



What's Up, Doc?

Grayson County Agriculture and Natural Resources Newsletter

Vol 2: Issue 9 (Sept 2023) by D. Chad Cummings

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Wildlife Issues

This issue of the Grayson County ANR Newsletter focuses on wildlife habitat and nuisance wildlife control options as we head into fall and winter. Photo of Brownwood, TX doe and habitat by D. Chad Cummings, 2022.

USDA Crop Report for late Aug (Grayson County)

August 28, 2023

Drought persists in the area, with most of the county moving into D1 Moderate drought, and the western edge entered D2 Severe drought. Relentless heat above 100F and drought have sent most of the vegetation into survival stress mode.

Trees have also started to show significant drought stress, especially elms, honey locust, maples, and hackberry. Oaks remain in good condition for the most part.

Corn harvest is almost complete for the county, with some reports of over 170 bu/A yields. Grain sorghum harvest is also almost complete for the county. Many stalks have been rolled up for fodder bales. Soybeans have been harvested over most of the county. Some soybean crops were harvested for grain, but many bean fields were rolled up for hay as well, due to low or negligible pod fill.

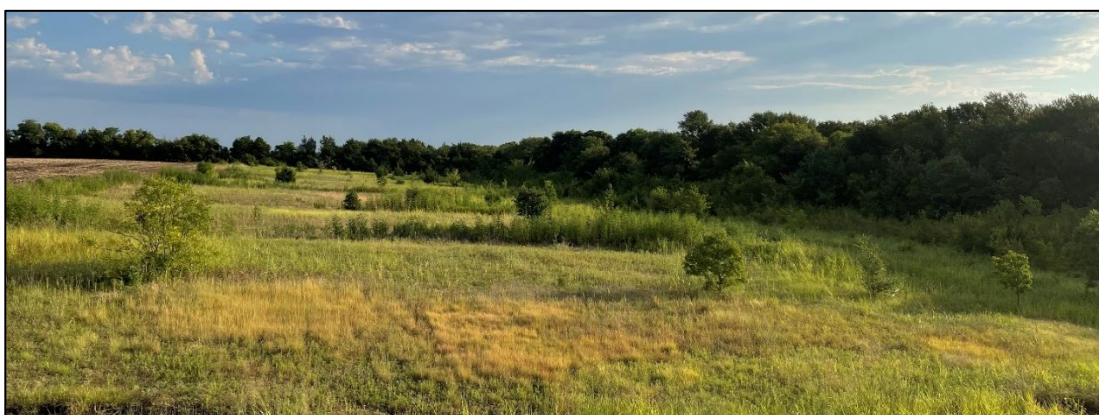
Livestock conditions are good currently. Nuisance flies are still strong, with tabanid flies also active. Water sources appear to be holding steady so far.

Many small to medium creeks are dry, but medium to large tanks, ponds are still holding adequate amounts of good quality water.

No disease or major crop insect pressure to note currently.

Note: Grayson County Health Department caught one West Nile positive mosquito in a sampling trap near Whitesboro in August 2023.

Drought returns to Grayson County in August 2023. (Photo by D. Chad Cummings)



New Landowner 101: What to Do in Sept?

1. Soil test in food plots and in pastures, lawns, and gardens.
 - a. <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu>
 - b. Get forms from the website above or at our office (Courthouse, A-G-1)
2. Plant fall wildlife food plots or cool-season livestock forage (Slide below) in late August through September. Seedbed preparation (herbicide to control existing plants or light tillage) is a key to successful stand establishment.
3. Avoid herbicide applications to drought stressed or heat stressed brush or weeds. Herbicides will not work as well and may cause grass injury in extreme conditions. Individual plant treatments to actively growing brush are one method to decrease potential grass injury.
4. Clear trees and shrubs from pond and tank dams (roots can cause leakage, and utilize much water, especially Eastern Red Cedar and Willow).
 - a. At our Cow-calf Production Clinic on Sept 15, in Sherman, TX we will discuss fall and winter brush control options for producers.
 - b. <https://grayson.agrilife.org/2023/08/24/grayson-county-cow-calf-production-clinic/>

Planting Options

	Seeding Rate (lb/ac)	Planting Depth	Months of Use
Ryegrass Only	25-30	0-0.5 in	Feb to May
Small Grain Only	90-100	1-1.5 in	Dec to April
Ryegrass & Small Grain	15-20 (ryegrass)	See above	Dec to May
	90-100 (small grain)		
Ryegrass & Legume	15-20 (ryegrass)	0-0.5 in (ryegrass)	Feb to May
	2/3 of pure stand seeding rate (legume)	0-1.0 in depending on legume	

Table courtesy of Dr. Vanessa Corriher Olson, Overton, TX.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service study shows toxicant effective tool to reduce feral hog populations

Two-year study reported sharp declines in numbers and property damages when used correctly and consistently

AUGUST 31, 2023

A warfarin-based toxicant has been shown to be an effective option for landowners in the control of feral hog numbers and damage on their property, according to a study by the [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#).



