



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.

October/November 2004, Issue 3

Aisha Cruz, Editor

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Federal fiscal year 2005 kicks off

October 2004 marked the beginning of several projects for the TMBC. And as it does every year, this federal fiscal year started with a flurry of meetings.

The USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) called a Community Outreach Project Directors' Meeting in Kansas City, Mo. in mid-October.

Attendees of the meeting included directors or agents of organizations who have been chosen to participate in a RMA Partnership Agreement for the year. The purpose of the two-day meeting was to welcome new project directors to the RMA family. Existing directors were re-acquainted with proper finance and reporting procedures and provided civil rights updates.

Each organization reported on their activities from the previous year. Most importantly, though, the meeting was a chance to visit with colleagues in agricultural outreach from across the country.

Just a few days after returning from Kansas City, the TMBC staff traveled to Laredo, Texas to attend the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation District's Annual Meeting.

This meeting was an assembly of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service executives and conservationists sharing techniques and success stories of their conservation efforts across Texas. The meeting also included an exhibition of agricultural organizations with products and services to sell and share. In addition to attending different sessions at the meeting, the TMBC sponsored an information booth.

The Laredo meeting provided a backdrop for the TMBC to hold a meeting of its own directors.

Lead by Omar Garza, TMBC chairman, the directors' meeting was an opportunity to update TMBC directors on the coalition's

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Events Calendar:

October

- 01 FARM Project funding begins
- 01 FARM Project, Year 2 begins
- 12 RMA Project Directors' Meeting Kansas City, Mo
- 18 TMBC Directors' Meeting Laredo, Texas
- 18 Texas SWCD's Meeting Laredo, Texas

November

- 03 TDA Agricultural Diversification Conference Weslaco, Texas
- 08 FSA COC ballots mailed out
- 29 NASS Meeting Austin, Texas

Preparations for eFARM underway

Proper implementation of the electronic Farm and Ranch Management (eFARM) Project requires TMBC staff to be savvy in the programs and applications of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA), as well as in computer and Internet applications.

Therefore, the TMBC has been in constant contact with the NRCS and FSA to schedule training sessions with each group. Plans for these sessions are going well and all of the organizations involved are eager to move ahead with this innovative project.

In the meantime, TMBC staff is independently studying the electronic government (eGov) initiative in order to form a well-rounded understanding before meeting with USDA trainers. And at the same time, a general curriculum for the project is being

created for the training sessions.

The ultimate goal of the eFARM Project is to train producers in the TMBC service area to utilize the USDA eGov initiative.

The TMBC will achieve this goal by providing Internet and computer instruction and teaching producers how to use the eGov features to save time and travel.

In addition to training sessions, the eFARM Project involves the coordination and implementation of a Help Desk and technical assistance services that will be available to training session participants. Help Desk technicians will be able to assist callers with Internet and computer concerns and with questions pertaining to NRCS and FSA

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NRCS news

Two very important activities are taking place within USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices in the next couple of months.

The NRCS invites the public to participate in Program Development Group (PDG) meetings occurring in each county across the United States. The purpose of the PDG meetings is to encourage participation and comments from local individuals, agencies, organizations and businesses interested in natural resource conditions and needs.

A guiding principle of the 2002 USDA Farm Bill supports conservation programs that are locally led. PDG meetings offer the public an opportunity to help set program priorities specific to their county.

Discussions in PDG meetings will help Local Work Groups (LWG) decide on recommendations to make to the USDA concerning resource issues specific to each county. These issues include eligible and vital conservation practices, appropriate cost-share rates, and the criteria for ranking for the county-based EQIP funding.

EQIP, a cost-share program, was established to help landowners apply conservation plans to address resource conservation concerns specific to each county. EQIP practices may include constructing livestock watering facilities, brush management, and cross fencing.

USDA cost-share funds have been released earlier this year compared to previous years, giving farmers and ranchers more time to consider using conservation practices before planting season begins. Producers can submit EQIP applications until the expected deadline in January or February 2005.

The TMBC is a close partner to the NRCS in the processing of EQIP contracts. For more information about the PDG or EQIP visit the NRCS Web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov

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activities, finances, and alliances. TMBC staff members received valuable feedback from the directors who attended the meeting.

In the first month of the federal fiscal year 2005, the TMBC staff has managed to

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programs and applications. Facilities for the Help Desk are being prepared now in anticipation of its need following the first training sessions scheduled for January 2005.

Settings for training sessions are currently being sought out. Ideal sites for the sessions are local schools, libraries and community centers with established Internet connectivity. An added bonus would be that these amenities are readily available to project participants beyond days of training.

Many contacts for these sites are presently

squeeze three very important gatherings into its schedule, which has set a fast pace for the next 11 months. Please [contact TMBC](#) staff for any information on upcoming activities.

available through TMBC's cooperation with The University of Texas-Pan American's Project FORGE, but the TMBC is looking to lengthen the list.

On the more creative side, TMBC staff is working to develop a thorough marketing strategy to help boost public recognition of, and eventually, participation in, the eFARM Project. Efforts are being made to design a logo specific to the project.

For more information concerning the eFARM Project, please [contact TMBC](#).

Project FORGE assisting Hispanic producers

In the three years since the inception of Project FORGE, a vital component has been the computer and Internet training program.

