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Finding common ground

Good friends can have a good time no matter what they are doing together. That is how I ended up helping with a Yoga on the Farm event at Hildebrand Dairy near Junction City recently. The event was organized by CommonGround Kansas, an organization of farm women in Kansas who share information and personal stories about farming and the food they grow.

Yoga on the farm events have been around for years but this was my first time attended one. I was pretty impressed to see around 50 people show up on a hot June weekend to moo-ve through poses on a lush green lawn next to cattle grazing in a pasture. The cows didn't make anyone too self-conscious because they only stared at the humans in the strange poses for a little while before they got back to snacking on the grass.

Participants in the event got a lot more than a yoga session. Melissa Hildebrand Reed, one of the farm owners, gave a tour of the farm including a sneak peak of two milking robots they are installing. Participants were also able to learn what the dairy cattle eat by building a trail mix version of the ration, and everyone got delicious soft serve ice cream at the farm's dairy store.

One of my favorite parts of the day was getting to see Melissa and her staff connecting with curious people. She does such a good job of teaching people about the farm, showing them how they take care of their cows and explaining how they make the dairy products you can buy in their farm store or at grocery stores throughout the state.

Looking around the crowd it was obvious some people were hardcore yoga enthusiasts, others were there for the novelty of a unique experience, a great

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photo op, to see the cows or for the post-workout ice cream. Regardless of the reason, everyone walked away having met a real life dairy farmer, more clearly understanding of how dairy farms work and having a great story to tell their friends about where dairy products come from.

Events like this are so powerful because they demystify farms, give people the chance to ask questions and help the public build confidence in how their food is grown or produced. The farm women who volunteer for CommonGround Kansas are really effective advocates because in addition to being farmers, they are wives, mothers, caretakers, grocery shoppers and so many other roles. They have so many of the same concerns, fears and goals as all of the rest of us — we have so much common ground.

One of the most important needs we all have is to be well fed. Meeting a farmer and realizing you have something in common can completely change your perspective. Having the opportunity and comfort to ask questions about how food is grown can lead to confidence and peace of mind. Opening farms to the public creates more informed, loyal consumers.

My first time at Yoga on the Farm was delightful, and I look forward to more opportunities like it in the future. If you have the opportunity to attend yoga or any other event on a farm, I hope you will take advantage because you will likely learn something new, make powerful connections and may even get a cute selfie with a farm animal.

"Insight" is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau, the state's largest farm organization whose mission is to strengthen agriculture and the lives of Kansans through advocacy, education and service.

Answers from Post Rock Extension

Cassie Thiessen, Post Rock Extension District Agriculture Agent,Horticulture,
K-State Research and Extension

Blossom End Rot of Tomatoes

If you are a gardener in Kansas, chances are you have heard of, or seen, blossom-end rot. This condition is most common in tomatoes and shows up as sunken, brown, leathery patches on the bottom of the fruit. It can also cause a problem in squash, peppers, and watermelon crops. You might be surprised to learn that this is not a disease, but actually a physiological disorder caused by a lack of calcium in the developing fruit. This does not necessarily mean that your garden's soil is lacking calcium. Most Kansas soils are derived from limestone, which is partially made up of calcium. So, just what is the reason your tomatoes are rotting? There are actually a number of possible reasons, let's look at some of them.

1. Heavy fertilization, especially with ammonium forms of nitrogen, interferes with calcium absorption. When you over fertilizer, the plant generates more top growth than root growth. Though tomatoes need to be fertilized to yield well, too much nitrogen can result in large plants with little to no fruit.
2. Gardening practices, especially weeding, that disrupt the plant roots can also encourage blossom-end rot. This could be tilling or hoeing the soil too deeply. Mulching helps because it keeps the soil surface cooler and therefore provides a better environment for root growth.
3. Tomato tops often outgrow the root system during cooler spring weather. As long as it stays cool, the root system can keep up. When it turns hot and dry, the plant has a problem, and water — with the calcium it carries — goes to the leaves and the fruit is bypassed. The plant responds with new root growth and the condition corrects itself after a couple of weeks.
4. Avoid inconsistent watering. You

want to keep the soil moist, but not water logged. Mulching is a good idea to help retain moisture levels overtime, in the garden.

You may need a soil test to determine if your soil has adequate calcium levels. If your soil has sufficient calcium, it will not benefit from an addition of calcium. If your soil is deficient in this nutrient, add 1 pound of gypsum per 100 square feet. Gypsum is calcium sulfate and will not affect soil pH. Though calcium raises pH, sulfate lowers pH, and the two will cancel each other out. An application of gypsum will not cause any harm to your soil, even if the amendment was not needed.

Gardeners may think that spraying the plant with calcium will be the trick to clear up blossom-end rot. However, the fruit's waxy surface doesn't allow absorption of the externally-applied calcium, and since calcium needs to be taken up by the roots, a foliar application will not be effective.

Unfortunately, there are years that you can do everything right and still have blossom end rot. If this is the case, remember that blossom-end rot is a temporary condition, and plants should come out of it in a couple of weeks. Vegetable plants will benefit from picking off the affected fruits, to encourage new, healthy, fruit formation. It is a good idea to keep garden records, you may find that certain tomato varieties are less susceptible to blossom-end rot than others.

If you have any garden questions this summer, reach out to your local K-State Extension Office.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at cthiessen@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (785-738-3597).

KDWP Special Hunt application
period now open for

Looking for a hunting experience without the crowds in some of Kansas' most unique locations? The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) Special Hunts program provides limited access to areas not normally open to hunting. More than limited-entry opportunities will be available this fall and winter. While access through the program is free, hunters must still meet all licensing and permit requirements under Kansas law.

Opportunities for deer, upland game, waterfowl, dove, and furbearers will be offered, with hunts taking place on a mix of public lands, parks, private lands, and other select areas. Managers, biologists, landowners, and partners offer these hunts with safety, management, and positive relationships in mind.

All fall and winter special hunt opportunities are available through a single application period, open July 1-29, 2025. Details of each special hunt and application details are available at ksoutdoors.com/Hunting/Special-Hunts-Information. Successful applicants will be selected through a random drawing.

“The Special Hunts program offers hunters unique opportunities to access generally restricted areas under certain conditions. Whether public land or private, because access is limited for safety and management reasons, these hunts can be high-quality experiences for a wide range of hunters,” said Brian Serpan, KDWP Public Lands Regional Supervisor. “The Special Hunts program does not guarantee a successful hunt or large numbers of wildlife, but it provides a great opportunity to introduce someone

to hunting, explore a new area, and enjoy the Kansas outdoors.”

Both Kansas residents and non-resident hunters can apply, though some hunts are restricted to residents only. When applying online, hunters will select hunts by species, date, and one of four hunt type categories: open, youth, mentor, or disabled.

- Open Hunts are available to all applicants with no age or experience restrictions.
- Youth Hunts require each hunting party to include at least one hunter age 17 or younger, accompanied by a non-hunting adult age 18 or older. Some hunts may have more specific age requirements.
- Mentor Hunts are designed for youth and novice hunters supervised by a licensed adult mentor age 18 or older. Both the novice and mentor may hunt, unless otherwise specified.
- Disabled Hunts are intended for hunters with disabilities. Some hunts may have specific eligibility requirements.

The drawing of applicants will take place in early August, and all applicants will be notified by email in mid-August. Successful applicants will receive their hunt permit and any additional details via email.

Hunters are responsible for purchasing any licenses, permits, tags, or stamps required by law, and must have completed a certified Hunter Education course unless exempt. Nonresident deer hunters must have drawn a Kansas deer permit earlier in the year to be eligible for deer special hunts.

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