

# River Valley District

K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NEWS

[rivervalley.ksu.edu](http://rivervalley.ksu.edu)

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Extension District

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## LOCAL STUDENTS LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE AT AG DAY

Area fourth and fifth grade students had the opportunity to experience agriculture firsthand during recent Ag Day events held in Republic and Washington Counties. These educational days focused on helping youth better understand the important role agriculture plays in their everyday lives, the impact agriculture has on local communities, and the importance of staying safe around agricultural equipment and environments.

Republic County Ag Day was held on April 29 and welcomed Republic County school fourth and fifth grade students for a full day of hands-on learning experiences. Washington County Ag Day followed on May 8, bringing together fourth grade students from Clifton-Clyde, Washington, Linn, Linn Lutheran, Hanover, and St. John schools.

Throughout both events, students rotated through a variety of engaging and interactive stations led by local agricultural professionals, organizations, and community partners. Presentations covered a wide range of topics including soil conservation, dairy production, grain bin safety, plant identification, and emergency medical services.

Students were able to participate in activities that encouraged them to ask questions, explore agricultural careers, and gain a deeper understanding of how agriculture impacts food production, natural resources, and daily life in rural Kansas communities. Safety was also a key focus throughout the day, teaching students important precautions to take around farms, machinery, grain bins, and livestock.

The success of both Ag Day events would not have been possible without the many volunteers, presenters, schools, and sponsors who dedicated their time and resources to educating local youth. By providing hands-on and interactive experiences, Ag Day continues to help students build an appreciation for the agriculture industry and the many people who work to keep it thriving.



## THE CONCORDIA FARMERS MARKET WILL OFFER FOUR TRIPLE MATCH DAYS FOR SNAP HOUSEHOLDS THIS SUMMER

The Concordia Farmers Market will be accepting SNAP, credit, debit and Double Up Food Bucks during the 2026 season. These card transactions can be processed June through September on Thursdays 4-6PM at the Concordia City Park located at the corner of Washington St and 11<sup>th</sup> St.

The second Thursday of each month (June through September) will be Triple Match Days for SNAP households. For example, SNAP households who want to spend \$10 at the market will receive an additional \$10 in Double Up Food Bucks tokens to spend on fruits and veggies AND an additional \$10 in SNAP tokens to spend on any SNAP-eligible food. Triple Match Days for SNAP households will be June 11, July 9, August 13, and September 10.

The Concordia Farmers Market always welcomes new vendors, the vendor fee for 2026 will be \$30, that covers the entire season, there are smaller fees for those just wanting to try the market out a few times. Questions can be directed to Kaitlin Moore, Nutrition, Food Safety and Health Agent at 785-243-8185 or [kaitlinmoore@ksu.edu](mailto:kaitlinmoore@ksu.edu).

## AGING AND SLEEP

It is important for all adults to get a good night's sleep. According to the National Institute on Aging (<https://www.nia.nih.gov>), older adults need around 7-9 hours of sleep per night.

Many reasons exist why older adults may not get a good night sleep. They could be experiencing pain, feeling sick, or their medication may be keeping them awake. Either way a lack of sleep can impact you the next day by experiencing forgetfulness, causing irritability, experiencing feelings of depression, or having more falls/accidents.

Below are some helpful tips to get a good night's sleep:

- Follow a Sleep Schedule – Have bedtime and awake time the same each day.
- Avoid Napping – Be aware of when you are taking naps and avoid taking them in the late afternoon or evening since this can keep you up at night.
- Bedtime Routine – Take time to relax before bedtime (i.e. read a book, soak in a tub, listen to music).
- Limit Screen Time – The lights from a television, computer, cell phone, etc., can make it difficult to fall asleep.

- Comfortable Temperature – Keep your bedroom set at a comfortable temperature and keep it quiet.
- Low Lighting – Utilize low lighting at night and as you get ready for bed.
- Regular Exercise – Exercising at regular times each day is helpful but try not to exercise within 3 hours of bedtime.
- Avoid Large Meals at Bedtime – Large meals close to bedtime can keep you awake.
- Watch Your Caffeine – Be aware that having caffeine late in the day can keep you awake.
- Limit Alcohol – Even a small amount of alcohol can make it more difficult to stay asleep.

## SALMONELLA OUTBREAK TRACED TO COOLER HIGHLIGHTS HIDDEN FOOD SAFETY RISK

K-State food scientist Karen Blakeslee details the importance of proper food handling to prevent foodborne illness.

