

# Field Notes



Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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## Kerr Center to Manage USDA Program

The Kerr Center recently received a three-year grant to manage the Professional Development (PDP) Program for the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, southern region.

Jim Horne, Kerr Center president and CEO, has been named regional coordinator. David Redhage is project associate. Other Kerr Center staff will participate in various aspects of the program.

"It was an honor to be chosen through a competitive process to manage the Professional Development Program of the Southern Region SARE program," says Horne. "This is the first time in the history of SARE that a non-profit has been chosen to lead a program of this scope.

"We will be taking this responsibility seriously and will use a collaborative approach to see that all stakeholders are well served. The southern region SARE program is highly respected for its innovative programs and we are prepared to continue this tradition."

The Professional Development program is a "train-the-trainer program" which provides sustainable agriculture education and outreach strategies for Cooperative Extension Service personnel, Natural Resources Conservation Service staff and others who work directly with farmers and ranchers.

SARE is a national competitive grants program funded by USDA and EPA to promote research and education about sustainable agriculture. Established in 1988, SARE has funded some 2,500 projects that examine how to improve agricultural profitability, protect natural resources and foster more viable rural communities. Information from the projects is disseminated through various publications and online at [sare.org](http://sare.org).



SARE Director Jill Auburn thanks Jim Horne after his speech at the SARE tenth anniversary conference.

*continued on page two*

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture offers progressive leadership and educational programs to all those interested in making farming and ranching environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically viable over the long term.

The Kerr Center is a non-profit foundation located on 4,000 acres near the south-eastern Oklahoma town of Poteau. It was established in 1985.

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#### **PROGRAMS INCLUDE:**

- Oklahoma Producer Grants
- The Stewardship Farm
- Rural Development and Public Policy
- Communications/Education
- Vero Beach Research Station
- Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm

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## Kerr Center to Manage USDA Program

*continued from page one*

SARE is part of the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service. Due to its popularity and record of meaningful research and outreach, SARE's funding has increased from about \$11 million at its inception to about \$18.5 million per year now.

The program almost didn't happen, says Horne. Horne testified before Congress in 1985 about the need for a program to fund research into alternative agriculture. His testimony and that of others led to the establishment of SARE, known for its innovation, local leadership, low overhead, and quality of projects, which are chosen only after rigorous review.

Southern SARE administers six separate grant programs: Research and Education, Producer, Graduate Student, Professional Development, On Farm Research, and Sustainable Community Innovation. Each has its own priorities and audiences. Calls for proposals are issued each year to start the competitive process.

Training activities funded by the Professional Development program include seminars, workshops, farm tours, or on-farm demonstrations. Grantees also may develop, market and distribute training materials such as handbooks or videos. Activities may take place in a single state, multiple states or throughout the entire southern region. Grants generally range from about \$20,000 to \$120,000.

One example of a previous professional development program grant is the "Statewide Journey" project run by the Center for Profitable Agriculture in Tennessee. It provided a great launching pad for needed and useful training in value-added and sustainable agriculture

for Extension agents, agriculture leaders and communities across Tennessee. The training project combined documented success stories from actual enterprises with on-site tours, seminar-style sessions, web-based resources and mass media.

A University of Kentucky project is another example of a successful PDP grant. The primary objective of the project was to equip Extension agents and other ag professionals to assist farmers interested in adding value to farm products through processing.

Workshops were held to show the various levels of small scale processing facilities, which ranged from a single-user on-farm permitted kitchen to a shared-user, commercial

incubator kitchen. Examples of existing facilities and their operators were identified, and some operators helped design training. Agents and farmers learned from the experiences of operators in establishing and operating the facilities.

Training in farm and forest land preservation was held in three cities across the South this past summer through a PDP grant awarded to the Kerr Center (see story on page 6). It is a good example of a region-wide project.

The next call for proposals for the professional development program will go out in March 2004 and the pre-proposals will be due in May (other grant programs have different time frames).

For more information about all the Southern SARE grant programs, visit [www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare/pdppage.html](http://www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare/pdppage.html) or call 770-412-4787. For more information on the 2004 PDP grants call David Redhage at the Kerr Center at 918-647-9123 or email [dredhage@kerrcenter.com](mailto:dredhage@kerrcenter.com).



## Kerr Center On the Web

Looking for a Kerr Center publication? Checking on an event? Looking for information on a program? Then look no further than the Kerr Center's website, [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com).

The website is a comprehensive, user-friendly compendium of educational publications such as our quarterly newsletter *Field Notes*, fact sheets, and reports, as well as information on programs, workshops, conferences, field days, crop trials, and conservation practices demonstrated on the Kerr Ranch. A history of the center and staff bios are available there, too. Press releases and photos are also posted and the calendar of events is updated frequently.

In addition, folks can read excerpts and reviews as well as purchase *The Next Green Revolution* at the website. One may also join Friends of the Kerr Center on-line.

### What's New

- From *Future Farms 2002* conference, information on hunting leases, risk management, agritourism, cell grazing, CSAs, farmers' markets, wind farms, producing and/or marketing: cut flowers, herbs, pecans, venison, range poultry, organic

beef, organic wheat, ethnic vegetables, natural pork, wine, hair sheep and more.

- Surveys of Consumers, Producers, and Small Meat Processors about Natural Beef
- Oklahoma Food Policy Council page
- *2003 Farm-to-School Report* (including the *Oklahoma Institutional Food Survey*)
- *The Oklahoma Food Connection 2003: A Directory of Agricultural Producers, Crops, and Institutional Buyers*
- Surveys of Farmers' Market Producers and Consumers
- Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm: info on antique farm equipment, rare breeds, and Fall Farm-Fest
- *Seeds of Change: Food and Agricultural Policy for Oklahoma's Future*



### Coming Soon

- More Oklahoma Producer Grants Project Fact Sheets
- Expanded information on best management practices on the Kerr Center Ranch

## Locally Grown is 2004 Essay Contest Topic

All Oklahoma high school juniors and seniors are invited to participate in the Kerr Center's 2004 essay contest entitled "Locally Grown Foods for Students."

Most of the foods served at schools in Oklahoma are shipped in from other states. In the United States, the typical 'fresh' food item is hauled an average of 1500 to 2500 miles before being served. The money paid for these foods largely benefits out of state businesses. Many Oklahoma farmers and ranchers struggling to make a living pay for school lunches for their children that consist of farm products grown many miles away. Many are starting to ask "Why are we supporting farmers in other states, but not our own?"

Farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma are capable of growing many products that are currently being bought elsewhere.

Schools could purchase many items from farmers in the communities surrounding the schools. Students could consume fresh farm products soon after they were harvested. Our children deserve the best and freshest food available.

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council is working with several agencies to form a statewide farm-to-school program to connect farmers and school cafeterias so that students will have the chance to eat locally grown foods. Farm-to-school will help schools provide children with fresh, tasty nutritious produce while small farmers will acquire new markets. Schools will be able to provide produce soon after it is harvested with less transportation cost.

This essay contest is designed to include young people in a thoughtful discussion of solutions and current challenges facing farmers and consumers in our food system. The winning essays will focus on the issues and potential benefits

involved in forming an Oklahoma farm-to-school program. The arguments and ideas in each essay should be well developed. Essayists will be asked to include their own ideas and convictions, as well as relevant research, which could include interviews of other students.

Contest information will be mailed to all Oklahoma high schools and will also be available on the Kerr Center's website at [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com) by mid-December. GRAND PRIZE is a cash award of \$750.00; 1st Runner Up is a cash award of \$500.00; and three awards of \$250.00 will be given for Honorable Mentions.

The deadline for entry in the contest will be March 12, 2004 and winners will be announced on May 7, 2004. For further information regarding the 2004 Essay Contest, you may contact Anita Poole at [apoole@kerrcenter.com](mailto:apoole@kerrcenter.com) or by calling 918-647-9123. Read the 2003 winning essay on page 4.



Winners of the Kerr Center's "Protecting Our Farm and Ranch Land" essay contest received their awards last spring.

Winners were:

- **1st Place** - \$750.00  
Jillianne Leigh Zweiacker,  
Pawnee High School
- **2nd Place** - \$500.00  
Melissa Williams,  
Weleetka High School

**Honorable Mentions** -  
\$250.00

Caroline Palmer,  
Salina High School

Elizabeth Copeland,  
Pawnee High School

Jason Eubanks,  
Salina High School

See p.3 for information  
on the 2004 contest.

