

The Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership Newsletter



Spring 2024

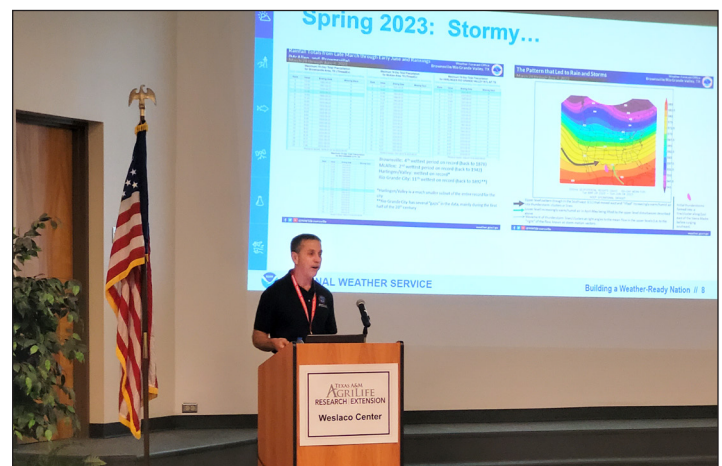
Rio Grande Valley Drought Contingency Irrigation and Water Supply Workshop

By Jaime Flores

The Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension hosted the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Drought Contingency Irrigation and Water Supply Workshop on October 25, 2023 at the AgriLife Extension Center Hoblitzelle Auditorium. The purpose of the workshop was to provide the farmers and producers in the RGV with information on the 2024 drought and weather forecasts for the RGV and how that will impact water deliveries to irrigation districts and municipalities. Barry Goldsmith, National Weather Service Meteorologist, was the most anticipated speaker and provided some insights for the 2024 forecasts. Goldsmith provided a summary of his forecast:

- El Niño (the phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation when the east-central tropical Pacific Ocean is above average in terms of sea surface temperatures) helps create the energy necessary to “feed” tropical moisture into upper level disturbances tracking along or near the U.S./Mexico border.
- If those disturbances track too far to the north (see next bullet point), the moisture won’t get “picked up” into them, and the Lower Valley/northeast Mexico would see less rainfall during winter (through February, perhaps into March).
- If an upper level ridge of high pressure sets up over the eastern Pacific through southern California south to Baja California, it would help “deflect” upper level disturbances farther north, i.e., moving into central/northern California and through the central/southern Rockies and into north Texas-Kansas, keeping the Lower Valley on the dry side of the pillow. This was the case in the winter of 2015/16.
- That same ridge could also keep west-to-east moving tropical-sourced impulses “pinned” well south of the Lower Valley/northeast Mexico, keeping the rainfall pinned as well. Those disturbances—infused by El Niño’s moisture (and warm waters)—can eventually be

“lifted” into the aforementioned southern/central Plains disturbances as they dip southeast into the northern Gulf Coast/southeast U.S. region. That is part of the prediction this winter; note that Florida and southeast U.S. rainfall prediction for winter (December-February) being over 60% chance of above average.



Barry S. Goldsmith, Warning Coordination Meteorologist at the National Weather Service for Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley, was the main speaker at the workshop. Photo by Jaime Flores.

So far, the “cool season” El Niño period (that began in November) shows both the Valley/northeast Mexico and Florida as “jackpot” for rainfall (based on percentage of average since November 10-11) but this includes the heavy rainfall during Veterans Day Weekend. Remove that event, and our percentage would be at or just a touch above average for the past 30 days while Florida would still be well above.

He also stated that even if the RGV did receive above average rainfall, it would not be enough to restore the Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs to normal capacities. That would require a tropical storm and or a hurricane making landfall in Northern Mexico to provide enough tropical moisture to fill them again. *(continued on page 4)*



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Rio Hondo Middle School Native Plant workshop

By Jaime Flores

Last year, TWRI was awarded a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act Section 319(h) Nonpoint Source grant, administered through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, to install coastal stormwater enhancement best management practices (BMPs) and low impact development (LID) elements at the Rio Hondo Middle School (RHMS) to implement BMPs identified in the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan.

Starting in April 2023, Jaime Flores, TWRI Project Manager, worked with native plant expert, Mike Heep, to develop a landscaping design and native plant list to be implemented at RHMS. Once the landscaping design was complete and the plants were selected, the project team began preparing the area to be landscaped by removing the existing non-native grass and 2 inches of dirt on October 11-13, 2023.



Removing the invasive grass and 2 inches of dirt. Photo by Jaime Flores.

After the grass and dirt had been removed, a layer of weed barrier fabric was rolled out and secured to the bare ground and 2 inches of mulch was applied to the entire planting area.

The TWRI Project Manager then began working with the RHMS principal and staff to coordinate the native plant workshop. The workshop would consist of the RHMS science classes being brought out to the planting area to plant the native plants every class period. This resulted in four science classes consisting



Installing the weed barrier. Photo by Jaime Flores.

of 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students per period coming outside to participate in the workshop.

