

## ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF EXTENSION EDUCATION

### PRIVATE WATER WELL CONCERNS

- More than a million private water wells in Texas provide water to 3 million people in rural areas and to those living on small acreages at the growing rural-urban interface.
- Private water wells have a greater risk of exposure to compromised water quality than do public supply water wells, which are monitored according to the Safe Drinking Water Act.
- Nitrates and *E. coli* bacteria are the most common contaminants of private water wells.

### AGRILIFE EXTENSION'S RESPONSE

- The Texas Well Owner Network (TWON) was created by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in cooperation with the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) and other collaborating agencies and organizations.
- The program is designed to deliver science-based, community-responsive education curricula focused on protecting groundwater quality and aquifer integrity. It complements the successful Texas Watershed Stewards Program, which also emphasizes best management practices.
- TWON offers two programs: "Well Educated," a full-day educational curriculum, and "Well Informed," a one-hour curriculum.
- TWON teaches Texans about water quality and best management practices for protecting their wells and surface waters, with the goal of averting off-site contaminants away from surface waters, preventing contamination of underlying aquifers, and safeguarding the health of landowners and their families.

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- Since TWON began screening well water in 2011, private water well screenings and wellhead protection trainings have been conducted for more than 17,550 private water well managers through 117 "Well Educated" and 183 "Well Informed" events in 186 counties across the state.
- Overall, primary (potential health risk) or secondary water quality standards were exceeded in 58% of 1,412 private water well samples screened by TWON in 2024. *E. coli* was detected in 3% of samples while 18% exceeded water quality standards for nitrate. In tests for arsenic, 47 of 608 samples (8%) had levels exceeding water quality standards.

### ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- One year after the program, 97% of participants with wells near contamination sources (pet shelters, livestock pens, etc.) had moved the sources; 67% with abandoned wells had plugged or capped those wells; and 66% with septic tanks needing pumping had pumped their tanks.
- Participants of TWON programs in 2024 were asked to self-assess the value of the program. The average response from more than 1,280 participants was \$1,088, or a total of \$1.4 million.
- For more information, please visit <http://twon.tamu.edu>.