

April 2026

Family and Community Wellness



Teresa Hatfield, Extension Agent

Get Prepared: Kansas Severe Weather

Last week was a reminder of how quickly severe weather can develop in the spring. My cousins in Kankakee, Illinois, recently experienced a tornado in their community. Just like in Illinois, severe weather can happen quickly in Kansas, so it's important to be prepared before it strikes.

There are several steps you can take now to be ready. Knowing what to prepare—and how to take

action—can make a big difference. Kansas State Extension professionals recommend starting with a household inventory and reviewing your insurance coverage.

Conducting a Household Inventory

A household inventory is a detailed list of your home's contents, including items in living areas, basements, garages, attics, and storage spaces. If you ever need to file an insurance claim, your company may require documentation of lost or damaged items. While it may seem like a big task, it can be done a little at a time. Be sure to include valuable items such as electronics, appliances, furniture, and other important belongings.

Ways to Document Your Inventory

- **Photos or Video:** Capture each room, including walls, closets, cabinets, and drawers. Take close-ups of valuable items and describe them as you record.
- **Digital Apps:** Many apps help store records, organize paperwork, and track home updates.
- **Written Records:** Use a notebook or printed forms, and keep a copy off-site in case your home is damaged.

Review Your Insurance Coverage

In addition to keeping an inventory, review your renter's or homeowner's insurance policy each year. Make sure you have adequate coverage for your home, vehicles, and personal belongings. If you have a mortgage, maintaining proper homeowner's insurance is required.

Check that you have funds available to cover your deductible and confirm whether your policy covers replacement value rather than depreciated value. It's also important to understand what is not covered. Depending on your policy, exclusions may include flooding, sewer or sump pump backup, earth movement, or mold, which may require additional coverage.

Taking these steps now can save time, money, and stress if severe weather impacts your home.

For more preparedness information, visit www.ready.gov.

Severe Weather Alerts (National Weather Service):

- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch:** Severe storms are possible
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** A storm is occurring or imminent
- **Tornado Watch:** Tornadoes are possible
- **Tornado Warning:** A tornado is imminent—seek shelter immediately

Holton Office

114 W 5th St.
Holton, KS 66436-1778
785-364-4125

Oskaloosa Office

P.O. Box 326
100 E Washington
Oskaloosa, KS 66066-0326
785-863-2212

Seneca Office

1615 Branch St.
Seneca, KS 66538-1504
785-336-2184

District Office Hours:

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

**Closed on designated
holidays**



Cindy Williams, Extension Agent

Time is Running Out to Sign Up for 2026 Walk Kansas

There are many signs of spring, and one of them is signing up for Walk Kansas. Walk Kansas is an eight-week healthy lifestyle challenge you can enjoy with friends and family while taking advantage of the refreshing spring weather.

Walk Kansas runs from **March 22 to May 16** with registration closing **March 31**.

There is still time to register your team of six or fewer—or participate solo—at www.walkkansas.org or contact one of the Meadowlark Extension District offices:

Holton—785-364-4125

Oskaloosa—785-863-2212

Seneca—785-336-2841

For questions, contact Cindy Williams at 785-863-2212. Dust off those walking shoes and get moving! Walk with us toward a healthier tomorrow.

It's Strawberry Season!

Strawberries are the first fruit to ripen in the spring. Fresh strawberries are tasty by themselves or in any meal or beverage.

Here are some fun facts.

- Eight strawberries contain more vitamin C than one orange.
- A serving (1 cup) of strawberries has twice as much fiber as a serving of grapes.



- Strawberry flavor is influenced by weather, the variety, and stage of ripeness when harvested.
- On average, there are 200 seeds in a strawberry.

Choosing Pectin for Jam and Jelly

It will soon be time for spring fruits and making jellied fruit products. Pectin is a key ingredient that helps these products gel. Some fruits do not require added pectin, while others do.

Recipes are developed using either dry or liquid pectin, and these types are not interchangeable.

Pectin is a group of pectic polysaccharides, or long-chain carbohydrate molecules. These contain chains of esterified galacturonic acid that differ in their binding properties between liquid and dry forms. As a result, the gelling process works very differently depending on which type is used. Liquid pectin is not simply rehydrated dry pectin, and the acid content also varies between the two, further affecting how they gel.

