

TACC NEWSLETTER

TEXAS AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE COUNCIL

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Farm Store Summit: The Sequel

Back again by popular demand, both in person and by Zoom, is TACC's Farm Store Summit held at the Inn on Barons Creek in Fredericksburg on January 20-21, 2021. The program will begin with a social distanced roundtable, which afforded last year's participants an opportunity to openly discuss the triumphs and challenges of running a farm store, and gain insights from others with similar experiences. Speakers from Texas, Colorado, Tennessee & Minnesota will cover topics such as social media, innovations in farm stores, proven successes and rural broadband initiatives that cooperatives can get involved in and benefit from. Registration materials will be sent out within a week. Anyone from general and branch managers to farm store managers can gather some nuggets of helpful information from this meeting and we hope to see y'all there!

Confirmed speakers (so far) include:

- **Bart Krisel** is the CEO of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative (TFC) located in La Vergne, TN which he has been with for almost 40 years! TFC is comprised of roughly 60 ag cooperatives throughout Tennessee with locations in five surrounding states.
- **John Prickett** is CEO of Grocery Supply Company in Sulphur Springs, a convenience store grocery supplier (*similar to Temple-based grocery supplier, Drayton McLane*) serving an area that includes Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kansas, and Missouri.
- **Dr. Molly McAdams** is the recently appointed Executive Vice President of the Texas Beef Council, the organization responsible for the Texas beef checkoff program. She previously co-founded a company to help small and mid-sized meat packers develop and market their business. She is a former HEB employee.
- **Matt Wohlman**, the Senior Director of State and Industry Affairs with Land O' Lakes in Arden Hills, Minnesota, is a 5th-generation farmer and previously served as the Deputy Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.
- **Ken Zuckerberg** serves as a lead industry analyst and senior economist in CoBank's Knowledge Exchange Division, utilizing his expertise in agriculture technology and innovation. Ken has been in this industry for more than 30 years!

The Sun Sets on Review of Texas Agricultural Agencies

Several state agencies responsible for segments of Texas agriculture were up for Sunset Review this year: Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation, Texas Animal Health Commission, and the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners. Hearings for each agency have been held and recommendations for each group have been voted on by the Sunset Commission (*the oversight committee containing bi-partisan members of the Texas House, Texas Senate and two public appointees*). When the state legislature reconvenes in January 2021, these agencies and their respective recommendations will be voted on by the entire body on whether or not each agency will be reauthorized for existence.

Keeping Co-ops in the Conversation

As the representative organization for cooperatives in Texas, it is important TACC stays vigilant and involved as to keep members in the loop and out of the ditch with regulators and policy-makers in Austin. Below is a look at the role TACC-PAC has played in preserving our industry's way of life and staying connected with the agriculture industry as a whole.

- Developed an 8th edition, two – year PAC hard copy newsletter highlighting where the state's ag PACs placed their money on the “contested” statewide, state senate, state house, and U.S. Congressional races from Texas.
- Participated in a donor group for the Texas Tribune (*Austin's political newspaper*) “Virtual Rural Symposium” in mid-November, where important rural issues such as broadband and healthcare were discussed with state lawmakers and rural representatives.
- Met with academic leaders to align greater engagement in ag lobby activities with ag universities.
- Developed a new website format for the 65-member group of ag associations in Texas (*Texas Ag Council*) and refurbished the online directory of leadership.
- Began tracking pre-filed bills, from both the House and Senate sides, that has the potential to impact agriculture and/or rural Texas.
- Participated in the annual retreat of all the ag lobby groups in Texas, held in Abilene.
- Coordinated action of the state co-op PAC, TACC-PAC, to contribute \$13,950 to 42 campaign races during the November 3rd General Election.
- Met with several elected officials, from both the state legislature and regulatory agencies, to get the inside scoop on changes and events happening at the State Capitol—especially as it relates to the impact of the pandemic on state matters and impending issues such as redistricting and the state budget.
- Since the election, TACC has received several calls from newly-elected legislators to discuss cooperative priorities for the upcoming session and build on existing relationships.

