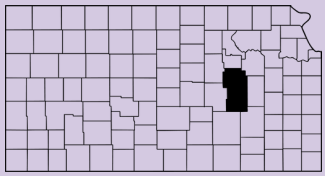

Flint Hills Extension District Newsletter

FEB-MAR 2026

Chelsea Bartels,
Director
Agriculture & Natural Resources & 4-H

Deb Andres,
Family & Consumer Sciences & 4-H

Agriculture & Natural Resources & 4-H Position
Interviews will be held in February.
Contact Office for more information.

Tara Thomsen,
Program Assistant

Donna Frese,
Program Assistant

Kelley Gawith,
Office Professional
Cottonwood Falls

Gianna Zimmerman
Office Professional
Council Grove

Flint Hills District Offices

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Council Grove, KS 66846
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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension
Flint Hills District

ksre.k-state.edu

Extension in Local Classrooms

By partnering with local schools, Extension strengthens youth learning while reinforcing the value of agriculture, nutrition, and community engagement.

At Chase County Elementary School, district director and ag agent Chelsea Bartels serves as an ongoing advisor for the school's bucket calf project, helping students build responsibility, confidence, and an understanding of animal husbandry. She provides monthly guidance in helping weigh the calves, and discusses feeding, care, and any issues that come up with the students.

Currently our whole team is bringing our annual Bread in a Bag program to 3rd grade classrooms in all three local elementary schools. Students will explore wheat's journey from farm to table, bringing agriculture and nutrition together right in their classrooms. Students learn about Kansas agriculture by discovering how wheat grows, and about healthy eating by making, and then tasting, homemade whole wheat bread in their classrooms using flour milled at K-State.

These programs reflect Extension's mission: meeting communities where they are, supporting educators, and helping young people develop a mindset for life-long learning.

Local Agent Honored with Service Award

We would like to congratulate Deb Andres, Flint Hills District Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, for being honored as a 2026 Distinguished Service Award recipient by the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS). This prestigious award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, commitment, and service to the field of Family and Consumer Sciences and AAFCS.

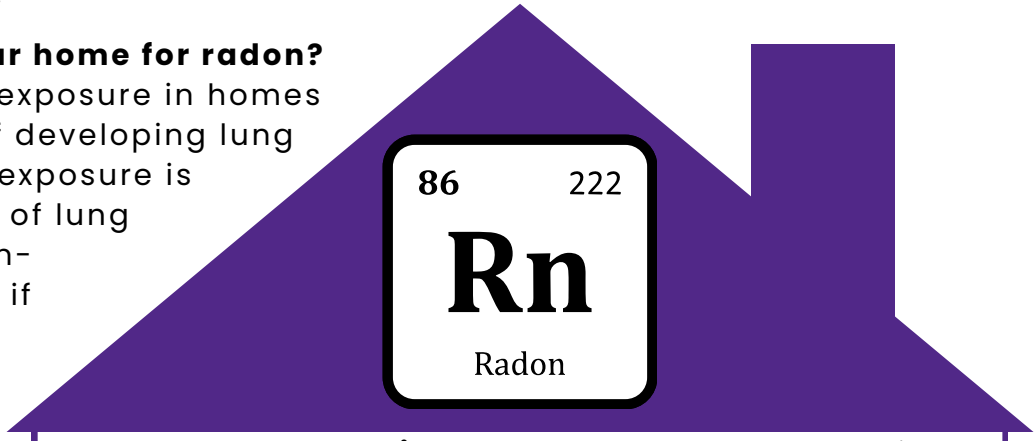
113th Cattlemen's Day

Date: March 6, 2026
Cost: $25/person
Registration Deadline: February 20, 2026
After that date or at the door the cost increases to $35/person.
Location: Bilbrey Family Event Center (located next to the Stanley Stout Center, 2200 Denison Ave, Manhattan, KS)
Tradeshow: 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Speaker sessions: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
For more information and to register for the event check out the link: https://www.asi.k-state.edu/events/cattlemens-day/

Radon Awareness

Winter is an excellent time to test your home for radon gas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends actively reducing indoor radon levels when homes are confirmed with 4.0 pCi/L of radon gas or higher. Both the Council Grove and Cottonwood Falls Extension offices keep radon test kits from the Kansas Radon Program (KRP) available for a small fee.

