

Commodity Focus – Poinsettias Offer Color Before, During, After the Holidays

JAMES BERNSEN

Each holiday season, many Texans look forward to spicing up their homes and offices with the brilliant red and green poinsettia plant.

Native to Mexico and South America, the poinsettia was discovered in 1828 by an American minister to Mexico named Joel Roberts Poinsett. Despite a common misconception, poinsettias are not toxic. The flower thrives in cooler fall months, because it requires up to 12 hours of darkness in order for its leaves to change color.

Even in Mexico, the poinsettia has long been associated with Christmas thanks to its dramatic red and green colors, which perfectly fit the holiday mood.

Each year in America, 85 percent of holiday plant sales are attributed to poinsettias. Almost all poinsettias sold worldwide are grown in the United States.

These beautiful plants can live indoors for long periods with proper care. Check the soil daily for moisture, as low moisture will cause the plant to prematurely wilt. When the surface is dry to the touch, water the soil until water runs freely out of the container holes. Place poinsettias near sunny windows, but do not let the leaves touch a windowpane, which may be cold and could damage the plant.

Poinsettias are the perfect way to set the holiday mood in your home or office. With proper care, they can keep that mood flowering for many weeks to come.



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Wildlife Drives the Economy as Texans Stay Hooked on Hunting, Fishing

DAVID GLESSNER



Mother Nature has a special place deep in the heart of Texans, which explains why hunting and fishing not only are longstanding Lone Star traditions, but also significant drivers of the state's economy.

For generations, parents and grandparents have passed down a love for the land to their children and grandchildren during seasonal family outings to Texas fields and streams. According to research commissioned by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, those kinds of outdoor adventures translated into a \$14.5 billion economic impact to Texas in 2008.

Not surprisingly, Texas leads the nation in numerous categories related to outdoor recreation. According to Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas has about 4 million deer, more than any other state in the U.S. The National Rifle Association reports Texas sells more hunting licenses than any other state. Similarly, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), which tracks hunting trends across the country, Texas leads the nation in total number of hunters and anglers (2.6 million); money spent on outdoor-related gear and collateral expenses (\$6.6 billion); jobs supported (106,000); and tax revenue generated (\$1.3 billion).

The NSSF study also says sportsmen in Texas support more than twice the jobs of Dell Computer Corp., Lockheed Martin, Electronic Data Systems and Dow Chemical Co. combined.

More than just a sport, hunting is also very helpful in controlling feral hog populations, which cause an estimated \$400 million in damage to Texas properties — urban and rural — each year, according to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. From vehicle collisions and food crop damage to demolished front yards, these animals are dangerous and destructive pests.

Even in a down economy, hunting continues to trigger increased spending. According to a recent article in USA Today, the NSSF reports companies that made, distributed or sold sporting firearms, ammunition and supplies generated a \$27.8 billion impact nationwide in 2009, compared with a \$19.1 billion impact in 2008. Seems more than ever, Texans are still hooked on wildlife.



News Clips

A PERFECT YEAR FOR AN OLIVE OIL BOOM

Olive producers say this year's weather was perfect for the growing Texas olive oil industry, which estimates it will turn a record-setting crop of 500 tons of olives into 15,000 gallons of olive oil worth about \$2 million, surpassing the previous record of 100 tons. That's only a drop in the bucket compared to annual U.S. consumption of about 70 million gallons; but since the U.S. currently imports about 99 percent of the olive oil sold domestically, producers say the market is ripe for the Texas entrepreneurs forging this industry.

CONSUMERS SUPPORT FOOD BIOTECHNOLOGY

An International Food Information Council survey reports consumers are likely to purchase genetically engineered plant and animal products when they understand their benefits. The survey found U.S. shoppers are supportive of agricultural technologies that decrease the use of pesticides, land and water resources. Key findings this year suggest the growing awareness of sustainable food production is tied to consumers' favorable perceptions of technologies that promote growing more with less.

