A cooperative partnership with local conservation projects, successes, and partnerships.

Take Care of the Land and It Will Take Care of You

August 2018
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On the Cover

Learn about Calcasieu Parish cattlewoman, Dezere Richard and how her love for the land led her to be awarded the 2018 Outstanding Louisiana Master Farmer on pages 4 and 5.
Notes from the Acting State Conservationist

I’m not sure if it is just me or if anyone else feels the ever so slight hint of fall in the air? The sun is coming up just a bit later and early morning temps in the 70’s have been a much welcomed change. In fact, not long ago I noticed cotton growing in the fields around Alexandria are beginning to bloom. So, harvest time is just around the corner!

This is a busy time of year for our 44 offices state-wide. As we work hand-in-hand with each of the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, we are focusing our efforts on conservation assistance for customers. In fact, this month we are wrapping up the process of obligating funds for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). In preparing for 2019, as always, our top priority is providing customer service through technical assistance that is second to none! If you haven’t gone to visit your local NRCS office in a while, now is the time to stop by.

In this issue of the Conservation Update, we meet Mrs. Dezere’ Richard, the Louisiana Outstanding Master Farmer award winner for 2018. If you look up the word tenacity you would likely see a picture of Mrs. Dezere’. She exemplifies a life of hard work and love for her family, her animals and her land. Join me in congratulating her on this prestigious award.

Last but not least, we are here to help you achieve the conservation goals you have for your land. Please stop by your local office and learn more about the many ways NRCS can assist you.

Tim Landreneau
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.

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.
There is a special place in Calcasieu Parish, just south of Lake Charles. Brilliant green grass leads the way to Ox Yoke Ranch. Baled hay sits neatly stacked in the barn. The hum of a tractor fills the air along with the occasional moo from one of the almost 300 head of cattle that graze the landscape.

What makes this spot in southwest Louisiana so unique? It’s not the green grass, perfectly stacked bailed hay or beautiful surroundings. But, the fact that this is also home to Dezere’ Richard, the first woman to ever receive the Outstanding Louisiana Master Farmer award. The Louisiana Master Farmer program is led by the LSU AgCenter and partners with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) and the Louisiana Cattleman’s Association (LCA).

The goal for the Master Farmer program is to teach landowners about utilizing research-based management practices while allowing them to maintain productivity and protect their natural resources. Richard embodies the essence of what the Master Farmer program is all about. Mary Beth Guillory, District Conservationist in the NRCS Jennings field office (who also served as Acting District Conservationist in Lake Charles) describes Richard, “Ms. Dezere’ is hard-working and caring, she is an incredible steward of the land.”

Richard along with her husband, Larry, own Ox Yoke Ranch where they raise cattle and grow hay on 1,200 acres. She grew up about five miles down the road, “I grew up in agriculture, my dad was a rice farmer and cattleman,” she recalls. “When I was a little girl I remember running around with my daddy on the farm, helping with everything I could.”

That is where the love of nature began for Richard. She grew up participating in rodeos, showing cattle and helping on their family farm. Richard’s farther was a tremendous influence, “My daddy always stressed the importance of education, my siblings and I grew up doing well in school and then I went on to get a B.A. in Home Economics from McNeese State University.”

After graduating from college, getting married and starting her own family farm. She utilized the knowledge she gained growing up on the farm and put it to good use. The love of learning inspired Richard her entire life. “I love reading, I get publications all the time about cattle and horses and farming,” she explained. That thirst for knowledge and greater understanding lead Richard to the Master Farmer program and the Master Cattleman program. She is a graduate of both. “I learned so much from both of those courses and I’ve put all of that information into good use here at Ox Yoke.”

Working with the Gulf Coast Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS to apply practices and knowledge gained in the Master Farmer and Master Cattleman programs is the logical next step for producers, according to Guillory. “We’ve been able to help Ms. Dezere’ achieve and maintain her conservation objectives through participation in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).”

Guillory further explains, “Through EQIP she has put up cross fences, livestock pipeline, watering facilities and heavy use protections allowing her to better distribute grazing, provide clean drinking water and practice rotational grazing.” CSP allowed her to make enhancements that improve wildlife habitat and improve forage for cattle.

