

# Ag Matters



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ★ COMMISSIONER SID MILLER



April 2016

## Spring is Here!

It's the most bountiful time of year! Spring represents new growth and opportunity for the future. It's a busy time for our farmers and ranchers, along with many of the home gardeners out there who have begun planting. Fresh fruits and vegetables are thriving all over the state. Spring is a great time to get the whole family outside, connect with the Earth and teach kids where our food comes from.

This land that we live on provides us with blessings beyond words, and one of our biggest priorities here at TDA is cultivating the connection young Texans have with agriculture. Just last month, I had the opportunity to visit the Kids R Fun child care center in San Antonio to plant a salsa garden. We talked about food and where it comes from, and we even got our hands dirty in the garden. Forming good habits, healthy food preferences and an appreciation for agriculture starts at a young age, and what better time than spring to get your family on the right track!

As we enjoy the fruit of agriculture's labor this spring and summer, let us remember each day where our food comes and why *Texas agriculture matters*.

Your servant,

Sid Miller

## Small Business Forum Set for May 5

TDA is excited to host a free small business forum on **Thursday, May 5**, in conjunction with National Small Business Week! This year's Small Business Week theme is "Dream Big, Start Small," and we know many Texas businesses are dreaming big and achieving success. The forum will be held at the Texas State Capitol from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The day's festivities give TDA the opportunity to celebrate and promote small businesses and their economic impact on the great state of Texas.

Attendees will have an opportunity to participate in a power networking session, as well as enter a raffle drawing. Additionally, the forum will introduce TDA's new Capital for Texas (C4T) small business loan program. This program is designed to increase small businesses' access to capital and enable private entrepreneurs to grow jobs.

To learn more and register for the free forum today, [click here](#).

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## Featured Videos of the Month



Breakfast makes a winner out of everyone



Why you should visit a farmers market



Check out the rodeo action in Houston

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## Ag Week Celebrated Farmers and Ranchers



At TDA, we celebrate Texas agriculture every day, but last month, we had the special opportunity to join our friends around the country to celebrate National Ag Week and National Ag Day. Gov. Greg Abbott also issued a [proclamation](#) for Texas Ag Day, which highlighted the bounty of agriculture in our lives, the impact it has on our families, the food it puts on our plates and the never-ending influence agriculture has on each and every Texan. Ag Day recognizes agriculture

and its contribution to feeding the world, conserving our natural resources, and supporting job creation and economic growth.

This year's Ag Day theme was *Agriculture: Stewards of a Healthy Planet*. Farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists and stewards of the land. More so than many, agricultural producers understand the importance of preserving our natural resources. To ensure future generations can continue to enjoy our bountiful and beautiful land, Texas farmers and ranchers are taking innovative approaches to conserving water, growing more food with fewer resources and keeping pests from harming the food that we all enjoy.

[Hear](#) directly from the farmers and ranchers who produce our food, and remember friends, *Texas agriculture matters*.

## Explore New Ways to Connect With TDA

We're always looking for new ways to share information with everyone in the Lone Star State, and TDA is excited to announce we are increasing our social media presence to do just that.

How so, you ask? You can now find the Texas Department of Agriculture on Flickr. It's a popular photo-sharing website where we'll post pictures from Commissioner Miller and the TDA team's travels around the state for events, school visits or just working hard for Texas agriculture. You can find us at [Flickr.com/texasagriculture](https://www.flickr.com/photos/texasagriculture/). It's a great way to see firsthand the work TDA is doing.

In addition to Flickr, be sure to check out TDA on Medium, too. Medium is a great tool for sharing the stories of Texas agriculture. Where Flickr gives you the photos, Medium gives you the words behind our journey of promoting and protecting Texas agriculture. You can find TDA on Medium [here](#). We're just getting started, so stay tuned for more.

If you don't already follow TDA on Facebook and Twitter, check us out today! We have cool facts, fun ag-related posts, videos and event recaps. It's a great way to connect with TDA, Texas farmers and ranchers, and more!

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## Child Care Center Building a Healthier Future for Texas Children



Establishing patterns for healthy behavior early in life is critical for future success. That's why Commissioner Miller visited the Kids R Fun child care center in San Antonio last month and planted a garden full of zucchini, basil, tomatoes and bell peppers with the young Texans enrolled at the center.

"The best time to build the foundation for a lifetime of health is early on, when children are still forming their food preferences and building habits, and child care centers are a critical part of that education," Commissioner Miller said. "Through centers like Kids R Fun that participate in our Child and Adult Food Care Program, we are working together to build strong partnerships that advocate for the 3E's of Healthy Living – Education, Exercise and Eating Right, and build a stronger future for the Lone Star State."

As a child care center working towards a Healthier Child and Adult Food Care Program Recognition Award, Kids R Fun has incorporated healthier options at meals and snacks, focused on cooking from scratch, expanded their garden, established relationships with local growers to purchase food, begun serving meals family-style and expanded options for breastfeeding mothers. These efforts are building a stronger, healthier Texas, and are a model for building the foundation for a healthy life.

[Read](#) more about Commissioner Miller's event, and [view](#) photos from the garden planting here.

