KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

May 15, 2026

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Insecticide Insurance?

Making the most of any field pass is good management. Why spend two passes doing what you can do in one? Its simple economics and economics are as important as ever.

Insecticide applications in corn and soybeans have always been one of 'competing' economic considerations. Is there value in them (there can be)? Should I try to combine it with an application pass to cut down on costs (makes sense…)? Will the optimum application window for insect pressure match when I'm already making a pass (sometimes…not always…)? Is an insecticide even needed? While there are no 'one size fits all' answers, one study from Ohio State University may help with the process of determining the need for insecticide insurance.

In it, Soybean and Small Grains Professor Dr. Laura Lindsey conducted two years of field trials (10 environments) looking at the value of foliar insecticide applications during the reproductive stage. Looking mainly at stink bugs and bean leaf beetles, her team found that even when combining species, treatment threshold levels were seldom reached. Insecticide treatment comparisons (no treatment, R3, and R5) also resulted in no yield response, affirming that preventative applications are of limited value.

Beyond economic considerations, Lindsey also noted other potential consequences to unnecessary applications, including potential increases in insecticide resistance (reducing the effectiveness of future applications) and the elimination of helpful prey insects (for example: reductions in lady beetle populations helping with aphid control). In addition, while soybeans don't require pollinator insects, there is some indication pollinators might be beneficial to helping increase seeds per pod counts and seed weight – potential *helps* to soybean yield.

While this research echoes the advice of many Extension Entomologists, they would *all* encourage scouting. It's not always an enjoyable in-season task, but sampling beyond field edges to get an accurate assessment of field wide insect pressure is key. Combined with treatment thresholds (the 2026 KSU Soybean Insect Management Guide has guidelines for bean leaf beetles, stink bugs, spider mites, etc…), in-season scouting is the best way to make sure an insecticide application – stand alone or in combination with another field pass – is more about efficacy than insurance.

Request a copy of the Soybean Insect Management Guide at any District Office, via e-mail (dhallaue@ksu.edu) or online at: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/soybean-insect-pest-management-2026_MF743.pdf .

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Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Early Castration Benefits

Spring branding and pasture turn-out have been happening or will happen very soon on cattle operations all across the Midwest. One of the common tasks to accomplish in this process is castration of bull calves. Everyone has their management approach to this procedure; either at birth, branding, weaning or later, but studies show benefits to early castration. One saying that has always stuck with me is "the longer they are attached, the more attached they are to them". Today let's look at the data that points to why this saying is a valid one.

Bulls get a bad rap on the ability to handle them. This is true, steers are generally easier to handle than bulls. Castration helps minimize aggressive behavior which eases handling stress and injury potential for people, as well as reducing the potential for damage to facilities.

An argument for keeping bull calves intact is for increased growth performance. While bulls may produce marginally higher yield in pounds, they also produce lower quality carcasses. Steers deposit intramuscular fat earlier and more evenly than bulls and that is particularly true in areas like the loin, where higher value cuts are sourced. Steer meat tends to be more tender when compared to finished bulls.

Beef Quality Assurance guidelines recommend castration as early in life as possible. Castration at birth is the gold standard, but preferably before 90 days of age has real benefits. The earlier in a calf's life that castration is done, the less stressful it is for the animal and the faster the recovery from lost production performance. Time-tested hormonal implants are an economical way to compensate for performance as well. Early castration also leads to healthier cattle as they move from the ranch to stocker operations and feedlots. These are all positives, from both a production perspective and an animal welfare perspective.

Research done by Dr. Hilton points out that the negative performance impacts of castration after 6 months of age never goes away. *("Castration of beef calves: What does the science say about timing and technique?")* Late castration can also be more time and labor intensive and carries higher injury risks for both cattle and cattlemen. Younger, smaller calves are easier to handle, and castration can often be done at birth or implemented alongside other management practices, like branding, tagging or vaccinations. Later castration not only carries higher infection risks, but it also impacts carcass quality down the road.

Another real factor is the economics of castration. The average cost of castration is approximately $5 per head. Work out of the University of Tennessee showed that over a ten-year period, the average reduction in per cwt price for bulls versus steers, ranged from $6.87 on four weights to just under $18 for eight hundred pounders. Other work has shown a discount in the $7-12/cwt range, so the price discount at the auction market is real. A simple way to increase market value is to steer calves, ideally early in life, and a very logical return on a $5 investment.