TEXAS INVESTS \$1.8 MILLION FOR SPECIALTY CROPS PROJECTS

TDA will partner with numerous state associations and universities to promote fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops such as nuts, horticulture and nursery plants. Among the 21 projects is one in which Texas A&M studies the effectiveness of irradiation protocols in reducing contamination risk and improving consumer safety of fresh leafy vegetables. Many others are focused on marketing and public education for specialty crops and certified farmers markets.

U.S. CATTLE HERD SMALLEST IN 50 YEARS

Ranchers began selling off their cows in 2007 as drought, production costs and a worldwide economic crisis took a staggering toll. After several years of hard luck, beef producers have been reluctant to invest in rebuilding their herds as consumers in a recovering economy shift demand from high quality beef cuts to ground beef. Market analysts are watching for indications the beef herd decline will rebound, but few agree on when that may happen.

PRIVATE LENDING EASES IN TEXAS

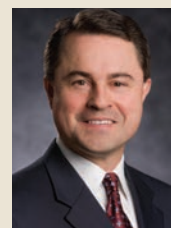
The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas reports Texas banks, which have been outperforming those in the rest of the nation since 2007, are increasingly comfortable extending credit to

agriculture producers as market conditions improve. Notably, banks with assets of less than \$1 billion, commonly called community banks, are making more loans than their larger counterparts, presumably because local bank personnel know their borrowers personally.

LUBBOCK BUSINESS COMMUNITY HONORS AGRICULTURE

A Lubbock Chamber of Commerce website calls agriculture the "life blood" of that city. The chamber launched LubbockAg.com to offer its urban members a doorway into the world of agriculture that the city depends upon. With Lubbock serving as a major hub for the surrounding producer community, the website is an excellent example of how urban and rural economies often depend on each other.

Commissioner's Note



The change of seasons reminds us that life is a turning circle. As we welcome fall, we say hello to football, hunting season and the fast-approaching holidays.

For our farmers and ranchers, the calendar turns from seasonal planting to the shipping of harvests and trips to market. The fact that the cycle of agriculture is often unnoticed by your average consumer, speaks well of its seamless nature. Is there a sudden shortage of food and fiber to remind us the seasons have shifted? No. Why? Because our farmers and ranchers wrestle with nature and economics to ensure optimum productivity in the face of drought, rising operating costs and competition.

As Americans, we enjoy the safest, most affordable and most abundant food supply in the world. Better yet, we enjoy it year-round. For that we can thank the men and

women who work the land so that we stay nourished and clothed no matter what time of year.

Besides the obvious contributions of food and fiber, agriculture plays a significant role in the betterment of science, medicine, energy and homebuilding. Think about it: Where would we be without the crops that are the basis for nearly all our daily-use products?

While we welcome the start of fall and gear up for Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations, let's remember there are countless hardworking farmers and ranchers who make sure the change of seasons doesn't close the door on our quality of life.

Have a safe and happy fall. And enjoy the cooler weather.

Todd Staples



Feral Hogs Pose a Threat as Big as Texas

VERONICA OBREGON

Guess what agent of havoc threatens your health, your safety, and the availability of your food supply? Would you be surprised to know that a terrorist is not the only correct answer? Although not nearly as intentional as terrorists, feral hogs are threatening residents all over Texas – both rural and urban.

A cross between domestic pigs that escaped into the wild and European boars that were introduced in the 1930s, today's feral hog is well-adapted to the environment and has no natural predators. According to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, feral hogs can be found in 230 of Texas' 254 counties and cause annual damages of nearly \$400 million a year.

Making matters worse, feral hogs breed several times a year and their population, if uncontrolled, can increase exponentially. Texas Wildlife Services estimates today's Texas feral hog population to be as much as 2 million.

Besides destroying habitat and cropland, feral hogs can kill small livestock like goats and lambs, as well as destroy the nesting habitats for birds such as turkey and quail. They can spread diseases like pseudorabies and swine brucellosis into domestic pig populations. And most dangerously, they inhabit urban communities, destroy urban landscapes, and are road hazards for drivers.

