KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension Meadowlark District News

December 2025

Community Vitality/Economic Development

David Key, *Extension Agent/Director*

Reflect, Recognize, and Refocus: How Nonprofits Can Learn from the Past Year

Kansas nonprofits are known for rolling up their sleeves and getting things done. From organizing local festivals to leading food drives and youth programs, nonprofit leaders and volunteers rarely stop celebrating what they've accomplished. As the year winds down, consider using these ideas and tips to help your organization reflect, recognize, and refocus for the coming year.

Host a Year-End Reflection Meeting—Gather your board members, staff, and volunteers for a structured conversation about the past year. Use guiding questions such as:

- What went well this year?
- What challenges did we face?
- What lessons did we learn from our successes and struggles?

Encourage open and honest discussion. Assign someone to take notes so key insights aren't lost. Consider holding this meeting as part of a holiday potluck or appreciation dinner to make it both productive and enjoyable.

Review Your Mission and Goals—Every event, fundraiser, or program should connect back to your mission. Spend time evaluating whether this year's activities aligned with your purpose and goals. If not, identify what may have caused the drift. Revisit your mission statement as a group and ask, "Does this still describe who we are and what we aim to do?"

Collect and Celebrate Impact Stories—Data matters—but stories move people. Ask volunteers, clients, and community partners to share short stories about how your organization made a difference this year. These can be used in annual reports, newsletters, social media posts, or grant applications. Sharing real examples of impact not only boosts morale but also strengthens community support and donor confidence.

Look at the Numbers, Not Just the Narratives—Numbers tell an important part of the story. Review participation counts, volunteer hours, dollars raised, and program outcomes. Look for trends—did attendance rise or fall? Did expenses increase in certain areas?

Seek Honest Feedback—Invite feedback from people outside your core leadership group. This might include event attendees, community partners, or clients served. Create a short online or paper survey asking what they valued most, what could improve, and what new ideas they'd like to see.

Identify Priorities for the Coming Year—Once you've reflected, reviewed, and celebrated, look ahead. Identify two to four key priorities for next year. These should be realistic, mission-driven, and based on what you learned. Create a simple action plan that lists what needs to be done, who's responsible, and how success will be measured. This transforms reflection into meaningful progress.

Build Reflection into Your Routine—Reflection shouldn't happen only once a year. Add short debrief sessions after major events or programs. Ask three questions: "What worked? What didn't? What should we do differently next time?" Making reflection a habit helps organizations adapt quickly, learn continuously, and avoid repeating mistakes.

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District Office Hours:

