



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

August 2016



#LouisianaStrong

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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On the Cover



An epic rainfall event occurred this month in south Louisiana. Find out how some of our local farmers are dealing with this disaster on pages 4 and 5.

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

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Notes from the State Conservationist

To all of you who were directly or indirectly affected by the devastating, historic flood that has hit our state, we, as an NRCS family, want you to know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. It is hard to believe, but here we are again facing another disaster of record proportions. The Red Cross has called the flooding in Louisiana the nation's worst disaster since Superstorm Sandy. And some of our Louisiana officials have described the scene in south Louisiana as some of the worst flooding ever to hit our state.



A number of our conservation family, their family members, and our customers have been severely impacted. In this month's issue our focus is on the flooding that has taken place and how three of our customers: a rice farmer, a sugar cane farmer and a cattle producer were impacted. The one overriding theme from all of them and their experiences is that they will not give up, they will continue to work hard and they do believe that better days ahead.

The challenges that we all will face, as individuals and as an agency, in the days, weeks and months ahead are not fully realized. The Acadia Parish Service Center in Crowley was flooded and is currently closed. We have relocated our employees to other field offices until a temporary building is ready. We are working with Farm Services Agency (FSA) to get an office space up and running soon.

As an NRCS family we take care of each other and our customers, who also happen to be our friends and neighbors. As always, customer service is our top priority so please do not hesitate to reach out to your local and the district conservationist near you. Our mission says it best, "Helping People, Help the Land."

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist

August 2016 South Louisiana Flood Facts

From 8/12 - 8/14, rainfall over southern Louisiana equated to more than 4 trillion gallons of water

According to NOAA, the highest storm total report was 31.39 inches near Watson, Louisiana

This was the second rain event this year in which Louisiana received more than 24 inches, the first was in northeast Louisiana in March.

<http://www.weather.com/>

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Thursday August 11, 2016, the rain began to fall and just wouldn't let up, pelting already saturated soil. No one could have predicted what would happen over the next 24 hours. Louisiana governor, John Bel Edwards described this disaster as a "historic, unprecedented flooding event".

The American Red Cross describes the flooding as the worst natural disaster to strike the United States since Hurricane Sandy ravaged the Northeast coast four years ago. To put the amount of rainfall Louisiana received into perspective, Watson, LA. (near Baton Rouge) received 31.39 inches of rain over a three-day period. That is more rain than Los Angeles, CA has received since 2012.



The flood knew no boundaries... homes, businesses, and agricultural land were all affected. For the producers in the flooded areas, the impact of this flood has not been fully realized. The initial reports are sobering. From rice, to sugar cane and then cattle production, a visit to three producers in Evangeline, Vermillion and St. Martin parishes tell the agricultural story that so many farmers and ranchers across the state are beginning to realize. All three possess a positive outlook about their circumstances along with the dedication and resiliency to bounce back and recover.



Neal Fontenot and his brother Richard of R & N Farms grow rice, crawfish and soybeans in Evangeline Parish. "It's a loss ... the rice that hasn't been harvested, was under water for about two days, "the grain has already sprouted, it's gone," said Neal. "We will try to pick it up, if we can, but a lot of times the damage is so great we can't, all it does is ruin the sample from the good rice we do have." Another impact that will ultimately cost the Fontenot Farm is the damage they will do trying to salvage what they can out of the fields. "We made 12 inch ruts in a rice field while trying to harvest as much as we could." The cost to repair the damage will be significant according to Neal.



Jack Haller, District Conservationist in Ville Platte, explains, "In Evangeline Parish I don't think we were even at 50 percent of the rice harvest." In fact, the Fontenot Farm usually has 900 to 1,000 acres in second crop rice in a year. This year only about 200 acres will be ready for a second crop. What will they do? How will they make it through the year? Neal says plainly but with a smile, "We will cut what is there and we will make do, that's all we can do." Neal and Richard both have the same positive attitude, the damage to their farm was bad but nothing like the farmers further south. "We are fortunate compared to those folks, we will take our lick and move on, because it could always be worse," said Neal.

Next stop is sugar cane with Chris Andre of HMC Farms. Chris's attitude is that of the Fontenot brothers, amazed at the devastating power of this "unnamed" rain storm. Chris along with his brothers Mike and Hugh grow sugar cane, soybeans and rice. "We lost a 70 barrel rice crop. That was what it was going to average," explained Chris. "We were able to cut about 20 acres out of 200 acres of rice we had planted." Chris does see a silver lining to all the dark clouds, the mature sugar cane growing in their fields. "Thank God for the cane that is already about 10ft. tall, because that cane is going to make it," said Chris.

Although not all the cane was mature, the Andre brothers also had about 400 acres of freshly planted cane and about 200 acres of that is under water. "We might get lucky," explains Chris. "As long as the mother cane in the ground doesn't rot, we might be able to harvest those." Only time, and the weather will tell. Much of the flooding the Andre brothers have experienced is not from the initial rains but from the back-up of water from the Vermillion River.

"Even with the hurricanes and tropical storms, we have never had a geographic area this expansive that got 30 inches or so of rain over three days and then the same area getting an additional 2 inches,

then 5 inches of rain," explained Stuart Gardner, Range Specialist from the Lafayette field office. "There was just nowhere for the water to go, this was unprecedented."

As far as conservation practices go, the Andre brothers know they have done their due diligence. "We know we have made the right decisions," said Chris. "Mother nature will take its course all we can do is go with the flow and keep working hard."

