



A “beginning farmer” and his dad hosted a farm tour that was part of KRC’s recent NC SARE funded training for USDA NRCS personnel on organic farming practices and certification.

Above Jason Elliott, and his son Cody, listen as Jason’s dad Roger Elliot (not pictured) talked about his crop rotation during a rainy tour of their organic crop fields for the southeast Kansas NRCS training session.

See inside page 10-11 for more on the trainings and more photos.

“Connecting Cows, Carbon, and Carrots: Making Sense of Our Food Future” Conference Set for Nov. 20, 2010

Whiting, Ks.- Mark your calendars for Saturday November 20, 2010, for KRC’s Sustainable Agriculture Conference at the Flint Hills Technical College, Emporia, Kansas. The theme for this year’s conference is “Connecting Cows, Carbon and Carrots: Making Sense of Our Food Future”.

Workshops following the four tracks of Cows and Crops (farming practices), Carbon (carbon, climate and farming practices), Carrots (local food and marketing), and Connections (politics of food) follow morning keynote speaker Joel Brown, who will speak on climate change and agriculture~ the challenges and the responses.

Brown is a rangeland ecologist in New Mexico for the USDA Natural Resources Service, where he is involved in research and development of land classification systems, carbon sequestration on rangelands, and grazing land ecology. He also works as the CSIRO (Australia) Project Leader and scientist, and NRCS Global Change Leader and Cooperating Scientist with the ARS Jornada Experimental Range.

“Climate change, whether natural or human caused, presents some serious challenges to agriculture. Agricultural producers are very familiar with responding to variable climate,” states Brown, “However, projected increases in climate variability will require an even more flexible approach to management.” According to Brown, an important aspect of responding is a realistic assessment of the risks, and development of responses and decision systems to address needed changes.

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Rural Papers

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Small Farmer Commentary

Food Movement is a Farmer Movement, Too

by Mary Fund

You would think that Agriculture (yes, that is Agriculture with a big A) would be happy that so many people are thinking about the food they eat. After years of bemoaning the fact that more and more of the population is becoming further removed from farming and ranching, you'd think the growing interest in where food comes from, how it is raised, and what the impact is on our communities, our resources, and the environment would be exhilarating.

But Agriculture with the Big A is upset. They don't like all of the stories, and they don't like all these people poking their noses into Agriculture's business. These people, Agriculture argues, live in cities or suburbs and are increasingly removed from farming and ranching, so they don't understand Agriculture. This misunderstanding, explains Agriculture, is mostly because of a "social movement" that tells the people bad things about Agriculture. This social movement is known as the "food movement"; and, Agriculture cautions, it is all around us. Local, organic, and farmers markets. Oh My!

According to Agriculture, the answer to the food movement people is to re-educate them, to fill the "ignorance gap" which Agriculture defines as "a void between what they think they know and reality". And it is the job of Agriculture to set the people straight about our food system and our farms—with "sound science" and "truth". Never mind that "sound science" is synonymous with "tobacco science" or the "best science that money can buy", and that "truth" may be something they can't handle. In other words, Agriculture with the Big A denies that problems exist; it

patronizes consumers' concerns about health and food safety, and urges everyone to stay the course.

Personally, I think Agriculture needs to think about who makes up the "food movement" that they criticize and fear.

Sure there are those who would not know one end of a cow from the other, or who don't have a clue what it takes to put in a crop or a garden, and who go overboard on health and safety concerns. But in Kansas, and probably across the country, more and more rank and file farmers and ranchers are throwing their hats into the ring of the "food movement".

You see, the "food movement" is defined as more than consumers or elite food purists looking for the perfect Arugula or free range chicken. It is more than health and diet-conscious urban consumers, although that is a big part of it.

The food movement is also home to those farmers, ranchers, and producers who ask questions about the wisdom of the status quo in agriculture, who explore new markets and production ideas, who search for new management approaches that will save time and money, and who seek new business opportunities. It is home to conservationists and stewards of the land, and it is home to wildlife enthusiasts. It is home to those who want to see a future in agriculture. With this broad definition, you will find that it includes a surprising number of people, rural and urban, including some pretty conventional farmers and ranchers.

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Sustainable Agriculture Conference 2010

Cows, Carbon, and Carrots...

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Brown spoke on climate change and the impact on agriculture at the 2002 Kansas Sustainable Agriculture Conference, providing an early perspective on what would be an issue of growing importance.

Two other featured speakers for a roundtable discussion of climate and agriculture are Karl Brooks, U.S. EPA Region 7 Director, and Jeff Schahczenski, Policy Analyst for the National Center for Alternative Technology (NCAT).

The conference will be held at the Flint Hills Technical College 3301 W. 18th Ave., Emporia, Ks. from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cost is \$20 per person which will cover lunch, snacks and materials. Registration is limited to the first 150 persons, and the deadline for registrations is Monday November 15. A detailed agenda with presenters listed is available at the KRC website.

Online registration is also available at www.kansasruralcenter.org, where you may register online (and pay by credit card), or print out a registration form and mail it and your check in. Or contact the KRC office at 785-873-3431, or ddysart@rainbowtel.net, for more information.

Co-sponsoring the event is the Kansas Center For Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops (KCSAAC). □

November 20, 2010

Agenda Summary

8:30 Registration opens

9:15 a.m. Welcome by Dan Nagengast, Executive Director, KRC

9:30 a.m. Keynote Speaker, Joel Brown, USDA NRCS

Climate Change and Agriculture: Challenges and Responses

10:45 a.m. Break

11 a.m. to Noon Workshop Session One Concurrent Workshops

- * Ecological Approaches to Farming: Models and Practices for a Sustainable System
- * Trends in the Production & Marketing of Grass-fed Beef
- * Opportunities for Local & Regional Food Production In Kansas
- * Growing Health: School & Community Gardens
- * Kansas Smoke Management: Melding Legislation & Production Practices
- * Food Policy Councils
- * Financial Resource Assistance for Sustainable Ag Farms

Noon- Lunch (sourced from as many local and regional products as possible)

1 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. Roundtable Discussion on Climate Change, Agriculture and Sustainability

