

River Valley District

K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NEWS

rivervalley.ksu.edu

April 2026
Volume 21 #4

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BROOKE OHLDE TRANSFERS TO HORTICULTURE AGENT POSITION

Hello, River Valley District! My name is Brooke Ohlde, and many of you may recognize me from my time as the Washington County 4-H Program Manager. During that time, I had the pleasure of getting to know so many wonderful families and volunteers, and I'm excited for the opportunity to continue building relationships through my new role as the district Horticulture Agent.

I grew up near Washington, where my love of plants began at a very young age. Some of my favorite memories include gardening and plant shopping with my mom. As I transitioned into high school, I joined FFA and quickly developed a deeper interest in horticulture. Competing on Nursery & Landscape, Floriculture, and Agronomy teams confirmed that horticulture was the right career path for me and ultimately led me to attend Kansas State University.

During college, I worked at the K-State Soil Testing Lab and the University Gardens. I also spent two summers interning with K-State Research and Extension in McPherson County, where I first discovered my interest in Extension work. While at K-State, I was active in the Horticulture Club, helping lead various plant sales and competing in collegiate landscaping events. Throckmorton Hall and the university greenhouses quickly became my home away from home, and I loved learning everything I could about plants during my time there.

After graduation, I accepted a plant health internship with Loma Vista Nursery in Ottawa, Kansas. I spent seven years at the nursery, working my way up to propagation manager and expanding my experience into perennial plant production. While I truly enjoyed my time in the plant production industry, I was ready to move closer to family and return to north central Kansas.

In 2022, I joined the Washington office as the 4-H Program Manager and have been there ever since. My time working with 4-H youth and families has been an incredibly rewarding experience and the perfect stepping stone into this new position. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to continue serving our communities in a new way as the River Valley District Horticulture Agent.

My family and I live outside of Palmer, where I'm constantly experimenting with new plants in our landscape and garden. In my spare time, I enjoy baking, reading, and of course, gardening. I look forward to helping River Valley District residents with all kinds of horticulture questions, as we grow and learn together.

You can reach me at 785-632-5335 or by email at brooke6@ksu.edu. Please feel free to stop by the Clay Center office anytime with questions or just to say hello!



OLDER AMERICANS MONTH



CHAMPION YOUR HEALTH: MAY 2026

Older Americans Month is observed in May and is a time to acknowledge older American's contributions, affirm our dedication to serving older adults, and focus on aging trends.

The 2026 theme is, "Champion Your Health," and focuses on the cornerstones of health aging such as prevention, wellness, and personal responsibility. This theme is encouraging older Americans to take an active role in advocating for themselves, managing their own health, accessing preventive care, and making informed decisions which support independence. This Older Americans Month, communities and individuals alike can take steps to champion health and advance healthy aging. Below are some ways individuals can take charge of their health at any age.

- Stay up to date on preventive care and screenings.
- Build and maintain social connections that support emotional well-being.
- Choose nutritious, minimally processed foods.
- Incorporate regular physical activity to maintain strength and mobility.
- Practice daily habits that support mental health and resilience.

PREPARING FOR MEDICARE

Have questions or concerns about Medicare? You're not alone—navigating Medicare can be overwhelming with all the different parts and constant advertisements.

Keep in mind, you can begin the Medicare enrollment process as early as three months before the month you turn 65. Reaching out early gives you time to get your questions answered and schedule a one-on-one appointment for personalized guidance.

Monica Thayer, Family Resource Management Agent and Jordan Schuette, Adult Development and Aging Agent, are here to help with your Medicare questions and needs. Call today to schedule an appointment by contacting your local extension office at the phone numbers listed below.

- Belleville - 785-527-5084
- Clay Center - 785-632-5335
- Concordia - 785-243-8185
- Washington - 785-325-2121

HEALTHY LIVING TIPS DURING RETIREMENT

Retirement can be an exciting and overwhelming time. Life is changing and your daily routine might start to look different. Below are some tips for how you can live healthfully during retirement.

