

Texas Crop Weather Report

The Texas Field Office released the following report for the week of Feb. 18-24.

Agricultural Summary

Scattered showers were observed in the Panhandle and Eastern Texas.

Small grains benefited from the recent showers in the Panhandle and the Blacklands.

Field work continued in the Panhandle, as cotton producers were preparing their fields for the upcoming planting season.

Corn planting was delayed in the Blacklands and South Central Texas due to the recent rainfall.

Soil moisture was mostly very short to short across the state.

Sorghum producers continued to prepare for spring plantings in the Northern Low Plains.

Rural Forum Discusses Various Issues

Rural leaders from across Central Texas discussed the future of economic development in rural Texas at a recent forum in Bastrop.

The session, hosted by the Texas Rural Innovators Forum, addressed the question, "What does rural Texas need most in 2008?"

State Senator Glenn Hegar began the discourse, noting, "Rural Texas needs to showcase its strengths - family-oriented values combined with a work ethic and community involvement."

Other speakers included Dr. Ed Smith, director of Texas Agri-

Life Extension; Greg Wortham, mayor of Sweetwater; Bryan Daniel, immediate past director of USDA Rural Development; Glynis Hulm-Strause, Director of Continuing Education at Coastal Bend College and David Pearson, CEO of Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals.

Colleen Landkammer of Blue Earth County, Minn., delivered the closing keynote with a discussion of policy priorities for rural America.

Landkammer is a county commissioner and immediate past president of the National Association of Counties.

She emphasized regional governance with the need for communities to conduct self-evaluations and promote entrepreneurship.

She proposed an interface between urban and rural entities establishing cooperative links to compete in the global economy.

Other rural needs cited by the group included quality education and healthcare and high-speed Internet access.

The forum is the first of the 2008 series of discussions presented by the Texas Rural Innovators Forum or "TRIF."

TRIF is a series of forums featuring national speakers on the most innovative practices in rural America.

Local elected and volunteer leaders in all fields are invited to participate.

The goal of TRIF is to bring the

leaders of rural Texas into personal contact with spokespeople from the most successful and innovative rural development programs in America, and to bring leaders of rural Texas together with one another to share their own energy and ideas for improvement.

Presenter Bryan Daniel is a TRIF proponent.

"TRIF is meeting a valuable need for rural community leaders. The insightful presentations and meaningful dialogue provide the spark necessary to generate and motivate new thinking," says Daniel.

The next Texas Rural Innovators Forum will be held in Bastrop on March 13.

For more information, see www.ruraltx.org or call 512-499-8948.

Livestock continued to be in good shape across the state, due to the supplemental feeding of hay and protein.

Ranges and pastures continued to be in need of moisture.

Field Crops Report Small grains benefited from the recent showers in the Panhandle and the Blacklands.

Irrigation continued in many wheat and oat fields across the state due to lack of moisture.

Wheat condition was very poor to poor statewide. Field work continued in the Panhandle as cotton producers were preparing their fields for the upcoming planting season.

Planting of cotton was underway in the Lower Valley.

Corn planting was delayed in the Blacklands and South Central

Texas due to the recent rainfall. Sorghum producers continued to prepare for spring plantings in the Northern Low Plains.

Sorghum planting was underway in the Coastal Bend and the Lower Valley.

Fruit, Vegetable and Specialty Crop Report Ground preparation was in full swing for vegetable plantings in South Central Texas.

Spinach, carrot and cabbage harvest was active in South Texas.

Sugarcane, citrus, and vegetable harvest continued in the Lower Valley.

Livestock, Pasture and Range Report Livestock continued to be in good shape across the state, due to the supplemental feeding of hay and protein.

Cattle calving was prevalent across most of the state. Ranges and pastures across the state continued to be in need of moisture.

Range and pasture condition was poor to fair statewide.

Area Students To Receive Go-Texan Scholarship

Three area high school seniors will be among the students receiving Go Texan scholarships from the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo during the Show's Area Go Texan Scholarship Banquet on Feb. 29.

They include, from Colorado County, Eduardo Losoya Jr. of Rice Consolidated High School; from Fayette County, Meghan Lillian Wied of Round Top-Carmine High School and from Lavaca County, Nathan Robert Holub of Moulton High School.

Go Texan scholarships will be awarded to seniors from 60 Texas counties this year.

Each is a four-year, \$15,000 award.

The Area Go Texan scholar-

ships are part of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's annual commitment to Texas students of more than \$10.6 million in scholarships and educational programs.