*By Chevy-Lynn Vaske, K-State Extension news service*

A recent Salmonella outbreak tied to a beverage cooler is serving as a reminder that foodborne illness risks can come from unexpected places, especially during outdoor events.

According to Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee, the outbreak was unusual because it was not linked to a traditional food source. Instead, contamination originated from a commonly used cooler.

“This was an uncommon source of foodborne illness, but it shows that contamination can happen anywhere,” Blakeslee said. “Investigators used traditional methods, along with artificial intelligence tools, to help gather information and identify the source.”

The issue stemmed from repeated use of the cooler without proper cleaning and sanitizing. Because coolers are often used outdoors, they are more exposed to environmental contaminants.

In this case, the cooler drained into an area with standing water, allowing contaminated water to siphon back inside. This led to contamination of melted ice, fresh ice, and even beverage cans stored in the cooler.

Blakeslee said this situation highlights how easily bacteria can spread when sanitation steps are skipped.

To reduce risk, she recommends thoroughly cleaning coolers after each use. “Empty the contents, wash the inside with hot, soapy water, then sanitize with a solution of one tablespoon of bleach in one gallon of water,” Blakeslee said.

“Let it drain and air dry completely.”

She added that coolers with cracks or deep scratches should be replaced, as damaged surfaces are more difficult to clean effectively.

With county fair and picnic season approaching, Blakeslee encourages people to adopt simple food safety habits when using coolers outdoors. Washing and sanitizing coolers before use is essential, along with separating food and beverages into different coolers to reduce cross-contamination. Raw meat should also be packed separately from ready-to-eat items.

“When you’re outdoors, keep coolers in the shade so they stay cold longer,” Blakeslee said. “And once you’re done, clean and sanitize them so they’re ready for the next use.”

By following proper cleaning and handling practices, individuals can help prevent contamination and keep outdoor gatherings safe. For more information on foodborne illness and proper food handling, refer to [guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration](#).

## ACCESS TO GLP-1 MEDICATIONS FOR ELIGIBLE MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES

Beginning July 1, 2026, eligible Medicare beneficiaries will be able to access certain GLP-1 weight-loss medications for a \$50 monthly cost through December 31, 2027. This temporary program, known as the Medicare GLP-1 Bridge, is a CMS demonstration designed to improve access to evidence-based treatments for obesity and related chronic conditions.

To participate, individuals must be enrolled in Medicare Part D or a Medicare Advantage plan with prescription drug coverage and meet specific clinical criteria, including body mass index (BMI) thresholds and certain health conditions. Access requires a prescription and prior authorization from a health care provider.

Medications currently included in the program are Wegovy (injection and tablets), Foundayo, and Zepbound (KwikPen formulation) when prescribed for weight loss and maintenance. Not all formulations are covered.

The Medicare GLP-1 Bridge operates outside the standard Medicare Part D benefit, using a centralized CMS system to manage authorizations, claims, and payments to pharmacies. While beneficiaries pay \$50 per month, this cost does not count toward Medicare Part D out-of-pocket spending limits or drug subsidies.

Medicare beneficiaries interested in GLP-1 medications should talk with their health care provider to determine eligibility and appropriateness.

For more information, visit: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/coverage/prescription-drug-coverage/medicare-glp-1-bridge>

## NATIONAL HOMEOWNERSHIP MONTH

June is National Homeownership Month, a time to recognize the value of owning a home and highlighting the financial planning needed to sustain it. While homeownership can build stability and long-term wealth, it also comes with ongoing costs that require careful budgeting.

Many homeowners plan for their monthly mortgage payment but may underestimate other regular and occasional expenses. A realistic homeownership budget should include property taxes, homeowners insurance, utilities, maintenance, and repairs, such as appliance replacement, roof repairs, or plumbing issues.

National Homeownership Month is a reminder that successful homeownership depends not just on buying a home, but on ongoing financial management. By budgeting for both expected and unexpected costs, homeowners can protect their home and enjoy greater financial stability throughout the year.

## MANAGING SUMMER EXPENSES

Summer can be an enjoyable time, but it often comes with higher expenses. Vacations, youth activities, increased utility bills, and dining out can quickly strain household budgets. Planning ahead can help families enjoy summer without added financial stress.

Start by anticipating seasonal costs. Make a list of typical summer expenses such as travel, camps, childcare, home projects, or higher electric bills. Comparing this list with your regular monthly budget can help identify where adjustments may be needed. A budget is typically never going to be the same for each month of the year.

