KERR CENTER

Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture Vol. 34, #2 • Summer 2008

Planning for Change

Future Farms 2008 Coming in August

–Maura McDermott

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Jazz and wine on the Back 40?

How about fresh, organic fruits and veggies, or dark-chocolate pecans?

In this era of change, Oklahoma farmers and ranchers are branching out— trying new crops and marketing options.

The best of these innovative farm enterprises will be featured during the *Future Farms 2008: Planning for Change* conference at the Bricktown Convention Center, August 5 and 6, in Oklahoma City.

The exciting two day conference will offer one day of farm and ranch tours and one day of indoor presentations. Turn to page three for detailed information.

Future Farms 2008 is the fifth in the Kerr Center's popular *Future Farms* series of conferences that began in 2000. The aim of the conference is simple— to help Oklahoma producers find success in this rapidly-changing world.

On August 5 buses will leave from the conference center, bound for three different parts of the state— northwest, central and east. Each tour will visit four or five farms. Each will feature at least one livestock operation, one vegetable farm and one vineyard/winery. On-farm food enterprises and agritourism will be explored as well.

"Each bus/tour will be limited to 50," says Alan Ware of the Kerr Center. He advises those interested to register early.

On August 6, conference attendees can choose from sessions under three tracks: financial planning, production and marketing. More than thirty experts and producers will present information and outline opportunities and resources to help Oklahoma farmers/ranchers be successful.

Just a few of the topics include: labor, insurance and legal issues; unconventional marketing opportunities; business planning; and how to raise in-demand crops and livestock.

The USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is partnering with the Kerr Center to sponsor the conference. Other sponsors are the High Plains Rural Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry; the Robert M. Kerr Food and Agricultural Products Center at Oklahoma State University; Fun Country RC & D; Langston University; and the National Center for Agricultural Law, Research and Information.

People can attend either day or both. Registration deadline is July 21.

Another event this summer will focus on organic production in Oklahoma. A field day for organic growers will be held July 10 from 2-7 at the Lane Agricultural Center near Lane in southeast Oklahoma. The event is free. See p. 2 for details.

For events later in the summer, see the calendar on the last page.

Join us at one of these events and find out how to make the changing times work for you!

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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PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

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- The Stewardship Farm/Ranch
- Rural Development and Public Policy
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Organic Growers' Field Day and Organic Soils Building Workshop

On Thursday, July 10, from 2 – 7, organic agriculture specialists will offer a day of discussion and learning at the Lane Ag Center in Lane. This free dual event offers something both for those interested in learning about organic production and for current organic producers.

The day begins with a soil building workshop, which will address:

- converting land for organic production
- soil building techniques
- challenges to organic fertility for vegetable production, and
- compost for soil improvement.

The field day portion begins at 5. Specialists from Wes Watkins Research Center, the Kerr Center, and the USDA Agricultural Research Service will cover topics including:

- getting and keeping organic certification
- organic production practices
- drip irrigation, and
- challenges in organic production.

Dinner will be served; to reserve a place, please pre-register by calling the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123.

In addition to the Kerr Center, event sponsors include the USDA Risk Management Agency, Wes Watkins Agricultural Research and Extension Center, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, and the Oklahoma Farm to School Program.

The Lane Agriculture Center is located 10 miles east of Atoka on Highway 3.

Kerr Center Online Organic Resources

The following publications on organic farming are new to the Kerr Center website, and can be downloaded free:

Small Farms and Markets – How to Assess Organic Compliance: A Tool for Market Growers, Market Managers, Produce Buyers, Extension Agents, and Others

Small farmers, as well as the managers of the markets at which they sell, may find the USDA organic standards complicated and confusing. This new Kerr Center publication simplifies the process of determining whether an organic farming operation is in compliance with the USDA standards. www.kerrcenter.com/publications /Organiccertification-report/Organic-report07.pdf

Organic Foods: What Do We Need to Know about Them?

Written for anyone who may eat organic foods, this publication answers common questions about the definition and benefits of organic certification. www.kerrcenter.com/pdf/organic-foods.pdf

Organic Production in Oklahoma: Questions and Answers

This publication is for Oklahoma farmers who may be considering organic certification and seek information about the steps involved and the current state of the market. www.kerrcenter.com/pdf/organicproduction-QA.pdf

Also, check out the following Kerr Center information packets on organics, available at www.kerrcenter.com/HTML/pub4.html:

- Organic Gardening
- Organic… Is It For Me?
- Organic: Making the Transition
- Organics in the Mid-South… What are the Challenges?

Additional information on organic farming, specific to individual crops, can also be found in those crops' sections on the same page.

Future Farms 2008:

Planning for Change

August 5 & 6, 2008

Tuesday, August 5: Farm Tours

Central	Northwest	East
OSU-OKC Horticulture Center *Oklahoma City*	**Crestview Farms** *Edmond*	**Queen's Ransom Farm** *Newalla*
Sunrise Acres *Blanchard*	**Cattle Tracks LLC** *Fairview*	**Valley View Pecan Company** *Earlsboro*
Wichita Buffalo Company *Hinton*	**Wagon Creek Creamery** *Helena*	**Tiger Mountain Ranch** *Henryetta*
Christian Cheese *Kingfisher*	**Indian Creek Winery** *Ringwood*	**Rocky Top Goats** *Henryetta*
Chapel Creek Winery *El Reno*		**Grape Ranch Winery** *Okemah*

Tours leave from Bricktown Convention Center in OKC. Check in at 7:00 a.m. and leave at 7:30 a.m., return at 6:00 p.m. except for the Northwest tour that will return at 6:30 p.m.

