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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USDA identifies census tracts with over 20 percent poverty (according to American Community Survey data) to identify sub-county pockets of poverty. As areas of persistent poverty are identified, USDA staff work with state, local and community officials to increase awareness of USDA programs and help build program participation through intensive community outreach.

Nearly 85 percent of America’s persistent poverty is located in rural areas.

StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity

Kobe Williams, son of Travis Williams, holds an NRCS partnership sign as Elvadus Fields looks on. Travis Williams, Calvin Williams, and Horace Robinson learned about USDA program opportunities at a StrikeForce outreach meeting in Franklin Parish. Today, they are working with NRCS to address resource concerns on their land.

To learn more about StrikeForce and these farmers, see pages 4 and 5.
USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity is a focused effort to form strategic partnerships of local, state, and federal agencies and organizations; communities; and people in targeted areas to help improve economic conditions in parishes identified as having persistent poverty. StrikeForce is not a new program with dedicated funding, but a new approach for enhanced cooperation that delivers results for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners, and their local communities.

In Louisiana, StrikeForce began in January 2014, and we have already achieved significant success. As a result of StrikeForce, young beginning farmers, as well as established farmers, have received much-needed funding from the Farm Service Agency to improve their operations; farmers have received technical and financial assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to conserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of their farms and ranches; and communities have received financial assistance to establish new farmers markets, improved community services, and housing. Established partnerships have been refocused and new partnerships have developed, and as a result, more people are learning about financial and technical assistance opportunities through USDA agencies—and we are learning better ways to serve people and communities.

In coming months, a StrikeForce outreach meeting will be hosted near you. I encourage you to attend and learn more about StrikeForce—and the opportunities USDA has to offer.

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist

Louisiana parishes designated by USDA as 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.

USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity currently targets more than 700 rural counties, parishes, boroughs, tribal reservations, and Colonias in 20 states, including Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and West Virginia.

The USDA StrikeForce initiative is led by three USDA agencies: the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD).
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.

In Louisiana, the Natural Resources Conservation Service is partnering with local grassroots organizations to help promote StrikeForce. One such partner is the Louisiana Association of Cooperatives led by Harvey Reed, Executive Director. During fiscal year 2014, Reed hosted five StrikeForce roundtable meetings and one multi-parish conservation field day in the Mississippi Delta Region of Louisiana. He recruited Elvadus Fields, the Association’s Director of the Delta Regional Outreach Center, to assist with these meetings.

“USDA’s StrikeForce is a step forward to reaching socially disadvantaged farmers and small farmers,” said Elvadus Fields. “USDA has been a helping hand all along, down through the ages; however, with the way the agriculture business works today, we really need something like StrikeForce to reach out to these individuals who need assistance the most.”

After attending a StrikeForce meeting organized by Reed and Fields in Winnsboro, Louisiana, three local soybean farmers—Horace Robinson, Calvin Williams, and Travis Williams—decided...
to find out more about the information they received, and they visited their local USDA Service Center to talk with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. They were having erosion and drainage issues, but they were not sure how to combat the problem.

After discussing their resource concerns with District Conservationist Jason Hardie and Soil Conservation Technician Joel Williams, they elected to apply for assistance to do land leveling and install grade stabilization structures. This combination of conservation practices will help to evenly disperse water across their farm and provide a drainage system for overflow, solving a lot of their erosion and drainage problems.

“These practices are really going to help our operation,” said Horace Robinson. “With erosion you lose a significant amount of topsoil, and we can’t afford to keep losing our greatest resource or having our water runoff into the streams and water basins.”

““It really means a lot to our family to be able to continue to pass down this great (family) relationship and this great land to our children, and hopefully they will do the same for theirs,” said Calvin Williams.
Elvadus Fields is the Director of the Delta Regional Outreach Center for the Louisiana Association of Cooperatives. His days are spent helping spread the word to socially disadvantaged farmers and landowners about the help they can receive from USDA agencies.

But this is nothing new to Fields. Agriculture has always been a way of life for Fields, and his relationship with the Natural Resources Conservation Service dates back to Soil Conservation Service days.

“I can still remember the lime green Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS) trucks that would pull up to our house when my daddy needed help with terracing,” says Fields. “SCS was always helping us make our farm a success.”

When he left the farm to attend school, he joined what was once referred to as the New Farmers of America (NFA), a group similar to Future Farmers of America (FFA); the only exception between the two groups was skin color. His membership in this club helped Fields decide that he wanted to make a career in agriculture.

