# Field Notes

## Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

***E-Field Notes***
**September 2024**

Happy fall, y'all!

David Redhage launches this month's issue with an **update on our survey of organic growers** in the Mid-South region.

We'll be at the **ARegenerate Conference** in Ft. Smith at the start of November, and we hope to see you there, too! Check it out, and make plans now!

You may have heard of the **white-nose syndrome** that's been **devastating bat colonies - but how is that tied to increasing death rates in human babies**? Read on to find out.

**Resources from our July elderberry workshop** are now **available free online - along with some extras!**

**In this issue:**


- **President's Note: Organic Growers Survey**
- **ARegenerate Conference**
- **Study Links Bat Die-offs to Increased Infant Mortality**
- **Elderberry Resources**
- **Early Fall Events: Native Plants, Renewable Energy Grants, Entrepreneurship, Monarchs, Conferences....**


How can we afford to hand out such valuable information for free? Because of your generous donations to the Kerr Center, of course! Thank you!

# President's Note: Organic Growers Survey

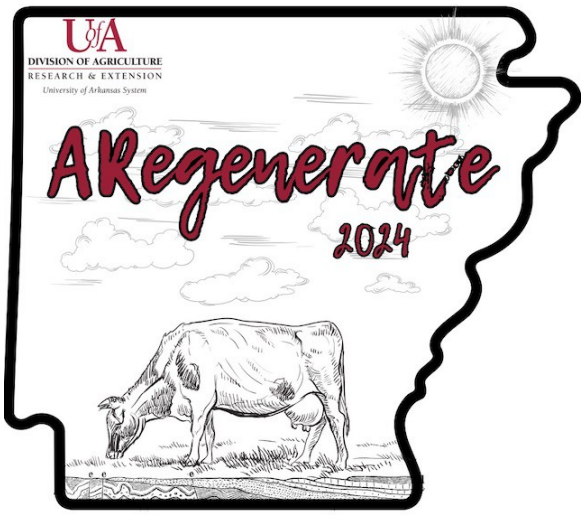
The Kerr Center has been working with the University of Missouri on a grant to **survey certified organic growers in the Mid-South**. This area covers southern Missouri, eastern Oklahoma, northern Arkansas and western Kentucky and Tennessee.

**There seem to be fewer certified organic growers in this region** than in other areas of the United States. The grant survey was an attempt to **understand the challenges growers are facing in this region** and how to address some of those challenges.

Here is a link to a one-hour **webinar** which presented the **results of our survey**.

# ARegenerate Conference

At the **ARegenerate Conference and Expo**, learn about **regenerative agriculture**: a farming and grazing method that aims to rebuild soil organic matter and restore degraded soil biodiversity.




- Learn: Principles in building soil health, water conservation, and climate change mitigation on farms and ranches.
- Grow: Build plans to apply techniques on farm and ranch operations.
- Network: Connect with experienced farmers and professionals to help you succeed.

Key speakers include Emily Jost (Mashie Farm), James Maginot (Beyond Organics), and Andy Goldsmith (Goats on the Go).

Single-day registration costs $5 per person per day. Full registration, including breakfast both days and lunch on Nov. 9, costs $75.

A **pre-conference farm tour** on November 7, hosted by seasoned homesteaders Andy and Hedwig Goldsmith of Goats on the Go Farm, will feature **beehives, high tunnel, goats, silvopasture, barn, and orchard**. (**Tour registration** costs an additional $25.)

For more information or to register, visit the **registration page**, or contact Amanda Spradlin by **email** or phone (479-484-7737).

# Study Links Bat Die-offs to Increased Infant Mortality

We've been keeping an eye on **white-nose syndrome in bats** for a while now. In case you haven't, it's a fungal disease that first appeared in North America around 2006. It keeps the bats from being able to hibernate comfortably, so that they keep awakening throughout the winter, thus running out of energy and starving to death before spring comes.

In infected colonies, white-nose syndrome kills something like 70% of bats. When you combine that with the gee-whiz factoids about the thousand insects that a single bat can eat in just one night's foraging, it can make you start to wonder: **what happens to all the bugs when most of the bats die off?**

One researcher, Eyal Frank, at the University of Chicago, did more than just wonder. He came up with an answer - and that answer led to more questions, and so on, leading to a recently published article in the prestigious academic journal *Science*.

In a nutshell, the article suggests that **after white-nose syndrome causes a bat die-off in a given area... the infant mortality rate in humans goes up**. On first hearing, it doesn't make any sense - but there are a few steps in between.

Spelled out, they go like this:
- White-nose syndrome causes a steep population decline in local bats.
- The local **insects, free from bat predation, start attacking farm crops**.
- In response to the pestilence, **farmers start applying more insecticides**.
- Even used according to the label, the residual toxicity of the additional insecticides leads to **more infant deaths** in the area.

