Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
September 2018

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In September we pass through the fall equinox, and the balance point where there are as many hours of daylight as of darkness. So, in this issue, we focus on the idea of **balanced halves and opposite poles**.

As we turn the corner towards cooler weather and shorter days, David Redhage looks at recent research on **growing cash crops during the cooler months of the year** - and sowing cover crops for the summer.

In time with the season, the **monarch butterflies are nearing peak numbers** at the Oklahoma midpoint of their fall migration.

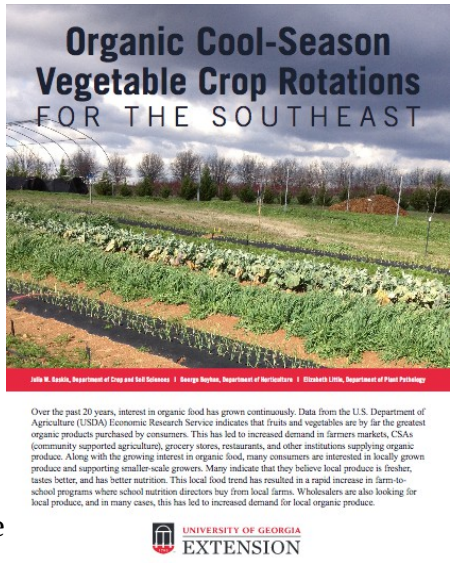
"**Take half, leave half**," has long been a rule of thumb in sustainable grazing management. We re-open a presentation that **walks beginning ranchers through putting it to use in their new operations**.

The Cannon Horticulture Project's **bio-extensive management system plants half its ground to cover crops in any given season**, trading the lost production for less time spent weeding and less money spent fertilizing.

One thing we *don't* do by halves at the Kerr Center is appreciate your **donations** - we value every last one, large or small, and work hard to get the most out of every penny. **Thank you**!

President's Note: Cool-Season Vegetable Crops

Summers in the southeastern United States and in Oklahoma can be challenging for some garden crops. There is the potential in Oklahoma for cool-season vegetable crops, provided you manage the rotations with summer **cover crops** and select crops adapted to the cool season.



The University of Georgia has **recently published** a new document on ***Organic Cool-Season Vegetable Crop Rotations for the Southeast***. While it is specifically written for Georgia conditions, many of the suggested crop rotation management ideas would work in Oklahoma. It is a short document (13 pages long), with some good links to small-scale budgets in the resource section. The publication results were developed from a Southern SARE supported grant (LS10-225).

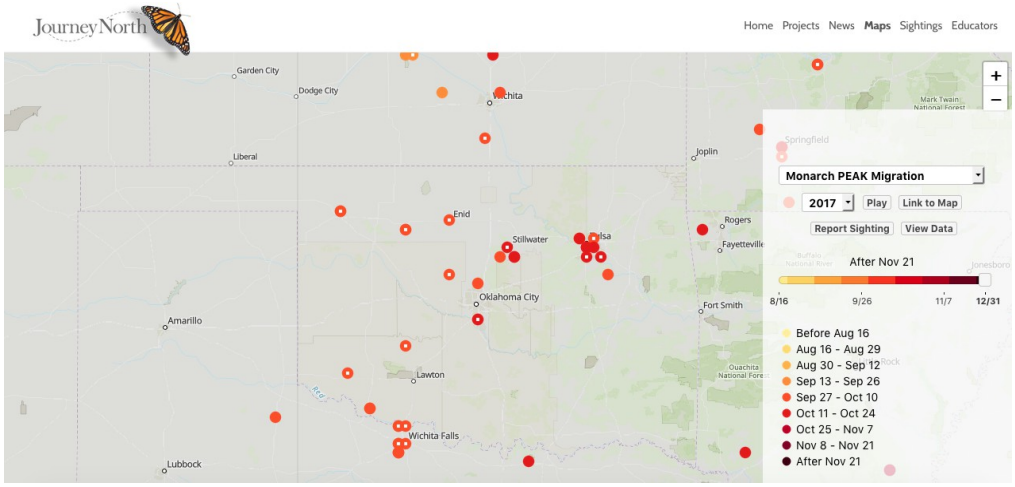
The Kerr Center has been working with season extension since the early 1990s. We feel it has great potential for Oklahoma, but there are many considerations a grower must look at before shifting into this production model. Most importantly, what is the market for your production? What varieties are adapted and work under Oklahoma conditions?

