

F O C U S

Florida NRCS Outreach and Conservation Updates



Photo Contest 1st Place Winner - Rick Robbins, Soil Scientist.
See page 14 for Photo Contest details.



A Final Note

From Your State Conservationist

Carlos Suarez

Dear Florida NRCSers,

As you read this I will be starting my trek to California, but I wanted to send you one final message to once again say "Thank You" for all the support and encouragement I received while I was your state conservationist. Since the day I arrived in Florida in March of 2008, I have had the honor of working with an outstanding group of professionals so committed and passionate about helping people protect their natural resources.

I know the last few years have not been easy on NRCS employees with the uncertainty of budgets each year. This year everyone is waiting to see what Congress will decide on our budget and the 2012 Farm Bill. Included in the new bill just passed to stop the "fiscal cliff" is an extension of most of the 2008 Farm Bill until September. This extension contains limited authority with reduced dollar amounts for most conservation programs, including WRP, GRP, FRPP, EQIP, CSP, and WHIP. It is our job to help farmers and producers make the best decisions they can with the resources they have. I am confident that you will continue to deliver outstanding service to the citizens of Florida at this critical time, even with the significant fiscal uncertainty.

I am extremely proud of the accomplishments we have achieved in the years I have been in Florida. Through your hard work we have made incredible steps forward in conservation. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do for this great state. I know you will afford the same assistance to Roney Gutierrez as he serves as your acting state conservationist, and to your new STC.

Words cannot express the gratitude I feel for your sincere support and respect during my tenure. All of you will have a special place in my heart.

Good luck in all your future endeavors.

Outreach and Civil Rights

2012 Black History Luncheon

By Chakesha S. Martin, DC

In observance of Black History Month, Florida NRCS and the USDA Forest Service hosted a 2012 Black History Month Inter-Agency Program on February 7, 2012 at the Paramount Plaza Hotel and Suites Conference Center in Gainesville, FL.

Other participating agencies were USDA Rural Development and USDA Farm Service Agency. All NRCS employees, other coworkers, and family members were encouraged to attend. Approximately 160 people across the different agencies were in attendance.

The national theme this year is, "Black Women in American History and Culture".

We had phenomenal presentations from USDA employees from the Forest Service, NRCS, and FSA about historical Women from Past to Present. The presentation highlighted accomplishments of 11 women ranging from Harriet Tubman to Madam C.J. Walker to Michelle Obama. The event included African dancing from the Makare African Dance Family, a duet by the Addison sisters and raffle prizes for participants.

The highlight of the event was being able to network with employees across the different agencies. We appreciate all the participation from all who attended the luncheon. We hope you enjoyed yourself and that it was a learning experience.



Sign up now for the 2013 celebration in Gainesville. Contact Crenel Francis for more information, 352-338-9508



Agricultural Producer Outreach Workshop

By Ann Bowens, State Outreach Coordinator

On May 22nd, approximately 35 agricultural producers from Seminole and Brevard counties gathered in Cocoa to learn more about NRCS programs and services. I served as the moderator for the workshop. Nick Francisco, President of East Central Florida RC&D Council, the sponsor for the workshop, gave a warm welcome, shared the history of the RC&D and gave a big plug for NRCS. Dave Millard, NRCS District Conservationist for Seminole and Brevard counties, presented an overview of NRCS programs followed by Crenel Francis, Easement Specialist, who discussed easement programs. Following the mid-morning break, Richard Burklew and Dave McGimmis, St. Johns River Water Management District covered topics of interest. We closed out the workshop with Peggy Green, Agri-Business Woman sharing opportunities in Florida in the Agri-Tourism Business. A delicious lunch was made possible by East Central Florida RC&D.

As a result of this effort we are working with 4 new farmers that otherwise might not have known about our programs and services.

Wreaths Across America

By Deborah Lee, Area 4 Admin Assistant

Wreaths Across America is a non-profit organization founded to continue and expand the annual wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery that began in 1992. Their mission, "Remember, Honor, Teach", is carried out partly by coordinating wreath laying ceremonies on a specified Saturday in December at veterans' cemeteries in all 50 states, as well as Arlington National Cemetery.

Their message is about the importance of remembering our fallen heroes, honoring those who serve, and teaching our children about the sacrifices made by veterans and their families to preserve our freedoms.

