

The freedom of choice

by Julie Tomascik
Texas Farm Bureau

We have a lot of freedoms. The freedom to worship as we please. The freedom to decide what we want to wear. And the freedom to choose what foods we want to eat.

The great thing about American agriculture is however you want to eat - organic, non-GMO, traditional, conventional, grain-fed or grass-fed—there will be a farmer or rancher there to grow it.

But all too often we let others - like celebrities - influence our decisions, especially about food and farming.

When did that happen? And why?

Because we've steered away from agriculture over the years. Farms have grown and diversified, leaving others the freedom to pursue a career off the farm. Doctors, lawyers, actors, teachers - we can be anything we want, because we have the freedom of not having to farm.

We often take that freedom and our food for granted.

Today, less than 2 percent of the nation's population is actively involved in farming and ranching.

The efficiencies of U.S. agriculture have given us a luxury. We don't have to grow our own food. Someone else can. And does so safely. That's a freedom we all should cherish.

Like former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said: "Every one of us that's not a farmer is not a farmer because we have farmers."

So when you have questions about food or farming, let's talk with the experts - farmers and ranchers.

Look up your local county Farm Bureau on Facebook, connect with farmers on Twitter and schedule a visit to see how farms work today.

Or take a short drive to the outskirts of town. That can lead you back to your agricultural roots - no matter how far back you might have to think.

There, the paved roads turn to gravel. Fields of wheat, corn, cotton and more line the roads. Cows graze in the pasture. Farmers are planting or harvesting. Ranchers are baling hay or checking cows and the new calves born overnight.

The smell of the earth and the sound of the wind rustling the tree leaves can bring back memories.

And there you will find a farm family growing our food.

...Coronavirus

(Continued from previous page)

At this time, CDC believes that symptoms of COVID-19 may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure. This is based on what has been seen previously as the incubation period of MERS coronaviruses.

How can I prevent COVID-19?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to

take precautions to avoid exposure to this virus, which are similar to the precautions you take to avoid the flu. DSHS always recommends these everyday actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Stay home when you are sick.

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

Follow the CDC's recommendations for using a facemask:

The CDC does not recommend that people who are

well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

What do I do if I think I may have COVID-19?

If you are experiencing fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, and you have traveled to China, been exposed to a sick traveler from China, or been exposed to a person with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, you should contact your healthcare provider. Be sure to call ahead before going to your doctor's office or emergency department to prevent any potential spread.

Where can I learn more?

To learn key facts and help stop the spread of rumors, see the Share Facts, Not Fear page on the CDC's COVID-19 website. Also see the CDC's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to learn more about COVID-19.

