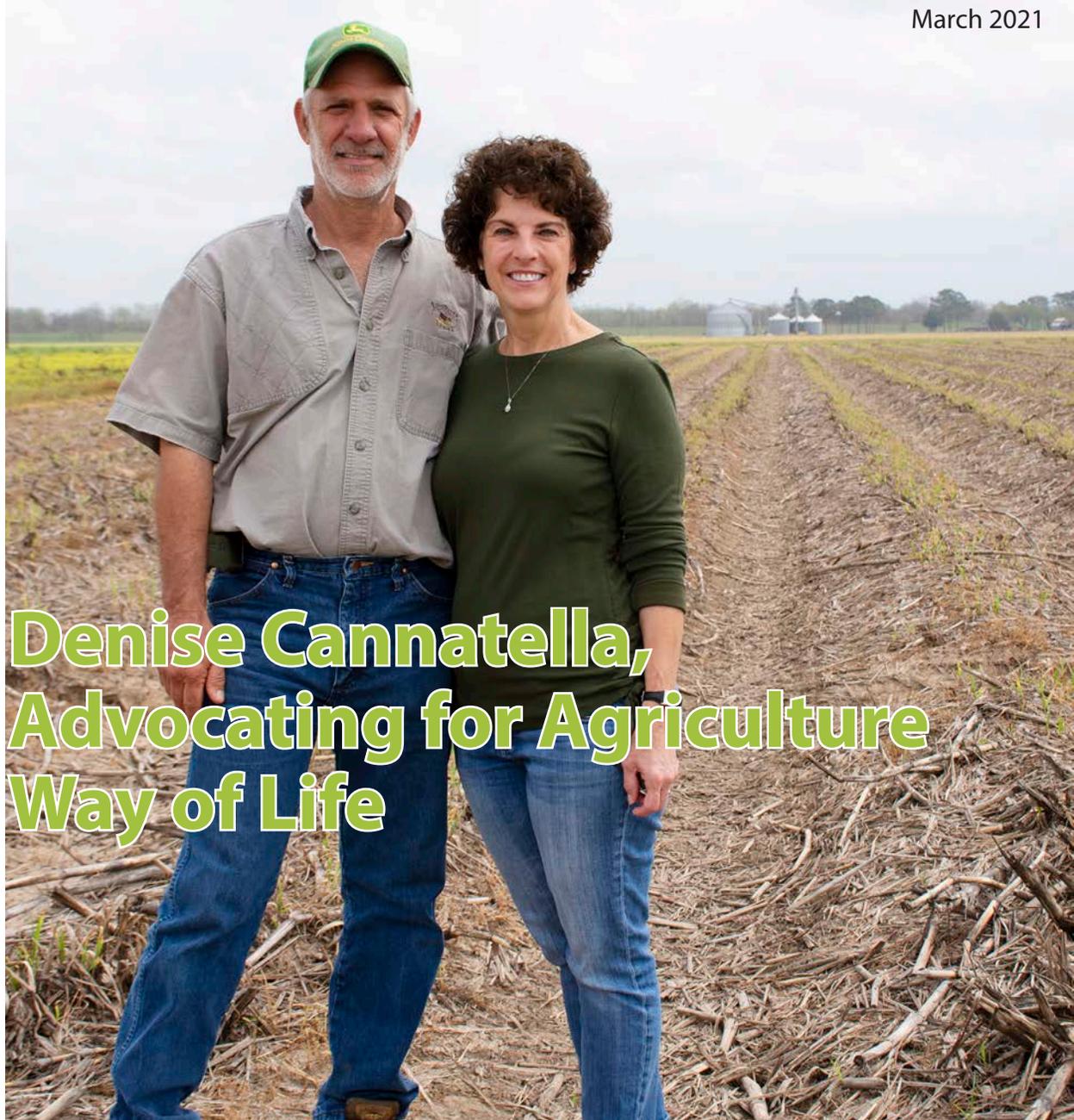




United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

March 2021



**Denise Cannatella,
Advocating for Agriculture
Way of Life**

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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On the Cover



Learn more about how St. Landry Parish farmer Denise Cannatella works tirelessly to advocate for agriculture 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

Spring is officially here! Days are longer and soon they'll become warmer and warmer. I know that our producers are preparing to get in the fields to plant, calves are being born, and signs of new life are all around. This is one of my favorite times of year, filled with fresh starts and new beginnings.

