

Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee 2020 Report

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What's Inside

- Comments from the CRAC Chair
- State Outreach Update
- Melissa Sturdivant Recognized for Excellence
- Bertha Venegas Selected as Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator
- EQIP Enhances Opportunities for Military Veterans
- Soils Judging Team Take Top Honors at Regional Competition with Assistance from Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Texas Tribal Liaison Activities
- American Indian/Alaskan Native Special Emphasis Program Update
- Black Special Emphasis Program Update
- Disability Special Emphasis Program Update
- Federal Women's Program Update
- LGBTQ Update
- Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Update
- Veteran's Special Emphasis Program Update

A Civil Rights Message from the Acting State Conservationist

by Clint Evans, Texas

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a legacy of providing practical, science-based, site-specific technical assistance to landowners and land managers to plan and apply conservation practices to address natural resource concerns on private lands.

NRCS delivers these services to all persons through the long-standing partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), in addition to numerous other partnerships. This conservation legacy is the result of the dedication and hard work of Texas NRCS employees across the state in getting conservation on the land.

A goal of this agency is to treat all employees and customers with dignity and respect and to ensure that all people are aware of and have an equal opportunity to receive assistance and participate in our programs.

The Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) played a critical role in Fiscal Year 2020 in this effort. Under the leadership of Pat Harris, chair, the committee has done an excellent job in achieving this goal. The committee's many accomplishments are showcased in this activity report.

The committee completed Civil Rights Compliance reviews in 10 field offices this fiscal year. Employees were also recognized for their achievements in civil rights through the Texas Civil Rights Awards program.

Program application and participation data for financial assistance programs was distributed to field offices to assist in evaluating and taking actions to ensure that equitable assistance is being provided to all persons.

The Texas NRCS website has a Civil Rights link and is updated regularly to ensure that information about CRAC activities and Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity in our agency is available to employees and others.

I appreciate the work of the CRAC and the Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) this year. NRCS employees have demonstrated that Civil Rights is not an afterthought, but rather the way that we do business.

Comments from the Civil Rights Advisory Committee Chair

by Patricia Harris

Civil Rights Advisory Committee Chair

It has been a great honor to serve on the Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee as chairman for the past two year. Unfortunately, my time was cut a year short due to my retirement at the end of 2020.

I truly enjoyed working with our committee. They are some of the most dedicated employee and have put in a lot of extra hours to ensure that our State is culturally aware and has had the opportunity to embrace the diversity of our state. As employees, I asked that you work with them and assist them in any way that you can.

These positions carry a lot of added extra duties to our already heavy workload and with the COVID-19 pandemic in play, it has become a more difficult cause with Social Distancing; however, it has allowed us to use a lot of creative ways to do our job. Can we all say "ZOOM".

I truly appreciate the accomplishment of the committee and all those who lent a helping hand to assist the committee.

We had a lot of turn over the past two years and I greatly appreciate all those who stepped up to assist and fill those openings.

I am grateful to have had the opportunities, experiences and friendships that I developed while serving as your chair.

I take great pleasure in introducing our new Chairperson, Kathleen Traweek. She is Soil Conservationist out of Zone 5 in the Brownwood Service Center. She comes highly recommended. She has worked diligently with Civil Right Review and ADA reviews, and in her efforts to assist me, she took on a lot of extra duties with Recruitment, sharepoint site with our required postings.

She will be greeted with an all-star team -- especially our Liaisons, who are our wings that keep us in flight.

This was your all star-team for 2020:

The Texas Civil Right Advisory Committee

- **State Conservationist: Salvador Salinas and Acting State Conservationist: Clinton Evans**
- Civil Rights Liaison: **Drenda Williams** and Acting Civil Right Liaison: **Doug Rose**
- **Melissa Sturdivant** - American Indian Liaison, Soil Conservationist, Coleman Service Center, Zone 5, 325-625-4197
- **Bertha Venegas** - State Outreach Coordinator, Management and Strategy, Boerne Service Center, Zone 2, 830-249-3508 x 103



The Civil Rights Committee Members consisted of:

