

2018 Upper Gulf Coast Rice Production Education Summary

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Relevance

Rice has been a mainstay of the Colorado, Matagorda, Jackson, and Wharton County's economies since the early 1900's. Rice income accounts for \$135 million in the four-county area, comprised of 53%, or 100,738 acres of Texas' 191,133 total rice acres. However, lack of profitability is placing financial stress on both the infrastructure and the farming community. Acreage has declined in recent years creating negative impacts on the local economy in general. The 2015 Texas Community Futures Forum identified that crop producers will need to keep abreast of marketing opportunities, precision agriculture practices, and variety/seed technology developments to remain competitive in the industry. Most recently in 2018, market influences and consumer demand created rice storage challenges for the 2018 rice crop. It's estimated that farmers produced 15-16 million hundred weights (cwt) of rice in Texas in 2018. Texas has only enough rice storage for 13 million hundredweights (11 million cwt in public storage + 2 million cwt in on-farm storage). By October 2018, 726,000 cwt still remained in rice warehouses from the 2017 crop; 2,750,000 cwt of the 2018 crop had been sold, but was still in rice warehouses; and 4,000,000 cwt of the 2018 were still unsold and in rice warehouses. To achieve and maintain the economic viability of rice producers, we must provide business profitability and risk management-based programs in response to the educational needs of those in the region. The Western Rice Belt program area committee for Matagorda, Wharton, Jackson and Colorado Counties reflects this educational need.

Response

County Extension Agents with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Wharton, Matagorda, Jackson, and Colorado come together each year to provide the Western Rice Belt Conference. This has been an ongoing multiyear, multi-county educational effort since 2005. The conference is comprised of a Producers Seminar, along with a Consumers Seminar, held each year on the third Wednesday of January. All stages of the event from planning to evaluation are directed by two, multi-county Western Rice Belt Conference planning committees – one for the producers section and one for the consumer section. Committees are made up of County Extension Agents, equipment dealers, rice warehouse managers, rice producers, rice producers, U.S. Rice Producers Association, USA Rice, Inc., wives of rice farmers, and Extension Education Association (EEA) members. The committee builds the agenda each year to address current production and consumer issues in the rice industry with guest speakers from Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension, and more.

In September 2018 the Western Rice Belt committee sought to gather a better understanding as to why the Texas rice industry has faced sudden challenges in 2018 finding storage space to store the 2018 rice crop. Any findings would be shared with rice producers at the 2019 Western Rice Belt Conference. On October 30, 2018 the Western Rice Belt Committee hosted a Rice Sustainability Forum in El Campo for professionals from the Texas rice industry.

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The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating

Results

2018 Western Rice Belt Conference

The 14th Annual Western Rice Belt Conference was held on January 24, 2018 at the El Campo Civic Center, after being cancelled on January 17, 2018 due to an ice storm that prevented safe travelling. 220 rice producers and 81 rice consumers attended the conference. To determine the programmatic results of the Western Rice Belt Producers Seminar a retrospective post evaluation instrument was administered the day of the conference. **131 of 220 (59.5%)** completed evaluations. **53.8%** of the participants plan to voice their input and concerns regarding the 2018 Farm Bill through the proper channels. Rice producers report a total anticipated economic benefit for their farm operations of \$876,550, or an economic benefit of \$4.83 per acre.

Client Change Level of Understanding: 2018 Western Rice Belt Conference

TOPICS	Mean Value BEFORE	Mean Value AFTER	Percent Increase
EPS worker protection standards laws that take into effect in 2018	2.24	3.16	30.7%
The various rice boards in Texas: their purpose, what empowers each one, who to contact	2.39	3.22	27.7%
Management of insects in Texas rice	2.61	3.29	22.7%
Research on new chemistry available in weed control for rice	2.38	3.06	22.7%
Disease management in rice	2.59	3.14	18.3%

2018 Rice Sustainability Forum

A total of thirty-nine (39) rice industry professionals attended the October 30, 2018 Western Rice Belt Committee sponsored, Rice Sustainability Forum in El Campo, Texas. These professionals represented rice producers, rice research, Texas Department of Agriculture, AgriLife Extension, grain marketers, grower associations, rice mills, and rice dryers. With limited time to discuss the market, and with a lot to discuss, the group focused on answering five questions pertaining to the rice industry:

Question 1	What are the challenges that you are facing in the rice industry?
<i>Response</i>	<i>Providing a quality product to a quality driven market; concern that not all rice producing regions in the U.S. preserve the identity of rice varieties; rice millers have a difficult time selling varieties with lower cooking qualities; pricing of rice in foreign markets; competing with rice of higher quality in foreign markets.</i>
Question 2	Do you see a path forward to handle and market 15-20 million cwts out of Texas?
<i>Response</i>	<i>Texas, we would have to expand our storage space; more consistent, annual production volume would be needed to justify the enormous investment in drying and storage infrastructure, as well as rice export facilities.</i>
Question 3	What are your customer's needs?
<i>Response</i>	<i>The farmer desires a profitable and consistent price for his/her rice. Rice dryer operators need volume of rice from their customers, the growers. The rice mills need consistent quality rice coming out of the mill (variety related).</i>
Question 4	Which seed varieties are viable for your customers?
<i>Response</i>	<i>Desirable varieties currently identified include 745,723,111,153, Presidio, Cheniere, and Provisia.</i>
Question 5	Do you see something that, as an industry we can improve?
<i>Response</i>	<i>communication shall improve between the mills, dryers, and growers; Opening the international market and supporting the export of rough rice through improvements in infrastructure</i>

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