



## 2011 Annual Report Plant Materials Program (PMP)

*This report contains fiscal year activity for the state of Colorado from the time period of October 2010 to September 2011.*

### Who We Are

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers and others care for the land. NRCS has six mission goals that include high quality, productive soils; clean and abundant water; healthy plant and animal communities; clean air; an adequate energy supply; and working farms and ranchlands.

### Vision

Productive Lands -  
Healthy Environment

### Mission

Helping People Help the Land

*“As a Plant Materials Specialist, I integrate the technical information and research developed at the Plant Materials Centers into NRCS’s standards and specifications, programs, conservation planning, and application.”*

**Christine Taliga,  
Plant Materials Specialist**



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### The Program

The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Plant Materials Program (PMP) is to develop, test, and transfer plant science technology to provide timely and effective vegetative solutions to meet customer and natural resource needs.

Plant Materials Centers (PMC) evaluate the variability among plant species across habitat and range gradients and select plants that will perform best in the environment of concern and develop propagation and harvesting techniques for those selected plants.

Plant Materials Specialists integrate the technical information and research developed at the PMC’s into NRCS’s standards and specifications, programs and conservation planning & application.

Specialists also provide training for Field Offices and Partners on planting and restoration techniques, seeding and seed mixes, plant identification and other related areas.

The Plant Releases and technology developed at PMC’s are incorporated into the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and become standards for conservation practices implemented on public and private lands. Over 70 percent of the plant species listed in the FOTG were selected by the Plant Materials Program.

### Current Program Emphasis

1. Integrate plant technology information into NRCS technical documents.
2. Address emerging conservation needs with national action plans for:
  - Climate change
  - Transition to organic production
  - Air quality
  - Energy conservation
  - Pollinators
  - Plant data collection

3. De-emphasize cultivar development (source identified or tested class releases), emphasis of ‘minor’ species for great species diversity.

The Colorado Plant Materials program’s needs are addressed by four plant centers including the Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center, the Manhattan Kansas Plant Center, the Los Lunas Plant Center, and the Knoxville Texas Plant Center.

### 2011 Projects Include:

- Methods of interseeding and diversifying high mountain rangeland in Larimer County
- Testing and evaluating applicable pollinators for the eastern foothills and southern plains
- Testing and demonstrating applicable conservation plants post irrigation in the San Louis Valley
- Inter- Center Bottlebrush Squirreltail Strain Trials to document performance differences of the selections in common gardens located at sites representing diverse western habitats
- Development of Indian Ricegrass selections adapted to Silty-Clay-Loam Sites within the Southern Rocky Mountain Region to develop Indian ricegrass selections best adapted to Silty-Clay-Loam Sites of the Southern Rocky Mountain Region by collecting and evaluating native accessions from sites with 35% or greater clay content.
- Evaluate conservation practice effects on grazing lands via the ALMANAC (Agricultural Land Management Alternative with Numerical Assessment Criteria) Inter-center Project, a national collaborative effort to measure plant growth data.

# NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY

## On-Farm Pilot Project Tests Efficacy of Native Plant Materials

Carl Wood continues a tradition of conservation on his family's ranch in the Williams Fork Valley in Grand County, Colorado, where he and his wife Deb own and operate the Wood Cattle Co.

Over 1,855 acres of the Wood Ranch is high, dry, and rolling country—rangeland whose productivity might reach 1,000 pounds per acre in a good year.

Carl has long worked to improve this productivity using careful grazing management, water developments to distribute livestock impact, and brush beating to thin dense stands of sage. He has also applied his inventor's mind to the problem of productivity.

Many years ago, Carl realized that the native bushes that catch snow along ridgelines might be put to useful service—that these same plants, if grown in windbreaks, could deposit snow into drifts whose moisture, slowly percolating into soil, might coax some added measure of productivity to the land. Carl waited and figured, but didn't have the resources to test his idea.

Then in 2011, Carl enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program and began an On-Farm Pilot Project coordinated by the NRCS Colorado Plant Materials Program.

The goal of the On-Farm Pilot Project is to showcase activities with proven environmental benefit not widely adopted in local community.

The Wood's On-Farm Pilot Project aims to test the efficacy of native plant materials and other strategies in establishing windbreaks for snow deposition on remote rangeland sites.

In October 2011, the Woods contracted with Victor Mendoza, experienced landscaper based out of Greeley, to install the windbreaks. In less than a week, working dawn to dusk and through sleet and sunshine, Victor and his crew harvested 124 native serviceberry bushes from the Wood Ranch and transplanted these same bushes into 1,000 feet of windbreak. Bushes ranged in size from 3 to 10 feet high.



**A native serviceberry bush from the Wood Ranch. A total of 124 bushes were transplanted to establish windbreaks.**



**Carl Wood and his wife Deb talk about the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program's On-Farm Pilot Project.**

Next spring, the Woods will finish planting the second row of the windbreak—Caragana and Rocky Mountain Juniper from the Colorado State Seedling Tree Nursery.

The Woods' commitment to this project shines through—from conception, to planning, to implementation.

Though one might measure success in terms of surviving trees, drifted snow, or added productivity, in some ways the best measure of success is Carl Wood himself. His experience, know-how, and "Get-'er-done" common sense deliver a potent message: Take an interest, take a chance, and try something new.