Open Monday-Friday
8:00 AM-Noon; 12:30-4:30 PM

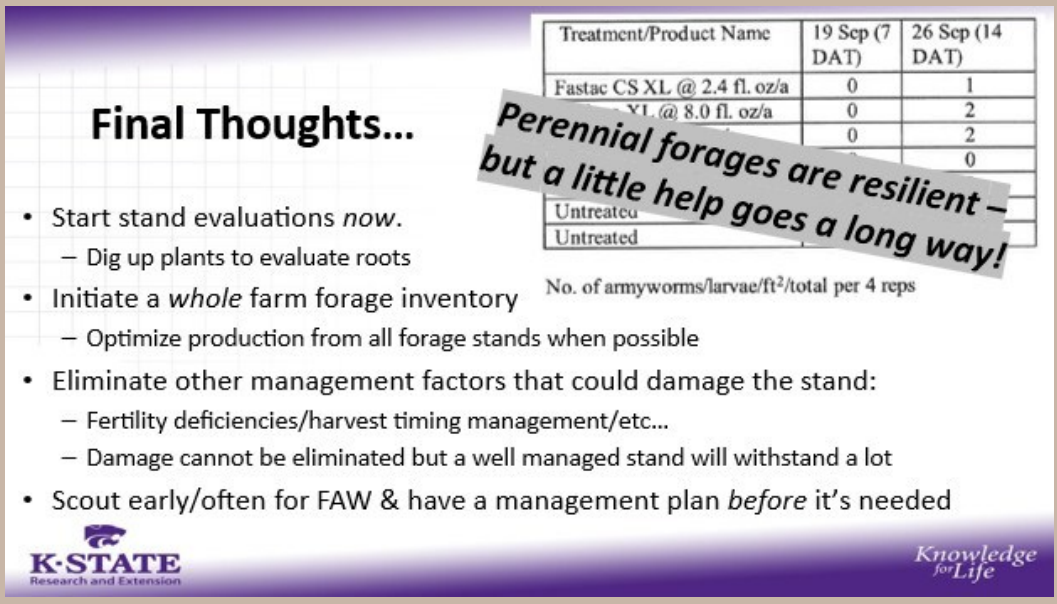
Closed on designated holidays

www.meadowlark.k-state.edu

David Hallauer, *Extension Agent*

Fall Armyworm Recovery Meeting Resources

This is a summary slide from our Fall Armyworm Recovery Meetings. Couldn't make it? E-mail me or contact a District Office for resources. View meeting excerpts starting in January on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@meadowlarkextensiondistrict/videos.



Ag Technology Survey

If you missed our recent Technology in Ag meeting, but are interested in sharing your perspectives on Digital Agriculture and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in farming systems, check out the Digital Ag Navigators survey at https://kstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bwoxVYFC5t10Wge?Q_CHL=qr. Responses will help identify opportunities, challenges, and resource needs across Kansas as these technologies continue to evolve.

Ag Stress Resources

Stress in Agriculture comes from numerous sources. Fortunately, the resources available to help deal with those stresses are also more numerous than ever.

Kansas Ag Stress is a website compilation of many resources to help assist Kansas farmers and ranchers in their well-being. Want to learn more – for yourself or someone else you care about? Visit https://www.kansasagstress.org/ and find help with everything from daily stress management to financial and legal challenges, and many other needs as well.

Rental Rate References

Did you know, the single highest expense (direct + fixed) in the 2026 KSU Soybean Cost-Return Budget for NEK: cash rent. It makes up almost 27 percent of the budget's total costs. Cash rent trails only fertilizer costs in the corn budget. Bottom line: it's an important factor to both landlords and tenants when negotiating a rental arrangement.

If you're still working through numbers for 2026 cropping year rental arrangements, these numbers and many others can sometimes be helpful. Fortunately, the Department of Agricultural Economics at Kansas State has a 'one stop shop' called AgManager.info. It is the host site for a ton of great information on all topics related to Agricultural Economics and can be especially helpful when working on lease arrangements. Under the Farm Management tab at www.agmanager.info is a drop down menu with access to Land Rental Rates: https://www.agmanager.info/farm-management/land-rental-rates and not just rates for the current cycle but for the recent past as well. Resources include survey data and budget based rental rates as well.

Need lease forms or other aids to help you decide on the 'right' arrangement? Check out the Forms and Presentations tabs for examples plus helpful presentations from KSU Ag Economics staff. It's as close to a one-stop rental rate resource as you'll find.

Check it out and if you find it difficult to navigate, reach out. We'll be glad to walk you through it so you can design an arrangement to fit your unique situation.

Cindy Williams, *Extension Agent*

Now You're Cook'n… Hot Cocoa Mix

Easy to prepare and makes 14 cups of cocoa

Ingredients:
3 cups nonfat dry milk powder
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 cup nonfat dairy creamer

Directions: (Remember to wash your hands!)
To prepare mix:

1. Measure ingredients into mixing bowl, stirring well to combine.
2. Store prepared mix in a covered container or in a re-closable plastic bag.

To prepare drink:

1. Fill a microwave-safe mug 3/4 full of water.
   Microwave for 2 minutes on high.
2. Measure 1/3 cup hot cocoa mix and stir into hot water.

Helpful Hints: This mix is easy to make and store and costs a lot less than the kinds you buy at the store. Kids love its creamy, chocolatey flavor, and it makes a great warm drink for cold days. Keep a canister of mix ready as part of a healthy after-school snack—maybe with some mini-marshmallows.