Joel Brown, USDA NRCS;

Karl Brooks, U.S. EPA Region 7 Director;

Jeff Schahczenski, National Center for Appropriate Technology

2:20 p.m.- 3:20 p.m. Workshop Session Two Concurrent Workshops

- *Hoop Houses 101
- * Specialty Crop Insurance
- * GAPs- Good Agricultural Practices for Food Safety
- * Cover Crops- Next Frontier in Farming
- * Patch-Burn Grazing the Prairies in Kansas
- * Intergenerational Farm Transitions: Planning for Success

3:30-4:30 p.m. Workshop Session Three Concurrent Workshops

- * Production and Marketing of Grass fed Beef in Kansas- Producer Panel
- * Marketing Organic Grain: Trends and Challenges
- * Scaling Up and Diversifying: A Tale of Two Farmers
- * Bio-Char
- * Farm Bill 2012: What does the future hold?

4:30 p.m. Adjourn!

Farm To School Lunch Prompts Excitement Among the Kids



Late last spring, kids at the Cordley School in Lawrence, Ks. chowed down at a special lunch prepared from locally raised foods.

Parents and schools around the country have been working towards incorporating more local fresh foods into school lunch programs as a response to nutritionally related health issues stemming from obesity. The thought, and hope, is that children might develop different eating habits which include more fresh fruits and vegetables, and less processed foods or foods containing added salt, trans-fats or sugar. Coupled with increased physical activity, that is the prescription for a society headed towards increased diabetes, heart disease and other maladies.

A group of interested stakeholders has been meeting with the Kansas Department of Education Child Nutrition and Wellness division about this issue. At the same time, the Kansas Rural Center received funding from the Kansas Department of Agriculture and USDA's Specialty Crop Improvement program to work with six institutional meals programs in providing limited cost share to include more fresh fruits and vegetables in their meals programs. The Cordley School event in Lawrence was one of the cost share recipients. KRC will be working with others and will keep you posted on the responses.

Dan Nagengast, KRC Executive Director

Cordley Elementary Farm-to-School Lunch: A Learning Experience

By Linda Cottin

Lawrence, Ks.- A group of Lawrence chefs, business owners, farmers and parents joined together to bring the students and staff at Cordley Elementary School, in Lawrence, Kansas, an all local, mostly organic, non-processed lunch on Friday, May 21, 2010. The event was in honor of the Cordley Picnic Shelter that was recently completed and a tribute to the local food producers and purveyors the Kaw River Valley has to offer.

Funding for the event was provided by a grant from the Kansas Rural Center and by donations from several local businesses. Cost for the meal averaged \$3.00 per person, with over 400 people being served a full meal during the event.

The Cordley event was the first of its kind in the school district and received the full support of the district's food services department and the school staff members. The community and district's positive response to the idea and willingness to support the corresponding activities was crucial to the event's success.

Menu choices for the day were limited to beef, vegetable or gluten free/dairy free lasagna. Cordley's group decided to serve lasagna due to the availability of local produce, and the willingness of the elementary students to eat the meal.

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KRC Receives Specialty Crop Grants

Topeka, Ks. -The Kansas Department of Agriculture recently announced that Kansas will receive \$282,828 in USDA grant funds to fund projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, which are defined as horticulture including fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, nursery crops and floriculture.

KRC will receive \$70,000 to increase specialty crop sales by helping build relationships between specialty crop producers, food businesses and consumers using a locally grown branding tool. KRC was also awarded another \$70,000 to help six farmers' markets develop electronic benefit transfer (EBT) capacity in 2011. KRC has successfully worked with at least 11 other markets to set up the EBT process, which allows food stamp recipients (now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) to shop for fresh produce at farmers markets.

Other grant recipients in Kansas include Highland Community College to offer in-the-field extension services to Kansas vineyard and winery owners; Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education to provide technical and educational support to K-12 Kansas schools to plant school gardens, tying lessons learned in the gardens to the classroom; Glacial Hills Conservation and Development Council to educate individuals about properly growing, preparing and preserving fruits and vegetables. □

Governor Elevates State Food Security Task Force

Topeka, Ks. - In early September, Kansas Governor Mark Parkinson made the Kansas Food Security Task Force, which was a temporary advisory group studying hunger and food security issues in Kansas, permanent. First formed in 2005 as an advisory group to former Governor Sebelius, the Executive Order will allow the task force to continue working on solving problems of food insecurity in the state.

"Ironically," stated Parkinson, "even though we produce an incredible amount of crops in this state, like every other state in the country, we have challenges with food security."

Food insecurity refers to the ability or inability to provide enough food for the household. According to Barbara LeClair, task force chairperson, there are different levels of food insecurity, ranging from anxiety over having enough money to buy food, to skipping meals to experiencing actual hunger.

As of June 30, the Kansas Food Assistance Program served an average of 117,000 families per month. During 2009-2010 nearly half the state's schoolchildren participated in the free or reduced school meal programs. In addition, three non-profit Feeding America food banks distributed more than 16 million pounds of food. Most food banks report an increase in demand for their services.

The 26-member group will

continue to include at least nine members drawn from various state agencies, public health and other advocacy groups. They will produce an annual report with recommendations on how to prevent or address hunger problems in Kansas.

In earlier reports, the task force recommended broad strategies including funding meal programs for seniors, summer school food programs, and raising the state's minimum wage.

"We know that the majority of these families are working families," LaClair said. Families in low-wage jobs, she explained, are not earning enough to pay all the bills, so they are making choices between food, rent, utilities, and medical bills.

According to LeClair, one successful task force recommendation was to increase the number of farmers' markets that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. SNAP beneficiaries use an encoded card similar to a debit card, which made access at outdoor farmers markets difficult to impossible. Through the efforts of several state agencies and the Kansas Rural Center, 11 farmers markets across the state now have EBT card accessibility.