For best results, do not substitute one form for the other—always use the type of pectin specified in the recipe.

Exercise and You Knees

Knee pain is common. Arthritis, injury, and overuse are the primary causes. If you have knee pain, it is important to keep moving—even if you don't feel like it. Exercise is key to restoring knee function, decreasing pain, and helping you lose extra pounds while maintaining a healthy weight.

Low-impact exercises are best for bad knees. Exercise can help alleviate swelling and stiffness, improve range of motion in the joint, and strengthen the muscles around the knees to reduce pressure. Research also shows that exercise can slow the progression of knee osteoarthritis.

Weak quadriceps muscles can lead to knee instability and increased wear and tear. The quadriceps are the main muscles that support the knees, so strengthening them plays an important role in knee function and pain management.

Another muscle group that supports the knees is the hamstrings. Low-impact exercises like those below will help stretch and strengthen the knee and its supporting muscles:

- **Walking** helps lubricate the joints, increase blood flow to tight muscles, and strengthen the muscles that surround your knee. Longer, slower walks are a more knee-friendly option.
- **Biking** is a safe option that provides aerobic and strengthening benefits. It targets the quadriceps, promotes range of motion, and also strengthens the hamstrings and glutes.
- **Water exercise** helps strengthen knee muscles, and the buoyancy of the water allows you to be active without putting pressure on your joints.
- **Strength training** is essential to improve knee function. Bodyweight exercises such as straight leg raises, squats, or modified squats are good options.
- **Stretching** is important and should not be skipped, as tight knee and leg muscles can increase pain. Include quadriceps and standing hamstring stretches.

While these types of exercise can help with knee pain, be sure to start slowly and gradually increase weight and repetitions. Increase the amount of time you walk, bike, and exercise over time. Avoid overdoing it, and stop any exercise that makes your pain worse. Also, avoid exercises that overextend or place excessive pressure on your knees.



David Hallauer, Extension Agent

Alfalfa Weevil Signup

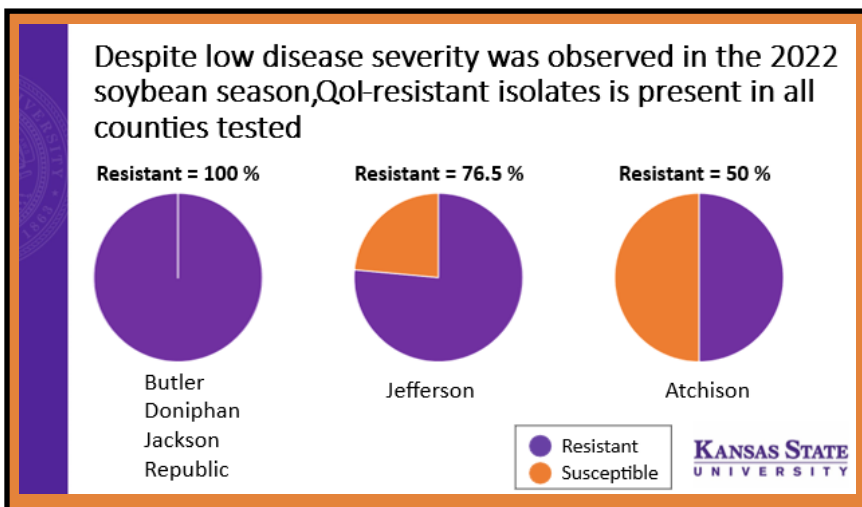
As temperatures rise and insect activity increases, one of the first pests of concern is alfalfa weevil. A mild winter already has us accumulating growing degree days (check them out via the Kansas Mesonet: <https://mesonet.k-state.edu/agriculture/degreedays/>) ahead of schedule and it's time to scout. If you're interested in weekly scouting updates e-mail me at dhallaue@ksu.edu. Include your preference of receiving notice by text, e-mail, or both.

Resistance Isn't Just a Weed Problem...