The system requires switching your cover crop season to summer, and growing vegetables in fall and winter. While switching cover crop seasons sounds easy, you need to time your cover crop kill date to allow for enough cover crop decomposition to allow fall vegetable planting.

Fall planting is different than spring planting. As the day length shortens, plant growth slows down and eventually stops when the day length drops below ten hours per day. You need to plant your cash crop early enough to allow it to mature before it stops growing, which means planting sooner and allowing for a longer time to maturity than you would in the spring.

It can be fun to experiment with season extension in a home garden either with open planting or under low tunnels. Give it a try!

The Monarchs are Coming!



Map from journeynorth.org

The monarch butterflies are on the move again, with their **southward migration soon to hit its yearly peak in Oklahoma** on its way from northern states to their wintering grounds in Mexico. Whether you're interested in **preserving or creating habitat** to support the species, helping to **track and monitor** its numbers, or just **observing**, the Kerr Center has resources to help.

A **recent president's note** gives an overview of the monarch's situation. This blog post goes into **more detail**, and this one **traces the monarchs' annual migration and explains the importance of milkweed** to the species. Our website also links to a **television newscast** covering the challenges the monarchs face, and efforts by the Kerr Center and other Oklahoma organizations to lend a helping hand.

For those inspired to take the next step of **planting butterfly gardens**, we offer a **guide to native milkweed species** of Oklahoma, as well as an in-depth look at **how to distinguish two of the most important Oklahoms milkweed species**.

Numerous **other organizations** offer quality online resources to help people help the monarchs. **Journey North** allows users to track the monarchs' progress via interactive maps, as well as log their own sightings. **Monarch Watch** offers a wealth of background information, and also sells milkweed seedlings (as well as offering free seedlings to schools, educational non-profits, and larger-scale restoration projects). The **Xerces Society** is another excellent resource on milkweeds.

Closer to home, the **Oklahoma Monarch & Pollinator Collaborative**, a statewide group of citizens and more than 40 organizations, operates the **Okies for Monarchs** initiative. Its website offers advice on **building butterfly gardens**, a **photo gallery** of gardens around the state, and a **searchable registry** of Oklahoma **butterfly gardens that are open to visits** from the public.

Don't miss the annual Monarchs on the Mountain festival in Tulsa Sept. 22!

Forage Strategies for Small Acreages

Last month, we looked at some of the ways beginning ranchers might cope when thrust onto new acreage before they're fully prepared.

This time around, we consider the **kinds of planning that can go on** when people have a bit more time **before taking the plunge**.

Fence: McDaniel will get better use of his forage and be able to manages those forages better if he cross fences the place and rotationally grazes it.

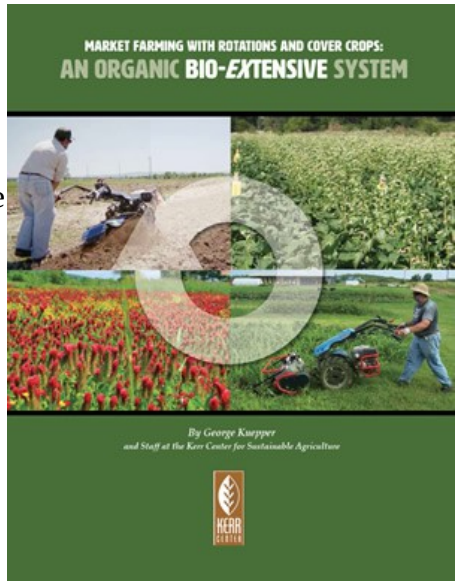
"Forage Strategies for Small Acreages" is a presentation from the livestock track of the Oklahoma Beginning Farmer & Rancher Program. It takes the point of view of "Old McDaniel," a hypothetical rancher **stocking cattle and goats on a newly-acquired, run-down 80-acre spread**.

The presentation goes into depth on the optimal strategies for **setting up fences and watering points**. It also delves into the pros and cons of cattle and goats, including their relative **nutritional needs**, as well as **forage improvement**.

View presentation....

Bio-Extensive Management

The principle at the root of the bio-extensive management system developed in the Kerr Center's horticulture program is as simple as it is revolutionary: **in any given season, plant half the ground to cover crops**.



Giving up that much production space might sound out of the question to many market gardeners. However, the **increases in soil health and fertility** - and the **decrease in weed pressure** - that result from such heavy emphasis on cover crops and rotations, can **leave the bottom line in as good or better shape** than otherwise.

