

Jody Holthaus, Agent
Meadowlark Extension District
Livestock and Natural Resources

Life Skills

In the 4-H program, we are all about teaching “life skills”. Some of those life skills come easier than others. My sons were always dreading doing their record books and then the even more dreadful “thank you notes”. Sometimes they would say “but I told them in person” and I would tell them that it wouldn’t hurt them to write a formal thank you note. This past month, my youngest son returned to his hotel room, after a 12 hour day trying to restore power to those in western Kansas. That was one freaky May blizzard! He found some handwritten thank you notes. A 4th grade teacher, had her class write the “thank you” notes to the lineman. It was pretty special for him, and maybe, just maybe he understands now why we wrote those thank you notes, after all those county fairs!

Breeding seasons for spring-calving herds will begin or have begun now.

A good manager keeps an eye on his bulls during the breeding season to make sure that they are getting the cows inseminated. Occasionally a bull that has passed a Breeding Soundness Exam may have difficulty serving cows in heat, especially after heavy service. Breeding Soundness Exams cannot evaluate bull libido. Such problems can best be detected by observing bulls while they work. “Libido” or sex drive refers to the desire to mate and is thought to be a highly heritable trait in cattle. Remember that semen quality and scrotal circumference are not related to libido. Therefore, a bull that passes a Breeding Soundness Evaluation may have poor libido, or a bull with good libido may fail a Breeding Soundness Evaluation.

Therefore producers should (if at all possible) watch bulls breed cows during the first part of each breeding season. If problems are apparent, the bull can be replaced while salvaging the remainder of the breeding season and next year’s calf crop. Likewise a small proportion of bulls can wear out from heavy service during the breeding season and lose interest. These, too, will need to be replaced. The greater the number of cows allotted to each bull in the breeding pasture the more critical it is that every bull be ready to work every day of the breeding season.

Injuries to bulls during the breeding season are relatively common. When a bull becomes lame or incapable of breeding, because of an injury to his reproductive tract, he needs to be removed from the breeding pasture and replaced with another bull.

In my last article about the pop bottle water filters, I was remiss to mention the help of the Jackson county Recycling center. They graciously, helped me collect the clear pop bottles for the project! It only cost me two batches of chocolate chip cookies. Thanks Mixie and crew!

David Hallauer, Agent
Meadowlark Extension District
Crop and Soils, Horticulture

Pasture Monitoring

One of the more important facets of livestock production is forage management. Some would even go so far as to call themselves forage managers as much as they would livestock producers! I think forage manager is a pretty accurate description – particularly as we get in to the heart of the grazing season and work at trying to manage that very important forage resource.

Our management has a lot to do with the forages available to us. Cool season grasses like brome and fescue grow very well when temperatures are in the forties through the mid-seventies. That's the reason we typically see those grasses heading here in late May and in to early June as they reach 'maturity'. Warmer season forages do well from the low seventies on in to the nineties, making them much better suited for the increasing temperatures we see in summer.

Unfortunately, we don't typically have the perfect balance of warm and cool season forages, and in some cases don't have more than one type to even think about grazing. That's what makes our management system all the more important.

In short, grasses grow leaves to capture sunlight and convert it to energy. As grass plants grow, the growing point moves from near the soil line further up the plant where it is often removed by grazing. When removed, the plant initiates regrowth from root systems and the plant starts the process over again. It works well – unless the roots haven't stockpiled enough energy to allow for recovery. If not, grass growth slows, root mass declines, and stands can thin.

To keep things in 'balance', good grass managers spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to maximize production. In short, that means grazing plants when they are actively growing, but always leaving enough foliage for recovery as well as a rest period to do so. For example, grazing a cool season pasture heavily isn't necessarily an issue, as long as three to four inches of growth is retained so that photosynthesis can start to replenish root reserves AND adequate rest is allowed for the plant to initiate recovery. If a pasture is heavily grazed, livestock can be moved to a warm season grass or other forage source to give the heavily grazed area time to recover. If they can't be moved, then grazing management has to include safeguards to keep grass from getting too short without time for recovery.

