D's Notes
05/25/26

Women in Agriculture

On Thursday, June 4th, at 5:00 pm, Women in Agriculture will be held at Elk Plaza, 203 N. West Street, Hanston. Hodgeman County Soil Conservation District, Hodgeman County Farm Bureau, and Hodgeman County Extension are sponsoring an evening together for the women of the county.

Racheal Clews, KSU Area Family and Consumer Science Specialist, will be speaking on "Mental Health in Agriculture."

Event will include vendors and door prizes. Main dish and drinks are provided. If your last name starts with *A-M*, please bring a side dish. If your last name starts with *N-Z*, please bring a dessert. Bring a friend and join us.

Kansas beef takes center stage during grilling season

Consider this: The sizzle of steak hitting the grill may be one of the most recognizable sounds of summer, and for Kansas beef producers, it also signals one of the busiest times of the year.

From backyard grills to barbecue smokers, warmer temperatures and summer gatherings traditionally drive increased beef sales beginning around Memorial Day. "(Generally, there are) two different seasons; grilling season and non-grilling season," said Erin Beyer, a Kansas State University Extension meat science expert.

Beyer said grilling season typically begins around Memorial Day and continues through Labor Day as consumers spend more time cooking outdoors.

"Beef sales really increase starting at Memorial Day, and that is due to cooking outside," she said.

Kansas producers play a major role in meeting that seasonal demand. "The beef producers in this state contribute massively to the overall economy," Beyer said. According to Beyer, Kansas is home to more than 26,000 beef producers, contributing more than $11 billion in economic impact.

While such traditional cuts as ribeye and strip steaks remain popular during grilling season, Beyer encourages consumers to explore other options on the beef carcass.

"Maybe this month, challenge yourself to get out there and try a new cut of beef that maybe you haven't tried before," she said. Cuts such as the culotte, also known as picanha, flat iron and Denver steak can provide flavorful and often more economical grilling options.

Grilling Safety

As outdoor cooking increases, Beyer said food safety should remain the top priority.

"My number one tip always is to use a food thermometer," Beyer said. For whole muscle beef cuts, USDA recommends cooking to an internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit, which corresponds to a medium-rare degree of doneness.

Beyer also emphasized preventing cross-contamination during food preparation. "Minimizing cross-contamination, washing hands and thermometer usage are my top tips for keeping everyone safe this summer," she said.

Cooking Quality

For consumers aiming to improve steak quality on the grill, Beyer said proper cooking techniques can make a significant difference. “The next most important decision you can make is how you cook it,” she said.

Beyer recommends removing steaks from the grill slightly before the desired final temperature, as internal temperatures can continue rising to 15 degrees after cooking. “If you are going for that medium-rare degree of doneness, you’re not pulling it from the grill at 145; (rather) you need to pull it around 120 degrees,” she said.

Beyer also encourages consumers to understand the difference between grilling and barbecuing, noting the two methods to use very different cooking styles. “Low and slow is barbecue,” she said. “Grilling is going to be that direct heat source right underneath that meat product, and it cooks very quickly.”

Grillin’ and Chillin’? Remember food safety, says K-State expert

Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee says food safety needs to be part of summer parties, especially when those get-togethers involve grilling food outdoors.

“To start with,” she said, “wash your hands. That’s the No. 1 step before you start handling any food, and then wash them again after you’ve handled any kind of raw meat.”

Much like cooking food indoors, home chefs need to keep a food thermometer close at hand, Blakeslee said. For meat, there are three temperatures that consumers should store to memory: 1. 145 degrees Fahrenheit for steaks, roasts, chops, fish and other whole cuts of meat. 2. 160 F for ground meat, including beef, pork and lamb. 3. 165 F for all types of poultry.

Those temperatures include products that are smoked, cooked on a grill or indoors. The recommended temperatures relate to the internal temperature of the meat. “Without a food thermometer, it’s very subjective” as to whether the meat is cooked properly, Blakeslee said. Judging doneness by color or pressing the meat with your finger are also subjective, she noted. To more accurately measure for doneness, insert the tip of the thermometer into the center of the meat. With a digital thermometer, the temperature sensor is normally in the tip, so those can be inserted into the top of the meat product.

“But the ideal way to do it – like with a hamburger – is to insert it from the side,” Blakeslee said. “That is the best way to reach the center of the product.” A thermometer with a dial display is another option. “If you look on the stem of a dial face thermometer, there should be a dimple, about halfway up the stem. Insert this type of thermometer into the food so that the little dimple gets into the meat product to get an accurate measurement.”

