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Still Recovering – Armyworms 2021

About this time last summer, the first reports of fall armyworms started rolling in. Let's hope 2022 is a much less damaging year, because many are still recovering from 2021.

If your hay stands never recovered from last summer's feeding and now you're giving though to reseeding brome, start planning now. Fall is the preferred seeding window for cool season forages with plantings recommended from mid-August until mid-late September.

Start with a soil sample if you don't have a recent one. If amendments are needed, apply prior to planting if possible. This is especially true if lime is recommended.

Evaluate weed pressure. Established plants will tend to have a competitive advantage over new seedlings, so elimination of existing vegetation via tillage or herbicides should be considered. When applying herbicides, use products that will allow planting in a timely manner. Some broadleaf herbicides require a replanting interval of a couple weeks or longer, potentially pushing you later than desired in to the planting window (see this list for some restrictions: https://webapp.agron.ksu.edu/agr_social/article_new/herbicides-for-damaged-brome-hayfields-479-2). For best results, weeds need to be actively growing, meaning moisture is important.

A nurse crop like wheat is often considered to help protect highly erodible soils while providing a potential forage crop in newly seeded areas the following spring. Avoid high seeding rates of nurse crops and choose wisely. Some commonly used winter cereals at high seeding rates may keep brome from establishing well as they take up nutrients and use moisture.

Seeding rates are based on the amount of pure live seed (PLS), so a germination test will be key to knowing how much seed we can expect to sprout and grow. Seeding rates for well-prepared seed beds are in the 12-15 pounds PLS per acre range while poor seedbeds will likely benefit from seeding rates closer to 20 pounds PLS. Drilling is recommended over broadcasting to increase chances of successful establishment (broadcast applications also require higher seeding rates than drilled). Plant at a quarter to a half inch deep or cover seed only slightly.

Weather is still going to dictate our success, but a good reseeding plan should begin sooner than later. For more seeding information, see the KSU *Smooth Brome Production and Utilization* publication at: <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/c402.pdf> or any District Office.

Blister Beetles

Lot of other insects get a lot of attention in the summer - Japanese beetles and Green June beetles are both bright colored and do a lot of damage. One that's more hidden – but still does a lot of damage by quickly stripping vegetables (especially tomatoes) – is the blister beetle.

There are several species, most a half to three quarters of an inch long coming in black, gray, or brown striped. What makes them instantly recognizable is their elongated, narrow, cylindrical, soft bodies with middle body part (thorax) narrower than the head or wing covers.

If removing them from plants by hand, wear gloves. As their name implies, they emit an irritant capable of blistering internal *and* external body tissues exposed to the chemical.

If populations are large, consider chemical controls using products containing cyfluthrin or permethrin. Many products have a zero-day waiting period on tomatoes, but always read and follow product labels prior to application.

Cindy Williams
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Family & Community Wellness

Back-to-School Strategies to Shave Costs

Budgets cuts to education are happening in districts across the country. As a result, parents are likely to see increased costs for school expenses. In some cases, families may be asked to cover or contribute to costs for activities or services previously provided at no charge.

While back-to-school expenses are typically second only to holiday spending, the increased costs will challenge many families. The dilemma also offers a valuable lesson in helping children learn to weigh wants versus needs.

Following are ten back-to-school tips from K-State Research and Extension:

1. Check with the school for a list of costs and requirements, such as enrollment fees, book and computer rentals or deposits, or other requirements, such as school supplies and costs for school breakfast or lunch. Also note costs for optional activities, such as rental fees for a band instrument or sports uniform.
2. Ask about options for paying enrollment fees, such as spreading out payments.
3. Check to see if your family qualifies for reduced costs, such as reduced lunch fees or scholarships for band or other activities, and guidelines for applying. If eligible, follow the directions on the application exactly. Also check to see if you qualify for community programs which provide school supplies for free and reduced costs.
4. Consider required school-related medical expenses, including immunizations, health screenings, and athletic physicals, and check to see if these needs can be met at an economical or group rate with a local healthcare provider or through the local Health Department. Compare prices from various providers and start early in case reduced-cost appointments are limited.
5. Review the school district list for required supplies. Plan to “shop” at home first, by checking supplies on hand and hand-me-downs such as a calculator from a previous year, art supplies in good condition and a reusable backpack or book bag to hold down costs.
6. Check sale flyers for the best prices on school supplies; wait to stock-up though, as the price on back-to-school supplies is typically reduced once the school year begins.
7. Spread out the expense, rather than trying to buy everything at once. Chances are, kids will want to wear summer clothing during the first weeks of school when the weather is still warm. Waiting also will give them time to settle in and see what others are wearing.
8. Help children choose budget-friendly clothes they will enjoy wearing. If a child wants something that doesn’t fit within the budget, suggest opportunities for them to earn the difference. Older children (who have jobs) should be expected to take on increasing responsibilities for their own expenses and extras.
9. Plan for school expenses to continue throughout the school year with costs for field trips, projects, school supplies, parties, and family outings to school events and programs.
10. Keep records. Carry a small notepad and jot down this year’s expenses to help in planning for next year. Save receipts, in the event purchases fail to meet expectations and will need to be returned. And, as with any purchase, ask about the store’s policy for returns or exchanges before buying.

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Livestock & Natural Resources

Ammoniating Low Quality Forages

I've heard local hay reports recently ranging from "best we've had" to "half as much as last year". Anyone following the Kansas Direct Hay Report, knows that volume has remained high and prices strong. Recent rains have been helpful to extend forage production, but the predicted stretch of hot, dry weather could change things rapidly. Today let's take a look at an option that may, or may not, make sense for livestock producers to explore to feed ruminants.

Ammoniating low quality forages can make some really decent feed, making use of feedstuffs that might otherwise go unused, due to bulkiness, low protein and energy levels. Although we don't sit in the wheat capital of Kansas, wheat and other cereal grain straw is a classic go-to for ammoniation. Right now, straw tends to be more available out of the field. Really any forage less than 5 percent crude protein and 45 percent TDN on a dry matter basis, are candidates for ammonia treatment. CRP hay might be another example, if low quality.

While it can be time consuming, labor intensive and requires close monitoring during the process; ammoniation can create a feedstuff that rivals good quality grass hay. Ammoniation increases the digestibility of crop residues by breaking lignin-cellulose bonds in plant fiber. Dry matter digestion (TDN) typically increases 8 to 15 percentage units. Feed intake can be boosted 15 to 20 percent or more because of improved forage digestibility and increased rate of passage through the digestive tract. Typically, you can expect crude protein content of the low-quality forage to double. Ammoniating using a rate of 3 percent, which equates to 60 pounds of ammonia per ton of dry matter forage, will yield the expected results.

What do you need to consider to see if this is an option for your operation? You first need a source of low-quality forage. Next, the bales need to be stacked (*three by two round bale pyramids are common*) on a level, firm, tight, soil surface and then covered with 6 to 8 mil black plastic, sealing the edges with at least 12 inches of soil. It is best to leave a few inches between pyramids to help with the treatment process. It will be critical to keep the plastic secure and free of punctures, to hold the ammonia. Finally, the ammonia (*NH₃ a readily available source*) is slowly released into the stack over a period of several hours. This is best accomplished with a pipe or hose system that evenly distributes the NH₃ through the middle of the covered stack. The full ammoniation process can take a few days, to weeks, depending on the temperature. Safety around NH₃ is of the utmost importance and discussed in the resources mentioned later.

So, does it make economic sense to do all this work? If higher quality forage is readily available, it may be the more logical choice, but even in today's higher priced NH₃ environment, ammoniation may still pencil out. Here's a quick example using the July 12 Kansas Hay Market report. Good quality brome hay (*assuming 9 percent crude protein and 56 percent TDN*) sold for \$140 per ton. Straw traded at \$90 per ton. Work out of Nebraska estimates that total cost of NH₃ at \$800/ton, plastic, equipment use, labor and miscellaneous fees equals about \$40/ton. That said, there is an economic advantage to ammoniated straw at roughly \$130/ton. Of course, this is just an example and many factors go into making this decision on your operation, but it might just be worth pushing the pencil in times of short available hay & other forage supply.

Research conducted by K-State in 2014 (*of which Meadowlark District was a part of*) looked at a half rate of NH₃, 1.5 percent, with favorable results nearly that of a full rate in increased digestibility & crude protein, it can be reviewed at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2097/17779> Through that study, we have an ammonia distribution manifold available for checkout through our Offices, please let us know if you're interested in renting this tool. Resources can be found in the KSU Forage Facts Notebook at: <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/s115.pdf> and video of the process viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JtjJb-umpk>

Teresa Hatfield
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Family and Community Wellness

Medicare Decisions and other Health Insurance

As you approach Medicare eligibility, things can seem complicated. And if you also have other health insurance, such as through your employer or your spouse's employer, you will need to consider how this will impact your options.

People still working and have employer insurance may want to consider whether to take Medicare Part B (medical) when they are first eligible. If you are turning 65 and the company you work for has 20 employees or more, or you are going on to Medicare because of a disability, and the company you work for has 100 employees or more, you can still use your employer insurance as your primary insurance.

When you retire, you can enroll in Part B during a Special Enrollment period without worrying about a late enrollment penalty. The Special Enrollment period lasts eight months from when you stop working. Many people who are still working delay taking Part B because of the additional monthly premium. If you do go ahead and take Part B while you are still working, Part B can act as secondary insurance to your health insurance through your employer. Things to keep in mind, COBRA, retiree, or Marketplace insurance do not count as active employer insurance. If you have these types of insurance, you will need to take Part B, or you may have a penalty later. Veterans Administration (VA) benefits do not count as health insurance. They are considered a benefit earned by the veteran. If a veteran does not enroll in Medicare Part B when first eligible, they may also have to pay the Part B penalty later if they decide to enroll.

Consider taking Part A (Hospital) insurance if you are employed and still using your or your spouse's employer insurance. Part A can act as backup hospital insurance to your employer insurance. Most people will not have to pay a Part A monthly premium if you or your spouse have paid into Social Security for at least ten years or 40 quarters. Use caution when considering taking Part A of Medicare if you and your employer are contributing to a Health Savings Account (HSA). If you continue contributing to the HSA, you could incur a tax penalty later if you take Part A.

Decisions about whether to take Part D prescription drug insurance will depend on whether your current drug plan with your employer is "creditable" or as good or better than a Medicare Part D plan. If you have a creditable drug plan through your employer, you can continue to use your plan without taking a separate Part D plan. You will have a Special Enrollment period later to enroll in Part D.

If you don't know whether your plan is creditable, you will need to contact your plan or your employer's human resources department to find out.

If you have questions about how your insurance works with Medicare, call me at the Meadowlark Extension District Holton office at 785-364-45125 or email me at thatfield@ksu.edu.

Upcoming Events: Stay Strong, Stay Healthy (senior strength training class), August 8- October 10, Monday and Wednesday, 9:30 a.m., Holton Courthouse, Room 105, Cost: \$20 for all 16 sessions, registration required. Contact our office for more information.