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Field Notes

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## **Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter**

### ***E-Field Notes*** **February 2015**

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Recent icy weather makes springtime seem a long way off, but new calves on the ranch remind us that it's not so far away. It's certainly not too soon for garden planning. An expanded series of native pollinator plant fact sheets and other pollinator resources can give you a leg up on incorporating these species into your landscaping. Have a look at an in-depth new report on the bioextensive system used on the Cannon Horticulture Plots, and consider putting its insights on cover crops and rotations to work in your own farm and garden. Find out what else you can learn from the Kerr Center with a look at our online calendar of upcoming educational events. Please also consider supporting our work! **Use the headlines above to navigate within this email, and click on the links within each story for more information.**

Plan a Native Garden





Yellow Wild Indigo

Baptisia sphaerocarpa
(AKA: Golden Wild Indigo, Bush Pea)

- **Native plant:** short perennial, pea family
- **Pollinators:** Native bees, especially long-tongued bees such as bumble bees.
- **Bloom period:** Oklahoma: April-June
- **Exposure/soil:** Sun. Average soil. Drought tolerant.
- **Environment/range:** Prairies, pastures, meadows; sporadic, but widely distributed
- **Landscape:** Looks best in plantings of more than one. Unusual-looking seed pods develop in late spring. Grown in Kerr office landscape from plants purchased from an Oklahoma native plant nursery.
- **Value to livestock:** Grows in rotationally-grazed spring pastures on Kerr Ranch. Not eaten by cattle. While it is listed as poisonous to cattle, no Kerr Center livestock have been observed eating it or have been known to die from it.
- **Related native species:** Blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*), Cream or Large-bracted wild indigo (*Baptisia bracteata*), White wild indigo (*Baptisia alba*), Large White wild indigo (*Baptisia leucantha*).

IMPRESSIONS: Important plant for native bees. Queen bumble bees emerging from nests in spring are frequent visitors to stands of this prairie native and its beautiful golden flowers.



NATIVE BEES ✓ HONEY BEES BUTTERFLIES ✓ BEETLES MOTHS FLIES WASPS HUMMINGBIRDS

A new crop of native-plants-for-pollinators fact sheets has popped up on the Kerr Center's [pollinator pages](#). Each has photos of the plants, a list of pollinators that visit them, and tips for successful growing. Fact sheets include:

- [Barbara's Buttons](#)
- [Butterfly Weed](#)
- [Celestial Lily](#)
- [Compass Plant](#)
- [Fogfruit or Frogfruit](#)
- [Illinois Bundleflower](#)
- [Maximilian Sunflower](#)
- [Narrow-Leaf Mountain Mint](#)
- [Purple Prairie Clover](#)
- [Rattlesnake Master](#)
- [Rock Pink](#)
- [Rose Verbena](#)
- [Yellow Wild Indigo](#)

More are being added regularly, so check back often!

The Kerr Center's extensive [native pollinator library](#) also includes resource lists to help you find [nurseries/seed sources](#), [pollinator/native plant websites](#), and books on [native pollinators](#), [native plants](#), [landscaping with native plants](#), and [propagating native plants](#).

Help Save the Monarchs!

Kerr Center is expanding its habitat for the monarch butterfly, and we urge everyone to pitch in and help save this butterfly. Get [monarch news](#) and check out our new fact

sheet, [Native Milkweeds of Oklahoma](#), to get information on the over two dozen milkweeds native to the state. We are adding information weekly.

Attend a Pollinator Workshop

Don't miss our June 6 [workshop on native pollinators!](#)

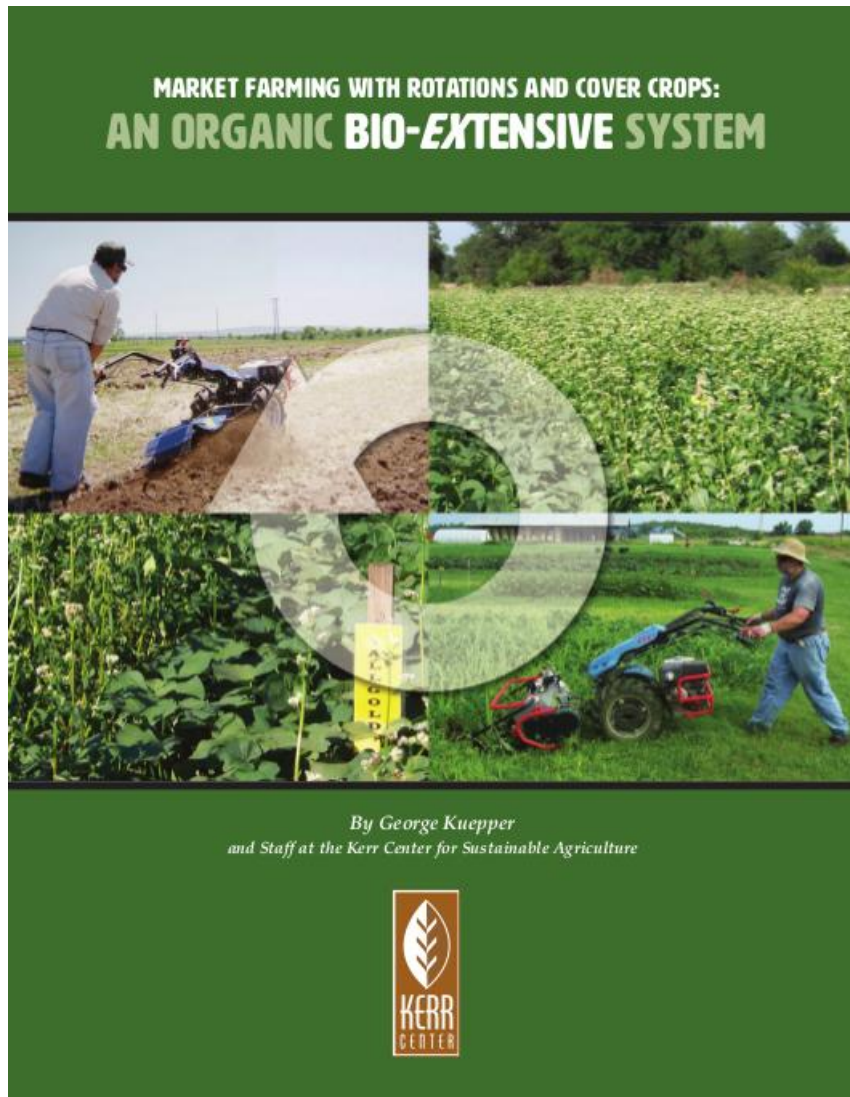


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Design Your Organic System

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This [new publication](#), by Kerr Center Horticulture Manager George Kuepper, highlights the bio-extensive system used for the [Cannon Horticulture Plot](#) demonstration. A bio-extensive system is built primarily around a planned [crop rotation and creative use of cover crops](#).

The report discusses these topics in depth, but also addresses other supportive cultural practices, especially organic no-till. It takes a whole-system perspective on organic system design and management, describing both the successes and failures that have taken place on the Cannon plots within that context.

Kuepper writes, "The bio-extensive system, we feel, paves the way for many other practices to be easier and more successful."

"[Market Farming with Rotations and Cover Crops: An Organic Bio-Extensive System](#)" is available as a free pdf from the Kerr Center website.

**See the Bio-Extensive System in Person!**

A [twilight field day on June 11](#) offers a chance to walk the Cannon hort plots with George Kuepper and listen as he describes the latest work.



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## Help Your Calves Hit the Ground Healthy

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Bottle-fed calves may be cute, but as anyone who's kept one can attest, they're a nuisance

- and worse, a drain on time and profits. Healthy cattle who can deliver healthy calves with minimal assistance are one key element of financial sustainability for ranches of all sizes.

Dystocia (difficult birth) causes up to 3 out of 10 lost calves between birth and weaning. It keeps calves from absorbing as much immunity-conferring colostrum during their first hours of life and reduces their growth rate, and keeps cows from returning as quickly to breeding and reduces their conception rates when they do begin to cycle again.

