



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

December 2020

Happy holidays from the Kerr Center!

With us as for just about everyone else, the story of 2020 has been dominated by the coronavirus pandemic. Underneath those headlines, and the struggles whose story they tell, **we've kept steadily at work in all our regular program areas throughout 2020 - and hope we can begin hosting on-site educational activities again soon.**

The giving season has moved some of you to make generous [donations](#). [Thank you!](#) If you'd like to help us start the new year with a bang, please consider [contributing](#).

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2020: The Year in Review



[Horticulture](#)

The horticulture program saw a number of new projects developed under our new Horticulture/Education Program Manager, Karlee Pruitt. Pruitt set up a [low-cost hydroponics](#) demonstration, and conducted **variety comparisons** of [cherry tomatoes](#) and [sweet peppers](#) in **self-wicking containers**.

This year also marked the third year of our **elderberry variety trials**, with findings summarized in a [free report](#).

[Livestock](#)

Fortunately, forages don't catch COVID-19 - but the pastures they grow in still catch whatever moisture falls, and **2020 was another year with excess summer precipitation**, with 12 inches in August alone.

The livestock program deployed the usual coping strategies, putting up extra hay and filling all the barns. Even so, much **additional pasture mowing was required to keep the flush of weeds in check**.

Even as they unleash short-term plant growth, the high summer rainfall levels also work unseen to leach nutrients from pasture soils. Where vegetation shifts signified that this

process has reached critical thresholds, the livestock program supplemented fertility with poultry litter applications.

Conservation

We've continued our leadership role in statewide pollinator conservation networks, to the extent possible under pandemic conditions. We were able to maintain our [pollinator plantings](#) and continue managing for habitat with [prescribed fire](#).

SARE PDP Program

The Kerr Center continues to manage the Southern SARE Professional Development Program. For 2020, not surprisingly, that activity shifted entirely to virtual mode, but work on the program continues as before.

2021

Karlee Pruitt's productive first year with the horticulture program unfortunately also proved to be her last. We wish her well in her next endeavors, and are actively [seeking a new Horticulture/Education Program manager](#).

If the pandemic situation improves sufficiently, **we look forward to hosting workshops on season extension, honeybees, and elderberries in 2021**. We have **added a 38-HP four-wheel tractor to the BCS walk-behind tractor**, expanding the range of home / market gardening techniques that we are able to demonstrate.

We've received a grant to **facilitate networking between organic growers** in the state, to foster information sharing and mutual support, and help coordinate bulk input purchases.

The livestock program continues working to **improve conception rates. Managing first-calf heifers as a separate herd** from the mature cows, and introducing a **greater proportion of Beefmaster-sired replacements**, with their greater tolerance for southeastern Oklahoma's heat and humidity, will be the coming year's main strategies on that front.

We'll be maintaining and improving infrastructure, repairing barn roofs and expanding the installation of water diverters on ranch roads.

Winter Events: Lichens, Greenhouse Tomatoes, Blue Thumb Training...

There's a webinar coming right up on **lichens** (Dec. 17).

In January, OSU kicks off a series of virtual webinars in a pandemic-era adaptation of its Shackelford Lecture Series. The first one is on **greenhouse tomatoes** (Jan. 21).

Blue Thumb is hosting a **volunteer training** in Stillwater (January 30-31).

The screenshot shows a vertical list of five event cards. Each card has a date and day in a small box on the left, followed by the event title and time on the right. The events are:

- DEC 17 Thu**: Webinar: Lichens and the Lichenologists Who Love Them @ online. Time: Dec 17 @ 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Includes a green 'Tickets' button and a plus sign.
- JAN 21 Thu**: Webinar: So, You Want to Grow Greenhouse Tomatoes? @ online. Time: Jan 21 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm. Includes a plus sign.
- JAN 30 Sat**: Blue Thumb Volunteer Training @ Stillwater (Oklahoma State University). Time: Jan 30 @ 8:30 am - Jan 31 @ 4:30 pm. Includes a green 'Tickets' button and a plus sign.
- FEB 11 Thu**: Webinar: The "Socially Distant" Nurseryman @ online. Time: Feb 11 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm. Includes a plus sign.
- MAR 11 Thu**: Webinar: Native Connections @ online. Time: Mar 11 @ 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm. Includes a plus sign.

Full details on these and other sustainable agriculture learning opportunities, as always, 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** 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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