K·STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

December 21, 2018

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Livestock and Natural Resources

I was thinking of just "recycling" one of my old columns from Christmas past. I opened one up from way back in 2005. In it there was a reference to the real meaning of Christmas. It's sad to me that I pondered, that this column today, might make some people feel uncomfortable and I might be accused of being insensitive to someone of another religion. That is a sad thought. Just like those that were offended by the 74-year-old song, "Baby It's Cold Outside". I guess I always liked the melody and the funny duet, not really giving it much thought. I mean if you're really going to get your panties in a knot, how about "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer", as a grandmother it really upsets me that no one is concerned for Grandma!

How much hay or supplement a cow needs depends on weather conditions, cow age and body condition, available pasture or crop residue, and reproductive stage of the cow. Some herds do well through fall and winter on good native pasture with just a salt/mineral supplement, especially if cows aren't nursing calves. But, if snow covers the grass deeply or weather gets quite cold, they may need hay.

In cold or stormy weather, cattle need more energy to maintain body heat. This can be adequately supplied by forages, since fermentation breakdown of roughage in the rumen produces heat. If cattle aren't fed additional energy, they rob body fat to keep warm, and lose weight.

During extremely cold or windy weather, cows should be given all the hay they'll clean up, or a protein supplement on dry pastures to encourage them to eat more. As long as protein is adequate, cows can process/ferment sufficient roughage to provide energy and body heat. Access to good windbreaks during severe weather is important to reduce cold cows' stress and energy requirements, as well.

Shelter is another obvious winter livestock management concern. Animals do not necessarily need or want to live in an enclosed barn every day in the winter and barns for shelter are not practical for large herds of cattle. Livestock can tolerate cold weather if fed properly for it. However, protection from wind and rain will decrease energy requirements and feed costs and increase animal comfort. Three sided sheds, hills, thickets of trees and solid or semisolid fences can all serve as adequate breaks from the prevailing winds. There must be sufficient space for all animals to benefit or overcrowding and even trampling can occur. If animals do not have enough space and variety of landscape to select a spot protected from the elements, a shelter should be provided. Shelter requirements vary between species—sheep with thick fleeces will graze and spend a great deal of time outside during poor weather, but most goats prefer to stay dry than eat. If a structure is provided, be sure to keep the bedding dry and as clean as possible. Bedding helps insulate animals from the cold ground. However, in bedding soiled with animal wastes, ammonia fumes can build up quickly which can cause, irritated respiratory linings that can lead to pneumonia causing bacteria and viruses. Provide good ventilation so the air seems fresh, but do not permit drafts in the structure. Again, prevent overcrowding and make sure there is enough space for all animals.

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AgManager

A number of years ago, the K-State Ag Economics Department updated their website to create a one-stop shop for the many resources coming out of their department. That work led to the creation of a new website: www.agmanager.info . As the name implies, the website is designed to be a clearinghouse of information, reports, and even tools to help agricultural producers manage their operations.

The Land and Leasing section includes resources to assist producers looking at land leasing and even purchase decisions. It includes links to Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service information as well as papers on everything from how to calculate an equitable lease to templates you can use to design one. *KSULease* is the name given to a spreadsheet tool that tenants and landlords can use to determine what an equitable share lease arrangement might look like.

Trying to figure out how much to charge or pay for some custom work? A link to the Kansas Custom Rates publication is available, as are budgets for the major crops grown in Kansas put together with help from KSU Specialists and the Kansas Farm Management Association. Want to determine whether you should stop paying for custom work and purchase a piece of machinery? The site even has tools to help you evaluate those options.

Want market analysis? Dan O'Brien provides regular grain market updates. Glynn Tonser does the same for livestock enterprises.

A new Farm Bill was just signed. Unsure of what it might entail, but not interested in sorting through the entire bill? A recently updated paper outlines some of the changes in ARC and PLC programs, as well as crop insurance and conservation sections. Rest assured, it will be updated frequently as more information is learned about exactly what is included in the bill.

Economics isn't always the most fun topic to spend time on, but it is an important one. Check out www.agmanager.info and see if these tools and papers can help make sense out of what can often be complicated. Don't want to try and fight a website or can't figure out where what you are looking for might be located? Don't hesitate to contact me at a District Office or e-mail me at dhallaue@ksu.edu . I would be happy to help you find what you are looking for.

Merry Christmas!

It would take way too many Christmas cards to reach all of you who might have visited a District Office this year, or called with a question, or worked with us on a project. In lieu of that, please accept this humble thank you for reading this column or listening on the radio or attending a meeting or field day. We appreciate you all and hope to work with you again in the *very* near future. Merry Christmas from our Extension family to yours!

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Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health and Safety

Mental Health and Stress In Rural Areas

Unpredictable weather, falling net farm income, spotty health care services and a host of other factors can make for incredible stress on farms and in rural communities. Many of the factors causing sleepless nights are beyond an individual's control, yet there are often ways to manage the stress, according to North Dakota State University family science specialist Sean Brotherson.

"People will power through even if they don't feel well, "Brotherson, speaking at a recent K-State Research and Extension workshop in Manhattan. "There's a cost to that. You can't put your health or relationships on the back end for long without consequences."

The most important asset of any agricultural operation is the health and wellness of the farm operator, said Brotherson. "Sustainable farming includes sustaining the farmer." he said.

Farming and ranching ranks in the top 10 of the most stressful occupations. That stress can lead to depression, anger, health concerns, failed marriages, loss of friendships or relationships with family members, alcohol or substance abuse or worse.

"When we talk about farm safety, we often talk about accident prevention but we tend to neglect talk about mental and emotional health," Brotherson said, adding that's a mistake.

He knows about the topic firsthand. His own family went through a decision to sell their part of the family ranch to an uncle and cousins after his father became ill. It made financial sense, he said, but having his side of the family give up their role in the business was in some ways giving up part of their identity and their role in the family farm legacy.

The way we think about and approach stressors makes up 40 to 50 percent of our stress, Brotherson said, noting that if people believe there will be a rough road ahead from an economic standpoint, the thought of what might be coming can produce anxiety.

Current obvious cause of stress have been drought conditions this year, expectations that crop prices will continue to stay relatively low, the potential for trade disruptions linked to tariffs, and upticks in interest rates.

Despite the overall U.S. economy booming, the farm economy has been in a slump the past several years: "This great economic condition is not translating into a good farm economy. Many farmers are very good at what they do, yet some still find themselves in situations that they can't control," Brotherson said.

Net farm income, a broad measure of profits, is forecast to decrease $9.8 billion (13.0 percent) from 2017 to $65.7 billion in 2018, after increasing $13.9 billion (22.5 percent) in 2017, according to an August report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service.

Net cash farm income is forecast to decrease $12.4 billion (12.0 percent) to $91.5 billion. In inflation-adjusted 2018 dollars, net farm income is forecast to decline $11.4 billion (14.8 percent) from 2017 after increasing $13.0 billion (20.3 percent) in 2017.

If realized, inflation-adjusted net farm income would be just slightly above its level in 2016, which was its lowest level since 2002.

The situation is taking a toll, Brotherson said. Some feel extra pressure because their farm has been in the family for generations and they don't want to be the one to lose it.

"Stress signals are like the warning lights blinking on your truck's dashboard," Brotherson said. "We often want to ignore them but at some point there is a price to pay–a heart attack, broken relationships, depression or worse. You maintain your car to keep it running properly. You have to maintain your health, too."

So what to do: coping strategies include things that help you unwind, Brotherson said. Listen to music at least some of the time, rather than farm news, political ads, or other news. Take a walk, garden, meditate, watch a movie, or schedule regular social time with friends. One participant shared that her brother who farms has for years gone into town to play basketball several times a week.

Other suggestions include:

*Exercise at least 20 minutes a day–walk, bicycle or swim.

*Get at least seven to eight hours of sleep.

*Take time every day to reflect on good things in your life.
*Write your thoughts in a journal.
*Spend 30 minutes doing something with your hands.
*Learn something new or restart a hobby or activity that you once enjoyed.
*Reach out to someone for support or help–a friend, a counselor, a loved one.
*Volunteer to help with a cause that's important to you.
*Do random acts of kindness.

K-State Research and Extension has teamed with NDSU's Brotherson to share resources linked to farm stress management including a tip sheet (https;//www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3421.pdf). In addition, K-State programs such as the Farm Analyst program (https://www.agmanager.info/programs/ksu-farm-analyst-program), Kansas Agricultural Mediation Service (https://www.k-state.edu/kams/) and Kansas Farm Management Association (https://www.agmanager.info/kfma) are available to work with rural enterprises. K-State Research and Extension offices (/about/stateandareamaps.html) in counties and districts across the state can help link individuals with these and other resources.

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Nancy C. Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Odorless, colorless radon gas is prevalent in Kansas; have your home checked

Location, location, location – Kansas is fortunate to have the scenic Flint Hills, a relatively low cost of living, and produces a valuable part of our food supply.

On the downside, there's a decent chance your home will test positive for radon, an odorless, colorless gas that is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.

"One in four homes in Kansas will test at or above the EPA's radon action level," says Bruce Snead, director of the Kansas Radon Program at Kansas State University. He referred to the Environmental Protection Agency's radon action level of 4.0 picocuries of radon per liter of indoor air.

To help raise awareness and encourage people to have their homes tested, the EPA has deemed January National Radon Action Month. Kansas Gov. Jeff Colyer signed a proclamation Dec. 18 recognizing the month in the state.

Radon occurs naturally in the soil. Its levels are low outdoors because its effects are diluted, but indoor levels can build and lead to lung cancer. And Kansas soils generate significant amounts of radon leading to the potential for homes to have elevated concentrations of this naturally-occurring class A carcinogen.

Snead encourages all homeowners to test for radon. Test kits can be obtained from many K-State Research and Extension offices for a small fee, which includes a lab analysis and return postage.

More than 112,000 radon measurements have been reported in Kansas, according to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. The agency indicates that the statewide average indoor radon level in Kansas is 4.9 picocuries of radon per liter (pCi/L), which is above the EPA threshold of 4.0.

For homeowners who test and find elevated radon levels in their homes, the most common technique to reduce it is called Active Soil Depressurization. An ASD mitigation system is a permanently-installed pipe-and-fan system that places a direct constant vacuum on the soil beneath the home's foundation, so the amount of radon that can penetrate into the living space is reduced.

More information about radon, testing and mitigation is available at kansasradonprogram.org/home or by calling the Kansas Radon Hotline at 1-800-693-5343.