

January-March 2012

Message From *R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist*

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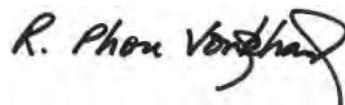
Greetings from the Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office. During the January to March 2012 period, NRCS staff began work related to obligating contracts for the first round of application funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 conservation practices.

Regarding outreach activities, NRCS attended five general outreach events targeted to potential clients and the general public. Such events included the Local Food Forum, RI Flower Show, 9th Annual Land and Water Summit, Women in Agriculture Conference, and RI Raised Livestock Annual Meeting and Trade Show. Related to this effort, three general NRCS information workshops and four Canada Goose Abatement workshops were held in cooperation with the Rhode Island Association of Conservation Districts. Such events were successful to increase awareness of NRCS technical and financial assistance and subsequently to increase the number of program applications received. In addition, NRCS actively participated at four recruitment events primarily geared to college students although one event was targeted to high school students.

The field staff concentrated on obtaining new applications for FY 2012. So far, Rhode Island has received 244 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications. Among applications received, 128 have been awarded contracts worth \$1,946,788. In addition, another 86 applications worth over \$1.25 million may be awarded funding. For FY 2012, the first- and second-round application ranking deadlines have ended with the third round application deadline to be completed June 1, 2012.

NRCS Rhode Island received \$6.45 million in disaster relief funds to help communities recover from a wave of natural disasters including the historic floods in 2010 and Hurricane Irene. Funding is provided through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program. The resource staff was involved with the Working Lands for Wildlife initiative which provides funding under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to develop and improve habitat for the New England cottontail rabbit as a species of focus in Rhode Island.

Lastly, soils staff completed a field review making Rhode Island the first state to complete a fresh water subaqueous soils survey.



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Conservation District Happenings Including Program Funding:

Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Melissa Hayden, Eastern District Conservationist

The Eastern District has been busy obligating contracts for our first round of funding for EQIP and AMA. We are also processing applications for our second round of funding including development of conservation plans and gathering eligibility documentation. An outreach meeting was held February 28 in Portsmouth where we received 5 applications for EQIP as a result of the meeting. A third outreach meeting is planned for July 18 at Watson Farm in Jamestown.

The Eastern District has been working closely with our State Biologist, Gary Casabona, to build relationships with several local land trusts. We have developed contracts this year with Aquidneck Land Trust and Conanicut Island Land Trust, and we have received an application from the Tiverton Land Trust. We also recently met with the Barrington Land Conservation Trust to discuss potential projects.

Implementation on existing contracts this quarter has included completion of 5 conservation activity plans, installation of 2 high tunnels, completion of several oyster reef restoration practices, as well as other practices including installation of a runoff management system, invasive plant control, and installation of nest boxes for wildlife.

Program Application Funding:

The Eastern District has received 63 applications to date with 46 developed into contracts under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for a running total of \$654,695 so far. Another 15 applications may potentially be funded worth an estimated \$198,000.

Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

An “open house” outreach event organized by the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District was held at the Cumberland Grange on March 12th and was very well attended.

The second quarter was also a busy time for construction and installation of conservation practices in the Northern District. The following summarizes conservation practices applied to date in fiscal year 2012:

Practice	Amount Applied 2012
Access Control	0.1 ac
Animal trails & walkways	977 ft.
Brush Management	2.4 ac
Critical Area Planting	3.1 ac
Fence	670 ft
Fish Passage	1 no

Forage Harvest Management	10	ac
Forest Stand Improvement	125.9	ac
Forest Trails and Landings	5	ac
Forestry Management Plan-Written	2	no
Grazing Management Plan-Written	2	no
High Tunnel	4338	sq ft
Mulching	1.5	ac
Nutrient Management	7.9	ac
Pest Management	7.9	ac
Pipeline	795	ft
Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats	5.6	ac
Seasonal High Tunnel	2250	sq ft
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	255	ac
Water Well	2	no
Watering Facility	4	no
Wetland Enhancement	0.8	ac

Program Application Funding:

The Northern District to date has received 94 applications with 38 being developed into contracts under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for a running total of \$395,398 so far. Another 45 applications may potentially be funded worth an estimated \$574,626.

Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

The SRICD has been working diligently to build relationships and partnerships to implement the new Working Lands for Wildlife program (targeting conservation of the candidate species New England cottontail) under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The SRICD has been working on 4 applications - these projects fall within the focal area for the historic range of the New England cottontail. The projects have been planned and are waiting to be ranked and potentially funded.

The Southern District held an outreach event on February 23rd at the West Greenwich Library. The meeting was held in an open-house format that had various booths for producers to look at information and speak with expert staff members – positive feedback from producers showed that they liked format of outreach.

