



# Ag Weekly

What you need to know about  
agriculture today

## Agriculture roundup: Farm Bill website set up

December 31, 2017

Source: Abilene Reporter News

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway has announced the launch of a new online resource which can be accessed through the committee's current website, [agriculture.house.gov/farmbill](http://agriculture.house.gov/farmbill).

This landing page is designed to provide updates and information related to the 2018 Farm Bill.

"I'm committed to completing a farm bill on time," Conaway said. "We've spent the past three years preparing — holding 113 hearings and six listening sessions around the country. We recognize what's at stake. We're working on

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getting the policy right and will use this site as a resource as we advance the next farm bill.”

### **Youth Hunters Camp Jan. 19-21 for 4-H members**

A Youth Hunter Education Camp for 4-H members – from 9 to 15 years – will be held Jan. 19-21 at the Texas 4-H Conference Center on Lake Brownwood, 5600 Farm-to-Market Road 3021.

“In this camp, participants will learn about hunting safety and responsibility as well as hunting laws and ethics,” said Cari Snider, 4-H youth development program coordinator for the center. “Participants will learn about hunting and the hunter’s role in wildlife conservation.”

Registration for the course is online at <http://texas4hcenterr.tamu.edu>. The cost is \$290 per person for youth and adults for registration through Jan. 5. An additional 10 percent late fee will be added for registration from Jan. 6-15, with Jan. 15 being the final registration deadline.



U.S. Rep. Mike Conaway  
(Photo: Contributed photo)

### **Online handbook for prescribed burns**

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – in tune with prescribed burning as a range management tool – has developed an online handbook to aid ranchers.

Funded by the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, the publication allows practitioners to access information virtually, said Morgan Russell, range specialist at San Angelo.

“The website information ([agrillife.org/rxburn](http://agrillife.org/rxburn)) offers a central platform for all practitioners, whether they are in a prescribed burn association, are a private burn manager licensed through the Texas Department of Agriculture or are someone just wanting to learn more about prescribed burning,” Russell said.

For more information, contact Russell at 325-653-4576 or [morgan.russell@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:morgan.russell@ag.tamu.edu).

### **Farm Bureau honors Conaway**

U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway of Midland received the Distinguished Service Award from the Texas Farm Bureau during the organization’s annual meeting recently.

The TFB Distinguished Service Award is the most prestigious award the organization bestows upon an individual. Conaway was cited for his outstanding leadership and fierce defense of federal farm programs important to Texas agriculture.

“Mike Conaway has been a true champion for agriculture long before he became chairman of the House Agriculture Committee in 2015,” TFB President Russell Boening said while presenting the award. “He was instrumental in the passage of the 2008 and 2014 farm bills. He worked tirelessly to make certain past farm bills focused largely on strengthening the agricultural economy and providing an adequate safety net for our hardworking farmers and ranchers.”

# Fumonisin not expected to be major yearly problem for corn producers

December 31, 2017

By: Kay Ledbetter, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Source: Feedstuffs



A corn broken in half shows silk cut as a result of poor kernel integrity.  
(Texas A&M AgriLife photo by Jourdan Bell.)

A “perfect storm” brewed up a batch of fumonisin in corn many High Plains producers won’t soon forget, but experts do not think the toxin will be a major recurrence in in years to come due to expected normal weather conditions.

About 80 producers recently gathered in Dumas to hear what the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Corn Producers learned since the outbreak in late September.

Fumonisin is a mycotoxin produced by two species of *Fusarium* fungi and can be toxic to livestock and humans at high levels, so regulatory limits are set on the amount corn can contain.

Jourdan Bell, AgriLife Extension agronomist in Amarillo, said fumonisin occurrence is very dependent on specific weather conditions, which vary from year to year.

Should producers expect it to return as bad next year? Probably not, Bell said. Weather forecast maps indicate a return to hot and dry conditions next summer and slightly below average precipitation, which is not good overall for corn, but is good if you are concerned by fumonisin.

Gary Patterson with Capital Farm Credit said producers might need to take that message back to their lenders and help with the education process.

“Fumonisin is a great unknown risk factor and lenders are in the business to help manage that risk,” Patterson said. “But we (lenders) charge you money to handle added risk. So producers need to let your lender know, odds are it won’t be a recurring storm.”