- **Pat Harris** – Chair - Computer Specialist, Management and Strategy, Texas State Office, 254-742-9952
- **Claude Ross** – Vice Chair – Assistant State Conservationist (FO), San Angelo Zone Office, Zone 2, 325-944-0147
- **Hal Rogers** – Member - Resource Team Leader, Lamesa Service Center, Zone 1, 806-872-6504
- **Deanna Gutierrez** – Member, District Conservationist, San Benito Service Center, Zone 3, 956-399-1311 x 6379
- **Julian Vela** – Member, District Conservationist, Pearsall Service Center, Zone 3, 830-334-3385
- **Kristi Oats** – Member, District Conservationist, Cooper Service Center, Zone 4, 903-395-2036
- **Kathleen Traweek** – Soil Conservationist, Brownwood Service Center, Zone 5, 325-643-1587

The Civil Right Special Emphasis Program Mangers consisted of:

- **Leslie Lastimoza** - AA/PIEPM, Administrative Support Specialist, Management and Strategy, Texas State Office, 254-742-9927
- **Elizabeth Noggler** - AI/ANEP, District Conservationist, Dalhart à Stinnett Service Center, 806-878-2611
- **Darrell Colbert** - BSEPM, Program Assistant, Paris Service Center, 903-732-2464
- **Tony Townsend** - DEPM, Specialist, Management and Strategy, Texas State Office, 254-742-9935
- **Alexandra Smith** - FWPM, Soil Conservationist, Albanyà Abilene Service Center, 325-692-8238
- **Ray Hinojosa** - District Conservationist, Edinburg and Kingsville Service Center, 361-592-4349
- **Jeremy Sharer/Pedro Ramos** – LGBTPM, Assistant State Conservationists (FO), Corpus Christi Zone Office, 361-241-0609
- **Jeremy Munn** - VEPM, Soil Conservationist, Iowa Park Service Center, 940-592-4147

Texas State Outreach Update

Beginning Farmers and Ranchers a Priority at USDA

by *Bertha T. Venegas*
State Outreach Specialist

The USDA Secretary has made it a priority to focus outreach efforts to increase awareness of USDA agencies, resources and programs among populations of young, beginning, small, veteran and historically underserved farmers and ranchers. To increase support for beginning farmers and ranchers and to build upon prior agency work, the 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to create national and state-level beginning farmer and rancher (BFR) coordinators.

At the state level, Texas Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Rural Development (RD) appointed an employee to serve as BFR champion for their respective agency. The Texas BFR team is led by Bertha T. Venegas with NRCS, with assistance from the BFR champions, Veronica Crum for FSA, Shelly Bilderback for RMA and Erika Archie for RD.

The responsibilities of the team include coordinating technical assistance at the state level to assist beginning farmers and ranchers in accessing programs of the department. It includes improving the coordination, delivery and efficiency of programs of the department to beginning farmers and ranchers, taking into consideration the needs of all types of production methods and sizes of agricultural operation, at each county and zone office of the state.

Coordinators will help field employees better reach and serve beginning farmers and ranchers; they will also be available to assist beginning farmers who need help navigating the variety of resources USDA has to offer by providing one-on-one technical assistance.

As a first step, beginning farmers and ranchers are encouraged to work through the USDA New Farmers "Getting Started" portal found here: <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/new-farmers>. This site includes a 4-Step Guide that walks them through what is needed to consider as they begin planning their farm journey. NRCS staff can provide this link to beginning farmers and ranchers to help them reach the desired agency or staff.



Texas Employee Receives Prestigious National Award

by *Lori Valadez*
State Public Affairs Director

Melissa Sturdivant, soil conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Coleman, Texas, recently received the NRCS Chief's "Individual Civil Rights Award." Selected by the Chief's Civil Rights Advisory Committee, the prestigious National NRCS Individual Civil Rights Award recognizes an individual who has made a significant contribution to the NRCS's civil rights program. Melissa Sturdivant, center, is presented with Chief's Individual Civil Rights Award by Texas Acting State Conservationist Drenda Williams, left, and NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr.

Sturdivant was nominated for the award for exceeding her normal duties with her involvement as member of the Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC), as American Indian Alaskan Native Emphasis Program Manager (AIAN) and Tribal Liaison for the past seven years. She currently serves as Tribal Liaison assisting the NRCS state conservationist and local field offices with outreach and program delivery to the three federally recognized tribes in Texas.

