

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture: FAQs

### **What is the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture?**

The Kerr Center is a 501c(3) non-profit educational foundation established in 1985. The home office, farm, and ranch are located near Poteau in southeastern Oklahoma. The Kerr Center also operates the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm and Museum near Sallisaw, Oklahoma.

**How was the Kerr Center created?** The Kerr Foundation was established in 1965 from the estate of Senator Robert S. Kerr. The foundation's agricultural division served farmers and ranchers in southeastern Oklahoma with information and educational activities until 1985.

In that year, the Kerr Foundation was separated into four new foundations. The "ag division" became the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, continuing its primary work of educational outreach, but with a new focus on helping family farms statewide become more sustainable—more environmentally sound as well as economically viable. Dr. James E. Horne has been president since 1985.

**How is the Kerr Center supported?** The Kerr Center operates on the earnings from its own endowment, as well as grants and donations. Individuals and organizations may donate through the Friends of the Kerr Center program.

**What are the Kerr Center programs?** Core programs are: Education/Communications, Oklahoma Producer Grants, Public Policy, the Stewardship Farm and Ranch, and the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm.

The Kerr Center administers the Professional Development Program of the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, Southern region, the first non-governmental group to do so.

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council is a joint project of the Kerr Center and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry.

In recent years, the center has created a Community Foods Program with support from USDA grants.

**Who is on staff?** Professional staff members have expertise in agricultural economics, horticulture, biology/ecology, animal science, public policy, law, communications, and business.

**What are the Kerr Center's educational offerings?** The center sponsors a variety of educational events for farmers and ranchers and those interested in sustainable food and farming systems. The quarterly newsletter *Field Notes* is free. *The Next Green Revolution: Essential Steps to a Healthy, Sustainable Agriculture*, by the Kerr Center's president Jim Horne and communications director Maura McDermott, is used worldwide. The Kerr Center website ([www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com)) has complete information on programs and events as well as many educational publications.

**What are the values by which the Kerr Center is governed?** The Kerr Center believes that a sustainable agriculture must be socially equitable, profitable for producers and ecologically sound. The Kerr Center values and supports the family farm structure of agriculture, a fair playing field for independent farmers and ranchers, public research for the public domain, the enhancement and protection of natural resources, respect for nature, and local/regional food systems that enhance local economies.

**What is its mission statement?** The mission of the Kerr Center is to assist in developing sustainable food and farming systems by:

Supporting farms that provide a perpetual stream of economic goods and ecological/environmental benefits, and which enhance the quality of life of farm families, rural residents and society as a whole;

Promoting markets made up of independently owned and operated farms and firms of a scale appropriate to offer a wide variety of product choices for consumers and economic opportunities for existing and beginning farmers;

Encouraging communities to protect the land from misuse, exploitation, and unfettered urban development; to ensure inclusion and equality of opportunity for all; to promote community food security; and support economic development from within;

Proclaiming the need for a culture that respects the earth and all of its diversity of life, and recognizes the physical, social and spiritual connections between people within a higher order of things.

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## The Oklahoma Food Policy Council: FAQs

### **W**hat is the Oklahoma Food Policy Council?

The council is a joint project of the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF).

### **What is a food policy?**

It is any decision made (or not made) by a government or institution, which shapes the type and cost of foods used or available, influences the opportunities for farmers and employees, or affects the food choices available to consumers.

### **Who are the members of the Oklahoma Food Policy Council?**

A dozen Oklahomans representing diverse groups make up the council. About the same number of ad hoc members contribute their expertise.

### **When was it established?**

The council was established on October 16, 2001, at the Kerr Center's *Bringing in the Sheaves* symposium.

### **Why was it established?**

- To broaden the discussion of issues beyond agricultural production to a more comprehensive, food system-wide examination.
- To provide an opportunity for a focused examination of how state and local government actions shape the food system.
- To create a forum in which people involved in all

different parts of the food system and government can meet to learn more about what each one does and to consider how their actions impact other parts of the system.

- To improve nutrition and the provision of nutritional information throughout Oklahoma.
- To create an infrastructure within the food system which will better connect stakeholders such as food producers, consumers, communities, food processors, marketers, and government agencies, including those agencies which may also be consumers.
- To improve the economic status of Oklahomans involved in the food system by creating new opportunities, increasing profitability, and ensuring that food dollars stay close to home through local processing, enhanced distribution, direct marketing, diversification of products, and distribution of information regarding presently underutilized opportunities.

### **What can a food policy council do that is not already being done elsewhere in government?**

- A food policy council can bring to the table a broader array of interests and voices, many of whom are not typically asked to be involved when farm and agriculture policy is discussed.
- A food policy council can examine issues— such as hunger in the state, the nutritional well being of citizens, and how to increase purchases of locally grown food— with fresh eyes.

- An food policy council can employ a more comprehensive approach to analyzing issues, which recognizes the interrelation between different parts of the food system and the need to coordinate and integrate action if policy goals are to be achieved.

**What has the Oklahoma food policy council accomplished so far?**

For its first project, the council examined the potential for increasing the amount of Oklahoma-grown and/or processed foods purchased by public institutions in the state. A survey of institutional food service directors was devised and mailed to 638 public institutions, 85% of which were public schools.