This element of FORGE has been vital to its success at reaching historically socially disadvantaged agriculture producers.

Recently, the program reached a milestone by providing more than 808 training sessions and instructing at least 4,930 sign-in participants in 26 rural communities.

FORGE seeks to improve the quality of life in rural South Texas by providing farm, ranch and other business technical assistance and support to rural residents. FORGE is a collaborative effort with The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), the USDA, the TMBC, Texas Cooperative Extension, Valley Telephone Cooperative and Grande River Communications.

FORGE has been effective by utilizing rural schools, libraries and community centers that are equipped with modern computer equipment, software, and high-speed Internet connectivity for computer and Internet training sessions.

These rural, often remote, computer and Internet access points provide an excellent

setting for providing computer and Internet training to Hispanic producers.

In areas where Internet connectivity is not available, FORGE will use its access to the NETmobile, a mobile computer and Internet lab. Provided by UTPA, the NETmobile is a self-contained, wireless, high-speed Internet facility with 15 computer stations.

FORGE focuses on the coordination and provision of computer and Internet training to Hispanic producers through coordinated efforts with the UTPA HiFARM and Rural Cooperative Development Projects, the TMBC, the Texas Cooperative Extension and the West Texas Telecommunication Project.

FORGE employs two computer and Internet trainers to cover a 37-county area in Texas. Eduardo Orozco, a native of San Perlita, Texas, trains in the Rio Grande Valley area as well as Southwest Texas. Jesus Reyes, of LaSara, Texas, handles additional sessions held in the Rio Grande Valley and Brooks and Duval Counties.

As part of an agreement with Valley Telephone Cooperative (VTC), Orozco and

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Get involved with the TMBC

With all the ways the TMBC is working to assist farmers and ranchers in the Texas/Mexico border region, you can help. Below are some suggestions on how to become involved:

- ◆ Sign up to be a member.
- ◆ Support TMBC events.
- ◆ Endorse TMBC principles and goals.
- ◆ Promote the TMBC.

Contact the TMBC if you are interested in working together.

TMBC CBO Directors and Staff

Chairman, Omar J. Garza
Santa Elena, Texas

Vice-Chairman, Ray Margo
Santa Elena, 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, Larry Ernst
Leaky, Texas

Director, Mario Escobar
Crystal City, Texas

Director, Ruben Carrasco
Presidio, Texas

Director, Rigoberto Delgado
El Paso, Texas

Technical Assistance,
Neal Alvarado

Project Director, eFARM,
Aisha Lee Cruz

Interim Project Director, FARM,
Ismael Delgado

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Reyes provide technical support to cooperative members of VTC outside of the classroom.

Computer and Internet training sites are chosen based on the number of Hispanic producers in the area and the interest indicated by community members.

FORGE provides computer and Internet

training to farmers, ranchers, and rural residents as well as training in computerized agricultural operations and management. Sessions include instruction in: basic through advanced computer and Internet, e-mail and introduction to Microsoft Word and Excel. For more information on Project FORGE, please visit the Web site at www.coserve.org/forge/

End-of-Year project summaries

TMBC's fiscal year 2004 was twelve months of hustle and bustle. Beginning in October 2003 and finishing off in September 2004, the year included many workshops, meetings and training sessions. The TMBC is heavily involved in three USDA agency-funded projects, either through direct operation of the project or by partnership with another non-USDA entity.

The Frontera Agricultural Risk Management (FARM) Project is financed through the Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program of the USDA Risk Management Agency. The goal of FARM Project is to help limited-resource, Hispanic producers by providing knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to make informed risk management decisions for their operations. Some major accomplishments of FARM in the 2004 project year include:

- * maintenance of a database of 14,853 producers in the TMBC service area;
- * distribution of 34,089 mail outs to producers;
- * attendance of 777 participants at 20 TMBC training events; and
- * sponsorship of 309 computer and Internet training sessions with 1,842 sign-in participants.

The Hispanic Farm and Ranch Management (HiFARM) Project is operated by The University of Texas-Pan American and directed by TMBC Chairman Omar Garza. The project is funded through the Farm Service Agency. This fiscal year ran differently for HiFARM than other TMBC projects. The project started on June 4, 2003 and ended on June 3, 2004. Under Garza's

supervision, HiFARM was able to effectively promote FSA operated and administered programs in the TMBC service area. HiFARM's 2004 project period included:

- * 3,320 program recipients served;
- * 402 FSA loans and program applications processed with a program assistance value of \$1,430,326; and
- * 24 outreach meetings held.

Another TMBC-operated project – this one is without an acronym – is a technical service provider agreement with the NRCS. This contract provides for Neal Alvarado, a TMBC employee, to assist the Starr County (Texas) NRCS office by providing technical assistance throughout the year. Alvarado aids in receiving, processing, and certifying EQIP and CRP applications and contracts. In the last year, Alvarado assisted 331 producers in Starr County, including 260 EQIP contracts, three CRP contracts and 25 SB503 contracts.

Additionally, funds were obtained through the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service to put on the first National Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Conference in San Antonio, Texas in February 2004. The conference included presenters and attendees from across the United States as well as state and national agricultural agencies. Overall, the conference was very well received and plans are being made for another conference in 2006.

The FARM Project, HiFARM and the technical service agreements have been re-funded for the 2004 fiscal year. Please [contact TMBC](#) for more information.

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