

Follow Guidelines, Do Your Part to Stop The Spread of COVID-19

Friday, March 27, 2020

By Mary Jane Buerkle

It's now been well over a week since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported on the Texas High Plains, and every day, news of additional confirmed cases and deaths across the region, state and nation further remind us of the gravity of the situation and the need to control the spread.

As of this writing, in the PCG service area, there have been two confirmed deaths from COVID-19, one in Amarillo of an Oldham county resident and one in Midland. Several area counties have confirmed COVID-19 cases, with more reported each day.

"It is absolutely critical to abide by all federal, state and local recommendations and mandates regarding gatherings, social distancing, and anything else designed to help prevent further spread of this virus," PCG CEO Steve Verett said. "Often, being in rural areas, we think we may be isolated from issues surrounding COVID-19 and feel a relative layer of protection. I cannot emphasize enough that this is not the case with the current pandemic. We all are susceptible and should be taking all proper precautions to prevent the spread."

At the time of this writing, at least one case of the virus has been confirmed in residents of Lubbock, Hockley, Terry, Dawson, Martin, Midland, Gaines, Hale, Lamb, Castro, Swisher, Potter, Randall, Oldham, and Deaf Smith counties in the PCG service area.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott has issued a series of executive orders over the past several days to combat the virus and minimize risk to public health including capping social gatherings at 10 people; temporarily closing schools, gyms, bars and dine-in areas in restaurants; restricting access to nursing homes and retirement centers unless providing critical assistance; expanding hospital capacity; and requiring air travelers coming from the New York Tri-State Area and New Orleans to self-quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Texas. As of press time, Texas has not yet followed other states in issuing a shelter-in-place order, although many counties in the state have, including Castro County in the PCG service area.

PCG continues to remain directly in contact with vested governing authorities at the federal, state and local level, advocating for agriculture to continue to be considered as an essential critical infrastructure workforce as laid out in the March 19, DHS guidelines. As the response to COVID-19 continues, Verett said it is imperative that individuals do their part and follow precautionary measures even while operating as a critical infrastructure workforce.

"We know that agriculture cannot stop, especially as we move toward planting season in our region," Verett said. "These measures are temporary but absolutely necessary to help preserve lives, and what we do now with regard to social distancing and following CDC guidelines certainly and directly will impact how quickly we recover from this crisis."

Congress Passes \$2 Trillion COVID-19 Aid Package

Friday, March 27, 2020

Information from SWCA and PCG

The U.S. House of Representatives today approved a \$2.2 trillion legislative package known as the CARES Act, designed to protect public health and help individuals, businesses, health care, agriculture and others amidst the COVID-19 epidemic. President Trump has indicated he will immediately sign the bill into law.

Included in the CARES Act is critical help aimed at providing much needed relief to farm and ranch families who continue to experience enormous financial strain and market volatility.

The legislation provides \$9.5 billion to the Office of the Secretary to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19 by providing support to agricultural producers impacted by COVID-19, including producers of specialty crops, producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools, and livestock producers, including dairy producers. Additionally, the agreement replenishes the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) borrowing authority by \$14 billion, which will provide USDA and the Administration necessary resources to assist producers in times of crisis. Lastly, the legislation gives authority to the Secretary of Agriculture to extend the term of the marketing assistance loan for any loan commodity to 12 months.

Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Hoeven (R-ND) who spearheaded the relief provisions for agriculture said, "As chair of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee, I worked hard to secure nearly \$25 billion to support our farmers and ranchers, who continue to produce the food, fuel and fiber our nation needs as we battle COVID-19. The CARES Act will help provide much needed support for the American people so we can beat the coronavirus."

View the Senate Appropriations Committee section-by-section breakdown of the bill at https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Coronavirus%20Supplemental%20Appropriations%20Summary_FINAL.pdf.

Farm Stress: Help and Hope

<https://pcca.com/farm-stress-help-and-hope/>

FSA Adjusts Programs to Enable Customers to Conduct Business More Easily

Thursday, March 26, 2020

From FSA

USDA Farm Service Agency county offices are open by phone appointment only until further notice, and FSA staff are available to continue helping agricultural producers with program signups, loan servicing and other important actions. Additionally, FSA is relaxing the loan-making process and adding flexibilities for servicing direct and guaranteed loans to provide credit to producers in need.

