



Agriculture Guide

FALL 2026

AG EDUCATOR KENNETH MALONE RECEIVES AWARD OF MERIT, NAYC'S HIGHEST HONOR

For Immediate Release Contact: Christin Kamm
402-471-6856 Nebraska Dept. of Agriculture

LINCOLN – Kenneth Malone, retired agriculture educator of over 44 years, was recently selected by the members of the Nebraska Agricultural Youth Council (NAYC) to receive the Council's highest honor. Malone received the Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute's (NAYI) Award of Merit during a special awards luncheon at UNL's East Campus Union in Lincoln. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) oversees NAYC and NAYI.

"Kenneth Malone has been an ag educator since 1976, inspiring generations of students," said NAYC Advisor Christin Kamm. "His work has supported those interested in agriculture for years, helping raise money for classroom materials and supplies, contributing to the continued education of all students."

Malone began his career at Diller from 1976-1984 before joining the staff at Tri County Public Schools 1984-1988 and finally ending his career at Palmyra in 2020. During his time as an educator, he worked with many students encouraging them to join

programs such as FFA and NAYI and supported them during their work. Malone also worked with the Nebraska FFA State, American Degree and State Star Review Committee to review State and American Degrees as well as FFA District application for the American Degree.

Additionally, Malone has been a Nebraska State Land Judging committee member for 36 years. He has worked with Natural Resource Districts, Soil Scientists and Teachers across the state to coordinate area and state contests, revise state curriculum and State Contest Regulations and awards. He visits teachers across the state of Nebraska and assists them with classroom training in Nebraska Land Judging and joined teams to the National FFA Land Judging contest to assist them on their trips.

"Ken is a shining example of what it means to be an ag educator," said Kamm. "We want to congratulate Ken on receiving this award and thank him for his dedication to the youth of Nebraska and the ag industry."

PASTURE AND FORAGE MINUTE: MANAGING HEAT-STRESSED ALFALFA, YUCCA AND LATE- SUMMER BROME RECOVERY

By Ben Beckman - Extension Educator,
Samantha Daniel - Extension Educator

Heat Effects on Alfalfa

By Ben Beckman

When it gets hot, alfalfa plants grow more slowly and moisture stress becomes common, even in moist soil. Maintaining high-quality hay is very difficult due to the high temperatures, especially when the heat does not subside at night. High night-time temperatures cause rapid respiration rates in alfalfa, burning off nutrients that plants accumulated during the day. This often produces alfalfa hay with fine stems that contain high protein, more fiber and lower feed value than expected.

Another problem with heat is how fast alfalfa plants mature. When it is hot, alfalfa may begin to bloom in less than four weeks. If you use blooming as a signal to harvest, this early bloom can be misleading. Early blooms may not mean the plant has fully recovered from the previous cutting.

During hot weather, alfalfa plants need more time, not less time, to rebuild nutrient reserves in their roots because they lose more to respiration. So, watch the calendar along with plant maturity to determine when to cut your alfalfa fields.

Waiting longer may support stand

health, but forage quality will continue to decline as the crop matures.

Finally, you might adjust the time of day when you cut hay. Some research has shown that cutting in late afternoon produces higher quality hay than cutting in the morning. However, on good drying days it may still be wiser to cut in the morning.

When hay in the windrow stays above 50% moisture, plant cells continue to respire, burning away nutrients. Hay cut late in the day respire all night long, losing yield and quality. On good drying days, plant cells can dry enough to be stabilized before nightfall, reducing respiration losses.

Getting high-quality hay can be challenging on a good day, but during heat waves, it can be even more so. Use the calendar, plant condition and drying forecast together to plan harvest for better results than relying on bloom or time of day alone.

Yucca Control on Rangeland

By Samantha Daniel

Yucca, also called small soapweed, is a common weed

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in western and central Nebraska rangelands. Yucca plants are especially noticeable when flowering in June. In some areas, high plant density can significantly reduce grass production, so yucca may need to be managed to reclaim grazing lands.

Once established, yucca plants can flourish on drier range sites due to their deep taproots, which compete aggressively for the limited soil water. With sharp leaves, cattle rarely eat these plants during summer, and grass production decreases where yucca thrives.

General broadcast spraying to control yucca is cost prohibitive, although small patches can and should be controlled before they expand. Labeled herbicides include Remedy®, Tordon 22K®, Chaparral + 2,4-D or Cimarron Plus® + 2,4-D for yucca suppression of individual plants.

