

Field Notes



Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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Healthy Farms, Food and Communities

—Maura McDermott

With an invitation for speakers and participants to “elevate and broaden the discussion” of food issues, Kerr Center president Jim Horne kicked off the *Bringing in the Sheaves* symposium October 16 at the Westin Hotel in Oklahoma City. About 250 people attended.

The symposium was ground-breaking in that it placed agriculture in the context of a larger food system of “stakeholders,” which includes consumers. Several speakers discussed the ways that the current food system is failing both producers and consumers, and the negative impact the system too often has on rural communities and the natural environment. Speakers also presented efforts by individuals, groups and government to make a food system that is “healthier,” and more equitable for all.

For many the high point of the symposium was when Oklahoma Agriculture Commissioner Dennis V. Howard announced the establishment of the Oklahoma Food Policy Council. The Council is a new effort by the state of Oklahoma to create more opportunities for Oklahoma family farmers and ranchers.

“We must foster the survival of family farms,” Howard said, a task given new urgency by the ever-increasing corporate control of farming.

Howard named the Kerr Center’s Jim Horne, and



l-r, Dennis Howard, Geni Thomas and Jim Horne

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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
- Communications/Education
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Geni Thomas, executive chef at Cassady School in Oklahoma City to co-chair the council.

Horne has been president of the center since its inception in 1985, and before that led the agricultural division of the Kerr Foundation. He has a M.S. in agricultural economics and a PhD. in biology. He is a popular speaker nationally and is a well-known advocate for family farms and a sustainable agriculture.

Horne said the group's first task will be to determine the strengths and weaknesses of Oklahoma's food systems, and then design solutions to problems.

Thomas is 2000 National Chef of the Year. She commented on the need to connect farmers with chefs and restaurants. Nationally, chefs have led the way in the promotion of locally-grown, high quality food. (Alice Waters, owner of Chez Panisse restaurant in San Francisco, is the most prominent and was featured in *Newsweek* last August)

The council will be made up of a diverse group of Oklahomans coming from all sectors of the food system and from government.

Oklahoma is one of the first states to appoint such a council, joining Connecticut and Iowa. Utah and North Carolina are in the process of creating them.

According to the Iowa Food Council information sheet "a food policy is any decision made or not made by a government or institution which shapes the type of foods used or available, as well as their cost; or which influences the opportunities for farmers... or affects the food choices available to consumers."

An example would be the regulatory requirement placed on someone desiring to open a food-based business.

A food policy council brings to the table a broad array of interests and voices, many of whom are not typically asked to be involved when farm and agricultural policy is discussed, and it can examine a broader array of issues and employ a more comprehensive approach to analyzing issues.

Commissioner Howard also charged the group with addressing the safety of the public's food supply, in jeopardy because of recent cases of contamination and bioterrorism concerns. The outbreaks of hoof-and-mouth and mad cow diseases in Europe are all causes for concern, he said, as is the continued use in other countries of chemicals banned in the U.S. for food production. He urged participants to "Buy American" and more specifically to "Buy Oklahoma."

More on the symposium on pages 3-9. Photos by Ken Biddle of the ODA.

Just Published!

The new book, *The Next Green Revolution: Essential Steps to a Healthy, Sustainable Agriculture*, by the Kerr Center's Jim Horne and Maura McDermott can be purchased from the Kerr Center. 918.647.9123



Hunger *in the* Heartland

One topic that generally isn't addressed at traditional agriculture conferences is hunger, especially in rural areas. Doug O'Brien, director of public policy for America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest food relief organization, addressed what he called the "persistent poverty in rural America."

In rural America "food insecurity is higher than in the rest of America." (Food insecurity is defined as limited or uncertain access to nutritious, safe foods...; households that experience food insecurity have reduced quality or variety of meals and may have irregular food intake)

He noted the irony of people going to a food bank for a box of cornflakes to feed their children in a community where thousands of acres are devoted to growing the corn for the cornflakes or even more ironically, for "feeding the world." He said that while hunger is the same everywhere— "the hunger in Chicago is similar to hunger in Cordell"— perhaps the hunger in Chicago is easier to solve.

He pointed to the fact that the rural economy did not grow with the rest of America in the 1990s and that in one-quarter of all rural counties, poverty rates

exceed 20%. The rates have stayed the same for thirty years.

O'Brien cautioned the audience that perhaps their notions of who is hungry may be mistaken. "Today in a soup line you are as likely to find a single mother with a family as you are a homeless man," he said. He also pointed out that 2/3 of the rural poor are working.

"Working people, children, the elderly— they are often the faces of the hungry," he added. The problem of hunger in the elderly population is especially acute in rural areas, where the population is aging.

While in the long term "a sustainable agriculture translates to sustainable communities," he cautioned that the problem of hunger must be solved first if people are to have the energy and resources to tackle the deeper problems. Bureaucratic barriers to alleviating hunger must be removed, he said. He used the example of a federal gun permit which requires an application of two pages. One must fill out a 12 page application in order to get food stamps. (In Oklahoma, only 55-68% of those eligible for food stamps participate in the program).

While the problems of rural poverty and hunger may seem intractable, he concluded on a positive note. The success of lunch and breakfast programs in all viating hunger in children, both urban and rural, shows that "the problem is solvable."

If we choose to solve it.



Doug O'Brien

...hunger is a form of violence that is inflicted by society. Some people have not enough food; others have too much, and the waste is violence."

Gandhi

- ▶ In South Dakota, 17% of individual farming operations were eliminated in the last five years.
- ▶ 11.9% of all households in Oklahoma are food insecure.
- ▶ 23% of rural children live in poverty.
- ▶ More than 33 percent of households in agriculturally-based communities have annual incomes below \$15,000.

Putting People First:

The New Agriculture

An increased appreciation of local food; the desire of consumers to connect with farmers and the land; the search for a new sustainable agriculture; the rapid growth of farmer's markets: all are signs of a "new agriculture" that is emerging in the United States, said Neil Hamilton, chairman of the Iowa Food Policy Council and professor of law and director of the Agriculture Law Center at Drake University in Des Moines.



Neil Hamilton

He said the pendulum is "swinging back to a farming and food system that places people, not corporations, first." This system is based on "sustainable agriculture, healthy farms and quality food."

Hamilton described the increasing strength in Iowa of the local food movement in his speech and in the paper "Putting a Face on our Food: How State and Local Food Policies Can Promote the New Agriculture," which he made available to conference-goers and is excerpted below.