Some other food safety tips that Blakeslee offered:

Keep meat cold until you’re ready to use it

Resist the temptation to let meat sit on a counter for long periods of time. “You could let it warm up a little bit (before cooking) – about 30 minutes. But please refrain from letting it sit out for hours. That invites any bacteria that could be on the meat to start growing, and cooking may not destroy all of the bacteria.”

Freeze meat that won’t be used soon after you buy it

If planning an event, consider buying meat 2-3 days before cooking it. Otherwise, Blakeslee said, “you need to freeze it.”

Frozen meat is best thawed in the refrigerator, not on a countertop. “Plan ahead for thawing,” Blakeslee said. “The amount of thawing time you’ll need depends on the size of your meat product.” Steaks can typically be thawed in a refrigerator in 24 hours. A brisket might take 3-4 days.

Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold

Side dishes are usually cold foods; keep them in a refrigerator until you're ready to serve them. Ice chests are handy for chilling side dishes. Cold foods should be kept at 40 F or lower, while hot foods should be kept at 140 F or higher.

Store food and eat leftovers promptly

Store food within 1-2 hours of serving them. Foods should be divided into shallow containers and placed in the refrigerator. "Today's refrigerators are very efficient, so you do not need to set them on the counter until they cool," Blakeslee said. Leftovers should be eaten within 3-4 days, otherwise transferred to the freezer for later use. "We all need to work better at reducing food waste," she said. "One way to do that is managing leftovers. Leftovers are great; they make an easy lunch or quick supper, or you can re-purpose them into a completely different meal."

'Give Mayo a Break'

Blakeslee said commercial mayonnaise often gets a bad rap for being a food safety concern, but the popular dressing is high in acid and can fend for itself. Homemade mayonnaise has an increased risk of *Salmonella* from raw shell eggs. If making homemade mayonnaise, use pasteurized eggs and keep it refrigerated.

"Commercial mayonnaise is not the problem," Blakeslee said. "It's what you mix into the mayonnaise that can be the problem. Cooked potatoes, hard boiled eggs…those are the ingredients that need refrigeration to reduce food safety risks.

"The mayonnaise is just holding the mixture together and adds flavor," she adds. "So, give mayonnaise a break. It's how you handle the rest of the ingredients in the potato salad that really matters."

Farm safety reminders become critical as school lets out

As the school year ends and children spend more time around the farm this summer, a Kansas State University safety expert is encouraging families to review safety practices for all ages. From toddlers to teenagers, experts say every stage of childhood brings unique safety considerations to agricultural environments.

"Growing up on a farm can be a great experience," said Tawnie Larson, program manager for the Kansas Agriculture Safety and Health program at K-State. Larson said farm life helps teach responsibility, work ethic and independence at an early age.

"A lot of farm kids are really prepared to go into the workforce because they've been out there and know the responsibilities it takes," she said.

Larson noted that agriculture is an entirely different home environment than anything else. "Agriculture is one of the only industries where we live and work in the same place," Larson said. Because of that, children are often exposed to equipment, livestock and other workplace hazards from an early age.

For babies and young children, Larson said hearing protection and limiting exposure to machinery are important considerations. "Hearing is a big one," she said. "Even short bursts of loud noise can affect their fragile ears and auditory systems."

Larson also encouraged parents to create designated safe play areas for toddlers and younger children that are separated from equipment and active workspaces. "It's important to create a safe play area on the farm for kids," Larson said.

She also emphasized that grain bins and grain carts should never be treated as play areas. "Allowing kids to play in grain kind of sets up an unsafe message that it's okay to play in grain, and it really is never okay," Larson said.

As children grow older and begin helping more with farm work, Larson said proper training becomes increasingly important. "We do have a youth tractor and machinery training program through K-State Extension," she said. Larson added that ATV and UTV safety training opportunities are also available through extension programs across Kansas.

In addition to training, Larson said parents and grandparents play a key role in modeling safe behavior for younger generations. "If parents or grandparents are doing things that are unsafe, that's not setting up a very successful culture and habits of safety," Larson said.

Larson also encourages every farm family to establish an emergency response plan and regularly discuss procedures with children. "Every farm needs to have an emergency plan," she said.

