

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Early Season Cool Season Management

Far too often the focus of this column has been some 'issue' in forage stands. Weather. Weeds. Fall Armyworms. You name it. Our forage crops have had the 'opportunity' to encounter just about every test possible – and now they're showing it.

In a few stands last week, cool season grasses on thin soils exhibited symptoms of drought stress. Soils were dry enough it was difficult to get a soil probe in the ground, and a few plants were even starting to head out – with very little height to them. Even with moisture, it's likely we'll see some production losses, increasing the need for attention to management as the season progresses.

Losses? Already?? Most of our forage base is cool season grass – brome and fescue that prefer temperatures into the mid 70's. We've already blown right through those temperatures on multiple occasions this spring. Leaf production declines as plants transition from vegetative to reproductive growth and above normal temperatures are pushing us quickly in that direction. Stressed plants in particular may try to get to reproduction sooner than later, reducing height and leaf area. Add in the 'issues' above plus years of stress from fertility, overgrazing, late haying, etc... and we likely started with reduced root energy levels and thinned stands. The result: it's time to at least be thinking about what we're going to do to help stands this spring – and beyond.

Start by evaluating your grazing management strategy. NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist Dustin Schwandt notes NRCS recommendations suggest grazing of smooth brome *begin* at six inches with grazing *stopped* when grass height falls to three inches. Stands damaged last year by fall armyworms might even benefit from increasing starting heights to ensure roots of smooth brome are not being damaged even more this year especially at the start of the growing season.

Meadowlark Extension District Livestock and Natural Resources Agent Ross Mosteller would suggest our grazing management mindset might need to adjust when forage production is below normal as well. He suggests taking a look at tactics such as reducing stocking rate, destocking/rest, shortening the grazing season, and supplementation to bridge the gaps. One – or all – deserve a second look if production levels in your pastures/hay fields are below normal.

Maybe everything turns around with favorable weather plus good plant growth, and this is a non-issue. Even so, it's never too early to start thinking ahead to how in-season grazing management – and even winter season forage needs – might have to be adjusted should the current trend of multiple challenges each season be the rule rather than the exception. Few stands are in a great position to weather a lot of stress. Being on top of issues early in the season might be one of the best things we can do to help stands longer term.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Bull Power

Horsepower is the measure of engine or motor power output, something that is a standard that most everyone understands. Today's title of "Bull Power" may leave more subjectivity on the table. We might venture into discussion of phenotypic three dimensionality and muscle expression. We could dive into genotypic excellence indicated by pedigree, EPDs and genomic testing. Both good things to discuss, but my focus today is more on having enough "bull power" to cover and successfully breed cows.

Breeding season has started for those late winter calving herds and the typical turn-out time for most pasture leases is here. A good goal for the breeding season is to get cows to breed early resulting in more calves being born earlier in the calving season. This shorter breeding and subsequent calving season allow for more older calves at weaning, which means more pounds of weaning weight. The typical beef calf gains about two pounds per day while nursing their mothers, which translates into about forty more pounds of weaned calf per estrus cycle.

Sounds simple right? Many factors play into this early conception like; postpartum interval, nutrition, health and today's focus - having an adequate number of bulls to get cows serviced. After bulls have successfully passed a breeding soundness exam, the old rule of thumb is that they can cover one female per month of age at turnout. Depending on which research is referenced, this ratio is an increasing scale up to 35-60 cows for a mature bull.

Looking at an example, a fifteen-month-old bull should be expected to cover fifteen heifers. If there are thirty heifers to breed in the group, two fifteen-month-old bulls should be utilized. Multiple factors play into this number such as synchronization or natural heats, single or multiple bull pastures, AI prior to natural service, size and topography of pasture, etc... Single bull pastures can make parentage easier, but can lead to fewer early bred cows, especially if bull injury or other problems occur.

Bulls on average can be utilized for five to six years, but there is no reason why they can't continue to service cows past that age point. The older bulls get, the more likely there will be for physical breakdowns that can cause open or late calving cows. Speaking from experience, a sore footed bull can extend your calving window and yield more open cows! Keep an eye on bulls of any age to make sure they are performing duties and watch cows for returning heats to indicate any potential issues before pregnancy, checking time and finding open cows.

