



Practicing collaboration and innovation to advance the unique interests of urban counties in Texas

TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Extension in the City

July 2024 Quarterly Newsletter

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extension
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD,
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Practicing collaboration and innovation to advance the unique interests of urban counties in Texas



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OUR WORK MAKES A DIFFERENCE. IN THE LIVES OF TEXANS AND ON THE ECONOMY.

MISSION STATEMENT:

“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service works daily to make Texas better by providing innovative solutions at the intersection of agriculture, natural resources, youth, and health, thereby improving the well-being of individuals, families, businesses, and communities through education and service.”

VISION STATEMENT:

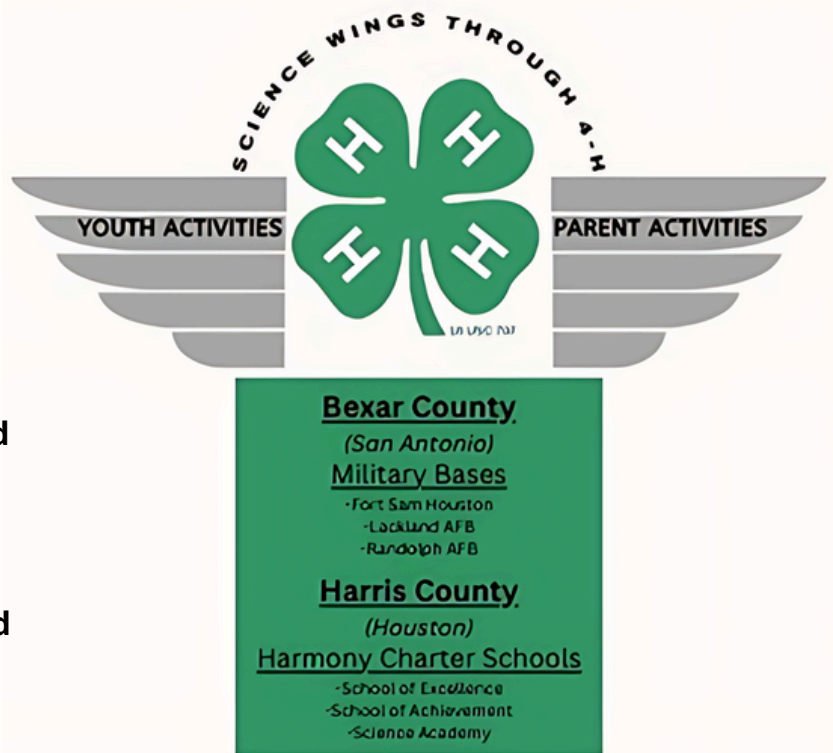
“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will be the leader in providing science-based information and solutions in agriculture and health to every Texan.”

SHARED VALUES:

“We value People, Programs, and Partnerships.”

We are proud to announce that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service was awarded the “2024 Children, Youth, and Families At Risk (CYFAR) Sustainable Communities Program” grant. The project titled “Science Wings Through 4-H” received \$640,000 from USDA-NIFA.

This is a 5-year project (Summer 2024 – Fall 2029) that will develop and conduct a 4-H Youth Development program that is science – and – garden – based, action oriented, and tailored for at-risk military and underrepresented youth and families at multiple sites in two Texas counties. The sites will target military families in Bexar County (San Antonio) and underrepresented families in Harris County (Houston).



The objectives of the project are:

- Create an urban community garden-based program
- Improve physical and mental health and nutrition
- Develop leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills
- Demonstrate and promote sustainable urban gardening practices among youth, families, and community members

Our programming will be offered at youth centers and schools at three Bexar County military bases and three Harris County elementary charter schools. The topics covered will be linked to the mandated Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) program. 4-H clubs will be established at the centers and schools and leadership will develop among all participants. This project will reach 2,258 youth and parents and is relevant to the central CYFAR goal of equipping at-risk youth to develop necessary skills to lead positive, productive, and contributing lives.

The CYFAR Project Director (PD) is David Wright, and the Co-PD is Nelda Speller.

