United States Department of Agriculture
NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Spring 2004

A Message from Gus

Feels like spring. Grass is green. Farmers are in the field. Trees have most of their leaves. The occasional, all too rare thunderstorm. As the poet said, In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of – CSP. (I didn't say he was a GOOD poet!)

Over the last few months, the CSP rule has been kicked around by plenty of people. During the next few months that pattern is likely to continue. There will be plenty of opportunities for criticism. We will do some things wrong. Ideas that seemed logical and worthy won't pan out as planned. And some folks will use those glitches to say, 'See. I told ya' so.'

We need to keep our eye on the greater prize. This program has such great potential. For the first time, we can reward those that do good stewardship. We have other programs that can help address the 'worst first' approach. CSP puts the best and most eager first.

We will be working with the folks in the Moses Coulee this summer to initiate the program. We're not expecting a perfectly smooth ride, but we are encouraged by the enthusiasm and willingness of the local people. We will have the opportunity to reward the good stewards in that watershed. And we'll learn from this summer's experience and provide a better program next year.

Ah. . . . Springtime.

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Welcome

Nick Somero, Soil Conservationist, Longview Field Office, effective 4/18/04

Bari Williams, Soil Conservationist, Port Orchard Field Office, reassigned from NRCS in New Mexico, effective 4/18/04

Amanda Wright, Soil Scientist, Toppenish Field Office, transferred from Colville Forest Service, effective 4/18/04

Bela Espinoza, Office Automation Assistant, Spokane State Office, reassigned from ARS in Pullman, effective 5/2/04

Larry Caudill, Biological Aid (Plants), Plant Material Center, effective 5/9/04

Amber Colcord, Biological Aid (Plants), Plant Material Center, effective 5/9/04

Linda Appel, Student Trainee (Rangeland Management), Okanogan Field Office, effective 5/16/04

Kimberly Galland, Student Trainee (Soil Conservation), Olympia Field Office, effective 5/16/04

Issac Gorton, Biological Science Aid (Plants), Plant Material Center, effective 5/16/04

John Wandschneider, Biological Science Aid (Plants), Plant Material Center, effective 5/23/04

Danielle Rohde, Student Trainee (Soil Conservation), Davenport Field Office, effective 5/23/04

James Davis, Student Trainee (Engineering), return to duty, Wenatchee Field Office, effective 5/23/04

Josephine Kamkoff, Student Trainee (Soil Conservation), Mt. Vernon Field Office, effective 6/3/04

Paul Gleason, Student Trainee (Soil Conservation), Puyallup Field Office, effective 6/20/04

Promotion

Kelly Sprute, Public Affairs Specialist, Olympia Area Office, effective 3/21/04.

Julie Henning, Student Trainee (Biology), Montesano Field Office, effective 5/2/04

Misty Seaboldt, promoted and reassigned to Spokane Field Office as Forester, effective 5/16/04

Richard Erickson, promoted and reassigned to Resource Conservationist in Ritzville Field Office, effective 5/30/04

Reassignments

Chad Dunnahoo, reassigned to the Spokane State Office, as Conservation Security Program Coordinator, effective 4/18/04.

Shelly Lassiter, reassigned to the Spokane State Office, as Soil Conservationist, effective 4/18/04.

Eva Muller, reassigned to the MLRA Staff in Bozeman State Office in Montana, effective 4/18/04.

Paul Dorning, reassigned as RC&"D Coordinator for Upper Columbia RC&D office, effective 5/16/04

Best of Luck

Deborah Black, Hydraulic Engineer, Olympia Field Office, effective 3/9/04.

Marlene Tilton, Student Trainee (Rangeland Management), Colville Field Office, effective 4/22/04.

Valerie Fuchs, Student Trainee (Engineer), Spokane State Office, effective 5/6/04.

Thanks from your HR office

The Human Resource Office continues to evolve. We have finally filled the Human Resource Assistant position permanently (it has been a temporary position for over three years) with Kathy Dickerson. Cheryle Miller came on board in November which relieved Eileen from doing two (or more like three jobs!). The Training Officer, Sherre Ingle, is now on board as well.

We realize many of you have requested items from HR, such as retirement computations, which have not been handled in as timely of a manner as we want to provide. There were also delays in getting jobs advertised, reviewed and certificates issued. But, Alaska is in the process of establishing a Human Resources office. There will be a period of adjustment until the turnover of all processing, opf's and workload is complete. Once that is completed, we can concentrate on taking the best care of our Washington employees that we can possibly do.

