Report Submitted to the Texas Rice Research Foundation
For 2004

Communications, Press and Public Outreach for the Texas Rice Industry

by

Jay Cockrell
Agricultural Communications Specialist
Texas A&M University System Agricultural Research and Extension Center
1509 Aggie Drive, Beaumont, Texas 77713

Duration: March 04 – March 05

Funds Awarded: $11,535.00
Communications, Press and Public Outreach at the Beaumont Center

Executive Summery:

Newsletter – 2004 was another good year for Texas Rice, and it continues to be a valuable communication tool for the rice industry, the Beaumont Center and Texas A&M University. The mailing list gets bigger every year, with email recipients topping 1200. We have kept the number of hard copies mailed out at 400 to keep printing and postage costs down.

According to the year-end report of activity for the Center website, Texas Rice took 7 of the top 10 downloads, with the March and April issues being the most popular. The web trends also show that issues from 2003 continue to be downloaded, especially the Winter 03 where we highlighted the importance of the rice industry to the environment.

We kept a very tight schedule this year, with each issue going out no later than the first week of each month, and the Winter issue went out well ahead of the Christmas break. I’ve kept in close contact with industry representatives, making sure that the information presented was timely and accurate. Besides our own scientists, I also worked with researchers from other states including Arkansas, Louisiana, Illinois, California and Florida.

Outreach – We brought around 200 people through the Center in 2004, from girl scouts to senior citizen groups. The kids went home with their own rice growing ‘kits’, and the seniors got rice recipe brochures and copies of Texas Rice. Besides the local groups, I also gave tours for visiting scientists and farmers from China, Mexico, Brazil and Peru.

We continue to participate in area career days and science fairs for junior high and high school students. This is a great opportunity to let kids know that there is more to agriculture than just farming, and all the things Texas A&M has to offer in these fields. It also gives me a chance to increase awareness of the work done at the Beaumont Center. Many of our best student workers learned of the job opportunity through outreach efforts at their schools

Press – In addition to the field day press, year round newspaper and television coverage has steadily increased. I have established excellent relationships with newspaper reporters, editors, television producers and anchors. In between special events, I do my best to keep agriculture high in their mind, either forwarding stories from AgNMore or making suggestions for good story ideas or interviews.

I continue to serve on the Jefferson County Ag Committee, chaired by Kelby Boldt, and we have made great progress in the past year. We have a regular Thursday column in the Beaumont Enterprise so the different ag related organizations can receive consistent placement of their stories. We also secured a regular segment on the local CBS affiliate News at Noon program, which runs the first Tuesday of every month.

Beside numerous press releases on AgNMore, my ‘Rice and the Environment’ story was published in the fall issue of Lifescapes, the quarterly magazine for the Texas A&M Agriculture Program.
In our 2004 season of *Texas Rice*, we continued to provide timely and informative stories that highlighted the rice industry, farmer issues and Texas A&M University.

We got the season off to a strong start in March with a cover story that highlighted the rice check-off program, emphasizing the tremendous role our farmers play in supporting research. In the ‘Farming Rice’ section, I wrote an article based on a presentation by LSU weed specialist Dr. Ron Strahan. The article contained excellent color photos to help farmers identify weed species, and gave recommendations for chemicals to control them.

For the April issue, we ran a story on insect newcomers that Dr. Mo Way identified in rice fields in 2003. With many close-up photos, it was intended to serve as an ID guide for growers. In a correspondence to one of our researchers, Owen Taylor, editor of RiceFax, said the article was “the best thing he had ever seen coming from a University system”. While it’s clear this is an exaggeration, the compliment was quite encouraging.

The June cover story promoted the Eagle Lake Field day, and Dr. Turner did an excellent article on nitrogen loss in rice soils for the ‘Farming Rice’ section.
The July issue honored Bill Dishman Sr. for an endowment the Dishman family established for research at the Beaumont/Eagle Lake Center. We also highlighted the research Mo Way and Gene Regan conducted done on the Mexican rice borer.

For the August issue, I went international, and tapped into research conducted on endophytes in rice by Chinese and Australian scientists. We also profiled Louis Broussard at Beaumont Rice Mill, one of the oldest mills in Texas.

Based on suggestions from our on-line survey, we ran a story on Rice Tec and hybrid rice production in the September issue. The article included a brief history of hybrid rice research, techniques used in producing hybrid seed and a performance overview of hybrid rice
Objectives

Specific objectives for this proposal were as follows:

1. Continue to publish and improve *Texas Rice*, the newsletter for the Texas rice industry; and
2. Refine and expand educational materials for presentations and projects dealing with rice production, targeting school children and the general public.
3. Continue to foster close relationships with representatives of the media to insure that agricultural issues get coverage.

Materials And Methods

All the writing, typesetting, editing and printing for *Texas Rice* is done in-house. Using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Pagemaker software, the newsletter is typeset on one of two Macintosh desktop computers. Interviews for original articles, such as the Grower Profile and Researcher in the News, are done on location. Scientists are involved, as much as their time allows, in writing special features.

The design, layout, and printing of brochures and handouts are also done at the Beaumont Center. Poster size materials are printed on the HP Design Jet 755CM which has the capability of printing a document 36” wide and up to 100 feet long.

Time Line

*Texas Rice* was published 9 times in 2004, March through October with a winter issue in December. Area high school career days were held in the spring, and recruitment seminars were in late May, just before school let out for the summer. Community presentations and station tours were a year-round endeavor.