"Five years ago, a person would have been hard-pressed to find "Iowa grown" food on a menu or in a store. But that is changing as the proliferation of farmers' markets and producers diversifying what they raise and how they sell it changes Iowa's food system. Menus featuring Iowa grown food and institutions

promoting 'all-Iowa meals' are important signs of this trend.

"Slowly but steadily the food culture of Iowa and other states is changing. The local foods movement is nationwide and it is helping consumers and communities consider where food is grown and how food buying decisions can support local farmers and businesses. Many consumers and communities are coming to recognize local is better in many ways— better taste and quality, but also better for the producers and businesses. And better for the environment since the food does not travel the 1500 miles it is estimated a typical U.S. food may move before being consumed.

"But the local food movement would not have so much energy if the food didn't taste great and if consumers didn't benefit as well as producers. The quality of food that ends up on the plate is key and locally

grown food, served fresh and in season, has a definite advantage.

"A challenge for many farmers and states is finding ways to support the institutional and attitudinal changes needed to build local food systems. Research will play a role, such as on lengthening growing seasons to produce and market local food. But an important part will be putting in place the laws and policies designed to support community food systems and expand the opportunities for farmers and consumers."

The full paper is available online at www.kerrcenter.com. It contains information on the initial achievements and limitations of the Iowa Food Policy Council, a model state and local food policy improvement act, a rationale for state and local food policy, and a discussion of some of the principal aims of such policy.

The number of farmers' markets in the U.S. increased 63 per cent from 1994 to 2000, with 19,000 farmers now selling at about 2,800 markets, according to the USDA.



Brother David Andrews

Eating is a Moral Act

Brother David Andrews is the executive director of National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) based in Des Moines. Brother David was the symposium luncheon speaker. After regaling the crowd with a series of chicken jokes, he challenged the attendees to think about the moral implications of their food choices. Following is an excerpt from his speech. The complete text is available online at www.kerrcenter.com.

Think about your tables, family tables, community tables, faith tables. Who eats? How is food prepared? How is it shared? And who gets to talk? What do they say? Tables are for eating and tables are for talking. Eating is a moral act. We shape each other and our world at our tables: family tables, community tables, faith tables. The Heartland hungers like all hunger, for family food, for civic participation, for justice, peace and love. Our choices create our tables, our food, our talk. Our choices feed our hungers, our physical, communal, spiritual hungers.

At the National Catholic Rural Life Conference we have a campaign directed at eaters, those who shape the structure of agriculture and the structure of our food system. By our choices we shape the world.

Do you purchase food from

retailers who support family farmers?

Do you eat food that was grown by farmers who treated their animals with dignity and respect, who raised the animals humanely?

Are there farm workers, mushroom pickers, apple warehouse workers, chicken catchers, vegetable pickers, processing plant workers, immigrant laborers involved in your food preferences?

Does your food habit contribute to global climate change?

Is the food you eat part of a sustainable food system that contributes to the well being of unknown future generations, to a healthy environment, to a local community in a rural or urban area which has a great deal of vitality? Or will the food you eat come from a system which depopulates the countryside and demeans farmers, farm workers, food process workers, corporate executives and

their families?

These choices create or negate a healthy rural America, yes, a healthy America, a healthy world as well. Think before you eat!

Eating is a moral act. We are what we eat! And we can ask ourselves who is at the table? What are they saying about the food system?

Eating is a moral act. Our tables need to include those who've been excluded. Our talk needs to include our farmers, their families, the rural communities, our environment, our landscape, our countryside, religious and moral values.

We are what we eat. By our choices we shape our world. By our conversations, our talking, our praying, our justice, our spirituality, we shape the future of rural America. We need to shape one that is healthy, that encourages biodiversity, community, spirituality.

Let us pray together to forge a world of justice, ecological harmony and peace. A world where the hungers for food, justice, community, ecological harmony are satisfied, in a holistic spirituality. These are the elements of a healthy rural America, and I suspect, a more healthy world too.

The food service at the University of Wisconsin at Madison recently added Wisconsin-grown, organic food items to its menu: tortilla chips made from blue corn, apples, potatoes and "natural beef" hamburger.

Voting with your Fork

– Maura McDermott

What does it mean to “vote with your fork”?

According to Dan Nagengast, director of the Kansas Rural Center, it means that we can shape our food system by what we choose to buy.

He should know. Since 1994, the Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance has been giving people in eastern Kansas an opportunity to vote with their forks. Nagengast is a founding member of the group, which numbers eight small, organic, family farms in eastern Kansas.

The alliance has been very successful. Rolling Prairie began with 135 customers. After three years they had over 300, gained through word of mouth, flyers, and newspaper articles, and sales had increased from \$28,000 to \$91,000. In 2001 they had 330 customers.

Rolling Prairie is a one version of community-supported agriculture (CSA). In a classic type of CSA, customers or subscribers pay the farm a large lump sum (perhaps a few hundred dollars) at the beginning of the growing season in anticipation of the produce they will receive later. Subscribers often contribute labor on the farm and distribute produce. In essence, the members form a partnership with the farmer. The subscriber shares with the farmer the bounty of the soil, as well as at least some of the risks inherent in farming.

The Rolling Prairie farmers doubted they could get their customers to gamble that much.

So they modified the CSA concept. Rolling Prairie is “a

vegetable subscription service,” though herbs and fruits are also part of the offerings. They ask a \$50 deposit when subscribers sign on and weekly payments of \$12 once deliveries begin. The deposit provides working capital to cover early-on expenses.

For growers, Nagengast sees many advantages to a subscription service. “You get the retail price, you can’t get rained out (as happens at farmers’ markets), there is no August slump, and you can sell earlier and later in the season,” he says.

The reality is, with this marketing approach, “it’s harder to grow the produce than to sell it,” he says. “You can move an amazing amount of produce.”

The fact that there is more than one farm providing produce gives customers a greater variety and provides the group a bit of insurance against crop failures. Because the farms are at different locales within the region, they experience some differences in weather and also can take advantage of microclimates. One year, for example, one farmer harvested his raspberries three weeks after another alliance farmer. The Rolling Prairie farmers are experienced growers— they need to be in order to deliver quality produce 25 weeks a year to expectant customers.

Each week produce is delivered to three outlets— two in Kansas City and one in Lawrence. The Community Mercantile in Lawrence, a natural foods market, has found that their sales, even produce sales, increase substantially when Rolling Prairie subscribers come in for their produce.



Dan Nagengast

Customers assemble their own bags from the produce the farmers have weighed and packaged. Grass-fed beef, organic chicken, eggs, and cut flowers are also available for sale from alliance farmers, but these items are not included as part of the subscription service.