He went on to attend Southern University and majored in agriculture. After graduating, Fields taught agriculture for a year while one of his former professors took leave to gain a master’s degree. Shortly after that, he received an appointment to become the Assistant County Agent for Work with Negroes in Tensas Parish. Fields retired after 32 years with the LSU Extension Service.

After retirement from LSU, Fields went to work for Southern University as a Farm Management Specialist, located in the USDA office. He worked there for 20 years, assisting with loan applications. During much of his career, Fields also worked as the 4H county agent, a job he remembers fondly.

“When working with children was really fulfilling. It gave me great pleasure to help shape the minds of our younger generations and hopefully grow a strong foundation for the future of agriculture,” said Fields.

Today, Fields is providing liaison support between USDA and the Louisiana Association of Cooperatives in support of USDA’s StrikeForce—continuing to spread the message of conservation and agriculture to those people in persistent poverty areas. We salute Elvadus Fields.

USDA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration Malcom Shorter participated in a StrikeForce roundtable discussion hosted at Inglewood Farm in Rapides Parish. Topics covered included food hubs, production and marketing of fresh produce for local markets, USDA programs, and partnership opportunities. Other organizations participating in the roundtable discussion included: Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance, City of Alexandria, City of Vidalia/Delta Agriculture Production Incubator, Inglewood Farm, Louisiana Association of Cooperatives, Rapides Station Community Ministries, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, USDA Forest Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and USDA Rural Development.

We salute Elvadus Fields for his lifetime of service to agriculture in Louisiana.

Sep 27
National Hunting and Fishing Day: Visit the NRCS tent at National Hunting and Fishing Day in Woodworth, Louisiana on September 27, 2014.

Sep 30
Red Bayou Watershed Project Ribbon Cutting Ceremony: The Caddo Soil and Water Conservation District will host a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark completion of the construction of the Red Bayou Watershed Project on September 30, 2014. For more information, call (318) 676-3461, ext. 3.
Jul 8-9  
**Iberia SWCD Revegetation Project:** The Iberia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) conducted their annual revegetation project along the shoreline and terrace tops of Marsh Island on July 8 and 9, 2014. Over 3,000 linear feet of smooth cordgrass, seashore paspalum, and saltgrass were planted. Volunteers included the trustee program of the Iberia Parish Sheriff’s Department, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Aug 26-28  
**Louisiana Forestry Association Annual Meeting:** NRCS hosted an exhibit at the Louisiana Forestry Association Annual Meeting in Shreveport, Louisiana. Rick Williams, Louisiana NRCS State Forester, provided visitors with information on Farm Bill programs.

Sep 17  
**Plaquemines SWCD Hosts Tour:** On September 17, 2014, in conjunction with the monthly board meeting, the Plaquemines Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) hosted a boat tour of lower Plaquemines Parish. The focus of the tour was to illustrate the unique and dynamic coastal ecosystem of the lower Mississippi River distributary system—particularly in the Empire, Louisiana area. Attendees learned about the many planned and implemented conservation projects, as well as conservation needs of the area.

Sep 18  
**Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts:** The Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts (LACD) conducted their annual convention planning meeting on September 18, 2014, in Alexandria, Louisiana. LACD President, Ruben Dauzat discussed the new format for the LACD annual meeting which is scheduled for January 12-13, 2015, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Oct 2  
**FFA Area III Forestry Career Development Event:** The Evangeline Soil and Water Conservation District will host the FFA Area III Forestry Career Development Event on Thursday, October 2, 2014 at Mountain Bayou Lake Boy Scout Camp in Evangeline Parish.

Oct 4  
**Boy Scout 2014 Scoutfest:** Visit the NRCS tent at the Boy Scout 2014 Scoutfest at Camp Avondale in Clinton, Louisiana, on October 4, 2014.

Oct 9  
**Annie’s Project Lafayette:** Register today to participate in Annie’s Project Risk Management Education for Women in Lafayette. Sessions begin October 9, 2014. Contact Deborah Cross-Young at (985) 543-6570 for more information.

Oct 10  
**USDA’s LGBT Rural Summit Tour:** On October 10, 2014, USDA’s LGBT Rural Summit Tour will visit Southern University’s Law School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. For more information, go to: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/lgbt_rural_summit_series.html

Oct 16  
**FFA Soils Judging Career Development Event:** The FFA Soils Judging Career Development Invitational event will be October 16, 2014, at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, Cade Farm. For more information, contact Angie Fogleman at Acadiana RC&D at (337) 262-1776.

Nov 14  
**Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference:** The 2014 Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference will be hosted on November 14, 2014, at the LSU AgCenter in Napoleonville, Louisiana. For more information, contact Angie Fogleman at Acadiana RC&D at (337) 262-1776.