Hexazinone products like Velpar L®, Pronone Power Pellet or Velossa® can be applied to the soil on the uphill side of individual yucca plants with an exact delivery hand-gun applicator. Herbicides are most effective when applied in spring or early summer. When using herbicides, be sure to follow label directions for the best control.

Winter grazing with cattle and bison can provide some yucca control success. During winter, yucca is often the only green plant prevalent, and some cows may chew through the base of the plant to get to the moist, tender parts. After several consecutive

winters of grazing, yucca stands can be reduced, allowing grass to thrive during summer.

Whether it is with herbicides or trying some winter grazing, reclaim your pasture(s) from yucca.

Late Rain and Brome Pastures

By Ben Beckman

Summer rain can turn a smooth brome pasture from brown to green, but it cannot replace spring forage production that was missed.

Common in eastern Nebraska pastures, smooth brome grass is a cool-season grass that makes much of its growth during April, May and early June. Many pastures entered spring stressed from a dry fall and winter, then missed timely spring moisture. Much of their main production window may already be gone.

Late rain can still stimulate new leaves, but that growth may be more valuable for plant recovery than additional grazing. New brome regrowth is highly palatable and can be grazed off quickly, especially when cattle have immediate access after rain.

Walk pastures rather than judging them from the road. Look beyond the green color and seedheads. Check plant height, leaf area, residual forage, bare ground and whether cattle repeatedly graze the same areas.

Where forage remains short, slow rotations, increase recovery time,



reduce grazing pressure or locate additional feed. Early weaning or marketing lower-priority animals may be needed if the forage budget remains short.

now gives stressed brome plants a better chance to rebuild vigor this fall and produce forage next spring.

The goal is not to harvest every green leaf. Maintaining leaf area

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Pasture and Forage Minute: 2026 Rental Rates, Native Range Production and Forage Inventory

By Shannon Sand - Agricultural Economics Extension Educator,
Ben Beckman - Extension Educator

2026 Nebraska Rental Rates

By Shannon Sand

What does it cost to rent pasture this year? The final 2026 Nebraska Cash Rental Rates Survey results are now available.

Average monthly pasture rental rates increased between 2%–8% compared to last grazing season, continuing the upward trend across Nebraska.

The north reporting district — primarily the Sandhills — reported the highest average rate at \$82.10 per cow-calf pair per month. The northeast and central districts followed at \$77.35 and \$74.60, while the northwest district — including much of the Panhandle — had the lowest average at \$56.45 per pair per month. Most other areas of the state averaged between \$61–\$70 per pair each month.

Keep in mind these are averages. Actual rental rates depend on factors such as pasture quality, fences and water, management responsibilities, cattle size

and local demand.

Whether you're renting pasture or leasing it to someone else, a written lease is one of the best risk management tools available. Be sure it clearly outlines the stocking rate or number of cattle, grazing period, payment terms, and how unexpected events like drought will be handled.

View the complete 2026 Nebraska Cash Rental Rates Survey on the Center for Agricultural Profitability website [https://cap.unl.edu/realestate/].

Late Rains and Native Range

Ben Beckman

Late rains have improved the appearance of native range across parts of Nebraska, but green is not always the same as growth.

Mid-June clipping data from the Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory showed cool-season forage production

at only about 20% of normal, with total forage production at roughly 30% of normal. While that is one location and conditions vary across the state, it illustrates how far behind some pastures were heading into summer.

While cool-season production can be significant, native range often contains a large amount of warm-season grasses, especially as we head east across the state. These plants make much of their growth during the heat of summer, so late June and July rain can still produce meaningful forage.

However, that response is not automatic. Growth depends on how much rain falls, whether moisture continues and how much plant vigor remains. With cool-season production already reduced, grazing pressure may also shift heavily toward warm-season grasses as they begin growing.

Do not estimate available forage from the road. Walk pastures and look at plant height, leaf area, residual forage, bare ground and how evenly cattle are grazing.

Late moisture gives native range an opportunity, but it does not erase the earlier forage deficit. Protecting leaf area and allowing adequate recovery will help plants use the next rain and rebuild vigor heading into fall.



Late summer decisions can shape forage supplies for months to come. Learn what rising pasture rental rates, recent rain-fall and mid-season forage inventories mean for your operation.

