



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

April 2018

## Investing in Soil Health for the Future

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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Learn how St. Mary Parish farmer, Al Lanie is improving the health of the soil on his farm to increase the yield of his crop and his bottom line on pages 4 and 5.

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

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## Notes from the Acting State Conservationist

In the world of conservation, April is a watershed month. First, we recognize and celebrate the 83rd anniversary of our agency. On Sunday, April 14, 1935, also known as “Black Sunday” one of the worst dust storms in American history occurred. Some 300 million tons of topsoil from the prairie area of the United States was displaced. And the effects of Black Sunday could be seen and felt as far away as Washington D.C. and New York City.

This month also includes National Volunteerism Week, April 16th – 20th. During this timeframe, we recognize the many accomplishments made by our dedicated group of Earth Team volunteers. In fact, last year alone Louisiana had over 6,360 hours donated by 422 volunteers across the state. The value of volunteer time for the State of Louisiana is \$22.77 an hour, adding up to over \$144,817 for NRCS Louisiana in 2017. Now that is something to celebrate!



With summer just around the corner, I encourage everyone (especially parents of teenagers “14 and up”) to think about volunteering for NRCS. There are many opportunities for high school and college students to get real life work experience from our knowledgeable employees. Contact your local NRCS office to learn more about Earth Team and how to apply.

We believe in volunteerism so much, we are getting out and getting our hands dirty for a good cause! We are partnering with the Veterans Hospital in Pineville to construct and plant raised bed gardens for patients and those who are living full-time at the facility. NRCS and VA employees, Earth Team volunteers, and community members working together for a great cause. Be sure to look for the next issue of the Conservation Update for pictures and

details about the event!

In this month’s issue we introduce you to a sugar cane farmer in St. Mary Parish who is passionate about soil health. Working closely with his local district conservationist and a resource soil scientist, he is implementing practices that will not only improve his soil, but also his bottom line.

So, this month, please join me as we shine a light on conservation and the many people across our state who put conservation into action every day.

Claude Ross  
Acting State Conservationist

## 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.

This is the perfect time for your high school or college aged student to sign up to volunteer and gain valuable work experience while helping NRCS accomplish its mission of “Helping People Help the Land” this summer.

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.



# Investing in Soil Health for

As you travel south on Highway 90 from Lafayette to Franklin, fields of sugar cane line both sides of the highway. The sugar industry is a billion dollar industry in Louisiana. According to the American Sugar Cane League, sugar cane is produced on over 400,000 acres of land in 23 parishes in Louisiana, and is processed in one of 11 raw sugar factories in the state, producing 1.4 million tons of raw sugar annually.

Just like every farmer in America, what is most important to sugar cane farmers is the bottom line. As the population increases and land for farming decreases, farmers like Al Lanie are working hard to figure out how to increase the overall yield of the crops grown on their farms to help feed the nation.

Lanie has been farming his entire life and currently farms 5400 acres of sugar cane in Lafayette, St. Mary and Vermilion Parishes. However, on his fields in St. Mary Parish he is trying something different. Lanie is using soil health principles to increase his overall yield. His goal is to average 10,000 pounds of sugar per acre.

When Lanie started farming in St. Mary Parish in 2015, he visited the St. Mary Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS office for advice on improving the production on his fields. Kayla Hebert, district conservationist in St. Mary Parish, visited his fields in St. Mary Parish and completed a conservation plan. Hebert contacted the resource soil scientist for south

Louisiana, Brandon Waltman, and a “sweet” partnership was formed.

Waltman visited the fields and investigated what types of soils were in the area and the overall health of the soils on his property. He then worked with Hebert on recommendations to include in the conservation plan to improve the overall soil health on Lanie’s fields, including residue management and planting cover crops.

Although not widely used by many sugar cane farmers yet, Lanie knew what he needed to do to reach his goal so he applied for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to implement the recommendations in the conservation plan.

Lanie stated, “My father was a very progressive farmer and he instilled in me the value of having an open mind when it comes to farming techniques that can make the farm land better. I am teaching my son the same values.”

