

Extension Information Corner
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Good bye November and hello March, oops I mean December. Weather conditions over the weekend could fool anyone since they resembled early spring rather than winter. Near 80 degrees in December-wow only in Southwest Texas. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

Much Anticipated 2018 Farm Bill Details Reached By Congress

Agriculture committee leadership announced on last week that they have reached an agreement in principle on the farm bill. While the final details of the bill have yet to be released and negotiators wait on cost estimates from the Congressional Budget Office. Getting a farm bill through the finish line before the end of the year is critical for the long-term viability and sustainability of family farmers and ranchers across the country. Farmers are enduring a growing financial crisis in the farm economy, and programs that support farm sustainability and diverse markets for family farmers have expired. Senate and House agriculture leaders and their staff have worked tirelessly to resolve differences in the chambers' respective farm bills, and they are optimistic that they will come to terms on a farm bill that begins to provide the relief and certainty farmers need amidst struggling markets due to oversupply and trade volatility. This is a big step for Congress to approve a farm bill before the end of the year. I will provide more details on this important legislation for the Zavala County agricultural industry.

Annual 4-H Animal Project Weigh-day and Show Workshop Set

The annual Zavala County 4-H animal project weigh-day and showmanship clinic has been set for Saturday, December 22, 2018 beginning at 9:00 a.m. at the Zavala Agricultural Exposition show barn in Crystal City. All 4-H members with steer, hog, lamb or goat projects are encouraged to attend this event. This is especially important for those first time 4-H members that will show an animal project for the first time at the show in January. A goat shearing demonstration is also scheduled to take place at 11:00 a.m. For more information regarding this annual event contact the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Tip of the Week: Tips For Selecting Your Perfect Christmas Tree

If you are not an allergy sufferer and you still enjoy the fresh cut pine smell in your home from a natural Christmas tree then you may want to read this column. It is usually customary for most families to go out looking for the perfect Christmas tree following the Thanksgiving holiday. In fact Christmas trees begin making their appearance at garden stores and even some grocery stores right around thanksgiving. The Christmas tree shopping experience can be an enjoyable one but it is important to know what you need to look for to get the best tree for your money especially this year since natural trees are a little more expensive this year due to a shortage of trees in the market.

Before buying your tree, decide where in your home you are going to display the tree. Keep the tree away from direct heat sources such as fireplaces or furnace vents because these may cause the tree to use more water and dry faster. Having an electrical outlet near the tree will eliminate the need to

run unsightly extension cords to the tree. Double-check there is adequate floor space for the height of tree you want to display. The taper (ratio of tree width to height) of real trees varies, but is usually around two to three. This means you need a space 4-feet wide for a 6-foot tall tree. Finally, and most importantly, measure the height of your ceiling. Trees usually appear smaller outdoors than they do inside, so measure your tree rather than relying on the “eyeball test” when picking out your tree at a tree lot or choose-and-cut farm.

Ask the seller when the trees were cut. Look for nice, green needles, and check for the presence of brown ones. But remember, many sellers paint their trees to increase the green color. Check the branches and bark for green coloring. While some do this simply to enhance the tree’s greenness, others may be hiding a wilted, brown tree. Run your hand down the branch; most of the needles should stay put. Bend the needles. On a fir tree, the needle should snap crisply; on a pine tree, the needle should bend and not break.

Most people buy trees already cut at a tree lot or they can cut their own at a choose-and-cut farm. Common options for buying pre-cut trees include big box stores and supermarkets, garden centers and freestanding tree lots. Pre-cut trees at box stores or supermarkets offer the convenience of buying trees while doing other shopping. Buying at garden centers or stand-alone tree lots supports local businesses or, in some cases, charitable groups such as scout troops or churches.

To guarantee the freshness of a try is for you and your family to go, choose and cut your tree. Choose-and-cut farms are usually smaller tree farms where consumers can wander fields, find their tree and cut the tree with saws provided by the farm. Many choose-and-cut farms also provide family-themed activities, such as hay wagon rides, petting zoos, bonfires, gift shops and hot chocolate or cider stands. To find a cut your own tree farm around the Zavala County area please go to <http://www.pickyourownchristmastree.org/TXxmassanant.php> and find the Christmas tree farm to visit. Have a fun Christmas tree cutting adventure this week. M.V.

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