Why is it important to test your home for radon? Chronic, long-term radon gas exposure in homes increases the long-term risk of developing lung cancer. Residential radon gas exposure is the number one leading cause of lung cancer death in the U.S. for non-smokers. The only way to know if there is an increased level of radon gas in your home is to test for it.



Where does radon come from? Radon comes from the natural radioactive decay of radium and uranium found in the soil beneath the house. The amount of radon in the soil depends on soil chemistry, which varies from one house to the next. Radon levels in the soil range from a few hundred to several thousands of pCi/L. The amount of radon that escapes from the soil to enter the house depends on the weather, soil porosity, soil moisture, and the suction within the house.

How does radon get into the house? Houses act like large chimneys. As the air in the house warms, it rises to leak out the attic openings and around the upper floor windows. This creates a small suction at the lowest level of the house, pulling the radon out of the soil and into the house. You can test this on a cold day by opening a top floor window an inch. You will notice warm air from the house rushing out that opening; yet, if you open a basement window an inch, you will feel the cold outside air rushing in. This suction is what pulls the radon out of the soil and into the house. You might think caulking the cracks and the openings in the basement floor will stop the radon from entering the house. It is unlikely that caulking the accessible cracks and joints will permanently seal the openings radon needs to enter the house. The radon levels will still likely remain unchanged. Fortunately, there are other extremely effective means of keeping radon out of your home. Throughout the country, several million people have already tested for radon. Some houses tested as high as 2,000-3,000 pCi/L; yet, there hasn't been one house that could not mitigate to an acceptable level. Mitigation usually costs between $800-$2500.

41% of homes in Kansas that have been tested for radon test at or above 4.0 pCi/L, meeting the criteria for mitigation.

Stop by the Flint Hills K-State Extension offices in either Council Grove or Cottonwood Falls to purchase your test kit. For more information about addressing radon exposure and testing, check out our website at https://www.flinthills.k-state.edu/health-home-family/radon_documents/

Follow Us on Facebook

Follow K-State Extension - Flint Hills District on Facebook to stay in the loop on upcoming events, important deadlines, and timely, research-based information from K-State Extension and our local offices. https://www.facebook.com/flinthillsdistrictksre

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: Breaking Down What They Really Say

The USDA created quite the stir when it recently released new Dietary Guidelines for Americans that appeared to turn the old food pyramid completely upside down. Rather than losing ourselves to media hype, let's dive into what the new guidelines actually recommend.

Prioritize Protein Foods at Every Meal

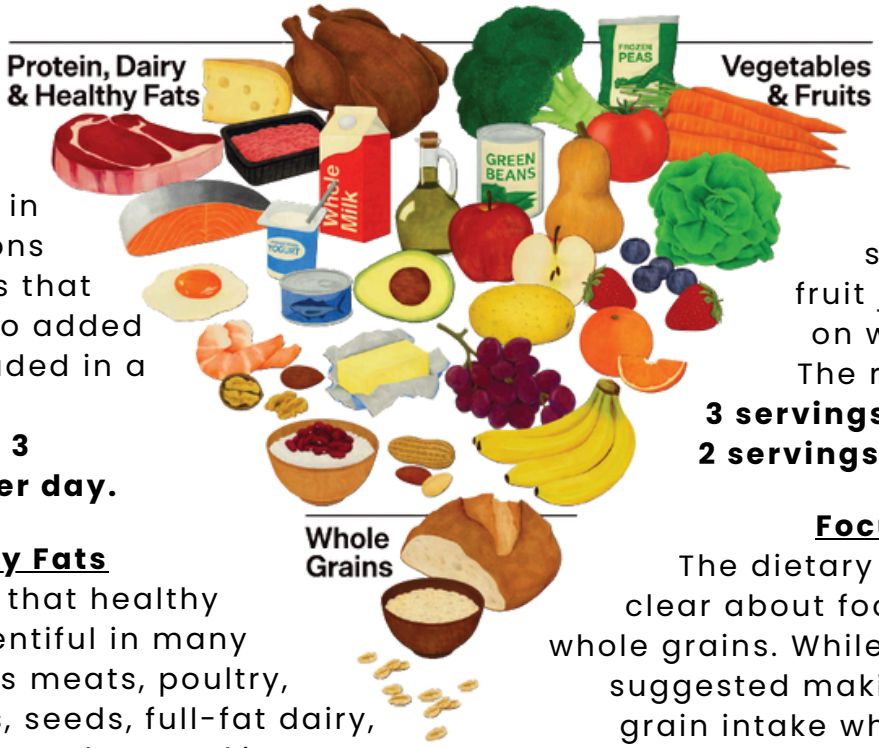
The new guidelines recommend consuming a variety of protein foods from both animals and plants, that are cooked with a variety of methods including baked, broiled, roasted, stir-fried, or grilled. For a 2000 calorie diet, the recommendation is **3-4 servings of protein foods per day**.