- Schedule your doctor's visits, stay-up-to date on health checks, and think of how you can proactively address health issues.
- Stay connected socially to your family, friends, former co-workers, and those in the community. Look for clubs or groups you can join and get involved within your community.
- Volunteer your time. Find organizations you are passionate about in your community and volunteer. Remember small contributions can make a big difference and these volunteer positions do not have to turn into full-time jobs.
- Look into community wellness resources or retiree fitness programs that are offered within your community.

NEW TO CANNING? LET US HELP!

Canning your own garden produce or farmers market produce can be rewarding and a great way to save your food for later use. If you are new to canning, it is important to start by getting educated and learn how to can safely.

For canning fruits, pickles, jams, jellies and most tomato products, a water bath canner or large stock pot with a lid and rack is needed. Water bath canners have fitted lids and removable perforated or shaped-wire racks. The canner must be deep enough that at least 1 to 2 inches of briskly boiling water covers the tops of jars during processing.

For canning plain vegetables, some tomato products and meats, a pressure canner is required. A pressure canner may have a weighted gauge or dial gauge, for indicating and regulating the pressure.

With any of these, always read the manufacturer's instructions before canning any food. Also, be aware that some canners cannot be used on glass stovetops.

Publications on how to water bath can and pressure can are available for free at your local Extension Office. Questions can be directed to Kaitlin Moore, Nutrition, food safety, and health agent at 785-243-8185.



HIDDEN HAZARDS IN HAY: FOREIGN OBJECTS AND HARDWARE DISEASE IN CATTLE

Hay is one of the most important feed sources for cattle, especially during winter or periods when pasture is unavailable. While hay is generally considered a safe and reliable feed, it can sometimes contain hidden dangers. Foreign objects accidentally baled into hay can pose serious health risks to cattle. Items such as plastic net wrap, baling twine, wire, nails, and metal debris from farm equipment are among the most common contaminants. These materials can lead to severe digestive problems, often referred to as hardware disease, and in many cases may result in the death of affected animals.

Hardware disease occurs when cattle ingest sharp or indigestible objects that become lodged in the rumen, the largest compartment of the cow's stomach. Because cattle do not carefully sort their food, they often consume foreign materials along with hay. Over time, these objects accumulate in the rumen, interfering with normal digestion. Sharp metal objects such as wire or nails can puncture the stomach wall, leading to infection, internal damage, and inflammation. This condition can rapidly become life-threatening if not identified and treated early.

Plastic materials are another major concern. Plastic net wrap and baling twine are commonly used to secure large round bales. If these materials are not removed before feeding, cattle may ingest them along with the hay. Unlike organic feed, plastic does not break down in the digestive system. Instead, it can form large masses inside the rumen, preventing proper movement of feed and disrupting digestion. This can lead to severe indigestion, reduced appetite, and decreased weight gain. In serious cases, the buildup can cause rumen impaction or bloat, which may ultimately lead to death.

In addition to equipment materials, hay bales can sometimes contain other unexpected contaminants. Plastic bags, trash blown into fields, and debris left behind during harvesting can easily become incorporated into the bale. Occasionally, small animal carcasses may also be trapped during the baling process. While less common, these contaminants can introduce harmful bacteria or toxins that may affect cattle health.

The symptoms of cattle affected by foreign object ingestion often include loss of appetite, decreased milk production, abdominal pain, bloating, and general weakness. In cases involving sharp metal objects, cattle may show signs of infection such as fever or difficulty moving due to pain in the abdomen. Without prompt veterinary attention, these conditions can worsen quickly. Preventing these problems begins with careful hay management. Farmers should inspect fields for debris before cutting hay and ensure that equipment is

well maintained to reduce the risk of metal fragments entering the bale. When feeding hay, all plastic net wrap and baling twine should be completely removed. It is also important to visually inspect bales for visible contamination before offering them to cattle.

