



Helping People Help the Land

# Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

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## Branch County Farmer puts Theory into Practice

Many farmers are born into the family business, that was not the case for Branch County farmer Brad Love.

“You either grew up on a farm or wished you did. I’m in the wished I did group,” said Love.

In spite of this, Love was not looking at a career in agriculture when he began studying engineering at Michigan State University. He intended to go into alternative fuels, until a family friend encouraged him to do a student internship at the MSU agronomy farm.

“I couldn’t get enough of it after that,” said Love.

While at MSU Love also met Edwin Martinez, an NRCS employee who was also a graduate student at the time. He’d never heard about NRCS before meeting Martinez, Love said. He became an Earth Team volunteer in St. Johns where Martinez was district conservationist at the time. In 2011, he took a position as a conservationist at the Cold Water NRCS office through the Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative, where NRCS and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development split the cost of funding the position.

After a couple of years in Coldwater, Love wanted to start applying what he’d learned on his own farm. He worked on any farm he could to gain experience, using vacation time from his CTAI position. He then began farming his own land, sometimes bartering for use of his neighbors’ equipment. Love now farms 150 acres near Cold Water and enjoys applying his



Branch County beginning farmer Brad Love stands in a field planted in clover after a crop of spelt was harvested in the summer.

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United States Department of Agriculture

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# State Conservationist's Message

If you're an NRCS customer who banks or pays bills online, Conservation Client Gateway, was made for you. Client Gateway gives landowners the ability to request services from NRCS online as well as sign contracts, track payments and review documents.

Anyone with an existing USDA client record and an email address connected to their account can sign up to use Client Gateway without a visit to their local field office. One way to know if your email address is connected to your USDA account is if you are already receiving USDA emails such as newsletters or other correspondence. If you are not sure, you can contact your local NRCS of Farm Service Agency office.

NRCS has been continuously improving Client Gateway since it was officially launched in May of 2015. Although customers must enroll in Client Gateway using a computer, once enrolled, they can access the service using mobile devices like smart phones and tablets. Farms operating as business entities will also be able to utilize Client Gateway soon. Before registering as an entity however, producers must first create an individual Client Gateway account.

FSA recently launched FSAfarm+ a new website that allows farmers and ranchers direct online access to their FSA farm information using personal computers (very much like Conservation Client Gateway does for NRCS information). Client Gateway users will not need to register for a new Level 2 eAuthentication account in order to use the FSA Farm+ application and vice versa. The same account can be used to access both applications.

Client Gateway was created as a convenience for our customers. Without Client Gateway, producers often had to visit their local field office to sign documents. Some producers have to travel 30 minutes or more to get to their local office so Client Gateway can be a great time saver. Please be assured that NRCS clients will not be required to use Client Gateway. All of our clients are more



State Conservationist  
Garry Lee

than welcome to conduct their NRCS business at their local field office even after they create a Client Gateway account.

~

After the fall harvest season comes farmer conference season. There will be no shortage of opportunities for farmers to learn about the latest advances in agriculture. The Farmer Veteran Coalition National Conference is scheduled to begin Nov. 30, at the Kellogg Center at Michigan State University and is followed by the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo in Grand Rapids in early December. Some of the other events on the calendar include the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference in Traverse City and the Michigan Family Farm Conference in Marshall, scheduled for late

January and early February respectively.

NRCS will have a presence at many of these events by presenting at workshops and/or participating in trade shows. Please keep an eye out for us and stop and chat.



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## Branch County Farmer puts Theory into Practice

conservation knowledge in the real world.

Love had a good opportunity to obtain NRCS conservation assistance since the land he farms is in the St. Joseph River watershed. A partnership headed by MDARD submitted a successful proposal to gain targeted NRCS conservation funding for the watershed through the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

The St. Joseph River Watershed Conservation Partnership, which includes parts of Michigan and Indiana, provides financial assistance for conservation practices tailored to soil health and water quality, said NRCS District Conservationist Marcus Reynolds.

In his fourth year of farming, Love grows corn, soybeans, wheat and spelt, with half of his land certified organic. He obtained financial assistance to offset the cost of cover crops and he will apply gypsum to his organic fields this fall. He planted a cover crop of clover after harvesting his spelt and had rye air seeded on his corn fields late this summer.

A combination of conservation tillage and cover crops has worked well for Love. His highest yielding corn crop received no additional nitrogen after planting. His best soybean crop was planted into a still green rye cover crop, he said.

It's tough to get into farming, said Love. As a beginning farmer, NRCS programs allowed him to implement more conservation practices than he would be able to afford otherwise, he said. Those practices are also helping to improve soil health and reduce the amount of fertilizers he uses.

"I'm a lot further ahead for having my background at NRCS," said Love.