Next, set spending limits for discretionary items like entertainment and travel. Look for low-cost or free local activities, community events, and libraries to keep families engaged without overspending. Planning meals ahead and limiting convenience dining can also reduce costs during busy summer schedules.

Finally, review your finances at the end of the summer. Understanding what worked—and what didn’t—can help with planning for future seasonal expenses. With thoughtful planning and simple budgeting strategies, families can make the most of summer while protecting their financial well-being.

For questions, contact Monica Thayer at 785-527-5084 or [mthayer@ksu.edu](mailto:mthayer@ksu.edu).

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

Everybody experiences both good and bad stress. It can come from mental activity (for example, working on income tax), emotional activity (for example, having a milestone birthday or paying the bills when the money is short), or physical activity (for example, working in the garden or walking down to the mailbox). The way you interpret stress is unique and personal. For example, what may be relaxing to one person may be stressful to another. Good stress can be healthy and useful. It helps you get to an appointment on time or meet a deadline. When stress becomes overwhelming, it becomes distress, or bad stress. Bad stress can lead to chronic stress, which can leave you feeling nervous, on-edge, and tense. It also puts you at greater risk for numerous health problems, including heart disease, sleep problems, digestive problems, depression, obesity, memory impairment, and various skin conditions, such as eczema. Learning what causes stress and different ways to cope with it helps you be more balanced and healthy throughout life.

## **What is Stress?**

Stress is the way your body responds to experiences and events. It helps you rise to a challenge in addition to preparing to meet tough situations with focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness. The events that provoke stress are called stressors. Some stressors are caused by negative events, such as a family argument, physical danger, test anxiety, or concern over finances. Events that you look forward to, such as celebrations, or going to a movie with a friend, are also stressors. It can be single events or a result of multiple events that pile up.

## **People who are experiencing stress overload may notice:**

- anxiety or panic attacks
- a feeling of being constantly pressured, hassled, and hurried
- irritability and moodiness
- physical symptoms, such as stomach problems, headaches, or even chest pain
- allergic reactions, such as eczema or asthma
- problems sleeping
- drinking too much, smoking, overeating, or doing drugs sadness or depression

## **Identify the Sources of Stress in your Life**

Everyone experiences stress a little differently. Some people become angry and act out their stress or take it out on others. The first step in stress management is to identify the stressors in your life. Are there any stressors you can change by avoiding, reducing exposure to, or eliminating completely?

## **Learn Healthier ways to Manage Stress**

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no “one size fits all” solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation; therefore, it is important to experiment with different stress-reduction strategies to lessen your feelings of stress. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Two common strategies for managing stress include changing the situation and changing your response to the situation. If there is a situation that you can identify that causes stress, avoid it. For example, if the crowds and chaos of a local festival make you feel anxious to the point that you do not like to go, stay home. In unavoidable situations, such as a holiday dinner with relatives, you may have to change your reaction. Accept it for what it is, focus on what is really important, adapt to the environment, and move on.

## **Stress Management Strategy 1: Change the Situation**

- Evaluate your physical environment. If the color on the walls affect your mood, or if you are worried about a toddler falling down the stairs or a loved one with dementia wandering out of the house in the middle of the night — modify your environment with paint, gates, or alarms on the door.
- Take a look at the people in your life. Is there a person or group of people that really causes you stress? If so, you may need to distance yourself or resign from that organization or group.
- Review your calendar. Sometimes stress results from your inability to say “no.” Look at your commitments. Are you doing what you want to do, should do, have to do? If part of your stress is over-committing yourself, cut back. Many commitments and tasks are beneficial, but if it is hurting your health, it may not be worth it.

## **Stress Management Strategy 2: Change Your Reaction**

- Laugh, don’t cry. Some things you just can’t change. These are the things that you need to learn to accept instead of letting them bother you. So your neighbor painted his garage hot pink. Instead of getting worked up when you drive past, accept the pink and laugh at his lack of style.
- Compromise. The need to be “right” often interferes with good communication and can cause stress when you are so focused on what the other person is doing. If you ask someone to change, you need to be willing to change yourself.
- Let it go. Ask yourself, “Does it really matter? Will it matter in five years?” Sometimes you have to pick your battles. Having realistic expectations of yourself, shifting your focus to looking at what is important, and taking care of yourself emotionally and physically will also increase your confidence to deal with stressors. Sometimes, taking a deep breath, meditating, relaxing, or taking time to smell the roses allows you to appreciate the little things so you don’t overreact to the big things.

