

Agriculture

During the 1980s, the dairy industry expanded very rapidly in the North Bosque River and adjacent watersheds. Erath County became the leading county for milk production in the State. The total number of milk cows in the watershed grew from around 20,000 head to the current total in the neighborhood of 41,000 head. In keeping with current trends in the dairy industry, operations in this watershed also shifted from relatively small dairies dispersed over the landscape, to large dairies that tend to cluster together for economic and cooperative reasons. According to the [North Bosque Total Maximum Daily Load \(TMDL\) plan](#), there are 105 dairies in the Bosque River Watershed, with 104 of those in the watersheds of the impaired Segments 1226 and 1255.

While dairying is the major agricultural enterprise in the watershed, peanut, beef cattle, pecan orchard, and hay operations are also important practices. Turkey production is another common agricultural activity, with approximately 263,000 turkeys on 13 farms in the watershed. Table 1 lists the major row crops produced by counties which lie in the North Bosque Watershed in 2002. Totals are not confined to the watershed, but are countywide.

Table 1. Row crops by county for 2002.

| County | Corn (bushels) | Cotton (bales) | Oats (bushels) | Peanuts (lbs) | Sorghum (cwt) | Soybeans (bushels) | Wheat (bushels) |
|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Bosque | 185,000 | 0 | 89,000 | N/A | 48,000 | 0 | 95,000 |
| Erath | 11,000 | 0 | 12,000 | 1,900,000 | 0 | 0 | 14,000 |
| Hamilton | 0 | 0 | 560,000 | N/A | 99,000 | 26,000 | 115,000 |
| McLennan | 4,151,000 | 4,800 | 460,000 | N/A | 542,000 | 0 | 1,555,000 |

Since many of the soils in the region are phosphorous-depleted, inorganic fertilizers are often needed to meet the nutrient demands of the crops. Figure 1 shows the average total weight of phosphorous applied in each county (based on data from years 1998 – 2002). Again, note that these totals are countywide.

Due to a combination of low milk prices and regulatory pressures, dairy numbers are beginning to decline. Agricultural records show that in Erath County alone, which spans both the North Bosque and Leon River Watersheds, the dairy herd has decreased from over 90,000 head in 2000 to just over 63,000 in 2002. Surrounding counties show a similar trend, although the decrease in herd size is not quite as dramatic.

Average Annual Total Phosphorous Applied by County

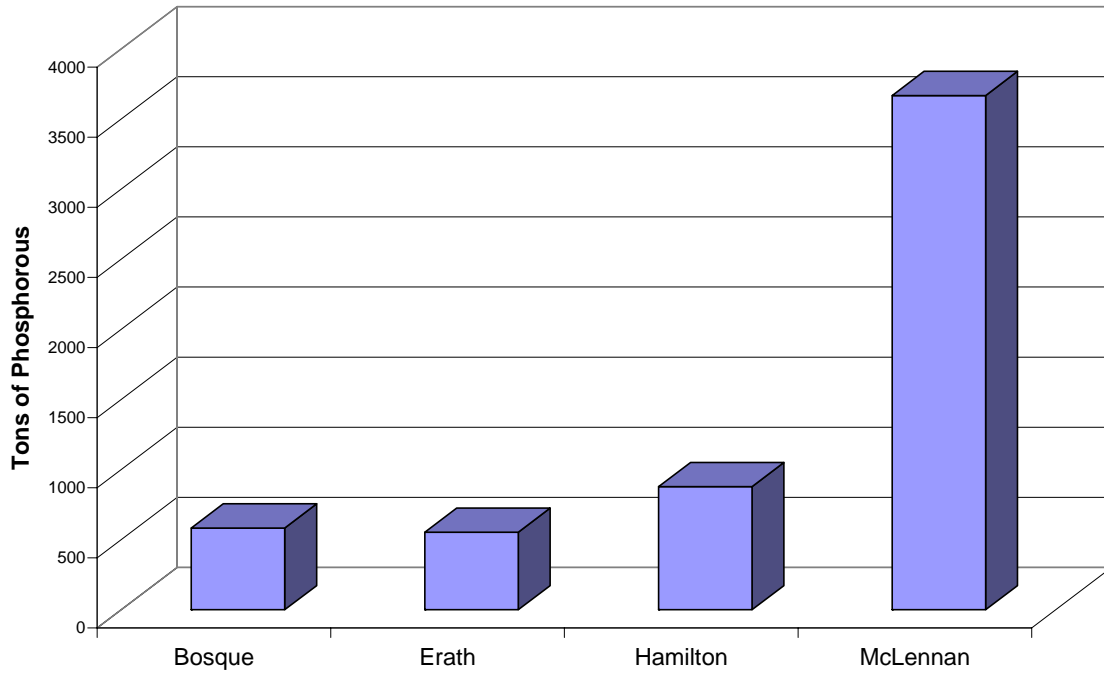


Figure 1. Average annual phosphorous weight in inorganic fertilizers applied to each county for the years 1998 – 2002.