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Queen competition begins



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Michelle Goetz, one of three contestants for 2006 Thomas County rodeo queen, took a few laps around the rodeo arena to warm up her horse today before the beginning of this year's

queen and princess contest. The competition started with horsemanship at the fairgrounds. The winner will be announced Tuesday during the rodeo.

Heat wave takes toll on farm fields

WICHITA (AP) — After a week of searing heat, corn grower Brian Baalman did not need this week's official government crop condition report to tell him how badly farm fields around him were faring.

"A lot of corn is starting to fire. It is just burning up," Baalman, who grows corn in the state's northwestern corner around Menlo, said in a telephone interview.

That means the plants are so stressed they have turned from a deathly gray to yellow.

According to the official weekly crop weather report, 17 percent of the state's corn was in poor to very poor condition. An additional 33 percent of the corn was still in fair shape and half the crop was in good to excellent condition, the Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

"It looks pretty bad," Baalman said. "Every day that goes by it is just getting worse."

Worst hit are the dryland crops. Irrigated fields are doing better, he said.

But it is not just the corn that is hurting. About 16 percent of the state's sorghum crops are in very poor to poor condition, KASS reported. An additional 37 percent were in fair condition, while 47 percent were rated as good to excellent.

Doug Jardine, a row crop pa-

"It looks pretty bad. Every day that goes by it is just getting worse."

Brian Baalman,
Menlo farmer

thologist at Kansas State University, left Manhattan on Monday to head out to Hesston, where he had some research plots. Along the way, he had a chance to see close-up the extent of the crop damage across much of the state.

He walked through some fields to see how they were doing.

"It is pretty sad out there. I was surprised with how bad it was out there. It was pretty nasty looking," Jardine said. Last week's heat wave appears to have hurt all crops, but especially corn and sorghum, he said. Soybeans, while not looking great either, are still faring better than the rest of the crops.

This week's government crop report appears to bear out that observation out as well.

KASS reported that 9 percent of the state's soybean crop was in poor to very poor condition, while 38 percent was in fair shape.

State says it's time to take precautions against West Nile

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

West Nile season is upon us but so far in Thomas County, there hasn't been any confirmed cases.

"At this point we haven't had any recorded cases," said Juanita Gatz, administrator at the Thomas County Health Department. West Nile virus is a disease popular during the summer months because of how it is carried by mosquitoes.

However, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment announced today a northeast Kansas resident had died from West Nile.

The person, who was over 65, had symptoms and was hospitalized before his death. It was the first West Nile death of the year in Kansas.

Two Reno County residents are currently



J. Gatz

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus, a disease transmitted by mosquito, is mainly a concern for humans in late summer and early fall. The symptoms can be mild, such as a headache and fever, or severe, like the swelling of the brain, or even death.

Juanita Gatz, administrator at the Thomas County Health Department, said there are precautions that can cut down the risk of getting bitten by an infected

mosquito.

Eliminating standing water and spraying for mosquitoes can help cut down on their numbers.

Staying inside during dawn or dusk, peak mosquito hours, was another suggestion. Gatz said if someone does have to be outside, they should use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants to avoid getting bitten.

The city uses one of two chemicals to kill mosquitoes.

The chemical Biomist 315, costs \$3,800 a barrel. In 2005, two 55-gallon barrels were used, and this year, he expects to go through one and a half barrels before spraying ends.

"We're looking for alternatives also," he said.

This year spraying, held every other week, started in June, and will end in September or October.

"I think it helps," Bieker said. "It's better than doing nothing."

Mosquitoes typically die during the first freeze of the fall.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment reported July 5, there was one human case of West Nile in Colorado. Mississippi also had one case and Texas had two. So far this year, 21 states have reported West Nile in mosquitoes, animals or birds. Last year in Kansas, there were 25 confirmed human cases and one death.

The disease can also be a problem in horses. Dr. Russell Bowers of Colby Ani-

mal Clinic, said there were no cases reported last year and very few in 2004.

He attributed it to people getting their horses vaccinated for the virus.

"We vaccinate a lot more horses now," he said.

There are two commercially available vaccines available for horses. Both require an initial shot followed by another a few weeks later; then a booster each year after to continue immunity.

He said horses are susceptible to the virus "just because of the way they're made."

Symptoms include slow reflexes, stumbling and drooling.

"The vaccine is the best preventive measure for horses," Bowers said, "but getting rid of standing water and using insect repellent sprays also help."

Mosquitoes multiply in standing water.

West Nile isn't the only example of a disease affecting both horses and humans. Equine encephalitis, or sleeping sickness, is transmitted by mosquito. Its symptoms are also flu-like, but can also be fatal in humans and horses.

Finance ruling nears

TOPEKA (AP) — While some legislators want to wriggle free of a lawsuit that has forced them to dramatically increase spending on public schools, attorneys who sued the state hope their legal battle isn't nearing its end.

The fate of a plan phasing in \$541 million in new spending over three years hinged on a Kansas Supreme Court's decision Friday.

The justices ruled last year that legislators had failed to meet their constitutional duty to provide for a suitable education to every child.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and legislative leaders hoped the court would see the plan as a good-faith

effort to meet the needs of Kansas' 296 school districts and 450,000 students.

Some legislators even hoped the court would be satisfied enough to end the lawsuit — and oversight of their work.

The lawsuit was filed in 1999 and even with the infusion of the new money into education, they still believed that over the next three years, the state would be almost \$1 billion short of meeting schools' needs.

"I hope they send the Legislature back to work, either in a special session or next year," said Alan Rupe, the plaintiffs' lead attorney.

*Thomas County
Fair 2006
special section
in today's edition*



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press



Monica Bugbee-Miller



Karla Haggard

Curtain call

A large crowd turned out to enjoy a performance by sisters Monica Bugbee-Miller and Karla Haggard at the last Picnic in the Park Thursday in Fike Park. The annual event ran each Thursday through June and July. For those interested in providing entertainment for next year's Picnic In The Park, call the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce at (785) 460-3401.

