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Editorial - Dirk Aaron, Agriculture Extension Agent

Wow! What a change from the Spring of 2009. We've transitioned from the one of the driest summer on record to the wettest winter & spring in years. We've had over 10 inches of rain at our office over the last three months. And in addition to the rain, our county has seen inches of snow fall that has stayed on our grounds - something that we haven't seen to that degree in years.

Bell County is truly blessed by the current tremendous soil moisture, yet here it is the first week of March and we are struggling to plant corn and to get out in our pastures with vehicles. Although the weather is uncontrollable, the season must go on and farmers and ranchers must still fight the battle in a very high risk business. I wish each of you the very best in this 2010 season.

This newsletter is designed to provide answers to recent questions addressed to our office and to inform about upcoming educational events. A common concern on the minds of cattle ranchers right now in Central Texas is the Trichomoniasis virus that affects untested breeding bulls. Other producers have been calling with questions about the financial and risk management assistance that is available to them. And our Central Texas gardeners are looking to this wet spring and the opportunities that a new rain water harvesting system could provide for them. Whatever your concerns are this spring, come and attend the local extension events and/or call our office with any other concerns or questions.

Small Grain Tour, April 23rd

The Texas AgriLife Extension Agriculture committees in Bell, Bosque, Coryell, Falls, Hamilton, Limestone and McLennan County are sponsoring a **Small Grain Tour** on Friday, April 23, 2010. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. in Huffman field off Highway 84 east of McGregor to view the demonstration plots. The tour will conclude at the McGregor Research Center in McGregor (773 Ag Farm Road) with a free meal for those who pre-register by April 20, 2010 to the Extension office.

- 8:45 - 9:25** Variety Trial Tour - **Robert Duncan**, Small Grain Specialist
- 9:25 - 9:50** Small Grain Insects - **Allen Knutson**, Extension Entomologist
travel to research center
- 10:05 - 10:50** Marketing - **James Welch**, Extension Grain Economist
break
- 11:00 - 12:00** Laws and Regulations - **Brandi Kelm**, TDA Inspector
- 12:00 - 1:00** Lunch - chicken fry



Those in attendance with a private applicators license will receive (3) three continuing education hours (1 general, 1 IPM and 1 Law/Regulations). For CCA license holders, they will receive (3) three CEUs (1.5 PM and 1.5 CM). The tour will include a sponsored noon meal at the TAMU Research Center, 773 Ag Farm Road in McGregor, Texas. **RSVP is required for the meal by April 20, 2010 to 254-757-5180.**

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Cattle Trichomoniasis

Times have improved in Central Texas purely because we now have soil moisture conditions that should get our native and improved pastures off to a better start compared to the last few years. I realize as well that many of the ranchers who either liquidated their herds or downsized will now want to repopulate.

Thus many ranchers will also be in need of new breeding bulls. On January 1, Texas bulls that undergo a change of ownership (except to slaughter) must be either certified as a virgin bull or be tested first for cattle trichomoniasis, a protozoal disease that can cause cows to abort very early in pregnancy. Infected bulls carry the microscopic “bug” that causes trichomoniasis without any signs and can transmit the single-celled protozoa to cows during breeding. This is a very significant new disease to Texas and the Texas Animal Health Commission has taken a positive role to help prevent its spread.

Dr. Dee Ellis, Texas’ state veterinarian and head of the TAHC says, “There is no effective treatment for bulls, and once infected, they can continue to spread trichomoniasis when they breed. Infected cows may clear the infection, but only if they are given rest from breeding for 120-150 days—an expensive option, as a calf crop will be missed. A vaccine also is available to help in the management of infected cows, but it will not prevent infection.”

The country’s western states have long-standing cattle trichomoniasis regulations. About two years ago, the Texas ranching industry requested similar regulations, to protect against the introduction and the spread of cattle trichomoniasis, or “trich.” For months, representatives from the state’s ranching, marketing and veterinary industries worked with the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) to develop effective regulations to control the disease, which affects herd productivity and an operation’s bottom line.

Last spring the TAHC, the state’s livestock and poultry health regulatory agency, enacted requirements for bulls entering Texas. In-state regulations however, were delayed until last month.