I think it is a true success story that HR has provided the quality service they have under the conditions they have faced and the number of employees they service. Thanks to all of you for your patience when you requested anything from HR, thanks for the many positive comments about Eileen and Kathy, and thanks for being the great bunch of employees you all are. We're proud to be part of NRCS in Washington State.

Introducing

Ryan Tyler

Born to **Tom & Tami Allen (Colfax Field Office)**
Birthdate: 5/13/2004
Birthtime: 5:18 AM
Weight: 7lbs
Length: 19.5in

USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
316 W. Boone Ave., Ste 450
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"Soil Survey Team Digs in to Promote Soil and Water Stewardship"

Submitted by Carolyn Kelly, District Manager, Skagit Conservation District

The Mount Vernon Soil Survey Team recently helped promote Soil and Water Stewardship Week in Skagit County. The 2004 theme was "The Living Soils" which fit the team's "profile" of expertise to a tee. Jason Outlaw, Soil Scientist, helped judge posters for the Skagit Conservation District's annual poster contest. After much review and thought, a winner was selected from nearly sixty entries that the judges felt conveyed the theme the best, as well as showing originality and artistic ability.

Mike Reagan, Team Project leader, accompanied the Skagit CD on a trip to visit with the Skagit County Commissioners, where a proclamation was declared for the week. Mike then had an opportunity to speak about soil surveys, how they were compiled, and their usefulness in local land use planning. For anyone who was unable to make the meeting, Mike's presentation was re-broadcast several times on the local cable channel!

Team members Jason Outlaw, Toby Rodgers, and Eric Dahlke also had an opportunity to share their knowledge of soils while hosting a station at the Skagit CD's annual 6th Grade Conservation Tour. Over 500 local students participated in the event to provide an outdoor educational experience of natural resource issues. Although two days spent in the sun on the banks of Friday Creek might sound like an easy tour of duty, the team faced unrealized challenges – the area was teeming with beautiful rocks (soil in the making) just perfect for throwing into the water or at other targets! It's ok – the guys know how to duck, and the team received high marks for their presentation from the attending teachers!

Many thanks to the Mount Vernon Soil Survey Team for helping support conservation education in Skagit County!

Mike Reagan, Soil Survey Project Leader, gets a hug from the Blossom, the Skagit CD Treeture after a great presentation to the Skagit County Commissioners.

The clock ticks as Jason Outlaw, Soil Scientist, and Brenda Cunnigham, local artist and Skagit Land Trust employee, work to select a winner for the poster contest

Sunfield – A Community Farm

Submitted by Art Greenberg, R&D Coordinator

The Sunfield Education Association, located in Jefferson County, in cooperation with the North Olympic Peninsula RC&D, has prepared and submitted a Community Food Project grant application to the USDA CSREES (Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service) in the amount of $241,000.

The Sunfield Education Association's mission is to provide programs in education, sustainable agriculture and land stewardship that strive to engage the hands, awaken the mind, and nurture understanding for the connection between the earth and its inhabitants.

Sunfield's goals:

- Create a replicable model of sustainable, organic, biodiversified agriculture.
- Restore a working farm of 50 acres to include diversified crops and responsible animal husbandry.
- Provide safe and healthy local foods for the community. Benefit will accrue to consumers county-wide who may purchase the organic produce and animal products grown on the farm and distributed through Community Supported Agriculture programs and local organic food outlets, such as the local Food Co-op and Farmer's Market.
- Create hands-on learning experiences for children and adults in sustainable agricultural and land stewardship.
- Include the whole of the Puget Sound region within the scope of the project.
- Network with local families, businesses, and organizations.
- Create a Community Supported Agriculture program that will allow low-income families to develop a sense of self-sufficiency by helping to produce their own food. These families will be invited to work on the land in exchange for farm products.
- Develop youth entrepreneurial projects to teach business and interpersonal skills, create small-business opportunities and training for young people, and create community connections for youth.
- Organize seasonal festivals around the activities of the farm to maintain community involvement with Sunfield Farm.
- Create a local hands-on learning center for agricultural and environmental education.
- Provide seasonal overnight facilities for up to 35 children and their teachers.
- Build a K-8 educational facility that will serve as a center for all programs listed above

