

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



January 30, 2003

From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

Happy New Year! The beginning of the year is a good time to look back at the past record to see where we stand. Working with our partners, we accomplished a great deal in 2002. The overall impact of our efforts for FY 2002 resulted in contacts with 228,669 landowners that applied practices on 296,920 acres of land. This is a measurable accomplishment. There are countless ways that NRCS, through its employees, influenced the conservation efforts of Alabama landowners. We can be proud of the work that we accomplished during the past year.

The beginning of a new year, both personally and professionally, brings opportunities as well as challenges. In order to optimize our efforts, it's always a good idea to have a plan in mind. Our game plan for 2003 should look something like this:

- We need to make sure that every farmer in Alabama knows about the Farm Bill and has a chance to participate in the programs. The strategy—Outreach.
- We need to focus more on overall conservation goals and less on program implementation. The measure of our success will be outcomes—how

well we help farmers and communities reach their conservation goals. The strategy—Keep decisions at the local level.

- We need to get the most conservation done that we can for the money. The strategy—Use incentives properly, and look for other sources of funding to leverage the federal funding.

As we assist landusers with their natural resource problems, let's emphasize the importance and value of developing a comprehensive conservation plan for the property. The 2002 Farm Bill will provide new programs and resources to address the natural resource problems on the "working" lands of Alabama. Our goal, as always, is to develop sound conservation plans that will effectively use the program resources to solve conservation problems, not just carry out programs.

We're just finishing the first quarter of the 2003 game. By working together, we have the opportunity to make 2003 a very good year.

Bob

Burton Outstanding RC&D Coordinator

by Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist, Auburn, AL

It's been a great year for Norman Burton. Not only was he recognized as the Alabama State RC&D Coordinator of the Year, he was also recognized as the Outstanding RC&D Coordinator for the Southeast RC&D Association for 2002. Norman received the regional award at the RC&D meeting in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in October. "It was an honor just to be nominated for the state. But to be selected by the state and then by the southeastern association is

really over-whelming," said Burton. According to Mason Dollar, "Norman excels in keeping his council focused on the Annual Plan of Work. He is a model coordinator, a trainer/mentor for new coordinators, and he is the standard by which many coordinators in the southeast are measured. He is very deserving of this recognition."



Delivery of Redstone Arsenal Soil Survey

by Doug Clendenon, Project Leader, MLRA Soil Survey Office, Normal, AL

In December, Rick Zellmer, Eddie Davis, and I met with personnel from Redstone Arsenal and presented the hard copy, CD, Arcview files, and Soil Data Viewer for the Soil Survey of U.S. Army Redstone Arsenal, Madison County, Alabama. It has been 22 months from the first day of mapping on this project until now. I've never been a part of a soil survey project that serviced a customer in such a timely manner and with such a great product. I am greatly pleased that in 2002 we are producing soil surveys superior to the reports of the past, and it is exciting to see the infrastructure in place to quickly get products into our customers' hands.

We spent a couple hours with Redstone Arsenal's Natural Resource Division Chief Danny Dunn and his staff in demonstrating Soil Data Viewer and discussing some of the interesting facts about their soil data. By their comments, it was evident that our products exceeded their expectations.



Left to right: Susan Weber, Ecologist, Redstone Arsenal; Daniel J. Dunn Natural Resources Division Chief, Redstone Arsenal; Doug Clendenon, NRCS Soil Survey Project Leader; and Gabrielle Ehinger, GIS Intern, Oak Ridge Institute of Science and Engineering

