

August 7, 2026

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Midwest Cover Crops Council – Decision Tool

Adoption of cover crops is all over the spectrum. To some growers, cover crops are a mainstay in their operation. Others may still be figuring out how they work. Fortunately, there are lots of good resources available to help. One of them is the *Cover Crops Decision Tool* available from the *Midwest Cover Crops Council*.

Founded almost 20 years ago, the *Midwest Cover Crops Council* has placed an emphasis on cover crop adoption based on sound agronomic principles. The many resources available on their website (<https://www.midwestcovercrops.org/>) are designed with the grower in mind. One of those resources is their *Cover Crop Decision Tool*.

Vetted through lengthy discussions among University researchers, government agency experts, growers, industry, and others, the power of the decision tool comes in its ability to search its large cover crop database. This database includes ratings for each crop based on what they might provide. Going after nitrogen? Sort crops based on their nitrogen scavenging ability. If grazing is an interest, the tool provides a ranked list of options to choose from. Need an erosion fighter? A crop with lasting residue? Choose up to three different goals and the decision tool helps rank them based on characteristics included in the database.

Recommendations are provided based on local adaptation (you'll be asked for your state and county of planting), and each crop includes information on planting, termination, characteristics, and even potential advantages and disadvantages. Change your goals or cash crop options and recommendations are adjusted accordingly. Information on each crop includes cultural information plus additional cover crop resources you may want to consider as well.

The decision tool is by no means the only source of cover crop information available – not by a long shot. It can however be a great tool for evaluating a new cover crop or trying to figure out how something you're already familiar with might work better. Check it out at the link above.

August 7, 2026

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Kansas Livestock Brands

When writing a weekly news column, one needs to seek motivation from about any source. Fortunately, the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health has provided inspiration this week through the excellent Animal Health Workshop held in Perry. Very timely topics including; Theileria, New World Screwworm and disease traceability were all excellent and things I've covered in news columns before, but a rather "old" subject ended my writer's block.

A livestock brand is a permanent, state-registered mark, applied with a hot iron or by freeze-branding, that identifies who owns an animal. Kansas has recorded brands since 1939, and today the Brands Program maintains a registry of more than 17,000 active brands. Registration with KDA is required before you brand any animal in Kansas, even though not a brand inspection state. It is illegal in Kansas to brand any animal before registering that brand with the Brands Office. A brand does not need to be registered to be used as a logo — but it must be registered before it's used on an animal.

A brand only works if it can be read and reported. A design that's too complex to identify, or that doesn't take well to branding, doesn't protect your livestock. Every registered brand must be distinguishable with reasonable certainty from every other brand recorded at that same body location. Locations include left and right side – shoulder, rib and hip. KDA maintains a searchable registry database of brands that can be found on their website.

Branding has marked ownership of Kansas livestock since the open-range era, moving from open-fire irons to electric irons to today's freeze-branding method — both hot and freeze methods are recognized under Kansas law. Brand inspection is not mandatory in Kansas. However, five contract inspectors are available statewide for a fee, and the same inspectors serve five Kansas livestock markets that contract with KDA for inspection services. Additionally, two livestock agent brand inspectors cover the state to assist local law enforcement with lost, stray, and stolen livestock cases across agencies.

The brand registration process in Kansas is easy to navigate. There is a non-refundable five-dollar application fee due with application. There is a registration fee of seventy-dollars, per location, that is good for five years from April 1 of the year registered. Before applying; search the Brand Database to check for conflicts, design the brand using the approvable character list, following the full brand guidelines. The design must differ in at least two ways from any other currently registered brand at the same location.

Brand design rules do not allow; single-letter or single character brands, more than four characters, slanting or tumbling letters/numbers, two-digit number brands or cursive letters or scrolled fonts. The following types of brands are discouraged: complex or intricate designs; letters, numbers or symbols enclosed in a closed shape; lowercase letters as these conflict visually with other characters; and broken bars due to too many variations which can cause confusion. For more information visit:

<https://www.agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/division-of-animal-health/brands-program>

August 7, 2026

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

It's Time to Plant Fall Crops

Many gardeners do not think of late summer as planting season. Yet planting cool-season vegetables now can bring you fresh produce into October or even late November. Since the produce will ripen in cooler weather, they can even be tastier and healthier.