Lanie has been sweeping his residue and practicing residue management on his fields in Lafayette and Vermilion Parishes for 20 years following in his dad’s footsteps of being a progressive farmer. He has not noticed any yield loss as a result of sweeping and in fact his yields have continued to increase year after year.



# the Future

“Improving the health of the soils in my fields will be a slow process,” said Lanie, “but a necessary one if I want to achieve my goals.”

Leaving the stubble on the ground in place of burning provides cover for the soil which helps keep the moisture in the soil, while also preventing erosion after a heavy rain. When soil isn't eroding, the quality of the water leaving the farm is also improved.

To further improve the soil health, Lanie planted a variety of cover crops this year, including austrian winter peas, tillage radish and vetch.

“Cover crops are the missing piece,” said Waltman. “When a producer uses no-till or minimum till and cover crops on his operation, the health of the soil is going to increase.”

Cover crops have many benefits, including improving water infiltration, breaking the pest

cycle, reducing erosion, suppressing weeds and adding much needed organic material and micro-nutrients to the soil.

By investing in soil health on the front end, the costs of adding things to the soil, like fertilizer, will decrease which will be a savings to farmers like Lanie where it matters most...in their wallet.

Waltman and Hebert have visited Lanie's farm several times to make sure that he is on his way to achieving his goals and will continue to visit his farm until his goals are achieved.

To find out how NRCS can help you achieve your conservation goals, contact your local USDA Service Center.



# Around the State

## March 7 - 9, 2018 Natchitoches SWCD Annual Tree Sale

The Natchitoches Soil and Water Conservation District held their annual tree and shrub sale from March 7 - 9, 2018, in Natchitoches, Louisiana.

There was a variety of bare root and potted trees and shrubs, including river birch, live oak, sawtooth oak, Indian hawthorne, strawberry bush, chinquapin, white, pink and red dogwood, crepe myrtle, fern, azalea, gardenia, hydrangea, sweet olive, sago palm, mayhaw, apple, peach, pear, plum, blueberry, fig, grafted pecans, satsumas, lemon variegated lemon, kumquat, avocado, paw-paw and others.



The tree sale is the SWCD's largest fundraiser of the year. All proceeds benefit the community through sponsorship of area projects including the conservation essay, soil and water stewardship week, conservation education programs, forestry awareness and feral hog control.

## March 28, 2018 20th Wetland Watchers Celebration

The Crescent Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS participated in the 20th Wetlands Watchers Celebration on March 28, 2018, in Norco, Louisiana. This year's event was sponsored by the United Way of St. Charles.

Over 2000, presenters and guests attended this year's celebration of which 800 were area 4th grade students.

The students rotated through exhibits and activities that included over 20 interactive displays, fish printing, and hands-on with baby alligators and other reptiles. This year, visitors to the SWCD/NRCS exhibit learned about healthy soils.



## March 28, 2018 Congressional Staffers Visit Louisiana Plant Materials Center

On March 28, Congressional staffers from the offices of Congressman Graves and Scalise, Senators Kennedy and Wicker and a staffer from the House Natural Resources Committee toured areas of coastal Louisiana to better understand the need for restoring our coast. This tour was hosted by Restore or Retreat and Restore the Mississippi River Delta to show the ways in which congressional action can aid the restoration initiatives in both the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan and through other programs such as CWPPRA.

During this tour they visited the Louisiana Plant Materials Center, so that they could see firsthand the work that the NRCS Plant Materials Program is doing to address coastal erosion and marsh restoration, and how important it is to continue to advance the science and research of coastal restoration.



## March 29, 2018 Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD and NRCS Hold Outreach Meeting

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Tangipahoa - St. Helena Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) held an outreach event for local producers on March 29, 2018. The event attracted a sizable number of producers that were interested in hearing about the technical and financial assistance offered by the SWCD and NRCS. Many past participants were welcomed back, as well as new ones who are just beginning to explore how USDA can help them bring their operation to its full potential.

