

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Woody Encroachment – How Bad Is It?

The 2024 version of the KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide went live online this week (accessible via the KSU Bookstore at: <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/SRP1183.pdf>). One of its sections I reference frequently is the one on weed and brush control options for range and pasture – and for good reason according to statistics from the Great Plains Grassland Extension Partnership. According to this multistate collaboration, *annual* rangeland production lost to woody encroachment (in the Great Plains region...) is estimated at over 22 million tons, and on the increase (numbers based on monitoring using satellite imagery with 1990 as the base year).

Not sure what 22 million tons looks like? It's the equivalent of over 35 million round bales. The lost acreage alone would supply the annual forage needs of 4.7 million cows. It is obvious that woody encroachment is a huge issue for grass managers.

There are significant production losses outlined in our Meadowlark Extension District counties as well:

- Nemaha County: 6,600 tons of production lost – equivalent to four percent of production
- Jackson County: 23,800 tons of production lost – equivalent to over seven and a half percent of production
- Jefferson County: 30,100 tons of production lost – equivalent to over 15 and a half percent of production

Source: <https://www.wlfw.org/yieldgap/Kansas/index.html>

Is woody encroachment an issue you're fighting? The KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide doesn't have all the answers, but it does have some pretty good ones if you want to take a look at chemical control options (it also provides information on some integrated management options, too). Check it out online or request a hard copy when they arrive in late January. We do have extra copies of the 2023 version left as well if you want to get a first look now.

This issue is larger than a chemical recommendation, however. An understanding of how we got here and how to combat this issue is also important, and a topic we'll discuss in this space further as we approach the new year. In the meantime, drop me a line if you want to discuss your specific situation in more detail – and start planning to halt woody encroachment losses.