

Making a Difference

2016 Western Rice Belt Conference

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Relevance

Rice has been a mainstay of the Colorado, Matagorda, Jackson, and Wharton County's economies since the early 1900's. Rice income accounts for \$135 million in the tri-county area. However, lack of profitability is placing financial stress on both the infrastructure and the farming community. Acreage has declined approximately in recent years creating negative impacts on the local economy in general. In response to challenging economic conditions, changes in land ownership patterns, and changes in water availability, Rice farmers are diversifying their operations through entrepreneurial pursuits - new enterprises, value added, niche marketing, seeking new water sources, etc. To achieve and maintain the economic viability of rice producers, we must provide business profitability and risk management-based programs in response to the educational needs of those in the county/region. The county program area committees in Matagorda, Wharton, and Colorado Counties reflect this educational need.

Response

County Extension Agents with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Wharton, Matagorda, Jackson, and Colorado come together each year to provide the Western Rice Belt Conference. This has been an ongoing multiyear, multi-county educational effort since 2005, at which time the combined rice production acres for the Texas Western Rice Belt totaled 116,157 acres. The conference is comprised of a Producers Seminar, along with a Consumers Seminar, held each year on the third Wednesday of January. All stages of the event from planning to evaluation are directed by two, multi-county Western Rice Belt Conference planning committees – one for the producers section and one for the consumer section. Committees are made up of County Extension Agents, equipment dealers, rice warehouse managers, rice producers, rice producers, U.S. Rice Producers Association, USA Rice, Inc., wives of rice farmers, and Extension Education Association (EEA) members. The committee builds the agenda each year to address current production and consumer issues in the rice industry with guest speakers from Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension, LSU Ag Center, and more.

Results

The 12th Annual Western Rice Belt Conference was held on January 20, 2016 at the El Campo Civic Center. 179 rice producers and 110 rice consumers attended the conference. To determine the programmatic results of the Western Rice Belt Producers Seminar a retrospective post evaluation instrument was administered the day of the conference. **142 of 179 (79%) completed evaluations. 79.6%**

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating


of the participants plan to adopt at Least One Practice and/or Technology. Rice producers report a total anticipated economic benefit for their farm operations of \$957,631, or an economic benefit of \$4.26 per acre.

Client Change Level of Understanding: Western Rice Belt Conference

TOPICS	Mean Value BEFORE	Mean Value AFTER	Percent Increase
The regional conservation partnership program (rcpp) composed of ducks unlimited and usa rice.	2.23	3.05	27.3
Understanding of the new march 1st and july 1st reviews dates for lcra water releases	2.29	3.10	27.0
Understanding of the new cbgcd meter requirement for all permitted wells	2.23	3.14	30.3
Understanding of new exceptions from texas regulated herbicide classification.	2.26	3.19	31
Understanding of the habits and lifecycle of the planthopper found in 2015 ratoon rice	1.88	3.25	45.7
Understanding of crop margin coverage insurance	1.94	2.74	26.7

V A L U E

Crop and Forage Production Education



Extension programs in crop production promote best practices that lead to reduced irrigation, safer pest management, and improved profitability of agricultural enterprises. This benefits Texas as a whole by contributing to the quality and quantity of water resources and enhancing both agricultural competitiveness and rural economies.