



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

May 2018

## A Legacy of Conservation, Cajun Style!



Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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## On the Cover



Learn how Evangeline Parish farmers, Kody and Shelly Bieber are continuing a legacy of conservation to grow their rice and crawfish operation 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

As the month of May ends, so does my third month serving as Acting State Conservationist for Louisiana. Since my arrival in March, I have traveled across the state, met countless staff members and partners that are dedicated to conservation. Louisiana has a strong conservation partnership that places priority on our natural resources.

An example of this partnership is the recent work with the Louisiana pinesnake. The Louisiana pinesnake was listed as a threatened species under the authority of the Endangered Species Act primarily due to fire suppression and loss of native pine habitat. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Louisiana and Texas teamed up and petitioned the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to “concur with their determination that the conservation practices listed in the Biological Assessment/Conference Opinion would not likely jeopardize the continuing existence of the Louisiana pinesnake”.



This move established a new “Working Lands for Wildlife” project for the Louisiana pinesnake. Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) projects, partner with private landowners to focus voluntary conservation on working landscapes. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and forest landowners, helping them plan and implement conservation practices to address their resource concerns, help them meet their objectives, and benefit target species and priority landscapes. Projects focus on declining species that have needs compatible with agricultural practices and rural land management, such as growing timber, with these species benefiting from conservation on private lands.

Landowners within the Louisiana pinesnake geography (Western/central LA and East TX) who develop and implement a NRCS conservation plan for their property can have predictability regarding incidental take. If landowners follow their conservation plan to manage their forest; even if they would happen to harm the species while carrying out their planned practices they will not be held liable. Any temporary impacts to the Louisiana pinesnake population from implementation of conservation practices will be far outweighed by the benefits of creation, restoration and maintenance of habitats shared by many wildlife species.

If you are a private, non-industrial forest landowner within the Louisiana pinesnake geography please consider working with NRCS to develop a conservation plan for your property. This a win for the species and a win for forest landowners and managers.

Thanks for your continued stewardship.

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.



# A Legacy of Conservation, Cajun

Have you ever wanted to know where to find Cajun culture? You don't have to look any further than Evangeline Parish. Meandering down country roads, lined with fields and farms are places like Ville Platte, Pine Prairie, and the ultimate destination for all things Cajun... Mamou.

Mamou, Louisiana is home to graceful live oaks, delicious food, Cajun music, warm and welcoming folks and Bieber Farms. Owned by Kody and Shelly Bieber, this rice and crawfish operation has deep roots in conservation.

The Biebers have a rich history in this region, in fact, Kody Bieber's grandfather started the farm, and it has grown since then. Jack Haller, District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the Ville Platte Field Office recalls, "I remember Kody's grandpa, Mr. Rheinhard, sitting down with him and talking with him about his farm. We have been doing conservation work with the Biebers for a long time."

Kody and his wife, Shelly, love this land that has been a part of their family for generations. The farm, processing facility, and office are all nestled close together. This family-owned farm and business has deep roots in the community and they also have a heart for conservation.

With over 4,500 acres of rice and crawfish, conserving water is an important part of their operation. Through the

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) the Biebers have installed 9.1 miles of underground irrigation pipeline. "NRCS has assisted the Biebers with installing 61 grade stabilization structures (pipe drops) to help drain their fields," explained Jack. "As well as, over 2,600 acres of irrigation land leveling."

What that doesn't take into account is the 1,900 acres of land leveling the Bieber's have invested in at their own expense. "What that says to me is that this family places a high value on water conservation and energy savings on their farm," Haller explains. "Not to mention every interior levee on his farm has pipes through those levees; he doesn't use rice irrigation curtains at all." Haller continues, "Kody is able to maintain a consistent level of water in his crawfish and rice fields."

Kody agrees that EQIP has made an incredible impact on their farm. "The EQIP program is extremely helpful to us, we have laser leveled our ponds, put in pipe drops and underground pipes," said Kody. "In fact, we would not be able to farm as many acres as we do right now, without EQIP."

This past year the Biebers water planted all their rice, and everything that was planted was in water held from the rains through the winter. "We hold the water as deep as we can in our crawfish ponds, that way toward the end of the season, when water starts evaporating, we can

hold it longer before we start pumping," explained Kody. The conservation benefit is a huge savings in water and energy.

Two other NRCS programs that have proven successful for the Biebers is their participation in the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Kody has over 3,600 acres enrolled in MBHI where he holds water through the winter providing essential habitat for migratory birds.

"With 3,000 acres in CSP, the Biebers have accomplished a tremendous amount of conservation work, said Haller. "We've been working with the Bieber family for 25 years and they have improved their operation and their bottom line, through the conservation efforts they have made."