Today instead of bush hogging her acreage, Richard practices rotational grazing. “I let the cattle do the work for me,” Richard proclaimed with a big smile.

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Fresh water tanks are in all of her pastures except for two, and she is working on getting those with assistance from NRCS. “I think fresh water is very important for the cattle, they just love their fresh water,” said Richard.

Richard is the first one to stress how invaluable it has been to work with the SWCD and NRCS over the years. “The relationship that we have is incredibly important,” she explained. “You really need to have someone you can go talk with about resource concerns, it is a vital relationship.” Richard goes on to say, “The critical part is having someone with “boots on the ground” who can actually come out and see what the resource concerns are.” Richard believes that nothing takes the place of having someone come out and walk your land with you and see resource concerns first-hand.

“I would encourage other farmers and ranchers to go into their local SWCD and NRCS office with an open-mind and learn all they have to offer,” Richard explains. Richard is happy to share that the technical advice she has receives and the cost share programs have helped her tremendously. “They have allowed me to put in place conservation practices that I would not have been able to do otherwise,” Richard said.

As an associate member of the Gulf Coast SWCD, Richard emphasizes the importance of soil health and water quality to fellow farmers and ranchers in her district. “If we don’t help each other, who will?” asked Richard. Conservation is at the heart of everything Richard participates in. “We have a responsibility to share the knowledge we have learned with others, and I consider it an honor to share with my fellow ranchers,” she beamed.

It is easy to see, Richard loves her family, her land and her cattle. “I love nature and I love the lifestyle of a rancher,” Richard smiles. One last bit of advice Richard would share with other landowners is the famous quote from Hugh Hammond Bennett, father of the soil conservation movement, “Take care of the land and the land will take care of you.”
Volunteer Spotlight

Hosted Volunteers from Puerto Rico Learn about Conservation in Louisiana

Through an agreement with NOLO Consulting, NRCS hosted students from Puerto Rico to work in several states as interns this summer. Here in Louisiana, we were happy to host five of those students. They were placed in various offices throughout the state including Amite, Jennings, Opelousas, Deridder and the State Office. This group of hosted volunteers definitely left their mark on NRCS in Louisiana.

The students landed in New Orleans and had no idea what to expect. They spent six weeks in the offices they were assigned to learning about NRCS, Louisiana agriculture and conservation practices. These students had opportunities to attend field days, learn more about soil health, visit coastal restoration projects and develop a love for longleaf pine, in addition to learning about the unique culture we have in Louisiana. Each of the students became valuable members of the offices they were in. As you will see in the quotes from each of their supervisors, this special group of Earth Team Volunteers had a very successful summer and will always be a part of the Louisiana NRCS family!

Melanie Rivera

“The Opelousas Field Office was blessed this summer to be able to host Melanie as an Earth Team Volunteer. Working with her provided a unique perspective on cultural diversity in our workplace. The clients of St. Landry Parish embraced the perspectives and diversity of Melanie’s views when applying conservation principles. Her unique background and work ethic was a welcomed addition to “helping people help the land” which is what our agency’s mission is all about. She provided a valuable experience to both internal and external customers and her presence is already missed!” - Kris Davis, District Conservationist

Javier Medina Sanchez

“I had the opportunity to supervise Javier this summer. He is a young cattleman and ag science student from the mountain region of southwest Puerto Rico. Office staff, as well as the landowners in the area enjoyed working with Javier this summer. His interest and enthusiasm in learning to plan and apply conservation on agricultural lands was contagious. I hope that Javier will consider future opportunities with NRCS.” - Corby Moore, District Conservationist
Jesus Adorno

“Jesus had a great work ethic, was willing to work on any project assigned with little oversight and will be an asset to any company who hires him in the future. His mechanical engineering background brought a welcomed new perspective to our current projects. It was a pleasure working with such a bright young student.” - Brandon Samson, Assistant State Engineer for Construction

