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2006 Kerr Center Events Highlight Innovation and Stewardship

Spring is here and preparation for the Kerr Center's 2006 lineup of educational events is underway. This year's lineup, with events for farmers and ranchers across the state, is perhaps the most diverse ever. These educational events are presented in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA).

We kick off the season with a field day at the Kerr Center on April 27 for poultry growers and ranchers interested in the use of poultry litter as a pasture fertilizer (see p. 3). Best management practices that prevent pollution of ponds and streams as well as information about grazing management will be covered by experts from the Kerr Center, OSU Extension and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Attendees will also see Kerr Center ranch projects designed to protect and enhance water quality. (Poultry Credit and Master Cattleman Credit available.)

In May, farmers and others wanting to learn how one small farm works are invited to attend El Sueño Enterprises Open House near Stillwater. Farmer/food entrepreneur Dick Ortez sells at the Stillwater Farmers' Market. He adds value to a variety of crops including heirloom beans adapted to Oklahoma.

On June 8, Daci Farms in Delaware County will host an evening field day. Farmer David Walter will talk about his producer-grant funded, large-scale composting project. On June 17, the Kerr Center will host a Beginning Farmer Field Day. Participants can choose four mini-workshops

(from a list of ten) covering basic skills such as fence building, chainsaw use/safety, and tractor maintenance/safety to name just a few of the choices. Turn to pages 6 and 7 for more information and registration details.

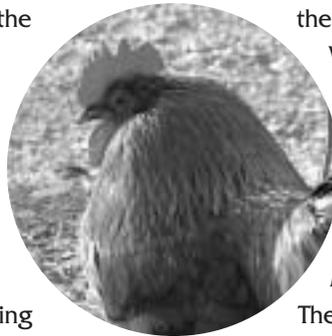
Three events in August will round out the season. "Sunflower oil as a fuel source" will be the subject of an August 3 workshop near Walters

in southwestern Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Land Stewardship Alliance will hold their annual conference on Aug. 11 and 12.

The season finale: the *Future Farms 2006* conference on August 25.

The conference will focus on marketing to restaurants, schools, colleges and other institutions.

Watch for more details on these late summer events in future newsletters.



See page 6 for information on **workshops for farmers' market and other small scale fruit and vegetable growers** that will cover Integrated Pest Management techniques and proper and efficient use of pesticides to be held June 6 in OKC and June 22 in Tulsa.



The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture offers progressive leadership and educational programs to all those interested in making farming and ranching environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically viable over the long term.

The Kerr Center is a non-profit foundation located on 4,000 acres near the south-eastern Oklahoma town of Poteau. It was established in 1985.

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- The Stewardship Farm
- Rural Development and Public Policy
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Jim Horne and Maura McDermott

The Next Green Revolution Goes International

The Next Green Revolution: Essential Steps to a Healthy, Sustainable Agriculture has recently been reprinted by Atlantic Publishers in New Delhi.

Readers interested in sustainable agriculture in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Bhutan and Bangladesh can now buy a low-cost English language version of this much-praised book.

The Kerr Center has long received requests for information from developing countries, including requests for *The Next Green Revolution*, first published in 2001 by the Haworth/Food Products Press of New York.

"I was happy to hear about the reprint and hope the book will have a positive impact on developing a more sustainable agriculture in those countries," says Kerr Center president Jim Horne who authored the book along with Kerr Center communications director Maura McDermott.

The book has been called a "well-researched introduction to sustainable agriculture." It provides instructors a useful framework for teaching the essential points of sustainable agriculture and can be used as a supplemental text in agriculture, environmental science and rural sociology courses.

The information in the book remains timely and important as sustainable agriculture becomes better known and more widely-adopted in the US and around the world.

To read reviews and samples from the book, go to www.kerrcenter.com. The original edition can be purchased from the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123 or online.

"What a delight to review a book which so eloquently traces the history of American agriculture, delineates its current status and shares a dream and guidance of how a sustainable future for agriculture might be assured! This volume is a practical guide for the farmer struggling to be productive and profitable in an increasingly hostile economic environment. It would also be useful as a reference for agricultural courses and outreach programs and the public, policy makers, and other interested in agriculture. The volume is instructive, thought provoking, and a stimulus for action..."

Norman J. Doorenbos, Auburn University, in *Economic Botany*

Free Field Day:

Best Management Practices for Pasture and Rangeland (Waste Management Education)

April 27, 2006

Program Starts at 1:00 p.m.

Located at the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture- Main Office HWY 271 S

THURSDAY, APRIL 27

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1:00 PM | Josh Payne, OSU Area Waste Management Specialist <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Path nutrients take from the plant, through the animal, to the soil• Calculating fertilizer value of litter and manure from grazing animals• Main types of pollution from grazing animals• Determine if a pollution control permit is required for an operation |
| 2:00 PM | Chris Rice, OSU Area Agronomist <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pasture tour and demonstration• Describe forage adaptation, forage use, and management practices that exist for forage species commonly grown in Oklahoma• Describe grazing management systems for pastures, indicate situations when each are appropriate, and describe the effects on forage and livestock• Demonstrate the relationships of different management practices by designing a total forage management program |
| 3:00 PM | Kenneth Risenhoover, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incentive programs for Best Management Practices (BMPs) |
| 3:30 PM | David Redhage, Kerr Center Natural Resources Economist <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tour demonstration areas of BMPs in practice--stabilized stream crossing, fenced-off riparian areas (streams), limited access watering points (to keep ponds clean) |

SPONSORS:



This educational event is presented in partnership with



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**3 hrs.
Poultry Credit
& Master
Cattleman
Credit**



For any additional information contact

Brian Freking
918-647-8231

or **David Redhage**
918-647-9123

In 2000, the Kerr Center received a Merit Award from the Soil and Water Conservation Society for protection of riparian areas on the Stewardship Ranch and for educating landowners about protecting their water and soil.

For more information, visit www.kerrcenter.com/HTML/stew.html

Farm (to Kitchen) to Market:

Open House at El Sueño Enterprises

—Wylie Harris

A “farm to kitchen to market” operation is how small farmer Dick Ortez describes his business.

On Saturday, May 20th, from noon until six, visitors can literally get a taste of just what that means, when he hosts an open house for all comers at El Sueño (The Dream) Enterprises in Glencoe, outside Stillwater.

The Kerr Center, in partnership with USDA’s Risk Management Agency, is sponsoring the free event.

Here’s a sneak preview: the taste of El Sueño is rich with diversity in all aspects of the business, from production to processing to marketing.

For example, Dick Ortez’s garden plots produce nearly twenty different fresh vegetable crops, everything from cabbage and cantaloupe to scallions and summer squash. And that’s just the vegetables.

El Sueño Gardens’ harvest also encompasses four varieties of common bean, and a host of grains, including wheat, rye, milo, oats, barley, millet, spelt, corn, and rice, as well as more exotic species like buckwheat, amaranth, and quinoa.

“What you have in me,” says Ortez, “is someone who is deeply committed to sustainability, deeply committed to diversity.”

It’s his efforts at diversifying in the bean field that have made Ortez a two-time recipient of Kerr Center producer

grants, supporting his work toward developing varieties of dry beans that perform well in Oklahoma and can form the basis of a line of value added products.

But Ortez emphasizes that his operation is about much more than just the beans, and May’s open house is meant to showcase the whole farm – and the kitchen, too.

Adding Value in the Kitchen

“Nurturing your meal from seed to table,” is El Sueño Enterprises’ marketing slogan. That refers to a range of production and marketing activities every bit as diverse as the gardens’ bountiful harvest.

Ortez does sell a small amount of each crop as fresh produce at the Stillwater Community Farmers Market. But, he says, “I don’t plant anything I haven’t already developed a value-added product I can make from in my kitchen.” The majority of his crops pass through that kitchen before they go into his customers’ hands and mouths.

Working in a licensed, on-farm commercial kitchen, Ortez turns El Sueño Gardens’ produce into a line of processed products that he sells, alongside his fresh produce at the farmers’ market, under the name Boarding House Classics.

Fresh cabbage becomes sauerkraut. Fresh beets get pickled. Sweet and hot peppers come out as salsa and chile verde. Boarding House Classics’ other value-added offerings include vinegar



Richard Ortez in his commercial kitchen

peppers, Louisiana hot sauce, dried beans, cracked wheat & rye, dried basil, and chili powder.

