

United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service • 760 South Broadway
Salina, Kansas 67401-4604 • Phone: (785) 823-4571 • FAX (785) 823-4540

Web: <http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov> twitter @NRCS_Kansas

Contact: Sheila Forrester (Acting) Public Affairs Specialist email: sheila.forrester@ks.usda.gov

Conservation Volunteers Honored During National Week

Salina, Kansas, March 28, 2013—U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is celebrating **National Volunteer Week April 21-27, 2013**, by thanking and honoring its Earth Team volunteers for their service to conservation. Earth Team is the agency's volunteer workforce, and nationally, in 2012, more than 19,000 people donated 305,564 hours of service to NRCS worth approximately \$6.7 million.

NRCS State Conservationist Eric B. Banks said Earth Team volunteers are making an environmental impact in Kansas. Last year 2,648 volunteers donated 20,188 hours. "That's worth \$439,896 of benefit to our customers and the taxpayers," said Banks. "These are impressive numbers, and we are grateful for the help, but we also recognize much more conservation work needs to be done."

Earth Team is a program that partners volunteers with NRCS employees. It was created in 1985 and offers many opportunities to individuals older than 14 who are interested in volunteering to improve the nation's natural resources. Earth Team volunteers help NRCS conservationists provide private landowners and others a range of services from conservation technical assistance to teaching and generating awareness about conservation through the use of community projects.

"The NRCS theme for this year 'Celebrate Volunteers' puts it best," said Eric Banks. "Earth Team volunteers allow us to stretch available resources and help us put additional conservation practices on the ground. Their volunteer efforts help us improve our land and wildlife habitat, clean our water and air, and they help us improve the environment for everyone." Banks said he hopes National Volunteer Week will motivate others to volunteer to help NRCS with its conservation mission.

"Earth Team volunteers work closely with our staff and they play an important role in our state's conservation work. They take on a variety of conservation assignments and many Earth Team volunteers tell us they find their volunteer work enjoyable and personally very rewarding," said Banks.

Learn more about the Earth Team Volunteer Program online at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers> or by calling toll-free 888-526-3227. For more information on NRCS visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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*Note: The Value of Volunteer Time to the Agency is \$21.79/hour as established by the Independent Sector and utilized by the Federal Interagency Team for Volunteerism.