

Still on track

JOHN HUTHMACHER
Hastings Tribune

Progress at Motorsport Park Hastings remains on track as more construction hurdles are cleared for the track to be built at the southeast corner of U.S. Highway 6 and Showboat Boulevard.

Hastings resident and managing partner George Anderson said recent approval of permits for sewers and one of the track's two driveways off Showboat will allow for ground breaking as early as October 2005.

"When are we putting asphalt down? October," he said.

Located 1,400 feet from the intersection, the approved driveway site will be used by construction crews to prepare the track area for MPH's inaugural events — the Tractor Quad Pull and Sports Car Club America (SCCA) National RallyCross Challenge — on Sept. 13 and Oct. 14-16, respectively.

"That (the RallyCross Challenge) is a first-ever national event," Anderson said. "That's a huge event. It's exciting

that we have racing coming here and we don't even have a track yet."

Competitors from 15-20 states are expected to lock horns in the three-day dirt-racing event, Anderson said. Temporary grandstands will help accommodate the 1,000-1,500 fans expected to attend, Anderson said.

"We're expecting half the people to bring lawn chairs or to stand around and watch," he said. "I'm not a grandstand fan. The type of racing we do is a more casual sort of event."

With all topographical survey work now completed, track designer Alan Wilson of Wilson Motorsport is expected to submit his design to JEO Consulting Group of Hastings in August. Once JEO completes its engineering renditions of Wilson's design, the plans will be ready to put out for bids.

Anderson said the track surface will be polymerized asphalt, a higher-grade material better suited for racing than standard asphalt.

He is confident the track will be completed in spring 2006. Just when

the accompanying buildings — including the timing tower — will go up will depend on how fast the respective building permits can be obtained, he said.

"Whether it's early or late spring, I don't know, but we'll be open," he said. "Sanctioning bodies and groups around the country are wanting to schedule events here next year, so that opening day is very important."

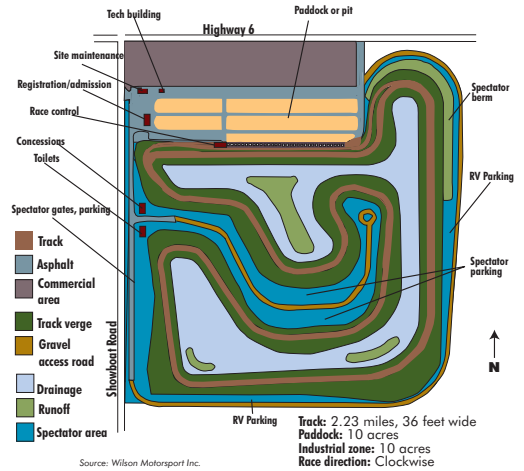
"The Nebraska region of the SCCA is already working on a 2006 schedule of where they're going to race. MPH is definitely going to be on their schedule."

Anderson said several area officials and companies — especially Hastings Economic Development Corp. — have played a role in forwarding the track's progress to date.

"MPH has a lot of great team members behind the scenes," he said. "Far more than I can name in the paper. This whole process never would have gotten this far without the help of Hastings Economic Development Corp."

Preliminary plans

Developer George Anderson recently released the tentative layout of his Motorsport Park, located at U.S. Highway 6 and Showboat Road. Some small changes may be made to make the track more motorcycle-friendly, according to Anderson.



DROUGHT

HEAT, LACK OF MOISTURE
BRINGING CRISIS TO MIDWEST



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Above: The drought caused pastures to "burn up a month ago," one farmer says. Top left: One Illinois farmer says the drought has caused cracks in the earth so big "you can stick your whole hand down in them."

BILL STRAUB

Scripps Howard News Service

When Brad Temple surveys the 1,000 acres of fertile soil he farms near Serena in northern Illinois these days, he finds himself confronted with wilting corn stalks, insatiable insects and cracks in the earth so big "you can stick your whole hand down in them."

"It can rain from now until Christmas and it's not going to help the corn," groaned Temple, who has been working the land for a little over 20 years.

Temple is far from alone in offering a pessimistic assessment of this year's crop yield in the Midwest, often described as the nation's breadbasket. A line stretching from central Texas up the Mississippi Valley all the way to Wisconsin and reaching into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan has experienced the worst drought since the disaster of 1988 that resulted in a national economic loss of about \$40 billion.

