KERR CENTER

Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture Vol. 37, #2 • Fall 2011

Crazy Weather

–Maura McDermott

They say a little summer breeze
Couldn't do nobody harm;
But it burns like a blazin' blowtorch
When you're livin' on a dryland farm...

Butch Hancock, "Dryland Farm,"
from *West Texas Waltzes and Dustblown Tractor Tunes*

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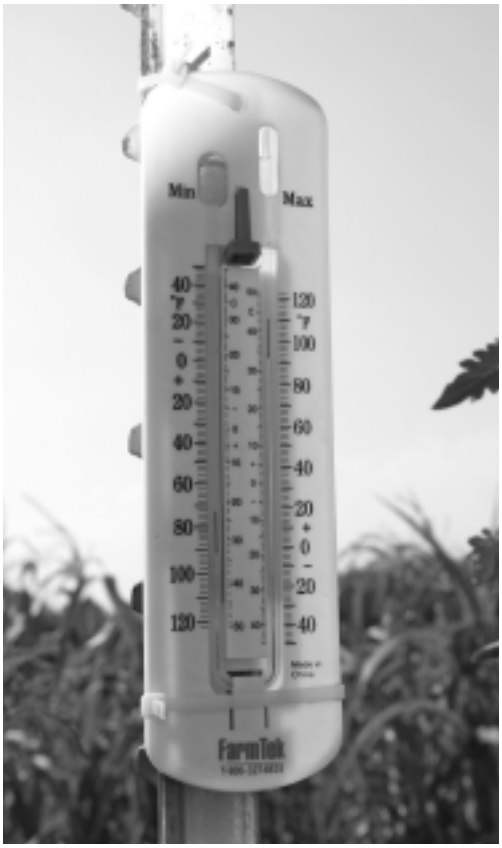
Blizzards and record cold, tornadoes, gale force winds, flooding rains, drought and record heat: the crazy weather has made farming, ranching, gardening, even living, in Oklahoma this year, especially challenging.



Nowhere is this truer than at the Kerr Center. The office was closed for more than a week in January due to snow, ice and extremely cold temperatures. We, like livestock producers across the state, worked overtime to keep our animals fed, watered and healthy.

In April, after a tornado toppled trees and barns, killed livestock and mangled a newly erected hoop house, we got busy and fixed the damage. The hoophouse field days in April went on as planned, with a large, enthusiastic group in attendance. Two hoophouses were built onsite and participants went away with valuable hands-on experience.

When torrential rain washed seed out of

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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 southeastern Oklahoma town of Poteau. It was established in 1985.

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the ground, the hort staff dug in and replanted. On the plus side, the rain made the winter cover crops of rye, hairy vetch and winter peas grow into a lush deep carpet that is enriching the soil. These cover crops are an essential aspect of the organic production system underway on almost seven acres at the center. (This acreage was certified organic in June.)

For the "Healthy Soils, Healthy Livestock" grazing workshop on April 8-9, it was unseasonably hot. But the spring storms had got the Kerr Ranch pastures off to a great start, and there was plenty of grass to illustrate the importance of a good rotational grazing plan that encouraged healthy soil and grass.

In late May, with Kerr Center ponds full to the brim, Ken Williams, one of the region's foremost pond experts, conducted an evening workshop on managing farm ponds for both recreational and commercial uses.

After eight inches of rain fell in May, the spigot was turned off: June saw not quite an inch and a half; July a trace. As the record heat of July bore down on southeast Oklahoma and drought set in and deepened, we worked even harder to keep livestock and hort projects on track.

The center's multi-species rotational system includes cattle, goats and pigs. Because of the drought, pasture grasses have gone dormant and animals have had to be moved more often, says Mary Penick, livestock specialist.

Providing adequate shade and water for the livestock has become top priority. As a result of the extreme conditions, "plans to add more does and hogs to the pasture rotation have been delayed," she says, until we get some moderate temperatures and rain. And the pastured pork field day, scheduled for October, has been cancelled.

Before the drought set in, the overall grazing system at Kerr Center had been overhauled, becoming much more efficient and productive. This has paid off: Penick figures she has enough grass for the cattle through October (see p. 5).

While change is a constant, not everything is negative. For instance, the bucks in this year's Oklahoma Forage-based Buck Test are doing "fantastic," says Penick. Due to good planning, they have plenty of forage, and she explains, "There are far fewer parasite problems during dry months… so the bucks are enjoying this weather. They like hot, dry conditions." A field day focusing on meat goat production is set for Saturday, September 24. (See page 4.)

As for the horticulture crops, George Kuepper and his staff are doing a heroic job of keeping things going and learning a lot in the process (see page 2 and 6). Crops that love the heat, like sweet potatoes, are performing like champs. On September 17, experts on sweet potato production will share information during the Organic and Heirloom Crop Field Day at the center.

Finding the crops and livestock breeds best-adapted to the local environment– that can not only survive, but thrive– is a basic tenet of sustainable agriculture. At Kerr Center we are looking for sustainable approaches that work on a practical level in this region. We invite you to find out more about what we are doing in the pages of this newsletter, on our website and at our field days in September. Or join us for a guided tour (see p. 10).

And don't let the crazy weather get you down.

