

Garza County

Texas Community Futures Forum Action Plan: 2000-2003

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102 South Avenue L • Post, Texas 79356 • October 29, 1999

Dear Citizens:

Responding to community-based needs of people is one of the most important responsibilities of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and the Texas A&M University System. The Texas Community Futures Forum (TCFF) was a comprehensive commitment on the part of Agricultural Extension Service to identify the community needs of Texans and build support along the way to help address those needs. The citizens and agencies involved in the TCFF process, including the Garza County Extension Program Council and the Garza County Commissioner's Court, can take justified pride in supporting this significant effort.

All of us in Garza County, as employees, public servants, concerned citizens, educators, parents, and family members, deserve nothing less than the best quality of life and involvement... and the **Extension Action Plan: 2000-2003** is the key to making this happen. The Texas Community Futures Forum shows that while much has been accomplished during the early stages of the TCFF process, much more work lies ahead.

The **Extension Action Plan: 2000-2003** is a report that presents the preliminary outcomes of the Garza County Texas Community Futures Forum and outlines the steps that County Extension Agents will take during the 2000-2003 to respond to the issues that have been identified. We are proud to present this report in our effort to be accountable to the leaders and to the citizens of Garza County and Texas.

Sincerely,

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KLA/JRS:dg

Garza County Profile

Post City, Texas, founded in 1907 by breakfast cereal magnate, Charles William Post, was truly a “dream city”. His vision drew him to one of the most beautiful locations in West Texas—the area where the head waters of both arms of the Brazos River join to outline the scenic caprock escarpment of the Llano Estacado. Here C.W. Post carved a county out of nature’s provisions which provided a home for cattlemen, plentiful oil and bountiful cotton.

C.W. Post founded the town to demonstrate to a world and nation that free men and true principles of American enterprise were an unbeatable combination. With land speculation prohibited and scientific farming encouraged, the town quickly grew and prospered.

Situated on the crossroads of U.S. Highways 84 and 380, Post has heavy highway traffic, along with the main line of the Santa Fe Railroad contributing to transportation access. The country surrounding Post is varied and swift in transition. From bushy, short-grass pasture, little changed since the earliest cowboys rode here, the land becomes an immense farm upon reaching the surface of the plains above Post. There are over 110,000 acres in cultivation in Garza County, with cotton remaining the primary crop in the area. As one can see, farming has been and will continue to be a major economic factor in the growth of Post.

On the entire Texas Plains, there exists no finer panorama of the structure of the remarkable geographic area known as the Caprock than at Post where canyons etch steep gashes into the tableland of the south plains, leaving long fingers thrusting into the lower lands. Just as contrast helps illustrate a straight surface of the plains end that their magnitude can be better seen and understood. The erosion which has shaped this area is on a time scale beyond real comprehension.

Within this historic West Texas “dream city”, C.W. Post envisioned a community that might enrich the citizens with cultural offerings. Post is a city with strong historical values but also rich in cultural activities and tourist attractions. Some of the most outstanding attractions to visitors are found in the city—the Garza Theatre, which produces several shows a year, a beautiful Art Center, housed in the historic Algerita Hotel, which offers exhibits year round, and the Garza County Museum located in West Texas’ first sanitarium. Old Mill trade Days plays host to an average 7000 visitors the weekend before the first Monday of each month. Over 450 vendors are there to provide antiques, art, wearables, food and entertainment. The OS Museum, Garza County Museum and the Warlords Museum provide art and history unsurpassed by any other city in West Texas.

Through the community’s dedication to its rich history and its commitment to the future, Post was awarded a “Main Street City” designation in 1987. Through the project’s economic development and renovation efforts, numerous downtown buildings have been restored that house gift shops, clothing stores and restaurants. Post also has two National Register Historical Sites and thirty Historical Markers. Historical Main Street houses many unique shops and the beautiful streetscape is a walk back to the past with street lamps, trees, park benches and plazas.

Post offers many opportunities for those who choose to live and work in a small community. There are numerous community and recreation facilities for residents to enjoy. Post has two parks, along with a City Intramural Sports Program, nearby lakes include South Lake, White River Lake, Lake Ransom Canyon and Lake Allen Henry. Area recreation includes Camp Post Boy Scout Camp, summer boating, swimming, fishing, hunting, arrowhead hunting along with tennis and golf courts. Post has one Catholic church and seventeen protestant churches. Post Community Center is accessible for community and family functions yearly.

