

David Hallauer  
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

### **Soybean Harvest Approaching**

Almost a decade ago, a group of University of Nebraska Extension Educators collected moisture samples from 115 truckloads of soybeans at elevator delivery. Close to 20 percent were below ten percent moisture and almost forty percent were below 11 percent. Maybe that's not a big deal - until you think about the fact 11 percent moisture soybeans represent a three plus percent yield loss versus harvest at our standard 13 percent moisture. While we know we can't harvest *every* acre at the optimum moisture, doing a few little things *can* help out at least a little.

Start by at considering harvest at a higher moisture level – say 14/15 percent. Soybeans are fully mature when 95 percent of the pods are at a mature tan color, likely with some leaves still left on the plant. That may mean more combine adjustments (even throughout the day as conditions change) and slower harvest speeds, but if those adjustments can be implemented without sacrificing in other areas that cost you money, they could be a consideration.

Harvest under optimum conditions, including hours when it may be possible to capture overnight moisture that may also help to reduce shattering losses. Four to five beans on the ground per square foot adds up, equaling almost a bushel per acre in losses.

Keep in mind as you look to harvest that soybeans dry down a fair bit faster than corn. Work by KSU Farming Systems Specialist Dr. Ignacio Ciampitti looked at the moisture content of soybeans during different growth stages, focusing on the dry down time from black layer to harvest. They found that from mid-late September through mid-October, the dry down rate (from 58 to 12 percent moisture) was around 3 percent per day, taking just 15 days in many cases. Temperature, humidity, and overall water content at black layer formation (maturity) will certainly affect this dry down, but the dry down often occurs quicker than we think.

There's a lot to balance during harvest. Soybean harvest moisture is just one consideration, but it deserves at least a little attention to see how big of a factor it may be in maximizing soybean yield – and revenue.

Ross Mosteller  
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

### **Match Feed Quality to Requirement Needs**

The more extended dry period has pastures looking parched and the combines starting to roll through fields to bring in the harvest. It is in these times that there are noticeable differences between cool season grass, warm season natives, harvested crop fields, summer annuals and some of the early planted winter cereals/cover crops. If there are visible differences, it only stands to reason that measurable differences in forage quality and quantity can be noted as well.

As the title of this article says, it's always good advice to assess feed quality and match resources to needs. Cattle producers should save their best feeds for when the cows' nutritional requirements are the greatest. That means feeding the best-quality feed after calving, when cows are lactating. Feed moderate-quality feeds in the period leading up to calving, and lower-quality feeds after weaning calves. Depending on the operation, you could be on either side of that equation now, or possibly dealing with all ends of the spectrum.

The period from calving to getting the cow bred back is the most critical time period that a cow faces in terms of nutritional demand. As the cow is lactating and preparing to rebreed this is also the most critical period to add supplements or additional feed to cow diets if necessary to meet the cow's requirements for energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. When feeding harvested feed following calving, the very best quality feed should be saved until that time. This is also true for the grazing animal, by moving animals to those fields/pastures/paddocks of higher quality and leaving lower quality options for later in the production cycle.

The second most critical time frame is the 60 days before calving as most of the fetal growth occurs in that period. Plus, it's very difficult to add condition once the cow starts lactating. Cows at that stage should get the second-best feed on hand. Carefully monitor to be sure that moderate quality feeds are meeting the cow needs. During the same time frame, checking vitamins A and E levels. Supplementing those two vitamins during that last 60 days of pregnancy, could have a nice impact helping the cow go through calving, providing better quality colostrum and assisting in successful breed-back.

The time to use poorer quality feeds is after calves are weaned and leading up to the 60 days before calving. It is at this period where cows in good condition, they can be pushed through on lower quality feeds. Remember though, if needing to add some body condition back to the cows, look at different, low-cost ways to add some weight at that time when requirements are the lowest. Remember too, that it can be more efficient to divide and manage cows by age, stage of production, body condition score or other factors that have similar nutrient requirements.

Another consideration that often comes up now is for feeds high in nitrates to be targeted in their use. Pregnant animals are susceptible to abortions from high-nitrate feeds. Whenever possible, target higher nitrate feeds use to non-pregnant animals, such as replacement heifers, stocker/finisher cattle or even cows following calving. It's critical that high-nitrate feeds be tested and then blended with other feeds to attain acceptable nitrate levels for the class of cattle being fed according to test results.

There never seems to be a year where overfeeding or mismatching nutrient demand to feed resources makes sense. Often, feed prices are just too high or cattle prices too low to get sloppy in feed management. While this looks to be a better year for the cow calf sector related to both those items, it's always best to analyze feedstuffs and balance diets to meet, but not exceed, nutrient requirements.

Laura Phillips  
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

### **Prepare your soil for spring**

As fall creeps closer, it is a perfect time to evaluate and improve your soil health. Your garden will thank you in the spring! The first step in evaluating your soil health is to do a soil test, especially if you have not done one in the past two years. Performing the standard gardener soil test through K-State can tell you about your soils' pH, organic matter, phosphorus, potassium, and nitrates. With this information you can make adjustments that optimize your soil for plant growth.

When evaluating soil health, one of the first things to look at is the pH. Soil that is too acidic or too basic can wreak havoc on your garden. Even if you have sufficient nutrients, an extreme pH level will essentially lock those nutrients in place, making them inaccessible to plants. While not all plants require the same PH range to thrive most, vegetables and ornamentals will grow well with a pH somewhere between 6.0 and 7.0. If your soil test indicates that your pH is too high, you can incorporate sulfur to lower it. If your soil pH is too low, you can incorporate lime to raise it. In Northeast Kansas, many gardeners have slightly basic soils (a pH just above 7.0) and need to incorporate sulfur into their garden.

