

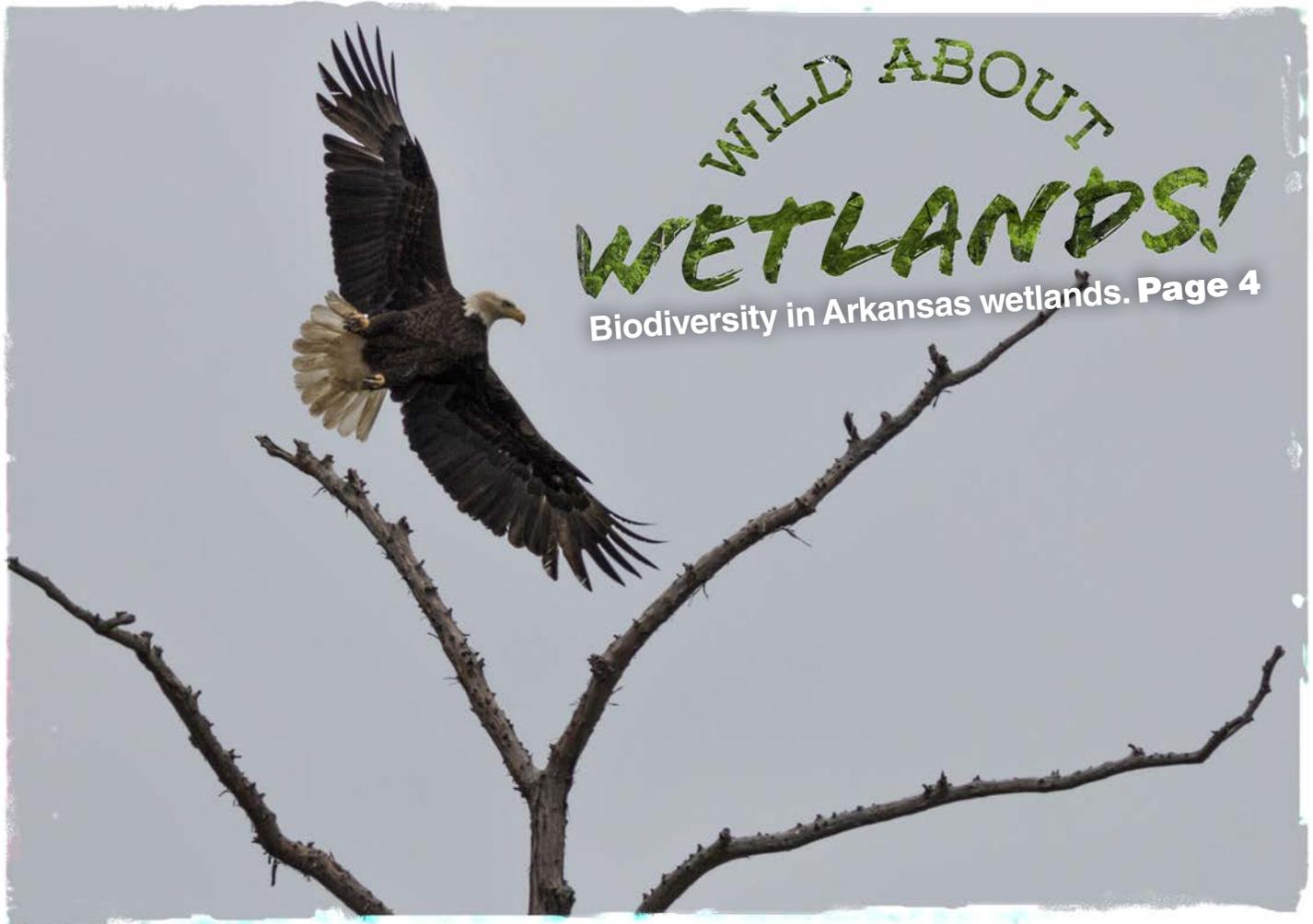
ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Second Quarter
2017

Room 3416, Federal Building, 700 W. Capitol Ave., Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: (501) 301-3100 • Website: www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov

Second Quarter
2017



Spring is here. Time to review your contract!
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Earth Team program gets a new State Coordinator and Area Coordinators. New year, new team, new goals!
Page 16



NRCS working with area youth for soil judging competitions.
Page 12

Helping People Help the Land

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

From the State Conservationist

We are proud to present our second quarter newsletter. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help foresters, ranchers and farmers implement conservation practices to address natural resource concerns on Arkansas's private lands to maintain productivity.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has made great progress in voluntary conservation efforts over the past several years. For FY17, Arkansas NRCS has chosen three priorities to help us accomplish our mission: 1) excellent delivery of Farm Bill programs; 2) enhancing conservation planning ahead of contracts; and 3) improving traditional training and assistance.

We continue our efforts in cultivating and expanding our partnership network, accomplishing our mission better and faster by sharing our successes along the way so that more people know who we are, what we do, and the valuable services NRCS provides. This serves as a valuable reminder to us on the importance of our traditional conservation partners, starting with the conservation districts; the need to continue exploring and expanding our partnership network; the need to continue delivering excellent services, conservation planning, technical assistance and Farm Bill

implementation; and the need to celebrate and share our successes.

National Volunteer Week is April 23–29. I want to thank our Earth Team volunteers for being valued members of our conservation team! At Arkansas NRCS, we are very proud of our volunteers' talents and commitment to conservation. Please join with us in celebrating National Volunteer Week as we enjoy the conservation contributions Earth Team volunteers are making in Arkansas.

The purpose and passion for conservation is shared by many in our state. With the tools and resources provided through the Farm Bill, NRCS and all our conservation partners continue to make a major difference not only in soil health, water quality, water quantity and wildlife habitat, but also in the lives of producers and the communities they work in.

Working together with all our conservation partners and Earth Team volunteers, our NRCS professionals are continuing to make improvements and deliver outstanding assistance throughout Arkansas helping people help the land.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Sullivan".

Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

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The Arkansas Conservation News is published quarterly by the Arkansas Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Please send submissions to [Reginald L. Jackson](#), State Public Affairs Specialist, or [Creston Shrum](#), Public Affairs Specialist at: Room 3416, Federal Bldg., 700 W. Capitol Ave., Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: (501) 301-3133, Fax: (855) 681-7044

Please send image submissions to [Christopher Willis](#), Visual Information

Specialist. Phone: (501) 301-3167. All submissions are the property of NRCS and may be edited for content or limitations.

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Arkansas Feral Swine Pilot Project

Feral swine have increased their range drastically in the last two decades. In Arkansas, populations of wild pigs have persisted in low numbers for over 150 years, but historically, they were relegated to the more remote areas of the state such as the large, forested river bottoms and the Arkansas highlands.