Subscribers get more than fresh, locally-grown produce from Rolling Prairie – they get a weekly newsletter updating them on farm news, farm picnics and tours, and a book of recipes. This is part of the effort to make Rolling Prairie more than a money-for-vegetables exchange. The cookbook is particularly popular. It has sections for each fruit, vegetable and herb offered by the alliance throughout the season. “You have to grow as many customers as vegetables,” says Nagengast.

Nagengast says there are seven or eight CSAs in Kansas; the CSA in Salina, with a population of 40,000, has 100 subscribers. He suggests that in addition to Oklahoma City and Tulsa, smaller cities such as Stillwater, Norman, Enid, and Muskogee might be candidates for CSAs.

Nagengast doesn’t downplay the difficulties of attracting and keeping customers. It is less convenient to get produce from Rolling Prairie than it is

to buy it at Wal-mart, and it is more expensive. Customers have to have a desire for flavor and quality, says Nagengast.

While buying from Rolling Prairie is not the cheapest way to buy food, it is one of the cheapest ways to buy local, seasonal food, he says. The alternatives to buying local are sometimes mind-boggling: for example, hot house tomatoes from British Columbia for sale in Kansas grocery stores in the summer.

Just as it takes effort to go to a polling place and vote on election day, so it takes effort on the part of both producers and subscribers to make this local food system work. And if customers of the Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance are indeed voting with their fork, what are they voting for? Since the alliance farms are organic, subscribers are voting for organic farming practices over conventional, and all that implies for the environment.

They are also voting for regionally grown food, supporting small family farms, and eating as much seasonal produce as possible. In short, says Nagengast, “trying to develop a local economy is what it’s all about.”

Competition = Fairness

Michael Stumo, general counsel of the Organization for Competitive Markets, gave conference participants a primer on the legal issues surrounding competition and concentration in the agriculture industry. He asserted that increased concentration in major sectors of the agricultural industry makes it more tempting and more likely, that illegal conduct such as price fixing, price manipulation, price discrimination, control of information, predatory pricing, retaliation, and exclusive dealing will occur.

“Undue market power is the explanation for why the prices of milk and meat are going up, while what

the farmers are getting is going down,” he said.

He called for corporate welfare to be redirected to support promotion of local and regional food systems and creation of new, niche markets where competition may flourish. He also called for universities to redirect their research and extension efforts toward supporting these new systems.



Michael Stumo

Prices Received by Farmers/Ranchers

(courtesy Oklahoma Farmers Union)

Lettuce (one head)	Retail: \$1.29	Farmer: 9 cents
Loaf of Bread	Retail: \$1.39	Farmer: 5 cents
Milk (one gallon)	Retail: \$2.89	Farmer: \$1
Boneless Ham (5 pounds)	Retail: \$8.95	Farmer: \$2
Wheaties (14.75 oz box)	Retail: \$3.71	Farmer: 4.6 cents
Fresh Potatoes (one pound)	Retail: 59 cents	Farmer: 6 cents

RESOURCES

Subscribing to Change: Starting and Sustaining a Vegetable Subscription Service: The Story of Rolling Prairie Farmers Alliance is a 73-page booklet available for \$5, \$2 shipping and handling from Kansas Rural Center. It is a great resource, covering in depth the farms making up the alliance and how the subscription service works—everything from pricing, to incorporation, to promotion, to getting along and dividing the labor. Includes examples of surveys, newsletters, newspaper articles, sales summaries. It is easy to read and comprehensive.

Kansas Rural Center is a non-profit organization working for “family farming and stewardship of soil and water.” Contributors get their excellent newsletter *Rural Papers* which is also available by subscription for \$25 per year. The center also

offer a series of sustainable agriculture management guides. PO Box 133 Whiting, KS 66552. 785.873.3431, www.kansasruralcenter.org, ksrc@rainbowtel.net

Growing for Market is a nationally-circulated monthly newsletter edited and published by Rolling Prairie grower Lyn Byczynski. Loaded with practical, timely advice. \$30 per year growing4market@earthlink.net, PO Box 3747, Lawrence, KS 66046, 800-307-8949, www.growingformarket.com

Rolling Prairie Cookbook can be ordered from Growing for Market (see above) for \$14.95 plus \$3 postage. It includes storage instructions for produce and directions for simple preparation as well as “a cornucopia of original recipes.”



Chief Chad Smith



Sister Christine Pratt

"You mean french fries are potatoes?"

"I really don't care what happens to dairy farmers. I get my milk at the grocery store."

"Everyone knows it's no damn good if it doesn't come in cellophane."

"I don't know why farmers complain—they only work in April and October."

Humility

"If you take something from creation, you put something back, so the thing you took can sustain itself." So Chief Chad Smith described a principle that the Cherokees have traditionally lived by, a principle that underlies modern sustainable agriculture. What fosters this principle? Humility, he believes, is at the center of the Cherokee relationship to land and nature. "If you abuse nature, it will defend itself," he said.

Native Americans have a long and

important agricultural history. Native farmers domesticated and cultivated our modern crops of corn, tomatoes, potatoes, varieties of beans, and squash.

For modern day Cherokees, farming and gardening provide opportunities to be self-sufficient and to eat in a healthy way. Smith said the Cherokees' long range community plan, which promotes self reliance, a strong cultural identity and strong tribal government, will incorporate agriculture.

Reconciliation

The gap between farmer and city dweller might seem insurmountable if judged by the preceding comments. But Sister Christine Pratt takes such misunderstanding as a challenge. Under her leadership, the Rural Life Ministry of the Roman Catholic diocese of Toledo, Ohio, has initiated a number of activities that connect people in Toledo to people in largely rural northwest Ohio. The activities of Project FarmHands have also served to reconcile urbanites with the soil and the joys and challenges of growing food, and helped to feed the hungry in both rural and urban areas

Perhaps the most successful project so far has been ToledoGrows, which has brought rural, suburban and urban people together to develop 33 community gardens in Toledo's low income central city.

The Children's Project has also been a success. It educates school children and their parents about the rural/urban food connection. The children and teachers have found many creative ways to help area food kitchens, from simple food collection to baking bread.

WormWorks is part of The Children's

Project and also helps Toledo Grows. Each of the participating classes (K-8) handles the feeding and maintenance of a worm box in their classroom. The worms recycle kitchen scraps and other waste into compost. "The children are learning to care for the earth and the least of God's creatures," said Sister Christine. The children also start plants for ToledoGrows in the vermicompost, and later plant them in the community gardens. The children learn how to give, she added.

Another interesting project is The Steer Project which encourages schools and organization to purchase steers from area farmers. The meat is then donated to food kitchens in Toledo and in smaller rural towns.

In addition, the Rural Life Ministry gives Century Farm Awards to families who have maintained the farm in the same family for over 100 years.

Sister Christine believes the current food system is unjust, and serves to divide and alienate people. The key to change is to bring people together to share stories, make connections and honor those who work the land.

Action

The final session of *Bringing in the Sheaves* was a panel discussion including Paul Muegge, Kate Clancy, and Miles Tolbert. Each spoke about policy on the state and federal level and how it can affect agriculture and rural communities.

Tolbert is chief of the environmental protection unit in the Oklahoma Attorney General's office. He spoke about the recent rulings by the attorney general that may shift responsibility for pollution away from the contract chicken farmer who often has few assets, towards the company which contracts with him.

State Senator Muegge spoke passionately of the need to ensure fair markets and competition for farmers. Muegge is the chair of the Oklahoma Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and he is active in the Organization for Competitive Markets.

Clancy is managing director of the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural and Environmental Policy at the non-profit Winrock International. She also directed the center's agriculture policy project which recently published *Making Changes: Turning Local Visions into National Solutions*, ninety-five grass-roots policy recommendations for agriculture and rural development. The report was released in May.

It was the culmination of a unique five-year project involving 350 farmers, ranchers, rural business people and civic leaders who met in local meetings in eleven states across the country, as well as at three regional and one national



Senator Paul Muegge

meeting.

Participants came together to identify agriculture or economic development issues facing their communities. For example, local people in Knox County, Nebraska, took up the barriers small farmers face in accessing local marketing and distribution systems. Those in Deaf Smith County, Texas, focused on water and air quality problems, while those in south coastal Massachusetts wrestled with access to capital and credit, and farmland preservation.

While many of the speakers at the symposium emphasized local and state solutions, Clancy pointed out the importance of good policy at the national level. The recommendations made in the report are specific, addressing legislative, oversight, appropriations, regulatory and administrative actions that should be taken. The report also outlines several recommendations for states and the private sector. The recommendations are unique in that they are truly from the grass roots— not national down, but local up.

Making Changes is available online or for \$15 from the Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy.

More Information

For more pictures and information about conference participants, go to www.kerrcenter.com Presentations by Bro. David Andrews and Neil Hamilton are available there.

America's Second Harvest
800.771.2303
www.secondharvest.org

Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma
918.456.0671 • www.cherokee.org

Iowa Food Policy Council
www.iowafoodpolicy.org

Kansas Rural Center
785.873.3431
www.kansusruralcenter.org

National Catholic Rural Life Conference
515.270.2634 • www.ncrlc.com

Oklahoma Attorney General
405.521.3921 www.oag.state.ok.us

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture
405.521.3864 www.state.ok.us/~okag

Oklahoma Senate
405.521.5628 • www.odl.state.ok.us

Organization for Competitive Markets
662.476.5568
www.competitivemarkets.com

Rural Life Ministry, Diocese of Toledo
419.334.1331
www.catholiccharitiesnwo.org/rurallife.html

Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural and Environmental Policy
703.525.9430
www.winrock.org/wallace

Thanks to the Oklahoma Sierra Club for their generous support of the symposium and Oklahoma Farmers Union for their sponsorship of a break. Thanks also to the Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture and all who helped us publicize the event.



Oklahoma Producer Grant Recipient Appreciation Day

A FUN TIME AT THE ZOO

- Alan Ware



Program director Alan Ware welcomes the crowd.

OKLAHOMA PRODUCER GRANTS

- ▶ Program began in 1998
- ▶ 28 grants awarded to date
- ▶ 2002 grants will be announced in January
- ▶ A competitive program, with recipients selected by an independent committee
- ▶ Extension personnel, NRCS specialists and other ag professionals assist recipients
- ▶ Goal: farmers learning from other farmers
- ▶ For more information contact the Kerr Center or go to www.kerrcenter.com

The fall is always a special time for celebration. On September 8, the Kerr Center sponsored an appreciation day for Oklahoma grant recipients, their families, and cooperators at the Oklahoma City Zoo.

The day began with families touring the zoo and seeing the sites. The weather was cool and made for an enjoyable experience. The zoo catered a chuck wagon barbeque lunch for everyone. After lunch, appreciation certificates were awarded to grant recipients who had completed their projects. On hand to receive certificates were Kim Barker, Jesse Snyder, Rick Jeans, Robert Wall, and Howard Beavin.

Dr. Jim Horne, Kerr Center President and CEO, spoke about the importance of making changes in agriculture. He

discussed how the farmers, ranchers, and cooperators are the real innovators in agriculture. He also thanked the participants and all who help make the producer grant program work.

During the afternoon session, grant recipients were asked to provide input to the Kerr Center on the producer grant program and agriculture policy. The grant recipients were divided into several groups and asked two questions. The questions and top responses are listed at right.



l-r: Grant recipients Vernon Dixon, Kim Barker, Mrs. Dixon, Sam McClure, Howard Beavin



What important topics could the producer grant program address?

1. Direct marketing
2. Consumer education
3. Marketability of innovative ideas
4. Increasing profitability

What important public policy issues pertaining to agriculture need to be addressed?

1. Removal of barriers on small farms (making sure small farms have the same opportunities as large)
2. Promoting the use of local food
3. Small producers and USDA inspection requirements
4. Labeling: country of origin & GMOs

These results will be used to develop future programming at the Kerr Center.

The day ended with friends visiting and continued fun at the zoo. The Kerr Center would like to once again thank all those who make the Oklahoma Producer Grant Program a success. It wouldn't be possible to run such a program without producers seeing its value and going out of their way to be a part of it.



Rick Jeans (l) receives a certificate from Jim Horne

Picking Lettuce in January?

At Au Naturel Farm in Kentucky, they grow lettuce and gourmet salad greens throughout the winter and harvest ripe tomatoes by Memorial Day. They do it in "high tunnels," large (20' x 96'), unheated hoop/greenhouses.

The operators of Au Naturel, Paul and Alison Wiediger, have been farming for over 25 years. The Kerr Center is bringing them to the 21st Annual Oklahoma/Arkansas Horticulture Industries Show (HIS) on Friday and Saturday, January 11th and 12th, at Tulsa Community College Northeast Campus. They will be featured during the sustainable agriculture/farmers' market workshop sessions.