In the end, 445 students from 24 science classes planted a total of 1,500 native plants at RHMS. The newly landscaped area will also serve as an outdoor classroom for the middle school. Interpretive signage will be installed with information about the native plants, stormwater runoff and nonpoint source pollution prevention. The science teachers will be able to utilize the area and the signage to teach the students about native plant identification, butterflies and hummingbirds that are attracted to the native plants, the water cycle, photosynthesis, earth science, and how to care for and appreciate the native plants.



445 RHMS students participated in the Native Plant workshop planting 1,500 native plants. Photo by Jaime Flores.



30th Annual RGV Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference

By Jaime Flores

The RGV Cotton and Grain Producers of the RGV hosted their Annual Membership meeting and Pre-Plant Conference at Rio Farms on January 18, 2024. The entire agenda was filled with pertinent topics:

- Dr. Ronnie Schnell, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist – Cropping Systems, College Station gave 2 presentations; Fertilizer Rates and Placement for Optimum Yields in Corn and Grain Sorghum and Herbicide Tolerant Grain Sorghum Hybrids and Herbicide Options for Grain Sorghum
- Dr. Mark Welch, Professor & Extension Economist for Grain Marketing, College Station, provided a presentation on Grain Crop Market Outlook and Strategies for 2024
- Wayne Cleavland, Executive Director – Texas Grain Sorghum Producers Association gave an update on International Markets, Research and Agronomy for Grain Sorghum
- Edward Herrera, Zone Manager, Harlingen – Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation gave an Update on the 2023 Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation activities and progress
- Dwight Jackson, Member Service Representative, Corpus Christi gave a National Cotton Council Industry Update
- Dr. Yuri Calil, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist, Corpus Christi gave a presentation on Cotton Crop Market Outlook and Marketing Strategies
- Danielle Sekula, Extension Agent, Weslaco – Integrated Pest Management, gave an update on the Cotton Stalk Destruction Methods and Volunteer Cotton in Grain Sorghum Result Demonstration project

The 2024 Cotton Crop outlook for the RGV is not ideal. The prediction is that the number of acres of cotton planted will be down this year due to high seed costs, low cotton prices and the uncertainty of water deliveries from the Amistad, and Falcon Reservoirs and the continued drought in the region.

The number of acres planted of Grain Sorghum should be higher this year as a defense crop. Sorghum is much cheaper to grow than cotton this year, with low seed prices, higher sorghum prices and the fact that sorghum does not need as much water. It is drought/heat tolerant and is harvested sooner and avoids the scorching hot temperatures of the late summer.

The conference was a success and a chance for some of the industry leaders to meet and plan on how to approach the 2024 planting season.



Attendees at the Annual RGV Cotton and Grain Pre-Plant Conference. Photo by Jaime Flores.



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Other topics that were discussed at the workshop were:

- Projected Reservoir Levels for 2024, Georgina P. Bermea, RGV Watermaster
- Irrigation District Forecast – Ag Use vs. Municipal Use- Possible Water restrictions 2024, Sonny Hinojosa, HCID #2
- Irrigation & Fertilizer Strategies for Drought, Dr. Juan Enciso, AgriLife Research

- Salinity Management in Arid Regions, Dr. Girisha Ganjegunte, AgriLife Research
- Ag Cost Share Assistance Programs, TSSWCB & NRCS

Without some much needed rain in the Fall and Winter to break the drought and raise the reservoir levels to ensure irrigation deliveries, growers will be reluctant to risk planting any crops that are more expensive to plant and maintain throughout the growing season. 

Second successful year of project serving socially disadvantaged farmers in 2023

Texas A&M University Professor Dr. Samuel Zapata and his project team were awarded a 3-year USDA-OPPE grant. The purpose of the program is to train socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in sustainable agricultural production and management practices through a series of workshops. 2023 marked the 2nd full year of the project and the team was able to plan and host another six workshops.

A total of eight workshops were held in 2023:

- Starting a Vineyard, February 10, 2023 – 62 participants
- Grape growing, March 10, 2023 – 46 participants
- Grape Quality, June 21, 2023 – 25 participants
- Wine Quality, June 21, 2023 – 21 participants
- Advanced Ranch Management & Marketing Strategies, June 23, 2023 – 20 participants
- Specialty Crops, July 20, 2023 – 56 participants

- Fall Ranchers Program, November 1, 2023 – 60 participants
- Herbs Workshop, December 8, 2023 – 60 participants

Each workshop also included an educational section focused on business planning. Landowners were informed about how to apply for cost share assistance programs through the TSSWCB and USDA-NRCS, as well as how to apply for USDA and FSA loans.

The project team is working on planning and developing more workshops for 2024, and currently five workshops are planned, including: growing herbs, Asian vegetables, agrotourism, ranch management, and irrigation practices.

The training workshops will be held at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Weslaco and at the Texas A&M Higher Education Center at McAllen. 

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The Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership

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