One factor that has led to their dispersal across the state has been the increased popularity of recreational hog hunting.

Dubbed the “poor man’s grizzly” by many sportsmen, they have been relocated to areas by misinformed hog hunters who believed that they were increasing recreational opportunities by establishing wild pig populations in areas that were historically devoid of feral swine.

Recently, Arkansas recognized that the practice of relocating feral swine was contrary to many resource management goals and the state legislature passed laws making this illegal.

Currently, the best method for removal of an entire sounder involves trapping with bait and utilizing remote accessible cameras and trap gates. In order for this methodology to be effective, cameras must be capable of providing real time photographs so that the trapper can determine when the entire sounder has entered the trap, at which time he can remotely trigger an entrance gate and capture the entire group. This method relies on having adequate monitoring and surveillance in place to determine trap and baiting requirements with as little human disturbance to the bait site as possible.

The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in collaboration with USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), have determined monitoring and surveillance prior to trapping is the point in the process where we may offer the most beneficial assistance to landowners.

Initially, NRCS is partnering with APHIS to identify and educate landowners in these areas. We are also working with University of Arkansas

Extension Service to provide education and demonstrations to landowners. Opportunities exist for conservation districts to become involved with supplying necessary components to this endeavor, such as trap panels and remote gates.

Issues associated with feral swine are multi-faceted and require a coordinated effort that includes eradication, treatment of resource concerns, monitoring and surveillance, and landowner education.

Although NRCS is not able to provide assistance with all aspects of feral hog control, we can provide assistance with the critical monitoring and surveillance aspect, as well as the treatment of damage caused by feral swine through our normal conservation programs.

Since camera stations have been deployed and participants are gathering data on feral swine populations in their areas. Feral swine in most areas are transient and their movements are based on food availability (which is seasonal and variable based on habitat type), life cycle needs, and human disturbance. Participants were advised to monitor populations throughout the fall and winter months and begin trapping efforts after hunting seasons were finished to minimize the human disturbance factor and allow sounders to return to normal and predictable behavior patterns. Feral swine are also wide-ranging and may only return to a particular habitat type annually, when local food sources are abundant.

Arkansas’s targeted focus areas have a common goal which is to collectively

work with our partners to identify, locate and remove feral swine thereby reducing the negative impacts of this species.

It is evident that landowners have demonstrated an interest in working with the partners to manage their feral swine problem. It takes the combined efforts of all the partners to have impact on the feral swine problem.

The feral swine surveillance/monitoring offered by NRCS is an asset to the combined efforts of the partners in targeting the efforts to achieve the highest benefit for the management and control of feral swine. When the surveillance and monitoring reveals feral swine are not present or rarely present due to the associated control efforts, we feel the health of the ecosystem and agricultural related production will increase. If needed, restoration efforts may be initiated to restore the areas damaged by swine activities.

Arkansas identified three priority areas in the state to target Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding to assist landowners and producers.

- Southeast Pilot—Arkansas, Chicot, Desha, and Drew counties
- Northwest Pilot—Pope, Yell, and Searcy counties
- Southwest Pilot—Sevier

NRCS contracts for feral swine monitoring had 59 in number, with \$296,400 being obligated to apply the activity on 31,590 acres.

For additional information, contact NRCS Biologist James Baker, at 501-301-3142 or at james.baker@ar.usda.gov.



Easements

Wild About Wetlands!

Arkansas's wetlands draw an abundance of wintering waterfowl. They are also home to songbirds, wading birds and birds of prey, along with amphibians, reptiles and other animals.

Arkansas agricultural producers have enrolled more than 245,000 acres in the Wetlands Reserve Easements Program (WRE)—previously called the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). NRCS has assisted landowners with easements in 47 counties in every area of the state.

"Wetlands are essential in providing critical habitat needs for a large host of species" says Assistant State Conservationist for Easements Randy Childress.

Besides providing habitat and food for wildlife, wetlands are essential to the health of the environment.

- They serve as floodwater barriers by slowing down the flow of water into creeks and rivers.
- Remove carbon dioxide from the environment.
- Remove toxins from the water supply including phosphorous and nitrogen.
- Decrease sediment flowing into waterways.
- Provide recreational activities.

To learn more about the wetlands program in Arkansas, visit the NRCS website at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov or contact your local USDA NRCS office.



American bullfrog, Crawford county WRE; photo by Creston Shrum



Stilt sandpiper, Prairie county WRE; photo by Christopher Willis



American alligator, Miller county WRE; photo by Creston Shrum

Easements



Bald eagle, Prairie county WRE; photos by Christopher Willis



Cottonmouth, Lonoke county WRE; photo by Christopher Willis



Great blue heron, Woodruff county WRE; photo by Christopher Willis



Bobcat, Miller county WRE; photo by Molly Voeller

Easements

USDA Seeks Project Proposals to Protect and Restore Critical Wetlands

Acting Deputy Agriculture Secretary Michael Young recently announced USDA is investing up to \$15 million in technical and financial assistance to help eligible conservation partners voluntarily protect, restore and enhance critical wetlands on agricultural lands. Restored wetlands improve water quality downstream and improve wildlife habitat, while also providing flood prevention and recreational benefits to communities.

Funding will be provided through the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP), part of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), a Farm Bill conservation program. The partnership is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the leading federal agency for wetland conservation on private lands. Through WREP, states, local units of governments, non-governmental organizations and American Indian tribes collaborate with NRCS through cooperative and partnership agreements. These partners work with tribal and private landowners who voluntarily enroll eligible land into easements to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their properties.

"These strong, locally led partnerships help improve water quality, prevent flooding, enhance wildlife habitat and provide landowners the financial resources needed to voluntarily conserve our lands," Young said.

Easements enable landowners to adopt a variety of conservation practices that

improve the function and condition of wetlands. The voluntary nature of NRCS' easement programs enables effective integration of wetland restoration on working landscapes, providing benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program, as well as benefits to the local and rural communities where the wetlands exist.

"The Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership is one way state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations work with NRCS to increase the number of voluntary conservation projects for targeted, high priority wetland protection, restoration and enhancement," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan.

This year, NRCS is encouraging partners to propose projects that focus on improving water quality as well as habitat on working landscapes in high-priority areas. A number of at-risk

species rely on wetlands, including the American black duck, bog turtle, wood turtle, spotted turtle, Blandings turtle and greater sage-grouse as well as a variety of mussel and fish species.

Proposals must be submitted to the NRCS state office (Room 3416, Federal Building; 700 W. Capitol Ave.; Little Rock, AR 72201) by April 24, 2017. For more information contact Randy Childress Assistant State Conservationist for Easements at 501-301-3131 or visit www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.

