

Farmers keep hope despite drought

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The area is still in a drought, and experts say there's no hope of catching up to the normal amount of moisture for the last few years or of replenishing the ground water anytime soon.

Even so, farmers in Decatur County still have hopes for a good crop if the moisture will come.

Ralph Unger, who has farmed here since he got out of high school in the early 1960s, said he would consider the area still in a drought.

There is no subsoil moisture to speak of, he said. It was used by the crops last year and said the fall crops burned up.

If the area doesn't get rain, he added, the drought will get worse. If it does rain, as the forecasters were predicting this week, things will get better, but Mr. Unger said it will take significant moisture to get a good crop.

Farmers always have hope, he added.

He said he isn't sure if the drought is running in a cycle. There have been both good and bad years since he started farming, but

it has been four years since the area had good fall and spring crops.

Back in the '50s, he said, when he was in grade school, he can remember a really bad drought.

This year's drought may push some out of farming, Mr. Unger said. It is stressing everyone in the business, but survival depends on the depth of a farmer's reserves.

People need to pray for rain, he said.

Victor Stegemiller, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Goodland, said the normal amount of moisture in

Goodland this time of year is 1.47 inches. As of Monday afternoon, the area had received .86 of an inch. Mr. Stegemiller said without an observer in Oberlin, the service doesn't have rainfall figures for this area.

Mr. Stegemiller said northwest Kansas is still in a drought based not only on the difference in moisture received but water levels in reservoirs and aquifers haven't been replenished. He said the levels aren't getting any lower, but they haven't gotten any better, either.

City wells near Oberlin show that the

stream bed aquifer has dropped two feet since last year. Figures for the Ogallala aquifer across the area are similar, with an average drop of 1.458 feet this year.

A drought, said Mr. Stegemiller is defined as when an area receives less precipitation than normal, taken from the 20 year average.

Wayne Bossert, manager of Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4 in Colby, said ground water levels in the district, which includes all of Sherman, (See DROUGHT on Page 10A)

City may let sign stay

The Oberlin City Planning Commission has recommended to the City Council that the ordinance which bars off-premises signs bigger than 6 by 6 feet, be changed to 24 by 10 feet.

That would mean the Classic Cable sign on U.S. 36, across from Sinclair, could stay, but council members weren't buying the change.

The planning commission met prior to the council meeting Thursday, March 6 night to discuss the sign.

In order to put up a sign in the city limits, a business has to get permission from the city by filling out a form, getting it approved and paying a fee. That was never done in the case of the Classic Cable sign, which was put in by Thomas Outdoor Advertising of Manhattan. Although the city received a check for \$100, the form was never filled out, returned or approved.

City Administrator Gary Shike said if the council changed the ordinance, then the sign would could stay since it is 24 by 10 feet.

Mayor Gary Walter asked what the committee's thoughts were on allowing the sign to stay. Judy Cathcart, a commission member, said she voted against the change but said she thought the feeling was that a 6 by 6 foot sign is kind of small and there are other signs that are larger which are exempt from that ordinance. The thing is, said Mrs. Cathcart, the company didn't follow procedure and now they are just trying to keep their sign up.

Councilman Ken Shobe said he could see changing the ordinance if the company had gotten the sign approved first, but the company didn't go through the process and now wants the city to change the ordinance so the sign can stay.

"There was a certain amount of arrogance to put it up in the first place," said Councilman Jay Anderson.

The council decided to table the discussion to do some research. The council will talk about the billboard during its meeting Thursday.

Sirens tested for spring

Decatur County resident heard something Monday morning they hadn't heard in a while: the storm sirens were going off.

With tornado season coming up, Emergency Preparedness Director Bert Cool said they will be tested at 10 a.m. every Monday from now until the end of the severe weather season, the last part of August or some time in September.

Mr. Cool said the sirens will go off at 10 a.m. in Oberlin, Norcatur, Dresden and Jennings.

Monday morning, he said, all of the sirens worked though they hadn't been used all winter.

