

AGRICULTURE

Golden Plains Area Newsletter

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October - December 2026

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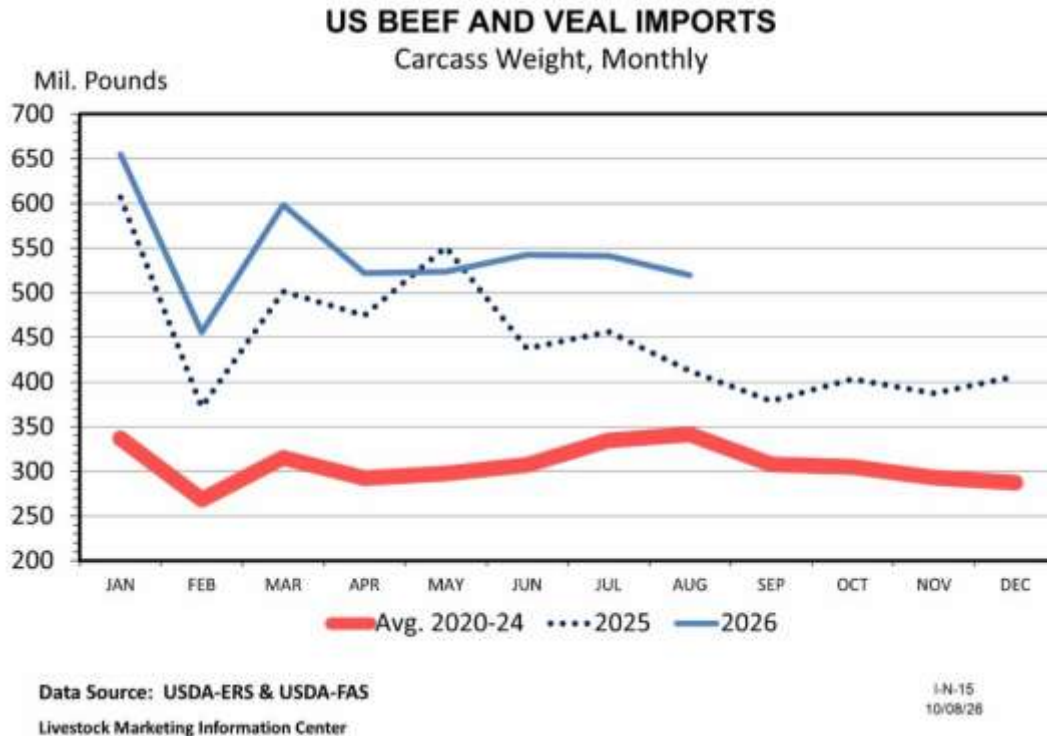


GOLDEN PLAINS AREA
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
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Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Kit Carson, Phillips,
Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties cooperating.
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AG BUSINESS

