



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana's Conservation Update

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help the Land

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March 2014

## Seasonal High Tunnel Success

# Growing Healthy Fruits, Vegetables, and Children in Sabine Parish

## Introducing Soybeans to the Sugarcane Rotation Reaps Great Economic and Conservation Benefits

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

Projects · Successes · Partnerships



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### On the Cover



Sabine Parish producers Jodi and John Harris have grown it all—vegetables, fruits, pastured chickens, dairy cows, berries, goats, and more—and they have produced cheese, sourdough breads, and yogurt from their harvests. Now, they are growing their vegetables and fruits in a high tunnel, or hoop house. To learn more, see pages 4 and 5.

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## NRCS *New Assignments*



- Randall Wordlaw**, Soil Conservationist, Bastrop
- Julius Ellis**, Civil Engineering Technician, Thibodaux
- Douglas Baker**, Supervisory Civil Engineer, Thibodaux
- Biff Handy**, Agricultural Engineer (Irrigation Water Management), Bastrop
- Wendall Meaux**, Civil Engineer (Energy), Jennings
- Ben Langlinais**, Civil Engineer (GPS and Precision Ag), New Iberia
- James Langley**, Technician, Oberlin
- Richard Williams**, State Forester, Alexandria
- Kody Meaux**, District Conservationist, Ruston



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## Notes from the State Conservationist



High tunnels, or hoop houses, are gaining in popularity among produce farmers across the country. Primarily, because they extend the growing season. Here, in Louisiana, we normally have mild winters. This past winter, however, proved to be an exception. Snow, sleet, and ice were a common occurrence. Producers Jodi and John Harris shared photos with us of their hoop house during one of the snow events (see below right). Notice the end flaps are up in the photo. They said the temperature was so warm inside the hoop house—even in the snow—they had to raise the flaps! I would have to say, it appears the hoop house is working!

The Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative is just one opportunity producers have with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to improve farm operations through conservation. Conservation doesn't cost, it pays—sometimes now, and other times into the future. The paycheck comes in soil saved, nutrients managed, increased production, and many other benefits depending on the farm, its location, and the needs of the land. Conservation delivers peace of mind knowing you are protecting your farm's natural resource foundation for agriculture viability for the generations that will follow.

A common thread that runs through all of our success stories is the desire to be proactive in addressing the realities of agriculture production today while leaving the land better for the next generation. Our service is to help you accomplish this on your farm or ranch. Stop by our office and find out how.

Kevin Norton  
State Conservationist  
Louisiana



A directory of our offices is included on the last page of this publication.



### High Tunnel/Hoop House *Ag Facts*

In Louisiana,  
**over 30 high tunnels**  
(or hoop houses)  
have been installed through  
the NRCS Seasonal  
High Tunnel Initiative.

The NRCS Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative assists producers address resource concerns by:

- **Improving plant quality**
- **Improving soil quality**
- **Reducing nutrient and pesticide transportation**
- **Improving air quality through reduced transportation inputs**
- **Reducing energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce**

Financial and technical assistance through the **NRCS Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative** is funded by NRCS's **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**. Eligible applicants include individuals, legal entities, Indian Tribes, or joint operations engaged in agricultural production.

For more information, visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/>

## Seasonal High Tunnel Success

# Growing Healthy Fruits, Vegetables, and Children

## in Sabine Parish

In 1989, New Orleans transplants Jodi and John Harris learned quickly—if you wanted to purchase organic food in Sabine Parish, you either had to visit a farmers’ market or you had to grow your own. By 1990, they were growing everything they needed on their farm in Sabine Parish.

The Harrises have grown it all—vegetables, fruits, pastured chickens, dairy cows, berries, goats, and more—and they have produced cheese, sourdough breads, and yogurt from their harvests.

“We believe it’s vital that our children grow up eating natural, healthy foods,” said John Harris.

