

Third freeze hurts beleaguered crop

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Just when farmers were worried their wheat could hardly take any more, another cold snap — the third in the last month — dropped temperatures below freezing on Thursday, giving the hardy plants a run for their money.

“The repeated hard freezes in Kansas are taking a toll on some of the wheat furthest along in development,” said Jim Shroyer, a Kansas State University research and extension crop production specialist. “Temperatures were in the mid- to low-20s on the nights of April 23 and 24, which is low enough to damage wheat in more advanced growth stages.”

Keith VanSlike, Extension agronomy agent in Norton, said that wheat usually looks its worst anywhere from five to eight days after a severe cold snap. On Monday, April 22, he and Mr. Shroyer toured Sheridan, Decatur and Norton counties to survey the damage for the Extension office.

“This is the third episode of hard freezes we’ve had, starting April 9,” Mr. Shroyer said. “This time, the freeze caught a few more fields in the jointing stage than the freezes on April 9 and 10 did.”

Of all the wheat, Mr. VanSlike warned, irrigated fields will see the

worst damage.

“Some stems could be mostly or entirely lost,” he added. “The irrigated wheat may have been further developed, just depending on stem development (which makes it more vulnerable to the freeze). Some of the dryland wheat in southwest Kansas, especially early maturing varieties and wheat in low-lying areas also may lose some tillers, or have even more severe damage in some cases.”

Mr. VanSlike said that the whole northwest Kansas region has been affected by the freezes, but that a lot of the fields he and Mr. Shroyer looked over appeared to be green-ing back up pretty well, especially where the growing point of the wheat was still at the soil level. Even where tillers were killed, he said, they saw new ones springing up in many cases.

“The best thing producers can do for the first few days is walk the fields to observe lodging, crimped stems and damaged leaves,” Mr. Shroyer advised. “Be patient, and don’t take any immediate actions as a result of the freeze, such as destroying the field for recropping. It will take several days of warm weather to accurately evaluate the extent of damage.”

Mr. VanSlike said that after several days, farmers should split

open some stems to check on the heads and get a good idea of where the crop is at this point. If the head is greenish and seems firm, he said, it’s probably fine. But if it’s yellowish and mushy, it probably was killed. But even this may be OK, he said, since new tillers can spring up from the crown of dead ones.

“The wheat may look ragged because the main tillers are absent,” Mr. VanSlike said, “but enough tillers may survive to produce good yields if spring growing conditions are good. If both the main and secondary tillers are injured, the field may eventually have large areas that have a yellowish cast and reduced yield potential.”

Overall, he said, the slowly emerging fields that were planted last fall and are just popping up now will average a loss of 40 to 60 percent as compared to those that emerged before winter, he said.

“The best thing we need is moderate temperatures, slow grain-filling temperatures and no or minimum stress in order to help this crop along,” he said.

More information on freeze damage is available online at www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/crps12/c646.pdf, or call Mr. VanSlike at (785) 877-5755.



Elementary track and field day fun

ON MONDAY, Jacquelyn Marshall (above) tried her hardest at the Oberlin Elementary School fun day. Giada Smith (left), Josie Sauvage and Giuliana Smith sat on a blanket in the grass and watched the events at the high school track.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Aviation agency pulls out of city airport deal

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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The Federal Aviation Administration has pulled out of the project to build a longer runway at the Oberlin Municipal Airport, City Administrator Karen Larson told the City Council on Thursday, and unless the state can help the city find some money, the project may have hit its final speed bump.

City officials now are looking at extending the present runway a bit to allow larger planes, such as air ambulances, to take off during hot weather.

“Right now,” she said, “the FAA has told us that without solid proof that big jets will be flying in here, they won’t give us any money to do any more (of the project)... We’re looking at doing 500 more feet on the one runway we already have, and I need to know if the

council wants to go ahead and pursue that idea.

