

FY13-14 Soil Health Campaign

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Health Campaign is picking up momentum in Oklahoma. Ray Archuleta, Conservation Agronomist at the NRCS East National Technology Center in Greensboro, North Carolina heads up the national campaign, called "Unlock the Secrets of the Soil." Archuleta has visited Oklahoma three times in recent months to speak at statewide events and train NRCS and partnership staff. He has said that by using soil health principles to increase soil function, every one percent increase in organic matter results in the land being able to hold 17,000 to 25,000 more gallons of water per acre.

Gary O'Neill, Oklahoma State Conservationist for NRCS, is passionate about soil health. At a recent speech before a major agricultural organization, O'Neill said, "Soil is a living and life-giving substance, without which we would perish. As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. We believe improving the health of our Nation's soil is one of the most important endeavors of our time."

Oklahoma NRCS has developed both a long term Soil Health Strategic Plan and an Annual Plan for 2014. The plan calls for the appointment of a State Soil Health Technical Committee that would include producers and conservation partners, utilizing on-farm demonstration projects, and providing training to staff and partners. NRCS has identified soil health teams for each quadrant of the state that will serve as points of contact for identifying training and technical needs of employees, partner employees, and farmers.

O'Neill added, "Soil has always been the foundation of NRCS's mission. It is my vision to have Oklahoma become a leader in the Southern Plains region on how to best protect this resource while increasing production for Oklahoma farmers and ranchers. To truly achieve long term sustainability of all natural resources and ensure all of Oklahoma's working agricultural lands are reaching maximum productivity, soil health management systems must become a reality. Oklahoma farmers and ranchers have a rich history of being good conservation stewards. This campaign will provide an opportunity to advance and integrate soil health systems into our everyday conservation strategies."

Producers interested in participating in NRCS programs may contact their local field office or go to <http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov> for program and office contract information.



Story of a Producer.... Jimmy Emmons - Dewey Co



Pictured: Congressman Frank Lucas, Jimmy Emmons, center, and Oklahoma State Conservationist Gary O'Neill

Jimmy Emmons is a farmer and rancher from Dewey County in western Oklahoma. He has become the leader and the major producer spokesman for the Soil Health Movement in Oklahoma. Emmons operates 5,750 acres in three counties in western Oklahoma. He is currently working closely with NRCS, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Dewey County Conservation District and Western Equipment John Deere on multiple Cover Crop/Soil Health Demonstration Projects. He raises wheat, canola and alfalfa in No-Till and Mulch tillage management system and is using a "cocktail" seed mixture for cover cropping that also adds nutrients back into the soil. Emmons has served on the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Board and is the lead person on the OSU Wheat and Canola Variety Tests in his area. He also has a cow-calf operation.

Emmons was a presenter at a multi-state No-Till Conference in 2012 and is frequently interviewed by the Oklahoma Farm Report for his views on Soil Health, No-Till and Canola. He participates in the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Emmons has become more known and respected for his work, more and more people call on him for advice and information, including Congressman Frank Lucas. Emmons represents 15 counties as the Area 1 Director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, is a member of the Public Works Trust Authority for Dewey County and is an advisory council member of the Dewey County OSU Extension Service.

Emmons and his farm are rapidly becoming an institution. He is well-liked and popular and is a "walking, talking, and doing" advocate for Soil Health and Conservation and is quick to credit others for his success. The region where Emmons lives is near the "heart" of the Dust Bowl and his farming practices are an inspiration to other farmers and an example of how the region has avoided having a second Dust Bowl during the current drought. He has become "Mr. Soil Health" in Oklahoma and he deserves the title.

OKLAHOMA

Annual Report 2013



U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service



Helping People Help the Land

Our Mission: The Natural Resource Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain and improve our Natural Resources and Environment. Working side by side with landowners, we identify natural resource concerns, such as water quality and quantity issues, soil erosion, air quality, wetlands and wildlife habitat, and develop unique conservation plans for restoring and protecting resources. NRCS helps Oklahoma and the nation balance economic goals with the needs of the environment; ensuring sustainable productive lands that supply food, fiber, forest products and energy for all citizens

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Message from NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill



Portions of Oklahoma are experiencing continued drought conditions that are rapidly surpassing levels that were present during the dust bowl period. Producers are seeking assistance with livestock watering and grazing distribution practices to make it through this emergency situation. NRCS and the partnership are providing both technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to address this need. This assistance is critical for farmers and ranchers to stay in business and to continue to protect our fragile ecosystem during drought conditions.

The current Soil Health Initiative represents the most significant natural resource campaign that the conservation partnership has undertaken in the last twenty years. Soil Health systems has the potential for significant benefits to the natural resources in Oklahoma; in the way of both on-site and off-site and benefits from improved water quality/quantity, air quality, and wildlife habitat. The basic principles of Soil Health systems can also impact a farmers yields and input levels which impact their profitability and opportunities to stabilize income from farming enterprises. The Soil Health campaign has also allowed the partnership to take on a renewed emphasis and focus on conservation planning, which represents the core of the NRCS mission and the assistance that we provide Oklahoma farmers and ranchers.

