

# Alexander receives ag update on tour

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The Town Talk

Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, received an update Monday morning on the state of agriculture within the region.

From soybeans to higher food costs to a state evacuation center, Alexander heard and/or toured it all during his visit to the C. DeWitt Livestock Facility at Louisiana State University at Alexandria.

The information presented only "touched the tip of the iceberg," though, said David Boethel, vice chancellor and director of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station. His intent was to show Alexander a portion of the AgCenter's operations and highlight the national implications involved.

In all, Louisiana's agriculture industry contributed \$5.7 billion to the state's economy in 2007 and employed more than 10,000 people in 2006, according to state figures.

Agricultural economist Kurt Guidry represents one of the AgCenter's na-

tionally pertinent operations. Guidry's job involves identifying the forces behind rising food costs. And regarding the current market and risk it holds for farmers, Guidry said it's "as bad as it's been for quite some time."

The bad-to-worse scenario revolves around high production cost coupled with rising commodity prices. Guidry said the AgCenter's location and coordination with area extension programs gives it a unique take on agricultural issues.

A member of the Agriculture Subcommittee and the House Appropriations Committee, Alexander said making the right move to remedy higher food costs isn't hard. The hard thing, however, is knowing what that right move is.

"That is the question," he continued.

Rising food costs is an issue that will play a part in the appropriations process that begins shortly, Alexander told Boethel and others with LSU's AgCenter.

The impact of the Louisiana Emergency Center falls a little closer to

home, but it was still a point of interest for Alexander.

The facility was built in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It's a 230,000-square-foot building that's able to house 3,500 people and is expected to open in October.

John Barnett, LSU AgCenter's regional director for the central region, said the evacuation center was 95 percent complete. It was located in Cenla, Barnett said, because the area is "out of imminent danger." He also cited the area's highway infrastructure -- Interstate 49 and U.S. Highways 71, 165 and 167 -- as a reason for the center's location.

Alexander said likewise. Central Louisiana is located far enough outside of the Gulf region to avoid serious damage.

As to whether the center could be up sooner than October, if needed, Barnett said there was a possibility, but it would require a lot of scrambling for beds, medicine and other supplies.