Mid-Season Forage Check

Ben Beckman

As we move through mid-summer, it's time to evaluate our forage situation. Depending on your location, meadow hay harvest might be starting, you could be on your second cutting of alfalfa or preparing to cut warm-season annual crops soon.

Now is a great time to assess your forage inventory. Most perennial grasses have completed their growth, and multiple alfalfa cuttings should be done. Even if not all meadow hay and summer annuals are harvested, we can estimate our total yield for the year.

Ask yourself: Does our current yield meet our winter feed needs? If not, consider options like late planting of summer annuals or fall forages like oats for grazing. Be cautious with planning fall hay harvests, however, due to drying challenges.

If you have excess hay, plan on how to manage it. For selling or storing, prevent quality loss by keeping hay dry. Store it under a roof or tarp if possible, elevate it from the ground, line bales with the topography and sun, and ensure good airflow around bales to maintain quality. Finally, if you haven't done so, send in hay samples for quality testing. Hay quality varies year-to-year, even from the same field. Testing helps us match hay to livestock needs or set appropriate selling prices.

Assessing forage stores now, while plants are still growing and hay is being harvested, helps close forage gaps, manage surplus and ensure quality use later.

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Weed Control in Pearl Millet

By Nevin Lawrence - Integrated Weed Management Specialist



Key Takeaways

- Herbicide options are limited: Pearl millet has few labeled herbicides, making early planning essential.
- Crop rotation matters: Mesotrione provides residual control but carries rotational restrictions for several common Panhandle crops.
- Start clean and act early: Begin with tillage or a burndown herbicide, then make timely POST applications before weeds become difficult to control.

- Preemergence (PRE) residual options are limited to mesotrione (Callisto).
- Postemergence (POST) broadleaf options are limited to 2,4-D and fluroxypyr (Starane) (only when grown for forage or hay).

Because pearl millet is planted in July, late-emerging weeds are the primary management concern. This includes pigweeds (redroot pigweed and Palmer amaranth), nightshade (hairy, eastern black and buffalobur), and bindweed.

Mesotrione is labeled to control the nightshade and pigweed species commonly found in the Nebraska Panhandle. However, it carries an 18-month rotational restriction for sugarbeet and dry bean and a 10-month restriction for alfalfa, which greatly limits its usefulness depending on the crops planned over the next two years.

Rotation-friendly options include 2,4-D and fluroxypyr, but fluroxypyr controls few of the weeds that would be emerging after the planting of pearl millet. 2,4-D

has good activity on bindweed and nightshade. However, Palmer amaranth can quickly outgrow effective control once plants reach 3 to 4 inches tall. Under drought or high-temperature conditions, even smaller plants may be difficult to control.

Recommended herbicide programs for pearl millet in the Nebraska Panhandle:

- If corn is planned for next year, use tillage or a burndown herbicide to start with a clean seedbed, followed by a preemergence application of mesotrione. Apply 2,4-D POST if needed while weeds are still small.

- If a crop other than corn is planned for next year, use tillage or a burndown herbicide to start with a clean seedbed. Apply 2,4-D POST early, before weeds reach 4 inches tall. If Palmer amaranth control is poor, harvest forage before seed matures.

If Palmer amaranth is present in forage, test the forage for nitrate

levels before selling or feeding it.

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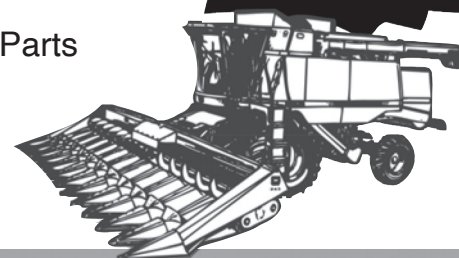
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Programs Designed to Support Nebraska Farmers

Learn more about the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's NextGen Beginning Farmer Tax Credit and Ag Mediation Programs

Starting out in any industry comes with challenges, and agriculture is no exception. Rising input costs, limited access to equipment, land, and capital, and difficulty securing long-term leases make it especially hard for new farmers to get established. Land access remains one of the biggest barriers.

At the same time, Nebraska agriculture is facing a demographic shift. The average Nebraska farmer is nearing retirement age, and many farm and ranch owners are actively looking for the next generation to take over their operations. In some cases, there is no family member interested in continuing the farm. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture's NextGen Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Program was created to help address this challenge.

