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District Extension Agent
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Last Call for Soybean Cyst Nematode Sampling

For the past three years, the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, via a Soybean Cyst Nematode (SCN) Coalition grant, has offered a limited supply of free SCN samples to Kansas producers. If you suspect soybean cyst nematode might be a production issue in your soybean fields, take advantage of this program soon. Time is limited.

We often don't notice SCN because they're small and damage closely mirrors other field issues. All of its reproduction/feeding occurs on roots. Even digging up plants to find them can be a difficult process due to field variability and their small size. Because the nematode interferes with plant uptake of water and nutrients, it looks a lot like heat/moisture stress – or other diseases like charcoal rot. You may not even know you have an issue until levels have increased to a point where substantial yield loss is already occurring.

Since 2019, a sampling of 30 plus fields across the Meadowlark Extension District confirmed around half had soybean cyst nematode present. Fortunately, none of the positives were at levels likely resulting in significant yield losses. Unfortunately, levels can grow over time. That's why monitoring potential trouble spots via programs like these are important.

Areas of poor production in many fields this year were likely due to moisture stress. If you've noted a pattern of poor production in a field area over time, however, it might be time to rule out SCN. Did you notice areas exhibiting yellowing leaves, stunted plants, and early maturity, often in a circular pattern? It may end up being nutrient deficiency, herbicide injury, compaction, drought, or root rot – but sampling for SCN can't hurt, either. For instructions on sampling and submission, contact me via any District Office or dhallaue@ksu.edu.

Was the Rain Enough?

Fortunately, much of the area saw beneficial rain last week. Unfortunately, soil moisture levels may not have recovered enough to supply the winter long needs of many landscape plants.

Much of our late season moisture has been of the 'light sprinkling' nature, wetting only the uppermost portions of the soil profile. Landscape plants need more, with moisture to a minimum of twelve inches more optimum for winter survival and spring growth. This is especially true for newly planted trees and shrubs (limited root systems) and evergreen trees (because they are losing moisture all year long).

Soil moisture levels can be accessed via the Kansas Mesonet at: <https://mesonet.ksu.edu/agriculture/soilmoist/>. Even during last week's rain event, you could monitor the rise in soil moisture levels and get a ballpark idea about how soil moisture levels might be faring.

If you want to check out your 'local' landscape, use a metal rod, wooden dowel, electric fence post turned upside down or something similar to check moisture depth. Dry soil is much harder to push through than wet, and you can get a pretty good idea in pretty short order whether this rain has been enough – or if supplemental watering would be beneficial.

KSU Horticulture Specialist Dr. Ward Upham suggests a 'normal' winter may require only a single watering before spring. If it stays warm and dry? Consider watering monthly.

Ross Mosteller

District Extension Agent
Livestock & Natural Resources

Geotextile Fabric

I was once told that an Extension agent will do about anything to find a reason to get out of the office on a Friday, especially if it is a nice day. Some choose “turfgrass management” sessions at the golf course, others field visits to producers or in my case last week a trip to Topeka to haul geotextile. Okay, so you might be asking what is geotextile and why are you hauling it?

Webster defines geotextile as: “*a strong synthetic fabric usually used in civil engineering construction projects, such as highway or dam building, that stabilizes loose soil and prevents erosion.*” This product can actually be the fabric (*yes, pun intended*) that weaves together the livestock and natural resources sides of my job responsibilities. If you are not familiar with this product, I’ll try to explain what I mean and how it can be utilized.

Livestock congregation areas around feed and water sources can lead to deep mud (*when it rains again!*) in places that it might not be feasible to invest in concrete. Utilizing this relatively inexpensive method of placing a layer of fabric down on a prepared soil bed, followed by rock or gravel, leads to a more stable and durable feeding pad, waterer apron or pond access - to name a few. If used in tandem with other practices that help to reduce runoff, pollutant loading and other less than favorable environmental effects from livestock production, you have the overlap of my job responsibilities.

Often the issue that arises for livestock producers is that you need a small amount of this product around a stock tank, feed bunk or similar project, but to get it at an affordable price, you have to purchase a roll of several hundred feet. My predecessor had become well known for her work in this area, with this product. Our Holton office has been a local go-to supplier of geotextile for many smaller projects, but I’ve not maintained inventory during the time of transition. I’m happy to report that demand has remained strong and we will continue to help meet this need, across Meadowlark District by keeping a roll of geotextile in our Holton office.

I’d be remiss to not address the fact that we are in the education business and not retail. This is not a primary function for Extension, but when coupled with education and technical advice, it becomes a logical service component for us. The “one stop shop” on education and information for many of these geotextile related projects can be referenced at: <https://www.kcare.k-state.edu/pubs/index.html> Some of the publications found here specifically mention geotextile fabric, others discuss operations where it could very easily be applied. One request that comes with purchasing and seeking advice on use of geotextile, would be that I might follow up with a request for photos and narrative of how you’ve utilized the product.

