

Jody G. Holthaus
District Extension Agent
Livestock and Natural Resources

It's PEARS Week!

I wish I meant the fruit kind, but it's that time of year when Extension agents across the state are doing year end reporting. PEARS actually stands for Program Evaluation and Reporting System, it's a bunch of year end data crunching. The only thing that resembles fruit, is my mushy brain after I'm done with it.

Last year, one of the more interesting programs we did was looking at the Kansas Farm Management data on beef herds. This paper studied the differences in those herds with the highest costs versus the lowest cost herds. That study showed it's all about feed costs. With all the lower quality hay put up this summer, everyone will be looking for some extra supplementation for their cowherd. So how do you control feed costs and what are the differences among the high and low cost producers. I ran across something interesting from Iowa state.

Feed inventory- Do you take an inventory of your winter feed supplies? The high cost producers wait until late winter, the average cost producers check it right before feeding season starts, the low cost producer monitors feed supply throughout the growing season. When do you cull cows? The high cost cull when they don't raise a calf, average cost producers cull the open, old or problem cows at weaning time. Low cost producers identify cull cows throughout the year, anything below average in production, bad eyes, teats or feet are culled in late summer.

What winter grazing options are available? High cost producers have none, average cost producers own stalk fields or hay stubble. Low cost producers will use owned or leased stalk fields, stock piled hay fields and winter annuals.

How do they use these resources to get the most winter grazing? High cost does nothing, average cost limits cows to one field or area at a time, while the high cost producer will strip graze and supplement to extend the grazing time if it is cost-effective.

When are winter feeding programs finalized? High cost producers always feed the same year after year. Average producers finalize in the fall and adjust based on forage supply. The low cost producers are working throughout the year to determine costs and select least cost feeding programs.

How do you determine how much feed? High cost producers feed as much as they will eat, average cost producers estimate their needs and feed that amount, high cost producers use ration balancing programs to determine their nutritional needs are met.

Ration balancing programs, huh? Like the BRANDS program? Another computer program I actually enjoy doing!! If you'd like to take a look at your proposed winter ration, I'd be happy to assist, give me a call!

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

Soil Testing: Sampling for the Sake of It – or to Gain Valuable Information

A good fertility program has a lot to do with a knowledge of a plant's requirements for growth balanced with what the soil can provide. That's where a good soil test can be invaluable.

What is a good test and how do you get it?

Start by asking why you are sampling. If evaluating a poor performing area, the sampling protocol will be different than when you are determining an 'average' fertilizer application rate. If trying to fertilize zones/grids on a precision basis, the sampling procedure will be different than if looking for a whole farm/field/garden nutrient level. If you participate in a cost share program that requires soil sampling, be sure to know what the program requires.

Collect an appropriate number of cores. A single core is not acceptable. The variability is too high. Base soil test recommendations on a minimum of 12-15. More is better.

Keep sampling depth consistent. Organic matter, pH, and other nutrient levels can vary significantly with depth. For the more routine nutrients (pH, organic matter, phosphorous, potassium, and zinc), sample to a six-inch depth. Sampling from varying depths can skew results and not accurately show what the soil is providing for nutrients in the root zone. When sampling for mobile nutrients (nitrogen, sulfur, or chloride), a two-foot sample depth is more appropriate.

Avoid 'patterns' when sampling. Zig zag back and forth rather than following planting, tillage or fertilizer application equipment. Non-uniform fertilizer applications can and do occur. Sampling in a more random pattern helps offset potential uniformity issues. If grid sampling, collect accurate GPS coordinates that will allow you to return to the same spot when sampling next time – then sample in a five to ten-foot radius around the center point for best results.

If you are evaluating a poor growth spot or uniformity issue, sample normal and abnormal areas separately. This will help determine if a nutrient is the issue or something else.

Watch for trends over multiple sampling cycles to get an even better idea as to how your nutrient management program is performing. For best results, sample at the same time of year (fall is an excellent time...) and following the same crop each time.

A soil sample is a relatively inexpensive way to get some really good information about what the soil can provide for the growing crop or turf stand or even a garden. You can make that good information even better if you follow some of these guidelines.

For more information on soil testing – for crop, forage, garden, or landscape – contact any of our Meadowlark Extension District Offices or e-mail me directly at dhallaue@ksu.edu. Soil probes are available for checkout via any Meadowlark Extension District Office.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Please use the following as you see fit if applicable to your circulation:

HOLTON RECORDER: Soil test cost share assistance for various soil test packages at a seventy percent level is available on a limited basis from the Jackson County Conservation District for field crop and forage. If interested, contact the Jackson County Conservation District or Meadowlark Extension District for details.

VALLEY FALLS VINDICATOR/OSKALOOSA INDEPENDENT: Soil test cost share assistance is available on a limited basis from the Jefferson County Conservation District for field crop and forage producers interested in a basic soil test package (pH/P/K). If interested, contact the Jefferson County Conservation District or Meadowlark Extension District for details.