NextGen operates under the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit Act,

which is intended to help beginning farmers and ranchers gain access to agricultural assets while providing tax incentives to asset owners.

Under the program, agricultural asset owners can receive a refundable Nebraska income tax credit for leasing or renting land, machinery, or breeding livestock to a qualifying beginning farmer.

A beginning farmer is generally defined as an individual who has farmed or ranched for less than 10 of the last 15 years, making the program accessible to a broader range of producers, including those who may be transitioning from hired labor to ownership.

To qualify for the tax credit, the asset owner must enter into a minimum three-year lease with the beginning farmer. This longer-term lease structure provides beginning producers with greater predictability as they establish their operations. The asset owner will receive a

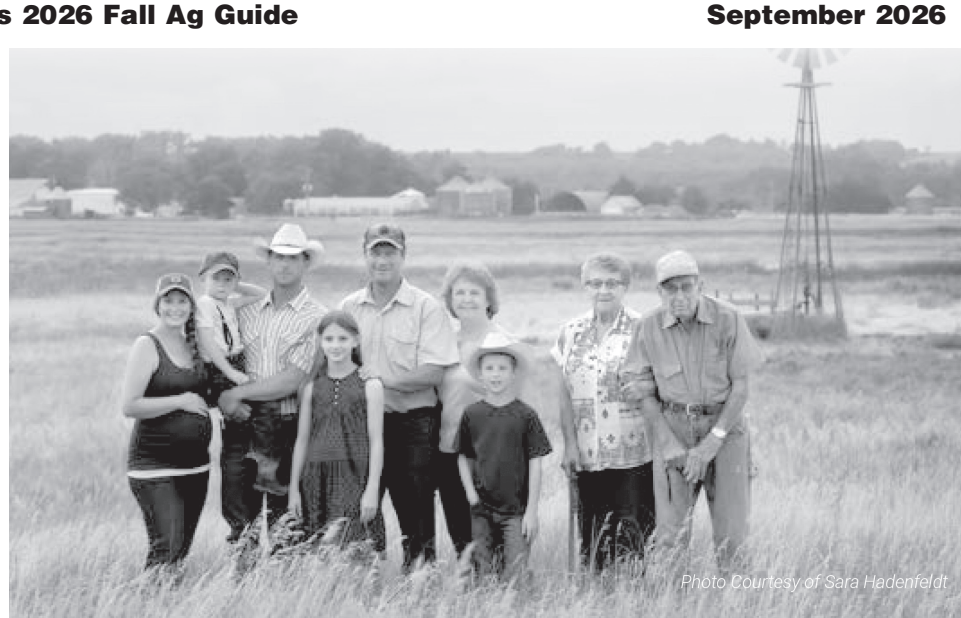


Photo Courtesy of Sara Hadenfeldt

refundable Nebraska income tax credit equal to 10% of the cash rent received or 15% of the value of the share crop rent received each year for up to three years.

Because the credit is refundable, it can be especially valuable for retired or semi-retired landowners with limited Nebraska tax liability. This is an important tax planning consideration when advising asset owners.

Relatives may participate and still qualify for the tax credit, provided the parties attend a succession planning workshop and the leased asset is included in a written succession plan.

While NextGen is designed to support new farmers and succession planning, ongoing financial and operational challenges remain a reality for many producers. The Negotiations Ag Mediation Program is available to help farmers and related parties work through financial and legal disputes.

The program is available not only to farmers and ranchers, but also to ag borrowers, creditors, and USDA program participants. Mediation is voluntary, confidential, and conducted in a neutral setting with an impartial mediator who facilitates discussion but does not impose solutions.

For producers facing legal challenges the Rural Response Hotline offers free, confidential consultations with experienced agricultural attorneys. The Hotline also provides disaster relief resources, financial guidance, and mental health support, including free counseling vouchers when needed. The Hotline can be reached at 800-464-0258.

Free clinics and workshops related to farm finances, succession planning, and legal issues are held across Nebraska each month. These sessions provide one-on-one education and practical resources for producers and landowners alike. For more information or upcoming dates, visit: negotiations.nebraska.gov or nextgen.nebraska.gov

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Detasseling: The Who, What, Why & How

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Who: If you grew up in any state that deals in corn, (like Nebraska) then you've probably heard of detasseling. Each year during the summer months, thousands of students, typically under the age of 18, head out to the cornfields and remove the tassel at the top of the corn plant.