Gardeners enter home stretch for onions, tomatoes

If gardeners are crying about their onions right now, it's not because they're slicing them in their kitchen. But they may soon. "This is the time of year that onions grow and develop rapidly," said Kansas State University horticulture expert Matt McKernan. "Regular watering – if the soil is dry – and light fertilization help maximize growth."

In soils that tend to be alkaline, McKernan suggests using ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) at the rate of ½ cup per 10 row-feet. The number series refers to the rates of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium contained in the fertilizer.

"You can use lawn fertilizer (such as 29-5-5, 27-3-3, or similar) but only use 1/3 cup per 10 row-feet," he said. "Make sure the lawn fertilizer does not have a weed preventer or weed killer included. Sprinkle the fertilizer 2-3 inches alongside the row and water in. Do not fertilize after the onions start to bulb."

McKernan said that as onions develop, as much as 2/3 of the bulb remains out of the soil. He said that is normal and there is no need to cover the bulb with soil.

Tomatoes

Another garden favorite – tomatoes – could benefit from mulching as long as soils are warm enough and not saturated with water, according to McKernan.

"Tomatoes prefer even levels of soil moisture, and mulches provide that by regulating soil temperatures and preventing excessive evaporation," he said.

Mulch also helps to suppress weeds, reduce disease problems, and prevent the formation of hard crust on the soil. Crusted soils restrict air movement and slow the water infiltration rate.

McKernan said hay and straw mulches are "very popular for tomatoes, but may contain weed or volunteer grain seeds." Grass clippings can be used as mulch, but should be applied in a thin layer – "only 2-3 inches thick," McKernan said.

"Do not use clippings from lawns that have been treated with weed killer until some time has passed," he said. "With most types of weed killers, clippings from the fourth mowing after treatment may be used."

Cattle Chat: Finding the right cow size for your herd

On a recent episode of the *Kansas State University Beef Cattle Institute Cattle Chat podcast*, https://ksubci.org/2026/05/15/theileria-diagnosis-cow-size-economics-and-heifer-

rebreeding-strategies/, beef cattle experts discussed how cow size can directly impact herd efficiency, production costs and long-term profitability.

The conversation highlighted that while larger cows often produce heavier calves, they also require greater nutritional inputs, making forage availability and operational resources key factors in determining the best fit for an operation.

The discussion stemmed from a producer's question regarding the economics of larger-framed cows compared to more moderate-sized cows. Beef Cattle Institute veterinarians Bob Larson and Phillip Lancaster shared research and practical considerations producers should evaluate when determining the ideal mature cow size for their herd.

Larson emphasized that geography and environment play a major role in determining what type of cow best fits an operation.

"Geography matters when deciding what kind of cow fits in a different environment," Larson said. "A bigger cow is going to require more calories and therefore have a higher cost, but if you get a bigger calf from her, it may be worth the trade. The value difference is something producers have to evaluate."

Lancaster added that increasing mature cow size without adjusting stocking rates can create challenges for grazing systems and forage management.

"If you have the same number of 1,500-pound cows and 1,100-pound cows with that big of a difference in mature weight, you either have to shorten up your grazing or you are overgrazing," Lancaster said. "I'm not sure we have been adjusting stocking rates as much as we should as mature cow size has changed."

Lancaster referenced research showing producers gain approximately six pounds of weaning weight for every 100-pound increase in mature cow weight. However, he noted the additional calf weight does not always guarantee increased profitability.

"The question is whether that increase is enough to offset the additional costs," Lancaster said. "That depends on several different factors, including forage availability."

The conversation also addressed labor considerations associated with larger cows. While the producer who submitted the question suggested labor requirements remain relatively similar regardless of cow size, Lancaster explained that the greater concern is often feed availability and grazing management rather than labor itself.

"In my mind, it's more about grazing days versus hauling feed because there isn't a significant slope in labor," Lancaster said. "It's more about days."

Throughout the discussion, the specialists emphasized there is no universal "ideal" cow size for every operation. Instead, producers were encouraged to evaluate forage resources, environmental conditions and production costs to determine the most efficient and profitable fit for their individual herd.

To learn more about the topic and others, listen to the full episode of the *BCI Cattle Chat podcast*, https://ksubci.org/2026/05/15/theileria-diagnosis-cow-size-economics-and-heifer-rebreeding-strategies/.

VIDEO OF THE WEEK:

When fertilizing plants, it is important to select the right fertilizers. One of the biggest differences in most fertilizers is how quickly or slowly the nitrogen sources in the fertilizers are released to plants. *This week's video provides information on both slow and quick release fertilizers,* and when is the ideal time to use each product: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/fertilizing-lawns-slow-and-quick-release-fertilizers.

