

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Hay Stand Evaluations – Horizontally AND Vertically

There are (give or take...) two times a year when we really spend some time looking *down* into our cool season hay fields: once when we apply fertilizer and again when we harvest. For the rest of the year, we spend a lot of time looking *across* them, usually from a distance.

It's not that these 'horizontal' evaluations aren't beneficial. We can see differences in heading and color. This year, some of those differences have been readily visible and it hasn't taken a lot to note the variability across our stands. These horizontal evaluations may not tell the entire story, however, and that's when a more 'vertical' evaluation might be in order.

By vertical, I mean looking down from above to get another angle at the stand. For example: a lot of fields have exhibited uneven heading this year. A look across the stand may 'smooth' some of those differences, but looking down from above, even if just from the seat of the swather or tractor, can help us see things a little more clearly – from what's actually going on to the size of the affected area. The hemp dogbane masked by seed heads from the road may be clearly visible as you look down into the stand. It's a good opportunity to take note of the areas to return post-harvest to determine how to manage in the future.

In some cases, a deeper look might be necessary. Use a measuring stick to see just how much difference there is in areas of the field. Are headed areas showing a significant difference in leaf height versus areas fully headed out? What about areas with darker versus lighter colored foliage? If we use a rule of thumb like the 300 pounds of forage per inch of height estimate we use when determining grazing needs, we can start to see how differently areas of a field may be performing – and the value of doing something to address said performance.

Don't be afraid to go even deeper. Whether you stop while you're harvesting or when hauling off bales or later, the notes you made about 'that thin spot near the corner' or 'the heavy hay along the road', can help you know where to return to and see if there are surface or even subsurface reason for the differences. A soil test to compare areas is always a good idea as are tasks like pulling cores to determine depth of top soil or evaluating compaction.

Differences might be due to management for *this* season – or the result of practices of years ago. Sometimes, they show up based on weather or other factors. Sometimes they can be the start of something more significant deserving a deeper look. Start looking now to make plans (when possible) to help with stand consistency – both horizontally AND vertically.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Creep Grazing

Just like the “red/green wars” that happen between farm kids on the bus, preferring one brand of iron to another, there can be a good deal of banter in the livestock sector over creep feeding. Some proudly market the fact that calves “have never had a bite of creep” and others see no scenario where creep feed isn’t of benefit. As is often the case, there is no one correct answer and each situation is different. Today I’ll throw another angle into this discussion with the potential benefits of creep grazing.

Creep feeding grain-based diets has been studied in animal science circles for years, with quite a lot of data available on the subject. Many factors drive the decision to use creep feed, ranging from grass saving measures on drought stressed pastures, to maximizing growth potential expression in purebred seedstock for fall sale season and likely many other options in-between.

Typically, the biggest question is whether creep feeding is cost-effective practice? The simple answer for most spring calving, commercial cow/calf operations is “not in most circumstances”. While it is proven that pounds of weaned calf can be added, the additional cost per pound of gain is not always economical. Additionally, there is the risk of getting calves “fleshy” prior to weaning, which can have detrimental effects on selling price as weaned calves at the sale barn.

Creep grazing, on the other hand, has potential to be a more cost-effective solution. Creep grazing programs can produce additional calf gains using forage rather than the traditional grain-based creep diets. There are many ways to adapt this system to each individual situation, but the bottom line is that it must be economical and profitable. Part of the benefit of this grazing practice is a reduction in needed equipment required in grain-based creep systems.

Most forages can be used for successful creep grazing as long as they are high in nutrient quality and readily available. The season will affect which forage is used for creep grazing. During the warm season months, legumes, pearl millet, sorghum-sudan grass or mixes of these plants can be used. During the cool season months, annual grasses like rye, oats, wheat or triticale can be used often times in combination with legumes.

Similar to grain creep, the added weight gain from creep grazing depends on pasture quality and with adequate quantity as well. Daily gains tend to be less than the full fed, grain energy creep systems. Expected daily gains are usually increased by 10 to 20 percent with creep grazing compared to standard grazing systems. There is high variability with gains in research settings, pointing to a need to keep adequate quantity of the highest possible quality feeds in front of calves at all times.

A couple of primary methods have been used to allow calves access to creep forage while keeping cows out. One method is to build a creep gate with entrance slots 15- 18 inches wide and place the creep gate in the fence line or at the gate separating the creep grazing area from the main pasture. Another method is to use one strand of electric wire to allow calves to graze while keeping cows out. Placing this single strand of wire 36 to 42 inches above the ground will allow calves to pass under while keeping the cows out. Neither method requires a great deal of complexity or equipment.

Creep grazing has a few other indirect benefits. One is that calves do not get as fat as when they are fed a grain-based creep feed and may not receive price discounts often assessed to calves fed an unlimited high energy creep feed. Replacement heifers may get too fat if fed a grain-based creep feed and ultimately have reduced milk production as cows later in life. This problem is less likely to occur when using forage as a creep feed.

