



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana's Conservation Update

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Sugarcane Farmer Rotates Soybeans and Reaps Benefits in Iberville Parish

Vermilion SWCD Septic System Pump Out Program

Conservation Practices Mean More Forage in Webster Parish

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.

If you would like to receive monthly issues of the Conservation Update, please send your mailing address or e-mail address to:

Holly Martien
State Public Affairs Specialist
USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service
3737 Government Street
Alexandria, Louisiana 71302
or
holly.martien@la.usda.gov

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

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On the Cover



John Gay is a seventh generation sugarcane farmer. His family has been farming in south Louisiana since 1807. Gay introduced soybeans to his sugarcane rotation and is reaping benefits. To learn more, see pages 4 and 5.



Follow us on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/LouisianaNRCS>

Follow us on Twitter: http://twitter.com/NRCS_Louisiana

Notes from the State Conservationist



Each month we bring conservation success stories to you from across Louisiana. The common thread in each of these stories is the desire by the farmers and ranchers to leave their land better for the next generation. They are all striving to improve the natural resources on their farms and ranches.

This month we are featuring a farmer whose family has been farming in the same spot in Louisiana since 1807. Seven generations of farmers working the same land—and leaving it a little better after each generation.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service and Soil and Water Conservation Districts are in business to make sure farmers and ranchers have the conservation tools they need to build sustainable farming operations. We walk your farm with you, learn your goals, identify your resource concerns, and work with you to develop a plan to address your concerns. We offer voluntary conservation programs that provide financial and technical assistance to ensure conservation success, and we walk beside you as you plan, implement, and manage your conservation practices.

Whether you are a first-year farmer or a seventh generation farmer, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Soil and Water Conservation Districts can help you protect and enhance the natural resources of your farm or ranch. Give us a call or come by our offices to learn how.

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist

Benefits from Cover Crops

- Cuts fertilizer costs
- Reduces the need for herbicides and other pesticides
- Improves yields by enhancing soil health
- Prevents soil erosion
- Conserves soil moisture
- Protects water quality
- Helps safeguard personal health

Ag Facts

From: Managing Cover Crops Profitably, 3rd Edition, Handbook Series Book 9, Third Printing, June 2012, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE). Retrieved from <http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Managing-Cover-Crops-Profitably-3rd-Edition>.

Visit your local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service to learn how you can benefit from cover crops on your farm or ranch. A directory of our offices is on the back cover of this publication.

Sugarcane Farmer Rotates Soybeans and Reaps Benefits

in Iberville Parish

“... it seems that the benefits of the soybeans outweigh the costs ...”

John Gay

John Gay is a seventh generation sugarcane farmer. His family has been farming in south Louisiana since 1807.

“This land has sustained many plates of food over the years, and it is my job to make sure that it continues to sustain all the generations of my family that will come after me,” said Gay.

To ensure sustainability of his farm, Gay has worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service since it was called the Soil Conservation Service. Through the years, he has implemented a variety of conservation practices such as pest management, precision land forming, and residue management just to name a few.

“I’ve seen what time and carelessness can do to the land. I won’t let that happen to my family’s farm,” said Gay.

“I want to leave a legacy of conservation for my children and grandchildren as my ancestors did for me.”



Most recently, Gay has targeted grass and weed growth in his sugarcane fields by planting soybeans as a cover crop.

Up until recently, Gay used wheat as his main cover crop. However, through working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Lower Delta Soil and Water Conservation District, he realized that soybeans can provide greater benefit.

Benefits of Soybeans as a Cover Crop

Provides Weed Control

Soybeans are able to choke out the weeds and grasses that naturally develop on Gay’s farm by providing a large canopy over the ground. This blocks the sunlight from getting to the grasses that compete with his sugarcane crop.



John Gay

Conservationist

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.



"For a long time, wheat seemed like the better option because there was more time between the harvesting of the wheat and the sugarcane planting," said Gay. "Now it seems that the benefits of the soybeans outweigh the costs. The soybeans can actually give me one more year of extra cane stubble that I may not have otherwise had."

Adds Plant Diversity

Wheat is a grass just like sugarcane. Using wheat as a cover crop creates a grass monoculture environment on the farm. Soybeans are legumes, which provide plant diversity as well as microbial diversity. The more diverse the soil ecosystem, the healthier the soil.

Prevents Erosion

Cover crops are especially important in sugarcane fields because the soils in south Louisiana—where sugarcane is primarily grown—are susceptible to erosion. Gay uses cover crops to battle erosion, but he is not limiting his battle against erosion to cover crops. He is also in the process of using precision land leveling and installing pipe drops on his land to help with sheet and rill erosion.

Provides Cash Crop

Soybeans are also used as a cash crop as well as a cover crop. This gives Gay extra income to offset management expenses during the time period between sugarcane growths.



John Gay implemented many of the conservation practices on his farm through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program.