For 50 years we've been dealing with herbicide resistance by various weeds in Kansas. Despite efforts to combat it, however, we still fight it. We have weeds. We use herbicides. Without being very careful to avoid it, the list of resistant species and products with resistance to them are likely to grow. Resistance screening continues even today with samples collected across the District in both 2024 and 2025.

It's not just a weed problem though. The graph below shows results of a survey of resistance to a class of fungicides used in soybeans. As fungicide use has increased in the past 15 years, so, too has the potential for resistance, with this study confirming it's presence very close to home.

Are insecticides next? Probably. In fact some would suggest we already have insecticide resistance, though confirmation is still pending. It wouldn't be a surprise, however. Think back to last summer: Most alfalfa stands were sprayed at least once – and some twice – for alfalfa weevil in early spring then received at least one more application of an insecticide in late summer/early fall for fall armyworms. Every time we apply a product, we provide an opportunity to introduce a greater level of resistance. If product classes weren't rotated or appropriate rates not used, or proper application coverage not achieved, we increase that opportunity – and start to put pressure on products that might be working for us.



Source: Rodrigo Onofre, K-State Extension Row Crops Pathologist, etal...

There are lots of ways to combat resistance, but it can be boiled down in many cases to three steps:

1. **Scout.** If insect or disease is present, you can help stem the tide of resistance by only using when necessary.
2. **Apply appropriately.** Use the right rate (don't skimp – this includes carrier gallonage as well...) in the right crop for the right pest at the right time. Rotate product groups. Off label product use is not only against the law, but can endanger human/animal users AND our ability to keep the product for future use.
3. **Scout...again...** After an appropriate time (read and follow label directions...), return to see how products performed. Can you see a difference in disease/insect/weed pressure? If not, investigate why. It might be one of the best visits you make into the field because it can prevent issues for years down the road.

Weed Control in Grasslands

Thin grass stands = open space = increased weed opportunities. As stand thinning events accumulated over the past decade, some stands could benefit from weed management efforts.

When we think weed management, most of the time we're talking herbicides – and rightfully so. Their effectiveness has cured a number of weed pressure ills over time and they may be considered the foundation of a good integrated weed management program. If you've got a program that's working – great! If you want to evaluate options, I'd encourage you to check out the Pasture/Range sections of the 2026 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide (<https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/2026-chemical-weed-control-for-field-crops-pastures-rangeland-and-noncropland-CHEMWEEDGUIDE>). It's full of recommendations with special sections for noxious weeds as well.

While herbicides are the foundation of an integrated weed management program, integrated means other methods should be considered as well. The guide also includes a reference chart at the beginning of the pasture/range section with other management considerations as well. Check it out online or pick up a copy from any District Office.

Fair Judge Training Scheduled

Are you interested in judging county fair exhibits or learning more about the judging process as a project leader, parent, or Extension staff member? Join us for a Fair Judges Training on **Tuesday, April 14**, in Concordia.

Judging 4-H projects isn't just about awarding ribbons—it's an important youth development strategy. When done effectively, the evaluation process helps young people build confidence, communication skills, decision-making abilities, and a strong sense of accomplishment. Judges play a key role in creating a positive learning experience by providing constructive feedback and encouragement.

This training will focus on how to conduct effective conference judging using recognized standards and best practices. Participants will gain practical tips for evaluating exhibits while engaging youth in meaningful conversations about their work. Whether you are new to judging or have years of experience, this training will help strengthen your skills and approach.

Project-specific guidance will be offered in the following areas:

- Visual Arts
- Posters, Notebooks, and Displays
- Woodworking
- Building Block Engineering
- Welding
- Fashion Revue
- Photography
- Sewing and Textiles
- Robotics
- Aerospace/Rocketry

The cost is **\$20** per person. Payment should be sent to the River Valley Extension Office in Concordia; instructions will be included in your registration receipt.

Sessions are come-and-go, so you are welcome to attend those that best fit your schedule and interests.

Please register by **April 1, 2026**, using the following link, https://kstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_oqVodpU6ViVWjv8?Q_CHL=qr.

Meadowlark District County Fairs



4-H Projects vs. County Fair Exhibits

What's the difference between 4-H projects and fair exhibits?