GARDEN CALENDAR:

- Harvest fresh asparagus until the spear size decreases. Stop harvesting when the majority of spears emerge the size of an ink pen in diameter.
- Plant kitchen herbs for summer use in dishes or food preservation.
- Thin heavy fruit set on apple and peach trees to increase fruit size. This also helps increase next year's crop.
- Plant annual flowers for summer color.
- Sod or sprig zoysia, bermuda, or buffalograss lawns to fill in bare areas.
- Mulch around young trees and shrubs to conserve moisture and control weed growth.
- Rotate indoor houseplants to develop a well-rounded plant.
- Four to six inch cuttings are a great way to start new houseplants. Root cuttings in a moist potting mix under low light conditions.

Protecting New Vegetable Transplants From The Wind:

As vegetable seedlings emerge and new transplants are planted into the garden, plants may need additional protection from strong winds. In Kansas, annual wind speeds average between 11 to 14 miles per hour around the state, with stronger, gusting winds regularly occurring. Even plants hardened off before transplanting can be broken, twisted, or snapped off by strong winds.

During the growing season, winds prevail mostly from the South. Consider placing wind breaks on the South side of plants for the most wind protection. Local wind conditions may vary however, as winds are funneled between or swirl around buildings and other objects in the landscape. Adjust the placement of wind protection as necessary.

Fences and hedgerows can serve as effective long-term windbreaks, protecting crops from prevailing winds. Temporary windbreaks can also be created using wooden shingles, or large plastic bottles, such as a milk jug or 2-liter soda bottle with both the bottom and top cut off. Push the jug or bottle into the soil far enough so it will not blow away. Use wooden dowels or metal rods to secure objects in windy conditions.

In addition to protecting plants from physical damage, windbreaks can have many other positive benefits on fruit and vegetable plants, including through improved water management, increased yield and quality, and earlier crop maturity. In fact, University of Nebraska research found that melon yields were 70% greater in sheltered fields than fields with no wind protection. They also found bell pepper plants with wind protection produced nearly five times as many flowers per plant in just 30 days after transplanting.

Visit the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's *publication, Windbreaks for Fruit and Vegetable Crops*, to learn more about the benefits of wind protection in the garden: https://extensionpubs.unl.edu/publication/ec1779/2006/pdf/view/ec1779-2006.pdf

Remove Blossoms On Newly Planted Strawberries:

June-bearing strawberry plants that were planted this spring should have their flower blossoms pinched off. New plants have a limited amount of energy. If blossoms remain on the plants, energy that should go to runner development is used to mature fruit instead.

Runners are long, leafless horizontal stems (also called stolons) produced by the strawberry plants that grow above the ground. Runners are an important way strawberries self-propagate and increase the amount of fruit-bearing area the following year. For strawberry plant establishment,

and a good crop next year, early season runner development is critical. Early runners will produce far more strawberries than runners that form later in the season.

If newly established June-bearing strawberry plants are allowed to produce fruit, they will eventually produce runners, but those runners will not be strong enough to produce a good crop of fruit the following year.

Everbearing and day neutral strawberry plants should also have fruits removed for the first 4 to 6 weeks after planting (until about July), in order to develop a strong root system. Also remove all runners during the first growing season for everbearing strawberries planted in a hill system. This forces multiple crowns which will increase fruit production.

Whether June-bearing or everbearing, all strawberry plants tend to be shallow-rooted plants and require frequent watering after transplanting. Water at least once a week during the spring, early summer, and early fall, and twice per week in July and August. Survival, root development, and fruit bud formation of strawberry plants and runners depend on adequate soil moisture.

Visit our *Strawberries publication* for more growing tips: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/strawberries_MF598.pdf

Little Barley: Recommendations & New Research:

Little barley (Hordeum pusillum) is a difficult to control grassy weed that commonly infests warm season lawns in Kansas. Not only can it decrease lawn quality, but little barley is also a concern for pet owners in early summer as the seedheads can become lodged between a dog's paw pads, causing discomfort or injury.

Little barley is a winter annual, bunch-type grass spread by seed. Little barley is thought to germinate September to October and spends the winter as a small plant. In the spring, it thrives in cooler temperatures, growing rapidly in size and forming seedheads. Plants often go unnoticed until May and June when they form seedheads, turn brown, and become more visible in lawns. With the onset of summer heat, little barley matures, drops its seed, and disappears.

