Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
July 2025

It's July! **Farmers markets are thriving, invasive ticks are spreading, butterfly populations need help bouncing back from twenty years of decline** - and we're here to tell you about all of it!

First, though, tune in to how David Redhage's **home garden** is doing so far this summer - his **challenges** may mirror yours.

With an eye toward **National Farmers Market Week** early next month, we take a fresh look at **farmers markets - where to find them, how they've been doing** state- and nationwide, **and the benefits they bring** to local communities..

The Xerces Society has an **antidote to recent bad news on the butterfly front: a roadmap to help them recover**.

OSU veterinarians are keeping a wary eye on **the "vampire" Asian Longhorned Tick** - and are recruiting ranchers to lend a hand by sending in samples.

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We don't need a study to know that our own roadmap to success gets much clearer when you **donate to the Kerr Center**. **Thanks!**

President's Note: Home Garden Challenges

This year has been particularly challenging for me in my home garden. It was a wet and cool spring, followed by a mild and wet early summer. Now it is dry and hot, hot, hot. Gardening under these conditions can be difficult.

I don't have time to grow a very large garden, so I usually just plant tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, beans, and cantaloupe, and just enough to eat out of the garden. We don't have time to can or preserve anything.

This year, cool, wet conditions slowed establishment. Then, out of nowhere, I have a pack rat problem. I have never had a problem with rats or mice in my gardens. This is a first. I have found mature zucchini squash hollowed out, cucumbers with bites in the side, and cantaloupe with bite marks as well.

The tomatoes are not bothered, but the yields are very low. So far, I have only harvested one cantaloupe. The plants don't seem to be setting fruit. I'm wondering if it's a pollination issue. Maybe it's a combination of heat, low pollinator numbers, and some disease issues with wet conditions.

Despite the issues, I still enjoy growing a garden each year. I guess when it comes to the garden, I'm an eternal optimist, thinking maybe this year will be great.

I hope everyone else is having a good garden season.

Oklahoma Farmers Markets

National Farmers Market Week is just around the corner. Do you know where to find your nearest farmers market? If not, **the internet is bursting at the seams with free tools to help** you find them.

Oklahoma Agritourism, Shape Your Future, the National Farmers Market Directory, and American Farmland Trust all have **online databases of farmers markets, searchable by location**. It's worth looking at all four, because several markets are listed in one but not the others.

Taken all together, these listings tally to **well over a hundred farmers markets in the state** - and that's not counting all the other direct-sales venues, like hubs, farm stands, and U-pick operations.

That may be a bit of an overcount, but it's still well above the 40 "registered" farmers markets listed in *Closer to Home*, nearly 20 years ago. (The Made in Oklahoma network no longer maintains that registry.)

The number of farms selling direct to the customer hasn't kept pace with that increase in the number of farmers markets, but the amount of money changing hands certainly has.

The last time we looked at those numbers, **the number of Oklahoma farms selling direct** (a number that includes farm stands, U-pick, and other outlets, in addition to farmers markets), was 2,344. That's from the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Since then, the 2022 Census has been released, showing **an increase of nearly 200 farms - around 8% - to 2,535**.

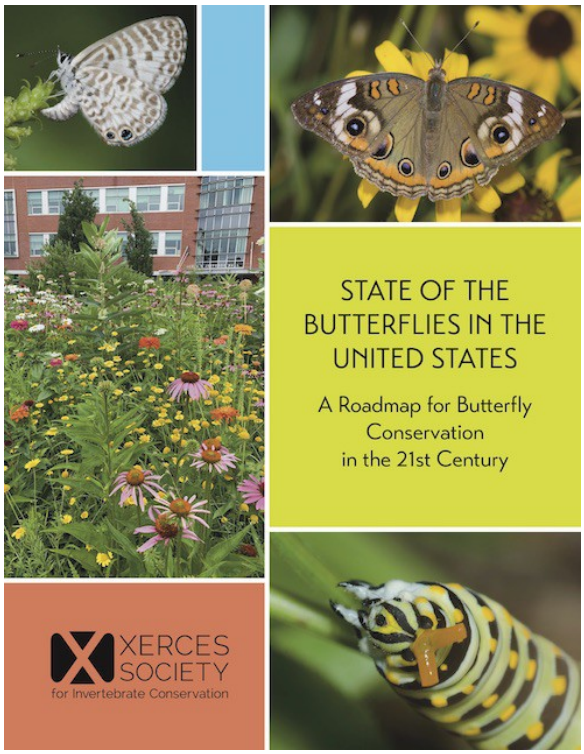
Over the same period, the **total value of direct sales in the state climbed from $9.9 million to $14.5 million - a nearly 50% increase**. (We'd speculated in the earlier article that direct sales might see a boost from COVID, and that certainly appears to have been the case.)