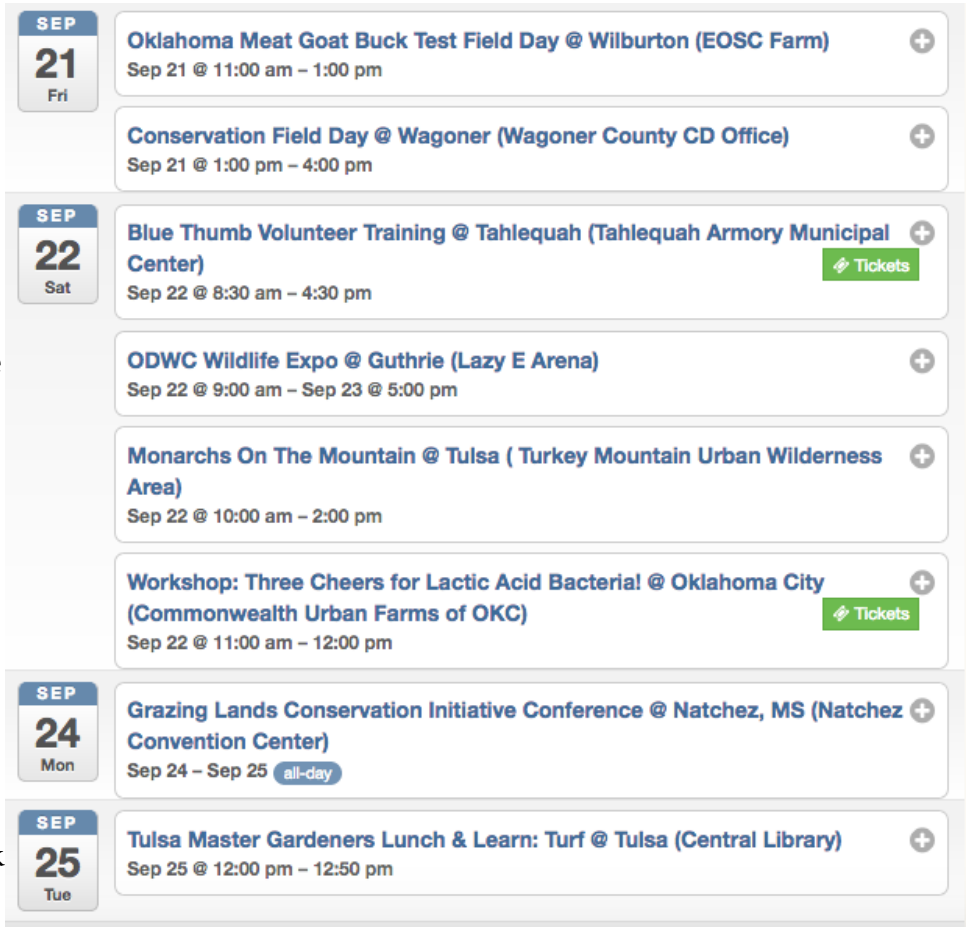
Market Farming with Rotations and Cover Crops: An Organic Bio-Extensive System, lays out the reasoning behind this approach. It also goes into specific detail on various practical aspects.

The report also includes a **resource list**, information to **help with planning**, **variations for different circumstances**, the Kerr Center's **experiences with various cover crops**, and **advice on tools**.

Read report....

Equinoctial Events Extravaganza: Meat Goat Buck Test, Stream Monitoring, Monarchs on the Mountain...

The start of fall is bursting with sustainability events and activities all across the state. On September 21, you can catch the results of this year's **Meat Goat Buck Test** (Wilburton), or take in a **conservation field day**. The very next day, choose between **Blue Thumb Volunteer Training** (Tahlequah), the ODWC **Wildlife Expo** (Guthrie), **Monarchs on the Mountain** (Tulsa), and a **lactic acid bacteria workshop** (Oklahoma City).



The rest of the month, and the start of October, offer events too numerous to list in this newsletter. You can check them out on the Kerr Center's online **events calendar**.

It provides full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events around the state and region. It also serves as a reminder for the dates of **monthly Kerr Center tours**, which run all year round, every second Tuesday by appointment.

Don't forget that you can also use our online calendar to **keep yourself and your friends up to date** on these and other upcoming events, including our tours:
- **Subscribe to our feed** and receive **updates to your personal calendar** (Outlook, Google+, etc.) as they are made.
- **Share events on the calendar** via a number of **different social media sites**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

Support the Kerr Center

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!

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