Nutritional Facts: 4 1/2 cup dried mix or 14 cups hot cocoa mix. Calories 90; calories from fat 5; cholesterol 5 mg; sodium 80 mg carbohydrate 18 g; sugars 15 g and protein 6 g.

Source: K-State Kids a Cook'n

Build Relationships and Create Lasting Memories

Strong families make their relationships a priority and often engage in activities that strengthen those bonds. Time spent together helps create a sense of family and builds resiliency in children. There are numerous ways to strengthen your family relationships, and many of these activities are not expensive. Consider some of the following:

- Have a "no phone/technology" rule during dinner or other family activities so that family members are encouraged to talk, share, and interact with one another.
- Make it a game and see who can go the longest without being on their phone!
- Have a family game night. Choose a game that is fun and includes everyone.
- Watch a special family movie with popcorn and other snacks to make it a special night.
- Shop the after-Christmas sales together and see who can get the best deal for the least amount of money.
- Cook together. Baking or preparing special foods or treats is a great way to instill cooking skills in youth. Young children can wash vegetables, set the table, or frost cookies.
- Make time for each child individually to build a sense of belonging.
- Have grandparents share stories from the past to help connect their values and beliefs with today.
- Share or start a family tradition. Words of appreciation and heartfelt "thank yous" can go a long way in showing your love and support for one another.

No matter what activity your family chooses, taking time together will help create lasting holiday memories.

Stretching Your Holiday Dollar

You can enjoy a meaningful holiday season without overspending or starting 2026 in debt:

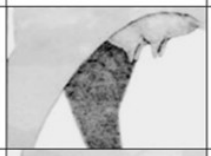
- **Decide how much you can spend and stick to it!** If things are really tight, have a family meeting and discuss the situation. Family members, including children, will often reduce their lists and expectations when they know the family is working together to get through difficult times.
- **Make a list to begin building the holiday budget.** List everyone you plan to buy for along with the amount you can spend for each. Be open to volunteering to do a service for someone or making a holiday treat rather than buying gifts. Remember to include extra holiday costs such as entertainment, food, travel, and those small expenses that add up.
- **Cash or credit?** If you're concerned about piling up debt, consider a cash-only holiday. Budget the money, and when it's gone, stop buying. If using credit, use only one card and charge only what you can repay quickly.

A realistic, affordable plan for your time and money should guide your holiday preparations. Make your holidays a time for living, laughing, loving, sharing, caring, and learning—things money can't buy but that make life more precious and full.

Ross Mosteller, *Extension Agent*

Longevity Traits – Udder Conformation

In the current low national cowherd number and high price point level environment, culling becomes increasingly important. Poor udder conformation is a trait that often gets females culled from the herd, especially when it prevents proper nursing. Functional females that will persist into the future and have the best opportunity to give returns to the operation, will need to have desirable udder conformation. The best way to measure this trait is to record, track and manage around it.

	Udder Suspension		Teat Size	
Score	Description		Description	
9	Very tight		Very small	
7	Tight		Small	
5	Intermediate /moderate		Intermediate/ moderate	
3	Pendulous		Large	
1	Very pendulous, broken floor		Very large, balloon-shaped	

Poor udder and teat conformation have the potential to contribute to a decreased profit margin for the beef producer, not only because of decreased calf performance, but also an increase in the potential for mastitis. Calves may have trouble nursing properly if the dam has large teats and pendulous udders. This difficulty nursing may create decreased milk production and potentially mastitis infections.

Udder scoring should take place within 24 hours of calving, using a score for both suspension and teat score, ideally by the same person for the entire herd. The score range is 1 through 9 for both udder and teat. Figure 1 shows examples and short descriptions of several conformation scores. Udder and teat conformation is scored individually, but the scores are combined to read as one number. If a cow scores a 5 on her udder and a 6 on her teats, the final score would read as a 56. Teat score is based on the largest quarter.