*Branch County farmer Brad Love stands in a corn field that was air seeded with a rye cover crop late in the summer (above right). Conservation tillage and cover crops have benefited soil organisms and soil health (right).*



## Online Tool Helps Landowners Identify Resource Concerns

There is a new online tool for landowners to identify resource concerns on their land. The Michigan Sensitive Areas Identification System was developed through a partnership between NRCS and the Institute of Water Research at Michigan State University.

The SAIS online mapping tool is used to identify areas of a farm that are prone to resource concerns such as wind or water erosion. The user begins by using the tool to locate his farm and then outlines field boundaries. After field boundaries are identified, the tool can generate a basic report based only on land features or a more detailed report by answering questions about cropping practices such as fertilizer application rates. The report recommends conservation practices that may reduce

the severity or occurrence of identified resource concerns.

Users can input their personal information to create an account on SAIS or choose not to and the report will be deleted after leaving the site. All saved data is encrypted and is only available to the account holder. SAIS does not replace on-farm conservation planning for enrolling in NRCS programs. The goal of the system is to improve water quality by connecting producers with NRCS and conservation organizations to address sensitive areas through conservation treatments and available assistance programs.

For more information and to utilize the SAIS tool, go to [sais.iwr.msu.edu](http://sais.iwr.msu.edu).

## Archeologist Duane Quates Joins NRCS Staff

Michigan has a lot of human history, its earliest residents, and later the first Europeans all left behind objects with clues and information about how they lived.

As a federal agency the USDA is required to preserve this history through the National Historic Preservation Act. Any time NRCS has involvement with a project that could potentially impact an archeological site, a cultural resources review must be completed. In the past, NRCS in Michigan used outside contractors to assist with this process but now the state has its first state archeologist and cultural resources specialist.

Duane Quates started work at the NRCS state office in East Lansing on Oct. 3. Prior to coming to Michigan, Quates worked as a civilian archeologist for the U.S. Army Installation Management Command at Fort Drum in northern New York. He also worked as an archeologist for the Michigan Department of Transportation from 2006 until 2009.

After spending four years stuck in the inside of a ship while serving in the Navy, Quates wanted to find a career that would get him outside. The desire to work



*State Archeologist  
Duane Quates*

outdoors and an interest in history led him to study archeology. An Alabama native, Quates earned a bachelor's degree from the University of West Florida. He later completed a master's and Ph.D. from Michigan State University in anthropology with an emphasis in archeology.

Quates is still re-locating his wife and stepson from New York but he is glad to be back in Michigan. "If you like the outdoors it's the place to be." He enjoys hiking with his two dogs and hopes to get back to hunting and fishing at some point.

### Cultural Reviews Unveil Michigan History

Most of the cultural resource reviews in Michigan will involve American Indian archeological sites, but there are also historical sites, some forgotten, from the state's frontier days, said Quates.

On a recent field review in Ingham County, he found a nearly intact arrowhead. Objects like this he will attempt to identify and date and report it to the State Historic Preservation Office. The object will then be returned to the landowner. In the case of human remains, funerary and similar objects, they are repatriated to one of Michigan's American Indian tribes.



## NRCS American Indian - Alaska Native Heritage Month Poster Unveiled

November is American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Heritage Month, and is a time to recognize the cultures, traditions and histories of Native people. Each year, the NRCS works with Native American tribes to create the AIAN Heritage Month poster to celebrate the contributions of Native Americans to our nation and history.

This year's poster theme is "The Creator of the Land 'Napi'," and features creation stories of the Blackfeet and Chippewa Cree Tribes of Montana.

We're very pleased to share this beautiful poster with the public," said Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS Tribal Liaison for Oklahoma. "Creation stories are

a unifying foundation for many cultures, including those of the Blackfeet and Chippewa Cree Tribes. We hope Oklahoman's will appreciate this unique story and artwork, and take time in November to reflect on the contributions of Native American's to our state and nation."

Art for the poster was created by Theodore M. Koop of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, and an accompanying story on the poster was told by George Bird Grinnell, famed conservationist and student of Native American culture. The poster and story have been reviewed by Blackfeet Tribal Elders.