So, there you have it, my justification for being out of the office on a beautiful fall day. We are now well supplied with geotextile fabric and offer it for sale by the linear foot. The roll width is twelve and one-half feet wide so you must take that width, times the number of running feet you need. One benefit of dry weather is that it is a good time to work on some of these types of projects - especially on ponds. If you would like to learn more about the application of geotextile, please reach out to me directly or contact any of the Meadowlark District offices.

Teresa Hatfield

District Extension Agent
Family and Community Wellness

Understanding Medicare Advantage Plans

This time of year, we constantly see television commercials for Medicare Advantage plans. A well-known celebrity tells us we need to call and check our benefits. What exactly does all this mean? What are Medicare Advantage plans, and how do they work.

Medicare Advantage plans are another way to access your Medicare benefits. They are also called Medicare Part C or MA plans. Instead of using Original Medicare as your primary insurance, you agree to use a private insurance company to manage your Medicare benefits. Medicare Advantage plans include in-patient hospital and medical coverage under one insurance plan. Many plans include prescription drug coverage as well. They may also have extra benefits traditional Medicare doesn't offer, including dental care, vision, hearing, gym memberships, etc. Plans typically use a network of providers, including hospitals, doctors, physical therapists, and skilled nursing facilities.

Medicare Advantage plans have to offer the same benefits as Original Medicare; they may have different coverage rules, premiums, and cost-sharing.

All Medicare Advantage plans are different. For example, with Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs), you generally must receive all your care from providers in the plan's network. The plan may not cover your care if you go outside the network. Private Fee-for-Service Plans (PFFS) can have a network of contracted network providers, or you can go to any provider that will take the plan. Preferred Provider Organizations (PPOs) also have a network of providers. It is more cost-effective to use network providers. However, the plan will cover some of the cost if you go out of network. Traveling outside the plan's service area may limit your coverage. However, if you have an emergency, the plan must cover you.

There are several things to consider before joining a Medicare Advantage plan. If you like your current doctor, will they be covered under the MA plan, or are they in the plan's network? Generally, it is more cost-effective if all your healthcare providers are in the network.

Will the plan cover visits if your doctor is not in the network? Which specialists, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and home health agencies are in the network?

How does this plan cover prescription drugs? Are all the drugs that you take covered by the plan? Will you be able to use the same pharmacy? What are the costs that you can expect in an MA plan? Many plans will have co-payments and co-insurance.

Plans must also have an annual maximum out-of-pocket cap that must be before the plan pays at 100%. PPO plans can also have a higher out-of-network maximum out-of-pocket if you go outside the PPO network.

You can only enroll in Medicare Advantage plans during designated enrollment periods. We are in the Open Enrollment period, which runs through December 7, 2020. Because there are a variety of plans and types of offered plans, you may want to consult with a trained Medicare counselor before you join a Medicare Advantage plan.

If you are interested in exploring your Medicare options or want more information about Medicare Advantage plans, contact Teresa Hatfield at the Meadowlark Extension District at 785-364-4125.

Cindy Williams

District Extension Agent
Family & Community Wellness

Tips For Low-Cost Holiday Meals

It doesn't take long for you to realize when you are in the grocery store to see that food prices are on the rise. Grocery prices have risen 23% over this time last year. Economists tell us that these prices are here to stay. So, here are a few budget friendly tips to help save money on holiday meals.

- * Plan your menu carefully. Check what food and ingredients you already have and then make your shopping list. Look at online and print grocery store ads. Using MyPlate as a guide to plan your holiday meals can be helpful.
- * Prepare less. Think about having less food. This could include less of the expensive items and a smaller number of dishes served. However, consider keeping the holiday foods important to your family traditions on the menu.
- * Trim protein costs. A whole turkey is less expensive per serving than a turkey breast. Lean roast beef, pork loin and some types of fish, such as cod or flounder are lower cost options. Consider serving soup or a casserole that can extend your protein dollar.
- * Serve it simple. Sometimes serving dishes with less ingredients can be healthier as well as save time and money.
- * Shop smart. Beware of store displays that are designed to tempt you to buy things you didn't plan on purchasing. Use unit pricing to help compare different brands and different sizes of products can help you save money.
- * Cook ahead. Instead of purchasing some of the more expensive convenience items, many of your dishes can be prepared or partially prepared a day or two in advance: roasting a turkey, cranberry relish, cube and dry bread for stuffing, and prep-prep vegetables for salads and casseroles.
- * Make smart beverage choices. Water is easy on the wallet and people typically will drink less of the other beverages if they can use water to quench their thirst. Regular soda, energy or sports drinks, and other sweet drinks can be expensive and usually contain a lot of added sugar.
- * Get your money's worth of leftovers. Handle leftover safely so that they can be used for meals in the days ahead. Always wash hands with soap and water before handling food. Leftovers should be stored within two hours of cooking. Divide leftovers into smaller portions and refrigerate in covered shallow containers so they cool quickly. Use refrigerated leftovers within 3 to 4 days for freeze for longer storage.