Colby firefighters use trailer to train

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Fire blazed with a menacing orange glow inside the trailer at the Colby High School parking lot Sunday afternoon.

Smoke billowed out of the trailer and into the air as firefighters headed inside to tame the blaze.

Throughout the effort, firefighters entered and left the trailer in a business-like fashion. In a little over an hour, the fire was extinguished and everyone was putting away their equipment and heading off to see what the rest of the day had in store.

The difference between this and other fires the volunteers battle every year is that this time they knew when and where it was going to take place. The burn trailer fire was the finale of a regional fire school put together by the Kansas State Firefighters Association.

J.L. Ellis, fire service officer for the Colby Fire Department, said the trailer fire was carefully planned.

"We control how much fuel we use so the fire is as realistic as possible, but offers the least danger to the participants," he said. "No flammable liquids are used and we adhere to National Fire Protection Association Standards."

The fact that the fire was planned beforehand didn't make it any less warm inside.

"It is 200 degrees to 900 degrees in there depending on how high off the ground you are," said Ellis, who also is first vice president of the state association.

The higher off the ground you are, he explained, the hotter it gets.

Ellis said his helmet registered 240 degrees when he was in the trailer. He was drinking cold water after he came out in spite of the weather.

"Even during cold weather, we have to worry about getting dehydrated," said Ellis.

Firefighters burned hay and wood pallets inside the trailer to get the fire going, he said.

When firefighters entered the trailer, they went in low and crawled down the hallway, said Ellis. The first thing they encountered was heavy smoke, he said. They eventually reached the seat of the fire in the burn chamber. After they reached the fire, he said, they used the fire hose to push back the flames, said Ellis.

"The firefighters didn't put out the fire until the last people went through the trailer," Ellis said.

The fire school began at 8 a.m. Saturday and concluded about 1:30 p.m. on Sunday. Ellis said 51 firefighters attended, about 20 of them from Colby.

There were four classes each day, and firefighters had to choose which of the four classes they wanted to take.

Offered on Saturday were defensive driving, farm extrication, rope rescue, wildfire training and search and rescue personal protective equipment.

The classes ran from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Firefighters got an hour break from noon to 1 p.m.

Old Christmas trees can help birds

When the garlands, lights and other holiday decor go back into storage, natural Christmas trees can become a month-long gift for birds trying to survive winter outdoors.

"You'll want to throw a discarded tree into your yard, not next to a building or other flammable structure," said Chip Miller, horticulturist with Kansas State University Research and Extension. "That way, as the tree dries out, it can safely provide birds with some shelter from the weather. It also can serve as a handy escape hatch when danger lurks nearby."

He suggested tossing out some holiday leftovers, too, so the tree can be a temporary bird feeder.

"A few of our snacks are among birds' favorite foods," Miller said. "The fruits they like include grapes, cherries, bananas and pieces of apple, orange and pear. Birds also like stale popcorn and bread. They appreciate any common nutmeat, but especially peanuts, pecans and most native nuts."

To extend a holiday tree's usefulness into February, gardeners then can use its limbs as mulch around roses or other acid-loving plants, he said.

"But, also keep an eye open for a place to choose as its final resting place," Miller said. "Some communities collect and chip old Christmas trees."

Conference scheduled for January

The *2009 Cover Your Acres Winter Conference* is scheduled for Jan. 20 and 21 at the Gateway Civic Center in Oberlin. The conference will be held for two days with the same program on both days.

The event, sponsored by Kansas State University Research and Extension and the Northwest Kansas Crop Residue Alliance, will feature presentations focusing on the latest technology, methods, and conservation practices to improve crop production on the High Plains.

Some of the breakout topics include: Weed Strategies in Grain Sorghum; Wheat Residue Management; Crop Insurance; Grain Marketing Strategies; Advances in Breeding Technology; Carbon Credit Trading; Yield Forecasts from Satellite Images; Glyphosate Resistance; Plant Nutrition; Advances in Breeding Technology; Oilseed Production, Marketing and Storage; and Pros and Cons of UAN (urea-ammonium nitrate) with Herbicides for Wheat.

Other topics include: Limited Irrigation and No-till; Sprayer Setup: Improve Efficacy and Reduce Drift; Improvements in Corn Traits; Planter, Drill Closing and Press Wheel Options; What do you Want From K-State Agronomy; Mechanics of Strip Till; Managing Rust on Wheat; Sunflower Production; Goss' Wilt in Corn; The Value of Nitrogen Testing; and The State of Fertilizer in 2009.

Two farmer panels will address the topics: Things to do Before You Start to No-Till and Summer Crop Plant Population.

Refreshments and heavy hors d'oeuvres will be available as participants take part in an industry-sponsored "Bull Session" as they view the exhibits.

An early registration fee of $22 (for the day of one's choice) is payable by Jan. 13.

After that date and at the door, the fee is $45. All registrations include the conference proceedings, refreshments and a noon meal.

Continuing education credits are available for crop consultants and commercial pesticide applicators.