For fumonisin to develop, the plant must first be predisposed to fusarium ear rot, Bell said. The fungus infects susceptible plants and can result in kernel and ear rot. Later in the season, the fusarium fungus releases the fumonisin only if environmental conditions are conducive for the mycotoxin to be produced. In some years, it is not uncommon for producers to have fusarium ear rot and not have any fumonisin produced.

“Many producers have never heard of fumonisin, but we have had varying levels of fumonisin historically,” she said. “This year we just ended up with a perfect storm that increased the incidence. The crop was stressed during flowering with hot, dry conditions followed by rain and high humidity during grain fill, which favored fumonisin development.”

This year was a teaching year that will help producers be better prepared in the future, and prompt more research into various areas of concern to help both the growers and cattle feeders face regulations should they become an issue.

Bell said there are some agronomic steps producers can take to help minimize their risk.

“We know some of the newer ‘racehorse’ hybrids are having some problems, so when you talk to your seed dealer, make sure you talk about traits such as fusarium ear rot and heat,” Bell said. “Some varieties cannot tolerate drying down in August and September when it is really hot and the kernel integrity is damaged.”

Susceptibility increases when kernel integrity issues, insect damage, hail, wind, husk coverage or smut causes stress and acts as a doorway to fusarium infection on the ear, she said. But, ear mold presence does not mean the fumonisin toxin is there.

“The fusarium fungus needs the correct moisture and amylopectin, or starch, to form fumonisin,” Bell said. “Extended periods of heavy precipitation and high relative humidity during grain fill, along with temperatures ranging from 50-86 degrees, are ideal for fumonisin formation.

“In fact, temperature fluctuations favor rapid development and we saw that through August and September. That is not normal for the High Plains in August, when our daytime temperatures are in the 90s to even 100 degrees.”

Another consideration is smut tolerance, she said. In fields with hybrids that had poor fusarium ear rot ratings, there seemed to be very high fumonisin levels associated with smut.

“In many areas, we had lots of smut in 2017. Smut can act like a sponge for all the pathogens in that field, so you need a hybrid with high tolerance to both head and common smut,” she said. “There are no fungicides to control common smut and crop rotation and tillage don’t help either, so the hybrid is the key. Because head smut can infect the plant systemically, fungicide seed treatments can be effective.”



Corn ear worm and ears with fusarium rot can- but don't always- lead to fumonisin contamination (Texas A&M AgriLife photo by Jourdan Bell.)

Other considerations for producers include Bt trait selection and husk coverage. Bt, or *Bacillus thuringiensis*, is an insecticidal protein to provide the plant resistance to Lepidopteran insects such as the corn earworm and fall armyworm.

Research by AgriLife Extension entomologists Pat Porter, Lubbock, and Ed Bynum, Amarillo, has shown that the level of activity is not the same for all Bt toxins. Also, ears with loose husks allow wet conditions to cause more mold growth on mature ears. Water can get inside the husks and sit there creating a perfect environment for mold growth.

“As we move forward, AgriLife plant pathologists and breeders Drs. Thomas Isakeit, Jason Woodward, Gary Odvody and Wenwei Xu will continue to be evaluating best management practices and hybrid susceptibility to minimize future fumonisin outbreaks such as in 2017.”

David Gibson, Texas Corn Producers executive director in Lubbock, told producers one change that has resulted is the Risk Management Agency, or RMA, reinstated a scale for fumonisin discounts. The scale existed until 2010 then disappeared, and now will be back in place for the 2018 crop.

Gibson said growers need to be diligent in their record-keeping.

“Hopefully you worked with your adjusters and are all set,” Gibson said. “What I have advised growers is document everything you did and get everything in writing because if you are reviewed, you want to make sure you have all the information.

“If you had over \$200,000 in claims, you are probably going to be reviewed by RMA. Every ‘i’ must be dotted, every ‘t’ must be crossed. They will go over every detail and make sure the records are provable that crop insurance is being used correctly and there is no fraud.”

Gibson said the concerns from this year are not over, as anyone who sold corn directly to a feed yard may be getting a letter from the Office of the State Chemist outlining fees and licenses required when selling a feed source into the industry.

Ben Weinheimer, Texas Cattle Feeders Association vice president in Amarillo, said the letters are due to a regulation stating farmers, truckers, brokers and elevators are subject to licensing, labeling and inspection fees if they market direct to an end-user.

