



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

HELPING TEXANS THRIVE

AgriLife Extension - Helping Texans Thrive

Since 1915, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has been delivering valuable, engaging education and services to every part of Texas. These programs cover a wide swath of crucial topics, including Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Community Health, and Youth Development. As Texas continues to evolve, and we remain dedicated to responding to the needs of Texans, we have increased our abilities to respond to natural disasters of all sorts, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, for example, we responded to more natural disasters than ever—hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, wildfires, and a record number of tropical storms. To assist during the pandemic, we joined with other state agencies as part of Texas’ COVID-19 response, delivering PPE, testing kits and other medical supplies. In 2021, we began delivering vaccines throughout the state. These efforts help communities respond quickly and appropriately when disasters of any kind strike.

Helping Communities Engage, Learn, and Flourish

Through our efforts, we helped generate in a single year:¹

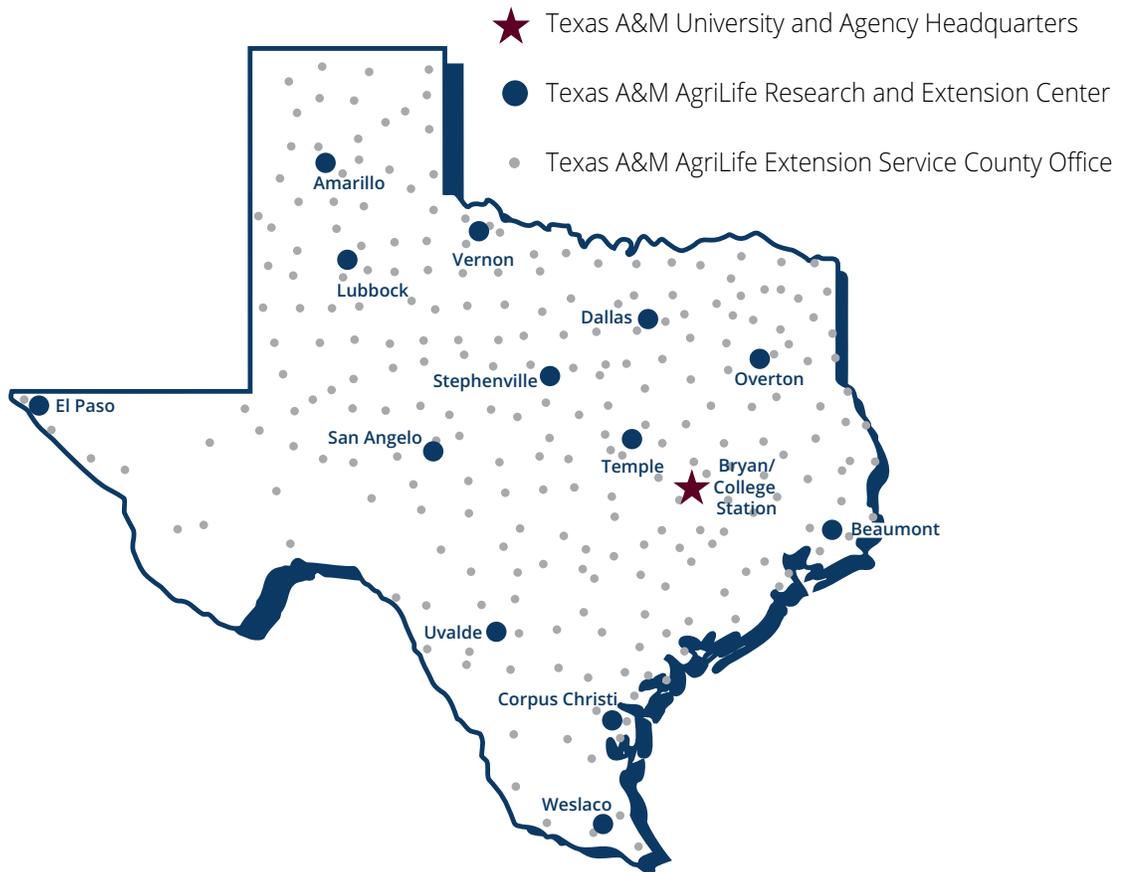
- Economic gains of more than **\$486 million** for agricultural producers.
- Savings of **\$107 million** (and conserving **3.1 billion** gallons of water) through wildlife/ecosystem management for **1.3 million** managed acres.
- Involvement with **550,000** 4-H youth through programs like STEM.
- Interactions with **18.4 million** educational contacts via nearly **128,000** educational events.
- Savings of **\$79.8 million** in lifetime healthcare costs by educating residents on diabetes, nutrition and physical activity.
- **5.5 million** hours of volunteer time (valued at **\$139.3 million**) by engaging **93,600** volunteers.

