

David G. Hallauer  
District Extension Agent  
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

### ***Zone Soil Testing of Forage Stands***

Forage stands aren't traditionally soil tested as intensely as crop fields. Yield monitoring isn't as precise and return on investment to sampling isn't as easy to see. Still, it doesn't hurt to review field histories to see if at least some increase in testing intensity shouldn't be considered.

Conditions this summer have provided one opportunity to see field differences. In many cases, a field's thinnest soils have become easy to see during this summer's dry stretches. If those droughty areas match up with areas traditionally lower in production, it may be a good place to consider 'zone' sampling. Take samples from within the lower production areas and compare them to samples pulled from more average areas. If fertility differences show up, then you can start to manage accordingly. If not, other factors can then be considered.

If noticeable differences don't stand out, check out soil type and productivity differences using the NRCS Websoil Survey: <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>. Separately soil sampling soils of varying productivity can help determine if fertility differences also exist and need attention.

Sampling field wise typically does a pretty good job of giving us a good number on which to base fertilizer application decisions. If you aren't soil sampling already, now is a great time to start, and field scale sampling is a great place to start. If you've got a sampling program in place already, zone sampling may help you fine tune your application program a little more.

Next week, I'll share a little more about accurate sampling. In the meantime, if you want to discuss potential zone sampling soil test programs, drop me a line at [dhallaue@ksu.edu](mailto:dhallaue@ksu.edu) or contact any of our Meadowlark Extension District Offices.

### ***Spring Flowering Shrub Management***

Spring blooming shrubs are often a much-anticipated welcome to spring after a long winter. They're the first color of the year, and that means we want them to show well – and that means management now.

If you've got spring flowering shrubs (Forsythia, Flowering Quince, Almond, Beautybush, Deutzia, Pyracantha, Lilac, Mock Orange, Cotoneaster, Weigela, Viburnum and Witchhazel, etc...), they're likely setting flower buds from now through September. Because of this effort on the plant's part to provide us with spring color, our job is to provide soil moisture when adequate rainfall is sparse. Avoid watering frequently, but consider a good deep soaking periodically until soil moisture levels are replenished.

Avoid pruning as well. If you have dead wood, removal of those shoots isn't a problem. Pruning now to shape spring flowering shrubs, however, will likely result in reduced bloom.

Just because flowering is done for the season, doesn't mean management is. Start getting spring flowering shrubs ready to show their stuff with a little TLC this fall.

Teresa Hatfield  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Family & Community Wellness

### ***Need Help Paying for Your Medicare Costs?***

If you are on Medicare and you or someone you know is struggling to pay for healthcare costs, there are programs that could help.

Extra Help is a program offered through the Social Security Administration. It is also known as Part D Low Income Subsidy. This program can help pay for the cost of prescription medication. Extra Help can help cover all or part of your monthly Part D premium, deductible, co-pays, and co-insurance. If you are enrolled in Medicaid, you will be automatically enrolled in Extra Help. People who are not automatically enrolled can apply for Extra Help through the Social Security Administration. You will have to meet income and asset guidelines to qualify. Visit the Social Security website to apply at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

Another program that can help pay for your Medicare costs is the Medicare Savings Program which KanCare administers. The Medicare Savings Program can help pay for your monthly Part B premium and potentially your deductible, co-pays, and co-insurance. Qualified Medicare Beneficiaries (QMB) will not have to pay premiums, deductibles, or co-insurance. You should not see a bill for any Medicare-covered service. Those that do not meet QMB guidelines may qualify for Low Income Medicare Beneficiary (LMB) or Expanded Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (ELMB). These programs will pay for the Part B premium. Social Security will no longer take the premium out of your monthly Social Security check or bill you for the amount. Application for the Medicare Savings Program can be made through KanCare.

Other programs that help with the cost of prescription medication include Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs). PAPs allow you to get free or low-cost drugs directly through the company that makes the drug. You may have to complete an application or have your doctor complete one. Some Patient Assistance Programs do not provide help if you are in a Part D plan. An excellent website to check for the Patient Assistance Programs for your specific medications is [www.needymeds.org](http://www.needymeds.org).

Prescription drug discount programs can also help with the cost of medications. You may get a lower medication price through the discount program than through your Part D plan. Keep in mind, however, that you cannot use the discount program and Part D coverage simultaneously.

Part D plans use tiers to categorize drugs for pricing. If a drug is in a higher tier, it typically will cost you more. You can ask your plan to move your medication to a lower tier. You may be able to ask your Part D plan for a tier exception if your drug is costing you more than you think it should. Contact your plan to find out how to apply for a tier exception.

For more information on these options, contact Teresa Hatfield at the Meadowlark Extension District at 785-364-4175 or [thatfield@ksu.edu](mailto:thatfield@ksu.edu).