On December 15, 2012, I took part in the laying of the wreaths at the South Florida National Cemetery in Lake Worth, FL. There were over 500 men, women and children participating. Among events that also took place was a small parade which included representative units from each branch of the military, Boy Scouts of America, Veterans POW-MIA groups, Junior ROTC groups, Patriot Guard bikers, and many more.



After the remembrance ceremony recognizing local veterans, organizers and sponsors; everyone went about placing wreaths on the grave sites. There were 7,400 wreaths donated from many sponsors to be placed. To see small children placing wreaths and saluting the site was very moving. What a wonderful teaching event it was about remembering our fallen and showing respect for their commitment to fight for the freedoms we now enjoy. It was an awesome feeling afterwards to stand back and look at all the wreaths placed.

In the wake of the shooting of the children and teachers at the Sandy Hook Elementary, prayers and thoughts went out to all the victims of this senseless tragedy. They, too, were remembered and their lives honored.

For more information and your opportunity to participate in next year's program in your area, visit the *Wreaths Across America* website <http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org>.

USDA Celebrates 150 Years

Throughout 2012 USDA has been celebrating 150 years of existence. The celebration will come to a close in January 2013. We will look forward to future celebrations.



Field News

Area 1 Holds Farm Tour for FWC Biologists

By Steve Tullar, Soil Conservationist

Monticello field office staff organized a tour for Biologists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) on Wednesday, May 30, 2012. The purpose of the tour was to expose species biologists to everyday farm management from a variety of operators.

“Giving our biologists a chance to visit with farm managers and see several types of ag operations has given us a better understanding of how agriculture benefits wildlife,” said Scott Sanders, FWC. “The information gained today will be used to help develop Best Management Practices (BMP’s) for wildlife.”

The tour included on-site visits with Kirk Brock, a row crop farmer who utilizes no-till techniques with heavy residue cover crops; Eric Sorensen, a farm manager with Boyd Farms where wildlife is managed in conjunction with center pivot irrigation; and Mac Finlayson, who practices rotational grazing in a bahia grass-clover cover.



Shown left to right: Jeff Norville –NRCS Area Conservationist, Scott Sanders –FWC, Rance Ellis – FDACS; Ray Scott – FDACS; Ted Heohn – FWC; Macky Thurman-FWC; Steve Tullar – NRCS Soil Conservationist; Arlo Kane – FWC; Mark Asleson – FWC; Jessica Graham – FWC; Rick McCann – FWC; Deborah Burr – FWC, Eric Seckinger – FWC; Joe Prenger – FWC and Joel Love – FDACS



Photos:
Left-Kirk Brock uses a soil pit to show how soil quality is improved with cover cropping.

Right - Mac Finlayson details his cattle operations.

Bottom - Eric Sorensen of Boyd Farms describes double cropping of oats and cotton under center pivot field.



USDA Shoots Video in FL

by Gail Hendricks, PAS

In April, the USDA Office of Communications sent a videographer to Florida to shoot a series of videos on the “Abraham Lincoln” variety of tomato to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of USDA. I assisted with the video and photos for the shoot. These how-to videos were filmed at Worden Farm, a community-oriented and USDA certified organic farm in Punta Gorda, Florida. They have worked with NRCS on natural resources on their farm.

Check out the videos for tomato growing information:
<http://go.usa.gov/gttP>

International Volunteer Finds Persistence Very Rewarding

By Amalia Castro, Former Earth Team Volunteer in Kissimmee

I discovered my interest in soil sciences at Autónoma University of Madrid, Spain, when I took a soils course that included working with USDA's taxonomy. It was not until I joined an exchange program to study at Wageningen University in the Netherlands that I was able to learn more about soils and my interest in the field grew.

I decided to extend my knowledge to be sure that soil science was the field I wanted to work in. One of my teachers encouraged me to take a look at the NRCS website. The program seemed perfect for me, so I decided to become an Earth Team volunteer.

The process of getting to the U.S. and becoming an Earth Team volunteer was challenging. Luckily the Earth Team staff gave me the steps to follow in order to make my experience go more smoothly. I never would have been able to do it without the emotional and financial support of my Spanish and American families. It was really important that they trusted me and, once here, my relatives made me feel at home.

I was able to experience many different farming and ranching practices at the Kissimmee field office. I saw how conservation work helps improve operations and the environment. Prescribed burning, chopping and irrigation systems are a few topics I have learned about during my time with NRCS. We were even able to see threatened species like bald eagles.

