



# COLBY FREE PRESS

10 pages

## Custom cutters setting sights on Kansas wheat

WICHITA (AP) — Facing soaring fuel costs and drought-stricken crops in the southern Plains, custom cutters are beginning their annual harvest run in Kansas this season — and pinning their hopes on the better crops in the nation's northern states, a trade group for custom harvesters said Tuesday.

The nation's winter wheat harvest typically begins in Texas, with custom cutters following the slowly maturing crops north throughout the season.

"Most are skipping Texas, there are very few making it that far," said Tim Baker, operations manager for U.S. Custom Harvesters.

"Not only is there a tremendous reduction in harvest acres, but the yield on those acres is way off."

The Agricultural Statistics Service forecast earlier this month that Texas would have a little more than a third of its normal crop and Oklahoma would have maybe half a crop left.

With the harvest now under way in those southernmost states, Baker said the crop in Oklahoma is faring far worse than even those estimates, and that only the northern parts of Oklahoma will have much of a wheat crop left to cut.

One Minnesota harvester told Baker it would cost him \$10,000 in fuel just to get his entire crew to Texas for the harvest, so he decided to skip that state's harvest this season.

"Some have determined not even to start in until they get to Kansas," Baker said.

"Some people have decided not to hire as big a crew because there simply is just not the bushels there to need as many trucks to haul it away."

"They are trying to do cost-saving measures."

In Kansas, the nation's biggest wheat producer, the agency's forecast of 319.6 million bushels is down 16 percent from a year ago.

On Monday, the Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service reported 44 percent of the state's wheat crop was in poor to very poor condition. Another 34 percent was rated as

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Tim Baker, operations manager for U.S. Custom Harvesters

fair, with 21 ranked as good and 1 percent as excellent.

About 96 percent of the wheat has headed across the state, and 12 percent has turned color, KASS said.

At the rate wheat is maturing now, the first Kansas wheat fields at the state's southern border could be ready to cut by June 1, Baker said.

Marsha Boswell, spokeswoman for the Kansas Wheat Commission, also is expecting the Kansas wheat harvest to begin around that date. She says cutting has begun in Oklahoma.

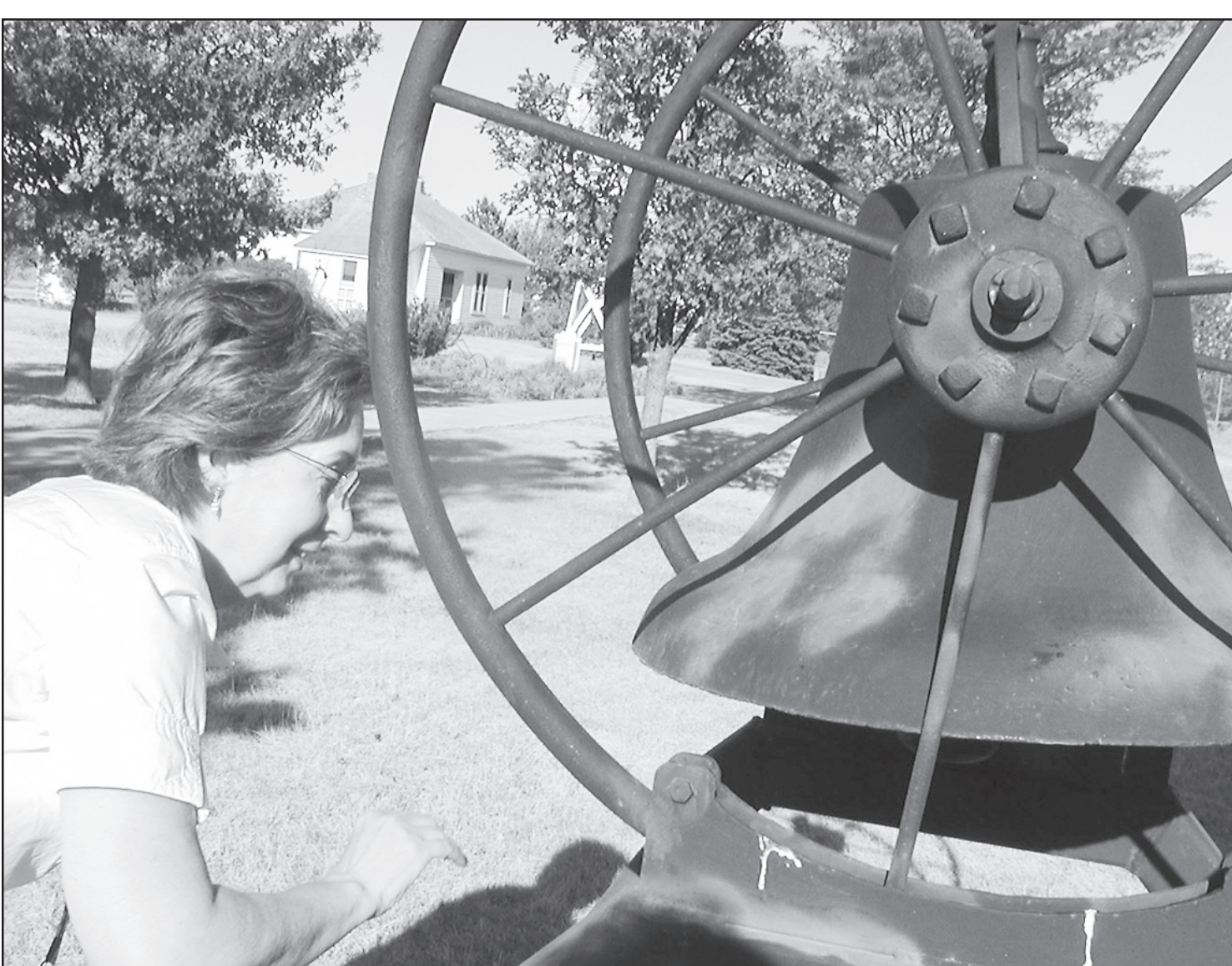
Nearly all the wheat crop has now headed across most of southern and eastern Kansas.