Traditional recommendations for little barley control start with growing a thick and healthy lawn. Little barley has a shallow root system, and can be easily hand pulled, especially when soil is moist. Additional control can be provided by making a pre-emergent herbicide application in early fall (late August through early September), however, there are very few products labeled for pre-emergent control of little barley. Dimension (active ingredient: dithiopyr) is one of a few pre-emergents labeled for little barley control. Be sure to water in products after application to activate pre-emergent products.

To determine if other pre-emergent herbicides might provide adequate control of little barley, new research was conducted this past winter at the John C. Pair Horticultural Center. Four common pre-emergent herbicides known for their control of annual grassy weeds were applied in August of 2025 to test for little barley control. Learn more about the surprising findings of this research trial over on the *KSU Turfgrass Blog:* https://blogs.k-state.edu/turf/research-update-pre-emergent-control-of-little-barley-hordeum-pusillum/

While the results of the trial were surprising, it highlights the continued need for horticulture research in Kansas. If little barley is a weed you struggle with remember: thicken turfgrass coverage, apply pre-emergents before little barley germinates in the fall, water in pre-emergents after application to activate, and stay tuned for future research findings.

Watch For Ticks When Outdoors This Spring:

The return of warmer days draws us back outside to our yards, gardens, trails, and pastures, but it also increases our likelihood of encountering ticks. While ticks are active for much of the year in Kansas, the early summer months are when many people begin to encounter more ticks as a result of spending more time outdoors. A simple walk through tall grass or gardening in tall weeds all have the potential to encounter ticks while outdoors. Given the possible long-term health concerns associated with tick bites, vigilance must be an essential part of safe springtime routines outdoors.

In Kansas there are four common tick species, the American dog tick, brown dog tick, lone star tick, and the black legged tick (aka deer tick). The activity and lifecycle of each tick varies by species and time of year, however all four ticks feed on blood as larva, nymphs, and adults. These ticks can be found nearly any time of year outdoors, but they all become most active April through November as they look for animals or humans to provide a blood source for food. Temperatures, moisture, and the amount of tall grasses and weeds for habitat all further influence tick activity.

When spending time outdoors, it is important to know where ticks will be most commonly found. Ticks are wingless and slow crawling insects, that most commonly use an ambush technique to find potential food sources. Ticks perch themselves on the ends of tall grass blades, the leaves of tall weeds, or on the foliage of low bushes and wait patiently until an animal comes along and brushes up against that plant. At that time, ticks transfer from the plant to the host, where they crawl around looking for a suitable site to feed. Ticks can also crawl several feet in response to stimuli such as carbon dioxide and host odors, but ticks do not jump or drop from trees.

To protect yourself from ticks while outside this summer, take the following steps:

- Avoid areas of tall grass, high weeds, or brushy plants, as these will be the primary habitats ticks will be found in. Regularly mowing areas can reduce tick habitat and expose ticks to sunlight, which can result in tick desiccation and death.
- Use insect repellents when outdoors, as they are highly effective in keeping ticks away. Use insect repellents that contain DEET or picaridin as the active ingredient. Permethrin-based insect repellents can also be used on clothing but should not be applied directly to the skin.
- Wear light colored clothing so ticks are easily spotted and removed before they reach the skin and feed.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants to reduce exposed skin. Tuck pant legs into socks for additional protection.
- When returning from areas that are potentially infested with ticks, inspect your skin and clothing thoroughly. Shower and change clothes. Wash clothing and dry on a high heat cycle.
- Remove any ticks you find immediately. Preserve ticks in a jar of rubbing alcohol or frozen in a plastic bag in the freezer for at least two weeks. This will allow the opportunity to have the tick identified if medical reactions occur.
- Frequently inspect pets when they return inside from the outdoors as well. Cats, dogs, and other pets can be frequent hosts for ticks as well, and a common way ticks are introduced into homes.

Winter ticks, spinose ear ticks, and other soft ticks are also present in Kansas. These ticks can be avoided using the same recommendations above. Visit our *Ticks In Kansas publication* for more information about ticks, their lifecycles, and how you can stay safe: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/ticks-in-kansas_MF2653.pdf. *Matthew McKernan,*

Consumer Horticulture Extension Associate, Jason Griffin, Extension Specialist and Director of the John C. Pair Horticultural Center