There’s also a vinegar bean salad made with twenty different varieties of beans, each with its own distinct texture and flavor.

In addition, Ortez bakes breads fortified with some of the many grains from El Sueño Gardens and makes soup to sell at his booth at the farmers’ market. One week’s offering was cream of potato; the next week’s customers savored curried squash.

Such fresh-cooked offerings actually represent a scaling back in the food service side of El Sueño Enterprises. For a decade, Ortez ran a café in Stillwater, again serving up dishes built around what he grows on his farm.

He’s now closed the café to focus on the farming and processing aspects of the business, but still serves up an occasional meal through his Boarding House Catering service.

“In everything I market, I have at least one thing I’ve grown,” Ortez says. That’s a model of vertical integration more commonly encountered in stories about giant agribusiness companies.

Instead, Ortez is turning it into a path toward viability for small farmers.

Integrated Approaches

The farm and the commercial kitchen have been complementary parts of Ortez's business since he started it in 1994. The kitchen, situated in a converted mobile home, began life on the farm, and then moved into Stillwater to accompany the café venture. Since the closing of the café, the kitchen has relocated back to a corner of the farm's 74 acres.

El Sueño Gardens, the farming part of Ortez's operation, doesn't occupy much more space than the trailer. He grows his immense diversity of crops in half a dozen 60' by 60' plots, in a vegetable-grass-legume rotation.

To Ortez, the integration of food production and processing makes sense in an operation the size of his. For a small producer,

Another advantage to Ortez's style of micro-integration, he says, is product longevity. If he doesn't sell a piece of fresh produce on market day, he explains, it's basically lost, unlikely to retain its quality until the next market the following week.

Canned and dried items, on the other hand, have "a shelf life measured in years," so that if they don't sell one week, it's easy to bring them back again and again until they do.

Ortez's personal history is as varied as his garden production and processed product line, and that diversity of experience makes him uniquely qualified to implement the business model he's developed.

He's retired from an academic career as a microbiologist, which included teaching classes on "food microbiology." As such, he has an in-depth understanding of the processes involved in, say, fermenting cabbage into sauerkraut. He also had

insight into why the commercial kitchen licensing regulations required the things that they did.

Learning More

Anyone curious to know more about – or just hungry to sample – Ortez' current and future cropping and processing plans can do just that at his open house on Saturday, May 20th.

Both the kitchen and the farm will be open for browsers beginning around noon, with light fare available for snacking. Ortez will lead

a guided tour every hour or so until early evening, with visitors welcome to come and go as they please.

The open house will offer a view of all aspects of El Sueño Enterprises – "from seed to table," in keeping with the spirit of its slogan – and provide a wealth of ideas for small Oklahoma farmers and food producers interested in maintaining and enhancing their own business viability.



Richard Ortez at a local farmers' market

he points out, production costs are always going to be high enough to prevent effective competition with larger farms on high-volume, low-profit margin crops.

"So," he says, "you have to come up with something that customers can't get somewhere else." With their added value and distinct marketing identity, preserved foods – dried, canned, and otherwise – offer a seemingly inexhaustible list of possibilities.



DIRECTIONS TO EL SUEÑO ENTERPRISES

El Sueño Enterprises, 4204 N. Bethel Rd., Glencoe, OK 74032, 405.377.8542

From the intersection of Highway 51 (E 6th Street) and 108 (S Rome Road), east of Stillwater:

Go north on 108 for four miles, to Richmond Road.

Turn east onto Richmond and go two miles, to the intersection of Richmond and Bethel (cemetery at southwest corner of intersection).

Turn south on Bethel and go half a mile.

On the west side of the road, there's a brown mobile home (the commercial kitchen) with a driveway to its north. Park at the road and walk up the driveway to the house.

Field Day begins at noon and goes until 6. Bring a lawn chair. If weather is rainy or looks to become rainy the field day will be cancelled and held the following Saturday, May 27. Call Alan Ware the morning of the field day at 918.658.5267 if you have a question about whether the field day will be held.

This event is presented in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency



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The Changing Face of Oklahoma Farming

- Reversing a trend of fifty years, the number of farms in Oklahoma grew by nearly 25% between 1992 and 2002.
- Most of these new farms were less than 180 acres.
- With roughly the same amount of farmland in the state, the addition of all these new, smaller farms reduced the average farm size, from a historic high of 480 acres to 404 acres.
- Women are the largest minority group in Oklahoma farming, and their numbers doubled between 1992 and 2002.
- Latinos are the fastest-growing minority group of Oklahoma farmers. Since 1992, their numbers have increased sevenfold.
- Since 1987, Oklahoma's numbers of Native American and Asian American farmers have more than doubled, and those of African American farmers have grown by a quarter.

June Events

For more information call the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123

FIELD DAY: Composting for Weed Control

This free field day will show visitors the large-scale composting project on the Daci Farm in Delaware County. The Walter family received a producer grant from the Kerr Center in 2005 to test the effects on production of using compost in various ways in their garden plots.

The compost, made from poultry litter, hardwood sawdust and a small amount of dairy manure, is made in a large (45 ton) continuously rotating drum "digester." The finished product has no offensive odor, and retains nutrients and beneficial microorganisms.

Visitors will see the family's organic production system and hear the results of their demonstration.

When and Where:

June 8, 5-8 p.m. No pre-registration required. Held rain or shine; bring a lawn chair.

Daci Farm is located 12 miles northeast of Grove. From Grove, at the stoplight at 3rd and Main, take hwy. 10/25 east for 3 miles. Turn north on hwy. 10. Go 5 miles to 240 and turn east (2 blue water towers on corner). Go 4.5 mi. to S. 697 Rd; look for the sign that says COMPOST, Daci Farm. Turn south (right) onto a gravel road. Go 2/3 mile; look for Daci Farm sign on left.

This event is presented in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency



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WORKSHOP: Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and the Proper Application of Pesticides

This free workshop is for farmers' market gardeners and small-scale producers of fruits and vegetables. Tulsa County Extension Horticulturist Sue Gray and Kerr Center staffers Alan Ware and David Redhage will teach farmers about IPM practices such as scouting and ways to determine insect populations. They will also cover calibrating and properly using a backpack sprayer so producers will not overuse chemicals. They will show attendees how to figure proper amounts of chemicals (and organic products) for small acreages.

When and Where:

June 6, 4-8 p.m., Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma City Campus (OSU-OKC), NW 10 and Portland, Oklahoma City

The workshop will be repeated

June 22, 4-8 p.m., Tulsa Community College Northeast Campus, 3727 East Apache St., Tulsa

Space is limited; pre-registration required.

Call 918.647.9123 by June 1 for OKC workshop, or by June 19 for Tulsa workshop.



Workshop for Beginning Farmers

Just moved to the farm (or farmette) of your dreams? Ready to dig in to the chores, but find your skills don't quite match your ambition? If so, this hands-on workshop might be just what you need.

When and Where: June 17 at the Kerr Center near Poteau. Held rain or shine; bring a lawn chair. Check-in/registration from 8-9 a.m. Sessions begin at 9 and run through 3:30. Choose four one hour sessions for the day. \$20 for the day includes materials and lunch.

Pre-register by June 5 by filling out the form below or online at www.kerrcenter.com

Getting there: Take highway 271 south of Poteau about five miles. Watch for signs.



BEGINNING FARMER WORKSHOP REGISTRATION

Deadline: June 5

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please include check made out to: Kerr Center.



Mail form to:
Kerr Center
Beg. Farmer Wkshp.
PO Box 588
Hwy. 271 South
Poteau, OK 74953

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MORNING SESSIONS: Pick two.

Designate #1 for first morning session (9-10 a.m.) and #2 for second morning session (10:30-11:30).

- ___ Sprayer Calibration
- ___ Soil Testing & Pasture Identification
- ___ Chainsaw Demonstration & Safety
- ___ Fence Building
- ___ Trailer Backing

AFTERNOON SESSIONS: Pick two.

Designate #1 for first afternoon session (1-2 p.m.) and #2 for second afternoon session (2:30-3:30).

