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District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Transition Planning: A Wrap-Up – or Just the Beginning?

During 2025, I've written monthly columns focusing on each of the 12 steps of a farm transition plan outlined in K-State's *12 Steps to Keep the Family Farming* succession planning reference. If a farm succession is in your future, see the columns on our Meadowlark Extension District Crops & Soils Page: <https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/crops-soils/>. Additional references will be added as applicable.

While this marks the end of the series, I hope your transition plan work continues. Michigan State University Extension Specialist Craig Thomas made this statement in a piece he wrote back in 2013: *In my work with farm families for nearly thirty years, as a Michigan State University Extension dairy farm business management educator, I have observed that it is nearly unanimous among all farms that the most important goal of the producer is to pass along the farm business to the next generation.* Unfortunately, it comes with some challenges.

In an article entitled *Farm Transition and Succession – Why Bother?*, Thomas references a Farm Journal survey stating 80 percent of farmers planned to transfer control of their operation to the next generation, but only 20 percent were confident their succession plan would achieve it. In an Iowa State study, 71 percent of retiring farmers said they had not identified a successor.

Farms aren't the only ones experiencing transition challenges. The Small Business Administration reports less than a third of family-owned businesses survive the transition from the first to the second generation. Further, only half of those making the first transition survive the transition from the second to the third generation, meaning only about 16.5 percent of family-owned businesses successfully survive to the third generation.

There is no shortage of reasons as to why a farm transition plan is difficult. Inheritance and tax laws, increasing land values and fewer children interested in returning to the farm are all challenges to address. For those interested in that return, however, the challenge is well worth it. Now is a great time to dig into what a successful transition might look like. Great resources are available at the link above, but there are numerous others as well. Drop us a line if we can help you find them to get started.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Understanding Equine Herpesvirus (EHV)

Viruses are a difficult and challenging part of life. We are now into the cold and flu season, when reminders about immunizations and staying home when sick abound. Many viruses cause issues in livestock production such as PRRS in swine, HPAI in poultry, IBR/BVD in cattle, to name a few, but for equids, Equine Herpesvirus (EHV) has been in the news again recently. Owners of horses, donkeys, mules, etc.. need to be vigilant with this virus, particularly if there has been exposure to other animals at events or new animals enter your premises.

Equine herpesvirus is a family of nine viruses named by numbers. EHV-1, the virus associated with the ongoing outbreak, is most commonly associated with respiratory tract infections. EHV-1 is also associated with neurologic disease and abortion. Upwards of seventy percent of horses are infected with EHV-1 as youngsters and carry it with them for the remainder of their lives.

Respiratory illness caused by EHV-1 often presents with fever, clear nasal discharge, and coughing. Horses will spread the virus before they show outward signs that they are sick. Pregnant mares may experience sudden late-term abortion of the fetus. In some horses, the virus progresses to equine herpes myeloencephalopathy (EHM), causing incoordination, hind-limb weakness, reduced tail strength, dribbling urine or sudden inability to stand.

Equine herpesvirus is spread from horse to horse through nasal discharge, aerosolized droplets from coughing and contact with contaminated surfaces. Even though humans cannot contract the disease, they can accidentally spread the virus between horses on their hands, clothing, or equipment. Veterinarians advise that any horse showing signs of illness should be isolated from all other horses immediately, and local veterinarians contacted. Quick assessment of possible exposure and strict quarantine procedures are essential in stopping further spread of the virus.

Commercial vaccines are available for EHV. While vaccination for EHV is known to be beneficial in reducing respiratory and reproductive disease, they are not reliably protective against EHM. Kansas Animal Health Commissioner – Dr. Justin Smith has offered that horse owners should follow a set of biosecurity measures to protect horses including:

- Isolating horses that have been exposed to EHV-1 or are returning from events for 14 days.
- Checking the horse's temperature twice daily and acting quickly if a fever is detected. A normal temperature ranges from 99.0°F to 101.5°F
- Keeping all horses' EHV-1 vaccinations updated; booster shots are recommended.
- Disinfecting water buckets, brushes, halters, bits, bridles, clothes, and boots after exposure at other facilities or events.
- Minimizing contact between horses, such as avoiding nose-to-nose interactions and using barriers or extra stall space at events.
- Changing clothes and boots after returning from events and never sharing equipment between horses.
- Checking with state animal health officials before traveling to out-of-state events. Some states have their own additional requirements, such as recent health papers.

