

FOCUS

Florida NRCS Outreach and Conservation Updates



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service



Summer 2011



Photo by Photo Contest winner Brandon Russakis, Summer Intern, Fort Pierce

A Note From Your State Conservationist

Dear NRCS Family,

As OCTOBER BEGINS ANOTHER FISCAL YEAR, I know many of you are watching the budget discussions taking place in Congress with concern for our agency. We have experienced this many times in the past and it is our job to keep focused on putting conservation on the ground. We will have customers wanting to address many resource concerns, and that is what we do best.

We all recognize the economic problems that the people in our country are facing every day. People are losing their jobs, their homes, or their life savings. During these hard economic times, we need to recognize that this situation may be impacting our customers, partners, the community, and the taxpayers that help support us. I know we will continue to put forth our best effort possible, every day, to assure the taxpayers are getting the best for their investment in us.



Carlos Suarez, left, with Leonard Jordan, regional conservationist - east, at the Secretary's WRP announcement in West Palm Beach.

As for FY 2011, I want to express my gratitude for all your hard work this year in getting conservation on the ground and accomplishing our goals. One of the highlights was Secretary Vilsack's visit and announcement of \$100 million in WRP funding for the Northern Everglades region (*see story on page 3*). This is the largest amount of funding Florida has ever received for projects in the same watershed through WRP in a single year; so we made some headlines. We had an outstanding group of student interns again this summer (*see story on page 5*). You all worked really hard to outreach to Hispanic and women producers to get the word out for USDA; Secretary Vilsack was very appreciative of your assistance. And these are only a few examples.

Each Area did a great job in meeting their goals. The state met or exceeded all but 2 goals; and those were within 80% and 91%. In many cases we far exceeded the goals. For example, Area 1 reached 145% of their goal for EQIP acres of cropland conservation to improve soil quality. Area 2 achieved 156% of their goal for EQIP acres of forestland conservation to protect and improve vegetation. Areas 3 and 4 exceeded their WHIP goals by 633% and 472%, respectively. Though there was no goal, I was very impressed and encouraged by the acres of conservation plans written in all Areas. My number one priority for fiscal year 2012 is improving on our number of conservation plans completed before contracting.

As you reflect on this last fiscal year, I hope you look back at the challenges you faced, both personally and professionally, and feel proud of how you responded to them. Personally, I am proud to be working with such a dedicated group of employees. Let's go into the new fiscal year with this hopeful and thankful attitude and continue to help people help the land.



Secretary Vilsack Makes WRP Announcement in South Florida

By Gail Hendricks, public affairs specialist



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack was in Florida again in August to announce \$100 million in financial assistance through the Wetlands Reserve Program. He held a press conference in West Palm Beach on Aug. 11, 2011 to make the announcement. These funds will be used in FY 2011 to acquire permanent easements from eligible landowners and assist with wetland restoration on nearly 24,000 acres of agricultural land in the Northern Everglades Watershed. This is the largest amount of funding Florida has ever received for projects in the same watershed through WRP in a single year.

“Protecting and restoring the Northern Everglades is critical not just to Floridians, but to all Americans,” said Vilsack. “Today’s announcement demonstrates the Obama Administration’s strong commitment to conserve our national treasures, enhance the quality and quantity of our water, and secure the economic opportunities afforded by a healthy Everglades ecosystem.”

As I am sure most of you saw, we had great media coverage, statewide and nationally. Many partners and producers were on hand to support us and speak with the secretary. After the speeches, Secretary Vilsack met with one of the landowners from Hendry County Nursery Farms that applied for this funding. Both the owner and the secretary signed the agreement to purchase a conservation easement (middle photo above). Following the signing the Secretary, media and partners toured the Winding Waters WRP site where the event was held, while Nga Watts (right, middle) gave a description of the restoration practices.



Organizing an event like this takes countless hours and the assistance of many employees. Jeff Schmidt and I spent over two weeks working with USDA Washington personnel to find a location and set up this press conference. On hand the day of the event from NRCS were Leonard Jordan, regional conservationist for the east, Carlos Suarez, Jeff Schmidt, Nga Watts, Roney Gutierrez, Maelo Reyes, Rosa Reyes and I. However, these were only a few of the employees it took to pull this off. Thanks to all those who ran down figures, spoke to producers, sent invitations and supplied information for the news release and talking points for the Secretary. It was a true team effort.



Plan ahead. NRCS Distribution Center will suspend distribution and exhibit services from October 12 to 28 during our move to new facilities. Distribution Center and Earth Team staff will be available by email, phone and BlackBerry. We will reopen October 31, 2011 at 4407 121st St., Urbandale, Iowa 50323. Starting October 25, our phone number changes to 1-515-270-4864. Moving with us is 1-888-526-3227.



OUTREACH

Outreach to the Magnolia Center

By Ann Bowens, outreach coordinator

On June 30, 2011, I and members of Three Rivers RC&D and FSA spoke to approximately 100 participants in the East Milton community as they celebrated the kickoff of the summer youth camp at the Magnolia Educational and Recreational Center. After talking about NRCS programs and the discrimination claims process, I asked the kids what they most needed at camp and their response was “coloring books”. NRCS provided 40 each of “Color & Grow With Florida’s Wildflowers,” and “Activities, Games, & Fun Facts about Florida Agriculture.” Three Rivers RC&D provided the meal and it was a fun day for all who attended. Mrs. Latasha Wall currently runs the Center and was happy that I had taken the time to outreach to their center.



