

ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Second Quarter
2020

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

Second Quarter
2020



NRCS Chief Lohr Visits Arkansas

Page 6



MRBI and NWQI Sign-up
Announced, Deadline April 17.
Page 8



USDA Invests More Than \$2.3 Million in Joint Chiefs' Project.
Page 3



National Unveils *Conservation at Work* Video Series.
Page 14

Helping People Help the Land

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

From the State Conservationist

We are working diligently to make the necessary adjustments to our operations in order to support you with the best financial and technical assistance, and customer service, while also taking the necessary and appropriate actions to ensure that our customers and USDA staff remain safe to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

USDA Service Centers in Arkansas will continue to be open for business by phone appointment only. Field work by our Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff will continue with the appropriate social distancing. Our program delivery staff will be working with our farmers, ranchers and foresters by phone, and using online tools whenever possible.

NRCS offers year-round continuous sign-up for our Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural

Conservation Easement Program. All NRCS field office visitors wishing to conduct business with us are required to call to schedule a phone appointment about sign-up, application submission options, etc.

NRCS will continue to look at flexibilities to deliver programs on behalf of producers.

Online services are available to customers with an e-Auth account, which provides access to the www.farmers.gov portal where producers can view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway](#). Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance, and electronically sign documents. Customers who do not already have an e-Auth account can enroll at www.farmers.gov/sign-in.

Please enjoy our newsletter and know that our conservation partnership is here to work with




Mike Sullivan, State Conservationist

and for you. We will continue to look at every possible option and flexibility to support the conservation needs of Arkansas's private landowners.

ARKANSAS CONSERVATION NEWS

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE



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.

For more information on Arkansas NRCS visit:
Website: www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov
Twitter: twitter.com/arkansasnrscs
YouTube: <https://bit.ly/2Hau3QO>

Arkansas NRCS Public Affairs Email Addresses:
Reginald.Jackson@usda.gov
Creston.Shrum@usda.gov
Christopher.Willis@usda.gov

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign and mail the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (PDF), found on line at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the

form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at: USDA; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

Or by email at program.intake@usda.gov. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities and you wish to file either an EEO or program complaint please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish).

Persons with disabilities who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us by mail directly or by email. If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) please contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

USDA Invests more than \$2.3 Million in Arkansas to Improve Water Quality, Forest Health, Wildlife Habitat

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will invest more than \$2.3 million this fiscal year in Arkansas through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership to protect and improve water quality for public drinking water, tourism, fisheries, and rural industrial development; encourage rural prosperity, forest health and resiliency; improve habitat for at-risk species; reduce and mitigate wildfire threats; and promote environmental education.

The Building Resilient Watersheds to Improve Drinking Water in the Ozark and Ouachita Highlands project area includes sites in six high-priority watersheds covering more than five million acres.

USDA's Forest Service (FS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will work together to replace degraded and undersized stream crossings, restore shortleaf pine forests, construct permanent fire breaks, reduce fuel loads, conduct controlled burns, and conduct outreach to local communities.

The Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership allows NRCS and FS to collaborate with agricultural producers and forest landowners to invest in conservation and restoration at a big enough scale to make a difference. Working in partnership, and at this scale, helps mitigate wildfire risk, improve water quality and restore healthy forest ecosystems on public and private lands.

"With the help of USDA, private forestland owners can improve their forestry operations while realizing many other benefits, including mitigating impacts from wildfires and improving water quality and wildlife habitat," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas.

"Arkansas NRCS has \$2 million available to help private landowners install conservation practices such as forest stand improvement (thinning), prescribed burning, firebreaks, tree and shrub planting and streambank and shoreline protection," Sullivan said. "As with all NRCS programs, participation is completely voluntary. This project



incorporates the same practices at an accelerated pace that landowners have been voluntarily implementing for years."

Project partners include Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Choctaw Nation, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Arkansas Forestry Association, The Nature Conservancy, National Wild Turkey Federation, Quail Forever, Monarch Watch, ANHC, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, Central Hardwood Joint Venture, and the 27 organizations involved with the Shortleaf Bluestem Community and Ozark Highlands CFLRP projects on the two national forests.

"Arkansas is honored to collaborate with USDA's NRCS and Forest Service, and a host of State partners to help private landowners in Arkansas implement conservation practices that will protect and enhance Arkansas's natural resources," said Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward.

Nationally, FS and NRCS will invest more than \$41 million this fiscal year through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership. Funding for 36 projects includes \$10.6 million for 16 new projects and \$30.5 million to complete work on 20 projects previously selected

in 2018 and 2019.

USDA has invested more than \$225 million over seven years to Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership projects, which focus on areas where public forests and grasslands intersect with privately-owned lands.

This year's selections bring the total number of Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration projects to 85. Since 2014, these projects have delivered important forest and rangeland funding to 40 states and Puerto Rico.

Through the new three-year projects, landowners will work with local USDA experts and partners to apply targeted forestry management practices on their land, such as thinning, hazardous fuel treatments, fire breaks and other systems to meet unique forestry challenges in their area.

For full project descriptions and information on completed projects, visit the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership website at <https://go.usa.gov/xEsyY>. For information on the Arkansas project, visit the Building Resilient Watersheds to Improve Drinking Water in the Ozark and Ouachita Highlands site at www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.

Ag producers and forest landowners interested in the project should contact their local USDA service center to learn if their land is eligible.

Controlling Feral Swine in Arkansas

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced it is awarding more than \$3.4 million to fund pilot projects to control feral swine in Arkansas.

These projects are part of the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (FSCP)—a joint effort between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to help address the threat that feral swine pose to agriculture, ecosystems and human and animal health.

"Feral swine cause significant damage to crop and grazing lands, while also impacting the health of our natural resources," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "By collaborating with our partners nationally and here in Arkansas, our hope is to control and eradicate this invasive species—improving operations for farmers while also protecting our natural resources for the future."

NRCS and APHIS are working with Arkansas Agriculture Department's Natural Resources Division and several partner organizations on four pilot projects in Arkansas to reduce the feral swine population, agronomic damage, and environmental impacts throughout the project areas.