The district conservationist, Dennis Ware, highlighted some of the great opportunities NRCS offers local agricultural producers for technical and financial assistance, as well as how to utilize the services of the local field office effectively. He also sought to clarify how the program application process works and common mistakes in that process. Details of popular programs like EQIP and CSP were explained and producers were encouraged to get involved with all the programs NRCS has to offer.



The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) county executive director, Patrick Babineaux, was also in attendance and spoke with participants about how the FSA and NRCS work together to put effective conservation measures on the ground. He and Dennis Ware encouraged all participants to stop by the USDA offices regularly to make sure all of their eligibility documents and contact information were up to date.

## Outreach Corner

**Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, State Outreach Coordinator**

St. Louis, Missouri, was the meeting location for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Conference, April 3 -5, 2018. The theme for this year's convention was "Our Farms, Our Future, The Next 30 Years of Sustainable Agriculture". There were over 950 people registered for the convention and all 50 states were represented, as well as some of the island residents were in attendance.

Louisiana was represented at the conference by NRCS' Dexter Sapp, Donna Isaacs, Campti Field of Dreams Executive Director, and retired NRCS Soil Scientist and now Southern University Extension Agent Burnell Muse. Personnel from LSU, Southern University and LDAF were also also.



The conference participants were able to engage in important discussions about the path of sustainable agriculture for the next 30 years. Engaging panels, technical and issue-oriented breakout sessions, exhibitor booths and farms tours were all incorporated into the conference.

One of the conference highlights was the tour "All About Livestock: Raising Animals Profitably and Sustainably". On this tour, the group visited pastured livestock production systems and an innovative

food hub. The Todd Geisert Farm, first stop on the tour, located in Washington, Missouri, since 1916, produces all natural pasture raised pork. The Geisert Farm is a 1,500 head swine operation. Todd hauls anywhere from 12-30 hogs to the butcher on a weekly basis.

The last stop on the tour was at the Fresh Pasture Farms in Millstadt, Illinois. This 65-acre operation features pasture-raised poultry, eggs, pork and grass fed beef. Every morning at the Fresh Pasture Farm, the chickens, pigs, turkeys and cows are moved to a fresh pasture of grass where they receive a variety of grasses, sunshine, and custom-made feed. The pastured chickens are grown until they reach 8 pounds and then they are sold for \$32.00 per chicken.

## Upcoming Events

**May 2, 2018  
High Tunnel Workshop and Tour**

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a high tunnel workshop and tour on May 2, 2018, from 9:30 am until noon, in Waterproof, Louisiana. Participants will learn about the basics and benefits of high tunnels, the types of high tunnels and will get to tour a high tunnel.

Registration for this workshop is FREE! Please call 318-255-3554 and leave your name and contact information, PLUS the name of the workshop you plan to attend on the answering machine, or e-mail [ceo@trailblazer.org](mailto:ceo@trailblazer.org) or call 318-243-9194.

**May 9 - 11, 2018  
Louisiana GLCI Louisiana Farms Bus Tour**

From way up north in Pioneer, Louisiana, to the rolling hill country of East Feliciana, all the way west to Cajun Country, many

farmers across the state of Louisiana are practicing holistic management on their farms. On this three-day excursion, participants will visit six of the best holistically managed farms in the state. Visit the Louisiana GLCI website for more information and to register for this event!

**May 17 - 19, 2018  
Back to Your Roots 2018**

The Campti Field of Dreams is hosting Back to Your Roots 2018 on May 17 - 19, 2018, in Russell Hall at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana. This conference is designed to empower the next generation of farmers, ranchers and value-added producers, with environmentally friendly tools and techniques that produce more income. Keynote speakers include Dr. Chuck Fluharty, President and CEO of the Rural Policy Research Institute, Jean-Martin Forties, farmer and author of "The Market Gardener", and Joel Salatin, third-generation farmer and author of "You can

Farm", Salad Bar Beef, and "Pastured Poultry Profits".

