



# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

*E-Field Notes*  
March 2020

In the midst of all the coronavirus-induced upheaval, we wish you a happy spring! In this issue, we're sharing **resources to help farmers and ranchers weather the COVID-19 outbreak.**

As far as we know, **monarch butterflies** aren't susceptible to the virus - but their **numbers are down** nevertheless. David Redhage has the latest - and a plea to **consider including monarch plants in your spring planting.**

After last month's look at the urgent need for fire preparedness, it's only fair to give equal time to the other side of the coin: the many **benefits of prescribed fire.**

Ranchers may want to consider signing up for **government assistance with protecting both wetland and grassland areas** of their spreads.

For gardeners, our series of **heirloom variety trial reports** can help inform your seed choices.

Your generous [donations](#) enable us to keep up this kind of education and outreach in sustainable agriculture. [Thank you!](#)

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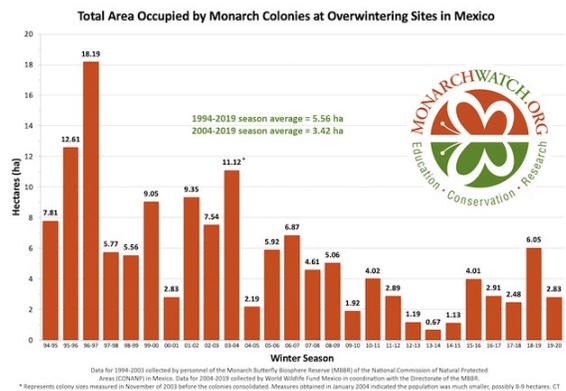
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# President's Note: Monarch Population Status

The most recent monarch numbers are in, and they don't look good. There was a 53.22% decrease in the overwintering monarch population in Mexico compared to last year. The area covered dropped from 6.05 acres to 2.83 acres.

See this [blog post](#) from Monarch Watch for more information.

Keep planting [milkweed](#) for the spring and summer, and don't forget [fall flowering plants](#) for monarch adults traveling south.



## COVID-19 Resources for Farmers and Ranchers

The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak impacts farmers and ranchers, like everyone else, in their individual and family health as well as in their business operations. On top of that, the unique nature of agricultural enterprises introduces any number of additional considerations.

Here are links to collections of **resources to help agricultural producers navigate these new challenges.**

The USDA has a [general information page on coronavirus](#)<sup>International license</sup> [agricultural impacts](#). There is also a page specifically for [producer updates on government agricultural programs](#), such as the [March 27 deadline for applying to the NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement](#) program. This covers agencies including the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. This information is important, as **many offices are now closed, and the page contains instructions on how to contact agency personnel** to apply for and participate in grant, loan, disaster relief, and other programs.

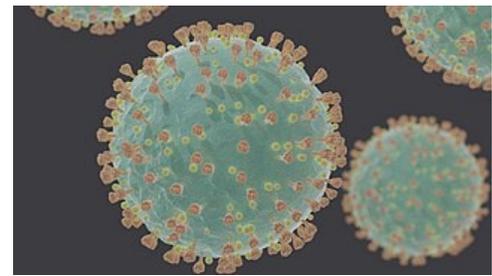


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The [Council for Healthy Food Systems' resource page](#) includes strategies for helping farmers markets remain open, alternative marketing platforms, sample guidelines/best practices for farmers markets, a guide to financial resources for farmers (including emergency loans), and consumer tools for locating local food.

[A Greener World's resource page](#) includes links to various extension agencies' pages on COVID-19, online sales/shipping/payment processing resources, and a news section.

Also, in a timely development, all of [ATTRA's 500+ publications on sustainable agriculture know-how are now free](#). (Shipping charges still apply for hard copies.)

We'll be updating the Kerr Center's own page of links to these and other [COVID-19 resources](#) as the situation develops. Please check back!

# Prescribed Fire Resources and Training

Last month the Kerr Center conducted another round of prescribed burns on the ranch. Considering the risks associated with wildfires, many landowners are understandably shy about deliberately setting fire to any portion of their acreage.

However, properly managed, **fire can be a safe and beneficial tool for pasture management.** It can even reduce the likelihood of unplanned fires.

Fortunately, there are a variety of **free and low-cost trainings** available to help would-be fire managers **learn how to conduct prescribed burns safely.**



A couple of those were coming up quite soon, but have been among those events postponed due to the virus situation. Keep an eye on the [Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association's](#) website for updates on these and other upcoming prescribed burn trainings. In addition, the site offers advice and resources for starting local prescribed burn associations.

The [Oklahoma Prescribed Fire Council](#), operated by the Department of Natural Resource Ecology & Management at Oklahoma State University, links to an [online basic prescribed fire training course](#) from [eXtension](#). ([This article](#), from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, provides [more information on the course](#), including [step-by-step instructions for accessing it.](#))

# Apply by March 27 for NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement

Oklahoma's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for its Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) component. **Applications submitted by March 27, 2020, will be considered for FY2020 funding.**



NRCS will prioritize applications that protect, restore, and enhance habitat for wildlife, and [reduce damage from flooding](#) and recharge groundwater.

Land eligible for easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, and pastureland owned by private individuals or Native American Tribes. Wetland Reserve Easements provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity, and provide opportunities for educational, scientific, and limited recreational activities.

