

News From Your County Agent
by Marcel Valdez, CEA-ANR
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Zavala County

Slow steady light rain over the weekend provided some needed moisture in our area, however measurable amounts did not meet the expectations as predicted by weather experts. Reports from as little more than half an inch to an inch fell across the county on Saturday but rainfall began to taper off on Sunday, but something is better than nothing. Greetings to all of you and thank you for reading this week.

Steer and Heifer Tag Orders Due Soon

Steer Tags and heifer validation documents for the 2018 livestock shows will be ordered next month as to meet the deadlines listed below. Please let me know if you know of any exhibitors that may be showing a steer or heifer project at the county and or at a major show in Texas. As Chairman of the steer and heifer validation program I have set the Zavala County Deadline to order steer tags and heifer validation numbers to be April 15, 2017 so that I can submit the Zavala county order on time and before the April 20, 2017 deadline. Please note validation fee increases for both steers and heifers for 2018 will be **\$15** per head for steers when tags are ordered during the **April 1-April 20, 2017** deadline and **\$25** per head for heifers if heifer numbers are ordered between **April 21-June 23, 2017**.

Orders in Zavala County may be placed by contacting the Zavala county office at 830-374-2883 or by contacting Jeremy Garza AST at La Pryor I.S.D. at 830-279-2727 and payment made on or before the county deadline of April 15, 2017.

Online 4-H Photography Contest Now Open For All 4-H Members

The District 12 4-H program will be hosting its annual 4-H Photography Contest for 4-H'ers in District 12. The contest will be open to all three age divisions (Junior, Intermediate, and Senior) and the theme will be "Reflections". The contest is done totally on-line including submission of photos and judging. Online registration and photo submissions will open on March 1, 2017 and will end on March 27, 2017. Each county is allowed to enter 1 photo per category in each of the three age divisions for a total of 45 eligible photos. Each 4-H'er entering photos for the District 4-H Photography Contest must register online through 4-H Connect. The registration fee will be \$8.00 per photo entry. Payment must be made on 4-H connect at the time of registration. Payments made by check must be postmarked within three business days of registration submission. No late entries will be accepted. No refunds will be given.

All photos must be submitted through 4-H CONNECT as part of the registration process. Please read these submission rules and requirements very carefully to prevent disqualification of entries. Photos must be in the correct format for proper evaluation. Entry steps, categories and other submission requirements are attached. Submit your photo(s) online between March 1 and March 21, 2017 as part of the registration process. All entries with submitted eligible photos will be

judged between April 5th and April 11th via an online evaluation process. All judges will be able to evaluate entries and provide individual feedback for respective photos.

A custom-designed photography t-shirt is available for purchase by participants when they register for this event on 4-H connect. The T-shirts will also be distributed to agents along with the awards in May. All proceeds from shirt sales are used to support District 12 4-H Events and Council leadership and service activities. The 2017 District 12 4-H Photography Contest Rules are currently available on the District 12 4-H website at <http://d124-h.tamu.edu>. For more information about this contest you may contact Marcel Valdez, County Extension Agent at the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883. This is an excellent contest for 4-H members without the need to travel to compete. I hope to see several Zavala County Entries in this contest.

Tip of the Week: Consider Using Good Bugs In Your Garden This Year

Some of you have already started putting in your spring garden and are anxious to see your efforts grow and at the end provide you with fresh from the garden veggies. Of course there are challenges along the way such as weather, water requirements and insect pest. How about trying something new this season and help our environment and save good bugs to do the job for you. Remember when you apply insecticides in your garden to control aphids and other insect pest you are also killing off the good bugs. No I have not turned into an anti chemical use fanatic but rather provide you an option for you to consider.

Insects are the most successful living organisms on the Earth. That's just one reason it makes good sense to balance one against the other, rather than trying to kill pests with poisons. It is also true that in nature there are no good or bad bugs. All are trying to make a living in the way nature programmed them. But from a gardener's perspective, some insects help and some don't. It's smart to learn about and exploit insect behaviors. In this article you'll learn how to wisely purchase and use beneficial insects. Using insects to control other insects has a long history. Ancient Chinese records describe the construction of bamboo runways to help predatory ants move through citrus groves, and for hundreds of years Yemeni nomads brought ant colonies from the mountains to control palm pests in oases. Modern biological control began in 1888 when a small lady beetle was brought from Australia to California. This effort, organized by state and federal agencies, saved the citrus industry from the cottony cushion scale and was successfully repeated dozens of times worldwide.

There are two kinds of beneficial insects: predators and parasites. Predators eat or otherwise destroy one or more other insect pests directly. Parasites complete their life cycles in a specific host, destroying it in the process. Today there are nearly 100 mail-order companies in the United States (and more in Canada and Mexico) either producing or selling several dozen species of predatory and parasitic insects. Most of these are used in agriculture, of course, especially in greenhouses. But a few are well-known garden beneficials. Releasing large quantities of a beneficial insect into your garden can work in several ways. Sometimes it's like a biological insecticide: The bugs you buy go straight to your pests, clean them up and then disperse or die off. Sometimes the beneficials have limited effectiveness on target pests, but then go on to establish

a local population of beneficial offspring that live on from year to year, helping to reduce the background level of pests. And sometimes the good bugs consume just a few of your pests before flying away. There are about 50 "good bugs" raised and sold commercially today. Many are very specific to regional or agricultural pests. Some are expensive or only available in limited quantities. Others, such as the praying mantis, are common but of limited usefulness. Those listed here are widely useful and available. These include; **Encarsia wasp, Green Lacewings, lady beetles(lady bugs), Pedio Wasp, Predatory mites, predatory nematodes, spined soldier bugs and Trichogramma wasps.**

When we say that one of the insects described above provides control, we mean that a release can make a significant dent in the population of the target pest. Most beneficial's will eat many different kinds of insects, but eating a few isn't control. Praying mantises, for example, feed on a wide range of pests but almost never serve to control outbreaks of any of them. In many instances, the beneficial s will only give you partial control, so you may occasionally need sprays, too. Be careful to select a time and a material that will do minimal damage to the bugs you have bought.

Often the best strategy is simply to increase the biodiversity of your garden. "Simplify" an environment--by spraying an insecticide or by growing only one kind of plant--and problems get out of hand quicker. Make an environment more complex and problems are less likely. Accomplish this in your garden by planting a wide range of plants and by not using broad-spectrum insecticides.

Learning to use beneficial insects will make you a smarter gardener. Start by ordering some catalogs. Most suppliers provide some direction on how to use what they sell, although the quality of these details--and the prices--can vary greatly. Shop for quality as well as quantity. When you realize it's time to resort to the bug busters, it's often best to phone your order in. Most suppliers are very aware of the need to transport living cargo quickly and use express shipping when appropriate. There are several beneficial insect suppliers which you can use such as [gardensalive.com](http://www.gardensalive.com) their website is <http://www.gardensalive.com/> then click on insect and pest control to order. Another source is rincon vitova and their website is <http://www.rinconvitova.com/catalog-beneficials.htm> and finally a source that I did not even imagined would have beneficial insects for sale is AMAZON which impressed me. The information given herein is for informational and educational purposes only and no discrimination is intended to other sources providing the same or similar products nor an endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service or this news media is implied. Have a wonderful week. M.V.

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