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New Year, New Beginnings

It's a new year, new beginnings, out with the old and in with the new. Unfortunately, it's been pretty wacky thus far. Signs are pointing to possibly a dry, warmer than average, calving season. There's nothing more hopeful than welcoming in a new calf crop. Dr. Robb Hensleigh made a trip into the office to get his IRM calving book a few days back. He had just had his first calf, a nice little heifer. I admired his attitude as he faced some serious health issues.

Unfortunately, he left us this week—my sincere sympathy to Peggy and their sons and wives.

If you are in the throgs of calving or waiting a bit longer, it's never too late to get organized. Here are a few things to consider; of course, there are always some supplies you want to have on hand:

OB gloves, OB lubricant, OB chains or straps, calf puller, halter and rope, iodine to apply on calf's navel, syringes, oxytocin or epinephrine, frozen colostrum or packaged colostrum replacer, tube feeder, electrolytes, tags and marker, bander and bands. Paper towels or rags are always helpful.

Review the stages of calving and when to intervene:

The first stage is preparing to calve, and this can last 2 to 6 hours. The calf is rotating to an upright position, contractions begin, and the water sac is showing. The cow or heifer will be restless, stops eating and drinking, and vaginal discharge can be seen.

The second stage is delivery, usually one hour or less. The cow is usually lying down, and the calf enters the birth canal, front feet and nose appear. At this point, the cow or heifer will be straining, one to three times a minute. Then the calf is born.

The third stage is cleaning, and this can take 2 to 8 hours. The "button" attachments in the uterus are relaxing in order to be expelled. Finally, the placenta is passed. If a cow does not "clean," consult your veterinarian.

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the mother after birth. This milk is high in nutrients and antibodies that are critical for the health of the calf. Calves need 2 quarts within 4 hours of birth and one gallon within 12 hours. Time is critical as the newborn calf's digestive tract allows antibodies to pass directly into the blood. Frozen colostrum from previous births or store-bought is another option.

David G. Hallauer
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Broomsedge Bluestem – Considerations for Control

This statement from a USDA Plant Fact Sheet on broomsedge bluestem tells us most all we need to know about why broomsedge has fared so well in our cool season grass stands: *On infertile soils, broomsedge is a long-lived competitor.* It also means control will be a challenge.

Mowing hasn't been shown to be effective. Late summer/fall burning might reduce broomsedge, but can also cause cool season weed increases. Work from the University of Missouri found that burns at this time may damage fescue stands, limiting their usefulness.

There isn't a 'magic bullet' herbicide, either. Broomsedge is susceptible to glyphosate, but since glyphosate is non-selective, you'll also damage other grasses/broadleaves as well. Use of a wiper or rollers has been inconsistent due to coverage issues.

Broomsedge work done at the University of Missouri in 2008 looked at increasing cool season grass (fescue in this study) competitiveness using fertility as a broomsedge suppressor. The addition of fifty pounds of phosphorous per acre plus lime increased fescue stand composition from less than 15 percent to over 35 percent, while *slightly* reducing the broomsedge stand. Bottom line: we can help our cool season grasses become more competitive with hopes of retaining the stand, but broomsedge doesn't go away quickly. This work suggests an appropriate fertility program will be needed for two or more years to see much difference.

As daunting a task as it may seem, start sooner than later if broomsedge is invading your forage stands. Consider a soil test now with implementation of a longer term nutrient management program based on those results. Anything else you can do to help the cool season grasses stay competitive can help as well, including appropriate haying cutting height and harvest timing/grazing management. Be patient. Broomsedge didn't get a foothold overnight – and it likely won't go away overnight, either.

Poison Ivy – Or Something Else??

About this time of year, it gets harder and harder to stay inside, particularly as we get warm winter days. If you're getting the itch to clean up some unwanted woody species around the home, don't *give* yourself an itch by unknowingly cutting in to poison ivy.

During the growing season, poison ivy's three leaves (versus the five leaflets common with Virginia Creeper, for example) are fairly easy to discern and avoid. In the winter, the absence of leaves makes it much more difficult. Look instead at the plant's roots. The aerial roots on poison ivy vines are hair like. Virginia Creeper root hairs are more plump, almost the size of a pencil lead. Before you start cutting, it's good to know what you are cutting in to.

If you thought winter would eliminate the need to know if you were cutting in to poison ivy, think again. The oil present in poison ivy that causes problems is urushiol. Present in all plant parts, it is especially potent in the sap, with the ability to cause a rash even one to five years after the plant has died. The sap will go down to a degree in winter, but still rises and falls a bit, meaning levels can still cause issues if you cut in to it. After all, the amount of urushiol that covers the head of a pin can cause a rash in 500 people. Brush cutter beware, indeed.

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

Do You Have a Case of the Winter Blues?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) isn't just a case of the "blues"—it's a cyclical pattern of depression during the winter months, with improvement during other times of the year.

Symptoms of SAD include:

- *Tiredness and loss of energy
- *An increased need for sleep
- *Craving of carbohydrates
- *Weight gain
- *Withdrawal---general disinterest in socializing
- *An overall sense of hopelessness, unhappiness, and/or irritability

SAD is a manageable condition, but it is essential to seek a trained medical professional's assistance and not to self-diagnose the disorder to ensure you're getting proper treatment.

Ways to counteract the effects of SAD:

- *Get more sunlight. Ways to do this are enjoying the outdoors during sun hours and, when indoors, having a window near where one sits or works during the sunny part of the day.
- *Eat healthy foods.
- *Exercise.
- *Spend time doing enjoyable activities with positive and upbeat people.
- *Prescribed light therapy may make a difference for some people in treating the symptoms of SAD. This involves exposure to very bright light (usually fluorescent) for 30 minutes or more each day during the winter months.
- *Some people may need mental health therapy and/or prescription anti-depressants during this time of the year.
- *Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs, which can impair one's judgement when making decisions and dealing with other people and could make SAD worse.

If you think you may be experiencing SAD symptoms, it is important to seek the opinion of a trained medical professional. In cases of severe depression or if having suicidal thoughts, contact a medical professional or the emergency room of a local hospital immediately.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Tips for Keeping Food Safe During a Power Outage

While much of Kansas and the Midwest have been spared so far this year from severe weather, many people well know that winter's freezing weather can descend rather quickly.

Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee said the break from cold weather is a chance for consumers to make sure they're ready to keep their food safe in the event of a power outage.

She said something that can be done now is to put an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer. Some appliances have built-in thermometers, but if the power is out, you won't be able to read the temperature. As long as the temperature inside the appliance stays below 40 degrees F, the food will be safe.

When a power outage occurs, consumers are best advised to keep the doors of the appliance closed as much as possible to keep cold air in.

An unopened refrigerator will stay cold for about four hours; a full freezer will hold the temperature for about 48 hours. If you have access to dry ice, add some to the freezer to keep food frozen longer. However, use caution when handling dry ice.

According to Blakeslee, storing food outside – such as in snow – can be risky and is not recommended. This is due to fluctuating temperatures, physical damage due to curious pets or other animals, or contamination of the food from vehicle fumes, dust, and grime.

If you're not sure if food is safe, Blakeslee suggests following a familiar refrain: "When in doubt, throw it out!"

"If the appliance temperature goes above 40 F for a long period of time, some foods will be too warm and can invite the growth of bacteria that may be present," she said. "For example, if frozen raw meat thaws out and is warm to the touch, it should not be saved."

"While throwing out food due to an appliance failure or power outage is wasteful, it is a lot cheaper to do than paying for medical treatment due to foodborne illness," she said.