Uvalde hosts wheat, vegetable field day

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The combined vegetable and wheat field day at Texas A&M Agrilife Research Extension Center in Uvalde was hosted on May 18, and events were quickly underway as presenters took to the front of the room and samples of tomatoes were distributed to each table.

While most talks involved breeding large market vegetables and how to properly treat diseases, two graduate students presented on onion production systems and soil amendments for bell peppers.

"The United States' most valuable crop is onions, and that is why I chose to do research on onion production systems," horticultural sciences graduate student Andrea Macias de Leon said. "I looked at the differences in direct seeding, where farmers directly plant into undisturbed soil, and transplant seeding, when farmers move one plant's location to another."

Though she said many farmers will employ direct seeding, as it is the least expensive, she said disease is more common in this type of farming.

"Transplants are my suggestion for farmers struggling with diseases, even though it is more expensive," she said. "It's expensive, but it reduces abiotic and biotic stress on the crops."

De Leon looked at crops from Speedling in Alamo, Texas, and Speedling in Ruskin, Florida. Both were transplanted, but de Leon said the onions from Florida were subject to more stress.

"The onions were transported to us in a truck, so they were a little stressed when they got to us," she said.

The onions grew considerably in a brief amount of time, which de Leon said is also beneficial to farmers as they don't have to wait for the next crop rotation.

"The onions were bigger than direct seeding onions," she said. "I am assuming this is because transplant onions are more resistant to diseases that occur at different times of planting."

With soil amendments for bell peppers, horticultural sciences graduate student Kuan Qin also faced his share of difficulties.

"In my research, I compared bell pepper growth in growth chambers, greenhouses, and fields. At each location I was able to assess, evaluate, and test, respectively," he said.

By doing so, Qin saw an improvement in plant growth due to the soil amendments.

"There was a difference between clay and sandy type soil, but soil amendments to both promoted an early yield in bell peppers," Qin said.

Though he was able to see a difference, he could not prove this difference would be present every season and rotation.

"Because it was only a one-year study, what we found in the field is not concrete," he said. "We'll have to wait another year to do it again and either prove or disprove my findings."

The field day concluded with a field tour of grafted tomatoes, onions, watermelons, peppers, lettuce, wheat cultivars, and cropping systems.

More information on other presentations will follow throughout the summer.