



United States Department of Agriculture

Arkansas Conservation News

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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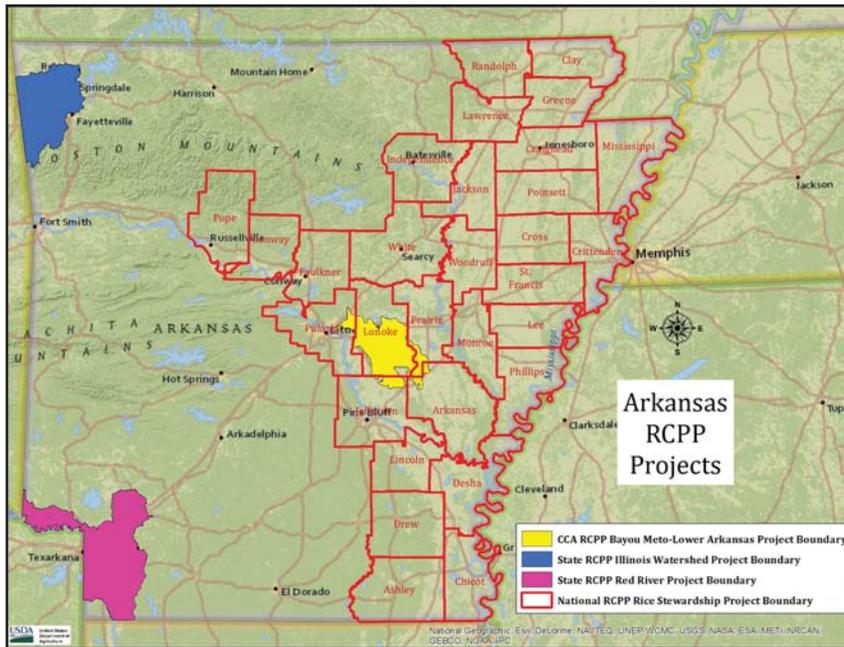
USDA selects four RCPP projects in Arkansas

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that 100 high-impact projects across all 50 states, including Arkansas, will receive more than \$370 million as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

During a meeting in Little Rock Jan. 16, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Assistant Chief Kirk Hanlin discussed RCPP projects approved in Arkansas with project sponsors and conservation partners.

RCPP's historic focus on public-private partnership enables private companies, local communities and other non-government partners a way to invest in efforts to keep our land resilient and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism and outdoor recreation, and other industries.

This year's projects in Arkansas will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural and natural resource goals from addressing water quality degradation, groundwater declines, and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife on irrigated cropland; reducing nutrient and sediment load entering the Red River; improving water quality in the Illinois River Watershed so that all waters meet their designated uses; and assisting rice producers address water quantity, water quality, and wildlife habitat across 380,000 acres in Mississippi, Arkansas, Cal-



Map of Arkansas's four RCPP projects.

ifornia, Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas.

“Partners are seeing the value of conservation and investing in their future,” Vilsack said. “These partnerships are forging a new path for getting conservation on the ground and are providing opportunities for communities to have a voice and ownership in protecting and improving our natural resources. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program ushers in a new era of conservation, and

we're excited about the down-the-road benefits from this new Farm Bill program.”

This year's projects will engage hundreds of partners with wide-ranging interests, including communities, conservation districts, agribusiness, non-government organizations, for-and not-for profit organizations, state and federal agencies and Tribal governments. In addition to USDA funds, partners will contribute an estimated \$400 million, more than doubling USDA's investment.

“RCPP puts our partners in the driver's seat,” said Mike Sullivan, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service state conservationist in Arkansas. “Projects are led locally, and demonstrate the value of strong public-private partner-

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From the State Conservationist

Dear Arkansan,

Welcome to the latest edition of Arkansas Conservation News. 2015 has gotten off to a busy start for us. In January, we announced four projects that will receive funding as part of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Assistant Chief Kirk Hanlin came to Little Rock for a meeting with project sponsors and our conservation partners to discuss RCPP projects approved in Arkansas. The project selection process was extremely competitive. RCPP is a 5-year \$1.2 billion USDA commitment. Projects not selected in this first year may be interested in competing in subsequent years.

