KGA Conference Set for January 19

Whiting, Ks. - The Kansas Grazier’s Association (KGA) will host its annual Winter Conference on Saturday January 19, 2008 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Assaria Lutheran Church located at 124 West First Street in Assaria, Kansas. The keynote speaker will be Gary Kilgore, retired Kansas State University Southeast Area Agronomy Specialist.

The conference will focus on the following topics as requested by a survey of producers:

* Economic effects of high price of fertilizer and inputs, value of grazing, cost of production, crop residue value, manure value, fertilizer price versus result curve, winter feeding costs;

* Selecting and managing a diverse mix of forages, maintaining a legume stand, better utilization of the forage base currently growing;

* Extending the grazing season with the use of annual forages, inter-seeded crops and legumes, crop residue;

* Rangeland management, controlling brushy and noxious weeds, and stockpiling forages for winter grazing;  
  Continued on page 6

Pharma Crops: Agricultural Salvation or Pandora’s Box?
by Mary Fund

Topeka, Ks. - “Growing pharmaceutical rice outdoors is risky business,” stated Jane Rissler, senior scientist for the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) at a mid-November conference in Topeka, Kansas. “You simply cannot eliminate the risks.”

Rissler and Bill Freese of the Center for Food Safety explained that pharma crops are not food or feed crops, but are “biofactories” for production of drugs—properties of which have the potential to contaminate the food system and other related crops.

Rissler and Freese described the risks of such crops unintentionally ending up in the food supply at the conference held at Washburn University School of Law and attended by about 30 farmers, food safety advocates, and law students. Rissler and Freese were joined by Bill Wenzel, from the Farmer to Farmer Campaign, and farmers representing the California and Arkansas rice growers associations. The farmers described their concerns with pharma rice, as well as the economic hardship farmers experienced from contamination of a rice crop from other genetically modified rice last year.

The conference, “Pharmaceutical Crops in Kansas: A Larger Perspective” was hosted by the Kansas Rural Center, the Center for Food Safety and the Farmer to Farmer Campaign on Genetic Engineering. The purpose was to ask questions and shed light on the issues surrounding the biopharm rice being grown in Kansas since last spring.

“This is a complicated issue,” stated Dan Nagengast, Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center. “It is presented as a win-win for farmers, economic development, and needy children in third world countries who will supposedly benefit from the new drugs generated.”

“The biopharm issues get tangled up with all genetically modified crop issues,” Nagengast explained. “But they are significantly different in that they are engineered to produce drugs to impact certain diseases. Contamination of the food supply with these is a whole different ballgame. There are risks and we feel these have not been adequately addressed.”

Continued on page 6
The Small Farmer Commentary
Time Out of Time, or The 2007 Ice Storm
by Mary Fund

The longest day of the year took on new-- or is it old?-- meaning this year. At my house, December 21 was Day Eleven of being without electricity. Following a history making ice storm on December 10-11, many in northeast Kansas and other areas of the state were left in the dark. Over 1500 electric poles and miles of line were down in my county alone.

An unseasonably heavy rain (up to 3 inches in some places), combined with temperatures hovering near or below freezing, deposited nearly an inch of ice on every surface.

The rain started early Monday evening of the 10th, and the sound of limbs crashing started not long after midnight, quickly taking the power with them all across northeast and parts of central Kansas.

We thought we were prepared. Oil lamps and candles were on hand, extra batteries for the lanterns and radio were dug out. My house also has a wood stove which provided both heat and hot meals. Our rural water district continued to provide water, and we even had hot water via our gas water heater. So my household was pretty comfy compared to many left without heat or means to cook.

The storm left us with some clear lessons in terms of our dependence on technology. Many were left without phone service as cordless phones don’t work without electricity, and cell phones quickly died without a means to recharge them. Plug-in phones, small propane powered heaters, and gas or diesel powered generators quickly took priority over the usual Christmas list items.

