

Post Rock Extension District Column

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2026 Winter Wheat conditions

Even though spring is officially here, Mother Nature just wants to keep surprising us with unseasonal weather!! Hopefully, we will get some measurable moisture soon!

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been experiencing some pretty big fluctuations in our temperatures around north central Kansas. Producers may be wondering if our wheat was affected.

The below freezing temperatures occurred Sunday evening, March 15, through Monday morning, March 16. According to our K-State Mesonet stations in each of our counties of our Post Rock District (Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne and Smith), temperatures ranged from 12-16 degrees F. on March 15, and 7-10 degrees F. on March 16. So really low temperatures for this time of year and for the wheat crop!

Since it has been more than 14 days, usually you can determine if any damage has occurred to the growing point (wheat head). For most of our wheat in north central Kansas, the wheat is between Feekes 5 (tillering) and Feekes 6 (jointing). According to K-State Extension research, in the **tillering** stage, temperatures can dip down to 12 degrees F. for two hours, before damage may occur. However, in the **jointing** stage, temperatures can only dip down to 24 degrees F. for two hours before damage may occur. Unfortunately, as you can see, we did experience temperatures that could cause some damage, but truly dependent on the growth stage of your wheat. K-State Extension has an excellent "Wheat Growth Chart" available at any of our district offices.

I did provide a couple of videos on our K-State, Post Rock District, YouTube and website, providing information on freeze damage and an update on the condition of our wheat crop. Simply go to postrock.ksu.edu and click on the "Crops" tab on the left and then "Video series". I also have a couple videos, a demonstration "splitting the wheat stems" along with my latest update on Facebook LIVE! Join us on Facebook by following the Post Rock Extension District!!

So, in the last 2-3 days, I have gathered wheat samples, split the stems and examined the "growing point" and have not found any indication that the growing point was damaged. Somehow, wheat has put on new growth since the low temperatures, especially with the warmer conditions on some days. I honestly don't know how that has happened with the very dry conditions we are experiencing! But you know, wheat does have "nine lives", but just don't know for sure how many are left!!!"

Actually, more of a concern, at this time, is the very dry conditions! We did manage to get a sprinkling in some areas, but we are still in much need of moisture for the wheat to continue to thrive and survive!!!

Producers are now making some really tough decisions on exactly what nutrients along with weed control, needs to be applied to their wheat crop, especially with the rising cost of inputs. Some wheat fields look pretty decent, while other fields are pretty thin due to limited moisture and the planting date. Producers need to evaluate their wheat stands for potential yield to determine what their management options might be. K-State Extension does have resources available for helping to determine potential yields that are available online or at any of our district offices.

Other things to watch for are insects that might be affecting the wheat. According to the K-State Extension entomologists, brown wheat mites have been very active in southwest Kansas and in central Kansas in Saline County. The brown wheat mites are early predators and tend to like hot and dry conditions so thus the reason for the higher populations. I have done some looking around our district, but have not really found any significant populations. They could be active for another couple weeks depending on our weather conditions.

If you have more questions, contact me at any Post Rock Extension District Office in Beloit, Lincoln, Mankato, Osborne or Smith Center. Don't forget to go to our Post Rock District webpage at postrock.ksu.edu and take advantage of our many agronomy educational programs to help you with your cropping enterprises. If you were unable to participate in our educational programs this winter, some of the programs were recorded.