“And growing our own food became an educational opportunity for our kids,” said Jodi Harris. “I homeschooled them, and it made sense to work it into their curriculum.”

In 2011, the Harrises attended a workshop hosted by the LSU Ag Extension Service that provided information about high tunnels and the assistance the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) could offer through the Environmental

Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Jodi and John were intrigued by the possibilities the high tunnels could offer, and it was not long before they contacted NRCS and began construction.

Seasonal high tunnels, commonly called hoop houses, are structures made of plastic or metal pipe and covered with plastic or other sheeting. They are easy to build, maintain, and move, and they provide an energy-efficient way to extend the growing season, reduce or avoid use of pesticides, and reduce run-off. Unlike greenhouses, they require no energy, relying on natural sunlight to modify the climate inside to create favorable conditions for growing vegetables and other specialty crops.

“The hoop house has allowed us to have a much longer growing season for our plants,” said John Harris. “It helps reduce pests naturally, and it is virtually maintenance free. Plus, I’ve never seen sugar snaps grow as tall as these have!”



The Harris’s high tunnel success has garnered quite a following in Sabine Parish. Several farmers in the area have toured the Harris’s farm and talked with them about the process and the benefits. As a result, 10 high tunnels have been installed in Sabine Parish, and 16 applications have been received for the first round of EQIP funding in fiscal year 2014.

Since installing the high tunnel in 2011, the Harrises have installed a micro irrigation system, cross fencing for rotational grazing of livestock,

## Jodi and John Harris Conservationists



**“Being a good steward of the land is important to us. We aren’t trying to make a million bucks, we are just trying to create a nice life for our children.”**

Jodi Harris



and planted pollinators in their pastures and woodlands through NRCS’s conservation programs. They have future plans to install a solar-powered livestock watering system.

“We learn more and more every day about conservation, and we try to pass the message along to others,” said Jodi Harris.

“We want to make sure that we leave this place better than we found it, a better place for our children,” said John Harris.”



The Natural Resources Conservation Service provided technical and financial assistance to the Harrises through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

## Focus on Results



### *Did you know?*

**Innovative sugarcane farmers are introducing soybeans into their rotation and reaping great economic and conservation benefits.**

Sugarcane is a perennial grass crop that is grown in southern Louisiana. Stalks are planted in raised beds, and the regrowth is harvested for 3-4 years. Between the last harvest in the winter, and subsequent planting of a new crop the following fall, cultivation is often used to keep fields free of problem weeds like bermudgrass. Although effective at controlling weeds, cultivation during this fallow period leaves the soil bare and susceptible to erosion.

Innovative farmers in Louisiana are beginning to introduce soybeans into their rotation by 'fitting' this crop into what was once the fallow period. The economic benefits of this cash crop allows sugarcane producers to offset most of the fallow costs normally incurred. What may not be obvious are the powerful conservation effects of introducing this legume into the rotation. Soybeans protect the soil from erosion and scavenge residual nutrients, resulting in improved water quality downstream. Soybeans also break up the monoculture of sugarcane and introduce a different root system into the soil ecosystem. This helps to improve pest pressure and promotes a diverse microbial population and rooting zone.

This summer, we will feature a farmer effectively utilizing soybeans in rotation with sugarcane and discuss how they have successfully transitioned into this system.

Submitted by Chris Coreil, State Agronomist, Alexandria State Office



## Around the State

### **Feb 8**

**St. Mary SWCD Tree Planting:** On February 8, 2014, the St. Mary Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), with help from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, 4-H, and many other volunteers, planted 50 live oaks along Louisiana Highway 182 in Baldwin, Louisiana. This work was accomplished through an Apache Tree Grant that was awarded to St. Mary SWCD to continue the Louisiana Highway 182 beautification project.

### **Feb 27**

**Northeast Louisiana Water Management Meeting:** On February 27, 2014, a Northeast Louisiana Water Management meeting was conducted at the Ag Auditorium in Bastrop, Louisiana. Participants discussed the Southeast Arkansas Feasibility Study planned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This study will examine the economic feasibility of transferring water from the Arkansas River into southeast Arkansas and northeast Louisiana to benefit area agricultural producers.

