



**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

# **East National Technology Support Center**

**Quarterly Report  
July 2010**

## **Director's Message**

In the immortal words of Briscoe Darling, "sometimes you just have to jump in and hang on!" For the past six months that's what we've done. When I stepped into the role of "acting" East NTSC Director, I had no idea that I would still be doing so at this point in the year. The staff at the Center continues to impress me with their willingness to go the extra mile to get the job done.

We continue to provide training and assistance to the states in our service area. Prescribed Burning (pg. 4) and CNMP training courses were held in the Northeast and each session had excellent participation. The Center hosted soil quality training for 35 students from 10 different states. Actually, make that 36 students with the addition of Ann Mills, USDA's Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, who visited our Center for a first-hand look at training and technical assistance we offer. Training on organic farming principles/practices was conducted by the Rodale Institute with more than 50 individuals participating (pg. 2). We also had the opportunity to host the East NTSC Advisory Board here in Greensboro and have them tour the local university farm and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) in Goldsboro, North Carolina. The feedback we received from the Board will help guide us in meeting the needs of the states, and I must admit that the feedback we received from the Board has been excellent.

Thanks to Ramona Garner, plant materials specialist, the East NTSC Community Garden is showing outstanding promise! In a very small space we are demonstrating just how productive these gardens can be. By the time this report is released, we will have harvested produce from the garden and hopefully can use it in the Feds, Farmers, and Friends Feed Families national outreach project that is being promoted by USDA.

We will soon be contacting the states for suggestions on webinar topics that you would like for us to sponsor during the next fiscal year. Please let us know about topics that interest you, and we will make arrangements to get the expertise in place to make the presentation(s).

The Director's Message in our next newsletter will feature comments from Mary Podoll, our new director. Until next time, we appreciate your continued support and encourage your feedback on how we can improve our assistance to the states.

**Bill Boyd, Acting Director**



**Soil Quality**



**Organic Systems**



**Advisory Board**

**The Science of  
Conservation, We Deliver!**

**Visit our Web site: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/ntsc/east/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/ntsc/east/)**

# Technology Transfer

## Environmental Protection Au Naturel

With NRCS's expanding role to work with organic producers and those transitioning to an organic production system, many in the NRCS community think (with a gut-wrenching feeling) that organic farming, which typically relies on at least some tillage, is taking a step backward when it comes to protecting resources and building soil quality. Tillage can lead to soil erosion, loss of organic matter, and offsite sedimentation if other management practices are not used to compensate for periodic soil disturbance. To help dispel some of these negative views about organic production, the East NTSC worked with the staff at Rodale Institute in Kurtztown, PA to host a 2-day workshop on "Enhancing Environmental Protection through Organic Production" the first week of June.

With over 35 years of research on organic crop production systems, Rodale's "New Farm" provided the backdrop for 56 NRCS employees from 14 states to receive onsite training on soil health/soil quality, managing nutrients, and the importance of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi in organic systems.

Highlights of the workshop included field demonstrations of Rodale's roller crimper to

terminate cover crops, seeing their innovative compost turning equipment in action, and visiting their Farm Systems Trial.

Participants walked away from the workshop with a clearer understanding of the organic certification process and how NRCS conservation practices can assist producers with transitioning to organic. While the workshop was primarily to educate, the wrap-up discussion resulted in a long list of activities for the East NTSC to follow-up on to assist field staff working with organic producers. A similar session related to organic livestock production is high on our to-do list. Contact David Lamm at (336) 370-3339 for more information.



*Demonstrating a roller-crimper*



*Hairy vetch cover crop*



## Culturally Significant

Ramona Garner, plant materials specialist, gave a presentation to the Cultural and Heritage Committee at the semi-annual meeting of the United Southern and Eastern Tribes, Inc. The meeting was held at the Battle House in Mobile, Alabama on June 14-17, 2010. United Southern and Eastern Tribes, Inc. is composed of 25 tribes in the eastern United States.

Ramona's presentation centered on how the NRCS Plant Materials Program can assist the tribes in reestablishing culturally significant plants on tribal land. She introduced them to the plant materials program, gave them examples of how Plant Materials Centers have worked with tribes, and offered suggestions on how the NRCS Plant Materials

Program can help them through the development of plant propagation techniques, training and demonstrations. Ramona's talk was followed by brief comments by NRCS Chief Dave White and Bill Puckett, AL State Conservationist, on how the Plant Materials Centers are available to assist tribes with the production of culturally significant plants. Contact Ramona Garner at (336) 370-3340 for more information



*Top left: White sage; Bottom left: Trail of Tears Indian corn; Right: Sweet flag*



# Technology Development Teams

## Manure Management Team



One of the services provided by the Manure Management Team is technology evaluation. The team, working with Virginia NRCS, recently provided a functional review of the state's first anaerobic digester. This modified plug-flow digester is to be installed on a 1,100 head dairy operation. Methane generated by the digester will be used to produce electricity that will be sold to the utility grid. Due to urban encroachment, the digester should significantly reduce odors from the farm. Separated solids from the digester will also be used for bedding, eliminating the need to purchase sawdust.

