KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

News December 2026

Megan (Vrbka) Tannahill – 4-H Youth Development Agent



School Enrichment

School enrichment programs are learning experiences offered to students during school hours by local 4-H educators. These programs are designed to enhance the subjects being studied in the classroom, provide hands-on learning opportunities, introduce new topics, or spark new interests!

The 4-H School Enrichment program is a great way to connect and collaborate with your local Extension office to help achieve your classroom's educational goals. Our programs are designed to supplement the learning already taking place in the classroom. School enrichment sessions help teachers engage students, enhance the learning process, and support Kansas State Board of Education standards.

Here are some of the tools available:

- Butterflies - Pre-K to 5th grade
- Glo-Germ Hand Washing - Pre-K to 5th grade
- Acres of Adventures - K to 5th grade
- Ag in the Classroom - K to 5th grade
- Chick Embryology (Egg Incubation) - K to 5th grade
- Exploring the Treasures of 4-H - K to 6th grade
- Farm Assorted Resources Materials - K to 5th grade
- Wheat Science (Bread in a Bag) - K to 5th grade
- Junior Master Gardener - 1st to 5th grade
- Reading Makes Cents - 2nd to 5th grade
- Science Discovery - 2nd to 6th grade
- Gray for a Day – 4th to 12th grade

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **What is School Enrichment?** K-State Extension offers a variety of in-class programs for teachers and students. More information is available on our School Enrichment webpage: **https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/4-h/school_enrichment.html.**
- **How do I schedule a program?** Visit our School Enrichment webpage, complete the registration form, and return it to your local Meadowlark Extension office.
- **Can I suggest topics for School Enrichment programs?** Yes! We welcome your suggestions. Contact your local Extension office and let us know how we can help enhance your classroom!

We are happy to work with students of all ages and would love to hear about your classroom needs.

If you are interested in bringing a program to your classroom or have questions, we would love to hear from you!

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Ross Mosteller – Livestock and Natural Resources Agent



Can Livestock Utilize Moldy Grain?

Fall rains may have helped pastures going into winter but created harvest challenges and that might not be the end of trials with this crop. Wet conditions at harvest and high moisture in storage can lead to molds in grain destined to be livestock feed, but are these molds a problem?

While livestock producers know that moldy grain and forage are not ideal feedstuffs, stored feed occasionally contains a small amount of visible mold and animals consume it with no obvious adverse effects. The question becomes; how much mold is too much for a feed to be unsuitable? Additionally, which type of molds pose the most concern for aflatoxin and mycotoxin production?

Labs report mold results in terms of "spore count" in cfus/gram. Generally, feedstuffs with spore count of 1 million or less per gram are safe to feed to livestock. Adjustments in rations should be made when feeds with higher spore counts are fed. **Table 1** indicates safety levels, feeding risks and concerns. Accumulation of mold can reduce the digestibility of the diet by up to 5% in ruminants, which is why Table 1 shows a 5% discount in energy levels once the mold counts reach 1 million. Additionally, palatability is affected by the presence of mold spores, reducing feed intake.

For livestock feeding purposes, knowing whether mycotoxins are present in moldy feed is much more important than knowing mold spore counts. Mycotoxins are chemicals produced by certain molds; which adversely affect the health and production of animals exposed to them. Mycotoxin presence may make products like milk, unsalable. To complicate matters, not all molds produce mycotoxins, and significant levels of mycotoxins can be present when mold infestation appears mild.

Mycotoxins important in livestock feeding include vomitoxin (DON), fumonisin, zearalenone, T-2, and aflatoxin. Effects on the animals depend on the individual toxin, the amount consumed, and can include feed refusal, decreased growth and milk production, reproductive problems, and – in the case of aflatoxin – death losses.

Knowing the specific mycotoxins and concentrations present in feedstuff can help tell how the feed might be used by animals. Different species and production stages have different sensitivities to mycotoxins. In general, feedlot calves are less likely to experience adverse effects of mycotoxins compared to breeding-age cows, swine, poultry, or dairy cows.

Moldy feeds should be sampled prior to use and screened for mycotoxin presence. Commercial laboratories can run extensive mycotoxin screening panels. A sample analysis is only as good as the sample submitted. A representative sample of the feedstuff will ensure that the sample sent to the lab represents the total of the feed available to be fed. Remember that unless the sampled grain is dry (< 15% moisture), mold growth and mycotoxin production will likely increase as the grain is stored. The K-State Extension publication: Mycotoxins in Feed Grains and Ingredients MF2061 has more information.

Table 1. Mold count levels and feeding concerns.

