



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

May 2016

## A Sugar Cane Revolution, How Sweet It Is

Story from the Field  
CWPPRA BS-16 Lake Lery  
Shoreline and Marsh  
Restoration Update

A cooperative partnership with local  
Soil and Water Conservation Districts and  
Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D)

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



The Conservation Update is distributed monthly by mail and e-mail.

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On the Cover



The Andre brothers have implemented several conservation practices on their sugarcane operation, including residue management. To find out more about how NRCS helped make this possible, see pages 4 and 5.

New Feature

New Partnership with TWILA

NRCS has a brand new partnership with "This Week in Louisiana Agriculture" (TWILA) to bring you even more of the conservation story featured in each monthly issue of the Louisiana Conservation Update. Check your local listings for program times or visit the TWILA website at http://www.twilatv.org/.



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## Notes from the State Conservationist

The traditional start to summer, Memorial Day, is a time for cook-outs and family gatherings. While most folks are looking forward to slowing down and taking it easy on the hot days that lie ahead. Those who make a living in agriculture continue to work hard and gear up for the upcoming harvest season.

There are so many exciting things happening in agriculture throughout our state, and there is so much for us to be proud of. I've had some time over the last few weeks to really think about what is happening with our conservation efforts here in Louisiana. It is EXCITING! Here are a few of my observations:



1) Conservation is a broad partnership. Historically, we have been known for, and maintained our core partnership with SWCD, LDAF, LACD, and RC&D Councils. While we respect and maintain this core partnership, we also have many other partners willing to come along side to expand our reach and support us in working with private lands stewards.

2) Conservation is mainstream in agriculture. The very foundation of agriculture rests on the natural resources under our collective stewardship. Agriculture operations with business plans that reflect the treatment of those resources through use of our programs and adopting conservation practices reducing input costs that mitigate losses of soil nutrients, organic matter, water, and erosion, have the best opportunity to perform profitably.

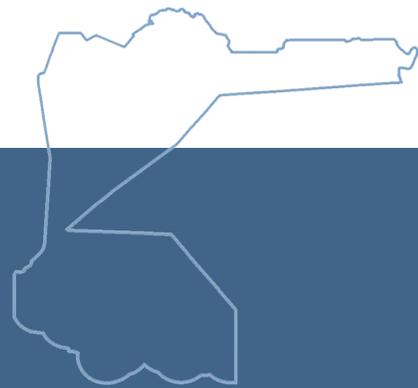
3) We are technically credible and effective. Partnerships are established and maintained on mutual respect and trust. Our partnerships are growing because folks believe we can help them or their customer base. The continuation of those partnerships has been in the hard work, shoulder-to-shoulder, we have done together to deliver science-based conservation delivering results farm by farm, habitat by habitat, watershed by watershed, and doing so fairly and equitably across our entire agriculture landscape.

4) Conservation is innovation. Agriculture and forestry continue to change. Our partners and customers expect us to lead and adapt conservation to the changing landscape. This ability to reflect on the past, adapt in the present, and prepare for the future forms our vision for a conservation agency that will always be relevant to "Helping People Help the Land."

These are exciting times, we are making a difference for Louisiana.

Kevin D. Norton

## Iberia Parish Facts



There are 279 farms in Iberia Parish.  
107,254 acres of land is in farms.  
79.7% is cropland and 5.7% is pasture.  
Sugarcane is the #1 commodity of the parish.

<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>



# A Sugar Cane Revolu

When you look up the word “revolutionize” in the dictionary it says, “To make a fundamental change in.” But you could just as well find a picture of three brothers working side-by-side in the sugar cane, soybean and rice fields of New Iberia. Hugh, Mike and Chris, the Andre’ brothers who make up HMC Farms have their minds made up to make a difference in the world of agriculture, one acre at a time.

Their sights are set for new, innovative and trail blazing ways to make their farm more efficient, all while keeping conservation first and foremost in their plans. Working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) New Iberia field office has played an integral role in helping the Andre’ brothers get established and most of all, help them put their ideas into a working conservation plan.

HMC Farms is situated in the heart of Cajun country. Rows and rows of sugar cane with the occasional gracious oak tree interspersed on the landscape, makes up the 7,400 acre farm. While most of their land is dedicated to sugar cane and soybeans, about 200 acres is planted with rice. The brothers also own 300 acres in Belize, also planted with sugar cane. To understand the workings of the farm today, and what the

brothers envision for the future, you have to take a look back at how the farm began.

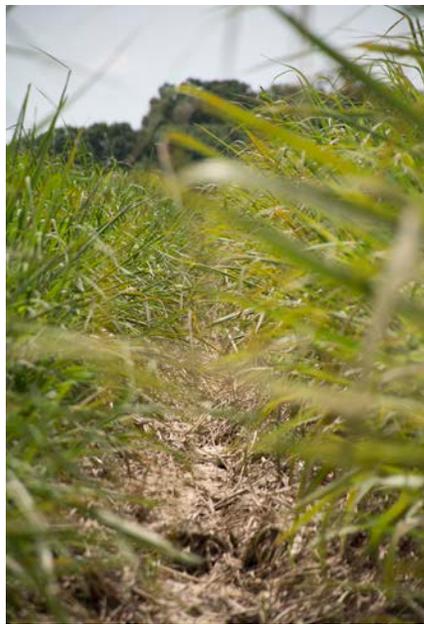
Hugh, the eldest Andre’ started off with 75 acres in 1998. Later Mike and his identical twin, Chris acquired some land in 2003 and from there the farm has taken off. “It has been a work in progress,” said Mike. “Today we have 7,400 acres and we still want to expand.” While the Andre’ brothers didn’t grow up on a farm (their dad worked in the oil field) they were surrounded by agriculture and they could not escape the call to try their hand at working the land. When you talk to the brothers, it is easy to see, they have an overwhelming love for the sugar cane industry and the work they do on their land every day.

“When I initially went into the NRCS office, I knew what I wanted to do but, I didn’t know how to make those dreams a reality,” explained Chris. “NRCS was able to help get us to the point where we could see our ideas put into action.” How did that happen? “NRCS helped facilitate installing conservation practices on our land,” said Chris. HMC utilizes several EQIP practices including laser land leveling, pipe drops and the most recent and innovative practice is residue management.

Residue management is a relatively new management practice, and it is one that is incredibly important to farmers, especially sugar cane farmers. “We are basically farming right next to Lafayette, as our farm grows it is getting closer to neighborhoods, schools and hospitals,” explained Chris. “So, although we still need to do some burning, residue management has revolutionized the way we farm sugar cane.” Chris is quick to point out that he and his brothers don’t advocate a ban on all burning but, he is also quick to explain that utilizing residue management is working for them in a big way.

A simple explanation of residue management is once the cane has been harvested, residue is left on the field. With sugar cane there is typically 8 to 12 tons of residue per acre. Chris goes on to say, “The idea is just leaving the residue on the ground instead of finding a way to remove it. We use a hay rake that has been modified to sweep off the top of the row and I also use a strip till unit. We get the furrows clean during harvest that way we can drain our fields properly.”

Residue will help slow down rain water from running off the field too fast causing erosion. For a crop like sugar cane, moisture



# tion, How Sweet It Is

retention is also paramount. Chris explains, “Especially with the erratic weather we’ve been having. We may go from 8 inches of rain one week to 35 or 40 days of dry weather. If we keep that moisture locked in the soil it will give the cane a chance to grow and flourish in drier periods.”

“I find it also, restarts the soil,” explained Mike. “Because the micro-organisms in the soil actually have something to eat and it makes for a rich and healthy soil with good texture.”

“The first year we tackled residue management was in 2014 with about 1,000 acres.” This year HMC added about 2,500 acres. “We’ve doubled the acres every year,” Mike said. “Eventually, most of our farm will utilize some type of residue management on it.”

Incorporating residue management wasn’t something the brothers began on a whim. They studied and researched the concept and then worked with NRCS to implement the practice. “I think we have taken that extra step to where now residue management is considered just another management practice on our farm,” said Chris. “Just like planting cane, fertilizing and planting soybeans ... it

is another normal thing we do on our farm. Residue is not a concern or worry for me anymore like it used to be about 5 years ago.”

Mac Parker, District Conservationist, in the New Iberia office sees first-hand that residue management works. “HMC Farms is living proof that this management practice is effective,” said Mac. NRCS is working hard to work with producers in the area to promote residue management. “Hugh, Mike and Chris are very progressive farmers and they are also good stewards of the land. They are always thinking of new and innovative ways on how to conserve water, promote soil health, and how their farming impacts water quality and wildlife. They come to us with ideas on how we can partner to help them achieve their goals.”

“All of the guys at the NRCS office are my friends,” said Chris. “I call them regularly. We have that type of relationship when they see me walk through the door, they know I’m serious and I need some help.” Chris also knows that NRCS is working hard for him as well. “We work together, that is what is important and that is why this has worked so well. They feel accomplished, I feel accomplished, we are on the same team, a true partnership,” explained Chris.

Mac couldn’t agree more, “I enjoy working with these guys, they are very progressive and very conservation minded.”

What is the future for HMC Farms? The brothers have the same idea, “Endless, there are no limits.” Chris goes on, “We are trying to expand our farming business but, at the same time, we are also trying to be as efficient as possible. I don’t want my children farming land that has less nutrients than what we farm now. If we can manage our land correctly, we can protect the land for future generations.”

To be able to make a difference in the sugar cane industry, to influence others to try residue management and other innovative practices is what the brothers are striving to do. “We want to be revolutionary in farming sugar cane,” said Chris. “If we can do that, it would be pretty cool.”

A sugar revolution, pretty cool indeed.

# Story from the Field

## CWPPRA BS-16 Lake Lery Shoreline and Marsh Restoration Project Update

In the September 2015 issue of the Louisiana Conservation Update, the feature story was “25 years of CWPPRA Construction”. One of the projects covered in the article was the BS-16 Lake Lery Shoreline and Marsh Restoration project in Plaquemines Parish. At that time, the construction had recently begun and the contractor was excavating material from the bottom of Lake Lery and using it to create approximately 35,000 linear feet of new shoreline

along the southern and western lake rim.

Construction is on-going and now the contractor has three dredges working around the clock excavating material and placing it in cells behind retention levees to create new marsh.



Construction on this project is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.



The BS-16 project is a CWPPRA project federally sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but NRCS completed the design of the project and is overseeing the construction.

For more information on this project and other projects, visit [www.lacoast.gov](http://www.lacoast.gov).

### StrikeForce Initiative



## Louisiana Update

### Louisiana StrikeForce Update

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

The Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers held a public meeting in New Orleans on May 10 - 12, 2016. This committee works in the interest of the public to ensure socially disadvantaged farmers have equal access to USDA program. The committee also advises the Secretary of Agriculture on :

1. The implementation of section 2501 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990;
2. Methods maximizing the participation of socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers in USDA programs; and
3. Civil rights activities within USDA, as such activities relate to participants in USDA programs.

Items addressed at the meeting were:

- Receipt for services at the applicable USDA offices;

- Goal to have an effective outreach strategy for USDA field offices to better serve those in the agricultural committees;
- The need for USDA to develop measurable department-wide goals to insure that minorities and females receive a proportionate share of the funds and resources available through USDA programs;
- Demographics regarding farm foreclosures;
- Issues regarding direct loan programs
- Data on minority participation in REAP;
- Landowner/tenant farmer EQIP funding issues;
- NRCS cost schedules in rural areas where producers face higher materials cost.

The recommendations from the committee will provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of

Agriculture on methods to maximize minority participation in USDA programs and services.



### Upcoming StrikeForce Events

#### June 23, 2016

Undivided Property Workshop  
Ruston, Louisiana

#### June 30, 2016

Proposed StrikeForce Meeting  
Homer, Louisiana

# Around the State

## April 27 - 28, 2016 Vermilion SWCD Re-vegetation Project

The Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) in cooperation with NRCS, the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's Office of Soil and Water Conservation, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and Vermilion Corporation held its annual re-vegetation project on April 27 and 28, 2016. This year's planting took place in the marsh near Pecan Island. The main objective of this project was to vegetate an existing open marsh area that had lost vegetation, lessen shoreline erosion, create habitat for wildlife and provide a seed source for natural regeneration. This year's group of volunteers successfully planted 5,773 plugs of Bullwhip for a project total of 17,319 linear feet.



## April 29, 2016 Acadia Parish Pasture Walk

NRCS held a pasture walk at the farm of Mr. Bryan Alleman on April 29, 2016. Alleman operates nearly 630 acres of pasture land across Acadia and Lafayette Parishes. Attendees learned about best management practices, decisions that cattle producers need to make and how production can be improved using rotational grazing. Participants also toured his pasture and looked at the conservation practices he has installed.



## May 4, 2016 MOU Signing

On Wednesday, May 4th NRCS State Conservationist, Kevin Norton, along with Louisiana Department of Ag and Forestry Commissioner, Mike Strain, and representatives from the Louisiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Resource Conservation and Development (RC &D) signed a memorandum of understanding at the Pentagon Barracks in Baton Rouge. The memorandum outlines how each organization will continue working together to meet conservation goals throughout the state of Louisiana.



## May 5, 2016 Louisiana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Soil Quality Health Workshop

On May 5, 2016, NRCS held a Louisiana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Soil Quality Health Workshop at the Delta Dairy Farms in Franklin Parish. Attendees were able to view a rainfall simulator demonstration, in addition to learning about farm bill programs, managing small

herds of cattle and soil health economics and the nitrogen value of clover.

## May 6, 2016 Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana Coastal Stewardship Awards

On May 6, 2016, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana held their annual Coastal Stewardship Awards at the Hilton Hotel in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The awards are given to honor individuals and organization who demonstrate outstanding commitment to the coast and have made significant contributions to the restoration and conservation of Louisiana's coastal wetlands. Plaquemines Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, Earl Armstrong received one of the coastal stewardship awards this year and former NRCS employee and longtime partner with both the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Ducks Unlimited, Mike Carloss received the coveted Distinguished Service/Sue Hawes Memorial Award.



## May 21, 2016 Tunica Biloxi Pow Wow

NRCS participated in the Tunica Biloxi Pow Wow held on May 21-22, 2016 at the Earl J. Barbry, Sr. Convention Center at the Paragon Casino Resort. Visitors to the exhibit learned about the ways NRCS is working with the Tribes in Louisiana.

## Programs Reminders

### **USDA-NRCS Announces \$330,000 to protect, enhance and restore pollinator habitat in southwest Louisiana**

NRCS recently announced an investment of up to \$330,000 in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to protect, enhance and restore pollinator habitat in southwest Louisiana. Eligible area for this project include Acadia, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jeff Davis and Vermilion Parishes.

NRCS will work with private landowners and livestock producers in these areas to protect and enhance grassland systems and provide sustainable pollinator habitat.

Interested landowners and livestock producers should contact their local NRCS office for more information. Applications for assistance must be received by June 17, 2016.

## Conservation Reflections



Marsh buggy used in Cameron Parish in the 1950's. It has large air-tight drum wheels that float and are corrugated to pull the buggy through the marsh and water..

**For a current list of our offices visit**

**<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/la/contact/local/>**

## Upcoming Events

### **May 26, 2016 Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Initiative Partnership Project Announcement**

Join NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service on Thursday, May 26, 2016, at the Kisatchie National Forest Vernon Work Center in Leesville, Louisiana for this important announcement. For more information, contact Amy Robertson at 318-473-7762 or by e-mail at amy.robertson@la.usda.gov.

**June 1 - 3, 2016  
State of the Coast Conference**  
Visit the NRCS exhibit at the State of the Coast Conference at the Ernest Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana on June 1 - 3, 2016. For more information visit [www.stateofthecoast.org](http://www.stateofthecoast.org).

**June 23 - 26, 2016  
Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention**  
Visit the NRCS exhibit at the 94th Annual Louisiana Farm Bureau Convention being held on June 23 - 26, 2016, at the New Orleans Marriott. For more information visit <http://www.lfbf.org/convention>.

**Visit our web site at:  
[www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov)**

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