Observing the need to connect to the American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) youth, she forged a partnership with the American Indian Education Program (AIEP) in central Texas that services 350 AIAN youth representing 61 federally recognized tribes. For the last three years, she has developed programs for students for cultural enrichment that included a field trip to Goldthwaite, Texas, mentored students, provided jobs and college scholarships announcements, and other professional development opportunities.

As a member and volunteer, Sturdivant received the American Indian Alaskan Native Employee Association (AIANEA) President's Award in 2019 for her outstanding leadership and initiative in providing support by consulting with financial and legal professionals in redesigning the scholarship program. Sturdivant was selected by the NRCS regional conservationist to serve a 3-year term as NRCS AIAN employee representative to assist with outreach and advocacy for tribal communities and tribal nations in the central region encompassing 12 states.

In this regional role, she represents and works with employees in the 12 states on developing and implementing strategies to assist the agency with providing services to tribes. She has facilitated the Central Region's Tribal Liaison Network and the development of a SharePoint site for NRCS tribal liaisons which allows them to store and share resources.



Sturdivant continues to serve as co-chair of the AIANEA scholarship committee working to develop a strong and sustainable scholarship program that will fulfill AIANEA's promise to provide educational opportunities to students and tribal communities across the nation.

Sturdivant assisted NRCS state conservationists in Wisconsin and Washington with the development of the national tribal liaison training and served as co-chair of communications for the Joint Employee Training Conference. She assisted and was instructor for the tribal liaison training given to 35 employees.

Sturdivant has been a valuable cadre member of the Working Effectively with American Indian Tribes national training course for three years and openly shares her Choctaw culture and family's history with other NRCS employees so they can have a better understanding of American Indian culture from a fellow employee. She has instructed eight courses, training approximately 480 employees.

Sturdivant took it upon herself to create a newsletter to facilitate the exchange of information concerning cultural awareness and showcases American Indian tribes. She has done this for three years and it includes one newsletter a week for the month of November in celebration of American Indian Alaskan Native Month, reaching more than 600 employees in Texas.

Sturdivant is also a professional member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) and serves as secretary for the Oklahoma Professional Chapter of AISES.

EQIP Enhances Opportunities for Military Veterans

article published by *Texas Agribility*
with contributions by *Kanika J. Davis, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist*

To maintain, train and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining freedom of the seas, is the U.S. Navy mission.

In Sulphur Springs, Texas, Chris Pogue and his wife, Theda, are proud U.S. Navy veterans who have fulfilled the Navy's mission. As Navy veterans, their deployments included northern Africa and Iraq. During Chris' service time he sustained injuries, including back and traumatic brain injuries. Despite his injuries Chris did not allow his disabilities to deter his dreams. And just as Chris and Theda faithfully served the U.S. Navy, they now serve their local community as proud owners of GP Ranch.

Having spent more than two decades away from the farm, Chris and Theda now, specialize in producing bison, poultry, pigs and growing a variety of vegetables at GP Ranch.

Active participants in several veteran-based agricultural programs, the Pogues have gained many achievements through their participation in USDA programs. Through financial and technical assistance from the Sulphur Springs Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office, Chris and Theda have applied for and received contracts through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to assist with the improvement and longevity of GP Ranch. From receiving conservation technical assistance, to receiving EQIP contracts for a high tunnel, fencing, brush management and range plantings, the Pogue's participation in NRCS programs like EQIP support the improvements needed to allow GP Ranch to continue thriving for years to come.

One of the first to apply for a high tunnel in their county, the Pogues are farmer advocates who host a variety of formal and informal educational sessions geared towards the educating of their community. Having proudly served in the U.S. Navy, they now serve as models for veteran farming in the great state of Texas.



Defense Department highlights Natural Resources Conservation Service employees hired through Operation Warfighter

by *Melissa Blair*
NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

For National Volunteer Week, a story highlighting NRCS employees who came to work for the agency through the Earth Team Volunteer Program and the USDA Pathways internship program highlighted two veterans and it was featured on the [U.S. Department of Defense Warrior Care website](#).

Full link to the article:
<https://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/2020/05/operation-warfighter-interns-receives-full-time-position-with-usda-natural-resources-conservation-service-texas/>



Soils Judging Team Take Top Honors at Regional Competition with Assistance from Natural Resources Conservation Service

by *Melissa Blair*
NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

The Texas USDA-Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) soil science staff worked with the soils judging teams from Texas A&M Kingsville and the Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) Multi Institution team a few days prior to their Region IV soils judging contest in Arkansas to prepare them for their contests by educating them on a variety of soils.

