



COLBY FREE PRESS

Warm weather affecting wheat, agronomist says

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Recent warm temperatures should be a concern for area farmers, said extension agronomist Brian Olson with the Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby.

Warm weather is spurring wheat growth and the wheat is developing faster than it should be this time of year. Olson said conditions vary depending on location.

“There are some fields that look OK to fair,” he said.

“There is also some good green wheat.”

Some fields in poor condition show brown patches, and some plants have dead growing points.

Variable conditions throughout the county have some farmers questioning whether or not to spend money on nitrogen application. Olson said they should consider it because wheat could turn around in the next few weeks if the area gets some rain.

“They could be undercutting potential yields on that wheat,” he said.

The area is a little behind on precipitation for this time of year, but the bigger problem is the warm weather.

Early growth is using up soil moisture that will be needed later, and the wheat is losing its winter hardiness.

“I’m concerned about the tem-



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ABOVE: Closeup of wheat with dry roots. **RIGHT:** Dan Foster, farm foreman at the Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby, checked wheat conditions at the center’s variety plots Tuesday. Foster said the plots were conventionally tilled and are indicative of conditions around the area.

peratures,” Olson said. “It will get the wheat way ahead quicker than we want to see it.”

A spring freeze or blizzard is always a possibility, and the crop might not be ready if it happens. He said most of the wheat still has a



chance to turn around if rain comes.

However, Olson said the eight inches of snow received by Thomas County last month has put this part of the region in better shape than most.

Another potential problem might

exist for spring planting. Even though the snow came last month, the soil is not storing enough moisture for dryland corn and grain sorghum planting later this spring.

Olson said the warm weather isn’t affecting just crops. It could be

a worry down the road for any farmer who has grass pasture for forage. Little precipitation now could mean dry pastures this summer.

“Moisture would be good,” Olson said.

Spotter course Monday

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

With severe weather being the number one hazard to Thomas Countyans, according to an emergency preparedness official, a free course to address this issue is planned Monday.



The Severe Weather Spotter course begins at 7 p.m. at the Colby Community Building and is free and open to everyone.

“The year 2005 was a year of records in Kansas with 135 tornadoes reported, up from a normal year of about 55,” said Jim Engel, Thomas County emergency management director.

“The public is encouraged to help themselves and their neighbors by identifying weather threats and notifying the proper authorities of the threat.”

David Floyd with the National Weather Service office in Goodland, said the course lasts about two hours and 15 minutes.

The discussion will focus on storm structure and evolution, reporting procedures, safety information and a review of the High Plains severe weather.

In addition to the weather spotter course, Engel is looking for people interested in becoming amateur radio operators.

“I will be starting an emergency communications team that is tasked out of my office and staffed by members of the Trojan Amateur Radio Club,” he said.

Engel said anyone who wants to volunteer as a radio operator could also assist in weather spotting within Thomas County and help local and state officials with emergency communications in the event of a communications disaster.

The annual course is in conjunction with the state’s severe weather awareness week, which runs from Monday, March 13 through Friday, March 17, Engel said.

Farm Service Agency consolidation revisited

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

After last year’s failed effort to consolidate Farm Service Agency offices, top officials will host meetings across the state to consider a new plan of action.

According to Farm Service Executive Director Darin Slack of Oakley, state director Bill Fuller announced Friday he is spear-

heading three meetings to talk with farmers, ranchers and agriculture stakeholders.

The closest meeting will be from 1-4 p.m. March 28 at the Plaza Inn in Garden City.

Other meetings will be March 29 in Great Bend and March 30 in Topeka.

“Last fall there was a national initiative coined ‘FSA Tomorrow’ which came out too fast and too

aggressively calling for an approximate 30 percent reduction in all Farm Service Agency county offices nationwide with little to no involvement from the community or customers served,” Slack said.

Slack said executive directors from each state have been asked to conduct independent, local level reviews of the efficiency and effectiveness of agency offices. Areas to be identified are how to

optimize a network of facilities, staffing, training, and technology within existing budgetary resources and staffing ceilings.

