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Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Tar Spot

As corn harvest winds down, 2023 planting plans are already taking shape. The end of the growing season added yet another potential variable for next growing season: Tar Spot. Found in five northeast Kansas counties (so far) for the first time this year, Tar Spot has been a disease of focus since it was first discovered back in 2015. What we've learned is concerning.

For starters, the disease prefers mild temperatures up to the mid 70's. Like most fungal diseases, it also likes high humidity and long periods of leaf wetness. Prolonged periods of leaf wetness are likely what resulted in it showing up here this season, and is likely to be a contributor to potential issues in irrigated corn moving forward. It also tends to survive in corn residue, with continuous corn being another potential 'hot spot'.

There's no guarantee 2023 levels will warrant concern, but the fact the disease is here increases those chances and the need for proactive action. Start by evaluating rotations and selecting hybrids to help combat potential infections. University of Illinois studies in 2018 indicated a 'significant response to tar spot' with hybrids in the same trial exhibiting severity ratings from two and a half to over forty percent. There is some promising work to help combat Tar Spot from the genetics side, but to date, no hybrids are known to have genetic.

Looking ahead, start thinking about irrigation timing, fungicide applications, and focused scouting during the next growing season. Even slight changes to an in-season management program could help a great deal towards preventing further pressure from this disease.

For more tips and a summary of disease findings, check out the newest KSU Agronomy eUpdate: https://webapp.agron.ksu.edu/agr_social/article_new/tar-spot-of-corn-is-now-confirmed-in-five-counties-in-kansas-516-5 or contact any District Office.

Late Lawn Seedings

The typical fall window for seeding cool season turfgrasses closes in mid-October. It's not that later seedings can't make it, but the odds *do* go way down. The reason: rooting.

We often blame the failure of late seedings on seed not germinating or young plants being sensitive to cold. That's possible, but most of the time, the lack of an extensive root system is of greater concern. Sometimes, that lack of root system results in heaving during freeze/thaw cycles. If young plants are heaved out of the ground, they'll typically dry out and die.

The other problem can be a lack of energy to help seedlings get going. The seed provides energy to the young seedling, but if enough top growth doesn't occur prior to winter, root systems may lack adequate energy to help the plant survive the winter and take off next spring.

For best results, keep newly seeded turfgrass stands watered through the fall. Mature lawns need less frequent watering but *all* should go into the winter with moist soil.

Ross Mosteller

District Extension Agent
Livestock & Natural Resources

Can We Feed Through Winter?

The recent line of rain showers that passed through the area makes a person feel like it can still rain, but it was a long way from breaking the extremely dry conditions we've been experiencing the past several months. Not to take a negative focus, but if you've been following the US drought monitor <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/> you know that most of the United States west of the Mississippi River is in various stages of drought. This large of area begins to create a drain on forage resources and creates concern on how livestock in the great plains will be fed.

Like it or not, worries about drought and how producers are going to make it through the winter with limited or no stored forage in some cases, is beginning to be at the center of mind for livestock producers. There are some critical steps that need to be made in order for those feeding livestock to successfully navigate the high-demand, winter-feeding period.

The first priority is to reduce the stocking rate to a level that can be sustained through the rest of fall, given the grazing resources available. That looks slightly different in each enterprise, but at its purest essence, this means strategically removing some of the mouths to be feed.

- If you are an operation that keeps or purchases stocker/feeders to utilize extra summer grass, fall grazing or other feed resources, this may be the time to sell early or send them to a grow yard or feedlot. Using stocker/feeder animals as part of the “normal” stocking rate of the operation allows producers to be flexible for drought and other adverse weather events. Many operations plan to utilize 30 to 50% of their summer forage for stockers in normal years, when forage production is limited these animals can be marketed reducing the culling of the herd that may need to occur.
- Selling replacements should also be considered, as these females will not provide a marketable calf for well over a year. In this current circumstance, these cattle may be too large of a drain on feed resources and have a respectable market value at the current time. Many operations pride themselves in genetics and building high quality replacements, so this can be a hard pill to swallow. That said, it still makes sense to cull hard and keep only the top cut, if you can't bring yourself to selling replacement females.
- Cull cowherd to a number that you can afford to winter by getting rid of old, open, less productive cows and/or cows that have higher nutrient requirements. Fall calving cows will require more nutrients to keep proper condition, and a higher level of nutrition equates to higher cost of winter feeding. If you have both spring and fall calving herds, this may be a year to sell fall pairs and let someone else feed them this winter. After culling to a sustainable level in the dry years, the number of cows left may more accurately reflect the sustainable long-term carrying capacity for your operation.
- Make the most of existing feed resources. If your management style is to graze entire pastures or crop fields, you might consider strip or paddock grazing to increase utilization rate. This approach does come with higher labor and fencing demand, but you might just find that it is a profitable endeavor. Reducing stored forage waste in storage, transport and feeding needs special attention this year as well.

