Healthcare Insurance Education Initiative, October 24, Schuyler County Courthouse Assembly Room, 4:00 p.m. —6:00 p.m. Contact Darla Campbell at 660-457-3469.

Healthcare Insurance Education Initiative, November 4, Milan Community Center, 6:00 p.m. —7:30 p.m. Contact Darla Campbell at 660-457-3469.

Annie’s Project, November 6, 13, 20, December 4, 11, 18 from 6:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m. Locations include Edina, Marceline, and Montgomery City, MO. Contact Karisha Devlin at 660-397-2179.


Healthcare Insurance Education Initiative, November 6, Seward County Library, Kahoka, MO, 5:30 p.m. —7:30 p.m. Contact Darla Campbell at 660-457-3469.

Healthcare Insurance Education Initiative, November 12, Putnam County Courthouse Old Soldier’s Room, 3:00 p.m. —5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m. Contact Darla Campbell at 660-457-3469.

Healthcare Insurance Education Initiative, November 14, Scotland County Hospital Library, 3:00 p.m. —5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m. Contact Darla Campbell at 660-457-3469.

Missouri Livestock Symposium, December 6-7, Kirksville, MO. [http://www.missourilivestock.com/]

Show-Me-Select Bred Heifer Sale, December 14, F&T Sale Barn, Palmyra, MO.

Show-Me-Select Bred Heifer Sale, December 21, Green City Livestock Marketing, Green City, MO
The Healthcare Insurance Education Initiative

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is the most sweeping health-policy change since Medicare was established in 1965. Congress passed the law in 2010 and the Supreme Court declared it to be Constitutional in 2012. This article touches on a few of these changes. Having access to health insurance, and therefore health care, helps you:

- prevent health problems or find them early on,
- get quality health care,
- get preventive care for free,
- know how much to put aside for health care, and
- prevent personal bankruptcy.

Here are some upcoming changes and one you are probably already aware of:

Since 2010
- Student dependents, like other young adults, can stay on a parent’s insurance until age 26 even if they are married and/or don’t live with the parent (the only thing that disallows them staying on a parent’s plan is if they are employed and their employer offers them insurance, even if it isn’t as good as the parent’s insurance). The parent’s insurance cannot cover an adult child’s spouse or dependents.

Starting in 2014
- Guaranteed coverage: Insurance companies must cover all who apply for insurance. They cannot deny coverage to people with pre-existing conditions. They cannot charge more for people with pre-existing conditions.
- Annual and lifetime coverage limits are prohibited: Insurance companies can no longer drop your coverage, or stop covering your health care expenses, after you have incurred a certain level of expense. In the past, insurance companies sometimes would stop covering your health insurance costs after your costs exceeded a certain amount for the year or within your lifetime. For example, $100,000 in one year, or $300,000 over your lifetime. It is now illegal to impose annual and lifetime limits on required essential health benefits. Health services that do not fall into the 10 categories of essential health benefits (e.g., adult dental care) can still have limits.
- Your insurance company cannot drop your coverage if you get sick, nor can your coverage be dropped if the insurance company or your employer makes a mistake on paperwork. Also, insurance companies cannot temporarily drop your insurance, or retroactively (after you get sick) cancel or discontinue your coverage (called a rescission by insurance companies).
- Preventive care (well visits, cancer screenings, colorectal cancer screenings, mammograms, etc.) is provided free of charge. (This is not necessarily true for grandfathered plans.)

These new rules apply to all new health insurance plans, not just insurance you can purchase in the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Some group plans are “grandfathered” because coverage has not changed since 2010. Grandfathered health plans do not have to follow all of these rules. Your employer will tell you if your plan is grandfathered.

Enrollment began October 1, 2013, but your insurance will not start until Jan. 1, 2014. This year only, the enrollment period runs from Oct. 1, 2013, through March 31, 2014. After this year, the open enrollment period every year will be Oct. 15 through Dec. 7, and insurance coverage will begin Jan. 1 of the following year.
The date you enroll will effect when your insurance coverage begins:
- If you enroll on or before the 15th of the month, your insurance will start the first day of the next month. If you enroll on or after the 16th of the month up until the last day of the month, your insurance will start the first day of the month after the next month. For example:
  - If you enroll by Dec. 15, 2013, your insurance will start Jan. 1, 2014.
  - If you enroll between Dec. 16 and Dec. 31, your coverage will begin Feb. 1.
  - If you enroll on Jan. 2, your insurance will start Feb. 1. If you enroll on Jan. 18, your insurance will start March 1.

