

## 2021 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.

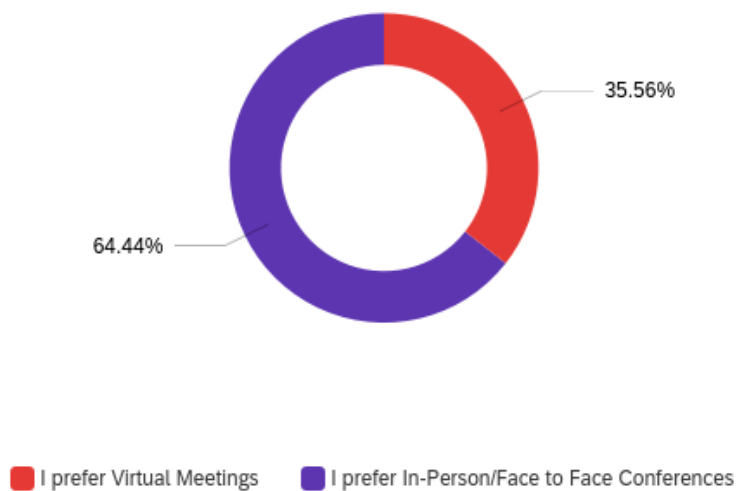
The Western Rice Belt Conference planning committee met six times in 2020, attempting to plan for an in-person Western Rice Belt Conference for January 2021. However, Covid-19 restrictions prevented the realization of an in-person conference for 2021. To continue the Committee's effort of educating rice producers and rice consumers, a virtual conference was held in conjunction with the annual rice conference that is held on the East side of Houston. The two conferences came together to hold one (1) Virtual Texas Rice Conference for 2021.

**Results**

Virtual Texas Rice Conference– January 20, 2021

One Hundred Forty-five (145) rice producers attended the virtual conference. Topics and speakers included Basics of Herbicide Resistance Development in Weeds - Dr. Muthu Bagavathiannan; Rice Varieties and Current Breeding Programs in Rice - Mr. Galen Franz; Insect Management - Dr. Mo Way; Pesticide Laws and Regulations Update - Melissa Barton; Cost of Rice Production - Joe Outlaw; Rice Market Outlook – Thomas Wynn; Update on Conservation and Working Lands Programs - Dennis Neumann; and Rice Water Efficiency - Dr. Michele Reba, Research Hydrologist USDA Agricultural Research Service. To capture the knowledge gained and adoption rate of recommended practices, a retrospective post evaluation instrument was administered via Qualtrics®. 97 of 145 (66%) completed evaluations. **45%** of the respondents report that they have adopted the practice of rotating herbicides by group number to combat herbicide weed resistance. Herbicide groups was a topic that was introduced to rice producers at the 2019 Western Rice Belt Conference.

**Chart 1. Percentage of Audience who prefer Virtual education experiences vs. percentage of audience who prefer in-person/Face-to-face educational experiences.**



**Table 1. Client Change Level of Understanding: Virtual Rice Research Field Day**

TOPICS	Mean Value BEFORE	Mean Value AFTER	Percent Increase
Knowledge of rice water efficiency practices and the overall impact the can have on your rice operation	2.58	3.58	38.00%
Awareness of breakeven costs of rice production in Texas.	2.66	3.58	34.58%