Dan Nagengast, KRC Executive Director, serves on the state Food Security Task Force. □ (From *Kansas Health Institute News Service* Sept. 1, 2010)

Delaware Watershed Tour Showcases Practices to Protect Water Quality

by Connie Pantle

Holton, KS—Heavy rain may have altered a recent tour of the Delaware River watershed, however the relevance of implementing practices to protect water quality was front and center throughout the day. Just two nights before the tour, a portion of the upper watershed received five to seven inches of rain, causing the Delaware River to rise and even flood in some areas.

David Royer's streambank stabilization project along the Delaware River in Atchison County illustrated the power of high flood waters. The streambank stabilization project was the largest of three projects that Royer completed along the river this summer.

Overall, there were 14 rock vanes designed on the three sites, totaling

2,713 feet. The rock vanes detour the main force of the river current away from the easily erodible bank and into the middle of the river. Willow trees, shrubs and grasses were also planted along the bank of the river to hold the soil.

Royer said he was motivated to stabilize the stream bank because he was tired of rebuilding the levee that protects his adjacent crop ground. He also recognized how much of the bank was sloughing off into the river each year.

"Every landowner we are working with on these projects reports losing several feet of bank nearly every year—that's extremely valuable farm land that is washing away, now resting in the

bottom of Perry Reservoir," Marlene Bosworth, Coordinator of the Delaware River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS), said.

According to Bosworth, the Delaware WRAPS received funding for Phase I of a large streambank restoration project on the Delaware River through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to fund seven projects on the river. The State Conservation Commission (SCC), the Kansas Water Office (KWO) and landowners also provided funding for the projects.

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A stop at the farm of Alta Behrnes and son Gary showed how riparian buffers can filter runoff and reduce sedimentation. See grass buffer to left, adjoining soybeans on right. Photo by E. Reznicek.



David Hallauer, Meadowlark Extension agent, (right) explained how Jefferson County farmer Daryl Sales uses variety of forages in his livestock operation. Photo C. Pantle

Clean Water News

Delaware Tour...

Continued from page 6

Phase II of the project will involve construction of eight additional river sites in Atchison and Jefferson Counties. Funding for these sites will come from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, SCC, KWO and landowners, Bosworth said.

Bosworth said “recent studies indicate that a large portion of the sediment that is filling in Perry Lake is coming from streambank sources.”

“In order to prolong the life of the lake, an important water resource for the entire Northeast Kansas region, we have to slow down this sediment source,” she said.

Another stop that illustrated the power of floodwaters was at the Jackson County farm of Alta Behrnes and her son Gary. While the stream waters were high, the banks were protected by a grass buffer strip that the Behrnes family planted along a tributary to the Delaware River. The buffer strip is a CP21 practice, which is part of the USDA Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through the Jackson County Conservation District.

“If we’re really concerned about our land, buffer strips will sure help reduce erosion and filter what goes into the creek,” Melvin Steinlage, former Buffer Coordinator for Nemaha County said.

The next stop on the tour illustrated an innovative livestock program and diverse crop rotation system. David

Hallauer with the Meadowlark Extension District explained how Jefferson County farmer Daryl Sales utilizes a variety of forages in his cow-calf operation. Hallauer said Sales uses a “diverse and flexible grazing program” with such forages as Eastern gammagrass, clover, alfalfa, and native grass. He said the operation includes a variety of warm and cool season grasses and they “use it when it is best”.

As the tour bus crossed Perry Lake Reservoir on Highway 92, Bunnie Watkins with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers explained the purposes of Perry Lake Reservoir and

their order of importance to the Corps. The intended purposes are: flood control; recreation; fish and wildlife management; water supply, and water quality. Maintaining a level of water for navigation in the rivers downstream is also an intended purpose for the lake, she said. Marvin Boyer, Lake Quality Program Coordinator for the Corps, said the natural succession for a body of water is to silt in, therefore it is important to “get the most out of the authorized purposes for the lake.”

A stop at the Danny and Deb Barrows farm in Jackson County highlighted a newly installed livestock alternative watering site, one of several the couple has installed for their 400 pairs of cows and calves.



David Royer, above, surveys the streambank stabilization work done on the Delaware River on his farm. Photo by C. Pantle

Danny said they rehabilitated an old pond instead of building a new one. The old pond—once surrounded by crop fields—had silted in over the decades. He said they breeched the original pond’s dam two years ago and let the silt dry. That silt now forms an island in the pond.

To control algae in his watering tanks, Danny utilizes minnows. He said he places cinder blocks in the tanks to provide habitat for the tiny fish and they eat the algae.

The final stop was at the Jackson County farm of Fred and Nancy Coombs. The couple is working to restore the prairies and forests on the farm, which has been the Fred’s family since 1857. *Continued on page 15*

Sustainable Food System News

Exodus of Rural Youth Puts Communities in Jeopardy

by Mark Parker



Weldon Sleight, Dean of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, spoke at the KRC summer board meeting, explaining the Nebraska College's programs to bring young people back to farms and rural communities.

Soldier, Ks - The precious national resource that is rural America is in peril and Weldon Sleight is trying to do something about it. It's not the grass-covered hillsides, nor the cornfields, nor those amber waves of grain that the dean of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is most concerned with - it is the young people born and raised out beyond the city limits sign.

"We can ride it out until it's all gone or we can do something about it," Sleight told Kansas Rural Center (KRC) board members and their guests at the August board meeting at Soldier, Kansas. "Somehow, rural folks have to stand up and say we are not going to lose our kids to the city any longer."

Citing statistic after statistic that track the rural-to-urban exodus in Nebraska as well as Kansas, the veteran educator outlined his strategy

for keeping young people on the farm and in the rural communities that nurtured them.

Entrepreneurship is the key to providing opportunities for rural youth, he asserted, and that approach has been incorporated into the curriculum at Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, located in the small town of Curtis in western Nebraska.

The school's 100-Beef Cow Ownership Advantage Program was Sleight's first volley in the battle to revolutionize agricultural education. With a goal of preparing students to be farm and ranch owners rather than hired hands, the effort begins with a contractual agreement between a student and an established cowherd owner.

