



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Board gets \$1.8 million to buy water

By Steve Haynes

Colby Free Press  
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

Colby-based Groundwater Management District No. 4 has won a \$1.8 million federal grant to help retire water rights in six critical areas of northwest Kansas where the Ogallala Aquifer is declining.

Wayne Bossert, district manager, said Wednesday the grant from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service would help pay farmers to take water rights out of service for six years. That's

part of a one-two punch where the district then uses state money to buy the rights out completely and retire them.

The result is that the fields involved revert to dryland farming, which produces less grain, but also costs farmers less. The trade is an economic decision for farmers, he said.

Bossert said the grant is the third for the district under the Agriculture Water Enhancement Program, totaling \$6.36 million, but that's only a drop in the bucket, so to speak. Water in all six target areas is "over-appropriated," meaning more wa-

ter rights have been issued than the aquifer can support.

"That's probably going to buy seven, eight, nine water rights," he said. "We're using that to set aside water rights for six years, five years of payments."

After that time, the district hopes to use state "Water TAP" (Water Transition Assistance Program) money to finish buying out the rights. Because farmers have already been paid about \$1,000 an acre, he said, bids under the state program are discounted to around \$700 to \$800 an acre. Those are much lower than those from

other parts of the state.

"We've been getting a lot of the Water TAP funds for the state out here," he said.

Bossert said the federal money would go farther if it could be used to buy just the least-efficient part of a farmer's water right. The service won't approve that, however. He said the federal agency requires "all-or-nothing" commitments, meaning all a farmer's irrigated acres must be changed over.

And with corn prices at historic highs, he said, farmers are less eager to give up

irrigation water now. The thing is, he said, the change is coming no matter what, because the aquifer is being depleted.

"That's the dilemma," Bossert said. "It's going to happen sometime anyway."

He maintains that the change would be easier – on farmers and the economy here – if the district could just buy a little water from a lot of farms, allowing farmers to give up their least-productive rights. He emphasized, though, that the district is buying only "real" water rights, not paper

See "WATER," Page 2

## Perry bows out of race, gets behind Gingrich

NORTH CHARLESTON (AP) – Texas Gov. Rick Perry dropped out of the race for the Republican presidential nomination this morning and endorsed Newt Gingrich, adding a fresh layer of unpredictability to the campaign two days before the South Carolina primary.

"Newt is not perfect, but who among us is?" Perry said.

He called the former House speaker a "conservative visionary" best suited to replace Barack Obama in the White House.

While the ultimate impact of Perry's decision is unclear, it reduced the number of conservative challengers to Mitt Romney. The decision also reinforced the perception that Gingrich is the candidate on the move in the final hours of the South Carolina campaign,

and that the front-running Romney is struggling to hold onto his longtime lead.

Perry had scarcely finished speaking when Gingrich issued a statement welcoming the endorsement.

"I ask the supporters of Gov. Perry to look at my record of balancing the budget, cutting spending, reforming welfare, and enacting pro-growth policies to create millions of new jobs and humbly ask for their vote," Gingrich said.

Romney reacted by praising Perry for running "a campaign based upon love of country and conservative principles" and saying he "has earned a place of prominence as a leader in our party."

Perry's exit marked the end of a campaign that began with soaring expectations, but quickly faded.

He shot to the head of the public opinion polls when he announced his candidacy last summer, but a string of poor debate performances soon led to a decline in support.

His defining moment came at one debate when he unaccountably could not recall the third of three federal agencies he has promised to abolish. He joked about it afterward, but never recovered from the fumble.

Romney, the former Massachusetts governor considered the most moderate candidate in the race, has benefited so far from having several conservative challengers competing for the same voters. New polls show Romney leading in South Carolina but Gingrich gaining steam heading into Saturday's contest in a state where conservatives hold great sway.