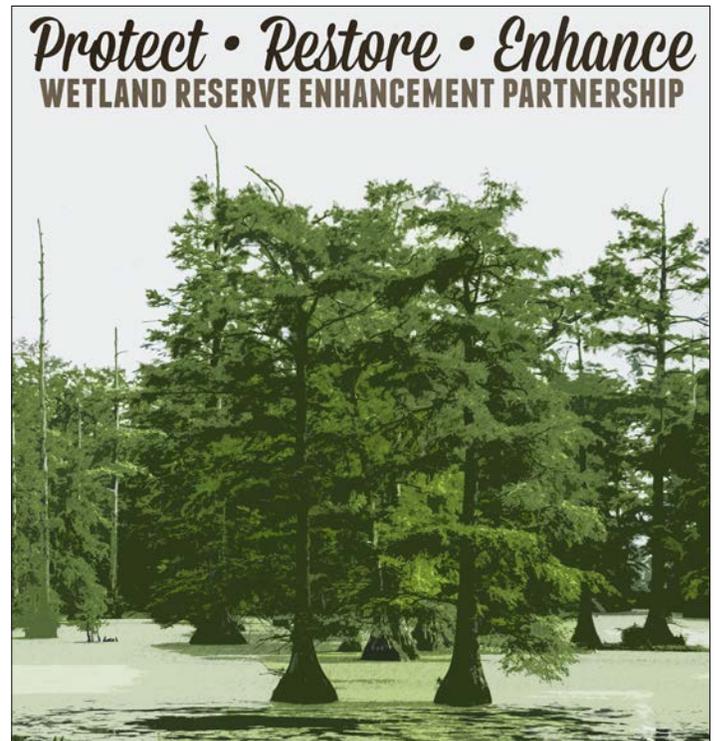


Photo and graphic by Christopher Willis

FIRE SAFETY

Preventing Fires in Litter Stacking Sheds

Recently, on a warm, windy day in northwest Arkansas, a pile of chicken litter in a stacking shed burst into flames and spread through the stacking shed and surrounding fields, which included a mobile home. Fortunately, no one was injured from the fire.

Normally, chicken litter piles heat up to approximately 130° F degrees due to composting. However, if conditions are wetter than normal and there is the right combination of water and chicken waste piled higher than seven feet, the pile can heat up to the point of spontaneous combustion. In this situation, the high winds turned the smoldering pile into a raging inferno.

To prevent this from happening, never stack chicken litter greater than seven feet. Do not attempt to compost dead animals in the litter, since it raises the water content of the litter. If there is smoke coming from a litter pile, do not attempt to pull apart the pile unless you have the fire department close by. Most of the time, a garden hose will not supply enough water to put out the smoldering pile.



Above, a poultry litter stacking shed in Yell County. Dry stack facilities are engineered to withstand weather conditions normally associated with Arkansas. Design features such as post and timber size, post embedment depth, truss design, knee bracing, and structural connections are critical to the integrity of the building. For more information, contact State Conservation Engineer Walt Delp at 501-301-3141.

The following are recommendations on how to properly operate and maintain a poultry litter stacking shed:

1. Prior to the winter storage season, empty the storage facility following the design and approved nutrient management plan. The litter removed from the stacking facility must be utilized at locations, times, rates, and volume dictated by an approved nutrient management plan.
2. Due to fire potential, dry wastes shall not be stacked higher than seven feet at the highest point in any structure and the contact with wood by the litter shall not exceed five feet.
3. Keep the litter dry. Do not wet the litter in hopes of preventing a fire; just the opposite may occur.
4. Avoid placing wet material in contact with dry material. Do not layer new litter on top of old litter. It is better to place new litter beside old litter.
5. Do not compact the material by driving over it or packing it with equipment.
6. Monitor temperatures at different points in the pile frequently. If temperatures exceed 190° F, or if the material is smoldering, prepare to remove material from the facility. This includes notifying the local fire department to be on hand. A smothering pile can burst into flames if exposed to air. A garden hose could be inadequate to extinguish the fire.
7. When moving litter from houses to the facility, push out and loading areas should be scraped and cleaned to avoid spilled litter from entering drainage ways. If possible, when loading litter from the facility, the litter should be loaded in the facility. If loaded outside, all spilled litter shall be scraped and removed.



Graphics by Christopher Willis

Programs

Take Time to Review Your Conservation Contract with Your District Conservationist

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assists farmers, ranchers and foresters with conservation practices on their operations. We would like to remind producers of some key items about NRCS programs that they want to make sure and adhere to.

If you have a contract with any of our programs and you are making changes on your farm for any reason, please make sure that those changes don't put you in violation with any of NRCS's programs. For practices or enhancements you sign up for within NRCS programs, please make sure you carry them out and keep documentation to show that they were implemented as required by NRCS.

It is always a good practice to visit your local NRCS office to periodically review your contract and ensure it is being implemented in accordance to NRCS policy.



New National Organic Farming Handbook Available

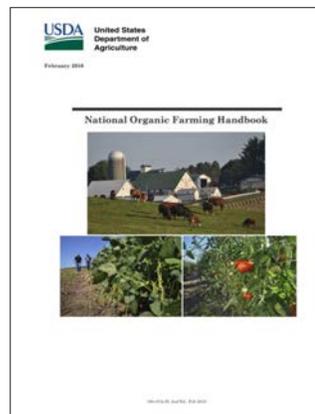
Consumer demand for organic products continues to grow. To meet that demand, more farmers and ranchers are pursuing organic certification and seeking assistance through USDA programs.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is making sure field staff are prepared to work with organic producers and those who want to get into organics. Recently, a new Organic Farming Handbook was released.

The Organic Farming Handbook describes organic systems and identifies key resources to guide conservation planning and implementation on organic farms. Producers and other audiences may also find the handbook useful. This publication explains NRCS

assistance in an easily-understood way, using "information artworks" of our customers and the practices we've helped them put on their land.

The handbook describes conservation practices and key resources for use on organic operations – some the same as those used in conventional operations, such as nutrient management, crop rotations, livestock grazing and pest management. The handbook includes additional practices and resources that address producers'



needs that are identified in the recent Organic Census.

Though this information is specifically for conservation on organic operations, producers of all kinds can benefit from many of the practices in the handbook.

For more information on NRCS assistance for organic producers and the NRCS Organic

Farming Handbook, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/organic or visit your local USDA Service Center.

🌱 🌿 🍅 2017 Organic Agriculture Webinar Series Set 🍅 🌿 🌱

The Organic Webinar Series was developed by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Oregon Tilth for NRCS field staff and may also be of interest to partners, producers and others.