The Garza County Regional Juvenile Center was opened in 1997, bringing 25 new job opportunities into the community. The Center has 48 beds and with an additional 48 beds being added sometime in the year 2000. The facility houses male and female juveniles 10 to 17 years of age. The Garza County Regional Juvenile Center provides a full range of services as well as programming and educational opportunities for the youth placed in the center. The newly built Giles W. Dalby Correctional Facility has 1000 beds and is due to open in the Fall of 1999 upon completion of contractual agreements. The Correctional Facility will bring 220-240 employment opportunities into the community with a payroll of \$6 million. The facility is named in honor of County Judge, Giles W. Dalby and construction cost were in excess of \$22 million.

Demographically, projections for Garza County in the year 2000, show very little anticipated change. In 1995, the population of Garza County was 5,330, and the prediction for 2000 is 5,490. In 1996, Garza County ranked 206th among Texas counties. Garza County is predominately rural and is not part of a Metropolitan Area. Females (2,770) out-numbered males(2,560) in 1995 and are predicted to remain constant in 2000. The largest age group is 18 to 64 (2,920) followed by 5 to 17 (1,200) year olds. The majority of the population by the year 2000 will be Anglos (3,290), followed by Hispanics (1,820).

In 1996, Garza County had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$18,233. This PCPI ranked 102nd in the State, and was 82 percent of the State average, \$22,324, and 75 percent of the national average, \$24,436. In 1986, the PCPI of Garza County was \$9,603, and ranked 214th in the State. The average annual growth rate for the State was 4.8 percent and for the nation was 4.9 percent. In 1996, Garza County had a total personal income (TPI) of \$84,911. This TPI ranked 202nd in the State and accounted for 0 percent of the State total. In 1986, the TPI of Garza County was \$54,832 and ranked 209th in the State. The average annual growth rate for the State during the ten year period was 4.5 percent. The average annual growth rate for the State was 6.3 percent and for the nation was 5.9 percent. The largest industries in 1996 were mining, state and local government, and services and the slowest growing of industries was retail trade.

Citizens of Garza County are concerned with maintaining a strong education system. There are five public and one private schools in the county. During the 1997-98 school year, 1,086 students were enrolled.

Currently, there is no hospital in Garza County. The Garza County Family Health Clinic provides health care during the week and limited service on the weekend. One physician, one physician assistant and one nurse provide health care for the community.

Garza County, like other Texas counties, is concentrating on maintaining economic development and providing a strong community-based atmosphere for its citizens.

For more information about Garza County, or any of Texas' 254 counties, you can access the following: the Texas Almanac 1996-1997; web sites www.angelfire.com, <http://govinfo.library.orst.edu/cgi-bin/bfact> and <http://monarch.tamu.edu> ; and the article titled, *Understanding Your Local Economy... County Data Set* by Drs. Dennis U. Fisher and Judith I. Stallman, Department of Agricultural Economics, 340 Blocker Building, College Station, Tx 77843-2124.

Texas Community Futures Forum

The Texas Community Futures Forum (TCFF), a statewide needs assessment, was sponsored by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Citizens were invited to identify, discuss, and prioritize their community's current and future needs at forums that were held in every Texas county during the spring of 1999. This broad approach to identifying the issues was designed and conducted by the Texas A&M University System's network of county, district, and state faculty. Implementation of the Texas Community Futures Forum was conducted by Extension agents in each county in cooperation with the members of the Extension Program Council in the county.

In every county, citizens from all segments of the population were asked to identify the most important needs and concerns they faced. Participants represented a cross-section of county residents, public agencies and businesses in the area. More than 13,500 citizens were involved in this state-wide needs assessment and more than 5000 issues were uncovered. All of the issues identified in all 254 counties are available through the Texas Community Futures Forum web site <http://futuresforum.tamu.edu>.

The Futures Forum proceedings were conducted by facilitators who were specifically trained to conduct the TCFF and who were familiar with group facilitation techniques. Facilitators took participants through the steps of identifying issues and then prioritizing them on the basis of their importance, and on the likelihood that the issues could be addressed. Beginning with the items having the highest priority, action steps, resources, time-frames, and contacts were specified for addressing each issue.

