

Foot of snow not enough to end a year’s drought

Anyone who thinks we’re out of the woods when it comes to the drought, just because we got some snow, is as optimistic as a New York commodities trader.

Which, come to think of it, might be why those folks sent the price of wheat spiraling down this week. The market knocked 58 cents, nearly 8 percent, off the cash price over the last two weeks.

So, we had a blizzard.

Oberlin got maybe 15 inches in two storms, and that amounted to about an inch of moisture.

That, according to wire reports, was about what most of the drought belt was reporting, though the farther east you go, the more water they got.

It brought our moisture for the year to 1.41 inches, which was .4 of an inch more than we had at this time last year. And that sounds pretty good – until you realize that last year we got only 11.35 inches all year. That is less than half our normal precipitation – and dangerously close to the 8 inches that defines a desert.

The wheat crop? Kansas Agricultural Statistics says it’s a little better now, but 41 percent remained in fair condition and 36 percent is poor to very poor. Statewide, 61 percent of the fields were short to very short of topsoil moisture. Here in the northwest, however, fully three-fourths of the fields were dry.

What would it take to end the drought?

Not an inch of rain, not a foot of snow.

Climatologist Mark Svoboda of the National Drought Mitigation Center in Nebraska told the Associated Press a foot of snow usually equals an inch of rain. That means, he said, it’d take two to four feet just to make up the deficit since fall, he said, and no one was asking for that – not all at once, anyway.

He estimated that we need 12 to 16 inches of moisture for fields and pastures to fully recover. So, the drought won’t end anytime soon.

Still, an inch of water is an inch of water. Wheat plants that were beginning to parch in the sun now lie under the snow, protected from the dry winds of spring.

When it melts, the moisture will keep them going for a while.

For a while.

They’ll need more in a couple of weeks, more after that. It’s likely we’ll get enough over the next three months to keep what’s left of the crop going. We usually do.

With a dry fall, though, many fields were damaged. Some didn’t come up at all. Farmers will be looking to plant milo or another crop in the spring – if there’s enough moisture.

The price, down right now, will bounce around, jumping this way and that with news reports. There’ll be a wheat crop, but nobody expects a good one.

One blizzard does not a drought break.

A couple dozen more might, but only a New York commodities trader would bet on that.

— Steve Haynes

Snow just keeps chasing us

We spent the weekend either rushing to leave someplace or driving slow and careful, it seemed. In between, we went to meetings, did job interviews and chatted with old friends.

It was time for the Colorado Press Association convention, held every year near the end of February. Cynthia and I have been going for 32 years now, though we haven’t lived in Colorado for 20. We kept going because we had made so many friends there, and I’m invited to the past president’s breakfast forever.

There’s no parole from being a past president. You’re only excused by death or infirmity.

We’ve never seen the time we couldn’t get to Denver for this meeting, though over the weekend, I came to think maybe we should have made this year an exception.

The fun started Wednesday when Cynthia started checking the forecast.

“Maybe we should get out of town ahead of the storm,” she said.

We threw everything together and wolfed down some lunch. We started west with snow already filtering down, though the “main storm” wasn’t to hit us until the next day. Little tendrils of snow danced across the pavement pretty much all the way to Denver.

Things went well until we got into the city. There, the Interstate was snowpacked and slushy. We got off onto city streets, and that worked fine, except that we picked one that was backed up for a mile under the freeway. We were a little late getting downtown.

The fancy convention hotel didn’t



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

want us early unless we’d pay the regular (read expensive) rate, but some friends offered a room.

We found Internet access and worked all day. That night, we saw old friends and went out again. Next day there were meetings and seminars and interviews with college seniors. That’s a vital part of the meeting for us.

Saturday, more meetings. We skipped the awards, since we didn’t win anything.

I was trying to take a nap – I’d had two of those nights where you wake up around 4 a.m. and, boing!, can’t get back to sleep – when she decided to check the forecast again.

“Have you seen this?” she shouted.

Seems they expected a blizzard across eastern Colorado on Sunday.

“We might not get home until Monday,” I said.

“Or Wednesday, if we were really lucky,” she added.

But I reminded her what the hotel did to unexpected guests. Maybe we should just go home, she said.

But we’d promised our niece we’d take her to dinner, and she was holding a lounge belonging to our son in Lawrence. She’s in medical



Weather work isn’t her forte

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I am a writer and not a weather forecaster.

Last week, I ended this column with a bright prediction that spring was drawing nigh and flowers would be bursting forth any minute. Boy was I wrong!

Not only is spring not around the corner, but Old Man Winter seems to have moved back in – with the intent to stay awhile. I think about a foot of snow was dumped on this part of the country, with drifts much higher than that.

Like a ninny, though, I thought I had to go to work for a few hours right in the middle of it all. Thanks to those hard-working highway crews, the roads were open.

We can’t thank those guys enough. The rest of us come and go because we want to. They go out in the worst kinds of weather because it’s their job.

One responsibility I have, no matter the weather, is my chickens. Jim went out earlier the day of the storm to feed them. Later, I scooped a path and carried more feed and water to them. None seemed to be the worse for wear, and they even thanked us with a few eggs.

I scooped my way to the wild bird feeders, too, but they eat faster than I can fill the containers. In fact, I saw they were empty Sunday night, but those feathered friends had to wait ‘til Monday morning for more chow.

