

Food Plots

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Olivia Hanlon, Kevin Andersen



Kevin Andersen 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the Small Farms Podcast, a production of the Small Farms Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.



Olivia Hanlon 00:29

In this episode, I interviewed Kevin Andersen, Private Lands Biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and talk about getting a food plot started. I'm Olivia Hanlon, Farm Food and Enterprise Development Extension Education Specialist and welcome to the show. Kevin, welcome to the show. Thanks for being on.



Kevin Andersen 00:45

Hey, no problem. It's great to be on with you guys.



Olivia Hanlon 00:48

Kevin, to get started, could you explain to our listeners a little bit of what exactly your role is for the DNR?



Kevin Andersen 00:55

Absolutely. My job is a Private Lands Wildlife Biologist. I work within a partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. My office is actually out of Fairfield, Iowa, far southeast Iowa. And my coverage area is 24 counties, basically from Story county all the way down to Lee County, and along the Missouri border in the Mississippi River. So I have a pretty good sized coverage area, and I've worked with private landowners all across my coverage area from things like Conservation Reserve Program, food plots, timber work, wildlife plans, just a varied amount of things I get to do.



Olivia Hanlon 01:35

Awesome. So to kick us off on the food plots, let's talk a little bit about what's required for the food plots. How much land do you need to get a food plot started? And are there certain locations that are better for the food plots than others?



Kevin Andersen 01:48

Yeah, those are great questions, really, as far as food plots, depending on what species you want to try to attract or feed on your land. And they can be as small as a 10th or a quarter of an acre. If you're talking about green browse plots like clover, alfalfa, white clovers, things like that. They don't have to be as large, to as large as I work with landowners who plan up to five to ten acres of corn, soybeans, grain, sorghum, sunflowers, things like that. So it just varies on the species that you're going to be planting in the food plot is according to the size.



Olivia Hanlon 02:25

Perfect. So when we're looking at our land, when we're looking at where we want to put our food plot, is there certain areas that we should avoid? Are there certain areas that wildlife would be attracted to?



Kevin Andersen 02:37

Yeah, absolutely. And once again, it goes back to the species that you want to try to manage for like whitetail deer, you could place a food plot next to cover, timber draw, a timber, some CRP land with tall native grasses, you might want to try to put your deer food plots closer to cover. As far as pheasant and quail if you're looking at doing food plots for them, you know, you might be looking at a little bit further away from cover. So you get it away from aerial predators like hawks and things like that, you know, you can

feed a number of species with food plots and attract them. And it's just, once again, it's up to the species that you're wanting to manage for and where you placed that food plot.



Olivia Hanlon 03:20

Okay, so going off of that when we talk about food plots, most people think of feeding deer, but what other species of wildlife are there that we can plant food plots for or that are most commonly planted for?



Kevin Andersen 03:32

Right, those are great questions. A lot of the folks I work with down in the southern southeastern part of my area, are always interested in deer and wild turkeys and things like that. And, you know, we always think about, you know, corn, sorghum, soybeans, you know, turnips, things like that for deer. Other species, I always think of bobwhite quail, pheasants as far as upland gamebirds, you could even think about songbirds, a lot of people will plant sunflowers for songbirds, you would think about for pheasant and quail, you would think about millets, grain, sorghum, even your soybeans and corn work well for them as well, you know, just this a myriad of different kinds of food plots for different species, depending on what species you truly want to manage for.



Olivia Hanlon 04:20

Perfect, so you've covered it a bit, but what are some of the really popular plants that we should consider putting in our food plots?



Kevin Andersen 04:30

Right, that's a really good question. As far as plants, I was trying to think about the species so if I'm thinking about whitetail deer, you know, a lot of the folks I work with will choose corn. I mean corns out on the landscape, corn is fairly easy to get planted and to get growing, if you know a farmer, if you have your own equipment. But if you have a lot of deer, you would say boy, I need to plant up to five acres of corn just to feed my deer throughout the fall and winter. You could do you know just plain old soybeans. If I look at bird species, I want to be thinking about grains, sorghums, I want to be thinking about millets things like that common sunflowers. They're really good. I know our gold finches love them. Our morning doves love them, pheasant quail love them. I've seen turkeys out in the sunflower plots, things like that. I mean, it sounds redundant, but it always goes back to the species you want to manage for and what type of you know plants that you want to plant. There's even some native plants like Partridge Pea, Illinois bundle flower

that will produce seeds annually up to perennially that can feed our wildlife as well.



Olivia Hanlon 05:38

Okay, are there plants that can be versatile to multiple species? Or should we always consider planting a food plot for each separate species?



Kevin Andersen 05:47

Really good question. No, if I think about let's just say whitetail deer, which is always really popular, like you said before, lots of different food plots work, green brows like clovers, alfalfas worked really well. But turkeys are also attracted to that, cottontail rabbits would be attracted to you know, clovers and things like that. Even like your pheasant and quail will be attracted to clovers taking their young of the year and they're to pick insects off of it. And if I'm talking about grain sorghum, or millet, like pearl millet, or proso millet or things like that, you would think well, that's just for birds. But you might also have turkeys in there, you might also have deer in there kind of nibbling on those plants early. Grain sorghum is an excellent example. You think well, that's for pheasant and quail. That's for turkey later on in the winter to you know, peck at the seedheads. But you will also have whitetailed deer, once they figure out what grain sorghum actually is, they're highly attracted to it. Once you get past a certain spot in the year, you get into October, November. Once they've identified that as a food source, they'll eat that. So you could get specific and plant one plant for one specific species. But usually, if it's grains, a lot of different species of birds and mammals will be attracted to multiple different things.



Olivia Hanlon 07:08

Okay, that's good to know. Sure. It depends a little bit on what type of species you're going for, but when's the best time to think about planting our plot? Or when do we want those plants to come into seeding or bloom?



