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Helping People Help the Land



SEPTEMBER 2012

Activity **report**



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Programs

We have obligated 98% of all our financially assisted programs (EQIP, WHIP, AWEP, CSP) for Fiscal Year 2012. We have a bit remaining which we keep on hand to address contract modifications and cost overruns. But for all intents and purposes, we have closed down our program funding operations and are looking forward to FY 13.

The same can be said about our easement programs (FRPP, GRP, and WRP). We are fully obligated there as well.

After September 30, we will enter into a continuing resolution that holds many surprises for us in program application. Some of the 2008 Farm Bill programs are authorized until 2014, but with the threat of sequestration in December, we do not expect to see any financial assistance funding until calendar year 2013. We will be in a holding pattern, revising ranking tools and preparing for FY 13 applications periods for the foreseeable future.

The field completed conducting their Local Work Group Meetings across the state on September 15th.

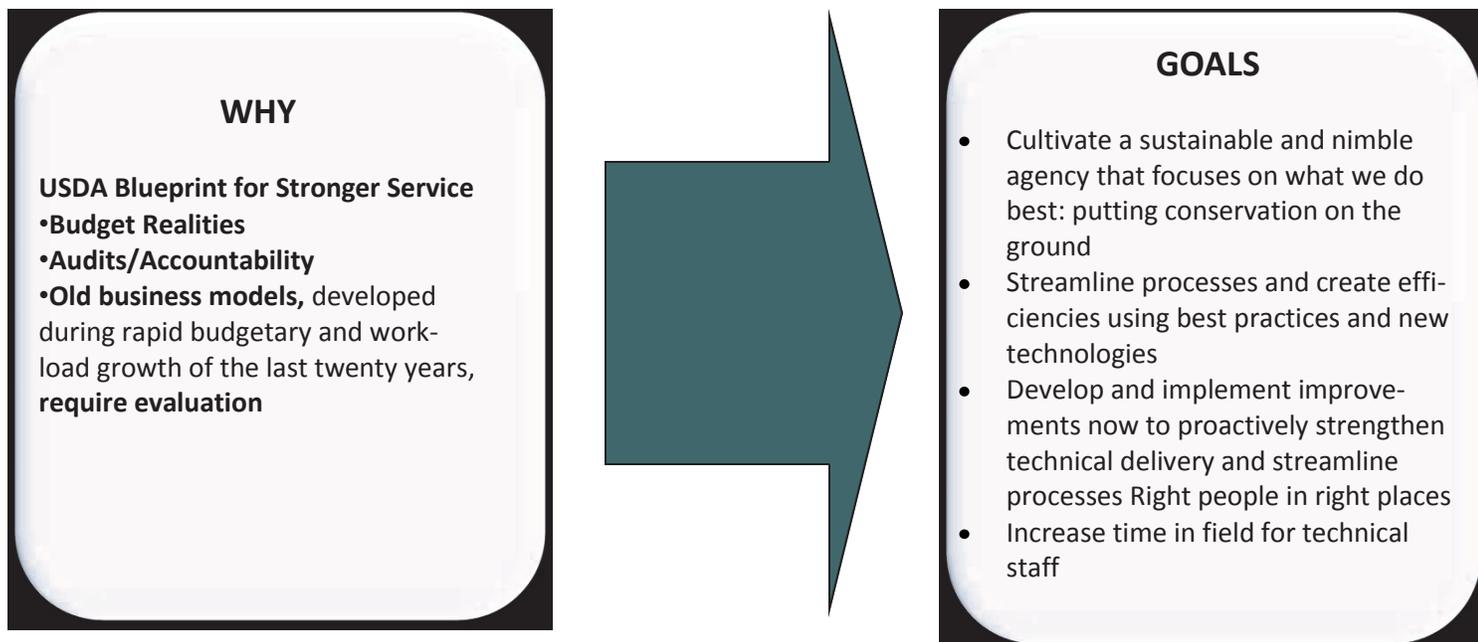
We will provide a complete summary of program application and funding obligated for the next Board meeting, as we have not tallied the final numbers at this point. There is still a chance we could get additional funding that will benefit Texas farmers and ranchers.

NRCS Improvements Update

NRCS Improvements

Vision: Position NRCS to continue to thrive and deliver exceptional conservation assistance to landowners through changing budgetary realities.

The NRCS Improvement Efforts are part of and coordinated with the [USDA Blueprint for Stronger Service](#). Our aims are the same--thriving in challenging, new budgetary environments by using cutting-edge technology, making operations more efficient, and, in the case of NRCS, focusing resources on what we do best--putting more conservation on the ground. The Improvements, organized in five areas, will be developed and implemented over the next couple of years.