What: Detasseling involves removing the top of the corn plant (the tassel) which contains pollen that allows the corn plant to reproduce. This simple act prevents unwanted pollination, resulting in the plant producing pure hybrid seeds.

Why: As mentioned before, detasseling prevents unwanted pollination and allows the plant to produce pure hybrid seeds. These seeds are what begin the planting season in the spring and it's because of the previous years' hard work of generating these hybrid seeds that allows for a better crop yield. These seeds are typically more drought tolerant and disease resistant because of effective cross breeding.

Each corn plant has a male and female flower. The tassel is the male flower and sits at the top of the stalk while an ear of corn with silk is the female flower. The

pollen from the tassel is shook loose by wind and travels down the silk to pollinate and develop an into a seed. Left on its own, corn will pollinate itself, but to generate better types of corn detasseling allows for cross-pollination and different strains of corn to be mixed.

How: Detasseling is done in two steps: machine and manual. First is detasseling by machine where the 'cutter' goes through the rows of corn and cuts off the tops. This makes the stalks more uniform for the 'puller' machine to come through and pull the tassel out of the plant. However, this is not 100% effective as cornstalks are not all the same height. Either with or without machine detasseling, human hands are needed to finish the process. Detassellers walk through the corn rows and pluck the tassels by hand. Sometimes workers walk the fields two or three times to catch all the tassels that might have been missed by the machine.



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Nebraska's Top National Rankings

1st

Beef and veal exports, 2024 – \$2,039,768,864
Commercial cattle slaughter, 2024 – 6,857,300 head
Harvested cropland acres, irrigated, 2022 – 7,857,031 acres
Great Northern bean production, 2024 – 763,000 cwt.
Cash receipts per capita, 2023 – \$15,765

2nd

All cattle and calves, Jan. 1, 2025 – 6,050,000 head
Popcorn production, 2022– 333,276,821 lbs.
Ethanol production, 2024 – 2,345,000,000 gallons
Pinto bean production, 2024 – 1,745,000 cwt.
All cattle on feed, Jan. 1, 2025 – 2,700,000 head
Commercial red meat production, 2024 - 7,978,000,000 lbs.
Proso millet production, 2024 –

3,182,000 bushels
Alfalfa hay production, 2024 – 3,483,000 tons
No-till cropland acres, 2022 – 10,101,251 acres
Bison, 2022 – 32,206 head

3rd

Cash receipts all farm commodities, 2023 – \$31,257,014,000, 6.0% of the U.S. total
Corn for grain production, 2024 – 1,802,920,000 bushels
Corn exports, 2022 – \$2,254,400,000
All hay production, 2024 – 6,135,000 tons

4th

Beef cows, Jan. 1, 2025 – 1,552,000 head
Cash receipts from all animals and products, 2023 – \$18,073,376,000, 7.2% of U.S. total
Cash receipts from all crops, 2023 – \$13,183,638,000,

4.9% of U.S. total
Total animal products exports, 2022 – \$2,413,400,000
All dry edible bean production, 2024 – 2,779,000 cwt.
Light red kidney bean production, 2023 – 35,000 cwt.
Land in farms and ranches, 2024 – 44,000,000 acres
Dry edible pea production, 2024 – 382,000 cwt.
Grain sorghum production, 2024 – 22,100,000 bushels
Sunflower production, 2024 – 28,125,000 lbs.
Cover crop acres, 2022 – 925,686 acres

5th

Agricultural exports, 2022 – \$9,977,000,000
Soybean exports, 2022 – \$2,343,300,000
Sugarbeet production, 2024 – 1,424,000 tons
Soybean production, 2024 – 301,300,000 bushels

6th

All hogs and pigs on farms, Dec. 1, 2024 – 3,650,000 head
Commercial hog slaughter, 2024 – 8,063,900 head
Harvest cropland acres, 2022 – 18,003,280 acres
Pork exports, 2024 – \$431,999,641

7th

Pastureland acres, 2022 – 21,940,079 acres

11th

Winter wheat production, 2024 – 47,840,000 bushels

12th

Harvested organic cropland acres, 2021 - 89,040 acres

Sources: USDA NASS, USDA ERS, USDA FAS, Global Ag Trade System
Information gathered by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 402-471-2341.
Additional information can be found on NDA's commodity and trade profiles on our website: nda.nebraska.gov/promotion/profiles/index.html

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