



# NRCS Alabama Current Developments

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## From the State Conservationist - Dr. William Puckett



It is good to be back on the mainland and at home. As most of you know, I have been on detail to the Pacific Islands Area (PIA) for 120 days. It was a great experience and I am lucky to have been chosen to do it.

PIA and Alabama were different in many ways-- tropical agriculture, high cost of living, flying to all field offices, piggeries, and culture--but they were similar in people and partners. People are always the common denominator and there is more commonality than differences. It reminded me of why I chose to be a public servant. I have included a collage of photos from my visit to the PIA in this newsletter.

I want to extend a big "THANK YOU" to Ben Malone and April Jones for the great job they did as Acting State Conservationist and Assistant State Conservationist while I was gone. I think the continuity of services was practically seamless and I hope you felt the same way.

We are under another Continuing Resolution (CR), which provides funding for the Federal government through December 11, 2014. The CR will allow us to continue our operations with just slightly less than what was provided in FY2014. Budget Officer Shirley told me that we will be ok during the CR in paying salaries and benefits, but we will not be able to do much more. I ask that we all be prudent in our spending for the duration of the CR.

As we close the books on another Fiscal Year, I see a lot of accomplishments that have been made. Because of challenges in funding, we are combining efforts with more and different partners to ensure our, and their, objectives are met. We are staying on track in providing good conservation programs and technical assistance to Alabama's landowners.

As we begin the new fiscal year, it's critical that we help our customers remain good stewards of natural resources and that we remain diligent in delivering quality services. I am proud of the work we do and I know that you will continue to provide high quality customer service.

Sharing some photos of my visit to the Pacific Islands Area.



Oahu- Dry Tara



Oahu - Papaya



Oahu – Birthing Stones



Big Island – Waipio Valley



Big Island – Waipio Valley



Big Island-Waipio Valley-Wet Tara



Big Island



Big Island – Kona Coffee



Maui – Sweet Onions



Maui - Exclusion Fence – Native Forest



Maui – Burning Sugar Cane



Kauai



Kauai



Am Samoa



Am Samoa – Tara, Coconut, Banana



AM Samoa - Vetiver



Am Samoa - Piggery



Am Samoa - Piggery



Am Samoa - Piggery



Am Samoa – Fale (Guest House)



Guam – Vetiver and Banana



Guam



Saipan



Tinian



Washington State



Mt. St. Helens

# News from the State Office

## Alabama NRCS Food Drive

“Feds Feeds Families” is the annual United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) national food drive. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and other service center staff participated in this year’s campaign that ran from June 1 through August 27 to help combat hunger in Alabama. Across the state, NRCS and partners donated over 3,000 pounds of food and \$400 in cash to local charitable agencies of their choice.

- West Area office in Grove Hill collected 281 pounds of food for Harriett’s House, Inc.
- Mobile County Service Center donated 415 pounds of fresh food from their garden to Bay Area Food Bank
- Limestone County Service Center collected 245 pounds for a local food pantry
- Madison County NRCS/SWCD Field Office collected 91 pounds for the Care Assurance System for the Aging (not shown)
- North Area office in Huntsville collected 200 pounds for The Caring a Place in Hartselle (not shown)

• NRCS State Office in Auburn collected 1,784 pounds of food and \$400 cash for the East Alabama Food Bank in Auburn, and the Montgomery Area Food Bank.

Nationally, it was reported that USDA employees beat their previous best by nearly 2 million pounds. USDA employees donated a record 6.2 million pounds of food, surpassing all Federal departments and agencies. Be proud of yourself and continue to remember those less fortunate.



Limestone Co Service Center



State Office



Mobile Garden



West Area

## Shortleaf Training

In September NRCS partnered with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) to host training on the Restoration and Management of Shortleaf Pine at the O.C. Eppes Community Center in Waterloo, AL.

Tripp Gaskins with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service discussed Shortleaf Pine Restoration and Management at the Bankhead National Forest. Chris Erwin with American Forest Foundation spoke about a Shortleaf Pine Grant. Mike Black from the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative presented a history of shortleaf pine. He said that forestland owners may be the answer to increasing the Bobwhite Quail populations in the state. Bobwhite Quail prefer a savannah-type environment and Alabama's cropland and pastureland are not an ideal environment for the bird.

Carrie Threadgill from ADCNR talked about non-game species that thrive in forest environments

with a pine component that could be achieved with a hardwood/shortleaf pine ecosystem. One of the keys to the survival of these non-game wildlife is to not only have a pine component to the forest, but also an early successional habitat. Jeff Thurmond, NRCS Wildlife Biologist, presented financial assistance opportunities for landowners thru EQIP and CSP. Financial assistance is available for shortleaf pine planting, prescribed burning, and thinning.

