

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

The Effect of Soil Fertility on Weed Density

It stands to reason that a higher density of desirable forages in cool season grass stands equals a lower density of undesirable weeds/brush. We maintain good densities via a combination of fertility and harvest management techniques, but it can admittedly be difficult to see if we're really making much change. A University of Missouri study sheds a little light on just how some of those management techniques really do affect weed density.

The study consisted of a pasture survey conducted bi-monthly through the growing season with each survey site within a pasture evaluated for weed infestation and soil fertility levels. The goal was to see what weeds were present and how fertility levels may be contributing to said presence. Soil tests confirmed low Phosphorous (P) levels at 80 percent of the sites and 37 percent with low Potassium (K) levels. Average pH was 5.8.

Fertility speaking, the results were kind of what we'd expect: better fertility equaled less weeds. For P and K, even a slight increase in soil test level reduced weed pressure with P often affecting weed density to a greater degree than K. Soil pH was the best predictor of weed pressure with a one unit increase in soil pH reducing weed density by 4000 weeds per acre.

Not all weeds/brush responded the same, with some *increasing* in response to higher fertility similarly to our desired grasses. As a rule, however, fertility management – pH in particular - in stands with below optimum nutrient levels helped reduce weed densities.

Just as fertility plays a role in the increased ground cover needed to keep weed densities lower, harvest management was confirmed as a factor as well. It showed an increase in ground cover of just one percent could reduce weed pressure by 35 weeds per acre. That 35 weeds per acre may *seem* insignificant, until you consider a plant like hemp dogbane which can produce anywhere from 800 to 12,000 seeds per plant.

If fertilizer prices have you reconsidering fertilizer application rates, proceed with caution. This study confirms numerically what we often see with the naked eye: low fertility stands are weedier. With some stand biomass levels already thinned by fall armyworm feeding, cutting fertility *could* compound the problem even further.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Kid & Doe Postpartum Management

Writing these columns weekly often pulls on personal experiences that have recently crossed my path. Today's topic is one that I don't have applied knowledge with, but thankfully we have a resource at K-State who does! Dr. Kelsey Bentley, Small Ruminant Extension Specialist, has recently published some very helpful publications. This article is an excerpt from MF3689 [*Kidding Resources for Beginning Goat Producers*](#), check it out at the K-State online bookstore to learn more about goat production.

The process of kidding can be stressful for animals and managers alike, often being a time of close and careful observation. The postpartum management window can be as important or more so than the actual process of birth. Once kids are born, follow these helpful next steps with approximate timelines postpartum shown. Hopefully these will serve as good reminders as we enter the typical kidding season.

Step 1: Ensure that the kid is breathing within the first few minutes following parturition. The doe should begin cleaning the kid. Ensure all mucus is removed from the head and muzzle. If a kid is struggling to breathe, firmly pat its side to encourage it to inhale.

Step 2: Observe from a distance (10 to 30 minutes). Maintain a distance and avoid interfering with the maternal bonding period. Watch for contractions. If only one kid is visible, another may still be coming. Wait until the kid attempts to stand on its own. Ensure the doe remains attentive and close to the kid. Look for signs of nursing, such as tail wagging, which indicates that the kid is feeding.

Step 3: Move doe and kid(s) to jug (1 hour). With gloved hands, use the kid(s) to guide the doe into the jug. If there are concerns about additional kids, palpate the doe to confirm.

Step 4: Kid processing (1 to 2 hours). Clip: if needed, trim the navel cord to less than 2 inches from the body wall. Dip: spray or dip navel in disinfectant such as iodine or betadine. Strip: strip teats to remove wax plugs and check the milk supply. Sip: make sure kids nurse as soon as possible. Check eyelids to ensure there is no entropion or inversion of the eyelid.

Step 5: Placenta delivery (4 to 6 hours). The doe may consume the placenta, so you might not see this step. If the doe doesn't consume her passed placenta, remove it from the jug. Never pull or tug on a retained placenta; this can cause hemorrhage.

Step 6: Monitor pairs in jug (24 to 48 hours). Routinely check to ensure kids are healthy, content, and well-fed. Ensure the doe is eating and drinking plenty of water. Inspect the udder for any signs of uneven fullness, mastitis, fever, or redness.

Step 7: Move to mixing pen (after 48 hours). Tag the kids before transferring them with the doe to a group setting. Routinely scan mixing pens for sick or chilled kids. Keep the creep pen clean, dry, and stocked with creep feed for the kids.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Supporting Winter Wildlife

While we stay cozy in our homes during the winter, our wildlife does not have the same luxury. Winter can be one of the hardest times of year for many animals, as they face cold temperatures, harsh weather, and low food supplies. Some birds migrate to warmer climates while reptiles and amphibians often hibernate in the ground. Yet many mammals, insects, and birds stick around for the winter, finding a way to survive the tough conditions.

