

AGRICULTURE

Golden Plains Area Newsletter

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January - March 2026

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GOLDEN PLAINS AREA
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 EXTENSION

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Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.

AG BUSINESS

RECORD-SETTING CORN EXPORTS SUPPORT IMPROVING CORN PRICE OUTLOOK **Livestock Marketing Information Center**

The monthly World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) from the USDA released earlier in December pegged corn exports at 3.2 billion bushels, a new record, based on shipments since the start of the crop year on September 1. This projection was up 125 million bushels from a month earlier and up 325 million bushels from expectations that were in place before harvest started in September. On the other side of the supply and demand ledger for the US corn market, corn production in September was expected to be 16.814 billion bushels based on 90 million acres harvested with an average yield of 186 bushels per acre. The current USDA estimate of corn production is down about 50 million bushels from September based on a downward adjustment to average yields.

The net shift of 50 million fewer bushels produced, and 325 million more bushels exported provides the impetus for raising price expectations. In August, the average corn price received by farmers was \$3.96, according to the USDA-National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS). The outlook for the average corn price at the farm for the 2025-2026 crop year (beginning September 1) was \$3.60 per bushel. Over the course of the last three months, WASDE has revised up the export forecast to the aforementioned amount. The effect of these changes should support an average corn price at the farm to average \$4.00 per bushel, up \$0.40 from the September outlook. The latest USDA-NASS estimate of corn prices at farm is for October with an average of \$3.93.

At the end of October, the nearby futures contract for corn was \$4.32, and in recent days, that contract expired at the same price, \$4.32. Corn prices in Omaha started October at \$3.93 but in mid-December have averaged \$4.30, suggesting that USDA-NASS farm corn prices for November and December will move up from the October average.

The next important date for the corn market could be mid-January when USDA-NASS releases their final estimate of 2025 corn production. Last January, USDA-NASS revised their corn production estimate of the 2024 corn crop from 15.143 billion bushels to 14.867 billion bushels based on a reduced yield. There has been some conjecture that a similar adjustment will be made again this year. If so, there would be price ramifications, but the cash market may have already anticipated this change.

Show your love for Colorado Agriculture **Jenny Beierman, CSU Agriculture Business Management Team**

Colorado State University Extension conducts an annual survey of land rental and custom rates charged for various crop and livestock operations and lease arrangements in Colorado in the preceding year. Data is collected from agricultural producers, landowners and managers, lenders, agricultural consultants, machine operators, and Extension agents. Results of the survey are used by producers, ag lenders, county assessors, the Colorado Department of Agriculture, land appraisers, and more.

Take just 10 minutes to complete the survey before February 14, 2025.

BUTTON: Complete the Survey https://colostate.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3fPoxORn3X4tSey

Land Rental and Custom Rates in Colorado is one of the most widely used publications available from the CSU Agriculture and Business Management Team. The results of the survey provide the following:

- The Land Rental and Custom Rates Report will allow you to advertise custom services or locate and hire custom service operators in your area.
- More responses ensure more accurate data and a more complete list of rates for today's practices. These determined rates influence land appraisal values, your property taxes, and more.
- Information about Land Rental and Custom Rates is used by elected officials to inform federal, state, and local policy, including crop insurance.
- Your responses are safe and anonymous.

The Custom Rates Survey will be available January 1 – February 14, 2026 through Colorado State University: https://colostate.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3fPoxORn3X4tSey

If you have questions your CSU Extension Agriculture and Business Management Team can be reached at <https://abm.extension.colostate.edu/meet-the-team/>

AGRONOMY

Private Pesticide License Recertification Ron Meyer, Area Agronomy Specialist

In early 2024, the Colorado Department of Agriculture made a change for private pesticide licensing. Private pesticide applicators who need to take licensing tests, or re-test due to license expiration, will now need to test at a proctored testing site. If you need to test, the first step is to get registered for testing. For both commercial and private pesticide testing, this can be accomplished by accessing Metro Institute, which is a computer-based testing scheduler, and can be found at <https://www.metroinstitute.com>. When at this site select the Colorado option. Set up an account at this site and find a Colorado testing center and time that works best. Once the date and location are scheduled, just arrive at the test site early and begin the check-in process. As a result, both commercial and private pesticide licensing are now accomplished using a proctored method at an approved site. While private pesticide testing is now proctored, the test is still an open book test. Commercial pesticide testing continues to be closed-book.