## First Place Essay Contest Winner 2003

# Protecting Our Farm and Ranch Land

- Jillianne Leigh Zweiacker  
Pawnee High School

Imagine, if you would for a moment, that the year is 2060. Your surroundings are very different. No longer do beautiful trees and colorful flowers surround you. Instead, concrete skyscrapers overshadow you, and the air is cloudy and hazy from factories and car exhaust. People do not like to be outdoors. Going outside means putting on an oxygen mask to filter the air because it is so polluted. There are not any animals to observe or plants to enjoy. Food is not fresh but chemically engineered. There are no farms to produce food. In fact, grass is a rarity. Everything is concrete. Society has become dependent on technology, and farming and ranching are things of the past.

Now, let's come back to the year 2003. There are still trees, flowers, animals, and fresh food present, but the importance of agriculture is being overlooked. Farmers are selling their land for urban development because they cannot make enough money to live sufficiently. The importance of conserving and protecting our farm and ranch land is continually pushed to the bottom of our priority list; and unless we act now, our future will be similar to the scene described above. We must act now while the fate of our future rests in our hands.

According to a study by the American Farmland Trust, "America loses two acres of farmland every single minute of every single day ([www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com)). In five years a land area the size of the state of Maryland could be developed. That is six million acres of land that is no longer available for agricultural purposes. Oklahoma alone lost 63,300 acres of farmland between the years 1992-1997. At this rate, Oklahoma loses 12,660 acres per year, 35 acres per day or 1.5 acres per hour. This is the cause of alarm for many conservationists throughout Oklahoma and across our nation. More people are moving into urban areas, and towns are beginning to modernize and expand. All of this leads to one thing: more land is needed to develop.

Usually this land is farmland. Farmland is the optimal choice for building. The land is more

level, which allows for easy access, and the soil is better. These factors make building less expensive and easier. The urgency for urban development has increased with our society becoming so technologically centered. Farming and ranching have been put on hold. We do not have much farmland as it is, and now most of it is being industrialized.

To fully understand how little land we have for agricultural purposes, let's pretend the earth is an apple. One half of the apple represents all the oceans on our planet. That leaves us with half of an apple. Half of that apple represents mountains and deserts, which is land unsuited for farming. We have only one fourth of the apple left. Half of that piece is swamps, marshes, and lakes. This leaves us with one eighth of all the land on Earth suitable for farming. There is not much land available for agricultural purposes. If we begin to take every acre of this land and develop it into urban areas, how will we grow our food and how will we survive ([www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com))?

This is the reason why we must act now. We must begin to protect our farm and ranch lands, especially in Oklahoma. If we lose our farm and ranch lands, we not only lose our way of life and the ability to feed ourselves, but we lose our heritage.

The best way to ensure that farmland remains available for agricultural purposes is through conservation easements. A conservation easement is

a “legally recorded, voluntary agreement that limits land to specific uses.” Easements may apply to entire parcels of land or to specific parts of the property. Land protected by conservation easements remains on the tax rolls and is privately owned and managed ([www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org)).

Placing a conservation easement on farm or ranch land will ensure that land will be permanently protected from development and kept available for agriculture. Landowners do not lose their property rights when land is placed under a conservation easement. They still hold the title to their property and enjoy all the rights of ownership such as the right to lease or sell property, leave it to heirs, the right of privacy, and others. Future owners are bound to the easement, making it impossible to terminate the easement. Easements do not affect borrowing, raise local property taxes, or affect local municipal by-laws or zoning regulations. Conservation easements do not lower the property value. Easements ensure that farm and ranch land will stay farm or ranch land for all future generations ([www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)).

The Oklahoma legislature has already enacted a conservation easement bill to help curb the dangerous losses of farmland. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, or the Farm Bill, reauthorized the Farmland Protection Program (FPP) to protect agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses. The FPP is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program provides matching funds to state, tribal or local governments and non-governmental programs to purchase conservation easements or other land interests. This program will allow farmers to keep farmland for agricultural purposes while receiving the same amount of money they would have been given by construction companies. The FPP gives farmers and ranchers an alternative to selling their land for development.

Oklahoma has already suffered large amounts of agricultural

land loss, but we can present a total loss of land if we begin our work now. Conservation easements are the best way to do this. Land under an easement will be forever devoted to agricultural purposes ([www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)).

Putting our farm and ranch lands under conservation easements will ensure an agricultural life for future generations. Instead of inventing new ways to produce food or adapting farming to deserts or mountains, people of future generations will be able to farm on the soil that is the most ideal for food production. Keeping the same land for farm or ranch land will be the most economical. Easements will ensure that farmland will be available in the future, and this ensures that there will also be plenty of food.

The soils of our farm and ranch land take thousands of years to develop. So far, no one has found a way to manufacture them. Therefore, productive agricultural land is one of our most important natural resources, as well as an irreplaceable one. The need to protect our farm and ranch land is higher than ever, and it increases every day. We must act now. We must begin to preserve our precious farm and ranch lands. We need to look at alternatives to selling out our farmland for urban development. We are the future. What we decide to do with our agricultural lands now may decide the fate of future generations. What do you want for the future?



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# Protecting Farm and Forest Land in the South

—Jim Horne

Protecting farm and forestland is an initiative of the Kerr Center that has evolved over the last two years. We began working with the Oklahoma office of the Trust for Public Land on a farmland protection program in 2001. In May of 2002, the Kerr Center sponsored a three-day workshop in Poteau to inform agricultural professionals and concerned citizens about the various farmland protection tools available to them. The instructors were from the nation's two leading farmland conservation organizations, the American Farmland Trust and the Trust for Public Land.

Then, in December of 2002 the Kerr Center and other interested citizens who saw a need for an organization to hold and monitor conservation easements, formed the first statewide land trust in Oklahoma, Land Legacy (see facing page).

To continue this work and expand on it, earlier this year the Kerr Center successfully competed for and won a grant from the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program to teach agricultural professionals across the South about the various tools that can be used to protect land.

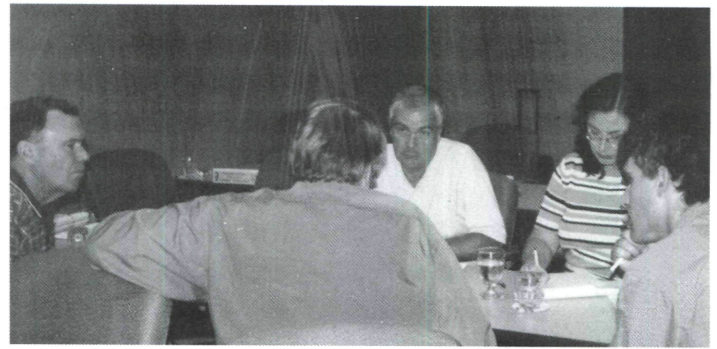
## The Case for Farm and Forestland Protection

Farmland and forestland are vanishing at a rapidly increasing rate around the country. Because the South continues to be a popular alternative to the large urban centers of the West and Northeast, one can imagine that within the next 5-10 years the issues of rampant urbanization and loss of prime and unique farm and forestland will hit the South with full force.

Agricultural professionals from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Extension at all levels in the South will soon have to deal with the development pressures on farm and forestlands that their colleagues in other areas of the country have already had to face.

Within many states, there are already areas of pressure. Atlanta and its surrounding areas are threatened; Dallas and Austin and surrounding areas are threatened; numerous locations throughout Florida are facing mounting urbanization pressures. Forestlands are becoming fragmented and fractionalized as the number of landowners increases while the parcel sizes decrease.

Unfortunately, too much agricultural land is lost because most people are not aware of the measures that can be taken to prevent the loss. We believe therefore that it is imperative for professionals who exert influence in their communities to



Small groups brainstormed strategies

be trained in the methods and tools that are available for farm and forestland protection. The goal of our project was to create the means for agricultural personnel in each of the southern states and protectorates of the Southern Region SARE to come together for in-depth training in farm and forestland protection.

When designing and managing the training program we sought input from a diverse array of individuals and organizations. A broad based Southern Region Advisory Committee designed the training program that included representatives from 1862 and 1890 land grant universities, NRCS, state agriculture and forestry departments, and NGOs experienced in land protection issues and farmers.

In addition to this advisory council, a management team was formed to implement the training program. It included representatives from the American Farmland Trust (AFT), the Kerr Center, Oklahoma State University, and Langston University.

## Meeting Highlights

The workshops were held in Oklahoma City, Atlanta and Memphis this summer. While instructors from the American Farmland Trust conducted the bulk of the training, farmers and/or foresters having experience in land protection were asked to share or teach in the training sessions.

All of the meetings were well attended and consisted of very diverse audiences. The participatory style of instructors Gerry Cohn and Kevin Schmidt kept attendees focused for the intensive day and a half meetings. Inviting farm families and others to share their experiences kept the sessions firmly rooted in reality.