QUICK NOTE FROM THE QST

The Quality Steering Team (QST) has a new team member! Sherre Ingle, Management and Program Analyst, has joined the team and will represent the State Office and also act as the Liaison with the State Leadership Team (SLT). The QST has recently added e-mail as another option for NRCS employees and partners to contact us with questions, comments and suggestions. Our new email address is QST@wa.usda.gov. Unless you choose to include your name, your comments to the QST sent through email will be anonymous. Over the past couple of months the QST has been working with the SLT to evaluate the need and feasibility of adding voice mail to our field office telephone systems. No final word yet, but a decision is not too far in the future. We have also been attending Washington Association of Conservation District and NRCS meetings seeking suggestions on improving our quality of service. Once all the suggestions are in, we will summarize them for the SLT and begin looking at opportunities to implement some good ideas.

Please feel free to use our new email address, or contact one of your Quality Steering Team members directly:

Dave Brown, Chair, and NRCS East Area Representative, 509-343-2268
Sherre Ingle, NRCS State Office Representative, 509-323-2911
Roger Briggs, NRCS Central Area Representative, 509-754-2463 X112
Jeff Swotek, NRCS West Area Representative, 360-704-7750
Chris Mahelona, Conservation District Representative, 509-924-4635
Bill Broughton, Conservation Commission Representative, (509) 397-5095

The North Central Washington RC&D, working with NRCS in Washington and Washington RC&D Association, will be hosting the 2004 Pacific Rim RC&D Association annual meeting. The meeting will be held in Chelan, Washington, September 26 – 29, 2004.

To learn more about this meeting, go to the PacRim web site at www.pacrimrcd.org and click on annual meetings, then 2004 Chelan.

Feeling stressed? Having financial, legal, alcohol, drug, or marital/family problems? Where can you turn?

Call your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is there to provide 24-hour telephone-counseling and face to face counseling by appointment, for all kinds of problems. The EAP is a no-cost, absolutely confidential source of help, and is available to you and members of your family. The program is separate from your medical benefits, so it doesn't tap into your deductibles or your co-pay dollars, and no problem is too big or too small for the EAP to help with.

Washington State's NRCS Employee Assistance Program is operated by THE SAND CREEK GROUP, Ltd. If you need help, call Sand Creek at 1-888-243-5744 or visit their website at http://www.sandreekeap.com. Take advantage of this wonderful federal benefit. You'll be glad you did!

Washington State Prepares For Implementation of the Conservation Security Program

Submitted by Ross Lahren, ASTC - Programs

During the past several months, the State Office has been working hard in preparation for implementation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Washington State was a host state for a CSP listening session on the proposed rule. In addition, there were eight informational meetings across the State that explained the proposed rules. National Headquarters received over 60,000 comments on the proposed rule. These comments are available on MY.NRCS.

There are four different methods of payments that an eligible participant may receive under the CSP no matter what Tier Level they qualify for.

1. **Base Rental Rate**

- NHQ has drafted County Level Base Rental Rates for Cropland, Irrigated Cropland, Pastureland and Rangeland. These rates were developed using several sources. The State Program Staff has been reviewing these rates and have provided input to NHQ on these rental rates

2. **Existing Practices**

- The State Office Program and Technical staffs, in consultation with Idaho and Oregon, have identified those existing practices that a CSP participant would receive a maintenance payment for. In addition, a maintenance payments has been established

3. **New Practices**

- The State Office Program and Technical staffs, in consultation with Idaho and Oregon, have identified those practices that a CSP participant would receive a one-time installment cost-share payment for. In addition, an average cost has been established for each of these practices.

4. **Enhancements**

- The State Office Program and Technical staffs, in consultation with Idaho and Oregon, have identified those practices that a CSP participant would receive an enhancement payment for. In addition, an enhancement payment has been established for each enhancement activity.

With the anticipation that the CSP Final Rule will be published sometime this summer, the State Office staffs have also been identifying those evaluation and assessment tools that will be necessary to determine applicant's eligibility, Tier Level and natural resource protection. Tim Dring and Gerald Rouse recently spent a couple of days back in Washington D.C. providing assistance to NHQ in developing tools for an applicant to use to assess their level of natural resource protection. Valerie Oksendahl has been working on RUSLE 2, Soil Conditioning Index and the Soil Tillage Intensity Rating for use as assessment tools.

