

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

March arrived with a strong message that winter is still lingering around our area even in March which for the most part it is not usually the case but this is south Texas weather. According to the 100 year average our last freeze date usually occurs around February 26-March 1 so this is one of those exceptional years for this average. Even a short distance of 20 miles makes a difference in a light or hard freeze. In the northern part of Zavala County around La Pryor chances are that it was at freezing or below and in Crystal City the difference would be 3 degrees warmer with temperatures hovering around 34. Regardless it was a cold start for the week. Greeting to all of you and thank you for reading this week.

Zavala County Steer and Heifer Tag Orders Due Next Month

Next month will be the time to place our Zavala County state steer and heifer tag orders. All 4-H and FFA families will need to decide if they plan to show a Steer and Heifer project in a major show in Texas during the fall of 2019 or in the spring of 2020. Once you decide if these projects are for you then you must place a tag order for your steer or heifer projects. The cost for the tags is \$15.00 per tag or heifer UIN number. You will need to place your order by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 17, 2019 to avoid a higher cost per tag after this date. The state steer and heifer validation committee will select the date, time and location for the state validation which must take place between June 1 and June 30, 2019.

To place your order please contact the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service at 830-374-2883 or place your order at the Extension office located at 221 North First Avenue in Crystal City. Your tags will NOT be ordered until payment is made so please be sure to submit your payment when you place your order. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this information.

Drones Help Identify Sick Cattle

A little bit of interesting information from AgriLife Extension. Lately, drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras have been buzzing over a research feedlot near Amarillo, as researchers develop test methods to identify feverish animals before they show symptoms of illness, like eating less feed or infecting other animals. Engineers from Texas A&M AgriLife Research believe that producers will be able to detect sick animals earlier and target their use of antibiotics more precisely than is possible with current technology. Small, remote-controlled and unmanned aerial vehicles are already central to a type of technology-assisted farming known as “precision agriculture.” For years, drones have been used to monitor crops to help reduce water, fertilizers and pesticides.

The use of drones to pick out sick cattle isn't AgriLife Research's only way to spot sick livestock. Scientists in College Station and the Panhandle also are experimenting with video cameras and artificial intelligence to identify ailing animals based on their behavior. Veterinarians already use thermal imaging in their clinical practice, for example, to detect lameness in horses. Soon producers will be able to put a thermography instrument up in the air and extend its usefulness, especially as the technology gets better and cheaper. The efforts with drones and artificial intelligence in the heart of the world's beef industry are just a couple of examples of the wide scope of work being done by experts at Texas A&M AgriLife Research.

Tip of the Week: When Selecting Plants-Check Out the Texas Superstars

Texas Superstars® are plants that have been tested and selected for their superstar performance in the Texas landscape. One of the keys to the success of the Texas Superstar® program is the quality and reliability of the plant material that is highlighted in educational and marketing campaigns. Every effort is made to ensure that highlighted plants will perform well for Texas consumers. Wherever appropriate, limitations to highlighted plants are mentioned during marketing campaigns. Additionally, cultural information is provided to give the consumer guidance regarding proper plant care.

The decision as to which plants are highlighted in Texas Superstar® marketing campaigns is made by the Texas Superstar® Executive Board (Tim Davis — College Station; Mike Arnold — College Station; Dan Lineberger — College Station; Cynthia McKenney — Lubbock; Brent Pemberton — Overton; Larry Stein — Uvalde; David Rodriguez — San Antonio). The board typically plans marketing campaigns at least two to three years in advance. Advisory input is received from the representatives, county horticulturists, arboretum and botanical garden representatives, horticultural writers, and landscape designers. To make it easy to locate retail nurseries and landscape contractors in your area who stock Texas Superstar plants, we have created a list of retailers in our area at <http://texassuperstar.com/retailers/regions/region1.html> .

The latest Texas Superstar available for purchase in retail garden centers and nurseries is Basket of Fire – which combines ornamental and edible variety characteristics. It's typically planted in June, and they grow superbly all summer with blooms and peppers that emerge early and can last through December. The Basket of Fire pepper is an annual plant bred especially for hanging baskets, but it also serves as a good edible ornamental pepper for beds, vegetable gardens or containers. It grows to 12-14 inches tall with a 20-inch spread with white, star-shaped blooms and fruit that matures from a creamy yellow to orange and finally red. Fruit sets typically last 90 days.

The pepper has a low, spreading branching habit, which makes it ideal for hanging baskets or planting with other ornamental or edible plants. You can plant it with pansies or cabbage, and it will perform well. The pepper will thrive in cooler temperatures and in extreme heat and low humidity. It prefers full sun and adapts to most soils, but needs good drainage. The hotter it gets the more this plant likes it. It also does better than most pepper plants in cooler temperatures, and the peppers' colors intensify as temperatures cool. So, it's also a good addition to any fall garden as well. The pepper can produce hundreds of peppers per plant. Peppers are relatively small, 1-2 inches, with a heat rating of approximately 80,000 Scoville Heat Units, which for comparison would fall between Cayenne and Thai peppers. It's a hot little pepper, which pickle great and look great in jars with the assortment of color. It's definitely a Superstar. It shows all the qualities an ornamental plant should have to make it in Texas. Texas Superstar is a registered trademark owned by AgriLife Research, a state agency that is part of the Texas A&M University System.

March 4-8, 2019.