July 2007

From The State Conservationist - *Gary Kobylski*

Recently, I stood by the window and looked out at the rain peppering down on my lawn. Yes, it was actually raining and I was thankful. There has been extreme drought across Alabama and severe water shortages across the country. The USGS scientists report the parched interior West is possibly the driest it has been in 500 years. Many of our rivers have the lowest flow of water on record. Lately I've seen fire trucks along the interstate highways putting out fires. People everywhere are talking about the 1930's drought in the Great Plains that turned our land into a dust bowl. Some scientists suggest this was brought on by changes in sea surface temperature. Maybe weather patterns have reduced the supply of moisture from the Gulf of Mexico. Much study and research will be required to try to figure out our future needs of water supply in drought situations. Irrigation supply will become increasingly important.

Farmers have suffered trying to set planting dates and replanting times. We all are affected when our crops don't produce. Even if we manage to get the corn, soybeans, or other crops up, with extended periods of dryness they may not pollinate, producing very little. Alabama pastures are brittle and dry. Farmers are hoping the pastures root systems will survive until the much needed rain arrives. This will affect our future feed supplies. Water requirements for farm animals will need to be increased. We need to plan and develop water resources during times of plenty so we are prepared during times of shortage. When there is shortage of water, many things are affected, including prices we pay at the grocery store.

We with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have always realized the importance of our natural resources, not just during drought conditions, but all the time. Conservation is our job. In times like these we once again become so aware of how dependent we are on the Good Lord and His sending the rain to water our fields. Have a wonderful summer and we all will celebrate the rain.

Gary

Retiree Passes Away

Dan Evans, retired Mailroom Clerk, passed away on June 23 from complications following heart surgery. Dan retired from NRCS in January 2007. Dan was a humorous, entertaining, and supportive person who was a bright spot in the state office. Condolences can be sent to his wife at:

Terri Evans
270 Lee Road 166
Opelika, Alabama 36804

From The Field

Rabbit Bar-B-Que Fund Raiser

The Alabama Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) councils provide grant funds to help secure markets for rabbit meat. On June 1, 2007, the rabbit was marketed in a different way--to raise funds for the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. More than $1,000 was raised.

Over 20 volunteers cooked, prepared, and served bar-b-qued rabbit and fixings to a crowd of special guests that included local citizens and elected officials in Leighton, Alabama. The Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association provided the rabbit meat.

Tri-State Rabbit Growers Association member J.C. Holt said, "Tri-State is glad to be involved with such a worthwhile endeavor."

St. Jude is unlike any other pediatric treatment and research facility. Discoveries made at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital have completely changed how the world treats children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases. Patients at St. Jude never pay for treatment beyond what is covered by insurance, and those without insurance are never asked to pay. Holt said, "We appreciate the strong community support to help provide a beacon of hope for the catastrophically ill children of the world."

Mr. Holt also thanked Alabama RC&D for their support.

The Rabbit Bar-B-Q fundraiser welcomed special guest Austin Pullen along with his parents and brother. Austin is four years old and has been a special patient of St. Jude Children's Hospital for the last two years. L-r: Jimmy King of St. Jude Trail Ride; Austin and Aaron Pullen ; and Charlie Meek of Northwest AL RC&D.

Luke Troutman and Arleigh Scott enjoy homemade ice cream on the Agriplex Touring Farm for Kids stop at Festhalle Market Platz while the other children spend their vouchers with the local farmers. Luke is the son of Billy and Jamie Troutman. Arleigh is the daughter of Tim and Jessica Scott. Billy Troutman is the Agriscience teacher at Hanceville High School. Tim Scott is with the Cullman County SWCD.

Youths Get Taste of Farming

By Johnny Grantham, Cullman County SWCD

The new Cullman Farmers Market, Festhalle Market Platz, was filled with youngsters as they made their last stop on the Touring Farms for Kids two-day bus tour.

They were each given vouchers to spend at the market as they wished. Tops on the list of items they bought were home made ice cream, cut flowers, and peanut brittle. They also bought produce to take home including tomatoes, squash, beans, and cantaloupes.