Join the webinars live at 2:00 p.m. at www.conservationwebinars.net. Webinars will also be archived for later viewing. Nearly 50 organic webinars are currently available (use the search term "organic"). Webinars are free, open to all, and brought to you by the NRCS Science and Technology Training Library.



Webinar Dates:

June 6, 2017—Results of a National Transition to Organic Survey

August 1, 2017—Results of Organic Focused Conservation Innovation Grants

October 3, 2017—Non-Ruminant Organic Livestock on Pasture

December 5, 2017—Organic Poultry and Outdoor Access

For more information on NRCS's conservation for organic farmers and ranchers, log on to www.nrcs.usda.gov/organic.

Programs

Conservation Client Gateway: Conservation Assistance at Your Fingertips

Conservation Client Gateway has been a secure web portal that lets producers work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) since May 2015. Farmers, ranchers, foresters and land managers, whether operating as individuals or authorized representatives of business entities, can track their payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance, and electronically sign documents. Conservation Client Gateway provides users the flexibility to determine when they want to engage with NRCS online and when they prefer in-person conservation planning assistance at the local USDA Field Service Center.

Instead of driving to your field office multiple times, Conservation Client Gateway enables producers to request assistance and interact with NRCS field staff online. NRCS field staff will still be available in field offices to work with you face to face. Using Conservation Client Gateway isn't required and is entirely voluntary, giving producers a choice between conducting business online or traveling to a USDA service center. It's simply another option for you to choose what is most convenient for you.

"NRCS's goal is to make it easy and convenient for farmers, foresters and ranchers to work with us," said Mike Sullivan, Arkansas state conservationist.

"Customers can log in 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to electronically sign documents, apply for conservation programs, access conservation plans, report practice completion, or track the status of conservation payments. Through

Conservation Client Gateway, producers have their conservation information at their fingertips and they can save time and gas money by reducing the number of trips to their local USDA service center."

Several NRCS employees throughout Arkansas were recognized for their work in getting producers in their county to utilize Conservation Client Gateway. Those employees are: Kelly Shrable, Aaron Shelton, Tim Durham, Wendy Hendrix, Zach Trublood, Derek Hall, Rebecca Long, Brian Langston, Carissa Ennis, Julie Osborne, Josh Fortenberry, Morgan Watson, Debra



Crawford, Colby Smith, Rick Adams, Roger Cousins, Kenny Crawford, Jody Rodgers, Peggy Bibb, Charles Grose, Joe Tapp, Jim Black, Mike Lantrip, Mike Whitis, Rhonda Foster, Wes Duvall.

Conservation Client Gateway is part of the agency's ongoing Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative, which will feature additional capabilities in the future. For more information about Conservation Client Gateway, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway or visit your local USDA Service Center.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



Years farming: 20

Crops/livestock: Beef Cattle, Rice, Soybeans

Years in CSP: 12

Acres enrolled in CSP: 2,000 acres

Enhancements applied:

- Agrotain on pastures and rice fields
- Drift control utilizing drift control nozzles
- Stock piling grasses
- GPS used to measure acres covered and compared to quantity applied to calibrate rates

Benefits as a result of participating in CSP:

- Increased rice and soybean yield
- Extended grazing period for the cattle

"CSP has been a very good deal for our farm. A lot of these things we were doing anyway, some of them we weren't and it got us to thinking. Ultimately, we do these practices through CSP to minimize losses and produce more yield."

Technical Training

Meetings Highlight Improving Irrigation and Soil Health

During an Irrigation Water Use Efficiency Program held March 7 in Manila, participants heard from a variety of speakers with many years of experience and varying topics. However, the majority of speakers had relatively the same take home message, “conserve water resources and implement new and old technologies to accomplish this goal.” The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) brought two local speakers in to talk about various programs and how they revolve around irrigation and water use efficiency.

Julie Bennett, NRCS soil conservationist in Mississippi County, explained the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the practices that can improve on farm water use and irrigation efficiencies. As she explained the structural practices and the application process, she also mentioned the management practices that pertain to irrigation water management. Irrigation water management is a practice that lets growers dive deeper into their irrigation systems and evaluate their water use, in order to make improvements, and fine tune their system to be better conservationists.

Jason Osborn, NRCS soil conservation technician in Mississippi County, discussed various examples of Conservation Technical Assistance projects and how NRCS offers assistance other than cost incentive programs to local producers and the benefits of utilizing this help.

NRCS/University of Arkansas Extension Irrigation Educator Mike Hamilton also spoke at the meeting. Hamilton works on partnership agreements between the two agencies. He is also involved in writing Irrigation Water Management Plans as well as teaching better irrigation techniques to producers and industry personnel, statewide. Hamilton discussed the advantages of computerized hole selection and how it is beneficial in all polytube irrigation systems.

The Extension service did an excellent job of getting this group of speakers, and coupled with a standing room only turnout, made for a successful and educational meeting for producers and industry professionals alike.



Charolette Bowie, Civil Engineer, Lonoke Technical Center, speaks to a crowd in Oil Trough March 8, about irrigation water management and soil health.



Jeremy Huff, grazing land specialist, demonstrates the rainfall simulator to a crowd in Oil Trough March 8.



(left) Mike Hamilton, irrigation educator, NRCS/University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, speaks about partnership agreements. (above) Julie Bennett, soil conservationist in Mississippi County, discusses the EQIP program.

Outreach Meeting Held in Helena for Minority Farmers

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) National Water Management Center (NWMC) in Little Rock recently partnered with the National Black Growers Council in Arkansas to host an outreach meeting in Helena for minority farmers from Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi. Topics discussed during the meeting included USDA Outreach and NRCS programs and initiatives overview. Guest speakers included Melleny Cotton, USDA NRCS program analyst for Conservation Innovation Grants in Washington, D.C., John Lee, USDA NRCS NWMC natural resources specialist, and from Arkansas NRCS Charlie Williams, USDA StrikeForce coordinator, and Alvin Peer, outreach coordinator.



Alvin Peer, Arkansas NRCS outreach coordinator, discusses NRCS initiatives and programs with farmers during an outreach meeting in Helena.

Photo by Reginald L. Jackson



Melleny Cotton, USDA NRCS program analyst for Conservation Innovation Grants in Washington, D.C., speaks with producers during an outreach meeting in Helena.

Photo by Reginald L. Jackson

NRCS Observes Black History Month

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) Service and the Arkansas Chapter of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees, hosted a Black History Month Observance February 16 at Philander Smith College in Little Rock. The theme for the program was "The Value of Collaboration: Working Together for the Betterment of Our Communities." The featured speaker for the program was James E. Tillman, Sr., NRCS Acting chief for conservation, in Washington, D.C.

During the program, Erica Westbrook, Arkansas NRCS assistant state conservationist (ASTC) for field operations Northwest, received the annual Chester S. Durley Award 'in honor of outstanding contributions to NRCS.' Westbrook is the first female African American ASTC for field operations.

