

Wheat Commission seeks at-large applications

The Kansas Wheat Commission is aggressively seeking applications for two at-large commissioners, one from the combined western three crop reporting districts of Kansas and one from the central three.

These two at-large commissioners will represent a geographical balance of the areas where the majority of wheat is produced in Kansas. Interested Kansas wheat producers must be willing to represent other wheat producers and serve a three-year term.

Submit an application to the Kansas Wheat Commission, 2630 Claflin Road, Manhattan, Kan. 66502-2743.

Applications, which must be received by February 15, 2004 should include: 1) nominee's name, biography and resume, 2) references, and 3) a letter from the nominee stating his or her willingness to serve.

At-large commissioners will be chosen at the March 2004 board meeting and will take office in April. For information, call 785-539-0255.

Pigs in Wichita, cows in Burrton snarl traffic

WICHITA (AP) — About 500 pigs died when a tractor-trailer overturned on an interstate on-ramp, snarling traffic for hours.

Hours after the Wednesday accident in Wichita, a herd of 100 cows that wandered onto Highway 50 in Harvey County near Burrton caused a five-vehicle accident, killing 19 cows.

Two others were so badly injured they had to be destroyed.

In the Wichita accident, a tractor-trailer hauling 1,000 small pigs in multilevel pens flipped on its side at about 1 p.m.

The ramp onto Interstate 235 reopened at about 7 p.m., said Highway Patrol Lt. Chip Westfall.

The truck driver and his passenger suffered only minor injuries.

The truck overturned after going out of control on the ramp's tight curve, Westfall said on Thursday.

"This ramp has had its fair share of rollovers," he said.

A few pigs that wriggled free from the damaged trailer had to be recaptured.

The pigs inside kept up a constant, high-pitched squealing as the wreck was cleared up.

Animal control officers herded the pigs through a chute to a small trailer, where they were taken to temporary facilities.

The pigs, weighing 50 to 70 pounds, were bound from Oklahoma to farms in Iowa and Minnesota to be fed prior to slaughter, he said.

In the Burrton accident, the wandering herd of cows caused a crash involving three tractor-trailers and two cars. One person had minor injuries.

The 8 p.m. accident happened about seven miles east of the Harvey-Reno County line, Westfall said.

Rover rolls off lander and onto Mars

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — The Spirit rover successfully rolled onto Mars early Thursday, placing its six wheels on solid martian ground for the first time since the robot bounced down on the Red Planet nearly two weeks ago.

Engineers and scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory cheered loudly after receiving confirmation at 5 a.m. EST that the maneuver was a success.

"Mars now is our sandbox, and we are ready to play and learn," said JPL director Charles Elachi.

Black-and-white pictures beamed from Spirit showed its two rear wheels on the martian soil, with its lander behind it.

Two parallel tracks led away from the lander.

"This is a big relief. We are on Mars. Spirit has landed," said Rob Manning, manager of the entry, descent and landing portion of the mission.

"Our wheels are finally dirty."

Jennifer Trosper, mission manager for surface operations, opened a celebratory bottle of champagne at a news conference.

"Now we are the mission that we all envisioned 3 1/2 years ago," she said. Elachi noted President Bush's call on Wednesday for moon missions and long-term robotic and human journeys to Mars.

"We at NASA, we move awfully fast," Elachi joked. "In less than 15 hours, we are doing our first step."

Spirit was to have taken less than two minutes to travel the 10 feet from the unfolded petals of its lander onto Mars. Engineers said the move likely would be the riskiest of Spirit's entire three-month mission.

Engineers delayed the move for three days to give Spirit time to reposition itself atop its lander, where

Food safety reorganization plan revealed

By JOHN HANNA
Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP) — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' plan for reorganizing food safety programs is drawing some praise, but a public health advocate argues it could hurt consumers.

The plan would transfer the responsibility for inspecting grocery stores, vending machines, conveniences stores, bakeries, food wholesalers and some other businesses from the Department of Health and Environment to the Department of Agriculture. KDHE would continue to inspect restaurants.

After receiving the plan from administration officials this week, Senate Agriculture Committee members praised it, although Chairman Derek Schmidt, R-Independence, said he wants to know why restaurant inspections would not be transferred, too.

But Sally Finney, lobbyist for local health departments and the Kansas Public Health Association, said if a consolidation occurs, all food safety programs should be under KDHE.

She also said putting an agency that promotes agribusiness in charge of more inspections would compromise food safety.

Currently, the state's Health and Environment department and the Department of Agriculture act as checks on each other, she said.

"This proposal erodes that system of checks and balances," she said after the Senate committee's meeting.

"It would be a major step backward for Kansas consumers."

Schmidt dismissed such criticism, saying the Department of Agriculture currently has food safety duties and has not faced criticism for its handling of them.

Sebelius issued an executive reorganization order, which will take effect July 1 unless either legislative chamber adopts a resolution by March 15 opposing it.

The governor's order came three weeks after federal officials confirmed the first-ever American case of mad cow disease, in Washington state.

However, Schmidt and other legislators have been pushing for a reorganization for a year, and Sebelius has been working on her plan since last summer, spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran said.

"The timing is right, now, to analyze and improve these programs," Agriculture Secretary Adrian Polansky said.

The Department of Agriculture

already inspects dairies and meat and poultry processors.

KDHE estimates it has issued between 17,000 and 18,000 food service licenses and about 4,000 of them would fall under the Department of Agriculture after the reorganization.

Some businesses hold more than one license.

Polansky said the two agencies are still trying to determine how many employees and how much money will transfer from KDHE to the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture's programs have 78 employees and a \$4 million budget, while KDHE's have 36 employees and a \$2.6 million budget.

Polansky and Health and Environment Secretary Roderick Bremby outlined the proposal for the Senate committee.

Schmidt called it "a great step forward" and said hearings would begin next week. Organizations like the Kansas Farm Bureau also support the plan.

However, Schmidt said he would like to see restaurant inspections also handled by the Department of Agriculture, which he said would make food safety programs even more efficient.

"There needs to be a very good reason to stop short, as she has," Schmidt said.

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