

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Woody Encroachment – How Bad Is It?

The 2024 version of the KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide went live online this week (accessible via the KSU Bookstore at: <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/SRP1183.pdf>). One of its sections I reference frequently is the one on weed and brush control options for range and pasture – and for good reason according to statistics from the Great Plains Grassland Extension Partnership. According to this multistate collaboration, *annual* rangeland production lost to woody encroachment (in the Great Plains region...) is estimated at over 22 million tons, and on the increase (numbers based on monitoring using satellite imagery with 1990 as the base year).

Not sure what 22 million tons looks like? It's the equivalent of over 35 million round bales. The lost acreage alone would supply the annual forage needs of 4.7 million cows. It is obvious that woody encroachment is a huge issue for grass managers.

There are significant production losses outlined in our Meadowlark Extension District counties as well:

- Nemaha County: 6,600 tons of production lost – equivalent to four percent of production
- Jackson County: 23,800 tons of production lost – equivalent to over seven and a half percent of production
- Jefferson County: 30,100 tons of production lost – equivalent to over 15 and a half percent of production

Source: <https://www.wlfw.org/yieldgap/Kansas/index.html>

Is woody encroachment an issue you're fighting? The KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide doesn't have all the answers, but it does have some pretty good ones if you want to take a look at chemical control options (it also provides information on some integrated management options, too). Check it out online or request a hard copy when they arrive in late January. We do have extra copies of the 2023 version left as well if you want to get a first look now.

This issue is larger than a chemical recommendation, however. An understanding of how we got here and how to combat this issue is also important, and a topic we'll discuss in this space further as we approach the new year. In the meantime, drop me a line if you want to discuss your specific situation in more detail – and start planning to halt woody encroachment losses.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Family Farm Business Transition

The increase asks for information on current “going” rental rates, purchase of Farm Account books and the arrival of the Farmers Tax Guides in the Extension Office, signals the end of a calendar year approaching. Along with this time of year is financial look back on the past year and looking ahead to the coming year. We often think in the short term of yearly finances, but what about longer term with generational transfer and planning?

Talking about transition of a family farm is a topic that few people like to address, but this is such a critical link to the success of the business. It is never too early to start thinking about generational transfer of the family farm, something most families want to see happen. Careful planning and good communication skills increase the chances of a smooth transition of a business and maintain harmony among family members involved.

Historical statistical analysis shows that about 30 percent of family-owned businesses are successful in transferring to the second generation. Approximately 15 percent go on to the third, only 5 percent make the fourth, and less than 2 percent will survive until the fifth generation. The factors affecting these statistics are many, such as younger generation lack of interest in the business or older generation fear of retirement and “death planning”, but in many cases it is simply a lack of planning or a failure to communicate effectively.

The first step in making a transition is to assess the current business, by evaluation of its financial health, and its strengths and weaknesses. Financial measures may reveal the need for substantial changes. Businesses that have not met or exceeded the industry average profit level in the past will probably have trouble surviving in the future. In addition, family members need to evaluate what areas of their business are competitive and what areas need improvement.

A comprehensive “planning thought process” is needed to increase the likelihood of a successful business transition. This is an on-going, never ending, cycle of planning that begins with the development of a shared stakeholder vision. A vision is a long-term concept focused on the plans for the future. Businesses that have a vision of where they are going and what they want to achieve, are more often successful than those who don’t.

Development of associated mission, objectives, goals, strategy and specific tactics, comes next. This will help the family business ultimately achieve the vision that the stakeholders have in mind. Going through the process of discussing these things and actually writing them down, help all involved understand where they are and where they want to go. As a final step in the process, stakeholders need to examine resource needs to determine what changes will be needed in the current resource base in order to achieve the vision of the business.

When planning for the future of family-owned businesses, good communication is the key. How well a family communicates on a daily basis relates strongly with the probability of success. If the family decides to pass down their business to the next generation, a transition plan is needed. A plan will summarize retirement plans for the existing generation and will address the question of fair versus equal for each stakeholder. A comprehensive plan will also need to establish the financial, organizational, and management structure of the business.

The succession process will be most successful if a “team approach” is established, supported by good communication, and has continuous skill development. The process can be relatively short, or it can take several years, and can sometimes lead to frustrations. There is good news however! AgKansitions, from the Kansas State University Office of Farm and Ranch Transition, is a resource here to help. Visit <https://www.agkansitions.org/> or contact your local Extension office for assistance connecting to this resource.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Act Now to Control Volunteer Trees

While we tend to focus on Christmas trees this time of year, there are another kind of tree we should think about in December: volunteer trees. Volunteer trees are saplings that appear on their own from seeds without human help. Volunteer trees are a vital part of our landscape, but if they are in your yard, garden, or pastures, they can be a nuisance. If the volunteer tree is desirable but in the wrong place, you can wait and transplant it in the spring. Other volunteer trees, can be cut down and treated to remove them from the landscape. December and January are a surprisingly good time to treat for these trees.