In Oberlin, there is a siren near the hospital, one at The Gateway, one behind the city shop downtown and at the ball park on the east side. Dresden, Norcatur and Jennings each have one siren. All can be triggered by remote control by county dispatchers.

Mr. Cool said the oscillating tone which was sounded Monday morning means to take cover and the solid tone is the all clear sound.



PICKLES, PICKLES everywhere. Young men used shovels and a back hoe to clean a truckload of pickles off U.S. 83 on Thursday morning (above) after two semi-trailer

trucks collided at the junction east of Selden. David Hare with the Kansas Department of Transportation (below) directed traffic. — Herald staff photos by Steve Haynes

Pickles, fertilizer make huge mess in semi accident

A sickening sweet, yet sour smell filled the air Thursday morning at the intersection of U.S. 83 and K-383 near Selden as contractors scooped up thousands of pickles spilled in a spectacular crash between two semi trucks.

Crew members worked with shovels and a back hoe, clearing a smelly combination of foot-long dills and fertilizer off the roadway while firemen prepared to spray the asphalt clean.

Sheridan County firemen from Selden and Hoxie stood by and hosed down the mess. More than a dozen state highway workers flagged traffic past the site. U.S. 83 west of the intersection was blocked, and there was room for only one lane traffic past the wreckage. Drivers had to detour on the old road to the south.

The trucks dumped cargo across the road as a westbound Navajo rig full of pickles smashed into a northbound truck carrying fertilizer.

The green slimy pickles were on their way to a packing plant in Colorado, so they were being carried in salt stock in plastic

bins, not in jars as they are seen.

State Trooper Jerry Stritt said the accident took place about 5 a.m. and the road was still partly blocked at 5 p.m. as crews unloaded both trailers.

Some of the fertilizer was salvageable, but a state health department inspector from Hays stood by to make sure the pickles went straight to the landfill.

"They tell me they're already changing color," she said.

Driver Joseph Garcia, 34, said he was driving the Navajo truck west on K-383 when he saw the other rig at the stop sign on K-23 heading north toward Oberlin.

Mr. Garcia said he slowed to 52 miles an hour but the other driver pulled out from the stop sign and the trucks collided, crushing the engine on Mr. Garcia's truck. Pickles split the front of the trailer, flooding into the cab and spilling out over the road, as the rig careened into the north ditch.

Mr. Garcia, from Pueblo, Colo., was taken by ambulance to the Sheridan County hospital in Hoxie. Trooper Stritt said the other driver was John Lowe, 49, El Paso, Texas. His tractor was knocked through the intersection and into the ditch along the railroad tracks, leaving the trailer



blocking the highway.

Mr. Lowe got a ticket for failure to yield. Both drivers were wearing their seat belts, Trooper Stritt said.

Mr. Garcia said he only had scrapes and bruises, and wasn't se-

riously injured. He hoped to be released on Friday and return home.

"I'm lucky to be alive," he said.

Board hears report on new federal law

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The Oberlin School Board heard a lengthy report at its meeting Monday night about the new federal school law, the "No Child Left Behind" act, how it affects school accreditation and what the district will have to do in upcoming years.

Elementary Principal Duane Dorshorst, who has been researching the law and accreditation issues, showed a program on the ins and outs to both.

Although law was proposed by President Bush and passed by Congress, it has been passed down to the state to enforce. The state has since set up performance goals and standards which schools have to meet

School Countdown

At a meeting last Monday night, the Oberlin School Board:

- Extended the three administrator contracts until the summer of 2005, but decided to wait on salary changes. Story to come.
- Talked about scholarships offered to high school students. Students only have two more weeks to get applications in. Story to come.

under the law.

The state has changed the names for performance levels students are graded on, from advanced, profi-

cient, satisfactory, basic and unsatisfactory, to exemplary, advanced, proficient, basic and unsatisfactory.

- Discussed suggestions on how the district to save money without cutting any programs. Story to right.
- Listened to a report on the "No Child Left Behind" act and school accreditation. Story to left.
- Talked about new grants and federal money the district gets and how it can be spent. Story to come.

