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District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Corn Stunt Disease

The end of the growing season doesn't always mean the end of paying attention to crop diseases. A newly confirmed-in Kansas corn disease is one example. Corn stunt disease and its associated vector, the corn leafhopper, have been confirmed in the state for the first time (it was also just recently found in Oklahoma and Missouri). Found first in central and southwest Kansas – at low incidence - it has been noted in NEK fields as well.

With corn mostly dried down, it will be difficult to see the symptomatic red/purple discoloration on plant leaves (note: other factors result in red or purple leaf discoloration as well), but you may note stunted plants with shortened internodes. While there's nothing to do about it now, note such areas in case they arise again in the future. If plants still have some green left in them (dry leaves not recommended), you can submit them for testing to the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab. This will help us confirm whether it really is corn stunt disease and see how widespread it might be. Previously limited to southern Texas, Florida, and California, additional observations are needed to see if its presence is expanding here.

This disease is spread only by the corn leafhopper which has not previously been seen in Kansas but *has* been confirmed here this fall. The corn leafhopper acquires pathogens within minutes of feeding on infected corn plants, but it can take up to 30 days for the leafhopper to infect healthy corn plants during feeding events. In addition to symptomatic plants, we are currently monitoring for corn leafhoppers as well to determine their coverage area and whether they are an overwintering pest here. Leafhoppers are light tan to yellowish white in color and approximately an eighth of an inch long with two distinct dark spots between the antennae and eyes. Like most leafhoppers, they move quickly when disturbed and hide in shaded areas of corn plants (search for them early in the morning when movement is reduced or use a sweep net).

For more information on corn stunt disease, feel free to contact me at any of our Meadowlark Extension District Offices or via email to dhallaue@ksu.edu . Additional information can also be found in a pretty good article from Oklahoma State University Extension at: <https://extension.okstate.edu/e-pest-alerts/2024/corn-leafhopper-leads-to-corn-stunt-outbreak-across-oklahoma-aug-12-2024.html> .

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Small Ruminant Waterbelly

In the last week I've been learning to do things one handed with my non-dominant left hand. It is amazing the humbling effect a broken clavicle will have on a person. There was pain associated with this condition, but not as much as when I suffered from kidney stones. That got me thinking on what to write about this week, so "waterbelly" in small ruminants came to the forefront. Small ruminants are not the only effected livestock species, but it is more common in sheep and goats.

Waterbelly (urolithiasis or urinary calculi) happens most often in the male population, causing significant production losses when it occurs. Most commonly, waterbelly is a concern in wethers on a high-concentrate feed ration. Knowing the symptoms, types, and prevention of waterbelly will help producers make the best decisions for effected animals.

Urolithiasis is caused by the blockage of the urethra by stones that are formed in the bladder. Young wethers are particularly prone to waterbelly, because castration reduces the growth of the reproductive organs, but this can occur in bucks also. Ruminant males have an "s" shaped curve in their penis called the sigmoid flexure. Stones are more easily caught in the smaller urethral tube within the sigmoid flexure.

Early symptoms may include reduced urine flow, hunched backs, and abdominal discomfort. Eventually, the stones will completely block urine flow, eventually distending or rupturing the bladder. This causes the abdomen to look swollen or distended and feel fluid, hence the name waterbelly. Most commonly, wethers develop these stones due to an improper Calcium:Phosphorus ratio in the ration. Stone development is caused by many factors, based on the type of stone present. There are four types of stones most commonly seen in small ruminants. Phosphatic and calcium carbonate stones are the most common, but calcium oxylate and silica stones can occur also. Looking at the two most common types, phosphate stones are soft, small stones build up in the urinary tract of animals on concentrate diets. High phosphorus in the diet leads to phosphatic stones. Calcium carbonate stones are more common when feeding a high-legume diet (such as alfalfa) due to excess calcium in the diet.