The two-year study was conducted by [Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management](#) associate professor and AgriLife Extension wildlife specialist John Tomeček, Ph.D., and Michael Bodenchuk, director of [Texas Wildlife Services](#). The evaluation took place on 23 sites in 10 counties across the various regions of the state. Tomeček said his and Bodenchuk's team were able to reduce feral hog numbers effectively and efficiently with diligent application of the product.

"Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service was tasked with evaluating the product's ability to reduce feral hog numbers and damage in regions across the state and seasons of the year," Tomeček said. "We found that it can be highly effective when utilized correctly and saw no access to the toxicant by non-target species when all feeder devices functioned properly."

John Sharp, Chancellor of [The Texas A&M University System](#), said the study is an important step in the fight to curb the economic and environmental impact of feral hogs in Texas and across the nation.

There are more than 3 million feral hogs that cause more than \$500 million in damage to agriculture and private property throughout Texas each year, according to the most recent economic estimates. Feral hogs are a burden on native wildlife and responsible for widespread disturbances within native ecosystems.

“Texas A&M AgriLife experts are the leading authorities on feral hog control in the nation, and we are the first to test this in a real-world application and to show that this warfarin-based toxicant can be effective for reducing these pests,” Sharp said. “Unabated feral hog populations threaten our natural resources, our livelihoods and our quality of life, and our goal, as a land-grant institution, is to provide safe, effective, science-backed solutions for all Texans.”

Evaluating toxicant as a tool

The goals of the study were to conduct field evaluations of a low-dose warfarin-based toxicant to determine its efficacy in various regions of the state and to assess the product’s ability to help landowners prevent property damage and economic harm from feral hogs.

The team of AgriLife Extension specialists worked with private landowners on recommended application methodologies to provide real-world testing conditions for the product and the suggested best practices.

Bait that included warfarin was placed in specially designed dispensers that prevent access by non-target species, Tomeček said. Feral hogs were conditioned to access the bait before the product was applied. Once the product was applied, feral hogs consumed lethal doses within five days of consistent access to the bait.

The product is not considered acutely toxic to non-target animals in the event some might gain limited access to the bait nor is it found at lethal levels within the tissue of deceased feral hogs, Tomeček said.

Correctly and consistently are the key words for effective use of warfarin, Tomeček said.

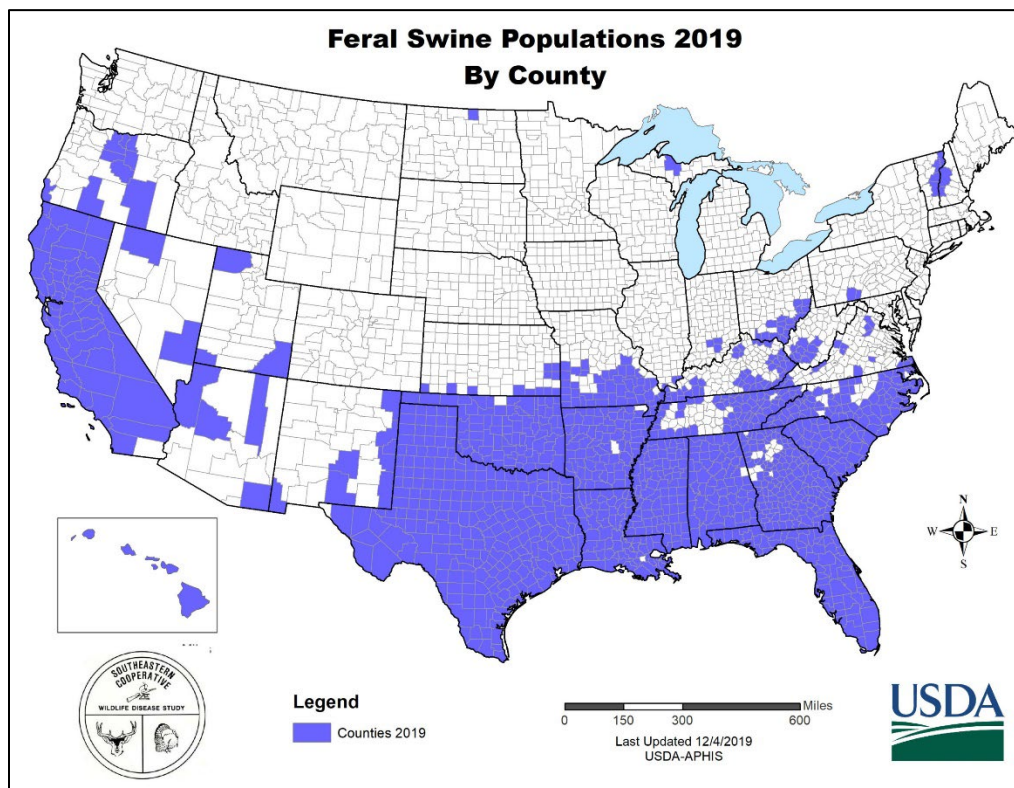
After a trial period of close supervision and instruction, landowners in the study applied and managed the bait themselves. During the project, the Texas A&M AgriLife team made several discoveries that will help increase efficacy of the product when applied.

