Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
July 2021

Nothing says July like a homemade lemonade stand. While lemon groves may be a rarity on Oklahoma farms, **farmers and ranchers in the state** do use that same strategy of **connecting directly with customers to improve their bottom lines - but how many? By how much? How are those numbers changing?** In this issue, we try to answer those questions.

We also take a look at the latest USDA numbers on the **farm share of the food dollar** - that is, **for every dollar you spend on food, how many cents end up in a farmer's pocket?**

At least **one Oklahoma farmer has found a path to profits by propagating pollinators**. You can **watch an interview with her, and other Oklahoma pollinator experts**, in a recent Oklahoma News segment.

But first, David Redhage takes us "way down yonder to the **pawpaw** patch" with a review of a **new book** on **a fruit that's sold almost entirely via direct marketing**.

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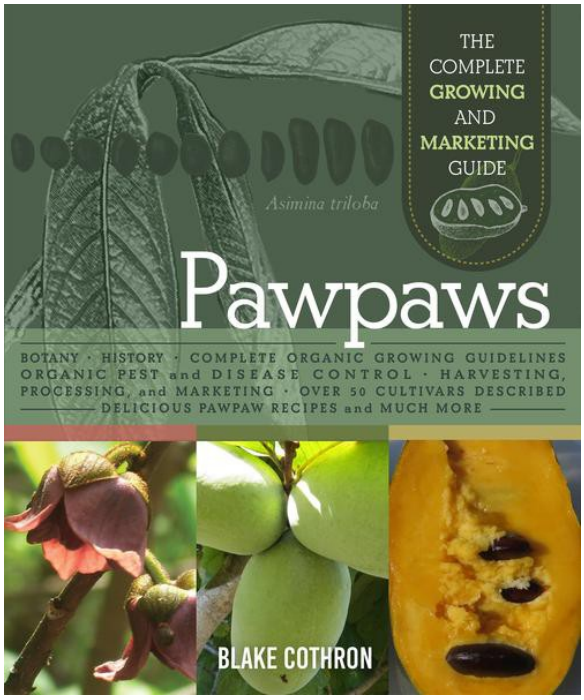
President's Note: Book Review - *PawPaws: The Complete Growing and Marketing Guide*



PawPaws: The Complete Growing and Marketing Guide. Cothron, Blake. 2021. New Society. 248 p.

I have had an interest in pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*) for many years. The pawpaw is an understory short tree or a multi-stemmed shrub native to North America.

This is the latest book on the subject, and covers some of the history, growing, marketing, and the work that is being done to improve the fruit. It also contains one of the most comprehensive cultivar lists I have seen.

The book is definitely written for those who want to grow organically. The author does a good job covering the marketing of the fruit, and speculates that one of the challenges with customer acceptance is the consistency of the fruit. It is more a custard consistency than crunchy like apples, and even under-ripe peaches we find in stores.

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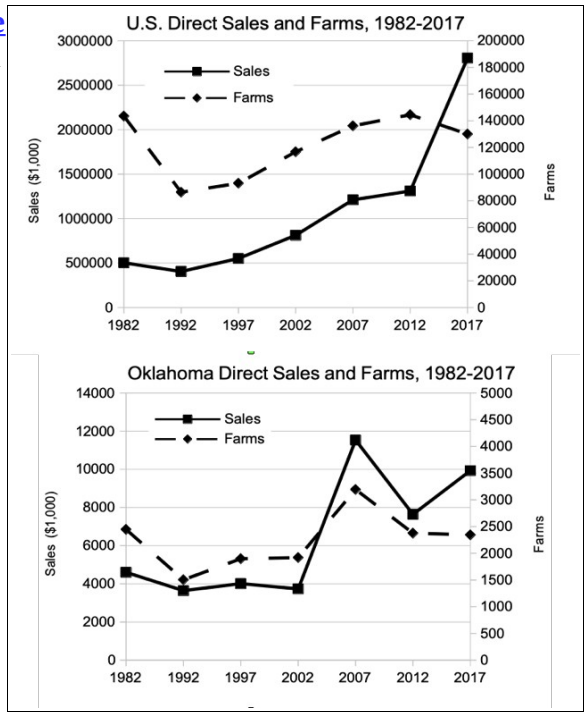
Direct Marketing: Higher Sales, Fewer Farms?



In **last month's newsletter** we talked about the **surge in demand for locally raised beef** that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This month, to put that in context, we're looking at **direct marketing** in general - both within Oklahoma, and in comparison with the situation nationwide.

The deepest look we've taken at the state of direct marketing in Oklahoma was in ***Closer to Home*** - 15 years ago now. The Census of Agriculture data we used aren't updated often enough to show any effects of the coronavirus pandemic yet, but they do show the trend against which any COVID-related changes would stand out.

Even without a pandemic thrown into the mix, the pattern over the last couple of decades presents some interesting puzzles. Back in 2006, when Closer to Home came out, the most recent data were from the 2002 ag census. From 1982 up until then, Oklahoma's direct-marketing numbers had held relatively steady - both the volume of direct sales, and the number of farms participating - with no discernible long-term trend. Meanwhile, since 1992, the nation as a whole had seen steady growth both sales and farm numbers.

Today, with another three ag censuses' worth of data, the picture has changed.

Learn more....

Don't Spend It All in One Place! Who Is Pocketing Your Food Dollar?

Buying direct from farmers may be the best way to get your food money into their pockets, but most of us can't lay hands on all our groceries that way. As the previous article showed, not many farmers are making a living that way, either. So, what's the picture like overall? **How much of your food dollar, on average, does make it into farmers' pockets?**

The USDA has been answering that question for a long time - since the 1940s, when Congress first directed the agency to "measure the cost of marketing U.S. agricultural commodities." If you've ever heard someone say something about **how many cents a farmer gets out of every dollar spent on food**, it was probably based on that USDA data.

