

*NRCS Alabama*

# Current Developments



January 2004

## From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

Happy New Year! There are all sorts of “markers” along our way, and the beginning of a new year is a significant milestone. It provides fresh opportunities—to make the best of our time with family and friends, to enhance our skills, and to provide service to our clients.

As an agency, our goal is to help producers maintain profitability, while meeting their conservation objectives. The phrase “meet their conservation objectives” is important. We need to look beyond regulations and beyond specific federal conservation programs and work toward overall conservation goals. I’ve worked with a lot of landowners in my life. I’ve never met a landowner who told me they were in the business because they loved the challenge of meeting

regulations and the thrill of applying for cost-share programs. Individuals working with the land are in the business because they have a deep, abiding respect of the land—they love making it produce, and they enjoy being a part of the cycle of feeding, clothing, and sheltering people. If we lose track of our love for the land, we are missing the joy of being in agriculture. The good news is that there are resources – and flexibility – in our conservation programs to provide many kinds of help for our clients. Let’s make 2004 a productive year, both for our clients and for each of us as individuals.

*Bob*

### Randall East Named Citizen of the Year

Congratulations to Randall East, Resource Engineer (West), who was recently named 2003 Thomasville Citizen of the Year. Not only is Randall an excellent NRCS employee, he is a tremendous asset to his community. From Boy Scouts to baseball to household repairs, Randall is right in the thick of things giving leadership and support. A Thomasville Times article is available on the Internet highlighting Randall’s many contributions to the community and calls attention to his work with NRCS. [http://www.thethomasvilletimes.com/news/2003/1203/Front\\_Page/005.html](http://www.thethomasvilletimes.com/news/2003/1203/Front_Page/005.html).

Thanks, Randall, for being the outstanding person and employee that you are!



# Alabama NRCS Launches a New Technology Newsletter

By Bill Hughes, State Resource Conservationist, USDA-NRCS, Auburn, AL

The first publication of Alabama NRCS *Tech News*, a quarterly newsletter to share new technologies, landowner successes, and innovative ideas with landowners/users and our partners was distributed in January. The newsletter features articles by our field office personnel recognizing the good work of Alabama farmers. The purpose of the publication is to relate success stories and information about NRCS programs. After reading these articles, we hope that other landowners may in turn implement similar conservation practices.

The newsletter was distributed via e-mail with an Internet link. It is available on-line at <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/AL/pdf/nltrs/tech1-03.pdf>. The primary audience includes landowners, agriculture and environmental agencies, and organizations. We are coordinating with these agencies and organizations to distribute the notice of publication to

their members. With just a click of the mouse, the newsletter can be read on the screen or printed to be read and passed on to others. We need the help from field personnel in two ways: 1) We need your success stories to include in the newsletter. Send those to Julie Best or to me, and 2) we need you to pass on the newsletter to individuals that you come in contact with.



# NRCS Participates in Forage Conference

NRCS helped organize and facilitate the 2003 Alabama Forage and Grassland Conference which focused on the theme of "Profit-Oriented Forage Management." Approximately 200 farmers and farming industry-related personnel participated in the conference held at Wallace State College, Hanceville, AL. In addition to a cadre of well informed speakers, there was an abundance of literature for everyone to take home. The conference was the fourth one by the forage coalition. The first two conferences were held in the Montgomery area; the last two have been at the Hanceville location. Participants ranged from people who were just getting into the cattle operation to those who have been in the business for many years. The Alabama Forage and Grazing Land Coalition sponsored the event.

