

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year...

While agriculture *never* really stops, there are times of the year when things at least slow down a little. I hope this fall can be that ‘most wonderful time of the year’ for you. Harvest is mostly complete with another crop in the bin. With any luck, chores aren’t taking the time they most certainly will later on. Hopefully, you can take a deep breath, and actually exhale with some degree of relaxation.

Unfortunately, sometimes that’s not the way it works. There’s still work to do outside – with less time to do it in - and finances to get in order by year’s end. Even though they’re enjoyable, holidays can add stress as well. With that in mind, I hope and pray you are headed into the Thanksgiving holiday with a light heart and good spirits, but if you’re not, keep in mind two things: you aren’t alone and there are resources to help.

I’m not an expert. I’m not a counselor. I don’t have a perfect understanding of what your individual situation or stress might be. What I can say, however, is taking care of your *own* health and well-being is as important as those decisions you are making to keep your ag enterprise running as it should – and it deserves your attention. What that might look like is different for everyone. Maybe it’s a conversation with a friend. Maybe it’s sharing with family. Maybe it’s a visit with a trusted clergy or counselor.

Maybe you don’t know where to start at all – and that’s okay. One first step might be a Kansas Agrability Project publication tailored toward agriculture: *Managing Stress: Tips and Resources* (available via District Offices or <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3568.pdf>). It provides a few quick tips to get you started plus numerous other resources as well, including the wide array of topics at: <https://www.kansasagstress.org/> . Whether completely overwhelmed, or just facing seasonal doldrums, these resources are designed with the ag producer in mind.

Need help to get started? Drop me a line. I don’t have all the answers, but I bet we can find someone to help *you* help *you* – and that’s a great place to start. Happy Thanksgiving!

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Will Cows Eat Corn Stalk Bales?

The corn fodder “debate” can go many different directions, in various settings. What’s best agronomically? What is the benefit to livestock? Do economics work for both sides of the equation? Graze or bale or leave for the soil? The questions are many and probably no one answer is right for each situation. As a livestock guy who is not in love with iron, my preference is always to let the animal graze, process and distribute nutrients. You may choose not to graze fodder for any number of reasons; perhaps fields lack fencing or water, field proximity to the operation, or an established market for harvested forages or bedding. Baling corn stover is another option worth considering.

Cows will preferentially eat grain, husk, leaves and then stalk/cob. If bales are placed in a feeder or unrolled, the animals WILL sort and not utilize a significant portion of the stover bales - mostly stalks. Grinding or processing the bales will help with utilization, but reduce the nutrient quality of the stover. This generally means the ground stover will need to be incorporated into a total mixed ration (TMR) or at the very least, protein supplementation is required to get the most effective utilization.

University of Nebraska round bale feeder research shows, 1300 lb cows ate about 15 lbs of dry matter (18 lbs as-fed), only meeting about half of the energy and one third of her protein requirement in mid pregnancy. The energy and protein requirements increase for cows in late pregnancy resulting in even more supplemental energy and protein needed if feeding corn residue in a round bale feeder.

Corn stover bales can replace a good percentage of good quality hay in a feed ration when supplemented with additional protein. If stover bales are fed free-choice anticipate feed refusal of less palatable components. UNL research indicates that 45 percent of the bale is wasted in sheeted, round bale feeders. Bale feeders can be moved to allow cattle to access and utilize refused feed as bedding, which can be a win-win if bedding is needed in wet or snowy conditions. Plan for losses of material related to storage and feeding.

Work at the University of Minnesota illustrated that finishing steers in a feedlot operation can be fed a ration with up to 20 percent corn stover on a dry matter basis without significantly affecting performance. Ration balancing is critical when factoring stover into cattle diets. Proper energy, protein and minerals must be provided to meet cattle nutrient requirements and performance goals. Many ration balancing tools are available to producers and most Extension offices have someone on staff who can help with ration balancing.

What are other factors that need to be considered with corn stalk bale feeding? Economics is surely one that comes to the top of list. If a forage source is available the requires less or no protein supplementation, for less cost, use it! Failed corn crops due to drought may have high nitrates, so know what the crop conditions were like. Initial moisture of stover at harvest and storage conditions can influence dry matter retention and nutritional composition. If you are purchasing bales, ask about the conditions at the time of baling. Dry matter loss is one thing, molds and other toxins related to too much moisture are another. Aflatoxins in the grain, get attention in years of drought, hail damage and other environmental conditions. This could be a problem if the corn crop was damaged and has whole corn ears remaining, but generally is not considered to be a problem in residue alone.

There are many considerations to evaluate when utilizing baled corn residues, but in general this is a good forage source that can be a part of winter cow herd nutritional management. There is a wealth of University research publications that can help guide decisions. Some to consider are: [North Dakota State’s Utilizing Corn Residue in Beef Cattle Diets](#); [University of Nebraska’s Crop Watch](#); and [Michigan State’s Corn Stover Project](#) to name a few.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

The USDA Unveils a New Plant Hardiness Zone Map

When you start planning what to put in your garden or lawn, one of your main tools is the U.S. Plant Hardiness Zone Map (PHZM) created by the USDA. The map labels every area in the U.S. on a scale of 1 to 13, with each zone broken into half zones, designated by “a” and “b” (e.g., 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, and so on). They base these zones on 30 year-averages of weather and lowest annual winter temperatures, with 1a resembling the warmest, and 13b the coolest. Since plants can have very specific growing requirements, the map helps us to determine what will thrive in our lawns, gardens, and landscapes. Every time you buy a plant or seed packet, odds are there is a label that tells you which zones it does best in. These maps save us a lot of headaches when it comes time to select plants for our gardens and landscapes.

