

**News From Your County Agent**  
**By Marcel Valdez, CEA-ANR**  
**Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service**  
**Zavala County**

Greetings to all of you and thank you for reading this Easter week. On behalf of the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service we want to wish all of you a safe and happy Easter Weekend with friends and family.

**Reminder Private Well Water Screening Next Week**

Zavala County will join other county offices of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service to host well water screening on April 18<sup>th</sup> at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Zavala County located at 221 N 1st Ave in Crystal City. This event will give area residents the opportunity to have their well water screened for common contaminants, including fecal coliform bacteria, nitrates, high salinity and presence of hydrocarbons. The cost is \$15 per sample and samples must be turned in between 7-8 a.m. on April 18, 2017 at the Valero convenience store in La Pryor and by 9:00 a.m. at the Zavala County Extension Service Office in Crystal City.

It is very important that only sampling bags from the Zavala County AgriLife Extension Service office be used and all instructions for proper sampling are followed to ensure accurate results. Area residents who want to have their well water screened need to pick up a sample bag and sampling instructions from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Zavala County located at 221 N 1st Ave in Crystal City or call 830-374-2883 for more information.

The presence of fecal coliform bacteria in water indicates that waste from humans or warm-blooded animals may have contaminated the water. Water contaminated with fecal coliform bacteria is more likely to also have pathogens present that can cause diarrhea, cramps, nausea or other symptoms. "Water with nitrates at levels of 10 parts per million is considered unsafe for human consumption," Smith said. "Nitrate levels above 10 parts per million can disrupt the ability of blood to carry oxygen throughout the body, resulting in a condition called methemoglobinemia. Infants less than 6 months of age and young livestock are most susceptible."

Salinity as measured by total dissolved solids will also be determined for each sample. Water with high levels may leave deposits and have a salty taste, and using water with high levels for irrigation may damage soil or plants. Smith said it is extremely important for those submitting samples to be at the meeting to receive results, learn corrective measures for identified problems and to improve understanding of private well management.

For more information, please contact your local County Extension Office. To learn more about the programs offered through the network or to find additional publications and resources, please visit <http://twon.tamu.edu>.

Support for the Texas Well Owner Network program is provided through Clean Water Act nonpoint source funding from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**Winter Garden Spinach Producers to Hold Educational Meeting**

The Winter Garden Spinach Producers will hold a meeting on Monday April 24, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center Auditorium in Uvalde. The meeting is being held to discuss spinach diseases, diagnosis, management and prevention. Data from a spinach disease screening results demonstration will be provided by Dr. Kimberly Cochran, Extension Plant Pathologist, and Marcel

Valdez, County Extension Agent-Zavala County will be providing two (2) CEU hours for pesticide applicator license holders, 1 hour in general and 1 hour in Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center Auditorium is located at 1619 Garner Field Road- Uvalde, Texas, If you have any questions or for more information please contact Marcel Valdez, CEA-ANR/4-H/PL/CoCoord, Zavala County at 830-374-2883 or Samantha J. Korzekwa, CEA- ANR, Uvalde County at 830-278-6661.

### **Tip of the Week: Food Safety Reminders for a Safe Easter Weekend**

As families are gearing up for Easter, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Zavala county would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a safe and happy Easter and at the same time provide some timely information to keep your egg hunts safe and fun. Eggs have been used to celebrate spring festivals for centuries. Immigrant settlers brought symbolic Easter rabbits and colored eggs to America, and since then, Easter egg hunts have been enjoyed by children of all ages!

You can make sure your Easter egg hunts are fun and safe for all by following these simple guidelines:

- Before buying eggs, inspect them to make sure they are not dirty or cracked. Dangerous bacteria can enter a cracked egg.
- Store the eggs in their original carton on a refrigerator shelf until you are ready to cook them. Keep the eggs away from foods with strong odors (such as fish or onions). Be sure the eggs do not freeze.
- Always wash your hands in hot soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling any food, including eggs.
- For the best results with hard-cooked eggs, buy the eggs 1 week in advance and refrigerate them. Eggs can be “too fresh” to peel easily.

When making hard-cooked eggs, follow these directions for perfect results:

- Place the eggs in a single layer in a saucepan and add enough cool tap water to cover at least 1 inch above eggs.
- Cover the pan and bring the water just to boiling. Turn off the heat and let covered eggs stand in the hot water for 15 minutes for large eggs. Adjust the time by about 3 minutes up or down for each size larger or smaller.
- Immediately run cold water over the eggs or place them in ice water until they are cooled.
- Dry and refrigerate the eggs, or you can decorate them at this point.
- Do not decorate cracked eggs. Instead, refrigerate and use them as ingredients in holiday recipes.

To decorate Easter eggs, use food coloring or follow the directions on Easter egg-dyeing kits. For the dye bath, use water that is 10 to 15 degrees warmer than the eggs. Write names or holiday messages on the eggs with a wax crayon before coloring them. To create designs, mark out patterns during repeated coloring.

You can also make your own natural colors. Simmer uncooked eggs in water for up to 20 minutes with 1 tablespoon of white vinegar per cup of water and one of the following materials, as suggested by the American Egg Board. This is an art, so colors may vary:

- Fresh beets or cranberries, or frozen raspberries provide a pinkish red
- Yellow onion skins provide an orange color
- Orange or lemon peels, carrot tops, celery seed or ground cumin provide light yellow
- Ground turmeric provides yellow
- Spinach leaves provide a pale green
- Yellow delicious apple peels provide a green-gold
- Canned blueberries or red cabbage leaves provide blue
- Strong brewed coffee provides beige to brown

After decorating, return the eggs to the refrigerator until it is time for the hunt. Do not hide cracked eggs. Also, avoid hiding eggs where they may come into contact with pets, wild animals, birds, reptiles, or lawn chemicals. Gather the eggs as soon as possible after they are hidden. Do not allow them to remain overnight. Counting the eggs before you hide them will assure that you have collected them all in the hunt!

After the hunt, inspect the eggs, discarding the cracked ones. Return them to the refrigerator within 2 hours. You can store any uneaten eggs in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Avoid eating eggs that have been used for table decorations. They have been out of the refrigerator for too long in the temperature danger zone – 40 to 140°F.

Of course an Easter in South Texas is not complete without some kind of grilling or cookout. Remember to follow good food safety practices to insure that your Easter meal is safe and enjoyed by everyone. Most grilling safety tips focus on the grill, but skimping on food safety procedures is a major mistake. Be mindful of keeping food at the proper temperatures before and after it is cooked. Put raw meats and cooked ones on different dishes. Always remember to keep

cold foods COLD and hot foods HOT. Completely thaw meat and poultry before grilling so it cooks more evenly. Use the refrigerator for slow, safe thawing or thaw sealed packages in cold water. For quicker thawing, you can you can defrost in the microwave if the food will be placed immediately on the grill. Marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter. If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade before putting raw meat and poultry in it. Don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Harmful bacteria present in raw meat and their juices can contaminate safely cooked food and finally remember to refrigerate any leftovers promptly in shallow containers. Discard any food left out more than 2 hours (1 hour if temperatures are above 90 °F). Follow these safety tips and insure a safe and happy Easter. Have a great Easter week. M.V.

April 10-14, 2017.

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.