K-STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

August 1, 2025

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Fall Armyworms Return to NEK

Like clockwork, the annual migration of Fall Armyworms was confirmed this past week with adult moths collected in local pheromone traps. It's unfortunately become a common August theme and follows fairly significant turf damage reports from South Central Kansas.

While we're in a different place this fall than the last few (decent moisture, periods of cooler temperatures, and good grass recovery post-harvest), it's still good to be aware of the potential for feeding damage, particularly in recently harvested stands or in locations where moisture has been lacking or forage growth has been limited for some reason.

Remember: the entire cycle of the fall armyworm will be around 30 days. About two weeks of that time will be spent feeding during their larval stage. During those two weeks, larvae go from well-hidden with light feeding to over an inch long and consuming large amounts of forage daily. Fall Armyworms don't overwinter here, but they don't head back south until later in the fall, meaning additional generations are possible.

Because much of the area has seen good moisture, regrowth, even in newly harvested hay fields will hopefully be plentiful enough to withstand feeding injury if it does occur. Still, it's good to keep an eye out for thin spots in fields and monitor for feeding injury to stay ahead of potential damage issues. This will be of particular importance if weather in the latter part of the growing season results in warm/dry conditions that inhibit grass recovery prior to dormancy.

Keep in mind: fall armyworms aren't the only species that can cause feeding injury. True Armyworm and Alfalfa Caterpillars are also known forage feeders. True Armyworm *do* overwinter in Kansas and may cause feeding injury even later into the growing season than the Fall Armyworm. All forage crops (plus cover crops, wheat, and even soybean) are susceptible to one or more of these species and monitoring is recommended. With any luck, growth will outpace feeding and there won't be any issues.

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Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Don't Pull the Bulls???

We are at the time of year when I typically encourage folks to establish a set calving window by pulling the bulls away from the cow herd to meet a specific amount of exposure days. That often means that females will be open but tightens the calving window. That said, the females that are bred tend to be the most fertile and ones you'd likely benefit the most from keeping. Although I do still believe that tighter calving windows have benefits to the operation, the value of a bred cow now might make you consider letting the bull continue to do his job and change up a marketing plan for cows this fall.

Leaving bulls with cows for the duration of the summer grazing season might be considered an old-school practice. Pulling bulls after 90, 60, 45 or even fewer days results in calves being born during a chosen window of time. Many producers find the leading advantage of a defined and relatively short calving season is a more uniform calf crop. Come marketing time, calves are closer in age and weight than calves born over an extended period. Other benefits come in managing nutrition of the cows, labor during calving and health protocols related to age of the calf.

Most of the nation's cowherd are spring calving cows, which means that pregnancy diagnoses and subsequent culling of open females happens in the fall. This often translates into depression of the cull cow price in the fall months. Working to change that timing, either through feeding open cows or selling later bred cows, can lead to more potential for operational profitability. Not pulling bulls until fall, with the combination of a veterinarian's pregnancy diagnosis of fetal staging, is an option that may need to be considered.

Not only are there cow marketing benefits, but there is the bull management side of the equation as well. Pulling bulls off cows in the hot summer months can be a challenge. Additionally, finding another place to keep the bulls separate from the cows and potentially separate from each other can lead to management challenges. Not having to manage bulls while allowing them to run with the cows certainly simplifies things in terms of management. One consideration should be early maturing heifer calves that might end up pregnant with this longer bull exposure strategy.

If you do decide to allow extended bull exposure, a plan needs to be put in place to keep the cows that "fit" your operation. This might mean that you sell as bred female the cows determined to be bred past your traditional calving window. This might also mean that you choose to market bred heifers or pairs that are born early, as they often have the highest value within the operation. This strategy can come with some risk, as those early bred females tend to be the most productive and profitable to the operation long term. If the operation has multiple calving herds/windows, simply shifting from group to group can be an option as well. Let group size and benefits of a tighter calving window govern decisions.

Producers may have to keep bred cows for a while to hit the most favorable market. If so, are there adequate feed resources to manage these cows? Often, cheaper gains can be put on bred, non-lactating females through the fall, with crop residues and other lower cost forages become available. Keep in touch with markets and shoot to capitalize on traditional seasonal high points. We are in a time of record prices and strong demand for bred females, what makes good sense this year might not in future years and vice versa. Be ready to adapt and change to market signals.

