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District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Fixed & Flexible Cash Rent Agreements

At last week's *Rental Rate Roundtable*, we discussed factors affecting rental rates. If current conditions have you taking a look at your rental rate agreement, there's a *North Central Farm Management Extension Committee* reference deserving a second look. Entitled *Fixed and Flexible Cash Rent Lease Agreements for Your Farm*, it takes a hard look at many of the factors affecting these leases and things to consider as you are putting one together.

From the fixed rent lease perspective, it provides an overview of advantages and disadvantages of cash renting for both landowner and tenant. It also includes a look at how to come up with rates. The obvious is survey data via the National Ag Statistics Service, but it looks at other calculated lease rates as well, including net share rent leases, or leases adjusted based on the operator's return to the land, percent of land value, and even percent of gross revenue. It includes best management practices for navigating the bargaining process and a look into what leases might look like from USDA's perspective.

If you're thinking a little more flexibility in the rental arrangement might be a good thing, there's plenty of information on that topic as well. Like the fixed rent section, it includes sections on advantages and disadvantages and multiple flexing rent options.

Any good agreement will be put in writing, and this publication helps with this process as well. There are sections on topics like what terms should be in an agreement as well as the use of an attorney to help you get started. The reference ends with an in-depth example lease which, while at first a little overwhelming, can at the very least provide suggestions for what you might want to consider as you draft your own.

It won't be a brief read, but it will be a helpful one if an evaluation of your lease arrangements is on the agenda. Check it out at <https://www.agmanager.info/farm-management/land-rental-rates/forms/fixed-and-flexible-cash-rental-arrangements-your-farm> . You can also request a copy from any of our District Offices.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Grazing Brassicas

A recent news column and complementary radio program about prussic acid testing has generated questions about issues with grazing forage brassicas. While prussic acid is not an issue with this forage resource, there can be other considerations in their utilization. A favorite story told around our house revolves around the first experience our family had working cows who'd been grazing turnips and the "shower" my Dad got pushing cows up to the chute. Let's look at grazing considerations today.

Brassicas popularity as a forage crop in the U.S. has been on the increase due to their suitability as cover crop. However, these plants have been utilized for over a century for the purpose of livestock feed. Many producers are attracted to the idea of improving their soil health while also feeding their livestock. Turnips, rape, and kale are traditional, well-utilized forages. Newer options include swedes (rutabagas), forage collards, mustards, radishes, and hybrids selected for various traits like those used to combat soil pests in crop rotations as cover crops. However, if the primary reason for growing them is for grazing, be sure the variety purchased was developed for grazing.

The strength of brassicas as a forage crop is their cold tolerance allowing them to provide high-quality pasture well into the fall and winter when most other forages are dead, dry and brown. Little new growth will occur after temperatures fall below freezing at night, but existing forage remains and holds its nutritional value very well. Brassicas extremely high moisture content makes preservation as a hay crop impractical.

Brassicas that form big bulbs, such as turnips, swedes, and radishes, can be grazed but are less suitable for multiple grazing's than varieties that do not raise their crowns on top of bulbs. However, there are turnip and radish varieties selected for grazing that have an increased proportion of top growth relative to the bulb and livestock readily learn to dig up brassica forage bulbs. Another strong point is a fast growth rate that, under good growing conditions, can provide emergency forage in as little as 45 days. Forage brassica yields are quite variable, ranging from 2 to 5 tons of dry matter per acre depending on species, variety, and environmental conditions.

Nutritionally, forage brassicas behave like a high moisture concentrate feed. Crude protein is typically sufficient to meet the needs of livestock on pasture. Brassicas are naturally low in fiber compared to grass and legume pasture. Brassica neutral detergent fiber (NDF) can range from 11 to 44 percent and has NDF digestibility up to 70 percent. Brassicas that form stems (rape and kales) will be at the higher end of the range, and leafy brassicas like turnips and radish will be at the lower end.