For example, at the Memphis meeting the Holland family of McKenzie, Tennessee, spoke of their struggle to keep their multi-generation land in production agriculture. The family's

accomplished by developing a water system that incorporated a quick-connect point system and a portable water tank that could be moved from paddock to paddock as the cattle moved. This prevented the cattle from using the lane to travel to water, thereby reducing erosion and improving grazing.

## The Water Line

Barker ran a water line from his house well nearly to the end of his property more than a mile away. The main line followed a central lane he had been using to take cattle to water points and move them from paddock to paddock. Under the fence-line between each paddock he plumbed a quick-connect water coupling, housed inside an 8-inch piece of PVC pipe.

When Barker needs water in a paddock, he moves a portable water tank under the fence and attaches a garden hose between the tank's float valve and the quick-connector on the water line.

His entire water line was laid in 20-ft sections of 1 $\frac{1}{4}$  inch PVC joined with glue joints.

He purchased Plasson connectors from Jako, Inc., in Hutchinson, Kansas, which specializes in fencing supplies and other intensive grazing tools. These quick



Barker used 8-inch schedule 20 PVC for a casing around each underground coupler.

connectors work somewhat like a hydraulic coupler. The nipple screws onto the end of a hose and can be snapped into or out of the fixture on the line.

Barker used 8-inch schedule 20 PVC for a casing around each underground coupler. These come in 10-foot lengths, which Barker cut into 2-foot lengths to make the casings.

On top of each piece of pipe he set a concrete lid, made by pouring concrete into a form. The casing and lid protects the waterline and couplers from freezing in the winter and from other damage the remainder of the year.

The lids he made by pouring ready-mix concrete into a homemade sheet-metal ring just larger than the diameter of the PVC casing. These he laid on a piece of plywood to give the lids a nice, smooth bottom so they seal fairly well against the PVC casings.

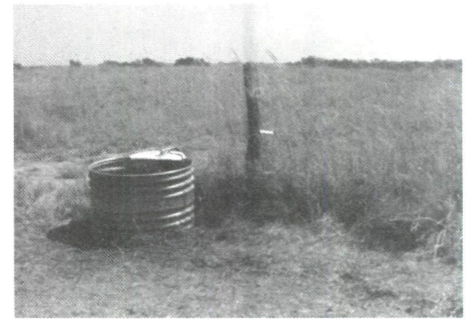
He put handles on the lids by bending one loop up from the end of a barbed-wire spool and laying it in the form so the bent loop stuck up above the top of the form. The stone lids are about two inches thick.

Before he started trenching and laying pipe he pre-made the PVC risers so they were quick and handy to glue into the line.

## The Watering Points

Barker's first moveable tanks were too small. He tried another grazer's recommendation of half a 55-gallon barrel, but it did not work. The cattle would drink all the water and turn the tank over. He now uses 4-foot and 5-foot wide round, galvanized tanks. These are still small enough to move on a four-wheeler.

Before moving a tank, Barker unplugs it and lets the cattle drink it down before he finishes draining it and moves the cattle and the tank to the



next paddock.

The use of moveable tanks is a tradeoff of some labor for significant expense. It would be handier to have stationary tanks, but that would cost a lot of money, Barker says.

Using moveable tanks also gives him more flexibility. It allows him to use the same tank-full of water in two adjoining paddocks. Further, he can have two tanks available per paddock when he has large numbers of cattle and the weather is hot.

A 20- or 30-foot area of ground around the watering points seems to take a real beating. However, these small abused areas in each paddock seem much better than the erosion Barker used to experience in lanes. Today he still uses the lane to move cattle from one paddock to another, and sometimes the cattle graze portions of the lane as if it were another paddock.

## Project Results

"I'd say we've accomplished what we set out to do in most of the areas," Barker says.

Erosion in the trails is beginning to heal now, although for the first couple of years excessive rains on the sandy soils actually made it worse. As the rainfall pattern has become more normal and therefore more sparse, the erosion has really started to heal.

Once cattle were fenced out of the pond, it healed dramatically. Vegetation covered the bare soil. Although Barker

tried to establish shoreline reed grass on the banks, it was natural vegetation that really took over. Those grasses around the edge are helping stabilize the banks and therefore are helping clear up the water. However, the pond recently went dry as it has in past years, Barker adds.

Grazing distribution of the cattle is much better because they're staying in the paddocks rather than going out the gate and down the lane two or three times per day and then lying around the pond. Also because the lane went through some

shade, the cattle tended to go lie in the shade and then go back to drink again before going back to graze. This behavior carried a tremendous amount of nutrients out of the paddocks and put them in and around the pond and in the lane.

## Resources

Jako Inc., Ken King, (877) 525-6462 or via his website at [www.jakoinc.com](http://www.jakoinc.com)

## Tips/Lessons Learned

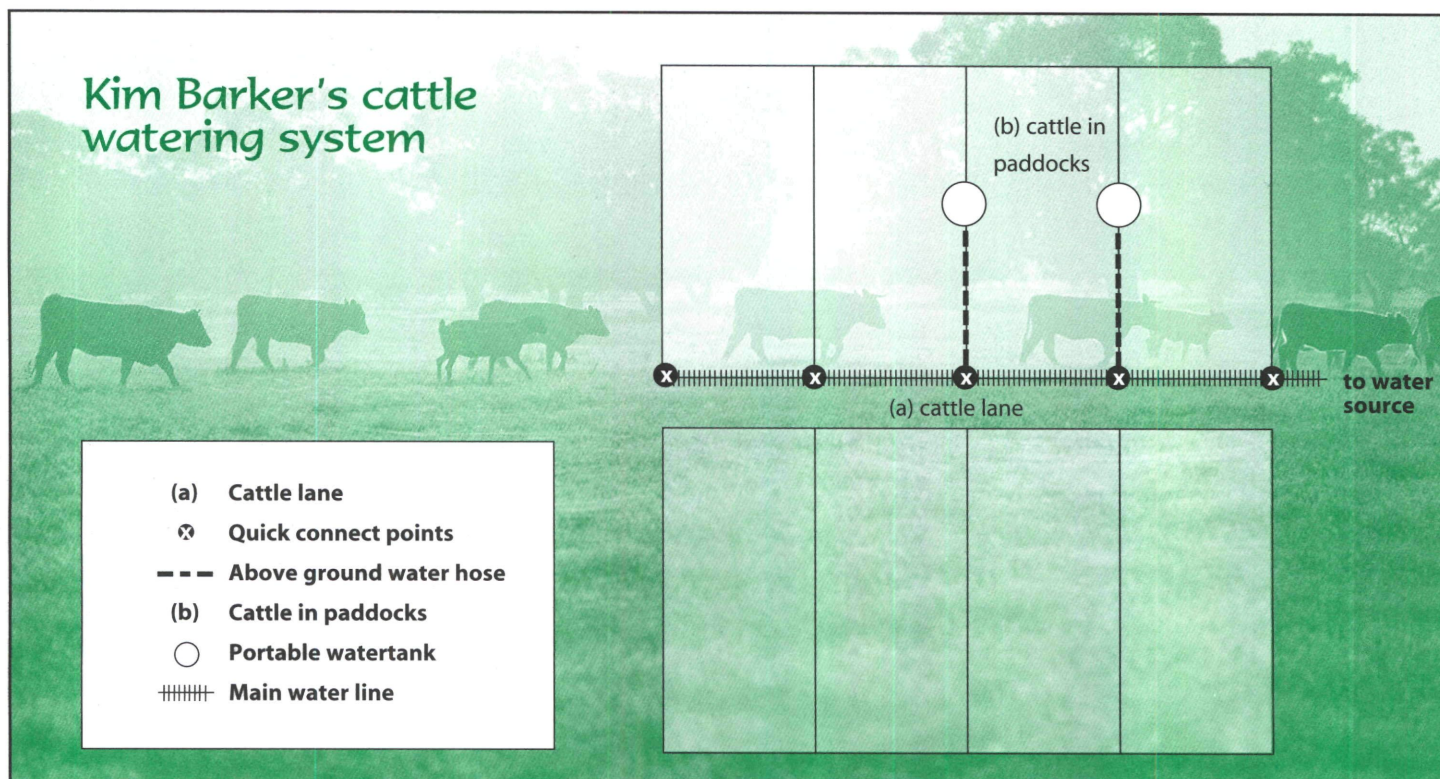
■ Barker said he should have used 2-inch pipe instead of 1 1/4 -inch pipe. He thinks he has too much friction loss and not enough volume in the 1 1/4 mile long line.

■ Barker installed the line in November when the days are shorter, and he says that was a mistake. Since he was renting the trencher he could have had more hours for the money when the days were longer.