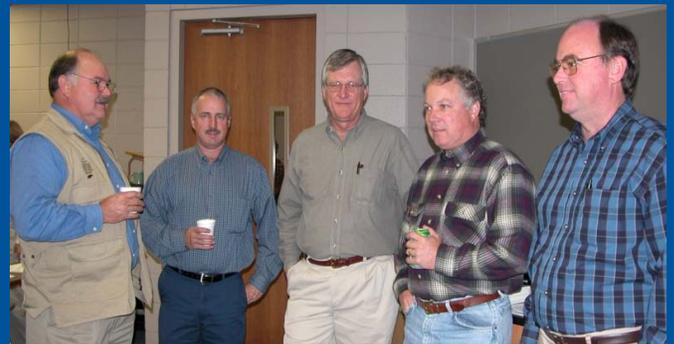


The 2003 Alabama Forage and Grassland Conference attracted over 200 interested farmers and farm-related individuals to the event held at Wallace State College Campus in Hanceville.

## ***NRCS Participates in Training for CCA and TSP***

The Alabama Crop Management Association, a state educational organization made up of independent fertilizer dealers, consultants, educators, and government representatives, sponsored training for persons interested in getting Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) and Technical Service Provider (TSP) points for certification. NRCS presenters provided training that covered pest and nutrient management, conservation planning, cropping systems, conservation tillage, and resource management systems. The training was designed to help technical advisors develop conservation plans that are beneficial to the landowner by suggesting alternatives and consequences for the problems associated with the land. A CCA participant said, "It's good to have NRCS taking a lead in this training. Salesmanship is an important concept in conservation. It's rewarding to see that the agency is acknowledging that concept." A TSP participant indicated, "I've taken all the on-line training that is available. I'm here to get this information to complete

my training for TSP certification." The goal of NRCS and its representatives is to provide technical assistance that helps the landowner protect the environment while doing what they need to do to make a living.



***Charles Mitchell, Auburn University; Rusy Parrish, Butler County Extension Agent; Ben Moore, USDA-NRCS presenter; and Alan Robinett and William Hovey, participants working toward TSP certification, represent the various entities involved in the training session.***

## ***Partnership Meeting***

The Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) held a one-day meeting in Montgomery, AL, in November. FY2003 has been a challenging year for the districts. And, with the state budget cuts, FY2004 will be even more challenging. AACD President Terry Poague encouraged supervisors to work in their respective counties to raise the awareness of the importance of the work of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). The focus of the year is to keep all 67 offices in the county open and staffed. In order to do this, districts will need to identify new partners for support of soil and water. Poague encouraged districts to tell their story—the past successes as well as the future needs—and to stand firm and strong so that the organization can function for many more years.



***SWCD supervisors and NRCS employees attended a one-day meeting in Montgomery. Numerous congressional figures dropped by to greet the group.***

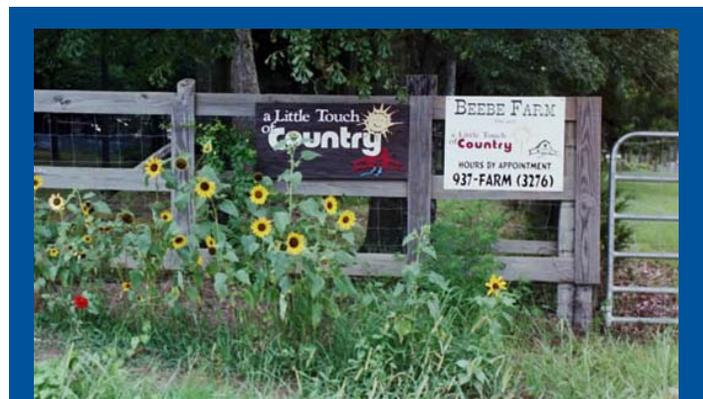
# Successful First Year for Alabama's FRPP

by Paul Kennedy, Alabama FRPP Program Coordinator, Birmingham, AL

Nearly \$1,188,000 was secured from the FY2002 Farm Bill for Alabama Farmers and Ranchers to preserve and permanently protect prime and unique farmland through the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). Over 622 acres of farmland in Alabama will remain productive and open for generations to come as a direct result of this program. Alabama received six formal applications; five of the six were accepted for protection. The farms are located in Baldwin, DeKalb, Etowah, and Talladega Counties. These properties all contain soils identified as prime farmland soils. The protected farmland ranges from pastureland to cropland, illustrating diverse agricultural practices throughout the state.

