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Kansas Farm Bureau.....Insight

Jackie Mundt, Pratt County farmer and rancher

**Attitudes for the best possible experience**

Earlier this month, I traveled to South Africa with the American Farm Bureau's Partners in Advocacy Leadership program. Our group has been exploring labor challenges in agriculture, and South Africa offered valuable perspective. The country is a major provider of H-2A guest workers, who fill critical labor gaps on U.S. farms and harvest crews.

Alongside labor issues, we learned about South Africa's agriculture, trade, geography, natural resources, government and culture. We were fortunate to have an exceptional guide, Manuela, who brought our trip to life. In fact, when I posted a photo of her online, a friend commented that she had also been his guide during a Kansas State University trip more than a decade ago — a small reminder of the close ties within agriculture.

One lesson I've learned from traveling, both near and far, is a good guide makes all the difference. Manuela, who has lived in South Africa most of her life, offered not just knowledge but also passion for her country, flaws and all. Her decades of experience gave us insights we would have missed on our own.

Still, even a great guide can't control everything. When we visited Kruger National Park, luck and timing played their part. Within minutes of entering, we saw elephants and a zebra. Over the next eight hours, we encountered giraffes, lions, cape buffalo, hippos, kudu, baboons, waterbuck and even a leopard. None of us had been to the park before, but we recognized that this was no ordinary day.

Our group's excitement turned playful as we joked about what else was on our "bingo cards." It felt almost as if we were willing each new sighting into reality. At day's end, Manuela confirmed our experience had been extraordinary

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**Fall Lawn Care**

While the gardening season may be winding down, fall is the ideal time to focus on your lawn. September is the prime month to fertilize cool-season grasses like tall fescue and bluegrass. It's also a great opportunity to tackle important lawn maintenance tasks such as overseeding and weed control, setting your yard up for a healthy start next spring.

If you have a cool-season lawn, such as tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass, now is the perfect time to overseed. Lawns that have become thin over the summer can be thickened up by overseeding during September. Start by mowing the grass shorter than normal, about one to one and a half inches, and removing the clippings. This will make it easier to achieve good seed-soil contact and increase the amount of light that will reach the young seedlings. Good seed-soil contact is vital if the overseeding is to be successful. Excess thatch can prevent the seed from reaching the soil and germinating. Normally we want 1/4 inch of thatch or less when overseeding. If the thatch layer is 3/4 inch or more, it is usually easiest to use a sod cutter to remove it and start over with a new lawn. A power rake can be used to reduce a thatch layer that is less than 3/4 inch but more than a quarter inch.

If your lawn is compacted or you have hard, clay soil you will need to aerate before you seed. This can be done in various ways. For small spots, a hand rake can be used to roughen up the soil before the seed is applied. A verticut machine has solid vertical blades that can be set to cut furrows in the soil. It is best to go in two different directions with the machine. A slit seeder is a verticut machine with a seed hopper added, so the soil prep and seeding operation are combined. Another option is to use a core aerator. The core aerator will punch holes in the soil and deposit the soil cores on the surface of the ground. Each hole produces an excellent environment for seed germination and growth. Make three to four passes with the core aerator to ensure enough holes for the seed. Using a core aerator has the additional benefit of reducing the amount of watering needed to get the seed germinated and growing. Aeration also increases the water infiltration rate, decreases compaction, and increases the amount of oxygen in the soil.

## K-State experts share strategy for dealing with armyworm infestations

By Madeline Drake, K-State Extension news service

As recent harvests and scouting reports may indicate, armyworms and fall armyworms seem to become a more serious problem for Kansas farmers each year.

For those who may have experienced problems with the insects this year, Kansas State University crop entomologist Jeff Whitworth and agronomist Tina Sullivan say it's a good idea to understand the issue and develop tactics for tackling future infestations.

Whitworth said the start of any good management program involves early scouting.

"Start by periodically monitoring whatever the vulnerable area you are worried about is to detect any infestation while the 'worms' are still small and have not yet caused much damage," Whitworth said.

When scouting, it's important to know the thresholds that signal when action should be taken.

"Generalized thresholds are four to five larvae per square foot," Sullivan said.

Usually two to four generations of armyworms per growing season means monitoring should continue until temperatures turn cold, approximately mid-20 degrees Fahrenheit for two hours, Whitworth said.

While armyworm infestations cannot be totally prevented, Whitworth recommends traps available to deploy around target areas.

"These traps will not control or prevent an infestation, but they can catch

If you just want to give your lawn a little boost without overseeding, September is the best time to apply fertilizer. These grasses are entering their fall growth cycle as days shorten and temperatures moderate. Cool-season grasses naturally thicken up in the fall by tillering. This means they are growing and forming new shoots at the base of existing plants.

Nitrogen (N), the first number listed on a bag of fertilizer, helps thicken the stand and encourages the development of a healthy root system. Apply 1 to 1.5 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. The settings recommended on lawn fertilizer bags usually result in about 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. A strong root system is the foundation of a nice lawn. Cooler temperatures, fall rain, and the addition of nutrients help the lawn to recover from stressful summer conditions. The food is converted into new roots, crowns, and shoots. This application helps to thicken up thin areas. A dense, healthy lawn is our best defense against weeds, and that prevention starts with this application of fertilizer.

Choosing the right type of fertilizer is important. Nitrogen in fertilizer is the most important nutrient, as it is needed in the greatest quantities by the turf. We recommend a quick-release source of nitrogen at this time. Most fertilizers sold in garden centers and department stores contain either quick-release nitrogen or a mixture of quick- and slow-release. Usually only lawn fertilizers recommended for summer use contain slow-release nitrogen. Any of the others should be quick-release. Nitrogen is essential for healthy growth, color, and density. Vigorously growing lawns use more than is available in the soil, so it must be replenished on a regular basis.

The second most important fertilization of cool-season grasses also occurs during the fall. A November fertilizer application will help the grass green up earlier next spring and provide the nutrients needed until summer. It should also be quick-release applied at the rate of 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

Be the envy of all your neighbors this year with a thick, lush lawn. Incorporating a few of these steps into your lawn care routine is sure to green up your yard. If you have any questions, please call your local Extension office.

## K-State experts share strategy for dealing with armyworm infestations

the moths to indicate when these adults are actually flying and thus depositing eggs," he said.

"Armyworms have chewing mouth parts, thus they bite and chew their food, most often a grass crop like sorghum, brome, wheat, fescue or other," Whitworth said. "Armyworms eat off the above ground green portion of whatever grass the moth deposited the eggs on."

Once a field is infested with armyworms, there are some options for eradicating them with insecticides.

"There are several insecticides labeled for armyworm control. Most work quite well if utilized according to the label," Whitworth said.

Sullivan added that forage stands are especially vulnerable.

"Our forage stands tend to be the most damaged year after year. The cost of insecticide applications is often more economical compared to the seed and planting costs of re-establishing any of our forage fields – tame or native," she said.

Maintaining a healthy forage stand, Sullivan noted, comes down to good fertility, timely grazing and cutting schedules, and awareness of weather conditions.



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