Field Notes

Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture E-Newsletter

E-Field Notes
August 2025

A **new report from the Kerr Center and the University of Missouri's survey of organic growers** in the Mid-South is out - get the latest from David Redhage.

Ever wonder what your chickens have been eating? Now you can send in a poop sample and **find out for free!**

The weather right now may be scorching, but soon enough we'll be putting crops under cover in high tunnels to dodge frosts - and the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture has just released a **new free guide to high tunnel production**.

Sept. 4 marks **National Wildlife Day**, shining a spotlight on **one of Oklahoma's more obscure endangered species**.

There's nothing obscure about our **thanks for your contributions to the Kerr Center** - we shout them to the mountaintops! **Please keep those checks coming!**

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President's Note: Organic Growers Survey Results

The Kerr Center has **just completed** work with the University of Missouri on an **organic agriculture research grant**. The purpose was to **survey organic growers in the Mid-South** (southern Missouri, eastern Oklahoma, northern Arkansas, western Kentucky, and western Tennessee) to hopefully determine:

Organic Agriculture in the Mid-South: Building an Ecosystem of Support

Report prepared by:

Mary Hendrickson, University of Missouri
Garima Srivastava, University of Missouri
David Redhage, The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture
Kerry Clark, University of Missouri

Photo Credit: Mary Hendrickson and Tim Reinbott

We want to thank all the producers who gave their time to talk with us about the challenges and opportunities for organic production in the Mid-South region of the country.

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Division of Applied Social Sciences
University of Missouri

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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"- **Why do the Lower Midwest and Mid-South have fewer organic producers** than other regions of the country, like the Northeast, Upper Midwest, or the West Coast?

- Why or how do regional characteristics impact the adoption of organic agriculture?

- What region-specific opportunities and farmer-led innovations are here, and how can they best be supported or expanded?

- Are there state-level policies that can help increase the number of organic farmers in the area **and expand organic production**?"

(Organic Agriculture in the Mid-South: Building an Ecosystem of Support, p. 1)

The resulting publication can be found here.

A Different Take on Chicken Dinner

One of the main perks of **pastured poultry** is that the birds can eat whatever they choose. **Have you ever been curious, though, to know exactly what they *are* eating?** Researchers at the University of Georgia are - and they'll **test your birds' poop for free to find out!**

The **University of Georgia's Chicken Ecology and Ecosystem Services (Chick-EES) research project studies pest control, food safety, and soil health in pastured chicken flocks** on working farms in the southeastern U.S.

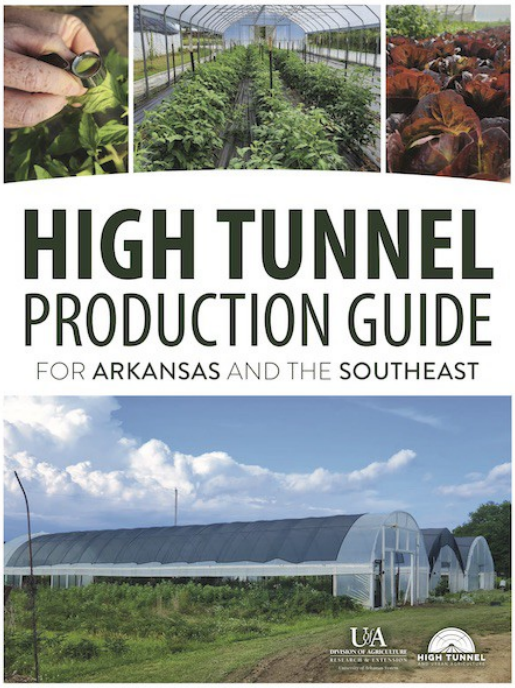
The **poop analysis fits into the pest-control part** of the research. Pastured poultry advocates suggest that **chickens consume crop pests. However, they could also be helping pests, if they're preying on pest species' natural enemies as well.**

By sequencing the DNA in chickens' poop, the Chick-EES team can get an idea of how much of the birds' diet consists of each kind of arthropod - pests versus beneficials.

The service is **anonymous, and free**. The research team will share your individual results directly with you, but any identifying information will be scrubbed when they're aggregated with data from other flocks.

To start the process, take an online survey on the Chick-EES website to make sure you meet the study's criteria. At the end of the survey, you'll be asked for a mailing address. You'll be sent a kit with instructions for collecting a sample, and a prepaid shipping label to send it to the lab.