Cfu/gram	Feeding Risk and Concerns[a]
Under 500,000	Relatively low count
500,000 to 1 million	Relatively safe
1 to 2 million	Discount energy (x 0.95) feed with caution
2 to 3 million	Closely observe animals and performance, discount energy (x 0.95)
3 to 5 million	Dilute with other feeds, discount energy (x 0.95), observe closely
Over 5 million	Discontinue feeding

[a] Risks refer primarily to effects of mold per se without regard to possible mycotoxin content. Depressed digestibility, feed intakes, and performance may occur from a high mold content without mycotoxins present. Harmful mycotoxins may be present, even when there is little or no obvious mold content.

Laura Phillips - Horticulture Agent



Winterizing Your Roses

As we approach our colder months, you may be wondering how you can ensure your rose bushes are ready for the cold weather. Most of the shrub, landscape, or older rose varieties can survive our winters without much issue, but some of the hybrid teas and other modern varieties require winterizing. If you have a young rose of any variety, winterizing can help ensure that it lives through the winter despite not having a fully established root system.



Caption: Minnesota Landscape Arboretum demonstrates loosely tying roses together to prevent wind damage.

1. The first step, pruning can be done as soon as roses go dormant. If your roses are exposed to winds, cut back canes to 36-inches and remove weak or thin canes. Tie the remaining canes together loosely to keep them secure during windy weather. If the canes are allowed to whip in the wind it can cause damage to the crown and disturb the soil. If your roses are well protected from the wind, you can wait until late winter to prune your roses.
2. Then clean up any plant debris in the area surrounding the roses, especially any leaves from the rose bushes or canes that you pruned off. This will help prevent any diseases from overwintering and infecting your roses next summer.
3. The next steps are dependent on weather, not time of year. You will want to make mounds of soil at the base of your roses only AFTER several hard frosts have occurred, but BEFORE the ground freezes. Doing this too early keeps the stems warm and moist which promotes mold growth, while too late risks damaging the sensitive graft union where the rootstalk attaches to the above ground growth. We have had several days (November 13-16) where temperatures dipped below 25°F, but our soil has not gone below 40°F yet so now is the perfect time to make these mounds around your roses.



When making mounds around the roses, aim for 8 to 10 inches of soil or compost around the base of each rose. Bring in new soil for this instead of displacing soil. Soil acts as insulation for roots in the cold winter, so you do not want to remove any soil from areas around the roses, or you may increase the chance of the roots getting frost damage.

4. Once the ground has frozen, which generally happens mid-December, add a 4-inch layer of straw, leaves, wood chips or other mulch over the mound and cover with a layer of soil to hold it in place. This will help protect the plants from the cold but also prevent early budding during warm winter and early spring days. You can check the current soil temperatures online using the K-State Mesonet tool online, or check with your local extension office.
5. You can then place a layer or soil or mesh wire over the mulch to keep it in place. You can also make a wire cage around the rose as a barrier to keep the mulch in place. As the mulch settles during winter you may need to add more.
6. When the ground thaws in the spring remove the mulch and soil from the base of the plant to return the soil level to normal.

David Key - Community Vitality & Economic Development Agent/District Director



Looking Back Before Moving Forward: An Annual Organizational Review

Extension Insight: Successful community organizations make time not only to plan for the future but also to reflect on the past. An annual organizational review can help boards and volunteers recognize accomplishments, identify opportunities for improvement and renew their commitment to serving their communities.

As another year comes to a close, many community organizations are already thinking about next year's activities, fundraising efforts and special events. Before moving forward, however, it is worthwhile to set aside some time to reflect on the past year. An annual review does not need to be a complicated or formal process. It can be as simple as dedicating 30 to 45 minutes of a board meeting to an open and constructive discussion.

Celebrate Your Accomplishments

Begin by identifying what your organization accomplished during the past year. Too often, volunteers move from one project to another without taking time to appreciate their successes.

- What were our most significant accomplishments?
- How did our efforts benefit the community?
- Did we reach new audiences or develop new partnerships?
- What accomplishments should we share with the public?

Remember that success should be measured not only by the amount of money raised or the number of events held, but also by the difference your organization made in the community.

Evaluate What Worked and What Didn't

Every organization has opportunities for improvement. Encourage an open discussion that focuses on organizational practices rather than individual shortcomings.

- Which activities were most successful, and why?
- Which activities required more time or resources than anticipated?
- Are there activities we continue simply because we have always done them?
- What would we do differently if given another opportunity?

It is acceptable to modify, replace or discontinue an activity that no longer serves a meaningful purpose. Doing so may free up valuable resources for new opportunities.

Assess the Health of Your Organization

A successful organization depends on more than successful events. Take time to evaluate the organization itself.

- Are responsibilities shared fairly among members and volunteers?
- Are meetings productive and communication effective?
- Is the organization financially sustainable?
- Are we developing new leaders and welcoming new volunteers?
- Are we still fulfilling our organization's mission?

These questions may uncover concerns that are easily overlooked during a busy year.