Due to their high nutritive value, brassicas can produce excellent animal performance but require adjustments to grazing management. Animals should be introduced to brassica-based pastures slowly to allow the rumen time to adapt and should never be grazed on pure brassica pastures. Effective fiber can be provided by planting brassicas in mixtures with small grains (oats, cereal rye, triticale, or wheat) or other forages, supplementing pastures with hay or providing access to separate grass pastures. A good rule of thumb is to limit brassicas to no more than 70 percent of the diet.

There is not a high frequency of issues related to grazing brassicas, but they can cause animal health disorders if not properly managed. The primary issues are polioencephalomalacia or PEM, hemolytic anemia (mainly with kale), nitrate poisoning, and pulmonary emphysema. In general, potential problems can be minimized by feeding brassicas as no more than 70 percent of the dietary dry matter intake, introducing animals to brassica pasture slowly, never turning hungry animals onto a brassica pasture, providing a trace mineral supplement that includes iodine, not grazing immature rape and avoiding excessive N and sulfur fertility.

The [K-State Forage Facts Notebook S115](#) has a chapter covering Brassicas as forage. The University of Arkansas has a good reference on this topic as well found at:

<https://www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/FSA61.pdf>

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Act Now to Control Volunteer Trees

While we tend to focus on Christmas trees this time of year, there are another kind of tree we should think about in December: volunteer trees. Volunteer trees are saplings that appear on their own from seeds without human help. Volunteer trees are a vital part of our landscape, but if they are in your yard, garden, or pastures, they can be a nuisance. If the volunteer tree is desirable but in the wrong place, you can wait and transplant it in the spring. Other volunteer trees can be cut down and treated to remove them from the landscape. December and January are a surprisingly good time to treat for these trees.

The first step to control volunteer trees is to cut them down. Some trees, like eastern redcedar, will not resprout after being cut. Many common trees, however, including oak, maple, elm, ash, hackberry, cottonwood, and sycamore, will resprout after cut if you do not dig out the roots or treat the stump with an herbicide.

There is a common misconception that trees must be growing for herbicides to work. It is true that without any leaves, a foliar herbicide spray will not do any good. Applying herbicide to a cut stump, however, can kill the trees at any stage of growth. Often, the winter is a convenient time to remove volunteer trees, and the absence of leaves and greenery helps you find and treat small trees.

Glyphosate (found in Roundup) and Triclopyr, are the most common active ingredients in stump treatment herbicides for homeowners. Whereas you usually use a diluted herbicide for foliar spray, stump treatments generally use an undiluted or lightly diluted herbicide. Before purchasing the herbicide, make sure the label says that it can be used for stump treatment. Make sure to read all instructions on the label and wear all the necessary protective equipment.

The goal is for the tree to absorb the herbicide and transport it to the roots. To do this, we need to apply the treatment in a ring on the outer edge of the stump immediately after cutting it. Trees have small veins in the outer rings that transport food and water, known as the phloem and xylem. Apply the herbicide on the outer edge of the stump to get the herbicide into the tree's veins. We recommend applying the herbicide immediately after cutting the tree, as the veins, when exposed to air, will start to close off and won't absorb the herbicide. These stump treatments should only be applied when temperatures are above freezing, or the herbicide may freeze on the stump instead of moving down into the roots.

While these stump treatments are great for getting rid of volunteer trees, they should not be used on suckers. Suckers are small shoots that appear at the base of a tree. If an herbicide is applied to a sucker, it will transport the herbicide to the roots of the main tree, and you may damage or kill your tree.

If you are having trouble with volunteer trees in your yard or garden and need more guidance, feel free to reach out to your local extension office for more information.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

2026 Medicare Updates: What Beneficiaries will Pay

We are currently in the midst of Medicare Open Enrollment for Part D (prescription drug plans) and Part C (Medicare Advantage plans). We have also been awaiting the announcement of the 2026 cost increases for Original Medicare.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) just released the costs for Medicare premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance for Medicare Part A and Part B for 2026. The changes will take effect on January 1, 2026.

Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance)

Part A Premiums are determined by the number of quarters you or your spouse have worked. If you have worked:

- 40 quarters or more: \$0 per month
- Less than 30 quarters: \$565 per month
- At least 30 quarters of coverage: \$311.00 per month
- Inpatient Hospital Deductible for the first 60 days: Increases to \$1,736, up \$60 from 2025
- Days 61–90: \$434 per day (up from \$419)
- Lifetime reserve days: \$868 per day (up from \$838)

Skilled Nursing Facility:

- First 20 days: No copay after a qualifying inpatient hospital stay
- Daily coinsurance for days 21–100 rises to \$217 (up from \$209.50)

Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance)

- Standard Monthly Premium: \$202.90, up \$17.90 from 2025
- Annual Deductible: \$283, up \$26 from last year
- Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA): Higher-income beneficiaries will pay surcharges ranging from \$81.20 to \$487.00 for Part B, with similar adjustments for Part D.

Medicare costs are increasing, primarily due to the ongoing rise in healthcare expenses. If you have Medicare, now is the time to review your Part D prescription drug plan during the Open Enrollment Period. You might be able to save money on next year's costs. Open Enrollment ends December 7, 2025, so don't wait to check your options. You can call 1-800-Medicare if you need help comparing your costs.

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

Holiday Meals Making Them Family Meals

In a recent article Maureen Bligh, Andrea Garen and Ashley Rosales; Registered Dietitians with the Dairy Council of California; shared the following information re-emphasizing studies which have shown that children who eat with their families are better nourished, lower rates of obesity and better vocabularies. These factors can have a positive impact on classroom behavior and academic performance. And when it comes to improving the health of our children, family meals are a great way to instill healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Research into family meals and their benefits is becoming more in depth, with some interesting findings:

- Dining as a family can create an environment for parents to lead by example for their children. Children who eat with their families consume more fruits, vegetables, milk and dairy foods compared to those who eat fewer family meals.
- Adults also report eating as a family is a positive portion of their day. Mealtime creates a feeling of togetherness and family cohesion. The concept of family meals does not exclude single-parent homes or couples without children. The routine associated with meals can provide a protective value for some of the risks associated with single-parent homes. For couples, the routine of sitting down together carves out time for each other and creates work schedule boundaries creating a balance between work and professional life.
- There is an association between family meal frequency and lower rates of obesity.

But the benefits of family meals go beyond nutrition and family unity. Family meals are also an opportunity to promote child development. Regular family meals teach children many things that will enrich their lives beyond the immediate health benefits of eating nutritious food. Here are some of them:

- **Memories** - Taking time to sit together at mealtime helps create positive memories for yourself and your family.
- **Enjoyment** - The first and most important place where children learn positive attitudes about food is in the home. Eating meals together starts a lasting and positive relationship with food.
- **Self-Esteem** - Mealtime conversation brings the family together and promotes positive self-esteem in children.
- **Life skills** - Children learn best by doing, not watching, so get them involved! You can teach children how to cook balanced meals for themselves by including them in meal planning and preparation.
- **Traditions** - Mealtime is an ideal time to strengthen family ties and pass on family cultural traditions. Whether you are celebrating a holiday or just eating an everyday meal, things you do in your home will be passed down to your children and grandchildren.
- **Curiosity** - Kids are more likely to try new foods when they are involved in meal preparation. They have a natural curiosity about food so be sure to offer new foods at mealtime (but never force them to try them.)
- **Relaxation** - Family meals are the perfect time to connect with each other and share your stories of the day. Shared time and positive experiences with your children is great way to connect and relax together after a hectic day of work, school and errands.
- **Communication** - Having conversations at mealtime increases your children's vocabulary. Encourage them to speak by asking about the best part of their day and probe more about what made the best part so great.
- **Love** - Children watch and imitate adults and look to them to learn proper behavior for everything from saying please and thank you to learning about fitness and nutrition. Mealtime is the ideal time to remind your children every day that they are important and loved.

Isn't it time to make family meals a habit in your home?