

Longtime Agricultural Report Remains Popular in Texas

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MORE THAN 20 years ago a weekly report of crop, livestock and weather conditions in Texas was initiated in agreement with the two major wire services—Associated Press and United Press International.

The report was widely accepted among the state's daily newspapers. Many Texas folks were still close to agriculture at that time.

Two decades later, even after considerable change in the number of farms, the weekly report still is used widely across the state.

The UPI version is a short, concise report, generally about a page of double-spaced copy. The AP version features a brief opening summary of general information followed by brief accounts of the most significant activities in each of the 13 districts of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Information for the reports comes from each of the extension district agents by telephone or telegram. The district agents receive weekly reports from their county agents. The information is compiled each Wednesday and the respective reports are prepared. The information in the AP report is attributed to the state Extension Service director while information in the UPI report is attributed to the Extension Service in general.

In a recent survey* directed to the agricultural editor or managing editor of each of the 110 daily newspapers in the state that should have access to either AP or UPI copy or both, 94 responses were received. Of those, 85.4 percent indicated that they do receive the weekly report, and all but 17.0 percent received the AP version.

*The initial survey of 110 daily newspapers by a mail questionnaire brought 47 responses. A follow-up telephone survey by random selection reached about one-third of the newspapers that did not respond to the mail questionnaire. The combined results were generalized to reflect the total of 110 newspapers in the state.

Table 1. Survey results for Texas Extension Service weekly report

Questionnaire Responses	Number of Newspapers	Percent
Receive report	94	85.4
Do not receive report	16	14.6
Receive AP report	78	83.0
Receive UPI report	16	17.0
Use weekly	21	22.7
Use whenever space allows	73	77.3
Use on Sunday	47	50
Use entire report	55	59
Use only part	39	41
Use county agents to localize reports	28	30
Information is valuable	64	68
Information has high reader interest	32	34
Information has moderate reader interest	52	55

Of those receiving either report, 82.5 percent indicated that they use all or part of the report on a regular basis. More than 22.7 percent of those using the report did so on a weekly basis while the remainder used the report "whenever space allows."

Sunday was the most popular day for publishing the report, according to the survey. Exactly half preferred using the report on Sunday, with the remainder indicating no particular preference as to the day of the week when the report was used. The AP report is tagged "for Sunday release," which may explain the heavy usage of the report in Sunday editions.

A question relating to the amount of the report that is used, especially in regard to the AP version, drew a surprising response. Fifty-nine percent indicated they published the entire report while the remainder indicated using only parts of the report they thought pertinent to their particular areas of the state.

On the question of using local county extension agents as sources in localizing the report, 30 percent indicated using such contacts.

Regarding the editors' values of the information in the report, more than 68 percent evaluated it as being "valuable" while 14.5 percent termed the report "too general" and about 10 percent judged it as being "too long." One respondent noted the report was "too short."

The editors were also asked how they felt their audiences valued the report. More than 34 percent felt the report had a high readership interest

while almost 55 percent evaluated the readership interest as "moderate." The remainder indicated a "low" reader interest in the report.

Concerning the 16 percent of those questioned who do not use the report, we were, of course, interested in the reasons for not publishing the material. Among the responses were these:

- Too crowded for space.
- Need more local news, which we get from the county agent.
- We have primarily an urban market.
- There is no farming in our coverage area.
- Agricultural interest has become virtually non-existent.
- Space is just too tight.
- We use little wire service copy.
- The report comes too late for our deadline for the Sunday farm page makeup.

As a final item in the survey, editors were asked to offer suggestions for improving the report. Here are the responses:

- Would like reports from each of the area livestock commissions.
- Keep the information as current as possible.
- We would like specific information pertaining to our coverage area.
- To make the report appear less routine and increase reader interest, select and concentrate on the most significant situation in the state.
- Shorten the report by including only the significant situations. Don't repeat conditions that are the same in several areas of the state.
- Regionalize the report more.
- Get the report to the wire service earlier in the week as we have an early deadline for our farm page.