Essentially, the student utilizes a low-interest loan through USDA's

Beginning Farmer-Rancher Program to purchase 100 cows and trades his or her labor to the rancher in return for hosting those cows. In addition to completing educational requirements, the young person is able to build the herd up to 300-or-so head in a 10-year period. At that point, he or she has the collateral to obtain financing for an independent operation. And instead of leaving the farm, the rural community gains a new business.

"We are at a critical crossroads," Sleight told KRC board members. "I want ranch and farm ground to be owned by families, not corporations." Sleight's strategy for preserving the vitality of rural America also involves programs aimed at other types of farming as well as any sort of rural-based business. Additionally, he supports that effort with an outreach program offering agricultural education classes at 27 Nebraska high schools.

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Sustainable Food System News

Exodus of Rural Youth...

Continued from page 8

And along with furthering the understanding of agriculture's pivotal role, Sleight aims to instill in young people a desire to remain part of rural America and its communities.

"Somehow, we have to teach community pride," he said. "We have to show them the reasons why they should come back home after college. We have to show them the opportunities."

Instilling community pride cannot be limited to young people, however. "It kills me when people drive 40 miles to go to WalMart when their local hardware store is about to close," he noted, urging rural folks to support rural businesses.

The educator believes that his strategy, which has dramatically boosted enrollment at Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, does not have to be limited to farms and ranches. Rural communities are also losing their town doctors, pharmacists, mechanics and a whole host of positions that, once empty, tend to remain that way.

"When (those people) retire, that's it," Sleight said. "Instead of identifying a young person in the community and showing them how they could come back to fill that role, we lose an important part of the community." He urged people in all aspects of rural life to consider creative ways in which they can pass on their businesses - and their

roles - in and outside small town America.

"Communication is the most important thing," Sleight emphasized. "There are ways to ensure succession but they key is you've got to do it before you die. ... In other words, you have to plan for it, you have to have vision."

Sleight isn't against rural community efforts to bring in new businesses from outside that community. "We ought to do all we can to get those (high-tech) jobs in our rural communities," he said. That approach, however, is not the answer, Sleight believes. Asserting that agriculture is central to both local and state economies, he insisted that it is critical to "go back to our base." That base is agriculture and Sleight emphasized the extreme importance of groups such as the Kansas Rural Center in fostering and promoting rural and agricultural development.

Urging all rural people to get involved, he reiterated his belief that efforts should be directed toward the young people of rural America. "Somehow," he said, "you have to put your arm around them and bring them home."

Sleight spoke at the Kansas Rural Center summer board meeting August 28 in an afternoon presentation open to the public. He also addressed a group of KRC board members and northeast Kansas farmers and ranchers that evening focusing on not only the economic development issues but livestock profitability. □

Symposium Stresses Need for Sustainable Farming Systems

Washington, D.C.-In mid-September a symposium in Washington, D.C. hosting agricultural leaders in organic and sustainable agriculture, highlighted the need for accelerated change toward sustainable farming systems. The event was held in response to the recently issued report "Toward Sustainable Agricultural Systems in the 21st Century", published by the National Research Council of the National Academies of Science.

The report is the third in a series of federal reports since 1980, that have focused on the potential of organic and sustainable agriculture.

"The report conveys that there's been steady and significant progress in sustainable agriculture in the U.S.", noted Ferd Hoefner, policy director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. "But it has not been nearly enough or fast enough, and there is an urgent need to accelerate the change to create a more sustainable food and agriculture system in this country."

Issues such as the structure of agriculture, climate change, air and water pollution, rural depopulation, and world food security were explored and kept leading back to a sense of urgency to make faster gains toward sustainability.

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Organic Training for USDA NRCS Held in September

Whiting, Ks. -The Kansas Rural Center held three trainings on Organic Farming Methods and Certification for USDA NRCS personnel over a three week period in September. 110 people attended the regional meetings held in Newton (south central Kansas), Chanute (southeast Kansas) and Scott City (west central Kansas). Attendees were mostly District Conservationists from counties across the state, but also a handful of County Extension agents attended. Participants ranked the trainings high saying they came away with a new appreciation of all that goes into organic farming. The success of the trainings was largely due to the support from the State NRCS office and State Conservationist Eric Banks.

Attendees received information on the background of organic farming, the resource conserving aspects of organic agriculture and the basics of organic certification from Dr. Rhonda Janke, Kansas State University. Ed Reznicek from KRC provided information on transition strategies for organic crop and livestock production including crop rotations, fertility, weed control, insect and disease prevention strategies, and livestock practices. Dan Nagengast, KRC, provided information on hoop house construction, production and management. Each training included a discussion with a panel of organic farmers plus a half-day tour of an area organic farm.

The impetus for the trainings, which were each a day and a half long, is the new USDA EQIP Organic Initiative that provides assistance to organic farmers with conservation needs and to those wishing to transition to organic. The trainings will help NRCS personnel understand the needs and challenges facing organic farmers and enhance their ability to assist the farmers. Sign-up for the EQIP Organic Initiative is on-going.

Surveys of the participants plus comments afterward indicate that the farmer panel and the tour of an area organic farm were the highlights of each training. The training was funded by a grant to KRC from the USDA North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and



Mark Andres, Newton, (left) answered questions about his crop rotations on the tour of his farm during the training.



Jerome Berning, right, of Scott City, hosted the organic farm tour at the western Ks. training. Ed Reznicek, KRC staff, (left) organized the farmer panels and farm tours. Photos on this page By M. Fund

Education (SARE) Program. In 2011, a second series of workshops will be held in other parts of the state for additional NRCS staff and for KSU Extension staff. KRC is also part of another program with other organizations that will offer regional trainings nationwide. See page 16 .

□



Farm tours were the highlight of each of the trainings, offering NRCS personnel the opportunity for one-on-one with organic farmers. Above, Barry Barber, Cowley County, and Loren Frees, State NRCS, talk with Ed Reznicek about fertility in organic systems at the Andres' tour.

At right, participants examine equipment at the Jerome Berning farm near Scott City; Berning and his son Jason farm over 3000 acres organically.