Under the leadership of State Conservationist Bob Jones and State Resource Conservationist Bill Hughes working with Alabama Land Trust, the first year program was a huge success. From northeast

Alabama to the state's Black Belt region, open land accepted into the Farmland Protection Program will be permanently preserved as working farms and forest.



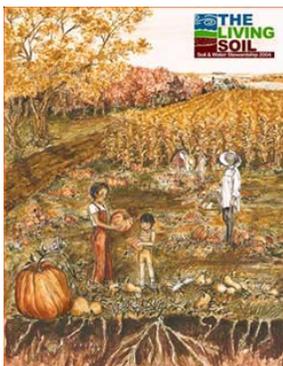
*Beebe Farm in Baldwin County is one of the farms enrolled in the FRPP program.*

## For Your Information!

### Soil and Water Stewardship Week

The 2004 Soil and Water Stewardship Week theme is "The Living Soil." For 49 years the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and its 3,000 local soil and water conservation districts have celebrated this observance to help remind all citizens of their individual responsibility to care for soil and water resources on private land. Soil and Water

Stewardship Week is officially observed between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May (April 25-May 2, 2004). However, the observance may be celebrated at any time during the year. For more information visit the official website: <http://www.nacdnet.org/pubaff/stewardship/2004/index.htm>.



### Self Development

The saying goes, you can't turn back the clock but you can wind it up again. No matter how long we have been working, we need to keep developing skills and abilities. Self development is an affordable and rewarding way to enhance skills and abilities. The NRCS Social Sciences Institute has an abundance of material available on-line. Check out the website at: <http://www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov/>.

### Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) Publications

Need information about Cogongrass or Tropical Soda Apple? ACES has publications that may be useful to you. Publication number ANR-1241–*Wanted Dead Not Alive: Cogongrass* is a new publication. Publication ANR-909–*Tropical Soda Apple in Alabama*, is also available. Publications can be ordered on-line at: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/balances/>.

## Soil Moisture Study

by Joey Koptis, Soil Scientist, USDA-NRCS, Jackson, AL

The MLRA staff at Auburn, along with a few members of the Clarke and Crenshaw County Soil Survey offices, has teamed up with the soils staff of the entire MO-15 Region to do a three-year study of water tables and their behavior in some of the commonly found soils of the Coastal Plain and Caribbean areas. Sites selected in Alabama were those soil series that occur commonly in the landscape throughout the Coastal Plain region.

Careful selection procedures were followed assuring that (1) the landowner's permission is granted to do the study; (2) the site is secure from any cultural practices such as controlled burns, damage from forestry, agricultural equipment, or grazing animals and (3) the site will be accessible for data transmission twice yearly for the next three years. The sites consist of 2-inch PVC pipe installed at the appropriate depths accommodating the soil moisture-monitoring device (a pressure transducer, several feet of cable, the data logger, and Windows compatible software). The automated data loggers are set to take readings four times daily. Caps are then placed on the pipes to protect the loggers. The data is downloaded to a palm pilot or laptop twice a year, interpreted, and entered into the NASIS database.

Much appreciation is given to our co-operators including, local land owners, the Poarch Creek Indian Tribe, and Tribal Liaison David Elliot for their help.



*(l-r) Soil Conservation Technician and tribal liaison David Elliott, Soil Scientist Sandy Page, and Data Quality Specialist George Martin discuss installation procedures on an Escambia fine sandy loam. The site is located on land owned and operated by the Poarch Creek Indian Tribe in Escambia County, AL.*

## Grazing Lands Conference Features Presentations By Successful Farmers and Ranchers!

Over 1,100 ranchers and other conservation leaders from all over the nation gathered in Nashville, Tennessee, in December to focus on conserving natural resources on the nation's grazing lands at the Second National Conference on Grazing Lands.

