

FOCUS

Florida NRCS Outreach and Conservation Updates



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Winter 2011



A Note From Your State Conservationist

Dear NRCS Florida Family,

It is nice to be back home among all of you. As you know, I spent the last part of 2010 serving as acting division director for the Stewardship and Community Assistance Division. This division was revamped from the old Resource Conservation and Community Assistance Division and now includes TSP and CSP, as well as RC&D. The work I did there gave me a fresh look and a better perspective and understanding of the complexities each of these important programs have and that they are valuable tools to put conservation on the ground. At the same I had the honor of working with many individuals that, like you, care deeply about the conservation of natural resources.

Immediately after the end of my assignment, I had the privilege of participating in the Federal Executive Institute's "Leaders for a Democratic Society" training. I met many individuals that share a common trait with all of us in NRCS; a passion and commitment for service to this great nation of ours.

Speaking of service, this is a perfect segue into a topic I care deeply about. National Volunteer Week, April 10-16, 2011, is fast approaching and it's a perfect time to recognize our Earth Team volunteers and understand what they do for us and our customers. The NRCS theme for this year is  "Earth Team Volunteers – The Key Foundation of Conservation". These "keys" allow us to stretch available resources and help us put conservation practices on the ground.

And, as Chief Dave White said a year ago, "Earth Team makes it possible for us to achieve our mission of Helping People Help the Land."

Last year, 120 Earth Team volunteers contributed 6,821 hours helping Florida NRCS and our partners with our critical conservation work. Earth Team volunteers multiply our effectiveness.

If you recruited an Earth Team volunteer last year or worked with one, I congratulate and thank you. You are personally responsible for helping make the Earth Team program a success in our state.

We can do more, and we must do more. Budgets are tight and some workloads are changing. Earth Team volunteers can be our key. Look for tasks Earth Team volunteers can do and recruit them. If you need help, contact your Area volunteer coordinator or Darryl Williams, our state volunteer coordinator. We need to expand Earth Team into every office in the state and increase its effectiveness.

In the meantime, please take a moment to tell our volunteers how much we appreciate them and the help they give us. Then let's all join in celebrating National Volunteer Week April 10-16, 2011.



Florida Farmers Receive Scholarships to Minority Landowner Magazine Conference

By Ann Bowens, Outreach Liaison

Mr. Victor L. Harris of Cierra Publishing, publisher of the Minority Landowner Magazine, invited the National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resource Conservation Employees (The Organization) to offer annual conference scholarships to the 1st and 2nd place winners of their Small Farmer of the Year contests.

The first and second place winners from 2010, Andrew Stephens of Madison County (pictured with Carlos Suarez, top, right) and Johnny Larry, Jr. of Jackson County, (bottom, right pictured with Carlos Suarez) are both Florida residents.



Thanks to The Organization, they each received a scholarship to attend the Minority Landowner Magazine's 5th Anniversary Conference in Raleigh, NC, February 24-26, 2011. The scholarships cover full conference registration fees which include all conference materials, meals and breaks, and hotel accommodations for the farmers and their spouses.

This will be a valuable learning experience for both farmers. Congratulations.

Brooksville PMC Takes Conservation to the Street

By Jonathan Connolly, PMC staff

The Brooksville PMC has begun an exciting collaboration with the *Farmworkers Self Help* organization and the *Rotary Club* of San Antonio, FL

Farmworkers Self Help is a nonprofit organization set up in 1982 as a grassroots effort by Mexican and Mexican-American migrant and former farm workers to find solutions to problems within the farm population. It is a community based organization that focuses on the health, education, and economic development of their community.

With the assistance of local organizations, *Farmworkers Self Help* purchased an old pool hall in downtown Dade City and is transforming it into "My Other House"; a place where teens can share a hot meal, tackle homework, watch a movie, dance, and receive counseling. There is also a park across the street that was formerly a woodlot and is now a paved basketball court, soccer, and t-ball field.

Through the People's Garden initiative, the PMC is working with *Farmworkers Self Help* and the *Rotary Club* to provide landscaping suggestions for "My Other House". We plan to involve the area Master Gardeners in developing the plans. In addition to the landscaping, the PMC will be helping *Farmworkers Self Help* start a community vegetable garden at the park.



"My Other House" before Peoples' Garden and landscaping. (top)

Park before landscaping and garden. (bottom)

After pictures in future FOCUS edition.