¹ Based on analysis of select programs offered in 2019

Helping Communities Engage, Learn, and Flourish (cont'd.)

Through our network of hundreds of agents and specialists, we provide programs in every county in Texas from our offices located in 250 Texas counties. Our experts at our 13 Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Centers across the state and from academic units at Texas A&M University and other locations respond to inquiries from clientele and provide expertise to directly support agents.

To make relevant information more accessible, we've expanded digital access to our expertise so that, everywhere, Texans can reach us when — and how — they need us.



Extending Relevant Knowledge

The concept of Extension is straightforward — we take research results and technological discoveries to the people who can best benefit from them. In other words, we “extend” knowledge to stakeholders. This knowledge is critical to a thriving Texas as we all face issues related to a long list of challenges and opportunities. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed federal legislation into law specifically to provide funds to land-grant universities to establish extension services and make access to these resources more equal. To help finance their Extension services, states and counties were to contribute their own funds. Combined, the funds allow AgriLife Extension to provide a network of agents and specialists that deliver educational programs and services across the state.

Our experts receive questions or requests for help in many forms, including office visits, phone calls, and emails. In responding to each request, our AgriLife Extension professionals not only address the immediate concern but provide beneficial knowledge for the long term. AgriLife Extension experts offer practical, educational programs and services through workshops and webinars; publications, podcasts, and videos; online courses and live-streamed events; and field days. We also engage in applied research to discover solutions to address Texans’ issues and concerns.

As technology has changed, we’ve adapted access to our science-based offerings to meet Texans’ needs in the convenient ways they expect.



Facing Future Challenges

Over time, the increased costs of maintaining the network of agents and specialists has outpaced our revenue growth. Since 2010, the number of agents employed by AgriLife Extension has fallen by 11% and the number of specialists by 22%.

Although AgriLife Extension’s workforce has declined in number, Texas is growing and becoming more diverse.

Texas is urbanizing and diversifying. U.S. 2020 Census data indicates six of the 15 fastest growing cities in the U.S. are in Texas. Major metroplexes around Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Austin are diverse markets of opportunities. Staffing and multilingual service capabilities can create opportunities to better serve and attract new constituents to AgriLife Extension.

In addition, the continual and rapid evolution of communication technologies creates significant challenges — and opportunities — for AgriLife Extension as we strive to serve every Texan. Tools such as social media, streaming videos, and online courses allow us to expand our reach. Unfortunately, many geographic areas are inaccessible due to inadequate broadband infrastructure. Yet, as we found in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, these channels are powerful tools for reaching Texans. Adopting them and keeping up with advances in these types of tools will be critical.

The three items (declining personnel, population changes, and technology changes), when considered together, point to a need to assess how we operate so that we can continue to serve Texans for decades to come.

Thus this strategic plan focuses on *how* we do business to maximize effectiveness.



The Strategic Planning Process

We launched our planning process in late 2019 by formally soliciting external facilitators and selected the experts at Campus Labs (later part of Anthology). As our partner, Campus Labs developed recommendations — steps we could take in this process, including changes necessitated by COVID. To create an effective, holistic plan, it was critical that we also gather and summarize feedback from both internal and external sources.² They administered surveys and listening sessions to gather data and provided feedback to AgriLife Extension administration. To coordinate the flow of information, Campus Labs communicated regularly with the Director, the Extension Leadership Team,³ and the Central Leadership Team.⁴

Our employees, program partners, and funders provided differing perspectives, all of which ensured the plan would be fully relevant to AgriLife Extension. Campus Labs asked both internal and external groups about the greatest challenges and opportunities AgriLife Extension is currently facing. This took the shape of an internal survey of each person in AgriLife Extension. For external groups, we held virtual listening sessions during the summer of 2020. Campus Labs staff held individual discussions with those who were unable to participate in a listening session.

The various groups’ observations and comments pointed to a few clear themes, forming the foundation for the goals AgriLife Extension would aim toward over the life of this strategic plan.