In the past, the schools had to let

the public know by January how students did the previous year on the tests. That has been changed to August, which means the state will have to have the results out by then.

All districts will have to have faculty teaching in the core academic subjects be "highly qualified" in their areas. Mr. Dorshorst said that won't be a problem here, because the district has always hired people to teach in their subject area, but it may be a problem for smaller schools.

All students will have to take the reading and math assessments in grades three through eighth and then once in high school. The problem, (See BOARD on Page 10A)

Board talks money

Cost-saving ideas discussed

With the state painfully short of money and less coming to school districts, the Oberlin School Board has started to ask the staff for ideas on how to save money.

At its meeting last Monday night, the board talked with principals, the athletic director and the transportation director about some ideas.

Superintendent Kelly Glodt said it is important to remember that the suggestions are just that, ideas, and nothing says that each and every one is going to be tried. He said he attended a meeting at Oberlin Elementary School and was amazed at what the staff is willing to sacrifice.

At the high school, the staff came up with several ideas to save money with supplies, said Principal Charles Haag.

Ideas included limiting supplies for faculty, having students pay a \$10 fee to rent musical equipment, charging lab fees for science classes, limiting copies for each classroom and having students bring in a box of tissue at the beginning of the school year.

Mr. Haag said another idea was to compare the cost of having a laser printer shared between several classes to having an ink jet cartridge printer in each class. He said on an ink jet printer, every black and white page costs between 5 and 15 cents while a colored one costs between 24 and 40 cents. On a laser printer, the same black and white page costs one to two cents and a color one costs between six and nine cents.

The laser printers are more expensive to buy, he said.

Cost saving ideas for custodial and maintenance services included eliminating towels being provided and washed, cutting back on custodial staff and asking the teachers to help clean their own rooms, eliminating overtime and using students in the cleaning plan.

For school lunches, said Mr. Haag, the staff suggested not serving seconds or having everyone pay extra for seconds, either eliminating the salad bar or asking people to pay a higher price for both the salad and meal, eliminating waste and cutting down on summer training.

Overall, the staff suggested finding less expensive health care insurance, savings in transportation, hourly wages for non-certified staff and energy savings. One idea was to have the school open four days a week with longer days, which would leave the buildings closed for three days.

Transportation Director Brian Simonson said the district has 11 bus routes now, which means 552 miles traveled each time the buses leave to pick up or take students home. In a day, that means the buses travel 1,104 miles without any special activities.

To save money, he said, bus routes could be combined, but he won't know if that is possible until after enrollment is done for next year.

Mr. Simonson said he has some drivers close to retirement age and he won't re-hire for the positions unless he has to.

Currently, he said, the buses are getting five to six miles to the gallon and the small vans get around 13.

If the kindergarten students were brought in by bus in the morning and then the district paid parents to pick (See SCHOOL S on Page 10A)

* Drought remains in fields

(Continued from Page 1A)
Thomas, and Sheridan counties, two-thirds of Cheyenne County, and parts of Rawlins, Decatur, Wallace, Logan, Gove, and Graham, have dropped this year, but the figures vary across the district.

The reason the wells are dropping is because more water is being taken out than has been recharged, he said. The state measures 295 wells for the northwest Kansas ground water management office, he said, with probably only 35 of those in Decatur County.

The area is in a drought, said Mr. Bossert, that is easy enough to determine. Looking at the long term in Decatur County from the data the office has, he said, there isn't a major problem with the wells measured.

It depends partly on how you define a problem, he added. If it's a problem to have a decline in ground water, then some areas are going to have to deal with it by decreasing water use.

Greg Lohofener, owner of Lohofener Grain, said the drought has slowed down business at his elevator, but so far hasn't affected his marketing or consulting business. He said he thinks the businesses downtown are feeling the pinch more than he is.

With 25 years of farming under this belt, he said he can't remember the last time it was this dry. In the '50s and the '30s, there were bad droughts, and this may be compared to those.

