



# 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.

Issue 6

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## 2006 Southwest Regional Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference



The first Southwest Regional Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference, hosted by the Texas/Mexico Border Coalition (TMBC) and several USDA agencies was held April 30 – May 3, 2006 in Edinburg, Texas. The Conference was themed, “Sustaining Border Region Agriculture through Risk Management”.

The focus audience of the Conference was Hispanic agricultural producers in the United States-Mexico border region. More than 125 participants from across the U.S. attended the panel discussions, tours, and Farm Bill Policy Forum included on the Conference agenda.

Attendees were welcomed to the Conference by Omar Garza, TMBC Chairman, and Dr. Blandina Cardenas, University of Texas – Pan American President. Opening ceremonies were followed by three discussion panels, each with its own emphasis.

The Risk Management panel was led by Alesia Swan of the USDA Risk Management Agency. Members of the panel were Tammi King with United Farmers from South Carolina; Ruby Ward from Utah State University; and Larry Owens of USDA Farm

Service Agency. This panel emphasized the importance of, and strategies for, record-keeping and financial planning.

The Alternative Agriculture panel was led by Al Almanza with the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service. Dr. Daniel Leskovar and Dr. Nasi Malik, both with the Texas Agriculture Extension Service, discussed less-traditional crops that are successful in the border regions of Texas, and other states.

The Traditional Agriculture panel was led by Tomas Dominguez with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Members of this panel included Benny Cano, USDA Farm Service Agency; Norman Bade, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Lupe Torres with the Texas Department of Agriculture. Each panelist described the programs and services their respective agencies provide.

A banquet themed “A Traditional Night in South Texas” capped off the first day of the Conference. Participants and guests enjoyed traditional Hispanic cuisine such as carne guisada and cabrito and enjoyed mariachi music and folklorico dancers.

At the banquet, honors were presented to

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## Events Calendar:

### June

- 2 Risk Management/Ranchers’ Seminar  
Floresville, Texas
- 10 Risk Management/Ranchers’ Seminar  
Mercedes, Texas
- 22 Risk Management/Farmers’ Seminar  
McCook, Texas

### July

- 20 Risk Management Seminar  
Alice, Texas
- 23 NOPHNRCSE Conference  
Orlando, Florida

### August

- 2 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Partners Meeting  
Washington, DC

## Risk Management Workshops

This summer, the USDA Risk Management Agency-funded FARM Project has three risk management-centered meetings scheduled in the South Texas region.

To kick off the summer, the first workshop will take place in Floresville, Texas. Biofuel, no-till farming, and rainwater harvesting are among the topics for the day.

Additionally, TMBC has paired with the Hidalgo County Farm Bureau to host workshops in Mercedes and McCook, Texas.

The emphasis includes livestock and crop insurance, livestock marketing, the national animal ID program, and eGov. Hidalgo County is home to the largest number of Hispanic agriculture producers in Texas.

For more information on TMBC risk management workshops in the Texas-Mexico border region and the FARM Project, [contact Raul Villarreal, Jr.](#)



## Technical Service Assistance Project

TMBC's many outreach activities have been supported and funded, primarily, by USDA agencies. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a strong partner to TMBC.

TMBC's Technical Service Assistance Project (TSP) employs five people in Texas to supply NRCS and local producers with assistance to plan, implement, and certify conservation practices for NRCS programs.

In the past year, TMBC employees have assisted more than 2,000 producers with EQIP contracts. In the last six months, more than 50 CRP participants and 300 other producers have benefited from TSP.

Typically, a "TSPer" will work one-on-one with agricultural producers to apply for NRCS programs, create a unique conservation plan, find the appropriate contractors to complete the work, and certify the finished task.

A "TSPer" usually finds themselves in an office setting for 40 percent of the time, and out in the South Texas heat the rest," says Neal Alvarado, a TSP employee in Rio Grande City, Texas.

"A heavy workload and small staff make 'TSPers' necessary," said Omar Garza, TMBC Chairman.

For more information about the Technical Service Assistance Project, [contact TMBC](#).

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TMBC Director Larry Ernst and former Texas Congressman Kika de la Garza for their hard and persistent efforts to improve conditions for border region ag producers.

A special presentation was made to Minerva Margo to honor her late husband Ray Margo, a former USDA employee who influenced many agriculture professionals, producers, and students through his work and his life.

On Tuesday, attendees toured Rio Grande Valley agricultural operations. Destinations included H&H Foods, a meat packing plant; Aloe King, an aloe vera farm; Valley Sugar Mill, the only sugar mill in Texas; Rio Farms, a citrus research farm; and What-A-Melon, a family-owned watermelon shed. At each stop, owners shared information on their businesses and industries.

The final day of the conference included the Technical Assistance Session, an opportunity for producers to interact with ag professionals directly; and the Farm Policy Forum.

