



10 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Wednesday

July 15, 2009
Volume 120, Number 109
Serving Thomas County since 1888



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Brian Eicher holds a Buff Orffington pullet belonging to his daughter Stefanie so state livestock inspector Dave Cuthbertson can swab her mouth. Under a recent state law, chickens, like many other animals, must have a clean bill of health before they can be put on exhibit at the county fair. The Buff Orffington, an egg-producing breed, is one of many that will be on display at the Thomas County Fair the last week in July.

Chicken tests open fair season

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkanas.com

Who ever thought drawing blood from a chicken would be easy? Apparently it is if you're a state livestock inspector or a federal veterinarian with a little experience.

Chickens destined for entry into the Thomas County Fair by 4-H members were swabbed, stuck and otherwise handled with loving care at the Colby Livestock Barn on Tuesday when they got a pre-entry exam.

Two years ago, new regulations made chickens subject to the state's livestock health inspection laws, said Clint Milliman, Thomas County Extension agent. That requires that all livestock entered in an exhibit or show be examined beforehand, including cattle and hogs.

Tuesday was chicken inspection day for 4-H projects, and two state livestock inspectors and one federal veterinarian were on hand to swab the mouths of five chickens per flock and draw blood from every bird.

The swab test is for avian influenza, or bird flu, said Milliman, adding that there has never been a case of the avian strain reported in the U.S.

He said a blood sample is drawn from a vein under the wing for a pullorum-thyphoid test. Chickens can be carriers of these bacteria without exhibiting any symptoms. The disease affects eggs used for hatching, he said. The chicks become ill and may die.

The 4-H chickens ranged from egg producers to meat producers in all sizes and color combinations. Besides a 3-year-old rooster named Peanuts who weighs 17 pounds, there is the Aracauna breed, which lays green eggs. The breed is multicolored, either an orange-and-gray combination, or just a soft gray, with very little to no comb and a tuft of feathers that makes it appear to have puffy cheeks. The breed is originally from South Africa.

Fairgoers, it seems, will be treated to an unusually interesting display in the poultry barn this year.

Although there are only five or six 4-Hers in the poultry project, said Milliman, there will be between 40 and 50 chickens at the fair.

Rain storms delay area wheat harvest

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkanas.com

What could have been an early start and early finish to wheat harvest this year has turned into a marathon season because of near-daily rains, not exactly the norm for the month of July.

Experts more than a week ago predicted the county's wheat harvest would be finished "in a few days," but with rain most nights, cutting crews are bogged down.

Many farmers are saying the grain is dry, but with water standing in the field, combines are unable to move. Grain trucks can't pull onto soft, wet ground without getting mired in mud.

A year ago, from June 29 to July 14, the Kansas State University Research Station west of town had reported .92 of an inch of rain. Monday night alone, the station had .7 of an inch. This year, for

that same 15-day period, the station reported eight storms with rain, producing 2.75 inches, plus two reports of a trace.

Winter was dry. As of April 1, the station had measured 1.07 inches of moisture. To date, though, the total measurement is 16.59 inches, compared to a 13.76 average for this point in the year. The National Weather Service is predicting even more rain for the rest of this week.

"I think it would be safe to say the harvest is about 85 to 90 percent finished in the county today," Clint Milliman, Thomas County Extension agent, said Tuesday. "What happens now is that the grain begins to bleach, there is a loss of test weight and protein content goes down, and it's also harder for elevators to get rid of it."

Most of the county's elevators are full, and some are putting grain on the ground.

"We're trying to move as much

out with truck and by rail as we possibly can," said John Strecker, general manager of High Plains Co-op, "so that we don't have to put it on the ground. Wheat is not a good commodity to put on the ground."

The Kansas Agricultural Statistics crop report on Tuesday said Kansas wheat production was up 6 percent from the June forecast, with harvested acres forecast to be 8.8 million, up 300,000 from June 1, but 100,000 acres less than last year.

Yield, statewide, is expected to average 41 bushels per acre. Many areas had unusually high yields this year due to moisture at the right time for the grain to fill, including some farms around Thomas County.

Wheat closed up 23 cents Monday but off 17 cents Tuesday, with the close at \$4.74. The price has hovered below the \$5 mark since the first load came in June 29.

Pickin' on the Plains draws diverse regional acts

By Andy Heintz

Colby Free Press
aheintz@nwkanas.com

Colby's 14th annual Pickin' on the Plains bluegrass and folk festival will begin at 6 p.m. Friday at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, but a free pre-festival kickoff potluck and jam session starts at 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

This year's festival will feature musicians living right here in Colby. The bluegrass band the McLemores, Bob and Susan and their sons Brandon and Blake, will be on stage a lot, and balladeer and songwriter Larry Booth also will be playing.

