Yes, Roadside and All the Other Wildflowers Matter!

Adam Janke, Extension Wildlife Specialist
ajanke@iastate.edu
515-294-7429

The title to this article is the answer to a question I get often. I suspect the curiosity is spawned from a combination of state law, which mandates roadways be spared the mower until at least July 15, and our deeply-rooted Midwestern sense of obligation to keep “a clean farm.” However, the simple argument that “a clean farm” is a closely manicured one, from the barnyard to the ditches, arguably falls short. Stands of wildflowers and grasses in roadways, idle areas, and barn lots provide aesthetic beauty, habitat for everything from butterflies to deer, and play an important role in keeping our air and water clean. Roadways—and all the other wildflowers—matter!

By now, I assume you’ve heard about the monarch butterfly. Concerns over steady declines in wintering populations on a mountainside in Mexico have led to an international effort to find ways to make conditions better for monarchs everywhere they go in their annual continental migration. If you’ve heard about monarchs, then you’ve surely heard about milkweeds, the often-maligned weed that stands at the center of the monarch conservation challenge in the Midwest. After years of effective suppression of milkweeds, we’ve learned that monarchs feel the pinch from the loss of the only plant on which they can raise their young. Monarchs also feel the pinch when they can’t find nectar from flowering plants to survive summer. A research article published in June called for an “All Hands on Deck” approach to reversing the declines of monarchs in the Midwest by using everything from crop fields to urban lots to (you guessed it!) roadways to grow milkweeds and other flowering plants from May to September.

If monarchs and other pollinating insects aren’t your thing, don’t forget that roadways and other natural areas matter for other wildlife, including Ring-necked Pheasants, Dickcissels, badgers, and deer. Iowa’s landscape was once over 80 percent prairie, so most of our wildlife rely on grasses and wildflowers to find their next meal or shelter their young from high heat or heavy rains. Sure, research has shown that roadways and other small patches of grassy habitats aren’t as safe for many wildlife as large grass fields, but we also know every little bit helps. As any hunter or wildlife enthusiast will attest, tall grasses and wildflowers spared the mower offer significantly improved odds of catching the sight of a migrating bird or the rush of a rooster flush than mowed areas.

The benefits of roadways and other natural areas on the farm extend beyond wildlife. Research at Iowa State University has shown that converting small percentages of land to prairie grasses with deep roots and a diversity of flowering plants can result in large improvements in water quality. Grasses and wildflowers also create a highly efficient air purification system. With all the benefits of these wild areas, I think we can make a pretty strong case for their inclusion on the margins of our productive farms. In fact they might be the ticket to help us keep an even cleaner farm.
Good Planning When Hauling Livestock Prevents Disasters on the Road

Fred Hall, Northwest Iowa Extension Dairy Specialist
fredhall@iastate.edu
712-737-4230

While towing a livestock trailer is a common practice on most farms, with the summer show season, additional precautions should be observed. The safety of cattle, young showmen and family members give drivers added responsibilities when loading, unloading and on the road.

To safely tow a livestock trailer, your truck must be capable of towing the weight of the trailer plus the added weight of the livestock. Check the Gross Combined Vehicle Weight (GCVW), which includes the tow vehicle's weight plus the loaded trailer weight. When calculating the weight, remember to include the weight for fuel, passengers, and cargo. The weight of large show cows and equipment can add up fast, so make sure you don't exceed the vehicle capacity.

Know the maximum tongue weight for your trailer. This is the amount of the trailer's weight that presses down on the truck's trailer hitch when using a bumper pull trailer or the truck's bed when using a gooseneck trailer. The majority of the weight (85 to 90 percent) should be carried over the axles so that only 10 to 15 percent of the weight is carried on the tongue.

Don’t pack the cattle. A little extra room is important to maintain cattle well-being and minimize injuries. It is recommended that you gate between cows and heifers. Hard stops can squeeze young animals as cows shift to maintain their balance. If you do have to decelerate suddenly, find a safe place to stop and check the animals.

