

# Free testing for private water well owners

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

**Growing healthy plants starts with a healthy soil. Learn more about “Soil Health & Evaluation” at an AgriLife Extension Office seminar on Saturday, November 18.**

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and others are collaborating to offer water testing opportunities for Galveston County private well owners affected by flood waters from Hurricane Harvey.

Although the majority of Texans are served by public water supplies, there are still more than 810,000 residents in the 39 Texas

counties impacted by Hurricane Harvey's flood waters that rely on private drinking wells. While most private wells provide clean drinking water, they can become contaminated and cause countless health problems.

Dr. Diane Boellstorff, AgriLife Extension water resource specialist at College Station, said water

from a flooded well should not be used for drinking, cooking, making ice, brushing teeth or even bathing until tested.

AgriLife Extension's Texas Well Owner Network is collaborating with the Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas, Virginia Tech (VPI) and others to provide a second round of free water testing to



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determine the presence, if any, of total coliform and E. coli in private water wells affected by flooding from Hurricane Harvey.

The first round of water testing for private water wells in Galveston County consisted of 23 samples. Forty-eight percent tested positive for Total Coliforms and 13% tested positive for E. coli.

Galveston County residents that rely on private wells for their water supply can pick up a free water sampling test kit from the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office but must be able to return the sample to our office from 8:00-11:00 a.m. on Thursday, November 16. The samples must be freshly taken and processed as soon as possible afterwards; an AgriLife Extension technician will pick up submitted samples on Thursday and return them to College Station for processing.

Instructions are included with the kits and only one sample kit will be provided per household. Any homeowner with a private domestic water well is eligible to have well water tested. The results will be confidential and will be either emailed or mailed to residents' homes.

Flood water might contain substances from upstream, such as manure, sewage from flooded septic systems or wastewater treatment plants or other contaminants. A septic system near a well can also cause contamination when the soil is flooded.

Dr. Boellstorff noted that "Data

from the well water testing will help us better understand a flood's impact on private wells and help us enhance our communications relating to well water quality."

Instructions for decontaminating a well are available through the following publications posted on our office website (<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/>).

Water wells should also be inspected for physical damage and signs of leakage after a flood. If it appears damaged, consult a licensed water well contractor to determine whether—and to what extent—repairs are needed.

### Soil Health & Evaluation Seminar

President Roosevelt is often considered the "conservationist president." When many at that time considered our resources inexhaustible, Roosevelt saw them as something to protect and cherish.

In a "Letter to all State Governors on a Uniform Soil Conservation Law" dated February 26, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote "The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself."

Soil health is critical for our health and that of generations to come. Take the time to dive into the amazing world of soil and learn how you can enhance the quality of your soil.

Soil has both inherent and dynamic qualities. Inherent soil

quality is a soil's natural ability to function. For example, sandy soil drains faster than clay soil. Deep soil has more room for roots than soils with bedrock near the surface. These characteristics do not change easily.

Dynamic soil quality is how soil changes depending on how it is managed. Management choices affect the amount of soil organic matter, soil structure, soil depth, and water and nutrient holding capacity. One goal of soil health research is to learn how to manage soil in a way that improves soil function. Soils respond differently to management depending on the inherent properties of the soil and the surrounding landscape.

It has been estimated that 75-80% of plant problems begin in the soil with "the plant root zone." Galveston County Master Gardener Jim Gilliam will present a PowerPoint program on "Soil Health & Evaluation" covering the 18 important indicators that can reveal your soil's health. Strategies to improve your soil's health for a better garden will also be addressed.

The seminar will be conducted from 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, November 18, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main Street in La Marque) Pre-register by e-mail ([galvcountymgs@gmail.com](mailto:galvcountymgs@gmail.com)) or phone (281-309-5065) to ensure availability of program handouts.