“For months, we have worked with the Texas cattle industry to inform producers and have participated in many meetings about cattle trichomoniasis and the regulations. More than 600 accredited private veterinarians in Texas have been certified to collect samples for trichomoniasis testing, and we are ready to implement the intrastate regulations for bulls undergoing a change of ownership in Texas,” said Dr. Ellis.

Dr. Ellis said the regulations will apply to bulls being sold, traded, leased or undergoing any change of ownership (except for slaughter).

The regulations include three basic steps:

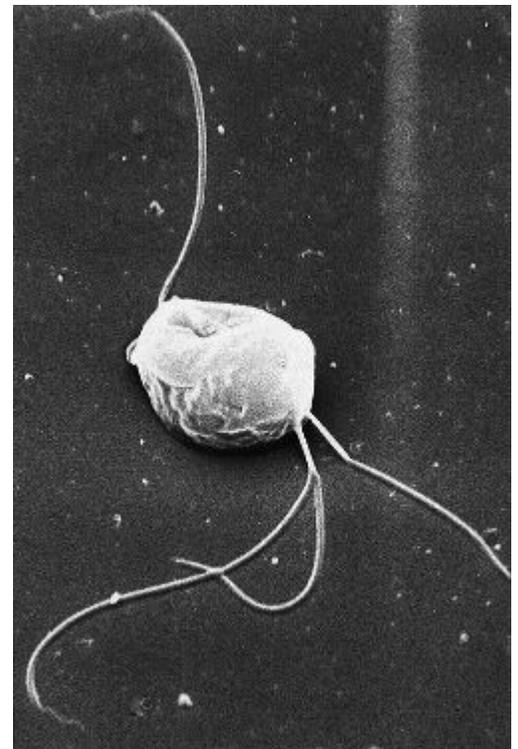
1. Identify the bull. Identification is essential for matching animals with virgin bull certificates or test documents. One form of identification is needed, and it may be an official USDA ear tag, breed registry brand or tattoo, an 840 flap, bangle or an 840 radio frequency identification device. If the bull originated from another state, it may have that state’s official state of origin trichomoniasis ear tag (Texas does not have an official ‘trich’ ear tag). An accredited veterinarian can apply an official USDA ear tag.

2. Certify virgin bulls. A breeder can certify the bull as a virgin, if the animal was raised away from cows after weaning, and the bull is 24 months of age or younger. A Texas-origin bull’s virgin status may be extended to 30 months, if the virgin certificate is signed also by the breeder’s accredited veterinarian. Virgin bulls are not required to have a trichomoniasis test prior to change of ownership. Virgin bull certificates are available at no cost on the TAHC web page at <http://www.tahc.state.tx.us>.

3. Test older or non-virgin bulls. Bulls older than 30 months or bulls that were maintained with cows after weaning must have a negative trichomoniasis test within 30 days prior to change of ownership. A certified, accredited veterinarian must collect the sample for testing at the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory.

While awaiting test results, which usually takes about a week, the bulls must be kept away from cows. Upon receipt of the negative test results, the animal is ready for change of ownership.

“Breeding bulls that haven’t been certified as virgins or tested are considered to



Bell County Pecan Grafting & Management Workshop

The Bell County Pecan Growers Association and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service - Bell County will again host the Annual Pecan Grafting workshop in Belton on **Saturday, April 10, 2010**, registration will be at 9:30 a.m., with the Program starting at 10:00. Commercial producers will receive 2 hours CEU's (1 IPM, 1 General) toward their private applicator license and the workshop is free. Grafting supplies and wood will be available for sale in the lobby of our office on this day starting at 9:00 a.m.. The day's event will be held at 1605 North Main in Belton at the Bell County Extension Office meeting room.

The grafting part of the workshop will be taught by Mr. Orville Michalk and Mr. Bill Winkler of Bell County. These two gentlemen have been involved in the pecan production business their entire lives and have tremendous credibility across the industry here in Central Texas.

The first portion of the program will be a presentation on "Spring Pest Management". This presentation will be made Mr. Bob Whitney—CEA, Williamson County, who is a renowned Pecan Expert. Spraying for insects and disease control is key when it comes to good Pecan Management.