### The Creator of the Land "Napi"

*By John Murray-Spiritual Leader and Tribal Historical Preservation Officer of the Blackfeet Tribe*

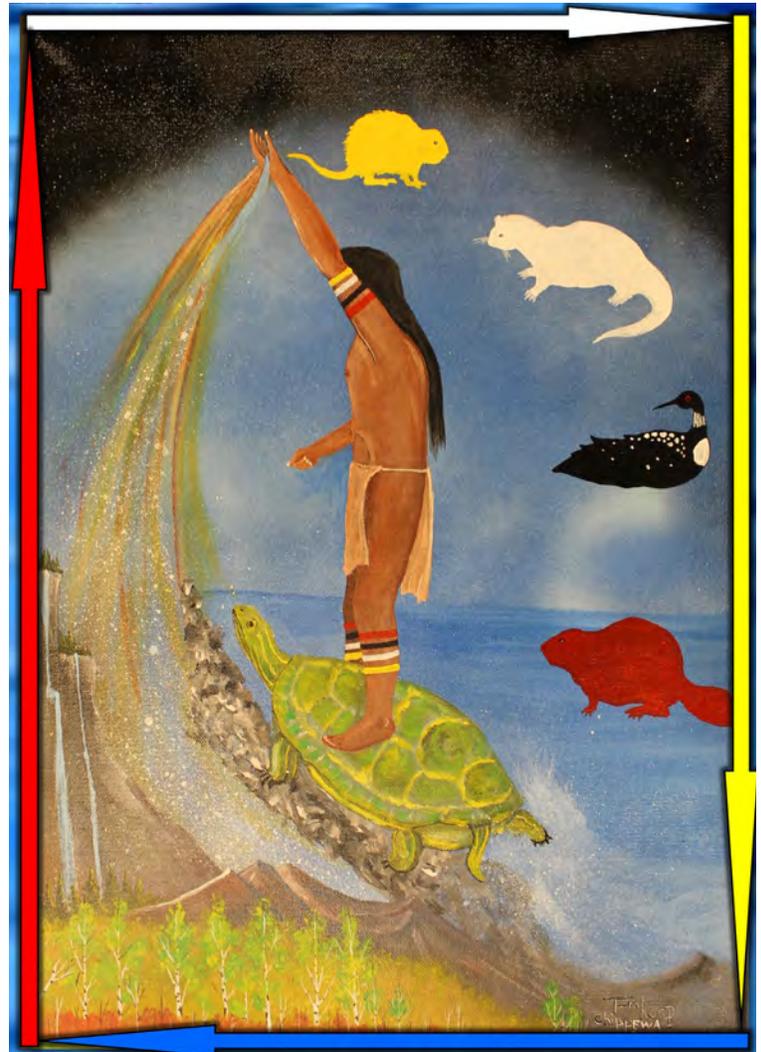
The Blackfoot Creator (iihtsi-paita-piiyo-pa) had twin boys—Napi and Natosi. Natosi went to live with his Father at the Sun. Natosi gave his name to Napi (Old Man) to help him in the creation of Napi's World—traditional territory of the Blackfoot.

In the beginning there was water everywhere; nothing else was to be seen. There was something floating on the water, and on this raft were Old Man and all the animals.

Old Man wished to make land, and he told the beaver to dive down to the bottom of the water and to try to bring up a little mud. The beaver dived and was under water for a long time, but he could not reach the bottom. Then the loon tried, and after the otter, but the water was too deep for them.

At last the muskrat was sent down, and he was gone for a long time; so long that the thought he must be drowned, but at last he came up and floated almost dead on the water, and when they pulled him up on the raft and looked at his paws, they found a little mud in them.

When Old Man had dried this mud, he scattered it over the water and land was formed."



## Civil Rights Committee Offers Coworkers Cultural Experiences

Equal opportunity in employment and program delivery is a high priority for the USDA. The NRCS Michigan Civil Rights Advisory Committee helps the department fulfill this commitment.

The committee is composed of NRCS employees from throughout the state that volunteer to advise leadership on equal opportunity issues. In addition, members organize events to expand the cultural awareness of their fellow employees. Here are some of the employee events held this year.

### Lac Vieux Wild Rice Day

Employees in the Upper Peninsula spent a day with members of the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians learning about all things wild rice.



Tribal member Roger LaBine talked about the role of wild rice in his tribe's culture as well as the process of planting, harvesting and processing wild rice. The event took place on Sept. 14, near Watersmeet.

*Roger LaBine (left) shows a wild rice plant to NRCS employees. NRCS staff observe the processing of wild rice (below).*



### Diversity Day at Idlewild

Area 2 staff in northern Michigan attended a diversity day at the historic village of Idlewild in Lake County. Idlewild was an African American resort community established during the days of segregation.

Employees visited the Idlewild Cultural Center and heard a presentation from Ned Stoller of Michigan AgrAbility. The organization helps farmers with disabilities continue farming.

### Area 3 Diversity Day

The Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve in Grand Rapids hosted an NRCS diversity day featuring a tour of the LEED certified Bunker Interpretive Center.

The day included presentations about resources for farmers with disabilities and issues facing the LGBT community.

*NRCS employees learn about coping with disabilities during an exercise at a Diversity Day event in Grand Rapids. (below).*



## Billboard Highlights Van Buren Conservation Efforts

### Van Buren Conservation District

A new billboard on westbound I-94 just after the Paw Paw exit (Exit 60) highlights some Van Buren County farmers that are leading the way in conservation farming. These growers have recently changed management practices on their farms to improve water quality and make their fields more resistant to pests and resilient in extreme weather events.