Reflections on a Long Hot Summer:

This is Why Yankees Move Back to Wisconsin

–George Kuepper

You know how it is when you hear that irritating Golden Oldie on the radio; the song that goes round and round in your head for days on end? And you just know you'll never get stop thinking about it… ever!?!

Lately, for me, that song has been "Disco Inferno." Perhaps I'm lost in a 70s time warp. Then again, it may have something to do with these blistering temperatures and the very serious and on-going drought.

The weather is certainly taking a toll on both gardeners and gardens. I've heard many experienced growers simply say that their plots have "burned up." Those that are still trying to salvage things are complaining most about their tomatoes and the fact that they won't set fruit, despite an abundance of blossoms.

The technical name for this problem is blossom drop. It occurs when day time temperatures exceed 85° F., and 72° F. at night. That has certainly been the case here at the Kerr Center and we have very few tomatoes to show for our efforts.

Since we'd had similar problems with blossom drop in 2010, we grew part of this year's crop under a high tunnel covered with shade cloth. To date, it appears that shade cloth has reduced high temperatures by only a couple of degrees-not enough to make an obvious difference in a year of such extreme heat.

As for now, the standard advice for blossom drop is to keep your plants watered and fertilized. When temperatures ease back down a bit, you may yet have a fall crop. I mention this as standard advice. We took this advice in 2010 and failed to get a fall crop, even with a reliable indeterminate variety like Cherokee Purple. Still, we're going to try it again this year. Maybe we'll get lucky.

Of the area gardeners that were lucky enough to get them to grow and set fruit, we've heard many complain about blossom end rot on peppers, eggplant, and summer squash. The likely cause of this problem is also weather-related. Blossom-end rot commonly occurs when watering is uneven, that is, the plants alternate between abundant water and drought stress.

You can counteract the problem by mulching and watering deeply each time you irrigate. Since the condition is also related to calcium in the plant, it doesn't hurt to apply a foliar spray containing calcium chloride. Of course, foliar sprays only work well if you apply them during the cooler parts of the day. Good luck with that!!

On the positive side, if anyone is growing sweet potatoes, and you've managed to keep them reasonably well-watered, you probably have a very nice looking crop about now. We've done that and our planting of a dozen heirloom varieties is in excellent condition.

Another crop that we're optimistic about in this hot weather is okra. While we are not growing okra ourselves this year, we recently visited the Wes Watkins Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Lane, Oklahoma, where they have quite a bit planted. While the researchers reported some stress and aborted flowers, the plants we saw were sporting a lot of attractive pods; a good crop, for sure.

While we hope that these weather extremes are not "the new normal" for Southeastern Oklahoma, our field plans for 2012 will be well-guided by the experiences of 2011. We will likely have a performance trial of heat-tolerant tomatoes (or at least those that claim to be "heat-loving"). Among them will be several cherry-tomatoes and other more "primitive" types. These are the kinds of tomatoes that the Lane Research Station and a few area gardeners report setting fruit despite the heat.

We will certainly continue our evaluations of sweet potatoes and probably take another look at okra varieties. If we're harvesting anything of value this summer, it is new insights into the challenges gardeners and commercial growers in the uncertain years ahead.

Keep cool!

(George, who has been living and working in Oklahoma and Arkansas for most of his professional life, grew up on a farm in Wisconsin. He is the center's sustainable agriculture specialist.)

Meat Goat Field Day Coming Up

Love is not love without a violin-playing goat.
So said Julia Roberts in the movie "Notting Hill."

You won't get any fiddling goats at the Kerr Center's upcoming meat goat field day. But you will get serious information about how to raise healthy meat goats in this region.

Meat goat producers, as well as those considering a commercial meat goat enterprise, will learn about parasites, forages, and animal health at this annual field day, which runs from 9-3 on Saturday, September 24, at the Kerr Stewardship Ranch in Poteau.

The registration fee of $30 includes lunch.

Featured speaker Dr. Nada K. Nadarajah, an animal geneticist from Auburn University, will speak on "Breeding, Genetic Selection, and the Importance of Recordkeeping."

Nadarajah has been a collaborator on the Oklahoma Forage-Based Buck Test (popularly known as the "buck test") for several years. He has used data from the test to establish statistical relationships - for instance, demonstrating that bucks with more parasite eggs in their feces will tend to weigh less at the end of the test. (See *Field Notes*, Spring 2011.)

Another highlight of the field day will be certification in FAMACHA scoring. The FAMACHA system compares the color of a goat's inner eyelid to a set of colored cards to evaluate parasite loads. Participants will receive FAMACHA training at the field day, and can then apply online to receive certificates and eye score cards.

Additional topics for the field day include parasite management and control, managing goats for herd health, and forages. Staff from both the Kerr Center and OSU Extension, including veterinarians Ann Wells and Dave Sparks, will present on these topics.

The field day will end with an announcement of results, and awards ceremony, for the 2011 Oklahoma Forage-Based Buck Test.

Download a registration form or register via Paypal on the center's calendar of events page (www.kerrcenter.com) or call/email to request a form. Registration is due by September 19. The event is free for buck test participants.

A Wealth of Meat Goat Wisdom

As the Kerr Center's meat goat program continues to grow and develop, it generates ever better resources to offer producers.