The first step to control volunteer trees is to cut them down. Some trees, like eastern redcedar, will not resprout after being cut. Many common trees, however, including oak, maple, elm, ash, hackberry, cottonwood, and sycamore, will resprout after cut if you do not dig out the roots or treat the stump with an herbicide.

There is a common misconception that trees must be growing for herbicides to work. It is true that without any leaves, a foliar herbicide spray will not do any good. Applying herbicide to a cut stump, however, can kill the trees at any stage of growth. Often, the winter is a convenient time to remove volunteer trees, and the absence of leaves and greenery helps you find and treat small trees.

Glyphosate (found in Roundup) and Triclopyr, are the most common active ingredients in stump treatment herbicides for homeowners. Whereas you usually use a diluted herbicide for foliar spray, stump treatments generally use an undiluted or lightly diluted herbicide. Before purchasing the herbicide, make sure the label says that it can be used for stump treatment. Make sure to read all instructions on the label and wear all the necessary protective equipment.

The goal is for the tree to absorb the herbicide and transport it to the roots. To do this, we need to apply the treatment in a ring on the outer edge of the stump immediately after cutting it. Trees have small veins in the outer rings that transport food and water, known as the phloem and xylem. Apply the herbicide on the outer edge of the stump to get the herbicide into the tree's veins. We recommend applying the herbicide immediately after cutting the tree, as the veins, when exposed to air, will start to close off and won't absorb the herbicide. These stump treatments should only be applied when temperatures are above freezing, or the herbicide may freeze on the stump instead of moving down into the roots.

While these stump treatments are great for getting rid of volunteer trees, they should not be used on suckers. Suckers are small shoots that appear at the base of a tree. If an herbicide is applied to a sucker, it will transport the herbicide to the roots of the main tree, and you may damage or kill your tree.

If you are having trouble with volunteer trees in your yard or garden and need more guidance, feel free to reach out to your local extension office for more information.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Scam Alert: Remote Patient Monitoring

The Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General wants Medicare beneficiaries to be aware of a new scam that fraudulent bills people for remote patient monitoring (RPM). Remote patient monitoring allows healthcare providers to manage acute and chronic conditions through medical devices such as scales, glucose monitors, blood pressure cuffs, and cardiac rhythm devices. RPM can be paired with telehealth to reduce costs to the patient and infection risk. However, HHS reports that dishonest companies and fraudsters are scamming unsuspecting Medicare beneficiaries by signing them up for services they don't need.

Scammers will attempt to contract beneficiaries by telephone (cold calling), through the internet with false and tempting advertising, or enticements to phone after seeing a television commercial. The scammers then enroll the beneficiary in the RPM program. They may or may not receive any durable medical equipment at their home. The beneficiary would see a monthly charge for the RPM on their Medicare Summary Notice. The beneficiary usually never receives monthly monitoring but is billed for the service anyway.

You can tell if you have been a victim of this scam by reviewing your Medicare Summary Notice. You should receive a quarterly Medicare Summary Notice (MSN). The MSN outlines claims processed by Medicare. The MSN will explain what a health provider billed, the amount approved by Medicare, how much Medicare paid, and your responsibility. You should review your notice to ensure that the services listed are accurate. Keep a separate record of all the services you have received to compare your record to the MSN.

Protect yourself from Medicare fraud and abuse.

- If someone calls you and offers free medical equipment (back brace, knee brace, blood pressure cuff), hang up.
- Always review your Medicare Summary Notice for errors.
- Only accept delivery of ordered medical equipment.
- A trusted healthcare provider should approve any requests for equipment for your medical needs.
- Be suspicious of unsolicited requests for your Medicare number.

If you believe you have been a victim of Medicare fraud or scam, call the Senior Medicare Patrol Program at 1-800-432.3535 to report the issue.

Cindy Williams
District Extension Agent, Family & Community Wellness

Strengthen Family Bonds During the Holidays

Holidays are typically the one time of year that families from near and far gather for celebrations. Spending time together is a way that families of all ages can build relationships and create lasting memories.

Strong families make their relationships a priority and often engage in activities to build their relationships. Time spent together helps to create a feeling of family and builds resiliency in children.

There are numerous ways to strengthen your family relations, and many of these activities are not expensive to do.

- Have a “no phone/technology rule” during dinner or other family activities, so that family members are encouraged to talk, share and interact with one another. Make it a game and see who can go the longest without being on their phone!
- Have a family game night. Choose a game that is fun and includes everyone in the activity.
- Watch a special family movie with popcorn and other snacks to make it a special night.
- Shop the after Christmas sales together and see who can get the best deal for the least amount of money.
- Cook together. Baking or preparing special foods or treats are a great way to instill cooking skills in youth. Young children can wash vegetables, set the table or frost cookies.
- Make time for each child individually to build a sense of belonging.
- Have grandparents share stories of the past to help connect their values and beliefs with today.
- Share or start a family tradition. Words of appreciation and a heartfelt “thank you” can go a long way in showing your love and support for one another.

No matter what activity your family engages in, it will benefit your family to create lasting holiday memories.