Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
September 2019

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Fall's upon us! Kids are back in school; monarch butterflies are starting to wing their way back into the state on their annual journey southward....

Monarchs have always faced perils aplenty on their epic migration, but **new research reveals just how much more toxic agricultural landscapes have become** for them and other pollinators.

Luckily, David Redhage is back with more tips on **where to find seeds for adding pollinator plants to your yards and gardens**.

If you think back-to-school is only for the K-12 set, well... think again! The Kerr Center has built up a well-deserved reputation as a teacher and trainer, especially **for those entering farming for the first time. Our virtual classrooms offer something to learn for just about everyone**.

One of the most interesting things to learn about in sustainable agriculture is all the benefits of cover crops - and SARE has a **new set of fact sheets explaining the many ecosystem services that cover crops provide**.

Schools can always use an extra dollar to stretch their educational efforts, and the Kerr Center's no different. Every dollar of your generous **donations** helps us train the next generation of farmers to be better stewards of the land. **Thank you!**

President's Note: Pollinator Seed Mixes

Normally, we do not promote individual products or companies, but Oklahoma-based Johnston Seeds has developed three different pollinator seed mixes tailored for eastern, central and western Oklahoma.

Most wildflower plantings are best done in the fall, so now is the time to plant wildflowers for next year's pollinators.

From the Johnston Seeds website:
Each of the native wildflowers and forbs has been carefully selected using Okies For Monarchs' recommendations and consists of beneficial species that will provide pollen and nectar for foraging pollinators throughout the growing season. The hardy annuals and perennials in this blend are low maintenance and adapted to a wide range of temperatures and soil types. Besides being a crucial food source, this mix will provide years of stunning color and natural beauty to your garden or landscape.

The contents of the seed mixes are:

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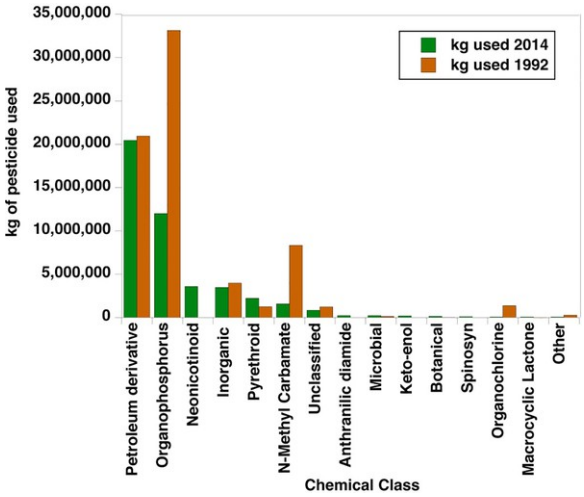
U.S. Croplands Now 50 Times More Toxic to Honeybees

When it comes to pesticides, there's good news and there's bad news. **The good news is, farmers aren't using as many tons of insecticides as they did in years past.**



The bad news is, they're switching to more pervasive, longer-lasting chemicals - making U.S. farm fields nearly 50 times more toxic to honeybees now than they were just 25 years ago.

The study that reported these shifts, published in August in *PLOS One*, examined the period between 1992 and 2014.

During that time, the amount of organophosphorus pesticides used on U.S. croplands each year dropped by about two-thirds, from nearly 35 million kilograms to around 12 million kilograms. The same window saw the rise of neonicotinamide pesticides (known colloquially as neonics), from zero to around 3 or 4 million kilograms annually.

That represents a drop in the overall weight of pesticides applied to fields each year, but there's a catch - actually, a few catches.

First, **neonics persist much longer in the environment that organophosphates** - up to nearly three years from a single application.

Second, they're applied preventively as a seed coating to crops like corn and soybeans - which together accounted for nearly half the increase in pesticide toxicity in U.S. agriculture overall. That **eliminates the possibility of waiting to see whether, and to what extent, pests appear** during the growing season before **deciding whether to apply pesticide**.

Continue reading....

Beginning Rancher Training Trove

School is back in session all across the state, but just because you're outside the K-12 age range doesn't mean you can't learn anything new.

With all the **free educational resources** available on the **Kerr Center website**, you can practically earn an advanced degree in sustainable agriculture.

If you're **new to farming or ranching**, we have a whole section of the **virtual classroom aimed right at you**. A few years back, we ran a series of classes for folks just like you - and the materials, rather than gathering dust in the bookroom, are still flying off the shelves of cyberspace.

The Oklahoma Beginning Farmer & Rancher Program had tracks to match both parts of its name: one for people **mastering market gardening**, and another specially designed just for those **learning the ropes of livestock**.

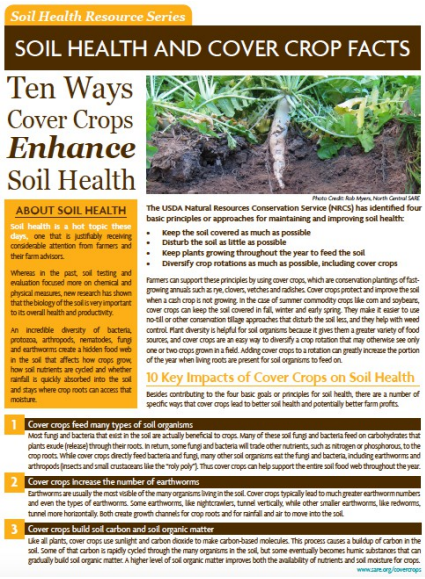
Curious how to save money by **turning a tractor tire into a water trough**? We've got you covered.

