

David Hallauer  
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

## Harvest Safety Tips

Harvest has started in spots across the Meadowlark Extension District. It signifies both the conclusion of a growing season and the start of a very busy time for producers trying to get crops out of the field in a timely manner. Unfortunately, it can become a dangerous time as well.

Injury prevention features on modern equipment are better than ever, but not failproof. Whether you're in the operator's seat or working nearby, give equipment a wide berth, paying particular attention to augers and power take off shafts. Combine snapping rolls for example, pull stalks in at a rate of 12 feet per second – much faster than you can react to pull away. Avoid any moving/rotating equipment until the machine is shut off and can be safely approached.

Be aware of fire hazards as well. Residue buildup around engine/exhaust systems and concealed drive belts/pulleys can cause friction resulting in fires. Regular equipment cleaning and electrical system checks are vital tasks to help prevent potential issues. When possible, start harvesting on the downwind side of fields. If a fire does occur, flames will hopefully move towards harvested portions of the field, reducing potential damage.

Safety equipment should consist of a cell phone, first aid kit, and fire extinguisher. Make sure fire extinguishers are properly charged and cell phones can be recharged through the day. If you have poor cell phone coverage areas, take extra care to share your harvest plans - including physical location - with your harvest crew and other family members. It can save a lot of precious response time later if someone needs to get you – but you can't communicate.

A vehicle traveling 65 miles per hour approaching a combine traveling 15 miles per hour will cover and catch that combine in less than 20 seconds. Operators should be aware of fast approaching vehicles, making sure equipment hazard lighting is clean and in working order. Look ahead for 'emergency exits', giving yourself a place to go when an approaching vehicle doesn't keep a safe distance. When following equipment or semis, give equipment and yourself plenty of room. Pass only when safe to do so and be aware of vehicles entering and exiting the roadway to prevent approaching too quickly.

Whether we like to hear it or not, it's good to stop now and again to stretch and move around. It's not wrong either, to get some 'time away' to refocus and get a break from harvest stresses? Carve out time to slow down and refresh. The marathon of harvest can feel like a sprint, but it will be much worse if you or others are injured because of physical or mental fatigue.

Harvest is an awesome time. Plan now to make sure it starts *and* finishes that way.

Ross Mosteller  
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

### **Sheep and Goat Breeding Season Considerations**

As election season approaches, the divide between political parties seems to be ever increasing. I'm not going down that road today, but a historically equal division has existed between shepherds and cattlemen. My intention is not to focus on cattle in these weekly articles, so hope to tip the scale back a bit towards small ruminants. Fall breeding season is upon us and the University of Missouri Publication [G2611 Breeding Season Considerations for Sheep and Goats](#), seems a good reference to digest today. Credit is given to the publication author David Brown, Livestock Field Specialist.

As fall season approaches, daylight begins to get shorter, and sheep/goats are ready for breeding. The breeding season should be an exciting time for producers because the number of lambs and kids raised and weaned successfully determines the profitability of the operation. The season of the year is the main determinant for sheep and goat reproduction, with the majority being seasonal breeders that cycle naturally in the fall and lamb/kid in the spring. However, some breeds will cycle in the spring and have lambs/kids in the fall.

Peak fertility is from late September through November. Ewes have an average cycle length of 17 days, with most being between 14 and 20 days, while does have an estrus cycle of 18 to 22 days, and they display estrus for 24 to 48 hours. The gestation period ranges between 144 and 152 days. Management practices for producers to ensure profitability during the breeding season to consider include the following areas.

Reproductive health of the male. Rams and bucks should be in good condition, masculine and legs should be stronger and free from defects. Producers should conduct the breeding soundness exam (BSE) before the breeding season to reduce risk of breeding failure. The BSE consists of a physical examination, inspection of the reproductive organs, semen collection and sperm evaluation. A veterinarian or trained individual should perform the BSE.

Body condition scoring (BCS). BCS ensures that does and ewes (watch the male side too!) are not too thin or too fat prior to the breeding season. Monitoring BCS allows producers to make informed decisions on animal nutritional needs and make adequate adjustments prior to the breeding season. Direct correlation exists between body condition, ovulation rate and number of lambs/kids born. Producers should try to have ewes and does around BCS of 3 on a 5-point scale at breeding and increase slowly to 3.5 at parturition.

Flushing. This is a management strategy to improve the ewe/does condition just before and during the breeding season. Producers may choose to flush the animals by supplementing with a high energy diet or relocating the animals to a high-quality pasture. Flushing should commence three to four weeks before breeding and continue through one estrous cycle. Flushing increases the ovulation and birth rate and decreases the early embryonic mortality.

Other considerations. In addition to good nutrition, body weight management of young ewes is important. Yearlings should weigh at least 80% of their mature body weight before the onset of the breeding season. Producers should examine breeding stock for internal parasites using the FAMACHA system and five-point check. Overall good management practices before mating will lead to a more successful lambing and kidding season.