Isolation from any news was nerve wracking the first day or so, as the local radio station went down too. While the ice storm was the big news on the urban stations, they did little to tell us news that really mattered. Who had power and who did not? how widespread was it? were emergency services up and running? who had generators for sale? what gas stations could even pump fuel since they too were dependent on electricity? and most importantly how long would we be without power?

The rest of the news --presidential campaigning, sex scandals in the state A.G.’s office, movie reviews and Christmas sales-- were irrelevant. Those of us without power in our homes and places of work stepped “out of time”, while the rest of the world careden wildly on down the road.

Continued on page 11
Farm Policy

Senate Passes a Farm Bill; Big Gains, Big Losses

Washington, D.C.- On December 14, the Senate adopted a Farm Bill which the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC) called a mixed bag of wins and losses for family farmers, consumers, and the environment. While SAC commended the Senate for taking important steps forward on conservation and competition, the Coalition emphasized significant disappointment with the bill’s lack of effective farm program payment reform.

“We applaud the Senate’s decision to advance working lands conservation, especially the Conservation Stewardship Program, as well as important competition provisions to restore balance and fairness to livestock markets,” stated SAC Policy Director Ferd Hoefner. “But at the same time, the Senate’s failure to pass the Dorgan-Grassley payment limit amendment repudiates the large majority of farmers who support reform and the largest bi-partisan nationwide movement for farm program reform ever mounted.”

“It means uncapped commodity program payments will continue to flow to mega farms and push rural communities, family farmers and the next generation of producers off the map,” Hoefner asserted.

The Senate version of the farm bill includes $2 billion over five years for the Conservation Security Program (now to be called the Conservation Stewardship Program). The new CSP would allow 13.3 million acres to be enrolled each year through a continuous nationwide enrollment opportunity and a ranking system to ensure strong natural resource and environmental outcomes. The bill also gives the highly successful Wetlands Reserve Program a new $2 billion to restore agricultural wetlands during the next five years. Without this funding, this SAC supported program would come to a halt.

“The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition strongly supports the new Conservation Stewardship Program,” said Hoefner. “The new CSP will assist farmers making a strong commitment to advanced stewardship. The House version stripped out funding for CSP, and we will strongly back the Senate version when the two chambers meet to conference the two bills in January.”

The Senate bill also contains the strongest livestock reforms ever passed in a farm bill, taking steps to stop the widespread use of unfair contract practices and disproportionate market power of meatpackers. The Livestock Title of the Senate bill includes four key reforms, including a ban on meatpacker ownership, feeding, or controlling livestock fourteen days before slaughter; the elimination of mandatory binding arbitration clauses in contracts between livestock producers and packers and processors; good faith bargaining and contract fairness on the part of packers and processors; and strengthened enforcement of laws against deceptive and unfair practices of packers and processors. The bill also includes a breakthrough provision to allow meat from small state-inspected plants to be sold in interstate commerce provided that the plants adhere to federal food safety standards.

The Senate farm bill also provides or increases mandatory funding for several other SAC-priority programs, including $130 million for the Bioenergy Crop Transition Assistance Program, $80 million for the Organic Farming Research and Extension Initiative, $40 million for the Rural Micro-Enterprise Assistance Program, $40 million for the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, $22 million for the Organic Certification Cost-Share Program, and $5 million for Organic Production and Marketing Data Collection.

“The bill does not go far enough in funding new farm and rural income opportunities, but it does make major strides in the right direction,” stated Hoefner. “The package for organic farmers is particularly noteworthy. Our biggest regret is the failure of the Senate to provide funding for the successful Value-Added Producer Grants Program and the much-needed Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. Both are funded in the House passed version and we will work for inclusion in the conference committee.”

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Winter Feeding-- Routine or Requirement
By Dale Kirkham

Feeding animals in the same spot all winter can result in wasted feed, manure build-up, and potential water pollution. (Photo by C. Blockson, KSU)

_Eureka, Ks._ As winter approaches in cattle country, the bale piles will be counted and the feed trucks prepared to roll to keep the herd fed. But it is also time to ask ourselves several questions.

