

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

In-Field Evaluations

Harvest: that awesome time of year when we get to evaluate all our 'inputs' to produce a crop by seeing the outcome in hard numbers (yield). If you tried a new product or practice this season, it's an opportunity to see in field performance. As you evaluate, do so with some critical thinking about why you may – or may not - be seeing a response. Often, that means understanding variability and the role it plays in the results.

Variability often comes in one of two categories: random field variability and between-treatment variability. Field variability we're familiar with. Soil types, previous use, etc... all combine to make a farm that *seems* uniform exhibit greater variability than we might think.

Between-treatment variability is what we're evaluating: is there a difference in yield between the product or practice applied. Together, they contribute to potential yield 'differences' and are what we have to 'sort through' to see if the difference is significant or not.

To sort through the in-field variability, look at layout. Did it cross previous management zones or soil types? Does strip one exhibit the same level of variability of strip two? Looking at previous yield history is a great first place to start looking for those variable areas. Keep in mind: the best results will come from replicated plots. Single strip layouts are more difficult to get significant results from and unless the farm is very consistent, comparing one side of the farm to the other can be difficult at best.

Look next at within the experiment results variability. If you see a big bump in one strip, but not others or differences in one part of the field but not the majority of the farm, is it consistent enough to consider the differences significant? Consider variability in non-treatment areas as well. The greater the variability across that strip often means greater yield bumps are needed from the treatment strips before they would be considered (statistically) significant.

Finally, try it again. Particularly in cases where a farm was split or the comparison was a single side by side comparison, it's good to look at multiple years or multiple farms. A 2023 summary of trials with an input product showed the same result 96 percent of the time. That's likely enough to help guide most decisions, but it doesn't hurt to try it again. There might be specific farms or soil types where a response *is* seen or reasons the product *didn't* work that need to be further evaluated. Giving a product a second try is seldom a bad idea.

September 11, 2026

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Taking The Last Bite

Rainfall has varied widely this year, with drastic changes noted just a few miles apart. The eastern part of the state has received good rainfall, while west continues to deal with various levels of drought. Approaching the end of the growing season, consideration needs to be given to how much can we graze grass plants, particularly in those areas where rainfall has created lush fall growth on cool season grass. Let's see if we can find the time when it is appropriate to take the last bite.

Pastures often contain a variety of cool-season and warm-season grasses, and these grasses have markedly different grow patterns. Cool-season grass has two growing seasons, one in early spring and another in early fall. We are currently in the window of fall growth commonly referred to as the fall "green up." Conversely, warm-season grasses grow later in the season during the summer and do not get another green up in fall. Knowing these growth patterns and having the ability to mix in annual plants, crop residues and stored forages; allows the opportunity to give rest to plants going into winter.

It is very tempting to graze fresh, green cool season grasses now. However, caution should be taken to not overgraze this green-up, because the cool-season grasses are initiating new shoots. During the fall green-up, cool-season grasses are storing energy reserves to ensure health through the dormant season and vigor next spring when the growing season starts again.

In addition, many of these fall-initiated shoots will overwinter and begin growing again next year. If these shoots are overgrazed, the growing point can be removed and will not continue to grow next season creating thin and less thrifty stands next season. Cool-season grasses should not be grazed shorter than four to six inches of plant height. Another benefit of leaving sufficient plant height into the dormant season is for the soil. Leaving this residue will protect the soil surface from erosion and optimize snow capture.

So, when is the right time for the grazing animal to take the last bite? Simply using the calendar and average frost dates, says now is the window to consider removing animals from pastures to allow the solar panels (leaves) to collect sunlight energy and send carbohydrate reserves into the plant batteries (roots). Since no year is "average" it is best to evaluate rainfall, plant growth, projected temperatures and balance other available forage in your situation. Don't forget that grass can be utilized after photosynthesis has been shut down by a killing frost, so grazing later into fall/winter is not "wasting grass".

The key question for many producers is whether to use growth this fall or leave it for later. Grazing now can relieve pressure on other feed sources, but it comes with trade-offs. Grass plants need time in the fall to rebuild root reserves and set buds for spring growth. Over-utilization in September or October can weaken stands and reduce vigor next year.

September 11, 2026

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Reseeding your cool season grass

If you have a cool season grass in your lawn, such as tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass, you may be wondering when and how to overseed your lawn this fall. There are several key things to consider for a successful overseeding of your lawn: timing, soil, seeds, and moisture.