Mrs. T, as she prefers to be called, was kind enough to give me a little bit of history of the Magnolia Center. Years ago there were no school houses in East Milton for Black children, so for many years they gathered in the Mason Hall. After the Mason Hall burned down, the children went to school at different area churches until they finished the 6th grade. Afterwards, rain or shine, they had to walk to the J. B. Turner School and, as a result, many of the children dropped out of school. In the early 1940s, Mr. Robert Talton gave the community an acre of land to build a school house. The one room building, named the Magnolia School, opened in 1942. After some time, the children were transported by a newly acquired school bus to the new T. R. Jackson School and for many years the Magnolia School was closed. Because of the efforts of community members, the school was deeded to St. John Divine Missionary Church, Greater Bethlehem African Methodist Episcopal Church and Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church. A lot of work has now been done to the Little Red Magnolia School, and much more will happen to what is now the Magnolia Educational and Recreational Center so that it can continue helping many children of all ethnic groups in the community.

DC Meets with Iraqi Visitors

By Allen L. Moore, District Conservationist

On August 10, 2011, I was invited to participate in a tour and round table discussion with some very special visitors from the country of Iraq. The theme of the visit was “Water Resource Management - A Project for Iraq” and was arranged by the World Learning Visitor Exchange Program. The visitors were identified by our embassy as emerging leaders and chosen to participate in the International Visitor Leadership Program. The specific program objectives for the project were to:



- Examine interstate water relations, how different levels of government work with citizens and non-governmental organizations to solve problems related to water sharing and water rights;
- Study drought management, water reclamation and irrigation techniques in the U.S.;
- Examine the design and construction of facilities and environmental impact assessment of water projects;
- Observe water-related projects for developing countries that are developed in the US; and
- Study economic factors in water management.

While in Jacksonville, the guests visited the St. Johns River Water Management District Office, the Jacksonville Electric Authority Main Street Laboratory and the Marine Science Research Institute, at Jacksonville University.

This particular visit was arranged by a local organization known as GlobalJax, a non-profit organization from Jacksonville. The tour and round table discussion was headed by Ms. Chelsi Henry, a member of the Duval Soil and Water Conservation District who is also a local law student and is an active member of GlobalJax.

I was asked to share the overall roles and responsibilities of the USDA NRCS and our partnerships with the local districts. I also addressed several questions from the guests. The visit was a tremendous success. I believe that this encounter was one of the greatest highlights of my short career.

Civil Rights Committee

Federal Women's Program Manager's Thoughts

by Kay Nickel, dc and FWP manager

Women are not girls.

I am still surprised to hear women called girls in a professional setting. Yes, I know that some women don't mind being called girls, but it is never appropriate at work. Why risk offending someone? You wouldn't call a man a boy, would you?

The following are a few examples of ways to make your language gender neutral:

- Woman is the equivalent of man. (Lady, gal or honey is not okay)
- Ms. is the equivalent to Mr.
- Begin letters with Dear Customer, Cooperator, Staff, Friend, or use the person's name, if known.
- Go plural. Use they or their instead of he.
- Eliminate the pronoun. A good technician reads (his) the technical guide.
- Substitute a job title. A soil conservationist (He) writes plans.
- Replace pronouns with articles. A smart secretary consults a (her) dictionary.
- Use specific genderless nouns. The person (man) on the street likes to give opinions.

See, it's easy if you just think about it. If you need more information, please send me an email kay.nickel@fl.usda.gov

If It's Summer, There Must Be Students!

by Gail Hendricks, public affairs specialist

As in the past few years, NRCS Florida hosted a terrific contingent of student interns again this summer. This year's group also included two Business Management Leadership Program (BMLP) employees. Human resources and the various recruitment teams worked hard to be sure we had the "cream of the crop" of agriculture students from around the state, and a few other states as well. Each student was assigned a field or area office for the summer and learned from experienced employees what an NRCS job entails.

On July 11–13, 2011, all the students were invited to the state office to meet the Leadership Team and receive more training (top picture). Carlos Suarez opened the session by welcoming the students and giving them a little background on his career. Also on the program was information on human resources, financial management, admin services, public affairs, conservation planning, web soil survey, grazing and range management, tool kits and economics. The highlight of the event for the leadership team were the presentations each student made on their background and what they were learning

at NRCS. The final day consisted of a WRP site tour in Alachua County (bottom photo). They even found a small alligator skull (insert) and took a lot of pictures.



NACD Regional Conservation Hall of Fame Inductee From Florida

By Steve Tullar, soil conservationist

Mrs. Dorothy Lewis was presented with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) South Region Conservation Hall of Fame award at the recent regional meeting in Alabama. Mrs. Lewis is one of the more recognizable faces of conservation in Florida. Known and respected by farmers and politicians alike, Dorothy is continually in the middle of agricultural events throughout the North Florida region. Whether it's serving on the Jefferson SWCD Board or as a local Farm Bureau Representative, working at the local voting station, driving dialysis patients to get treatments, gathering up aluminum cans for the Kidney Fund, cleaning the church or typing the church bulletin, Dorothy is always on the scene assisting wherever her talents are needed.



NACD awards reception. L- R: son - Dr. John Lewis, Dorothy Lewis, son - David Lewis, grandson - Wilson Lewis, and Darrell Johnson NRCS D.C.

Born and raised in rural Missouri, Dorothy married Paul Lewis, who was from Tennessee. Soon after, the couple moved to Alaska, where Paul worked with the Department of the Army. Dorothy's first two sons, John and David, were born in Anchorage during the family's 10 year stay in Alaska. Paul's job then moved the family to Washington, DC, where son Mark was born. In 1963, after seven years in our nation's capital, the family moved to Florida. It was here they finally settled on a farm in Jefferson County. The family row cropped corn, peanuts, tobacco, and cotton. Peanuts were their "money" crop and Dorothy often pulled loaded peanut wagons 30 miles to Thomasville, GA. She also kept a large garden for years; canned or froze vegetables of all kinds and gave a lot of produce away to friends and neighbors. Today Mrs. Lewis, along with her sons John, a veterinarian, and David, a professional forester, manages cattle and timber on their family farm.