(*"COTTON NEWS" continued on Page 2*)

FSA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into to the office, they will be working with our agricultural producers by phone and using email and online tools whenever possible.

“FSA programs and loans are critical to America’s farmers and ranchers, and we want to continue our work with customers while taking precautionary measures to help prevent the spread of coronavirus,” FSA Administrator Richard Fordyce said. “We recognize that farm loans are critical for annual operating and family living expenses, emergency needs and cash flow through times like this. FSA is working to find and use every option and flexibility to provide producers with credit options and other program benefits.”

FSA is delivering programs and services, including:

- Farm loans;
- Commodity loans;
- Farm Storage Facility Loan program;
- Disaster assistance programs, including signup for the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (this includes producers now eligible because of losses due to drought and excess moisture in 2018 and 2019);
- Safety net programs, including 2020 signup for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs;
- Conservation programs; and
- Acreage reports.

Relaxing the Farm Loan-Making Process

FSA is relaxing the loan-making process, including:

- Extending the deadline for applicants to complete farm loan applications;
- Preparing Direct Loans documents even if FSA is unable to complete lien and record searches because of closed government buildings. Once those searches are complete, FSA would close the loan; and
- Closing loans if the required lien position on the primary security is perfected, even for loans that require additional security and those lien searches, filings and recordings cannot be obtained because of closed government buildings.

Servicing Direct Loans

FSA is extending deadlines for producers to respond to loan servicing actions, including loan deferral consideration for financially distressed and delinquent borrowers.

FSA will temporarily suspend loan accelerations, non-judicial foreclosures, and referring foreclosures to the Department of Justice. The U.S. Attorney’s Office will make the determination whether to stop foreclosures and evictions on accounts under its jurisdiction.

Servicing Guaranteed Loans

Guarantee lenders can self-certify, providing their borrowers with:

- Subsequent-year operating loan advances on lines of credit;
- Emergency advances on lines of credit.

FSA will consider guaranteed lender requests for:

- Temporary payment deferral consideration when borrowers do not have a feasible plan reflecting that family living expenses, operating expenses and debt can be repaid; and

- Temporary forbearance consideration for borrowers on loan liquidation and foreclosure actions.

Contacting FSA

FSA will be accepting additional forms and applications by facsimile or electronic signature. Some services are also available online to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in.

FSA encourages producers to contact their county office to discuss these programs and temporary changes to farm loan deadlines and the loan servicing options available. For Service Center contact information, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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Links for Trainings and CEUs

Here are some Texas A&M AgriLife Extension online trainings you, an employee or someone you know may need:

Auxin Training (1 Laws & Regs CEU):
<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=AGCH-001>

Texas Pesticide Applicator Training Course (required to obtain TDA Pesticide License):

<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=AGCH-015>

Paraquat Training (1 Laws and Regs CEU, good for three years; anyone who will be applying or mixing paraquat products must be licensed as well as completed the training): create account at <https://campus.extension.org/login/signup.php>

CEU’s

Minimizing Drift:
<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=AGCH-012>

Herbicide-Mode of Action:
<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=AGCH-018>

Aquatic Vegetation Management:
<https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=WFSC-002>

Here is the Texas Department of Agriculture Pesticide CEU online & correspondence course link:

<https://ceusearch.texasagriculture.gov/CourseList.aspx>

Thank you to Kerry Siders, EA-IPM for Hockley, Cochran and Lamb counties, and Debbie Slocum, Assistant Regional Director-Pesticides for TDA Region 1, for sharing this information!

Editor’s Note:
 “Cotton News”, a weekly service of Plains Cotton Growers to the cotton industry and news media in the 41-county High Plains area, is mailed from Lubbock each Friday. Its contents are confined to news items and comments pertaining to the High Plains cotton industry which is so vital to U.S. all. Anyone interested in making comments about the contents of this column can call 806-792-4904 or Email PCG at: editor@plainscotton.org