A 4-H "project" is an area of interest you want to learn more about—similar to a hobby, but with guided learning and goal-setting. This is what you sign up for during enrollment in 4-HOnline (examples include horse, electricity, dogs, photography, and more). A project is designed to help you explore new topics, build knowledge, and practice skills over time. Youth must select their projects at enrollment so they have plenty of time throughout the year to learn, practice, and grow in their chosen areas before fair season arrives.

A County Fair "exhibit" is what you actually bring to the fair to showcase what you've learned. This might include the cabbage you grew, the animal you trained, a photograph you took, or a rocket you built while working in your project area. Not everything you do within a project needs to become a fair exhibit—and that's perfectly okay. The goal is learning and growth. Youth sign up to exhibit at the County Fair in June or early July, following the guidelines and categories listed in their local county fair book.

Each county in the Meadowlark District hosts its own county fair, providing youth with the opportunity to share their accomplishments with the community. Exhibiting at the fair gives young people a purpose for learning, encourages responsibility and hard work, and offers valuable real-world experience in setting goals and receiving feedback.

If you have time this summer, consider attending one of our local fairs. Visit the youth exhibit buildings, stop by the 4-H concession stands, watch a showmanship class or style revue, or take a walk through the animal barns. These events highlight the dedication and achievements of our local youth and are a great way to support the 4-H program.

2026 County Fair Dates:

- Jackson County Fair: **July 13–17**
- Jefferson County Fair: **July 27–30**
- Nemaha County Fair: **July 23–27**

Join Us In Celebrating National Volunteer Week—April 19-25!

National Volunteer Week was established in 1974 and has grown into a nationwide effort to encourage community service. We are incredibly thankful for all the 4-H volunteers in our district. In the Meadowlark District 4-H program, more than 175 adult volunteer leaders serve in a variety of roles and are valued partners in our success.

In addition to our adult leaders, many youth also volunteer, demonstrating leadership and a commitment to helping others. Behind every 4-H success story are mentors—individuals who support youth, share their knowledge, and help bring ideas to life.

To show our appreciation, stop by your local Extension Office to pick up a seed packet for a volunteer who has made a difference. To all youth and adult volunteers, thank you for the time, talents, and support you give to the Meadowlark District 4-H program.



David Key, Extension Agent/Director

Running an Effective Meeting With No Time for an Agenda

Volunteer boards and community event committees often operate on tight timelines. Whether organizing a festival, responding to a last-minute opportunity, or addressing an unexpected issue, there are times when a group needs to meet quickly and simply does not have time to prepare a formal agenda.

While agendas are helpful for most meetings, a productive meeting can still occur without one if the group follows a simple structure. A few practical steps can help volunteer boards stay organized, make decisions, and respect everyone's time.

Start by Clearly Stating the Purpose

When a meeting begins without a prepared agenda, the first step is to explain why the group is meeting. The chair or facilitator should briefly describe the situation and what the group needs to accomplish.

For example, the meeting may be called for the following reason(s):

- Address a time-sensitive issue
- Finalize details for an upcoming event
- Respond to a new opportunity or challenge
- Clarifying the purpose helps everyone focus on the same goal.

Ask for Key Topics from the Group

After the purpose is explained, invite members to suggest the most important items that need discussion. The facilitator can write these topics down and create a quick working agenda on the spot.

Helpful questions include:

- What decisions need to be made today?
- What information needs to be shared?
- What tasks must be assigned before the next meeting?

Focus on the Most Important Items

When time is limited, focus on two or three key issues rather than trying to cover everything. This keeps the meeting productive and prevents conversations from drifting off topic.

Assign Someone to Take Notes

Even in an informal meeting, it is important to record decisions and action steps. Notes should include:

- Decisions made
- Tasks assigned and who is responsible
- Deadlines or follow-up steps
- These notes can later serve as the official meeting minutes.

End with Clear Next Steps

Before closing the meeting, summarize what the group decided and confirm responsibilities, so everyone leaves knowing what happens next.

