



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

February 2019

Whether or not the groundhog saw its shadow where you are, things will soon be greening up on ranches, farms, and gardens around the state.

Recent research has shown how **adding cover crops and cattle to cash crop rotations can boost both soil health and profits.**

We've done some of our own thinking on **how cover crops can boost beneficial insect populations.**

Some of the most important among those beneficial insects are **native bees. Can they step up to help out beleaguered honeybee populations?** That's an important research question - we share some of the **latest findings.**

None of this means giving up on honeybees. In fact, we're offering a [beekeeping workshop on March 28](#). Please spread the word!

Your generous [donations](#) help us with our own re-greening each spring. [Thank you](#) for supporting sustainable agriculture!

In this issue:

**Beekeeping Workshop
March 28**

**Resources for Grazing
Cover Crops**

**Cover Crops as Beneficial
Insect Habitats**

Managing Excess Forage

**Late Winter Events:
Produce Safety, Farmers
Markets, Pollinators, High
Tunnels**

Beekeeping Workshop March 28

Jeff Asbury will lead this **free 90-minute evening workshop on beginning beekeeping**. It will focus on starting and managing a hive from a beginner's perspective.

The workshop runs from **7:00 - 8:30 on March 28** at the Kerr Center ranch outside Poteau.

Mr. Asbury, who resides in Le Flore, ran 4,000 hives in California for a number of years before working in the queen industry for a couple of years.



After moving to Oklahoma about 11 years ago, he ran 700 hives, working them from here to North Dakota. He has worked with several bee clubs, has extensive knowledge of pollination.

The workshop is free and open to the public, but **advance registration (by 5:00 P.M. on March 27) is required** to reserve one of the limited spaces available.

For more information or to register, visit the online [event description](#), or contact the Kerr Center by [email](#) or phone (918.647.9123).

Resources for Grazing Cover Crops

Cover crop promoters talk a good game, but **are the benefits real?** That's the question researchers in Iowa and Minnesota have been trying to answer for the past three years. Their answer? A resounding yes.



Eight farms cooperated in the study, each raising a cash crop without cover crops in some fields. In other fields, the farms grew the same cash crop but planted - and rotationally grazed - winter cover crops between cash crops.

Over time, the **fields with cover crops showed increasing soil health** - measured as soil carbon and microbial biomass - **as well as fertility**.

The researchers also ran an economic analysis. Although planting a cover crop cost more, the **economic returns from grazing** - as well as savings in reduced soil erosion and increased fertility and water storage - **made the cover crop fields' net profits higher**, by an average of \$135 per acre per year.

The farms that saw the biggest improvements from cover cropping and grazing were those that optimized the timing of planting, grazed in both fall and spring, and minimized tillage.

The study authors caution that with the small number of cooperating farms, and different cover crop mixes and management practices on each farm, and the three-year timeframe, the findings are not statistically significant. However, despite these limitations, the study's results point clearly toward numerous benefits of grazing cover crops.

Both a **summary and the full text of the study** are [available free online](#), along with a **how-to guide to grazing cover crops** and cover crop **webinars and video tutorials**.

The study was run by a partnership between The Pasture Project, Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Sustainable Farming Association, and the Land Stewardship Project.

Cover Crops as Beneficial Insect Habitats

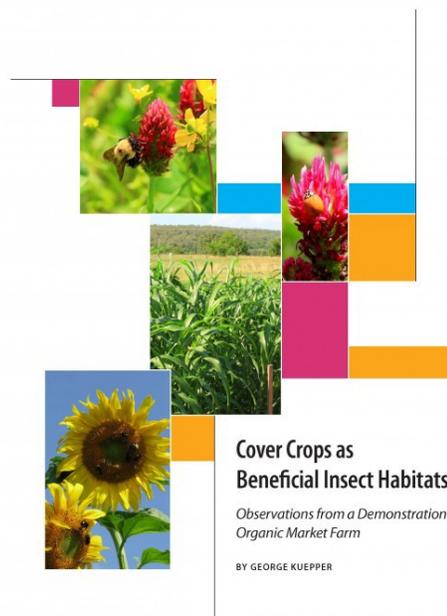
Cover crops' benefits aren't limited to farm finances and soil health. Managed properly, they can also support populations of beneficial insects.

[Cover Crops as Beneficial Insect Habitats](#) delves into some of those possibilities.

The eight-page report shares observations and insights from the Cannon Horticulture Project on how cover crops can be managed to foster beneficial insect populations. For example:

- Delaying cover crop termination as long as possible keeps flowers available to beneficial insects longer.
- Buckwheat interseeded into sweet potatoes can be allowed to flower and set seed. Its short growing season keeps it from competing with the cash crop, and if the rotation is followed by summer green fallow, re-seeding is (for once) not a problem.

Learn more - [read the report](#).



Native Bees: Important - and Little Understood

Evidence continues to mount that **honeybees face increasing challenges**, putting something like **two-thirds of crop pollination in jeopardy**.

A common suggestion is to focus on **substituting native bees** to make up the pollination shortfall.

Of course, **native bees face their own challenges** as well. One of those is just how **little is known** about them.



In a real sense, we don't even know what we don't know. A 2017 workshop took a stride toward fixing that problem, coming up with a list of research questions on native bees to help fill in the picture of how they can help with the future pollination of crops.

The workshop gathered researchers from academia, government, and industry. To that assemblage of experts, it posed a few seemingly simple questions: **What is known about native bees?** Are they exposed to pesticides in the same ways as honeybees? **What are the main ways that native bees are exposed to pesticides?** Is the honeybee a good model for studying pesticide exposure in other bee species? **What research needs to be done?**

The **papers from the workshop** were collected and published as an issue of *Environmental Entomology*. All are [available free online](#). In addition, here's an article that gives a [summary of some key findings](#).

Late Winter Events: Produce Safety, Farmers Markets, Pollinators, High Tunnels

Before February is out, you can catch a **produce safety course** (Feb. 27, Edmond), and the **statewide farmers markets/agritourism conference** (Feb. 28, Edmond). March buzzes in like a bee, with back-to-back **workshops on native pollinators and plants** in Tulsa (Mar. 1) and Oklahoma City (Mar. 2). University of Arkansas Extension offers one of a series of **high tunnel workshops** in Lonoke (Mar. 8).

Don't forget to register early for our upcoming [workshop on beginning beekeeping](#) (Mar. 28).

FEB 27 Wed	Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course @ Edmond (Hilton Garden Inn & Conference Center) Feb 27 <small>all-day</small> Tickets
FEB 28 Thu	Oklahoma Farmers Market & Agritourism Conference @ Edmond (Hilton Garden Inn & Edmond Conference Center) Feb 28 <small>all-day</small>
MAR 1 Fri	Attracting Bees and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants @ Tulsa (Tulsa Garden Center) Mar 1 @ 6:00 pm
MAR 2 Sat	Forget Television – The Real Entertainment is Happening Outside in Your Pollinator-Friendly Yard @ Oklahoma City (OSU-OKC Allied Health Auditorium) Mar 2 @ 1:00 pm
MAR 8 Fri	High Tunnel Workshop @ Lonoke, AR (Lonoke County Extension Office) Mar 8 @ 9:00 am – 3:00 pm Tickets
MAR 12 Tue	Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center Mar 12 @ 9:00 am
MAR 15 Fri	Application Deadline: Annie's Sustainable Agriculture Scholarships Mar 15 <small>all-day</small>

You can find full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events around the state and region on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

The calendar 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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