

VOLUNTEER SHOWCASE

May 2013, South Carolina

Doing Her Part, and Giving Back: South Carolina's Volunteer of the Year

Earth Team volunteer Elizabeth Hunter says farming is in her blood. Growing up, her maternal grandfather was a farmer, and her paternal grandfather was a veterinarian, so she always had a strong love of animals and the land.

Today, as the owner of a small horse farm, Elizabeth also has a great love of sharing her knowledge and time with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office in Lancaster, South Carolina. Her dedication as an Earth Team volunteer, as well as accumulating more volunteer hours than any other individual volunteer in the South Carolina NRCS field offices, has earned her the title of Volunteer of the Year.

Elizabeth started volunteering in 2011. Her help has become indispensable in the Lancaster Field Office, according to Supervisory District Conservationist, Ann Christie. "If it is the purpose of a volunteer to step in and help decrease the workload of the staff, then she is definitely fulfilling that purpose," stated Christie.

As a volunteer, Elizabeth not only has hands-on experience as a farmer, but also personal knowledge of NRCS programs and procedures, being that her farm received an Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract in 2006. Through this cost-sharing program, she received financial assistance to implement conservation practices on her farm, including cross fencing, heavy use areas and watering facilities.

While working closely with the Lancaster Field Office to install conservation practices on her farm, friendships were formed, and she noticed the office's heavy workload and offered to volunteer. "I started helping because they helped me, and seeing that they were overwhelmed, I decided to pitch in," stated Elizabeth.

Elizabeth usually volunteers several times a week, and provides technical assistance to the District Conservationist by assisting with surveys in the field and meeting with local farmers to inspect their conservation practices and take pictures. She performs many of the duties of a Soil Conservation Technician.

"She is a tremendous help in my office, and her assistance allows me the time to complete other tasks, such as



Ann Christie, Supervisory District Conservationist in Lancaster County, Elizabeth Hunter, SC 2012 Earth Volunteer of the Year, and Sabrenna Bryant, PAS and SC Volunteer Coordinator.

contracts and conservation planning," stated Christie. "If not for her, I would have to constantly take work home after hours.

In addition to providing technical assistance to NRCS, Elizabeth works with the Lancaster Soil and Water Conservation District Manager, Amanda Roberts, on conservation education programs and outreach. She regularly assists in the preparation and implementation of field days, career days and presentations to local schools. Elizabeth plans to continue volunteering with NRCS.

I think everyone should help when needed and I think everyone should give back," stated Elizabeth. "Regardless of getting paid, I enjoy what I do and have learned so much, and I feel it is a privilege to volunteer with NRCS."



The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a USDA agency. For more about NRCS and the Earth Team, visit www.usda.nrcs.gov.

If you are interested in volunteering, call (888) 526-3227 or visit your local NRCS office to learn about volunteer opportunities.