

“Recent Texas flora Facebook posts, and photos from native plant enthusiasts, that I received during the winter storm included blooming bluebonnets covered in ice in central Texas,” said Jason Singhurst, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) botanist. “Believe it or not though, most native perennial or biennial plants

such as bluebonnets fared just fine under the insulated snow and ice. If we can get some steady rain in the coming weeks and temperatures stay in mid-80’s or below through April, it should be a great Texas bluebonnet spring.”

During the early spring, Texans everywhere can expect to see a flourish of trout lilies, butter cups,

many mustards, Dakota vervain, four-nerve daisy, spring beauty, violets, Texas rainbow cactus, fishhook barrel cactus, Texas mountain laurel flowers, among many others.

Singhurst says that he anticipates that this spring will allow for a very promising wildflower season in the Big Bend and far west Texas region.

Previous years have had extremely dry winters but this season will likely be more colorful due to increased wet weather over this winter. In central Texas, Singhurst anticipates that residents will see many vegetative bluebonnets, Engelmann’s daisy, Blackfoot daisy, Drummond’s skullcap, Lindheimer’s paintbrush,

Missouri primrose, prairie fleabane, and many others.

Texans who set out to view wildflowers this spring can log the flora they see on iNaturalist and contribute to biologists knowledge of the state’s wildflowers. The platform also allows other plant enthusiasts to assist one another in identification of species throughout the state.

## Texas lamb and goat markets remain hot

Texas lamb and goat meat producers continue to command high prices in a niche market driven by high demand and low supplies, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

Reid Redden, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension sheep and goat specialist and interim director of the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center, San Angelo, said the Texas lamb and goat markets have thrived despite COVID-19 and that travel restrictions likely helped spur demand higher.

“The lamb and goat markets are in another world as it relates to market conditions most Texas ag producers have been dealing with,” he said. “The market for Texas lambs and goats is diverse, resilient and growing. It avoided supply chain bottleneck issues other livestock markets dealt with, and I think the COVID restrictions kept the regular consumers home, which means more family functions to eat lamb and goat meat.”

### Lamb in high demand

Texas producers continue to command top prices as they supply a niche market around the U.S., Redden said.

In January, the base price for 60-pound lightweight slaughter lambs was \$3 per pound, up 70 cents per pound from this time last year, he said. Those lambs are selling \$1 per pound over the five-year rolling average.

Overall, consumer demand for lamb has expanded in recent years. But Redden said Texas lambs have commanded premium prices through the non-traditional market compared to the traditional market for restaurants or retail sale.

The traditional feeder market, which prefers larger framed, wool-type lambs fed to 140-180 pounds, and mimics the beef industry as far as processing and logistics, is not as common in Texas as it used to be, he said. The vast majority of Texas lambs are smaller-framed hair sheep that typically weigh 40-80 pounds – and go to ethnic consumers.

Prices for Texas lambs are driven primarily by the demand from nontraditional ethnic consumers, who are concentrated in major populations centers around the state and nation, Redden said.

Lambs are shipped live to the markets where they are sold directly to consumers or harvested by ethnic processors and distributed to ethnic grocers and butcher shops.

These non-traditional markets demand smaller, leaner lambs and pay a premium for them.

“The market has been strong for some time now, but prices continue to trend upward,” he said.

### Prices reflecting demand

Lamb production is limited in the U.S. because very few regions have climates and production conditions that sheep perform well in compared to other livestock.

Redden said Western parts of Texas are ecologically perfect for sheep. Native plant species include many varieties of browse that sheep find palatable, and the arid conditions make controlling internal parasites easier.

A significant piece of the traditional U.S. lamb market is supplied by imports and they are one-third to half the cost of domestic lamb, but imported lamb do not appear to have as large an effect on the ethnic market supplied by Texas lambs and goats, he said.

Many consumers want lambs at 40-60 pounds, but producers are realizing better margins at 60-80 pounds, Redden said. These market conditions factor into maintaining and inflating strong prices as buyers jockey for specific weight and class lambs.

