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Pasture Season Around the Corner

It's time to start thinking about getting cattle out to grass. First off, it's time to do a breeding soundness exam on your bulls.

The Breeding Soundness Evaluation (BSE) is a relatively quick and economic procedure that can be performed by your veterinarian. It is recommended that all bulls be checked annually, within 60 days of the start of the breeding season. The BSE system is a screening procedure that places bulls into categories of satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or deferred.

The BSE system is most effective in identifying bulls at the lower end of the fertility spectrum. Eliminating bulls from the breeding herd that the BSE system has determined to be less fertile (classified as unsatisfactory potential breeders) and replacing them with bulls that are classified as satisfactory potential breeders increases the likelihood of high pregnancy rates and high percentage of calves being conceived early in the breeding season.

The BSE procedure includes the following.

- A general physical exam that evaluates the bull's nutritional status (body condition).
- Looking for structural defects and disease conditions that affect the feet and legs and would hinder the bull's breeding performance.
- Evaluation to determine the adequacy of their eyesight and teeth.
- Internal structures of the reproductive system are examined, such as the prostate, seminal vesicles, ampulla and inguinal rings to ensure normalcy.
- External structures of the reproductive system such as the penis, prepuce, sheath, testicles, scrotum and epididymis are also examined for normalcy.
 - Scrotal circumference is measured and adequacy is determined based on established standards by age.
- Semen evaluation is a critical component of the BSE and includes a microscopic evaluation of the semen to determine sperm motility and the percent of morphologically normal sperm.

On a herd basis it is generally found that more than 75% of the bulls tested meet the requirements to be classified as satisfactory.

The objective of the BSE is to identify those bulls that fail to meet the minimum standards. Having bulls that are unsatisfactory potential breeders in the breeding herd places the herd at risk for lower and/or delayed pregnancies. Remember that the higher percentage of calves that are conceived early in the breeding season means more profit. In multi-sire breeding pastures, generally one or two bulls will be dominate and breed more cows compared to bulls that are subordinate. If by chance the dominate bull(s) are unsatisfactory then reproductive success is placed at risk.

BSE does not routinely assess the sexual behavioral traits, such as libido, mating ability, and social adaptability of bulls within the mating environment. Therefore, it is important to observe the breeding behavior of the bulls during the breeding season to insure that the bull(s) are detecting and servicing the cows which are in estrus.

David G. Hallauer

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Grass Growth and Development

Spring green-up is a great time for the forage producer. If you're grazing the forage, it is hope that winter feeding will soon be over. For the hay producer, it's time to see what can be produced. Spring weather, on the other hand, can throw us some curves. That's when understanding what we can expect out of that forage plant can help 'temper' our expectations.

The brome and fescue that makes up our predominant forage base in much of Northeast Kansas are cool season grasses. They grow best at temperatures in the 45-75 degree range. They respond well to fertilizers and grow well in the spring as well as again in the fall.

The bluestems, Indiangrass, and others that make up the Flint Hills region of Kansas are warm season grasses. They grow well when temperatures creep above 75 degrees. They really take off well in late spring and in to summer.

Like all plants, the photosynthetic process is very important. The capture of sunlight and its conversion to energy used to make plant proteins and other parts is what helps plants continue in their life cycle. The goal: maximize production and help the plant to survive another year.

Even as the grass plant seems to be developing quickly, young leaves may not be producing enough to meet plant growth needs. That means that energy 'draws' are required from the plant crown. This will likely continue until at least two to three full leaves are formed.

Why is this important now? Any excess removal of leaf area as the plant goes through these early growth stages often has an impact on how the plant performs in the near term as well as in the future. Stresses like unintended fire or heavy grazing or clipping too short can all be detrimental to continued development – if the situation isn't managed correctly. Bottom line: now is not the time to take grass growth for granted – it could have season long consequences.

Early July Tomatoes?

As temperatures crept upwards this spring, thoughts of early garden plantings crept in as well. If you like tomatoes like I do, you might be tempted to put some out early and see whether you can speed things up a little. Possible? Maybe. Probable? Not as much...

I referenced our KSU Vegetable Garden Planting Guide a couple of weeks ago. The calendar in that guide shows tomato planting in May. Fact is, we're probably looking at the middle of May in NEK in most years. If you want to give early planting a try, however, heed these tips from Ward Upham, a horticulture specialist at Kansas State University:

First, understand weather risks. Temperatures jump around early in the season and that has an effect on soil temperatures. 'Tomatoes need a soil temperature of at least 55 degrees to do well' according to Upham. A good source of soil temperatures is the Kansas Mesonet mesonet.k-state.edu. If using plastic mulch to warm the soil, Upham suggests waiting several days after laying to allow temperatures to increase.