When not helping on the farm, Dorothy also volunteers on the Jefferson SWCD - a position she has held since 1988. She is not only a board member but also voluntarily serves as Secretary/Treasurer and even cooks noon meals for monthly SWCD board meetings. Her culinary talents help assure a quorum of board members and often 10 or more hungry, conservation-minded persons who show up for the meetings. In her duties as district secretary she performs many other services and functions for the clientele of NRCS and Jefferson SWCD.

Here are a few of Mrs. Lewis' achievements:

- The Lewis family was recognized as Jefferson County's Farm Family of the Year in 1989
- Administrator of state sponsored Jefferson Co. Water Quality Cost Share Project: 1992-95
- Past President/Vice President of Area 2 Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD).
- Served on the Suwannee River RC&D Council: 1990-2011
- Jefferson SWCD Secretary/Treasurer: 1989-present
- Delivers Land Stewardship materials to local churches during Stewardship Week: 1990-present
- Annual Ecology Field Day Presenter: 1990-present
- Annually represents the Jefferson SWCD at Farm Bureau's Legislative Reception: 1995-present
- Currently serves as board member for District 1 AFCD events.
- Farm Bureau Board Member: 1980-present.
- Past President of the Jefferson County Farm Bureau.
- Long standing Earth Team Volunteer: 2003-present

NRCS congratulates Mrs. Lewis on this much deserved recognition.



Lake Hampton Dam Dedication Ceremony. L-R: Curtis Mixon, agricultural engineer; Allen Moore, district conservationist; Jesse Wilson, state conservation engineer; and Frank Ellis, area conservationist.

Lake Hampton Dam EWP Dedication

by Gail Hendricks, public affairs specialist

Allen Moore, NRCS district conservationist, and the Nassau Soil and Water Conservation District organized a Lake Hampton Dam Dedication Ceremony that took place in Boulogne, FL on September 9, 2011.

Lake Hampton was severely damaged by flooding and debris from Tropical Storm Fay in 2008 (photos right). Shortly after, the Nassau Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) contacted NRCS for help. The SWCD and several partners entered into an Emergency Watershed Protection program (EWP) project agreement in March 2010 to repair the dam.

Construction was completed in April of 2011 at a total cost of \$422,354.10 (photo below). Local residents spoke at the dedication expressing their appreciation for the great work done to clean up and restore the lake and spillway.



Grazing Lands Stewardship Award Announced

By Brandee Williams, rangeland management specialist

The Florida Grazing Lands Coalition (FGLC) and the Florida Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) are pleased to announce Deep Roots Meat, LLC., as the recipient of the third annual Grazing Lands Stewardship Award. This award recognizes outstanding contributions to the ranching community in the areas of grazing and wildlife management.

Deep Roots Meat, LLC, is a family owned and operated agricultural business located in Greenville and Madison, Florida. This North Florida ranch has raised Angus cattle for six generations. Harold and Troy Platt are the present managers of this diverse operation. They currently have 3800+ acres on the Greenville property while the Madison property has 380 acres with 160 acres being used as a hay field. Cattle graze on several forages including: peas, millet, sudan grass, rye, and oats. Their animals are not fed grain or given any antibiotics or growth hormones. The Platts not only run grass-fed cattle but are now in the process of raising organic chickens.

Deep Roots Meat, LLC has won several other awards for their environmental conservation and ingenuity Troy Platt also spoke at the 4th National Conference on Grazing Lands in Reno, NV, in 2009. They are looking forward to the future challenges and rewards associated with agricultural life in Florida.

On October 20, 2011, during a joint SRM and FGLC meeting and tour of the ranch, the Grazing Lands Stewardship Award will be presented to Deep Roots Meat, LLC. This meeting is open to the public.



Okaloosa Ranchers Diversify with Longleaf Pine

By Dennis Hall, soil conservationist and Darryl Williams, district conservationist

In many parts of Florida, landowners are encouraged to plant longleaf pines to help re-establish this once dominant ecosystem. Leo (Bud) and Karen Turner, north Okaloosa county ranchers and wildlife land managers, have been hard at work following this recommendation from the NRCS and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The Turner's own 200 acres of pasture and forest land. They participated in WHIP and a plan was developed to plant 40 acres of longleaf pines and various species of native hardwoods. The plan has been implemented and the longleaf pines have thrived. The Turners have noticed an increase in Bob White quail on their farm along with an increase in other species of birds.

Prescribed burning is the conservation practice that gives longleaf pine the advantage over other plant species in competing for water and nutrients from the soil. Longleaf pine thrives with the periodic application of prescribed fire along with many native grasses. The Turners firmly believe that native grasses should be a part of the landscape and can provide food and cover for many species. The WHIP plan recommends that prescribed burning should be applied early in the life cycle and at 3-5 year intervals thereafter. Once the tree crowns have grown enough to protect the candle from excessive heat, the potential for damage from a prescribed fire is remote.

With the declining habitat of longleaf pines comes the threat of exotic and invasive species such as climbing fern, cogongrass, and tropical soda apple. The Turners have worked hard to control invasive species and other pests. They take great pride in managing their property in a results-oriented management style. They have clearly defined objectives and follow a plan to achieve the desired outcome; whether it's following the recommended burning cycle or grazing their herd of Florida Cracker Cattle through the silvopasture, nothing is out of place. They encourage others to follow their example, which is to diversify their operation. This will result in the better utilization of natural resources while providing a wildlife friendly landscape.

Golden Acres Goes Green with NRCS Help

by Steve Tullar, soil conservationist



Jefferson County landowners Bobbie and Fred Golden recently installed a solar-powered watering system on their ranch (left). Their farm, Golden Acres, produces many agricultural products including registered Miniature Fainting Goats, lamb and goat meat, Mayhaw jelly, farm fresh 'natural' eggs, and timber. Golden Acres Ranch was recognized by the North Florida Fair Association and the local Kiwanis Club as the 2010 Jefferson County Outstanding Farm Family.