The HSI Multi-Institutional Soil Judging Team students won first place in the soils team pit judging competition, beating the other collegiate soil pit judging teams at the Region IV Collegiate Soils Judging Contest hosted at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville in October. Contestants from various universities were expected to correctly identify, evaluate, classify and describe three soil profiles in several soil pits.



The HSI Multi Institution soil judging team outscored teams from Texas A&M University, Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech University and Tarleton State University. The TAMUK team placed tied for third in the Team pit contest but lost the tie breaker.

“A special thanks goes to the USDA-NRCS soil scientists, Carlos Villarreal from Temple and Sara Russell from Nacogdoches, who helped train the Multi-HSI-Institutional and TAMU-Kingsville student teams during a very wet week in soggy soil pits in Arkansas,” said Dr. Shad Nelson. “Our early dream to educate more students in Soil Science skills is paying off.”

The Soils Judging Pit Team included Ricardo Torres from University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez (UPRM), Joshua Holguin and Karla Lopez from University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), and Emily Morgan from Florida International University (FIU). Karla, Joshua, and Emily also participated in a two-week summer training workshop in Costa Rica on soils, water and plants.

These students were part of the Student Training in Agricultural Research Techniques by Novel Educational Workshop (START NOW) USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Multi-Institutional HSI Collaborative grant program. Ricardo Torres also participated in the “Educational Tours to Puerto Rico and Texas” as part of the Natural Resources Career Development Program (NRCDP), between NRCS, TAMUK and UPRM.

This soils competition is another collaborative professional training activity as part of the START NOW USDA-NIFA HSI grant award led by TAMU-Kingsville in collaboration with UTEP, UPRM and FIU.

“This is the third year NRCS has been involved with this project between Texas A&M Kingsville and USDA-NIFA,” said Alan Stanke, Texas NRCS State soil scientist. “Carlos and Sara met these students on a Sunday and on Thursday their team beat all of the other ag schools in the team part of the contest. We get to interact and spend a lot of time in the field with these students.”

The Regional contest involves an individual contest and a team pit contest. The top five individuals get medals and the top three team pit get medals. The Overall Sweepstakes takes the scores from the individual contest for each team and awards the top three teams. The top three from the overall sweepstakes are invited to Nationals. The HSI team won the team pit contest and received fifth in the sweepstakes. The Texas A&M Kingsville soils judging team received sixth in the sweepstakes.



Texas Tribal Liaison Activities

by Melissa Sturdivant
State Tribal Liaison



USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Texas NRCS Tribal Liaison Report



Helping People Help the Land

FY20 Report

Fig. 1 (left) Decorative basketry of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (ACTT) made from longleaf pine needles. <http://blogs.usda.gov/2011/08/03/alabama-coushatta-tribe-of-texas-begins-longleaf-pine-restoration-efforts/>

Tribal Support & Farm Bill Delivery

- ◆ Worked with NRCS and Tribal leadership teams to coordinate the nomination of an ACTT tribal member to serve on the NRCS Central Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (RTCAC).
- ◆ Coordinated two virtual consultation sessions with tribal leadership teams.
 - ⇒ Three federal tribes attended.
 - ⇒ Federal partners attending—EPA, USDA-APHIS, USDA-FSA, USDA-RD
 - ⇒ Prepared reports and submitted to NRCS NHQ Tribal Office.
- ◆ Worked with local DCs to facilitate conservation planning assistance and program delivery on tribal lands:
 - ⇒ Fish census of Lake Tombigbee
 - ⇒ Plant propagation of culturally significant plants
 - ⇒ Infrastructure projects on tribal lands
 - ⇒ Hemp production & management plan
 - ⇒ Prescribed burn for Longleaf Pine ecosystem management
- ◆ Worked with the East Texas Plant Materials Center to provide technical assistance for tribal project to propagate culturally-significant plants.
 - ⇒ Worked with Public Affairs Staff to prepare educational materials for tribal members of BMPs and protocols to grow culturally significant plants using their EQIP-funded seasonal high tunnel. (Fig 3)
 - ⇒ Disseminated brochures to tribal staff for use.
- ◆ Participated as a Judge for the American Indian Science and Engineering Society's National Science Fair conducted virtually by Oklahoma State University and the Oklahoma Chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES).
- ◆ Assisted with the development and selection of the 2020 American Indian Heritage Month poster for NRCS with a Cherokee artist selected for the artwork. (Fig 5)

