KERR CENTER

Field Notes

40 YEARS of good ideas

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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Fit Kids Coalition Wants to Stop the Supersizing of Oklahoma's Student Body

Integris Health CEO leads the way to healthier choices for kids

—Shauna Lawyer Struby

The black-and-white photo of a puffy faced kid with a serious expression and sprinkling of freckles across his nose captures your attention right away. He could be anybody's child, the kid next door, your nephew, even your own child.

INTEGRIS Health President and CEO Stanley Hupfeld and students at Western Village Academy were on hand to watch Governor Brad Henry sign a bill into law to curb childhood obesity.

Then you see the provocative headline, "How to Stop Supersizing the Student Body" and facts about the health risks associated with childhood obesity, the growing crisis, possible solutions. The experts catch your eye next, scrolling photos of pediatricians accompanied by quotes about the complications associated with childhood obesity.

The website's clickable words "Wake up" launch you further into the plethora of information and once there, an impressively organized array of information designed to compel action takes a tenacious hold. And reading through the info, you begin to understand just how pervasive obesity has become and why is it so threatening to Oklahoma on a number of levels.

What you're reading isn't the website of "Good Morning America," CNN or The New York *Times*. It's a homegrown, 100-percent Oklahoma-initiated website organized and backed by the Oklahoma Fit Kids Coalition, more than 40 organizations who take Oklahoma's growing obesity problem very seriously.

The Fit Kids coalition is the brainchild of Integris CEO and president, Stan Hupfeld. Hupfeld heads the state's largest Oklahoma-owned health system with hospitals, rehabilitation centers, physician clinics, mental health facilities, independent living centers and home health agencies throughout much of the state.

In a recent interview he noted that after successful work on State Question 713 in 2004, which raised cigarette taxes by a net 55-cents per pack and is estimated to raise $200 million a year for health-related

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The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture offers progressive leadership and educational programs to all those interested in making farming and ranching environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically viable over the long term.

The Kerr Center is a non-profit foundation located on 4,000 acres near the south-eastern Oklahoma town of Poteau. It was established in 1985.

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Christmas in August? Heritage Turkey Field Day

–Mary Penick

Mike Walters holds a heritage turkey

With the temperatures rising during the dog days of summer, most people are not thinking about the Thanksgiving feast and Christmas holidays.

Mike Walters is.

Much like the retail industry, Walters Hatchery relies upon the holiday season to provide most of the year's profit from his farm.

Walters raises "heritage" turkeys, chickens, quail and pheasant on his ranch outside Stilwell, Oklahoma.

He is nationally known for his turkeys. These old fashioned breeds are once again in demand.

On Thursday, August 18 from 6-9 pm, the Kerr Center and Walters will hold a field day to provide information about his heritage turkey-breeding program and sales.

The event is sponsored in partnership with the USDA's Risk Management Agency.

According to the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, a non-profit organization that strives to retain genetics and information about breeds of domestic production animals, the turkey is the one of the most genetically eroded of all livestock species.

Commercial birds are limited to a very few strains of large white turkeys that have been selected for large confined production systems.

Walters Hatchery takes a different approach. Walters's goal is to diversify and maintain the turkey gene pool for future generations.

He currently raises nine varieties of turkey: *White Holland, Bronze, Bourbon Red, Royal Palm, Narragansett, Blue Slate, Eastern Wild, Black* and *Buff*. All of these birds are listed on the ALBC list of threatened varieties.

Walters says he relies upon good breeding practices to develop naturally hardy turkeys that have no need of growth hormones, stimulants, or chemical medications to survive.

The birds are raised free range, with access to open air and pasture throughout the day. He grows the turkeys for 6-8 months until they reach full maturity.

The slow grow-out time allows the birds to develop a layer of fat, thereby allowing the meat to be moist and more flavorful.

An additional benefit to Walters's free range system is that the birds are not heavily concentrated in one area like that of large turkey farms, so that there is little to no build up of manure and no run-off of nitrates and other pollutants into nearby water systems.

Walters received a producer grant from the Kerr Center in 2001 to help with the preservation of his turkeys.

The field day will cover all aspects of raising, processing and genetic recovery of the birds Walters raises. He will also discuss the issues of processing and marketing poultry within the state.

The event is free, but pre-registration is required. Participants are limited to 30, so register early. For more information and to register, call the Kerr Center at 918-647-9123.

For more information about the preservation of turkeys and other breeds of livestock, go to www.albc-usa.org or go directly to Walters's website, www.historicalturkeys.com.

RMA

The USDA Risk Management Agency is an equal-opportunity provider.

At Tulsa Garden Center's Farmers' Market, AITC's Jamey Allen (L) and Mary Ann Kelsey stand amidst the bounty from Jennifer Cooper's (right rear) farm.

Oklahoma Teachers Go "A Gardening"

–Doug Walton

In late May, thirty-four Oklahoma schoolteachers came together in Stillwater to learn about gardening and farming in Oklahoma and to get ideas for sharing this knowledge with their pre-K through 8th grade students.

The teachers, who came from all over the state, signed up for two full days of touring and experiencing some of the essential components of a healthy food system.

Sponsors of the tour were the Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom (OAITC) program and the Kerr Center.

Over the course of this traveling workshop, entitled "A Gardening We Will Go," teachers toured three northeastern OK counties by bus.

They visited three different small-scale family farms, two farmers' markets, three public gardens, and a winery within a registered historic landmark.

One of the trip's many interesting stops was Three Springs Farm, where Emily Oakley and Mike Appel raise two acres of vegetables in southwest Tulsa. The couple sell their produce at the Cherry Street Farmers' Market and through their thirty-six member CSA.

CSA or Community Supported Agriculture is an arrangement whereby customers sign-up with a farmer to receive a certain amount of produce on a regular basis throughout the growing season.

A pre-season agreement is made directly between farmer and customer, often with the customer paying for all or most of their produce at that time.

When Emily asked the teachers if they were familiar with Community Supported Agriculture, none were.

But as she described the workings and benefits of CSA—the shared risks, the much needed farm income in late winter, the connections between farmers and eaters, the weekly basket of fresh produce and the pleasures of eating with the season—the teachers' curiosity grew.

Back on the bus several asked, "How do I find one of those CSAs in my area?"

Another enlightening tour stop was Wayne and Connie Whitmore's farm in Coyle.

The Whitmores showed the teachers how well their wash line could clean up their freshly picked yellow squash, destined for their booth the next morning at the Stillwater Farmers' Market.

Some teachers had a try at hand-snapping some of the ready-to-harvest purple asparagus.

Teachers also met Wayne and Connie's two college-aged children, who have been engaged in their family's farm all of their lives, and who are now studying agriculture at OSU.

They demonstrated the use of the family's custom asparagus harvesting vehicle, which allows three people to sit and pick asparagus stalks while moving slowly down the field.

The tour was planned so that participants would visit farms, meet farm families and then see them sell their produce at farmers' markets.

For instance teachers enjoyed seeing the abundant variety of unusual and enticing vegetables such as kohlrabi, bulb fennel and watermelon radishes on the tables of James and Jennifer Cooper's stand at the Tulsa Garden Center Farmers' Market.

L-R Teachers Michelle Jennings and Phyllis Harp from Coyle School show off cut flowers from Nuyaka Farm.

L-R Mary Ann Kelsey and Annie Ortiz of Stillwater Schools check out a custom-made asparagus harvester at the Whitmore Farm.

At the Stillwater Farmers' Market, Richard Ortez makes a sale to teacher Charlotte Cross of Fletcher Elementary in Comanche.

Then they visited the Coopers' Nuyaka Natural Farm near Beggs, where this young energetic couple and their full-time farmhand from Equador have turned ten acres of Bermuda grass pasture into bountiful fields of produce and flowers in little over a year's time.

These interactions allowed teachers to experience the connections taking place within the local food system and helped prepare them to pass on this knowledge to their students.

One participating teacher summed-up her response by saying, "I want to support them [local farmers] myself and by informing others of their importance."

Throughout the two-day workshop, a number of experts also gave presentations on a wide variety of garden-related topics.

Dr. Douglas Needham, a floriculture professor at OSU, skillfully led the teachers through some fun hands-on plant propagation suitable for classroom use.

David Hillock, an OSU Extension Horticulturalist, helped teachers plant a new bed of mixed flowers and vegetables at the OK Botanical Gardens in Stillwater.

Teachers also learned about Tulsa County's Junior Master Gardener program and heard about the progress of farm-to-school initiatives facilitated by the Oklahoma Food Policy Council.

From the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, Mike Schulte discussed the growth of farmers' markets and Chad Goss informed teachers about the organic certification process.

Barbara Denney, an OSU Extension educator, showed pictures and talked about her successful school gardening project working with troubled youth near Jay in Delaware County.

"Since our gardening project began, children's use of the salad bar has doubled and our school cafeteria's director even sold the deep fat fryer," she said.

> "Since our gardening project began, children's use of the salad bar has doubled and our school cafeteria's director even sold the deep fat fryer"
>
> ~ Barbara Denney, OSU Extension educator

Her experience supports a growing body of evidence that shows kids are more interested in, and eat more fruits and vegetables, when they grow, harvest or prepare their food.

Research on farm-to-school programs from around the country has shown that students are more likely to choose farm-fresh fruit and vegetables when given that choice along with standard cafeteria fare.

Many educators now recommend a mix of nutrition education, school gardens/experiential agriculture and food education to help children develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Some advocates also contend that once people get more connected with farmers and understand more about how and where their food is grown, they begin to prefer to eat locally grown foods over foods of unknown or distant origin.

In fact, two meals on the trip actually featured Oklahoma grown and processed foods. Mexican food catered by Bloomin' Botanicals of Stillwater included local beef, pork, tortillas, green chiles and onions.

Lunch by Jodi Walls Catering on Riverside included local chicken, cucumbers,

Teachers watch a cooking demonstration at Stillwater Farmers' Market.

tomatoes and lettuce.

In between speakers, meals and even on the bus, Ag in the Classroom teacher trainers and workshop organizers Jamey Allen and Mary Ann Kelsey cheerfully shared many tips with the teachers.

Mary Ann and Jamey reviewed several lessons and activities focusing on fruits, vegetables and gardening.

They also frequently reminded teachers to check out www.agclassroom.org/ok, where all their lessons can be found. The website is managed by curriculum writer Pat Thompson from OSU's 4-H Program in Stillwater.

The tour was one of many educational activities that are part of the Kerr Center's "Building a Foundation for Community Food Security in Oklahoma" project, funded by the USDA's Research, Education and Extension Service.

A primary goal of this project is to increase the public understanding of our food system and to develop an awareness of how our food choices affect our own lives and those of others within our communities.

Plans are already underway and funding is secured for taking another 35 schoolteachers "A Gardening We Will Go" next summer.

Sharon Carmichael of Owasso Schools tries her hand at rototilling.

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom program is a joint effort of the Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the State Dept. of Education and OSU Cooperative Extension. To arrange for onsite training in your school or for information about other teacher training opportunities, contact Jamey Allen, urban schools coordinator, 405-522-6768, or Mary Ann Kelsey, rural schools coordinator, 405-522-0638.

Read more about CSAs and community food security at www.kerrcenter.com

Banking on Home Grown Goodness:

Community Gardens Find a Food Bank Niche

–Wylie Harris

"Community gardening" is a term tailor-made for truth-in-advertising believers. It means just what it says: communities coming together to grow food.

Often community gardens are in urban neighborhoods, where the grounds of a church or a school or even a vacant lot can be transformed into a garden. In Oklahoma City, the Urban Harvest program of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma coordinates 25 gardens.

Chris Kirby. Before coming to the Regional Food Bank, Kirby spent seven years at the OSU-OKC farmers' market, making it the state's largest, with over 60 growers and $400,000 in annual sales.

Chris Kirby is the director of the Urban Harvest program. She says the food bank took over Oklahoma City's community garden program in 2001, with twelve gardens in existence.

Since then, with help from a grant from the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, Kirby has helped thirteen new gardens get started, mostly in the Oklahoma City metro area, but including three in Norman.

The food bank provides a "good, stable home for Oklahoma City's community gardening program," says Kirby.

The food bank also provides guidelines and advice on how to build partnerships to make a successful community garden.

"You can go into any neighborhood and start a community garden, but you need the support of the community to be successful," Kirby says. "You have to get an investment from everybody to sustain a garden."

To persuade people to make that investment, she gives presentations to interested groups. In turn, the Urban Harvest program rewards those groups' commitment to community gardening, providing equipment, seeds, plants, and grants.

The food bank also cooperates with OSU to provide soil testing, fact sheets on various crops, and nutritional education. Kirby has a school gardening curriculum available on request.

Planting the seed is only the first step in successful gardening; for constant care and cultivation of the community gardens she's seeded, Kirby relies on local community members who step up and nurture the gardens with their own energy – and character.

For instance, at the City-County community garden, "foster grandfather" Floyd Jameson coaxes three crops a year from an acre and a half across from Parker Elementary school.

Jameson sees the crops from planting right on through to harvest time, when he welcomes the entire community to come and pick.

Just as a single garden contains a variety of crops, each with its own particular preferences and requirements, the community gardens in the food bank's network have sprung up from a diverse collection of locations, backgrounds, and needs.

Neighborhood groups, schools, and churches are some of the many entities that have started community gardens.

One of the earliest community gardens in Oklahoma City, at Selecman First United Methodist Church at Independence Avenue and SW 41st, has individual plots alongside the community ones.

Anyone can get a plot, with the produce going to the needy in the congregation and the local community, including

low-income and elderly residents.

Almost all the plants in Selecman's garden are transplants started at the food bank. It is also one of the food bank's "tractor gardens," tilled at the beginning of each season courtesy of the food bank's tractor.

Over in the Westlawn neighborhood, one of the city's newest community gardens serves the needs of the residents of the Pershing Center as they transition out of homelessness.

As well as going to other members of the local community, produce from the garden complements food bank provisions to help feed the Pershing Center's residents.

For some who are completing drug rehabilitation, the vitamins and nutrients in the fresh produce are particularly important for the role they play in the recovery process.

The food bank supplies seeds, plants, and the tractor for the garden, which, says Kirby, is helping the area come together as a neighborhood.

Plans are in the works for fencing, and an edible-landscape border, as well as a hoop house for season extension.

At the Central Park Community Garden, at NW 31st and Shartel, Allan Parlier began with a front-yard garden, and eventually got city permission to expand to four additional lots for a community garden.

Some of the lots had chlordane contamination. After some research, Parlier combined a bioremediation product from an Arkansas firm with several years' cropping of barley to remove the pollutant from the soil.

In the meantime, the gardens had drawn people out of their houses, and the area's crime rate had dropped. A project intended to get people to grow more of their own food thus ended up increasing other forms of security than just the food kind; the gardens' positive effects cascaded into greater safety and neighborliness as well.

Kids at the Memorial Park Boys' & Girls' Club Community Center in OKC tend a garden under the direction of A. Jaye Johnson (back left).

Bruce Edwards. Last year he and his crew grew sixteen different fruits/vegetables in the Urban Harvest Gardens and also started vegetables from seed to transplant in Oklahoma City's commmunity gardens.

Another food bank community garden thrives at the Boys' & Girls' Club Community Center, at NW 36th and Military Avenue, where summertime finds 175 kids using the garden to learn about nutrition and grow food – while having fun in the process.

The Boys' Club is also one of the sites for a program called Kids' Café, an after-school program providing kids with healthy snacks as well as mentoring and nutrition education.

There are about twenty Kids Café's in Oklahoma.

As the food bank's community gardening program continues to grow, Kirby hopes to expand the amount of outreach and support that it provides to community gardens in outlying rural areas of the state.

Given the food bank's growing reputation as a source of know-how and tools for community gardening, such hopes seem well grounded.

Breaking New Ground: Urban Harvest Demonstration Gardens

–Maura McDermott

The old adage, "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for life," is the inspiration for the Regional Food Bank's demonstration gardens, an essential part of the Urban Harvest Program.

Ex-Army ranger Bruce Edwards coordinates the program. Edwards and his crew of volunteers plant, transplant, weed and "grow with love" a diversity of produce on 2 1/2 organic acres on South Purdue in Oklahoma City.

"Without them [volunteers] we couldn't do it," says Edwards.

To walk with him around the garden grounds is to view a cornucopia of projects—raised beds growing vegetables, big compost piles, a greenhouse and a hoop house. All in some way demonstrate sustainable agriculture on a garden scale.

Individuals and groups who want to learn how to successfully grow a garden need look no further than the Urban Harvest gardens.

But, as Edwards has found, growing a garden in central Oklahoma can be a challenge.

"We have good Oklahoma concrete for soil," says Urban Harvest director Chris Kirby.

Edwards works hard on soil-building, composting wood chips, horse manure and anything else compostable he can get his hands on. His vermiculture project has been a particular success.

He uses his compost to build the soil in his garden beds and as a growing medium for the many vegetable transplants the program distributes to community gardens around the city.

Why should people garden? One word: health. Many Oklahomans are not eating the recommended number of servings of fresh fruits and vegetables per day.

"Produce is so expensive," says Kirby, "but it is so important to nutrition."

The fresh produce the food bank distributes is either grown on site or been donated from farmers (66,000 pounds total last year).

Flowers and vegetables grow together in the attractive beds near the entrance to Regional Food Bank.

Client response to the fresh food has been really positive, she says.

Groups that tour the on-site gardens have also had a positive response.

One visiting group "had never seen sweet potatoes growing," recalled Kirby. And only two of the twenty kids had ever tasted one.

After seeing the tubers growing, and even helping with the weeding and harvesting, nineteen were willing to sample oven-baked sweet potatoes with fresh rosemary (also from the garden). Not only that, "they liked it," she says.

Edwards newest project is the big hoop house installed last winter, one of only a few in Oklahoma City. The hoop house is a low cost way to extend the seasons for fresh produce. This spring they began to harvest strawberries in early April.

As he experiments with growing in the hoop house, he will pass on what he learns to others, so that they may help themselves and their communities.

That, after all, is what Urban Harvest is all about.

To learn more about community gardens, to volunteer with the Urban Harvest program, or donate produce and other food, call 405.972.1111 The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma provides food and other goods to 500 charitable feeding programs in 53 central and western Oklahoma counties. Last fiscal year, the regional food bank distributed 21.1 million pounds; since inception in 1980, it has distributed almost 200 million pounds to those in need. To learn more, go to www.regionalfoodbank.org

At Home on the Local Range:

Buffalo

Roam Their Way into Oklahoma's Local Food Scene

– *Wylie Harris*

A hundred years ago, the once-great herds of buffalo were nearly extinct, and the United States farm population numbered some thirty million. Today, bison are back from the brink, and innovative Oklahoma family farmers are using them both to save themselves and rebuild the state's local food systems.

James and Sandy Stepp of Hinton started their Wichita Bison Company when they began running buffalo 6 years ago. Three years later, they got into meat sales. In Eufaula, Dennis Garrett started his Belle Starr Buffalo Company in 2000, on land his father had previously used to raise Simmentals.

Stepp, who grew up on a farm, recalls when 100 head of Angus cattle would make a living and pay for land. Raising Angus as an adult, though, he quickly saw that it had become a big-operation game.

Buffalo, he says, "can eat native grass, withstand heat and cold. They don't have birthing problems. They're just stronger and sturdier."

Garrett came to buffalo by a somewhat different route – specifically, by realizing how good it tasted at a time when he was serving it nightly to diners at a Colorado ski resort.

"They're great, easy to take care of," he says.

For decades, the mantra of U.S. agribusiness has been, "Get big or get out." Both Garrett and Stepp are living examples of how small operators, even starting from scratch, can cash in on small-farm advocate George DeVault's contrary advice: "Get small, and get in!"

Like half of all farmers and ranchers in the U.S., both have off-farm jobs – Garrett is a certified public accountant; Stepp is a project management consultant. Both anticipate a time when their ranch operations will support them full-time.

As a small operation, Garrett says, he has to make his bison enterprise pay by maximizing profit rather than building volume. To do that, both he and Stepp follow strategies common to many innovative small-scale stock raisers, selling meat with unique nutritional qualities to specific local markets.

Bison meat has an established reputation for leanness, which attracts many health-conscious customers. In addition, Garrett says, the National

Bison Association maintains a "Certified American Buffalo" standard that prohibits the use of steroids, antibiotics, and synthetic growth hormones, contributing to bison's "all-natural, all healthy" image.

Unlike beef, bison meat has about the same amount of fat – roughly 2 grams in a 100-gram serving – whether finished on grass or grain. However, finishing buffalo on grass does confer other nutritional benefits absent from the grain-fed variety, such as increased levels of omega-3 fatty acids and conjugated linoleic acids (CLAs).

"People say grass may someday be like wines," Garrett says, "with different regional tastes."

Regional meat flavors may still be in the future, but regional and even local markets are very much a part of a successful bison rancher's program for economic viability in the here and now.

Dennis Garrett and buffalo, near Eufaula

Not long ago, bison ranchers came as close to extinction as the buffalo themselves did back in the late 1800s. Bison numbers nationwide grew at 14 to 18 % during the 1990s, says Garrett, but meat sales lagged behind, at half that rate or less.

Eventually, that gap got too large, and – helped along by a Plains drought that raised feed costs – the market for breeding stock collapsed in 1999-2000. Buffalo cows were selling for $200 per head. Most of the bison ranchers who stayed in business were those who had developed innovative markets for their animals' meat, rather than focusing exclusively on selling breeding stock.

For Garrett, those innovative markets include bison-like herds of drive-up customers who come straight to the farm for their bison meat. In summer, he says, there are so many that "I can't walk to the barn."

Garrett also does a steady business through the Oklahoma Food Co-op, has sold at the Tulsa State Fair and farmers markets in Jenks and Muskogee, and supplies a local restaurant as well. His biggest sellers are ground meat, followed by a variety of specialty products including hot links, summer sausage, and jerky sticks.

In addition to meat, he sells artfully decorated buffalo hides and skulls.

Stepp got his start with home deliveries of quarters and eighths of bison. Like Garrett, he also sells through the Oklahoma Food Co-op, and he's since branched out into supplying buffalo meat to several restaurants at truck stops along Interstate 40. His client list also now includes several grocery stores and a couple of large health-food stores.

To make a successful sales pitch to one of the stores, Stepp installed freezers for his meat in the store at his own expense. His bison meat has since become that store's top-volume item.

Such unique sales arrangements are common fare for farmers venturing into direct and niche markets, and they require new expertise. As Stepp puts it, "My dad couldn't say where on the cow the T-bone came from, because he didn't need to know."

"You have to be involved from gate to plate," Garrett agrees.

One critical stage in that involvement is processing, to transform buffalo from an animal grazing on the range into a steak gracing a dinner plate.

"My biggest obstacle is processing," admits Garrett, who drives his animals five and a half hours to a plant in Kansas.

Stepp also takes some buffalo to Kansas, as well as using a state-inspected plant in Weatherford.

Part of the reason for the long haul to an out-of-state processor is that no USDA-inspected Oklahoma processor currently handles bison. In addition, local processors may not be as willing to leave carcasses hanging long enough to age tenderness into bison's leaner meat, or may have inconsistent quality control on package weights.

But there are challenges in a federally inspected plant, too. Bison is classed as a "non-amenable" species, meaning that a producer pays the USDA inspector's hourly fee, instead of the flat or weight-based rates commonly charged for cattle.

The exception to the trend of local direct marketing in bison meat is Ted Turner, who is reputed to own a whopping 10% of the North American bison herd, along with a new restaurant chain devoted to bison.

Opinion is divided on the opportu-

nity the restaurants might hold for small bison ranchers. Some hope that Turner's eateries will source their supply from nearby producers, but others suspect that the chain will do well just to absorb the meat from the millionaire's own herds.

Garrett and Stepp may be small-timers compared to Ted Turner, but they're expanding just as quickly.

With his herd swollen to 65 head after buying animals from another rancher leaving the business, Garrett is looking for more land to support them. His other projects for expansion include increasing his freezer capacity, doing some of his own processing in-house, and offering hayride tours of the ranch.

As a corrective measure against commercial cooks unfamiliar with cooking lean meat, he'd also like to start his own bison meat restaurant, á là Ted Turner.

Stepp started with six head on 320 newly-bought acres. Last year, he slaughtered 225 animals, and is aiming for 25% above that figure this year.

With all the breeding stock he can afford to have, he buys 100 to 150 yearling bulls each year to finish. The pool of suppliers of those calves hasn't grown as quickly as he expected. But that limit on his volume can also spell opportunity to those who'd like to enter the buffalo business on the cow-calf side, without the added challenges of processing and marketing.

Whatever the attraction of buffalo ranching, both Stepp and Garrett offer words of caution to newcomers. For those who haven't boned up on the basics of bison first, Stepp has blunt advice: "Don't do it! You need to seriously understand what you're getting into. They're not just another breed of cattle."

Garrett and Stepp agree that the hardest part of raising bison is working and loading the animals. Both use pasture fencing that seems surprisingly light to those untutored in bison lore – standard five-strand barbed wire, as well as high-tensile electric on flexible fiberglass posts, appears to do the trick.

But, says Stepp, "You have to have a really good corral" – as in, 7' lengths of 3-1/2" welded steel pipe, with "crash gates" to keep the animals from leaving the chute ahead of time. "Design your facilities to reinforce the stress points," Garrett explains.

Corralling the animals is only one of many hurdles that would-be bison ranchers face. "There's no infrastructure as far as distribution," says Stepp.

"The bank won't loan on buffalo," adds Garrett. "You can't sell at any time, as you could with a cow. People who have one bad experience with buffalo won't ever eat it again. If it's beef, they'll just say, 'That's a bad steak.' If it's buffalo, it's 'I don't like buffalo.'"

Still, for all their awareness of the gopher holes in the landscape of bison ranching, its current crop of Oklahoma practitioners seem unlikely to abandon it anytime soon. The best part, according to Stepp, is to ride out on a beautiful evening into the middle of a herd of resting buffalo, "and just enjoy the world with them."

Larry the buffalo grazes on the Stepp Ranch

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continued from page one

initiatives, Fit Kids turned their attention to Oklahoma's growing obesity crisis.

A number of Integris pediatricians had expressed concern about the number of pre-teens and teens they were seeing with Type II diabetes, historically a disease seen in adults aged 40 plus, often as a result of obesity. Hupfeld says as the doctors began to look at national statistics, they were alarmed at what they found. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported an increase in diabetes of 33 percent nationally, with 8 - 45% percent of children with newly diagnosed diabetes having Type II diabetes.

Further, as the U.S. population becomes increasingly overweight, CDC researchers reported they expect Type II diabetes to appear more frequently in younger, pre-pubescent children. The statistics dovetailed with what Integris pediatricians were seeing in their practices in Oklahoma.

In addition to the many unpleasant and often life-threatening consequences obesity exacts on individuals and families, obesity threatens the economic health of Oklahoma and the nation. For instance, the Washington, D.C.-based National Business Group on Health (NBGH) estimates obesity costs employers $12 billion a year. Armed with such data, Hupfeld said Integris felt compelled to act.

"We began to ask ourselves basic questions. As the largest provider of health services in Oklahoma, ought we to be taking proactive positions in public health issues? And if not us, then who?" says Hupfeld. "Our answer was, 'Yes,' we should take a more proactive role."

Hupfeld led the charge in forming the coalition as a public interest group that could affect opinions and legislation. He also serves as chairman of Fit Kids.

Once the coalition formed and began meeting, they recognized obesity as a societal and family problem but also realized that as with any problem it's important to find a starting point.

"We thought the easiest place to grab hold was in the school system. While at the same time we understand it's certainly family and societal based, schools shouldn't make the problem worse," says Hupfeld.

Working with several partners, and contracting with the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy to provide administrative services, the Coalition researched what other states were doing, collected data, and conducted field work, actually going to a middle school in the Oklahoma City metro area and taping the food being served in the cafeteria.

"We were absolutely appalled by what our kids were being fed both in the regular line and particularly in vending machines," said Hupfeld. "In our judgment the schools were in fact making the obesity issue worse by what they fed kids both in the cafeteria and in vending machines and by the fact that many of them had eliminated physical education as part of their curriculum."

The coalition's solution? When it makes sense, propose legislation to effect change. And during the last two legislative years, Fit Kids has done just that, leading the charge on three bills, all three of which have passed.

The first, SB 1627 created the Healthy and Fit Kids Act of 2004 by providing for the establishment of local Healthy and Fit School Advisory Committees, which get parents involved first-hand in working with school administrators to address health and fitness issues.

The second, SB 265, limits students' access to junk food by mandating healthier food choices for vending machines by 2007. And the third, SB 312, addresses physical fitness by requiring mandatory physical and health education in grade schools and elective physical education in junior high and high schools.

In such a short time the ability to overcome powerful opposition not only demonstrates the persuasive skills of the coalition, but shows the issue reached critical mass in the minds of the public, says Anne Roberts, executive director of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.

"For an organization as young as Fit Kids to be able to be so successful at the legislature is a testament to the urgency of the issue and the widespread support we got from parents, superintendents and physicians," says Roberts.

The greatest opposition to the Coalition's work came when they addressed unhealthy snacks in vending machines. Schools dependent on revenue from vending machines to fund vital programs like debate and band, as

The Kerr Center and the Oklahoma Food Policy Council are members of the *Fit Kids Coalition*. Other members run the gamut from health care organizations and associations to chambers of commerce to groups such as the Girl Scouts and the YWCA.

For more information on the Fit Kids Coalition visit **www.integrislifespan.com** or call the Fit Kids Project at 405.236.5437 in Oklahoma City or 918.697.9677 in Tulsa.

well as vending machine and snack companies, vigorously fought what they saw as a direct assault on their economic livelihood. The Coalition was able to work with the schools, vending machine and snack companies, contending that providing healthier snack foods wouldn't change the revenue stream of the schools and companies.

"We're not asking Pepsi to go away; we're asking Pepsi to replace bad Pepsi products with good Pepsi products," says Roberts. "I think it's a win/win for everyone."

Three for three in the legislative arena, Fit Kids is contemplating the horizon and their next move. Hupfeld says the group is looking at a number of issues: how to quantify healthier kids through tracking BMIs (body mass index), the current easy access older students have to fast-food vendors on campuses, and implementing healthier food in cafeterias.

He fully realizes the topics are controversial and jokes about being labeled "food Nazis," but says in the end the process of debate on the issue itself is healthy, a means of getting all the stakeholders to come to the table and work on what's best for the kids.

Roberts maintains a key ingredient to the Coalition's success is the coordinated efforts of so many partners, members and individuals with courage.

In particular, Roberts credits Integris and the vision of individuals like Hupfeld for forming and leading Fit Kids.

Ruminating on the lessons learned in the short life of this remarkable organization, Hupfeld meanwhile, appears well suited for the next battle in helping Oklahomans live healthier lives.

"This is really a textbook case of a public health issue getting enough organization and impetus— which includes money, time and people— that you can win out over the vested interests, and that's never easy," says Hupfeld. "You start with a good cause, something that makes sense to do, and you put some organization behind it, raise an effective following that will call and write letters, and you can make changes."

Shauna Lawyer Struby is an Oklahoma-City based writer with an interest in food and agriculture issues.

> *"This is really a textbook case of a public health issue getting enough organization and impetus, which includes money, time and people, that you can win out over the vested interests, and that's never easy. You start with a good cause, something that makes sense to do, and you put some organization behind it and raise an effective following that will call and write letters, and you can make changes."*
>
> —Stan Hupfeld, President & CEO, Integris Health.

"Healthy Vending" Essay Contest Winners

In May, the Kerr Center announced the winners of its annual essay contest for Oklahoma high school juniors and seniors.

The subject of the 2005 essay contest was "Healthy Choices in School Vending Machines."

The first place prize of $750 went to Steven Connel, a senior at Madill High School. The second place prize of $500 was awarded to Mark Donaldson, a senior at Holland Hall Upper School in Tulsa.

Three honorable mention prizes of $250 each went to Kaylynne Canady, junior, Perry High School; Zack Stoycoff, junior, Inola High School; and Peter J.Housewright, junior, Sapulpa High School.

The Kerr Center received 215 entries from around the state.

In their essays, students expressed concerns about childhood obesity and the lack of healthy choices in school vending machines.

"Students were really engaged by this topic," said Anita Poole, contest coordinator.

This is the fourth year for the contest. Each spring, students are invited to write a persuasive essay of 800-1000 words on a given agricultural or food system topic with relevance to the larger society.

An independent panel of judges chose the winners. They looked at how well the writer developed his/her ideas, used good writing skills, documented assertions, and elicited an emotional response.

The winning essays can be read at www.kerrcenter.com.

Farmers: Be a Part of Our Updated Directory

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council is updating *The Oklahoma Food Connection 2003: A Directory of Agricultural Producers, Crops and Institutional Buyers.* Institutional food service buyers (schools, resorts, colleges, etc) as well as chefs and the general public will use the directory to locate Oklahoma-grown fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, meat, fish, eggs, dairy and honey.

In addition to updating the directory, we are compiling a list of farmers interested in visiting a local school or hosting a tour of their farm by school kids.

If you are already listed in the directory and would like to update your entry or if you would like to be listed for the first time please fill out the form below and return to: Liz Speake, Kerr Center, PO Box 588, Poteau, OK 74953

Listing in the Food Connection is free of charge. The directory will be printed and distributed later this year and will also be online.