The Wiedigers have a diversified farm that includes organic vegetables, cut flowers, and beef (Murray Grey) production. They will cover their successful strategies to extend the season for vegetables and cut flowers. The couple describes the use of high tunnels as "low cost/high profit." They will also cover marketing strategies, especially the use of email.

Along with the Wiedigers, Area Extension Horticulture Specialist Jim Shrefler will be sharing information on onion research he is conducting. Finally, on Saturday afternoon a Farmer's Market Alliance meeting will be conducted for producers starting at 4:00 p.m.

The HIS show offers two days of educational programs as well as a trade show. Growers of vegetables,

fruits, grapes, herbs, and Christmas trees will also offer sessions concurrently beginning at 10:30 each day. Workshops sponsored by those involved in public gardens and master gardener programs are also planned. Attendees can go to any of the sessions.

Offerings are designed to appeal to both new and experienced growers. Researchers will present the latest information on new varieties, pest control strategies, and innovative cultural techniques. Growers will share their experiences, insights, and individual research.

From 9-10 each day a general session will be held. The topic covered this year will "Better Crops through Soil Conservation." Growers will also be able to visit with vendors at the trade show and stock up on supplies for the coming year.

Advance registration for the two-day show is \$40 if received by December 15; \$50 after that date. Saturday only registration is \$25 by December 15; \$30 at the door. Spouse/additional adults pay a reduced rate. There is a \$20 additional charge for the grape sessions. Registration begins at 8 a.m. both days.

Program information and a pre-registration form can be found at www.hortla.okstate.edu or call your county Extension office or the Kerr Center at 918-647-9123. Check out the Wiedigers at aunaturelfarm.homestead.com





Farmland Preservation *through* Conservation Easements

In Oklahoma and in every other state in the nation, valuable farmland is being lost to urban development.

– Anita Poole

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement by a landowner to limit development on his/her property while still retaining private ownership.

How extensive is the problem? In Oklahoma between 1982 and 1992, 72,000 acres of prime or unique farmland were converted to urban land. In fact, almost half (46%) of the land developed in the state during this time period was farmland.

It was the same story in other states, with Texas leading the nation in lost farmland. Since then, conversion rates nationwide have only increased. The American Farmland Trust, a leading advocate of farmland protection, has concluded that thus far, “efforts in the United States to manage land have, for the most part, failed to protect farmland.”

The implications of this failure are serious. “By converting some of its best farmland to urban uses, the U.S. is limiting future options to deal with social, economic, food security and environmental problems,” says the organization.

This trend has implications for the individual farm family as well as the nation as a whole. Too often, farmers are caught in a bind when it comes to making sure their farms survive for future generations to work and enjoy. Increasingly, younger members of farm families are leaving the farm for urban professions. Because of this trend, farmers rightly worry that after they pass the land along, their successors may be tempted to sell or divide the farm rather than continuing to farm.

Another problem for farmers is rising land values due to nearby development, which causes property taxes also to rise proportionally. Farming often is not profitable enough to justify the payment of the increased tax rates.

One tool to preserve a farm for future generations that makes economic sense is a conservation easement. A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement by a landowner to limit development on his/her property while still retaining private ownership.

Conservation easements are used to protect land for several purposes, including but not limited to, prevention of development, wildlife protection, environmental protection, and tax considerations.

Conservation easements are signed by the landowners, then donated to either the government or a qualifying conservation or historic preservation organization. The easements are then recorded with the County Register of Deeds which ensures perpetual protection of the land no matter who owns the land in the future. The landowners retain ownership and the full right to control and manage their lands within the limits of the easement.

Conservation easements are usually held by nonprofit organizations for the simple reason that farmers can receive charitable deductions on their taxes when

the easement is properly transferred. Many organizations have become holders of conservation easements. Organizations such as American Farmland Trust, Trust for Public Land, and the Nature Conservancy all use conservation easements and have had success in achieving their respective goals.

Many of these organizations have funds available to pay landowners for giving up the right to develop. (There aren't many farmers who wouldn't benefit from a new source of income!) Farmers can, however, reserve some areas of their land for future "development," for example, to construct a barn or to build a house for a relative.

It is important that the landowner and the holder of the easement develop a good relationship with one another to ensure stability. Farmers can protect their own interests by researching the organization that will ultimately hold and manage the easement.

Once a good relationship is built, the farmer continues farming and usually just reports to the easement holder any changes made or planned. When farmers have specific plans for their property, whether it be composting, or irrigation, or some other practice, they can work with the easement holder before granting the easement to make sure there are no misunderstandings. They can submit plans, past records and future projections and can discuss their concerns while gaining more information. The landowners and the easement holders in essence become a team that protects the land for future generations.

"America is destroying farmland in every state."

— *Farming on the Edge*

One of the most attractive aspects of conservation easement are the tax benefits which flow from them. The first tax benefit in some states is lower property taxes. But the benefits do not end there. The IRS allows a deduction if the easement is

perpetual in nature and is donated only for conservation purposes. Many states further give relief from estate taxes when conservation easements are in place.

Easements do not have to cover all of a landowner's property. The farmer/landowner can decide to restrict development only in specific areas of his farm including areas that historically were not beneficial to him due to wetness or incline or other defects which made that acreage un-farmable.

However, even when a farmer chooses to protect his best farm land with a conservation easement, he still retains the full right to control and manage the land within the limits of the easement. The easement holder would monitor the property to ensure compliance with the terms, but usually does not have any direct control over the other activities on the land. Monitoring is usually done by reviewing the landowner's reports.

Landowners should be aware that while conservation easements will prevent development on the land by private landowners, most states do not extend that protection to development by the state or federal government.

Conservation easements do not change the ownership of the land, only the development rights. Therefore, landowners continue to have the right to transfer title to the land in any way that they see fit. The landowners can leave the farm to their heirs or sell it. However, all future owners would gain ownership to the property subject to the restrictions on development found in the conservation easement. They would take the land not only subject to the restrictions, but also with the same benefits.

Conservation easements can be a valuable tool for farmers to achieve their long term goals on their property. We have seen the continuing demise of the family farm due to many external factors including lack of profitability. The use of these easements is one way to combat the loss of farmland while providing some measure of economic relief to farmers.

Learn more about Conservation Easements

The Kerr Center is planning an in-depth short course May 20-24 in Poteau on conservation easements. For more information on the course or conservation easements for farmers, contact the center at 918.647.9123.