Naturally, the older the cow, the more likely she is to have larger teats and more pendulous udders, tracking this over time becomes a useful herd management tool. Much like any other production trait, targeting moderation is often the goal, because very small teats can be as problematic as ballon shaped very large teats. As we approach spring calving, I encourage every producer to track udder scores as part of your calving records routine.

K-State's Agricultural Profitability Conferences

The cow/calf business has been a profitable sector of the agricultural economy, but Kansas farmers continue to face rising financial pressures. In response to this, Kansas State University is hosting a series of Agricultural Profitability Conferences - Making 'Cents' of a Shifting Ag Economy - across the state, beginning in December.

The conferences will focus on preparing farmers to navigate economic downturns, manage input costs, and take advantage of new opportunities. Topics include updates on agricultural policy, farm bill changes, and land values. Also slated to be discussed are stress and mental health, as well as farm succession and retirement planning. Events closest to Meadowlark District include:

- **December 9** – Manhattan, Cico Park, Pottorf Hall
  Contact: Riley County Extension, 785-537-6350 or email lindsayshorter@ksu.edu or sriffey@ksu.edu.
- **December 17** – Hiawatha, Fisher Community Center
  Contact: Brown County Extension, 913-370-0946 or email mayoung@ksu.edu.

Registration costs vary by location. For more details or updates, visit the AgManager website at https://agmanager.info/profitability.

Teresa Hatfield, *Extension Agent*

The Silent Struggle: Social Isolation During the Holidays

As we head into the holiday season once again and begin to gather with family and friends, many Americans face feelings of loneliness and isolation during the holidays. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, social isolation and loneliness are significant public health concerns. According to a report, "the lack of social connection poses a significant risk for individual health and longevity. Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively. More broadly, lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day." These findings are significant and should not be ignored. This isolation is more than just an emotional burden it is a serious health concern. Holidays can hit people especially hard. There are expectations from society that you are supposed to be happy during this time of year, after all, as the song by Andy Williams goes, "it's the most wonderful time of the year". If this is true, why do we sometimes not feel this way? There are several reasons why this might be.

- **Unrealistic Expectations:** Many of us want the holidays to be perfect. Lofty expectations can create undue pressure for us to live up to a picture-perfect holiday.
- Living alone, being unable to leave your home, or feeling isolated and disconnected from others.
- **Suffering from grief and loss:** Many have lost people they are close to, a spouse, a friend.
- **Being a caregiver:** Caregivers often feel alone in their struggles. The pressure to make things perfect is frequently overwhelming.

What can you do to reduce the sense of loneliness you or others feel? Below are some tips to help make you feel more connected.

- Attend events and programs at local community centers, schools, or churches.
- Participate in a local exercise group.
- Volunteer with local charities or organizations.
- Share stories about a loved one you have lost, or make their favorite recipe to share with others.
- Schedule some time to connect with family, friends, or neighbors.
- Limit social media time as it can trigger anxiety or feelings of inadequacy.

Remember to try and focus on the moment and enjoy the time without expecting everything to go flawlessly. Realize that traditions can change over the years, and that's okay. Reach out intentionally to those you know who may be struggling with loneliness.

The world we live in can be challenging and polarizing. Seek out professional help if you are showing signs of depression. Contact the suicide and crisis lifeline at 988, if you or someone you know is considering harming themselves.

Achievement Program Celebrations

Each year the Meadowlark Extension District 4-H programs recognizes the outstanding achievements of their 4-H members and volunteers during their annual Achievement Celebrations. 4-H members over the 4-H year, have attended project workshops, camps, competitions, and 4-H activities, gaining valuable life skills. As 4-H'ers participate, they broaden their horizons and bring their local 4-H program fresh ideas that impact their community. 4-H provides young people with leadership, communication, self-discipline, and other valued life skills for their future.