USDA recently announced that \$100 million will be made available nation-wide this year through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Although CSP applications are accepted all year, producers should submit applications by February 27 to ensure they are considered for this year's funding. CSP is a way of incentivizing farmers, ranchers, and private forest managers who maintain a high level of conservation on their land and agree to adopt higher levels of stewardship. By focusing on multiple resource concerns, landowners are able to achieve a sustainable landscape and maintain or increase the productivity of their operations.

Priorities for FY15 remain much the same as in recent years: deliver excellent and innovative service including Farm Bill Programs and our Healthy Land and Waters Campaign, strengthen and modernize conservation delivery including establishing electronic access to plans and contracts for those who are interested, expand our technical capacity by placing more emphasis on irrigation water management, soil health and conservation planning, and broaden our reach continuing to build our Conservation partnership, expanding StrikeForce increasing USDA assistance to the 48 highest poverty counties, and in communicating our results. With a strong commitment to conservation in the 2014 Farm Bill, the best Conservation partnership and employees in the Nation, I am confident that Arkansas will continue to see big successes in conservation on private lands addressing priority resource concerns such as soil health, water quality, water quantity and wildlife habitat, and improving the lives of farmers, ranchers and foresters and the communities in which they live and work.

I'd also like to congratulate Stone County Conservation District in Mountain View for winning the 2014 National Association of Conservation Districts/NRCS Earth Team Partnership Award. The strong partnership between the NRCS field office, Stone County Conservation District, and Earth Team volunteers has enabled them to be chosen as the best in the nation and I couldn't be more proud. In addition, I'd also like to congratulate Aaron Shelton, soil conservationist from Salem, for receiving a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Day of Service Drum Major for Service Award at USDA headquarters. Aaron won the award for his work with his son's Cub Scout Pack, with mentoring, fundraising, and meeting planning. Congratulations again to all for the fine work that you do and the recognition you've received.



Mike Sullivan
State Conservationist

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael E. Sullivan".

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

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(Left) The green line shows where a 900-foot section of the levee along Mill Creek in Scott County, Ark., was destroyed by flooding in May 2013.



The “new” levee was completed Aug. 24, 2014, protecting residents, buildings and other infrastructure. (Photos by Todd Stringer)

NRCS rebuilds levee, resident’s peace of mind

When flood waters tore through the levee along Mill Creek in western Arkansas in May 2013, the small unincorporated community of Y City in Scott County sustained massive damage. Mill Creek rose more than 19 feet destroying lives, homes, businesses and a levee.

Flood damage covered a five-mile long area and killed five people. A month later, northwest Arkansas was hit with record rainfall and subsequent flooding again threatened Y City since a 900-foot section of the previously damaged levee was still in need of repair.

Thanks to the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS, Poteau River Conservation District and Scott County leadership, residents in the Y City community can now rest a little easier when storm clouds threaten.

After attempts to receive financial assistance through some federal agencies weren’t successful, Scott County representatives turned to NRCS and the Poteau River Conservation District for help.

This need for assistance turned out to be a true testament to the strong relationship forged over years between NRCS and the local conservation district.

The levee break occurred on private property so permission to repair the area had to be obtained from the landowner first. Once that was secured, NRCS was able to team up with the conservation district through the agency’s Emergency Watershed Protection Program, or EWP, to begin repairs. The district was the official sponsor of the project.

Scott County is considered by NRCS to be a limited

“Safety for the residents was a primary concern of mine and those I’ve spoken with since the project was completed said they feel a lot safer.”

