Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
August 2023

It's hot enough to pop corn on the stalks lately - and things are certainly popping at the Kerr Center! **We're hiring for two new positions**, and we're putting on a **free workshop and tour of our elderberry plots**, on September 14.

Elsewhere in this issue, we get back to the roots with a look at **what sustainable agriculture is really all about**, thanks to an update of a classic SARE publication, and share some **promising - and urgently needed - new strategies for postponing insect pests' resistance to biopesticides**.

Also, David Redhage shares the reason behind one of our new hires - **we're part of a new USDA Regional Food Business Center grant!**

In all this heat, how about "popping" on over to our website and supporting our work with a **donation to the Kerr Center**? **We appreciate it!**

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President's Note: Heartland Regional Food Business Center

The Kerr Center is part of the USDA **Regional Food Business Center** grant program.

There are 12 Regional Food Business Center grants. We are part of the **Heartland Regional Food Business Center**, which includes Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. It is administered through the University of Nebraska.

The goal is to develop an asset map for local foods and to help **grow the local food system in the five-state area**.

Opening: Full Charge Bookkeeper and Executive Administrative Assistant

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture is taking applications for the position of **Full Charge Bookkeeper and Executive Administrative Assistant**.

The successful candidate will be a highly skilled and motivated person to take care of all the bookkeeping needs of a non-profit organization and also provide administrative support to the President/CEO.

The ideal person will have high attention to detail, accuracy and organization and will be proficient in Microsoft Office and Quickbooks.

Qualifications include a Bachelor's or Associate's degree in business and/or accounting or equivalent experience with a minimum of three years of experience in an office setting.

Salary is competitive and will be commensurate with education and experience. The Kerr Center also provides an excellent benefits package along with opportunities for professional development.

See full job description on our website.

Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Please submit a resume with three references along with a cover letter/narrative of experience, skills, and goals. Send information to: Shelley Shipman, Kerr Center, 24456 Kerr Road, Poteau, OK 74953, or email Shelley at **sbennett@kerrcenter.com**. All applications will be kept confidential.

Opening: Grant Program Manager

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture is taking applications for a **Program Manager** in support of the **Regional Food Business Center grant**.

In this role, the Program Manager will be a highly motivated, knowledgeable, organized, and collaborative individual with a background in resource identification, information analysis and assessment, and preparation and management of work plans and reports.

Qualifications include a Bachelor's degree in agriculture or related field and five (5) years' experience in ag marketing or local food systems.

This is a full-time, limited-term grant-funded position and is expected to end June 30, 2026. Salary is competitive and will be commensurate with education and experience. The Kerr Center also provides an excellent benefits package.

View full job description.

Resumes / CVs will be accepted until the position is filled. Please submit a resume with three references along with a cover letter/narrative of experience, skills, and goals. Send information to: Shelley Shipman, Kerr Center, 24456 Kerr Road, Poteau, OK 74953, or email Shelley at **sbennett@kerrcenter.com**. All applications will be kept confidential.

Free Kerr Center Elderberry Workshop Sept. 14

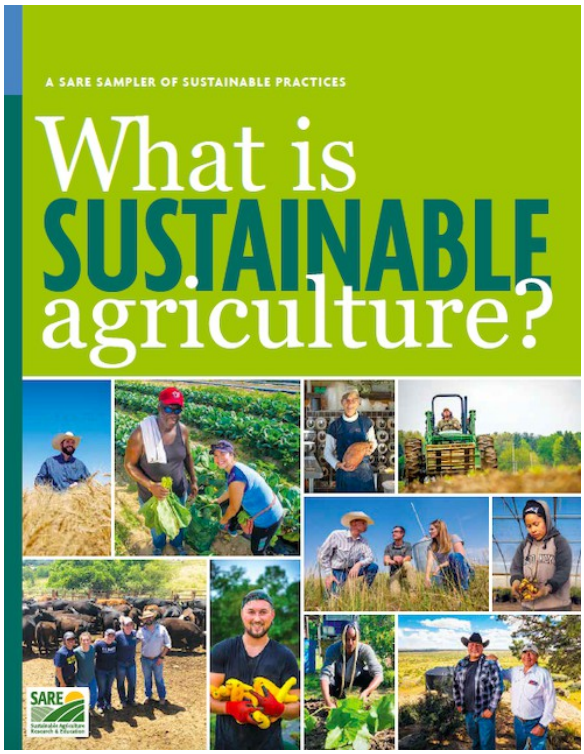
At this **free** **elderberry workshop**, attendees will tour the elderberry research plots at the Kerr Center Horticulture Farm.

The plots contain twelve different selected **elderberry** varieties in a scientific design, and are part of a multi-state research grant directed by the University of Missouri, with additional plots located in Missouri, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

The workshop will cover current elderberry **research, production, and marketing**. Several **experts in the field will make presentations, including Dr. Andrew Thomas** from the University of Missouri.

