

ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

First Quarter
2019

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First Quarter
2019

BOOTS ON THE GROUND



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Helping People Help the Land

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From the State Conservationist



As we embark upon 2019, we have a chance to reflect upon our accomplishments over the past fiscal year in assisting Arkansas's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners put conservation on the ground. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas obligated more than \$148 million in financial and technical assistance on nearly 4 million acres under active contract. Arkansas NRCS, along with our conservation partners, has developed a reputation as a strong organization with a "can-do" spirit when it comes to "helping people help the land."

NRCS relies on our partners to help assist producers. Conservation districts, advocacy groups, universities, state agencies, federal agencies, community-based organizations and others play key roles. Having expertise across disciplines allows staff to have a holistic view of conservation and agriculture with an eye towards long-term conservation planning and stewardship of natural resources. We will continue to help people get conservation on the ground offering sound technical and financial assistance through our direct relationships with farmers, ranchers and foresters.

When Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue took over the reins at USDA, he placed an emphasis on USDA providing the best customer service to our customers. He said, "we are already providing our customers with great service, and our career professionals

are among the best in the federal government, but we can be even better." He wants us to simply be the most efficient, effective, and customer-focused Department in the Federal government. We want our customers to feel valued and appreciated. NRCS is taking action to make improvements for customers and employees. Your ideas for improvements are needed, feel free to share them with me.

Secretary Perdue recently announced the appointment of Matthew Lohr to serve as Chief of NRCS. We all look forward to working with Chief Lohr as he provides leadership for NRCS to support private landowners in their voluntary conservation efforts. See the article in this newsletter for more information on Chief Lohr.

As you may know, www.farmers.gov is an online resource built around the needs of the people who grow our food, fuel, and fiber. Farmers.gov isn't intended to replace our agency website, but to provide the information and tools our customers need to get the job done, all in one place. It's about the information and services our customers need to fund, manage, conserve, and recover their operation. USDA built [Farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov) around our customers' needs and ideas through a streamlined, farmer-centered approach—bringing the most usable information together in a new way. Farmers.gov will help our customers be better informed about how we can help, and be better prepared to work with

us, making it easier for us to continue providing exceptional customer service. Enjoy the newsletter and Happy New Year!




Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

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

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Please send image submissions to [Christopher Willis](mailto:Christopher.Willis@ar.usda.gov), 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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USDA Updates Wetland Determination Guidance to Increase Consistency, Timeliness

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is improving the process by which it makes wetland determinations, updating guidance to improve consistency and timeliness as well as to responding to feedback from farmers and other stakeholders. The updates do not change the definition of a wetland for USDA program participation purposes, but rather provide greater clarity and uniformity in how NRCS makes determinations nationwide.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has posted this updated guidance in the Federal Register as an interim final rule. NRCS is accepting comments on this rule through Feb. 5, 2019.

"These changes will help us better serve America's farmers, ranchers and foresters through greater certainty in the wetland determination process used," said USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Bill Northey. "We listened to what our stakeholders had to say, we held several meetings with stakeholder groups this summer, and we have updated the rule to improve consistency and efficiency in how we make wetland determinations following the guidance handed down by Congress."

Wetland determinations are part of conservation compliance outlined in the Farm Bill. To be eligible for USDA programs and federal crop insurance, producers must be compliant.

Updates to the conservation compliance provisions include:

- Identifying that determinations will rely on precipitation data from 1971–2000. Though data and average rainfall have varied over time, using this specific dataset makes determinations more predictable.
- Clarifying the certification status of previously

completed wetland determinations, including those completed 1990–1996.

- Adding definitions for playas, potholes and pocosins. These terms are found in current policy, but they are added to the regulation for transparency.
- Clarifying that determinations do not have to cover the entire farm tract, but only the area of the farm on which a producer is planning to make changes.
- Establishing that NRCS can now assess offsite, impacts on neighboring wetlands when producers request minimal effects exemptions. For those neighboring wetlands, NRCS can now do the evaluations offsite using aerial photography and other resources.
- Incorporating criteria to better reflect on-field observations of hydrology, rather than basing determinations strictly on a set number of days.