For more information on loss of farmland visit the American Farmland Trust web site at www.farmland.org or call them at 202.331.7300

Check out *Farming on the Edge*, a state-by-state report on endangered farmland at www.farmlandinfo.org



Small Fruit Trial Report

– David Redhage

During the 2001 Horticulture Farm field day, participants toured the small fruit variety trials. The Kerr Center has been setting up the trials since 1998, and Simon Billy manages the projects. Small fruit production may fit the needs of market gardeners who don't have the time or soils to grow vegetables. It may also complement a vegetable production system. In the past, we have grown and marketed strawberries successfully. The small fruit trial now consists of perennial plantings of various fruits. The trials include muscadine grapes, table grapes, blackberries and blueberries.

Muscadine Grapes

Two varieties of muscadine grapes *Nesbitt* and *Fry*— have been planted. We made the first planting of 50 of each variety in February 1998. For reasons unknown, survival was poor. We have tried several different management techniques to increase survival: mulch, no mulch, irrigation, no irrigation, etc. The trial was replanted and the plants left to sprawl during the 2001 growing season with very little irrigation. Survival seems to be good, but the second growing year will determine how well the muscadines survive.

Table Grapes

Two varieties, *Edelweiss* and *Alwood*, have been planted. Both are seeded grapes. Because high heat and humidity tend to create perfect conditions for diseases, eastern Oklahoma is not generally conducive to producing table grapes under a low spray or no spray program. The varieties we are testing were selected based on a reports that they seemed to do well near Fayetteville, Arkansas, under a low spray or no spray program. 25 plants of each variety were planted in the spring of 2001. Survival has been excellent so far, with only two plants lost.

Blackberries

Two new varieties were selected from the Arkansas breeding program. The varieties were *Chickasaw* (thorned) and *Apache* (thornless). We have grown thornless in the past and seem to have trouble with them thriving under our growing conditions. These two varieties were planted in March of 2000. The *Chickasaw* variety yielded extremely well in the spring of 2001. We didn't set up a yield trial since we didn't plan on such a large yield. The thornless variety *Apache* yielded very few berries. Yields from each variety will be recorded in 2002.

Blueberries

Three varieties are currently being evaluated: *Ozarkblue*, *Summit*, and *Blueray*. *Ozarkblue* was release from the University of Arkansas breeding program several years ago. Our planting is currently three years old. Yields were recorded during 2001 and *Ozarkblue* yielded approximately 1 lb. per plant. *Blueray* is generally the most successful blueberry for our area to date and we planted it as a comparison to *Ozarkblue* and *Summit*. There are 25 *Summit* plants currently and we will plant 100 in the spring of 2002. Yields for the new plants will be recorded starting in year three.



Balers & Tractors Line Up

The new display barn at the Overstreet Kerr Historical Farm was put to good use during the tenth annual Fall Farm-Fest, Friday and Saturday, October 12 and 13. Members of the Arkansas Valley Antique Tractor Club parked their lovingly restored tractors and other pieces of farm equipment in and around the new barn.

On Friday, over 2000 school children watched club members demonstrate the use of the equipment and got some hands-on experience shelling corn.

Overstreet Farm curator Jim Combs is looking for John Deere haymaking equipment and memorabilia used from 1890 to 1940 to display in the new 38- by 80-foot barn. The balers will be arranged in ten-year intervals to show how change occurred.

Combs is also looking for grain production equipment from the same time period, and is planning to build



Restoring tractors is a popular hobby. This past summer Kerr Center president Jim Horne restored this 1958 John Deere 730, the famous "Poppin' Johnny." The two-cylinder tractor runs on propane, and is like one that Horne remembers from his boyhood on a farm near Snyder, OK. Many parts are still available for these antiques.

another display barn next spring. The new exhibit will be unique in that it will help tell the story of agriculture in this area, helping to educate school-children and others.

Combs hopes to collect equipment through donations, loans and purchases from the public. Due to time constraints, only easily restorable or already restored equipment will be accepted. Combs has indoor storage space available for pieces to be held until they are restored.

Since the Kerr Center is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, donations of equipment and funds for restoring equipment or developing the educational display are tax deductible. (Donors will be given a receipt to use for tax purposes). Those who donate or loan items will be acknowledged on the display itself.

For more information contact Jim Combs at 918-966-3396 or email okhfarm@crosstel.net.



School kids enjoyed shelling corn and seeing other farm chores demonstrated at Fall Farm-Fest.

A 1935 belt-driven Case hay press owned by Arkansas Valley Antique Tractor Club member Wayne McFerran of Hartford, Arkansas.





Agriculture and Drug Resistant Bacteria: Is There a Link?

- Maura McDermott

Should the use of antibiotics in animal agriculture be cut back or even banned? Are there animal production systems that minimize the need for such antibiotics?

For more information

Profitable Pork: Alternative Strategies for Hog Producers is a new bulletin from the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Network which showcases examples of alternative ways to raise pork profitably. Available at www/sare.org/bulletin/hogs

The National Research Council's *The Use of Drugs in Food Animals: Benefits and Risks* is available on line at nap.edu/openbook/0309054346/htm

The Union of Concerned Scientist's *Hogging It* is available online at www.ucsusa.org

The USDA/ Economic Research Service report *Antimicrobial Drug Use and Veterinary Costs in U.S. Livestock Production* is available at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib766/

These are questions that people involved in animal agriculture are considering as the public becomes more aware of the links between antibiotic use on the farm and antibiotic-resistant microbes in meat, soil, and water. Drug resistant bacteria can threaten people who undercook their meat or who consume food or water contaminated by animal droppings.

However, whether or not agricultural use of antibiotics is actually having a significant negative effect on public health is a matter of hot debate.

Antibiotics were the wonder drugs of the twentieth century, with almost magical effects on bacterial infection. Antibiotics made diseases such as tuberculosis, which commonly killed people one hundred years ago, curable.

But today, at the beginning of the 21st century, some of the magic has been lost. Some pathogens are not being killed by antibiotics that formerly worked against them. And some bacterial strains capable of causing life-threatening illnesses have become resistant not only to the principal drugs used to treat them, but to the

entire stockpile of antibiotics, more than 100 drugs.

Because of this, death rates for tuberculosis and some other communicable diseases have begun to rise. For example, the deadly bacteria that causes hospital staph infections has become resistant to its once reliable antidote, and it is feared that it will soon become an unstoppable killer. The upshot: many call the situation a major international public health crisis.

The issue has recently been in the public spotlight because of anthrax terrorism and the suggestion that the public should be given Cipro, an antibiotic which kills anthrax, on a mass scale as a precautionary measure. Public health officials have warned against this approach because of the possibility that this would lead to resistant bacteria and decreased effectiveness of this antibiotic which is used for a variety of difficult-to-treat infections.