Space is limited so register today at [www.camptifieldofdreams.org](http://www.camptifieldofdreams.org). If you have questions, contact Donna Isaacs at 318-521-4998, or by email at [donna@camptifeildofdreams.org](mailto:donna@camptifeildofdreams.org).

**May 18, 2018  
Timber Marketing Workshop**

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a timber marketing workshop and tour on May 18, 2018, from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm, in Homer, Louisiana. Participants will learn about estimating value of timber, the process of selling timber, a presentation from a CPA and taxes.

Registration for this workshop is FREE! Please call 318-255-3554 and leave your name and contact information PLUS the name of the workshop you plan to attend on the answering machine, or e-mail [ceo@trailblazer.org](mailto:ceo@trailblazer.org) or call 318-243-9194.

# Upcoming Events

## **May 22, 2018 LSU AgCenter Market Ready Workshop - Oak Grove**

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting a Market Ready Workshop from 8:30 am - 2:30 pm, on May 22, 2018, in Oak Grove, Louisiana. The focus of this workshop is to assist local food producers in establishing a business strategy and effectively market to local restaurants and schools as well as grocers and wholesalers. Registration is FREE, but participants are required to register via Eventbrite. For more information or to register visit, [www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready) or by contacting Alessandro Holzapfel at [aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2701.

## **May 24, 2018 LSU AgCenter Market Ready Workshop - Shreveport**

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting a Market Ready Workshop from 8:30 am - 2:30 pm, on May 24, 2018, in Shreveport, Louisiana. The focus of this workshop is to assist local food producers in establishing a business strategy and effectively market to local restaurants and schools as well as grocers and wholesalers. Registration is FREE, but participants are required to register via Eventbrite. For more information or to register, visit [www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready) or by contacting Alessandro Holzapfel at [aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2701.

## **May 30 - June 1, 2018 State of the Coast Conference**

Visit the NRCS Exhibit at the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana's 5th Biennial State of the Coast Conference being

held at the Ernest Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, from May 30 - June 1, 2018. State of the Coast 2018 will consist of two and half days of presentations by leading experts in concurrent sessions, keynote presentations, poster session and networking opportunities. More than 1,000 scientists, landowners/managers, federal and state agency personnel, local officials, industry and business leaders, resource users and interested citizens will be in attendance. Visit [www.stateofthecoast.org](http://www.stateofthecoast.org) for more information.

## **June 4 - 6, 2018 89th Louisiana FFA Association and Convention and Expo**

Visit the NRCS Exhibit at the 89th Louisiana FFA Association and Convention and Expo on June 4 - 6, 2018, at the Alexandria Riverfront Center in Alexandria, Louisiana.

## **June 12, 2018 LSU AgCenter Market Ready Workshop - Alexandria**

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting a Market Ready Workshop from 8:30 am - 2:30 pm, on June 12, 2018, in Alexandria, Louisiana. The focus of this workshop is to assist local food producers in establishing a business strategy and effectively market to local restaurants and schools as well as grocers and wholesalers. Registration is FREE, but participants are required to register via Eventbrite. For more information or to register, visit [www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready) or by contacting Alessandro Holzapfel at [aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2701.

## **June 13, 2018 LSU AgCenter Market Ready Workshop - Lafayette**

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting a Market Ready Workshop from 8:30 am - 2:30 pm, on June 13, 2018, in Lafayette, Louisiana. The focus of this workshop is to assist local food producers in establishing a business strategy and effectively market to local restaurants and schools as well as grocers and wholesalers. Registration is FREE, but participants are required to register via Eventbrite. For more information or to register visit, [www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/louisianamarketready) or by contacting Alessandro Holzapfel at [aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:aholzapfel@agcenter.lsu.edu) or by phone at 225-578-2701.

## **June 21 - 24, 2018 Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention**

Visit the NRCS exhibit at the annual Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Convention being held at the New Orleans Marriott on June 21 - 24, 2018.

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[www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov)**

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