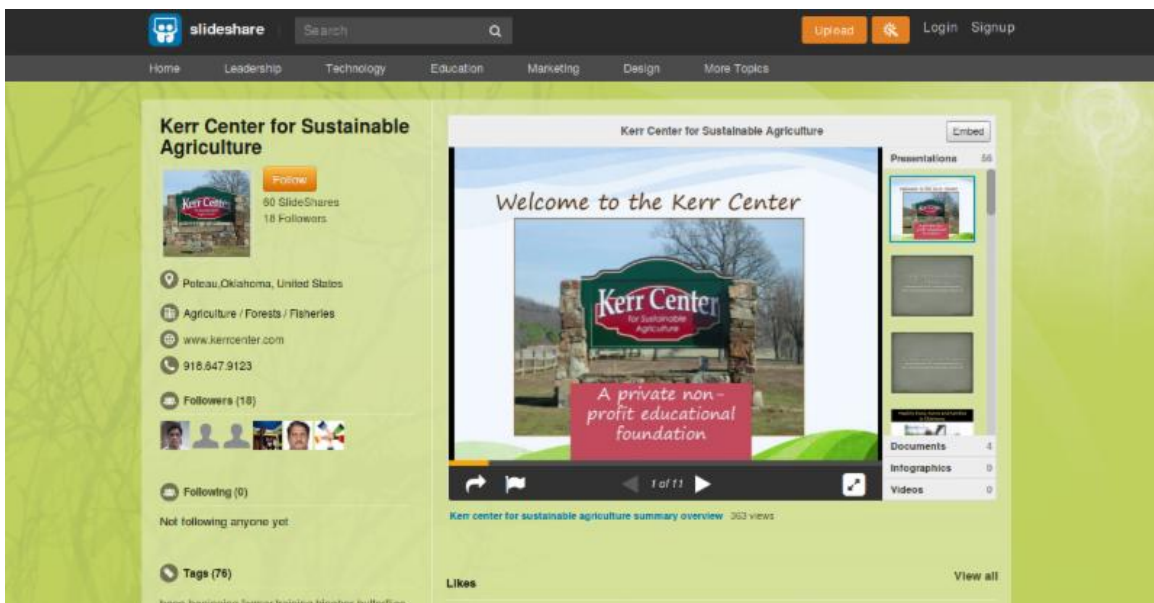
With all those facts in mind, avoiding difficult births is a clear winner among strategies for improving both cow and calf performance. On the cow side, good practices include developing - and using - an early-assistance protocol for calving time, culling cows with small pelvic area and/or poor udder conformation, and growing heifers out to be at 80-85% of their mature weight at the time of first calving.

Bulls can also be selected for smaller pelvic area, as well as for lower birth-weight calves. Selecting for calves that are smaller at birth may seem counter-intuitive, but as David Sparks said in a livestock workshop, "You get paid for how many total pounds of calves you wean and sell, not how many cows you have, or how big they are."

Sparks' presentation, "[Management for Animal Health](#)," contains more detailed information on strategies for reducing dystocia, as does Brian Freking's report "[Heifer Management](#)." Both are available as free pdf downloads from the Kerr Center's online [livestock library](#).

Check out Kerr Center Slideshows and Presentations

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If you've looked at a [slideshow or presentation](#) on the Kerr Center website in the past few years, chances are it was hosted on the [SlideShare site](#).

The Kerr Center has [over 60 slideshows and presentations](#) posted on SlideShare. Our "[Hoop House How-to](#)" series is in the top five percent of most-viewed content there, but that's only the tip of the iceberg.

Most presentations from three years of Beginning Farmer & Rancher classes are posted there, along with those from more specialized individual workshops on topics ranging from landscaping for pollinators to biochar to microbial inoculants. [Browse our presentations on Slideshare](#) to see what you can learn!

# Learn from the Pros with the Kerr Center This Spring and Summer

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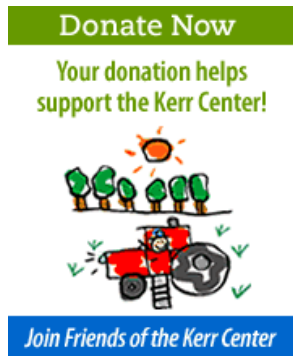
New details on event dates, times, programs, and registration are being added to the Kerr Center's [online events calendar](#) constantly. Check them out for upcoming workshops on [plasticulture \(May 9\)](#), [native pollinators \(June 6\)](#), [organic horticulture \(June 11\)](#), and more!

Events on the calendar can be shared via a number of different social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. If you see something that interests you, please share it with your friends and colleagues!

The calendar also has a **feed that you can subscribe to**, to receive **updates to your personal calendar** (Outlook, Google+, etc.) as they are made.

Support the Kerr Center

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Since 1965 the Kerr Center has been reaching out to folks in Oklahoma and beyond. Today, the Friends of the Kerr Center help us continue this vital work! If you enjoy reading this newsletter or visiting our website, please consider [making a gift to the Kerr Center](#) today!

**Quick Links...**

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