Before using a livestock trailer, Extension professionals suggest checking both the truck and the trailer to ensure that they are in good working condition. In addition, take the following actions:

- **Latches and Safety Chains**: Double-check the latches and the safety chains and cables between the truck and trailer to make sure they are fastened securely. Make sure you are using a ball that is the correct size for the trailer.
- **Trailer Brakes**: Inspect the breakaway cable or brake system. Manufacturers recommend that any trailer exceeding 1,000 lb. have its own brake system, but you should also check state regulations regarding brake system requirements.
- **Wheel Bearings**: Check and repack the wheel bearings on a regular basis and replace as necessary.
- **Electric Wiring and Connections**: Make sure all wiring is in good condition. Trailer connectors should match the truck connectors. Check to make sure that all the lights (brake light, turn signals, and taillights) on both the truck and the trailer are working. Make sure the electrical connection is securely plugged into the truck. With the extra draw on the charging system, make sure it can handle the load.
- **Tires**: Examine the tires for signs of dry rot, wear, or damage, and make sure that all tires, including the spare and inside dual tires, have the correct air pressure. Consider replacing tires at least every five years, regardless of use.
- **Lug Nuts**: Inspect the lug nuts regularly to ensure they are properly tightened.
- **Trailer**: Inspect the trailer floor to make sure it is sturdy and clean. If more traction is needed, install rubber matting. Consider replacing floor boards that are showing signs of wear or rot.
- **Battery**: If you use battery-powered accessories, ensure that your emergency battery is charged and ready for use.
- **Brake Controllers**: Test your brake controllers and make adjustments as needed depending on the weight of your trailer. The protocol to test controllers include:
  1. The first step in testing your electric brakes is to locate the controller or adjustor, which is typically located beneath the instrument panel on the tow vehicle. The controller has an adjustment button (+ or -) and sliding lever. You may need to use the controller to increase braking power (+) for heavier loads or decrease braking power (-) for lighter loads.
  2. Once you have located the controller, slowly move forward on a level surface and shift the tow vehicle transmission to neutral. Use the slide lever on the brake controller to bring the load to a stop using the trailer brakes.
  3. If the trailer brakes cause the truck to jerk, your trailer brakes are adjusted too high. Lower the braking power on the trailer until the trailer comes to a smooth stop. If the truck and loaded trailer do not slow to a stop, the brake controller must be adjusted to a higher level.

Loading animals into a trailer can sometimes be a frustrating task, but there are steps you can take to make the task safer and, ideally, easier. For example, use a ramp so animals can walk into the trailer without having to step up. Remember to be patient and calm during the loading process so that you do not scare or stress the animals. Additional recommendations include the following:

- **Protrusions**: Inspect the trailer for broken or sharp objects protruding into the trailer. These items should be repaired immediately to prevent an injury to an animal or operator.
- **Weight Distribution**: When using a bumper pull trailer, place the heaviest animals in the front of the axles. Load older and larger animals first, followed by younger and smaller animals.
- **Ties**: When tying animals in the trailer, use slip knots and tie securely at head height in the trailer.
- **Visibility**: Make sure animals can see you when you enter and exit the trailer, when you are in the trailer, and when you tie or untie them.
- **Squeeze and Pinch Points**: Remain alert to the danger of being pinned between animals and trailer sides and being pinched by the trailer gate.
- **Gates**: Once the animals are loaded into the trailer, quickly close the gates latch them. Then don’t delay in getting the trip underway.

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The Rising Star Internship: A Win-Win

Dave Stender, Swine Specialist
dstender@iastate.edu
712-225-6196

It’s a win-win scenario. College students gain valuable experience while earning income for tuition and school expenses, and ISU Extension and Outreach receives help with summer programming.

Several ISU Extension and Outreach regions are currently hosting interns. These individuals are doing work for the benefit of Iowa. One of the goals for the Rising Star Interns is for the students to more fully understand the broad and diverse impacts of ISU Extension and Outreach. Part of their duties include meeting with Extension Field specialists to discuss issues and educational efforts. This morning, for example, I met with two interns from Region 1 in Northwest Iowa. We talked about swine industry issues, including but not limited to: the difference between antibiotic resistance and residue issues, environment, water quality, food safety, and animal handling certification workshops for producers. Additionally, we visited a niche swine farm and discussed production practices.

