

Energy Use Audit Program Available at No cost to Producers and Agri-Business Operations

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The office of the Comptroller of Public Accounts in Texas has funded and is offering an energy use audit program to agricultural producers and agri-business operations at no cost to the participant. The objective of the audit is to assess energy use, the relative efficiency of its use and to identify ways to reduce energy use, increase the efficiency of its use and to analyze the cost-benefit relationship of adopting current, more efficient energy use practices. The project will also provide assistance to producers in identifying potential financial assistance to implement cost saving/energy saving technology in their operation.

According to a recent news release from the office of Susan Combs, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, saving energy can help farmers and ranchers increase their profits while also helping to preserve Texas' energy resources. The news release explains that farmers and ranchers could benefit from the free assessments that examine utility costs and energy consumption in farms and agri-business operations. Producers can also access assistance in finding loan and grant programs to increase efficiency or purchase renewable energy systems.

The office of the Comptroller includes the State Energy Conservation Office (SECO) (ph#: 800.531.5441 ext 3-1931) which manages the program and has entered into a partnership agreement with EnSave, a private, for profit company, to administer the program. The pilot program is currently planned to operate for about one year, through August 2009, with an initial objective to conduct 150-200 energy audits or more, depending on funding. The

program could be extended if it is effective.

Several other agencies, such as USDA's-Rural Development Agency, USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Texas Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Areas are involved in the project.

Participation

Interested potential participants may inquire about the program and/or register to participate by contacting EnSave at (800) 732-1399 or SECO at (800) 531-5441 ext 3-1931. More program details may be obtained by visiting EnSave online at www.ensave.com.

General basic qualifications to participate in this energy use audit include: being an agricultural producer; meet basic fuel use threshold standards for electricity, propane, natural gas or diesel use; have an energy savings potential; be committed to saving energy, i.e., be committed to implement energy audit recommendations, and generally have an energy usage ranking cost of about \$50,000/year or more in energy costs (total cost from all energy sources, such as electricity, propane, natural gas, diesel, etc.).

Once a producer enrolls in the program, EnSave, through the use of a ranking guide, will determine the level of participation. This determination ranking will determine whether a producer(s) receives services in Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the program. These tiers provide appropriate service levels to producers based on their energy use, savings potential, likelihood of implementing energy efficiency measures, and the depth of assistance needed.

All participants in Tier 1 of the program will receive consultation by phone and a Best Practices Guide filled with low-cost and no-cost tips and recommendations to save energy on the farm. Other services may include a cost/benefit analysis for a piece of energy efficient equipment, or referrals to other programs.

Energy Assessment Report (EAR)

Tier 2 services are for producers with energy intensive operations and greater energy savings potential. Tier 2 participants will receive an Energy Assessment Report (EAR).

Producers who qualify for an EAR will receive a scope of work plan, detailing the process to receive an EAR, and will sign and return a Service Agreement agreeing to participate in the program. An appointment will be made with Tier 2 participant(s) for an on-farm visit by a Technical Assistance Program data collector who will interview the participants and collect technical use data, i.e., size of operation, number and size of tractors, irrigation systems, key data on all energy use activities, etc. This information will be analyzed to create an EAR with recommendations for energy savings, i.e., analysis of present energy usage, recommendations for improvements, cost analysis of recommended improvements, including payback period, and potential productivity improvements, if applicable.

Following the delivery of an EAR, producers will receive a follow-up call to review the report and discuss options to implement the EAR's recommendations.

NOTE: USDA-NRCS personnel may be some of the onsite data collectors.