Practice What You Preach

Story from the Field
Improving Herd Health Through Conservation
On the Cover

Find out how one soil conservation technician practices what she preaches when it comes to conservation on pages 4 and 5.

Webster Parish

Ag Facts

There are 447 farms in Webster Parish
52,281 acres of land is in farms
44% is in pastureland, 33% is in woodland and 19% is in cropland
Poultry is the #1 commodity of the parish

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Notes from the State Conservationist

The month of April is important to me for many reasons. First, I believe this is the most beautiful time of year to live in Louisiana. Crawfish boils, the abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables. And did I mention the crawfish? Each day grows warmer and sunlight lingers later in the evening. All signs point to summer just a few weeks away. And that means more time to spend with family and friends.

This time of year also causes me to reflect on the beginning of the real work of conservation. It was on Sunday, April 14, 1935 that one of the most severe dust storms of the Dust Bowl era occurred and later became known as “Black Sunday.” Millions of tons of dirt and dust was thrown into the air, reaching as far as the East coast. The effects of this and other powerful dust storms were devastating to families, farms and animals.

Out of the ashes of the disastrous storms of the Dust Bowl was the dawn of a new day of farming and conservation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the legislation on April 28, 1935, creating the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) under the Department of Agriculture. This new agency was tasked with promoting improved farming and land management techniques, with the hope that a tragedy like the Dust Bowl would never happen again.

Today in April of 2017, I reflect on how far we have come as an agency. Even though we are light years ahead of where we were back in 1935, at the very core of who we are and what we do, providing technical and financial assistance, to agricultural producers has not changed. We are an agency made up of individuals who have a heart for conservation. NRCS employees are passionate about what they do, they realize that the conservation measures they help put into practice today will benefit generations to come.

It is fitting in this issue of the Conservation Update, we feature one of our own, Cindy Beard. A Soil Conservationist Technician, who knows first-hand that NRCS conservation practices work. She knows because she has used them on her own land. She practices what she preaches! Cindy has worked for NRCS for 37 years, assisting land owners and promoting conservation, helping hundreds of customers realize their farming dreams.

Last but not least, I’m excited about a new feature in the Conservation Update, “Ask the Expert”. This is an opportunity for YOU our customers, friends and neighbors to ask us conservation questions. This is a way for us to connect with you. So, if you have a question that has you stumped…. Please ask away! The NRCS team is standing by to give YOU an answer.

We have come a long way since 1935. However, the work of conservation of the land and our natural resources remains all important to Cindy Beard as it does to all of our NRCS staff! Thank you for extending us the invitation to visit your farm, ranch or forest and assist in “Helping you help the land.”

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist
When you look up the word “conservation” in the dictionary you may very well see a picture of Cindy Beard, sometimes better known as, “The Pond Lady.” Why is her name synonymous with conservation? The short answer is she practices what she preaches. As a Soil Conservation Technician with NRCS for 37 years, Cindy has helped hundreds of landowners from Alexandria north to the Arkansas state line.

Cindy’s journey began many years ago as a young girl walking the land that now makes up her working farm. “I can remember walking through this property with my dad when this was all pine trees and hard woods,” said Cindy. He had a dream of turning this piece of land into something remarkable. “He described clearing and re-planting the land, creating ponds and building a log cabin,” explained Cindy. Her dad didn’t get a chance to do what he dreamed about but Cindy vowed that one day she would make those dreams become a reality, and she has accomplished just that.

Driving onto Cindy’s 70-acre farm, it is easy to see why she named it, “Field of Dreams.” Rolling hills of lush green grass, a barn in the distance with horses grazing next to shimmering ponds and a log cabin tucked right in the middle of the property, makes for a picturesque scene. This land didn’t always look this way, after inheriting it in 1999, it was clear cut and it took lots of planning, hard work and conservation practices put into place along the way to make “Field of Dreams” what it is today.

Cindy has done much of the work herself, putting up fences, planting grasses, creating wildlife and pollinator habitat and the list goes on and on. As a certified Master Farmer and the Webster Parish 2015 Farmer of the Year, she knows a thing or two about the land. And that translates into her job at NRCS, “Many times at work I look around and think… I get paid to do this….walk with a landowner over their property and discuss conservation, time gets away from me because I love what I do so much,” said Cindy.

“One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is when I get to talk to a customer who has no clue of all the different things NRCS can do to help them,” Cindy goes on to say. “When you get talking to them and they tell you their dreams have included having a pond, cattle, or a crop but it seems out of reach. I tell them that NRCS will help with cross fencing, water troughs, pipelines and ponds.” Cindy will proudly tell anyone, “NRCS conservation planning and designs are the best... you won’t be able to find a better pond or fence design anywhere else!”

Sarah Trichel, District Conservationist for Webster and Claiborne Parishes, agrees, “When Cindy gets questions about specific practices it is really easy for her because she can say let me tell you… these are your options… and this is what I’ve learned on my own place and this is what works.” Cindy knows first-hand that these conservation practices work because she has seen the results on her own land. Sarah explains, “It definitely gives her credibility, people walk into our office and ask for the “pond lady.” Cindy is known far and wide because she has helped countless customers all across north Louisiana.