Farmland Protection Program

by Bill Hughes, Resource Conservationist, Auburn, AL

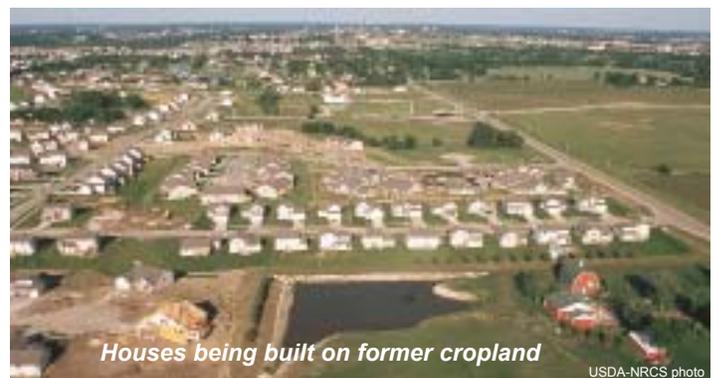
Alabama NRCS is embarking on a new program—the Farmland Protection Program (FPP). This program's emphasis is protecting working farms and prime farmland from being engulfed by urban development and sprawl.

FPP is an easement program that requires the landowner to sign a perpetual easement that restricts the number of houses to be constructed on the property. The landowner also has to follow a conservation plan prepared when the easement is signed. Otherwise, the farmer can continue to follow traditional farming, grazing, wildlife, and silvocultural practices, and can build barns, install irrigation, or other agricultural structural improvements. Additional houses for other family members can be built after the easement is signed, but the location and number must be determined at the time of the easement.

The payment to the landowner is equal to the appraised fair-market value of the land minus the agricultural value. For example, if the fair-market

value is determined to be \$5,000 and the agricultural value is \$1,000, then the payment to the landowner is \$4,000.

Another unique aspect of this program is the landowner works with a unit of government, tribe, or in most cases a Land Trust Company that develops and manages the easement. NRCS provides up to 50 percent of the cost of the easement to the trust.

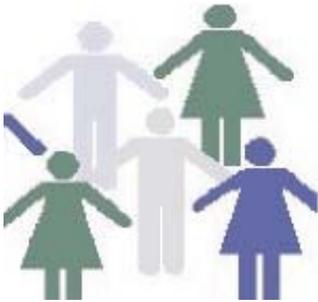


Houses being built on former cropland

USDA-NRCS photo

How Can We Help You?

By Fay Garner, Chair of the Civil Rights Advisory Committee, Auburn, AL



I have been asked many times, “What does the Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) do and how can they help me?” The committee discussed this issue at our last meeting and decided to make a special effort this

year to market our committee.

The Alabama NRCS CRAC is composed of employees in various occupations, grade levels, sex, race, and geographical locations. There are two representatives from each area, two from the state office, the special emphasis program managers, the Human Resource Manager, and an advisor appointed by the Deputy EEO Officer Bob Jones, State Conservationist (STC).

The CRAC works with the STC to promote and assist in meaningful and effective affirmative action in NRCS in Alabama by acting as a forum for exchange of ideas and action proposals on sensitive issues, matters, or concerns of an EEO nature. We also provide feedback on the performance of equal opportunity, workforce diversity, and civil rights program, identify areas of weakness, and make recommendations for improvements. The Alabama CRAC members are:

- Fay Garner**, Chair, State Office representative and Disability Employment Program Manager
- Sarah Walker**, State Office representative
- Richard Collier**, Vice Chair, West Area representative
- Amy Bell**, West Area representative
- Chandra Berry**, North Area representative
- Tim Williams**, North Area representative
- April Jones**, East Area representative
- Tanga Skinner**, East Area representative
- David Elliott**, Native American Employment Program Manager
- Deb Sloat**, Recorder, Federal Women’s Program Manager
- Johnny Trayvick**, Black Emphasis Employment Program Manager

- Carolyn King**, Hispanic Employment Program Manager
- Clark Painter**, Asian American Employment Program Manager
- Paul Swenson**, Human Resources Officer
- Jimmy Chaffin**, ASTC-Administration, Advisor

Your committee representative and the special emphasis program managers are available to help you. Let us know about trends, problems, issues, or concerns needing to be brought to the attention of management. Keep us informed of specific personnel practices or EEO problems that may be causing dissension and dissatisfaction among employees. We do not handle individual or class complaints of discrimination, but we can direct you to the people who can help. The committee also investigates recruitment practices—ensuring that under represented groups are made aware of employment opportunities for career positions, temporary summer employment, or special appointment.

