



NRCS Alabama Current Developments

What's Inside:

Pages 2-3

- Small Farmer of the Year
- AL SWCD/NRCS Receives National Earth Team Award
- Puckett Receives AWF Governor's Award
- Forestry News
 - Team Forestry Reviews
 - Wildlife School for Landowners

Pages 4-5

- Prescribed Burn Workshop
- Land Judging Training
- Forestry Field Days
- Feds Feeds Families Food Drives

Pages 6-7

- State Earth Day Events
- State Water Festivals

Pages 8-9

- RC&D News
 - Partnerships-Outreach
 - Coosa Valley RC&D Hall of Fame
- From the Field
 - Colbert Co FFA Ag Day
 - Colbert Co Forest Program
 - Macon Co Outreach
 - Covington Co In-Service

Pages 10-11

- From the Field (con't)
 - Boardwalk Restored
 - Sumter Co Ag Safety Day
 - Covington CO Annual Youth Day
 - Cullman Co Teacher Workshop

Pages 12-13

- From the Field (con't)
 - Soil Health Through Con Till
 - Happy Heart at the Pond
 - Mobile Co Assists with Workshop
- Retiree News
 - Mac Nelson Receives Award and Collaborates with AU
 - Jones Holds Luncheon
 - Earl Norton Receives Award

Pages 14-15

- Outreach News

Pages 16-17

- Outreach News (con't)
- Students Give Presentations
- Fed of Southern Coop Meeting
- Outreach Initiative in AL
- Personnel Actions

Pages 16-17

- AL SWCS Meeting
- In Sympathy

From the State Conservationist - Dr. William Puckett



FY13 is coming to a close and much has been accomplished. You, the districts, and many other conservation partners are to be congratulated on another outstanding year in conservation. I appreciate your dedication and hard work that has resulted in more conservation on the ground. Alabama's citizens can take great pride in knowing that the conservation partnership is dedicated to not only keeping Alabama beautiful, but also keeping a healthy environment.

Alabama NRCS has recently been in the spotlight due to your hard work. The Jasper Field Office received the 2013 National Earth Team Chief's Field Award for the Southeast Region, Thomas and Mary Freeman of Colbert Co received the 2014 Small Farmer of the Year Award, and I was honored as the Soil Conservationist of the Year at the 2013 Alabama Wildlife Federation Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards. Our StrikeForce efforts with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) made tremendous strides in locating summer feeding sites for children across central Alabama. I also want to recognize your efforts for the Feds Feeds Families Food Drive. Your efforts collected over a ton and a half of food for Alabama families. Thanks to Zona Beaty for leading this effort.

We are continuing to implement StrikeForce, a partnership with local and state agencies, universities, community-based organizations, and USDA agencies—NRCS, FSA, RD, FNS, Ag Marketing Service, and Risk Management Agency. We are identifying the community-based organizations that want to be involved to increase customer's access to, and participation in, programs to address needs in 23 persistent poverty counties. We are looking at what is already available and working to adapt it for other counties. The intent of this initiative is to enhance the opportunities for people in these rural communities and to help them increase their quality of life. I commend the NRCS staff in these counties for your hard work in making sure the StrikeForce goals are implemented and our work helps make this initiative a success.

Another exciting effort is our Soil Health Initiative. Our agency has always been about Soil Health and we are reaffirming our commitment to make Alabama's soils productive and healthy. Keeping farms productive and farmers prosperous is vital to a sustainable rural economy. The prescription for healthy soils is not magic, we all know the formula--(do not disturb) + (keep it covered) / (plant variations) = healthy soil. We are highlighting eight producers from across Alabama who are doing outstanding jobs protecting and improving soil health as Soil Health Champions. The Soil Health Initiative and Champions were introduced at this year's ALFA Commodities Conference in Birmingham. (Fact sheets on each of these producers are on our website at: www.al.nrcs.usda.gov.) Please take some time with the partnership in your county and see how soil health works locally.

It has been a great year and we should take time to reflect on our accomplishments and what challenges still remain. We are about to embark on another fiscal year and there is much uncertainty. I know you have questions concerning the Farm Bill, FY14 budget, sequestration, debt limit, etc., all issues that affect our operations. However, I ask you to remain focused on the mission and know we are all fortunate to be able to serve the citizens and resources of this great state. Let us continue to "Help Alabamians Take Care of the Land."

FY14 Small Farmer of the Year

Thomas Freeman of Colbert Co is the FY14 Alabama NRCS Small Farmer of the Year. A plaque and an engraved clock was presented to him and his wife, Mary, by Terry Cosby, NRCS Acting Southeast Regional Conservationist (l) and Dr. William Puckett, Alabama NRCS State Conservationist (r), at the August Federation of Southern Cooperative's 46th Annual Meeting, in Epes, AL.

"People like Thomas and Mary Freeman make our conservation work rewarding," said Dr. Puckett. "We are pleased to honor the Freemans with this award."



(l-r) AL Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) Area III Vice President Diane McCool; Walker Co Supervisors Joe Love and Dwight Hicks; Walker Co SWCD DAC Katherine Patton; AACD President Sue Gaines; AL NRCS State Conservationist Dr. William Puckett; and Jasper NRCS DC Daniel Goins.

Alabama SWCD/NRCS Office Receives 2013 National Earth Team Award

The Walker Co Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Jasper NRCS field office staff worked together to coordinate quality projects that earned them the Earth Team Chief's Field Award for the Southeast Region.

Their activities included tree giveaways on Arbor Day, and the annual tree sale at the local Wal-Mart garden center to help citizens become aware of the importance of trees to the environment. Tours, clinics, and workshops like the Forestry Landowner Tour, Beef Herd Health Clinic, Wildlife Management Seminar, and Estate Planning for Landowners Workshop that allowed land managers to learn best management practices from their peers. Conservation education activities to engage and teach area youth were also organized. These included land, livestock, and forest judging contests; tractor driving contest; and outdoor classroom events.

The Walker Co SWCD also received the Alabama 2013 State Conservation Education District of the

Year Award. This is the first time they have received this award.

Dr. William Puckett said, "We are proud of the conservation achievements of the SWCD/NRCS staff and the Earth Team in Walker Co. They are very deserving of this award."

Dr. Puckett Receives Award

Dr. William Puckett was awarded the Soil Conservationist of the Year Award at the 2013 Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards banquet in August.

This is one of the most respected conservation honors in Alabama. Over the past 30 years, the AWF has presented these awards to individuals and organizations that make significant contributions to the conservation of Alabama's wildlife and related natural resources.

The AWF is the state's oldest and largest citizens' conservation organization and their mission is to promote conservation and wise use of Alabama's wildlife and related natural resources as a basis for economic and social prosperity. To learn more about AWF, including membership details, programs, and projects, visit www.alabamawildlife.org.



(l-r) Charles Welden, III, AWF President; Horace Horn, PowerSouth Energy; Dr. William Puckett; Governor Robert Bentley; and Matt Bowden, Alabama Power Company.

Forestry News by Tim Albritton

Forest Improvement Practices Reviewed in NRCS West and North Team Areas

Forest stand improvement practices are not highly used in Alabama compared to other practices like site preparation and tree planting practices. We need to promote and highlight their use whenever we can.

Reviewing forest stand improvement practices was the primary focus of two training sessions in Jackson and Escambia Cos. Presenters included NRCS's Tim Albritton, Jeff Thurmond, Tracy Cole (North) and Charlie Ramsey (West); Jim Schrenkel from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Mark Hinds and Ad Platt from the Longleaf Alliance; Gary Cole, Regional Forester from the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC); and Ron Tucker, U.S. Forest Service.

The North review was hosted by Jack McQuinn, TREASURE Forest landowner in Jackson Co, and the West event, a joint training session with the AFC, was at the Little River State Forest near Atmore.

The attendees visited thinned pine stands, planted and patch clear-cut hardwood sites, and more. They discussed thinning plans on some wildlife management area plantations and received information on live crown ratio and basal area measurements.

The West event attendees visited natural regenerated slash, loblolly, and longleaf pine stands, an artificially regenerated longleaf stand, and a mature longleaf stand that was recently prescribed burned. They were tutored in burn and chemically treated stands vs. untreated stands. They discussed trees

per acre, growth rates, thinning methods, when to burn, understory, and the chemical and mechanical treatment of undesirable plants, Gopher Tortoise habitat, and FSI (Forest Stand Improvement) options.

It was good to review and discuss practices and make recommendations in the field at both events. There were about 35 people at each of the events and they seemed to enjoy the days spent in the field and gained a lot of useful information.



Wildlife School presenters talk to group in the field.

Wildlife School for Landowners

In August, AACD partnered with Fort Rucker to hold their annual Wildlife School for Landowners in Enterprise, AL.

On the first day indoor session, the group discussed various wildlife management topics. The second day was a field tour on some of the 62,000 acres owned and managed by Fort Rucker.

Many of the forest stand improvement practices discussed on the first day were included in the tour of Fort Rucker. They are thinning pine plantations and prescribed burning to improve wildlife habitat. They are converting some pine stands to longleaf pine. The timber and wildlife management activity level at Fort Rucker was more than many expected. It was good to see this!

With more pressure being placed on wildlife due to the urban sprawl and population growth, Fort Rucker forestry staff know that, more than ever, they need to protect and enhance valuable natural resources.

It is very important for Fort Rucker to partner with conservation agencies. The public needs to see and



Trainees use a wedge prism to determine basal area.



Wildlife School instructors show how a feral hog trap works.

be aware of the many ways the military is conserving the natural resources and managing the forest in a productive and useful way. The military is entrusted with a valuable resource and part of their responsibility is to show the public it is being managed wisely. Their partnership with groups that have private landowners in their membership is a good way to help accomplish this public education task.

Fort Rucker's forester, James Jennings, assisted with planning the field visits. Fort Rucker also provided two buses to transport the attendees to the various tour stops.

The attendees visited thinned pine stands, longleaf planted sites, managed food plots, wild hog traps, and more.

It is good to review and discuss forestry practices in the field and to see all of the management practices being implemented at Fort Rucker. Everyone enjoyed the day in the field and gained a lot of useful information.

Landowner Prescribed Burn Workshop

Could you benefit from more controlled burning on your forest land? Learn why, how, and who can help you at the South AL Landowner Prescribed Burn Workshop, November 22, 2013, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the Dixon Forestry Education Center on AL Highway 29 between Andalusia and Brewton.

Topics covered will include benefits of controlled burning, burn planning, and government programs and private sector resources that can help you get the job done. Learn how to overcome the barriers that keep you from prescribed burning your land. Registration is \$10 and includes lunch. SWCD/NRCS folks, inform landowners who may be interested in attending. For more information, contact the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) office in Andalusia at 334-222-1125.

Land Judging Training Held at NRCS

In June, high school instructors and agency staff involved in promoting land judging contests met at the NRCS state office for training. Tim Albritton, coordinator of the training, said he received many positive comments after the workshop indicating the attendees really enjoyed the event.

"Jacob Davis, Education Specialist with Alabama Department of Education, is already asking if we can offer this again in a couple of years," said Tim. "This event is not quick and easy to set up and administer. The Alabama NRCS staff represented itself well and I appreciate everyone's help in making it a success."

2013 Forestry Field Days in Alabama

Forestry Field Days, sponsored by the Alabama Natural Resources Council and the Alabama State Tree Farm Committee, will be held across the state.

The purpose for these meetings is to show forest landowners how to manage forests for multiple uses. Attend one of these meetings and encourage producers in your county to attend and hear experts speak about forest resource management. Each field day will include a tour of a Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest.

October 3, 2013

Magnolia Branch Wildlife Preserve
Escambia Co - 251-867-7760

October 10, 2013

Lochicohi Farm
Hale Co - 334-624-8710

October 17, 2013

Cane Creek Farm
Cleburne Co - 256-463-2620



Learn how to do a prescribed burn at the November workshop.

Feds Feeds Families (FFF) Food Drives

Food donations for all SWCD/NRCS offices was 3,273 lbs. Zona Beaty, state coordinator, says a big “thank you” to all who participated. Nationally, NRCS collected 224,819 lbs. and USDA’s total was over 4.3 million lbs.

State Office - Held a contest to see which section could donate the most food. The Administrative Section won the contest and will be honored with a lasagna luncheon. The State Office total was 1,390 lbs. Not pictured: Oneonta reported 40 lbs. for the Hope House. Rainsville reported 116 lbs. for the Rainsville Community Church.



North Team - during the North Team meeting the staff gathered 221 lbs. of food for the Cullman Caring for Kids Food Bank.



Mobile Co - The food drive netted 470 lbs. that was given to the area food bank.



Pickens Co - Gathered 80 lbs. of food for the Pickens Co Baptist Church.



Limestone Co - NRCS and FSA donated 230 lbs. to replenish the local food pantry -- Limestone Co churches.

West Team Office - Collected 185 lbs. of food for the area food bank.



Linden – The USDA Service Center gathered 30 lbs. of food for the Harriet House for Battered Women and Children.



Bay Minette - Collected about 485 lbs. of fresh produce from their garden that they reported to the FFF efforts. Two local churches, the veteran’s home across the road, and the women’s and children’s home from Bay Minette came and helped pick produce for their respective use

Earth Day Events Across The State



Lee Co SWCD/NRCS - Lee Co Earth Day was held at Louise Krecher Forestry and Ecology Preserve. Students saw first-hand some local wildlife in the amphitheater and learned about water filtration from the Auburn Water Department. Good water quality practices were discussed using the Enviroscope. Photo above shows art instructors teaching plant identification through student art projects.



Cullman Co - An Earth Day Celebration was held at West Point Elementary School. Cullman Co DAC Deborah Widner and Project Coordinator Travis Kress presented an Earth Day program to six classes of 3rd graders, about 135 children. They learned the importance of the preservation of the Earth for future generations. Each teacher was given a packet with information about Earth Day for them and the students. After the program, a group of children went outside where they were presented with an oak tree to plant. This is the 6th tree the district has planted at this school to celebrate Earth Day.



Lauderdale/Colbert Cos - The Shoals Earth Month, Inc. held their 6th Annual Earth Day Fest. Sammy Soil and Ruby Raindrop greeted the visitors at Wilson Park in Florence, AL. Etta Mask, Colbert Co SWCD, and Helen Parker, Lauderdale Co SWCD, welcomed everyone with coloring books, hand outs, and information about the services provided by SWCD/NRCS. The event started with the "Turtle Trot," a run through downtown Florence. Magician Steve Trash performed as well as local music talent.



Limestone Co - DAC Brenda Wigginton and NRCS Technician Jessica Cleveland presented "Life in a Fishbowl" to kindergarten students at Brookhill Elementary to celebrate Earth Day.



Madison Co - Madison Co SWCD held an Earth Day event at Lynn Fanning Elementary. Soil babies were created for adoption in 21 classrooms. In the photo, DAC Kathy Walker explains the rules of the contest and introduces "Millie," her soil baby, to the students. Each classroom competed for first place in their grade for the best soil baby.

Water Festivals Across the State



Cullman Co 11th Annual Water Festival - In May on the Wallace State Campus in Hanceville, about 1,200 students participated in three class rotations learning about the water cycle, aquifers, watersheds, and filtration.



10th Annual Lee Co Water Festival - in March at Haley Center at Auburn University, over 1,700 4th graders, teachers, and volunteers engaged in fun, educational activities, and learned about water conservation and environmental stewardship. Activities included the edible aquifer, water filtration, water cycle bracelets, and ended with a magic show.



Limestone Co 15th Annual Groundwater Festival - In March at Athens State University, 1,002 area 4th graders attended the Festival with teachers and volunteers. Hands-on activities included water cycle bracelets, edible aquifers, and water filtration system. The event ended with a magic show.



Tuskegee Hosts First Water Festival - In March, over 227 4th graders volunteers, and sponsors attended the event. The students participated in three activities- water cycle bracelets, edible aquifers, and the filtration process.



Madison Co 16th Annual Drinking Water Festival - In May, over 800 students attended the Festival. The Water Wheels Bus was a new addition. The bus includes a computer lab where students got to learn some neat ways of conserving water and using it wisely. The event ended with an environmental magician show. Thanks to all our volunteers.

Chilton Co First Water Festival - In March, over 650 4th graders participated in the first Chilton Co water festival at Jefferson State Community College. Over 70 volunteers signed up to help with three projects, water cycle bracelets, edible aquifer, and fantastic filtration.



Blount Co Groundwater Festival - Over 80 volunteers helped with the Festival "Where Does Your Water Shed?" held at Wallace State Community College. Over 657 4th graders and their teachers participated in two hands-on learning activities - edible aquifers and water cycle bracelets.

Mobile Co Holds 5th Annual Water Festival - In April about 800 4th graders attended the Festival at the Alabama Cruise Terminal. Hands-on activities included water filtration, model watershed, and edible aquifers. It concluded with the Fishin' Magician.



Partnerships - Outreach Movement

By Alice Love, AL NRCS Outreach Liaison, Auburn, AL

NRCS is partnering with the Coosa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council to enhance the knowledge and skills of people participating in conservation Best Management Practices (BMP's). Workshops are being held for practices being offered through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with a special emphasis for the underserved.

Jimmy Keel from Tallapoosa Co is a three-year seasonal high tunnel and transiting organic producer. He is one of the many producers that have benefited from this outreach approach. He grows tomatoes, green beans, corn, and strawberries. A sign on the road to his farm informs people that his produce complies with the state requirement that "Produce that is sold-must be grown by seller."

Another farmer, John Neighbors of Neighbors Farms, received help to purchase blueberry plants which will be used in future outreach demonstrations focusing on BMPs such as micro-irrigation. Neighbors also planted 48 acres of longleaf pine using EQIP financial assistance.



(l-r) Elijah Moore, Coosa Valley RC&D; John Neighbors of Neighbors Farms; and Alice Love, NRCS; talk about the farming operation.

Coosa Valley RC&D Inducts Hall and Thomas into Hall of Fame

By Eddie May, Executive Director, Coosa Valley RC&D



(l-r) Chris Langley-council member, Representatives Richard Laird & Barbara Boyd, RC&D Hall of Fame Inductees Alton Hall and William Thomas, Representatives Mark Tuggle and Steve Hurst, and RC&D council members Chairman Larry Raughton and Dr. David West.

In July, the Coosa Valley RC&D inducted Alton Hall and William Thomas into their newly formed Hall of Fame at the 2013 Annual Meeting held at Clay Central High School in Lineville, AL.

Alton Hall, a White Plains native, has been an active council member since 1975. He has served as RC&D secretary/treasurer and the chairman of the Watershed Structure Improvement Committee. William Thomas is a native of Lafayette, AL, and a charter member of the council which was formed in 1965. Thomas has served in many capacities on the council and is currently the vice-chairman. Together, Hall and Thomas have provided more than 86 years of dedicated service. They received a standing ovation from the more than 100 people that attended the meeting.

From The Field

Colbert Co FFA Ag Day 2013

The Colbert Co SWCD/NRCS, with the help of the Lauderdale and Lawrence Co SWCD/NRCS personnel (Billy Frost and Don Beacham), assisted with the Colbert Co FFA Ag Day. Byron Aycock (NRCS), Heath Potter (SWCD), and Will Gotcher (Tri-Green) judged the Safe Tractor Driving Contest and Matt Copeland (NRCS) along with Darryl Rutland (Colbert Co FSA) judged the cattle. The students had a great day!



Dustin Potter (Lauderdale SWCD) and Will Gotcher (Tri-Green) adjust panels for the "Safe Tractor Drive Contest."

Colbert Co Presents Forest Program

The Colbert Co SWCD/NRCS cooperated with other partners to present "Classroom in the Forest-Forest in the Classroom" to area students.

Partners included RE Thompson School in Tuscumbia, AL; Colbert Co 4-H, Dr. Jimmy Gardiner (Colbert Co SWCD Supervisor) and Nan Gardiner; AL TREASURE Forest Association; Northwest AL RC&D; Tuscumbia NRCS; Colbert Co FSA; Colbert Co SWCD; and U.S. Forest Service.



Matthew Copeland, Tuscumbia NRCS DC, assisted Tim Malone FSA to present a portion of the outdoor classroom.



Macon Co DC Christopher Joe presents a program about NRCS and told how to become eligible for financial assistance.

Macon Co Outreach Meeting

Macon Co SWCD/NRCS held an outreach meeting to discuss NRCS programs and conservation practices for landowners in April at the Grandma Home House Retreat in Pike Road, AL. Over thirty people attended. Wiregrass RC&D coordinator James Currington presented a program about RC&D and Tuskegee University Professor Victor Kahn talked about vegetable crop production. Dinner was provided by the staff of Grandma Home House Retreat.



NRCS DC Steve Yelverton welcomed the teachers and explained the role that NRCS plays in supporting Covington Co landowners and promoting stewardship of our natural resources.

Covington Co Educator In-Service

The Covington Co SWCD partnered with county and city schools to host the first Educator In-Service in July. The event focused on biodiversity and natural resources in Alabama. Educators discovered that environmental education connects easily to science, math, and language arts.

Covington Co Chairman and District Supervisor Bill Godwin thanked the teachers for coming and emphasized the important role they play in developing student awareness and appreciation for their state and the world they live in.

Doyle Keasal, ACES Conservation Education Specialist, was the presenter for Project Wild and Project Learning Tree. These activities and materials move easily from paper tasks to fun, active learning situations that can challenge and motivate students.

Twelve teachers attended the day-long workshop rotating classroom lectures with outdoor and indoor hands-on activities. They were given activity guide-books, NRCS posters, and other materials.

Boardwalk Restored in Gulf Shores

At Gulf Shores Plantation on the Fort Morgan peninsula, a wooden boardwalk was a gateway between condominiums and the white beaches and protected the beach mouse, sea turtle, and shore bird habitat. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan wiped out the boardwalk and the sand dunes. The boardwalk was rebuilt, but the dunes didn't have any vegetation and blowing sand buried the new boardwalk.

The Baldwin Co SWCD/NRCS, North Baldwin Center for Technology, Locust Grove Baptist Church, and Boy Scout Troop 369, pitched in on a project to stabilize the dunes and uncover the boardwalk.

Volunteers spent the first week of April planting native dune vegetation to help hold the dunes together. The dune plants were purchased with a grant by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Volunteers planted the 8,000 plants, including sea oats, sea purslane, and panic grass. NRCS DC Joey Koptis said, "Our mission is to help people help the land. This is a good way for folks to see that conservation doesn't just happen in farms or forests. We can also protect natural resources on the beach."



Baldwin Co SWCD DAC Rhonda Bryars and NRCS DC Joey Koptis prepare the plants for dune stabilization.



NRCS DC Mike Gunn talks to students about ATV safety at the Progressive Agriculture Safety Day.

Sumter Co Helps Host Progressive Agriculture Safety Day

In May, the 14th Annual Progressive Agriculture Safety Day was held on the University of West Alabama campus for all 3rd graders in the county.

Students rotated through eight stations. A large group demonstration was held at the end of the day with a power-take-off demonstration by Sid Nelson.

Instructors set up stations to teach different types of safety. These included Sun Safety by Tera Glenn of ACES, Fire Safety by the Livingston Fire Department, Underground Utilities by McKay Lyvers of AL One Call, Animal Safety by Johnny Gladney of ACES, Firearm Safety by Joe Little of AL Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Food Safety by Kristin Woods-Williams of ACES, ATV Safety by Michael Gunn of NRCS, and Tractor Safety by Donny Sanders of Martin Truck and Tractor, Inc.

Thanks was expressed to all for making this event a success with special kudos to the volunteers that made the day camp possible. Special acknowledgement is given to the University of West Alabama, Sumter Co Board of Education, and Sumter Academy for their contributions.

Covington Co SWCD Annual Youth Event

Students from across the county were honored in April at the Annual Youth Event for their achievements in area-wide conservation contests. Over 90 parents and teachers shared in the fun, food, and fellowship at Oakwood Lodge. The theme, "Where Does Your Water Shed?" was illustrated by the posters on the walls made by participating 3rd graders.

Bobby Jackson, Covington Co SWCD Chairman, welcomed everyone, then a few students explained some facts about watersheds.

Fred Kelley, Pleasant Home Envirothon Team sponsor, thanked the District for their support and described some of the events his team of five students competed in. Afterward, NRCS DC Steve Yelverton presented a program about the role SWCD/ NRCS plays throughout the county and the programs available to assist landowners.

Cash awards and trophies were presented to the Essay and Poster Contest winners. The District supports the contests and provides educational instruction for the classes in addition to donating 450 pieces of poster board, student booklets, and educational manuals for all 3rd grade teachers.

The Youth Event was co-sponsored by the Covington Co Commission, Covington Co Farmers Federation, City of Andalusia, and the Covington Co Forestry Planning Committee. After the program everyone enjoyed the fellowship and a hamburger–hot dog dinner.



Education Specialist Patricia Gable (r) divided students into teams to compete in a game about water.



Cullman Co SWCD Environmental Education Teacher Workshop

The Cullman Co SWCD sponsored a three-day teacher workshop in June highlighting watersheds. The first day they toured the Smith Lake Hydro Dam. John Davidson with Alabama Power gave a brief presentation then took the group on a tour of the hydro plant. Four floors beneath the lake they viewed the turbines in action generating electricity. Later, Phyllis McGuire with the State SWCC, presented various water related programs and hands-on demonstrations to the teachers.

On day two, the group toured the future site of the Duck River Dam with reservoir manager Tim Scott and the City of Cullman Water Treatment plant where Wendy Waldrop, with the City of Cullman Utilities Board, gave a tour of the plant. The group then went up in the tower to get a bird's eye view of the facility and Lake Catoma.

On day three, Allison Newell Jenkins with Clean Water Partnership gave several water related presentations and led hands-on projects. The teachers got to make their own watersheds in a box.

Later, teachers got a special treat. Guest speaker Dr. Doug Phillips with "Discovering Alabama," gave them previews of the newest DVDs in the Discovering Alabama series, and the first Discovering Alabama Model School. It was a good workshop. Teachers went away with some real sources for teaching conservation.

Soil Health Through Conservation Tillage

The Geneva Co SWCD/NRCS and ACES sponsored an area-wide meeting and demonstration in March near Hartford, AL. Landowners and operators saw new crop roller/crimpers demonstrated on cover crops ready to be planted to row crops for the 2013 growing season.

The Wiregrass RC&D worked with the Geneva Co SWCD to acquire a no-till drill and a roller/crimper through a CIG grant for 2013. The new equipment will assist producers to improve soil health and cut soil loss in their farming operations. It can be rented by landowners and operators at a minimal fee. The District works cooperatively with NRCS, Wiregrass RC&D, ACES, and other agricultural agencies to provide the latest technology for producers in Geneva and surrounding counties.



Above: Attendees listened as presenters talked about new technology. Bottom: A roller/crimper was demonstrated.

A Happy Heart at the Pond

Kim Prince is an entrepreneur and a farmer. She owns a small organic transition farm, "At the Pond Farm LLC," where she grows shiitake mushrooms, okra, and sunflower seeds. She has also recently opened her own local market, "Happy Heart Market," in Hartselle, AL.

Using EQIP funds, she and her sister, Konnie Miller, completed an Organic Transition Conservation Activity Plan and put in a seasonal high tunnel. She

is currently installing a micro-irrigation system in her tunnel house and heavy use areas outside .

Some of the merchandise in her store includes fresh strawberries, milk from the only organic dairy farm in Alabama - "Working Cow Dairy," "Lindsay Farms" jams and jellies, and "Golden Eagle" syrup. She also sells art from local artists.

Check out her website for more information <http://happyheartmarket.com/>.



Morgan Co NRCS Soil Con John Lyle visits the Happy Heart Market.

Mobile Co Assists with Workshop

In August, Mobile Co SWCD/NRCS participated in the Agricultural Risk Management and Business Development Workshop, a collaborative meeting with Alabama A&M University Small Farms Research Center and ACES. The workshop was held in Mobile Co at the Jon Archer Agricultural Building.

Joyce Nicholas, Mobile Co NRCS DC, gave a presentation about NRCS programs and showcased some of the farm and urban conservation activities. The Mobile Co SWCD provided drinking water for the field day.

This is the sixth year that the Mobile Co SWCD/NRCS has participated in this three-day event.



Mobile Co NRCS DC Joyce Nicholas speaks to the group about financial assistance programs available to small farmers.

Retiree News

Mac Nelson In the News

Receives Engineering Award - Mac Nelson, AL NRCS retiree, received the Distinguished Engineer Award in March 2013 at the Annual Meeting/Banquet of the Alabama Chapter of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE).

Mac is a third generation SCS/NRCS employee. The first Alabama State Conservationist, Olin C. Medlock, is his great-uncle, and his father retired as a Soil Conservationist in Marshall Co with over 30 years of service. Mac retired in 2007 after almost 41 years with NRCS. He works part-time in the Engineering assisting with complex design issues.

Perry Oakes, State Conservation Engineer said, "Even part-time, Mac is a tremendous asset. Without his help, NRCS engineering in Alabama would suffer. Mac's quality work ensures that NRCS project technical assistance is thorough and correct."



Collaborating with AU Students - Mac was one of six disabled veterans who teamed with students at Auburn University to generate ideas for customizing assistive technology devices to improve the quality of life for veterans with disabilities. The students and veterans worked together to reveal challenges, research each disability, learn what already exists for the veterans, and then worked to find solutions.

While serving in Vietnam, Mac lost a leg below the knee when he stepped on a land mine. He heard about the AU research program while in the prosthesis office at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System. Even though he said he has few problems with mobility, the research team developed some things that could benefit him and all veterans.



Researcher checks proto-type of shower transfer device being developed.

American Cancer Society Luncheon

Retiree Deloris Jones held her annual American Cancer Society luncheon at the NRCS State Office.

She gives special thanks to those who went above and beyond to give generously. Even though the number of attendees was lower than in past years, the fellowship and luncheon of sandwiches, chips, and "specialty desserts" was a big success, as usual. The event raised \$1,087 for the "Relay for Life."



Earl Norton Receives Recognition

At the annual meeting of the Alabama Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) in June in Birmingham, AL, retiree Earl Norton received an Outstanding Service Award for his leadership and service in conservation programs in Alabama. The award was presented by SWCS President Andrew Price.



Outreach News by Alice Love



Victor Kahn, Tuskegee University (TU) Planter Breeder assists in educating workshop participants in the installation of raised-beds as an alternative for vegetable production.

These strawberries were grown using micro-irrigation, a practice offered through NRCS EQIP.



Cathea Simelton (standing), from the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach, was the guest speaker at the 4-H Annual Meeting in Barbour Co.



(l-r) James Currington, Wiregrass RC&D Executive Director; Shanice Jones, TU/NRCS Scholar; and Khalia Giles, NRCS Soil Con Tech, at the announcement about Alabama becoming a USDA StrikeForce state.



(left) Alabama USDA conservation partners-RD, FSA, FNS, and NRCS participate in Future Farmers of America (FFA) Annual Convention in Montgomery, AL.

(below) Food was collected for "Kids Against Hunger" during convention.





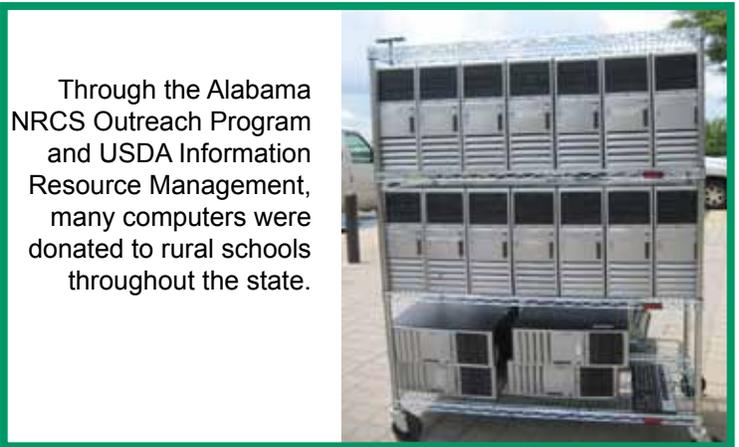
(l) USDA-1890 Program Liaison Rodney Stone observes the mechanics of a pea sheller at AI Hooks Farm in Shorter, AL. Hooks participates in USDA programs.



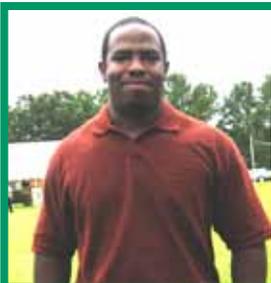
(r) A bushel of peas can be shelled in about 5-10 minutes by the pea sheller compared to hours using the traditional handshelling method.



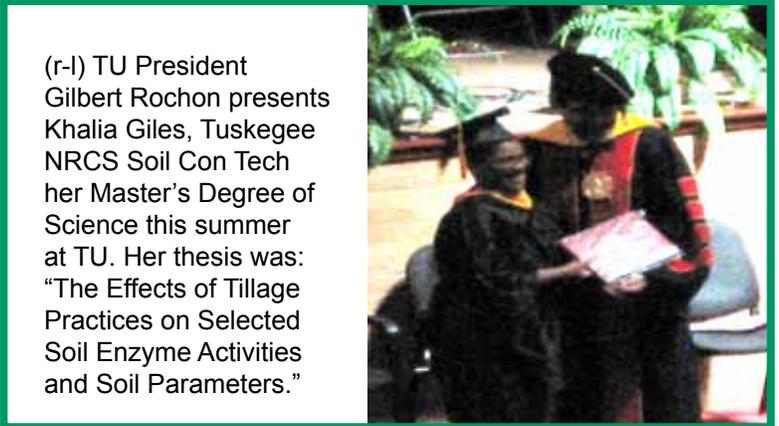
(l-r) AI Hooks; TU College of Agriculture Dean Hill; Rose Hill, USDA participant/Tuskegee Cooperative (TC) member hosts USDA Rural Development Acting Undersecretary Doug O'Brien on a visit to Tuskegee, AL. RD approved a grant for a refrigerated semi-truck to assist TC to safely transport produce. Most TC participants are active NRCS program participants.



Through the Alabama NRCS Outreach Program and USDA Information Resource Management, many computers were donated to rural schools throughout the state.



Demetrius Johnson, NRCS Soil Con in Troy, participated in the 2013 Federation of Southern Cooperatives Annual Workshop in Epes, AL.



(r-l) TU President Gilbert Rochon presents Khalia Giles, Tuskegee NRCS Soil Con Tech her Master's Degree of Science this summer at TU. Her thesis was: "The Effects of Tillage Practices on Selected Soil Enzyme Activities and Soil Parameters."



NRCS AL State Conservationist William E. Puckett motivates 2013 USDA Pathway Students to continue to pursue good academics and remain focused on their career paths as they depart to their designated universities after a successful summer experience with NRCS.



USDA participants and Tuskegee Cooperative members/staff hosted an outreach meeting with representatives from WP Rawls to pursue a vegetable distribution partnership.



Quinton Harris, RD Area Director, spoke at the USDA Partnership StrikeForce Initiative Outreach Meeting in Phenix City, AL.

Students Give Presentations

The Alabama USDA/NRCS Pathway Students came to the state office in July to give presentations about what they did and learned on their summer job assignments. USDA offers different pathway opportunities for students and recent graduates to work in the agricultural, science, technology, math, environmental, management, business and many other fields. USDA offers internships to students and recent graduates to help them to excel in their chosen fields.



(l-r) **Kalauna Carter**, Loxley, Student Soil Scientist from Portland, Oregon\Tuskegee University, Environmental Science with Plant and Soil Science Focus. **Na-Asia Ellis**, Auburn MLRA, Student Soil Scientist, Home: Long Island, NY\AL Agricultural & Mechanical University, Civil Engineering /Environmental Science. **Broderick "Brody" Betz**, Auburn, Student Soil Conservationist, Home: Auburn, AL\AU, Environmental Science. **Bradley Williams**, Mobile, Student Soil Conservationist from Fairhope, AL\University of West Florida, Environmental Science/Environmental Management. **Delta Bell**, Normal, AL, Student Soil Scientist from Lonoke, AR\University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Regulatory Science. **Hannah South**, Huntsville, Student Soil Conservationist from Hartselle, AL\University of AL Huntsville, Civil Engineering (Environment). **Angelina Lasko**, Troy, Student Soil Conservationist from Arcata, CA\Humboldt State University, Wildland Soils-minor in Botany and Ecological Resto-

ration. (Inset-not present) **Matthew Allen**, Florence, Student Soil Conservationist from Florence, AL\ University of North AL, Geography (Computer Information Science)

Elizabeth Lim, Student Intern, Guntersville - Last year, I started interning at the NRCS State Office as a Student Engineer a month before I voyaged to Mongolia for five weeks to teach English to middle and high school students. Since then, I've been working part time while earning my degree. I'm a junior at AU studying Civil Engineering. I will return to the State Office to work this fall. I am thankful for the opportunity at NRCS to learn, grow, and mature in my major and in myself as a person.



Federation of Southern Coop Annual Meeting

USDA national and state staff participated in the Federation of Southern Cooperatives awards banquet at their 46th Annual Meeting in Birmingham, AL, in August.

The meeting concluded at the Federation Rural Training Center in Epes, AL, where Terry Cosby, NRCS Acting Regional Conservationist, Washington, D.C., acknowledged the Federation for their dedicated work and continuous partnership with USDA. Vivian Dickson of NRCS Outreach and Advocacy Division joined Cosby for a special presentation to a Federation retiring staff member, Jerry Pennick, for his service, not only to the mission of the federation, but also to the USDA partnership.

Dr. William Puckett was on a panel with other USDA staff to address agency program questions/concerns from attendees. He also presented the AL NRCS FY14 Small Farmer of the Year award to the Freemans of Colbert Co.

Doug O'Brien, Acting USDA-Undersecretary Rural Development, was the guest speaker. He reiterated USDA Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack's commitment to serving rural communities.

USDA personnel staffed exhibits and were available for one-on-one discussions with attendees.



Terry Cosby (l) and Vivian Dixon (r) presents Jerry Pennick a service award.

Outreach Initiative In Alabama

USDA Outreach is a mechanism to help facilitate progress. The AL USDA Outreach Liaisons continue to partner in projects to insure participants are aware of various USDA programs statewide. These programs targeted agricultural related college majors, conservation land uses, housing, agricultural farm loan/ grant programs, along with other services offered through USDA and other conservation partners.

Outreach also includes making the public aware of various vacancies on USDA Advisory Committees for Secretary Thomas Vilsack. Program participants embraced this opportunity and submitted applications to serve as a local voice from rural communities. Final selections from USDA are pending.

USDA recently selected Alabama as a StrikeForce state. USDA agencies and other conservation partners are encouraged to enhance their one-stop outreach service effort by hosting joint meetings targeting America's rural resource concerns relating to soil, water, air, plants, animal and humans

(SWAPA + H). The result of this joint outreach effort is apparent in the increase in service requests in specific USDA offices.

USDA Liaisons Alice Love and Rodney Stone networked to inform community-based organization's, local schools, and the general public of the 1890 Scholars Program. This program is designed to encourage and support students seeking a degree in agricultural-related studies from the eighteen 1890 Historically Black Land-Grant Universities. Hundreds of applications were submitted nationwide and increased the enrollments in these universities and started a future generation of USDA conservationists!

These liaisons identified the need for additional computers in rural schools. They partnered with the USDA Information Technology in Alabama to coordinate the donations of sanitized computers to rural schools in the state.

Personnel Actions

Accessions

Stacey Riggins, Secretary, Auburn
Norris Hudnall, Central Admin Coord, Bessemer

Promotions

Cooper Nichols, Soil Scientist, Auburn
Matthew Copeland, Soil Con, Tuscumbia
James Dawson, Soil Con Tech, Autaugaville
Steve Lloyd, Soil Con Tech, Evergreen
Robert Kerr, Soil Con Tech, Talladega
Jessica Cleveland, Soil Con Tech, Athens
Allison Smith, Secretary, Auburn
Luis Cruz-Arroyo, Resource Con, Grove Hill
Adam Sconyers, DC, Ozark
Beth Chastain, DC, Luverne
Frank Cochran, DC, Auburn

Permanent Appointment

Jessica Cleveland, Soil Con Tech, Athens
Jason Childers, Soil Con Tech, Gadsden
Christopher Story, Soil Con Tech, Huntsville
Daniel Collins, Soil Con Tech, Andalusia
John Lewis, Soil Con Tech, Camden
Daniel Dearmon, Soil Con Tech, Mobile
James Dawson, Soil Con Tech, Autaugaville

Resignations

Shanice Jones, Student Soil Con, Tuskegee
Jessica Mills, Ag Engineer, Guntersville

Reassignments

Jason Gardner, Easement Coord, Auburn
Jason Forrester, HR Asst, Auburn/ Huntsville

Kendall Rodgers, Student Soil Con, Auburn/Phenix City
Jack Lee, Student Soil Con, Normal
Elizabeth Lim, Student Civil Eng, Guntersville/Auburn

Conversions

Michelle Floyd, to Career Cond, Soil Con, Jackson
Na-Asia Ellis, to Exc Appt, Student Soil Scientist,
Huntsville/Auburn
Kalauna Carter, to Exc Appt, Student Soil Scientist,
Oregon/Loxley

Retirees

Charlie McAlpine, Outreach Coordinator, Auburn
Sylvia Long, Soil Scientist, Auburn
John Lyle, Soil Con, Hartselle

Students - Pathways Appointment

Delta-Deme' Bell, Soil Scientist Trainee, Normal
Matthew Allen, Student Soil Con, Florence
Hannah South, Student Soil Con, Huntsville
Bradley Williams, Student Soil Con, Mobile
Broderick Betz, Student Soil Con, Auburn
Anglina Lasko, Student Soil Con, Troy

In Sympathy

Bill Palmer

Former soil conservationist William "Bill" Palmer, Jr.,
79, of Linden, AL, died in April.

Wife of Retiree

Judy B. McCullough, 69, wife of former Area
Conservationist Jim McCullough, died in August. Jim's
address is 1 Harborview Ct NE, Decatur, AL 35601.

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



Dr. William Puckett
State Conservationist

Julie Yates
Director of CMO

Fay Garner
Public Affairs Specialist

Alice Love
Agricultural Outreach Liaison

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AL SWCS Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the AL Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), entitled "Got Soil Health?," was held in June in Birmingham, AL.

The first day of training included David Lamm, from the NRCS, Greensboro, NC, as the keynote speaker. He talked about "Understanding Soil Health." Other speakers included Dr. Charles Mitchell and Dr. Eve Brantley from AU, and Edwin Marty of Hampstead Institute in Montgomery, AL.

Thursday the group toured sites in Jefferson Co related to soil erosion and building/protecting soil health. The stops included:

- Regions Park and the Baron's baseball field.
- Hopewell Project Hoop House - An NRCS EQIP funded hoop house. Dr. Kahn of TU talked about how to maintain a hoop house and various crops.
- Corridor X Interstate 22 Project relating to preventing soil erosion through vegetation and other means.
- Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Project.
- Jones Valley Urban Farm, a community farm in the city of Birmingham.

Meetings were held by the professional groups and committees. Sunshine Suppliers sponsored a ballgame and supper at the Baron's field for anyone wanting to attend.

On Friday the business meeting included executive committee reports and awards. Two members received awards, and our own retiree Earl Norton received an Outstanding Service Award for his leadership and service in conservation programs in Alabama.

President Andrew Price passed the AL SWCS leadership to the new President, Gary Banks of ALDOT.

The silent auction earned almost \$300 that will be split among three students chapters in Alabama universities: TU, Alabama A&M, and AU.

The Friday morning training topics included:

- "Getting Vegetation Established on Challenging Sites" by Howard Peavey of ALDOT
- "Fire Ant Management" by Fudd Graham, from AU.
- "Precision Application – Is It Ready for Use Outside Agriculture" by Dr. John Fulton, AU.

The next meeting will be in Huntsville in June 2014.



David Lamm, NRCS Natural Resources Specialist, gave an enthusiastic talk about "Understanding Soil Health." Participants got up close with soil health experiments he set up. Lamm was also in Alabama in July to kick-off the Soil Health Initiative at the ALFA Commodity Conference in Birmingham.