High Tunnel Production Guide for Arkansas and the Southeast



At the Kerr Center, we've got quite a few seasons of work with high tunnels (aka **hoop houses** or cold frames), as one of a variety of **season extension techniques**, under our belt.

The sheer number of possible variations - in the design and operation of the high tunnel itself, crop and variety selection and management, and many other aspects - can be daunting, even for growers who have been using them for years.

The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture has just published a **new, free, online resource that helps growers - both new and experienced - navigate the choices involved in high tunnel design, construction, and operation**.

High Tunnel Production Guide for Arkansas and the Southeast weighs in at 115 pages. It begins with an overview of **both the advantages and limitations of high-tunnel production**, and goes on to discuss **establishing a high tunnel** and **creating a management plan** for using it.

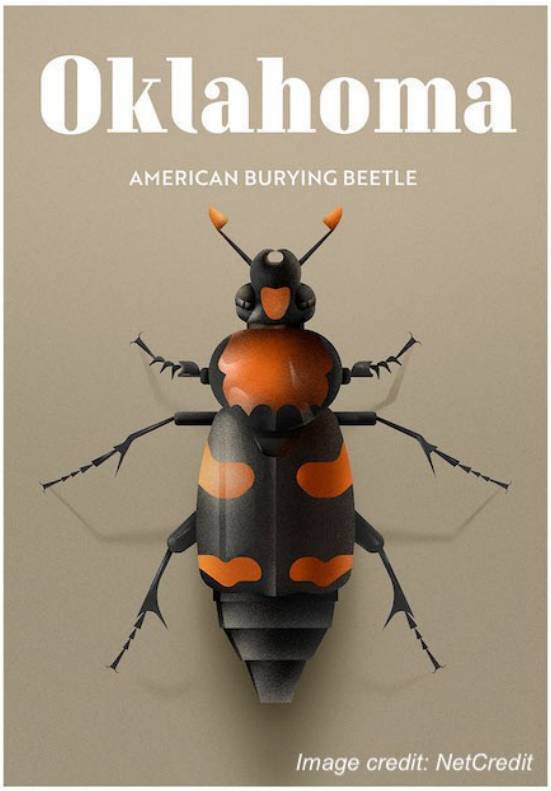
The guide then digs, in detail, into **more specific topics, including site selection, high tunnel design, climate management, irrigation, and soil and soil health**.

The information in the guide can **benefit growers at any level of experience**, from those considering building their first high tunnel to those with multiple structures already in production.

High Tunnel Production Guide for Arkansas and the Southeast is available free in digital format from the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture website.

National Wildlife Day: Oklahoma's Buried Treasure

National Wildlife Day is September 4th - a day for celebrating the abundant wildlife with which **Oklahoma's** blessed, but also for shining a spotlight on the state's **threatened and endangered species**.



If someone asked you to name threatened and endangered species in Oklahoma, what would come first to mind? The **monarch butterfly?** (**Technically, it's currently neither threatened or endangered!**) The **whooping crane** or **red-cockaded woodpecker**? Maybe one of the **four species of bats** - Gray, Indiana, Ozark Big-eared, and Northern Long-eared - that call the state home?

Of the **21 federal- and state-listed threatened and endangered species in Oklahoma**, the **American burying beetle** (*Nicrophorus americanus*) would probably not be the first to pop into most people's minds. However, it's **arguably one of the most crucial species for Oklahomans to protect**, simply because it doesn't live many other places anymore.

The American burying beetle was once documented in 35 U.S. states - essentially the eastern half of the country - as well as southern Canada. **By 1989, though, when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service classified the species as federally endangered, it could only be found in two - Oklahoma and Missouri.**

Visually striking, the beetles play an outsized role in the ecosystems they still inhabit. You might think of them as **insect buzzards: they feed on carrion, chewing up and burying bits of animal carcasses to lay their eggs on**.

However, they've got a bit of a Goldilocks side to them: they won't dispose of dead animals that are too big, or too small. Something dove- or squirrel-sized is just about right for them. In fact, one theory for their decline suggests that they once fed on the remains of the now-extinct passenger pigeon. Other potential causes include a more general decline of birds and mammals in that same size range, as well as more widespread use of pesticides, and habitat fragmentation.

The American burying beetle's federal protection commonly turns it into a literal roadblock whenever new roads are being built through its habitat (or potential habitat). If beetles are discovered in the path of proposed road construction, the builder can either go around, or pay to protect an equal acreage of beetle habitat somewhere else.

Is this protection plan helping the American burying beetle?

