



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

April 2021

Creating Bird Habitat in Vermilion Parish

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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On the Cover



Learn more about how Vermilion Parish farmer Chad Hanks is creating habitat for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl 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

Reflecting over the last year, I'm proud to say we've all come a long way! This time last year looked a lot different, as we were all learning a new way of life during COVID, the realities of working virtually and finding ways to get our work completed. As we worked through this past year, we've continued to provide technical and financial assistance to our agricultural producers, partners, neighbors, and friends. The future is much brighter today with our field offices now staffed at 50 percent. In addition, you can now make an appointment to meet with your local field office in person.



When you visit your local field office, you will also notice that the face of NRCS Louisiana is changing a bit, too. We have been hiring and we have a wonderful group of new employees who are located across the state. If you see some new folks around your local field office, please say hello and welcome them to NRCS Louisiana. We are excited to have these folks on board and working toward our shared conservation goals.

This month we visit Chad Hanks in Vermilion Parish. Chad and his business partner, Karl Guidry, own Advanced Agriculture, together they are making a difference on the Louisiana landscape by creating much needed waterfowl and shorebird habitat in south Louisiana. The work that Chad is doing is also an excellent example of the importance and power of forging strong partnerships with multiple agencies and organizations.

If you would like more information about the waterfowl and shorebird programs please contact your local office.

Chad Kacir
State Conservationist



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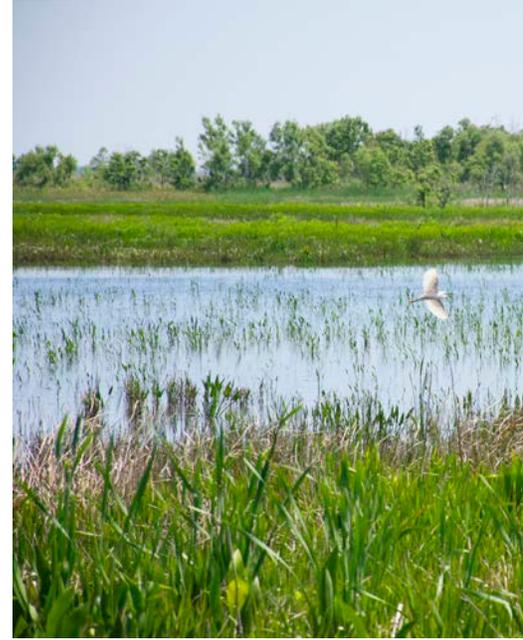
Program Delivery Continues while taking Safety Measures Related to Coronavirus

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. Although in person visits are permitted by appointment only, our program delivery staff will continue to also work with our customers by phone, by email, and other online tools.

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:
www.la.nrcs.usda.gov



Creating Bird Habitat in Vermilion

There is a distinctly southern destination in Louisiana, south of Lafayette. A place where the sunrises and sunsets paint brilliant hues of orange and gold; where massive oak trees line the byways and, on the horizon, the rice fields are brimming with the iconic red top of crawfish traps.

Lafayette is home to Chad Hanks and his business partner Karl (Bubba) Guidry who together own Advanced Agriculture. Bubba has worked hard ensuring the day-to-day business side of the operation is running smoothly and Chad is the farmer, conservationist, and visionary of the business. Together they have worked hard to restore the land they lease in Vermilion Parish from the State of Louisiana through the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

Chad is no stranger to the world of agriculture. He grew up on a rice farm, graduated with a degree in economics, worked as a grain broker and then ventured into farming on his own. He has been farming sugarcane for over 30 years and has about 5,000 acres in Lafayette Parish. Several years ago, he inherited land that grew rice and crawfish. Over time, he realized he wanted to concentrate his efforts on crawfish production and began to search for additional land to farm.

After extensive research, Chad discovered over 2,000 acres of land in the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, available for lease. He reflects, "I thought about the farmers who preceded us 150 years ago. They saw this beautiful land and made it a very productive farm in the 19th century." Not long after Chad leased the land, he realized, in addition to creating profitable crawfish ponds, his over-arching goal for this land was to create a robust habitat for all types of wildlife, especially migrating birds.

An integral part of Chad's management focus is holding water longer on portions of land, creating a perfect home for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. Chad's unique crawfish-only operation allows him the flexibility to manage habitat for more species of wildlife. All along the process the Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have partnered with Chad. Addressing resource concerns, one by one, NRCS provided technical assistance helping Chad make strategic improvements over time.

Kayla Hebert, Resource Conservationist in the Abbeville NRCS field office explains, "Chad has a very unique place. He is addressing a wildlife concern by holding water for migratory birds and shorebirds." She continued, "By managing his property for waterfowl, he is bettering the property for wildlife."