The family's relationship with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) began shortly after the Goldens began their ranching operation. "Back in 2003, we came to NRCS to make sure our goats and sheep would stay healthy without hurting the environment," says Bobbie Golden. "Since then, the local NRCS staff has been there to help us with many of our land management goals."

Starting with the preparation of a conservation plan, NRCS provided the technical assistance the Goldens wanted. Next, with financial assistance from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Goldens began implementing their planned conservation practices. Since 2004, the Goldens have built interior cross fences, prescribe burned woodland areas, planted several types of forages for their grazing animals, and installed a solar-powered livestock watering system.

Working with the Goldens has been good for NRCS, too (Steve Tullar working with Fred Golden, right). During a 2009 meeting of the Florida Meat Goat Association held on their ranch, I had a chance to describe NRCS' programs to a group of 35 ranchers, some from as far away as Pensacola and Gainesville. The following week, one of the attendees stopped by the Jefferson County NRCS office for information and assistance. The producer participated in the conservation planning process and signed up for EQIP. When asked what she liked most about working with NRCS, Bobbie Golden was quick to zero in on technical assistance. "We really appreciated the technical advice that NRCS provided. While the cost sharing helped, we really needed the direction provided by the NRCS staff."



"People see our success and they want to know how they can do it," says Fred Golden. "We tell them to go to the local NRCS office and see what's available. Those guys really helped us." For more information about Bobbie and Fred Golden's operation, visit their website: www.goldenacresranchflorida.com.

AFCD Holds Annual Meeting in Ocala

by Gail Hendricks, public affairs specialist

The annual meeting of the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD) was held in Ocala this year. State Conservationist Carlos Suarez spoke to the assembled group during the general session on August 12, 2011.

Before the general session, Carlos met with the Florida Conservation District Employees Association (pictured right) to discuss ways to strengthen the relationship between NRCS and the Florida Soil and Water Conservation Districts.



L - R: Audrey Driggers, Okeechobee SWCD; Lola Allard, Jackson SWCD; Jackie Bailey, Highlands SWCD; Michael Brown, Suwannee River SWCD; Carlos Suarez, USDA-NRCS; Patty Fletcher, Lake SWCD; Dana Langford, Levy, Gilchrist, and Dixie SWCD; and Mellody Hughes, Choctawhatchee River SWCD.

Volunteers Wanted

Carlos Suarez, STC, recently instituted the *Volunteer 10K* Campaign in Florida. He challenged every office in the state to recruit at least one Earth Team volunteer to their staff and is expecting 100% office participation. After you have recruited your volunteer, be sure to use the national volunteer tracking system so that the hours can be counted. The State Office will use this system to review reported hours for each office to see who is making the most use of volunteers. If you have any questions on how to register and count hours for your volunteer, check with your Area Volunteer Coordinator or Darryl Williams, State Volunteer Coordinator.



Below is a good example of volunteer recruiting and use.

College Volunteer Interns

By George Johnson, district conservationist

In the fall of 2009 I received an email from a Stetson University student inquiring about internships. She found the Volusia SWCD website while searching for “sustainable agriculture”. Naturally, I assumed she was looking for a paid summer position so I sent her the information on NRCS and the Intern program. When I spoke with her, I found she was thinking of something else altogether.



At Stetson, students can get credit for a college course by completing 150 hours of work as an intern at a job approved by their advisor. She asked if anything like that was available. Of course, I was clueless and called my supervisor who said, “Why not?” “Sign her up for the Earth Team.” I called her and told her I had a position available. I then called our Earth Team “Mayor” (Darryl Williams) who sent me a whole list of Earth Team job descriptions. Who knew there was such a thing as a “Hugh Hammond Bennett Earth Team Intern”? As it turns out, I was about to get the first of three outstanding young people to fill that position.

A big plus is that they have to make weekly reports to their advisors so they are attentive, eager and responsible. When they first came into the office, I explained who we are and what we do. As much as it pained me, I introduced them to the Planning Procedures Handbook which they could look over as much as they wanted; but I wanted them to learn what we do in a more meaningful, active, productive way. What worked well for them has led the way to getting a lot of important stuff done in this office. I had many Conservation Plans finished, as in the 6 part folders were complete. I dreaded the idea of spending countless hours photocopying, hole punching and assembling the Customer’s copy; which may be the most important part - actually getting our product to the end user. I gave them a folder and a checklist and encouraged them to take a lot of time, ask a lot of questions, read and try to understand what each piece of paper in that plan was for. It took a lot of time, answers and explanations, but eventually they got it. By the time they left they knew the difference between an ECS 7 and the dreaded 52 and actually understood the reason for each. I was able to learn from them, too, and made some logical changes. Eventually they got faster and more efficient and I got caught up on getting plans out to the customers. My only regret is by the time this happens they have to move on!



Mixed in with the tedious office work, it is very important to get them in the field as often as possible. Just riding along, meeting the farmers and walking the land is valuable for them. They can hold a survey rod, measure a fence or a pipeline and take pictures to actually help get the job done. You may even have them prepare drawings or job sheets after they catch on.

I have learned that other colleges and universities have similar programs and I encourage others to pursue this valuable resource. I have a good relationship with the Environmental Science Advisor and he is on the lookout for qualified future candidates. Try to contact the head of the departments of Agriculture, Environmental Sciences, Biology, Geography, or other related disciplines. Tell them you have “open positions” and prepare for a great experience.

We all know the monetary value associated with volunteer hours. This is a great way to recruit future employees and create a positive image for NRCS in the community. Seeing these young people work is a rewarding experience and you may even be able to get caught up, at least a little!

Sea Oat Planting in Franklin County

By Brian McGraw, district conservationist

In March, Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District (FSWCD) joined forces with NRCS, students and Rotary Club volunteers from across the county, to plant over 9,000 sea oat seedlings (*Uniola paniculata*) on the St. George Island dunes in an effort to stabilize dunes damaged by Hurricane Dennis in 2005. Cathy Davis, Franklin SWCD secretary and I worked 2 days with students planting sea oats. We dug a lot of holes (photo on right). Technical assistance was provided by the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the University of Florida/Franklin Cooperative Extension Sea Grant Program.



Sea oats seedlings were planted 18 inches apart in three linear staggered rows in keeping with best management guidelines provided by the University of Florida. Late March was selected for planting to avoid the sea turtle nesting season, which runs from May through October.

In addition to the Rotary Club and FSWCD, the West Florida Resource Conservation and Development Council and the Tourist Development Council funded the restoration project, which cost just over \$5,000. About 1,000 of the seedlings were sent to Carrabelle Beach, whose restoration was set to begin soon after.

Feds, Farmers and Friends Feed Families Food Drive

by: Matthew Griffin, soil conservationist (SCEP)

Over the course of the past three months, USDA employees nationwide have been participating in the annual food drive called Feds, Farmers and Friends Feed Families (F5). Originally part of the Obama Administration's *United We Serve* campaign, it was designed to offer assistance to food banks, shelters and pantries as a way to help them as they served their purpose in different communities. As we all know, our nation has been faced with challenging times these past few years. Likewise, in these tough economic times, although our nation is trying to recover, food banks and other organizations across the nation have steadily seen declines in the amounts of non-perishable goods they are receiving. These goods are essential to them in their outreach to those in need. That's why, with the help of USDA employees, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council, and other federal agencies were once again hard at work collecting food for these entities, local families and persons in need.



This year OPM decided its goal would be to raise 2 million pounds of food goods. Efforts kicked-off June 1st and ended August 31st. To help meet this goal Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack asked that the USDA offices collectively donate 500,000 pounds of food.

At the USDA Baldwin Service Center in Baldwin, FL, efforts were made by all NRCS and FSA employees to promote and reach out to the local community for assistance. Momentum was gained after Mayor Stan Totman and other local city officials joined in and urged other citizens to do likewise. During the months of June, July and August, 207 pounds of non-perishable items were collected and donated to the Samaritan Baker County Ministers Assoc., in Glen St. Mary, FL.

F5 Food Drive Statewide Winner

Offices throughout the state participated in the Feds, Farmers and Friends Feed Families Food Drive.

Based on reports sent in to the State Office, Area 4 was the Florida NRCS big winner donating 4,070 lbs to area food banks. Their largest donations came from the Florida City SC - way to go Christine Coffin.

Thanks for all the work you put into this effort. Food banks across the state are facing severe shortages. Together, we helped feed those in need and helped USDA exceed it's goal.



Area 4 Royal Palm Beach SC employees Chris Halfpap, Rosa Reyes and David DeMaio show off their collections.

Plant Materials Center News

Rent an Expert – Price \$0, Experience Priceless

by Mimi Williams, plant materials specialist

Jason Hayford, district conservationist in DeFuniak Springs in Area 1, found a new use for the Plant Materials Program...Rent an Expert!



In September NRCS, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, University of Florida IFAS Extension, and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) hosted a Wildlife Management Field Day at the Hester Farm in Gaskin, Florida. Janet Grabowski, manager at the Brooksville Plant Materials Center (photo: blue shirt), and Mimi Williams, plant materials specialist, were the NRCS experts “on call” for the native plant ID portion of the tour. About 60 people attended the Wildlife Management Field Day, where, in addition to the ever popular plant ID walk, Fish and Wildlife Commission staff talked about timber and pond management and prescribed burning. Randy English, resource conservationist, talked about NRCS programs for landowners, and the NWTF representative talked turkey.

The plant ID site consisted of an upland, natural longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) stand with a diverse native understory. Some of the plants present in the understory were St. John’s wort (*Hypericum* spp.), comfortroot (*Hibiscus aculeatus*), bluecurls (*Trichostema* sp.), native lespedeza (*Lespedeza* sp.), stiff or rayless sunflower (*Helianthus radula*), Florida paspalum (*Paspalum floridanum*), toothachegrass (*Ctenium aromaticum*), and switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*). The upland side transitioned into an isolated seepslope with two species of pitcherplant (*Sarracenia* spp.), a blazing star (*Liatrix* sp.), hog-fennel (*Oxypolis filiformis*), and switchcane (*Arundinaria gigantea* ssp. *tecta*). If you want to see what these plants look like go to <http://plants.usda.gov/java/> or <http://florida.plantatlas.org/>.

Florida Plants (and plant materials specialist) Make NRCS National Booth

By Mimi Williams, plant materials specialist

John Englert, National Plant Materials Program leader, put an all points bulletin out for pollinator, wetland, longleaf pine, and sage grouse habitat plants back in May to use in the NRCS national booth at the first Land and Wildlife Expo held August 12-14 at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, TN. This was a big deal because NRCS was an official conservation partner for the expo and Chief White was scheduled to be a keynote speaker. NRCS programs, technical assistance, and initiatives were featured at three locations in the Expo. Florida NRCS came through in a big way, supplying plants from the Brooksville PMC and a plant materials specialist to help with the displays.



The permanent outside conservation demonstration site was organized by the Tennessee State Office, while the other two locations consisted of an NRCS pollinator garden in the Opryland Hotel atrium and a NRCS booth that covered over 1,000 square feet of floor space. These sites were the responsibility of the National Public Affairs staff and the NRCS Turkey Federation Liaison with assistance from Plant Materials Program staff, wildlife biologists, Earth Team Volunteers, Tennessee State Office staff, and others from the southeast.

continued on next page

Expo continued

Agency activities with pollinator habitat were highlighted with a “pollinator garden” planting, including bee boxes, in the hotel atrium at the entrance to the convention center. Pollinator plants came from all over the United States. Material from Florida included Joepyee weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*), wrinkleleaf goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*), and white wild indigo (*Baptisia alba*).

