KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

April 3, 2026

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Freeze and Forages

Winter or spring? The dates on the calendar delineating between the two sometimes get blurred by reality. A spring with bouncing temperatures (and somewhat sporadic moisture) like 2026 can heighten concerns for our cool/early season forage crops. Should we be? Maybe…

Cereal crops were visibly injured but unless they were pretty tall, the growing point was likely below ground and damaged forage will 'melt away' as plants regrow (if the growing point was above ground, things get more complicated…). Unfortunately, that may not mean zero impact. While the long term effects to plants with protected growing points will likely be limited, the wrong type of tissue injury can persist through the growing season. If 'good' conditions persist, we might see few significant effects. If stressful conditions occur, plants with limited vascular systems could face challenges. Impacts will vary greatly (with grain crops likely affected to a greater degree than forage crops), but all cereals *could* experience losses due to everything from growing point injury to lost production days during plant recovery.

Alfalfa was also visibly injured, with some early hatching alfalfa weevil mortality noted as well. Healthy stands seemed to recover relatively quickly with the greater concern being any early weevil insecticide applications. Insecticide effectiveness is based upon contact with the weevil and that means getting product to green leaf tissue. Freeze damaged tissue could either intercept insecticides weevils will likely never feed on or will open up the canopy as it falls from the plant, allow more insecticide to reach the ground – where weevils also aren't feeding. Fortunately, most dead tissue will be replaced by new tissue prior to insecticide applications.

Injury to bromegrass might be the great unknown. Brome's cool season growth characteristics and longevity as a perennial forage can give us a false sense of security about its tolerance to these events, but that doesn't mean it's bulletproof. Alaska research from the 80's suggests that while brome *can* tolerate low temperatures, some of that tolerance is attributed to a *lack* of winter temperature fluctuations. When temperatures 'bounce' like they have this winter, injury potential seems to increase. You can read more in a post on the Meadowlark Extension District Agronomy Blog (https://blogs.k-state.edu/meadowlarkagronomy/) but the take home is: stands may have been injured as much by temperature *swings* as the true cold with 'weakened' stands (fall armyworm/drought/fertility/overgrazed…) potentially seeing greater impacts.

There's a lot of growing season left to counter any potentially detrimental impacts of the mid-March freeze, but it's a good event to keep in mind as you make observations through the rest of the season. Sometimes the unexplained might have more background to it than we think.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

April 3, 2026

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Rebreeding Two-Year-Olds

Trying to find a day when the wind isn't howling cold out of the north or blasting hot out of the south has been a challenge lately, but this past weekend was fall calving cow pregnancy checking day at the farm. There is always a small sense of apprehension when the two-year-old, first-time momma walks into the chute. This is a time in the female's life where they are still growing themselves, in addition to raising their first calf. If energy is limited, reproductive success can be the first thing to suffer. Let's check into this issue today.

Every operation has a different take on managing heifers for their first calf. Research shows that finding females that calve around 24 months of age and who maintain a 365-day calving interval, over at least 6 calves are the herd profit makers. Some operations choose to breed heifers at 18 months, some wait until 24 months, others buy bred heifers or heifer pairs. Whatever the model, it must fit the operations production system.

What can be a frequent problem seen in reviewing herd records is a difficulty getting nursing, two-year-old heifers bred back for their second calf. Excellent research over the past decade shows that improving body condition score (BCS) in these heifers before their first calf is the most important factor in getting them bred back. The biological priority of nutrients goes from vital functions/maintenance, growth, milk production and finally reproduction. That said, reproduction is the first thing to suffer, and this age class can often be open at preg check.

While calf birth weight may increase slightly when pre-calving BCS is improved in heifers, calving difficulty remains the same. A study of 240 first-calf heifers in three states not only showed the "non-issue" of dystocia, but points out how important pre-calving BCS is to the re-breeding rate. Only 56% of heifers calving in a BCS 4 were rebred after a 60-day breeding season, while 96% of heifers in a BCS 6 were rebred in the same time frame.

Another way to improve total herd fertility is to breed heifers for a shorter period of time than breeding the cow herd. When heifers are bred for only 30-42 days, as opposed to 65 days for cows, the possibility of late-calving heifers is eliminated. Generally, a late-calving heifer has a couple fates in the herd -- she continues to be a later-calving cow, or she becomes an open cow. Neither option is desirable, so removing these females from the breeding herd early in their life can lead to long-term improvement of cowherd fertility. Another consideration is that those long-yearling, open heifers generally have good value as feeders.

Here are some additional measures to improve heifer fertility. Have your herd health veterinarian perform reproductive tract scoring on heifers 30-60 days pre-breeding. Vaccinate heifers with a modified-live IBR-BVD-Lepto vaccine at least 30 days prebreeding. This should be part of a comprehensive vaccination program in which this is not their first exposure to this vaccine. Choose high-fertility lines of heifers for replacements. Use a synchronization program to get more heifers bred the first few days of the breeding season. Breed heifers 14-21 days before breeding cows so heifers have more recovery time between calving and rebreeding.