Central

OSU-OKC Horticulture Center *(Oklahoma City)*

www.osuokc.edu/agriculture/jek.aspx

OSU Horticulture Department head Julia Laughlin will show visitors the John E. Kirkpatrick Horticulture Center's 40-acre grounds and gardens, including 16,000 square feet of production greenhouses, orchard, vineyard, arboretum, and community garden. The Center also hosts the year-round OSU-OKC Farmers Market, featuring 100% Oklahoma-grown produce, meats, dairy, plants, and flowers.

Sunrise Acres *(Blanchard)*

sunriseacres.home.att.net

Robert & Barbara Stelle will walk visitors through their high-density two acre market garden area, featuring some vegetables at harvest stage and others newly planted for fall & winter production. Tour participants will also see the 9000 square feet of greenhouse space, where they grow vegetable & herb transplants, along with lettuce and tomatoes for winter production. The Stelles sell their certified organic produce directly from the farm seven days a week, all year long, and at venues including the OSU-OKC Farmers Market and the Oklahoma Food Co-op.

Wichita Buffalo Company *(Hinton)*
www.sandyspringsfarms.com

James and Sandra Stepp raise free-roaming buffalo on pasture, without hormones or other growth stimulants of any kind. They will address how buffalo can be successfully raised and marketed in Oklahoma, including fencing, corrals, handling equipment, and medical and nutritional needs. They will also discuss the demand for buffalo meat and the need for more producers to raise the animals. The Stepps began their buffalo business in 1998 as a sideline. They now both work full-time on the ranch and have five employees.

Christian Cheese *(Kingfisher)*
www.christiancheese.com

George and Lawanna Christian have been dairying for forty years and making cheese for ten, using Grade A milk from their own dairy herd. Their raise their cattle without hormones or antibiotics and graze year-round on pastures kept free of synthetic herbicides and fertilizers. The Christians market their cheeses directly online, through the Oklahoma Food Co-op, and at some forty Oklahoma grocery stores.

Chapel Creek Winery *(El Reno)*

Professor Andrew Snyder will show tour-goers this working winery, which also helps to train students in Redland Community College's program in enology (wine science) and viticulture (grape growing). The winery focuses on making small batches of many types of wines, so that students will become experts in all aspects of the industry. It opened a tasting room last winter.

NORTHWEST

Crestview Farms *(Edmond)*

Susan and Vernon Graff grow certified organic vegetables, berries, fruits, herbs, and other produce on their 26-acre farm. They sell at the OSU-OKC Farmers Market, through the Oklahoma Food Co-op, and from an on-farm retail shop that also features other Made-in-Oklahoma products.

Cattle Tracks LLC *(Fairview)*
www.johnsfarm.com

John and Kris Gosney raise certified organic hard red wheat and beef on their Centennial Farm. They grind some of the wheat into flour, and sell wheat berries, flour, and beef cuts on their website and through the Oklahoma Food Cooperative. This tour stop includes a meal featuring products from the farm, as well as the family tradition - homemade ice cream. Tour participants will also have opportunity to grind flour from organic wheat berries, see the Oklahoma Centennial witness trees, and go to the top of the Gloss Mountain range, on the farm, for a view of the beautiful area.

Wagon Creek Creamery *(Helena)*
www.wagoncreekcreamery.com

Ron and Barbara Crain have been dairying for 15 years, raising their herd of 50-60 pasture fed cows without growth hormones or grain. From the milk, they make a variety of dairy products, including yogurt, yogurt cheese, butter, ricotta, buttermilk, and cottage cheese. They sell online and through the Oklahoma Food Cooperative.

Indian Creek Winery *(Ringwood)*
www.indiancreekvillage.com

Jenny & Chris Lewis produce a wide variety of wines from their vineyard's grapes. The winery also hosts several agritourism attractions, including a bed & breakfast, wedding chapel, and gift shop.

East

Queen's Ransom Farm *(Newalla)*

Jeff & Rejina Janes grow tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables on ten acres, including 1/4 acre of strawberries on plastic and 350 Apache blackberry vines, for sale at the Shawnee farmers market. They are currently adding about 200 table grape vines. The couple, who have been farming for two years, will discuss becoming a self-supporting farm through diversification, perennial crops and annual crops. They will focus on planting crops among the trees, working with the land to maintain natural habitats, and using plasticulture and drip irrigation for water conservation and weed control. Micah Anderson of the ODAFF plasticulture program will also demonstrate laying plastic.

Valley View Pecan Company *(Earlsboro)*
www.valleyviewpecans.com

For over 30 years, John and Janice Grundmann have been shelling pecans, specializing in Oklahoma native varieties. In 2001, they completed construction of a new 6,000 square foot plant, capable of custom shelling on orders of all sizes. An on-site retail store offers pecan candies, fudge, peanuts, English walnuts, black walnuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, almonds and candies made with a variety of nuts. The Grundmanns shell for customers in four states, and ship candy and nuts nationwide. They will walk visitors through the process, from cracking, shelling, floating, and cleaning to the ready-to-eat pecan meat.

Tiger Mountain Ranch *(Henryetta)*

Sharon and Carl Glidden's guest ranch demonstrates many of the endless possibilities of agritourism, offering customizable programs drawn from a range of Native American and cowboy traditions and skills.

Rocky Top Goats (*Henryetta)*
Cliff Porter runs 200 to 250 Boer goats on 180 acres, selling mostly show wethers and slaughter goats. He handles all the labor and management himself, with a focus on minimizing costs and labor as far as practicable. Before beginning the goat enterprise in 2000, Porter ran a commercial cow-calf operation for many years.

Grape Ranch Winery *(Okemah)*
www.graperanch.com

Since its beginning in 1999, Grape Ranch Winery has been voted best winery in Oklahoma more than once. Overlooking a pecan orchard on the North Canadian River, the winery offers daily tasting, as well as a full schedule of live music on Saturdays and Sundays.

Future Farms 2008:

Planning for Change

August 5 & 6, 2008

Bricktown Convention Center, Oklahoma City

Wednesday, August 6: Breakout Sessions

8:00 – 8:30	***REGISTRATION***		
8:30 – 9:30	***WELCOME & PLENARY*** Dr. Derrell Peel, Keynote Speaker		
Concurrent Sessions:	***Financial Planning***	***Production***	***Marketing***
9:35 – 10:20	***Making a Business Plan*** Dr. Rodney Holcomb	TBA	***Marketing through Farmer-Consumer Co-ops: The Oklahoma Food Cooperative*** Robert Waldrop
10:20 – 10:35	*BREAK*		
10:35 – 11:20	***Farm Labor and H2A Visas*** TBA	***Organic Production for Market Gardeners*** John Leonard	***Elements of a Marketing Plan*** Chuck Willoughby
11:25 – 12:10	***Insurance Options for Farmers, Ranchers, and Small Food Businesses*** Kim Holland & Donna Reynolds	***Bumper Crops Early and Late: Season Extension and Plasticulture*** Glynis Coleman & Steve Upson	***Out of the Sale Barn: Marketing Alternatives for Livestock Producers*** Sky Shivers
12:10 – 1:25	*LUNCH & DOOR PRIZE*		
1:25 – 2:10	***Legal Issues for Producers: Liability and Food Safety*** Harrison Pittman, J.D.	***Pasture Monitoring and Management*** Charley Orchard	***Starting/Operating a Small Food Processing Business*** Dr. Richard Ortez
2:15 – 3:00	***Getting a Loan: What Farmers and Ranchers Need to Know*** Dale Beerwinkle & Don Taylor	***Pasture Monitoring and Management (continued)*** Charley Orchard	***Catering from Your Garden*** Kamala Gamble
3:00 – 3:15	*BREAK*		
3:15 – 4:00	***Panel: Professional Resources*** Barry Dodson Brent Kisling Ron Hilliard Dr. Ross Love Gary O'Neill Terry Peach Jim Reese	***Multi-species Grazing in Oklahoma*** Dave Sparks, D.V.M.	***Panel: Marketing*** Abby Cash Chris Kirby Doug Walton Justin Whitmore Chuck Willoughby
4:05 – 5:00	***Panel (continued)***	***Goat Production Basics*** Dr. Steve Hart	***Panel (continued)***

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Dr. Derrell Peel
Professor & Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist, OSU

Dr. Peel received his undergraduate and Master's degrees from Montana State University and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois. In addition to extension and research responsibilities, Dr. Peel teaches Introduction to Agricultural Economics and other courses. He has numerous publications and is a co-editor and a chapter author of the Oklahoma Beef Cattle Manual, published by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Making a Business Plan

Dr. Rodney B. Holcomb
Agricultural Economist, Oklahoma State University, Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center

Business plans serve as both a personal "things to do" list and a tool for obtaining capital. Using examples of various types of agribusinesses, Dr. Holcomb will discuss the basic components of a business plan, what lenders usually request, and how to develop financial analyses. He studies processing alternatives and business structures for adding value to farm products, and their impacts on local and state economies.

Farm Labor and H2A Visas

TBA

Insurance Options for Farmers, Ranchers, and Small Food Businesses

Kim Holland
Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner

Ms. Holland is the first woman elected Insurance Commissioner in Oklahoma. A business woman and active civic volunteer before becoming Insurance Commissioner, Holland has worked over more than two decades as an insurance professional.

Donna Reynolds
Risk Management Specialist, USDA Risk Management Agency

Ms. Reynolds will give an overview of different types of insurance programs available to rural farmers and ranchers, including livestock (such as cattle, swine and lamb), crops, pilot programs, and any new programs RMA will be implementing for Crop Year 2009. She serves as the liaison for her office on several Research and Outreach partnerships, working with various entities, such as the Kerr Center, on congressionally mandated educational programs. Additionally, she works with reinsurance companies on insurance programs for all the different crops within her region of New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Legal Issues for Producers: Liability and Food Safety

Harrison M. Pittman, B.S., J.D., LL.M.
Director, National Agricultural Law Center, University of Arkansas

Mr. Pittman is a frequent presenter on various agricultural law and policy topics, including environmental law, the impact of globalization and the World Trade Organization on U.S. agriculture, conservation programs, legal liability issues in agritourism operations and other landowner liability issues, agricultural liens, the future of farm commodity programs, and the interrelationship between local food systems and public health issues.

Getting a Loan: What Farmers and Ranchers Need to Know

Dale Beerwinkle
Agricultural Business Management Coordinator, Caddo Kiowa Technology Center

Mr. Beerwinkle will discuss considerations in obtaining debt financing for an agricultural operation, including what lenders might look for in deciding whether or not to honor loan requests. He works with family farmers and ranchers on budgeting, recordkeeping, and finance, helping them to apply business concepts while working with their own operation. These farms range from specialty crops, vegetables, and agritourism to traditional commodity crops, with sales from as little as $15,000 to well over $2,000,000.

Don Taylor
Senior Vice President, First American Bank, Woodward

What do commercial banks require of applicants for agritourism loans? Mr. Taylor, in banking since 1974, will talk about the questions bankers will ask and what applicants need to be successful.

Panel: Professional Resources

Barry Dodson
USDA Risk Management Agency, Oklahoma City Regional Director

Ron Hilliard
Oklahoma State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Brent Kisling
USDA Rural Development, Regional Director

Dr. Ross Love
Assistant Director, OSU Cooperative Extension

Gary O'Neill
Assistant State Conservationist, Director of RC&D

Terry Peach
Oklahoma Commissioner of Agriculture

Jim Reese
State Executive Director, Oklahoma Farm Service Agency

PRODUCTION

Organic Production for Market Gardeners

John Leonard
Owner/Partner, Organic Gardens

Built on inspiration 8 years ago, Mr. Leonard's family-owned farm has become a success, providing unique herbs, bedding plants, and certified organic produce to farmers' markets and restaurants in central Oklahoma. He will share his experience in organic production, focusing on soil building, integrated pest management (IPM), and crop management.

Bumper Crops Early and Late: Season Extension and Plasticulture

Glynis Coleman
Deep Valley Farms

Ms. Coleman and her family run a small-scale farm operation on 40 acres, selling at the Okmulgee Farmers' Market. They apply sustainable agriculture principles and holistic management practices. A participant in ODAFF's plasticulture program, Coleman will address plasticulture as a means of season extension, weed control, and increased competitiveness for small scale farmers in local markets.

Steve Upson
Horticulture Consultant, Noble Foundation

Mr. Upson will give an overview of the various components used in a plasticulture growing system. including drip irrigation, plastic mulch, floating covers, mini tunnels and high tunnels (hoop houses). He will highlight examples of the application of this technology by local growers. Upson has been with the Noble Foundation for the past 20 years, and previously worked as a county and district horticulture agent with OSU Cooperative Extension, and as manager of a commercial market gardening operation.

Pasture Monitoring and Management

Charley Orchard
Land EKG, Inc.

Mr. Orchard grew up in Wyoming, a fourth-generation rancher. His innovative "Land EKG" is a way to monitor the health of rangeland that is comprehensive yet easy to understand and simple to master. He will explain how to do it and what ranchers will learn using this approach.

Multi-species Grazing in Oklahoma

Dave Sparks, D.V.M.
Area Extension Food Animal Quality and Health Specialist, OSU Cooperative Extension

Dr. Sparks will relate the findings of his current research grazing cattle and goats together under range conditions. He will consider impacts on parasites, range plant composition, and economics. Dr. Sparks has practiced veterinary medicine in Oklahoma, Kansas, California, and Arizona, and joined the OSU Cooperative Extension Service in 2006, covering 40 eastern Oklahoma counties.

Goat Production Basics

Dr. Steve Hart
Goat Extension Specialist, Langston University

Dr. Hart will share the fruits of his 17 years of work in goat extension at Langston, asking several questions that producers need to answer before getting into the goat business, and discussing some considerations in planning a goat enterprise. He will also provide a list of suggested goat information resources, and discuss several current Oklahoma goat enterprises.

MARKETING

Marketing through Farmer-Consumer Co-ops: The Oklahoma Food Cooperative

Robert Waldrop
President, Oklahoma Food Cooperative

Mr. Waldrop will discuss the history and operation of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, which is a monthly order and delivery network connecting Oklahoma farmers and customers. Producing and selling for the local marketplace is a growing market that offers farmers profits and security from the typical boom to bust cycle in agriculture prices. The demand for locally grown foods is in excess of the supply, especially vegetables. A native, fourth generation Oklahoman, Waldrop is the founder of the Oscar Romero Catholic Worker House, which delivers food to people in need who don't have transportation, and the director of music at Epiphany of the Lord Catholic Church. He is also a founding member of the Oklahoma Sustainability Network.

Elements of a Marketing Plan

Chuck Willoughby
Business & Marketing Relations Manager, Oklahoma State Univsersity, Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center

Just like the business plan, the marketing plan serves as a tool that directs and evaluates the marketing activities of an organization. Marketing can be defined as the process of initiating and building mutually beneficial relationships with customers. While no two marketing plans are alike, Mr. Willoughby will present and discuss recommended elements that should be included.

Out of the Sale Barn: Marketing Alternatives for Livestock Producers

Sky Shivers
Cowboy Storyteller, Rancher

Mr. Shivers raises goats and cattle and is also a popular humorist and cowboy storyteller. His Kiko bucks were among the top performers in the Kerr Center's 2007 Meat Goat Performance test.

Starting/Operating a Small Food Processing Business

Dr. Richard Ortez
El Sueño Enterprises

After a career as a microbiology professor, Dr. Ortez achieved his lifetime goal of owning a farm. In 1994, he established El Sueño Enterprises, consisting of gardens, commercial kitchen, and café, as portrayed in the company motto: "Nurturing your meal from seed to table." He has since closed the café, but continues to grow and transform fresh vegetables into value-added processed foods to sell at a local farmers' market. The 20 items in his stable product line each contain at least one ingredient grown on his farm. His practical presentation is aimed at helping those interested see through the mystique of starting a small commercial food processing business. He will describe how El Sueño Enterprises got started and developed into its present form, addressing such issues as health regulations, setting up a commercial kitchen, business and other skills, and product cost analysis.

Catering from Your Garden

Kamala Gamble

Chef Gamble operates a catering service featuring fresh produce from her own suburban organic garden as well as other local growers, and meat and dairy items from Oklahoma farms and ranches. Kam's Kookery and Guilford Gardens also host cooking classes and run a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program. Gamble helped to found the Oklahoma City Slow Food Convivium.