These updates were based on responses to comments received as part of the 2015 regulatory review process. Comments included requesting improved timeliness and customer service in administering the wetland conservation provisions and ensuring these provisions are consistent with the statute.

Wetland conservation compliance requires that producers refrain from planting on converted wetlands or converting wetlands for crop production to be able to participate in USDA programs and to receive federal crop insurance premium support.

Review or comment on the interim final rule on the Federal Register by Feb. 5, 2019. Learn more about conservation compliance at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmbill/?cid=stelprdb1257899>.





REPAIRING A PIECE OF HISTORY: EWP project rebuilds damage to 80-year-old dam

A record rainfall event in April 2017 caused the downstream face to erode on an 80-year old dam built to study the effects of water run-off, silt and erosion.

Floodwaters scoured several large holes in the back slope of the 35-foot high earthen and masonry rock core dam at Lake Bennett in Faulkner County, Ark. Although the dam was still fully functioning, the downstream slope had to be repaired.

"We were able to get funding through the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) to rebuild the back slope of the dam to a stable and pre-disaster condition," said Walt Delp, state conservation engineer for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas.

Repair work consisted of placing ½" to 3" graded rock, also called drainfill, next to the exposed face of the dam to allow any seepage water coming through the masonry core to continue to move through. Riprap, larger rock, was added on the backside to provide stability.

According to Delp, the construction went well and "the contractor did an excellent job of placing the drainfill and riprap."

Delp and his staff worked with the

Arkansas State Parks Department, who sponsored the project, to let the contract and oversee the repair.

"Our partner was excellent to work with. They were able to take care of all the paperwork. Park Ranger Matt Woodard kept the public out of the construction area for their safety and worked with the contractor to minimize the impact on tourism."

Lake Bennett, also known as Woolly Hollow State Park, provides visitors with a wonderful place for fishing, boating, swimming and camping.

The lake was named after Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first chief of the Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS). Bennett began his career in agriculture in 1903. Eventually he saw how soil erosion was taking a destructive toll on American farmland and, he believed, if left unchecked, would impair the nation's ability to produce food.

The Lake Bennett Watershed project was one of the first dams in the United States built to scientifically study a specific

watershed. Small erosion control structures were designed to slow the runoff and allow soil to filter out and stay on the hillsides, leaving clear water to flow into the 40-acre lake. The dam was designed to catch the water and stop it from pouring into the valley and washing away the topsoil.

As a result of these studies, a new philosophy of land management was born. Principles tested at Lake Bennett laid the foundation for soil conservation practices considered common today. Strip cropping, terracing, crop rotation and planting soil-retaining vegetation are now soil protection methods used nationwide.

"Being able to work on a project 80 years after our agency's founder established it has been an honor," Delp said. "The quality of workmanship from that era was evident. And, when you consider they didn't have the equipment or technology we have today, it had to be quite an undertaking."

"With the historical significance of the structure and the impact it has had on soil conservation across the country, I'm thankful I had a part in ensuring the dam is here 80 years from now."

View a short video about the repair project at <https://youtu.be/AoatHjTU8Zs>.



Hugh Hammond Bennett



Construction crews repair the 80-year-old Lake Bennett dam at Woolly Hollow State Park in Faulkner County, Ark.

Photo and Story by Creston Shrum



Annual Data Refresh of Soil Survey Data



United States
Department of
Agriculture



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The largest natural resource information system in the world, offering free soil maps and data for more than 95% of the Nation.

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Find Additional Resources at:
soils.usda.gov

The official soil survey database was refreshed on October 1, 2018. The updated official data is now available for use in implementing national programs affecting landowners and managers. Soil Survey Offices have completed projects updating soils information in Arkansas. One of the major updates is the splitting of the Cleburne-Van Buren County Survey into two separate databases. This is a continuation of splitting multi-county surveys for data purposes on the Web Soil Survey. Many national interpretations are also being updated, and their interpretation criteria will be posted as these updates are completed. Seven new or updated national interpretations have been added that pertain to conditions in Arkansas.

New National Interpretations that pertain to conditions in Arkansas include:

- **Suitability for Aerobic Soil Organisms** This interpretation assesses the soil's suitability as habitat for aerobic soil organisms.
- **Concentration of Salts—Soil Surface** This interpretation indicates soils that are likely to have concentrations of salts at the soil surface.
- **Organic Matter Depletion** This interpretation indicates the propensity of the individual soil properties to influence organic matter degradation.
- **Soil Surface Sealing** This interpretation indicates the degree of susceptibility to surface sealing. Surface sealing is the orientation and packing of dispersed soil particles that result from the physical breakup of soil aggregates, mostly due to raindrop impact.
- **Catastrophic Event, Large Animal Mortality, Burial** This interpretation indicates where to bury deceased livestock resulting from of a large-scale natural disaster, such as a hurricane.
- **Catastrophic Event, Large Animal Mortality, Incinerate** This interpretation indicates where to incinerate deceased livestock resulting from a large-scale natural disaster, such as a hurricane.
- **Road Construction/Maintenance (Natural Surface)** This interpretation assesses the suitability of soils for U.S. Forest Service single-lane system roads that are built to specification with a natural surface.

For additional information on the annual data refresh of soil survey data contact Edgar Mersiovsky, state soil scientist, at Edgar.Mersiovsky@ar.usda.gov.



Programs



USDA NRCS Accepting 2019 EQIP Applications through Jan. 11, 2019

Farmers and landowners in Arkansas have until January 11, 2019, to submit applications to receive financial assistance to implement conservation activities through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for the 2019 program year. Applicants can sign up at their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service field service center.

Individuals and entities actively engaged in agricultural production are eligible to participate in EQIP. The EQIP deadline is for consideration in the local, state and initiative funding categories. EQIP offers a continuous application sign-up. However, to be considered for funding under the second batch period applications must be received by January 11.

LOCAL, STATEWIDE & INITIATIVE FUNDING

Local categories focus on the priority resource concerns in a localized area, as identified by the locally-led conservation workgroup representatives for each county or designated local area.

Statewide categories address water quality issues related to animal manure management and sedimentation, soil quality, reduction of erosion, improved management of irrigation water and reduction in ground water use, forestland enhancement, livestock management operations improvement, and improvement of wildlife habitat resource concerns.

Special initiative funding includes: Alternative Crops; Feral Swine; Ground Water Decline and Historically Underserved Categories (Beginning Farmers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers, Limited Resource Farmers and Veteran Farmers).

All applications will be evaluated for funding based on a state and nationally developed procedure to optimize environmental benefits. Applications ranking highest in a funding category will be funded according to priority and is subject to availability of program funds.

For more information about EQIP visit your local field service center or visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ar/programs/financial/eqip>.

Funding Category	Application Deadline	Ranking Deadline	Preapproval Begins	Obligation
Alternative Crops/Small Cropland Farms	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019
Feral Swine	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019
Ground Water Decline	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019
Wildlife	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019
EQIP - Historically Underserved	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019
EQIP - Local (Crop, Pasture, Forest)	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019
EQIP - Statewide (Crop, Pasture, Forest, CAFO)	Jan. 11, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Mar. 8, 2019	Apr. 26, 2019





Army Veteran Keeps a Tight Knit Unit with more “Boots on the Ground” at the Family Cotton Farm in Desha County

As our nation celebrated the bicentennial in 1976, James Dunnahoe, an Arkansas Army National Guardsman from 1964 until 1970, decided it was time to re-enlist in the Guard. During that same time, he decided to purchase a tractor from his mother and began a small farm of his own in Desha County. He had grown up working on his father's farm picking cotton and milking cows, so it was a natural progression for him. A few years later in 1978, his then 10-year-old daughter, Sondra, joined him. She's been working with her dad on the farm ever since.

“Sondra would work in the field and help drive tractors along beside me, so it's been a family affair for quite a long time,” James said. “She used to hate the weatherman because she knew if the forecast said it was going to rain, we were going to work all night,” he said with a laugh.

James, along with his wife Shirley, Sondra and Sondra's son Bradley, grow cotton, soybeans and corn on Dunnahoe Farms in Desha County. Bradley hopes to continue the family farming business after he completes his studies in Agribusiness at the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

James, who retired from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Stuttgart, also retired from the 153rd Infantry Regiment of the Arkansas Army National Guard in 2005 at the rank of first sergeant.

“I didn't have a direction in life until I got in the military,” he said. “And farming was a necessity, because this is what I knew about growing up.”

“The one thing in life that made him who he is today, is his time in the military,” said Shirley, who manages the family farm, and is a member of the county conservation district board. “He would not change that at all.”

Some of the responsibilities of a first sergeant are to hold formations, instruct platoon sergeants, advise commanders, and assist in the training of all enlisted members.

“He runs this farm kind of like that to,” she said with a chuckle. “If he says it,

that's the way it is, no question about it.”

His family always took care of the farming operation whenever he had to serve on duty.

“He was never worried about being deployed, but we were,” said Shirley. “Someone has to step up and defend the country. Every generation has to realize that. It's a sense of duty and love of the country.”

The Dunnahoes have long used technical assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). They've installed conservation practices for many years working with former Desha County District Conservationist Gwen Hancock and Soil Conservationist Jennifer Griffin.

“The Dunnahoes are great stewards of the land and are dedicated to protecting and improving all the resources on their farm,” said Griffin. “They currently participate in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).”

CSP offers an opportunity for cotton, soybean and corn producers, and others, to enhance their operations while adopting conservation activities that can reduce energy use, improve soil health, and improve water quality. There are a number of enhancements for crop production. Examples of enhancement options James uses include drift reducing nozzles, GPS targeted spray application, nitrification inhibitors, controlled traffic system and split nitrogen applications to improve soil health and productivity and enhance water quality. They are also using water management activities to improve water efficiency.

“We stay involved with NRCS because of the assistance we receive to enhance our operation,” Shirley said. “We've been doing this so long that we just feel that we need to do better for the environment every year. Through

the conservation practices we participate in, we see where we are producing more crops every year.”

“You commit yourselves to the conservation programs,” James said. “You don't want run-off from the fields going on to your neighbors' farms and into the watersheds. And that makes it better for the environment. My grandson also cares about wildlife and the environment so working with me, he is making a commitment to conservation as well.”



Shirley and James Dunnahoe talk conservation stewardship with Soil Conservationist Jennifer Griffin. Photos by Reginald Jackson

Preparedness and defense are critical to food and agriculture sectors and to sustaining and growing rural Arkansas. That's why the USDA is looking to military veterans across the country to fill the roles that keep America's food supply safe and secure, preserve and strengthen rural communities, and restore and conserve the environment.

USDA wants to ensure that veterans looking to return home or start a new career on a farm or in a rural community have the tools and opportunities they need to succeed. USDA's veterans website serves as a one-stop navigator for veterans looking to learn more about employment, education, and entrepreneurship on or beyond the farm <https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/initiatives/veterans>.

To learn more about EQIP and CSP opportunities, producers should contact their local USDA service center or go to www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.



Total Farm Plan Helps Sharp County Producer Address Resource Concerns

A mandatory Certified Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) for Joseph Colvin's Sharp County, Ark., poultry operation turned into a voluntary "total farm plan" from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The plan resulted in funding through the Middle Strawberry River Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) project to assist with improvements on his farm.

"When it comes to the business side of farming, it's critical to lay a solid foundation from the start and to know where to go for support," Colvin said.

He found that support at the Sharp County USDA Field Service Center. Sharp County Conservation District Water Quality Technician Frankie Dickerson worked with Colvin to prepare the CNMP for his 100-acre farm located within a ¼ mile of the Strawberry River.

He manages six broiler houses and a cattle operation. Colvin began working with NRCS Soil Conservationist Cody Wallace and Technician Tim Durham in 2016 when he purchased his farm. "We have been working with Mr. Colvin to address natural resource concerns related to soil erosion, water quality and air quality from manure management on the farm," said Becky Long, Sharp County district conservationist in Ash Flat.

"Colvin plans to continue improving his farm with more projects, such as, a pond, watering facilities, pipeline, heavy use areas, herbaceous weed control, cross fencing and prescribed grazing," she said.

The 2016 Middle Strawberry River MRBI project is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers for addressing water quality concerns in the Whaley Creek-Strawberry River, Hamilton Branch-South Big Creek and Fool Creek-South Big Creek watersheds in a portion of Sharp County. The project area covers 54,322 acres.

Since 2016, landowners have received more than \$700,000 to address the resource concerns in the project area.

The Strawberry River, including the three watersheds in the project, was listed as impaired by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality on its 2008 303(d) list for siltation/turbidity and pathogens. The cause of this impairment is attributed to agricultural activities in the watershed.

Arkansas law requires farmers to follow a CNMP if they own or operate a confined poultry operation. A CNMP is developed by NRCS and the local conservation district to assist feeding operations to meet local, tribal, state, and federal water quality goals and regulations.

A CNMP identifies management and conservation actions necessary to meet clearly defined nutrient management goals aimed at reducing excess nutrients in soil and water when fertilizing pastures and managing animal waste. These plans specify how much fertilizer, manure or other nutrient sources may be safely applied to crops to achieve yields and prevent excess nutrients from impacting waterways.

For more information about nutrient management or MRBI visit your local USDA field office or online at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.



Landowner Joseph Colvin stands in his stacking shed. Colvin manages six broiler houses and a cattle operation in Sharp County.

63rd Annual Rural Life Conference Date Set in Pine Bluff

The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff's (UAPB) School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences (SAFHS) will convene the 63rd Annual Rural Life Conference on Friday, February 1, 2019 at 8:30A.M. at the Pine Bluff Convention Center. The theme for the conference is: "Working Together to Strengthen Farmers, Families and Communities."

In addition to the general plenary sessions, there will be workshops on agriculture, families, conservation and rural development, display posters, and educational exhibits. For additional information, contact Ms. Flavelia E. Stigger at (870) 575-8818/8105 or email stiggerf@uapb.edu.





USDA SURVEYS BEE & HONEY OPERATIONS

In January, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will reach out to United States bee and honey producers to collect information for its annual Bee and Honey surveys. NASS will conduct two concurrent surveys in the Delta Region of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The Bee and Honey Inquiry and January Colony Loss survey query operations with five or more colonies. These surveys cover bee health, mortality, and inventory as well as honey production, sales, and expenses.

“Bee and Honey surveys provide important information for development of official inventory and production estimates in the Delta. Arkansas crop security is dependent on a stable beekeeping industry for pollination services and local honey making supports farmers markets and other food manufacturing,” said Eugene Young, Director, Delta Regional Office. “Reports created from this monitoring help producers address key issues facing Arkansas apiculture industry such as bee health, competition for apiary sites, and maintaining confidence of consumers and regulators.”

In Arkansas, National Association State Directors of Agriculture (NASDA) enumerators will survey a sample of local beekeepers. By participating, these producers ensure NASS provides timely, accurate, and objective data which all stakeholders can use to make sound business decisions. Accurate information helps reduce uncertainty and provides reliable facts on bee and honey industry.

Information provided by respondents for all NASS surveys is confidential by law. NASS safeguards privacy of all responses and publishes only aggregate data, ensuring no individual operation or producer can be identified.

NASS will publish survey results in its annual Honey report on March 14, 2019, and its Honey Bee Colonies report

on August 1, 2019. These and all NASS reports are available online at <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/>. For more information, call NASS Delta Regional Office at (800) 327-2970. NASS provides accurate, timely, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.

To provide occasional feedback on NASS products and services, sign up at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/subscriptions> and look for “NASS Data User Community.”



IRRIGATION & WATER MANAGEMENT

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will soon conduct the 2018 Irrigation and Water Management Survey as a follow-on to the 2017 Census of Agriculture. By providing a single source of comprehensive, up-to-date information on irrigation and water use across the agricultural industry, this survey will aid efforts to promote efficient irrigation practices and long-term sustainability of water resources.

USDA’s NASS will survey farm, ranch, nursery, and greenhouse operators to gather data on land and water use, crop yields, irrigation practices, application methods, equipment, facilities, and expenditures.

The survey will be mailed January 3, 2019. Please respond online, by mail, or telephone by February 15, 2019. Survey results will be available November 13, 2019 on the NASS website.