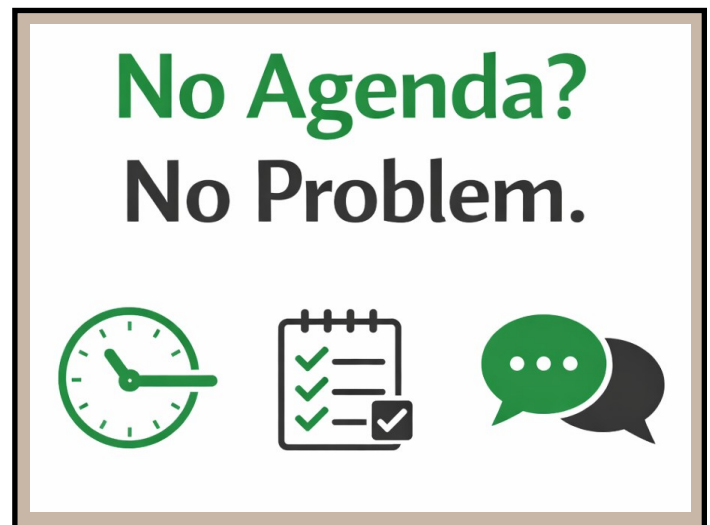
Volunteer boards play an important role in organizing community celebrations, festivals, and nonprofit programs in rural communities. With a few simple steps, even a last-minute meeting without a prepared agenda can still be productive.

Quick Tool: The 5-Step Emergency Meeting Checklist

1. State the purpose of the meeting
2. List the most important topics
3. Focus discussion on key decisions
4. Assign someone to take notes
5. Confirm next steps before ending

A Simple Two-Minute Agenda

- Purpose of Meeting: What decision or issue needs attention?
- Topics to Discuss: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
- Expected Outcome: What decisions or assignments should be made today?





Laura Phillips, Extension Agent

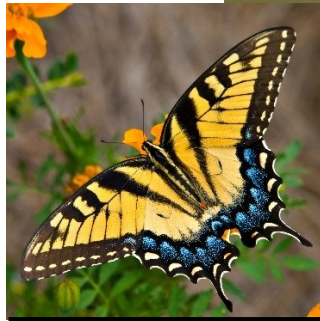
What about the bad bugs?

If you had issues with pests in your garden last summer, you might be thinking that cleaning up garden debris to stop insects from overwintering sounds like a great plan—and you would be right. In situations where you had high numbers of pests, removing garden debris can help curb their populations for the following growing season. In these cases, you primarily need to focus on removing the plants that were infested. For example, if you had a large number of cucumber beetles, remove the debris from any cucumber plants in your garden. This will not prevent them from coming back, but it can put a dent in their population.

Similarly, if you experienced high levels of disease or fungus, removing plant debris will help reduce those issues in the next growing season. Some plants, like tomatoes, are especially susceptible to fungal diseases, so it's a good idea to remove all of their dead vegetation from your garden. When removing vegetation affected by insects or disease, be sure not to add it to a compost pile that will later be used in your garden. Composting infested material and then reusing it can inadvertently reintroduce those problems.

Another effective way to reduce disease and pest pressure is to rotate crop families. Some insects and fungi can survive not only on dead plant material but also in the soil. In these cases, removing debris alone won't be enough, and crop rotation becomes especially important. This means that plants from the same family should not be planted in the same location in consecutive years.

For plants that did not experience pest or disease issues, consider allowing the vegetation to remain and overwinter beneficial insects. By doing so, you may support insects that help control pests naturally in your garden.



Caption: Chrysalis from a tiger swallowtail butterfly attached to a twig. Adult tiger swallowtail in smaller photo. Photo of chrysalis by Dean Morley.

Yard Talk: Leave the Leaves Be

When we have nice weather during the midst of winter, we often feel tempted to go outside and get a jump start on our lawns and gardens by clearing brush, leaves, and other dead vegetation from last summer. However, while we may feel ready to venture outside, the same is not true for all the critters in our yards and gardens.