Panel: Marketing

Abby Cash
Agritourism Director, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, & Forestry

Chris Kirby
Oklahoma Farm to School Program Administrator

Rick Maloney
Oklahoma Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture

Doug Walton
Community Foods Coordinator, Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Justin Whitmore
Diversified Agriculture Marketing Development Coordinator, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, & Forestry

FUTURE FARMS 2008:

Planning for Change

AUGUST 5 & 6, 2008

Ask for special rates for Future Farms/Kerr Center conference attendees; reserve by July 21.

CONTACT:
Bricktown Hotel & Convention Center
2001 E. Reno Avenue
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73117
www.bricktown-hotel.com

DIRECTIONS::
Take I-40 to Oklahoma City. Take exit 154 toward Scott St./Reno Ave. Merge onto Tinker Diagonal St. Turn left at E. Reno Ave. Airport shuttle available.
Call Toll Free: (866) 378-0966
Local Calls: (405) 235-1647

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Adding Value to Oklahoma

HOTEL INFORMATION

Bricktown Hotel & Convention Center

Affordable friendliness in a classic Oklahoma setting

The Bricktown Hotel and Convention Center puts you in the heart of one of Oklahoma City's historic settings. The newly refurbished facility is located only 1.5 miles from Bricktown, OKC's downtown restaurant and entertainment district. Other nearby major attractions include: Ford Center, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City National Memorial, SWB Ballpark, Zoo & Museum area, and Bass Pro Shops. *Shuttle is available 24 hours a day.*

FUTURE FARMS 2008 REGISTRATION

Register by July 21, 2008!

Register online at www.kerrcenter.com/futurefarms_08

Name: _____

Organization/Occupation:: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Day Phone: _____ Email: _____

☐ **Farm Tour ($40) - Tuesday, August 5th**

Choose only ONE Farm Tour:

- ☐ Central
- ☐ Northwest
- ☐ East

☐ **Conference ($35) - Wednesday, August 6th**

Total: _____

Make check or money order payable to Kerr Center and mail to:
Kerr Center
Future Farms 2008
PO Box 588, Poteau, OK 74953

KERR CENTER

Livestock... Naturally!

– Wylie Harris

The markets for natural and grass-fed meats are growing fast, both in Oklahoma and nationwide. Between 1997 and 2002, meat goat production doubled in Oklahoma, putting the state fifth in the U.S.

At a March 29 workshop at Connors State College in Warner, an experienced group of ranchers, veterinarians, and extension specialists laid out guidelines to help livestock producers get in on these profitable opportunities.

The presentations illustrated both the fundamentals common to many successful natural livestock enterprises, like rotational grazing and low-stress handling, as well as some of the individual strategies such businesses can use to adapt to their local circumstances.

Two Takes on Pastured Beef

"Agriculture is so tradition-bound," says Jon Taggart, of Burgundy Pastured Beef in central Texas. "Everybody does it the way granddad did it."

Taggart got the day rolling.

"I've been in ranching for 25 years, marketing beef for 10 years. I've been in cow-calf, stockers. I did the whole plant wheat, fertilize, spray-for-weeds thing – lots of inputs."

But, Taggart said, that approach was making less and less money. "We were either going to figure out a way to make a living in the cattle business or get out of it."

"There were no books, no classes," he says. "I was told in no uncertain terms that this wouldn't work."

"But," he continues, "I'm kind of hardheaded…."

These days, Taggart says, "We've been killing cattle once a week for 4 years. For 6 years our business has doubled every year, or more. We now have 8 full-time employees."

In Arkansas, a group of eleven farmers combined a total of 50 head of cattle, of several different types and ages, on pasture, with the idea of marketing the meat cooperatively.

In 2002, nine of those farmers formed an LLC named Ozark Pastured Beef to pursue that plan.

The partnership now has seven members, four of whom are actively raising cattle. Two of them, holistic veterinarian Ann Wells and NRCS Arkansas grazing specialist Ron Morrow, also spoke at the workshop.

Feed and Forage

Both Ozark and Burgundy use management-intensive rotational grazing, and try to feed hay for as short a time as possible each year.

"We use a high-intensity, short-duration grazing system," says Taggart. "We've done that forever and ever."

At Ozark Pastured Beef, said Wells, the goal is to feed hay no more than 60 days out of the year.

Taggart is more blunt. "I hate it. If you gave me a baler today, I'd sell it tomorrow."

"The only hay I feed is alfalfa," he continues. "This year, we started at Christmas and went through February 15, which is when the winter annuals kick in." He also sometimes feeds hay in the summer if the weather is dry.

With hay playing such a small role, live forages have to make up the difference.

To do that, Taggart relies on cool-season annual crops, like wheat, oats, rye, and ryegrass. "I try to rotate pastures so that the ryegrass will go to seed," he says. "I went four or five years without planting any before this year."

"Ryegrass will make anyone look like a good farmer," he jokes.

Taggart plants these forages with a no-till drill - "the only good piece of farm equipment I ever bought."

He also uses the no-till drill to plant legumes, including alfalfa and various clovers, for fertility."I don't fertilize anything," he said.

Ozark uses northwest Arkansas' abundant supply of chicken litter as fertilizer. The plan is to raise soil fertility to a certain level with the litter, and then maintain it through management alone.

Quality Control

Raising livestock on grass alone is an accomplishment in itself, but it's only the first step toward a successful overall enterprise. In Taggart's experience as well as Morrow's and Wells', meat has to be both tender and well marbled to sell, no matter how it was produced.

"The biggest problem I see in the grassfed industry is quality," Taggart opines. "People will only buy the story one time. They'll buy the quality, the flavor, and the tenderness over and over again."

"There's a market for lean beef. There's also a market for good beef."

Wells concurs. Customers may say they want lean beef, she says, but they

RMA in Oklahoma

Donna Reynolds of the USDA Risk Management Agency spoke briefly about RMA's reasons for sponsoring events like this workshop, and the resources it offers livestock producers.