- ___ Small Engine (mowers, tillers) Repair
- ___ Organic Vegetable Production
- ___ Tractor Maintenance and Safety
- ___ Basic Animal Care (cattle, goats, hogs, sheep, horses) and Feed Labeling
- ___ Garden Irrigation



Read it! Read it! Walk it! Walk it! Kids take up the "reading and walking challenge."

It Takes a Village

Western Village Academy and Integris Health team up to reduce the risk of childhood obesity in students

—Shauna Lawyer Struby

On the face of things, Western Village Academy in northwest Oklahoma City is like any other elementary school.

Halls are decorated with brightly colored student art. Outside the principal's office pictures and certificates noting the achievements of students line the walls. During recess the laughter of children reverberates across the campus.

And of course no school is complete without the smell of freshly sharpened pencils and cafeteria food wafting through the hallways.

But in at least one way, Western Village is different.

Western Village has David Dubé, a physician's assistant who came to the school five years ago and is actually an employee of Integris Health, Oklahoma's largest health care organization. Dubé's salary, paid by Integris, is a part of the corporation's sponsorship of the academy, the first elementary charter school in Oklahoma.

Since few schools have the luxury of a full-time nurse, much less a physician's assistant, Dubé is in many ways a pioneer in school health care.

During his first school year (2000-2001), he settled in and began interacting with the kids. As he took family medical histories, worked on getting immunizations up to date, and doctored skinned knees, intuitively he felt something was not quite right with the health of the students.

"When I got here, I just took a look around at the kids and intuitively I thought something was awry," says Dubé. "I had a feeling something wasn't right in regard to the health of the kids but I wasn't sure what it was."

So Dubé went on a fact-finding mission, searching for what his intuition was telling him. Dubé logged students' height and weight, calculated growth charts using the Center for Disease Control's body mass index (BMI) formula, and screened every single child's hearing and eyesight.

He also collected data on socio-economic indicators including a student's grades, family health history, and income level. The school is located in a low-income area of northwest Oklahoma City where many of the families have an average monthly income of less than \$1,000.



Kids keep moving during Family Arts Night.

Compiling such comprehensive data for 330 individual kids by hand was so time-consuming and data intensive that Dubé sought the help of a computer programmer, Kathleen Patton of Edmond. Patton created a program allowing Dubé to efficiently track every child at Western Village and analyze the factors influencing a child's health.

The result was Dubé got an expandable, adaptable tracking program and perhaps more importantly discovered what his instincts were trying to tell him.

“Our successes come from our partnerships with so many and a dedicated staff,” says Brinson. “This is truly the epitome of the concept that it takes a village to raise a child. Everyone has their heart in doing the best for these children.”

“When we calculated the overall BMI of the children, 27.8 percent of the kids at Western Village were at risk for obesity,” says Dubé. “I think at the time the national average was about 20 percent. We also found a direct correlation between the economic status of the family and the risk for obesity, with lower income families at greater risk.”

This was before the studies and headlines about America's obesity epidemic hit mainstream consciousness, but to Dubé, the statistics were disturbing considering the role childhood obesity plays in other health issues.

Obesity places children at an increased risk of high blood pressure, higher cholesterol and fat levels, and Type 2 (often referred to as adult-onset) diabetes. These conditions in adulthood are well-established risk factors for heart attacks, strokes and numerous other medical problems.

It's also known the longer a child remains obese, the more likely that child is to become an obese adult.

Alarmed by his discovery, Dubé shared his findings with Western Village Academy principal, Peggy Brinson. Fully aware they couldn't control all the factors contributing to the obesity risk for their students, Dubé and Brinson focused on factors they could



The "Excellent Elevated Eagles" jump rope team in action

The Skinny Behind the Bulge

■ During the last 30 years in the United States, the percent of overweight children ages six to eleven has quadrupled, while the percent of adolescents who are overweight has increased by two and a half times.

■ Between 1977 and 1996, children increased their intake of foods from restaurants and fast food outlets by 300%, while soft drink consumption by adolescent boys tripled over a similar timeframe.

■ Children who eat fast foods consume more sugar-sweetened beverages, less milk, and fewer fruits and non-starchy vegetables, than children who do not (according to research published in the journal *Pediatrics*).

■ Nationally, only two percent of school-aged children consume the recommended daily number of servings of all five major food groups.

■ In Oklahoma, only 14% of Oklahoma high school students eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

change. Dubé assessed the school's programs in two vital areas: physical education and nutrition.

Dubé's examination of the school's lunch program revealed a menu high in fat, sweets, and fried and breaded foods. Working in partnership with the school district's meal planners, Dubé and Brinson made adjustments to meals and snacks that would continue to provide the amount of nourishment needed by the kids but that at the same time was lower in fat.

"Breakfast and snacks were easiest to address. We added a lot of fresh fruit, cheeses, crackers and that helped out quite a bit," says Dubé. "Lunch is more challenging due to state and federal guidelines on what children should be receiving every day, but we've made strides there as well." One student favorite: fresh fruit yogurt smoothies.

As a charter school, Western Village focuses on the arts. In keeping with this emphasis, the kids were doing primarily dance-based physical activities rather than traditional physical education.

The school decided to offer a more varied program. A walking program with prizes for the kids was instituted and new playground equipment was added.

The school also hired a full-time physical education teacher, Dana Chambers. Chambers started with a regular rotation of physical education each week for every child.

In addition to dance Chambers added seasonal games like soccer and basketball, gymnastics, jump rope and

other games.

"The kids love it, they enjoy it," says Chambers. "Our physical education program is a very cooperative effort that involves the whole school. The teachers realize physical education stimulates the kids. They come back to their teachers after P.E. ready for class and ready to learn."

Through private donations, the school recently added a brand new walking track. "The track may seem like a small thing but to this school and the surrounding community it's huge," says Dubé. "People from the community are using it and families are walking together.



David Dubé is a physician's assistant at Western Village Academy.

They're proud of the track."

As a result of the school's efforts, student BMIs are coming down and this year hit the lowest level yet, with only 15.1 percent of Western Village's students found to be at risk for obesity. That's down more than 12 percentage points from 27.8 percent when Dubé first tallied BMIs.

Brinson is thrilled with the results and adds a decrease in discipline referrals could also be related to the release of energy the kids now get with the

increased physical activity.

"The changes David instituted made a difference in the overall well-being of the kids," says Brinson. "They are more self-confident now and overall their physical health definitely is a piece of the larger success we're having with the kids here."

Brinson noted many of the school's success over the last few years are inter-related, building on and feeding each other, linked to the holistic approach they take in educating the children. For instance, when Brinson arrived only 25 percent of the children could read at or above their level.

With the addition of a rigorous reading program, that number is up to 66 percent, and as Brinson and Dubé proudly note, every child at Western Village has a mentor, which they feel makes a huge difference in the lives of the kids. Most of the volunteer mentors come from Integris Health, Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Arts in Edmond, and Heritage Hall High School in Oklahoma City.

"It's a slow process but we've made some big strides," says Dubé. "It's interesting. I've never been involved in a school quite like this where not only are we educating children, we we're also caring for them holistically."

"Our successes come from our partnerships with so many and a dedicated staff," says Brinson. "This is truly the epitome of the concept that it takes a village to raise a child. Everyone has their heart in doing the best for these children."

Momentum Building for Farm-to-School Programs

—Maura McDermott

The four-year effort to establish a statewide farm-to-school program in Oklahoma gained momentum in the fall and winter of 2005 as the pilot program expanded and farmers, schools and policy makers expressed interest and support.

Simply put, farm-to-school programs connect schools and farmers. Schools purchase food (often fresh fruits and vegetables) from local farmers to serve in school meals and snacks. Nutrition lessons can be coordinated with the locally-grown produce being served.

The most effective programs include fun learning activities such as food tastings and cooking demonstrations, school gardens, farm/farmer visits and lessons about agriculture. The goal: get kids excited about eating healthy food.

In 2004, four school districts (Broken Arrow, Edmond, Shawnee and Tahlequah) participated in a pilot farm-to-school project, serving Oklahoma-grown seedless watermelons for lunch during August and September.

The watermelons, grown by Bob Ramming of Hydro, were so popular with students and food service that in fall 2005 two school districts (Muskogee and Tulsa) were added to the four, tripling the number melons delivered.