Keeping the weekly report of interest to a wide range of readers will be particularly challenging in the days ahead. Yet, with agriculture gaining and maintaining the spotlight as it has in recent times, the market for this type of report appears fairly stable. Of course, it must be kept interesting not only to the agricultural producer and agribusinessman but also to the consumer who is concerned about the supply, price and quality of agricultural products. The consumer must be made to see the relationship between adverse weather conditions and higher prices or lower quality products, or the effect of such conditions as fertilizer and fuel shortages.

Preparing the weekly report is indeed a challenge, especially in a state where diversity is the rule rather than the exception; where a multitude of geographical areas and climatic conditions abound.

The survey was conducted to obtain current feedback on the usage and contents of the weekly report. Based on the responses, the report will

continue on a weekly basis, and special attempts will be made to provide more specific information and information that might be of more interest to consumers in general.

Examples of typical releases to both UPI and AP follow.

FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS
BILL BRADEN, ASSISTANT EDITOR

SPECIAL TO: United Press International

COLLEGE STATION, June ____—(Spl). . . . Cotton and sorghum planting is still in full swing in the Plains of Northwest Texas while some sorghum harvesting is expected to start in the Rio Grande Valley next week.

Spring crops are generally making good progress over the state, reports the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, but moisture is still short over much of the western part of the state and is becoming short in Central Texas.

Some dryland farmers in western areas are waiting on rain to plant cotton and sorghum. Planting of peanuts and soybeans is active in North Central and Southeast Texas.

Boll weevils are increasing in cotton through South and Central Texas. Spraying continues to control pecan nut casebearers.

Wheat harvesting continues to make good progress over the state. Yields are generally light but some have reached the 50-bushel per acre mark.

(etc.)

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FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS
BILL BRADEN, ASSISTANT EDITOR

SPECIAL TO: Associated Press

COLLEGE STATION, June ____—(Spl). . . . Most crops are making good progress over the state although moisture is still short in much of the western half of Texas and is becoming short in Central areas. Many dryland farmers in the Plains are needing rain to plant their spring crops.

Some sorghum will be harvested within the next week in the Rio Grande Valley, points out Dr. Dan Pfannstiel, associate director of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Cotton is also fruiting heavily in South Texas.

Peanuts and soybeans continue to be planted in Southeast and North Central Texas.

Boll weevils are increasing in cotton in southern and central areas.

Wheat harvesting continues active over the state, notes Pfannstiel. Yields vary greatly, from five to 50 bushels an acre, but the average crop is light. Oats and barley are also producing generally light yields.

Alfalfa harvesting continues in western areas and yields have been good. Hay making is underway in many counties and first cuttings have produced generally good yields.

(etc.)

District Extension agents reported these conditions.

PANHANDLE: Soil moisture continues short except in southeastern counties. Cotton planting is active and ranges from 40 to 85 per cent complete. Recent thunderstorms have brought needed moisture but more is needed. Range conditions are short.

SOUTH PLAINS: Corn and sorghum are generally making good progress. Some dryland farmers are still waiting on moisture to plant cotton and sorghum. Recent sand storms have damaged some young cotton. Irrigated cotton looks good north of Lubbock. The wheat harvest is underway and yields are light. Recent rain showers have helped the moisture situation but more is needed.

ROLLING PLAINS: Soil moisture continues short in over half the counties. Cotton and sorghum planting is in full swing and is nearly complete in some counties. Guar and peanut planting is also active. The wheat harvest ranges from 25 to 95 per cent complete and yields range from five to 50 bushels per acre. Range conditions are fair to good.

NORTH CENTRAL: Harvesting of wheat, oats and barley continues active and is about at the halfway mark. Yields are fair to good. A few fields of cotton remain to be planted. Most crops are making good growth. About 40 per cent of the peanut crop and 30 per cent of the soybean acreage has been planted. Spraying is active for the pecan nut casebearer. Cowpeas, blackeyes and pintos are making good progress. Hay baling is in progress.

(etc.)

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