These steps may not be palatable to everyone, because of changing traditional management styles, it may require more labor than typical or desired, or it may cost more than budgeted or what has been historically acceptable. At the end of the day, the goal should be to have an intact livestock operation to move forward, when weather conditions change as they always do. More information on dealing with issues surrounding drought can be found at:

<https://www.asi.k-state.edu/extension/beef/focusareas/feedandwater.html#drought>

Teresa Hatfield

District Extension Agent
Family and Community Wellness

Medicare Marketing Scams Common During the Open Enrollment Period

The Medicare Open Enrollment Period, which runs from October 15 to December 7 each year, is when Medicare beneficiaries can join, switch, or drop a plan.

Insurance agents are required to follow rules when contacting beneficiaries. Sometimes they break the rules – like cold calling or approaching beneficiaries with no prior relationship. In the last few weeks, I have heard of several instances of people showing up at Medicare beneficiary's homes uninvited and unannounced in our local area.

Insurance agents are allowed to call beneficiaries who have expressly given advanced permission, make unsolicited contact with potential enrollees using conventional mail and other print media (e.g., advertisements) and by email provided it contains an opt-out function, and conduct marketing/sales activities in common areas of health care settings. So, for example, if you have filled out a card requesting more information about an insurance product, the agent would be allowed to contact you. If you have made no effort to reach out to the insurance company, they cannot show up uninvited at your home.

Be aware that insurance agents cannot:

- Conduct marketing or sales activities at an educational event
- Require participants to provide contact information to attend an event
- Sell door-to-door or leave information like leaflets, flyers, door hangers, etc., on someone's car or at their residence (unless the beneficiary is a "no show" for a prescheduled appointment)
- State that they are approved, endorsed, or authorized by Medicare; are calling on behalf of Medicare; or that Medicare asked them to call or see the beneficiary
- Send unsolicited text messages, make unsolicited phone calls, or leave voicemail messages for potential enrollees
- Approach beneficiaries in public areas (i.e., parking lots, hallways, lobbies, or sidewalks)
- Provide information that is inaccurate or misleading

Beneficiaries who think they may have been wrongfully enrolled in a plan or those who see other potentially suspicious activity can call the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) program for help.

SMP provides you with the information you need to **PROTECT** yourself from Medicare fraud, errors, and abuse; **DETECT** potential fraud, errors, and abuse; and **REPORT** your concerns. To report Medicare marketing concerns, contact Teresa Hatfield with the Meadowlark Extension District, your SMP contact, at 785-364-4125.

Cindy Williams

District Extension Agent
Family & Community Wellness

Pumpkin Ideas for Halloween and Beyond

Do you know that a single ½ cup of canned pumpkin provides 4 grams of fiber, no fat or cholesterol, and only 50 calories? Pumpkin also has more beta-carotene per serving than any other common food. Your body converts beta-carotene to vitamin A, and that may protect against heart disease and some cancers.

Fresh pumpkins are available from late summer to well into the fall. Small sugar (a.k.a. pie) pumpkins are the best for eating, though you can eat the large ones, too. Be sure the pumpkins are clean and dry, then store them in a cool, dry and dark place. Pumpkins may last for several months, depending on the storage conditions.

To prepare a pumpkin for cooking, cut off the top. Flip it over and cut a thin slice off of the bottom. That way, the pumpkin will sit flat on your cutting board. Using a large knife, cut slices of the skin off from top to bottom, working your way around the pumpkin, just like you would cut the skin off of an orange. Halve the pumpkin and scoop out the seeds and stringy pulp; then cut the pumpkin into chunks.

To make pumpkin puree, steam those pumpkin chunks until they're quite tender. Drain them, then puree in a food processor. If you don't have a food processor, mash them as fine as you can with a potato masher. Press the mixture through a fine sieve.

You can also bake unpeeled, seeded pumpkin halves at 325° until tender. This takes about 1 hour. Scoop the flesh out of the shell and puree it. Since this puree will be drier than the puree in the other method, you won't need to drain it. All homemade pumpkin puree may be frozen for up to six months.

Canned pumpkin puree is easy to use and works very well in recipes. Be sure to purchase plain pumpkin and not the pie filling. Pumpkin pie filling is loaded with sugar and other ingredients. Read the label carefully to see which one you are buying.