Chester S. Durley (1915–1987) was Arkansas's first full-time African American USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS now NRCS) employee and soil conservationist in Arkansas (in the Marion field office). He earned a B.S. degree at Arkansas Agricultural Mechanical and Normal College at Pine Bluff (now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff) and a MS degree from Michigan State University. In 1966, SCS promoted Durley to district conservationist where he served until his retirement in 1979. Durley was an active role model and left a profound legacy in his West Memphis community.



Derinda Smith, NRCS district conservationist at the Clarendon Field Service Center, presents a Certificate of Appreciation to NRCS Acting Chief for Conservation James E. Tillman, Sr. who gave remarks at the annual NRCS Black History Month Observance at Philander Smith College in Little Rock. Photo by Reginald L. Jackson



At left, Jena Moore, NRCS Arkansas Civil Rights Advisory Committee chair person, presents the Chester S. Durley award to Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations Erica Westbrook at the annual Black History Month Observance February 16.

Photo by Reginald L. Jackson

NRCS WORKING WITH AREA YOUTH FOR SOIL EVENTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Resource Soil Scientists David Hargis, Marie Ross, and Richard Vaught, play a big part in educating youth in soil science and land use through FFA Land Judging events at the local, district and state levels. Traditionally, land judging emphasis has been placed almost entirely on uses for agricultural production; however, as we become more urbanized, uses of land for non-production purposes becomes equally important.

Students learn to recognize soil clues, or factors, to use in classifying land. These factors tell us how intensively we can use land and still maintain top production over a long period of time. These factors can be used to determine what limitations land might have from many engineering uses. Some of these factors include: evaluating soil texture, depth, slope, erosion, permeability, internal drainage, and surface runoff. Students also learn how to read and apply fertilizer recommendations.

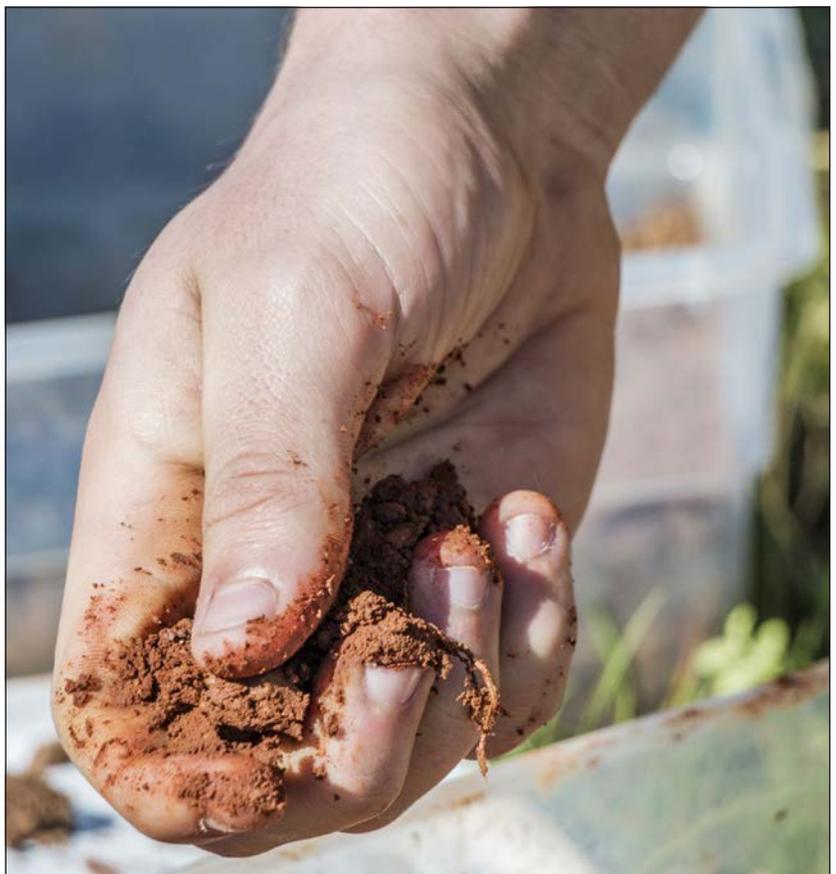
Through these activities, the resource soil scientists help youth in Arkansas understand land, determine what makes it productive and useful, and how to treat it.



Soil scientist Marie Ross reads out the results of the soils competition at the Mine Creek Forestry and Land Judging Competition in Nashville March 1. Caddo Hills, pictured, won the land judging competition. Photos by Christopher Willis



Above, a student takes soil measurements at the Mine Creek Forestry and Land Judging Competition. At right, a student grades a soil sample based on texture and composition.



Announcements

2016 NRCS Arkansas Annual Report Now Available

The 2016 Arkansas NRCS Annual Report is available on the Arkansas NRCS website. The document summarizes the hard work and commitment of the many conservation professionals and producers who work together putting conservation on the ground.

The first Soil Conservation Service Chief, Hugh Hammond Bennett, had a strong conservation ethic. His message was clear: “take care of the land and the land will take care of you.” The conservation movement that started back in the 1930s with his efforts and many other early conservationists, is alive and well today. NRCS worked with Arkansas farmers, ranchers, and foresters this past year to assist in conservation efforts with the goal of high quality, productive soils; cleaner, abundant water; healthy plant and animal communities; cleaner air and an adequate energy supply.

With sound technical assistance, more producers are moving to prescribed grazing systems on pastureland to improve

their soil, plant, and animal health. Foresters are improving their timberland and benefiting wildlife and water quality. More time is being spent on irrigation water management for irrigated cropland as the key component of an effective irrigation system. With good conservation plans and sound technical assistance, farmers, ranchers and foresters are able to maintain or increase production in a sustainable manner.

More than \$138 million in financial assistance was obligated during FY 2016 through Farm Bill conservation efforts. Working together with dedication, hard work, and extra effort allowed us to enhance technical assistance addressing irrigation water management, water quality and conservation planning, watershed coordination, soil health, organic farming, and cropland.

To view the document, please visit the Arkansas NRCS website at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.



Graphic by Christopher Willis

Producer Profile

Delta Row Crop Farmers Mike and Mikey Taylor Use Cover Crops to Keep their Farm Productive

Mike Taylor and his son Mikey Taylor, Jr., are producers with a long farming lineage in the Arkansas Delta.

Mike's grandfather started farming in the Phillips County town of Helena in the late 1930s and the family has been farming there ever since. Today, Mike and Mikey, Jr., are the owners and operators of Long Lake Plantation. When Mike started farming, he was producing cotton.

