FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND
A Story of Upland Pines and Pollinators

Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference

Campti Field of Dreams
No-till Organic Market Garden Program

Coastal Restoration in Southwest Louisiana
The Conservation Update is distributed monthly to highlight important and interesting conservation work across Louisiana.

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School is out and long hot days are here which means one thing: summer is officially here! So much has happened since our last issue of the Conservation Update. As a state, we’ve turned a corner with the Covid pandemic, with cases slowing to a rate where all of our offices are now fully staffed and open for customers to enter our service centers.

As Covid precautions have eased over the last few months, NRCS employees have responded with planning, and participating in, outreach events, trainings, conferences and workshops. Having said that, during the past two years NRCS and SWCD employees have continued to work hard to push through the work challenges we all faced. In fact, recently we highlighted a few NRCS and SWCD employees in a video that was shown at the Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting. Please scan the QR code below and take a few minutes to watch the video, you’ll be glad you did.

Also in this issue of the Conservation Update, we travel to Mansfield to check in with Peter Moncrief and the work he has done on his ancestral home. By planting conservation cover, conducting prescribed burns and thinning he’s managed his forest land to become a destination for wildlife and pollinators.

This issue, we also welcome a couple of guest feature writers. Donna Isaacs is the Executive Director of Campti Field of Dreams, a non-profit organization and valued partner of NRCS. She describes the recent NRCS Conservation Innovation grant she received and how it is helping a whole new generation of producers learn the importance of soil health. The other featured writer is Hanna Gamble, the co-owner and manager of Eightfold Farms in Logansport. Hanna describes her experience as an attendee, presenter and farm tour host for the 2022 Louisiana Women in Agriculture (LWAG) conference that recently took place in Alexandria. Many thanks to all of our partners and friends who helped make this year’s conference an incredible success. With 500 ladies (and a few gentlemen) from across the state attending this year was, by far, the biggest and best conference yet!

Last but not least, we hear from Ron Boustany, Natural Resources Specialist, in the Lafayette field office, who has worked with a team of dedicated engineers, biologists and ecological scientist to plan and complete a major coastal restoration project in southwest Louisiana. The Cameron Creole freshwater diversion project has been in the making for many years, and we are happy to report that construction is complete! Don’t miss the video that accompanies the Q & A on page 10.

As always, we appreciate all of our producers, customers and friends. Please be sure to reach out to your local field office to learn more about how NRCS can assist you!

Yours in Conservation,

Chad Kacir
State Conservationist

Notes from the State Conservationist

The Power of Partnerships

Louisiana Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Louisiana Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) across the state continued conservation work through the challenging times of the past two years.

Scan the QR code to watch a video about NRCS and SWCD’s working together side-by-side with private landowners demonstrating the power of partnerships!
For the Love of the Land
A Story of Upland Pines and Pollinators

What happens when you are so closely tied to the land that where the land begins and where you end is almost unrecognizable? Sometimes family connections are so deeply embedded to the land that there is hardly a difference between the web-like roots of pollinator plants deep in the soil or the heart-felt land stewardship of generations caring for their land.

For Peter Moncrief and his family, the ties that bind he and his three brothers and their families to the rolling hills of upland soil in Mansfield began decades ago. When Peter Moncrief’s grandfather, Joseph Bice, Jr., bought this land his goal was to create habitat where pine trees and low land hardwood trees would both flourish and thrive in the same ecosystem.

Known far and wide as a “Man of the Land” Peter’s grandfather purchased 180 acres of diverse forest stands in southern DeSoto Parish. Peter explains, “My grandfather was a smart man and he loved being in the woods.” Although Peter’s grandfather lost his sight in a forestry accident, he knew his land and surrounding parcels like the back of his hand. The care and stewardship of the land was passed down to Peter and his brothers. In the early 2000s Peter took over as the “boots on the ground” manager and began exploring how to elevate conservation efforts on their 180 acres of land.

That is when the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Mansfield field office stepped into the story. NRCS Natural Resource Specialist Brian Baiamonte recalls how work began on the Moncrief land. “Mr. Peter came to us with a good idea of what he wanted to do, as far as the improvements, a main goal was to enhance wildlife habitat,” said Brian. The great news was the Moncrief’s were already good stewards of their land. Brian continues, “The conservation plan that we developed with Mr. Peter was a continuation of the work he and his family were already doing and a little step forward in their conservation efforts.”

“Conservation cover plantings are extremely important because we have lost so much habitat, which is why we’ve seen a significant decline in pollinators and other wildlife species.”

Those additional conservation steps included the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Through EQIP the Moncrief’s implemented a Forest Management Plan (FMP) that included fire breaks, prescribed burning, forest stand improvement, riparian forest buffers and planting conservation cover. Brian explains the importance of a FMP, “With fire breaks in place it is easier to take the leap into prescribed burning. It just so happens the timber here was newly thinned, which made the prescribed burning a little bit easier.” With land cleared and the goal to improve wildlife, planting conservation cover was an easy next step. “It wasn’t a big stretch. Adding conservation cover with the early successional habitat together creates and promotes the perfect habitat for wild turkeys and other wildlife.”

Did the prescribed burning and conservation cover work? Brian gives a resounding, yes! “It was easy to see from the beginning that Mr. Peter was working hard to implement the conservation plan we created,” smiled Brian. One day as Brian and Peter were walking the land and inspecting the area after a prescribed burn, they ran up on a flock of turkeys. “Turkeys are the litmus test,” said Brian. “When you walk up on a flock of turkeys, you know you are doing something right! Peter whole-heartedly agrees, “We’ve had our first round of prescribed burning this year that got rid of a lot of undergrowth and the fire also adds pot ash that in turn enriches the soil and has drawn more wildlife to the land.”

Planting conservation cover was integral to the success of the Moncrief FMP. Sabrina Claeys, Farm Bill Biologist with Quail Forever, who assisted NRCS staff with this project, explains. “Mr. Moncrief had an area mulched on a pipeline right of way that he planned to convert to native grasses and wildflowers through conservation cover.” She continues, “I recommended a mix that Quail Forever biologists designed; the “Right of Way” seed mix. It consists of 26 native grasses and wildflowers, perfect for attracting native bees and butterflies, as well as quail and other native wildlife species.”

Sabrina goes on to explain, “Conservation cover plantings are extremely important because we have lost so much habitat, which is why we’ve seen a significant decline in pollinators and other wildlife species.” By planting these areas, Mr. Moncrief is providing essential habitat to bring back wildlife and pollinators to the area.
“My family and I have all grown up loving the land. We want to maintain the heritage of being good stewards of the land.”
What are the next steps for the Moncrief family land? With appropriate management, the area planted with conservation cover will have wildflower species blooming throughout the growing season from April through October. Pollinators will collect pollen and food from the flowers, birds may use these areas to nest, and it will be attractive for wildlife like turkey, quail, and deer.

Peter and his family were already putting conservation practices in place prior to their relationship with their local USDA NRCS field office. However, once they began working with NRCS they have not turned back. "My family and I have all grown up loving the land. We want to maintain the heritage of being good stewards of the land." Sabrina is proud of the work that Peter and his family have accomplished through their partnership with NRCS and Quail Forever, "Mr. Moncrief is willing to explore new practices to enhance his property and get his hands dirty while doing it, which makes him a great conservationist."

Mr. Moncrief will host a Quail Forever Pollinator field tour on June 23. See page 12 for more information.

To learn about how the NRCS can help your operation, contact your local USDA Service Center.

**What is Conservation Cover?**
Conservation cover is the practice of establishing and maintaining perennial vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources needing permanent protective cover that will not be used for forage production or to critical area plantings.

**Benefits of Conservation Cover?**
Conservation cover reduces soil erosion, sedimentation, enhances wildlife habitat, and improves water quality. Operation and maintenance of the conservation cover includes mowing to control weeds and maintain vegetative cover.
Louisiana Women in Agriculture

from the perspective of an attendee, speaker and farm tour host.

The Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference (LWAG) is a gathering of agriculture enthusiasts, producers, and consumers from around the state of Louisiana and beyond. As an attendee, speaker, and farm tour host I had the pleasure of seeing all sides of this inspiring meeting.

No detail was overlooked when the LWAG board members curated the agenda for this dynamic event. There were stunning floral decorations offset by hay bales and corn stalk shaped balloon arrangements that welcomed attendees to the Randolph Riverfront Center in Alexandria. After a seamless check in and quick review of a fantastic goody bag, I entered the Expo area where I was greeted by goats, chickens, quail, and Highland cows on our way to a delicious and locally sourced breakfast. The conference was officially underway!

The saying “there is strength in numbers” is true; and I could feel the collective power of so many strong agricultural women coming together to learn and grow. It felt so empowering to be surrounded by so many other women who are interested or involved in Louisiana agriculture!

I was able to attend a portion of the first round of speakers before I needed to prep for my break-out session on equestrian business. My presentation was successful, and the attendees enjoyed the hands-on horse evaluation. I especially enjoyed answering questions and connecting with the other attendees after my session. It was so encouraging to see women in all stages of life coming together to learn about the different aspects of agriculture and share their farming knowledge with each other! Afternoon speakers on topics including forestry and food labels concluded the educational offerings. An evening reception and dinner party at the Hotel Bentley was a fantastic finish to a great day.

The following morning, I was up bright and early to make it to my tree farm, St. Lucia Plantation, before the tour attendees arrived around 10am. A hayride through the trees with stops at clear cut sites, recently thinned stands, and our sawmill operation were on the tour agenda. We finished the day with a fish fry for lunch and great fellowship back at the farmhouse. A wonderful time was had by all, and I felt so fortunate to be able to participate in LWAG as an attendee, speaker and farm tour host.

LWAG is a representation and celebration of the female faces in farming, and an incredible asset to our state. Be sure to save the dates for LWAG 2023, so you can join in the fun too! The future of farming is female!

LWAG is made possible through an outreach agreement with USDA/NRCS. The purpose of LWAG is to provide a place for women involved in all aspects of agriculture to connect, learn and share information and ideas. To learn more about LWAG visit their Facebook at www.facebook.com/louisianawomeninag/.
Campti Field of Dreams was one of nineteen awardees of a Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation (NRCS) Innovation grant. The three-year grant program began on March 1, 2022. It will support 21 historically underserved producers as they implement No-Till Organic Market Garden (No-Till OMG) production to restore soil health and help re-build local food systems.

Tillage, the turning over of soil, is considered the first step in food production. However, tillage destroys soil health leading to a dependency on synthetic chemical fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and pesticides. This leads to a loss of biodiversity, decreasing soil resilience and destruction of naturally functioning ecosystems. The decline in soil health makes farming increasingly vulnerable to climate change. This vulnerability makes crop and ecosystem loss a true threat and reduces the ability of future generations to feed themselves.

While regenerative agriculture practices have been successful in rebuilding soil health, they continue to use synthetic inputs which reduces nutrient density and has a negative impact on human health. Organic production does not allow synthetic inputs but is heavily dependent on tillage for weed control. No-Till OMG combines organic production with regenerative agriculture practices to improve soil health, human health, and the health and well-being of the community.

No-Till OMG will combine virtual training, a market garden fertility toolkit, and financial incentives, to shift the mindset of participants, creating organic agricultural producers that do not till. Using a combination of proven soil conservation practices and natural amendments such as: deep mulch, biochar, compost, vermicompost, compost tea, micro-irrigation, along with tarping, and cover crops, participants will learn to grow food organically, without tillage. This will minimize dependence on external inputs, improve soil health, raise crop yields, increase farm profitability, and enhance the local food system.

