



# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

*E-Field Notes*  
February 2017

This month we take a look at some tips for tasks that are timely as winter winds to a close:

- **assessing cattle's body condition by eye**
- **starting transplants from seed**

We also report some **sad news from monarch butterflies' wintering grounds** in Mexico - as well as David Redhage's thoughts on **what can be done to help right here in Oklahoma.**

As always, if you value our work, [please consider supporting it!](#)

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## President's Note: Monarch Butterflies

Many of you may be aware of the plight of the monarch butterfly. This iconic species is struggling to maintain and grow its population.



Each year surveys are conducted in the mountains above Mexico City to determine how many monarchs made the migration successfully. Last year's early fall count showed an increase from previous years, but a late winter storm seems to have wiped out the increase, and the butterflies were not able to recover last year.

There are many theories as to why monarchs are struggling, from changing weather patterns to land use in the upper Midwest. In the upper Midwest, where most monarchs migrate on their way north, the amount of land under cropping has increased. With the use of GMO Roundup Ready crops, there is evidence that the amount of milkweed available to monarchs for egg laying and larval development has dropped. It is also important to have flowering plants available in the fall, so migrating monarchs can feed as they travel south.

In both the spring migration north and the fall migration south, Texas and Oklahoma are critical since they are in the "funnel" corridor. It is up to us to help the monarch's population by planting and restoring habitat as well as protection existing habitat. Doing so also benefits other native pollinators.

The Kerr Center has [several publications available on native pollinator habitat](#). One of our newest publications lists [all species of milkweed native to Oklahoma](#). By doing your part to plant milkweeds for larva and flowering plants for the adult monarchs to feed on, you can add some much needed habitat. Help us save the monarch!

# Body Condition Scoring

Last month, we talked about the [weight loss that cattle tend to undergo during the winter months, and approaches to managing it.](#)

But if you don't happen to own an expensive set of livestock scales, **how do you monitor cattle's weight?**

**One handy tool is body condition scoring (BCS) - a visual numeric estimate of an animal's overall status.**



Done at regular intervals, with good records, BCS can clearly show trends in herd status, including winter weight loss (as well as compensatory gain in spring).

OCES offers such a good [fact sheet on BCS scoring](#) that we use theirs as a handout at our own livestock workshops. It's free from your local Extension office, or from the [Kerr Center website.](#)

# Seeds, Seeding & Growing Transplants

Spring is still officially a month off, but **the time for getting transplants started is already upon us.** The [Kerr Center's horticulture library](#) offers a succinct walk-through of this critical phase of both home and market gardening.

[Seeds, Seeding, and Growing Transplants](#) is a presentation from the horticulture track of the Oklahoma Beginning Farmer & Rancher Program. It covers **seed biology, germination, storage, variety selection, planting dates, field & greenhouse plantings, and growing out transplants.**

"Seeds, Seeding, and Growing Transplants" is available **free from the Kerr Center website.** Download a copy today and learn how to **give your seedlings the best possible start on the season.**

## Seeds, Seeding & Growing Transplants

Luke Freeman, Horticulture Program Assistant  
Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
Beginning Farmer Workshop, May 19, 2012



The Kerr Center  
for Sustainable Agriculture



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture

# Monarch Butterfly Numbers Drop by 27 Percent in Mexico

*from Phys.org:*

The number of monarch butterflies wintering in Mexico dropped by 27 percent this year, reversing last year's recovery from historically low numbers, according to a study by government and independent experts.

The experts say the decline could be due to late winter storms last year that blew down more than 100 acres (40 hectares) of forests where migrating monarch butterflies spend the winter in central Mexico.



Millions of monarchs make the 3,400-mile (5,500-kilometer) migration from the United States and Canada each year, and they cluster tightly in the pine and fir forests west of Mexico City. They are counted not by individuals, but by the area they cover...

Officials estimate the storms in March killed about 6.2 million butterflies, almost 7.4 percent of the estimated 84 million that wintered in Mexico, said Alejandro Del Mazo, Mexico's commissioner for protected areas. The monarchs were preparing to fly back to the U.S. and Canada at the time the storm hit.

While no butterfly lives to make the round trip, a reduction in the number making it out of the wintering grounds often results in a decline among those who return the next year....

[Read the rest of this article on phys.org.](#)

[See the Kerr Center's resources on preserving pollinators and their habitat.](#)

# Late Winter Learning: Soil Health, Pecans, Grapes

Winter's run of conferences is wrapping up with the **Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts state meeting** (Feb. 28 - Oklahoma City). This year, it has a separate track on soil health. There are also **multi-month courses on both pecan and grape management** starting soon.

The Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#) provides full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events

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.

The screenshot shows a calendar interface with the following events:

- FEB 28 Tue**: Soil Health Track – OK Association of Conservation Districts State Meeting @ Oklahoma City (Embassy Suites Downtown/Medical Center) Feb 28 @ 8:00 am – 4:00 pm. Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- FEB 28 Tue**: 2017 Oklahoma Pecan Management (Part 1 of 8) @ Perkins (Cimarron Valley Research Station) Feb 28 @ 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm. Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- MAR 2 Thu**: 2017 Oklahoma Grape Management (Part 1 of 7) @ Perkins (Cimarron Valley Research Station) Mar 2 @ 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm. Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- MAR 14 Tue**: Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Mar 14 @ 9:00 am.
- MAR 27 Mon**: Deadline: USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) Grant Applications Mar 27 @ 10:59 pm.
- MAR 27 Mon**: Deadline: USDA Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) Grant Applications Mar 27 @ 10:59 pm.

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## Quick Links...

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