

Closing of grocery stores poses economic challenges for towns

In 2007, Kansas State University faculty, working with the university's newly formed Center for Engagement and Community Development, identified the closing of local grocery stores, citizens' subsequent inability to buy a variety of foods at home and economic losses to towns as an emerging issue in the state.

Since that time, 82 groceries in the state have closed, says David Procter, director of the center. And, while many were located in rural areas, urban neighborhoods also are suffering.

Procter, who noted that groceries typically anchor small-town and neighborhood business districts, said the loss of a grocery affects other businesses, as grocery shoppers might also plan a stop at the hardware store, bank, business or insurance office in town.

Lost revenue affects an entire community, he said.

After a fire destroyed the grocery in Onaga, Bob Cole, Pottawatomie County economic development director, said that Onaga was losing about \$20,000 per year

from lost sales tax collections.

The center has held three "grocery summits" to address the issue and assist towns seeking to strengthen or reopen a grocery. A fourth summit is planned for 2014.

Procter noted that stores in many Kansas towns are capitalizing on strengths, such as offering locally grown foods and making customer service a priority, strengths that set them apart from stores in larger towns.

Ray's Apple Markets, a family-owned, Kansas-based chain that prides itself on offering a variety of healthy foods and community-based customer service, is an example.

As the owners of Ray's Apple Market in Manhattan, Mike, Aaron and Tom Floersch strive to provide "modern stores with old-fashioned service."

The trio is following in the steps of Ray Floersch, father of Mike and Tom and grandfather of Aaron, who started the business nearly 48 years ago. These grocers work to remain competitive

with other chain grocers in town by maintaining relationships with their customers and their community.

"We were brought up that way," Mike Floersch said. "We think it's a basic; it's a thank you for shopping with us."

Ray's Apple Market is a full-service grocery store, with a bakery, deli, coffee shop, free Wi-Fi, and video kiosk. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the deli provides all-you-can-eat dinner deals, with chicken, ribs and side dishes, as well as daily specials, such as preservative-free salads made onsite.

The Floersch family also provides hometown service in a smaller downtown store in Manhattan, and in St. Marys, Clay Center, Seneca and Council Grove in Kansas and in Fairbury, Neb.

For information on local grocery stores, access to food and effect on community health, contact the center at (785) 532-6868 or go to www.ksu.edu/cecd or www.ruralgrocery.org.

Work finished on new rule to trace diseased livestock across state lines

TOPEKA – The U.S. Department of Agriculture says it has finished a rule to improve traceability of diseased livestock moving across state lines.

The final rule, to be published in the Federal Register Friday, will establish a framework to allow states and Native American tribes to establish animal disease traceability systems that meet their needs.

Dr. Bill Brown, Kansas animal health commissioner, said an effective animal disease traceability program will give Kansas the ability to easily trace the movement of livestock in the event of a livestock disease outbreak. He also said an effective program should reduce the number of animals involved in a disease investigation and the necessary response time while minimizing the financial impact on stockmen and ranchers.

"We have been preparing for the final animal disease traceability system since February 2010, and we appreciate USDA's efforts to work with states, tribes and all industry stakeholders to finalize this rule," said Dr. Brown. "Agriculture is the largest industry in Kansas. As such, we have worked closely with our partners in the livestock sector in Kansas to educate livestock farmers and ranchers about animal disease traceability and develop a statewide plan to implement the program in Kansas."

Dr. Brown said Kansas has purchased USA-Herds, an in-house, secure electronic "filing cabinet" to collect confidential traceability data. Kansas is one of about 12 states that use the program and is leading efforts to educate other states about its capabilities to track the interstate movements of animals.

The final rule will go into effect 60 days after

publication. Under the rule, unless specifically exempted, livestock moving interstate must be officially identified and accompanied by a certificate of veterinary inspection (also known as a health certificate) or other state-approved documentation. The final rule exempts cattle under 18 months of age from traceability requirements, but the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service plans to work with the industry to promulgate a separate rule for this group.

Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Dale Rodman said while traceability is important for animal health purposes, it may also have implications on export markets as well.

"More than 99.96 percent of the world's population lives outside of Kansas. Our farmers and ranchers have been feeding Kansans since before our statehood, but in the future, we will play an increasingly important role in feeding the world," he said. "Cattle traceability could impact market access in the future. This is especially concerning when recognizing that of the world's eight largest exporters, six have adopted mandatory cattle animal identification and traceability systems."

"We have worked with USDA on the animal disease traceability framework and will continue working with the agency to implement this rule and on all issues that impact the ability of farmers and ranchers to raise healthy animals and produce safe, wholesome food."

For information about the issue and to read the rule, go to www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/. For information about animal disease traceability in Kansas, go to www.ksda.gov/animal/content/417.

Specialist says benefits of snowfall are better than rain in some ways

Much-anticipated snow this winter will bring many benefits to the struggling wheat crop, said Jim Shroyer, K-State Research and Extension crop production specialist.

In many ways, he added, snow will be even better than rain.

Those benefits include:

- Moisture. Obviously, snow brings much-needed moisture to wheat fields. The general rule is 10 inches of snow equals 1 inch of rain, although this varies, depending on how fluffy or heavy the snow is. One of the benefits of getting moisture in the form of snow is that nearly all the moisture will move down into the soil

and remain there for quite some time. Since the weather is cold, or at least cool, after a snow, little will evaporate.

- Root development. Moisture from snow will help increase root growth of wheat. Even if the top growth is dormant and isn't growing during cold weather, roots will continue to grow if there is moisture.

- Soil protection. Snow cover does a great job in keeping the soil from blowing. As long as the ground is protected by snow, soil particles on the surface can't be picked up by the wind, preventing erosion.

- Soil temperatures. Snow in-

sulates the soil, keeping cold air from reducing soil temperatures and protecting the crown of the wheat plant from cold. Snow also keeps the ground warmer during the winter by adding moisture. It takes longer for wet soil to get cold.

The best way for a grower to improve the chances of having snow cover is to maintain standing residue on the field, Shroyer added.

"Standing residue is especially effective in capturing and keeping snow, especially when it's windy," he said. "That's another reason that keeping residue on the soil is important."

Conference offers farmers, ranchers advice

Farm operators and landowners face a myriad of decisions, set against the backdrop of drought, an uncertain Farm-Bill picture and other challenges. Those topics and others are on the agenda at the "Ag Stewardship Conference – People Helping People" planned for Friday, Feb. 15, in Overbrook.

The free one-day conference, to be held at Grace Community Church, 310 E. Eighth Street (U.S. 56), is open to all farmers, ranchers and landowners. It is coordinated by K-State Research and Extension, the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency and conservation districts in Douglas, Franklin, Osage and Shawnee counties.

Topics include Kansas leasing, fencing and eminent-domain laws, estate and tax planning, and marketing, as well as drought-related decisions and the most recent update on the 2012 Farm Bill.

The conference is sponsored by the coordinating organizations, as well as Frontier Farm Credit and WIBW Radio.

Because space is limited, reg-

istration is required a week in advance, by Friday, Feb. 8, by

calling the Osage County Conservation District in Lyndon at (785)

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Announcer plays along when three deer run race on Pennsylvania horse racing track

WASHINGTON, Pa. (AP) – Spectators who came to watch horses at a western Pennsylvania racetrack got a surprise when three deer got onto the course first and beat the horses to racing.

According to KDKA-TV (cb-sloc.al/VdzJuq), a race was about to begin the night of Dec. 5 at the


Meadows Racetrack when the deer jumped onto the track.

Race announcer Roger Huston didn't miss a beat. He began calling the race as it unfolded, saying things like: "As they race down the track, Bambi has the lead. Here comes Rudolph from the outside."

The deer ran fast but kept changing directions. At one point, they appeared headed to the paddock, where the horses were being held.

Several minutes later, the deer left the track to the horses.

Huston says Bambi won the race.



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