



# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

*E-Field Notes*  
August 2019

Drought conditions are currently mild for this time of year, but August is still a month when **water is often on people's minds**.

For this issue, we've collected several of the **Kerr Center's most popular water management resources**.

We also share the schedule of a **traveling Smithsonian museum exhibit on water** that's currently making its way around the state.

If you missed last month's **elderberry workshop**, we've also got a rundown on its essentials to help you get caught up.

But first, check out David Redhage's thoughts on how **old tools are sometimes still the best**.

Whether you're an old supporter or new, knowing we can count on your generous [donations](#) helps us plan, maintain, and extend the "plumbing" of Oklahoma sustainable agriculture. [Thank you!](#)

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## President's Note: Modernizing Old Technology

This past weekend I had to laugh at my daughter as she did some college math homework. She was working online and using a dry erase board at the same time.

I asked her why, and she said she was tired of working assignments on paper and erasing mistakes over and over to rework the problems. The dry erase board was faster and easier.

I pointed out to her that the dry erase board was the modern version of the slate boards used in one-room schoolhouses. Each student had a piece of slate to work problems on, and then could wipe it clean for the next assignment.



No one could afford paper, or even had access to paper and pencil. Even my dad used paper for work in school, so this was really moving back in time.

The combination of a computer and dry erase board struck me as a strange juxtaposition. Studies have shown that we retain more when we write it down, as opposed to typing it into a computer. While we embrace new technologies, we still find some old technologies useful. The same holds true in agriculture.

Go into any hardware or farm supply store and look around. Every one still has hand tools. Even though we use power equipment to cultivate market garden crops, we still use [various types of hoes](#) to weed. We still use a pitchfork to move manure or mulch. Even on a modern combine, sharpened metal blades cut the crop. While it is powered by an engine, it is still a knife used to cut the crop.

How many times have you wired something and forgotten the electrical wire strippers, reached into your pocket, and pulled out a pocketknife to stripe a wire? Which reminds me - how many of you carry a pocketknife every day working in agriculture? I have since I was in middle school.

I have spoken to some individuals who prefer to sharpen a knife with a whetstone because they feel a power sharpener removes too much metal too fast and shortens the useful life of a knife.

We have access to cordless screwdrivers, but for many tasks a simple handheld screwdriver works best. Which brings to mind one area where we have moved forward: drilling holes in wood and metal. I only use power tools for this type of work.

Some technologies do become obsolete over time, but some are modernized and find good use in today's world. Think about it in your day-to-day work. Where do you use an old technology because it is the best tool for the task, even though more "modern" technologies exist?

# Water Systems: Planning, Plumbing, Plus

After a record wet spring, drought has yet to take hold in most of the state even at the beginning of August. That takes one worry off the brows of farmers and ranchers for the time being. Still, **water management is about much more than just not running dry.**



Well-designed and solidly built **water systems can get better performance out of both pastures and the animals** that graze them. The Kerr Center's website is overflowing with useful guides to planning, building, and using [watering systems](#) to get the best use from pastures while optimizing grazing animals' well-being.

It's no accident that we mention **planning** as a separate activity, and first on the list. A little time spent with paper and pencil before you make the first pipe connection will pay for itself many times over in both costs and headaches avoided down the line. A presentation by Brian Freking makes a great [starting point for the planning process](#).

Two of our fact sheets demonstrate **how two livestock producers in different parts of the state laid out watering systems** to make the best use of their available resources. Even though both put in planning time, they still uncovered additional ways that they could have saved more time and money. The **lessons they spent time and sweat to learn are yours for only a couple of mouse clicks:**

- [Ranch Management Practices to Improve Water Quality](#)
- [Protecting Water Quality While Healing Erosion Caused by Livestock Trails](#)

An important part of any water system plan is how to get the water where it's needed for the least cost. In that effort, **gravity can be our friend - it will carry water downhill without the need for expensive, power-guzzling pumps.** The Kerr Center's website includes an article on how [the ranch's watering system is set up to use gravity flow](#) wherever possible.

Once the water's flowing, where are you going to collect it for livestock to access it? Plastic tanks from farm-supply stores are certainly an option, but on a dollar-per-gallon basis, **tanks made from used heavy equipment tires are more cost effective.** They're also more resistant to damage from both freezing weather and rowdy cattle. [Our YouTube channel](#) has [videos](#) that **explain how to prepare and install** such "tractor-tire" watering tanks, as well as a [report](#) that covers the same information in text format.