Besides clerical work, I also processed contracts and digitalize data with GIS. I attended a workshop on water quality and traveled to the Tavares office to study and do soils survey work.

Many times I have been asked why I was so persistent to travel overseas to work at an unpaid position. To me, it was simply a great chance to develop my skills and knowledge about a subject I am passionate about. It also allowed me to work with one of the most prestigious organizations in the world. Now I am able to understand the theory behind the lessons I studied. I very much appreciate this opportunity to work with NRCS. My experience as an Earth Team volunteer helped me learn and evolve. This experience is something I will keep and be able to apply everywhere I go.

Thank you NRCS and Earth Team.



Citrus Water Seminar

By: Carlos Javier Torres, Agricultural Engineer & Kayla Milburn, Soil Conservationist

On September 26, 2012, more than 70 citrus producers and farmers attended the Highlands County Citrus Water Seminar. Personnel from Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and both South and Southwest Florida Water Management Districts participated in this workshop. Carlos Javier Torres and Kayla Milburn had the opportunity to set up a NRCS display and speak to producers about how the new federally recognized BMPs fit into the agency's mission. Several producers expressed interest in NRCS technical and financial assistance, as well as an appreciation for the help that the agency offers agricultural producers in meeting environmental compliances.



Creating Space for High Value Crops and High Income!

by Edward B. Page, Easements Program Specialist (This was Ed's last submission before his death)

Higher value, sometimes organic, and normally locally marketed crops are gaining attention and enticing new farmers into agricultural production. Relatively small areas can produce significant income if properly managed and especially if crops are protected from the elements. The NRCS "Seasonal High Tunnel System for Crops" Assistance Program will help farmers to achieve their conservation goals and increase profits at the same time. Crops such as small fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers or other ornamentals can be sold directly to the public through a farmers' market or a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organization; making this type of business a possibility.

This system is intensive and requires a farmer who is interested in dealing with the details and the often more technical aspects of production. It can be both demanding and very rewarding. One good example of how this can work for a local Florida farmer comes in the story of White Rabbit Acres, a farm that operates in an organic model (though it is not certified), belonging to Brian and Valerie Quant (pictured right) near Vero Beach, Florida. They started farming on about 30 acres in 1999 with an existing citrus grove. They then moved into a crop and livestock operation with about 5 acres of organic greens and tomatoes. In 2011, they added a 3696 square foot high tunnel to allow growing cucumbers, summer squash, and better quality tomatoes. Field grown tomatoes in this area often could have a high percentage

of cracked and blemished fruit because of the weather, while cucumbers and squash would often freeze out in January or February cold spells.

High tunnels have a lot of advantages with very little expense. Valerie says she likes the high tunnel because it prevents erosion of the highly organic soils she has created with lots of compost and also some biochar, a product that is made by creating charcoal from organic material for the amendment of soils. This is all very good for the bottom line: new products that farmers were not able to grow before or a more extended season, higher quality products that can be sold for more money because they are protected from the weather, and the ability to attract new customers and hold old ones better because of quality, variety, and extended season. There is almost no limit to what can be grown.

NRCS's Seasonal High Tunnel Program (practice 798) is available to anyone who can qualify for EQIP and is rather straight forward in its requirements as well as highly flexible in what the farmer is able to accomplish for her or his business. Sign ups for the practice will now be evaluated for the 2013 season.



NRCS Participates in Natural Resource Diversity Initiative at UF

By Donna Hopwood, former Florida DC

Tabitha Morgan, Master's student in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida, and SCEP intern with the USDA Forest Service, along with fellow Masters students Nia Haynes and Karen Bailey, initiated a program at UF called the Natural Resource Diversity Initiative (NRDI). The goal of NRDI is to expose students, especially those of minority backgrounds, to the field of natural resources. One of the main barriers to minority interest in natural resource fields is the uncertainty of what the many agencies do.

With that in mind, Morgan, Haynes and Bailey organized a "Meet and Greet" at the UF Student Union. Federal, State and Local natural resource agencies met with dozens of students and provided information about careers and internships. NRCS was able to directly connect with students who are interested in interviewing for 2013 summer internships, and with students preparing to graduate. Partnering with NRDI and UF professors will provide NRCS an excellent platform for diversity in recruitment efforts.

