

# Farmers Support You!



**I**n 2010, nearly \$300 million went to each of the 41 counties in the Texas Panhandle. This money was used for a myriad of things: clothing for children, new cars, new tractors, new playgrounds, and maybe a luxurious vacation for the family. But where did this money come from? In this year alone, agriculture brought more than \$2 billion to the local economies in the Texas Panhandle, to be spent on whatever they deemed important, according to the Farm Forward Study.

The Farm Forward Study, a joint study by Texas Tech University and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, analyzed the forward impact of agriculture on an area's economy, in West Texas. The area studied reached from the northernmost counties in the Texas Panhandle to the counties surrounding the Midland and Odessa area.

For the study, researchers analyzed alfalfa, corn, corn silage, cotton, peanuts, grain sorghum, sorghum silage, and wheat harvest averages from 2006 to 2010. These averages were taken from 41 counties in the Texas Panhandle.

Researchers in the past have looked at the

backward impacts of agriculture or the start up needs for a new crop each year, such as where the farmer went to purchase his equipment and seed. The Farm Forward Study, wanted to identify how agriculture affected an area after the crop was harvested and sent for processing.

Darren Hudson, a professor within the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics and researcher for the Farm Forward Study, said

*“Without farming, one third of the population of this area would have to leave...”*

the study focused on water-rights issues to see what would happen to the area's economy if modern irrigated agriculture ceased to exist and farmers had to return to dry land farming.

“One third of the population of this area would have to leave because we couldn't support that level of economic activity anymore and maintain the same standard of living,” Hudson said, in relation to water restrictions.

With that being said, Lubbock would not feel the pressure from restricted water usage rights immediately, but a small town like Levelland, Texas, would, due to the fact the area's economy is almost fully supported by agriculture, Hudson said.

"You can trace Lubbock's economy," Hudson said. "When you have a bad crop year, you don't necessarily feel it in the same crop year, but you will feel it in the next year in Lubbock. This is because farmers are cutting back, so those businesses won't feel it until later."

The study discovered agriculture supported 103,000 jobs in 2010. Without the water rights usage to combat these dry growing seasons, Hudson said the area would lose one-third of its population, which is similar to one-third of Lubbock leaving. But citizens should not be alarmed.

"In general, agriculture is a shrinking percent of the economy, but in an area like the Lubbock, Amarillo, and the South Plains Panhandle Region, there is not a lot of other activity that is likely to take place," Hudson said. "Agriculture is going to continue to be an important part of the overall economy."

"We wanted to have true economic numbers that showed the impact of what agriculture is for this region," said Stephanie Pruitt, communications director for the Texas Corn Producers.

Pruitt said all these different commodity groups and water conservation districts were interested in this study because without the statistical data, the non-agricultural sector of the community would not understand the importance of agriculture, how water restrictions could put a hamper on agriculture, and the effect on the local communities and economies.

"Yes, agriculture does use water, but it uses it to grow a product that is feeding and clothing the world, but also the local area," Pruitt said. "It's also producing something that is bringing in people and jobs."

The 103,000 jobs supported by agriculture bring in \$12.2 billion dollars to the local economies. Without current farming practices, especially irrigated farming, these numbers would be gone and towns would disappear, Hudson said intently.

"We needed these numbers to show people how important it is to have a thriving agricultural industry in our state," Pruitt said.

But what do all of these numbers and this study really mean for the non-agricultural sector?

"It [Farm Forward Study] doesn't need to sit on a shelf. It doesn't need to be the end of what you're doing. But when you're faced with a new problem, the nice thing about this, is that it allows us to add another layer of information," Hudson said.

The study and its findings can be used as a tool. The study can be used to educate the general public about-water usage rights for agriculture and to help politicians implement more effective legislation to keep these numbers in the area. Both Hudson and Pruitt agreed that the study was not conducted for farmers and ranchers, but for the non-agriculture

sector and politicians to see that their lives are directly affected by agricultural practices.

"This study gives you a glimpse of how important water is to the area and to the agriculture industry," Pruitt said.

Hudson said politicians need to understand what it is like to farm with restricted water. This study quantified the need for irrigated agriculture and lends politicians an understanding of the need for water on the South Plains. The study accomplished this by tying agricultural success to the number of jobs created and how the economy is bolstered by a successful growing season.

"It's a way of conveying a magnitude of an effect," Hudson said.

Pruitt said it is easy for people in agriculture to see

the progress they are making and money they are bringing to a local economy. However, it is not as easy for people who are not directly tied into the agriculture industry, to see the fruit of the farmers' and ranchers' labors.

"Twelve billion dollars is really just skimming the barrel in how important this industry really is," Pruitt said. **T**



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