



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

October 2016

## It Takes a Village

Feral Hog Management in Natchitoches Parish



Story from the Field  
Legacy Farm in Sabine Parish

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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

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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service 3737 Government Street Alexandria, Louisiana 71302

Attention: Amy Robertson State Public Affairs Specialist amy.robertson@la.usda.gov or Adele Swearingen Public Affairs Specialist adele.swearingen@la.usda.gov

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service 3737 Government Street Alexandria, Louisiana 71302 (318) 473-7751

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On the Cover



The Natchitoches SWCD, NRCS and USDA's APHIS Wildlife Service is working together to reduce feral hog populations. Find out how these partners are working together to accomplish this on 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

Happy New Year! For those of us who work according to the fiscal year, we recently celebrated the beginning of our “New Year” on October 1st. As I reflect on all we have accomplished as an agency over this past year, I was reminded of the critical importance and vital role relationships forged by local NRCS employees and our partnerships play in our conservation successes.

Partnerships, both big and small, from non-profit agencies that allow us to reach out to a brand new customer base to the state and national organizations that broaden and strengthen our relationships with our traditional producers. All of these partnerships are important pieces to the conservation puzzle that collaboratively we put together every day.

Never has it been clearer to me that together we can accomplish so much more than we can on our own. Which is a perfect segway into this month’s Conservation Update article about the ground-breaking work being done to eradicate feral hogs in Natchitoches and Winn Parishes. NRCS is working in tandem with the Natchitoches Soil and Water Conservation District and USDA’s APHIS Wildlife Services to implement a multifaceted approach to dealing with feral hogs.

Feral hogs are a huge resource concern for every land owner in our state. Especially farmers, who have so much to lose when feral hogs eat their crops seeds after planting and forage on the plants after they emerge. The issue for farmers is not only an economic one, with loosing crops and having to re-plant existing crops, but to the larger issue of resource damage to soil and water and the spread of disease.

We hope that this article will shed some light on the feral hog situation in our state and what we, NRCS along with our partners are doing to combat this problem. Working together with our private land owners along with local, state and national partners we are making a difference.

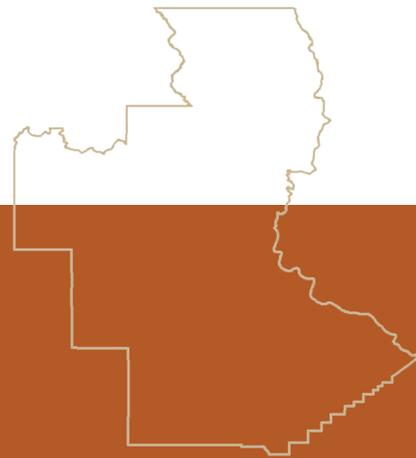
Kevin D. Norton  
State Conservationist



# Natchitoches Parish Ag Facts

There are 571 farms in Natchitoches Parish.  
221,756 acres of land is in farms.  
35% of the land is in crops, 44% is in pastures and 16.2% is forest land.  
Poultry is the #1 commodity of the parish.

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



# It Takes a Village...

## Feral Hog Management in Natchitoches

There is a saying in Louisiana when it comes to feral hogs, among wildlife biologists and outdoor enthusiasts alike. "There are two type of people in Louisiana... those that have feral hogs on their land and those that will have hogs on their land." The issue of feral hogs is no longer one just for farmers and those living in rural areas, because the hogs know no boundaries. Not between property lines, city lines or parish lines, feral hogs are always on the move searching for food and leaving a path of destruction in their wake.

That is where the story begins ... with a problem, a big one. Glenn Austin, District Conservationist in Natchitoches explains, "As we conducted our locally led process, reaching out to landowners, we asked what their biggest resource concerns were. Consistently the number one concern was feral hogs and what to do about them." Coincidentally, inadequate wildlife habitat due to feral swine invasion has been a top five resource concern across the state. Using 2013 data, LSU AgCenter Economist Dr. Shaun Tanger estimated in excess of \$74 million economic impact to agriculture by feral swine.

Sidney Evans, Chairman of the Natchitoches Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) agrees, "The feral hog problem had gotten so bad we felt like we had to do something about it because it is our job to help land owners with their resource concerns, we can provide assistance."

