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Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Tar Spot

The 2022 yield loss from diseases affecting the Kansas corn crop was recently estimated at somewhere around ten percent. Four percent was attributed to nematode losses, and another three percent from stalk rots. The other three percent is blamed on a combination of ear rot diseases and the ones we spend most of our time worrying about: foliar diseases.

Tar Spot was one of those foliar diseases in 2022. First reported in the Midwest in 2015, the disease has spread through the Corn Belt, reaching Kansas in mid-September, affecting fields in Nemaha, Doniphan, Brown, Atchison, Jackson, and Jefferson Counties. It's contribution to yield loss was likely minimal, affecting most fields too late in the season to result in damage.

Because of its ability to survive on residue, however, it could be a disease to watch for in 2023. Later infections may not be a big deal, but if heavy tar spot levels show up early in the season, susceptible hybrids could be significantly affected

Want more background on tar spot, as well as some of our more common corn foliar diseases (Southern Rust and Gray Leaf Spot come to mind...)? If so, hold Thursday, February 15th. That's the date for two area Corn/Soybean Disease Management meetings. More information will be available in this space next week, or check out a flyer on the events page of the Meadowlark Extension District at: <https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/events/> .

Truth or Myth: Coffee Grounds to Lower pH

Most of our commonly grown landscape plants prefer pH levels in the six to seven range. There are some, however, that will do their best only in a more acidic soil pH: azaleas, holly, butterfly bush and blue hydrangeas are examples. For those plants, sometimes soil pH needs lowered for best results.

Correction of soil pH isn't a rapid process. It requires a soil test to determine actual soil pH level. When pH is determined, an application rate of elemental sulfur can be calculated. Even then, it's likely to take three to six months to lower pH (in short, plan ahead...) appropriately.

Some gardeners promote using used coffee grounds to drop pH. Unfortunately, used coffee grounds have essentially a neutral pH. *Fresh, non-percolated* grounds do have some level of acidity, but elemental sulfur is probably still a better bargain over applying fresh coffee grounds to landscape beds.

Spent coffee grounds *aren't* useless, however. They contain carbon, nitrogen, and other compounds that can provide food for soil organisms. Once they break down, they can increase organic matter and help build soil structure.

Coffee grounds aren't all bad...just don't plan on them lowering pH levels. Elemental sulfur is a better option for that.

Ross Mosteller

District Extension Agent
Livestock & Natural Resources

Does Your Stocking Rate Need Adjusting?

David and I have had a very good group of folks gathering at the Northeast Kansas Heritage complex on Wednesday nights to discuss land leasing issues. I've been working on the pasture lease presentation, and it seems a topic to be worthy of discussion in the news column this week as well. A factor that is very specific to pasture rental arrangements is stocking rate, so let's take a look and see if your rate, or maybe your mindset, might need a tweak.

One thing that always seems to surprise me is the way different people talk about stocking rates. Head per pasture, acres per head, pairs for the season, pounds of grazing animal per acre, etc... That said, sometimes the discussion needs to start by defining the unit of measure so both parties are speaking the same language. The best "standard" would be to use Animal Units (AU) which equates to 1000 pounds of grazing animal. This lets us move between species and classes of livestock within species using Animal Unit Equivalents (AUEs). For example: AUEs are calculated at these levels: yearling lamb - 0.15, yearling steer - 0.60 or horse - 1.25.

When it comes to stocking rate, it is not uncommon to hear statements like "*Grandpa used to graze 100 cows on this pasture all summer and now I've got to rotate them out after four months with only 90 cows. What's wrong with that pasture?*" Often, there's nothing wrong with the pasture, although many producers might increase pasture productivity by using improved grazing techniques, fertilizer, weed/brush control and other focused management. Most often, the problem actually is the cows or, more precisely, how producers count the cows.

A hundred years ago, most cows were often straight bred British, small framed, easy keeping foragers, who weighed around 1,000 lbs. They calved in spring and started grazing with a calf weighing about 100 lbs. Today, it's not unusual to have 1,400-lb. cows (or even larger) with winter born calves weighing 300 lbs. when they start grazing. That's a big change, from a 1,000-lb. cow with a 100-lb. calf to a 1,400-lb. cow with a 300-lb. calf. That's 700 lbs./pair, with a dramatic change in forage demand, but head count is the same.