Turn Reflection Into Action

Conclude your annual review by identifying two or three realistic priorities for the coming year. Assign responsibilities, establish reasonable timelines and periodically revisit those priorities throughout the year.

Consider asking each board member to identify one thing the organization should **start doing, stop doing and continue doing.** This simple exercise can generate meaningful discussion and help establish a shared direction. An annual organizational review should become a regular practice rather than something undertaken only when problems arise. Taking time to look back, celebrate success and learn from experience can help ensure your organization remains relevant, effective and responsive to the needs of your community for years to come.

David Hallauer – Crops and Soils Agent



Local Extension Crops & Soils Information

A lot can happen between newsletters. Local events get added to the calendar or topics requiring immediate attention arise. If you're looking for some of those events or just want to take a deeper dive into certain topics, check out these resources (links below):

- First Friday Forage Focus[1]: check out our Meadowlark Extension District Facebook page the first Friday of each month, for a forage production focused topic.
- Meadowlark Extension District YouTube page[2]: hitting on multiple topics and updated as new content is complete, the page includes archived videos as well, including this summer's Tailgate Talk forage management series.
- Events Page[3]: for information/flyers on upcoming events – sometimes even before a meeting announcement is made (like our December soybean Sudden Death Syndrome meeting…), check out our events page.
- Meadowlark District Crop Connections Agronomy News[4]: if you've ever read my news column and wanted a slightly expanded version (graphics/video/etc…), visit the Crop Connections Agronomy News page. New article notifications are posted periodically to the Crop Connections e-mail list. To subscribe, e-mail dhallaue@ksu.edu.

[1] https://www.facebook.com/KStateExtensionMeadowlarkDistrict
[2] https://www.youtube.com/@meadowlarkextensiondistrict/videos
[3] https://events.k-state.edu/department/ksre_meadowlark_ag
[4] https://www.k-state.edu/news/meadowlark-agronomy/



Grazing POST Dormancy

With the 'gut punch' many perennial grass stands have taken recently, it's wise to exercise caution to avoid further setbacks. While a full recovery will take time, we've been fortunate this season to see some late season regrowth and that may have you considering some fall grazing. As you do, keep the plant's growth cycle in mind. Doing so can help you maximize utilization of the forage while minimizing potential added stress to the stand.

Once perennial forages reach dormancy, additional growth stops. At this point, forage removal via grazing won't trigger a depletion of energy reserves from plant crowns and roots for regrowth like during the active growth season. In other words, we can go ahead and utilize much of that existing forage without undue stress on the plant. Quality will vary, but if biomass is needed, the dormant forage could provide a source.

Caution *is* still needed, however. Grazing lower than three to four inches is still discouraged because opening the canopy too much can increase erosion potential as well as expose plant crows to conditions that could result in winter kill. Grazing too short can also remove the plant parts that store energy to kick off the next growing season. Doing so could result in plants entering the next growing season with less energy and slower greenup. In short, feel free to utilize this available forage – but do so with caution.

Reducing Error in Soil Sampling

Ever wondered how many subsamples/cores should make up the composite sample you submit for a soil test? The short answer: more is better! We know from work with soil test results for Phosphorous that our confidence interval (ppm P) drops to plus or minus two parts per million when we get to 40-50 cores per sample. Based on the time that would take and bulk it would create, that's probably not going to happen.

We also know from this work we can get to a confidence level that's only slightly less (three to four parts per million) if we pull 15-20 cores per subsample. That's a lot lower bar to reach with only slightly greater variability – and a pretty good number to aim for. Get many less cores than that and variability increases greatly. If you're going to go to the trouble of sampling, get the best results you can and that can often start with the number of cores you collect.

Cindy Williams - Food, Nutrition, Health and Safety Agent



This Holiday Season, Spice It Up with Ginger!

As we move into the holiday season, plans are being made to bake tasty treats. Some of these may include ginger, such as gingerbread and gingersnap cookies.

The use of ginger for medicinal purposes dates back thousands of years. The Chinese have used it as a digestive aid and to help prevent nausea. Queen Elizabeth I is credited with developing the first gingerbread man as a Christmas treat. In 1907, a Canadian pharmacist patented "Canada Dry Ginger Ale," which later became popular during the American Prohibition era. Ginger is also an essential ingredient in Indian cuisine.

For culinary use, ginger is available in several forms, including fresh ginger root, dried ground ginger, and crystallized ginger. Its flavor is often described as citrusy, musty, soapy, pungent, and bitter.

Ground ginger is readily available in many grocery stores. Besides gingerbread and gingersnap cookies, it is often used in apple and pumpkin pies. Ground ginger tends to have a milder flavor than fresh ginger.

Fresh ginger can be found in the produce section of grocery stores. Peel off the outer skin, then grate, chop, or julienne it into small pieces. Fresh ginger has the most pungent flavor.