The SRICD is holding its next outreach event on May 5th at Breene Hollow Farm in West Greenwich. Breene Hollow Farm is a dairy farm and member of Rhody Fresh. The event will be an open house format and folks will be able to speak with Mr. Breene as to the management of the dairy and how NRCS is helping him to address and manage his natural resources issues on the farm. People will have the opportunity to speak with various NRCS staff to learn more about conservation opportunities that NRCS can potentially assist them on their own farms and woodlands.

Program Application Funding:

The Southern District has received 87 applications to date with 44 being developed into contracts under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for a running total so far of \$896,695. Another 26 applications may potentially be funded worth an estimated \$483,000.

Engineering

by Kevin Farmer, State Conservation Engineer

This quarter, we received approximately \$6.5 million dollars in Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program funding to provide flood recovery assistance to the RI-State Conservation Committee (RISCC), the Town of Coventry, and the City of Pawtucket. The funds will be used to remove debris impairments in the Pocasset, Wood, Pawcatuck, and Queens Rivers. We will also be able to repair the Blackstone River sea wall behind Pawtucket City Hall and to stabilize the stream banks of the Pawtucket River just downstream of the RIDOT repair of the Laurel Ave Bridge.

We have also completed the denil ladder designs for the Lower Blackstone River Fish Passage project. Construction is expected to start this summer.

We assisted the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC) in acquiring an A&E design firm to begin designs for the Manton Dam fish passage project.

The NRCS engineering team developed an engineering action plan to improve the delivery of engineering services to our customers. Part of the action plan is to utilize the assistance of a recently hired district technician hired as part of an agreement with the RISCC.

On January 23-24, we provided EFH-2 and WinTR-55 training to 23 of our customers and partners.

The attendees represented NRCS, RIEMA, local towns, district employees, TSP's, and private A&E firms. The training also covered the use of the Northeast Regional Climate Center (NRCC) rainfall data. The NRCS instructors were very helpful in explaining the importance and proper application of the updated Precipitation Frequency Analyses data that are being used here in Rhode Island. In addition, they helped to further introduce the EFH-2 supplement that we have drafted for use here in Rhode Island.

We provided the participants with training materials and resources that will serve as useful guides when they employ these tools to perform small watershed hydrology computations on future NRCS and other natural resource related projects.

Our engineering staff worked with the Town of Johnston and provided them a storm water pollution prevention plan to aid in the demolition of the Pocasset Watershed Project homes.

The engineering team worked with the City of Cranston to provide oversight and guidance in the design of the Pocasset River flood wall project in Cranston, RI. These designs are moving forward and are expected to be complete by the end of the year.

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by *Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist*



RI Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Roberts speaks at the Women in Agriculture conference at the University of Rhode Island.

During the January to March period, NRCS sponsored several exhibit booths at conservation related events throughout the state. In February, NRCS attended the Local Food Forum at Brown University with over 250 attendees (e.g., farmers, food vendors, conservation partners) where the theme was the creation of the 2012 Farm Bill. NRCS highlighted its funding for high tunnels/hoop houses which provides the potential for farmers to extend their growing season. For general public education, NRCS exhibited at the RI Flower Show where staff showcased current conservation projects throughout the state which contribute to clean air and water. NRCS had an exhibit booth at the 9th Annual Land and Water Summit where Assistant State Conservationist Mike Moorman conducted a presentation on the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). The event which had the theme “Working together to protect our communities” was well attended with over 300 attendees who learned about conservation efforts and had the opportunity to network with a multitude of conservation partners in Rhode Island. NRCS also exhibited at the Second Annual Women in Agriculture Conference with

almost 200 attendees who learned about women’s accomplishments in agriculture, financial assistance available from several sources, and the challenge balancing work and family. Prominent speakers at the event included Elizabeth Roberts, RI Lieutenant Governor; John Kirby, URI Dean of the College of Environment and Life Sciences; Janet Coit, Director RI DEM; and Susan Sosnowski, RI State Senator. The Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association held its annual meeting in March where NRCS provided information on its programs to approximately 75 attendees.

Regarding recruiting events, NRCS exhibited at four events including the 2012 URI Green Industry Day which targeted the landscaping community and students attending the URI College of Environment and Life Sciences. Staff highlighted employment opportunities for soil conservationists, soil scientists, civil engineers, and biologists at the URI Summer and Internship Job Fair and URI Spring Career and Job Fair where over 400 students attended each event. To provide insight to high school students on careers and educational requirements in natural resource conservation, NRCS staff attended the North Kingstown High School Planning Night where staff



Civil Engineers David Gold and Jade Nield explain NRCS program information to attendees at the RI Flower Show.