For more information the Natural Resource Diversity Initiative contact Tabitha Morgan at tcmorgan@fs.fed.us.



Organizers (L-R) Nia Haynes, Tabitha Morgan, and Karen Bailey

Federal Women's Program (FWP)

Field Day 2012

by Jean-Paul Calixte, with contributions by Alison Steglich

On a cool Central Florida morning, 60 NRCS employees and others from partner agencies gathered at the Hickory Point Recreational Center in Tavares, Florida, to celebrate Women's Education-Women's Empowerment. The Field Day was an opportunity to highlight *Women in Soils and Changes in Technology*. This event was organized by the Federal Women's Program Committee. The day started with very informative presentations by an all female cast of Soil Scientists (top photo) on topics such as *What is Soil Science* by Alison Steglich (Tavares MLRA); *Soil Survey-What's In It for You* by Julie Ruh (Tavares MLRA); and *Access to our Data* by Sherlynette Perez-Castro, (Ft. Myers). Several posters and displays were staged outside to showcase Web Soil Survey, the different soils of Florida, and different equipment that is used to get the job done.

After a terrific lunch attendees had a chance to get their hands "dirty" by trying to figure out the texture of several soil samples, and also by teaming up for an augering contest. The goal of the contest was to use a soil survey auger and dig a hole to a depth of 40 inches. Naturally, people were jockeying to have an experienced Soil Scientist on their team and in the end the team that won first place included Darryl Leach, Tom Weber, Dan Oliver, Rick Robbins, and J'Que Jones (second photo, right). Surprise, anyone? No, I really meant that this team should have one hand tied behind its back! But I digress...Texturing Champs were Manuel Matos in first place; Rick Robbins finished second; and Jean-Paul Calixte for third place. It was just plain fun!

The day ended with an additional presentation about *Soil Scientists Across the Country* by Alison, Julie, and Sherlynette and the FWP field day was concluded with remarks by Tom Weber, State Soil Scientist. I came away quite impressed with the quality of the organization of this event, the enthusiasm of the speakers and the rich history of contributions of women in the field of Soil Science.



Howard Yamataki, Soil Scientist, Retires After 40 Years

By Elwood Holzworth, Soil Con Tech

As most of you know, Howard Yamataki retired last month. Following is a short history of a longtime NRCS employee.

Howard Yamataki is a Sansei Japanese American, born in Cleveland Ohio in 1950. Sansei is a term that indicates a third generation of Japanese immigrants. His family lived in a blue collar neighborhood with many different European groups. Three of Howard's four grandparents migrated to the United States from Japan, but he isn't sure when his Hispanic grandmother entered the U.S. While his mother may have spoken to friends in Japanese on the telephone, English was spoken in the home. Howard didn't learn to speak Japanese.

In high school he was in the horticultural club and also was an active member of Future Farmers of America. Both of Howard's parents worked in factories and insisted he go to college as, "that is the way up." By working summer jobs he was able to pay for much of his own education at Ohio State University where he majored in Agronomy, because he always loved outdoors and soil.

Howard began his duty with NRCS on September 11, 1972. During his career with this agency, he is proud to have had the opportunity to work with a variety of professionals and function as a contributing team member. He has had this attitude from the early years of being a Soil Survey team member in North and South Florida, the middle years as a Party Leader in Central Florida, and later years as a Resource Soil Scientist.

Some of the work Howard is especially proud of is his soils work in various wetland studies and contributions to refining the hydric soil indicators for sandy soils, which had national implications.



He received a national award from the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) and received special recognition for work on establishment of the State Soil – Myakka, sponsored by the local chapters of the SWCS and the Florida Association of Environmental Soil Scientists (FAESS).

Howard has been a Certified Soil Scientist in the Soil Science Society since 1979 and also has been the president of the state chapters of SWCS and FAESS. Howard is also pleased to have been the Chair for the state Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee from 1992 to 1995.

Recently I had the opportunity to work with Howard as he was doing a soils investigation on a large citrus grove. The new managers needed questions answered about the accuracy of the mapping in the soil survey. Additionally, two soil conservation technicians and a soil conservationist received hands on training in soils.

Howard spent the day augering holes and providing insight into the soil characteristics that would help the growers in determining root stocks when they replanted the grove. He subsequently provided additional pertinent information to the growers as well as to the NRCS staff that were in attendance.

