

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Broomsedge Bluestem – Nothing New Under the Sun?

Andropogon virginicus, more commonly known as Broomsedge Bluestem, has become a huge nemesis of cool season grasslands across eastern Kansas. It's been frequently discussed in this space, and a literature search would suggest we aren't at all alone – but why?

The large geography over which it's found is likely the result of a combination of management and environment. References suggest Broomsedge isn't overly competitive, requiring open space for establishment. Even after it germinates, it might take a couple years before plants produce seed. Unfortunately, the state of many cool season (and some warm season/native) grass stands is such that open space *does* exist. Multiple dry falls plus long-term fertility deficiencies plus external factors (fall armyworm feeding, etc...) can individually thin stands but together create significant stand stress and openings for Broomsedge establishment.

What can we do in the near term? Make grass stands as competitive as possible. For cool season grass stands, that starts with a fertility program based on a soil test. Phosphorous and soil pH are often blamed – and rightfully so - but the need for Potassium has also increased. Don't have a soil test to guide your fertilizer applications? Reach out and we can discuss potential blends. Already fertilized? No problem. Set a reminder now to pull a post-harvest soil test and make a note of areas where Broomsedge seems to be on the increase. Whole farm sampling programs provide excellent information, but focused sampling programs can be valuable as well.

While fertility is also an issue in pastures, they have the benefit of nutrient cycling through the grazing animal to keep soil test levels from declining as quickly as they do in hay stands. In pastures, the largest contributor to broomsedge establishment is likely overgrazing. Make sure stocking rates are appropriate, leaving ample forage height for rapid grass recovery.

Former Director of the University of Tennessee Beef and Forage Center, Dr. Gary Bates said: *Remember that the broomsedge did not move into the field in one year, and you won't be able to outcompete it in one year. But a sustained approach over several years can help you solve this problem.* Fertility and grazing management likely worked hand in hand with factors we often can't control (weather, fall armyworm feeding, etc...) to get us here and while they'll also be the management factors we have to adjust to get out of it, there are other things we might try as well. They'll be the focus of future columns. In the meantime, if you aren't sure what broomsedge is or if you have it, drop me a line. Staying *ahead* of broomsedge should be the goal.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Post Calving Calf Health

Recently I watched an episode of “The Incredible Dr. Pol” where he pulled a calf and made the statement that the calf was breathing and so it would be just fine. While Dr. Pol’s statement was correct, there is an ever-looming issue that can cause challenges to vibrant, thrifty calves. Post-partum health challenges are what I’m referencing for today’s discussion. Proper post-partum practices to ensure calf health is extremely important.

Ensuring that cows are in an adequate nutritional status, proper body condition score of 5 or 6 and not overfed can help reduce dystocia concerns. Cow health and condition additionally has a major role in determining the quality and quantity of colostrum. Colostrum is full of protective immunoglobulins that must be absorbed across the small intestine in the calf within the first 24 hours of birth to allow the calf to develop passive immunity against common diseases until its immune system is fully functional.

Calves need to consume colostrum as soon as possible, ideally within the first half hour of birth. By 6 hours after birth, 4-6 quarts of colostrum should ideally be consumed for proper passive immunity for prevention of early-calfhood diseases. After this time, the calf’s ability to absorb immunoglobulins starts to decline and concludes after 24 hours. To add another layer of prevention to disease, prior to suckling, the udder and teats should also be clean and free from manure, mud and other contamination.

Injectable vaccinations given to the dam prior to calving have been shown to provide antibodies through the colostrum. Proper dam vaccination is more effective for early life protection through the passive immunity process. Administering vaccines to the calf directly has been shown to be more effective after the calf is at least one month of age. This is because its immune system is more active, and there isn’t the influence of maternal antibodies from colostrum. Proper products and protocols should be discussed with your veterinarian prior to administration.

In cold conditions, another good post-partum practice is making sure the cow has cleaned the calf off to prevent hypothermia. Cold mouths and lack of suckling reflex are common indicators of hypothermia. Warming crates/boxes, blankets, warm water bath, etc. can help raise calf internal body temperature. Cold stressed calves can have a decreased defense system against disease. The umbilical cord is a direct route to the calf’s immune system and one of the most important items to address soon after calving. Inspecting the navel for abnormalities and dipping the umbilical cord in a navel dip can help reduce the risk of infection by helping the cord dry out faster.

Reducing the pathogen load in the environment around the newborn is important as well. The Sandhills Calving System has been known to reduce pathogen exposure to newborn calves by using a series of rotations throughout various calving pastures. The basic concept is that late gestation cows are moved to clean calving pastures every two weeks during the calving season. In this way, newborns are not exposed to as much of an environmental pathogen load from cows or other, older calves. Adoption of this system has been shown to reduce death loss and veterinary costs without negative impacts on calf performance.

A variety of other practices can be implemented, such as administering individual forms of identification and castrating bull calves. A final key step during calving is observing the calf to detect any abnormal signs or behaviors, especially during the first month following calving. This is a simple practice that has a direct impact on early calf health and catching things before they become issues. Considering calf health following calving is a number one priority for calving season and to better prepare the calf for the rest of its life.

February 20, 2026

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

No news article this week.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Building Community and Strengthening Families: Bonding Through Board Games

With spring still a month away, we continue to navigate the ups and downs of the Kansas winter. Many of us turn to digital devices to pass the time, but what we often crave most is meaningful, in-person connection. To help foster that connection, K-State Research and Extension Meadowlark District is partnering with the 1867 Social Club in Oskaloosa to host **Bonding Through Board Games**—an event designed to bring people together through play.

Board games are a fun and effective way to build relationships, strengthen social skills, reduce stress, and reconnect with others.

A Free, All-Ages Community Event

This event is open to all ages and community members. It is free to attend, and both snacks and board games will be provided. Participants will have a chance to unplug and unwind in a welcoming, relaxed environment while trying something new.

Event Details

March 5, 2026

4:30–6:30 PM

105 Jefferson St., Oskaloosa, KS

Free to attend — everyone welcome

Why Board Games Matter

Board games may seem simple, but they offer powerful opportunities for building relationships and practicing life skills. They create natural moments for communication—inviting conversation, humor, negotiation, and shared experiences. Games also encourage teamwork and cooperation, making them ideal for strengthening family and community bonds.

Playing games helps us learn patience and good sportsmanship, both in winning and losing. These experiences are valuable across generations; young people can learn from older adults, and adults benefit from playful engagement with youth.

Beyond social benefits, board games provide a healthy mental break. Stepping away from screens and focusing on face-to-face interaction can lower stress, boost mood, and increase overall feelings of well-being.

Join the Fun on March 5!

K-State Research and Extension Meadowlark District and the 1867 Social Club invite everyone to come together for an evening of fun and connection. Whether you're an experienced gamer or brand new to board games, you'll find something enjoyable—and people to enjoy it with.

For More Information Contact

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