“When looking at how available resources, coupled with limited budgets, could be utilized more efficiently in continuing to obtain outstanding service and benefits from Farm Service Agency offices in Kansas,” Slack said.

He said he likes the idea of getting input from the public and agriculture stakeholders.

“This approach is much more open and transparent to the farmers and ranchers who ultimately will be affected by any decisions made,” Slack said.

For information about the upcoming Farm Service Agency public meetings contact Slack at (785) 672-4861.

Thomas County Commissioners approve new equipment purchase

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Thomas County Commissioners Monday approved a bid from Colby Implement for 15-foot, three-section mowers for \$11,866.

The bid includes less a \$6,500 trade-in. The mower will be purchased for \$5,366, through a bid which met all specifications.

Other bids submitted were from Colby Ag Center for \$8,995; Dougherty Imple-

ment for \$8,870 for a model FR15 or \$10,425 for a model FL15; and Lang Diesel for \$7,488.

Road and bridge supervisor Clair Schrock met with the commissioners and reviewed the bids.

Schrock and the commissioners also approved a bid from Penco Engineering of Plainville for bridge inspection. Thomas County has 33 bridges which will be inspected by Penco for \$1,650.

The commissioners unanimously ap-

proved the appointment of Schrock to the Thomas County Fair board. Evans called the appointment a “win-win” situation for the county.

“Clair, I’m glad to see you step forward,” Evans said.

He said two weeks prior to the fair the fair board usually consults with Schrock about fair and rodeo issues and the need to have the road department’s equipment ready the properties.

“This a good deal for both that Clair will

be in the loop,” Evans said.

In other business, the commissioners approved a \$720 payment to Colby Medical & Surgical for an outstanding bill. A denial of payment of \$720 toward the outstanding \$1,460.56 was made in the form of a motion made by Commissioners Paul Steele, seconded by Ken Christiansen and approved 3-0.

• A review of which county employees were bonded was made during the Feb. 28 commission meeting. On Monday, com-

missioners approved to include Emergency Management Director Jim Engel and Economic Development Director Gerry Fuller among those bonded. Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms was directed to oversee the process.

• Engel and the commissioners reviewed two bids for updating a new sign in from of the Thomas County Office Complex on Range Ave. The bid of \$910 from Colby Canvas was accepted; the other bid was from Commercial Sign for \$1,300.

Farmers pay off more debt thanks to prices

WICHITA (AP) — Bolstered by high cattle prices and bountiful crops last season, the nation’s farmers have paid off farm loans at levels not seen in years, the Farm Service Agency said Tuesday.

Across the country, farm loan delinquency rates fell to 12.4 percent in February, compared with 16 percent for the same month in 2005.

In Kansas, delinquency rates plunged to their lowest levels in at least a decade.

The number of Kansas farmers behind on their loans through the agency fell to 8.9 percent in February, said Lee Hartford, farm loan specialist at the agency. That is down from 11.6 percent a month earlier.

“Cattle prices have really helped a lot of operations stay afloat the last few years,” Hartford said. “We have

some areas where a lot of loans are tied to livestock enterprises. That has probably been one of the keys.”

Last February, 11.8 percent of Kansas farmers were delinquent in their government farm loans. In February 2004, delinquencies were running 17.8 percent. In February 2003, they soared to 22.2 percent in the midst of several back-to-back years of drought.

February is often seen as a bell-weather month for the farm economy because it is typically the first month when delinquencies on operating loans, most which come due in January, show up in the statistics.

“You wouldn’t think times are that great. A lot of cash flows we look at are fairly tight,” Hartford said. “The government payments are one of the things that keeps operations’ cash flowing.”

Spritley spring singers

The Colby Public School fifth and sixth grade choir performed “A Little Bit of Good” during the “Singing in the Spring” vocal concert Tuesday at the Colby High School auditorium. The concert also featured the seventh and eighth grade choir and high school women’s and concert choirs.



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