Facebook Continues to Make an Impact

- October 5, 2020 • The Lubbock Avalanche Journal recently reported that 75 years ago, the Floydada Producers Co-op Elevator held an annual meeting where members voted unanimously to begin construction of a new elevator with 150,000-bushel capacity. That same elevator is being used by the co-op today, but now the co-op also consists of beer & lottery ticket sales and the recent acquisition of a new convenience store & fuel station on a major thoroughfare through town. **Seth Stephens** is general manager of the co-op --- located 40 miles northeast of Lubbock.
- October 20, 2020 • TRAINING TIP TUESDAY: When a West Texas co-op manager was asked what the best advice he ever received about managing a co-op was, his response was that another manager had said that you have to “approach the job with a servant's heart.”
- November 2, 2020 • The Texas State Comptroller is **Glenn Hegar**, who holds a degree in ag law from the University of Arkansas. On a video call with ag lobby groups, he stated that 19% of all the U.S. exports ship out of Texas!
- December 1, 2020 • In an effort to continue the 50 – plus years of an exceptional academia / industry relationship, TACCs **Tommy Engelke** and **Dr. John Park**, holder of the Roy B. Davis Co-op Chair at Texas A&M University arranged for a meeting with the new statewide executive director (**Dr. Jeff Hyde**) of the Texas AgriLife Extension on November 16 in their home office in College Station. Dr. Hyde holds three degrees in agricultural economics from Penn State University and is the son of a Pentecostal preacher. The group reviewed the countless strategic plans performed by both parties, the scholarship program established in the ag economics department years ago, the joint internship initiative handled by both, and all the joint work TACC has performed with the co-op chair since 1971. Dr. Hyde will be making a presentation at TACCs Joint Co-op Meeting in San Antonio on Monday, March 15, 2021.

Bringing Closure to an Awkward Year – 2020

In general, when someone says they had an unforgettable year, it usually has positive connotations, but not this year. It is one for the ages and a memory-maker, but for all the wrong reasons! However, with excellent director direction and a very loyal membership base, the Council recently noted several highlights for 2020 . . .

- With the cancellation of the traditional Joint Cooperative Meeting in mid-March at The Woodlands down near Houston, TACC held its first - ever VIRTUAL annual meeting in its 86 - year history in early May.
- Given the horrific consequences of the virus, the Council held a virtual educational meeting over the summer covering legal issues and answering questions about seeking a co-op PPP loan. There was an overwhelming response with 98 participants.
- What started as a simple suggestion from a co-op manager to conduct a “Farm Store Summit” to help co-ops restore profitability to that segment of their business, resulted in 49 people attending the conference in late January 2020 in Fredericksburg ---- with exceptional ratings. So much so that another one has been scheduled for January 28 – 29, 2021 again in Fredericksburg.
- With TACC recently retiring in June from serving a 2.5-year role as chair of the 65 – member ag lobby group at the State Capitol (Texas Ag Council), the Council and all the relationships developed during that tenure propelled the organization to be in a prime position to continue to preserve the excellent “business climate” advantages afforded cooperative agribusinesses.
- Initiated a “Fundraiser February” initiative to attract a greater audience and fundraising effort into the state co-op political action committee, TACC-PAC. It has begun to attract more interest and dollars in some of the most unlikely places.
- The pandemic has caused more “shelter in place” ordinances for co-ops, and for TACC, it has allowed for much more webinars and training opportunities for the staff that never existed before. The payoff will be in new and exciting approaches to their programs and events.
- Even though TACC has been known as a ‘go to’ partner when it comes to conducting strategic plans for cooperatives, this year took on a new addition, plus the development of historical documents never seen before by co-op leadership. This has led to greater information at local co-op annual meetings and better long-term direction for organizations.
- As an added document to aide cooperatives to navigate REGULATORY and legislative offices in Austin, the Council prepared “Legislative Readiness Papers”. On the surface this seems quite simple, but during a pandemic and stay at home orders by state employees, it has been extremely difficult to reach key “agency” personnel & legislative leaders when you need them. These papers were prepared to come to your rescue.
- Although the Council has adapted many of its programs with more of a technology component and daily Facebook posts for over four years, TACC introduced a weekly LinkedIn page at mid-year to accommodate those who crave “educational” papers that better explain a particular co-op or business focus. This has been quite successful.
- Even though at times the Council staff had to shelter in place due to city ordinances, they continued to produce high quality & timely materials such as personnel placements, regulatory assistance, training webinars, participating in legislative and political campaigns, and expanding the co-op voice with ag universities across the state.

