

RELEVANCE

Across the United States, consumers are interested in foods that are healthy, locally grown, and organically or sustainably produced. Small acreage horticulture producers can market directly to consumers at farmers markets and sell to local restaurants. Williamson County boasts more than 10 farmers markets throughout the county, with a large number of market and hobby growers producing vegetables, fruit, pecans, and value-added products for the markets.

In June 2022, the Texas Comptroller reported that the Cedar Park Farmers Market averages about 3,000 shoppers per market day. Most markets in Williamson County report 25-130 vendors at their markets with products. The farmers markets attract local shoppers, creating a positive economic impact on the local community. Additionally, farmers markets accept SNAP benefits, which helps get nutritious, locally grown produce to low-resource families.

Producers of horticultural crops need assistance and information on best management practices and marketing strategies. Extension educational programs can help producers lower production costs and grow a quality product for market.

RESPONSE

The Williamson County Horticulture Committee planned four programs in 2022 to address the needs of small horticulture producers: Vegetable Conference, Fruit Forum, Pecan Field Day, and an Organic Growers Conference.

Educational programs focused on reducing input costs, integrated pest management, water conservation, and introducing high value crops for central Texas.

The programs were offered to local small acreage horticulture producers and hobby gardeners. Programs were marketed through the local farmers market associations, newspapers, social media, and newsletter lists. Local growers helped identify topics that are relevant to their needs.

“Great information and resources. Lots of information to take in and absorb. Definitely have a better understanding on some information, and plenty of resources to comb through as well.”

VALUE STATEMENT

Horticulture Production

Extension programs in crop production promote best practices that lead to reduced irrigation, safer pest management, and improved profitability of agricultural enterprises. This benefits Texas as a whole by contributing to the quality and quantity of water resources and enhancing both agricultural competitiveness and rural economies.

USDA National Agricultural
Statistics Service reports

8,140

farmers markets in the US

916

households shopped at each
US farmers market on an
average day and spent

\$14,547



RESPONSE

Pecan Field Day: March 22

- AgriLife Specialists Dr. Monte Nesbitt and Dr. Young-Ki Jo presented on Pecan Grafting, Pest Management in Orchards, and Terminal Leaf Dieback/Pecan Scab.
- **21 pecan producers attended** from Williamson County and the surrounding area.

Vegetable Conference: April 6

- AgriLife Specialists Dr. Rus Wallace and Bob Whitney spoke about Weed and Pest Control in Vegetables, Using High Tunnels to Extend the Season, Strawberry Production, and Organic Vegetable Production
- **50 people attended** the program held in Taylor

Fruit Forum: September 16

- Dr. Russ Wallace: Strawberry Production
- Jacy Lewis: New Crop- Raspberries in Central Texas
- Bob Whitney: Challenges to Growing Peaches in Central Texas
- Dr. Thayne Montague: Plant Stresses
- **15 people attended** in Taylor

Organic Conference: October 18-19

- First AgriLife Organic Growers Conference program focused on providing information for growers who are certified organic or transitioning into the certified organic program
- **34 people attended** the two-day program in Georgetown
- Speakers included AgriLife Research, Corteva Field Researcher, Texas A&M University Horticulture Professor, Kunafin Insectary, Certis Bio, AgriLife Organic Specialist, and the Texas Department of Agriculture. Field tour to Certified Organic Gabriel Valley Farm



Evaluation Strategy

A retrospective post survey is used at programs to measure knowledge gained, customer satisfaction, and intention to adopt best practices. This survey asks participants to rank their level of knowledge about topics before the program and after the program on a scale of one to four, with one being poor and four being excellent, and the survey asks participants to indicate their intention to adopt best practices on a five-point scale of "definitely will not" to "already adopted."

RESULTS

Your understanding of...

	Mean before	Mean after	Percent increase
Organic weed control options (41/42 respondents)	2.05	3.27	40.7%
The advantages of high tunnels (41/42 respondents)	2.10	3.66	52.0%
Fungicide program for pecan scab (20/20 respondents)	2.10	3.30	40.0%
Early season pecan insect scouting and control methods (20/20 respondents)	2.20	3.45	41.7%
Symptoms of pecan leaf dieback fungus (20/20 respondents)	2.37	3.47	36.7%
How to select a biopesticide (12/15 respondents)	1.58	3.42	61.3%
Using biological controls products to control pests and diseases (14/15 respondents)	2.07	3.50	47.7%
The importance of the certified organic program for marketing and regulation (14/15 respondents)	2.00	3.57	52.3%
Planting time for strawberries (13/14 respondents)	1.69	3.38	56.3%
How to identify and treat iron chlorosis (13/14 respondents)	1.92	3.46	51.3%

Your intention to adopt...

	Probably will	Definitely will	Already Adopted
Adding compost to improve soil health (15 respondents)	6.7%	60.0%	13.3%
Using biological control products to control pests and diseases (15 respondents)	40.0%	26.7%	13.3%
Soil testing to improve soil health (15 respondents)	13.3%	46.7%	20.0%

"[The program] increased knowledge and understanding. Good responses to questions, and the information provided was relevant."

For More Information:

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