Research in other states has revealed that farm-fresh fruits and veg-

etables are student favorites at lunch. Lisa Griffin, Tulsa Schools Child Nutrition Coordinator, agrees. The watermelon was served in all Tulsa schools and the kids eagerly chose it when it was offered.

“The teachers and cafeteria workers all thought the program was great,” she says.

“Farm-to-school is a win-win for both farmers and school kids,” says Jim

Chris Kirby, vice chair of the Oklahoma Food Policy Council. She says that if you teach children about growing fresh fruits and vegetables their interest in eating healthy foods shoots up.

Horne notes that almost 400,000 school lunches and over 150,000 breakfasts are served each day in Oklahoma. By one estimate, if just half of the

current amount spent by schools on fresh produce went to purchasing locally-grown items, it would amount to \$6 million going to local farms and into local economies.

Oklahoma ranks twelfth in the nation in watermelon production, yet until the pilot project in 2004, few of those melons were being served in Oklahoma schools.

The most important winners, naturally, are the kids. Jill Poole, head of food service at Broken Arrow, credits the freshness and taste of the melons for their popularity.

“It was the best watermelon I ever had, period,” she says.

Buying the watermelons locally and having them delivered weekly allowed the schools to have watermelon on the menu much more often, and for a longer time period—five weeks.

“One of the most exciting aspects of the Farm-to-School program is the cooperation we are seeing among the groups involved,” says Terry Peach, Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture.



Left-right. Kerr Center president Dr. Jim Horne, Fit Kids Coalition chair Stanley Hupfeld, and OICA Executive Director Anne Roberts at the Fit Kids Coalition meeting Feb. 22 at the Oklahoma state capitol.

Horne, president of the Kerr Center and chairman of the Oklahoma Food Policy Council, which organized the pilot. “Kids eat tasty, fresh, nutritious produce, while farmers gain a new market.”

In conjunction with the watermelon deliveries, the Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom program distributed a “watermelon curriculum,” to teach students about nutrition, food, agriculture and biology.

Farm-to-school goes a step beyond saying “eat this, it’s good for you,” says

continued on page twelve

Momentum Building for Farm-to-School Programs

continued from page eleven

“Educators, farmers, consumer groups and our agricultural organizations are completely behind this initiative and I foresee great advances in this area for the future.”

The cooperation indicates a growing concern in the state about children’s health. During the last 30 years, there has been a four-fold increase in the percentage of children who are overweight. Teaching children to make healthy food choices is the key to reversing this trend.

Having fresh fruit that kids like on the menu is important in a state where only about one-quarter of Oklahoma fifth graders eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and even fewer high school students do.



Healthy for Life

Last fall, the Legislative Task Force on the Promotion of Children’s Health recommended seven areas of potential legislation, including Oklahoma farmers selling fresh produce to schools and healthier food options in school cafeterias.

Late in the year, Sen. Daily Lawler established an interim study of farm-to-school and invited those familiar with



Rita Moore, Child Nutrition Manager, Eisenhower International School.

the Oklahoma program as well as farm-to-school advocates from outside Oklahoma to speak at two hearings at the state capitol.

During the first interim hearing, Jim Horne said farm to school is “a way to help encourage better nutrition, to get parents actively involved in supporting better nutrition in schools. But it also will get our farmers interested and realizing that this is a market.”

Prior to the interim hearings, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA) and the Fit Kids Coalition endorsed an expanded statewide farm-to-school program. Both organizations are influential advocates for improving children’s health.

The Fit Kids Coalition is a grass roots association of more than 90 organizations. The organization supports efforts to fight childhood obesity in Oklahoma.

During a press conference in March announcing the Fit Kids legislative agenda for 2006, Fit Kids chairman Stanley Hupfeld, president of Integrus Health in Oklahoma City, said that the quickest way to positively affect change in children’s health is through the schools.

In March, initial bills supporting farm-to-school efforts in Oklahoma were passed in the Oklahoma legislature. Senate Bill 1515, authored by Sen. Lawler passed unanimously March 2. House Bill 2655, authored by Rep. Susan Winchester, (and Neal Brannon), passed 99-1 on March 6.

As of press time, final bills were pending. The legislation would create a farm-to-school program within the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

The director of the program would develop farm-to-school efforts statewide by providing information and assistance to both farmers and school food service managers. The director would also advise state agencies on what is needed to make the program a success.

“This a win-win bill for helping our kids with better health and nutrition and for rural economic development,” says Sen. Lawler. “Our initial pilot program was a resounding success and surveys of school districts throughout the state tell us they’re very enthusiastic about this concept.”

Farm-to-School Explored at Seminar

—Maura McDermott

About eighty farmers, food service directors, policy makers and agency personnel attended the Kerr Center's Farm-to-School Seminar on November 4 at the Seretean Wellness Center on the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater.

Participants listened to ten speakers explain how farm-to-school programs work in other states as well as developments in the Oklahoma farm-to-school pilot. They were also treated to an Oklahoma-grown lunch, featuring lasagna (made with ground buffalo), fall greens with apples and pecans, sweet potato cake and baguettes made with Oklahoma-grown organic wheat.

Speakers from out of state were Kristen Markley of the Community Food Security Coalition, Glyen Holmes and Vonda Richardson of the New North Florida Cooperative, and Judi Jaquez and Betsy Torres from the Santa Fe, New Mexico, school district.

Speakers who explained the Oklahoma program were Jim Home, Anita Poole, and Doug Walton of the Kerr Center, Paula Price of the Department of Human Services, Mary Ann Kelsey of Oklahoma's Ag in the Classroom program, Bob Ramming, a watermelon grower from Hydro, and Jill Poole, food service director at Broken Arrow public schools.

Markley opened the program, emphasizing the importance of establishing good communi-



Vonda Richardson and Glyen Holmes of the New North Florida Cooperative

cation between school food service personnel, farmers, parents and state officials. Everyone involved should strive to understand and respect the challenges each face, she said.

Food service directors, she added, are doing the best they can with tight budgets, and farmers face uncertain weather and growing conditions.



Jill Poole

Glyen Holmes, farmer and organizer of the highly successful New North Florida Cooperative, echoed Markley's thoughts. He urged farmers to learn to talk the "food service language," for example, translating bushels into cases and cost-per-serving.

"Look at the food service buying guide," he advised, and

think about what will save food service staff time and effort.

Holmes should know. His Florida panhandle cooperative of small-scale farmers sells to

For more information on:

New North Florida Cooperative

www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/pages/resources/marketing/wholesale.cfm
www.foodsecurity.org/f2s_case_florida.pdf

Bulletin No. 1, Marketing Fresh Produce to Local Schools: The North Florida Cooperative Experience
www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/PDFpubList/sfss-1.pdf

Bulletin No. 2, Cultivating Schools as Customers in a Local Market: The New North Florida Cooperative
www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/PDFpubList/sfss-2.pdf

Bulletin No. 3, Acquiring Capital and Establishing a Credit History: The North Florida Cooperative Experience
www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/PDFpubList/sfss-3.pdf

Bulletin No. 4, Success of the New North Florida Cooperative: A Progress Report on Producer Direct Sales to School Districts")
www.ams.usda.gov/TMD/MSB/PDFpubList/sfss-4.pdf

New Mexico Farm-to-School Program

www.farmtoschool.org/nm/programs.htm

www.foodsecurity.org/f2s_case_newmexico.pdf

Cooking with Kids Program
www.cookingwithkids.net/

schools in Florida and three nearby states—Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. They sell collards and sweet potatoes year-round as well as Southern peas, muscadine grapes, strawberries, blackberries and watermelon.

Their “signature crop” is collard greens (shredded and bagged) and he advised Oklahoma farmers to find one or two such crops that schools cannot get readily from vendors.

Broken Arrow food service director Jill Poole agreed with Holmes that “time constraints are an issue.” Her schools serve 11,000 lunches in two hours each day. “We’re the largest fast food restaurant in town.” But she is dedicated to serving her kids good food, spending \$130,000 each year on fresh fruits and vegetables.

“The kids eat fresh fruits and vegetables better than canned,” she said.

Betsy Torres, who coordinates farm-to-school in Santa Fe, told of introducing kids to a locally-grown salad mix that did not include the more familiar iceberg lettuce. Wary at first, now “they don’t even think twice about it. It’s the exposure,” she says.

