

October 9, 2026

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

2026 Fall Armyworm Trapping (Final?) Update

Last year at this time, moth numbers in our fall armyworm traps had dropped significantly after a summer of up and down numbers that mirrored the significant feeding we saw across the area. The numbers *did*, however, spike at season's end and while they didn't cause much additional feeding injury, they do underscore two things about this pest:

- 1) They aren't leaving until after frost
- 2) Monitoring is still encouraged

Fall Armyworms aren't known to overwinter in Kansas. The temperatures we see in winter are too low for their life stages to survive. Once we get freezing temperatures, they're not likely to be an issue for us. While we're inching closer to those temperatures every day – we're not there yet and that means the presence of fall armyworm and feeding from them is *still* possible. With any luck it won't be at significant levels – and moth trap numbers would support this - but it doesn't mean you won't find them or that isolated spots wouldn't see feeding.

Other Armyworm species *do* overwinter here and can sometimes be found feeding on vegetation late into the season. They're looking for green plant material and will continue their life cycle as long as temperatures (typically above the low 40's) are conducive.

With the ample regrowth many of our cool season grasses have exhibited during the latter part of the growing season, combined with lower feeding pressure than in recent years, it might be tempting to stop scouting. In most cases, that will likely be okay, with a couple of exceptions.

Also keep an eye on heavily grazed or late harvested stands with limited regrowth. These stands need good regrowth prior to dormancy and would suffer the most if feeding *does* occur.

Newly seeded crops should also be a focus. New alfalfa or grass seedings or newly established cover crops all need an opportunity to develop a root system. The young, tender growth in these types of stands won't tolerate feeding nearly as well as well-established stands.

Are we out of the woods for this year? We're still catching fall armyworm moths in our traps and other armyworm species are present as well – so not fully. That said, you can refocus the bulk of scouting efforts on new seedings or stands recovering from late haying or grazing.

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Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Nitrates and Prussic Acid

Fall is finally in the air and officially on the calendar! I've pulled my vests out of the closet, appreciate the freshness of mornings/evenings and enjoy fall colors dotting the landscape. Now is a perfect time to discuss the subject of Nitrates and Prussic Acid in forage crops, as it applies to the grazing animal.

If you've grazed livestock at all, you know those two terms can bring fear and anxiety, especially in times of plant stress - like dry weather and frost events. Although they are not specifically related to each other and have different management approaches, both can cause serious issues in livestock including reduced performance, abortions and death. The causative effect is due to the reduced oxygen carrying capacity of red blood cells in both cases. Prussic Acid is most often discussed in sorghums, Sudan grasses and the hybrids of those two. Nitrates may accumulate in these annual plants but can accumulate in a wide range of both cultivated and wild species.

Prussic acid is likely the more toxic issue, but probably easier to manage. Prussic acid, also known as Hydrocyanic acid or hydrogen cyanide (HCN), is a compound that is released when the cells of plant species mentioned burst under stressful conditions. The highest management intensive times are: 1) during new plant growth - such as after planting, tillers after harvest or flush of growth following rain and 2) after a killing frost. Management for new growth should allow the plant to regrow to a height of 18-24 inches, as the concentrations tend to dilute to safe levels. Waiting a week after a killing frost should nearly completely remove prussic acid concerns, as hydrogen cyanide dissipates in dead plant tissues in that length of time.

Nitrate poisoning is a bit misleading, as it is actually nitrites within the rumen causing issues. Many more factors come into play with nitrates, but stressed plants are still the indicator. As adequate to excessive soil nitrogen is available, and stunted plants are unable to convert nitrates to plant proteins, nitrates will accumulate in the forage plant. This starts in the lower plant portions but can be present throughout. The same two major time periods mentioned for HCN are also key for nitrates, but any condition that prevents normal healthy growth is suspect. Unlike prussic acid, once accumulated in a plant, nitrates will not dissipate after plant death.

Testing is always the best idea to know exactly where these levels are within plants. If nitrate levels are found to be high in a plant, there are some management options. First, if the plant can be ensiled, the ensiling process will reduce nitrates - somewhere in the neighborhood of half. Secondly, probably the most applicable, is to dilute high nitrate feed with safe feed, to reduce the total nitrate concentration. Feeding to different classes of livestock is also an option, as some animals can tolerate nitrates better. Finally, do not use the feed!

Additional information on both issues can be found in KSRE publications: [MF3040](#), [MF3244](#) and [S115](#). Please reach out to your local Extension office for additional information and support as well.

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Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Fall Blooms on Spring Flowering Plants

Over the past couple weeks, many people have noticed plants that are blooming out of season. Crabapples and lilacs that normally flower in the spring are starting to bloom. You may be wondering: why did this happen, and will my plant still bloom in the spring?

This past summer saw some extreme heat. We had several weeks with 90 to 100 degree F heat that felt relentless. Our plants felt the heat too. Many plants, although they had sufficient water from our rainy weather, still felt the heat stress. Some entered dormancy to avoid trying to grow in such high temperatures.

