



Jim Horne Marks 30 Years at the Kerr Center

—Maura McDermott

Kerr Center President and CEO Jim Horne marked his 30th anniversary with the Kerr Center in July.

A lot has changed since 1972—in Oklahoma, in America, and on farms and ranches across the nation. Jim Horne has changed too, and with him, the Kerr Center.

Back then, the Kerr Center was the Agricultural Division of the Kerr Foundation. The "Ag Division" was one of four divisions of a large foundation, funded by the estate of Senator Robert S. Kerr. Jim was fresh out of OSU, with a master's degree in agricultural economics. In his first job with the foundation, he dispensed advice on finances and farm management to producers in the Poteau area. But despite his best intentions and the work of the Kerr Foundation and numerous other groups and individuals across America, small farms continued to disappear at a rapid rate.

As he says in his recently published book, *The Next Green Revolution: Essential Steps to a Healthy Sustainable Agriculture*,

"My first inklings that the industrial agriculture system was not all it was cracked up to be came gradually, as I worked with small farmers and realized how difficult it was for them to stay in business. I had grown up happy on a small farm, and I believed it was a worthwhile way of life—a way of life that should at least be an option for people in rural Oklahoma.

But small farms were disappearing, unable to compete...what I discovered was that farmers operating small farms, who needed the most help, were often the last ones to get it..."

This concern has motivated the work he has done consistently throughout his life as an advocate of family farms and the revitalization of rural communities. He has guided the Kerr Center into its role of giving assistance to

just those farmers who need it most.

Jim became director of the Ag Division in 1979. He led the transition the organization made in 1985 to become the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The change was motivated by the recognition that Oklahoma's agriculture was in crisis. The board of trustees, led by the senator's daughter Kay Kerr Adair, believed that environmental and financial problems on the farm needed to be addressed with fresh ideas that emphasized long-term solutions.

The transition was often painful (half the staff quit the day after the organization's name was changed to include "sustainable" agriculture), but Jim stayed on, coming to his own understanding of the word "sustainable." As he has written,

"For an agriculture to be sustainable, I believe it ought to be science based, farmer driven and profitable. It should contribute to, or at least not detract from, the environmental health of the area. It must be consumer friendly, delivering safe, nutritious food. It should provide the basis for strong rural communities."

He has guided the organization in developing sustainable agriculture research and demonstration programs on the Kerr ranch/farm and statewide; in creating a variety of educational resources for farmers and ranchers, most of them free of charge; and in preparing policy analysis for opinion leaders and interested citizens.

As he says in his book, a question that Kay Adair asked him long ago-- "Are we really helping people?"—continues to be his touchstone.

For more on the history of the Kerr Center, go to www.kerrcenter.com and click on "About Kerr Center." The Next Green Revolution is available from the Kerr Center at 918.647.9123 or from Haworth Press, 1-800-429-6784 or www.haworthpressinc.com For excerpts and reviews visit the Kerr Center website.