-- Scott County Judge James Forbes

resource county due to factors, such as low income levels and high unemployment rates. This designation allowed 90 percent of the costs of reconstructing the levee to be granted to the Poteau River Conservation District through the EWP. As the sponsor, the district provided the dirt for the levee and 10 percent of the construction costs.

Arkansas NRCS engineers were the boots on the ground. They surveyed the damage, designed the project and oversaw construction.

The project entailed removing flood debris from the damaged portion of the levee and rebuilding it with earth fill. More than 25,000 cubic yards of fill was hauled from a location two miles away. The rebuilt area was then compacted down by a machine operated roller and then reseeded and mulched for coverage.

The final cost of the project was nearly \$300,000 and was completed within two months this past summer.

Because of these partnerships forged by adversity, hundreds of residents and 12 homes with multiple shops, barns and outbuildings are now protected. A local truck stop, restaurant, roads and utilities have also benefited from the new levee.

“After the Poteau River Conservation District signed on as a sponsor, the project went well,” said Scott County Judge James Forbes. “NRCS did everything I asked of them that was allowed under the rules.”

“Safety for the residents was a primary concern of mine and those I’ve spoken with since the project was completed said they feel a lot safer. The levee repair looks outstanding,” he added.

Programs News

RCPP

(continued from Page 1)

ships that deliver solutions to tough natural resource challenges. RCPP provides an opportunity for locally driven partnerships to work side-by-side with local Conservation Districts and NRCS to accelerate conservation efforts and achieve measurable progress.”

Arkansas’s four RCPP projects and funding amounts are:

State Level – Illinois River Watershed Partnership: Growing Conservation in the Illinois River Watershed (\$1.1 million)

The primary goal of the project is to improve water quality in the Illinois River Watershed so all waters meet their designated uses. Portions of the Illinois River and its tributaries have been cited as not meeting these designated uses due to impairment from bacteria, sediment, and/or excess nutrients.

Water quality degradation to be addressed includes excessive sediment in surface waters, elevated water temperature, excess nutrients in surface and ground waters, excess pathogens and chemicals from manure, bio-solids or compost applications. Soil erosion is a resource concern due to concentrated flow erosion and excessive bank erosion from streams creating excessive sediment in surface waters. On-farm energy improvements will also be addressed.

State Level – Southwest Arkansas RC&D Council: Arkansas Red River Project (\$700,000)

The Arkansas Red River Project area is a multi-county project that includes Hempstead, Lafayette, Little River, and Miller counties. This project has been developed to address the primary resource concern of water quality in the Red River Watershed in Arkansas.

Secondary resource concerns include soil erosion, irrigation water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat benefits. Project success will be measured by the acres of agricultural land under contract and the number of producers adopting conservation practices that will reduce nutrient and sediment load entering the Red River.

National – Ducks Unlimited and USA Rice: Rice Stewardship Partnership — Sustaining the Future of Rice (\$10 million)

The Rice Stewardship Partnership, composed of DU, the USA Rice Federation, and 44 collaborating partners, will assist up to 800 rice producers to address water quantity, water quality, and wildlife habitat across 380,000 acres in Mississippi, Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas.

Using remote sensing to estimate bird population carrying capacity in shallow waters and the Field-to-Market Fieldprint



(left to right) Dow Brantley, chairman, USA Rice Federation; Jacqueline Dunn, project director, Southwest Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development Council; Mike Sullivan, state conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Kirk Hanlin, assistant chief, NRCS; Dr. Delia Haak, executive director, Illinois River Watershed Partnership (IRWP); Gene Pharr, IRWP board member; and Gene Sullivan, executive director, Bayou Meto Water Management District.

Calculator to monitor results over time, the partners offer several innovations to augment conservation implementation and gain broader producer participation.

Critical Conservation Area – Bayou Meto Water Management District: Bayou Meto Lower Arkansas Region Conservation Partnership Proposal (\$3 million)

This project builds on strong momentum among landowners and existing partnerships developed over the past five years through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative. It will use the full suite of NRCS programs — EQIP, CSP, ACEP-WRE, and PL-566 — to address water quality degradation, groundwater declines, and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife on 300,000 acres of irrigated cropland.