Once animals are exhibiting abdominal pain and trouble urinating, treatment often requires surgical intervention. If left untreated, the bladder ruptures into the abdomen contributing to the name "waterbelly." Identifying the type of stone present is important in management decisions moving forward. A veterinarian can perform an ultrasound to see the urethral obstruction. However, phosphatic stones are sometimes challenging to see on an ultrasound. Therefore, prevention is the best way to protect small ruminants against waterbelly. Prevention methods include:

- Promoting water consumption to dilute the urine and increase urination. Providing free-choice salt can encourage water intake. Clean, quality water should always be a top priority.
- Delayed castration can increase the diameter of the urethra, allowing for easier stone passage.
- Ensure that the diet contains a Calcium:Phosphorus ratio of 2:1. Access to a complete mineral and balancing forage and concentrate is key in prevention.
- Ammonium chloride can be added at 0.5% of the ration to reduce the risk of phosphatic stones by increasing the urinary pH and dissolving the stones. However, if animals are suffering from calcium carbonate stones, ammonium chloride may not dissolve the stones and may lead to over-acidification and additional calcium excretion into the urine increasing stone formation.

With proper nutrition and husbandry practices, urolithiasis can be easily prevented. If it should occur in your flock/herd, working with a veterinarian and identifying the type of stone is crucial for management and treatment decisions.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Grow Your Own Oak Trees

Oak trees are great additions to many landscapes. However, buying a tree can be expensive. Luckily, there is another option: starting your own tree from a seed. As we enter fall, and many oaks start dropping acorns, it is prime time to start your next oak tree from seed. Thad Rhodes with the KS Forest Service shared the following tips on growing your own oak trees from acorns.

First, collect acorns as soon as the seed is mature. This is typically when the acorns drop from the tree. Other signs that a seed is mature include browning of the acorn (turning from green) and when the acorn slips easily from the cap.

Be selective as you collect seeds. Collect seeds from trees with good form, as they will be more likely produce higher-quality trees. Consider the landscape location of seed trees and planting locations (e.g. pick hillside trees for planting on hillsides and creek bottom trees for planting in lower areas). Select the largest available acorns, as they will have more energy to initially feed the seedling.

Once you have your seeds, keep them from drying out. Try to collect freshly-dropped seeds if possible. Soak acorns in water for 2 days, changing water 1-2 times per day to rehydrate them. Before you start the germination process, test to see which seeds are viable. If you are able to remove the cap of the acorn, place it in water to see if it floats. Those that float are generally no good; those that sink are viable. If caps cannot be removed, collect extra acorns to allow for a certain percentage of “bad” seed.

Depending on the type of oak you are growing, you can plant them in the fall or wait to plant them in the spring. Oaks are divided into two groups: white oaks and red oaks. White oaks have rounded leaf tips, like the Bur oak, Chinkapin oak, White oak. White oaks will germinate in the fall and can be planted right away. One exception is the burr oak, which can be held over to the spring.

Red oaks, on the other hand, have pointed leaf tips, like the Northern red oak, Black oak, Pin oak. Red oaks will need to go through a period of time exposed to cold and damp conditions in order to “wake up.” We call this stratification. This can be done by field planting in the fall and allowing mother nature to provide cold, snowy weather. Keep in mind that your seeds will be at the mercy of animal predation and at risk of drying out if it is a warm/dry winter.

You can also simulate stratification in the refrigerator and then plant in the spring. To do this, put fully-hydrated seeds in gallon ziplock bags with dampened peat moss. Soak the peat moss in water and then squeeze out excess moisture so it is damp, not drenched. Then place the bag in the crisper drawer. Be sure to label bags with species name, collection date, and landscape setting (or other details that might be important for determining planting location). Monitor seeds in early spring and plant once the root begins emerging (or just before); the main item is that the root not be damaged during planting.

When you are ready to plant the acorns, dig a hole twice as deep as the seed’s height. For a larger seed, you will need a deeper hole, and for a smaller seed, a shallower hole. At each planting location, plant three seeds – especially if you are planting in the fall or did not float test the seeds. After sprouting, seedlings can be thinned to a single plant. You can protect planting areas from animal damage by installing cages (or similar barriers).

For more details, you can find the US Forest Service Woody Plant Seed Manual available on the US Forest Service website. Plants in this manual are listed by scientific name (e.g. Bur oak will be under “Q” for *Quercus macrocarpa*).