Diseases are serious in Texas, especially Pecan Scab disease. In east, south and central Texas effective pecan-labeled fungicide sprays must be applied during periods of rainfall to prevent Pecan Scab. In this area varieties need to be resistant to Pecan Scab. In addition, Stem-end Blight, Shuck Dieback, Powdery Mildew, Downy Spot, Fungal Leaf Scorch, and other diseases can be damaging.

Insects are a problem in Texas. The Pecan Nut Casebearer, Pecan Weevil, Yellow Aphid, Black Aphid, Stink Bug, Hickory Shuckworm, and others need to be monitored closely to determine if insecticide sprays are needed for economic control. The spray guide for pecans is based primarily on insect biology and life cycles, because, generally, more pecan losses are from insects than disease.

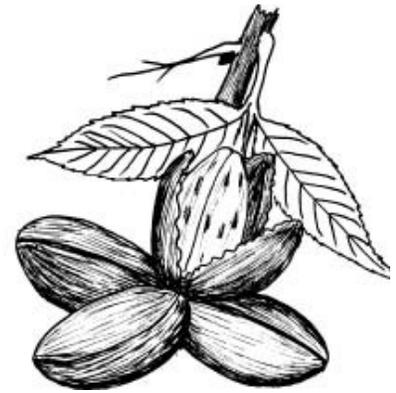
If you plant scab-disease-resistant varieties, you may need to treat only for insects. Another reason to concentrate on insect control is the fact that pecan fungicides are available only in commercial-size packages.

Before using any pesticide, carefully read all the instructions on the container. Follow instructions such as for wearing protective clothing during mixing or spraying. Take the necessary precautions when applying pesticides to avoid being exposed to chemicals.

Mix pesticides in a well-ventilated area or outdoors. Avoid chemical contact with your skin, and do not breathe chemical vapors. Apply the pesticides at the proper rate. If you use less chemical than is prescribed, it may not control the pests well; if you use more than is recommended, you may damage the plant or leave too much residue.

A copy of the "Homeowner's Spray Guide" can be obtained from the Bell County Extension Office and will be available at the clinic free of charge.

For more information on these events you can contact our office at: 254-933-5305.



Cattle Trichomoniasis (continued)

be slaughter-only bulls," said Dr. Ellis. "In some cases, however, buyers may want an untested bull, although they may be buying trouble. We have provisions under the regulations for untested bulls to be identified and moved under a TAHC-issued hold order and movement permit. The animal must be isolated from female cattle, and cannot be moved until it is tested within 30 days of purchase at the owner's expense."

"Because cattle trichomoniasis is a reportable disease, we will be notified regarding test-positive animals," explained Dr. Ellis. "Test-positive bulls may undergo a confirmation test, provided the owner or the accredited, certified veterinarian makes the request within five days of the positive results."

Because there is no effective treatment, infected bulls must go to slaughter within 30 days of confirmation "The cattle trichomoniasis regulations can save cattle producers a lot of money in the long run, because this disease greatly affects calf production. If you are obtaining a breeding bull, make sure the animal has been certified as a virgin or was tested—for your herd's sake," said Dr. Ellis. "We will be reviewing the regulations on a yearly basis with an industry working group, to ensure that the rules remain timely and effective."

The TAHC's cattle trichomoniasis regulations and additional information are available on the TAHC web site at: <http://www.tahc.state.tx.us>. For additional information feel free to call our office 254-933-5305.

The Agricultural & Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University

Recently farmers questioned what is in the farm bill and who provides support information to assist them with making informed decisions on how they should sign in to either the DCP program or the ACRE programs per say. The general rule of thumb is that neither Extension personnel nor USDA –Farm Service Agency personnel can recommend how a farm, farmer, or landlord should sign into the program. But the AFPC provides support information, general facts, and a computer based calculator to assist growers analyze whether or not to participate in the ACRE program.

