

Field Notes



Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Vol. 27, #1 • Spring 2001

Getting More for Your Cattle

How can ranchers get a better return on their cattle? Can they beat the low prices that have, too often, plagued the industry?

Mike Callicrate thinks so. The St. Francis, Kansas, independent feedlot owner markets his beef directly on the Internet under the name Naturally Tender Beef by Callicrate™. He is also part of a group that is exploring a way to offer producers \$300-\$400 per head above the current market price with a pilot project in Mississippi (see page 3).

Callicrate will be the keynote presenter at three events across the state in April sponsored by the Kerr Center and OSU. These events will explore alternative ideas for marketing cattle. Speakers will discuss, in particular, linking cattle producers and small beef processors in order to market quality "natural" beef products in this region.

The meetings will be held on April 18 at Tulsa Community College, northeast campus; on April 19 at Baker Hall, Eastern Oklahoma State College in Wilburton; and on April 20 at the OSU Cooperative Extension office in Chickasha. Each meeting will start at nine and be over by five. There is no registration fee.

The results and implications of three important regional surveys of cattle producers, independent meat processors, and beef consumers will be the focus of the meetings. In addition, Dr. Rodney Holcomb of OSU's Food and Agricultural Products Center will present information on niche markets and closed cooperatives.

Last summer, the Kerr Center and OSU surveyed cattle producers in Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas to

assess their interest in direct marketing and in natural beef. (What is natural beef? It is usually defined as beef from cattle that have not been given hormone implants or sub-therapeutic doses of antibiotics. Processors sometimes also require that there be no animal by-products in the feed given the cattle).

The producer survey appeared in the June 2000 *Field Notes*. In brief, nearly all who responded were owner-operators and the majority had been raising cattle for more than twenty years. The average size of their cowherds was 51-100 head. Ninety-five per cent said they would be interested, or possibly interested, in alternative ways to market their cattle.

Next, OSU surveyed small-scale independent meat processors in order to learn about their businesses and explore possible retail outlets for producers to use to direct market beef. Many of those who responded expressed an interest in value-added processing enterprises they might incorporate into their operations.

Finally, the marketing firm of Tom Diel and Associates completed a survey of customers at groceries in Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and Dallas. Those surveyed were asked about their beef buying habits and attitudes towards natural beef.

Farmers and ranchers from Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas, local processors, feed lot owners, ag professionals such as Extension, rural development experts, and policy leaders are all invited to attend.

Contact Eric Allenbach at the Kerr Center to pre-register by phone at 405-478-7618 or email kcsa@flash.net. Walk-ins are welcome.

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 southeastern Oklahoma town of Poteau. It was established in 1985.

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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The Next Green Revolution Is Still Coming

Attention: educators, producers, Ag professionals and policy makers. *The Next Green Revolution: Essential Steps to a Healthy, Sustainable Agriculture*, a book by Kerr Center President Jim Horne and Communications Director Maura McDermott, will be out this summer. Initially expected in February, the publication date has been pushed back a few months due to the crowded publishing schedule at Haworth Press of New York. The book was edited by Dr. Raymond Poincelot, who is also editor of the *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*.

This book is a must for agriculture and natural resource programs, for libraries, and for individuals who want an easy-to-read introduction to sustainable agriculture: what it means and why it is needed.

For a list of topics and chapter contents contact the Haworth Press or the Kerr Center. Examination and review copies are available from the publisher. Those interested can order hard or soft cover copies of the book at a substantial prepublication discount. (soft: \$19.96, regularly \$24.95; hard: \$55.96, regularly \$69.95).

Enthusiastic Prepublication Reviews by Educators and Agriculturists

"Timely, informative, readable... Speaks to mainstream farmers in a very effective manner. Offers a vision of a more successful agriculture that supports both farmers and rural communities, and an eight-step plan for achieving it. A blueprint for farmers who want to improve profits and stewardship...should also be read by researchers, policymakers, and anyone who has an interest in the future of agriculture."

