

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

There is no doubt spring is here for our area at least. This is not the case for folks in the north eastern part of the country. If you have family and friends in the Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire area where heavy snow and morning temperatures in the teens is what their first day of spring will be like wish them well. I am sure they will envy you for the nice weather we will have this week, except for the windy Monday. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

**Private Water Well Screening Event Will Take Place April 18**

Zavala, Dimmit, Frio, Atascosa, and McMullen Counties of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is hosting a water well screening on Wednesday, April 18 at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service offices for Zavala County at 221 N 1st Ave in Crystal City, Dimmit County at 539 Industrial Boulevard, in Carrizo Springs, Frio County at 400 S. Pecan Street, Pearsall, TX Atascosa County at 25 E. 5th Street Leming, TX and McMullen County County Courthouse, HWYS 72 & 16 Tilden TX in to give area residents the opportunity to have their well water screened.

Results will be available on Friday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, at your Local County Extension Office. If results indicate high levels of contaminants then owners are advised to get a full water test done by a certified water testing lab. If samples submitted are within tolerable limits the well owner do NOT have to do any additional testing and thus save the cost of a full blown water test. The screening is presented by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. According to John W. Smith, AgriLife Extension Program Specialist private water wells should be tested annually. It is very important that only sampling bags from the Zavala, Frio, Atascosa, McMullen or Dimmit County AgriLife Extension offices be used and all instructions for proper sampling are followed to ensure accurate results.

Area residents who want to have their well water screened, will need to pick up a sample bag and sampling instructions from the Zavala County AgriLife Extension office (830-374-2883), the Dimmit County AgriLife Extension office (call 830-876-4216 for more information), Frio County AgriLife Extension office (830-334-0099), McMullen County AgriLife Extension office (361-274-3323) or the Atascosa County AgriLife Extension office (830-596-8997).

The cost is \$15 per sample and samples must be turned in by 9 a.m. on April 18<sup>th</sup>. Samples will be screened for common contaminants, including fecal coliform bacteria, nitrates, high salinity and presence of hydrocarbons. 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. 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. 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.

### **Latest on Cotton Ginning Cost Share Payments**

Cotton growers in Zavala and surrounding counties will be able to participate in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Ginning Cost Share payments will be made available based upon their 2016 planted acres. Signup for these payments began on Monday, March 12th and continues through May 11th. According to USDA, Producers who reported their 2016 cotton acreage to FSA will receive a prefilled CGCS application in the mail, which is to be signed and returned to the recording office listed on the form. CGCS applications can be submitted to your local FSA office either in person, by FAX, or by email.

As a reminder, ginning rates vary by region due to differences in yields and individual ginning costs per bale, and so the payment for Texas is calculated at \$19.65 per acre. Cotton Ginning Cost Share payments are capped at \$40,000 per individual or entity and do not count against 2014 Farm Bill payment limitations. To be eligible for a cost share program payment, each applicant is required to be a person or legal entity who was actively engaged in farming in 2016 and who complies with requirements including, but not limited to, those pertaining to highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation provisions, commonly referred to as the conservation compliance provisions. A producer's three-year average adjusted gross income may not exceed \$900,000 to be eligible for the cost share payments. Additionally, the Seed Cotton Program was signed into law on February 9th. This program allows seed cotton to be classified as a program crop and thus becomes eligible for PLC and ARC payments for the 2018 – 2019 crop year. A National Cotton Council summary of the Seed Cotton Program may be found on the NCC web site at [www.cotton.org](http://www.cotton.org)

### **Tip of the Week: Spring Gardening-Peppers**

Most peppers are easy to grow in the Zavala County area especially hot peppers because they are not only hot but they do well in hot weather. Red and green peppers are good sources of vitamin C, some vitamin A, and small amounts of several minerals. Red peppers have more vitamin A than do green peppers. Peppers are good raw or cooked. Eat them as a snack, use them to decorate food, or add them to salads and casseroles. You can also stuff peppers with seasoned bread crumbs or meat and bake them. The best varieties of sweet peppers for growing in Texas include: Bell Tower, Big Bertha, California Wonder, Gypsy, Jupiter and Yolo Wonder. Suitable hot pepper varieties include: Hidalgo Serrano, Hungarian Wax, Jalapeño, Long Red Cayenne and the popular TAM Mild Jalapeño.

Peppers grow in all types of soils but do best in heavier, well-drained soils. Plant them in areas that receive at least 6 hours of sunlight each day. Several weeks before planting, work the soil 8 to 10 inches deep and rake it several times to break up the large clods. Work the soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to garden tools. Incorporate large amounts of organic matter into the soil, especially if you are working with heavy clay. You can use compost, peat moss, rotted hay, or other organic matter. Because a few plants will feed most families, it is best to buy pepper plants rather than grow them from seed. Buy healthy plants that are 4 to 6 inches tall. About three to four hot pepper plants and eight to ten sweet pepper plants usually are enough for a family of four.

Make the transplant holes 3 to 4 inches deep and about 1½ feet apart in the row. Space the rows at least 3 feet apart. Before planting, fill the holes with water and let it soak in. Move the plants carefully from the box or flat, and set them in the transplant holes. Leave as much soil as possible around the roots. Fill the hole with soil and pack it loosely around the plant. Do not cover the roots deeper than the original soil ball. Leave a slightly sunken area around each plant to hold water. Water the plants after planting. It is best to transplant peppers in the evening or on a cloudy day. This will keep the plants from drying too much and wilting.

Fertilizing peppers is easy. If you will plant single plants, place about 2 level tablespoons of 10-10-10

fertilizer on the soil in the planting area. Mix it well with the soil then water it in. After the first fruit begins to enlarge, place about 2 tablespoons of fertilizer around each plant about 6 inches from the stem. Water the plant after adding the fertilizer. This will increase the yield and the quality of the peppers. Water the plants enough to keep them from wilting. Slow, deep watering helps the root system grow strong. Do not let pepper plants wilt because this will reduce yield and quality of the fruit. Insects and diseases of pepper. Many insecticides are available at garden centers for homeowner use. Sevin is a synthetic insecticide; organic options include sulfur and Bt-based insecticides. Sulfur also has fungicidal properties and helps control many diseases. Before using a pesticide, read the label and always follow cautions, warnings, and directions. Because diseases can be a problem on peppers, watch the plants closely. In mild weather, diseases start easily. Leaf spots are caused by fungi and bacteria and can be treated with neem oil, sulfur, or other fungicides. Again, always follow label directions.

And finally If you pick the peppers as they mature, the yields will be greater. The first peppers should be ready 8 to 10 weeks after transplanting. Pick bell peppers when they become shiny, firm, and dark green. If left on the plant, most peppers will turn red and are still good to eat. Harvest most hot peppers when they turn red or yellow, depending on the variety. Jalapeños are mature when they reach good size and develop a deep, dark green sheen. For more information on this topic or for an Extension Publication on growing peppers contact the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883. Have a great week. M.V.

March 19-23, 2018