Although cool-season vegetables are more apt to withstand lower temperatures, they will need time to establish themselves before they can face fall weather. Planting seedlings when it is appropriate rather than seeds can give your crops a head start. When sowing seeds, plant them slightly deeper than you would in spring. With our current hot weather, this will provide extra insulation and moisture for successful germination. You can also help them with light fertilizing, as many nutrients from spring fertilizer applications are likely depleted by now. Do not be alarmed if the first frost causes some damage – this is normal and well-established crops should pull through.

In late July through early August, you can start planting cucumbers, summer squash, and beans. Beets, carrots, radishes, and other root vegetables can be sown directly into the soil. Once August hits, spinach and heat-tolerant leafy greens can go in the ground. If you have any cabbage, broccoli, or cauliflower starts, you can begin putting them into the ground in early to mid-August as well.

As you look ahead to the rest of your fall garden, now is the time to start seeds indoors for late August and early September plantings. Options include chicories, bulbing fennel, collards, kale, and leafy greens. Allowing these plants to start inside gives them a head start on growing when it is still too hot for them to be outside. Since the conditions inside your home or greenhouse are very different from those outside, be sure to slowly introduce them to the outdoors, increasing the amount and intensity of sunlight and the exposure to outdoor temperatures. This will prevent the plants from experiencing shock when they are planted in the ground.

Taking care of your fall garden is not difficult. You might even find that fall gardening is easier, as the lower temperatures mean you won't have to battle as many pests and weeds. When sowing seeds for fall, remember to keep the soil moist to allow germination. A soaker hose or drip irrigation is often the best option. Adding mulch can also help insulate the seedlings from hot August temperatures and retain moisture in the soil. If you are experiencing extended, intense heat, consider putting up a shade cloth a few feet over the soil to help provide protection from the heat during seed germination.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

The Hidden Dangers of Youth Vaping

E-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among youth in the United States. Many young people believe that vaping is a safer alternative to smoking traditional cigarettes. However, this is a dangerous misconception. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), no tobacco product, including e-cigarettes, is safe, especially for children, teens, and young adults.

E-cigarettes, often called vapes, are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid to create an aerosol, commonly referred to as vapor. Users inhale this aerosol into their lungs. Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine along with other potentially harmful substances, including flavoring chemicals. The amount of nicotine can vary widely, and some cartridges contain as much nicotine as an entire pack of cigarettes.

Although these products are marketed under a variety of names and flavors, they are far from harmless. E-cigarettes are highly addictive and contain chemicals that can negatively affect the brain, lungs, and heart.

Health Effects of Vaping

Vaping poses significant risks to young people because their brains are still developing. Nicotine can interfere with areas of the brain responsible for attention, learning, mood, and impulse control. Research has shown that adolescents who use e-cigarettes are at greater risk of developing nicotine dependence and are more likely to use other tobacco products, including traditional cigarettes, later in life.

The health risks extend beyond addiction. Regular use of e-cigarettes has been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. Some studies suggest that daily e-cigarette use may significantly increase the likelihood of experiencing a heart attack. In addition, vaping exposes users to harmful chemicals that may contribute to cancer and other long-term health problems.

Young people who vape are also more likely to experience respiratory symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, and worsening asthma. Vaping can damage lung tissue and impair lung function. One chemical of concern is diacetyl, which is used to create buttery or sweet flavors in some vaping products. Diacetyl has been linked to bronchiolitis obliterans, commonly known as “popcorn lung.” This serious and irreversible lung disease causes inflammation and scarring of the small airways in the lungs, leading to breathing difficulties and reduced lung function.

Nicotine Addiction and Quitting

With repeated use of vaping products, the brain becomes dependent on nicotine. Over time, individuals may feel they need to vape simply to feel normal. Signs of nicotine addiction include strong cravings, an inability to stop using the product, and the development of tolerance, meaning more nicotine is needed to achieve the same effect.