■ Use the right size tank. Barker found he needed a tank big enough the cattle couldn't tip it over if they drank it down, especially with his relatively low-volume water system. (He also noted that since he began this project he has heard University of Missouri grazing professor Jim Gerrish talk about watering cattle. Gerrish says as long as cows can see each other they will go to water and drink one or two at a time, but if the ground is rough, or the pastures too large so they can't see each other, they will all come together.)

■ Barker placed his water points under the electric fence on both sides of nearly every paddock. This lets him graze two paddocks before moving his water, but it also lets him have water on both sides of a paddock if he wants to, although most often he does not.

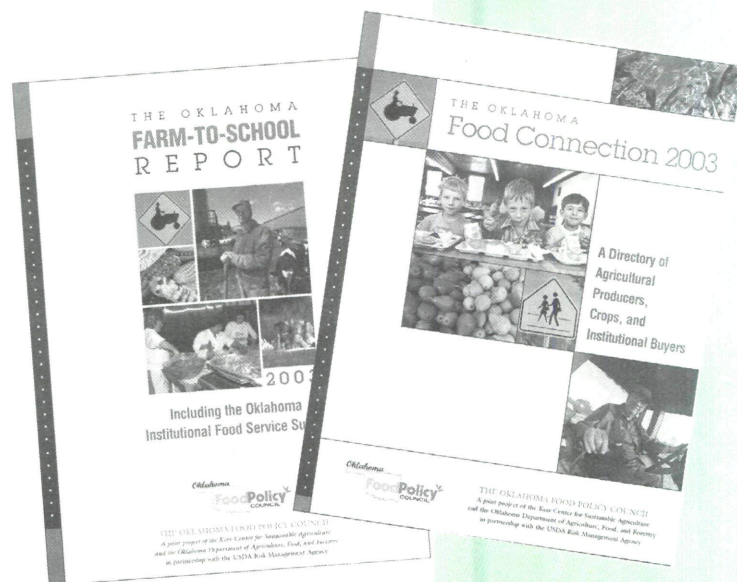
■ Barker used the well and pressure tank at his house as the main source for the water, and says he needs to up-size these when they wear out. Bigger well equipment than is typically used for rural homes would be more useful for a pasture water system.





# Bringing Oklahoma Food to Oklahoma Schools

— Maura McDermott



Two groundbreaking publications--*The Oklahoma Farm-to-School Report* and *The Oklahoma Food Connection: A Directory of Agricultural Producers, Crops, and Institutional Buyers*— are now available from the Oklahoma Food Policy Council.

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council is a joint project of the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF), in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency. Its mission is to “Bring Oklahoma food to Oklahoma tables.”

Fifteen Oklahomans representing diverse groups with an interest in Oklahoma’s food system make up the council. Current members represent farming and ranching, food processing, retail foods, education, and the media; as well as tribal, conservation, religious, and anti-hunger organizations. Key staff from the ODAFF and the Kerr Center assist members and help coordinate projects.

For its first project, the group examined the potential for increased use of locally grown foods by public institutions, especially public schools.

The council was acting on the belief that serving fresh, locally grown foods would not only improve the quality and the nutritional value of the meals served by these institutions, but would also bring increased opportunities and profitability to farmers interested in this market.

The first step in the project was to learn the buying habits of institutional food service directors in the state. The council, assisted by Barry Bloyd

and his staff from the Agricultural Statistics Service and Dr. Kathleen Kelsey of Oklahoma State University, with coordination by council co-chair Jim Horne and Kerr Center staff, devised and mailed a 30-question survey to 638 institutions in Oklahoma: public schools, colleges and universities, correctional centers, state hospitals, technology centers and state resorts.

The response to this survey was very good, nearly 67%. While it is clear from the responses given that currently not much Oklahoma-grown food is served by these institutions, many have a high level of interest in buying it.

Dr. Larry Sanders, professor of agricultural economics at OSU, and graduate student Tihomir Ancev analyzed and summarized the survey results. Their analysis, along with information on farm-to-school programs around the country, an Oklahoma nutrition profile, and a list of food crops produced in Oklahoma are included in *The Farm-to-School Report 2003*.

*The Oklahoma Food Connection* builds on the expressed wish of many food service managers to connect with local food producers. The directory includes a list of Oklahoma farms interested in selling to institutions, and what they grow; a harvest calendar; a list of produce grown in

## \*Survey Says Top Five Motivations to Buy Local

- Ability to buy small quantities
- Helping Oklahoma farms/businesses
- Higher quality food
- Access to fresher food
- Support the local economy

\*From the 2002 Oklahoma Institutional Food Survey



## Survey Says

### Past Local Food Purchases in Oklahoma Schools

25% of responding institutions have purchased foods from a local producer in the past year. Items bought include (from most to least):

- Melons
- Onions
- Cheese
- Pork
- Cucumbers
- Ground beef
- Dairy products
- Tomatoes



Oklahoma-grown meal, including cheese, pears, and venison sausage.

Oklahoma; a supply and demand map by county and region of the state; a list of Oklahoma farm market producers; and a list of institutional food managers who may want to buy locally. Kerr Center intern Shawn Campbell did the extensive research for the publication.



### What's For Lunch?

As those with school age children know, the food choices in school systems in Oklahoma and around the nation vary; however, the trend is towards convenience and fast food, often at the expense of nutrition. According to a study cited in a recent *New York Times* article, over a week's time 86 per cent of the basic school lunches in the U.S. meet the USDA's nutritional guidelines on paper. But experts point out that children often can choose between the "nutritious meal" and items from vending machines or fast food restaurants. Excitability, poor concentration, and low achievement in the classroom have been linked to poor diets at home and, sadly, at school.

It doesn't have to be that way. "Healthier

eating options" can make a significant positive impact on student attention and discipline, say teachers at Appleton Central High School in Wisconsin, an alternative school where students are at higher risk for dropping out.

Teachers say that improved school lunches introduced five years ago have made a vast difference in reducing behavior problems—and helped them "get through" to their students. As one teacher said in a recent ABC News Report, "They are on task, they are attentive. They can concentrate for longer periods of time."

What do the students at Appleton eat? Meals consist of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and entrees free of additives and chemicals, supplied by Natural Ovens and Bakery, a local company. Soda vending machines were replaced with ones offering only juice, water and energy drinks.

Students at the school agree that food does have an impact on their behavior. "I am able to concentrate better," said one student. "Not as tired. More energy."

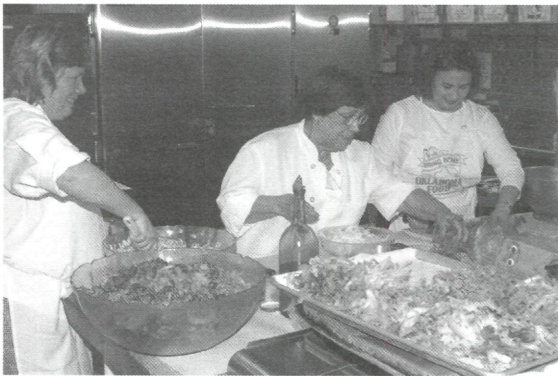
### Healthy Oklahoma Kids

As has been extensively reported in the national media, the health of American children is not as good as it could be. According to the USDA, 19.3 percent of children in Oklahoma are overweight (compared to 16.1 percent nationally). This is not surprising, given that during the past decade the percentage of overweight Oklahomans of all ages has steadily increased. As the Oklahoma State Board of Health said in its *2002 State of the State's Health Report*, "For our youth the increase has been appropriately called an epidemic."

Obesity contributes to many serious health conditions over the course of a person's lifetime, beginning in youth. Obesity contributes significantly to diabetes, heart disease, stroke, arthritis, certain cancers and other chronic diseases and conditions. Oklahoma has higher rates of death from chronic diseases compared to the rest of the nation, and the health of the adult working population has been called "relatively poor."

Reflecting these facts, our state's health ranking has steadily declined, moving from 33rd of the 50 states to 42nd.





Healthy lunches are prepared at Casady School in Oklahoma City

Reversing these trends will be a challenge. It is common sense, however, to assume that good health begins in childhood and intervention then will set the stage for good health throughout a person's life. The time for change is now. Take just one disease: according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in three US children born in 2000 will become diabetic unless children start making serious changes to their lifestyles and eating habits.

Diabetes should be of particular concern in Oklahoma, because of our high population of Native Americans and African Americans, both of whom "show a disproportionate number of diabetes related deaths, twice that of whites," according to the State Board of Health.

Like children around the U.S., children in Oklahoma are getting fat because they do not get enough exercise and they eat too much of the wrong kinds of foods—foods high in fat and sugars. These poor food choices lead not only to obesity but also to nutrient deficits.