In Oklahoma, RMA insures cattle, hogs, and lambs, as well as grazing land and many crops. Reynolds said she is working within the agency to add goats to the list of insurable livestock.

In 2008, RMA insured 450,000 acres in Oklahoma for a total liability of $8.2 million. More information is available at the RMA website, www.rma.usda.gov.

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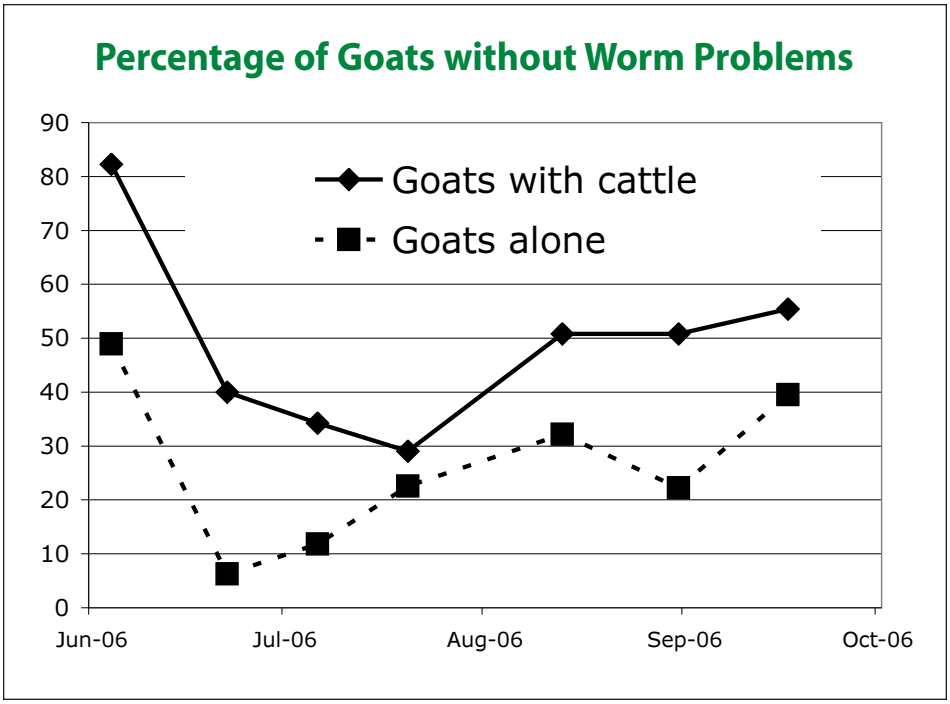


don't really.

"On grass, I can fatten calves and then hold them for 2 years, if need be," Taggart says. "I don't subscribe to the idea that grass-finished cattle have to be managed on an 'increasing plane of nutrition' right through slaughter."

Based on that thinking, Taggart gives his finishing herd what he calls "TLC." Next year's cattle, though, "have to work a little harder" on less palatable forage.

Burgundy Pasture Beef now kills animals between 24 and 30 months, usually at 1,250 to 1,350 lbs. Ozark's kill weight is slightly less, around 1,100 to 1,200 lbs., which Wells said is the minimum necessary to cover costs

The Fat of the Land

However, weight is not the primary concern of either operation. "I don't care what they weigh," says Taggart. "They don't have to weigh a certain amount, but they have to be fat."

Many ranches measure live animals' fat content with ultrasound sensors, but neither Burgundy nor Ozark does. Ozark relies instead on body condition scoring (BCS), which does the same job by sight and touch, to judge whether animals are ready for slaughter.

"I think I can do as good a job by hand as by ultrasound," Wells said. BCS scores range from 1 to 9. By Wells' standard, animals scoring 6 and higher will have the fat cover and marbling necessary for quality cuts of meat.

"We're looking for a body type rather than a breed," Wells says – an attitude reflected in Ozark producers' different breeds and types of cattle.

Taggart, on the other hand, uses all Angus cattle. "If it's not broke, don't fix it," he says. "I'm a big believer in genetics."

In fact, Taggart now buys cattle from only 2 ranches, whose genetics he's found to be best for his purposes. In a departure from the cow-calf system used by Ozark (and many other) operations, he keeps no mother cows on the ranch at all.

Two years ago, he switched to buying only heifers. "Heifers marble better and earlier than steers," he explains.

Part of the Process

Quality control begins in the pasture, but continues right through slaughter and beyond.

"The biggest headache was processing," Taggart said, reflecting on Burgundy's learning curve for direct marketing grass-fed beef. "A north Dallas customer paying twenty-eight dollars a pound for tenderloin doesn't want blood all over the package."

Eventually, the Taggarts solved that problem by building their own processing facility. A plant 32 miles away still kills their animals, but they do the rest of the processing – aging, cutting, packaging, and shipping – right on the ranch.

Ozark Pasture Beef, like most other ranches marketing meat direct to the customer, relies on a custom processor. For Ozark, it's a two-hour trip across the state line, and

they never haul less than 4 animals at a time.

The processor charges Ozark 60 cents per pound hanging weight, plus a $15 per animal kill fee. When Taggart custom processes other ranchers' animals, his fee is a flat 70 cents per pound, including vacuum wrapping.

Both operations emphasize the importance of low-stress animal handling before and during processing. "You can do everything right and then screw it up in 20 minutes," Taggart says.

"Never haul one by itself. In the early days, I'd take two even if we were only processing one," he says, to avoid the stress of isolation in an unfamiliar environment. For the same reason, he avoids leaving the animals at the processor overnight.