The NRCS booth’s theme was “Conservation Beyond Boundaries” and featured three simulated ecosystems, longleaf pine, sage grouse, and migratory bird habitat, which are the focus of current regional initiatives for NRCS.

Many Florida plants contributed to the longleaf display. Those included the “star of the show” (right) an 8 foot tall longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), dense blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), Black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Joepyee weed, wrinkleleaf goldenrod, and white false indigo.



How to put together a sage grouse habitat!

Earth Team Volunteer Patty Henry and east regional plant materials specialist Ramona Garner created a sage grouse lek by arranging plants in a duct tape and plastic Nevada landscape and ‘painting’ with dirt.



Farm Bureau Legislative/Elected Officials Tour Agriculture in North Florida

by Darryl L. Williams, district conservationist

On September 13th, Keith Free, Okaloosa County Farm Bureau President, welcomed everyone to the 3rd Annual Farm Bureau Legislative/Elected Officials Agriculture Tour. The purpose of the tour was to help elected public officials and their staff members become more knowledgeable about agriculture in our area, and to become more aware of the economic impact agriculture has on the community. The tour focused on agriculture operations, the importance of water, and issues dealing with nutrient numeric criteria.

The 47 participants, which included Mary Beth Barrows, special assistant to US Senator Marco Rubio and Cheryl Fulford Flood, external affairs director for Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam H. Putnam, toured several agricultural venues. Stop #1 was at Shannon Nixon’s Okaloosa County farm that has problems with crop damage from deer. Nixon said several common methods to control deer do not work for any length of time. Stop #2 centered on nutrient water quality at the Yellow River on the Florida/Alabama state line. The North West Florida Water Management representative talked about the Total Daily Maximum Loads (TMDLs) that are set by EPA for safe water quality levels for each nutrient. The Yellow River is not exceeding any critical levels at this time and overall water quality is good. Stop #3 was at a longleaf pine and silvopasture operation at Turner’s Magnolia Valley Farms. Leo (Bud) and Karen Turner, north Okaloosa county ranchers and wildlife land managers, highlighted the EQIP, WHIP and CSP contracts that have helped them develop their showcase farm. Turner said they would not be where they are today without the help of NRCS and other partners. The last stop for the day was in Walton County at Pridgen Farms, where the topic of discussion was tree farming with a private consulting firm managing the property. The CRP land is managed by burning and controlling noxious weeds with herbicide treatments. CRP and EQIP have helped them stay in business.

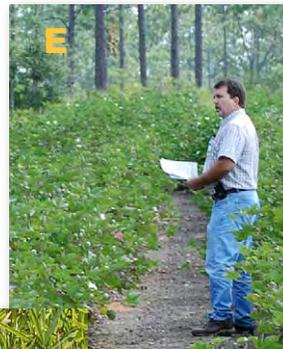
Plant ID Quiz "...you might be a redneck!"

by the PMC staff

Pretty much everyone has heard comedian Jeff Foxworthy's stories about what might make you a redneck. For example, "If you own a home with wheels on it and several cars without, you just might be a redneck," or "If you have a complete set of salad bowls and they all say Cool Whip on the side, you might be a redneck." The humor in these jokes is that we all can visualize these characteristics and readily associate them with rednecked-ness.

Plant families are also recognized by a grouping of characteristics (flower shape, leaf shape and arrangement, seed shape, etc.) which in the field can let you make a pretty good guess as to the plant family. With plant ID, deciding on the family in which the plant is a member is more than half the battle to finding a name. The staff at the Brooksville Plant Materials Center has scheduled a Plant ID and Pollinator Training in Area I this November. At this training we will provide more information on how to recognize important plant families and decide on the name for a specific plant, but take the quiz below and see if you can match the picture with the correct family. (Hint: Their names are all mentioned in the Rent An Expert! article on page 12)

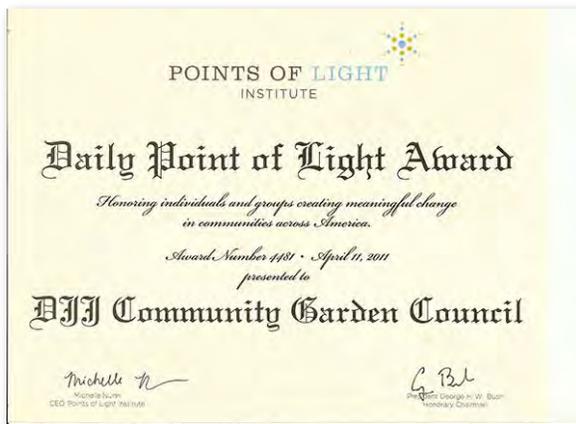
1. If your stamens are fused in a central column and your flowers look like cotton or okra, you might be a member of the Mallow family. _____
2. If your leaves have parallel veins and your stems have nodes (joints where leaves arise), you might be a member of the Grass family. _____
3. If your leaves often have three leaflets and you have pea-shaped flowers, you might be a member of the Legume family. _____
4. If you speak in farm bill acronyms and are always muttering things like "batching period" and "sign up", you might be a redneck... err in the NRCS Family. _____
5. If you have 2-4 needle-like leaves arranged on aerial branches and you have trunks, you might be in the Pine family. _____
6. If you have small flowers (and seed) arranged in a broad, flat cluster at the end of a stem similar to water hemlock or Queen Anne's lace you might be in the Carrot family. _____



Answers on Page 18

People's Garden Project receives Daily Point of Light Award

By George Johnson, district conservationist and Cheryl Massaro, Flagler Community Garden Advisory Council member



In April, the 41st President of the United States, George H. W. Bush, Honorary Chair of the Points of Light Institute, and CEO Michelle Nunn sent notification that Flagler's Community Garden Advisory Council was presented a 2011 Daily Point of Light Award: Honoring individuals and groups creating meaningful change in communities across America. The Advisory Councils volunteer efforts honor the legacy of this award and demonstrate the power of service to create tangible change.