Results and reports from each year's buck test have been available free on the Kerr Center website since the beginning. The results pages list the names, owners, and vital statistics of winning bucks; the reports detail the background, rationale, and protocol of the test, as well as challenges encountered and changes made.

The 2011 report will continue that vital reporting, but will also take a more comprehensive look at lessons learned during the first five years.

"We've seen how the quality of the bucks coming into the test has changed over the years," says test manager Mary Penick, as producers have learned what traits allow meat goats to gain weight on pasture.

"We're dealing with the weather better, with more and better housing. We're already supplementing the doe herd less than the 'minimal' supplementation used in the buck test." Sixteen does make up the center's year-round meat goat herd.

"We should be able to project and have really solid guidelines for people who want to raise goats on pasture," Penick says.

In addition to the buck test reports, the Kerr Center website offers extensive resources and links on meat goat production and management. Some of the highlights and recent additions include:

Brush Control with Goats

One of the Kerr Center's most visited web pages, this report is now in available in a download-friendly format. It details the Center's experiences with using goats to control brush in a project that ran from 1988 to 1992. Originally published in 1996, the report includes information on fencing, facilities, breeds, stocking rate, management, and predators. www.kerrcenter.com/publications/brush_control_with_goats.pdf

Multispecies Grazing Field Day

This 2010 event was hosted at the Porum area farm of OSU veterinarian and goat producer Dr. David Sparks, and his wife Linda, who manages their goat operation. In addition to the Sparks, speakers included Dr. Steve Hart of Langston University, OSU extension agronomist Dr. Bob Woods, OSU Extension animal waste specialist Josh Payne, and Haskell County Extension Educator Brian Pugh.

Topics included general principles of multi-species grazing, fencing, economics, forages and stocking rates, parasite control, birthing and neonatal care, mortality composting, and a demonstration of the Sparks' home-built working system.

Full proceedings from the field day, including handouts, presentations, and slideshows, are available free from http://kerrcenter.com/past-events/goat-field-day-2010.htm.

Buck Test Online

The buck test has its own Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/Oklahoma-Forage-Based-Buck-Test/134978943189279), as well as a blog (kerrosubucktest.blogspot.com). While the test is running, staff post frequent updates with the latest performance and weather information.

How the Drought is Affecting Livestock Programs

by Mary Penick, Livestock Specialist

Here on the ranch we are doing everything we can just to keep up with the changing conditions of our pastures and water sources. It seems daily that the conditions become drier and more fragile.

Our pastures are not coming back as we graze over them, and the rotation has slowed to a snail's pace. Most, if not all, of what our cow herd is eating is standing hay. Despite this we estimate that it will be the end of October before we run completely out of grass, even if conditions stay the same.

Shade has become a life or death limiting factor here, and this has added to the complexity of our grazing system.

The other item we are watching is the loss of our livestock water. We mainly rely upon ponds and a gravity flow system out of our larger ponds, and with every day of these extreme temperatures we are losing enormous amounts of water.

Because of the weather, we have not been able to develop our fencing systems to add more goats and hogs to our pasture rotation. For this reason, we canceled our pastured pork field day.

We are also looking at selling more females than we would in a good year, as well as most of the steers we were growing out for a new grass-fed beef endeavor.

HEIFERS FOR SALE

The Pineywoods cattle project has developed to the point that twenty heifers will go up for sale this fall. Interested parties should contact Pineywoods cattle manager Mary Penick at 918.647.9123 or mpenick@kerrcenter.com.

Details forthcoming at www.kerrcenter.com

The heifer sale was planned before the drought. We decided to keep all our heifers from last year after they were weaned, so that we could sell them as bred heifers, which would bring a higher price.

For right now we are looking at keeping four or five steers and selling the rest. The very high prices steers are fetching currently also factored into our decision.

As for the females, we will begin with the youngest females that do not fit our program very well.

We will then possibly sell some older females. We don't know as yet how many that will leave us with, but by the end we should have a lean, highly productive cow herd that our land can sustain.

2011 Sweet Potato Trial Varieties

*** also grown in 2010**

Bunch Porto Rico
Southern Delight
Georgia Jet
Carolina Ruby
Carolina Nugget
Japanese Red
* Nancy Hall
* Dianne
* Hernandez
* Oklahoma Heirloom
* Okinawa Purple (aka Okinawan)
* Sumor

Other varieties grown in 2010:

Jewel, Vardaman, Centennial, Allgold, Cordner's Red, Cherokee, Redgold, Georgia Red, Caro Gold, Scarlet, Redcliff

Varieties recommended by OSU Extension include: Jewel, Redgold, Earligold, Allgold, and Centennial.

Move over Carrie
The New American Idol (of Veggies)

–Maura McDermott

In November 2007, the *Wall Street Journal,* in a front page story, panned the sweet potato.

The venerable newspaper pointed out that annual per capita consumption (4 lbs.) hadn't changed in 40 years and trailed even celery. The conclusion: once the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are over, the sweet potato "might as well be a turnip."

It now appears that this unassuming vine, with its sweet fleshy roots, did not take this dig lying down.

Fast forward to 2011 and the sweet potato is everywhere, in a surprising array of colors at farmer's markets, in recipes, in restaurants, in bags of "fries" in the frozen foods aisle.