Program applicants had to meet at least one of the requirements to be considered historically underserved: Beginning Farmer or Rancher (Less than 10 consecutive years), Socially-Disadvantaged, Limited-Resourced, or be a Veteran. Campti Field of Dreams is proud to announce the following 20 participants and 1 alternate who rose to the challenge of No-Till Organic Market Garden Production. This multi-generational group from diverse backgrounds, represent 13 parishes throughout Louisiana from Caddo in the Northwest to Tangipahoa in the Southeast. They come from urban, suburban and rural communities. Each participant is dedicating a quarter acre to this research.

Participants were selected on March 12 with their first class on March 15. The classes are instructed by Daniel Mays, farmer and author of The No-Till Organic Vegetable Farm. Over the last several weeks, we have delivered the market garden fertility toolkits to participants. James Maples, a veteran, reminded us that God always makes a way, while we visited his aptly named Make a WAY Farm. Sierra Torres and Becks Hilliard, beginning farmers and co-owners of Cicada Calling Farm posted on social media that it “felt like Christmas” when they received the toolkit.

We are thankful for the assistance of NRCS and the CIG grant. It has afforded us the opportunity to reach out to a diverse set of producers across the state. Participants are dedicating a quarter-acre to No-Till OMG production, tracking volunteer hours, and extending both the reach and impact of this grant in rural and urban communities, many of which are food desserts!”

Follow the participants on their journey by visiting www.CamptiFieldofDreams.org or Campti Field of Dreams, Inc. on Facebook.
### USDA NRCS CIG No-Till OMG Nonprofit Partners & Historically Underserved Farmers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Role</th>
<th>Parish/Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Maples</td>
<td>Veteran Farmer</td>
<td>Ida, Caddo Parish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cenerica Smith</td>
<td>Louisiana Urban Gardening Initiative</td>
<td>Shreveport, Caddo Parish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anthony Hoff</td>
<td>Beginning Farmer</td>
<td>Boyce, Rapides Parish</td>
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<td>Doris Sims &amp; Jessie Mae Mayfield</td>
<td>Limited Resource Farmer</td>
<td>Ruston, Lincoln Parish</td>
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<td>Gloria Lefall &amp; Maxine Rideau</td>
<td>Rabboni Kingdom Church Intl.</td>
<td>Shreveport, Caddo Parish</td>
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<td>Waylon Breaux</td>
<td>Beginning Farmer</td>
<td>Eros, Jackson Parish</td>
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<td>Marianna Langston</td>
<td>Beginning Farmer</td>
<td>Marion, Union Parish</td>
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<td>Samantha Starkey &amp; Sammy Woods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Konda Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maidie McCray</td>
<td>Foster Grandparents Program</td>
<td>Mansfield, DeSoto Parish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Bourgeois</td>
<td>Lincoln Preparatory School</td>
<td>Grambling, Lincoln Parish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sierra Torres &amp; Becks Hilliard</td>
<td>Beginning Farmer</td>
<td>Independence, Tangipahoa Parish</td>
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<td>Tanji Jefferson, Alternate</td>
<td>Limited Resource Farmer</td>
<td>Shreveport, Caddo Parish</td>
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**No-Till, Organic Market Gardens: Restoring Soil Health & Rebuilding Local Food Systems**

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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Image: [Field of Dreams](#)

Image: [The Ross Lynn Charitable Foundation](#)
Q: Give us an historical perspective of why projects like Cameron Creole are important?

A: The idea of this project stems from the idea of reconnecting the historic hydrology to the wetlands. Over decades of activities along the coast the natural hydrology of the wetlands has been altered for navigation and flood control. The best example is the leveeing off of the Mississippi River to prevent flooding of coastal communities. At this location, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway bisects the upper basin from the lower marshes and prevents natural flows of freshwater to the marshes. Because of this isolation, the marshes have become increasingly vulnerable to saltwater intrusion and inundation. The project is a simple idea of reconnecting the marsh complex to a freshwater source to allow for sediments and nutrients to nourish the marsh and allow the marsh to naturally restore itself and build resilience to the subsidence and sea level rise.

Q: Cameron Creole Fresh Water Diversion—how did this project get started?

