K-STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

March 20, 2026

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Focus on ROI – Corn Fungicide Tool

As row crop budgets face tightness, growers continue to take a hard look at costs affecting their operation. If one of those input costs, you're evaluating is a corn fungicide application, the Crop Protection Network Corn Fungicide ROI Calculator deserves a look.

Designed as an interactive tool to help evaluate the potential economic benefit of a corn fungicide application, it combines research-based data from multi-year, university-conducted fungicide trials across the U.S. with user-provided variables including input costs, market prices, and corn yields. The resulting output provides an estimate of expected net benefits and breakeven probabilities to help support informed decision-making.

Keep in mind: the Corn Fungicide ROI Calculator is not predictive. If last season taught us anything, its disease pressure often doesn't look the same at the end of the season as it does the beginning. Instead, these calculators are more of an overview of the financial risks and rewards of adopting a particular strategy under varying conditions.

They are also only as good as the information you input. To maximize their value requires accurate fungicide cost data and a predicted corn price. From there, you can toggle back and forth between low and high disease pressure to see where products/prices might sort out.

Lastly, it is *not* a substitute for good field disease scouting. Severity levels can differ even within fields, not to mention between fields or among different hybrids or management levels. Scouting is *not* a part of the crop management equation to eliminate.

Fungicide season will be here before we know it. While you still have time to 'run some numbers', check it out at: https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/roi-calculators .

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Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Counting Cows

I once saw a cartoon poking fun of cowboys who seemed to be perpetually counting cows. Speaking only for myself, it does seem like it is a daily activity of getting a head count to make sure that everyone has come up to eat, no one is sick or this time of year – all the babies are still there and nursing. Not too long ago, another "cow count" came out, that being the US beef cowherd inventory. Dr. Darrell Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist, has done an analysis of why we continue to see a decline in the momma cow numbers. His work serves as the basis for today.

The January 1, 2026, beef cow inventory was 27.607 million head, down 1.0 percent from one year ago. The beef cow herd has decreased a total of 4.033 million head since the cyclical peak in 2019, a decrease of 12.7 percent. The debate continues as to whether this is the new cyclical low, much of which depends on what the weather does. There was a noted slight increase in beef replacement heifers in the latest data giving hope to the momentum for heifer retention and eventual herd rebuilding.

The logical question becomes, where has liquidation taken place? A proportionally larger share of herd liquidation has occurred in the heart of beef cow production regions of the United States. In 2019, 13 states in the middle of the country accounted for 64.6 percent of the total herd, by 2026 the share had dropped to 63.1 percent. The herd inventory change in these 13 states in the past seven years totaled 3.0 million head, 74.3 percent of the total herd decrease. Kansas specifically had the largest percentage drop of 25.1 percent, losing 384,000 head and dropping from 6th to 7th with Montana surpassing in state rankings.

The top five ranking states; Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Missouri, South Dakota, remained in order during this timeframe, but lost nearly 1.796 million head. Widespread drought from 2021-2025 prompted much of the beef cow herd liquidation in major beef cow states. Unfortunately, continuing drought conditions and drought threats are likely to keep cattle producers cautious and hesitant to aggressively restock in much of this region and in other areas of the country.

Changes in crop production and land use are also a factor in some areas. From 2019 to 2025, corn and soybean planted acreage in the U.S. increased by 8.6 percent, an increase of 14.2 million acres. Simultaneously, hay acreage is in decline, reducing the potential for forage resources. Increased crop production may limit herd rebuilding in the Midwest and eastern regions of Great Plains states including Kansas, Nebraska and North Dakota, along with South Dakota. This is a factor I consider to be an obstacle to cowherd expansion in Northeast Kansas if crop acres aren't available for livestock integration.

On the heifer side of the equation, all heifers 500 pounds and over as of January 1, 2026 totaled 18.0 million head, 1 percent below the 18.1 million head on January 1, 2025. Beef replacement heifers came in at 4.71 million head, were up 1 percent from a year ago, which might be a signal that heifer retention has begun. Kansas specifically reported the same number of beef replacement heifers in 2026 as 2025 at 190,000 head, so we may not be seeing the cow herd yet expanding in Kansas.

For those wishing to review the complete report, it can be found on the USDA website: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide_to_NASS_Surveys/Cattle_Inventory/ The long story short is that ongoing weather conditions and longer-term structural adjustments in agriculture suggest that beef cow herd rebuilding will continue to be a slow process.