Chad has applied to be a part of the Shorebirds in Louisiana Wetlands initiative, a Louisiana priority through NRCS's Working Lands for Wildlife program. Karis Ritenour, a Conservation Biologist with Manomet explains the importance of the Shorebirds Initiative. "This initiative focuses on providing open, shallowly flooded, agricultural fields in late summer and early fall, when water is generally scarce on the landscape and migratory shorebirds are most in need of habitat." She continues, "Shorebirds that migrate through the midcontinent can travel up to 18,000 miles between their wintering grounds in South America and their breeding grounds in the Arctic every year, with few stops along the way. For many of these species, Louisiana is their first stop in North America as they travel north in the spring, and their



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last chance to refuel in North America before they cross the open ocean as they return south in the fall.”

Troy Mallach, NRCS State Wildlife Biologist, goes on to explain, “Landowners like Chad, who are willing to tweak management practices to provide water for migrating shorebirds like the Greater and Lesser Yellow-legs and the Short-Billed Dowitcher, are making a positive impact.” Mallach goes on to say that, as the population grows worldwide and habitat for wildlife continues to shrink, it is important for landowners to partner with the local SWCD and NRCS. “Many times, it is not a big change that is needed on agricultural lands, but rather small management changes over time that create tremendous benefits.”

One of the greatest benefits that Chad enjoys is seeing how the conservation improvements he has made to the land is paying off. “The results of all the hard work we’ve done to improve the habitat is evident in the abundant wildlife we see every day.” Chad continues, “When I drive through my land and see the large amount of waterfowl and shorebirds we have using the crawfish fields, or watching ten, sometimes 12, white-tailed deer foraging along the tree line, it is a great feeling.”

In addition to creating thriving habitat, Chad is proud of the strong agency partnerships he has cultivated over the last several years; working hand-in-hand with NRCS and the Vermilion SWCD, the State of Louisiana, LDWF, Louisiana State University AgCenter and Ducks Unlimited. Chad is also grateful to Jack Montoucet, Secretary of LDWF for giving him the opportunity to farm the land in the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area.

“My goal is to maintain agricultural integrity on this land, using it as God intended; blending agriculture and creating natural habitat for wildlife,” Chad smiled. “I’m so proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish, my hope is that the Vermilion SWCD, NRCS, the State of Louisiana and my other partners can point to this land as an excellent example of blending agriculture, conservation and creation of habitat.”



Outreach Corner

Submitted by: *Dexter Sapp, Rapides SWCD*

For the past six years I have had the privilege of writing outreach features for this NRCS Louisiana Conservation Update publication. However, for this month's feature I decided to take a pause from my routine feature, which normally covers Outreach Events, and instead do a feature on my sister who is heavily involved in agriculture. The youngest of five kids, Carlyle Sapp Roberson, is the offspring of Richard and Lucy Sapp of Arcadia, Louisiana.

A family whose deep roots in agriculture have been around for over 120 years, Carlyle continues to carry on the family tradition to this day. Reflecting back on how Carlyle's late grandfather and living father used to plow our truck patches with a mule and how the family raised our own produce, pork, beef, eggs and produced our own milk, buttermilk and butter, Carlyle carries on the family tradition of tending livestock to this day.



For Black females, the concept of women involved in agriculture isn't revolutionary. Carlyle's late paternal grandmother, who lived alone, raised some of the finest hogs, a milk cow named Daisy and she raised an abundance of produce in her garden that she shared with other family members.

Operating under the name of Roberson Farms, Carlyle has teamed up with her brother, Douglas Sapp, who operates Boise Land & Cattle Company and together they run a herd of Black Baldie cattle on leased land in Claiborne Parish. There is an NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contract on the property in which pasture management practices will be installed.

When Carlyle is not branding cows, fixing fence, cutting, and hauling hay, or bushhogging, the Grambling State University graduate can be found on her full-time job as a Staff Accountant at a local hospital in Homer, Louisiana. If the aforementioned duties were not enough, Carlyle also is a mother to 3 young adults, a grandmother to one Cam Roberson and one of the caretakers to her about to be (May 12th birthday) 90-year-old father and her 89-year-old mother.



Carlyle, an Annie's Project graduate, an attendee at past Trailblazer RC&D sponsored Outreach Big Events held at Grambling State University, and a regular attendee at the NRCS sponsored Annual Louisiana Women in Ag State Meeting, is a firm believer that women are empowered to play a key role in farm, forestry, and livestock operations across the country. She involves her kids and grandson in her livestock operation. In 2015, two of Carlyle's kids, who were involved in 4H and FFA at their school and had a youth cattle operation, were nominated for the Whitehouse Champion of Change award and they attended an awards ceremony that was held at the White House in Washington D.C.



CIG Proposals

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is seeking proposals through June 21 for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials (On-Farm Trials). On-Farm Trials, part of the agency's Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program, feature collaboration between NRCS and partners to implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact. Incentive payments are provided to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches.

This program harnesses the expertise, resources and capacity of partner organizations nationwide to help NRCS boost natural resource conservation on private lands and support climate smart agriculture.

"USDA is a leader in using the latest science, research and conservation tools to reduce the impacts of climate change," said Chad Kacir, State Conservationist in Louisiana. "We're doing our part in helping America's farmers and ranchers conserve the natural resources we all depend on, like clean air and water, while supporting the health and resiliency of their operations for the future. Conservation Innovation Grants are an important tool in the development of new and innovative technologies and systems to support agriculture and conservation."

