



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

February 2021



**Anything is Possible...  
A St. Landry Parish  
Cattlemen's Success**

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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### On the Cover



Learn more about how St. Landry Parish cattleman, Filmore Larkins worked with the St. Landry SWCD and NRCS to convert cropland to a pasture on pages 4 and 5.

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

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## Notes from the State Conservationist

Since I moved to Louisiana a little over a year ago as the State Conservationist, we have experienced many extreme weather highs and lows. From the unrelenting hurricane season of 2020 to the snow and ice storm we just experienced, I think we'd all agree, Spring cannot get here soon enough! My hope is that each of you were able to weather this recent winter storm without damage to your crops, livestock, and forest land. However, if you did experience damage, know that the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and our sister agencies are here to help. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your local USDA Service Center to learn how we can assist you through the recovery process.



Every February is Black History Month and is a special month for NRCS as we celebrate African Americans and reflect on their invaluable contributions to the world of agriculture. I'm reminded of an inspirational quote from the renowned scientist and educator, George Washington Carver when he said, "*Learn to do common things uncommonly well; we must always keep in mind that anything that helps fill the dinner pail is valuable.*" Those words are just as powerful today as they were when Mr. Carver spoke them several generations ago. The work of supplying and feeding our nation with the nutrition and fiber that is needed is at the very heart of who we are and what we do as an agency.

This month, we visit one of the many outstanding African American agricultural producers in our state. Mr. Filmore Larkins is known far and wide as a livestock producer who cares for his cattle and has a profound understanding of the importance of land stewardship. Although he didn't grow up on a farm, this New Jersey transplant considers himself an adopted son of the South. Larkins shares his experience of working with NRCS and explains why other producers should reach out to their local USDA field office.

I completely agree with Mr. Larkins, now is the time to reach out to your local NRCS office to learn about the technical assistance and many programs offered by our 44 offices located throughout the state.

Chad Kacir  
State Conservationist



### USDA Service Centers are Open for Business by Phone Appointment Only

*Program Delivery Continues while taking Safety Measures Related to Coronavirus*

USDA is open for business. Our team is continuing to provide the best customer service we can while also prioritizing the health of our employees, the health of our customers, and the health of our partners. USDA's Service Centers are open in Louisiana by phone appointment only. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into to the office, they will be working with our customers by phone, by email, and using other online tools whenever possible.

To learn more about USDA programs and the Department's response to the Coronavirus visit [farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus)

 <https://www.youtube.com/user/LouisianaNRCS>

Visit our website at:  
[www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov)



# Anything is Possible...A St. Landry

What brought a New Jersey boy to a farm in St. Landry Parish? "The same thing that brought men to Louisiana from all over the world - women!" Filmore Larkins grinned, "My wife was from Louisiana." This New Jersey native was drawn to the area by the love of his wife, warmer weather, and the call of the land.

Larkins tells his story, "I visited this part of Louisiana during Mardi Gras; it was nine degrees in New Jersey and 80 degrees in Louisiana," laughed Larkins. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that it was meant for me to be in Louisiana." Larkins and his two sons moved to their farm in Palmetto, Louisiana 33 years ago, shortly after his wife passed away from cancer.

My wife always wanted our sons to grow up in the country; moving here full-time was the realization of her dream. At first, Larkins did not know how he would adapt to living in the country but was pleasantly surprised to learn that he loved it. Larkins had no experience with cows when he started his journey in agriculture. "I was 40 years old before I even stood by a cow," said Larkins. However, he knew that he wanted to learn everything he could about working with cattle and managing his land. Larkins explains, "I decided to take all the classes I could; that's when I discovered the information and technical help offered by the St. Landry Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS."

By attending NRCS workshops and field days, Larkins learned about the importance of rotational grazing and utilizing the technical assistance available through

the SWCD and NRCS. Joshua Soileau, NRCS District Conservationist in the Opelousas and Ville Platte offices explains, "We've been working with Mr. Filmore for over eight years now." During that time, he has participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). "We have helped with multiple conservation practices including cross-fencing, water troughs, heavy use pads, as well as grass plantings and prescribed grazing on his land," said Soileau.

**"I'm not the largest cattle operation, but there is room to grow, and with a good plan and the assistance of NRCS, anything is possible."**

*Filmore Larkins, St. Landry Parish Cattleman*

One of the land parcels of Larkins farm was a soybean field that is now converted to pastureland. Soileau explains how NRCS assisted with the transformation process, "Pasture and hayland plantings (grass and/or clover) are practices that NRCS can assist with to convert crop land to pasture." Larkins planted Bermuda grass to establish permanent forage and improve the grazable forage for his cattle. "We also worked to get fresh water to the cattle by establishing a well, installing pipeline and troughs. Heavy use area protections were installed to protect those watering areas and gates, and cross fencing was built to divide the



# Parish Cattleman's Success

pastures to allow for rotational grazing," Soileau explained. Larkins describes what he experienced while working with NRCS, "At first I thought to myself, rotational grazing doesn't make sense, this won't work." He continued, "Then I discovered after practicing rotational grazing for a few years, it produces healthier cows and conserves grass." Larkins noticed that, over time, the land produced more grass than the cows could consume. In fact, he practices rotational grazing year-round, so the cows never get out of the habit of rotating. "The cows are easier to handle and to pen with rotational grazing," said Larkins.

Over the years, Larkins witnessed first-hand the incredible benefits of working with NRCS. During that time, he has become one of the biggest advocates for NRCS programs and technical assistance. "I try to recruit new farmers and ranchers into the cattle business," Larkins explained. "Today, there are all kinds of opportunities for producers, even those who are just starting out." Larkins continues, "NRCS has so many programs and they will give you guidance all along the way to make sure you are successful."

Soileau describes the relationship with Larkins, "He is one of the best conservation leaders in our area and makes our job so much easier." Soileau continues, "Having someone like Mr. Larkins, who is always seeking knowledge and constantly talking with other producers about NRCS programs, is an incredible asset to the work of conservation."

A mutually beneficial partnership is the best way to describe the relationship between Larkins, NRCS and the

SWCD. "Our programs would not exist if it were not for private landowners like Mr. Larkins voluntarily signing up to implement conservation programs," explained Soileau. "We bring the technical knowledge but our customers bring the land and the resources to the partnership."

Larkins believes the conservation practices he has implemented on his land have been instrumental in the success of his cattle operation. "The land is the only thing that we have. If you don't take care of it, it won't take care of you." Larkins smiles, "We get the best out of our land when we follow the practices NRCS shows us."

The future looks bright for the Larkins family. "It makes me feel great when I look around and see what we have been able to accomplish," beamed Larkins. "I'm hopeful that my children and grandchildren will carry on what I've started." Larkins believes in the importance of planning, and then following through, to make dreams become a reality. "I'm not the largest cattle operation, but there is room to grow, and with a good plan and the assistance of NRCS, anything is possible."

Even for a New Jersey boy who now calls Louisiana home.

# Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Rapides SWCD

Marty Earnest's Farm near Columbia, Louisiana, was the site of a recent Soil Health Farmer Field Day. The field day was a joint venture between NRCS, Trailblazer RC&D, and the Boeuf River Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The event was conducted in two parts. The first part of the event included presentations and demonstrations from NRCS and LSU Ag Extension Service employees. In addition, some area farmers, including Marty Earnest, shared how valuable soil health is to their farming operations.

Rachel Stout Evans, Resource Soil Scientist for NRCS in Ruston, Louisiana, performed a slake test demonstration which exhibited the aggregate stability of the soil. "Stable soil aggregates are strong enough to withstand internal stresses, while soils with poor aggregation are not. Slaking is the breakdown of large, air-dry soil aggregates when they are suddenly immersed in water" says Rachel. "This test is important because it shows how well(or not) a soil can maintain its structure to provide air and water for plants and soil critters when it is rapidly wetted, such as during an irrigation or rainfall event."



Steve Nipper, Water Quality Specialist for NRCS in Monroe, Louisiana, demonstrated the importance of soil health using NRCS' Rainfall Simulator. The simulator provides a "seeing is believing" demonstration of how practices such as no-till farming, cover crops, forestland management and prescribed grazing can benefit soil health and improve the water cycle on cropland, pastures, and forestland across Louisiana.

