

Group learns about Kansas ethanol plants

About 17 people showed up to learn more about ethanol and the possibility of plants in Kansas.

The meeting last Tuesday at The Gateway, hosted by the Oberlin-Decatur County Area Economic Development Corp., featured Dana Peterson with the Kansas Wheat Commission.

The federal government has put a lot of money into research for ethanol.

Ms. Peterson gave a slide show on cellulosic ethanol and a projected plant by Abenoga BioEnergy in Kansas, but no announcement has been made about where it will be built.

Companies are watching Kansas because they see partners coming together to make these kinds of plants work, she said. The midwest produces a lot of crops with different harvest schedules, which work well for ethanol plants.

The Abengoa plan is to build the first commercial scale cellulose facility by 2011, she said, with 15 million gallons per year produced from biomass and 85 million gallons per year from starch.

Plants will contract with producers at least a year in advance to obtain crops from them.

Ms. Peterson said they will also be doing some research probably in 2009 with grinding straw before it goes to the plant. Anyone interested in the study can call her at (800) 759-4328.

Ms. Peterson said 245,000 bone dry tons of biomass, which is all the material that can be used to make ethanol, equals 386,721 barrels of oil.

Which means, she said, that Kansas could compete in the oil industry in the next 15 years. That many barrels would put the state fourth behind other producers including Saudia Arabia, Iran and Kuwait, she said.

Ms. Peterson said part of the ethanol procedure would be taking the crop residue from the fields or planting switch grass.

One of the biggest problems is transportation, she said. Transportation infrastructures will determine where plants go, more importantly the transportation to get the product from the plant not the crops to it.

Doug Claussen, manager of the Decatur Co-op, asked if there were any cellulosic ethanol plants under construction.

A pilot plant is underway in York, Neb., Ms. Peterson said, but not anywhere else.

How many plants are needed in the state to cause this kind of change with oil? asked Mr. Claussen.

Ms. Peterson said no one knows for sure — definitely more than one.

What about water, said Bob Strevey, a Norcat farmer; doesn't cellulosic take more water?

The same amount of water is used for cellulosic and starch ethanols, she said.

There is only so much water in this part of the country, said Doyle Brown, county commissioner and Jennings farmer. What happens after it's used in the plant.

It goes into the city's waste plant, said Ms. Peterson.

The government must think that each person has a swather and a baler, but that's not the case, said one farmer. Besides the idea is to pay \$10 to \$20 an acre for crop residue. He said he won't sell his for that.

That is something that we need to know, said Ms. Peterson. What is crop residue worth?

"We use that crop residue," said Dan Grafel, a Traer farmer.

The residue is important during droughts, said one farmer, it doesn't have a price on it.

What's the value of the biomass that comes out of the plant, not the ethanol, asked Michael Wasson, farmer.

There is an animal product that comes out, Ms. Peterson said, but no one knows the value of it yet.

With ethanol, said John Brown, will the crop residue become more valuable than grain?

That depends on the technology, said Ms. Peterson. If cellulosic ethanol becomes more valuable than starch, then that is a possibility.

Have any of the communities in southwest Kansas said what they are doing about ethanol plants, said Mr. Claussen. Ms. Peterson said the Kansas Wheat Commission doesn't know, but she does know one of the communities has both a railroad and a gas pipeline to move products including ethanol.



AT THE WHEAT TOUR on Thursday morning Brian Olson, agronomist with Kansas State University, talked about infestation of the Hessian fly in some of the crop. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Crowd checks out extension wheat plots

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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Around 30 people walked out to a field south of U.S. 36 about five miles west of town early Thursday morning to look at 23 varieties of wheat planted in the traditional extension test plots.

The wheat plots, planted Sept. 26, are on the May Family Farm. Before the group of mostly men headed out to the tour, they met at the 4-H building at the Decatur County Fairground for breakfast cooked and served by the Mays.

Brian Olson, area agronomist with Kansas State University Extension; Dan O'Brien with Kansas State University; Chuck Johnson with AgriPro; and Byron Hale, Decatur County extension agent, headed up the event. Dana Peterson with the Kansas Wheat Commission joined area farmers for the tour.

At the beginning of the season, said Mr. Olson, everyone started out with great yield expectations. In May, the area missed some needed rain, he said, then it hailed in parts of the county. In April, a freeze hurt some crops, then leaf rust came in and was prevalent on a lot of acres.

All of that, he said, means that the area has lost a lot of yield potential. Mr. Olson said he doesn't know how the wheat will be effected or how the yields will end up.

Varieties in the field included Bond, Cutter, Danby, Fuller, Hatcher, Infinity, Jagaline, Keota, Millennium, NuFrontier, NuHills, Overly, Postrock, Ron L., Santa Fe, Shavano, Smokey Hill, T136, T81, TAM111, Thunderbolt, Trego and Wesley.

The men took turns talking about a few of the varieties. Mr. Olson said he likes Cutter and thinks people who have found where it works the

best really like it, too, but this variety will get passed by for newer wheat.

Fuller, he said, will probably be in the top three wheats planted in Kansas in a few years. The variety's name comes from the inventor, Mr. Olson added; it doesn't mean it has fuller heads.

Jagaline, said Mr. Johnson, had a fantastic run until Overly beat it out by a few acres in Kansas. This is the No. 1 wheat planted in the state, he said.

Both NuFrontier and NuHills, he said, were licensed originally to General Mills, but the company gave them back to AgriPro.

Breaking open a wheat head, Mr. Olson, said some of the crop did get infested with Hessian flies this spring. If you open the head, he said, you can see a little fly egg inside. There is nothing anyone can do to stop these from hatching and the

larve from eating some of the crop, he said.