5

These five themes showed that we will need to:

- **Invest in appropriate technologies** and train people to use those technologies skillfully.
- **Develop a program strategy** that both ensures coordinated, integrated programs to serve Texans and that coordinates how we evaluate and promote those programs.
- **Retain and recruit** outstanding people across AgriLife Extension
- **Pursue operational efficiencies**
- **Ensure effective internal communications**

The data gathered within this process and the engagement with Central Leadership Team and others has been incredibly valuable in shaping the plan detailed in the remainder of this document. The plan is a reflection of collective input and feedback. Our strategic plan is aligned with the new Texas A&M AgriLife Strategic Plan, and will drive our value to the broader Texas A&M AgriLife and Texas A&M University System.

2. This included inviting input from judges and commissioners across Texas, industry partners, community leaders, program partners, and other staff and Texas residents.

3. The Extension Leadership Team comprises the Director, Executive Associate Director, three Associate Directors, and the Chief Financial Officer.

4. The Central Leadership Team comprises the agency’s “middle managers,” including Associate Department Heads, Program Leaders, District Extension Administrators, Regional Program Leaders, County Extension Directors, and others in similar positions.

Evaluating Our Mission, Vision and Values

In launching a new plan, we needed to revisit the existing mission and vision statements to ensure they continue to reflect our aspirations for the future. We also felt it was important to adopt a set of shared values to guide all facets of AgriLife Extension. Taken together, the three statements reflect what we do (the mission statement), what we aspire to be (the vision statement), and the things we value as we operate across all aspects of the agency (the shared values).

MISSION STATEMENT:

“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service works daily to make Texas better by **providing innovative solutions** at the intersection of agriculture, natural resources, youth, and health, thereby **improving the well-being of individuals, families, businesses, and communities** through education and service.”

VISION STATEMENT:

“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will be the leader in providing **science-based information and solutions** in agriculture and health to every Texan.”

SHARED VALUES:

“We value **People, Programs, and Partnerships.**”

Shared Values:

“We value People, Programs, and Partnerships.”

PEOPLE

- We recognize and value the role that a diverse group of **employees and volunteers** have in the organization’s success.
- We value **‘ideal team players’**— those who are humble, hungry, and smart.⁵
- - **Humble** – We put AgriLife Extension’s priorities (based on issues facing Texans) ahead of our own.
- - **Hungry** – We work hard to achieve AgriLife Extension’s mission.
- - **Smart** – We establish and maintain effective relationships within the agency and with outside stakeholders.
- We strive to be an agency that **retains, develops, and recruits** a diverse pool of world-class talent (employees and volunteers) through its recruiting practices, investment in professional development, and competitive compensation.
- We value **flexibility and adaptability** to changing conditions.
- We value **effective use of technology** that helps us do our jobs better and is beneficial to our audiences.
- We value **honesty, integrity, and mutual respect**, striving to build trust, within and outside of AgriLife Extension.

PROGRAMS

- We recognize our programs are the primary means through which we impact individuals, families, youth, businesses, and communities across Texas. We value **flexibility and adaptability in program development and implementation**.
- We value the role that **technology** plays in expanding our reach to impact Texas and beyond.

PARTNERSHIPS

- We value the **people and organizations** we partner with to meet the needs of Texans.
- We strive to identify **organizations whose missions overlap** with ours and establish sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships.

5. This term was coined by Patrick Lencioni, an organizational expert and author of books on business management.

Defining AgriLife Extension's Goals for 2021-2025

Based on the data we gathered and the feedback we reviewed, we identified four goals to address over the next five years. In pursuing these, we will be better positioned to provide impactful programs and services to Texans for decades to come. Taken as a whole, these actions will not change what we do but will impact *how* we do it.

1 Retain and recruit outstanding people across all of AgriLife Extension

AgriLife Extension's employees and volunteers are truly our greatest asset. Their expertise and relationships (with clientele, partners, elected officials, etc.) are vital for the agency's success. In retaining and recruiting outstanding people, we will focus on a number of related objectives.

- We will **strive for continuous improvement** in training programs, including onboarding, orientation, and mentoring.
- We will **work to establish a diverse workforce** that communicates effectively with AgriLife Extension's customers.
- We will **ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of performance expectations** related to annual reviews as well as career ladder considerations.
- We will **find ways to provide recognition** for outstanding performance.

2 Coordinate and integrate programs to serve every Texan

AgriLife Extension's impacts are a result of programs that our people develop and implement, often in partnership with others. While we have surely had deep and lasting impacts, the data gathered throughout the strategic planning process pointed to opportunities to continue to improve through better coordination and integration of our programs. Therefore, we will work to establish processes to coordinate and integrate while also improving communications about our programs to both internal and external audiences. As part of meeting this goal, we will undertake a review of how we can work most effectively with volunteers to implement programs.

