



TMBC/Border Region Review

The newsletter for the Texas/Mexico Border Coalition CBO in partnership with UTPA and other border region organizations; providing information about TMBC and border region projects which are coordinated and enhanced through Project FORGE.

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Aisha Cruz, Editor

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First NHFR Conference a success

During a three-day conference in San Antonio hosted by the Texas/Mexico Border Coalition (TMBC), top officials from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials vowed to improve program availability and delivery to the nation's rural Hispanic communities.

“Education, partnership development, networking and improved customer service were underlying themes of the first National Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference,” said Omar Garza, chairman of TMBC.

The groundbreaking “Risk Management through Environmental Stewardship” conference provided a forum for representatives of federal and state agencies, industry, and academia to offer information on farm programs, water issues, food safety, small farm initiatives, and financial risk management.

True to its title, a significant portion of the conference was dedicated to information on risk management practices. The USDA Risk Management Agency was vital to the success of the conference.

Topics such as *Water Issues* and *Sustainable, Organic, and Alternate Farm Production* were presented at the conference. Sessions on *Food Safety* and *Financial and Environmental Risk Management* were also available.

Presenters of the sessions ranged from business owners to federal and state government agency employees to university educators. Presentations by the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service were conducted in Spanish.

Colien Hefferan, administrator for the USDA Cooperative State Research,



FSA Administrator Jim Little, with a delegation of Hispanic producers, at the National Hispanic Farmers & Ranchers Conference.

Education, and Extension Services (CSREES), spoke at the event. CSREES was a significant provider of support for the conference. Initial funding for the conference was provided by a CSREES grant program. Supplementary funding was provided by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Food Safety and Inspection Service.

James Little, administrator for the USDA's Farm Service Agency highlighted FSA's successful involvement in The University of Texas-Pan American's Hispanic Farm and Ranch Management (HiFARM) Project. The HiFARM initiative is funded primarily through FSA and is designed to help Hispanic agricultural producers in a 56-county focus area along the Texas and New Mexico border region.

Little encouraged producers to return to their communities and develop similar partnerships between USDA and their community-based organizations.

Garza declared the First National Hispanic Farmer & Rancher Conference a success.

“This conference has established a foundation for us to build an annual, enjoyable, educational, and mutually beneficial event for Hispanic farmers and ranchers, their families, USDA and members of the agriculture industry,” Garza said.

Events Calendar:

June

- 01 GAP Food Safety Training, San Antonio, Texas
- 05 Farm & Ranch Expo, Rio Grande City, Texas
- 16 *Food Handling Safety and Estate Planning Workshop*, Edinburg, Texas
- 28 NARC & DC Forum, Kansas City, Mo.

July

- 07 *Food Safety and Estate Planning Workshop*, Laredo, Texas
- 14 *Food Safety and Estate Planning Workshop*, Alice, Texas
- 28 *Food Safety and Estate Planning Workshop*, Hebbroville, Texas

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Food safety and estate planning workshops

Four workshops will be presented in the summer of 2004.

Workshops will cover food handling safety or BSE and West Nile Virus and estate planning.

Employees of the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, Animal and Plant Inspection Service and Texas Department of Health will lead the food safety sessions. Local attorneys specializing in the topic will cover estate planning.

For more information or special accommodations, please contact the TMBC at (956)488-0534. [Back to page 1](#)

NRCS news

The TMBC and Starr County NRCS have established a working relationship that provides for easy communication between organizations.

All 2004 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) applications submitted to the NRCS office by the April 16, 2004 deadline have been reviewed and ranked. This process was completed May 28 and contracts are currently being written. Work on approved contracts may begin on October 1, 2004.

EQIP is a cost-share program that provides producers a percentage of the cost for certain conservation practices. Eligible practices include root plow, brush management, constructing cross-fences, water wells, and water storage facilities.

Kenneth Buford, Starr County district conservationist, reminds Texas producers that local NRCS offices are now

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The TMBC is a community-based organization focused on maintaining the health, social, environmental, and economic integrity of rural communities in the border regions of Texas and New Mexico's international borders.

The Second National Farmers and Ranchers Conference has been tentatively set for April 2005 in Edinburg, Texas. For more conference information, please contact TMBC at (956)488-0534 or visit online at www.tm-bc.org [Back to page 1](#)



Roberto and Lori Trevizo, W. Texas producers; and Rigoberto Delgado, Heifer Project International and TMBC Director at the first NHFR Conference.

HiFARM connects producers to USDA

The Hispanic Farm and Ranch Management (HiFARM) Project is a vital link between border region producers and the USDA. HiFARM's outreach programs have benefited South Texas producers in a variety of ways.

One such instance is that of Baldomero Bazan of Rio Grande City, Texas. With the help of Neal Alvarado, HiFARM technical assistance provider, Bazan applied to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to build a well that would provide water for his livestock. The land was not suitable to be grazed before this time.

EQIP is a cost-share program provided by the USDA and NRCS. To qualify for this

assistance, Bazan agreed to operate the well for the term of the contract.

Based on Bazan's income, he was able to receive 90 percent of the cost of installing the water well, including materials and labor, which totaled more than \$4,000.