She noted that kids will “eat what is available,” and are more flexible than adults.

Santa Fe’s program began with incorporating local produce—lettuce and melons—onto salad bars at three pilot high schools and two elementary schools. Today, eight schools regularly incorporate local products.

“It’s a guaranteed market if your product is good,” said Torres. One success story is a local apple grower who sells his smaller apples to local schools and is now upgrading his equipment to better serve the school market.

Torres, Jaquez and others mentioned the challenges of buying locally under restrictive procurement policies. The New Mexico Department of Agriculture employs a middleman, Craig

“It’s a guaranteed market if your product is good.”



The Oklahoma Food Policy Council researched interest in an Oklahoma farm-to-school program and then organized a pilot project. Council members Chris Kirby, Jim Horne, Paula Price, and Dean Smith at a recent meeting

Mapel, who helps food service directors and farmers write and meet specs.

“It takes creative thinking,” Torres said.

“Today a farmer has to wear many hats,” said Holmes. “You’ll be a dinosaur—extinct if you can’t.”

After listening to the presentations, seminar participants broke into small groups to discuss the most immediate needs of the Oklahoma farm-to-school program.

The item consistently mentioned by all of the small groups was the need for a state-level program coordinator, said the Kerr Center’s Anita Poole, organizer of the seminar. The groups also identified about a dozen tasks for such a coordinator to tackle.

Other needs—the development of farmer cooperatives, more nutritional

education, production techniques to extend the growing season, mini-grants for schools to purchase locally-grown and the development of promotional campaigns such as “It’s Cool to Eat in School”—were also mentioned. (The complete list of recommendations is online at www.kerrcenter.com.)

Mary Ann Kelsey of Oklahoma’s Ag in the Classroom program summed up what should be the bottom line in every school cafeteria in Oklahoma: “If kids eat well, they’ll learn well. At least they’ll have a chance.”

The Farm-to-School Seminar was presented in cooperation with the Community Food Security Coalition, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the USDA Risk Management Agency. Thanks to the Seretean Center for donating space.

Get Involved in Farm to School!

—Doug Walton

Now is the time to act, if you would like to see farm-to-school blossom within your own community.

In 2004, two important laws were passed requiring public schools to review and establish policies that impact the wellness of their students.

Thanks to the efforts of the Oklahoma Fit Kids Coalition, a law was passed by the Oklahoma legislature mandating that all public schools form health advisory committees.

A second law was passed by the U.S. Congress, as part of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act. It requires every school district to develop and implement a local wellness policy.

Taken together, these two measures give communities the opportunity to help shape the future course of health and nutrition at the school and district levels.



Paula Price, head of Commodity Distribution at the Okla. Dept. of Human Services, was key to the success of the Oklahoma farm-to-school pilot project.

School Advisory Committees

The Healthy and Fit Kids Act of 2004 requires each individual public school in Oklahoma to establish a Healthy and Fit School Advisory Committee, consisting of at least six members, which can include parents, students, teachers, food service staff, administrators, local business persons and others.

These healthy school committees are charged with assessing and making recommendations in three areas: health education and services, physical activity, and nutrition education and services.

Upon reviewing current school practices in each of these areas, the advisory committee is to identify possible ways for the school to help improve student health and fitness.

Farm-to-school approaches such as offering fresh locally grown produce in the cafeteria, creating a school garden, and teaching kids how to prepare and eat healthy foods are examples of some measures that could be advocated for by the advisory committee.

Contact your school principal to find out more about the current status of the Healthy and Fit School Advisory committee. Many schools have not yet formed one and may just need a little encouragement from a concerned parent.

School District Wellness Policies

Federal law requires each public school district participating in the National School Lunch Program to establish a local school wellness policy by July 1, 2006.

The law specifies that each district's wellness policy should include: goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness; nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus; assurance that nutrition guidelines for reimbursable school meals are not less restrictive than federal policy; a plan for measuring the implementation and effectiveness of the wellness policy, including the designation of at least one person in each district to ensure that each school fulfills the policy objectives; community involvement including parents, students, food service staff, school administrators and the public in the development of the wellness policy.

Contact your local school district office to inquire about the status of your district's policy and to learn how you can become involved.

Do farm-to-school programs improve child nutrition?

Are such programs an opportunity for farmers?

How did the Oklahoma pilot project work?

Get answers to these questions online at www.kerrcenter.com

For more information:

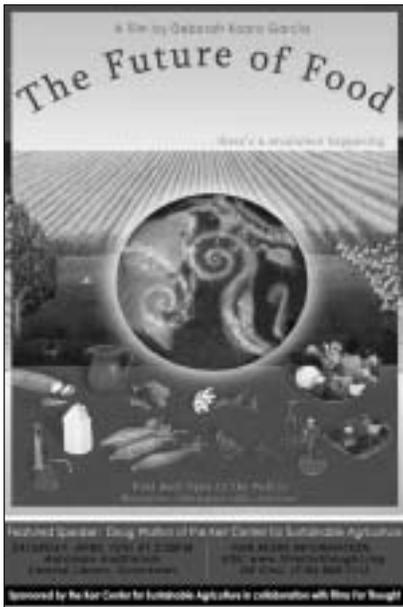
Recommendations for Healthy and Fit School Committees
Oklahoma Fit Kids Coalition
www.integralifespan.com/318.html
405-236-5437 ext. 201

Establishing a Local School Wellness Policy
OK State Dept. of Education, Child Nutrition Programs
www.sde.state.ok.us
(on SDE homepage, select "Child Nutrition – Wellness Information and Policies")
405-521-3327

Make Farm to School Standard Practice - Model School Wellness Policy
Language Community Food Security Coalition
www.foodsecurity.org/california/F2SWellnessPolicy.pdf
310-822-5410

Model Wellness Policy Guide
Center for Ecoliteracy
www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/wellness_policy.html

Free Films on Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture Offered Monthly



Should consumers be concerned about where and how their food is grown?

Community food activists say yes. With the average food item in the U.S. traveling 1500 miles from farm to table and most Oklahoma farmers earning on average less than \$10,000 per year, some say it is time to establish a more diverse and self-reliant local agriculture, with markets where consumers can buy locally grown food.

To explore this potential, the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, with support from the USDA Community Foods Program, and the Tulsa group Films for Thought will present a free documentary film series on food security and sustainable agriculture in Aaronson Hall at the Tulsa Central Library, 400 Civic Center.

Beginning in April, a new film will be shown one Saturday afternoon per month through August.

The films will explore community-based alternatives to corporate food

production such as sustainable agriculture, urban permaculture, and community gardens. Preserving farmland from urban sprawl will also be explored.

A speaker from a local organization will follow each film, discussing current efforts in Oklahoma to address issues raised within the film.

The series will open Saturday, April 15 at 2 p.m. with *The Future of Food*. This film examines the web of market and political forces influencing the world's food production.

The Future of Food gives a voice to farmers whose lives and livelihoods have been negatively impacted by the globalization of food and explores alternatives to large-scale industrial agriculture. Doug Walton of the Kerr Center will discuss efforts underway in Oklahoma to establish better connections between local farmers and consumers.

For more information on the film series visit: www.filmsforthought.org or www.kerrcenter.com. Or call 918.808.7713.

This project is supported by the Community Food Projects Program of the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, grant #2004-33800-15141



The other films in the series are:

Saturday, May 13, 2 p.m.

Broken Limbs, told from a hometown perspective, presents the hopeful stories of farmers creating a new model for agriculture and emerging solutions to the farm crises of recent years.

Speaker: Dr. Jim Horne, Kerr Center President and CEO, author of *The Next Green Revolution: Essential Steps to a Healthy, Sustainable Agriculture*.

Saturday, June 17, 2 p.m.

Beyond Organic tells the story of one farm's battle to survive rapid suburban development and will appeal to anyone who cares about land, food, and the preservation of local farms.

Speaker: Robert Gregory, Director, Land Legacy.

Saturday, July 15, 2 p.m.

Global Gardener goes to sites where permaculture design weaves together soil, water, annual and perennial plants, animals, and human needs into productive communities.

Speaker: Robert Waldrop, President, Oklahoma Food Cooperative.

Saturday, August 19, 2 p.m.

A lot in Common follows the construction and growth of a community garden in Berkley, offering an overview of the work involved as neighbors come together to reclaim the commons.