March is Women's History Month. To celebrate this month we are featuring Denise Cannatella from St. Landry Parish. Denise is an advocate for agriculture and passionate about conservation on her land. Over the past 30 plus years, she has been a vocal advocate for Louisiana agriculture with school age children, teachers, and our elected officials. She has served in many capacities, and her newest role is the President of the Louisiana Women in Agriculture (LWAG) Board of Directors.



As many of you know, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a proud sponsor and leader, along with the Rapides Soil and Water Conservation District, of the LWAG conference and 501c3 organization. We are proud to say we led the way in this movement to reach all Louisiana women who work in the world of agriculture.

Almost one year ago, we held LWAG 2020, with over 400 in attendance, presenting our conference just as the face of the unknown, COVID-19, began. It was a very successful event and a credit to all that attended, sponsored, and created this important event.

This year, it was decided to postpone LWAG 2021, but with Denise Cannatella at the helm, I know that LWAG 2022 will be bigger, better and reach more diverse audiences than ever before. Please join with me and thank the wonderful women involved in all aspects of agriculture. We are thankful for your contributions and insight!

I encourage anyone interested in learning more about NRCS and how we can assist with conservation assistance on your land, please reach out to your local NRCS field office.

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

Visit our website at:
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Photo courtesy of Denise Cannatella



Photo courtesy of Denise Cannatella

If you look up the word “advocate” in the dictionary, you may very well find the name *Denise Cannatella*. This city girl turned farmer’s wife has spent the last thirty years teaching and educating children and adults about the importance of agriculture.

Born and raised in Opelousas, after a year of college, Denise married her sweetheart, Charles, and settled in the Melville area, where Charles’ family at that time farmed 1,400 acres of row crops. After the first few years of marriage and the births of



Denise Cannatella, A

their children, Denise’s journey with agriculture advocacy official began.

“In the early 90’s Charles was invited to be a part of the Farm Bureau in St. Landry Parish,” explained Denise. “I joined the women’s committee and that is when I really started becoming aware of agriculture and the importance that it has on our lives.” Growing up in Louisiana, Denise was always aware of agriculture, but her involvement in Farm Bureau taught her about agriculture.

After a few years of serving on the local board, Denise became a board member of the state Ag in the Classroom Committee. “This is where I found my place,” beamed Denise. “I realized that I love educating people about agriculture and why it’s so important; it was like the work was made for me,” she continued. After a lot of encouragement from fellow farmers and mentors, Denise found her voice, and the advocacy for agriculture began.

“I enjoyed bringing products from my farm into the classrooms and explain to the children about where these products came from,” Denise said. It was an eye-opening experience, as she realized most children and adults are far removed and have little knowledge about where their food comes from. Denise explains, “When most people think of agriculture they think of a cow, corn or maybe soybeans.” Bringing awareness of the importance of agriculture to children, watching their eyes light up with understanding, was one of the highlights of her time working on the Ag in the Classroom Committee.

As a true advocate, Denise did not stop there. Along with her Committee, she blazed a trail to a new method of education, teacher’s workshops. They developed curriculum specific to Louisiana agriculture that also met all the educational standards for teachers in the classroom. Local Farm Bureau offices donate materials and supplies to schools along with lesson plans.



Advocating for Agriculture Way of Life

"Education about agriculture is my love and my passion," Denise smiled.

From there, Denise's involvement with Farm Bureau skyrocketed. She was on the state-wide women's committee for two years, from there she was elected as Women's Chairman and served for seven years. As Women's Chairman, she used her voice on the Farm Bureau Board of Directors and served as an advocate for Louisiana farmers at the Farm Bureau Federation national convention. "People looked at me as a viable individual, not necessarily as a woman, but as a knowledgeable person, who had something valuable to contribute," explained Denise. She utilized opportunities like meeting with legislators in Baton Rouge and Washington D.C. to discuss issues important to Louisiana agricultural producers.

Over the years, Denise's work on the farm has evolved from being a bookkeeper to handling all the paperwork and overseeing the H2A visa program. Denise explains, "I take care of all the paperwork and documentation, all the housing we provide, I make sure that all of our employees are well taken care of." She continues, "We are fortunate to be able to get these laborers. This program allows us to have the production on the farm we have today."

With their farm growing to over 4000 acres, it is easy to see the Cannatella's cherish their land. They have been working with the St. Landry Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for over 20 years. Denise explains, "This land is very important to our family, we take care of it and we know it will take care of us. Charles and our son Vincent, put their hearts and souls into this land." The Cannatellas are constantly searching for ways to protect and enhance their natural resources and improve the quality of their soil. "We know

this land is giving us the life we love to live, and we want to make sure that it is here for many generations to come," said Denise.

