Colby research team earns award

Research Crop Scientist Rob Aiken, Research Irrigation Engineer Freddie Lamm and Northwest Area Director Dan O'Brien of the Kansas State University Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby were recently honored by K-State Research and Extension (KSRE) as recipients of one of three KSRE Team Awards for the year 2006 as part of the Irrigation Water Management Team.

Other members of the Irrigation Water Management Team are Norm Klocke, Alan Schlegel, Mahbub Alam and Troy Dumler from the Southwest Research-Extension Center in Garden City and Gary Clark, Loyd Stone, Jeff Peterson, Danny Rogers and Dale Fjell from the main K-State campus in Manhattan.

The Irrigation Water Management Team is an informal alliance of colleagues that regularly collaborate to address various irrigation water management issues. They recognize each other's strengths and expertise and join together as necessary to address the issue at hand.

The Mobile Irrigation Lab developed by Gary Clark, Dan Rogers, Mahbub Alam and Dale Fjell is one example. This lab provides general irrigation educational programs and technical assistance to Kansas agricultural producers. A key educational effort is the lab software, KanSched, that the team has developed to aid irrigators in scheduling.

Several team members (Norm Klocke, Loyd Stone and Troy Dumler) also recently cooperated to develop a software program called Crop Water Allocator which allows producers to plan and evaluate combinations of crops, irrigation amounts and land allocations.

Team members have used multiple approaches to extend information about irrigation issues. They play a leadership role in the annual regional Central Plains Irrigation Conference which was held in Colby in February.

The conference included oral and written presentations authored or co-authored by Lamm (5 papers), Rogers (4), Klocke (2), Alam(3), Aiken (1), Schlegel (2), Stone (3), Dumler (4), O'Brien (1). They have collaborated on multiple research projects, the results of which have been shared at agricultural producer meetings. They have developed web sites, and have authored books and numerous irrigation-related articles.

In one example publication by Lamm, Stone and O'Brien, irrigation schedules (1972-2005) were coupled with yield functions and economic models to examine profitability for the major summer crops. The results indicate the primary advantage of irrigation system improvements that increase application efficiency is in the improvement in crop yields for lower capacity systems. Crop yield improvements alone may justify governmental incentives for irrigation system improvements.

Three Web sites are most closely associated with the irrigation water management team: SDI in the Great Plains: www.oznet.ksu.edu/sdi/ Mobile Irrigation Lab: www.oznet.ksu.edu/mil/ and General Irrigation Topics: www.oznet.ksu.edu/irrigate.

A colleague from a neighboring state endorsed their nomination for the team award with these words

"I believe there is no state that has better agricultural irrigation water management technical support from the land grant system than Kansas."

There's always room for Jell-O history

LAWRENCE (AP) — Long after the Jell-O molds had set and the students brought the long-lost recipes back to life, it became clear why some flavors never worked in the first place.

"With some, it's not so mysterious," Kansas University student Samantha Harper said, looking down at the rather disliked apple Jell-O flavor.

Harper and the rest of her class spent a recent Sunday trying to explain the history of, and science behind, gelatin and Jell-O products at the Kansas University Natural History Museum.

Spread throughout two floors of the museum, students in the public education class from the museum studies graduate program displayed everything from old television shows sponsored by Jell-O to the samples of discontinued Jell-O flavors sitting in front of Harper and her classmates.

"We went through a lot of different ideas, but we wanted something the kids would enjoy," graduate student Martina Smith said. "What's more fun than Jell-O?"

Well, how about Jell-O flavors that no longer exist — like cola and pineapple-grapefruit?

The flavors were not, of course, the original recipes. Harper said Jell-O — or, more likely Kraft Foods, its parent company — keeps those a secret in case it ever wants to give former flavors another shot.

Instead, the students mixed plain, flavorless gelatin with what they thought would produce the flavors — such as apple juice for the "apple" flavor.

People signed their name under which flavor they liked the best. Late in the day, "apple" had only a handful of signatures.

In all, the class project took about a month-and-a-half to complete, and about 75 people — including many children — toured the Jell-O exhibits and interactive stations.

Ducks mysteriously die along Idaho creek

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — More than 1,000 mallard ducks have died in a bizarre cluster along a southeastern Idaho creek bed, puzzling wildlife agencies.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security were testing tissue samples Wednesday, hoping to rule out an avian flu outbreak.

The ducks mysteriously began dying last week around Land Springs Creek, near the remote town of Oakley, about 180 miles southeast of Boise.

Some migratory mallards from Canada and their local cousins were still perishing at the creek Wednesday, staggering and struggling to breathe before collapsing, said Dave Parrish, regional supervisor for Fish and Game.

"I've never seen anything like this in 20 years here," he said. "There were dead mallards everywhere — in the water and on the banks. It was odd, they were in a very small area."

The massive outbreak is vexing scientists because only mallard ducks are dying. Golden eagles, geese, magpies, crows and other birds in the area all remain healthy.

Tissue from the ducks' intestinal tract and water samples from the creek were sent to the Fish and Wildlife Service national laboratory in Wisconsin, the University of Idaho and Washington State University. The agencies expect to review test results Thursday to determine the cause of death.

Mark Drew, a wildlife veterinarian with the state Department of Agriculture, said the ducks likely were exposed to a single contamination source and gathered at the creek, their mutual roosting point, to die. He did not suspect the mallards were passing a contagious virus.

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>
> Dave Parrish,
> Idaho Fish and Game
> Regional Supervisor

The ducks may have contracted a bacterial or fungal infection by eating grain treated with pesticides by local cattle farmers, Drew said. Farming chemicals may also have spilled into the small spring-fed creek, which measures just 3- to 6-inches deep.

In addition to Idaho Fish and Game and Homeland Security officers, representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the local health district were investigating the deaths.

The agencies posted signs warning hunters not to eat any birds killed near the creek.

"I'd say there's no reason for alarm in the sense that literally the sky is falling and there's disease spreading," Drew said. "It's unusual in the number of birds and the sense that it's only mallards, but it's nothing that would cause anyone to panic."