

Farm Tours Offer Tips for Growers

Just in time for the growing season, two successful small farms in central Oklahoma will host half-day tours of their farming operations on Saturday, March 30.

"This will be a great opportunity for anyone interested in growing or making products for farmers' markets in Oklahoma to get tips from the experts—experienced growers," says Doug Walton, president of the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance.

The morning tour will take place from 9-11:30 at OEI Farm, near Lake Thunderbird State Park, east of Norman. The afternoon tour, from 2-5, will be held at Sunrise Acres near Blanchard, west of Norman. Lunch is slated from 12-2. Tour goers are encouraged to bring their own lunch and eat together at either farm location, where drinks and dessert will be provided. Eating establishments are also available in Norman.

Admission for the day is \$5 per person, with children under 12 admitted free. Admission for members of the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance is \$2 per person. No advance registration is required; people can just show up and register at either farm.

David and Sharon Kill of OEI Farm have grown vegetables, cut flowers, perennials, trees and shrubs for sale at the Norman Farmers' Market for the last nine years. At the market, David is frequently referred to as the "guy with the unusual varieties" of produce and plants.

The Kills consider their farm a very small market gardening operation that is a good example of what can be done at that scale. Tour goers will get to see

early season production of lettuces, cabbages and other cool season vegetables using homemade and improvised row covering methods. David and Sharon will also share some of their hints for starting and growing difficult seeds and plants.

Robert and Barbara Stelle of Sunrise Acres have been growing and selling fresh vegetables, herbs, perennials and other plants for the past six years. The Stelles market their goods through the OSU-OKC Farmers' Market and also directly from their farm near Blanchard. Robert and Barbara use natural fertilizers and pest control on 3 1/2 acres of produce and in nearly 6000 sq. ft. of greenhouse space.

Robert will demonstrate seed starting and transplanting techniques for the market grower and will show his 3-point tractor-mounted planter used for sowing a wide variety of garden seeds. Participants will also see Sunrise Acres' first attempt at container growing of tomatoes, squash and cukes in the greenhouse for winter market.

The tour is being sponsored by the Kerr Center and the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Alliance. The alliance was organized to promote farmers' markets in Oklahoma and help them be successful. Collinsville, Edmond, McAlester, Muskogee, Norman, OSU-OKC, Shawnee, Stillwater and Tulsa-Cherry Street are members. Current members of those markets are automatically members of the alliance, too.

For more information about the tours or alliance, call Doug Walton at 918/686-6939 or Chris Kirby at 405/945-3326.

Directions to the Farms

To reach **OEI Farm** from Norman, go east on Hwy 9 to Lake Thunderbird dam. Turn right on 156th, then take next right. Go south for 2 mi. and look for farm on right side. From I-40, go south on Hwy 102 (exit#178) for 8 mi. to Hwy 9. Turn right (west) on Hwy 9 and proceed to Lake Thunderbird Dam (approx. 10 mi.). At dam, turn left on 156th, then take next right. Go south for 2 mi. and look for farm on right side.

To get to **Sunrise Acres** from OKC, take I-44 south to Hwy. 37 (just south of Canadian River). Go west on Hwy. 37 for 3 mi. Turn south on Hwy. 76 for 4 mi., then west on SW 16th for 1.3 mi. Turn north and follow signs to Sunrise Acres. From Norman, take I-35 south to Hwy 9. Go west for 6 mi. to Hwy 62, then north to Newcastle, turn west on Hwy 130 at the stoplight. Go 3 mi., then south on Hwy 76 for 1 mi. to SW 16th. Go west 1.3 mi.