Nicotine addiction can negatively affect relationships with family and friends, interfere with school performance, and impact mental health. Quitting can be challenging, and many youth experience withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and mood changes.

Young people are more likely to quit successfully when they have support from parents, family members, healthcare providers, and other trusted adults. Free resources are available to help youth stop vaping, including www.teen.smokefree.gov and www.ks.mylifemyquit.org. Families can also talk with their healthcare provider about additional support and treatment options.

Vaping may seem harmless, but the health risks are real. Understanding the dangers of e-cigarettes can help young people make informed decisions and protect their long-term health.

References: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Purdue University Extension; K-State Extension.

August 7, 2026

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

Champion 4-H Food Recipes Revealed

The 2026 Jefferson County 4-H Fair is now in the books. I hope you were able to come out and see what 4-H members have been working on and accomplished this past year. For many years, I have highlighted the Overall Grand Champion and Overall Reserve Grand Champion food recipes and the members who exhibited these “winning” recipes.

The Overall Grand Champion food product was made by Hallie Noll from the Winchester 4-H Club. She is the daughter of Sara and Luke Noll, and this is her third year in 4-H. Her “champion” recipe was “Grammy Jo’s Apple Pie”. Hallie told me that this was her grandmother’s Joan Navinsky’s recipe and they are living in her house. Now for that “winning” recipe.

Grammy Jo’s Apple Pie

Crust:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2/3 shortening
- 6 – 7 T. water

Filling:

- 4 cups sliced apples
- ¾ sugar
- 2 T. flour
- 3 pats butter
- Ground cinnamon

Using a pastry blender to mix flour, salt, shortening. Add water 1 T. at a time until you can roll it out on a floured surface. Divide the dough into two equal pieces. Roll the bottom crust out to fit a 9” pie pan. Place the sliced apples in the bottom crust. Cover with sugar, flour, and pat with butter. Sprinkle cinnamon to your liking. Place the top crust on, crimp the edges, and cut slits in the top crust before baking. Bake at 400°F for 15 minutes, then turn down the oven to 350°F for another 45 minutes.

August 7, 2026

Another “winning” entry at the 2026 Jefferson County 4-H Fair was Blueberry Kolaches made by a Jolly Junior’s 4-H member, Ian Hoffman, of Oskaloosa. This is Ian’s 7th year in 4-H, and he is the son of Crystal and Chris Hoffman. He is 13 years old and he is very involved in several projects including: Performing Arts, Shooting Sports, Visual Arts, and Rocketry. Now for that “winning” Blueberry Kolaches recipe.

Blueberry Kolaches

Dough Ingredients:

- ¾ cup water
- 9 teaspoons yeast
- 2 ¼ cups evaporated milk (heated and diluted with water)
- ¾ cup sugar
- 3 teaspoons salt
- 3 eggs (slightly beaten)
- ¾ oil
- ½ cup potato flakes
- 8 cups flour

Crump Topping:

- 1 stick oleo
- 1 ½ cups flour
- 1 ½ sugar
- 2 teaspoons almond extract
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Fruit Filling:

- Sugar
- Fruit
- Almond flavoring
- Instant clear gel

Add water and yeast together in a mixing bowl. Warm the evaporated milk and dilute with water. Add milk, sugar, salt, eggs, oil, and potato flakes with the yeast. Then start mixing. Add flour slowly. Once mixed, if not in a metal bowl, put in the microwave for 20 seconds. Then leave the bowl in there for around an hour to raise.

While the dough is rising, make your filling. In a food processor, puree desired pie filling. Add sugar, almond flavoring, and instant clear gel. Mix well and then let set to thicken. Then make the crumb topping by mixing all the ingredients together.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. After the dough has risen, roll a 1.2 oz. ball of dough and put it on a cookie sheet. Flatten with a cup, leaving an indent in the center to put filling into the indent. When cookie sheet is full, add crumb topping to each kolache and place the cookie sheet in the oven and bake for 5 minutes on the bottom rack. Then move to the top rack and bake for another 5 minutes.

Thank you to Hallie Noll and Ian Hoffman for sharing their “winning” recipes with us.