Field News

Soil Scientist Contributes Expertise to Envirothon

By Sherlynette Perez Castro, Soil Scientist



On December 10, 2010, Martin Figueroa, (left) soil scientist from MLRA 15-8, coordinated the soils section in the 11th Annual Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Envirothon. It was his first effort as a coordinator after years of coordination by Howard Yamataki, NRCS soil scientist. Total students in attendance exceeded 100 for a day filled with activities, enthusiasm, competition and fun.



The Envirothon is an environmental competition offered to area high school students. It provides a hands-on approach to solving issues related to forestry, soils, aquatics, wildlife, and current issues. Five-person teams competed in five written tests using their knowledge of the natural environment of the Caloosahatchee Regional Park (CRP). The CRP is located near Alva in Lee County, Florida, and draws students from Charlotte, Collier, Highlands and Lee Counties.

Students examined a soil pit (left) and soil samples for texture and color classification among other activities and questions. Martin also took the opportunity to promote the NRCS Earth Team Volunteer Program. NRCS also provided career information through a display ordered through Landcare and with career information brochures.

The Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Envirothon was initially coordinated by district conservationist, Kendal Hicks, from the Fort Myers Service Center.



L to R - Howard Yamataki, Sherlynette Castro, Martin Figueroa

AWEP Helping to Prevent Dry Wells and Sinkholes

By Ken Lackmann, Area Resource Conservationist

The Dover/Plant City area experienced heavy impacts from groundwater usage for cold protection during the January 3 – 13, 2010, freeze event. During that event, area farmers pumped large quantities of groundwater to protect their crops; mainly strawberries. The combined pumping dropped the aquifer level 60 feet, causing more than 750 temporary dry wells for neighboring homeowners and creating 85 sinkholes.

Partnering with NRCS for the Dover/Plant City Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) project, which covers approximately 256 square miles in Hillsborough County and 32 square miles in Polk County, are the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Office of Agricultural Water Policy, the Hillsborough County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). The partners, all working closely with the

University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Research and Extension Service, are committed to reducing the use of groundwater for cold protection practices within this area through AWEP producer projects, non-federal cost share programs, and implementation of FDACS' adapted best management practices for water quality and water conservation.

Twelve contracts totaling just over \$704,000 were awarded to various producers in the Dover/Plant City AWEP project area. Contracts vary in size (5 - 40 acres) and number of practices to be implemented such as tailwater recovery systems, water control structures, irrigation conveyance pipeline and micro irrigation system conversion - sprinkler to micro drip. The main focus of the AWEP project is reducing Dover/Plant City farmer's dependence on ground water pumping. A vast majority of the contract practice implementation will begin in late spring after the current crop of strawberries has been harvested.

Through AWEP funding, the number of future sinkholes and residential dry wells due to freeze events should be greatly reduced by the decreased dependence on ground water pumping.

Improving Wildlife Habitat While Managing the Land

by Darryl Williams, DC

Cecil O. Rogers, better known as “Bill”, is truly a natural resources conservationist. Bill owns and manages a 1200+ acre farm in the Svea community of Okaloosa County, Florida. Long range planning, setting realistic goals and implementation of the plan has been Mr. Rogers’ recipe for success on his farm. EQIP, WHIP, and CSP have all been used as important venues for assistance in getting conservation on the ground.



He operates a 125 cow/calf operation (left) and grows timber on approximately 450 acres of the farm. In conjunction with managing the land for the cows and timber, improving wildlife habitat for bob white quail, turkey (right), and white tailed deer has been a priority for him.



EQIP was used for livestock watering for the farm with the installation of a well and pumping plant back 2004; however, WHIP has been the program that has been the best fit for Bill’s operation. WHIP contracts for 2004, 2009 and 2010 have been used to dramatically improve the wildlife habitat on the property. The 2004 contract provided assistance with establishing a prescribed burning regime. In areas where fire could not be used to reduce plant completion, a tree cutter was used to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor to promote native grasses and other flowering plant growth resulting in an increase in the carrying capacity of the land. Land clearing was used to provide open spaces for permanent food plots to be established that would further enhance the carrying capacity.

The 2004 contract was completed and Bill was extremely happy with the results he observed. In fact, he signed up again and was awarded a 2009 contract for assistance to enhance an additional parcel he purchased. Realizing the results that had been obtained by utilizing the prescribed burning and the wildlife openings, Bill wanted to install the same practices on the new parcel. I assisted him in the planning process to identify conservation practices that addressed the resource concerns and fit the landowner’s operation.

