Challenges Facing Texas Farmers and Ranchers

- Livestock and poultry producers are facing serious threats from pervasive and invasive animal diseases such as bird influenza, Rift Valley fever, West Nile virus, and tick-borne diseases.
- Changing global markets and the management of agricultural production and price risk have farmers and ranchers seeking ways to maximize production efficiency to maintain competitiveness.
- Issues regarding Texas’ water supply and demand balance have brought about the need for more efficient use of this vital resource.
- Rising input costs and various production-related challenges, including droughts, invasive species and other pests have placed serious stress on farmers and ranchers across the state.

AgriLife Extension’s Response

In agriculture, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service delivers wide-ranging educational programs focused on research-based production and management practices, evaluation of technologies, improved decision making, water-use efficiency, and job training.

- Programs for crop producers cover variety testing, irrigation efficiency, disease and pest identification and control, commodity marketing, financial risk management, and farm bill education.
- Programs for livestock operations focus on improved reproduction strategies, animal health, feeds and nutrition, forage production, breeding stock replacement strategies, and livestock marketing.
- AgriLife Extension is at the forefront in responding to emerging issues such as drought, wildfires, and insect and disease outbreaks.
- Through 16,500 educational events, planning meetings, and workshops in 2017, AgriLife Extension achieved more than 3 million educational and other contacts.
- AgriLife Extension often collaborates with industry groups and with other government entities to deliver educational programs.

Economic Impacts

Selected programs are highlighted below. Impacts were measured by the increase in net returns associated with adoption of certain management practices taught in 2017.

- Livestock and dairy production programs resulted in an estimated economic gain of $42.8 million, and programs that focused on managing crop and livestock-related financial risk resulted in estimated gains of $39 million.
- Outreach related to crops, floriculture, and nursery production led to an estimated increase in annual net returns of $105.1 million, and assisted cotton growers with variety selection valued at $22.9 million.
- Extension plays a significant role in the boll weevil eradication program, which had estimated benefits of $328 million, with cumulative benefits of $3.9 billion since 1996.
- These crop and livestock-related impacts supported an additional 3,236 jobs in agribusiness and retail sectors.
- 75,000 Texas farmers used the web-based decision aid for the 2014 Farm Bill, developed by the Agricultural & Food Policy Center (AFPC), with an estimated impact of improved decision making valued at $1.3 billion annually.
- Provided required job training and continuing education related to pesticide safety, cotton ginning, and beef cattle handling for 65,732 business owners and employees, with an annual wage base of $965.3 million.