Here are a few final thoughts on bull power to consider. Every situation is different but keen observation can go a long way in avoiding problems.

- A breeding soundness exam must be performed on all bulls prior to the breeding season.
- Monitor virgin bulls for mounting activity. Breeding is a learned behavior. As bulls get older, they have fewer false mounts and higher pregnancy rates compared to younger bulls.
- A pecking order amongst the bulls must be established before the breeding season. Turning out a new bull in a multi-bull pasture can cause a reproductive wreck.
- Rotating bulls can help reduce any potential fatigue and/or breeding issues.

The K-State publication ["Why Aren't My Cows Pregnant?" MF-3585](#) looks at this topic and other factors associated with avoiding open cows.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Red Meat Allergy – A Tick-Borne Illness

Recently I wrote a news column about the different tick-borne illnesses that you may encounter in Northeast Kansas. One of those illnesses stands out from the others, as it is not a bacteria or virus. You may know it as the “red-meat” allergy, but its real name is alpha-gal syndrome. It is becoming more common in Kansas, with over 500 cases reported between 2023 and 2024, mostly in the eastern portion of the state.

In the United States, alpha-gal syndrome is primarily transmitted by the lone star tick. These ticks are easy to identify as adults: the females have a white spot on their back, and the males have small white patches on the edge of their back.

Alpha-gal is a molecule that is found in the saliva of the lone-star ticks. It is also naturally found in most mammals, but not in humans. When the tick’s saliva enters your bloodstream, the alpha-gal in its saliva can trigger an immune response, which causes your body to release chemicals that cause an allergic reaction. Once a tick has exposed you to alpha-gal via your bloodstream, your body can become sensitive to alpha-gal overall. We call this sensitivity to alpha-gal molecules “alpha-gal syndrome.” With this condition, your body will have allergic reactions to consuming products that contain alpha-gal molecules, such as beef, pork, dairy, and even certain medications.

It is important to note that while most mammals have alpha-gal in them, consuming meat or generally being exposed to alpha-gal from mammalian products does not cause alpha-gal syndrome since these products do not release the molecule into your bloodstream. The ticks cause alpha-gal syndrome because they do release alpha-gal into your bloodstream. However, not everyone who is exposed to alpha-gal from ticks will develop this sensitivity.

When you have alpha-gal syndrome, the allergic reaction is typically delayed; you may not experience an allergic reaction for 3 to 6 hours after eating animal products with alpha-gal in them. This reaction can show up as hives, nausea, heartburn, congestion, or even anaphylaxis. Reactions can be anywhere from mild to life-threatening. It is important to seek medical attention immediately if you have severe symptoms. The delay between eating meat and developing an allergic reaction can make it tricky to pinpoint alpha-gal as the allergen.

Unfortunately, there is not currently a treatment for alpha-gal syndrome. Some individuals have outgrown the condition and slowly can re-incorporate mammalian products, but there is no guarantee that alpha-gal syndrome will resolve. If you have alpha-gal syndrome, it is important to avoid possible exposure to ticks, as another bite from the lone-star tick could exacerbate the issue.

The best thing to do is prevent tick bites as much as possible. Wearing bug spray and avoiding thick vegetation can help lower the odds of a tick bite. If you are bitten by a tick, use fine tipped tweezers to grasp the head of the tick and pull it out. Do not agitate the tick, burn it, or grasp it with your fingers. Agitating it or squeezing the body can cause the tick to spit more saliva into your bloodstream. Once you have removed a tick from your body, photograph or save the tick (freeze or kill it with rubbing alcohol) in case you need to identify it later.

If you suspect that you may have a tick-borne illness, talk to your doctor immediately.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Smart Kitchens: Help from Assistive Technology

The kitchen can sometimes be a challenging place to work—and I have experienced this firsthand. As a left-handed person, I often notice that common kitchen tools such as vegetable peelers, soup ladles, and scissors are designed primarily for right-handed users. In much the same way as we get older, the kitchen tools we once relied on may no longer work as well as they used to. When that happens, it might be time to replace worn-out or hard-to-use utensils with items that work better—and smarter—for our needs.