NRCS Improvements Share Common Goals:

- Increase efficiency
- Streamline business practices/processes
- Increase accountability
- Use cutting edge technology
- Increase time in the field

Five Improvement Areas:

1. Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI)
2. Science
3. Administrative
4. State
5. Communications

Improvements within Each Area will be sequenced over several years (FY12-14):

- **CDSI**, the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative, will streamline and enhance the delivery of conservation technical and financial assistance. It will

refocus the work of technical staff to providing conservation assistance in the field; increase operating efficiency through a logical use of staff resources and streamlined processes; enable sound financial management and accountability practices; and improve the quality and timeliness of NRCS customer service.

- **FOOF, FIELD OFFICE OF THE FUTURE** - Texas NRCS and Conservation District Partnership have been charged to develop a plan for field offices of the future. The plan will include determining the best way to meet customer needs and how field offices should look and function. We must design the most efficient and effective delivery system at the field level planning for potential budget constraints. NRCS, the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board are actively engaged in development of the plan. Currently Texas NRCS Budget is 77% Personnel and 23% Support.

NRCS Improvements Update *(continued)*

- **90% SOLUTION** — The 90-Percent Solution task is one of the nationwide improvement efforts to provide better service to NRCS customers. Chief White asked each state to develop a 90% solution plan with a goal of having 80 to 90 percent of NRCS technical staff providing direct customer service by 2015. Texas submitted a draft improvement plan of how we anticipate reaching the 90% target by 2015; however, it is based upon budget projections and subject to change.



Legislative Update

Farm Bill (as of Friday, Sept. 14)

On September 12th, representatives of more than 50 agricultural and conservation groups of “[Farm Bill Now](#)” gathered on the Capitol grounds on Wednesday to encourage Congress to pass a new farm bill. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Representatives Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Kristi Noem (R-SD) addressed the rally. While many conservation groups attended the rally, other environmental organizations urged the House to reject the farm bill, in a [letter](#) that went to each representative.

With the House only in session for three more days in September, the passage of a 2012 Farm Bill before the 2008 Farm Bill expires remains in question. Interest groups continue to press for passage, but House leadership has yet to agree to take the measure to the floor. Rep. Collin Peterson (D-MN), ranking member on the House Agriculture Committee, told Energy and the Environment on Tuesday that he does not believe the full five-year farm bill can be passed before the end of the year.

On Thursday, Rep. Bruce Braley filed a petition ([Petition No: 112-5](#)) that would discharge the consideration of the resolution ([H.Res. 739](#)) from the Rules Committee in an effort to bring the House bill (H.R. 6083) to the floor. The resolution had been referred to the Rules Committee on July 24, 2012. At this time, 53 Members have signed the petition, and two have withdrawn their signatures (Tipton, CO; Ellmers, NC). While it's unlikely that proponents will get to the needed 218 signatures, if successful, House leaders would have to allow a vote on the Farm Bill that passed the House Agriculture Committee in July.

Final passage of the 2008 Farm Bill was preceded by six temporary extensions to cover the time period from program expiration in September 2007 until the new farm bill was passed. Extensions ranged in length from several months to one week. House leaders are reportedly trying to generate support for a farm bill extension that could be voted on next week and would extend current law into December.

The **House Farm Bill**, H.R. 6083, Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management (FARRM) Act of 2012, can be found at: <http://agriculture.house.gov/sites/republicans.agriculture.house.gov/files/documents/HR6083FARRM.pdf>

The **Senate Farm Bill**, S. 3240, the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs (ARFJ) Act of 2012, can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s3240pp/pdf/BILLS-112s3240pp.pdf>

Continuing Resolution

On Thursday, the House passed the continuing resolution (CR) ([H J Res 117](#)) by a vote of [329 to 91](#), which will keep the Federal government running through March 27, 2013. As passed, the measure continues funding at the current rate of operations for federal agencies, programs and services. To meet the bipartisan agreement between the House, Senate and White House that established a total rate of operations at \$1.047 trillion, a 0.6 percent increase over the base rate is included. In total, including all discretionary spending, the annual rate of the CR is \$26.6 billion below last year's level.

Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas' Tribal Council Chairman to serve on natural resources multi-state advisory committee

Story by Beverly Moseley

Kyle Williams, Tribal Council Chairman of the Alabama Coushatta Tribe of Texas, has been selected to serve on the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Tribal Council Advisory Committee (RTCAC), for a two year term.

"This is indeed great news that Kyle Williams has been selected to serve on this important regional advisory committee. Texas NRCS has worked closely with the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas over the years providing quality technical assistance and funding opportunities," said Salvador Salinas, NRCS Texas State Conservationist. "I look forward to strengthening our partnership and teamwork as we continue our work focused on the natural resources of Tribal lands."

The Alabama Coushatta Tribe of Texas is located in the Big Thicket of East Texas in Polk County. There are an estimated 1,150 members, of which 600 live on the 10,200 acre reservation.

