

Energy program to lower costs

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that U.S. Department of Agriculture will take new steps to save consumers money on their energy bills in partnership with rural electric cooperatives. The Department plans to provide rural electric cooperatives up to \$250 million to lend to business and residential customers for energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy systems.

"Energy efficiency retrofiting can shrink home energy use by 40 percent, saving money for consumers and helping rural utilities manage their electric load more efficiently," said Vilsack. "Ultimately, reducing energy use helps pump capital back into rural communities. This program is designed to meet the unique needs of consumers and businesses to encourage energy efficiency retrofiting projects across rural America."

Vilsack noted that the Energy Efficiency and Loan Conservation Program, by promoting energy savings in rural areas, is another step by which the Department of Agriculture is

supporting President Obama's Climate Action Plan. The program will help build a cleaner and more sustainable domestic energy sector for future generations by reducing barriers to investment in energy efficiency and potentially cutting energy bills for American families and businesses in the process.

Although energy efficiency measures can reduce home energy use considerably, many consumers and businesses do not invest in them because they lack the capital or financing to do so. Consistent with President Obama's Climate Action Plan, this program will reduce barriers to these investments by making financing more available.

Funding will be provided to rural electric cooperatives and utilities - the majority of which already have energy efficiency programs in place - who will then re-lend the money to help homeowners or businesses make energy efficiency improvements. In addition to energy audits, the loans may be used for upgrades to heating, lighting and insulation, and conversions to more efficient or renewable

energy sources.

A March 2012 Rockefeller Foundation report on financing energy efficiency projects found that a \$279 billion investment could yield more than \$1 trillion in energy savings over 10 years. That is the equivalent of 30 percent of the annual electricity spending in the U.S. Funding from the loan program will complement and strengthen other energy efficiency activities at the Department of Agriculture. Through its Rural Development mission area, the Department also supports the research, development and use of renewable fuels.

Vilsack noted that many of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's existing efforts to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency are provided by the Farm Bill - and he once again urged Congress to provide a new, multiyear Food, Farm and Jobs Bill that continues investing in a clean energy future for rural America.

The rule was scheduled to publish in the Dec. 5 issue of the Federal Register.

Sixth grade concert



The sixth grade band class at Eisenhower Elementary held a concert on Thursday afternoon. Under the direction of band director Don Mordecai, the students performed several songs for family and friends packed into the band room.

-Telegram photo by Mike Stephens

A new approach to manage groundwater

Necessity is the mother of invention, goes the proverb. And that's how Kansas State University agricultural economist Bill Golden sees what is happening in western Kansas when it comes to how farmers are adapting to a diminishing Ogallala Aquifer. His presentation on how crop profits are affected by water management policies is among several planned for the K-State Ag Profitability Conference Jan. 7 in Oakley.

The Ogallala, which has long been the source of water for farmland irrigation in western Kansas and other states, is being depleted faster than it can be replenished. As a result, government agencies and producers are working to conserve what is left in order to keep the land productive for generations to come.

Golden, a natural resource economist with K-State Research and Extension, said a water regulation program called Intensive Groundwater-Use Control Areas (IGUCAs) implemented more than 30 years ago sparked changes on farms in west-central Kansas when producers lost 15 to 50 percent of

their water.

"Farmers there have been very innovative. By adopting new technologies and being willing to try different crops, they've returned to their previous levels of profitability," Golden said.

He believes that farmers will respond to a new process called Local Enhanced Management Areas, or LEMAs, in much the same way. LEMAs, unlike IGUCAs, are public-driven and allow irrigators and other water users to establish their own groundwater conservation policies.

Golden said he is watching the first LEMA in Kansas, the Sheridan County LEMA, or Sheridan 6 LEMA in the northwest part of the state. Through support from the Kansas Water Office, the Kansas Farm Management Association will assist participating producers in that area in keeping accurate enterprise records of their LEMA activities.

Golden will then analyze the profitability of the LEMA activities over five years.

The conference will feature presentations by K-State agri-

cultural economists including:

- Grain Market Outlook and Strategies for 2014 - Dan O'Brien;
- How Crop Profits are Affected by LEMAs and Other Irrigation Water Management Policies - Bill Golden;
- Farmland Rental Rates for Irrigated, Dryland and Pasture - Mykel Taylor;
- Macroeconomic and Agricultural Outlook - Brian Briggeman;
- Beef Cattle Leases and Pasture Rental Arrangements - Marty Fear and Dan O'Brien; and
- Northwest Kansas Farm Management Association Crop Enterprise Lease Break-evens and New Tax Law Issues - Kiel Roehl, Mark Wood and Clint Milliman.

The cost to attend is \$15 if paid by Jan. 3 or \$20 at the door. Lunch is provided. More information or registration is available by contacting Julie Niehage in the K-State Research and Extension Golden Prairie District at 785-671-3245 or julienie@ksu.edu.

Money available for community gardens

For anyone who has considered starting a community garden in Kansas, this is your chance. Grants of up to \$5,000 are available to fund new community gardens, thanks to a project by K-State Research and Extension and the Kansas Health Foundation.

"The Kansas Health Foundation is interested in the health and well-being of Kansans. The foundation approached K-State Research and Extension to partner with them in establishing a grant program to help expand the number of community gardens in Kansas" said Evelyn Neier, associate extension specialist in youth development. The two organizations collaborated on a three-year project. 2014 will be the final year. The application deadline is Jan. 15, 2014.

Many individuals and groups would like to start a community garden, but don't have the start-up funding, Neier said. This is an opportunity for people to do something good in their communities and get some funding to get a project started.

Application information and descriptions of the 2012 and 2013 grant recipients are available at www.kansascommunitygardens.org or by contacting Neier at 785-410-3760 or enieier@ksu.edu.

