



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

Local Grower Thrives on Both New and Old Ideas

“They [NRCS staff] tend to see a lot more in not just the county, but the state, so they bring a different value to the table,”

*—Paul Barger,
walnut & almond grower*



Barger's Practices

- Installed hedgerows to improve pollinator habitat and attract more beneficials to his property.
- Installed a wetland to provide safe habitat for local waterfowl.
- Entered into two conservation easements to keep his land in agriculture forever.

By Brett Johnson
The Davis Enterprise
Photos: Phil Hogan, NRCS

For Paul Barger, a walnut and almond grower in Davis, practices that are centuries-old and the latest farming technologies are of equal importance when it comes to managing pests, water and nutrients for his produce.

Hedgerows, used in Europe more than 5,000 years ago, are filling a necessary role in controlling weeds and attracting beneficial insects to kill pests for the grower. The practice of planting rows of shrubs is also intended to prevent erosion and absorb excess water.

Not far from the archaic hedgerows lies an advanced water management system. A device called a neutron probe monitors moisture levels on the orchard, which Barger relies on to adjust irrigation and enhance efficiency. His sprinklers also spray liquid fertilizer accordingly.

“Way more scientific than I ever thought it would be,” said Barger, who earned the Cooperator of the Year award in 2011 from the Yolo County Resource Conservation District for his innovation in conservation.

However, none of this would have been so conveniently implemented in the orchard without the support provided by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, an agency he partnered with to bolster his 10-year-old operation.



Paul Barger's walnut and almond ranch in Davis sports a recently planted native plant hedgerow established by Florin High School students through the Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship program, which engages California high school students in habitat restoration projects.

Partners in Conservation

- Yolo County Resource Conservation District
- Yolo Land Trust
- SLEWS

Florin High School students worked as part of SLEWS, a youth program administered by the Center for Land-Based Learning (located in Winters) that partnered with NRCS to install Barger's hedgerow.

In total, their efforts helped to install 230 shrubs, 3,650 plugs of grasses, sedges and rushes, 40 forb plugs, and 5 bee blocks.

Barger has worked with the conservation agency through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a voluntary program that provides technological and financial assistance to agricultural producers.

EQIP has shared costs of many of the conservation practices that Barger has established on his land, said Phil Hogan, the Natural Resources Conservation Service's district conservationist.

Farmers and ranchers who are on eligible land and have a natural resource concern may apply for EQIP program benefits anytime. Contracts are issued from the agency based on an evaluation of local priorities.

"These contracts provide financial assistance to help implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns," Hogan said. "And for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland.

"In addition, a purpose of EQIP is to help producers meet federal, state, tribal and local environmental regulations."

Conservation methods Barger has implemented also include cover cropping and a riparian restoration on Dry Slough, including building an adjacent wetland for local waterfowl.

There is nothing that can undo his efforts, due to two conservation easements managed by the Yolo Land Trust, which bar any future development on the property. These easements ensure that it will remain as farmland forever.

The advances he has made with conservation on his property, Barger explained, are in part thanks to his fruitful involvement with the EQIP program.

"They tend to see a lot more in not just the county, but the state, so they bring a different value to the table — statewide experience working with farmers (who) harvest the same stuff that we do," Barger said.

A walnut in its husk and shell on one of Yolo County grower Paul Barger's trees.

