

# Israelis, Texans to start cooperative farm effort

AUSTIN (AP) — Israeli experts who have turned deserts into cropland are trying to help Texans do the same with some of the state's more forbidding farmland, State Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower said Monday.

The cooperative effort will be showcased in a Laredo project that could introduce new cash crops in some parts of the state. The list of products officials from the Jewish state will help grow includes Christmas trees.

"If this is economically viable, we are agreeable," said Arie Nechamkin, Israel's minister of agriculture. "With us, we're not big experts because there isn't a big demand for Christmas trees" in Israel.

Nechamkin, who spoke through an interpreter, joined Hightower at a news conference. The Israeli official is on a four-day tour of Texas.

Hightower has aggressively worked to establish links with Israeli

farm experts because he believes Israel has solved many of the problems now faced in Texas.

"There is a very logical connection between the state of Texas and the state of Israel," Hightower said. "In addition to us sharing very handsome ministers of agriculture on both sides, we also happen to share the same latitude on the globe. We have very similar soil and climate conditions."

He said Israel and Texas also share an attitude.

"You cannot tell a Texan or an Israeli that you cannot do something," said Hightower, who toured Israeli farms in November.

A team of Israeli farm experts will evaluate the 135-acre "blueprint farm" that will be developed next year. Most of the land — scrubland along the Rio Grande — is owned by Laredo Junior College.

The Jewish National Fund, a private fund-raising organization, will

pay approximately \$50,000 for the cost of the preparation studies.

Hightower said the farm could be used to show South Texas farmers how traditionally non-productive land can be used to raise Christmas trees, fish, cut flowers, specialty vegetables and other products.

"Because of the depression in our overall agriculture economy in this nation and also here in Texas, we have got to find new crops that make sense for the farmer and rancher," Hightower said. "If we're not making money on corn and cows and cotton, then we need to be moving into some new commodities that do allow our farmers to make a profit."

Nechamkin said Israeli officials also are learning from Texas farmers and ranchers. Specifically, he said Israel wants to produce more of its own beef, and he was impressed with the Texas cattle ranches he has seen on the tour.

## Police seek two suspects in shooting

PORT ARTHUR (AP) — Police searched Monday for two suspects in a shooting spree that resulted in the deaths of two men and the wounding of three others.

Four of the victims were shot inside Tam Game Room, located in a mostly Asian neighborhood in this coastal city, and another was shot outside the building about 6:10 p.m. Sunday.

Police were searching Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana for the suspects described as young Vietnamese men.

"No one has been apprehended, but we have leads as to who they are," Port Arthur Police Sgt. W.C. Wright said.

Witnesses told authorities the two gunmen jumped into a light blue 1976 Monte Carlo and a dark 1986 Nissan with out-of-state license plates.

Some onlookers told police the shooting was gang-related, but Wright said, "we have nothing to indicate it was gang-related at this time."

Police believe the attack was intended for one or more of the victims.

Sgt. Mark Blanton said a crowd of about 200 mostly Vietnamese people were inside the game room when the gunmen opened fire with what police believe were a shotgun and an M-16 machine gun.

Wounded were Nang Pham, 30, and Dinh Nguyen, 20.

## Commissioners delay decision on permits for shelter for aliens

BROWNSVILLE (AP) — Cameron County commissioners delayed a decision Monday on whether to grant permits for a controversial shelter for illegal aliens, despite warnings that their action could prompt a civil rights lawsuit.

"There is no legal basis for denying the permits," County Attorney Brian Janis told commissioners at an emotional meeting to consider a request by the Catholic Diocese of Brownsville to locate Casa Oscar Romero east of this border city.

Failure to comply with federal civil rights laws could subject the county to a lawsuit and stiff damages, he said.

A divided commissioners court, however, voted to postpone the decision until Friday, a day after a hearing is scheduled in state district court on a lawsuit seeking to bar the diocese from locating Casa Romero on six acres outside the city limits.

County Judge Moises V. Vela said the county was stuck with the problem because no one else is dealing with the issue of finding shelter for illegal aliens seeking refuge from Central America.

"The cities have been unable to solve it, the state doesn't want to look into it, so the counties are burdened with it," Vela said. "The state won't take them, the cities won't take them, the federal government won't take them, so the county has to take them."

County commissioners voted last month to temporarily suspend permits for the diocese to locate five mobile homes at the site for use as a shelter. Residents of nearby mobile home parks had complained Casa Romero would lower property values.