Speakers: Panel of local garden leaders.

FARMERS: Be a Part of Our Updated Directory

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council is updating *The Oklahoma Food Connection 2003: A Directory of Agricultural Producers, Crops and Institutional Buyers*. Institutional food service buyers (schools, resorts, colleges, etc) as well as chefs and the general public will use the directory to locate Oklahoma-grown fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, meat, fish, eggs, dairy and honey.

In addition to updating the directory, we are compiling a list of farmers interested in visiting a local school or hosting a tour of their farm by school kids.

If you are already listed in the directory and would like to update your entry or if you would like to be listed for the first time please fill out the form below and return to: Mary Penick, Kerr Center, PO Box 588, Poteau, OK 74953

Listing in the *Food Connection* is free of charge. The directory will be printed and distributed later this year and will also be online.

If you have not filled out a newsletter form or an online update form in the past year you will not be included in the 2006 edition of *The Food Connection*. Please submit a form if you want your farm to be listed.

THIS FORM MAY BE COMPLETED ONLINE AT WWW.KERRCENTER.COM

Name: _____
 Name of Farm: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ Zip code: _____
 County: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____
 Website: _____

Certified organic? Yes No
 Certifier: Oklahoma Dept. of Ag
 Other (Please name) _____
 Are you an uncertified organic farm? Yes No
 If so, are you in the process of becoming certified by ODAFF?
 Yes No
 Please check all categories of food that you grow:
 Fruits Vegetables Grain Nuts Meat
 Fish Egg Dairy Honey
 Do you sell at a farmers' market? If so, which one? _____

Please check the specific crops that you are growing this year or typically grow:

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apples | <input type="checkbox"/> Cherries | <input type="checkbox"/> Gourds | <input type="checkbox"/> Onions | <input type="checkbox"/> Rutabagas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arugula | <input type="checkbox"/> Corn | <input type="checkbox"/> Granola | <input type="checkbox"/> Peaches | <input type="checkbox"/> Rye |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asparagus | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken | <input type="checkbox"/> Grapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Peanuts | <input type="checkbox"/> Salsa |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beans | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken eggs | <input type="checkbox"/> Green beans | <input type="checkbox"/> Pears | <input type="checkbox"/> Soybeans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beef | <input type="checkbox"/> Chuckar partridge | <input type="checkbox"/> Greens | <input type="checkbox"/> Peas | <input type="checkbox"/> Spinach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beets | <input type="checkbox"/> Cream/Butter | <input type="checkbox"/> Herbs | <input type="checkbox"/> Pecans | <input type="checkbox"/> Squash |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blackberries | <input type="checkbox"/> Cucumbers | <input type="checkbox"/> Honey | <input type="checkbox"/> Pheasant | <input type="checkbox"/> Strawberries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blueberries | <input type="checkbox"/> Duck | <input type="checkbox"/> Jams/jellies | <input type="checkbox"/> Plums | <input type="checkbox"/> Tomatoes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Broccoli | <input type="checkbox"/> Eggplant | <input type="checkbox"/> Kiwi | <input type="checkbox"/> Peppers, hot | <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brussels sprouts | <input type="checkbox"/> Elk | <input type="checkbox"/> Kohlrabi | <input type="checkbox"/> Peppers, bell | <input type="checkbox"/> Turnips |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buffalo | <input type="checkbox"/> Emu | <input type="checkbox"/> Lamb | <input type="checkbox"/> Pork | <input type="checkbox"/> Venison |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cabbage | <input type="checkbox"/> Fish | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettuce | <input type="checkbox"/> Potatoes | <input type="checkbox"/> Watermelon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carrots | <input type="checkbox"/> Garlic | <input type="checkbox"/> Milk | <input type="checkbox"/> Pumpkins | <input type="checkbox"/> Wheat and products made from wheat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cantaloupe/Honeydew | <input type="checkbox"/> Geese | <input type="checkbox"/> Mushrooms | <input type="checkbox"/> Quail | <input type="checkbox"/> Yogurt/Kefir |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cauliflower | <input type="checkbox"/> Goat | <input type="checkbox"/> Nectarines | <input type="checkbox"/> Quail eggs | <input type="checkbox"/> Zucchini |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chard | <input type="checkbox"/> Goat milk | <input type="checkbox"/> Oats | <input type="checkbox"/> Radishes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese | <input type="checkbox"/> Goat cheese | <input type="checkbox"/> Okra | <input type="checkbox"/> Raspberries | |

Have you ever sold to schools or institutions? If so, please name.

Would you be interested in learning more about selling to schools and other institutions? (If so, we will put you on a mailing list to notify you about any upcoming farm-to-school workshops and/or publications)
 _____yes_____no

Yes, I would be interested in:

Hosting a tour of my farm by school classes

Visiting a school to speak to kids about my farm (Teachers would contact you in advance to arrange a tour or visit)



l-r Jim Combs, Alan Ware, Barbara Zieschang, Jeremy Henson

Kerr Center Honors Barbara Zieschang

On February 1, the Kerr Center/ Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm staff presented Barbara Zieschang with a plaque and plant honoring her 12 years of dedication to the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm.

The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm showcases rural life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, preserving the knowledge and artifacts of earlier generations. Barbara and her late husband, Wallace, began assisting with the development of the Overstreet-Kerr Farm in 1994.

With their knowledge of herbs and heirloom fruit trees, the Zieschangs were helpful in establishing the farm herb garden, and an orchard containing antique varieties of peaches, plums, and apples, as well as contributing plants for the decorative fish pond.

From their own garden, and those of friends in eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas, they established a demonstration herb garden containing a wide variety of plants consistent with those that might have been found in a pioneer farm family household.

Throughout the past 12 years, Barbara, with friends from the Herb People Club of eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas, has provided plants for the farm's herb garden. She has also been active as an instructor for various herbal workshops for youth and adult

groups visiting the farm.

In the fall of 1995, Wallace and Barbara picked a site for an heirloom orchard, located in the same place as the original Overstreet family orchard.



When Wallace passed away on January 23, 1996, Barbara and her family requested that donations be made toward the establishment of a Wallace Zieschang Memorial Heirloom Orchard.

In the early spring of 1997 the first of the current 21 fruit trees were planted. This orchard is an outdoor classroom, where visitors can learn the importance of a family orchard, how to

care for the trees, and how to harvest and use the abundant fruit.

In earlier days when sprays were not so widely available, farmers tried to plant fruit varieties that were well-adapted to the local climate and had some disease resistance. Such varieties, represented in the Zieschang Memorial Heirloom Orchard, include Mirabelle and Ozark Premier plums, Belle of Georgia and Elberta July peaches, Arkansas Black and Grimes Golden apples, and Kieffer pears.

The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm is open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays from 10-4. Admission is \$3 per person, free for children under six. School and youth groups are welcome by reservation.

The annual Fall Farm-Fest will be held on October 13 (for school groups) and October 14 for the general public. For more information go to the Overstreet farm pages at www.kerrcenter.com, call 918.966.3396

The farm is located ten miles south of Sallisaw on highway 59, then right on Overstreet-Kerr Rd. For more information, call 918.966.3396 or email okhfarm@crosstel.net or visit the Overstreet-Kerr website at www.kerrcenter.com/overstreet/index.html.

Importing the State Meal of Oklahoma

—Wylie Harris



Most Oklahoma schoolchildren can probably name the state song (“Oklahoma!”), the state animal (bison), and perhaps even the state tree (redbud).

On the other hand, it probably takes either a true Sooner patriot or trivia buff to know that Oklahoma has an official reptile, soil, and crystal – much less what they are (collared lizard, Port Silt Loam, and hourglass selenite, respectively).

Even if you could make a perfect score on that quiz, did you know that Oklahoma also has a state meal? Could you name its ingredients? And – trickiest of all – could you find Oklahoma-grown versions of them all?

In 1988, Oklahoma’s state legislature gave legal status to the state’s official meal. Its menu includes fried okra, squash, cornbread, barbecue pork, biscuits, sausage and gravy, grits, corn, strawberries, chicken fried steak, pecan pie, and black-eyed peas.

Sure enough, Oklahoma grows or raises every item in that eye- and button-popping spread. The question is, does it grow enough of them to feed the official state meal to each and every Oklahoman?