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

It's Time to Review Your Medicare Options

As the end of the year approaches, Medicare Open Enrollment begins on October 15 and runs through December 7. This is your opportunity to review your plan options for 2025. Changes in 2025 will impact Medicare beneficiaries, and you must know what they are.

Some beneficiaries keep the same plan year after year and never look at other options. However, not reviewing your plan could leave you open to cost increases and the potential for your plan not to cover your current medications. In 2025, several changes will impact your 2025 costs. The structure of the Part D benefit updates reflect provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). These changes include:

- The IRA caps the total out-of-pocket threshold at \$2,000. This does not include the cost you pay for your premium.
- The sunset of the Coverage Gap Discount Program and the establishment of the Manufacturer Discount Program.
- Elimination of the Coverage Gap phase.
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- Part D sponsors must offer plan enrollees the option of paying out-of-pocket costs in monthly amounts spread throughout the year.

Other changes in 2025 for Part D plans include a deductible increase of \$45 to \$590 annually. Medicare beneficiaries must also be aware of changes to premiums, copayments, and drug formularies (the list of covered medications). Your insurance company may discontinue the plan you are currently on. If this happens, the same insurance company could enroll you in a different plan for next year with a higher premium. If your current insurance company eliminates all their plans in your service area, you must choose another insurance company for your Part D plan or risk not having coverage in 2025. In Kansas, some plans fall into this category.

You should have received an Annual Notice of Change Letter (ANOC)- in September describing changes to your current plan for next year. The ANOC is an important document that contains valuable information about your plan. The letter will come from the insurance company you are enrolled in for Part D or Part C of Medicare. The ANOC will not come from Medicare itself. Review the information to see if it still aligns with your healthcare needs.

Even if you are satisfied with your current plan, seeing if other options are available doesn't hurt. The Meadowlark Extension District is now making appointments for free one-on-one Medicare counseling sessions with a trained Senior Health Insurance for Kansas (SHICK) counselor. Plan comparisons can be made at all three Meadowlark District offices in Holton, Oskaloosa, and Seneca. Call 785-364-4125 for an appointment.

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Effective Delegation in the Family

If everybody in a family helps create the work, why shouldn't everybody join in getting things done? As long as one person works double time, others are less likely to pitch in and help. There are four common reasons why people chose not to delegate:

- They feel like they aren't doing their job
- It is easier to do the job themselves
- They like being recognized for doing the job
- The responsibility for a task may be too scattered

Whether you are volunteering within a local group, serving on a committee at work, or dealing with a family situation, dividing large tasks into smaller segments that can be shared is beneficial for everyone. Don't let guilt feelings interfere with good intentions. If you find it difficult to delegate, follow these suggestions:

- Define responsibilities clearly. Allow for individual differences in the way tasks are done, but define limitations to provide consistency.
- Delegate complete segments of a task. Make sure others can see the end goal. Others may lack motivation if they are asked to do only bits and pieces of a project.
- Feedback is important, but be honest and accurate in your assessment. Emphasize what went wrong, but who did something wrong. Praise efforts of family members, and expect some mistakes in the beginning.
- Set goals and performance standards. Discuss expectations and deadlines for particular tasks. It may be helpful to write out responsibilities and deadlines.
- Provide support. Share your knowledge, information and plans. If special skills are required, teach others or provide the means for them to attend necessary classes in the community.
- Share decision-making. Let others have a voice in the plan. If you ask your spouse to do the grocery shopping, let that person plan the schedule and decide if it is easier to go once or twice a month.
- Let go of authority. Transfer authority to allow others a feeling of personal success or failure. Perhaps the most difficult part of delegating is letting go.
- Remember to say, "Thank you." After a job is done, acknowledge the accomplishments of others. Commend and encourage family members as they learn new responsibilities.

Delegating has a long-term advantage. You teach someone else skills and responsibilities. It is easier on everyone's schedule if tasks are divided among many members. On the job, at home, and in the community, most work is the responsibility of a group, not just one person. Go for the delegated advantage.