TRADE UPDATE: BEEF IMPORTS HIGHER Livestock Marketing Information Center

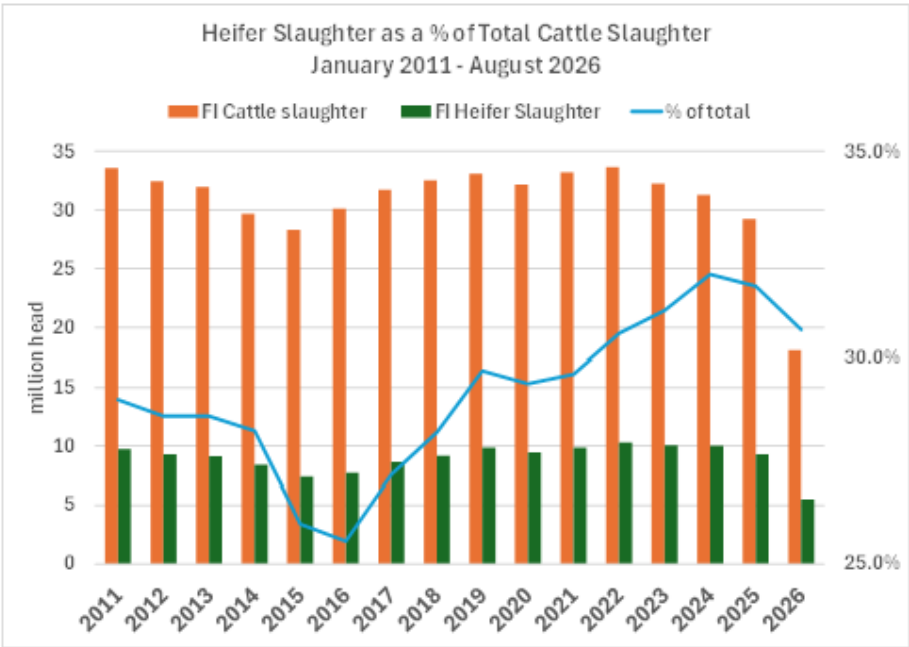


Through the first eight months of the year, beef exports continue to track below year-ago levels while beef imports are higher. From January through August, total beef imports are up more than 546 million pounds (+14%) from the same period last year to nearly 4.4 billion pounds. Year-to-date through August, 81% of total beef imports have been supplied by five countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and New Zealand. Beef imports are up from each of these countries through August with Australia leading the way at 985 million pounds shipped (+18%), Brazil at 877 million pounds (+2%), Canada at 656 million pounds (+2%), Mexico at 539 million pounds (+26%), and New Zealand at 478 million pounds (+9%). Beef exports through the first eight months of the year are down 228 million pounds (-13%) to nearly 1.6 million pounds. Lower exports through August have been reported for South Korea (-10%), Japan (-17%), Mexico (-13%), Canada (-15%), and China (84%) to 400, 362, 176, 136, and 24 million pounds, respectively. Year-to-date through August, beef exports are higher to Taiwan (+7%), Hong Kong (+49%) and Vietnam (+7%) to 122, 98, and 12 million pounds, respectively.

Pork exports totaled more than 4.6 billion pounds through the first eight months of the year, up 66 million pounds (+1%) from the same period last year. Mexico remains the key destination for U.S. pork exports with nearly 1.8 billion pounds shipped through August, which is a marginal increase of 3 million pounds (+0.2%) from the same period last year. Pork exports to Japan have risen 90 million pounds (+14%) to 749 million pounds through the first eight months of the year. Year-to-date through August, shipments to Canada totaled 307 million pounds, up 14 million pounds (+5%). Lower pork exports have been reported through August to South Korea by 41 million pounds (-9%) totaling 423 million pounds and China, which is down just over 1 million pounds (-1%) to 244 million pounds.

Lamb imports totaled nearly 208 million pounds through the first eight months of the year, up 9 million pounds (+5%) from the same period last year. Lamb imports from Australia increased more than 6 million pounds (+4%) through August totaling 154 million pounds. Shipments from New Zealand totaled nearly 52 million pounds through August, up 3 million pounds (+6%). Broiler exports totaled more than 4 billion pounds from January through August, up 35 million pounds (+1%) from the same period last year. Year-to-date through August, turkey exports increased 32 million pounds (+12%) to 294 million pounds.

The Impact of Heifer Slaughter on Herd Expansion & Beef Supply
LMIC, Hannah Baker M.S. University of Florida



Data Source: USDA-NASS & LMIC

It is no secret that record-high beef prices over the last year are a result of tight cattle supplies and strong consumer demand. The average monthly retail price for all fresh beef products in July was \$9.63/lb. This is down from the high of \$10/lb. in April but is still 5% higher than the same month last year and 31% higher than the 5-year historical average for August.

Demand shifts among beef products are normal for this time of year as we transition from the grilling months of summer to the pot roast days of fall. As we get closer to the holiday season, we can expect to see more demand shifts and seasonal price changes among beef products. Additionally, fuel prices continue to require a larger portion of household incomes that could otherwise be spent on grocery items such as beef. However, the overall story is that consumers still want to buy beef amidst tightening cattle supplies further supporting beef prices.

Beef production so far in 2026 (as of September 1) has declined by 5%, or 829.4 million pounds, compared to the same period in 2025. While average dressed weights for both steers and heifers have

increased by roughly 30 pounds since last year, the increase has not been enough to offset the decrease in the number of cattle being processed. At the time of writing this, year-to-date federally inspected steer and heifer slaughter are down by 5.6% and 11.2%, respectively.

The decline in heifer slaughter does imply more heifers are being retained, but the percentage of heifers being slaughtered so far in 2026 is 30.7%. When we started holding back heifers from 2012-2016 for the last expansion period, this percentage ranged from 28.6% to 25.6% before heifer slaughter began increasing again in 2017. Fundamentally speaking, as more heifers are retained, beef production can be expected to decrease in the short-term until more calves enter the market, resulting in an increase in beef production in the long-term.