The last time there was a wet season producing a good crop, he said, was probably 2000 for fall crops including corn, milo and sunflowers. Surprisingly, there was a good wheat crop last year and a real good crop in 1999 and 2000.

How the county got a good wheat crop last year, he said, no one knows. It was dry.

By the fall, though, all of the subsoil moisture had been used and the fall crops burned up in the fields. Many farmers didn't bother to harvest.

So far this year, it looks a lot like last year. The wheat could make a decent crop. The fall crops, if it remains as it is now, won't have near enough moisture to grow.

In order to have good fall crops, said Mr. Lohofener, the area would need above-normal rains.

Mr. Stegemiller said the weather service doesn't make predictions that far out, but the area is expected to get rain most of the week.

Bomb set at ranch

A 15-year-old at Sappa Valley Youth Ranch allegedly made a chemical bomb and set it off on the ranch grounds.

Police Chief Wade Lockhart said the bomb was made with things that could be found around the house.

The incident happened Feb. 27, but was reported only recently. Chief Lockhart said the ranch was handling the case but the police department had been asked to look into the incident.

Nothing was damaged at the ranch.

The paperwork will go to the city attorney's office soon, said Chief Lockhart.

On Thursday, March 6, Gary Allen reported a bank bag was taken out of his car parked in front of the courthouse. There was no money in the bag, just the American Legion Post's checkbook.

Chief Lockhart said the bag was taken between noon and 1 p.m. on Monday, March 3.

Man charged for rape

A former Decatur County man was arrested in early March in Norton County on a warrant charging one count of rape which allegedly occurred in 2001 near Jennings.

Walter S. Tillson III, 21, was arrested Friday, March 7, and returned to Decatur County. Mr. Tillson is in

A little chicken 'n' noodles



KAINE FREDRICKSON enjoyed chicken and noodles at an Oberlin Eastern Star benefit held at the Masonic Temple for the Forget-Me-Nots. Members prepared all the food, including 70 pounds of mashed potatoes, and the Masons helped serve the meal to over 170 guests. The \$1,400 raised from the meal will go to Dennis Brown, who uses it to brighten the lives of the town's elderly.

— Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

* Schools look at ways to tighten budget

(Continued from Page 1A)
them up at noon, at 32 cents a mile, it could save some money. He said there are several questions with that idea.

Mr. Simonson said he didn't know how parents would take it and he doesn't like cutting pay for his drivers.

Soon, he said, there will have to be an adult monitor, other than the bus driver, on buses carrying Head Start kids, and they will have to have seatbelts. That will cost money, he said.

It would save money to limit each class at the grade school to one field trip a year and limit high school activities. He said the district might provide a vehicle for fun trips that don't have to be taken, but the group could pay for fuel and the driver's

salary. The fleet has already traveled 177,000 miles this year, he said, and 60,539 of those have been for activities.

All trips students take are great, he said, but maybe they can do more fund raising and help pay for some of the expense.

A huge part of the budget is spent on maintenance, salary and fuel, he said, and for the most part, those things can't be changed.

Mr. Simonson said drivers are already policing themselves and if they don't have any kids to take home, they aren't coming in.

Athletic Director Randy Olson said he talked to coaches and sponsors, who suggested lengthening uniform rotation, eliminating the towel service, reducing inventory

and putting teams on one bus together to cut back on how many vehicles go to the same place.

In the activity fund, suggestions were to cut the meal allowance, which is normally \$4 per student on out of town trips of more than 90 miles or if the students will miss more than one meal, having only two officials per game instead of three at the basketball tournament here and cutting the C team in football.

The athletic activity account can be used to supplement the money from the general fund used for athletics, said Mr. Olson.

The idea of asking students to pay to play sports came up, but the consensus from the board and the director were that they didn't want to eliminate any student from partici-

pating because they can't afford it.