Stories from the Field

Vermilion SWCD Septic System Pump Out Program

Improving Water Quality in the Vermilion River Basin

The Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is working in the Vermilion River Basin to improve the water quality of Boston Canal as part of the Clean Water Act Section 319 program. During phase one of this project, agricultural producers were encouraged to voluntarily adopt conservation practices through the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry-Office of Soil and Water 319 Program.

The second phase of this project is a septic system pump out program for homeowners in the project area. The Vermilion SWCD began accepting applications from homeowners for the septic system pump out program on March 3, 2014, and will continue to accept applications for three years. Once an application is processed and approved, the homeowner chooses a contractor to complete the work and the SWCD schedules the work to be done with the selected contractor. Once the work is completed, the SWCD pays the contractor for his services.



To date, the Vermilion SWCD has received 24 applications for the program. Work has been completed on 11 septic systems within the project areas. For more information or to apply for this program, contact Mitzi Dohrman, Vermilion SWCD, at (337) 893-5664, extension 3.



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that rural communities with aged septic systems are known to be a significant contributor to pollution. A failing septic system can discharge more than 75,000 gallons of untreated wastewater into ground and surface water annually.

For more information on this project and the Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District, visit: <http://vermilionswcd.weebly.com/boston-canal-319-project.html>

Submitted by Mitzi Dohrman, District Secretary, Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District

Conservation Practices Mean More Available Forage in Webster Parish

Alvin Womack is a retired USDA Forest Service employee with 34 years of service. He was raised in Greensburg, Louisiana. He bought his first herd of cattle in 1993 as a hobby. Now, the cattle supplement his retirement. He asked NRCS for assistance with improving his pastures in 2011.

The Minden Field Office staff and area staff scored the pastures for prescribed grazing to improve the health and quality of his forages. He interseeded legumes for the improvement of forage diversity and pasture condition. The area grazing lands specialist discussed soil health and the importance of nutrients with Mr.



Womack. This year, Mr. Womack is scheduled to install pipeline, a water facility, and a heavy use area protection pad to give his livestock an adequate, good quality water supply. As a result, Mr. Womack is managing his cattle with more forage available throughout the year, and hay and feed have been reduced due to more available forage.

Submitted by Cindy Beard, Area Soil Conservation Technician, and Mary Beth Guillory, Acting District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Minden Field Office.

Around the State

Apr 17

Isle de Jean Charles Sand Live Oak Planting: Through the efforts of the Natural Resources Conservation Service New Orleans Field Office, Lafourche-Terrebonne Soil and Water Conservation District, Bayou Land RC&D, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office of Soil and Water, and four Earth Team volunteers, approximately 100 sand live oak seedlings were planted on Isle de Jean Charles. Isle de Jean Charles is a narrow strip of land in coastal Terrebonne Parish that is home to the Isle de Jean Charles Band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Indians. The sand live oaks were planted as part of an effort to evaluate the tree's potential use in coastal restoration. It often grows in sand soils, such as those found on coastal dunes and barrier islands in the southeastern United States. It is highly resistant to wind from storms, it can adapt to more saline environments, and it is beneficial to wildlife and migratory songbirds.



May 22

Jena Elementary Landscaping Project: The LaSalle Soil and Water Conservation District, in partnership with the Town and Country Garden Club, recently purchased 40 crepe myrtle trees to be planted as part of a landscaping project at the new Jena Elementary School. The Town of Jena dug the holes and the LaSalle Parish School Board furnished top soil and mulch as well as employees to do the plantings.



Jun 23

Capital SWCD Coastal Revegetation Project: On June 23, 2014, through the efforts of the Capital Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office of Soil and Water, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and seven volunteers, 1,000 plugs of California bulrush totaling 5,000 linear feet, were planted along the northern shoreline of Lake Maurepas near the mouth of the Amite River.



Jun 10

East Feliciana Cattleman's Association Meeting: The East Feliciana Cattleman's Association hosted a meeting on June 10, 2014. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided information to participants on soil health, soil structure, and different management techniques. In addition, NRCS provided a demonstration of the soil health rainfall simulator.



Mark your calendar!

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 LSU T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History will exhibit the "I Remember..." art show featuring select archival materials from LSU Libraries Special Collection at the Hill Memorial Library from March 31 – August 30, 2014.

Jul 28 - Aug 1

Conference on Ecological and Ecosystem Restoration: Visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service exhibit at the Conference on Ecological and Ecosystem Restoration from July 28 – August 1, 2014 at the Hilton Riverside in New Orleans.

Aug 2

The Big Event: A workshop featuring technical and financial opportunities available through USDA, community based organizations, and others will be hosted by Trailblazer RC&D at Grambling State University on

August 2, 2014. This workshop is presented as part of USDA's StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity. For more information, contact Trailblazer RC&D at (318) 255-3554 or esimmons@trailblazer.org or visit www.trailblazer.org.

Aug 26-28

Louisiana Forestry Association Annual Meeting: Visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service exhibit at the Louisiana Forestry Association Annual Meeting at Sam's Town Hotel & Casino in Shreveport.



Contact Our Offices

Visit our web site at:
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) 665-4253, 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) 665-4253, 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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