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is a flagship nutrition education program funded by USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Since 1969, EFNEP has worked in local Texas communities like Bexar County to provide food and nutrition education to vulnerable limited-resource families and youth.



DARIO DOMINGUEZ

This year our very own Dario Dominguez was awarded the **Outstanding Agent Award**. This award represents an individual who excels in building strong partnerships within the community and demonstrates remarkable adaptability, initiative, and reliability. Dario's commitment to lead with compassion for others reflects his invaluable contribution to EFNEP and The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

SYLVIA GUERRA

This year's **Exemplary Excellence Award** was proudly awarded to Sylvia Guerra. Sylvia has been a Nutrition Education Associate and educator for more than 10 years and has been a leader in the community sharing her knowledge and heart with families and partners. She never fails to help families make healthy food choices, increase their physical activity and make the most of their food dollars. She is a pillar of strength and well respected among her peers. She consistently exceeds her performance expectations and never shies away from hard work. Her attention to detail and teaching style sets her apart from many. It is with great joy that we congratulate Sylvia on this momentous achievement.



ANDREW CHAVEZ AND SHELBY WOOD

Finally, this year's **Highest Education Success Award** was awarded to Andrew Chavez and Shelby Wood for their outstanding youth outreach.

Through hard work and dedication, Andrew and Shelby have helped youth improve their ability to choose healthy foods, learn to keep food safe by incorporating food safety practices, and increase their physical activity. Last year alone, they educated 10,602 youth

which is 22% of EFNEP's total state youth outreach. Their commitment to excellence is recognized among their many partners and peers. We congratulate them and are honored to celebrate their achievement.



NAVIGATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Navigating Cultural Differences was a three-session workshop that we held in June with guest speaker Kris Parker, Regional Community Development Educator of Purdue Extension. This workshop allowed participants to learn how different societal factors and upbringings have shaped our thinking and the world we live in. It was very insightful for those who attended, and we had a tremendous turnout across all three days. Participants actively engaged in tabletop discussions, breakout sessions, and a Q&A with our moderator. This workshop left all who participated a little more informed on their cultural differences yet also showed each attendee how similar they may also be to those around them despite the differences of opinions and upbringings. We are so appreciative of Kris Parker and the time she took to come and educate Dallas County on such an important topic in our world today.



4-H PRESENTS TEENS AS TEACHERS

Teens As Teachers took place for a week in the North Dallas Government Building with 4-H leaders Elver Pardo and Kimberly Randall leading this event. Students that participated in Teens As Teachers training were recruited from several Boys and Girls Clubs and Community Centers. Students were able to come and learn lessons from our staff that could be implemented when the students went out into various communities within the county teaching other students the curriculum they learned. SNAP-Ed Associate Terri Wesley trained the students on a variety of healthy eating curriculum for them to be able to go out and teach the lessons at multiple sites around the county. Teens As Teachers had a great turn out when it came to the students actively participating and we are excited to see the impact that they make within the communities in Dallas County.



DALLAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT HONORS MASTER GARDENER GRADUATES

Earlier this month some of the Dallas County Extension staff were present as the Dallas County Commissioners Court recognized the 2023 Master Gardener graduating class. This class holds 32 new graduates who have completed a minimum of 50 volunteer hours. The Dallas County Master Gardener Program has engaged over 1,000 volunteers throughout the county to provide community-based education programs, with volunteers contributing over 120,000 hours valued at \$2.6 million dollars. Dallas County has been providing outstanding service to its citizens through Cooperative Extension Services for the last 110 years in partnership with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Prairie View A&M Cooperative Extension Program.



Some of our Dallas County staff present
at the Commissioners Court meeting

WELCOME TO THE TEAM!

In a new partnership with RAISE, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, has gained two new interns for the summer. Over a 5-year period, RAISE will provide the opportunity to 275 students to complete paid internships with USDA, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, or Texas State University Bobcat Farm in an effort to combat the barriers that underrepresented populations face when it comes to quality internship experiences. The RAISE internship hub will be the first of its kind focusing on Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences (FANH) careers and training our next generation for professional careers in the USDA and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

With that being said, we want to welcome Jonathan Meadors and Makayla Otakpor to the team! We are so excited to have them here with us and can't wait to watch them learn and grow! In addition to our interns, Dallas County also welcomes new members to our team. We'd like to welcome our new office staff Cara Kailukaitis, Kimberly Randall, Delilah Torres, and Bria Cooper. We are so excited to have so many new faces on our team and in our office and are eager to see the impact that each of them will help us make within the communities in our county!