Normally for a cool season grass, it is recommended that you oversee early to mid-September. However, our hot weather may have deterred you from starting the overseeding process. Cool season grass, as the name suggests, does not thrive in high temperatures. If you already put down seed, be sure to water often. If you have not yet overseeded the lawn, wait until the hot weather subsides. This may mean overseeding in mid to late September.

The next concern is your soil. While you need good seed to soil contact, the seed only needs to be 1/8 to 1/4 inch deep. A rake is usually sufficient to disturb the soil enough for overseeding. If the soil is compacted, consider aerating the soil before germinating. This is best done with a core aerator that pulls plugs of soil out of the ground. This will also help create better seed to soil contact.

You will also want to ensure that the soil has adequate nutrient levels, specifically for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. If you have not done a soil test within the last few years, you can test for these nutrients through your local extension office. If your lawn is not routinely fertilized, it is usually safe to assume that you need more of all three nutrients. You can use a lawn starter fertilizer and apply at the rates the fertilizer suggests on the label. If your lawn has sufficient phosphorus and potassium, you will still want to add nitrogen. A slow-release nitrogen fertilizer is best to lower the risk of burning young, tender grass.

Once you have the soil and timing right, you need to put down seed at the proper rate. For tall fescue, use around 6-8 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet for establishing a new lawn. If you are using Kentucky bluegrass, aim for closer to 3 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet. For overseeding a thin lawn, use about half those rates. Adding too much seed results in overcrowding, which leads to a lawn that is more susceptible to disease and pest damage.

After seeding, it is critical that the lawn have sufficient water for germination. In hot weather, it may need watering two to three times a day to promote better germination rates. This moisture is critical as the grass germinates. Newly germinated grass should also not dry out until the seedlings establish more robust root systems. If you do not know if your newly sprouted grass needs water, you can do a simple test. Push down on the grass and see if the blades spring back up quickly. If they do not, the lawn needs water.

If you have any questions about this process, reach out to your local extension office for more information.

September 11, 2026

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Medicare Plan Changes are Coming

Medicare Open Enrollment is just around the corner, running from October 15 through December 7, 2026. This annual enrollment period gives Medicare beneficiaries the opportunity to review and make changes to their Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage or Medicare Advantage (Part C) plans for the coming year.

It is important to note that Open Enrollment is not a guaranteed time to change a Medigap (Medicare Supplement) policy. However, it is an excellent time to evaluate your current Medicare Part D or Medicare Advantage Plan coverage and determine whether changes could help reduce your costs or better meet your healthcare needs.

Medicare beneficiaries are encouraged to review their coverage annually and compare available plans. Each year, plans can change their monthly premiums, annual deductibles, copayments, coinsurance amounts, provider networks, and the medications they cover. Even if you have been satisfied with your current plan, taking time to compare options can help ensure you continue to receive the best value.

By September 30, beneficiaries should receive their plan's **Annual Notice of Change (ANOC)**. This document outlines any changes that will take effect on January 1, 2027, and can provide valuable information when comparing coverage options.

Several factors can affect the amount you pay for prescription medications. The maximum Medicare Part D deductible is expected to increase from \$615 in 2026 to \$700 in 2027. In addition, the annual out-of-pocket spending cap for prescription drugs is projected to rise from \$2,100 in 2026 to \$2,400 in 2027.

More information about available plans will become available as the new Medicare & You handbook arrives later this month. This publication includes information about Medicare Part D prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage plans available in your service area. Keep in mind that plan availability varies by ZIP code, and not all Medicare Advantage plans are offered in every Kansas community.

Beneficiaries can compare plans using the Medicare Plan Finder tool at [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov). The Plan Finder allows beneficiaries to compare costs and coverage based on the specific medications they take and the pharmacies they prefer to use. Because healthcare needs differ from person to person, the best plan for one individual may not be the best choice for a spouse, family member, or friend.

When comparing plans, be sure to consider:

- Monthly premiums
- Annual deductibles
- Drug coverage
- Preferred pharmacy options
- Provider networks for Medicare Advantage plans
- Estimated total annual costs

If you would like assistance reviewing your Medicare options, contact the Meadowlark Extension District at 785-364-4125 to schedule a free appointment with a SHICK counselor. We provide unbiased Medicare counseling to help you make informed decisions about your coverage. We do not sell insurance or endorse specific plans.

Taking time to review your Medicare coverage each year can help ensure you have the plan that best fits your health needs and budget for the year ahead.

September 11, 2026

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

No news this week.