The Mission Statement and Guiding Principles of the committee sums up what we do:

Mission Statement

To facilitate the fair and equitable treatment of USDA customers and employees while ensuring the delivery and enforcement of civil rights programs and activities.

Guiding Principles

“We value our employees and customers and believe in the strength of diversity. We are committed to treating both with dignity and respect. We listen and learn. We take pride in our abilities and are dedicated to contributing to the success of the USDA. We encourage and reward creativity and teamwork. We are open and honest, holding ourselves accountable and possessing the highest level of integrity. We identify the needs and expectations of our employees and customers, and provide quality and timely products and services.”

Remember--we are here to help you!

Cultural Resource Training in Alabama

by Teresa Paglione, Alabama NRCS Cultural Resources Specialist, Auburn, AL

According to the NRCS General Manual, the National Programmatic Agreement between NRCS, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, our Tribal Agreement with the Poarch Creek Indians, and our State Agreement with the Alabama Historical Commission, all Alabama NRCS employees involved in project planning, conservation planning, or conservation application will be certified in cultural resources.

In the past five years, I have presented cultural resources training several times. However, with the influx of new employees over the past year, we had to offer the mandatory training again. New Alabama NRCS employees received the training on December 9-11, 2002, in Wetumpka at the Firefighting Training Center. Also in attendance were Jessica Bertine, the new Florida NRCS Cultural Resources Coordinator (an agricultural economist with collateral duties), and Brad Bole, Watershed Project Coordinator, working out of the Hartselle Field Office. After two days of classroom instruction, we made field trips in Elmore County to visit Fort Toulouse/Jackson State Park, the Taylor Brothers Farm, and Hickory Ground, and then visited Kalumi in Montgomery County.

We received special permission from the Poarch Creek Indians to visit two of their properties (tribal reservation land) with archaeological resources: Hickory Ground, a historic Creek Indian town settled



Listening to Greg Rhinehart in the recreated Fort Jackson area.

in the 1780s, and Kalumi, a site with two Mississippian period mounds. After a short drive to the Tallassee area, we were led by Mr. Paul Taylor on a walking tour to the Creek Indian site known as Tuckabatchee, which is located on the Taylor brothers farmland. A small portion of Tuckabatchee was excavated by archeologists before the city of Tallassee developed the industrial park, however, the majority of the site is still farmed, and protected, by the Taylor brothers. At Tuckabatchee, the “students” got some real field experience trying to recognize artifacts in plowed fields. At Fort Toulouse/Jackson State Park, Greg Rhinehart (archeologist with the Alabama Historical Commission) gave a tour of the historic site: a replica of the 1751 French fort, a partial reconstruction of the 1814 American Fort Jackson, the 1830 Graves House (renovated as the park’s Welcome Center), and a Mississippian mound and village site.

We had lunch in Tallassee at the Talisi Hotel - a famous local historic landmark that is well known for their fried chicken, sweet potato soufflé, and banana pudding.

My sincerest thanks go to Elmore County DC Pam Mason for helping find the training location, coordinating the planning (snacks and lunches!), arranging for our visit with the Taylors, and making reservations at the Hotel Talisi.



Employees checking the plowed surfaces and learning to recognize artifacts.

Aging Watershed Dams in Alabama

by Perry Oakes, State Conservation Engineer, Auburn, AL

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program is underway in the United States. Several of the older structures have already been rehabilitated to extend their useful life. Alabama is yet to rehabilitate any of its 108 structures (PL-566 and RC&D) that were built over the last 42 years. Many of our structures only have a 50-year design life. It is estimated that about 20 of our structures need some type of rehabilitation at an estimated cost of \$24 million. Eight of our sites were designed and constructed for a low hazard potential, and due to downstream changes, now need to be upgraded to a moderate or high hazard site. Some



Drain Pipe Corrosion



Excessive Sediment Buildup

watershed sponsors are considering rehabilitation by requesting that NRCS provide an assessment report of the site. This report will help the sponsors to make the decision about rehabilitation. At least three assessments will be completed this year. A Capacity Building Workshop is scheduled for January 28th to present material that will help watershed sponsors understand their responsibilities and opportunities. The sponsors of our watershed projects don't need to miss this opportunity to extend the useful life of an old watershed dam that has served them well over the years.

