



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

February 2016

No Change Needed

... in Beauregard Parish

Story from the Field
A Legacy to my Father
and Grandmother

A cooperative partnership with local
Soil and Water Conservation Districts and
Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D)

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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

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On the Cover



David Daigle is maintaining a natural longleaf pine savanna on his farm in Beauregard Parish. To find out more about his operation, see pages 4 and 5.

New Feature

New Partnership with TWILA

NRCS has a brand new partnership with "This Week in Louisiana Agriculture" (TWILA) to bring you even more of the conservation story featured in each month's issue of the Louisiana Conservation Update. Check your local listings for program times or visit the TWILA website at http://www.twilatv.org/.



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Notes from the State Conservationist

I'm sure you have noticed, like I have, that the days are getting longer and temperatures are warming up, which means springtime is just around the corner. Spring in Louisiana cannot be beat! If you take a walk anywhere in our great state

in the next few weeks you will witness azaleas blooming, wisteria dripping from tree limbs and the sweet smell of gardenias floating in the air. And last but not least, this time of year means crawfish season and what's not to like about that?

Speaking of crawfish, right now our rice producers, who raise crawfish, are entering their busiest time of the year. It is not a surprise that Louisiana provides 70-90% of the crawfish consumed in the United States. Approximately 150 million pounds are harvested each year and 7,000 people depend directly or indirectly on the \$300 million crawfish industry. So, let's all do our part and eat some Louisiana crawfish this season.

Rice producers, there is still time to apply for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) Rice Stewardship Partnership Project sponsored by USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited, the deadline is March 2nd. The main goal for this project is to improve irrigation and water use efficiency while reducing groundwater demand from aquifers in rice production areas to insure sustainability of the water source for future rice production.

Lastly, in this issue of Conservation Update we meet the owner of Daigle Farms, Mr. David Daigle, a cattleman and forest land owner who lives in Vernon parish and serves as chairman of the Calcasieu Soil and Water Conservation District. David is a conservationist in the truest sense of the word. He is known for his love of the land and his work in re-establishing the Longleaf Pine Savanna in Southwest Louisiana. David is truly making a difference on his land and we are happy to partner with him and help meet his conservation goals.

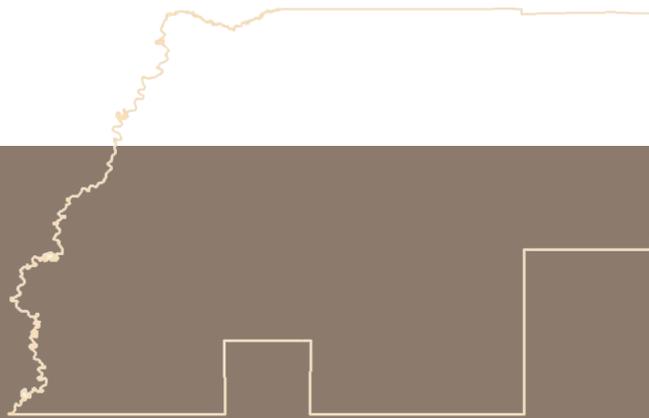
If you are interested in learning how to improve the quality of your soil, water or other resources on your land please contact your local NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District office. We have a team of professionals who can help build a conservation plan to meet all of your conservation goals.

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist



Beauregard Parish Ag Facts

From www.agcensus.usda.gov



There are 860 farms in Beauregard Parish
146,203 acres of land is in farms
29.2% is cropland and 31.5% is forest land
Forestry is the #1 commodity of the parish



No Chan

David Daigle is a landowner, farmer, and cattleman, as well as, a husband, father and friend. While all of those titles are true and fit him perfectly, another way to describe David is a conservationist. To his fellow landowners and farmers, he is a man unabashedly committed to the stewardship of his land.