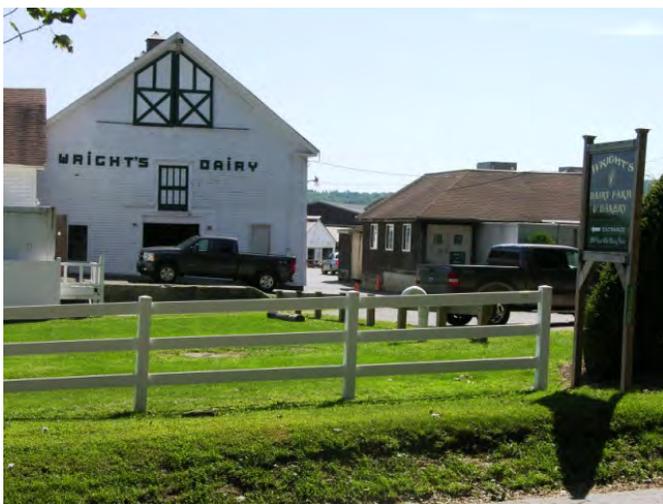
Landscape Architect Kanseese Xiong explains NRCS conservation success stories to an attendee at the URI Green Industry Day.

discussed careers in natural resource conservation to approximately 80 juniors. Names and contact information for attendees interested in NRCS careers were collected at recruitment events for any upcoming vacancy announcements including internships.

NRCS collaborated with the RI Association of Conservation Districts to conduct three general information sessions targeted to farmers and woodland owners in the three conservation districts. The events were all well attended where several potential applicants learned about technical and financial assistance provided through

the two organizations. In addition, four Canada Goose Abatement workshops were held to provide information for public and private landowners. The combined efforts of these information sessions and workshops led to an increase in the number of applications received for NRCS program assistance.

Historic Dairy Farm Wins Rhode Island’s 2011 Outstanding Dairy Farm of the Year Award by Rhode Island Green Pastures Committee; Wright’s Dairy Benefits From Technical and Financial Assistance Provided by NRCS



Wright’s Dairy Farm, founded in 1900, processes 1,000 gallons of milk per day where customers purchase products at its onsite retail store.

Wright’s Dairy Farm in North Smithfield, Rhode Island was named Rhode Island’s 2011 Outstanding Dairy Farm of the Year by the Rhode Island Green Pastures Committee. The award recognizes a dairy farm each year based on its quality animal care, implementation of conservation practices, and high quality dairy products. The Rhode Island Green Pastures Committee is led by DEM’s Department of Agriculture and includes the R.I. Farm Bureau, R.I. Dairy Farm Cooperative, R.I. Farm Service Agency, and Agri-Mark Cooperative.

Wright’s Dairy Farm is a fifth generation family farm where 10 family members actively run the operation which includes approximately 70 full- and part-time workers. Clayton Wright and his three sisters Ellen, Jen, and Elizabeth along with their husbands Steve, David, and Paul conscientiously oversee the entire operation which

includes a milking parlor, dairy processing plant, bakery, and retail store. The farm consists of the main property on 100 acres with 160 Holstein cows which were specifically selected for the quality and quantity of milk they produce. In addition, the family rents 160 acres of additional land to grow corn silage and hay used to feed the cows.

Wright's Dairy Farm only sells its quality products at its onsite retail store where over 900 customers from Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts visit each day.

Wright's Dairy received the Outstanding Dairy Farm of the Year Award based on the quality of animal care, implementation of progressive procedures on the farm, and quality products sold at its retail store. All cows have a diet balanced by a nutritionist. They utilize high-quality forages to form the base of the rations which include corn silage, hay, and grain. These rations are balanced with vitamins and minerals. The cows receive no synthetic hormones and antibiotics are only administered when a cow's life is at stake. In such cases, a cow's milk is not used until it is tested to be free of antibiotics. The cows are well cared for where sand bedding is used to reduce the prevalence of bacterial infections and automatic fans are installed in the barns to keep the cows cool during hot weather. In addition, the farm recently implemented a new breeding program which has resulted in heifers calving in less than 24 months and peak milk production has risen. To enhance productivity and efficiency, all cows have radio id transponders which include a history of milk production. In 2009, a new double 10 parallel milking parlor was built with several energy efficient attributes. It includes variable speed pumps, tankless hot water, energy efficient lighting, and a cooling system that uses well water to cool the raw milk in tanks. A radiant floor heating system was installed to reduce heating costs during the winter months.



Over 900 customers visit the retail store each day to purchase fresh dairy and pastry products all made on the premises.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a long history working with the Wrights to implement several conservation practices on the farm. Such technical and financial assistance was funded under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). For over 20 years, NRCS staff has worked closely with the Wrights to address several natural resource concerns including soil erosion, water quality, plant health, and water quantity.

