Springtime rain helps grow optimism for Texas dairy industry

The recent rains have changed the landscape of Texas, and the attitudes of Texas dairy producers have brightened as well. Most areas of the state have had enough moisture to plant a crop or harvest spring forage. After more than a year of severe drought, these are extremely valuable circumstances for forage production. The cost of forage has been staggering this last year, and producers cannot stand another year of drought conditions.

All producers are optimistic that this marks the end of the drought. However, the U.S. Drought Monitor said in early April that the drought still covers almost 85 percent of the state and is hitting parts of West and South Texas particularly hard.

But the rest of the industry also seems optimistic. The Texas Association of Dairymen has received calls for information on new dairies, new plants and about innovative dairy products.

There is a lot of optimism about the future of agriculture, especially for dairy. A recent statistic I read stated that, by tomorrow morning, 200,000 people will be born around the world. This will continue for the next day and the next and will only increase exponentially over time. The ability to feed the world is a task that is expected to be undertaken by America’s producers. The dairy industry already is undertaking this task. Dairy product exports have reached new heights, with 13 percent of our domestic production being sold overseas for the first time. This is a trend that is not expected to slow down in the future.

The domestic market is seeing a drastic increase in yogurt consumption and, with recent, growing popularity of Greek-style yogurt, the category has seen new highs. After tasting this product, it is easy to understand why this market will continue to grow as the product moves across the country.

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Growing Panhandle dairies mindful of water use
By Kay Ledbetter, Texas AgriLife Extension

AMARILLO – The dairy industry in a five-state region – Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas – has seen a tremendous growth in the past decade, a growth that provides both concerns and opportunities, according to Texas AgriLife Extension Service specialists.

Joining other experts at the High Plains Dairy Conference held recently in Amarillo, Dr. Ellen Jordan, a Texas AgriLife Extension Service dairy specialist, said the five-state area is home to about 450,000 cows, which provide approximately $4.3 billion in annual economic impact.

However, water use by these dairies and in the industry has been questioned, especially after the drought of last year.

“We are the newcomers on the block, so we are receiving some of the blame for water levels going down,” Jordan said. “We are seeing a higher demand for feed grains, driven primarily by the dairy industry. But a lot of that product is being imported into the region.”

Jordan said the industry uses about 28,000 acre feet of water per year directly for drinking water and facility cleaning, or about the equivalent of 22,000 acres of cropland.

A dairy cow and the heifer grown to replace her will eat about 9.7 pounds of alfalfa, 92 pounds of silage, 18.84 pounds of concentrate, 4.9 pounds of cottonseed, 4.6 pounds of protein and 1.2 pounds of mineral each day.

“That’s 10.8 million tons of feed a year that the dairies in the Southern Ogallala feed,” she said. “It would take 1.5 million acre feet of water if we were producing 100 percent of that in this area.”

But a high percentage of the corn, distiller’s grains, soybean meal and other products are not grown regionally, so the water use is not that high, Jordan said.

Jordan joined forces with AgriLife Extension economists Dr. Bridget Guerrero, Lubbock, and Dr. Steve Amosson, Amarillo, to evaluate the economic impacts to the region. The team used a software program called IMPPLAN to estimate the dairy industry generates about $1.7 billion from milk sales and $1.39 billion from processing for an overall impact of $3.09 billion.

“That’s a new industry to this region in the past 15 years, and as a result, we’ve seen new Wal-Marts, Holiday Inn Expresses and other businesses in some of these communities,” Jordan said. “And that doesn’t count the indirect impact from employment, trucking and such. The economic impact is $4.3 billion from it all, with more than half of that economic income in Texas.”

So the economic benefits are there, Jordan said. However, that doesn’t mean the industry shouldn’t be looking for ways to meet the water challenges and be good water stewards, she said.

Some criticisms or suggestions have been to stop or reduce the amount of alfalfa fed, eliminate the practice of double-cropping, switch to more sorghum, use drought-resistant crops, improve irrigation efficiencies and import more feed, she said.

