

* Co-op joins with others for storage

(Continued from Page 1A) where they sit in the deal."

When looking into the benefits for the Co-op, he said, the main issue of concern was storage.

"First of all, we've had to put products on the ground and sell it quicker than would be profitable," he said. "Second, we are very storage deficient in our company. By joining, we'll be able to arbitrage (buy grain someplace else and be able to ship it from a location closer to the end user) grain better."

"Here, we have 60 days to harvest and turn the grain out. It's not always the most profitable, but it's what we've had to do. Last year, we made an effort to keep as much as possible due to the market, and it paid off."

"But as our farmers ... aren't selling as much as harvest; you're holding it out longer for more profit. And that has hurt our abilities to turn the wheat out for the incoming fall crops. It's a storage deficiency."

"That part is long-storage in their system - they may have 5 million in storage, but they take 4 million a year, for example. When they're buying wheat, they won't have to move anything because they have storage, and will allow us to put corn inside our storage instead of on the ground, but still keep the storage income flowing in. The grain that generates no income then goes out so the grain that does can come in."

Mr. Anderson, while pointing out the benefits of CoMark to the members, was quick to say that it wasn't an instant cure for the association's problems.

"I'm not saying that we won't be dumping grain on the ground over the next four to five years," he said. "It will depend on harvest in both places."

"But, by them bankrolling the purchase of grain, last year's interest was \$800,000 to \$900,000, and if we don't have to do that, then that's a savings to us on interest. From the CoMark side of things, the advantages are in the background. They can pick up on markets we can't, and they can ship the best grain to the best bid from the closest location."

There will be a few differences for farmers, he said.

"After Aug. 1," Mr. Anderson continued, "if you have grain in open storage, it's part of CoMark at that time. The storage rate won't change, but we'll have 15 days of free storage instead of 30. Fifteen is the industry standard."

"If you bring grain in on June 1 and sell it on June 25, we will take the price of storage out of the check. If you don't sell it by Dec. 31 that year, we'll bill you for the storage. A lot of people come in and prepay that for tax purposes. The current policy on condo storage (wherein farmers who helped pay half of the cost for extra storage 20 years ago in return for not having to pay a fee) will remain unchanged."

It sounds like a lot to digest, Mr. Anderson said, but for farmers, not a whole lot will really be changing.

"Those are the four biggest things you're going to see. When you come in to do something, all the same people will be here. The checks on the grain we purchase after Aug. 1 will say CoMark Grain. The tickets on the scales will also say that, with "Decatur Branch" on it. The accounts will still be used, and the system will be the same, though account numbers may change. If you defer payments before Aug. 1, Decatur will authorize those checks. After that, CoMark will."

Mr. Anderson stressed the positives of the change.

"Their banker is the same we use, and their auditing firm is the same. The board of directors for CoMark are the general managers of each co-op. Their fiscal year is Dec. 31 and ours is Jan. 31, so there may be some changes down the line."

"They have very strong talent in their organization, and all they do is market grain. We do it to the best

of our abilities here, but it's going to be a positive change."

The quality of the grain is still the co-op's responsibility, Mr. Anderson said, and the co-op can't be any more lax just because it has a marketing team now.

In answering questions, Mr. Anderson did his best to make clear where the Co-op and CoMark would be doing what and where. For example, both corn and wheat will be going out on trucks.

"We're either going to be the largest or second-to-largest co-op in the company," he said, "because of our five-year average of grain receipts."

That average, he said, is 10 million bushels.

Mr. Anderson assured the seven farmers who attended the meeting that there would be no changes in how the co-op bids on grains in general and no automatic drops in price. The end result, he said, is to become more profitable so that they can invest in facilities and pay patronage in the future.

One farmer asked if this meant that the co-op wouldn't own its own storage anymore, but Mr. Anderson replied that was not the case.

"Our co-op will still own the elevators; all they have is the grain, which is covered under federal warehouse bonding and licensing in all the members' elevators. The upkeep, discounts and discount schedule are our responsibility. They hire the trucks, and we got them in touch with some of our local guys. They like to hire local."

One question everyone was curious about was posed late in the meeting - Will the basis farmers be paid on improve?

"Our basis is based on need," Mr. Anderson said, "market telling and what the competition is doing. I don't think you're going to see hardly any changes in the way it was priced before this company and after, unless we see bids close to us that we latch on to. Then you could see an increase, if they're closer. If we still pay attention to our competition and the market around us, I don't see it changing at all. Competition between the co-op and other elevators will not change much."

Mr. Anderson seemed wary of raising farmers' expectations too high in the process of explaining how the benefits would materialize.

"I would rather underpromise and overdeliver than the opposite," he said.