Bryan Alleman, a cattle producer in Acadia and Lafayette parishes, grew up on the farm he now runs. "In my lifetime of farming and cattle production, this is highest the water has ever gotten," Bryan explained. "We had about four to five feet of water out in the pastures and hay fields, it looked like a lake for about three or four days." Luckily he did not lose any of his 600 head of registered Braford cattle.

During the time when the pastures were flooded with water, Bryan could not get to his cows. "You would look out over the flooded pastures and all you could see were the calves' heads sticking out of the water. There was nothing I could do, I just couldn't reach them," he explained. By opening some of the gates in his pastures, cows and their calves were able to find higher ground.

Although none of his cows were lost in the flood, the signs of stress and fatigue are evident. You notice the ribs on the cows are now protruding because of the significant weight loss. Bryan said, "These cattle have been stressed but, they will re-bounce, they are a pretty hearty breed." He was thankful that the cattle were in a great body condition before the flood, due to the excellent grazing that they had all summer.

The greatest need now for Alleman and most of the other cattle producers in flood stricken areas is hay. Bryan had about 400 rolls of left over from the previous year and it was all destroyed by flood water. "I need about 3,000 bales to make it through winter," Bryan said. The rainy summer had only provided limited opportunity to get some hay cut, raked and baled. With hard work and perseverance Bryan knows they will find a way to make it work.

The Fontenot brothers, Chris Andre along with his brothers Mike and Hugh, and Bryan all share the same resolve and positive attitude. Chris Andre sums it up best, "There is always light at the end of the tunnel, it's pretty dark right now, we'll get there, we'll keep fighting, we're not going to give up."

Thank goodness for Louisiana farmers and ranchers! All we can say is #LouisianaStrong



Louisiana StrikeForce Update

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

NRCS State Conservationist Kevin Norton was one of the presenters at the Morehouse Black Farmers and Landowners Association, Inc., Field Day that was held on Friday, July 22, 2016. Close to 300 people were in attendance at the event.

The Morehouse Black Farmers and Landowners Association has been partnering with Southern University and the LSU AgCenter in conducting field days for the past several years. The field day took place on the farm of Harper Armstrong and included presentations, equipment demonstrations, as well as a hayride to look at crops in the field. The District Conservationist for Morehouse Parish, Tony Vaughn, was on hand to answer questions about NRCS technical and financial assistance



After leaving the Armstrong Farm, the field day participants stopped by the Dickson Farm where a solar powered surge valve was being used for crop irrigation.

This Week in Louisiana Agriculture (TWILA) interviewed Kevin Norton at the Dickson farm regarding the surge valve. Kevin explained that the purpose of the surge valve was to reduce the tailwater that leaves the fields and to even the delivery of water within the furrows which saves water and it also brings down a farmer's irrigation cost.

The day ended with more presentations by USDA and Southern University personnel at the LSU AgCenter Auditorium in Bastrop.



Upcoming Meetings

August 30, 2016
StrikeForce Meeting
Bernice Civic Club House
Bernice, Louisiana
5:30 PM

October 13, 2016
StrikeForce Follow-up Meeting
Galilee Baptist Church
Haughton, Louisiana

For more information, contact Dexter Sapp at 318-473-7688 or by e-mail at dexter.sapp@la.usda.gov

Around the State



The only USDA Service Center flooded during this event was the Crowley USDA Service Center. The photo on the left is the the front of the building and the photo on the right is from the interior of the building.

Some of the Acadia Parish NRCS field office staff will be temporarily working out of the Abbeville Field Office located at 3221 Veterans Memorial Drive, Suite H. You may contact that office by phone at 337-893-5664 Ext. 3. The rest of the field office staff will be working out of the Jennings Field Office located at 2003 Port Drive. You may contact that office by phone at 337-824-0975 Ext. 3.

Around the State



Rice crop submerged in flood waters in Vermilion Parish.



Freshly planted sugarcane field flooded in St. Martin Parish.



Flooded sugarcane in Lafayette Parish.



Soybeans holding flood waters in Evangeline Parish.



Flooding near Kentwood in Tangipahoa Parish.



High water line on fence in front of soybean field in Evangeline Parish.



Flooding of I-12 in Tangipahoa Parish.



Flood waters in Vermilion Parish.



Rice inundated with water from the flood in Evangeline Parish.



Rice that has sprouted while submerged in flood waters in Vermilion Parish.



Flooded agricultural field in Vermilion Parish.

For a current list of our offices visit
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/la/contact/local/>

Upcoming Events

September 15, 2016

Northeast Beef/Forage Field Day

The LSU AgCenter will be hosting a Beef /Forage Field Day at Goldmine Plantation in Mangham, Louisiana, on September 15, 2016. For more information, please contact Keith Collins at 318-728-3216.

September 16, 2016

Forestry BMP Workshop

The Trailblazer RC&D will be hosting a Forestry BMP workshop on Friday, September 16, 2016, at the Origin Bank on Highway 167 North in Ruston, Louisiana, from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. To RSVP, or for more information call 318-255-3554.

September 24, 2016

National Hunting and Fishing Day

NRCS will be participating in the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' National Hunting and Fishing Day at the LDWF Outdoor Education Center in Woodworth, Louisiana on Saturday, September 24, 2016.

Visit our web site at:
www.la.nrcs.usda.gov

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