Are our normal feeding practices necessary or are we simply following a routine? What should be fed and how much feed is actually needed? How often and when do we feed? Where do we feed? What is the cost of winter feeding the cows? and is there a more practical approach?

What impacts do our feeding practices have on our land resources, including water quality on our land as well as downstream? Can we reduce our trips across the pasture cut costs and minimize erosion and soil compaction? Let’s look at some practical ways of winter feeding that maintain cattle at equal or less cost while improving water and other land resources by looking at a common scenario.

Many Kansas cowherds are spring-calvers and kept on dormant native pasture and/or crop residues after the calves are weaned in the fall. These forages are good sources of energy but lack the protein needed by rumen microbes to release that energy. The more of these grass and crop residues can be used to supply the energy that is needed, the less hay that will have to be hauled to the cowherd. Even if you grow and bale your own hay and the bale pile is big, it comes with a cost. It should be valued at opportunity cost, or what it would bring if sold.

A cow’s demand for higher levels of energy and protein starts about 45-60 days before calving. Maintaining the cowherd on dry residues with protein supplement is a practical way to reduce the amount of hay needed and the number of trips to and across the pasture. Research has shown that cows provided protein supplement three times weekly do just as well as cows fed daily, as long as the weekly total is equal.

Selection of replacements that are moderate-framed, easy-fleshing and feed efficient will reduce the need for additional feeds, whether hay or other protein supplements. Also, adjusting the calving date until the start of new grass is another proven way to reduce winter feed demand. The return from slightly lighter calves at weaning is more than offset by saving on the winter feed bill.

Every winter brings some days when hay may be necessary, for example, those days when the “leftovers” are covered with ice and snow. But ask yourself, how many days in an average winter actually have weather so severe that a cow won’t get out in the pasture and find enough forage to fill her needs? Most storms don’t last more than one or two days and cows will graze more and take on extra fill in advance of storms. Studies in Iowa have shown that cows will “root” through 12-16 inches of snow to graze as long as the snow is not crusted.

In situations where hay is being fed daily, the amount of hay being provided is a major consideration. Most stockmen probably feed a little extra just to be on the safe side. But research at Purdue University has shown that this is not necessary and is wasteful. In this study, cows were divided into four groups which were allowed 4, 8, 12, and 24 hour access to hay, respectively. At the end of the trial period, there was no difference in the average weights of the four different groups, each having gained essentially the same amount.

*Continued on page 8*
Clean Water News

CWFP Profile

Water Quality Improved in All Directions on this Farm

By Connie Pantle

Corning, Ks. - John Rempe and his son Dan operate a typical diversified family farm near Corning, Kansas, raising cattle, corn, beans, milo, alfalfa, sudex and grass, as well as managing a hog operation. But the farm’s location has a unique feature.

Just behind the farmstead north of Corning in southern Nemaha County, the South Fork of the Big Nemaha River flows north, eventually ending up in the Missouri River. And in the farm’s pasture just three miles south of the farmstead, Vermillion Creek flows south to the Kansas River. Thus the water leaving the Rempe farm meets up again where the Kansas River joins the Missouri River 125 miles away.

Because of this unique feature of his farm, John was especially interested in the quality of the water leaving the farm. With the help of Ed Reznicek, CWFRFFP Field Organizer, John completed the Kansas Rural Center’s River Friendly Farms environmental self assessment. According to John, completing the notebook, gave him ideas on how to make improvements on his farm. “I learned quite a bit that you can do,” he said, “to improve water and hold soil from erosion.”

Using this knowledge, John went to work to improve water quality on his farm. John was approved for CWFRFFP cost-share funds to implement several water quality projects including: relocation of a lot away from the creek; installation of a sediment basin; establishment of a creek crossing, an alternative watering point and a windbreak; fencing a pond, and installation of a waterer.

