



Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes

April 2023

Happy Earth Day! We're getting out of that time of year when it's hard to know what the weather will do from day to day - as David Redhage describes in this month's president's note - and into consistently warmer weather.

Get out and enjoy that warmth with our **free grazing workshop on May 13!**

With the weather warming, it feels like drought can't be far behind. Forty years of data show that **organic management helps maintain yields during dry spells.**

Speaking of water, **Stewardship Week starts at the end of the month**, and this year the event is focused on the wet, life-giving stuff, with the theme, **One Water.**

The warming weather also means that **dragonflies** will soon be buzzing lakes and ponds. Catch a **recent Outdoor Oklahoma video segment** on these fascinating insects, filmed in part on the Kerr Ranch.

It would warm us up if you'd buzz on over to our website and [donate to the Kerr Center](#). If you already have... [many thanks!](#)

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President's Note: The Challenging Climate

We are finally moving into spring here at the Kerr Center. It has been an interesting winter season, with our challenging Oklahoma climate on full display.

I was at a talk on [beekeeping](#) last week and the speaker mentioned Oklahoma had several “**false springs**” this year.

I had never heard it described that way, but we had several **warming spells followed by hard cold snaps**.



This is really **hard on honeybees**. They try to forage when it warms up, but don't find any flowers, so they burn up energy reserves and honey to survive. Hive owners needed to feed their bees more often this year than in other years.

Late spring freezes are nothing new to vegetable growers, but even knowing it can happen, we get lulled into complacency when the temperature stays warm for several weeks and we think spring freezes are over.

The last frost-free date here is considered April 15th, but after weeks of warm weather, we had temperatures hit 33 degrees the night of April 16th, and had some cold damage on tomatoes in our open [coldframe](#). The Kerr Center office sits higher than the horticulture farm. Some tomatoes in tubs outside the office did not seem to have any freeze damage. This shows how, at close to freezing temperatures, low-lying areas can have frost while other areas do not experience freezing conditions.

Two days from now, the extended forecast shows temperatures dropping down to 34 degrees. A week ago, the extended forecast did not show temperatures dropping this low. Over the last several years, we seem to be experiencing warm conditions in March and April followed by sudden freezes after April 15th. So **maybe the frost-free date has moved to later in April?** At least we are reminded **how fickle nature can be this time of the year**.

These are both examples of how the changing climate continues to challenge and frustrate growers.

Kerr Center Grazing Workshop May 13



Join us for this **free grazing workshop at the Kerr Center** as we cover two important grazing topics:

1. Basic [grazing management](#), with emphasis on pasture plant ID and the use of electric [fencing](#).

2. Livestock water systems with emphasis on gravity flow water development and pros and cons of different types of livestock [watering systems](#).

This will be an outdoor workshop – boots and jeans (or long pants) are recommended.

Registration is FREE, BUT you must sign up by Wednesday, May 10, to reserve a place.

For more information or to register, contact the Kerr Center by [email](#) or phone (918-647-9123).

Organic Resilience in Extreme Weather

A persistent problem of **scientific studies in agriculture** is that they're often [too short to be conclusive](#). If you only collect data for a season or two, you may end up with unusual conditions that don't reflect the long-term situation on the ground. **When a single study's been running for four decades, the findings carry more weight.**

That's how long the Rodale Institute's [Farming Systems Trial](#) has been going on. Over that stretch of years, it's accumulated **solid data on the differences between organic and conventional farming.**



Overall, organic and conventional management have similar yields - except in drought years, when conventional yields plummet but **organic yields hold more or less steady, producing about 30% more than conventional.**

That's because - as the study's deep dataset also shows - the organically managed fields build up larger reserves of soil organic matter, which acts like a sponge to hold more water when the weather takes a break from rain.

Thanks to the yield differential, along with lower operational costs, **the organic plots have also been more profitable - even without the organic price premium.**

The trial grows **corn and soybeans**, because those two crops occupy 70% of the farmland in the United States. In addition to the conventional treatment, it actually has two organic systems - one using animal manures, and one using only plant-based fertility.

Agriculture hasn't sat still over the past 40 years, and the trial has adapted over time to keep pace with the changes. In 2008, all three treatments were split into full- and reduced-tillage treatments, and genetically modified crops were added to the conventional one.

To commemorate the trial's 40th year, the Rodale Institute released a report on its findings to date. The report can be had free in electronic format from the organization's website.

[Read the Farming Systems Trial Report](#)

Stewardship Week: One Water

If you're working day-in, day-out at being a better steward of the environment, it's good to pause now and again to reflect on why you're doing it in the first place - and to spread the word to others who may not be as tuned in to the topic. [National Stewardship Week](#) provides that opportunity.

This year, Stewardship Week runs April 30 - May 7, with the **theme, "One Water."**

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) started Stewardship Week back in 1955, to encourage people all over the U.S. to focus on stewardship. Running from the last Sunday of April to the first Sunday of May, it is one of the largest conservation-related events in the world.



According to the NACD website, "the program relies on **conservation districts sharing and promoting stewardship and conservation through field days, educational programming, and workshops to educate citizens** about the need to care for our natural resources. Many district activities extend beyond the one-week observance to include an entire year of outreach."

"Stewardship Week helps to remind us all of **the power each person has to conserve natural resources** and improve the world. **When everyone works together** with their local conservation district, **that power continuously grows.**"

The Stewardship Week page on the NACD website links to a variety of educational materials, as well as an entry form for a poster contest. Why not take a few minutes to look through these offerings, learn about watersheds, and reflect on the importance of water conservation?

Video Segment on Historical Dragonflies at Cavanal Lake

Outdoor Oklahoma recently aired a video segment filmed in part on the Kerr Ranch, focusing on [dragonflies](#) around Cavanal Lake.

In the segment, Brenda Smith, of the OU Biological Survey, and Jena Donnell, with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, hit the shore of the lake with sweep nets, catching, identifying, and releasing dragonflies, and discussing the site's importance for the history of dragonfly study in Oklahoma.



The lake is famous in the history of Oklahoma odonatology - the study of dragonflies and damselflies - because the first known recordings of species in that group were made there, in 1907, by an Indiana banker named E.B. Williamson.

The segment also highlights the importance of citizen scientists, and mentions websites where dragonfly sightings can be logged in larger scientific databases.

As you can see in the video segment, Cavanal Lake still has healthy populations of many dragonfly species. [Watch and learn](#) more about these fascinating creatures!

Spring Events: Earth Day, Monarch Research, Soil/Human Health, Stewardship Week, Grant Deadlines....

Learn about earth-friendly habits for the home and yard at OSU Extension's **Earth Kind workshop** (Apr. 22, Oklahoma City). A week later, head to Lawrence, Kansas, for the nearest **Mother Earth News Fair** (Apr. 29).

Online, you can **get the latest on monarch butterfly research** from Monarch Joint Venture (Apr. 25), learn about the **links between soil health and human health** (Apr. 26), and get trained to **monitor monarch larvae as a citizen scientist** (Apr. 29).

It's **Stewardship Week** (Apr. 30 - May 7), brought to you by the National Association of Conservation Districts, with the theme of One Water.

Application deadlines are coming up soon for several **grant programs**: the **Living Classroom Grant** (Apr. 30), and USDA's **Farmers Market Promotion Program, Local Food Promotion Program, and Regional Food System Partnerships** (all May 2).

The **Kerr Center's [tour](#) season is underway**. Tours are second Tuesdays, by appointment - **[come visit us!](#)**

There are many more sustainable agriculture educational activities going on, and we're adding more to the calendar all the time. Get the latest on our 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.

APR 22 Sat	Earth Kind Earth Day Workshop @ Oklahoma City (Will Rogers Gardens) Apr 22 @ 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	+
APR 25 Tue	Monarch Research Review (MJV webinar) @ online Apr 25 @ 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Tickets +
APR 26 Wed	Exploring the Link Between Soil and Human Health (webinar) @ online Apr 26 @ 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Tickets +
APR 29 Sat	Mother Earth News Fair – Kansas @ Lawrence, KS Apr 29 – Apr 30 <small>all-day</small>	Tickets +
	Monarch Larva Monitoring Project Training – Northern States @ online Apr 29 @ 10:00 am – 3:00 pm	Tickets +
APR 30 Sun	National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Stewardship Week Apr 30 – May 7 <small>all-day</small>	+
	OKC Living Classroom Grant Program (application deadline) Apr 30 @ 5:00 pm	+
MAY 2 Tue	Grant Application Deadline: Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) May 2 @ 10:59 pm	+
	Grant Application Deadline: Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) May 2 @ 10:59 pm	+
	Grant Application Deadline: Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) May 2 @ 10:59 pm	+

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