Corporate sponsors for the Cover Your Acres Winter Conference include Hoxie Implement; Lang Diesel; National Sunflower Association; McCook National Bank; Pioneer Hi-Bred; Producers Cooperative Oil Mill; Monsanto; and Farm Credit of Western Kansas.

More information is available by calling 785-462-6281 or email *bolson@ksu.edu.*

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county Extension offices, experiment fields, area Extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan.

Nursery crops eligibility explained

Bill R. Fuller, State Executive Director of the Kansas Farm Service Agency, encourages producers to pay a fee for nursery crops to become eligible for the 2009 Supplemental Disaster Assistance Programs authorized in the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (The Act).

For 2009 nursery crops to remain eligible for the following Supplemental Disaster Assistance Programs, producers must purchase a waiver by Jan. 12, 2009 if insurance was not obtained timely on the crops:

• Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised fish.

• Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program.

• Tree Assistance Program.

To be eligible for these programs, producers must purchase at least catastrophic risk protection level of crop insurance for **all** insurable crops and/or Noninsurance Crop Disaster Assistance Program coverage for **all** non-insurable crops.

Because the deadline of Aug. 14, 2008 to purchase crop insurance for 2009 nursery crops passed within 90 days of the enactment of The Act, producers who were eligible to purchase 2009 crop insurance but did not, can 'buy-in' to be eligible to participate in the 2009 disaster programs by paying an administrative fee.

The buy-in fee must be paid at the administrative Farm Service Agency county office by Jan. 12, 2009.

FYI

Gunnery Sergeant Sean M. Poore has spent the past year at Camp Fallujah, Iraq as part of the marines "Regimental Combat Team – One" Data Squad. Sean will be spending a few weeks at his Hill City home enjoying family and friends before heading on to Officer's Training in Quantico, Virginia.

Sign up for program ends September, 2012

The Farm Service Agency announced that signup for the Milk Income Loss Contract Program began Dec. 22 and will continue through the program's expiration date, Sept. 30, 2012.

The 2008 Farm Bill reauthorizes the program, which operates similarly to the counter-cyclical payment program for crops, and makes three key changes in program operation. Under the 2008 Act, the program payment rate and the per-operation poundage limit are modified, depending on when the milk is produced. In addition, a "feed cost adjuster," is introduced over the life of the 2008 Act, which adjusts the $16.94 per hundredweight (cwt.) benchmark price upward depending on the cost of feed rations. When available, the program payments are based on a payment rate percentage that is multiplied by the difference between a now-flexible target ($16.94 per cwt. or higher) and the specific month's Boston Class I price of milk.

USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation issues the program payments on an operation-by-operation basis up to a maximum of 2.4 million pounds of milk produced and marketed (about 120 cows) from Oct. 1, 2007, through Sept. 30, 2008. The production limit per operation increases to 2.985 million pounds (about 145 cows) for each fiscal year from Oct. 1, 2008, through Aug. 31, 2012. The production limitation reverts back to the original limit of 2.4 million pounds per fiscal year in Sept. 2012.

The 2008 Act adjusts the trigger price of $16.94 cwt., depending on the extent to which feed costs increase. The feed cost adjustment takes effect when the monthly National Average Dairy Feed Ration Cost (calculated from the "entire month" prices published by the National Agricultural Statistics Service) is greater than $7.35 per cwt. beginning Jan. 1, 2008, through Aug. 31, 2012.

Calculations from Jan. 1, 2008, through Aug. 31, 2012, will be made at 45 percent of the percentage that the National Average Dairy Feed Ration Cost exceeds $7.35 per cwt.

Beginning with Fiscal Year 2009 marketings, which started Oct. 1, 2008, the 2008 Act made changes to the provisions for payment eligibility to add an adjusted gross income limit. If the individual or entity has annual non-farm adjusted gross income for the relevant base period greater than $500,000, the individual or entity is not eligible for the program benefits. The base period will be set pursuant to adjusted gross income regulations yet to be issued. That rule will also define what is considered to be non-farm income.

During the signup application period, participating dairy operations must select the month of the fiscal year to start receiving payments for eligible production. Producers submitting a contract application within 30 days of the beginning of the application period can select any preceding month as the start month. Producers submitting contract applications after Jan. 21, 2009, will not have the option of selecting an earlier month as the payment start month for the dairy operation for a fiscal year; and will be limited to applicable start month selection rules. Those general rules are that the start month must either be the month the contract is submitted or some later month. Changes in the month may be made from year to year so long as the designation is made by the fourteenth of the month proceding the new start month. Pound limits run from the start month and all pounds for which payment is received count against the limit for that fiscal year.

Eligible dairy producers are those who commercially produce milk in the United States. To receive program approval, producers must enter into a the program contract with Commodity Credit Corporation and provide monthly milk marketing data. Dairy producers can apply for the program at local FSA offices.

All payments in the program are subject to limits in the contract, regulations, and to changes in statutory provisions for payment.

More information on the Milk Income Loss Contract Program is available at local FSA offices.

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