

Local



Singing in the rain?

Photo by Dave Einsel

Chris McVady, a sophomore accounting major, does a little catch-up work during the rainy weather Monday by the Harrington Center.

Satellite photos help A&M assess timberland tax value

A Texas A&M University laboratory is using high-altitude aircraft and satellite photos to help tax assessors determine timberland values in 48 East Texas counties.

With the aid of remote sensing photos from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station forestry science lab is drawing maps outlining where pine, hardwood and a mixture of the two grow in East Texas. The maps will be used by county-wide appraisal boards and school districts to more accurately — and evenly — determine land values.

“Under 1979 tax laws timberland owners are given incentives to produce wood, since they can reduce their tax assessment by means of production,” explained Dr. Robert Baker, a Texas A&M professor of forest science.

Baker said choice soil can produce as much as \$400 an acre of

pine and taxes can be levied on that amount instead of the market value, which could be anywhere between \$800 and \$1,000.

“This value is commonly called timber-use value,” Baker said.

“Timber growers in Texas know from experience that pine is worth more per unit than most hardwood, that timber grows best in certain areas that it takes capital to operate a timber-growing enterprise,” Baker said. “For instance, pine growing on the best soil could have over 20 times the value per acre of hardwood timber growing on the poorest soil.”

“The values which the local assessor computes for the categories of timberland is a method for ranking the timber use values per acre.”

The Texas A&M forestry scientists have already mapped over 10 million acres of privately owned timberland. Maps have also been

drawn to outline soil types.

“Our work will lead to more standardized procedures for assessing the value of forest land,” Baker said, explaining that the project began in 1976 through a joint effort of the agricultural experiment station and the Governor’s Office of Educational Resources. The State Property Tax Board has joined the project.

“The data will help us make decisions we have not been able to make before,” Baker said. “It would be useful to industry for determining which lands would be best suited for growing trees or it could help determine where federal wilderness areas should be

placed so they wouldn’t compete with areas that would be better suited for production.”

By using infrared satellite photos, the researchers can also keep an update on which timber lands have been harvested and where new trees are being planted.

About 50 school districts of the almost 300 in the area that have been surveyed are already using maps from Texas A&M for assessing property values, Baker said, and 20 of the 48 counties have been supplied the drawings. Maps for additional school districts and counties will be available upon request.

Factory workers lift state rank in product-wage ratio

Texas factory workers outproduced their counterparts nationwide by 34 percent during the late 70s, lifting the state to fourth in terms of value produced per dollar paid in wages, a Texas A&M industrial researcher says.

Production workers in Texas added an average of \$4.99 for ev-

ery dollar they received during 1977, compared to the national average \$3.72, Dr. Charles Zlatkovich said at the 31st annual Texas Industrial Development Conference. The conference was held at the Greenspoint Marriott Hotel north of Houston.

Zlatkovich developed the figures in conjunction with the Industrial Economics Research Di-

vision of the Texas Engineering Experiment Station, a branch of the Texas A&M University System.

“The chemical industry is largely responsible for lifting the overall productivity level of Texas industry so far above the national average,” Zlatkovich said.

“Chemicals and allied products account for more than 22 percent of all Texas manufacturing value, compared with less than 10 percent nationwide. The Texas chemical industry has posted a level of production per wage dollar, 35 percent higher than the national chemical industry.”

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