Nestled in Beauregard Parish is Daigle Farm, home to Braford cattle and beautiful tracts of Longleaf Pine, as far as the eye can see. You need only talk with David for a moment to realize his deep love of the land and how that love drives all the decisions he makes in managing his farm. With a sparkle in his eyes and kindness in his smile, Daigle, will gladly discuss with anyone why he believes that, **No Change is Needed**, when it comes to managing his land.



Photo not taken on Daigle land.

“Often I’ve thought about ... why do we have to work so hard to maintain a system that is natural? And the truth is, the native people who lived here long ago, managed the land very well with fire and the grazing of animals that kept the environment in sync,” explained David.

Journal entries of early explorers when they arrived in the South, commented on the vast, open, park-like savanna of the longleaf forest. They described the long-needled pine trees over a diverse understory of grasses and other plants. Along with Native Americans setting routine fires, Mother Nature would put things back in balance with lightning strikes that caused frequent fires. Over thousands of years the longleaf savanna habitat was created and the result was a unique home for a diverse community of plants and animals that survive and thrive on fire.



Change Needed... in Beauregard Parish

When Daigle talks about **“No Change Needed”** he describes two key concepts; the vital role of fire on the landscape and the grazing of large, undulating animals working in harmony, and creating an ecological balance on the land.

“We know that fire and the proper amount of grazing, that mimics bison, (like that of the early settlers in this area) we know those things work to maintain the land,” said Daigle. “We don’t drain these sites, we don’t fertilize them – we don’t make them wetter or dryer, we maintain them as they are.”

Another aspect of **“No Change Needed”** is the idea that this is a natural system. And embracing the natural rhythms of this land will produce a wealth of healthy, robust outputs like cattle, timber, consumptive wildlife, non-consumptive wildlife and biodiversity.

Daigle goes on to explain, “We take into account the ecosystem function processes, what I mean by that is the energy flow of the land. How it all fits together: the mineral cycling, water cycling and community dynamics or biodiversity.” Daigle continues, “If we don’t take a product off of this land every year or in regular increments – through compatibly harvesting timber or managing cattle for crop, then we have this energy that flows through this system that we don’t capture for mankind’s benefit.”

While managing his six other sites in Allen, Beauregard and Jeff Davis Parishes, Daigle has learned the value of the Longleaf habitat

is far-reaching, particularly in managing his land for endangered species and plants.

Historically, the Longleaf Pine Savanna was home to the now endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker and Louisiana Pine Snake, as well as, the endangered plant, the American Chaffseed, to name a few.

“Endangered plants are an indicator of an ecosystem that is functioning correctly,” explained Daigle. “It is important to manage these sites for the endangered species and plants, because we feel like the land is far more productive, even from a business standpoint, when the ecosystem functions are flowing through it.” Daigle points out this relationship with the land is a win/win situation.

Getting to this point did not happen overnight and the relationship that Daigle has developed with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been long-standing. Over the years David has worked with several District Conservationists (DC) and in 2009 when Corby Moore arrived as the DC in the Beauregard office, the relationship only grew stronger.

“My partnership with NRCS is fundamental to what we do. The technical support and at times the financial support through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are vital to us carrying out the practices we have to do to maintain this system correctly,” said Daigle.

“The other wonderful thing about working with NRCS is that you grasp this concept that, what we are doing to manage this landscape is for the benefit of society as a whole,” Daigle explained.

The conservation practices put into place on the Daigle Farm impact water, soil and air quality. Not only for his land but all the land surrounding his property.

Beauregard and Vernon Parishes DC, Corby Moore, agrees and adds, “Mr. Daigle is also key in assisting what we are trying to accomplish through the Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) and that is to establish these corridors and link farms up to make contiguous Longleaf habitat.”

Developing a strong conservation plan is key in conservation land management and it is a cornerstone of what NRCS provides to landowners. Moore explains, “We are constantly tweaking David’s conservation plan, and it is constantly changing, because we are always learning new things and then we develop a way to incorporate those ideas into the plan.”

“Local people see what David is doing and we want other producers to mimic this type of land management. That is what NRCS is here to do, work with ranchers, farmers and forest land owners to develop a plan that will help them meet their production needs and at the same time, establish strong conservation practices.”



