

Small Acreage Management Issues

Robert Scott, County Extension Agent - Agricultural and Natural Resources

Relevance

The small farm owner is a growing segment in Texas agriculture. Per Ag Census statistics, 33% of all farms and ranches in Texas are ranked under 50 acres in size. The small scale farm or ranch owner may have purchased the operations for many reasons - retirement, a source of alternate income, or to impart a life-style change. Small scale farmers/ranchers many times have arrived in the enterprise with the need for education concerning enterprise choices, basic production guidelines, as well as advice on marketing strategies and agricultural legalities.

Response

Texas AgriLife Extension in Lubbock developed the following activities to address the Small Acreage Landowner Issue.

- **Small Acreage Landowner Newsletter-** Small scale farmers/ranchers have hurried schedules but are considered very technically astute. With this in mind an electronic Small Acreage Landowner bi-monthly newsletter was developed. The purpose of this newsletter is to assist and educate small acreage landowners to make the best decision for their production needs and keep them updated on educational opportunities.
- **South Plains Agriculture Wind and Wildlife Conference -** Lubbock AgriLife Extension Service joined with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Wildlife Association to conduct the South Plains Agriculture, Wind and Wildlife Conference Feb. 13 at Lubbock's American Wind Power Center and Museum. Over 200 attendees heard legal, wildlife, real estate, industry, legislative and landowner viewpoints. Conference topics included: past, current and future of wind energy on the South Plains; wind turbine anatomy and construction; wind energy and wildlife; real estate impact and land appraisals; and small tract landowners and wildlife. There was also a landowner panel sharing multiple perspectives.
- **TBQP Level 1 + 2 Workshop -** Lubbock County AgriLife Extension Service and Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association conducted a free Texas Beef Quality Producer Program on April 21 in Lubbock. The Texas Beef Quality Producer Program is a management system that helps producers improve the quality and safety of their beef product. Thirty ranchers were updated on changes occurring in the beef industry and what they must do to increase the demand for their cattle. The Texas Beef Quality Producer Program clearly demonstrates how a producer's actions on the ranch can have a big impact on their final product. The half-day training and certification covered the program's principles, record keeping, environmental stewardship, genetic selection, cattle handling, culling, and vaccine and drug use.
- **"After CRP: Wildlife, Farming and Grazing Conference"-** was held June 18th at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Lubbock. Eighty Producers in attendance were thinking about the future management of the land that they currently have under a CRP contracts, or were starting to consider various alternatives and would like to know what others exist. The program provided answers to compliance issues, cost-assistance programs, land management and economics with wildlife in mind, the economics of farming and grazing alternatives, impacts on land value and the effect on future eligibility for federal farm programs. Private Pesticide applicators were given 3 CEU's. Conference partners included Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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- **Livestock Fecal Workshop** - A Parasite Evaluation Clinic on Tuesday, May 12th. The clinic gave producers an opportunity to test their livestock for internal parasites. Producers were instructed to collect fresh fecal samples not larger than a golf ball in size. Each sample was collected in an individual plastic bag and labeled properly. To get an accurate reading on a herd, producers collected 10-20 individual samples from each pen/pasture tested. Samples were collected from lactating cows, dry cows, developing heifers, calves, growing calves or finishing cattle, horses, sheep and goats. Dr. Don Bliss, a Veterinary Parasitologist from MidAmerica Agricultural Research evaluated 540 fecal samples for egg types and counts under the microscope. Dr. Bliss tested the fecal samples parasite content on Tuesday morning and presented the results to participants at an evening meal. Producers were instructed with the best and most economical treatment for their situation. This program was sponsored by Intervet/Schering-Plough AH and Safe-Guard Dewormer.
- **Alfalfa Workshop and Tour** - On Friday, August 14 alfalfa producers attended a alfalfa production workshop held at the Texas Boys Ranch northeast of Lubbock. Workshop topics included: Alfalfa Agronomics discussed by Calvin Trostle, and David Drake. Extension agronomists Peter Dotray discussed Weed Control, Pat Porter Extension entomologist discussed Insects in Alfalfa,. The program concluded with a visit to Randy McGee’s drip irrigation alfalfa field north of Idalou. Registration included a alfalfa crop book containing NMSU, A&M, National Alfalfa Alliance publications. Private Pesticide applicators were given 3 CEU’s.

Results

In order to determine programmatic results of the Lubbock County Small Acreage Landowner Programs evaluations were given at several activities.

- **Small Acreage Landowner Newsletter**
To date I have 75 electronic subscribers. Based on responses from subscribers: the average size ranch is approximately 45 acres. They are interested in horses, goats, cattle, weed control and grazing. The topics in the bi-monthly newsletter are determined by questions received from Small Acreage Landowners between issues. The newsletter is also posted on the county web-site
- **TBQP Level 1 + 2 Workshop**
The Texas Beef Quality Producer program is the Texas Cow/Calf & Stocker producers’ response to the national BQA effort. The mission of the Texas Beef Quality Producer Program (TBQP) is to promote good management practices for cattle producers in an effort to strengthen consumer confidence in beef as a wholesome food product. The thirty ranchers attending received their TBQP certification.
- **South Plains Agriculture Wind and Wildlife Conference**
Average number of acres owned / managed / operated represented 14 Sections. Attendees estimate the economic impact for having attended this conference total \$4,241,300.00. Participants completed the following evaluation