As they often were years ago, some of the buildings and lots on John’s farm were built near the creek. To comply with the renewal of his Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) livestock waste permit, John needed to move his lot further away from the creek. John uses the lot as a calving pen for his 130 cows.

“The concern was the amount of water coming off the building and crossing the lot,” John said. By crossing the lot, the rainwater becomes contaminated with the livestock waste. A grass buffer strip would help filter the nutrients out before reaching the creek. Therefore, John installed a buffer strip of brome between the lot and the creek, which is a tributary to the South Fork of the Big Nemaha River.

“Keeping livestock back from the creek allows drainage across grass sod before it hits the creeks,” he said. After the cows have their calves, he moves them out to the winter pasture. This reduces the amount of time the cows spend in the lot, which in turn reduces the amount of waste in the lot.

To address runoff from another lot—the finishing lot for 130 calves—KDHE asked John to revamp the terrace that was being used to filter runoff before reaching the creek below. Working with Joe Harner, Kansas State University Extension engineer, and Mike Christian, KSU Watershed Specialist, and KRC’s Ed Reznicek John was able to find a

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KGA Conference...
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* New grasses and forages on the market;

* Best practices for brush control and prevention of reinfestation, cost of lost forage production, chemical control, fire control options, and wildlife enhancement.

Producers will also have an opportunity to share low stress livestock handling experiences and techniques they have implemented since last year’s conference with Dr. Lynn Locatelli.

Registration for the day is $25.00 per person. Lunch and refreshments are included. Booth space is available for vendors and grazing related enterprises for the price of registration. Registration is 8:30 a.m. with the conference starting promptly at 9:00 a.m.

For more information or to register, contact Mary Howell at 785-363-7377, or e-mail her at marshallcofair@networksplus.net. Pre-registration is needed by January 14, 2008. □

Biopharmaceutical Crops...
Continued from page 1

The issue. Ventria Bioscience, after being driven out of California (2004) and Missouri (2005) by rice farmers and food companies concerned about contamination of their products with the company’s pharmaceutical proteins, came to Kansas. They were welcomed with open arms by state and local officials as a boon for the local and state economies. Farmers were going to profit, a new industry would be launched, and everyone would prosper from the cutting edge technology aimed at saving children in third world countries with the resultant drug to treat diarrhea.

Ventria is experimenting with a rice genetically engineered with human proteins that they hope to use in oral rehydration solutions to treat diarrhea, and as nutritional supplements in other products. In 2007, Ventria grew about 200 acres of experimental pharmaceutical rice near Junction city, Kansas and had plans to grow up to 3200 acres.

“They came to Kansas because no rice is grown here,” explained Rissler. And the risks were apparently assumed negligible. But the message from the conference speakers was one of caution, not just for Kansas but for rice growers and food companies across the country and beyond.

What are pharmaceutical crops? According to information posted on the Union of Concerned Scientists website, pharma crops are crops genetically engineered to produce drugs (or properties of drugs) to prevent or treat a variety of diseases. A closely related issue entails crops engineered to produce industrial products. The pharma crop industry focuses primarily on food crops such as corn, soybeans, and rice because they are easy to grow and easy to engineer. They threaten the food supply because the pharma crops are usually grown in areas of the country where the food version of the crops are also grown. And the government, though stating a policy of “zero tolerance” has been unable to ensure that biotech companies do not contaminate surrounding food and feed crops.

Rissler explained that there are many paths to the food supply. Seed and on-farm production and storage, and incidents during transport --spills, accidental mixing, or contaminated equipment-- can all result in contamination. Wildlife can carry seeds off site to other locations, where it can cross with other related plants.

USDA issues permits for the production, establishes conditions for buffers around the fields, requires dedicated storage and post harvest monitoring and applies operating standards. But Rissler claims USDA’s oversight is largely non-existent, pointing to lax review, weak requirements in terms of site security (escape of seeds) and poor follow-up. “Outdoor production of these pharma crops cannot reduce the risk,” she firmly stated.