Landowners who checked the feeder for mechanical issues and replaced bait consistently as part of their regular maintenance schedule reported sharp declines in feral hog numbers and damage levels over the seasons of the year. Landowners who did not adhere to instruction reported mixed to low success in curbing feral hog numbers on their property. These results were true, regardless of the season of the year or the region of the state where the trial was being conducted.

Rick Avery, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension director, said AgriLife Extension is dedicated to providing effective, science-backed tools and information to Texas landowners dealing with feral hogs. "This toxicant is a new tool to have in the toolbox as we deal with feral hog populations across the state," Avery said.

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Planting the seeds of a successful hunt

AgriLife Extension wildlife specialists encourage preparation for cool-season food plots

AUGUST 14, 2023

As cicadas herald the dog days of summer and triple-digit temperatures blanket the state, cool, quiet mornings in a deer blind overlooking a food plot are a distant dream.



However, if you want to ensure mornings like this in the future, the time to begin preparing a food plot is now, said Jacob Dykes, Ph.D., [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#) wildlife specialist, Corpus Christi.

Food plot benefits to wildlife

Dykes, assistant professor in the [Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management](#), said warm- and cool-season food plots provide benefits beyond attracting white-tailed deer during hunting season. They also support other mammal and bird species during times when forage isn't abundant and create opportunities for wildlife viewing.

While game feeders dispensing corn or pelleted feed are a popular option in Texas, Dykes said they don't offer the same benefits as food plots.

"Most feeds are imperfect in that they take a cookie-cutter approach to nutrition and are formulated for the average animal," Dykes said. "But wildlife are rarely average and have different nutritional needs based upon their stage of life."

“A food plot with different forages provides deer with the opportunity to choose what they need as they balance their nutrient requirements.”

Eating vegetation may also have other benefits such as antimicrobial and antiparasitic properties, Dykes said.

Further, because food plots disperse deer over an area as opposed to concentrating them in a single spot, there is a reduced risk of disease transmission between animals.

Ensuring successful food plots from the ground up

While planting cool-season food plots in Texas typically takes place from September through October, preparation should begin sooner.

“My first recommendation is to always have your soil tested,” Dykes said. “It doesn’t matter how much you plan or how much fertilizer you use — if the soil pH isn’t where it needs to be, nutrients are not going to be available to the plants.”

Soil pH measures the level of soil acidity or alkalinity and ideally should measure in the range of 6-7, Dykes said.

The AgriLife Extension [Soil, Water and Forage Testing Laboratory](#) offers Texans a full suite of soil tests. In the case of food plots, the laboratory’s routine soil analysis provides landowners with the information and subsequent recommendations needed to achieve ideal soil conditions.

Additionally, Dykes said landowners should take environmental conditions into consideration when establishing food plots.

“For example, if you know an area of your property is prone to flooding, that’s not the best spot to plant your food plot,” Dykes said.

It also helps to think like a deer when appraising potential plot locations.