In anticipation of a large training need, utilization of local work groups to identify enhancement activities, coordination of activities between program, technical, and administrative staff, we have assigned Chad Dunnahoo to the Program staff. Chad's responsibilities will include policy development, coordination of activities both within and outside of NRCS, training and program management.

The South Central Team had an Irrigation Planning workshop on March 16 in the Zillah field office. The workshop was organized by Rod Lobos, Civil Engineer for the Central Area and was conducted by Civil Engineering Technicians, Martin Rodriguez and Oscar Tobias. New planners were given tools such as inventory worksheets that directed them to ask the right questions for ongoing EQIP sign-up. They were also informed on the different crops that were grown and the typical types of irrigation that would be used on the particular crop. Typical irrigated farming practices were also discussed for the various crops grown in the Yakima Valley.

The Central Team had an Engineering Technician meeting on April 22 in the Yakima Service Center. The meeting was conducted and organized by Rod Lobos, Civil Engineer for the Central Area.

The meeting began with technician concerns and needs then moved to the distribution of surveying and field marking materials. Use of the Central Area's pipeline spreadsheet was reviewed and irrigation system file documentation was explained. All of the technicians had their laser levels peg tested before breaking for lunch.

Usage of the new digital cameras was explained. Joe Lange, Engineer from Wenatchee, had some unique tips and tricks for the digital camera and accompanying software. Finally, the day was wrapped up with using the new GPS units to mark points around the service center and then downloading them into the computer and bringing them into ArcView.

GRASS BUFFER STRIPS IN WHITMAN COUNTY

Jeff Kuhlmann, Soil Conservationist, St. John

Fall layout of a Grass Buffer Strip on the Tim Gerlitz farm near Endicott,

The first grass buffer strips to be installed under the Conservation Reserve Program occurred in March of 1999. Since that time, the practice has evolved into the current (741) Grass Buffer Strips interim practice. To date, the staff in Whitman County has installed 20,280 acres of grass buffer strips, helping to protect approximately 40,500 acres of cropland from erosion. The installation of grass buffer strips reduces the average erosion rate from about 11 tons per acre per year to less than 5 tons per acre per year. This has saved an average of 380,000 tons per year of soil loss in Whitman County. In addition, soil condition is improved where the perennial vegetation is planted and the grass provides habitat for wildlife.

Grass buffer strips have been very popular among farmers in that they remove the steeper, less productive farmland from production. If correctly installed, they can also improve efficiency by reducing corners and odd areas that tend to be over-farmed. For example, on a 400 acre tract of land we installed approximately 70 acres of grass buffer strips which reduced the operator's tillage time by 30%. Several growers have commented that even when the landowner receives 100% of the CRP payments, the operator's net returns were still higher with installation of grass buffer strips. Greater efficiency, increased returns, and reduction in soil erosion prompted substantial interest in this practice in Whitman County as well as other areas in the Palouse. Agri-businesses are also supportive of the practice as demonstrated by numerous positive comments received from field reps. They are pleased with what the practice does for the environment and that the majority of farmland remains in production.

Grass buffer strips are generally laid out in the spring and fall. The best option has been to get the field all in spring crop stubble. This sometimes takes substantial commitment from the farmer as many have divided slopes. This requires farmers to re-crop to get the entire field into spring stubble for layout. Once the areas are flagged the operator marks the strips out with some type of tillage equipment, usually a disc. Typically, the buffers are direct seeded in the spring using a conventional drill equipped with press wheels or packed after seeding if the drill is not equipped with press wheels. The grass mix typically used includes Intermediate Wheatgrass, 'Manchar' Smooth Bromegrass, and 'Cover' Sheep Fescue. This mix has been fairly easy to get established and aggressively competes with weeds once established.

Newly seeded Grass Buffer Strips on the Tim Blumenshein farm

Grass buffer strips are custom designed for each farm. They decrease erosion, prevent degradation of the lower slope soils by limiting deposition of marginal soils from eroded slopes, and provide habitat for wildlife. Grass buffer strips also promote greater tillage efficiency, improvement in water quality, and increased net returns for the farm. For further information about this practice, contact your local NRCS office.