- Jill Shore Auburn, PhD, former associate director, University of California Sustainable Agriculture Program, currently with USDA.

"It gives practical suggestions for increasing profits and reducing risks while regenerating the soil, protecting the environment, and being a good neighbor. Horne and McDermott show us that sustainable farming is not only possible, it is also very practical."

- John E. Ikerd, PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of Missouri.

Order by calling 1-800-HAWORTH, email: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com;
web: <http://www.haworthpressinc.com>.

(This corrects information in the last *Field Notes*).

Mississippi's "Family Farm Initiative": *Could it Work in Oklahoma?*



These days the Mississippi agricultural community and legislature is abuzz with talk about the state's "Family Farm Initiative." A key project of the initiative will be the development of a new beef processing and marketing system that will return a much larger portion of the retail value of beef to Mississippi cattle producers.

"The initiative will give Mississippi cattle producers the opportunity to sell into a much higher value market and take a share of the retail value," says Fred Heindl, director of Mississippi's Agribusiness and Natural Resource Center.

How would it work? Mississippi producers would retain ownership of their cattle through the feedlot. The cattle would then be slaughtered at a meat packing plant that utilizes patented technology to enhance the taste and healthfulness of the beef.

The beef would be returned to Mississippi in boxed form to be further processed into retail cuts, cooked products, and specialty items. The state of Mississippi may use rural development funds to help finance the construction of this state-of-the-art portion control plant.

The resulting premium quality product would be

marketed directly to the public- bypassing the concentrated packing, processing, and retail system- in order to capture more of the total value at the producer level.

Long time Mississippi House Agriculture Chairman Steve Holland remarked, "Packers and retailers, through their concentrated market power, have hijacked what was once Mississippi's largest agricultural industry- the cattle business. It is time to take it back!"

Family Farm Foods of Mississippi, Inc. (FFFMS), a not-for-profit Mississippi corporation, will spearhead the initiative by building the non-profit, value-added beef plant in Mississippi with the goal of returning \$300.00 to \$400.00 per head above the current market price to the cattle producer.

This amount is significant, not only in terms of

family farm profitability, but also as compared with past cooperative efforts such as Farmland's (fourth largest packer) U.S. Premium Beef which is reported to have paid a mere \$13 per head in premiums over the cash market through February 2000, according to Heindl.

The Mississippi initiative has such promise that private investors (with a goal of helping farmers and ranchers through smart, new business startups) are volunteering to help finance the project.

Ralph Smucker, a successful Texas businessman with a public interest bent, has offered to match dollar-for-dollar all rural development funds plowed into the project. Smucker said, "I see this project as having the potential to create unprecedented economic benefit where it's needed the most: at the farm and ranch gate and in America's rural communities."

According to FFMS president Thomas F. "Fred" Stokes, the non-profit corporation will operate in a manner that stands in sharp contrast to that of the prevailing food production and delivery system. This effort will be characterized by:

- Recompensing farmers from the marketplace rather than through federal income transfer payments;
- Targeting independent family-owned and operated farming operations;
- Providing fair prices, fair wages and a healthy working environment;
- Delivering high quality, wholesome and safe food products to consumers; and
- Employing cutting edge technology to reduce costs and increase profitability for farmers.

Check out *Naturally Tender Beef by Callicrate*

at www.ranchfoodsdirect.com. To learn more about packer concentration and pricing problems in today's beef market go to www.nobull.com. For further analysis of the agricultural marketplace, try the Organization for Competitive Markets (OCM) at www.competitivemarkets.com.



Grazing Management Workshop on April 5-6

The Kerr Center will hold an in-depth, advanced workshop on rotational grazing Thursday and Friday, April 5-6, at its Stewardship Ranch near Poteau.

The workshop is geared to people who already have a basic understanding of rotational grazing, but who wish to develop and implement a long-term grazing plan or fine-tune the systems they have.