Angel Padilla

It was a privilege supervising and working in the field with Angel Padilla during his six weeks in Louisiana. He did not mind assisting with field work, always lending a helping hand and was willing to do any task asked of him. He assisted with surveys and check outs on irrigation and livestock pipelines, grade stabilization structures, HUA, troughs and irrigation land leveling. Angel brought his personal drone with him from Puerto Rico and I was amazed at the drone capability and the photos and video footage it can collect. The drone is an instrument that could help the field office staff in the future. Angel was a tremendous benefit to the agency and especially the office, due to his enthusiasm for field work and contracting. I hope Angel comes back for a future internship or as a permanent NRCS employee.” - Mary Beth Guillory, District Conservationist

Luis Pratts

“The opportunity to work with Luis this summer was a great experience and allowed for cultural development for both the NRCS staff and the student. I think we may have learned as much from him as he did from us. Overall, I believe the program was a success and the agency should continue programs like this in the future.” - Dennis Ware, District Conservationist
Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, State Outreach Coordinator

Andrea Bridgewater, district conservationist in Bossier City, Louisiana, was one of the speakers at a June 21, 2018, Trailblazer RC&D sponsored Estate Planning Workshop that was held in Bossier City, Louisiana. Andrea gave a presentation on the landowner assistance that is available through NRCS. Her presentation covered such topics as what NRCS does, tools that we use, examples of livestock practices, conservation solutions, examples of cropland practices, examples of forestry practices, where NRCS offices are located and the NRCS website. Handout materials were made available to the audience.

Dayna Ryan, a local attorney, gave a presentation on estate planning. Dayna covered such topics as the basics of an estate plan, the importance of making a will, probate assets, co-ownership of property, inheritance taxes, Medicaid planning and other topics. Dayna stated that a husband and a wife should have Power of Attorney over each other. She also stated that only the original will is valid and accepted by the courts.

On July 18, 2018, Trailblazer RC&D sponsored a High Tunnel Workshop at the LSU AgCenter Office in West Monroe, Louisiana. James Shivers, district conservationist in Monroe, Louisiana, gave a presentation on NRCS’ High Tunnel Initiative, funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). James informed the meeting participants on how to qualify for the high tunnel practice, and he talked about the financial and technical assistance that is available. High tunnel owner Chris Mills from Waterproof, Louisiana, was also a speaker at the workshop. Chris and Ann Mills own and operates Enola Farms.

Four years ago, the Mills received financial assistance through the StrikeForce Initiative funded by EQIP to help them construct their high tunnel. Chris shared his high tunnel experience with the audience. Miron Gordy with JCM Greenhouse spoke to the group about the construction of a high tunnel. They are the company that installed the Mills’ high tunnel. Trailblazer’s CEO, Ellzey Simmons, gave the concluding comments. Because of the workshop, NRCS received 4 requests from individuals that would like to receive assistance from NRCS with the high tunnel practice.

Upcoming Events

September 19, 2018
Louisiana GLCI Pasture Walk

The Louisiana GLCI is hosting a pasture walk at Four Oaks Farm located at 10118 Fordoche Bayou Road in Morganza, Louisiana, on September 19, 2018, from 9:00 am - 12:30 pm. At this event, Matt Frey will share how he transformed his crop acreage into a healthy pasture used for rotational cattle grazing and will also demonstrate planting rye grass using a no-till method. The event is $5 per person at the gate and a catered lunch will be provided. For more information, visit www.louisianaglci.org

September 21, 2018
Louisiana GLCI Veteran’s Field Day for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

The Louisiana GLCI is hosting a veteran’s field day for beginning farmers and ranchers on September 21, 2018, from 9:00 am - 1:30 pm at 740 Wilson Bridge Road in Washington, Louisiana. Attendees of this workshop will learn about the planning and development stages of establishing a small to medium scale local farm & ranch. They will also receive insight from the owners of the host farm, Brandon and Lauren Breaux and experienced small and medium scale producers of beef cattle, hair sheep, goats and layer chickens. For more information and to pre-register, visit www.louisianaglci.org. This event is FREE and lunch is provided.

September 22, 2018
Louisiana GLCI Pasture Walk

The Louisiana GLCI is hosting a pasture walk on September 22, 2018, from 10:00 am -2:00 pm at the Local Cooling Farms located at 57355 Sam Mizell Road in Bogalusa, Louisiana. For more information, visit www.louisianaglci.org and to pre-register visit www.louisianaglci.org/registration.

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

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