

David Hallauer  
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

### **Fall Herbicide Applications – Beyond the Weeds**

The fall weed control window is open. While we're looking directly at getting rid of weeds with most programs, there are often other benefits as well, as outlined in a 2013 University of Missouri Integrated Pest Management article by Extension Weed Scientist Dr. Kevin Bradley. In that article, he not only discussed spring weather uncertainty and longer term (residual) weed control benefits, as well others worth thinking about as well.

The first was soil temperature. While a dense mat of winter annual weeds may make planting conditions more difficult, temperature differences can be significant as well. Missouri research comparing sites where weeds were present versus where they were absent showed temperatures differences approaching five degrees Fahrenheit in corn and as much as eight degrees Fahrenheit in soybeans. Warmer temperatures in weed free areas may not seem significant, until stands are reduced by below optimum soil temperatures due to weed pressure.

Winter annual weed presence also led to reductions in soil moisture content at planting. When weeds were removed via fall or early spring pre-plant herbicide applications, soil moisture content at corn planting was as much as 13 percent higher and up to six percent higher at soybean planting time. With ample moisture that may not be a penalty. If the spring is dry, however, it might become more important.

Fertility levels may be impacted, too. Kansas State University research into nitrogen uptake by winter annuals (14 sites) showed an average N uptake of almost 16 pounds per acre. Weed pressure also affected developing corn plants the following spring.

Winter annual weeds (henbit, pennycress, shepherd's purse, etc...) can result in pest issues, too, serving as alternate hosts for soybean cyst nematode with henbit also found to be an attractant for black cutworm moths. A soybean study showed insect populations 10 times greater in soybean stands when winter annuals were left uncontrolled until seven days before planting.

There are many factors (cost...time...etc...) influencing whether a fall weed control program is worth it, but this work underscores how it's not all about the weeds. Want more information? A couple of recent KSU Agronomy eUpdate (<https://eupdate.agronomy.ksu.edu/>) articles by KSU Extension Weed Management Specialist Dr. Sarah Lancaster outline some fall options to consider. They are also available upon request from any District Office.

Ross Mosteller  
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

### **Fall Grazing of Alfalfa**

There is a notable change in the air this morning as I write this. Freeze warnings are being announced, with excessive heat warnings seeming still to be recent experiences - you've got to love Kansas weather! A killing freeze signals the end to many things, but it can also mean the beginning for others. In many areas, fall forage is running short this year and there could be interest in grazing alfalfa this fall/winter. Alfalfa can provide good grazing opportunities, but comes with considerations for both the plant and animal health sides of the equation.

In some cases, the last cutting of alfalfa may not have had enough tonnage to warrant haying, but still has enough biomass for livestock to benefit from grazing. In general, a properly managed alfalfa stand should have good regrowth following a killing freeze. Another positive situation is when an alfalfa field sits adjacent to field with crop residue. Standing alfalfa can provide a protein source to help livestock better utilize the residue. A side benefit is that grazing alfalfa in late fall or winter can reduce alfalfa weevil infestations by removing stems and plant parts that serve as a wintering site or a spring laying site for weevil eggs.

All classes of livestock can benefit from grazing alfalfa. Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have shown yearlings can have 1.5 to 2.5 lb/d ADG (average daily gain) and cows can increase body condition score before harsh winter months. One of the greatest concerns for livestock is bloat. Unfortunately, you never can be completely certain that alfalfa won't cause bloat, as it is in the class of bloating legumes. Feed additives such as poloxalene and ionophores can limit bloat risk, but require regular consumption to be effective.

Bloat risk is much lower a week after a hard freeze that causes wilting, so one week post hard freeze is a good run of thumb for turning out. Always use good management methods to help reduce the risk further. This includes; having full rumens before turning out to alfalfa, wait until midday (after frost or dew is gone) before turning out, provide other dry, palatable feeds or even bloat retardants and defiantly keep a close eye on animals for the first couple days.

Alfalfa plants need six weeks of uninterrupted growth prior to a killing freeze to properly winterize. Winterization allows for accumulation of energy in the roots of alfalfa plants. While alfalfa can be grazed during this time, it is not recommended unless absolutely needed. As with a late cutting, any harvest will increase the likelihood of winterkill and impact future productivity. Fall grazed alfalfa can be incredibly high-quality but low quantity. Graze lightly leaving at least eight inches of stubble on average to minimize depletion of the stored energy reserves.

Just like with normal range and pasture settings, rotational grazing can be a good tool to more effectively utilize standing, frozen alfalfa. Properly managed grazing may allow plants to better winterize than a late hay cutting but is still a risk for the stand. Plan grazing to be done when the field is dry and firm. If the soil is too wet, animal hooves can damage plant crowns. Having a sacrifice area or an adjacent lot ready to pull animals into if conditions get wet, can avoid excessive damage to the stand.

There is often fear associated with grazing alfalfa due to bloat potential or hurting the alfalfa stand. These are very valid concerns, but with additional management and timing, alfalfa stands can provide valuable supplemental forage in the fall and winter months. Alfalfa can be grazed safely, just be careful and attentive. K-State's [Alfalfa Production Handbook C683](#) provides additional information.

Laura Phillips  
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

### **Prolong the life of your garden tools**

Last week I wrote about the importance of maintenance on your lawn mower before storing it away for the winter. Yet your lawn more is not the only tool that can use some extra care while our gardens rest until spring. K-State Research and Extension Horticulture Specialist Dr. Domenghini offers insight into tool maintenance that can prolong the tools' lifespan

"Hoses should be drained by stretching them and coiling for storage," Domenghini said. "Water will drain as you pull the hose toward you for coiling."