“When I step onto Cindy’s place what I see is a higher level of conservation … I see success,” Sarah goes on to say, “Cindy does a great job managing her grasses, water quality is a big concern for her and because of the conservation practices she has implemented, this whole area has...”
benefited, not just her farm.” In fact, one of the larger projects
stopped gullying and sediment from washing into Lake
Bistineau which has benefited all the people who live around
the lake.

In January, after 37 years with NRCS, Cindy was seriously
considering retiring. “I had my paperwork completed but I
was back and forth, I just wasn’t sure,” said Cindy. “Sarah said
why don’t we toss a coin … heads you stay, tails you retire.
It seemed fair to me so we tossed the coin and it landed on
heads.” The other part to this story is that Sarah taped two
quarters together so she couldn’t lose. “We can’t afford to lose
Ms. Cindy,” Sarah explains. “She is training the next generation
of conservationists, Cindy knows her stuff. You would be hard
pressed to find anyone else who knows more about NRCS and
conservation planning than Ms. Cindy.”

So Cindy has decided to stay, at least a few more years. “I’ve
got a lot of young folks coming up that I need to train,” said
Cindy. “I have 37 years of experience to share with these
young people.” Sara is thrilled, “Ms. Cindy is a small farmer and
she is doing this on her own. I want folks to know that this
level of conservation can be achieved no matter how big or
how small your farm may be. NRCS is here to help you make
your dreams come true.”

To learn how NRCS can help you achieve all of your
conservation goals, please contact your local field office.
**Outreach Update**

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Outreach Coordinator

Through an outreach agreement with NRCS, Trailblazer RC&D conducted a Forestry Best Management Practice/Pipeline Safety Workshop and Field Tour in Cullen, Louisiana. Trailblazer had a host of Louisiana sponsors as well as sponsorship from the Arkansas Timber Producers Association. Trailblazer’s CEO, Elzey Simmons has formed a unique partnership with George Lease with the Arkansas Timber Producers Association in which together they have conducted joint State Forestry Workshops in Arkansas and Louisiana.

Over 50 workshop participants got to hear presentations on such topics as:

- Forestry BMP’s
- Forestry BMP’s and Water Quality - USDA Assistance on Private Lands
- Forestry Update
- Pipeline Safety
- Summary of Drax Biomass Operation in Morehouse Parish

Rick Williams, NRCS State Forester in Louisiana was one of the speakers at the workshop. Rick gave a detailed presentation on NRCS’ Technical Assistance as well as the forestry related practices that are available through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.

The afternoon portion of the workshop included a tour of a pine plantation whereby Rick Williams and NRCS Area Forester Wayne Roberts showed the participants some Best Management Practices being used on a logging road. The BMP’s installed were designed to protect the soil and water quality during routine forestry operations.

For attending the Workshop and Field Tour, the participants received 6 Continuing Logging Education Credits.

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**Story from the Field**

**Improving Herd Health Through Conservation**

Submitted by: Scott Breedlove, Soil Conservationist, Oak Grove FO

Jeff Simmons has a small cattle ranch, J & S Joint Venture, in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana. Simmons had some concerns about the health of his cattle and the quality of water they had to drink. He visited the Oak Grove Field Office to get help.

Field office personnel visited the ranch and found that herbaceous weeds such as goat weed and dwarf palmetto were causing forage species for his cattle to perform poorly, pastures were being over grazed, no cool season forages were available and water sources were also lacking.

NRCS personnel developed a conservation plan with possible solutions and alternatives for him to address his problems. Simmons applied for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to install conservation practices that would address the issues.

Heavy use area protection pads were installed in livestock concentration areas, as well as an exclusion fence along a stream on the property which helped reduce erosion taking place on the ranch and improve the water quality in the stream. Herbaceous weed control was used to reduce the amount of weeds that were competing with desirable forage species. Forage and biomass planting was used to establish a winter forage to be available for the cattle during the winter months when forage typically run low. Cross fencing was installed and prescribed grazing was implemented to help combat over grazing of the pastures. He also installed water troughs and pipelines to address the lack of water for his herd.

The results have pleased Simmons. He has a more evenly grazed system with better forages for his cattle which has resulted improved health for his entire herd.
Louisiana NRCS to Begin Design on the RESTORE Act Funded Bayou Dularge Coastal Restoration Project on Behalf of the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana

NRCS in Louisiana is beginning the engineering and design of the Bayou DuLarge Ridge, Marsh and Hydrologic Restoration Project on behalf of the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana. The Bayou DuLarge Project was the only tribally proposed project to make it on the Initial Funded Priorities List approved by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (the Council).

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council is using funds from the settlement with Transocean Deepwater Inc., for planning and construction activities in key watersheds across the Gulf Coast. The Mississippi River Delta in Louisiana was identified as one of the key watersheds. Included in the Initial Funded Priorities List in this watershed are one project for implementation and six projects for planning, including the Bayou DuLarge Ridge, Marsh and Hydrologic Restoration Project. The Council approved funding for planning so that good projects are ready to go when additional funding becomes available.