Contributing to this looming crisis is an unmerciful heat wave that has seen the mercury jump over 100 degrees on several occasions. Temperatures on Sunday reached

102 degrees in St. Louis and 101 degrees in Iowa City, Iowa, exacerbating the arid conditions.

"It's like I told people, I put out the most expensive corn crop I ever put out this spring and I'm watching it wither right before my eyes," said Phillip Nelson, who operates a farm just north of Seneca near the Illinois River in central Illinois. "It cooked the corn crop. The middle part of the day looks pretty deathly around here."

Northern Illinois appears to be suffering the most damage with the fifth driest growing season in 110 years, although parts of eastern Iowa, southern Wisconsin and a good chunk of Missouri are facing similar strains.

On Monday, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich asked U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns to declare a national disaster emergency in all of the state's 102 counties. That could provide farmers with low-interest loans. The state reports that 117,000 farmers have reported production losses with 74,000 estimating the drought will destroy 30 percent or more of their crops. Sixteen farmers already have reported total losses.

Please see DROUGHT/page E2



J.D. POOLEY/AP

Two of Roger Boyle's steers try to keep cool in a small area of water Tuesday on his family farm just west of Bowling Green, Ohio. Farmers across the Midwest are trying anything to keep their livestock from wilting in the oppressive heat that is being blamed for killing at least 1,200 head of cattle in Nebraska.

Livestock not immune from heat stress

JOHN SEEWER
The Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio — Farmers across the Midwest are using everything from electric fans to cold showers to keep their live-

stock from wilting in the oppressive heat, which is blamed for killing at least 1,200 head of cattle in Nebraska.

Please see LIVESTOCK/page E2

Liquid chicken?

"Hey, look at that truck," my daughter Kinley said as she pointed out the window of the car. I looked. It was a semi truck with a trailer that read "food grade" on the back.

We were driving down the interstate somewhere in Kansas on our way to Oklahoma for the umpteenth time this summer to see a surgeon about Kinley's recovery from a recent gall bladder surgery. We liked to ponder what the different trucks were hauling.

Once, we saw a huge bronze sculpture of several longhorns headed south. The plates on the truck indicated it was from Montana. We figured it was going to Texas.

We already had seen two semis carrying something that looked like huge fiberglass luggage racks — about the size of a small house — headed north. They had "GE" on the sides of them, so we decided they must be generators of some sort.

We had also passed a truck carrying brand new all-terrain vehicles in easy-pack containers and two trucks carrying parts of an airplane.

"What do you suppose is in that truck?" Kinley asked as we followed the truck.

I thought it could be molasses or soybean oil or some other vegetable oil.

"Maybe it's liquid chicken," Giselle put in from the back seat.

"Liquid chicken?" I asked. "There's no such thing as liquid chicken."

"There is," Giselle insisted. "When Taylor and I went to Ohio, we actually saw a truck like this that said liquid chicken on the back."

"What the heck is liquid chicken?" I asked.

I've never heard of such a thing, and I've been in farming quite a while. She had to be joking.

"No, really, Mom, it said liquid chicken," Giselle insisted.

I didn't think she was lying. I just couldn't grasp the concept of liquid chicken. Giselle suggested it could be chickens on hallucinogens.

Kinley thought they could have pureed chickens. I grimaced at the thought and decided it was chicken broth on its way to become soup.

"Or just that got a little warm," Kinley suggested.

I decided I would have to look it up when I had a chance, but it did make us remember all the times when we've seen agricultural products hauled from place to place.

Between us, we've seen cattle and horses, hogs and turkeys. We've seen combines and tractors and corn and soybeans going down the road and many pivot irrigation systems.

The worst truck we ever got behind was the dead animal truck. The truck comes out to the farm to pick up animals that have died and takes them to a rendering plant.

The one we were behind had a leg sticking up out of the top of it, which led to questions from the girls.

"I don't remember that," Giselle said, "and I must have never seen one again, because I didn't even know they existed until a few weeks ago when I was working with a vet for a few days."

We didn't see many more interesting trucks except for three from the Love Box Co. at Wichita, Kan. The girls never had considered cardboard box manufacturing, but already knew about the plant, since it is located about six blocks from where my aunt used to live in Wichita. When we got to the Love Box Co., we knew we were almost to Aunt Ellen's.

I checked the liquid chicken out on the Internet when we got to Oklahoma, but couldn't find anything. Maybe it's just not a common ag product.