A critical element of each On-Farm Trials project is the project evaluation. Partners must propose robust scientific approaches for their projects, resulting in data and analyses of the environmental, financial and, to the extent possible, social impacts of the trials.

NRCS will invest up to \$25 million on On-Farm Trials in 2021. This total includes up to \$10 million for the Soil Health Demonstration Trials (SHD) priority. The Soil Health Demonstration Trial (SHD) component of On-Farm Trials focuses exclusively on implementation of conservation practices and systems that improve soil health.

NRCS is seeking proposals that address at least one of the following four On-Farm Trial priorities:

- Climate-smart agricultural solutions
- Soil health demonstration trial
- Irrigation water management
- Management technologies and strategies

NRCS will accept proposals from the following eligible entities:

- Private entities whose primary business is related to agriculture
- Non-government organizations with experience working with agricultural producers
- Non-federal government agencies

NRCS encourages proposal submissions from historically underserved entities and encourages all applicants to meaningfully include historically underserved producers in their On-Farm Trials proposal submissions. Historically underserved producers include those who identify as one or more of the following: American Indian, Alaskan native, Asian American, Black/ African American, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic/Latino. It also includes producers who are military veterans, low income or have farmed for 10 years or less. Proposals that include the meaningful participation of these producers receive priority consideration through the evaluation criteria.

In the past two years, NRCS has invested \$50 million in 30 On-Farm Trials projects. The On-Farm Trials component is distinct from the national CIG Classic competitive grants funding, which is used to support early pilot projects or demonstrations of promising conservation approaches and technologies. This year, NRCS will invest \$15 million in the national CIG Classic competition, and more details will be announced in coming weeks.

More Information

Visit the [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) website and view the On-Farms Trials funding announcement. For more information on CIG On-Farm Trials, please visit the On-Farm Trials webpage.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

Upcoming Events

May 7, 2021

Wildlife Forum & Field Day

The LSU AgCenter is hosting a wildlife forum and field day on May 7, 2021 at the First Baptist Church Gymnasium located at 404 Church Street in Columbia, Louisiana from 8:00 am - 12:00 pm. For more information, or to register for this event contact the LSU AgCenter at 318-649-2663.

May 14, 2021

Farm Pond Construction and Management Workshop

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a Farm Pond Construction and Management Workshop on May 14, 2021, at Red Oak Lake located at 1495 Potter Road in Haughton, Louisiana from 9:00 am - 2:00 pm. This is a FREE workshop. To register, call or text 318-237-8350 and provide your name, contact information and the name of the workshop.

May 18 - 20, 2021

Restoration on the Half Shell

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana is holding "Restoration on the Half Shell", a three-part virtual mini-conference on May 18 - 20, 2021. This is a FREE event open to anyone. The event will discuss the current state of Louisiana's coast, land loss, plans for restoration and other organizations involved in this work in non-technical language. The event will be held on May 18th from 11:30 am - 1:00 pm, May 19th 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm and on May 20th from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Those interested in participating can register at <https://crcl.regfox.com/restoration-on-the-half-shell-2021>.

June 1, 2021

Rare Louisiana Animals

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a community workshop focused on "Rare Louisiana Animals" from 5:00 pm - 7:30 pm on Tuesday, June 1, 2021, at the Lincoln Parish Library located at 910 North Trenton Street in Ruston, Louisiana. To register, call the Lincoln Parish Library at 318-251-5030. On-site registration will begin 30 minutes prior to the start of the workshop.

June 2 -4, 2021

State of the Coast Conference

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana is hosting the biennial "State of the Coast" (SOC) conference virtually on June 2 - 4, 2021. SOC is the largest statewide conference of its kind, providing an interdisciplinary forum to exchange timely and relevant information on the dynamic conditions of Louisiana's coastal communities, environment and economy. For more information, or to register, visit <https://www.stateofthecoast.org/>.

June 29, 2021

Louisiana Master Farmer Program Phase 1 Training

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting Phase 1 Training for the Louisiana Master Farmer Program on June 29, 2021, at the LSU AgCenter Rice Research State in Rayne, Louisiana, from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. For more information, or to register contact Donna Gentry at 318-613-9278.

June 30, 2021

Rice Research Station Field Day

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station Field Day on June 30, 2021 from 7:00 am - 12:30 pm at the H. Rouse Caffey Rice Research Station located at 1373 Caffey Road in Rayne, Louisiana. For more information, contact Dr. Dustin Harrell or Dr. Kurt Guidry at 337-788-7531.

August 3, 2021

The Value of Your Trees

The Trailblazer RC&D is hosting a community workshop focused on "The Value of Your Trees" from 5:00 pm - 7:30 pm on Tuesday, August 3, 2021, at the Lincoln Parish Library located at 910 North Trenton Street in Ruston, Louisiana. To register, call the Lincoln Parish Library at 318-251-5030. On-site registration will begin 30 minutes prior to the start of the workshop.