Since we do not see insects buzzing around in the winter, you may assume they are all dead. In reality, many of these insects are hibernating, just like bears do in the winter. Some native bees nest down in the hollow stems of plants like coneflower and bee balm, and would die if this vegetation is removed. Other bees are known to nest underground and would be disturbed by any raking or tilling. Underneath the leaf litter in your yard, there are likely lacewing eggs, butterfly and moth larvae (like the swallowtail butterfly, pictured above), and perhaps even a queen bumblebee seeking shelter. Leaf litter also attracts lady beetles, which will eat aphids in your garden in the summer.

The other reason to keep debris is for the benefit of your plants. Cold snaps in the spring can really hurt your perennials and cause die back. Leaf litter adds a layer of insulation to root systems under ground and help your perennial plants tough out the cold weather.

While a garden full of debris might not look appealing to us, just know that all kinds of beneficial organisms are sleeping under the dead vegetation. By removing this vegetation or tilling the soil, we are killing the next generation of beneficial insects before they have the chance to emerge and contribute to a natural ecosystem.

When should you clean up your yard and garden? There are varying answers. You can track soil temperatures or air temperatures to try and estimate when insects may be emerging. But the easiest way is to watch for insects. Look around and see if bees and butterflies are fluttering around. After you notice insects coming out from hiding, wait a few days and then start your clean up. If there are areas you do not plan on planting, you can always leave debris in place for future insects to nest in, too.

By forgoing the pristine garden look for a more natural one, we can all work towards helping support these essential pollinators that play a significant role in our food chain.



Ross Mosteller, Extension Agent

How Fast is Mature Cow Size Increasing?

Dr. Paul Beck, OSU Cooperative Extension Beef Cattle Nutrition Specialist, recently published the following article. As an industry we continue to struggle between the demand for larger carcasses and cowherd efficiency, something that can run in opposition to each other.

Over the past 60 years, mature cow body weight has increased at an annual average of 7.7 pounds per year, but it has not increased at a constant rate. The chart below shows the average annual estimated cow live weight estimated from

USDA reports for monthly cow carcass weights. When we look at annual average live weight data, we see that the major structural shift in cow size began in the mid-1960s when selection for larger framed growthier cattle became popular. Prior to that mature cow weight was relatively stable and even slightly declining. After 1965, cow size began a steady upward climb increasing by approximately 6.5 pounds per year until 1995.

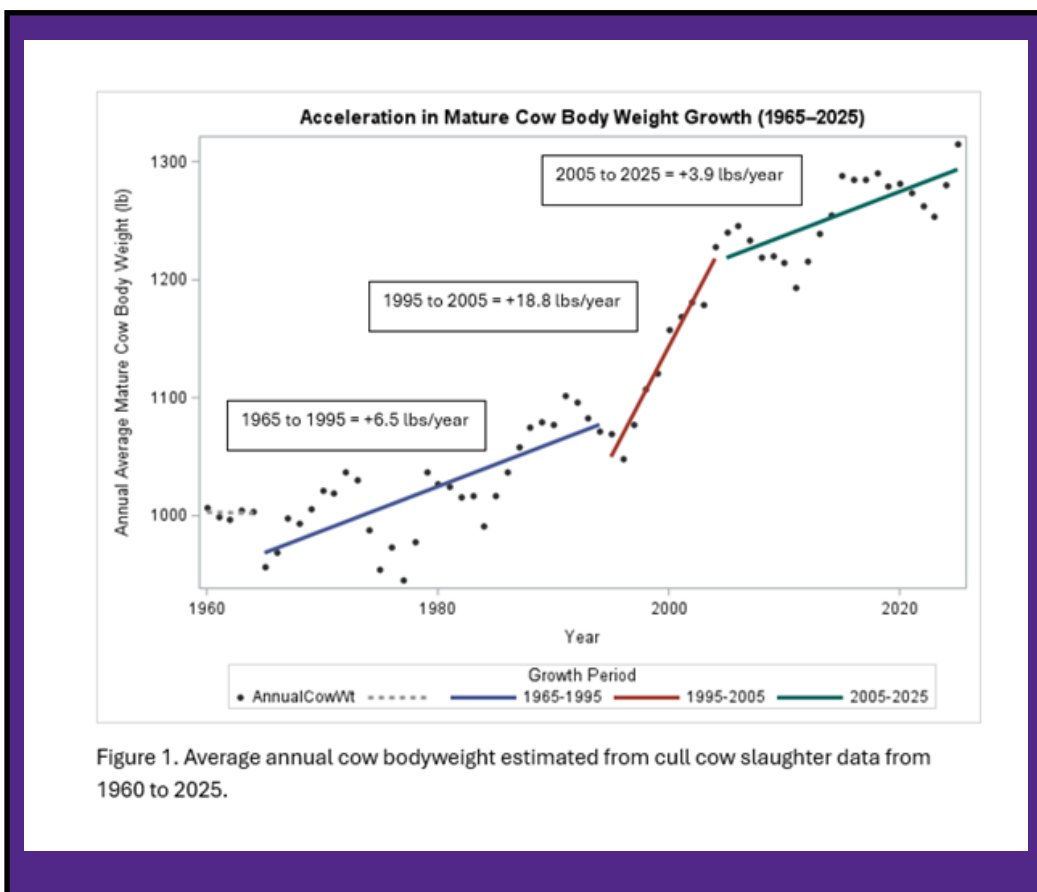
During the 1960s and 1970s, cow size really changed very little. The increase in cow mature size began with the introduction of larger frame Continental genetics into the US cowherd in the 1980s. This resulted in the rapid acceleration in cow weights of nearly 19 pounds per year from 1995 to 2005.

