

Helping People Help the Land



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

The *UPDATE*

North Carolina January - March 2013

United States Department of Agriculture . Natural Resources Conservation Service . North Carolina

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Terrance Rudolph, Acting State Conservationist

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Acting NRCS Chief

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AND MORE...

A cooperative partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and
North Carolina Division of Soil and Water

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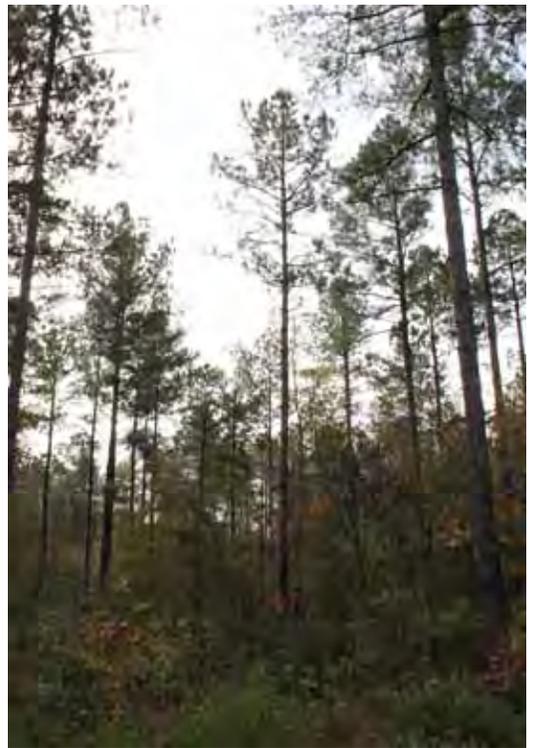
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If you would like to contribute to The Update, or have questions about this or past editions of The Update, please contact Stuart Lee at 919.873.2107 or Stuart.Lee@nc.usda.gov.



The photos on this page and cover were taken by Stuart Lee at Mr. Albert and Ada Beatty's farm in Bladen County.

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Notes from the State Conservationist

Hello North Carolina friends, I am very excited to be serving as Acting State Conservationist.

There is a great quote by Duke Ellington, in which he said, "a problem is a chance for you to do your best." Though there are many uncertainties facing NRCS, it is by no means a time for us to ponder the challenges in front of us as negative obstacles. The Federal Government faces difficult budget horizons that we will tackle. In addition, we may or may not have a Farm Bill this year. Nonetheless, what we are facing in 2013 is the time that our employees, partners and customers have "a chance to do our best"-- our best in delivering natural resource conservation and conservation management.



***Terrance Rudolph
Acting State
Conservationist***

In North Carolina, this means that we are going to be proactive, maintain our momentum, and look for new opportunities in the future. The North Carolina NRCS staff is devoted to doing this very thing for the Agency, our partners and our landowners -- we are going to be proactive, to keep moving forward and be the relevant, results oriented organization that we have proven we are in North Carolina.

Our path forward has been well outlined by our former Chief Dave White and is continuing under our Acting Chief Jason Weller. The path forward for NRCS is outlined under seven Agency priorities.

Priority 1: Strengthen Business Operations

We are well on our way towards implementing the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI), and field offices will soon see the benefits of CDSI. CDSI is critical to our future and to getting our conservation professionals back in the field to provide direct customer contact, conservation planning and delivery to farmers and ranchers.

Priority 2: Expand Soil Health Campaign

We will be expanding the Soil Health campaign and focusing on strengthening a foundation built on soil health, which is crucial for NRCS's success.

Priority 3: Enhance Landscape Conservation Initiatives

This agency has pushed the envelope on how we approach local, regional and national conservation priorities. We're doing amazing things for water quality, water supply, water quantity and wildlife habitat. Through enhancing our landscape conservation initiatives, such as the Longleaf Pine Initiative, we will integrate adaptive management and better articulate the benefits and true value of our conservation efforts, and what taxpayers are getting for their investments.

Priority 4: Enhance Access to Underserved Communities

One in six Americans today lives in poverty, and 90% of the highest poverty rate counties in this country are in rural America. This agency has vast gifts, both on our technical and our delivery sides through our Farm Bill programs. We will be utilizing enhanced outreach methods to serve, assist and help improve natural resources for all landowners.

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The Update is distributed by email and published on our North Carolina web-site at www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov. Limited print copies are available by request by emailing Stuart.Lee@nc.usda.gov or calling 919.873.2107.