"Cotton, in the Delta, as the old saying goes, 'dance with the one that brung ya'; so we stayed with cotton," Mike said. "We were growing cotton continuously on the better soils, and soybeans on the balanced. There was very little variety in the crops and there was very little rotation. There were no specialty crops, no cattle, livestock, dairy or even poultry. Today, we have no cotton. We have gotten into corn, soybeans, peanuts, and cows. We also have taken cover crops into something greater as an off season cover grazing situation."

Mike, said in the old days with cotton, they sub-soiled annually and would let it lay open and bare over the winter thinking it was good.

"Our cotton soils were highly productive, but with continuous cotton production, they had been worn down with the tillage practices and fertilizer recommendations of the day," he said.

"The soils were thin and tended to be highly erosive in the winter rains and blowing sand during the spring. The tillage practices of the day were sub-soiling. We owned every type of tractor and sub-soil, or combination and had very little irrigation," he added.

In the early 1990s, the Taylors began to explore the use of cover crops to prevent erosion on the farm. Cover crops enhance soil health, increase soil water retention and keep nutrients in the fields. Although cover crops can be effective under conventional tillage, they also improve soil quality and ease the transition to continuous no-till.

"We began planting wheat as a means of preserving the soil in the winter, and



NRCS Program Support Specialist Lawrence Lanos (far left), Phillips County Producer Mikey Taylor and Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan discuss cover crops and no till on Long Lake Plantation in Helena.

Photo by Doug McClellan

we went on to use cereal rye," Mike said. "We really didn't have any complications, but found that we needed to add to that." he said.

"In the winter for our cool season, we're running a blend of cereal rye, black oats, radish, rape greens, and some turnip greens trying to run a five to seven way blend in the winter," said Mikey.

Since the Taylors have been using cover crops on their farm, they have significantly reduced tillage.

"We have been using cover crops for 25 years and use them on almost every acre," Mikey, said. "We've advanced slowly to where we have added additional blends. Now we're basically utilizing very limited tillage to no-till using cover crops every year."

The Taylors have been utilizing technical and financial assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for many years.

"NRCS has assisted us not only through financial support because of the cost sharing, but more so, with the meetings, introductions and associations with other people across the country involved in cover crops," Mike said. "We've learned through the meetings the 'do's and don't's' because of the presentations of others, hearing what other people are doing and how they are doing it. We've also been fortunate to have meetings here for NRCS as a training farm."

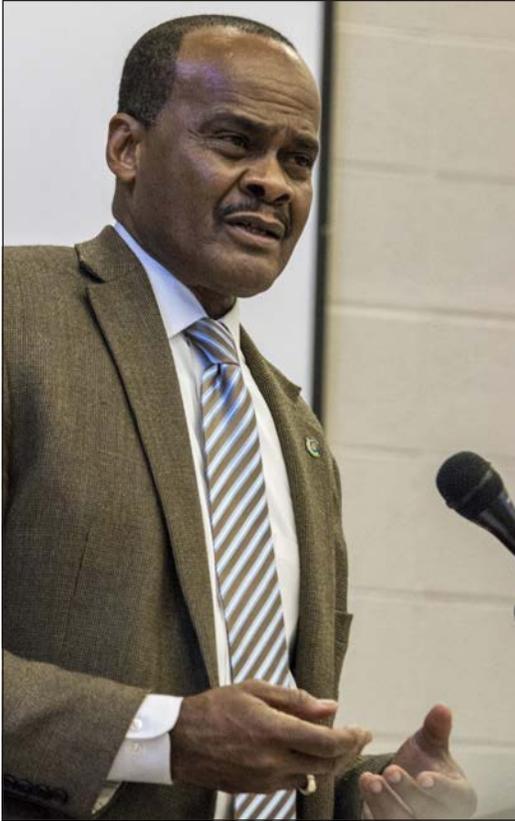
The Taylors are known throughout the region and the country for their work with cover crops and soil health management. Mikey is a member of the Phillips County Conservation District Board. Both Taylors are charter members of the Arkansas Soil Health Alliance. They have spoken at the Southern Agricultural Cover Crops Training Conference held in Jonesboro and co-sponsored by NRCS and the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts for the last three years.

Mike and Mikey have been honored by being named Soil Health Champions by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). They are one of 150 producers recognized nationally for their use of soil health practices in their operations and their willingness to share and promote their soil health stories with other farmers and producers in their community. They were also recognized by No-Till Farmer during their 25th annual National No-Tillage Conference for their efficient and effective use of applied fertilizer in their no-till systems.

"The Taylors are some of the most outstanding farmers who are always willing to look at new, innovative ways of improving any kind of resource concern there might be," said Debbie Moreland, program administrator with the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts.

StrikeForce Initiative

NRCS Program Information Presented to Landowners at ALCDC Winter Meeting



Acting Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Leonard Jordan, spoke about the importance of conservation and the economic future of agriculture at the Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation meeting in Fargo.

Photo by Christopher Willis

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed strong partnerships with many community based organizations to help present program information to agriculture producers. The "Advancing Economic Development-Job Creation and Growth through Rural and Urban Agriculture" is one such meeting held January 27 by the Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) in Fargo.

"NRCS personnel were really on display during the meeting," according to Charlie Williams, USDA StrikeForce coordinator and a key contact person who helps coordinate USDA assistance at partnership outreach meetings. Approximately 75 landowners had an opportunity to increase understanding of how NRCS programs assist with "Helping the People to Help the Land."

NRCS Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan, served as the morning speaker, and gave a vivid overview of how to access NRCS programs. He explained how participation in NRCS programs helps to sustain our natural resources as well as farming operations. Sullivan also showed a video on attributes of

High Tunnel House usage for growing vegetable crops.

Leonard Jordan, acting chief of NRCS, served as the meeting's luncheon speaker. Jordan emphasized that American farmers, metaphorically, have their 'Hands on the American Agriculture Steering Wheel' and are now driving the agriculture movement in America." He encourage all the attendees to stay engaged.

To "get into the weeds" so to speak, of how agriculture producers benefit from participation in the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program, Charlie Williams, facilitated the Conservation Resources Opportunities for Rural and Urban Agriculture session. Presenters included Kennard Williams, district conservationist in Pulaski Co. and Daniel Perry, with the Census of Agriculture.

"I appreciate the efforts of NRCS in the rural community," said Dr. Calvin King, Sr., president and CEO of ALCDC. "NRCS has a vast amount of conservation resources available including soil and water management practices, that make it practical for the economic sustainability of family farmers."

Dr. Calvin King, Sr., speaking at the Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation meeting.