From left to right Jonathan Meadors, Makayla Otakpor, Bria Cooper, Cara Kailukaitis, and Delilah Torres.

FABENS AGRICULTURAL LITERACY DAY: CULTIVATING CURIOSITY THROUGH INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING

by Dakota Vasquez, Prairie View A&M University Extension Agent - 4-H & Youth Development

As the CEP 4-H Agent, I'm thrilled to share the success of Fabens Agricultural Literacy Day! Witnessing the enthusiasm of 620 students from pre-K through 3rd grade exploring agriculture was truly rewarding. This culminating event capped off a period of dedicated learning and showcased the efforts of our incredible students, teachers, and the innovative programming we implemented.

One highlight was the "Farm Web 4-H Activity." This engaging, web-based simulation allowed students to back track the day to day products we consume and use daily in a fun and interactive way. Emphasizing the importance of Agriculture, it perfectly complemented presentations like "Horse Knowledge" and "Horticulture," which provided fascinating insights into the worlds of horses and plant science, respectively.



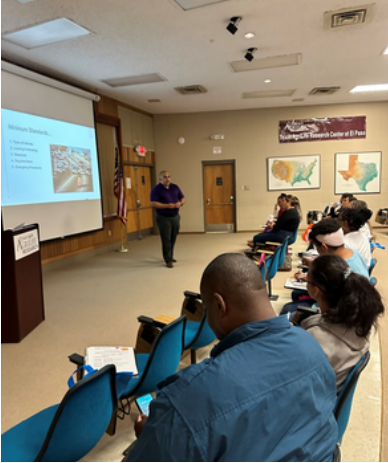
Horticulture, agent Eduardo Rascon, educating Fabens elementary youth on the importance of horticulture.



The wonderful team, who were able to make Faben's agriculture literacy day a success.

Finally, the "Local Farming in the Fabens Area" presentation connected students to their own agricultural community, highlighting the vital role farms play in their daily lives. By incorporating the 4-H Agricultural Literacy Curriculum and offering a variety of engaging topics, we believe Fabens Agricultural Literacy Day planted the seeds of agricultural awareness in a new generation. We're excited to see this knowledge blossom in the future!

SUMMER FUN & SAFETY CHILDCARE PROVIDER CONFERENCE

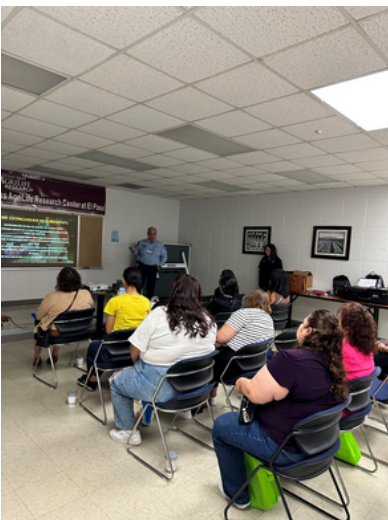


As the summer beckons children outdoors, the importance of safety for daycare providers becomes critical. With increased outdoor activities, a heightened need for safety and preparedness is essential. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, through its Promoting Early Education Quality (PEEQ) program, endorses scientifically-based best practices among early childhood education (ECE) professionals. In partnership with Workforce Solutions Borderplex and Texas Health and Human Services, we support early educators in El Paso County. On June 1, 2024, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service El Paso hosted a "Summer Fun & Safety Childcare" provider conference. This event focused on safety training and education, providing childcare providers with new information to help keep children healthy and safe.

