



Ag News

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Commissioner Staples announces first-ever young farmer grant program

Source: TSCRA

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Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples announced Wednesday the Texas Department of Agriculture now offers grants to young farmers interested in creating or expanding an agricultural operation in Texas. "Farming is a difficult and challenging business, especially for young farmers," Commissioner Staples said. "By working with the Texas Legislature, the Texas Department of Agriculture has developed more tools for Texas producers, including the new Young Farmer Grant Program, to help young farmers thrive in the second largest agricultural state in the nation."

In 2009, the 81st Texas Legislature authorized the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority (TAFA) to establish the Young Farmer Grant Program. The program comes at a critical time for Texas agriculture when farmers and ranchers are challenged with economic uncertainties, tight credit and drought. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the average age of Texas farmers is rising, with only 6 percent of the state's farm operators under 35 years old. This raises concerns about who will replace our food and fiber producers when they retire.

Commissioner Staples also worked with Texas legislators during the 81st Legislative Session to make significant improvements to other programs within TAFA, which provides financial assistance to creditworthy individuals and businesses through partnerships with banks or other agricultural lending institutions. TAFA includes four programs designed for eligible applicants who wish to establish or enhance their farm or ranch operation, or establish an agriculture-related business.

Young Farmer Grant: For the first time ever, TAFA now offers a grant program to encourage individuals who are at least 18, but younger than 46 years of age, to start or expand their own agricultural business in Texas. The applicant must be able to make dollar-for-dollar matching expenditures to sustain, create or ex-

pand the proposed project. Individual grants may range from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Agricultural Loan Guarantee: TAFA provides financial assistance through loan guarantees to eligible applicants who wish to establish or enhance their farm or ranch operation, or establish an agriculture-related business. The program provides guarantees based on a tiered structure, not to exceed \$750,000 or 70 percent of the loan amount, whichever is less. The program also provides an interest rebate to eligible borrowers as part of the guarantee process.

Interest Rate Reduction: TAFA can facilitate commercial lending that may result in below-market interest rates. Any person who proposes to use the proceeds under this program in a manner that will help accomplish the goal of fostering the creation and expansion of an agricultural business in Texas is eligible.

Young Farmer Interest Rate Reduction: Even more beneficial than the standard interest rate reduction program, the Young Farmer Interest Rate Reduction program offers young farmers greater rate reductions through TAFA. The program is open to any person at least 18 years old, but younger than 46, and who proposes to use the proceeds to help accomplish the goal of fostering the creation and expansion of an agricultural business in Texas.

The TAFA board will set two periods in each fiscal year, during early winter and summer, to receive and approve grant applications for the Young Farmer Grant Program. The current application deadline is Dec. 4. For more information about the Young Farmer Grant and other TAFA programs, visit

www.TexasAgriculture.gov and click on Grants/Funding.

Anyone wanting this newsletter by email please send me a note at the above address and I will put your name on the list, if you want a mailed copy be sure to add your correct mailing address.

Thank you,

Heath Lusty, BS, MS
County Agent
Agriculture & Natural
Resources.

USDA Designates 69 Additional Counties in Texas as Primary Natural Disaster Areas

Source: USDA

WASHINGTON, Nov. 4, 2009 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture has designated 69 counties in Texas as primary natural disaster areas because of losses caused by drought, above-normal temperatures and associated wildfires that that occurred during 2009. These 69 counties are in addition to 70 counties previously designated as primary natural disaster areas earlier this year for the same reason.