The response to the survey was overwhelming, with almost 67% completing and mailing back the survey. The council published *The Oklahoma Farm-to-School Report*, containing an analysis of the survey answers as well as an examination of the importance of increasing local consumption of locally produced foods.

The main finding of the survey was that a high percentage of schools were interested in buying locally grown foods, but did not know what was available and how to connect with farmers.

In response to this need, the council compiled a directory of Oklahoma food producers and what they grow along with schools interested in buying locally. *The Oklahoma Food Connection* was published in 2003 and updated in 2006.

Armed with the results of the survey and with the help of partners in the Oklahoma Departments of Human Services and Education, the council organized a successful farm-to-school pilot project in four school districts in 2004, which was expanded to six in 2005. In 2006, 40 school districts served Oklahoma-grown watermelons and honeydew melons.

Children's advocacy groups such as the Fit Kids Coalition and the Institute for Child Advocacy recognized the potential that the program has to improve the eating habits, and health, of Oklahoma's schoolchildren. Through the efforts of these groups and others, the Oklahoma legislature created and funded a state farm-to-school program in spring 2006. The coordinator of the program will work with schools and with farmers to expand the program further.

Oklahoma Food Policy Council  
Contact the Kerr Center for more information  
at 918.647.9123 • [www.kerrcenter.com/ofpc](http://www.kerrcenter.com/ofpc)

## Building a Foundation for Community Food Security in Oklahoma

In 2004, the Kerr Center received a three-year grant (# 2004-33800-15141) from the USDA's Community Foods Grant Program. The funded project entitled "Building a Foundation for Food Security in Oklahoma" has enabled the Kerr Center and the Oklahoma Food Policy Council to work with diverse groups to craft comprehensive responses to pressing food, farm and nutrition issues in the state.

The overarching goal of the project is to help Oklahomans understand and establish sustainable local food systems that are mutually beneficial to both consumers and producers.

Through these food systems, it is hoped that people of all ages and income levels will be able to access and regularly eat nutritious, locally-grown food produced profitably and sustainably by small and medium-sized family farms.

### **Closer to Home—an Analysis of Oklahoma's Food System, from Field to Fork**

The research and writing of this report, *Closer to Home: Healthier Food, Farms and Families in Oklahoma*, was funded by this grant.

The purpose of this report is to increase the knowledge base of the Oklahoma Food Policy Council and other policy makers, as well as to present food issues to the public in an understandable way.

This report identifies the greatest threats to health and food security in the state. It identifies the counties in Oklahoma with high poverty rates and poor access to food where community food projects such as farm-to-school might be established.

The report proposes that Oklahomans, both young and old, could be healthier if they ate more foods grown "closer to home," i.e., on Oklahoma farms, and it explores the possible economic benefits to Oklahoma farmers of expanding production of the foods Oklahomans need to eat to be healthy.

A food system encompasses  
agricultural production,  
food processing and distribution,  
and consumption and nutrition.

*Closer to Home* also suggests actions and policies for addressing the specific problems and opportunities identified in each chapter.

### **Educational Activities**

In addition to this report, other grant-funded activities are:

- An educational campaign about community food security and community food projects such as farm-to-school (using the Kerr Center newsletter, newspaper articles, educational brochures, and web pages).
- Outreach to low income families (providing information about healthy farm-fresh food and local sources such as farmers' markets).
- Curriculum/activities on locally grown food and local farms for schoolchildren and teachers (such as farm and garden tours, farmers' speaker bureau, and Ag in the Classroom curriculum).
- Expanding farm-to-school programs (information guides and workshops for farmers and food service, and information transfer to policy makers).

The project has brought together groups from sectors (agriculture, health and education) that have not previously worked closely together, creating a critical mass of energy, expertise and enthusiasm that is building a foundation for community food security in Oklahoma.

## USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service: Community Food Projects

**T**he Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program (CFPCGP) has existed since 1996 as a program to fight food insecurity through developing community food projects that help promote the self-sufficiency of low-income communities.

Community Food Projects are designed to increase food security in communities by bringing the whole food system together to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs.

The 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (FAIR) established new authority for federal grants to support the development of Community Food Projects, and the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 re-authorized the program. The program is designed to:

- Meet the needs of low-income people by increasing their access to fresher, more nutritious food supplies.
- Increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs.
- Promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues.

Additionally, projects should:

- Meet specific state, local, or neighborhood food and agricultural needs for infrastructure improvement and development.
- Plan for long-term solutions.
- Create innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers.

Preferred projects also develop linkages between two or more sectors of the food system, support the development of entrepreneurial projects, develop innovative linkages between the for-profit and non-profit food sectors, encourage long-term planning activities, and build the long-term capacity of communities to address the food and agricultural problems of communities, such as food policy councils and food planning associations.

These grants are intended to help eligible private nonprofit entities that need a one-time infusion of federal assistance to establish and carry out multi-purpose community food projects. Projects are funded from \$10,000-\$300,000 and from 1 to 3 years. They are one-time grants that require a dollar-for-dollar match in resources. Approximately 18 percent of the submitted proposals have received awards during the history of this program. Funds have been authorized through the year 2007 at \$5 million per year.