By remaining vigilant and maintaining good feeding practices, producers can significantly reduce the risk of hardware disease and digestive obstruction in their herds. Although foreign objects in hay may seem like a minor issue, their impact on cattle health can be severe. Preventing contamination and carefully monitoring feed quality are essential steps in protecting livestock and maintaining a healthy, productive herd. For more information or if you have any questions contact livestock production agent Kaitlyn Nelson in the Washington office at 785-325-2121 or email at khildebrand@ksu.edu

GRASS TETANY IN BEEF CATTLE: RECOGNIZING AND PREVENTING A SPRINGTIME THREAT

Each spring, as pastures begin to green up and cattle are turned out onto lush forage, producers should be aware of a potentially serious condition known as grass tetany. Sometimes called grass staggers or hypomagnesemia, grass tetany is a metabolic disorder caused by low levels of magnesium in the bloodstream. If not recognized and treated quickly, it can lead to sudden death in affected animals. Understanding the risk factors and prevention strategies can help protect herd health during the grazing season. Grass tetany most commonly occurs in early spring when cattle graze rapidly growing, cool-season grasses. These young plants are often high in potassium and nitrogen but relatively low in magnesium. High potassium levels in the forage can interfere with the animal's ability to absorb magnesium from the rumen, which can quickly lead to a deficiency. Cool, cloudy weather and rapidly growing pasture conditions can increase the risk even further.

Mature cows with young calves are the most susceptible to grass tetany, especially those in early lactation. Milk production increases the cow's demand for magnesium, making it harder to maintain adequate levels if dietary intake is limited. Older cows are also more at risk because their ability to absorb magnesium decreases with age. While less common, growing cattle can also develop the condition under certain grazing conditions.

The symptoms of grass tetany can appear suddenly. Early signs may include nervousness, muscle twitching, and a stiff or uncoordinated gait. As the condition worsens, affected animals may become excitable, stagger, or collapse. In severe cases, cows may lie on their side with paddling

legs or experience convulsions. Because grass tetany can progress rapidly, animals may sometimes be found dead without obvious warning signs. Immediate veterinary treatment is critical when grass tetany is suspected. Treatment typically involves administering magnesium, often through an intravenous solution that also contains calcium. Quick response can save the animal's life, but prevention is far more effective than treatment.

Providing adequate magnesium supplementation is the best way to prevent grass tetany. Many producers offer high-magnesium mineral mixes beginning several weeks before cattle are turned out on lush pasture and continuing through the high-risk period. These mineral supplements should contain approximately 10–15 percent magnesium and be formulated specifically for grass tetany prevention. Consistent intake is important, so placing mineral feeders in high-traffic areas and ensuring they remain stocked can improve consumption.

Additional management practices can also reduce risk. Avoid turning hungry cattle onto lush pasture; instead, provide hay or other roughage beforehand to slow initial intake. Maintaining balanced fertilization of pastures—particularly avoiding excessive nitrogen and potassium applications—can help reduce conditions that favor grass tetany. Including legumes in pastures may also help increase magnesium availability in the forage. Grass tetany is a preventable condition, but it requires awareness and proactive management. By recognizing the risk factors and implementing a sound mineral supplementation program, beef producers can help ensure their cattle transition safely onto spring pasture and maintain good health throughout the grazing season.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR APRIL 2026

Cow Herd Management

- Evaluate BCS and adjust nutrition for spring-calving females going into breeding.
 - * Ensure thin (BCS \leq 4.0) females are on an increasing plane of nutrition.
 - * BCS 5.0+ females should be maintaining weight and condition.
 - * Record cow BCS and use it as a guide for future management.
 - * Start lactation rations/supplementation by end of first calving cycle.
- Pregnancy check fall calving cows and make culling decisions.
 - * How were pregnancy rates compared to last year?
 - * Do we need to re-think our fall/winter nutrition program?

