Statewide road measure must pass to keep dairies and milk moving

Editor’s Note: TAD supports passage of Proposition 1.

By Scott Haywood, director, Move Texas Forward

Texas is creating a great future, and agriculture plays a critical role in growing our economy. For that to continue, we must invest more resources in our transportation network beginning with the passage of Proposition 1.

Dairymen are one of the top contributors to the state’s agriculture economy. Even with the double blows of drought and falling prices, milk producers are critical to the state’s rural job base.

The success of our agricultural economy requires a reliable and efficient multi-modal transportation system in order to move those products across our state and to customers around the globe.

As our state continues to grow, we must continue to invest in the safety and reliability of all of our modes of transportation, including our roads and bridges. On Nov. 4, (Continued, “Roads,” Page 3)
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Texas State Chemist. TAD has met with many state representatives and senators to discuss the upcoming legislative session and possible legislation. TAD also has conducted a number of media interviews (you can find links to many of these on our Facebook page or website). We have helped conduct tours of dairy operations around the state. TAD continues to work hard to build coalitions with other agriculture groups to protect Texas agriculture, as a whole.

The best way to keep up with TAD activities is to read this newsletter, check out our website or follow us on social media.

As you work hard to feed Texans, be assured that TAD is working hard to continue these much-deserved good times for the Texas dairy industry.

Jordan receives dairy industry award

Dr. Ellen Jordan, professor and extension dairy specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extensive Service, has received the American Dairy Science Association (ADSA) Fellow Award.

The Fellow Award recognizes Dairy Foods Division and Production Division members of the ADSA who have provided distinguished service to the dairy industry for at least 20 years. The ADSA specifically recognized Jordan for her “exemplary contributions to ADSA as well as to the dairy industry,” citing her service on ADSA committees and as an officer, as well as her participation in other agriculture organizations.

Enrollment open for federal dairy risk program

Enrollment is underway through Nov. 28 for dairy farmers in the USDA’s new dairy Margin Protection Program.

The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating farmers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the farmer. Enrollment is for both 2014 and 2015.

USDA also launched a new web tool at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool to help producers determine the level of coverage under the Margin Protection Program.

The Margin Protection Program replaces the Milk Income Loss Contract program.

For more information, visit http://1.usa.gov/10dGbda.

Why did the dairy cow go “tweet tweet”?

She joined Twitter! TAD recently added Twitter to its social media presence.

With Twitter, users send and read short 140-character messages, known as “tweets.”

If you are on Twitter, please follow TAD @TXDairymen.

TAD also is on Facebook at www.facebook.com/texasdairy.

“Joining Twitter was the next natural step for TAD in order to both keep up with and share information of importance to our industry, as well as to communicate our own news,” said TAD Executive Director Darren Turley.

TAD also is working on a redesign of its website.

Legislators visit TAD Board Meeting

Following Southwest Dairy Day, the TAD Board met in Lubbock and was pleased to welcome State Rep. John Frullo and newly elected State Sen. Charles Perry (fifth and fourth from the right), who shared updates on upcoming elections and the legislative session.

TAD Board Action

The Texas Association of Dairymen Board of Directors took the following actions at its October meeting, which was held in Lubbock the day after Southwest Dairy Day:

- Voted to hire an attorney to investigate the case of an alleged manure spill at a Sulphur Springs dairy that involved the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). TAD Executive Director Darren Turley gave an update of the issue and reported that letters of notice of violation from the TCEQ and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had been received by the dairy. While the dairy is not a member of TAD, the Board expressed concern that the case could have implications for other dairies in the state.
- Heard a presentation by Dr. Bruce Akey, the new director of Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory. Akey updated the Board on his new role and discussed the options available to producers from both of the TVMDL laboratories. Akey spoke to the board about his past experiences in New York with Cornell University’s Cattle Health Assurance Program. The Board requested more information on this program for review at the next Board meeting.
- Heard an update from Turley on activity at the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), including the proposed rule change to reduce the El Paso dairy quarantine zone and the proposed legislative issues TAHC expects to pursue in the upcoming legislative session.
- Heard a report from a TAD government affairs consultant about TAD’s recent visits with Texas legislators and TAD’s participation at a meeting in Lubbock with State Sen. Dan Patrick, Republican candidate for lieutenant governor.
- Turley reported on a recent Texas Agriculture Council retreat.

The next Board meeting will be Dec. 4 in Grapevine.
Immigration reform necessary to keep U.S. agriculture healthy

Editor’s Note: As the federal immigration debate continues, the Texas Association of Dairymen advocates passage of a reasonable reform package that takes the burden of policing workers’ eligibility off the shoulders of dairy farmers and does not restrict access to a much-needed labor pool.

By Luke Legate, Partnership for a New American Economy

Immigration reform is necessary to drive the agricultural economy and foster job creation in Texas, but Congress is doing nothing on this pertinent issue.

Meaningful reform is necessary for a booming Texas agricultural industry – and we know our state’s economy is heavily reliant on the success of the industry.