The transition might result in some issues, he added.

"We know we can raise huge grain crops here," he said, "but now we need to get the facilities to handle it. We need to update our facilities to handle our crops, and to do that we need to be more profitable. We hope to become more profitable by joining forces with CoMark."

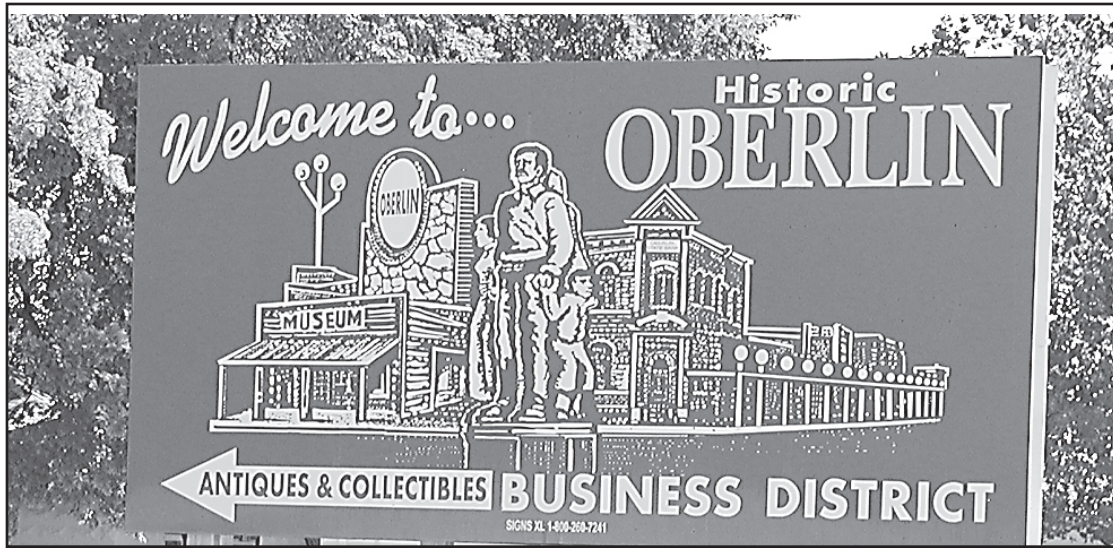
When it came time to talk dollar figures, Mr. Anderson didn't hesitate.

"The profits from the CoMark group are split among the cooperatives," he said. "That money will come back to the company. At the end of the fiscal year, after audit and going through patronage process, it will be treated the same as it always has been."

Mr. Anderson will be a board member with CoMark, and Chris Bailey, a co-op board member, will be on the advisory board, he said. The main office of CoMark is in Cheney, just west of Wichita.

"We've got a lot of local people working for the co-op," he said at the end of the meeting, "and that's a special thing."

The 11 other members are Anthony Farmers Co-op, Cairo Co-op, Danville Co-op, Farmers Co-op of Garden Plain, OK Co-op, Farmers Co-op Association of Columbus, Farmers Co-op in Conway Springs, Two Rivers Co-op, Valley Co-op, Caldwell Co-op and Farmers Co-op of Wellington.



New signs take over

A LARGE NEW SIGN pointing the way to downtown was ready to be turned around and installed Monday afternoon next to the Pizza Hut on U.S. 36. An identical sign was to replace the old sign (left) that still stood on U.S. 83.

- Photo by Cynthia Haynes

County hopes feds will help bridge

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP sdccamp@nwkansan.com

Decatur County commissioners gave Road Supervisor Tim Stallman the go-ahead to apply for federal money to replace an old wooden bridge three miles west of Clayton on old highway 383 with a new concrete one.

The new bridge will span about 160 feet, he said, adding that the county will be working on four other bridges this year.

"Last week, there wasn't enough rain for a bridge," joked County Attorney Steve Hirsch. "I was a little amused by how fast we went from drought to rain there."

Mr. Stallman added that the application to the Kansas Department of Transportation was just the first step to get the project in line for federal money. The total cost is estimated at \$578,000, but the county would only be responsible for 20 percent of that, about \$115,000, plus the cost of designing it.

There are over 350 bridges on county and township roads in Decatur County, Mr. Stallman said.

About half need to be replaced, but using both the federal program and county money, the county can only afford to do two to three a year.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Passed a motion to give the fire department money for electrical repairs at the Jennings ambulance barn. The air conditioning was wired on the same circuit with the garage door, electrician Brad Larson said, so when the door went up, it would trip the breaker, especially when it was hot outside. The commissioners agreed to pay for the repairs, estimated at \$500 to \$600.

