We’re Nuts About Pecans!
in Natchitoches Parish

Tribute to Conservationist Steve Cruse

Louisiana Named StrikeForce State

Louisiana Pine Snake Cooperative Conservation Agreement Partnership

A cooperative partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D)
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Shelled pecans, whole pecans, pecan pieces, pecan candy, pecan coffee, pecan pralines, pecan cookbooks, pecan crackers, pecan oil—you can find it all at Natchitoches Pecans. To find out more about Julie and Mark Swanson’s pecan orchard, see pages 4 and 5.

Louisiana Ag Facts

2012 Pecan Production in Louisiana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pecans</th>
<th>Number of Producers</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Yield per Acre</th>
<th>Total Production</th>
<th>Gross Farm Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>8,730</td>
<td>580.79</td>
<td>5,070,291 pounds</td>
<td>$8,873,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>10,238</td>
<td>15,198</td>
<td>499.43</td>
<td>7,590,110 pounds</td>
<td>$5,692,583</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

On January 12, we lost a member of our NRCS family—Steve Cruse. Steve was a dedicated conservationist and family man. Those of you who knew Steve will remember him as a brilliant, honest, hard-working, straight talking, down-to-earth cowboy, who was loyal to his friends and loved his family above all else. He often shared stories of his girls, his animals, and his farm, and his stories were always peppered with “Cruse-isms” that would make you laugh—and make you think.

Steve’s career with the Natural Resources Conservation Service spanned 33 years. He began his career as a Soil Conservationist then served as District Conservationist, Wetlands Reserve Program Team Lead, Area Conservationist, and Assistant State Conservationist for Programs. Under his leadership, hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands were restored and thousands of conservation practices were implemented. His boots have left an indelible footprint across the landscape of Louisiana.

Everyone had a unique and different experience with Steve—stories to tell and challenges conquered. I observed over the years that within the first thirty minutes of meeting a person, Steve found a way to connect and relate to them on a personal level—an admirable quality that was just plain Steve through and through. His guiding hand left a legacy of young conservationists—or “young bears” as Steve called them—trained and ready to deliver conservation to producers in Louisiana. His conservation ethic and positive influence will be felt throughout the conservation community for many, many years.

He truly lived a life making a positive difference on the land and within our larger conservation family. To put it in Steve’s words (although, he would be too humble to say this about himself)—his accomplishments were as diverse as a “bucket full of spotted puppies” (he did it all)—he was “finer than a frog hair split four ways” (there is no finer man)—and he will be missed more than I can say.

Kevin Norton
State Conservationist
Louisiana
We’re Nuts . . . About Pecans!

Shelled pecans, whole pecans, pecan pieces, pecan candy, pecan coffee, pecan pralines, pecan cookbooks, pecan crackers, pecan oil—you can find it all at Natchitoches Pecans!

“We love working for ourselves,” said Julie Swanson. “We call most of the shots, it keeps you grounded, and—like the sign says out front... we’re nuts... about pecans!”

Julie and Mark Swanson (and family) own 368 acres of Little Eva Plantation in Natchitoches Parish and lease 100 more. On these acres, they grow some of the best pecans you will ever find—and a herd of 200 cows.

While Julie comes from a farming family, Mark had never farmed until 1986. They like to say, they learned a lot by trial and error. Julie’s pre-vet degree and Mark’s degree in agronomy from Louisiana Tech helped a lot, but both agree they really learned how to be successful on a nut farm from their mistakes. Both say “hard work and staying the course” is secret to their success.

“It is important to prepare for growth—(with a good product) it can get away from you in a hurry,” said Julie. “Our gift shop adds value to our product, and our mail order business grows each year. We evaluate our progress each year to examine what worked and what did not—and as a result, this year we added a social media push... Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter.”

For more information on Natchitoches Pecans, go to: http://www.natchitochespecans.com

“Conservation is making the most of what you’ve got.”

Mark Swanson
“We grew our business in steps, and we use everything we have,” said Mark. “Last year, we even sold pecan shell residue for mulch.”

Ultimately, the success of their nut farm depends on their crop, and the Swansons recognize the importance of caring for the land to ensure a good crop. They keep a healthy cover crop of Bermuda under their trees and rye grass volunteers in winter months. They fertilize their trees in January with chicken litter, and cattle graze under the pecan trees after harvest from January/February until September. They calve two times a year, with the largest calving in the spring. The calves are sold in the fall before the cows are moved from the trees.