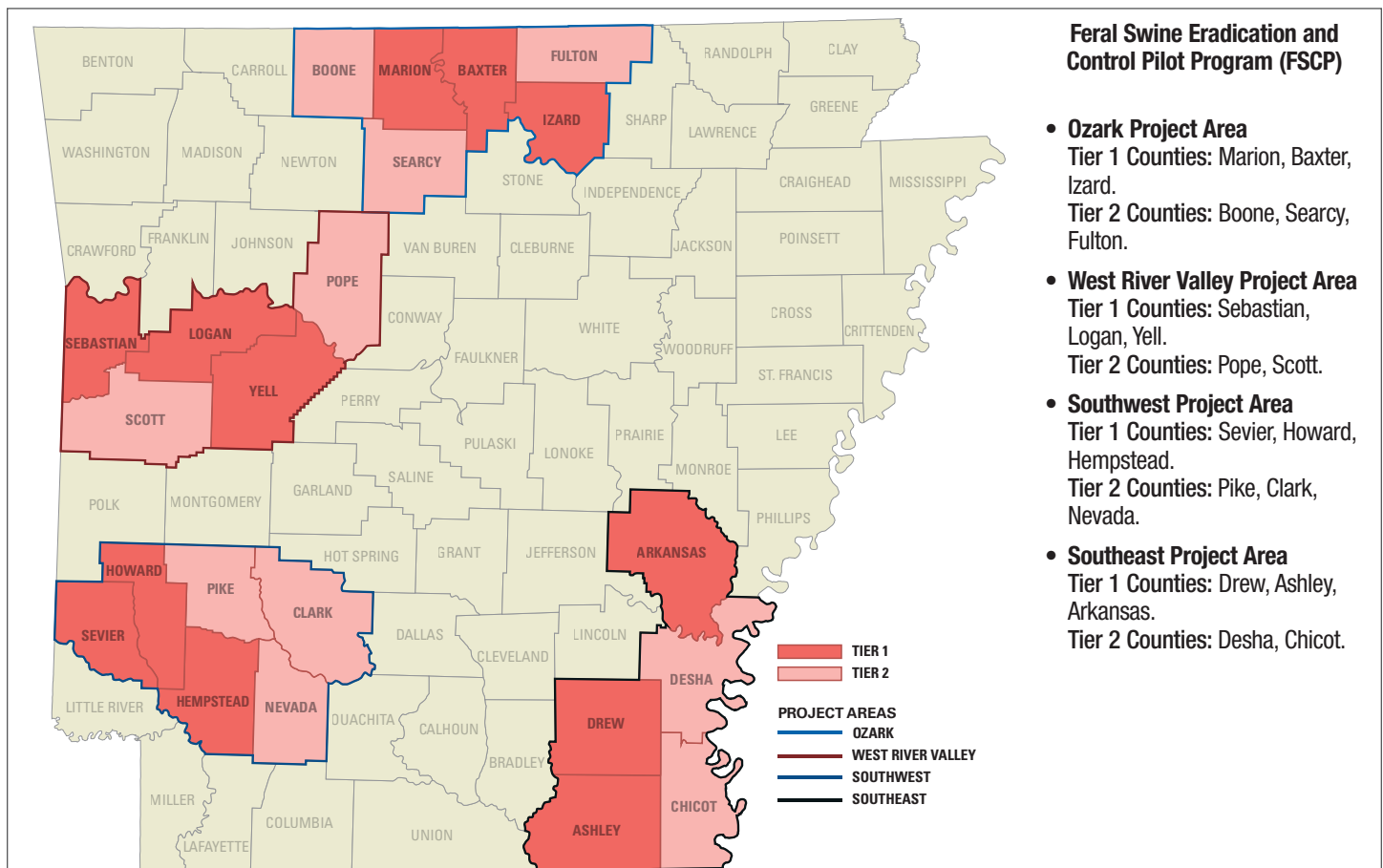
NRCS, APHIS and the Arkansas State Technical Agriculture Committee worked together to define the critical areas to be

considered for projects within the state. The Arkansas pilot projects are for three years in duration. Proposals were submitted to NRCS in August 2019 and a competitive process was used to evaluate each proposal for potential funding. The four Agriculture Department Natural Resources Division projects cover four regions of the state that have experienced excessive agricultural damage from feral swine.

NRCS is awarding more than \$3 million this year for the feral swine pilot project in select areas of Arkansas. The funding limit for a single award is \$1.5 million. Awardees are required to provide at least 25 percent of the partnership agreement budget as a match to NRCS funding. APHIS is providing \$23.3 million this year to the Wildlife Services programs located in the pilot projects states.

The 2018 Farm Bill provides \$75 million for the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program. These funds are for the life of the Farm Bill and divided evenly between NRCS and APHIS.

Additional information on feral swine control work in the state can be found at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ar/programs/farmbill/89e4ddbf-0842-43aa-b627-709ea50cf060/> and <http://nrcs.usda.gov/fscp>.



Application Deadline for Arkansas Groundwater Initiative Funding in Nine Arkansas Counties

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas has dedicated a portion of its Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funding to accelerate voluntary installation of conservation practices for sustaining agriculture through stabilizing groundwater levels.

Agricultural producers in Arkansas, Prairie, Monroe, and portions of Craighead, Cross, Lonoke, Lee, St. Francis, and Poinsett counties have until April 3, 2020, to submit applications for funding consideration to voluntarily implement conservation practices through the Arkansas Groundwater Initiative (AGWI).

Arkansas ranks third in the nation for the number of irrigated acres. The primary source of irrigation water is and has historically been the shallow Mississippi River Valley Alluvial Aquifer. This aquifer is being overdrawn 80 percent beyond its safe yield. In addition, the Sparta Aquifer which supplies drinking water for many residents in the Mississippi River Valley is now being used for irrigation. Through this initiative, approximately \$3 million is available through EQIP to address the water quantity issues in the Alluvial and

Sparta aquifers.

“While Arkansas has an abundance of good quality groundwater in many parts of the state, groundwater is being depleted faster than the rate of recharge in the primary agricultural area for cultivated crops,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist for Arkansas.

