

Field Notes



Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Vol. 25, #1 • Spring 1999

◆ VIEWPOINT ◆

An Open Letter to Dan Glickman

February 19, 1999

The Honorable Dan Glickman
Secretary United States
Department of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Last year was a tough year for farmers and livestock producers. Record low prices for hogs, continuing low prices for cattle and commodity crops, and adverse weather made it difficult for many in agriculture to keep going. But keep going is what we have always done! But even more disturbing than the weather are the daily newspaper reports about mergers and acquisitions that continue the trend of concentration in agribusiness. And that means that markets are not as open and free as they should be. All of this bad news compelled me to write you a letter that addresses what I see as key problems and solutions in agriculture, issues that the USDA needs to address swiftly and decisively.

This is my third letter to

a Secretary of Agriculture. The first two were in an official capacity, as chairman of the National Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Council. I'll start with a brief sketch of my credentials and experience, so you may assess my credibility and my qualifications to comment on agricultural policy.

My name is Jim Home, I am a 51-year-old son of a share-cropper, born and raised in southwestern Oklahoma. I was educated in a rural high school in the town of Roosevelt, named after Teddy Roosevelt, a near ghost town today. I continue to farm and ranch but my real livelihood comes from serving as president of The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Inc. in Poteau, Oklahoma. The Kerr Center is a non-profit foundation, established by the family of the late Senator Robert S. Kerr of Oklahoma. I have a B. S. degree in Agricultural Education, a M. S. in Agricultural Economics and a

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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.

Programs include:

- Oklahoma Producer Grants
- The Stewardship Farm
- Rural Development and Public Policy
- Education

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Spring in Oklahoma

Excerpts from *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
by N. Scott Momaday

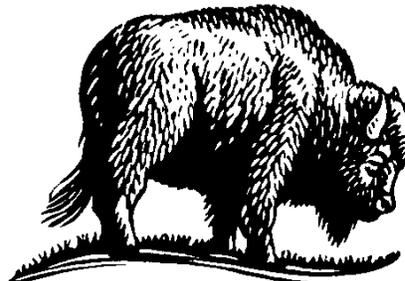
One morning my father and I walked in Medicine Park, on the edge of a small herd of buffalo. It was late in the spring, and many of the cows had newborn calves. Nearby a calf lay in the tall grass; it was red-orange in color, delicately beautiful with new life. We approached, but suddenly the cow was there in our way, her great dark head low and fearful-looking. Then she came at us, and we turned and ran as hard as we could. She gave up after a short run, and I think we had not been in any real danger. But the spring morning was deep and beautiful and our hearts were beating fast and we knew just then what it was to be alive...

A few feet from the southwest corner of my grandmother's house, there is a storm cellar. It will be there, I think, when the house and the arbor and the barn have disappeared. There are many of those crude shelters in that part of the world. They conform to the shape of the land and are scarcely remarkable; low earthen mounds with heavy wooden trapdoors that appear to open upon the underworld. I have seen the wind drive the rain so hard that a grown man could not open the door against it, and once, descending into that place, I saw the whole land at night become visible and blue and phosphorescent in the flash of lightning...

There are meadowlarks and quail in the open land. One day late in the afternoon I walked about among the headstones at Rainy Mountain Cemetery. The shadows were very long; there was a deep blush on the sky, and the dark red earth seemed to glow with the setting sun. For a few moments, at that particular time of the day, there is deep silence. Nothing moves, and it does not occur to you to make any sound. Something is going on there in the shadows. Everything has slowed to a stop in order that the sun might take leave of the land. And then there is the sudden, piercing call of the bobwhite. The whole world is startled by it...

– University of New Mexico Press, 1969.

Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. He is a Kiowa and a native of Kiowa County, Oklahoma.



An open Letter continued...

Ph.D. in the biological sciences. Since 1972 I have leveraged my passion for farming by assisting farmers and ranchers throughout Oklahoma. I and a few others provided the initial testimony in the mid 80's to both the Senate and House Committees that made the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program actually happen. I have since served as chair of the Southern Region SARE Program, an unpaid job I did because I believe in the program.

But I'm not here to talk about myself. I want to take the remaining space to visit with you about the concerns that I have for agriculture. Having lived among and represented farmers all my life, I believe I know well the issues that actually hurt farmers most: market concentration, the notion that exports will save us, the illusion of agricultural efficiency, and the false promise of corporate agriculture.



Jim Horne

Market Concentration

Never before have so few been in charge of so much, especially when we start talking about food. I'll not cite the figures, we are both familiar with them. But I will tell you the impact of market concentration.

Even if farmers use the very best management practices in producing food, the most sophisticated marketing techniques, such as the use of futures and options, it is not enough. We cannot even come close to negating the effect that a handful of firms controlling over 80 percent of our meat-packing industry and a huge chunk of our grain market is having on us. Prices are not being fairly or openly reported. Proving it requires a desire for truth and a band of attorneys backed by big money or a Department concerned with its clients.

In Oklahoma, there is virtually no live market for pigs or chickens today. That is unless you want to trade off the tailgate of your pickup at the edge of town. While the Department has preached and taught that free markets and competition are the best thing for

agriculture, its own policies have contributed to the loss of both in the United States. Smaller processors are being forced out of business or bought out and competition is being reduced instead of increased throughout all of agriculture. Because of NAFTA and other trade agreements, farmers in other countries have competitive advantages over our own farmers. Is this what the Department means about a more global and competitive environment? Perhaps the Native American knew best when he said that Washington speaks with a forked tongue.

The profits in agriculture are not being made at the farm gate. The USDA needs to take bold steps to turn this around, and begin searching for and supporting new forms of businesses owned by farmers such as new generation co-ops. These businesses will help keep farmers on the land and keep rural communities intact.

On behalf of two million farmers, I urge you, Mr Secretary, to take immediate action, using the

full force of your Department and its allies, to stop the further concentration in agriculture and its processing industries. It is a matter of food security.

Exports

Every Secretary of Agriculture I have known since I was a young lad on the farm has told us how exports would not only save us but would actually put money in our pockets. But have they?

I recall listening to the radio and hearing announcements that Russia would import grain. Prices would skyrocket in financial markets, and then a few days later prices would fall drastically when the deal was canceled. For many farmers, it's tough to understand how this could be; how the price of something they produce as a staple commodity could be worth so much one day and so little the next.

Two things that contribute to price volatility are: the weather (which can't be controlled) and the policies that come forth out of USDA (which can be). The average farmer is not the winner when prices are

An Open Letter continued...

volatile – the winners are the handful of large grain and meat packing companies that win either on the cash market or through their hedged positions.

Therefore for the 90 percent of farmers that are uncomfortable with or lack sufficient volume to utilize marketing strategies, the market gyrations surrounding an export sale mostly have painful consequences. A cynic might look at the situation and say that we in agriculture have reverted to the social Darwinist view of survival of the fittest, that you must become a market whiz or you don't deserve the right to farm.

It seems to me that agricultural surpluses are viewed as valuable, not because they help farmers, but because they can be used to offset negative balance of trade payments and keep food cheap. At the same time, these agricultural surpluses drive down prices and put farmers out of business. In other words, agricultural surpluses turned into exports are being used as a tool to support a country (the United States) that is about five percent of the population of the world, yet uses about 40 percent of the resources of the world, many of them imported and certainly not essential for life. Trading food for trinkets worries me when the cost of producing food is not accounted for.

It is difficult to say anything negative about exports for fear of being misunderstood. There are indeed hungry people all over the world. But, often they are hungry because of inadequate distribution, waste, and corrupt or greedy governments, not because there aren't enough calories produced to feed the world. If we are to be both kind and helpful to the rest of the world, then let's get to the task – helping them feed themselves.

Can we not wake up and see that a bushel of wheat is much more than just wheat? There is a whole production process behind it that consumes the earth's limited natural resources. No one is even talking about the hidden cost of full throttle agricultural production, such as removing sediment and pesticides out of the water. Not to mention the cost of restoring some ecological balance to our farming systems.

If society only knew the true cost of exports, it

might come to the conclusion that what we gain is not worth what we are paying. Yes, exports have cost us farmers on the land, increased soil erosion, and polluted water.

On behalf of the many farmers, mostly small and medium-sized family farmers who have been underserved by your Department, who are increasing in age and are unable to grasp the sophisticated market programs, much less understand the impact of USDA rules and regulations, I challenge this injustice.

It is necessary that our Congress and our USDA officials recognize the impact of their actions on the lives of the people that their department was created to serve, a department that Abe Lincoln called “the people's department.” Please recognize, Mr. Secretary, that exports are not a panacea, and that they have played a significant role in changing the structure of agriculture, in decreasing social fairness, creating ecological disturbances, and in wasting the nation's treasury of natural resources to offset a negative balance of trade. We are now experiencing the beginning of ecological disturbances in many fragile areas across rural America.

Agricultural Efficiency

For as long as I can remember, the whole game of agriculture was about becoming more efficient. That generally involved becoming more specialized. Certainly during the 60's when I was a college student, we were moving out of an age when farms were more diversified into an age of specialization and the development of monoculture farming. It was hard to argue against the point that specialists could do a much better job than a general farmer. Who could argue with the notion of reducing waste, feeding more with less, and squeezing the profitability equation to show more cash profit? Undoubtedly, we assumed it was the right thing to do. Efficiency was even promoted in the name of old fashioned thrift, an idea that has always appealed to farm families.

However, Mr. Secretary, you and I know that this kind of efficiency is somewhat superficial. Efficiency has turned out to mean moving people off their home places. Why is it that the USDA and our deans of agriculture can spew forth the stats on efficiency without counting the real cost to society? In this land of

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plenty, is efficiency the only measuring stick? It has spawned the false idea that if we can become efficient enough we won't really even need our neighbor.

It's no wonder when I drive north across the western tier of Oklahoma and Kansas counties, I don't see people on the land any more. Instead I see big tractors rolling across fields and then the boarded up windows of what used to be the hometowns of so many farm boys and girls. Were it not for my mother who lives in such a town, I would not look forward to those visits back home. Who wants to witness the making of a modern day ghost town? Surely, Mr. Secretary, as a Kansan, a neighbor, you know what I am talking about.

Rural America is being desolated because of this notion of efficiency. Again I ask, have we as a nation, through our farm policy, adopted the principles of Darwin, that only the toughest deserve to remain? I wish it were not so, but the evidence seems quite clear that historically, we have done just that. Believe me, I'm a red-blooded American who believes that a little competition is good, but if farm policy is about providing missiles to assist the strong in gaining more land, and providing darts to those who are small and underserved – our family farmers – then it is wrong on both moral and ethical grounds. Mr. Secretary, make sure that when you make policy that at least you “do no harm” to those who remain.

And Mr. Secretary, it would be even better if you would develop programs that would help provide opportunities for young farmers, move swiftly to implement the findings of the Small Farm Commission, and expedite the settlement to those that have suffered outright discrimination from the Department that Abe called the “people's department.”

Corporate Agriculture

As an agricultural economist, I know all about the prevailing paradigm that when outside capital comes to a community, it is good for the community. For many years I accepted it. But Mr. Secretary, unfortunately, we are finding that profits from that outside business normally flow back to where that original money came from. Local institutions and businesses are bypassed in the construction phase of corporate-owned confined

animal feeding operations. This is exactly what has happened with the coming of corporate-raised hogs (and to a lesser extent with corporate chickens) to rural areas in our state. And where are the good jobs that these industries are supposed to bring? Mr. Secretary, surely you remember the Time article on corporate agriculture, and remember the U.S. News and World Report article on INS raids of processing plants and the way these plants exploit their workers. Mr. Secretary, help us to avoid sweatshops in agriculture in this country. We don't need them.

Suffice it to say that more and more communities are being with overcrowded schools, rises in crime, and environmental liabilities, such as polluted water, rather than prosperity. It is clear that this pollution threatens the ecological communities that agriculture is dependent upon. We are changing the balance of nature. And instead of bringing economic prosperity to a broad cross-section of people in the area, these corporations have exploited workers and siphoned profits to only a few in the community, while most of the profits go out-of-state and sometimes out of the country.

Solutions

There are other concerns that I have, the effects of biotechnology and the loss of biodiversity, to name two of the most serious. The list could go on and on, but the question before us, Mr. Secretary, is “What can you do, and what can I do?” I and countless farmers are willing to do our share. Government cannot save us, it cannot guarantee us a profit but the government can do a few things.

1. It can stop promoting expansion of industrial agriculture and allowing concentration of agribusiness until the last family farmer moves to town. We don't need another reorganization of the Department of Agriculture. What we need is a reorientation towards a more sustainable agriculture. Help us convince the world that sustainable agriculture is not about starving the world, but is about empowering people wherever they are to sustain themselves.

2. It can stop talking about the value of sustainable agriculture and begin to fund it in a significant way. We need to go from a widow's mite of twelve million per

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An Open Letter continued...

year for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program to a respectable level of funding. As you have been told, the program can easily fund twice the proposals it receives and suffer no loss in quality of projects. Something is wrong when the Kerr Center, a rather modest institution from a small state, itself devotes to sustainable agriculture the equivalent of ten percent of what the gigantic USDA spends!

3. It can make sustainable agriculture a priority within the many agencies of the USDA. I am pleased to see that some agencies are doing this. But there is a lot of catching up to do. Somehow employees of "the people's department" need to be reinvigorated to carry out the job of meeting the needs of the present generation, without

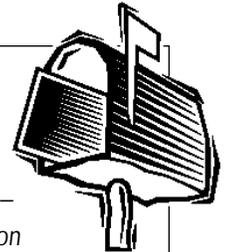
jeopardizing the choices of future generations.

Please Mr. Secretary, distinguish yourself from other secretaries. Renew our faith that you are a man of deeds, not just words. We await your reply.

Sincerely,
Jim Horne, Ph.D.
President, Kerr Center
for Sustainable Agriculture

The Kerr Center invites readers to write us with their own perspectives on agricultural policy.

Interested readers may access *A Time to Act – A Report of the USDA National Commission on Small Farms* at www.reeusda.gov.



Oklahoma Catching Co-op Fever

In 1997, speaking at the Kerr Center Rural Development conference, former North Dakota agriculture commissioner Sarah Vogel described her state's "co-op fever." A new generation of farmer-owned cooperatives, which allow farmers to add value to their crops, Vogel said, had resulted in millions of dollars in new investments, thousand of new jobs and "a sense of renewal and optimism."

In attendance at the Kerr Center conference were Oklahoma Farmers Union president Philip Klutz and Oklahoma House agriculture committee chairman M.C. Leist, who accepted Vogel's invitation to visit North Dakota and learn more. Last year Rep. Leist and House and Senate colleagues created a Task Force on

Agricultural Cooperatives to develop public policy options and recommendations relating to product-development and marketing-oriented cooperatives. Kerr Center president Jim Horne was appointed by Governor Keating to serve on the 12 member committee.

For years Horne has advocated helping family farmers add value to their crops. As the Task Force's final report noted, "There is common agreement an urgent need exists to implement policy that will increase the net income of Oklahoma farmers and ranchers to a level that will allow them to continue in business. The development of cooperative ventures to enhance processing or find new and better uses for Oklahoma agriculture commodities can have direct benefit to our producers."

The Task Force recommended the creation of a new Advisory Board which would give grants and loans in several areas. These include:

Cooperative Marketing Grants

The purpose of this category is to promote productivity, to provide added value to agricultural products, to stimulate and foster agricultural diversification, and to encourage processing innovations.

Marketing and Utilization Grants

The funds in this category will be used to assist in the development or implementation of sound domestic or international marketing plans for Oklahoma agricultural products through financing market feasibility studies, business plans and test marketing.

Farm Diversification Grants or Loans

These could be used for projects that help Oklahoma family farms and ranches become more diversified by adding non-traditional crops, livestock, or on-farm value-added processing of agricultural commodities.

Basic and Applied Research Grants and Loans

Funds would be used for business creation or expansion, or research which would likely lead to a marketable product.

Currently there is a bill in committee in the Oklahoma legislature dealing with these recommendations.

Bringing Home the Bacon?

– Michelle Stephens

Bringing Home the Bacon?- The Myth of the Role of Corporate Hog Production in Rural Revitalization is the latest Kerr Center publication on public policy and sustainable rural development. It is based upon research conducted by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University, under the direction of Dr. Cornelia Butler Flora.

Information in the report will help rural communities in Oklahoma and throughout the United States respond intelligently and appropriately when faced with rural development options. The report, using data from Texas County, Oklahoma, illustrates the impact of the recruitment of industrial swine production on a particular rural county.

The impact was measured by changes in 1) financial indicators including job, income, taxes, business activity, banking activity, public assistance and housing; 2) people-related indicators including population size and diversity, education; 3) social indicators including crime rates and civil court cases and 4) environmental indicators including water, soil, and air quality.

Bringing Home the Bacon? reports findings from multi-county research. Two major questions were used as the basis for the study: **Do the benefits of the**

particular economic development proposal outweigh the costs? and Will the outcomes for the community serve the people of that community and state? These are the overarching questions that citizens and government officials should ask when they are faced with deciding whether and to what extent to pursue industrial recruitment as a means of rural revitalization.

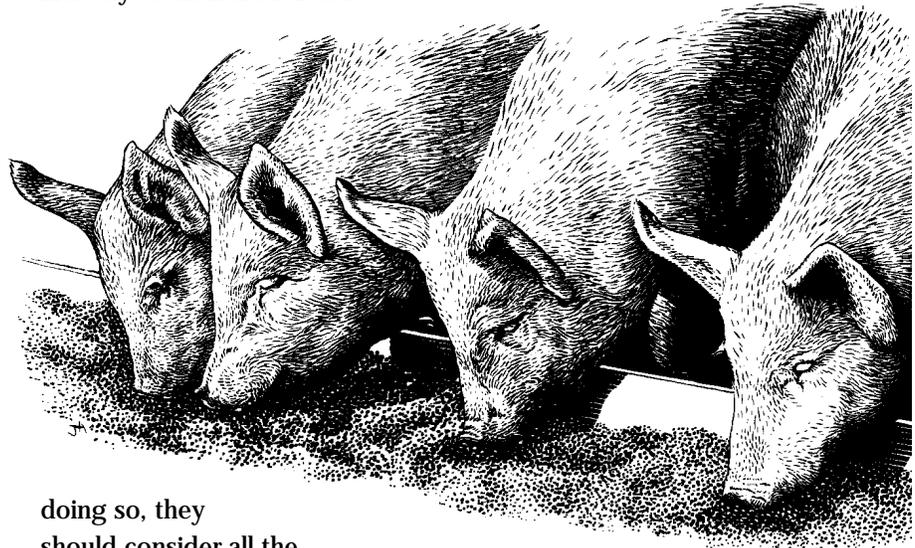
When communities in rural Oklahoma decline economically, they often consider recruiting industry to their area. Before

jobs are they replacing? Is it a good “fit” for the infrastructure and makeup of the community?

Often in the rush to seek new industry, these questions either go unasked, or their answers go ignored. The result can still be jobs, but quite possibly jobs that extract more out of a community than they give back.

The report can be accessed through the Kerr Center web site www.kerrcenter.com.

For more information on Public



doing so, they should consider all the possible impacts of that industry. What will a particular industry require in terms of infrastructure? What will be the effect of the new labor force on the schools, the businesses, the housing? What will be the effect on the environment? Is there a sufficient labor pool or will outside labor move in? What types of jobs are they and what types of

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Step Back in Time in '99 Workshops at the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm

Enjoy a day in the country at the charming Overstreet-Kerr Farm and become a soap artist, a pioneer cook or an herbalist.

April 10 Lye Soap Making

Before there was Dial or Tide, it was a farm woman's responsibility to make the family's soap – used for washing laundry as well as the family. Hand-made soap has been making a comeback in recent years. Learn how to make your own beautiful, scented soaps with experienced soap maker Charlotte Hayer. Participants will make their own soap using fresh herbs and vegetable oils. Hayer will talk about molds, fragrance ingredients, colors and textures, and provide information to take home.

Class time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Fee: \$40 per person

April 17 Dutch Oven Cooking

Along the cattle trails that criss-crossed Oklahoma in the 1800's, cowboys rode hard, sang around the campfire, slept under the stars, and last, but not least, ate some good meals. It wasn't just beans along the Chisholm Trail – thanks to the amazing, all-purpose Dutch oven. At this special workshop, participants

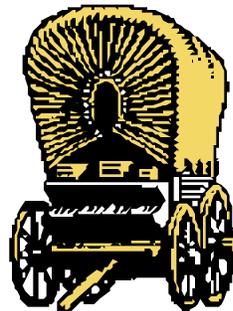
will assist with preparing an 1870's cattle drive meal. Renowned outdoorswoman Luann Sewell Waters of the Oklahoma

Department of Wildlife will discuss the varieties and uses of cast iron cooking utensils. Handouts will include easy recipes and sources of cast iron cookware. For a truly authentic experience, come dressed in 1870's attire (optional)— prizes will be awarded to best dressed female and male. Class limited to 20.

Class time: 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Fee: \$20 per person

April 24 Propagating and Growing Herbs

It's spring! Time to create that herb garden you've always wanted. Instructor Barbara Zieschang will show proper techniques used for taking cuttings, rooting, and growing your favorite herbs. Information on soil types, location, moisture



needs, harvesting, storage, and cooking with herbs will be provided. Participants will tour the Farm's herb beds and nature trail to identify and collect culinary and tea herbs. Fees include an herb-seasoned lunch with iced herb tea. Class limited to 15.

Class time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Fee: \$15 per person

May 8 Tea Herbs and Tea

Tired of the same old Luzianne? Spice up your pitchers of tea this summer with some new flavors. Instructors Barbara Zieschang and Jeremy Henson will take participants on a tour through the Farm's varied herb beds and the nature trail to identify and collect domestic and wild herbs for making tea.

Participants will learn site testing, location, harvesting, storage and uses of plants for making teas for pleasure and medicinal purposes. Class limited to 15. Class time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Fee: \$15 per person



September 11 Container Herb Gardening

Want to grow herbs but find you are short on space? Herbs are wonderful plants to grow in containers on patios and on sunny windowsills. Cap off the summer with Ann Louise Potochnik who will demonstrate the creation of culinary and tea herb planters for the home and patio. She will discuss companion plants, containers, soil, moisture, and location preferences.

Class time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Fee: \$15 per person

Happy Birthday, Spiro!

In honor of the town of Spiro's 100th birthday, the Spiro Historical Society and Overstreet-Kerr Farm are inviting friends and neighbors to come to a party at the Historical Farm on May 22. Featured at the "Choctaw/Pioneer Celebration" will be guest speaker Choctaw Chief Gregory Pyle, singers, dancers, historians, and a hickory-smoked barbecue dinner on the lawn. Help us celebrate Spiro's rich Native American and Pioneer heritage. Funds generated from this event will go to the Spiro Historical Society and Spiro Museum.

Time: 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Fee: \$10 per person

Historical Farm Receives Sorghum Mill and Cooking Pan

— Alan Ware

The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm recently received some additions to their sorghum cooking display. A copper sorghum pan and mill was donated by the daughter of the late Earl Hall of Mansfield, Arkansas. Mr. Hall had cooked sorghum for most of his life. He was 95 years old when he passed away recently.

The sorghum mill is a John Deere brand that was built in the 1920's. (The mill is used to press the juice out of the cane). The donated mill is a large one with 24-inch rollers that required a team of horses to operate. Most mills were pulled by a single horse. This mill can squeeze some cane!

The copper pan is baffled. Baffles are used to separate different sections of the pan and allow the juice to travel across the pan as it cooks into a thick syrup. The pan was probably built during the same time period as the mill. Both pieces of equipment were being stored at a Mansfield farm. They will be cleaned and restored for use in the annual fall festival sorghum cooking at the

Historical Farm or will be on display at the farm.

Sorghum cooking is an art that is in danger of being lost in only a few years. It is important to keep the art of sorghum cooking alive for younger generations to experience. The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm truly appreciates the donation of this equipment to help keep an old tradition alive.