How do we replace 40 years of experience? Thanks Howard !



A new version of the Plant Hardiness Zones Map has been released on the web. See: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/pr/2012/120125.htm> for an explanation of the changes.

See: <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/Default.aspx> for the web-based interactive and static maps.

My Transition from Intern to Career

By Kayla Milburn, Soil Conservationist

Wow, how time has flown! As I recently reached my three year milestone with NRCS in June of this year, I wanted to share my experience in transitioning from a student intern to a permanent employee with the agency.



Throughout my internship appointments, I had the pleasure to work under three very knowledgeable and influential individuals. I owe many thanks to Chris Menhennett, District Conservationist (DC) of Suwannee County (right), Donna Hopwood, DC of Alachua and Bradford County (left), and Howard Harrison, DC of Okeechobee County (not pictured) for their commitment to seeing me excel in the agency. Each of my supervisors taught, encouraged, and challenged me in both my professional and personal life.

Few are as blessed as I was to be able to learn the ropes of their future career while still in school, and hit the ground running as soon as they graduate. In three short years, I was given the chance to assist in putting conservation on the ground in 10 different field offices and working with a broad array of agriculture including dairy, citrus, silviculture, beef, cropland, aquaculture, and organic operations.

My internships and part time employment prepared me well to start working with ease in any field office in Florida, but I could not have chosen a better location. Carlos Torres, District Conservationist in the Sebring field office, put me straight to work and the rest is history! I fell in love with the locale, the landowners, and the large scale agriculture found in Highlands County. Carlos is constantly coaching me in areas where I still have a great deal to learn, and allowing me to use and improve upon the skills that I have.

I am extremely anxious and excited to see where the agency will take me next, knowing that what I have seen so far is just the beginning! Since my start in 2009, Florida NRCS has treated me exceptionally well and I am so grateful to be a member of this workplace family.

Suwannee Celebrates "CARES" Farmers

By Daniel Gibble, Student WAE

Over 700 people attended the 12th Annual CARES



(County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship) Celebration at the UF/IFAS Suwannee Valley Agriculture Extension Center. The event was held in honor of 22 farms that take part in the CARES program in the Suwannee and Santa Fe River Basins. Each recipient received a plaque, gift basket, and a large sign to display outside of their farm that says their farm "CARES."

These farms are using best management practices (BMPs) with new technology and advanced management techniques that push their farms into the future. The program has awarded almost 500 farmers who have done their part to reduce their use of natural resources.

Over 130 organizations and many Florida officials came out to support the event and congratulate the farmers on their achievements including Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam. Other guests that spoke were Florida Farm Bureau



President John Hoblick, State Representative Leonard Bembry and Frank Ellis (left), Area Conservationist for Area 2, who represented NRCS.

In his closing remarks Putnam said, "The next generation is counting on us to get it right, so that we can preserve opportunities for them to come back home to the Suwannee Valley, and find a career, and build their farm, and raise their family, and find their piece of the American dream. The success of this program is key to the future of Florida agriculture, and the future of Florida will be determined by the future of Florida agriculture."

Agency Officials in Florida

It was a busy summer for Florida NRCS with several USDA and NRCS leadership members coming to Florida for announcements and speeches.

by Gail Hendricks, PAS

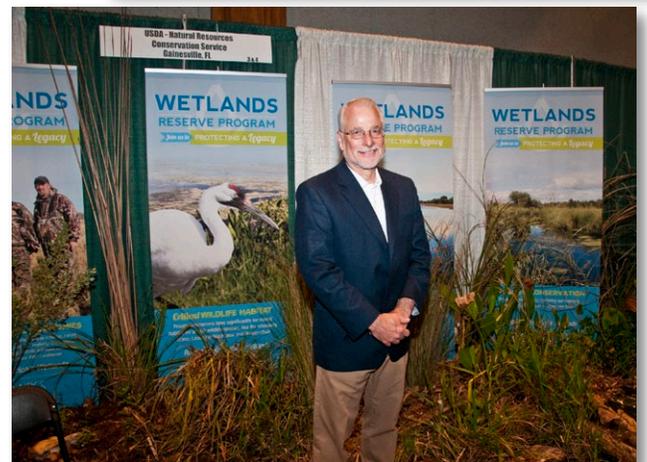


Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (left) held a roundtable discussion with Florida agriculture representatives and also made an announcement, along with several other federal agency representatives, on President Obama's commitment to Everglades Restoration and WRP funding in Florida.

