

# Report on Customer Service

June 2014



Texas Department of Agriculture  
Commissioner Todd Staples

## **Introduction**

We are pleased to report the customer service survey findings indicate the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is meeting customer needs and expectations exceptionally well, with a majority of categories receiving more than a 90 percent favorable rating. We are proud of these encouraging results. The mission of the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), under the leadership of Commissioner Todd Staples, is to partner with all Texans to make Texas the nation's leader in agriculture, fortify our economy, empower rural communities, promote healthy lifestyles, and cultivate winning strategies for rural, suburban and urban Texas through exceptional service and the common threads of agriculture in our daily lives. In doing this, TDA has continually achieved a reputation of customer service excellence. We place a high priority on our ability to continue this tradition, and our agency does so under Commissioner Staples' leadership and *Partners for Progress* vision.

## **TDA Customers**

TDA serves all Texans, ranging from the agriculture production community to the many consumers of agricultural products. All of the approximately 25 million Texas residents reap the many rewards provided by Texas agriculture every day. For purposes of this report, TDA's customers are those persons, companies or entities with whom TDA directly interacts for licensing, grant and other program participation.

Below is a list of strategies, as listed in the 2014 General Appropriations Act, and a corresponding inventory of our customers:

### **A.1.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

#### *Farmers and Ranchers*

Farmers and ranchers are customers of TDA in numerous ways. Specifically, producers benefit from various marketing, consumer education and outreach initiatives promoting Texas agricultural products within our borders, as well as internationally. Additionally, TDA serves farmers and ranchers through partnerships with banks or other agricultural lending institutions. The Texas Agriculture Finance Authority, administered by TDA, provides special incentives to individuals who wish to establish or enhance their farm or ranch operation or to establish an agriculture-related business.

#### *Texas Consumers*

Through GO TEXAN, TDA provides a variety of services for Texas consumers. GO TEXAN offers consumers a one-stop shop on how to go local — everything from how to find locally grown and raised produce and meats, to recipe ideas to hunting opportunities to tourism. TDA also promotes the role agriculture plays in each person's life through the educational component of GO TEXAN — Agriculture is Your Culture.

#### *GO TEXAN Member Businesses*

The GO TEXAN program works with restaurant owners, food and wine producers, processors, distributors and manufacturers of Texas-made goods, communities and wildlife

operation owners to enhance their marketability. From the State Fair of Texas to the annual statewide GO TEXAN Restaurant Round-Up to the international marketing program, the GO TEXAN program is a unique marketing campaign dedicated to promoting the products, culture and communities of Texas.

#### *GO TEXAN Member Communities*

Through the GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Community program, TDA assists city, county and local community leaders with certifying and promoting Texas communities as preferred retirement destinations to people within and outside the Lone Star State. Communities also can become Associate GO TEXAN Rural Communities program members to promote rural Texas communities as places to visit and vacation, and receive economic development assistance to help them thrive.

#### *Livestock Producers and Marketers*

TDA's livestock export facilities are holding and inspection sites for livestock leaving the country. Once livestock is inspected, animals are loaded for transport to Mexico through four border facilities, or to destinations all over the world by air and sea via Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas.

#### *Small Businesses*

TDA is working with venture capital investment funds to help small businesses to attract private investment and create economic development opportunities for the future. The Jobs for Texas Program, funded through a federal allocation by the U.S. Department of Treasury, increases small businesses' access to capital funds and enables private entrepreneurs to make market-driven decisions to grow jobs.

### **A.1.2 REGULATE PESTICIDE USE**

#### *Texas Consumers, Home and Business Owners, and Agricultural Producers*

TDA helps ensure pesticides are utilized safely and effectively with the protection of the consumers, homeowners and business owners as the top priority. This is done through various inspections, pesticide misuse complaint investigations, sampling and laboratory analysis. TDA strives to minimize unnecessary impacts to agriculture, while also enhancing protection for consumers and farm workers.