This was the seventh annual North Alabama Agriplex Touring Farms for Kids. It is a two-day event to introduce Cullman County children, ages seven to sixteen, to agriculture and how it affects their lives.

This year the 36 youngsters started the tour at Cullman Stock Yard then they were bused to Maple Ridge Gun Club, Peinhardt Living History Farm, and Cook's Museum in Decatur. The second day started with a visit to Garrison's Bee Farm. Later the group traveled to the North Alabama Agricultural Experiment station where they learned what goes on

there. While there, they also learned about raising Boer Goats, horse care and safety, wildlife, and archery.

The North Alabama Agriplex was established by the Alabama Legislature in 1999.The mission of the Agriplex is to

- educate children and adults through heritage based, hands-on opportunities
- demonstrate the history and importance of agriculture in our society
- offer the opportunity to reconnect with our food, fiber, wildlife, and forestry heritage
- integrate the importance of natural resource conservation.

The Agriplex Tour is made possible each year by hard work and dedication of the Cullman County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Cullman City and County Development Boards, and the Agriplex Board Committee.

Lauderdale County Hires New TSP

Since February 7, a new Technical Service Provider (TSP) has been working in the Florence Field Office assisting with field work. Jessica Cleveland is not a new face in the field office. She was an Earth Team Volunteer for several months in 2005 while earning her Bachelor of Science degree in Geography at the University of North Alabama. She assisted with field check outs, surveying, CRP tree counts, ArcView, and other computer related activities.

Jessica is a native of the Lexington area in Lauderdale County and has worked on the family farm all of her life. Her husband is a self-employed logger in the area, so when Jessica is not working on the farm, she is assisting in her husband's logging business.

Jessica Cleveland was familiar with NRCS programs. It was an easy transistion becoming a TSP.

L-R: Terry Williamson with Mike and Annie Dee in a field of sunflowers—a new crop grown on Dee River Ranch to produce on-farm bio-fuel.

Dee River Ranch Regional Winner of the 2007 Environmental Stewardship Award

Dee River Ranch is one of six regional winners competing for the National 2007 Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP). Sponsored by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), Dow AgroSciences, and NRCS, the annual ESAP awards honor cattle producers whose stewardship practices are inventive, cost-effective, and contribute to environmental conservation. The Dee River Ranch was nominated by the Alabama Cattlemen's Association.

Dee River Ranch is a family owned and operated multi-commodity farming operation. Daily operations are controlled by Mike Dee and his sister Annie. The Ranch is located in Pickens County, on the Alabama-Mississippi line, and includes 3,500 acres of corn, wheat, and soybeans; 2,500 acres of forages and cattle; and 4,000 acres in CRP. The cattle operation is made up of 650 cows producing feeder calves and Angus X Brahman commercial females.

Pickens County NRCS DC Terry Williamson says, "Annie and Mike Dee are good stewards of the land. They have learned the value of partnerships in the conservation effort. They sought the help of NRCS to help them use the land that has been entrusted to them in the most efficient ways. They have combined their love of the land with a sound business plan to produce an operation that is both profitable and sustainable."

The prestigious ESAP is now in its 17th year. The national winner will be presented at the national meeting in January 2008.

NRCS is proud of the conservation ethic demonstrated by Mike and Annie Dee and we wish them all the best in the national competition.

Program News - Outreach in Action

Regional Successes of the USDA-NRCS Small Farm Initiative Program Highlighted

By Alice Love, Soil Conservationist, NRCS, Auburn, AL

Alabama NRCS Outreach/Program Staff worked with USDA Small Farmer Liaison Winford Pace to create an exhibit to highlight the successes of the USDA-NRCS Small Farm Initiative. The exhibit was displayed at the Black Environmental Thought: Land, Power, and Sustainability Conference at Tuskegee University in May 2007. The exhibit demonstrated and promoted the benefits of the program inititive to the Limited Resource-Small Scale Farmer farming operations.

This program was released in 2005 to NRCS in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and the Caribbean.