Moving Out with Conservation Planning

by Bill Hughes, Resource Conservationist, Auburn, AL

Conservation planning is the basis for NRCS technical assistance. Planning helps landusers recognize resource problems, consider alternative treatments/management practices, and make decisions that protect natural resources. "If the landowner is willing and able to make those decisions," says Bob Jones, State Conservationist, "we need to develop conservation plans that address natural resource problems on the entire property, not just EQIP or WHIP."

We wanted to highlight a few employees who have been accelerating conservation planning efforts to get a jump on anticipated workloads and to give landusers more time to consider the alternatives.

Conecuh County

District Conservationist (DC) Richard Collier developed a conservation plan for Chris Booker who recently purchased a 188-acre tract of land. Primary resource concerns are erosion (critical area and gully)

and forage (quality and availability). Mr. Booker plans to implement a rotational grazing system which will



DC Richard Collier (l) reviewing conservation plan with landowner Chris Booker.

require cross fencing, additional water facilities, and a commitment to move the animals as necessary. Mr. Booker plans to sign up for EQIP and state cost-share programs to implement different parts of the conservation plan. The

(continued page 6)

conservation plan addresses forestland that Mr. Booker will manage for timber. Mr. Booker realizes that he may not be approved for the cost-share programs, but plans to implement what he can until cost-share funds are approved.



DC Richard Collier and Mr. Booker discuss a gully to be treated, if funding is available through EQIP or state cost-share programs over the next few years.

many practices he plans to implement over the next several years in his pastures, forestland, and wildlife land. Some of these practices include critical area and pasture planting, a pond, pipelines, cross fencing, tree planting, and many others. He will apply for the EQIP program, but he is already installing some of the practices. He plans to apply for the state cost-share program if his EQIP application is not approved.



DC Winford Andrews (l) reviews the conservation plan with Greene County landowner Dickie Odom.

Coffee County

Jimmy Waters is already implementing a conservation plan developed for his entire 120-acre farm. With assistance from Soil Conservation Technician Travis Carnley, Mr. Waters is installing underground outlets, grassed waterways, and terraces at his own expense. He did not want to wait on cost-share programs to address the erosion problem on the 54-acre cropland field. Mr. Waters plans to sign up for EQIP funds for some of the additional planned practices, which will include grass planting, grade stabilization structures, filter strips, and other management practices. Mr. Waters is to be commended for his willingness to install these practices at his own expense and Travis is to be congratulated for his selling abilities in raising this resource concern to this high priority.



SCT Travis Carnley (l) and Jimmy Waters review design of a new underground outlet, which is the first phase of the newly developed conservation plan.

Greene County

W. R. "Dickie" Odom has recently updated his conservation plan with the assistance of DC Winford Andrews. The conservation plan covers the entire 300-acre multiple enterprise farm. Mr. Odom has

2002 Census of Agriculture

A survey was mailed to Alabama farmers by the Alabama Agricultural Statistics Service that is essential to update information the government needs to make farm policy. The survey is part of the 26th National Census of Agriculture that the USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service publishes every five years. The 2002 Census of Agriculture will be the most comprehensive portrait of agriculture at the county, state, and national levels. It will compare farms today with where they were five years ago.

Response to the survey is required by federal law. According to State Statistician Herb Vanderberry, "The same law requiring farmers to complete the survey also guarantees each report to be held strictly confidential. No individual farmer's report can be disclosed to anyone, for any reason." A farm is defined as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the referenced year.

Only America's farmers and ranchers can supply the answers needed to produce an accurate and useful picture of our Nation's agriculture. The survey completion deadline is February 3.