#### *Pesticide Dealers*

TDA requires a person or business who distributes state-limited or restricted-use pesticides, or regulated herbicides, to obtain a pesticide dealer's license from TDA and adhere to recordkeeping and other requirements. TDA monitors compliance by conducting periodic inspections at these facilities that are required to have a Pesticide Dealer License. TDA monitors for record-keeping and to ensure these businesses are distributing pesticide to appropriately licensed applicators.

#### *Pesticide Product Registrants*

Texas pesticide laws and regulations require pesticides to be registered before they are sold or distributed in Texas. TDA maintains these registrations and provides related information to the public.

### *Pesticide Applicators*

TDA certifies and licenses individuals who use state-limited or restricted-use pesticides or regulated herbicides in Texas. Through the continuing education requirement for its licensees, TDA educates pesticide users to help increase compliance with pesticide laws and regulations.

### *Farm Employees*

Worker safety compliance monitoring is part of a comprehensive inspection program conducted through TDA's pesticide agricultural applicator inspections. TDA monitors for compliance with state and federal worker safety rules.

## **A.1.3 INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT**

### *Consumers, Farmers and Ranchers*

Agricultural industries and consumers benefit from an array of pest management programs that control the spread of plant pests in the state.

### *Cotton Producers*

Cotton producers benefit from the TDA boll weevil eradication program. Boll weevils can have devastating economic impacts on the cotton industry. The boll weevil program has been successful in significantly reducing the number of boll weevils in Texas, thereby preserving an industry that provides one-fourth of the world's cotton production.

### *Organic Producers, Handlers, Distributors, Retailers and Consumers*

TDA is approved by the USDA to certify producers, processors, distributors and retailers of organic products. This industry-funded program ensures entities meet the requirements for being certified organic. This not only helps Texas farmers diversify their operations and capture a larger share of a growing premium market, but also offers another layer of consumer protection by ensuring the authenticity of the organic marketing claim.

### *Citrus Producers*

Texas citrus producers rely on TDA's Budwood Certification Program to protect their crops from viral diseases and quarantined citrus pests. TDA also enacts plant pest quarantines in areas of the state to slow the spread of specific pests and diseases such as the Mexican fruit fly and citrus greening, which are detrimental to the citrus industry. TDA works closely with USDA/APHIS (the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) to monitor for these pests through various federal grants.

## **A.1.4 CERTIFY PRODUCE**

### *Farmers*

Farmers who seek to market certain commodities benefit from TDA's fee-funded Texas Cooperative Inspection Program, which inspects commodities for quality and grade standards, and issues certificates.

## **A.1.5 AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION DEVELOPMENT**

### *Texas Producers*

TDA generates marketing opportunities for Texas producers by ensuring seed certification standards are met through the inspections of seed crops.

#### *Landowners*

TDA advocates for the protection of private property rights and assists constituents in navigating issues impacting them and their property. The agency also proudly operates the Family Land Heritage program, which honors farms and ranches that have been in continuous agricultural production for more than 100 years.

#### *Students*

The Urban Schools Agriculture Grant program is designed to foster an understanding and awareness of agriculture in public urban elementary and middle schools. This program provides funding for hands-on projects to teach children about the role that agriculture plays in their daily lives.

#### *Livestock Producers and Marketers*

International sales of Texas livestock and genetics are facilitated through the activities performed by TDA staff in coordination with various industry groups and federal resources.

### **B.1.1 SURVEILLANCE AND BIOSECURITY EFFORTS**

#### *Consumers, Farmers and Ranchers*

TDA conducts inspections to prevent the introduction of harmful plant pests and diseases into the state and enacts quarantines for the presence of pests that may enter the state. TDA conducts various road station inspections, which are conducted at specific major points of entry, to monitor and regulate the commercial movement of plant material into the state.