From conservation easements and intensive grazing rotations to tracking livestock patterns through the use of GPS, attendees gained knowledge to help them conserve and protect natural resources on range and grasslands throughout the country while keeping those lands productive for cattle, sheep, and other grazing livestock.

The National Conference on Grazing Lands is sponsored through the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), a national coalition of agricultural

organizations, conservation organizations, and government agencies who recognize the need to keep the nation's rangelands productive, while conserving their resources for future generations.

"The fact that well over a thousand people traveled to Nashville for this conference is a clear indication of the increased interest in grazing lands," said NRCS Chief Bruce Knight. "Grazing is finally being recognized as an important tool to achieve conservation objectives, rather than something that is bad for the environment."

Individuals interested in receiving a copy of the proceedings, or interested in learning more about GLCI can contact Monti Golla, administrator of the GLCI at 979-268-0980, or by e-mail at [grazinglands@cox-internet.com](mailto:grazinglands@cox-internet.com).

# Innovative Waste Management Practice

by Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, AL, and Randall East, Resource Engineer, Grove Hill, AL

Ching Dairy, located in Mobile County, sits adjacent to Juniper Creek which is on the 303d stream list for pathogens, nonpoint source grazing cattle.

The dairy is locally owned and operated by three brothers who are third generation dairy farmers. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with other stakeholders within the watershed and throughout the state, has provided technical advice and financial assistance for innovative best management practices (BMPs). The BMPs are addressed in a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan developed by the local NRCS office. Planned and installed practices will address a waste storage lagoon, a unique solid separator and proper fencing for safety, heavy use areas, critical planting areas, cross fencing, and wastewater irrigation application. The goal is to provide a conservation system that will allow the brothers to continue their work in a growing neighborhood while conserving valuable natural resources.

The waste from the milking parlor pad will flow into a pit, which includes a 400-gallon “sand trap” adjacent to a 3,000 gallon collection tank. Two pumps will transport the waste through a four-inch pipe to a Geotube, solid separator.

Geotubes at this particular site are two 50 feet long by 45 feet circumference Geotextile bags. The bags will be housed on a concrete pad adjacent to the waste lagoon. The pad will slope to ensure proper drainage of the leachate and is large enough to hold two bags. The bags will dewater and leachate will drain into the lagoon. The lagoon measures 220 feet by 200 feet by 10 feet and is composed of a two foot clay compacted liner and a one foot protective soil cover. Odor will be reduced, pest will be controlled, and the solids contained within the bags will be dried. The dry matter will be analyzed and applied on site according to soil test recommendations, which will reduce the amount and cost of purchased fertilizers. It is believed the solids will reduce soluble Phosphorous. Tests will be run to confirm the reduction.

Every conservation planner knows that each land unit is unique and can or will present the conservation planner with specific site limitations, which make each

plan specific to that location. The Ching Dairy has provided several challenging factors: property lines and location of the milking barn, rolling hills and sandy soils, limited resources, high voltage power lines, and encroaching neighbors.

Innovative practices are attempts to provide solutions through unique applications that could prove to be cost effective, user friendly, and beneficial to farmers who are faced with waste management situations. The site in Mobile County will be one of the first “on-farm” applications, if not the first, in Alabama where the animal waste is being put into bags before the leachate empties into a lagoon or holding pond.



# Focus on Asian/Pacific Americans Special Emphasis Group

by Clark Painter, Special Emphasis Program Manager, USDA-NRCS, Auburn, AL

Special Emphasis Programs are designed to assist in the recruitment, selection, development, and career advancement of American Indians, Asian/Pacific Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, disabled veterans, persons with disabilities, and women within NRCS. Each special emphasis program manager serves as the resource person or advisor on the unique concerns for the particular group. I serve as the Asian/Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager for Alabama.