Farm-City Week Across the State

“Focus on Family Farms” was the theme for the 2002 Alabama Farm-City Week observance. The majority of Alabama farms are still operated by families—a husband and wife, and other family members such as brothers and sisters or their children. Many Alabama residents can trace their roots back to agriculture. A century ago, most people in Alabama made their living on a farm. While the number of farmers has decreased dramatically during the past 100 years, agriculture is still vital to the state’s economy. Farm-City Week serves as a reminder of how important agriculture is to Alabama. Many counties throughout the state observed Farm-City week with various activities.



From The Field

Lee County NRCS/SWCD Assists ACES

The Lee County NRCS/SWCD staff assisted with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's (ACES) First Annual Forage/Beef Field Day on Saturday, December 7, 2002. The event was held on the Homestead Farm of Banks and Margo Herndon, just outside of Opelika. The three-hour event included speakers from private businesses, NRCS, ACES, veterinarians, and the Herndons. About 42 landusers and interested parties attended the workshop.

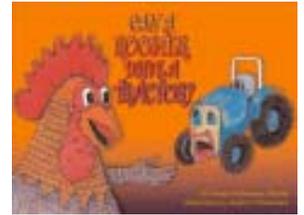
The Herndons received planning assistance from NRCS/SWCD and received state cost-share to implement pasture and hayland planting, fencing and watering facilities on heavy use areas. These practices were available for public viewing at the field day. NRCS staff stressed the importance of good planning in a farm operation. Participants were treated to lunch following the program.



Franklin County NRCS/SWCD Teams with ALFA

Franklin County NRCS/SWCD staff, along with Alabama Farmers Federation (ALFA) personnel, presented the book "Can a Rooster Drive a Tractor?" to Phil Campbell Elementary School students. The local ALFA office is donating the book to all elementary school libraries in the county. Coloring books and crayons made from soybeans will be given to all first graders in the county. The local NRCS staff talked to the children about preserving our natural resources and helping preserve the family farm. Mrs. Glass with the local ALFA, talked with the students

about how farmers provide our food and clothing. The children were excited about the coloring book and loved the story about the rooster driving a tractor. The Franklin County NRCS/SWCD office is pleased to form this new partnership with the local ALFA and looks forward to working with them in the future.



Marshall County Reaches Out to Schools

The Guntersville NRCS/SWCD Office presented 500 Spanish water quality activity books to Hispanic students at two elementary schools in Marshall County. Crayons were donated by the Marshall County SWCD.

Tuscaloosa County News

Tuscaloosa NRCS/SWCD staff are working with the Black Warrior River Basin Clean Water Partnership, Lower Sub-Basin Action Committee, and Alabama Water Watch. The 319 technician and Jim Dunaway are testing Big Sandy Creek, Carroll Creek, and Big Yellow Creek in the county.

Tuscaloosa County NRCS/SWCD staff are also working with the Tuscaloosa County Forestry Planning Committee on two upcoming functions. (1) The All American Loggin' Demo at Cainwood Farms is May 30-31, 2003. Several thousand spectators are expected. All proceeds will benefit Log-A-Load for Kids. For more information visit the Loggin' Demo website at www.allamericanloggin.com. (2) The Master Wildlifer 2003 Southwide Satellite Broadcasts, February 4-March 18, 2003, each Tuesday, 6-9 p.m. For more info visit www.pfmt.org/wm2003.

"Alabama Soils" Video a Hit

According to Dr. Doug Phillips, the Discovering Alabama "Alabama Soils" segment is popular, especially among teachers. About 200 videos and teacher's guides have been distributed, with the majority being requested by school systems from all parts of the state. Each NRCS field office has a copy of the video for conservation education programs.