### **B.1.2 VERIFY SEED QUALITY**

#### *Seed Companies, Farmers, Ranchers and Home Gardeners*

Seed Companies, farmers, ranchers and home gardeners rely on seed testing to ensure truthful labeling. Purity and germination tests are conducted at the TDA seed laboratory, located in Giddings, Texas, on seed samples collected by TDA inspectors. These seed tests ensure farmers and home gardeners receive the quality of seed promised by the producer.

### **B.1.3 AGRICULTURAL COMMODITY REGULATION**

#### *Egg Consumers*

Purchasers of eggs rely on TDA to license egg wholesalers and dealers who buy or sell eggs for resale. Facilities where eggs are graded, stored, packed or processed must be licensed. TDA also licenses brokers of eggs to ensure that consumers are purchasing products that meet quality standards for labeling and grade. TDA maintains these registrations and provides related information to the public.

#### *Grain Owners*

Grain owners who deposit their grain with a grain warehouse for storage purposes rely on TDA to license grain elevators or businesses engaged in the operation of a public warehouse

where grain is stored. TDA maintains these registrations and inspects the licensed grain warehouses regularly. Records are available to the public.

#### *Fruit and Vegetable Producers*

To protect producers of Texas grown fruits and vegetables from losses of payment associated with commodities sold on credit, TDA issues licenses to packers, handlers, dealers, processors and warehouses of Texas-grown fruits and vegetables under the Handling and Marketing of Perishable Commodities law, and administers the Produce Recovery Fund.

### **B.1.4 STRUCTURAL PEST CONTROL**

#### *Home Owners, Business Owners and Customers of Business Owners*

The purpose of TDA's Structural Pest Control Service is to license and regulate the business of structural pest control. Structural pest control involves pesticide and other control methods used by pest control operators to control pests inside or around structures, such as residential properties, businesses, schools, daycare facilities, restaurants and nursing homes. TDA licenses commercial and noncommercial pesticide applicators, approves continuing education courses for the recertification of licensees and conducts inspections of pest control businesses to ensure compliance with structural pest control requirements. TDA provides educational awareness to the public concerning matters relating to pest control, with an emphasis on integrated pest management in Texas public schools, and providing education and information to the public and pest control industry.

### **C.1.1 INSPECT MEASURING DEVICES**

#### *All Texans and Travelers from Other States*

All Texans and travelers from other states are provided consumer protection as they use business-operated commercial gasoline, kerosene or diesel fuel pumps, scales (from grocery to jewelry stores, as well as livestock scales), bulk meters and liquefied petroleum gas meters. TDA conducts regular and risk-based device inspections to ensure that consumers receive the correct weight or measure of the product they purchase. TDA maintains these registrations and provides the related information to the public. TDA also protects Texas drivers by testing the quality of fuel sold in Texas against national standards.

#### *Pump and Scale Service Companies*

In order to maintain a fair and equitable marketplace for both consumers and businesses, service companies licensed by TDA to install and service commercial weighing or measuring devices must have their testing equipment calibrated annually by an approved metrology lab. TDA's Metrology Lab is recognized by the National Institute of Standards and Technology and performs these types of calibrations on an annual basis.

### **D.1.1 SUPPORT NUTRITION PROGRAMS**

#### *Infants, Children and Adults*

Texans of all ages benefit from TDA's efficient and effective administration of nutrition programs that provide healthy low-cost meals or meals at no charge to qualifying participants. Meals are made possible through USDA commodity foods and federal meal reimbursements. All nutrition program providers receive outreach assistance; training and compliance

monitoring to help them successfully administer the programs and furnish services for needy Texans. Administration of these programs is primarily funded through federal administrative funds. Some matching dollars are required and are primarily provided to local education agencies through the Texas Education Agency.

### **D.2.1 NUTRITION ASSISTANCE**

#### *Infants, Children and Adults*

Texans of all ages benefit from TDA's efficient and effective administration of nutrition programs that provide nutritious low-cost meals or meals at no charge to qualifying individuals. Qualifying infants, children under 5 years of age and adults receive meals made possible through USDA commodity foods and federal meal reimbursements. Nutrition program providers receive outreach assistance; training and compliance monitoring to help them successfully administer the programs and furnish services for needy Texans. Administration of these programs is fully funded with federal dollars.