In addition, Colorado State University Extension hosts Private Pesticide Recertification sessions at various locations in Northeast Colorado. Anyone who purchases restricted-use pesticides must have a Private Pesticide Applicator license which is issued by the Colorado Department of Agriculture. Once a license is received, it is active for 3 years before renewal is needed. Renewal can be achieved by either retaking the exam at a proctored site or attending a recertification session. These recertification sessions offer seven core credits which can be substituted for retaking the exam and qualifies for private pesticide license renewal.

Colorado State University Extension will host various private pesticide license recertification meetings

beginning on February 10 and continuing into March. Meetings will begin at 8:30 am and conclude at 12:30 pm each day. Sites and contact numbers are:

February 10 – Julesburg – Contact Catie Green 970-474-3479

February 11 – Burlington – Ron Meyer – 719-346-5571 (a zoom option is available at this site)

February 18 - Akron – Kat Caswell – 970-400 -2095

Preregistration is mandatory. Cost is \$60 per person plus fees.

Registration can be accomplished by registering at Eventbrite for the Julesburg, Burlington, and Akron meetings at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/private-pesticide-recertification-julesburg-burlington-and-akron-tickets-1967706578345?aff=oddtcreator>, or by calling the local office at the numbers listed above.

All seven credits needed to recertify a private pesticide license will be offered at these events. Keep in mind that the recertification credits will only work for unexpired pesticide licenses. Once a Colorado pesticide license expires, only retesting will work to get a new Colorado Pesticide license.

LIVESTOCK



Rebuilding the Herd: It's Not Just About Price **Scott Stinnett, 4-H Youth and Livestock Specialist**

The current state of the national cattle herd being the lowest in over 50 years has created a limited supply of replacement females and therefore higher prices for them. Cattle producers are looking for replacements to maintain current herd size, and to rebuild and grow herds who may have shrunk as producers took advantage of high prices, selling heifers as feeders instead of retaining them, as well as marketing marginal and open cows.

Price of replacement females should not be the single factor for purchasing decisions. Purchasing replacement females in a high market should be treated as a long-term investment. During their productive life, it is probable they will produce calves in the next year or two that will be sold in a favorable market, but as herd rebuilding occurs in earnest, will produce calves that will bring less in future years as cattle supplies increase.

As with any investment, selecting the best females for the price is a priority. Possible replacement females should be evaluated for phenotype, genotype, and suitability to the production environment. Phenotypic attributes to consider would include mature size, body condition, hoof angle and claw set, udder suspension and teat size, and condition of teeth. All of these can influence the efficiency and productivity of a female.

Genotypic considerations cannot be visually appraised and sometimes requires the evaluation of data to determine the suitability of a female to your production goals. The productivity of the heterosis of F1 crossbred females may be valuable to consider to the commercial cattle producer. Producers who are

looking to incorporate purebred females should evaluate the EPDs and multi-trait indexes of those females as an indication of possible productivity for themselves as well as future offspring.

The final consideration is the environment. Cattle are only as successful as the environment they are provided, but not all cattle thrive in the same environment. It may be tempting to purchase cattle from outside your general geographic area, especially if the price is right, but consideration should be given to their adaptability to this environment. For example, an issue such as High-Altitude Disease (HAD), also known as brisket disease, which causes heart failure in cattle at elevations over 5,000 ft., may be of little concern to producers in the eastern plains, but of great concern for those of the high plains and mountainous regions of the western U.S.

As with all production decisions, putting pencil to paper and evaluating decisions financially is important. The best replacement females are the ones who have lower production costs, produce higher incomes, thus creating the greatest possibility for profitability to the operation. Evaluating their genotype, phenotype and suitability to your production environment should render options appropriate for your cattle operation.



Do You need a Cattle Vault? Travis Taylor, Area Livestock Specialist

As you read this, I was pondering record high cattle prices. August 2025 saw 5-Market fed cattle price at \$244/cwt and cull cows \$169/cwt. Shift to October 2025 for yearly highs in Oklahoma feeder cattle prices of \$480/cwt for five-weights and \$383/cwt for eight-weights. At the beginning of 2026, a pen of two-hundred steers weighing 1450 pounds is worth over \$660,000, and we wonder if we need a vault to protect our investment?

