

FHD Extension News

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Inside this issue:

AG News 1-2

4-H & FCS 3

Agriculture News

Alfalfa Management: Deciding on the last cutting this fall

By: John Holman, Cropping Systems Agronomist, Southwest Research-Extension Center and Romulo Lollato, Wheat and Forages Specialist

Alfalfa will quit growing after the first hard freeze (when temperatures reach below 26°F), which in Kansas occurs on average around October 15, but can be as early as October 1 or as late as November 1. The decision should be weather-based at this time of the year because the timing of the last two cuttings impacts the winter survival and productivity of the stand in the following year. The last cutting, prior to fall dormancy, should be made based on expected crown regrowth rather than one-tenth bloom because of the decreasing photoperiod. The last cutting should be made so there will be 8 to 12 inches of foliage, or 4 to 6 weeks of growth time, before the first killing frost. This should allow adequate time for replenishment of root reserves. This means the second to final cutting should occur around early September.

At this stage of the growing season, alfalfa plants need to store enough carbohydrates to survive the winter. If root reserves are not replenished adequately before the first killing freeze in the fall, the stand is more susceptible to winter damage than it would be normally. That could result in slower greenup and early growth next spring, and in some cases stand loss due to winter kill. The potential of the alfalfa crop to grow new foliar tissue in the spring is greater with greater root reserves in the fall, thus root reserves this fall are the main driver of next crop's yield and quality. Varieties are continually being selected for winter hardiness so varieties today are less susceptible than varieties of yesterday to winter injury but it is still important to manage varieties for best success. Otherwise, spring growth can be reduced and stand loss can occur.

The final cutting should occur right after the first killing freeze before too many of the leaves have dropped. Producers should be prepared to enter the fields as soon as soil moisture conditions allow. After a killing freeze, the remaining forage (if any) can be hayed safely. However, the producer should act quickly because the leaves will soon drop off.

Consider soil sampling alfalfa fields now

Late fall is also a great time of the year to soil sample alfalfa ground. This timing allows for an accurate assessment of available soil nutrients and provides enough time to make nutrient management decisions before the crop starts growing in the spring. Key soil tests include pH, phosphorus, and potassium, and to a lesser extent, sulfur and boron. In particular, potassium is highly related to winter survival so it's important to make sure to have an optimum range of potassium in soil before entering the winter. When sampling for immobile nutrients, the sampling depth should be six inches, while mobile nutrients (sulfur) should be sampled to 24 inches. Based on the soil test, a fertility program can be established to ensure nutrient replenishment and maintain hayfield productivity. To submit soil samples to the K-State Research and Extension Soil Testing Laboratory, see this website: <https://www.agronomy.k-state.edu/outreach-and-services/soil-testing-lab/>.

JOIN US TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2023 FOR A SHEEP AND GOAT PROGRAM



TOPICS INCLUDE:
Forage & Nutrition
Parasite Control
Kidding &
Lambing Tips

**WHERE: Community
Building in
Cottonwood Falls**

**Swope Park, 1715 210 Rd,
Cottonwood Falls, KS 66845**



**TO RSVP, PLEASE
CONTACT:**

**Chelsea Bartels
(620) 273-6491**



**HOSTED BY: K-STATE RESEACRCH & EXTENSION
FLINT HILLS DISTRICT**

Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability, contact Chelsea Bartels at the Flint Hills Extension District, (620) 273-6491. Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

What is 4-H?

We teach kids from all backgrounds how to become well-rounded individuals. We do that by teaching for four H's:

Head - Make sound decisions, stick with your goals and develop practical skills.

Heart - Act with integrity and accountability.

Hands - Put the needs of the community first and commit to serving others.

Health - Actively take care of your mind and body.

What will I do?

4-H centers around projects. Members choose from a wide range of individual projects based on their interests and community availability. Through these projects, members set goals, learn the necessary skills, and exhibit or demonstrate their skills at events like county fairs, speaking contests and competitions.

How can I get involved?

Join a club! 4-H clubs are groups of families and volunteers who generally meet monthly. At meetings, youth members share their projects, plan community service activities and practice running meetings. There are many sub-clubs for individual projects led by adults or older members.

Visit Kansas4-H.org for more information or contact the local Extension Office to find a club near you!

Medicare Open Enrollment Information



Medicare Open Enrollment Period is held from October 15 – December 7 each year. SHICK counselors receive training on all aspects of Medicare and other health insurance topics that concern Kansans. Counselors are available to meet with consumers for personalized counseling sessions, help with problems and questions, and provide support during the decision-making process. SHICK counselors will not recommend policies, companies or agents but will provide free, unbiased answers to the questions of consumers, their family members and other caregivers. The goal of our counselors is to educate and assist the public in making informed decisions about their health care options.

Please call the Council Grove Extension Office at 620-767-5136 if you are a **Morris County** Resident to get an appointment. Please do not call until after October 1st for an appointment. The two dates that will be offered are Saturday, October 21st from 9am-4pm and Saturday, November 4th from 9am-4pm. The appointments will be held at the Council Grove First Baptist Church.

Please call the Chase County Senior Center at 620-273-8511 if you are a **Chase County** resident to get an appointment. Please call the Senior Center with any and all questions regarding Medicare. The Senior Center will set dates soon and you can call and set-up an appointment starting October 2nd.

K-STATE
Research and Extension

Flint Hills District

Flint Hills Extension District

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