In 2010, the state’s dairy industry alone generated $2.4 billion in total output and employed nearly 15,000 jobs across the state.

Now is the time for Congress to take the initiative before President Obama decides to address immigration issues by executive action. If executive action is the only route for addressing immigration policies, we will continue to have a broken system. A meaningful solution must be reached through legislative action.

Our farmers need these reforms. No matter how bad the economy becomes, American born workers are unwilling to fill essential labor-intensive on-the-farm positions, according to the Partnership for a New American Economy (PNAE).

To fill the growing labor shortage, Texas farmers and dairymen are reliant on immigrant agricultural workers. Unfortunately, we have a rigid immigration system that makes it difficult for agricultural employers to utilize the current guest worker program.

A better program will benefit everyone. Filling agricultural jobs with immigrant laborers through the guest worker program creates jobs for American workers. A PNAE case study conducted in North Carolina found that one American worker job was created for every three to four immigrant farm workers in the state. Many of these newly created positions are in the higher paying industries of manufacturing and transportation.

Texas dairymen and farmers need a legal, reliable source of labor to continue to operate at our full capacity.

To avoid decreased production and increased food prices, we need a guest worker program that meets current labor needs. We must encourage Congress to take the lead and support substantive immigration reform that will drive economic growth in the state and create jobs for Texas workers.

The Partnership for a New American Economy brings together more than 500 Republican, Democratic, and Independent mayors and business leaders united in making the economic case for streamlining, modernizing and rationalizing our immigration system. Learn more at www.renewoureconomy.org.

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Texans will vote on a constitutional amendment to inject up to $1.7 billion in new funds into our transportation budget without raising taxes or fees and without imposing new tolls on drivers. The amendment would authorize annual disbursements from the state’s oil and gas production tax collections to the State Highway Fund. This would be a major step toward meeting the funding needs for transportation projects in Texas.

Investing to reduce traffic congestion in our state encourages the expeditious flow of supplies to the state's dairymen and delivery of milk products. Without continued investment in our highways, we risk losing the significant contributions manufacturing makes to communities across our state.

A special commission of business and civic leaders got together with some of our state’s top transportation researchers and determined Texas’ unmet transportation needs at $5 billion annually. The shortfall includes $1 billion for existing road maintenance and $4 billion for capacity improvements.

Texas is projected to add 18 million people by 2040. That’s in addition to the 27 million residents today. All of our state’s new families and businesses are bringing their cars and trucks with them – but not their roads. That means another 18 million additional vehicles on Texas roads by 2040.

Highways are expensive. But delaying construction will ultimately cost more in dollars—and lives. The old ways of paying for roads have not kept up with our state’s growing needs. The state tax on gasoline and diesel fuel is 20 cents per gallon. It hasn’t changed since TAD was founded in 1991, and 5 cents of that goes to public schools. State transportation officials have maxed out their department’s credit cards with billions of dollars in bond spending to try to keep up with our boom in population and economic activity. We need to find a new way to maintain and grow our surface transportation network.

It would be easy to think of Texas transportation problems as limited to our growing cities and sprawling suburbs. Easy, but wrong. Connecting Texas milk producers in every corner of the state to their suppliers and customers will be increasingly difficult if the Texas Department of Transportation lacks the resources to maintain our network of Farm-to-Market roads.

We must not cripple agriculture's lifelines and the state's rural economy with aging highways and crumbling bridges. Passing Proposition 1 will provide critical highway funding that will help keep Texas a global leader in agriculture by moving products to customers across the globe and taking us all home safely when our work is done.

Move Texas Forward is a bipartisan nonprofit corporation to educate and inform Texans about the importance of funding transportation infrastructure to keep pace with our state’s rapid job and population growth. Learn more www.movetexasforward.com.
FRIONA – Drought might have hurt the dairy industry in the Panhandle over the past few years, but a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service specialist said signs indicate the industry is growing once more.

Dr. Ellen Jordan, AgriLife Extension dairy specialist, said the growth of the dairy industry in the Panhandle was spotlighted when more than 500 people attended Southwest Dairy Day at the Del Rio Dairy south of Friona on Oct. 8.

“We had a number of very rough years with the drought in 2011 and 2012, and producers kind of held their own,” Jordan said. “Now we are beginning to see a little growth again in our industry. We aren’t seeing so many new farms go in, but some of the dairies that are here have expanded a little bit.”

She said the industry in the Panhandle has grown from about 20,000 cows in 2001 to the current number of about 285,000 cows.

One of the newer dairies was the host for the Southwest Dairy Day, the Del Rio Dairy, owned by the Rocky and Liz Gingg family. The Ginggs moved to the Panhandle in 2006 and now have 3,800 milking cows, raise 3,380 acres of crops and have 45 employees.

Tours throughout the dairy included the milking parlor, Saudi-style barns, a special needs facility, heifer pens and commodity barns.

Attendees also were able to view the dairy’s composting operation and a manure application calibration demonstration, Jordan said.

Dairy producers also were provided an update on the latest technology in the industry, with vendors displaying everything from tractors to teat dippers.