- Plan your mineral supplementation for this coming spring and summer.
 - * Make effort to measure intake regularly and adjust it as needed.
 - * If using fly control products, start them at recommended area times.
 - * Properly store bagged mineral and avoid damaging bags and pallets.
- Risk of grass tetany is greatest for lactating cows and older cows. Consider magnesium levels in mineral supplements, particularly for cows grazing the following:
 - * wheat, rye, triticale, oats, bromegrass, and other cool season forages
- Schedule breeding soundness examinations on bulls well prior to turnout.
 - * Allow plenty of time to re-test or find a replacement bull if needed.

MEDICARE BASICS

Medicare can be confusing, but you don't have to navigate it alone. If you are eligible for Medicare or will be starting Medicare within the next couple of years, Medicare Basics can help you better understand your options.

River Valley Extension District Agent Monica Thayer will present Medicare Basics twice in April. Both sessions will cover the same information, so you only need to attend one.

- Tuesday, April 7, at 6:30 pm
Cloud County Co-op Conference Room
1401 E. 6th Street, Concordia
- Thursday, April 23, at 6:30 pm
Education Room, Republic County Hospital
2420 G Street, Belleville

The program is free to attend, but registration is requested. To RSVP, please contact the River Valley Extension District office in Concordia at 785-243-8185 or Belleville at 785-527-5084.

If you prefer to schedule a one-on-one appointment or have questions about Medicare, please contact Monica Thayer at 785-527-5084 or Jordan Schuette at 785-325-2121.

AMERICA SAVES WEEK: SMALL STEPS, BIG IMPACT

Each year, America Saves Week encourages individuals and families to take small, practical steps toward stronger financial well-being. This national campaign highlights simple actions anyone can take to build savings, reduce debt, and create more financial stability. Whether you're just getting started or looking to refresh your goals, April 6th through

10th is an ideal time to focus on your financial future.

The topics over the week include:

Monday, April 6 – Building a Strong Foundation

Tuesday, April 7 – Expect the Unexpected

Wednesday, April 8 – Dream Big, Plan with Purpose

Thursday, April 9 – Rewrite the Debt Narrative

Friday, April 10 – Your Story, Your Future

To learn more or to take the America Saves pledge, visit www.americasaves.org.

FINANCIAL PREPAREDNESS FOR STORM SEASON

Spring storms can arrive quickly, and while most people think about emergency kits and shelter plans, financial preparedness is just as essential. A severe storm can disrupt income, damage property, or create unexpected expenses. Taking a few simple steps now can make recovery faster, less stressful, and far less costly.

Just as you keep flashlights and batteries ready, you should also have key financial documents organized and easy to grab. Store copies in a locked, waterproof, and fireproof container or a secure digital location, including insurance policies, identification (driver's license, Social Security cards, passports), bank account and loan information, home and vehicle titles, a list of monthly bills and due dates, and emergency contact numbers. Digital backups, stored securely in the cloud, can be a lifesaver if physical documents are damaged.

Even a small cushion can make a big difference after a storm. While it is recommended for everyone to have an emergency fund that could cover 3-6 months expenses, if you aren't there yet, at least have enough to cover expenses, such as temporary lodging, food and fuel, insurance deductibles, and minor home repairs. If saving feels overwhelming, start small. Setting aside even \$10–\$20 per paycheck builds resilience over time.

Storm season is the perfect time to make sure your coverage matches your risks, including coverages, deductibles, and any limitations. Take photos or videos of your home and belongings as this documentation can speed up claims and reduce disputes. Digitally stored photos and videos can be beneficial if your phone or camera gets destroyed.

Storms are unpredictable, but your financial readiness doesn't have to be. By organizing documents, reviewing insurance, and building savings, you give yourself and your family a stronger financial foundation for recovery. Preparedness isn't just about weathering the storm; it's about bouncing back quickly afterward.

