



Making a Difference

In Fort Bend County

First Quarter Newsletter—2020

Special Topics for Winter 2020

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Jan.—March, 2020 TOTAL CONTACTS

324 educational sessions
42,363 attendees
(74.1% adults, 25.9% youth)
(39.4% male, 60.6% female)
1,099 Social Media posts
43,489 Soc. Media followers
21 Newsletter Editions
21,957 Newsletter contacts
603 Volunteers assisted
2,873 Volunteer hours
880 Edu. Resources Used

Message from the Co. Extension Director - Cooperative Extension Service offices are conveniently located in courthouses, post offices, or other local government buildings throughout the entire United States of America and in just about every county to improve the quality of people's lives by providing research-based knowledge to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of families, communities and agriculture enterprises. Extension experts focus on, among other subjects, food safety and quality, plight of young children, revitalizing rural America, sustainable agriculture, and waste management. With that in mind, the Cooperative Extension Service, including TX A&M AgriLife Extension Service has incorporated E-Xtension, (<https://impact.extension.org/>) to expand our capacity above and beyond face-to-face meetings as we work with our clientele. But what about our own Extension professionals?

The newest edition to the e-Xtension lineup is Connect Extension. This new venue is available to all Cooperative Extension professionals, is an interactive hub for learning, professional development, and collaboration intended to drive engagement opportunities through cross-sector partnerships that collectively drive innovation and action toward meaningful impact. In addition to being a great place to find new learning and professional development opportunities, Connect Extension provides tools that will help institutional or multi-state programs accomplish its mission. Connect Extension provides all the tools you need – forums, chat, content creation, sharing functions, calendars and surveys – on a single, proprietary platform that is available to all Extension professionals. We strive to stay ahead in this fast-moving world so you are clientele can stay informed.

A Global Pandemic on the Horizon

The Texas A&M University System continues to monitor the spread of the virus as more cases are confirmed in the U.S. and other countries. The first case of COVID-19 in the U.S. was announced on Jan 21 and other cases have been identified. The Texas Department of State Health Services is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, in monitoring the developing outbreak. Information and resources related to the coronavirus are available at the Texas Extension and Disaster Education Network (EDEN) website (<https://texashelp.tamu.edu/>). Texas EDEN, part of AgriLife Extension, provides credible and reliable research-based information related to disaster preparedness, mitigation & recovery. including disease and epidemic resources. "The Texas EDEN website is a repository of emergency & disaster preparation and recovery materials from experts associated with land-grant educational institutions throughout the country," said Dr. Monty Dozier, Dir. for AgriLife Extension's Disaster Assessment & Recovery Unit. "Through this network we hope to provide Texans and others with accurate, objective, timely and helpful information related to the coronavirus and what they can do to help prevent its spread." To help prevent the spread of respiratory COVID-19, the CDC recommends preventive actions, including: 1) Avoiding close contact with people who are sick; 2) Avoiding touching the eyes, nose & mouth; 3) Staying home when sick; 4) Covering a cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash; 4) Cleaning & disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces using a

regular household cleaning spray or wipes; 5) Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating and after blowing the nose, coughing or sneezing; and 6) If soap and water are not readily available, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

"There are personal and environmental health practices that help slow the spread of communicable diseases and those are where we are focusing our efforts, said Miquela Smith, AgriLife Extension specialist – health, Amarillo. "Proper handwashing and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces are examples of small actions that can make a big difference. AgriLife Extension has put together an online resource page to provide Texans with an assortment of digital resources to sustain them during times of social distancing. Resources include guides, publications, digital resources and online learning regarding health, parenting and child activities, food and nutrition, and self-reliance.



Article by: Paul Schattenberg, Communications Specialist II, AgriLife Communications (Texas A&M AgriLife) email: paschattenberg@ag.tamu.edu

35th Annual Fort Bend Regional Vegetable Conf.