The Rising Star Interns have a wide variety of backgrounds and interests. Let me introduce you to the two Rising Star Interns that I met with this morning:

Madison Lapke, from LaMotte, Iowa, is a Junior in Global Resource Systems and Agriculture and Society at Iowa State University. She is passionate about the agriculture industry, as well as serving the community. Lapke worked for her hometown ISU Extension and Outreach office in Jackson County as a youth program intern in the summer of 2016, which is what sparked her interest in the Rising Star Internship. This summer, she has enjoyed connecting with and gaining knowledge from producers in the region, as well as attending events to promote the goodness of local foods and healthy living. After graduation, Lapke hopes to secure a job in the agriculture industry, with goals of working in underdeveloped countries. She also has interest in governmental work in the field of agriculture policy.

Ruby Hotchkiss is a Junior in Graphic Design with a minor in Leadership Studies at Iowa State University. At ISU, Hotchkiss is a graphic designer for Trend magazine, the largest student-run fashion publication on campus, and participates in student ministry. Hotchkiss has also worked at a flower shop and enjoyed taking environmental studies classes at Iowa State University. Fueled by interests in community service and horticulture, Hotchkiss became a Rising Star Intern to use her love for design to make a difference in her home state. Throughout the summer, Hotchkiss has enjoyed working with local producers and exploring video creation to assist in building marketing strategies at local farmer’s markets. In the future, Hotchkiss hopes to find a job that combines creativity and community improvement, just like the Rising Star Internship.

The Rising Star Internship is a great opportunity for talented young people to assist and learn about ISU Extension and Outreach - all while serving the people of Iowa. Visit their blog located at https://www.extension.iastate.edu/flavorsofnorthwestiowa/ to learn more!

Good Planning When Hauling Livestock Prevents Disasters on the Road (continued)

When driving on any roadway, always maintain a safe speed, keep your headlights on, and stay alert. Your braking time increases when you are towing a full trailer, so maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you and leave adequate room to stop. Plan your travel time carefully, and be aware that weather can cause delays by impacting road conditions and animal comfort.

Do not lock the trailer when you are transporting animals. In the event of an emergency, rescue workers don’t need the hassle when they are trying to help your animals.

More information on trailer safety is available at: http://articles.extension.org/pages/64391/livestock-trailer-safety
MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Aug. 3 - NW IA Land Leasing & Value Meeting at 9:00 a.m. • Northwest Iowa Community College, Sheldon
Aug. 3 - Commercial Manure Applicators Certification at 9:00 a.m. • Primghar
Aug. 3 - Confinement Site Manure Applicators Certification at 1:00 p.m. • Primghar
Aug. 3 - NW IA Land Leasing & Value Meeting at 2:00 p.m. • Public Library, Rock Rapids
Aug. 5 - In the Garden with Kids at 9:00 a.m. • Fairgrounds, Rock Rapids
Aug. 7 - Welcome to Retirement Training at 5:30 p.m. • Pizza Ranch, Sibley
Aug. 8 - Commercial Manure Applicators Certification at 8:30 a.m. • Sibley
Aug. 8 - Confinement Site Manure Applicators Certification at 1:30 p.m. • Sibley
Aug. 9 - Cooking with Herbs at 6:00 p.m. • Osceola Community Hospital, Sibley
Aug. 10 - NW IA Land Leasing & Value Meeting at 9:00 a.m. • Orange City
Aug. 10 - Commercial Manure Applicators Certification at 9:00 a.m. • Rock Rapids
Aug. 10 - Confinement Site Manure Applicators Certification at 1:00 p.m. • Rock Rapids
Aug. 10 - Cooking with the Family at 6:00 p.m. • Forster Community Center, Rock Rapids
Aug. 10-20 - Iowa State Fair • Des Moines
Aug. 17 - Commercial Manure Applicators Certification at 8:30 a.m. • Orange City
Aug. 17 - Cooking with Herbs at 6:00 p.m. • Multi-Purpose Building, Fairgrounds, Sioux Center
Aug. 21 - Osceola County Youth Agriculture Safety Day at 9:00 a.m. • Fairgrounds, Sibley
Aug. 29 - Beef Quality Assurance Certification Workshop at 10:00 a.m. • Orange City

www.extension.iastate.edu/content/county-offices

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