“The FAA won’t work with us anymore (on the new runway), but (the Kansas Department of Transportation) may help us add 500 feet to the current runway, and that might at least help with takeoffs.”

Originally, the second phase of the plan for the airport was to build a second runway that would have the length required for large planes to take off and land safely, like those carrying commercial goods and freight. Also on the minds of those who wanted a longer runway were the air ambulances that rush critical patients to larger hospitals. Those planes can take off and land on the current runway except during very hot weather.

For most aviation insurance companies, 5,000 feet is the length a runway must be for small jets and larger (See NEW on Page 8A)

But wait! There could still be fireworks for this Fourth of July

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Are you longing for the day you can blow something up again, wistfully daydreaming of another Fourth of July when you can safely make sparks fly?

Well so is Jonathan Fick, who came to the City Council meeting Thursday to ask for a permit to do just that this year — if the weather permits.

City Attorney Steve Hirsch said that while the city can’t exactly issue a permit for the fireworks show

Mr. Fick puts on out at the city ball field every year, it can give him its blessing — which the council happily agreed to, again, weather permitting.

Mr. Fick said that this year’s display will be either June 28 or 29 at the baseball field. The reason he came to ask for a permit this year, he said, is that there is a precedent in Colorado that sometimes, even if fireworks are banned due to a drought, a city will still let a professional shoot a live show. Mr. Hirsch said that unfortunately, that doesn’t

apply here in Kansas.

Mr. Fick assured the council that his fireworks are all electronically shot, that he already has an insurance policy if something was to go awry and that a full fire protection plan would be in place.

If the weather is good and the city and county give the thumbs-up on the day of the show, it can proceed, Mr. Hirsch said, but he reminded Mr. Fick that last year, fireworks weren’t banned until July 3.

At its previous meeting April 18, the council:

- Re-elected Councilman Rusty Adleman as council president.
- Had a 30-minute closed to discuss personnel, after which the members approved a \$1-an-hour pay raise for electric department employee Logan Fortin, who completed his third session of lineman’s training.
- Heard that the crew has been working to smooth out some bumps on Penn Avenue and replace some of the bricks. Mrs. Larson said the city is also working with a handful of downtown businesses, including

Prairie Petals, to replace some of the curbs, gutters and sidewalks.

• Heard from Mrs. Larson that many businesses have agreed to buy special custom-made benches to feature their advertising, as well as some families for memorials. Walter Lewis of JLB Welding of McCook is selling the benches at \$500 each, she said, and the city has designated 22 places for them at the fairgrounds, parks, downtown and at the cemetery.

“They’re metal and have a kind of plastic paint on them,” she said,

“and I think it’s going to make our town look nice. It won’t cost us anything because he’s selling them to the businesses, and places like NexTech and Verizon are more than happy to buy them for advertising. If you know anyone who would like to buy one, have them call the city office (at 475-2217).

• Heard that there would be no report from health-code enforcement officer Jan Ackerman this month. Mrs. Larson said that Mrs. Ackerman told her that she was still (See FIREWORKS on Page 8A)

Troopers watching for seat belt usage

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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If you’ve been one of the unlucky ones to get a \$10 ticket for not wearing your seat belt lately, take comfort in this: You’re not alone.

State Trooper Tod Hileman says a recent slew of tickets on *The Oberlin Herald’s* second page started because of the SAFE program at Decatur Community High School, which encourages kids to buckle up with contests and prizes. The flow has kept pace since Oberlin is now home to not one, but two new troopers.

“Part of the program is an enforcement period,” Mr. Hileman said, “and that was in March for two weeks. And it’s not just for teens; it’s part of the initiative.