Also, a Food and Drug Administration guidance in 2001 specifies the levels the industry is to follow when accepting grain and the state chemist office has put these into state regulations. So the 60 parts per million guideline isn’t negotiable for them; they can just accept or reject loads of corn, Weinheimer said.

However, he said, it is a level they believe needs more research for validation both by the industry and Texas A&M AgriLife because there is not a huge inventory of trial data for fumonisin in feeding rations.

# New feral hog poison to get field tests in Texas in 2018

**By: Janet McConnaughey - Associated Press**

**December 26, 2017**

**Source: Statesman**

Feral swine do more than \$1.5 billion a year in damage around the country, and scientists are taking what could be a big step toward controlling them.

They are field-testing poison baits made from a preservative that's used to cure bacon and sausage.

The tests will start early in 2018 in dry West Texas and continue in humid central Alabama around midsummer. The tests are being done in two major habitats where feral hogs are common during seasons when they're most likely to go for bait, said Kurt VerCauteren, feral swine project leader for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services.

The bait VerCauteren is working on uses the meat preservative sodium nitrite. It can keep an animal's red blood cells from pulling in oxygen. Pigs make very low levels of an enzyme that counteracts it, so it's more deadly to them than to humans or most domestic animals. Swine that gobble up enough sodium nitrite show symptoms similar to carbon dioxide poisoning: They become uncoordinated, lose consciousness and die within 90 minutes after eating it.

The federal government has previously approved a feral hog bait that uses the blood-thinner warfarin, but no states have approved it so far, VerCauteren said.

In the spring, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller had announced that he was approving a warfarin-laced bait food, "Kaput Feral Hog Lure," to tackle the state's feral hog problem, but controversy ensued. In April, amid a backlash from hog hunters, meat processing plants and environmentalists, the company producing the warfarin-laced bait asked the Texas Department of Agriculture to withdraw its approval of the product.

Feral hogs cause at least \$50 million in damage annually to Texas agriculture, destroying crops and livestock tanks. Their rooting and wallowing can destroy pretty much any terrain, fouling waterways and exposing banks to erosion. Invasive plants often take over uncultivated areas rooted up by hogs, VerCauteren noted.

VerCauteren, who works out of Fort Collins, Colo., worked on the sodium nitrite bait with scientists at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Auburn University and in Australia and New Zealand.

If the field trials work well, the new bait might get federal approval in 2020, opening the way for states to approve it. But at least for the first several years, landowners will have to get the USDA to set up the bait and feeders.

"It's not going to be on the shelves of Home Depot," VerCauteren said.

It won't replace trapping, helicopter hunts and other methods, but should be a powerful addition to the anti-hog arsenal, VerCauteren said.

Much of the work so far has involved finding a way to get pigs to eat sodium nitrite, which tastes nasty and breaks down quickly in the presence of air or water. Researchers had to microencapsulate the powder to hide the taste, and find a coating that would both stand up to chewing and keep the chemical stable from the time the bait is made until it hits a pig's gut. They worked up a hog-tasty formula for bait in which to mix it.

Researchers also had to make sure other animals couldn't get into the bait feeders, and that hogs killed by sodium nitrite were safe for scavengers.

They're working on making bear-proof boxes, using cameras and sound recognition so only pigs can get in, but that's probably a couple of years away, VerCauteren said.

"Right now, we just won't use the bait where there are bears," he said.

# Windmill Country: Weather wreaked havoc on Texas agriculture in 2017

By: Jerry Lackey, Windmill Country

December 23, 2017

Source: San Angelo Standard Times

This Christmas Eve, many farmers and ranchers across West Texas are looking back at 2017 and counting mixed blessings. As has been said many times, all of agriculture depends on the weather because it can make the difference between success and failure.

Unseasonable weather events – from drought and rainfall to hail, wildfires and flooding – pretty much dictated the final outcome this year.

“Mother Nature added to the misery with some of the most severe natural disasters in decades,” said Gene Hall, with the Texas Farm Bureau. “In March, devastating wildfires swept across the Panhandle, destroying half a million acres of grasslands and claiming several lives.

“August brought the landfall of Hurricane Harvey, killing more than 70 people and inflicting about \$200 million in damage to Gulf Coast farmers. Cotton, rice, soybeans and livestock also were affected,” Hall added.



