



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana's Conservation Update

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help the Land

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November 2014

For the Greater Good Farmers Helping Farmers

**Gravity-fed
drainage system
uses Red River
water for crop
irrigation**

**Neighbors
Helping
Neighbors
StrikeForce
Update**

**Story from the field
Maximizing Production and
Conserving Resources
in Webster Parish**

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



For many Louisiana farmers, the lack of available irrigation water has been a struggle for decades. A group of farmers in central Louisiana banded together to bring irrigation water to farms in Rapides, Avoyelles, Evangeline, and St. Landry Parishes. To learn about their efforts, see pages 4 and 5.

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

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Upcoming Events

Jan 11-13

LACD Annual Meeting: The Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts will host their annual meeting on January 11–13, 2015, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. For more information or to register, contact Amy Ballard at 225-665-4253, extension 3.

Jan 16-17

Ag Expo: Look for the NRCS exhibit at Ag Expo on January 16–17, 2015, at the Ike Hamilton Expo Center in West Monroe, Louisiana.

Feb 12

8th Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Prescribed Fire Council: The 8th Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Prescribed Fire Council (LPFC) will be Thursday, February 12, 2015, at the LSU AgCenter’s Dean Lee Research Station in Alexandria, Louisiana. Landowners, foresters, wildlife biologists, contractors, farmers, resource professionals, or others who are interested in prescribed fire are encouraged to attend. For more information or to pre-register for the event, please contact Cody Cedotal, LPFC Chair at (225) 765-2354 or by e-mail at ccedotal@wlf.la.gov.

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

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Notes from the State Conservationist

For the greater good . . . what does that mean to you? Would you be willing to sacrifice time, money, and energy for something that did not bring you profit or gain? In this issue of the *Conservation Update*, we feature farmers who did just that.

Driven by the need for a good source of irrigation water, a group of farmers in central Louisiana banded together, formed an LLC, and worked together to bring local, federal, and state agencies together with a common goal . . . bringing water from the Red River through a gravity-fed drainage system of bayous and channels to their farms. At times, it did not seem as though the pieces of the puzzle would ever come together on this project, but when they did, everything started falling into place. What is unique about this group? Some of the farmers who support the LLC with funds and time and energy did not need the irrigation water. They did it for the greater good, for the future, for all farmers within reach of the project.



Seeking a better way of farming using high tunnels, another group of beginning farmers asked a local produce farmer to provide advice, information, and guidance on successful produce production. The successful farmer spent a day with these beginning farmers sharing information on crops, planting, marketing, and sustainability. The farmer's investment of a day with the beginning farmers did not increase his bottom line, nor did it help get the crops out of his field. He did it for the greater good. For the next generation of farmers.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service works with farmers and ranchers every day to help them achieve the greater good. We do it for cleaner water for our farms and communities, healthier soil on farms to produce food and fiber for the next seven generations and beyond, and abundant wildlife for a healthy ecosystem.

If you would like our assistance on your farm or ranch, please give us a call or drop by our office. A listing of offices is included on the back page of this publication.

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist
Louisiana



Ag Facts

About the Red River

The Red River begins its total length of 1,360 miles in the Texas panhandle. The origins of the Red River are two forks (branches) in the Texas panhandle. The southern fork, Prairie Dog Town Fork, is formed in Randall County near Canyon, Texas. Prairie Dog Town Fork is formed from the confluence of Palo Duro Creek and Tierra Blanca Creek. The northern branch, North Fork, flows east entering Oklahoma. It then joins the southern branch at the Texas-Oklahoma border, northeast of Vernon, Texas. The Red River flows east, its south bank forming the border between Texas and Oklahoma and a portion of the border between Texas and Arkansas at the northeastern corner of Texas. The Red River flows into Arkansas and turns south at Fulton, Arkansas entering Louisiana near Ida. In Louisiana the Red River forms the boundary between Caddo and Bossier

parishes and flows southeast, through Red River, Natchitoches, Rapides, and Avoyelles parishes to join a partial outflow from the Mississippi River into the Atchafalaya River. The Red River ends in Louisiana where it empties into the Mississippi River and the Atchafalaya. More specifically, the Red River ends as water from an outflow channel from the Mississippi River joins the Red River and flows into the Atchafalaya River near Simmesport, Louisiana. Water flowing from the Mississippi River into this outflow is regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Old River Control Structure. The water from the Atchafalaya River flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

From: LSU Shreveport, Red River Watershed Management Institute online: <http://www.lsus.edu/offices-and-services/community-outreach/red-river-watershed-management-institute/about-the-basin>

For the greater good . . . Farmers Helping Farmers

Gravity-fed drainage system uses Red River water for crop irrigation



Louisiana tends to get more rain than other areas in the country, which leads people to believe that the state doesn't have its own issues with drought. However, for many Louisiana farmers, the lack of available irrigation water has been a struggle for decades.

In the 1960s, farmers in central Louisiana realized the potential the Red River offered to alleviate some of their irrigation obstacles. They hoped to divert some water from the Red River into Bayou Boeuf, which was easily accessible to farmers in the area. Unfortunately, at that time the level of the river was not stable, and salinity of the water was considered too high for irrigation purposes.

In 1994, the \$1.9 billion Red River Waterway Project was completed, adding a series of five lock and dam complexes to the river. These structures control the level of the river and even out the flow of the water, causing a great deal of the salt to settle out of the water

before it reaches central Louisiana.

A little over two decades after the first attempt to capture Red River water for irrigation, the sons of the 1960s farmers decided to move forward with their fathers' initial plans for diverting the water

from the Red River as a source for irrigation. The river water was now stable and the salinity of the water had greatly decreased. Their plan used existing control structures and natural flow to move Red River water to their fields.

Unfortunately, they found the control structures that could redirect the necessary water were no longer functioning. Many repairs would have to be made before the farmers could irrigate their fields with water from the Red River.

Avoyelles Soil and Water Conservation District board member John Earles II is one member of the group of farmers that set out to find a solution to their problem. He got the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) involved, and NRCS assisted the farmers by providing engineering information concerning the weirs in Bayou Boeuf—more specifically, how to regulate the height of the weirs in relation to the amount of water coming in from the Red River.

Earles enlisted the help of NRCS Soil Conservationist Gordon Newton who, at the time, was working on the NRCS Water Resources staff. Newton and Earles visited the city of Alexandria; the Rapides Parish Police Jury; Red River, Atchafalaya, and Bayou Boeuf Levee District (RRABB); and Gravity Drainage District #1, to discuss proposed solutions for not only the damaged control structures, but also the lack of good irrigation water for the farmers of the area.

Mother Nature gave the project a jump start when in 2008 she sent Hurricane Gustav towards Alexandria.

The hurricane caused major flooding in the city shedding light on drainage problems and the need for repairs to control structures within the city. The farmers met again with the four governing organizations and offered their idea to the city again, this time explaining that repairing the old control structures would not only help the farmers, but also solve the city's drainage problem.

After gaining approval for the project from the city of Alexandria, the Rapides Parish Police Jury, RRABB, and Gravity Drainage District #1, the group of farmers started pooling their own money to repair the control structures. In 2012 the farmers formed Cenla Drainage and Irrigation LLC (CD&I, LLC), a nonprofit corporation comprised of twenty farms in a four-parish area.



Water control structure on Red River that connects Red River to Bayou Rapides



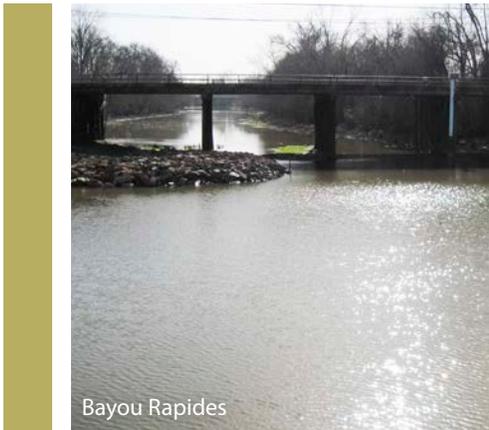
Inlet to water control structure on Red River that connects Red River to Bayou Rapides



Red River at Alexandria

Diversion Canal Bayou Boeuf Drainage System

Benefits farmers in Rapides, Avoyelles, Evangeline, and St. Landry Parishes



Bayou Rapides



West Diversion Channel that connects Bayou Rapides to Bayou Boeuf

Project Funding

Funding	From	Purpose
\$45,000	State of Louisiana	Breach of weir in Bayou Rapides
\$350,000	Red River, Atchafalaya, and Bayou Boeuf Levee District	Replacement and repair of gated water control structure that connects the diversion channel to Bayou Rapides
\$25,000	Cenla Drainage and Irrigation LLC (farmers)	Operation and maintenance in Bayou Boeuf: silt removal, debris removal, beaver dam removal, and vegetation removal

It is anticipated that Cenla Drainage and Irrigation LLC will spend \$25,000 per year in operation and maintenance expenses.



Bayou Boeuf

plan of action and impressed by the farmers' proactive response, the state contributed money to ensure the completion of the project.

The project required a great effort from many groups of people and more than a little luck. The stars finally aligned, and the project moved forward with great success for both the farmers and the city of Alexandria.

Farmers who are members of the Cenla Drainage and Irrigation LLC still contribute money annually to the project (usually around \$1,500 per farm) for maintenance of the control structures and for new phases of the project—ensuring farmers in Rapides, Avoyelles, St. Landry and Evangeline Parishes continue to have access to Red River water for irrigation.

“What amazes me is that farmers who did not need the extra irrigation put up their own money for the greater good,” said John Earles II.

“They knew what this would mean for the farmers in their area who couldn't get access to reliable irrigation water.”

The work of the farmers gained the attention of state leaders. Governor Bobby Jindal and Commissioner of Agriculture Mike Strain were particularly impressed to learn that the local citizens had banded together and contributed their own money for the good of not only the farmers, but also for the good of the city of Alexandria. Convinced by the

Cenla Drainage and Irrigation LLC Conservationists



Story from the Field

Maximizing Production and Conserving Resources in Webster Parish

More forage for cattle, better water quality, erosion control, reduced sedimentation, better plant health

Dr. Renee Cottrell came to the Minden Field Office in April 2007

with a life-long dream of establishing a commercial cattle operation. She was looking for assistance to improve her newly acquired pastures in preparation for the start-up of her venture. Over time, that need for assistance has grown to include multiple projects for her cattle operation, advisement for her timber production and wildlife management, and the ever present need to conserve the land and other natural resources while maximizing her production.

Dr. Cottrell and her husband William are lifelong residents of Webster Parish. They started her dream with 70 acres in 2006; by 2008, they had purchased an additional 105 acres. Her dream was to raise a cross of Hereford, Brahman, and Angus cattle to produce the ultimate commercial cattle. In 2013, the Cottrell's purchased a herd of American Blackbelly sheep. With the new adventure of sheep raising, they have discovered there is a demand for these sheep for table fare and hunting.

Since 2007, Dr. Cottrell has improved her pastures, installed livestock pipelines, watering facilities, rock heavy use area protection gate openings, and water facility pads. In 2013, Dr. Cottrell installed fence to facilitate rotational grazing. She has completed two of the phases to become a Master Farmer. In 2015, she will complete the implementation of her Master Farmer Conservation Plan and be certified.

The Cottrells are conservationists and understand the value of being good stewards of the land and environment. They are teaching their two young sons to follow in their footsteps. Their sons have been a part of the farm activities since they were born. It is not uncommon to see the couple and their kids checking on the livestock as a family on a daily basis. Their kids have been right along beside them when working on the conservation projects. Three year-old Luke will happily elaborate on fence building and running water lines to watering facilities. They love enjoying the land together, whether it is working with the livestock, taking nature walks in the pastures and woods, hunting squirrel and white tail deer, or slipping off to the farm ponds to catch some bass and bream.

Dr. Cottrell has helped NRCS by hosting a training field day at her farm for new Soil Conservationists and Soil Conservation Technicians. They completed resource inventory on the forest/wildlife fields of her farm and gave recommendations to her as part of a conservation planning training.

As a result of their conservation efforts, Dr. Renee and William Cottrell have provided more forages for the cattle, better water quality, helped control erosion, helped control sedimentation in streams, installed a rotational grazing system to provide more forages for the livestock and better plant health.

Submitted by: Cindy Beard, Area Soil Conservation Technician, Minden Field Office



For the greater good
Neighbors Helping Neighbors



The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is committed to increasing participation in its programs and services by socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers. To help accomplish this in Louisiana, NRCS is partnering with local grassroots organizations through USDA's StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunities Initiative.

One StrikeForce partner, Rapides Station Community Ministries, is establishing a cadre of four soil health coaches who will teach, mentor, and coach beginning farmers.

On November 24, 2014, NRCS sponsored a field trip, for members of the Rapides Station Community Ministries to visit Robin Farms, a 42-acre commercial vegetable operation in Church Point, Louisiana. Robin Farms is owned by Brandt and Jamie Robin. They have been in business since 1999, and they grow and sell produce according to season.

In 2012, Robin Farms constructed an NRCS-funded high tunnel. This high tunnel has been extremely successful for the Robins. Over the past two years, the Robins have worked tirelessly planting crop after crop in the high tunnel eventually netting \$40,000 on the vegetables harvested—it was a lot of work, a big investment of time, but a great success.

During the field trip, Brandt Robin shared information about lessons learned, marketing, labor, equipment needs, crop varieties, and all facets of his operation with Rapides Station



Community Ministries. Robin said approximately 3,000 heads of lettuce can be planted in the high tunnel, and he is planning to harvest tomatoes in his high tunnel until the end of March 2015.

Rapides Station Community Ministries representatives left Robin Farms armed with lots of great information about commercial produce farming—and charged with new enthusiasm for production of produce in high tunnels. Information gained during this field trip will greatly benefit the beginning farmers being trained by Rapides Station Community Ministries.

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

Around the State

Nov 14

Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference:

The 2014 Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference was hosted at the LSU AgCenter in Napoleonville, Louisiana, on November 14, 2014. This year, presenters included Louisiana Ag Commissioner Mike Strain; Kevin Norton, State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Craig McCain, State Executive Director, USDA Farm Service Agency; Clarence Hawkins, State Director, USDA Rural Development; Nathan Crisp, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service; Deborah Cross-Young, Capital RC&D and Annie's Project; and Alicia Wiseman, Ducks Unlimited. Participants learned about a variety of topics, including Annie's Project, agriculture and wildlife, soil health, and USDA program opportunities. There was also a tour of a local sugar mill.



"... and I became a farmer."

Dana Frey, crawfish farmer and presenter at Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference



United States Department of Agriculture

Contact Our Offices

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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	2259 Business Park Boulevard, Donaldsonville, LA 70346	(225) 473-7638, ext. 3
Assumption	Donaldsonville	Lower Delta SWCD	2259 Business Park Boulevard, 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 Sterlington 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	2259 Business Park Boulevard, 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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