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Livestock and Natural Resources

Who's Guarding the Flock?

Predator management is an integral part of any sheep or goat enterprise. According to USDA statistics, predators, mostly coyotes and domestic dogs, accounted for 30-40% of sheep deaths and 25% of goat deaths in 2015.

There are numerous ways to manage predator risk. Like most problems, a multi-pronged approach is usually necessary. On our mostly smaller farms, predator control starts with a good fence. Livestock guardians can add another layer of protection. A good livestock guardian stays with the flock without disrupting it and represents a viable threat to predators.

There are three types of livestock guardian animals: dogs, llamas and donkeys. There are pros and cons to each and not all make suitable guardians. When choosing a guardian animal, it is important to match the characteristics of the guardian to the farm where it will work.

Livestock guardian dogs have been used for centuries, mostly in Europe and Asia, to protect livestock. Globally, there are more than 30 different breeds of dogs, used as guardians. Breeds most common to the US include: Great Pyrenees, Akbash, Maremma, Komondor and Anatolian Shepherd. The Great Pyrenees is the most popular and probably best suited for small "residential" farms, it is the least aggressive.

One of the advantages to livestock guardian dogs is they can be effective against a variety of predators, including birds of prey. The individual is more important than the breed. Gender and neutering have also not been found to have an effect on guardian success.

The key to a good guardian dog is to start with a puppy that has been raised on a farm with sheep and/or goats. It is important that the pup be bonded to stock before they are 16 weeks old. Bad behaviors such as biting, chasing and wandering need to be corrected early. Guardian dogs need to be socialized, but probably not double as the family pet.

Donkeys and llamas can also be very effective guardians because they are herding animals that have a natural dislike of dogs or coyotes. They are best suited to smaller flocks and pastures. They have numerous advantages over dogs. They are longer lived and consume the same diets as sheep or goats. They don't dig, bark or roam.

Size is important when selecting a guardian llama or donkey. Alpacas and miniature donkeys are generally likely to be less effective. They should be used singly, and geldings and females are preferred to intact males, which can be too aggressive.

Sheep and Goat Workshop, December 11, 2019 at the Fairgrounds in Holton, 7 pm. Dr Allison Crane will present Preventative Vaccinations and Parasite Control. If the weather is questionable, call before you drive.

David G. Hallauer
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Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Fall Garden Soil Prep

When you look out the window in early November and see snow, it makes you think a bit about all the things you *didn't* get done yet this fall. If you are gardener, that 'didn't get done' list might have included some garden preparation.

Fortunately, as long as soil isn't frozen, we can still get something done in the garden even in to winter. In fact, it's probably a wiser decision to do any end of season tillage now than it is to wait until spring. Soils now tend to be moist – not too wet or too dry – and are ideal for tillage. Soils in the spring? They will tend to be much more cold/wet, limiting our ability to work them easily. If you've ever tried to till your garden when it's wet, you probably remember the result: hard clods that break down very slowly. Those clods are an example of soil structure that has been destroyed, and that's a problem that isn't easily – or quickly – remedied.

While you are thinking tillage, consider adding organic matter as well. In most cases, adding a couple of inches of organic matter will suffice. If you are really trying to 'take a big swing' at changing organic matter levels, up to five or six inches can be added at one time, though it will also likely increase some variability that you may not like. For best results, shred organic matter (leaves, etc...) prior to application. Shredding increases the surface area of the organic matter that comes in contact with soil. This helps to speed the decomposition process and make it more complete.

Your garden prep window isn't closed yet, but all that takes is a long cold snap or winter moisture. Add organic matter and think about some fall garden tillage sooner than later for a better end product next planting season.

Surface Applied Lime Study

As no-till acres have increased over the last two decades, so, too, have surface applications of lime to croplands. When that occurs, one of the questions that sometimes arises is: do surface applications of lime do any good?

The short answer is yes. According to a three-year study (at two different sites) in Mitchell County by KSU researchers, a response to surface applied lime was variable, but found in corn, soybeans, and wheat to the tune of six percent, six and a half percent, and five point three percent respectively.

The study also highlighted the stratification effect that no-till can have on soil pH levels. If you've ever wondered if surface applied lime does any good, read this study in its entirety at: <https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7761&context=kaesrr> .

