



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
June 2017

As summer looms, many thoughts turn to water. For this month's issue, we focus on some farm- and ranch-related aspects of that life-giving liquid.

We highlight a report full of advice on **how to protect the ecological benefits of streamside vegetation from thirsty livestock**.

Next, we focus in on one way to achieve that, by **putting watering points in more pastures**.

Finally, we point to the results of an **heirloom sorghum variety trial** - which included assessing the crop's resistance to a tropical storm!

But first of all, check out David Redhage's **advice on trying new crops**.

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

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President's Note: The Challenge of New Crops

I have been involved in agriculture my whole life, and it seems there is a wave of new crop possibilities every several years. **New crops are exciting. Everyone wants to be the first to successfully grow and market a new crop.**



I hope I don't sound negative about new crops. I like the challenge and find new crop possibilities interesting, but **many times I think the potential is oversold and new growers don't evaluate the crop realistically.**

My cardinal rule on new crops is to **start small and evaluate the potential costs and revenues.** This rule holds true for crops new to the grower but with an established market. Many small fruits (blueberries, blackberries, etc.) fall into this category.

Most new crops require market development. They are direct sold to customers so the entire expense of growing, marketing, and selling is handled by the grower. It can be a challenging undertaking.

Customers tend to be comfortable with crops they understand: wheat for bread and baking, tomatoes in the spring and summer, apples in the fall. When I was growing up, you never saw papayas, avocados, and kiwi fruit in the store. Now it is normal, and most people know how to use them.

Alternative grains to wheat include amaranth, quinoa, millet and teff. One plant I see and don't know how to use is cactus pads. I have too many bad memories of the small thorns to want to buy some and try to figure out how to eat them. But to those who know how to use them, go for it!

[Continue reading....](#)

Riparian Area Management Techniques

The land along the **edges of rivers and streams** makes up the **riparian area**.

Riparian areas have an **outsized importance in ecosystem function**, including their roles in **preventing erosion** and **creating wildlife habitat**.

However, they are also **extremely vulnerable to damage from mismanagement** - such as unlimited access by hot, thirsty cattle.



[Riparian Area Management Techniques](#) gives an **overview of riparian area management practices in use on the Kerr Ranch**, including **fencing, limited-access watering, and stabilized stream crossing points**. It includes a **detailed budget and description for constructing stabilized stream crossing points**, as well as a discussion of the **benefits of riparian areas**.

Tire Tank Videos



Since their first posting online last summer, **two videos** walking viewers through the process of preparing and installing [water troughs made from old tractor tires](#) have been runaway hits in the [Kerr Center's video library](#).

The tanks have long caught the eye of visitors to the Kerr Ranch. They form a low-cost backbone to the livestock team's efforts to [bring water to every pasture](#).

Have a look!

[Tire Tanks: Preparation](#)

[Tire Tanks: Installation](#)

Heirloom Sorghum Variety Trials

The Kerr Center has been **growing sorghum** for years, both for [syrup](#) and as a [cover crop](#).

In 2008, the Center planted a **trial of 26 sweet sorghum varieties** - mostly [heirlooms](#), with a few "improved" varieties in the mix for comparison.

Ironically, for a crop prized for its drought tolerance, the planting was wiped out by the remnant of a hurricane as it plowed up through Oklahoma.

Still, the trial lasted long enough to yield **valuable information, including stalk height, degree of tillering, and timing of head emergence.**

The resulting report, [Growing Heirloom Sweet Sorghum](#), also contains ample background information for anyone considering sorghum as a crop.

It's yet another gem **free for the downloading** from the [Kerr Center horticulture library](#).



Early Summer Events: Backyard Farming, Soil Health, Grazinglands Field Day

June 23, Dale Spoonmore (From Seed to Spoon) will explain how he **turned his family's OKC backyard into a farm that grows nearly all their vegetables**. There are **soil health workshops** coming up in both Durant (June 27) and Enid (July 6). July 13, the **Grazinglands Research Center** in El Reno will host its **free annual field day**.

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.

Date	Day	Event Title	Location	Time	Tickets
JUN 23	Fri	How We Converted Our Backyard into an Urban Food Farm @ Oklahoma City (OSU-OKC Horticulture Building)	Oklahoma City (OSU-OKC Horticulture Building)	Jun 23 @ 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm	
JUN 27	Tue	North American Agroforestry Conference @ Virginia Tech (Blacksburg, VA)	Virginia Tech (Blacksburg, VA)	Jun 27 – Jun 29 all-day	Tickets
JUN 27	Tue	Choctaw Nation Soil Health Seminar @ Durant (Choctaw Nation Community Center)	Durant (Choctaw Nation Community Center)	Jun 27 @ 5:30 pm – 8:00 pm	
JUL 6	Thu	Soil Health: Successful Production on the Farm and Ranch @ Enid (Northern Oklahoma College Gantz Student Center, Montgomery Hall)	Enid (Northern Oklahoma College Gantz Student Center, Montgomery Hall)	Jul 6 @ 8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Tickets
JUL 7	Fri	Selman Bat Watch @ Alabaster Caverns State Park (Freedom)	Alabaster Caverns State Park (Freedom)	Jul 7 all-day	Tickets
JUL 8	Sat	Selman Bat Watch @ Alabaster Caverns State Park (Freedom)	Alabaster Caverns State Park (Freedom)	Jul 8 all-day	Tickets
JUL 11	Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center	Kerr Center	Jul 11 @ 9:00 am	
JUL 13	Thu	Field Day: Grazinglands Research Laboratory @ El Reno	El Reno	Jul 13 @ 9:00 am – 3:30 pm	Tickets

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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