Cotton lines a tree in a field of damaged cotton in Bayside Richardson Co-Op Gin's field one month after Hurricane Harvey, on Friday, Sept. 22, 2017. (Photo: Courtney Sacco/Caller-Times)

Big rains in the late fall of 2016 delayed cotton harvest, and by year's end less than half of the crop remained on stalks awaiting strippers. "We'll be lucky if we finish harvest by March," one farmer told me in mid-January.

By late February, summer-like temperatures – 80s in daytime and 30s and 40s at night – sent mixed signals to the winter wheat and caused it to break dormancy and start growing.

By spring, the cattle market showed signs of recovery from 2016 lows, when prices fell below a dollar per pound. "It's amazing the value of cattle now versus 18 months ago," said Jason Cleere, beef cattle specialist at Texas A&M University in College Station.

By mid-December 2017, the cattle market – particularly the fed cattle – rallied again. Steer and heifer calves sold at auction nationwide from \$4 lower to \$5 per hundredweight higher "and everything in between," according to Drovers' market reports.

At the last cattle sale of the year, a large offering of calves weighing less than 600 pounds sold fully \$1 to \$3 higher at Producers Livestock Auction in San Angelo. Calves were steady to \$1 higher and cows \$2 to \$3 higher at Abilene Livestock Auction.

Central Texas had the warmest winter in 22 growing seasons, said Jim Kamas, horticulturist at Fredericksburg. "This year's peach crop will not produce a very good yield due to a mild winter," he said.



Melvin Horst picks Fire Zest cling peaches for Studebaker Farms on Thursday, April 20, 2017. Winter pretty much stood Central Texas up this year, and the evidence will soon be showing in this summer's lackluster crop of Hill Country peaches. Lacking an adequate number of "chill hours," what is budding came out early, and the varieties that tend to be ready later in the season pretty much took the season off. "I'm just glad we have some peaches," longtime peach farmer Russ Studebaker said, estimating about a 30 percent crop. Peaches in general will be in high demand this year, as the cold weather that missed the Texas orchards hit the Georgia and Carolinas peach crops hard. (Photo: Kin Man Hui, AP)

By late July, summer heat was beginning to stress crops and rangeland. Seasonably hot, dry conditions continued with triple-digit temperatures. Although some scattered, isolated showers were reported in a few areas, the heat dried everything up again quickly. Extreme heat was depleting soil moisture in all areas, according to the weekly report from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

An August rainfall came at just the right time to save the majority of the 2017 dryland cotton that was stressed from hot July days.



Local farmers help strip the cotton crop of Colin Klattenhoff Thursday, Jan. 5, 2017, near Miles. (Photo: Adam Saucedo)

“In many places throughout Glasscock, Reagan and Upton counties, the cotton crop perked up following rains that have sporadically been falling over the last several weeks of August,” Brad Easterling, integrated pest manager for the region, said at the time. “Several areas have had in excess of 3-4 inches of rainfall.

“This year’s crop had a rough start in the Big Country. Some farmers in Fisher County lost half their planted cotton around Sweetwater and Roby. Also, storms July 4 blew out some cotton in the Concho Valley,” said Karin Kuykendall, executive director for the 31-county Rolling Plains Cotton Growers Association and 12-county Southern Rolling Plains Cotton Growers Association.

“Even with that loss, the acres left in the two regions is projected to yield an above-average cotton crop,” Kuykendall said.

Officials were still unsure about the full impact of Hurricane Harvey on Texas agriculture by the year end. Many of the cattle herds and other livestock and wildlife that were caught off guard by the catastrophic rainfall and flooding were either drowned or strayed from home range.

In South Texas and the Coastal Bend, most of the cotton had been harvested when the hurricane hit. High winds sliced through many cotton fields and obliterated stalks and lint. Tarps were blown from rectangular modules, and lint torn from the modules was knee deep on the ground or washed away.



A fire at the Roscoe Co-op Gin caused an estimated \$825,000 damage. The fire began about 2 a.m. Friday, Oct. 27, 2017. (Photo: Contributed/Sweetwater Fire Department and Ambulance Service)

In early December, the dry fall and winter were blamed for multiple cotton modules burning. “When there is a little hot spot in a module it can more readily switch from just a smoldering spot into a fire,” said Shawn Wade, with the Lubbock-based Plains Cotton Growers. “Those modules are valued anywhere from \$3,000 to \$4,000.”

Despite the loss by fire, the Texas High Plains cotton growers are on pace to produce one of the largest crops in the region’s history.