Not being sure that a large enough vault is available, producers need to turn to reviewing records and improving record systems to provide protection for their valuable herds. Just as a clarification, any information collected that never gets reviewed is only a recording and not a record unless utilized. January is the perfect time for operational planning by doing a production review and comparing it with prior production years. Production benchmarks to look at include the following items:

- Average Weight of Weaned Calves / Total Pounds of Calf Sold
- Average Cow Weight / Average Cow Body Condition Score at Calving
- Length of Calving Season / Percent of Cows Calved in First 21 Days
- Percent Calves Weaned of Total Cows Bred

Such production records, when tracked, can give producers pause to see if management practices may need adjusted or if an unknown issue is arising. For example, if fewer cows calve in the first 21 days of the calving season it can signal management to make changes. However, it is not often easy to pinpoint the cause as such decreasing fertility may be due to drought, a shift in genetics, or changes to the vaccination program. No matter what the cause, management will not be able to make changes

proactively unless they can identify that an issue exists, which includes having reviewed data that captures production changes.

Additionally, producers should keep detailed inventory records to help protect themselves from outside actions that may not seem problematic, until they come knocking. New World Screw Worm is pressing in from Mexico and the blood borne pathogen, Theileria, carried by ticks has shown up in twenty states since 2017 are just two examples of outside pressures that can affect the value of cattle on any given operation. Keeping precise inventory records of cattle numbers, cattle origination, stocking locations, days at a location, animals doctored, and even who else had animals in the same proximity may be the information needed to allow producers to operate in certain animal health events in future. Producers may not need a cattle vault, but it is imperative to understand that the base-line data an operation has can prove to be the most valuable toward improving or maintaining the bottom line.

HORTICULTURE

Windbreak Trees

Linda Langelo, CSU Horticulture Specialist

Windbreak trees serve as an important feature of the landscape on the Eastern Plains. Their purpose is to slow down the wind speed and redirect it. Windbreaks serve other purposes, including crop protection, capturing snow, providing shade and protection for livestock, and serving as habitat for other animals.

These days, windbreaks are having their health issues. Drought years have affected trees such as Colorado Blue Spruce and Austrian Pines that are used in areawide windbreaks. If we have a summer with extended periods of high temperatures and no precipitation, these two species are the first to experience dieback or not recover from the season. First, Colorado Blue Spruce prefers humid, cooler climates. Its ideal high temperature is 75 degrees Fahrenheit, which helps keep the tree in good health by being in an environment for good growth. These trees are out of their normal range. But they have adapted to our climate until it becomes too extreme.

Austrian pines have originated from Southern Europe, from mountain ranges to coastal areas. They are very adaptable and resilient. They prefer colder climates. They are also used to heavy snows in the winter, which helps make them more resilient in the summer season. Our prolonged droughts with no snow cover over the winter have created a stressful condition for Austrian Pines.

According to the Kansas Farmer Magazine, Editor Jennifer M. Latzke in 2022 said, “The Great Plains Initiative reports that over half of windbreaks in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas are waning.” In the article, she did not state why. Here is a link to the article:

<https://www.farmprogress.com/conservation-and-sustainability/great-plains-windbreaks-in-decline>

One of the major reasons is that the trees in the windbreaks are aging out or have reached their maturity since 1930's when they were introduced during the Dust Bowl. This is what is happening in our rural towns. Renovating the windbreak is key. As we age, so do our trees.

Other issues are conflicts with farming practices that drive windbreak removal. The cost of managing the windbreaks is an issue. This can increase the poor condition of a windbreak. Therefore, climate issues are only one factor in the decline of a windbreak.

There are grants through the Conservation Districts for producers to help renovate their windbreaks. I would recommend that for new plantings to place the trees further than 15 feet apart, giving the root system a place to expand without competing with the next tree, and giving each tree proper sunlight before growing into each other.

SAVE THE DATE

Colorado State University Extension

CALVING & CALF CARE CLINIC

Saturday, February 7, 2026
Kit Carson County Fairgrounds
Burlington, CO

Watch For Registration
Information in January
2026



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION