



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

December 2017

Healthy Soils Lead to High Tunnel Success



Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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The Conservation Update is distributed monthly by mail and e-mail.

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On the Cover



Find out how healthy soils are a vital part of a high tunnel system's success on pages 4 and 5.



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Notes from the State Conservationist

It is hard to believe that we have celebrated Thanksgiving and now we are entering the holiday season. This time of year gives me pause, to reflect, and think about all the things I have to be thankful for. To begin, my wife, children and grandchildren, my extended family and friends, my colleagues and partners in the conservation world. All of whom play an integral role in my life.

I'm also thankful for the relationships in my work-life that continue to inspire me to grow and expand the reach of conservation work, in Louisiana and across the nation. In fact, now more than ever, all of the USDA agencies are working together to provide the best customer experience for you, farmers, ranchers, forester stewards and our neighbors.

One of our USDA sister agencies, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), is preparing to send out 3.1 million census packages the first week in December. Every five years NASS conducts a survey of all agricultural producers no matter how big or small the operation. This is an incredible opportunity to speak up for agriculture and have your voice heard. The results from the survey will influence the future of American farming, so, the more voices that are heard, the more accurate information will be available for our elected officials and policy makers. Please take the time to complete your survey and support Louisiana's agriculture community.

Finally, in this issue, you meet a couple in Tensas Parish who have taken the idea and dream of growing fresh produce all-year and have turned that into a reality. Through NRCS outreach efforts, they received technical assistance and funding for a high tunnel and have made it a resounding success!

If you are interested in learning more about high tunnels or any other NRCS program please contact your local NRCS field office or log onto www.nrcs.usda.gov

My hope is that you and your family will enjoy a happy and healthy holiday season!

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist

Programs Reminder:

To be considered for 2018 funding, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetlands Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE) applications must be received by **Friday, December 15th**. Visit your local office today for more information.



Healthy Soils Lead to H

Gardening is a favorite past-time for many people in Louisiana. A lot of people look forward to that first taste of a juicy ripe homegrown tomato during the summer. With the help of a seasonal high tunnel, the growing season is extended and that first taste can happen earlier in the spring.

Located in Tensas Parish, one of the parishes in the Mississippi River Delta, Enola Farms is finding success with a seasonal high tunnel.

Ann and Chris Mills had been growing their own vegetables for years and eventually had branched out to sell produce at local farmers markets. What couldn't be sold fresh was brought home and canned and then once again brought back to market to sell.

Three years ago, the Mills heard about an opportunity for technical and financial assistance to construct a high tunnel system that would help them extend the growing season for their produce. They contacted the local field office and the rest is history.

Receiving financial assistance through the StrikeForce Initiative funded by the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the high tunnel was constructed and the planting began.

They have since installed drip tape to irrigate the plants and they use hay as cover to help keep the moisture in the soil.

Soil health is a big concern for the Mills. They use crop rotation to enhance the soil the same way farmers use crop rotation in large open fields. Pointing



High Tunnel Success

to different locations within his high tunnel, Chris explains, "I planted tomatoes in this location this year, because I had peas there last year".

taken time and hard work to improve the health of my soil. Organic farmers don't deep till, we add the compost and shallow till."

"It extends the growing season, there's no doubt about that." Jim Mills

One of the most important components of healthy soil is organic matter. To keep organic matter in the soil, the Mills mix composted horse manure from the horses on their farm into their soil..

He went on to say, "I don't deep till because I don't want to kill my worms. If you deep till it disturbs the biological balance in the soil. When I first started, my soil did not look like this. It has

The Mills keep the high tunnel full, growing things like lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, Brussels sprouts, and various herbs. This would not be possible without healthy soils.

"Growing in the high tunnel has been a learning process," said Chris. "I read a lot and have attended several workshops to master my skills. I also know that NRCS is just a phone call away for all of my technical questions."

Production in the high tunnel has been so successful that the Mills are considering adding another high tunnel on their farm.

Although not certified organic, the Mills use organic practices because they feel it is the right thing to do. And they know that if they do decide to fully transition or become certified organic, that NRCS has a special initiative through EQIP that will help with that too.

Outreach Update

Outreach Update

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Outreach Coordinator

NRCS is pleased to be partnering with Re-Entry Solutions, a non-profit organization in Alexandria whose mission is to coordinate with existing community resources and develop new ones to help break the cycle of return to incarceration. The organization is headed by Executive Director, Candy Christophe of Alexandria. For the past 5 years the organization has primarily focused on employment of returning citizens. They have provided services to over 500 returning citizens. The Re-Entry Organization has been

able to successfully establish a pipeline to employment with many community partners.

With the establishment of a New Beginning Transitional Complex located at 1815 N. Bolton Avenue in Alexandria, Re-Entry Solutions is partnering with NRCS with the establishment of an Urban Garden on the 5 acre property site. The site will provide independent and transitional housing with essential support services for 61 family members who are in need of a Second Chance. The NRCS assisted Urban Garden component will allow the residents of the New Beginning Transitional Complex to grow fresh produce onsite which in turn will help to promote a healthy lifestyle for the residents.



Story from the Field

New Educational Coloring Book Features Tiny Superhero of the Soil

Submitted by: Ron Nichols, Public Affairs Officer, Greensboro, NC

She's a wee bit smaller than your typical superhero.

But the creators of a new soil health-themed coloring book believe "Mighty Mini Microbe's Tale" will encourage the next generation of real-life hero farmers, conservationists and scientists to further unlock the secrets in the soil.

The 24-page coloring book is produced by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and is part of its on-going "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil" soil health awareness and education campaign. It is illustrated by Cat Bailey, an NRCS public affairs specialist in Portland, Oregon.