Members of the Department of Juvenile Justice Community Garden Advisory Council and countless volunteers, including George Johnson, NRCS district conservationist, share a common goal to inspire Americans in service and to direct public attention to the

value of volunteer efforts in solving serious social problems, like hunger. Since the establishment two years ago of the DJJ Community Garden, a USDA People's Garden project, the overall purpose of all volunteers is to help feed Flagler's hungry. Fresh garden vegetables and fruit are harvested seasonally, and donated to local food pantries for distribution. Every year the need for local social assistance has increased, and so has the production of the garden.



Flagler County's People's Garden is a huge success, gaining national recognition. Due to this success, many new community gardens have been sprouting up throughout the county with the same purpose in mind, helping to feed Flagler's hungry. Special thanks to the Flagler County DJJ Council for adopting the program, and to Flagler County Council and Flagler County School Board for supporting the development of the garden. It truly does take a village to evoke positive change, as well as the commitment and vision of the gardens Advisory Council, keeping the garden headed on the right track.

FGLC Meeting at the 2011 Annual Cattleman's Meeting

By Brandee Williams, rangeland management specialist

Several ranchers, along with federal, state, and local agencies, met on June 21st to discuss the direction of the Florida Grazing Lands Coalition (FGLC). NRCS state conservationist Carlos Suarez (right) opened the meeting by sharing his passion of rangeland, including grazing plans, Forage Suitability Groups (FSG), and Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD).



Discussions included how several universities and groups are working together to provide technically sound and precise FSGs and ESDs. A date is being set for Florida to host an ESD Workshop in early November. Carlos also talked about the budget for the next fiscal year and how this will affect the partnership that NRCS has with GLCI. GLCI will need to help provide Technical Service Providers (TSPs) for all of the work coming down the line.

Bob Montanaro gave a video presentation called "Critters, Cows, and Cowboys: A Photographic Exploration into the Wildlife and Work of a Florida Cattle Ranch", which featured domestic livestock and wildlife successfully coexisting. Sean Sexton, owner of Treasure Hammock Ranch, allowed Bob to spend a year taking pictures and follow a working cattle ranch. Other presentations included Erin Myers, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Naples, talking about the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow and the biology of the species; and Yoanna Newman speaking about Smutgrass control without herbicides. Newman's results indicate that burning with mob grazing significantly reduces smutgrass growth. Hillary Swain briefly touched on FRESP (Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project) and how she is trying to determine how much carbon sequestration is taking place on the ranches that are saving water on their land.



Photo Contest



2nd place - **Wayne Wiggs**, Soil Con., Bartow - "Caracara hunting early morning at Turkey Creek WRP, Seminole Co."



First Place - **Brandon Russakis**, Summer Intern, Fort Pierce - "This is a photo I snapped while on the boat in Indian River County."



3rd place - **Trenton Rader**, Soil Con, Ft. Pierce - "Saw this Prickly Pear cactus flowering while in Bluefield Natural Area inspecting some firebreaks."

Indian River County Student Wins 1st Place

by Brenda Davis, Indian River Soil & Water Conservation District



Lauren Kenney received a first place certificate and a \$500 cash award in the annual Association of Florida Conservation District's (AFCD) State Level Public Speaking Contest! The state contest was held on August 13th during the AFCD annual conference in Ocala.

The topic for this year's contest was "What is the economic impact of Florida forests?" Lauren's speech discussed the many ways that forestry contributes to the economy of Florida and included important topics such as conservation, hunting, and tourism. Lauren, thirteen years old and entering the eighth grade at St. Helen Catholic School, competed against students from around the state who were eighteen years old, or younger. Congratulations to Lauren.

Employee News

Andytra (Dytra) Lewis Joins SO Staff



Dytra Lewis joins the state office as the state conservationist's secretary. Dytra comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, where she worked as a Secretary in the divisions of Emergency and Environmental Health, Bacterial Disease, and HIV/AIDS Prevention. Her previous positions were at the VA Medical Center in Gainesville, Florida, and Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Dytra is a native of Gainesville, Florida, and is ecstatic to be working for NRCS. This allows her to further her government career by improving skills she gained at CDC, learn new skills at NRCS, and be closer to her parents. Dytra loves playing volleyball, spending time with her family, and parenting her teenage daughter. Welcome her when you get the chance.

Odessa Armstong Conservation Program Specialist



Odessa Armstrong is originally from a small town in Orangeburg County South Carolina named Eutawville. It was there that she gained her first insight into conservation, growing up on her family farm.

Odessa is a Magna cum Laude graduate of South Carolina State University, where she studied Agribusiness and holds a Masters of Science degree in Agricultural Education from Clemson University. She began her career with NRCS as a career intern soil con tech in St. Matthews, South Carolina and worked in ten counties within five field offices throughout the state. She gained valuable experience by completing a detail as State Planning Specialist in Maryland. Before coming to Florida she was the District Conservationist in Orangeburg County, SC.

Odessa is married to Jason B. Armstrong. She is a member of Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church and in her spare time she enjoys traveling, watching good movies, meeting people and, of course, Clemson sports.