"The first year we had \$100,000 and 90 applications," she added. Demand was so great that the KHF increased the amount available in 2013 to \$150,000 and that's the amount available in 2014, the final year for this funding."

To be considered, a garden has to be publicly accessible. It can be either an allotment

garden where the community's citizens rent a spot or a communal garden where the produce is grown and distributed for the good of the community - or a combination of the two. Funds can be used for such resources as sheds, fencing, site preparation, tools, and irrigation systems, including rain barrels as well as more traditional irrigation methods.

"We encourage applications from all areas of the state. We're very pleased that we have gardens in urban and suburban areas, as well as rural communities," Neier said, adding that groups in Sublette, Colby, Mulvane, Wichita and Olathe were among the 35 recipients of the 2013 grants.

The Inner-City Garden in Wichita, for example, is affiliated with Breakthrough Club, a non-profit organization that provides services for adults with serious mental illness. The goal is to teach members about gardening and how to supplement their food source with healthy choices at an inexpensive cost.

The Mulvane Community Garden is located on city property adjacent to the city swimming pool. Twenty-eight plots are available for rent by residents of the Mulvane school district. All 28 plots are rented and there is a waiting list for those that want to rent plots in 2014.

Organizers of the Wilson Community Garden coordinated with the Summer Lunch Program, which provides daily meal meals to youth during the summer. They created a "start-up" garden on unused raised beds and planted cantaloupe, honeydew, peppers and toma-

atoes for the program. Garden participants led educational lessons about science and nutrition for youth twice a week.

The Wilson FFA Chapter has taken over management of the garden and teachers have been encouraged to get involved. The wood shop class is interested in building raised beds and students in the National Honor Society plan to pair with elementary students to garden and give produce back to the school.

The Lyndon Pride Community Garden, which is a source of fresh vegetables in the community, is located conspicuously just to the side of the road as drivers enter town.

In that way, it serves as a visual reminder of progress and volunteerism, Neier said.

Special consideration for the grants is given to groups that are far from sources of fresh fruits and vegetables - what are often referred to as food deserts, she said.

"It helps if the group is well organized going into the (grant application) process," she said. Thought should be given to such considerations as rules and fees for the garden before the group applies and applicants should keep in mind that these are startup grants. Those who are applying should indicate how they will sustain the garden when this initial funding is gone.

"Oftentimes these gardens are on city property, such as a park or an empty lot, and sometimes they're on church property. It can be a good way to put underutilized community property to productive use," Neier said.

Health care workers honored with award

This year the Kansas Hospital Association established a new award to highlight hospital employees who have made a significant contribution to the betterment of their hospital. Hospitals across the state nominated individuals for the Health Care Worker of the Year Award because they routinely went above and beyond the call of duty.

Diana Bryant, Clinical Analyst at Wilson Medical Center in Neodesha, and Vickie Gaddis, Social Services Designee at Coffey County Hospital in Burlington, were awarded the 2013 Health Care Worker of the Year Award at the KHA Investiture and Awards Luncheon on Thursday, Nov. 14 during the KHA Annual Convention in Wichita. Bryant and Gaddis each received a cash award of \$500.

Seven additional hospital employees were nominated and recognized: Henriette Area, Holton Community Hospital, Holton; David Engel, Phillips County Hospital, Phillipsburg; Marlene Gawith, Ottawa County Health Center, Minneapolis; Barbara Starks, Hutchinson Regional Medical Center, Hutchinson; Lyn Thiele, Norton County Hospital, Norton; Amanda Vandervoort, Pratt Regional Medical Center, Pratt; and Karla Washington, Labette Health, Parsons.

All of these candidates demonstrated excellence in health care and routinely went above and beyond the call of duty. To just be nominated from all the employees across the state is an honor. Nominees for the Health Care Worker of the Year were reviewed and scored by hospital and health care professionals in other states.

Vickie Gaddis is the Social Services Designee at Sunset Manor, the long-term care unit of Coffey County Hospital. She leads by demonstrating how to interact with residents. "She speaks to residents with a soft, respectful tone, no matter what the circumstance, and staff follows suit," said Diane Peters, long-term care unit director.

Gaddis also has helped patients and their families get questions answered regarding the state's new Medicaid program. Rather than simply giving family members contact information to Kan-Care or clinic billing offices, Gaddis has taken time to make the calls, relieving residents and their families of that frustration. Gaddis has an overall cheery attitude and an ever-present smile.

She enjoys talking with the elderly residents and hearing stories about their lives from years ago. She also has been there to hold a resident's hand in the final minutes of life to let them know they are not alone. For 31 years, Gaddis has dedicated her life to Sunset Manor and its many residents and staff.

Diana Bryant's leadership skills are reflected in her versatility and her incredible skill of supporting many departments simultaneously. Her great sense of humor and her sharp wit gives all employees a lift. Her position as a clinical information technology analyst has been a tremendous challenge during the hospital's implementation of the electronic medical record. Bryant's vast knowledge of the IT world has made everyone's life easier at Wilson Medical Center. There have been many obstacles to overcome in the implementation process, but Bryant has persevered. Janice

Reese, marketing/foundation director states, "She is a true team player." Diana treats patients and co-workers with kindness, respect and compassion. Her positive can-do attitude spreads throughout the hospital." Bryant was awarded Wilson Medical Center's 2010 employee of the year. She also served as a service excellence advisor. Bryant demonstrates the compassionate characteristics of a quality health care worker.

The Kansas Hospital Association is a non-profit association of health care provider organizations and individuals that are committed to the health improvement of their communities. KHA membership includes 215 member facilities, of which 128 are full-service community hospitals. Founded in 1910, KHA maintains its vision of "an organization of hospitals working together to improve access, quality and the affordability of health care for all Kansans."

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