Ann Mills, deputy under secretary for natural resources, (second from left, below) was also at this roundtable and press conference.



NRCS Chief Dave White was in Florida twice. He made a WRP announcement on funding for a major project, American Prime WRP,



(top, right) and returned in June to do a tour of the Suwannee area and give the closing speech at INTECOL, an International Wetlands Conference in Orlando (above). Mimi Williams, plant materials specialist, and the Brooksville PMC staff designed and set up the national exhibit for this conference. (see page 12)



NRCS Regional Chief Leonard Jordan also visited twice this summer. He attended the NACD SE Regional meeting (left) in the panhandle in July and later in the month he represented USDA and NRCS at a press conference regarding a new partnership agreement for Longleaf Stewardship Fund grants.

Plant Materials Center News

Exhibit Decorators For Hire!

by Gail Hendricks, PAS

Mimi Williams, plant materials specialist, and the crew from the Brooksville Plant Materials Center, including Janet Grabowski, manager and Mary Anne Gonter, biological science technician, have taken on the new (unofficial) roll of exhibit creators. In June they created a wetland habitat for the national NRCS exhibit at an international wetlands conference in Orlando; complete with a water feature, plants and even an alligator skull. (photos below) Everyone at the conference was amazed.

In October, they outdid their previous display with an example of a coastal dune for the national NRCS exhibit at the Restore America's Estuaries conference in Tampa. The dune was made from sculpted Styrofoam with sand glued on and included plants they grew or collected along with objects found at the coast such as shells and a sand fence. (photos left)

Both displays were so realistic that conference attendees had to take a close look, and occasionally touch, to see if the displays were real.



Creating coastal dune. Janet Grabowski, left, Mary Anne Gonter, center, Mimi Williams, right.



Coastal dune display



Wetland habitat display



The water feature consisted of black plastic with a sheet of Plexiglas over it.

Plant Materials Program Soil Health Study

By Mimi Williams, Plant Materials Specialist

The Brooksville Plant Materials Center (PMC) is one of six plant materials centers nationwide that have been asked by NHQ to participate in a national soil health study. In a letter to Carlos Suarez and the other five State Conservationists, John Englert, Plant Materials Program National Leader, said "On April 24, Chief Dave White sent a message to NRCS employees about a new national focus on soil health. The Chief and Deputy Chief Wayne Honeycutt are expecting PMCs to play a big role in this effort." A three year study has been outlined to look at cover crop mixes in rotation with a commodity crop and the effects it will have on improving the dynamic soil properties which determine soil health. The data and information we collect at the PMC will support NRCS recommendations and conservation planning effort. The following PMCs were chosen based on their distribution around the country and the willingness of the staff to participate in this study: Beltsville, MD, Brooksville, FL, Bismarck, ND, Elsberry, MO, Pullman, WA, and Lockeford, CA.

The three year study will look at the effects of simple grass/legume cover crop mixtures (ryegrass and crimson clover), compared to more complex mixtures with multiple species of grasses, legumes, and forbs (ryegrass, oats, crimson clover, hairy vetch, rapeseed, and daikon or tillage radish) at three seeding rates. In addition to plant dry matter yield, the plant materials staffs at the six PMCs will be determining nitrogen content, plant cover and plant

height, bulk density, soil temperature, soil moisture content, and soil resistance (with a penetrometer).

Soil samples will be collected and sent to a USDA, Agricultural Research Service cooperator who will determine biological activity (biological activity, organic C, organic N, P saturation, etc.). The samples will also be sent to the NRCS National Soil Survey Laboratory for soil indicators (aggregate stability, organic matter, available water capacity, etc).

Each year at the recommended time, the cover crop stand will be terminated by rolling down and commercial field corn will be planted to study the effect of the different cover crop mixes on corn yields. Due to our long growing season, the Brooksville PMC will also be planting a grain sorghum crop following the corn. Stay tuned for results!