The PHZM has always been an evolving project. The first maps for the US came from the Arnold Arboretum in the 1920s, and researchers at the Arboretum published a few updates over the following decades. Then, in the 1960s, the USDA published their first PHZM, and have continued to updated it as more detailed information became available. The USDA published an update in 2012, which has been our standard map for the last 11 years.

This past Wednesday, however, the USDA released a new version of the PHZM. Significantly, the USDA notes that this new map incorporates a larger amount of data: “the 2023 map incorporates data from 13,412 weather stations compared to the 7,983 that were used for the 2012 map.” The new data set has shifted the hardiness zones across most of the U.S to a warmer zone, often by half a zone. Nemaha County moved from zone 5b to 6a. Jackson County, which used to be primarily zone 6a, is now split, with the northern half of the county in zone 6a and the southern half in 6b. Jefferson County, which was zone 6a, is now almost all 6b, with the northeastern portion remaining in 6a.

As you sit down to plan out next year’s garden or landscape improvements, take into consideration the shift in your Plant Hardiness Zone. The updated map can be found on <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov>, and, as with the last map, is interactive so you can zoom into your state and county for greater detail. If you have questions on what will grow in your zone, do not hesitate to reach out to your local extension office for more guidance!

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Helping Caregivers Care for Themselves

Rosalyn Carter said, “There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver.”

Family caregivers experience significant stress due to caregiving’s emotional and physical challenges. Caregivers have higher levels of stress than people who are not caregivers. They often report that it is challenging to take care of themselves. Many caregivers report a lack of sleep, poor eating habits, and lack of exercise. They also say that they often provide care when they are sick. They are at a greater risk of depression and a greater risk to abuse alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. These are just a few risk factors faced by caregivers.

Caregivers report facing barriers to self-care. Personal attitudes and beliefs can get in the way of caregivers caring for themselves. Many people believe they are being selfish and that the person they care for is the one that needs care, not themselves. They may feel like they are not a good caregiver if they ask for help or feel they can only care for Dad properly. However, caregivers who fail to care for themselves set themselves up for becoming ill and unable to care for the person they are trying to help.

It is essential to recognize the early signs warning signs of stress. For instance, you may feel frustrated and angry one minute and helpless the next. You may make mistakes when dosing medications or turn to unhealthy behaviors like drinking too much alcohol or smoking. We are all different, so it is vital to know your stress symptoms and take care of them before they become a health issue.

To manage your stress, consider what kind of stress is affecting you. If your stress is physical, like high blood pressure, digestive problems, headaches, or pacing, try physical relaxation activities like walking, swimming, gardening, or a massage. Or suppose your stress is mental, like worrying or having difficulty concentrating. Try mental relaxation, like listening to soothing music or reading for pleasure. You may need to use a combination of physical and mental relaxation techniques. Remember, there are some things you can’t change.

Being a family caregiver can be challenging and rewarding; during the holidays, there is more pressure on the caregiver to maintain and continue family traditions. The holidays can often be a wonderful and joyous time. Still, for many people facing illness or the illness of a loved one, the holidays can be stressful and even depressing.

With the approaching holiday season, don’t be afraid to choose to do less with holiday preparations. Be choosy about which activities to participate in and what decorations to put up. Try to keep things simple. You might ask family and friends to help with a potluck-style meal instead of trying to do everything yourself. Get a prepared meal from a local restaurant or your local grocery store. Encourage friends and family members to visit, but keep the visit brief.

As a caregiver, don’t think that you have to do all the caregiving all the time. Ask for and accept help from others. If someone tells you, “Let me know if you need my help,” give them something to do. You can say, “Yes, can you sit with Dad for a few minutes while I take a brisk walk.” And don’t be so hard on yourself; know that you are doing your best under challenging circumstances.

The Meadowlark Extension District will offer a class for family caregivers starting January 11, 2014, at 1615 Branch, Seneca, KS 66538, at 1:30 p.m. The “Powerful Tools for Caregivers” series will focus on taking care of yourself while caring for others. You become a better caregiver by caring for your own health and well-being. The classes will be held once a week for six weeks and are led by experienced class leaders. Class participants receive The Caregiver Helpbook to accompany the class and provide additional caregiver resources. We will meet for six weeks. Space in the class is limited. For more information, contact Teresa Hatfield at the Meadowlark Extension Office at 785-364-4125 or thatfield@ksu.edu.

Community resources are available for caregivers:

- Northeast Area Agency on Aging: 785-742-7152 or 1-800-883-2549 (Jackson and Nemaha Counties)
- Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging: 785-235-1367 or 1-800-798-1366
- VA Caregiver Support Line: 855-260-3274

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Cindy Williams
District Extension Agent, Family & Community Wellness

No news article this week