The timing was right to forge a new partnership. The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Service (WS) was using aerial gunning to remove hogs from wildlife refuges, they wanted to expand their success and reach out to local landowners, inviting them to participate in a fee for service aerial gunning program. Evans continues, "We spread the word, had several meetings with land owners, many signed up and we

ended up with about 40,000 acres enrolled the first year."

Although the aerial gunning was successful, everyone involved realized that a multi-faceted approach was needed to make a substantial impact on the hog population. The Natchitoches SWCD decided to buy some traps and loan them out to land owners who were already participating in the cooperative. "We purchased four traps, all of them are technologically advanced. They have a camera that will send pictures to your cell phone so you can monitor the number of hogs in the trap," said Evans. "If you have a hog problem, if you need a trap, they are here and you can borrow them." In fact, the Natchitoches SWCD will also supply the technical assistance to get the traps set-up and get it going. We want to teach the landowners how to trap effectively."

J.D. Cox, Wetlands Technician agrees, "There is not a silver bullet... it has to be an integrated approach. The aerial gunning is great, it takes care of a lot of problems. The trapping is great, night shooting is great but in order to have efficient control it takes all of those approaches fitting together to make it work."

After three years running the program the SWCD believe the statistics speak for themselves. Benny Dobson, Natchitoches SWCD District Technician explains the stats, "You will notice the number of hogs goes down in the third year, the reason for that is not bad marksmanship on the part of the aerial gunning it is due, we believe, to the multi-layered approach to we are using."

So how does the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) fit into this partnership? Glenn explains, "Several years ago we started an EQIP pilot feral hog management program. Through EQIP, we are providing funds to participating landowners to monitor feral hogs." There are specific requirements for the program.

Glenn continues, "First, they must get a game camera that will send pictures to a cell phone; they must document those pictures; they must have a corral type trap on their property so once they get the information they can use it to trap hogs. When the requirements are met they get a payment." Natchitoches Parish has 21 participating land owners in this EQIP program that covers about 12,500 acres.

One of those participants is Casey Messenger, who farms of 1,200 acres of corn, soybeans and a little wheat from time to time. Casey started seeing hogs on his land about five or six years ago and since then the population has escalated. For the past several years, hogs have been a serious problem for Messenger. "We have seen 15 to 20 acres of corn that have been totally damaged by feral hogs," said Messenger. "It was damage that resulted in a total and complete loss for us. We utilize every acre that we have and every acre that a hog destroys is profit out of our pocket."

They were not very successful trying to take care of the feral hogs on their own. "After working 12 to 14 hours a day the last thing I want to do is go chase hogs all night long," Casey explained. "When the aerial gunning program came along we were all in and it has made a huge difference. In fact, I think that the damage to our farm would be triple or quadruple if it wasn't for the aerial gunning."

Through the EQIP feral hog monitoring program Casey was able to purchase surveillance and monitoring equipment that complemented the trap he had in place. The Natchitoches SWCD provided the technical assistance to get it set-up and get started.

"I would encourage any farmer to look into participating in this program because it is a vital part of our operation ... with all the diseases that hogs carry, it is almost becoming a must for us to integrate trapping into the aerial gunning program,"

# Parish

said Casey. "If it wasn't for the NRCS office and what they do we would be a step behind."

"Natchitoches is only one of two parishes in the state that have the pilot program, Winn Parish is the second. Other states are utilizing this program. This is just a way for NRCS to see if this works. As it expands, this multi-faceted approach to control feral hog's needs to cross -parish's boundaries just like the program needs to work from farm to farm," explained Glenn. "If you are going to manage feral hogs in Louisiana it needs to be a concerted effort from every agency in the state and every land owner in the state."

So why isn't everyone jumping on this problem? In Louisiana, known as "Sportsman's Paradise", a feral hog represents another game animal to many. Unfortunately, unless someone is a landowner, the ramifications of the feral swine invasion are probably not realized.

The issue of feral hogs is also one of public safety. Feral hogs can carry different water born pathogens, when they root along rivers, creeks and other water bodies that results into damage to water quality. They damage crops, and damage habitat for wildlife and even endangered wildlife. Glenn explains, "NRCS's role is to help landowners manage their property for conservation purposes. To improve water quality, to increase wildlife and address conservation issues on their property. And when feral hogs are damaging all of those resources then we as an agency have determined that we can help them."

Glenn continues, "It's about corn crops, it's about soybean crops, it's about the financial impacts but the untold story is the impact to wildlife and water quality. And it's also about disease that the feral hogs carry, all of these impact landowners."

Through the aerial gunning cooperative and the EQIP feral hog monitoring program, NRCS is doing just that. Working together with the Natchitoches SWCD, APHIS and other federal and state agencies the feral hog population in Natchitoches Parish is dwindling.



Year	Landowners Participating	Acres	Removed by Aerial Gunning	Removed by Trapping	Total Per Year
2014	37	41,000	391	80	471
2015	48	42,000	583	625	1,208
2016	53	38,000	381	196	577
<b>Total Hogs Removed</b>					<b>2,256</b>

### Louisiana StrikeForce Update

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

The Natural Resources Conservation Service recently met in New Orleans with the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Dr. Joe Leonard and some of his staff along with officials with the City of New Orleans and the New Orleans based Black Men of Labor Organization (BMOL). Chad Dyer, the Director of Code Enforcement for the City of New Orleans and other departments within the City are working with partners (non-profits, restaurants groups, and grocery stores) to turn vacant lots in the Lower 9th Ward and St. Claude neighborhoods into commercial scale urban farms. For the meeting, presentations were given by Chad Dyer and Todd Higgins. The group then toured some of the city's vacant lots in the Lower Ninth Ward.



## Client Gateway

As a new and beginning tree farmer Ron Tucker works closely with his District Conservationist, Corby Moore. "When I first started working with NRCS, Corby told me about Client Gateway and said I should check it out, so I did," explained Ron. He took an initial look at the site and then he went back later, after some improvements and upgrades were made. "When I got on again the first thing I realized was, it was a lot more advanced, it had all the information that was pertinent for me, my contract, everything I wanted to do was there."

According to Chad, the basic premise is that the city through Code Enforcement will grant a right of entry to the BMOL to perform long-term abatement of vacant and blighted lots in the city via a commercial scale urban farm utilizing the expertise of individuals formerly incarcerated in the Louisiana State prison system. Many of these former inmates have considerable skills in agriculture, as many of our state prisons are heavily involved in agriculture.

The urban farm concept will have multiple impacts. First of all lots that have been vacated as a results of Hurricane Katrina can be converted into something useful. The Urban Farm concept will be able to provide job opportunities for jobless individuals who were formerly incarcerated. The concept will help to address the food desert situation in the Lower Ninth Ward. Also since New Orleans has approximately 1,300 restaurants, most of which purchase their foods from outside sources, the local urban farm concept could provide the restaurants with fresh locally grown foods.

NRCS and the Farm Service Agency will be working the City of New Orleans and the designated

partnering nonprofit organization to get them qualified for financial assistance through NRCS Farm Bill Programs.

### Upcoming Events

#### October 29, 2016

NRCS Urban Agriculture Information and Eligibility Workshop  
9:30 - 11:00 am  
St. Roch Community Church  
1738 St. Roch Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70117

#### November 1, 2016

Forestry BMP Workshop  
10:00 am - 3:00 pm  
Crossett Public Library  
1700 S. Main Street  
Crossett, AR 71635

#### November 9, 2016

NRCS Urban Agriculture Information and Eligibility Workshop  
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm  
TBD

#### November 12, 2016

StrikeForce Meeting  
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM  
Campti Library  
3129 Highway 71  
Campti, LA

Ron believes this is the way to go, "This saves me time, I don't have to coordinate when to go into the office to sign paperwork, it is just better for me all the way around," said Ron.

Ron's advice to producers who have yet to try Client Gateway, "Don't be afraid of it, just jump in feet first and go!" Perhaps the best piece of advice Ron has for newbies, "You can't mess up, because you know where the information is going. If something happens you can always pick-up the phone."