CONSERVATION FARM BILL PROGRAMS

2013 PROGRAM ROLL-OUT - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Now is the time to work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a conservation plan, and learn how to apply for programs to help you reach your conservation goals. All landowners interested in Farm Bill conservation programs administered by NRCS must have an active conservation plan so that their application can be considered for available program funding.

Together, NRCS and the landowner decide the best ways to improve the productivity, sustainability and profitability of the farm based on the landowner's objectives. The Conservation Plan will serve as a roadmap to a variety of technical and financial assistance and options available to the landowner.

"We're getting back to our roots with conservation planning," said Greg Walker Assistant State Conservationist. "Conservation planning is the vital first step in understanding natural resources on your land, and also understanding how technical and financial conservation assistance can be incorporated into your operation to help you help the land."

Financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs can be made available at anytime. To ensure that your application for programs can be considered for funding, schedule an appointment today to talk to your local NRCS Field Office about developing or reviewing your conservation plan.

For more information on Conservation Planning, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and all other Conservation Farm Bill Programs, please visit our State Programs web site at www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov. The 2013 EQIP Payment Schedule and Payment Schedule for Energy are also now available on the web.

Ranking Deadlines For Programs

Date	Program / Initiative
February 15, 2013	General EQIP EQIP Forestry EQIP Longleaf Pine Initiative All EQIP National Initiatives WHIP WLFW – Golden Winged Warbler
March 15, 2013	FINAL EQIP Forestry FINAL EQIP Longleaf Pine All EQIP National Initiatives WHIP WLFW – Golden Winged Warbler
April 19, 2013	FINAL All EQIP National Initiatives FINAL WHIP WLFW – Golden Winged Warbler

- Field Office Are Continuing to take CSP Applications in anticipation of future funding.
- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) applications from cooperating entities are due February 15th. For more information on FRPP, please see our state web site.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM OVERVIEW