As we move into 2014, we prepare and gear up for implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill. With more than \$26 billion of funding included in the Conservation Title, the bill represents great opportunities for improving the Oklahoma natural resource landscape. These resources along with the strong conservation stewardship from Oklahoma farmers and ranchers and the technical assistance available from the conservation partnership we can expect to have great impacts on the quantity and quality of our resources for future generations. By doing things like no-till farming, planting cover crops, improving grazing management, addressing Eastern Red Cedar encroachment, increasing prescribed fire for addressing grassland/rangeland condition; we can make a difference on the environment that we all live in and what we pass on to our children. I am proud of the work that the conservation partnership does in Oklahoma, and look forward to finding new ways to assist our customers in dealing with new conservation challenges in the future. It is our job to be ready to meet these challenges in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Message from OCC Executive Director, Mike Thralls



A year of water quality success, devastating tornadoes, and a new focus on soil health has proven the partnership of conservation districts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission to be as strong as ever.

Working with local producers in impaired watersheds, the partnership has once again set Oklahoma apart from its peers as a national leader in water quality improvement. EPA ranks Oklahoma as second in the nation for reduction of harmful nutrients flowing to streams. This is the fifth year in a row Oklahoma has ranked in the top ten for this distinction.

The partnership faced tragedy as well. When tornadoes swept paths of destruction across the city of Moore and several other central Oklahoma communities, the three branches of conservation came together to assist in mapping the area, assess damages, clear debris, and provide whatever other assistance they could.

Though drought continues to challenge many parts of the state, a new focus on soil health promises to carry conservation forward in the 21st century with bright prospects for the protection and restoration of Oklahoma's natural resources. The performance of this partnership through uncertainty past and present gives me nothing less than the highest confidence in its future as a resourceful, adaptable, and reliable asset to the people and land of this state.

FY13 and FY12 NRCS Contracts and Financial Assistance to Oklahoma Participants by Program

Mandatory funding: Farm Bill Programs	FY13 Contracts	FY13 Dollars	FY12 Contracts	FY12 Dollars
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	1065	\$17.9 million	1375	\$24.3 million
Wetlands Reserve Program	4	\$2 million	19	\$6.7 million
Conservation Stewardship Program	716	\$9.1 million	583	\$9.1 million
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	9	\$455,000	10	\$528,000
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	0	0	6	\$582,000
Grassland Reserve Program	2	\$1.5 million	0	\$3,000
Total, Farm Bill Programs	1796	\$31 million	1993	\$41.2 million

Watershed Rehabilitation

NRCS assisted in the rehabilitation of 4 watershed dams and the decommission of one watershed dam in 2013 through the Rehabilitation Program. The following watershed dams were Rehabilitated: Sallisaw Creek Site 26, Caney Coon Creek Site 2M, Lower Clear Boggy Creek Sites 34 and 36; Cottonwood Creek Site 5 was decommissioned.

The purpose of rehabilitation is to extend the service life of the dams and bring them into compliance with applicable safety and performance standards or to decommission the dams so they no longer pose a threat to life and property.

Caney Coon Creek Site 2 M also known as the Coalgate Reservoir was rehabilitated in 2013. This dam was originally constructed in 1965 by the City of Coalgate and the Coal County Conservation District with assistance of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and NRCS. Site 2M is a multipurpose structure; it provides flood protection, water supply for the City of Coalgate and also recreational areas. This dam was originally designed as a low hazard dam with a 50-year design life. It was reclassified as high hazard due to the development downstream. The dam was rehabilitated in 2013 to extend the life for another one hundred years and also to upgrade the site to high hazard criteria. Rehabilitation of the dam included removing and disposing of the existing concrete principal spillway and constructing a new concrete principal spillway to meet current NRCS requirements; and constructing a 300-foot-wide roller compacted concrete auxiliary spillway over the top of the dam. Caney Coon Creek Site 2M provides over 58,000 in average annual benefits.

Caney Coon Creek Site 2 M - Coalgate Reservoir



NRCS DROUGHT INITIATIVE

Does the picture look like it came from the Dust Bowl? Actually, it was taken on January 9, 2014 by the Cimarron County Conservation District! Most of Oklahoma continues to be headed in the direction of the worst drought since the Dust Bowl and in some cases it is drier than it was then. State Conservationist Gary O'Neill is seriously concerned. On April 1, 2014 he released information required to implement the National Drought Recovery Initiative in Oklahoma. The Drought Initiative has been set up for producers to apply for cost share funding to address inadequate quantity and quality of livestock water on grazing lands. Funds are available for producers in counties that are in the D3 and D4 drought intensity rating by NOAA. Much of western Oklahoma falls into that rating. Both short term and long term mitigation practices are included in the initiative. Short term mitigation practices include: water well testing, livestock pipeline, prescribed grazing, pumping plant, watering facilities, and water wells. Long term mitigation practices include: crop rotation, residue management, no till, cover crop, ponds, micro irrigation systems, and irrigation water management.