The Health Insurance Marketplace is regulated by a set of rules established by the Affordable Care Act. Imagine a farmers market with booths where individual farmers sell their produce to customers. Now replace the farmer with a private health insurance company and the produce with health insurance plans, and the whole farmers market happens online. (These are not government-funded or government-sponsored plans). Each health insurance plan must contain a similar set of essential health benefits. Consumers will be able to compare plans easily across insurance companies within the Marketplace. The information you enter will only be used to communicate with insurance companies. It is not saved.

Marketplaces in every state can be run by the state government or the federal government or through a partnership between them. Missouri’s Marketplace will be run by the federal government, at least initially. Beginning in tax year 2013, Medicare hospital insurance taxes increase by 0.9% to 2.35% of applicable wages above $200,000 annual modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) ($250,000 for couples). MAGI is your Adjusted Gross Income plus untaxed social security benefits plus non-taxable bond interest.

Also starting in 2013, high-income earners will pay a new investment tax on unearned income such as dividends, interest, rent and capital gain. The tax will be 3.8% of, whichever is less, the individual’s net investment income OR any modified adjusted gross income over $200,000 ($250,000 for couples). The first $250,000 ($500,000 for couples) in profit (capital gain) from a home sale is exempt from the Medicare investment tax. Some families’ taxes will go down because they will qualify for premium tax credits (if they buy insurance in the Marketplace and are between 100% and 400% of the federal poverty level).

Premium costs
- Insurance companies cannot charge more for a healthy person than for an unhealthy person. Insurers can charge a higher premium based on the size of the family. For example, an insurance company could charge a family of four more than it charges a family of three.
- Age: Insurance companies can charge a maximum of three times more for a premium for an adult 55 years old or more than for a younger adult. For example, an insurance company can charge up to three times more for someone who is 55 than for someone who is 35. So if the cost of the premium was $100/month for the 35-year-old, the insurer could charge no more than $300/month for the 55-year-old based on age differences. In the past insurance companies have charged 10 to 14 times more for older adults than for younger adults.
- Tobacco: An insurance company can charge up to 1.5 times more for an adult who is a tobacco user than for an adult who is not. For example, for two adults of the same age, if the premium is $100 for the non-user of tobacco, the cost for the tobacco user can be no more than $150. It is unclear how a company would verify tobacco use status; one way could be from your medical records. If you do not disclose your tobacco-use status on an application, it would be considered fraud and could result in loss of coverage or an increase in premium.

Each insurance company in the Health Insurance Marketplace can offer four different types of “qualified” health insurance plans to be included in the Health Insurance Marketplace — Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum.
A Bronze plan (60/40) will cover on average 60% of health care costs, leaving the consumer responsible for 40%. Silver (70/30) plans are 70%-30% meaning on average they will cover 70% of the cost and the consumer is responsible for 30%; Gold (80/20) are 80%-20%; Platinum (90/10) are 90%-10%. Platinum is not available in Missouri. There are limits on costs to consumers with income below two-and-a-half times (250% of) the federal poverty level. For example, someone with income between actual poverty level (100%) and 133% of the poverty level who is enrolled in a Silver plan will pay only approximately 6% of health care costs.) All plans must include the required essential benefits.

Costs vary based on family size, age, tobacco use, and geographic region within the state. These are the costs before Premium Tax Credits (financial assistance) are applied:

- **Bronze plans (60/40)**
  Average premium cost for individual: $140-$218

- **Silver plans (70/30)**
  Average premium cost for individual: $186-$270

- **Gold plans (80/20)**
  Average premium cost for individual: $211-$335

Every County in Northeast Missouri will be holding an educational meeting on this topic from now through December 7th, so contact your local Extension office to find out when yours is scheduled.

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**AGRIBUSINESS NOTES**

Joe Koenen

**Farm Estate/Business Transition Planning – Getting from Here to There**

In my almost 34-year career (in December I will mark that officially) one of the things that has been frustrating is the number of farmers/landowners who know they should do estate planning yet the few that actually go ahead and do it. I am not going to sit here and tell you that it is simple or that you don’t have to update from time to time but you do have to get from here to there so let’s discuss that here.

First off, the state of Missouri has a plan if you don’t do anything before you die but I’m willing to bet you won’t like it. I think there are some critical steps to get from where you are to where you hopefully want to be.