## Helping People Help the Land

### Feb 28

#### **Louisiana Day at Poland Junior**

**High School:** On February 28, 2014, the Rapides Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), along with special guests Alphonse the Alligator and Terry the Turtle, participated in "Louisiana Day" at Poland Junior High School. Poland Junior High hosts this event each year to give students an opportunity to learn about the food, culture, and wildlife of Louisiana. Rapides SWCD employees, Brenda Archer and Marilyn Rabalais, taught the students about animals that are found in a wetland habitat, how wetland areas play an important role in our ecosystem, and the importance of wildlife conservation.

### Mar 1

#### **Capital SWCD Hardwood Seedling Planting:**

On March 1, 2014, Capital Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS Denham Springs Field Office personnel hosted a hardwood seedling planting project for members of the Walker, Louisiana, Cub Scout Pack #479 and Boy Scout Troop #479. Scouts planted 100 nuttall and cherrybark oak seedlings and 50 buttonbush seedlings on Capital SWCD board member Steve Horvath's farm in Livingston Parish. Orientation was provided by Steve Horvath; on-site assistance was provided by Lynwood Abbot, Capital SWCD Technician; and soils instruction was provided by Brandon Waltman, NRCS Soil Scientist. The scouts learned about soils, forest

management, woodland functions and values, and other important conservation topics. Through this activity, the scouts earned their environmental science merit badges.

### Mar 10

#### **University of Louisville Visits the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center (PMC):**

Twelve volunteers from the University of Louisville visited the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center through Operation Nehemiah on March 10, 2014. The group assisted PMC staff with ground cover and construction of new planter boxes. Additionally, the students were able to learn about Louisiana's coastal concerns and how the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center contributes to saving our coast.



## Upcoming Events

### Mar 31 - Aug 30

#### **"I Remember..." An Art Show of Environmental Significance:**

The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act Task Force in Partnership with the Louisiana State University T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History will exhibit the "I Remember..." art show featuring select archival materials from LSU Libraries Special Collection, photographer Lane Lefort, and artist Marian Brister Martinez at the Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

