

David Hallauer  
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

### **Soybean Seed Treatments – Sudden Death Syndrome (part 1...)**

In last week's column (available at: <https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/crops-soils/index.html>) I referenced both early planting of soybeans and soybean seed treatments. In columns the next couple of weeks, I'll hit again on both topics centered around a disease that reared its ugly head again in 2023: Soybean Sudden Death Syndrome.

Soybean Sudden Death Syndrome (SDS) has increasingly been an issue for NE Kansas soybean growers over the past decade. It's a fungal disease that can survive on not only soybean residue and in soil, but on corn residue as well. This allows it to survive *through* our corn/soybean rotations while it waits for an infection opportunity - most often when seedling development is slowed by cool/wet soil conditions.

Even after infection, we might not know it. The fungus remains in plant roots as it grows, only manifesting itself during the late vegetative or early reproductive stages. At that point, the fungus produces a toxin that moves upwards through the plant to the leaves where the very visual symptomology – green veins with yellow then brown between the veins – confirms the infection.

Management wise, start with the seed. Check varieties for SDS tolerance and use high germination seed when possible. Good planting practices are also key. Research from the Kansas River Valley Experiment Field showed increased frequency of SDS foliar symptomology in narrow row spacings as compared to wider spacings and its long been known that SDS severity is typically worst when planting in cooler/damper conditions (there *are* exceptions...).

Because it's a fungus, fungicide seed treatments have become popular as well. In next week's column, we'll dig into that a little deeper. For more information on Soybean Sudden Death Syndrome, feel free to drop me a line at [dhallaue@ksu.edu](mailto:dhallaue@ksu.edu).

Ross Mosteller  
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

### Managing Young Cows

It might be that more frequent checks of first calf heifers getting ready to calve at the farm has me thinking about management of those young breeding females. It could be follow-up to the heifer development meeting hosted earlier in the year. Or it might be the fact that I've recently become involved with an upcoming field day on raising and breeding the best dairy heifers happening in the District this April. Whatever the reason, heifers are again on my mind to write about.

It's long been recognized that reproduction is often the main limiting factor relative to production efficiency of any livestock operation. The most common reproductive problem that cattle producers encounter is getting first-calf heifers rebred. This is as important now as ever, as net present value of putting replacement heifers into the operation is running somewhere around \$1800 per head. Producers simply can't afford to lose a female at an early stage of her reproductive life, before she recovers her development cost, estimated to be around five weaned calves.

Following are some strategies to improve the reproductive performance of young cows through additional inputs, management and selection to reduce nutrient requirements of cows:

- Match the cows to the environment. The genetic potential of the female must be in synch with the production environment. Keep in mind it's essentially impossible to avoid a negative energy balance in young cows that are growing and raising a growing calf.
- Manage the young cows appropriately, possibly separate from the rest of the cow herd. Calving heifers earliest in the calving season allows for longer postpartum interval. This comes with the caveat of having good nutrition the further away from green grass they are at calving.
- Develop heifers to 65% of mature weight at breeding. Be honest with yourself on what your cows weigh and manage accordingly. Research has indicated that heifer development to a lower mature body weight percentage, even 55%, can be successful with the right genetics.
- Synchronize heifers to conceive early during a short breeding season. This is a benefit whether bull breeding or using AI. Keeping the breeding season short, means no more than 60 days, with some heifer programs going much shorter, such as 28-30 days.
- Artificially inseminate heifers with semen from high accuracy, calving ease proven sires. The next best thing is using the highest accuracy calving ease sire you can buy as a breeding bull. Not all "calving ease" bulls are created equally, so do your homework and choose wisely.
- Provide additional energy during the last 50 days of gestation so that heifers calve at a minimum body condition score (BCS) of 5. Research suggests that a BCS 6 may be the ideal target for younger cows, both from a rebreeding and calf health standpoint.
- Provide early calving assistance when intervention is needed. After a heifer has spent 1.5 hours in stage 2 labor (hooves visible), every 30-minute delay in aiding in delivery, results in an additional six days of postpartum interval, according to some research.
- Deliver the best feed resources available after calving to young cows. Providing ionophores to cows after calving has been proven to shorten postpartum interval in cows by an average of 18 days, at a minimal increase in feed cost, provided adequate energy is available.
- Consider early weaning if reasonably priced feed is available. Early weaning holds more promise for improving reproductive efficiency in first-calf heifers than probably all other methods combined. This is mostly due to the nutrient demands on the young female in maintenance, growth and lactation. Studies show that calves weaned as early as 40 days can have comparable growth rates of suckled calves.

Laura Phillips  
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

### **Planting Asparagus**

Are you looking to plant something in your garden that will give you food for the next 30 years? Then you should consider asparagus. Asparagus is a low maintenance crop that will come back year after year, ready for harvest each spring.