Ross Mosteller  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Livestock & Natural Resources

### ***Woody Expansion is a National Rangeland Crisis***

The title of this article is the take-home message received from Dr. Dirac Twidwell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, at the Nebraska Grazing Conference. Woody encroachment puts pressure on working rangelands by decreasing livestock production and increasing wildfire risk, as well as harming grassland biodiversity and increasing threats to animal species living in this biome. Dr. Twidwell presented some staggering data that is flat out scary, but wide-scale conservation efforts are becoming a focus across the Great Plains.

Research shows that since 1999, woody plants have increased on more than 108 million acres in the western United States. This equates to an area 2.3 times the state of Nebraska! New monitoring technology confirms that the rates of grassland lost to woody encroachment now approaches the rate of conversion to agriculture cultivation. It doesn't matter if your concerns may be directed towards livestock, wildlife, water resources, wildfire prevention, social programs linked to land trusts or other interests; the loss of the grassland biome needs widespread focus and collaborative efforts, across the Great Plains, to make impact.

Much of the context of this article comes from an excellent new resource called "*Reducing Woody Encroachment in Grasslands*". The guide boils down grasslands management into evaluating and managing Risk and Vulnerability. Vulnerability is further divided into three components: Sensitivity, Exposure and Adaptive Capacity. Simply defined, sensitivity can be described as the relative ease that woody plants can establish and spread in grasslands. Exposure is directly related to a seed source, as woody plant encroachment cannot occur when grasslands are not exposed to seed sources. For example, a female Eastern Red Cedar tree can produce more than 1.5 million seeds per year! Adaptive capacity is the ability to increase the potential to adapt to a threat or problem. All these components need to be evaluated to develop a plan.

The take-away message was that what has been done in the past 50-100 years is not working, so a new strategy needs to be implemented. This was compared to preventative medical care, versus addressing serious medical conditions in the ER. Currently, time, attention and financial resources are often devoted to the visual problem - mature woody trees/brush stands. Many cost-share programs do not help, until a certain percent coverage threshold is reached. The mindset shift we were challenged with, was to address the issue before it becomes a problem. Most notably this means managing the seedbank in the dispersal and woody plant recruitment stages (*there are excellent charts to illustrate this in the guide*). Additionally, the methods of control need to shift from higher cost, higher labor, higher disruption tactics; to more easily manageable, lower cost and available tools; such as controlled burns and spot spraying.

Last time I mentioned that I am now ready to cut down my cedar windbreak, but a better approach might be to intensively manage the first 100 - 200 yards out from woody areas. Seriously managing core grass areas, the size of a football field or two away from the woody plants, prevents additional encroachment and then allows you to continually work to "push back" the woody core where seed/ sprout production occurs. This will never be a "one and done" approach! Tackling a seedling in a healthy grass stand is a much less daunting task than looking into a bare cover, wooded forest that used to be productive grass.

I welcome continued discussion with anyone who shares this widespread concern. There are focused efforts in place, like the Great Plains Grassland Initiative, and resources abound. The publication mentioned above can be found on the Meadowlark District website or <https://www.wlfw.org/assets/greatPlainsMaterials/E-1054WoodyEncroachment.pdf>. Although lengthy, the following YouTube link provides additional information presented by Dr. Twidwell and Jeremy Maestas from NRCS: <https://youtu.be/SW0IDh9Pibw>

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

### ***Making the Most of Your Doctor Visit***

Being able to talk with your doctor is important, especially if you have health problems or concerns. Use these tips to make the most of your doctor visit.

- Prepare for your visit. Be ready to ask three or four questions. Share your symptoms, medicines or vitamins, health habits, and any major life changes.
- Take notes or ask for written materials. Do not be afraid to ask the doctor to repeat or clarify important information.
- Make decisions with your doctor that meet your needs. Discuss risks, benefits and costs of tests and treatments. Ask your doctor about other options and preventive things you can do.
- Be sure you are getting the message. If you have trouble hearing, ask your doctor to face you when talking and to speak louder and more clearly.
- Tell the doctor if you feel rushed, worried or uncomfortable. You can offer to return a second visit or follow up by phone or email.

### ***Laughter is Good Medicine***

Stress can take a toll on your health. Laughter can improve your emotional and physical health. Try these ways to add laughter to your life.

1. Look for funny things happening. Instead of thinking about all the factors causing you stress, try to find laughter all around you. Most things we laugh at come from situations happening that were not meant to be funny.
2. Make funny friends. Surrounding yourself with funny people will change your perspective on life. Funny people have a charisma that people are drawn to.
3. Watch a funny movie or a comedy.
4. Go to the card section of the store and read funny cards.
5. Focus on the joy in life and laugh several times a day.

Laughter is the best medicine. It is good for your health!