



Walker County Agriculture Update

April (Early Edition)
2020

Greetings from the Walker
County, Texas A&M AgriLife
Extension office!

Wow! We have seen events unfold in the past several weeks that we have never seen on this scale here in the U.S.A.

I was at the Houston Livestock Show the day it was closed due to COVID-19 concerns. We knew a big announcement was coming and many of us in the bleachers were watching the press conference online even as the youngsters were exhibiting animals in the showring. That and other closures since resound as very unfortunate impacts upon our agricultural youth. From my vantage point in and among the livestock barn that day, I want to say how proud I was of the families and youth I interacted with.

Disappointment to disbelief was apparent; however, all whom I observed personally truly made the best of a very difficult situation. There are parents out there who are raising kids properly and setting great examples. Good Job!

Since then, the COVID-19 health issue has progressed and is impacting all of us in many ways. We are truly saddened that this situation has negatively impacted our local fair as well as the two Texas Majors that have been canceled. AgriLife Extension education is not immune to these impacts either. We have been directed to cancel planned face to face educational events and activities for the near future. This policy will be reviewed weekly as the public health issue continues to unfold and at some time recede. I have since hosted our 1st Master Gardener Class training online, so we are learning how to successfully do this on the local level.

I am very sure that we will be offering additional online options (some live/some recorded) as an alternative for the duration. On the drive into the office this morning, I was thinking about this newsletter and the opportunity that is being offered - *(let's be positive and make lemonade)*.

Newsletters are a tradeoff at best. They can only be so many pages until they are just too much to ask anybody to read. My newsletters push the envelope of maybe being a bit much on the long side, I am totally aware.

The tradeoff is in the limited space available how many event details and dates can be provided vs. how much information provided. Today's opportunity is that I can focus on information rather than events and dates.

Glad to have you here! Read on.

- ***When you have the opportunity, let others hear your message.***

As we all learn about this “Social Distancing” thing:

We may be spending a little more time around the yard or our farms and ranches in the next few weeks. As you venture out into public, please be very cognizant of your personal space, sanitation and possible exposure situation. Accurate information regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is best obtained from the CDC at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

Remember to wash your hands regularly! Stay healthy!!

Upcoming Events:

- **Coffee & Conservation (Walker County)**
 - April 8th, 2020 **(THIS EVENT IS POSTPONED WATCH FOR NEW DATES)**
- **2020 Walker County Farmers Market Organizational Meeting**
 - April 2nd, 2020 **(THIS EVENT IS POSTPONED WATCH FOR NEW DATES)**

*If you are interested in joining the WC Farmers Market, please call the AgriLife Extension office at (936) 435-2426 and give us your name and contact info. If enough potential participants have email contacts and online capability, we MAY be able to hold this meeting online at some point (I am thinking “*out loud*” about this option).

Facebook Live with Aggie Horticulture

Wednesday(s) & Friday(s)

1:00 PM

<https://www.facebook.com/Aggie-Horticulture-26803072143/>

No Facebook Account required

Join online for Facebook Live presentations from the Aggie Horticulture experts. A variety of relevant and timely topics will be covered on this platform. Also, you can follow the link to see previous live presentations.

Facebook Live: Texas 4-H Virtual Experience

March 24, 25, 26 – Agriculture & Livestock

April 1, 2 -STEM

April 7, 8, 9 -Natural Resources

April 14, 15, 16 -Leadership & Citizenship

10:00 AM (each day)

<https://www.facebook.com/texas4h/>

No Facebook Account required

Kids around the house due to everybody’s current change in schedule? We have some great 4-H & Youth events about to happen online. These online events will be excellent viewing for our young people during their extended at-home time.

Facebook Live with Junior Master Gardeners (JMG)

April 2nd (continuing Tuesdays & Thursdays)

1:00 PM

<https://www.facebook.com/Aggie-Horticulture-26803072143/>

No Facebook Account required

Kids around the house due to everybody's current change in schedule? Want some neat horticulture education and crafty related things to do? These online events will be lots of fun to both teach and entertain the younger crowd.

-The "New Normal", ONLINE SYMPOSIUM-

2020 South Texas Agriculture Symposium – Advocating for Agriculture

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

Online Webinar

Cost: \$10.00 per person

7:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Registration: Call the Walker County AgriLife office at 936-435-2426 before April 14th - we will provide you with the meeting link on April 13th via email. You will log in over your own connection and complete the registration & payment the morning of the event.