Bieber Farms is not just about growing rice and raising crawfish. They also have a crawfish processing facility that is second to none; where crawfish are gathered from the pond, processed and are in the grocery store in the hands of the consumers, sometimes within one day.

When January rolls around, that's when things really get moving. Kody explains, "We sell live crawfish beginning in January and then the processing of the crawfish tails begins in February. The operation couldn't run without the nonimmigrant foreign workers we hire every year." The Biebers employ 80 H2B workers and 26 H2A workers.



# Style!

Shelly Bieber explains, "Most of our workers come back every year, we even have extended family members that all travel together and work here during the crawfish season." Shelly continues, "The process includes washing, boiling, cooling, peeling, and packaging then refrigeration." Freshly packaged crawfish tails are delivered north of Jackson, Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee to Arkansas and Texas and throughout Louisiana.

Bieber farms is unique, not only because it has a full operation of growing rice and crawfish to processing and selling crawfish across the nation. NRCS through programs like EQIP, MBHI and CSP have made all the difference for the Bieber's.

If you would like to know more about NRCS and learn how utilizing conservation methods can help your land? Contact any of the 44 field offices across the state or visit [www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov)



# Around the State

## April 20, 2018 Coastal Prairie Burn Workshop

To help land managers understand the benefits of prescribed fire on grasslands, the Louisiana GLCI hosted a Coastal Prairie Prescribed Burn Workshop on April 20, 2018. The workshop was held on the Gray Ranch, south of Vinton, Louisiana. The event was well attended by people with a variety of interests, from livestock producers to ecologists and native prairie plant and wildlife enthusiasts.



Attendees heard from Dr. Chris Reid with LSU, who spoke about the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries native prairie restoration project on the site and the use of prescribed fire as a tool. He explained that most grasslands evolved with periodic burning and that fire is an essential part of native grassland ecosystems. To get a livestock producer's perspective on the benefits of prescribed burning the group heard from Jay Duhon, Conner Hayes and Dave Daigle, who raise cattle on area pastures. They stressed that forage quality is improved, and invasive woody plants are suppressed with prescribed fire. Dr. Larry Allain added a wildlife element to the workshop by explaining how controlled burning can be used to benefit various wildlife species such as waterfowl, quail and numerous other grassland birds. The workshop finished up with a prescribed burn demonstration.



## April 25 & 26, 2018 Vermilion SWCD Planting Project

The Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD), in cooperation with the NRCS, the Louisiana Department of Ag & Forestry's Office of Soil and Water Conservation Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and Apache Corporation held its annual re-vegetation project April 25th and 26th.

This year the planting took place just south of Erath in the marshes near Hebert Lake. The main objective of this project was to vegetate an existing open marsh area that had lost vegetation, lessen shoreline erosion, create habitat for wildlife and provide a seed source for natural regeneration.



With the help of hard working volunteers, such as Erath FFA, Springfield FFA, ULL Americorps, Will Husband, and Solomon Sagraera, we were able to successfully plant 5,773 plugs of Bullwhip for a project total of 17,319 linear feet.

With successful re-vegetation projects since 1994, the Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District is already in the planning stages for next year's project

south of Intracoastal City in Vermilion Parish.

Anyone interested in participating in these revegetation projects can contact Mitzi Dohrman at the VSWCD office at 337-893-5664 ext 3.

## May 2, 2018 High Tunnel Workshop

The Trailblazer RC&D hosted a high tunnel workshop on May 2, 2018, at Enola Farms in Waterproof, Louisiana. Suzie Rush, District Secretary for the Tensas-Concordia Soil and Water Conservation District, welcomed everyone to the area and provided attendees with opening comments and background information. Enola Farms' Chris Mills spoke to the group about his experience with the high tunnel and gave the group a tour. Jason Hardie, Acting District Conservationist, spoke to the group about NRCS programs and services and how to apply for financial assistance.



Amy Weeks, master craftsman beekeeper gave a presentation on beekeeping and the role that bees have in vegetable production.



# Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, State Outreach Coordinator

Lisa Shook, Soil Conservationist in the Franklinton Field Office, was one of the presenters at the USDA Outreach Meeting that took place recently in Hammond, Louisiana. Other presenters at the meeting included Martin Fontenot, FSA Senior Farm Loan Officer, RD's Area Director, Mack McCraney, Campti Field of Dreams Executive Director, Donna Isaacs and NRCS' Dexter Sapp.