The trainings were held in three different parts of the state to cover agronomic and ecological differences. A panel of area organic farmers was a key part of each training. Above, Jim Rowh, Norton, Galen Decker, Scott City, and Wade Belier, Lakin, shared their experiences with organic production in western Kansas, where lower rainfall limits the use of legume soil building crops., a mainstay of organic rotations in other areas.



Roger Elliot, Center, and his son hosted the tour at Chanute.



Mark Andres is experimenting with sun hemp as a cover crop in his organic system. Photos on this page by M. Fund

Nature Provides Pasture Strategy Worth Copying

by Mark Parker



Oren Long, Valley Falls, shared his farm and ranch philosophy and management strategy during a tour of his grazing operation in early October. Photo by M. Parker

Valley Falls, Ks.- The way Oren Long sees it, the native prairie is a pretty darn good model for tame pasture management. The Valley Falls, Kan., farmer has developed a self-generating, self-regulating system that lets “Mother Nature and the cows do the work and you do the thinking.”

Long and his wife, Vera, hosted a pasture tour of their farm recently and Long shared his philosophy as well as his management strategy with a good crowd of area farmers and landowners.

It begins, he told the group, with plant diversity. Fescue and red clover are the primary species in Long’s system but that forage base is bolstered with brome, sweet clover, orchardgrass, alfalfa, lespedeza and others – including some weeds.

“A weed is just a plant that’s out of

place,” he said. “We prevent weeds from going to seed with mowing but we also realize that there are ‘weeds’ that the cattle get a lot of good out of. Ragweed, bindweed – a lot of plants have a high nutrient content at certain stages of growth so while we control them, we also take advantage of them. The fescue and the red clover will out-grow the weeds until mid-summer if your stand is good and you have some natural fertility in the soil.”

And if you want to know which plant species are most desirable out there in the pasture, Long’s advice was simple. “Just watch the cows,” he said. “They’ll tell you what’s good and what isn’t.”

Red clover plays a pivotal role in the pasture plant community, Long said, by providing nitrogen for the soil as well as nutrition for the cattle which

are owned and managed by his grandson, Brandon Hetherington. A good red clover stand can provide 100-150 pounds of free nitrogen annually and Long manages grazing to ensure legume persistence. Splitting the farm in two, red clover on half the farm is allowed to go to seed while the paddocks on the other half are grazed. The cattle are then moved so legumes on the remaining half of the farm can mature.

“By allowing the red clover to go to seed each year, we always have new plants coming the following year,” Long explained. “That helps maintain the fertility and the plant diversity we want.”

Another important component of Long’s pasture plan is his design to extend the grazing system. Along with nitrogen fertilizer, hay is a major input expense that the veteran grazer aims to minimize. Rotational grazing, he explained, helps keep the forage species growing and in a vegetative state in addition to prolonging optimum grazing time.

The biggest factor, however, is stockpiling standing forage. Through his own experimentation, Long has found that mowing pastures in mid-August at a height of four to six inches results in the best combination of weed control and regrowth forage quality and quantity. The resulting mulch, he said, also helps build soil fertility.

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Grazing News

Oren Long tour...

Continued from page 12

Selected pastures are deferred from grazing for 60-75 days, depending on conditions and need. The result is high-quality new-growth fescue that dramatically reduces the need for winter hay.

Although any forage can be stockpiled, fescue is particularly suited for deferred grazing because it has good autumn growth, resists weathering and has a high concentration of soluble carbohydrates in the fall. Long also observed that stockpiled fescue is higher in total digestible nutrients (TDN) and crude protein (CP) than most of the hay beef cows receive in the winter. Allowing the cows to harvest the standing forage saves labor as well as money.

“And,” Long added, “I wouldn’t even get too worried about snow cover. Cows can graze through a lot of snow and it’s rare that we would get enough snow in this part of the world to prevent them from grazing. Actually, mud is much more of a winter-time problem because the cows can tear up the stand – we keep that in mind when we select winter pastures.”

The Long farm consists of two pieces of ground, a 110-acre farm he and Vera purchased in 1960, and another quarter section they added in 1970. The first was historically a grass farm and the second had been row-cropped. The higher productivity of the original land has made Long a firm believer in the importance of organic matter.

“The most valuable lesson I’ve learned is the value of organic matter,” he asserted. “It provides natural

Sustainable Food System News

Symposium.... *Continued from page 9*

The report’s recommendations encompass two strategies- the incremental and the transformative. The distinction between the approaches is the difference between business-as-usual and systemic changes to our agricultural system.

During a panel discussion, farmer Ron Rosmann, an organic farmer from Iowa, spoke about the transformation in agriculture over the past few decades, and the negative impacts that change has brought to the environment, rural communities, and the farmers’ bottom line. Rosmann noted that in the past 40 years, we’ve decreased diversity; and that while productivity has doubled, farmers earned \$40 billion less in net cash income in 2009. A shrinking middle class is also being reflected by a shrinking middle agriculture. “What are the transformative changes of the next 40 years?” he asked. Rossmann argues that it will largely be consumer driven.

Ricardo Salvador, a program director with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, observed that common themes in all three reports are a lack of implementation of key sustainable practices and an appeal for systems

fertility and that’s one of the reasons I prefer grazing to feeding hay – haying removes organic matter and depletes nutrient reserves.

“It also removes the cover that protects the soil and conserves moisture. Organic matter supplies the food and energy for almost all soil life.”

Dedicated to the health and sustainability of his farm, Long views each field as a unique ecosystem and manages it according to its needs. One particular hilltop area, for example, was highly eroded when it came under his stewardship. He planted burr oaks on the land to help sequester carbon and he controls grazing to help rebuild the soil.

The tour was sponsored by KRC, along with the Jackson and Jefferson County Conservation Districts, the Lower Kansas River WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy) and the Delaware River WRAPS. □

approaches. He acknowledged that both incremental and systemic approaches are needed. “They need to be parallel, they need to be interlinked,” he stated.

Bob Scowcraft, director of the Organic Farming Research Foundation, argued, “It is really a matter of deciding that yes, we want to transform agriculture. It was done once before, around 1970. They said, “get big or get out, “feed the world”, and “better living through chemistry”. By 1990 agriculture was transformed. They did not use the word ‘incremental’. They set the frame-work, they gave the charge, and I believe we have to do the same.”

