

David Hallauer  
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

### **Soybean Lodging: 2025 Insect Issues**

It's not uncommon for us to annually see wilted or lodged plants along field edges. Anything from wind to wildlife to mowing/spraying/etc... equipment could be the culprit. It's when it starts moving out into the field a few rows that we start to get concerned and this is one of those years when those 'underperforming' plants deserve a second look. Damage from Dectes Stem Borer and Soybean Gall Midge have both been confirmed this summer, most notably in areas closer to the Nebraska border.

Dectes isn't a new pest, having been in soybeans since the 1960s and in sunflowers before that. Adult females chew holes on the underside of a leaf petiole where eggs are laid and larvae hatch. As they grow, larvae tunnel into the main stalk feeding on the pith/central core of the plant. Girdling occurs as the larvae prepare for overwintering and the combination of boring plus girdling results in the potential for collapsed plants and lodging (yield loss estimates are difficult to nail down – and inconsistent from year to year). Insecticidal control is not considered feasible due to the extended period of adult emergence making timing of an insecticide difficult as well as the protection provided by the plant from larvae feeding on the inside of the stem.

Soybean Gall Midge is a newer pest. Previously confined to western Iowa and eastern Nebraska, it was first confirmed in Kansas in 2023. Soybean gall midge larvae overwinter in the soil, emerging in early spring as adults that lay eggs in wounds or natural openings on the lower stems/base of soybean plants. Larvae feed until plant maturity, then fall off the plant and into the soil to restart the cycle. Before they do so, larvae feed on the base and lower stem of the plant, compromising water/nutrient movement. Difficult to detect early, symptoms include dark, discolored areas that spread from feeding sites. Stems become withered, weak, and can eventually break at the base. There are currently no recommended management practices for soybean gall midge. Studies on seed and foliar insecticides have not proven effective.

Neither pest affords much opportunity to prevent their damage, but scouting is encouraged to reduce surprises at harvest. Often limited to field borders, Soybean Gall Midge has resulted in damage to larger field areas in Nebraska. While slow moving and thus far limited to counties nearest the Nebraska line, damage has moved slowly south over the last two seasons with multiple fields along and south of Highway 36 confirmed for the pest.

For additional information, visit the Meadowlark Extension District Agronomy blog (<https://blogs.k-state.edu/meadowlarkagronomy/>), any District Office or [dhallaue@ksu.edu](mailto:dhallaue@ksu.edu).

Ross Mosteller  
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

## **Culling the Flock**

Gathering eggs as the days get shorter often means fewer minutes spent in the hen house, as poultry will naturally start to lay fewer eggs and prepare for a molt in declining daylight. This is a natural process that is required by the hen for long term egg production, and it can be regulated with artificial light. But what needs to be done when a hen goes more permanently out of production? In staying with the same theme from last week, culling - this time of hens, seems like a topic to discuss.

Culling refers to the identification and removal of the non-laying or low producing hens from a laying flock. Removing the inferior birds reduces the cost of producing eggs, reduces the incidence of disease, and increases the available space for more productive hens. Hens eat feed whether or not they are laying. Removing the cull birds will make more feed and space for productive birds. Unless the birds are diseased, they are suitable for marketing or home cooking.

There are different ways to cull the flock, each with pros and cons. Some common methods are: "all in, all out", sight culling and individual inspection. All in, all out involves replacing the entire flock with new birds. This is a simple process that has some biosecurity benefits but often involves removing productive hens. Sight culling is just like it sounds, looking at the flock and culling out those that are smaller, look less thrifty, have obvious deformities/injuries or appear to be sick. Individual culling is the most labor intensive, but lends itself to removing non-producing birds, especially those that might not have visual indicators that they aren't laying using the simple sight culling method.

Individual culling requires handling each bird, typically done at night to cause the least amount of disturbance. This also provides a good opportunity to inspect for mites or other pest issues that can be treated while handling the birds. After the laying flock has reached peak egg production and production decrease is noted, occasionally check the flock for poor producing hens. This can be accomplished with evaluation of physical characteristics of the bird.

A good layer will have a large, smooth, moist, almost white vent. The vent of a non-layer is usually small, puckered, and round. The two small bones at the sides of the vent are called the pubic bones. They should be flexible and wide apart, with at least two finger widths between them. The abdomen should be deep, soft, and pliable without an accumulation of body fat. As the hen produces eggs, she diverts yellow color from certain portions of her body and deposits it into the yolks of the eggs. Bleaching of various parts of the hen's body is a very good indicator of the time the hen has been in production. Comb and wattles should be large, bright red, and glossy.

Hens will not lay well or at all if they are suffering from a health condition or molting. Delay culling if a significant portion of the flock is suffering or recovering from a minor disease or molt. Culling a diseased or molting flock often removes some of the better laying birds. If unsure of your culling ability and fear elimination of good hens, place suspect hens in wire-bottomed coop or cage and observe egg production for a few days before completing the culling process. Mississippi State University has a good publication (#358) on culling hens for those seeking more information with charts and examples.

Laura Phillips  
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

### **It's Almost Time to Fertilize Cool Season Grasses**

If you have Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue in your yard, it's time to think about fertilizing. While the current heat feels, soon our days will shorten, and temperatures will lower. As it does, our aptly named cool season grasses will enter their fall growth phase, spreading new shoots and roots.