2 hours TDA Pesticide CEU's

I had originally passed on offering this event in Walker County as the date was during the Walker County Fair schedule. Unfortunately, that has changed plus we will not be capable of holding a viewing site due to current COVID-19 occupancy restrictions. If you are interested in these topics, you have the option to log in from your personal location and attend the symposium.

7:30-8:00 REGISTRATION online.

8:00 The NOT Beef Burger—*Dr. Joe Paschal*

8:30 Update: Hemp Production Laws in Texas—*Dr. Josh McGinty*

9:00 Update: New Range & Pasture Herbicides—*Dr. Megan Clayton*

9:20 The Scoop on Glyphosate—*Dr. Josh McGinty*

9:50 Cattle, Sheep, or Goats? Fitting the Right Animal to your Situation—*Dr. Joe Paschal*

10:20 BREAK

10:35 Insect Update

10:55 Pesticide Safety & Environmental Health— *Dr. Mark Matocha*

11:25 Fertilizing: Options and Accurate Prescriptions—*Dr. Jamie Foster*

11:55 Cattle Fever Tick Update—*Dr. Joe Paschal*

12:10 The Sustainability Movement—*Dr. Megan Clayton*

12:30 FINAL QUESTIONS/ADJOURN

2020 Landowners Workshop Series (Walker County)

#1: Options for Property Management

Monday, April 27th, 2020 (THIS EVENT IS PROBABLY GOING TO BE POSTPONED WATCH FOR NEW DATES)

Additional Items and Information of Note:

Pruning Hedges

I was outside in the yard "enjoying" all the pollen floating around two weekends ago while pruning my hedges. We always cover this hedge pruning topic somewhere in the Master Gardener class and it is an item I have learned that many people don't really understand even if they do it every year.

Pruning in general can be done at any time of the year, however. Timing for best management varies based on the plant species. Generally, it is better to prune prior to the initiation of spring growth. If the flush of growth prior to pruning is too much, the plant is losing nutrients it very much needs for growth.

Late pruning (end of summer) can also cause issues as this may encourage a late flush of growth which can cause winter kill or cold damage.

Yes, it IS getting a bit late in the year, but not yet too late. How late is too late, you may ask? The answer is if the hedge has new growth more than one foot in length, you are too late.

Cuts made when pruning should be clean and smooth. Be sure to use sharp equipment. The pruning of hedges is quite a bit different thing than the pruning of shrubs. That is a long story for another time. When planning your hedge work, approach the plant with an overall view and intent to keep the base of the hedge wider than the top. There is a simple reason for this as plants require sunlight and if it is too wide up top, the base of the hedge can be shaded which will then begin to thin and weaken.

Vegetable Gardens

If you have seen and noted the run on our grocery stores, you may have a renewed interest in home gardens...

March vegetable plantings (ideal time): Beans, Lima & Snap Bush & Pole; Corn (soil is warming), Cucumbers (mid-month into April); Eggplants (mid-month into June); Cantaloupe & other musk melons (mid-month into June); Peppers (mid-month into April); Pumpkin (mid-month into mid-July); Radish (yuck..); Squash (mid-month through April); Tomatoes (protect them from wind). I gave you all the link last month, but it is still a good reference: <http://counties.agrilife.org/walker/files/2011/05/WC-Vegetable-Planting-Chart1.pdf>

If you don't have space for a "traditional" flat garden, think about growing vegetables in containers. There are a lot of "other" space options that can be utilized.

<https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/library/gardening/vegetable-gardening-in-containers/>

At the Spring Garden Expo back in February, I was visiting with one of my Master Gardeners and we discussed the possibility of how many people are overlooking small space vertical gardening options. One of my thoughts (*in no way original*) is to grow vegetables and herbs on fences. With a simple horizontal gutter system incorporating a slight downward slope for drainage, we could utilize a lot of overlooked space on fences around our yards and barns. Just don't use fences that livestock have access to or that project is OVER. Think about the available space you have and take advantage of it.

Fertilizing Lawns, now or later?

The short answer: If you have mowed your grass three times it is time to fertilize. I didn't say, if you have mowed your winter weeds three times, it is your grass that you want to use as the gauge. When the grass has grown to the point where you have had to mow grass leaves three times, then it has enough leaf surface to collect sunlight and process the nutrients you are providing to the roots via your expensive fertilizer.

