

# Comanche County Agriculture Newsletter

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## **Drought Outlook and Management Ideas**

Here is the part of this newsletter no one wants to read, but you must do your best to plan for the worst, so here goes. Currently, Comanche and surrounding counties are listed as experiencing moderate drought, the bad news is the National Weather Service and NOAA forecast are predicting drought conditions to persist through April 30. April 30 is as far out as they are currently making predictions. Certainly, these predictions can be wrong and with the Gulf of Mexico at our back door, things can change overnight. However, these predictions are as accurate as is currently possible and should be used when making management decisions. Remaining aware of current conditions, accepting them and looking at the forecast predictions gives you better opportunities for long-range forage planning. Here are a few thoughts that might help you plan for the potential of on-going dry conditions:

- We have had two pretty good hay years, despite that hay is getting hard to find. While prices have risen in the last few weeks, there is still hay to be found and the prices are certainly below drought level prices. If your budget allows for it, finding some hay now might be a good option.
- I would like to say we can expect a good spring flush, but it looks pretty iffy right now. It would be unusual not to get some spring rains and spring grass growth. Be prepared to take advantage of any rainfall received.
- Herbicides and fertilizer can help you grow more forage with less moisture. Timely scouting, weed identification and use of the proper herbicide at the proper rate will help you grow more forage. Likewise, having fertilizer applied will help grow more introduced forage with less rainfall. Again, be prepared to take advantage of rainfall when it does fall. Base your fertilizer applications on soil test reports and forage demand. Proper phosphorus and potash levels can be critical to plant growth and survival during periods of drought stress.
- For row crop farmers, include drought management in your crop planting decisions. Utilize, crops that are more drought hardy when possible.
- Be mindful of pest, if we do have drought conditions lasting until summer, armyworm, grasshopper and BGSM pressure will be especially high on irrigated fields and those fields that might be lush from catching a lucky rain or two.

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- Consider removing calves, and perhaps selling calves early. While the cattle market is not what it was in 2014, it is not really that bad and prices appear to be somewhat stable. This might be a good year to take those calves off their mommas at lower weights than you normally would. Dry cows do not require nearly as much grass as one that is supporting a calf.

I hope La Nina gives way to El Nino and we get good rainfall this summer, but it does pay to be prepared in case drought conditions persist.

### **Dicamba Label Update and Mandatory Training for Applicators**

Dicamba tolerant cotton and soybean varieties were brought to the market in 2015 and 2016, respectively, and were followed in 2017 by the newly registered dicamba herbicides formulated specifically to have lower volatility. Following a challenging launch in 2017 of these newly registered herbicides in some states, the EPA worked with companies registering the new dicamba formulations to make revisions to those product labels in an effort to reduce incidence of off-target movement during application. In mid-October, revised labels for XtendiMax® with VaporGrip® Technology, Fexapan Plus VaporGrip® Technology, and Engenia® herbicide were approved and released by the EPA and the corresponding companies, Monsanto, DuPont and BASF, respectively.

Notable revisions include the addition of new restrictions as well as clarifications to previous label language. New restrictions include the following:

1. Classification of these three products as Restricted Use Pesticides
2. Required record keeping of all applications for 2 years

Annual mandatory auxin-specific training for every person that will be applying the product to any crop.

While restricted use classification and record keeping are currently in effect for these products in Texas, the mandatory auxin-specific training for all applicators is a new change that applies to not only those with an applicators license but also to those making applications under someone else's license. This requires awareness for all applicators to ensure their ability to use these herbicides in 2018 and in subsequent years.

Clarifications to label language include but are not limited to what qualifies as a "susceptible" or "sensitive" crop, requiring the use of downwind buffers, clarification around temperature inversions and restricting the application time to only include sunrise to sunset, tightening the wind-speed window from 3-15mph down to 3-10mph, and amplifying the language on sprayer cleanout to prevent cross-contamination.

The Texas Department of Agriculture has approved the auxin-specific herbicide training. This training aims to educate applicators on the requirements and practices for keeping these dicamba based products on-target and will satisfy the newly mandated auxin-specific training requirement.

## **Beekeeping and Pollination Contract Program**

The beekeeping program will be held on Thursday, February 8<sup>th</sup> at the Comanche Community Center. Registration will begin at 1:00 and the program will run from 1:30 until approximately 3:30. We will have Bill Baxter from the Texas Apiary Inspection Service presenting at the program. Topics will include basic beekeeping and apiary management, pollination contracts and apiary rules and regulations. There will be 2 CEU's offered 1 IPM and 1 Law and regulation.

## **Private Applicator Training**

The Comanche County Texas AgriLife Extension office will be hosting a Private Applicator Training on Friday, February 16<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 PM until 5:00 PM at the Comanche County Community Center. This training is for folks that need to get a private applicator license to use restricted herbicides on their property. You are required to purchase the training manual for \$40.00, and the training will cost \$15.00. Please call the office if you have questions.

## **Bermudagrass Production Program**

The "Bermudagrass Production Program" will be held Thursday, February 22 at the Comanche Community Center and will run from 10:00 until 2:00. We have a couple of excellent speakers presenting, Dr. Allen Knutson, Texas A&M Entomologist will be focusing on forage pest and how to control those pests. Dr. James Rogers, Forage and Soil Specialist at the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation will be covering two topics: Soil Health and Bermudagrass Forage Production Technologies. We will be offering 3 CEU's and 1 DOPA credit at this program. Lunch will be provided by our excellent local ag businesses

## **Cotton Production Program**

This program will be held on Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> from 9:00 AM until 2:00PM. Speakers will include: Dr. Gaylon Morgan Texas A&M AgriLife Extension State Cotton Specialist, Gaylon will be covering the Auxin training and cotton varieties and seedling vigor. Scott Nolte Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service State Extension Weed Specialist will be covering weed control and managing herbicide resistance in cotton. Dr. Jason Johnson Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Economist will be giving a cotton outlook update.

For anyone needing the Auxin training, it will be covered from 9:00 until 10:00 AM by [Dr. Gaylon Morgan](#). If anyone just needs this specific training, they are welcome to come and attend the 9:00 to 10:00 portion and then skip the rest of the program. 3 total CEU's will be offered.

Like it or not last year is in the books, for the most part 2017 was a fair year for agriculture production in Comanche County. Here is a look at a few crops and how they performed in 2017: Milk production is by and large the largest single contributor to the counties agriculture economy, milk prices were stable in 2017, unfortunately this stable price hovered around break-even for dairy families in the county. Even with the less than stellar prices, production was up, and total milk sale dollars was up from 2016. Milk sales alone in the county accounted for just over \$100 million in 2017. Beef production income was similar to 2016, with approximately \$52.2 million in beef sales. Pecan production was fair to good. Due to dry conditions, quality was down for most orchards, but production was good. Initially prices were good but have dropped considerably. Pecan production accounted for approximately \$12.5 million in sales in 2017. Cotton production and sales had a significant increase in 2017, we had right at 5300 acres of cotton planted in the county in 2017. Irrigated yields were good to excellent with many over 4 bales to the acre, and most dryland fields topped 1.5 bales to the acre. Total income from cotton lint and seed sales in 2017 was approximately \$6.4 million.

Comanche County is one of the more dynamic and diverse agriculture counties in the state, with many other commodities adding to total ag sales. This years estimated total ag sales in the county was \$222.3 million.

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