K-State has a good publication discussing everything ruminant nutrition in C735 Beef Cow Nutrition Guide if additional information is needed. To summarize, heifers need additional attention nutritionally, particularly as it relates to re-breeding. Keeping cattle in good body condition throughout life is a decent management goal.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension Meadowlark District

April 3, 2026

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Spray Schedule for Fruit Trees

It can be a challenge to know how to spray fruit trees for pest control. Spray schedules will vary depending on whether the trees have fruit or not. Here are some tips on preparing for your fruit tree pest control program this spring.

Peaches, nectarines and apricots: Often late frosts prevent fruit set on these fruits. Trees that are in full bloom, become much more sensitive to frost damage than those with buds still closed. Temperatures at 28 degrees and lower will harm buds that are in full bloom.

If there will not be any fruit, there isn't any need for being on a spray schedule. If there is fruit, use a product that contains captan or myclobutanil (Immunox, Fungi-Max, Fertilome F-Stop Lawn and Garden Spray) from now until about two weeks before harvest. Spray about every 10 days.

If a specific problem develops such as borers, peach leaf curl or gummosis on peach, see our listing of common problems at our "Common Plant Problems in Kansas" website. Look under "Peach" for possible problems and what to do about them.

Cherries: We often have good fruit on cherries without spraying. However, a wet period as fruit ripens can lead to problems with brown rot. Myclobutanil (Immunox, Fertilome F-Stop Lawn and Garden Spray, Fungi-Max) or Captan will give good protection. Cherry fruit fly may attack the cherries with the maggot causing damage to the fruit. Malathion (check label), Bonide Fruit Tree & Plant Guard or Sevin can be used for control.

Apples: Apples are the crops most in need of a spray schedule. Unless you have disease-resistant trees, cedar-apple rust is a perennial problem. The larvae of the codling moth is the insect most likely to damage fruit. Control can be a challenge due to changing labels and an extended spray season. Look up the K-State publication "Spray Schedules for Growing Apples at Home" on online.

Pears: Pears are often able to escape damage without spraying. If trouble does arise, use the same recommendations given for apples.

You can find more information about pest control on fruit trees in the K-State publication "Fruit Pest Control for Home Gardens." You can also reach out anytime for more guidance.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

April 3, 2026

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Nearing 65? Important Medicare Dates to Remember

If you are approaching age 65, there are several important dates you need to know related to Medicare enrollment. Medicare eligibility, whether based on age or disability, can feel confusing, but understanding key timelines and deadlines is essential. Missing an important enrollment deadline can result in delayed coverage or costly penalties.

As you approach Medicare eligibility, keep the following enrollment periods and considerations in mind.

Initial Enrollment Period (IEP)

The **Initial Enrollment Period (IEP)** is your first opportunity to enroll in Medicare. This seven-month window is tied to your eligibility—either when you turn 65 or when you become eligible due to receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

Your IEP includes:

- The three months before your eligibility month
- Your eligibility month
- The three months after your eligibility month

During this time, you may enroll in:

- **Medicare Part A** (hospital insurance)
- **Medicare Part B** (medical insurance)
- **Medicare Part D** (prescription drug coverage), or
- A **Medicare Advantage Plan (Part C)**

Deciding Whether to Enroll During Your IEP

Whether you should enroll in Medicare during your Initial Enrollment Period depends on your individual situation. Several factors may influence your decision, including:

- Are you or your spouse still actively working and covered by an employer health plan?
- Are you contributing to a Health Savings Account (HSA)?
- Do you qualify for Medicaid, which may affect Medicare premiums and costs?

The answers to these questions can determine whether you should enroll in Medicare right away or delay enrollment without penalties.

Automatic Enrollment

If you are already receiving benefits from **Social Security (SSA)** or the **Railroad Retirement Board (RRB)**, you will be automatically enrolled in **Medicare Part A and Part B** beginning the month you become eligible.

If you are receiving benefit payments, you are required to take Part A. However, you may choose to decline Part B. Be aware that declining Part B—depending on your circumstances—may lead to late enrollment penalties if you enroll later.

Non-Automatic Enrollment

If you are not receiving SSA or RRB benefits, you will need to actively enroll in Medicare during your Initial Enrollment Period. Enrollment can be completed by contacting the **Social Security Administration** or the **Railroad Retirement Board**.

Why Medicare Dates Matter

Medicare enrollment dates are important. Failing to review your options or missing a deadline can result in mistakes that impact both your finances and your health. Some enrollment decisions are difficult—and in some cases impossible—to reverse.

If you have questions about Medicare, consider connecting with someone who understands the program and is trained to provide accurate, unbiased information.

The **Meadowlark Extension District** offers free, unbiased Medicare information. For answers to your questions, contact **Teresa Hatfield** at **thatfield@ksu.edu** or call **785-364-4125**.

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension Meadowlark District

April 3, 2026

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

No news article this week.