Local partners, including irrigation districts, conservation districts, state game and fish and resource agencies, farmer co-op, higher education institutions, and for-profit entities, have well-defined roles and supported contributions to the project.

More than 600 pre-proposals were submitted for RCPP in 2014. Of those, more than 200 were invited to submit full proposals. “With so many strong project proposals, the selection process was extremely competitive. RCPP is a 5-year \$1.2 billion USDA commitment; projects not selected in this first year may be eligible in subsequent years,” Sullivan said.

Conservation partners have big impact in St. Francis River Watershed

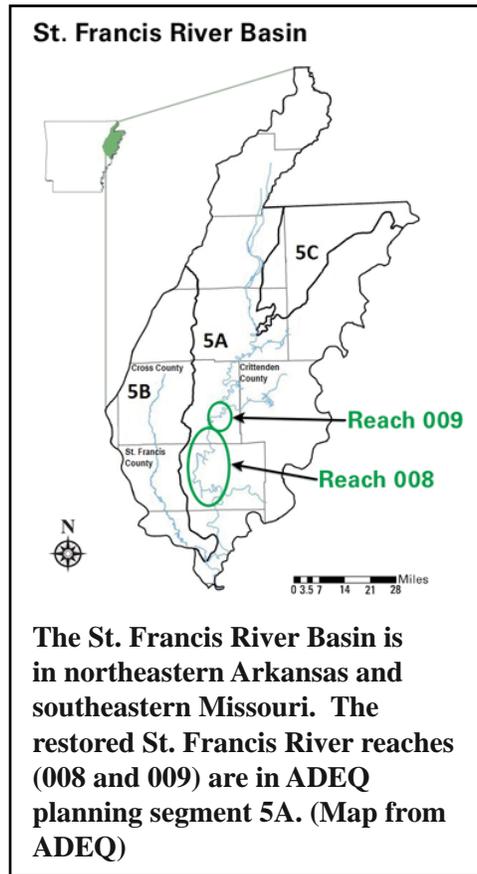
The St. Francis River in Missouri and Arkansas has suffered for years from turbidity, or cloudy water caused by runoff of sediment, but thanks to the dedication of government and non-government groups as well as farmers, the river's water quality is improving. Two segments in Arkansas were listed in 2006 as impaired. In 2014, those segments were removed from the list. As Sarah Clem, Branch Manager for Water Quality Planning at the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality stated, "Since these efforts were undertaken by agricultural producers in the watershed, turbidity levels have declined markedly."

The St. Francis River begins in southeastern Missouri, flows across Arkansas, and empties into the Mississippi River near Helena, Arkansas. Soils eroding from farm fields have washed into waterways that flow to the river, contributing to water quality problems downstream.

A strong partnership combined with the opportunity for farmers to make a big impact on water quality made this area perfect for additional conservation funding and assistance through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative.

Beginning in 2010, NRCS accelerated efforts with farmers and ranchers, as well as conservation partners in the watershed, to implement conservation systems on 479 farms and ranches in order to curb soil erosion, improve the quality of water coming off of fields, and enhance irrigation efficiency.

The five MRBI projects in the wa-



tershed allowed farmers to implement NRCS conservation systems that avoid, control, and trap nutrients and sediment leaving their fields. NRCS invested more than \$14 million through five projects in the watershed, putting conservation systems on more than 81,227 acres. Through a targeted approach to implementing voluntary conservation systems, the partners identified areas of high conservation need and tailored practices, such as nutrient management, residue and tillage management, water control

structures, and irrigation pipelines, to the uniqueness of small watersheds near the St. Francis River and specific environmental concerns, including the turbidity issue, and excess nutrients.

