

# Texas farmers, ranches benefit from record exports

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Exports are a critical source of income for a wide range of agricultural products. Over 20 percent of U.S. agricultural production is exported. Many of the products that benefit the most from exports are grown heavily in Texas. At the top of the list is cotton. Seventy-eight percent of U.S. cotton production is exported, and cotton is the most valuable of all row crops grown in our state. Grain sorghum is another big

crop in Texas, and 60 percent of U.S. sorghum production is exported. Fifty one percent of U.S. rice and 50 percent of U.S. wheat production is sold abroad. Twenty percent of U.S. corn and 11 percent of U.S. beef is exported. Beef cattle is the top economic sector in Texas agriculture. There is good news ahead. A record \$157 billion in ag exports is expected in fiscal year 2021. Record exports to China are fueling the sales. Texas farmers and ranchers are thankful for the demand.

Paso's tap at a purified standard. "I don't know how I feel about that," she says. "Part of me thinks it's really cool because you never think of El Paso as progressive, but it's kind of gross so long as the flavor doesn't change, she'll continue drinking from the tap. Per surveys administered by El Paso Water, 85% of El Pasoans will do the same.

"We're not getting much negative feedback from our customers saying, 'Hey, you're making us drink our sewer water. Why are you guys doing this?'" Trejo says of pilot testing. "We've had a lot of support from the community, and we think it's due to decades of education."

El Pasoans have decreased their water usage by 30% per person since the '80s. And now, El Paso, New Mexico, and Mexico often work together to

bolster their water sources. Because of these efforts, four water parks are scheduled to open soon in El Paso.

But this is still the desert, and some have used the landscape to their advantage to boost tourism. "The desert gave us Hueco Tanks," says Mary Bocchicchio, a guide at Sessions Climbing and Guiding, which hosts recreational activities at Hueco Tanks State Park. "Our business is solely based on the state park being here."

Even if 2020 came and El Paso escaped the most dire predictions of water depletion, the resource will never be plentiful here. "We can't predict the future," Dominguez says, "but there are studies that all point toward a drier state along the Rio Grande."

What happens when months pass between rain and canals go dry? When the reservoir two hours north of El Paso that was

once almost at capacity falls below 5%, as it did last October? When the El Paso part of the Rio Grande has just six weeks' worth of flowing water, even if it once ran for eight months of the year.

The existential questions of life in the West Texas desert are impossible to ignore. These latest solutions underscore the ongoing tension between the will of the land and the people intent on inhabiting it.

*This article appeared in the June 2021 issue of Texas Highways Magazine.*

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### ...El Paso water

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Another program paid homeowners to replace their grass with cement, landscape rocks, or desert plants and trees that require little water, like Arizona ash. Those who kept their grass could only water it on certain days.

"El Paso and surrounding cities have successfully met the sustainability goals of conservation efforts," says Marisol Dominguez, a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas at El Paso. She's earned national grants and awards for her research on water, a topic she chose because she grew up in a family of farmers in an arid region of the border.

By 1991, El Paso made wasting water a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$500. And because water conservation could only work if future generations also participated, El Paso Water introduced Willie the Waterdrop that same year. He makes appearances at elementary schools, libraries, and community events, where he teaches kids how they can save water.

Toni Mizdal, a graphic designer, grew up abiding by the rules of the blue mascot with a red headband bearing "Willie" in yellow letters. She has lived in El Paso for most of her life, in a house with a front yard that once "had amazing grass" but is now just "rocks and dirt." As a student, she went on field trips to water plants and learned about recycling water. As a mother, her daughter's field trips included tours of the Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination Plant, the aqua-colored building in El Paso's east side surrounded by desert to its north.

While the Bustamante plant treats wastewater then returns it clean to canals, the Kay Bailey Hutchinson plant—in simple terms—takes salty, undrinkable groundwater buried deep beneath the desert and makes it safe to consume. It's the world's largest inland desalination plant. Since 2007, this is another way the city gets clean water.

