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A vacuum tube probed a load of sunflower seeds when it came into the Red River Commodities plant on Thursday. Semi-truck loads of the seeds dump seed daily to be cleaned, measured and made ready to ship to domestic and overseas markets.

## Ammonia tank robbed near Levant

By Andy Heintz

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Last Monday night someone stole 15 percent of an anhydrous ammonia tank's content out at the 3000 block of County Road 11, north of Levant. Sheriff's deputy Craig Cersovsky investigated the case.

The owner of the tank discovered the theft when he saw the valve was open and leaking, said Cersovsky.

Anhydrous ammonia is a colorless gas with pungent, suffocating fumes that is mostly used as an agricultural fertilizer and industrial refrigerant. Unfortunately for farmers, anhydrous ammonia is also an ingredient for illegal methamphetamine production. This has led drug dealers to engage in anhydrous ammonia thefts from areas where it's stored like farms, industrial refrigeration systems and railroad tanker cars.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy reports that "these thefts often lead to releases when valves are left open as ammonia is being siphoned; ammonia is transferred inappropriately into makeshift containers, such as propane tanks used on barbecue grills; plugs are removed from ammonia lines at refrigeration facilities; or the wrong hoses or fittings are attached."

Liquid anhydrous ammonia can be very dangerous when it is exposed in the environment. The office of drug control policy reports that symptoms of exposure include eye, nose and throat irritation, wheezing, chest pain, pulmonary edema, skin burns and frostbite. Exposure at high concentrations can be fatal.

There is no way to tell how many thefts occur on a daily - and nightly - basis, said Finley. He said the reason for this is that most

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## Sunflowers a big business for Colby processing plant

By Vera Sloan

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Although Kansas and Thomas County may not hold the number one spot in production of sunflowers like they do for wheat, Red River Commodities considered it to be an ideal place to build a plant and encourage farmers to dedicate acreage to the crop.

In the mid 1980's Sigco Sun of Breckenridge, Minn., and a group of local investors built a receiving plant for confectionery sunflowers at 320 E. College Dr. in southeast Colby to clean confection sunflowers.

In 1990 the facility was purchased by Red River Commodities, a private corporation in Fargo, N.D. Red River is one of the largest processors of sunflower products in the United States, and the birthplace of confectionery sunflowers at the Fargo location.

The hybrid sunflower plant is a good crop for western Kansas because of its extensive root system, which aids the plant during dry conditions generally experienced in the high plains area. The marketable sunflower is so hybridized that if you were to plant one of the harvested seeds it would revert back to wild in the first year. Unlike hybrid sunflowers, the wild ones have multiple heads, and are so common to Kansas they are actually a serious weed problem.

Planted acreage grew after the government farm program allowed sunflowers to be planted on idle acres, providing planting flexibility and price support.

Dee Olson, administrator at the Colby plant, said Red River contracts with the



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Checking sunflower seeds samples for foreign material, insect damage, discoloration, and weed seed, is an every load process for lab workers Chuck Plumisto, receiving supervisor, and his assistant, Eric Smith at Red River Commodities.

grower and that, through extensive research and development with Sunflower Breeders, they are able to provide a planting seed that has been developed for optimum production. The crop from the hybrid seed brings a premium for the grower.

On the average year, between 2,600 and 2,800 pounds to the acre under irrigation is considered to be a good yield. On occasion 3,000 pounds to the acre can be reached and is considered to be an excellent crop.

Most dry land sunflowers will average 1,200 pounds to the acre. A bushel of confectionery sunflowers weighs only 23 pounds, as compared to wheat which weighs 60 pounds, and the price is quoted on the market in the hundredweight.

Large seeds are preferable, and the snack food market pays a premium for them. Red River has seed for which produces large

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## County listed as second best in retail strength

A report released this week from the Kansas Revenue Department lists Thomas County as second highest in the state in retail business strength, known as pull factor.

Pull factor uses per capita county sales tax revenue measured against statewide per capita sales tax to estimate how much retail trade an area is gaining or losing. A pull factor of more than 1 means an area is gaining enough retail traffic from outside, including shoppers from our of state, to make up for its residents shopping elsewhere. The report uses data from the 2008 fiscal year.

Thomas County's pull factor was 1.53 last year, a 8.2 percent increase over 2007.

State sales tax collection from the county was \$7.9 million in 2008. With an adjusted population of 7,196, this means that the per capita sales tax for Thomas County was \$1,098, only \$10 less per

capita than Ellis County, which has a much larger metropolitan center.

The other counties in the top five were Ellis, Pottawatomie, Ness and Johnson. According to the report, Ellis County's pull factor, the highest in the state, has been steadily growing for the past few years.