MRBI provided Fred Stuckey, of Stuckey Farms Partnership, the financial assistance to help establish a detailed nutrient management plan throughout his 8,000 acre operation.

The financial incentives supported development of detailed soil maps, and combined with yield maps, provide even more data to better make nutrient management decisions. "As a result," said Stuckey, "we have seen our overall input costs decrease, and we are also confident that increased management has led to improved water quality benefits not only on the farm but also throughout the watershed."

This work builds on the efforts of conservation districts in the area, including the Cross County Conservation District and Poinsett County Conservation District. The districts have helped farmers install water control structures that trap sediment and have been leaders in promoting the use of no-till.

"By bringing all of the partners to the table to address the water quality concerns in the St. Francis, we were able to get results," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "These MRBI projects have shown that targeted approaches in small watersheds can be very effective to improve water quality and maintain viable agricultural operations."



Soil and Soil Health

Mid America Museum Exhibit

The Crops, Soils and Environmental Sciences Department at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville and the NRCS Soils/GIS Staff are collaborating with the Exploratorium in San Francisco, Calif., in developing a new exhibition project for Arkansas' Mid-America Museum in Hot Springs.

The exhibit will be part of a gallery that explores the natural resources of the state, called "Arkansas Underfoot."

This particular part of the gallery will include a large USGS map of Arkansas with samples of natural products found in the state on display, such as different rock types, crude oil, fossils, and soil

The soils exhibit will include soil monoliths depicting unique soil horizons from around the state.



Edgar Mersiovsky, state soil scientist, samples soil for display.

USDA joins global partners to kick off International Year of Soils in 2015

USDA joined nations from across the globe to kick off the International Year of Soils Dec. 5, an effort to highlight the importance of soil in everyday life. Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Robert Bonnie addressed members of the 68th United Nations General Assembly, which designated 2015 for the yearlong celebration.

"We are excited to be working with the United Nations to help raise awareness and promote the importance of conservation of our soil resources," Bonnie said. "USDA is embracing this unique opportunity to tell the world about the importance of soil conservation and how we've worked with private landowners since 1935 to protect and improve this priceless natural resource."

UN's Food and Agriculture Organization spearheaded the global International Year of Soils campaign within the framework of the Global Soil Partnership. The year of awareness aims to increase understanding of the importance of soil for food security and essential ecosystem functions. Soils play a crucial role in food security, hunger eradication, climate change adaptation, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Bonnie is one of several leaders who

addressed the assembly, on World Soil Day, about the importance of soil. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service – America's agency for soil conservation, classification and studies – plans to make the year a memorable one.

"We're excited soils will be in the spotlight during 2015," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "Soil is a living and life-giving natural resource. As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance."

NRCS works hand-in-hand with producers through technical and financial assistance programs and services to help ensure their success. The agency was born amid the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s, the nation's largest environmental disaster caused by over cultivation, drought and record-breaking temperatures.

"NRCS conservationists work with farmers and ranchers across the country, including here in Arkansas, to take care of the soil, ensuring agricultural operations are sustainable for many years to come," Sullivan said.

For more information on International Year of Soils, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/.

Web Soil Survey

Soil Data Refresh

Soil data for the Web Soil Survey (<http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>) was refreshed on Oct. 1, 2014, for the entire state.

The refresh of data was due to the national calculations for the following soil interpretations: K-factor, T-factor, Wind Erodibility Group (WEG), Hydrologic Soil Group (HSG), Steel Corrosion and Concrete Corrosion.

The calculations were developed to provide uniformity and consistency in the population of various soil factors and to assist soil survey staff in efficient population of the soils database. Calculations are written using scientific peer reviewed and published criteria and developed to be applicable nationwide.

Beginning farmer utilizes conservation programs to enhance his operation

Lee County, Arkansas, farmer Roger Smith, Jr., hasn't been in the business long, but he's optimistic about his future in farming. The 24 year-old has only been farming since 2011, but he has quickly grasped conservation practices as a key to his operation's future success.