The planting date has nothing to do with a spring infestation of the Hessian fly, he added. The winds just blew them up from Texas. Mr. Olson said the flies laid their eggs on the first joint.

It isn't common to get a spring infestation, he added, but it can happen.

The group also talked about leaf rust. Mr. O'Brien said it's up to each farmer whether to spray for the disease or not. Sometimes spraying will pay off and other times it isn't needed, he said, adding that it costs about \$18 to \$20, at least, an acre to treat for the disease.

The wheat plots will be harvested and the extension office will have the information including the weight and yield of each variety, said Mr. Olson.

Re-Load moving to new location by end of summer

The Re-Load, serving cold beer, pizzas, sandwiches and more, will move across the street to the west side of Penn Avenue by summer's end.

Mick and Rhonda Barth purchased the old Flower Shop building on S. Penn, just north of Addleman Drug, in May. Since then, the couple has worked to get the building cleaned out and remodeled.

With the help of their sons, Wiley Farr and David Barth, and another young man, Seth Ritter, the couple started tearing out the interior.

The Barths will celebrate their 14th anniversary at the Re-Load on Thursday, although they didn't buy the business until the following January. Mrs. Barth said a cousin, Chris Walston, owned the business before them.

She said she started working at the bar in 1974 when the Castles owned the business, then called the Alibi. The bar was on U.S. 36 where Trader Horn is now located. In 1986, the business moved back to Main Street.

The Barths rent the building at 160 S. Penn from Rich and Anna Shaw.

With more space in the new location, Mr. Barth said, they plan to put in a bigger kitchen, which will be open like the current one. That will provide a more user friendly work

space, he said, making it easier to give quick service.

They are still tearing out the interior of the new building, said Mr. Barth, and they will install a new roof and new electrical, plumbing, furnace, air conditioning and flooring over the next few months.

He said he would like the bar to be relocated by the time school starts in August or at least by Sept. 1.

At the new building, the couple said, they plan to have a nonsmoking environment up front with smoking in the back of the bar. They said they will have more tables to allow for bigger parties and more seating.

The Barths said they plan to make the transition to the new building smooth, keeping the Re-Load open until moving day. Mrs. Barth said they want to keep the down time as minimal as possible.

Mr. Barth said they have appreciated the community's support and hope the customers will stay with them through the move. He said he has had lots of people volunteer to help, adding that he didn't think he would turn anyone down.

Groups receive \$300 each

The Decatur County commissioners gave \$300 each to nine organizations, which had requested money from the history book fund at the meeting last Tuesday.

Organizations included Decatur Tomorrow Sappa Park Committee, Tripple Creek Riders, the fair foundation for the livestock barn, Oberlin Rotary, the fair board for a new sound system, the county recycling group, the Last Indian Raid Museum, the health foundation and the Chamber of Commerce.

The money was raised by the county selling leftover history books. The commissioners asked for letters from organizations asking for money for upcoming projects and got nine.

That leaves \$329 in the history book account.

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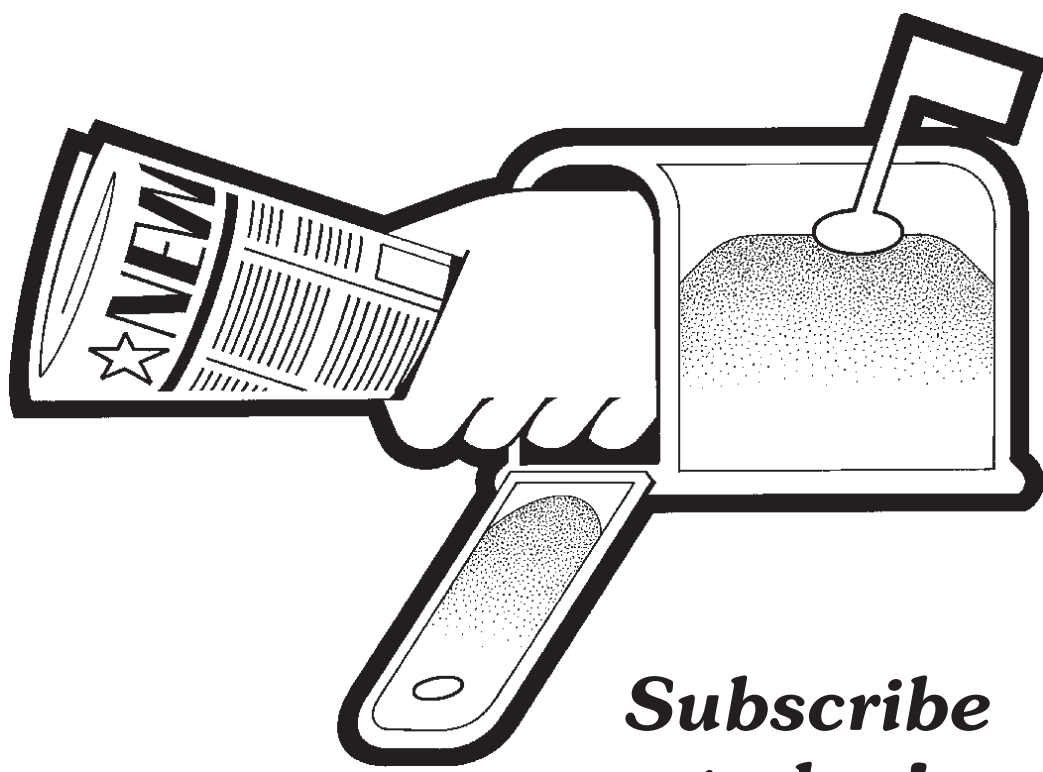
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