

Well water sampling, private well management training available

Bastrop County landowners who are interested in private water well management are invited to a Texas Well Owner Network training April 13 in Lincoln, Texas.

The training, which is free and open to the public, will be from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Lincoln Community Center, 1074 Main Avenue.

"The TWON program is for Texas residents

who depend on household wells for their water needs, so they can learn about improving and protecting their community water resources," said Drew Gholson, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program specialist and network coordinator.

Participants may bring well water samples to the training for screening. The cost is

\$10 per sample, due when samples are turned in. Bringing water samples to the training is not required, Gholson said, but those wanting to have water samples analyzed must attend.

"Water samples will be screened for nitrates, total dissolved solids and bacteria," Gholson said.

Well owners who would like to have their

well water sampled can pick up two sample containers from the AgriLife Extension office for Lee County, 310 S. Grimes St. in Giddings, or for Bastrop County, 901 Pecan St. in Bastrop.

Space is limited, so attendees are requested to register at <http://twon.tamu.edu/training> or by calling 979-845-1461 as soon as possible.

The training is one of

30 programs being conducted statewide through the Preventing Water Quality Contamination through the Texas Well Owner Network project.

More than 1 million private water wells in Texas provide water to citizens in rural areas and increasingly to those living on small acreages at the growing rural-urban interface.

"Private well owners

are independently responsible for monitoring the quality of their wells," Gholson said. "They are responsible for ensuring their drinking water is safe. This means they are responsible for all aspects of the water system - testing, inspecting, maintaining - and this training will help private well owners to understand and care for their wells."

Recent weather creating environment for potential aphid infestation

By RACHEL LUCIO
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Sorghum growers may need to begin proactive measures to prepare for possible sugarcane aphid infestation. Wet weather kept damage from the

destructive insects down last year, but this year's early spring and a relatively dry winter offer a favorable environment for sugarcane aphid populations to thrive.

Scouting for the insects may be the best

way to determine if and when treatment is needed. To properly identify the insect, a magnifying glass is needed, as identifying characteristics are difficult to see with the naked eye.

Sugarcane aphids have a tan to light green colored body and dark feet. They also have dark-colored cornicles, unique extensions at the rear of the body that resemble tailpipes.

Sugarcane aphids can usually be found on the underside of sorghum leaves, and one tell-tale sign they are present is a sticky residue that they excrete onto the leaves called "honeydew", which can be found on the sorghum leaves below the leaves where the aphids re-

side.

The sugarcane aphid poses a couple of different problems for sorghum growers. The aphids themselves will feed on the sorghum, and can destroy the crop. Sugarcane aphids are also asexual in nature, are all female, and are born pregnant, so when environmental conditions are favorable, reproduction is rapid and populations can grow quickly.

In addition to the aphids themselves posing a challenge for growers, the "honeydew" they excrete is a potential problem. It can age, and as it does can produce a black mold; and because of the sticky nature of the "honeydew" it can all but destroy a combine.

Catching an infesta-

tion early and proper treatment appear to be the key to successfully controlling a sugarcane aphid infestation, but predicting if and when to treat can be tricky.

"Predicting the occurrence and severity of insect pest is an imperfect science," said Robert Bowling, an AgriLife Extension entomologist at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Corpus Christi.

But a tool has been created to aid sorghum producers in determining when it is cost-effective to treat for sugarcane aphids. It is a spreadsheet in which a grower can enter information specific to their field conditions and circumstances to help determine when the time

is right.

"The development of this tool was made possible through the Southern Extension Risk Management Education Competitive Grants program, and we designed to be fairly simple to use. It is an Excel-based tool that can be called up and used on any iPhone or other mobile instrument or computer with an internet connection even in the field," said Mac Young, an extension program specialist at Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Corpus Christi.

The tool is available for download at no cost at agrilife.org/coastal-bend/program-areas/entomology/sugarcane-aphid-on-sorghum.



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SANDY SMITH sent in this photograph of her backyard on Taylor Road following the storms that hit Elgin in the middle of the night March 24.

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Workshop explains new food safety rules

Early in the morning on March 22, about 30 Central Texas family farmers gathered in Elgin for a workshop on the new Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) rules issued by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The new rules, which went into effect in January, impact fruit and vegetable farmers with gross revenue over \$25,000 per

year, as well as a wide range of food processors and distributors. The workshop gave attendees information they can use to plan ahead for compliance with the new federal requirements.

Farms selling wholesale to grocers, schools, and hospitals will generally face new food safety requirements. On the other hand, small farmers who sell mostly direct to consumers through farmers' markets, farm stands, and subscription services (CSAs) will have some exemptions from the law.

Judith McGeary, an attorney and Executive Director of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Al-

liance, presented the workshop.

"The FDA has written such a convoluted set of rules that just figuring out whether or not your farm or food business is exempt is a major task - much less complying with them, for those who are not exempt," she said.

For farms that are not exempt, the FDA has estimated average annual compliance costs of \$25,000 per year. The Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, based in Texas, led a national coalition that won the exemptions for direct-marketing farms.

Family farmers came to Elgin for the workshop

from as far away as Mason in the Hill Country. The workshop was offered by the nonprofit National Center for Appropriate Technology, with grant funding provided by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.

"We've been working to bring small food processing businesses to Elgin and we're learning how this new law will affect our plans," Project Manager Sue Beckwith of Elgin said.

For more information, contact Beckwith at beckwith@pobox.com or Judith McGeary at Judith@FarmAndRanch-Freedom.org.

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