Spinach: Major Impact on the Economy

Commercial growers in South Central Texas, particularly in what is called the Winter Garden area, produce about 30 percent of all spinach consumed in the United States. Texas ranks second in U.S. spinach production with about 50 million pounds. More than 90 percent of the spinach produced in Texas is from the Winter Garden area, and its total value is approximately $7.675 million. (National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2012)

About 70 spinach producers and representatives of the spinach industry from the U.S., Canada and Europe attended this year’s International Spinach Conference, held Nov. 29-30 in San Antonio, said Dr. Larry Stein, conference coordinator and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service horticulturist.

Spinach producers learned methods for improving spinach production, consumer trends in spinach consumption, managing plant disease, ensuring product safety and the marketing of spinach.

In the past few years, the spinach industry in Texas has rallied back, due to Extension spinach research and educational programs. Baby leaf spinach production has increased from 0 acres in 2010, to 30 acres in 2011, and to 450 acres in 2012.

In San Antonio, Peterson Wholesale Plant Growers, supplies over 60,000 individual transplants annually to local backyard gardeners and small-scale vegetable producers.

The conference allowed producers to get first-hand knowledge on which spinach varieties are best suited for commercial and small-scale production in South Central Texas.

“Whatever future the Texas spinach industry has, it owes to Extension, the Spinach Improvement Team and the researchers who have been devoted to it for many years.”

— Ed Ritchie III, President
Winter Garden Spinach Producers Board
“Texas A&M Agriculture Lifescapes”
Vol. 5, Issue 1—Spring/2005

David Rodriguez, county Extension agent in Bexar County, and Jan de Visser, Netherlands spinach breeder of the “Ashley” spinach, evaluate the performance of Ashley spinach growing in La Pryor, Texas.
"Backyard Basics” kicks off at Pearl Farmers Market

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Bexar and surrounding counties introduced South Central Texas residents to the agency’s new Backyard Basics program at the Pearl Farmers Market near downtown San Antonio.

“This new program focuses on supporting healthy living through home-based food production, preparation and preservation in sustainable, do-it-yourself ways,” said Dr. Connie Sheppard, County Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences, Bexar County. “Texas residents are becoming more interested in growing and preserving their own and want to feel more connected to the food they serve to their families.”

The Backyard Basis series programs will be piloted in Bexar, Comal, Atascosa, Guadalupe, Kendall and Wilson counties.

At the Pearl Farmers Market, AgriLife Extension set up Backyard Basics tent displays on backyard poultry, home vegetable gardening and home-based food preservation. Agency personnel from Comal and Kendall counties joined Bexar County personnel to staff the displays.

More information on upcoming Backyard Basics program topics, times and locations can be found at http://BackyardBasics.tamu.edu

4-H Gives Helping Hand at Service Dog Fundraiser

4-H members from Bexar County got hands-on experience during their participation in a dog-wash fundraiser held at Bark of Southtown, a pet grooming facility near downtown San Antonio.

4-H’ers involved in the 4-H Dog Project washed dogs at the event, which included dog adoptions and a “hoo-l-o-ween” costume contest. They washed the dogs in exchange for a monetary donation or donation of at least 30 pounds of dry dog food.

All proceeds from the event went to the SA K-9’s Service Dog Club, which trains service dogs for use by wounded warriors, autistic children and others.

The event provided 4-H’ers with a great opportunity to provide a community service to help those who have sacrificed for their country and to help young people needing special attention and care, according to Greg Myles, county agent for 4-H and Youth Development, Bexar County.

Laura Stewart, 4-H adult leader, said 4-H dog project members meet weekly in McAllister Park to participate in dog training.

“I’m glad our 4-H club could help out at this event and provide support to the SA K-9’s Service Dog Club,” said Stewart.
San Antonio International Farm & Ranch Show

AgriLife Extension was involved in the coordination and delivery of more than 20 educational programs at this year’s San Antonio International Farm and Ranch Show held Nov. 8-10 on the San Antonio Livestock Exposition grounds.

The show attracted from 2,000 to 3,000 farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers representing more than 500,000 acres and more than 20,000 head of livestock.