While data on children's nutrient intake in Oklahoma is not readily available, the situation can be extrapolated from more general data. Fewer than half of Oklahomans meet the recommended daily allowance for several key nutrients: calcium, magnesium, Vitamin A, B<sub>6</sub>, E, and zinc. Fewer than 50 percent of Oklahomans meet the daily vegetable, grain, fruit, meat, and dairy serving recommendations. Slightly over 50 percent get enough Vitamin C and iron. (Oklahoma consistently rates 3-5 percentage points below national rates.)

Nationally, less than twenty percent of children eat the recommended servings of vegetables and less than 15 per cent eat the recommended serv-

ings of fruit.

The problem is big and it is difficult to know where to begin. But because school food programs reach a very large number of our children every day, the USDA, various states, and school systems in many communities around the country have seen them as the ideal place to institute a number of programs to encourage increased consumption of fresh, nutritious produce. In addition to fresh produce, lean meats, grain products and dairy—foods that Oklahoma farmers and ranchers are good at raising and produce in abundance—are of course crucial elements of a balanced diet for children.

In Oklahoma, about 387,000 of approximately 600,000 schoolchildren (about 61%) participate in the school lunch program. It would seem to be an ideal place to positively impact their nutrition.

### Farm-to-School

Oklahoma's fertile soil can grow a cornucopia of crops. People in Oklahoma are raising everything from asparagus to zucchini. What they need are opportunities to market their products and have consumers appreciate the diversity and quality of Oklahoma-grown food.

Farm-to-school (also called farm-to-cafeteria) programs connect farmers and school cafeterias in a direct way. Farmers, or more often, farmers' groups grow specific food items to sell to schools. Farmers themselves, private companies or groups, or government entities (such as the Department of Defense Fresh Produce Program) help in various capacities to get the produce to the schools that want it.

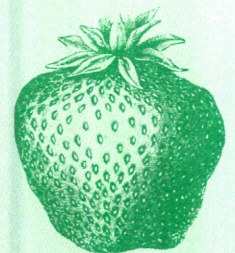
Both schools and small farmers benefit from these efforts. Schools provide children fresh, tasty,



## Survey Says

### Possible Local Food Purchases

- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Onions
- Lettuce
- Eggs
- Potatoes
- Melons
- Strawberries
- Ground Beef
- Cheese
- Dairy Products





nutritious produce while small farmers acquire new markets. Schools are able to provide fresh produce quickly and with lower transportation costs by buying it from small farmers instead of from distant markets. While fresh fruits and vegetables are often the mainstays of such programs, other locally raised farm products such as dairy, eggs, nuts, meat, even breads and other locally processed products could also be sold to schools.

Spurred by USDA initiatives and facilitated by state efforts (such as food policy councils) and action at the grass roots, such programs are gaining in popularity. Farmers are forming cooperatives or alliances in order to provide the products schools desire. Already existing farmer groups such as farm market growers or commodity organizations are taking advantage of the opportunity to sell to schools. Parents and food activists are also involved in challenging their school systems to get involved.

According to the *New York Times* in January of 2003, school districts in 17 states have signed contracts with small, local farms in farm-to-school programs. The potential is huge: four billion dollars are spent on school lunches every year in the US.

Farmers are just beginning to tap into that potential. One example is North Carolina, where the farm-to-school purchases in 2002 totaled \$289,057.83.

Both schools and small farmers benefit from their participation in farm-to-school initiatives, says the USDA. Schools provide children fresh, tasty nutritious produce while small farmers acquire new markets. Schools are able to provide fresh produce quickly and with lower transportation costs by buying it from small farmers instead of from distant markets. Farmers find a new, profitable market.

In order to make a farm-to-school program successful, farmers must be ready to supply what schools need. According to Ken Wilmoth, a Department of Defense produce buyer who has helped to set up farm-to-school programs in North Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama, farmers can adjust when and what they plant in order to better match school calendars. He cites the example of Mississippi farmers making mid-summer (in addition to normal springtime) plantings of melons in order to harvest them during the fall school term.

On the other side of the equation, school

officials must have a genuine commitment to placing local produce on their menus to make such programs work. The availability of competitively priced, quality, locally grown food, incentives from school boards and other public entities, and parental support, can help school officials adopt such programs.

In many farm-to-school programs, featuring locally grown produce on school menus is just one aspect of a larger focus on nutrition education. In such comprehensive programs, children not only learn how to eat in a healthy way, but also learn how their food is grown from farmers visiting the classroom or during field trips to the farm, thereby experiencing first hand the value and appeal of fresh fruits and vegetables. School gardens, too, add hands-on learning experiences and appreciation for locally grown. Such programs, many feel, are key to improving the eating habits of today's kids.

## The Farm-to-School Survey

Improving the health of our children by making nutritious foods more available and appealing at school is a desirable goal. Another worthy goal is to improve opportunities for Oklahoma farmers, including those running small and medium-sized operations, by exploring new outlets for their products.

Achieving both goals through farm-to-school programs would seem to be a win-win situation. But challenges must be overcome before producers can tap into such a large market and schoolchildren are regularly eating locally grown food.

Discovering the barriers to farm-to-school programs was one goal of the food service survey. Another was to gauge the level of interest in buying locally grown or processed food. "The significant finding of the survey," say OSU's Sanders and Ancev, "is that a majority of these institutions would be willing to make such purchases [of locally-grown foods] if institutional practices and policies supported such decisions."

Indeed, two-thirds of respondents agreed that they would buy locally grown items if price and quality were competitive and a source was available. Four-fifths of those who have made local purchases would do so again. About half said they would be interested in contacting local food producers, and many of those provided

## Survey Says

### Types of Information Helpful in Making Local Food Purchasing Decisions

- Local Food Program Information from Other States
- Local Supplier Lists
- Health and Safety Information on Local Foods
- Regulatory Information
- Assistance in Developing Multiple Source Buying Systems
- Assistance/Research on Consumer Preferences

contact information.

Sanders and Ancev identified a number of factors and concerns that might affect the decision to buy local. They include: the Oklahoma Office of Central Purchasing including local foods in contract services, competitive prices, availability of local sources, consistency of quality, timeliness, food safety, order size, processing and preparation, payment arrangements, awareness of Oklahoma food production and processing, and categories of desired food.

They conclude that most of these concerns can be addressed. For example, private cooperatives could provide competitive prices, and improve the availability and quality of products.

“The state,” they say, “through legislative actions and agency rules, can be supportive of local purchases and education on access, availability and safety.” They suggest further public research on local production, processing, and distribution.

### The Next Step

Council members were encouraged by the survey findings. However, since they also learned that current institutional purchases of local food are low (only 25% had purchased locally in the last year), it became clear that that it will take some effort to make consumption of Oklahoma-grown and processed food in our schools the norm, rather than the exception.

The publications are just the first step in

establishing farm-to-school programs in the state. Recently members of the food policy council met with staff from the state departments of agriculture, education and human resources, school food service managers, and representatives from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, FSA, and the Department of Defense Farm Fresh program to explore farm-to-school program initiatives.

The dedication and cooperation of people from all walks of life— parents, teachers, health and nutrition specialists, farmers and ranchers, state and federal officials— are all crucial to the success of such a program, and also to realizing the larger goal of both healthier children and healthier farms.



*The Oklahoma Farm-to-school Report and The Oklahoma Food Connection 2003*

are online in a pdf

format at [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com). To order copies of the printed publications, send \$2 for one, \$3 for both to cover shipping and handling, to the Kerr Center. To be included in future editions of the *Food Connection* directory, please contact the Kerr Center or visit our website.

## About Shawn Campbell



Shawn Campbell was a summer 2003 intern at the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture. He attends Oklahoma State University, majoring in Agribusiness. He plans to graduate from OSU with a Bachelors of Science in Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources in May 2004.

He plans to further pursue a graduate degree in Sustainable Agriculture.

At Oklahoma State, he is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, Golden Key, Alpha Zeta, and National Society of Collegiate Scholars Honors Societies.

He is also an active member of the Agricultural Economics club Aggie-X.

Shawn has been interested in agriculture and rural communities all his life growing up on ranches both in Northern California and Oklahoma. His future goals are to manage his ranch in south central Oklahoma as a sustainable system, and to find alternative marketing opportunities for both himself and other producers in the state of Oklahoma.



### Survey Says

#### Barriers that currently stop institutions from buying locally grown

- Lack of producers from whom to purchase
- Lack of products available during certain times of year
- Safety
- Lack of staffing for prep of large amounts of fresh produce/uncooked bulk meat
- Budget
- Convenience

# Ag in the Classroom Goes On the Road

– Pat Thompson, Oklahoma Curriculum Coordinator, Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom

**F**orty-one Oklahoma elementary school teachers rolled across eastern Oklahoma July 28-30 to explore the diversity in Oklahoma agriculture. The Oklahoma Beef Council sponsored the “On the Road With Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom” tour.