Garza County Futures Forum

A total to 59 citizens participated in the Garza County Futures Forum events. Their names are listed in Appendices I and II. Also listed are the resource people and experts who were enlisted as the priority issues emerged.

The issues and needs were identified in an Open Forum event in Garza County and were compiled in an earlier report entitled, *Garza County Needs and Issues*. A full copy of the report is in Appendix I. In a second Futures Forum event, the priority issues and needs were further developed, and, with the help of citizens and partnering agencies, an action plan was written for the next 3 to 5 years. A full copy of this report is in Appendix II. Based on the input received, the high priority issues that were identified as important to the citizens of Garza County, and that required further attention included in the following:

Importance Rank (Vote)	Likelihood Rank (Vote)	Item # and Description
53	53	425. To bring God back into schools, government, etc., teaching all citizens to be better citizens leading to less police, fewer prisons, less government, etc.
47	47	104. Continuity of health programs and health providers.
47	40	301. Youth/family center—activities for youth, indoor/outdoor recreation facilities, youth and adult education classes (computer, parenting, health and job skills training.)
44	51	228. Educate general public and Ag producers in pesticides, water conservation, chemical usage and safety, livestock quality/marketing.
22	16	213. More help for elderly—safety programs and financial help.

County Partnerships

Other agencies and community groups have participated with Extension in the Futures Forum process. They are listed in Appendix II, Partners in Action. Working together, such groups can plan individual, joint, or coordinated actions to effectively address a county's or a community's critical needs. That is, some issues may not be within the scope of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. So, non-Extension organizations or groups may have agreed to take the leadership for such issues because they were more in line with the purpose of their respective agencies or organizations.

Some examples of coordinated efforts are:

- * The Garza County Schools, coaches, local churches, church youth camps, Girl and Boy Scouts, 4-H, Rotary and Lions Club, and other organizations interested in making Garza County a better place for all citizens will form a Community-Based Partnership.
- * Citizens of Garza County, Hospital Board, Covenant Health System, local organizations and the Trailblazers Senior Center will incorporate the health issues identified in the TCFE process in a Community- Health Partnership to insure health care in the community.
- * The local MAD DADS chapter, Youth Advisory Council, Garza County Juvenile Probation Department, and other youth oriented organizations will form an alliance to provide activities for the youth and families of Garza County.
- * Local churches, Trailblazers Senior Center, South Plains Community Action, SPARTAN Transportation, and other organizations interested in Senior issues will incorporate the issues identified in the TCFE process in a Senior-Community Partnership initiative.

Special Acknowledgment

The Garza County Futures Forum was planned by the Extension Program Council and the staff of the Garza County Extension office. They are:

Kelly L. Ahrens
John R. Senter
Diane Graves

Others supporting this effort included Bobby and Jennie Cowdrey and a special thank you is extended to Post High School for the use of their facilities and Post Dispatch and KPOS Radio for advertising the Texas Community Futures Forum events.

Garza County Action Plan, 2000-2003

This report, the third in a series, represents the Action Plan for Garza County for 2000-2003. The Action Plan is a result of the Garza County Futures Forum coordinated by the Garza County Extension Office.

Many of the issues that were identified are closely linked to the educational role of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The issues that will be addressed in more depth by the Extension Agent's in Garza County and the Texas A&M University's System's network of county, district, and state faculty are as follows:

Issue: To Bring God Back into the Schools, Government, etc., Teaching all Citizens to be Better Citizens Leading to Less Police, Fewer Prisons, Less Government, etc.

Description of the Issue

We are creatures that puzzle over what life means, where we come from, and where we are bound. To be anxious and bewildered at times is to be human. In the struggle to make sense of life, certain activities create a supportive framework that connects us to our "inner selves", and to each other, and to the world.

It goes without saying that educators are committed to developing youth potential to the fullest and through careful monitoring of performance and emphasis on learning, this aim is achieved. Youth independence at any age should be respected and educators should remain sensitive to the essential partnership that needs to exist between home, school and religious outreach.

