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**Federal assistance urged for Texas agriculturists**

BY JEANETTE SIMPSON  
The Battalion

For the past few months, many parts of Texas have seen little rainfall, and weather forecasters say they see no relief in sight. Data from the Palmer Drought Severity Index indicates the Brazos Valley area has experienced moderate drought conditions, leading to lower-than-average crop yields.

Wes Sims, Texas Farmers Union president, said he asked the U.S. Congress to provide desperately needed disaster relief to Texas farmers.

Sims said Texas will not receive disaster assistance unless Congress passes legislation to change the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform act (FAIR), a seven-year farm policy effective through 2002.

Sims said when Congress passed the 1996 law, it eliminated important disaster-relief programs and fixed the marketing loan rate at 1995 levels.

Because caps were placed on marketing loans by the FAIR act, farmers are receiving loans related to the 1995 prices for cattle, cotton, soybeans and other products.

Sims said the FAIR act approved changes to farm laws, which are critical during times of disaster. FAIR eliminated emergency livestock feeding and other programs now needed in

Texas because of severe drought conditions.

"The 1996 farm law was based on the false assumption that farmers and ranchers could depend solely upon the international market to receive a fair price for their product," Sims said.

A \$7.3 billion farm-relief package offered by U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, was voted down by Congress.

The proposal included funds to cover both disaster and economic losses. Instead, the committee adopted a \$4 billion Republican plan.

The Farmers Union is calling on Congress to reject the weak legislation and send it back to committee for improvements.

Sims said more assistance will be needed to meet the needs of farmers and ranchers in Texas.

"Many producers in Texas will not make it through the year if Congress doesn't get down to business and pass this legislation now," he said.

The union leader said the USDA is doing all it can within current laws to help farmers.

"Some people in Texas are mistaken when they claim that Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman is not doing enough to assist farmers and ranchers in drought-stricken areas," he said.

"It is Congress, not Agriculture Secretary Glickman, that is responsible for the lack of disaster assistance in our state."

**Blobel wins Nobel Prize for medicine**



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STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) — Dr. Guenter Blobel of The Rockefeller University in New York won the Nobel Prize for medicine today for protein research that shed new light on diseases such as cystic fibrosis and early development of kidney stones.

Blobel, 63, a native of Germany who became a U.S. citizen in the 1980s, was cited for discovering proteins carry signals that act as zip codes, helping them find their correct locations within the cell.

Some hereditary diseases are caused by errors in these signals and the associated transport mechanisms, the Nobel Assembly said in announcing the prize.

The work has helped scientists use cells in laboratories to churn out drugs and has had an "immense impact" on studies of the cell, the assembly said.

Blobel said he initially thought the call from Stockholm telling him he had won was a prank.

"I'm very excited," Blobel said at a news conference in New York, where he lives with his wife.

Blobel, a founder of Friends of Dresden, a group that helps collect money for the German city, said he would use the \$960,000 he won to help pay for the restoration of Dresden's famed Frauenkirche church, which was destroyed during World War II, as well as to fund restoration of a Dresden synagogue.

Blobel was born in the town of Waltersdorf, Silesia, in present-day Poland, in 1936. His family moved to Freiberg, in Germany's eastern Saxony state, after World War II.

**Shepard murder suspect goes on trial**

LARAMIE, Wyo. (AP) — A year after the beating death of Matthew Shepard, the man accused of instigating the attack chatted quietly with his attorneys today as jury selection got under way in his death-penalty trial.

Aaron McKinney smiled occasionally and briefly looked at his notes as prosecutor Cal Rerucha outlined how a jury will be chosen.

Rerucha reminded prospective jurors they must set aside passion and treat both sides fairly.

McKinney's father, William McKinney, along with three other family members or friends, sat behind the defendant.

Shepard, a gay college student, died a year ago today after a beating that sparked national outrage.

As McKinney's trial got under way, small groups of anti-gay protesters and people dressed as angels demonstrated outside the courthouse.

Seventeen people wearing golden halos and costumes made of white bedsheets stood silently in a street near the courthouse. Romaine Patterson, 21, of State College, Pa., said her colleagues wanted to send a message of love.

They faced a half-dozen protesters from

Kansas who waved signs with anti-gay slogans. The Rev. Fred Phelps, 69, of Topeka, Kan., his followers wanted "to insert a little sanity into this mad orgy."

At midmorning, eight prospective jurors had been dismissed for reasons such as duty, medical problems or job issues. The 51 prospects in today's pool.

McKinney, 22, is charged with first-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated robbery. He could be sentenced to death.

His alleged co-conspirator, Russell Herveyson, 22, received two life sentences after pleading guilty in April to felony murder and kidnapping.

Shepard, 21, was lured from a bar on Oct. 1998, driven to a remote prairie, tied to a pistol-whipped into unconsciousness and left to die on the freezing plains. He died five days later in a hospital.

McKinney, who said he had no idea Shepard was gay and does not hate homosexuals, pleaded innocent.

His trial date coincided with state memorials commemorating the first anniversary of the slaying.

**San Francisco security guard kills neighbor**

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A mentally ill security guard marched upstairs and killed three neighbors before taking his own life, leaving a wounded 2-year-old girl sitting in her high chair amid the bloodbath.

Lorenzo "Sol" Silva, 63, had been friendly with the young family who lived on the second floor of the two-story home he shared with his mother.

But recently his mental condition worsened, and he could not sleep without his mother in the room and a light on, his brother, Silvestre Silva, said.

"He had been nervous for years," the brother said. "I saw him last week — he looked like

he wanted to grab you. It was like he was drowning. He looked like he was seeing a ghost."

**"I saw the four bodies and the baby crying."**

— Buen Lirios  
murderer's brother in law

Police said they do not know what prompted the shooting.

Police said Silva finished the graveyard shift at the San Francisco airport and came home early Sunday.

About 1:30 p.m., he marched upstairs with a gun — one of the half-dozen he kept in his apartment.

He fatally shot Noel, his 28-year-old wife, Jose and a friend, Ola Marjorie, 32, who lived with the couple.

The Riduals' daughter, Jessica, was wounded in the shoulder and was in fair condition yesterday.

Downstairs, members of the Silva family heard the gunshots and went upstairs.

"I saw the four bodies and the baby crying" in her chair, Silva's brother-in-law, Buen Lirios, said. "The blood all over."

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