Adding lime or sulfur to your soil, however, will not alter the pH overnight. In fact, it can take over a year for these amendments to fully react with your soil and alter your pH. Rather than waiting until spring to mess with your soil pH, make those changes now so that the amendments have time to react with the soil before your next spring planting.

Next you want to look at your organic matter content. Organic matter refers to decaying plant materials or animal waste, which can offer numerous benefits. Beyond providing nutrients, it can improve the soil structure, increase water infiltration and retention, and increase the amount of nutrients available to your plants. If you have low organic matter content, consider applying a thin layer of organic matter to your garden in the fall. This will allow it to breakdown and incorporate into your soil over the winter. It is important to note that not all compost is equal. Depending on the source of the decomposing matter, it can alter your pH, or have high amounts of nutrients your soil already contains. Make sure you are adding organic matter that is suited for your soil.

Once you have added any pH amendments and organic matter, cover your soil for the winter. You can do this either with mulch or cover crops. Bare soil is prone to erosion, nutrient leeching, and damage the soil structure. Additionally, both cover crops and mulch will provide additional organic matter to your soil.

Lastly, you want to look at your soil's nutrient values. You can compare your soil nutrient results to our K-State *Fertilizing Gardens in Kansas* to determine how much phosphorus, potassium, and nitrogen your specific plants will need. You can apply these fertilizers in the spring either before planting or as you plant, and make sure to water them into the soil.

If you have any questions on working with your soil, or need to get a soil test done, reach out to one of our offices for more information.

Teresa Hatfield  
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

### **The Truth About Plastic Medicare Cards**

A couple of days ago, a woman came into the Meadowlark Extension office in Holton and expressed concern about a phone call she had received from someone claiming to be from Medicare. The caller wanted to send her a new plastic Medicare card. The woman knew this was a scam, but she was concerned that these calls are made in our local area.

Scams like this one are on the rise. Medicare fraud and abuse are big business. According to estimates from the Administration for Community Living, taxpayers lose more than \$60 billion a year to Medicare and Medicaid fraud. In 2018, Medicare updated the Medicare card from containing a person's Social Security number to a random identifier that includes numbers and letters. That was the last time Medicare updated the card, and there are no plans to update cards again.

The Medicare card issued by Social Security is a paper card with a blue banner on the top, a white background, and a red banner on the bottom. Medicare cards issued by the Railroad Retirement Board are the same color printed on thin plastic.

If someone calls you claiming to be from Medicare and wants to offer you a new Medicare card, be suspicious. Often, they will claim they have information on your health record, healthcare providers, partial Social Security, or Medicare number. Keep in mind that:

- Social Security is not issuing new plastic Medicare cards
- Medicare is not switching to a card with a chip in it.
- You will not receive a new Medicare card because it is Medicare Open Enrollment.
- Medicare will not call to verify your Medicare number to confirm you have the correct card.

These scammers will sound very legitimate and persuasive. They may threaten that you will not be able to use your Medicare benefits if you do not give them the information they need. They may ask for banking details or credit card information, claiming it is necessary to send you your new card. If the scammers can obtain this information, they can use it to steal your identity. You may only realize that your data is stolen much later. With access to your Medicare number, scammers can make false claims on your Medicare account. Incorrect information could potentially endanger your health by having inaccurate information on your healthcare record.

So, what can you do?

- Only answer calls from numbers you recognize.
- Do not confirm your Medicare number or answer "Yes" to any question.
- Guard your Medicare card and number like a credit card. Do not share your number.
- Do not talk with the scammer on the phone. New AI technology can create a fake narrative from a recorded conversation.
- Check your Medicare Summary Notice for any services or charges you do not recognize. If you see something suspicious, report it.

If you believe you have been scammed, act quickly. Contact Medicare (1-800-MEDICARE) immediately to report the scam. These kinds of scams have potentially serious consequences. Remember, Medicare will not contact you unless you initiate a call to them first. Stay alert to protect yourself.

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

### **Adding Lavender to Food**

For several years I have had the opportunity to help with judging foods at Kansas State Fair and this year was no exception. I find this experience to be very educational and you can see current trends in the food world. One of those trends is adding lavender to food items. Lavender is often used in soaps, perfumes and home décor. But have you tried it in food?

English lavender is for culinary use. French lavender is used in cosmetics. While purple is the common color of lavender, varieties range from vivid purple to almost pink.

Lavender blooms are used for cooking and baking. The blooms should be crushed to release the fragrant oil. Here are some tips:

- Lavender is an anti-microbial and should not be used in yeast breads.
- Fat brings out the lavender flavor.
- When infusing liquids, use fresh or dried lavender. Do not boil lavender in liquid, it will become bitter. Squeeze the lavender to get more flavor.
- Lavender has a strong flavor; a little goes a long way!

So, if you have the desire to experiment with lavender, keep these tips in mind.

### **What Makes Pickles Soft?**

I receive a lot of food questions, especially concerning food safety and food preservation. A common question is about what causes pickles to become soft. Some of the most common reasons include the following:

- Vinegar is too weak. Use vinegar that is at least 5% acidity.
- Blossom end of cucumbers not removed. The blossom contains an enzyme that causes softening. Remove at least 1/16<sup>th</sup> inch.
- Jars of pickles not processed properly. They need to be water bath processed or steam canned properly for safety.
- Hard water contains minerals that cause softening. Use softened or distilled water instead. Alternatively, boil water and let it sit for 24 hours to let sediment settle to the bottom, then use the water.
- Use pickling varieties of cucumbers and pickle them within 24 hours of harvesting.
- You might have heard of Ball® Pickle Crisp® is calcium chloride. It can be added to any vegetable pickle to add crispness to the vegetables. Note only a small amount is needed and needs to be added to each jar. Check canister for expiration date of this product.