“Deer want cover they can use as an escape,” Dykes said. “If you already know that deer are using a particular part of your property, my recommendation would be to simply place your food plot in that area.”

Plot size and composition

Dykes said the most common question he receives regarding food plots relates to the size needed to be effective.

"I've planted plots that were one-tenth of an acre, and I've planted plots that were 25 acres," he said. "It just depends on the density of deer on your property and the resources you have available."

Dykes said if the deer population is high, they can completely devour a plot in a matter of days — especially if you plant a desired crop like soybeans.

While pre-mixed options are available from retailers, Dykes prefers ordering seeds separately and preparing the mix himself.

"Typically, all mixes contain ryegrass, which I am not a big fan of," Dykes said. "It's always going to be beautiful and green, and that's why it's included."

Dykes said ryegrass, not to be confused with cereal rye, contains less crude protein and is less palatable and digestible than other cool season options.

Because of its hardy nature, ryegrass can also out-compete other species in the seed mix and become an issue if it establishes on your property.

Aside from ryegrass, Dykes said plenty of options remain for cool-season crops including brassicas, clovers, winter peas and more.

"I really like the standard mix of winter wheat, oats, crimson clover and arrow leaf clover," Dykes said.

Landowners can [access information](#) on seeding rates and planting depth for Dykes' recommended cool-season mix in a guide published by AgriLife Extension.

Thanks to the successional growth stages of this species mix, Dykes said the life of the food plot can be greatly extended and serve hunters through the spring turkey season.

That is, of course, if the plot receives sufficient moisture.

"Lack of rainfall is probably one of the biggest limiting factors for successful food plots in Texas," Dykes said. "I highly recommend food plots, but I always include the

disclaimer that if it doesn't rain or receive supplemental water, the plants won't grow."

Breaking ground

After addressing any soil issues, Dykes advises a combination of herbicide and disking to remove existing vegetation and establish a good seed bed.

Fertilizer can also be applied at the time of seed dispersal.

This process typically takes place in the late summer to early fall when rain becomes more dependable. The timeframe also provides around two months for the food plots to germinate and attract white-tailed deer before the November general hunting season begins.

"I start watching the weather in mid-September," Dykes said. "If I see that the forecast includes rain the following week, I'll plant the seeds that weekend."

Challenges and management

Deer aren't the only wildlife attracted to newly established food plots. The rooting and foraging habits of feral hogs can destroy them.



"If you have a feral hog problem, you need to address that before you plant what essentially amounts to a buffet," Dykes said.

In order to reduce the impact of white-tailed deer on a newly established food plot, Dykes said the most common method is a two-tiered polywire electric fence. The

inner tier of the fence perimeter typically consists of three to four strands of polywire with a strand of polytape forming the outer tier.

Dykes also recommends placing an exclusion cage within the plot.

The cage, which can be constructed using something as simple as chicken wire, prevents feeding in a single area. This untouched boundary sheds light on plant growth, as well as how heavily deer are browsing the plot.

"I've had cases where landowners think their food plots were doing poorly, but they were actually performing very well," Dykes said. "The deer were just coming through and mowing everything down."



In addition to annual food plots, Dykes said separate perennial plots comprised of durana or ladino clover are also beneficial.

"I love perennial plots because if you miss the opportunity to plant your annual food plot, the perennial plot will hopefully provide some forage to hunt over," Dykes said.

For landowners hoping to make an even longer-lasting impact, Dykes encourages the planting of trees beneficial to wildlife, such as oaks and common persimmon.

"It all comes down to creating beneficial habitat for the deer," Dykes said. "If you create good habitat on your land, they won't have a reason to leave."

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Plants, Insects, and Diseases Active Now

Plants

Drought/heat induced stress is widespread in all plants currently. Warm season plants have matured to flowering in many species. Warm season weeds including goatweed, bitter sneezeweed, ragweeds, lambsquarters, marshelder, and sunflowers in flowering stage or beginning to dry down. Fall milkweed growth has matured to pod production in many pastures.

Second crop of hay is baled across much of the county on improved forages.

Insects

June bugs, butterflies, moths, grasshoppers, and flies are very active in urban environments. Stable flies, horn flies, and Tabanid flies are active. Some noctuid moths and larva (armyworms, cutworms) are present and feeding, but no major outbreaks currently.

