

Storage costs taxpayers millions

Fall crops may rot in fields

United Press International
Farmers in the Midwest and Southwest may face the worst elevator storage crisis in years this fall because of low prices, bumper crops and billions of bushels owned by the government or in reserves.

The corn and sorghum crops are still being harvested in many areas where the elevators already are near capacity from a record wheat crop. Farmers fear things may become so bad they will have to dump their crops outside full elevators or let them rot in the fields.

"There will be a bigger problem this fall than there has been for many years," said Herb Cast, associate director

of the Kansas City, Mo., field office of the U.S. Commodity Credit Corp.

"It's partly because of the accumulation of grain owned by the government, partly because of the record volume of grain still owned by the farmers but pledged into the reserve program and last but not least, the anticipated size of the new crops," he said.

Kansas, Nebraska and the Texas Panhandle are feeling the pinch especially hard because they have several grain crops to harvest and store.

Agriculture Secretary John Block two weeks ago approved emergency storage of grain crops, which include soybeans, oats, barley and rye

in surplus barges, rail cars and other facilities not normally qualified to store harvested crops.

Farmers say they hope the emergency storage will help ease the crisis, but it will take expanded export markets, higher prices, new policies or a bad crop next year to prevent an even worse storage problem.

"This whole darn thing seems to be working against us," said Jerry Schweitzer of Farmer's Co-Op Elevators in Dighton, Kan. "The thing we need to do is get somebody using our grain rather than storing it. Every bushel in reserve is costing the government. We need to see better

prices that would encourage the farmer to sell grain rather than put it in reserve."

Taxpayers are paying a whopping \$168.7 million annually to store 491 million bushels of wheat, corn and sorghum in the nation's grain elevators, most of it because farmers found it more profitable to default on their government price support loans than sell on the open market.

About 80 million of the bushels were bought by the government after farmers

suffered when President Carter imposed the Russian grain embargo. President Reagan has lifted the embargo for one

year, but there is a worldwide glut of wheat.

Meanwhile, farmers have put 2.1 billion bushels of wheat, corn and sorghum in the three-year price support reserve program and 499 million bushels of the same crops in the nine-month Commodity Credit Corp. plan all crops stored in farm bins or elevators.

"They're just kind of sitting on this stuff," said Erik Ness of the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau. "It's getting to be a critical situation because this year's crop is coming up. They've got to do something with it or let it rot in the fields."

Loan to be asked for jobless fund

United Press International
AUSTIN — In order to bail out the state's nearly bankrupt fund for jobless workers, the Texas Legislature may use its special session to make an unprecedented request for a federal loan.

The special session was called to avert an impending 2,000 percent jump in unemployment compensation taxes. One proposed solution is to request a federal loan, Texas' first such request since a system to loan federal funds to state unemployment coffers was established as part of the New Deal in 1938.

Texas employers have paid the lowest unemployment compensation taxes in the nation and enjoyed one of the country's lowest unemployment rates.

But with recent massive layoffs by Braniff Airways and Lone Star Steel Co. and the burden of jobless workers from northern states in the cinched Sunbelt, Texas employers face the prospect of a 2,000-percent jump in payments.

The Legislature met in special session Tuesday to try to ease the necessary tax increase by reworking the constitutional formula which was forcing it.

House Speaker Bill Clayton of Springlake has proposed borrowing \$450 million from the federal government to keep the fund solvent, with \$45 million in state money provided to pay interest on the loan. Clayton's bill also would increase most employers' annual contributions to the fund from about \$6 to \$22 per employee.

If the state opts to follow Clayton's suggestion, it would mark the first time Texas has used the federal loans for unemployment.

Rep. Lloyd Criss, D-LaMarque, has suggested an alternate plan to levy a one-time, \$400 million surtax on Texas employers, avoiding the need for a federal loan.

Seventy percent of Texas employers currently pay the minimum fee of \$6 per employee per year and the average tax of \$36 is the lowest in the nation.

A 2,000-percent increase would require a minimum of \$120 per employee for employers, unless the Legislature changes the taxing formula.

Meanwhile, lawmakers must also consider avenues for bailing out the nearly bankrupt unemployment fund.

Bay City rally to hit landfill

United Press International
BAY CITY — A Matagorda County citizen group says it will hold a rally to protest a toxic chemical waste company's proposed landfill and incinerator near Bay City.

The Matagorda Citizens For Environmental Protection, led by Bay City city secretary Sharon Serafino, was formed last May when Chemical Wastes Management Inc. of Illinois gained control of an option to buy 950 acres of prime land in the southwest corner of Matagorda County.

The environmental group plans to hold a rally Saturday at 11 a.m. in Bay City to protest the possible dump site.

Although the waste firm officially announced it has no intention of establishing such a site near Bay City, critics say they are skeptical as long as the company holds the option on the property.

The firm handles the incineration of polychlorinated biphenyls, a transformer coolant found to cause cancer in animals.

The company burned the chemicals in the Gulf of Mexico 180 miles off the Texas coast last December and again Aug. 25. Now it has applied to the Environmental Protection Agency

to burn another 2.1 million gallons of PCB plus 260,000 gallons of the pesticide DDT.

Results of the hearings last week in Brownsville will be announced within 30 days by EPA officials.

An attorney for the Texas Farmworkers Union, Robin Alexander, questioned EPA officials at the hearing and said she felt the agency was unsure what was contained in the permit.

"The description of the chemicals to be burned was so vague, CWM thought they were asking for Silvex (another pesticide), and the EPA didn't realize it," she said.

Serafino and representatives of environmental groups, including Green Peace, also testified at the hearing.

Serafino said: "With recent environmental problems, such as groundwater contamination resulting from CWM hazardous waste landfill operations in Kansas and Louisiana, we strongly question their ability to safely operate a landfill site as well as disposal by incineration in the Gulf of Mexico."

One alternative to the burning of PCB is the use of mobile units which can chemically destroy PCBs inside electrical transformers.

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