



TMBC/Border Region Review

The newsletter for the Texas/Mexico Border Coalition Community-based Organization in partnership with UTPA and other border region organizations, providing information about TMBC and border region projects which are coordinated and enhanced through Project FORGE.

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Aisha Cruz, Editor

Food safety and estate planning workshops

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In the months of June and July, the top priority for the TMBC was the series of food safety and estate planning workshops in South Texas co-sponsored with the Rio Bravo Resource Conservation & Development.

The first workshop was held in Edinburg on June 16 at The University of Texas-Pan American Annex Building. To address the needs of local consumers and property owners, topics included safe food preparation and estate planning.

The food safety presentation was made by Al Almanza of the Food Safety and Inspection Service. Almanza's session was an open dialogue on the importance of good hygiene habits in food preparation. He warned attendees on the dangers of E. coli, listeria, salmonella and BSE, and how these perils could be avoided.

The afternoon session featured Henry Claeys, P.C. of McAllen, Texas. Claeys informed participants of the benefits and drawbacks of the probate process, wills, powers of attorney and trusts. His discussion included examples of how each method of planning can affect the property and finances of parties involved.



Al Almanza speaking to producers at the food safety and estate planning workshop in Edinburg, Texas.

Additional workshops were held in Laredo July 7 at Texas A&M International University; Alice July 14 at Jim Wells County Fairgrounds; and Hebbronville July 28 at the First National Bank.

Workshops held in Laredo and Hebbronville shared a similar agenda. Geared mostly towards farmers and ranchers, these workshops focused on topics relevant to herd and livestock health and estate planning.

Dr. Laura Robinson of the Texas Department of Health spoke on the symptoms, incidence and prevention of West Nile Virus and West Nile disease. Her presentation comprised of information on the progression of the West Nile Virus across the U.S. and Texas. She also suggested methods to prevent disease-

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Events calendar:

August

- 02 Beef Cattle Short Course, College Station, Texas
- 18 Bootstrap Marketing Workshop, Kingsville, Texas
- 30 Conservation Reserve Program general sign-up begins

September

- 01 *Food Safety and Estate Planning Workshop in Helotes, Texas*
- 03 Last day to file COC nomination forms with the FSA office
- 24 CRP general sign-up closes
- 26 HESTEC, Edinburg, Texas www.hestec.org

October

- 01 eFARM Project begins

Funding for eFARM Project granted

In July 2004, the TMBC received official word that the Electronic Farm and Ranch Management (eFARM) Project was selected for federal funding by the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES).

The three-year project will provide basic, intermediate and advanced computer and Internet training for residents of rural communities in the TMBC service area.

The purpose behind the eFARM Project is to train agriculture producers in rural areas to use government and USDA Web sites. This will allow producers to complete applications and forms online that would otherwise have

to be done in a service office. Training sessions will take place in local schools, libraries and community centers equipped with Internet capabilities.

To take the project a step further, the CBO is working to set up a help desk that will be available to project participants for hardware and software technical assistance as well as help in completing USDA documents.

In areas where Internet is not available, the NETmobile, a mobile computer/internet lab provided by The University of Texas-Pan American, will be utilized. The NETmobile is a state-of-the-art, 38-foot mobile Internet

[*eFARM Continued on page 2*](#)

FSA facts

The TMBC and Starr County Farm Service Agency (FSA) have formed a working relationship to provide for easy communication and cooperation.

FSA county offices administer all FSA programs. The County Committee (COC) is a grassroots approach to give farmers and ranchers a say in how federal actions affect their communities and individual operations. The COC is accountable to the State Committee and oversees the work of the county office and its executive director, who manages the county office. The COC also acts in an advisory capacity to the farm loan manager.

The COC is democracy in action. Once elected by peers to the committee, local producers make important decisions about how FSA programs will be carried out in the county. The COC is a direct link between the farm community and the USDA. The USDA also acts as a board of directors for the county office.