The use of antibiotics in animal production specifically has been the subject of several recent reports. Agricultural use of antibiotics can be classified in two ways: therapeutic and subtherapeutic. Therapeutic use means

treating disease. Subtherapeutic use includes use of antibiotics to promote growth and for disease prevention.

It is subtherapeutic use that has come under fire as contributing to the rise of disease-resistant bacteria, bacteria that can affect people as well as animals. Antibiotics are routinely given to chickens, pigs and cattle, to prevent illness and to promote growth, especially when animals are crowded in CAFOs. The drugs are commonly put in feed or water in concentrations below that used to treat infections (subtherapeutic).

The practice is controversial because it encourages the emergence of antibiotic resistant microbes and because the same drugs prescribed to humans (tetracycline, penicillin, erythromycin) are used in animal husbandry.

Resistance: How it Happens

Bacteria are microscopic, single celled organisms. They are everywhere it seems, unseen, including on our skin and mucous membranes. “Most live blamelessly,” says Stuart Levy, a professor of molecular biology, microbiology and medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine, in a 1999 article in *Scientific American*.

Of course, it is harmful bacteria that antibiotics were developed to kill. Unfortunately, the use of antibiotics has “broad, undesirable effects on microbial ecology” producing long-lasting change in the kinds and proportions of bacteria and the mix of antibiotic-resistant and antibiotic-susceptible types not only in individuals but in the environment and society at large,” says Levy.

How do bacteria become resistant to an antibiotic? Two factors are key: the existence of resistant

genes in the bacteria and how much the antibiotic is used.

An individual bacterium gets antibiotic resistant genes a number of ways— through inheritance, through spontaneous genetic mutation or by taking up genes from other nearby bacteria. How do whole populations of bacteria become resistant to a given antibiotic? First there have to be resistant genes present. Then if an antibiotic is used over and over, susceptible bacteria will die and resistant ones will live to multiply.

The problem, everyone agrees, is in the extent of antibiotic use, as well as antibiotic misuse.

The use of antibiotics in the United States has soared since they were introduced. In 1954 two million pounds of antibiotics were produced in the U.S.; today, it is more than 50 million pounds. Misuse of antibiotics is a major problem. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have estimated that one-third of the outpatient prescriptions for antibiotics are unneeded.

Another problem is improper dosing, such as when a patient does not complete a full course of the antibiotic. In such cases, the disease agent (bacteria) may not be completely eliminated. and without a knockout punch, the most resistant bacteria live to reproduce.

Conservative estimates of human use of antibiotics puts it at 60 per cent and agricultural use at 40 per cent of total use. Recently, some scientists have begun to dispute those figures. In a recent report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, *Hogging It: Estimates of Antimicrobial Abuse in Livestock*, agricultural use is

put at 70 per cent of total use. This higher figure is hotly contested by groups such as the Animal Health Institute. (The problem is that numbers must be extrapolated from such sources as sales figures; the U.S. government keeps no statistics.)

Whichever number you accept, the use of antibiotics in animal agriculture appears to be substantial.

Antibiotics in Agriculture

Subtherapeutic use of antibiotics— small amounts mixed into feed to promote growth— remains the usage most controversial for a couple of reasons. One, it accounts for the lion's share of the antibiotics used by agriculturists. Amounts too small to combat infection are given to food animals for weeks or month at a time. It is not known exactly how this supports growth.

However, Levy says “this long-term exposure to low doses is the perfect formula for selecting increasing numbers of resistant bacteria in the treated animals, which may then pass the microbes to caretakers and more broadly to people who prepare and consume undercooked meat.”



Hogs crowded into small spaces in CAFOs are at risk from infection.



Not all scientists agree that the way that antibiotics are used in animal agriculture presents a public health threat. In the 1999 book *The Use of Drugs in Food Animals: Benefits and Risks* prepared by a special agriculture committee of the National Research Council (NRC), the authors acknowledge “that there is a link between the use of antibiotics in food animals, the development of bacterial resistance to these drugs, and human disease— although the incidence of such disease is very low.” Because of this purported low incidence, the authors concluded there was no immediate public health concern.

However in the report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, the authors contend that public health is indeed at risk, writing that “the evidence demonstrating ties between animal agriculture and human illness has accumulated to the point that it cannot be ignored.”

The development of resistant salmonella bacteria at livestock facilities has been documented. However, it is often difficult to connect a person who got sick with salmonella poisoning after eating a piece of meat, with a particular livestock facility. But a recent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* cited in the Union report describes an outbreak of salmonella poisoning that made dozens sick and led to the death of two people. The salmonella in question was resistant to five different antibiotics.

The outbreak was traced back through the food system to its source, a herd of swine infected with the same multi-drug resistant strain of bacteria. According to Dr. Abigail Salyers of the American Society of Microbiology, the study is the “closest that anyone has come to ‘a smoking gun’ linking agricultural use of drugs to microbial resistance that contributed to a particular human death.”

This incident occurred in Denmark. The Danish government has an extensive countrywide program of testing for salmonella and testing the salmonella for microbial resistance. Public health officials were able to determine that many of the stricken individuals had bought pork from grocery stores that had been supplied by a single slaughterhouse. Records showed which farms had supplied the slaughterhouse. Then officials collected salmonella samples from the slaughterhouses and farms, and compared them with samples from the victims. The resistant strains in the patients, including those who died, and strains from the stores, the slaughterhouse, and the farms had

identical molecular fingerprints.

Just how widespread is meat contaminated with disease-causing bacteria, and how many of those bacteria are resistant to antibiotics? A study published in the October 18, 2001, *New England Journal of Medicine* tried to answer those questions. Scientists at the FDA and the University of Maryland examined 200 samples of ground meats— chicken, beef, turkey, and pork— from three supermarkets in the Washington, D.C. area. One-fifth of the samples were contaminated by salmonella.

Antibiotic resistance was rampant among the contaminated samples, with 84 percent resistant to at least one antibiotic and a little over half resistant to at least three antibiotics. (Most salmonella infections get better on their own within a week, but in about ten percent of cases the infection can spread to the bloodstream and become deadly).

Another study published in the same issue found widespread contamination of chicken (more than half the samples from supermarkets in four states) by the sometimes fatal germ *Enterococcus faecium*, in a form resistant to Synercid, one of the few drugs of last resort against the infection. Synercid was approved for humans only two years ago, but a similar drug, virginiamycin, has been given to livestock since the 1970s.

The FDA is considering a ban on the use of virginiamycin. However, spokesman for animal industry trade groups say that such a ban is premature. They point out that the same study also found that only one percent of randomly selected human stool samples carried the resistant germ. This suggests that there is very little of the resistant bacteria in the human population.

