Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
June 2025

How do you know if you're successful at farming? How do you even know if you're a farmer? David Redhage shares his perspective.

It's summer already! If you need an excuse to retreat inside from the heat, how about making a start on that **farm business plan** you've been meaning to put together? **SARE's new bulletin** will make it less painful.

Your cattle are probably getting into the shade, too - but don't let them into the creek! **The benefits of fencing cattle out of streams are so far-reaching that even New Yorkers have taken notice!**

Have **insect pests** reared their heads in your fields or gardens? Why not **plant some native plants at the edges to attract their natural enemies**? New research shows that **even two plant species can make a big difference**.

Another thing that makes a big difference is your decision to **donate to the Kerr Center**. Every contribution, no matter how small, helps us keep working to support sustainable agriculture. **Thank you!**

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President's Note: Am I a Successful Farmer?

I wrote the following up in response to an email request in 2019 about identifying a farmer, and thought I would share it.

What we choose to call a successful farmer depends on your definition of a farmer:

1. **Full-time farmers** (no given scale) who **make their entire living from the farm**.

2. **Full-time farmer with spouse or family members who work off the farm** to even out the yearly cash flow and/or to provide insurance. The farm provides enough net income to allow the family to live should they lose the off-farm income.

3. **Part-time farmers with off-farm jobs**. The farm positively supplements the family's yearly income, but would not be sustainable without the off-farm income.

4. **Work full time off the farm and manage the farm as a lifestyle choice**. The off-farm income subsidizes the farm operation.

5. **Home gardeners/small-scale livestock producers** use production to **supplement the family food supply**. (This can fit into any of the above categories, but recognizes the non-cash contribution to the family's yearly budget.)

The USDA uses a definition based on the dollar amount of product sold to determine if farms qualify for federal programs. **Under the USDA definition, a farm needs to produce and sell at least $1,000 worth of agricultural products during the year.** While this threshold is low, remember, it says "sell" the product. If you are growing for yourself, or home gardening without selling, you don't meet the definition.

The way I see it, **all the above are farmers who at some level produce food**, and this includes urban gardeners/farmers. However, I think most of the public consider "real" farmers in terms of #1 and #2, and possibly #3. I don't think the public looks at the other categories as farmers, but they are food producers.

I think **all are important, since they help the rest of the public understand how our food is grown**. Granted, those in definition #4 and #5 who just have home gardens don't necessarily farm year-round, unless they have season extension. The off-farm income takes pressure off making a living from just the farm, so crop failures are not as stressful.

What's the value of farming if you don't sell what you grow?

The Basics of Farm Business Planning

Opportunities in Agriculture

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The Basics of Farm Business Planning

Your business plan is a roadmap to the success of your farm or ranch. Photo by Preston Keres, USDA

SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND RANCHING MEANS taking care of the land, the environment, people and the community, while the farm business makes a profit. Many farmers and ranchers choose sustainable farming and ranching as a lifestyle that reflects their values. Common goals include:

- Having a good quality of life for themselves, their families and their employees
- Producing fresh, healthy foods for their communities
- Taking care of the land for the next generation
- Helping their communities understand and accept their way of farming

Farm business planning is critical because it helps you to identify and achieve long-term goals for yourself, your family, your business and your land.

Creating a solid business plan for your operation can be an involved process. This publication will introduce you to its basics, including what a business plan is, why you need one, and what to expect from the planning process when you're ready to get started.

This publication summarizes the five tasks (or steps) to help you create a written business plan. These tasks are based on SARE's *Building a Sustainable Business* (www.sare.org/business), an in-depth workbook that guides readers through the many details of the planning process.

Along with information about each task, *Building a Sustainable Business* provides dozens of worksheets you can use to create a unique plan for your own situation. When you're ready to start planning, consider using the guidance and worksheets in Building a Sustainable Business.

See the "Resources" section of this guide for more publications on a range of related topics, such as federal funding opportunities, planning the transition to organic, setting up a legal structure for your farm business, and adapting your farm to a changing climate.

Also available at www.sare.org/business-planning-basics, or order a free hard copy at (301) 779-1007.

SARE Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

4/25

Most of us glaze over pretty fast when we hear the term "business planning." We'd rather be out planting, or plowing, or really just about anything else!

But having **a solid business plan makes a huge difference in any ag operation's odds of turning a profit**, and therefore its sustainability. That's why it featured so heavily in our **beginning farmer trainings**.

Now, SARE Outreach has a new bulletin, ***The Basics of Farm Business Planning***, that condenses the process of making a farm business plan into a more digestible form.

The **free publication** "offers a framework to help farmers clarify their goals, evaluate their resources, and build financially and ecologically sound enterprises."

It lays out five essential planning steps:

- Identify values
- Understand your farm's history and current situation
- Define vision, mission, and goals
- Strategic planning and evaluation
- Present, implement, and monitor

The Basics of Farm Business Planning condenses concepts from SARE's earlier ***Building a Sustainable Business*** workbook. Though longer, the workbook contains "real-life examples of how farmers have used business planning to launch new enterprises, expand sustainably, and achieve personal and financial goals."

The Basics of Farm Business Planning is available **free in both print and digital format** from SARE's website, or by phone (301-779-1007). Educators can also order it in quantity, still free, for use in educational workshops, classes, or tours.

Download *The Basics of Farm Business Planning.*

Clear Country Streams Catch City's Eye: Oklahoma Water Conservation

Oklahoma farmers' and ranchers' water conservation successes recently drew praise from an unlikely source: the *New York Times*.

Last month, the newspaper ran a **feature article** on how **conservation practices** - mainly, limiting livestock access to waterways - **have removed around 100 Oklahoma streams from "contaminated" status**. According to the article, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says **no other state has improved that many streams**.

The practices that the article describes are ones that we've **long used on the Kerr Center ranch**, and the **conservation benefits** that result are ones that **we've seen and documented**.

Fencing cattle out of creeks and streams takes a few acres out of production, but the resulting benefits - **cleaner and more abundant water**, and resulting increases in **forage production** and improvements in **animal health** - more than make up for that loss.

Other changes, like **increases in wildlife numbers** - from common species such as deer and coyotes, to showy ones like bald eagles - may not show up as directly on the bottom line, but still convey benefits to the overall ecosystem, while also enhancing our own species' quality of life.

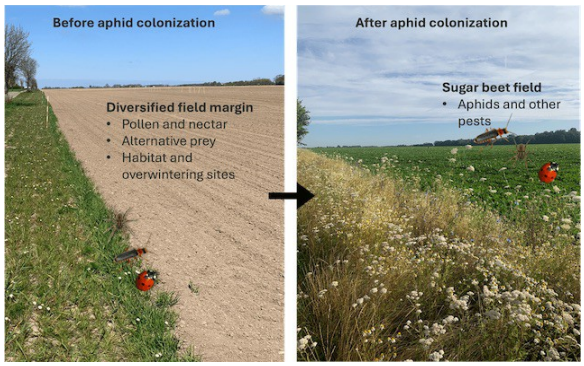
As the article points out, **these changes often begin much more rapidly than one might expect**. On our website, you can view time series photographs of a riparian corridor improvement that began when we first fenced cattle out of a stream in 1998. The initial improvements in vegetation cover were quite sudden, and still continue today.

If keeping cattle away from streams removes their access to water altogether, **watering points** will need to be installed. This, too, incurs financial costs, but also brings additional benefits - like spreading cattle's grazing - and manure - more evenly over pastures, further improving forage production. State and federal **cost-share programs** can help to limit the initial investment required.

You can read the *New York Times* article **here**, and learn **how we conserve water on the Kerr Center ranch** **here** and **here**.

Two's Company: Just a Pair of Wildflower Species Can Boost Beneficial Insects

In poker, holding just a pair probably won't keep you in the game long. In farming, though, it can be all you need to fill your fields beneficial insect predators looking for a lunch of crop pests.



