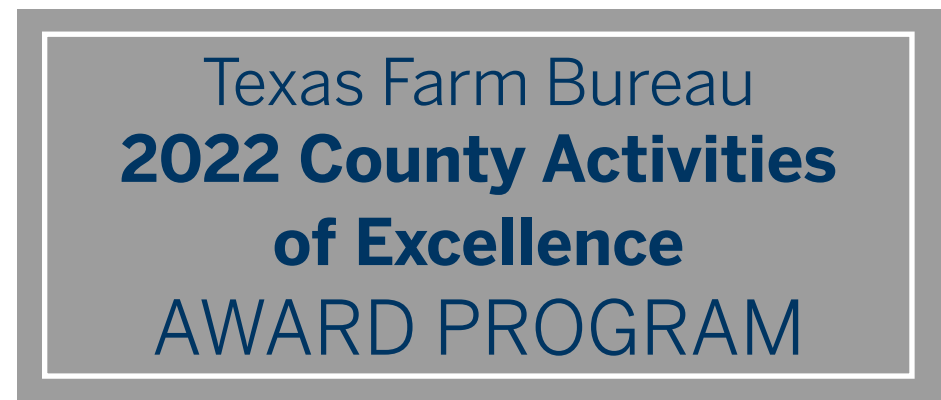
The CAE awards recognize counties that have created unique, volunteer-driven programs at the local level.

The CAE program categorizes county activities into the following areas: education and ag promotion, member services, public relations and information, leadership devel-

opment and policy implementation.

This marks the ninth year of a statewide CAE program to highlight county activities and outreach efforts.

For more information about CAE awards and participation, contact Benton at cbenton@txfb.org or 254-751-2282.



Angelina County Farm Bureau

Angelina County Farm Bureau hosted an informative meet-and-greet to boost agricultural awareness and cultivate relationships within the community.

The meet-and-greet was held at the Angelina County Fair for exhibitors and their parents. The event gave county leaders the opportunity to present Farm Bureau programs and activities at a more personal level, while offering encouragement to the exhibitors.

“We are a voice for agriculture. We want people to know that agriculture is very important, and that it affects everyone,” Jennifer Raymond, Angelina County Farm Bureau board member, said. “The dinner and meet-and-greet helped show our community members not only what we do but how important agriculture is to their daily lives.”

The Angelina County Farm Bureau board of directors identified the needs for the event, developed a plan

and coordinated with the county fair board.

Angelina County Farm Bureau provided dinner and discussed Farm Bureau membership, youth opportunities and Texas agriculture. This allowed community members to understand Farm Bureau, how they can become involved and how Farm Bureau helps Texas agriculture.

There were about 75 people in attendance.

“The event helped the community members put faces to our organization and helped foster relationships,” Raymond said. “It makes it more personal and allowed them to grow confidence with us and with what we do as Angelina County Farm Bureau.”

The county fair is one of the largest agricultural events in the mostly urban area, and Angelina County Farm Bureau is a large sponsor of the premium sale. But county leaders wanted to expand their support



Angelina County Farm Bureau hosted a meet-and-greet during the Angelina County Fair for exhibitors and their parents. The event was an opportunity to highlight Farm Bureau activities, scholarships and more. Courtesy photos.

of the event, and the meet-and-greet allowed them to interact with current and potential members.

It was the first time the county had a catered meet-and-greet at the fair. Raymond noted the event received a positive response, and new members joined the organization.

“This event planted a seed and showed people that we truly care about our community, especially for our younger community members,” she said. “It is important we support them because they are the future of agriculture and the future of Angelina County.”

Cherokee County Farm Bureau

Cherokee County Farm Bureau successfully incorporated an educational program into its social media platforms. Videos and photos featuring Farmer Fred, a cardboard cutout, helped community members and social media followers gain a better understanding of agriculture in Cherokee County.

Farmer Fred is modeled after the popular school project “Flat Stanley.” County board members and young farmers and ranchers post photos and videos of Farmer Fred’s adventures in agriculture on the county’s Facebook and TikTok accounts.

“We saw a need to create a virtual outreach educational program for our community,” Aaron Low, Cherokee County Farm Bureau president, said. “We created Farmer Fred, who we could use to engage community members of all ages through social media.”

Cherokee County Farm Bureau board members have worked to grow

agricultural awareness and literacy by creating videos and photos focused on different agricultural topics.

Cherokee County Farm Bureau Young Farmer & Rancher Committee members have participated in the Farmer Fred project, too. Members took Farmer Fred with them to Amarillo on the Young Farmer & Rancher Fall Tour.

“It’s a way we can show what we do as a county Farm Bureau from the board’s perspective, young farmer’s and rancher’s perspective and to engage children and community members,” Low said.

Videos posted with Farmer Fred have even been used by teachers in local classrooms.

The county also has a large stand-up character for use at events like meetings and ag days.

The goal was to create an activity that had a far-reaching impact that engaged, and entertained, people



Cherokee County Farm Bureau created Farmer Fred, a flat cardboard cutout modeled after the “Flat Stanley” school project. Farmer Fred is featured in videos and photos shared on social media. Courtesy photos.

about agriculture in the area.

Farmer Fred was first introduced to the community early in the year at the county fair.