The conference included training topics related to one or more of the Texas Core Competencies of early childhood practitioners through the following sessions:

1. "Bright Summer Days, Safe Ways" by Care: Offering strategies to keep children engaged with fun summer activities while emphasizing the importance of safe outdoor play.
2. "Precious Cargo-Safely Transporting Children" by ESC Region 19 HeadStart Transportation: Covering all aspects of transportation safety, including rules, regulations, tips, tricks, and tools to ensure a safe and pleasant experience.
3. "Fire Safety" by El Paso Fire Department Community Risk Reduction: Providing general fire safety training for childcare providers and reviewed requirements for residential daycares.

The conference was attended by fifty-one childcare providers from twenty-four different childcare centers. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 98% of respondents finding the information and programs extremely valuable and 96% valuing the opportunity to network with experts and peers. Remarkably, 71% of attendees were first-time participants in an Extension activity, and 100% indicated they would attend future Extension events addressing their specific needs and interests. Attendee comments included: "All excellent presentations," "Very educational," "Safety is an ongoing learning process, don't stop," and "Very effective trainings."



SO MANY WAYS TO REACH AND TEACH YOUTH



Programming at **Juvenile Leadership Academy (JLA)** opens doors of opportunity! Better Living for Texans Agent, **Celeste Feast** kicked off a “Walk and Talk” physical activity program for JLA participants on June 17th. The group will meet once per week for 8 weeks. Not only will they learn more about nutrition and exercise, but they will also be introduced to gardening, opening the door for more education adventures. Fort Bend County Extension Technical Assistant a.k.a. Do-it-all-**Doug Staff** and Agent Feast helped the participants lay the groundwork for garden development. Under the leadership of JLA Assistant Director Melton Finley, doors are open for continued partnerships to benefits the youth.



*Left top: Doug Staff, ready to do what Doug does.
Left bottom: Celeste Feast preps by teaching and doing*



Left: Jose helps a student rewind the fishing line reel

PVAMU 4-H Agent **Jose Cavazos** connected with PEAK Academy, a local micro-school. Jose taught **4 sessions** with **28 students** just before school adjourned for the summer and just in time for participants to know about natural resource sciences and **how to fish**

Fort Bend County 4-H member Saige Sowa won 1st place Project Presentation for her stall display at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Scramble Show - Wave II. Her calf's name and display board were a tribute to Willie Nelson who turned 90 around the time she purchased her calf. Saige is the president and a member of **Journey 4-H** and Stephen F. Austin FFA. Her brother, Connor, caught a scramble calf this year. So, she looks forward to helping him with showmanship and learning the ropes of raising a calf.



Above: Saige and Willie at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

TELLING OUR STORY: SOCIAL MEDIA, BILLBOARDS, & EVEN SOME “SMOKE SIGNALS”



At the **Smokin' Savvy** Workshop on May 18, guest instructors Benet Gaytos and Deane Hafling shared tips and tricks on smoking beef briskets learned from experiences on BBQ cook-off teams and home. But first, FCH Agent **Nisa Khan** and Livestock Coordinator **Kally Felcman** taught the **23 participants** about beef production and nutritional benefits of proteins.

Above: Participants at the Smokin' Savvy Workshop beefed-up their knowledge and got a taste of success

Left: County Commissioner, Pct. 3, Andy Meyers posts on Facebook after visiting Fort Bend County Extension staff on June 21.

The **Fort Bend County Extension Row Crops Committee** wants to share messages of **safety and awareness** during harvest season. Extra large farm equipment may be on the roads as farmers move to and from fields while they work to grow food and fiber for us. It only takes 5 seconds for a car traveling at 55 mph to close a distance the size of a football field on a tractor that may be traveling 25 mph. Drivers are encouraged to be patient. The **Fort Bend County Epicenter** ran a reminder on their marquis during the month of May. The message was **visible from Highway 59 as thousands of drivers** passed by each day. The ad also ran during the **week of high school graduations with hundreds of visitors each day**. Although Fort Bend is quickly growing, we still have plenty of farms and farmers working to feed and clothe the population.



Above: An infographic for the “Be Neighborly” Safety campaign ran on the Epicenter electronic billboard throughout the month of May.

Adoption of Urban-Appropriate Conservation Practices by Youth in Juvenile Detention Centers Harris County Leadership Academy

Exciting developments are underway at the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (HCJPD) Leadership Academy, where students are engaging in a unique program focused on Urban Appropriate Conservative Gardening practices. This initiative not only educates youth about sustainable gardening methods but also offers hands-on experience and a sense of ownership over the garden areas they help design and build.



