



# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

*E-Field Notes*  
March 2019

This month the air is rich with the scent of soil broken open for planting in fields and gardens across the landscape. It's a prime time to talk about **soil health: how to achieve and improve it, and the positive impacts it can have on crops, livestock, and human beings.**

In this month's president's note, David Redhage responds to a recent article on the **connections between food and human health.**

Even unhealthy soil is better than no soil at all, so **a sound step toward improving soil health is to limit erosion.** Pond and stream edges face some of the greatest erosion risks - we talk about how to protect them.

Once you've kept soil from washing or blowing away, how do you go about making it healthier - and what does that mean for a herd of **livestock**? A few years back, **soil health expert Ray Archuleta** gave a talk on just that subject at a Kerr Center workshop.

Finally, what about the **connections between soil health and human health**? That was the topic of a recent conference, whose report has just been published. It makes for interesting reading!

Our efforts at sustainable agriculture education sprout vigorously in the healthy soil of your kind [donations](#). [Thank you!](#)

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## President's Note: Food - the Best Medicine?

Every morning I look over some headlines in national news publications online, and occasionally one strikes me as important. The following article was one of those, but in the field of sustainable agriculture, it seems obvious.

This president's note is about an article from Time magazine, titled "[Why Food Could Be the Best Medicine of All.](#)"



The article is about how the medical field is finding ways to help patients adjust their diets, and the positive results they are seeing. Some insurance companies have taken note.

While I applaud the effort and the results, **I thought this was obvious. Good food helps maintain good health.**

While this is to me intuitive and obvious, the article does point out one problem. **How do we change the eating habits of individuals in today's society?** It gives several examples of programs working on this.

Implementing such programs has several challenges. Medicine is designed to treat individual issues (blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol) rapidly, while food and exercise can have the same results, but take longer. The article also points out how difficult it is to tie an individual's diet to preventing certain diseases.

To me the basic takeaway is that a healthy diet is beneficial no matter what age you are or what health issues you may face in the future. The difficulty is changing your eating habits to be consistently healthy in a society where we are always on the go and feel forced to eat quickly and move on with the day.

[Continue reading...](#)

# Stream and Pond Protection

At first glance, protecting water quality in streams and ponds might not seem to have much to do with preventing erosion. As it turns out, though, **many of the same practices that keep soil from washing into the water also keep it from washing out of fields and pastures** in the first place.

The [stream and pond protection page](#) in the [conservation section](#) of the Kerr Center's website describes three **practices used on the ranch that can improve water quality while holding soil in place** on the landscape.



[Conservation buffer strips](#) keep livestock away from streams and ponds except at designated crossing and watering points. As vegetation develops within a buffer strip once it's fenced away from cattle, it protects the edges of the stream from erosion during flooding, and enhances the soil's sponge-like ability to hold water.

[Stabilized stream crossings](#) provide a way for livestock and ranch vehicles alike to get from one side of a waterway to the other without churning it into a muddy mess just waiting to ooze downstream in the next heavy rain.

In a similar way, [fenced watering points](#) limit cattle's access to the edge of a pond, concentrating them in a smaller area where the ground has been reinforced to withstand their hooves.

At some locations on the Kerr Center ranch, these practices have been in place for years, with photo monitoring to show what a positive impact they can make over time.

# Soil Health and How It Relates to Healthy Cattle

Many soil health recommendations focus on reduced tillage and **cover crops** - with good reason. Row cropping, by its nature, leaves soil vulnerable to erosion, and any changes that minimize those windows are priceless.

Still, many a rancher walks away from a soil health workshop wondering **what a livestock producer can do to improve soil health on pasture and rangeland** - and what those changes could mean for the health of the animals.

A few years back, at the Kerr Center's "Healthy Soil, Healthy Livestock" workshop, soil health expert Ray Archuleta tackled just those questions.

His [slide presentation](#) is available free from the Kerr Center's [livestock library](#).

A **video** of Archuleta's presentation is also available on our [YouTube channel](#):

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

[Part 3](#)

[Part 4](#)



# Connections between Soil Health and Human Health

It's only natural to wonder: if **healthy soil grows healthy crops and livestock, what about the health of the humans who consume that food?**

A new [report](#) from the Soil Health Institute gives the **best available answer** to that question - and points the way forward to better answers to come.

Last October, the Institute convened a conference across academic disciplines. Participants included experts in fields across a wide range of specialties: medicine, chemistry, food safety, public health, agronomy, soil science, geology, nutrition, and more.

All were tasked with establishing the current state of knowledge about the relationship between human health and soil health, and with drafting a plan to improve on that state.

The [report](#) from the conference is now [available free online](#) from the Soil Health Institute's website. At 23 pages, it contains brief descriptions of the sessions and the assignments to the speakers and panelists. It also gives summaries of most of the presentations, including links to [videos](#) of some **presentations and slides**.

The report also details the major recommendations developed by the conference participants, including proposed **next steps**.



# Spring Events: Soil Health!

We're not the only ones talking about **soil health and healthy food** this spring. You can catch workshops on the topic in Spencer (Apr. 6), Elk City (Apr. 9), Watonga (Apr. 16), and Antlers (Apr. 18) - and be sure to check out our [events calendar](#) online for **more that wouldn't fit on this list**.

In addition, there are full details on many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events around the state and region on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

APR 6 Sat	<b>Healthy Soil for Healthy Gardens @ Spencer (St. Luke Baptist Church)</b> Apr 6 @ 10:00 am – 12:00 pm	+
APR 8 Mon	<b>USDA Programs: Who We Are, What We Do, &amp; Our Services @ Madill (Marshall County OSU Cooperative Extension Service Expo Center)</b> Apr 8 @ 5:30 pm	+
APR 9 Tue	<b>Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center</b> Apr 9 @ 9:00 am	+
	<b>Managing for Healthy Soil and Healthy Food @ Elk City (North Fork of Red River Conservation District Outdoor Classroom)</b> Apr 9 @ 10:00 am – 3:00 pm	+
APR 16 Tue	<b>Grazing Management for Healthy Soil &amp; Healthy Food @ Watonga (Blaine County Fairgrounds)</b> Apr 16 @ 5:30 pm	+
APR 18 Thu	<b>13th Annual Eastern Oklahoma Ag Trade Show @ Poteau (LeFlore County Fairgrounds)</b> Apr 18 @ 8:00 am – 3:30 pm	+
	<b>Grazing Management for Healthy Soil &amp; Healthy Food @ Antlers (Choctaw Nation Community Center)</b> Apr 18 @ 5:30 pm	+

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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