

# District may get new computers

While most computers used by students are fairly new, teachers have to save information on aging machines that could shut down any day, the school district's technology coordinator told school board members on Wednesday.

Karla Murray attended a special meeting to ask permission to gather prices on 34 new computers for the high school. After the board approved, she reported on technology maintenance, saying over half of teachers' computers are 7 years old, while those

students use are 4 to 5 years old. She said corporations usually replace computers every three years.

The district has maintained equipment for students well, Murray said, but may see an increase in lost data as teachers' computers grow older. She said hard drives on two teachers' computers failed recently, which could have been caused by electrical problems.

Member Mike Campbell suggested Murray devise a three-year replacement plan and look into leasing computers. He said she could

replace 25 percent of the teachers' computers each year. Murray said that would cost about \$30,000, with each machine costing about \$1,300.

She added that North Elementary School needs a new printer and the technology committee wants to buy three new network servers next year.

If the board gives Murray permission to buy the 34 computers for the high school, 24 will go in the computer applications classroom and 10 in the library. The older computers will be put to use elsewhere, she said.

# 'Freedom to farm' bill changed Kansas agriculture

By Roxana Hegeman  
Associated Press Writer

WICHITA (AP) — Kansas farmers once embraced the 1996 farm bill with its tantalizing promise of planting flexibility.

At last, growers figured they would be able to put in the crops best suited for the markets and their own land rather than farm the government programs with the same old commodities. They bought into the premise that declining government subsidies would be replaced by greater profits in the marketplace.

As lawmakers begin drafting a new farm bill, that farm policy — popularly known as Freedom To Farm — is under intense scrutiny after years of emergency government bailouts to keep family farms and rural economies afloat.

But the beleaguered farm program has changed the rural landscape in Kansas. Fields that once grew wheat in eastern Kansas now grow a rotation of corn, sorghum and soybeans. A fledgling cotton industry has emerged in southern Kansas.

Farmers planted less wheat. Bountiful harvests of corn and sorghum overfilled grain elevators, dotting western Kansas each fall with huge mounds of grain piled on the ground.

But market prices collapsed in a nation awash in surplus grain. And the political parties, as well as farmers themselves, are deeply divided on whether to scrap the concept of freedom to farm.

The average Kansas farm last year would not have broken even except for federal subsidies. Kansas Farm Management Association reported that the typical farm received \$45,614 in government payments in 2000 — or 116 percent of its net farm income.

A year earlier, the average government payment was \$47,056. In 1997, government payments averaged \$14,980 per farm.

Fred Ditruxhe raises wheat, milo, soybeans, sunflowers and calves on a farm east of Concordia. He said if he had not gotten the additional govern-

ment payments he would have had to sell out.

He works the land his father and grandfather once tilled, but most of the 2,000 acres he farms is rented ground. To make up for low commodity prices, he has planted all his acres. Sometimes he longs for the old farm programs where the government paid farmers not to plant all their acres.

"When we used to have set-asides, it wasn't so bad. Now we are trying to grow a crop on every bit of those acres," he said. "For me, it has gotten more stressful."

Ditruxhe also tried different ways to add value to his crops. He got into raising calves to better use the cheap milo he grows. He grows the new hard white winter wheat in the hopes he can get a better price for his wheat crop. He has even tried raising confectionary sunflowers.

"I love to farm — you have to do it. I'm working from 7 in the morning until 9 at night, hardly see the wife and kids," he said. "... I just want not to be a failure. I'm worried about being a failure."

Duane Hund is a northeast Kansas farmer who makes an off-farm living by counseling other struggling farmers as a farm analyst for Kansas State University Extension Service.

He recently sat down with a Kansas farm couple and their lender at their home in Nemaha County near the Nebraska state line.

"I am willing to put a Band-Aid on this thing until next winter," the lender told the farm couple, "But we are going to have to see what Congress is going to come up with."

If Congress does not come up with something different for a new farm bill, they would have to make some hard choices, the banker told them.

"The 63-year-old farmer and his wife were sitting there and he just broke down and started crying," Hund said.

It is a scene that Hund has been seen repeated a lot lately.

"Lenders are willing to allow the process politically to develop before they say for sure to that family, 'You

have to retire and get out.'" Wheat acres have generally declined in Kansas in the past few years. In 1994, Kansas farmers planted 11.9 million acres in wheat. Last fall they planted just 9.9 million acres.

At the same time, acres planted for other major crops went up.