“There is a critical decline of groundwater in the aquifer beneath these increasingly irrigated acres. NRCS uses its programs and technical expertise to install systems that convert from groundwater use to abundant surface water utilizing the state’s annual rainfall and to promote efficient irrigation water management,” Sullivan said.

In addition to surface water conversions, priority will be given to systems which will reduce overall water usage by irrigation water management and more efficient distribution systems. All contracts will require implementation of an Irrigation Water Management (IWM) plan for a minimum of three years and detailed water use reporting to NRCS. Overall priority will be determined through a tiered system with the areas experiencing the most significant impacts in the aquifers being

the highest priorities.

Most irrigation conservation practices will be available for EQIP funding. In addition, practices which increase the water holding capacity of the soil will also be eligible. Priority ranking will be given for:

- Locations within the greatest cones of depression or the least percent of saturated thickness of the alluvial aquifer
- Systems converting to surface water systems;
- Installation of permanent flowmeters on all wells/reliefs;
- Yearly water level monitoring and data collection of water usage and water levels in producer wells by NRCS; and
- Irrigation Water Management plans which have higher levels of management to achieve greater water savings.

To sign up for EQIP, visit your local USDA field service center. To locate the local office, visit <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>. For more information about NRCS programs, visit www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.



Chief Lohr Visits Arkansas

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Matthew Lohr traveled to Little Rock December 8-9 to attend the USA Rice Outlook Conference at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock. Chief Lohr spoke to more than 800 attendees about his role and NRCS's efforts to implement the new regulations under the 2018 Farm Bill during the event. He also spoke about Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue's overarching mission to improve USDA's customer service to all those whom we serve.

While in Arkansas, the Chief had an opportunity to meet with several agriculture and conservation leaders in Little Rock. He also had an opportunity to drop by the NRCS State office to meet and talk to NRCS, Water Management Center and Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff.

Chief Lohr traveled to Lonoke County to tour The Morris Farm, which has the distinction of producing the first rice crop in Arkansas in 1902. He visited with Richard and Matt Morris in front of their 17-acre reservoir. There he was told by the Morris' how, through an NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract, they are able to irrigate the farm with 100 percent surface water.

The chief then traveled to the Bayou Meto Water Management District to hear first hand about the groundwater depletion problem in the Sparta Aquifer and how the Bayou Meto Basin Project will help save the Aquifer. NRCS is the federal partner for the large-scale project to help address the critical ground water problem and recently received \$12 million in PL-566 funding to assist with implementation.

The chief's final stop was a leadership dinner hosted by the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts where they discussed recent activities, accomplishments and efforts of conservation that are being put on the ground all around the state. The chief also received an Arkansas Traveler Certificate from Arkansas Department of Agriculture Secretary Wes Ward.



Top, NRCS Chief Matt Lohr with NRCS Arkansas staff at the USA Rice Outlook Conference. Above, Lonoke County producer Chris Isbell (left) talks about conservation and rice production with Chief Lohr at the USA Rice Outlook Conference. Photos by Chris Willis

By CRESTON SHRUM
PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

Editor's note: During USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Matt Lohr's visit to Arkansas, he met with state office staff, local district conservationists, Water Management Center staff and Farm Service Agency employees.

On a trip to the west coast about six months ago, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Matthew Lohr shared recently that nothing went right. He finally arrived at his hotel at 9 p.m. and hadn't eaten all day. He looked horrible. But, when he looked out the hotel window and saw one of his favorite fast food restaurants across the street his night got a little better.

"I go across the street, walk up to the counter and the young man looks

at me and kind of smiles. He says, 'Sir—I can tell you've had a really rough day. I don't know anything about you. Don't know who you are, where you're from, but I want you to know that all of us appreciate you coming in here and having dinner with us tonight and hopefully, the hamburger and fries we prepare tonight will help you feel better and cheer up your spirits,'" Lohr said, adding "I'm looking around, wondering if I'm on candid camera, because this normally doesn't happen in fast food restaurants. But, this simple 30 second conversation didn't cost anything, didn't take much effort, but it really made me feel better and lifted my spirits."

In contrast, the next morning the Chief got up early and rushed out the door. The hotel he was staying at had breakfast from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m.

"I look at my watch and it's 5:57 a.m. The doors are open and lights are on.

I walk in and this lady comes running from the kitchen screaming, 'What are you doing? Didn't you see the sign? We don't open until 6. Get out.' I said I just need to get a cup of juice. She says she doesn't care, comes over, puts my cup down and marches me out of the room."

"She's so mad at me. She slams the doors so hard it pops open and we're standing there just looking at each other. She folds her arms and looks at the clock and just stands there for 3 minutes. When 6 comes she jerks the doors open, sticks her finger in my chest and says now go get your juice and walks back to the kitchen. Needless to say, this 30 second interaction did not leave me feeling like the most valued guest."

The Chief said if he could go back in time, he figures neither of the two people would remember him. However, he remembers them. "It taught me a valuable lesson. It's the little interactions

Chief Lohr



NRCS Chief Matt Lohr with NRCS Arkansas, NRCS National Water Management Center, and FSA Arkansas staff. Photo by Christopher Willis

we have with people that make the biggest difference,” he said.

These are just two examples of customer service the Chief likes to share when he speaks out in the states to NRCS staff - most recently in Arkansas. The delivery of quality customer service is one of the Chief’s top priorities.

“Secretary Perdue and Under Secretary Northey preach customer service all the time. It doesn’t mean that we give the customer whatever they want. Nor does it mean they’re always right,” Lohr said. “It means we listen and determine what the need is. And, sometimes we can help them. But if we can’t, it’s being able to explain in detail why. If someone comes in with a question about a Farm Service Agency program, don’t just send them out the door. Get up and walk them down and introduce them to someone that can help them.”

As a fifth-generation farmer from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Lohr said he is on the receiving end of quality customer service from his local

USDA Service Center. He has utilized technical assistance, along with Farm Bill programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

“I’ve been a customer of NRCS and FSA for many years. In fact, when I got a call from the Under Secretary asking if I had an interest in serving as Chief, the first call I made was to my wife. The second call was to my local district conservationist. I went by the NRCS office and talked to him about this opportunity. He was so good at explaining more about the agency and providing a broader layout of this agency. I knew after talking to him that I wanted to continue this journey,” Lohr shared.

