

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Can We Expect Much More?

While I wouldn't say it's uncommon to see brome grass heading in early May, I also wouldn't say it's ideal. Our weather roller coaster: warm and dry early, then a cold snap, and now moisture with cooler temperatures have kind of 'piled on' already stressed brome stands, with at least some stands exhibiting the beginning of heading – without attaining much height. That push to reproduction without much biomass could be a concern in some fields.

Grass tillers begin growth with their growing point developing from a dormant bud at or below ground level. As long as that growing point remains close to the ground and growth remains vegetative (not grazed too short/harvested and no stems are produced), the plant continues to produce leaves. On the other hand, if that tiller is triggered to elevate or enter reproduction, not only is the growing point exposed to potential removal by grazing, but once we get seedheads, production of vegetative tillers will be considerably reduced. Biomass accumulation at this point begins to flatten and plant height comes predominantly from stem elongation, a few tillers, and seedhead emergence.

What's that mean for grass production this year? In stands where growth is still vegetative, leaf number might still be on the increase, and we could continue to accumulate biomass. For those beginning to elongate and put up a seedhead, however, any increase in production is going to have to come from basal regrowth, which will be at least somewhat dependent on a combination of temperatures remaining cool and ample root/crown energy reserves required to send out new growth.

Bottom line: some of our cool season grass plants have already maximized leafy biomass production and it's unlikely we'll get a lot more from them until fall. Scout fields now to stay ahead of grazing pressure – and so you aren't surprised at harvest.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Replacement or Feeder Heifer?

Looking back on my article selection of recent months, it appears that the topic of the replacement heifer continues to come up. This is of industry interest as the national cowherd continues to dwindle and drought plagues much of the United States. We are reaching a window of opportunity for those early spring bred heifers to conduct a pregnancy diagnosis and convert open replacements into feeder heifers. Let's jump in and look at the benefits of this approach.

Pregnancy can be diagnosed by palpation at 60 days, by ultrasound as early as 30 days and blood testing kits as early as 28 days of pregnancy. Early culling of open breeding heifers has several benefits to the cow-calf operational bottom line. In addition to reducing grazing pressure on pastures there are several other long-term benefits to the cowherd.

Different percent of mature body weight targets for heifers at breeding, range from 55 to 65% depending on the producer's management system. Regardless of this initial target weight, if the females have a developed and functioning reproductive tract, the yearling heifer is at the easiest point in her life to conceive. Typically, it is recommended to have a short breeding season of 45 to 60 days to challenge heifers to conceive early. For the females that don't, there are benefits of converting them from replacement females to feeder heifers.

Improving the long-term reproductive performance of the cowherd is one of the major benefits. Reproductive traits are generally low in heritability; however, culling open heifers will improve the genetic potential for reproductive performance in the cowherd by eliminating sub-fertile heifers. Bred females and increasing percent of calf crop weaned is a critical economic factor in cow/calf operations.

Culling open heifers early yields the potential for them to be marketed as yearlings. At a younger age going on feed, they still have the potential to finish out in the young maturity group and have a better chance of harvesting in the Choice or Prime quality grade. If the operation doesn't finish cattle, these feeder type heifers are at a weight that has value in the auction market venues as well.

It is good management practice to breed heifers to calve prior to the mature cow herd. This allows more management to be focused on the heifer calving season and it's equally important to give them a little extra time to breed back and calve on schedule the following year. This can also allow forming calving groups based upon gestational stage and management of these groups.

One counter argument that has merit is that later bred females can be an equally important revenue stream and potentially gives more return on the heifer development cost. That is a valid argument but may not be creating the best cow for the herd, long-term. A wealth of research has shown that early calving heifers who persist in the herd past 5-6 years are the profit makers.

Having said all of this, be intentional in challenging the replacement heifer and have a plan to hold her accountable. Cull opens (or alternatively sell later bred) as soon as practical to save on feed bills, maximizing value capture and improve the cow herd fertility. Unfortunately, long-range forecast for summer moisture doesn't seem optimistic, so have a plan now to make culling decisions quickly.

May 8, 2026

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

No news article this week.

May 8, 2026

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Dining with Diabetes Program Coming to Valley Falls in June

Living with diabetes—or supporting someone who is—can make everyday food and lifestyle choices feel overwhelming. About one in nine adults in Kansas have been diagnosed with diabetes, a chronic disease characterized by elevated blood sugar (blood glucose). Knowing where to start and how to take meaningful steps to manage type 2 diabetes can feel challenging.

Beginning June 11, the Dining with Diabetes program will be offered in Valley Falls. Dining with Diabetes is a nationally recognized Extension program from K-State Extension designed to support the health and wellness of Kansans with prediabetes or type 2 diabetes. The program is open to adults with diabetes or prediabetes, as well as family members and caregivers who want to learn how to better support healthy lifestyle changes.

The program consists of four interactive sessions that cover diabetes fundamentals, meal planning, reading food labels, understanding portion sizes, and using the Diabetes Plate Method to create balanced meals. Each class also includes food demonstrations and opportunities to sample simple, nutritious recipes that participants can prepare at home.

Dining with Diabetes has been offered previously in the Meadowlark Extension District and has received positive feedback from participants who appreciated the interactive, hands-on learning approach. In addition to nutrition education, the program emphasizes small, realistic changes that can help reduce the health risks associated with diabetes and support long-term success.

Classes in Valley Falls will begin in June, with space limited to ensure a comfortable learning environment.

For more information or to register, community members are encouraged to contact the Meadowlark Extension District or reach out directly to Teresa Hatfield at the Meadowlark Extension office at 785-364-4125 or thatfield@ksu.edu.

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

No news article this week.