



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

MISSISSIPPI



May 2021

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 approach the mid-part of 2021, I want to send special thanks to all of our employees, constituents, and partners across the state of Mississippi! Embarking on this agricultural journey in 2021 is no small feat—but I wouldn't want to do it with any other group of people across the country! Mississippi's farming community is one of the best, and I can't wait to see what we produce the rest of this month.

May holds a special place in my heart because it allows us to recognize all the wonderful moms across the world on Mother's Day! Like so many of you, I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for our mothers or the women who filled the role of being a motherly figure in our lives. Although it has passed, I once again want to say Happy Mother's Day to all of the incredible moms in our state! The work you do for different agencies and partners across our state keeps us up and running, and for that, we say thank you.

May also grants us the opportunity to recognize the men and women who have given their lives to fight for this great country. Each year, Memorial Day salutes these heroes for the sacrifices they made to ensure a better life for all Americans. We will forever remember their service, and for that, we say thank you.

The old saying goes, "April showers bring May flowers" (and other plentiful and sometimes delicious opportunities for some great crops grown during the Spring season)! As we are moving forward in the year, make sure you take time out to plant and grow during this Spring season; and let us also make sure we are taking care of Mississippi's farming community to have a great growing season.

May will be an excellent month for Mississippi, and I can't wait to take it on! As always, please protect yourselves during this pandemic season, so we all can have a safe and healthy future.

Kurt Readus, State Conservationist

Feature Story Highlight

2021 Mississippi Envirothon

Story and Photos by: Leslie Mayeaux , Executive Assistant



I was fortunate to attend my first Envirothon with James Curtis, Delaney Johnson, and retired State Soil Scientist Mike Lilly. The Envirothon is a high school competition designed to stimulate, reinforce, and enhance interest in the environment and natural resources. Students were tested on their knowledge of soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatic ecology, and current environmental issues. In addition, the Envirothon encourages cooperative decision-making and team building.

The state competition was On April 23, 2021, at the FFA facility in Raymond, Mississippi. After being divided into teams, students competed against one another, rotating from area to area for testing.

The field-testing areas included:

Soils: A soil pit was prepared, and students were tested on the soil properties they observed in the soil pit.

Forestry: Tools used in forestry were on display as students were tested on their identification and plant species identification.

Aquatic ecology: Water and macroinvertebrates samples were displayed for identification by students, including watershed mapping and water quality as well.

Wildlife: Biological samples were displayed for identification, as well as mechanisms used in tracking and trapping.

MISSISSIPPI USDA NRCS LEADERSHIP

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The Soil Pit Team Challenge

Each five-member team was allotted seven minutes in the soil pit with their test. As the teams entered the soil pit, I observed a pattern of behavior that would often repeat itself.

Two team members did not actively participate in the collaborative effort; one member would ask the test questions and record the answers. Two members would take a hands-on approach, take the required measurements, extract the soil sample, and compare the soil colors, while two members stood and watched the others do the work.

There was one team where all members contributed while in the soil pit. They got my attention, and I watched as they worked. While one was reading the test questions and recording the answers, another took the tape and measured, one took the knife to dig out a soil sample, another had the water bottle to moisten the soil, while one held the Munsell soil color chart to compare the colors. They participated, discussed their thoughts, and came up with a group consensus on their answers. Watching this team work together reminded me that everyone on a team must contribute to reaching its maximum potential.



When the competition concluded, we walked to the pavilion to observe the awards ceremony.

I mentioned to James and Mike the one team that genuinely collaborated while they were in the soil pit. Although I did not know any test scores, I thought based on their teamwork, they would finish well.

As we watched the awards, I learned that this team I mentioned was from Oxford, and they won all but one field category and were the overall first place winners of the competition.

I noticed in the winners' soil pit specific attributes, and I wondered if I was the only one who saw this. So, what did I learn? I would not have passed the tests these teams took; I would have needed an "NRCS team effort" to do so.

If you want to go far, the most critical lessons go together, and every person on a team must contribute something to succeed. (Sic)

Scholars Shine in Mississippi



Last month, USDA/1890 scholars Ashley Clinton, Mashayla Dyson, and Khristjon Walker each had an opportunity to meet and network with USDA-NRCS senior staff leaders from Mississippi to discuss the do's and don'ts of the agency, as well as what they can expect during their internships this summer. Leaders informed students of the opportunities for growth and career advancement, as well as the importance of being prompt, dressing for success, and remaining professional at all times. Students were also encouraged to build relationships, have integrity, be positive and respectful, and always follow the proper policies and protocols, especially when working for a federal agency. We want to congratulate them on this work!

Area 2 Success Story



Kathy Rickles' unmistakable display of confidence comes from years of relentless research on raising healthy dairy goats. Read more about the work she does with NRCS, that allows her to have success in Neshoba County, [here](#).

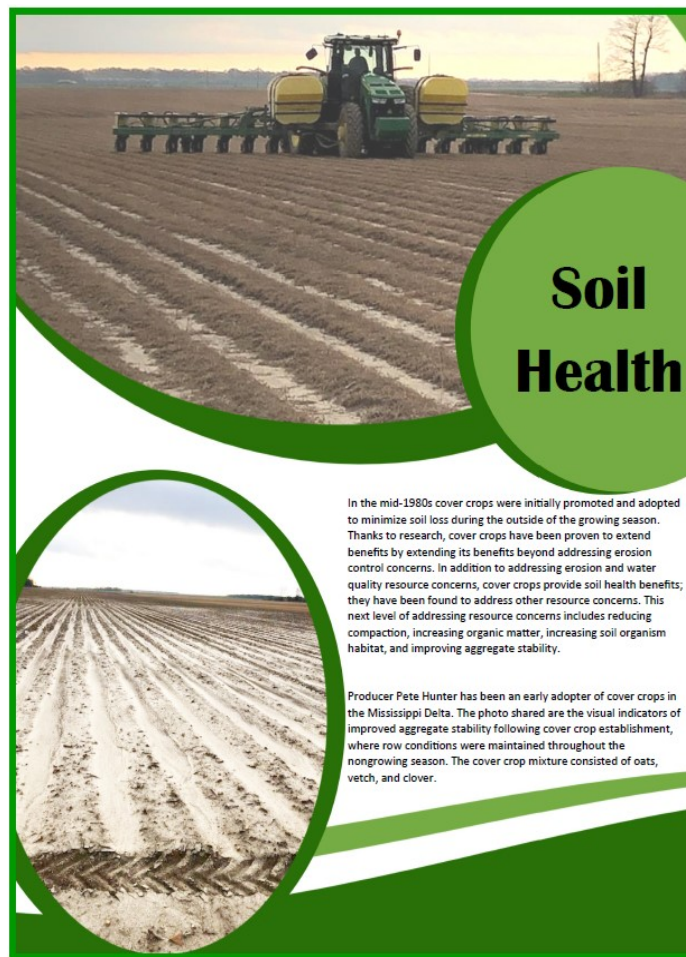
The Delta Receives New Area Conservationist



Taharga Hart has been selected as the new Area 4 Conservationist in Mississippi! [Read more here](#).

Soil Health

In the mid-1980s cover crops were initially promoted and adopted to minimize soil loss during the outside of the growing season. Thanks to research, cover crops have been proven to extend benefits by extending its benefits beyond addressing erosion control concerns. Check out the photo below on our webpage under [Soil Health!](#)



FEEDBACK

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

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