“This was a new and unique experience for us, posting these videos about the different aspects of agriculture in Cherokee County. We

have been able to share information you wouldn’t usually get unless you were there in person,” Low said. “This created a different avenue for us to share information about cattle, timber and other agricultural topics with such a large and growing audience.”

Montgomery County Farm Bureau

Montgomery County Farm Bureau created a hands-on activity for children to build their own bag of reindeer feed during the Downtown Conroe Christmas Celebration.

The activity helped children and adults learn about the nutritional value of each feed ingredient and showed participants how agriculture ties into everyday life and Christmas.

“This event allowed Montgomery County Farm Bureau to provide a hands-on activity, which created increased levels of engagement for both youth and adults while maintaining an agricultural focus during the well-attended community Christmas celebration, which previously did not have agricultural representation,” Mason Parish, Montgomery County Farm Bureau board member, said.

County leaders developed the activity with the goal of reaching community members of all ages in the increasingly urban area.

“With a rapidly growing urban population, the county board identified the need to develop a unique activity to gain the interest of a diverse audience. The Reindeer Feed Store allowed us to teach agricultural principles through a hands-on activity,” he said.

At the Reindeer Feed Store, Montgomery County Farm Bureau members guided children and helped them add hay for roughage, oats for protein and corn for energy into a feed bag they could take home and leave out for Santa’s reindeer.

The community Christmas celebration previously lacked an agricultural presence, so this activity gave county leaders an opportunity to highlight agriculture.

The Reindeer Feed Store allowed for broad conversations about the nutritional needs of humans and livestock, while engaging in dialogue about how agriculture fits into Christmas traditions.



Montgomery County Farm Bureau hosted the Reindeer Feed Store during the Downtown Conroe Christmas Celebration. Adults and children could make bags of reindeer feed to take home. Courtesy photo.

“While the Montgomery County Farm Bureau anticipated that children might not fully understand all the agricultural principles on display, they could likely grasp the need to help Santa’s reindeer be healthy and strong,” Shannon Parish, Mason’s wife and Montgomery County

Farm Bureau member who played a large role in the event, said. “We knew this would create a space for a shared interest in feeding Santa’s reindeer and open a unique door to teach youth and adults about agriculture by learning about different types of livestock feed.”

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Growers share their passion for pecans with the Lone Star State

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Crack open the shell of a pecan, and you'll find a story of the state's economy, agriculture and history.

And it's a story that began in 1985 for Royalty Pecan Farms near Caldwell where about 13,000 trees are growing on 500 acres.

You'll find Andy Sherrod managing the orchard, caring for the trees and harvesting the fruits of their labor.

"This was a cotton field before it became a pecan orchard. And then back in the late '70s and early '80s, about a five-year span, the previous owners came in and planted this orchard, and it's been established since that time," Sherrod said.

They grow six different varieties—Wichita, Cheyenne, Choctaw, Kiowa, Desirable and GraCross.

Growing and harvesting

Growing pecans is a year-round process.

"There's something happening here in the orchard every single month. Beginning in April at bud break, the leaves come out. The flowers come out. The crop is set," he said. "We protect it against insects and disease. We manage the orchard floor. We supply enough

water and nutrients to keep the trees healthy for the following six months."

Then in October and November, when the green husks split open and the nut is exposed, harvest begins.

For Sherrod and Royalty Pecan Farms, that continues through the

end of the year and into January.

It takes several pieces of equipment to gather the crop, process it and get it ready for sale.

Harvest begins with the shaker removing the crop from the trees mechanically. The shaker grabs the trunk about waist high and gives it a good shake. And the crop falls to

the ground.

The shaker head is designed with a rubber pad and rubber flap so as not to damage the trees during the process, Sherrod noted.

"Then, we have tractor mounted sweeper blowers that come through and create these long windrows, sweeping everything on the ground



Andy Sherrod has been the orchard manager at Royalty Pecan Farms near Caldwell for over 30 years.



The machine shaker removes the pecans by shaking the tree. It's the first part in the harvest process.

into one long row between the tree rows," he said.

After that, a machine comes back and removes the leaves to reveal the crop for the harvester to pick up. Soil and other debris are blown back into the field, and everything heavy is retained in the harvester as it moves through the orchard.

They take the pecans to their processing facility where a series of blowers and screens separate out the orchard trash from the saleable pecans. The pecans go through a chlorine bath to sanitize them, and then they go into a dryer to remove the surface moisture from the sanitation process, but more importantly, the kernel moisture.

Once that process is complete, the pecans go across an inspection table.

"They're visually inspected. Any imperfections or anything that's mixed in with the saleable nuts is removed," Sherrod said. "And then they're sized into large, medium and small and bagged into 50-pound bags or 2,000-pound super sacks."

After harvest is completed in January, the trees go dormant.

"That's when we come in with our hedger mechanical limb cutter and create open spaces between the trees so that sunlight can then penetrate the canopy in the summertime for the photosynthesis process to take

place," Sherrod said.

Pecan production

Pecans are a unique crop when it comes to production. They typically go through a cyclical performance year to year.

"They put on a big crop one year and a light crop the next," he said. "In our off year, we hope it's a good off year. The heavy year sometimes can be too heavy. So, we'll go in the summer with our shaker and remove a portion of that crop, so it doesn't stress the tree. The quality of that crop is increased and then the potential for it to come back the following year with a good off year is increased."