If you ask how much to fertilize, you need to have a soil test analyzed. We have the forms and collection bags here at the office.

Grubs in lawns...

After pruning my hedges, the other day, I was dive bombed in the garage by a couple of "June bugs". If it isn't June can these things really be June bugs? Probably not. Regardless, do we need to treat the grubs that you are finding in your lawn now?

The answer is no. White grubs found in lawns right now are a non-feeding form which will emerge as adults around May. It is likely that the grubs seen in your lawn are technically a scarab beetle known as either a June beetle or a masked chafer. Most harm from grubs will happen July to October when they go back to the ground and lay new eggs which then form young feeding grubs.

Treat for grubs later in the summer when the economic threshold of three per square foot is reached. Any treatment in early spring will not be effective when it is really needed later in the year.

There are over 100 very similar looking species of these beetles found in Texas. Most are harmless, but with that said, if you see a great number of “June bugs” flying around later in the spring/early summer, they can actually damage young trees and lawn plants. I can tell you how to build a “June bug” trap. Now that’s a seriously fun project. Almost as fun as an old-style bug zapper. Call me...

Yes, I am getting phone calls:

Industrial Hemp Production in Texas

Everybody wants to be in on the ground floor of a new thing. Keep in mind the ground floor is where knowledge is most limited. AgriLife Extension is working to learn the information that those of you with interest are wanting and needing to know. Our team is working to gather and distribute information that will begin answering questions. Some questions can be addressed now, while some will take time to learn what and how our location(s) and weather will impact this crop. The industrial hemp information which has been gathered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension can be viewed at:

<https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/browse/hemp/>

Native Grasses for Walker County

There seems to be a great interest in native grasses at the moment based on the phone calls and electronic-based questions I am receiving. If I was guessing and I am, it would have to be the increasing interest in wildlife land tax valuation and new landowners. Native grasses are a very good thing; however, there is a reason we have so much land with introduced and improved grasses.

You have to totally understand the management and limitations of native grasses for these to be often considered successful and long term. That is sort of an odd thing to say about plants native to our area and the reasons could fill a newsletter of their own. Some of the limitations that most people need to know is (1) you have to have the proper equipment to plant grasses with fluffy type seeds (not our standard equipment), (2) the establishment phase for most native grasses can require up to 2-3 years, and (3) these grasses do not tolerate extended or heavy livestock grazing pressure when they are fully established.

When exploring native grasses for Walker County, keep in mind that where you are (in the county) will affect which grasses you can successfully grow. Our county is comprised of two ecological regions. Some land here is comprised of piney woods and some is post oak savannah and of course there are some areas where the two ecology areas overlap to some extent one way or another.

Native grasses for the piney woods type areas:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Big blue stem | Bushy bluestem |
| Broomsedge | Inland sea-oats |
| Canada wildrye | |

Native grasses for the post oak savannah type areas:

| | |
|---------------|------------|
| Big blue stem | Broomsedge |
|---------------|------------|

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Sideoats grama | Cane bluestem |
| Buffalograss | Inland sea-oats |
| Hooded windmillgrass | Canada wildrye |
| Big muhly | Little bluestem |
| Indiangrass | |

You should also note that our rainfall amounts will even impact the list(s) above since we may receive amounts in excess of tolerances for some of those grasses such as Buffalograss. There are other native grasses which will grow here; however, the list above is the general base. Some of the grasses on the Post Oak Savanna list will grow in the Piney Woods soils due to the closeness of our ecoregion(s). Just make sure you have plenty of sunlight for all of the open space grasses.

Following up on my previous information here is some additional reading:

Excerpted from **Using Goals & Profitability to Determine What to Plant in Pastures**, by Clayton, Young, Redmon & Smith, ERM=033, 5/17

Landowners replant a pasture for many reasons such as invasive plants, drought impacts, wildlife concerns, or changes in the ranch operation. Choosing the right pasture plants involves important considerations.

What are your goals?

Always begin management decisions by establishing goals for the property. A written plan helps you optimize the time, effort, and money spent on ranch operations. Goals define where you ultimately want to be; objectives serve as guidelines to achieve those goals.

Objectives should be measurable and revisited at the end of every year or season. For example, you may want to increase calving rates by 5 percent or to harvest deer to meet a predetermined sex ratio. Before planting a pasture, determine if the land will be managed solely for livestock production or does wildlife contribute to your profit or recreational interests?

