



# NRCS Alabama Current Developments

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## From the State Conservationist - Dr. William Puckett



I hope your New Year is off to a good start! There are many exciting activities and opportunities as we enter calendar year 2014; new Farm Bill, budget, hiring new staff, soil health, and the StrikeForce Initiative, to name a few. Hopefully we will be rolling out information on the Farm Bill soon. I know you and your customers are anxious to get started with the new streamlined programs. We do have a budget and will begin to fill some vacancies soon. I am asking Assistant State Conservationist (FOs) to have meetings on cover crops to get ideas from the field staff on how more farmers can realize the benefits of growing cover.

I just finished listening to our Black History Month speaker, Mr. Bobby Hayden. What an inspiring individual and what a path he has traveled. It reminded me of the many paths we all travel each day and how we strive to be better human beings with joy and passion for our life, family, jobs, etc. The theme of our celebration was "Civil Rights in America: Remember! Celebrate! Act!" I hope we all remember the sacrifices, celebrate the victories, and act like we want to be treated. As Mr. Hayden stated, "We are all Americans and it does not matter the color of our skin."

I was in California a few weeks ago at the National Association of Conservation Districts' meeting where Chief Weller outlined his priorities for the next three fiscal years. The priorities are: (1) Implement the new Farm Bill, (2) Get a clean opinion on the audit, (3) Implement the Conservation Delivery Streamline Initiative, (4) Implement the Foundational Maintenance and Improvements, (5) Improve the State Resource Allocation process, and (6) Implement Administrative Transformation. The Chief stated that these six items would be the "foundation for the future" for NRCS. We will provide more information on these topics as it becomes available.

Congratulations to the Madison County Earth Team for receiving the 2014 National NACD/NRCS Earth Team Award. Volunteers are important to our mission and I appreciate everyone's efforts in recruiting and supporting local volunteers in your office.

Regardless of our challenges in 2014, we will continue to do what we do best, serving our customers, improving our communities, and ensuring the viability and stability of our natural resources through good conservation practices and sound technical advice. What you do matters. Remember that voluntary, locally-led conservation is the formula to success.

## Black History Month

A program, organized by Black Special Emphasis Program Manager Eddie Davis, was held at the NRCS State Office on February 26, 2014. Speaker, Mr. Bobby Haden, held the attention of the audience as he talked about his early days in the military. His self-respect and high respect for others helped secure him a position as one of seven black soldiers to integrate the White House Honor Guard. He displayed magazine and newspaper articles showing him in the White House, at President Kennedy's funeral service and standing first duty guard at the President's grave, and other events.

The meeting concluded with the Alabama Chapter of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees sponsoring a lunch of fried chicken, ribs, and all of the fixin's. It was a great presentation, a great meal, and great networking for all.



## Earth Team Volunteer Awards

### National Award Winners

Alabama Shines Again! The Madison County SWCD/NRCS won the 2014 National NACD/NRCS Earth Team Award. The award was formally presented at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Meeting in February 2014 in Anaheim, California.

“We have had a wonderful year in Madison County with a wide range of projects and programs for our Earth Team Volunteers (ETVs) to participate in,” said Kathy Walker, District Administrative Coordinator. “We also appreciate our great partners that always help make us LOOK GOOD!”

The Madison County NRCS/SWCD excel in promoting conservation with educational programs through local schools and organizations. The staff intentionally works to develop new partnerships and recruit ETVs to assist in area projects to help educate the county population about natural resource conservation.

The Madison County NRCS/SWCD sponsors many projects. They said that ETVs are vital to the support of their mission. A few of the projects include programs for high school and elementary students informing them about sources of pollution, “Read across America” celebrating reading with Dr. Seuss, River Works Discovery Program, Outdoor Classrooms, the Envirothon, and Poster and Essay Contests. ETVs participate in public projects such as the Rain Barrel Workshop, Flint River Clean Ups, Soil Baby Contests, and the 11th annual Teacher Workshop. At this year’s teacher workshop they hosted 28 teachers from K-12 with a free 40 hour workshop that includes CEU credits.



