

Fenceline

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### The Simple Life

I recently was selling something off the farm, it's a bit scary this day and age to invite strangers onto your property. Luckily there was only one family that came, and fortunately it was close to dark. I say that because they came from Kansas City and they were enthralled with the farm. They had two small children and they wanted to see the ponies, horses and goats. They played with our kittens as well. I'm afraid if it would have been daytime, they would have stayed awhile longer. They just kept going on about how peaceful it was. I guess as rural folks we take for granted what we have. I've always thought I have a pretty simple life, compared to others I'm grateful for it.

There is nothing simple about agriculture these days.

Average net farm income in Kansas plummeted to \$4,568 in 2015 or less than 5 percent of the previous year's average of \$128,731, according to annual [Kansas Farm Management Association](#) member data. The 2015 level was the lowest average level of nominal net farm income since 1985.

The average net farm income – recorded on an accrual basis – had been slipping, but until 2015 had been over \$120,000 for several years. In 2015, however, the drop was more akin to falling off a cliff. Average net farm income across the state was \$159,352 in 2012 before dipping to \$140,356 in 2013 and \$128,731 in 2014 before falling to \$4,568 in 2015. Net farm income represents the amount a farm has available to use for debt repayment, family living and expansion.

Across all farms, the gross crop value per acre in 2015 was \$315.92, down from \$339.36 in 2014, \$407.27 in 2013 and \$421.44 in 2012.

Generally, across the state, farms that primarily focused on dairy production, cow herds and irrigated crop farms fared better than dryland farming, livestock backgrounding and farms that both grew crops and had livestock backgrounding operations, said Kevin Herbel, KFMA program administrator.

U.S. beef cattle prices dropped from an average \$166 per hundredweight (cwt) in January 2015 to \$132 by January 2016 – the largest one-year drop on record, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service.

"As we come out of a period of strong profitability in the agriculture sector and enter this current downturn, it is important for producers and their advisors to know and understand the financial position and financial performance on each operation," said Kevin Herbel, Kansas Farm Management Administrator, noting that not all Kansas farmers are KFMA members, but the annual report can be viewed as a reflection of financial conditions for farmers across the state, especially when comparing one year to the next. The data presented in the 2015 analysis came from 1,159 KFMA member farms and ranches.

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### Trees Leaf Loss

Mid-summer can be a tough time for our trees. It's hot. It's dry. And they have to adapt to it! Fortunately, they are actually pretty good at doing so. Unfortunately, when they don't adapt, we typically lose an integral – and sometimes expensive – part of our landscape!

Leaf loss in the summer can be due to multiple factors. Herbicide damage is generally the first thing we look to, and while certainly an issue, there are lots of other leaf loss causes that need to be considered.

When you see leaf loss well distributed throughout the tree canopy that causes a general thinning, the problem usually isn't serious. It's not uncommon for trees to set more leaves in spring than they can support in summer. Along comes heat and drought stress and the tree drops leaves it can't support based on the moisture we receive. Falling leaves are characterized by a yellow color with no disease spots. There may be some 'perfectly healthy' green leaves dropped as well. Because the thinning is gradual and spread across the tree, the tree should persist just fine. Just be sure to keep it watered during dry periods (more on that later!).

What really starts to concern us is when we see most all of the leaves drop! Hackberry, for example, is a species that will often drop all of its leaves as it enters summer dormancy. If we get good rains, we may delay dormancy. If not, leaves drop and trees look bad! Watch for this phenomenon if summer weather continues the hot/dry pattern that June exhibited. If leaves do drop, check twigs and buds. Trees should have supple twigs and healthy buds, not dead tissue usually associated with other problems. Healthy trees usually sustain this stress fairly well as long as they have enough stored energy reserves to make it through to next spring. If buds/twigs become brittle and die, at least part of the tree is dead.

One of the more curious issues occurs when a tree has leaves die (sometimes overnight!), but they remain attached to the tree! In these cases, the tree died quickly when it couldn't keep up with moisture demands. Excessive spring rains can damage root systems, limiting their ability to handle summer stress and moisture needs. Again, check the buds/twigs. If they are alive and well, let the tree remain!

As stated before, other causes – physical damage, herbicide drift, etc... - are always a possibility. In many cases, trees can handle a little bit of damage and still live. Healthy trees tend to have a great ability to handle defoliation or damage to trunk or other parts so long as they are well watered and monitored for further decline.

Bottom line: your trees can look a little tough but it isn't necessarily need for panic! Knowing how the tree lost its leaves and whether buds and twigs are still alive can tell you a lot about what the tree is experiencing. In addition to giving the trees some time, ample water is a good practice, too. Watering isn't as 'simple' as it might sound, though. For further information on watering, check out *Watering Established Trees & Shrubs* available from your local K-State Research & Extension Office or online at:

<http://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/mf2801.pdf> .

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*MEADOWLARK EXTENSION DISTRICT AGENT NEWS*

Cindy Williams  
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No news column this week.

Nancy C. Nelson  
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Family Life

## Simple Changes for Home Safety

Six out of every 10 falls happen at home, where we spend much of our time and tend to move around without thinking about our safety. Many falls could be prevented by making simple changes in your living areas, as well as personal and lifestyle changes.

Take steps to "fall proof" your home, both inside and outdoors using these suggestions from the National Institute of Health Senior Health. To make your home safer, you can remove or avoid safety hazards, improve lighting, install handrails and grab bars, and move items to make them easier to reach.

An important step toward preventing falls at home is to remove anything that could cause you to trip or slip while walking. Tripping on clutter, small furniture, pet bowls, electrical or phone cords, or other things can cause you to fall. Slipping on rugs or slick floors can also cause falls.

Arrange furniture to give you plenty of room to walk freely. Also remove items from stairs, hallways, and pathways.

Be sure that carpets are secured to the floor and stairs. Remove throw rugs, use non-slip rugs, or attach rugs to the floor with double-sided tape.

Put non-slip strips on floors and steps. Put non-slip strips or a rubber mat on the floor of your bathtub or shower, as well. You can buy these items at a home center or hardware store.

At home and elsewhere, try to avoid wet floors and clean up spills right away. Use only non-skid wax on waxed floors at home.

During the winter, ask someone to spread sand or salt on icy surfaces. Be sure to wear boots with good traction if you must go out when it snows. Better yet, don't take chances walking on icy or slippery surfaces.

Poor lighting – inside and outdoors – can increase your risk of falls. Make sure you have enough lighting in each room, at entrances, and on outdoor walkways. Use light bulbs that have the highest wattage recommended for the fixture.

Good lighting on stairways is especially important. Light switches at both the top and bottom of stairs can help.

Place a lamp within easy reach of your bed. Put night lights in the bathroom, hallways, bedroom, and kitchen. Also keep a flashlight by your bed in case the power is out and you need to get up.

Have handrails installed on both sides of stairs and walkways. If you must carry something while walking up or down stairs, hold the item in one hand and use the handrail with the other. When you're carrying something, be sure you can see where your feet are stepping.

Properly placed grab bars in your tub and shower, and next to the toilet, can help you avoid falls, too. Have grab bars installed, and use them every time you get in and out of the tub or shower. Be sure the grab bars are securely attached to the wall.

You might find it helpful to rearrange often-used items in your home to make them more accessible. Store food boxes, cans, dishes, clothing, and other everyday items within easy reach. This simple change could prevent a fall that might come from standing on a stool to get to an item.

If you have fallen, your doctor might suggest that an occupational therapist, physical therapist, or nurse visit your home. These health care providers can assess your home's safety and advise you about making changes to prevent falls.