AGRONOMY

End of Season Fertility Considerations **Kat Caswell, Area Agronomy Specialist**

The 2026 crop year has been anything but typical, from severe drought to the price of inputs varying throughout the season. It was not uncommon across northeast Colorado for dryland fields, that were intended for corn, to be left fallow or for irrigated fields to have been planted later than normal. Based on individual conditions, fertility management may need to be adjusted for the following crop.

Residual nitrogen (N) can still be present in the top 2 feet of the soil in previously farmed fields. In fields that were planted with a dryland crop in 2025, and had lower than expected yields, residual nitrogen may remain in a nitrate form. Soil sampling to the depth of 1 foot and 2 feet, as separated samples, can determine the pounds of nitrogen that are available to any following crops. The typical amount of N applied can be adjusted based on expected yield of the following crop. While the growing conditions for 2027 cannot be predicted, applying only the amount fertilizer to fulfill the needs of the crop can help keep input costs lower.

The same considerations apply to irrigated fields where the total applied water was lower than in previous years. If a crop was fertilized based on the previously expected yield, there is the possibility that not all the fertilizer was utilized by the crop under different conditions. Soil sampling can again determine any remaining nitrogen that can offset the amount of fertilizer needed in 2027.

Stalk nitrate testing can be used to determine nitrogen use efficiency during the growing season. Testing the N efficiency is an indicator if the applied fertilizer is being utilized by the crop or if over application is occurring. The results are calibrated based on normal growing conditions and results for dryland or limited irrigated crops cannot be correctly interpreted this year. Stalk nitrate testing is available for corn and sorghum.

Fall manure and fertilizer applicators should consider that dry weather and warmer soil will increase the rate of nitrogen loss through volatilization. Manure N typically costs less than synthetic fertilizers but can be rapidly lost from volatilization when surface applied during warm conditions. The amount of fertility applied to the field will need to be adjusted to account for this increased N loss. Where available, liquid manure injection can prevent N loss and increase plant utilization. Manure application rates should be based on the amount of phosphorus (P) needed for the crop, not the amount of N. Excess application of P and N can result in nutrient loss and decrease water quality in the surrounding area.

In conclusion, the drought this year does not mean that active fertility management is not needed for 2027. Residual N can be present in the top 2 feet of the soil following the dry conditions. Soil testing can determine the amount of N available and offset the amount of N needed from off-farm inputs. Both dryland and irrigated fields can benefit from soil testing. Fertility managers should continue to follow the 4Rs for efficient fertilizer use and adjust management as needed.

Pesticide Applicator Testing Center Information

Catie Green, Area Agronomy Specialist

HOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR TEST

1. Apply for a Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) testing ID number at www.metrosignup.com – You must do this prior to being able to schedule your test.
2. Wait to receive your email from CDA approving you to test. This will include a CDA ID number that you will need to schedule the test.
3. Schedule your test by phone or online. a. Online: www.metrosignup.com and select “schedule here”
b. Phone: 877-533-2900
4. Select your preferred testing location, and then the date and time.

FAQ's:

Q: Can I sign up to test directly through the Extension Office?

A: No, you have to sign-up online through Metro Testing.

Q: Can I sign up the day-of OR the day before the date I want to take the test?

A: No, Metro Testing Institute requires you to schedule your test *at least* two days in advance. Unfortunately, the County Extension Office or testing center has no control over this process.

Other Helpful Information:

Julesburg Testing Center, CSU Sedgwick County Extension Office
118 W 3rd Street Julesburg, CO 80737

Typical Testing Hours: Wednesdays from 9-4 Call or Email Catie for other availability if needed.

Effective July 1, 2026, the pesticide certification and training program is transitioning to a new, fully paperless licensing system (Salesforce). All future correspondence - including notices for pesticide license renewal, failure to renew, and any applicable continuing education credit status - will be sent

exclusively via email. Hard copy notices will only be available upon request. These requests will be mailed within one week of your request. To make any request for paper applications or if you have questions concerning the licensing portal, please email the section (cda_pesticidesprogram@state.co.us) or contact the Program Coordinator at 303-869-9063.