*National NACD/NRCS Partnership Award Winners – Madison County SWCD: (l-r) Greg Dansby, Charles Butler, Sue Gaines, Kathy Walker, Dr. William Puckett, and Rodney Goode.*

### Alabama Earth Team Award Winners

Alabama’s 2013 ETV award winners were announced the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) Annual Meeting in Orange Beach, Alabama, in November 2013.

The Alabama Earth Team winners are:

- Individual – Rena Smith, Russellville Field Office
- Group – Lee County Water Festival
- Chief’s Field – Bay Minette Field Office
- NACD/NRCS Partnership – Madison County SWCD.



**Individual Award** – Rena Smith from the Russellville Field Office, shown here with Dr. William Puckett and Rodney Goode, received Alabama’s Individual Earth Team Award. Since she started volunteering in 2011, the field office staff says that she does whatever is needed. She files, answers the phone, assists with construction checks, and with educational programs such as the Envirothon and FAWN.

Renea said, “I knew I would like volunteering, but I didn’t know I would love it.” The staff said that her eagerness to learn and her love for the outdoors shines in all she does personally and professionally.

**Group Award** – The Lee County Water Festival Group captured the Group Award because of their efforts to educate local children about water problems as well as solutions. The Lee County Water Festival has been held for 11 years to educate 4th graders and their families about surface and ground water and other related natural resources such as wetlands, forestry, and wildlife. The purpose is to instill in them a general environmental awareness and stewardship ethic.



Lee County Water Festival Group Receives Award: (l-r) Frank Cochran, Sue Gaines, Juanita Gardinski, Robert and Shell Gaines, Dr. William Puckett, and Rodney Goode.

Over 1,700, students and their teachers participated in last year’s festival at Auburn University in March 2013. More than 84 volunteers from 21 agencies and organizations helped organize, seek funding, and performed the many background tasks that are needed to carry out the large scale event.

**Chief’s Field Award** – The Bay Minette Field Office won the Alabama Chief’s Field Award for building a strong group of ETVs from local technical centers, high schools, and organizations to enhance the conservation activities of the local NRCS/SWCD office.

A major project was sand dune restoration in Gulf Shores. ETVs worked closely with other agency personnel, local vocational ag students, and a Boy Scout troop from Kentucky to help plant sea oats on the dunes. The older students did most of the physical labor on the project, while the younger scout troop volunteers participated on a scale they could handle. An experienced leader guided the groups and kept them on track. The staff said that projects like these would not be possible without the support of ETVs.

The plants established during the project help the sand dunes resist wind erosion and helps protect the shoreline, homes, and the unique wildlife habitat.



Bay Minette Field Office Receives Chief’s Field Award: (l-r) Ronnie Northcutt, Sue Gaines, Frank Trione, Rhonda Bryars, Dr. William Puckett, and Rodney Goode.

*In Alabama, 3,038 volunteers provided 18,543 hours of volunteer service ranking us number one in the Southeast and in the Nation in total number of volunteers. In number of reported volunteer hours, Alabama was again first in the southeast and ranked fifth in the nation.*

## News from the State Office

### CFC Auction

The Auburn State Office held a silent auction for the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Bidding wars at the last few minutes added to the excitement. The most popular items were trees rooted in pots—some sold for \$30.

Organizer Nancy Reagan thanks everyone who brought in items for the auction and for all of the bidders.

After a generous donation, the final total raised was \$512. Ebony Ricks, this year's State CFC Project Leader for NRCS reported a total of \$8,123 was raised against the set goal of \$6,900, or 118%.

### Archeology Students Assist NRCS

*By Teresa Paglione, Cultural Resources Specialist, NRCS, Auburn, AL*

Since fall of 2011, the Troy University Archaeological Research Center has conducted archaeological surveys for NRCS's Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) easements across the state. The principal investigator, Jason Mann, the director of the Research Center, directed the archaeology students in an apprentice-style fashion to perform the survey work,

to achieve work experience and focus on future professional goals.

In addition to completing the archaeological survey work and fulfilling the reporting requirements, NRCS WRP archaeological surveys provided students interested in archaeology as a profession with active experience in a real-world archaeological practice which bolsters their overall educational experience and future employment marketability.