His journey as Chief began just over a year ago while he was picking sweet corn and working as a full-time farmer. His phone rang and it was from a 202 area code—Washington D.C. It was Under Secretary Bill Northey asking if he’d be

interested in serving as Chief of NRCS.

“I was very, very happy being a farmer,” Lohr said, who has also been a middle school ag teacher, Virginia Legislator and the Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture. “But my mom raised me that when Washington calls with these types of positions you need to at least consider it. So, we had a family meeting and we all took a vote and learned that I had their blessing.”

He said he was fortunate to be selected as NRCS’s 16th Chief and the first one in almost 30 years who is a farmer.

“We really have incredible employees that are dedicated, caring and are willing to go that extra step to serve,” Lohr said. “I see it reinforced every day when I have a chance to visit with staff, partners and producers. The role each of you play is so important to conservation. And, it’s the little things that we do that have the biggest impact. Most of the time it’s the things we do that we probably don’t remember that makes a big difference to people on the other side.”



Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan talks about computerized hole selection with Chief Lohr.



Home of the oldest rice farm in Arkansas still producing rice, NRCS Chief Matt Lohr visits Merlin Morris Farms in Carlisle, Ark. with NRCS staff. Photo by Reginald Jackson

Programs

USDA to Invest \$56 Million in 2020 to Help Farmers Improve Water Quality Application Deadline April 17 for Arkansas Projects

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$56 million this year to help agricultural producers improve water quality in more than 300 high-priority watersheds across the country. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is continuing two of its successful landscape-level water quality efforts, the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

"We've learned that when we partner with producers to deliver conservation practices to critical watersheds, we see a positive impact," said NRCS State Conservationist in Arkansas Mike Sullivan. "Through these partnerships we maximize the delivery of our conservation efforts which yields greater results to water quality and benefits the public, our natural resources and farmers' bottom lines."

Arkansas has five MRBI projects covering 23 watersheds and four NWQI projects in seven watersheds. More than \$8.7 million is being invested in these projects this year. Agriculture producers in these project areas have until April 17 to apply for funding consideration through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to



implement conservation practices to improve water quality.

Arkansas' project areas are:

MRBI

- Cache – Portions of Woodruff, Jackson and Cross counties
- Middle Cache – Portions of Jackson, Woodruff, Poinsett and Craighead counties
- Lower St. Francis – Portions of Crittenden, Cross and St. Francis counties
- Upper Lower St. Francis – Portions of Clay and Green counties
- Cardron Creek Brewer Lake – Portions of Conway and Faulkner counties

NWQI

- Departee Creek – Portions of Independence, Jackson and White counties
- Greasy Creek-Strawberry River – Portion of Fulton County
- Buffalo Slough-Cache River – Greene and Lawrence counties

NRCS has strengthened focus on watershed assessment and partner engagement in priority small watersheds in fiscal 2020. NRCS will soon solicit state partners for new MRBI and NWQI watersheds and source water protection areas for fiscal 2021.

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but applications are ranked and funded by enrollment periods that are set locally. Producers interested in technical and financial assistance should contact their local NRCS field office.

USDA Invites Input on Regional Conservation Partnership Program Rule

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) seeks public comments on its interim rule for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which helps partners develop and implement unique conservation solutions that engage farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The rule – now available on the Federal Register – takes effect on publication and includes changes to the program prescribed by the 2018 Farm Bill.

"Through RCPP, we co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes," said NRCS State Conservationist in Arkansas Mike Sullivan. "We look forward to making available this improved, more flexible program to partners."

The 2018 Farm Bill made RCPP a stand-alone program with its own dedicated funding, simplifying rules for partners

and producers. Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill reduces the number of funding pools and emphasizes partner reporting of conservation outcomes.

The updated program also expands flexibility for alternative funding arrangements with partners and availability of watershed program authorities to projects outside critical conservation areas.

Submitting Comments

NRCS invites comments on this interim rule through April 13 on the Federal Register. Electronic comments must be submitted through [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) under Docket ID NRCS-2019-0012. All written comments received will be publicly available on [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) as well.

NRCS will evaluate public comments to determine whether additional changes are needed. The agency plans on publishing a final rule following public comment review.

Partnerships

Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist's Partnership Award Winners announced at Annual AACD Meeting

The State Conservationist's Partnership Awards were presented Jan. 17 during the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) annual meeting in North Little Rock.

Mike Sullivan, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state conservationist in Arkansas, presented the awards during AACD's luncheon. The award recognizes a non-federal partner organization or individual who made outstanding contributions towards NRCS programs, accomplishments, and the mission in Arkansas between Oct. 1, 2018, and Sept. 30, 2019. This year's winners are:

- **Organization:** Wes Ward, Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Arkansas, accepted the 2019 Arkansas State Conservationist's Partnership Award in the Organization Category on behalf of the Arkansas Department of Agriculture (ADA). Through its various agencies and commissions the ADA has partnered with NRCS Arkansas on the Farm Bill Pilot Feral Hog Program, Joint Chiefs Forestry Program, Feral Hog Handbook, Cultural Resources Archaeologist Program, and many other joint projects.
- **Individual:** Martha Blackwell, Stone County Conservation District's district coordinator, has been instrumental in explaining Farm Bill programs, taking applications and managing funded contracts in Stone

County. In 2019, the Stone County office had 200 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and 13 Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) applications. She assisted 120 of the EQIP and all 13 CStP applicants with their applications. She also managed 100 active contracts.

"Congratulations to all our partnership award winners," said Sullivan. "We have great support from our conservation partnership and many others working together to enhance conservation assistance to farmers, ranchers and foresters. More than 250 different partners help make NRCS landscape initiatives successful. We are blessed to work in the state of Arkansas, where the conservation partnership is alive and well."

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers adopt a variety of conservation practices on their land. NRCS staff help producers with a conservation plan and provide funding to cover part of the costs for adopting the practices. These practices are designed to benefit both the natural resource and the agricultural operation.

For more information on AACD, visit www.aracd.org. To learn more about assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or for more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.



