



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
March 2022

Welcome to spring! Whether you're planting new crops or new enterprises, we've got news we hope you can use.

Planting **collards**? David Redhage reviews a book on that old southern garden standby.

Many of us spend spring itching for the first fireflies to appear - but new research shows that more of us need to be watching, and counting, to fill **gaping holes in our knowledge of fireflies and the health of their populations**.

Whether you're buying **organic beef** or raising it, a new **report and scorecard** can help you make more informed choices.

Speaking of selling, if you're considering taking your direct marketing online, or just looking to switch platforms, **new resources comparing direct marketing software platforms** may save you time and money.

We hope these resources we share are helpful to you. If they are, please help us back: [donate to the Kerr Center](#). [Thank you!](#)

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President's Note: Book Review - *Collards*

[Collards: A Southern Tradition from Seed to Table.](#)
Davis, Edward H., and John T. Morgan. 2015.
University of Alabama Press. 240 p.

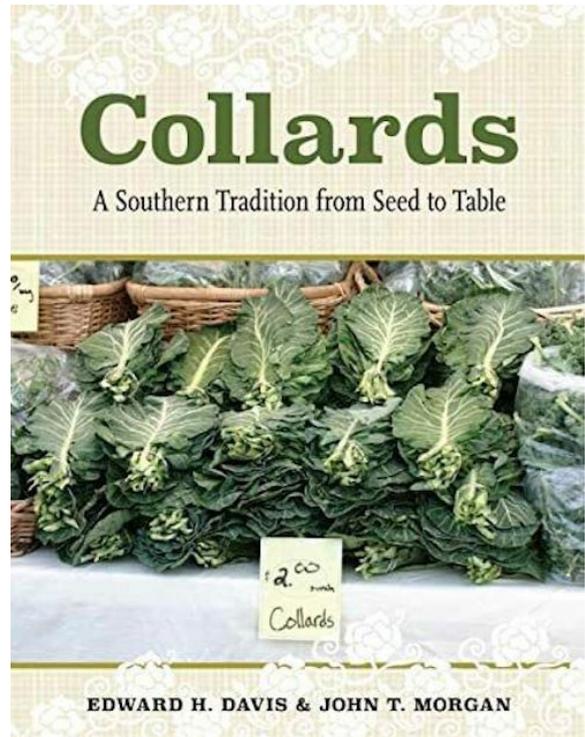
I seem to be writing a lot of president's notes on books I have read. Well, here is another one. I find myself attracted to books which focus heavily on one topic or subject, especially if history is included. This book is one example.

It was published in 2015 and is part of a larger project on preserving [heirloom](#) collards. The 2022 Seed Savers Exchange catalog has a two-page writeup on the project. You can also find information about it at [heirloomcollards.org](#).

I want to say right off the bat I have only eaten collards a few times, so don't consider me a connoisseur. Growing up in Missouri, there are three garden vegetables I always associated with the south: [sweet potatoes](#), [okra](#), and collard greens. Of these three, my parents only grew sweet potatoes one time. I didn't know anyone who grew okra or collard greens, even though they will grow further north.

I find the book interesting because it delves into the history of collards and explains how it became associated with the south. It is a well-written and -documented work on this one food plant. There are several tables covering consumption and production by state, and one table comparing its nutritional value to other greens.

Maps show where collards are preferred, where seed saving occurs, and where local restaurants serve collards as the main or only cooked greens. Overall, an interesting study on the history of a food plant tied to the southern United States.



Fireflies Endangered? For Half of Species, We Don't Even Know

It's early in the season yet for spotting [fireflies](#), but that doesn't mean many of us aren't already counting down the days until the first sighting of the season.

Many longtime firefly fans have been suspecting that **firefly populations, like [insect populations in general](#), are in decline**, but - especially in North America - there's been **little hard data** to confirm or refute that.

The Xerces Society, working with partner organizations, recently took a first step toward filling in that lack of data. The organization systematically **evaluated the extinction risk of populations of 128 species of firefly** in the U.S. and Canada.

The good news? Approximately **a third of the species surveyed appear to be in good condition**. However, **another 14% are considered as threatened with extinction**.

Perhaps even more troublingly, though, **for over half of the species evaluated, there simply isn't enough information to make a determination**.

More detail on these findings is available in a free report from the Xerces Society, [State of the Fireflies of the United States and Canada: Distributions, Threats, and Conservation Recommendations](#). The report summarizes the threats affecting fireflies in the two countries, with maps of species richness, distributions, and threatened status.

[Find out what you can do!](#)



Does Your Organic Beef Make the Grade?