*Jared Aguayo was a survey field technician on several WRP surveys.*



## From The Field

### Cullman County FAWN

*By Johnny Grantham*

Cullman's Sportsman's Lake Park was filled with over 700 Cullman County sixth graders participating in the fall Forest Awareness Week Now (FAWN) event. FAWN is an educational program which involves a field trip and interactions with forestry and natural resource professionals.

Resource professionals staffed stations that included: forest products, soils, forest management, and wildlife. The learning stations provide a positive, hands-on, interactive learning experience for the students. They left with a better understanding of the importance of Alabama's forest and related natural resources.

Helping with the two day event were staff from the Cullman County SWCD/NRCS, Alabama Forestry



Commission, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Louisiana Pacific, and local volunteers.

*Students learned about forest products, soils, wildlife, and the forest at the fall FAWN event held at Sportsman's Lake. Overseeing the soil making contest is NRCS's Blake Garner (center).*



*Instructors talk to Dale County students about water filtration.*

## 2013 Dale County Groundwater Festival

*By Janet Benton, District Technician, Ozark, AL*

About 525 fourth graders attended the 2013 Groundwater Festival hosted by the Dale County SWCD at Wallace College in Midland City in October 2013.

The students participated in three hands-on educational activities related to groundwater: the Edible Aquifer, Water Filtration, and Water Cycle Bracelet.

This was a great experience for all the students. They learned the importance of keeping water clean and specific ways to prevent groundwater contamination. Judging by the smiles and enthusiasm, this year's event was another success.

Many organizations helped with the event. It was sponsored by grants from the Wiregrass Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council; the Alabama Department of Environmental Management; and the Choctawhatchee, Pea, Yellow River Management Authority. Local businesses also provided contributions for t-shirts and for bus transportation. Wallace College provided their Science building. About 50 volunteers helped to make the event a success.

## Montgomery 2013 Farm City Festival

*By Codie Yelverton, Soil Conservationist, NRCS, Elmore/Montgomery Counties*

The Montgomery County Farm City Festival was very successful. This was my first year helping out and it was wonderful. There were families everywhere, and kids were able to see bits of how important agriculture is and how it works.

I was told that the event gets bigger every year. Over 800 people attended this year.

There was no charge to attend the festival, but everyone was asked to bring a can of food. Over 215 pounds of food was collected for the Montgomery Area Food Bank.

New to the festival this year were representatives from the Alabama Farmers Federation (ALFA). They cooked pizza and helped out wherever they were needed.

This event could not have been done without all of the agencies hard work. These included NRCS, Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), Farm Service Agency (FSA), ALFA, Alabama Ag Credit, Montgomery County SWCD, Montgomery Clean City, AL Farmers Federation, and Montgomery Water Works Sewer Board. It was truly a team effort.



*Codie Yelverton (Soil Con, left) and April Jones (DC, right) helps student with a craft project.*

## Madison County Green Living Expo

*By Chris Story, Soil Conservation Technician, NRCS, Madison County, AL*

NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Chris Story and Intern Jack Lee represented NRCS at the 2013 Green Living Expo at the Alabama A&M Agribition Center.

Sponsored by the ACES Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs unit, the Green Living Expo was an excellent outlet to present information about NRCS programs.

Landowners from all over the county attended to hear various speakers and visit the many exhibits focusing on the theme of the expo--Green Living, Green Families, and Green Communities.

“Auntie Litter,” an award-winning nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting a healthy and clean environment, provided interactive activities to show the importance of natural resource conservation and keeping the environment free of litter.

Through excellent outreach opportunities like the Green Living Expo, NRCS can continue efforts to educate the people of Madison County and surrounding areas about our programs and natural resource conservation.



## Central Alabama Forestry Tour

*By Sutton Gibbs, DC, Greensboro, AL*

The Central Alabama Forestry Tour was held in October 2013, on the Dr. Chip Taylor property in Akron, AL. The tour highlighted hardwood timber stand improvement, beaver control, high fence deer management, tree stand safety, recreational ideas (3D archery range, fitness trail), and landscaping/gardening.

