

September 18, 2026

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District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

A Year for Green Stems?

Soybean drydown is occurring in rapid fashion, but if you look at fields and note mature brown pods while stems are still green, you may be seeing the effects of an issue known as green stem syndrome. While common in a few plants along field edges or randomly scattered throughout a stand, it can also affect large areas of a farm and make harvest a challenge.

Pinpointing the 'absolute' cause of green stem syndrome is difficult. In short, as the plant dries down naturally, nutrients in soybean plant vegetative tissue is shipped to the developing seed. If there isn't enough developing seed to absorb it all, it remains in stems (and maybe leaves as well), beyond the plant's 'normal' maturity. While not always a yield robber, it *can* reduce harvest efficiency and *potentially* contribute to declining seed quality/dockage as well.

Green stem syndrome is often associated with any factor that might result in less grain (sink) tissue than plant (source) tissue. They might include:

- Disease: Bean Pod Mottle Virus, transmitted by the bean leaf beetle could reduce seed set.
- Insect: stinkbug feeding on pods/seeds can reduce seed load
- Genetics: plants predisposed to producing excess pods that might not always produce seed
- Fungicide: the delayed senescence sometimes associated with applications might be misidentified as green stem
- Weather: If we produce a large plant but weather inhibits pod set or fill, plants may not dry down normally

The best solution for green stem: reduce the stressors contributing to it. Since that's not always possible, all we can do now is try to understand *why* it occurred as we plan for next season and be aware that harvest could be slowed if green tissue remains.

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Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Grazing Sprouted Corn

Fall harvest was well underway when the latest round of rainfall arrived this week. Very likely this fall will be no different from most, when moisture arrives after harvest, creating the question about grazing sprouted corn left in the field. This situation can be managed if a few basic risks and principles are understood prior to turning the grazing animal out on corn residue.

A few sprouted kernels are common every year and not necessarily a problem, even at high levels. The first step is to assess the amount of ear drop and residue conditions. Before turning livestock out, walk the field to estimate ear drop per acre. If there are more than 15 ears total in three 100-ft rows, management to reduce grain intake by the animal is needed to prevent acidosis.

Nitrate accumulation is the primary concern with sprouted corn. Collect representative samples and test for nitrate concentration before grazing. Random, representative sampling by crop field will be important. Clip plants at ground level, placing plants in a bag. If there are plants taller than eight to ten inches, consider testing those separately as nitrates tend to accumulate in the lower portion of the plant. Remove air, seal, freeze, and send promptly to a commercial laboratory for analysis. Your local Extension office should be able to assist with sampling and testing.

If the laboratory analysis indicates the presence of nitrates, keep the following management approaches in mind. Adapt animals gradually by limiting initial access or feeding a palatable feed source, such as quality dry hay, to reduce intake of high nitrate corn sprouts. Fill up the rumen before grazing. Even if nitrate levels are low, ensure animals are not hungry when turned out. Feed hay first to prevent rapid consumption of sprouts. Timing does matter, so turn livestock out after noon, once filled up on hay. This timing allows observation during daylight hours and reduces risk of overconsumption. Feeding 2 to 5 pounds of grain or by-product dilutes the amount of nitrate in the total ration and provides the energy necessary for bacteria to quickly convert nitrite to ammonia.

Having the ability to strip graze or limit access to areas with higher levels of regrowth is an effective management approach as well. This not only limits the issues associated with nitrates but can allow for better utilization of the crop residues as well. Don't forget about water quality and quantity in this discussion. Frequent intake of high-quality water is important for optimal rumen fermentation. Remember that freezing temperatures do not reduce nitrate levels in plants, so this could be an issue even after a killing frost.

The take home message is that it's essential to evaluate corn fields before grazing, test for nitrates, and manage turnout carefully. These steps will help minimize risk while making effective use of valuable fall residue. Reference the K-State publication [Nitrate Toxicity MF3029](#) to learn more about this topic.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Prepare your soil for spring!

Although our weather still feels like summer, the end of the growing season is right around the corner. As the growing season for many gardens comes to a close, it is a perfect time to evaluate and improve your soil health. Your garden will thank you in the spring! The first step in evaluating your soil health is to do a soil test, especially if you have not done one in the past two years. Performing the standard gardener soil test through K-State can tell you about your soils' pH, organic matter, phosphorus, potassium, and nitrates. With this information you can make adjustments that optimize your soil for plant growth.

When evaluating soil health, one of the first things to look at is the pH. Soil that is too acidic or too basic can wreak havoc on your garden. Even if you have sufficient nutrients, an extreme pH level will essentially lock those nutrients in place, making them inaccessible to plants. While not all plants require the same pH range to thrive most, vegetables and ornamentals will grow well with a pH somewhere between 6.0 and 7.0. If your soil test indicates that your pH is too high, you can incorporate sulfur to lower it. If your soil pH is too low, you can incorporate lime to raise it. In Northeast Kansas, many gardeners have slightly basic soils (a pH just above 7.0) and need to incorporate sulfur into their garden.

Adding lime or sulfur to your soil, however, will not alter the pH overnight. In fact, it can take over a year for these amendments to fully react with your soil and alter your pH. Rather than waiting until spring to mess with your soil pH, make those changes now so that the amendments have time to react with the soil before your next spring planting.

Next you want to look at your organic matter content. Organic matter refers to decaying plant materials or animal waste, which can offer numerous benefits. Beyond providing nutrients, it can improve the soil structure, increase water infiltration and retention, and increase the amount of nutrients available to your plants. If you have low organic matter content, consider applying a thin layer of organic matter to your garden in the fall. This will allow it to break down and incorporate into your soil over the winter. It is important to note that not all compost is equal. Depending on the source of decomposing matter, it can alter your pH or have high amounts of nutrients your soil already contains. Make sure you are adding organic matter that is suited for your soil.

Once you have added any pH amendments and organic matter, cover your soil for the winter. You can do this either with mulch or cover crops. Bare soil is prone to erosion, nutrient leeching, and damages the soil structure. Additionally, both cover crops and mulch will provide additional organic matter to your soil.

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Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

No news this week.

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

What is Alpha-gal Allergy?

The next time you work outside or do outdoor recreation, be aware of ticks and protect yourself from tick bites. The Lone Star tick has been linked to causing allergic reactions after eating red meat.

The Lone Star tick is a vector that can spread disease. Mosquitos and fleas are other insects that spread disease. The Alpha-gal molecule is carried in the saliva of the Lone Star tick. People bit by this tick can become sensitive and produce the immunoglobulin E (IgE) galactose. Unlike typical food allergies, which is a reaction to protein, this is reaction to the carbohydrate galactose- α -1, 3-galactose. This carbohydrate is found in most mammals, such as red meat animals. It can also be in products made from mammals. It is not found in poultry or fish.

Symptoms include rash, hives, difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure, dizziness, fainting, nausea, and severe stomach pain. These symptoms can occur 3-6 hours after eating red meat.

The Alpha-gal allergy can be severe, and potentially life-threatening. See a healthcare provider immediately for care.