It’s All in the Process... Conservation Planning at its BEST
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On the Cover

Learn about Caddo Parish beginning farmer, Grace Peterson and how a conservation plan is helping her achieve all of her conservation goals on pages 4 and 5.
Notes from the Acting State Conservationist

I’ve heard it said that fall in Louisiana is more than just a season, it’s a feeling. And I wholeheartedly agree! You can catch glimpses all around our beautiful state … just take a look at the fields as you drive along our highways and byways. Cotton stretching high, bursting white. Cut sugar cane being hauled to the mill, sweet potatoes in crates and soybeans overflowing in their bins. All of these are tell-tell signs it is harvest time in Louisiana.

In this issue of the Conservation Update, we travel to north Louisiana to Legacy Louise, a unique farming operation that is taking root in the heart of Caddo Parish. Legacy Louise is also the home of Grace Peterson, first-time farmer, life-long nature enthusiast and conservationist at heart. With the help of NRCS and the Caddo SWCD, Ms. Peterson is able to follow her dream of growing food and creating a sense of community for all those around her.

Ms. Peterson, and her agricultural journey, bring to life the importance of the conservation planning process. At NRCS, the nine-step planning process is the bedrock of our agency. NRCS planning and technical staff work right along-side our customers to determine objectives and inventory resources, identify resource concerns and opportunities, and then develop conservation alternatives to treat resources. The final result is a conservation plan, tailored specifically for each land owner that can be used as a road map to reach their conservation goals. I encourage you to stop by your local NRCS office and learn what we can do for you!

I’ve truly enjoyed my time as acting state conservationist for Louisiana. It has been an incredible learning experience and I have enjoyed the opportunity to travel the state and meet with so many of you. This experience has given me an even higher appreciation for the great work that our employees, conservation partners, agriculture and forestry producers, and coastal landowners are doing to protect and sustain the diverse natural resources of our great state. While my detail did not take me away from home, I am looking forward to getting back to my job as the assistant state conservationist for easement programs. Please let me know if I can ever assist you in the future.

Please join me in welcoming Kevin Norton home! Kevin represented us well in Washington, D.C. for the past seven plus months and I know we are all just as happy to see him return as he is to be back in Louisiana. Please stay tuned to hear more from Kevin in future Conservation Updates.

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.
Grace Peterson started with a dream and a plan. A dream of starting her own family farm, but not in the traditional sense of farming, that you might have in mind. She knew she wanted goats, ducks, and chickens to assist in weed and pest control. She wanted a high tunnel to grow vegetables year-round, and she wanted to build a special place dedicated to educating her community about the importance of conservation and nature, and so … Legacy Louise was born.

Tucked into the heart of Blanchard, Louisiana, standing tall among the pine trees is Legacy Louise, Grace’s home and budding farming operation. “I see my farm as my lab, I get to experiment with innovative ideas, learn from them and then put them into practice,” explained Peterson.

Peterson grew up with conservation near and dear to her heart. She would spend every summer at her grandmother’s ranch in Texas. That is where she discovered her love of the outdoors, “I grew up feeling that it was such a gift to be able to be in nature and be a part of growing our own food,” Peterson remembered. “You really begin to understand the strong connection between the land, the way food is grown and how it brings families and communities together.”

Having that cherished experience as a child planted a seed that has grown into a family farm focused on conservation. Brian Baiamonte, NRCS District Conservationist in Shreveport explains, “This is not a conventional agriculture setting and Ms. Grace is not a conventional producer.” Baiamonte goes on, “Everything that we’ve done here, I’ve never done before.” But, it works and the proof is all around.

Peterson recalls her initial visit to the Caddo Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS field office and she readily admits she wasn’t quite sure what the SWCD and NRCS were all about. “When I walked in the front door, I said, what do y’all do anyway? Grace laughed. “I want to start a farm, don’t y’all help with that?”

Peterson goes on to say, “It’s a process, it doesn’t happen overnight but it is worth it when you see the outcome of the conservation plan you’ve worked hard to create.” Baiamonte echoes the sentiment, “The first step when you walk into your local office is to have a vision of what you want.” NRCS utilizes a nine-step planning process to develop and write conservation plans tailored for each producer. “When we begin the planning process we analyze specifics,” Baiamonte explains, For Ms. Grace I asked some questions like; “What kind of vegetables will you grow? How will you water them? Where will you sell them?

“One of the great things about working with the SWCD and NRCS is I now have a conservation plan,” Peterson smiled. “Our first few visits were conversations about Ms. Grace’s goals and then my recommendations on how we get there,” said, Baiamonte. “Discussing so many details over a long period of time, can be overwhelming,” he explained. “But if you capture those thoughts on paper, in a conservation plan, you will have a guide to follow that will help you reach your conservation goals.”

