

Agriculture and Natural Resources

2020 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 and the Eagle Lake Rice Research Field Day. 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.

The Western Rice Belt Conference planning committee brought forth results of a November 19, 2019 round table discussion of conservation programs for working ag lands for rice producers to the January 15, 2020 Rice Conference. These results were used to better educate rice producers of conservations programs available to rice producers. The local USDA-NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District conducted a local working group meeting at the conclusion of the Rice Conference on January 20, 2020. NRCS receives input from Working Groups to see how funds are best utilized in an area.

As a result of Covid-19, the annual Eagle Lake and Beaumont Rice Research Field Days could not be held in their traditional, face-to-face format. On July 9th, a team of Extension Agents from across the entire Texas Rice Belt made available one (1) Rice Research Tour available to rice producers in a virtual format,

via Zoom®. The Texas A&M Agrilife State Rice Initiative Team cooperated with Dr. Ted Wilson, Director of the Beaumont Rice Research Station to host the 2020 Rice Field Day in a virtual format.

To help promote food security awareness, the Western Rice Belt Conference coordinated and funded a large donation of rice in December 2020 to the Central Texas Food Bank in Austin, Texas.

Results

16th Annual Western Rice Belt Conference, El Campo, Texas – January 15, 2020

Two Hundred Fifteen (215) rice producers and 65 rice consumers attended the conference. To capture the adoption rate of conservation programs by those attending the Western Rice Belt Producers Seminar, a retrospective post evaluation instrument was administered via Qualtrics® in August 2020. 15 of 172 (9%) completed evaluations. **30.77%** of respondents indicated that they gained information on programs that can improve the productivity and efficiency of their farming operation. **23.08%** of respondents report that they already participate in government funded conservation programs. 21 rice producers attended the USDA-NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District local working group meeting at the conclusion of the Rice Conference in January 2020, a **320%** increase in attendance compared to previous years' Local Working Group Meetings.

Conservation Programs That Best Apply to Rice Farming Operations

Conservation Program	% Response	# of Responses
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQUIP)	50%	5
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	30%	3
Rice Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)	20%	2

Western Rice Belt Conference donation to the Central Texas Food Bank

Western Rice Belt Production Conference Committee coordinated and funded a donation of 11,000 lbs (5/1/2 tons) of packaged rice to the Central Texas Food Bank during the week of Christmas 2020. This was an amount of rice for 110,000, servings of rice. This donation could not be possible without the collaboration of the Texas Rice Council, U.S. Rice Producers Association, Riviana Foods, the Central Texas Food Bank, and the Rice Marketing Association.

2020 Virtual Rice Research Field Day

112 rice producers registered for the Virtual Field Day, yet 64 attended via Zoom®. A retrospective post evaluation instrument was administered via Qualtrics® in August 2020. 5 of 64 (8%) completed evaluations. Evaluation results indicate that 100% of the participants would attend another virtual field day hosted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. 80% were completely or mostly satisfied with the Field Day being delivered via a ZOOM format. 100% of the participants logged in on a personal computer, with 60% identifying familiarity with other virtual formats such as Webex, Skype, and Google Meets. Only 40% identify familiarity with Microsoft Teams®. The recording of the 2020 Rice Field Day is posted along with twelve other research highlight videos at <https://beaumont.tamu.edu/RiceFieldDay/>

Client Change Level of Understanding: Virtual Rice Research Field Day

TOPICS	Mean Value BEFORE	Mean Value AFTER	Percent Increase
Understanding of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).	2.00	3.00	50.00%
Knowledge of current trade situation surrounding US Rice during the Covid-19 pandemic.	1.80	3.00	66.66%

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