Pecan trees can produce anywhere from 30 pounds to 100 pounds per tree. It all depends on the variety and growing conditions.

Holiday market

Texans have a love for pecans, and pecan farmers aim to deliver.

Pecan products are available at Royalty Pecan Farms' retail store. They sell a variety of flavored pecans made in their farm kitchen. But they also have several other items available for purchase, including raw pecans, pecan coffee, pecan oil, pecan pies and pecan butter.

"We produce a whole lot of pecan pies, especially in the holiday season. And there's pecan bread," he said. "A great many things come out



Long windrows are made along the rows of the orchard for the harvester to pick up the pecans.

of that kitchen that are really tasty."

They have a lot of traffic in their store, but their online sales are growing, too.

"What's unique about this particular crop is that we can go straight to the consumer, unlike cotton and some of the other row crops," Sherrod said. "We get to see the fruit of our labor go into the hands of a customer as they walk out the door and be pleased that they have something of high quality they can enjoy with their family."

Texas pecans

Pecan trees are native to Central Texas. They fuel the economy and are a rich part of the state's agriculture and history.

"In this area, they grow wild along the creeks and rivers, and it's an ideal soil," he said. "This is a river bottom flood plain, alluvial type soil. It's deep. It's well-drained, and yet it has a very high water holding capacity. Pecan trees just love this type of soil."

And pecans are a symbol of state pride. Two official state symbols include the Lone Star favorite—the state tree and the state pie.

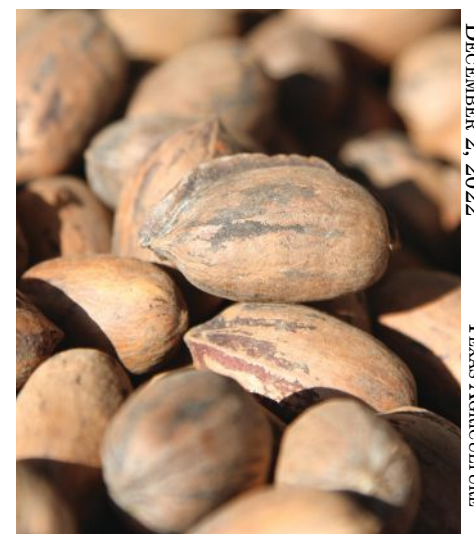
They're in demand, too. Domestic demand for pecans is stronger this year, and export demand from other countries, including Mexico, South Africa and South American nations, filled some of the gap the trade war

with China created for U.S. pecan growers.

Those markets are important to keep pecans moving to consumers both near and far from the Lone Star State, which currently ranks third in pecan production behind Georgia and New Mexico.

Each crop brings challenges and excitement through the year, but there's no doubt the most enjoyable part of the harvest is the satisfaction of a job well done.

Pecan growers take pride in being associated with Lone Star State symbols and growing a crop that folks truly enjoy, sharing their pecan passion with Texans across the state.



Texas ranks third in pecan production behind Georgia and New Mexico.

USDA announces ERP funds, additional pandemic assistance

Additional emergency relief and pandemic assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was announced in mid-November.

USDA is preparing to roll out the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) Phase Two, as well as the new Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP).

“These new programs apply a holistic approach to emergency assistance—an approach not focused on any one disaster event or commodity but rather one focused on filling gaps in assistance for agricultural producers who have, over the past few years, suffered losses from natural disasters and the pandemic,” U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

ERP Phase Two

Phase Two builds on ERP Phase One, which was rolled out in May and has since paid more than \$7.1 billion

to producers who incurred eligible crop losses that were covered by federal crop insurance or Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

ERP Phase Two includes producers who suffered eligible losses but may not have received program benefits in Phase One.

To be eligible for Phase Two, producers must have suffered a loss in allowable gross revenue as defined in forthcoming program regulations in 2020 or 2021 due to necessary expenses related to losses of eligible crops from a qualifying natural disaster event.

Eligible crops include both traditional insurable commodities and specialty crops that are produced in the United States as part of a farming operation and are intended to be commercially marketed.

ERP Phase Two payments are expected to be based on the difference

in certain farm revenue between a typical year of revenue as will be specified in program regulations for the producer and the disaster year. ERP Phase Two assistance is targeted to the remaining needs of producers impacted by qualifying natural disaster events, while avoiding windfalls or duplicative payments. Details will be available when the rule is published later this year.

Deadline for ERP Phase One

Producers who are eligible for assistance through ERP Phase One have until Dec. 16 to contact FSA at their local USDA Service Center to receive program benefits.

Going forward, if any additional ERP Phase One prefilled applications are generated due to corrections or other circumstances, there will be a 30-day deadline from the date of notification for that application.

Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program

PARP will assist eligible producers of agricultural commodities who experienced revenue decreases in calendar year 2020 compared to 2018 or 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PARP will address gaps in previous assistance, which was targeted at price loss or lack of market access, rather than overall revenue losses.

To be eligible for PARP, a producer must have been farming during at least part of the 2020 calendar year and had a certain threshold decrease in allowable gross revenue for the 2020 calendar year compared to 2018 or 2019. Exact details on the calculations and eligibility will be available when the rule is published.

More information

For more information, visit farmers.gov or contact your local USDA Service Center.