In the meat department, the answer is a qualified “yes.” Oklahoma raises several times more cattle and hogs than its residents eat – and in the case of hogs (as well as chickens), those numbers have been increasing rapidly of late.

However, Oklahoma doesn’t turn

enough of those animals into meat to meet its own consumers’ demand. Instead, it has to send live animals out of state and bring processed cuts back in.

The situation is much the same for grains. Oklahoma is a major producer of corn and wheat, but again, though it grows more of those raw materials than Oklahomans eat, by and large it relies on out-of-state processors to mill them into enough flour and meal for biscuits, grits, and cornbread.

Even so, Oklahoma only grows half the sweet corn needed to match what its residents eat in a year, and more often than not, the same holds true for the other fresh fruits and vegetables on the state meal’s menu.

Oklahoma does grow many more pecans than its people eat, and also exports surpluses of okra and black-eyed peas. But Oklahoma has to import over 75% of its squash, and more than 90% of its strawberries, from other states or countries.

The legislature meant the official state meal to reflect Oklahoma’s “cultural backgrounds and the state’s historical and contemporary agriculture,” a laudable goal. But, having enlightened Oklahomans as to their culturally and historically appropriate food items, perhaps it is time to redouble support for Oklahoma farmers and processors and make the official meal a truly “made in Oklahoma” affair.

This article and others that examine community food security in Oklahoma will be included in *Closer to Home: Healthy Food, Farms and Families in Oklahoma*, forthcoming from the Kerr Center.

Almost two years in the making, this groundbreaking report features extensive research and original analysis of Oklahoma’s food system from field to table.

You can support Oklahoma food businesses by buying products with the Made in Oklahoma (MIO) label!

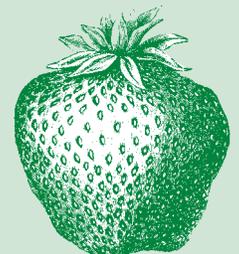
What if Oklahoma farms grew half...

... of all squash eaten in Oklahoma (instead of the current 22%)?

Another 442 acres would have to be used to grow squash, and the value of squash sales would increase by \$1.1 million.

... of all the strawberries eaten in Oklahoma (instead of the current eight percent)?

An additional 227 acres would be needed for growing strawberries, and the value of strawberry sales would increase by \$7.2 million.





SPARC

SPARC-ing Change on the Plains: Soil, Health, and Sustainable Wheat

—Wylie Harris

Seventy-odd giant windmills slowly churn the sky from the ridges around Weatherford, turning the sun-baked air of the southern Plains into a clean, renewable source of electrical power.

However, more than just hot air is driving other currents of rural sustainability in western Oklahoma.

Larry Wright, the Resource Conservation and Development Coordinator for southwestern Oklahoma's Great Plains Area, is helping wheat growers chart a course through some of those currents.

With a group of farmers, university staff, and other agency personnel, Wright in 2004 formed the Southern Plains Agricultural Resources Coalition, or SPARC.

The group's aim, he says, is to "spark" sustainable change in the region's agriculture.

Wright began formulating the idea of SPARC as a kind of self-test as he completed a five-year area plan for the Great Plains RC&D.

To really make a difference, he thought, any conservation plan would have to affect a large portion of the land area. In western Oklahoma, that line of thought leads straight to wheat (Figure 1).

"So," Wright asked himself, "What can I do to add value to wheat?"

The Value of Ideas

Originally from Hinton, Wright is a career Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, formerly the Soil Conservation Service) employee with 22 years under his belt as district conservationist for Weatherford. So he naturally thought of answers to that question in terms of conservation.

"This is catching the wave of the Conservation Security Program," he

says, "The idea of rewarding farmers for stewardship."

SPARC's idea, he says, is to take wheat into the market not as a commodity, but as a finished product, produced in an environmentally friendly way.

"It's a new way of thinking," says Wright. "We need that in agriculture in order to be economically sustainable."

According to Wright, SPARC's economic rationale is similar to the one that planted windmills outside Weatherford.

"We all want to do our part," he says. "People are willing to pay more for sustainability."

"Wind-generated electricity costs \$5 more a month," Wright says. "Within the first 6 months, they had 8,000 people sign up."

To generate the same "green" consumer appeal for wheat, SPARC proposes to create a certified label for products made from wheat produced in accordance with its standards of sustainability.

To qualify for the label, producers must be certified by an independent third-party inspector. SPARC has negotiated an arrangement with the Portland, Oregon-based Food Alliance to conduct the inspections and certification.

By December 2005, according to Wright, ten Oklahoma wheat farmers have signed up and paid their SPARC membership fees. Later in the winter, SPARC elected its board of directors and officers.

It also drew 277 participants to a SPARC-sponsored no-till seminar in Hollis. Food Alliance certification visits may begin as soon as early spring of 2006.

Making the Grade

The label tells the consumer that the wheat in certified products was grown in a way that improves soil health and water quality, two of SPARC's priority resource concerns.

Criteria for certification are based on growers' use of practices that improve the soil conditioning index, such as minimal tillage, and maintaining soil surface cover in the form of crop residues or cover crops.

The Food Alliance certification criteria include four fixed standards that must be met by all certifying farms. These are: no genetically modified organisms, no use of synthetic hormones or feed additive antibiotics, no use of a prohibited list of highly toxic pesticides, and continual improvement in production and management practices.

In addition to these fixed criteria, there are other "scored standards," for which farmers receive points on a sliding scale, with a set minimum number of points required for certification. These include whole farm standards, such as soil and water conservation, reducing pesticides, safe and fair working conditions, and animal welfare.

Finally, there is a set of product-specific standards that must also be met to complete the certification process. For wheat, these include detailed evaluations of cover crop usage, seedbed preparation, grain storage, and several other practices.

The Dough in Wheat

As consumers opt for SPARC's certified, labeled wheat products, they will help the coalition realize its third priority research concern – that of improving local rural economies.

“We ask only the cost of production, plus a reasonable rate of return,” Wright explains.

As part of that rate of return, the consumer pays a premium for the ecosystem services, such as soil and water conservation, provided by environmentally friendly wheat farming.

Here, too, Wright uses wind power as an analogy. “The payment from one of those windmills to the landowner is about \$4,000 a year,” he says.

With over seventy windmills in the area, most on land held by different owners, the economic returns are large and relatively well distributed.

For wheat, SPARC's scenario runs like this: Imagine that a regular loaf of bread costs \$1.00, of which the wheat grower receives 3 cents. Now, say that a loaf of bread bearing the SPARC label retails for \$1.05.

“If we can get the producer another 3 cents out of that extra nickel,” Wright says, “We've doubled his income.”

“Then,” Wright continues, “what if a third – or half – or even all, of the wheat growers sign up? What has that done for the economy?”

SPARC is focusing first on wheat, Wright says, because the crop is such a major part of western Oklahoma's farm economy.

But once the system is in place, he points out, it can be expanded to other crops – cotton, beef, fruits and vegetables – as well as to other areas, both in Oklahoma and in neighboring states.

Wright emphasizes the market-oriented nature of SPARC's strategy, providing a product to satisfy consumers' expressed demand while using a price premium to persuade farmers to change their practices.

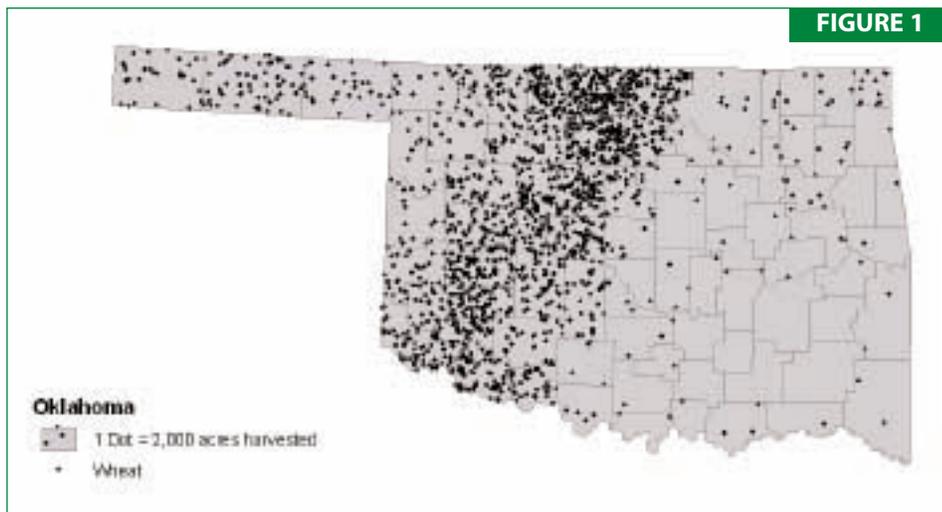


FIGURE 1

Shades of Green

Voters' desire for a greener agriculture, Wright says, is evident in the fact that conservation programs moved up to Title II in the most recent farm bill, though their level of funding has lagged behind.