Many landowners now manage for both livestock and wildlife on the same piece of property. Cattle may thrive on pastures of thick, introduced forage grasses. Wildlife do best where a diversity of native plants, including broadleaf forbs (herbaceous plants other than grass) and brush, provide not only food for various wildlife species, but also diverse cover for protection from predators or shade from the sun.

On most Texas properties, landowner's base management decisions such as planting or brush management on a combination of livestock and wildlife priorities. However, there is a difference between maximizing a livestock operation (maintaining the highest carrying capacity possible for the most profit) and using cattle as a tool to manage habitat for a particular wildlife species. Your goals may even vary by pasture or section of the ranch.

What are you willing to sacrifice?

While there are pros and cons to every management decision, it helps to recognize what you are willing to tolerate. Introduced grasses, such as buffelgrass and Tifton 85 bermudagrass, often establish quicker, may be less expensive to establish, and have the potential to grow more forage per acre than most native plant species. Planting these grasses could translate into grazing more livestock on the acreage with less delay after planting. However, these introduced species need more inputs, such as fertilizer, irrigation, or weed control to do well. Also, they typically grow as a monoculture, or pasture with one dominant grass species, which is far less desirable for wildlife management.

Planting native grasses in a mix, even with some forbs, increases the success of establishing the stand and provides the diverse plant species necessary for wildlife habitat.

Choose seeds adapted for your area and plant them according to recommendations. Often, native seed cost is considerably higher than introduced species because of a limited supply of native seed, but once established, there are fewer, if any, input costs associated with fertilizer and herbicide.

The diversity of plants that grow in a native seeding can provide both livestock grazing and wildlife habitat, although you must delay livestock grazing for a couple of years to establish the native plants. Also, to balance both wildlife and livestock needs and to maintain stands of native plants, stocking rates are more conservative and managed more carefully in response to rainfall.

What can you expect for production?

It is probably not surprising that grasses introduced for livestock forages can typically produce more forage (dry forage per acre) than a native plant mix. How would you estimate the potential increase in livestock stocking rate with the added cost of cattle ownership and depreciation? Annual cow variable cost is usually around \$550 to \$600 per cow (2017 numbers), including costs such as vaccinations, supplementation when needed, pregnancy testing, and some labor costs for those intense cattle working days.

When restoring the pasture, plants typically establish best when deferred from grazing or haying for some time. Allowing the plants to seed out fully adds valuable seed back into the soil for germination later. Native plants cannot withstand the grazing intensity that introduced species can, nor can they be grazed as soon after establishment as introduced forages. So, deferring grazing for 2 years is recommended for natives, whereas Tifton 85 can be grazed or hayed a year after planting.

Use only 25 percent of the total forage produced on a native pasture for livestock, accounting for insects, trampling, and stubble, which should be left standing. This stubble maintains healthy plant root systems, provides cover for wildlife, helps water infiltrate into the soil instead of running off, prevents soil erosion, and provides many other important ecosystem benefits. In our example, the native field yielded 3,000 pounds of forage per acre. Introduced grasses can safely be grazed more intensely than natives, so we estimate a 65-percent use of Tifton 85 (of 5,000 total pounds per acre).

What is the future use of the land?

Although we base many decisions on what benefits our operation now, choosing the plant type warrants some consideration of what will happen to the land in the future. If you plan to pass the family ranch down to your children or grandchildren, will their land-use goals be the same as yours? If you intend to improve and then sell your land, what would be more desirable to a buyer?

Currently, people purchasing land usually place more emphasis on wildlife habitat and recreational hunting than on cattle production. Once you have established many of the introduced grasses, they may be hard to eradicate. If you later choose to plant natives for their additional wildlife benefit, you may find that the introduced species continue to out-compete the natives. Remember, there are agriculture property tax valuations available for both agricultural practices and wildlife management. Check with your local tax appraiser for information specific to your county.

If you have questions or would like more information regarding Extension Educational Programs, call us at (936) 435-2426.



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Provisions from the American Disability Act will be considered when planning educational programs and activities. Please notify the Walker County Extension Office if you plan on attending an Extension Educational program and need specialized services. Notification of at least three to five days in advance is needed, so that we may have ample time to acquire resources needed to meet your needs.

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