Story from the Field

A Legacy to my Father and Grandmother

Submitted by: Cindy Beard, Area Soil Conservation Technician, Minden FO

Patricia McMurray grew up in the small rural community of Thomasville. As a child she, her father, grandmother and brother would plant purple hull peas, corn, green beans, potatoes, tomatoes, watermelons and sugar cane. They raised hogs, chickens, ducks and cows, so they always had fresh meat and vegetables which she credits to her good health and her mother's good health at over 100 years old.

Her father Reuben James McMurray was an elementary principal in Webster Parish. He used gardening and farming as a stress reliever to help cope with being in education. He liked things to be clean, free from trash and well taken care of. This is home to her and she was ready to make improvements to follow her father and grandmothers legacy.

Ms. McMurray came into the office in June of 2014. She said she had been passing by

the office for years and felt like she needed to stop and see how NRCS could help her.



Once she requested assistance, a field visit was made and a conservation plan was developed. Soon after, she applied for financial assistance and began implementing conservation practices.



Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, she was able to construct a pond, install livestock pipeline, watering facilities and rock heavy use area pads. Because she has good quality water

in each of her fields now, she is able to graze her cattle on a rotational basis.

By rotating her cattle between pastures, there will be an increase in available forages, protection from soil erosion and improvement of soil health, as well as overall livestock health. The rock heavy use protection areas will protect areas from soil erosion and help maintain the health of her herd.

Ms. McMurray's father always felt that you should leave a place better than you found it and that's what she is trying to do. She hopes the legacy of her father, grandmother and her work on the family farm will be appreciated. Much sacrifice has been made by her and family before her and she hopes it will continue for future generations.



StrikeForce Initiative



Louisiana Update

for Rural Growth and Opportunity

An NRCS StrikeForce Record

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

Since 2014, NRCS in Louisiana has allocated funding to various community and grassroots organizations for the purpose of helping Louisiana NRCS with its StrikeForce efforts for Rural Growth and Opportunities.

One of the deliverables in the agreement is for the organization to arrange the meetings and solicit for attendance at the meetings.

On February 16, 2016, the Campti Field of Dreams conducted a USDA StrikeForce Meeting at the DeSoto Parish Council of Aging Office in Mansfield, Louisiana. This meeting set an attendance record with 70 people present to learn about programs and services offered by USDA.

Meeting attendees had the opportunity to hear presenters from the Campti Field of Dreams, Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, Louisiana Small Business Development, Southern University Ag Center and of course NRCS. This meeting yielded 14 requests for assistance, 12 of which were from first time USDA participants.

Other StrikeForce Related Activities

On February 18 – 20, 2016, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator, Dexter Sapp, attended the Minority Landowner 10th Anniversary Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

The magazine's editor, Victor Harris stated that he would like to work with the Louisiana StrikeForce Team in establishing a Farm Turnaround Team like the one established in North Carolina in 2012.

The Farm Turnaround Team would meet at the kitchen table with family farm enterprises to help identify and correct deficiencies and inefficiencies in their land management operation, and provide short term and long term strategies for turning things around.

Around the State

February 4, 2016 Feral Hog Workshop

The Dugdemona SWCD held a feral hog workshop on February 4, 2016, at the Winn Parish Forestry Building. Participants learned about control and management of feral hog populations and the practices accompanying the growing feral hog problem. Pre-baiting, trapping techniques, diseases and the NRCS Feral Swine Pilot Program were discussed by personnel from the USDA Wildlife Services, NRCS and LDWF.



February 5, 2016 Cover Crop on Sugar Cane Field Day

The Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District has partnered with local producer, Joe Denais, for a demonstration cover crop on a sugar cane plot which was funded through the Boston Canal 319 project. Two separate field days were held in February, one for sugar cane producers and one for NRCS personnel.