#### *Food Insecure Citizens*

TDA administers two food assistance programs under the Texans Feeding Texans initiative, which supplements and extends funding for home-delivered meal agencies and food banks in Texas. The home-delivered meal funding allows homebound elderly and disabled citizens to remain self-sufficient and in their homes longer. The food bank funding provides a temporary means of assistance to various other food insecure Texans.

#### *Preschoolers and Students*

Nutrition education grants, TDA's "Establishing the 3E's" and "Expanding the 3E's," allow TDA to reach children in daycares and elementary school settings to high schools to after school community programs. The objectives of these programs are to increase awareness of the importance of the 3E's of Healthy Living – Education, Exercise and Eating Right. The initiatives under this effort promote good nutrition, especially for children, and encourage children to stay active and do their part to live a healthy life.

### **E.1.1 RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

#### *Producers, Processors and Consumers*

Through grants, TDA funds short-term, industry priority, applied research at Texas universities. One example is the Zebra Chip Research Grant that investigates the pathogens causing Zebra Chip Disease in potatoes, which is harmful to product quality and producer economics.

### **F.1.1 RURAL COMMUNITY AND ECO DEVELOPMENT**

#### *Rural Cities and Counties*

TDA supports rural Texas through technical and educational assistance to target constituents through field-based staff and Austin-based program staff. Field-based personnel are often the first point of contact and provide a wide variety of information about the assistance available through TDA and its partners. This assistance includes economic, community and workforce development, entrepreneurship and funding sources for capital investment.

In addition, TDA administers the state's non-entitlement Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG). This rural-focused program is the largest state CDBG program in the nation and serves approximately 995 eligible non-entitlement communities and 244 non-entitlement counties, as well as providing services to more than 400,000 rural Texans each year. Of the 995 cities eligible for CDBG funds, 723 have a population of less than 3,000 and 410 have a population of less than 1,000. The demographics and rural characteristics of Texas have shaped various programs that focus on community and economic development. Programs target infrastructure needs to help rural residents and assist with attraction of new capital investment and new job creation in rural businesses to help ensure sustainability in rural economies.

### **F.1.2 RURAL HEALTH**

TDA oversees the Texas State Office of Rural Health (SORH), which strives to ensure and improve access to health care for residents in rural areas of the state. SORH provides technical assistance to rural hospitals to improve quality of care, as well as operational and financial functions. Funds also are distributed to rural hospitals for capital improvements. The shortage of health care professionals in rural areas is partially addressed through limited loan repayment and stipend programs to non-physician healthcare professionals who agree to practice in rural medically underserved areas. SORH also encourages the development of cooperative systems of care joining together critical access hospitals, EMS providers, clinics and health practitioners to increase efficiencies and quality of care.

### **F.1.3 RURAL ADMINISTRATION AND RESEARCH**

TDA acts as a clearinghouse for rural information available to all customers. In an effort to improve programs affecting rural communities, TDA works with other state agencies, associations, rural stakeholders and legislators to identify specific challenges to the development and vitality of rural areas. Rural issues include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) Climate for Job Creation, 2) Infrastructure Development, 3) Health Care, 4) Workforce and Skills Development, and 5) Broadband.



## Survey Methodology

TDA created an online customer service survey using the Agency Strategic Plan Instructions as a guide.

On April 24, 2014, TDA invited 5,880 randomly selected stakeholders (account holders, licensees and customers) from a pool of more than 140,000 customer accounts to participate in the survey. The group was gathered from existing data sources and verified for accuracy. Duplicate contacts were removed. The purpose of the survey was to assess the customer's perception of TDA and to gather information to assist in strategic planning for the agency.

The survey remained online for a period of seven calendar days.