The billboard and many of the changes made by the farmers are the result of a 3-year project that began in early 2014.

“We want to promote the efforts these farmers have made that have contributed to improvements in the South Branch of the Paw Paw River, which drains into Maple Lake in the Village of Paw Paw,” said Colleen Forestieri, Conservation Technician from the Van Buren Conservation District.

Forestieri, who is also on the billboard, has been the primary technician working with farmers on this project, which has prevented 570 tons of sediment and 668 pounds of phosphorus from entering the river since 2014.

“Changing practices can have a huge impact on water quality. What we do on the land impacts the water. The changes these farmers are making are a big deal and we think the community should know more about it,” said Forestieri.

Approximately 64 percent of the land that drains to the South Branch is used for agriculture. The South Branch Watershed includes the Eagle Lake Drain and Gates Extension Drain, which are both listed as impaired by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality due to sediment and nutrients from bank erosion and agricultural runoff. Traditional USDA Farm Bill programs, a drain



The Van Buren Conservation District and its partners placed this billboard on I-94 near Paw Paw.

assessment reduction program, and a special pilot payment program (sponsored by the Village of Paw Paw) were promoted throughout the area.

These programs offered financial incentives that helped farmers plant 2,422 acres of cover crops and convert 690 acres of conventional tillage to no-till during the project. Project partners included the Van Buren Conservation District, Village of Paw Paw, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Two Rivers Coalition, Van Buren County Drain Commissioner and the Friends of the St. Joe River.

“I’m happy that our farmers are being highlighted on this project. Making changes to farming practices is not easy. It often requires new equipment and added initial expenses. We hope the programs we offer can help growers with the transition,” said Forestieri.

For more information about this project, please visit the Van Buren Conservation District website at [vanburencd.org](http://vanburencd.org) or contact Colleen Forestieri at the Van Buren Conservation District, (269) 657-4030 x 5.

### NRCS Joins Partnership to Protect Monarchs

NRCS has joined more than 50 partners in a conservation effort to protect the monarch butterfly.

The Monarch Joint Venture is a partnership of federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic programs that are working together to support and coordinate efforts to protect the monarch migration across the lower



**MONARCH  
JOINT VENTURE**

48 United States. The MJV is committed to a science-based

approach to monarch conservation work, guided by the North American Monarch Conservation Plan (2008).

More information and educational materials are available at [monarchjointventure.org](http://monarchjointventure.org)

## Michigan Farmers Learn about Water Quality on Maumee River Cruise

by Amy Gilhouse, Lenawee Conservation District

Over 10,000 acres of Michigan farmland were represented by the participants in the July 28th Sandpiper Boat Cruise on the Maumee River in Ohio. The Sandpiper Boat Cruise involved a 3- hour roundtrip on the Maumee River on a 65' welded steel vessel that was built in 1984 in Maumee, Ohio.

Larry Bonnell, a Hillsdale Michigan farmer, led a presentation on the value of cover crops. Howard Pennington, a retired Lenawee County Veterinarian shared the value of farms of all sizes obtaining MAEAP verification. Various other presenters provided information in regard to conservation practices to protect water resources.

The Field to the Great Lakes events are hosted by the Lenawee Conservation District with support from various sponsors and provide a way for the agricultural community to gain a greater understanding of current and emerging issues of water quality and of conservation programs



Southeast Michigan farmers attended a cruise on the Maumee River in Ohio to learn about the region's water quality issues.

available to assist in protecting water resources. Farmers who participated in the events have provide valuable input on conservation programs as well.

### Upcoming Events

#### November

- 30-2 Farmer Veteran Stakeholders Conference, MSU Kellogg Center - East Lansing, for more information go to [www.farmvetco.org](http://www.farmvetco.org)

#### December

- 6-8 Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo, DeVos Place Conference Center - Grand Rapids, for more information go to [www.glexpo.com](http://www.glexpo.com)

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*Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.*

### NRCSers Run for Conservation



NRCS employees (l-r) Erin Busscher (East Lansing), Carol Schadd (Caro), Linda Ortiz (Mason), Toni Pastotnik (Mt. Pleasant) and Kathy Lemke (Sandusky) competed as a relay team in the Capital City River Run held in Lansing on Sept. 18. Not pictured is teammate Kathryn Stevens (Sandusky).

A team of Michigan NRCS employees represented for conservation at this year's Capital City River Run held along the Grand River in Lansing.

The six competed in the marathon relay race where each member ran 5 to 6 miles to complete the 26.2 mile distance. The event took place on Sept. 18.