1. **Sit down as a couple and discuss what you’d like to do with your assets.** You may not always agree (I won’t say that my wife and I do completely either) but it starts the conversation.
2. **Determine if the farm business or land will continue in the family.** This is the point where a child or children may need to be involved, at least to decide whether or not they are interested in the farm or in keeping the land. Yes, this can get complicated sometimes but it is critical. I have been involved with parents that wanted the farm to continue that had children that had absolutely no interest too – it won’t work.
3. **Learn all the basic information you can on estate planning so you are knowledgeable enough to make decisions with assistance.** University of Missouri Extension holds classes every January/February in different locations that provide some of this basic information. The tentative dates for 2014 are January 14, 21, 28 and February 4. This program can help you have the basic knowledge that can help you when you go to a professional (attorney, etc.) later on. We also can provide individuals with some basic materials at a small charge or individual assistance if needed to prepare you better for the professional.
4. **Seek out a competent attorney with Agriculture and estate planning expertise.** This is not as easy as you think but is a very important step where many people stop. Your local family friend who is an attorney may not be the best person to go to (and likely isn’t if your farm estate amounts to very much). These folks are also very likely to be busy so you may have to keep after them to get your plan on the front burner.

You pay for expertise so expect to pay for an attorney’s time and expertise – good ones are well worth it.
(5) **An estate/farm transition plan can protect you from some issues but can’t do everything.** You have to determine what are your bigger concerns (probate costs, estate taxes, treating non-farm heirs and a farm heir equitably, protecting the farm from long-term care asset seizure) but the fact is you can’t do everything normally. Your attorney can help you determine what to protect but in the end it’s your choices.

(6) **Communicate your estate plan to your heirs.** This is another really tough step for families to take but is one of the most critical. I always say “not having a plan guarantees family conflicts after your gone, having a plan that no one but you knows about can lead to conflicts as well”. Does a communicated plan assure no conflict? – no, but it at least shows you tried to tell everyone your wishes and can help.

(7) **Go over the plan and make changes on a regular basis.** An estate/business transition plan is not something to put on the shelf and forget. Why not? Laws change on a regular basis and so do family situations. Finally, your assets change over time also. This needs to be a living document that you look at every 2 to 3 years at a minimum.

Putting it off will not avoid hard feelings or conflicts forever and could mean legal battles in a worst case scenario (trust me, I have been involved in some of those) Farms have a large amount of assets to protect and with current land values are worth that protection. If you would like to know the specific locations of our classes or have individual questions, please feel free to contact your county Extension Office to connect you with your Agricultural Business Specialist or contact koenenj@missouri.edu.

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AGRONOMY NOTES

Missourians Encouraged to Contribute Drought Monitor Reports

North Missouri has experienced drier than normal summers for the past two years. This current dry weather pattern is following an extended wet period dating back to the early 1990s. Weather patterns in Missouri can change abruptly from extreme wet to extreme dry according to Pat Guinan, University of Missouri Extension Climatologist with the Commercial Ag program. He provides information on a state wide level for Missouri to the Drought Monitor Index. But the public is also welcome submit comments by visiting the website [http://droughtreporter.unl.edu](http://droughtreporter.unl.edu) and clicking on the “Submit a Report” tab. There everyone has the opportunity to make comments about the impact the drought is having on the area. The website is operated by the National Drought Mitigation Center and is located in Lincoln, Nebraska. This information helps decision makers determine the categories of drought to assign to the state. The more information they have the better able they are to make accurate decisions.

Comments submitted to the website are seen by the Drought Monitor authors and the public as well. Participants are encouraged to submit information regularly to establish a change in the situation over time. These comments help the authors to determine the severity of drought which range from abnormally dry to exceptional drought.

- Abnormally Dry (D0) is defined when going into a drought as: short term dryness slowing planting, growth of crops and pastures, above average fire risk; and when coming out of drought: some lingering water deficits; pastures and crops not fully recovered.

- Moderate Drought (D1) is defined as some damage to crops and pastures; fire risk high; streams, reservoirs, or wells low, some water shortages developing or imminent, voluntary water use restriction requested.
• Severe Drought (D2) is defined as crop or pasture losses likely; very high fire risk, and water shortages common.

• Extreme Drought (D3) is defined as major crop and pasture losses; extreme fire danger; widespread water shortages or restrictions.

• Exceptional Drought (D4) is defined as widespread crop and pasture losses, exceptional fire risk, water shortages to the point of creating water emergencies.