In 2010, Bill implemented a nutrient management plan to reduce his fertilizer cost. I provided the guidance needed to develop a sound overall nutrient management strategy through soil testing and planting legumes to cut down on the need for nitrogen applications.

Not at all surprising, the farm qualified for two CSP contracts – one for forest land and another for pasture land. Through these contracts an even higher level of management is being implemented with several new practices planned along with specific CSP enhancements. The forest land contract will use Brush Management, Forest Stand Improvement, Riparian Forest Zone Enhancement, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Upland and Wetland Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Prescribed Burning to protect and increase the productivity of the forest land for many wildlife species, along with increased timber production.

Bill selected enhancements for his pasture land CSP contract that he felt would be the best fit for his operation and management style. He knows how ground disturbance can afford the opportunity for seeds laying dormant to germinate and bring new plant life to the community. He selected the following enhancements that meet that objective – Improve non-cropped areas for wildlife and patch-burning for wildlife habitat. He then chose two additional enhancements that are good for the environment; recycling 100% of his farm lubricants and rotation of supplement and feeding areas.

Through working directly with the NRCS, and developing a sound conservation plan, Bill has addressed many resource concerns that are priorities here in Florida. Soil erosion, water quality and animal and plant health all have been addressed and improved. This was made possible through the programs offered by NRCS.

Area 2 Supports the Troops

by Teal O'Neal, Administrative Management Assistant

Area 2 employees generously donated items to Operation First Response, Inc. to support the troops and their families. The non-profit organization thanked them saying, "We could not meet the needs of our Heroes and their families without the support of wonderful Americans like you. The soldier's sacrifices can/should never be forgotten."

Area employees put together 25 kits with over \$200 worth of items. Donations included sweats, socks, travel size kits consisting of a razor, shaving cream, toothbrush, toothpaste, mouthwash, and comb. Travel size lotions and body washes for each kit were also purchased.



USDA Agencies Celebrate Black History Month

February saw USDA agencies working together to celebrate Black History Month with a luncheon at the Gainesville Best Western. NRCS was the agency in charge this year and Chakesha Martin, DC and BEPM worked very hard to make this the most successful celebration ever; with 140 participants from NRCS, Forest Service, RD, and FSA. Jean-Paul Calixte, NRCS GIS/GPS coordinator was the MC (top photo). Throughout lunch he chose tables at random and asked black history questions, Jeopardy style. Each table chosen was asked a different question and everyone had a great time trying to guess the answer (middle photo).

Keynote speaker was Dr. Patricia Hillard-Nunn, Adjunct Assoc. Professor of African American Studies at the University of Florida (bottom photo) who talked about the history of African Americans, slavery, and their history in Florida.

Who Are We?

Lazing away a warm day in Florida in 1977. Both are now Florida NRCS employees.

Answer on page 9.



Plant Materials Center News

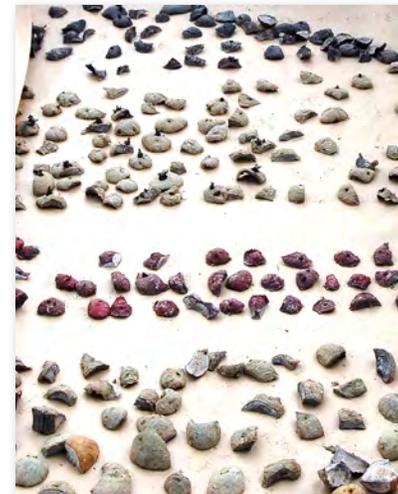
Planting for Earth Day Cold-Season Potato Garden

By PMC Staff

Jon Connolly, PMC gardener and Ed Black, PMC biological science technician, added to the Brooksville PMC's ongoing efforts to establish People's Garden projects with the creation of a cold-season potato garden. Earlier efforts with the People's Garden Initiative at the PMC focused on native wildflower and pollinator habitat. This newest demonstration garden will illustrate three different potato growing techniques and will be featured in the PMC's upcoming Earth Day celebrations on April 20th, 2011.



Jon Connolly, Ben Sperry and Ed Black planting potatoes into conventionally plowed, mounded rows.



To establish the garden, Jon and Ed collected four varieties of potatoes and placed them on a slotted table in a dry, sunny part of the greenhouse to start growing the nodes of the

potato stem (eyes). After two weeks of growth the potatoes were cut into pieces around each budding eye; and after waiting for them to scab over (picture on right), were planted. These eyes are specialized shoots that will grow above and below the ground.