Why this sudden reversal of fortune? At about the same time as the front page dismissal, the sweet potato made the top ten list of "super foods" that Americans should eat on a regular basis for good health.

Called a "near perfect" vegetable, the sweet potato's popularity has been climbing steadily ever since, leaving the turnip in the dust. High in vitamins A and C, potassium, antioxidants and fiber, the orange spud is not only sweet, but is low on the glycemic index and good for diabetics.

In the last few years, the number of restaurants offering a sweet-potato side dish has increased 40 percent. In 2010 U.S. farmers harvested a record-setting two billion pound crop.

The homely sweet potato's star, at last, has begun to shine brightly. The American people, armed with the nutritional facts, have voted: this old time favorite of the rural South is the new American Idol of the veggie world.

George Kuepper

A Deserving Root

For farmers and gardeners in places where the sweet potato grows well, like Oklahoma, this is good news. Attractive, heat loving, heavy bearing-- sweet potatoes in the Kerr Center's test plots thrived during the brutal summer of 2010. Grown under heavy mulch and with drip irrigation, this year too they have shrugged off the heat, during the hottest July in Oklahoma history.

Experiments with the sweet spud began last year when the Kerr Center received funding from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) through the 2009 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. The grant funds a three-year project investigating and demonstrating small-scale heirloom sweet potato production.

Goals for the project include identifying appropriate-sized equipment, small tools, varieties, and organic growing practices suitable for the region's market farmers and gardeners.

The first year (2010) was an opportunity to experiment with planting and harvesting equipment and techniques, says the center's sustainable agriculture specialist George Kuepper.

Kuepper and 2010 student intern Seth Stallings also made general observations about the performance of the varieties grown, which they related in their report, "Heirloom Sweet Potato Varieties: A Preliminary Look in 2010," available free on the Kerr Center website. (www.kerrcenter.com/publications/sweet_potato_2010.pdf)

This summer the center began the variety trial in earnest, planting twelve "heirloom" varieties (see sidebar). Kuepper included several that did well in 2010. Results will be covered in future reports.

The varieties of sweet potato familiar to most U.S. gardeners and consumers have moist, orange flesh, with red or orange skins. However, Kuepper points out, there are also dry-fleshed varieties, and flesh and skin colors can vary widely. Yellow, white, purple, and red are among the common colors.

According to OSU extension,

Some of the Kerr Center Publications on Organics and Heirloom Variety Trials

(Available online and at field day)

- Rotations, Cover Crops, and Green Fallow on the Cannon Horticulture Project: A 2010 Status Report
- Heirloom Vegetables, Genetic Diversity, and the Pursuit of Food Security (2008)
- Heirloom Variety Trial Reports: okra, sorghum, tomatoes, grafted tomatoes, squash, sweet potatoes
- A Brief Overview of the History and Philosophy of Organic Agriculture (2010)
- Farm Made: A Guide to On-Farm Processing for Organic Producers,
  An Overview and Four Example Enterprises: Sorghum Syrup, Packaged Fresh Salad Greens or Salad Mix, Jams, Jellies and Spreads, and Table Eggs
- Organic Foods: What do We Need to Know About Them? (2007)
- Small Scale Organics: A Guidebook for the Non-certified Organic Grower (Includes Guidelines and an Organic System Plan)
- Organic Production In Oklahoma - Questions and Answers (2007)

Organic and Heirloom Crops Field Day

Sept. 17, 10-4:30, Kerr Ranch, Poteau

The $40 registration fee is due by September 7 and includes a noon meal and refreshments, as well as copies of materials used by presenters.

To register, use Paypal at kerrcenter.com/joomla/eventlist/details/92-field-day-heirloom-vegetables or MAIL your registration form (available to be printed online) to: Kerr Center, Organic/Heirloom Crop Field Day, PO Box 588, Poteau, OK 74953. Include a check made out to Kerr Center, and your name, mailing address, daytime phone, and email address.

Call the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123 to receive a registration form by mail or fax. Directions to the ranch are online on the Contact page at www.kerrcenter.com.

Tomatoes grown under shade cloth during the hot 2011 summer.

sweet potatoes can be one of the most profitable vegetable crops grown in Oklahoma. It is not, however, a "get rich quick" crop.

Oklahoma Sweets

On Saturday, September 17, from 10-4:30, the center will hold its Heirloom and Organic Crops Field Day.

Why test heirloom varieties? These older varieties were once widely grown and often have unique flavors, colors or shapes. The Kerr Center is looking for varieties that do well, are adapted to the soils and climate common eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas.

An example of a locally-adapted sweet potato is Oklahoma Heirloom, which did well in the 2010 preliminary trial. Reportedly the original stock was grown by Ralph Mills of Beggs, Oklahoma. He received it from a neighbor in Coalgate and grew it for more than 30 years.

Field Day topics will include varieties, planting and harvesting methods, irrigation, and pest management.

Featured speakers include Dr. Warren Roberts of OSU/ARS Lane Agricultural Center and Gary Schaum of Duck Creek Farms in Mounds, Oklahoma.

Roberts' topic will be sweet potato production for field and garden. Schaum will talk about heirloom varieties.