A: We need to make these projects to get the area back on a good sustainable tract. The first part of the process was to build the Cameron Creole protection levee to keep marshes from eroding into Calcasieu Lake. This project also included several (five) structures along the levee to allow ingress/egress of fisheries between the lake and the marsh. This area was doing quite well until Hurricane Rita (2015) hit and there was a massive loss of marsh due to salinity intrusion and marsh inundation. Shortly thereafter, NRCS decided to look at the area and see if there were additional actions that could be taken. We determined that there was a great opportunity to divert water from the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and run it through the Cameron Creole marshes rather than just bypass the marsh and flow straight out to Calcasieu Lake locks. We also did some research to determine the number of additional sediments and nutrients we could bring into Cameron Creole marshes and determined through some modeling efforts what those benefits would be. We determined the diversion would greatly benefit the marsh by providing sediments, nutrients and also lowering salinity levels with the freshwater input. The Cameron Creole Freshwater Introduction project was designed and constructed this past year which included the freshwater introduction structure along with bank line rock protection and over 150,000 linear feet of terraces. This project compliments the previous actions in the Cameron Creole marshes and additional action is now being considered, including marsh creations and improved drainage.
Q: Coastal restoration projects are complex in planning and construction, give us an idea of the timeline from concept to completion?

A: The concept was introduced in 2009 (PPL18) and final construction was in 2021 so it took quite a bit of time from conception to construction. The project initially required modeling to determine if there would be any adverse effects mainly in bringing more water into the Cameron Creole marsh and potential for flooding some of the communities to the south. This took about three years to work out to everyone’s satisfaction. The project proceeded to engineering and design. The project design was completed in 2015 and did not initially get funded. The project eventually received funding for construction in 2017 and construction was completed in September 2021. From concept to shovel ready took about seven years (2009–2015) then had to compete for funding before construction began in 2019.

Q: Now that the project is complete is it what you thought it would be? Is it a success?

A: So far everything has been great. The construction was nearly flawless and the finished product is performing as expected. The structure construction is excellent, the terraces are doing very well despite getting hit by a major hurricane and the shoreline protection is showing good foundation. It is too early to tell the true effects of the freshwater introduction at this time, but the water flow is what we expected and we have great expectations that this project will greatly enhance the 20,000 acres of anticipated created marsh.

Q: Why are coastal projects like these important not only to those living on the coast but everyone in Louisiana and the nation?

A: The Louisiana coast is responsible for an enormous amount of the commercial catch supplying the nation with seafood; second only to Alaska in total yields. This is an incredibly productive system that serves the entire nation. It also provides the primary location for the nation’s oil and gas production and infrastructure. Because of these reasons, in 1990 Congress passed the Coastal Wetland Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) that is designed to identify, prepare, and fund construction of coastal wetlands restoration projects.

Projects like Cameron Creole freshwater diversion are an integral part of this effort and this project in particular has important value because of the size of the area it will effect. The Cameron Creole project is expected to benefit over 20,000 acres of very productive marsh that will positively impact crab, shrimp, alligator, fur bearers and oysters. The project also encompasses a national wildlife refuge that provides important habitat for waterfowl and wildlife.

Q: If someone is interested in learning more, volunteering or contributing how would that do that?

A: Visit the CWPPRA website and LAcoast.gov for a wealth of information. There are also numerous advocacy groups involved in this collective effort to restore Louisiana’s coast including Coalition to Restore Louisiana, Lake Pontchartrain Conservancy, Rainey Alliance, etc. The State of Louisiana is very actively involved in coastal restoration and information can be found on their website at coastal.la.gov.
Around the State

QUAIL FOREVER POLLINATOR FIELD TOUR

National Pollinator Week is June 20th - 26th! Come celebrate with us by learning about the benefits of native pollinators and touring a wildlife focused property in DeSoto Parish.

Field Tour Information

When: June 23rd from 9:30am - 12pm
Where: 2493 Hwy 346, Pelican, LA 71063
*Look for the green fence with red pipe gate*

Lunch will be provided at the end of the program!
Please bring your own lawn chair for opening remarks and a short presentation!

Please RSVP by calling or texting
Sabrina Claeys @ 563-221-1009

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