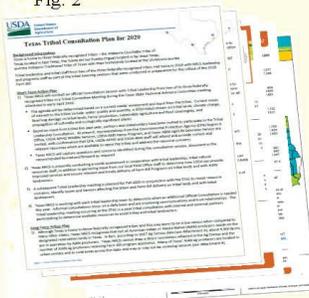


Fig. 3

Contributions to the Team

- ◆ Developed Texas NRCS Tribal Consultation Plan for FY20 to address outreach and Farm Bill delivery to our three federally recognized tribes in Texas. (Fig 2)

Fig. 2



- ◆ Served as a Cadre member of the Working Effectively with American Indians (WEWAI) training course.
 - ⇒ Facilitated and worked as Lead Instructor for WEWAI training course conducted for NRCS Arizona.

- ◆ Served as a Federal Member of NRCS Central Region's Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (RTCAC).
 - ⇒ Served as a Liaison for NRCS leadership and tribal leadership as the American Indian-Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANEA) Representative.

⇒ Prepared & conducted presentation to NHQ Leadership team and Tribal leadership at a face-to-face meeting of the NRCS West, Central and East RTCACs.

⇒ Assisted with management of the NRCS Central Region's Tribal Liaison Network (TLN) SharePoint site.

⇒ Created Tribal Fact Sheet template for states to use to improve continuity of service to tribes especially during periods of transition. (Fig 4)

- ◆ Participated as a presenter during the Federal Women's Program national training and shared information on professional employee groups available for networking and employee engagement.



Fig. 4

Professional Involvement

- ◆ President, American Indian-Alaska Native Employees Assn (ALANEA) - NRCS
- ◆ Sequoyah Fellow, American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES)

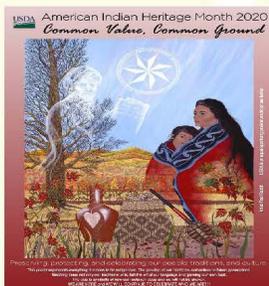


Fig. 5



For more information about services provided to our Tribes, and to American Indian and Alaska Native producers by Texas NRCS personnel, contact:

Kristy Oates
State Conservationist
254-742-9800

Melissa Sturdivant
Texas NRCS State Tribal Liaison
325-625-4197, x108

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American Indian/Alaskan Native SEPM Update

by Elizabeth Noggler
American Indian/Alaskan Native Special Emphasis Program Manager



1st Quarter FY 20

- Represented NRCS in booth at South Plains High School Career Expo.
- Gave AI/AN presentation at Zone 1 DC Meeting
- Attended/Participated in quarterly National AI/AN SEPM teleconference

2nd Quarter FY 20

- Represented NRCS in booth at West Texas A&M University Career Fair
- Spoke to senior level class of 30 students at West Texas A&M University about careers and opportunities through the NRCS
- Planned to attend Texas Tech University Career Fair but it was canceled due to COVID-19.
- Attended/Participated in quarterly National AI/AN SEPM teleconference
- Attended the quarterly Texas CRAC teleconference

3rd Quarter FY 20 COVID-19 Restrictions

- Attended/Participated in quarterly National AI/AN SEPM teleconference
- Participated in Federal Women's Program Leadership Workshop Series

4th Quarter FY 20 COVID-19 Restrictions

- Participated in Federal Women's Program Leadership Workshop Series
- Gave On-The-Job Training to employees in field offices over the electronic 230 filing system

Black Special Emphasis Program Update

by Darrell Colbert

Black Special Emphasis Program Update



Outreach & Recruitment

- Justin Parks (District Conservationist located in Lufkin, TX) and I attended a career day at Austin State University on October 10, 2019 and February 13, 2020. There were approximately 120 students that attended the October career day and approximately 135 students attended the February career fair. Approximately 30 students visited NRCS' booth on October 10th and approximately 40 students came by NRCS' booth on February 13th.
- I attended Prairie View's A&M University career fair on February 12, 2020. Additionally, Prairie A&M hosted a direct hiring event for NRCS, FSA, and RMA, which was also held on February 12, and 13, 2020. There were approximately 275 students came by NRCS' booth for information on careers and NRCS Pathways Internship Programs.