Hunters reminded of CWD testing requirements

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

Deer hunters in more than two dozen Texas counties are now required to take any white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, sika deer or red deer they harvest to a Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) check station within 48 hours of harvest to be tested for the fatal, neurological disease.

There are now CWD zones in at least some part of the following counties: Duval, McMullen, Gillespie, Mason, Hunt, Kaufman, Van Zandt, Rockwall, Kimble, Limestone, Navarro, Hill, Lubbock, Lynn, Crosby, Garza, Val Verde, Dallam, Sherman, Hartley, Moore, Oldham, Potter, Deaf Smith, Randall, Parmer, Uvalde, Medina, Bandera, El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson and Reeves.

In early November, ahead of the opening of the general white-tailed deer hunting season, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) issued an executive order creating the new CWD surveillance zones in Limestone and Gillespie Counties.

“In Gillespie County at a deer

breeder facility, as part of the routine surveillance there, two 14-month old bucks were detected with CWD. In Limestone County, five does in the same pen were confirmed to have CWD,” Carter Smith, TPWD executive director, told the Parks and Wildlife Commission.

The new CWD zone covers 117,282 acres of Gillespie County north of U.S. 290 in Harper. The zone extends just above the Gillespie-Mason county line and just west of the Kimble-Gillespie County line.

In Limestone County, the new 118,687 acre zone is west of Mexia. It extends from Highway 84 north to Dawson and Hubbard on Highway 31.

Smith said it’s important that hunters remember to have their harvest tested for CWD before leaving the zone.

“This will allow us to collect the samples that we feel are really important from a detection and monitoring perspective,” Smith said.

These two zones were not created when the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission created and expanded

CWD zones in Duval and other counties in August because the testing had not been confirmed at the time.

Because the new zones were created with an executive order, there is a time limit on how long they may remain in effect.

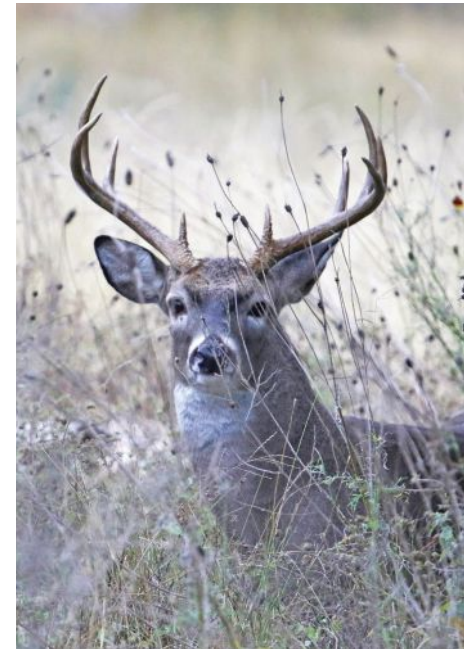
“An executive order can be issued for 120 days, and then it can be extended for another 60 days, but the maximum timeframe that it can endure is for 180 days,” Smith said.

Hunters are encouraged to check the TPWD website at tpwd.texas.gov before hunting to see if the area they’re hunting in lies within a CWD zone, and if so, where the nearest check station is.

CWD is a fatal, neurological disease that affects cervids, including white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk and moose.

It is highly-contagious and can be spread by prions that may live in the environment, remaining infectious, for years.

According to TPWD, if left unmanaged, CWD can have catastrophic, long-term impacts on the native

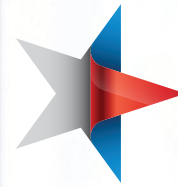


There are now Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) testing requirements in 33 Texas counties.

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To date, TPWD reports there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk to humans or non-cervids. However, as a precaution, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization recommend against consuming meat from infected animals.

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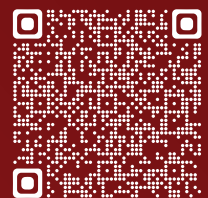


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Farm Bureau Leadership Conference set for Feb. 6-7 in Austin

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

The Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Leadership Conference, set for Feb. 6-7 in Austin, offers farmers and ranchers from across the state the opportunity to meet with legislators and get the latest on what's happening in the 88th Legislative Session.

"This conference will allow us to discuss policy issues, the legislative session and hear from and meet with legislators," TFB Director of Government Affairs Regan Beck said. "This meeting is especially important because the legislative session will have just kicked off, and we can get some much-needed face time with our elected officials."

Legislative items to be discussed during the meeting include right to farm, truth in labeling and tax abatements.

Local municipalities are enacting ordinances to regulate farms and ranches as a nuisance or threat to public health and safety. Strength-

ening right to farm legislation would help preserve statutory protections to ensure farms and ranches can continue operating, even if they are within city limits.

Truth in labeling of meat products will be back on the session agenda. The bill will ensure food labeled as containing meat products does not falsely or misleadingly include alternative protein sources.

The reauthorization of the Texas Economic Development Act, Tax Code Chapter 313, will also be a point of discussion in the upcoming session. This temporary school tax abatement has been available to large-scale capital investments. Historically, the approved projects are manufacturing or energy-related, including solar and wind.

"These are just a few of the topics we'll cover during the conference and this upcoming legislative session," Beck said. "We hope to see many Farm Bureau members in attendance and visiting with their



Texas Farm Bureau members can visit with state senators and representatives during the Leadership Conference in February.

elected officials."