Along the way teachers learned that Oklahoma agriculture is cattle and much more. They learned that kiwis the size of grapes can be grown in Oklahoma, that there are many breeds of turkeys, some of which are in danger of extinction, and that to make it in agriculture you sometimes have to look out your back door and dream beyond the usual. Mostly teachers were inspired by the stories of the people who live and work in agriculture in Oklahoma.

Mike Walters of Walters’ Turkey Farm was a favorite. A past recipient of a Kerr grant, Walters raises rare turkey breeds to preserve them for future generations. The teachers were impressed with Walter’s vision, passion and persistence—and that he was able to do it all on only five acres.

“This has to be one of my favorite stops,” Jackie McGolden, a pre-K teacher from Fairview wrote in her journal. “It was refreshing to see a young person so passionate about agriculture and preserving the past. I’m so glad we saw a place that the Kerr Center had directly impacted,” she said.

The tour began Monday morning, July 28, with a stroll across the catwalk to the sale barn at the OKC Stockyards. Walking the catwalk, high above the whirl of cattle and cowboys on horseback, motorcycles and electric carts, the teachers were quickly engulfed by the smells and sounds and constant motion of the beef industry. Tour guide Tom Manske, OSU Extension 4-H youth educator from Canadian County, explained that this was the original Bricktown, since brick pavement lies beneath the soil on which the cattle are herded from pen to pen.

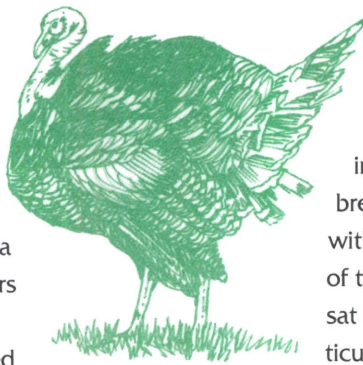
DeLane Sampler, an after-school teacher from Altus, was

surprised to see real cowboys on horses and to learn that the OKC Stockyards are almost 100 years old. Lawton first grade teacher Arthenia Haney didn’t realize it was the world’s largest stocker and feeder market. First grade teacher Janet Howard of Chickasha loved the smell and the excitement of the auction.

Down the road near Okemah, the teachers were dropped from the bus right in the middle of a herd at the Fisher Quarterhorse Ranch and allowed to wander up close among beautiful horses.

Dinner was at the Rockin’ LH Asparagus Ranch and Big River Emporium, near Stidham. Lee Henry told the teachers he and his wife, Sharon, had tried to make it as asparagus farmers,

but when that failed they had to start thinking creatively. Now they sell pickled asparagus and an assortment of mustards, relishes and other condiments, most with asparagus as at least one ingredient. In addition, the Henrys have a bed and breakfast and go all over the state catering events with their authentic Dutch oven cooking. The success of that enterprise was evident as soon as the teachers sat down to eat. The sourdough biscuits were a particular favorite. A western swing band provided entertainment, and teachers cut loose with a little scatter square dancing (an Ag in the Classroom activity) to burn off some of their delicious dinner.



Stacy Williams of Jones kicks up her heels at the Rockin’ LH Asparagus Ranch at the end of the first day of touring

The Kerr Mansion near Poteau was home base for the next two days as teachers traveled to Spiro Mounds to learn about prehistoric agriculture in Oklahoma, were astounded at the size of the Green Leaf Nursery in Tahlequah, learned how cows are artificially inseminated at the Canadian Valley Limousin Ranch near Shawnee and how pecans are harvested at the Five Starr Ranch near Okemah.

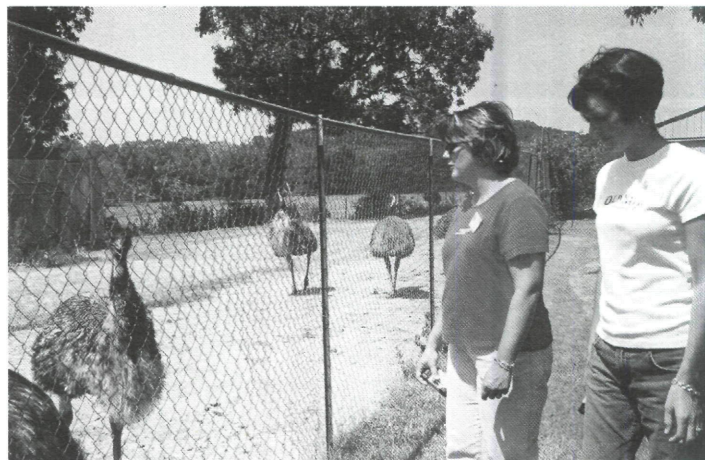
Before leaving the Kerr Mansion on day three, the teachers heard a few more stories from Jim Horne, Kerr Center director. Using a PowerPoint, with photos, Dr. Horne told teachers about a few of the projects financed by Kerr grants. Many of the teachers were unfamiliar with the grant program and were pleased that the Kerr Center is helping farmers find environmentally sound methods for growing the food and fiber we need.

"There is so much I was not aware of in agriculture. [Dr. Horne's presentation] gives me a new meaning for the word 'sustainable.' It also helped me realize the 'culture' part of the word 'agriculture.' Agriculture is a way of life, and there are people out there to help you and encourage you," wrote Anna Lietch-Adams, second grade teacher from Porum

"Seeing the struggles our farmers and ranchers face daily, I am so glad to know there are programs and grants available to help in the ongoing challenge to sustain their way of life," said Holdenville pre-K teacher Mary Jo Myers.

Next stop was the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm, rated, hands-down, the best stop of the entire tour. Tour guides Jim Combs and Jeremy Henson got high marks for taking the teachers back in history to see and hear about life on a territorial farm and about the part Indian lands played in the history of agriculture in our state.

"I loved the history. Awesome and amazing. I loved the animals," said Theresa Balan, sixth grade teacher from Moore. "It's nice to see where we came from and where we are



Jackie McGolden of Fairview and Nealie Wake of Haworth listen to the ostriches boom at Walters' Turkey Hatchery during the Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom ag tour for teachers this summer.

going. We really enjoyed the speakers. They were great entertainers and very knowledgeable."

"On the Road With Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom" was OAITC's first attempt at an ag tour. For the past ten years teacher workshops have been held on the OSU campus in Stillwater, making use of research facilities and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service specialists there.

"This year it was just time for a change," said Charles Cox, Oklahoma 4-H Program Leader, who works with the program at OSU. "We decided it was time to take it on the road." The Oklahoma Beef Council has funded the institute for most of the past ten years and liked the tour idea.

OAITC staff members were very pleased with the tour. "It was good," said Urban Schools Coordinator Jamey Allen, "because the teachers got to actually hear the stories of real people who work in agriculture."

## OKLAHOMA AG IN THE CLASSROOM

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a joint program of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. Agricultural organizations such as the Oklahoma Beef Council, Oklahoma Pork Council, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, Oklahoma Wheat Commission, Oklahoma Sheep Growers, Oklahoma Cotton Council and Oklahoma Peanut Commission also provide support.

The purpose of the program is to help Oklahoma school children understand the importance of agriculture in their daily lives. Over 125 lessons and other resources are available

online at <http://www.agclassroom.org/ok>. The lessons are designed to help teachers use information and activities centered around agriculture to reinforce basic skills in math, science, language arts, social studies, visual arts and music. Each lesson reinforces at least one of the Oklahoma State Department of Education Priority Academic Student Skills (P.A.S.S.).

Two teacher trainers, both experienced classroom teachers, are available to introduce the program in schools. Training can be scheduled by calling 405-522-6768 or 405-522-0638.

# Fall Farm-Fest a Local Tradition

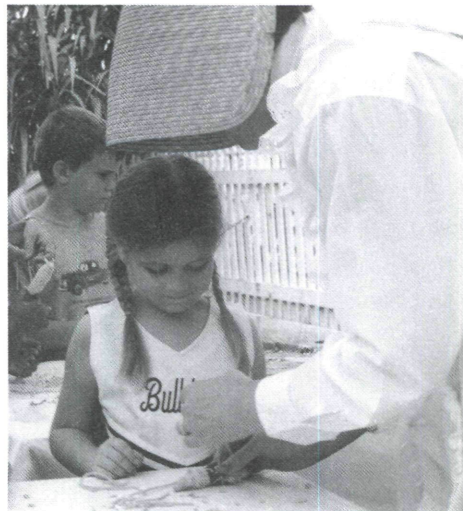
**B**eautiful weather, friendly volunteers, and good crowds marked the 12th annual Fall Farm-Fest, Friday and Saturday, October 10 and 11th at the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm.