Candied or crystallized ginger is typically used in desserts, either as an ingredient or a garnish.

Having a Safe Holiday Feast

One in 6 Americans will get a foodborne illness this year. Food safety is important. Follow these simple rules to ensure a SAFE holiday feast.

- **Shopping for your feast**—Make room for your feast in the refrigerator and freezer. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables separable from raw meat and poultry. Keep all food away from household chemicals in your shopping cart and in bags. Refrigerate perishable foods as soon as you get home from the store. Always pay attention to "sell by" and "use by" dates. Buy a food thermometer!
- **Preparing your feast**—Wash your hands, surfaces and utensils between each food step-prep step. Thaw formula—24 hours for every 4-5 lbs. Thaw frozen turkey in a refrigerator in the original packaging. Stuff turkey just prior to cooking. Cook turkey breast and stuffing to 165°F. Temperature is the only indicator that food is cooked for quality and safety. Turkey thighs are best cooked to 175°F. Keep hot foods above 140°F. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables just before eating or consuming unless labeled "ready-to-eat" or "pre-washed."
- **Eating your leftovers**---Leftovers cool more quickly in shallow containers. Bring gravy to a boil before re-serving. Reheat leftovers to 165°F. Eat or freeze leftovers within 3 to 4 days. Eat or freeze gravy within 2 days.

Yogurt Mashed Potatoes (makes 10 servings)

4 cups potatoes, peeled, cut into eighths (about 2 lbs.)

¼ cup fat-free milk

1 ¼ cups plain fat-free yogurt

½ to 1 teaspoon garlic powder, or desired seasoning

Salt and pepper to taste

1. Place potatoes in microwave-safe dish. Add milk.
2. Cover tightly and microwave on high for about 12 minutes, or until potatoes are tender but not mushy.
3. Meanwhile, combine yogurt and garlic powder in a bowl.
4. Remove potatoes from microwave, add yogurt mixture, and mash roughly. Season with salt and pepper.

Nutrition Facts: Per ½-cup serving (without added salt): 70 calories, 0 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 25 mg sodium, 16 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 3 g sugars, 3 g protein.

Source: K-State Research and Extension "Focus on the Stars"

Teresa Hatfield - Family and Community Agent



Small Changes, Big Results: Building Healthy Habits for the New Year

As we approach the new year, many of us begin thinking about New Year's resolutions. It's natural to reflect on ways we can improve our health and well-being. However, many people try to make too many changes at once, making it difficult to sustain those efforts over time. Common goals often include losing weight, exercising more, or eating healthier. When we attempt a complete lifestyle overhaul all at once, it's easy to become overwhelmed and abandon our resolutions.

A better approach is to focus on making small, realistic changes that can become lasting habits throughout the year. Creating a simple action plan can help set you up for success. Rather than trying to change everything at once, choose one or two healthy habits to work on first.

For example, consider replacing sugary beverages with water. If plain water seems boring, add slices of fruit, cucumber, or fresh herbs for flavor. One small healthy change can build momentum and lead to even greater improvements over time.

Here are a few simple ideas to consider as you begin 2027:

- Eat more meals with your family around the table and fewer meals on the go.
- Eat more vegetables. Aim to fill half your plate with non-starchy vegetables.
- Find ways to move more throughout the day. Stand up and move around after sitting for 30 minutes.
- Prioritize sleep. Aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- Learn a new skill or hobby such as gardening, dancing, painting, or a new card or board game.
- Schedule a regular family game night.
- Choose more whole foods and fewer highly processed foods.
- Identify sources of stress and take steps to reduce them.
- Spend more time connecting with friends and family in person.

Remember, lasting change starts with small steps. Make healthy habits easier to achieve and unhealthy habits more difficult to follow. Celebrate your progress along the way with healthy rewards and be patient with yourself. Small changes, practiced consistently, can lead to big results. Most importantly, remember that your health and well-being are worth the effort.

Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment

January 1-March 31, 2027

You can make ONE change:

- **Drop your Medicare Advantage Plan and return to Original Medicare. You'll also be able to join a separate Medicare drug plan.**
- **Return to Original Medicare and, if needed, join a separate Part D plan.**

This period is only for people already enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan-not for switching from Original Medicare to Medicare Advantage.

SMP Senior Medicare Patrol
SHICK Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas
SHIP State Health Insurance Assistance Program
Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services

Questions? Call your local SHICK office.
Meadowlark Extension District: 785-364-4125

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

Holton Office
114 W 5th St.
Holton, KS 66436

Address Service Requested

Some 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



Taking Appointments for Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment which is **January 1 through March 31.**

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

Oskaloosa Office
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

https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/
https://www.facebook.com/KStateExtensionMeadowlarkDistrict

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