THIS FORM MAY BE COMPLETED ONLINE AT WWW.KERRCENTER.COM

Name: _____

Name of Farm: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip code: _____

County: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Website: _____

Certified organic? Yes ☐ No ☐

Certifier: ☐ Oklahoma Dept. of Ag

☐ Other (Please name) _____

Please check all categories of food that you grow:

☐ Fruits ☐ Vegetables ☐ Grain ☐ Nuts ☐ Meat

☐ Fish ☐ Egg ☐ Dairy ☐ Honey

Do you sell at a farmers' market?

If so, which one? _____

Please check the specific crops that you are growing this year or typically grow:

☐ Apples	☐ Cherries	☐ Gourds	☐ Onions	☐ Rutabagas
☐ Arugula	☐ Corn	☐ Granola	☐ Peaches	☐ Rye
☐ Asparagus	☐ Chicken	☐ Grapes	☐ Peanuts	☐ Salsa
☐ Beans	☐ Chicken eggs	☐ Green beans	☐ Pears	☐ Soybeans
☐ Beef	☐ Chuckar partridge	☐ Greens	☐ Peas	☐ Spinach
☐ Beets	☐ Cream	☐ Honey	☐ Pecans	☐ Squash
☐ Blackberries	☐ Cucumbers	☐ Jams/jellies	☐ Pheasant	☐ Strawberries
☐ Blueberries	☐ Deer	☐ Kiwi	☐ Plums	☐ Tomatoes
☐ Broccoli	☐ Duck	☐ Kohlrabi	☐ Peppers, hot	☐ Turkey
☐ Brussels sprouts	☐ Eggplant	☐ Lamb	☐ Peppers, bell	☐ Turnips
☐ Buffalo	☐ Elk	☐ Lettuce	☐ Pork	☐ Watermelon
☐ Cabbage	☐ Emu	☐ Melons	☐ Potatoes	☐ Wheat and products made from wheat
☐ Carrots	☐ Garlic	☐ Milk	☐ Pumpkins	
☐ Catfish	☐ Geese	☐ Mushrooms	☐ Quail	☐ Yogurt
☐ Cauliflower	☐ Goat	☐ Nectarines	☐ Quail eggs	☐ Zucchini
☐ Chard	☐ Goat milk	☐ Oats	☐ Radishes	☐ Other:
☐ Cheese	☐ Goat cheese	☐ Okra	☐ Raspberries	_____

Have you ever sold to schools or institutions? If so, please name.

_____

_____

Would you be interested in learning more about selling to schools and other institutions? (If so, we will put you on a mailing list to notify you about any upcoming farm-to-school workshops and/or publications) _____yes_____no

Yes, I would be interested in:

☐ Hosting a tour of my farm by school classes

☐ Visiting a school to speak to kids about my farm
(Teachers would contact you in advance to arrange a tour or visit)

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY AUG 15.

Enough Grass to Make Your Head… Rotate: The Keys to Rotational Grazing

–Wylie Harris

"Rotational grazing" has become a real buzzword these days. But what is rotational grazing, really? How does it work? And what in grazed green pastures does it have to do with community food security?

In simplest terms, rotational grazing is basically what it sounds like: a system of moving grazing livestock from one pasture to another to keep fresh forage in front of them. Beyond that basic point, practice quickly gets more complicated than theory, and definitions and disagreements multiply.

The principles behind rotational grazing are nothing new. North America's bison herds practiced them on a continental scale, as did Spanish shepherds pushing their lords' sheep up and down the royal highways to the rhythm of the seasons.

Rotational grazing was born of human efforts to put those same principles to work within the fences of a single farm. The earliest husbanders to attempt this feat may have been the landlords of 18th-century England.

Their motive wasn't the value of livestock production itself, but rather that of the manure the livestock produced, as a source of fertility for sustaining and increasing crop production in a country where land was scarce and at a time when synthetic fertilizers were as yet undreamt.

This British movement of "convertible husbandry" had agricultural writers like Arthur Young and James Anderson for its chroniclers and apostles. Two centuries later, Frenchman André Voisin picked up their mantle, and his book *Grass Productivity* remains a classic manual on what he called "rational grazing."

Long after its first printing, it inspired a writer whose name is much more widely recognized in today's grass-based circles, that of Allan Savory. (Savory will speak in Oklahoma Aug. 5-6. See p.18)

The Name Game

Every new wrinkle on a grazing system seems to sprout names like grass after a spring rain. André Voisin worked to distinguish his system of "rational grazing" from a variety of close copies and distant cousins.

These days, Savory and other modern-day grassfarming gurus like Allan Nation and Joel Salatin still have their work cut out for them keeping their readers straight on the differences between "rotational grazing," "intensive grazing," "management intensive grazing," "pasture farming," and so on.

The grazing systems carrying those names fall out along a spectrum of gradually increasing holism or sustainability in management. At a minimum, a rancher trying to meet consumer demand for the health and nutritional qualities of grassfed beef might shift cattle from one pasture to another as the seasons progress – wheat in the spring, bermudagrass in summer.

That approach grows beef that satisfies consumer demand for the nutritional and health qualities of grassfed meat, and it is "rotational" grazing in the sense that the animals do move from one pasture to another over time.

At the other end of the spectrum, where terms like "management intensive grazing" are more common, the purest purists of holism and sustainability abide.

Several traits can separate these opposite ends of the rotational grazing spectrum, but the most important one has remained unchanged from the days of Anderson and Young through the era of Voisin to the modern times of Savory and Nation. That factor is time.

All in the Timing

In application, observing the time factor means making sure that pasture plants get a short enough time exposed to cow's teeth during bouts of grazing, and a long enough time to recover and regrow between those bouts. Naturally enough, the reason for that has everything to do with how grass grows.

When a seed sprouts, it begins a race against time, trying to grow enough roots to capture water and nutrients, and leaf area to catch sunshine, before its own limited energy reserves are used up.

New plants grow slowly at first, barely maintaining a positive balance in their internal energy banks.

At some point, the seedling unfurls a large enough solar sail and underground anchor to bring in more nutrients and energy than it needs to break even. At that point, the plant begins to grow much more rapidly, in a phase that Voisin poetically called the "blaze of growth."

Eventually, that blaze of growth begins to fade, and the plant grows again at a slower rate as it diverts more energy into making flowers and then seed.

The ideal time to graze is just before plants' blaze of growth fades. Nibble them too long before that, and they won't have energy reserves enough to reestablish their root system and put on a vigorous spurt of regrowth.

Graze them too late, and they'll already have begun shift-

ing their nutrients into reproductive structures, making the leaves less palatable to livestock.