Their cattle operation first brought the Swansons to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Through NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Swansons installed water troughs and heavy use area protection pads, fenced out sloughs, and ran water to pastures.

“Conservation is making the most of what you’ve got,” said Mark Swanson. “We do our best to take care of the land, our trees, and our cattle—and we leave the rest to the man above.”

For more information about Louisiana pecans, go to the Louisiana Pecan Growers Association webpage: http://www.lapga.com

Julie and Mark Swanson
Conservationists
Jan 17
Louisiana Named StrikeForce State—44 Parishes Targeted for Enhanced Outreach by USDA
In 2010, USDA launched a pilot project—USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity—in Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi to help increase economic opportunities in poverty-stricken rural areas. Since 2010, StrikeForce efforts expanded into persistent poverty counties in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. On January 17, 2014, forty-four parishes in Louisiana were added to USDA StrikeForce efforts, along with persistent poverty counties in Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Louisiana’s designated StrikeForce parishes are: Acadia, Allen, Avoyelles, Bienville, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Claiborne, Concordia, DeSoto, East Baton Rouge, East Carroll, East Feliciana, Evangeline, Franklin, Grant, Iberia, Iberville, Jackson, Jefferson Davis, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Orleans, Ouachita, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, Red River, Richland, St. Bernard, St. Helena, St. James, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Tangipahoa, Tensas, Union, Washington, Webster, West Carroll, West Feliciana, and Winn. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development will work with ag producers, communities, and partners in these parishes to identify needs, collaborate on solutions, and implement programs to make a positive economic difference.

Partner Spotlight
Louisiana Pine Snake Cooperative Conservation Agreement Partners
The Louisiana pine snake (Pituophis ruthveni) is recognized as one of the rarest snakes in North America. It is a candidate species for federal listing as threatened or endangered. In 2003, a Cooperative Conservation Agreement was signed as a cooperative effort among private, state, and federal agencies in order to collectively implement proactive conservation measures and habitat management guidelines throughout a significant portion of the snake’s known range. In 2013, this agreement was amended based on current habitat threats, implemented management action, and significant new information derived from research, threats assessments, and habitat modeling.

Cooperators in the Cooperative Conservation Agreement are:
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- USDA Forest Service
- Angelina and Sabine National Forests, the Southern Research Station in Texas, and Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Louisiana
- U.S. Department of Defense
- Fort Polk and the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Association of Zoos and Aquariums

State and federal partners are working with private landowners on private lands and on public lands in targeted areas to implement conservation practices to conserve the snake and its habitat. Non-governmental partners are working to sustain captive populations of Louisiana pine snakes as population colonies for breeding.

To learn more about USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity, go to: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE_FORCE

To learn more about the Louisiana pine snake and the Cooperative Conservation Agreement, go to: http://www.fws.gov/southeast/news/2013/058.html
Jan 8-10
Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention - Lafayette, Louisiana

The Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts hosted their 68th annual convention in Lafayette, Louisiana, on January 8-10, 2014. Over 200 people attended from conservation districts across Louisiana. Sessions focused on water challenges for agriculture in Louisiana, and a wide variety of presenters offered thought-provoking information on the most pressing water issues. Presenters included Mark Davis, Director of Tulane University Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy; Dr. Mike Strain, DVM, Commission of Agriculture and Forestry; Jason Weller, Chief, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Edward Swaim, Resources Division Manager, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission; Dr. Bill Branch, Agriculture Engineer Consultant and Extension Volunteer; Matthew Reonas, Ph.D., Outreach Education and Research, Office of Conservation, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources; James Devitt, Attorney, Deputy General Counsel, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, Michele Laur, USDA NRCS Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem Restoration Team; Jerome Zeringue, Executive Director, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana; Richard Raynie, Senior Scientist, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana; and Bryan P. Piazza, Ph.D., Director of Freshwater and Marine Science, The Nature Conservancy, Louisiana Office.

A special luncheon was hosted during the convention on Thursday, January 9, recognizing the 29 farmers who were certified as Master Farmers in 2013.