These resources are all useful, but they only scratch the surface of what's available on the subject of [water systems](#) from the Kerr Center's [livestock pages](#). Please swing by online and have a look.

## Elderberry Workshop Recap

A capacity crowd attended the Kerr Center's **July 13 elderberry workshop**. If you missed it, here's a **quick rundown** on the content.

The Kerr Center is **evaluating several American elderberry varieties under eastern Oklahoma growing conditions**.

The workshop featured **regional experts on elderberry production and marketing** who addressed multiple aspects of this increasingly popular perennial crop.



The day began with a **field tour** of the Kerr Center's elderberry trial on the [horticulture farm](#).

Moving indoors, the classroom portion of the workshop started with a presentation by Patrick Byers. Byers is part of an ongoing University of Missouri Extension project to evaluate elderberries and encourage their production in North America. He gave an overview of **varieties, disease and insect concerns, and production techniques**.

After lunch, participants heard from Brent Madding of 360 Farms in Webber Falls, Oklahoma. Brent and his wife Valerie manage several elderberry plantings, focusing on **flower production for use in teas**.

The Kerr Center's David Redhage wrapped up the workshop with an overview of the **Kerr Center's elderberry project and its findings to date**.

**Previous years' elderberry workshop materials** are available [here](#) and [here](#). The **elderberry project's early stages** were also featured on an [episode of Oklahoma Gardening](#).

# Smithsonian's Water/Ways Exhibit in Museums around Oklahoma

The Smithsonian's [Water/Ways](#) exhibition dives into water - an essential component of life on our planet, environmentally, culturally, and historically. **From now through April, Oklahomans can take in the exhibit in different museums around the state.**

In societies across the globe, water serves as a source of peace and contemplation. Many faiths revere water as a sacred symbol. Authors and artists are inspired by the complex character of water - a substance that is seemingly soft and graceful that is yet a powerful and nearly unstoppable force.



Water also plays a practical role in American society. The availability of water affected settlement and migration patterns. Access to water and control of water resources have long been a central part of political and economic planning. Human creativity and resourcefulness provide new ways of protecting water resources and renewing respect for the natural environment.

[Click here to find out where and when to see Water/Ways on its Oklahoma tour.](#)

# Late Summer Events: Soil Health, Feral Hogs, Grazing, Monarchs...

The start of September offers back-to-back workshops on **soil health** (Sept. 4, Ponca City) and **feral hog management** (Sept. 5, Atoka), and a **grazing** talk (Sept. 7, Ada). **Monarch season** gets rolling later in the month, with celebrations at various locations around the state, including **Monarch Madness** (Sept. 14, Oklahoma City) and **Monarchs, Milkweed, & Moore** (Moore, Sept. 19)

Full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture

events around the state and region can be found on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

The calendar also serves as a reminder for the dates of **monthly Kerr Center tours**, which run all year round, every second Tuesday by appointment.

Don't forget that you can also use our online calendar to **keep yourself and your friends up to date** on these and other upcoming events, including our tours:

- **Subscribe to our feed** and receive **updates to your personal calendar** (Outlook, Google+, etc.) as they are made.
- **Share events on the calendar** via a number of **different social media sites**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

SEP 4 Wed	<b>Workshop: Simple Steps to Healthy Soil @ Ponca City (Pioneer Technology Center)</b> Sep 4 @ 11:00 am	+
SEP 5 Thu	<b>Workshop: Feral Hog Management @ Atoka (Choctaw Nation Community Center)</b> Sep 5 @ 10:00 am	+
SEP 7 Sat	<b>Coffee Shop Talk: Grazing @ Ada (Pontotoc Technology Center)</b> Sep 7 @ 9:00 am – 3:00 pm	+
SEP 10 Tue	<b>Tour the Kerr Center @ Kerr Center</b> Sep 10 @ 9:00 am	+
SEP 14 Sat	<b>Monarch Madness @ Oklahoma City (Oklahoma City Zoo)</b> Sep 14 @ 7:30 am	Tickets +
SEP 19 Thu	<b>Monarchs, Milkweed &amp; Moore @ Moore (Moore Public Library)</b> Sep 19 @ 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm	Tickets +

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