Registration for the conference will begin Monday, Feb. 6, at 9 a.m. The opening general session will be held from 2:30 to 5 p.m., followed by a group dinner.

On Feb. 7, a morning session will be held from 9 to 11:30 a.m. After a group luncheon, buses will depart for the Capitol so members can visit with legislators.

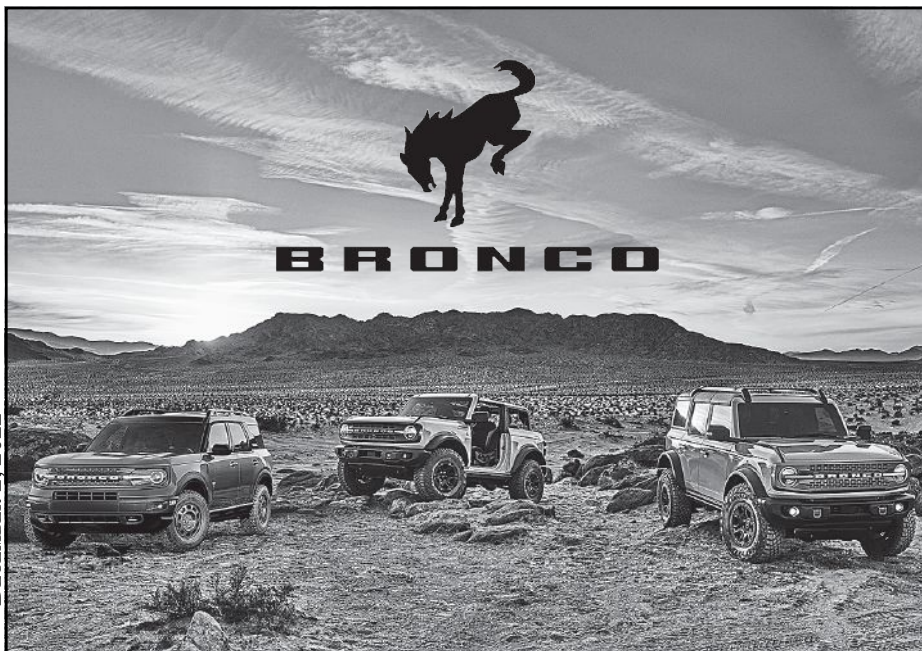
"We'll be glad to be back to nor-

mal and have visits with legislators in the Capitol since we were limited last session due to the COVID pandemic," Beck said.

A tentative agenda and room reservation form are available at texasfarmbureau.org.

The deadline for room reservations is Jan. 6.

Contact Betsy Simon at bsimon@txfb.org or call 1-800-537-8294 with questions about reservations.



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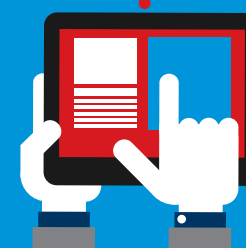
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Mexico plans to proceed with GM corn ban

By Emmy Powell
Communications Specialist

Mexico's government issued a decree to ban genetically modified (GM) corn in 2024 and plans to phase out glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup.

Mexico's deputy agriculture minister said that Mexico is on track to reduce to one half of its U.S. imports of yellow corn that's used primarily for livestock feed.

"There is a market for it, but the government cannot make a purchase because we do not want GM," Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico's president, said.

The Mexican government has been discussing the possibility of the GM corn ban for several years.

For Texas farmers like Charles Ring, it means losing a market.

"Most of my corn has gone into Mexico over the previous years. They have been hungry for our corn, and they need it," Ring, a Southeast corn farmer and Texas Corn Producers

president, said. "They can't produce enough to fill their demand."

Although Mexico is mostly self-sufficient in white corn, they depend on the U.S. for the majority of their yellow corn supply, importing almost 17 tons a year. Shipments to Mexico make up nearly 30% of U.S. corn exports, and the country is the largest export market for U.S. corn.

The ban is expected to lead to significant economic ramifications for both the U.S. and Mexican economies, resulting in billions of dollars in losses for U.S. farmers and higher food prices for consumers in Mexico.

Ring, who is also a San Patricio County Farm Bureau member, noted there is a small percentage of corn in Texas that is not genetically modified.

"We have to be proactive on this. We've known about it for several years, but we were hoping it would just simply go away, because they need the corn. The industry needs the corn. Their people need the corn,

and they can't produce enough," he said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

A study, conducted by World Perspectives Inc., reported that the cost of corn in Mexico would increase by 19%, and tortilla prices would rise by 16% on average. In the first year of the ban, non-GM corn prices would rise 48% to \$8.14 per bushel. Mexico would pay an additional \$571 million for imported corn.

The study also found that Mexico's livestock production will decline by an annual average of 1.2%. The beef and dairy sector would see output falls of 9% and 8%, respectively. Poultry production would fall by 17% and hog production by 13%.

"We need to be engaged. Our ambassadors and the administration need to be involved," Ring said. "We just need to show them GMOs are not detrimental to anyone or their livestock. They have increased the production of corn and animal production across the world. If we've



been able to keep corn yields going up, we need to keep corn. With it, production has been a result of these technologies that we have been able to embrace over the last 20 years."

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has called for clarity on Mexico's GM corn ban, noting the U.S. could use the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade pact to challenge Mexico's policies if necessary.