### Data Limitations:

Twenty percent of TDA customers with an active account and a valid email address were targeted, and only a percentage of those customers respond to the survey request. Additionally, the survey recipients had seven days to respond. Finally, the frequency may vary as a result of the responses reported. This would be contingent on the valid responses completed and received to date.

### Confidence Intervals:

Translating to 95 percent confidence interval within 0.12 on a scale of 1 to 6 or  $\pm 2.18$  percent.

### Error/Response Rate:

Of 5,880 emails sent, 385 responses to the survey were received, giving a response rate of 6.5 percent. This is an improvement on the response rate of the 2012 survey, which was 4.8 percent.

TDA did not allow the survey to be performed from the same computer twice by checking the respondent's IP address against previously submitted surveys.

The questionnaire design logically grouped questions in sets.

There were not enough comments to adjust the methodology for the survey in the next biennium.

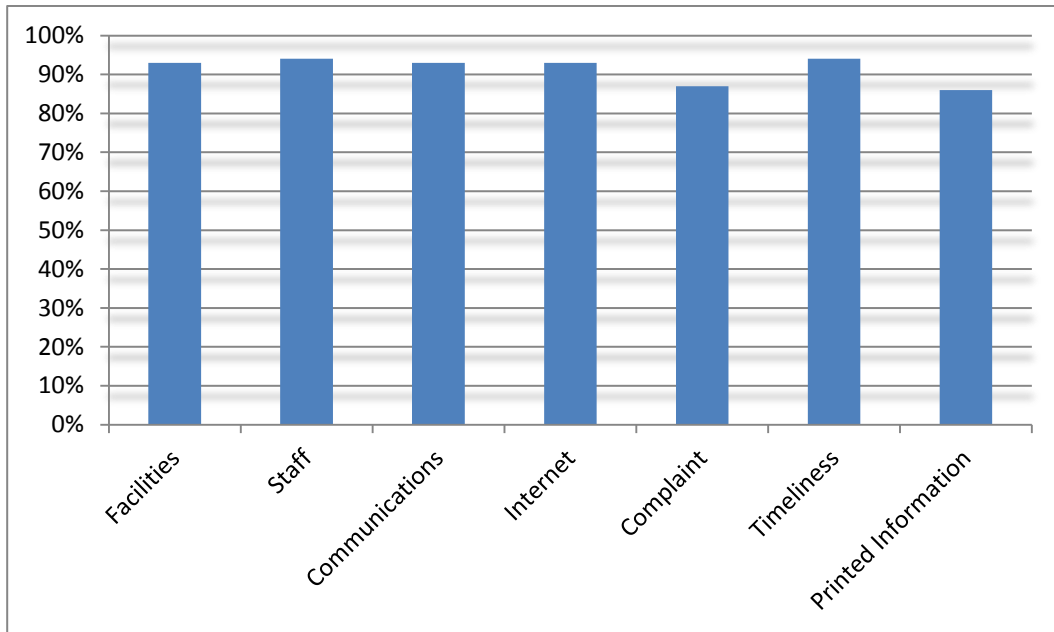
TDA continues to respond to comments provided by our customers to strengthen the quality of service the agency provides to the citizens of Texas.

## Analysis narrative of the findings identified

TDA excelled in the areas of facilities services; having valuable, supportive and communicative staff; and upholding the mission of the Texas Department of Agriculture (see Figure 1).

In keeping with TDA's mission of recent years, the agency strives to meet the needs of Texas citizens and promote the state's products and culture. We take feedback seriously and look forward to receiving comments.

Figure 1



## Conclusion

The survey findings indicate TDA is doing an excellent job overall, with a majority of categories receiving a 93 percent or higher favorable rating. TDA will continue to conduct this customer service survey and other surveys to continually seek opinions regarding the agency's service delivery. TDA takes pride in its mission, service and customers, and will continue to provide Texans with excellent service.