The Cannatellas have utilized the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) where they have incorporated cover crops, improved water and air quality and introduced pest and nutrient management systems. In addition, they have improved wildlife habitat by leaving standing grain on field edges. A whole conservation system approach has been used to manage their land.

Stuart Gardner, NRCS Area Range Conservationist, explains, "I've worked with the Cannatellas on pasture management for over a decade." He continues, "They have a unique situation here. Just like a lot of cattlemen in the area, they graze on the levee, and the land on the other side between the levee and the river." Grazing on the levee system is a unique situation for many cattle producers in this area. With the Atchafalaya River typically rising between March and November, more than half or more of pasture can be taken up by water. Stuart continues, "It's important to have a reasonable stocking rate to ensure that cattle can thrive during the high-water level months when pasture acreage is reduced."

With the help of Stuart and NRCS, the Cannatellas established a basic rotational grazing system facilitated by fencing to ensure good animal health and nutrition. Stuart goes on to explain, "Denise, Charles, and Vincent have transitioned to minimum tillage and no till systems." In addition, they plant cover crops, allowing something to grow when the regular crops are not growing, improving soil health by capturing and holding nutrients.

For Denise, agriculture is not just a livelihood it is a way of life. Denise concludes, "I love our lives in agriculture, and I will continue to advocate for the best profession I know!"

Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Rapides SWCD

Located at 6287 Old Baton Rouge Highway in Alexandria, Louisiana, you will find Inglewood Farm. According to Inglewood Farm President Elisabeth Keller, the farm has been owned by the Keller Family since the 1940's. "Established in 1836 as Inglewood Plantation", says Elisabeth, "the land carries the history of slavery, sharecropping, and industrialized farming". Given this history and its legacy, the Keller family is committed to good care of the soil, along with long-term efforts to address inequities in farming. Inglewood is now host to an organization called Jubilee Justice, led by Konda Mason. Jubilee is working with Black Farming communities across the South, creating access to new supply chains and methods of regenerative farming. On Inglewood Farm, Jubilee Justice is conducting trials of rice and other grains, incorporating cover-cropping and low-till methods of farming."

According to the Inglewood Farm website, Inglewood Farm has been an organic farm since 2012. Their mission is to produce nutritious delicious food in a conscious manner, while regenerating their land. The website also states that the Inglewood owners envision Inglewood Farm as a place where people can learn about healthy food and its source, and the widespread benefits of regenerative agriculture, in a way that is fun.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is about to embark upon a new partnership with Inglewood Farm and the Trailblazer RC&D. Through the proposed partnership, a Seasonal High Tunnel will be constructed on Inglewood Farm which will serve, in part, as a place for various groups and

organizations to have workshops to learn about high tunnels, the agronomic practices associated with high tunnels, soil health, USDA programs and services, as well as other conservation practices.

A High Tunnel, commonly called a "hoop house," is one of NRCS' flagship conservation practices because it:

- Extends the growing season and protects plants from severe weather
- Improves plant quality and soil quality
- Reduces nutrient and pesticide transportation
- Offers a greater ability to control pests and even protect plants from pollen and pesticide drift



Ask USDA

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RCPP

USDA Seeks Innovative Partner-led Projects Delivering Sustainable Agricultural Solutions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking proposals to fund up to \$75 million in new, unique projects under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program's (RCPP) Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA) that take innovative and non-traditional approaches to conservation solutions at the local, regional and landscape scales. In making selections, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will prioritize projects related to climate smart agriculture and forestry.

NRCS will fund up to 15 projects this year through AFA, where partners have more flexibility in working directly with agricultural producers to support the development of new conservation structures and approaches that would not otherwise be effectively implemented through the classic RCPP.

"Collaboration and partnership are leading to advanced conservation delivery on working lands, both rural and urban," said Terry Cosby, Acting Chief of NRCS. "We want to continue funding projects that harness the power of partnership and innovation to develop solutions that benefit producers while conserving our natural resources."

A significant portion of funds will address projects related to climate smart agriculture and forestry. These include projects related to carbon markets and new technologies. Meanwhile, NRCS also strongly encourages proposals from RCPP projects that address the conservation needs of urban farmers in metropolitan areas, supporting access to healthy fresh food in historically underserved populated communities.

NRCS will execute AFAs through agreements with eligible lead partners who will be responsible for contracting directly with eligible producers and landowners to implement conservation activities on the ground.

NRCS is accepting AFA project proposals now through May 28.