Other technology evaluations have included a complete mix anaerobic digester (Massachusetts), in-house composting of poultry litter (DelMarVa), and manure amendments (various states). Contact Bill Boyd at (336) 370-3334 for more information on this and other Manure Management Team activities.



## National Plant Data Center

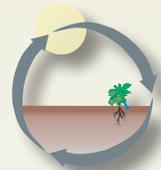


Kat Anderson, ethnobotanist, distributed "The Ozette Prairies of Olympic National Park: Their Former Indigenous Uses and Management" to NRCS offices, Olympic National Park, and tribes in western Washington state. The report provides natural resource conservationists and other technical specialists with a broad knowledge of the past cultural importance of the Ozette Prairies to the Makah Nation. The document addresses the many indigenous uses of these openings for hunting wildlife, gathering plants, and smoking foods. A segment of the document is devoted to how the Makah played a major role in the conservation of these landscapes by lighting periodic fires which kept the brush and trees from encroaching, encouraged the growth of herbaceous plants important for

foods, medicines, and basketry, and promoted forage plants that were attractive to game animals. By examining the many indigenous uses, harvesting, and management practices on these openings, tribal and non-Indian landowners, in collaboration with NRCS field offices, can incorporate this ancient body of knowledge and practice in restoring and maintaining prairies and wetlands today. Contact Susan Andrews at (336) 370-3337 for more information on National Plant Data Center activities.



## Soil Quality Team



Members of the Soil Quality Team also serve in various capacities in the Soil Survey's Dynamic Soil Properties (DSP) Initiative. In May, Susan Andrews, SQT Leader, and Curtis Talbot, NSSC Range Conservationist, two members of the DSP Technical Leadership Team, traveled to Georgia to meet with a DSP project team. The group visited several sites and discussed possible sampling designs to meet the objectives for both the Ecological Site Description (ESD) and DSP projects. They visited various state phases of multiple longleaf pine/wire grass ecological sites to observe the effectiveness of the proposed sampling design for upcoming ESD and DSP work in the Southern Coastal Plain, MLRA 133A. Susan and Curtis presented their findings and the unique Georgia design to the full DSP Technical Team the following week. The Technical Team approved the design, despite some discrepancies with the Soil Change Guide. The final work plan is the next step in the DSP process. The Georgia staff should be commended for taking a leadership role in the inventory of ESDs in the East. A clear and commendable initiative to couple the ESD inventory with a DSP project makes this project doubly important, but also raises several challenges, most if not all of which were addressed during this trip. Contact Susan Andrews at (336) 370-3337 for more information on Soil Quality Team activities.

# Personnel News

## Soil Quality Dynamics

In June, members of the Soil Quality Team were notified that some of its responsibilities and two staff members are being reassigned from Science and Technology to Soil Survey and Resource Assessment. Soil quality policy, programs, and technology transfer responsibilities will remain with Susan Andrews, team leader, and Holli Kuykendall, ecologist, located in Greensboro. Charles Kome and Faustin Iyamuremye, both soil scientists, are reassigned to the new Soil Ecology Branch located at the National Soil Survey Center in Lincoln, NE. They will assist with inventory and interpretation responsibilities associated with ecological site descriptions and dynamic soil properties. We'll miss Charles and Faustin, and wish them the best of luck and happiness in Lincoln.

## Here's what's happening...

- ❖ Elvis Graves, national technology specialist, is detailed to Massachusetts as Acting State Conservationist. Center staff wish Elvis well with this opportunity.
- ❖ Dennis Chessman, Georgia grazing lands specialist, is detailed to the East NTSC. Dennis is assisting the Center with the Agency's national emphasis to accelerate development of ecological site descriptions and forage suitability groups.



# Technology Transfer, continued

## Prescribed Burn Training

Prescribed Burning is a conservation practice that can be used to maintain or restore a variety of grassland and forestland plant communities. Several northeastern states have requested East NTSC assistance in providing awareness-level prescribed burn training. A multidisciplinary team consisting of Hank Henry (biologist), Kevin Ogles (grazing lands specialist), and Tom Ward (forester) presented four one-day training courses at sites in Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts in April and May 2010. Eighty NRCS employees from nine northeastern states received training that provided the qualifications to include Prescribed Burning (338) in a conservation plan. Subject matter covered in prescribed burn training included fire ecology, effects on plants and animals, fire behavior, fire control and safety, effects of weather and topography, and smoke management.

# Assistance Highlights

In the third quarter of FY2010, the Center provided assistance on 34 requests, of which 18 were direct assistance to states, five were regional and 11 were national activities. In addition to direct assistance to the states, the center hosted 15 training events to a combined audience of more than 700 participants.

Visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/ntsc/east/workshops.html> to view a list of training sessions scheduled for upcoming months or to download training materials and replays associated with our monthly webinars.

### Webinar Schedule

Milking Center Waste  
September 29

Grazing Management Concepts  
October 27

Developing Seeding Rates for  
Conservation Practices  
December 1

2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time  
Contact Kristin Smith at  
(336) 370-3362 for more information.