Knowledge level Before and After Program

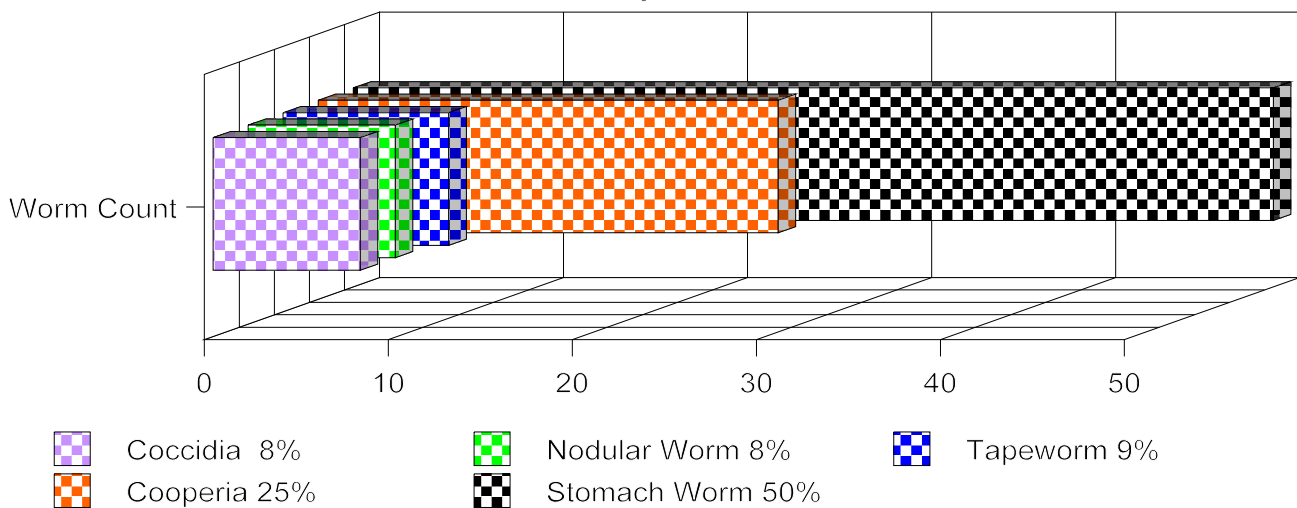
Topic	Before	After	Change
Understand the history and current state of wind energy	2.04	3.29	+1.25
Understand the viability and future of wind energy	2.18	3.27	+1.09
Understand the anatomy and construction of wind turbines	1.82	3.23	+1.41
Understand what we know and don’t know about wind and wildlife	2.04	3.14	+1.10
Understand wind energy and lesser prairie chickens: the role of a candidate species	1.87	3.20	+1.33
Understand wind energy development and wildlife associated with playa wetlands	1.73	3.18	+1.45
Understand legislative issues relative to wind energy development	1.67	2.59	+0.92
Understand CREZ and transmission of wind energy	1.76	2.75	+0.99

Understand the impact of wind energy development on land appraisals and real estate values	1.64	3.07	+1.43
Understand community wind: small tract landowners and wildlife concerns	1.60	3.20	+1.60
Understand wind development and South Plains land uses: their environmental and economic compatibility	1.82	2.95	+1.13
Understand TPWD voluntary wind energy development guidelines and federal wind guidelines	1.49	2.64	+1.15
Understand landowner and land manager perspectives about wind energy development	1.78	3.00	+1.22
Understand what is involved in site determination and construction of wind energy developments	1.71	2.70	+0.99
Understand the operation of a wind energy installation	1.69	2.73	+1.04

- **Livestock Fecal Workshop**

Five hundred and forty 3 gram samples representing 21 Ranches/Farms and Producers. The average egg count per pound of manure collected was 3223. These samples were from various ages and breeds of beef cattle.

Fecal Sample Results



- **“After CRP: Wildlife, Farming and Grazing Conference”**

Eighty Producers in attendance. Results of completed evaluations are as follows:

Breakdown of people in attendance:

- Farmers 42.3%
- Ranchers 15.4%
- Absentee Landowners 19.2%
- Interested Public 7.7%
- Others 15.4%

Attendees represented:

- Number CRP acres owned/managed/operated: 19,619
- Number of acres in rangeland: 18,205
- Number of acres in crop land: 6,860

Participants completed the following evaluation

Knowledge level Before and After Program

Topic	Before	After	%Change
Understand the origin and extent of the CRP Program	2.81	3.35	.54
Understand the production options “after CRP”	2.42	3.42	1.00
Understand what the future holds “after CRP”	2.39	3.27	.88
Understand wildlife management alternatives “after CRP”	2.19	3.15	.96
Understanding grazing management alternatives “after CRP”	2.27	3.38	1.11
Understand economic considerations for wildlife management “after CRP”	2.04	3.12	1.08
Understand economic considerations for farming and grazing “after CRP”	2.42	3.35	.93
Understand landowner experiences relative to land management “after CRP”	2.46	3.15	.69
Understand Agency perspectives relative to land management “after CRP”	2.54	3.12	.58

Future Implications

Educational programs for 2010 have been developed from suggestions provided by the Small Acreage Landowner Task force, feedback from those receiving the Small Acreage Landowner Newsletter and emerging issues from producers. Some of these educational programs include: Horse Management Workshop, Small Acreage Management Newsletter, After CRP: Wildlife, Farming and Grazing Conference, Well Water Management Program, Alfalfa Result Demonstration, and a Goat Management Workshop. Agent also serves on a State Small Acreage Management Initiative Team to help develop information for new Agents working with Small Acreage Landowners.