

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Corn and Soybean Schools

The format has changed for the traditional corn and soybean schools held each winter as a joint outreach effort of K-State Research & Extension, Kansas Corn and the Kansas Soybean Association. This year's program will combine both schools into a single event packed with information for corn and soybean growers.

This year's two eastern Kansas events will be January 16th in Parsons (K-State Southeast Research & Extension Center) and January 19th (Friday) at the John Deere Ag Marketing Center in Olathe. Each program will differ slightly with potential topics including row crop disease issue (tar spot, soybean sudden death, etc...), carbon credit programs, soil fertility and weather and market updates. It will be a full day of excellent crop management information.

Check-in begins at 8:30. The program starts at 9:00 and will conclude by 3:00 p.m. Certified Crop Advisor and Commercial Pesticide Applicator credits have been applied for.

KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide – Now Available

The 2024 edition of the KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide was shipped this week meaning hard copies will soon be available at all three Meadowlark Extension District Offices as well as the upcoming Topeka Farm Show. This guide provides a wealth of useful information related to herbicide products for all major field crops and forage crops as well. Stop by the office and pick one up or visit: <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/CHEMWEEDGUIDE.pdf> .

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Calving Season Preparation

I once heard an old cowboy say that the best way to avoid losing calves to hypothermia of a January blizzard was calving in April or May - I can follow that logic. Everyone has an opinion on the “right” time to calve cows (*or birthing of any specie for that matter*), which can be an article by itself. My purpose today is to get you thinking about preparing for calving season, regardless of when that might be for your operation. If you’d like to learn more on this topic of birthing, I’d invite you to attend the K-State Calving School **January 11, 6:00 pm** at the Northeast Kansas Heritage Complex, Holton. Register by January 8 online at: <https://tinyurl.com/ksucalvingschoolholton> or by calling the Holton office of Meadowlark District at 785-364-4125.

Preparing for calving season should not be something you think about as the first water bag presents itself in the first heifer. There are many things that need to be considered from nutrition, health, equipment, facilities and cowboy knowledge. Here are some of the important factors to review and consider prior to calving season.

- Herd health planning. Preparing for calving gives a perfect opportunity to visit with your veterinarian on identifying critical control points where management could reduce risk and cost effectively improve herd health. If your herd has historical health or disease issues, work with your vet on proper preventative vaccinations and disease mitigation planning.
- Nutrition matters! Adequate nutrition during the last trimester of pregnancy and especially the last 50-60 days prior to calving is important. Acceptable body condition impacts stamina during delivery, quality of colostrum, calf vigor, and also impacts subsequent rebreeding. Two-year-old heifers and three-year-old cows are especially vulnerable during this time period as they are still growing. Higher quality feed, with adequate energy and protein at this time is critical.
- Calving facilities and equipment. Inspect gates, pens, alleys and head catches; servicing, fixing or replacing broken items. Give pens and facilities a good cleaning and disinfecting. Inevitably, a percentage of cows will calve at night. Good lighting is critical for night calving and inside enclosed buildings, make sure lights are in working order with replacement bulbs handy.
- Provide wind protection in clean and dry environments. Wet, muddy conditions are stressful both to cows and calves. This environment also provides a situation where disease spread is more likely to happen. When possible, providing a clean, dry place for calves and cows to lay down will reduce stress and promote calf health. Supplemental bedding needs to be on hand.
- Check calving supplies. Make sure you have on hand plastic sleeves, obstetrical lube, obstetrical chains or straps, esophageal feeders and calf feeding bottles. Inventory halters, ropes, and other cattle handling tools needed. Make sure the calf puller is clean and working properly, hopefully not to be needed. Test flashlights or spotlights to make sure they are working as well.
- Keep colostrum or colostrum replacement products on inventory. Quality colostrum consumption by the calf shortly after birth is foundational for the calf’s lifelong health. Calves experiencing a difficult delivery are less likely to timely nurse and will benefit from receiving colostrum shortly after birth via a bottle or esophageal feeder. The best source of colostrum your own herd, ideally the mother. Colostrum replacement products can be a good option when calves are not vigorous, after stress or when there is poor maternal bonding.
- Review the stages of calving and understand when further examination and assistance is needed. Again, the primary purpose of the upcoming K-State calving school! Our Nebraska neighbors have a good publication called [Assisting the Beef Cow at Calving Time](#) that provides good information on this topic as well.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Protecting Young Trees in the Winter

If you planted trees, shrubs, or other perennials this past year, you might be wondering: how do I help them through the winter? Young trees do face extra challenges, but you can take steps to help them survive and thrive into the spring.

The first thing to consider is water. Last week I wrote about how all perennials can undergo drought stress in the winter if their roots get dehydrated. With younger trees, the roots are less expansive, making it easier for them to dry out. To combat this, check on any trees and shrubs planted less than 3 years ago twice a month to see if their soil is dry. You can use a rod or stick to see how moist the soil is a few inches under the surface. If the soil is dry, you can use a 5-gallon bucket with a 1/8-inch hole drilled near the bottom to let water slowly and deeply irrigate the soil.

To help the soil retain the moisture it receives, ensure there is a healthy layer of mulch around your young plants. You may have already mulched at the time of planting, but between wind, critters, and decomposition, it is a good idea to double check there is sufficient mulch for the winter. Ideally, you should have 3-inch layer of mulch extending at least 2 or 3 feet from the base. Make sure that the mulch is not touching or piled up around the trunk, as that can trap moisture against the bark and cause rot. Instead, create a donut shape with the mulch around the tree.