The exhibit is available for NRCS/SWCD use. Contact Fay Garner, Public Affairs at 334-887-4506.

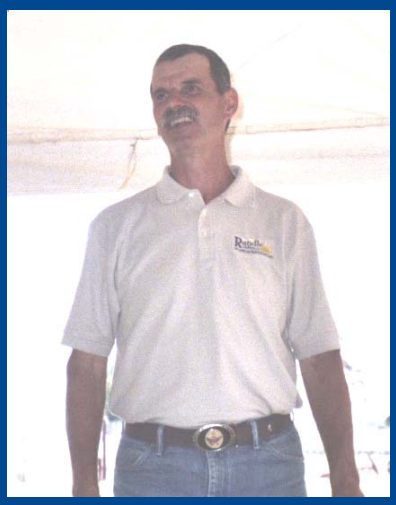
This exhibit is available for use by Alabama NRCS/ SWCD field office personnel. (L-R) AL-NRCS Outreach Liaison Andrew Williams, GA- NRCS Soil Conservationist Angie Billups, AL-NRCS Soil Conservationist Alice Love, and SC-NRCS Small Farmer Liaison Wilfred Pace.

Randle Farms Field Day

By Alice Love, Soil Conservationist, NRCS, Auburn, AL

Members of Alabama NRCS Program Staff attended the Randle Farm Field Day held in Opelika, Alabama, in June 2007. This was an excellent opportunity to gain and share new technologies being adopted in today's farming community.

Some of the topics discussed were drip irrigation, fencing, raising vegetables and fruits, and using organic and sustainable methods.



Mr. Randle at the farm tour.

L-R: Steve Musser, ASTC-Programs talking to Dr. Joe Kemble, Auburn University and producer about drip irrigation systems.

Artichokes are just one of the many crops grown at the farm.

Historical Heritage

by Julie A. Best, Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS, Auburn, Alabama

We just celebrated July 4th, the birthday of our nation. The President in his address to the country said:

> "The United States is truly a diverse nation made up of dynamic people. Each year on July 4, Americans celebrate that freedom and independence with barbecues, picnics, and family gatherings. Through the Internet we are learning about and communicating with people of different nations, with different languages and different races throughout the world. Bringing the world closer with understanding and knowledge can only benefit all nations."

We need to remember the past in order to appreciate the present. Perry Oakes recently shared with me an address that NRCS Historian Douglas Helms gave at the 5th International Water History Association Conference. That address dealt with the history of NRCS. I'll share segments of the address with you.

> The U. S. Congress created the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in 1935 in legislation that declared "the wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forest lands of the Nation, resulting from soil erosion, is a menace to the national welfare and that it is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress to provide permanently for the control and prevention of soil erosion and thereby to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of reservoirs, and maintain the navigability of rivers and harbors." When the law was enacted, little hydraulic or hydrologic research had been done on the relationship of soil erosion to flood control, the impairment of streams and harbors, and the sedimentation of reservoirs. SCS undertook hydrologic and hydraulic research in order to design and implement effective conservation practices. The research developed basic principles that both aided the soil and water conservation program and made pioneering contributions to science and technology related to land and water.
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> Several interpretive points arise from the SCS's experience in hydrologic and hydraulic research. When the agency was created, little was known about hydrology and hydraulics on a scale that would benefit the design of on-farm soil and water conservation measures. The trial-and-error process at demonstration projects illustrated the lack of basic design data at the time. SCS started a research program simultaneously with the opening of demonstration projects, and a strong link was forged between field needs and research. The research eventually provided the information for better designs. The applied research also made basic contributions to science and technology. Government sponsorship of the research made continuity possible. There are records for more than seventy years in some data sets. Institutional support, rather than periodic grants, was necessary to sustain such a program. Finally, the credibility of the national program of soil conservation rested on being able to offer practical, cost-effective solutions. That the research effort was able to supply some of these solutions validated the wisdom of the public investments and public policy on soil conservation.

A look at historical photos validates the work of SCS/NRCS through the years. It seems to me that our heritage as an agency is one more reason that we should take pride in the work that we do.