When the course is over, says Brian Freking, livestock production specialist for the Kerr Center and one of the course instructors, attendees will have a better understanding of:

- Forage development as it relates to quality and yield
- Matching livestock and forage resources
- Landscape utilization
- Meeting the nutritional needs of livestock from pasture
- Economic potential of planned grazing management

A portion of class time will be spent monitoring and evaluating pastures. Visually monitoring the animal impact on a grazing management system will be one focus. Other topics to be covered include:

- Managing grazing to optimize the health of the land
- Managing grazing for animal performance
- Basic design: fences and water
- Pasture monitoring techniques
- Animals as tools to improve and maintain the long-term sustainability of an operation

The workshop fee is \$50 per person. Fee for an additional family member is \$25. Registration is limited to 20. Confirmation of registration, with directions and motel information will be mailed upon receipt of payment.

For more information contact the Kerr Center at 918-647-9123 or mailbox@kerrcenter.com.



GRAZING WORKSHOP

REGISTRATION FORM

Deadline for registration is April 2.

Name _____

Family member name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

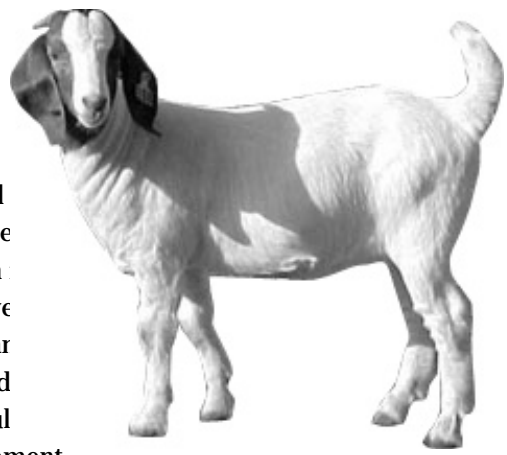
Phone (day) _____ Phone (night) _____



Mail this form with check or money order for \$50 plus \$25 for additional family member to:

Kerr Center – Grazing Workshop
P.O. Box 588
Poteau, OK 74953

Goats from A-Z



Everything you might want to know about incorporating goats into your farm or ranch will be covered in a meat goat seminar on Friday afternoon and evening, April 20, through Saturday, April 21, in Oklahoma City. The workshop is sponsored by the Kerr Center. Instructors will be well-known goat experts Dr. An Peischel and Dr. Frank Pinkerton.

Peischel is a partner in Goats Unlimited in Rackerby, California. For ten years she has raised KIKO meat goats for replacement breeding stock and meat production while enhancing land pro-

ductivity. Peischel has a PhD in range livestock nutrition from Kansas State University. She has a wide range of experience and education in livestock agriculture including management of a beef cattle research center, and an elk production facility.

Pinkerton is a retired Extension goat specialist from Langston University. He owns "The Goat Works," a meat goat production and marketing consultant business in Grapeland, Texas. Peischel says Pinkerton "has forgotten more about goats than most of us could ever hope to learn."

The workshop will be held at OSU/OKC campus at 900 N. Portland Ave. Cost for the workshop is \$100, \$75 for additional family member. For more information on the content of the workshop contact Alan Ware at the Kerr Center at 918-647-9123. For registration information contact Liz Speake at the same number or email either at mailbox@kerrcenter.com.

Topics will include:

- Meat goat marketing, supply and demand channels
- Managing goats on rangeland
- IMPS/live and carcass grading standards
- Procurement of foundation stock
- Rent-a-goat operations
- Noxious weed and brush control
- Nutritional supplementation
- Fire mitigation with goats
- Stocker/finisher goat operations
- Health care for range goats
- Goat breeds and breeding plans



REGISTRATION FORM

Deadline for registration is April 16.

GOAT SEMINAR

Name _____

Family member name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ Phone (night) _____



Mail this form with check or money order for \$100 plus \$75 for additional family member to:

Kerr Center – Goat Seminar
 P.O. Box 588
 Poteau, OK 74953



Come meet Leroy, the Pineywoods calf!