Oklahoma has beaten the national trend over the same period, which has seen direct sales increase by less (16%), while the number of farms with direct sales has actually dropped by 10%.

Taken all together, those numbers mean that **the value of direct sales per farm grew 30% nationwide, to $27,981. In Oklahoma, the growth was higher, at 36%, but the average value was still only $5,748.**

What's the big deal about farmers markets, anyway?

A Roadmap to Butterfly Recovery



Back in April, we shared the news that **butterfly numbers have dropped by 20% in the past twenty years**. We weren't the only ones to have noticed.

The Xerces Society has just published a **new report**, ***State of the Butterflies in the United States***, that both delves deeper into those findings, and also lays out a "roadmap for butterfly conservation" for the rest of this century.

There are around 650 different resident butterfly species in the lower 48 states. Of those, the study authors were able to collect data on 554, and there was enough data to estimate population trends for 342.

(Alarmingly, this means that, **for nearly half the butterfly species in the U.S., there's not enough data to know whether the population is declining!** Also, the **declines are hitting common and widespread species, not just scarce ones**.)

Out of those 342 species, 65 (around 20%) had actually grown in numbers by 10% or more over the past 20 years. Another 32 species had held steady, with populations changing by less than 10% either way.

The rest - **245 species, or 72% of those in the study - had declined by 10% or more**. Of those, **143 had declined by more than half, and 24 species had declined by 90% or more**.

The Xerces Society report breaks those figures down further, by region and state. **The overall decline in butterfly numbers in the southwest region, to which Oklahoma belongs, was the highest of any region - 37%.**

Of the 70 species in the southwestern region, 69 are declining. Forty-eight of those - including the one increasing species, the Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*), as well as the one undergoing the steepest decline, 96%, the Painted Crescent (*Phyciodes picta*) - occur in Oklahoma.

The Xerces society report goes much farther than simply rehashing the original study's bad news in greater detail. It also lays out a detailed program for rebuilding butterfly numbers.

The report **describes concrete steps to be taken in a variety of different landscapes**, including towns and cities, farm and ranch lands, and natural areas. It also **emphasizes the importance of protecting and increasing the connections between these** different landscapes, **to furnish butterflies with safe corridors for traveling from one to another**.

What else is in the roadmap to recovery?

OSU Vet School Seeks Ranches to Participate in Asian Longhorned Tick Study

Researchers at the Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine **are seeking cattle operations in Oklahoma and surrounding states to participate in an ongoing study on the spread of the Asian longhorned tick** (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*) in cattle.

Producers, with help from their veterinarians, **can submit up to 20 blood samples and 15 ticks** (if collected) per operation.

All laboratory testing and shipping supplies are provided at **no cost to the participants**. Producers and veterinarians will receive reports on the results of the testing.

"We are **trying to assess if this tick has potentially marched further west**," said Dr. Rosslyn Biggs, who is teaming with Drs. Ruth Scimeca and John Gilliam to lead the project.

"Hopefully, this will lead to a better understanding of environmental factors, wildlife populations, and future research opportunities," she said.

With documentation of the Asian longhorned tick in northeastern counties last summer, Oklahoma became the 21st state occupied by the pest.

"The Asian longhorned tick is known as a three-host tick, meaning each of its life stages - larvae, nymph and adult - requires a blood meal, usually from a different host animal species," says Jonathan Cammack, Oklahoma State University Extension specialist for livestock entomology and parasitology and assistant professor of entomology.

"With the Asian longhorned tick, all three life stages have been seen feeding on the same species or individual. In the case of livestock, that could be a cow."

According to Cammack, **up to 1,000 of the ticks can feed on a single animal at once, causing death from blood loss**. The ticks **can also reproduce without mating** (a process known as parthenogenesis), which means **a large population can rapidly establish itself from a single individual tick**.

Only as large as a sesame seed, the individual ticks can be **challenging to spot**.

Moreover, the ticks can **transmit a disease** with symptoms - anemia, weakness, and loss of coordination - **similar to** those of **anaplasmosis**.