Diseases

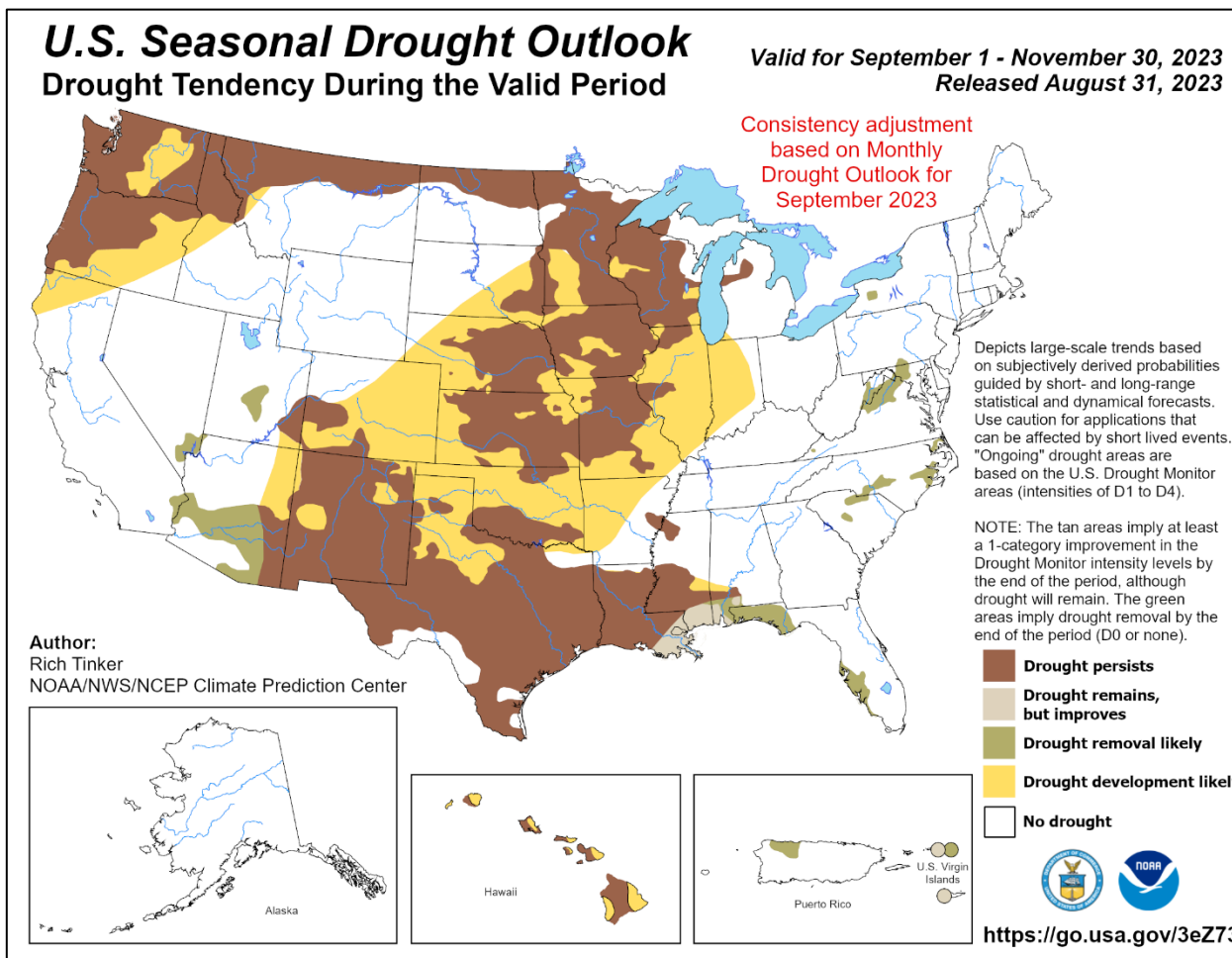
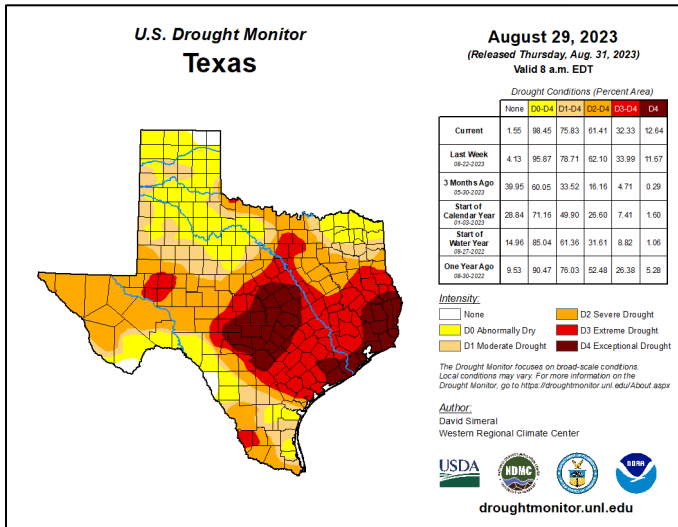
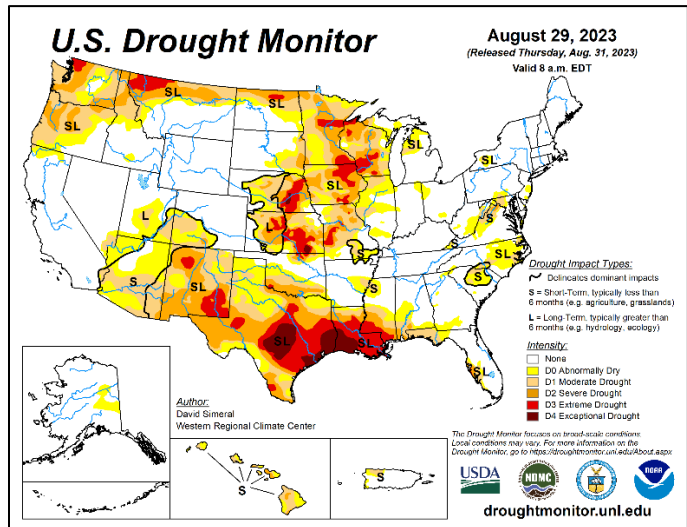
Tree disease or injury/death reports have been common in the office over the last few months. Many are a result of extreme weather conditions over the past 2 years coupled with an insect or disease pathogen stressor. Most healthy trees are very resilient to external stresses.

