

Making a Difference

2017 Western Rice Belt Conference

Developed by:

Corrie Bowen, County Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resources, Wharton County
Stephen Janak, County Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resources, Colorado County

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, and more.

Results

The 13th Annual Western Rice Belt Conference was held on January 18, 2017 at the El Campo Civic Center. 257 rice producers and 101 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. **159 of 257 (61.9%)** completed evaluations.

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

76.3% of the participants plan to adopt the practice of using mixtures or sequences of herbicides with differing modes of action. Rice producers report a total anticipated economic benefit for their farm operations of \$1,178,327, or an economic benefit of \$4.45 per acre.

Client Change Level of Understanding: 2017 Western Rice Belt Conference

TOPICS	Mean Value BEFORE	Mean Value AFTER	Percent Increase
Herbicide resistance in weed populations	2.65	3.30	21.7%
Disease management in rice	2.61	3.27	22.0%
Recent changes to EPA pesticide certification and training regulations	2.21	3.28	35.7%
Management of insects in Texas rice	2.59	3.20	20.3%
Tools and resources available to Texas rice producers to manage financial and commodity price risk	2.16	2.96	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.