“As taxpayers, we give up our dollar before the final say,” he says, “And the money doesn't always show up where we wanted it.”

But as consumers, Wright says, “We keep the power right up until we lay that dollar down.”

When farmers can perceive – and benefit from – that consumer desire, Wright believes, it creates a powerful incentive for change. While traditional federal farm conservation payments could in effect penalize farmers who were already practicing good stewardship, green price premiums reward both new and existing practitioners.

“You reward the best, and motivate the rest,” Wright says.

While the price premiums sound appealing, much of the interest SPARC has generated among wheat farmers has stemmed instead from what conservation tillage might save them in fuel costs.

With diesel at \$2.30 per gallon, conventional wheat production requires a total variable cost of \$42.45 per acre, versus \$20.86 for no-till continuous. By shifting to chemical rather than mechanical control of weeds, Wright says,

“They're not burning all that diesel, not pulling all that iron through the fields.”

No-till has drawn criticism from some environmentalists for that same, more chemical-intensive approach to crop production.

However, Wright points to one wheat grower who has been using no-till techniques for 12 years, and now uses smaller quantities of herbicides than neighboring conventional farmers because the crop residue in his fields is so effective as a weed-controlling mulch.

Wright also points out that SPARC's producer standard will not have to be no-till in all cases, so long as growers maintain a positive soil conditioning index.

SPARC's emphasis on soil condition stems in part from evidence suggesting that crops grown on high-quality soils have higher nutritional value.

In the case of the twelve-year no-till system mentioned earlier, Wright says the farmer's wheat crops consistently yield higher, and have higher protein content, than the area's average, despite lower-than average fertilizer application rates.

“When you shift to production efficiency – boom! All the vitamins and nutrients drop out of the soil,” says Wright.

“We, as American farmers, have done great at feeding the world. We need to shift to quality.”

Sustainable Tulsa Publishes Oklahoma's First Green Directory

Tulsa's first "Green Directory" has been published by Sustainable Tulsa. A compilation of over 130 pages and more than 700 local listings, the directory is the first of its kind in Oklahoma.

The user-friendly directory is packed with information. Included are listing of businesses and services ranging from "green" architects to local organic food producers, from community organizations to holistic health options.

Thirty pages are devoted to sources of locally grown foods (including farms, stores, farmers' markets, co-ops, CSAs) and farming and gardening supplies.

Through the process of compiling the Green Directory "we discovered incredible diversity in our community that we didn't know existed", said Ande Reed, president of Sustainable Tulsa. "Sustainable Tulsa aspires to promote local people, places, events and organizations in dynamic ways and the Green Directory gives us a venue to promote a large variety of small businesses to which the public may not otherwise have access."

A 2007 version of the directory is planned. Corey

Williams, chairperson of the directory committee, invites anyone with suggestions or additions to the directory to contact Sustainable Tulsa.

Listings in the directory are free. Businesses also may purchase ads, which help offset printing costs, Williams said.

The Kerr Center is a supporter of the directory.

The Sustainable Tulsa Green Directory is on sale at the Cherry St. Farmers' Market and will also be available at the free film series on community food security and sustainable agriculture to be held in Tulsa this spring and summer (see p. 16). It will also be online at www.sustainabletulsa.org. or by writing Sustainable Tulsa, P.O. Box 3543, Tulsa, OK 74101-3543.

Sustainable Tulsa is a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to responsible economic growth, environmental stewardship and quality of life for all. Sustainable Tulsa is a chapter of the Oklahoma Sustainability Network, which also has chapters in Oklahoma City, Norman and Stillwater.

The organization's fifth annual conference will be held Sept. 15 and 16, 2006. For more information go to www.oksustainability.org/index.php.

New and Classic Publications from SARE

How to Direct Market Your Beef portrays how one couple used their family's ranch to launch a profitable, grass-based beef operation focused on direct market sales. From slaughtering to packaging, through labeling and advertising, Jan and Will Holder transform their real-life experiences to a compelling narrative rich with practical tips.

Building a Sustainable Business: A Guide to Developing a Business Plan for Farms and Rural Businesses brings the business planning process alive to help today's alternative and sustainable agriculture entrepreneurs transform farm-grown inspiration into profitable enterprises. Sample worksheets lend a practical perspective and illustrate how real farm families set goals, researched processing

alternatives, determined potential markets, and evaluated financing options. Blank worksheets help the reader develop a detailed, lender-ready business plan or map out strategies to take advantage of new opportunities.

These and many more publications are available to buy or download at www.sare.org/publications/index.htm



Ann Ware

August 13, 1964 - December 07, 2005

Ann Ware, our colleague and friend, passed away on December 7, 2005.

Ann was the Kerr Center's business manager for 11 years—a job she performed with great pride. She was efficient, accurate, and always reliable, helping the Kerr Center run smoothly and contributing greatly to the success of our events and programs.

Jim Horne, Kerr Center President had this to say: "Ann was always involved in any major decision I had to make. I valued her counsel on many matters. She was a dear friend and a trusted employee that gave her best everyday. Ann has left an enduring mark on our organization and her life made all of us better."

Ann was a kind and loving person with great courage. Her positive attitude inspired everyone who knew her. With faith and spirit she fought the cancer that ultimately took her away from us.

She is survived by her two children, Daniel and Rachel, and her husband, Alan Ware, who heads our producer grants and stewardship farm programs.



CALENDAR: SPRING/SUMMER WORKSHOPS

FIELD DAY: Best Management Practices for Pasture and Rangeland (Waste Management Education), April 27, 1:00 pm, Kerr Center, Poteau

This free field day is for poultry growers and ranchers interested in the use of poultry litter as a pasture fertilizer. Experts from the Kerr Center, OSU Extension, and USDA NRCS will cover best management practices to prevent water pollution, followed by a tour of best management practices on the Kerr Center ranch. Poultry Credit and Master Cattleman Credit available. (See p. 3)



El Sueño Enterprises Open House, May 20, 12 pm - 6 pm, Glencoe

Small farmer Richard Ortez will be showcasing his market garden and on-farm commercial processing kitchen outside Stillwater. Rain date is May 27. For more information call Alan Ware at 918.647.9123 or Dick Ortez at 405.377.8542.

WORKSHOP: Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and the Proper Use Of Pesticides: June 6, 4pm - 8pm, OKC, and June 22, 4 pm - 8 pm, Tulsa

At this free workshop, Tulsa County Extension and Kerr Center personnel will teach market gardeners and small scale fruit and vegetable growers about IPM practices and proper use of pesticides. Pre-registration required by June 1 for OKC, June 19 for Tulsa; call 918.647.9123.

FIELD DAY: Daci Farms, June 8, Delaware County

At this evening field day, farmer David Walter will talk about his producer-grant funded, large-scale composting project. (See p. 6)

Beginning Farmer Field Day, June 17, 8 am - 3:30 pm, Kerr Center, Poteau

This all-day field day offers a series of workshops training beginning farmers in a variety of basic skills, including fence building, chainsaw use, and tractor maintenance. Registration is \$20 and includes lunch. Pre-register by June 5 using the form on page 7 of this newsletter, or online at www.kerrcenter.com.



Details on these later summer events will follow in future newsletters:

- **Workshop: Sunflower Oil as a Fuel Source**, August 3, Near Walters
- **Oklahoma Land Stewardship Alliance Annual Conference**, August 11-12
- **Future Farms 2006 Conference**, August 25

Check the Kerr Center website www.kerrcenter.com for special online articles, as well as a complete array of publications, including *Field Notes*, and information on staff, programs, and history.



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