

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Multi-stemmed Brush Species – Buckbrush

The first brush species we typically see in spring is an invasive species known as bush honeysuckle. It's an issue, but not so much in pasture or rangeland. One that *is* an early season issue, however, is buckbrush (coralberry). These native perennial spreads mostly via runners, with plants eventually forming dense patches and shading out desirable forage species. Control will require multiple years, and maybe multiple approaches as well.

If using a controlled burn or mechanical removal (mowing, goats, etc...), removal of top growth after plants have leafed out (when root carbohydrate levels are at their lowest) can be effective since it requires the plant to 'start from scratch'. Over time, this can weaken plants and make them less competitive. Burning can be effective in warm season grass stands but is more difficult in brome/fescue because a) we don't (and shouldn't) burn as frequently and b) the timing of cool season grass burns does little to defoliate buckbrush to the level needed for control. It's often mid-April before buckbrush leaf's out – well after we should have burned cool season stands (cool season grasses also don't handle well the multiple years of burning that would be required to do much against buckbrush). If you want to integrate mowing into the mix, consider an early to mid-May timeframe. Again, multiple years of mowing will be required.

If herbicides are used, timing is important as well. The best application window occurs just as the leaves start to transition from light to dark green color, confirming that low point in the nonstructural carbohydrate cycle. Numerous herbicides are labelled for buckbrush control with several 2,4-D LVE formulations typically effective at a relatively economical rate. If you're after other weed/brush species as well, consider combination products with additional active ingredients like picloram (restricted use), triclopyr, aminopyralid, etc...

Herbicides *may* damage desirable grasses under the right conditions and any of the previously mentioned herbicides can do *significant* damage to desirable legumes and broadleaf forbs in the stand. *Always* read and follow label directions prior to application. For additional information on rates/timings/products, request a copy of (or link to...) the 2024 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide available through any District Office or e-mail to dhallaue@ksu.edu .

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Is Coccidiosis an Issue in Your Herd or Flock?

Spring is here and with it can be extreme swings in weather conditions. This isn't necessarily a good thing when it comes to young livestock. Scours, respiratory issues and other health concerns can plague producers at this time of year. I came across a good summary of another problematic issue that can be even more persistent in the operation - Coccidiosis. If you've dealt with this problem in your livestock, you understand how nasty it can be. Baby chicks can also be ravished by a Coccidiosis.

Coccidiosis is caused by a microscopic protozoan parasite. The parasite invades intestinal cells and destroys the cells while multiplying, causing diarrhea in the process. Coccidiosis in cattle is characterized by straining and bloody diarrhea. The organism is widespread - almost all cattle become infected at some time in their lives, although many never show signs of illness. Illness is more common in concentrated livestock operations because there is more opportunity for the environment to become contaminated in large numbers, and for calves to be exposed to large doses of the parasite.

The disease spreads by fecal-oral transmission. Older animals serve as carriers of the organism and contaminate pastures and pens with infective oocysts shed in their manure. Oocyst can persist in damp surroundings for a couple of years. New infections occur when calves ingest the oocysts. Calves are very susceptible to infection and then shed large numbers of oocysts into the environment. The larger the dose-load of oocysts the more likely the calf is to develop illness. Calves are more susceptible to illness if the immune system is compromised by poor nutrition, or stressors such as crowding or severe weather. Often, outbreaks of the disease follow severe weather.

Control of the coccidiosis is based on preventing calves from being exposed to large doses of oocysts and maximizing immune function through good nutrition and minimal stress. The dose/load of exposure is controlled by reducing animal density (*spreading cattle over more acres*), preventing feed and water from fecal contamination (*preventing calves from walking in bunks and troughs*), and minimizing shedding levels by supplying medicating feed or water. Medication can be overwhelmed without paying attention to hygiene. Also, it is often a challenge to provide adequate levels of medication in young calves because they aren't consuming very much solid feed.

This isn't just a cattle issue, poultry especially can be adversely affected as well. As with any health-related concern, your veterinarian can provide recommendations specific to the circumstances of your herd or flock. The K-State publication "[Winter Feeding Sites and Calf Scours - MF2753](#)" gives good advice on the hygiene portion of this discussion. The OSU publication "[Coccidiosis Treatment and Prevention in Cattle](#)" goes into depth on this issue as well. Penn State has a good article on Coccidiosis control in small flocks of poultry found at: <https://extension.psu.edu/management-of-coccidiosis-in-small-flocks>

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Become a Master Gardener

Calling all gardeners! This year the Meadowlark District will resume our Extension Master Gardener program. If you love to garden, or if you have never gardened but always wanted to, this is the program for you.