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

It's Fall and Time for Pumpkins!

The most popular use for pumpkins this time of year is jack-o-lanterns and fall decorations. But pumpkin is healthy and versatile, so we could be preparing and eating it in a variety of ways, as well. Pumpkin provides fiber, vitamins A and C, potassium and protein. Here are some guidelines when choosing a pumpkin for cooking:

- *Choose a small pumpkin that weighs two and six pounds.

- *"Pie pumpkin" or "sweet pumpkin" is a good choice, but the jack-o-lantern variety also works just fine for eating.

- *Look for a pumpkin that has one or two inches of stem left. Pumpkins with shorter stems decay more quickly.

- *Choose a pumpkin that has a rich orange color with skin that cannot be easily broken or scratched by your fingernail.

For every pound of whole pumpkin, you can expect to get one cup of pumpkin puree.

To get multiple uses out of it, you can use first use your pumpkin as a decoration by painting a funny face on it using non-toxic paints. Then, after the holiday, you can wash and cook it.

To use the pumpkin for maximum benefit, don't throw out the seeds---they can be roasted and eaten. Start by removing the stem with a sharp knife. Cut the pumpkin in half and scoop out the seeds and scrape the stringy part away. Wash the seeds in warm water and spread them out to dry. To roast, spray pan with oil and spread seeds thinly on the pan. You can sprinkle the seeds with salt or any seasoning that appeals to you (such as cheesy popcorn or Cajun seasoning). Bake in a 250° F oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

There are three ways to prepare the pumpkin in order to make pumpkin puree.

- *To bake: Cut the pumpkin in half, place the cut side down on a cookie sheet and bake at 350° F until fork tender or about an hour.

- *To microwave: Place half of the pumpkin cut side down on a microwave safe plate and microwave on high for fifteen minutes or until fork tender.

- *To boil: Cut the pumpkin into large chunks and rinse in cold water.

Place the chunks in a large pot and cover with water. Cover the pot and boil for 20 to 30 minutes until tender.

After following one of the three methods above to prepare it, you can now make the puree: Cool and peel the pumpkin and use a food processor, blender, ricer or potato masher to puree it. Pumpkin puree can be used in any recipe in which you use purchased pumpkin. Pumpkin puree can be frozen at 0° for up to one year. It is not recommended to can pumpkin puree as the center of the jars may not get hot enough to kill bacteria.

If your desire is to can pumpkin, can it into chunks first and then use a pressure canner as it is a low acid vegetable. Pumpkins should have a hard rind and string less, mature pulp. They should be ideal for cooking fresh. Small pumpkins (sugar or pie pumpkins) make better products.

Hot pack—Wash pumpkin and remove seeds. Cut into 1-inch slices and peel. Cut flesh into 1-inch cubes. Add to a saucepot of boiling water, boil 2 minutes. CAUTION: DO NOT MASH or PUREE. Pack hot cubes into hot jars, leaving 1-inch head space. Fill jars to 1 inch from top with boiling hot cooking liquid. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids and process.

Process in a Dial Gauge Pressure Canner at 11 pounds' pressure OR in a Weighted Gauge Pressure Canner at 10 pounds' pressure:

- Pints for 55 minutes or Quarts for 90 minutes.

If you have pumpkins but you're not quite ready to cook them, keep in mind that pumpkins can be stored for several months if kept at 50° F to 55° F in a dry, airy place.

For more information, contact your local Meadowlark Extension District Office. We have offices in Oskaloosa, Holton and Seneca. I can be reached at 785-863-2212.

Nancy C. Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Living Life Richer

Being constantly on the go allows little time for reflection, long-term planning, and enjoying the present. Choosing how best to live life richer is a personal decision.

For some people it would mean more time to cultivate meaningful relationships with family and friends. For others it could be reducing financial concerns, practicing healthful habits that contribute to a longer and more independent lifestyle, or being able to more fully nurture one's inner self and pursue creative interests.

You may sense that your life is not headed in the direction you desire. To some who are older, it may seem their younger lives were spent making a living, but now are spending their older years trying to regain their health or catch up in other areas.

Are your current eating, physical activity, and other health-related habits likely to contribute to a long, healthy life? What benefits would you expect to have from good physical health and financial security, now and long into the future?

What kind of event might occur that would increase your motivation to stick to your resolutions? Would it take a serious illness or accident, extreme financial distress, or the disruption of a valued relationship to trigger change? What would need to change to make your resolutions a reality? Why, and how, could you live life richer by making some lifestyle changes?

Another way to view this is to make a "bucket list". Write down at least two to three lifetime goals. Achieving goals is more likely if you write them down. What could you do right now to achieve the items on your list?