Interested in giving **multi-species grazing** a try? Check.

At a loss for **how to set up your acreage** with fencing and water? Follow "Old McDaniel"'s **step-by step-example**.

Our website is packed with so much useful and interesting information, it's enough to make almost anyone want to hit the books. Check it out!

New Fact Sheets: Ecosystem Services of Cover Crops



There are so many benefits to **cover crops** that it can be hard to keep track of them all. In addition to reducing costs and boosting crop yields, cover crops yield a host of environmental benefits, both on the farm and off.

SARE has released a **new series of cover crop fact sheets exploring these ecosystem services** more deeply, one by one, from carbon sequestration to water quality.

"These **free, downloadable and printable** fact sheets are an excellent resource for educators, extension service providers, farmers hosting field days, and others," reads **SARE's press release**.

"A great overview fact sheet is '**10 Ways Cover Crops Enhance Soil Health**,' which addresses the four basic principles for maintaining and improving soil - and how cover crops support those principles."

Each fact sheet synthesizes the scientific literature documenting a different ecosystem service provided by cover crops:

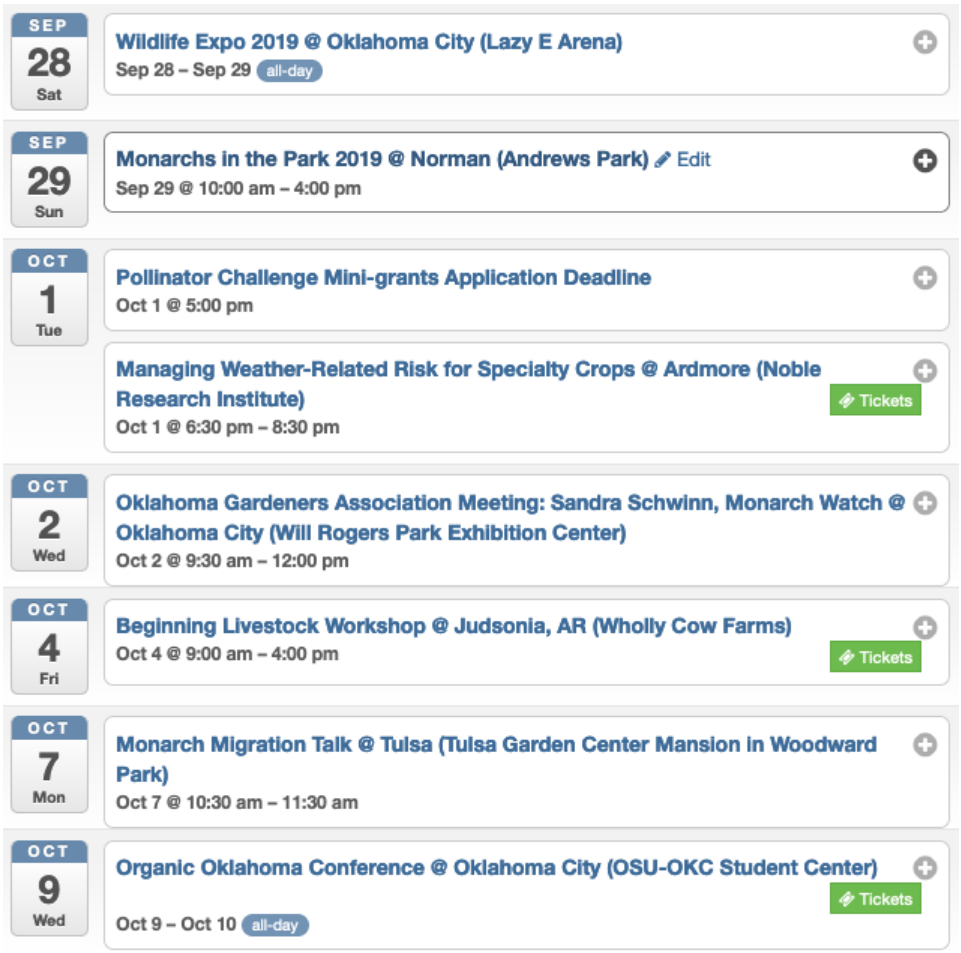
Continue reading....

Early Fall Events: Monarchs, Beginning Livestock, Organic Oklahoma...

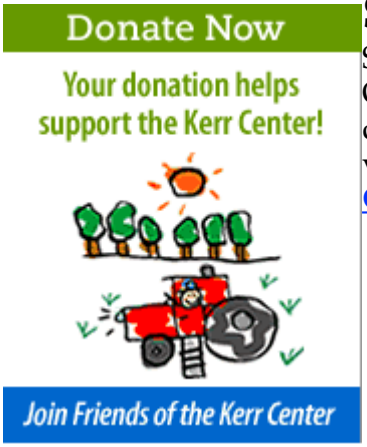
It seems that **monarch events** are nearly as thick out there as monarchs themselves: Norman (Sept. 29), Oklahoma City (Oct. 2), Tulsa (Oct. 9). There'll even be an **Okies for Monarchs booth at the Wildlife Expo** in Guthrie this Saturday (Sept. 28).

There's also a training coming up in Arkansas for **beginning ranchers** (Oct. 4) - and don't forget the **Organic Oklahoma Conference**, Oct. 9 in Oklahoma City.

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](#).



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.



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