Photo by Christopher Willis



Earth Team

Earth Team Program Gets New Volunteer Coordinator and Area Coordinators

By HOLLY ANDERSON

State Conservationist Mike Sullivan has challenged Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees to achieve a level of 100% Earth Team participation in all offices. We have a great group of Earth Team coordinators to lead us toward reaching that goal. Mendy Rice is the new state volunteer coordinator. She started with the Soil Conservation Service in 1988 and served as a soil conservation technician in the Delta for 11 years. Mendy left federal service for a while, but returned in 2015 and now works as secretary to both the programs and the soils staff in the NRCS state office. Mendy's excited about leading the Earth Team, leveraging federal funds to make even greater progress in preserving our state's natural resources.

Northwest Area coordinator is Johanna Edwards. She joined the Carroll County Conservation District in 2010 and is the administrative assistant there. Johanna has served as a volunteer in her church and her children's school. She says she knows from experience that volunteers help to lighten the load and get the job done.

Elizabeth Earl is South Area coordinator. Elizabeth began

her career in 2014 as a conservation technician assistant at the Faulkner County Conservation District and has been an NRCS soil conservation technician at the Fordyce Service Center since July 2016. She says her interest in Earth Team is a result of her positive experience serving as an AmeriCorps Environmental Education volunteer while studying at the University of Central Arkansas.



From left to right: Northwest Area Coordinator Johanna Edwards, South Area Coordinator Elizabeth Earl, Northeast Area Coordinator Julie Bennett, and State Volunteer Coordinator Mendy Rice. Photo by Christopher Willis

Northwest Area coordinator is Julie Bennett. Julie is the NRCS soil conservationist at the Osceola Field Service Center and is also looking forward to being an integral part of the Earth Team's success.

NRCS field service centers work with their area coordinators to determine the ways volunteers can best assist us in achieving our mission. Remember, the goal

is 100% participation across all offices. It can't happen without everyone making an effort.

National Volunteer Week is April 23–29. The NRCS Earth Team theme is "Volunteers Improve Today For Tomorrow." To learn more about the Earth Team and to volunteer visit www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov or email the State Volunteer Coordinator Mendy Rice at mendy.rice@ar.usda.gov.

VOLUNTEERS



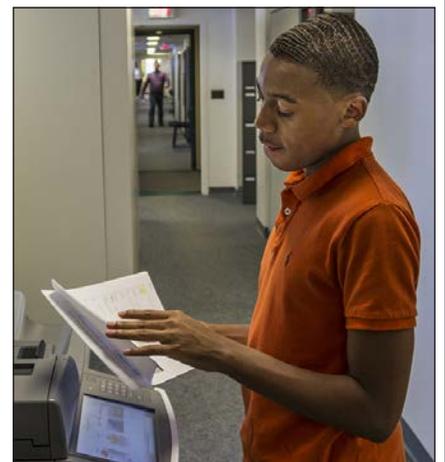
Gene Nistendirk, an NRCS retiree and Earth Team volunteer helped set up the forestry courses at the Dallas County Forestry Competition March 16. Gene helps every year with this competition and his hard work is greatly appreciated.

Photo by Elizabeth Earl



NRCS retiree and Earth Team volunteer Ray Erickson instructs youth participants on the tree identification course at the Columbia County Forestry Competition February 15.

Photo by Christopher Willis



Earth Team volunteer Chris Peer spends a day assisting the programs staff in the NRCS state office. Chris was participating in a job shadow day.

Photo by Christopher Willis

Volunteer

Conservation Volunteers Honored During National Volunteer Week

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is celebrating National Volunteer Week April 23–29, 2017, by thanking and honoring its Earth Team volunteers for their service to conservation.

Earth Team is the agency's volunteer workforce, and nationally, in fiscal year 2016, more than 28,500 people donated 312,219 hours of service to NRCS valued at over \$7.1 million.

"Volunteers work closely with our staff, and they play an important role in Arkansas's conservation work," said State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "We are grateful for our volunteers help, and are seeking additional volunteers in each county to join our Earth Team. We recognize much more conservation work needs to be done and our Earth Team volunteers help us fulfill that need."

Earth Team is a program that partners volunteers with NRCS employees. It was created in 1985 and offers many opportunities to individuals 14 years of age and older 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 community projects.

Earth Team volunteers allow NRCS to stretch available resources and help put additional conservation practices on the ground. Volunteer efforts help improve land and wildlife habitat and contribute to cleaner water and air for everyone.

Learn more about the Earth Team Volunteer Program online at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/earthteam> or by calling Mendy Rice, Arkansas State Volunteer Coordinator at 501-301-3124.

For more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

**Note: The Value of Volunteer Time to the NRCS is \$23.56/ hour as established by the Independent Sector and utilized by the Federal Interagency Team for Volunteerism.*

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK | APRIL 23-29, 2017

Volunteers improve
TODAY *for*
TOMORROW

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
EARTH TEAM VOLUNTEERS

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Williams Wins 2016 National Civil Rights Award

Charlie Williams, USDA StrikeForce Initiative coordinator in Forrest City, recently received the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Individual Civil Rights Award at the National Association of Conservation Districts meeting in Denver. Williams, a 42-year employee of NRCS, has been the USDA StrikeForce coordinator since 2010.

He received the award based on:

- executing partnership agreements with community-based organizations to devise alternate means for socially disadvantaged and historically underserved agriculture producers to gain USDA and NRCS program information and assistance;
- spearheading partnership agreements with grassroots organizations that led to approximately 75 high school students receiving stipends to complete new and beginning farmer curricula; and
- working in partnership with organizations to receive the National Forestry Endowment African American Sustainable Forestry grant that provides strategic resources to assist forest landowners to prepare to 'Keep the Land in the Family,' while also offering assistance to increase economic prospects of the land.

Upon receiving the award, Williams said, "Of the awards I've received during my period of work, I'd have to place this NRCS National Civil Rights Award among the awards I'm most proud of receiving. This is in part, due to it being National in scope and most relevant to my immediate work duties of 'Increasing the Implementation of USDA programs in high-poverty communities.' For this task to be accomplished, in my opinion, a 'cultural change' in the minds of citizens and agriculture producers had to occur in high-poverty communities to believe that NRCS programs were tailored for them as well. Receiving the award helped me to validate that Cultural Transformation is actually occurring...however, more work needs to be done."



USDA StrikeForce Initiative Coordinator Charlie Williams and receiving the NRCS Individual Civil Rights Award from Acting Chief Leonard Jordan in Denver.

Mike Sullivan Awarded 2016 Outstanding State Conservationist Award from NASCA

Mike Sullivan, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state conservationist in Arkansas, was awarded the 2016 Outstanding State Conservationist Award from the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) at the National Association of Conservation Districts meeting in Denver. Sullivan has been Arkansas's state conservationist since December 2009.