Cattle will consume 10-20 lbs. of green grass for every 100 lbs. of body weight. Larger animals tend to have a higher maintenance requirement and need to eat more before converting energy into milk or growth. Using the example above, today's cow-calf pairs eat almost 50% more when they start grazing than the pairs of years ago ate and just looking at the head count can lead the producer astray on stocking. It might be fun to brag about large individual weaning weights at the coffee shop, but weaned pounds per acre and increased Animal Unit Months (AUM) per acre, probably gives you more bragging rights in the enterprise profitability arena.

If you want to take grazing management and effective leases to the next level, vocabulary and stocking mindset needs to change from head count alone to several contributing factors first. Here is a quick run-down of those terms, in addition to AUE discussed already.

- Animal Unit Month (AUM): air dried forage one animal unit consumes in one month
- Carrying Capacity: amount of forage a land unit can produce at maximum utilization rate
- Stocking Density: number of AUE in a specific area at a single point in time
- Utilization Rate: Amount of foraged produced to be harvested by animals

I'd challenge you to dig into these concepts and work on a mindset change from head count stocking rate to AUE stocking rate as your guide for the grazing animal. Then, if you add better grazing management, increase forage quality, do weed/brush control, improve water developments, your pastures could perform even better than they did for your ancestors. "[Stocking Rate and Grazing Management](#)" MF-1118 is a good K-State publication to reference.

Teresa Hatfield
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Family and Community Wellness

Operation Red File

What would happen if first responders showed up at your house and you were found unresponsive? Would they know your health conditions or what medications you are taking? Many programs have been around over the years to help people make their health information known to first responders. Operation Red File began in 2016 with the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services and is another way to provide this vital information to first responders. The program allows access to your pertinent medical information in an emergency. If first responders know your medications and health conditions, they will be better able to treat you in an emergency.

The Red File is a large red folder attached to your refrigerator's front. In the file, you will enclose any information you believe first responders need to know. Information can include:

- Medication list (review and replace as often as necessary to keep it up-to-date)
- Any health conditions that you have
- Clear, a recent photograph of yourself
- A copy of any Advance Healthcare Directive like; a Power of Attorney for healthcare, living will, or a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR).

First responders and emergency staff can use this information to:

- Immediately access your medical information in an emergency
- Avoid delays if you are confused or unresponsive
- Enable quick notification of your family members or responsible party
- Have a photograph in case of a Silver Alert

Although it may sound like Operation Red File is only for older adults, it is helpful for anyone with a health condition that needs attention. If you have children or teenagers with a health condition or are an adult with a health condition, consider utilizing a Red File.

The Meadowlark Extension District is currently distributing the Red File at our offices. Stop by to pick up a file. If you have questions about the Red File, don't hesitate to contact Teresa Hatfield at 785-364-4125 or thatfield@ksu.edu.

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Cindy Williams
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Family & Community Wellness

Brain Health and Tea

There have been many reports on the benefits of drinking tea. It can be refreshing, soothing, calming and also provide health benefits.

In a recent study from the National University of Singapore, they looked at how tea effects brain function. Specifically, they targeted the connection between the left and right hemispheres of the brain. This was designed to see if tea would reduce the aging affects on the brain and the connections regarding cognition and organization.

By using neuropsychological tests and magnetic resonance imaging, the study found that consumers who drank black, green, or oolong tea four times a week had better brain connectivity and better functionality.

Kitchen Cupboard Management 101

Here are a few tips to take control of storing foods in your cupboard:

- *If you tossed portions of expired foods, buy a smaller container next time.
- *Keep a permanent marker pen in your kitchen and put the date—month and YEAR---you purchased the food on the container.
- *When in doubt about storage times, call the company (many have toll-free numbers), write the address on the label, or check if the company has a web site that might answer your questions.
- *If you can't determine how old a food is and the container contains no "use by" date, check for a production code on the container. If it's not possible to decipher the production code, call or write the company or check if this information might be given on a company web site.
- *Practice "first in, first out" for foods. If you have purchased several containers of the same type of food, arrange the containers so you reach for the oldest package first.
- ***READ LABELS CAREFULLY** for storage information and possible recommended "use by" dates.