While our wildlife works to survive our winters, you can take a few simple steps to make the cold weather more bearable for our outdoor friends.

First thing you can do is create habitat. This is an easy one. All you have to do is stop removing plant debris in the fall. By leaving garden debris in place in the fall, many pollinators, birds, and other creatures can use the dead vegetation as homes for the winter. Instead of removing all the leaves from your yard, you can leave some in place for different butterflies and moths that will make their cocoons and chrysalises on fallen tree leaves. Spiders, beetles, and other insects will also use these leaves as a place to lay eggs or hide in the winter. Not only does this support a more diverse insect population, but over 90% of our birds are insectivores. By allowing insects in your yard, you are supplying birds with essential food for the winter.

If you really want to build habitat for wildlife, creating brush piles can provide extra protection for many critters. If you have a live Christmas tree, consider setting it out in your yard or on your property after the new year as an easy form of habitat for wildlife.

Another consideration is water. When temperatures drop below freezing, it can be hard for wildlife to find water that they can drink. If you have the ability to put a heated bird bath out, you will likely find lots of critters coming to take a drink when their normal water sources freeze over.

To really make a difference for wildlife in the winter, consider landscaping with your local wildlife in mind. Conifers and other dense shrubs can provide protection from cold chilling winds. To help provide food for wildlife, consider planting deciduous shrubs that offer berries throughout the winter, such as sumac, serviceberry, possumhaw (our only native holly) and viburnum. Birds will enjoy snacking on the seeds of coneflowers, sunflowers, black-eyed susans, and different native grasses throughout the winter. These flowers, however, will not be much help if you remove all dead vegetation from your garden in the fall.

Through these steps, you can ensure that wildlife have an easier winter. If you have any questions about supporting specific species of wildlife, you can always reach out to your local extension office for more information.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Coming Soon: Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment 2026

As the Annual Medicare Open Enrollment period has ended, you will have another opportunity to change your Medicare Advantage Plan in 2026. The Medicare Advantage Plan Open Enrollment Period starts on January 1, 2026, and ends on March 31, 2026. During this period, you can change your existing Medicare Advantage plan.

This enrollment period allows Medicare beneficiaries already enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan, also known as a Part C plan, to:

- Switch to a different Medicare Advantage plan (with or without drug coverage).
- Drop your Medicare Advantage plan and return to Original Medicare, with the option to add a Part D prescription drug plan.

Any changes made during this period will take effect on the first day of the month following the processing of your request. During this period, you are not guaranteed the right to purchase a Medigap, also known as a Medicare supplement plan.

Beneficiaries who are interested in returning to Original Medicare should consider that Medicare has out-of-pocket costs for healthcare, such as coinsurance and copayments. These payments are the responsibility of the Medicare beneficiary. Many people who choose to go with Original Medicare consider having backup insurance to help them cover those costs. Medigap plans can require applicants to go through the underwriting process, which means that they will ask you health questions to determine whether or not they will accept your application. If you have chronic health conditions, have been recently hospitalized, or have had cancer, the insurance company may turn down your application or ask you to pay more for your premium. Care should be taken before changing or dropping your Medicare Advantage plan.

Tips for Beneficiaries

- Check your plan's provider network: If you like your doctor, ensure they are part of your plan's network.
- Review prescription coverage: Make sure all your medications are covered.
- Compare out-of-pocket limits: This is the maximum amount you will pay for covered services, which vary significantly from plan to plan.

Remember, this is the time to ensure your plan still meets your needs. If you have questions about your plan, please contact your local Senior Health Insurance Counseling of Kansas representative. Teresa Hatfield can be reached at thatfield@ksu.edu or 785-364-4125.

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

Spice It Up With Ginger!

As the holiday season is upon us, plans are being made to bake tasty treats. Some of these may include ginger, such as gingerbread and gingersnap cookies.

The use of ginger in medicinal uses dates back thousands of years. The Chinese use it as a digestive aid and to prevent nausea. It was Queen Elizabeth I who is credited for developing the first gingerbread man Christmas treat. In 1907, a Canadian pharmacist patented “Canada Dry Ginger Ale” that became popular during the American prohibition era. It is an essential ingredient in Indian cuisine.

For culinary use, ginger is available in several forms such as fresh ginger root, dried ground ginger, and crystallized ginger. The flavor of ginger is described as citrusy, musty, soapy, pungent, and bitter. Ground ginger is readily available in many grocery stores. Besides gingerbread and gingersnap cookies, it is often used in apple or pumpkin pie. Ground ginger tends to be less pungent than fresh ginger.

Fresh ginger is found in the produce aisle of grocery stores. Peel off the outer skin then grate, chop or julienne into small pieces. I like to use a spoon to peel off the skin. Fresh ginger has the most pungent flavor. Candied or crystallized ginger is typically used in desserts, either as an ingredient or garnish.