Do you have some antiques or old equipment that you would like to see used in a demonstration like this? The Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm is seeking specific antiques and equipment that were used from 1895 to 1940. The equipment must be in good

condition and easily restored due to time constraints. If you would like to have a list of items needed to complete our different collections, please contact Jim Combs at the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm at 918-966-3396. He is seeking different items pertaining to farm life from 1895 to 1940. Donations are tax-deductible, and names of donors will be displayed. Help us preserve Oklahoma's agricultural history!



Riparian Areas – An Important Natural Resource

–David Redhage

Recently, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has put an emphasis on restoring and protecting riparian areas. A riparian area is the vegetated area adjacent to a stream or any other water body. Riparian areas are threatened primarily due to their location and attractiveness. Riparian bottomland forests have been cleared for prime farmland or for pasture, while other riparian areas are often considered prime real estate by developers. Channelization of streams has also reduced the effectiveness of many riparian areas.

Why are riparian areas important? Riparian areas help reduce floods, stabilize streambanks, provide food and shelter for wildlife, and reduce the effects of non-point source pollution. Non-point source pollution can include pesticides, fertilizers, and sediment from the surrounding watershed. Sediment loads can interfere with fish feeding and reproduction in streams, as well as clog channels, increasing the erosion of streambanks.

The Kerr Center is developing several riparian area demonstrations on its Stewardship Farm. Some riparian areas have been fenced out for eight years, and others have been fenced for only one to three years. Several riparian areas will not be fenced. One controversy surrounding riparian area management

is whether or not to fence livestock out. Since the Kerr Center practices rotational grazing as opposed to continuous grazing, visitors will be able to compare riparian areas where the livestock have been fenced out to those located in pastures that are rotationally grazed. Fenced areas are being planted to trees in order to enhance wildlife habitat. We are photo-monitoring the areas on a quarterly basis to better observe changes over time. Photo-monitoring is an excellent way to monitor gradual changes in habitat that occur over long periods of time.

Before fencing out a riparian area, several things must be considered. If you are raising livestock, one of the most important considerations is how to provide them with water. Often the riparian stream was the water source for livestock.

To improve water availability to the Kerr Center herd, several small ponds are being constructed outside of the riparian areas. Developing these watering points has the added benefit of allowing us to intensify the grazing. We can cross-fence more effectively and better utilize the pasture resource. These ponds are also being fenced so cattle do not have unrestricted access. Rock ramps will be installed to allow access but prevent soil erosion and

to keep the livestock from wading into the pond. This will extend the life of the pond, improve water quality and enhance the wildlife benefit of the pond.

Stream crossing points are also an important consideration, for both livestock and machinery. Often pastureland is dissected by a stream and simply fencing the stream out would eliminate access to a large area of the pasture. To solve this problem, we are installing livestock and equipment crossing points. These are graveled areas, constructed to reduce the amount of cutting or erosion that will occur as water flows across them. Crossing points have been used in other states, but to our knowledge, we are the first to do so in Oklahoma. We will observe how well they work over time.

One of the most important aspects of a riparian area is the benefit to wildlife. The main threat to wildlife today is habitat loss. Not only do riparian areas provide food and shelter, but they act as travel corridors between increasingly segmented habitats.

There are two major habitats provided by riparian areas: aquatic and terrestrial. The aquatic habitat consists of perennial streams and wetlands. Vegetation in the riparian area moderates the water temperature which helps fish. Vegetation is

also a source of food for invertebrates in streams which are the basis of the food chain. If you want to protect the fishery, it is important to maintain the vegetation within twenty-five feet of the shoreline. Riparian areas can also provide habitat for land-based (terrestrial) wildlife. Generally, the riparian area contains a “diversity of structure” which increases the number and kind of animal species present. Diversity of structure means diversity in the type and age of vegetation, i.e., mature trees, saplings, vines, grasses, bushes, etc.