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Sustainable Food System News

Ken Meter to be Featured at Regional Food System Workshop

Kansas City, MO- A workshop on “Regional Food Systems” will be held Saturday February 16 at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church at 4501 Walnut Street in Kansas City, Missouri. It will feature Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center, Minneapolis, MN. The Crossroads Center works to strengthen local communities by building wealth that stays in the region. Meter will speak about the important use of local economic analysis in building regional food systems.

Here is an excerpt from an updated study of the agricultural economy of Southeast Minnesota which illustrates why Meter’s work is of interest:

“Finding Food in Farm Country” Findings in southeast Minnesota (updated since original publication of report)

* The region’s farmers sold $912 million of farm commodities on average each year since 1997-2003. However they spent $996 million, on average, to produce these crops. The net loss is $84 million per year. The region has lost money producing food commodities for seven years straight.

* Federal subsidies average $98 million each year, but farmers must earn another $68 million each year to cover the costs of farming.

* Moreover, the region spends about $500 million each year purchasing farm inputs from outside the region, and another $500 million buying food from outside the region (out of $670 million spent on food). This means the region ships out as much money producing and buying food as the entire value of all commodities produced.

* If the region’s consumers were to buy 15% of their food from local sources, it would generate as much income for the region as two-thirds of farm subsidies.”

Meter has since authored studies in Hawaii, Northeastern Iowa, Iowa as a whole, the Central Coast of California, Northwest Minnesota, and the U.S. in aggregate. He discovered that in the U.S. as a whole, from 1998-2001, U.S. farmers lost $43 billion dollars (2001 dollars) producing crops and livestock. Farmers were earning less producing crops in 2002 than in 1969, despite doubling their productivity.

Meter is being brought in by workshop sponsors to jump start a dialogue between farmers and economic development professionals.

Business as usual, commodity crops and livestock, conceal a slowly hemorrhaging rural landscape, with little or no opportunity for future generations. There are other models as well, including Woodbury County, Iowa which has strived to build a local food model based on organic production incentives, and health and wellness policies in local institutions.

The February 16 workshop is sponsored by the Kansas Rural Center, Kansas Farmers Union, Kansas City Food Circle, Missouri Farmers Union, Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture, and others.

Registration is $20, and lunch $10. For more information contact Ben Kjelshus at 816-767-8873 or e-mail him at bkjelshus@sbcglobal.net. You can also see a detailed agenda and registration at the KRC website at <www.kansasruralcenter.org/calendar.html/#RFSW>.

Farm Policy

Senate Passes Farm Bill...
Continued from page 3

The Senate bill also requires the Agriculture Research Service to invest a larger portion of total research dollars into organic research systems, includes new competitive grant research priorities for agricultural entrepreneurship, for public breeding research to advance sustainable and organic farming systems, and to investigate antibiotic resistance.

The bill also creates a USDA Office of Small and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers to ensure coordination and goal setting for small and beginning farmers and ranchers programs, and requires the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint a diverse team to study existing local food systems and potential community, economic, health and nutrition, environmental, food safety, and food security impacts of local and regional food systems.
Winter Grazing...
Continued from page 4

However, the group having 24 hour access had “used” 30 percent more hay than the group with four hour access. The researchers attributed to this 30 percent extra use to less efficient digestion and wastage. If you are set up to control access to four hours per day, you can probably save hay, manure hauling, and some dollars. Likewise, if you are unrolling bales in the pasture daily and the cows haven’t consumed in four hours what you unrolled, you are probably feeding more than needed.

How important is location in a pasture when feeding protein supplement or hay? Cattle tend to linger in the feeding location and return to the same after going to water. This encourages them to use the dry grass and crop residue in that area, which becomes a grazing distribution tool to get better use of areas not grazed heavily earlier in the season. Consider using temporary feed grounds throughout a pasture and reserving the sheltered spots next to streams for truly bad weather days.