Black History Month Celebration

- In February 2020, a Presidential Proclamation was emailed to all Texas NRCS Texas employees in recognition of Black History month.
- A Black History program was planned for the State Office, but cancelled due to illness and the COVID-19 virus.

Community Outreach

- Youth/Middle school & H.S Activities
- On October 16, 2019, NRCS Clarksville, Cooper and Paris teams, and Red River Soil and Water District Board members, hosted the Red River Student Wildlife Contest in Red River County. There were approximately 85 students that competed in the contest. The competition included wildlife biological facts and techniques, wildlife identification of animals, and a test that measured the student's knowledge of wildlife laws, and wildlife habitats.
- Collaboration with leadership or teams or subcommittees
- The Cultural Transformation Subcommittee (David Hinojosa-CRAC Federal Women's Program and Josh Allen,-Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Program Manager Committee Member) had a telephonic meeting to determine what issue(s) should this sub-committee address and bring to the full CRAC Committee for further discussion and agreement relating to cultural transformation. During this telephonic meeting, it was agreed we would get data from Texas NRCS employees by developing an employee survey with cultural transformation questions. On October 21, 2019, the Cultural Transformation sub-committee and had another telephonic conference call and it was suggested and agreed we would use some of the same questions the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey ask for its survey to get employee data on creating a safe and equitable work environment, improving the customer experience for internal and external customers, encouraging employee interaction and cohesion, and breaking cultural and social barriers. Although the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey captured data from employees on the aforementioned subjects, it was a macro view for all federal employees and not a micro view of only Texas NRCS employees. At the present time, the subcommittee is working on the survey and will present it to the CRAC committee for their input and approval.

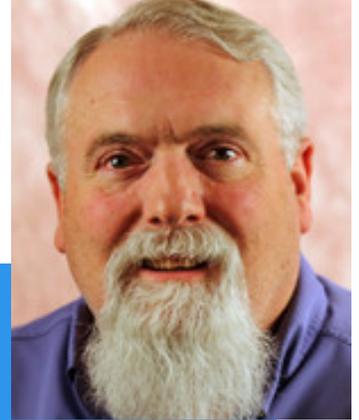


Disability Special Emphasis Program Update

by *Tony Townsend*
Disability Special Emphasis Program Manager

It has been an privilege and honor to serving on the Texas Civil Rights Committee. As my term comes to an end, it is my pleasure to welcome Angela Sims as the new Disability Special Emphasis Program Manager for Texas.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication in making Texas NRCS a great place.



1st Quarter FY 20

- National CRAC to the Chief VTC with new members – November 19
- FPAC Human Resources ECC National Detail for 120 days

2nd Quarter FY 2020

New Mexico State
University Career Fair, Las
Cruces, NM

3rd Quarter FY 20

- NCRACC Qtrly Teleconference with the Chief and State Chairs
- Awards Subcommittee meeting on Annual NCRACC awards
- Texas State University Teleconference with Agricultural students
- Teleconference with FPAC CHRO on MD 715 and AEP
- Veteran's Virtual Recruitment with Central Region states



NEW MEXICO

4th Quarter FY 20

Under personal COVID restrictions for several months

I will continue to work for another year on the National Civil Rights Advisory Committee to the Chief.

Highlights from the Federal Women's Program Manager

by *Alex Smith*
Federal Women's Program Manager

Working as a conservation planner for the last 11 years has been rewarding in so many ways. Assisting landowners in achieving their dreams and bonding with them over a mutual love of sustainability and caring for the land for the benefit of present and future generations is a dream job realized.

In 2019 I became the Federal Women's Program Manager (FWPM) and started working toward a new dream. A dream to help my peers and coworkers to become more knowledgeable about the benefits and services available to them as employees with the USDA. A dream to maintain their passion for the job through continuous learning and work life balance. A dream to recruit, retain, and advance a diversified and well qualified work force.



As the Region 4 council member for the Organization of Professional Employees of the US Department of Agriculture (OPEDA), chair person for the Mentorship Committee for the Texas Section of the Society for Range Management (TSSRM), and the chair person for the Texas Federal Women's Program (FWPM), I am combining multi-faceted knowledge from each platform to benefit Texas NRCS employees on multiple levels.

