Great Scott! Raising Chickens Is More Than Meets The Eye
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Find out how Lincoln Parish poultry farmer, Greg Scott, is saving energy on his farm on pages 4 and 5.
Notes from the State Conservationist

The last several weeks have been tough ones for many in Louisiana and certainly our friends in Texas and Florida have suffered through some trying times. As some of our producers move into recovery mode, and assess damages and losses resulting from the hurricane and subsequent flooding, we (NRCS) along with leaders from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Rural Development (RD) are committed to be there through the recovery process.

Now more than ever before, we are working hand-in-hand with our sister agencies to provide exceptional assistance. Our employees out on the ground will be with you to make assessments of damages and develop creative approaches that focus on effective recovery of the land.

Right now, we are accepting Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications from everyone in the state for our ongoing program delivery. But we also encourage producers who have been affected by the recent storms, and who live in the 12 disaster declared parishes to reach out to your local NRCS and FSA office to learn how we can help you move forward. The declared parishes as of this writing are: Allen, Acadia, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Natchitoches, Rapides, Sabine, Vermilion and Vernon. To see an updated map of the declared parishes, visit http://emergency.louisiana.gov/. The EQIP application process for Tropical Storm Harvey will expand to other parishes as the declaration is amended.

In this issue you will meet Greg Scott a poultry producer in Lincoln Parish who has utilized EQIP and the results have been outstanding. Also, take some time to look over the special EQIP section in this month’s issue to learn more about how EQIP can help you reach your conservation goals.

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist

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 of Red Ants Pants
White Sulphur Springs, Montana
Have you ever noticed something from afar … and could imagine the potential? Envision what that place or thing “could” be with some elbow grease and TLC? Most people have, either with a house or a car. The dream of transforming the mundane and ordinary into something shiny and new, and perhaps more importantly, useful.

In the case of Greg Scott, that dream of transformation became reality in a farm, a poultry farm to be exact (with some cattle thrown into the mix, too). Today, Scott Family Farms, LLC is not only successful and productive, but energy efficient, as well. Many agricultural industry leaders point to Scott Family Farms as an example of land and animal stewardship.

Located along the vibrant green, rolling hills of northeast Louisiana stands Scott Family Farms. Greg is a first-generation farmer. His “real” day job, Greg is quick to tell you, is working with developmentally disabled people in Lincoln Parish. In fact, that is how Greg stumbled on the poultry farm he owns today. “I would help find jobs for some of the clients at a farm close by. When I would go with them I would see this place, and I could see it had potential,” he explained. “I’ve always loved the outdoors and the idea of being able to own a farm was intriguing to me and I knew with some help I could make the farm successful.”

Scott purchased the farm nine years ago. He will be the first to admit that he was a novice when it came to farming. And the learning curve at times was steep. Scott laughs, “When I bought this place I didn’t know anything about chickens.” Scott adds, “Most people don’t realize all that goes into raising them. Everything is completely computerized. It all comes down to wind speed and static pressure in the houses, height of water and feed lines, the light and darkness in the houses.” Scott admits, “You wouldn’t think it would be so complicated, but it is. There are so many factors that go into keeping the chickens healthy.”

Through fellow farmers and family, Scott found his way to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office and visited with Jeff Foster, who was serving as the Acting District Conservationist in the Ruston Field Office. “Mr. Scott came to our office with some specific goals in mind;” Foster said. “He knew he wanted to improve water quality on his place, increase water availability for his cattle, reduce sheet and rill erosion, develop a comprehensive nutrient management plan and improve animal health and profitability.”

NRCS was there to help Scott meet his conservation goals. “Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) we were able to match the right practice to the goal that Mr. Scott had in mind;” explained Foster. The outcomes with EQIP for Scott’s farm were so successful, he decided to learn more about the Agriculture Energy Management Plan. Foster continued, “He knew he wanted to reduce the carbon footprint of his poultry operation with a systematic reduction of greenhouse gas and to make his farming operation more profitable by being more energy efficient.”

Scott signed up for an On-farm Energy Audit. Through this process farm owners learn conservation measures and management activities that will ensure production and natural resource protection goals are achieved. It is a way to maximize energy conservation and efficiency.
One of the recommendations that Scott received was to replace 40 watt incandescent bulbs in the chicken houses to more energy efficient nine watt LED bulbs with dimmer controls. LED’s last up to 100,000 hours and have low maintenance cost, do not contain mercury and are highly reliable. So what did that mean for Scott’s bottom line? “I’m spending a third less on lighting each chicken house,” Scott explained. “80 light bulbs in eight houses, that adds up fast.”

Scott also put in new insulation with the help of NRCS and the result? “The investment I made in new insulation literally paid for itself in one year,” replied Scott. “My natural gas bill dropped 50% and my electricity bill went down about 15%.”

“The old adage “it’s all about relationships” proves to be true, especially when it comes to the working relationship that NRCS employees have with producers. Scott sums it up perfectly, “Working with the NRCS Ruston Field Office staff over the last six years has been a true blessing. Their experience and technical expertise has helped me accomplish my goals for my farming operation that I would not have been able to achieve on my own.”

