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Crop losses won't show until spring

By Vera Sloan

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Farmers concerned with the condition of their winter wheat crop still have a few weeks to wait to see if there is any damage from cold temperatures that have plagued northwest Kansas off and on since December.

Clint Milliman, Extension agent for Thomas County, said late-planted wheat might have some problems, but when it warms up in March, and growth begins, will be a better time to determine how it survived the winter.

Brian Olson, Kansas State University regional agronomist, who covers the northwest quarter of the state, said he is seeing some spots where plan tops are burned back throughout the area.

"It could be cosmetic, with the brown foliage just on the tops, and is not considered an indication of what the health of the whole plant actually is," he said. "Damage is more likely to occur where there is a north-facing side for terraces that had little or no snow cover.

"We don't know how much damage is out there, but I encourage farmers to just be aware. There could be some spots of winter kill, but we need to remember how durable wheat is. That's the reason we plant it here."

Olson said the area has good subsoil moisture. Although the top couple of inches of soil could dry out, he added, there should be enough moisture to carry the wheat through to harvest.

"Winds like we had two weeks ago are never good," Olson said, "especially for the smaller plants of late-seeded wheat. However, it is just a wait-and-see thing. Warm weather will reveal how the wheat went through the winter.

Mary Knapp, state climatologist in Manhattan, said low temperatures can sometimes be a good thing. When the weather stays warm, she said, and plants don't go completely dormant, extreme cold in March can be a shock to growing plants.

Although this season has seemed colder than we remember

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Hundreds of thousands of cookies



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Volunteers (from left) Mint Culver, Hannah Johnston and Amanda Lang and others from area Girl Scout troops had the unenviable task of counting 10,548 boxes of cookies delivered to the Colby American Legion Post on Tuesday. Culver said

so far, people have ordered about a hundred fewer boxes this year than last, but these are just the initial orders. She said she expects the Scouts will sell a lot more before the end of March.



JOYCE MAHIN/Colby Middle School



Dogsled racer visits school kids

Dewey Halverson, a nine-time veteran of the Iditarod, a dogsled race in Alaska, (above) talked with students at Colby Middle School on Tuesday. Halverson talked about his races, how he trains his dogs and the book that inspired him as a fourth grader to race dog sleds. He brought along a sled and one of his dogs (left) and showed the middle schoolers the kinds of cold weather gear he wears during the 1,150-mile race.

Investigation leads to drug bust at trailer

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
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What began as a "routine investigation" in another case Saturday night led Colby Police officers to a trailer on Franklin Avenue, where they arrested three people and recovered several kinds of drugs.

Police Chief Randy Jones said officers Donnie Valles and Sage Hemmert were investigating a possible child endangerment case at a different address when a warrant from Saline County turned up for Brittani Vallow, 21, Salina.

Jones said information in the warrant led the officers to a trailer at Friendly Acres on South Franklin.

While waiting for the owners to show up, they saw a man take a large duffel from the trailer to a nearby car. Jones said the officers talked to the man, Matthew Shepherd, 27, of Dinuba, Calif., and Diedre

Brantley, 51, Atwood, the owner of the vehicle.

Jones said the officers got permission to search both the duffel and the car. They found about one gram of methamphetamine, 44 grams of marijuana, liquid morphine and powdered cocaine, along with pipes and other paraphernalia. Officers later got a search warrant for the trailer and found more drugs, the chief said.

Shepherd and Brantley, along with Nancy Robinson, 35, of Colby, were arrested for narcotics possession and taken to the Thomas County Jail. Vallow was arrested on the warrant from Saline County. Jones said none of those arrested had been released as of Wednesday.

Officers Jerad Lange and Ron Alexander from the Colby Police Department and Kraig Cersovsky of the Thomas County Sheriff's Office assisted in the investigation, he said.

School audit says consolidation might save up to \$138 million

By John Milburn

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — Consolidating public school districts in Kansas could save millions of taxpayer dollars, although not enough to solve the state's budget crisis this year, according to a report released Monday.

Under one scenario, all districts with fewer than 1,600 students would be forced to consolidate —

including virtually every district west of Hays in northwest Kansas.

Kansas, which has 293 school districts, last forced consolidation in the 1960s when the state overhauled education governance. Since then, legislators have relied on districts to decide for themselves when it's time to merge, offering a few financial incentives to ease the process.

In its report, the Legislative

Division of Post Audit looked at methods that would reduce the number of districts to either 266 or 152.

The first scenario — in which the state would have 50 fewer public school buildings and 230 fewer teachers and administrators — would save \$18 million. Auditors said the consolidation could happen among districts that

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Briefly

Lube up to help cancer victims

The Northwest Kansas Foundation for Hope will partner with Kansas Quick Lube for a "lubeathon" from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. For every vehicle serviced Saturday, Quick Lube will donate \$10 to the foundation, which helps cancer victims and their families with expenses. For information, call Carrie Bartlett or Sarah Laubscher at 462-2224.

Foundation has grants for kids

The Thomas County Community Foundation is accepting applications until March 1 for the first quarter cycle for Kids Can Do! grants. Teachers, principals and club sponsors are encouraged to apply for the \$200 grants for student-run projects. For information, go to www.thomascountycommunityfoundation.com or call Executive Director Melinda Olson at 460-9152.

Food sign-up ends Friday

Prairie Land Food sign-up for the month will be open through Friday at the State Farm Insurance office, 905 E. Fourth St. Delivery will be at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 27, at the Sacred Heart School gym, 1150 E. Sixth St. For information, call Gene Griffin at 460-3579.

Youth group plans dinner

The Colby United Methodist youth fellowship group will hold a pasta dinner and "slave" auction from noon to 1:30 p.m. Sunday at the church's fellowship hall. Proceeds will go to the church's missions and ministries and to the "Helping Hands," community fund. For information, call Doug Finley at 462-3308.

Baptists to hold family seminar

Colby Independent Baptist Church will hold

"Family Focus" seminars at 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Sunday at the church, 730 E. Second St. Evangelist Bob Bliss from Pueblo, Colo., is the featured preacher. Call the church office at 460-0313.

Food bank meeting is Monday

The annual meeting of Genesis-Thomas County Food Bank will be at 7 p.m. Monday in the meeting room of the Pioneer Memorial Library, 375 W. Fourth St. The public is invited. For information, call Wynn Duffey at the First Presbyterian Church, (785) 462-6342.

Rotary to serve soup Tuesday

The Colby Rotary Club will hold its annual soup supper from 5 to 7:30 Tuesday at the Community Building during basketball games with Goodland. The cost will be \$4 for adults and \$2 for children 12

and under. For information, call Sara Bryan at (308) 530-8363.

Water district sets annual meeting

The 35th annual meeting of the Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District will be held at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Hoxie Elks Lodge, said Wayne Bossert, district manager. The agenda includes the 2009 audit, 2011 proposed operating budget, an open discussion session and election of four board members, representing Sheridan, Graham, Logan and Gove counties. For information, stop by the office at 1175 S. Range, Colby, call (785) 462-3915 or e-mail wab@gmd4.org.



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