

Natural Resources Conservation Service

MISSISSIPPI



August 2020

# CONSERVATION BYTES



Kurt Readus, State Conservationist

## ABOUT NRCS

USDA's Natural Resources

Conservation Service collaborates

with farmers, ranchers,

communities and other landowners  
to help protect natural resources on

private lands. We work side-by-side

with landowners to identify and

address natural resource concerns,  
such as the quality of water and soil

and the amount of habitat for  
precious wildlife.

Find your local service center for  
more on how NRCS can help you.

## A Message From The State Conservationist

As we near the end of the fiscal year 2020, I would like to extend my most enormous gratitude for the fantastic achievements that we've accomplished this year. 2020 has brought us many challenges – some may even call it a new normal, but we have been able to continue to move forward safely and efficiently as the year has gone on. On the journey to closing a great year, it is essential to know that our agency continues to focus on what we're here to do, "Help People; Help the Land."

Our efforts in providing safe and quality assistance to landowners, farmers, and communities during a global pandemic that has further supported the agricultural community has been outstanding. USDA Service Centers have not been open to visitors for several months during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, USDA employees have continued to assist agricultural producers with disaster assistance, conservation, safety net, and farm loan program services like conservation planning and acreage reporting while supporting flexibilities for producers and implementing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Securities (CARES) Act.

As we continue to uphold the standards of USDA and NRCS, we will provide this country with the practices, resources, and plans to conserve our land and feed our families for years to come.

Though we have faced challenges with the new Conservation Desktop and the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool, we have still pushed forward in our mission. We must continue to aim towards our destination, but remember that it's the journey that counts.

Again, I want to emphasize that we must finish strong. Thanks in advance for making this such a successful year for our ag producers and local communities. Remember, the benefits of conservation placed on the farm benefit the community and our watersheds that we live within.

Kurt Readus, State Conservationist

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## Fifth-Generation Farmer Continues to Add to His Family Legacy

*Story By:* Aaron Porter, State Public Affairs Assistant

*Photos By:* Laura Anderson, State Public Affairs Officer



Sledge Taylor, owner of Buckeye Farms

Sledge Taylor can remember riding with his dad on his family's farm as a child, creating memories that have lasted a lifetime. It was there that the two forged a bond that will never break, and where Taylor formed his love for farming and agriculture. Now, as a fifth-generation farmer walking in his father's footsteps and becoming the owner of Buckeye Farms, Taylor seeks to continue the farming legacy in Panola County. Buckeye Farms consists of a diverse crop rotation of cotton, corn, soybeans, wheat, and peanuts. Taylor farms on 4,500 acres of land, has 1,400 pasture acres and over 250 acres in hay crops. Taylor first heard about the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) at the genesis of his farming career back in 1974 through his father's relationship with the agency. Over the years, Taylor has also formed a connection with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and conservation practices. Combining his insight and knowledge of the land with NRCS and their expertise on what is new in agriculture has created a match made in heaven.

"The program gives you an incentive to try something new," stated Taylor. "Whether it be cross fencing or cover crops or anything out there you're interested in doing, they can help you do it."

One of his most significant benefits through the EQIP program was the grade stabilization structure he installed in December of 2019. The structure helps reduce erosion and improve water quality.

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◆ **Michael Carr**, Assist. State Conservationist, Management & Strategy

◆ **Clarence Finley**, Assist. State Conservationist, Programs

◆ **Jason Keenan**, Assist. State Conservationist, Easements

◆ **Olguy Louis**, State Conservationist Engineer

◆ **Delaney Johnson**, State Soil Scientist

◆ **Rogerick Thompson**, State Resource Conservationist

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## FEEDBACK

Conservation Bytes is a newsletter produced by the NRCS Mississippi State Office. Please send us your questions, comments, or ideas to

[Luis.montgomery@usda.gov](mailto:Luis.montgomery@usda.gov)

The structure helps reduce erosion and improve water quality. For Taylor, this structure has done wonders for his crop production and soil.

“If we did not have this structure, it would make a deeper gully in the land,” said Taylor.” “Having it has saved us thousands of tons of soil. Due to the high rainfall we get, this is critical to us; and I am a huge proponent of these grade stabilization structures.”

Cover crops have been an essential part of Buckeye Farms over the years. Providing ways to keep his soil cropping system healthy is a priority for Taylor, like cereal rye, and radishes offer multiple benefits for his land.