For more information about this survey:
Call toll-free (888) 4AG-STAT or (888) 424-7828
Visit us online at www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus
Follow us on Twitter @USDA_NASS





Producer Profile



Lee County Producer Dr. Mildred Barnes Griggs honored as NOPBNRCSE Small Farmer of the Year

Lee County producer Dr. Mildred Barnes Griggs, a retired college professor and dean, has been recognized as the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE) Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year for 2018. A Marianna native, she was honored during NOPBNRCSE's annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 1.

Dr. Griggs operates a fruit and vegetable farm and participates in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the StrikeForce Initiative. Through EQIP, she has installed two seasonal high tunnels to extend the growing season for her vegetable crops, an irrigation well, drip irrigation, and cover crops to address water quality, water quantity, soil erosion and soil health. In addition, she owns and operates a 150-acre loblolly pine tree farm. She has a Forest Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) plan for improved soil health and biological suppression of brush, weeds and invasive species in her pine crop.

"Dr. Griggs's commitment to conservation and community service is why she was recognized as the recipient of the National Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year Award," said Erica Westbrook, acting assistant state conservationist for management and strategy and president of the Arkansas

Chapter of NOPBNRCSE. "Not only is she addressing resource concerns on her farm, she has made it a mission to help other small and beginning farmers."

She has worked to increase the number of minority farmers in Lee County by helping introduce Delta area youth to careers in agriculture, in alternative crop production, and careers with USDA. She regularly demonstrates EQIP practices on her farm to other producers. She also assists other small farmers locate markets to sell their produce, especially local schools Farm to School programs.

"I want to congratulate Dr. Griggs on winning the Small Farmer of the Year award in recognition of her conservation efforts and community involvement," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "She is a shining example of what a small farmer and a good steward to the land can do with a conservation plan and technical assistance from NRCS to help make their operation successful."

The Small Farmer of the Year award is named for Lloyd E. Wright, a retired USDA NRCS employee. He is a founder of NOPBNRCSE and served two terms as the first president of the Organization.

View the nomination video at https://youtu.be/bL_OmVRaA7c.



At left, Lee County producer Dr. Mildred Barnes Griggs works salad greens in her high tunnel. Above, Dr. Griggs receives the Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year award from NOPBNRCSE founder Lloyd E. Wright and Organization President Dr. Sharon Nance in Atlanta.



SAWG CONFERENCE JANUARY 23-26, 2019 AT THE STATEHOUSE CONVENTION CENTER IN LITTLE ROCK

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group's (SAWG) 28th annual conference will be held January 23 – 26, 2019, at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock. The conference is tailored for those in the South producing organic and sustainable food on a commercial scale and for those in the region working to improve local food systems.

Southern organic and sustainable farmers, researchers, and community leaders will attend the event for practical information on organic and sustainable vegetable, livestock, flower and specialty crop production. The forum will feature information including marketing strategies, urban farming, farm to school, business and finance management, community food systems development, useful federal farm programs, agriculture policy developments and a trade show.

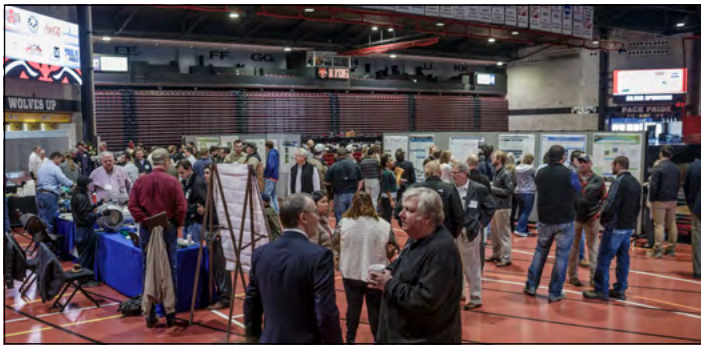
All conference sessions, pre-conference courses and field trips will be led by producers, educators and organizers from around the region, including several from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, with extensive knowledge and practical experience. The keynote speaker will be Cornelius Blanding, executive director of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund.



