

September 5, 2025

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Forage Stand Soil Sampling

I'm an admitted advocate for soil sampling forage stands. I always think more information is better than less and I think soil fertility is a contributing factor to everything from yield to the ability of a stand to withstand pressures like drought stress and fall armyworm feeding. Even so, while I seldom discourage someone from taking a soil sample, we should also do what we can to maximize the value of our results.

For example: why are you sampling in the first place? If you are after a broad view to see if soil test levels are holding steady, you may sample differently than if trying to determine why part of the farm is performing well, and other areas are weedy. Limit sampling area to 40 acres when possible, keeping in mind additional value may be gained from more focused zone sampling as well. When trying to tease out an issue, more samples are likely going to be better.

Once you decide why you're sampling, focus on how. Sampling variability comes from a lot of places, but if we approach sampling horizontally and vertically, we can limit at least a few issues. Horizontally, make sure to take enough cores across the landscape. A minimum of 12-15 cores per sample are recommended to reduce the variability occurring with fewer subsamples. Vertically, maintain a consistent depth. There may be reasons to sample to a shallower depth just like there are reasons to sample deeper, but if you want to get consistent and comparable information, sample to a consistent depth. Nutrient stratification can drastically affect a soil test taken from a four-inch depth versus one taken from eight inches. Knowing what depth you should be pulling from (zero to six inches is most common) and be consistent.

Finally, get good interpretations of the results. The numbers soil test results provide are just numbers unless you understand the values we're trying to compare them to. Whether you're submitting samples through our K-State Soil Testing Lab or a private lab, analyze the results and where recommendations come from. Doing so can provide a greater degree of confidence in the decisions you make from the results and what you need to continue to do moving forward.

Want to dig deeper into designing a soil test program – or improving your current one? Drop me a line. I'd be happy to visit with you more about whether a soil test should be considered (yes...) and how to maximize the value from one should you decide to pull samples.

September 5, 2025

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Fall Foraging

October signals the end of the summer pasture grazing season for many lease arrangements and management situations. However, this doesn't mean that there is not a wealth of grazing resources available to livestock to utilize during autumn. In fact, it is the one time of year, with a bit of pre-planning, that there are as many options to graze animals as any other time in the year. Let's take a bite into the options for fall foraging today.

Feed costs typically are the greatest expense for a livestock operation, and with winter just around the corner, it is wise to plan for feeding herds and flocks in the months ahead. Baled forage resources are more plentiful this year across the Midwest, but feeding harvested forages almost always comes with more cost versus grazing. The easiest way to reduce winter feed cost is to add grazing days and optimize forage utilization in the fall.

Crop residue is one of the most abundant fall grazing resources. Cornstalks and grain sorghum stalks are common crop residues for grazing livestock across Kansas. Mature, non-lactating animals can usually maintain body condition on stalks with little to no protein supplementation. If left to their own devices, animals selectively graze higher quality plant parts, like leaves, husks and dropped grain first. Supplementation may be necessary depending on the class of livestock, grazing management, weather conditions and length of grazing window. Turn livestock out on crop residue as soon as possible after grain harvest to take advantage of higher residue quality.

Annual forages are another forage tool in the fall grazing toolbox. It is too late at this time of year to plant summer annuals, but if those have been planted, this is a great opportunity to extend grazing. Warm season plants that have been grown through the heat of summer can be grazed standing or placed in windrows to be grazed later. Caution does need to be considered around sorghum species in relation to nitrates and prussic acid. Mixes of grasses, legumes, brassicas and broadleaves can increase the quality of this annual forage option, reduces some of these risks and lends to extended grazing days, if the various plants have more cold tolerance compared to others.

While it might be too late to plant summer annuals, it's not too late to put in cool season annuals such as cereal grains, brassicas and other cold tolerant species. One benefit to this class of plants is that many will overwinter and provide early spring grazing opportunities as well. There are also cool seasons that will not overwinter, but provide good fall grazing, such as oats and barley. The sooner in fall these crops are planted, it stands to reason that more grazing days can be obtained.

The final notable forage resource that can be used to extend fall grazing days is stockpiled perennial forage. This can be cool or warm season pastures, legume hay fields like alfalfa and regrowth on grass hay fields as well. If these resources have been utilized during the grazing season, the best management plan would be to utilize the stockpiled forage after a killing frost, so carbohydrate root reserves can be built during the growing season and not be drained to damage future production.

Strip grazing and adjusting stocking densities can move utilization to fifty percent or more. Unrestricted grazing can hover around the twenty-five percent utilization mark. Small improvements in forage utilization can extend the number of grazing days. Stocking density and the rate of forage degradation significantly impacts how long livestock can rely on these forages as the sole feedstuff. The longer livestock can graze; the fewer days producers must deliver higher cost harvested forages to them. An excellent K-State resource on this subject can be found at: https://www.kcare.k-state.edu/training_events/grazing.html

September 5, 2025

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

No news article this week.

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Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

It's Time to Review Your Medicare Options

Medicare Open Enrollment starts **October 15** and ends **December 7**. This is the time each year when people with Medicare can look at their current plan and decide if they want to make changes for the next year. Even if you like your current plan, it's smart to check your options. Plans can change from year to year. If you don't review your plan, you might end up paying more or losing coverage for some of your medications.

Why You Should Review Your Plan

Some people stay with the same plan every year without checking if it's still the best choice. But Medicare Advantage (Part C) and Medicare drug plans (Part D) are offered by private companies, and these plans often change.

In 2026, **three drug plans will no longer be offered**. If you have one of these, you'll need to pick a new plan. If you don't, your insurance company may move you to a different plan automatically.

The plans going away are:

- Cigna Healthcare Extra Rx (S5617-269)
- Cigna Healthcare Saver Rx (S5617-374)
- Wellcare Medicare Rx Value Plus (S4802-227)

Other Changes Coming in 2026

- The **maximum amount you'll pay out-of-pocket** for Part D drug costs will go up to **\$2,100**.
- The **deductible** for Part D will increase to **\$615**.

These changes could affect how much you pay for your medicine.

Choosing a Plan Can Be Confusing

Many people find it hard to choose the right Medicare plan. They may not know that their plan's costs or coverage are changing. This includes things like:

- Monthly premiums
- Copayments and coinsurance
- Deductibles
- Which drugs are covered

If you don't compare plans, you might miss out on better coverage or end up paying more than you need.

Get Help With Your Medicare Questions

Medicare isn't the same for everyone. What worked for you last year might not be the best choice for 2026. Comparing plans can help you protect your health and your money. Even if you're happy with your current plan, it's worth seeing what else is out there.

The **Meadowlark Extension District** is offering **free one-on-one Medicare counseling** with trained SHICK (Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas) counselors. You can get help comparing plans at any of the Meadowlark offices in:

- Holton
- Oskaloosa
- Seneca

To make an appointment, call **785-364-4125**.

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

No news article this week.