Personnel

Accessions

Walker Williams, Soil Conservationist, Rainsville, AL

Promotions

Sharon Andress, Soil Conservationist, Talladega, AL
to District Conservationist, Russellville, AL

Michael Gunn, Soil Conservation Technician,
Linden, AL

James Hyde, Soil Conservation Technician,
Monroeville, AL

Ronald Koptis, Soil Scientist, Alexander City, AL

Shawn Manning, District Conservationist, Linden, AL

Betty C. Terry, Soil Conservation Technician,
Moulton, AL

Sebastian Thomas, Writer-Editor, Auburn, AL

Reassignments

Justin Norris, Soil Conservationist, Guntersville, AL to
District Conservationist, Clarksdale, MS

Timothy Poole, Soil Conservationist, Evergreen, AL to
Resource Data Collection Specialist, Evergreen,
AL

Transfer

Jason Burcham, Soil Conservationist, Russellville, AL
to Environmental Engineer, Corps of Engineers,
Huntsville, AL

Retirements

David J. Barrow, District Conservationist,
Montgomery, AL

John C. Meetze, State Resource Conservationist,
Auburn, AL

James O. Norris, Jr., District Conservationist,
Geneva, AL

Retiree News From Jesse Bush

Plans are being made for the spring 2003 retiree meeting in Tuscaloosa on April 24-25. Details about lodging and other information will be mailed to all retirees in February or early March. With the continued increases in postal fees, we would like to get as many retirees as possible on our list to receive information via e-mail. I appreciate you sending me your e-mail address at cgbush@mindspring.com. This would decrease our expenses a great deal.

We are saddened to learn about the death of W.I. Dollar who passed away in early January. He was a Soil Conservation Technician in Lamar County.

****ATTENTION RETIREES:** This newsletter is posted, in color, on the Alabama NRCS home page at (<http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov>). NRCS employees no longer receive hard copies, but get an e-mail when the newsletter is posted.

Retirees who prefer to view the newsletter on the Internet, please e-mail Fay Garner, Public Affairs Assistant (fay.garner@al.usda.gov), and request to be added to the list to receive notification when the newsletter has been posted. You will then be removed from the hard copy mailing.

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer."

Earth Team in Alabama

Alabama has a nationally recognized Earth Team volunteer program. Last year, 4,271 volunteers contributed 68,572 hours to promote conservation on private lands. Alabama ranks first in the nation for number of volunteers (almost double the hours of the number two state, Iowa, with 2,150) and number two for hours contributed (Minnesota is first with 87,317).

Nationwide, more than 38,000 Earth Team volunteers contributed over 1,089,100 hours. This equates to more than \$17 million, based on the \$16.05 hourly rate established by nationally recognized volunteer organizations.



Opelika Earth Team Volunteers were a great help in organizing the NRCS/SWCD float in the Christmas Parade. They won 2nd prize for best hand-made float. See whole story on the Alabama NRCS home page under Earth Team success stories.

Brochure Available

A simplified guide to conservation programs of the 2002 Farm Bill will soon be sent to each field office. *Conservation Practices and Programs for Your Farm* is an attractive, 8-page color foldout that ties conservation practices to an overview of the farm bill conservation programs.

A program matrix outlines eligibility requirements, type of financial assistance, and producer obligations for eight major USDA conservation programs.

The guide is meant for agricultural producers— owners of small and large farms, ranches, dairies, vineyards and forestlands— but will also be a handy reference for USDA field staff, federal and state agencies, conservation districts, conservation organizations, and technical service providers.

The brochure presents an overview of programs that gives producers a starting point in deciding how conservation programs might help them conserve croplands, improve water quality, and

manage for wildlife on private land.

The guide was produced by the Wildlife Management Institute with technical help from the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute.

We will mail the publication to field offices as soon as it arrives at the state office. It will also be available on the web at www.nrcs.usda.gov - under publications.

Longleaf Pine Meeting

The Monroeville Experiment Farm held a longleaf meeting in November 2002, to provide the latest information on establishing longleaf pines.

Longleaf pines once covered almost 90 million acres in the Southeast. Today, less than three million acres remain, an over 97 percent decline. John Richburg (l) NRCS Assistant State



Conservationist assisted Longleaf Alliance researcher Mark Hinds (r) in explaining proper seed selection.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
P.O. Box 311
Auburn, Alabama 36830
334-887-4530
<http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov/al>
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, \$300



**The Earth
Needs You —
Join The Team!
Call 1-888 - LANDCARE**