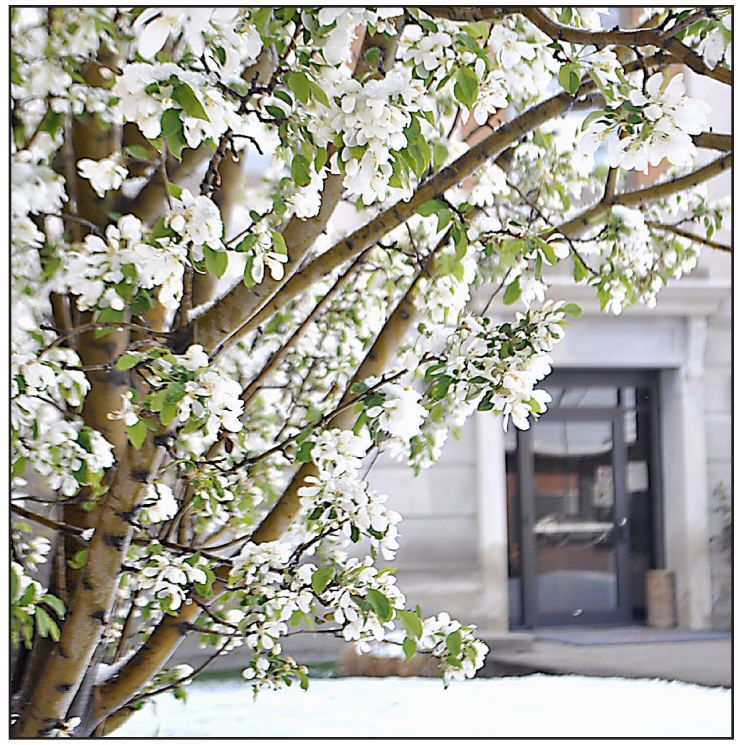
“So we’re looking to see if the

teens are buckling up, but you can’t let it pass you up when you see an adult not wearing one, too. So if we see a violation of the seat belt law, we’ll always tag you for it.”

The fine is only \$10 for adults. A passenger can get a ticket as well as the driver. And if you’re under 18, the fine is \$60.

Mr. Hileman said the enforcement isn’t likely to wind down, either. Over Memorial Day weekend, the Kansas Department of Transportation offers troopers and officers with other agencies financial incentives to focus on some area of law enforcement, mostly for catching those who drive under the influence. This year, he said, the focus is on seat belt and speed violations. The Fourth of July, he said, will be all about drunk driving violations.

“Seat belt usage and removing drunk drivers from the roads are our biggest goals,” the trooper said.



A LATE SNOW DRIFTED down on the Decatur County courthouse in Oberlin on Thursday, leaving about 4 1/2 inches on the ground the morning of May 2. The record for the latest snow, at just a trace, was set May 7, 1938.

— Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCAMP

Late snow surprises, but sets no record here

Sandwiched between a handful of warm spring days, the 4 1/2 inches of snow that Decatur County got Thursday was predicted by many, but still seemed to surprise those who study the always unpredictable weather of the sunflower state down in Goodland.

“We were thinking the last snow we’d get for the year was the one early last week, but then we had this one, too,” said meteorologist Randy Bowers of the National Weather Service office in Goodland. “As far as snowfall, most areas got around 3 inches, and a few got 4 inches throughout the community and the county, which is really pretty good for this time of year.

“The liquid equivalent was about a quarter of an inch of water, which isn’t too much, but every little bit helps at this point. We didn’t set any records, though. It was cold, way below normal, but

no record breakers.”

Mike Kochasic, another meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said that the snow Thursday just barely missed the current record holder, which is May 7, 1938, when Oberlin received “just a trace” of snow.

The Kansas drought, however, was unchanged by the flurry of late-to-the-party snowflakes. The National Drought Mitigation Center, which monitors conditions throughout the entire Midwest daily, still says that Decatur County is suffering “exceptional” drought conditions, which on the center’s U.S. Drought Monitor ranks as the worst kind.

Mr. Kochasic said that right now, Oberlin stands at about 3.9 inches of total precipitation for the year, compared to what’s usually the norm — 5 inches.