



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

December 2016

Season's greetings from the Kerr Center!

Following our habit, we've devoted the December issue to a look back over the **highlights and accomplishments of the year**. Please have a look to see what's been happening on the Kerr Ranch and around the state in our **horticulture, conservation, and sustainable livestock management programs**. There's also a **quick peek ahead at the horticulture program's directions for 2017**, from Kerr Center President David Redhage.

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As always, if you value our work - past, present, or future - please also consider supporting it!

President's Note: Kerr Center Horticulture 2017

We are fast approaching the end of 2016 and looking forward into next year. The Kerr Center will be moving to incorporate more plasticulture at the horticulture farm in 2017.

While we will continue to rotate summer fallow and winter cover crops, some of the vegetable work will use plasticulture techniques.

Due to the climate extremes we have been experiencing, we think plasticulture offers us the opportunity to be more successful in our vegetable production work. I have concerns about using petroleum-based products extensively in crop production, and the corresponding disposal issues. I am also concerned about how to maintain organic matter when using plastic mulch. But in light of climate, weed and labor challenges, not trying different methods is not an option.



What is the difference between global warming, climate change, and climate extremes? All are talked about and argued about. I don't get into arguments about global warming and how much is natural or man-made. The way I see it, the climate has always been changing, and we need to learn how to adapt agricultural production techniques to minimize the effect of those changes.

The averages seem to be the same over years, but it is the extremes that are causing production problems. What do I mean by this? Well, the average temperature for both 40-60° F and 20-80° F is the same: 50° F. The average of 50° doesn't sound bad, does it? Many cool-season plants can survive very well between 40-60°, but would struggle in the 20-80° extremes.

Rainfall is another example. Having four inches of rain with one inch per week sounds nice, but one four-inch rainstorm per month is a problem. Or how about one inch of rain over six hours vs. one inch in 30 minutes?

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Horticulture: Propagating Perennials

The [horticulture program](#) maintains the [bio-extensive cover crop rotation](#) on the full acreage of the [certified organic](#) Cannon Horticulture plots. This year, the plots grew an array of summer vegetables, including squash and watermelons. Another section reserved for perennial crops went into an expanded **elderberry planting**.



Interest in elderberries' potential as a new crop for Oklahoma growers continues to surge, as reflected by high attendance at this year's [elderberry workshop](#), held at Brent & Valerie Madding's 360 Farms, as well as the [segment aired on "Oklahoma Gardening."](#)

In addition, this year saw the addition of a second perennial crop to the mix on the Cannon plots. The Kerr Center participated as one of a number of sites in an OSU **variety trial of lavender**. Not all the varieties in the trial performed well under our conditions - but since the point of the project is to identify which varieties are better adapted to different parts of the state, that's still valuable information.

By way of outreach, this year the horticulture program published a **video** explaining [how the Kerr Center used a tractor-mounted bed shaper to build raised beds](#) right in the fields. In low-lying areas like the Cannon plots, that **extra few inches of soil elevation can make all the difference** between a crop surviving a flood or having to be replanted or written off.

Conservation: Promoting Pollinators

The Kerr Center's [pollinator landscape plantings](#) are well established by now, and our emphasis this year was on **"planting" the ideas and know-how behind them in other locations around the state:** Oklahoma City, Lawton, Norman, Shawnee, Stillwater, and Tulsa, to name some. The project also received publicity from a [TV segment on "Oklahoma Gardening"](#) and from a mention on the website of the Tulsa Zoo.



As usual, the ranch also hosted several other events related to soil and water conservation throughout the year, including a plant identification workshop for employees of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation service, and a soil judging contest for area chapters of the Future Farmers of America.

Livestock: Refining the Rotation

This year, the [livestock program](#) continued its ongoing **grazing study**. "The hope is that this study will answer questions on how forage utilization and stock density affect the quality and quantity of stockpiled forage," says Cattle Manager Will Lathrop. "Also, **how differences in stock density influence weed infestations, soil fertility, and overall pasture productivity.**"



The study incorporates two stock densities and two utilization rates for a total of four treatments. Each treatment is grazed once in the spring and again in the fall. Forage quantity and quality, along with soil fertility, are tracked in each treatment over the course of this long-term study.

The study is now completing its third year. In the first year, rainfall was spread evenly throughout the year, which made for unusually wet weather in July and August. As a result, large amounts of high-quality fall forage were available to stockpile for winter grazing.

The study's second year saw a much higher rainfall total, but concentrated heavily - over 18 inches - in May. This flooding postponed the start of grazing by a month, and killed all forages except bermudagrass, cutting into both quantity and quality of forage.

Rainfall in 2016 has been closer to normal, though still higher than usual in August. After that wet summer, weed pressure increased - especially in the low-density treatment, which ultimately had to be mowed to knock the weeds back. Drought conditions took hold during the fall, and limited the growth of fall forage for winter stockpiling.

Not many conclusions can be drawn from such a short span of time. However, Lathrop reports that the results so far indicate that during wetter than normal years, **higher stock density grazing could provide higher-quality stockpiled forage without damaging production** in subsequent years.

As it does most years, the livestock program this year hosted a [workshop](#) to familiarize livestock producers with the philosophy and practice of rotational grazing systems as implemented on the Kerr Ranch. A **fact sheet released this year**, [Grazing Management](#), summarizes the key points of that approach in print form.

Don't Miss the Horticulture Industries Show!

The [Horticulture Industries Show](#) is coming up **January 13-14 in Fayetteville**. In addition to the usual slate of stellar speakers, it offers the chance to hear from two former Kerr Center employees: George Kuepper and Luke Freeman. Also, take a look at [Southern SAWG's annual conference](#) in **Kentucky at the end of the month**.

JAN 10 Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Jan 10 @ 9:00 am
JAN 13 Fri	Horticulture Industries Show @ The Chancellor Hotel, Fayetteville, AR Jan 13 – Jan 14 all-day
JAN 25 Wed	Southern SAWG Conference: Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms @ Lexington, KY Jan 25 – Jan 28 all-day
FEB 14 Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Feb 14 @ 9:00 am

The Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#) provides full details on these and many other sustainable agriculture goings-on all around the state and region. It also serves as a reminder for the dates of **monthly Kerr Center tours**, which run all year round, every second Tuesday by appointment.

Don't forget that you can also use our online calendar to **keep yourself and your friends up to date** on these and other upcoming events, including our tours:

- **Subscribe to our feed** and receive **updates to your personal calendar** (Outlook, Google+, etc.) as they are made.
- **Share events on the calendar** via a number of **different social media sites**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

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