Some of the conservation measures Peterson adopted do not necessarily fit into the ‘conservation box.’ Through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Peterson planted conservation cover by establishing a 30 ft. strip along the creek and pond on her property, where she
planted native grasses, forbs, wildflowers, trees and shrubs. “We’ve planted trees before and we’ve planted native grasses before, but planting a planned mix of native grasses, trees and shrubs is unique,” said Baiamonte. “She planted paw-paws, elderberries, plums, and muscadines.

“We really wanted to value what was already here on the land, take our time, and promote diversity.” Peterson explains. “Conservation is a big part of what we do, honoring what is already in place and building on that is very important to me.”

Legacy Louise is also home to a newly constructed seasonal high tunnel. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Peterson was able to purchase and construct a season high tunnel. Right now, she has a cover crop of purple hull peas and buckwheat that are not only building and improving soil health in the high tunnel but, the cover crops are also attracting pollinators that support the ecosystem.

The next step for Peterson is prescribed grazing using her goats for cover crop termination, that in-turn, reduces the need for herbicides and insecticides. Integrated pest management comes next, using chickens and ducks after the goats finish eating. They will scratch the ground, eliminating weeds and weed seeds, leaving improved soil health. “All of this works together for a healthy and thriving ecosystem,” Baiamonte explained.

Plans for the high tunnel this fall include planting fall tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and squash. Peterson has also ordered seeds for lettuces, cabbage, and several types of greens.

“I’m excited about what we have built up to this point, but I know this is a process and will continue to get better as we go along,” said Peterson. “I would recommend to anyone interested in getting started in some type of agriculture to visit their local SWCD and NRCS office and explore all of the options available.”

“Brian worked with me through the process and I’m still figuring it out. It is a really great partnership, NRCS is supporting me around my goals for a family farm and conservation is at the core of my vision,” Peterson said.
Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, State Outreach Coordinator

The 2018 Morehouse Parish Farm Tour took place this summer at the Odis Hill Farm in Bonita, Louisiana. This Farm Tour tradition, hosted by the Morehouse Parish Black Farmers and Landowners Association, along with several sponsors, has been going on for 16 years. Around 220 people attended this year's event. Participants learned about topics such as weed control & technology, youth ag loans, NRCS programs from a landowner’s perspective, and health issues.

In addition to the presentations, the group was able to tour Odis’ sunflower, soybean, and corn fields. While on the tour, ag specialists talked about production, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides. During the event NRCS received one request for assistance and 9 new customers signed up to receive NRCS’ monthly Louisiana Conservation Update publication.

At the very end of the event and before a catfish lunch, I was surprised to receive an award from the Morehouse Black Farmers and Landowners Association for years of service and outreach to the Morehouse Black Farmers. The presentation was made by the MBFLA Treasurer Antwain Downs. However, my outreach efforts can be directly attributed to Kevin Norton, state conservationist in Louisiana who has consistently allocated funding and entered into agreements with various grassroots and community-based organizations here in Louisiana.

Programs Reminder

NRCS Announces ACEP-WRE Sign-Up Deadline

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Louisiana has announced the availability of financial and technical assistance funding through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetlands Reserve Easements (ACEP – WRE) in fiscal year 2019. Private landowners across the state are encouraged to apply. Even though NRCS accepts conservation program applications on a continuous basis, the ACEP-WRE application deadline is Friday, October 19, 2018, to be considered for 2019 funding. Applications received after this date will be evaluated for the funding year beginning October 1, 2019.

The ACEP-WRE program is designed to restore and protect wetlands. Eligible lands include farmed or converted wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. The Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) program helps private landowners successfully enhance and protect habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality and reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, and provide opportunities for educational and recreational activities.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private and tribal landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of these easements. Eligible landowners can choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement. In FY 2018, NRCS in Louisiana provided over $12 million in ACEP-WRE funding to enroll 4,528 acres of eligible land through nine new easements.

“NRCS provides assistance to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners through the WRE program by developing highly productive wildlife habitat, reducing the risk of farming flood-prone land, and improving environmental benefits while retaining private ownership,” explained, Tim Landreneau, acting state conservationist in Louisiana. “WRE is an important tool to help landowners voluntarily provide long-term protection of our state’s wetlands for future generations.”

Easement rates vary by region, but landowners may receive up to $3,930 per acre for enrolling eligible land in WRE. Additionally, NRCS will pay 100% of the restoration cost for permanent easements and 75% of the restoration cost for 30-year easements.

ACEP-WRE applications can be submitted at any time to NRCS; however, ACEP-WRE applications for 2019 funding consideration must be submitted to the local NRCS office by Friday, October 19, 2018.

For more information on ACEP, visit the NRCS ACEP webpage or your local NRCS office. To get started with NRCS, visit your local USDA Service Center or www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted. Learn more about the Farm Bill at www.nrcs.usda.gov/FarmBill.
October 10, 2018
CWPPRA’s Coastal Celebration
“Rockin’ SW Louisiana”

The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Task Force, the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and the parishes of Southwestern Louisiana will be celebrating the progress on CWPPRA projects in southwestern Louisiana on October 10, 2018, at 10:00 am at Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. A field trip will be held after lunch to the Rockefeller Refuge Gulf Shoreline Stabilization project. Please RSVP to GGriffard@contractor.usgs.gov or by phone at (337) 266-8606.