The meeting, which was held at the Hammond Parish Council on Aging, was made possible through an Outreach Agreement that NRCS has with the Campti Field of Dreams organization. There were 51 people in attendance at the meeting. After all of the presentations were done,

USDA received 15 requests for USDA Assistance and 13 of those requests were from first time USDA participants. NRCS picked up 4 new customers from the meeting that would like to receive our monthly issue of the Louisiana Conservation Update publication.

Donna Isaacs brought 25 quart bags of fresh picked lettuce to use for door prizes at the meeting. Campti Field of Dreams has three NRCS funded high tunnels in Campti, Louisiana. Donna Isaacs and Waylon Breaux, farm manager, thought that it would be something unique to bring some of their high tunnel-grown lettuce to the meeting and use as door prizes.

# Story from the Field

## Louisiana GLCI Hosts Mob-Grazing Workshop

Submitted by: Taylor Frey, LGLCI Coordinator

World-renowned mob-grazing specialist Ian Mitchel-Innes likes to say, "Energy is money, money is energy, time is money, and water is money." That's the message he presented to fifteen Louisiana cattle producers at the Mob-Grazing workshop hosted by the Louisiana Grazing Lands Coalition and Brookshire Farm in April. Innes encourages producers to use the free energy they receive from the sun to make their farm more profitable. He says, "Land is a solar panel. Farmers need to harvest energy from the sun, use that energy through cattle to get a product to sell and make money."



One year ago, the Blanchets, who raise 100% grass fed beef, hired Innes as a consultant for their farm. Since then, they have seen major improvements on their land. The Blanchets say, "We were able to graze permanent pastures longer into the fall and had a shorter hay supplementation time than our neighbors. This spring, we are able to get fattening gains on those pastures with a 16% increase in our stocking rate." The biggest change they've applied to their farm is putting more hooves on smaller areas for shorter times.



"We accomplished that by combining all classes of cattle into one herd. Initially, we divided the farm for a 48 day rest period. The grass is growing fast enough now, spring 2018, that we've reduced that to a 21 day rest period. People who are grazing the normal two acres per cow in Louisiana could probably do one acre or half an acre per cow, and you would have more forage

than you did previously," according to Bob Blanchet.

Tara Morris, cattle producer in St. Francisville, LA said she's grateful for the people she connected with at the workshop. She also said, "I really enjoyed learning about how to quickly improve poor pasture with the techniques that Ian uses for high density mob grazing." She said, "If we stumble across a piece of land that needs some quick improvement, I know how to do it now."



For upcoming events hosted by the LGLCI, visit their website [LouisianaGLCI.org](http://LouisianaGLCI.org) or follow them on Facebook, Louisiana Grazing Lands Coalition Initiative. You can also follow Brookshire Farm on Facebook, Brookshire Farm in Meaux, LA.

# Upcoming Events

## 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. 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 1, 2018 National Wild Turkey Federation Field Day

The National Wild Turkey Federation is hosting a field day on native plant establishment and their benefits on Friday, June 1, 2018, from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm, at the International Forest Company Evans Nursery in DeRidder, Louisiana. Roundstone Native Seed will provide a FREE educational how-to seminar. Registration is required. Please visit [www.louisianaglci.org/registration](http://www.louisianaglci.org/registration) or call 318-237-5569 to register.

## June 2, 2018 Louisiana GLCI Pasture Walk

The Louisiana GLCI is hosting a pasture walk on Saturday, June 2, 2018, from 8:30 am - 12:30 pm in DeRidder, Louisiana, at the farm of Tom and Joan Lester. The Lester's will highlight forage choices they have made, pasture rotation, and experiences they have had with summer legumes. They will also showcase Calcasieu SWCD's new no-till drill used in planting forages that benefit soil

health. For more information visit [www.LouisianaGLCI.org](http://www.LouisianaGLCI.org).

## 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 establishin 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.

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

## June 14, 2018 Soil Health in Grazed Longleaf Pine Savannah

The Louisiana GLCI is hosting a soil health in grazed longleaf pine savannah workshop on June 14, 2018, from 9:00 am - 2:30 pm at the Family Place Church on Emma Street in Reeves, Louisiana. The workshop is free, but space is limited. Please pre-register at [louisianaglci.org](http://louisianaglci.org). If you have any questions, contact Taylor Frey at 225-240-3376.

## June 19, 2018 LSU AgCenter Crop Production and Pest Management Field Day Expo

The LSU AgCenter is hosting a Crop Production and Pest Management Field Day Expo on June 19, 2018, at the Macon Ridge Research Station in Winnsboro, Louisiana. Please contact Dr. Tara Smith at 318-435-2903 for more information.

## June 20, 2018 LSU AgCenter Market Ready Workshop - Hammond

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 establishin 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.

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