*Keys to Embracing Aging- Stress Management MF3264*

# WITS WORKOUT



Many factors contribute to brain health throughout life. Two of these factors include intellectual challenge and social connectedness. WITS Workout provides a purposeful opportunity to engage intellectually and socially.

**“Happy Birthday, USA”**

**Thursday, June 25th**

**11:00 a.m.**

**Washington Public Library**

**116 E 2<sup>nd</sup> St.**

**Washington, KS 66968**

Join Adult Development and Aging Agent, Jordan Schuette for a WITS Workouts. Please RSVP for this free program by calling RVED - Washington County Office at 785-325-2121.

**KANSAS STATE  
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K-State Research and Extension is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Program information may be available in languages other than English. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, including alternative means for communication (e.g., Braille, large print, audio tape, and American Sign Language) may be requested by contacting the event contact (Jordan Schuette) four weeks prior to the start of the event (May 28, 2026) at (785-325-2121 and jschuette@ksu.edu). Requests received after this date will be honored when it is feasible to do so. Language access services, such as interpretation or translation of vital information will be provided free of charge to limited English proficient individuals upon request.

**Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service**  
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## UNDERSTANDING HEALTH SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (HSAs)

A Health Savings Account (HSA) is a tax-advantaged savings account designed to help individuals and families pay for qualified medical expenses now and in the future. HSAs are available to people who are enrolled in a high-deductible health plan (HDHP) and meet eligibility requirements.

One of the biggest advantages of an HSA is its triple tax benefit. Contributions are made with pre-tax dollars, the money grows tax-free, and withdrawals are tax-free when used for qualified medical expenses. Funds can be used for doctor visits, prescriptions, dental care, vision services, and many over-the-counter health items.

Unlike flexible spending accounts (FSAs), HSA funds roll over from year to year and belong to the account holder—not the employer. This makes HSAs a valuable tool not only for managing current health care costs but also for long-term savings, including health expenses in retirement.

HSAs can be especially helpful for individuals who are generally healthy and want to save for future medical needs while lowering their taxable income. However, it's important to compare health plans carefully, as high-deductible plans may result in higher out-of-pocket costs before insurance coverage begins.

If you're considering an HSA, review your health care needs, options, budget, and savings goals to determine whether it's a good fit for your situation. An HSA can be both a practical health care resource and a smart financial planning tool.

For questions, contact Monica Thayer at 785-527-5084 or [mthayer@ksu.edu](mailto:mthayer@ksu.edu).

**RIVER VALLEY DISTRICT OFFICES  
WILL BE CLOSED ON  
FRIDAY, JUNE 19TH  
FOR JUNETEENTH  
AND  
FRIDAY, JULY 3RD  
FOR INDEPENDENCE DAY**

## BIG FUN AT BIG RIGS AND CAREER PICKS!

K-State Research and Extension–River Valley District hosted its second annual Big Rigs and Career Picks event on May 6, 2026, at the Cloud County Fairgrounds. During the event, community partners brought their big rigs and equipment to teach Cloud County youth about their career paths and the important roles these machines play in the community.

This hands-on learning opportunity allowed youth to explore careers in their area while also gaining a better understanding of the large equipment they see traveling down the road every day. Students had the chance to see several vehicles and machines up close, including a dump truck, combination roller, backhoe, fire truck, ambulance, police car, combine, street sweeper, and road grader.

A special thank you goes to our community partners — PrairieLand Partners, the City of Concordia, Concordia Police Department, Concordia Fire Department/EMS, and the Kansas Department of Transportation — for providing this educational experience for Concordia Elementary students. Their support and willingness to share their time and expertise made this event possible.



## SUCCESSFUL HERB GARDENING

June is an excellent time to enjoy fresh herbs straight from the garden. Many herbs thrive in Kansas summer conditions, and with a little maintenance, they can provide flavorful harvests throughout the season. Here are some popular herbs for Kansas gardening:

- Basil
- Oregano
- Thyme
- Chives
- Sage
- Rosemary
- Parsley

Most culinary herbs prefer full sun and well-drained soil. Herbs such as basil, rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage, and lavender perform best with at least six hours of sunlight each day. Avoid overwatering, as many herbs prefer slightly drier conditions once established.

Regular harvesting is one of the best ways to keep herbs productive. Frequent trimming encourages fuller growth and helps prevent plants from becoming leggy. When harvesting, avoid removing more than one-third of the plant at a time.

June is also a good time to watch for flowers forming on herbs. While flowering can attract pollinators, it may reduce leaf flavor in some culinary herbs. Pinching flowers from basil, cilantro, or mint can help maintain leaf production longer into the summer.