Marty Earnest spoke to the group about the benefits of having healthy soils. He stated that, in some of fields where he has been implementing no-till and cover crop

practices, he is seeing 4-10 earthworm burrows in a square foot of soil. Jamie Shivers, Resource Conservationist for NRCS mentioned the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) financial assistance program that could assist farmers with the planting of cover crops.



The second part of the event involved a field tour of one of Marty Earnest's fields where a cover crop mixture of wheat, oats and mustard greens were sown. Three pits were dug which revealed the depths of the plant roots. One of the pits revealed that the roots of the wheat plants had penetrated depths of 18-20 inches below the soil surface. Rachel talked about the biology and soil structure when cover crops and no-till farming practices are implemented on cropland.



# USDA Disaster Assistance

## USDA Offers Disaster Assistance to Farmers and Livestock Producers in Louisiana Impacted by Recent Winter Storms

The USDA provides technical and financial assistance to help Louisiana farmers and livestock producers recover from damages brought on by winter storms Uri and Viola. Agricultural producers are encouraged to contact their local USDA Service Center to learn about the programs available to help them recover from crop, land, infrastructure, and livestock losses.

“These recent winter storms have taken their toll on farmers and ranchers in Louisiana,” said Christine Normand, Acting State Executive Director for USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Louisiana. “We stand with our producers who have worked tirelessly in these severe conditions to keep livestock fed and to protect crops from Mother Nature’s wrath. We know these storms have left damage in their wake, and I’m glad that USDA offers a strong portfolio of disaster assistance programs available to help.”

Disaster Assistance

USDA encourages farmers and ranchers to contact their local FSA county office to apply for eligible programs and to learn which documents, such as farm records, herd inventory, receipts and pictures of damages or losses should be provided to help expedite assistance.

Producers who experience livestock deaths due to the winter storms may be eligible for the Livestock Indemnity Program. Meanwhile, the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program provides eligible producers with compensation for feed and grazing losses. For LIP and ELAP, producers will need to file a notice of loss for livestock and grazing or feed losses within 30 days and honeybee losses within 15 days.

Additionally, eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers may be eligible for cost-share assistance through the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes or vines lost during the winter storms. This complements Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) or crop insurance coverage, which covers the crop but not the plants or trees in all cases. For TAP, a program application must be filed within 90 days.

FSA also offers a variety of direct and guaranteed loans, including operating and emergency loans, to producers unable to secure commercial financing. Producers in counties with a primary or contiguous disaster designation may be eligible for low-interest emergency loans to help them recover from production and physical losses. Loans can help producers replace essential property, purchase inputs like livestock, equipment, feed and seed, cover family living expenses or refinance farm-related debts and other needs.

## Risk Management

Producers who have risk protection through Federal Crop Insurance or FSA’s NAP should report crop damage to their crop insurance agent or FSA office. If they have crop insurance, producers should report crop damage to their agent within 72 hours of damage discovery and follow up in writing within 15 days. For NAP covered crops, a Notice of Loss (CCC-576) must be filed within 15 days of the loss becoming apparent, except for hand-harvested crops, which should be reported within 72 hours.

“Crop insurance and other USDA risk management options are there to help producers manage risk because we never know what nature has in store for the future,” said Roddric Bell, Director of RMA’s Regional Office that covers Louisiana. “The Approved Insurance Providers, loss adjusters and agents are experienced and well trained in handling these types of events.”

## Conservation

The Emergency Conservation Program and Emergency Forest Restoration Program can assist landowners and forest stewards with financial and technical assistance to restore damaged farmland or forests.

NRCS also offers programs to help in the recovery process. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) can help producers plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches and working forests impacted by natural disasters.

“USDA can be a very valuable partner to help landowners with their recovery efforts,” said Chad Kacir, NRCS State Conservationist in Louisiana. “Our staff will work one-on-one with landowners to make assessments of the damages and develop approaches that focus on effective recovery of the land.”

## Assistance for Communities

Additional NRCS programs include the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, which provides assistance to local government sponsors with the cost of addressing watershed impairments or hazards such as debris removal and streambank stabilization. Sponsors must submit a formal request (via mail or email) to the state conservationist for assistance within 60 days of the natural disaster occurrence or 60 days from the date when access to the sites is possible. For more information, please contact Britt Paul, Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources at [britt.paul@usda.gov](mailto:britt.paul@usda.gov).