An Asian/Pacific Islander is a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. This area includes: Cambodia, China, Guam, Hawaii, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. For purposes of grammatical simplicity, the term "Asian" is used interchangeably with "Asian/Pacific Islander".



Each year during the month of May, we celebrate the contributions of Americans who trace their ancestry to Asia and the Pacific Islands. Asian Pacific Americans continue to excel nationally and internationally and they serve as a constant reminder of America's commitment to freedom, equality, and equal opportunity for all.

Currently within NRCS in Alabama, there are no employees who consider themselves to be of Asian/Pacific heritage. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, there are about 31,250 persons in the state who declare themselves to be of Asian/Pacific origin.

## From The Field

### Farm Days in Covington County

By Renea Dyer, Soil Conservationist, Andalusia, AL

Covington County NRCS, SWCD, Farmers Federation, Cattlemen's Association, ACES, and FSA held farm days for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at Pleasant Home, Fleeta, Straughn, and Red Level schools. The



event was hosted by landowners Joey Holt, Tommy Blackstock, and Patricia Gibson.

The students learned how cotton and peanuts used to be harvested and how they are harvested today. They learned about erosion, how much soil is actually used to grow the world's food supply, and the importance and proper techniques of soil sampling. They discussed the different cuts of meat and the importance of healthy cows. They toured a chicken house and talked about chickens and goats. They also learned how chicken litter is used as fertilizer and applied to the land as part of a nutrient management plan.

The students had a wonderful time, and learned valuable lessons about where food comes from and the importance of conserving natural resources.

### Talladega County NRCS Hosts A Meat Goat Meeting

by Eddie May, District Conservationist, Talladega, AL

Talladega NRCS employees, in conjunction with the Coosa Valley RC&D, hosted a meat goat meeting in Talladega County that attracted 33 people. The demographics of the audience was a

clear indication of the variety of people who are interested in meat goat production.

The vision is to establish a meat goat association in the county that will serve as a forum to disseminate information, help with grant applications, provide demonstrations on relevant topics, and identify ways to market the product.

### **Mock Inspection Held**

The Barbour County NRCS, SWCD, and ACES recently staged a “mock inspection” for area poultry growers. Thirty-five poultry producers from Barbour, Dale, Henry, and Pike Counties gathered at C&C Farms, owned and operated by Vic Coker in Barbour County, to follow the procedures used during



I-r: Jimmy Hatcher (NRCS), Vic Coker (producer), and Shane Brown (ADEM), review records of the C&C Farms during the mock inspection.

an inspection by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). The “mock inspectors” used a checklist and evaluation method designed for an official assessment of a poultry farm. The inspection process is

designed to identify and evaluate problems that may occur on poultry farms. ADEM and NRCS offered technical standards, guidelines, and information to help poultry producers reduce or eliminate critical concerns on their farms, such as the amount of litter produced, how it is handled, and where it is applied or stored.

## **RC&D News**

### **Cawaco RC&D**

In October the Cawaco RC&D Council assisted the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham to conduct a public meeting to view alternatives and discuss the stakeholders’ vision for the Upper Cahaba Watershed. Over 250 citizens attended.

The Council is responsible for coordinating and facilitating small group sessions where

individuals could freely express their wants, needs, and opinions about this effort. Another public meeting will be held in early 2004 to present the model to the public.

Visit the websites of the study and the Council for more information. [www.cahabastudy.com](http://www.cahabastudy.com) and [www.cahabariver.com](http://www.cahabariver.com).

### **Coosa Valley RC&D**

**Randolph County Timber Bridge** -- County Road 276 in Randolph County was deteriorating due to rust and corrosion. The road was impassable and all traffic, including school buses, had to detour.

The Coosa Valley RC&D helped the county apply for a grant from the *Wood In Transportation Project*, provided by USDA Forest Service, to install a new timber bridge. Funding was based on local cooperators (Randolph County Commission) matching federal dollars. The Coosa Valley RC&D administered the program and kept track of the project including financial statements and photographing the progress.



