



# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

*E-Field Notes*  
January 2020

**Happy 2020!** It's the time for resolutions. Why not tackle learning a whole new group of organisms? David Redhage suggests a publication that would be useful for anyone seeking greater familiarity with **Oklahoma's resident lichens**.

One person we know must have plenty of new resolutions is our **new Education/Horticulture Program Manager, Karlee Pruitt**. Please join us in welcoming her as she **takes the reins of the horticulture program**.

You might also resolve to **reduce erosion on your farm or ranch roads**; this month, we bring you up to speed on **how our own efforts along those lines are working out - as well as how much they cost**.

Or, you might resolve to make this the year you **take advantage of some of the USDA's financial support for farmers and ranchers**. We've got the lowdown on two grant programs with **deadlines coming up soon**.

We'd deeply appreciate it should you resolve to [support our work](#) in 2020. [Thank you!](#)

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# President's Note: Lichens in Oklahoma

## Lichen Study Guide for Oklahoma and Surrounding States



Sheila A. Strawn

In the eastern part of Oklahoma, where the Kerr Center is located, there is an industry based on landscape rock. Many rock yards are looking for "moss rock."

While I am not a fan of the wholesale removal of such rocks from the landscape, I do smile when I see the signs, realizing that in many cases the rocks are probably covered with lichen, moss, or a combination of the two.

Moss is a multicellular organism, while lichens are the result of a symbiotic relationship between two different organisms, a fungus and an alga. The patterns formed on the rocks are interesting.

Until recently, lichens were thought to consist of two different organisms. [New research](#) has shown two or possibly three fungi in some lichens, which makes lichens a more complex symbiotic relationship than previously realized.

I have always thought lichens would be an interesting subject for micro (or macro, depending on how you define it) photography. If you are interested in studying lichens in Oklahoma, there is a [Lichen Study Guide for Oklahoma and Surrounding States](#), by Sheila A. Strawn, published by the Botanical Research Institute of Texas.

## New Horticulture Program Manager

With the start of the new year, the Kerr Center welcomes our new Education/[Horticulture](#) Program Manager, [Karlee Pruitt](#).

Pruitt comes to Poteau fresh from a master's in horticulture from the University of Arkansas. Her thesis research looked at the effects of combinations of different biological pesticides for strawberry production in high tunnels.

There's agriculture in Pruitt's background. Her father had a hobby cattle ranch, and her grandfather had a mid-sized production garden and managed the farmer's market in Branson, Missouri.

Still, she says, she didn't set out to build a career in agriculture. "Originally, I didn't want to do anything agriculture related," she says. "I was very interested in wildlife and forestry, but decided that I needed to be smart about college."



At North Arkansas College, though, the work-study student job that she took was working for an agriculture instructor, growing strawberries in a high tunnel. "After that, I kept getting opportunities to continue and grow within the field of horticulture. Every opportunity just led me on to a new one."

Elena Garcia, a horticulture professor at the University of Arkansas, offered her a student position there if she'd transfer - which she did. She ultimately earned her bachelor's in Agricultural Education, Communication, and Technology, with a concentration in communication.

From there, she moved on to her master's program, in horticulture, with Garcia as her major advisor.

One summer during college, Pruitt interned as a Lloyd Noble Scholar at the Noble Foundation (now the Noble Research Institute). It was there, she says, working with Steve Upson, that she first became interested in sustainable agriculture.

"I was able to learn more about agriculture in a practical sense rather than an academic sense," she recalls. "I met a high-school biology teacher from Oklahoma City whose students didn't realize where their food comes from."

After that experience, the position with the Kerr Center seemed like a natural fit. Once she heard of the opportunity, Pruitt says, she asked around about her potential employer. "I came to the conclusion that the Kerr Center is an honest and wholesome organization, with a sense of family," she says.

"They really want to teach people about sustainable agriculture, and that was something that I was passionate about - both learning for myself, and getting that information back out into

the public." She's keen, she says, to focus on what both she and others can do to take care of the land we inhabit, "whether it's a backyard, five acres, or even a rooftop garden."

Looking ahead, Pruitt sees abundant potential in her work with the Kerr Center's education and horticulture projects. "I am most excited about starting from the ground up," she says. "There are so many possibilities that can come from this program."

# Using Old Conveyor Belts to Prevent Erosion on Gravel Ranch Roads

by David Redhage

The Kerr Center Ranch has miles of gravel roads, some of them on steep slopes. Due to heavy rainfall events, these roads are experiencing erosion issues.

In 2018, we installed some [conveyor belt diverters](#) to move the water off the road surface at various intervals. The interval varies with the slope of the road.



The conveyor belt should be set with at least a 30% angle to the road, and should only leave 4-5 inches exposed above the road surface, so that a vehicle can cross it. The conveyor belt diverters are not for roads with heavy traffic.

Overall, we have been pleased with the results. We have cleaned some material off the upslope side of the diverters due to material movement, but we have not needed to grade the roads, and no ditches have formed in the road surface over the last year, despite several heavy rainfall events. We are considering additional locations on the ranch to install more diverters.

Materials and installation costs include:

Belt	30' x 3/8"-1/2" thick	\$2.28/ft. + shipping*	\$68.40
Treated lumber	2" x 6" x 14'	\$10.50/board	\$31.50
Screws	4" galvanized	\$2.00	\$2.00
Backhoe	0.5 hours	\$85/hr. (minimum 4 hr. charge)	\$42.50
Labor	1.5 hours	\$10/hr.	\$15.00
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$159.40</b>

*\*Costs will vary depending on your location. We can purchase used belt either from Texas or Wisconsin; shipping costs will vary.*

We would prefer to use a small ditch excavator rather than a backhoe, but our location didn't allow us the choice. A small ditch excavator would be cheaper and leave a smaller trench. The backfill would be easier. Using a backhoe requires you to come back and refill on the upper side due to settlement of the soil.

# USDA Grant Deadlines Approaching

Individual farming/ranching operations are eligible to apply for two USDA grant programs, with deadlines coming up soon.

General sign-up for the [Conservation Reserve Program](#), which helps producers to safeguard environmentally sensitive land, has a **February 28 deadline**. Applications for the [Value Added Producer Grant \(VAPG\) program](#), which helps producers process and market new value-added products, are **due March 5**.

## [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\)](#)

In the CRP, the government pays farmers and ranchers an **annual rent in exchange for planting long-lived plant species, from an approved list of grasses and trees**. This is intended to **control soil erosion, improve water quality, and develop wildlife habitat**.

Under certain conditions, [CRP land can be grazed and/or hayed](#), providing a potential win-win for conservation-minded livestock producers.

For more information on the CRP, visit the program webpage at [fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://fsa.usda.gov/crp). To find the nearest FSA office, use the agency's locator at [farmers.gov/service-locator](http://farmers.gov/service-locator).

[Read more about CRP signups.](#)

## [Value Added Producer Grant \(VAPG\) program](#)

According to its [website](#), "The Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program helps agricultural producers enter into **value-added activities related to the processing and marketing of new products.**"

Independent producers are eligible to apply, along with "agricultural producer groups, farmer- or rancher-cooperatives, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures."

Priority may be given to applications from beginning or socially-disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, small or medium-sized farms or ranches structured as family farms, farmer or rancher cooperatives, or proposals for a mid-tier value chain.

The program awards planning grants for up to \$75,000, and working capital grants of up to \$250,000. Both categories have a 50% matching funds requirement.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition maintains an [informational webpage](#) on the VAPG. It includes [examples of successful proposals](#) from past years.

The **deadline for VAPG applications is March 5** for applications submitted electronically, and March 10 for those submitted by mail or in person.

For more information, visit the [VAPG website](#), or contact Brian Wiles, Acting Business Program Director, by [email](#) or phone (405-742-1060).

[Read more about VAPG applications.](#)

## Winter Events: Compost, Cover Crops, Grazing Management, Farmers Markets...

Tulsa County's **Master Composter training** for the year kicks off on Feb. 1. On Feb. 10, you can catch the **Oklahoma Farmers Market & Agritourism Conference** (Edmond), or the **Oklahoma Natural Resources Conference** (Norman). Meanwhile, **workshops all around the state** are covering **cover crops, grazing management, no-till**, and the relation of all those practices to **soil health**.

There are more events in the latter half of February than will fit this section. You can find full details on these and many other upcoming sustainable agriculture events around the state and region on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

The screenshot shows an online events calendar for February. It lists several events with their dates, times, and locations. Each event entry includes a date box with the day of the week, the event title, location, and time. Some entries have a 'Tickets' button.

Date	Event	Location	Time
FEB 1 Sat	Tulsa County Master Composter Training Classes	Tulsa (OSU Extension Center at the Tulsa Fairgrounds)	Feb 1 all-day
FEB 1	Cover Crops / Soil Health: The Beginning	Weatherford (Deer Creek Conservation District)	Feb 1 @ 8:30 am – 3:00 pm
FEB 4 Tue	Harmon County Field Days: Improving Grazing Management Practices	Vinson area	Feb 4 @ 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
FEB 5 Wed	Harmon County Field Days: Converting to No-Till with Cover Crops	Hollis area	Feb 5 @ 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
FEB 10 Mon	OKFMAC 2020 (Oklahoma Farmers Market and Agritourism Conference)	Edmond (Hilton Garden Inn & Edmond Conference Center)	Feb 10 – Feb 12 all-day
FEB 10 – Feb 12	Oklahoma Natural Resources Conference	Norman (Norman Embassy Suites)	Feb 10 – Feb 12 all-day
FEB 11 Tue	Grazing Management, Cover Crops, and No-Till for Soil Health Benefits	Perry (Noble Fairgrounds, Women's Building)	Feb 11 @ 9:30 am

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** as they are made.
- **Share events on the calendar** via a number of **different social media sites**, including Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

## Donate Now

Your donation helps  
support the Kerr Center!



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## Support the Kerr Center

Since 1965 the Kerr Center has been reaching out to folks in Oklahoma and beyond. Today, the Friends of the Kerr Center help us continue this vital work! If you enjoy reading this newsletter or visiting our website, please consider [making a gift to the Kerr Center](#) today!

## Quick Links...

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