He first got interested in farming while working with his uncle on a farm when he was a child.

As he got older, he began working on a farm and also attended youth farming programs at Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC), a community based organization in Fargo.

He also attended ALFDC workshops, where he learned about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and USDA's StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative, available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

When he first started farming on his own operation, he grew soybeans, corn, milo, rice and grain sorghum. But the field he was raising his crops on had depressions and other surface irregularities and was in need of more surface drainage.

He went to his local USDA Service Center to seek assistance. He wanted to learn more about land leveling and visited with Lee County District Conservationist Derinda Smith. She discussed several conservation practices that could help enhance his farming operation through EQIP as well as through the StrikeForce Initiative since Lee County is one of 48 StrikeForce counties in Arkansas.



Lee County District Conservationist Derinda Smith (center) discusses Roger Smith Jr.'s conservation plan with him and his uncle Larry Terry.

"You would think Roger is older than he is because he has aligned himself with some of the older farmers in the area who know a lot," said District Conservationist Smith. "Because of that, he had gotten so much information and had already learned so much from them about farming. I am really proud of him and appreciate him for trusting us by implement-

ing several practices as part of his conservation plan."

Roger's conservation plan includes underground piping, drop pipes, land leveling, cover crops, nutrient management, and waste transfer.

"I'd like to steadily build up my yields, begin growing wheat and eventually get bigger one day," Roger said. "I'd like to thank StrikeForce and NRCS; they've helped me out considerably. I think more people, especially small farmers, need to check in to it. There are a lot of programs that NRCS has to help farmers starting off if they are willing to learn about them.

"I know NRCS programs have been around for a while, but there are still some farmers who believe that they won't qualify for them or believe that the programs are only for big farmers and not for them," Roger said. "I believe StrikeForce has simplified the process. I've got friends I tell all the time about what NRCS will do for them; they just need to go to the office and talk to them.

"There are so many NRCS programs that can help farmers accomplish everything that they want to do with everything they are doing already," he said.

Did You Know ...

Stone County Conservation District wins national Earth Team Award

The Stone County Conservation District captured the National 2014 NACD/NRCS Earth Team Award.

The strong partnership between NRCS in Mountain View, Stone County Conservation District and Earth Team volunteers has enabled the Mountain View field office to expand their Farm Bill and conservation technical assistance services to new clientele who otherwise would not have known about their services and visited the office.

The district takes the lead in sponsoring and providing outreach events and in mobilizing, training and utilizing their 66 Earth Team volunteers who donated a total of 2,642 hours of service in 2014.



Pictured are: Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist; Earl Garber, NACD president; Derek Littrell, district director; Terry Stewart, district director; Wendy Hendrix, district conservationist; Martha Blackwell, district coordinator; and Jason Weller, NRCS chief.

Arkansas Forestry Commission presents AFC Partnership Award to NRCS

The Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) recently presented NRCS in Arkansas the AFC Partnership Award for helping create a lasting impact on Arkansas forests and forest landowners, in collaboration with AFC personnel, programs, education, and outreach efforts.

“The recipient of this award has extended in some way the mission and vision of the AFC through mutual goals and strategies. The NRCS has accomplished this in every way, and we are so grateful,” according to the award nomination.

“We cannot thank the individuals at this agency enough for their friendship, leadership, and collaboration through the years. We would not be making as powerful of a difference in Arkansas forests and with forest landowners without their partnership,” said Joe Fox, state forester.



Pictured are: Joe Fox, Arkansas Forestry Commission state forester; George Rheinhardt, NRCS state forester; Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist; Nancy Young, state resource conservationist; and Rob Parkes, Arkansas Forestry Commission chairman of the board.

CSP applications due Feb. 27

USDA will make available \$100 million this year through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners should submit applications by Feb. 27, 2015, to ensure they are considered for this year's funding (applications received after that date will be considered for future funding). This year's investment may result in the enrollment of up to 7.7 million acres in the program by private landowners.