Since the Show's beginning in 1932, more than \$220 million has been committed to the youth of Texas.

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is a 501(c)(3) charity that benefits youth, supports education and facilitates better agricultural practices through exhibitions and presentations.

The 2008 Show runs from March 3-22.

For a schedule of events or more information, visit www.rodeohouston.com

Homemade Focaccia Bread

Visit a grocery store or bakery these days, and you're likely to recognize the popularity of focaccia bread. This bread started becoming popular in the early 1990s, and bakery owner/author Amy Scherber helped the bread grow a fanbase.

Scherber shares her recipe for focaccia bread with Arlene Feltman Sailhac for the latter's "Cooking at De Gustibus" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang), a collection of recipes from some of the most influential chefs of the last 100 years.

Focaccia
Makes 2 Loaves
2 1/2 cups lukewarm (105-115 F) water
1/2 teaspoon dry yeast or 1 teaspoon fresh yeast
2 cups Sponge Starter (see box)
6 cups (2 pounds) high-gluten flour or bread flour
2 scant tablespoons coarse salt
3 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for oiling the bowl and pans
3 tablespoons milk
Basil oil
For topping:
sliced tomatoes
fresh basil leaves
diced, sweated onions
pitted black olives

Combine the water and yeast in a large mixing bowl, whisking to dissolve the yeast. Let stand for 3 minutes.
Add the starter and, using your fingers, break the mixture up. Mix until slightly foamy.
Add the flour and begin mixing, lifting the wet mixture up and over the flour to incorporate. When the mixture forms a rough mass, begin to knead the dough in the bowl with your hands for about 5 minutes, or until it is smooth and somewhat elastic. Set aside to rest for 15 minutes.

Add the salt and briefly knead it into the dough. Slowly add the olive oil and milk, gently kneading into the dough. When incorporated, transfer the dough to a clean, flat work surface and knead for about 12 minutes or until very silky and elastic.
Lightly oil a large, clean bowl and transfer the dough to the bowl. Cover with plastic film and either refrigerate overnight or set in a warm, dry spot and allow to rise for about 2 1/2 hours, or until doubled in bulk.
Using a pastry brush, lightly coat the interior of two 8-inch square baking pans with olive oil.

Remove the risen dough from the bowl and cut it in half. Place one piece in the center of each of the prepared pans and, using your fingertips, gently press on

the dough to stretch it to the edges of the pans, taking care not to tear the dough. Let the dough relax enough to stretch it fully and evenly to the edges of the pans.

Cover the dough with plastic film and set aside in a warm, dry spot to rise for 1 1/2 hours, or until the dough looks light and airy and fills the pan.

Preheat the oven to 425 F.

Gently arrange whatever toppings you have selected in a decorative or symmetrical pattern on top of the dough in each pan, taking care not to deflate the dough.

Using a pastry brush, lightly coat the top of both the dough and toppings with basil oil.

Using your fingertips, create a few dimples in the dough. Do not do too many or the dough will deflate.

Sprinkle the tops of the loaves with salt.

Place the pans in the preheated oven and bake for 3 minutes, misting with cool water three times during this brief baking period. Bake for 20 more minutes.

Reduce the oven temperature to 350 F and continue to bake for about 10 minutes, or until the bread is golden brown and crusty on the exterior but still soft and chewy on the interior.

Remove the loaves from the oven and, using a pastry brush, again lightly coat with basil oil.

Allow the loaves to cool in the pans for 10 minutes, then remove from the pans to prevent steaming. Serve while still warm. PC083515

SIDEBAR: Sponge Starter
1 1/2 cups very warm (105-115 F) water
1/4 teaspoon dry yeast
3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Combine the water and yeast in a mixing bowl. Stir in the flour, beating for about 3 minutes with a wooden spoon, or until a smooth, somewhat elastic batter has formed.

Cover the bowl with plastic film and set aside to rest.

You may do one of the two following things, depending upon your time frame. No matter which you choose, it is a good idea to have all of your ingredients measured and ready to go before you begin to make your focaccia.

If using the sponge later in the day, let it rest in a warm, dry spot until it has risen to the point where it begins to collapse in on itself, usually about 8 hours. It will triple in volume and small dents and folds will begin to appear in the top of the sponge as it reaches its peak and begins to deflate. You can now measure the amount you will need for your dough and proceed with the recipe.

"When you compare... it's not fair"



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