(left) Wes Ward, Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Arkansas, accepts the 2019 Arkansas State Conservationist's Partnership Award: Organization from Mike Sullivan, NRCS Arkansas State Conservationist. (right) Martha Blackwell, Stone County Conservation District's district coordinator, accepts the 2019 Arkansas State Conservationist's Partnership Award: Individual at the annual AACD meeting held in North Little Rock. Photos by Christopher Willis

Outreach

Arkansas's USDA NRCS Programs Staff Wins National Civil Rights Award

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs staff in Arkansas was recently awarded the National NRCS Team/Group Civil Rights Award for making significant contribution in the area of civil rights program delivery.

To assist historically underserved (HU) customers in south Arkansas with their property concerns, specifically forestry landowners, they began an initiative called Keeping it in the Family (KIITF), in cooperation with the Arkansas Forestry Division and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

"Meetings were held highlighting KIITF in areas where the need was identified to provide information to landowners," said Alvin Peer, NRCS Arkansas outreach coordinator. "Since the program began in 2017, we have obligated more than \$189,000 to unserved and underserved forestry producers through this initiative.

Other highlights of the program staff's civil rights work in 2019 includes:

- Provided civil rights training, as well as outreach, to professional organizations they represent.
- While implementing a new farm bill, obligated more than \$10.1 million for historically underserved Environmental Quality Incentive Program customers in 2019.
- Awarded almost 26 percent of 2019 Conservation Stewardship Program funding to HU participants.
- Arkansas producer, who the staff works with and submitted, won the 2019 National Organization for Professional Black NRCS Employees Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year award.
- Hosted a booth at the 2019 Women in Ag Conference.



NRCS Chief Matt Lohr presents NRCS Arkansas Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Jena Moore with the National NRCS Team/Group Civil Rights Award in Las Vegas, NV.

- Supported more than 34 statewide outreach conferences.

"The programs staff provides exemplary service to Arkansas producers and landowners by equally committing to conserving Arkansas's natural resources and preserving the legacy of civil rights through USDA programs," said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "Through meetings and outreach efforts, the team stays abreast of the needs and desires of producers in the state."

Cochran named Arkansas NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Kevin Cochran was recently named assistant state conservationist for field operations (South Area) for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas.



He began his career with NRCS in 2000 as a soil conservationist in Lonoke County. Over the next three years, he worked with farmers, foresters and ranchers in Howard, Jefferson and Pike counties. In 2004, he was selected as the district

conservationist in Jackson County. He has also served as district conservationist in Craighead, Lonoke and St. Francis counties.

Cochran also served as Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative Resource Conservationist. In this role, he worked with producers in Arkansas, Lonoke and Prairie counties with the implementation of conservation practices addressing water quality and quantity concerns.

He is a native of Craighead County, Arkansas. He graduated from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro in 2000 with a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Business.

"I am very excited for the

opportunities ahead to work with NRCS staff, our customers and our conservation partners in the South Area putting conservation on the ground," he said.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers adopt a variety of conservation practices on their land. NRCS staff help producers with a conservation plan and provide funding to cover part of the costs for adopting the practices. These practices are designed to benefit both the species and the agricultural operation.

To learn more about assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or for more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Around the State

Former Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist inducted into the Arkansas Ag Hall of Fame

Albert Eugene “Gene” Sullivan, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Arkansas state conservationist from 1986 until 1990, was inducted into Class XXXIII of the Arkansas Agriculture Hall of Fame on March 6.

He was inducted along with ag aviator and longtime chairman of the Arkansas

State Plant Board George Tidwell of Lonoke; Tuskegee Airman and retired Cooperative Extension agent Thomas Vaughns of Marianna; retired University of Arkansas faculty member



Gene Sullivan

Gene Woodall of Little Rock; the late timber landowner and philanthropist Jane Ross of Arkadelphia; and the late cattleman and banker Leo Sutterfield of Mountain View.

Sullivan served as NRCS deputy state conservationist in California and as NRCS state conservationist in Nebraska, Mississippi and Arkansas. He spent a career creating and implementing soil

and water management, conservation and reclamation projects that impacted farmers and ranchers.

A native of Lonoke, Sullivan earned a degree in agricultural engineering

from the University of Arkansas, and immediately went to work for the USDA's Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS). He was a graduate of the United States Senior Executive Development Program, a past president of the Arkansas Society of Agricultural Engineers, a member of the University of Arkansas Academy of Biological and Agricultural Engineers and was inducted into the Arkansas Association of Conservation District's Hall of Fame.

The Arkansas Agriculture Hall of Fame began in 1987. Their mission is to build public awareness of agriculture and to formally recognize and honor individuals whose efforts have led to the prosperity of local communities and the state.

Sullivan passed away on September 4, 2017. He was the father of current state conservationist Mike Sullivan.

Lonoke County Producer Wins NACD Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award

Lonoke County producer Robby Bevis was awarded the Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Appreciation Banquet in Las Vegas in February. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Matthew Lohr and NACD President Tim Palmer presented the award to Bevis for his extensive leadership ensuring conservation-minded farming techniques throughout the state of Arkansas are in good partnership with nature.

Bevis, a fifth-generation farmer in Lonoke County, has an operation consisting of 3,000 acres of corn, rice and soybeans. He has implemented a host of conservation practices on his farm including irrigation reservoirs and tail-water recovery systems, and management plans for nutrients, pests and irrigation water.

He is a founding member of the Arkansas Soil Health Alliance, a producer-lead organization formed to increase awareness and understanding of soil health principles, specific to mid-south agriculture. He also serves as a personal mentor for numerous producers who are getting started with soil health. He has hosted numerous tours, field days, and events at his farm to help promote expanded use of soil health.

Bevis currently serves as president of the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) and has hosted several AACD/NACD tours on his operation. He also serves on a water management district board looking to utilize excess surface water to provide necessary irrigation water to much



(l-r) Jerry Don Clark, AACD 1st Vice President, Arkansas NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Amanda Mathis, Robby Bevis, AACD President and Arkansas Soil Health Alliance founding member, Martha Manley, AACD Past President, and Debbie Moreland, AACD Program Administrator at the NACD Annual Appreciation Banquet in Las Vegas.

of Lonoke County. In 2017, Robby Bevis Family Farms was selected as the Lonoke County Farm Family of the Year by the Arkansas Farm Bureau.