One of the most frequently asked questions is: “How wide should a riparian area be and what should be planted?” Unfortunately, the answer is not that simple. It all

depends on what your goals are, how the adjacent land is being used, and the slope of the land. If the adjacent land is in row crops, a riparian buffer may be needed to filter out fertilizers, herbicides and sediment before runoff enters the stream. A buffer strip in this case may consist of maintaining a grass strip between the field and stream. If an additional goal is wildlife habitat, planting trees and shrubs may be needed. If the area is in permanent pasture and grazed rotationally, your goal may be wildlife habitat enhancement. In that case, the width of the area is determined by the wildlife you hope to attract and the type of vegetation you will plant. The width of a riparian area is measured from the top of the stream

bank, back. We have allowed a 30-foot width (on average) in one of our new riparian areas.

Agriculture is increasingly being looked at as a source of non-point source pollution and riparian areas can help buffer and reduce the effects of non-point source pollution. Protecting riparian areas demonstrates to an increasingly urbanized population that agriculture is concerned about the environment and is doing its part to protect the environment while producing the food society needs.

RESOURCES

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Oklahoma State University, and Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Riparian Area Management Handbook. Publication E-952. 1998.

◆ RURAL DEVELOPMENT ◆

Wanted: Growers for Farmers' Markets

A successful farmers' market has eager customers and plenty of attractive produce. You can't have one without the other. In recent years, both nationally and in Oklahoma, the popularity of farmers' markets has been booming. Sales in Oklahoma are on the rise, say market managers, and the season has been extended in some markets. What's needed now: more growers.

To help prospective growers learn the ins and outs of growing successfully for market, a free market gardening workshop will be held Saturday, April 3, from 9 to 5. Participants will visit two successful small farms. The morning session will at Nature's

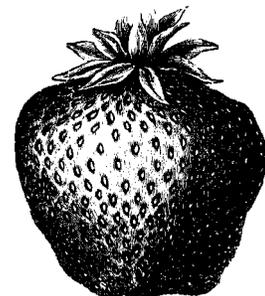
Best Berries near Sperry and the afternoon session will be at Sand Creek Farm near Braggs.

Ray and Marcia Duncan of Nature's Best Berries grow 1 1/2 acres of berries and vegetables for the Cherry Street Farmers' Market in Tulsa. The Duncans will lead a farm tour and explain aspects of small-scale commercial berry and vegetable production, including berry propagation, tomato trellising and onion production.

Participants will caravan to Susie and Ted Lawrence's Sand Creek Farm for the afternoon session. The Lawrences raise 1 1/2 acres of cut flowers for the Muskogee Farmers Market. They will demonstrate basic farm operations which apply to vegetables as well as to flowers

including greenhouse production, transplanting, drip irrigation, and raised bed construction using a tractor and disc (weather permitting).

The workshop is sponsored by the Cherry St. Farmers' Market, Muskogee Farmers' Market Association, and the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture. For more information contact Susan Kelley at 918-747-6701 or Susie Lawrence at 918-487-5474.



Fruit Tree Workshop March 27

– Alan Ware

How to prune and manage pests on fruit trees will be the topics at a workshop/field day at Leon Kelly's orchard near Red Oak, Saturday, March 27 from 9 to 3. Topics of instruction include pruning techniques, equipment, tree varieties and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices. Both home fruit growers and small-scale orchardists are invited. Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Service from Latimer and Pittsburg counties and the Kerr Center in Poteau are sponsors. Admission is free, but you must pre-register by March 24 to get a free lunch.

Kelley owns a two-acre apple and peach orchard, and recently received an Oklahoma Producer Grant from the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture. His project is to evaluate chicken litter as a fertility source on peach and apple trees. He is also implementing Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices in his apple trees as a demonstration.

Dean McGraw, professor of horticulture at Oklahoma State University will conduct the pruning workshop. Participants will have the opportunity to work in small groups to learn the pruning techniques.

After lunch, pest management

will be discussed as well as IPM practices that homeowners may use. Tree varieties and equipment will also be covered. For more information or to receive a registration form, contact: Ted Evicks, Pittsburgh County Extension, 918-423-4120 or Tony Johnson, Latimer County Extension, 918-465-3349 or Alan Ware/David Redhage at The Kerr Center, 918-647-9123. Leon Kelley's farm is located 4.9 miles north of Red Oak on Highway 82. Red Oak is located 13 miles east of Wilburton, Oklahoma on highway 270. Signs will guide you to the farm.

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture
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