ACEP has two components, one for Agricultural Land Easements (ALE), and one for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE). Applications for both ALE and WRE are accepted on a continuous basis.

Under the ALE component, funds are provided to eligible entities that use ACEP funding to purchase permanent agricultural land easements that not only protect the future of the nation's food supply, but also support environmental quality, wildlife habitat, and historic preservation and protection of open spaces.

Under the WRE component, funding is provided directly to landowners for the purchase of an easement and for restoration. Wetland reserve easements allow landowners to successfully restore, enhance, and protect habitat for wildlife on their lands. Eligible landowners may choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement. Eligible lands include farmed or converted wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored.

To apply for a Wetland Reserve Easement, landowners should [contact their local NRCS field office](#), to be considered in the current batching period ending March 27, 2020.

*Note that signup for another USDA conservation program, the [Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Grasslands](#) component, opened March 16 and runs through May 15.*

# Heirloom Crop Varieties for Southeastern Oklahoma

Beginning back in 2008, the Kerr Center horticulture program ran a series of [variety trials and demonstrations of heirloom vegetables](#) (as well as some non-vegetable crops).

The **results** of each year's trials were published in report form, and are still **freely available** in electronic format from our [online horticulture library](#).

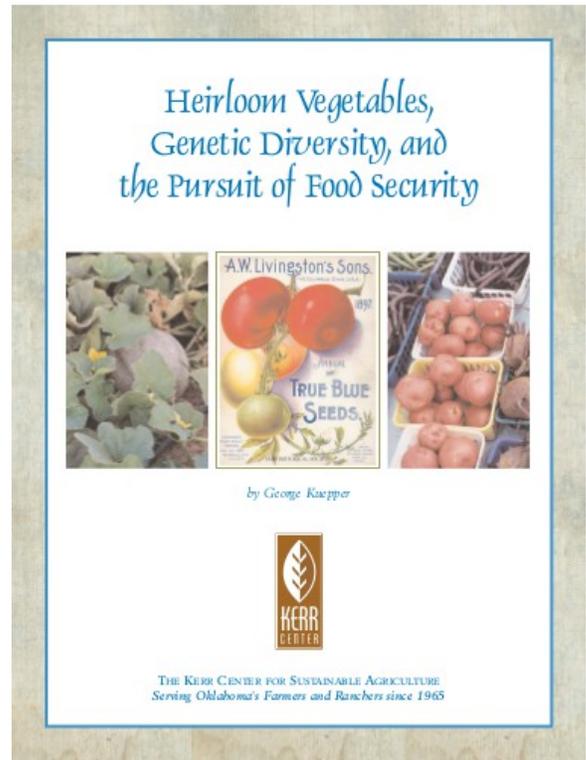
The trials were unique both in their focus on **varieties that perform well in southeastern Oklahoma's** unique climatic conditions, and in their certified [organic management](#) regime.

Crops with varieties trialed at one point or another during the series included [okra](#), [summer squash](#), and [pumpkins](#).

**Tomatoes** received particular focus, with standard variety trials in both [2009](#) and [2010](#), as well as a [grafting demonstration](#) in 2011.

[Sweet potatoes](#) also made repeat appearances, three years in a row beginning in 2010, with a follow-on report addressing [small-scale tools and cultural methods](#).

Certain grain crops also earned a slot in the trial series, including [sorghum](#) and [flour and meal corn](#). Finally, in 2012, a demonstration trial was conducted of corn, beans, and squash in the traditional Native American "[three sisters](#)" combination.



## Early Spring Events: Cancellations and Postponements...

Most of the listings on our online [events calendar](#) for the next couple of months have been **canceled or postponed**, as organizers do their part to cooperate with social distancing measures to **limit the spread of COVID-19**. That's also the case with the start of our own [tour](#) season at the Kerr Center ranch.

We are keeping the calendar as up to date as possible with these changes. Please keep checking back for updates on reschedulings. In addition, there are a number of **virtual events that will still be going forward**; as usual, full details on these can still be found on the Kerr Center's online [events calendar](#).

The screenshot displays a calendar interface with the following entries:

- MAR 26 Thu:** CANCELED: Eastern Oklahoma Beef Cattle Summit @ McAlester (SE Oklahoma Expo Center) Mar 26 @ 8:00 am – 3:30 pm. Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- MAR 27 Fri:** Deadline: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easement component Mar 27 all-day.
- MAR 27 Fri:** Oklahoma Conservation Leadership Academy: Application Deadline Mar 27 all-day.
- MAR 27 Fri:** POSTPONED: Prescribed Fire Planning Workshop @ Pryor (Twin Ridge Ranch) Mar 27 @ 8:30 am – 3:30 pm.
- MAR 28 Sat:** Blue Thumb Volunteer Training – Duncan @ Duncan (Fairgrounds: Heritage Room) Mar 28 @ 8:30 am – Mar 29 @ 4:30 pm.
- MAR 28 Sat:** POSTPONED: Landscape Design for Water Conservation @ Oklahoma City (OKC Zoo Education Auditorium) Mar 28 @ 10:00 am – 12:00 pm. Includes a 'Tickets' button.
- APR 2 Thu:** CANCELED: Monarch Meetup: McAlester @ McAlester (McAlester Public Library) Apr 2 @ 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm.

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.

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## Quick Links...

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