About 80 percent of the crop has formed heads in northwest Kansas and 88 percent in west central Kansas, according to the latest KASS update.

Wheat plants are shorter and their heads smaller than normal, Boswell said.

That is especially true in western Kansas, but is also showing up in fields in south central and central Kansas.

"That is due to the lack of moisture," Boswell said. "That is the one factor that is really hurting us at this point."



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Barbara Barnett, assistant professor at the University of Kansas William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, took a closer look at the school bell on the grounds of the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Barnett was one of many faculty members on the annual Wheat State Whirlwind Tour to give new university staff the chance to see western Kansas.

### University of Kansas

## Whirlwind Tour blows into Colby

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

Seeing western Kansas for the first time has been a treat for professors and other faculty members from the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

More than 50 faculty members were in Colby Tuesday and today as part of the school's annual Wheat State Whirlwind Tour. The group will travel more than 1,500 miles in six days across the state. University relations Mary Jane Dunlap said the tour's purpose is to educate faculty about the state's economy, landscape and history.

Gail Agrawal, dean and professor of the school of law, was ex-

periencing western Kansas for the first time. She starts at the university this fall.

"I was surprised to find so far Kansas isn't particularly flat," she said. Originally from New Orleans, that city is below sea level.

All her life, she's heard of waving wheat, and had never seen any until rolling into western Kansas.

"I'm struck by how beautiful it is," Agrawal said.

Learning more about the state itself isn't all. Agrawal said she is appreciating the people and gaining perspective on the places her students will come from.

Agrawal has loved meeting the people in the area.

"The people are proud of their heritage and I get a sense of deep

friendship and respect."

Another first-timer to western Kansas was Barbara Barnett, assistant professor of journalism and mass communications. She has taught at the university three years and relished the chance to see more of the state.

"The faculty spends most of its time just working and going home, and the tour is an opportunity to gain some perspective, especially to those who are new to Kansas," she said. "It is good to see the places students are from, meet people and learn about the history of the area."

Also on the tour was Richard W. Lariviere, the university's new provost and executive vice chancellor. The stop at the museum in Colby today marked his first 48 hours in

Kansas.

"It's great," he said. "I'm having a wonderful time."

He came from the University of Texas in Austin and said the area there is much like Lawrence. However, he said he is not unfamiliar with the western landscape because west Texas is similar to western Kansas, but said doesn't have as good as growing conditions.

Lariviere said he was interested in the degree of civic pride shown in the communities the group visited.

"Kansas will be a great place to live. The surprise for me is the richness of the cultural life in these small communities," he said.

## Area helps Iraqi children

By Jan Katz Ackerman  
Colby Free Press

A fundraising project in Thomas County to help Iraqi children is paying off and making a soldier, his family and children happy.

"So far, four boxes have gotten over there," Susan McMahan said. "The kids just went crazy over the

soccer balls and candy."

McMahan, at the request of her husband, SFC John McMahan, placed collection boxes in Colby and Brewster to collect toys and candy to ship to her husband who is stationed in Iraq.

John McMahan is a member of the Kansas Army National Guard's 125th Field Artillery Unit at Dodge

City. In April, he joined an Army unit from the Midwest for a year-long tour of duty in Iraq. McMahan's civilian job is a trooper for the Kansas Highway Patrol.

After arriving in Iraq, he was taken back by the war's effect on the children and wanted to help them. He called home and asked his wife to collect toys and candy to be sent to him.

"I would like to thank everyone that has given towards this fundraiser," Susan McMahan said. "My goal was to be able to send two boxes a month to him while he is there. Right now I have a total of 15 boxes made and ready to ship."

While the project was originally scheduled to end May 14, Susan McMahan said she has had such an overwhelming response it will continue until her husband returns.

"I've had some people come forward and donate promissory notes to have a box a month sent," she said. The McMahans live in Brewster. They are also members of the Brewster Community Church, which donated shipping costs for the boxes going to Iraq.

"I am impressed with the generosity of our community. I think the soldiers get as much enjoyment out of giving these items out as the kids do getting them," Susan McMahan said. "Thanks so much from John McMahan and our family."

Anyone wanting to make a donation can contact Susan at the Law Enforcement Center at 225 N. Court Ave. in Colby from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.



COURTESY PHOTO

SFC John McMahan handed a soccer ball to an Iraqi child after his wife, Susan, spearheaded a fundraising project to collect toys and candy to ship to him while on a year-long tour of duty with the Kansas Army National Guard.

## Fill 'er up



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

City of Colby employee Jerry Reitcheck checked on water flowing in the city pool today as it was filled. The pool will not open Saturday, said recreation director Ryan Sturdy, but will open sometime next week because of delays.