It is important to remember that calves consume all the milk available whether they are fed creep in any form or not. Calves prefer milk first, palatable creep feed second, then forage. If increasing cow body condition score is the desire, early weaning calves is a better approach for the cow side of the equation. Discussion here was with cattle, but the same rules apply for sheep as well. The University of Georgia has a good publication on this topic called, [“Creep Feeding Beef Calves” Bulletin 1315](#).

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Brown Spots in Your Lawn

As the summer heats up, many homeowners notice brown spots on their lawns. While there are many causes of discoloration in turf grasses, one common reason is a disease called Brown Patch. Brown Patch will affect all cool season turf grasses, making it one of the most widespread turf diseases.

Brown Patch causes roughly circular patches of - you guessed it - brown grass that can appear seemingly overnight. It can also cause tan lesions with black outlines on the individual blades of grass. Brown Patch is caused by a fungus known as *Rhizoctonia solani*. Our Kansas summers provide favorable conditions for Brown Patch, as it thrives in hot, humid weather.

Proper lawn care can prevent the appearance of Brown Patch or reduce its severity. When applying fertilizer, use only what the lawn needs, as excessive nitrogen from fertilizer will promote Brown Patch. Never fertilize when a Brown Patch is active. Avoid watering your lawn in the late afternoon or evening, as the water will not get a chance to evaporate before the sun goes down, allowing for moisture to stay on your grass longer. If the Brown Patch is severe, some home fungicides can fight Brown Patch. If your lawn has Brown Patch, start by practicing good lawn care, and reach out to our extension office for more care tips and fungicides available in your area.

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Choose Healthy Carbs

It seems that carbohydrates (carbs) have a bad reputation these days. However, carbohydrates are the primary source of fuel for our bodies. They keep our brains, muscles, and organs going. The energy they provide keeps us breathing, our heart beating, thinking, and our muscles moving. It is important to note that not all carbohydrates are created equal.

Simple carbohydrates will increase your blood sugar quickly and can also make it harder to control diabetes. Common types of simple carbohydrates include table sugar, honey, fruit juice, and syrup. These ingredients are often found in processed foods like soda, cookies, cakes, and other foods with added sugar. Simple carbohydrates are also found in fruit and dairy. These foods contain vitamins and minerals important for a balanced diet.

Complex carbs, on the other hand, are a smarter choice. They increase your blood sugar more slowly, thanks to their fiber and complex starches that take longer to digest. This can make it easier to manage your diabetes. Complex carbs include potatoes, beans, lentils, and whole grains, all of which are rich in nutrients and can be a delicious addition to your diet.

Carbohydrates are essential for a healthy diet, they provide the energy our cells need, healthy carbs can help prevent energy spikes and crashes, and help sustain us throughout the day. Healthy carbs are rich in nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Whole grains are rich in B vitamins, iron, and magnesium. Whole fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamins A, C, and E. Fiber aids digestion and promotes good digestive health. The fiber in healthy carbs makes you feel fuller longer, which can help you maintain a healthy weight.

You can incorporate nutritious carbs in your diet by choosing the right kinds of food and watching your portion sizes.

- Eat whole fruit instead of fruit juice
- Choose whole wheat pasta, tortillas, and bread; whole wheat flour should be the first ingredient.
- Try to include a variety of colors in your fruits and vegetables to get an array of vitamins and minerals
- Try to incorporate beans, lentils, and other legumes in your diet
- Use low-fat dairy products
- Limit the amount of processed food you eat.

We have an excellent class for you if you're eager to learn more about carbohydrates and how they can fit into your diet. The Meadowlark Extension District will be offering a class series called "Dining with Diabetes" at the Meadowlark Extension Office in Seneca starting on July 25, 2024. The classes will meet for four Thursdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. In these classes, you'll learn how to prepare healthy meals if you or a family member is living with diabetes. You will also get to prepare and taste some delicious recipes. Registration is required to attend, and space is limited, so don't miss out. Contact the Meadowlark Extension office in Seneca at 785-336-2184 to secure your spot today.

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

What is Alpha-gal Allergy?

The next time you work outside or do outdoor recreation, be aware of ticks and protect yourself from tick bites. The Lone Star tick has been linked to causing allergic reactions after eating red meat.

The Lone Star tick is a vector that can spread disease. Mosquitos and fleas are other insects that spread diseases. The Alpha-gal molecule is carried in the saliva of Lone Star ticks. People bit by this tick can become sensitive and produce the immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibody. Unlike typical food allergies, which is a reaction to the carbohydrate galactose-a-1, 3-galactose. This carbohydrate is found in most mammals, such as red meat animals. It can also be in products made from mammals. It is not found in poultry or fish.

Symptoms include rash, hives, difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure, dizziness, fainting, nausea, and severe stomach pain. These symptoms can occur in 3-6 hours after eating red meat.

The Alpha-gal allergy can be severe, and potentially life-threatening. See a healthcare provider immediately for care.