Cow depreciation, or the cost to put a cow into production, minus salvage value, divided by years of production; often indicates that it takes five or six calves for a cow to become profitable to the operation. This logic is based upon an open cow of lower value, leaving the operation. By adding value to her salvage value, through selling a bred female, cow deprecation cost can be decreased. This might allow less productive cows to be sold sooner and increase the overall production efficiency of the herd. All these points need to be considered whether you decide to pull the bull, or not.

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Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

It's Time to Plant Fall Crops

Many gardeners do not think of late summer as planting season. Yet planting cool-season vegetables now can bring you fresh produce into October or even late November. Since the produce will ripen in cooler weather, they can even be tastier and healthier.

Although cool-season vegetables are more apt to withstand lower temperatures, they will need time to establish themselves before they can face fall weather. Planting seedlings when it is appropriate rather than seeds can give your crops a head start. When sowing seeds, plant them slightly deeper than you would in spring. With our current hot weather, this will provide extra insulation and moisture for successful germination. You can also help them with light fertilizing, as many nutrients from spring fertilizer applications are likely depleted by now. Do not be alarmed if the first frost causes some damage – this is normal, and well-established crops should pull through.

In late July through early August, you can start planting cucumbers, summer squash, and beans. Beets, carrots, radishes, and other root vegetables can be sown directly into the soil. Once August hits, spinach and heat-tolerant leafy greens can go in the ground. If you have any cabbage, broccoli, or cauliflower starts, you can begin putting them into the ground in early to mid-August as well.

As you look ahead to the rest of your fall garden, now is the time to start seeds indoors for late August and early September plantings. Options include chicories, bulbing fennel, collards, kale, and leafy greens. Allowing these plants to start inside gives them a head start on growing when it is still too hot for them to be outside. Since the conditions inside your home or greenhouse are very different from those outside, be sure to slowly introduce them to the outdoors, increasing the amount and intensity of sunlight and the exposure to outdoor temperatures. This will prevent the plants from experiencing shock when they are planted in the ground.

Taking care of your fall garden is not difficult. You might even find that fall gardening is easier, as the lower temperatures mean you won't have to battle as many pests and weeds. When sowing seeds for fall, remember to keep the soil moist to allow germination. A soaker hose or drip irrigation is often the best option. Adding mulch can also help insulate the seedlings from hot August temperatures and retain moisture in the soil. If you are experiencing extended, intense heat, consider putting up a shade cloth a few feet over the soil to help provide protection from the heat during seed germination.

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Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

The Power of Sleep: Unlocking Memory Through Rest

In our busy lives, we often sacrifice sleep. We need a good night's sleep for good physical and mental health. Sleep is critical for helping our brains sort, consolidate, and store memories.

Researchers have shown that a good night's sleep is vital for memory formation. Sleeping less than six hours can impair our ability to form and consolidate memories. Experts say most adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night. During sleep, our brains go through an active process to decide which daily activities to keep and which to discard. This process is called memory encoding and consolidation.

Some of the information in our daily lives is stored in "short-term" memory. These pieces of information may be a phone number that you may only need to recall once, or they could be information you will remember for the rest of your life. Sleep is one of the ways your brain helps to decide whether or not the information is valuable enough to be stored in your "long-term" memory or discarded.

Sleep helps our brains perform these storage tasks. Converting newly acquired information from our short-term to long-term memory is called consolidation. While sleeping, consolidation begins without the incessant barrage of external information. During sleep, your brain goes through different stages, transitioning from light to deep several times per night. During these cycles, your brain performs its restorative work and creates memories. Those 7 to 9 hours of sleep are highly productive.

As we get older, getting a good night's rest becomes harder, and we are more prone to experience insomnia. Many things can interfere with our ability to get a good night's sleep, including chronic illness, some prescription medications, lack of exercise, stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

There are things you can do to help improve your chances of getting a good night's rest. Below are a few examples:

- Use your bedroom for sleep and sex only. Avoid reading, conversation, or watching television.
- Exercise in the afternoon or early evening, not within a few hours of bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol for at least 3 to 4 hours before bed.
- Try to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and participate in a quiet, relaxing activity. Go back to bed when you are sleepy.
- Don't eat a heavy meal right before bedtime.
- Keep your room at a steady temperature (not too warm).

In a fast-paced, busy world, remember that getting a good night's sleep is one of our best defenses to ensure good health. Happy dreaming.

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Cindy Williams
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No news this week.