SPOT AND STOP THE SCAM

Scams are becoming more common and more convincing, making it important to know how to recognize warning signs and protect yourself. Spot and Stop the Scam focuses on helping individuals identify common scams and learn practical steps to avoid becoming a victim.

This program covers common scam tactics, red flags to watch for, and what to do if you believe you have been targeted. The information is helpful for adults of all ages and especially timely as scams continue to increase.

River Valley Extension District Agent Monica Thayer will present *Spot and Stop the Scam* twice in April. Both sessions will cover the same information, so you only need to attend one.

- Monday, April 20 at 2 pm
Carnegie Library
706 6th Street, Clay Center
- Thursday, April 23 at noon
Golden Bell Haven Senior Center
1401 17th Street, Belleville

The program is free to attend, but registration is requested. To RSVP, please contact the River Valley Extension District office in Clay Center at 785-632-5335 or Belleville at 785-527-5084.

If you have any questions, please contact Monica Thayer at 785-527-5084.



A FEW SPRING GARDENING MISTAKES TO AVOID

As warmer temperatures arrive, many Kansas gardeners are eager to get outside and begin planting, pruning, and preparing their landscapes for the growing season. While enthusiasm is a great motivator, spring is also a time when a few common mistakes can create problems that last throughout the summer.

Working soil when it is too wet.

Spring rains often leave garden beds saturated. Tilling or digging in wet soil can destroy the natural structure of the soil and cause compaction. When soil is compacted, plant roots struggle to grow and water may not drain properly. A good rule of thumb is to squeeze a handful of soil. If it forms a sticky ball that does not crumble easily, it is still too wet to work.

BE CAREFUL FERTILIZING COOL-SEASON LAWNS IN THE SPRING

Pruning spring-flowering shrubs too early.

Many popular shrubs, including lilac and forsythia, set their flower buds the previous year. Pruning these plants in early spring can remove the buds and eliminate the bloom. If pruning is needed, it is best done shortly after the plants finish flowering.

Planting warm-season crops too early.

Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and squash thrive in warm soil and can be damaged by cool temperatures. In north-central Kansas, frost is still possible into early May. Even if plants survive a cold night, cool soil temperatures can stunt growth and delay development. Waiting until the danger of frost has passed and the soil has warmed will help these crops establish more quickly.

Skipping the hardening-off process for seedlings.

Plants started indoors need time to adjust to outdoor conditions. Placing tender seedlings directly into full sun, wind, and fluctuating temperatures can cause transplant shock. Gradually exposing plants to outdoor conditions over several days helps them adapt and improves their chances of success.

Applying herbicides on windy spring days.

Many products used to control weeds in lawns can drift onto nearby gardens, flowers, or young trees and shrubs. Even a small amount of drift can damage sensitive plants such as tomatoes, grapes, and ornamental flowers. Applying herbicides on calm days and carefully following label directions can help prevent accidental injury to desirable plants.

Allowing lawn equipment to damage young trees.

As mowing season begins, string trimmers and lawn mowers can easily injure the thin bark of young trees. These wounds can weaken or even kill the tree over time. Maintaining a mulch ring around the base of trees not only protects them from equipment but also helps conserve moisture and reduce competition from grass.

Neglecting early-season watering for newly planted shrubs and trees.

Even though temperatures are cool, young plants continue to use water. Dry soil in the spring can stress recently planted trees and shrubs before they establish a strong root system. A deep, thorough watering once a week (when soil is not frozen) helps them survive the season and promotes healthy growth.

Rushing fertilization before plants are ready.

Many gardeners apply fertilizer as soon as soil is workable, but fertilizing too early can stimulate leafy growth while roots are still weak or dormant. For both lawns and garden beds, it's best to wait until plants show active growth before applying nutrients.

Spring is an exciting time in the garden, but patience and good timing can make all the difference.