The Agricultural and Food Policy Center (AFPC) was created by the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents in 1983 and conducts analyses of the impacts of government policy proposals and/or implementation procedures on farmers, agribusiness's, taxpayers, and consumers. Its primary constituency is the U.S. Congress, particularly the Agriculture Committees. The AFPC also conducts research and/or educational programs for government agencies, farm and agribusiness organizations, and agricultural leadership throughout Texas and the nation. Specific AFPC objectives include:

- Respond to legislative requests for analyses of agricultural and food policy options.
- Identify and define emerging agricultural, resource and food policy issues.
- Identify and clarify agricultural and food policy options.
- Analyze the impacts of changes in macroeconomic policy on agriculture.
- Develop educational programs and publications to explain the results of AFPC research and improve understanding of policy options and their consequences.
- Provide leadership in developing new scientific methods for analyzing public policy issues.

While AFPC is prepared to deal with most agricultural and resource policy issues, the faculty has developed special expertise and an extensive track record of accomplishments in the following areas:

- **Crop Program Analysis**
- **Farm-Level Impacts**
- **Livestock Policy**
- **Dairy Policy**
- **Crop Insurance**
- **Farm Program Participation**
- **Government Payment Calculator**
- **Environmental/Resource Policy**
- **Rural Development Policy**
- **Congressional Interns**
- **FARM Assistance**

For more information on this Center go to <http://www.afpc.tamu.edu> .





DO IT YOURSELF

BASIC RAINWATER HARVESTING WORKSHOP

APRIL 21ST & 22ND, 2010

HARKER HEIGHTS ACTIVITIES CENTER

Texas AgriLife Extension Service is offering a 1½ day introductory course open to anyone interested in learning about rainwater harvesting for both outdoor and indoor applications. This course will provide an overview of rainwater harvesting, its uses and applicability to conserving rainfall as a natural resource. Concepts and techniques introduced will cover passive and active rainwater harvesting, including rain gardens, landscape design, rain barrels, sanitation, maintenance, and irrigation. Incentives to install rainwater harvesting will be discussed as well as rules and regulations.

In addition, multiple hands-on sessions will allow participants to see the components and steps involved in designing rainwater harvesting systems, including a rain garden and rain barrel. They will also see how to set up a solar-powered pump and drip irrigation. The course is designed for anyone interested in installing a rainwater harvesting system.

Day One

- 8:30 Registration**
9:00 Welcome, Introductions and “Why We Are Here”
9:30 Water issues, Incentives, Codes and Regulations
10:30 Passive Collection Landscape Design – Techniques will be covered on how to effectively harvest the rain on your landscape.
Green Roofs, Rain-gardens, Bog Gardens and Swales – Basics of each of these passive rainwater harvesting methods will be covered.
Rain-only Landscape – Learn how create a landscape that only uses rain as a source of water.
“Let’s build it!” – See the components and walk through steps of rain garden construction.
12:00 Lunch
1:00 Active-Container Catchments
3:15 “Let’s build it!”
Rain barrels – Made from a recycled 55 gallon drum, a rain barrel is one of the easiest ways to harvest the rain.
400 gallon Tank – construction from roof to container including, conveyance, screens and first flush.
“Let’s hide it” – Here learn how to cover, hide, or decorate a tank to make it more aesthetically pleasing.
5:00 Adjourn

Day 2

- 9:00 Sanitation and Maintenance**
10:15 “Let’s build it!”
170 gallon Water Trough Tank – See how to make a relatively cheap watering trough into a rainwater harvesting tank.
Solar Pump Connection – See how to power a water pump with the sun’s energy.
Electric Pump Connection – See the basic set up of an electric water pump.
Adding Make-up Water – Components added to a system so that back-up municipal water can be added to a rainwater tank.
Add in drip irrigation
Gravity feed – Adding drip tubing without a pump.
Pressure feed – Using a pump for drip tubing.
11:45 Review
12:00 Adjourn



To Register, Go to: <http://agrilifeevents.tamu.edu>

Questions?

Call the **Bell County AgriLife Extension Office**
 (254) 933-5305

Financial And Risk Management Assistance Available

For Texas agriculture to become more profitable and competitive--in light of uncertain weather conditions, risky prices, and increasing production expenses--farmers and ranchers must be better able to weigh the risks and projected impacts of alternative decisions on their operations. In response to this need, Texas AgriLife Extension specialists developed a whole farm and ranch computerized decision support system for long-term strategic planning decisions, called Financial And Risk Management Assistance (FARM Assistance).