Personnel Actions

May - August

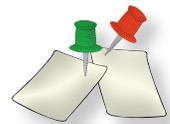
New/Promotions/Changes

- Zimmerly, Greg, Exc Appt, Soil Con Tech, LaBelle SC
- Francis, Crenel - Promotion & Reassignment, Easement Prog. Coord, SO
- Starling, Cliff - Promotion-Career Soil Con, Bonifay SC
- Beck, Bob - Promotion, DC, Naples SC
- Perez-Castro, Sherlynette - Promotion-Career Soil Scientist, Tavares MLRA
- Sperry, Benjamin - Ext of Appt, Biological Sci Aid, PMC
- Armstrong, Odessa - Promotion from NRCS SC, Conserv Prog Speclst, Programs, SO
- Stephens, Jillian - Conv to Exc Appt, Soil Conserv Tech, Marianna SC - Name Change: Etruss
- Gutierrez, Roney - Reassignment from NRCS CA, ASTC - EASM, SO

Leaving/Retired

- Aristizabal, Fernando - Resignation, ENG Aid, SO
- Seeds, Cindy - Retirement, Prog Specialist, SO
- Sullivan, Kevin - Soil Scientist, Reassignment to NRCS WA
- Mathews, Ron - Retirement, Soil Con, Live Oak
- Sheahan, Chris - PMC, Reassignment to NJ

Upcoming Events



Mark your calendars

- ✓ Sept. 15 – Oct. 15 Hispanic Heritage Month
- ✓ Oct. – Disability Awareness Month
- ✓ Nov. – Native American Heritage Month
- ✓ Jan. 16 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- ✓ Feb. 2 – World Wetlands Day

Area 2 GeoXT Training at Ocala Ranch

By Donna Hopwood, district conservationist

The Area 2 “We Can Do It” South Team held a training session on the new Trimble GeoXT GPS units on August 23rd at the Kelby Watt farm in north Marion County. The training was headed by George Johnson, dc from Deland with assistance from Wiley Feagle, soil con tech from Gainesville. Everyone arrived at the Ocala Service Center ready for a day in the sun with clipboards and charged GPS units. George began the session by showing us all how to download the aerial for the planned land unit and then explained the different data types. He then walked everyone through setting up data collection templates and we were ready to go!

We arrived on site to a typical summer day--full sun and humidity--but eager to put our new units to work. Paula Allen was prepared with plenty of water for everyone. The team turned the units on and waited for satellite reception and noted the reliability of the GPS signal, known as PDOP. We then headed over to the installed fence and began taking points (below left) with George sharing his methodology to be sure all the pertinent information was collected to complete the checkout and certify the final product.

Lunch was a treat at Tommy’s BBQ and then it was back to the office to download our points (right below). We all found the exercise to be a great experience and a fun way to learn new technology. We encountered a few “bugs”, but with George and Wiley’s expertise we were able to work through them. Our team will definitely plan other training events and face-to-face meetings for information and technology sharing throughout the year.

For more information and tips on how to develop your team, contact Kesha Martin, Bronson dc or Donna Hopwood, Gainesville dc. To view additional pictures, visit the Florida SharePoint site and select NRCS Photos/Area 2 GeoXT Training 8-23-11 folder.



L - R: Bill Harb (ACES), Doug Ulmer, Kesha Martin

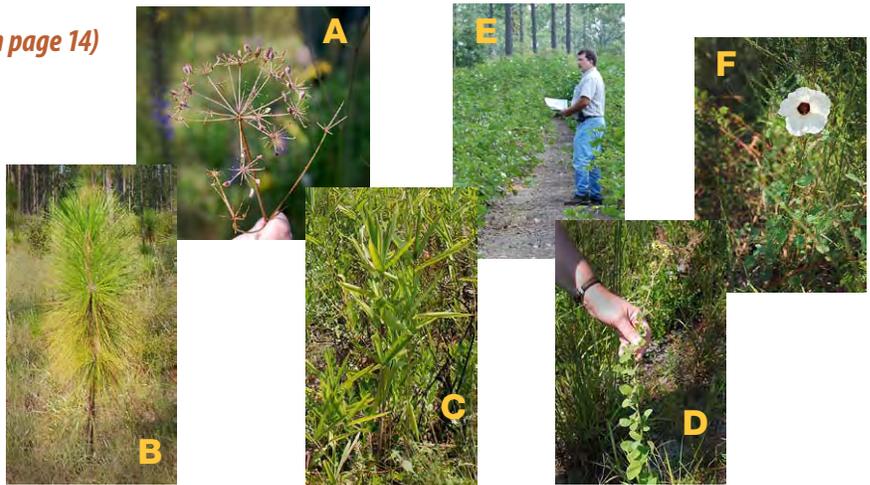


L - R: Tom Cheyne, Bill Harb, Jill Dobbs, Paula Allen, Kesha Martin

Plant ID Quiz Answers: (from page 14)

Answers:

1. F Mallow Family
2. C Grass Family
3. D Legume Family
4. E NRCS Family
5. B Pine Family
6. A Carrot Family



Plain Writing: Now Required on All Public Information

On October 13, 2010, President Obama signed into law the Plain Writing Act of 2010, which is designed to promote “clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.”

Plain writing is concise, simple, meaningful, and well-organized. It avoids jargon, redundancy, ambiguity, and obscurity. It does not contain unnecessary complexity. Avoiding ambiguity and unnecessary complexity can increase compliance simply because people understand better what they are supposed to do. Plain writing is no mere formal requirement; it can be essential to the successful achievement of legislative or administrative goals, and it promotes the rule of the law.

Plain writing can:

- Reduce questions from the public to agency staff;
- Improve compliance with regulations;
- Reduce resources spent on enforcement;
- Reduce errors on forms and applications; and
- Reduce time spent addressing errors.

Beginning October 13, 2011, all NRCS employees are expected to use plain language in all new or substantially revised documents that:

- Provide information about any of our services or benefits;
- Is necessary to obtain any of our benefits or services; or
- Explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

A new AgLearn training module is under development at USDA and will hopefully be ready in October. You will be advised when it is available. But, you shouldn't wait for this new training. Here is a suggested course available now on AgLearn to renew your awareness of the Plain Language requirement: *Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely*.

For more information go to: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/TOC.cfm>

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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