Adding all the benefits together of; safer handling, better health, reduced stress, offset in performance with implants, increased carcass value and marketing value, the choice to castrate earlier in life versus later seems to be a logical one when looking at the science.

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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

A Healthy Body Supports a Healthy Brain

As the Family and Community Wellness agent with K-State Research and Extension's Meadowlark District, I often partner with local organizations to promote health and well-being in our community. Currently, I am working with the Alzheimer's Association as a community educator, sharing information about Alzheimer's disease and brain health.

While the causes of Alzheimer's disease are still being studied and there is no cure, research shows there are steps we can take to care for our bodies in ways that support brain health. Although these steps cannot guarantee prevention of dementia, they can help reduce risk and support overall health.

The Alzheimer's Association outlines **10 healthy habits** that may promote better brain health. These include protecting your head protection, not smoking, staying physically active, managing diabetes, getting quality sleep, eating a healthy diet, challenging your mind, controlling blood pressure, continuing education or lifelong learning, and maintaining a healthy weight. Let's take a closer look at a few of these habits.

Eat for Your Brain

The *Healthy Brain, Healthy Body* fact sheet from K-State Research and Extension notes growing evidence that the gut acts like a "second brain." In addition to helping with digestion, it also affects mood and overall health. Eating a variety of nutrient-dense foods can support both gut and brain health.

Foods associated with brain health include green leafy vegetables, nuts, berries, beans, whole grains, fish, poultry, and olive oil. Try incorporating these foods into meals and snacks on a regular basis.

Get a Good Night's Sleep

Sleep plays an essential role in overall health, including heart and brain health. During sleep, the body processes the day's events and allows time for repair and renewal. Most adults should aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night, while children and teens need even more.

Establishing a consistent sleep routine can help. Try going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, sleeping in a dark, cool, and comfortable environment, and limiting alcohol before bedtime. Alcohol can interfere with rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which is important for brain restoration.

Challenge Your Brain

Keeping your brain active is another key component of brain health. Engaging in a variety of mentally stimulating activities helps keep the brain sharp and encourages new neural connections.
Try challenging your brain with more complex activities such as learning to play a musical instrument, studying a new language, taking a class, or expressing creativity through painting or other visual arts.

The heart and brain are closely connected, so caring for one supports the other. Small, healthy choices can add up over time and make a meaningful difference. It is never too late to start making decisions that support a healthier body and brain.

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

Small Hops for Bone Health

Did you play hopscotch or jump rope when you were a child? It turns out these might be even better for your health as an adult, than they were when you were young.

Regular physical activity will keep bones strong and slow the rate of bone loss, even if you have fragile bones or osteoporosis. Be leading an active lifestyle, you can significantly decrease your risk of falling and breaking a bone.

Weight-bearing exercise is anything that forces you to work against gravity and involves an impact with the floor or earth, requiring your feet and legs to support you. Some examples include brisk walking, hiking, jogging, marching, climbing stairs, weight training, dancing, yoga, and tennis. Gardening can be weight bearing if you carry a water can, walk in your yard, etc.

Another way to build stronger bones is to jump, stomp or hop. These activities jar your bones a little, sending a message that they need to get stronger. So, have a little fun and act like a child again!

A recent study, reported in the American Journal of Health Promotion, reveals that jumping 10 times/twice a day provides greater bone-building benefits than running or jogging. This is not recommended for anyone who has osteoporosis, but for those who want to be proactive with exercise, this is great news!

If hopping is too difficult, start with marching or doing heel drops. Make sure you warm up muscles first by walking for a bit or marching in place. Here are tips for adding easy weight-bearing moves to your day.

Marching with impact: This movement is basic marching where you push or stomp your feet on the ground.

Heel drop: Hold onto something about waist high for stability. Rise up on your toes, then drop your heels down abruptly.

Power Hop: You can hop on both legs or on one leg for maximum benefit. Hold onto something for stability if needed. Bend your knees for cushion when you land---never land on straight knees. You can do the hops quickly or rest between each hop. Start with 10 and work up to 20 hops twice daily.

Think about something you do everyday without even thinking about it. Could you do 10 heel drops or power hops right after you brush your teeth? This is an example of how you can form a new habit by linking it to something you already do automatically.