



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

November 2021

Happy Thanksgiving! Despite yet another unusual year, David Redhage finds plenty to be thankful for - not least, the farmers and ranchers who put food on our tables no matter what form the year's unusual-ness takes!

This year the season brings a wealth of new sustainable agriculture resources to be grateful for: a **soil health video series** from NCAT, a **guide to starting a new meat processing facility**, and USDA **financial assistance for existing and transitioning organic operations**.

As ever, we're especially [thankful](#) for your [donations to the Kerr Center!](#)

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President's Note: It's Been an Unusual Year

When does agriculture *not* have an “unusual year”? It seems something unexpected happens constantly in agriculture. Farmers and ranchers deal with this all the time. Too much rain, too little rain; three inches in 45 minutes, compared to a slow, steady six-hour storm.

Equipment breakdowns lead farmers to become their own mechanics. One year you may have low conception rates on your cattle, or a bull goes bad during breeding season. The next year you have an excellent calf crop and high crop yields, but the market price is down.



This year at the Kerr Center we had a wet spring. The summer [cover crop](#) did not get planted at the [horticulture farm](#) until late June. Because of the late planting we didn't plant sorghum-sudangrass, which we need to for [bermudagrass suppression](#). Instead, we planted a short season cover crop of buckwheat.

When it stopped raining, the weather turned dry. An early outbreak of [armyworms](#) stripped many pastures, leaving us short on [forage](#) and feeding some hay early. Fortunately the rain started this fall, and pastures recovered, so we have winter grazing.

All of these events add up to the unpredictability of agriculture. Farmers and ranchers learn to adjust to the changes, but the stress is high.

While our food production system is not perfect, we try here at the Kerr Center to teach methods to make it more sustainable. Just be thankful at Thanksgiving for the farmers and ranchers who spend the time and effort to grow the food we eat.

Many times I feel we take for granted the abundance of food we have. Farmers and ranchers work hard to produce our food despite the fact that it has been an unusual year - again!

NCAT Soil Health Innovations Videos

[via NCAT](#)

The National Center for Appropriate Technology has released a series of 19 videos from its inaugural Soil Health Innovations Conference.

The presentations feature nationally recognized experts and innovative farmers from around the U.S. who share the latest in soil science, best practices in soil management, and the emerging technologies that will drive the future of sustainable and regenerative agriculture.



“The Soil Health Innovations Conference occupies the cutting edge of [soil health](#) across the country – on-farm practices, soil biology, carbon markets, and public policy,” said Steve Thompson, NCAT executive director. “This set of videos adds to NCAT’s trusted knowledge base and provides a free resource to any producer or land manager working to improve soil conditions.”

The keynote presentation by Dr. Fred Provenza, one of the country’s leading ecologists, is a highlight of the conference videos. He discusses the link between the health of soils and plants with the health of livestock and the people who eat these foods.

Dr. Robin “Buz” Kloot, a soil health research professor in the Environmental Health Sciences Department at University of South Carolina’s Arnold School of Public Health, spoke about helping farmers find their way forward using new soil testing techniques.

[Continue reading....](#)

Resources for Starting a Small-Scale Meat Plant

Back in [June](#), we looked at some resources for the many people newly interested in [buying and selling more local meat](#) in response to last year's pandemic-induced shortages and cost increases. Shortly after press time, another **new guide**, specifically for the construction of **small-scale meat processing plants**, was released.

So You Want to Start a Meat Plant? is published by the [Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network \(NMPAN\)](#), which offers many other related resources as well. Based at Oregon State University, NMPAN is an extension-based network aiming to **assist small processors** and the farmers, marketers, and meat buyers who depend on them, by sharing **information, tools, and technical assistance**.

The new guide is written as a primer, squeezing a summary of the wealth of deeper information on particular topics available on the NMPAN website into just 6 pages. It covers **market requirements, regulations, financing, feasibility, and business planning**.

In addition, *So You Want to Start a Meat Plant?* includes profiles of two existing small meat processing plants - one in west Texas, and one in Massachusetts. The profiles include advice and lessons learned from the operators of both plants.

[So You Want to Start a Meat Plant?](#) is available free in pdf format from the [NMPAN website](#).