The interaction of people with their environment represents the link between students and educational bias. Youth need direction and guidance in order to make decisions that will result in positive performance.

In Garza County, there are two school districts, Post and Southland. In the county, there are over 15 different church affiliations.

Target Audience

The target audience for this program is the residents of Garza County. This will include students, school administration, clergy and anyone interested in how the role of government intersects our educational system.

Long-Range Goal

Garza County residents will change the community focus from a negative approach to a positive.

Program Design & Implementation

The program is geared toward changing the way people in the community view the role of government and understanding the school system. Information will be incorporated into the program to increase the knowledge, skills and use of government in today's society. The Garza County Extension Service's role is educational in nature. Due to the complexity of this issue, an outreach approach of networking through local churches will be utilized to relay this issue to appropriate ministers and school officials.

Teaching Methods and Proposed Activities

Various methods and activities will be used to disseminate information and improve the skills that will enable the residents of Garza County to fully understand governmental practices associated with education.

Church and School Outreach - Through a series of educational information dissemination meetings, Extension will relay pertinent information regarding this issue to appropriate clergy and school administrators.

Newsletter - Updated information concerning the progress of educational meetings, workshops, etc will be sent in the Extension newsletter.

Evaluation

*Due to the complexity of this issue, the Extension Service will evaluate their efforts according to the outcome of community support and interest in the issue.

Interpretation

The Extension Service will disseminate information and the results of this issue with school administrators, clergy, students and parents involved, various elected officials, and Extension personnel.

Issue: Continuity of Health Programs and Health Providers

Description of the Issue

Our health system is complex and specialized. At times people have difficulty accessing services when they need them. People often find the system confusing and spend a great deal of time trying to find services for themselves or a family member.

Like many of our institutions, the US health care system relies on a wide variety of public and private resources. Health care is provided in several ways: by physicians in private practice; by prepaid plans; by municipal, county, state, and federal institutions, and by hospitals. Health care may be financed by the individual, by private or employer-employee insurance plans, through Medicare and Medicaid, or through other governmental programs.

It is important to maximize the services of the well-trained people and health care facilities in the United States. How do you choose a physician or change physicians? What are the differences in medical practices and how does one select a nursing facility and/or home health care? These are just a few of the questions asked by those concerned with availability of health programs and providers in our community.

To provide simple access to a network of services in every community, public information about available programs should be advertised. Health professionals need to be well informed of available programs so they can make appropriate referrals. Agencies should educate health care providers and the public about community-based services. In today's fast-paced world, and with the aging baby boomer population, health care has become increasingly important. Americans want to be assured that their health care is meeting their needs. To ensure continuity of care among community-based services, communication links among all facets of the health system are needed.

In 1995, Garza County was home to one hospital, with 26 beds. In 1999, there is no longer a hospital available to residents in the county. Currently, there is one operating clinic with one physician, one physician assistant and one nurse. Residents in the county must travel to Lubbock to seek emergency or full-time health care.

Target Audience

The target audience for this program is residents of Garza County. Adults as well as youth will benefit from the increased continuity of health care in the county.

Long-Range Goal

Citizens of Garza County will be assured of continuous quality medical care 24 hours a day.

Program Design & Implementation

The program is geared toward increasing the continuity of health programs and health providers for residents in Garza County. Information will be incorporated into the program to increase the knowledge, skills and use of the health care system in the county.

Teaching Methods and Proposed Activities

A variety of methods and activities will be used to improve the skills that will enable the residents to understand their available health care options. The following is a list of educational ideas to ensure a successful outcome.

Health Fair - Interactive educational fair utilizing health care providers, clinical care and health care access in Garza County. The event will showcase community support systems and provide an opportunity for residents to obtain health care information and options.

Health-Related Educational Sessions - Updates of health care and practices will be discussed during periodical educational sessions for residents. Topics will include health care insurance, Medicare, community-based options, volunteer programs, home health care, etc.

Newsletter - An Extension newsletter will be sent updating health care and services provided in the county along with educational information pertaining to health care practices.

Web Site - Featuring health tips and availability of health care services in the county.

Evaluation

*Prior to program implementation, health care experts will review program plans, to ensure a quality design has been formulated to increase the likelihood of success.

