

COLUMNS

Never too late: eating right is good at any age

The recently released Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025, provides direction for living healthy through all life stages, birth through adulthood.

Karen Blakeslee, food safety specialist, K-State Research and Extension, said the guidelines, announced in December 2020, mark the first time the governmental agency has devoted chapters to each life stage, including sections on infants and toddlers and women who are pregnant or lactating.

"We all can make changes to our dietary pattern that can be beneficial at any stage of life, infancy to older adulthood. The Dietary Guidelines take a lifespan approach to meet dietary needs at any age. Good nutrition during the first year of life helps set the foundation for healthy habits as children grow."

Blakeslee champions the phrase from the Dietary Guidelines, "Make Every Bite Count," as a way to good health throughout life. She offers four guidelines:

- Eat a healthy diet throughout

every life stage.

- Choose nutrient-dense foods that fit your personal preferences, cultural traditions and budget.
- Eat foods from each food group that are nutrient-dense and within calorie limits.
- Limit added sugars, saturated fat, sodium and alcoholic beverages.

She notes that those four principles can help reduce the incidence of chronic diseases that affect about 60 percent of Americans.

"Be intentional when making food choices to make every bite of food be the best that it can be for you," Blakeslee said. "Food should be the primary source of nutrients, and including a variety of foods, each day helps meet your personal nutritional needs. Nutrient-dense foods have little to no added sugar, saturated fat and sodium."

Blakeslee also notes that the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025, are not intended to be a rigid prescription for eating right, but they are a guide to make personal choices to meet your nutritional needs.

Family Life

BY: NANCY NELSON
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Easy meals for two or just for you

Do you feel like it just isn't worth the time it takes to prepare a meal for only one or two people? Do you find yourself settling for less healthy frozen dinners or take-out food more often than you would like? If so, you are answering "yes" to these questions. You may be selling yourself short. Try experimenting with the following tips designed to help you find the inspiration to prepare and enjoy healthy meals... even when cooking for one or two. Remember, our health is important, and you are worth the effort!

Healthy Cooking: how to get started –

- Make a plan. Take time to jot down the week's menu and a shopping list. You'll find it makes your grocery shopping easier and ensure that you have everything you need when you're ready to cook.
- Stock your pantry. Keep canned vegetables, beans and fruits on hand for quick and healthy additions to meals. Consider whole grains, such as brown or wild rice, quinoa, barley and pasta. Dried foods are easily portioned for one. More suggestions for pantry staples can be found at <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/ME3516.pdf>.
- Take advantage of your

freezer. Buy in bulk and freeze into smaller quantities that you can thaw and cook for one or two meals. You may be surprised to learn that you can freeze foods, including breads, meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts and seeds. Freezing keeps food fresh longer and helps prevent waste. For the best quality, freeze foods while it's fresh. Many items are sold in convenient resealable packages so you can use just what you need. More tips for staple items to keep in your freezer can be found at <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3517.pdf>.

• Prepare one-dish meals. For quick and simple cooking, choose a dish that serves as the whole meal. Look for dishes that include items from several food groups, such as meats, whole grains, legumes and vegetables. Healthy examples include beef, barley and vegetable stew, chicken, vegetable and rice casserole, turkey and bean casserole, and vegetarian chili.

• Cook a batch and freeze into single portions. For example,

make a casserole or stew and freeze the extra into individual-size servings. Then, take out only the amount of food you need. You will need to experiment so that you don't have more leftovers than you can use. Be sure to write the date and contents on packages and move older packages forward as you add food to your freezer.

• Cook once, use twice. Plan meals so that you can use the extra food in new dishes. For example, cook rice as a side dish for one meal, then use the remainder in a casserole. Bake chicken for a meal and use the leftovers in sandwiches or soup, or toss with greens, dried fruit and nuts for a tasty salad. Or make a meatloaf mixture and bake some as meatloaf and use the rest for meatballs that can be frozen and eaten later.

• Shop with convenience in mind. There will be days when you don't have the time or don't want to cook. So, plan ahead and keep on hand ready-to-eat, low-fat, reduced sodium canned soups and healthy frozen meals or pre-packaged single-serving foods. The latter can be pricey, so stock

up when you find a sale.

Healthy cooking: Making it fun –

Finding inspiration may be one of the biggest challenges when it comes to cooking for one. Fortunately, you can find a multitude of cookbooks about cooking for one or two people. Some even provide practical advice on such things as selecting healthy foods, planning menus, shopping and reading food labels.

Don't be afraid to mix things up and try a nutritious snack instead of a traditional meal when you're short on time or energy. For example, make a smoothie by blending fresh, frozen or canned fruit with low-fat yogurt or milk with ice. It's a great way to use up overripe fruit. Other snack-turned-meal ideas are corn muffins served with apple and cheese slices, or fat-free refried beans mixed with salsa, a small amount of low-fat sour cream and baked tortilla chips.

Finally, why not treat yourself to company from time to time? Invite friends or relatives over to sample some of your home cooking. Or start with a cooking club — it's a great opportunity to try new recipes and have fun in the kitchen.

Nutrition & Finance

BY: CINDY WILLIAMS
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Sulfur management

Last week, I shared information on sulfur research for corn – but it isn't the only crop that will respond to applications of this "fourth major nutrient." For producers managing forage systems that include bromegrass, sulfur can be an important nutrient consideration as well.

A two ton per acre brome crop is estimated to remove approximately eight pounds of sulfur. Work in Kansas has shown consistent forage yield responses to sulfur applications even when soil organic matter levels are greater three percent since the cooler growing season for brome often limits early season sulfur release from organic matter. So while the response you see may not be large – often less than ten percent – applications of up to 15 pounds per acre of actual sulfur under high level management systems can result in some decent yield responses.