## Colbert County Progressive Safety Day

*By Etta Mask, DAC, Tuscumbia, AL*

Colbert County hosted 3rd graders from the county, city, and private schools at the North Alabama State Fair Grounds in October 2013.

Students were guided to 11 stations featuring hands-on exhibits demonstrating safety. Included were safety exhibits for Bikes, Grain, Fire, Electricity, Fire Arms, Boating, Tractors, Lawnmowers, ATVs, as well as Drug Awareness and Dangerous Look Alikes.

Over 600 children were greeted with smiling faces from all those who worked! With the help of the local NRCS, SWCD, FSA, ACES, RC&D, AMP, and local business, this event went well.



*(l-r) Chris Story with Dr. Andrew Hugine, Jr., President, Alabama A&M University.*

## Congratulations to A New Graduate

*By Joyce Nicholas, DC, Mobile County, AL*

April Griffin, DAC for the Mobile County SWCD, achieved one of her major life goals. She graduated in December 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Business from Troy University.

April is not one to give up. She had a plate full-but that did not stop her. She worked full time at the Mobile Field Office; helped family through several "life" events; and is a full-time mom to a great teenager-Hannah.

We are all so proud of April and wish her continued success in all her endeavors!





## First Natural Resources Council Meeting Held in Lawrence County

*By Kathy Gotcher, DC, Moulton, AL*

The Lawrence County Natural Resources Council held its first meeting in November 2013 at the USDA Service Center in Moulton, AL. The council is made up of individuals from NRCS, FSA, ACES, Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC), US Forest Service (USFS), Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (AWFF), Lawrence County Industrial Development Board, and local timber consultants.

Kathy Gotcher chaired the meeting and held a round table discussion about the needs of landowners and what the council could do to assist them.

An announcement was made recently about International Paper closing and numerous phone calls were received by USDA from landowners who needed information on where to market their timber. A timber landowner meeting was planned. The council decided to have 4 to 5 representatives from other mills to tell the landowners about their requirements. A panel of local timber consultations were planned so landowners could ask questions. It was decided that timber prices would not be covered since they are continuously changing.

During the landowner meeting local staff from NRCS, FSA, AFC, ACES, USFS, AWFF, Lawrence County Industrial Development Board, and any remaining timber consultants were introduced.

Attendees were excited to hear about the new opportunities that were available.

A meal was sponsored by several consultants and local businesses.

Despite the extremely cold temperatures the night of the meeting, about 75 people attended.

## Cover Crops Producer Meeting Held in Hamilton

*By Wade Hill, DC, NRCS, Hamilton, AL*

An outreach producer meeting was held in January 2014 at OhBryan's in Hamilton, Alabama. The main presentation was cover crop practices that are offered thru NRCS EQIP.

All producers certified in row crops in the Hamilton FSA Office for Marion and Winston Counties were sent invitation letters. Out of 28 letters mailed to producers, 19 attended the meeting.

I explained how you can improve soil health by planting cover crops in the late fall season. I told how soil health is increased due to planting deep rooted plants to aid in soil compaction and planting legumes to replenish nitrogen and sequestering carbon in the soil. We talked about how conservation tillage, or "no-till," helps stop soil erosion, increases organic matter, and suppresses weed growth.

Farmers were informed about the EQIP financial assistance available to farmers who apply and get approved to plant cover crops.

After an explanation of the cover crop options and which ones would qualify for each type of crop rotation that is being used in the two counties, 15 entities filled out an application and indicated the potential of putting as many as 1,950 acres into cover crops, if funding is available.

"Not only would current producers benefit from this program," I told the crowd, "the producers of the future could reap these benefits also."

The meeting was a success and the NRCS staff and the Marion County SWCD will continue to do what we do best--assisting farmers in the county.



*Wade Hill talks to the producers about protecting soil health using cover crops.*

## AWEP Project Implemented in Madison County

*By Hannah South, Civil Engineering Student, Madison County, AL*

With financial assistance through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), an irrigation pond was constructed in September 2013 in Madison County on the property of row crop farmer Lee Sublett.