*During implementation, the program will be monitored to determine appropriateness of delivery methods and design parameters. Program quality will be measured along with the level of information dispensed using participant satisfaction surveys.

*In 2003, an outcome evaluation will determine the overall effectiveness of the program. A survey distributed to all participants focusing on health care will determine the extent of the knowledge and skills of the participants.

Interpretation

To report the results of the program, we will collect information from the evaluations, surveys and one-on-one and group interviews. This information will be shared with health care providers, various elected officials, Extension personnel and program participants.

Issue: Youth/Family Center–Activities for Youth, Indoor/Outdoor Recreation Facilities, Youth and Adult Education Classes (computer, parenting, health and job skills training)

Description of the Issue

A network of family and friends may be more important than we realize: a readiness to find emotional sustenance through others is a strong element in the pattern of well-being. The more isolated we are, the less healthy we are likely to be, since it can be difficult to have a rich emotional life alone. The feeling of loving and being loved, and of being part of a supportive community, may have much to do with this issue. Several studies have indicated that the support of family and friends improves the quality of individual lives.

The age-old saying, “ A family that plays together, stays together” may have more merit that we realize. The earliest relationships we form are those within the family, the attitudes and habits developed at this time can have a powerful influence on our patterns of behavior later in life. Youth as well as adults need physical exercise as well as mental exercises to stimulate the mind. Educational classes such as computer, parenting, health and job skills training can benefit all.

The youth of today are activity-driven, and need organized activity in their daily lives. The organization, MAD DADS was established in Post in 1997. This organization provides youth in the community an access for activity after school, on the weekends, as well as throughout the summer months. MAD DADS operates on a limited budget and is partially funded with local dollars within the community. The local organization Director is committed to rebuilding the youth atmosphere in Garza County. Acquiring a Youth/Family Center is part of the organization’s overall goal.

According to statistics (Bureau of the Census, 1992) gathered from 1990 data, 88% of residents in the county 16 years of age and older worked inside the home while 12% worked outside of the home. These numbers are an indication of how family members spend time in and out of the home.

Target Audience

The target audience for this program is the residents in Garza County. Youth of all ages will benefit from the program as well as adults. The program will focus on activities for the entire family.

Long-Range Goal

To establish a community activity center that would provide both indoor and outdoor recreation and education facilities.

Program Design & Implementation

A task force has been formed that has made preliminary plans associated with acquiring a youth/family center. Grant and funding possibilities are currently being discussed and reviewed.

A Board of Directors that includes both youth and adults will be formed. A youth group will be established to serve as a catalyst for non-traditional youth activities. Qualified educators will teach educational classes as well as guide recreational activities. Educational classes will be in the following areas:

- *Computer
- *Parenting
- *Health
- *Job and Career Skills Training

Teaching Methods and Proposed Activities

Various methods and activities will be used to enhance the educational information disseminated, and to improve the skills that will enable the adoption of the life skills training.

The following program ideas will help ensure a successful outcome.

Family Recreational Activities - Activities for the entire family will be made available to encourage group participation. Recreational opportunities will be provided for both indoor as well as outdoor activities.

Youth Career Skills Training - Educational sessions focusing on career opportunities and job skills training for youth in Garza County. Post ISD Counselors and educators will be utilized to teach the various aspects of career opportunities such as résumé writing, preparing for interviews, balancing work and personal time, etc.

Adult Career Skills Training - Adults in the work force change career paths often in life. This educational series will incorporate the succession of changing careers and adopting new job skills. Adults who are entering the work force for the first time will acquire skills necessary to conform to the career opportunity.

Youth and Adult Educational Classes - Educational classes focusing on computer training, parenting and health will be provided for youth and adults in Garza County. Classes will be taught by qualified educators in a holistic approach.

Evaluation

- *Prior to program implementation, a panel of experts will review program plans, to ensure an effective design has been formulated to increase the likelihood of success
- *Throughout implementation, the program will be monitored to determine the appropriateness of delivery methods, levels of information disseminated, and participant satisfaction.
- *Participants will be asked to complete survey instruments focusing on skills and information acquired and adoption practices achieved.
- *In 2003, an outcome evaluation will help assess the overall effectiveness of the program. Program participants will be asked to share information concerning adoption of recommended practices and skills learned.