Individual agricultural operations statewide, using information specific to their business, can effectively assess the expected financial impact of proposed changes, as well as the financial risk associated with those changes. For example, producers can compare their cash flow risk under various plans, and view estimates of their plan's impact on net worth 10 years down the road; will they be worse off or better off? In the past, management changes were evaluated based on gut instincts and average conditions. Texas producers have, at their fingertips, the ability to evaluate their plans including the risks they face with technical financial expertise.

In 1997, Texas AgriLife Extension Service was provided funds from the 75th Texas Legislature to develop a pilot risk management education program to address increased financial and marketing risk, as well as the high level of risk associated with production agriculture in Texas. The region of the pilot program included the Texas Panhandle, South Plains, and Rolling Plains. The following year the initiative effort was expanded to cover the entire state of Texas.

The program, referred to as the Texas Risk Management Education Program (TRMEP), was designed to assist Texas farmers and ranchers in better identifying the sources of risk in the operation, inform producers of how to use the tools and/or strategies available for managing risk, and help producers quantify the financial impacts of alternative risk management strategies. As a part of TRMEP, the FARM Assistance program was born.

FARM Assistance is best described as a computerized decision support system. The computer model itself was built on a foundation of 20 plus years of research. Agricultural economists at Texas A&M University have perfected methods in risk analysis and simulating the financial future of an agricultural production firm. These capabilities are now being extended to provide farmers and ranchers in Texas with sound decision making information.

The broad objective of the FARM Assistance

program is to improve decision making in and for the agricultural industry of Texas. To that end, FARM Assistance focuses on both the individual producer and the aggregate industry.

One of the two main functions of the FARM Assistance program is to provide individualized analytical service for agricultural producers in Texas. The FARM Assistance system provides an agricultural manager with a 10-year financial projection of his entire operation. It is a one-of-a-kind tool, unique in that it includes all of the following features:

The FARM Assistance projection includes the reality of risk associated with agricultural production and prices. The FARM Assistance projection is specific to an individual. FARM Assistance provides a long-range (10 year) financial outlook. A professional analyst conducts and delivers the FARM Assistance program.

The system works to help farmers and ranchers plan for their financial future and the risks they face. Unfortunately, many producers operate their farm or ranch year after year not knowing if their business is sustainable over a long period of time. By using the FARM Assistance system, a producer can gain valuable insights into the feasibility, profitability, and overall viability of his operation. A formal financial outlook can also ease or prompt valuable communication between the manager and family members, partners, or creditors.

The system also has a powerful ability to provide decision information. Farmers and ranchers daily face a risky business environment, in which they must make critical and complex decisions that affect their financial stability and the future livelihood of their business and family. Unfortunately, the information that producers typically use to make even critical decisions is inadequate. For years, farm and ranch managers have based decisions on traditions, instincts, advice from neighbors, or generic advice from experts. While these factors shouldn't be ignored, they shouldn't be the sole basis for critical business decisions. Some managers have the skills to "pencil out" a particular decision with accounting, finance, and economic concepts. Even in these situations, it is difficult to evaluate the full implication of strategic decisions and plans over multiple years.

FARM Assistance fills the information gap, by narrowing down the effect of an alternate plan or strategy to the bottom-line cash flow, profit, and equity impacts. Using the FARM Assistance decision support system, producers now have more and better information than they have ever had to make strategic decisions and formulate viable business plans.

Extension specialists work with producers one at a time, so the entire FARM Assistance analysis is an individualized process. Before the process begins, you'll be asked to do a little homework by gathering some paperwork. The required data is readily available from your crop insurance agent, FSA office, accountant, and loan officer. Often the information needed has already been compiled to obtain financing. The total cost of the FARM Assistance analysis includes the time you spend gathering data, the time you spend with the extension specialist, and a subscription fee of \$250.