"While the characters are fictional, there's solid science behind the narrative," said Ron Nichols, the book's author and NRCS soil health campaign coordinator. "Many people don't realize that the elegant symbiosis of life underground enables

all life above ground," he said. "Through this simple story we hope to encourage the next generation of farmers, scientists and consumers to learn more about what we can and should do to enable that subterranean life so we can rebuild and regenerate our soil to sustainably feed our growing population."

Nichols said the story not only highlights the role of soil microbes in our lives, but also the role of "farmer heroes," who farm in ways that protect and improve soil microbial habitat.

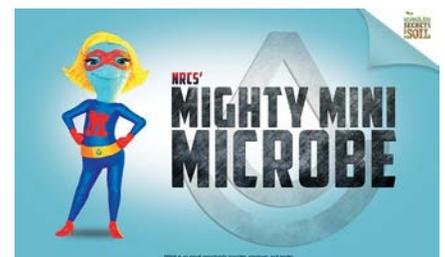
"Farmers who implement soil health management systems on their farms are the other heroes in the story," he said. "By using no-till, cover crops and diverse species and rotations, these producers are increasing the health and diversity of soil microbiological communities. In turn, these microbes provide nutrients, protect plants from pests and disease and improve soil aggregation and function – all of which make farming operations more productive, profitable and more resilient to weather extremes."

As part of its educational campaign, Nichols said, NRCS plans to release a series of animated "Mighty Mini Microbe"

educational public service ads later this year, which are designed for children's television programming.

"The more we discover about the wonderful life below ground, the more we realize how much more there is to discover about our living and life-giving soil," Nichols said. "It's an exciting frontier in science. Hopefully, this little coloring book will unlock the imaginations of our next generation of soil health explorers."

The coloring book can be ordered or downloaded from the NRCS web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov.



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

Upcoming Events

Louisiana Soil Health and Cover Crop Conferences

Tuesday, January 23, 2018
Hampton Inn - West Monroe
601 Mane Street, West Monroe
8:00 AM

Wednesday, January 24, 2018
State Emergency Shelter (South of LSUA)
Highway 71 S, Alexandria
8:00 AM

NRCS and the LSU AgCenter are hosting Soil Health and Cover Crop Conferences in January. It is FREE to attend but pre-registration is required. Visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/louisiana-soil-health-cover-crop-conference-west-monroe-tickets-40791418230> for West Monroe Conference and <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/louisiana-soil-health-cover-crop-conference-alexandria-tickets-40791660956> for Alexandria Conference.

Earn Louisiana Master Farmer Program Phase 2 Credit and CEUs and CCA CEUs.

Contact James Hendrix at 318-235-7198 or Donna Morgan at 318-613-9278 for more information.

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OR A GUIDED HIKE IN KISATCHIE NATIONAL FOREST



6 PM: RECEPTION

HEAVY HORS D'OEUVRES INCLUDED, COCKTAILS AVAILABLE



FRIDAY

8 AM: CONFERENCE

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SPEAKERS, INCLUDING CANEY CREEK RANCH MANAGER
KIMBERLY RATCLIFF, AND RED ANTS PANTS OWNER AND
FOUNDER, SARAH CALHOUN



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REGISTRATION: \$50

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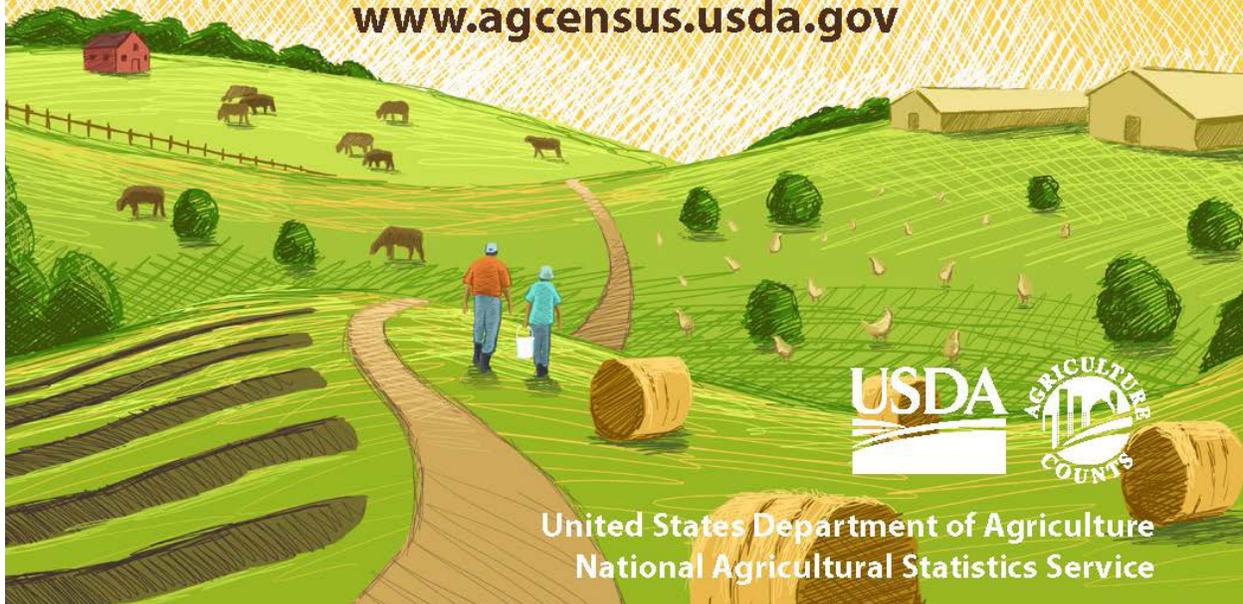
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