

July 2, 2014

AGRIVIEW

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Besides fireworks, nothing says July 4th like a cookout, so to help Texas residents declare independence from fires and other mishaps related to outdoor grilling, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has offered some advice.

Many Texans will fire up their grills and have family cookouts this weekend. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the National Fire Protection Association have some practical tips to ensure safe grilling.

It's extremely important that people take extra care if planning to grill outdoors, especially in open areas. Three out of four households have an outdoor grill, and cookouts are a favorite activity during the Fourth of July holiday weekend.

Data from the National Fire Protection Association shows gas grills were involved in an annual average of 7,200 home fires from 2007 - 2011, while charcoal or other solid-fuel grills were involved in an annual average of 1,400 home fires. In 43 percent of home outdoor fires in which grills were involved, the fire started when a flammable gas or liquid caught fire.

Before making plans for a cookout in a public area, check to see if there's a burn ban in effect for that area.

It's not only dangerous to ignore or defy a burn ban, but there can also be some pretty stiff fines for doing so.

Some additional outdoor grilling fire safety tips offered by AgriLife Extension experts and the National Fire Protection Association include:

***Setting up the grill on a concrete surface or on the ground where grass and vegetation in the area are trimmed and where there are no dry leaves, brush, mulch piles or other combustibles nearby.**

***Placing the grill in an open area away from deck railings, eaves and overhanging branches or other potentially combustible surfaces.**

***If using a gas grill, check for leaks and make sure hose connections are tight.**

***Placing the grill at least 10 feet away from your house or building and do not grill in a garage or under a carport or other surface that might catch fire.**

***Keeping young children and pets at least 3 feet from the grill.**

***Removing any grease or fat buildup from the grill and/or in the trays below the grill.**

***Keeping charcoal fluid out of the reach of children and away from heat sources.**

***Never leaving the grill unattended once the fire has been lit.**

***Not attempting to move a hot grill.**

***Keeping a multi-purpose fire extinguisher within reach.**

***Using flame-retardant mitts and grilling tools with long handles instead of household forks or short-handled tongs.**

***When finished grilling, letting the coals completely cool before disposing, and use a**

metal container for disposal.

***If using a liquid propane grill, taking extreme caution and always follow manufacturer recommendations for connecting or disconnecting the tank.**

We want people to be safe during their July 4th holiday cookout, and by following these tips on grilling safety, we feel they can minimize the chance of starting a fire.

BEEF REFERENDUM PASSES:

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) today announced Texas beef producers have voted to establish a state-level Beef Checkoff program, which was approved by a wide margin of 66.79 percent of voters. Overall, 33.21 percent of voters opposed the measure. TDA conducted this referendum upon petition by cattle industry organizations under the authorities designated by the Texas Legislature.

Passage of the referendum establishes a producer-funded program without the use of tax dollars. The Beef Checkoff program will research ways to continue improving Texas beef quality, as well as educate prospective consumers of Texas beef around the world. Texas beef producers will pay a refundable assessment of no more than \$1 per head of cattle they sell. Collection of the assessment will begin on Oct. 1, 2014 and continue until the Beef Promotion and Research Council of Texas (BPRCT) notifies cattle collection points to cease collection.

Voting on the measure took place June 2–6, 2014. Beef producers, regardless of age, who owned cattle in Texas between June 6, 2013 and June 6, 2014 were eligible to vote in the election. The Beef Checkoff program will be used for the promotion, marketing, research and educational efforts of beef and beef products for prospective consumers of Texas beef around the world.

As required under the Texas Agriculture Code, TDA conducted the referendum following a petition from cattle industry organizations on behalf of their members. After cattle owners voted, a canvassing committee of representatives from TDA and the Texas Secretary of State counted the votes. TDA conducted an eligibility audit of voters, which confirmed the vote results.

80 Henderson County beef producers voted in the election. 30 votes were cast for the referendum and 50 were against.

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