## Appendix A

### Standard Measures

#### *Outcome Measures*

Percentage of Surveyed Customer Respondents Expressing Overall Satisfaction with Services Received:

95 percent

Percentage of Surveyed Customer Respondents Identifying Ways to Improve Service Delivery:

2.1 percent

#### *Output Measures*

Total Customers Responding to the Survey:

385

#### *Total Customers Served*

TDA directly impacts the lives of 25 million Texans.

#### *Efficiency Measures*

Cost per Customer Surveyed:

\$2.37 / survey

#### *Explanatory Measures*

Total Customers Identified:

TDA identified more than 140,000 customers that have an active account.

#### *Total Customer Groups Inventoried*

Individuals from 24 customer groups participated in the survey. The customer groups are incorporated within the strategies, as listed in the 2014 General Appropriations Act.

## Appendix B

Following are the overall responses to the Texas Department of Agriculture's survey:

1. I believe the mission of the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is important.  
98 percent Agree
2. If TDA services were interrupted, it would negatively impact me and/or my business.  
86 percent Agree
3. Overall, I am satisfied with the services I received at TDA.  
95 percent Agree
4. If I had other options, I would still choose to get services from TDA.  
92 percent Agree
5. The location of services was convenient (parking, ADA accessibility, public transportation, distance, etc.).  
87 percent Agree
6. The facility where I received services was clean, orderly and easy to get around.  
96 percent Agree
7. The facility is open during reasonable hours.  
98 percent Agree
8. The staff was able to answer my questions.  
93 percent Agree
9. The staff was courteous.  
95 percent Agree
10. Staff members were knowledgeable and demonstrated a willingness to assist.  
94 percent Agree
11. Staff members identified themselves or wore nametags.  
96 percent Agree
12. I received the information I needed to obtain services.  
93 percent Agree
13. TDA has been responsive to my requests and needs.  
93 percent Agree

14. I received services in a timely manner.  
93 percent Agree
15. I was given a clear explanation about the services available to me.  
90 percent Agree
16. I was given a clear explanation about the documentation needed to receive services.  
93 percent Agree
17. My telephone call, e-mail or letter was routed to the proper person and responded to in a timely manner.  
95 percent Agree
18. I use the Internet to conduct business or communicate with TDA.  
91 percent Agree
19. I am able to access information about the services I need using the Internet.  
96 percent Agree
20. The TDA website was easy to use and well organized.  
91 percent Agree
21. The TDA website contained clear and accurate information on events, services and contact information.  
94 percent Agree
22. I know how to make a complaint regarding services at TDA.  
83 percent Agree
23. If I complained, I believe it would be addressed in reasonable manner.  
91 percent Agree
24. The time I waited to receive services was reasonable.  
94 percent Agree
25. I have received printed information (such as brochures, handouts, etc.) clearly explaining the services available.  
85 percent Agree

## Appendix C

### Some of the positive comments received were:

“I believe the reps in my area take pride in what they are doing and show that as they talk and visit with you.”

“I appreciate the CEU (continuing education unit) events you provide. It helps a lot. Thanks.”

“TDA does a great job all the way around, and I would be totally 100 percent negatively affected if I didn't have them.”

“I think the TDA is truly here to help us.”

“Overall, I am very pleased and fortunate to be able to rely on TDA reps to help us out in our times of need. Very blessed to be able to count on them.”

### Some of the comments suggesting improvement included:

“Would like to see more emphasis on examination of employee training records. Many PCO's (pest control operators) think that all the classroom training that a technician needs is the eight hour Approved General course. Others think that all they need is the 20 hour training course. Very few realize that they also are required to have eight hours of classroom training in the service categories, i.e. pests, termites, etc.”

“It is very time consuming and expensive having to drive to Giddings to have our cans calibrated annually. Could this be changed to every two years?”

“There appears to be many changes in the Food Service Program. It would be helpful if meetings could be scheduled at the Regional Educational Service Centers for training, and questions and answers rather than having to figure it out or call for technical assistance.”