We happen to be in prime asparagus-planting season. Asparagus should ideally be planted between the second week of March through the first week of April. The easiest way to plant asparagus is buying 1 year old root crowns from a nursery or garden store. You can start asparagus by seed, but it takes a year for an asparagus seedling to produce a root crown that can be transplanted into your garden.

It is important to choose a space that you are willing to dedicate to asparagus for the next 30 years, as these plants will establish and keep coming back. The ideal site should get at least 8 hours of sun each day, and have well drained, fertile soil. If your site has poor soil, you can incorporate compost or manure into the soil before planting. A soil test will help you determine if fertilizer or pH adjustments are needed.

To plant asparagus crowns, dig a trench around 9 inches deep and 10 inches wide. Place the crowns in the trenches, spacing each crown 18 to 24 inches apart. Rows need spaced at least 4 feet apart. Rather than immediately burrowing the crowns, cover them with 2 inches of soil and pat the soil down. Over the summer, as the plant grows, you can gradually add more soil and fill in the trench.

Overall asparagus beds need little maintenance. The biggest task is preventing weeds that will try to outcompete young asparagus plants. Later in the summer, asparagus gets big and starts shading out weeds on its own. You can expect asparagus to get 4 to 6 feet tall. You may need to add posts into the asparagus patch to keep them from falling over. As the season progresses, they will also get bushy and start to produce seeds. At the end of the season, some gardeners remove the plant debris, but you can leave them to provide shelter for birds and critters during the winter, or to act as a wind break.

During the first year, asparagus needs to focus on sending food reserves to its roots. This means you should not try to harvest asparagus in the first year so it can focus on establishing. The following spring, asparagus will start to poke up from the ground. You can harvest some, but limit your harvest to 3 to 4 weeks. The following year you can begin harvesting for the full 6 to 8 weeks in the spring.

You can expect harvest to start around mid-April. When the shoots start to come out of the ground, cut them off with a knife at surface level or just below the surface. More spears of asparagus will then start to pop up from the ground. You can expect to harvest about every three days. During periods of warm temperature, you may be harvesting every day. If you do not harvest when the asparagus starts to emerge, they will get tall and start to branch out. At this point, it is best to leave them alone for the season.

If you have any questions about starting asparagus or how to care for your asparagus patch, reach out to your local extension office for more information!

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

### **Medigap Plans: What You Need to Know**

If you are new to Medicare, or you are already on Medicare and are considering purchasing a Medigap plan, there are some things you need to consider before making a purchase. Medicare was never intended to pay 100 percent of medical bills. Beneficiaries are often concerned with the potential high out-of-pocket costs they may have to pay with traditional Medicare. With so many options available, it is vital to understand the basics of how these plans are structured and when you are eligible.

Medigap plans work with traditional Medicare and are a secondary insurance to help pay your share of the co-insurance, co-pays, and some deductibles, or the “gaps” in Medicare. Because Medigap plans work with traditional Medicare, a plan will only cover what is covered by Medicare. For example, Medicare does not cover routine dental work; therefore, your Medigap plan will not cover routine dental work. You must utilize a separate dental plan to cover most dental costs.

Federal and state governments regulate the private insurance companies that offer Medigap plans. Medigaps use letters to identify each plan: A, B, C, F, G, K, L, M & N. Medigap plans are standardized, meaning all companies that sell a particular type have to have the same coverage. All companies that sell Plan G will be covered the same way regardless of the cost of the plan’s premium.

The best time to purchase a Medigap plan is during your open enrollment period, six months after your Medicare Part B started. During this time, you can buy any Medigap sold in Kansas, even if you have health problems. Some people will also have special enrollment opportunities under certain circumstances to purchase a policy later, such as losing employer insurance, losing coverage through no fault of your own, losing Medicaid eligibility, your company commits fraud, utilizing the Medicare Advantage plan trial period, or you move out of a select policy’s service area.

If you choose to purchase a plan after your open enrollment period and you do not qualify for a special enrollment period, you can apply for insurance at any time. However, you may have to answer questions about your health. The company will then determine whether or not to insure you. Remember that there is no annual enrollment period each year for Medigap plans. In Kansas, disabled beneficiaries under age 65 have equal access to all Medicare Medigaps sold in the state. If you are currently on a Medicare Advantage plan and during Medicare Open Enrollment (October 15-December 7) you decide you want to go back to Original Medicare, you may have to go through the underwriting process when you apply for a Medigap plan.

Because of the complexities of Medicare, many people seek help from trusted individuals. The Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK) provides unbiased information on Medicare and the other insurance that work with Medicare. Most Kansas counties have SHICK counselors to answer your questions. In the Meadowlark Extension District (Jackson, Jefferson, and Nemaha Counties), contact Teresa Hatfield at 785-364-4125 or [thatfield@ksu.edu](mailto:thatfield@ksu.edu). For a SHICK counselor across the state, call 1-800-860-5260.

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

**No news this week**