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Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

No news this week.

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Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Get Prepared: Kansas Severe Weather

Last week, I was reminded of how quickly severe weather can develop in the spring. My cousins live in Kankakee, Illinois, where a tornado recently impacted their community. Just like in Illinois, severe weather can happen quickly in Kansas. We all need to be prepared before severe weather strikes.

There are several steps you can take now to be ready. Knowing what to prepare—and how to take action—is essential for managing the situation effectively. Kansas State Extension professionals recommend starting with a household inventory and reviewing your insurance coverage.

Conducting a Household Inventory

A household inventory is a detailed list of your home's contents, including items in the living areas, basement, garage, attic, and storage spaces such as sheds or off-site units. If you ever need to file an insurance claim, your company may require a list of lost or damaged items. While the task may seem overwhelming, there are several approaches that make it manageable. Be sure to document valuable items such as electronics, appliances, furniture, and other important possessions.

Video Walk-Through or Photo Documentation

Take photos or videos of each room, including walls, open closets, cabinets, and drawers. Capture closeups of expensive items and document their condition. As you film, verbally describe what you see. Photos and video provide strong support for your written inventory.

Digital Apps

Consider using a digital app to help with inventory. Many apps not only store a record of your belongings but also help with paperwork organization, maintenance tracking, barcode scanning, and documenting home improvements. Digital tools make it easy to update your inventory over time.

Written Itemized Record

If you prefer a traditional approach, you can download inventory forms or use a notebook. Be sure to keep a copy of your written record off-site in case your property is destroyed.

Review Your Insurance Coverage

In addition to keeping an inventory, take time to review your renter's or homeowner's insurance policy. The purpose of insurance is to cover major losses, and it's wise to review your policy annually. During this review, make sure you have adequate coverage for your home, vehicles, and personal belongings. If you have a mortgage, your lender will require you to maintain proper homeowner's insurance.

Make sure you have funds available to cover your deductible. Also, check whether your home and contents are insured for replacement value rather than depreciated value; otherwise, your policy may not cover the full cost of rebuilding or replacing items. Because each insurance policy is different, take time to understand what is *not* covered. Depending on your location and your insurance provider, excluded events could include earth movement (earthquake, sinkhole, landslide), flooding, sewer or sump-pump backup, or mold.

For more information on disaster preparedness visit www.ready.gov

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March 20, 2026

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

Rhubarb-A Spring Favorite

Rhubarb will soon be popping out of the ground. It is a perennial favorite in Midwest gardens. Here are some tips to store rhubarb or preserve it for later use.

After harvest, store rhubarb stalks in the refrigerator loosely wrapped in foil. This helps prevent moisture loss causing the stalks to become limp. Wrapping them tightly in an airtight

Plastic bag or wrap can also soften the stalks quickly. Wrapping loosely in foil reduces ethylene gas loss. It should remain fresh for about two weeks. To preserve for later use, here are some options from

National Center for Home Food Preservation at the University of Georgia.

- **To freeze rhubarb:** Choose firm, tender, well-colored stalks with good flavor and few fibers. Wash, trim and cut into lengths to fit the package. Heating rhubarb in boiling water for 1 minute and cooling promptly in cold water helps retain color and flavor.

- **Dry pack:** Pack either raw or preheated rhubarb tightly into containers without sugar. Leave headspace, seal and freeze.

- **Syrup pack:** Pack either raw or preheated rhubarb tightly into containers, cover with cold 40 percent syrup. Leave headspace, seal and freeze.

- **To can rhubarb:**
  - **Hot pack:** Select young, tender, well-colored stalks from the spring or late fall crop. Trim off leaves. Wash stalks and cut into ½ to 1-inch pieces. In a large saucepan add ½ cup sugar for each quart of rhubarb. Let stand until juice appears. Heat gently to boiling. Immediately, pack rhubarb mixture in hot jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids, Process in a Boiling Water Bath. Process Prints or Quarts for 15 minutes. If over 1000 feet process for 20 minutes.

If you have any questions concerning food, food preservation or food safety, be sure to call Cindy Williams on 785-863-2212. KSU has several publications with recipes on many products and how to preserve them. These publications are very educational and free. These publications are available at most extension offices, especially at the Meadowlark Extension Offices located in Oskaloosa, Holton and Seneca.