After lunch, the group toured the wildlife management areas to see shortleaf pine in various stages of growth. Some stands had been burned and some had not. Andrew Nix from ADCNR led the field tour ending in a 100 year old forest. At the last stop, Tim Albritton led a discussion about what might be appropriate NRCS financial assistance practices to offer forestland owners in various situations.



## Oklahoma Creek Tribe Member Visits AL

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

Charles Coleman is the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Thlopthlocco Tribal Town in Oklahoma, a federally recognized tribe with ancestral ties to Alabama. He was invited to a Cultural Diversity event in July for the Alabama Army National Guard. Coleman wanted to visit the historic towns of the Creek Nation in Alabama. Since a few of the places he wanted to visit were in Elmore County, Pam Mason, former DC in Elmore County, joined us.

We visited the archaeological site of Sam Monac's Tavern on the Old Federal Road near Pintlala; the recently discovered site of Holy Ground, which had been the staging ground for the attack on Fort Mim; and a tour of the western half of Atasi, a prominent Creek Indian town that was established by the early 1700s on the Tallapoosa. This site was almost entirely in cropland.

We visited a place called Polecat Springs near Tuskegee where much of the archaeological remains has been disturbed, if not destroyed. However, Coleman stated he still felt good visiting the area since it was the homeland of his Tribal town.



*Charles Coleman was impressed with this tall corn.*

We also visited a portion of what is believed to be Hoithlewaulee where Red Stick warriors attacked General Floyd's encampment on Calebee Creek. Today, this site is in hayland, longleaf pines, and a mixed hardwood and pine forest.

Coleman was so impressed with the tall corn and large cotton fields he wanted lots of photographs to take home. These photos raised the hopes of many of his Tribe to soon visit their Alabama homeland.

The landowners where the Historic Creek towns were located were more than willing to accommodate us. Many thanks to Pam Mason for arranging a visit to one farm where the owner grilled lunch for us.

Read more about this story on the Alabama NRCS website ([www.al.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov)) under News Room/Success Stories - *Oklahoma Creek Indian Native Visits Alabama*.



### NRCS CFC Campaign

By Omar Covington, Project Leader, AL  
NRCS CFC Campaign

Thanks to everyone who has donated to the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). If you haven't given yet, you still have time. We have currently achieved 77 percent of our goal and have until December 3 to meet or surpass it.

Please take a moment, and if you have not already donated, help us meet our Alabama NRCS 2014 CFC goal. Contact me to donate the traditional way or go online at [www.heartofalabamacfc.org](http://www.heartofalabamacfc.org).

The NRCS State Office holds a fundraiser for the CFC each year. At this year's silent auction, we made a total of \$224. Way to go!

Again, thank you all for helping our great state reach or exceed our goal for this year's CFC drive.

### Program Info Available in a New Language

Phương thức đăng ký tham gia các chương trình của NRCS--this is Vietnamese for "How to Signup for NRCS Programs." Alabama NRCS now has program information in Vietnamese available for our customers. John Curtis, previous Alabama NRCS Asian American/Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager (AAPI/SEPM), worked with Thomas Tran, AAPI/SEPM from Sisseton, SD, to get the documents translated.

EQIP, Energy Retrofits, and How to Sign up for Programs are available on the Alabama NRCS website. More information will be added as it is translated.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/al/programs/financial/eqip/>

### Wyoming STC Comes to Alabama

Astrid Martinez is the NRCS State Conservationist for WY. She is spending four-weeks in the Auburn NRCS State Office learning about the unique resource concerns facing the South and is being mentored by Dr. Bill Puckett. Since being here, she has attended Poarch Band of Creek Indian Tribal meetings in Atmore, viewed conservation projects on a variety of farms, and saw cotton for the first time.

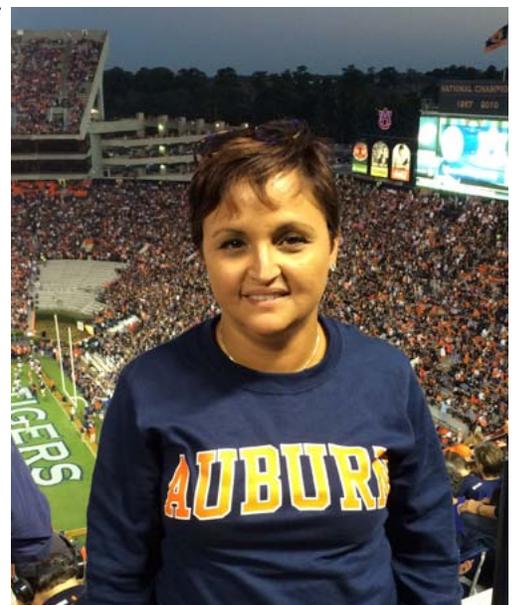
Being the State Conservationist in a state like Wyoming is very different from being one in the South, she indicated. "The resource concerns in Alabama are as different as night and day from what we face in Wyoming," Astrid said. "You certainly don't have our wind erosion problems!"

Astrid was born and raised in San German, Puerto Rico, and graduated Cum Laude from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus with a major in Agronomy and Soils in May 1996. She earned a Masters Degree in Soils with Honors from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Campus in Soil Science in May 2005. Astrid worked as an NRCS STEP student in the summer of 1996. On March 1997 she started her professional career with NRCS. In her 17+ years she worked as a Soil Scientist in Greenfield, MA; a Soil Conservationist in Oconto, WI; Major Land Resource Area Project Leader in Grand Island and Scottsbluff, NE; State Soil Scientist in Casper, WY; and has been the Wyoming NRCS State Conservationist for 2.5 years.

She has served in many professional organizations and associations. She is currently in her second term as President of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees-NOPHNRCSE.

We hope Astrid enjoys her time in our state and learns a lot about Alabama. She was quick to

mention one of the highlights of her trip was her very first Auburn University football game when the Tigers took the South Carolina Gamecocks handily by a score of 42-35. "War Eagle!" she said.



## From the Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC)



Members completing their terms were recognized for their contributions and were presented a plaque by Dr. Puckett. (l-r) Wesley Halbrooks, Michele Wood, Blake Garner, Wendy Smith, and Christopher Joe (not pictured: John Curtis)

### The First CRAC Meeting of FY 2015

The first meeting of the new fiscal year was held for all current committee members and those newly elected.

New members were welcomed. These include Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) Steve Lloyd for American Indian Alaskan Natives and Blake Garner for Disability. New area representatives include Robert Moore-North; Codie Yelverton-East, and Erika Justiniano-Velez-West.

Luis Cruz-Arroyo (Hispanic SEPM) is the new Chairperson, Blake Garner (Disability SEPM) is the

Vice-Chair, and Eddie Davis (Black SEPM) is the new Recorder.

Members of the committee were recognized for their exemplary performance and attendance over the past 3 years. Because this is a voluntary position, their attendance is representative of their commitment to service and to the CRAC in Alabama.

The CRAC worked really hard this past year -- with a national civil rights audit, diversity days, and all of the 2-2-2 FEVS listening sessions. It is important that we recognize their extra efforts.

CRAC attendance awards (l-r): FY14 perfect-Rita Johnson, Norris Hudnall, Allison Smith, Eddie Davis. FY13-14 perfect-Zona Beaty, Marshall Colburn. FY11-14 highest attendance-15 meetings out of 17 - Michele Wood



# Cultural Diversity Training

## West Area Cultural Diversity Training

On April 24, NRCS/SWCD staff from across the West Area attended Cultural Diversity Training at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PBCI) Reservation in Atmore, Alabama.

Tribal Elder Billy Smith addressed the group and thanked NRCS for holding the meeting in their facility.

Robert Thrower, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, presented a PBCI historical and cultural presentation. He shared stories about his family life, particularly about his mother and grandmother. Employees received handout material with photos and maps.

Margaret Baggett, PBCI Cultural Artist, gave a basket weaving demo. She stressed the importance of preserving and passing along family traditions to future generations. Ms. Baggett studied under national master artisans and she teaches traditional arts to children and seniors in the Creek Cultural Center in Atmore. She is a Tribal Member and has worked with the Tribe for more than twenty years. Her skills include basket weaving using river cane and pine straw, pottery making, and shell-carving for making jewelry.

The PBCI Leaders and Elders treated the group to lunch at their Senior Center.

The meeting ended with a guided tour of the PBCI Museum. This exhibit tells the story of an active and living culture and people. The displays invite everyone to share the history and ongoing culture and traditions of the Tribe. In audiovisual programs, oral histories, and hands-on interaction, the spirit and voices of the Tribe shine through. It was a very enlightening and informative meeting.

Special thanks to all the committee members and the planning committee that consisted of Marshall Colburn, David Elliott, Charlie Ramsey, Luis Cruz-Arroyo and Wendy Smith. David Elliott, PBCI Tribal Liaison, helped coordinate the meeting with the Tribe.



*Chief Gina Williamson of the UCAN Indian Tribe speaks to the North Area attendees.*

## North Area Cultural Diversity Training

In June, the North Area held a Cultural Diversity event and provided employees with first-hand perspectives of different cultures. This meeting was one in the series of events held across the state by the CRAC Committee to educate NRCS employees .

Members of the United Cherokee ANI-YUN-WIYA Nation (UCAN) Indian Tribe provided a history on the Cherokee Indian culture, along with a visual display of the clothing, tools, and weapons used by their ancestors.

Bobby Hayden, Alabama A&M University historian, provided a personal history of his experiences as an African American before and during the Civil Rights era. He talked about being in the military and what it meant to serve his country. In 1963, he became one of the first African-American honor guards for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, along with six others who referred to themselves as "The Magnificent Seven." As one of the last living guards, earlier this year he was invited to meet President Obama at the White House.

Omar Smith, a Business Relations Consultant with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), talked about working with persons with disabilities to get them into the workforce through job readiness training, mentoring, and locating jobs. He gave examples of accommodating a person with a disability at their workplace so they can perform their job effectively. He spoke about overcoming worksite obstacles which would be beneficial with recruiting and retaining persons with disabilities.

The meeting provided a lot of insight into different cultures. Special thanks goes to the people who made this event happen--the current and former members of the Alabama CRAC committee, STC Dr. Puckett, Acting STC Ben Malone, ASTC-FO North Area Greg Dansby, and the members of the North Area Cultural Diversity Day Committee--Merry Gaines, Wesley Halbrooks, Suzanne Baucom, Eddie Davis, Blake Garner, and Renea Dyer.

## From The Field

### Summer Intern Gets Exposed to Conservation

Jacqueline Martin is a student at Tuskegee University with a double major in Environmental Science and Computer Science. As a NRCS summer intern in the Huntsville Field Office, she was exposed to various NRCS assistance programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP). Jacqueline also assisted in the checkout/layout of practices such as retrofitting of center pivot nozzles, residue management, WRE evaluations, terraces, heavy use area protection, and dry hydrant layout. Jacqueline also learned about GPS, toolkits, and ArchGIS.

She plans to work next summer for NRCS in a different location of the state to gain more experience and prepare herself for a career with the agency. Jacqueline is an 1890's National Scholars Program recipient and a member of the girls basketball team at Tuskegee University.



*Robert Moore (Area Engineer) teaches Jacqueline how to use GPS to check distances.*

### Small Farms Research Center at Alabama A&M University Holds Meeting in Mobile

The Mobile County NRCS staff received a letter of thanks from the Alabama A&M Small Farms Research Center for participating as resource speakers for the August Agricultural Risk Management and Business Development Workshop. The letter stated,

“Your time, effort, and participation helped to make the event a big success!”

Through this collaboration, nearly 100 socially disadvantaged, civilian veterans, and new and beginning farmers and producers, as well as Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) agents and community leaders were trained and educated about sustainable agriculture and funding opportunities for small farm operations.

Through the great partnership and financial support of the Gulf Coast Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, each participant received a booklet that highlighted public and private funding opportunities.

Several presenters shared with the participants their wealth of knowledge, expertise, and experience. People working behind the scenes were recognized including LaTangy Charley, ACES; Joyce Nicholas, Mobile County NRCS; and April Griffin, Mobile County SWCD.



*Joyce Nicholas talked to the group about NRCS programs and opportunities.*

### Madison County Small Farmers Outreach

*By Hannah South, NRCS Student Intern*

In May, a Small-Scale Farming and Sustainability Workshop was held at the Alabama A&M Agribition Center attended by 18 people. Robert Spencer, ACES Extension Specialist; Executive Director of the Alabama Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys RC&D Mike Roden; Madison County NRCS DC Anthony Hudson, and NRCS student intern Hannah South spoke at the meeting.

NRCS personnel discussed the financial assistance programs and practices offered such as the EQIP program. The participants were interested in both the Seasonal High Tunnel state initiative and



*Hanna South  
NRCS student  
intern, addresses  
the group at  
the outreach  
meeting.*

other practices such as cross fencing, heavy use areas, and watering troughs. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) was also discussed and landowners were encouraged to participate.

The step-by-step process for applying to NRCS programs was covered along with the benefits of being considered a “Beginning Farmer/Rancher, a Veteran, and a Historically Underserved Farmer/Rancher.”

Contact information for the NRCS Huntsville Field Office was available and participants were encouraged to come by the office to sign up for eligible programs.

## Soil Mapping and Wetland Determination on Eastern Gulf Coast Flatlands

A soil exercise was held in Mobile with NRCS State Soil Scientist Lawrence McGhee, Mobile NRCS DC Joyce Nicholas; and the Alabama NRCS Technical Soils Staff. The exercise gave soil scientists with limited field experience an enriching experience on soil mapping and wetland determination in MLRA 152. It also gave staff an opportunity to share and reinforce relationships with intraregional (MO-7) coworkers and SSO Leaders that otherwise would have been difficult to meet.



## Soil Tunnel Trailer Developed in Pike County

The late Paul Harvey once said, “Man — despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and his many accomplishments — owes his existence to a six inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.” Developing an appreciation of soil and stewardship is the mission of the Soil Tunnel Trailer, a brand new, one-of-a-kind portable demonstration tool built as an interactive package to showcase what is special about soil.

Inside the Soil Tunnel visitors experience what it is like to be six feet underground. The Soil Tunnel Trailer transports soil monoliths and the official state soil of Alabama, displays local burrowing wildlife including the endangered gopher tortoise, and includes unusual facts about Alabama’s natural resources.

The Soil Tunnel Trailer was developed by Jessica Morris, while working as the Education Specialist for the Pike County SWCD.

The Pike County Soil and Water Conservation District secured grants from the Wiregrass RC&D Council and Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Yellow River Watershed Management Authority. The project was started in December 2013 and completed in July 2014.

The 8’x12’ trailer is divided into three sections: 1) underground ecology surrounding the local endangered gopher tortoise and associated organisms; 2) Alabama soil monoliths; and 3) what makes up the soil and how we use it every day. There is also a station with a video for visitors to listen and watch information about Alabama. Outside the trailer are learning stations where students can get more hands on with various watershed and erosion activities.

From NRCS in Auburn, AL, MLRA Soil Survey Area 07 Project Leader John Burns and Soil Scientists Cooper Nichols and Darnae Hopkins created the five soil monoliths that included four local coastal plains soils and one piedmont soil -- the Bama series -- Alabama’s official state soil. These monoliths show the educational contrast between different soil types, visual soil properties, and the different layers.

The Soil Tunnel Trailer is valued around \$17,000. It is available for use by schools and other education events.

The Soil Tunnel Trailer was initiated at the Pike County Third Grade Farm Day hosted by the Pike County Young Farmers on September 25. It will travel to many other future events.



*To schedule a Soil Tunnel Trailer visit, call the Pike County SWCS office at 334-566-2300, Extension 3 or contact our Education Specialist Deborah Huggins Davis at (334) 566-2301 for information on the trailer.*



## Colbert County Partners Host Forestry Event

The Colbert County Office of the Alabama Forestry Commission, the NRCS Tuscombina Field Office, and other local partners hosted the North Region Forestry Field Day/Landowner Tour. This event took place at Q-Bik Foot Enterprise (Tree Farm owned by Marshall and Brian Burgess). The tour included four stops to show attendees better ways to manage their land. John Mims was presented with "Lifetime Achievement" Treasure Forest Award.



*The tour concluded at the Rattle Snake Saloon, a natural shelter that has been developed into a restaurant.*

## Limestone County SWCD Sponsors FFA Land Judging Contest

*By Brenda Wigginton, DAC, Limestone County SWCD*

Limestone County SWCD sponsored the annual FFA Land Judging competition in September 2014. This year six teams with about 40 students competed representing all county schools. The students judged the soil for different characteristics and for various conservation practices needed for pastureland, cropland, forestland, and a homesite.

Jack Gilbert, Limestone County District Supervisor, presented the awards and thanked the schools for their participation. Winning schools included:

1st Place - Tanner; 2nd Place - East Limestone FFA; 3rd Place - Clements; 4th Place - West Limestone; 5th Place - Elkmont; 6th Place - Ardmore.  
High Scorer - Tiara Grisgby from Tanner.

Many thanks to the Limestone County Commission for assistance in digging the holes and Soil



*Students judge soils at a pit dug for the competition.*

Scientist Milton Tuck for his assistance in judging. It was great to see such interest and participation in the contest.

## Sustaining Diversity in Production Agriculture

*By Joyce Lane, DC, Athens, AL*

This year's theme for the National Black Growers Council (NBGC) speaks volumes. The NBGC have a simple mission: To improve the Efficiency, Productivity, and Sustainability of Black Row Crop Farmers.

In August 2014 at Bridgeforth Farms, a 4th generation farm located in Tanner, Alabama, in Limestone County, the NBGC held their Third Model Farm Series Field Day for 2014. Over 115 farmers and others from South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia, and other states joined local farmers on one of the hottest days of the year to tour the farm and hear presentations on Crop Insurance, 2014 Farm Bill, NRCS USDA programs, FSA, and Farm Safety. The



*Attendees experienced first-hand the combine and self-propelled sprayer.*

tour allowed experts to present many things that are essential to being a successful farmer. The urgency is to maximize all needed resources and minimize the costs.

Attendees were divided into groups to visit stations. At one station the attendees learned about precision agriculture technology and actually participated in a demonstration. Another station was a soybean field where they observed variety trials of resistant weed management, and a 2014 Soybean Budget.

Kyle Bridgeforth discussed planters, tractors, sprayers, combines, and using precision ag as a tool to gather pertinent information to manage next year's crop.

Additional topics discussed included Farm Bill updates, crop insurance, NRCS financial assistance, and Farm Safety.

Later the group loaded onto two buses to look at a recently completed Sub Drip Irrigation System on the farm. The Sub Drip Irrigation system is an NRCS EQIP financial assisted practice installed on 107 acres, the largest area installed to the practice in Alabama.

Greg Bridgeforth worked closely with NRCS DC Joyce Lane to make sure the project stayed on schedule.

Bridgeforth laughed and said that he could assist others who plan to install future Sub Drip Irrigation systems. Bridgeforth said the system is working very well and they plan to install the practice in another field just across the road.

This was a great time to let the group know that assistance is available to help landowners install numerous conservation practices. NRCS collaborated with the NBGC to inform Socially Disadvantaged and Limited Resources producers. The group was informed about steps to take to sign-up for program assistance.

## Mobile County SWCD Sponsors Second Annual Forage Field Day

It was a good day for being out in the field and the information presented was just like the weather—"perfect timing" for over-seeding or drilling in seed for winter forage.

Bob Pittman hosted a no-till grain drill demonstration on his farm in south Mobile County. The day's activities were possible with a 319-grant through the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and in cooperation with Randy Shaneyfelt, Mobile County SWCD, and the Mobile County Farmers Federation. The district entered into an agreement with ADEM to purchase a new grain-drill to improve



water quality by reducing soil loss and improving soil health.

Kirk Iversen, NRCS ACES Soil Scientist, discussed the no-till practice and how it can improve the quality of soil and change the dynamics of the living soil. Anthony Wiggins of ACES spoke about forages for south Alabama. NRCS employees Brad Williams and Bentley Dearmon gave presentations about financial assistance programs and meeting NRCS conservation practice standards and specifications. Randy Shaneyfelt of ADEM provided topic discussions on conservation buffers and water quality.

The goal is to increase the number of acres of cropland and pasture land in which a no-till cropping system will be applied or intensified using more and various species in the planting mix.

The no-till method of planting cover crops or winter annuals into a pasture is common in south Alabama, and cover crops behind row crops are often mandatory for HEL compliance. Mobile County SWCD's grain drill is available for rent. Call 251-441-6505, Extension 3 for more information.

## New Employees Assists with WRP Restoration

A team of NRCSers visited the construction site of a dam for a shallow water pond within a Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) easement in New Hope, Alabama. The landowner enrolled 123 acres of his property into a 30 year WRP easement. The landowner Ira Gunn had already planted the required trees on his site and is in the process of building the shallow water pond to complete the restoration. The team included DC Anthony Hudson, Senior Soil Scientist Eddie Davis Jr., and two new employees Soil Conservationist Technician James Fountain and Pathway Student Hannah South.

The site visit was requested by Gunn after a backhoe operator reported observing a soil color-



*l-r: Hannah South, James Fountain, Eddie Davis Jr. and landowner Ira Gunn.*

ation change while excavating the ditch for the core of the dam. This allowed an opportunity to cross-train between disciplines within the agency as the team worked together to address the landowner's concerns. This also allowed for general soils training for the new employees as they learned about landscape positions, soil structure, and soil texture to help them determine if the soil present would be suitable material for the core of the dam.

At the conclusion of the visit, the NRCS team had learned from each other, learned more about soil and conservation, and provided technical services to the landowner.

This is all in keeping with the agency's mission "Helping People Help the Land."

### From the Soil Up Outreach Meeting

The locally grown/produced movement is alive and well in Florence, AL. In August, the Lauderdale County SWCD/NRCS office partnered with the Northwest Alabama RC&D Council, the Alabama A&M University's Small Farms Research Center, and Alabama's Mountains, River and Valley RC&D Council for an outreach meeting at the local farmer's market in Florence, AL, in August.

The farmers market in Florence has seen tremendous growth over the last few years. An estimated 300 consumers visit the local market on Saturdays for fresh produce and locally produced items such as honey, canned goods, soap, and flowers.

A new outlet for local producers will be opening soon in downtown Florence called the Court Street Market. This marketplace will house 10 booths featuring local farmers, artisans, and food kiosks.

As an incentive to draw producers to our booth, Northwest Alabama RC&D volunteer Sheri Chavez and Coordinator Charlie Meek tested the pH of soil samples. Soil boxes and instructions were also available on how to pull a soil sample and send it to Auburn University for analysis. NRCS DC Renea Dyer offered assistance on signing up for Farm Bill programs and technical advice on conservation practices. JaMarkus Crowell presented information on services available thru Alabama A&M University's Small Farms Research Center.



*l-r: JaMarkus Crowell, Charlie Meek, Sheri Chavez, and Renea Dyer.*

### At Home in South Dakota

Brian Smith said Southern hospitality is alive and well — in South Dakota.

Smith is a Lauderdale County SWCD Board member and president of the Lauderdale County Junior Cattlemen's Association. In June he led a group of students and adults to South Dakota to help ranchers devastated by a winter blizzard last winter. The Lauderdale County SWCD along with Northwest Alabama RC&D Council sponsored the trip.

The group delivered 21 heifers to those who lost about 80,000 head of cattle during the blizzard. "They just gave us a huge welcome," Smith said. "They opened up their homes to us. Twelve families divided 56 of us to stay in their homes."

The junior cattlemen delivered one heifer to 21 different families and helped the ranchers with branding. Smith said the kids will remember the experience for the rest of their lives.

The visitors spent their days working on fences, clearing brush and other ranch chores. Each night the families gathered for a potluck supper.



Alabama youth helped repair damaged fences in South Dakota.

The group had lots of invitations to come back. The ranchers are talking about chartering a bus and coming to Alabama for visit.

The group also assisted with tree planting. “We planted about 300 trees in one day,” Smith said. “They actually plant trees in South Dakota to catch the snow to store up and put on their hay fields during the summer because they don’t get a lot of rainfall.”

The group was also able to do some sight-seeing on the trip with visits to Mount Rushmore, a John Deere plant, and several livestock operations and shows.

“Everyone came away with a fantastic experience that they will treasure forever,” Smith said.

Read the whole story on the Alabama NRCS website: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/al/newsroom/stories](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/al/newsroom/stories).

## Limestone County SWCD Hosts Workshop

By Brenda Wigginton, DAC, Limestone County, AL

Limestone County SWCD hosted the 8th Annual Area I District Administrative Coordinator Training Workshop in September 2014. Coordinators from 10 counties attended. The theme was “WHOOOOO Doesn’t Love Conservation?” “Owl” decorations were everywhere and all took home an “owl” made from a pinecone and a notebook with information about workshop topics and other tidbits.

Employees got a chance to learn about other counties in Area I and to gain new ideas. We are grateful for the support of the Area I Alabama Association of Conservation Districts that provided this important training that enables us to better do our jobs.

Bill Bailey, Limestone County District Supervisor, welcomed everyone and thanked them for the important work they do. Ann Smith, Area I Trainer, guided attendees as they learned shortcuts and tips in Microsoft Excel. Dr. Jones informed us about Identify

Theft. Lynne Hart talked about different events going on in Limestone County, the Limestone County Recycling, and the benefits of recycling. A video “Keep Limestone-Athens Beautiful” was shown along with videos from September 11, 2001, to honor and remember the victims and families of the Twin Towers tragedy.

The highlight of the day was a field trip to Belle Chevre Creamery in Elkmont, AL, who are famous for making world class goat cheese. For over 100 years the facility previously stored locally grown and ginned cotton. Attendees learned about how the creamery got started, the process of making the cheese, and were able to taste-test the yummy products!

Limestone County SWCD was honored to host this workshop and appreciate all who assisted and participated. Training with a small group like this is vital to assist District employees so they can better serve the landowners and aid in protecting our natural resources. Next year the workshop will be held in Lawrence County and we are looking forward to seeing what they have in store for us.



## Outreach News from Alice Love

### Festival in the Forest

In September the USDA Forest Service (FS) and Tuskegee University (TU) College of Agriculture, Environment and Nutrition Sciences hosted “Festival in the Forest” at Tuskegee National Forest in Macon County. NRCS and other partners participated in this free event targeting the general public. The day was filled with education, fun, and cultural activities in the forest.

The event embraced the “21st Anniversary of National Public Lands Day,” recognized as the nation’s largest single-day volunteer effort for public lands. Along with various conservation partners, TU students and Youth Taking Action group volunteered to help with the event.

Macon County Commissioner Chair Louis Maxwell enjoyed the day and welcomed future park activities. USDA’s FS and NRCS mascots -- Smokey Bear, Ruby Raindrop, and Sammy Soil interacted with the kids and adults alike.

Tuskegee National Forest consists of about 10,358 acres. It was proclaimed by President Eisenhower in 1959. Even though it is the smallest of its kind in America, it offers some of the best hiking, fishing, biking, and wildlife in the southeastern US. This event reminds us to enjoy, preserve, conserve, and protect our public and private lands through good conservation operation and maintenance.



*Smokey and Friends: (l-r) Ruby Raindrop, Smokey Bear, and Sammy Soil.*

### Outreach Partners Participate in Forum

USDA partners embraced the 45th Anniversary of the Tuskegee University (TU) Forestry/Natural Resources Program/Outreach Forum held in August at the Kellogg Conference Center on the TU campus.

The 150 attendees were informed of the history of the TU Program which was first implemented in the late 1960’s. Since this time, USDA Liaisons representing the Forest Service and the 1890 National Outreach Program has been located at TU to partner in the Forestry/Natural Resources efforts. These include student recruitment, USDA Educational Scholarships, and educating the general public about USDA conservation programs, forestry resources, benefits, and enhancements.

NRCS Program Manager Steve Musser talked about the various NRCS programs offered and administered through EQIP that is directly related to forest lands. Alice Love, NRCS Agricultural Outreach Liaison, exhibited various educational materials promoting EQIP and career paths within USDA. A USDA career listening session was held for College of Agriculture majors. NRCS Associate Chief for Conservation Leonard Jordan and other agency representatives was available.

The 45th TU Forum addressed diverse components associated with forestry from landuse, conservation, and professional career paths.





*Standing: Leonard Jordan, USDA-Associate Chief for Conservation, encourages future conservation students to pursue career paths in the TU College of Agriculture.*



*Local agency, organization, and University representatives reach out to students in Tuskegee University's College of Agriculture majoring in various agricultural related areas. (l-r) Rodney Stone, USDA 1890 Liaison; Shirley Tyson, State Rep-NWIAA; Alice Love, NRCS Agricultural Outreach Liaison; LaTanya Hunt-Haralson, TU Cooperative Extension County Agent; and Oga Bolden-Tiller, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Animal Science.*



*A Women & Youth in Agriculture Farm Camp was held for area youth on the Rose Hill Farm in Camden, AL.*

*(left) Commissioner of Agriculture John McMillan participates in the "camp" with Rose Hill.*

*(right) NRCS staff demonstrates soil erosion. (l-r) Craig Johnson, Alice Love, John Lewis, Michele Wood, and Erika Justiniano-Velez.*



*Alice Love, Agricultural Outreach Liaison (center in pink) and Dr. Errol G. Rhoden (next to her) partner at TU College of Agriculture to broaden the academic and professional horizons of the students in the World, Food, Fiber, and People Class of Fall 2014.*

# Personnel

## New Appointments

Gabriel Boyett, Soil Con Tech, Troy  
James Fountain, Soil Con Tech, Huntsville  
Dustin Potter, Soil Con Tech, Cullman  
Summer Stidham, Soil Con Tech, Bay Minette

## Reassignments

Adam Dossett, Ag Engineer, from WY to NRCS Troy AO  
Demetrius Johnson, Soil Conservationist, from Troy to Jasper  
Eric Schwab, Agronomist, from AL NRCS State Office to OH NRCS State Office  
Betty Terry, Soil Con Tech, from Moulton to Tuscumbia  
Chad Wetzel, Soil Con Tech, from AL NRCS to IL APHIS

## Resignations

Kayla Ware, Resignation (Student) Soil Conservation Aid, Montgomery

## Retirees

William Prince, Environmental Engineer, Oxford/Auburn

## Conversion to Permanent

Bradley Williams, Soil Conservationist, Mobile

## Stream Crossing Demonstration

A stream crossing as an outreach project for forest landowners was designed by Alabama NRCS engineering staff and installed on the property of Charles Holmes, a forestry and grazing landowner in Marion, AL. Funding for the stream crossing was provided by the ALA-TOM RC&D Council.

A demonstration for the project was held as part of the Alabama Natural Resources Council's Central Region Forest Field Day Landowner Tour in October.

The stream crossing will be used by the landowner to move equipment across the stream in an environmentally safe manner.

NRCS Engineers Bill Smith and Erika Justiniano-Velez attended the demonstration and field day. Bill said, "Our NRCS folks, especially David Stewart and Marshall Colburn from the local field offices, put in a lot of long hours and hard work to ensure the stream crossing was installed correctly. With a little maintenance, Mr Holmes should have a functional stream crossing for quite some time."



(top) Bill Smith talks to the attendees at the demonstration about construction of the stream crossing.



(left) stream crossing before.



(bottom) stream crossing after.

### 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)



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