Ultraviolet light can make hoses brittle and decay over time, so proper storage is necessary, she said.

Irrigation lines for lawn sprinkler systems should also be winterized by shutting off the main valve for the system and opening manual drains to prevent freezing in the lines.

"Lawn irrigation systems usually have shallow lines, and most lines are self-draining. These systems should be blown out with an air compressor. Lawn irrigation companies often offer this service," Domenghini said.

To clean garden tools, it is suggested to use a steel brush to remove dirt and debris from previous uses. Once this has been done, clean the metal portion of the tool with oil and a paper towel to prevent rusting in storage.

"Store these tools in an area where they will not be exposed to poor weather conditions. This will help prevent splintering," Domenghini said.

Wooden handles that are becoming rough can be sanded lightly and coated with a light application of wood preservative, boiled linseed oil or polyurethane. After a few minutes, wipe off the excess coating.

"Some quick maintenance will increase the life of your tools and save you money from having to replace them," Domenghini said.

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

### **Military Benefits and Medicare**

If you have retired from the armed services or are a military veteran, there are some important things you need to consider about your benefits and Medicare. Depending on whether you use Tricare for Life or if you are utilizing the Veterans Administration (VA) benefits, Medicare will behave differently.

If you are approaching age 65 and receiving your healthcare through the VA, you will need to consider what parts of Medicare to take. The VA recommends eligible veterans enroll in Medicare Parts A and B. By signing up for Medicare when you qualify, you will have healthcare coverage if you must go to a non-VA hospital or other healthcare provider. If you decide to wait and want to take Part B later, you will pay a late enrollment penalty. This penalty does not go away; you must pay it as long as you are on Medicare. Remember that if your VA benefits change in the future, you will still have to pay the late enrollment penalty. If you get your medications through the VA, you do not have to take a separate Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. However, you will need a Part D plan to get medication outside the VA system from a non-VA doctor or pharmacy. There is no penalty for enrolling in a Part D plan later if you have pharmacy benefits through the VA. You can enroll during the Open Enrollment Period to enroll in a drug plan or 63 days if your VA benefits should end.

There is no coordination of benefits between the VA and Medicare. You have to choose to use VA benefits or Medicare. One will not help pay for the other. You must receive care at a VA medical center to use your VA benefits. The VA sometimes authorizes care at a non-VA hospital or another healthcare facility. Veterans may have to pay copays for non-service-related care. If you have a Medigap or other supplement insurance, the VA may bill this insurance.

If you are retired from the U.S. armed forces and are approaching age 65, you must enroll in Medicare to keep your Tricare benefits. When you turn 65, you will be eligible for Tricare for Life (TFL). You are automatically enrolled in TFL if you have signed up for Medicare. Tricare for Life offers secondary coverage after Medicare in the U.S. and U.S. Territories. It also provides coverage overseas as the primary payer. Tricare for Life includes prescription drug coverage, so you may not need to enroll in a separate Part D plan. Tricare for Life prescription coverage is considered creditable, so it is as good or better than a Part D plan. If you want to enroll in Part D later, you can do so without paying a late enrollment penalty.

If you have an employer plan based on current employment, Medicare allows you to delay your Medicare Part B enrollment without paying a penalty. If you wait to take Part B, you will have a special enrollment period to sign up. This is available if you or your spouse are still working. To have Tricare for Life, you must still enroll in Medicare Part A and B.

For answers and questions about how Medicare works with military benefits, contact Teresa Hatfield at the Meadowlark Extension office at 785-364-4125 or [thatfield@ksu.edu](mailto:thatfield@ksu.edu).

Cindy Williams  
District Extension Agent, Family & Community Wellness

### **Old Financial Rules Still Apply**

Good financial advice never changes. Yes, a bad economy may force us into being a little more frugal, and to pay closer attention to finances, but we all should have been doing this anyway. Listed below are some basic principles to build a sound financial plan. There are not tricks, and certainly not quick solutions, but they are tried and true regardless of the times:

- Make sure to keep others in mind---Studies show that those who regularly contribute a small percentage of their money to charitable causes are happier and more fulfilled, regardless of income level.
- Create a budget---A budget is a plan for setting and reaching financial goals. If your budget is not helping you reach your goals, it is not working and needs adjusting. There's no right or wrong way to budget as long as it works!!
- Set SMART Goals---Effective financial goals will be Specific, Measurable, Agreed upon, Realistic and Timed.
- Step-down on your spending---(cable, internet, eating out) ---You don't have to give up your weekly dates with your spouse, but there are ways to have fun without breaking the bank. The more creative the ideas, the more memorable they will be.
- Build an emergency savings---Unless you are regularly putting some savings aside every month for emergencies, you will be forced to rely on credit cards and other debts for unexpected expenses.
- Create a plan to pay off your high interest debt (s)---The debt snowball is a method of paying off the smallest debt first, and rolling that extra payment towards the next largest debt and so on. Every couple of months a new debt will be eliminated which will keep you focused and motivated.
- Take advantage of FREE money in your 401-k---In spite of the fear of stock market volatility, tax sheltered mutual funds are still the best long-term growth vehicle for your retirement investments. Don't let media panic scare you from pursuing a tried and true long-term method of preparing for retirement.
- Don't rush into home ownership, or save for children's education until you are out of debt and investing for your own retirement. Probably the most valuable education children can have is seeing their parents handle their money wisely. They will take those lessons with them throughout their entire lives.
- Make it a family affair—Two (or more) heads are better than one! Involve your kids without burdening them with the details.
- Don't spend money that you don't have---enough said!