Each COC consists of three to five members that may include a state appointed member as an advocate for underrepresented groups and to assist in outreach activities.

COC nomination forms are on hand at the county office or online at

www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/elections

Farm owners, tenants and sharecroppers of legal voting age can vote if they are eligible to take part in any FSA program along with spouses in community property states.

Important COC dates:

July 15 – nominations open
Sept. 3 – nominations close
Nov. 8 – ballots mailed out
Dec. 6 – ballots are returned
Jan. 1 – elected take office

The COC system is an opportunity to have a voice in delivery of federal farm programs in each county.

For more information on the COC system, contact your county FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov

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causing mosquitoes from proliferating. Dr. Gary Svetlik of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service discussed Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies with a special emphasis on Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). He discussed the history and symptoms of BSE and the form of the virus that affects humans, as well as how the virus is spread from one animal or person to the next.

At the workshop in Alice, Dr. Wayne Hayenga of Texas A&M University – College Station addressed estate planning.

eFARM, continued from page 1

computer lab. It serves as a self-contained, wireless high-speed Internet facility with more than 15 computer/Internet stations.

Because of its innovative nature, the eFARM Project has received attention and support from Texas leaders including U.S. Senator John Cornyn and U.S. Representatives Ciro Rodriguez, Rubén Hinojosa and Solomon Ortiz. Other supporters include agricultural agencies and universities.

Project funding for eFARM will officially begin Oct. 1, 2004. After a few months of developing and refining a curriculum, the training sessions for agriculture producers will begin in January 2005. The project has been funded for a three-year period.

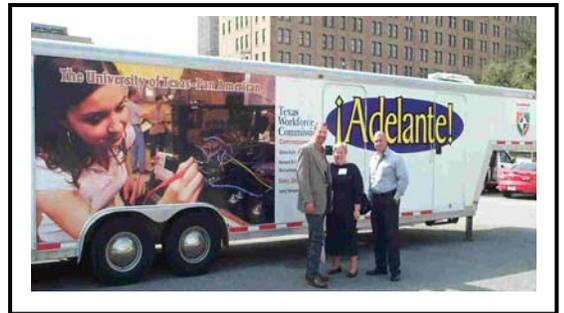
Hayenga's presentation was centered on the best planning method to fit the needs and wishes of property owners for the future of their possessions.

The TMBC would like to thank the following contributors to the workshops: Guillermo Benavides, TMBC director; Flavio Garza, Webb County district conservationist; Bruce Healy, Jim Wells County district conservationist; Rogelio Mercado, Jim Wells County extension agent; Erika Melo, Jim Hogg County district clerk; and Sibyl Wright, Food Safety and Inspection Service.

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Partners to the TMBC include The University of Texas-Pan American, the Texas Cooperative Extension Service and Resource Conservation and Development Councils within the TMBC service area.

For more information concerning eFARM, please contact TMBC at 956/488-0534.



The NETmobile will be utilized for the eFARM Project.

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Sweet results for ag-business

Justin Kent was 12-years-old when he began experimenting with bees for a science project. At the time, he could not imagine that in only nine years he would own a bee-pollination business worth \$1 million.

In 1995, Kent's business was incorporated into Kent Honey Bees Inc. As his business became a large operation with national reach, Kent found himself in need of capital. He realized acquiring customers and expanding the business was easier than finding a bank that would understand his business needs. He then turned to The University of Texas-Pan American's Project FORGE for assistance.

Project FORGE's staff soon worked with Kent to develop a strategy to expand his business. Kent bought another bee

pollination business and assumed payments on a FSA farm ownership loan. With the assistance of Project FORGE's staff, Kent was also able to develop a business loan proposal focused on obtaining a commercial loan for further business expansion. The proposal required demonstration of the viability of the business from a market and financial soundness perspective.

