

Ag Matters



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ★ COMMISSIONER SID MILLER



December 2016

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!

Friends, my favorite time of year is here! It seems like just yesterday we were starting 2016, and here we are with another year almost under our belts. This joyous season, keep your loved ones close and reflect on the many blessings we've all enjoyed this year. I feel extremely honored to be a part of the team here at the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) working for all Texans. It is such a privilege to protect our farmers, ranchers and consumers all year long and especially during the Christmas holiday.

Even though it's only the first full week of December, I can already feel the excitement and anticipation for Christmas day! This is a time for both giving and receiving, and I encourage all of you to do a little something extra for those in your community. Whether it's lending a helping hand at your local food pantry or providing presents for those families who usually go without, I hope you can make a real difference in someone's life this Christmas season.

I want to wish you and your loved ones all the best this Christmas season. Remember, today and always, *Texas agriculture matters*. Merry Christmas, Texas!

Your servant,

Sid Miller

Grain Referendum Voting Underway, Ends Friday



The Texas Grain Producers Indemnity Board (TGPIB) is holding a referendum of eligible Texas producers of corn, sorghum, soybeans and/or wheat, including grain which is sold for seed, to decide if a refundable assessment should be collected. The assessment will be 0.2 percent of the final sales price of grain. TGPIB will set the assessment rate each year.

If the referendum is approved, collection of the assessment will begin on Feb. 1, 2017. Only a producer who has sold grain in the 36 months preceding Dec. 9, 2016 is eligible to vote in the referendum. Eligible grain producers are individuals, including the owner of a farm on which grain is produced or the owner's tenant or sharecropper, or legal entities engaged in the business of producing grain or causing grain to be produced for commercial purposes. Each person or legal entity is entitled to one vote, regardless of how many participants are involved in the entity.

The referendum will be conducted by mail balloting from **Dec. 5 - 9, 2016**. Eligible producers may cast a ballot at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension county offices during regular business hours. If you are unable to visit an AgriLife Extension Office, a ballot may be requested from TDA by calling (800) 835-5832.

All ballots cast must be mailed to TDA and **postmarked no later than Dec. 9, 2016**.

[Read](#) more about the referendum here.



FULFILLING the MISSION 2015-2016 Accomplishments

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE MISSION STATEMENT

Partner with all Texans to make Texas the nation's leader in agriculture, better our economy, empower rural communities, provide healthy lifestyles, and cultivate winning strategies for rural, suburban and urban Texas through exceptional service and the common threads of agriculture in our daily lives.

Looking Back at 2016: TDA's Accomplishments

It's been a busy year at TDA, and as 2016 winds down, we are looking back at all that we've accomplished in serving the great state of Texas and the people who call the Lone Star State home. [Check](#) out how TDA has fulfilled its mission to all Texans and our agriculture industry.



STEP Up For Exports

TDA administers a number of economic development programs to assist businesses across the state. Even if the business is not in agriculture, financial assistance is available through TDA to support export training, lead development and other international trade activities. We're all about growing the Texas economy, and Commissioner Miller supports the agency's efforts to do just that.

Back in October, TDA [accepted](#) a grant for \$800,000 from the U.S. Small Business Administration Office of International Trade for the [State Trade Expansion Program \(STEP\)](#). The goal of the program is to help increase the number of small businesses in Texas that are exporting their goods and increase the value of goods already being exported by businesses. Through STEP, eligible Texas businesses will be able to participate in customized international training and international trade shows, as well as receive financial assistance for other eligible export activities.

Whether a company is looking to explore opportunities for international sales for the first time or expand into new foreign markets, TDA's Trade and Business Development Division is ready to connect them with a wide variety of federal, state and regional resources to help grow their business.

Eligible businesses looking to export beyond the U.S. border should contact TDA for more information on upcoming training events, export trends and statistics. If you have questions about going global, we're here to help. [Email](#) us today!

ICYMI: November GROW Award Announced, Texas Agriculture Memorial Day



Each month, Commissioner Miller awards the GROW award to a different middle or high school student. In November, we were pleased to announce Coltin Walton, a sophomore from Magnolia High School was selected as our winner. Coltin serves as a 4-H club officer and the second vice president for Montgomery 4-H County Council. He is a member of the Magnolia FFA and Magnolia High School JV football team. Academically, Coltin is in the top tier of his class, taking advanced placement courses and ranking seventh overall out of 509 students. He also received the Citizenship Award at Magnolia High School and was a district finalist at the science fair. To read more about Coltin's accomplishments and nominate a deserving student in your area for GROW, click [here](#).

TDA celebrated Texas Agriculture Memorial Day on November 21. This celebration came from an idea created by John Paul and Heather Dineen of GO TEXAN's [The Yellow Farmhouse](#). In Texas, November 21 is now a day to celebrate the lives of farmers and ranchers across our great state! Commissioner Miller even addressed attendees at the inaugural Texas Agriculture Memorial Day ceremony at the Capitol. Be sure to mark your calendars for next November 21, so you can celebrate Texas agriculture with us.

Gift of Produce Rings in Holiday Season

This month, the Houston Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association (HFFVA) will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Gift of Produce, an event that benefits the Houston Food Bank. It brings together HFFVA's retailers, wholesalers, brokers, growers and shippers to provide valuable donations to the Houston Food Bank, which serves 18 southeast Texas counties. This year's goal is to donate 3 million pounds of produce, and the event will culminate in the Gift of Produce holiday giving celebration.



This year's event will be at the Houston Food Bank on December 16. Last year, Commissioner Miller was a special guest speaker for the event where HFFVA presented a check for 2.8 million pounds of produce to the Houston Food Bank. TDA regional staff members also help out each year as part of a team that builds a display for the event using fresh produce.

All year long, TDA partners with food banks across Texas through a variety of programs including the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which enables food banks to connect low-income Texans age 60 and older with a package of U.S. Department of Agriculture foods they can take home. TDA's partners in the program include the East Texas Food Bank, Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley, Houston Food Bank, North Texas Food Bank, San Antonio Food Bank and South Texas Food Bank. Recently, TDA added the Central Texas Food Bank to the list of Texas food banks in this program.

As many Texans look forward to gathering for delicious meals at Christmas and for the New Year, others are facing food insecurity and often look to food banks to access the nutrition they need for active, healthy lives. This is a great time of year to think about supporting a local food bank by giving time, money or food to help them serve more of our fellow Texans. Everyone is encouraged to contact their local food bank or food pantry to see how they can help. This is something we can all do this Christmas and throughout the year.

Tips For a Healthy Christmas Tree



There's nothing quite like the aroma of a real Texas Christmas tree during the holiday season. Their fresh scent can make a house a home and keep the holiday spirit bright. To help you take good care of your Christmas tree this season, our friends at [Texas Christmas Tree Growers Association](#) have some helpful tips:

- Keep your tree hydrated. Just like fresh flowers, Christmas trees need water.
- Keep your tree in a water-holding tree stand.
- Add fresh water daily as needed.
- If storing your tree outside before decorating, be sure you keep it in water, and do yourself (and the tree) a favor by protecting it from the elements like wind and sun.
- Keep your tree away from fireplaces.

Turn off all of your tree decorations at night and when you leave your home.