The report, *Toward Sustainable Agricultural Systems in the 21st Century*, is available from National Academies Press at: http://www.nap.edu/catalog.htm?record_id=12832. You can download a summary or report in brief for free. □(From Organic Farm Research Foundation News Release)

Grazing School Delivers Profit-enhancing Lessons

By Mark Parker



David Kraft of the Ks. NRCS and Mark Kennedy of the Missouri NRCS, facing the crowd, address stockmen attending the recent Eastern Kansas Grazing School. The “classroom” pictured here is on the John Bradley farm near Lawrence, Ks.



Mark Green, left, NRCS district conservationist from Springfield, Mo., discusses fencing techniques with participants at the Eastern Kansas Grazing School. Photos by M. Parker

Lawrence, Ks.- The cattle business is no place to be below average. In 2009, there was a \$357 per cow difference in net return between top-third Kansas producers and those in the bottom third. Higher costs were the 800-lb. gorilla in the pasture for the least profitable operations and, among those, feed expense took a King Kong-size bite out of profits.

It's a given that grazed pasture is by far the most economical source of nutrition for cattle but how those pastures are grazed can make the difference between profit and loss.

That's what brought producers to Lawrence, Kan., recently for a two-day Eastern Kansas Grazing School September 8-9. Sponsored by the Kansas Rural Center, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Kansas State University Research and Extension, the event was limited to 30 farms but there was no cap on the

information presented. With an educational opportunity as intensive as the subject itself, the livestock producers explored techniques designed to give them more control over livestock demand and forage supply.

University of Missouri Extension Agricultural Economist Wesley Tucker told the participants that a management intensive grazing system can meet the nutritional needs of livestock from standing pasture while optimizing pasture yield, quality and performance. “Every day a cow is standing and you're hauling feed to her, you're losing money,” he said, adding that, “Cows, sheep, goats or horses can all harvest forages cheaper than you can. The biggest impact you can have on your profitability is in the area of feed cost.”

In addition to reducing the need for mechanically harvested forages, the

management intensive approach can decrease or eliminate inputs like nitrogen fertilizer, herbicides and supplemental feed as well as spreading overhead costs over more animals. One of the biggest benefits of pasture subdivision, the economist pointed out, is the ability to stockpile cool season forages to reduce winter hay feeding which is the most expensive practice on most stock farms.

Management intensive grazing, Tucker explained, also allows the producer to adjust stocking rate to fit the economic situation. “When profit margins are tight,” he pointed out, “that's when you want to maximize individual performance because each animal must cover its individual costs. When profit margins are more favorable, that's when you want to have more animals because each animal is generating a profit.”

Continued on page 15

Grazing News

Eastern Kansas Grazing School....

Continued from page 14

Tucker and several other experts from Missouri and Kansas outlined the art and science of management intensive grazing from designing multi-paddock rotational systems to forage utilization and fencing and watering advice.

Regarding fencing, Mark Green, Green County, Mo., NRCS district conservationist, said there's no need for overkill but urged graziers not to cut corners on their chargers, insulators and ground systems. What's most important, he said, is to keep an open mind. "There's no monopoly on good ideas so go to field days, visit with the folks at NRCS and Extension, and talk to other cattlemen. You can always learn more."

Kansas NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist David Kraft taught the participants how to inventory their pastures by surveying the amount of desirable plants, ground cover, residue cover, plant vigor and uniformity of use. "Be sure to watch the cattle graze and see what they select first," he suggested. "It may not be what you expect."

Missouri NRCS Grassland Conservationist Mark Kennedy said an intensively managed system provides grazing flexibility and allows the producer to establish goals based on the class of cattle and the quality of the forage. Through timing and stocking rate, he said, the grazer can

impact animal performance.

"The more performance you want, for example, the more often you offer (the cattle) fresh forage," he said. "You may want to allow growing animals to pick the higher quality forages and then utilize the 'leftovers' for dry cows with lower nutritional requirements. That's the level of efficiency you can gain with an intensively managed system and the degree of efficiency is determined by the degree of management."

A one-pasture continuously grazed system attains a level of about 30 percent harvest efficiency, the experts said. Intensify that to an eight-pasture system with a three to five day grazing period in each and efficiency jumps to 50 percent while 24 paddocks with one to two days grazing can up that figure to about 70 percent.

Ryan Babbitt, a Baldwin City, Kan., cattleman, was enthusiastic about what he learned at the grazing school. "There are so many ways to be more efficient," he said. "We tend to think that we need more acres but we can, in effect, gain more acres without buying them if we can use what we have more efficiently. This has been a great opportunity to learn how to do that."

Jason Schmidt of the Kansas Rural Center said the Eastern Kansas Grazing School accomplished exactly what its organizers had hoped for. "We wanted to provide education geared to increased management of cool season forages," he said. "That's

an area where we saw a need for more information and the demand was certainly there because the school filled up fast. The presenters were extremely knowledgeable and they shared an amazing amount of knowledge in two days. I think everyone was pleased with the information and we hope to do more of these in the future." □

Delaware Tour...

Continued from page 7

Working with Dave Bruton, District Forester with the Kansas Forest Service, the Coombs are implementing Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) practices such as thinning and pruning.

The Coombs are eliminating invasive species and plant desirable trees such as black walnut, burr oak, shellbark hickory and pawpaw. Additionally, they are improving the native pastures on the property by adding native plants, forbs and wildflowers.

The tour was funded through a grant to the Jackson County Conservation District by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). Additional sponsors include: Delaware River WRAPS; Glacial Hills Resource Conservation & Development Region, Inc.; Jackson County Board of Commissioners; Jefferson County Conservation District; Kansas Forest Service; Kansas Rural Center; Meadowlark Extension District; NRCS; State Conservation Commission; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Wildhorse Riverworks, Inc. □

Meet KRC's Summer Intern



Yoshika Crider's interviews of farmers and ranchers from eastern to western Kansas included a stop at the Scott City Co-op.

