

Texas Crop Weather Report

The Texas Field Office released the following report regarding Texas agriculture for the past week.

Agricultural Summary

The Plains and East Texas received 0.01 to 1 inch of precipitation, while the rest of the state showed little to no rainfall.

Wheat in the Low Plains, Cross Timbers and Blacklands suffered due to dry conditions and was becoming a major concern.

Cotton harvest in the Trans-Pecos was almost complete, with some fields experiencing a second

pick due to late boll openings.

In the Coastal Bend, harvest of high starch corn planted in late summer was in progress. Sorghum harvest in the High Plains and Northern Low Plains was almost complete, and yields varied.

Peanut harvest was complete in the Northern Low Plains and was

almost complete in South Texas.

Pecan harvest continued in the Cross Timbers, Blacklands, Trans-Pecos and Edwards Plateau with very poor yields.

Livestock were in fair to good condition across most of the state while supplemental feeding had increased.

Range and pasture land was

in need of rain across most of the state.

Topsoil moisture was mostly very short to adequate across the state.

Field Crops Report

Wheat in the High Plains is in need of moisture and growth has been slow.

Wheat in the Low Plains, Cross Timbers and Blacklands suffered due to dry conditions and was becoming a major concern.

Statewide, wheat condition was mostly fair to good, and oat condition was mostly poor to fair.

Harvest of cotton had been slow in the Northern Plains, and yields were far below expectations.

Harvest in the Southern High Plains neared completion, and yields varied.

Harvest in the Trans-Pecos neared completion with some fields experiencing a second pick due to late boll opening.

Cotton condition was mostly fair to good statewide.

Producers of corn in the Blacklands prepared fields with anhydrous ammonia fertilizer.

In the Coastal Bend, harvest of high starch corn planted in late summer was in progress.

Harvest of sorghum in the High Plains and Northern Low Plains was almost complete, and yields varied.

Harvest of peanuts was complete in the Northern Low Plains and was almost complete in South

Texas.

Fruit, Vegetable and Specialty Crop Report

Pecan harvest continued in the Cross Timbers, Blacklands, Trans-Pecos and Edwards Plateau, and yields were very poor.

Cabbage and spinach harvest took place in South Texas.

Sunflower harvest neared completion in the Southern High Plains.

Sweet potato harvest neared completion in North East Texas, and yields improved over recent years.

Onion yields made good progress in South Texas.

ress in South Texas.

Livestock, Pasture and Range Report

Livestock were in fair to good condition across most of the state while supplemental feeding had increased.

Several minor cold fronts caused stress on livestock in the Edwards Plateau.

Range and pasture land was in need of rain across most of the state.

Range and pasture condition was mostly poor to fair statewide.

Master Naturalist Class Offered

Do you enjoy learning about local plants and wildlife? Do you want to know more about preserving and restoring natural resources in our area?

Would you like to share your knowledge with others? A 'yes' answer to these questions may mean that the Texas Master Naturalist program is right for you.

The Gideon Lincecum Chapter, which includes Austin, Colorado, Fayette, Lee and Washington counties, is starting a new training class on February 7, 2009, finishing on May 9.

Classes will be held at the Winedale Historical Center, on Monday evenings, from 6 to 9 p.m. Field trips will take place on Saturdays in various locations.

Texas Master Naturalist is

a collaborative effort between Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

There are over 37 chapters throughout the state, with over 3,000 volunteers.

The intention is to produce a corps of well-informed volunteers who will work toward the restoration and conservation of native wildlife and habitat through education, outreach, and service projects.

To become certified Master Naturalists, trainees complete 40 hours of instruction, 40 hours of volunteer service, and 8 hours of advanced training.

To remain active, volunteers perform a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours

of advanced training annually. The fee for training is \$150 per person to cover the cost of the text and other materials, or \$250 for couples sharing the text - a \$50 discount.

Session topics include geology; ecology concepts; aquatic systems; hydrology and soils; weather and climate; forest, rangeland, and wetlands ecology; and information about species of plants and animals in our area.

To apply, or to receive more information about the program, please contact Judy Deaton, 936-878-9900, e-mail judith_deaton@yahoo.com.

Or you can visit our chapter web site. <http://gideonlincecum.org>. See <http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu> to learn more.

LCRA Forms Regional Councils

AUSTIN — The LCRA Board of Directors in November selected 111 members for six new regional councils that will provide a communication link between LCRA and the communities it serves.

These volunteers will serve two- or four-year terms beginning in January. The councils replace the lake and river advisory panels that were formed in 1996.

Members will provide input and discuss regional issues related to LCRA's mission, which is to provide energy, water and community services and to help ensure the protection and constructive use of natural resources in the lower Colorado River basin.