Monitor your forage resource by consistently observing grass growth through the season. Have a plan for removing animals when forages reach critical grazing levels and make sure that pastures receive adequate rest for ample recovery before they are grazed again or prior to fall or winter dormancy. Make sure you are grazing cool season species in the appropriate time frame and warm seasons in the best time frame to maximize their production. If you want to get even more technical, start taking pasture measurements. A ruler or grazing stick and production data for specific forage species, combined with appropriate grazing height suggestions can give you a really good idea about how much grazing you can expect from an area. All of these tools can help you not only manage the forage resource for the current season, but help you maintain stands in to the future!

Cindy Williams, Agent
Meadowlark Extension District
Food and Nutrition, FNP

Safety First When Grilling

Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee says getting ready for the outdoor grilling season requires one important tool in addition to tongs, a spatula and oven mitts.

“Grab that meat thermometer, too,” Blakeslee, who is also coordinator of the university’s Rapid Response Center, a source of information on food safety and other consumer topics.

“A thermometer is your best defense against any foodborne illness and checking for doneness,” she said. “Don’t rely on color, because it’s really misleading. Internal temperature is the best way to check for doneness.”

Blakeslee said digital, instant-read thermometers are the best type to use for grilling because the sensor is on the point of the thermometer.

“You will get a really quick read with those,” she said. “They will give you a reading in about 10 seconds.” She added that depending on the type of meat you are grilling, there are three temperatures to remember:

165 degrees F --For any type of poultry, whether it’s chicken or turkey, and regardless if it’s ground or even whole.

160 degrees F --For any type of ground meat, including beef, pork or lamb.

145 degrees F --For steaks and chops, whether it is beef, pork or lamb. Try to insert the thermometer in from the side, not from the top. That will give you a better reading. Blakeslee shared other tips to make sure your grilling experience is successful:

Cleaning the grill

Caked-on grease or food can cause a fire. Brush and scrub the grates well. Some spray-on grill cleaners can be effective at removing residue.

Blakeslee also suggested taking the grate out and clean leftover grease and food particles from inside the grill. She also advised inspecting the cleaning brush; ‘If you’ve got a brush where those little metal bristles are starting to come loose or break, it’s time to throw it out and get a new one,’ she said. “Those may break off on the grate itself and if you don’t see them, they could get stuck on your food, and you could ingest them.”

In addition, check the propane tank to make sure it’s full and ready to go, and that there are no cracks in the hoses.

Food Safety

Blakeslee cautioned against cross-contaminating foods. “The main thing is if you’re handling raw meat with tongs, don’t use those same tongs that handled the raw meat with your cooked vegetables or meat” she said. “Wash your tongs in between handling raw and cooked foods. If you have an extra set, use a clean set instead.

“Once you take your meat off the grill, don’t put it back on the plate that had the raw meat on it. And eat it right away. Once it starts to get warmer outside and up over 90 degrees, you can leave food out for about an hour, but after that I would put it in the refrigerator or ice chest.”

In cooler, springtime weather, Blakeslee said food can be left out for up to two hours, but then should be refrigerated.

Use an ice chest --Ice chests are convenient for storing drinks or, when filled with ice, can help to keep food cold during an outdoor party.

“You’re re-creating your kitchen outside,” Blakeslee said. “If you have access to power outside, you could even have a portable refrigerator for your gathering. Remember to plug it in early enough to make sure it’s cold.” Keep an ice chest in a covered area or out of direct sunlight, she added.

Safety precautions “Supervise the grill all the time,” she said. “Pay attention to what’s going on, because if you leave it unattended, it could spark a fire, or if kids or pets are running around outside, they may accidentally tip it over.”

Nancy Nelson, Agent
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

No News Today.