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

Tips for a Food Safe Thanksgiving

In the next few weeks, millions of Americans will gather family and friends around the dinner table to give thanks. But for those preparing the meal, it can be a stressful time. Not to mention, for many it is the largest meal they have cooked all year, leaving plenty of room for mistakes that could cause foodborne illness. To avoid making everyone at the table sick, here are a few tips for a safe Thanksgiving:

1. Don't wash that turkey. According to the most recent Food Safety Survey, conducted by the FDA, 68% of the public washes whole turkey before cooking it. USDA does not recommend washing raw meat and poultry before cooking. Washing raw meat and poultry can cause bacteria to spread up to three feet away. Cooking (baking, broiling, boiling, frying or grilling) meat and poultry to the right temperature kills any bacteria that may be present, so washing meat and poultry is not necessary.
2. Use the refrigerator, the cold-water method or the microwave to defrost a frozen turkey. There are three safe ways to defrost a turkey: in the refrigerator, in cold water and in the microwave oven. Thawing food in the refrigerator is the safest method because the turkey will defrost at a consistent, safe temperature. It will take 24 hours for every 5 pounds of weight for a turkey to thaw in the refrigerator.
3. Use a meat thermometer. The only way to determine if a turkey (or any meat, poultry or seafood) is cooked to check its internal temperature with a food thermometer. A whole turkey should be checked in three locations: the innermost part of the thigh, the innermost part of the wing and the thickest part of the breast. Your thermometer should register 165°F in all three of these places.
4. Don't store food outside, even if it's cold. Storing food outside is not food safe for two reasons. The first is that animals, both wild and domesticated, can get into food stored outside, consuming it or contaminating it. The second is temperature variation. The best way to keep that extra food at a safe temperature (below 40°F) is in a cooler with ice.
5. Leftovers are good in the refrigerator for up to four days. Cut the turkey off the bone and refrigerate it as soon as you can, within 2 hours of the turkey coming out of the oven. Leftovers will last for four days in the refrigerator, so if you know you won't use them right away, pack them into freezer bags or airtight containers and freeze.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

So, Now What? Tips for Managing Life after Retirement

The youngest baby boomers are about 55 years old, the oldest in their 70s. That means a whole lot of people are retiring every day in this country. I know a few of those folks. Some say that after a few months, they didn't know what to do with themselves, so they went back to work. Others say their blood pressure dropped and health improved.

Entering into retirement is an exciting adventure. You have worked for decades, and retirement from the workforce may feel liberating. Finally, you have more time to spend with your loved ones and engage in activities that you enjoy. The bucket list you have always wanted to tackle can finally be done.

Then something unexpected happens. You might realize that you miss feeling productive and you become uncertain of your purpose. You are not sure how to go about your day and you find that you are having a hard time adjusting to your new life. These uncomfortable feelings are normal and experienced by many retirees. It is important to understand that these ups-and-downs happen, and that eventually, you will likely settle into a comfortable routine, re-establish your sense of purpose, and enjoy your retired life.

Retirement can be a rollercoaster of emotions and adventures, both fun and nerve-racking. The stages of retirement highlight what some retirees may experience during their retirement years.

Honeymoon. Retirees enjoy their newfound freedom and spend their time relaxing and engaging in activities that their previous working schedule did not allow.

Disenchantment. Retirees may find a lull in their retirement, realizing that it may not be as exciting as what they had hoped. They may feel bored or lack a sense of purpose, missing the stimulation that work and colleagues provided. Retirees might ask themselves, "Did I retire too soon?"

Reorientation. During this phase, retirees will reassess their retirement, engage in new activities, and reinvigorate their sense of purpose. They might also develop a more realistic plan for their retirement years.

Retirement Routine. Retirees in this stage will effectively adapt to their new retired life and will feel content with their activities and purpose.

Termination. Some retirees may terminate their retirement by returning to work, either part- or full-time. For most people, however, termination occurs when individuals become too sick or fragile to live their life independently.

A good conversation starter (even if that conversation is with yourself) is the K-State Research & Extension factsheet, *So Now What? Tips for Managing Life after Retirement* https://www.aging.k-state.edu/programs/managing_retirement/MF3426_Fact%20Sheet.pdf. If you are already retired, where do you think you fit in these stages? It is important to be aware of these stages and understand that you might experience ups-and-downs during retirement. Despite this, retirement is an amazing opportunity to thrive and enjoy your life.