Through CSP, participants take additional conservation steps to improve the resource conditions on their land, including soil, air and habitat quality, water quality and quantity, and energy conservation.

The 2014 Farm Bill brought changes to CSP including an expanded conservation activity list that will offer participants greater options to meet their conservation needs and protect the natural resources on their land. These conservation activities, called enhancements, include cover crops, intensive rotational grazing and wildlife friendly fencing.

Applications should be submitted to local NRCS offices. As part of the CSP application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land, which will help determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

To sign up, visit your local USDA service center.

Shelton earns National Day of Service award

Aaron Shelton, soil conservationist at the Salem Field Service Center, recently received a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Day of Service Drum Major for Service Award at USDA headquarters.

Shelton firmly believes in service to others and has shown this through his time as a volunteer fireman, assistant scout master in his local Boy Scout troop, and now cub master with the local Cub Scout pack.

An Eagle Scout himself, his goal is to be an example to boys and help them on their path to becoming responsible young men and future leaders in the community. Since Shelton has been cub master participation in his Cub Scout



Pictured are: Dr. Zina B. Sutch, director of diversity, recruitment and work/life; Aaron Shelton, NRCS soil conservationist; and Dr. Gregory L. Parham, assistant secretary for departmental management.

program has doubled in the last year.

His motto of "service to others" continues to be seen in the work place. He volunteers to help co-workers within his team, and travel to other areas within Arkansas to provide assistance.

NWQI applications due Feb. 20

State Conservationist Mike Sullivan announced applications are being accepted through Feb. 20, 2015, for the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) in three Arkansas watersheds in portions of Jefferson and Lincoln counties.

Eligible producers in Cousart Bayou-Little Cypress Bayou, Upper Deep Bayou and Lower Deep Bayou watersheds will invest in voluntary conservation actions to help provide cleaner water for their neighbors and communities. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the initiative by making funds available to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners in the selected watersheds.

Using funds from the Environmental

Quality Incentives Program, NRCS will provide technical and financial assistance to producers to install conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips and tailwater recovery systems.

Arkansas's three watersheds were selected based on the high amount of sediment and total phosphorus concentration that flow into tributaries of the Bayou Bartholomew watershed. Deep Bayou and Jacks Bayou, which flow through the watersheds, have been identified as impaired waterways because of excessive levels of siltation primarily from agricultural practices. The three watershed total 62,473 acres in parts of Jefferson and Lincoln counties.

To sign up, visit your local USDA service center.

Suite of practices assists organic producers

You probably hear the word “organic” quite a bit, but do you really know what it means?

Organic producers use practices that foster the cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. Organic farmers limit their use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and do not use sewage sludge, irradiation or genetic engineering.

Consumer demand for fruits, vegetables, grains and livestock with the organic seal is high— and the industry is growing. Organic operations are more than a \$30 billion industry in the United States.

During the past 10 years, the number of certified organic farms and businesses in the U.S. exceeded 17,000, a 240 percent increase since USDA first began collecting this data.

USDA’s National Organic Program sets the standards for organic production and handling, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provides financial and technical assistance to organic producers or producers wanting to transition their operations into organic ones.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program are the two key NRCS conservation programs for organic and transitioning organic producers.

NRCS helps these producers by developing a conservation plan and conservation activity plan also known as a transition to organic plan, which may include establishing buffers, improving soil quality, reducing soil erosion and pests and improving irrigation efficiency, among other things.

Buffers, such as field borders and hedgerows, effectively separate organic crops from non-organic, while cover crops prevent erosion and make the soil healthier.

When certified organic and transitioning organic producers use conservation practices on their operation, the benefits extend beyond producing quality fruits, vegetables and meat from their farms or ranches. These practices can also lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and habitat for birds, bees and other pollinators.