Wells and Morrow, along with the other Ozark producers, visited their processor while the facility was still in the planning stages, to make sure that each understood the other's expectations. Taggart confesses that he's not above slipping a case of beer into the trailer to inspire a little extra care from the workers who'll be handling his animals.

Ozark has their processor dry-age the carcass for about two weeks; Taggart prefers a full three. There's a tradeoff: meat that hangs longer will be more tender, but also drier. A thick outer layer of fat is essential to keep the meat from drying out too much.

To Market...

Though their production methods are quite similar, the two businesses diverge in their proprietors' off-farm obligations as well as in their location, and those differences shape their marketing strategies.

All four of Ozark's currently active producers have what Wells calls "day jobs" – she as a veterinary consultant, Morrow with NRCS, and so on.

"This is a secondary or tertiary enterprise," she says. "Marketing is way down the list."

The business relies mainly on its website, as well as word of mouth, to attract customers in its northwestern Arkansas delivery area.

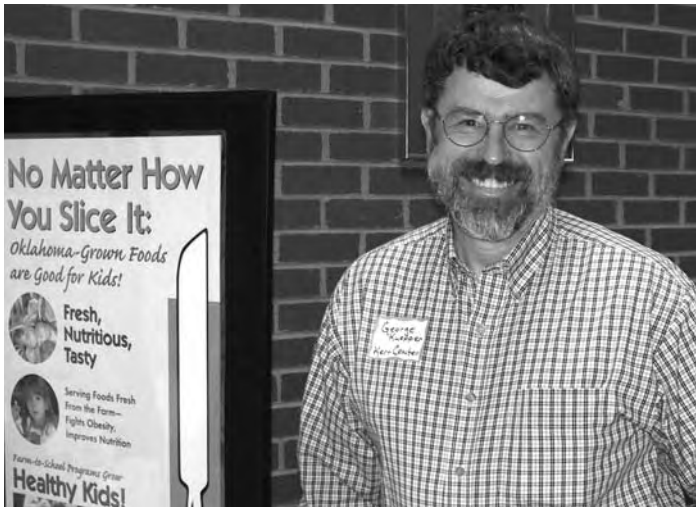
"Marketing is a lot of work, and the four of us are not marketers," Wells says. "That is our biggest weakness."

"Also, there's no major metropolitan area nearby. Therefore, we don't sell as much."

Burgundy Pasture Beef, on the other hand, sits an hour's drive from six million potential customers in the Dallas/Fort-Worth area.

Jon Taggart confers with conference goer.

Sue Floyd, Director of Development, Connors State College, and Jim Horne, Kerr Center president.



George Kuepper.

Kerr Center and Connors State College: Partners in Sustainability

The Natural Livestock workshop drew about 75 people, both established ranchers and newcomers to the livestock business. Most came from Oklahoma, with a sprinkling from Arkansas and Texas. Most attendees rated the workshop as "highly informative."

Over a dozen Connors students attended the workshop for college credit. The college, which President Donnie Nero described in his welcoming remarks as "Oklahoma's best-kept secret," offers students experience with cattle, sheep, and hogs in a livestock program with over 1,300 acres.

Currently celebrating its 100th year, Connors is working to maintain its agriculture programs' cutting edge for its new century. The College is partnering with the Kerr Center to incorporate sustainability into its agriculture program.

The college and the center will next present the "Growing for Local Markets" workshop Sept. 20 in Warner. See calendar, p.16 or check www.kerrcenter.com for details.

This event was sponsored by the Kerr Center and Connors State College in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency and help from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

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At the registration desk, Maura McDermott and Jessica Castillo of the Kerr Center

Selling the Whole Cow

"Most of our marketing is home delivery," Taggart says. "We were losing money when we started out, but we had to suffer through that."

One breakthrough came when, like Ozark, they switched to a minimum order. (Burgundy's is 10 pounds; Ozark's is one hundred dollars.)

Another came through increasing volume. "Very few people will buy quarters and halves. You could do a small amount, kill once a year, sell to ten or twenty families – but we were looking at something bigger."

In addition to their prime location, neither Jon nor Wendy Taggart works off the farm – a fact that has enabled them to expand their direct marketing well beyond their home-delivery base.

"I take care of the cows when they're alive," he quips, "and she takes care of them when they're dead," referring to the processing plant, "boucherie," and restaurant that the couple have added over the years at the ranch.

"The restaurant is a way to move the surplus ground beef in a very high-value form – hamburgers," he says. "It's also made some former home-delivery customers into pickup customers; they'll eat a hamburger once a month when they come to pick up their order."

In addition, Burgundy has a nationwide shipping operation – born overnight, Taggart says, after a Time magazine article featured the ranch. The Taggarts also sell to selected area restaurants at retail prices.

Direct marketing has caused both Burgundy and Ozark to devise ways to move all the different kinds of cuts. Taggart pointed out that ground beef makes up half the weight of the cuts from a beef, but less than 40% of the value. The steaks are worth almost as much, but are only 15% of the weight.

"We have trouble moving the high-end steaks," Morrow said. "The challenge," Taggart agreed, "is to sell the whole cow."

Reading the Label

Burgundy Pasture Beef's label bears no special claims, such as "grassfed," "organic," or "hormone/antibiotic free." Such a "no-claim" label can be approved "in-house" by an on-site inspector; otherwise, Taggart says, it has to go all the way to Washington, D.C., and there's much more red tape.

"If I was selling through Whole Foods, where the only customer contact was via that label, I would do the special claims," he explains.

Ozark operates on a similar philosophy. "Both our land and cattle could be certified organic, but aren't because we don't need to," Wells says. Customer relationships, she explains, serve the same purpose as the organic label.