In order for these grasses to truly thrive, they will need sufficient amounts of nutrients. Our hot summer has likely depleted the nutrients in your lawn, which makes September most important time of year to fertilize your cool season lawn.

When you purchase fertilizer, you will see a series of three numbers on the bag. The first number is nitrogen, which helps your grasses develop healthy root systems and recover from the stressful summer conditions. Most lawns will require regular nitrogen applications. We recommend applying 1 to 1.5 pounds of quick-release nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. It is a good idea to repeat this process in November. If there is no rain, make sure to water the fertilizer yourself.

The second and third numbers on the bag are phosphorus (P) and potassium (K), respectively. These nutrients contribute to overall growth and stress tolerance. In established lawns, you often have sufficient quantities of P and K, so there is no need to add these nutrients unless a soil test indicates the need. You can look for fertilizers with high nitrogen, such as 30-0-0 or 29-5-4 or 27-3-3.

When fertilizing, take care to read the instructions and apply fertilizer evenly across the lawn and the rate given on the packaging. When you are done fertilizing, sweep or blow any fertilizer or granular products off of your sidewalks and hard surfaces. This prevents the fertilizer from entering our water ways and protects our water quality.

If you have questions about the fertilizer you need, would like to do a soil test, or need guidance on applying fertilizer to your yard, reach out to our office for more information.

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

### **Learning Never Retires: Stay Current, Stay Connected**

We have heard it said, "You learn something new every day." We should say, "We need to learn something new every day". Change is constant in our world; technology and society are not slowing down. Older adults are proving that it is important to roll with the changes and stay in tune with the times. Continuous active learning promotes increased knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and decision-making skills. Staying on top of the latest technology, like new smartphones, video games, current events, social apps, and music, helps enhance brain stimulation. Keeping up with the times also helps to maintain independence and improve mental health.

Researchers at the University of California, Riverside report that "older adults who challenge themselves to learn new things are less likely to experience loneliness or depression." There seems to be a connection between learning new skills and improved mental health. According to the K-State Research and Extension lesson series on "Keys to Embracing Aging," people who have reached 100 years of age or older report that staying connected and learning new things has allowed them to live so long. So, what are some ways you can stay connected?

Music surrounds us, from grocery stores, small town main streets, fitness centers, elevators, and hair salons. There are many health benefits of listening to music. Music releases a chemical in our brains called dopamine, the feel-good chemical. When you listen to music, you feel better and enjoy the experience. Music can also enhance perception, distract from pain, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, relax muscles, and stimulate old memories.

Computers and the internet can be used to stay connected to vast amounts of information and maintain social connections. Video calls are a way to stay connected with family and friends who live in different locations. It's just as easy to make a video call as a telephone call to a distant friend. You might even connect with family members and friends you have been out of touch with. The possibilities are endless. Computers can be used for live streaming programs, games, shopping, banking, research, and more.

Just remember to stay safe when surfing the net. You can take the following steps to protect yourself.

- Make sure to lock all devices when you are not using them. Protect the device with a password, fingerprint, or facial recognition.
- Keep your software and apps up to date. Software that is updated has improved security measures.
- Create strong passwords that are at least 16 characters long, random, and unique for each account.
- Share with care. The more personal details revealed on social networking sites, the easier it may be for scammers to steal our identities.

In this age of rapidly changing technology, many older adults stay current; you can too. By staying engaged, we can stay connected.

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

### **Getting Your Child Off to a Great Start at School**

Summer is winding down; it's time to think about school again. As you pick out new clothes and backpacks, here are some back-to-school preparations that can make a real difference in your child's health and academic success this school year.

1. Get your child on a good sleep schedule with good sleep habits. During the summer, we often let our children stay up late. To avoid a grumpy child when school starts, begin the school sleep schedule a week before school begins. Children need 8-10 hours of sleep every night, so count back from when they need to wake up to find the right bedtime. Switching to a school routine may not be easy but healthy sleep habits will help them in the classroom this school year.
2. Plan healthy lunches and snacks. Use the end of summer to talk with your child about healthy foods they can bring to school. If they get to pick their healthy foods, they are more likely to eat it.
3. Make an appealing homework place and decide on a routine. They should have a quiet, well-lit, pleasant place to do their homework. For younger children, it should be where you can easily supervise, but not necessarily in the middle of family chaos. Decide together when your child will do homework. You can always change it up later if it doesn't work out but have a plan.
4. Plan activities and downtime. It's important that your child be active, so signing up for a team sport or other physical activity can be a good idea. Be sure that there is enough time for homework and sleep. This is crucial for your child's mental health. Your child needs time to relax and play no matter what their age.

These may seem basic and simple but can get lost in the shuffle. These simple tasks can be very effective when families do them. So, give them a try. You'll be glad you did.

### **Why Does Home Canned Corn Turn Brown?**

If sweet corn browns during canning, it usually means that the temperature required for canning is too high for the sugar levels in the corn variety. This caramelization has become more of a problem as newer varieties of corn get sweeter and sweeter. You cannot, however, safely reduce the heat or processing time needed for canning corn; you can freeze that corn or find a locally grown variety that is recommended for canning. Though not an immediate safety concern, you might want to consider refrigerating these jars and/or consuming them more quickly since they may not maintain the best quality for long.