Some of the topics covered during the field days were:

- How and when cover crops fit into sugar cane systems

- Discussion of cover crop blends used in the demonstration site
- Comparison of sugarcane growth to growth with cover crops on the demo site
- Suggestions of other conservation measures that could potentially be used for sugar cane.

February 6, 2016 Alexandria Children's Mardi Gras Parade

On Saturday, February 6, 2016, NRCS participated in the Alexandria Children's Mardi Gras parade. Staff and family members rode the float, threw USDA beads and cups as a way of promoting USDA and NRCS to the local community. The Alexandria/Pineville Convention and Visitor's Bureau estimate between 18,000 and 20,000 people attended the parade.



February 10, 2016 Project WET and Wonders of Wetlands Workshop

Acadiana area educators recently attended a Project WET (Water Educations for Teachers) and Wonders of Wetlands workshop at Longfellow-evangeline State Historic Site in St. Martinville, Louisiana, on Wednesday, February 10, 2016. Workshop attendees were instructed on wetlands ecology, water distribution, the water cycle, watershed dynamics and waters' chemical and physical properties. Upon completion of the six hour workshop, participants received copies of the curriculum guides and 6 hours of CLU certification.

This workshop was sponsored by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office of Soil and Water Conservation, the St. Martin SWCD and the USDA NRCS.

February 16, 2016 Pasture Workshop

NRCS and the Saline SWCD held a pasture workshop in Ringgold, Louisiana on February 16, 2016. There were 16 people in attendance from Bienville Parish. Attendees learned about pasture management, weed identification, and how to read a herbicide label.

February 16 - 17, 2016 Secretary Vilsack Visits Louisiana

Secretary Vilsack visited Louisiana on February 16 - 17, 2016. While in the New Orleans area, Vilsack visited a potential RESTORE Act project in Jefferson Parish.



Vilsack will be back in Louisiana during the Commodity Classic in March.

February 17, 2016 St. Mary Parish Locally Led Meeting

The Franklin Field Office held a locally led meeting at the St. Mary Parish Courthouse on February 17, 2016. The group discussed NRCS programs, alternate ways for the district to make money, the feral hog processing plant, giant salvinia and using the salvinia beetle to control and the invasive apple snail.

Programs Reminders

Deadline for 2nd application period for rice stewardship partnership project sponsored by USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is announcing a second application period to accept applications for financial assistance for the Rice Stewardship Partnership Project. **Applications must be received by Wednesday, March 2nd to be considered for 2016 funding.**

Contact your local NRCS office today for more information!

Conservation Reflections



Cutting sugar cane with a Thornton Harvester in 1947. Photo taken near Jeanerette in Iberia Parish.

Visit our web site at:
www.la.nrcs.usda.gov

For a current list of our offices visit
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/la/contact/local/>

Upcoming Events

2016 High Tunnel Production Workshop March 1, 2016

NRCS in partnership with the LSU AgCenter will be hosting FREE high tunnel workshop in Jennings, Louisiana on March 1, 2016, from 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm at:

LSU AgCenter Office Meeting Room
1006 South Lake Arthur Avenue
Jennings, Louisiana 70546

Please register in advance for this free workshop at <http://lahightunnelworkshop.eventbrite.com>

For more information contact Ann Savage, asavage@agcenter.lsu.edu or by phone at 225-578-1037 or Carl Motsenbocker, cmotsenbocker@agcenter.lsu.edu or by phone at 225-578-1036

Commodity Classic March 3 - 5, 2016

NRCS will be exhibiting at this year's Commodity Classic being held in New Orleans, Louisiana, on March 3 - 5, 2016. For more information about this

convention and trade show visit <http://www.commodityclassic.com>.

Prescribed Burning Workshop March 4, 2016

Prescribed Burning on Private Lands: A Workshop for Southeast Louisiana Woodland Owners will be held on Friday, March 4, 2016, at the Sandy Hollow Headquarters Shop in Kentwood, Louisiana. There is a \$10.00 fee to attend. Please Contact Keri Landry at 225-765-2809 or by e-mail at klandry@wlf.la.gov for more information or to register to attend.

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