The Kansas 4-H Member Achievement pins are designed to recognize 4-H members as they reach milestones throughout their 4-H journey. The pins are awarded in a series. As a member's 4-H journey progresses, the achievement pin requirements expand to challenge individuals to explore and engage in more opportunities to develop life skills. There are 9 Achievement pins in which 4-Her's can receive during their 4-H career.

1. **4-H Member Pin**
2. **Bronze Pin**
3. **Clover Pin**
4. **Emerald Pin**
5. **Silver Pin**
6. **Silver Guard Pin**
7. **Leadership Pin**
8. **Gold Pin**
9. **Gold Guard Pin**

Each year 4-H members are honored for outstanding project work within their County 4-H Program. The Kansas Project Report Form is a tool used and submitted by 4-H'ers to learn how to set 4-H project goals, make a plan to accomplish those goals, and evaluate their goals at the end of the 4-H year. Project Report Forms fall into three age groups:

- Juniors, ages 7-9
- Intermediates, 10-13
- Seniors, 14 and older

For each project and age group submitted, County Champions are selected. From there, 4-Hers are awarded project pin awards at their local county Achievement Program Banquets. Those banquets have currently taken place this past month throughout the Meadowlark District 4-H programs.

We would like to say congratulations to all those 4-H members who did the extra work and turned in their 4-H Record Books and to those members who were awarded a project pin.

Meadowlark District 4-H Recognizes the Kansas 4-H Key Award Winners

The Kansas 4-H Key Award is a program of distinction. Since 1952, this award has been presented to only the finest 4-H members in recognition of outstanding achievement. The Key Award is the highest honor and the most prestigious award a Kansas 4-H'er can receive. It is reserved for approximately the top 1% of the total 4-H membership in Kansas.

Kansas 4-H members age 16 (4-H age) and older are eligible to apply. As a 4-H award, applicants should highlight 4-H-related events, activities, and achievements accomplished at the club, county/district, regional, or state levels. The Key Award is a special milestone and a wonderful achievement worth celebrating in 4-H.

The 2025 Meadowlark District 4-H Key Award recipients are:

- **Jackson County**
  - Brooke Slipke
  - Dalton Peters
  - William Beauchamp
- **Jefferson County**
  - Megan Malone
  - Katlyn Gier
  - Sarah VanHouse
- **Nemaha County**
  - Vincent Deters
  - Emma Henry
  - Kenzie Niehues
  - Natalee Strathman
  - Maddy Mosteller

Congratulations to all these 4-H'ers on this very special achievement in your 4-H career.

Using 4-H Skills

The holiday season is a perfect time to put your 4-H skills to use and create thoughtful, handmade gifts for family and friends. Whether you're working on a craft project, gardening, or cooking, there are endless ways to use what you've learned in 4-H to make something special and unique.

Laura Phillips, *Extension Agent*

New Tree Care Checklist:

- Water slowly and deeply whenever the top few inches of soil are dry. You can water until all the leaves are gone from the tree or the ground freezes.
- Add 3 inches of mulch that extend 2-3 feet from the base, but not covering the trunk.
- Wrap the trunk with a light colored plastic or paper protector to prevent sunscald.
- If you have issues with wildlife, add a wire cage around the tree.

Caring for New Trees in the Winter

If you planted trees, shrubs, or other perennials this past year, you might be wondering: how do I help them through the winter? Young trees do face extra challenges, but you can take steps to help them survive and thrive into the spring.

The first thing to consider is water. All perennials can undergo drought stress in the winter if their roots get dehydrated. With younger trees, the roots are less expansive, making it easier for them to dry out. To combat this, check on any trees and shrubs planted less than 3 years ago twice a month to see if their soil is dry. You can use a rod or stick to see how moist the soil is a few inches under the surface. If the soil is dry, you can use a 5-gallon bucket with a 1/8-inch hole drilled near the bottom to let water slowly and deeply irrigate the soil. You can continue to water until the ground is frozen.