Mulching around herbs can help conserve soil moisture and reduce weed competition, especially during hot, windy Kansas weather. Mulches such as straw or bark work well, but avoid placing mulch directly against plant stems.

Container herb gardens are especially popular during summer, but pots dry out quickly in the heat. Check containers daily during hot weather and water thoroughly when soils become dry. Grouping containers together can also help reduce moisture loss.

With proper sunlight, careful watering, and regular harvesting, herb gardens can remain productive and attractive throughout the summer season.

For more tips on growing herbs, or for information on ways to utilize and store them, reach out to your local extension office.

## BELLEVILLE GARDEN TOUR

Come join us for the Belleville Chamber & Main Street's upcoming garden tour! Each stop will highlight different gardening styles, plant selections, and creative ideas homeowners are using to add beauty and function to their outdoor spaces. The tour offers a chance to gather inspiration, ask questions, and see how local gardeners adapt their landscapes to Kansas growing conditions.

Brooke Ohlde from River Valley Extension and Rebecca

Frerking from Farmhouse on Fifteenth will be stationed on the south side of the courthouse square at Belleville's florist, David's Creations. We will be available to answer gardening questions and discuss care tips for summer-blooming plants. Topics include watering practices during hot weather, dead-heading and pruning, fertilizing, pest concerns, and ways to keep annuals and perennials blooming throughout the season. Gardeners are encouraged to bring questions about their own landscapes or specific plant problems they may be experiencing.

Whether you are an experienced gardener or simply enjoy spending time outdoors, the garden tour is a great opportunity to learn, connect with fellow plant lovers, and celebrate the beauty of local gardens.

The tour is scheduled for the morning of Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup>. Tickets will be available for \$15 each, and can be purchased at the Belleville Chamber & Main Street office located in the Kallman Office Suites at 1806 M Street. Contact Brooke Ohlde at 785-632-5335 for additional details.

## MULCH VERSUS ROCK

Mulch plays an important role in maintaining healthy landscape plants, especially during Kansas summers. Both mulches and rocks have benefits, but each performs differently in the landscape.

Mulches such as wood chips, bark, straw, or compost help retain moisture, suppress weeds, and moderate soil temperatures. These materials also improve soil quality as they gradually break down over time. Around trees, shrubs, vegetable gardens, and perennial beds, mulch is often the preferred option. A mulch layer approximately 2–3 inches deep is ideal for maximum moisture conservation and weed suppression. When using mulch, avoid piling materials directly against tree trunks or plant stems, as this can cause rotting.

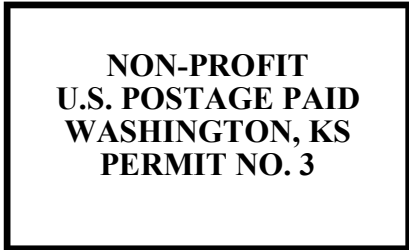
Rock is long-lasting and requires less frequent replacement than mulch, making it attractive option for low-maintenance landscapes. However, rock absorbs and radiates heat during the summer. This increases soil temperatures around plants and their root systems. In sunny locations, this added heat can place extra stress on plant roots and dry soils more quickly.

The best mulch choice often depends on the site, plant selection, and maintenance goals, but understanding how different materials affect soil temperature and moisture can help gardeners make better long-term decisions.

For more information on how to decide between mulch and rock, or for input on the best plant choices for your garden situation, contact Brooke Ohlde at 785-632-5335 or brooke6@ksu.edu.

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**RIVER VALLEY DISTRICT**  
**“2026 UP-COMING MEETINGS & EVENTS”**

DATE	TIME	PROGRAM	LOCATION
June 3	12-1pm	Garden Hour: Maximizing Garden Success with Extension Resources	*See the link below
June 19		Juneteenth-All River Valley District Extension Offices Closed	
June 25	11am	WITS Workout-”Happy Birthday, USA”	Washington-Library, 116 E 2nd St.
July 1	12-1pm	Garden Hour: Addressing Food Insecurity Through Extension	*See the link below
July 3		Independence Day-All River Valley District Extension Offices Closed	
July 14-19		Cloud County Fair	Concordia- Fairgrounds
July 14-19		Washington County Fair	Washington- Fairgrounds
July 21-26		Clay County Fair	Clay Center- Fairgrounds
July 27-Aug 1		NCK Free Fair	Belleville- Fairgrounds

\*Garden Hour link: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>