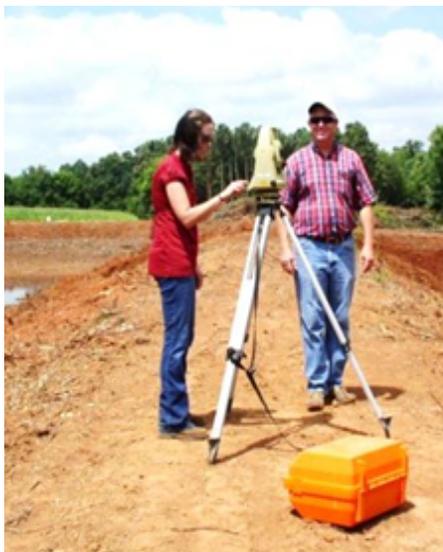
The pond, about 10 acres in size, will irrigate nearly 400 acres of cropland during the dry summer months. Water from the pond will be pumped to center pivots located in the field during the growing season. During winter, water will be pumped from a nearby stream into the pond for storage.

AWEP helps farmers implement water activities to improve water quality on farms while conserving ground and surface water. Applications are competitively selected with higher priority given to applicants located in areas with a high percentage of agricultural land and producers. Priority is also given to producers who will show a significant increase in agricultural activity, along with several other factors.

Activities to ease the effect of drought are some of the enhancement activities that are implemented under the AWEP program.

Mr. Sublett's pond will help him see a definite ease from the effects of drought. Land irrigated during dry months will produce a much higher yield than non-irrigated land. Also, the storage of water during winter months helps conserve water, another enhancement activity supported through AWEP.

*(l-r) Hannah South (Civil Engineering Student) receives training from Tim Williams (Resource Engineer) on the use of the total station to survey the 10 acre pond.*



*Sam Sandlin with Madison County SWCD explains program guidelines for the Hurricane Creek 319 public meeting. The grant was advertised throughout the watershed in advance. Seven landowner applications were taken at the meeting.*

## Cleaning Up Hurricane Creek in Madison County

The Madison County SWCD was recently awarded a Section 319 grant from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) for Hurricane Creek. Located on the eastern side of Madison County, the grant will be used to implement conservation practices on private land that will benefit water quality and hopefully remove Hurricane Creek from the 303(d) list of impaired waters.

Hurricane Creek, a tributary to Flint River, was initially listed as impaired from pathogens (fecal coliform) according to past data. An ongoing partnership continues between ADEM, Madison County SWCS/NRCS, Flint River Conservation Association, and many private landowners to create management plans, apply for funding, and to implement "on the ground" conservation practices.

The Hurricane Creek project initially kicked off in July 2013 with a public meeting. The audience was presented information regarding history and water quality data for Hurricane Creek, 319 program eligibility and requirements for financial assistance, and available conservation practices for private landowners that could benefit local water quality. A meal was catered by Ole Hickory Barbecue of New Market, AL.

Madison County SWCD, local partnership members, and local watershed stakeholders have successfully implemented past 319 grants since FY2000 within Flint River Watershed and have two success stories for stream segments being de-listed from the 303 (d) list since that time indicating that the water quality was improved.

# Outreach News by Alice Love



*Tuskegee University College of Agriculture, Environment and Nutrition Sciences (CAENS) undergraduates attend “2013 Outreach & Ag Education Expo” in Atlanta, GA. This opportunity was made available through the partnership efforts of the Alabama Natural Resources Conservation Service – Outreach, Tuskegee University CAENS, National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resources Conservation Service Employee Organization and the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education.*



*Ben Malone, NRCS-ASTC for Field Operations Central Team presents StrikeForce updates at outreach meeting in Ariton, AL.*



*Tuskegee University Forestry and Natural Resources Advisory Council meeting held in December 2013. Membership consists of various conservation partners.*



*Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development (RD) Patrice Kunesh (center in purple and black); joins local RD Representatives, Tuskegee University Cooperative Members, and Staff to welcome the delivery of a refrigerated truck purchased through RD. The truck will be used to transport and deliver locally grown produce from producers to distribution sites.*



*Kalauna Carter, Tuskegee University College of Agriculture student, presents at the Forestry and Natural Resources Council meeting regarding to her NRCS Soil Scientist Summer Internship.*