Key methods for controlling feral hogs are hunting and trapping. Unfortunately, given the hog population's rapid reproduction, these methods are, at best, only a part of the solution until a more thorough program of abatement is established. The Texas Department of Agriculture received authorization from the Texas Legislature to implement a Feral Hog Abatement Grant Program, designed to encourage counties across Texas to make a coordinated effort to reduce the feral hog population.

Additionally, in October, Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples challenged all Texas counties to help TDA battle the state's growing hog problem through an effort called, "Hog Out Month - Get the Hog Outta Texas!" During the month of October, counties competed to remove the highest number of hogs, hold public education sessions for hog removal and dedicate the largest number of acres for hog trapping. The initiative is expected to energize existing efforts within Texas counties to continue to address Texas' feral hog problem.

Protecting homeowners, drivers, farmers, ranchers and hunters from the ongoing threat of feral hogs is a top priority for Texas. To learn more about Feral Hog Month and TDA's Feral Hog Abatement Program, visit TDA's website, www.TexasAgriculture.gov.



Shopping at a Texas farmers market is a great way to buy ingredients for a delicious GO TEXAN holiday meal. Locally grown products don't travel as far as those shipped cross-country, so they stay fresher and taste better. Buying local can also stimulate the economy in your community as it supports area farmers, ranchers and other food producers.

"Some of Texas' best produce is available from November to December," said Richard De Los Santos, Texas Department of Agriculture marketing coordinator for horticulture, produce and forestry.

"Traditional foods like turnips and sweet potatoes are prime for picking during the holiday season," he said. "Other side dish items like broccoli, cabbage, carrots and peas are also available."

Other Texas crops available for your holiday meal include:

- Celery and herbs – stuffing
- Greens, spinach, cucumbers and mushrooms – dinner salad
- Apples, pumpkins and pecans – dessert/pies
- Oranges and grapefruits – citrus punch
- Ham and turkeys (available year-round)

GO TEXAN For the Holidays

BECKY OZUNA

Availability varies by region, so check PickTexas.com for a produce availability chart and farmers market locations. You can also find Texas-grown food at your neighborhood grocery store by looking for the GO TEXAN logo on produce and other ingredients.

While you're shopping for the holidays, don't forget the gifts! From cowboy boots to bath soap, the GO TEXAN Holiday Gift Guide is a one-stop shop for all your gift-giving needs. Fruit baskets, salsas, marinades, smoked meats, jewelry and pies are just some of the available products. Check www.TexasAgriculture.gov and look under GO TEXAN Programs for the GO TEXAN Holiday Gift Guide.

Whether you're cooking dinner or buying gifts, everything you need to celebrate the holidays is made in Texas. Remember to GO TEXAN when you go shopping.

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Record Grape Production As Holiday Season Kicks Off

JOYCE HILL

In the mid-17th century, Franciscan priests made Texas the site of the first vineyard established in North America. Now, some 350 years later, Texas has about 280 commercial grape growers and approximately 3,400 acres of vineyards. The U.S. Department of Agriculture forecasts Texas grape production for 2010 at a record 8,900 tons, up 44 percent from a year ago.

As Texas celebrates a record year in grape production and wraps up Texas Wine Month, celebrated in October, the state's wine industry – home to more than 200 wineries – prepares for a holiday season filled with even more events and tastings that have been drawing nearly 1 million tourists to Texas wineries annually.

"Thanks to the commitment of our grape growers and winemakers, the number of wineries in the state has grown from 40 to more than 200 in less than a decade," Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples said. "With Texas Wine Month and the holiday season, fall is the perfect time to introduce everyone to Lone Star wines that are recognized among the nation's best."

To find a list of wineries across Texas, visit the GO TEXAN Wine website at www.gotexanwine.org. The site also features a link to the Texas Wine Trails page, which highlights 10 different wine trails in the Texas wine region. Travelers can document their winery visits using the GO TEXAN Winery Passport and earn rewards, including wine glasses and group wine tastings by participating in the Passport Rewards Program. Passports are available at all winery tasting rooms and may be ordered online at www.gotexanwine.org.

According to the Texas Wine Marketing Research Institute, the Texas grape and wine industry has a total economic impact of \$1.35 billion and accounts for 9,000 jobs statewide.

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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.

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