### Apr 12

#### **Party for the Planet 2014:**

Earth Day at the Alexandria Zoo

### Apr 27

#### **Louisiana Earth Day 2014:**

Baton Rouge



United States Department of Agriculture

# Contact Our Offices

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

Parish	Field Office	Soil and Water Conservation District	Address	Telephone
Acadia	Crowley	Acadia SWCD	157 Cherokee Drive, Suite C, Crowley, LA 70526	(337) 783-5823, ext. 3
Allen	Oberlin	Allen SWCD	309 North 1st Street, Suite 1, Oberlin, LA 70655	(337) 639-4850, ext. 3
Ascension	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD and New River SWCD	2438 Highway 1 South, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
Assumption	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD	2438 Highway 1 South, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
Avoyelles	Marksville	Avoyelles SWCD	629 Tunica Drive West, Marksville, LA 71351	(318) 253-9445, ext. 3
Beauregard	DeRidder	Calcasieu SWCD	597 Mahlon Street, Suite B, DeRidder, LA 70634	(337) 463-8555, ext. 3
Bienville	Minden	Saline SWCD	216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055	(318) 377-3950, ext. 3
Bossier	Benton	Bodcau SWCD	200 Burt Boulevard, Suite 101, Benton, LA 71006-4901	(318) 965-2185, ext. 3
Caddo	Shreveport	Caddo SWCD	1402 Hawn Avenue, Shreveport, LA 71107	(318) 676-3461, ext. 3
Calcasieu	Lake Charles	Gulf Coast SWCD	5417 Gerstner Memorial Drive, Lake Charles, LA 70601	(337) 474-1583, ext. 3
Caldwell	Columbia	Boeuf and Dugdemona SWCD	7128 Highway 165 South, Suite 2, Columbia, LA 71418	(318) 649-2651, ext. 3
Cameron	Lake Charles	Gulf Coast SWCD	5417 Gerstner Memorial Drive, Lake Charles, LA 70601	(337) 474-1583, ext. 3
Catahoula	Jonesville	Catahoula SWCD	3545 4th Street, Jonesville, LA 71343	(318) 339-4239, ext. 3
Claiborne	Minden	D'Arbonne SWCD	216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055	(318) 377-3950, ext. 3
Concordia	Ferriday	Tensas-Concordia SWCD	8331 Highway 84, Ferriday, LA 71334	(318) 757-2455, ext. 3
DeSoto	Mansfield	DeSoto SWCD	332 Lake Road, Mansfield, LA 71052	(318) 872-4949, ext. 3
East Baton Rouge	Denham Springs	Capital SWCD	907 Florida Boulevard, SW, Denham Springs, LA 70726	(225) 664-1430, ext. 3
East Carroll	Lake Providence	East Carroll SWCD	406 Lake Street, Suite C, Lake Providence, LA 71254	(318) 559-2604, ext. 3
East Feliciana	Clinton	Feliciana SWCD	9752 Plank Road South, Clinton, LA 70722	(225) 683-5496, ext. 3
Evangeline	Ville Platte	Evangeline SWCD	205 Court Street, Ville Platte, LA 70586	(337) 363-6602, ext. 3
Franklin	Winnsboro	Northeast SWCD	616 Riser Road, Winnsboro, LA 71295	(318) 435-6743, ext. 3
Grant	Colfax	Grant SWCD	510 Main Street, Colfax, LA 71417	(318) 627-9903, ext. 3
Iberia	New Iberia	Iberia SWCD	2617 Northside Road, Suite 600, New Iberia, LA 70563	(337) 369-6623, ext. 3
Iberville	Addis	Lower Delta SWCD	7747 Highway 1 South, Addis, LA 70710	(225) 687-2184, ext. 3
Jackson	Ruston	Dugdemona SWCD	1412 Celebrity Drive, Ruston, LA 71270	(318) 255-3136, ext. 3
Jefferson	New Orleans	Crescent SWCD	1041 Rue La Cannes, Luling, LA 70070	(985) 331-9084
Jefferson Davis	Jennings	Jefferson Davis SWCD	2003 Port Drive, Jennings, LA 70546	(337) 824-0975, ext. 3
Lafayette	Lafayette	Lafayette SWCD	905 Jefferson Street, Suite 310, Lafayette, LA 70501-7913	(337) 262-6601, ext. 3
Lafourche	Thibodaux	Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD	143 Laura Drive, Thibodaux, LA 70301	(985) 447-3871, ext. 3
LaSalle	Jonesville	LaSalle SWCD	3545 4th Street, Jonesville, LA 71343	(318) 339-4239, ext. 3
Lincoln	Ruston	D'Arbonne SWCD	1412 Celebrity Drive, Ruston, LA 71270	(318) 255-3136, ext. 3