If you're buying organic beef, the [certified organic](#) label might seem like a simple either/or proposition: either the product is certified organic, or it isn't. In reality, **beef bearing the certified organic label can be produced under a wide variety of circumstances, and both ranchers and buyers can benefit by learning more about the details.**

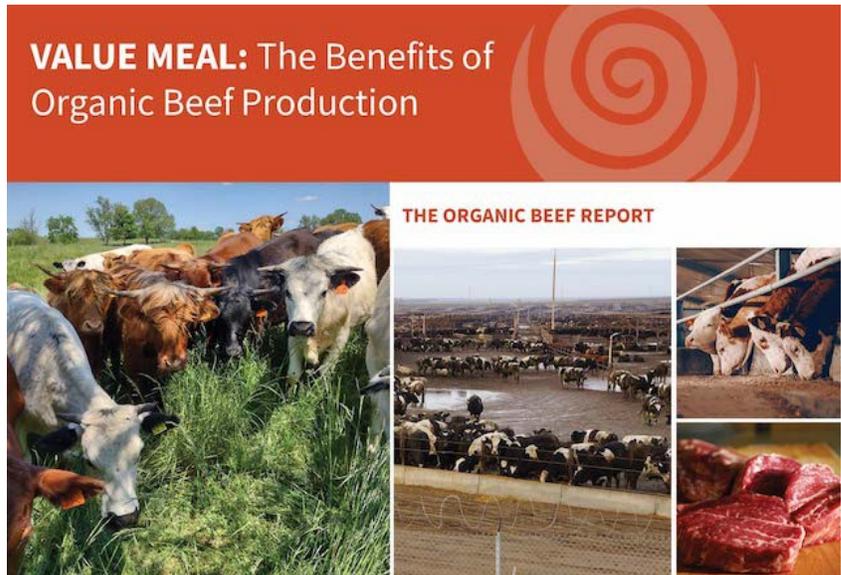
A **free report** from the Cornucopia Institute aims to **deliver that knowledge.** [Value Meal: The Benefits of Organic Beef Production](#)

“uncovers the latest research in certified organic beef production, with takeaways for anyone interested in shifting their beef buying habits to prioritize quality,” according to the organization.

The report reviews the letter of the organic regulations, and then covers some of the main **ways that certified organic production practices vary** from one operation to the next: the degree of **confinement**, the amount of **grass in the diet**, and **animal welfare practices**. It also explores the **impacts** of these factors **on human health, climate, and ecosystem health.**

The report comes with an [organic beef scorecard](#) that rates certified organic brands by the degree to which they go “above and beyond” the minimum set by the USDA organic standards. Scoring criteria include supply source (single farmstead vs. integrated purchases from multiple ranches), commitment to organics (strictly organic vs. split operations), additional labels, finishing (feedlot vs. pasture), and more. The organic beef report card includes nearly **200 different certified organic brands in a searchable online database.**

Both the report and the scorecard are valuable to beef customers as a way of making more informed choices about the meat they purchase, and to producers as a way of tracking trends in the organic beef industry and assessing which practices are the best fit for their production and marketing circumstances.



Choosing an E-commerce Platform for Direct Marketing

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more **farms selling direct to their customers** were exploring online sales. While selling online can save time and labor over traditional direct marketing models, there's a **bewildering diversity of online sales platforms**, and sifting through them all can be a daunting prospect.

The National Young Farmers Coalition has tackled that problem with its [free Farmers Guide to Direct Sales Platforms](#). The guide profiles **19 different farm-specific online sales platforms**, with details on **features and pricing**, and links to additional information.



Following up on that work, the CSA Innovation Network surveyed farmers using those platforms to produce a **report on e-commerce platforms**. The report **ranks each platform based on feedback from 170 farmers, on aspects including set-up experience, ease of use (from both the farmer and customer ends), value, and customer service**.

In addition to the platforms in the Farmers Guide to Direct Sales Platforms, the CSA Innovation Network report covers four additional, non farm-specific platforms.

The CSA Innovation Network recently **updated its e-commerce report to include feedback from additional farmers and three more platforms**. The [updated report](#) also includes a resource section with links to information about platforms that didn't receive enough farmer feedback to be included in the rankings.

Taken together, the guide and reports can be a valuable, time-saving resource for any farm operation looking to add online sales to its direct marketing enterprise, or shift an existing enterprise to a different software platform.

Early Spring Events: Soil Health, Citizen Science, Farmers Markets, CSP Signup, USDA Grants....

There's a **soil health workshop** in Clinton March 25. You can get trained to **monitor monarch larvae** (Mar. 26, online), or **monitor stream health as a Blue Thumb volunteer** (Mar. 27, Woodward). The new **Eastside Fresh Market** in Oklahoma City is holding a **vendor fair** (Mar. 29)

Signups for the next round of the **Conservation Stewardship Program** close Mar. 31.

Application deadlines to the **USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)** and **Regional Food System Partnership Program (RFSP)** are coming up later in the spring. There are **webinars** Apr. 5 (FMPP) and 6 (RFSP) with **more information for those interested in applying**.

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.

MAR 25 Fri	Growing with Integrity: Better Soil, More Life @ Clinton Mar 25 @ 9:00 am – Mar 26 @ 5:00 pm	Tickets +
MAR 26 Sat	Community Science Training: Monarch Larva Monitoring Project @ online Mar 26 @ 10:00 am – 3:00 pm	Tickets +
MAR 27 Sun	Blue Thumb Volunteer Training – Woodward @ Woodward (Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Chem Lab Room 152) Mar 27 @ 8:30 am – Mar 28 @ 4:30 pm	Tickets +
MAR 29 Tue	Eastside Fresh Market Vendor Fair @ Oklahoma City (OSU Extension Conference Center) Mar 29 @ 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Tickets +
MAR 31 Thu	2022 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) (signup deadline) Mar 31 <small>all-day</small>	+
APR 5 Tue	Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) Applicant Webinar @ online Apr 5 @ 12:00 pm	Tickets +
APR 6 Wed	Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) Applicant Webinar @ online Apr 6 @ 12:00 pm	Tickets +

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