To help the soil retain the moisture it receives, ensure there is a healthy layer of mulch around your young plants. Ideally, you should have 3-inch layer of mulch extending at least 2 or 3 feet from the base. Make sure that the mulch is not touching or piled up around the trunk, as that can trap moisture against the bark and cause rot. Instead, create a donut shape with the mulch around the tree. This will also help to insulate the roots and prevent frost damage.

Make sure your mulch is around 3 inches deep but does not touch the trunk of the tree.

Add a cage around the base of new trees and shrubs to prevent wildlife from damaging them.

You may also find that rabbits, voles, or other critters enjoy the taste of young, thin bark when looking for a winter snack. One of the best strategies to prevent animal damage is to discourage them from visiting. Mow the grass to 2 inches and remove any yard waste build up from the area to prevent small critters from finding a cozy home next to your tree or shrub.

The second thing you can do is to make a physical barrier that prevents wildlife from reaching your tree. The type of barrier you need depends on what kind of wildlife are trying to snack on your plants. Make sure that whatever barrier you build lets the trunk or stem remain exposed to the air. Piling up materials against the base of the trunk will do more harm than good.

In addition to hungry animals, sunscald can cause severe bark damage, especially on species with thin bark such as honeylocust, fruit trees, ash, oaks, maples, lindens, and willows. When the sun heats up the thin bark it can trick the tree into thinking that it's time to wake up from dormancy. The cells in the trunk then start to become active, resulting in less cold hardiness. When night falls and temperatures drop, the tree is not as prepared to handle it, causing frost damage, or sunscald. The affected bark will later crack and peel off, leaving your young tree with a wound that is open to infection.

To prevent sunscald, wrap the tree trunk in a light-colored plastic or paper from the ground to below the first branches. The light color will reflect light and reduce how hot the bark gets. Never use a brown or dark colored material, as that will absorb light and make the bark hotter. Generally, wrapping trees for their first winter is sufficient. For thin-bark trees, you may want to wrap them for winter as well. Make sure to check the wrapping before the second winter arrives to ensure it is not too tight or deteriorated. These wraps should be taken off in the spring to allow the trunk space to grow.

Wrap the trunk of young trees with white or light-colored plastic or paper to prevent sunscald.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

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facebook https://www.facebook.com/Meadowlarkextensiondistrict

Publications & Resources For Sale

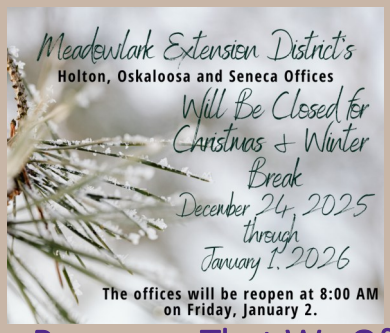
Caregiver Helpbook
Family Account Book
Farm Account Book
Radon Kits
Predator Calls
IMR Calving Books (Red)
Pesticide Manuals
Geo Textile Fabric (12 1/2' wide-sold per linear ft.)
Neutroleum Alpha®
Mosquito Briquets
Soil Tests - Crop, Pasture, Lawn & Garden
Water Test Kits (pay SDK Labs, not us)
Forage Tests
Grazing Sticks
911 Signs
Pesticide Application Field Record Book (free)
Cow/Calf Record Book (free)
Body Condition Record Book (free)
K-State Publications (free)

Items to Check Out

Soil & Hay Probes
Pesticide Manuals
Mole Trap
Freeze Branding Irons
Buzzers

Upcoming Events

Extension Master Gardener Training—Sept. 4-Dec. 4 (Thurs.) - 1:00-4:00 PM—Zoom
Ag Profitability Conference, Hiawatha—December 17
Offices closed for Christmas/Winter Break—December 24 January 1
Offices closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—January 19



Some of the Programs That We Offer

- A Matter of Balance
- Dining With Diabetes
- Gray for a Day
- Master of Memory
- Stay Strong, Stay Healthy
- Walk With Ease
- School Enrichment
  - Butterflies
  - Chick Embryology
  - Glo-Germ Hand Washing
  - Wheat Science