Asked if he would recommend Client Gateway to other producers, Ron whole-



hearted says, "Yes, I would encourage anyone to try this out, just give it shot,"

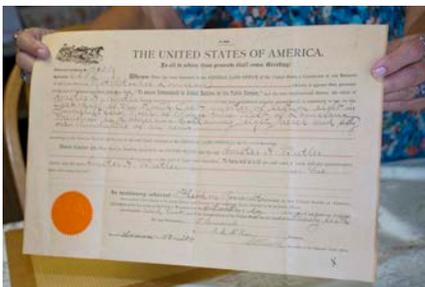
# Story from the Field

## Legacy Farm in Sabine Parish

What is a legacy? Webster's dictionary defines it as ... something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor. For Marjorie Brown and her husband Roy Lee their farm in Florien, Louisiana is the very essence of a legacy. This past summer Marjorie and Roy Lee were the proud recipients of the Louisiana Century Farm Award at the annual Farm Bureau convention in New Orleans.



In 1902, Marjorie's grandfather, Amster A. Butler, homesteaded 80 acres in Florien, Louisiana where he grew cotton, corn and peanuts. One day while looking through some family belongings, Marjorie found the original homestead papers signed by President Theodore Roosevelt. Understandably, that is one of her great treasures. But her greatest treasures are the memories of her family and growing up on the farm that she now calls home.



"My mother was a school teacher and my daddy farmed, so my babysitter was my grandfather," recalled Marjorie. "You could not have asked for a better one, I have so many wonderful memories, spending time with my grandfather here on this farm." Marjorie and Roy Lee moved away from the area for a little while but they returned home after her grandfather passed away so they could help her mother continue working the land.

Drew Coombs, Acting District Conservationist in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS), Many Field Office explains how NRCS has worked with Browns over the years. "We have helped with some cross fencing, and several practices including forging and biomass plantings to help promote rotational grazing of their cattle, and we did some soil testing along with cross fencing and heavy use pads for the cattle." Drew continues, "The Browns have not only been NRCS customers, Marjorie also serves on the Sabine Soil & Water Conservation District board. "Conservation is very important to me and I want to help farmers, I want to share with other farmers the resources are available to them," said Marjorie.



Receiving one of the Louisiana Century Farm awards this summer was a truly amazing experience for the Browns. "It meant the world to me to be recognized, my grandfather worked very hard on this land, so did my father and mother, Roy Lee and

I have continued that hard work," explained Marjorie. The Browns share their time and expertise with their fellow farmers and also their children and grandchildren. When asked if they have someone in the family who would want to carry on the farming tradition, they are hopeful one or several of their six grandchildren might be interested when the time comes.

Drew enjoys working with the Browns and it is easy to see the Browns enjoy working with Drew. "Being out in the field, working with our customers that is the favorite part of my job," said Drew. "I'm able to help the Browns and share information with them about different NRCS programs or technical assistance we can offer." But the best thing according to Drew, "I really learn a lot from the Browns, too." The time that Drew is able to spend with them is the passing of information from one generation to the next that is invaluable.

Marjorie and Roy Lee have no plans to retire any time soon. "You know what they say...you can take the girl out of the country but you can't take the country out of the girl" laughed Marjorie. "This is the best life I could have asked for, we are truly blessed."



# Save the Date

## Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference February 9 - 10, 2017 Alexandria, Louisiana



### Keynote Speaker: Kim Bremmer

Kim grew up as a farm girl and is a wife, mother of two, graduate of University of Wisconsin-Madison and was a dairy nutritionist for almost 15 years. She is a vocal champion of agriculture everywhere she goes, from the grocery store to the airport. Her true passion is sharing the REAL story of agriculture with everyday consumers.

Kim is the Wisconsin State Coordinator for Common Ground, a national movement of farm women who share information about farming and the food we grow; a regular contributor on Rural Route Radio; and President of Wisconsin Women in Agriculture, an affiliate of American Agri-Women, the nation's largest coalition of farm, ranch and agri-business women dedicated to protecting and advancing agriculture by increasing awareness, building alliances, communication and education. She is also an Academy Member of the National Speaker's Association and a proud member of the American Dairy Coalition.

For more information about Kim, visit <http://aginspirations.com>



***New Format***



***Networking***

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