The 69 additional counties are:

Angelina	Crockett	Guadalupe	Kerr	Robertson
Atascosa	Crosby	Hale	Kimble	Somervell
Bailey	Deaf Smith	Hall	Lamb	Starr
Bandera	Denton	Hardeman	Lavaca	Swisher
Bexar	Dimmit	Harris	Leon	Trinity
Brazoria	Duval	Haskell	Lynn	Walker
Brazos	Edwards	Hidalgo	Madison	Ward
Briscoe	Fort Bend	Hood	Milam	Webb
Brooks	Frio	Houston	Mitchell	Wheeler
Burleson	Gaines	Jack	Montgomery	Willacy
Cameron	Galveston	Jackson	Palo Pinto	Williamson
Castro	Goliad	Jeff Davis	Parker	Zapata
Clay	Grayson	Jim Hogg	Parmer	Zavala
Colorado	Grimes	Jim Wells	Refugio	

"President Obama and I understand these conditions caused severe damage to the area and serious harm to farms in Texas and we want to help," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "This action will provide help to hundreds of farmers who suffered significant production losses to their pasture, hay and other forage, wheat and oats."

Farm operators in the counties listed below in Texas also qualify for natural disaster assistance because their counties are contiguous. Those counties are:

Anderson	Cottle	Howard	McMullen	Stephens
Andrews	Crane	Hudspeth	Medina	Sterling
Aransas	Culberson	Irion	Menard	Stonewall
Archer	Dallas	Jasper	Montague	Sutton
Armstrong	Dawson	Johnson	Motley	Tarrant
Austin	De Witt	Jones	Nacogdoches	Terrell
Bastrop	Dickens	Karnes	Nolan	Terry

Baylor	Donley	Kendall	Nueces	Throckmorton
Bee	Eastland	Kenedy	Oldham	Travis
Bell	Ector	Kent	Pecos	Tyler
Borden	Erath	King	Polk	Upton
Bosque	Falls	Kinney	Potter	Uvalde
Brewster	Fannin	Kleberg	Presidio	Val Verde
Burnet	Fayette	Knox	Randall	Victoria
Caldwell	Fisher	La Salle	Reagan	Waller
Calhoun	Floyd	Lee	Real	Washington
Chambers	Foard	Liberty	Reeves	Wharton
Cherokee	Freestone	Limestone	Roberts	Wichita
Childress	Garza	Live Oak	San Augustine	Wilbarger
Cochran	Gillespie	Loving	San Jacinto	Wilson
Coke	Gonzales	Lubbock	San Patricio	Winkler
Collin	Gray	Martin	Schleicher	Wise
Collingsworth	Hays	Mason	Scurry	Yoakum
Comal	Hemphill	Matagorda	Shackelford	Young
Cooke	Hockley	Maverick		

Farm operators in the counties listed below in the adjacent states of **New Mexico** and **Oklahoma** also qualify for natural disaster assistance because their counties are contiguous.

New Mexico: Curry, Lea, Quay and Roosevelt

Oklahoma: Beckham, Bryan, Cotton, Harmon, Jackson, Jefferson, Love, Marshall and Roger Mills

All counties listed above were designated natural disaster areas Nov. 2, 2009, making all qualified farm operators in the designated areas eligible for low interest emergency (EM) loans from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided eligibility requirements are met. Farmers in eligible counties have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for loans to help cover part of their actual losses. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. FSA has variety of programs, in addition to the EM loan program, to help eligible farmers recover from adversity.

USDA has also made other programs available to assist farmers and ranchers, including the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE), which was approved as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008; the Emergency Conservation Program; Federal Crop Insurance; and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program. Interested farmers may contact their local USDA Service Centers for further information on eligibility requirements and application procedures for these and other programs. Additional information is also available online at: <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov>.

Consumers Want High-Quality, Branded Beef

Source: *Cattlenetwork.com*



Beef reigns supreme in consumers' protein choices, according to research released earlier this year from West Texas A&M University. Nearly half of consumers surveyed put beef as their No. 1 protein choice, and 97% indicated they ate beef between one and 12 times each week. The study, "Consumers' perceptions and preferences of meat and the meat industry," was the result of doctoral research conducted by Lindsay Chichester, Canyon, Texas. She looked at the whole range of popular opinion on meat.