The FDA has also proposed pro-

Scientists
have found
tetracycline-
resistant genes
in soil and
groundwater
bacteria beneath
hog waste
lagoons.

hibiting the fluoroquinolone family of antibiotics (which includes Cipro) from use in chicken farming. This is because the most common cause of food-borne intestinal illness is caused by the microbe *Campylobacter*, and the number of cases resistant to fluoroquinolone is rising. About 10,000 Americans ill enough with the microbe to receive antibiotics have a resistant strain of it. In Minnesota, scientists have shown that there has been a rapid rise in fluoroquinolone-resistant bacteria in Minnesotans after this class of antibiotics was approved for use in poultry.

But it is not just urban consumers who are at risk, in fact, those who come in contact with animals are probably at greater risk. A case in point: a 12-year-old boy in Nebraska who came down with a multi-drug resistant strain of salmonella identical to strains isolated from cattle on his family's and neighbors' farms. The boy recovered, but the salmonella strain was found to be resistant to a drug relied upon by pediatricians for treating serious infections in children. This drug is related to a drug commonly used to treat diarrhea in cattle.

Scientists have also found tetracycline-resistant salmonella genes in soil and groundwater bacteria beneath hog waste lagoons. The concern is that these resistance genes could be passed to other more dangerous bacteria in the environment or in humans who drink the water. The scientists doing the study believe that the use of tetracycline on these farms is pushing the evolution of the resistant genes.

To Ban or Not to Ban

In 1998, the European Union prohibited the use of antibiotics as animal growth-promoters if the drugs are similar to ones used in human

medicine. Now, many groups in the United States are pushing for a similar ban.

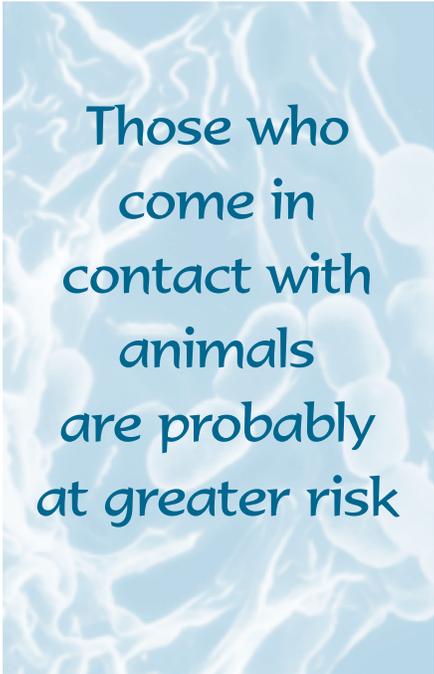
Others oppose such a ban. The authors of the National Research Council study concluded that sub-therapeutic use of antibiotics “does not seem to constitute an immediate public health concern,” while noting additional data could alter this conclusion. They made three recommendations for further research and regulatory oversight.

Further they stated that “in current agricultural practice, raising animals for food depends heavily on the use of pharmacologically active compounds: drugs. The use of drugs in food animals is fundamental to animal health and well-being and to the economics of the industry.” They warn that a goal of producing food animals without antibiotics “would in fact require a total change in the philosophy and the economics of how production animals are raised.”

This “total change” is probably not going to happen right away. However, alternatives to CAFO production of hogs and chickens exist and are gaining in popularity. Proponents claim that such systems are more humane and result in less pollution. While preventing antibiotic-resistant bacteria is not often given as the principal reason for raising animals in less crowded conditions, it may be a significant positive side effect.

The Leopold Center at the University of Iowa has promoted the use of open-bedded hoop houses as an alternative approach to raising hogs. More than one million head of hogs are now raised in more than 2000 of these structures in the state.

Even the positive economic impact of the use of antibiotics in producing hogs has recently been called into question by a study by the



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USDA's Economic Research Service. It asserted that hog farmers lose money by feeding growth-promoting antibiotics to pigs because the extra production holds down pork prices. Producers who used antibiotics collectively lost \$45.5 million in 1999 because of the cost of the drugs and lower hog prices, the report stated.

However, in a broader economic sense, analysts say, livestock producers today have few incentives to consider the risks of antibiotic use. Ramanan Lexminarayan, writing in *Resources*, has suggested that society should “create a system that stresses the economic value of preserving the effectiveness of the drugs. In the language of economists, antibiotic resistance is a negative ‘externality’ associated with antibiotic use, much as pollution is an undesirable externality associated with the generation of power at a thermal power plant.” He says “society should devise mechanisms by which the cost of antibiotic resistance is taken into account or in economic terms, ‘internalized,’ in decisions regarding the use of the drugs.”

CALENDAR

Green– What Does It Mean?

Greening your backyard, business, campus and curriculum will be the theme of the 2002 Oklahoma Environmental Educators annual environmental expo on Thursday, Feb. 7, at MetroTech in Oklahoma City. Keynote speaker John C. Ryan will take participants on a tour of what resources are used before we sip our coffee, tie our shoes, click our mouse, or step on the gas. Once you follow a day in the life of an average North American and see the secret lives of your food, your clothes, and your “toys,” your world will never look the same. A researcher and journalist, Ryan is currently on a year-long fellowship from the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C. to write on national energy issues. He has covered sustainability issues for more than a decade and his work has been published in 20 languages. He is the author of *Stuff: the Secret Lives of Everyday Things*. For more information go to www.okaee.org or call (918) 455-7595.

Grazing: Dollars and Sense

How to make cattle operations more profitable will be the focus of the Oklahoma Land Stewardship Alliance conference, Friday and Saturday, Feb. 1-2, at the airport LaQuinta Inn (I-40 and Meridian) in Oklahoma City. The lineup of 8-10 speakers will include Dr. Barry Dunne, a professor at South Dakota State University, who will discuss his study of the profitability of 200 ranches in South Dakota. Dunne looked at what is needed for a family to make a reasonable (\$35,000) income from cattle ranching. Arizona nutritionist Dick Diven will speak about low-cost cow-calf nutrition. Alan Hubbard of Olsburg, Kansas, will discuss the economics of cell grazing and also his experience making the switch from suburbanite to successful cattleman. For more information or to register, call the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123 or Wally Olson at 918.256.8195.

For more information about upcoming events visit the Kerr Center web site, www.kerrcenter.com

JANUARY 25-27

“Practical Tools and Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms”

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group annual conference,
Chattanooga, TN, 480.370.1813, www.attra.org/ssawg



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