Kids: Meet the Farm Animals!

School groups who would enjoy meeting Leroy, the Pineywoods calf, Buddy, the young buffalo, and other farm animals are invited to schedule a visit to the Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm in April. Kids will even get a chance to pet baby calves and goats.

While school groups may (by reservation) tour

the historical farm during any month, farm manager Jim Combs is encouraging school groups to come in April to get "up close and personal" with the farm's rare breeds of livestock and other birds and animals, including the striking Dominique chickens (the first American chicken breed), Black Mammoth donkeys Gidget and Bridget (donkeys were a common work animal in early Oklahoma), Spanish goats (an early, now

endangered breed), and the Pineywoods cattle (a compact, hardy breed developed in the Mississippi pine woods, original home of the Choctaws).

Other interesting animals that can be seen on the farm include Buddy, the young buffalo (the buffalo or bison is our state mammal), and fantail pigeons.

Visiting youth will have the opportunity to learn about the history of livestock in Oklahoma and

the importance of livestock to both the pioneers and Native Americans who came to the state. Other programs available to be scheduled during visits include 1800's Fun and Games, The Value of Trees, and Oklahoma Statehood and Emblems.

To make reservations or to get more information contact Jim Combs by writing Rt. 2 Box 693 Keota, OK 74941 or phone 918-966-3396 or email okhfarm@brightok.net.

How is My Food Grown? *Labeling for Sustainable Production*

- Manjula Guru

A label is an attached paper with information. [Webster's 21st Century Directory]

Labeling relates to any words, particulars, trade marks, brand name, pictorial matter or symbol relating to a food stuff and placed on any packaging, document, notice, label, ring, or collar accompanying or referring to such food stuff. [EU Food Labeling Directive, 1979].

Over the years, food labeling has gained importance as consumers make more purchasing decisions. With consumers having more knowledge about the health effects of certain foodstuffs, there is growing pressure for more detailed food labeling. The study of food allergies has brought into focus a whole new area of knowledge that should be contained within the information provided to the consumer on the food label. However, the safety of food is always open to a number of views and arguments, and the propriety of foods being labeled and marketed has been both applauded and criticized.

A new Kerr Center report, *How is My Food Grown? Labeling for Sustainable Production*, examines the importance of food labeling in today's world. Part one discusses how labeling helps ensure the consumers right to know;

their right to make an informed decision about what to eat based on the information provided by labels. Part two looks into how a price or income change may affect the availability of nutritious food. The third section examines how organic agriculture offers a clear alternative to chemical intensive agriculture. Parts four and five conclude on the note that labeling of genetically-modified foods is an issue of growing concern that cannot be ignored. The final section points out the importance of having a universal understanding regarding biotechnologically engineered foods as well as organic foods.

Go to www.kerrcenter.com to download or print out the report in PDF format. Contact the Kerr Center to order hard copies of the report. There is a nominal shipping/handling charge.

Spring Farm Tour for Market Growers

The Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance will conduct a tour of two successful small farms in central Oklahoma on Saturday, March 31. These events will be a great opportunity for anyone interested in growing or making products for farmers' markets in Oklahoma, says Doug Walton, president of the Alliance, who grows for the Muskogee market.

The tour will visit one farm in the morning and the other after lunch. (Rain or shine). Crow's Vegetable Farm just east of Shawnee will host visitors in the morning, and the afternoon tour will be held at Frost Farms near Noble, just south of Norman.

Crow's Vegetable Farm
(9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.)

Ricky and Claudia Crow have been growing produce commercially for 14 years and have 40 acres in vegetable production. The Crows market their crops through the Pottawatomie County Farmer' Market in Shawnee, the OSU-OKC Farmers' Market and through a roadside market that they own in downtown Shawnee.

During this farm tour, participants will learn about the Crows' extensive use of succession planting and early production of squash and cucumbers using black plastic. A demonstration of the mechanical laying of black plastic and trans-

planting is planned, if weather permits.