"It's common enough to make it on to the back of a truck," Giselle reminded me.

True. I guess I'll keep researching.

Denise Andersen of Fairbury is a columnist for the Tribune. Contact Andersen at (402) 461-1252 or e-mail at tribune@hastingstribune.com

Honey's back — and with matches

The last week of July and first week of August were always the longest and hottest weeks of the year on the southern Illinois farm of my youth. They were some of the most dangerous weeks of the year, also.

The danger did not arise from a hayfield-induced heat stroke or the killing boredom that accompanies canning 100 quarts of field corn.

Nope, the danger lurked in that other two-word woe on our farm: Uncle Honey.

Regular readers may recall my great Uncle Honey, the sweetest, kindest human ever to walk the earth. A milkman by trade, Honey retired to our farm to delightfully discover the destructive power of farm machinery.

After that epiphany, Honey

spent six days per week (seven, if he was fall plowing) tickling the chin of the Grim Reaper with sickle mowers, silage choppers, grain augers, five-bottom plows, fold-up disks, chain saws, balers and, well, anything that could be misused badly enough to deliver disability or death.

Even five-gallon gas cans were weapons of minor destruction for Uncle Honey, as I learned one early August nearly 40 years ago.

With little to do until silage chopping began later in the month, Honey often spent August mornings traveling the farm in search of prey: pecan tree stumps to burn, johnson grass to kill, groundhogs to maim or murder.

Since no one on the farm trusted him with machinery actually designed to kill — like

a rifle or hand sprayer — Honey went after all fated flora or fauna with a volatile 50/50 mixture of gasoline and diesel fuel.

In fact, rare was the day Honey was without a jostling can of the killing combination. A good day for my father, the farm's manager, was Uncle Honey returning at quitting time with the can unspattered. A bad day for Dad was when he'd spot smoke rising somewhere on the farm's 720 acres.

One early August morning, with five gallons of his lethal elixir already on the Oliver 770, Honey quietly (he did everything quietly, even argue)



Alan Guebert

asked my mother if I could be released from assisting in the kitchen to assist him treating johnson grass.

Like everyone in the Mississippi Bottoms back then, Honey hated the prolific weed. Left untreated, johnson grass could choke the life out of the farm in weeks. A neighbor liked to say there were only three surefire methods to get it out of our lives: pave over the entire farm, move or die.

That recipe never stopped Honey from trying to do his part with his recipe. Since Dad wouldn't allow him access to any herbicides, Honey treated johnson grass one of two ways: digging it out with a spade or dousing it with his gas/diesel mixture.

Generously dousing it; two gallons per square foot mini-

mum. The potion killed the grass quickly alright, but it also guaranteed nothing would grow on the spot for years — maybe decades.

Our first stop that fateful morning was to kill another couple of square yards of the farm for another couple of years. Upon arrival, Honey slowly inspected the patch from the tractor seat, then leapt into action.

Can in hand, he sloshed the offensive grass with several gallons of his unpatented medicine. Then, without so much as a word or a sigh, he pulled a kitchen match out of the bib of his overalls and in a single, well-practiced motion struck it on the 770's drawbar and tossed it on fuel-soaked grass.

Whoosh! the air, dirt and

my short life exploded in a column of napalm. I felt my face scorch and smelled my eyebrows burning. Honey, practiced as he was, turned away at the last instant and escaped any damage.

"Maybe I didn't put enough diesel in," was all he could say when he discovered he had not cremated me. "Come to think of it," he added a second later, "I might not have put any diesel in it at all. Hmm."

Hmm?

Later, while on our way to immolate some groundhogs, Honey had a quiet suggestion. "Best not tell your Mom and Dad about that last thing."

Alan Guebert can be reached at P.O. Box 648, Delavan, IL 61734 or e-mail at agcomm@sbcglobal.net

Drought: Lack of rain stressing Midwest farms

Continued from page E1

Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt has asked the Missouri Farm Service Agency to begin assessing the damage wrought by the drought in 106 of the state's 114 counties, and Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle has declared a statewide drought emergency that would expedite farmers' requests for irrigation permits.

"Agriculture is the backbone of Wisconsin's economy, generating \$51 billion a year and accounting for one in five jobs," Doyle said. "We will do everything we can to help our farmers get through this drought emergency, save their crops and protect our farm economy."