About 1500 school children from schools in the area came on Friday to try their hand at shelling and grinding corn, cross cut sawing, making rope, corn dolls and butter as well as learning about a number of activities common on an eastern Oklahoma farm 100 years ago.

What were the favorite activities? "Sawing," said a few; "the corn" (grinding and shelling), said others. Janette Garland of Keota liked "looking at the house," as did other kids who seemed to think the big, white 1895 house was "spooky."

"I did it all. It was fun," volunteered one boy.

Keota fourth grade teacher Debbie Roos said, "The kids really get into it. We come almost every year." She tells them



Ag in the Classroom's Jamey Allen helps in making a corn-cob doll.

about the farm in class before Farm Fest, and notes "they've paid attention—I've been real proud of them."

Saturday brought out about 900 people from across the state to see rare farm animals, tour the historical home, and watch "pioneers" cook sorghum syrup. Other activities included demonstrations of Dutch oven cooking, making butter, soap, and sauerkraut, quilting, spinning cotton, weaving, flint knapping, woodcarving, and blacksmithing.

Visitors also had a chance to inspect an impressive display of antique farm equipment, some of it on permanent display at the farm's equipment museum, and some of it set up by the Arkansas Valley Antique Tractor club. Many pieces in the farm's collection have been donated or loaned by people in the area. (For more information on donations, contact Jim Combs at 918.966.3282).

About seventy-five people, many local, volunteered their time and skills this year to make Farm-Fest a success, says Jeremy Henson, education coordinator at the historical farm. Some, such as Peggy Crane of Spiro, help out year after year. Her daughter Ginger Fischer, a first grade teacher at Spiro, is also a supporter who brings her classes to Farm-Fest each fall.

"I do it for the kids," says Mike Walters, who raises heirloom varieties of turkeys near Stilwell and brings his



"Welcome to the world of naturally grown turkeys," says Mike Walters on his website [historicalturkeys.com](http://historicalturkeys.com). He sells both poults for establishment of breeder flocks as well as prepared turkeys for holiday meals. Contact him at 918.778.7535, Rt. 3, Box 1409 Stilwell OK, 74960 or see what he has to offer and order online.

beautiful *Bronze*, *Royal Palm*, *White Holland* and *Blue Slate* turkeys for visitors to admire and learn about. He raised his first turkeys when he was a teenager and has been fascinated by them ever since. The Kerr Center and the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program have awarded him grants to further his work preserving rare turkey varieties. He brings several birds with him every year to Farm-Fest. This year he brought some wild turkeys as well. "Some kids do not know there are domesticated turkeys," he marvels.

Connecting kids with their food and their farming heritage—that's what Farm-Fest is all about.

*To learn more about the historical farm and educational activities for schoolchildren and adults there go to [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com) or call 918.966.3396. Or visit. The farm is open on Fridays and Saturdays, 10-4. Entrance fee is \$3 per person, children under six free.*



# The Art of Making Sorghum

It's always a gamble. In June Alan Ware and other Kerr Center staffers planted three acres of "Dale" and "Topper" varieties of sweet sorghum. All summer they tended the crop and hoped for the best.

The challenge the Kerr Center faces each year is having the sorghum reach the right stage of maturity at the time of Farm-Fest, which is always the second Friday and Saturday of October. (Friday is reserved just for school groups.)

This year's crop didn't look so promising early on. Ware admits he was worried when heavy rains this spring meant a thin stand and slow growth in the sorghum patch on the Kerr Center farm south of Poteau on highway 271. But better conditions later allowed the irrigated cane to flourish, and the sorghum was ready on time.

Growing the cane is just the first challenge. Then comes the processing. During Farm-Fest, the cane is pressed in a 1900 Chattanooga mill, powered by mules led by Wes Pickle of Wister. The extracted juice is then poured into a continuous-flow copper "sorghum pan" and boiled down over a wood fire outside



Steve Bryan of the Kiamichi Electric Co-op kept the fire going

until it thickens into a dark brown syrup.

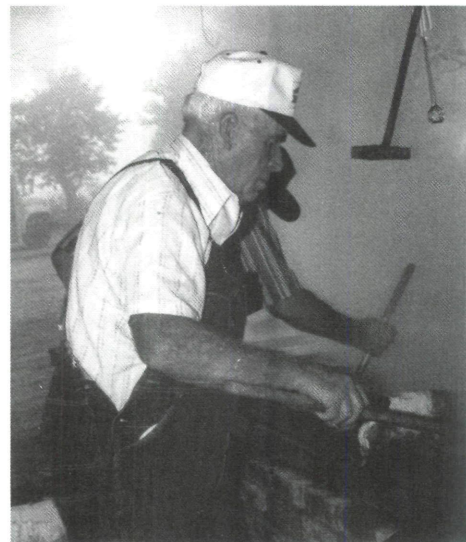
Before cooking the juice, Ware measures its sugar percentage using an optical instrument called a refractometer. The ideal range is 18-22 percent. After cooking, the syrup is about 80 per cent sugar.

Each year a team of volunteer cooks tends the juice as it passes through the five chambers of the pan, and this year was no exception.

Eighty-year-old Delmar Robinson, who has been cooking sorghum since he was a kid, was the man at the far end of the pan. Every few minutes he tested the thickness of the syrup with the stick he kept close at hand, and judged when the sorghum was ready to pour out. The syrup finishes cooking for about ten minutes in the last chamber, he says.

Although this year the sugar content of the juice fell a bit short of ideal and the weather was a bit too cool and cloudy the days of the fest (best is sunny and dry), they did in the end get a very good tasting syrup. Says Ware: "That's why it's the art, not the science of making sorghum."

The Kerr Center offers a manual, *Sweet Sorghum: Production and Processing*, which describes a small scale, commercial operation, which can be purchased online at [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com) or by calling 918-647.9123. For more information on Farm-Fest call 918.966.3396 or visit [www.kerrcenter.com](http://www.kerrcenter.com)



Master sorghum maker Delmar Robinson checks the syrup



Alan Ware has grown sorghum for eleven years



Wes Pickle and mules power the sorghum mill

# Tulsa to Host 2004 Oklahoma/Arkansas Horticulture Industries Show

—Alan Ware

**T**his year's Oklahoma/Arkansas Horticulture Industries Show will take place at Tulsa Community College Northeast Campus on Friday and Saturday, January 9th and 10th, 2004. Registration begins at 8 a.m. each day and the program runs until 5 p.m.

This year's show theme is "Growing a Horticulture Business." The sessions will start each morning with a keynote speaker who will encourage you to take the steps needed to make your business grow. After the opening session you will be treated to an array of opportunities to receive valuable information about your existing operation or to explore a new horticultural business for your farm.

Individual organizations will sponsor breakout sessions each day and you may select the type of programming you want to attend. Sessions will be available from the fruit growers, Christmas tree growers, vegetable growers, herb growers, master gardeners/public gardens, and a combined session of farmers markets/sustainable agriculture.

During the breaks you will want to visit the trade show. Over 35 vendors will be available to discuss your supply needs for the coming year and assist you with technical information to meet the challenges on your farm. It will be a great time to visit with other growers and professionals about what is going on in the horticultural industry.

If you are a new producer or want to be a producer, you should make a point to attend this conference. It will be the best opportunity to see examples of many different types of operations in Oklahoma and Arkansas.

## Impressive Lineup for Farmers' Market/Sustainable Agriculture Sessions

The Farmers' Market/Sustainable Agriculture session programming will feature several topics over the two-day program. The first program on Friday will feature speakers that will speak on alternative marketing options. These will include: information about selling through the newly-formed Oklahoma Retail Food Cooperative, presented by Robert Waldrop, one of the organizers (see p.25); how to sell to restaurants with tips from James



Shrader, chef/owner of the Palace Café in Tulsa; and an introduction to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) from Doug Walton of the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance.

The afternoon session will start with a panel of growers who will discuss their experiences with operating a CSA in this region. The panel includes Sharon Miller from Pink, OK, Don McGehee, of Okemah, OK, and Kirk Cusick, from Salina, KS. Audience participation will be encouraged in this panel discussion about opportunities for CSAs in Oklahoma and Arkansas.

The first day will end with a discussion of new regulations on farmers' markets in Oklahoma and how to become a certified market in Oklahoma. Rick Maloney and Jason Harvey from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry will provide information. Following this discussion, the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance will take place.

Saturday will begin with local success stories about growing a horticulture business. Successful farmers' market growers will share their experiences with developing their businesses. Speakers will be Burl Doyle of Doyle's Country Gardens in Stilwell, OK; April Harrington of Earth Elements Farm, Lexington, OK; and Mark Cain, of Dripping Springs Gardens, Huntsville, AR.