Contact CSU Extension Specialist Catie Green with any other questions. Email is usually best.
Email: catie.green@colostate.edu Phone: 970-474-3479

Save the Date: **Crops Clinic**

Continuing Education for Certified Crop Advisers, Commercial Applicators, and Producers

Event Details:

December 7th & 8th

In-Person and Virtual Options will be available.

8 AM – 4 PM

Contact Catie Green or Kat Caswell with questions.

Catie: catie.green@colostate.edu 970-474-3479

Kat: kat.caswell@colostate.edu 970-304-6535

The in-person workshop will be held at Northeastern Junior College in Sterling
Breakfast and lunch will be provided for in-person attendees. Included in registration price.
Hotel Room Block information will be available at registration.

Save the Date: **Private Applicator Continuing Education**

Julesburg: February 2nd 2027

Burlington: February 3rd 2027

Contact: Catie Green

Phone: 970-474-3479

email: catie.green@colostate.edu

LIVESTOCK



Beef Market Influences

**Scott Stinnett, Area Extension Specialist
4-H Youth Development / Livestock**

Time for the 2026 fall run is upon us. What will feeder cattle prices be is a big question. To give an answer requires looking at all the traditional and unique influences that are at work on the cattle markets.

The basic influence on the market is supply and demand. The supply hit a cyclical and historic low the past two years due to the United States cow herd being the smallest that has been seen in over half a century. This low supply led to the significant price increases that began in 2024. All sectors of the cattle market saw dramatic price jumps in the past two years. Why? Demand. Although beef prices at the retail level also increased, although not as dramatically as live cattle prices, consumer demand did not decrease in a significant enough amount to affect the live prices, holding live prices high. This demand at retail kept demand pressure on from processing, through feeding, down to the calf market.

Feeders were so eager to fill pens, light weight cattle were bringing more per head than heavier, longer weaned cattle. This was due to the low cost of feed, specifically corn, allowing for cheap gains for feeders. Feeders were taking advantage of the cheap gains, feeding cattle longer to higher weights producing larger carcasses with higher quality grades. Thus, producing more beef with less head of cattle and meeting consumer demands.

But things have now changed a bit in demand. Major processors tried to ride out the rising prices on the cattle they were sourcing, but when they put pencil to paper, several decisions were made to begin closing slaughter and fabrication facilities as well as eliminating some shifts. Essentially, too many empty shackles due to the low supply of cattle. This decline in processing had an effect, softening demand and began the trend of lowering prices.

Feeders also made some changes in the prices they are willing to pay. Corn prices have rebounded from market lows during the past two years. Gain is not as cheap as it was, and feeder cattle prices have declined.

Government policy and politics have also had some influence to decline cattle prices. Announcements to lower tariffs on imported beef put a dip in cattle prices, even though to meet consumer demand, more imported lean beef is needed to blend with the current high quality American beef supply. As the threat of screwworm has lessened, the announcement Mexican cattle will again enter the U.S. was mixed news. It will increase the supply especially for Texas feeders, but not at a significant amount to have a major effect on meeting the current demand. But markets react on perspective and an increase in cattle created another minor drop in cattle prices.

On a recent *Pasture to Profit Podcast* episode, Tyler Cozzens with the Livestock Marketing Information Center, discussed all these influences. He expected feeder cattle prices to be lower this fall by possibly \$30 to \$40 per hundred weight. He felt the basic influences on demand from the closing of processing

facilities coupled with rising feed prices are the major factors creating lower prices. While the U.S. cattle herd may be beginning to show a glimpse of possibly rebuilding, the supply is still low, and demand will be the driver of cattle prices.



Body Condition Scoring at Weaning Time **Travis Taylor, Area Livestock Specialist**

Weaning time in Colorado's Golden Plains Extension Area, is an exciting time for cow-calf producers. It is the time when all the benefits of nutrition, breeding and genetics programs can be seen and an important time to do evaluations on the beef herd. There are several factors, such as weaning weight, that need to be evaluated and goals for the coming year need to be re-evaluated. It also provides an opportunity to evaluate cow Body Condition Score (BCS) and make necessary adjustments to give cows the best advantages going into winter and gestations final trimester. Cows in good condition (BCS 5.5 to 6) are more tolerant of the stresses of winter and require less maintenance energy than cows in poorer condition (BCS 4 to 4.5). A dry cow during her second trimester, can gain body condition more efficiently and economically than during her third trimester. This can be done on native range or stalk fields with reasonable levels of protein and energy supplementation. Possible separation of thin cows that require additional supplementation from cows with acceptable BCS at weaning can allow for better forage utilization.