Local Food Systems Response to COVID:
Building Better Beyond



So You Want To Start A Meat Plant?
A short primer on what you need to know

A resilient food system requires a diverse group of meat processors when it comes to scale, services provided, and location. The coronavirus pandemic has stretched small and mid-sized slaughterhouses and meat processors thin. Demand has outstripped supply in many places. The bottlenecks in parts of this system have encouraged many entrepreneurs, start-ups, and frustrated livestock producers to consider opening new meat processing facilities. The Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network (NMPAN) [website](#) has a variety of resources available for people to learn more about what it takes to plan, design, and construct a meat processing facility, as well as how to run it efficiently and profitably. Those resources are summarized in this information brief which includes links to additional resources that delve deeper into specific topic areas.

What is required to successfully build and launch a new meat processing facility?

Customers: that bring a consistent volume of animals to your facility and are willing to pay for your services

Capital: which includes both owner investment plus outside capital, not only for start-up costs but also to cover operations for the first couple years

Location: ideal site, suitably zoned for what you plan to do, accessible to highways and producers, near a population that can provide a workforce

Resolve: determination, patience, and grit to see the project through

People: the right team with experience, business savvy, regulatory understanding, etc.

USDA Support for Certified Organic and Transitioning Operations

[via USDA Agricultural Marketing Service](#)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide **support to cover certification and education expenses** to agricultural producers who are **certified organic or transitioning to organic**. USDA will make \$20 million available through the new Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP) as part of USDA's broader Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, certified organic and transitional operations faced challenges due to loss of markets, and increased costs and labor shortages, in addition to costs related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification, which producers and handlers of conventionally grown commodities do not incur. Transitional operations also faced the financial challenge of implementing practices required to obtain organic certification without being able to obtain the premium prices normally received for certified organic commodities.

Eligible Expenses

OTECP funding is provided through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). Certified operations and transitional operations may apply for OTECP for eligible expenses paid during the 2020, 2021 and 2022 fiscal years. For each year, OTECP covers **25% of a certified operation's eligible certification expenses**, up to \$250 per certification category (crop, livestock, wild crop, handling and State Organic Program fee). This includes **application fees, inspection fees, USDA organic certification costs, state organic program fees, and more**.

Crop and livestock operations transitioning to organic production may be eligible for **75% of a transitional operation's eligible expenses**, up to \$750, for each year. This includes **fees charged by a certifying agent or consultant for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan**.

For **both certified operations and transitional operations**, OTECP covers **75% of the registration fees, up to \$200, per year, for educational events** that include content related to organic production and handling in order to assist operations in increasing their knowledge of production and marketing practices that can improve their operations, increase resilience, and expand available marketing opportunities. Additionally, both certified and transitional operations may be eligible for **75% of the expense of soil testing** required under the National Organic Program (NOP) to document micronutrient deficiency, not to exceed \$100 per year.

[Read more....](#)

Late Fall Events: Crop Insurance, Estate Planning, Grants, Conferences....

The University of Tennessee's Farmland Legacy program wraps up its **estate planning webinar series** Nov. 23, while NCAT concludes its **crop insurance webinar series** with a session on **mixed vegetable/livestock enterprises** Nov. 30.

Upcoming grant deadlines include USDA's **Pandemic Response and Safety Grants** (Nov. 22), **Southern IPM Grants** (Dec. 3), and **America's Healthy Food Financing Initiative** small grants (Dec. 7).

The winter conference season gets rolling Dec.

6, with the **National Grazing Lands Conference** in South Carolina, and the **Acres U.S.A Eco-Ag Conference** in Ohio. Close on their heels is NCAT's **Latino Farmer Conference**, online Dec. 8 and continuing monthly through February.

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.

The screenshot displays a calendar interface with the following events:

- NOV 22 Mon:** Pandemic Response and Safety Grants (Application Deadline) - Nov 22 @ 10:59 pm
- NOV 23 Tue:** Farmland Legacy and Estate Planning Webinar Series @ online - Nov 23 @ 6:00 pm
- NOV 30 Tue:** Risk Management and Crop Insurance Options for Small Farms (webinar) @ online - Nov 30 @ 11:00 am - 1:00 pm
- DEC 3 Fri:** Southern IPM Grants Program (application deadline) - Dec 3 @ 4:00 pm
- DEC 6 Mon:** 8th National Grazing Lands Conference @ Myrtle Beach, SC - Dec 6 - Dec 9 all-day
- DEC 6 Mon:** Acres U.S.A. Eco-Ag Conference @ Cincinnati, OH - Dec 6 - Dec 9 all-day
- DEC 7 Tue:** America's Healthy Food Financing Initiative Targeted Small Grants Program (application deadline) - Dec 7 @ 10:59 pm
- DEC 8 Wed:** NCAT Latino Farmer Conference @ online - Dec 8 @ 7:00 am - 10:30 am

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