*The Wood In Transportation Project helps develop structures that showcase wood-in-transportation technology and provides useful design and cost information to potential users throughout the country.*

**Alabama Water Watch** -- The Coosa Valley RC&D contributed toward the expenses of training new water quality monitors. The monitors are a part of the Alabama Water Watch Program.

**Longleaf Pine Tour** -- The Coosa Valley RC&D helped the Calhoun County TREASURE Forest Association host a tour of one of the oldest stands of longleaf pine in east central Alabama.

**Woodland Community and Senior Center** -- The Coosa Valley RC&D contributed toward the completion of a new parking area, installation of a split rail fence, planting of shrubbery, and a new community center sign.

## Retiree News from Jesse Bush

Retirees in the Auburn-Opelika area meet each month at IHOP for food and fellowship. Ten retirees, including Dr. Ben Hajek of Auburn University, met on January 5th for breakfast.

The spring meeting of retirees will be on April 22-23, 2004, in the Montgomery-Prattville-Wetumpka area. Exact location and meeting details will be available soon. Mark your calendar now and make plans to attend.

### In Sympathy

We are saddened by the recent deaths of these NRCS/SCS retirees.

**Charlie Harper**, former Area Conservationist in Ozark, died on January 7, 2004. A native of Tallapoosa County, Charlie graduated from Auburn and served at a number of locations in Alabama prior to his assignment in Ozark. Expressions of sympathy can be sent to:

Margie Harper  
121 Peacock Court  
Ozark, AL 36360

**Jerry Johnson** passed away on December 31, 2003. He was a native of Centreville, AL, and served as State Staff Forester for 30 years with nearly 34 years of federal service. Jerry had battled cancer for several years and only recently retired. Expressions of sympathy can be sent to:

Gloria Johnson  
2048 Evergreen Drive  
Auburn, Alabama 36830

**Sam Richbourg**, former SCS State Design Engineer died on December 2, 2003, at the age of 91. Mr. Richbourg continued to live in Auburn since retiring.

## Personnel

### Accessions

Timothy Albritton, State Staff Forester,  
Auburn, AL

William Keys, District Conservationist,  
Mobile, AL

Duane Nappier, Soil Conservation Technician,  
Wedowee, AL

### Promotions

Jeff Ethridge, Soil Conservation Technician,  
Abbeville, AL

Wade Hill, Soil Conservationist, Geneva, AL  
Maurice Johnson, Soil Conservation Technician,  
Greensboro, AL

Joey Koptis, Soil Scientist, Jackson, AL

### Reassignments

Benjamin Malone, District Conservationist,  
Mobile, AL to Resource Conservation &  
Development Coordinator, NRCS, Hammond, LA

Jim Dunaway, Soil Conservation Technician,  
Tuscaloosa, AL to Program Technician, FSA, Pickens,  
AL

### Retirements

Bobby Fox, Resource Soil Scientist, Decatur, AL

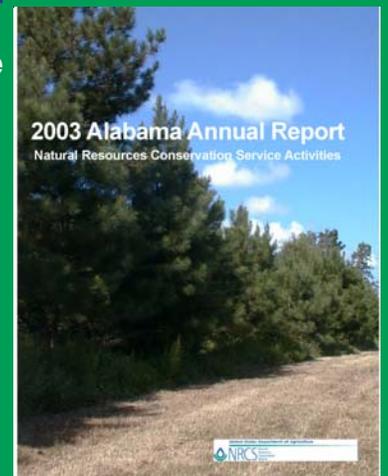
Gary Jones, Agricultural Economist, Auburn, AL

## 2003 Alabama Annual Report for NRCS

This report has been distributed and is  
available on the Internet at:

[ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/AL/pdf/  
rpts/03\\_an\\_rpt.pdf](ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/AL/pdf/rpts/03_an_rpt.pdf)

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