



Subscribe



April 2017

Texas Agriculture Matters Across The Globe

Agriculture touches each of our lives multiple times a day, each and every single day. Expanding Texas agriculture's reach across the globe has been an important initiative of mine since I took office as Agriculture Commissioner. Last month, I had the honor and privilege of visiting Israel on behalf of the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). I was able to strengthen our partnerships there and continue spreading the word about Texas agriculture.

TDA wants to continue establishing and growing relationships with countries around the globe, so that Texas farmers and ranchers can tap into new markets for their goods. This comes with many exciting opportunities for Texas, and I couldn't be more proud to be a part of it.

Read [more](#) about the Declaration of Cooperation and my recent trip to Israel, and remember friends, *Texas Agriculture Matters!*

Your servant,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Sid Miller'.

Sid Miller

New Texas Agriculture Matters Video Series Launches

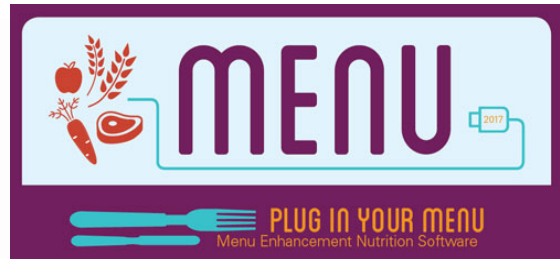
We are excited to announce the launch of our latest video series, *Texas Agriculture Matters*. In each episode, we'll tell you a story about Texas agriculture and introduce you to some of the folks behind the ag industry who are so important to all of us.

Our first episode features a farm-to-table journey from Johnson's Backyard Garden to Jack Allen's Kitchen in Austin. TDA and Commissioner Miller are committed to the farm-to-table movement, and we're excited for you to see it play out right here in our own backyard. Check out the video today! Be sure to stay tuned for more episodes coming to our [Facebook](#) page.



TDA Serves up New Software to School Nutrition Programs

TDA is rolling out an exciting new software platform for all Texas school nutrition programs called the Menu Enhancement Nutrition (MENU) Module. What's exciting is that school districts in Texas will be able to use the software to analyze the nutrients in the foods they serve, making it easier to comply with federal guidelines, and it's available at no cost to the district.



Additionally, MENU will simplify the process for school districts when they're submitting documents for TDA's review of their operations. MENU even has features to assist school districts in choosing Texas products for their menus. Instantaneous communication is vital to the success of serving school meals today, and MENU includes a mobile app that allows school nutrition teams to communicate with children and parents about upcoming meals, special events and important nutrition news. Families and students can also rate meals served using a star system.

Click [here](#) for more information on this exciting school nutrition opportunity.

Commissioner Miller Signs Historic Agreement in Israel to Encourage Agricultural Trade and Build Partnership

Commissioner Miller signed a [historic agreement](#) with Israeli leaders last month to encourage agricultural trade with Texas and strengthen the relationship between Texas and our greatest ally in the Middle East, Israel.

The "Declaration of Cooperation" between Commissioner Miller, on behalf of TDA, and Chairman Yossi Dagan, on behalf of the Shomron Regional Council of the State of Israel, was signed in the Israeli Knesset, or parliament.

"I am proud to represent the people of Texas and sign this historic accord to renew the spirit of cooperation and friendship between Texas and Israel," Commissioner Miller said. "As an eighth-generation farmer and rancher, I am here to send a strong message that Texas agriculture producers and other Texas-based companies are ready to do business with the people of Israel."

During his time in Israel, Commissioner Miller visited with several high-ranking Israeli government officials, as well as representatives from a host of companies who are seeking to do business with Texas. Gildad Erdan, Public Security and Strategic Affairs Minister (Likud) for the State of Israel, was also present at the signing ceremony. In addition to his visit's agriculture-related itinerary, Commissioner Miller's presence in the West Bank had broader implications for U.S.-Israeli relations.



TDA Establishes New Office of Produce Safety

We are excited to announce TDA's new Office of Produce Safety that is geared towards helping producers understand and comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) "Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption" (commonly referred to as the Produce Safety Rule). The purpose of FSMA is to shift food safety regulations toward a more modern system designed to prevent food contamination. New enforcement actions are designed to achieve higher rates of compliance with preventative safety standards.

Through FSMA, FDA now has the tools it needs to hold imported food to the same high standards as domestically-sourced food. Through a cooperative agreement, TDA is working to advance efforts for a nationally-integrated food safety system that encourages the safe production of fresh fruits and vegetables. TDA is creating the necessary infrastructure and will conduct producer outreach, education and inspections based on FSMA. To learn more, click [here](#). For any additional questions, send us an [email](#).

STAR Fund: Call for Donations, Aid Available to Assist Victims of Wildfires

Commissioner Miller continues his call for his fellow Texans to donate to the State of Texas Agriculture Relief Fund (STAR Fund) and lend a helping hand to our neighbors impacted by the devastating wildfires in the Panhandle.

As farmers and ranchers continue assessing the damage and rebuilding their lives, Commissioner Miller is also encouraging them to apply for assistance through the STAR Fund. If a producer lives in a county where a disaster declaration has been issued by the governor, they have 60 days from the date of the governor's proclamation to turn in an application. Information about donating to or applying for assistance through the STAR Fund can be found [here](#).



The STAR Fund was created to collect monetary contributions from private individuals and businesses to assist farmers and ranchers in responding to and recovering from natural disasters like the latest series of wildfires that burned a trail of destruction across the Panhandle. Funds may be used to rebuild perimeter fences, pay for livestock burial costs, restore operations and assist with other agricultural relief efforts — basically anything that isn't covered under federal farm assistance or insurance programs.

"Many of our fellow Texans are in need of a helping hand, and all Texans have an opportunity to really help people by donating to the STAR Fund," Commissioner Miller said. "Farmers and ranchers are trying to rebuild fences, clean up their properties and pick up the pieces after this devastating tragedy. That's where the STAR Fund comes into play and why it was created — to help folks out with things federal money and insurance won't cover."

Farmers and ranchers can apply for assistance through the STAR Fund by contacting [TDA's Grants Office](#) or visiting the [STAR Fund Web page](#).

Legislative Update

We have reached the halfway point of the 85th Legislative Session. Here at TDA, we are hard at work ensuring that the voices of agriculture are being heard. Over the past several weeks, we have spent much time before the House Appropriation Committee (HB 1) and the Senate Finance Committee (SB 1) advocating for budget tools that are necessary to administer many of our programs and encouraging lawmakers to use your taxpayer dollars to drive the agriculture industry forward. We urge all Texans to stay involved and follow

issues that are important to them and their respective industries. Commissioner Miller and the entire TDA legislative team continue to advocate for consumer protection, promoting Texas goods and advancing Texas agriculture.



ICYMI: March GROW Award Winner Announced



Whitney Mahan, a sophomore from Honey Grove High School, was selected as the winner of the Texas Department of Agriculture's monthly GROW award in March.

Whitney is a leader inside and outside the classroom. She is a member of and holds officer positions in the FFA, 4-H and marching band. Her academic record also shines, as she is currently ranked second in her class.

"I am honored to receive this award because agriculture is truly my passion," Whitney said. "I hope to continue to pursue my leadership skills through this industry."

[Read](#) more about Emily's selection and find out how to nominate a deserving student in your area.