Schaum's farm is the source for most of the heirloom sweet potato varieties in the Kerr Center trials. His 2011 catalog lists about 75 varieties, including Redgold, which was developed by OSU.

Kerr staff will also discuss growing heirloom tomato varieties (Paul Robeson Angola, Cherokee Purple, Millionaire and Homestead) in-season under various high-tunnel covers to evaluate effects on sunscald, pollination, early blight, and insects.

Innovative Organics

Another focus of the field day will be the center's organic system. In 2008, several acres of pasture on the Kerr Ranch near the Kerr Center offices were converted to organic vegetable and herb production. This past June the almost seven acres was certified organic, meeting the standards established the USDA National Organic Program and adopted by ODAFF.

Growing crops organically in Oklahoma requires not only a good plan, but the willingness to innovate. During the field day, visitors will learn what approaches the center is using to meet the unique challenges of growing crops organically in southeastern Oklahoma.

Topics will include: composting and compost teas, biochar, no-till production, crop rotation and cover cropping (including organic management of bermudagrass), and ways to integrate livestock and crop production.

Farm implements designed for use on small-scale farms will be on display, including a Jang Clean Seeder, a Hatfield Transplanter, a Seed Stick Planter, a propane lawn mower, and an Italian-made BCS walk-behind tractor and the implements that go with it. The tractor gets heavy use during the growing season.

Scheduled to talk about organic certification and compliance are Brian Buchwald and/or Jeff Stearns from ODAFF's organic program.

Also on hand will be Brian Freking, Le Flore County extension educator for agriculture. He will tell growers about assistance and resources available to farmers and ranchers.

If you want to dig deeper into sweet potatoes, heirloom varieties, and organics, join us on Sept. 17!

Mr. Carver and the Sweet Potato

When it comes to innovative thinking, George Washington Carver is up there with Henry Ford and Thomas Edison. And although his name is on schools, stamps and submarines, you probably know next to nothing about him.

Called the "Black Leonardo" by Time magazine in 1941, Carver was an African-American botanist, inventor, educator, and all-round genius. Most famous for his work with peanuts, he also developed more than 100 products for sweet potatoes, including dyes, wood fillers, candies, library pastes, breakfast foods, starches, flours, and molasseses.

Carver was also an early proponent of what we now call sustainable agriculture.

From his vantage point at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Carver saw the deleterious effect on Southern soil of monoculture cotton and tobacco. Early on, he recognized the importance of crop rotation, promoting peanuts, soybeans and sweet potatoes as alternative crops.

According to Dennis Keeney of the Leopold Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, "Carver worked on improving soils, growing crops with low inputs, and using species that fixed nitrogen (hence, the work on the cowpea and the peanut)."

Carver's many "bulletins" full of practical information, even recipes, made him a trusted advisor to limited resource farmers in the South through the days of Jim Crow, and then the Great Depression.

He wanted poor farmers to grow alternative crops both as a source of their own food and as a source of other products to improve their quality of life. He was also a strong proponent of self-sufficiency, and making use of on-farm resources.

His success was all the more remarkable considering where he started. He was born in the last year of the Civil War as a slave on a southwest Missouri farm. Orphaned after the war, he was raised by the Carvers (who had once held his family as slaves) and taught to read and write. Seeking more schooling, he went from town to town, until he finally was allowed to attend high school in Kansas.

After farming and saving money for tuition, he attended Iowa State Agricultural College in Ames (now Iowa State University). When he began in 1891, he was the first black student, and later taught as the first black faculty member.

He died in 1943. Because his products and inventions were largely non-commercial (but of great use on the family farm), he never made much money. The epitaph on his gravestone says it all: "He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."

In 2000, Carver was a charter inductee in the USDA Hall of Heroes. Henry Ford was an admirer; he even erected a replica of his birth cabin at the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Closer to Oklahoma, one can visit the George Washington Carver National Monument, located between Neosho and Joplin, Missouri, about 20 miles from the Oklahoma state line. It is the first national monument dedicated to an African American and the first to honor someone other than a president. The 210-acre complex includes a science classroom, a bust of Carver, a nature trail, a museum, the 1881 Moses Carver house, and the Carver cemetery.

The monument will hold a free "Prairie Day Celebration" on September 10, from 10-3. Celebrating life on the Missouri prairie during the late 1800s when George Washington Carver was a child, the event includes woodcarving, basket weaving, candle-making, Dutch-oven cooking, spinning, weaving, storytelling, musical groups, quilting, a junior ranger station, and more.

For more info call 417.325.4151 or visit www.nps.gov/gwca/index.htm

Kerr Center News

Flies, Beetles, Bats and Bees: A Native Pollinator Education Program

In mid-August Kerr Center received a two-year Oklahoma Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) called "Native Pollinator Education for Eastern Oklahoma."

With the ongoing decline in honeybee colonies, native pollinators are increasingly needed to pollinate food crops. Livestock operations can also benefit from native pollinators by improving the seed set on legumes in pastures. Native pollinators include numerous flies, beetles, bats and other bee species.

While honeybees are under siege, native pollinators, too, face threats from many sources including the use of insecticides, intensive farming/ranching practices and loss of habitat to urban development.

While native pollinator habitat has been studied and promoted in different regions of the United States, limited work has been done in the Eastern Oklahoma region. Kerr Center will be developing strategies to both develop and maintain habitats for native pollinators, and then teaching the public about it.

The two year project is in cooperation with the Xerxes Society. David Redhage, the center's expert on natural resource management, will lead the project.

Guided Tours of Kerr Ranch Now Available

Guided tours are now available one day each month, on the second Tuesday (see below for dates in 2011).

During these tours, Kerr Center staff show visitors our current horticulture, livestock and conservation projects.

Half-day tours go from 9-12 or 1-4 and cost $10 per person. Full-day tours are also available, beginning at 9 a.m., and cost $20 per person. Tours begin at the Kerr Center office; advance registration is not required.

Tour fees are tax-deductible donations to the Kerr Center, a non-profit 501c3 foundation, and benefit educational programs. Request a form/receipt at the time of your visit.

Kerr Center public tour dates for the rest of 2011 are: September 12, October 10, November 14, and December 12.

All other visits must be requested at least two weeks in advance. Call the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123 or email mailbox@kerrcenter.com with "tour request" in the subject line to arrange a visit.

The Kerr Center is a working ranch and farm, as well as an educational center. Our emphasis is on sustainable methods of meat and vegetable production and sustainable natural resource management.

Check the "contact" page on www.kerrcenter.com for directions.

Kerr Center featured on Public Television Newscast

Kerr Center President and CEO Jim Horne and Kerr Center Agricultural Economist David Redhage were featured on the Oklahoma News Report, Friday, July 22. Reporter Cathy Tatom toured the center's horticultural and livestock projects for the segment.

The Oklahoma News Report (ONR) is a one-hour in-depth news program airing on OETA, Oklahoma's public broadcasting network. It is the only news program to cover the entire state.

If you missed the broadcast, check the center's website for a link to the video as it becomes available.

New Program Assistants on the Job on the Ranch

The Kerr Center has two new program assistants: Erin Campbell-Craven and Luke Freeman.

Erin joined the Kerr Staff in late spring 2011. She works closely with Mary Penick and the livestock team. Erin has a degree in animal science from the University of

California, Davis. She grew up outside of Placerville, California, on a five acre farm, raising sheep, goats and chickens. She is putting that experience to good use working with the Kerr Center chicken flocks and the goats in the buck test and doe herd. She had an internship with Heifer International in Arkansas before coming to Kerr Center.

Luke joined the staff at the Kerr Center in June of 2011 after graduating from the University of Missouri. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with an emphasis in sustainable agriculture. At the Kerr Center, Luke is working with George Kuepper to maintain and expand the horticultural programs on the farm.

National Conservation Innovation Grant Awarded to Center

In August the center received word that a three-year project to train organic, transitioning, and sustainable vegetable farmers will be funded by the USDA's National Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Program.

"We are very pleased to be working through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to further our work in soil building technologies that reduce off-farm inputs and labor costs," says Kerr Center Program Director Ann Wells.

"This project will allow us to reach farmers in the Mid-South with our information and help them learn about sustainable and organic vegetable growing methods," she added.

The focus will be organic bio-extensive models, which have not been well-explored or demonstrated in the Mid-South. Bio-extensive strategies rely mainly on crop rotations and the use of winter and summer cover crops to nurture soil biology, improve fertility, control erosion, prevent nutrient leaching, provide mulch, attract beneficial insects, and control pests, especially weeds.

George Kuepper and staff have been successfully using a bio-extensive approach on the on the Cannon Horticulture Project since 2008. This grant affords them the opportunity to expand their educational outreach.

Workshops, targeting training, handbooks, manuals and videos are planned under this grant. A key collaborator will be the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (MFSI). MFSI is a grassroots, Native American-led organization located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, capitol of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

The workshops will be open to the general public. At the core of the project, however, will be a targeted training effort that will work with a select group of Eastern Oklahoma and Western Arkansas farmers to assist them in adapting the bio-extensive model to their farms.

For more information, download "Rotations, Cover Crops and Green Fallow on the Cannon Horticulture Project," at www.kerrcenter.com.

Spring Tornado Damage at the Kerr Center

The April 15 tornado destroyed a newly built hoophouse.

The tornado caused extensive damage to trees, barns and fences.

What's New Online?

Have a look at these latest offerings on the Kerr Center website:

VIDEOS

The Kerr Center now has its own channel on YouTube to share videos on sustainable agriculture and related topics, at www.youtube.com/user/Kerrranch. Some recent video offerings include:

Fencing

Does setting up a new electric fence have you tied up in knots? Give as good as you get, after watching these videos' explanations of knot-tying for electric fences.

Ray Archuleta

Soil quality expert Ray Archuleta opened many an eye as the featured speaker at this spring's "Healthy Soils, Healthy Livestock" workshop (see 'Reports and Resources' next page). These videos capture his informative and inspiring lectures on how to foster and monitor healthy soils: www.kerrcenter.com/past-events/soil-health-2011/archuleta/index.html

Ray Archuleta , left, talks with an attendee at this spring's "Healthy Soils, Healthy Livestock" workshop.

Visit our blog to find out the latest happenings around the Kerr Center. Google "kerrcenterdaytoday"

SOCIAL MEDIA

Day-to-Day

This new blog on the Kerr Center site lets visitors keep better track of the latest goings-on in the Kerr Center's various programs on the Stewardship Ranch. Recent posts include minimal-till techniques for small farms, and summer photos of cattle, hogs, goats, and chickens on the Stewardship Farm & Ranch: www.kerrcenterdaytoday.wordpress.com

Email updates

Another way to stay in the loop on Kerr Center news and events is to sign up for our email list. Mailings are sparse enough not to fill your inbox, yet often enough to keep you up to date. You also get an electronic version of *Field Notes*. Sign up at www.kerrcenter.com

Facebook

One fan responded to a post on a new sweet potato report with a question about where to buy slips. Within hours, others provided several sources.

An outpouring of concern and support followed on the heels of this spring's tornado damage.

Come join in the discussion and find out why nearly 400 people are fans of the Kerr Center on Facebook. Search for "kerr center" on Facebook, or go to: www.facebook.com/pages/Kerr-Center-for-Sustainable-Agriculture/179959438245

REPORTS AND RESOURCES

Workshop: Healthy Soils, Healthy Livestock

This two-day event drew over fifty people from five states for a slate of speakers including veterinarians, livestock producers, and extension educators. Topics included soil health, hands-on animal assessment, fencing and watering system layout, and genetics for grazing. Full proceedings from the workshop, including handouts, presentations, and video, are available online:
www.kerrcenter.com/past-events/soil-health-2011/index.html

Growing Cows for Grass

This is a text version of a presentation from the "Healthy Soils, Healthy Livestock" workshop, by Kerr Center Pineywoods Cattle Manager Mary Penick. In it, she discusses the Center's low-input, higher-profit approach to raising cattle on grass, with emphasis on the role of genetics:
www.kerrcenter.com/publications/growing-cows-for-grass.pdf

Hoop House Slideshows

The "Hoop House How-To" manual is one of the Kerr Center's most popular publications. Now, these even more lavishly illustrated slideshows complement that publication, with a visual guide to the process of building a low-cost, Hanley-style hoop house:
www.kerrcenter.com/publications/hoophouse/hoophouse-how-to-slideshow.htm

(For additional slideshows on a range of topics, visit www.kerrcenter.com and click on "Slideshows and Presentations" on the right-hand side of the page.)

Riparian Area Management Techniques

Updated for this spring's pond management workshop, this fact sheet by the Kerr Center's David Redhage details the practices used on the Kerr Center Stewardship Farm and Ranch to keep river and stream ecosystems healthy and productive:
www.kerrcenter.com/publications/Riparian-Area-Management-Techniques.pdf

Hay, Fertility, and Profit

This recently reissued report explains the bottom-line rationale behind the Kerr Center's practice of buying hay in rather than baling it on the ranch - a system that still works as well now as it did when this publication first came off the presses in 1997:
www.kerrcenter.com/resources/publications/hay-report-2011.pdf

Where We Shop

Ever wonder where the Kerr Center horticulture and organics programs get their seeds, tools, and supplies? If so, you're not alone. This handy new publication answers all those questions in detail, and includes contact information for suppliers:
www./kerrcenter.com/publications/seed_and_supply_list.pdf

Join Us in Building a Sustainable World:

Vision 2035

The next 25 years promise to be among the most challenging time periods in the history of our nation, indeed the world.

The key to meeting these challenges is education.

Building upon its 25 years of experience, the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture is establishing an educational center at its headquarters on the historic Kerr Ranch near Poteau in southeastern Oklahoma.

Over the next 25 years the Kerr Center will become the "destination for education" about sustainable food and agriculture in the region. The center will give rural residents the tools they need to meet the economic, social and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

A sustainable agriculture is an essential piece of a sustainable world. At the Kerr Center, producers from family farms across Oklahoma and the South will learn to raise animals and crops using the most up-to-date, innovative, sustainable practices.

Over the next 25 years the Kerr Center will become the "destination for education" about sustainable food and agriculture in the region.

1985-2010: The First 25 Years

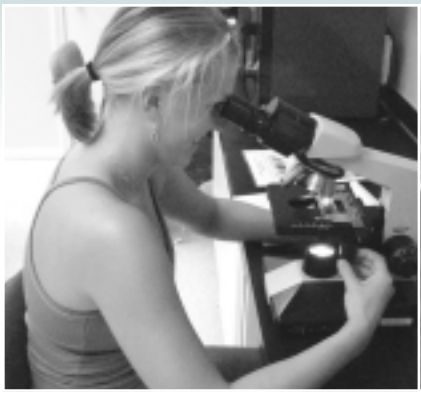
Since 1985, the Kerr Center has been looking to the future-- dedicating its own endowment, and staking its reputation, on a vision of healthy, sustainable farms and ranches. In its early years, the center did groundbreaking work in formulating the basic concepts of sustainable agriculture and applying them to operations on the home ranch.

From 1998-2008 the center expanded its educational program statewide. Field days, conferences, and workshops were held in locations across the state of Oklahoma, reaching many thousands. These events, along with educational publications and a comprehensive website, spurred a groundswell of support in the state for family farmers, sustainable and organic agriculture, sustainable livestock production, farmers' markets, farm-to-school programs, and eating healthy, locally grown food.