No major disease issues to report currently in crops, lawns, or pastures.

D. Chad Cummings, PhD

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Current US drought monitor & 3-month climate prediction





TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION



Cow-calf Production Clinic



- **Cody Maxwell, Fannin County**
 - Weaning strategies
 - Keep/cull strategies for the cow herd
- **D. Chad Cummings, Grayson County**
 - Cool-season pasture considerations
 - Brush control options in the fall and winter

*** Visit <https://grayson.agrilife.org> to register ***

Friday, September 15, 2023

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Grayson County Courthouse Annex Assembly Room, Sherman, TX

Fee of \$15 in advance online or pay at the door

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or sexual orientation, and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.



TXGLC CROSS TIMBERS COALITION FALL MEETING

Friday, September 22, 2023
Clint & Betty Josey Pavilion, Dixon Water Foundation
 5190 Co Rd 398, Decatur, TX 76234

Join the Dixon Water Foundation as they team up with USDA-NRCS and the Texas Grazing Land Coalition to bring producers together for the TXGLC Cross Timbers Coalition Fall Meeting, education, and fellowship.

9:30 Registration & Coffee
 10:00 Pasture and Plant ID Walk led by Ricky Linex
 12:00 Lunch
 1:00 Rainfall Simulator & Dixon Water Foundation Ranch Tour

There is no fee to attend. To learn more, please contact Hilary Knight by emailing hknight@dixonwater.org or calling 940-626-9848.

RSVP on EventBrite by visiting: [Fall2023CrossTimbersTXGLC.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fall2023cross-timbers-txglc-tickets-704444444444)

Please RSVP by September 18, 2023 for catering purposes.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Events Coming Up in NTX

Sept 15

- Cow-Calf Production Clinic (*Sherman*)

<https://grayson.agrilife.org/2023/08/24/grayson-county-cow-calf-production-clinic/>

Sept 22

- TXGLC Cross Timbers Pasture Walk & Rainwater Simulation (*Decatur*)

Oct 24 and 26

- Goat and Lamb Validation for TELS show and Winter/Spring Major Shows (youth; *Denison*)

Dec 16

- Fur, Feather, and Friends Small Livestock Show (youth; *Denison*)

Jan 23, 2024

- NTX Pest Management Conference (*Sherman*)

Visit our website at [Welcome to Grayson County - Grayson \(grayson.agrilife.org\)](https://grayson.agrilife.org/) (<https://grayson.agrilife.org/>) to sign up for the events.