## ICYMI: Canton Renews Status as Certified Retirement Community, 2016 Quilt Competition Kicks Off

GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Communities offer residents and retirees a great quality of life in the perfect Texas settings. The city of Canton was recently recertified for an additional five years. While many people know Canton for its World Famous First Monday Trade Days, it is known by locals as a great place to live with plenty to do and some of the friendliest people around. [Read](#) more about all the great things Canton has to offer.

Are you a quilter? Check out TDA's 2016 Quilt Block Competition and show off your skills. This year's theme, *Texas Wine and Floral – Two Texas Treasures*, was chosen to celebrate two shining agricultural industries in the Lone Star State that complement each other beautifully. It only costs \$20 to participate, and openings are limited. [Sign up](#) for the quilt competition today!

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## Help TDA Stop Feral Hogs in Their Tracks

The feral hog population in Texas inflicts an estimated \$52 million in agricultural damage each year, and that's why TDA is spearheading the 2016 Coordinated Hog Out Management Program (CHOMP). The effort is focused on decreasing the feral hog population in Texas.

Participating counties will be scored on the number of feral hogs taken during the one-month challenge, which runs **May 1-31, 2016**. Additional points will be awarded based on the educational initiatives implemented to teach residents about abatement technologies to help further manage the feral hog population in the area.



“Feral hogs cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage every year, but by working together, we can take steps to protect our farms, ranches and property from these dangerous and destructive animals,” Commissioner Miller said. “Feral hogs are both an urban and rural problem, and there is no single solution that will solve it statewide. Through this partnership, local officials will have the flexibility to implement feral hog abatement efforts that work best in their areas.”

CHOMP is a concentrated and coordinated effort with local county partners across the Lone Star State to decrease the feral hog population and mitigate the millions of dollars in damage they cause. Through CHOMP, winning counties will receive assistance to continue local abatement activities after the challenge ends. This includes educating landowners on removal methods, coordinating trapping and hunting programs, conducting aerial gunning and addressing public safety hazards related to feral hogs.

To apply for a CHOMP grant, individual Texas counties must include the number of hogs taken, along with the number of individuals participating in county-approved educational courses, as certified by the county, during the one-month challenge. The deadline to submit an application is **June 16, 2016**. To learn more and download an application, [click here](#).

## TDA Partners With USDA for Pesticide Data Program

In cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), TDA inspectors pick up food samples from wholesale distributors and grocery stores each month as part of USDA's [Pesticide Data Program](#). These samples are then packed and shipped to USDA-contracted labs for testing. The purpose of this sampling and subsequent testing is to determine whether pesticide residues are within acceptable tolerances. One week inspectors may collect grapefruit, sweet potatoes and strawberries, and the next week, they're looking for apples, pears and tomatoes. Milk and eggs were also recently added to USDA's sampling list.

All of this work is being done to ensure you're safe and protected, and it's just another way TDA is working for you!

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## It's Wildflower Season in Texas

Texas is bursting with blooms of bright, plush and beautiful wildflowers right now. Our friends at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) have planned several activities this spring to help you capture and enjoy the beauty of Texas wildflowers. Check out some of the happenings below:

- Wildflower Walks every Friday and Sunday in April at the Hill Country State Natural Area in Bandera
- Wildflower Walk on May 7 at Lake Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway
- Wild Walk at Lockhart State Park on May 7 and June 4.
- Guided Nature Wildlife Tour and Walk on April 16 at the LBJ State Park and Historical Site in Stonewall.



Additionally, TPWD offers ranger-led hikes that can help you identify interesting native and non-native plants in the park. For more information on these and other wildflower events hosted by TPWD, [click here](#).

This spring when you're out and about in the bluebonnets and trying to get the perfect family picture, remember these tips:

- Ask permission before walking onto a property.
- Bring a stick to check for snakes. They can hide in tall grass, even though most avoid high traffic areas. The stick will help make sure the area is free from unwelcome guests.
- When you walk in the wildflowers, follow the same path as those who came before you, so you don't trample the flowers.

Enjoy the bluebonnets and all of Texas' wildflowers this spring!

## Learning Made Fun at Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

Each day during the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in March, nearly 1,000 people visited TDA's Food and Nutrition exhibit, *Discover the Great Plate of Texas with a Healthy Meal*. Visitors enjoyed interactive displays and left with a better understanding of Texas agriculture's role in good nutrition. They also enjoyed spinning the seasonality wheel to learn what's growing in Texas during any given month and taking pictures at the farm-themed selfie station. Children created healthy-plate coloring sheets and participated in other educational activities. Commissioner Miller also spent time at the booth talking to guests about Texas agriculture and healthy meals. But don't worry if you missed the exhibit at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, it will also make an appearance at the State Fair of Texas in Dallas this fall!

## New E-zine Offers New Format, Easier Viewing



Each month, TDA's GO TEXAN team brings you the *GO Local. GO TEXAN.* monthly digital magazine that showcases Texas food, wine, restaurants, recipes and more. The e-zine highlights GO TEXAN members and shares with you the best of Texas. The publication recently underwent a face lift and debuted an entirely new look that features larger graphics, an easy-to-read format and more.

Check out the [latest issue](#), and be sure to [subscribe](#) today!