When temperatures begin to warm in spring, many homeowners are eager to fertilize their lawns. However, I want to caution that spring fertilization of cool-season grasses should be done carefully and in moderation.

Many lawns in Kansas are composed of cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. These grasses grow most actively during the cooler temperatures of spring and fall, but that does not necessarily mean heavy fertilization is needed early in the season. According to K-State Extension turfgrass recommendations, applying large amounts of fertilizer in early spring can actually create problems for lawns later in the year.

One reason is that cool-season grasses naturally experience a rapid flush of growth as temperatures warm. Adding fertilizer too early can stimulate excessive leaf growth, forcing homeowners to mow more frequently while the plants devote less energy to developing strong root systems. This can weaken turf going into the hot, stressful conditions of summer.

Heavy spring fertilization can also make lawns more susceptible to heat and drought stress. When turf grows too quickly in the spring, it tends to produce more top growth than roots. Shallow root systems make it harder for the lawn to tolerate Kansas summer weather, when high temperatures and dry conditions are common.

Extension specialists often recommend limiting fertilizer applications in early spring or delaying them until the initial flush of growth slows. In many cases, a light application in late April or early May is sufficient if fertilization is needed. This approach supports steady growth without overstimulating the turf.

For many Kansas lawns, the most important fertilization actually occurs later in the year. Fall applications allow cool-season grasses to recover from summer stress and build stronger root systems. Thus, fall fertilization is far more important than spring fertilization for maintaining healthy lawns.

Homeowners who are unsure about their lawn's nutrient needs should consider conducting a soil test before applying fertilizer. Soil testing helps determine whether nutrients such as phosphorus or potassium are already present in adequate amounts, preventing unnecessary fertilizer applications.

In short, while it may be tempting to fertilize lawns heavily as soon as spring arrives, restraint is often the best approach. By limiting spring fertilization and focusing more attention on fall feeding, Kansas homeowners can encourage healthier turf that is better able to withstand summer stress and remain attractive throughout the growing season.

INTRO TO ESTATE PLANNING

Estate planning is an opportunity to put your wishes into legal documents for your health care, minor children or dependents, finances, and assets.



Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 6:30 pm

Clay Center Zoo Conference Room

4th Street and Pomeroy

Clay Center, KS 67432

This free program provides a foundational introduction to estate planning.

Please RSVP to RVD-Clay Center at 785-632-5335.

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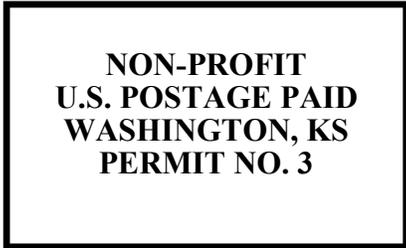
Extension
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River Valley Extension District

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RIVER VALLEY DISTRICT

“2026 UP-COMING MEETINGS & EVENTS”

DATE	TIME	PROGRAM	LOCATION
Mar 22-May16		Walk Kansas	Statewide Event
April/May	10-11am	Stay Strong, Stay Healthy (Monday’s and Friday’s)	Wakefield - Public Library, 206 Dogwood St.
April 7	6:30pm	Medicare Basics	Concordia-Cloud Co. Coop, 1401 East 6th St.
April 16	6:30pm	Intro to Estate Planning	Clay Center- Zoo Conf. Rm.,4th St. & Pomeroy
April 20	2pm	Spot & Stop the Scam	Clay Center- Carnegie Library, 706 6th St.
April 23	Noon	Spot & Stop the Scam	Belleville- 1401 17th St, Senior Center
April 23	6:30pm	Medicare Basics	Belleville-Republic County Hospital
April 25	8-5pm	Tractor Safety Training for Youth	Beloit-Carrico Implement, 3160 US Hwy 24
April 14, 21 May 5, 12	4-6pm	Dining With Diabetes	Clay Center-Clay Co. Med. Cntr., 617 Liberty St.