

News Column

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## FIRST HOLLOW STEM

My 13-year-old son doesn't remember me ever playing catch with him, like I did with his oldest sister. All he knows is that he is growing up with a dad who is old and tired.

Last week, that 24-year-old, oldest child took the youngest to the ball field in Riley for some baseball practice. She also took her 16-year-old sister along for some softball practice. They practiced throwing, and she pitched to each of them so they could get in a little batting practice.

Where was I? I really don't know. I think that was the day I de-wormed the sheep and sorted a few more ewes into the up-close lambing pen. I know it was a Saturday though because big sis was moaning about a sore arm the next day, on the way to church. She said, "I don't know how you used to do this, Dad? My arm is really sore."

Little brother had no sympathy for his sister, or for his old dad. Instead, he pointed out that, "Kelsey says you used to play burnout with her, Dad. Why don't you do that with me?"

Ryan is good at reminding me that I'm old. I try to act young, and try to convince both him and me that I'm not really that old. Then,....I start writing about something that I did 40 years ago,....and realize maybe I am old.

Forty years ago, or maybe more, I remember my dad pasturing his wheat until about mid-April. In those days (another feel old statement), and in the part of the state where I grew up, wheat sometimes didn't joint until mid-April. But, that year it jointed earlier and he had clearly

pastured his wheat too long.

Dad knew that he had messed up and he whined about it for several weeks – something I'm sure he will deny. Then he got lucky. We had a late freeze that damaged most of the wheat that year and Dad's over-grazed field was one of the best around. By being grazed too long, it was far enough behind to not be affected by the freeze.

Sometimes it's better to be lucky than smart.

If I was grazing wheat this year, I wouldn't rely on luck. Instead, I would be crawling around on my hands and knees – dodging cow pies, of course – checking plants for what the experts call First Hollow Stem (FHS). In the old days, we called it jointing. Whatever. It's the same concept. But, I suppose jointing is technically a bit later than FHS.

Cut some plants open and you'll soon understand the First Hollow Stem concept. As the teeny tiny wheat head is about to emerge through the ground in the spring, the first internode will be hollow. This will occur before you can feel the first joint, which is right above the first internode. Therefore, to be safe, you should be looking for the hollow stem instead of feeling for the first hard joint.

First Hollow Stem occurs while the developing head is still below the soil surface, so you'll have to dig to find it. From the bottom up, what you'll find is about one half inch of hollow stem, then the first node (what will be the joint), then a really small wheat head.

Start looking for FHS outside the electric fence, where the wheat hasn't been grazed. When you find it, cattle should be removed to prevent grain yield loss. Yield loss from grazing too long can range from 1% to 5% per day, depending on grazing intensity and weather following cattle removal. If weather is hot, dry, and harsh, then yield losses will be on the higher end.

With this winter's warmer than normal temperatures, First Hollow Stem and jointing

could be earlier than usual. With the earlier maturing varieties that we have now, as compared to 40 years ago, I often start looking for joints in mid-March.

This year, we need to start checking fields earlier. Mid-March will be too late. We need to check fields now!

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to [gmclure@ksu.edu](mailto:gmclure@ksu.edu).

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