The regional advisory committee will assist NRCS in areas such as identifying regional natural resource concerns or issues on Tribal lands. The RTCAC provides a platform and opportunity for dialogue and interaction in areas such as promoting strong partnerships and teamwork, providing quality technical and financial assistance, enhancing natural resources conservation, while providing an opportunity to offer feedback on agency programs, services and technologies.

NRCS Partner Honored with Secretary's Award

Wade Ross, state coordinator of the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers Community Based Organization (TSFR/CBO), based in Navasota, Texas was the recipient of the Secretary's Honor Awards in the category of Assisting Rural Communities. Ross attended the Secretary's Honor Awards ceremony on Wednesday, September 12, where Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsak recognized Mr. Ross' exceptional efforts.

Founded by Ross in 1998, the organization is dedicated to assisting limited resource agricultural producers with information and participation in the services and programs offered by organizations and agencies. Today, the CBO has grown into a dynamic 400 member organization, in part due to the symbiotic relationship between, Ross and USDA agencies. Ross works closely with NRCS staff across Central and East Texas on communication efforts and in providing speakers for meetings, workshops and field days. It's at these events that NRCS employees are able to meet one-on-one with landowners

and agriculture producers about conservation practices and financial assistance available through Farm Bill programs. Last year, more than 50 workshops were held and the CBO's members and partners have reached hundreds of landowners with the tools they need to help them meet and sustain their management goals.

The vision of having a first-ever state headquarters office and training center became a reality for Ross (far left) the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers Community Based Organization, now permanently based in Navasota, Texas.



decrease input costs | increase production | protect resources

2012 soil health workshops



Conservation Agronomists Ray Archuleta and Willie Durham of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are holding five Soil Health Workshops across Texas starting September 18.

Both men have worked with top producers and scientists in the country. They will teach principles of Agroecology, basic soil function, ecosystem processes and adaptive nutrient management plus adaptive grazing principles. The theme of the Soil Health Workshops is to facilitate a holistic understanding on how the soil functions to Texas agricultural producers.

“Healthy soils are productive soils,” says Durham. “We want to introduce people to soil health management systems that concentrate on improving the soil’s ability to function which ultimately leads to sustainability and increases in their bottom line. Through demonstrations and hands-on activities in the field, the workshops will showcase how an effective soil health management system can improve overall land production, among other benefits. Producers will learn, if they will dig a little, they will learn a lot from the soil.”



The Soil Health Workshops will be held Tuesday, September 18 in Seguin at the Big Red Barn; Wednesday, September 19 at Blacklands Research Center in Temple; Friday, September 21 at the Taylor County Expo Center in Abilene; Tuesday, September 25 at the Chillicothe Research Station in Chillicothe and Wednesday, September 26 at North Central Texas College in Gainesville.

NRCS Texas Welcomes Drenda Williams

NRCS Texas State conservationist Salvador Salinas announces a new member of his principal staff.

On September 10, Drenda J. Williams joined Salina's staff as the Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) for Operations at the NRCS State Office in Temple, TX.

Williams was serving as the ASTC for Operations in Missouri before joining the NRCS Texas team. She began her 19-year career with USDA NRCS as one of the first USDA/1890 National Scholars.

Born in Vandalia, MO, Williams attended Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO, and graduated cum laude with a bachelor's of science in Agriculture and Natural Resources. She began her work with NRCS as a computer specialist in the USDA Audrain County Service Center. Throughout her career, Williams worked in various NRCS field offices, at Lincoln University's Center for Excellence and later, the MO State Office.

Williams advanced within the agency from Soil Conservationist, Geographic Information Systems Specialist, Resource Conservationist, Ag Economist, EQIP and CSP program manager, to her current leadership position as the ASTC for Operations.

She serves as a member of the National Recruitment Strategy Team, Activity Based Costing Forum Group, National Video Teleconferencing Advisory Group, and the Conservation Delivery and Streamlining Initiative Readiness Team – Central Region.

Drenda has served on various details within NRCS which include Deputy Chief for Programs' Business Tools Team, Missouri State Administrative Officer (SAO), Kansas SAO, Acting Missouri State Conservationist, the Office of the Regional Conservationists' State Improvement Team, and most recently the Acting State Conservationist of Oregon NRCS.

In 2010, Williams directed Missouri NRCS' involvement in several outreach activities for USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack including the Cooperator's Conference, National Summit of Rural America, and Cultural Transformation Employee Listening Session. Additionally, she continues to establish new partnerships to further carry out the Mission of NRCS. While serving in her position as the ASTC for Operations, MO she allocated approximately \$8 million dollars for technical assistance agreements with partners to implement conservation initiatives, natural resource information education, and special projects.

Williams has consistently excelled in the performance of her duties to ensure successful NRCS operations in Texas. In addition to her challenging NRCS responsibilities in the state office, Williams leads by example. She received honorable mention honors for the 2010 USDA Organization of Professional Employees of the Department of Ag's Unsung Hero award for her work in promoting civil rights and is the current as president of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees organization.