Doyle is a third generation strawberry and vegetable farmer who also raises bedding plants. He sells from his roadside stand in Stilwell and at the Muskogee Farmers' Market. Harrington grows certified organic vegetables and herbs. She uses these herbs in her value-added products—soaps and dried food mixes— and sells at the Edmond Farmers' Market and from her website. Cain grows cut flowers, vegetables and herbs and has sold his produce at the Fayetteville Farmers Market for many

years. He is known for his experiments with low-till production practices.

The afternoon session will feature Anne and Eric Nordell from Trout Run, Pennsylvania. They operate Beechgrove Farm as a successful market garden. The Nordells are well known nationally for their whole-farm approach to weed control. They write a column in the *Small Farmer's Journal* dealing with cultivation questions.

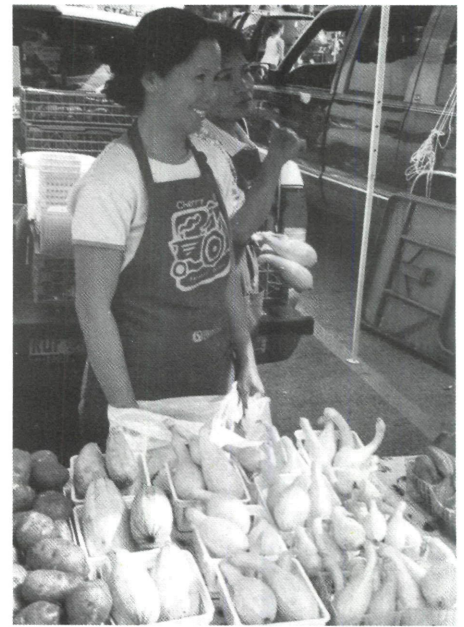
During their first presentation they will cover the techniques they use to control weeds without chemicals, focusing on rotations between cover crops and production crops. In their second presentation they will discuss the alternative tillage techniques, such as skim

plowing and surface tillage, which they use on their farm.

Although they are from a different part of the country, their concepts and techniques can be adapted to many of the situations growers deal with in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

Please join us for this great time together! Contact the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture for registration information by email: [dollins@okstate.edu](mailto:dollins@okstate.edu) or by phone 405-744-6470. You can also register online at <http://home.okstate.edu/Okstate/dasnr/hort/hortlahome.nsf/toc/HIS>.

We want to see you there for this great opportunity to learn more about how to grow your horticultural business.



Tulsa's Cherry Street Market offers great produce

## Oklahoma Farmers Union Announces COOL Survey Results

Conflicting research, debate and opinions have recently been focused around the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) issue. As a result, Oklahoma Farmers Union surveyed over 1,000 Oklahoma consumers during the 2003 Oklahoma and Tulsa State Fair, to evaluate how Oklahomans feel about labeling of food and costs associated with the program.

"Country-of-Origin Labeling is a safeguard American consumers deserve and are demanding," said OFU President & CEO Ray L. Wulf, whose comments were reinforced by the recent survey results. "Many other countries already have labeling available for their consumers. Don't U.S. citizens also deserve this information?"

The results were overwhelmingly supportive of Country-of-Origin Labeling related issues, further proving that consumers want to know where products originate and are even willing to pay

more for this information. The questions asked and results are as follows.

1. When you purchase meat at the grocery store, does the USDA-approved stamp lead you to believe the product was raised and produced in the USA?

YES: 81% NO: 19%

2. Do you believe that food produced in the USA is safer and of higher quality?

YES: 96% NO: 4%

3. Would you choose a USA-labeled product over another country's product?

YES: 98% NO: 2%

4. Would you be willing to pay more for a USA food item over a cheaper food alternative from another country?

YES: 95% NO: 5%

*(Conducted Sept. 12-28, 2003, at the Oklahoma State Fair, Okla. City, Okla. & Sept. 25-Oct. 5, 2003 at the Tulsa State Fair, Tulsa, Okla. A total of 1,019 surveys (537 OKC, 482 Tulsa) concerning Country-of-Origin labeling were filled out and collected by volunteers manning the Oklahoma Farmers Union booth.)*

These results match similar studies

conducted by economists at Colorado State University and North Carolina State University. Their conclusive results found that consumers are willing to pay more for U.S. labeled beef. The data showed 73 percent of consumers were willing to pay an 11 percent premium for labeled steak and a 24 percent premium for labeled hamburger meat. In addition, the data showed four out of five consumers believe U.S.-grown food is fresher and safer than imported food.

"Country-of-Origin Labeling is an issue whose time has arrived. COOL will allow American producers to showcase their products and give consumers more information about the food they consume," said Wulf.

COOL, which was included in the 2002 Farm Bill, will require country-of-origin labeling on all fruits, vegetables, peanuts, meats and fish by 2004, allowing consumers to know where the product originated.

In order to be labeled as a USA product, a commodity must be born, raised and processed or planted, harvested and processed in the United States.

# OK Food Co-operative Forming

-Doug Walton

You probably shouldn't read the following article unless one of these conditions apply:

- ▶ You're a food consumer who wants greater access to locally grown and raised meats, eggs, cheese, flours, nuts, produce and other food products and/or
- ▶ You're a market gardener, farmer, rancher or other Oklahoma food producer interested in selling your products at retail prices to Oklahoma customers.

If either of the above statements describe your situation, then you are very likely to be interested in the recent formation of the Oklahoma Food Co-operative.

Oklahoma Food is a non-profit marketing network attempting to bring together Oklahoma's food producers and consumers through a buying-club type arrangement. Their hope is to eventually open co-operative grocery stores that sell only food produced in Oklahoma, but for now are starting with a monthly delivery cycle, where customers can order available foods raised by fellow Okies. At the time of printing, the membership count was at 81, which included 26 producers, with numbers continuing to rise.

## Here's How it Works:

▶ It's a Co-op, so everyone who participates, both customers and producers, is a member of the OK Food Co-operative. The Co-op functions as the order and delivery service between producer and customer. There is a one-time membership fee of \$50, which can be paid in monthly installments if necessary. These monies will be used to cover startup and overhead expenses of the network.

▶ All members receive a listing of available products, with descriptions of all the producers and the various items they sell.

▶ Beginning November of '03, customer orders will be placed once a month by phone, Internet or U.S. mail. Customers pay at the time of ordering and can pick up their order the following week from locations in Edmond, Norman, OKC, Stillwater and Tahlequah. A pick-up site for Tulsa is under consideration at this time. Home delivery can be arranged for an additional \$5.00.

▶ Producers are notified within 24 hours if any of their products are ordered. They can deliver their ordered products to a NW Oklahoma City location and receive payment upon delivery. Producers can also arrange to meet a pickup vehicle near the Stillwater, Tahlequah and Waynoka areas, in which case a payment check will be mailed within 24 hours. Non-perishable products can also be shipped to OKC via UPS or U.S. Mail.

▶ Producers decide ahead of time what size increments will be offered for their various products and at what price. No commission is paid to the co-op, therefore full retail prices are anticipated. Producers are responsible for packaging according to the total number of units ordered, i.e. six 10 lb. sacks of onions and ten 5lb. bags of carrots etc., unless they wish to deliver in bulk and pay a commission (to be negotiated) for the co-op workers to repack.

▶ As the network develops, arrangements for delivery and pick-up of ordered items will evolve to meet the needs of participating customers and producers.

Four categories of Oklahoma food products that will be offered include:

1. Certified Organic

2. All Natural – Substantially complies with organic standards, but not currently certified. No products from Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO's)

3. Standard – No synthetic herbicides or pesticides, but allows for some synthetic fertilizers. No CAFO products.

4. Commercial – Conventionally produced. No CAFO products.

Producers will classify each of their products by providing information about production practices and location. OK Food organizers reserve the right to verify producer claims.

## Benefits

### As a Customer:

- One stop shopping for a variety of locally- and sustainably- grown and raised foods such as all natural meats, cheeses, eggs, nuts, flour, jams, jellies, salsa, produce and more.
- Getting to know the people who raise the food for you and your family.
- Supporting local farmers and keeping your food dollars circulating within your community and state.
- Meeting other like-minded people who share these values.

### As a Producer:

- Increasing your retail customer base beyond your immediate vicinity.
- Selling bulk volumes at or near retail prices.
- Free marketing and advertising via OK Food's website and other printed media.
- Possibly contracting future production by pre-selling bulk quantities.

For more information and a full list of producers and products visit [www.oklahomafood.org](http://www.oklahomafood.org) or contact Robert Waldrop at 405-613-4688.