NRCS and NACD jointly established the Olin Sims Conservation Leadership Award. The award is presented to an up-and-coming leader who demonstrates excellence in promoting and leading voluntary conservation on private lands. For more information about NACD, visit: www.nacdnet.org.

Outreach

NRCS participates in Diversity in Agriculture Conference in North Little Rock

United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) participated in the first *Diversity in Agriculture Conference: Empowering Today's Farmers for the Future* February 27 and February 28 in North Little Rock.

The event, hosted by Arkansas Farm Bureau, was coordinated to foster an expansion of public and private partnerships within agriculture, Arkansas's largest industry sector, which accounts for more than \$20 billion annually. It also was an effort to expand the awareness of the career and business opportunities that exist in agriculture.

The conference brought together agriculture communities, agriculture professionals and leaders, and partners from across the state to network, gain knowledge of agriculture best

practices, and ag community economic development resources. Students from universities around the state had an opportunity to talk to ag professionals and explore various career opportunities and fields in agriculture.

The conference included an opening forum featuring NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan and USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) State Executive Director David Curtis discussing the 2018 Farm Bill.

Arkansas Farm Bureau worked closely with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, NRCS, FSA, Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation, the University of Arkansas, the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas—Pine Bluff and the National Center for Appropriate Technology in planning the event.



Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mik Sullivan opens the Farm Bureau Diversity in Agriculture Conference in North Little Rock, Arkansas.



Participants posed questions to the panel about diversity, career opportunities, and the future of agriculture in Arkansas. Photos by Reginald Jackson

USDA Portal Enables Producers to Request Conservation Assistance Online

Farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners can do business with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the online portal Conservation Client Gateway.

Producers have the ability to work with conservation planners online to access Farm Bill programs, request assistance, and track payments for their conservation activities.

Conservation Client Gateway enables farmers, ranchers and private landowners to securely:

- Request NRCS technical and financial assistance;
- Review and sign conservation plans and practice schedules;
- Complete and sign an application for a conservation program;
- Review, sign and submit contracts and appendices for conservation programs;
- Document completed practices and request certification



of completed practices;

- Request and track payments for conservation programs; and
- Store and retrieve technical and financial files, including documents and photographs.

Conservation Client Gateway is entirely voluntary, giving producers an opportunity to conduct business online.

"USDA's goal is to make it easy and convenient for farmers and ranchers to work

with us," NRCS Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan said. "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."

For more information about Conservation Client Gateway, visit: www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway.

Partnerships

NRCS participates in the signing of Memorandum of Cooperation for the Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants depend on pollinators to reproduce. Most vegetable, fruit, and seed crops—and other plants that provide food and fiber—are pollinated by these animals. Some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like butterflies, moths, bees, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects.

For generations, scores of Monarch butterflies have blanketed landscapes, backyards, fields and gardens in Arkansas. The nectar-seeking butterflies are daytime garden visitors that pollinate many plants. But over the past two decades, the iconic orange-and-black pollinator has faced sharp population declines. The plummeting population of this familiar butterfly threatens our well-being, because our food security is dependent on the ecological services these and other pollinators provide.

The migration of the monarch butterfly is at risk of being lost unless humans take rapid action to protect it. Arkansas lies within the migratory path and spring breeding area of the monarch butterfly. Several years ago, state conservation leaders in Arkansas recognized this as an important issue and began discussions on Arkansas's role in monarch conservation. Monarch and pollinator conservation is a greater and far more complex task than any one organization or agency can accomplish individually.

In November 2018, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Arkansas onboarded a state-wide monarch and pollinator coordinator in cooperation with Quail Forever and the Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership (AMCP) to develop conservation goals, strategies and action items.

In November 2019, the AMCP, a group of citizens, conservation and agricultural organizations, government agencies, utilities and agribusinesses committed to the creation, enhancement, and conservation of monarch and pollinator habitat in Arkansas, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC). The MOC outlines a working agreement between

partners as it relates to the Arkansas Monarch and Pollinator Conservation Plan. It establishes a framework of cooperation among partners to maintain and increase monarch and pollinator habitat and will run through August 31, 2024.

Partners involved in the signing of the MOC included USDA NRCS, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Arkansas Department of Transportation, Arkansas Forestry Association, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas Master Naturalists, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, Arkansas State Parks, Arkansas Wildlife Federation, Audubon Arkansas, Botanical Garden of the Ozarks, Central Arkansas Water, Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, Enable Midstream Partners, Little Rock Parks and Recreation, National Center for Appropriate Technology, National Wildlife Federation, Northwest Arkansas Community College, Pine Ridge Gardens, Pulaski Conservation District, Pheasants Forever, Inc. & Quail Forever, Sebastian County Parks, The Nature Conservancy, University of Arkansas—Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Arkansas Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Forest Service—Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, and U.S. National Park Service.

For additional information about Arkansas NRCS's role in monarch butterfly conservation, contact Leslie Fowler, monarch and pollinator coordinator at Leslie.Fowler@ar.nacdnet.net, call her at 501-301-3169, log on to <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/?cid=nrcseprd402207> or log on to <http://arkansasmonarchs.org>.



NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan participated in the signing of the Charter and Memorandum of Cooperation for the Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership in Little Rock. The Memorandum of Cooperation establishes a framework of cooperation among partners to maintain and increase monarch and pollinator habitat throughout Arkansas. Photos by Christopher Willis



Conservation

USDA NRCS *Conservation at Work* video series features Grant County Livestock Producer

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has unveiled a new video series, *Conservation at Work*, which consist of short, 90-second videos that highlight common conservation practices.

The videos shine the spotlight on farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners from across the U.S. who tell us their own conservation stories, and how practices are helping them protect and improve resources and save time and money. Grant County livestock producer Kenny Sites and Hot Spring County District Conservationist Derek Nokes are featured in a conservation video highlighting prescribed grazing. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOiyO31rOis&feature=emb_title

"By sharing the conservation successes of our customers, we hope the videos will help educate our customers and the general public and motivate more farmers and landowners to consider conservation," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan.



Some of the videos you might find helpful in Arkansas involve High Tunnels, Nutrient Management and Cover Crops.