How I Spent My Summer in Kansas by Yoshika Crider

As an undergraduate environmental engineering major, I hear people use the word sustainability all the time. But if you ask different people exactly what it means to be sustainable, you'll hear a lot of different answers.

Last year, I took a class about the global food economy and became curious about the sustainability of our current food production system. In the spring, I set out to do a research project asking: What does sustainable agriculture mean to farmers?

I received funding from my university to partner with the Kansas Rural Center, completed a research methods class, and came back home to Lawrence for the summer to find the answer.

From July through early September, I gathered my GPS and audio recorder and made trips across Kansas, interviewing farmers and ranchers about their perspectives on sustainability. My hour-long, anonymous interviews touched on environmental, economic, and social sustainability, and gathered a wide variety of perspectives across the political spectrum.

By the end of my summer, I had spoken with 33 farmers and ranchers. Their ages ranged from 30 to 75 years, and they grew their products on farms ranging from 10 to 8,000 acres. Individuals shared with me concerns about the sustainability of rural communities, opinions on irrigation practices, and ideas about the future of agriculture. I heard from those who would be considered innovative but also those who would be considered quite conventional.

I headed back to school, carrying a summer's worth of research to begin to make sense of. I'll be taking a data analysis class this term and writing a final report to share what I've learned during an enlightening summer. The grant I received was specifically for community-based research, and my summer was certainly an opportunity to learn much more about the communities and individuals who depend so much on agriculture.

Thank you to Virginia Visconti and Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service, which provided my research grant, and to my faculty sponsor, Stanford Professor Walter P. Falcon. Many thanks go to all the willing participants who contributed so much to my research, and many more to the kind and extraordinarily helpful individuals at KRC! □

KRC Receives Grant to Work on Organic Systems

Whiting, Ks.-The Kansas Rural Center recently learned it has been awarded funding as part of a national collaborative effort which will focus on conservation measures and programs for organic and sustainable agriculture systems. The collaborative of twelve organizations received a \$500,000 Conservation Innovation Grant through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The 3-year grant will help the groups work with NRCS to integrate sustainable and organic approaches into the programs and standards at NRCS. It will also allow the groups to provide NRCS training in organic farming practices and certification.

KRC will receive up to \$87,615 over 30 months for developing materials and providing training for NRCS personnel in organic farming methods. KRC will work with the other collaborating organizations on three regional trainings around the country, and a national conference, as well as providing a training in Kansas.

"The funding will enhance work we are currently doing with Kansas NRCS," stated Mary Fund, project coordinator, "allowing us to offer expanded opportunities, involving more organic farmers and more expertise from around the country."

Partners include National Center for Alternative Technology, Center for Rural Affairs, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, National Sustainable Ag Coalition, Land Stewardship Project, Practical Farmers of Iowa, and more. □

Local Food News

Cordley school Lunch...

Continued from page 4

With 100% local ingredients as the lofty goal, lasagna fell into the doable category with the ability to produce the noodles locally as well as the cheese and sauce. A beef version using local grass-fed beef was top on the list, followed by a vegetarian version substituting tofu for beef. Cordley's group also made a dairy-free, gluten-free, vegan lasagna, to round out the options for pretty much every child in the school.

Cordley students were served locally produced white skim Iwig Dairy milk in compostable cups. Locally bottled water was also available. Bread sticks, a locally stocked salad bar and dressings, and strawberry rhubarb crisp for desert completed the choices.

All ingredients, save a little sugar, rolled oats, cinnamon and nutmeg, were sourced locally. Bainter's Sunflower oil was used in place of olive oil and whole wheat Acme flour was used for the bread sticks, noodles and crisps.

Area farmers were generally excited and supportive of the project, with a majority offering to donate items or sell product at deeply discounted rates. This was not the intention of the project, but in the end, the discounts and donations allowed the event to stay within budget. Farmers, chefs and food service staff all noted that there is a strong need for a workable distribution method. Locating suppliers for each of the meal's ingredients, as well as coordinating pickups and deliveries of each of the products, proved to be one of the more difficult parts of the event.

Cordley Elementary School lacks a full service kitchen, so the meals for Cordley are prepared in the high school kitchen and transported to the elementary school daily. The majority of the kitchen staff were not accustomed to working with locally grown products, and one questioned the safety of the locally produced foods. But when the food arrived, the staff was surprised at the high quality of products being delivered.

It was the students that made the event a success... the smiles, thumbs up, empty plates and cups were enough to fill anyone's heart with hope and amazement.

Students were encouraged to take full ownership of the meal in the week before the event. One student from each classroom was selected to make the lasagna noodles. Sixteen students cracked four dozen farm fresh eggs and measured out 4800 grams of local whole wheat flour to create the fresh pasta for the meal. Families and friends were invited to area farms to pick strawberries and gather eggs for the event also. A week before the event, organizers went to each class room and provided an interactive, educational presentation.

The students tasted different types of lettuce, ran their hands through whole grains, oats and flour, dipped fresh strawberries into local honey and basically touch, smelled and learned

about almost every ingredient in the meal they were about to receive.

Rather than take all of the students to the participating farms, a former Cordley student created a short film highlighting the farmers and their farms. The video was then played for each class immediately before the students headed to the cafeteria for lunch. During the lunch the students interacted with several farmers from the video as well as many other community members, local and state officials.

In the end, it was the students at Cordley Elementary School that made the event a huge success. After the meal, the halls echoed with little voices chanting "We want farm-to-school every day!" The smiles, the thumbs up and the empty plates and cups were enough to fill anyone's heart with hope and amazement.

The school principal noted that he had never before experienced anything as awe inspiring as the student's reactions to the food. Kids ate raw turnips and sliced radishes, drank white milk and pushed away their empty plates, smiled and said, "I'm stuffed!"

It was also reported that the district's superintendent, who was wary of attending the event and eating an "all local" meal in the school's cafeteria was also awe struck, noting, "I had no idea that local food could taste that good."