Snacks will be provided. Registration is limited to 30. Though there is no charge for the workshop, **registration is required by September 12**. For more information or to register, contact the Kerr Center by **email** or phone (918-647-9123).

What Is Sustainable Agriculture?



At first glance, it might seem a little strange for us to focus a newsletter article on the question of **what sustainable agriculture is**. After all, we practice it every day, and we have a **whole section of our website** dedicated to it.

Then again, a big part of our work is **introducing the concept to people who have never encountered it before**. On top of that, the term **"sustainable agriculture" means different things to different people**, and has many different aspects. It's a good idea to keep that thought fresh in mind, even for those of us who have been striving toward a more sustainable agriculture for many years.

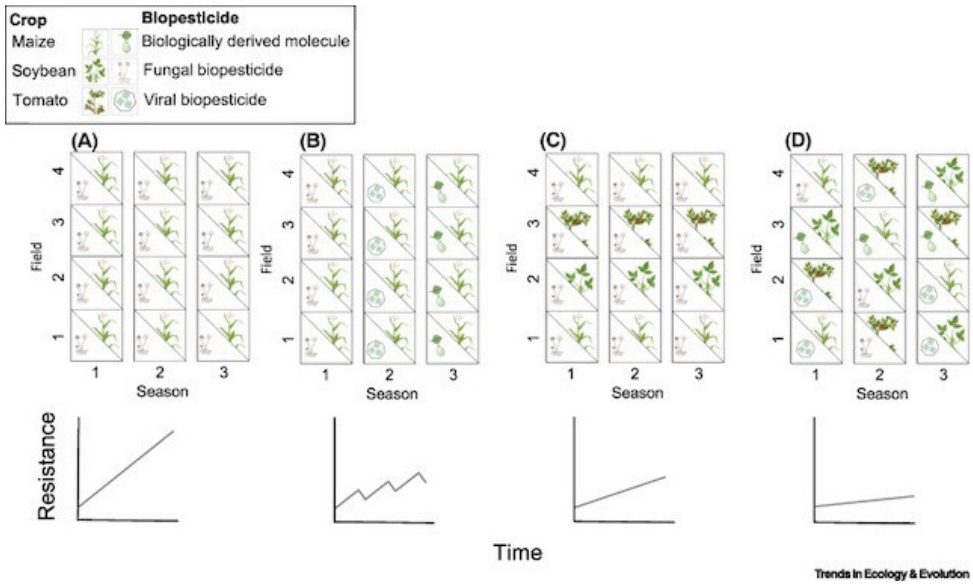
With all that in mind, we're happy to share the news that **SARE has recently updated its sustainable agriculture primer, *What Is Sustainable Agriculture?***

The 12-page document spends a page **defining sustainable agriculture in broad terms**, focusing on **three goals common to all sustainable operations: profit, stewardship, and quality of life**. It then lists several categories of **practices that have been proven time and again to contribute to sustainability**. These include things like climate resilience, soil health, health and wellbeing of people, ecological pest management, and biological diversity.

The bulk of the publication then delves into detailing **specific SARE grants that have supported work in each of these categories of proven practices**. For instance, under the Livestock Health and Husbandry heading, there's an account of a goat rancher who used a SARE Farmer/Rancher grant to develop new strategies for dealing with predators when moving her operation exposed her stock to much higher levels of predation. There's also a story of a SARE Graduate Student grant that funded research showing that sheep in **silvopasture** systems had lower temperatures - and stress hormone levels - when they had access to shade in hot weather.

What Is Sustainable Agriculture? is available **free in both print and pdf format** from the SARE website.

Postponing Insect Resistance to Biopesticides



The so-called treadmill effect has long been a **problem with synthetic pesticides**, with r**esearchers trying to develop new classes of chemicals before insect pests develop resistance to the current ones**.

Biopesticides brought the hope of a less toxic alternative - hopefully, one to which pests' resistance would also develop more slowly. Lately, though, researchers are sounding the alarm that **pests are developing resistance to biopesticides as well**.

Now, a new **study** suggests **ways to slow that process down**.

In some ways, it shouldn't surprise anyone that insect resistance to biopesticides has emerged. **Insect pests can quickly develop resistance to synthetic pesticides because the chemical formula of any given pesticide is fixed, unchanging.** A mutation in a single gene can be enough to confer resistance. When you're spraying the same chemical over millions of acres, such a mutation is bound to occur - or even exist already.

So far, **most biopesticides aren't all that different**. Take Bt as an example. In nature, the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* makes a toxin that's harmful to insect pests. Commercial Bt producers brew that same toxin up in a lab, package it, and sell it to farmers to put on their crop. But, produced and marketed in that way, it's just as fixed and unchanging as a synthetic pesticide.

In fact, insect **pests have developed resistance to Bt, but so far there are no known cases of resistance to living populations of *B. thuringiensis***. Because it's living, changing, adapting from one generation to the next, it can co-evolve with the pests, and prevent - or at least delay - their development of resistance.