Scott continues, “This is truly a family farming operation and one day, my hope is that I’ll pass this on to my children and they will continue the conservation practices I’ve put into place.”
EQIP FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

StrikeForce
A USDA initiative for rural growth and opportunity to address specific challenges associated with rural poverty in 44 parishes in Louisiana. Funding and outreach efforts are used to better serve producers in these persistent poverty rural parishes. Check with your local office for eligibility.

“NRCS educated me on what I needed to do to have a more productive farm and more importantly, why I needed to do it.”

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers/Ranchers
You may be eligible for this if you are an individual or entity who’s a member of a socially disadvantaged group. These groups consist of American Indians/Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders and Hispanics.

Wildlife
Louisiana is offering a funding opportunity to meet wildlife conservation needs. You may be eligible if you are restoring, developing, or enhancing wildlife habitat.

Migratory Bird Habitat
You may be eligible for funding through this initiative if you are protecting, restoring, and enhancing migratory bird habitat.

Beginning Farmer & Rancher
You may be eligible for this if you have owned or operated a ranch for less than 10 consecutive years.

Working Lands for Wildlife - Gopher Tortoise
Joint effort with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that assists ag producers and forest land managers create, enhance and manage habitat for the tortoise in St. Helena, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa and Washington Parish.

“With NRCS’s help, we have seen a huge increase in the population of turkeys, quail, woodcocks, and woodpeckers.”

“USDA has been a helping hand all along, down through the ages; however StrikeForce reaches out to those individuals who need assistance the most.”

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**October 20, 2017**

*Applications can be found at your local NRCS office.*

**National Organic Initiative**
Assists eligible producers with installation of conservation practices on ag operations related to organic production. You may be eligible if you are a certified organic producer or a producer transitioning to becoming certified organic.

**Longleaf Pine Initiative**
Assists producers in targeted areas manage, restore or enhance the historic longleaf pine forest landscape on private lands. The Joint Chief's longleaf pine project is a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and is also available to improve health and resiliency of the ecosystem. Check with your local office for eligibility.

**Seasonal High Tunnel**
Assists producers to extend the growing season for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. Farmers can plant earlier in the spring and later into the fall, while protecting crops from frost. In addition to statewide funding, special funding is set aside to increase local food production via community gardens and urban farms in the metro New Orleans area.

**Mississippi River Basin Initiative**
The purpose of MRBI is to improve water quality, increase water conservation and enhance wildlife habitat within selected watersheds draining into the Mississippi River. Check with your local office for eligibility.

**Dairy Water Quality**
If you are a dairy producer, you may be eligible for funding to help address water quality resource concerns on your farm. Check with your local office for eligibility.

**National Water Quality Initiative**
Partnership effort between, the Environmental Protection Agency, NRCS and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to assist producers in selected watershed address high-priority water resource concerns. Check with your local office for eligibility.

“We believe it’s vital that our children grow up eating natural, healthy foods.”

“‘When I see clear water running off my pastures, and wildlife benefiting from conservation, I know that I am doing the right thing.’

“There is no way we could have accomplished on our land what we have without NRCS, no way.”
Upcoming Events

**September 30, 2017**
**Community Rally for Veterans**

The Village of Athens, Trailblazer RC&D, and NRCS are hosting a “Community Rally for Veterans” on September 30, 2017, at 3:00 pm at the Athens Town Hall. This event is in support of an effort by the Village of Athens and the Trailblazer RC&D to construct a Veteran’s Therapy Health Garden and Trail. For more information, contact Ann Brown at 318-258-5275.

**October 11, 2017**
**CWPPRA Dedication Ceremony**

The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Task Force is hosting a Dedication Ceremony at 10:00 am on October 11, 2017, at Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe Centre in Lacombe, Louisiana. For more information contact Mirka Zapletal at 337-266-8623.

**October 13, 2017**
**Tallgrass Prairie Workshop**

The Louisiana Grazing Lands Coalition and NRCS are hosting a Tallgrass Prairie Workshop on October 13, 2017, in Eunice Louisiana. Acadia Parish farmer, Vernon Fuselier, has established about 30 acres of native grasses and forbs on his land. Learn how this diverse native plant community benefits soil health, pollinators and forage for livestock. Pre-registration is required. Visit LouisianaGLCI.org for more information and to register.

**October 19, 2017**
**Dean Lee Beef and Forage Field Day**

The LSU AgCenter will host a Beef and Forage Field day and the Dean Lee Research and Extension Center in Alexandria, Louisiana on October 19, 2017. Please contact Glen Gentry at ggentry@agcenter.lsu.edu for more information.

**October 19, 2017**
**Longleaf Pine Field Day and Workshop**

Learn about longleaf pine and financial assistance opportunities for planting and managing longleaf pine at an upcoming workshop and field day on Thursday, October 19th, from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. The workshop will begin at the Kisatchie Ranger District Headquarters located on Hwy 117 approximately 25 miles north of Leesville and 12 miles south of Provencal in Natchitoches Parish. Continuing Forestry Education credits can be earned by attending the event. Registration is $10 and includes lunch. To register or for more information, contact Chris Rice at (318) 237-5569 or by e-mail at crice@tnc.org.

**October 28 - 29, 2017**
**Experience Louisiana Festival**

Visit the NRCS Exhibit at the Experience Louisiana Festival at LSUE on October 28 & 29, 2017. Dr. Mike Lindsey will be there for a soil health demonstration using the rainfall simulator at 1:00 pm on October 28th.

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

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