□ *Linda Cottin was the volunteer coordinator of the Cordley Farm to School event; she is a business advocate in Lawrence, Ks.*

Roundup-Woes Multiply; Weed Resistance and Now Birth Defects

Last May, the *New York Times* published a story about the problem of new superweeds resistant to the miracle herbicide Roundup. Not known as a primary agricultural news source, the *Times'* interest is perhaps evidence that the problem is indeed widespread and of concern to more than just agricultural readers.

Introduced in the mid- to late 1990's, Roundup Ready crops today account for 90 percent of the soybeans and 70 percent of the corn and cotton grown in the United States. They have allowed farmers to reduce tillage operations and cut back on use of stronger herbicides- until now that is.

Farmers across the country are experiencing problems with weeds (such as horseweed, giant ragweed and pigweed) developing resistance to the herbicide, so they are returning to tillage and to other herbicides to ensure a weed free crop.

But weed resistance and the breeding of superweeds is only one of the problems related to Roundup.

New studies from South America, also home to high Roundup use, are now linking Roundup to birth defects.

According to the *Organic and GMO Reporter*, a recently released study indicates that "glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, causes malformations in frog and chicken

embryos at doses far lower than those used in agricultural spraying and well below the maximum residue levels approved for use in the European Union."

The study was recently reported on in *Chemical Research in Toxicology*. The research was led by Prof. Andres Carrasco, director of the Laboratory of Molecular Embryology at the University of Buenos Aires Medical School. At a press conference Carrasco said, "The findings in the lab are compatible with malformations observed in humans exposed to glyphosate during pregnancy."

Reports of birth defect problems started in 2001 two years after the large scale introduction of Roundup Ready soybeans in Argentina.

The study authors concluded that the results raised "concerns about the clinical findings from human offspring exposed to Roundup in agricultural fields." □ (*From Organic and Non-GMO Reporter, Volume 10 No. 9, October 2010*)

K.C. Passes Urban Agriculture Codes

In June, the Kansas City Missouri City Council approved an ordinance updating the city's zoning and development codes enabling urban agriculture and helping the budding local food movement to function more effectively in Kansas City.

According to Kathleen Kelly, director of the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (KCCUA), the ordinance secures the right of homeowners to grow produce in their front yards for their own consumption or sale off-site. The codes also allow on-site sales, enable local food growers to have apprentices and interns, and allow gardening as a principal or accessory usage of a property so that farmers can live where they farm.

KCCUA plans to work with local farmers and growers to ensure that the new codes are understood by producers. Also stakeholders, including the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition, community members and city development and codes personnel, will continue to work with the City Council during an 18 month code review period set by the Council.

To learn more about the changes to the city zoning ordinances, visit the KCCUA website at www.kccua.org, or the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition at www.kcfoodpolicy.org □

Small Farmer Commentary

Continued from page 2...

KRC was involved in sustainable agriculture before the term "sustainable" was cool, and before consumer interests in all things agricultural and food related heated up. Over the years, the audiences at our workshops and conferences have always been forward-thinking farmers and ranchers, and consumers interested in how their food is raised. Increasingly, the audiences include market gardeners, and vegetable and fruit enterprises, either as smaller more intensive operations, or as parts of a larger more conventional enterprise looking to diversify its income stream.

More consumers have also become involved as they seek to develop the infrastructure and businesses to handle the food products raised on these farms. Institutions looking for solutions to poverty and diet, childhood obesity, or diet related diseases like diabetes, have begun talking to these producers, hoping to reconnect the population with healthier food

Instead of circling the wagons to protect their turf, and instead of trying to re-educate us, I suggest that Agriculture join us as we work to solve the food and

From the Editor

I want to thank you all for your kind words, thoughts, and support during the recent death of my mother, Alice Fund. She passed away on September 25, 2010, at age 88 after a long period of decline. I also thank you for your patience with this issue of **Rural Papers**, as its initial publication date coincided with my mother's illness and passing, and thus work on it had to be put off a few weeks.

My mother was a key part of our years at the Kansas Rural Center, as well as our family life. When Ed and I returned to the farm in 1978 after my father's death, we worked out an arrangement for her to remain on the homestead, and share a house with us, and share in the rebuilding of the farm for the next generation. So, she was a daily part of our family life, as three generations lived under the same roof for years.

Since Ed and I often worked on our KRC projects from home, she was often a part of that work. She labeled newsletters, stuffed fund-raising letters, hosted staff meetings, acted as our secretary answering the phone, and endured countless hours of our discussion and debate on political issues. During the Farm Crisis of the 1980's when Ed provided credit counseling for troubled farmers, he received lots of phone calls,

farming challenges ahead of us. We won't agree on everything, but we have common values and common goals.

Those values include love for our families, and respect for our elders. We value independence, but recognize strength in cooperation. And we all want a better world for our children and grandchildren, and we are willing to work hard for it.

Talking with each other about who we are and what motivates us may be the best thing we can do. □

many from panicked farmers. My mother's voice was often the first one they heard, and it was a calm voice of empathy and understanding due to her own experiences, sometimes as helpful as the technical information Ed would provide.

She was also a wealth of information about farming, the ways of livestock, and the equipment, and taught us both a great deal as we took over the farm.

Thank you, Mom.

Mary Fund



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Calendar

Monday, November 8, 2010, Grazing Management Teleconference Call;
Contact Jason Schmidt, 316-461-3243, or go to the KRC website (www.kansasruralcenter.org) for dial in information.

Saturday, November 20, 2010, Kansas Sustainable Ag Conference, "Connecting cows, Carbon, and Carrots- Making Sense of Our Food System", 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Flint Hills Technical College, Emporia, Ks. Go to www.kansasruralcenter.org for agenda and registration information; or call 785-873-3431.

Thursday, December 2, 2010 North Central SARE Farmer and Rancher Grant Proposal Deadline. For

more information or for proposal forms, visit: www.sare.org/NCRSARE_cfp.htm; or contact Joan Benjamin, at benjaminj@lincolnu.edu or 573-681-5545 or 800-529-1342.

January 6-8, 2011, Great Plains Growers Conference, Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO.
More information to come.

Please check the KRC website for updated and more detailed calendar and announcement information at: www.kansasruralcenter.org/calendar.html

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