## Airport manager wants county to control heights

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press  
colby.society@nwkansas.com

Colby Municipal Airport manager Mark Ostmyer told county commissioners Monday he hopes to implement a height-hazard ordinance throughout the county to maintain safe approaches for area pilots.

A similar ordinance is already in place in Colby, he said, adding that he doesn't want to restrict new structures, but wants a process in place so that the airport can be aware of developments that may reduce accessibility to the runways.

Specifically, he said, he wants people to get approval to erect structures that could interfere with airport development. He said the Federal Aviation Administration has restrictions for new construction or alterations exceeding 200 feet and/or within 20,000 feet of the airport which exceed a 100:1 surface from any point on the runway, which is 3,200 feet in elevation.

The potential ordinance could cover all of Thomas County, including the cities within it, he said, but it would not be retroactive and would only affect new construction or alterations.

Ostmyer provided commissioners with a sample ordinance used in Tribune. He said a consultant was paid to complete the document, which could cost upwards of \$30,000.

Although he also said the state would likely pay for it, commissioners were not eager to approve anything during the meeting without a draft ordinance explaining Ostmyer's thinking.

"This isn't going to be a popular idea, and we will definitely need to have a public hearing before anything is approved," said Commissioner Paul Steele. "We don't want to create any dilemmas by approving an ordinance that creates instant problems."

For example, commissioners discussed a potential problem that could arise with trees as they grow and reduce accessibility to the airport. An already established tree, even exceeding the height requirement, could be "grandfathered" in, but the new tree would be a problem even if it were shorter than an older tree beside it.

They also discussed how such an ordinance would affect development as the airport develops longer or different runways, especially on the north side of

See "AIRPORT," Page 2

## Tax expert to testify

TOPEKA (AP) – Economist Arthur Laffer is going before Kansas lawmakers to defend Gov. Sam Brownback's proposed reforms in the state income tax code.

Laffer was known for his work during President Ronald Reagan's administration as an advocate of "supply-side" economics. Brownback's administration hired him as a consultant to help develop the plan to cut income tax rates.

He was scheduled to speak today to a joint meeting of the House and Senate tax panels.

Critics have assailed the Brownback plan as "Robin Hood in reverse" because the lowest tax bracket would see taxes rise, while upper brackets get cuts.

## College board gets three resignations

By Kayla Cornett

Colby Free Press  
kcornett@nwkansas.com

Colby Community College trustees accepted three resignations Monday during their monthly meeting in Thomas Hall, which brought up a discussion about losing employees.

Dr. Philip Shuman, vocal music instructor; Dr. David Kruse, computer/science instructor; and Mark Adams, a mechanic and maintenance worker, turned in the resignations.

Trustee Dale Herschberger asked if Dr. Stephen Vacik, college president, had looked into comments Adams made on his resignation letter. Vacik said he has reviewed some of the comments,

but said if the board wanted to talk about it further, it would need to be in a closed session.

"We're working on some things, and there are some areas that are in need of fixing," Vacik said. "Some things take a little more time than others, and I think that some remedies have been fitted that I think are making some improvements...."

"I can assure you that I'm trying to stay on top of that and I do hate to lose any employee, and if I felt like there was a way to do things differently, I probably would, but I think at this point in time, we're where we are."

Herschberger said he didn't think it looked good from the outside looking in when the college has an Employee of the Month resign.

"Something's not clicking," he

See "COLLEGE," Page 2



## Farmers check out new stuff

Plenty of Colby-area people, vendors and farmers alike, were at the Cover Your Acres no-till conference at The Gateway in Oberlin on Tuesday and Wednesday. Leland Jones of Colby Ag (above) was showing Steve Kastens of Luddell features of a new, red combine. Brett Roemer (left in photo at right) showed Larry Manhart of Grainfield a Shelbourn Reynolds stripper header for cutting wheat. And a tiny Case IH tractor (below) hauled a giant ear of corn around one display.

CYNTHIA HAYNES  
Colby Free Press