Defining AgriLife Extension's Goals for 2021-2025 (cont'd.)

3

Enhance financial sustainability

AgriLife Extension has several sources of income including county, state, and federal governments, grants and contracts, philanthropic activities, and program revenues. Each of these is important in maintaining our network of experts and providing them with operational funds. As noted earlier, personnel numbers have declined over time, reducing our capacity to serve Texans. To maintain or grow our network of experts, we will need to increase revenues from these and possibly other sources. It will also be important to review how funds are used across AgriLife Extension to ensure that organizational priorities (such as expended digital capacity) are funded while personnel costs and operating expenses are covered.

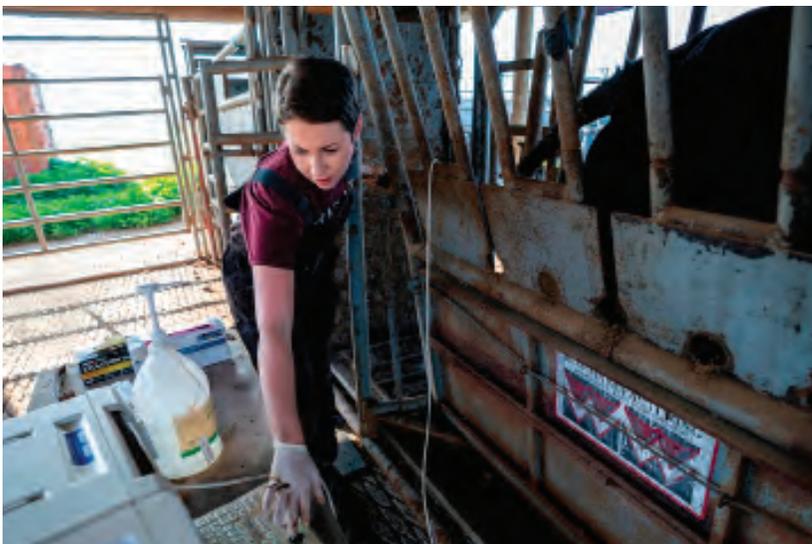
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Explore ways to increase operational efficiencies

A number of operational issues need to be evaluated and potentially modified to ensure we are efficient and effective in how we do business so that our agents and specialists can focus on program development and implementation. In addressing this goal, we will evaluate how we manage physical (e.g., fleet vehicles, the warehouse), financial (e.g., transactions, financial reporting) and human resources (e.g., performance management processes). We will also explore implementing various digital platforms for items such as event management, customer relationship management, and the AgriLife Extension website. Supporting agency personnel with services related to event management, external communications, promoting programs, etc. will reduce their time spent on these items so they can focus more time on program implementation. Finally, we will develop approaches to continually improve internal communications.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

Developing this plan required broad engagement with internal and external stakeholders. It is vitally important that we continue to obtain broad input as we develop the most beneficial decisions for the entire agency. Work on each objective in the plan will be led by a member of the Extension Leadership Team. That individual will work with others, as needed, to complete the objective. For example, as we work to identify ways to expand use of volunteers in Agrilife Extension programming, an Associate Director will work closely with many in AgriLife Extension who are effectively engaging volunteers in program implementation as well as others who might benefit from expanded volunteer engagement. As we review personnel performance expectations for agents, the Associate Director for County Operations will work with DEAs, agents, and colleagues in the HR unit to identify areas for improvement. Over the life of this plan, implementation details will be communicated on a regular basis with Extension personnel and stakeholders.



Anticipated Outcomes

The interrelated objectives of this plan will lead to favorable outcomes for AgriLife Extension’s programs, people, and the agency as a whole.

AgriLife Extension’s programs will:

- Remain focused on Texans in the counties **where they live and work**
- Be **better coordinated** and integrated
- Be **promoted** better
- Utilize contemporary tools and approaches to engage Texans, therefore becoming available to more Texans in more ways

AgriLife Extension’s employees will:

- Fully **understand their roles** in the Agency’s success in serving Texans
- Be **recognized for their contributions** to Agency success
- Be **supported by improved professional development programs**, including onboarding and orientation
- Increasingly **reflect the Texas population**
- Be **better connected** to each other

The Agency will:

- **Increase revenues** from a diverse portfolio of sources
- **Operate more efficiently**
- Utilize **contemporary tools and approaches** to support programs
- **Improve internal communications**
- **Be an even stronger partner** with other AgriLife entities and external governmental and non-governmental organizations
- **Be positioned to serve Texans for decades to come**