Among the numerous conservation practices implemented, NRCS provided cost share assistance to design and install a waste storage facility which is particularly beneficial when it is difficult to access the field during wet or cold weather. In addition, NRCS designed and installed a composting facility where the composted manure is used on the farm and also sold to residential homeowners. Other conservation practices implemented include a highly erodible land plan for fields that they own and operate and a filter strip and catch basin that address drainage and water quality issues on the property. A comprehensive nutrient management plan was completed for Wright's Dairy Farm in 2004 and is currently being updated to reflect changes made to the operation. Additional NRCS practices planned for the future include addressing waste utilization to increase the amount of compost produced and sold, installing roof runoff structures that divert water from the barns, and building a temporary manure storage area to help with the management of waste from the milking parlor and heifer barn.



The cows eat a balanced diet consisting of hay, corn silage, and grain supplemented with vitamins and minerals.



NRCS Soil Conservationist Nina Bhattacharyya consults with Clayton Wright on the conservation plan.

Wright's Dairy is a prime example of how a successful partnership with NRCS promotes conservation of natural resources while creating local, high quality dairy and bakery products which can be enjoyed by local consumers.

Resources

by Eric, Boettger, Resource Conservationist; Gary Casabona, State Biologist; Chris Modisette, State Forester; and Reena Shaw, Agriculture Economist

The Resource Team continues to provide assistance through:

Technology Transfer in the form of training, technical tools, standards, and jobsheets required for technical assistance.

Program Delivery by assisting in the management process for effective program delivery during the fiscal year which includes setting priorities and goals in addition to addressing resource needs in the State.

The Resource staff has been working with RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) – Office of Water Resources and the RI NRCS State Technical Committee on the selection of HUC -12 watersheds which are targeted under the 2012 Water Quality Initiative. The selected watersheds are as follows:

- 1) Sakonnet River watershed
- 2) Upper East Passage watershed
- 3) Tomaquag Brook – Pawcatuck River watershed

The Resource staff has been working with RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) – Office of Water Resources in adopting the new NRCS - Nutrient Management (590) standard for Rhode Island.

The Resource Team, through an agreement with the URI Cooperative Extension, offered a Nutrient Management Training for RI NRCS Planners, Technical Service Providers (TSP), and District employees.

Wildlife

Gary Casabona has been involved with the new Working Lands for Wildlife initiative, attending planning meetings with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, visiting landowner sites with field staff, and coordinating the nomination of species for next year's program (beginning in Fall 2012). The list of seven species nationwide is expected to expand to approximately 20. Several of these species will likely occur in Rhode Island. Currently, the only Rhode Island focal species is the New England cottontail rabbit.

Agronomy

The Resource Team participated in the Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association's (RIRLA) annual meeting March 19, 2012. Employees from RI NRCS were there in support of our partner and to answer questions about our programs.

Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist

Technical Soil Services:

The soil staff completed 13 on-site soil and geophysical investigations providing technical soils assistance to the staff and partners. The soil staff along with the resource staff has been working on updating the State Offsite Methods for Wetland Conservation provisions of the Food Security Act. The new methods will replace the current state mapping conventions and provide a more accurate protocol to identify and map wetland areas.

Outreach:

A talk about the soils of Rhode Island was given at the RI Forestry Conservatory Organization winter workshop. Most of the attendees were private landowners who own forest land. The talk was focused on soil forestry interpretations, how to use soil maps, sources of soils information and other resource data. Soil Scientist Jill Phillips staffed the NRCS booth at the URI Job Fair.



New Soils Data planned for March:

In January at URI's East Farm Pesticide Training Facility, soil staff conducted a field review of the fresh water subaqueous soil survey which will make Rhode Island the first state to complete such a survey. Several soil scientists reviewed the soil cores and data to propose new soil series. Version 4 of the RI Soil Survey Spatial and Tabular data-set will be released by the end of April. This will feature many improvements to the RI soils data which undergo yearly revisions to improve quality. The new version will include a re-map of Block Island, Phase II of the RI Coastal Zone Soil Survey, the first ever example of a fresh water subaqueous soil survey, and general edits of the older version.

Soil scientists analyze soil cores from several RI fresh water sites to document new soil series.

Notice to Hispanic and/or Women Farmers or Ranchers

Compensation for Claims of Discrimination

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic, or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation.

This means you may be eligible if:

1. you sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period; and
2. the loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, or approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
3. you believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic, or your being female.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims packet, you can call the Farmer and Rancher Call Center at 1-888-508-4429 or access the following website:
www.farmerclaims.gov

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community.

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

USDA Cannot Provide Legal Advice to You.