Second, protect plants from frost. Consider the use of hot caps or water teepees, types of protective cones that fit over young plants. They can protect plants early and plants will outgrow them as they develop.

Even following these guidelines is no guarantee of early tomatoes. You might get something by early July, but mid-July will still be our most common production window.

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

Food and its packaging does not seem to be a source for novel coronavirus

While many of our day-to-day systems continue to be strained by the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, the safety of America's food supply does not appear to be one of those, says a Kansas State University food safety specialist.

Karen Blakeslee notes that three of the United States' leading agencies – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture – all report that so far there have been no human illnesses that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted through food or food packaging.

"The nation's food system is being challenged," Blakeslee said, "but is still performing well."

However, while the food supply seems to be safe, Blakeslee urges consumers to continue practicing common food safety steps when preparing meals:

- Clean hands, utensils, and surfaces often.
- Separate raw foods from ready-to-eat foods and use separate equipment for different foods and tasks.
- Cook foods to the proper temperature measured with a food thermometer. Keep hot foods hot.
- Chill or freeze food properly. Refrigerate perishable foods and leftovers within two hours of preparing them. Keep cold foods cold. Freeze foods for later use to reduce food waste.

Blakeslee also reinforced the importance of washing hands throughout the day, such as when preparing food and eating; caring for someone who is sick; after using the bathroom or changing a diaper; after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing; or after touching animals or handling the garbage.

"Handwashing is the most important defense against many illnesses, whether foodborne or overall health," she said. "This simple practice can save your health and the health of others. The soap, water, rubbing, rinsing and drying steps all help physically remove visible and invisible contamination from your hands. Soap bubbles and friction help remove visible dirt and break up bacteria so it can be washed away. Always wash your hands before and after handling food."

Blakeslee added that getting through stressful times will require many people to be considerate of one another.

"We are all in this together," she said, "and we all need to eat. Make a plan before going to the grocery store and only buy what you need. If you don't need the item, don't handle it. This helps reduce potential contamination. Use up the food you already have to reduce food waste."

For more information and tips to help people take care of themselves and others during times of crisis, K-State Research and Extension has [compiled numerous publications and other information online](#).

Local K-State Research and Extension agents are still on the job during this time of closures and confinement. They, too, are practicing social distancing. Email is the best way to reach them, but call forwarding and voicemail allow for closed local offices to be reached by phone as well (some responses could be delayed). To find out how to reach your local agents, visit the K-State Research and Extension [county and district directory](#).

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
You Asked It! (monthly newsletter from K-State's Rapid Response Center) –
<https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/newsletter>

K-State Research and Extension resources -- <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/about-us/covid-19-extension.html>

Local extension offices in Kansas -- <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html>

Nancy C. Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Select Healthy Seasonal Foods

This year as a part of Walk Kansas, the lifestyle traits of places across the world where people live measurably longer and healthier lives are a focus. In Blue Zones® communities, people eat little to no processed food.

Their eating patterns ebb and flow with the seasons, creating natural variety throughout the year. They eat a wide variety of seasonal, local fruits and vegetables. In addition to logging activity minutes, Walk Kansas participants can log the amount of fruits and vegetables they eat.

In our country, processed foods have become a staple. People rely on and value convenience and some minimally processed foods have a place in a healthful diet. These include bagged spinach and salad greens, cut vegetables, and roasted nuts, canned tuna packed in water, as well as fruits and vegetables frozen or canned (in water).

Foods with added ingredients to enhance flavor and texture (sweeteners, spices, oils, colors, and preservatives) can be consumed occasionally. These include jarred pasta sauce, salad dressing, yogurt, and cake mixes.

Heavily processed foods should be avoided when possible. This includes ready-to-eat foods, such as crackers, chips, and deli meat. The most heavily processed foods are frozen pizza and premade meals (except for those you prepare and freeze yourself).

Take inventory of heavily processed foods you buy. Can you replace some of these with more healthful options? Keep fresh fruit on hand and prepped veggies in your refrigerator for easy snacking. Make your own frozen meals. Enjoy a bowl meal or stir fry to incorporate more plants every day.