The McLemores, Booth and a few others helped found the festival 14 years ago. The McLemore family is deeply involved in the city's civic affairs: Bob is the city's fire chief, while Susan is a new school board member.

Leilani Thomas, head of Colby Convention Visitors Bureau, said the first festival was just local.

"It was a glorified jamfest," she said.

After the first year, the bureau began marketing and advertising the festival in the Kansas Bluegrass Association's monthly newsletter, she added, the McLemores and Booth spread the word while performing for other festivals, and



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

The McLemores, seen here performing at the Colby Implement open house in May, are just one of several area groups that will be appearing at the Pickin' on the Plains festival this weekend.

things just took off from there.

She said she's happy they have the McLemores as the host band.

"They are good for Colby," she said.

The family has been playing together for 10 years. Brandon McLemore said his parents had been in a band before they put the family group together. He said they have been influenced by bluegrass

musicians such as the Chapmans and Tony Rice.

He said the members, especially him and Blake, all listen to a variety of music, from classical to Rock 'n' Roll.

"I listen to all types of music," he said.

McLemore said the best part of

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County landfill to expand pit to handle overflowing trash

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkanas.com

Thomas County commissioners learned from landfill operator Larry Jumper on Monday that it's time to open up more pit space.

"We can't stay ahead, and we're filling up faster than we can cover it up," Jumper said about the cells used for burying re-

fuse. "That last cell had 4,000 tons in it, and that equates to 8 million pounds."

The cell in use at the landfill will be expanded 200 feet east and 200 feet south, he said, and will be around 37 feet deep.

"It's good that we can stockpile the cover dirt this time of year when there's plenty of sunshine," Jumper said, "because when the snow comes, it's a different story."

Jumper said he has offers from two of

the road department crew who are willing to help with the pit excavation, plus he and some of his crew will help on weekends.

"You have no idea what a help it has been to be able to use those guys from road and bridge," he added.

He told the commissioners he will be paying overtime, but that there is more than enough money in his budget to allow for the work, and that he's hoping to be

done before the ground freezes.

Commissioner Paul Steele asked Jumper how much expense he anticipated. Jumper said he thought \$10,000 should cover it, depending on weather and other variables.

"You've made a good proposal," said Steele, "and the idea of using in-house crew and cooperation between departments is great."

Commissioners approved the project.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center Director Wendy Wacker and center board member Bruce Bandy came to ask for the Thomas County liquor tax money.

The commissioners told them there had been no word from them for the last several years, and they needed to come back with a report of what all they have been doing with the money. The agency got

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Briefly

Step right up; help needed

The Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and the Thomas County Amusement Association are looking for about 60 volunteers to man game booths at the carnival Tuesday to Saturday, July 28 to Aug. 1. Shifts will be from 6:45 to 9 p.m. and 9 to 11 p.m. Volunteers will be taking tickets and running the games. For information or to volunteer, call Holly Stephens at 460-3401.

Birthing classes remains open

Couples can still sign up for Citizens Medical Center's childbirth education classes, which will run from 7 to 10 p.m. the next three Thursdays. The staff will catch new couples up on information from the first class. Women who are due to deliver before November are encouraged to attend, along with the

support partner. Classes will be held on the hospital campus. The next classes will be in October. For information or to register, contact Jeanene Brown in the center's education department at (785) 460-4850.

County van to take a holiday

The Thomas County transportation van will not run Thursday because the driver will be at a required meeting. Please make other travel arrangements. For information, call the county clerk's office at 460-4500.

Pick some food for Genesis

Remember to bring your nonperishable food donations for the Genesis-Thomas County Food Bank to the Pickin' on the Plains Bluegrass Festival this

weekend. Boxes will be placed near the entrance. The schedule kicks off with a potluck supper at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in the 4-H Building at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, and continues Friday to Sunday, July 17-19. For information, call the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau at 460-7643 or (800) 611-8835.

Coach offers tennis camp

The Colby Eagle Net Slammers Tennis Camp will be from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Monday to Wednesday, Aug. 3-5, at Fike Park. Children 6 to 12 can sign up no later than Monday, July 27. The cost will be \$25, which includes a T-shirt. No late registrations. For information, call tennis coach Jennifer Rall at 462-0320.

Alumni planning 2010 reunion

The Colby High School Alumni Reunion planning

committee will meet to discuss the 2010 reunion at 5 p.m. Sunday at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. All alumni are invited. For information, call Amanda Wahlmeier at 460-9145.

Pets available for adoption

Looking for a pet? Colby Animal Clinic has four kittens available for adoption. Lost or strayed animals are often brought to the clinic. Call or stop by 810 E. Fourth St. All animals have current shots, and costs are minimal. For questions, call 460-8621.



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