Kansans who suspect an outbreak of EHV-1 or EHM should notify the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health at (785) 564-6601. The Equine Disease Communication Center <https://equinediseasecc.org/> has a wealth of current information on EHV.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

What to do with your tree after Christmas

If you have a live Christmas tree, how can you responsibly dispose of it after the holiday is over? First you want to make sure you remove your tree before it becomes a fire hazard. You can tell that your tree needs removed when the needles become brittle and the branches are no longer pliant. However, a Christmas tree's useful life does not have to be over once you remove it.

While our first thought might be to toss it in the landfill, this is the most harmful way to dispose of a tree (or other plant material). When landfills are sealed, there is no oxygen for the tree to use while it breaks down. This means the tree will take a much longer time to decompose. Additionally, when the decomposition process takes place without oxygen present, it releases methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas. Instead of a landfill, there are numerous ways you can easily dispose of your tree that will benefit the environment and be more convenient than a trip to the landfill.

The first option is to use the wood for another purpose. If you have access to a woodchipper, you can turn the tree into mulch for your garden or landscape. In addition to sprucing up your garden, mulch helps retain moisture and regulate soil temperatures, which will help your plants when summer comes around. As it breaks down, it will also provide nutrients to your plants for the next few years. You can also chop up the tree for firewood but beware that conifers tend to spark and pop when they burn more than other trees. If you have access to a pond or lake, you can also use it to make underwater habitat. Simply tie a cinder block or two to trunk tree and sink it in the pond, ideally so that the tree is vertical. The dense, complex branches of an evergreen tree provide shelter for smaller fish, and studies show an increase the biodiversity and abundance of fish in ponds and lakes.

For those of us who do not have time to utilize the wood or create an underwater home for the fish, the best option is to simply put the tree in a quiet spot out in nature and forget about it. This will attract birds and critters that are looking for shelter, giving a boost to local wildlife.

Depending on where you live, your municipality may provide a tree recycling program for you. Some towns and cities will pick up trees that are free of decorations and ornaments from the curb and use them for habitat in local parks and ponds. Check with your town's trash and recycling service to see if this is offered in your area.

Whatever option you choose – mulch, firewood, fish habitat, or simply setting it outside – keeping your tree out of the landfill will give it a second life. If you have questions about any of these options, reach out to me for more information!

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Help Available for Home Energy Costs

While recent weather hasn't felt like winter, Kansans know cold temperatures are on the way. For many households, heating costs can be a challenge during this season. The **Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)** offers help by providing a one-time annual benefit to eligible households to offset a portion of their home energy expenses.

Application Period:

January 20, 2026 – March 31, 2026 (applications must be submitted by 5:00 PM on March 31).

Eligibility Requirements:

To qualify, applicants must:

- Be personally responsible for paying heating costs at their residence, either directly to the utility company or through their landlord.
- Meet income guidelines: the combined gross income of all household members cannot exceed 150% of the federal poverty level.
- Be a U.S. citizen or a legally admitted permanent resident.

The benefit amount depends on several factors, including federal funding levels, the number of applicants, household size and income, dwelling type, and heating fuel type.

How to Apply:

Applications can be completed online through the **DCF Self-Service Portal** at dcfapp.kees.ks.gov. If you do not have an account, you will need to create one. Paper applications are available by contacting the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF).

Tips for a Successful Application:

- Answer all questions completely.
- Include signatures of all adults in the household.
- Provide proof of income for everyone living at the residence.
- If applicable, include VA award letters, SSA/SSI award letters, or pension documentation.
- For self-employment income, submit a copy of your most recent tax return.
- Include copies of all fuel bills.
- Provide proof of child support payments received or court-ordered.
- If living in subsidized housing, include a copy of your rental agreement.
- Submit **copies only**—original documents will not be returned. Keep copies of everything for your records.

For more information or assistance, visit the DCF website or contact your local DCF office.

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

This Winter Think About Oats

January is the perfect month to celebrate oats. A hot bowl of oatmeal can warm up cold winter days. While this 'stick to your ribs' food is a familiar breakfast food, oats are being used in many unique ways such as oat milk lattes and overnight oat recipes.

Oats date back about 32,000 years when wild oats were hand ground by paleolithic hunter gatherers. There are many wild oat species, but only four have been cultivated for today's use. The species *Avena sativa* is on grocery store shelves. *Avena byzantine* and *Avena strigose* are for animal feed. *Avena abyssinica* is exclusive to Ethiopia.

The popularity of oats grew when the Roman's introduced it to the British Isles, especially Scotland, where they flourished. Oats came to North and South America in the 17th century and used primarily as animal feed. Today, Europe is the leader in oat production.

Oats are primarily steamed and flattened into rolled oats or "old fashioned" oats. This keeps the oat nutrient components intact as a whole grain. Quick or instant oats are also whole grain. So, this winter consider enjoying a hot steamy bowl of oats to start your day off right and healthy.