Fire Hazard Reduced Through Implementation of EWP

By Shannon Weaver, Assistant State Conservationist for Natural Resources, NRCS, Auburn, AL

Wildfires in Georgia and Florida this past April, May, and June brought home the need for wildfire prevention. As news of these wildfires in drought-stricken areas make national headlines, we are reminded of the dangers and damage uncontrolled fires can cause. Not making headlines, however, is the other side of the story—that controlled fire, applied in the right way and at the right time, can improve the beauty and value of forests and timberlands, and can even help prevent or control wildfires.

NRCS is taking a pro-active approach to control wildfire fires in Alabama. The land across much of the State was impacted from the 2005 hurricanes, including Dennis, Katrina, and Rita, which caused thousands of tons of timber debris to lie on the ground, creating a tremendous wildfire hazard. Through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) Downed Timber/Debris Removal Initiative, NRCS encourages producers to remove the hazardous waste, and thus lower the potential for damaging wildfires. Prescribed burning is one of the best management tools available to help control understory growth, reduce fuel loads, and enhance natural vegetation.

Treated land not only reduces the fuel load but also improves the aesthetics.

Many producers have taken advantage of this cost-share assistance. This past year, 670 landowners across the southern and western parts of the state treated 142,000 acres by removing debris and prescribed burning. Since adverse conditions during the past burn season limited some producers from burning their land, 160,000 acres are planned to be burned with cost-share assistance from the EWP special initiative during the up-coming burn season.

Installation of fire breaks is a cost-share practice under the special EWP Downed Timber/Debris Removal Initiative.

Computers Donated to Washington County Schools

By Fay Garner, Public Affairs Assistant, NRCS, Auburn, AL

It was a very hot day when Jock Allday and Bob Younge from the Washington County Department of Education arrived in a school bus at the NRCS State Office in Auburn to pick up computers being donated to the county school system. Allday and Younge were glad they brought the school bus. Instead of the 38 computers as expected, they were given 54 computers that included laptops, desktops, monitors, and various accessories. What a haul!

Mr. Younge said that the drive to Auburn was long, but it was worth it. He said, "We brought the bus because we knew there would be a lot of cargo, but we really did not expect a bus full." He said the students in Washington County Schools needed the computers and that the Washington County Board of Education was grateful for the additional resources.

Alabama NRCS State Conservationist Gary Kobylski says, "Computers are an important part of helping students achieve success and in helping them train for the jobs of tomorrow. We are proud to be a part of their success by donating our surplus computers to the Washington County Schools. Being able to help our young people is very special."

Gary Kobylski (c) presents computers to (l) Jock Allday and Bob Younge.

NRCS strives to have the latest equipment available for employees to assist landowners with conservation planning, engineering designs, soils interpretations, and other conservation needs. Because computers are replaced across the state at the same time, many computers are retired in excellent working condition. The computers are "sanitized" to remove all NRCS information and software, and then can be donated to schools.

Personnel

Promotions

Zona Beaty, Resource Conservationist, Auburn, AL to State Resource Conservationist, Athens, GA

Amy Bernauer, Agricultural Engineer, Tuscaloosa, AL

Cortez Brundage, Contract Specialist, Auburn, AL

Michael Gunn, Soil Conservationist, Rainsville, AL to District Conservationist, Linden, AL

Kent St John, Soil Conservation Technician, Gadsden, AL

Drew Wright, District Conservationist, Jackson, AL

Reassignment

Alex Vaughan, Soil Conservationist, Dothan, AL to Soil Conservationist, Bonifay, FL

Angela Warden, Soil Scientist, Grove Hill, AL to Jackson, AL

Resignation

Paul Kennedy, RC&D Coord, Birmingham, AL

Transfer

Jean Sparks, Administrative Coord, Auburn, AL to Veterans Affairs, Decatur, GA

Retirement

Lawayne Robinson, District Conservationist, Hamilton, AL

Summer Interns

Christopher Joe, Tuscaloosa, AL, Alabama A&M University

Omayra Ortiz-Santiago, Guntersville, AL, University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

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