Interpretation

To report the results of the program, information from the evaluations, questionnaires, and one-on-one interviews will be collected from program participants. This information will be provided to various elected officials, Extension personnel, and program participants as well as other collaborators in the project.

Issue: Educate the General Public and Agricultural Producers in Garza County in Pesticides, Water Conservation and Safety and Livestock Quality and Marketing.

Description of the Issue:

There is over 500,000 acres of land used for agriculture purposes in Garza County. Of this total, there is 42,000 acres of land are planted to skip row cotton. Of the cotton acres only about 30%, just over 12,000 acres are irrigated. The number of center pivot irrigation systems have doubled since 1995. However, the average pumping capacity of these wells is only 400 gallons per minute. This equates to about ten inches of supplemental moisture per acre per year. With normal rainfall of 18 inches per year, producers typically face some level of drought conditions at some point in each growing season. In addition, only about 30% of county producers utilize Conservation Compliance plans. It is obvious that cotton producers must increase management practices to conserve and properly utilize water resources.

The majority of the land in the county is native pasture. This grassland is one of the main resources to approximately 20,000 head of beef cattle, mostly cow/calf operation. Beef producers are challenged with increasing costs and fluctuating market prices. In order to help offset risks, cattle producers need insight to production trends, market updates, herd health practices and best management practices.

Finally, citizens inside the city limits of Post must also be aware of conservation practices. Daily water use averages approximately 700,000 gallons per day, reaching as high as 1,000,000 gallons per day during peak summer use. As much as 75% of this use is for home lawns and gardens. With the increase in fertilizer and pesticide applications, non-point source pollution is a concern.

It is critical to educate all county residents regarding best management practices to protect water through conservation, pesticide and chemical usage and safety and livestock and commodity marketing to increase sustainability and profitability for agriculture.

Target Audience:

The intended users and recipients of this program are all residents of Garza County, regardless of their affiliation, directly or indirectly, with production agriculture.

Long Range Goal:

Create communication between the public and agriculture in water conservation and chemical safety, livestock quality and product marketing to foster a better understanding of production agriculture.

Program Design and Implementation:

In order to sustain agriculture, producers must adopt best management practices in chemical usage, water conservation, and livestock marketing and quality. The public sector must develop an appreciation for the plight of the ag producer. In order to implement this adoption, programs to offer knowledge to producers in the following practices will be utilized:

- Weed control
- Water management
- Livestock management
- Marketing

Additionally, by utilization of weekly news columns and feature new stories, outstanding county producers can be profiled to highlight best management practices and educate the general public of local producer accomplishments.

By enrichment of knowledge through these programs and exposure to various practices, this not only becomes the means of sustaining a producer's livelihood and improving the quality of life as well as the local economy and a better understanding among the public.

Teaching Methods and Proposed Activities:

A variety of teaching methods will be utilized in order to impart the knowledge and research-based information. These include but are not limited to:

County Ag Newsletter/News Columns - Timely information pertaining to ag and urban production topics to inform producers of production updates and management strategies.

Field Days and Crop Tours - Informative meetings at strategic times during the production season to relay timely, critical information to ag producers. Topics will include:

- Cotton Production
- Best Management Practices
- Marketing Strategies
- Weed and Brush Control
- Cow/calf and Stocker Cattle Production
- Water Quality and Conservation.

Result Demonstrations - Result demonstrations to compare production practices for row crops and livestock to allow producers to make informed production decisions.

Educational programs to meet the needs of producers will be conducted throughout the year to provide the most effective and timely information and will be planned and conducted in conjunction with the county Ag Improvement Committee.

Evaluation:

These programs will be evaluated at various times during 2000-2003. During implementation, the program will be monitored to determine if the delivery is appropriate to design intentions. Each year a survey will be given to participants to assess their knowledge and practice use related to sustainable agriculture. In 2003, an outcome evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the program, in terms of goal attainment. A survey focusing on sustainable agriculture practices and scheduled observations of producers will determine the extent of adoption of recommended best management practices. All evaluations will be conducted by the County Agriculture Agent in cooperation with the County Ag Improvement Committee.