Livingston	Denham Springs	Capital SWCD	907 Florida Boulevard, SW, Denham Springs, LA 70726	(225) 664-1430, ext. 3
Madison	Tallulah	Madison SWCD	1900 Crothers Drive, Tallulah, LA 71282	(318) 574-4158, ext. 3
Morehouse	Bastrop	Morehouse SWCD	9604 Marlatt Street, Bastrop, LA 71220	(318) 283-7626, ext. 3
Natchitoches	Natchitoches	Natchitoches SWCD	6949 Louisiana Highway 1 Bypass, Natchitoches, LA 71457	(318) 357-8366, ext. 3
Orleans	New Orleans	Crescent SWCD	1041 Rue La Cannes, Luling, LA 70070	(985) 331-9084
Quachita	Monroe	D'Arbonne/Boeuf River SWCD	2410 Old Sterling Road, Suite B, Monroe, LA 71203-2668	(318) 343-4467, ext. 3
Plaquemines	New Orleans	Plaquemines SWCD	1041 Rue La Cannes, Luling, LA 70070	(985) 331-9084
Pointe Coupee	New Roads	Upper Delta SWCD	180 East Main Street, New Roads, LA 70760	(225) 638-7746, ext. 3
Rapides	Alexandria	Rapides SWCD	3734 Government Street, Building C, Alexandria, LA 71303	(318) 473-7856, ext. 3
Red River	Coushatta	Red River SWCD	1311 Ringgold Avenue, Coushatta, LA 71019	(318) 932-4352, ext. 3
Richland	Rayville	Boeuf River SWCD	141 Industrial Loop, Rayville, LA 71269	(318) 728-4451, ext. 3
Sabine	Many	Sabine SWCD	570 Highway 171 By Pass, Many, LA 71449	(318) 256-3491
St. Bernard	New Orleans	Crescent SWCD	1041 Rue La Cannes, Luling, LA 70070	(985) 331-9084
St. Charles	New Orleans	Crescent SWCD	1041 Rue La Cannes, Luling, LA 70070	(985) 331-9084
St. Helena	Amite	Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD	805 West Oak Street, Suite 1, Amite, LA 70422-2820	(985) 748-8751, ext. 3
St. James	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD and New River SWCD	2438 Highway 1 South, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
St. John	New Orleans	Crescent SWCD	1041 Rue La Cannes, Luling, LA 70070	(985) 331-9084
St. Landry	Opelousas	St. Landry SWCD	5832 I-49 North Service Road, Opelousas, LA 70570	(337) 942-2530, ext. 3
St. Martin	Lafayette	St. Martin SWCD	905 Jefferson Street, Suite 310, Lafayette, LA 70501-7913	(337) 262-6601, ext. 3
St. Mary	Franklin	St. Mary SWCD	500 Main Street, Franklin, LA 70538	(337) 828-1461, ext. 3
St. Tammany	Franklinton	Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD	1111 Washington Street, Franklinton, LA 70438	(985) 839-5688, ext. 3
Tangipahoa	Amite	Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD	805 West Oak Street, Suite 1, Amite, LA 70422-2820	(985) 748-8751, ext. 3
Tensas	St. Joseph	Tensas-Concordia SWCD	1223 Plank Road, St. Joseph, LA 71366	(318) 766-3502, ext. 3
Terrebonne	Thibodaux	Lafourche-Terrebonne SWCD	143 Laura Drive, Thibodaux, LA 70301	(985) 447-3871, ext. 3
Union	Farmerville	D'Arbonne SWCD	501 Glory Road, Farmerville, LA 71241	(318) 368-8021
Vermilion	Abbeville	Vermilion SWCD	3221 Veterans Memorial Drive, Suite H, Abbeville, LA 70510	(337) 893-5664, ext. 3
Vernon	Leesville	Calcasieu SWCD	205 North 5th Street, Leesville, LA 71446	(337) 239-2193
Washington	Franklinton	Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD	1111 Washington Street, Franklinton, LA 70438	(985) 839-5688, ext. 3
Webster	Minden	Dorcheat SWCD	216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055	(318) 377-3950, ext. 3
West Baton Rouge	Addis	Upper Delta SWCD	7747 Highway 1, South, Addis, LA 70710	(225) 687-2184, ext. 3
West Carroll	Oak Grove	West Carroll SWCD	208 South Constitution Street, Oak Grove, LA 71263	(318) 428-9303, ext. 3
West Feliciana	Clinton	Feliciana SWCD	9752 Plank Road South, Clinton, LA 70722	(225) 683-5496, ext. 3
Winn	Natchitoches	Dugdemona SWCD	6949 Louisiana Highway 1 Bypass, Natchitoches, LA 71457	(318) 357-8366, ext. 3

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