The three different methods of growing potatoes illustrated in the garden were: 1) conventional row planting; 2) circular mounds; and 3) container planting. Conventional row planting consisted of plowing up a mounded row, which was planted with peas and carrots on the side. The circular mounds were built with a hoe to 10 inches in height, and then planted with three potatoes in each. Four different containers were used in the last planting technique, and were repeated twice.

Pollinator Information Available

The Plant Materials Fact Sheet #4 – “Developing Pollinator Mixtures for Pollinator Habitats” and its accompanying “Pollinator Mixture Calculator and Cost Estimator Worksheet”, found under Plant Materials in Section II of FOTG, have been updated.

These updates show the addition of more recommended species, particularly for South Florida.

The types of containers used were: pallet planters, 30 gallon tree pots, “potters’ boxes” (fiberglass coffins), and chicken-wire planters. Each technique was also multi-cropped with cabbage, onions, and peas in a variety of designs.

When you come for our Earth Day Celebration, be sure to check out the PMC's newest garden!



Three of the four techniques for container planting. Closest to the foreground are the “potters’ boxes”.

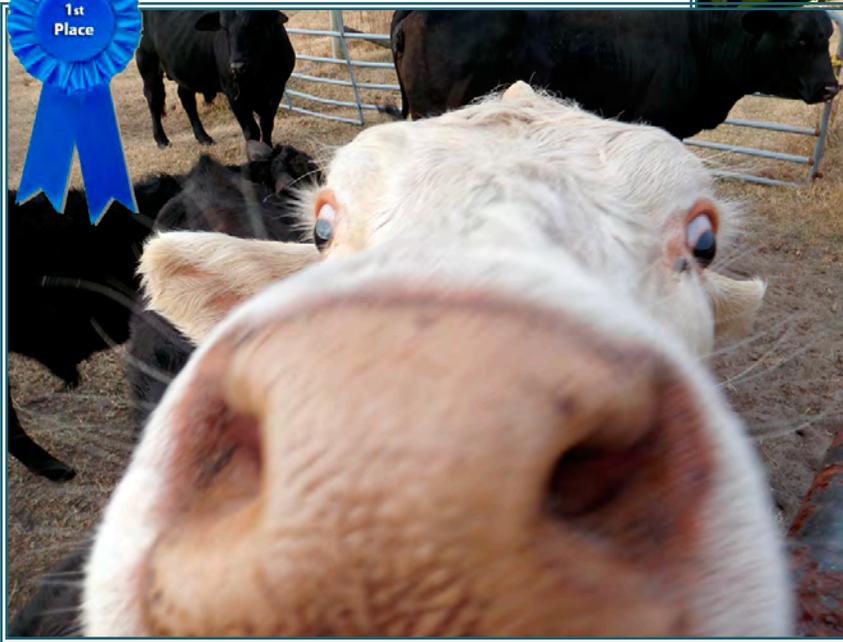


Photo Contest

2ND



1st Place



3RD



First Place - Gene Bertine, Civil Eng. Tech, Lake City - This is a picture of my daughter Amanda's cow.

2nd place - Ed Wright, ASTC, State Office - Squirrel in Drake Elm.

3rd place - Elwood Holzworth, Soil Conservation Tech, Vero Beach - Photo of a tree on the prairie at Archbold WRP site. Close observation indicates a breeze.

**"...Mary, Mary quite contrary,
how does your garden grow?..."**

Perhaps no silver bells, but if you got a pollinator microgarden last year, you need to check it out. The one at the PMC has four different wildflowers surviving, resprouting, or coming up as seedlings. We didn't do anything except let mother nature take its course and trim off the dead tops late last month.



Employee News

HR Has New Manager

By Eileen Winkle, Human Resources Officer

Hello, I am Eileen Winkle your new HR Manager. I recently transferred here from Portland, OR where I served 2 years in the same position. I am accompanied by my husband Tom and son Tommy (who will be attending Santa Fe community college). I have two daughters (one in Pensacola, FL and one in New Orleans, LA) and a six year old granddaughter.



Prior to working in Portland, Oregon, I lived on Oahu and worked for NRCS, Pacific Islands as an HR Specialist and HR Manager. Before joining NRCS in 2006, I was a staffing specialist for the Everglades Restoration Project, working for the National Park Service. I lived in Key Largo and Plantation, FL. Throughout our careers my family and I were blessed to have lived and/or worked in 7 different national parks. I enjoy reading, movies, fishing and travel.