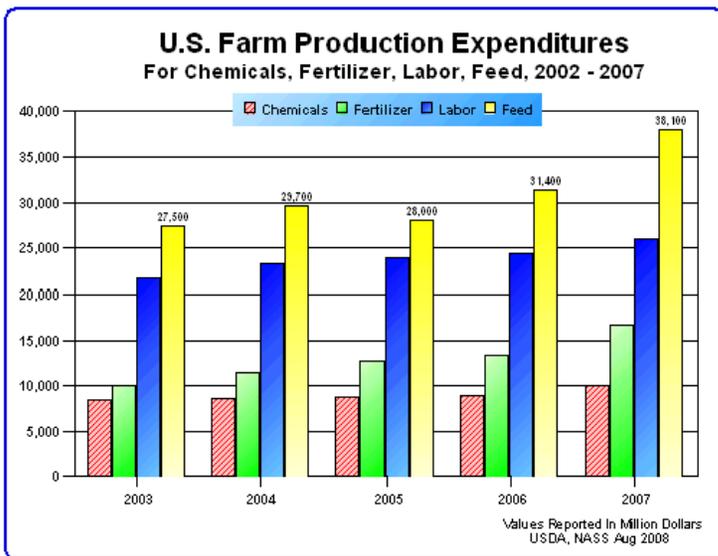
The analysis begins with an initial data collection meeting and can typically be finalized in two subsequent meetings. The information collected in the initial meeting is used to develop a preliminary baseline projection for your operation. In the second meeting you will review input data, verify preliminary results, and develop any alternative strategies that you would like to have analyzed. Finally, in a third meeting, your extension specialist will

deliver and explain you FARM Assistance analysis report.

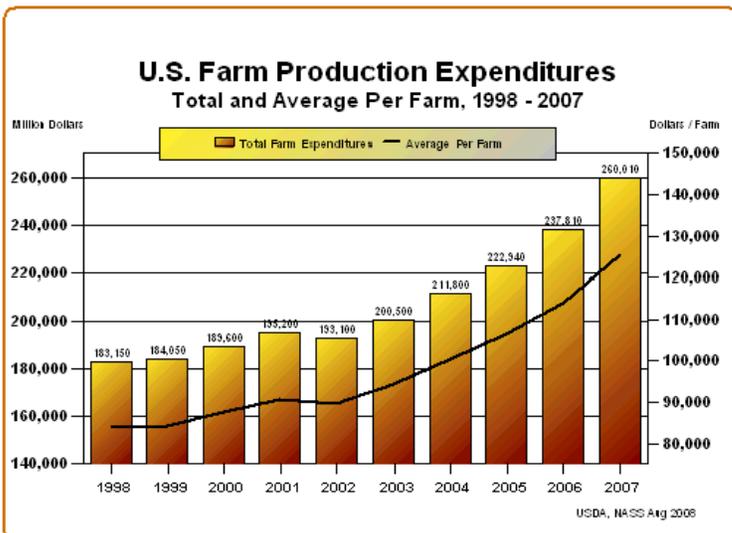
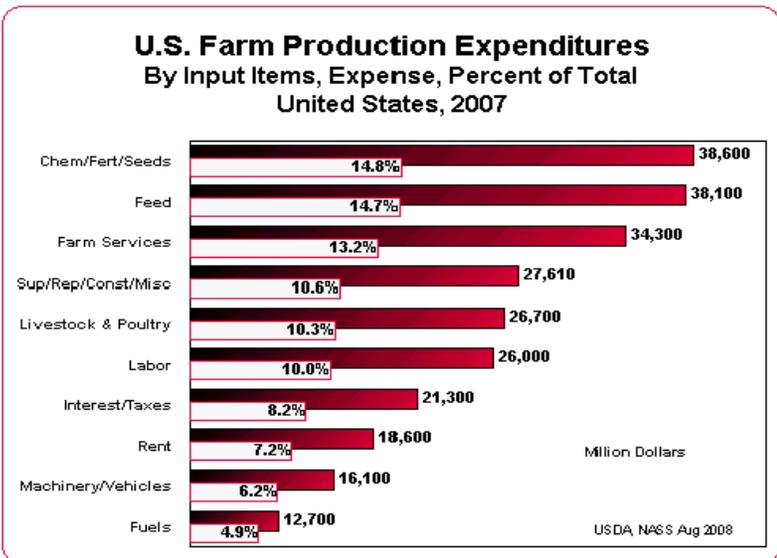
The total time required for this process depends on the complexity of your operation, the completeness of your information, your schedule, and the specialist's schedule. While everyone is different the typical time you'll spend in session with the specialist is 3-5 hours for the initial meeting, 2-3 hours for the review, and 1-2 hours for the final report delivery.

