Working With Louisiana’s Veterans

A Q & A With Wayne Patterson, Union Parish Farmer
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On the Cover

NRCS is working with America’s veterans across Louisiana. To find out more about U.S. Veteran and Union Parish farmer, Wayne Patterson, see pages 4 and 5.

Get Involved with the Earth Team!

Are you interested in volunteering with conservation professionals on private lands to improve soil quality, conserve water, improve air quality and enhance wildlife habitat? If you answered yes, then volunteering as part of the Earth Team at your local NRCS office is for you!

Available to anyone 14 and older, the Earth Team provides a variety of opportunities: full- or part-time; outdoor or indoor activities; and as an individual or group. There is something for everyone.

For more information, contact Amy Robertson at 318-473-7762 or by e-mail at amy.robertson@la.usda.gov or Adele Swearingen at 318-473-7687 or by e-mail at adele.swearingen@la.usda.gov.
Notes from the State Conservationist

Here we are in the dog days of summer! We know that you, our customers, friends and partners are busy with beginnings of harvesting summer crops and preparing for the fall. After a tough start to the season and the struggles with getting the crops in, it looks like an excellent crop is awaiting maturity and harvest. Best wishes to our farmers, forest, and livestock producers for a successful and safe end to this year’s growing season. And just speaking for myself, I’m always enjoying the bounty of summer… tomatoes, peaches and corn to name a few!

This is a special issue of the Conservation Update. It is our pleasure to feature NRCS customers who have selflessly served our country. Each of them have a remarkable story to tell and we are proud and appreciative of every one of them.

As an agency, we salute and honor the men and women of our armed forces. As many of you know, in the 2014 Farm Bill special provisions were made for veterans interested in entering the realm of agriculture. By providing what we do best, technical and financial assistance, our hope is to play a role, large or small, in making their agricultural dreams come true.

Anytime I travel across this great country of ours and see the expanse of land, the land that provides the supply of food, fiber and fuel that we all need. I cannot help but think of the courage and honor of our men and women of the armed forces. Those who have given the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, and those who return seeking the opportunity to cultivate and farm this great land of ours.

God bless our veterans and God bless the USA!

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist

Get Involved with the Earth Team!
Q&A With Wayne Patterson

1. In what branch of service did you serve?

I got my commission as an infantry officer in the Arkansas National Guard. I then went on to airborne school to be a paratrooper and then went to Ranger school. I transferred to the Louisiana guard as an engineer. I’ve been a lieutenant and a company commander, battalion commander and state group commander. I had a good career, I made some of my best friends in the service.

My company was activated during Desert Storm. We performed war time missions, including the assault into Iraq and we were also a part of the recovery in Kuwait and Iraq. We took 700 soldiers with us and we brought 700 soldiers home, we were truly blessed.

2. When did you get started in farming?

I’ve been involved in farming and cattle for years in Union Parish. Now I would have to say the focus of my life is more toward stewardship and taking care of what God has blessed us with…our land, our water and animals.

3. When did you start thinking about conservation and how it would affect your land?

About 10 years ago I went through a transformation, as far as, the way I look at things. Really embracing the stewardship part of owning land and what our responsibilities are. I’m gradually adding conservation practices to my land.

4. You discovered a bee hive on your property. After you made that discovery and started researching bees, you were surprised at some of the statistics about bees in the U.S. What did you learn?

I was shocked when I read several articles about the decline in our bee population, not only in Louisiana,
but nationwide. Statistics that I have seen show a decline of 50 to 60 percent. So, I have a hive of bees that I’m nurturing and one of the ways I plan to help the bee population is by planting about 15 to 20 acres of clover this year. I have a friend who raises bees and he is going to bring some hives out to my place and we are going to see if we can introduce the bees back into the area.

5. Wildlife is extremely important to you, can you explain the role of providing wildlife habitat on your place?

We have all types of wildlife here... we see deer, bobcats, turkeys, doves, wood ducks and quail. Providing habitat for the quail is critical and that is one of my goals. I believe if I manage my land right, caring for it and taking care of it, a vibrant and flourishing habitat will be the end result. And then we will see the quail population rise.

6. How did you get started with NRCS? And what programs/practices are you currently using?

In 2016, I heard about NRCS from a good friend of mine. I have to say, at first, I was a little reluctant to sign-up for any kind of assistance. But, I contacted the District Conservationist in Farmerville, Stephanie Cruse, and she really helped me and developed a conservation plan for my land. Throughout the process, Darren Cooper, Soil Conservation Technician and Stephanie made the process an excellent experience for me. If you follow their prescription I don’t think you can fail.

7. What NRCS programs are you currently enrolled in?

Through the Environmental Quality Initiative Program (EQIP) I planted pine trees. Part of my 73 acres was land that was cut over. We planted last March and the seedlings are healthy and growing. I’m also in the process of applying for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to further conservation on my place.
In honor of America’s Independence Day, we would like to take this opportunity to recognize some of the veterans who work with NRCS and the soil and water conservation districts to get conservation on the ground across Louisiana. Thank you for your service!

Joseph Frank is a cattle producer in St. Landry Parish. Frank served our country in the U.S. Air Force. After serving our country, Frank returned to his homeplace in St. Landry Parish and began farming in 1973. He began receiving conservation technical assistance, as well as financial assistance, through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program in 2014.

Dennis Courtright is a cattle producer in Grant Parish. Courtright served our country as a pilot for the U.S. Air Force. Courtright grew up on a farm but began farming himself in 1974. His relationship with the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS began around the same time. Courtright is currently serving his second term on the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Board.

Adrian Bowie and Sandra Fisher are beginning cattle producers in Grant Parish. Bowie retired from the U.S. Marine Corps and Fisher served our country in the U.S. Army. Bowie and Fisher recently moved back to Grant Parish to live and start their cattle operation. They are new customers with NRCS and have signed a contract for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.
Ken and Stella Gibson are beginning farmers in Richland Parish. They both served our country in the U.S. Air Force. The Gibson’s currently have chickens, goats, fruit trees and vegetables. They are working to expand their operation and have applied for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to construct a seasonal high tunnel. They are hoping that one day their farm will be a model for other veterans to learn about farming.

Thomas Smith is a cattle producer in Grant Parish. Smith served our country in the U.S. Army. After serving our country, Smith returned to Grant Parish and worked for the U.S. Postal Service. Smith began raising cattle 30 years ago and began his relationship with the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS. Smith is currently serving his second term as a board member on the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District.

Ben Littlepage has been growing pecans in Grant Parish for 70+ years. Littlepage served our country in the U.S. Army. After his service, Littlepage returned to Grant Parish where he continued to farm. Before exclusively growing pecans, he also farmed soybeans and corn. In fact, he planted his first two corn crops with mules. Littlepage has had a relationship with the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS as long as he’s been farming.
The 2018 Louisiana Women in Agriculture will be held on February 22 & 23, 2018 in Alexandria, Louisiana at the Holiday Inn Downtown.

To pre-register or sponsor visit LouisianaWomeninAG.com. Registration is $50 and includes meals. Special room rate code: LWA

Keynote Speakers:
Kimberly Ratcliff,
Manager of Caney Creek Ranch
East Central Texas

Sarah Calhoun
Founder and Owner
Red Ants Pants
White Sulphur Springs, Montana

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