Traveling the same paths and repeat feeding in the same area often causes soil compaction and increases runoff and erosion. Choice of feeding sites also has a big impact on where the manure is deposited. Areas of a pasture with thin, poor soils, such as “go-back” and reseeded crop fields, are ideal for feeding hay as the resulting manure deposits will build humus and mineral levels in the soil. A 1200-pound bale of grass hay contains well over five dollars worth of nitrogen and phosphorus which is worth much more spread across a pasture than being washed downstream with the first run-off event.

Cattle, much like people, are very much creatures of habit. If we develop a routine of feeding, whether it is protein supplement or hay, at the same time every day in the same location, they will be there waiting for the feed truck to arrive rather than out making a living by hustling for the forage that is available in the pasture.

Whenever possible, we need to feed at different times of day and enter by different gates on other sides of the pasture to keep cattle from “standing in the chow line” at a regular feeding time.

Livestock geneticists contend that we can select cattle that have 20 percent greater feed efficiency. This translates into an equal percent less feed hauled to cattle in the winter and likewise less waste. Selecting for feed efficiency will take some time. But with the price of feed, fuel and equipment “up in the clouds”, now is the time to evaluate each aspect of our winter feeding program and answer the question-- is it a routine or a requirement?

Dale Kirkham, Field Coordinator for the Clean Water Farms Program, ranches near Eureka. This article was reprinted with permission from the October 2007 “Grassland Watershed Newsletter” available online at <www.oznet.ksu.edu/glwwq/pdf/watershed/v10n3Web.pdf>.
Clean Water News

Before installing a filter strip, cropland and John’s cattle lot bordered the stream. (Photo E. Reznicek)

Rempe planted a grass filter strip along the creek, and installed a creek crossing to help move cows from the lot to pasture after calving. (Photo C. Pantle)

Rempe profile...
Continued from page 5

solution.

Where the terrace once was, John installed a 250 foot sediment basin below the lot. The basin is drained by large PVC pipes with distribution outlets into a three acre grass buffer, allowing the grass to filter and serve as a cover from winter winds and storms, he offers a windbreak in the form of a large bundle of recycled tires.

The Rempes also addressed water quality on the property along Vermillion Creek. In this particular pasture, the cattle used a pond as their primary water source. John said he “wanted to put a waterer in and clean the pond out.” John said he can see a difference in the pond water. “It isn’t mucky—it is clear,” he said. And the cattle seem to see the difference as well. “They drink there before they go to the creek,” he said.

The pond project was not without obstacles however. After the completion of the work, John said the pond would not hold water. While the pond was nearly empty, bentonite was applied to the pond basin. John is optimistic about the solution as the pond is now about half full.

John has adopted other management practices as well to reduce cost and improve water quality on the farm. The cattle graze standing sudex, eliminating the inputs from harvest and hauling manure. And John utilizes crop residue such as corn stalks and wheat straw by grinding it along with feed for the cattle.

John said he knows he is affecting water quality downstream by reducing the amount of livestock waste runoff. “The water leaving this place is a better quality than it was,” he said. So as the water leaving the Rempe’s Nemaha County farms heads in two different directions, it’ll be a little cleaner when it meets up again downstream.
Biopharmaceutical crops...
Continued from page 6

Dan McGuire of the American Corn Growers Foundation described the impact on the export market that genetically modified (GMO) crops have had in general. In 1994-95, the U.S. had 82% of the European corn market. Then GMO corn was introduced in the U.S. in 1996; by 2002-03, the market had dropped to 2%-- because the European consumer was opposed to GMO crops. GMO contamination of any crop hurts U.S. grain exports, he said.

