



Farm thaws winter weather

BY LISA KUCHARSKI
Staff Reporter

When University Farm Manager Bill Kuntz started working at Truman's farm 11 years ago, he decided that not continuously chipping and thawing ice was worth a slightly higher financial cost.

The Farm is equipped with 10 automatic waterers for the large outdoor water tanks and 20 individual heated water buckets for the stalls to provide the horses and cows with water each day. Kuntz said that before the heaters, ice made work a little more difficult.

"Two or three times a day you would have to go out and basically take the bucket out of the stall and knock the ice out of it," Kuntz said. "Overnight it would freeze solid. During the day it would have a pretty good layer of ice on it. It was a real pain."

Kuntz said he started using the large outdoor automatic waterers with heaters his first year at the Farm, but didn't use the heated buckets until 2004. He said small automatic waterers have been in the corners of each stall since approximately 1998. However, they started breaking and because they were outdated, he had difficulties finding replacement parts. The auto-waterers have heaters in them, but Kuntz said the water lines to the bowl would freeze and it became too much of a hassle, so he decided to switch to the heated buckets.

At a price of approximately \$35 to \$40 per bucket and ap-

proximately \$1 per day to operate — depending on how cold it is — Kuntz said they are expensive, but worth it.

"It's probably a little more expensive on the bill end of it, but as far as the expense of our time emptying buckets out or thawing waterers, it's a lot less taxing," Kuntz said. "There'd be days where I didn't spend any time doing anything except thawing waterers out."

The heaters are kept plugged in from mid-December through January, unless there is a warm spell, in which case they are unplugged to save electricity. Kuntz said the heated buckets in the barns are turned off when it's above 20 degrees, but the heaters outside are not shut off unless it is above freezing.

If the buckets are left unplugged and the water freezes, Kuntz said that sometimes creates problems because the buckets can crack and leak.

Another problem Kuntz said he occasionally encounters with the buckets is when horses mess with them. He said some horses have pulled the cords out of the outlets and their water freezes, while others have chewed on the bucket cords. The buckets have metal springs around the cords to avoid this problem although the cords are fed through a hole in the stall wall to try to keep them out of reach. Kuntz said none of the horses has been injured by them.

Kuntz said the electrical system has been installed with safety in mind by having the outlets on a ground fault circuit to shut off the power in case something shorts out. He also said the heated buckets have built-in thermostats that shut off the heat when the water reaches 50 degrees to prevent the bucket from overheating, melting and possibly starting a fire.

"There's a little bit of a risk, but I think the risk of having a horse not have water is probably worse than that," Kuntz said.

Kuntz said it is easier to have water available to the animals rather

than having to thaw it out every day. Without adequate water, horses have a higher chance of developing colic, which is abdominal pain.

Senior Nicole Reindl said it's important to make sure the water tanks outside stay filled not only for the horses, but also because the heaters don't turn off by themselves. After working at the Farm since her sophomore year, Reindl said she has dealt with a variety of water tank issues.

"Every now and then they'll just quit working, they short out if you don't keep them full, or at least some water in them, they'll evaporate the water off slowly and then once they're empty, the element keeps working," Reindl said. "They're kind of expensive to replace."

Reindl said keeping the water full in the automatic waterers outside usually is not an issue, but there was a time when the water level indicator was frozen, the tank didn't refill and the heater melted to the bottom of the waterer.

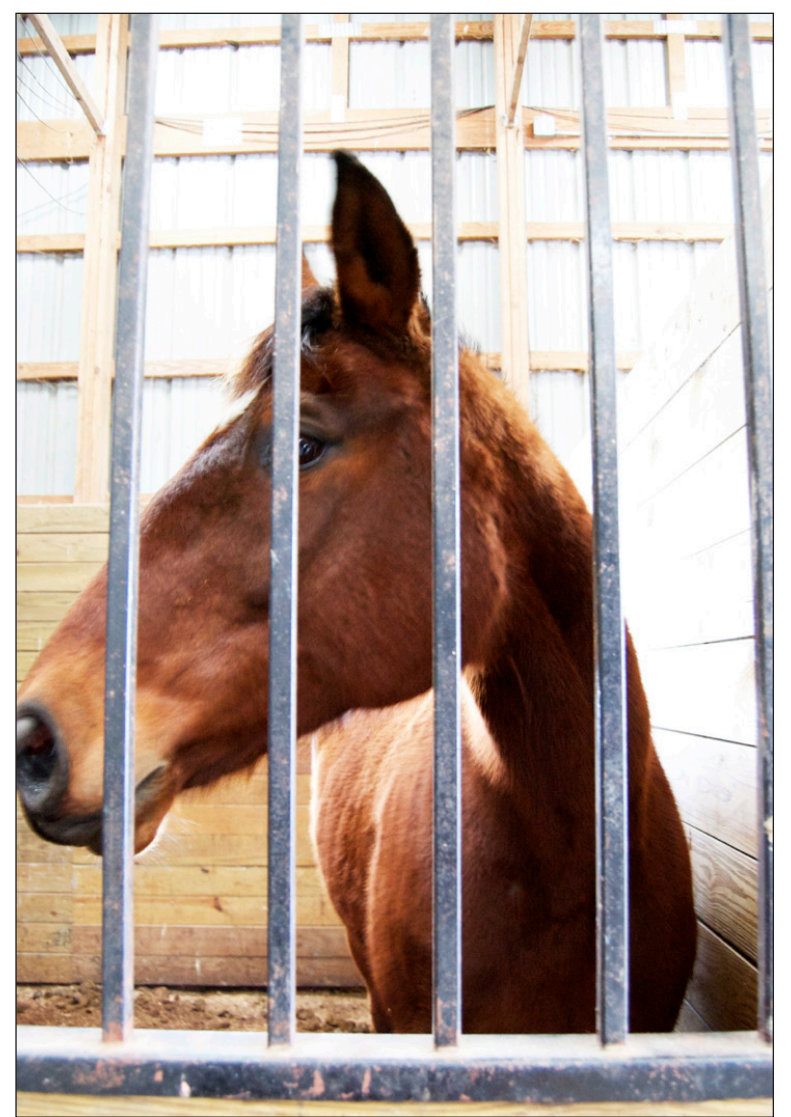
Besides freezing water, Reindl said the cold weather also can create problems for the farm machinery sometimes.

"The first winter I was here, I took water out to the cow pasture and we put hot water in a bucket and put it in the back of the gator, which is what we drove at the time for chores, and we hit a few bumps on the way out there and ended up spilling hot water on the gear box for the gator and broke the gator for a few days before it unfroze," Reindl said.

Senior Krystin Schupp said making sure to plug in the diesel vehicles when it's cold is important to remember so they keep working. She said it's harder to get the equipment started otherwise.

Schupp said the cold weather can make chores an interesting and difficult task, especially when handling the wheelbarrows.

"The worst is when the ramp is completely covered in ice and you're trying to put the manure wagon up and you slip, then the wagon slips, and then it flips all over you," Schupp said.



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Above: A horse stands in its stall at the University Farm.
Below: The stalls at the Farm are equipped with heated buckets.



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