Consume Dairy

The largest change in the recommendations surrounding dairy is that full-fat diary with no added sugars can be included in a healthy diet. The recommendation is **3 servings of dairy per day.**

Incorporate Healthy Fats

Guidelines suggest that healthy fats are already plentiful in many whole foods such as meats, poultry, eggs, seafood, nuts, seeds, full-fat dairy, olives, and avocados. When cooking or adding fats to meals it is recommended to prioritize using oils with essential fatty acids, such as olive oil. Butter and beef tallow are given as alternatives to using olive oil. **A serving of healthy fats is described as 1 tsp of olive oil or butter, and guidelines recommend limiting to 4 ½ servings per day for a 2000 calorie diet.**



Eat Vegetables & Fruits Throughout the Day

It is recommended to eat a variety of colorful, nutrient-dense vegetables and fruits. Whole fruits and vegetables in their original form are suggested, with frozen, dried, or canned vegetables or fruits with no or very limited added sugars also given as good options. Dietary recommendations still suggest limiting fruit juices and focusing on whole fruits instead. The recommendation is **3 servings of vegetables and 2 servings of fruit every day.**

Focus on Whole Grains

The dietary guidelines are very clear about focusing on fiber-rich whole grains. While the prior guideline suggested making half of our daily grain intake whole grains, the new guidelines emphasize only whole grain products. It is also recommended to significantly reduce the amount of highly processed and refined carbohydrates. It is still recommended to eat **2-4 servings of whole grain products per day.**

Limit Highly Processed Foods, Added Sugars, & Refined Carbohydrates

Americans are directed to avoid highly processed foods such as chips, cookies, and candy that have added sugars and sodium. Sugar-sweetened beverages, as well as foods and beverages with artificial flavors, petroleum-based dyes, artificial preservatives, and non-nutritive sweeteners (sweeteners like aspartame or sucralose) are also to be avoided or limited. The guidelines state that one meal should not contain more than 10 grams of added sugars.

Native Grassland Management – When Should You Seed Native Mixes?

Planting date matters when establishing native grasslands in Kansas. The right timing can improve germination, reduce risks, and help plantings establish more successfully. Native seed mixes are usually dominated by warm-season grasses, like big bluestem or sideoats grama, with some wildflowers (forbs) and native broadleaf plants such as purple prairie clover. Traditionally the suggested time for planting native mixes is spring, a few weeks before last frost in late March or April, but dormant planting in winter can offer additional flexibility and provide the cold exposure the forbs need to germinate.

Factors to consider when determining when to plant native seed mixes include precipitation, temperature and seed dormancy, risk of seed loss prior to germination, and weed control.

Spring planting aims to take advantage of May rains, but unpredictable rainfall can delay field access or shorten the growing window leaving new seedlings unprepared for the summer heat. Dormant seeding during winter allows seeds to receive the moisture when it falls without the risk of delayed planting due to wet fields.