## More Information

On [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov), the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Farm Loan Discovery Tool can help producers and landowners determine program or loan options. For assistance with a crop insurance claim, producers and landowners should contact their crop insurance agent. For FSA and NRCS programs, they should contact their local USDA Service Center.

# New Form Requirements

## Be on the Lookout: New Form Required for NRCS Customers

by: Katherine Fidler, USDA

If you are a producer or landowner who participates in USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) may be reaching out by mail with information about a form you'll need to fill out.

Starting this year, all producers and landowners participating or applying to participate in certain NRCS conservation programs must complete form CCC-902, Farm Operating Plan.

Historically, to participate in these programs, legal entities could file either the CCC-901, Member Information or the CCC-902, while individuals were not specifically required to file the CCC-902 with FSA. Now, to ensure FSA and NRCS are properly determining payment eligibility and maximum payment limitations, all customers must have a CCC-902 on file to establish eligibility.

These changes will not affect participants who already have a Form CCC-902 with a "determined" status recorded with FSA.

Customers who do not have a CCC-902 on file with FSA will be sent a letter in the mail in the coming weeks with detailed information on what is needed and how to file the form. The letter requests that the form be completed within 30 days of receipt of the letter.

For added convenience, USDA is offering options for remote or in-person submission of the CCC-902.

Fiscal year 2021 is considered a transition year to ensure all NRCS program participants can meet this updated filing requirement. Beginning in FY 2022, if form CCC-902 is not on file your payments may be impacted.

We can help: NRCS and FSA staff are available at USDA Service Centers nationwide to provide information and assistance to walk you through meeting this filing requirement.

# Careers at NRCS

## Civil Engineering Technician (2 Vacancies)

Open and Closing Dates: 12/23/2020 to 07/15/2021  
Salary: \$35,265 to \$69,462 per year  
Pay scale & grade: GS-5/6/7/8/9  
Full performance level: GS-9  
Series: GS-0458  
Appointment Type: Permanent  
Work Schedule: Full-time  
Job Announcement Number: [NRCS-21-10990602-DHA-LA-SC](#)  
Location: Alexandria

## Soil Conservation Technician (10 Vacancies)

Open and Closing Dates: 12/23/2020 to 7/15/2021  
Salary: \$35,265 to \$56,790 per year  
Pay Scale & grade: GS-5/6/7  
Full Performance Level: GS-7  
Series: GS-0458  
Appointment Type: Permanent  
Work Schedule: Full-Time  
Job Announcement Number: [NRCS-21-10990220-DHA-LA-SC](#)  
Location: Bastrop, Bossier, Clinton, Coushatta, Franklin, Jonesville, Leesville, Many, Natchitoches, New Orleans, Oberlin and St. Joseph

## Rangeland Management Specialist (3 Vacancies)

Open & Closing Dates: 01/08/2021 to 07/15/2021  
Salary: \$35,265 to \$69,462 per year  
Pay Scale & Grade: GS-5/7/9  
Full Performance Level: GS-9  
Series: GS-0454  
Appointment Type: Permanent  
Work Schedule: Full-Time  
Job Announcement Number: [NRCS-21-11001265-DHA-LA-SC](#)  
Locations: Clinton, Jennings and Ville Platte

## Soil Conservationist (9 Vacancies)

Open & Closing Dates: 01/08/2021 to 07/15/2021  
Salary: \$35,265 to \$69,462 per year  
Pay Scale & Grade: GS-5/7/9  
Full Performance Level: GS-09  
Series: GS-0457  
Appointment Type: Permanent  
Work Schedule: Full-Time  
Job Announcement Number: [NRCS-21-11001059-DHA-LA-SC](#)  
Locations: Denham Springs, Jennings, Lafayette, Mansfield, Minden, New Iberia, St. Joseph, Shreveport, and Thibodaux

**To apply for one of the vacancies above, visit [USAJobs.gov](#). If interested, make sure to submit an application as soon as possible in order to be considered!**

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