Mizdal, who drinks tap water, knew about the desalination

## Water Weekly

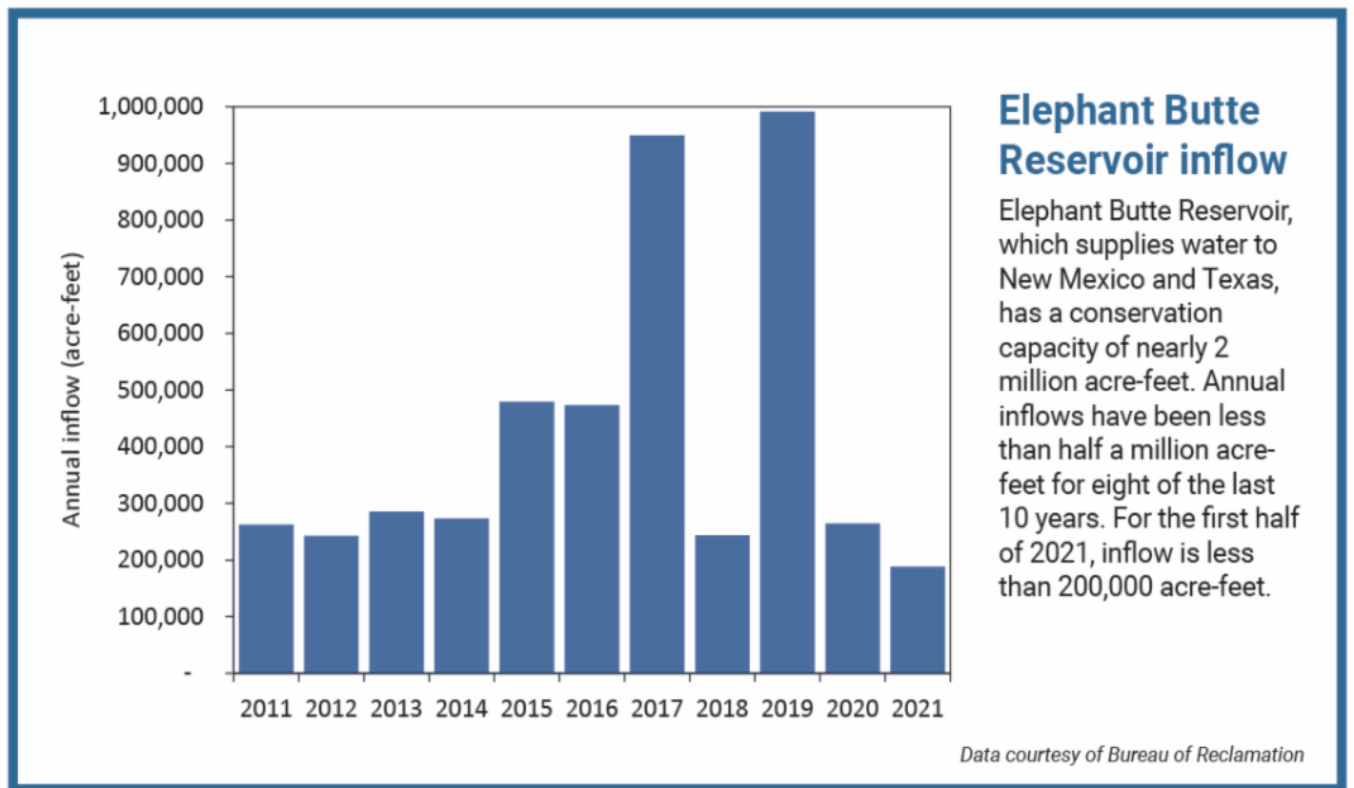
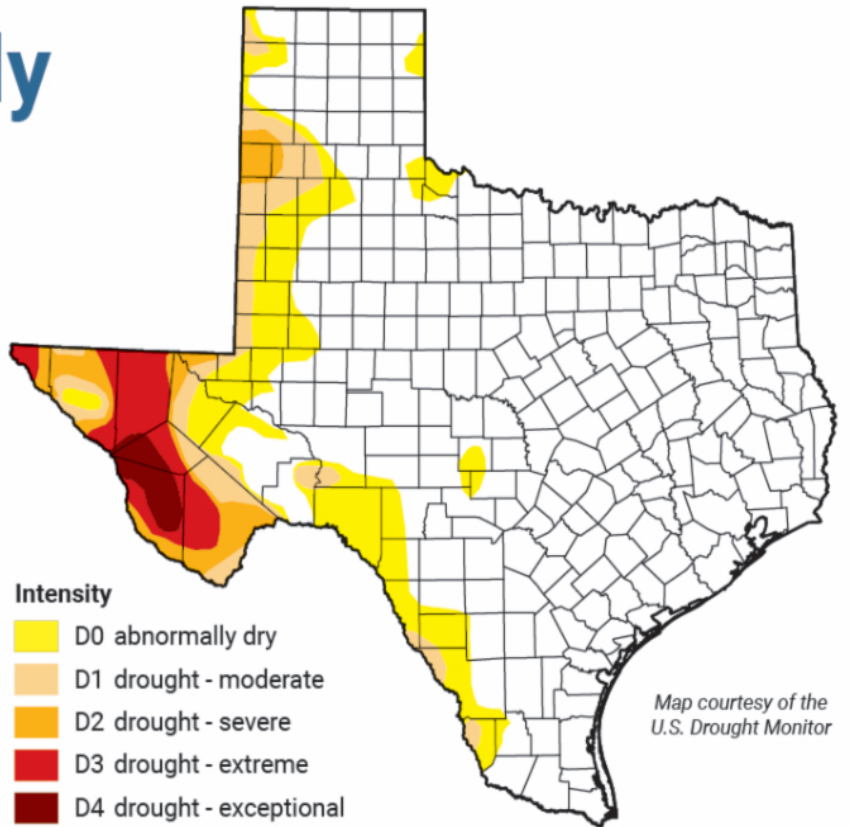
For the week of 06/28/21

### Water conditions

The latest drought map for conditions as of June 22 shows an increase in the area of the state impacted by drought from the previous week, the first increase in 10 weeks. Precipitation in June is shaping up to be less than average for most of the state.

### Drought conditions

- ◆ 13% now
- ◆ 12% a week ago
- ◆ 68% three months ago
- ◆ 25% a year ago



### Elephant Butte Reservoir inflow

Elephant Butte Reservoir, which supplies water to New Mexico and Texas, has a conservation capacity of nearly 2 million acre-feet. Annual inflows have been less than half a million acre-feet for eight of the last 10 years. For the first half of 2021, inflow is less than 200,000 acre-feet.

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