Janis said the permits complied with state and county regulations and should not be denied.

Church spokesman Herman Gonzalez, following the meeting, said, "We'll see what legal remedies we have." The meeting was attended by at least 200 people on both sides of the controversy.

The diocese has been looking for a new location for the shelter since officials in San Benito moved to oust it, saying it violated city building standards. Church officials had agreed to move it by last Friday, and now face fines of \$100 per day from the city of San Benito.

Dennis Sanchez, an attorney for four Brownsville residents who are suing to block the move, said the church's handling of the center in San Benito boded ill for the Brownsville area.

"It's not a pretty place . . . it's crowded, it's an eyesore," he said.

Casa Romero has housed up to 500 refugees at a time, although San Benito officials say city building standards are violated when the occupancy rate exceeds 50 a night.

## Report: prison director had role in early release system

AUSTIN (AP) — Members of a legislative committee say Texas prison director O.L. McCotter misrepresented the role his administration played in speeding up the early release of prison inmates, the Dallas Times Herald reports.

The Legislative Budget Board's corrections subcommittee found that McCotter directed a change in status for incoming inmates that resulted in more new inmates being automatically classified as trustees, the Times Herald said Monday.

Before McCotter issued the directive, approximately 69 percent of inmates had trustee status. By October that percentage was up to 83.5 percent, the newspaper said.

The committee staff also found the Texas Department of Corrections has allowed inmates who were violent or who repeatedly broke the rules to earn bonus "good time."

Sen. Ray Farabee, D-Wichita Falls, said the committee will use the findings in a probe to determine whether legislation to tighten good-time rules is needed or the rules should be eliminated.

Farabee and Rep. Bob Melton, D-Gatesville, said the

good-time issue will be a top priority with the 1987 Legislature, which convenes next month.

Farabee said the good-time program, originally intended to encourage good behavior, has become a tool for releasing prisoners.

"It's one response to the overcrowding problem," he said. "I don't feel that it's the best or proper response. If it isn't contrary to existing law, it's certainly contrary to tradition and good judgment."

A state law prohibits incoming inmates to be classified as trustees and are barred from earning good time for the first 90 days of their incarceration.

"Good time should be earned, and if you have to accelerate good time for certain non-violent types, then I think the public will understand that," Farabee said.

Melton said, good-time provisions should not be used to control prison population, but as a reward.

McCotter has said that his administration has not established any new policies and that the prison system is operating under rules conceived by his predecessor, Ray Procnier.

## Organized kill of tame deer stirs fast response from eager hunters

RICHMOND (AP) — Texas Parks and Wildlife officials say an organized deer kill at Brazos Bend State Park netted 91 deer for the 100 hunters who participated in a weekend hunt of the tame animals.

Officials say they have received an overwhelming number of calls from people who want to kill one of the deer, now teeming in the park about five miles east of Richmond.

There also have been complaints from people who philosophically oppose the killing, said Herb Kothmann, program leader for public hunting for the department.

"But, we've gotten far more calls from people who want to hunt than from people who complain," Kothmann said. "The trouble is, all the hunters were chosen in a drawing in September and all the spots have been filled. There's no room left."

Parks and Wildlife officials say the

number of deer in the 5,000-acre park has grown to about 2,000, reducing the grazing area for each animal.

"We'll be removing 250 to 300, then determine if the others need to be thinned out further," Kothmann said.

Laird Fowler, the park's superintendent, said most of those who failed to bag a deer over the weekend probably passed up a shot at a doe in hopes of killing a buck. The shooters are limited to one deer, which may be of either sex.

Each hunt lasts 48 hours, to be spread over three days. The sixth will end at noon Sunday. The first of six groups of 50 hunters each was admitted at noon Dec. 2.

The park has been closed to the public since Dec. 1.

The shooters are required to wear bright orange clothing and are taken

to fixed positions and not allowed to roam during the day, Kothmann said.

There have been complaints that the event is not a true hunt because the park deer have become too tame and have lost their natural fear of humans.

"We sort of have the philosophy that we would prefer any removal of wildlife from a public park be done by the public, if it's feasible, rather than surgically by sending our staff in to kill them," Kothmann said. "The public owns the park and they're the public's deer."

Kothmann said similar shootings have been held in Yellowstone Park where elk became too prolific.

Another kill is being conducted in Pedernales Falls State Park near Johnson City.

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