Proposals must be submitted through the RCPP portal at <https://nrcs-sites.secure.force.com/>. Information about this request for proposals is available on [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

AFA projects were initially authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill, while the 2018 Farm Bill enhanced the AFA provision and authorized NRCS to award up to 15 AFA projects annually. Project types that may be suited to AFAs, as highlighted by the 2018 Farm Bill statute include:

- Projects that use innovative approaches to leverage the federal investment in conservation.
- Projects that deploy a pay-for-performance conservation approach

- Projects that seek large-scale infrastructure investment that generate conservation benefits for agricultural producers and nonindustrial private forest owners.

The fiscal 2021 AFA funding announcement incorporates policy updates following publication of the RCPP final rule, including:

- The revised RCPP Critical Conservation Areas (announced in August 2020).
- Updated RCPP AGI waiver policy.
- Clarifying language about when RCPP activities can be carried out on public lands.
- New policy language developed for AFA easements.
- New policy language to highlight that producer "cost-share" funding related to implementation of conservation activities, like land management practices or systems, cannot be counted as partner contributions for the project.

Farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners apply for RCPP projects through project partners, like conservation districts, producer associations, water districts, state or local governments, American Indian tribes, institutions of higher education and nongovernmental organizations.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation's lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local, and Tribal governments.



WREP Projects

USDA Invests \$28 Million in New Projects to Help Restore Lost Wetland Functions, Benefits on Agricultural Landscapes

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing \$28 million in six new Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) projects and four ongoing ones, which enable conservation partners and producers to work together to return critical wetland functions to agricultural landscapes. Partners will contribute \$2.82 million, bringing the total investments to \$30.82 million.

“Wetlands have tremendous benefits ranging from cleaner water, to flood prevention, to enhancing wildlife habitat, to sequestering carbon,” said Chad Kacir, State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Louisiana. “The Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership helps partners cover more ground with producers in expanding the footprint of healthy wetlands across our country.”



Since 2014, WREP projects across 11 states have resulted in 136 closed wetland easements and wetland easements pending closure, protecting more than 27,425 acres. In total, NRCS has supported landowners in protecting more than 2.85 million acres through wetland easement programs nationwide.

Tim Landreneau, Assistant State Conservationist for Easement Programs, explains, “In Louisiana we are fortunate to work with dedicated WREP partners, including The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and Mississippi River Trust.” Through WREP, over 9,030 acres of wetlands have been restored and protected under ongoing Louisiana project phases.

Tri State: The Nature Conservancy

This existing project seeks to enroll an additional 2,000 acres per state, totaling 6,000 acres, in Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE). The project focuses on restoring forested wetlands within priority portions of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley in Arkansas, Louisiana, and

Mississippi, including specifically targeting priority watersheds of the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative area. The proposed project is Phase III of a continuing effort that began in 2017. Existing efforts have resulted in more than 3,800 acres of easements that have been acquired or are pending in the project area to date. NRCS will invest \$8.35 million for the first year.

Lower Mississippi River Batture Phase VI: Mississippi River Trust

This existing project seeks to build on sustainability efforts and water management in the active floodplain of the Lower Mississippi River, or the Batture, thus providing significant ecological, economic, and societal benefits. Partners propose to facilitate the enrollment of an additional 9,000 acres of privately owned, predominately cleared, flood prone land in wetland easements along the Batture area. The project also helps agricultural producers by removing frequently flooded land from production and eliminating the expenses and subsidies associated with farming that land. The proposed project is phase six of a continuing effort that began in 2012. Current efforts under phases one through five have resulted in acquired easements or easements pending for more than 22,000 acres of land in the project area. First-year activities are fully funded by partner contributions.

About WREP

WREP is a component of ACEP-WRE through which NRCS enters into agreements with eligible partners to target and leverage resources to address high priority wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement activities and improve wildlife habitat on eligible lands. WREP enables NRCS to collaborate with partners on high-priority wetland restoration projects to return critical wetland functions and improve wildlife habitat.

Through selected WREP projects, partners voluntarily work with agricultural producers to execute targeted wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement activities on eligible agriculture lands. WREP enables effective integration of wetland restoration on working agricultural landscapes, providing meaningful benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program and to the communities where the wetlands exist. Restoring wetland ecosystems helps filter sediments and chemicals to improve water quality downstream, enhance wildlife and aquatic habitat, reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater and offers recreational benefit.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity, and natural resources including our soil, air, and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers, and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local, and Tribal governments.

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