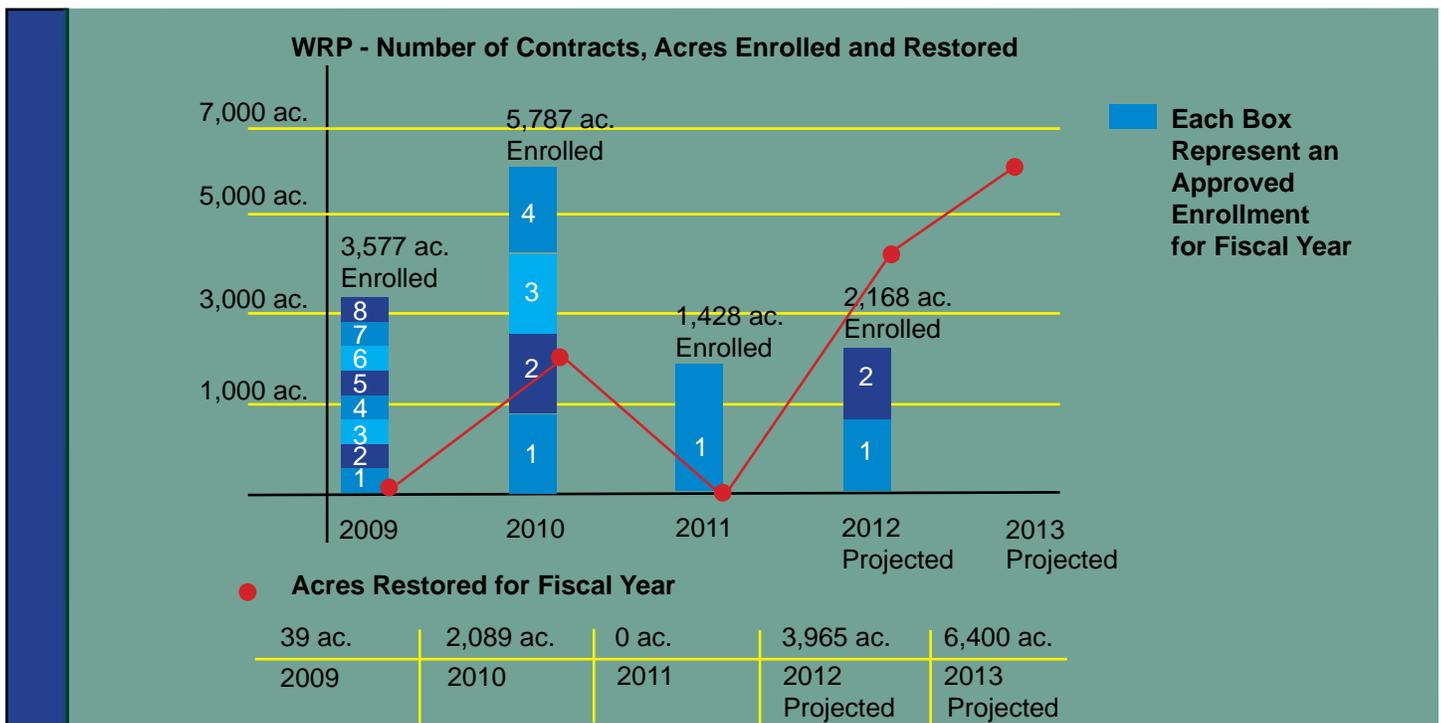
BY THE NUMBERS - 2002 TO 2012

Farm Bill Conservation Program Financial Assistance Delivered in North Carolina

YEAR	AWEP	CSP	CStP	EQIP	WHIP
2002				\$3 mil	
2003				\$9.3 mil	
2004				\$12 mil	\$250,000
2005		\$1.8 mil		\$12.5 mil	\$250,000
2006		\$1.65 mil		\$12.6 mil	\$230,000
2007		\$1.6 mil		\$13.8 mil	\$350,000
2008		\$1.5 mil		\$13.6 mil	\$900,000
2009	\$40,000	\$1.3 mil		\$12.4 mil	\$860,000
2010	\$55,000	\$800,000	\$1 mil	\$12 mil	\$580,000
2011	\$80,000	\$700,000	\$1.9 mil	\$16.7 mil	\$1.1 mil
2012	\$30,000	\$650,000	\$2.7 mil	\$21 mil	\$25,000
Totals	\$205,000	\$10 mil	\$5.6 mil	\$138.9 mil	\$4.545 mil

TOTAL ALL YEARS = \$159,250,000

Estimated numbers - official numbers available upon request.



USDA STRIKEFORCE

TARGETED OUTREACH IN NORTH CAROLINA



Stuart A. Lee
State Public
Affairs and
Outreach
Coordinator

“In North Carolina Participation in Conservation Programs among our Historically Underserved landowners has increased 124% in three years.”
- Stuart Lee

One in six Americans lives in poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau—and 90 percent of counties with the highest poverty rates are in rural America. These are also communities with high numbers of Historically Underserved groups, like African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans.

Three years ago, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack launched the StrikeForce Initiative, a cross-agency effort to accelerate assistance to Historically Underserved groups. Through this initiative, USDA is working to ensure all producers have access to programs that can help them thrive, including proven conservation programs. North Carolina is now designated a StrikeForce State for targeted outreach to historically underserved and economically distressed communities.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce annually ranks the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each county a Tier designation. The 40 most economically distressed counties are designated as Tier 1, the next 40 as Tier 2 and the last 20 least distressed as Tier 3. When looking at North Carolina Tier 1 and 2 counties and US Census demographic data, 44 counties across the state have been identified as focus counties for USDA North Carolina StrikeForce outreach.

Those counties are *Anson, Beaufort, Bladen, Camden, Caswell, Cherokee, Chowan, Cleveland, Columbus, Currituck, Duplin, Edgecombe, Gates, Graham, Granville, Green, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Hoke, Jackson, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Montgomery, Nash, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Person, Pitt, Richmond, Robeson, Rowan, Rutherford, Sampson, Scotland, Tyrell, Vance, Washington, Warren, Wayne, Wilson.*

The objective of StrikeForce is to partner with local community-based organizations, three USDA agencies— Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency and Rural Development—and then work to improve USDA's and our partnership's outreach to these identified communities in order to increase their access to—and participation in—our valuable programs.

NRCS is working in three key areas to propel this initiative:

1. We're expediting our service by placing a high priority on enrolling producers in StrikeForce counties quickly, so they can start implementing conservation.
2. We're expanding outreach and participation, devoting staff resources to outreach and let producers know that assistance is available and help them understand what's needed to take advantage of these programs.
3. We're removing barriers, identifying regulatory roadblocks to getting service to the StrikeForce counties and getting assistance to Historically Underserved and Limited Resource producers.

