Communications, Press and Public Outreach for the Texas Rice Industry

by

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Communications, Press and Public Outreach at the Beaumont Center

Objectives for this proposal were as follows:

1. Publication of *Texas Rice*, newsletter for the Texas rice industry.

*Texas Rice* continues to be a valuable communication tool for the rice industry. The mailing list gets bigger every year, with email recipients now topping 1700. We have maintained 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 Beaumont Center website, *Texas Rice* took 10 of the top 20 downloads. The web trends also show that issues from past years continue to be downloaded, indicating that the newsletter is valued as reference resource as well as for current events.

In producing a strong line-up of articles for the 2005 season, I worked with many Texas scientists, plus researchers from other states including Arkansas, Louisiana, Illinois, California and Florida. Internationally, I gathered information from scientists in China, Israel, Australia and India.

We got the season off to a strong start in March with a cover story that highlighted research being conducted on allelopathy in rice, the ability of some varieties to retard weed growth in the surrounding area. We were also proud to publish a very moving and insightful letter from Jack Wendt to President Bush. And for our researcher in the news, we profiled Dr. Jim Stansel, highlighting a most productive and inspiring career.

For the April issue, our cover story highlighted the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, and the farmers who grow rice there. It emphasized the close affiliation between the rice industry, and the health of our wildlife habitats. For our Grower Guide, we put together an early season checklist with everything from early weed identification to fertilizer recommendations. The information came from researchers and some of our top growers.
The May issue had a definite political theme, with a cover story detailing a speech Representative Ted Poe made on the House floor. It was a heartfelt and inspiring plea on behalf of Texas rice farmers. In addition, we highlighted all the elected officials in the Texas rice belt, to help farmers better understand the positions of those who represent them. And as in past years, we presented an overview of TRRF funded projects, to make farmers aware of how their check-off funds were being used.

The June cover story highlighted the Eagle Lake Field Day, in an effort to encourage strong attendance and participation. We also did an extensive story on conservation tillage, outlining the many benefits as well as the difficulties in adapting to the production practice. We also ran a story on the latest in biomass-to-ethanol research from the University of Florida.

For the July issue, we provided coverage of research being conducted in Louisiana and Arkansas on the use of polypipe for side inlet irrigation. This is especially import for farmers in regions where water availability is a growing concern.

We combined the August/September issue into a monster 16-page edition with the cover story by Dr. Yubin Yang
detailing the new web-based water conservation analyzer being developed at the Beaumont Center. We also highlighted research by Dr. Lee Tarpley on the effects of UV-b radiation on rice. Genetic marker research by USDA scientists on Carolina gold was also covered, in addition to an article on the EQIP program with information supplied by Ronald Gertson.

Due to a growing interest in this new technology, our October cover story gave an overview of research being conducted in precision agriculture. We discussed benefits, future possibilities, as well as current limitations to adapting this leading edge technology.

2. **Continue to foster close relationships with representatives of the media to insure that agricultural issues get coverage.**

   In 2005, Beaumont Field Day press coverage was excellent. Arrangements were made ahead of time for Dr. Elsa Murano to have an interview with our leading news station in this market. That segment ran on the 5, 6 and 10 o’clock news. We also had advance press releases in our two major papers, as well as over a dozen smaller publications throughout the eastern rice belt. Year round newspaper and television coverage has steadily increased. I have established excellent relationships with newspaper reporters, editors, television producers and anchors.

   I continue to serve on the Jefferson County Ag Committee, chaired by Kelby Boldt, which is responsible for a regular Thursday column in the Beaumont Enterprise. This insures that 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, I wrote an article for *Lifescapes*, the magazine for the Texas A&M Ag Program, which highlighted Linda and L.G. Raun detailing their extensive efforts on the behalf of the Texas rice industry.

3. **Refine and expand educational materials for presentations and projects dealing with rice production, targeting schools and the community organizations.**

   While this area of my efforts has been somewhat reduced, I continue to participate in high school career days and science fairs.