The Extension Master Gardener program, or EMG, is a staple of K-State Research and Extension. The program offers extensive horticulture training on topics ranging from lawn care, to soil fertility, to common plant diseases. These topics are supplemented with hands on gardening practice and volunteer work. Beyond the learning experiences, EMG programs actively work to embed themselves in their communities and create collaborative and welcoming environments.

The EMG training runs from September through November with a total of 40 hours of training. Each session is taught by different specialists from K-State who share their expertise with our groups. All trainings are recorded and posted online for those who cannot participate in real time. After training, all Master Gardeners complete 40 hours of volunteer work, focusing on educating and inspiring others in their community.

To learn more about our EMG program, you can attend one of our EMG informational sessions. The first session will take place at the Delaware Township Library in Valley Falls, from 6:00pm to 7:00pm on April 3rd. If you cannot make the session, email lauraphillips@ksu.edu to get updates on future informational sessions in Jackson, Jefferson, and Nemaha Counties or request more information.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Don't Lose Your Extra Help Benefit from Social Security

The Part D Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) or Extra Help helps Medicare beneficiaries with limited incomes and resources pay for prescription drug costs. It can also help pay for monthly premiums, co-insurance, co-pays, and deductibles. Many people automatically qualify for Extra Help. People who receive Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are automatically enrolled in Extra Help; everyone else must apply to qualify for the benefit.

You can apply for extra help through the Social Security Administration (SSA) at www.ssa.gov. In 2024, people below 150% of the poverty level and have assets less than \$17,010 for a single person and \$33,950 for a married couple living together may qualify. Eligible beneficiaries will have a \$0 monthly premium (on benchmark plans), have a \$0 annual deductible, and will pay no more than \$4.50 on generic medications and \$11.20 on brand-name medications. This year, all eligible beneficiaries will receive the full subsidy.

Social Security periodically reviews beneficiaries enrolled in Extra Help to see if they still qualify for the benefit. Sometimes, beneficiaries will lose their eligibility for Extra Help because they fail to complete and return the required paperwork to Social Security or KanCare. If you receive redetermination paperwork, you must complete it and return it by the stated date. Failure to do so will result in losing your Extra Help benefits.

In November 2023, some Extra Help beneficiaries may have received notification that they were no longer eligible. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) conducted a data cleanup to correct open-ended eligibility periods. Some Medicare beneficiaries may have received notice that they were no longer eligible and that they would owe underpayments, cost-sharing, or premiums for the months they were no longer eligible. Medicare Advantage and Part D plan sponsors were responsible for the notification and the retroactive payments.

The repayment of the cost-sharing and premium discount may have caused hardship for some Medicare beneficiaries. On December 29, 2023, CMS notified Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug plans that the collection efforts adversely affected Medicare beneficiaries. CMS advised plans to contact affected beneficiaries and retract the initial letter regarding Extra Help disenrollment. However, some beneficiaries may not have been contacted by their plan and were unaware of the retracted initial letter. CMS and the Administration for Community Living state that beneficiaries will be held harmless for retroactive premium and cost-sharing payments and will not owe the balances listed in the plan statements they received. You can take steps to prevent losing your Extra Help if you are in this situation.

- Appeal to Social Security if you feel you have been wrongly terminated from Extra Help
- Understand that if you do lose your Extra Help, you have a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) to choose a new Medicare Advantage or Part D plan. The SEP begins the month the plan notifies you of the subsidy loss and continues for two months thereafter.
- Check with your local Senior Health Insurance Counselor for Kansas (SHICK) to see if any other program is available in your area to help with the cost of prescription drugs.

If you need assistance with Extra Help benefits, please contact your local SHICK counselor. In the Meadowlark Extension District (Jackson, Jefferson, and Nemaha Counties), contact Teresa Hatfield at 785-364-4125 or thatfield@ksu.edu. Those in other Kansas counties can call the SHICK Call Center at 1-800-860-5260 to connect with a counselor.

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

No news article this week.