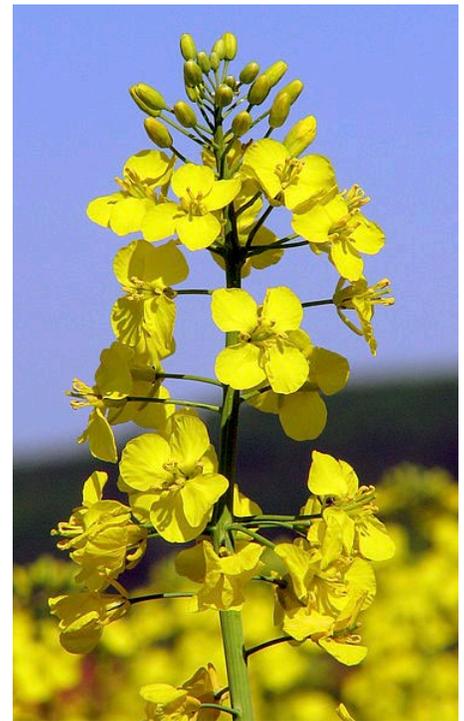
Oats (*Avena sativa*).



Hairy vetch (*Vicia villosa*).



Daikon radish (*Raphanus sativus* var. *longipinnatus*) and root.



Rapeseed (*Brassica napus*) flowers.



Crimson clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*) flowers.



Photo Contest



1st Place: Rick Robbins, Soil Scientist - "Mushrooms are thriving at Rainbow Springs State Park."

2nd Place: Elwood Holzworth, Soil Con Tech - "Fiddle head fern – taken on ranch in Indian River County while doing NRI work."

3rd Place: Yesmarie Chaparro Feneque, Summer Student Intern - Red Shouldered Hawk



Public Affairs Specialist Receives USDA Honor

Hundreds of employees submitted art work for USDA's 1st Annual Art & Agriculture Competition last spring. NRCS Florida public affairs specialist, Gail Hendricks' photo of a Roseate Spoonbill (left) was chosen in the first round by employees who selected winning entries in each category. Gail's photo is displayed in the USDA South building, on the first floor near the TARGET Center, in Washington, DC.

The the winning entries are scheduled to remain on display at the USDA office in Washington for a year.

The first exhibition had such a resounding response that they are conducting a second competition. If you are interested check out the rules at: <http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctdiscuss.nsf/dx/arts>



The Perks of Retirement!

"This is a pic of a Floridian seeing snow on Berthoud pass on the continental divide in Colorado. You should try this retirement gig-it is wonderful!" - Cindy Seeds, Program Payment Specialist, Retired.

Did You Know?



Social Media Tips Every Government Employee Should Know

July 20, 2012 By Jason Kay
(Partial reprint from www.fedsmith.com/article/)

All the buzz anymore is about social media this, and social media that. Truth be told, social media has infiltrated our lives in a big way, and by all accounts, it looks like it's here to stay. It's important to government employees to keep some social media guidelines in mind, so they don't end up having it cause problems with fellow employees or with their jobs.

Social media includes such things as blogging, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and all the other such sites that are popping up around the cyber world. With over 800 million people alone using Facebook, there's a good chance that most government employees have signed up there as well. They may even be using several social media opportunities and creating their own websites, with all roads pointing to trouble if they are careless with what they do on these sites.

Here are some social media tips that every government employee should follow:

- When it comes to the online world, things can be difficult to decipher and feelings and intent can be misunderstood. Often times, people will write something online, and because of the absence of body language and voice inflection, people can easily misunderstand what the person is saying.
- Social media is not anonymous. Many people mistakenly believe that the Internet provides anonymity, but that's just not the case. There are ways to track down

the information to find the source from where comments originated.

- It's important to always use good judgment when using social media tools. This goes for whether you are acting as an individual or on behalf of the government. In other words, you may want to skip the pictures of you partying down on a Saturday night while wearing a bikini and covering yourself with whipped cream.
- Although freedom of speech exists and some people may feel they can make comments about their employer, boss, or coworkers, it doesn't mean there won't be any repercussions. In all likelihood, there will be some problems that arise if you do engage in writing negative or hurtful things. Even if they cannot outright let you go for what you said, it could mean you will get passed up for possible promotions or there may just be bad feelings with coworkers.
- It's important to always know copyright laws. Copyright laws cover both images used online, as well as verbiage.
- Employees should maintain confidentiality about their work and fellow employees. This means they should not post photos of the people without their permission.
- If you are responding to something outside of work that people may confuse for a work related position, add a short disclaimer that states your opinion is no reflection upon or is not associated with your job.

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 can be either print or digital pictures, (digital pictures must be 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 previously used photos. 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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