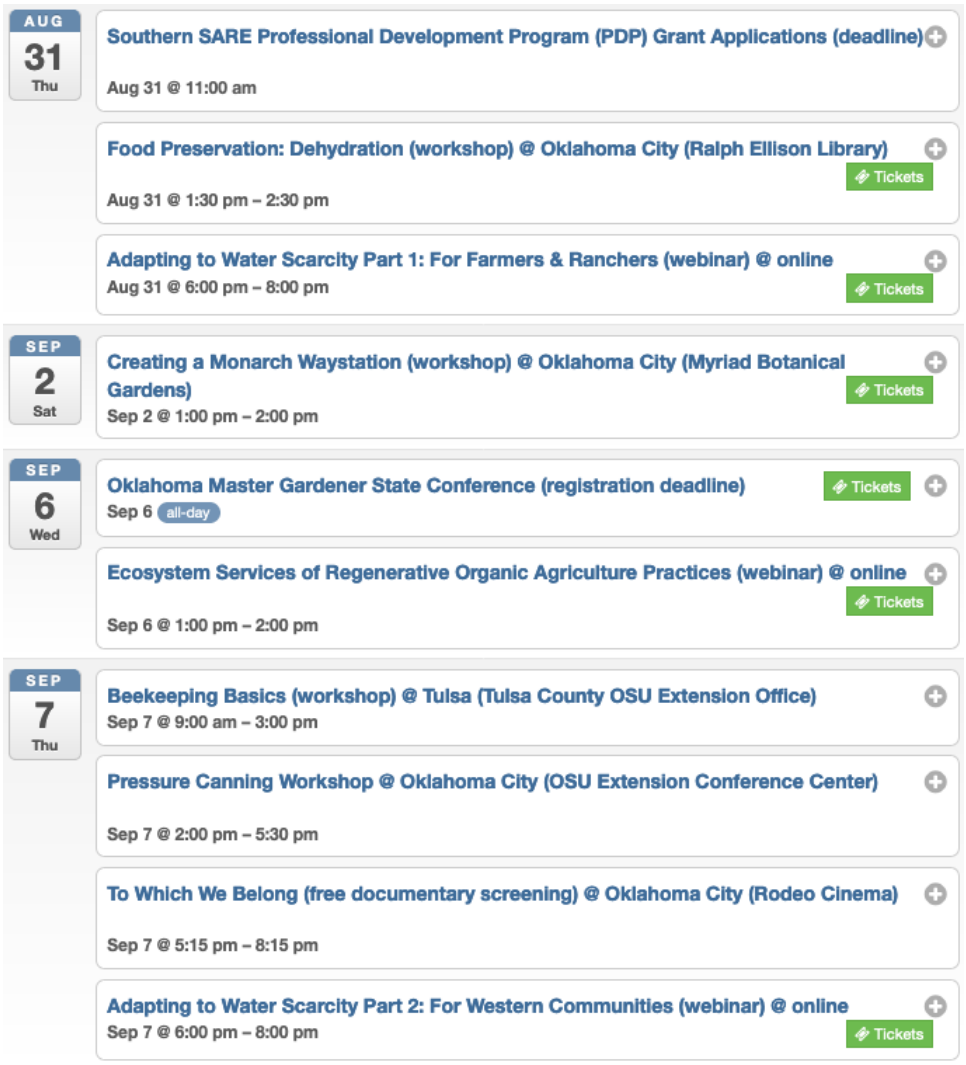
With that key difference in mind, a team of researchers recently put forth a **new strategy for delaying the development of resistance to biopesticides**. They argue for using diversity in many aspects of cropping systems: changing up the mix of crops planted in both space and time via **rotations**, as well as alternating which biopesticides are used. They also **promote living beneficials, with their capacity to adapt and change, over static biopesticides**.

Continue reading....

Late Summer Events: Food Preservation, SARE PDP, Monarch Waystations, Master Gardener, Beekeeping....

Don't miss our [elderberry workshop], coming up on September 14 right here in Poteau!

OSU Extension is running **food preservation workshops** in OKC on **dehydration** (Aug. 31) and **pressure canning** (Sep. 7). There are also workshops coming up on **monarch waystations** (Sep. 2, OKC) and **beekeeping** (Sep. 7, Tulsa), and a **free screening of the documentary "To Which We Belong"** (Sep. 7, OKC). **Online**, you can learn about **regenerative agriculture's ecosystem services** (Sep. 6) and **coping with drought** (Aug. 31, Sept. 7).



The **application deadline** for **SARE Professional Development Program (PDP)** grants is Aug. 31.

Register by Sep. 6 for the Oklahoma Master Gardener State Conference Oct. 5-6.

The **Kerr Center's tour season wraps up September 12**. **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.

Support the Kerr Center

Since 1965 the Kerr Center has been reaching out to folks in Oklahoma and beyond. Today, the Friends of the Kerr Center help us continue this vital work! If you enjoy reading this newsletter or visiting our website, please consider making a gift to the Kerr Center today!

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