Ralph Schmidt Retires After 42 Years Of Federal Service

Ralph's life story is about adventures and changes. It all began with his childhood on a grain and livestock farm in Whitman County, Washington. On the farm there was always something to be done where he learned a variety of skills and hard work. In high school, in addition to the academics, he was active in sports and the Future Farmers of America where he became an officer of the State Association. Upon graduating as valedictorian, he enrolled in engineering at WSU following the footsteps of his grandfather and uncle. While in college, he was selected as one of 50 farm youths to represent the United States in a farm youth and cultural exchange program. He was a delegate to Norway and had the opportunity of living with families and learning about their farm life during his 7 months in the country.

Returning to WSU, he graduated on Sunday afternoon June 3, 1962 and reported to work with the SCS on the morning of June 4th at Moses Lake. Now, 42 years later we are celebrating his graduation from WSU and retirement from the NRCS (formerly SCS). However in the interim there have been many changes in his life such as military duties in Europe, 37 years of marriage, raising a family, moves, job changes and changes within the federal government. His wife Lynn, an English and Literature teacher at University High School, will also retire this June. His two children, Todd and Sarah are married and have very successful careers. Todd, a chemical engineer with Intel, is on a startup team for a new factory in Ireland. Sarah is a Program Manager for Safeco Insurance in Seattle. Ralph's three grandsons are also in Ireland, which he and Lynn are planning to visit this summer.

Additional locations and duties for the NRCS have included: Field Office Engineer at Prosser and Sunnyside, Area Engineer for Northwest Washington at Seattle, Assistant State Conservation Engineer at Spokane and his present assignment as Regional Design Engineer. He has been located in the Spokane State Office for nearly 30 Years. Currently he is active in the community serving on the county elections, Habitat for Humanity, and on the board of directors for Twin Lakes, Idaho and the Episcopal Church. For the past 5 years, he has actively served on and helped with the logistics for construction and medical teams in Belize, Central America. Construction projects have included remodeling residences and a hurricane shelter in response to Hurricane Keith in 2000. And the construction of a 16-station computer class room for a school earlier this year.

Ralph's future includes helping others to establish and strive to achieve their dreams.

NRCS PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO THE TULE GUN CLUB AND YAKAMA NATION

By Larry Cooke, Environmental Specialist

NRCS has been providing technical assistance to the Tule Gun Club through the Wetland Reserve Program for almost five years. A permanent easement has been secured and a conservation plan was developed with the objective of restoring the area back to a wetland. Who is the Tule Gun Club? Presently the club consists of eight owners who have the goal of managing their 140 acres for waterfowl and other wildlife habitat. The property is in "fee status" within the boundaries of the Yakama Indian Reservation. The club is one of the oldest clubs in the Toppenish Creek watershed. Records show the club was in existence in the 1920's.

Roger Amermann, Tribal Liaison, Yakama Tribal Office, is the NRCS representative and lead planner for the conservation plan and its implementation. Both Roger and Dave Guenther, District Conservationist, put together a team of resource specialists that include Larry Cooke, Environmental Specialist, Tim Dring, State Biologist and Mark Schuller, Fish Biologist. The team's assignment is to assist Roger with finalizing the formulation and analysis of alternatives. The preferred alternative that was identified previously was set to go through ESA consultation and the permit process with the Tribe. The team recognized that another alternative appeared to be better than the already selected alternative. This "new alternative" would be contingent on the neighboring property (about 400 acres) joining in with wetland restoration and delivering water to the Tule Gun Club property as gravity flow. The neighboring property is managed by the Tribe and is both Tribal and Individual Trust lands. The Tribe has recently requested to enter into a cost-share agreement through the WRP Program. The new adjacent Tribal lands and the Tule Gun Club property amount to 540 acres of Toppenish Creek floodplain being brought into the WRP Program. These two planning units are now part of a 16,000 acre Tribal wetland restoration area. In future years, the Tribe plans to add an additional 12,000 acres to the watershed restoration project in the watershed.

The NRCS planning process was put to use and it shows that when we consider our potential effects to the immediate area, to the neighbors and to the watershed, the selected alternative might not be the best one when we take into account cumulative impacts.

The plan is now being revised to reflect a new chosen alternative that is acceptable to the Tule Gun Club, the WRP program goals and objectives, and the Yakama Tribe. Roger and the team will proceed with the permit process and ESA consultation after the engineered design phase is completed.

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