In addition to maintaining palatability and nutrition, grazing before the blaze of growth fades can actually postpone plants' reproductive development, causing them to grow leaves longer into the season. That can add up to a sizeable increase in forage production – up to twice as much per year. One key to capturing that advantage is to allow plants enough recovery time between bouts of grazing.

The other key is to make sure that a given bout of grazing doesn't go on for too long. The reasoning is the same: once a plant has been grazed, it drops back to an early point on the growth curve where it has to struggle to put out enough leaves and roots to keep itself growing.

If a cow's teeth crop a plant that's just been grazed, the effect is similar to grazing an establishing seedling: root recovery, and thus overall plant growth and forage production, all slow down markedly.

This is the source of the well known "take half, leave half" rule of stocking.

Planting Fenceposts

Achieving such fine-tuned control over the time factor is what makes fencing such an important part of rotational grazing.

To see why, consider the extreme bad example of a herd of cattle grazing a single pasture. Every set of bovine teeth can get at every plant all the time, so new growth is continually cropped back before it can carry the forage on into its blaze of growth. Productivity of both plants and animals is at its lowest.

Run a single wire across that pasture, dividing it into two paddocks, and suddenly each of the two paddocks is at rest from grazing 50 % of the time. Bisect the first wire with another, and the result is four paddocks, each of which spends three quarters of its time free from grazing.

Continuing that progression, graziers can determine the number of paddocks they need by choosing their two keys: the number of days each paddock will be grazed at a time, and the number of days each paddock will go between bouts of grazing.

For a single group of animals, a 5-day bout of grazing followed by 36 days of rest for each paddock requires a total of 8 paddocks. If the length of grazing is shortened to one day, the necessary number of paddocks increases to 37.

There are, naturally, complications. One is, although plant growth always follows the same progression, it doesn't always reach the same stage in the same amount of time. A plant that takes only 21 days to complete its "blaze of growth" in May might need 50 by August.

That means grass farmers have to increase or decrease the number of paddocks in the rotation during the course of the growing season to make sure that all paddocks get an adequate rest period.

Another wrinkle is that some graziers prefer to make hay from those extra paddocks while they're not in the rotation, while others have sworn off hay altogether and save the "slack" paddocks' forage for winter-feeding instead.

Add to that the fact that mixed range vegetation, as opposed to pure pasture stands, contains a number of different forage plant species, each of which has a different seasonal growth curve, and you begin to get a feel for why this end of the rotational grazing spectrum has picked up the label "management intensive."

Farm Friendly Food

While the management may become more intense, though, other aspects of raising grazing animals become more easeful in return.

Initial fencing costs aside, management-intensive rotational grazing requires fewer inputs than other approaches: as paddocks renovate themselves under lengthened rest periods, they produce more and better forage and beef for less fertilizer, seed, and feed.

While intensive management's reduced capital inputs cut costs, the higher value accruing to marketing labels like "free-range," "grass-fed, "and "natural" may raise per-unit returns, increasing profit margins from both ends.

Meanwhile, ecological sustainability increases in step with economic viability. Cropped fields and conventional pastures converted to management intensive rotational grazing have been shown to hold soil better, contaminate water less, and attract more wildlife than prior management practices.

Economically viable, ecologically benign farms play an important role in defining community food security. Whatever its name, management intensive rotational grazing fosters that sort of farm – making it an easy piece to fit into the community food security puzzle.

Further Reading

The classic work on the principles and practice of rotational grazing remains André Voisin's *Grass Productivity*.

Those looking for a more recent and readable book may enjoy *All Flesh Is Grass*, by Gene Logsdon, which also expands the horizons of pastured livestock from cattle down through hogs, goats, sheep, and poultry.

A new work by Logsdon's most trusted pasture scientist, Jim Gerrish is *Management Intensive Grazing*.

Finally, for readers more interested in cooking grassfed meat than raising it, there's *The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook*, by Shannon Hayes.

Learn How to Do It

The Kerr Center is offering a three day workshop, Grazing Management: $Pasturing for Profit$, in Poteau, August 11th, 12th and 13th. See p. 17 for more information and registration.

Grazing Management $ Pasturing for Profit $

An introductory course on planned grazing management

After you attend this three day workshop, you will be able to develop a long term grazing plan for your operation.

You will have a better understanding of:

- forage development as it relates to quality and yield
- matching livestock and forage resources
- landscape utilization
- meeting nutritional needs of livestock from pasture
- economic potential of planned grazing management

Topics will include:

- Grazing management for health of the land & drought preparedness
- Grazing management for animal performance
- Using animals as tools to improve and maintain long term sustainability
- Basic design of fence and water
- Learn pasture monitoring techniques

REGISTRATION FORM

Class size is limited so be sure to register early.
Deadline for Registration is August 9, 2005

GRAZING MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP
August 11, 12, & 13, 2005
Kerr Center Office & Ranch
Hwy. 271 South, Poteau, OK

Name _____

(Family member) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ Phone (night) _____

Email _____

Mail this form with check or money order for $75 plus $25 per additional family member payable to:

Kerr Center – Grazing Workshop
P.O. Box 588
Poteau, OK 74953

TEACHERS

Your teachers are two lifetime ranchers, Kim Barker and Walt Davis, and agricultural consultant Charles Griffith. They have valuable experience managing grazing systems. A portion of your class time will be spent monitoring and evaluating pastures on a nearby ranch.

WORKSHOP TIME

THURSDAY:
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
FRIDAY:
8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
SATURDAY:
8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

REGISTRATION AND FEES

The workshop fee is $75 for three days per individual. This fee covers your materials only. Meals will be on your own. Fee for an additional family member is $25. Class size is limited.

Confirmation of registration, including location, directions and motel information will be mailed or emailed upon receipt of payment.

For more information, contact:
The Kerr Center
P.O. Box 588
Poteau, OK 74953
918-647-9123
918-647-8712 (fax)
email: jcastillo@kerrcenter.com

Workshops presented in partnership with

RMA

The USDA Risk Management Agency is an equal-opportunity provider.

Praise for *Holistic Management*

"Without question, Allan Savory's work is seminal to our ability to restore the earth's living systems. It is an unusual combination of brilliant ideation and practical experience backed up by decades of field observations and an intimate knowledge of nature and science. Read *Holistic Management*. It will not only surprise you, but it will change your understanding of how decisions should be made with regard to all systems, from industry to agriculture to government. This is true breakthrough thinking."

— Paul Hawken,
author of *The Ecology of Commerce*

Maura McDermott, Teddy Gentry and Jim Horne at *Grazefest Alabama 2004*. Gentry is part of the super group *Alabama* and raises grassfed beef.

Food, fun and expert info is slated for *Grazefest Mississippi* July 22 and 23 in Jackson. Read about grassfed meats and Grazefest at kerrcenter.com, usgrassfed.com or call 256.845.3009.