Southern SAWG, founded in 1991 focuses attention on issues and differing perspectives around food production, marketing, and distribution, and brings sustainable solutions to farmers, families and communities in the southern U.S. It operates in 13 states in the South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

For general information about the conference log on to www.ssawg.org/conference.

Soil & Water Education Conference and Expo Announced for January 30



The Arkansas Soil & Water Education Conference and Expo 2019 will be held Wednesday, January 30, 2019, at the First National Bank Arena (formerly the Convocation Center), Arkansas State University, Jonesboro.

The conference will cover topics such as irrigation

water management, emerging technology, and how to sign-up for conservation assistance as well as a vendor trade show.

For registration information visit <http://www.astate.edu/college/agriculture-and-technology/outreach-programs/arkansas-soil-and-water-education-conference/>.

Thornton named NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy



Clifford Thornton

Clifford Thornton was recently named assistant state conservationist (ASTC) for management and strategy for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Little Rock.

Clifford grew up on a small row crop farm in Lee County, Arkansas. In 1990, he graduated

from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Economics.

Upon graduation, he worked in Kansas as a soil conservationist in Miami and Jackson counties. In 1994, he was selected as the Wyandotte County district conservationist in Kansas.

In 1999, he was promoted to resource conservation and development coordinator in Defiance, Ohio. In

2004, he became the ASTC for field operations in Dayton, Ohio. In 2011, he was detailed to South Carolina as Acting ASTC for operations.

In 2013, he was detailed to Kentucky as acting state conservationist. In 2012 he became the ASTC for field operations in Emporia, Kansas.

"I am very excited and looking forward to the opportunities ahead and to work with the conservation team in Arkansas," Thornton said.



SECRETARY PERDUE NAMES NRCS CHIEF

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the appointment of Matthew J. “Matt” Lohr to serve as Chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources



Matt Lohr

Conservation Service (NRCS). In his role, Lohr will provide leadership for NRCS and its mission to support America’s farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners in their voluntary conservation efforts through a network of over 3,000 offices in communities nationwide.

“Matt has committed his entire life to the betterment of agriculture,” Perdue said. “The knowledge and experience he brings to the table will help ensure our locally-led, science-based approach continues to offer farmers the conservation solutions needed

to enhance their environment and commercial viability.”

Lohr, raised on a century farm in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, now owns and operates Valley Pike Farm, Inc., with his wife Beth and their six children. Prior to his appointment by the Trump Administration, Lohr held public office, serving in the Virginia House of Delegates from 2006–2010. In 2008, Lohr was awarded Legislator of the Year in honor of his work as an ambassador for economic and community development in Virginia. He then served as Virginia’s Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services from 2010 to 2013. More recently, Lohr worked as Knowledge Center Director for Farm Credit of the Virginias, a customer-owned financial cooperative that provides resources and education outreach to local farmers and the community. And since June 2017, he has been farming full time on the family

operation, which includes poultry, beef cattle, row crops, and sweet corn.

“I am honored and humbled to serve America’s agricultural industry in this new capacity,” Lohr said. “As a 5th generation farmer, I care deeply about conserving and protecting our most valuable agricultural resources. I look forward to the chance to lead this valuable agency and assist our producers nationwide with their conservation practices.”

NRCS, through voluntary natural resource conservation programs, works side-by-side with producers, local conservation districts, and other partners to protect and conserve natural resources and build sustainable farming solutions through soil conservation on private lands throughout the United States. For more information on NRCS visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.



New Year. New Conservation Plan.

It’s a new year with a new Farm Bill anticipated and we want to remind Arkansas’s farmers, ranchers and forest landowners how they can get started with USDA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

- It’s never too late to develop or update a conservation plan for your land.
- We are here to help you meet your new conservation goals, while supporting your farm’s long-term profitability.
- Make conservation planning a priority this year and set a path to profit, protection and productivity.
- Our technical assistance is one-on-one, personalized advice and support to help you make the best decisions for your lands—and is offered free of charge.
- Stop by your local USDA service center and talk to an NRCS district conservationist to get started.

Get Started with USDA

- USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in Arkansas weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. Visit farmers.gov or contact your local USDA service center to learn more.
- NRCS is here to help! Contact your local USDA service center to find out what programs can help your agricultural operation.