In 2020, hard work and much research was put into establishing a digital FWP Library for use by all NRCS employees. This led to the discovery of the National Agriculture Library (NAL), which is a tremendous and free resource available to USDA employees. This resulted in achieving the FWP goal of establishing an NRCS library, as well as substantial cost savings to the government in the short and long term.

With the assistance of a passionate 6-person committee, the Federal Women's Program has accomplished much despite the constraints we have been put under in 2020. Paramount to the world we are living in, we have begun to adapt and plan in new directions to achieve our committee goals.

As a committee we are working toward virtual delivery of FWP trainings for NRCS employees in the year 2021 to cover topics such as employee spotlights, benefits, finances, mentorships, performance measures, hiring/interview process, Civil Right Advisory Committees, promotions, farmer success stories, National Agriculture Library, and more.

Six \$500 FWP Scholarships were granted to employees this year to attend trainings and conferences to further their development and abilities as conservation planners. In 2021, we intend to offer the same opportunities.

Three Women's History Month Articles were written by committee members and published in the NRCS Texas Newsletter to highlight the journeys and successes of conservation minded women.

In an effort to recruit a diverse workforce, USDA opportunities were emailed to qualified students across Texas in numbers in excess of 4,000 individuals with each email, which included 2 on-site hiring events, 13 job fairs, and job opportunity announcements for 97 positions across Texas.

Committee member, Juliet Carter and I worked a job fair/recruitment booth at Tarleton University on 2/20/2020, whereby we individually met with 10 female and 5 male agriculture students.

Three or more Career Development Events were attended, providing outreach and a visual USDA presence to more than 520 high school agriculture students in Texas ensuring our future workforce is aware of the opportunities within the USDA.

Committee members and I completed our required committee training course: EEO, It's Place in the Federal Government, to further our knowledge and abilities as committee members and to better serve Texas employees.

I worked directly with Graduate School USA on the planning and logistics for implementing the training course: CRAC Roles and Responsibilities, which is required for all CRAC members. Though we were unable to have the training this year due to COVID, this planning will be utilized to implement the course in person or virtually in the year 2021.

Though we were blindsided by the turn of events in 2020, the Federal Women's Program is prepared for a productive 2021. We have adapted to new possibilities and we are excitedly looking forward to the future for USDA employees.

LGBTQ Special Emphasis Program Update

by Pedro Ramos
LGBTQ Special Emphasis Program Manager



Since October, I have made contacts with the Corpus Christi Pride Center. I met with the director twice. Once to introduce NRCS to the center and a second time to learn about the center. I have offered to review resumes and conduct mock interviews with the center clients. I have reviewed 2 resumes for the center clients although not related to work for NRCS, I did it to demonstrate the assistance we can provide.

The center has clients interested in being Earth Team volunteers however the volunteers are waiting until COVID allows us back into offices.

LGBTQ Emphasis Program

403.130 Purpose

This subpart provides guidance and direction to NRCS organization units on the development and implementation of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Emphasis Program. The purpose of the program is to provide LGBTQ awareness and education to NRCS employees and partners while focusing on such issues as employment, retention, promotion, training, career development, and advancement opportunities affecting LGBTQ applicants and employees at NRCS.

403.131 Policy

It is NRCS policy to conduct a positive and continuing LGBTQ Emphasis Program that provides equal employment opportunity for LGBTQ persons in all personnel management policies, practices, and in NRCS-sponsored programs and activities.

403.133 Program Objectives

The LGBTQ Emphasis Program is an integral part of the overall equal employment opportunity (EEO) program and is designed to-

- Ensure that gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people receive equal treatment in all aspects of employment.
- Increase the number of LGBTQ people employed in all professional, administrative, technical, clerical, and other categories, series, and grade levels.
- Provide opportunities to participate in training, career development, and leadership programs.
- Encourage the participation of LGBTQ populations in all NRCS-sponsored programs and activities.(5)
- Provide a network of professional support for LGBTQ.
- Provide mentoring support to LGBTQ in the workforce.
- Educate all NRCS employees by raising the level of awareness of LGBTQ workplace issues and concerns.