Learn about the benefits of conservation practices directly from the farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners applying them by checking out

the *Conservation at Work* video series at farmers.gov/conservationatwork. To learn more about NRCS assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or for more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Illinois River Watershed Partnership honors Arkansas NRCS With the Golden Paddle in Agriculture Award

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was recently honored with the Golden Paddle Award in Agriculture from the Illinois River Watershed Partnership (IRWP) at IRWP's Learning Center in Cave Springs. Benton County District Conservationist Mike Whitis and Washington County District Conservationist Josh Fortenberry accepted the award on behalf of the agency.

The award is given annually to entities that exemplify excellent stewardship in the protection, preservation, and enhancement of the Illinois River watershed. NRCS Arkansas was honored with a Golden Paddle in Agriculture for their ongoing partnership over the course of the IRWP's 14-year history. From financial

assistance via the Regional Conservation Partnership Program for landowner outreach and practice implementation, to technical assistance for IRWP's own Riparian Restoration Program, NRCS Arkansas staff at the local and state level have provided assistance.

"It is a great honor to receive the Golden Paddle in Agriculture from the Illinois River Watershed Partnership," said Mike Sullivan, USDA NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. "We have great support from our conservation partnership and many others working together to enhance conservation assistance to farmers, ranchers and foresters in the Illinois River Watershed. Our conservation partnership continues to enhance and improve getting



(left to right) Benton County District Conservationist Mike Whitis, Executive Director of the Illinois River Watershed Partnership, Nicole Hardiman, and Washington County District Conservationist Josh Fortenberry. Photo courtesy of the Illinois River Watershed Partnership)

conservation on the ground."

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers adopt a variety of conservation practices on their land. NRCS staff help producers with a conservation plan and provide funding to cover part of the costs for

adopting the practices.

For more information on IRWP, visit www.irwp.org. To learn more about assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or for more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Agriculture Education

FFA Field Day Career Development Events Recently Held in Logan and Faulkner Counties



Photos by Reginald Jackson



The Logan County Conservation District in Paris sponsored the 29th annual FFA Field Day Career Development Event (CDE) contest in March at the North Logan County Fairgrounds in Paris. The contests were held at Paris High School, the Paris Rodeo Arena, the county fairgrounds, and Ezell Farm. Approximately 1,602 students, 95 agriculture instructors from 78 schools, and volunteers from federal, state and local agencies and organizations participated in the event.

The Faulkner County Conservation District also sponsored their annual FFA CDE contest in March at Mid-State Arena in Damascus. Over 1,823 students from 70 schools from all over Arkansas participated. Over 100 teachers and volunteers from federal, state and local agencies and organizations participated in this year's event.

"The FFA Career Development Event is a new name for what FFA historically called their Judging Contests," said Canton Ford, with the Faulkner County Conservation District and CDE event coordinator. "We have held this event annually since the 1980s and it has blossomed from the original "Tri-County FFA Judging Contests" into the Central Arkansas CDE. Typical attendance is over 1,500 students. NRCS, the conservation districts and other local volunteers help FFA teachers put on the contest."

The CDEs tested the abilities of individual students and teams in major areas of agricultural instruction including: Crops, Electricity, Farm Management, Floriculture, Forestry, Meats Evaluation, Land, Horse Evaluation, Mechanics, Milk Quality and Products, Nursey/Landscape, Poultry, Agronomy, Livestock and Veterinary Science.

FFA has worked over the years to create CDEs that demonstrate meaningful connections between classroom instruction and real-life scenarios. The events were designed to help prepare students for careers in agriculture. Each of the CDE contests included the acquisition of career development skills and knowledge in the students' areas of interest that they may use in their prospective careers. Classroom instruction met reality as the students demonstrated agriculture skills in competitive scenarios.

Volunteers from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Forest Service, Arkansas Department of Agriculture Forestry Division, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, West Central Area Conservation Districts, Farm Credit Services of Western Arkansas, Logan County and Faulkner County schools' agriculture teachers and other state high school instructors, and other volunteers were there to assist, run contests and contribute to the success of these huge events.

"The next generation of agriculture starts now," said Holly Jones with the Logan County Conservation District and CDE event coordinator. "These events could not have been successful without the many staff members and volunteers who came together to make it happen."

The USDA and National FFA are collaborating on both short- and long-term initiatives to motivate and prepare young people, connect them with opportunities in agriculture, food, and natural resources systems, and build appreciation for the reach and importance of agriculture.

"The conservation of our natural resources, the joy of watching things grow, and the excitement of farming and ranching make agriculture a very exciting career choice for high school students," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "I'm happy to see that USDA, NRCS and the conservation districts can continue to collaborate with FFA in Arkansas to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their interests in career success through agricultural education."

There is something in agriculture for everyone. If you'd like to connect your students with agriculture resources, your local USDA Service Center can be a great first stop. Give them a call to make an appointment. You can also visit www.nrcs.usda.gov for more information. For more information on Arkansas FFA, log on to <https://arkansasffa.org>.

Earth Team

Stone County NRCS Earth Team Volunteers Win Regional Award

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Stone County Field Service Center and the Stone County Conservation District in Mountain View won the 2019 Chief's Southeast Region Field Office award for the best office that utilized Earth Team volunteer assistance. The Mountain View Field Office and the Stone County Conservation District utilized 59 volunteers who contributed 1,846 hours on a variety of conservation activities.

Some examples of the work volunteers contributed to the field office staff include utilizing the "Friends of Conservation" group to assist with conservation planning, and surveying, implementing, and certifying conservation practices; recruiting the Master Gardeners of Stone County to renovate the flower beds around the office complex, showcasing cover crops and pollinator practices; and, utilizing the Stone County Rain Gauge Group to collect rain fall data and report it to the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, and Snow Network.

"All our Earth Team volunteers' work has been an asset to the Mountain View Field Office, the Stone County Conservation District and Stone County landowners," said District Conservationist Wendy Hendrix. "Their hard work has allowed office personnel more time to work on conservation planning, complete engineering surveys and designs, and complete the payment process in an expeditious and efficient manner. Our volunteers are an asset to help educate the public on soil health, pollinators, cover crops and other conservation practices."