At the grade school, Principal Duane Dorshorst said the staff suggested moving the textbook cycle from a five-year to six-year rotation, cutting the number of school days and increasing their length, increasing student fees and maybe reorganizing the staff instead of replacing a fifth grade teacher who has resigned.

Board Member Barb Olson said the ideas were great, but asked what the board should do now. Mr. Glodt said they are just ideas, although some of them are already being done. Now the board has to decide if there is anything they want to do.

"Hopefully by doing a bunch of little things," said Mr. Glodt, "the district won't have to cut any of the big things."

Council agrees to pay fourth request for water job

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**
The Oberlin City Council agreed to the fourth pay request from J Corp, the company working on the city water project.

Thaniel Monaco, with Miller and Associates, the city's engineering firm, said, at a meeting March 7 that the request was for \$103,376, and he had reviewed and accepted it. The payment includes a major portion of the work on the 12-inch main which comes in from south of town and bores under the railroad. The company has also begun individual meter work, which is why payment is more than previous ones.

He said he has looked at the high school and they have a meeting set up with Superintendent Kelly Glodt about what the district is going to use for its future irrigation system and what needs to be left for city water.

Councilman Ken Shobe asked if the change in the borings under the railroad will require a change in the original contract.

Mr. Monaco said it is in the contract now, but a change order will need to be done at the end of the project.

Have there been any problems with cold weather and holes being open, asked Mayor Gary Walter. The holes are covered during the night and then re-dug, said Mr. Monaco.

Councilman Stan McEvoy said he talked with a business in town where J Corp is behind in paying bills. Mr. Monaco said he has talked to the company about it and they said

it would be resolved.

Is there a waiver or something the city can do so that payment is held until the local businesses are paid from J Corp, asked Mr. McEvoy.

The city already has the 10 percent retainer, said Mr. Monaco. That has been held in past jobs until the businesses are paid. He said the city has other options if it comes to that. Mayor Walter said he shares Mr. McEvoy's concerns and wants to see that the bills get paid here.

The council approved the pay re-

quest.

Mr. Monaco said he has received some more information on a test well drilled by Layne Western on property the city bought last year south of town. He said there are some more discrepancies on the numbers.

Before the city bought the land and irrigation well, he said, a test showed that the city should be able to get a pretty good pumping well in that area. The preliminary numbers from this test, however, showed that

it would be a smaller well.

Mr. Monaco said the results are conflicting to say the least and he had been on the phone most the afternoon trying to get more information. If the company can't get it right and can't get the information out, he said, he would suggest the city not pay the \$600 for that part of the test. Mr. Monaco said the company doesn't deserve to be paid for information that isn't usable.

The computer generated data, he said, shows a lot better well than the

* Board hears report

(Continued from Page 1A)
he said, is that students in high school don't take all their math classes at the same time. It may be that each student will take the test when they have finished with the curriculum instead of having all the 10th graders take the test.

There are new graduation requirements, he said. This year's sixth graders will need four English credits, three math, three science, three social studies, one physical education, one fine arts and six electives for a total of 21 credits to graduate. The district's graduation requirements are: four English, three social science, two science, two math, one physical education and health, and 10 electives, for a total of 22 credits.

Mr. Dorshorst said the state has set up some requirements on what schools have to offer for students to fill their graduation requirements. Included are earth/space science and geography and economics, which haven't been offered in Oberlin, but now have to be. Family and consumer science, or home economics, although always offered at the school, were never a requirement until now.


All of the schools in Kansas will have to score in the proficient range, he said. By the year 2014, all the students in every school need to be 100 percent proficient. Oberlin's numbers are above what is set now, but in a few years the numbers here will be even with what the state says students should be scoring to get to 100 percent proficient. That process is called "adequate yearly progress."

If schools don't meet that progress for two consecutive years and receive Title I grant money for federal programs, they will have to develop an improvement plan, will be provided technical assistance and will have to offer parents another school choice.

Each year the school doesn't meet the adequate yearly progress targets, he said, something else will have to be done.

Mr. Dorshorst went through how accreditation has changed. The board had no questions.

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