

News From Your County Agent
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A little rain, a lot of heat and a lot of similar days ahead as we are now officially in the summer season. According to the long range weather forecast we should have a hot summer however our chances for rainfall this year seem to be favorable so don't be surprised if we get good rains during our typically drier months of June and July. Greetings to all of you and as always thank you so much for reading this week.

First Case of Anthrax Confirmed in Neighboring Uvalde County

The first anthrax case of the year was confirmed in one captive antelope on a premises in Uvalde County last week on June 19, 2019. The premises has been placed under quarantine and the premises will not be released from quarantine until the animals on the premises have been vaccinated and the affected carcasses are properly disposed of, as outlined in TAHC's rules. The premises is located within the triangular area of Texas where anthrax is historically found in the soil. This triangular area where Anthrax is historically found is bound by the towns of Uvalde, Ozona and Eagle Pass. This area includes portions of Crockett, Val Verde, Sutton, Edwards, Kinney and Maverick counties. There is an effective anthrax vaccine available for use in susceptible livestock in high risk areas. We encourage you to consult with your local veterinary practitioner if you suspect an Anthrax case. Symptoms include Acute fever followed by rapid death with bleeding from body openings are common signs of anthrax in livestock. Carcasses may also appear bloated and decompose quickly. Livestock or animals displaying symptoms consistent with anthrax should be reported to a private veterinary practitioner or a TAHC official. Producers are encouraged to follow basic sanitation precautions when handling affected livestock or carcasses. It is recommended to wear protective gloves, long sleeve shirts and to wash thoroughly afterward to prevent accidental spread of the bacteria to people.

Anthrax is a bacterial disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, which is a naturally occurring organism with worldwide distribution, including certain parts of Texas. The bacteria can surface, contaminating soil and grass after periods of wet, cool weather, followed by hot, dry conditions. During these conditions, animals ingest the anthrax bacteria when they consume contaminated grass and hay, or by inhaling the spores. Outbreaks will usually end when cooler weather arrives. For more information about Anthrax, visit www.tahc.texas.gov/news/brochures/TAHCBrochure_Anthrax.pdf, or contact your local TAHC region office, or visit www.tahc.texas.gov.

Expiring CRP Contracts Have Until August 23rd To Re-enroll

Letters are in the mail to all producers with expiring CRP contracts, describing possible options. Farmers and ranchers with expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts may now re-enroll in certain CRP continuous signup practices or, if eligible, select a one-year contract extension. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) also is accepting offers from those who want to enroll for the first time in one of the country's largest conservation programs. FSA's 52nd signup for CRP runs from June 3 to August 23. Agricultural producers with expiring CRP contracts have set aside land

to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, provide habitat for wildlife and boost soil health for at least a decade. FSA stopped accepting offers last fall for the CRP continuous signup when 2014 Farm Bill authority expired. The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized the program this past December, and FSA has carefully analyzed the bill's language and determined that a limited signup prioritizing water-quality practices furthers conservation goals and makes sense for producers as FSA works to fully implement the program.

This year's CRP continuous signup includes such practices as grass waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetland restoration and others. View a full list of practices approved for this signup. Continuous signup enrollment contracts last for 10 to 15 years. Soil rental rates are set at 90 percent of 2018 rates. Incentive payments are not offered for these practices. Producers interested in applying for CRP continuous practices, including those under existing CREP agreements, or who want to extend their contract, should contact their USDA service center by August 23. To locate your local FSA office, visit www.farmers.gov. More information on CRP can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Tip of the Week: Keep Your Garden Producing In The Heat of Summer

Hot weather is tougher on plants than it is on people. It's easy to understand why, when you consider that our bodies contain about 60 percent water and most plants are 85 to 90 percent water. So when temperatures rise, plants get even thirstier and sweatier than we do.

As with people, some plants tolerate heat better than others. Knowing which plants like it hot and which would prefer air conditioning, you can help your vegetables and flowers survive — and even thrive in — hot weather. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, corn, melons and squash actually need at least a month of 80 to 90 degree weather to develop a flavorful and abundant crop. As long as they don't run out of water, these sun worshippers are well equipped to survive the heat. On hot days they conserve energy and moisture by slowing down. While resting, their foliage may appear to be wilting from lack of water, but as evening approaches they'll perk up again. Heat loving plants are thirsty—the average tomato plant needs more than 30 gallons of water in a season. Using a combination of mulch and drip or soaker hose will ensure these plants stay healthy and well hydrated.

Probably peppers are the most heat tolerant plants in your garden. I am talking about hot peppers (Not Bell Peppers) such as serranos, jalapenos and others. Hot temperatures do affect the peppers' ability to set fruit. When temperatures rise above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, the pepper may drop its flowers. Even in well-watered soils, high temperatures may cause the pepper to wilt. If the soil is too dry, the plants may also wilt in the heat of the day. While there is a common misconception that you should wait to water until evening, if your peppers begin to wilt because of lack of moisture, you should water them immediately with 1 gallon of water per plant.

Mulching is one of the very first techniques that has been demonstrated as beneficial to both quality and quantity. Combined with a drip system on a timer, large improvements to the health and vitality of the plants can be seen quickly. These two factors improve the stability of the soil moisture levels, moderating the peaks and valleys from wet to dry. This reduces the stress levels on the plants as they are able to access water on a continuous basis. The mulch insulates the soil and top levels of roots from drying out too quickly and often brings the moisture level up to the surface of the soil, instead

of a couple of inches down. Another benefit to mulching with at least an inch of straw type mulch is the temperature insulation of the soil. Reducing the heat gain in the upper levels of the soil improves the plant's amount and quality of production.

Shading of the pepper plants was recently examined with experiments done in Mexico, Spain and Israel as well as by the University of Georgia. What the study has shown is a moderate amount of shade, such as a 30% shade cloth, is the ideal. More shade didn't produce better peppers past the 30% shading. In fact, as more shade was applied, the plants grew more but produced less peppers with more defects that caused them to be rejected. The moderate shading reduced the heat stresses by lowering the air and root zone soil temperatures, while decreasing diseases such as sunscald and blossom end-rot.

Shading also works on tomatoes. It is interesting for us to note that these exact same approaches have proven to be the key to successfully growing tomatoes through the hot summers in Phoenix and Tucson, where daytime highs can reach 110 – 115°F! The use of raised beds, drip systems on timers, thick straw mulching and shade cloth allows the pollen to be under the critical 90°F for enough of the day to continue producing tomatoes. If you have had problems in the past with peppers, chiles or tomatoes slowing production and having disease issues with the onset of hot weather, try these growing tips to get you back on track! Have a great week keeping your garden on track this summer.
M.V.

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