Along with the business plan development, staff assisted with SBA documentation to get a SBA loan guarantee. This improved the chance for loan approval. It was not long before Kent found a bank that would help him and his business.

The services provided by Project FORGE go beyond loan application assistance. Project

[Sweet Results, Continued on page 3](#)

Get involved with the TMBC

With all the ways the TMBC is working to assist farmers and ranchers in the Texas/Mexico border region, you can help. Below are some suggestions on how to become involved.

- ◆ Sign up to be a member
- ◆ Support TMBC events
- ◆ Endorse TMBC principles and goals
- ◆ Promote the TMBC

Contact the TMBC if you are interested in working together.

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FORGE uses an array of government programs that include USDA farm ownership and operating loan programs, the USDA Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program and U.S. Small Business Administration loan guarantee programs.

Non profit organizations are used for micro-loan programs such as Accion of Texas, Rural Development and Finance Corporation and National Counsel of La Raza.

Project FORGE also worked with the Texas

Manufacturing Assistance Center when assisting Kent Honey Bees Inc. on a patent for a beehive box designed by Kent.

Project FORGE is a USDA funded program that focuses on providing technical and business assistance to socially and economically disadvantaged farmers, ranchers and rural businesses.

For more information on Project FORGE, contact Ismael Delgado at 956/292-7542.

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TMBC CBO Directors and Staff

Chairman, Omar J. Garza
Santa Elena, Texas

Vice-Chairman, Ray Margo
Santa Elena, Texas

Secretary, Homero Vela
Premont, Texas

Treasurer, Samuel Rodriguez
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Director, Guillermo Benavides
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Director, Mario Escobar
Crystal City, Texas

Director, Ruben Carrasco
Presidio, Texas

Director, Rigoberto Delgado
El Paso, Texas

Technical Assistance,
Neal Alvarado

Project Director, RMA,
Rodolfo Garza III

Asst. Project Director,
Aisha Lee Cruz

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South Texas co-ops awarded USDA grant

The Texas Rural Cooperative Development Center provided value-added technical assistance to Planter's and Petronila Grain Cooperatives. Both co-ops were jointly awarded a 2003 Value-Added Producer Grant of approximately \$350,000 to develop a new emerging market in Central and Southern Mexico for value-added, identity preserved grain sorghum.

Combined, the cooperatives have a membership of about 310 sorghum producers. The co-ops successfully developed a direct sales market to Northern Mexico, but were ready to expand into the Central and Southern Mexico markets.

"Grain producers in Texas, especially in the underserved border region areas, need the benefits that this project will provide through the development of an identity preserved grain sorghum product and an emerging Mexican market," U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison said in a letter of support for the project.

The grant will allow these co-ops to assist border-region producers by using Near Infrared (NIR) technology to determine the nutritional and food value of their grain sorghum prior to marketing it to end users in Mexico.

"This project will help constituents throughout South Texas. Underserved, border region grain producers need to maximize their returns by selling their grain

directly to Mexican end users," U.S. Representative Rubén Hinojosa said.

Direct sales to this emerging market, coupled with the nutritional information provided through innovative NIR technology will allow underserved, border region producers to preserve the identity of their sorghum and increase its value.

Texas Agricultural Commissioner Susan Combs stated, "with the support from the TDA, grain sorghum producers in the coastal region of South Texas have been actively developing export markets through their grain elevator cooperative. The cooperatives' efforts to expand their market for identity preserved grain sorghum into Central and Southern Mexico will positively impact the farmers and local economies that depend on farming."

The Texas Rural Cooperative Development Center provides technical assistance to potential and existing cooperatives facing specific problems or challenges. Albert Canales, center director, states that technical assistance could include helping a co-op develop a business plan to cope with new competitive forces, decide whether to form a joint venture with other cooperatives, or find a way to turn co-op members' raw products into value-added products.

To arrange an appointment with the center, call Ismael Delgado at 956/292-7542.

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