- Approved a motion to buy new masks, breathing filters and fire-retardant foam for the fire department. The masks and filters will be \$2,200 and the foam, which helps fight oil hay fires, among others, will be \$1,040.

"We need to restock before another fire happens," Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said. "Supplies are short all over now."

- Hired a surveyor to determine the area for a proposed beer garden

at the county fair ground. Brian Berlier, of BEB and Associates out of Norton, will be taking on the task. He and race promoter Rick Salem are going to leave the center area of the grandstand for families and zone the side aisles, walkways and front of the garden area for beer. Mr. Berlier said the cost would not exceed \$1,000.

- Heard from Clerk of the District Court Janet Meitl that the courtroom repairs are going well. She said that the sheet rock is up and the back hall is mostly cleared out.

- Decided that stored items removed for the courtroom construction would be put in a county auction in the first part of September. A Jeep from the sheriff's department also will be included.

- Heard that the Coryell jury trial has been continued from Oct. 22 to Nov 2.

- Heard from Treasurer Jean Hale that the new computer system the state bought for motor vehicle and license work has been down more than it's been up. On the last day of the month, she said, the system was

down all but two hours.

"We're lucky we don't have the lines that some counties do," she said.

- Heard a report from Noxious Weed Director Gaylen Huntley that three quarters of the township roads have been sprayed, and that they were working on the dirt road tops. It's cheaper and more effective to spray, he said, because the county won't have to hire someone with a grader to do it and it won't pile dirt up on the sides of the roads.

He also said recycling is up since the burn ban started, with an increase of plastics and cardboard, much of it from the Decatur Co-op.

- Heard a report from Mr. Stallman that the city bridge project on South Penn Avenue is set to start Monday. Reese Construction will be coming in Aug. 1 to begin construction on three steel bridges on county roads, replacing the old wooden ones with steel ones for a total of five to be built over the next few months. It is a joint project between the county, Reese and Wayne Hackney of Oberlin Concrete.

* Attorney general visits with area prosecutors

(Continued from Page 1A)

Since last year, he said, Nicole Romine, an assistant attorney general, has staffed a regional office in Goodland, helping area prosecutors and coordinating with the state.

With legislation and policy, Mr. Schmidt said, he'd like to play a better role in coordination.

"We tried to step it up," he said, "and the goal is to be the coordinating, not dominating, force."

"We got all but one of our public safety proposals approved, and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation formed a new crimes against children unit."

His office is now recruiting the staff, he said, and last time he had talked to them, they were going to train five agents to be placed throughout the state.

"Legislation authorized additional funding for us as well," he said "When we started, we had one digital lab analyst. Now we'll have nine. Our goal is to supplement, and not to replicate, what we have. Hopefully we'll be able to get digital evidence back to you quicker now."

"We're also improving in the bureaus of toxicology and firearms. We went from one to three examiners of firearms."

"Hopefully, I will know more by September," he said, referring to a lack of space for the bureau con-

tributing to slow return times. "In January we will get approval for a new lab that meets the needs of the modern criminal justice system."

"We've worked on overhauling our capacity for (consumer protection) caseloads and alignment of resources," he said.

While consumer protection cases can bring in a lot of money, he continued, he measures success in one question - did we do justice by the Kansans?

David Baumgartner, the Phillips County attorney, said that his county seems to be getting a lot more sex crimes involving children. Is that unusual, he asked, or is this a problem statewide?

"I will tell you that I have eight cases like that right now, which for us is a hefty pace," Mr. Schmidt responded.

Ms. Romine, the assistant attorney general in the Goodland office, said that all rural prosecutors are saying that these cases are increasing. Society is better educated, she said, and children are more comfortable talking about abuse.

"The violent crime rate went down," Mr. Baumgartner said. "Is that because of the Kansas conceal and carry (law)? Did that measure have an impact?"

"That's a good question," Mr. Schmidt said "I don't know. We

all have our theories, but I don't know what the data will say about the causes."

Kevin Berens, the Thomas County attorney, brought up the problem of prison space.

"The prison population is going to exceed 20,000..." he said. "As we continue, if the Legislature doesn't increase capacity for these guys, then we'll have a problem."

"For drugs, treatment is the new thing. The issues I see are driving under the influence arrests. We have such a slow turn-around on our blood tests ... it's six months on some of these toxicology blood

tests."

Karen Whitman, an aide to the attorney general, took up the answer.

"I know that the lab they're being sent to is in Pennsylvania," she said, "and we're sending 40 a day. There are only two analysts there, but the lab is accredited and they're ready to come to court when needed, and that's taking some time."

"We're trying to make it so we can have a live feed in the courtroom for specialists to be in court," Mr. Schmidt said, "instead of (them) driving out there."

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