On the production side, weaning time BCS can be helpful for culling cows that may not fit into your ranch's production model. Each operation truly is a unique model with often vastly different resources available. One operation may have availability to abundant crop aftermath fields, while the next operation is trying to operate solely on native range with limited supplementation. The two operations most likely join fences, but just as likely in both operations management could identify cows that are considered excessively thin or overly fat. At weaning it is important to identify cows that are non-productive, such as a late calving cow with the light weight calf having a BCS 6 or more. Such a cow is likely poor milking, using up more energy into maintaining herself than producing a calf, and is a culling candidate. In contrast, a cow could be considered always a BCS 4 and weaning the heaviest calf in the herd. She may be out milking her nutritional environment and most likely will start breeding later and later until she is open at a young age. Not only is this cow a possible candidate for culling, but likely the big shinny heifer calf at her side should be eliminated in the replacement pen.

No question that a productive cow will see fluctuations in weight and body condition do to varied factors such as stage of production or forage quality and availability. Cows need body energy stores to respond to changing requirements efficiently. It is how she responds when those situations on her nutritional demands are improved or changed that is important. Likewise, as producers, being able to utilize a simple and effective tool like Body Condition Score, which can even be applied from the pickup window, to make nutritional and culling decisions that benefit the bottom line is important. For questions involving BCS link to <https://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/ec281.pdf> on the web or better yet contact your Colorado State University Extension Office.

HORTICULTURE

***“The Relentless Gardener”:** Golden Plains Area Specialist Linda Langelo is a CSU Extension Horticulture Specialist, a member of Garden Communicators International, and a regular contributor to MarthaStewart.com gardening articles. She produces The Relentless Gardener Podcast and the Relentless Gardener Column, which won a Laurel Award from Garden Communicators International. She is a guest blogger for AARP Colorado and AARP Maryland.[LL1.1]*

Is Fall the Proper Time to Divide All Perennials **Linda Langelo, Area Horticulture Specialist** ***“The Relentless Gardener”***

Every plant has a life cycle. We may not be fully aware of what it entails or when it begins and ends. Let’s face it, having plenty of perennials to divide means more perennials to fill in other areas.

Why does fall seem like the perfect time to divide some perennials? The weather is cooler. There can be adequate moisture. The soil temperature is still warm to help establish root systems. However, here is a short list of reasons that certain perennials should not be divided. Those perennials that are still flowering, those with taproots or woody root systems, and those that lack enough time before the soil freezes.

New England Asters are among the perennials that fall into the do-not-divide category. They flower later in the season, and their energy is directed toward flowering. If you divide and transplant them, there is not enough energy left to establish a root system and still flower. In addition, it takes 6 to 8 weeks for new roots to establish enough before the ground freezes. Spring is the ideal time, when new shoots emerge from the ground.

False indigo is a perennial with a woody root system. When this is divided, it takes longer to recover and grow new roots to support the plant. Without an adequate root system, it will not have enough stored energy to overwinter. A 6- to 8-week window before the ground freezes is not an ideal window to recover before winter.

Certain grasses, such as Switchgrass, have ornamental appeal in winter and provide habitat for wildlife. Switchgrass provides nesting sites and shelter for songbirds and habitat for game birds such as pheasants. Its seeds are food for many birds. Small mammals such as mice, voles, and rabbits need shelter and concealment in winter. The foliage and stems provide habitat for insects and pollinators.

Get to know your perennials and the season that suits their ideal growth. Understand when plants naturally grow, flower, and go dormant. This will help you select the best perennials to divide in the fall. Working with the perennial's natural growth cycle encourages healthier plants.

Best Practices for Lawn Care
Linda Langelo, Area Horticulture Specialist
“The Relentless Gardener”

My mantra for lawn care is that grass is the highest-maintenance crop of any crop! Having said that, here are tips for best practices to apply. Some might surprise you, while others will sound logical.

Watering between 3-7 am lowers evaporation and wind. This gives water time to soak into the soil and hydrate grass before the heat of the day. Do not water to extend the dew period. Extending the dew period keeps grass leaves wet longer, which creates conditions favorable for disease development.

When we water later or in the heat of the day, we lose 50% of the water to evaporation before it even infiltrates into the soil. If you water from a hose, the widest diameter hose delivers more water. It shortens the watering time.