The current farm program also allowed producers to change crop rotations without risking their eligibility — a move that has allowed them to do a better job with the conservation plans, Hund said.

Freedom to farm also enabled people to try out on small scales some different things that they might not have attempted under the old farm program, he said.

Among the most visible is the burgeoning cotton industry that has taken hold in southern Kansas, where cotton acreage has increased from 1,400 acres in 1994 to 40,000 acres last year.

But perhaps the most immediate impact of the current policy is that it has given farmers in Kansas and elsewhere the freedom to grow as much as they want without forgoing their eligibility for government programs.

"We produced ourselves into the economic gutter," said Tom Giessel, a Larned farmer. "We are overproducing. Now market prices are low and are going to stay low; and contrary to economic law, the cheaper grain gets, the more farmers try to produce."

No clear consensus exists that any government program can be blamed entirely for low commodity prices — or many other changes in agriculture also driven in part by new crop varieties and economics.

After all, Kansas farmers planted fewer wheat acres in recent years but still often set record production levels because of good yields. In some years that helped offset the poor wheat prices as markets plunged during bountiful harvests. But this year — as wheat growers face a dismal harvest — prices remain low.

Nor has the latest government version of a farm program stopped the exodus of farmers leaving the family farm.

# Colby man flown to Denver hospital

By Jay Kelley

Colby Free Press

A farm accident west of Colby sent a 21-year-old Colby man to Swedish Hospital in Denver in critical condition Thursday night.

Colby Fire Chief Bob McLemore said J.R. Mattson was part of a work crew repairing a grain bin at 1274 U.S. 24, near Levant, when he fell into the bin.

Although McLemore said he wasn't sure how far Mattson fell, he described the injuries as serious.

Access to the bin was made more

difficult by a panel that had been welded shut. Co-workers attempted to cut it open with a torch, but had to abandon the attempt because of the danger from sparks.

Colby Fire Department rescue squad members used hydraulic tools to pry open the hatch, and gain access for Thomas County Emergency Medical Services personnel.

"It was pretty straightforward after we got the hatch open," McLemore said. Mattson was transported by Thomas County ambulance to Citizens

Medical Center and was later flown to the Denver hospital, where he is listed in critical condition.

McLemore had high praise for two Marine recruiters who were at the scene recruiting.

"Sgt. Ross and S/Sgt. Jensen were both level-headed and a lot of help," he said. Ross and Jensen also helped out at the scene of a one-car rollover north of Colby on Tuesday.

Thomas County Sheriff and Kansas Highway Patrol also assisted in the accident.

# Electric bills may be going up in Goodland

CITY, from Page 1

said. The charge, Wolak said, would be the extra cost that city has above the cap divided between all of the customers and customers would only pay for what they use. Your electric rate will depend on the city's cost, so if the city pays more, so do you.

"Everybody pays," he said, "including the city."

Wolak said if people have questions about the electrical adjustment charge, he would be willing to answer questions at the meeting, which will start at 5 p.m. on the second floor of the city offices, 204 W. 11th.

For other old business, the commission will:

- Listen to a request for money from the Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce Economic Development com-

mittee.

- Hear what Scottsdale Insurance, the company that has liability insurance for the Steever Water Park, would do if the city changed the high board at the water park to a low board.

- Hear the third readings of two franchise agreements, one for a telephone system and another for a cable television system, between the city and S&T Communications Inc. of Brewster.

- Decide whether to approve a settlement offer from the Environmental Protection Agency for the treatment and storage of PCBs at a superfund site in Kansas City.

Under new business, the commission will:

- Discuss two requests for home occupation special use permits for daycare centers. One request is from

Connie Johnson at 1502 Sherman and the other is from Dedra Sawyer at 804 Walnut.

- Discuss street design improvements on Cattletrail between 12th and 16th Streets, where the new West Side Apartments are to be built.

- Discuss an ordinance which would repeal an existing ordinance that deals with the mill levy for the library. The state of Kansas repealed the tax levy limits in 1999.

- Revise an ordinance relating to the tap charge for electrical service on newly built homes or buildings or modifications to existing ones.

In his report, City Manager Ron Pickman is to give an update on replacing the brick intersections between Sixth and Eighth Streets along Main. APAC-Kansas of Hays is to do the work.

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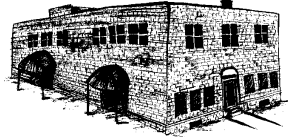
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