The drought monitor for the United States is updated weekly and can be viewed at http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu

HORTICULTURE NOTES

PREPARING YOUR GARDEN FOR WINTER

The days are getting shorter, the nights longer and trees are turning color and beginning to drop their leaves. We are nearing the end of the growing season, which means you need to prepare your garden beds for winter soon. Start with a clean up. Remove dead annual flowers and vegetables, and if not diseased or insect infested, add them to the compost pile. Till your soil to expose insects and insect eggs to the surface so they are exposed to the winter elements. Fall tilling also makes it easier to work your soil in the spring. If you have never had a soil test done or haven’t for several years, you might consider taking one this fall. Take several samples of soil from your garden, usually a sample from the corners and a few in the middle, mix them together in a bucket, and take at least two cups to your county extension center. It will be sent to the University of Missouri soil testing lab and you will receive a report typically within 10 days. After you remove spent plants from your raised beds, work up the beds and add compost if needed. This will make spring planting easier. If you have a row cover or small greenhouse, you might consider extending your season by placing it over a raised bed. You can grow cool-season crops like lettuce, spinach, kale and other greens well into December. Then you can cover them with some straw, and they will perk up again in February as the days get longer and warmer.

You can cut back faded or dead foliage on perennials after the first hard frost, unless they add color to your garden in winter, or if you want to leave the seed heads for the birds. Leave dead foliage on chrysanthemums. Research has proven that mums not cut back, over-winter better than those that were cut. Apply a 2-4 inch layer of mulch around your perennials, bulb beds, trees and shrubs. It will help suppress weeds, hold in moisture, and give some protection from the elements of winter. You can use shredded leaves from your lawn or other loose materials like pine needles, wood chips, bark chips or coarse gravel. Do not use un-shredded leaves or other matter that compacts easily because it will mat down and suffocate the plants. Bulb beds can be covered with evergreen boughs.

Modern, bush-type roses (hybrid teas, floribundas, and grandifloras) require protection during the winter months. Exposure to low temperatures and rapid temperature changes can severely injure and often kill unprotected roses. Hilling or mounding soil around the base of each plant is an excellent way to protect bush-type roses. Mound the soil 10 to 12 inches high around the base of the canes. Place additional material, such as straw or leaves, over the mound of soil. A small amount of soil placed over the straw or leaves should hold these materials in place. Prepare modern roses for winter after plants have been hardened by several nights of temperatures in the low to mid-twenties. Shrub roses like ‘Knockout’ or ‘Carefree Beauty’ do not need this type of protection.
Strawberries are also susceptible to winter injury. Temperatures below 20°F may kill flower buds and damage the roots and crowns of unprotected plants. Repeated freezing and thawing of the soil through the winter months can heave unprotected plants out of the soil and also cause considerable damage. Apply a 3-5 inch layer of straw mulch over your strawberries in late fall. Allow the strawberry plants to harden or acclimate to the cool fall temperatures before mulching the bed.

Rake up and compost fallen leaves on the lawn. Before the ground freezes, water evergreens, especially broad-leaved ones deeply, and spray them with anti-desiccants if they are planted in exposed, windy areas. If necessary, protect them with burlap screens to minimize heaving, desiccation, scalding from intense sun, and other winter damage.

Wrap young trees, especially recently planted trees or thin, smooth-barked trees like maples and crabapples. I even wrap my young fruit trees. Get a tree wrap from a garden center or farm supply store and wrap from the base of the trunk to the first branch, allowing some overlap to allow water to escape. I secure the ends with electrician’s tape or duct tape. During the winter months, rabbits often gnaw on the bark of many woody plants. Heavy browsing can result in the complete girdling of small trees and small branches clipped off at snow level. Apple, pear, crabapple, and serviceberry are frequent targets of rabbits. Small trees with smooth, thin bark are the most vulnerable. The best way to prevent rabbit damage to young trees is to place a cylinder of chicken wire around the tree trunk. The cylinder should stand about 1 to 2 inches from the tree trunk and 20 inches above the ground. The bottom 2 to 3 inches should be buried beneath the soil. Small shrubs, roses, and raspberries can be protected with chicken wire fencing also.

Cover containers that will remain outdoors to prevent them from filling with water, freezing, and cracking. Clean terra-cotta pots and concrete containers, and store them in the garage or potting shed to protect them from the elements. Drain your water hose and bring it in so it doesn’t freeze. Clean and store tools, ceramic pots and birdbaths. Putting them away before the harsh weather starts will prolong the life of these garden essentials.