I’m not a devoted bird watcher, but I do love to stand at my kitchen window and watch the scrappy little sparrows fight for their share with the cardinals and one pretty little bluebird.

The avian broadcasting system must be working fine, because I’ve never seen so many birds at the feeders before. Probably a sign of how



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplots65@gmail.com

hungry they are.

—ob—

I got a reminder this weekend of why I don’t cater parties any more.

Twenty plus years ago when I lived in Dallas, I needed to make extra money, but I didn’t want a second job that would take me away from my girls any more than I had to. It dawned on me that the office where I worked paid a lot of money to have sandwiches and veggie trays for committee meetings and such. I told one of the directors I could make food trays that would be better and cheaper.

Soon I was the unofficial office caterer. When they asked me if I could make “such-and-such,” I would always answer, “Yes,” then go home and look for a recipe.

One thing led to another, and I began to cater parties for other businesses, then do wedding receptions and company dinners.

There were many times when I would stay up all night cooking, grab a couple hours of sleep, load it all in my car, deliver and set up, serve, clean up, then take the leftovers home.

Remember I said 20+ years ago. My memory of how much work it really was had faded and, when a friend was being honored, I offered to prepare the refreshments for a small reception. It started out to be a simple little party, but like many of my plans, it mushroomed.

Mushrooms ... that reminds me, I should have fixed my stuffed mushrooms. They are delicious. See, there I go. As it was, I still got carried away.

There was the layered Mexican dip, dill dip, fruit dip, shrimp dip, cheese tray, veggie tray, fruit tray, Texas sheet cake, chips, crackers, jalapeño roll-ups, chocolate-covered strawberries, little wieners in a cranberry-picante sauce, white-chocolate candy hearts and fruit punch.

What I had forgotten were those long hours on your feet peeling carrots, mixing, stirring, arranging, wrapping, storing, packing, serving, cleaning. By the time it was all over, the only dip I wanted was one in the deep end of our Jacuzzi bathtub.

From the Bible

And there came a voice from heaven, saying, “Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

— Mark 1:11-13

Writer worries about money

To the Editor:

So, I read the Jan. 30 paper, and I sort of fear for the city of Oberlin’s future.

The mayor has some very valid concerns about the financial burdens we’re about to take on, the townspeople are writing letters to the editor about letting the voice of the people be heard, and their votes, stand and we have at least one council member whose stance seems to be “it’s not like the money is coming out of our pocket.”

To me, it’s the federal government in a microscope.

We’re building a runway that we don’t need and can’t afford; we’re most likely going to be building a new swimming pool that’s overpriced, and while we could use it, we don’t need it.

Plus, the state tax cut scheduled for July that the pool committee insisted would help defray the cost to us local shoppers looks more and more likely to evaporate.

Letters to the Editor

To top this all off, a couple weeks back, we had community leaders complaining in the paper about Nextech not spending 2.5 million dollars of its own money to overcome the problem of the city’s neglected infrastructure.

We are about to take on millions of dollars in debt for an airport and a pool, and yet, nobody, young or old should drink our water.

I guess it’s fine to swim in, as long as we have an awesome pool. We can’t get fiber to the home because the utility poles in our town can’t safely hold one more cable.

The same people complaining that Nextech is screwing the town of Oberlin are busy trying to spend money on things that are not necessities, while ignoring the things that are.

The townspeople are divided over money and want. It seems a whole bunch of people are putting their wants on the top of the shopping list, ignoring the needs of the community and refusing to balance their checkbook to see if they can afford it. Remember this, a government, federal, state or local, has absolutely no money until it takes it from a taxpayer.

Chris Mastin, Oberlin

EDITOR’S NOTE: This letter was set aside for information three weeks ago and then got lost until someone asked about it on Facebook. It’s our policy to run all letters unless they raise legal issues. We just lost this one; no excuses. Our apologies. — Steve Haynes

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Cancer group looks for volunteers

To the Editor:

Due to a lack of committee people and volunteers, the American Cancer Society has come to the difficult realization that we cannot hold a Relay for Life in Decatur County this year unless volunteers step forward to support the event.

For the past several months, society staff has unsuccessfully tried to recruit volunteers and to fill Relay committee positions.

Volunteers are the driving force behind all Relay for Life events, and without enough committed people in this community, the Relay cannot continue.

Rest assured that the society will continue to provide much-needed programs and services for cancer patients and their caregivers in Decatur County.

We expect that 21 Decatur County

residents will hear the words “You have cancer” this year.

Last year, Decatur County residents received American Cancer Society services including information and support, transportation assistance, Look Good, Feel Better appearance classes, patient packets and Personal Health Manager materials.

About 30 survivors were honored at last year’s Relay for Life in Decatur County and \$8,990 was raised for the fight against cancer.

We encourage those survivors, care givers and newly diagnosed cancer patients in Decatur County to attend a Relay for Life event in a neighboring county, such as Norton at 6 p.m. Friday, June 7.

Call Lee Russell at (785) 871-1539 for information.

We appreciate the support that

Decatur County has shown us. If you have questions about Relay, please contact me at (785) 820-9423 or Tammy.Kimminau@cancer.org.

Tammy Kimminau, Salina American Cancer Society in Kansas

In the U.S.A.

“Common-looking people are the best in the world; that is the reason the Lord makes so many of them.”

— Abraham Lincoln
16th U.S. president