Interpretation:

A final report will be comprised in 2003 with results and numbers of program participants and changes adopted. The report will be provided to County Commissioners Court and Texas Agricultural Extension Service administrators as well as funding agencies and program participants. Public copies will be utilized in order to impact the perception of production agriculture.

Issue: More Help for the Elderly—Safety Programs and Financial Help

Description of the Issue

The full impact of this generation's aging will not be felt in society until approximately 2015, and people over 60 already constitute a large and growing portion of the general population. Of the approximately 18 million people in Texas, 2.5 million (about 14 percent) are at least 60 years of age. According to 1995 statistics, Garza County is home to 850 residents that are 65 years and older. Older Americans comprise 16% of the residents living in the county.

As the human body becomes old and frail it can be frustrating and frightening if one is not equipped to deal with the process of aging. Elderly adults want to live in their own homes, to feel safe, to have transportation, and to have the resources to stay healthy and financially secure. Many can do all of this on their own. Others need some help. They want to stay connected to their neighbors, friends, relatives, physicians, the grocery store— in short, their lives. Helping neighbors is an old tradition. Spreading the word and educating people about the opportunities for independent living is critical.

Transportation provides us with the mobility to be independent and enables us to connect our lives with others. Our main transportation is the private car, but people generally drive less as they age: a 65-year-old person typically drives half as many miles as a 35-year-old. Though many older people drive their own cars, as time goes by they rely increasingly on rides from others, on walking, or on public transportation. What are the problems associated with transportation? The isolation created by limited mobility, dependency on others, and inadequate public transit can harm anyone's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Public transportation is largely limited to urbanized areas and transit routes and schedules are generally skewed toward work and rush-hour patterns, not to mention that some older people may have difficulty getting on and off buses.

In Texas, as in the rest of the nation, people over 60 have generally done better financially, and the Census Bureau figures indicate that 14 percent of Texans 65 and older are still below the poverty level and 15.5 percent are classified as "near poor", with incomes no better than 25 percent above poverty. Older Americans want to live as independently as possible, even if that means living on fixed incomes.

Seniors are often the target for scams. Educational programs to alert older citizens have been identified as a point of interest within the community. Community involvement is needed to ensure safety and independence for our older residents in the county.

Target Audience

The target audience for this program is elderly residents of Garza County, 65 years and older.

Long-Range Goal

Elderly residents of Garza County will have access to adequate transportation and programs to assist with living on fixed incomes and living safely.

Program Design & Implementation

The programs will be geared toward providing elderly residents an opportunity to receive relevant and helpful information concerning transportation, financial assistance and community-based activity data. Information will be incorporated into programs to increase awareness, knowledge, skills related to:

- *Financial Assistance
- *Safety Programs
- *Accessible Transportation

To implement the program, such collaborators will include County Judge, Garza County Commissioner's Court, Spartan/Texas Human Resources, Garza County Sheriffs Department, community churches, clergy, and the Trailblazers Senior Citizen Center.

Teaching Methods and Proposed Activities

A variety of teaching methods will be used to disseminate research-based information and improve the skills that will enable the adoption of safety programs and financial assistance for the elderly. The following is a list of educational activities that make up the program.

Senior Seminar - Interactive presentations focusing on topics including formulating budgets, investments, health care and medical coverage, life and auto insurance, and tax advice.

Senior Transportation - Community-based volunteer transportation for seniors will be discussed. Transportation will be provided to assist the elderly with various daily activities such as doctor appointments, grocery store shopping, the bank, etc.

Safety Fair - Educational sessions focusing on safety: "buddy system", telephone fraud and scams, independent living.

Senior Newsletter - Updates on issues relating to seniors. Calendar of community events will be listed along with telephone numbers and contacts for accessibility.

Evaluation

- *Prior to program implementation, a panel of experts will review program plans, to ensure that a proper design has been formulated to increase the likelihood of success.
- *Throughout the course of the program, efforts will be monitored to determine appropriateness of design guidelines. Direct observation will be used to monitor levels of information distributed and program quality. Surveys will be used to assess participant knowledge and practices.
- *In 2003, an outcome evaluation will assess the overall effectiveness of the program, in terms of goal attainment.

Interpretation

A final report of the program will be gathered from the overall evaluations, surveys, and interviews. Information will be provided to various elected officials, Extension personnel and program participants.