OKC Grazing Conference to Feature Allan Savory

The *Grazing Lands Dollar$ and Cent$* conference on August 5 and 6 in Oklahoma City will feature internationally-recognized grazing expert Allan Savory. Savory is the author of *Holistic Management: A New Framework for Decision-Making* (see sidebar) and co-founder of the Savory Center in Albuquerque.

The Oklahoma Grazing Lands Conservation Association, a consortium of farm, government and conservation groups, is sponsor. The conference will be held at Langston University/ OKC, 4605 N. Lincoln Blvd.

Friday morning will feature a panel discussion on the health of Oklahoma grazing lands from the producer's perspective and a session with Charlie Orchard titled "Land EKG: Optimizing Profit by Enhancing Rangeland Health."

In the afternoon Savory will teach participants how to use livestock to reverse land degradation. He will also lead an evening session titled "Creating a Sustainable Civilization through Holistic Decision Making."

Saturday, participants will travel to the ARS Grazing Lands Research Station in El Reno. Savory and Orchard will lead breakout sessions while there. The day will end with a visit to Ft. Reno Historic Cemetery.

For more info go to www.okgrazinglands.org

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: JULY 30TH, 2005

Late registration and registration at the door will not guarantee lunches or copy of proceedings

Registration - **$100 per person** and includes: Attendance to both days and Friday evening session, lunches both days, and copy of proceedings.

For additional people from the same operation/family: **$50.00 each** and includes the same as listed above.

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

TOTAL Paid ($100)_____

Registration for additional people from same operation and/or family

Name ($50 each) _____

Name ($50 each) _____

Name ($50 each) _____

TOTAL Paid _____

BUS TOUR ON SATURDAY – Buses will be available to take people from conference site to Ft. Reno. Please indicate here how many people will be riding the bus. Number _____

Make checks payable to OLSA and mail with registration form to:

OLSA – Grazing Lands Conference
c/o Kerr Center
PO Box 588
Poteau, OK 74953

If you have any questions, please call 918-647-9123.

Vendor Displays and Posters are Welcome:
Space (8x10 ft.) is available on first come first serve basis for displays and posters. There are no additional costs for attendees and vendors who wish to have displays and/or posters.
If interested, please indicate and provide information. This will be for Friday only.
Yes, I would like to have a:
(Indicate by circling)
Display Poster
Topic of display / poster: _____
_____

2005 Producer Grant Program Recipients

—David Redhage

The Kerr Center's Oklahoma Producer Grant Program has awarded four grants to Oklahoma farmers and ranchers. The grant program focused on three priority areas: Alternative Crop Production Systems, Alternative Livestock Production Systems, and Alternative Marketing Methods.

A technical committee of agricultural producers and professionals evaluated grant proposals.

Grant Recipients 2005

1. DACI FARMS is owned by David Walter and is located in northeast Delaware County, near Grove.

This is a family owned and operated farm with a dairy/compost business.

The demonstration grant is entitled "Compost Usage to Reduce Harmful Insect Damage in Vegetable Crops." A large digester will be used to make compost using poultry litter, hardwood sawdust and a small percentage of dairy cow manure.

Three garden plots will be set up with 1) no compost incorporated, weed control by tilling, hoeing and hand with irrigation; 2) one inch of compost incorporated into the top six inches of soil, weed control by tilling, hoeing, and hand with water as needed 3) one inch of compost into the top six inches of soil with approximately 1/2 inch of compost as a mulch initially, with more as the plants grow, weed control with compost mulch only.

The goal of the project is to demonstrate the benefits of well-made compost on garden plants. Cooperators include Jason Hollenback, OSU Extension Educator, Delaware County and Ron Foster of Flower Beds by Ron in Grove.

2. SAM MCCLURE'S farm and ranch operation is located along the South Canadian River in Hughes County. Peanuts were previously an important part of the operation but are no longer produced. Onions are an increasingly important part of the operation.

Several short and intermediate day onion varieties have been identified as adapted to Oklahoma growing conditions. As the markets for onions have grown, so has the need to determine the best methods for harvesting, curing and storing onions.

The research will help determine the best procedures to do this, using equipment already on hand.

Project cooperators include Jim Shrefler, Horticulture Extension Specialist; Dr. Penny Perkins-Veazie, Postharvest Psystiologist USDA-ARS; Michael Carter, Extension Educator from Hughes County, and Dr. Merrit Taylor, Agricultural Economist at OSU-Lane.

3. SUE SELMAN from Buffalo, Oklahoma received a three-year demonstration grant to set up a non-traditional multi-species grazing system for increasing profitability.

Selman is a third generation owner and operator of a historic ranch in Harper County. Traditional production has been livestock with some hay.

The ranch has some problems with invasive species such as salt cedar, willows and Eastern red cedar. The goal is to add Droper Croix sheep and goats to help control the invasive species without resorting to chemical control methods.

The test area consists of 500 acres set aside for a six-pasture rotation. Cooperators on the project include Dr Phil Sims, USDA-ARS; Jim Shaffer, USDA-NRCS; Trapper Heglin, Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance; and Wade Free of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

4. The fourth grant was awarded to **Thad Doye** of Walters, Oklahoma. The three-year research grant will look at sunflower oil as a fuel source.

The farm/ranch operation consists of a small cow/ calf operation with wheat production. The goal of the project is to dedicate 40 acres to sunflower production and determine the yield in gallons of fuel per acre.

The production costs will be used to determine the price per gallon for the fuel. Project cooperators include Marty New, Comanche County Extension; George Weber of Webers Diesel Service; Damona Doye, Extension Economist and OSU Regents Professor; and Kathy NcNally, Director of Field Services and Commodities for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau.

UPCOMING EVENTS

OKLAHOMA WINE GRAPE PRODUCTION FIELD DAY

Saturday, July 23, 2005

Learn about Growing Grapes and Making Wine!

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, OSU Horticulture and Landscape Architecture Dept., and the Kerr Center in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency.

DIRECTIONS:

OKLAHOMA FRUIT RESEARCH STATION
Perkins, OK—From US 177 & US 33 intersection with the Sonic Drive-In, 1/2 mile north, west side of road.

WOODLAND PARK (HANE) VINEYARD
3023 N. Jardot, Stillwater—From US 177 & Hwy 51 Intersection, 1 mile east to Jardot, turn North on Jardot for 2 1/2 miles, Vineyard on East side.

REGISTRATION

The event is free.
Call Kerr Center at 918.647.9123 or email easpeake@kerrcenter.com, wine grape field day in subject line, by July 21 to reserve lunch.
Held rain or shine; bring your own lawn chair.

Morning Session:
Oklahoma Fruit Research Station, Perkins, 9-11:30

Lunch and Afternoon Session:
Woodland Park (Hane) Vineyard, Stillwater, 12-4

For more information call the Kerr Center or go to **www.kerrcenter.com**

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