

Agriculture and Natural Resources

2019 Upper Gulf Coast Rice Production Education Summary

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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. 53% of Texas' 154,052 acre rice industry in 2019 is found in this four-county area. Rice acreage in Texas continues to decline, dropping 18%, from 187,684 acres in 2018. The decline in rice acreage and a 42% reduction in farm income (as identified in the 2017 Census of Agriculture) is placing financial stress on both the infrastructure and the farming community. The 2015 and 2019 Texas Community Futures Forum identified that crop producers will need to keep abreast of marketing opportunities, precision agriculture practices, and variety/seed technology developments to remain competitive in the industry. Additionally, producers will seek income from all available USDA programs to sustain the challenges brought about by trade negotiations with foreign trade partners. 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 region. The Western Rice Belt program area committee for Matagorda, Wharton, Jackson and Colorado Counties reflects 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. 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, 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 USA Rice, U.S. Rice Producers, Texas A&M AgriLife Agriculture and Food Policy Center, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas A&M AgriLife Research, and more.

In October 2019, at a planning committee meeting, the Western Rice Belt committee sought to gain more information on conservation programs for working lands available for rice producers. Members of the Western Rice Belt Production Conference Committee advised that these USDA programs available are underutilized in our region of the Texas Rice Belt. On November 19, 2019 the Western Rice Belt Conference Committee hosted a round table discussion, inviting representatives from several organizations and agencies to discuss conservation programs for working ag lands for rice producers. The committee's goal of the Roundtable meeting was to use the outcome of the November 19, 2019 Roundtable to develop a session at the 2020 Western Rice Belt Conference, with the intent of educating rice producers on the conservation programs available for their working rice lands.

Results

15th Annual Western Rice Belt Conference, El Campo, Texas – January 16, 2019

Two Hundred Sixty-two (262) rice producers and 85 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. 145 of 262 (55.8%) completed evaluations. 73% of those completing evaluations intend to apply their knowledge of Herbicide group selection to combat herbicide resistant barnyard grass. Rice producers report a total anticipated economic benefit for their farm operations of \$1,322,880 or an economic benefit of \$4.62 per acre.

Client Change Level of Understanding: 2018 Western Rice Belt Conference

TOPICS	Mean Value BEFORE	Mean Value AFTER	Percent Increase
Understanding of herbicide groups	2.38	3.30	30.7%
Using multiple effective modes of action is a priority to combat herbicide resistant barnyard grass	2.60	3.37	25.7%
Current export market status and the 2019 market and trade outlook for u.s. rice	2.31	3.06	25.0%

2019 Conservation and Working Lands Round Table Discussion

Eighteen (18) representatives from the local Rice Industry, Ducks Unlimited, USDA-NRCS, and AgriLife Extension came together for a round table meeting to discuss conservation programs for working ag lands for rice producers. The committee developed four questions by which to direct discussion and seek input:

Question 1	What are the conservation programs available to rice farmers?
<i>Response</i>	<i>NRCS Program Liaison, Sonny Vela, said NRCS programs fall into 2 categories; Financial and Easement programs. Financial - EQUIP helps with cost share on things like land leveling, drop pipes, multiple inlets and underground pipelines and is probably the most utilized. CSP programs pay for management changes. The priority resource concerns include insufficient water, soil erosion, soil quality, and water quality. NRCS also partners with groups to offer value-added contributions. Applications for Conservation Security Programs (CSP) have been cumbersome and restrictive under previous Farm Bills but new rules are being written.</i>
Question 2	Which conservation programs are active in your district/county, and what are some success stories of those programs?
<i>Response</i>	<i>Programs being utilized in the area include EQUIP, RCPP. NRCS receives input from Working Groups to see how funds are best utilized in an area. Getting people to attend Working Groups and offer input is hard. Need to make more producers aware of Working Groups and their function. More Local Working Group sessions need to be scheduled throughout the coming year.</i>
Question 3	How can we educate rice producers on utilization of available conservation funds at a 1 hour presentation at the January 15, 2020 Rice Conference in El Campo, Texas?
<i>Response</i>	<i>Q & A afterward would provide the best education of programs available. Areas outside the main conference area would also be made available for producers to discuss their individual needs and concerns Panel would consist of Sonny Vela, Dennis Neuman, Kirby Brown, Raul Villarreal and Brian Koch.</i>
Question 4	Who could present this topic in a one-hour-long presentation at the Western Rice Belt Conference?
<i>Response</i>	<i>The Panel would consist of Sonny Vela, USDA-NRCS; Dennis Neuman, Kirby Brown, and Raul Villarreal – Ducks Unlimited; and Brian Koch – Texas Soil and Water Conservation Board.</i>

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

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