According to the report, most of the counties with positive pull factor numbers have regional retail hubs, such as Colby or Hays, that serve as shopping and business centers for the surrounding areas. Counties that are adjacent to these retail centers often have negative pull factors. For instance, Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Sheridan, Logan and Wallace Counties all have negative pull factors, while they are in proximity to Sherman, Thomas and Gove Counties, all of which have retail centers, a major interstate highway and positive pull factors.

## Ag secretary calls for larger agriculture department roll in climate legislation

WICHITA (AP) — The acting Kansas agriculture secretary said Thursday that the U.S. Agriculture Department should have a leading role in any revisions of climate change regulations.

Josh Svaty said he wants the Agriculture Department rather than the Environmental Protection Agency to oversee climate change policy because the department, like Kansas's Agriculture Department, has dual roles.

"We are a regulatory agency, but we

also promote the industry of agriculture and the Kansas farmer and rancher," Svaty said at the annual conference of Kansas wheat growers opened in Wichita. "It is important for us as we regulate to understand just how complicated and how up and down the industry of agriculture can be."

Svaty was appointed by Gov. Mark Parkinson earlier this month to replace Adrian Polansky, who returned to his old job at the Kansas Farm Service Agency.

A bill passed earlier this summer by the U.S. House that is now under consideration by the Senate would impose the first nationwide limits on greenhouse gases and require electric utilities to produce at least 12 percent of their power from pollution-free sources such as wind and solar energy by 2020.

The House bill would set up a cap-and-trade system, in which limits would be placed on greenhouse gas emissions and a market would be created where business-

es could buy and sell permits to pollute.

Svaty said state officials must be prepared for whatever happens "to make sure we have minimized the cost and maximized the potential for whatever comes out as policy in Washington, D.C."

The climate change issue is expected to permeate much of the two-day conference of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers and Kansas Wheat Commission because of the possibility of new regulation and its impact on farmers.

"Right now I don't know any farmers who are excited discussing climate change, let alone any legislation concerning climate change," said Paul Penner, Kansas Association of Wheat Growers president and a Hillsboro farmer.

Many farmers are skeptical about the idea of a market for so-called carbon credits, Penner said.

"But we also realize the political realities don't allow us to ignore it and hope it goes away," Penner said.

### Briefly

#### Brewster enrollment next week

Enrollment for the Brewster School District will be from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday and Tuesday at the school. The first day of school is Aug. 18. For information, call the Brewster School at 694-2236.

#### City to trim trees next week

City crews will be trimming trees from 7 a.m. to noon Tuesday and next Friday on School and Garfield Avenues south from West 8th Street. Trees will be trimmed to a height of 13 feet, six inches over the streets and alleys and a height of eight feet over the sidewalk. Residents are asked to move vehicles that are parked under low hanging branches. For information, call city hall at 460-4410.

#### District to hold public meetings

Colby School District Superintendent Terrell Har-

ison and Business Manager Jo DeYoung will conduct two public meetings at 7 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday in the Colby High School auditorium. The purpose of these meetings is to allow the public the opportunity to hear about the district's budget status and cuts that have been made. The public will also be able to ask questions. For information, call the administration office at 460-5000.

#### College to hold budget hearing

The Board of Trustees of Colby Community College will hold a special meeting at 5 p.m. on Monday in the board room of Thomas Hall. The meeting will be a public hearing of the 2009-2010 budget. For information, call the college at 462-3984.

#### School registration Aug. 6 and 7

K-12 returning student enrollment will be from 7

a.m. to 4 p.m. next Thursday at Colby High School. New student enrollment will be at 8 a.m. Friday, Aug. 7 in each school. The first day of athletic practices will be on Aug. 17, with time to be determined by the coaches. The first day of classes will be Aug. 20. The district also has class of 2008 diplomas available for pick-up at the administration office. For information, call the district at 460-5000.

#### Equivalency classes offered

The Adult Education Department at Colby Community College is offering free General Education Development (GED) preparation classes beginning Aug. 17. The diploma is widely recognized as credible and valuable by employers and colleges. One in 20 students enrolled in post-secondary education nationwide holds a general education diploma. Class times are flexible. To enroll call Nance Munderloh at (785) 460-4663.

#### Salvation Army has fans to give

The Thomas County Salvation Army representative has box fans available for anyone who needs them. Call Sue at 460-4842 if you need a fan.

#### Dance planned for next Friday

There will be a singles and married couples dance Friday, Aug. 7, in the Community Building from 7:30 to 11:30 p.m. This is a free dance for Janet Phelps' 75th birthday. Please, no gifts. For information please call Lue Duffey (785) 855-2341.