Mulching will also help prevent another issue: cold damage to roots. Overall, roots are not as cold-hardy as stems and branches. Normally, soil provides insulation to keep roots warm. Around newly planted trees and shrubs, the soil is likely to have cracks or empty space from moving soil around. These cracks let cold air penetrate the soil and reach the roots. Mulch adds another layer of insulation to keep roots warm. The insulation from mulch also helps prevent the freeze-thaw cycle from causing soil to expand and contract around the roots, which can dislodge the plant or damage the roots.

You may also find that rabbits, voles, or other critters enjoy the taste of young, thin bark when looking for a winter snack. One of the best strategies to prevent animal damage is to discourage them from visiting. Mow the grass to 2 inches and remove any yard waste build up from the area to prevent small critters from finding a cozy home next to your tree or shrub.

The second thing you can do is to make a physical barrier that prevents wildlife from reaching your tree. The type of barrier you need depends on what kind of wildlife are trying to snack on your plants. Make sure that whatever barrier you build lets the trunk or stem remain exposed to the air. Piling up materials against the base of the trunk will do more harm than good.

In addition to hungry animals, sunscald can cause severe bark damage, especially on species with thin bark such as honeylocust, fruit trees, ash, oaks, maples, lindens and willows. When the sun heats up the thin bark it can trick the tree into thinking that it's time to wake up from dormancy. The cells in the trunk then start to become active, resulting in less cold-hardiness. When night falls and temperatures drop, the tree is not as prepared to handle it, causing frost damage, or sunscald. The affected bark will later crack and peel off, leaving your young tree with a wound that is open to infection.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

How to Pay for Long-Term Care

When I talk to people about what Medicare covers, many are surprised to learn that Medicare does not cover long-term care. Long-term care covers supports and services that people need to perform activities of daily living. Activities of Daily Living or ADLs include things such as bathing, eating, dressing, toileting, and transferring. While Medicare will cover skilled nursing services for a certain period, it will not cover extended long-term care. Skilled nursing requires trained medical Help with ADLs, which is considered custodial care, and providers are not required to have special medical training to perform care.

For Medicare to cover skilled nursing, you must meet specific requirements. Skilled nursing covered by Medicare will cover things like intravenous fluids, wound care, medications, or physical therapy. Medicare will only cover skilled nursing for a limited number of days. So many people who need long-term care and support must use other options besides Medicare to pay for long-term care. Generally, there are only three ways to cover this type of care: private pay, Medicaid, or long-term care insurance.

The Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) reports that the average cost for a semi-private room is \$80,000 per year. Long-term care insurance can help pay for the costs of long-term care services and support that other types of insurance will not cover. Long-term care insurance might be an option for people wishing to protect their assets. Typically, these policies work for people who can afford the premiums. Plans will vary in cost depending on the policy. Many things can affect the premium, including the benefit amounts, the duration or maximum benefit, inflation, and the benefit payout method. The cost can also be affected by age, pre-existing conditions, family history, gender, and the company's financial rating.

The Kansas Insurance advises keeping these shopping tips in mind.

- You do not need long-term care insurance if your income and assets qualify you for Medicaid.
- Talk to several agents and companies before deciding on a policy.
- Learn about the agent and the company, and determine how many complaints have been filed.
- Take your time. Do not be pressured into buying a policy.
- Never buy something you do not understand.
- Never sign a blank application.
- When purchasing online or by mail, look for a local agent or a toll-free number you can contact for questions.
- Make payments to the insurance company and not the agent. Never pay cash.
- Do not pay premiums for more than one year at a time.
- Do not buy multiple policies.

Medicaid is another way to pay for long-term care for people with limited income and assets. Medicaid will cover the cost of long-term care, including room and board, medical care, mental health counseling, social activities, and assistance with ADLs. A person's income will go to their care in a nursing home; they can keep \$62 for personal items. Medicaid will cover whatever is not covered by a person's income. The State of Kansas has the right to recover expenses for long-term care expended on the recipient from their estate after death.

Lastly, if you do not have a long-term care insurance policy and are not eligible for Medicaid, you will have to pay for the care from private funds. You can find additional information about long-term care at the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services at www.kdads.gov. You can also find more information about long-term care insurance on the Kansas Insurance Department's website at <https://insurance.kansas.gov/>.

Cindy Williams
District Extension Agent, Family & Community Wellness

Family Meals.... Worth Making a Priority

When was the last time you sat down for a meal with your family? For many, family mealtime has been lost in our overscheduled lives. School, work schedules and extracurricular activities can make it difficult to find time to eat together and some go days or weeks without sitting down to share a meal as a family. However, family meals are important. Researchers have found that families who share meals together on a regular basis, whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner reap many benefits.

In an article, Maureen Bligh, Andrea Garen and Ashley Rosales; Registered Dietitians with the Dairy Council of California; shared the following information re-emphasizing studies which have shown that children who eat with their families are better nourished, have lower rates of obesity and better vocabularies. These factors can have a positive impact on classroom behavior and academic performance. And when it comes to improving the health of our children, family meals are a great way to instill healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Research into family meals and their benefits is becoming more in depth, with some interesting findings:

- Dining as a family can create an environment for parents to lead by example for their children.

Children who eat with their families consume more fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy foods compared to those who eat fewer family meals.

- Adults also report that eating as a family is a positive portion of their day. Mealtimes creates a feeling of togetherness and family cohesion. The concept of a family meals does not exclude single-parent homes or couples without children. The routine associated with meals can provide a protective value for some of the risks associated with single-parent homes. For couples, the routine of sitting down together carves out time for each other and creates work schedule boundaries creating a balance between work and personal life.
- There is an association between family meal frequency and lower rates of obesity.

But the benefits of family meals go beyond nutrition and family unity. Family meals are also an opportunity to promote child development. Regular family meals teach children many things that will enrich their lives beyond the immediate health benefits of eating nutritious food. Isn't it time to make family meals a habit in your home?