“It’s a specialty market, and it’s become harder and harder for supplies to meet demand,” he said. “The prices reflect that.”

### Goat prices strong, getting stronger

Goat prices continued to experience a price trajectory

similar to lamb, Redden said.

“The kid goat market is even brighter than lambs,” he said. “The goat market has been on fire the last several years and getting better and better.

Producers don’t understand it, but they’re just riding the wave as far as it will go.”

Unlike Texas’ lamb market, goats have never been part of the traditional meat production

apparatus, Reid said. There are no big processing plants or packers, and production feeds non-traditional, primarily ethnic demand.

(Continued on next page)

## Water Weekly

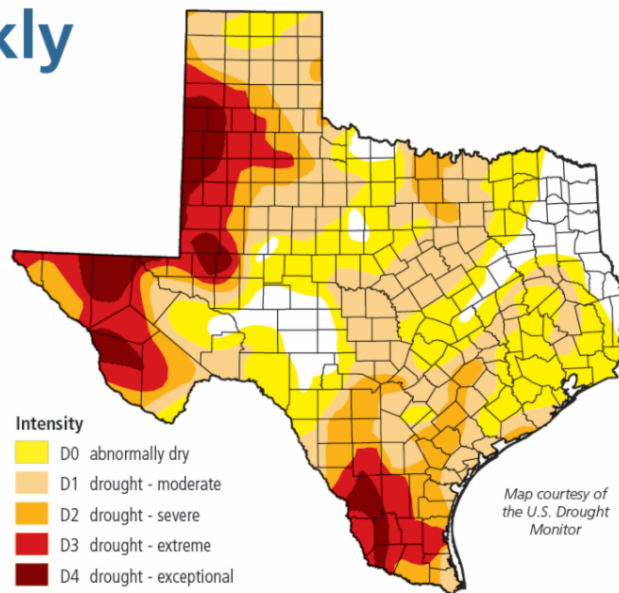
For the week of 03/15/21

### Water conditions

The latest drought map for conditions as of March 9 shows expansion of drought for the third consecutive week. Since mid-February, the area of the state impacted by drought has grown by 17 percentage points. Drought now covers more of the state than at any time since late December 2020.

### Drought conditions

- ◆ 62% now
- ◆ 54% a week ago
- ◆ 79% three months ago
- ◆ 21% a year ago



Map courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor

### Dallas County percent area

Since mid-October, drought has advanced and receded across Dallas County and other parts of north central Texas. The county was covered by drought by mid-November, drought free by late January, and is now back in drought. Since the beginning of October, rainfall has been less than 70 percent of normal.

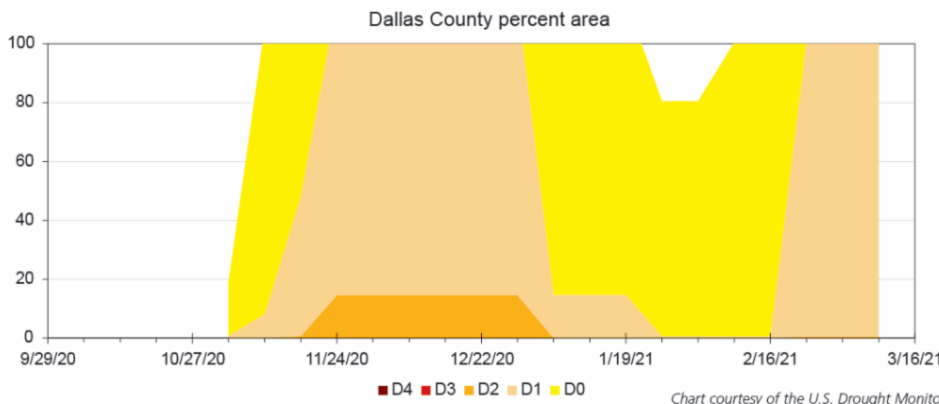


Chart courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor

Written by Dr. Mark Wentzel — Dr. Mark Wentzel is a hydrologist in the TWDB’s Office of Water Science and Conservation.

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