How can I keep Asian Longhorned ticks out of my cattle herd?

Monarch Monitoring, Farmers Markets, Food Preservation, Butterfly Garden Grants, Grazing Webinars, Grassland CRP....

The **International Monarch Monitoring Blitz** is underway - visit the website and find out how to contribute to the count! If you live along Route 66, **apply for a grant to plant a butterfly garden** by July 31.

Find and support your local growers in **National Farmers Market Week** (starts Aug. 3).

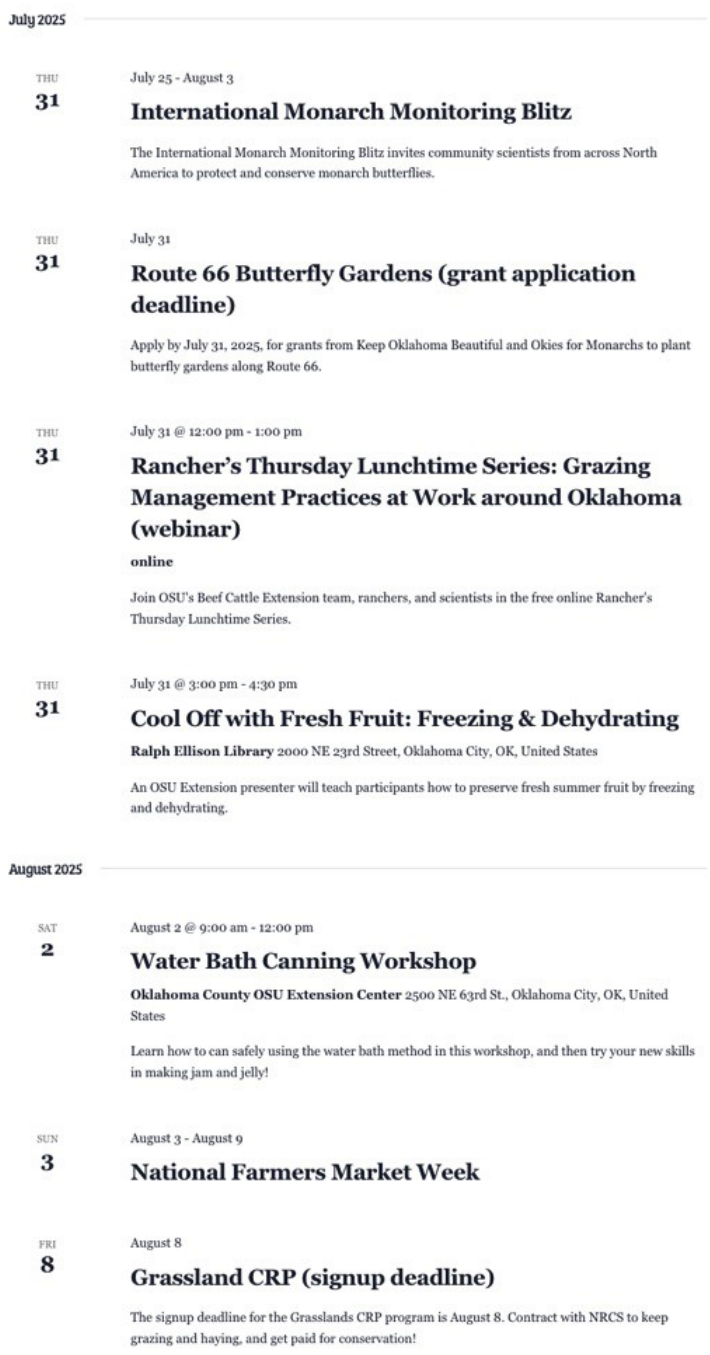
Whether you grew it or bought it, learn to **preserve fresh local produce by freezing** (July 31, OKC) **or canning** (Aug. 2, OKC).

OSU's Beef Cattle Extension team is offering a **free** Thursday **webinar series on grazing management**, with the next session July 31. You can also come in person to **see how we do it at the Kerr Center - our next tour is August 12**.

Sign up by Aug. 8 for NRCS conservation practice cost-shares on grazing and haying land through **the Grassland CRP**.

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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Contact Information

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture
24456 Kerr Road
Poteau, OK 74953
Phone: 918.647.9123
Fax: 918.647.8712
mailbox@kerrcenter.com