(Continued, “Growing dairies,” Page 3)
Heritage and economy of Texas agriculture important to protect

By The Honorable Glenn Hegar, Texas State Senator, District 18

As the Legislature works during the interim in preparation for the 83rd legislative session, my colleagues and I seek common sense ways to address challenges facing Texas taxpayers in their everyday lives. The year 2011 was a challenging one for our state, and more specifically for Texas' farmers and ranchers.

As the only member of the Texas Legislature who currently makes his or her living as a farmer or rancher, I take my role as a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Affairs very seriously. My family upbringing, work ethic, love for my rural background and determination to make government simpler rather than more complex, goes with me from our family farm to the Texas Senate.

We all know that rural Texas is the backbone of the economy, in part, because of agriculture production. Agriculture is one of the five largest industries in the state and employs one out of every seven working Texans. Texas’ food, horticulture and fiber industries generate more than $100 billion a year for the state’s economy. In many parts of the state, agriculture provides the vehicle by which rural communities preserve their cultural heritage.

As most of the state continues to experience a severe to exceptional drought, lawmakers are looking for solutions to alleviate the burden this devastation is sure to have on farmers and ranchers across the state. The agriculture industry alone has already seen a negative impact of more than $7.6 billion. Almost four million acres have been burned in more than 30,000 fires, destroying 175 million cubic feet of trees, more than $150 million in agricultural value and more than 6,000 miles of fence. More than 600,000 head of the state's cattle herd has been liquidated. The state's reservoirs are 40 percent below normal. More than 900 water providers have implemented water restrictions. It comes as no surprise that Texans are hurting.

As we move forward to minimize the effects and respond to the challenges ahead, I will work diligently to protect the historical heritage of this state: Texas agriculture. As the impact of the current drought is continually felt, I am reminded of how important this industry is to the economic growth of our state and the continued success of our citizens. I am honored and humbled by the responsibility I have been given to promote and help preserve this industry for the generations to come; the generations who will one day be the farmers and ranchers of our great state.

Thank you for that opportunity to be your voice in Austin. As a farmer, I realize that now more than ever, having an individual, who learned the value of a hard day's work on a small farm in Hockley, Texas, is an important voice to have in Texas government.

State Sen. Glenn Hegar

Sen. Glenn Hegar served two terms in the Texas House of Representatives prior to his election to the Texas Senate in 2006.

He is a sixth-generation Texan and earns a living farming on land that has been in his family since the mid 1800s.

He currently resides in Katy with his wife, Dara, and their three children, Claire, Julia and Jonah.

"Growing dairies," Continued from Page 2

However, Jordan said, the elimination of alfalfa would only reduce the amount of water a cow and her calf use through feed per year from 17.8 acre inches to 16.8 acre inches.

And, she said, double-cropping corn for silage at a dairy may actually use less water than growing the corn for grain for three reasons: No pre-watering is needed, less mature crops require less water, and up to 10 percent of the water comes from lagoons at the dairy.

Dr. Dana Porter, AgriLife Extension engineer from Lubbock, and Dr. Brent Bean, AgriLife Extension agronomist in Amarillo, each discussed ways dairy producers could make a difference in the water they use.
Reminder: Check your permit date

What’s your date?
If you are operating under an individual permit in the North Bosque River watershed, your permit date is an important number to know. Permits must be renewed every five years, and that date is approaching.

But be aware renewal applications must be received at least 180 days in advance of the renewal date.

If you miss this application deadline, you may lose your operating authority resulting in unnecessary fines and expenses.

Check your permit date and confirm with your consultant that an application for renewal will be timely filed.

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The national dairy industry is poised for future growth and expansion.

Texas dairy producers will definitely increase production to help meet these demands.

Texas dairymen have shown their resilience over the last few years, but the outlook is starting to brighten for dairy products and markets.

The green landscape of spring is always a welcome sight, but it is enjoyed more following some relief to the extreme drought that the state of Texas has been experiencing.