Guests will also tour the Crows' produce washing room/packing shed. A technical specialist will also be on hand to discuss drip irrigation design and layout.

Lunch - Bring your own (12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.)

Tour goers are encouraged to bring their own lunch and eat together at either farm location.

Drinks and dessert will be provided. Eating establishments are also available in Shawnee and Norman.

Frost Farms
(2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.)

Richard and Wanda Frost have a small greenhouse operation growing perennials, with an emphasis on herbs, groundcovers and native ornamentals. They have been growing and selling their plants and fresh-cut herbs at the Norman Farmers' Market for 10 years.

The Frosts also produce wheat and other grain crops on their 280

acre farm. Participants will tour two greenhouses, learn about landscaping with perennials and visit a 60-acre reforestation project. The Frosts will also demonstrate plant propagation techniques. A local extension specialist will be on hand to answer questions.

Admission for the day is \$5 per person, with children under 12 admitted free. Advance registration is not required. Admission for members of the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance is \$2 per person. Farmers' Markets that currently belong to the Alliance include Collinsville, Pittsburgh County (McAlester), Muskogee, Norman, OSU-OKC, Pottawatomie County (Shawnee), Stillwater and Tulsa-Cherry Street. Any current member of these markets is considered a member of the OK Farmers' Market Alliance.

For more information call Doug at 918-686-6939.



DIRECTIONS:

Crow's Vegetable Farm -

From I-40, east of Shawnee, take the Earlsboro exit (#190). Go south 2 1/2 mi., then 1/2 mi. west. House is on the north side of road, look for sign.
47504 Independence Rd.

Frost Farms - On U.S. Hwy.

77, south of Norman, go approx. 1 1/2 mi. south of downtown Noble. Turn west on Cemetery Rd. Go 1/2 mi., then south on Burkett Rd. Go approx. 1/2 mi. to white two-story house on east side.
8951 Burkett Rd.



**Statewide
Kerr-Sponsored
Educational Events**

March 31- Spring Farm Tour for Market Growers. (see p.7)

Month of April- Meet the Farm Animals! Tours for schoolchildren (see p.6)

April 5- Rick Jeans Field Day (see this page)

April 5-6- Grazing Management Workshop (see p.4)

April 18, 19, 20- Natural Beef Meetings (see p.1)

April 20-21- Goat Seminar (see p.5)

Producer Grant Field Day: Rick Jeans Farm
Rick Jeans, a 1998

recipient of a Kerr Center producer grant, will hold a field day on his farm near Tonkawa on Thursday, April 5. The event is free, and open to farmers, ranchers and ag professionals interested in the use of chicken litter as a fertilizer.

Under the Kerr Center grant, Jeans applied chicken litter to wheat using three different tillage methods: conventional, low-till and no-till. The goal of the project was to determine how much of the litter fertilizer was being captured by the wheat crop instead of leaching deeper into the soil profile. Jeans performed soil tests to monitor nutrient movement. He will discuss the results,

beginning at 10 a.m.

At one p.m. the field day will shift focus to the results of the grant Jeans received from the USDA's SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) program. The project looked into using chicken litter to fertilize alfalfa.

Jeans raises wheat, soybeans and milo on 1500 acres. He also has a cow/calf herd and raises stocker cattle on wheat during the winter.

Contact David or Alan at 918-647-9123 or mailbox@kerrcenter.com for more information.

Environmentally-Friendly Awards

Keep Oklahoma Beautiful, the statewide

environmental education organization, is calling for nominations for their annual awards. The deadline is May 1; there is no entry fee.

The competition is open to individuals and groups in Oklahoma in the following categories: community effort, news media, youth, individual achievement, business, non-profit organizations, government, and educational institutions.

Areas of competition are: environmental improvement, beautification and landscaping, and education/ promotion.

For more information call 405-844-6543 or go to www.keepoklahomabeautiful.com for descriptions of last year's winners.



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