Many warm season grasses will germinate whenever the soil temperatures warm to above 55-60 degrees. Native forbs need longer cold exposure, ideally 30-60 days, before germination can occur. Planting in winter once soil temperatures are below 40 degrees gives that needed cold exposure. Seeds can also be refrigerated for 30 to 120 days to simulate this cold exposure and be set up for success when planted in spring. Seeds that don't experience this cold exposure prior to spring planting may attempt to germinate the following season when they are competing with more established plants for resources.

When seeding in spring, there is a lower risk of seed loss due to the shorter time between planting and germination. With winter seeding there is a higher risk of seed loss due to erosion, animals, or decay, which should be offset by using planting strategies that ensure good seed to soil contact such as using a grass drill or pairing broadcast seeding with post-seeding surface compaction, as well as increasing the seeding rate by 25-50%.

Since seedbeds are typically prepared the late summer or fall before winter or spring planting, weeds that pop up during the winter can compete for resources before the seeded species emerge. Spring seeding allows for herbicide use on winter weeds prior to seeding, while herbicide use may need to be avoided or altered to avoid impacting the germination and establishment of winter seeded species.

The best time to seed will depend on several factors. Spring seeding may be the best approach when you want to take advantage of the spring rains for seedlings moisture needs and forb stratification isn't a priority. Dormant winter seeding can be useful when you need flexible planting timing, want to improve forb establishment, or field access in spring may be limited. For additional guidance reach out to our local Extension office to discuss what options best meet your needs and goals.

KSU Cow-Calf Checklist

By Jason M. Warner, Ph.D., Extension Cow-Calf Specialist

Management Considerations for February 2026

Cow Herd Management

- Target BCS at calving for spring-calving cows:
  - 5 for mature cows
  - 6 for young females
- Be ready to start your post-calving nutrition program for spring-calving cows.
- Evaluate fall-calving cows for BCS:
  - Adjust nutrition program as needed relative to weaning date
- If conditions allow, keep grazing crop residues and dormant pastures but be prepared to move cattle or provide supplemental feed.
- Increase energy content 1% for every degree F below the lower critical temperature (LCT) when dry, 2% if they have a wet hair coat.
- Put down bedding, remove snow, ensure cattle have access to wind protection.
- Supply adequate water volume and space in freezing conditions.
- Don't forget about your herd bulls!
  - Bulls need to be in a BCS ≥ 5.0 prior to the next season of use
  - Keep young and mature bulls separate if possible and provide plenty of space to prevent injury
  - Spread sufficient fresh bedding to help avoid testicular frostbite

Calf Management

- Do you have a plan for weaning and marketing fall-born calves?
  - Evaluate your feed resources and cost of gain relative to the value of gain
  - Talk to prospective buyers in advance of selling
- Evaluate calf health protocols, both spring- and fall-born calves.
- Monitor growth and pubertal development of replacement heifers.

General Management

- For spring-calving herds this calving season:
  - How are you going to record your calving data?
  - What information are you going to record?
- Take inventory of supplies and clean equipment prior to spring calving.
- If making bull selection decisions:
  - Review your herd performance relative to your marketing and genetic goals.
  - Study EPDs impacting your marketing and genetic goals and do your homework well before sale day

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The red IRM book is a handy tool to have during calving time. The book helps record calving activity, herd health, pasture usage, cattle inventory, AI breeding and sales, plus a date book and room for extra notes. This book is helpful for keeping good records, not just for calving, but overall herd management.

The Extension Offices have a limited number of the IRM red book available for producers. Please stop by and pick one up for $5 today.

Flint Hills District
K-State Research & Extension
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Council Grove, KS 66846

Upcoming K-State Extension
Flint Hills District Dates - 2026

Date	Event
February 28	Flint Hills District 4-H Club Day
March 6	Cattlemen's Day - Kansas State University
March 7	K-State Junior Beef Producer Day
March 28	K-State Sheep Day
April 11	K-State Junior Sheep Producer Day

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