These efforts succeeded beyond our wildest dreams, and we are proud of the "seeds of change" we have planted. But the effort has been costly. In addition, the Great Recession has cut deeply into the center's endowment. Over the last couple of years, in response to these fiscal constraints, the center has had to cut staff and services to the bone, and stay closer to home.

While painful, the changes allowed us time to assess our strengths and weaknesses. And just as the darkest hour is just before the dawn, this period of austerity and taking stock has given rise to a bright vision for the next 25 years.

We call it Vision 2035.



2011-2035: The Next 25 Years

It can be difficult to envision a future very different from the present. But a vision is imperative for progress.

The Kerr Center will mark its 50th anniversary in 2035. By the time that landmark date rolls around, we envision the center as a first-rate, state-of the-art educational center open to all. Over the next twenty-five years, the center wants agriculturists from around the region to make the Kerr Farm and Ranch near Poteau, Oklahoma, their "destination for education."

What will be uniquely valuable about the Kerr Educational Center will be the hands-on training in sustainable production that it will offer farmers and ranchers, in the field and in the pasture, under real-world conditions.

Vision 2035 has already been set in motion. Workshops on grazing, farm pond management and hoop house construction took place in spring 2011. In late summer and fall 2011, field days and workshops on horticulture crops, organic production, and meat goat production are planned.

Nowhere else in the region is this kind of experience available, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. The spring events filled our small meeting room to capacity, and we have had to limit attendance. We hope to expand our facilities in future years so that more people will be able to participate.

We also want to continue to make the center's website, www.kerrcenter.com, a "virtual destination" for education. Our reports and our newsletter also offer valuable information to anyone who wants it.

To realize this vision of being a destination for education, the center needs your support. Donations, large and small, will be used to:

- Provide internships to college students
- Provide scholarships for producers to attend educational events
- Develop online educational resources, accessible to those of all income levels
- Create curriculum for beginning farmer and rancher courses
- Enhance ranch infrastructure to be used for educational demonstrations
- Bring top-notch instructors to our educational events
- Expand educational facilities

Donations may be earmarked for any of the areas above, if desired.

If you have benefitted from a Kerr Center event, publication, or webpage, please consider donating and becoming a Friend of the Kerr Center. It's easy to get involved and show your support. All donations are tax-deductible.

With your support, we will succeed in making Vision 2035 a reality. Please join us in building a sustainable world for our children and grandchildren!

Friends of the Kerr Center: How it Works

All contributions are tax deductible. We have designated levels of support–

TILLER ($20-$34), SOWER ($35-49), CULTIVATOR ($50-$199), HARVESTER ($200-$999) and STEWARD ($1,000 or more).

All donations, no matter what the level, will be gratefully accepted.

Please visit our website or call the center for more information. You may donate online or mail donations to the center (see address on page 2).

The Kerr Center for
Sustainable Agriculture, Inc.
P.O. Box 588
Poteau, OK 74953

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Poteau, Ok 74953
PERMIT No. 64

Calendar: Fall/Winter Events

FIELD DAY:
Organic & Heirloom Crops
September 17
(register by September 7)
Poteau

Participants will learn about Kerr Center's experiences with sweet potatoes as part of the specialty crops research project. Topics will include varieties, planting and harvesting methods, irrigation, and pest management.

Featured speakers and topics will include:

■ **Dr. Warren Roberts**, Lane Agricultural Center - sweet potato production for field and garden

■ **Gary Schaum,** Duck Creek Farms, Mounds, Oklahoma - heirloom sweet potatoes (Duck Creek Farms is the source for most of the heirloom sweet potato varieties in the Kerr Center trials.)

■ **Brian Buchwald** and/or **Jeff Stearns**, ODAFF - organic certification and compliance

■ **Brian Freking**, OSU Extension - assistance and resources available from the extension office

Kerr staff will also discuss growing heirloom tomato varieties in-season under various high-tunnel covers to evaluate effects on sunscald, pollination, early blight, and insect pests.

Tours of the Kerr Center's other horticultural projects will also be offered, featuring biochar, composting and compost teas, no-till production, organic crop rotation and cover cropping (including organic management of bermudagrass), integration of livestock and horticulture programs, and small-scale market gardening equipment (See p. 8.)

FIELD DAY:
Commercial Meat Goats
September 24
(register by September 19)
Poteau

Meat goat producers, as well as those considering a commercial meat goat enterprise, will learn about parasites, forages, and animal health at this annual field day, which runs from 9-3.

Featured speaker Dr. Nada K. Nadarajah, an animal geneticist from Auburn University, will speak on "Breeding, Genetic Selection, and the Importance of Recordkeeping."

Participants will also become certified in the FAMACHA system of eyelid color scoring to assess parasite loads.

Staff from the Kerr Center and OSU Extension will present on topics including parasite management and control, managing goats for herd health, and forages. (See p. 4.)

FIELD DAY:
Pastured Pork
October 6
CANCELLED

CONFERENCE: Practical Tools & Solutions for Sustaining Family Farms (Southern SAWG)
January 18 - 21
Little Rock, AR

The full conference schedule will be posted in October at www.ssawg.org.

► **To register for Kerr Center events, and for more information on these and other upcoming sustainable agriculture events, visit the online events calendar at www.kerrcenter.com.**