Bryan Davis, county Extension agent for Natural Resources, Bexar County, said more than 650 people attended the 20-plus educational programs at this year’s show. Topics included brush management and forage, low-stress cattle handling, drought-resistant crops, low-stress deer husbandry, irrigation efficiency, hydraulic fracting, AgrAbility for military veterans, feral hogs and dressage.

Instruction was provided by employees of AgriLife Extension, Texas A&M AgriLife Research, the Texas Department of Agriculture, the Texas Deer Association and other cooperating agencies and organizations.

Meet the Staff: Desiree Rucker

Desiree Rucker is the new Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program agent for 4-H and youth development for Bexar County. She will work from the AgriLife Extension office to provide 4-H and youth development programs and activities, with an emphasis on serving limited-resource areas of the county. Her efforts will complement those of AgriLife Extension personnel working with county 4-H clubs.

Rucker earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Texas at San Antonio and a master’s degree in animal science from Prairie View A&M and is currently working toward her doctorate in agricultural leadership, education and communication from Texas A&M University.

4-H Members Place 1st at District Contest

4-Hers from throughout AgriLife Extension’s multi-county District 10 area participated in this year’s 4-H Food Show and 4-H Food Challenge held Nov. 3 at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Both the show and challenge encourage participants to make healthy food choices, improve energy and alertness, reduce disease and illness risks, and gain knowledge of nutrition. Some of the learning experiences include nutrition, food purchase, menu planning, and food preparation techniques and safety.

The first-place winners from among Bexar County 4-H clubs in this year’s District 4-H Food Challenge were 9— and 10-year-olds Micah and Jeremiah Palacios, Eric Warner and Emily Bergeron—all from the Faith and Fun 4-H Club. They won with their taco salad recipe.

“The biggest thing the kids learned in the challenge was teamwork,” said Esther Palacios, the food and nutrition adult leader for the club.
A Message from the County Extension Director

With each new year comes both opportunities and challenges. The beginning of a new year is when we make resolutions as well as reflect on how we might improve ourselves to better meet our own expectations—as well as how to meet the expectations others may have of us. At this transitional time, I would like to reiterate to our stakeholders and to the residents of the state that our agency will continue in 2013 to be committed to helping meet the challenges faced by all Texans—both individually and collectively. Whether it’s developing our youth, protecting our natural resources, improving animal and human health, increasing food security, providing nutrition education, establishing sustainable agriculture or other agency efforts, we again resolve to provide the information and educational outreach needed to help Texans meet the many societal challenges facing them. The land-grant system was established 150 years ago to help address society’s grand challenges, and we’re proud of our role as part of that system in helping Texan’s meet theirs.

- Lupe Landeros

Calendar of Events

January 2013
17, 24 Annual South Texas Beef Cattle Short Course
11 Larkspur Elementary Health/Wellness Fair
15, 22 Master Wellness Volunteer Training Begins
15 Backyard Basics: Composting 101
16 Pantry, Kitchen & Fabric Pests
17 Understanding Diabetes and Other Chronic Illnesses Workshop
19 Backyard Basics: Fruit Tree Seminar
26 Backyard Basics: James & Jellies
31-2/28 3rd Annual Jammin’ Jams & Fruit Tree Adoption

February 2013
2 Children’s Vegetable Garden Program Orientation
6-27 Health and Wellness Series Begins
7-24 Little Buckaroo Farm: A Truly Texas Family Experience
9 Earth-Kind: Preparing for and Planting a Spring Vegetable Garden
16 Children’s Vegetable Garden Program Begins
19 Structural CEU Course
19 Backyard Basics: Preserving a Tradition - Home Canning
19 Backyard Basics: A Rose is a Rose
23 Earth-Kind: Preparing for and Planting a Spring Vegetable Garden
26 Child & Adult Care Food Program - Kitchen Math Basic Skills

For more information about these and other events, please call 210-467-6575 or visit our website: http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu.

CONTACT US
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Bexar County Office
3355 Cherry Ridge St., Suite 212
San Antonio, TX 78230
TEL: 210-467-6575
FAX: 210-930-1753
E-mail: bexar-tx@tamu.edu
Web: http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu