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Livestock and Natural Resources

Weaning by The Sign of the Moon

After Allen Arnold taught me about the Signs of the moon, we decided to wean in the “right sign.” It was quite noisy the first night but then tapered off. Thankfully, we have not had any sickness to speak of. I’m not sure if “working” them should be under a different moon sign, that didn’t go as well as planned. I was delegated to bringing them up. With a combination of no catwalk and too wide of an alley, they kept spinning around on me. Of course, it was all my fault! After the cattle prod (which I used judiciously) was broke in two pieces, I offered to quit. We definitely will have more help around next time.

Some of the whispers about winter have been that it’s going to be a bad one. I was able to hear Mary Knapp, our KSU Climatologist, the other day. We are in a La Nina, which means a bad winter for up north and warmer and drier for the south. So here’s the deal we are the border between the north and the south. I’m opting for the warmer and drier, and that’s sort of what she is thinking. I’m hoping so anyway.

Getting ready to bring the cows home? To minimize the effects of adverse weather conditions, cow-calf producers should plan ahead as much as possible. Here are some key management considerations to ensure your cows and bulls come through winter in good condition. Consider the following management practices to reduce winter stress on your herd:

Develop balanced rations with available feed and supplement when necessary.

- increase ration TDN to meet additional energy needs during adverse weather events
- consider feeds like Distillers Grain (DDG) to increase energy and protein
- manage feed resources to keep the best quality feeds for late gestation and lactation. Be very careful if you plan to use grains (corn) to increase the energy density of the diet during severe condition as you may do more harm than good. Feeding more than 2-3 lb/hd/da of corn to cows on a forage based diet will decrease fiber digestion. When cows are on a forage-based diet, and supplemental energy is needed, consider the use of high energy, non-starch feed stuffs such as distillers grains and soy hulls to meet cow energy requirements. It would not be advisable to change rations daily, but it is predicted that weather conditions will be severe over a period of time then ration changes may be warranted.

Shelter is a luxury in this business but can be beneficial during severe conditions.

- provide dry bedding areas with corn stover or similar crop residues for cows and bulls
- provide windbreaks that can be accessed by cows during adverse weather

Body condition score all cows and monitor monthly to assess their status and group cows and heifers based on nutritional needs by age and body condition.

And don’t forget to take care of your bulls! Protect their fertility in extreme cold temperatures.

David G. Hallauer
District Extension Agent
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Weed Seed Movement – a Wisconsin Case Study

There's been a lot of challenges in 2020, but one of the positives we saw (for the most part anyway...) was good weed control in field crops. Still, some weeds did survive, and that means the possibility that they've set seed and will give rise to more in the future.

Weed seeds that make it to maturity can also get spread to other locations. Migratory waterfowl are a known source. Feedstuffs with weed seeds gets moved from field to feeding area – and sometimes back again in manure. Soil left on equipment can move seeds, and combines are a big potential seed spreader – and one of the reasons for a University of Wisconsin study on weed seed movement potential from harvest equipment.

A link to full results can be found at our Meadowlark Extension District Crops & Soils page: <https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/crops-soils/index.html>, but here are a few highlights:

Samples (31) were collected from the combine head, feeder house, rock trap, and rotor area. Sample seeds were grown out and counted.

Viable weed seed was found in 97 percent of the samples.

Header samples contributed to 49 percent of the weeds emerged. The feeder house contributed another 30 percent.

Why is this important? Herbicide resistance occurs naturally in weed populations, and spreading weed seeds increases the chances of further herbicide resistance issues. Spreading may not be limited to your fields alone, as transport can dislodge seeds as well.

To help reduce the spread of weeds – and herbicide resistance – University of Wisconsin researchers recommend harvesting the cleanest fields first, moving to weedy fields as harvest progresses. In addition, make sure combines are cleaned thoroughly before moving from field to field. When time is limited, focus on the head and feeder house areas first.

It's been a pretty good year for weed control, but every seed counts. Make sure harvest operations aren't contributing to greater weed pressures in the future.

Garden Tillage Best Done in the Fall

It can be tempting to walk away from the garden at season's end without another thought. After all, we've already spent hours out there, and nothing is still growing. That's not the best approach for a successful start to 2021, however.

If you typically work your garden prior to the next crop, fall is the preferred time. Soils are typically drier – a better option to keep tillage from destroying soil structure. If we till in the fall and *do* happen to cause issues, freeze/thaw action in the winter typically helps correct them. Insect and disease pressure can be reduced by working garden debris under as well.

Fall tillage also can help you increase organic matter. Old debris is a good source of organic matter. Tree leaves, too. Incorporating organic matter now might even allow you a second chance to add more organic matter in the spring.

If organic materials are larger in size, mowing can help reduce their size, resulting in better breakdown. KSU Horticulture Specialist Dr. Ward Upham suggests adding two inches of organic material and tilling it in. Avoid overtilling, stopping when particles are the size of grape nuts – or larger (if you get to dust – you've gone too far...).

The growing season might be done, but 2021 is just beginning – plan to till soon.

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

How to Avoid the Fake News Trap

Do you wish you could save time investigating the memes and questionable stories filling your social media feeds? Ever wish the person who shared it had fact-checked it before they shared?

Fortunately, librarians at K-State Libraries are sharing resources and tools you can use to identify fake news stories that run across your news feed.

“If your feeds have become flooded with content that makes you feel more emotional than informed, you can choose to hide those posts and get your news from legitimate news outlets and research organizations,” said Sara K. Kearns, professor and academic services librarian with K-State Libraries.

If you do want to run down the fact-checking road, Kearns recommended that you find out if someone has already done the work for you before you lace up your shoes. The following sites not only investigate the stories, but they also provide you with more information to back up their claims.

*FactCheck.org (<http://www.factcheck.org/>) FactCheck.org is a nonpartisan organization that has investigated politics since 2003. They also fact-check science claims. FactCheck.org is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. (<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/>)

*Poynter Institute---Fact-Checking Research (<https://www.poynter.org/channels/fact-checking/>) Journalists at the Poynter Institute collect and explain major studies and events related to fact-checking, fake news, and misinformation.

*PolitiFact (<http://www.politifact.com/>) Politifact is a Pulitzer Prize-winning website created by the Tampa Bay Times and now operated as part of the Poynter Institute. The site focuses on political news and statements made by elected officials.

*Snopes (<http://www.snopes.com/>) Originally a debunker of urban myths, Snopes now investigates memes, tweets, and the news. You can go straight to it's fact-checking page (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/>).

Kearns says these fact-checking sites establish, publish and follow their own investigation guidelines. Sometimes, the researchers clearly confirm or refute the stories. They also provide enough information for the user to come to their own conclusions about more nuanced issues.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Family meals are important for kids' development

The more meals that families eat together, the more positive results that are seen in the individual and the family unit. Even toddlers benefit from being with family during meal time.

This is where a lot of useful conversation happens, and young children who aren't able to speak yet are really picking up on language development and formation. It's shown to be a benefit to them as they're getting a start at processing words and interacting with conversation.

As youth grow into the teen years, family meals provide grounding and "a connectedness" to the family's values.

We know from research that young pre-teens and teens are less likely to have anti-social and or delinquent tendencies if they have more family meals. There are some grounding benefits to meals that reach well beyond just the fact that it's nice for parents to know where everybody is at for a short period of time.

Eating together more than five times a week has been found to be linked to better mood and better mental health for kids in the school years, meaning ages 6-10 and teens. Sometimes our schedules get so crazy, and it's hard to make it happen. People need to be a little forgiving of themselves and know that it won't happen every meal, but when you can make it happen, it's well worth the effort.

If family meals happen at breakfast, that's great. The family's schedule may only allow for morning meals on some days and evening meals on others. Be flexible.

Older children may be able to do some of the cooking while setting the table is more appropriate for others. Encourage time when everyone is focused on the task. Some of those conversations are more true and meaningful than they might be otherwise.

Electronics are a distraction to productive family conversations. The research around family meals suggests that if your family is one of those that doesn't have spontaneous conversation, then maybe you could try conversation starters, such as, "What are two things that you learned today that surprised you." Every family is unique, and it may take practice to get those conversations to flow.