Kevin Andersen 07:20

That's an excellent question. If you if you think about the type of species, like I'm thinking about pheasant and quail, and I want to having sorghum plot for winter food, I would probably think about since sorghum is a grass, I would think about planting that usually late May and early June, depending on your latitude longitude in Iowa. I would think a little bit earlier in southern Iowa and just a little bit later in Northern Iowa. Sorghum likes warm soil to be planted into you know, if you think about that, you should start thinking about corn, you know, April, May, sunflowers, you can go all the way through May into

June. You know, there's there's other types of grains, I have folks that plant fall and winter food plots to attract whitetails to their farm. I've got folks that have already planted brassicas, radishes, turnips, kale, you know rutabagas, things like that they tried to plant those in July through about now. I'm sure you know that we're pretty dry. We're even getting dry down here in southeast Iowa. So it's kind of a tough time to plant your fall food plots right now, because you don't know if it's going to rain. But once we get into September next week, you can start thinking about planting winter wheat, winter rye, or a cross between wheat and rye. So we can be thinking about planting food plots early. And we can also be thinking about planting food plots later in the summer, even into early fall. So there's always a there's always a time period that we can be planting something to attract wildlife.



Olivia Hanlon 08:56

Great. So these can really be year round projects if you want them to be?



Kevin Andersen 09:00

Absolutely, absolutely. There's even things like double cropping. Let's say I planted soybeans for whitetail deer and I have some brows, you know, the deer have browsed down my soybeans by you know, September and I'm like, well, I don't think it's going to feed my deer throughout the winter, I might want to go in there and broadcast a bushel or two of you know, winter wheat or winter rye, just right over the top of my plot and hope for a nice rain and get some of that green growing in the fall and having an extra food source there which hopefully your winter wheat and winter rye will overwinter and then I have a green food plot again in the spring. So there's also those kind of cool things you can do with those plots.



Olivia Hanlon 09:44

Okay, so what kind of maintenance are we looking at to keep up these plots to kind of track what's going through our plots anything that we should consider for that?



Kevin Andersen 09:53

Right, right. If you think about the different types of grains, if you think about corn, soybeans, kind of the common things that, you know farmers and food plotters would plant, we would think about kind of doing it like the farmers would. We would go out and we would do a soil test, we would want to know if we needed to get our pH, you know, up to a seven, we would want to know that for the reason of if we're going to put fertilizer on

the soil tests will tell us we may need NPK, nitrogen, phosphorus and potash, if we're going to want it to be a healthy food plot, we would want to do those things. We may need to use some type of herbicide, a burndown herbicide or a pre-emerge or a post-emerge herbicide to keep annual weeds at bay in those plots. As far as maintenance, I think of maintenance those things with your annual grains like your sorghum, your soybeans, your sunflowers, corn, things like that, as far as maintenance on a green brows plot like white clover, leaddyno clover, alfalfa or red clover, same thing, soil test, fertilize, putting it in properly with good farming practices. And then thinking about mowing in that first year just to keep the annual weeds down. And then you might want to do on food plots that I help friends with, I always tell them wake your clover up with some fertilizer in the spring like a 62828. And again, in the fall, they're storing nutrients, I would want to put some fertilizer on in the fall. So it just differs whether you're talking about an annual food plot or a perennial food plot.



Olivia Hanlon 11:23

So obviously, this podcast is a great resource for listeners who are interested in getting a food plot started. But if people were looking for more information or a great resource for say, their seeds or something like that, are there some good resources that you could give to our listeners?



Kevin Andersen 11:39

Yeah, as far as books and things like that, I always reach out to individuals, not that you can't Google it and find a lot of sponsors. You know, on the internet, there's a lot of information out there. Some of its good, some of its, you know, mediocre but my personal preference is to reach out to let's say ISU Extension, if you have a specialist. Or reach out to your private lands wildlife biologist, your private lands technician, reach out to your local Pheasants Forever Farm bill biologists, maybe your national Wild Turkey Federation person in your area, you could reach out to DNR management staff at the wildlife units, but manage public lands around the state, county conservation boards. There's a lot of knowledgeable folks out there and I like turning to people not that the resources aren't great, but a lot of the folks around the state that are in my field in conservation have years of experience and can really really get you headed down the right path to be successful at food plots.



Olivia Hanlon 12:36

Yeah, that's great. If people were wanting to get in touch with you, is there a good email that they could reach you at?

K Kevin Andersen 12:43
Yeah, email is perfect. I check my emails every day. My email would be kevin.andersen@dnr.iowa.gov.

O Olivia Hanlon 13:06
Perfect. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you'd like to add on here, Kevin?

K Kevin Andersen 13:12
They were great questions. I think it would really help people get started, you know to become a successful food plotter. I've been food plotting for too many years to count and it's very enjoyable to me. I grew up on a farm in West Central Iowa in Carroll County. So I you know, grew up helping put crops in and helping take crops out, and always had a big garden on my folks and grandparents farm. So food plotting to me kind of just comes naturally but don't get disappointed. I have as many failures as I have successes. Never give up. Always think about even if you have small equipment, even if you just have, you know, a UTV or an ATV and a small little disc or something like that, or just a hand cedar you can do a lot of things with food plotting, and it's always enjoyable. Whether you're trying to attract wildlife or just, you know, have watchable wildlife or if you're trying to feed wildlife or attract it for hunting purposes, just stick with it. And always remember everything starts at the soil level. And if you treat the soil right, you can probably grow up pretty good food plot.

O Olivia Hanlon 14:15
Great. Well, thank you so much for being on Kevin.

K Kevin Andersen 14:15
Absolutely. It was my pleasure.

S Speaker 3 14:15
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