During the 80's, mature cow weight increased at roughly 8 pounds per year, 80 pounds in 10-years. Along with the widespread adoption of larger framed genetics and Continental breed influence across commercial herds, the increased emphasis on growth EPDs has increased cow mature size but is also important to modern increases in post-weaning beef production and efficiency. Selection pressure for growth, heavier weaning weights, and changing market signals all contributed to that trend.

After 2005, cow weights have shown a moderate increases of around 4 pounds per year, which is essentially a plateau relative to the "acceleration decade" from 1995 to 2005. The recent moderation in the increase in cow size indicates our efforts to improve maternal efficiency have been fruitful. Cow size remains substantially larger than in the 1960s. Over the 6 decades, that translates to over 450 additional pounds per cow.

That increase in cow size has consequences on ranch sustainability and risk tolerance. If stocking rates are not adjusted for the increased cow size, long term rangeland productivity will suffer from overgrazing and weather disruptions such as drought will have greater impacts. Bigger cows require more forage, greater maintenance energy, and influence stocking rates. While larger cows can wean heavier calves, they are often not as efficient. The cow efficiency question remains critical: are we adding pounds where they generate greater returns?

Understanding how cow size has changed can help producers evaluate whether their current cowherd aligns with forage resources and profitability goals. Bigger cows are not inherently good or bad—but cows must fit the production environment or we will be required to fit the environment to the cow by providing more supplemental feed from harvested forage and concentrates. As always, the most efficient cow is the one that matches her environment and pays her own way.



Meadowlark Extension District

Holton Office

114 W 5th St.
Holton, KS 66436

Address Service Requested

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
Soil Tests - Crop, Pasture, Lawn & Garden
Water Test Kits (pay SDK Labs, not us)
Geo Textile Fabric (12 1/2' wide-sold per linear ft.)
Neutroleum Alpha®
Mosquito Briquets
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 Freeze Branding Irons
Pesticide Manuals Buzzers
Mole Trap

Upcoming Events

Empowered Caregiver—**April 29 thru May 20 (Wednesdays)**, 10:00, Holton
Dining with Diabetes—**June 9 thru 30 (Tuesdays)**, 10:30–11:30, Circleville
Dining with Diabetes—**June 11 thru July 2 (Thursdays)**, 10:30-11:30, Valley Falls

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
- Bonding Through Board Games
- School Enrichment
 - Butterflies
 - Chick Embryology
 - Glo-Germ Hand Washing
 - Wheat Science

This institution is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Program information may be available in languages other than English. Language access requests and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, including alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, and American Sign Language), may be requested by contacting the event contact four weeks prior to the start of the event to their phone number and email. Requests received after this date will be honored when it is feasible to do so. Language access services, such as interpretation or translation of vital information, will be provided free of charge to limited English proficient individuals upon request.

Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer..