

Conservation Matters

In the Palmetto State

Information for Employees and Friends of SC NRCS



From the office of the
Acting State Conservationist

Jack Lewis
South Carolina NRCS

Helping People Help the Land

Greetings NRCS employees and conservation partners,

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first few months on the job as SC NRCS' Acting State Conservationist. The employees and partners of the conservation partnership have been extremely welcoming, and it has been great traveling the state to meet the conservation family, the farmers, and landowners who live and work here. As a native of Arkansas, I am no stranger to the south, and you all have made me feel very much at home. I look forward to getting around the state even more as my detail continues.

We ended the fiscal year on a high note, and SC NRCS state office staff worked very hard to put the finishing touches on our year-end close out processes. Field employees also went the extra mile to wrap up FY 2014, and I want to thank you all for your extra efforts. One thing we can look forward to this year is bringing on new hires. This includes vacancies for soil conservationists, as well as a state soil scientist, which we hope to advertise soon.

We embark upon Fiscal Year 2015 under a Continuing Resolution (CR), and thus have received an interim allocation which carries us through December 11th. The full-year appropriation has not been finalized yet, so we don't know what the rest of the year looks like. Stay tuned and we will keep you updated.

I want to emphasize how important quality assurance is when it comes to our farm bill contracts—now more than ever. With the agency, as well as the Department, under more scrutiny, we must be diligent in our attention to detail when it comes to practice planning in order to ensure consistency and to streamline our business practices. To this end, we will be introducing the use of a new tool--a cost estimator--which I am confident will help us attain a higher level of quality, and promote consistency across the state in the way that our practices are being planned.

I am not sure how much longer I'll be serving in this role, but it's been an honor and a privilege thus far, and I look forward to continuing to learn more about the great conservation work going on in South Carolina.

Jack Lewis
SC NRCS State Conservationist, Acting

In this Issue.....

- Small Farmer—Big Impact in Eastover, SC.....2-3
- NRCS' Ray Archuleta Inspires Farmers in Dillon County.....4
- Longleaf Pine Workshop in Kershaw County.....5
- EQIP Helps Landowner in Hampton County.....5
- Earth Team Student Volunteers in SC.....6
- Conservation Technical Assistance in Fairfield County7
- Civil Rights Update.....8
- 2015: International Year of Soils!9
- Personnel Update.....10



NRCSSouthCarolina



Like us on Twitter
@SC_NRCS

USDA-NRCS is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Provider

Small Farmer Makes Big Impact on the Land and in Community

Photos and story by: Sabrenna Bryant, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist



Ann Pringle Washington enjoys growing a variety of fresh vegetables on her farm.

Deeply rooted on her land and in her beloved community, Ann Pringle Washington wears many hats. She's a mother, a wife, an entrepreneur, a community leader and a small farmer. She makes her home in the small rural town of Eastover, SC, located 30 minutes from downtown Columbia. Alongside her husband Richard, Ann worked with the SC USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to develop a whole farm management plan to expand their small farm using a naturalistic approach.

The Washington's farm consists of 17 acres of beautiful, green, open space, located off a main highway, and bordering natural wetlands behind the property. But, this wasn't always the case. Much of the Washington's farm was once covered with trees, such as pines and hardwoods, and they desired to make their land more productive.

Ann attended outreach workshops hosted by the Richland SWCD through the *Organic Richland* program, a partnership project with SC NRCS which promotes local, sustainable, and organic agriculture. Ann learned of NRCS programs and services, and was introduced to both District Conservationist Ajoa

Harris and District Education Coordinator Chanda Cooper, through these workshops.

Harris was able to assist the Washington's in developing a farm management plan, as well as receiving financial assistance through the EQIP program. Through EQIP, Ann received cost-sharing for a seasonal high tunnel, micro-irrigation and mulch, and the deactivation of an old well. "The Washington's have been wonderful to work with," stated Harris. "We have a great [farm management] plan in place and will continue to work together as the farm progresses, and see what additional steps we need to take in the future."

The Washington's grow a vast variety of fruits and vegetables, including a muscadine vineyard. They were able to remove many trees from their property, and re-planted with a variety fruit and nut trees and berry patches. Raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, Fuji apple trees and pecan trees are only a few of many plantings to be found on the Washington's farm. Ann also takes pride in harvesting the fruits of her labor, turning 500 pounds of muscadine grapes gathered over the summer into wine and jelly, and using her tomatoes to make fresh pasta sauce and salsa.

Ann is an innovative farmer, who wants to keep her farm as healthy as possible. "We believe in a naturalistic approach to farming, no chemicals," stated Washington. The farm is fertilized primarily with compost, which is kept



The Washington's are innovative farmers, developing new farming concepts, such as keyhole gardens.



Compost is the primary fertilizer used on the Washington's farm.

contained in a pile for regular use. The Washington's have also developed two "keyhole gardens" on their farm, a new farming concept adapted in many dry regions, in which produce is grown in a circular, raised garden bed, and compost is deposited into a small open hole in the middle of the garden, enriching the soil through the breakdown of organic matter.

The Washington's are currently entering their first season with their new high tunnel, and anticipate the advantages of extending their growing season. "It is going to allow us to have year round access to produce," stated Washington. "The covering will also

give us the advantage and flexibility to work on the farm when we want to, even if the weather isn't suitable." They plan to grow many different vegetables in the high tunnel, including tomatoes, jalapeños, egg-

plant, spinach and arugula, and are also contemplating trying new vegetables, such as shitake mushrooms. The couple love to explore and experiment with different farming techniques, and is already familiar with the use of hoop houses, as they also use several a "low tunnels" for growing vegetables, as well as seedlings under a heating light.

As her farm progresses and grows, Ann's vision is to make it "a kid-friendly experimentation farm," educating children on the process of growing healthy foods. Also, as the volunteer president of the Eastover/Lower Richland Business Association, her aim is to educate her community through outreach events, such as the "Richland County 2014 Farm Expo" held in November, which promotes locally grown produce and active lifestyles in Richland County. "Not only have the Washington's been progressive and proactive in applying the conservation practices on their own land, they also serve as a hub of information, spreading the word about conservation and the services we offer to their community," stated Cooper.

The Washington's are great community leaders, as well as conservation-minded small farmers and look forward to passing down a conservation legacy to future generations. "I love this farm because it is an indication of who we are and what we enjoy," stated Washington. "We believe in improving what we have access to and preserving something for the future."



The Washington's received cost-share through EQIP to construct a seasonal high-tunnel, giving them year-round access to fresh produce.

Ray Archuleta Inspires Dillon County Producers

By: Angela Baker, SWCD District Coordinator, Dillon SC



Ray Archuleta entertained and educated producers from Dillon and surrounding counties.

It was the buzz all around the state—Ray Archuleta is going to be in Dillon County!! On August 5th, 2014, 75 producers from Dillon, and surrounding counties, gathered at the Dillon Wellness Center to witness Ray Archuleta, a Conservation Agronomist at the NRCS East National Technology Center in North Carolina, discuss the importance of soil health and the principles of agroecology. The meeting began with Ray performing demonstrations to let others see what healthy soil looks like.

The first was a demonstration called the “Slake Test”, which involved taking a clod (or aggregate) of dirt from a field that has been tilled, and another from a field that has been NOT been tilled. Slaking is the breakdown of large, air-dry soil aggregates into smaller sizes when immersed in water. The test was an amazing illustration that gave everyone a visual depiction of how tilled and

untilled soil responded to the water, which represented rainfall.

The test proved that tilled soil quickly breaks apart, while untilled soil remains intact. “I used to think if I tilled the soil—fluffed it up—it would allow more water in. But that’s just not true,” stated Archuleta. “Tilling soil closes pore space and keeps rainfall from infiltrating. You’ll have pore space in your soil from top to bottom.” This confirms that tilled soil is a major cause for erosion and runoff into streams and rivers. However, soil health goes beyond the measuring of soil degradation. It is also about having fertile soil, and one way to achieve fertility is by the use of cover crops.

The primary use of cover crops is to increase soil fertility and soil quality over time, by increasing soil organic levels. Increased soil organic matter enhances soil structure, better retains water and nutrients, and increases the buffering capacity of soil. By reducing soil erosion, cover crops often reduce the rate and quantity of water that drains off the field, which would normally pose environmental risks to waterways and ecosystems downstream. Cover crops help maintain moisture in the soil for longer periods of time, and reduce the temperature of the soil by provid-



Slake Test Results: Left– No Tilled Soil
Right– Tilled and plowed soil



ing a “shade” for the soil underneath --- so **“Discover the Cover!** No matter what type of soil you have, the addition of organic matter will work wonders for its health. It will replenish the nutrients in your soil and improve its texture. Regardless if you have a 1,000 acres or a backyard garden, it takes the same practices and components to make and maintain healthy soil.

Kershaw Conservation Partnership Hosts Longleaf Workshop

By: *Sharonte' Williams, District Conservationist, Kershaw County, SC*

The USDA-NRCS partnered with the Kershaw County SWCD and the National Wild Turkey Federation to host a longleaf pine workshop in Kershaw County. The goal of the one-day workshop was to encourage successful plantings and management of the declining Longleaf pine species within its native range in South Carolina.



Landowners learn how to identify native plants within Longleaf pine stands during the workshop field tour.

Presentations discussed longleaf values, establishment, fire ecology and wildlife, economics, and financial assistance programs. The afternoon session concluded with field tours of established Longleaf pine forests that showcased different age classes within the county, different site preparation treatments specific to each site, and future plans of managing the forests. Field tour discussions were facilitated by the workshop speakers, and were an excellent opportunity for private landowners to learn about establishing and managing the Longleaf Pine ecosystem.

Speakers included Sharonte' Williams from NRCS; Gary Burger and Johnny Stowe from SC Department of Natural Resources; Wayne Harris and Paula Sisson from the US Fish and Wildlife Service; Russell Hughbright from the SC Forestry Commission; and Jimmy Lisenby from the Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership.

"This information will provide landowners, consultants and other professionals with a better understanding to make Longleaf pine restoration a success," said Williams. As a result of the excellent feedback from participants, plans are in place to host a similar workshop in the future.

Conservation Practices Increase Production on Hampton County Farm

By: *Catherine Magee, Soil Conservation Technician, Hampton County, SC*

When Neal Murdaugh came to NRCS for technical assistance, he was using sprinkler irrigation to provide water for his vegetable crops. This water system proved to be inefficient in crop production and water management. With the assistance of Hampton County District Conservationist Ben Padget, Murdaugh applied for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2013. NRCS has since assisted him in installing conservation practices on his land, including a water well, pumping plant, an irrigation pipeline, a micro-irrigation system and mulch.

After implementing the majority of these conservation practices, Murdaugh has increased water absorption and crop production on his farm. The new micro-irrigation system has allowed him to grow more watermelons on 6 rows (1/2 acre) than he did on 2.5 acres last year. This means that by changing from a sprinkler system to micro-irrigation, he increased his vegetable yield by 400%!

Murdaugh is a *New and Beginning Farmer* (farming 10 years or less) in Hampton County, and primarily grows and sells fresh produce such as watermelons, beans, pumpkins, okra, and summer squash to local farmers markets and restaurants. His micro-irrigation conversion success is a great example of how NRCS fulfills its mission by helping people help the land each and every day.



District Conservationist Ben Padget, left, assisted farmer Neal Murdaugh with installing micro-irrigation on his farm.



Earth Team

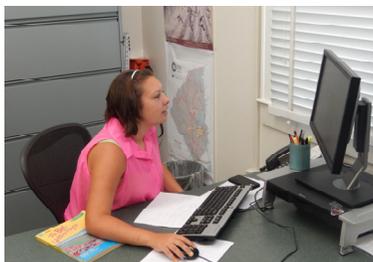
Volunteers in South Carolina



South Carolina NRCS Salutes Summer Earth Team Volunteers!



Samantha (Sammi) Hayes served as an Earth Team Volunteer in the York Field Office from June to August 2014. Sammi is a 17-year old rising senior at South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts, a residential high school located in downtown Greenville, South Carolina. Her parents and brother live in Rock Hill. An Environmental Science class taken last year inspired her to apply to be an Earth Team volunteer with NRCS. **Thanks, Sammie!**



Kiana Patterson served as an Earth Team Volunteer in the Oconee Field Office. She is a 15-year old sophomore at West-Oak High School in Westminster, SC. She is involved in JROTC, FFA, and Beta Club. She is an A/B honor student, with dreams of attending the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO. Her goal in life is to become a registered surgeon and serve her country in the United States Air Force. **Thanks, Kiana!**



Caleb Vereen served as an Earth Team volunteer in the Kingstree Field Office. Caleb is a freshman at Carvers Bay High School. He assisted the Kingstree Field Office with assembling Conservation Program contracts and other office duties. Caleb wants to one day become a Forensic Scientist. He is a member of the Carvers Bay Junior Varsity Football team, and also plans to play basketball. He enjoys hunting and fishing. **Thanks, Caleb!**



Christle Tindall served as an Earth Team volunteer in the Orangeburg Field Office. She is currently a sophomore at Edisto High School. She is on the Student Council and is a Junior Varsity Cheerleader. Her favorite subjects are Math and Science. Her hobbies include roller skating (every Friday night), clogging and cheering. Her future plans are to enter the medical profession, hopefully with a specialty in surgery. **Thanks, Christle!**

Mikaela Jackson served as an Earth Team volunteer in the Orangeburg Field Office. She is currently a Junior at Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School. She is also enrolled in the Middle College Program at Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College (OCTC). Her hobbies include: drawing and reading Magna (Japanese Comics). Her favorite subject area is science, particularly biology. Her area of interest is Veterinary Science. **Thanks, Mikaela!**

Fairfield County Farm Benefits from Conservation Technical Assistance

by: David Nathaniel Findley, State Forester/Grassland Specialist



Fescue and riprap (loose stone used to stabilize soft ground) near the livestock handling facility at Lou-Al-Tuck farms.

In 1972, Thomas A. Jackson, began raising Santa Gertrudis cattle in Mitford, South Carolina (Fairfield County). While it began as “having-something-to-do”, it evolved into much more. Today, at age 86, Jackson still serves as the head of Lou-Al-Tuck Farms, and manages a thriving registered herd of big-framed red cattle. Through the integration of conservation practices and Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), this is an outstanding farm that defies what is considered “normal” cattle management.

The 130 acre farm has roughly 120 acres reserved for forty-five brood cows. With the cow weights ranging from 1,300 to 1,600 pounds, adequate grazing land is a necessity, and Lou-Al-Tuck Farms have ensured that their cattle continue to thrive through their innovative grazing practices. On any given day there are numerous paddocks sitting idle with knee-deep fescue and a sundry of other grasses that the cows relish. Chester/Fairfield County NRCS District Conservationist Bruce Andrews once posed the question, “Where can you see fescue like this in August?” The

answer is Lou-Al-Tuck Farms.

Jackson has worked with NRCS conservationists to receive cost-share to install conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Their plan included installing pipelines, heavy use areas, and watering tanks. Lou-Al-Tuck farms also serves as a research station, utilizing the technical assistance of NRCS staff, as they experiment with new technologies, oftentimes introducing new farming concepts to NRCS. An example of this is a circular livestock handling facility, which has made routine maintenance of the cattle easier.

The farm also helps educate other producers about the benefits of conservation practices, and emerging technologies. Recently, the *Santa Gertrudis Breeders of the Carolinas* hosted their annual field day at the farm which included a workshop, livestock show and pasture tour. The Fairfield NRCS field office also discussed NRCS programs and services, and provided technical information on grazing.

Lou-Al-Tuck Farms has forged a strong relationship with NRCS, as well as other farmers, through an effective and successful focus on the importance of Conservation Technical Assistance. They has proven that through seeking knowledge and then sharing it with others, they have created a strong foundation on their own farm, and helped other land users reach their goals of creating a sustainable farmstead.

Newberry District's Camp Conservation

by: Staci Henry, District Conservationist, Newberry, SC

The Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District hosted their annual **Camp Conservation** on August 2, 2014. The event was held at The Setzler Hatchery in Newberry, and was a huge success with 18 kids in attendance and 13 volunteers. The children participated in many hands-on activities, such as assembling and decorating blue bird houses, and they learned about environmental issues. Topics discussed included water quality, air pollution, recycling and soil health.

NRCS Newberry District Conservationist Staci Henry conducted a soil and water experiment that illustrated the benefits of cover on soil, and how this can improve water quality. She used soda bottles to help the students see how much clearer the water was that came from soil covered with foliage.

If you would like more information about *Camp Conservation*, contact Danielle Rowe at (803) 940-6001, or visit the Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District office at 719 Kendall Road, Newberry, SC.



Civil Rights Advisory Committee Update

By: Reginald Hall, Civil Rights Committee Chair

I would like to thank all of you for participating in the **Feds Feed Families** campaign this year. We donated a total of 318 pounds of food to the Harvest Hope Food Bank in Columbia, SC.

The Civil Rights Committee is continuing to implement South Carolina's 2-2-2 Action Plan, and we have currently completed 12 of 20 action items. The State Leadership Team will be attending a team building retreat at Fort Jackson later this Fall.

Lastly, I hope that everyone enjoyed this year's Cultural Awareness Day program. We appreciate the speakers that joined us, and the information that they presented. The Civil Rights Committee looks forward to another great program in 2015, and are currently brainstorming ideas for a fun-filled day.

2014 Cultural Awareness Day Highlights



Soils Take Center Stage in 2015



© Tim Peters

By: Amy Overstreet, SC NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, on detail to NRCS Soil Science Division, Washington, DC

NRCS, as well as USDA, has a once in a lifetime opportunity in the coming year to celebrate the importance of soil, and the work that our agency has accomplished in the field of soil science over the past 80+ years. Why? It's the International Year of Soils (IYS)!!!

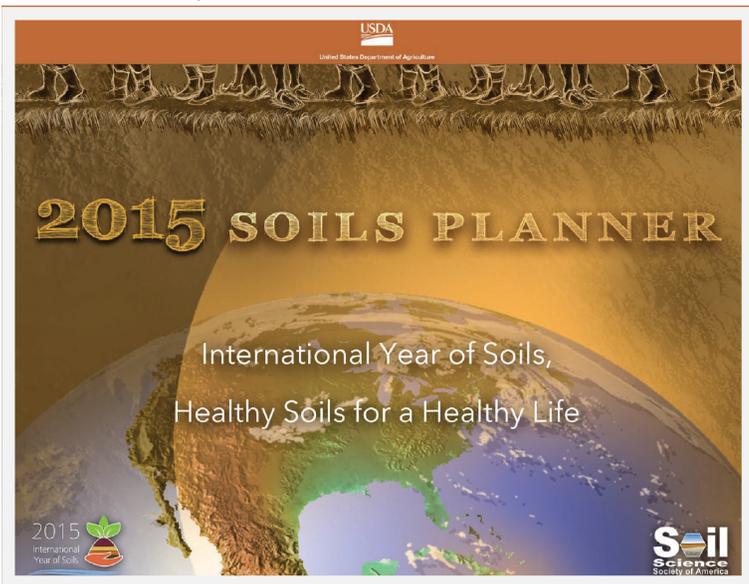
The United Nations-FAO(Food and Ag Organization) declared 2015 as the International Year of Soils and I was asked to serve a detail to the National Soil Science Division in Washington, DC, this summer to help craft a communications plan and create this year's 2015 Soils Calendar. I recently was asked to continue my work on this detail experience throughout the year!

2015 presents our agency, and each of our employees, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase the contributions of NRCS' employees, technology and research, and customer service to farmers and landowners in the U.S and across the globe. We are working in collaboration with the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), as well as the United Nations, and the Global

This summer I had the privilege of spending one week each month at NRCS headquarters in Washington, DC. It was the experience of a lifetime and I am looking forward to continuing work on the project which will promote the International Year of Soils in 2015.

Soil Partnership. I had a chance to travel to Madison, Wisconsin, in August to meet with staff at the SSSA headquarters and discuss our partnership to promote the IYS.

Planned outreach products include state press kits for all NRCS offices which will include talking points, a press release, and related information about IYS. I hope that field offices, in partnership with your local conservation partners and landowners, will think of ways that you can celebrate IYS in your county next year. In addition, SC NRCS is creating a series of 12 brief video productions (by Dr. Buz Kloot) with each one exploring one of the monthly themes reflected in this year's soils calendar. NRCS also plans to promote IYS through social media, USDA blog posts, and by engaging with partners around the globe. How will you celebrate? Got ideas? Contact me and let's chat!



Long live the soil,

amy.overstreet@sc.usda.gov



2015
International
Year of Soils

A sneak peek at the 2015 NRCS Soils Planner which features soils around the world. The calendars will soon be available for employees and customers to order for free from the NRCS Publications Center in Iowa. Stay tuned!

Personnel Update

South Carolina NRCS Welcomes New Resource Soil Scientist



Steve Herriman is the new Resource Soil Scientist in Florence, SC. He began his career with SCS/NRCS as a temporary full-time soil scientist in Ellensburg, WA in 1987. He later began a permanent soil scientist position in Shelby, MT, mapping soils as a project member. He then transferred to Havre, MT, for 2 years, until taking a job in Liberal, KS, in 1991 as a project leader. Six years later, Steve took a job in Fallon, NV, as a resource soil scientist for the next 13 years. In 2009, he left Fallon for the Minden, NV MLRA office during a downsizing and stayed there five years until accepting the job in Florence. Steve and his wife are happy to be near family, as she is a native Floridian and has relatives in SC. He looks forward to the challenges of the job and getting to know everyone in SC NRCS. Welcome Steve!

- **Jackie Heuermann** entered duty as a permanent Soil Conservation Technician in Chester on 7/27/14. Jackie was previously a term Soil Conservation Technician employee in Chester.
- **Daniel Griffin** entered duty as the District Conservationist in Bishopville on 8/14/2014. Daniel was a Soil Conservationist in the Marlboro Field Office.
- **Jada Burrell** has been selected to serve on the Contracting National Service Delivery Team and will begin reporting to NHQ on 11/3/2014. Her duty station will not change. Until 11/3, Jada is the Supervisory Contracting Officer for SC.
- **Amy Overstreet**, PAS/Outreach Coordinator, will continue her 50% detail to the national Soil Science Division, Washington, DC, to work on the agency's communications plan for the International Year of Soils.

Cute Critter Catch!

This fox is looking for breakfast near the Gills Creek Dam in Lancaster, SC.

Photo submitted by NRCS
Supervisory District Conservationist
Ann Christie,
Lancaster Field Office



If you have questions, contributions, or suggestions regarding the newsletter, please contact Amy Overstreet at amy.overstreet@sc.usda.gov, or Sabrenna Bryant at sabrenna.bryant@sc.usda.gov

USDA-NRCS
1835 Assembly Street
Room 950
Columbia, SC 29201