To put numbers on these patterns, the 70% reduction in bat populations is followed by a 30% increase in pesticide applications, which is followed in turn by an 8% increase in infant mortality.

The paper doesn't conclusively prove the links it suggests, but it does document that the same sequence of events has occurred in hundreds of counties, and the explanation it proposes is plausible. It's an eye-catching demonstration of the cliché that **in ecology, everything is connected** - as well as an illustration of the law of unintended consequences.

The **study** is available online.

# Elderberry Resources

**Resources from July's elderberry workshop** at the Kerr Center are now available **free online**.

If you attended the workshop, some of these materials may look familiar, but this collection includes additional items as well.

The publications and tools included are provided by the **Advancing American Elderberry** project and the Kerr Center.

**Fill out this form** to receive a link to the resources.

# Early Fall Events: Native Plants, Renewable Energy Grants, Entrepreneurship, Monarchs, Conferences....

The Oklahoma Native Plant Network's **Fall Native Plant Festival** is September 28, followed by Martin Park Nature Center's **Native Seed Swap** October 12 (both in OKC).

Martin Park Nature Center is also hosting a **Monarch Migration Celebration** (Oct. 5), or you can flutter along yourself (vicariously) in the **Symbolic Migration Project** (early bird deadline Sep. 30).

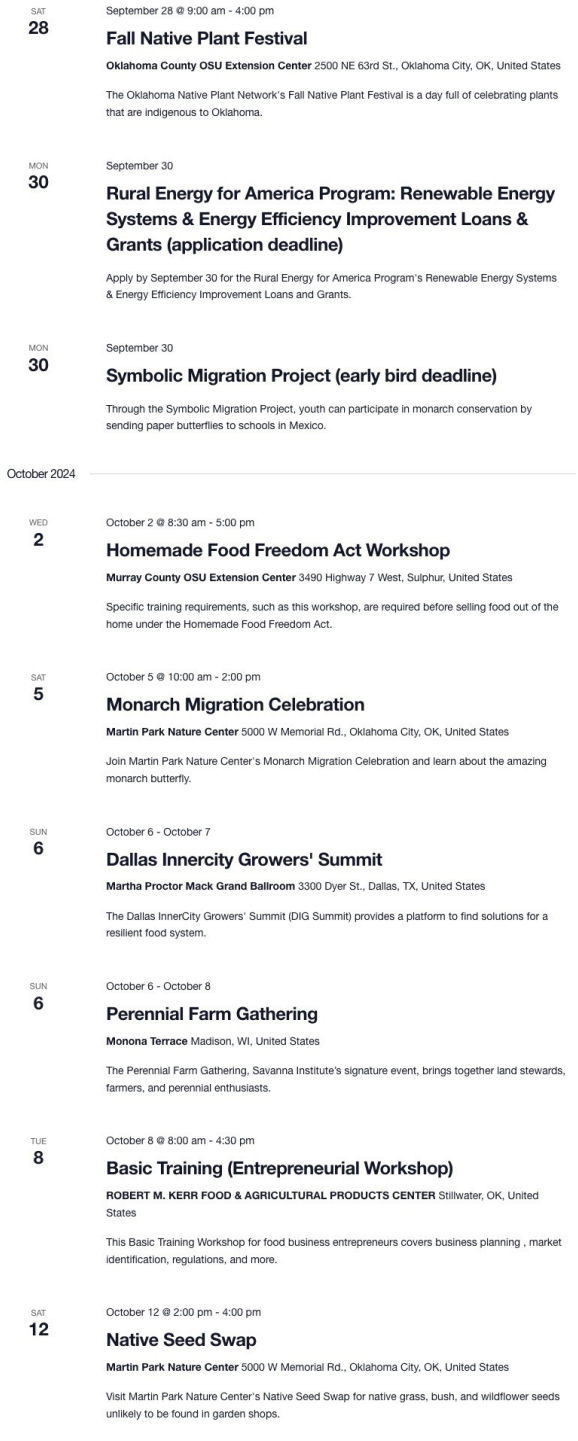
Learn the legalities of selling food out of the home in the **Homemade Food Freedom Act workshop** (Oct. 2, Sulphur), and get **Basic Training** on such **food entrepreneurship** (Oct. 8, Stillwater).

Conference-wise, the **Dallas Innercity Growers' Summit** and the **Perennial Farm Gathering** (Madison, WI) both kick off on October 6.

Applications for loans and grants for **renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements** through the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) are due September 30. Also, don't forget that applications for **Business Builder Grants** from the Heartland Regional Food Business Center are due October 15.

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.



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