Recently, under the guidance of Harris County 4-H agent Zachary Giblin and Harris County Horticulture agent Stephanie Gray, students have successfully established six raised garden beds, installed a drip irrigation system, and created an ADA-compliant pathway. Their efforts extend beyond the academy as well. The youth have collaborated with The Neighborhood Garden Project, a non-profit donation and community garden located in Katy, Texas founded by Josh Singleton, to add a pollinator garden to the community garden site.

As the program continues, students will deepen their knowledge of urban sustainable gardening through both classroom education and practical projects, such as creating pollinator gardens, espaliered/trellised fruit trees, and keyhole gardens. These activities are designed to empower students with valuable skills and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.





Kaden and Sammie

TARRANT COUNTY 4-H MEMBERS EXCEL AT TEXAS 4-H ROUNDUP

CEA 4-H & YD Kate Marshall mentions 4-H members from Tarrant County 4-H participated at Texas 4-H Roundup in Bryan/College Station, Texas, June 3rd-6th. Texas 4-H Roundup, the pinnacle event for all of Texas 4-H, welcomed around 1,300 senior level, or high school aged, youth to compete in approximately 50 diverse competitions, educational workshops, career learning opportunities, and more throughout the week. The contests included both qualifying events, where 4-H members qualified at their county and district contests to compete at the state level, and invitational events. Additionally, the Texas 4-H Youth Development Foundation awarded \$2.7 million in scholarships to 229 youth.

4-H is America's largest youth development organization, empowering nearly six million young people with the skills to lead for a lifetime. 4-H is a community of young people

across America who are learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills. The mission of Texas 4-H is to provide meaningful opportunities for all youth to have fun, learn, explore, and discover. While participating in 4-H, young people make new friends, develop new skills, become leaders, and form positive attitudes helping them to be capable, responsible, and compassionate members of society. Texas 4-H, as part of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, also stands to, through the application of science-based knowledge, create high-quality, relevant continuing education that encourages lasting and effective change.

Additionally for 2024, Roundup participants had the opportunity to participate in the Quilts of Valor program, designing a quilt for a veteran. At the evening assembly on Tuesday, the veteran was presented with a previously made quilt and honored for her years of service.

The 2025 event is planned for June 2-5, 2025, in Bryan/College Station, Texas.

"It's finally time for Texas 4-H Roundup again and we could not be more excited! Texas 4-H Council chose the theme Ignite. They want 4-H'er's across the state to ignite their 4-H journey, their story, their passion, their experience... the list goes on," Dr. Montza Williams, Texas 4-H Youth Development Program Director said.

"Throughout the week, we hope these youth were charged to take the steps necessary to ignite their 4-H experience in the coming year. Whether in competition, receiving scholarships, or participating in educational workshops and the college and career fair, all youth attendees had something to gain and enjoy at the 2024 Roundup."

The Tarrant County 4-H program is proud of the following youth for their participation and success at Texas 4-H Roundup:

Sammie Duncan
Educational
Presentation
(Qualifying Event)

Kaden Gordillo
Educational
Presentation
(Qualifying Event)

Isabella Rodriguez
Talent Showcase
Variety Show
(Qualifying Event)

Isabel Garza
Invitational Contest

Elizabeth Hall
Invitational Contest

Joseph LeBlanc
Invitational Contest

Samantha Stoffels
Invitational Contest

Cali Whiddon
Invitational Contest

SUMMER EFNEP HIGHLIGHTS:

Recognition, Learning, and an Exciting "Special Addition"

Recently, EFNEP staff from across the state gathered for the 2024 EFNEP State Conference that not only enriched our professional knowledge but also celebrated the dedication and hard work of our team.

Celebrating Years of Service and Excellence



EFNEP EA Robin Hall shares that the Conference began on a high note with the EFNEP Awards and Recognition Banquet where all attendees were given time to lift up one of their team members with inspiring sentiments and words of encouragement. The banquet was also a time to honor the commitment and longevity of our team members, who have contributed to our mission over the years, by recognizing each staff member for their years of service.