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Texas startup named semi-finalist in Ag Innovation Challenge

By Emmy Powell

Communications Specialist

The 2023 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge seeks to identify top entrepreneurs working to address challenges faced by America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

A Texas startup has placed in the top 10 semi-finalists of the national competition, thanks to the company's non-invasive analysis of embryo morphokinetic activity to improve pregnancy outcomes of assisted reproductive techniques in livestock.

EmGenisys, Inc. is an animal health company that aims to improve the production economics and sustainability of livestock production.

"Twenty percent of embryos that get transferred into recipients are non-viable at time of transfer. The human eye cannot identify these embryos. They have no chance of establishing a pregnancy and are a financial drain to the producers," Cara Wells, founder and CEO of EmGenisys, said. "Our technology scans embryos and is 85-95% accurate at identifying those non-viable embryos prior to transfer. Once they're identified, people can elect to not transfer them, discard them or use them in some other capacity."

The company's flagship product is a Software as a Service (SaaS) solution offering a non-invasive analysis of embryos before transfer.

The software can be used with a smartphone and a microscope.

The user records 30-second videos of embryos in culture. The software analysis evaluates the videos frame-by-frame to scan each embryo for signs of life. Embryos are ranked so the veterinarian or embryologist can select to transfer only healthy embryos and improve pregnancy outcomes.

It allows producers to know if the embryo is alive at transfer, so they do not spend time and money transferring non-viable embryos.

"By making sure that every embryo is alive and healthy at time of transfer, pregnancy rates improve," Wells said. "Because we're not trans-



EmGenisys, a Texas startup focused on improving pregnancy rates in livestock, was named a Top 10 Finalist in the American Farm Bureau Federation's Ag Innovation Challenge. The company will compete for the Ag Innovation Challenge Award and \$50,000 during the AFBF convention in January. Courtesy photo.

ferring the non-viable or dead embryos that don't have a chance, we're making sure every recipient has a good, verified viable embryo."

When using the program, pregnancy rates improve up to 20%.

Although veterinarians or embryologists are the users, producers benefit the most, Wells said.

"They bear the economic burden of failed pregnancy," she said. "We have a dichotomous customer segment, where those technically-inclined individuals are the user and the direct customer, but we're benefiting the farms at the producer level."

The startup seeks to help make animal production more efficient and sustainable and is working to get rid of limitations within the industry.

"The way that people evaluate embryo health hasn't changed in over 40 years. We've had a lot of progress in animal genetics and nutrition," Wells said. "IVF and embryo transfer has really played a huge role in creating the industry and herds that we have today. But the way that we evaluate embryo health hasn't changed since the 1980s. So, we've created the first non-invasive and objective methods to evaluate

the embryo's health, which can be done in the lab or on the farm."

The computer-based technology can see details the human eye and brain cannot, so it allows the user to look at advanced parameters of the embryo's development in real time to evaluate its health.

Among the many challenges agriculture faces, one is rural veterinarian retention.

"If we can give veterinarians technologies that reduces the physical labor that they have to do and gives them a revenue stream as they can sell these technologies to their clients, it helps improve their profitability and reduces labor they have to do to improve the health of their clients' animals," she said.

Wells works alongside a team to develop and utilize the technology.

Russell Killingsworth is co-founder and chief veterinary officer for EmGenisys. He's a veterinarian who practices embryo transfer in the Texas Panhandle. Tracy Druce is chair of the board and an intellectual property attorney. Wells, Killingsworth and Druce are the founding team and work alongside additional employees with various backgrounds.

As one of the 10 semi-finalist teams in the Ag Innovation Challenge, EmGenisys was awarded \$10,000 in start-up funds.

The startup will compete for the Ag Innovation Challenge Award during the American Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention in January. During the convention, \$15,000 will be awarded to two finalist teams, \$20,000 to the runner-up and \$50,000 to the winner. An additional \$5,000 will be awarded to the People's Choice Team, which is chosen by public vote.

The semi-finalist teams will participate in pitch training and mentorship from Cornell University's SC Johnson College of Business faculty and network with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Business Investment Companies.

The AFBF challenge is funded solely by corporate sponsors—Farm Credit, Bayer Crop Science, John Deere, Farm Bureau Bank and Microsoft.

More information about the contest is available at fb.org/challenge.

Learn more about EmGenisys at EmGenisys.co.

TPWD proposes potential changes to Texas hunting regulations

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) gave the public a brief preview of potential changes to hunting regulations for the 2023-24 seasons.

The first proposed change presented to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission in early November was the statewide closure of the Light Goose Conservation Order.

A conservation order is not a hunting season. It is a special management action needed to control certain wildlife populations when traditional management programs are unsuccessful in preventing an overabundance of the population.

The Light Goose Conservation Order was a special amendment to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that allows U.S. Fish and Wildlife to authorize states to allow additional hunting opportunities.

It was enacted because in the 1980s and '90s, there were concerns

that increasing populations of snow geese in staging and breeding areas in Manitoba were going to cause an ecological collapse.

“At the time, it was thought if we could improve hunter success, we could actually decrease populations of light geese. That was the ultimate goal,” Shaun Oldenburger, TPWD small game program director, said.

In 1980, there were about 1.2 million light geese on the Texas coast. In the late 1990s, the conservation order was enacted. Then, in the early 2000s, there were about 500,000 light geese in Texas as geese chose other locations to winter.