Water Weekly

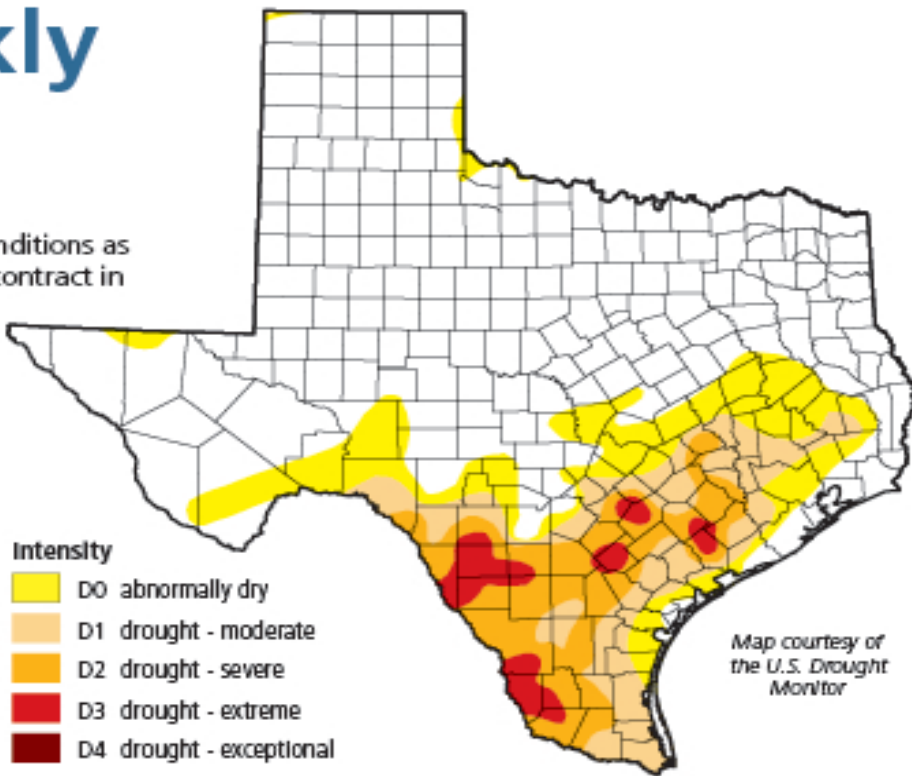
For the week of 03/02/20

Water conditions

As shown in the latest drought map for conditions as of February 25, drought has continued to contract in central and north Texas. In south Texas, where drought remains firmly anchored, 3 percent of the state is impacted by extreme drought.

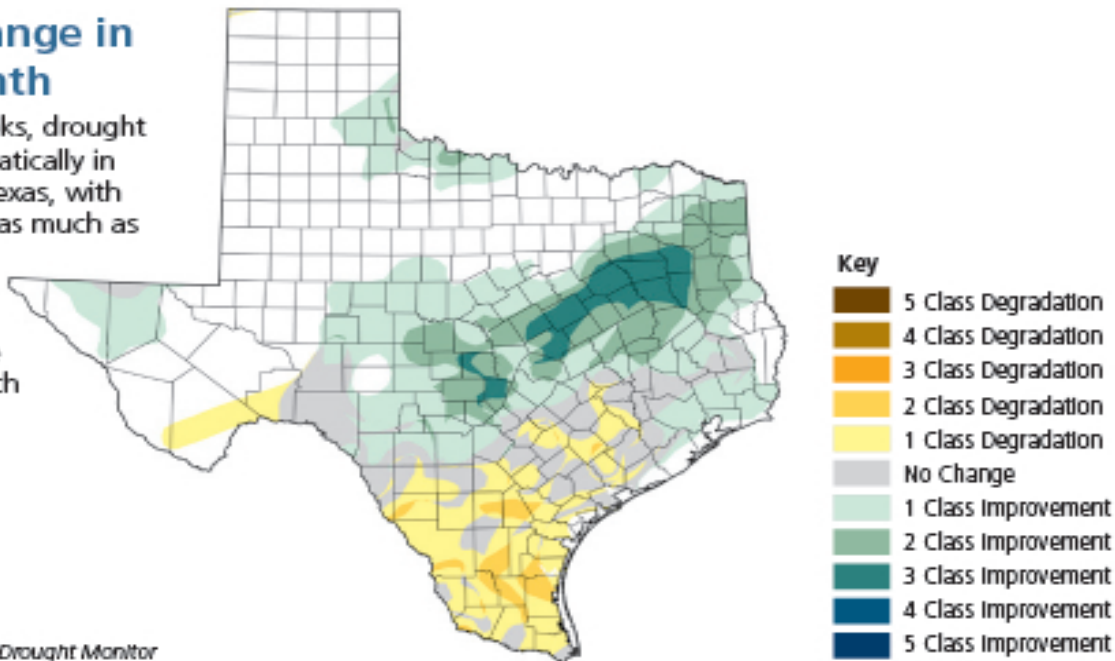
Drought conditions

- ◆ 20% now
- ◆ 24% a week ago
- ◆ 32% three months ago
- ◆ 16% a year ago



Drought change in the last month

In the last four weeks, drought has improved dramatically in north and central Texas, with some areas having as much as three classes of improvement. Meanwhile, areas of south Texas have experienced as much as two classes of degradation.



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

Bryan McMath, Governmental Relations | bryan.mcmath@twdb.texas.gov | 512-463-7850
Sarah Haney, Media Relations | sarah.haney@twdb.texas.gov | 512-463-5129

www.twdb.texas.gov

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