Alvarado also assists with surveying and transecting contracted acreage and certifying conservation practices.

The HiFARM focus region includes 67 percent of the Hispanic operators in Texas and New Mexico and 27 percent of the Hispanic operators in the United States.

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Small business recommends Project FORGE

Although it was already a successful business, RY Livestock Sales was in search of a different method to reach its clientele.

When Project FORGE, an umbrella project that coordinates and enhances a number of border region initiatives, announced a computer and Internet training workshop in Rio Grande City, Texas, RY staff members jumped at the opportunity. They attended the training and soon after launched RY Livestock into cyberspace, with wonderful results.

Sam Rodriguez, owner of RY Livestock Sales, points out the advantages he has acquired through his experience with Project FORGE.

In addition to basic Web site training, RY Livestock learned the importance of an up-to-date, easy-to-manage computer accounting system. This form of accounting makes keeping up with the daily accounting

transactions very simple.

"All we have to do is enter the information as it becomes available, and the program does the rest. It makes periodic reports much easier," Rodriguez said.

The Web site offers updated market reports, private treaty livestock and equipment sale announcements, and RY's sale list for a particular day.

Rodriguez and his employees agree the training and the overall experience with the Project FORGE staff was very positive. They all recommend that small businesses take advantage of similar opportunities that comes their way.

To discuss computer and Internet training, contact Ismael Delgado at (956)292-7542.

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accepting EQIP applications for 2005.

Approved applicants are guaranteed to receive at least 50 percent assistance while limited resource producers can receive up to 90 percent of the costs incurred.

For complete details on EQIP requirements, contact your local NRCS office.

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TMBC CBO Directors and Staff

Chairman, Omar J. Garza
Santa Elena, Texas

Vice-Chairman, Ray Margo
Santa Elena, Texas

Secretary, Homero Vela
Premont, Texas

Treasurer, Samuel Rodriguez
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Director, Mario Escobar
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Director, Ruben Carrasco
Presidio, Texas

Director, Rigoberto Delgado
El Paso, Texas

Technical Assistance,
Neal Alvarado

Project Director, RMA,
Rodolfo Garza III

Asst. Project Director,
Aisha Lee Cruz

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The Art of Public Relations

Nothing makes for a better training day than great presenters with passion for their job. TMBC staff members and UT Pan American program directors gathered at the UTPA Annex, April 20 and 21 to reap the benefits of a well-chosen and well-delivered public relations workshop.

Guest presenters at the workshop were among the most qualified the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) had to offer. Collectively, their influence spanned the nation. Presenters included: Brenda Carlson, Southwest Region Public Affairs Specialist; Mark Dennis, Northeast Area Public Affairs Specialist; and Ronda Adams, Program Specialist and Communications Coordinator for the Texas FSA. The workshop was titled, "The Art of Communications: Managing Media, Messages and Mayhem."

"Brenda [Carlson] and her team have a lot to offer organizations that want to effectively reach the public. We are very glad they could make the trek to South Texas," said George Bennack, director of Project FORGE, an umbrella project that coordinates and enhances a number of border region initiatives.

During the two-day event, workshop participants were coached in dealing with the media, given some useful tips in photography, guided through event-planning procedures and instructed in desktop publishing. Participants were put to the test when they were challenged to play the role of reporters and write a news article that was later critiqued by Adams.

"Overall, this was a great way to spend the day. It was high-energy and extremely relevant to the purpose of our organizations," said Omar Garza, TMBC director.

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\$1.8M in grants awarded to Texas farmers

In December 2003, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced the approval of seven Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) in Texas, totaling \$1.8 million.

"The grants will foster the development of value-added projects to help create the opportunity for economic development and job creation in rural areas," Veneman said. Authorized as part of the 2002 Farm Bill, the VAPG Program provides support to refine agricultural commodities and products and increase their value in the marketplace.

"The VAPG program was very competitive this year," noted Bryan Daniel, Texas State Director of Rural Development.

He also said 184 grants were approved in 40 states for a total of more than \$28.7 million. Three of the seven Texas VAPGs were secured by clients of the Texas Rural Cooperative Development Center.

Planter's and Petronila Grain Cooperatives received a joint award for working capital to penetrate a new Mexican market. Additionally, the Texas Aquaculture Cooperative was

awarded a grant for working capital to develop and market a new line of frozen catfish products.

A planning grant was awarded to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Hispanic Farmers' Cooperative that will develop a network of controlled environment, agricultural greenhouses for hydroponic and organic vegetable production.

USDA Rural Development Texas Representative Billy Curb acknowledged that due to the rigorous application process and evaluation criteria, only seven of 29 Texas applicants were awarded. He encouraged those agricultural cooperatives that wish to submit VAPG applications for 2004 to contact the center for technical assistance.

The center provides technical assistance to potential and existing cooperatives facing specific challenges. According to Albert Canales, director of the center, technical assistance includes helping a co-op develop a business plan to cope with new competitive forces, decide whether to form a joint venture with other cooperatives and find a way to turn raw products of co-op members into value-added products.

To arrange an appointment with the Center call Ismael Delgado at (956)292-7542.

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