Earth Team volunteers can work on a variety of projects including office, photography, speaking, education,



Wendy Hendrix

training, conservation planning and implementation, computer, soil conservation, wildlife habitat, clerical, budget and contracting skills, to name a few. With technology, some volunteers can work from home and never come into an office. Working from home allows a volunteer to work days, nights, and even weekends.

"Congratulations to Arkansas volunteers in Stone County and District Conservationist Wendy Hendrix on winning the Chief's Southeast Region Field Office award," said Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "These individuals deserve our gratitude and appreciation. I'm proud to acknowledge them and their contributions with you. They continue to win Earth Team volunteer awards and I am proud of the work all our volunteers do to help put conservation on the ground."

The Earth Team is a program which partners volunteers with NRCS employees to help conserve, maintain and improve our natural resources and environment. Earth Team volunteers must be at least 14 years of age. People interested in volunteering in Arkansas should contact the district conservationist in their local USDA Serve Center or visit the Earth Team website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers.

Arkansas NRCS Conservation Volunteers Honored During National Volunteer Week

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is celebrating National Volunteer Week April 19–25 by thanking and honoring our Earth Team volunteers. We use the week to show gratitude to Earth Team volunteers for their superb service to conservation.

The Earth Team is the agency's volunteer workforce. In fiscal year 2019, more than 42,288 people across the country donated 324,784 hours of service to NRCS worth approximately \$8.3 million. During the same period, Arkansas NRCS had 757 Earth Team volunteers who worked a total of 9,197 hours to assist NRCS conservation specialists in promoting conservation programs and activities.

"Our volunteers work closely with our NRCS staff and play a very important role in our agency's mission of putting conservation on the ground," said Arkansas State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "We are truly honored and

appreciate all the hard work and efforts of our dedicated staff and Earth Team Volunteers contribute throughout the state.

We are also grateful for our volunteers' help and are seeking additional volunteers in each county to join the Earth Team. We recognize that much more conservation work needs to be done and our Earth Team volunteers help us fulfill that need," Sullivan added.

Earth Team is a program that partners volunteers with NRCS employees. It was created in 1985 and offers many opportunities to individuals 14 years 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 are invaluable

as they expand NRCS's efforts to help protect and conserve the nation's natural resources. 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.

NRCS's mission of "Helping People Help the Land" is strengthened by the passion Earth Team volunteers bring to the important conservation work they do every day. Learn more about the Earth Team Volunteer Program at www.nrcs.usda.gov/earthteam. For more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

*Note: The Value of Volunteer Time to the Agency is \$25.43/hour as established by the Independent Sector and utilized by the Federal Interagency Team for Volunteerism.

Earth Day

Earth Day Every Day

Earth Day is April 22 of every year. April 22, 2020 will mark 50 years of Earth Day. On Earth Day, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) celebrates the farmers, ranchers and foresters who've arranged their lives and livelihoods to improve the environment for all of us. Every day, these stewards of the land demonstrate that agriculture can be productive and regenerative.

Arkansas producers are on the front lines providing food and fiber to feed the world. Utilizing financial and technical assistance from NRCS, their voluntary investments in conservation save them time and money, make their land resilient and fertile, while striking a healthy balance between man and nature.

Across Arkansas, a growing number of farmers are adopting conservation practices that will allow our children to celebrate healthy, beautiful environments on future Earth Days.

We invite you to meet a few of these producers:

Robert, Cathy, & Stuart Seidenstricker

of Prairie County have Precision Land leveled fields on their operation which remove irregularities on the land surface. This conservation practice improves surface drainage, provides for more uniform cultivation, and improves equipment operation and efficiency. They also have Irrigation Reservoirs. This practice is applied as part of a resource conservation system to achieve one or more of the following: Store Water to provide a reliable irrigation water supply or regulate available irrigation flows; improve water use efficiency on irrigated land; provide storage for tailwater recovery and reuse; provide irrigation runoff retention to increase breakdown of chemical contaminants; and reduce energy consumption.



Kenny Sites of Grant County has Prescribed Grazing on his operation. This conservation practice manages the harvest of vegetation with grazing and browsing animals. Prescribed grazing improves and maintains desired species composition and vigor of plant communities. It improves and maintains the quantity and quality of forage for grazing and browsing animals' health and productivity. It also improves and maintains surface and/or subsurface water quality and quantity.



Terry Small of Pope County has an Animal Mortality Facility and In-Vessel Composter on his poultry farm. This conservation practice is used to dispose of daily poultry mortality to create a pathogen free product that can then be applied to the land according to a nutrient management plan. The purpose of composter is to reduce the impact of pollution on surface and groundwater and reduce odor.



"Thank You" to all farmers, ranchers and foresters who treat every day as Earth Day. We are proud and honored to work with you.

For additional information on conservation practices you could install on your operation, log on to our website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ar/technical/cp/5af51c54-a37b-4f30-b67b-0ebf678c6858>.



Crop Insurance

USDA RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY



Why have crop insurance?

Federal crop insurance is critical to the farm safety net, as it provides producers and owners various methods to mitigate production and revenue risks and helps to maintain a healthy rural economy.

Policies

- The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) facilitates the sale of crop insurance through licensed private agents and brokers
- All policies are sold and serviced by the private insurance industry
- Producers receive premium support at varying levels

How it Works

- A contract between insured producers and their insurance provider
- The producer agrees to insure all eligible acreage of a crop planted in a particular county
- The insurance company agrees to cover the producer against natural losses that occur during the crop year and covered by the policy

Insured Causes of Loss

- Adverse Weather (frost, heat, drought, hail)
- Failure of Irrigation Water Supply
- Wildfire
- Insects and Disease (If proper control measures accepted good farming practices are used.)
- Wildlife
- Price fluctuation

Manage Your Risk

- Know where you are financially
- Know your cost of production
- Understand your markets
- Know what risk management tools are available and how they work
- Seek input and communicate with loan officers, and insurance agents
- Set goals, develop a plan, and transition farms from one generation to another

For more information visit <https://www.rma.usda.gov>

Receive RMA emails:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDARMA/subscriber/new>

USDA is an equal opportunity employer, provider, and lender. | February 2020