Laura Phillips  
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

### **It's Time to Fertilize Cool Season Grasses**

If you have Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue in your yard, it's time to give them your attention. While our current heat wave feels never ending, soon our days will shorten and temperatures will lower. As it does, our aptly named cool season grasses will enter their fall growth phase, spreading new shoots and roots.

In order for these grasses to truly thrive, they will need sufficient amounts of nutrients. Our hot summer has likely depleted the nutrients in your lawn, which makes September most important time of year to fertilize your cool season lawn.

When you purchase fertilizer, you will see a series of three numbers on the bag. The first number is nitrogen, which helps your grasses develop healthy root systems and recover from the stressful summer conditions. Most lawns will require regular nitrogen applications. We recommend applying 1 to 1.5 pounds of quick-release nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. It is a good idea to repeat this process in November. If there is no rain, make sure to water in the fertilizer yourself.

The second and third number on the bag, are phosphorus (P) and potassium (K), respectively. These nutrients contribute to overall growth and stress tolerance. In established lawns, you often have sufficient quantities of P and K, so there is no need to add these nutrients unless a soil test indicates the need. You can look for fertilizers with high nitrogen, such as 30-0-0 or 29-5-4 or 27-3-3.

When fertilizing, take care to read the instructions and apply fertilizer evenly across the lawn and the rate given on the packaging. When you are done fertilizing, sweep or blow any fertilizer or granular products off of your sidewalks and hard surfaces. This prevents the fertilizer from entering our water ways and protects our water quality.

If you have questions about the fertilizer you need, would like to do a soil test, or need guidance on applying fertilizer to your yard, reach out to our office for more information.

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

### **My Social Security Number was Stolen: Now What!**

Our Social Security numbers are among the most important identifiers we possess. However, they are also very vulnerable to scams and thieves who want to use them for nefarious purposes. That is why it is terrifying when we believe our number may have been compromised. So, what can you do when you think this has happened to you?

According to the Social Security Administration, if someone steals your Social Security number, they can use it to assume your identity and attempt to apply for loans, credit cards, cell phones, mortgages, and countless other transactions. Taking quick action when aware of the breach could help prevent fraud and financial loss.

1. Visit [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov) to make a report and get a recovery plan. The Federal Trade Commission manages this one-stop resource. You can also call (1-877-438-4338).
2. File a police report and keep a copy for your records in case problems arise in the future.
3. File an online report with the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) at [ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov). The IC3 receives, develops, and refers cybercrime complaints to law enforcement and regulatory agencies.
4. Notify one of the three major credit bureaus and consider adding a credit freeze or fraud alert. The company you call is required to contact the others.
  - Equifax: 1-800-525-6285
  - Experian: 1-888-397-3742
  - TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289
5. Regularly check your credit report for anything unusual. Free reports are available online at [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com)
6. Contact the IRS to prevent someone else from using your Social Security number to file a tax return to get your refund. Visit <https://www.irs.gov/identity-theft-central> or call 1-800-908-4490.
7. Create or sign in to your personal *my* Social Security account to check for any suspicious activity.
  - You should only find benefit payment amounts if you have applied for benefits. Review your statement to verify the accuracy of the earnings posted to your record and ensure no one uses your Social Security number to work.
  - If you receive benefits, you can add blocks to your personal *my* Social Security account. However, you will need to contact Social Security to remove blocks.

Taking quick action and following the steps above can minimize the damage and protect your personal and financial information. Remember never to carry your Social Security card, keep it at home safely, and be selective about who gets your number.

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

### **Are Pumpkin Leaves Edible?**

Fall is almost here!!! And pumpkins are starting to dot landscapes and yards. Pumpkin flesh is typically what most people eat. But the young leaves are also edible. While plants are likely mature now, according to University of California-Davis, "You don't have to wait for the pumpkin to mature before enjoying the plant. The leaves are edible and can be cooked like spinach. Choose young, tender leaves for that purpose. Of course, the seeds are edible, too. Enjoy them roasted and salted to increase the food value of your crop, particularly if you have limited space."

### **Do Tomatoes Need to be Peeled Before Canning?**

I saw several posts on FB concerning this topic and I get asked this frequently, too. The answer is "YES", and it takes extra time. But it is important and time well spent for safely canned tomatoes.

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, "Most bacteria, yeasts, and molds are difficult to remove from food surfaces. Washing fresh food reduces their numbers only slightly. Peeling root crops, underground stem crops, and tomatoes reduces their numbers greatly. Blanching also helps, but the vital controls are the method of canning and making sure the recommended research-based process times found in the USDA's Complete Guide to Home Canning are used."

Easily peel tomatoes by dipping them in boiling water for 30-60 seconds or just until the skins slit. Then dip in ice water, slip off the skins and remove cores. For more information about canning tomatoes safely, ask for the publication called, "Preserve It Fresh, Preserve Its Safe: Tomatoes. This is located in any of the Meadowlark Extension District Offices at either Oskaloosa, Holton or Seneca. There is no charge for these publications and it contains several tomato recipes if you are needing to some new tomato recipe ideas.