Dolores Haley, one of our Adult Educators was awarded the Exemplary Excellence - AgriLife Extension Award for Tarrant County. This prestigious accolade was bestowed upon one outstanding staff member per county in recognition of exemplary service to EFNEP. Recipients of this honor demonstrate an attitude of excellence, teamwork, and go "Above and Beyond" the expectations of their job duties, setting a high standard of excellence for all of us.

Enhancing Mental Health and Physical Activity Resources



In recognition of the increasing importance of mental health, our training included a comprehensive overview of the mental health resources available to us as employees. This information is vital in ensuring that we can maintain our well-being and continue to provide excellent service. The session equipped us with strategies to manage stress and prioritize our mental health, reinforcing our commitment to fostering a supportive work environment.

Additionally, staff enjoyed a session focused on new tips for conducting physical activities with youth. These practical insights will help us engage young people more effectively, promoting their physical health and well-being through fun and interactive activities.

Thank
you
to all
staff
members
for your
hard
work
and
commitment.

Introducing a New Lesson for Pregnant and New Moms



Among other information shared related to the curriculum used for EFNEP classes, a pivotal highlight of the EFNEP State Conference was the introduction of a new lesson specifically designed for pregnant and new moms, appropriately titled, "Special Addition." This lesson will serve as a supplemental lesson for the existing adult curriculum, and focuses on prenatal nutrition, food safety, physical activity, and infant nutrition for the first year of life. The lesson is scheduled to officially roll out in October, and we are enthusiastic about the positive impact it will have on the communities we serve.

Moving Forward



This conference was a testament to our collective dedication to professional development and excellence in service. The knowledge and skills we have gained will benefit our work and the communities we serve. As we implement the new lesson and utilize the mental health and physical activity resources, we are well-prepared to meet the evolving needs of our participants.

2024 INSIDE AUSTIN GARDENS TOUR WOWS PARTICIPANTS WHILE EDUCATING THEM ON SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING METHODS

The Inside Austin Gardens Tour is an Extension educational program offered every 18 months, with the theme "For Gardeners, by Gardeners," and is a rare, behind-the-scenes look at several private Central Texas gardens. The tour serves not only as an educational program, but also as a fund-raiser for the Travis County Master Gardeners Association. The tour focuses on beautiful native and well-adapted plants available for use in any Central Texas garden and highlights sustainable gardening practices and principles. The plants in each garden are labeled and various educational materials are developed specifically for each garden.

For the 2024 IAGT, four home landscapes (the Travis County Hort Agent's home, along with the homes of three TCMG volunteers) were on display, each demonstrating various realistic gardening practices that "inform and inspire."

TCMG volunteers serve in various roles for the tour, including as garden docents at each landscape, and relevant Extension horticulture publications are available at the registration table of each home on tour day. The 2024 tour raised over \$11,000 in ticket sales and \$5,000 in sponsorships and was highlighted on the nationally syndicated PBS gardening program, Central Texas Gardener. (You can watch that video segment on YouTube [here!](#)) All 115 current Travis County Master Gardeners volunteered to assist with the tour, contributing over 1000 hours of their time. A combined total of 1,758 contacts were made during this program.



Satsuma mandarin citrus and other backyard fruit and vegetables were featured on the IAGT



Travis County Master Gardener Robert Northrup educates 2024 IAGT participants on sustainable gardening practices



All plants on the IAGT were labeled, and water conserving plants like this Agave were highlighted

BEXAR COUNTY

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Commissioner Rebeca Clay-Flores
Commissioner Justin Rodriguez
Commissioner Grant Moody
Commissioner Tommy Calvert



DALLAS COUNTY

County Judge Clay Jenkins
Commissioner Dr. Elba Garcia
Commissioner John Wiley Price
Commissioner
Andrew Sommerman
Commissioner Dr. Theresa Daniel



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With the support of the County Judge and County Commissioners, each Texas A&M AgriLife Extension County Office offers the knowledge resources of the Texas A&M University System to local citizens for self-improvement, individual action, and community problem-solving.

Thank You.