

News From Your County Agent
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Zavala County

A cold spell last week gave way to a comfortable weekend and now another cold front will keep temperatures more within the average for this time of year. Some light rainfall was scattered across the area and we all know we could use a good rain very soon to keep our cool season grasses and forbs green for livestock on native range and pastures. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

Saturday Is Stockshow Grounds Workday

All 4-H members, 4-H parents and 4-H volunteers are encouraged to attend the annual stockshow barn and facilities workday this Saturday, December 21, 2019. At 9:00 a.m. there will be an animal weighing activity. All 4-H members with an animal project that would like to weigh their animals are encouraged to bring their animals to the show grounds to get them weighed from 9-10 .m. At 10:30 a showmanship clinic will be held to help first time exhibitors to get ready for the show in January.

There will be two stockshow facilities clean-up/workday opportunities. Those who can help in the morning are welcome to come by from 9-12 noon. Another work group will have the opportunity to put the finishing touches on the workday from 1-4 p.m. Some of the task at hand will be cleaning and sanitizing the kitchen/concession stand, ranking and leveling the show ring, trash pick up, cleaning restroom facilities and checking and repairing animal pens and alleys. For more information about this event contact the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension at 830-374-2883.

USDA Opens CRP Program Sign-up

The U.S. Department of Agriculture opened up the sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) last Monday, December 9, 2019. The deadline for agricultural producers to sign up for general CRP is February 28, 2020, while sign-up for continuous CRP is ongoing. Farmers and ranchers who enroll in CRP receive a yearly rental payment for voluntarily establishing long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”) to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands.

Currently the CRP has 22 million acres enrolled, but the 2018 Farm Bill lifted the cap to 27 million acres. This means farmers and ranchers have a chance to enroll in CRP for the first time or continue their participation for another term. Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the U.S. The program was originally primarily intended to control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. This Farm Bill program has evolved over the years, providing a variety of conservation and economic benefits from coast to coast. To enroll in CRP, contact your local FSA county office or visit fsa.usda.gov/crp.

Tip of the Week: Tips and Considerations If Giving A Pet For Christmas

There are many messages you receive online, on phone apps. and on television about hundreds of ideas on what to give as a special Christmas gift. During this holiday season there are many people that like to surprise their children or even their aging parents or a close friend with a new pet. As much as you might long to see the way your loved one's face lights up when they find a puppy or kitten under the tree on Christmas morning, giving a pet is more than a priceless photo op. It's a years-long commitment to a new family member. Before dreaming up ways to surprise someone with a pet, consider whether they're ready to take on that kind of responsibility. Giving pets as gifts does have the potential to backfire if it's not done with a lot of consideration, preparation, and care. Here are some tips to help you determine whether a pet would be an appropriate gift for someone:

1. Has the person ever expressed a desire for a pet? Keep in mind that simply liking animals isn't quite the same thing as actually wanting a pet. It's best to confirm that the recipient actually desires the responsibility of pet ownership.

2. Is the person capable of caring for a pet? The recipient should not only physically be able to keep up with the demands of caring for a pet, but they should also be able to afford to take care of one. The cost of pet food, leashes, litter, toys, and routine veterinary care adds up quickly. If a pet becomes injured or ill, this free gift of a pet can become quite expensive.

3. Is the person ready for the responsibility of caring for a pet? Obviously, young children aren't yet able to handle the responsibility of caring for a dog or cat. Older children are certainly able to pitch in and help, but they shouldn't be put solely in charge. If you're considering getting a dog or cat for your kids, no matter what their age, you should be prepared to take on the responsibility of being the pet's primary caregiver. Bear in mind that the pet may remain with you in his senior years once your kids leave the nest.

4. Does the person's lifestyle leave any room for a pet? Whether a teenager with a hectic school schedule and active social life, or an adult with a demanding job that keeps them traveling or working long hours at the office, it wouldn't be fair or healthy for a dog or cat to be given to someone who never has time for her. It's also a good idea to make sure ahead of time that the recipient doesn't have any pet allergies.

5. What type of pet would be the best fit? If considering a pet for your small children, a toy dog breed, such as a Chihuahua or toy poodle, might not be the best match, but could be a great choice for an elderly parent living in a small space. Larger breeds are a better fit for households where there is someone who is both willing and able to take them on walks, or where there is a large, fenced-in yard where they can get plenty of exercise. For the mobility-impaired or people who are at work or school all day, a cat may be a better fit.

If after considering all of these tips and considerations you are still determined to give a pet as a Christmas gift try to adopt one to give. If you do not care about the breed, I encourage you to adopt any furry soul that you feel a connection with when you visit a shelter. They will be just as loyal and loving as a store or breeder bought pet. With that being said, please consider adopting instead of buying. And finally the grim reality is that a lot of people who get pets as Christmas gifts realize they

are not ready for the responsibility and unfortunately choose to abandon them. Of those pets, not all of them make it to shelters, and those who do are still unlikely to get adopted due to the large number of animals who are looking for loving families. If you do give a pet for Christmas I wish you the best of luck and many, many years of happiness with your new 4 legged member of the family. Have a great week-M.V.

December 16-20, 2019.

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