Harvey Howington, rice farmer from Arkansas and former president of the Arkansas Rice Growers Association, described the 2006 GMO contamination event in rice. One of their European Union customers found traces of an unapproved genetically engineered variety of rice in a Riceland Food (the largest miller of rice in the world) shipment and sent it back to the U.S. Riceland did not tell anyone about the incident until just before harvest in 2006, so that rice farmers did not know that they rice they had planted might be contaminated too.

The announcement brought a crash to rice prices and exports, and economic hardship to rice farmers who had planted the contaminated variety. Yet, USDA did not take enforcement action against Bayer, the producer of the untested/unapproved GE variety that found its way into the rice stream.

“Basically, the company made the decision that farmers had to clean up the mess,” stated Howington. “Also, rice dealers were told that if they tested their seed for GMO’s most of it would likely be found contaminated. So, no one tested.”

This incident did not involve rice genetically engineered to have pharmaceutical properties. But the ease with which it happened, the cavalier attitude of the companies involved, and the look-the-other-way actions or inactions of USDA do not instill confidence that crops with pharmaceutical properties will not find their way into food crops.

More than one speaker referred to the 2002 incident when 500,000 bushels of soybeans contaminated with pharma corn in Nebraska had to be destroyed. Other incidents have also occurred.

In addition to the economic losses farmers bear in contamination cases, an analysis of the economic benefits and risks of successful production has shown that farmer benefits may be small. A study by economist Robert Wisner at Iowa State University argued that the acreage required even if the biotech industry meets its expectations is small, and thus only a very few growers are needed.

Don’t the needs for the drugs outweigh the concerns? Ventria has been pushing their GE rice for diarrheal oral rehydration treatment of children. But Rissler argued we already have oral rehydration solutions available. “The problem,” she explained, “is access to these, and the need for improved basic sanitation. Clean Water, hygienic training, and improved sanitation in third world countries have lowered the mortality rate from 4.6 million in 1989 to 2 million today.”

“These pharma crops pose unnecessary risks to farmers, the environment, and the food supply, she concluded. “State should stop subsidizing these risky companies, and open air testing should be banned.”

Above, Gerard Steinlage, Corning farmer, speaks with Bill Freese, Center for Food Safety at the conference in Topeka. (Photo by M. Fund)
As my husband commented several times throughout the nearly 12 days we were “off the grid”, “Electricity changed man’s consciousness.” It certainly changed the speed of life.

Somewhere on my book shelves is a book titled, “Slowing Down to the Speed of Life.” It speaks more to the value of de-stressing your life, changing your attitude for a healthier life, and creating inner peace. I don’t believe he ever suggested going off the grid as a way of slowing down. But for future reference, it works.

One afternoon, I pulled out the old family photos and sat with my 86 year old mother to identify those without captions or names. One photo stands out. It is a picture of our family farmhouse in the 1910’s, with a small wind turbine attached to the side of the house. It was used to power a battery for one of the first neighborhood radios.

I’m not suggesting that wind turbines are immune to ice storms, far from it. But that photo sparked conversation at my house of how to be better prepared for the next time, how to build infrastructure not so dependent on a single system, and how conservation is a key part of our energy future. We also talked about how cooperative effort had built the rural electric cooperatives and how such cooperation could once more help solve our energy issues.

Although isolation and lack of information initially hampered community efforts, innovation, cooperation, and old fashioned neighborliness prevailed. We found a way.

Although I confess I would not want to give up my washing machine any time soon and I truly depend on my DSL hook-up, “slowing down to the speed of life” maybe wasn’t so bad. Who knows? It may hold some key to a healthy future.

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for the New Year! ☀️

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Editor’s Note:

The December issue is shorter and later than originally planned, due to the mid-December ice storm that hit northeast Kansas.

If you tried to contact the KRC Whiting office between Dec. 10 and 17, please retry! No electricity meant no computers, no phones and no answer machine! So we may have missed your call or your e-mail!

The next issue of Rural Papers will be the Jan./Feb. 2008 issue!

Best wishes to you and yours this holiday season from all of us at the Kansas Rural Center!

Mary Fund, Editor