“A cover crop is precious as it builds organic matter on the soil, and for us, planting cover crops allows us to keep growing even in the wintertime, which is beneficial for the land,” said Taylor. “The ground becomes mellow, and it doesn’t crust as much, making the soil great for the new crop going in.”



Part of Sledge Taylor’s grade stabilization Structure

Buckeye Farms practices what we call “no-till farming.” No-till farming is the agricultural technique for growing crops or pasture without disturbing the soil through tillage. Since attending an event on it in the 1980s, Sledge has used this on most of his land with a lot of success.

No-till allows for Taylor not to have to plow his fields, burn fuel, and overwork tractors on his land. Taylor has had so much success with no-till, that he has some areas that have not been plowed in over 20 years! He has also seen his crops last seven to 10 days longer without rainfall in a no-till field, as opposed to a conventionally tilled area. Once he discovered the positive contributions no-till could bring to a farmer, it was a no-brainer; he knew he had found the key to success.

Being the owner of several thousand acres of land can be a lot, but Taylor credits a lot of his success to working with NRCS. He believes going into the field offices with the right mindset and approach can do wonders for a farmer.

“Go in with a good attitude and the approach that these are some practices you want to try,” said Taylor. “Staying with the program and learning how it works is the best thing you can do; it’s helped me tremendously, and I know others can benefit from it as well.”

With farming being his life-long passion, Taylor wants to be remembered as someone who cultivated the land and did the very best he could to heal it.

“I learned a lot from my father and saw what he did to improve the land, so my goal was to do the same and leave it in even better shape than when I found it,” said Taylor. “The land is like a house—you want to take care of it as best as you can because this is where you live and eat. It’s the same with your farm—it’s where your livelihood is, and you want to take care of it and leave it to someone when you’re done who will do the same.”



## State Office Employee Update



NRCS welcomes Olguy Louis to the State Office. As a proud Florida A&M graduate, Olguy began his professional career in Iowa City, performing quality assurance. Due to weather

complications, he relocated to central Florida to work for Soil and Water technology laying down drainage tile, installing, and building kits for center pivots. Shortly after, He joined NRCS in Arkansas as a Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) Engineer. While in Arkansas, Mr. Louis worked two details as a field engineer and Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WRE) Engineer, where he was then selected to serve as the Area engineer in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Now, Mr. Louis will serve as a state Conservationist Engineer in Jackson, Mississippi. His mission is to continue to create innovative engineering solutions.

“Excellence in Conservation, by Design.”

## News Release

Big Sand Creek Watershed Drainage District constructed Floodwater Retarding Structures Y-32-9A and Y-32-11 (dams) as Low Hazard Class dams in 1965. State of Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has recently determined that they are now High Hazard Class Dams. The current hazard classification based on the potential for loss of human life due to the prevalence of bridges, roads, homes, and buildings is existing in the downstream dam breach inundation zone.

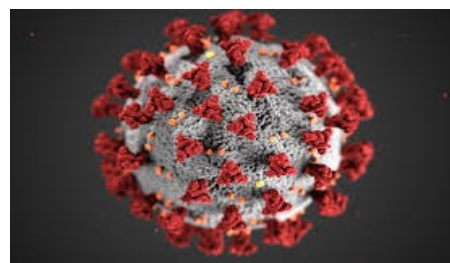
COMMENTS: Submit comments and inquiries on or before August 25, 2020.

A copy of the Supplemental EA is available by clicking this link: [Big Sand Creek Dams Plan EA-July 2020](#)

## Coronavirus and Service Centers

We are committed to delivering USDA services to America's farmers and ranchers while taking safety measures in response to the Covid-19, or new Coronavirus outbreak. Covid-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. We will update this page with further information related to the new coronavirus and current status of USDA service centers, online options for farmers and ranchers across the country, and any temporary Service Center closures.

For more information visit: <https://www.farmers.gov/coronavirus>



## Water Quality Month Story

### Agriculture Partners Unveil First Wetland Pollinator Garden in Mississippi

Biloxi, Mississippi, sets on the Gulf of Mexico. It's well known for its sandy white beaches and casinos. It is also home to the native Cueva' Indians 1492 or Biloxis', and Keesler Air Force Base. But deep in Biloxi's heart, agricultural partners have been working diligently to establish a first of its own in Mississippi—a wetland pollinator garden. Read more [here](#).