In Illinois, 56 percent of the corn crop, the most severely hit to this point, was rated poor to very poor.

Since May 1, only five inches of rain has fallen in Ottawa Ill., located in the general vicinity of the Temple and Nelson farms — almost six inches below normal. Across the Mississippi River, in Clinton and Scott counties, Iowa, it's no better. Last week, in Maquoketa, Iowa, temperatures were about five degrees above normal while rainfall since April 1 is nearly nine inches below normal.

Virgil Schmitt, a crops specialist with the U.S. Agricultural Extension Service at Iowa State University, said plantings, particularly corn, "are at a very critical time and we have a lot of unhappy plants out there."

The desert conditions have "shortened the ears up a lot." Even if cooler and wetter conditions prevail, it's unlikely the corn will produce more kernels. "A lot of the corn has taken on a gray color," Schmitt said. "Soybeans have been doing some wilting during the day, but generally speaking they're still fairly good."

Ultimately, the biggest problem could be the alfalfa crop. Normally, cattle and sheep farmers plant and cut several fields of alfalfa and other grasses during the growing season and store it as hay to be used as feed during the long winter. But conditions already have dried up pastures, forcing growers to dig into their reserves. That means less hay will be available when snow covers the ground.

"To compound that, the second and third cuttings of hay are much smaller than normal," Schmitt said. "So they're feeding hay sooner and harvesting less at the same time. A lot of people are



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Corn withers in the field over much of the Midwest because of the heat and drought.

concerned."

Temple, who raises sheep, is one of them. The first alfalfa crop was near normal, he said. But the second and third cuttings were only half the normal size.

"What is hurting you now, whether you're raising cattle or raising sheep, your pastures are gone and you're consuming a lot more forage, feeding

hay a lot more," Temple said. "Hay prices in this area have already skyrocketed."

Nelson, who raises cattle, said his pastures "burned up a month ago." The first hay-cutting resulted in 65 round bales at 1,500 pounds each. The second cutting resulted in only nine bales and there has been no third cutting — nothing has grown back over three weeks.

The impact is clear. While the drought's cost won't be determined until after the growing season, farmers expect to face considerable economic distress. And consumers will almost surely find themselves paying more at the supermarket checkout counter, particularly if farmers are forced to pay inflated hay prices.

Livestock: Cattle not immune from heat stress

Continued from page E1

Tracy Swank, who raises sheep near Toledo, said she has been opening more barn doors to increase air flow and filling more troughs and buckets with water.

"Animals are pretty resilient. They'll adjust, but you still have to give them plenty of water and provide some shade," she said.

The blistering heat wave brought stifling humidity and temperatures in the 90s Tuesday on the East Coast, but a cold front brought some relief to the West and parts of the Midwest after days of triple-digit heat index readings.

The heat wave already has been blamed for many deaths across the country, including 28 in the Phoenix area alone, most of them homeless people.

Oppressive heat also posed health risks for animals. In northeast Nebraska, hundreds of cattle died over the weekend when the humidity reached 90 percent and tem-

peratures stayed warm into the night.

Roxanne Bergman, president of the Northeast Nebraska Rendering and Bergman Inc., in Clearwater, said her business has collected about 1,250 head of dead cattle.

"And we're still picking up," Bergman said Tuesday. "I thought today it would slow down and we could catch our breath, but we've had a lot of calls."

One producer lost 200 head of cattle, she said. She estimated that losses to cattle producers in the area would be in the millions of dollars.

Veterinarians and livestock experts say keeping plenty of fresh water on hand is a must when temperatures exceed 80 degrees. They also say it's better not to exercise animals during warm weather and allow them to rest as much as they need.

Clark Emmons, a dairy farmer from Fayette near

the Ohio-Michigan state line, figures he's losing about \$350 per day because his cows are making about 10 pounds less milk per day, down from their usual 90 pounds a day. Plus, there's the extra cost of running more fans in the barn and providing more water.

"Cows sweat just like people do," he said. "Moving air makes them feel colder."

Keith Kemp, a hog breeder from West Manchester in western Ohio, said his animals handle the heat much better than they did years ago because the pigs are now bred with less back fat. Some hog farmers run mist sprayers in their

barns, but he said there's plenty of ventilation to cool off his pigs.

"It's harder on the people than it is the hogs."

Associated Press Writer Chuck Brown in Omaha contributed to this report.

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