Remember: while sulfur is often called the fourth essential nutrient, it is still considered a secondary nutrient. That doesn't mean it's not important, but it does mean balancing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium first will provide greater brome yield responses than reducing any of the "big three" and applying sulfur instead. Sulfur should be given consideration only after balancing other nutrient needs – including necessary lime applications if pH levels are low.

Looking Ahead Lawn Calendar – Cool Season Grasses

The benefits of a healthy turfgrass stand are well documented: reduced weed pressure, better drought stress, etc... Many of the practices we should implement to maintain a healthy stand should be done in the fall. Fertilizer applications and even weed control

often give us the best "bang for our buck" when done then versus in the spring. That doesn't mean there aren't still things we can do this spring, however, to give us a better opportunity for a healthy lawn.

Start with weed control. March is a great time to spot treat broad-leaf weeds as you see them. Treatments are best performed on days with temperatures above 50 degrees and when rainfall will not occur within 24 hours of application.

April is typically the month for redbud trees to bloom – and that means crabgrass preventer applications. Since crabgrass preventers need to be watered into the root zone, plan to apply at least a quarter-inch of water with the application.

If you are thinking of an application of fertilizer, think May, but only if you typically receive enough natural moisture or can provide irrigation to keep turf from going dormant in the summer – if not, fall might be a better time. Got grubs? May is also grub treatment time for products containing imidacloprid or chlorantraniliprole. Water in with a quarter inch of water.

It might be just a little early to get started on some of these chores, but it's never too early to plan. Mark the calendar today for a healthier turfgrass stand this summer.

K-State Garden Hour Webinar Series Off and Running

The K-State Garden Hour webinar series is off and running. Live webinars are held from noon to one on the first and third Wednesday of each month, with presentations recorded for later viewing. Sign up once to get registered for them all at <http://ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour>.

Crops & Soils

BY: DAVID HALLAUER
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Experts outline criteria for buying bulls

For cattle producers, bull sale season has arrived. Prospective buyers are flipping through the sale catalogs and studying the pedigree information, performance data and bull pictures trying to determine where they want to make their investment.

As genomic advancements have progressed, cattle producers have more information than ever before to help with their selections. But for some, all that data can be overwhelming and make it difficult to know what information they should prioritize.

Experts at Kansas State University's Beef Cattle Institute addressed data-driven bull selection during a recent podcast to help cattle producers sort through the data. Dan Moser, president of Angus Genetics, Inc., joined the Kansas State team and offered the following advice.

Genetic Priorities on Data
"Focus first on the economic indexes," Moser said.

He explained that an index is a number that combines trait EPDs – Expected Progeny Differences, which are an estimate of the animal's genetic merit for a given trait compared to other animals – weighted by their economic impact.

K-State beef extension specialist Bob Weaber cautioned buyers to align with the right index for their operation.

"One of the biggest mistakes producers make with indexes is that they select bulls on one index, but raise the calves under a different scenario," Weaber said.

Moser explained it further by citing the terminal index.

"Think about it as a steer index because it combines growth and carcass traits, but does not include maternal traits such as calving ease and cow longevity," he said.

In a scenario where those who are raising cattle don't retain ownership through the cattle feeding phase or participate in a feeder cattle marketing program that documents carcass merit, there may not be a benefit to selecting on the terminal index because the cow/calf producer isn't getting paid a premium on the calves.

While studying the data is an important part of the buying process, Weaber recommends producers do a visual inspection of the cattle.

"While we are improving EPDs and indexes, it is still important to look at the cattle for structural issues so you know that the bulls are sound and will be able to service cows for a long time," he said.

The experts also agreed that there is some data that producers can discard.

"Don't focus on the actual weights and measures because those have already been included in the EPDs," Moser said. Weaber added that the buyer needs to confirm with the seedstock operator that all of the actual data has been turned into their respective breed

association so that the purchaser is assured of accurate data.

"I advise commercial buyers to extend that review of data to the dams of the bulls in consideration," Moser said. "If you are going to base your selections on indexes and EPDs, which you should, then you also need to be working with seedstock producers who are the complete recorders and submitters of the data."

Bull-to-Cow Ratio

As producers plan for their upcoming bull purchases, it is advisable that they know what the breeding demands of that sire will be. Age of the bull, terrain and length of the breeding season are just some factors for consideration when trying to estimate that number according to veterinarian Bob Larson.

"The national average is one mature bull for every 30 cows," Larson said.

Weaber added that yearling bulls will not be able to breed as many cows in season as mature bulls. "Figure out how many months old the bull is at turnout and then follow the rule of one cow per bull for each month of his age," he said.

Larson also stressed the importance of watching the bulls closely during breeding season to look for signs of their inability to mate.

If there are breeding challenges during the season, Weaber and

Larson said that the relationship with seedstock producers in the area will be of importance.

Other Bull Buying Considerations

"Most commercial producers will buy cattle within a 100-mile radius of their ranch. I encourage them to get to know their seedstock vendors in their area," Weaber said. "Get sale catalogs and go look at bulls at a variety of places, and evaluate how those seedstock producers can service your needs."

Moser added that it's also a good idea for the prospective buyer to visit the ranch of the seedstock supplier outside of the sale day.

"Seedstock producers have high value animals. As the buyer you want to make sure they raise cattle in a similar way to how you do," he said.

Larson added that commercial customers should consider the services provided by the seedstock operator when making that purchase.

"A lot of breeders provide transportation services but some will provide even more like helping you market your feeder calves and providing connections with others in the cattle chain," he said.

Moser added, "Write a job description for your bull and then make sure he is qualified for the one you write."

More information on this topic is available on a weekly podcast produced by the Beef Cattle Institute.

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