Physical tasks such as chopping, lifting cookware, or opening jars can become difficult due to arthritis, decreased strength, or limited dexterity. Fortunately, adaptive kitchen tools can significantly reduce strain and fatigue. Items such as electric can openers, rocker knives, lightweight cookware, and pull-down shelving are designed to make everyday cooking tasks easier and safer.

For individuals experiencing reduced mobility, dexterity challenges, or vision loss, K-State Research and Extension's Meadowlark District offers assistive technology kitchen kits that you can view for ideas to use in your own kitchen. These kits are designed to help make preparing home-cooked meals easier, safer, and more enjoyable. No matter your age or whether you have a disability, there are tools available that can support independence and confidence in the kitchen.

Examples of Items Included in the Kitchen Kit

Below are just a few examples of what you will find in the assistive technology kitchen kit. We invite you to stop by one of our offices to see the full kit in person.

- **Battery-Operated Jar and Bottle Openers**
Ideal for anyone, but especially helpful for people with limited hand strength or for one-handed users.
- **Large-Print Measuring Cups and Spoons**
These feature clear, bold numbers with a contrasting background, making them a great aid for individuals with reduced vision who need to measure ingredients accurately for cooking and baking.
- **Rocker Knife with Silicone Grip**
Designed to ease chopping and cutting, this knife is especially useful for one-handed users or those with reduced hand strength. The stainless steel blade is dishwasher safe.
- **Dycem® Non-Slip Mat**
Dycem is a versatile, antimicrobial, non-slip mat that helps keep items secure without being sticky. Use it under plates, bowls, cups, or cutting boards to prevent slipping and spills. Dycem is easy to clean, latex-free, and non-toxic, making it ideal for kitchens or anywhere extra stability is needed.
- **Foam Grip Tubing**
Foam grip tubing can be added to writing utensils, toothbrushes, razors, silverware, and other kitchen tools to improve comfort and control. The tubing is easy to clean, can be cut to size, and is especially helpful for individuals with weaker hands, arthritis, or those who need a wider grip.

Cooking with Confidence

There is a wide variety of assistive technology tools available that can help make cooking activities safer and more manageable. For many older adults, the result is simple yet powerful: the ability to prepare meals on their own terms, in a kitchen that feels familiar, comfortable, and safe.

For more information about kitchen assistive technology or to view the Meadowlark District kitchen kits, contact our office at **785-364-4125** or email thatfield@ksu.edu.

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

Food Safety on the Road

V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N! Oh, how we long for the eight letter word every summer, when millions of us eagerly get away from school and work. We take to the road in cars or recreational vehicles; live on boats; relax in beach or mountain vacation homes; and camp out.

No matter where we go or what we do, there is a common denominator that runs through all of our summer travels and relaxation ----it's called F-O-O-D!

The "road" to food safety, however, can either be a bumpy one or smooth---depending on what precautions are taken handling meals as we travel this summer.

First, some general rules, while traveling this summer:

- In hot weather (above 90°F), food should never sit out for more than 1 hour.
- Discard any food left out more than 2 hours (1 hour if temperature is above 90°F).

Plan ahead:

- If you are traveling with perishable food, place it in a cooler with ice or freezer packs.
- When carrying drinks, consider packing them in a separate cooler so the food cooler is not opened frequently.

Pack Safely:

- Pack perishable foods directly from the refrigerator or freezer into the cooler. Meat and poultry may be packed while it is still frozen; it stays colder longer. Also, a full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one partially filled.
- Be sure to keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods, or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits.
- If the cooler is only partially filled, pack the remaining space with more ice.
- For long trips to the shore or the mountains, take along two coolers---one for the day's immediate food needs, such as lunch, drinks or snacks and the other for perishable foods to be used later in the vacation.
- Limit times the cooler is opened. Open and close the lid quickly.

Make this a vacation to remember because of the memories made, not because everyone was sick from preventable food mistakes.