*l-r: Russell and Jewell Bean owner/operators of S&B Farm, share their experiences and services received as USDA participants.*



*A Community Outreach Workshop was held in McIntosh in Washington County to explain programs that can benefit farming operations for the landowners in the StrikeForce counties. Luis Cruz-Arroyo, NRCS Resource Conservationist/ West Team, (standing) speaks to new farmers, people with limited income, and community members to educate them about programs that can help manage pastureland, vegetable crops, woodland, and other natural resources.*



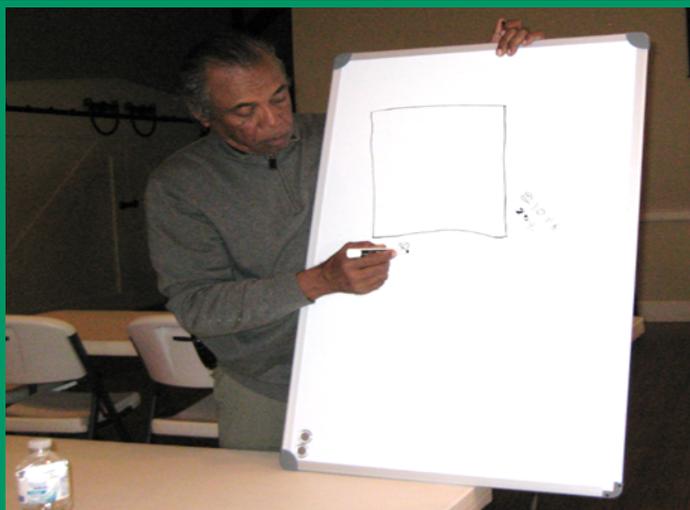
*l-r: William Puckett, NRCS State Conservationist; Barbara Shipman, Alabama Chapter-Women in Ag; Tammy Steele, Executive Director, National Women in Ag; and Leonard Jordan, Regional NRCS Conservationist, network during the 2013 Professional Agricultural Workers Conference in Tuskegee, AL.*



*USDA participants form "A Loosely Fitted Cooperative," an organization that functions as a certified cooperative without the designation of a Cooperative Certification. "Loosely Fitted Cooperative" members pride themselves on adopting the wisdom of B.T. Washington; "Drop Your Bucket Where You Are!" Be self-significant.*



*Attendees listen to a program at Tuskegee University 2013 Professional Agricultural Workers Conference in December.*



*Victor Khan, Tuskegee University Plant Breeder/Plasticulturist, lectures at an outreach meeting hosted by Alabama NRCS and the Wiregrass RC&D. As part of his lecture, he demonstrated how to calculate lime and fertilizer rates on small acreages associated with seasonal high tunnels and micro-irrigation systems. These practices are offered through the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program.*



*Outreach meetings enhance local economy thru support of local business during activities held throughout the state.*

*Demetris Johnson, NRCS Soil Conservationist in Troy, presents at Tuskegee University 2013 Professional Agricultural Workers Conference for the "Tomorrow's Agricultural Youth Symposium."*

*He talked to high school students about his career path from a TU Student/ NRCS Scholars Program to a full-time NRCS employee. He encouraged the students to focus on early college readiness, the importance of networking skills, and how to evaluate and implement personal educational goals.*



*Dr. Gregory Parham, USDA Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Administration (tan suit), visits with Tuskegee University USDA Scholars and encouraged them to continue their academic studies in the field of natural resources and related fields.*

*Limited resource farmer Charles Adams of Notasulga is excited about the experimental wooden hoop house being built on his property through Alabama NRCS and Wiregrass RC&D. The hoop house will help him extend his growing season.*



### Next Issue

**Submissions for Current Developments, potential success stories, and news releases are welcomed, and appreciated anytime.**

**Contact Communications, Marketing, and Outreach (CMO) staff with questions or submissions by e-mail: [AL-nrcs-publicinfo@one.usda.gov](mailto:AL-nrcs-publicinfo@one.usda.gov).**

### ALABAMA

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# Alabama NRCS StrikeForce Initiative



Dr. William Puckett (l) talks with producers Jewell and Russell Bean who are participants in a hoop house experimental project between AL NRCS and Wiregrass RC&D. The purpose is to build 10 wooden hoop houses to explore their use compared to using kits. Wiregrass RC&D staff are helping build the houses and are tasked with writing instructions on how to construct them.