"We were trying to gauge consumer preferences, what their concerns were, and what they're not concerned with," Chichester says. "I think as an industry that's where we need to go – our consumers are obviously the ones who support us and keep us in business." Digging into details, 65% of consumers preferred some type of branded beef. Among them, the largest breakout group, 28%, preferred their steaks branded as Angus beef. Chichester's academic advisor, animal scientist Ty Lawrence, says that proves the power of marketing. "A lot of that is obviously going to tie back to the recognition of a brand like Certified Angus Beef," he says.

The term "Angus" outweighed any other branding term, including Prime, tender, organic and grass-fed in consumers' perception, but branding with words is not enough. Consumers are looking for quality behind those terms, Lawrence points out.

"The data also indicated customers say they want a higher quality cut of meat," Lawrence says. When asked to visually identify the desirable amount of marbling in a steak, 49% selected Modest or Moderate marbling – the same level required for Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand acceptance. "CAB's marbling criteria overall was the largest sector of what consumers indicated they wanted – average Choice or better," Chichester says. Another 20% of the population indicated a desire for Slightly Abundant or Moderately Abundant marbling, fitting into the Prime and CAB Prime category. These results outline a clear challenge to cattle producers, Lawrence says. "Twenty percent preferred Prime-level marbling, while the beef population is at 2.5% Prime, maybe 3% on a good day. So we're 17% short of the Prime population our consumers say they want." With nearly 70% of the population indicating they preferred upper Choice or higher, he says, "It's phenomenal what consumers say they would prefer in comparison to what we actually have to offer them."

Most consumers, 83%, make those purchases at a supermarket, where competition rules the meat case. They are most concerned with price, color of the meat, the amount of edible product and marbling. "So we're still looking at price, color, yield and quality," Lawrence says. "The customers want their best combination of quality and cutability at a price they deem reasonable – and that's different for everybody."

Results did indicate 56% of consumers were willing to pay a premium for all-natural products like CAB brand Natural. However, it also indicated consumers were unsure of the true meaning behind a "natural" label, Chichester pointed out. "Producers should know they have a market for natural products," she says. But it comes with a need for producers to better define and educate consumers about what those labels mean, Lawrence says.

The survey also pointed out a need to correct misperceptions. One-third of consumers thought eating meat from animals treated with antibiotics would make them "resistant to antibiotics." Another 57% said they were concerned that animal mistreatment is widespread in the industry. "We have some education to do," Lawrence says. "And we have a long way to go in showing our consumer base that animal husbandry is alive and well in production."

FSA urges farmers and ranchers to vote in county committee elections



I particularly encourage minority and women producers to get involved so that county committees fairly represent the producers of a county or multi-county jurisdiction."

County committee members are an important component of the operations of FSA and provide a link between the agricultural community and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Farmers and ranchers who serve on county committees help deliver FSA farm programs at the local level, applying their knowledge and judgment to make decisions on: commodity price support loans and payments; conservation programs; incentive indemnity and disaster payments for some commodities; emergency programs and payment eligibility. FSA committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal laws. To be an eligible voter, farmers and ranchers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program. A person who is not of legal voting age, but supervises and conducts the farming operations of an entire farm may also be eligible to vote. Agricultural producers in each county submitted candidate nominations during the nomination period which was held last summer and ended on Aug. 3.

Eligible voters who do not receive ballots in the coming week can obtain ballots at their local USDA Service Center. Dec. 7, 2009, is the last day for voters to submit ballots in person to local USDA Service Centers. Ballots returned by mail must also be postmarked no later than Dec. 7. Newly elected committee members and their alternates will take office Jan. 1, 2010.

Close to 7,750 FSA county committee members serve in the 2,248 FSA offices nationwide. Each committee consists of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Approximately one-third of county committee seats are up for election each year.

More information on county committees, such as the new 2009 fact sheets and brochures, can be found on the FSA Web site at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections or at your local USDA Service Center (Clay-Jack County, 940-538-4681).



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