I recently returned from a trip to Southeast Asia with my 3 sisters, where we visited Thailand, Viet Nam, Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Laos. I am honored to work for the Natural Resources Conservation Service and proud of the work we all do.

Please stop by and introduce yourself the next time you are in the state office. I truly look forward to meeting and working with each one of you.

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars



- ✎ March -- Women's History Month
- ✎ March 15 -- National Agriculture Day
- ✎ March 22 -- World Water Day
- ✎ April -- National Garden Month
- ✎ April 10 - 16 -- National Volunteer Week
- ✎ April 20 -- Earth Day Event, PMC
- ✎ April 22 -- Earth Day
- ✎ April 29 -- National Arbor Day
- ✎ May -- National Wetlands Month

Personnel Actions

November - January

New/Promotions/Changes

- ★ Alan Hedding, Career Conditional Conversion, Purchasing Agent, GS-1105, State Office
- ★ Chad George, Promotion, Rangeland Management Specialist, GS-454, ECS, State Office
- ★ Michael Bush, Promotion, Biologist, GS-401, ECS, State Office
- ★ Eileen Winkle, Reassignment, Human Resources Officer, GS-201, State Office

Leaving/Retired

- ★ David Ruggles, Resignation, Archeologist, GS-0193, ECS, State Office
- ★ Sherry Brown, Retirement, Fiscal Technician, GS-503, State Office
- ★ Lenora Haynes, Retirement, RC&D Coordinator, GS-401, Central Florida RC&D, Lake Wales
- ★ David Howell, Retirement, Soil Scientist, GS-470, Lake City Area Office
- ★ John Harper, Retirement, RC&D Coordinator, GS-401, Florida Three Rivers RC&D, Milton
- ★ Ramon Ortiz-Rodriguez, Reassigned, Maryland NRCS

Who Are We?

Answer

Left to right - Ken Morgan, Program Specialist in the state office and Tom Cheyne, DC in Palatka. Taken during their college days at UF.



President Bans Texting While Driving

The President signed E.O. 13513 “Federal Leadership on Reducing Text Messaging While Driving” in order to demonstrate Federal leadership in improving safety on our roads and highways.

Departmental Regulation 5400-007, <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR5400-007%20Text%20while%20driving.htm>, establishes the policy of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) on text messaging by employees when driving Government owned, leased or rented vehicles (GOVs), when driving privately owned vehicles (POVs) on official Government business or when using electronic equipment supplied by the Government while driving. It is USDA policy to:

- ✎ ban any and all text messaging by all USDA employees and encourage contractors to adopt policies that ban text messaging (1) when driving a GOV, (2) when driving a POV while on official Government business; and (3) using electronic equipment supplied by the Government when driving any vehicle (even during off-duty hours);
- ✎ take appropriate disciplinary action for violation of this mandatory ban on texting, up to and including removal from Federal service, as outlined in Section 9 of this regulation; and
- ✎ encourage USDA employees and contractors and their families to refrain from texting, or from engaging in any behavior that distracts attention from driving safely, at any time.

Texting or text messaging means reading from or entering data into any handheld or other electronic device (including, but not limited to, cell phones, navigational tools, laptop computers or other electronic devices), including for the purpose of Short Message Service (SMS) texting, e-mailing, instant messaging, obtaining navigational information or engaging in any other form of electronic data retrieval or electronic data communication. The term does not include the use of a cell phone or other electronic device for the limited purpose of entering a telephone number to make an outgoing call or answer an incoming call, unless this practice is prohibited by state or local law. The term also does not include glancing at or listening to a navigational device that is secured in a commercially designed holder affixed to the vehicle, provided that the destination and route are programmed into the device either before driving or while stopped in a location off the roadway where it is safe and legal to remain stationary.

Driving is defined as operating a motor vehicle on a roadway, including while temporarily stationary because of traffic congestion, a traffic signal, a stop sign, another traffic control device, or otherwise. It does not include being in your vehicle (with or without the motor running) in a location off the roadway where it is safe and legal to remain stationary.

Don't Forget to Submit Your Photos For the Next Photo Contest

The contest is open to all employees of Florida NRCS and SWCD staffs. Submissions should be digital pictures at least 150 ppi. Photos must be taken in Florida and should include one or more of the following elements: soil, water, air, plants, animals, and/or employees. They can not be photos previously used by NRCS. When submitting photos include your name, contact information, and detailed information about the photo and subject matter (location, name, title, date taken, event, etc.) See rules sheet for more information.



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Send questions, comments or contributions to:

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