He received the award based on:

- being the state conservationist who has had the greatest impact on locally led conservation on a state wide basis; and

- demonstrated excellence in service, dedication, cooperation, and partnership.

According to the NASCA newsletter "Mike's nomination was accompanied by countless letters of support from industry, academia, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and core partners in Arkansas.

Adrian Baber, NASCA president, said of Sullivan, "I am blessed to work in the state of Arkansas, where the conservation partnership is alive and well. I feel especially fortunate to work with Mike Sullivan, who I consider the finest state conservationist in the business."

Around the State

NRCS Participates in Workshop Presentations during UAPB Rural Life Conference



UAPB Interim Dean of the School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences Dr. Edmund Buckner presents the dedication award to retired USDA NRCS employee Theodis Bunch.

Photo by Christopher Willis

The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) recently held its 61st annual Rural Life Conference at the Pine Bluff Convention Center March 3. This year's conference theme was "Promoting the Vitality of Arkansas Communities." The conference was sponsored by the UAPB School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences.

Since its inception, the Rural Life Conference has offered farmers, UAPB faculty and students, representatives from public and private agencies and others an opportunity to

brief, discuss, network, document, and develop solutions to the challenges facing rural life in Arkansas. Several staff members from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) made presentations during the conference including Alvin Peer, Arkansas NRCS outreach coordinator, Corey Farmer, Arkansas NRCS resource conservationist, Sonya Neal Reeves, USDA NRCS national program manager for Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C., Melleny Cotton, USDA NRCS

program analyst for Conservation Innovation Grants in Washington, D.C., and John Lee, USDA NRCS National Water Management Center (NWMC) natural resources specialist in Little Rock.

The conference was dedicated to retired NRCS NWMC water resources outreach specialist Theodis Bunch. Bunch, who retired in 2016 with over 40 years of service with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NRCS, was chosen as this year's honoree because of his contributions to UAPB's School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences and rural development, for improving the quality of life for people in the community and for more than 19 years of positive contributions to the Rural Life Conference.



Reginald L. Jackson, NRCS state public affairs specialist discusses NRCS programs and opportunities at the 61st Annual Rural Life Conference in Pine Bluff. Photo by Chris Willis

ARKANSAS ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS MEETING



NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan handed out the State Conservationist Partnership Awards to Sherry Pfaffenberger, at left, and University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) Small Farm Program, at right, at the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts meeting on February 8. Mike Sullivan said "Sherry has been instrumental in helping Dewitt Field Service Center effectively handle a very large Farm Bill workload. Dr. Henry English has proactively led UAPB's Small Farm Program to help provide the "intensive care" needed to improve NRCS program awareness and participation among Historically Underserved producers." Photos by Christopher Willis

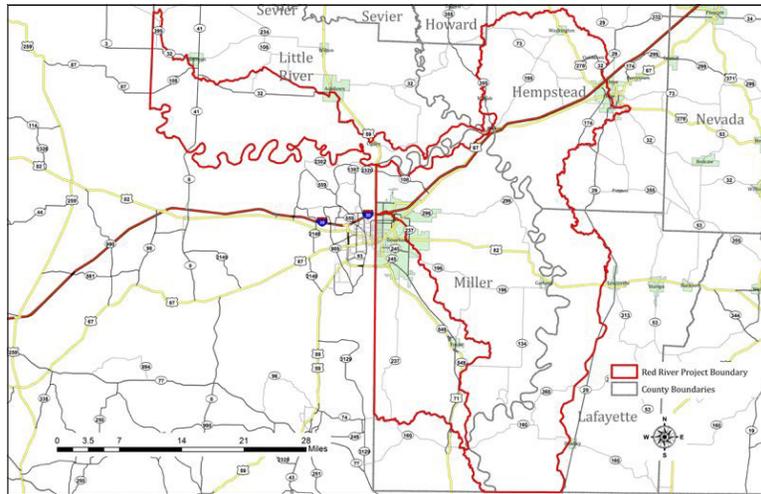


Sign-Up

Accepting Applications through May 15, 2017, for RCPP project in portions of Hempstead, Little River, Lafayette and Miller Counties

Farmers and landowners in the Red River Watershed in a portion of Hempstead, Little River, Lafayette and Miller counties in Arkansas have until May 15, 2017, to submit applications to receive financial assistance to implement conservation practices through the Red River Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Applicants can sign up at the Hempstead, Little River, Lafayette and Miller counties USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Service Center (FSC).

Funding will be available to eligible landowners through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS will provide financial assistance for a systems approach using approved conservation practices for the purpose



of addressing water quality and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife. Land and producer eligibility, adjusted gross income, and all other program criteria for participation must be met to participate in this initiative. Agricultural lands are eligible for enrollment in the initiative.

More than 30 conservation practices are available, including tree and shrub establishment, irrigation water management, cover crop, nutrient management, forage and biomass planting and pipeline.

RCPP is a comprehensive and flexible program that uses partnerships to stretch and multiply conservation investments and reach conservation goals on a regional or watershed scale.

Additional information about the RCPP project is available at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov. For more information contact the Hempstead FSC at (870) 777-8800, ext. 3; Little River FSC (870) 898-3611, ext. 3; Lafayette FSC (870) 921-4206, ext. 3; and Miller FSC at (870) 773-3531, ext. 3.

USDA Offers Renewal Options for Expiring CSP Contracts

Acting Deputy Agriculture Secretary Michael Young announced that a contract renewal sign-up is underway for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), USDA's largest working lands conservation program with more than 80 million acres enrolled. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) made several updates to the popular program last fall. These changes help producers better evaluate conservation options that benefit their operations while improving the health and productivity of private and Tribal working lands.

"The changes made to CSP are providing even greater opportunities for stewardship-minded producers across the country to participate and bring their conservation efforts to a higher level," said Young. "The new tools and methods for evaluating operations, expanded options to address the producer's conservation and business objectives, and the focus on local resource priorities have resulted in a 30 percent increase in applications for this widely popular program."

Participants with existing CSP contracts that will expire on Dec. 31 can access the benefits of the recent program changes through an option to renew their contracts for an additional

five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands. Applications to renew expiring contracts are due by May 5.

Through CSP, agricultural producers and forest landowners earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, buffer strips, pollinator and beneficial insect habitat, and soil health building activities—all while maintaining active agricultural production on their land. Benefits to producers can include:

- Improved cattle gains per acre;
- Increased crop yields;
- Decreased inputs;
- Wildlife population improvements; and
- Better resilience to weather extremes.

"CSP is for working lands," said Young. "Thousands of people have made the choice to voluntarily enroll in the program because it helps them enhance natural resources and improve their business operation."

Producers interested in contract renewals or applying for CSP for the first time should visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp or contact their local USDA service center to learn more.