The MOWA Tribe (a state recognized tribe) held its first StrikeForce Initiative meeting on July 13, 2013, in Mt. Vernon, AL. Topics included grazing systems, forestry and wildlife management, vegetable production, organic farming using high tunnels, plasticulture and drip irrigation systems.



Victor Khan explains the differences in the wooden hoop house (background-left) and one constructed from a kit (background covered with plastic) at Headland Middle School in the Wiregrass RC&D area. (l-r) Victor Khan, Tuskegee University; James Currington, Wiregrass RC&D; Dr. William Puckett, AL NRCS; Representative Dexter Grimsley, 85th District (Henry and Houston Counties); Ronnie Sparks, Director, Alabama Rural Development, and Senator Billy Beasley, 28th District (Barbour, Bullock, Henry, Lee, Macon, Russell).



(l-r) Dr. William Puckett, NRCS, Auburn, AL; Diane Amera, Risk Management Agency, Valdosta, GA; Patrice Kunesh, USDA-Rural Development, Washington, DC; and Ronnie Davis, Rural Development; Daniel Robinson, Farm Service Agency (FSA); and Steve Lohr, U.S. Forest Service.

A breakout session about the Alabama StrikeForce Initiative was held at the Professional Agricultural Workers Conference (PAWC) at Tuskegee University (TU) in December 2013. USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development Patrice Kunesh emphasized the importance of the StrikeForce Initiative in promoting American agriculture and creating economic value in the community.

A StrikeForce Initiative breakout session by USDA agencies was also held for farmers at the Annual Farmers Conference February 20, 2014, at TU. Often cited as the oldest event of its type in the nation, the conference was a two-day educational forum that featured tours, panel discussions, interactive demonstrations, and concurrent workshops. Presentations at the breakout session were made by USDA's FSA, NRCS, US Forest Service, Risk Management, and Food and Nutrition Service.



The Poarch Band of Creek Indians (a federally recognized tribe) and Alabama USDA agency leaders hold a StrikeForce Initiative consultation meeting. (l-r) Robert McGhee, PBCI Tribal Council Member (TCM); Dr. William Puckett, NRCS State Conservationist; Garvis Sells, PBCI TCM; Sandy Hollinger, PBCI TCM; David Gehman, PBCI TCM; James W. (Billy) Smith, GM, Magnolia Branch Wildlife Reserve; Cassondra Searight, FSA; Ronnie Davis, State Director RD; and David Elliott, NRCS Tribal Liaison.



A StrikeForce meeting was held at the MOWA Choctaw Tribal offices in Mount Vernon, AL, on February 13, 2014, to inform them about USDA programs and to tour their forestland. The state recognized Tribe has an existing EQIP contract and has planted longleaf pine on some of their acres. Newer program interests expressed was small ruminants and silvopasture.

Representatives from NRCS, FSA, ACES and TU presented information and provided resource materials to be shared with the other Tribal members. (l-r) ASTC-FO (West) Charlie Ramsey, American Indian/Alaska Native Special Emphasis Program Manager Wendy Smith, MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians Chief Weaver, and Robert Russell, Executive Director, AL Indian Affairs Commission.

Farmers Jeremy Calvert and Myron Johnson talked about soil health and a discussion was held on how to continue the success of and enhance soil health.



Dr. William Puckett (l) talks with AL NRCS Soil Champion Annie Dee (c) about soil health. Eric Schwab, NRCS Conservation Agronomist (r).

## Conservationists Meet Elected Officials

SWCD/NRCS and RC&D staff and descended on Montgomery to meet with elected officials on agricultural issues facing rural communities. This year's Legislative Reception, hosted by the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD), attracted more than 300 conservationists who work with farmers and ranchers to protect natural resources on private lands. The reception was held on February 19, 2014, at the RSA Activity Center. The Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard, as well as numerous state representatives and senators, attended.

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private lands and many public lands in the United States.