Councils may be organized in the future to represent other areas served by LCRA. Council members are as follows:

Colorado/Wharton/Matagorda Regional Council: Julius E. Bartek, Owen W. Bludau, Matagorda County Commissioner George Deshotels, Rebecca Cole

Dutcher, Donna Huitt, Nancy Hunter, Sam Kana, Delmar Krenel, Raul Martinez, David Riedel Melanson, Wharton City Councilman Domingo Montalvo Jr., Robert W. Noster, State Rep. Mike O'Day, Bob Pickens, Haskell L. Simon, Chandra Spennath, Robert Weiss and William R. "Willie" Younger



State Spending Strategies On Tap

By Susan Combs
Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

At our office, we continuously pore over budgets in keeping the books for our agency and the state as a whole, a large task, and one that should be open to scrutiny.

By my fourth day as Comptroller, we published all of our agency expenditures online, right down to the pencils.

And thanks to the "Where the Money Goes" Web site, our expenditures and those of other state agencies are available and easily searchable online.

In these tough economic times, Texans deserve to know their tax dollars are used wisely.

Just as working families must cut expenses and look for ways to save, government must tighten its belt and make the most of every dollar.

To do our part in improving Texas government, we recently introduced Open Book Texas, a three-part set of initiatives aimed at improving government spending, transparency and accounting accuracy.

First Initiative: Texas Smart Buy

Transparency helps spotlight spending inefficiencies after the fact, and our office also works to make Texas state government a better shopper from the outset.

That is where Texas Smart Buy helps.

The initiative gives agencies and local governments access to an online shopping cart, much like shopping at popular online retailers, that allows them to purchase goods and services through state-negotiated contracts.

By purchasing from those contracts, individual purchasers can leverage the state of Texas' bulk buying power to receive lower prices.

For years, families have bought in bulk to save money, and it makes sense for state government to have the same option.

Second Initiative: Texas Transparency Check-Up

With the rollout of a new Web site, Texas Transparency Check-Up, our office expands on previous online accountability efforts and encourages transparency at all levels of Texas government finance.

The Web site offers transpar-

ency guidance to local governments and provides Texans an opportunity to see how well their local governments stack up in offering online access to financial information.

When you know what you are spending, you know how to spend better.

Our office is committed to seeing that philosophy spread to every level of government.

In the age of the Internet, there is seldom a reason to not publish public information online.

Third Initiative: Single Set of Books

To shine more light on state agency bookkeeping, beyond our Where the Money Goes online expenditure database, we are pursuing an initiative to introduce more uniformity in Texas government accounting.

Today, we have many sets of

books of sometimes conflicting accounting data across Texas state agencies, a recipe for duplication that can make accurate bookkeeping an enormous challenge.

With the Single Set of Books Initiative, our office will work with agencies to present a report to the Legislature on ways that state accounting systems and processes can be made more accurate and useful in decision making.

Transparency and wise spending are important during the best of times, and absolutely essential during an uncertain economy when there are no dollars to waste.

We need to be sure we show the same common sense, resourcefulness and thrift when spending money as the hard-working citizens of the Lone Star State.

Tips For A Healthy Holiday Feast

By Texas Health & Human Services Commission

Even for the healthiest among us, holiday dining tends to be the nutritional equivalent of a month-long partying spree in Las Vegas.

Unfortunately, what happens in Holiday Vegas tends not to stay there; it follows us the rest of the year in the form of about 1.4 extra pounds on average.

And some unlucky souls gain as much as five pounds.

According to a 2005 study by the National Institutes of Health, these small weight bumps add up over the years.

Worse, the anything-goes mindset of holiday feasting can tempt us to relapse into unhealthy dietary habits, thus accelerating our weight gains.

Wouldn't it be great if we could avoid this annual caloric assault without sacrificing the heart-warming experience of delicious food and drink shared with our loved ones?

Thanks to a creative new generation of cooks, this dream now is entirely feasible.

And no, the solution doesn't require choking down lots of brown rice casserole, artificially

sweetened pies or soy-based faux meats.

Flavor-Friendly Swaps Are the Secret

"My advice for cooks around holiday time is to keep on doing what comes naturally in terms of creating flavors you like, but look for ways to make them a little healthier," said sous chef Frank Lopez of Central Market Cafe in Austin.

"You just need to look for alternative ingredients, be it nonfat maple syrups, Splenda-type brown sugars or substituting Crisco for most of the lard in your tamale stuffing."

"You'd be surprised; all it takes is just a little bit of lard to give you that authentic taste." In his kitchen, which turns out thousands of readymade holiday meals and to-go entrees, side dishes and desserts, this often means cutting intensely flavored, high-calorie ingredients in favor of ones that pack all the taste but less fat and sugar.

Some of the healthy tradeoffs Lopez and other new-school cooks are using include:

—Topping roasted meats with

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- 75 3-5 yr old Crossbred Pairs & Bred Cows
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