“(Light geese) populations used to be low. We used to have high productivity. Now, we have high populations with extremely low productivity,” Oldenburger said. “What we thought would control the populations has completely changed based on these population models. We’ve seen pretty much a crash in repro-

duction in the last 10 or 15 years in the Canadian arctic and subarctic.”

Oldenburger said looking back, scientists grossly underestimated the snow goose population because it was difficult to inventory them at the time. He said experts also probably underestimated the carrying capacity of the area in Manitoba that caused concerns in the '80s.

“That’s just a small snapshot of one location. That is not occurring across a large area in the Canadian arctic by any means,” Oldenburger said.

The conservation order didn’t reduce adult light goose survival, which was its intent, so it could help control the population. Instead, adult light goose survival increased.

The number of young geese in the population has declined.

“We thought we could control adult survival because we thought we just had a few million geese, and we had a lot of hunters. As it turns out, we had a lot more geese, and

we weren’t taking that large a percentage,” Oldenburger said. “Really, the conservation order is not accomplishing the management objective it was set out to.”

The proposed closure to the conservation order will be presented to the commission for their consideration in January.

The commission could also consider the removal of Harvest Information Program (HIP) from point-of-sale license locations for migratory game bird hunters.

Migratory game bird hunters are required to become HIP certified before hunting. Each year, U.S. Fish and Wildlife selects some hunters from the HIP list for a survey to estimate harvest.

Oldenburger said some people are being HIP certified when buying a hunting license although they’re not hunting migratory game birds, which is skewing numbers.

There also appears to be a discrepancy between answers hunters

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will give when answering HIP questions at point-of-sale locations and online.

If the commission adopts the proposed change, migratory game bird hunters would have to go online, call a 1-800 number or possibly text in details after purchasing their hunting license for the year to become HIP certified.

“We’re talking about those things right now. We don’t have a very clear path right now,” Oldenburger said. “There are some options in play. This is something we’re proposing to do in the next hunting season or in a couple of hunting seasons.”

The goal, Oldenburger said, is to ensure the department has high-quality data to estimate the harvest accurately.

“The reason for that is we have a number of species management strategies when it comes to Fish and Wildlife Service in how seasons are set, and that depends on harvest data,” Oldenburger said. “For instance, how many mourning doves we estimate we shoot here in Texas

matters to hunting seasons in Minnesota and Montana because it all goes into the harvest strategy to

estimate the number of mourning doves that are going to be in next year’s population.”

The next Parks and Wildlife Commission hearing is set for Jan. 25-26, 2023.

Good prospects for second part of dove hunting season

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

The second part of dove hunting season opens Dec. 17, and experts say hunters should have good chances of bagging some birds.

“As sparse as it may have been for the majority of the state in the first season, the way this thing has played out, it should lead up to a really good second season,” Bobby Thornton, co-founder of the Texas Dove Hunters Association, said. “Generally speaking, drier conditions usually lead to a really good breeding crop. We’re anticipating having lots of birds having gone through the early stages of infancy to now being here for the second season. This could lead up

to a really good season.”

Although the second part of the season can provide some great opportunities for hunters, it’s typically not the most popular.

“Statistically speaking, you get more hunters before the split. Within the first three weeks of a dove season, you’re shooting over 80% of your birds that are harvested in an entire season,” Thornton said. “That being said, if you eliminate the first weeks and compare the end of the first season to the second season, we are starting to see more and more hunters coming out in the second season.”

The second season runs through Jan. 1 in the north zone, through Jan. 15 in the central zone and through Jan. 22 in the south zone.

“January is a great time to be in the field—early to mid-January—as long as the weather cooperates,” Thornton said.

Hunters who plan to take advantage of the reopening of dove season in December are encouraged to scout their potential hunting areas to find the best spot to hunt.

“The hard thing about scouting second season is weather conditions really tend to move birds,” Thornton said. “It’s a great idea to scout and see where they’re going, but if all of a sudden you get a cold front come through with a lot of rain, a field that was just phenomenal will be horrible the next day or vice versa. That’s just the nature of the second season.”

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Drip irrigation successful on pima cotton crop in El Paso Valley

By Emmy Powell

Communications Specialist

Drip irrigation was used to grow pima cotton successfully and efficiently for the first time in the El Paso Valley.

Alex Eveler, cotton farmer and crop consultant for Nutrient Ag Solutions in Brownfield, planted 12 acres of pima cotton on his family's farmland in El Paso.

Eveler strives to preserve his family's land. He said drip irrigation allowed him to conserve water and is a sustainable option.

"The drought has really affected agriculture in the lower valley," Eveler said. "I've noticed a lot of the farmland being fallow for multiple years down there, and I saw a solution that could maybe help aid that and allow us to grow more crops with less water on a year-over-year basis."

He noted the importance of being a good steward of the land.

"The lower valley of El Paso is forward-thinking, sustainable producers. I view it as an investment in the future, to be more efficient

with our resources. Minimum tillage kind of goes hand-in-hand with all that and just trying to be better stewards of the land and grow more with less," he said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network.

Eveler harvested about 41 bales of cotton total.

"It's kind of a proof of concept, what we did down there," Eveler said. "It was a temporary system to make sure it would work. It did 3 bales approximately (per acre), but overall, for a pilot I'm pretty happy with the results. I think it's shown that it's worth looking into and proceeding with permanent systems."