October 10, 2018
Louisiana Master Farmer Program
Phase 1 Training

Phase 1 training for the Louisiana Master Farmer Program will be held at the DeWitt Livestock Facility in Alexandria, Louisiana, on October 18, 2018, at 8:00 am. This six hour training session is open to all agricultural producers. For more information, contact Donna Morgan at 318-613-9278.

October 18, 2018
State Technical Advisory Committee Teleconference

NRCS will hold a State Technical Advisory Committee meeting by teleconference on Thursday, October 18, 2018 from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. You may participate in the teleconference by calling 1-888-844-9904 and entering 5549554# as the passcode. Items for discussion include:

- Farm Bill Update and Fiscal Year 2019 Outlook
- NRCS Easement Program Update
- FSA Conservation Reserve Program Update
- Timelines for NRCS Financial Assistance Programs and RCPP
- Louisiana USDA Outreach Update
- Web Soil Survey Update
- Partner Updates of New Activities

If you have any questions about the teleconference, please contact John Pitre, state resource conservationist for NRCS at 318-473-7774.

October 18, 2018
Pasture Management Workshop

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a FREE pasture management workshop on October 18, 2018, at the Wade Farm located at 400 Hicks Frasier Road in Farmerville, Louisiana. For more information and to register, e-mail ceo@trailblazer.org.

October 18, 2018
6th Annual Dean Lee Research Station Beef & Forage Field Day

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting the 6th Annual Dean Lee Research Station Beef Cattle & Forage Field Day from 2:30 pm - 6:00 pm at the State Emergency Shelter, Highway 71 South, in Alexandria, Louisiana. A short field tour will include discussions and demonstrations for cattle and forage producers. This field day is approved for Louisiana Master Farmer Program Phase 2 and Continuing Educational Credits. For more information, please contact Vincent Deshotel at vdeshotel@lsu.edu.

October 23, 2018
USDA Outreach Meeting

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a USDA Outreach Meeting on October 23, 2018, at 6:00 pm at the Galilee Baptist Church in Haughton, Louisiana. Find out how USDA can help you on your land. For more information or to register, e-mail ceo@trailblazer.org.

October 29, 2018
Land Management for Waterfowl Workshop

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a land management for waterfowl workshop on October 29, 2018, at 6:00 pm at the Sheriff’s Substation in Bossier City, Louisiana. For more information or to register, e-mail ceo@trailblazer.org.
CWPPRA Update

Submitted by: Andi Cooper, Ducks Unlimited

Lafourche Parish residents will have more protective coastal marsh between them and the rapidly encroaching Gulf of Mexico thanks to a partnership between Ducks Unlimited and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). As part of a slate of projects approved for funding by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Task Force, Ducks Unlimited will begin engineering and design for the TE-112 North Catfish Lake Marsh Creation Project to build more than 400 acres of marsh and nourish an additional 200 acres near Golden Meadow.

In Louisiana, CWPPRA is often called the “Breaux Act” in honor of U.S. Senator John Breaux, who helped initiate the legislation in 1990 along with U. S. Senator J. Bennett Johnson.

“Senator Breaux was a visionary who understood the national, regional and local importance of Louisiana’s rapidly disappearing coastal wetlands,” DU Director of Conservation Programs Mike Carloss said.

CWPPRA is designed to identify, prepare and fund construction of coastal wetlands restoration projects. Since its inception, CWPPRA has designated between $30 and $80 million annually for work in Louisiana.

“Ducks Unlimited has been diligently working to restore coastal wetlands in Louisiana for more than 30 years, and we are honored to team up with our long-term partners at the NRCS to deliver this project,” Carloss said.

Once engineering and design are completed, the project will be eligible for Phase 2 funding, which would include construction and implementation costs.

The CWPPRA Task Force is comprised of one member each from five federal agencies and the state of Louisiana. The federal agencies include the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NRCS, National Marine Fisheries Service, Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Louisiana’s governor’s office represents the state on the Task Force.

“NRCS and DU have a mutual interest to conserve, protect and enhance Louisiana’s coastal wetland ecosystems,” said Britt Paul, assistant state conservationist for water resources at NRCS in Louisiana. “DU is currently designing and implementing a similar coastal restoration project adjacent to the North Catfish Lake project area that will create synergy between the two projects, which is advantageous to NRCS as well as the CWPPRA program.”

As the most imperiled and important wintering area for waterfowl on the continent, coastal Louisiana is one of Ducks Unlimited’s highest priorities. Coastal restoration has tremendous benefits for fisheries, other wildlife, and the people who live here.

For more information on the North Catfish Lake Project and other CWPPRA projects, visit www.lacoast.gov.