

News From Your County Agent
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Zavala County

Even though it was not enough some dryland wheat and oats got a little drink this past week as slow light rain moved through our area also dropping temperatures down into the mid 30's by Monday morning. Winter is not over in Southwest Texas folks so don't put up those jackets just yet. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

Public Hearing On Hemp Rule Held This Week

As controversial to some growers in Zavala County regarding the issue to grow or not to grow Hemp might be the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) held a public hearing this week to take comments on the proposed rules for growing industrial hemp in the Lone Star State. Comments on the state's proposed rules are due Feb. 10. Once TDA receives the comments, they'll consider them and publish the adopted rules, which will be what hemp farmers have to abide by going forward with the Hemp industry in Texas.

TDA submitted the state hemp plan to the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Oct. 29, 2019. The proposed rules were published Jan. 10 in the *Texas Register*, the journal of state agency rulemaking in Texas. The state hemp plan must be approved and finalized before TDA can begin granting licenses to legally grow hemp in Texas. In addition to the state comment period, USDA also has an open comment period for federal rules and regulations establishing a domestic hemp production program. The USDA comment period closes next week on January 29, 2020. Currently the interim final rule from USDA has some areas that may prove difficult for farmers, including the 15-day period allocated by USDA to sample hemp crops for acceptable tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) concentration levels. THC is the main psychoactive component in cannabis plants. Cannabis with a THC level exceeding 0.3 percent is considered marijuana, which remains classified as an illegal substance under state and federal law. One issue in the rule is the timeline of 15 days which is when regulators visit a farm to collect samples of the crop for THC levels and harvest. Farmers could harvest the crop in that 15-day window under USDA rules, but if the THC content came back above acceptable levels, the harvested crop would have to be destroyed. The farmer would lose their investment on growing and raising the crop, as well as the money spent on the labor-intensive harvest. If you were unable to attend the public meeting, comments may be submitted by mail to: Philip Wright Administrator for Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Texas Department of Agriculture P.O. Box 12847 Austin, Texas, 78711 Comments can also be submitted online by emailing RuleComments@texasagriculture.gov. Visit the Texas Department of Agriculture website for more information on hemp regulations.

Livestock Traceability Will Soon Be Part Of Raising Cattle

From the threat of animal disease outbreak, growing importance of export markets and the innovative wasy beef is marketed to consumers around the globe, the

U.S. live-stock industry is realizing that animal ID might soon become a necessary part of doing business. Riding a crest of popularity in 2015, Chipotle Mexican Grill was a trendy lunch and dinner spot for many millennials. Touting its “Food With Integrity,” Chipotle’s profits had reached \$445 million the year before on sales of \$4.1 billion. The first three quarters of 2015 brought more of the same, with revenue up more than 15% and profits up 25%. Then the crash came. In the fall of 2015 more than 500 people fell ill in several states after eating Salmonella- and E. coli-contaminated Chipotle burritos. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found a critical lapse in the restaurant chain’s trace back system: once ingredients arrived in stores, all tracking stopped. Tomatoes and lettuce, for instance, came from many identifiable sources but were mixed together during food prep.

Of course there will be problems as well as solutions as this idea moves forward. There are opportunities that we can all get out of a more robust traceability system,. As we are more in a global economy, we realize what can happen with animal disease—how quickly things can move. And other species besides cattle have had some really major problems. So we will leave you with this question, until we can get more answers. And what are the next steps? Well one of the next steps is the 2 year pilot program. During the two-year pilot project, CattleTrace will collect the minimal data necessary for disease trace-ability, including the date and time, an individual animal identification number, and a GPS location, each time an animal’s tag is read with pilot project readers in the production chain. Approximately 55,000 Kan-sas-based calves will be tagged for the pilot, which will conclude this year-2020. For more information about the CattleTrace pilot project, visit www.CattleTrace.org.

Tip Of The Week: What To Do With Your Left Over Poinsettias

If you are still trying to keep your left over holiday poinsettias alive and happy in Zavala county you may be wondering what to do with them as one caller asked me last week. First tip of advise is to don't plant your poinsettias in your landscape just because you have them. Generally it is a good idea to just discard them in a good way after Christmas. The poinsettias can go into the compost pile, and you will not feel a bit guilty. Think of these plants as temporary decorations like flower arrangements.

However, they can be planted in the landscape and provide years of beauty. Plant them if there are spots where you think poinsettias would look good and fit in well with your existing plants. The time to plant poinsettias outside in Zavala county is late February to early March, after the danger of frost has passed. Until then, keep the plants in a sunny window and water when the soil begins to feel dry.

Just prior to planting, cut the poinsettia back about half way (even if the colorful bracts are still on the plant). Plant them in a sunny, well-drained location protected from north winds and frost. The south side of a house or wall is usually a good spot. Make sure the location receives no artificial light at night from flood lights, street lights or porch lights, as this can prevent poinsettias from blooming properly.

Remember poinsettias grow to be fairly large over time (8 feet tall and wide). To keep the plants bushy and compact, and to encourage more flowers, pinch them occasionally during summer. Pinching means to prune off the tip of a growing shoot. Branches that are pinched will develop several growing shoots where there was just one. Do not pinch or prune poinsettias after the first week in September, as this will delay or prevent flowering. Fertilize your poinsettias with your favorite fertilizer during the summer, per label directions. I hate to be discouraging but don't expect to keep this year's poinsettias in containers, grow them over the summer and produce a quality blooming plant for next Christmas. It takes research and know-how and the controlled growing conditions of a greenhouse to produce quality blooming poinsettias like the ones you see commercially. If you decide to try this challenge good luck and if you need additional information about poinsettia care contact the Zavala county office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883. Have a great week. M.V.

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