He plans to continue using drip irrigation on the entire farm, which is 70 acres.

Eveler said a large influence in using drip irrigation on the pima cotton was for water efficiency.

"Water use efficiency would be the biggest positive outlook for drip," he said. "It allows you to apply irrigation as the crop needs it throughout the growing season. If you use soil



A drip irrigation system was installed as a pilot project on Alex Eveler's family's farm in the El Paso Valley. Courtesy photo.



The drip irrigation system was piloted on 17 acres of pima cotton. Since it was successful, the plan is to expand the irrigation system to the remaining acres on the farm. Courtesy photo.

monitors and moisture probes, you can apply exactly what the crop needs when the crop needs it, and not only with water, but with nitrogen and phosphorous, you can inject your fertilizers and insecticides as needed through the crop without having to put a tractor or other implement through the field. That helps with ease of operation and decreases labor needs, as well."

The Valley is known to produce high-quality pima cotton because of its climate.

The drought, inflation and high agricultural input costs influenced Eveler's decision to use drip irrigation instead of the traditional technique in the area, flood irrigation.

"With drip irrigation, the drought eases the need to change irrigation decisions, because you can give the crop what it needs when it needs it and be more efficient with water," he said. "The drought certainly makes you want to build toward systems like this, because the alternative is not planting and not having enough

water to flood or other systems, other conventional systems, wouldn't allow you to even have a crop."

Eveler noted a farmer's decision to change irrigation techniques in the Valley has many influences but mainly cost and tradition.

"The infrastructure cost can be mounting, and it's a big investment to make, especially if you're not sure it's going to work," he said. "Flood irrigation has been done effectively down there for decades."

Although techniques have been practiced and proved to work well, he noted the importance of adopting and creating more efficient practices and working to sustain the resources they have.

"It's difficult to change management styles, especially in an aggressive way, that quickly," Eveler said. "Agriculture has been a lot of times innovation by necessity, so it's hard to make that change. I think that if we can prove that it works, it would certainly make it more of a comfortable change to make."

WTAMU receives AFBF Collegiate Farm Bureau mini-grant

By Emmy Powell
Communications Specialist

Ten collegiate Farm Bureau chapters, including one from Texas, were awarded the 2022-2023 Collegiate Farm Bureau mini-grant from the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) received \$500 to aid in chapter recruitment, leadership development, purchase of educational materials or registration costs for conferences.

“The collegiate Farm Bureau chapter builds a network of people who are passionate about agriculture on campus,” Kyli Kraft, WTAMU Collegiate Farm Bureau president, said. “We strive to engage with the public on issues in agriculture, and one of the ways we do that is by educating our club members over a variety of sectors, so they can go out and spread the word so agriculture can continue to thrive for generations to come.”

The \$500 mini-grant will help the chapter send more members to Texas Farm Bureau’s (TFB) Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) Fall Tour.

The chapter implemented a point system, which rewards involvement and service within the chapter and community. If students earn enough points, the chapter will pay for their trip.

“If members achieve a certain percentage of points or participate throughout the year, they’re able to go on the YF&R trip, and it’ll be paid for by the club,” Kraft said. “The \$500 will allow us to have more people from the chapter choose to attend YF&R activities come end of the spring.”

WTAMU Collegiate Farm Bureau provides undergraduate and graduate students the chance to engage in agriculture and grow in professional and leadership development, as well as provides service opportunities.

“Collegiate Farm Bureau is different from other clubs on campus. We



Officers and committee chairs of the WTAMU Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter. Courtesy photo.

receive support from Randall County Farm Bureau and can give back to them, whether that’s donating our man hours or teaching fourth graders about ag,” she said. “Having that network and community has helped us to be where we are today.”

The WTAMU chapter was established in 2021 and is one of three Collegiate Farm Bureau chapters in Texas.

“We are proud of WTAMU Colle-

giate Farm Bureau for being named an AFBF Collegiate Farm Bureau mini-grant recipient. The chapter has worked diligently to advocate for agriculture,” McKenna Bush, TFB youth outreach coordinator, said. “We look forward to continuing our work with them and supporting them as they complete their projects.”

For more information on TFB Collegiate Farm Bureau, visit texasfarmbureau.org/collegiate.



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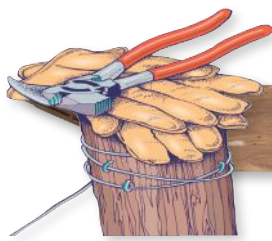
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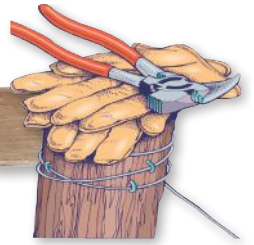
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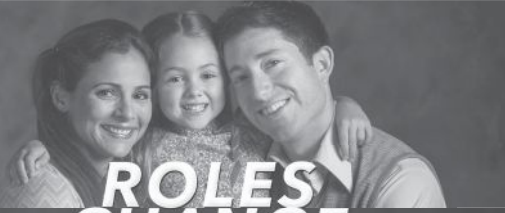

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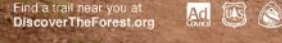
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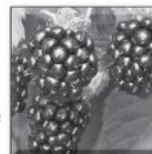
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