This celebration of vegetable production along the upper Gulf Coast region is a collaborative effort of agents from Fort Bend, Waller, Wharton, Harris, Galveston, Brazoria, Colorado and Austin Counties. This yearly event focuses on teaching sustainable practices to help producers maximize efficiencies and increase profitability. Boone Holladay, our CEA-Horticulturist says, "We have something for every producer, and as always, we will offer 5 continuing education credits for TDA license holders." Topics included: Variety Selections for the Gulf Coast, Protecting Pollinators, TDA Updates & the Big Mac Award, Rainwater Harvesting, Growing in Containers, Updated Pesticide Laws & Regs., and IPM-Pest Scouting. Participation included over 180 paid participants, 14 commercial exhibitors, 9 speakers and 45 guests including volunteers for a total of about 250 in attendance. Major sponsors were Capitol Farm Credit and Fort Bend Farm Bureau. We again included a program segment from our FCS division. Local FCS agents Dianne Gertson and Leticia Hardy demonstrated a healthy meal and dessert during the lunch break from our Dinner Tonight! Moving ahead in responding to the needs of our diverse audience, break-out sessions were offered where guests could choose the topics that best suited their needs. As evaluation results are returned, we'll move forward with our final interpretation; but, verbal comments from guests say that they all look forward to coming back next year!



The Role of 4-H Adult Leaders

Parent Leaders, Club Leaders and 4-H parents & grandparents are a valued and essential part of the any 4-H program and have a profound impact on the life trajectory of 4-H members. Here in Fort Bend County we have two groups of adult leaders—the 4-H Parent Leaders' Association which is composed of adult 4-H leaders who meet and work together to improve and enhance overall 4-H opportunities available to all 4-H members. These volunteer leaders:

- Are dedicated to the well-being and development of youth.
- Assume direct responsibilities in working with youth.
- Believe in a helping relationship between youth and adults.
- Seek to improve their own abilities in working with youth.

And, other Adult Volunteers serve in a variety of roles in a 4-H club:

- **4-H Community Club Leader** – Provides administrative support for the 4-H clubs.
- **Project or program volunteers** – Have expertise in particular areas which they teach to participants, parents/guardians, or special interest groups.
- **Activity or event volunteers** – Provide leadership within a specific, short-term project or activity. These activity volunteers work with 4-H members to make preparations for the activity, obtain relevant literature and distribute it to adult and youth participants, and coordinate the activity or community event.
- **Resource and key volunteers** – Have expertise in club organization, planning and conducting activities, or specialized subjects relating to projects.
- **Other volunteer roles** – Help with transportation, management, or recruitment. Adult volunteers may also serve on county and state level 4-H committees.

Become a Texas Master Naturalist—Join Today!

The mission of the Texas Master Naturalist Program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources within their communities for the State of Texas. There are numerous reasons why becoming a Master Naturalist is a good idea:

- Local knowledge -The MN program covers a range of topics relatable across the state. However, local knowledge is stressed through the selection of local experts to instruct sections of the course. Most of the course sections have a lecture and field lab component, so participants learn about and experience the local ecosystems first hand. The majority of participants learn interesting facts about ecosystems in their backyard and share that information with many other people, which leads us into my next reason to become a TX MN.
- Environmental education - Through the MN training, participants not only learn about natural resources, but they also receive training on how to educate others about natural resources. A primary goal of the Master Naturalist program is to develop an organization of knowledgeable volunteers to help promote conservation and management of natural resources through educating their communities.
- Continuous learning - The MN program and partners offer many advanced training opportunities throughout the year. These opportunities serve as more focused trainings on many aspects of the basic course or cover topics not included in the basic training. Thereby, continually increasing the participant's knowledge.
- Networking - The selected instructors and program partners are well respected individuals and entities in the environmental field. Through the MN program, participants get to meet, mingle, learn from and pick the brains of these environmental leaders. Often the participants connect with one or more of the program partners for opportunities outside of the program.
- Credentials - Who doesn't want to be able to put "Certified Master Naturalist" on their resume? Participation in this program and its associated certification often leads to participants being recognized as environmental experts and/or leaders in their communities.

For more information on Fort Bend's Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist contact: Margo "Mac" McDowell, Program Coordinator at Email: mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu , Ph: 281-633-7033 or Email: info@coastalprairie.org



Safe Handling of Fresh Produce!