FARM Assistance is technically a "computerized decision aid" or "decision support system." While the foundation of the program is a computerized financial forecasting model, the real backbone of the service is the individual specialists who conduct the analysis and deliver the information in a professional format. FARM Assistance is not software; rather it is a service provided by a technical analyst.

Contact the FARM Assistance team toll free at 1-877-TAMRISK or via the Internet at <http://farmassistance.tamu.edu>



← This chart shows the continued increase in the major areas of production cost for Farmers and Ranchers across the US and this is just the case for Central Texas Growers.



↑ The above chart shows that chemicals, fertilizer and seed are our primary areas of production cost and I can assure you that even though we are in a depressed economy we will not see these cost increases reverse themselves in the next production year.

← Look at the escalation in farm inputs over the last ten years across the country and on a farm by farm bases. We have also seen the value of our commodities go up but have not seen farmers be able to take advantage of this due to these rapid increase in production.

SPRING 2010 AG EVENTS CALENDAR

Improved Forage Management Clinic

Friday, March 12th - 9:00am - 2:00pm - \$10 fee
Buckholts Community Center - 2.5 CEU's
Contact: Milam County Extension - 254-697-7045

Bell County Master Gardeners Plant Sale

Saturday, March 27th - 8:00am - 3:00pm
Bell County Master Gardeners Greenhouse
Earthkind Landscaping Seminar - 9:00am - 9:45am
Contact: Bell County Extension Office - 254-933-5305

Pecan Grafting & Management Workshop

Saturday, April 10th - 9:00am - 1:00pm
Bell County Extension Office Classroom - 2 CEU's
Contact: Bell County Extension Office - 254-933-5305

Fruit/Nut Budding & Grafting Seminar

Tuesday, April 20th - 6:00pm - 8:00pm
Williamson County Extension Office Classroom
Contact: Williamson County Extension Office - 254-943-3300

Do It Yourself Rainwater Harvesting Workshop

Wednesday & Thursday April 21-22nd, 2010
Harker Heights Activities Center - 8:00am - 5:00pm
Register at: <http://agrilifeevents.tamu.edu> - \$150 fee
Contact: Bell County Extension Office - 254-933-5305

McLennan & Bell County Small Grain Tour

Friday, April 23rd - 8:30am - 1:00pm
McGregor Research Center, McGregor, TX
Contact: McLennan County Extension Office - 254-757-5180

Williamson County Small Grain Tour

Tuesday, April 27th - Noon - 3:00pm - \$5.00 fee
Stiles Farm, Hwy 79, Thrall, TX
Contact: Williamson County Extension Office - 254-943-3300

Water - Where are we Going in McLennan County?

Wednesday, April 28th - 8:00am - 1:30pm - \$10
Brazos River Authority, Waco, TX
Register by Tuesday, April 20 - 3 CEU's
Contact: McLennan County Extension Office - 254-757-5180

Early Season Pecan Management Field Day

Wednesday, May 5th - 9:30am - 1:00pm - \$5 fee
Area Pecan Orchard, Jonah, TX - 2 CEU's
Contact: Williamson County Extension Office - 254-943-3300

Oak Wilt & Other Tree Diseases Workshop

Friday, May 7th - 9:30am - 5:00pm - \$10
Local Taylor Restaurant, Taylor, TX
Contact: Williamson County Extension Office - 254-943-3300

Vegetable & Fruit Production Tour

Tuesday, May 18th - Noon - 3:30pm - \$10
Taylor, TX - 2 CEU's
Contact: Williamson County Extension Office - 254-943-3300



<http://bell-tx.tamu.edu>

Agriculture and Natural Resources · Family and Consumer Sciences · 4-H and Youth Development · Community Development

Extension programs service people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.
The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating
A member of The Texas A&M University System and its statewide Agriculture Program