

Old world bluestem concerns for Kansas rangeland

BY OLIVIA BERGMEIER

Throughout Kansas, residents and visitors can see rolling fields of prairie grass filled with native species like big and little bluestem alongside switchgrass species. These grasses ruled the prairies for centuries, but there's a southern species of bluestem threatening the gold and ruddy hues of the Kansas prairie.

According to Mitchell County Conservation District board member Fred Severance, the grass species was originally grown in Texas due to its affinity for drier climates but eventually made its way up through the Midwest into Kansas.

"It's a short-season, dry-weather grass that, once it's put into a more advantageous surrounding, really takes off," Severance said. "If you take it from Texas and bring it to Kansas, where it rains and we actually have soil, it just takes off. The big problem with that is it chokes out all the native



The rolling plains of the Flint Hills just before sunset in eastern Kansas.

grasses we have up here."

He continued, "The problem with that is, you'll have two weeks of really good grazing in the spring, and then you will have nothing once it's choked out the rest of the grass."

According to a 2016 article published by K-State Research and Extension

agents, multiple range scientists have called the species invasive and can "reduce the growth and vigor of other grasses that are more nutritious and palatable for livestock."

In the article, it states there are two types of old world bluestem: yellow and Caucasian, which

FILE PHOTO BY OLIVIA BERGMEIER

only differ in appearance but have the same growth cycle and impacts on pastureland. These species can also impact the biodiversity in the region, causing cascade effects for other native plants and animals.

Even though the species is invasive and has become

prevalent across Kansas, rangeland scientists and the conservation district boards they help advise have a few solutions for the state's landowners.

"To get rid of it and establish your 10,000-year biome, you either have to spray it out or have prescribed burning to get rid of it," Severance said.

According to Severance, he prefers prescribed burning since many of the weed-killing chemicals have their own pressures on the environment outdoors and in rangeland manager pockets.

"The chemical is fairly expensive and very inexact," Severance said. "Burning takes place in August for old world bluestem, and to do that you need things like a burning plan and another pasture to take your current livestock to, but it's always best to just not get old world bluestem."

Another factor of concern for Severance about the invasive grass is simply beauty. During the winter, native prairie

grass species often fill fields with hues of yellow, gold and ruddy browns, but native grass' invasive counterparts fill the fields with white, feathery foliage instead.

"All I can tell you is the anecdotal evidence that in the last 5 years, with dry weather, old world bluestem has thrived and taken over thousands and thousands of acres of pastures just in this area. If you drive past a pasture, it's white; that's old world bluestem," Severance said. "Whereas, you would see muted greens and pinks and nice chocolate browns out there 10 years ago, now it's white."

Rangeland scientists and the boards and officials they advise continue researching the invasive grass species, and work locally with producers to drive off the hardy plant. To learn more about old world bluestem, contact the Cloud County Conservation District or K-State Research and Extension agents with the local River Valley District.

Kansas land values reflect stability

Hughes says diverse income streams, interest rates and profitability pressures continue to shape farmland markets across the state

BY CHEVY-LYNN VASKE,

K-State Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Kansas agricultural land values appear to be stabilizing as producers enter 2026, according to Kansas State University Extension experts.

After several years of rapid appreciation, the land market is showing more measured movement, influenced by profitability pressures, interest rates and the increasingly diverse ways land generates income.

K-State Extension land and crop market specialist Megan Hughes emphasized that land values are driven by more than just crop production potential.

"Things like hunting access or energy development can absolutely

increase land value," Hughes said. "Those non-agricultural uses matter, and they're part of what keeps demand strong in certain areas."

Kansas producers are often highly diversified, operating across crops, livestock and alternative enterprises — a reality that directly affects land markets. Hughes noted that decisions about land cannot be made in isolation from the broader farm business.

"Because we tend to be so diversified, producers really have to consider all enterprises when making decisions," she said. "Low profitability in the crop sector will bleed over into everything else."

While land values remain relatively steady, economic pressures are building. Kansas net farm incomes in 2026 are projected to remain steady or decline

slightly compared to 2025, adding another layer of caution for producers evaluating long-term investments.

Hughes stressed that interest rates continue to be a major driver in land market behavior.

"There are a lot of factors that go into land values, including interest rates, and it's something we'll be keeping a close eye on," she said.

She also reminded producers that the Kansas Land Values publication provides benchmark averages rather than precise pricing.

"Kansas land values are averages — they're not exact numbers," Hughes said. "Every parcel is different, and location, quality and use still matter."

Even for producers with no plans to enter the land market, shifts in land

values can have significant ripple effects. Hughes explained that real estate makes up a substantial share of farm wealth nationwide.

"Real estate accounts for about 80% of farm assets in the United States," she said. "Any change in land values can affect a farm's financial position moving forward, even if you're not buying or selling land."

As economic conditions evolve, Kansas producers are encouraged to use land value data as a planning tool rather than a prediction, keeping a close eye on trends that influence both balance sheets and long-term resilience.

More information also is available in a new publication from K-State Extension, the 2025 Kansas Land Values Book, which can be accessed online.

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