Links to Resources

- [GLBT Historical Society](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [GLBT National Help Center](#)
- [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation](#)

HATCH ACT Clarification: "The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Agriculture of the linked websites, or the information, products or services contained therein. Unless otherwise specified, the Department does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations. All links are provided with the intent of providing additional information in support of the Special Emphasis Program Initiatives."

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Pride is currently celebrated each year in the month of June to honor the 1969 Stonewall riots in Manhattan. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay club located in Greenwich Village in New York City. The raid sparked a riot among bar patrons and neighborhood residents as police roughly hauled employees and patrons out of the bar, leading to six days of protests and violent clashes with law enforcement outside the bar on Christopher Street, and neighboring streets. Though the Stonewall uprising didn't start the gay rights movement, it was a galvanizing force for LGBT political activism, leading to numerous gay rights organizations, including the Gay Liberation Front, Human Rights Campaign, GLAAD (formerly Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), and PFLAG (formerly Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

Veteran's Special Emphasis Program Update

by Jeremy Munn, Veteran's Special Emphasis Program Manager and Melissa Blair, NRCS Texas PAS



Battleground to Breaking Ground Veteran Program

NRCS in Texas has been one of the USDA partners with Texas AgrAbility since conception of the Battleground to Breaking Ground program in 2011. Texas AgrAbility has expanded the program each year through USDA grants to reach veterans, beginning farmers/ranchers and historically underserved producers and others in and outside of Texas to educate and mentor them to be able to run successful farm and ranches. About 95% of the participants have become involved with USDA NRCS and Farm Service Agency through this program.

NRCS staff Jeremy Munn and Melissa Blair served on the Battleground to Breaking planning committee for virtual events. NRCS participated in five Battleground to Breaking Ground events during the FY.



Before COVID, one Battleground to Breaking Ground workshop at Gatesville on career opportunities was presented by Tony Townsend, human resource specialist and Angela Sims, management analyst in public affairs.



Four online events where conservation technical and financial assistance was shared by NRCS staff of Jeremy Munn, Veteran SEPM and Melissa Blair, public affairs specialist to an estimated 50 participants.



Battleground to Breaking Ground agriculture workshop set Dec. 6 in Belton, TX. Battleground to Breaking Ground program for veteran, other beginning farmers/ranchers slated for Dec. 6 at the AgriLife Extension office in Belton, TX. #agrability

Farmer Veteran Coalition Annual Meeting in Austin

NRCS was part of a OneUSDA effort held during Farmer Veteran Coalition’s annual meeting held in Austin on Nov. 17-20 with more than 800 attendees. Texas NRCS staff, Jeremy Munn, Veteran SEPM and Melissa Blair, public affairs specialist, visited with conference attendees at the NRCS booth sharing about how we can provide technical and financial assistance to help accomplish their land management goals. Also provided NRCS contact information for their respective counties for follow up by attendees and sharing career opportunities. USDA NRCS staff, Jeremy Hasty, spoke during a panel discussion.



CAMP Mentoring Program

One of the Battleground to Breaking Ground trainers who is a veteran and works with NRCS on conservation efforts on his farm, Doug Havemann, was one of the first volunteers for NRCS new mentoring program called Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP). The program is aimed at ensuring new NRCS employees are properly trained and mentored about the local production agriculture where they work. A key component is having expert producers who are passionate about conservation and teaching serve as mentors. The goal is to deepen new employees’ relationship with producers in their local communities while enhancing their expertise related to production agriculture. Producers will be asked to share their knowledge of common agricultural practices, equipment, inputs, and other agricultural factors with the new employee(s). The level of engagement will be determined solely by a producers’ availability and will be done on their farming operation.

Veteran Success Stories

NRCS shared [veteran conservation success stories](#) with news media, Twitter, Facebook through partners or individuals, [Beginning Farmers Tap into USDA Programs for Organic Urban Farm in Bexar County](#).



Other outreach included

- Participated in Disabled Association of Veterans (DAV) event in Wichita Falls on Nov. 1, 2019
- July 8th Webinar USDA showcasing Veterans with the Texas Veteran commission, 45 individuals attended various ages and ethnicity, unable to identify individuals during meeting.
- Internally provided an article for African American Month on veterans
- Joel Jimenez commander for the DAV chapter 41, connected with Battle Ground to Breaking Ground for apprenticeship program for veterans in Childers.
- University of Florida, emails communications for recruitment opportunities. One application received