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet, but....harmful bacteria that may be in the soil or water where produce grows may come in contact with the fruits and vegetables and contaminate them. Or, fresh produce may become contaminated after it is harvested, such as during preparation or storage. Eating contaminated produce (or fruit and vegetable juices made from contaminated produce) can lead to foodborne illness, which can cause serious — and sometimes fatal — infections. However, it's easy to help protect yourself and your family from illness by following these safe handling tips! •Purchase produce that is not bruised or damaged; •When selecting freshcut produce (melons, mixed salad greens, etc.) choose only those items that are refrigerated or surrounded by ice; •Bag fresh fruits & veggies separately from meat, poultry and seafood products; •Refrigerate at 40° F or below ASAP; •Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing; and •Scrub firm produce before peeling or cutting. Healthy Eating & Enjoy!

SPECIAL NOTE: COVID-19 IS NOT A FOODBORNE ILLNESS!

On 3/17/2020 the U.S. Food & Drug Administration reported that "currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19." This novel coronavirus is not considered a foodborne illness, and "foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission." A foodborne illness designation falls to viruses like Norovirus and Hepatitis A, both of which can make you very sick via the food you eat. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention has posted similar reassurance that the food supply is safe and that the coronavirus is not transmitted via food. In a statement released this week announcing its 2020 Shopper's Guide and updated *Dirty Dozen* and *Clean Fifteen* lists, the Environmental Working Group underscored these assurances: "As all Americans struggle to adapt to the reality of daily life during the coronavirus pandemic, it is important to know that there is no evidence people can be exposed through food. The spread pattern for coronavirus is quite different from those of foodborne pathogens like salmonella and E.coli. That is why, even though the risks of COVID-19 are serious, consumers should continue eating plenty of healthy fruits and vegetables, whether they are conventional or organic."

Fort Bend County Directives Regarding COVID-19

From: FBC Judge KP George ... To: Fort Bend County Department Heads and Elected Officials....

Due to the increasing complexity of COVID – 19, Judge KP George and Dr. Minter, Health and Human Services Director, have determined that the continued increase in positive cases within Fort Bend County now requires further action to protect County employees, assure the continued delivery of essential County services, and support current CDC guidelines related to the spread of COVID-19.

Therefore, effective Monday, March 23, 2020, non-essential employees will be asked to remain at home and remain in contact with their supervisor. Essential employees will need to report to work in order to maintain the mission of each department.

As a Department Head or Elected Official, you will need to determine which employees are essential and non-essential in this emergency situation. It is encouraged that you make arrangements for non-essential employees to work from home if the work and technology is conducive to such arrangement.

Please make sure you outline guidelines within your department for the means of maintaining communication, and ensuring employees who work from home are productive and hours worked are recorded. This arrangement will remain in effect until April 3, 2020. Please refer to Fort Bend County Employee Policy 413 – Emergency Personnel and Pay Procedures, and Policy 414 – Communicable Disease Emergency.

Snap-Shot of Upcoming Events:

~~NOTE: All face to face meeting as of March 18th has been cancelled until further notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic as outlined by FBC Commissioners' Court, TX A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Cooperative Extension Program of PVAMU.~~

For all of the above programs visit fortbend.agrilife.org or email us at fort-bend-tx@tamu.edu or call us at 281-342-3034

A Glimpse of Fort Bend Co.

In 2018, the population of FBC has reached 764,828 of which 41.4% are college educated, 88.5% are high-school graduates and the average household income is \$118,558.

For over 20 years, we have been in the top 20 counties in the U.S. for economic excellence and population growth - and that is by design and not by accident. "Among the largest counties (>250,000 or more in 2015), Fort Bend, was the fastest growing, as we climbed 4.3 % between 2014 and 2015, to 741,237".

Excellent schools, affordable housing, planned communities and extensive recreational facilities have attracted families with impressive demographic profiles. These actions results in a local employment base that provides companies with a diverse mix of professional, technical, skilled, and unskilled labor with the highest educational levels in the region.

For more info see: www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/ .



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