



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

November 2017

Happy Thanksgiving from the Kerr Center!

This month, David Redhage reviews a book that looks at techniques for **restoring soil life in different regions and climates the world over.**

We share some of the livestock team's results from a **comparison of cost and nutrition in grazing wheat pastures versus feeding hay.**

We also offer an update on the **latest uses and design improvements** for the Kerr Center's **portable hoop house.**

With many of us turning to seed and nursery catalogs to **plan next spring's gardens**, it's a good time for a look at one of our **most popular guidebooks** to get some ideas for **including pollinators in the mix.**

Finally, in this season of thanks, we'd like to offer our deep gratitude to those of you who [support our work!](#)

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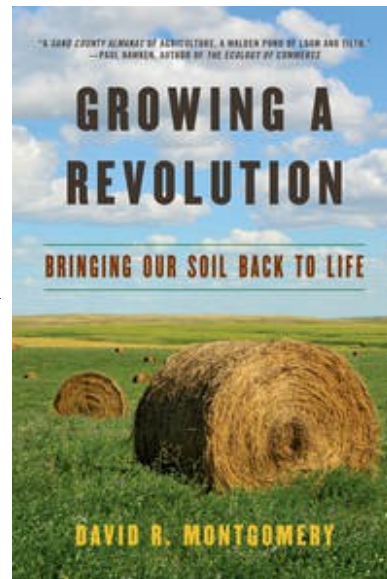
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President's Note: Book Review: *Growing a Revolution*

This is a followup to a [president's note from May 2016](#). In the president's note, I wrote about a book from author David Montgomery, entitled *Dirt*. The author has just released another book, entitled [Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life](#).

In this book, the author travels to farms in different parts of North America, and even visits Africa and Central America, to see how innovative farmers are using different techniques to improve the soil, reduce erosion, and produce a viable crop. While I am familiar with many of the examples he covered from North America, the tropical examples were intriguing. No-till systems were working very well in those climates.



One thing became clear: most of the techniques were region/climate/site specific. What does this mean? It means that while the basic concept of year-round cover on the soil and no-till systems was the universal preference, the crop and livestock mixes, along with timing of planting and harvest, were dependent on the location and how the farming operation was managed.

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Extending the Grazing Season: Wheat Pasture vs. Hay

The Kerr Center livestock program tries to **extend the grazing season as much as possible**. The ideal situation would be to [feed no hay](#), 365 days a year.

There are **three basic strategies** for working toward that goal. One would be to **adjust the stocking rate** by buying and selling cattle according to forage availability. That works fine for stocker operations, but not for cow-calf operations like the one on the Kerr Ranch.



That leaves two options: either **stockpile warm-season forages**, or **plant cool-season forages**, such as wheat or turnips.

Heading into the winter of 2012-13, Mother Nature took away the first of those possibilities: summer drought left much lower reserves of stockpiled forage than usual for winter grazing.

To prolong the grazing season and feed less hay, we planted two six-acre pastures to wheat. We applied chicken litter at a rate of 2 tons per acre, and drilled the wheat at 90 lbs. per acre. An additional nine-acre pasture was used as a control, receiving no chicken litter or wheat seed.

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Season Extension Hits the Skids

[Last month's hoop house workshop](#) looked at a variety of [season extension](#) structures. One of them came about almost by accident, but is proving to be one of the **most versatile and popular on the ranch.**

When a tornado hit the ranch in 2011, it tore up a [Hanley-style hoop house](#), twisting several of the hoops. Trying to recover whatever could be salvaged, we **welded up a pipe frame to hold several of the hoops.**



The pipe frame isn't nearly as large as the full hoop house design - only 14' x 23', as opposed to 17' x 100'. However, it is rigid, and the bottom members of the pipe frame can act as skids, making the **entire structure portable.**

That **smaller size also turns out to be an advantage** in many situations - such as for people who don't have the space for a full 1,700 square-foot structure. The space is more than adequate for supplying a **household's worth of fresh produce.**

The skid-frame also has **versatility** in its favor. It can be used to **get crops started earlier in spring, extend harvests through the first frosts of fall, and keep cool-season greens going all winter.** It can also be used for **starting and hardening off transplants,** as well as providing crucial **summer shade for both crops and livestock....**

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Native Plants for Native Pollinators

Are you including **pollinator plantings in your planning for next spring's garden?** For **ideas, information, and inspiration**, be sure to take a look at our guide, [*Native Plants for Native Pollinators in Oklahoma*](#).

The **full-color guidebook** contains a full-page profile on each of **38 native plants**.

Each plant profile has a bulleted list of information including the plant's **common and scientific names, growth habit, plant family, pollinators that visit it, and bloom period in Oklahoma**.

It also includes **growing information, including sun exposure, soil type, native habitat, uses in the landscape, and propagation**. In some cases, we note whether the plant is favored by livestock.

Finally, the guidebook includes **observations and experiences from David Redhage**, who manages the Kerr Center's native plant and pollinator project. His "**tips from the field**" **give the reader a feel for the beauty and value of these plants** and the pollinators that visit them, as well as observations about their use in a garden or as landscape plantings.

[*Native Plants for Native Pollinators in Oklahoma*](#) is **available free** both as a downloadable pdf, and in a **flip-book format for online browsing**.



Fall/Winter Events: More Conferences!

Conference season rolls on through December and January, including the yearly highlights of the **Horticulture Industries Show** (Jan. 5-6, Tulsa) and the **Southern SAWG conference** (Jan. 17-20, Chattanooga). Make plans now for networking and learning!

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.

NOV 28 Tue	Southern Soil Health Conference @ Wichita Falls, TX (Wellington Conference Center) Nov 28 – Nov 29 <small>all-day</small>	Tickets
DEC 4 Mon	Growing for the Future: Beginning Farmer & Rancher Online Virtual Conference Dec 4 @ 3:00 pm – Dec 7 @ 6:00 pm	Tickets
DEC 7 Thu	National Conference on Cover Crops & Soil Health: Harvesting the Potential @ Indianapolis, IN Dec 7 – Dec 8 <small>all-day</small>	Tickets
DEC 12 Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Dec 12 @ 9:00 am	
JAN 5 Fri	Horticulture Industries Show @ Tulsa Jan 5 – Jan 6 <small>all-day</small>	
JAN 9 Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Jan 9 @ 9:00 am	
JAN 17 Wed	Southern SAWG Conference @ Chattanooga, TN Jan 17 – Jan 20 <small>all-day</small>	Tickets
JAN 30 Tue	No-till on the Plains Winter Conference @ Wichita, KS Jan 30 – Jan 31 <small>all-day</small>	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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