

Sustainable ag conference is Dec. 4 in Ogallala

Written by Gothenburg Times
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“Rural Economic Development Revitalizing Rural Communities” is the theme of the fourth annual Western Sustainable Ag Crops and Livestock Conference, scheduled for Dec. 4 in Ogallala. The conference will take place at the Platte River Inn, 201 Chuckwagon Road, from 8:45 a.m. until 3:45 p.m.

The University of Nebraska, Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS) and OCIA Nebraska Chapter 2 are sponsoring the conference.

Keynote speaker Kevin Fulton will describe how he transitioned his 2,800-acre farm near Litchfield from crop production to an organic grass-based operation, and how this transition has changed his goals and family’s outlook on farming. He will talk about how he is building healthy soils, improving the farm’s pastures and direct marketing his beef; how to analyze a farm’s sustainability level; and how to develop a plan to reduce or eliminate inputs, while increasing production and profitability.

Fulton also will address how the value of sustainable economic development of rural communities leads to keeping more people working the land which is essential to rural development and how he is developing a mentoring program on his farm to encourage beginning farmers to start their own enterprises.

Supporting and developing the infrastructure to attract young people home and provide care for our elderly are necessary steps to revitalizing rural communities, according to Extension educator Karen DeBoer. Tom Rauner, PCO Director, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) Office of Rural Health, will discuss “Issues Regarding Access to Health Care Services in Rural Nebraska” and how to create a sustainable health care system.

The Internet has become a powerful tool for revitalizing rural communities, and Connie Hancock, UNL Extension educator, will explain how to access the “Online Roadside Market” and discuss a whole new marketing strategy to reach a new target market.

Doug Anderson, UNL Extension educator, Ogallala, will discuss how multi-grazing cattle, goats and sheep together can increase income and improve pastures.

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In a workshop titled "Edible Berry Production in Western Nebraska," Roger Stockton, Ph.D., coordinator of the Southwest Nebraska Resource Conservation and Development, will discuss the adapted varieties of berry shrubs, production requirements and profit potential and how 10 acres of berries could add enough income to an operation to allow that son or daughter to join the family farm or ranch.

Dipak Santra, assistant professor/alternative crops breeder at the UNL Panhandle Research and Extension Center, will discuss different aspects of new (alternative) crops for western Nebraska and the potential opportunities for production. He will examine the possibilities of proso millet for biofuel and human food, discuss how farmers could make their own biodiesel, and speak about producers' role in developing these alternative crops for western Nebraska.

Advance registration is requested by Nov. 29. The registration fee is \$30. Lunch will be served.

For registration and information about the conference or exhibitor booths, contact Extension educator Karen DeBoer at the UNL Extension Office, P.O. Box 356, 920 Jackson St., Sidney, NE 69162.

Phone: 308-254-4455 or 866-865-1703; Email: kdeboer1@unl.edu. To download a brochure and registration form, go to <http://www.ckb.unl.edu>.