By now, plenty of people recognize that **planting native vegetation in the vicinity of crops** - say, in strips along the edges of fields or gardens - **can boost populations of pollinators and other beneficial insects**.

However, many may still hold back from implementing that practice, unsure about what mix of native plants to use or daunted by the thought of how many species to plant.

New research shows that **it doesn't take that many species. In fact, just two species of native plants, planted in a strip along a field's edge, can increase the number of natural enemies of crop pests by 70%.**

Beyond that, **you can get another 4% increase in beneficial insect numbers for each additional species of native plant** (on average).

The study, published this spring in the journal *Agriculture, Ecosystems, and Environment*, did a "meta-analysis" of other, earlier research projects to develop these findings. It compiled data from 24 studies.

As with most things ecological, the details get a little messy. Not surprisingly, **the number of beneficial insects depends heavily on *which* two species the mix includes**.

Focusing on perennial species can save time, money, and effort, since once established, these species do not have to be replanted every year.

More specifically, says study author Nika Jachowicz, "Flowers such as **yarrow, ox-eye daisy, bellis, and various umbelliferous flowers are suitable for flower strips** because they have **open flowers with easy access to pollen and nectar, which is an advantage for predatory insects, parasitic wasps, and solitary bees**."

The Kerr Center's horticulture program has already been putting some of these principles to work - such as in the "beetle banks" of eastern gamagrass planted at the ends of our elderberry rows. While most of our work with native plants has focused on supporting **pollinators** rather than **natural enemies** of pests, **some species do both jobs**.

Our website is full of information on native plant species. Pick any two, and let us know what happens!

Early Summer Events: Food/Produce Safety, Small Ag Businesses Online, Native Plants, Native Food Systems Scholarship....

Early July is brimming with opportunities to **get your food and produce safety certifications**:

- **Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course** (July 7; online)
- **Food Safety Training** (July 8; online)
- **Preventive Controls for Human Food course** (July 11-13; Stillwater)

Learn how to **take your small agriculture business online** in a free webinar July 8.

The Oklahoma Native Plant Network's **Professional Growers Workshop** takes place July 10 in Oklahoma City.

Apply by July 11 for the **Native Agriculture and Food Systems Scholarship** from the First Nations Development Institute.

The next **Kerr Center tour** is July 8 - 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.

MON 7

July 7 @ 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Remote Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course

online

This Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course is one way to satisfy the FSMA Produce Safety Rule requirement.

TUE 8

July 8 @ 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Kerr Center Tour

Kerr Center Poteau, OK, United States

Guided tours of the Kerr Center are available one day each month, on the second Tuesday, April through September, for $10 per person.

TUE 8

July 8 @ 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

How to Digitize Your Small Agriculture Business

Oklahoma County OSU Extension Center 2500 NE 63rd St., Oklahoma City, OK, United States

This workshop aims to help small farmers and artisan producers to digitize their small agriculture business.

TUE 8

July 8 @ 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm

Food Safety Training (online)

online

This free online Food Handlers Food Safety training is for anyone working in food service or cooking for large groups.

WED 9

July 9 - July 11

Preventive Controls for Human Food – Qualified Individual Training (PCQI V2.0)

ROBERT M. KERR FOOD & AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS CENTER Stillwater, OK, United States

This preventive food controls course fulfills the food safety plan training requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).

THU 10

July 10 @ 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

Oklahoma Native Plant Network Professional Growers Workshop

Resonant Head 400 Southwest 25th Street, Oklahoma City, United States

Join the second Oklahoma Native Plant Network Professional Growers Workshop for engaging presentations tailored to growers of all scales.

FRI 11

July 11 @ 6:00 pm

Native Agriculture & Food Systems Scholarship (application deadline)

July 11 is the deadline for applications to the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Scholarship from the First Nations Development Institute.

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!

Quick Links...

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