

News From Your County Agent
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Greetings to all of you and thank you for reading this week. The old saying that goes “when it rains it pours” seems to fit the kind of weather we have been experiencing lately. In fact by the time you are reading this column this week we will be getting rain once again. One thing for sure is that everything is nice and green and temperatures in the 90’s are pretty much done for the year, unless we get close to 90 by the weekend as some weather experts predict. We will wait and see!!

Private Water Well Screening To Take Place Next Week

Do you have your own water well? Have you had it screened lately? if this is your case then you might want to consider participating in our multi-county water screening event coming to you soon.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is hosting a water well screening on November 1, 2018 at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office for Zavala County at 221 N 1st Ave in Crystal City, to give area residents the opportunity to have their well water tested.

Results will be available on November 5th at the County Extension Office. The screening is presented by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. “Private water wells should be tested annually,” said John W. Smith, AgriLife Extension Program Specialist. “It is very important that only sampling bags from the Zavala County AgriLife Extension office be used and all instructions for proper sampling are followed to ensure accurate results.”

I suggest that area residents who want to have their well water tested, pick up a sample bag and sampling instructions from the Zavala County AgriLife Extension office (830-374-2883). The cost is \$15 per sample and samples must be turned in by 10a.m. on November 1, 2018. 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,” Griffin 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. For more information about this valuable program contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883. Remember free water collections bags and instructions may be picked up at the Zavala county office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 221 N 1st Ave in Crystal City, Texas.

Friday is The Produce Safety Rule Required Training For Growers In Leming

The Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in collaboration with the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Atascosa County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will host a PSA training opportunity for agriculture producers. The Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) has been tasked with developing the standardized national produce safety training program to prepare fresh produce growers to meet the regulatory requirements in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR). The Produce Safety Rule outlined in § 112.22©, states that “at least one supervisor or responsible party from the farm to successfully complete food safety training at least equivalent to that received under the standardized curriculum recognized as adequate by the Food and Drug Administration.

The standardized curriculum developed by the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) is recognized by the FDA as adequate and meets the requirements of the PSR. This training will be available to ALL produce growers in the Wintergarden area on Friday October 26, 2018. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. with the training to begin promptly at 9:00 a.m. and conclude at 5:15 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Atascosa county Extension office located at 25 east 5th street in Leming, Texas 78050. Cost to attend this program is \$40.00 per participant to cover the noon meal, printed training materials and other resources. After attending the entire course, participants will be eligible to receive a certificate from the association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) that verifies they have completed the training course. To receive an AFDO certificate, a participant must be present for the entire training and submit the appropriate paperwork to their trainer at the end of the course. To register for this training you may register online at <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/productListingDetails/2655> or you may contact the Atascosa County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-569-0034 or the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Tip of the Week: Keeping Your Food Safe

Fruits and vegetables are a key part of a healthy diet. But because of the way produce is grown, handled and consumed – often raw – it can become contaminated with foodborne pathogens that may make consumers sick. Farmers understand the importance of food safety when they grow their crops. So did Congress when it passed the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). This law, for the first time, charged the FDA with establishing science-based standards for the safe production and harvesting of produce. The Winter Garden Spinach Producers Board has for years supported me with grants to conduct food safety training to fresh spinach and vegetables handlers in Zavala county and other counties in the Winter Garden Region of Texas. The Zavala county food safety efforts were presented worldwide when I had the opportunity to travel to Spain in February for the international spinach conference in Murcia, Spain.

The resulting Produce Safety Rule requires domestic and foreign farms to put preventive measures in place during growing, harvesting, packing and holding of their fruits and vegetables. The goal is to protect these products from contamination. Another FSMA rule, Current Good Manufacturing Practice, Hazard Analysis, and Risk-Based Preventive Controls for Human Food (the Preventive Controls rule), requires food facilities, such as fresh-cut produce processing plants that prepare bagged salad mixes or fruit salads, to have a food safety plan in place. These plans must include an analysis of hazards, and risk-based preventive controls to minimize or prevent those hazards. Prevention is the central aim of FSMA.

We understand that produce safety begins on the farm, but it doesn't stop there. Everyone in the supply chain, from farm to table and in between, has an important role to play in food safety. Compliance by the produce industry with FSMA's preventive controls is critical to achieving the public health benefits envisioned by the new law. And the FDA is committed to providing training and other support to farmers and produce processors to help achieve that goal.

Toward assisting farmers and processors in achieving these goals, today the FDA is releasing two new, draft guidance documents, one of which will help farmers better understand the range of steps they can take to comply with the Produce Safety Rule. The other will help processors better understand the relevant provisions of the Preventive Controls Rule for fresh-cut produce that apply to their practices.

To accommodate growing practices that vary by region and commodity, flexibility was built into the Produce Safety Rule. That flexibility is reflected in the new draft guidance document. The draft guidance for farmers, "Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing, and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption: Guidance for Industry," gives examples of possible approaches to comply with the Produce Safety Rule to demonstrate how the rule might be implemented on different kinds of produce farms. It's important to recognize that not every scenario is covered in the draft guidance, and farmers can always use an alternate approach as long as it satisfies the requirements of the Produce Safety Rule. But farmers can use the draft guidance as a guide to help evaluate their own on-farm practices.

Stakeholder input and feedback has been a critical part of the FSMA implementation process. Public comments will help ensure that the recommendations contained within the two new draft guidance documents are effective and practical. Although you can comment on the draft guidance's at any time, you should submit your comments by April 22, 2019, to ensure that they are considered before work begins on the final versions of the guidance's. Extension is committed to helping ensure that fruits and vegetables — whether whole or prepared as fresh-cut produce — are safe for consumers. This starts with helping farmers and fresh-cut produce processors, at home and abroad, meet FSMA's food safety standards. We'll continue to collaborate with stakeholders as FSMA is implemented to ensure that our nation has one of the safest food supplies in the world. One important part for a safe food supply on the table is consumer education of properly storing, preparing and washing both products and handlers hands. Enjoy you safe and healthy veggies this week and always-MV.

October 22-26, 2018.

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