To control flies, Taggart releases parasitic wasps every 2 weeks, wherever the cows are grazing. He buys them by mail, but suspects that he's built up a resident population of wasps over time.

When the wasps aren't enough to control all the flies, he uses orange oil. Wells uses essential oil preparations; some are available commercially, but she mixes her own.

Getting Parasites' Goat

After the morning devoted to the specifics of two grassfed beef operations, Morrow and Wells continued into the afternoon, splitting the audience to focus on the general principles of natural raising of cattle and goats, respectively.

For goats, those principles necessarily involve a heavy emphasis on parasite management.

Drawing on her experience as a holistic veterinary practitioner, Wells reviewed several methods of parasite control as alternatives to chemical dewormers. Such alternatives are increasingly important, she said, since parasites are rapidly evolving resistance to the existing array of chemical controls.

However, Wells cautioned that alternative methods alone will never provide the same level of parasite control as chemical dewormers once did. As such, she emphasized a holistic approach combining alternative treatments with preventive management.

Management strategies that she said help to minimize parasite problems include selecting healthy animals with as much natural resistance as possible, quarantining new additions to the herd for a minimum of two weeks, regular monitoring of parasite levels, rotational grazing, and multi-species grazing.

The More, the Merrier

The day closed with a panel discussion of multi-species grazing. According to OSU Extension veterinarian David Sparks, grazing goats and cattle together can control parasites in both species, as well as undesirable plant species in pastures.

Cattle and goats, Sparks explained, are immune to each other's parasites. "When a cow comes along and eats grass that has goat parasite larvae on it," he said, 'the only thing that the parasite gets to do is get digested. Cattle and goats just clean the pastures for each other."

Sparks presented preliminary results from a study designed to test this idea.

Even without rotational grazing, goats had less severe worm problems when they shared native range with cattle (see figure p.12).

According to Sparks, this finding is even more encouraging than it might seem, since last summer's cool and rainy conditions were ideal for the parasites. (This research is continuing with help from a Kerr Center Producer Grant; see *Field Notes*, Spring 2008.)

The same principle could apply to combining sheep with cattle as well, but Sparks favors goats because their diet is more different from that of cattle. "If you stock correctly, you probably don't need to decrease the cattle stocking rate," he said.

He mentioned one ranch that pays cropdusters every year to spray of one-third of its acreage for briars and brush. "If you had something that would eat those species, this could be an income stream instead of an expense," he said.

"The days when we could afford to operate inefficiently and take the profit from cattle and put it into spray are probably at an end," Sparks said. "I think that what we're seeing here is probably the future of the livestock industry."

Calendar: Summer/Fall Events

FIELD DAY: Lane Ag Center Annual Field Day
June 21 – Lane

The Lane Agriculture Center Annual Field Day provides an opportunity for the public to learn about new developments with topics such as vegetable production, biofuel and biofumigant crops, weed, insect and disease control, and production practices for certified organic vegetable production. In addition to the educational aspects of the Field Day, the event will include food, entertainment and opportunities to visit with the Center staff. An antique tractor show and competition is open to all who want to bring their favorite tractor along. For more information, visit www.lane-ag.org or call 580.889.7343.

FIELD DAY & WORKSHOP: Organic Growers' Field Day and Organic Soils Building Workshop*
July 10 - Lane

This free dual event offers a day of discussion and learning for both current and potential organic producers. The soil building workshop comes first, addressing converting land for organic production, soil building techniques, challenges to organic fertility for vegetable production, and compost for soil improvement. The field day follows, and will cover topics including getting and keeping organic certification, organic production practices, drip irrigation, and challenges in organic production. Dinner will be served; to reserve a place, please pre-register by calling the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123. Event sponsors include the Kerr Center, USDA Risk Management Agency, Wes Watkins Agricultural Research and Extension Center, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, and the Oklahoma Farm to School Program.

CONFERENCE: *Future Farms 2008: Planning for Change**
August 5-6 – Oklahoma City

Oklahoma farmers and ranchers are branching out - trying new crops and marketing options. The best of these innovative farm enterprises will be featured during the *Future Farms 2008: Planning for Change* conference at the Bricktown Convention Center, August 5-6 in Oklahoma City. The two-day conference will offer one day of farm and ranch tours and one day of indoor presentations. Register by July 21 at www.kerrcenter.com. Registration is $40 for tours only, $35 for breakout sessions only, or $75 for both days (lunch included). Tour bus seating is limited, so early registration is encouraged to ensure a place. (See p. 3 for more info. See p. 9 for mail-in registration form.)

FIELD DAY: Hoop Houses*
September 14 – Norman

Fall is the perfect time to build a hoop house to extend your growing season. Join Tod and Jamie Hanley at Trebuchet Gardens to see how they built a 25' x 96' hoop house for under $1000, allowing them to grow produce year-round. Event will be held rain or shine. For details, call 918.647.9123.

WORKSHOP: Growing for Local Markets*
September 20 – Warner

The Connors State College campus will host this all-day workshop for market gardeners. In the morning, Mike Appel and Emily Oakley, from Three Springs Farm in Cherokee County, will talk about their successful market farm, both production and marketing. The afternoon will include a selection of basic skills sessions, covering specialty marketing, drip irrigation, and other topics of interest to small growers. Event will be held rain or shine. For details, call 918.647.9123.

FARM FEST
October 10-11 – Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm

The annual Fall Farm Fest is held the second Friday and Saturday each October. Friday is reserved for school groups. On Saturday, the festival is open to the general public from 9 – 4. Volunteers demonstrate activities and crafts common on farms one hundred years ago.

RMA

**These events presented in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency, an equal opportunity provider*

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