Watering deeply and infrequently rather than frequently and shallowly supports a deep root system. More frequent watering causes a shallow root system. Allowing the grass to become slightly drought tolerant is healthier. But once you notice foot printing, start watering because turgor pressure decreases. This is an early sign of drought stress.

Mow according to the turfgrass species in your lawn. Proper mowing height is essential to protect the crown. The location of the grass' crown varies by species in your lawn. Does it sit higher or lower on the plant? The crown is the growing point of any turfgrass. New leaves, shoots, and roots develop from the crown. Scalping the grass damages the crown. Do not mow in the heat of the day. The grass will need more water. Do not mow after a rainstorm. This leads to soil compaction. Wait until the next day to mow.

Proper mowing heights for Kentucky bluegrass are 2 ½ to 3 inches, and for Fine Fescue, 2 to 3 inches during summer. When you mow grass under a shade tree, raise the mower height to the higher end. Kentucky bluegrass has a crown that sits lower at the soil surface. Fine Fescue does well in full sun but can be planted under a shade tree with dry soil conditions. If you have buffalograss, mowing it will stimulate it to grow by creating lateral growth and maintaining a dense turf. The general rule is to remove only 1/3 of the height of the blade at one mowing for any grass.

Fertilizer will benefit the turf density. Apply fertilizer when the grass is actively growing. Improperly applied nitrogen in the summer can be a waste since it can volatilize. It can burn the foliage. This causes more stress on the grass when applied in summer. The grass requires more water to utilize nitrogen. It can also cause disease issues. All cool-season grasses, such as Kentucky Bluegrass and Fescue, are best fertilized in the fall and early spring. The optimal growing temperature for cool-season grass is 60- 85 degrees Fahrenheit. Early fall fertilization will green up the lawn sooner in the spring. It will also develop a deep root system. Spring fertilization isn't necessary unless you want to support spring growth, but it will add to more mowing. Warm-season grasses are best fertilized in late spring to midsummer. Warm-season grass has an optimal temperature range of 70-95 degrees Fahrenheit.

Nitrogen is the fastest-moving element in the soil. Phosphorus and potassium take years to move a very short distance. Phosphorus can take 5-10 years to move an inch. Potassium moves more moderately between nitrogen and phosphorus. But it depends on the soil particles. If you have sand, it lacks the cation exchange capacity to hold these elements for long periods. Silt and clay soil can hold more phosphorus and potassium in 4-6 inches of soil depth. Getting a soil test and a tissue culture test periodically can help you determine what amounts and elements your turf needs.

Phosphorus is essential for establishing roots of new lawns. Potassium helps with drought stress because it regulates water. It is essential for stomatal function and water balance.

Iron is the most deficient element of turfgrass. Micronutrient deficiencies can cause detrimental effects on the turf. Iron plays a role in photosynthesis. Interveneal yellowing is a symptom of iron deficiency.

Calcium, magnesium, and sulfur are necessary secondary macronutrients. Calcium builds cell walls. Magnesium is essential for chlorophyll. Sulfur is essential for protein synthesis and amino acids.

There is a great deal to understanding grass. As in life, timing is everything. Timing with temperature, water, fertilizer and mowing is important. But mowing is an essential key practice that has a large contribution towards the overall health of grass.

Eastern Plains Forestry Council
Linda Langelo, Area Horticulture Specialist
“The Relentless Gardener”

The Eastern Plains Forestry Council came into being with the Federal Grant for Tree Removal and Replacement. Our communities on the Eastern Plains do not have an adequate tax base to support removing aging trees. Most of which have lived to maturity. Some were creating a liability in public spaces.

With assistance from Carrie Tomlinson, State Arborist at the Colorado State Forest Service, we secured \$429,999 for three counties: Sedgwick, Phillips, and Yuma. Kit Carson and Washington were not within the designated funding area.

Creating an Eastern Plains Forestry Council was one of the elements lacking in our area. Every region across the state has implemented one. A forestry council serves our area by coordinating communities, landowners, forestry professionals, and agencies to improve the health and management of local trees and forests.

The area also gained a certified arborist in Yuma County. More individual training was provided for other area tree trimmers who did not wish to become certified at this time.

We educated town councils, local citizens, and tree boards about the need for continual upkeep of a town's canopy. We created diversity and understanding. There is still more to do and hence, another reason for the Eastern Plains Forestry Council.