"NRCS has been working in this area for decades," said Kevin Norton, NRCS State Conservationist in Louisiana. "If constructed in the future, this project will work synergistically with other projects in the area, creating a beneficial impact on a larger area of Louisiana's vanishing wetlands."

The Bayou DuLarge Ridge, Marsh and Hydrologic Restoration project is a component of a much broader effort to restore coastal Louisiana. The project was identified in the 2012 Louisiana Coastal Master Plan as a "priority location". If implemented in the future, the project would directly benefit 540 acres of marsh in Terrebonne Parish, an area of cultural and archaeological significance for the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana. Project features include re-establishing hydrologic and salinity conditions, restoring the ridge and creating and restoring marsh.

"The Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana is proud that this important planning project was selected for RESTORE funding. Although we no longer occupy much of our aboriginal lands, that does not mean we no longer care about that land and the important cultural sites and resources we had to leave behind," said Kimberly S. Walden, Chitimacha Cultural Director & Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. "We have been consulting with NRCS regarding this particular area since 2013. This gets us one step closer to restoration. This funding will allow us to continue our successful partnership with NRCS to make a difference in Louisiana, not only for our Tribe but for all of those who are connected to and impacted by the tragic loss of Louisiana's coast, which has impacts far beyond Louisiana."

For more information on the Initial Funded Priorities List approved by the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council, visit www.restorethegulf.gov.

The ME-21 Grand Lake Shoreline Protection Project Begins Construction

Construction recently started on the ME-21 Grand Lake Shoreline Protection Project in Cameron Parish, Louisiana, funded by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA). The original project called for construction of approximately 43,500 feet of rock dike to be constructed along the southern shoreline of Grand Lake between Superior Canal and Tebo Point. The state constructed approximately 38,700 linear feet of the dike using Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) funds. The remainder of the project, approximately 5,681 feet of dike is currently under construction.

Construction should be completed by the end of May 2017.
**Question:** How can cover crops benefit soil health in a rice/crawfish rotation?

**Answer:**
Rice and crawfish production in Louisiana offers many conservation benefits that other crop systems do not. Rice is a high bio mass crop, and the residue that remains after harvest is recalcitrant. The residue provides a tremendous source of organic matter. If left undisturbed, it helps build soil structure and feeds the soil ecology. If disturbed, either mechanically or biologically (crawfish), it provides resiliency to withstand excessive manipulation. This system also provides habitat and food for a suite of migratory birds. During dry periods, these working lands are essential for many critical species.

Cover crops can offer several benefits if included in a rice/crawfish system.

1. **Soil protection.** After the crawfish harvest, or during other fallow periods, cover crops will reduce erosion by providing a physical barrier against raindrop energy.

2. **Root diversity.** Many rice systems are kept “clean” and the only plant that is grown is rice. Growing rice, year after year, will inadvertently promote pests specific to rice to flourish. Without root exudate diversity, you will not have soil ecology diversity. Disease pressure will build. Introducing cover crops, especially a multi-species blend, has the effect of a multi-crop rotation.

3. **Organic matter and soil structure.** Without cover crops, you can continue to add food (carbon) to the system. This in turn will improve soil structure. The better your soil structure, the better the environment you create for soil ecology.

Do you have a conservation question? E-mail amy.robertson@la.usda.gov to have your question answered.

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**Ask the Expert**

**Upcoming Events**

**May 9, 2017**
**Soil Health Workshop**

NRCS, Natchitoches SWCD and the Cane River Lake Commission will be hosting a Soil Health Workshop on May 9, 2017, from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm at the Glory Island Plantation in Natchitoches. This event will emphasize soil health within the Cane River Lake Watershed. Pre-registration is required no later than May 5, 2017. For more information or to register, contact Brandy Hinds at 318-357-8366 or by e-mail at brandy.hinds@la.nacdnet.net. Lunch is provided.

**May 18, 2017**
**Feral Hog Workshop**

NRCS, Sabine SWCD, and the LSU AgCenter are hosting a feral hog workshop on May 18, 2017, from 6:00 - 8:00 pm at the LSU AgCenter located at 1125 W. Mississippi Avenue in Many, Louisiana. This workshop is limited to 50 participants so RSVP early. Dinner will be provided. For more information or to RSVP, contact Chris Pearce at 318-256-3406 or by e-mail at tpearce@agcenter.lsu.edu.

**June 3, 2017**
**8th Annual Youth Fish Fest Tournament**

The Sabine SWCD and the Toledo Bend Lake Association will be hosting the 8th Annual Youth Fish Fest Tournament at the Sabine River Authority’s Cypress Bend Park in Many, Louisiana. Pre-registration is required. For more information or to register, call Anita Manshack at 318-256-3491 x. 100, Tuesday-Friday.

Visit our web site at: www.la.nrcs.usda.gov