The Forum, lead by Edmond Gomez of New Mexico State University, served as an outlet for ag producers to voice their concerns and ideas about the 2007 Farm Bill. Comments collected at the Forum were recorded and will be routed to the appropriate agency.

The Southwest Regional Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference was a great accomplishment and another stepping stone for Hispanic ag producers.



Mr. Elizondo and Mrs. Martinez, producers in the Benavides, Texas area, review recordkeeping material supplied in the Risk Management Panel.



Following the Alternative Ag panel, Dr. Leskovar (right) and his assistant (center) speak with Fidencio Salazar, a cattle producer from San Antonio.

The Conference was a diverse assembly of ag producers who continue to provide for themselves and for the world. It was an effective medium for the exchange of information, ideas, and resources that will help attendees to improve their operations.

Along with TMBC, USDA Risk Management Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Office of Outreach, Office of Civil Rights, National Agriculture Statistics Service, and Cooperative State Research Extension and Education Service contributed to the Southwest Regional Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference. Additional supporters were the University of Texas – Pan American and Texas Department of Agriculture.

For more information on the Conference, including materials from panel discussions, please [contact TMBC](#).

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Agriculture producers from Los Fresnos, Texas talk with Vidal Saenz, an Ag Loan Specialist with the Prairie View Cooperative Extension Program in McAllen, Texas.



## Computer & Internet Training

### Mondays

Mercedes, TX .....10a – 12p  
Los Fresnos, TX .....1p – 3p

### Wednesday

Sebastian, TX .....830a – 930a  
Raymondville, TX ...10a – 1130a  
Premont, TX .....130p – 330p

### Thursday

Ben Bolt, TX .....5p – 630p  
Alice, TX .....7p – 830p

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# Friends of eFARM



The CSREES-funded eFARM Project has been running strong for one and a half years and continues to gain support from various organizations in rural communities.

At the end of 2005, the rural community of Premont, Texas expressed a strong interest in computer and Internet training classes. Unfortunately, the public library lacked a structured computer lab and Internet connectivity.

Cooperation between Library Director Mrs. Salinas, community leaders, and Time Warner Cable resulted in the library being

wired for cable Internet.

In another gracious move, Salinas offered to travel the fifteen miles from her library in Alice to Premont with six laptops for class each week.

Now, in a lab with eight computer stations and high-speed Internet available, eFARM classes in Premont are so popular, there is a waiting list.

For information on computer and Internet training, [contact Aisha Cruz](#).

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### TMBC CBO Directors and Staff

**Chairman,** Omar J. Garza  
Santa Elena, Texas

**Vice-Chairman,** Larry Ernst  
Leaky, Texas

**Secretary,** Homero Vera  
Premont, Texas

**Treasurer,** Samuel Rodriguez  
Rio Grande City, Texas

**Director,** Guillermo Benavides  
Laredo, Texas

**Director,** David A. Garza  
San Benito, Texas

**Director,** Mark Grijalva  
Fabens, Texas

**Director,** Mario Escobar  
Crystal City, Texas

**Director,** Fidel del Barrio, PhD  
San Antonio, Texas

**Director,** Rigoberto Delgado, PhD  
El Paso, Texas

**Director,** Minerva Margo  
Santa Elena, Texas

**Project Director, eFARM,**  
Aisha Lee Cruz

**Project Director, FARM,**  
Raul Villarreal, Jr.

## UTPA Receives USDA Funding

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development has awarded a \$228,536 Rural Cooperative Development Grant to The University of Texas - Pan American (UTPA).

According to the USDA web site, Rural Cooperative Development grants help establish and operate centers for cooperative development for the primary purpose of improving the economic condition of rural areas through the development of new cooperatives and improving operations of existing cooperatives. The USDA desires to encourage and stimulate the development of effective cooperative organizations in rural America as a part of its total package of rural development efforts.

The grant will fund the Texas Rural Cooperative Center, a program designed to improve the economic condition of rural areas along the Texas-Mexico border through the development of cooperative business structures, training and technical assistance.

Cooperatives benefit rural residents by reducing costs associated with product production and purchasing; developing housing and credit; building and operating rural utilities; and providing other services needed in rural neighborhoods.

USDA Rural Development State Director Bryan Daniel awarded the check to George Bennack, an Associate Director for the UTPA Office of Center Operations and Community Services (CoSERVE), a public service division of UTPA.

“USDA Rural Development promotes efforts to provide assistance to rural areas in the Texas/Mexico border region. This grant will promote the support of cooperatives that directly impact small, South Texas rural communities,” said Daniel.

CoSERVE, an umbrella organization for twenty-three community outreach centers, will oversee the new Texas Rural Cooperative Center through its Business and Community Development Division.

“Obtaining funding to provide community services to our rural communities is highly competitive. We are grateful to USDA for recognizing the need in our area and appreciate the strong support given to UTPA by area legislators to receive this type of funding,” said Bennack.

For more information on program services offered by the Center, or other community services at UTPA, contact the CoSERVE Business and Community Development Division at (956) 292-7542.

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