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Texas Comptroller Susan Combs Offers Free Energy Assessments to Farmers and Ranchers

(AUSTIN) — Saving energy can help farmers and ranchers increase their profits while also helping to preserve Texas' energy resources, Texas Comptroller Susan Combs said today as she premiered a new initiative to promote energy efficiency in agriculture. The new Texas Agricultural Technical Assistance Program will provide farm and ranch operations information about cost-effective energy choices, aid in accessing funding and incentive sources, conduct training and offer free Energy Assessment Reports (EARs) of producers' buildings and facilities. The State Energy Conservation Office (SECO), a division of the Comptroller's office, will conduct the program.

Combs said farmers and ranchers could benefit from the free assessments that examine utility costs and energy consumption in farm and business operations. Producers can also use assistance in finding loan and grant programs to increase efficiency or purchase renewable energy systems.

“Rising energy costs impact all sectors of our economy, but agriculture producers in Texas now have new opportunities to streamline operations, reduce costs and remain competitive,” Combs said. “To help farmers and ranchers face these significant challenges, this program will identify incentives to move toward more energy-efficient farms, reducing energy costs, increasing available capital, spurring economic growth and improving the working environment.”

SECO will run the Texas Agricultural Technical Assistance Program in partnership with EnSave Inc., USDA Rural Development, the Texas Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Areas Inc. and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. By working together, this partnership will maximize the effectiveness of energy efficiency activities within the Texas agricultural sector.

“Investing in our communities through improved energy efficiency in farming operations is a win-win opportunity for state agriculture,” Combs said. “We want to make Texas-made products available to every market in the world, and we can keep prices competitive when farmers operate efficiently.”

The Texas Agricultural Technical Assistance Program will provide Texas agricultural operations with free EARs for their farm buildings and facilities. The reports will collect data regarding energy consumption usage and information about the farming equipment used in production. These reports will identify opportunities to save on energy costs and recommend changes concerning electricity, propane and diesel fuel within the farm operation.

This program will also help agricultural producers access additional funds to implement energy efficiency

projects, such as grants and guaranteed loan funds available through the USDA Rural Development

Section 9007, Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), utility company incentives or other funds (loan funds, economic development funds). Some of these loans and grants can help agricultural producers make energy efficiency improvements to their existing operations or install their own renewable energy systems.

SECO will host informational workshops in Stephenville, Lubbock, Nacogdoches and San Antonio throughout August and September to provide more information to producers and the extended agricultural community. SECO representatives on hand at the presentations can answer questions and sign eligible producers up for free EARs.

In addition, partners involved in the Texas Agricultural Technical Assistance Program will provide training on writing grant applications for REAP and a separate three-day workshop for intensive data collector training. Data collectors will receive training on two or three types of agriculture operations prevalent in their respective regions. Texas RC&D councils, the farm bureau, university extension, conservation districts and similar organizations can attend. The schedule for workshops dates and locations is as follows:

Stephenville, Texas

Program Information Workshop: Aug. 18, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Grant Writing Training: Aug. 19, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Data Collector Training: Aug. 20–22, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Lubbock, Texas

Program Information Workshop: Aug. 25, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Grant Writing Training: Aug. 26, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Data Collector Training: Aug. 27–29, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Nacogdoches, Texas

Grant Writing Training: Sept. 15, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Program Information Workshop: Sept. 16, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Data Collector Training: Sept. 17–19, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

San Antonio, Texas

Program Information Workshop: Sept. 22, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Grant Writing Training: Sept. 23, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Data Collector Training: Sept. 24–26, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

For more information on how to sign up for this exciting new program or one of the workshops, please call EnSave at (800) 732-1399 or visit SECO online at <http://www.seco.cpa.state.tx.us/agriculture.htm>.

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