The agency's Economic Research Service (ERS) has just released the latest update. **In 2019**, on average, **every dollar spent on food put 14.3 cents in farmers' pockets**.

Where does the rest - the "marketing share" - go? According to the USDA, "The marketing share is the remainder accruing to food supply chain industries involved in all post-farm activities that culminate in final market food dollar sales." Those could include food processing, transportation, and even accounting and legal costs.

Just under **15% may not sound like much, and - especially from the farmer's point of view - it probably isn't**. It isn't much below the long-term average, though....

Continue reading....

Pollinators in the News!

The Oklahoma News Report turned its cameras on pollinators last month, interviewing a panel of **Oklahoma experts on pollinator biology** for National Pollinator Week.

In its June 25 episode, the OETA news show hosted a panel consisting of:

- **Amy Seiger** - State Soil Health Coordinator for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission
- **Courtney Bir** - Assistant Professor, Dept. of Agricultural Economics, OSU
- **Jane Breckinridge** - Director, Euchee Butterfly Farm & Co-Director of Tribal Environmental Action for Monarchs and Tribal Alliance for Pollinators

In the fifteen-minute segment, these three local specialists give a comprehensive overview of the state of **pollinators** in Oklahoma - their basic ecology, the **pressures they face, and the things that individuals can do** to help preserve and create habitat for these essential organisms.

The pollinator segment begins at approximately 35 minutes, 45 seconds into the program, and runs for about fifteen minutes.

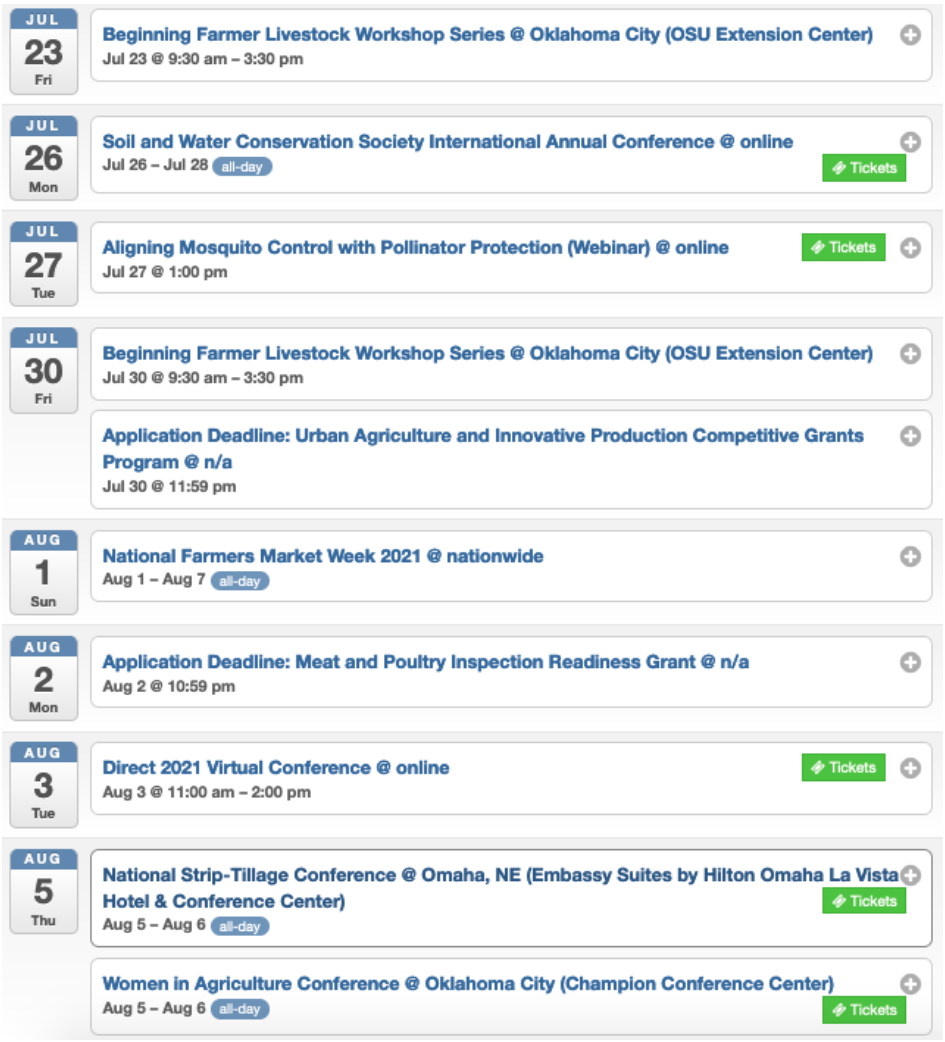
Watch the segment....

Summer Events: Beginning Farmer Series, National Farmers Market Week, Conferences, Grants....

Before July is out, OSU Extension's **Beginning Farmer workshop series** starts (Oklahoma City, July 23), running weekly through August 20. On July 27, Monarch Joint Venture is offering an online workshop explaining how to **control mosquitos without harming pollinators**. **National Farmers Market Week** runs August 1-7.

There are several **conferences** coming up in the next couple of weeks, both online and in-person:

- **Soil & Water Conservation Society** (July 26-28, virtual)
- **Direct 2021** (Aug. 3, virtual)
- **Women in Agriculture** (Aug. 5-6, Oklahoma City)



Two **USDA grants** also have upcoming **deadlines**:

- **Urban Agriculture & Innovative Production** (July 30)
- **Meat & Poultry Inspection Readiness** (Aug. 2)

The Kerr Center's **tour** season is also open, by appointment only. **Come visit us!**

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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