Perhaps one of the best statements made about this year was by TACC Vice President **Tony Morton**, Senior Vice President & CFO of PYCO Industries in Lubbock when he said, “We don’t function well within the co-op structure when we don’t get out and mix among the people. It’s one of the hallmarks of the co-op system!”

Looking Forward to State Legislative Session Challenges

Here are some key issues facing state elected officials in the upcoming legislative session:

1. **Redistricting** will remain a huge issue and it is possible a special session could be called in order to allow enough time to complete the calculations and language. Of the 150 House members, 110 of them have been there five years or less and have not yet undergone the process. This process has a huge impact on rural Texas and their representation.
2. The impacts of **COVID-19** on state responsibilities and procedures will need to be addressed in two ways:
 - a. Health and safety measures will need to be established to mitigate any risk posed to elected officials, employees in the State Capitol, and members of the public as business is conducted. In a recent meeting, one Republican representative said it’s important that the “people’s house remains open for those that need to access their representation.”
 - b. One apparent impact of the pandemic was on the state budget, thus navigating the deficit will be a large focus of elected officials.
3. **Broadband access** has been an issue highlighted by the pandemic, particularly as it relates to the availability of telehealth and the option of online schooling to all Texans. This is a bipartisan issue gaining support from both rural and urban policy-makers.



Out and About (Since September 30)

- Attended an exclusive EPA-Region 6 Ag Summit virtual meeting on October 7.
- Attended a campaign event for South Texas State Representative **Ryan Guillen** on October 7.
- Prepared recommendations and held a TACC-PAC Board of Trustees' meeting on October 9 to determine TACC contributions to the November 3 General Election.
- Wrote, published and distributed a TACC-PAC Special Edition Newsletter announcing where most ag PACs placed their contributions in the November 3 General Election and to inform members on activities of TACC-PAC.
- Continued to post daily to TACC's Facebook page, as has been done since December of 2016.
- Participated in the Texas Tribune Virtual Rural Symposium on November 9-13, along with other ag groups.
- Assisted **D. Williams and Company** with the TACC FYE September 30 audit in Austin, November 12-13.
- Developed a TACC 2020-2021 budget.
- Taught the co-op business model and summer co-op internship program on November 16 at Texas A&M University.
- Began coordination of a second "Farm Store Summit" to be held in January 2021.
- Continued to track legislative bills that are of interest to Texas agriculture and rural communities.
- Prepared for the December 15 TACC Executive Committee meeting.
- Developed and distributed a TACC Christmas card.
- Assisted with job placements throughout the state.
- Attended the National Conference of State Co-op Council's meeting online on December 16.



Will Be

- Preparing and soliciting attendees for the upcoming Farm Store Summit on January 28-29 in Fredericksburg.
- Solidifying plans for the approaching January 12, 2021 State Legislative Session in Austin.
- Meeting with elected officials, as a part of the Texas Ag Council, to receive legislative updates and communicate important topics on behalf of agriculture.
- Preparing for a February 9 TACC Virtual Family-style co-op director training experience.
- Setting parameters to launch a weekly 15-minute Thursday morning legislative briefing for co-op members to track the most important ag events at the State Capitol.



Calendar of Events

December

24-25 TACC Christmas Holiday

January

1 TACC New Year's Day Holiday

5-7 Beltwide Cotton Conference... Virtual

12 State Legislative Session Begins

28-29 TACC Farm Store Summit – Inn on Barons Creek, Fredericksburg

February

9 TACC Virtual Family-Style Co-op Director Training

12-14 National Cotton Council Annual Meeting... Virtual

March

14-16 TACC Joint Cooperative Meeting – La Cantera Resort, San Antonio

July

14-16 TACC Cooperative Managers Conference – Inn of the Mountain Gods, Ruidoso, NM

28-30 TACC Cooperative Board Chairmen's Conference – Inn of the Mountain Gods, Ruidoso, NM