

**News From Your County Agent**  
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**Zavala County**

After a stormy Saturday a very beautiful Sunday was enjoyed by everyone. I finally had a chance to actually be outside and take in the cool evening without a breeze at all in fact there was an hour or two which a temperature inversion took place (an inversion in the lower atmosphere keeps the air from rising because the normal decrease in temperature with height switches to the temperature increasing with height). It's pretty interesting to watch as smoke tends to linger for a while without moving anywhere. Greetings to all of you, thank you for reading this week and may all of you have a wonderful and safe Easter weekend.

**Last Chance to Order State Steer and Heifer Tags**

This week is the last chance you have to place a Zavala County state steer and heifer tag order. 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.

**Just Released Censuses of Agriculture Show Decline in Farms**

Last week on April 11, 2019 the 2017 census of agriculture was released by the United States Department of Agriculture shows a decrease in the number of farms in the United States. Since the 1997 Census of Agriculture, the number of farms in the U.S. has declined 7.8%. The total number of farms on Dec. 31, 2017, was calculated at 2,042,220, which was 67,110 fewer than reported in the 2012 Census of Agriculture. NASS found the average size of farms in 2017 was 441 acres, up slightly from 434 acres in 2012. However, the total number of land in farms in 2017 was down 1.5%, totaling slightly more than 900 million acres.

While NASS found the overall number of farmers declined, the declines occurred among mid-sized farms. Both the smallest sized farms (less than 9 acres) and the largest farms (2,000 acres or more), showed increases. Farms with fewer than 9 acres (273,325 farms) increased by 18% since the 2012 census, and farms with more than 2,000 acres (85,127) increased 3.5%. The Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) with information directly from farmers and ranchers. Overall, USDA said there continue to be more of the largest and smallest operations and fewer middle-sized farms. The average age of all farmers

and ranchers continues to rise. The next census of agriculture will take place in 2022 and we ask everyone in Zavala county that receives the census questionnaire to please complete it and be counted.

### **Tip of the Week: Safety Tips For A Wonderful Easter Weekend**

Be sure that Easter toys and dolls (such as bunnies, chicks, etc) are free of choking hazards. Pieces that can be removed from a doll or toy pose a potential choking danger to small children. In order to prevent choking, do not give small candies or chocolates to children under 5 years of age. Chocolate bunnies are an Easter tradition; however, be very careful when giving such gifts to children who have peanut or nut allergies. Make sure you read the label of ingredients, as many chocolates, although said to be “pure chocolate”, may have been in contact with nuts or peanuts during preparation or packaging.

Of course it would not be Easter with eggs. Eggs are a potentially hazardous food, in the same category as meat, poultry, fish, and milk. In other words, they are capable of supporting the rapid growth of disease-causing bacteria like Salmonella. After boiling eggs for Easter decorating/painting, they must be kept refrigerated to avoid bacterial growth. Never leave raw eggs, in any form, at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Don't eat or cook with cracked eggs or eggs that have not been refrigerated for more than two hours. Hard-boiled Easter (decorated) eggs left in room temperature for many hours or days as a decoration or table centerpiece should be discarded and not eaten. Use only clean, unbroken eggs. Discard dirty or broken eggs. When you boil your eggs, make sure the water is hot (185-190 degrees F). Cool your eggs in cold water or just in the air.

Cleanliness of hands, utensils, and work surfaces is essential in preventing the spread of bacteria. Always wash your hands when handling your eggs, especially between cooking, cooling and dyeing. Wash hands again, along with all utensils, equipment, and counter tops that have been in contact with any raw food before preparing other foods. Safely storing and cooking your eggs before consumption is important. When storing eggs make sure they go inside the fridge, not the fridge door. Once hard-cooked, refrigerated eggs can be stored for up to one week. Eggs can be out of refrigeration for 2 hours (when it's under 90°F) and still be safe to eat.

Easter ham is also a popular meat to cook during Easter. If your Easter ham is prepared with a fresh, uncooked ham, be sure to cook it to an internal temperature of at least 145°F (63°C) and allow the ham to rest for a few minutes before serving. Always avoid cross-contamination from countertops, knives, dishes and pots and pans. Do not let the uncooked ham come into contact with foods you will eat raw. If you purchase a pre-cooked Easter ham, which can be served cold or heated, be sure to reheat leftovers to at least 140°F before serving.

Of course in south Texas brisket is the choice meat for Easter. As all of you know this cut of meat needs to be cooked for a long time because it is less tender. Preferably, set the oven temperature to 350°F and no lower than 325°F. Place the brisket fat-side up. Use the same temperature or close to it in the BBQ pit with south Texas mesquite, a lot better than the oven. And yes some folks in these parts also enjoy lamb for Easter. Lamb is another popular dish for Easter and Passover. Remember that lamb should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 145°F. Let it rest a

few minutes before serving. As always, avoid cross-contamination with uncooked meat and juices. And finally remember to be smart with left overs. Making a little extra is almost a given at holiday time, as is taking home goody bags. Just remember to keep food safety in mind. Have a very happy and safe Easter weekend. M.V.

April 15-19, 2019

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