Late Summer Events: Grazing Management, Sustainable Gardening, Monarch Scholarships, Hive Check, Food Labeling, Pollinator Party

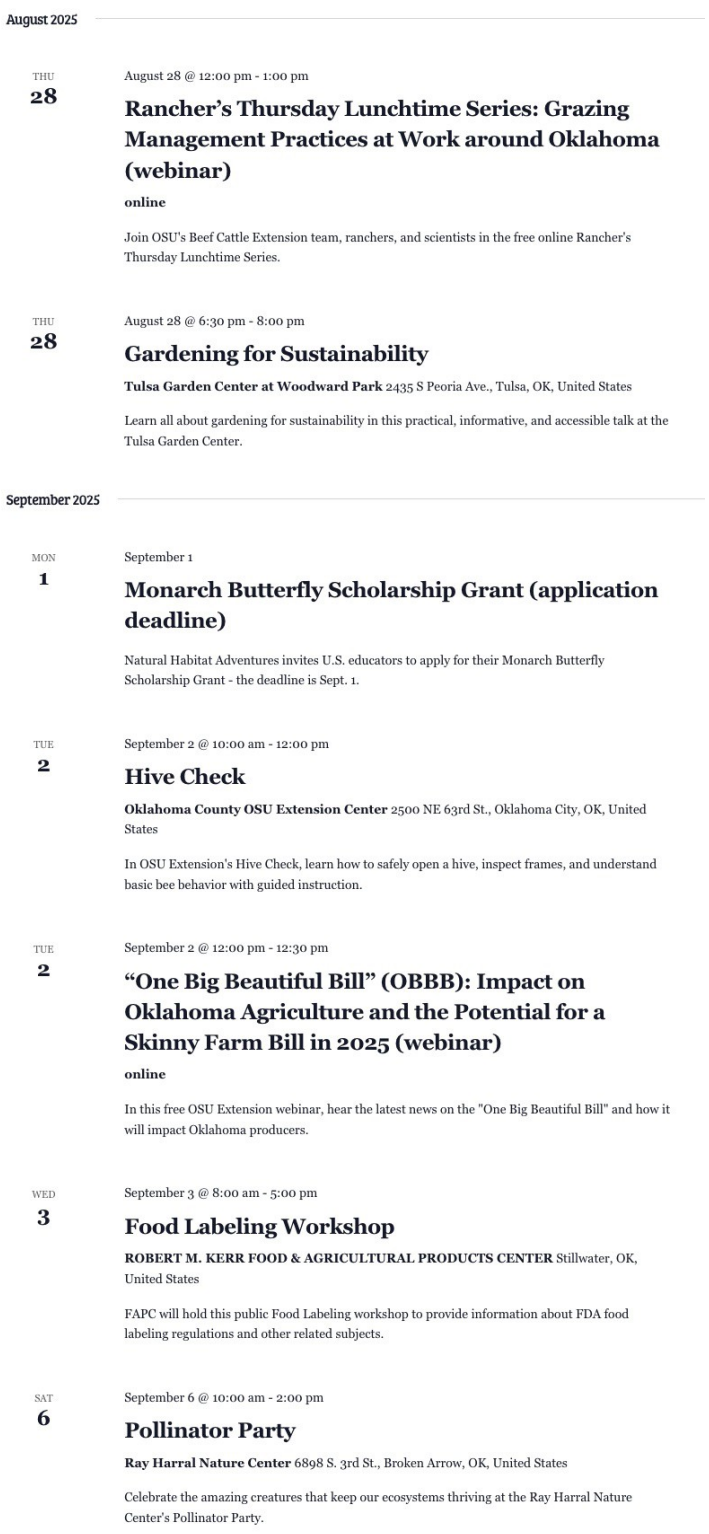
Get in on the next of **OSU Beef Cattle Extension's Rancher's Thursday Lunchtime webinar series on grazing management practices** August 28. Also online, learn about the **"big beautiful bill"'s impacts on Oklahoma agriculture** (Sep. 2).

Upcoming in-person workshops include the Tulsa Garden Center's **Gardening for Sustainability** (Aug. 28, Tulsa), and FAPC's **Food Labeling** Workshop (Sep. 3, Stillwater). You can also learn how to inspect beehives in OSU Extension's **Hive Check** (Sep. 2, 15, and 29, Oklahoma City). The Ray Harral Nature Center is throwing a **pollinator party** (Sep. 6, Broken Arrow).

Educators: apply by Sep. 1 for a scholarship grant to travel to Mexico and learn about monarch butterflies.

The **last Kerr Center tour of the season** is September 9 - 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.

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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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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