Now our weather has been unusually warm this last month. In mid-September some days saw highs in the low 70s, while other days reached upper 80s to low 90s. These unseasonably warm fall days and the temperature fluctuations, combined with all the rain, can confuse plants, especially if they had a hard summer. They interpret their intense stress from the heat similar to the way they experience their winter dormancy. When followed by weather that mimics spring, it is easy for these plants to think it might actually be spring.

This likely means fewer blooms next fall. Many of our plants put new buds on their old growth in the summer after they finish their spring bloom. These buds should stay dormant until the following spring and pop open when the weather warms up in March or April. In these cases, plants will not have enough time to put new buds on before winter to give off a nice full bloom in the spring.

The best course of action to support your plants is to ensure they have enough water. Continue to provide water during dry weeks while soil temperatures are above 40 degrees F. This can help ease their stress so that they are able to survive the winter and thrive in the spring.

October 9, 2026

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Medicare Statements Aren't Trash

If you are enrolled in Original Medicare, you should receive a Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) every three months. This is an important document that should not be automatically discarded. Reviewing your MSN can help you identify billing errors and even detect potential Medicare fraud or abuse.

What Is a Medicare Summary Notice?

The MSN summarizes the health care services and supplies billed to Medicare on your behalf during the previous several months. This may include visits to physicians, services provided by nurse practitioners, radiology services such as MRI interpretations, durable medical equipment, laboratory tests, medical procedures, and hospital stays.

The MSN is not a bill. Instead, it explains whether Medicare approved or denied each claim and how much Medicare paid. If a claim is denied, it does not automatically mean that you are responsible for paying the bill. The notice also explains your appeal rights and provides instructions on how to file and appeal if necessary.

Why Should You Review Your MSN?

Your Medicare Summary Notice is an important tool for protecting both your finances and your health. Many people glance at their statements but do not take the time to review them carefully. Just as you would check your credit card statement for inaccurate charges, you should examine your MSN for anything that does not look right.

Taking a few extra minutes to review your MSN could help prevent Medicare fraud, identify billing errors, and save you money.

If you find information you do not recognize, contact your health care provider first to determine whether an error has occurred. You may not recognize a procedure, provider name, or service date. Honest mistakes happen, and many issues can be resolved with a simple phone call.

However, if your concerns are not addressed, do not ignore them. Contact your local Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK) program or Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP). Trained counselors and volunteers can help answer your questions, review your Medicare statements, assist with appeals, and connect you with the appropriate agencies if fraud or abuse is suspected.

Watch for These Red Flags

When reviewing your Medicare Summary Notice, look carefully for:

- Services you never received
- Medical equipment you did not order
- Appointments on dates when you were not seen
- Duplicate claims for the same service
- Claims for diabetic supplies you did not receive
- Hospice services you did not use
- Glucose monitors you did not order
- Urinary catheters you did not receive
- Genetic testing you did not request
- Telehealth, telephone, or virtual visits you did not have

Protect Your Medicare Benefits

Reviewing your Medicare Summary Notice is important not only for your finances but also for your health. Incorrect information about tests, procedures, or equipment could affect future medical decisions and services. By reviewing your MSN regularly, you can help ensure that your Medicare record is accurate and that your benefits are protected.

If you have questions about your Medicare Summary Notice, contact your local SHICK counselor. In Jackson, Jefferson, and Nemaha counties, call K-State Research and Extension Meadowlark District at **785-364-4125** for assistance.

October 9, 2026

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

So, Which Potato to Buy?

There are so many varieties of potatoes in the grocery store, so how do you choose which potato to buy? While many shoppers choose potatoes based on personal preference, there are some guidelines to help you choose the right potato for the right recipe.

Potato preparation is based on two quality characteristics, starch and moisture content. These two components can determine the best way to cook them.

High starch/low moisture—The russet potato fits in this category. The high solids content yields a dry, fluff, mealy texture well suited for baking, mashing, frying, or pureeing. They also make good French fries.

Low to medium starch/high to medium moisture—Red and yellow potatoes fit in this category. They have a waxy texture which makes them good for boiling, steaming, braising, stewing, in salads, or any other recipe where potatoes need to remain intact. They don't absorb much water during cooking, so they have a smooth, creamy texture.

Here are some common varieties and their uses:

- **Russet**---baking, mashing, frying, roasting
- **Whites**---boiling, steaming, mashing, baking roasting and in casseroles (scaloped and au gratin), soups and salads.
- **Reds**---Boiling, roasting, steaming and in casseroles (scaloped and au gratin), soups and salads.
- **Yellows**---baking, boiling, mashing or roasting.
- **Blue/purple**---bake or mash, French fries, steam, or boil.
- **Fingerlings**---steam, bake, or boil; also good in salads.

Hope this gives you some better insight as to the variety of potatoes that are available and how best to use them. For more information and other questions, call 785-863-2212.