## AL NRCS Meetings

### National Forum for Cover Crops and Soil Health

Alabama NRCS staff and others participated in a National forum on February 18, 2014, at E.W. Shell Fisheries Research Center. Over 75 farmers, AU staff/professors, ACES staff, state and federal agency representatives, and others attended the event.

After Eric Schwab, from NRCS welcomed the group and Dr. William Puckett made opening remarks, a live video feed from the national conference was broadcast from Omaha, NE. The live feed included Howard G. Buffet and NRCS Chief Jason Weller. Farmer videos displayed the success of cover crops and the impacts on soil health.

After the live feed, the local forum continued with presentations from the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), NRCS, AU Experiment Station, and AU College of Agriculture and ACES.



(c) Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard and Rep. Pebblin Warren met with conservation leaders from across the state.

## RC&D News

By Charlie Meek, Executive Director, NW AL RC&D Council, Tusculumbia, AL

The Northwest AL RC&D Council helped sponsor the “N Harmony With Nature Project” that was selected as the TOP project for the Southeast RC&D Region. It will now compete at the national level. This program seeks to create a sustainable model to help local public events become litter-free. The program makes portable recycle bins, partitioned trailers, and litter grabbers available free of charge to organizers.

The Northwest AL RC&D sponsored two separate grants for the project over the past two years. The first grant helped fund the creation of a “how-to” handbook to help organizers learn how to plan and host their own litter-free events. The second was used to create a promotional video to encourage the litter-free event concept. RC&D partner Steve Richerson of Concrete Dream Inc., a Alabama Green Business Consulting company, wrote and produced the video which can be viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj\\_EAjxUw7I&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj_EAjxUw7I&feature=youtu.be).

“Everyone is excited about winning the regional award. This is like winning a conference championship in sports,” noted Charlie Meek, Executive Director of the Northwest AL RC&D Council. “Our RC&D council appreciates the strong support we receive in our service area and the diversity of quality projects that are completed each year.”

Other Alabama award winners at the Southeast Regional RC&D meeting included:

- Outstanding Council Employee: Renona Seibert, Programs Manager, Alabama Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys RC&D
- Outstanding Council of the Year: ALA-TOM RC&D
- Outstanding Council Member: Craig Sizemore, Vice President, Tombigbee RC&D

NWAL RCID sponsored a video about the trailer used to transport “N Harmony With Nature Project” materials and supplies.



## Personnel Actions

### Promotions

Amy Bell, District Conservationist, Monroeville  
Jason Childers, Soil Con Tech, Gadsden  
Daniel Dearmon, Soil Con Tech, Mobile  
Lawrence McGhee, State Soil Scientist, Auburn  
Robert Moore, Ag Engineer, Huntsville  
Joe Norris, GIS Specialist, Auburn  
Ebony Ricks, HR Specialist, Bessemer  
Betty Terry, Soil Con Tech, Moulton

### Reassignments

Jack Lee, Student Soil Con, from Normal to Arizona  
Pamela Mason, State Res Inventory Coord, from Wetumpka to Auburn  
Robert Moore, Ag Engineer, from Bessemer to Huntsville

### Resignations

Na-Asia Ellis, Student Soil Scientist, Auburn  
Jesi King, Soil Con Tech, Auburn  
Christopher Story, Soil Con Tech, Huntsville  
Adam Threatt, Soil Con Tech, Troy

### Retirements

Perry Oakes, State Conservation Engineer, Auburn  
Clifford Puckett, Soil Con Tech, Cullman  
Larry Spratling, Carto Tech, Auburn  
Sarah Walker, Secretary, Auburn

## In Sympathy

**Martha Franklin**, Stan Franklin’s wife, passed away on December 2013. Stan retired in 2007 as the District Conservationist in Guntersville, AL. He also worked part-time after his retirement. If you would like to send Stan a card, his address is:

Mr. Stanley C. Franklin  
P.O. Box 11  
Plantersville, AL 36750

**Barbara Kennedy**, Retired NRCS (SCS) employee, passed away October 2013, after a battle with cancer. She was 80 years old. If you would like to send her husband a card, his address is:

Wendell Kennedy  
713 Crawford Road  
Opelika, AL 36801

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