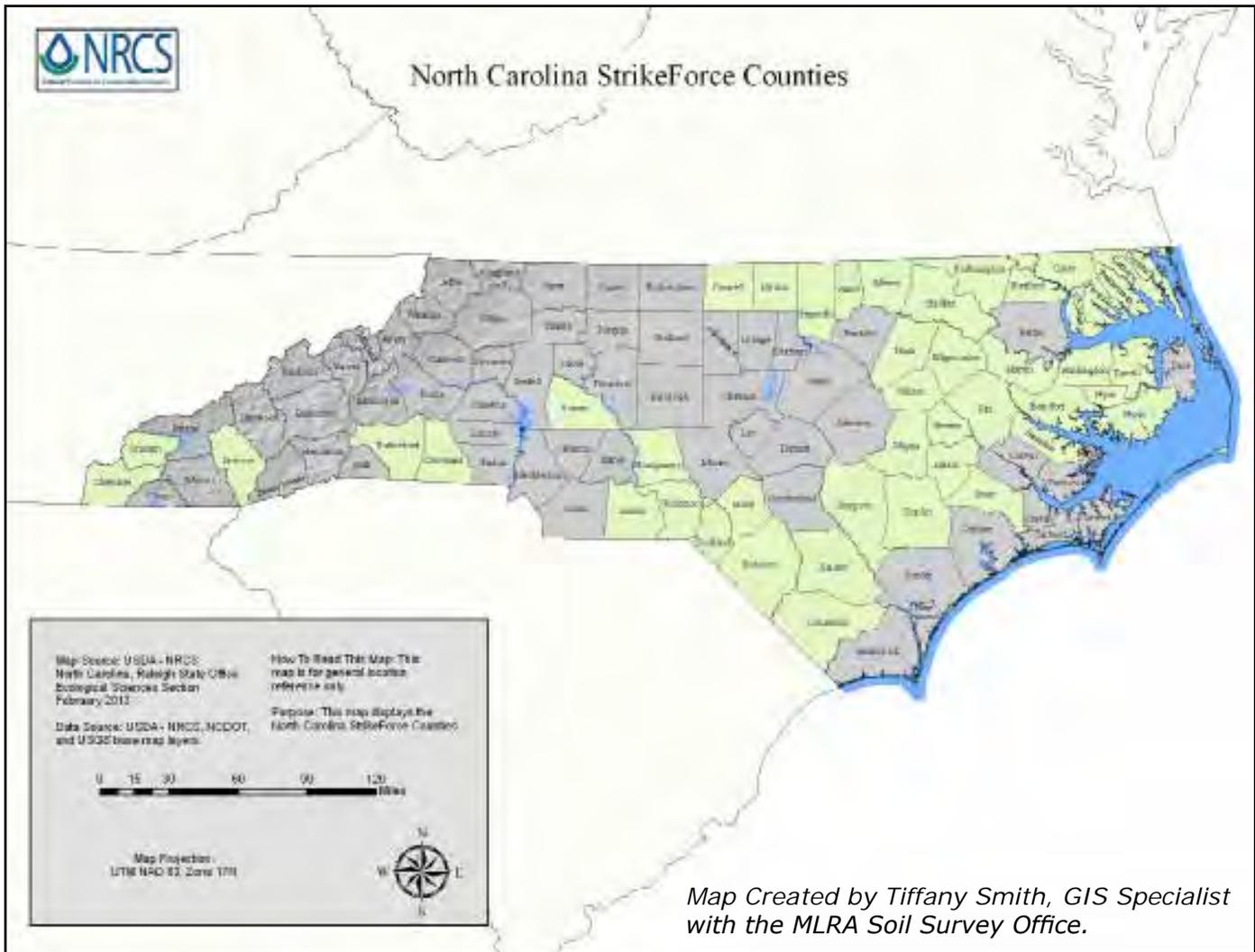
Since USDA began this initiative three years ago, NRCS has helped hundreds of producers in StrikeForce counties make conservation work on their lands -- increasing productivity while also improving their bottom lines. In North Carolina, our increased outreach efforts has lead to 124% increase participation among Historically Underserved Landowner in Farm Bill conservation programs.

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StrikeForce - Continued From Page 6

Recently we've started localize field office training on developing comprehensive county level marketing data that will help identify opportunities for outreach, as well as help our field offices and partnership build a collaborative marketing strategy for the following fiscal year.

NRCS is committed to ensuring all producers across the state have access to conservation programs. By working together with our partners, we can support a productive agricultural industry while also preserving the health of our environment and the sustainability of our natural resources. If you are interested in learning more about StrikeForce, Outreach Training or discuss opportunities to deliver outreach to Limited Resource and Historically Underserved landowners, please contact Stuart Lee at 919.873.2107 or by email at Stuart.Lee@nc.usda.gov.



Priority 5: Broaden Regulatory Predictability

NRCS is helping to define, shape and lead regulatory predictability. We are looking at how we can work with other Federal Agencies and partners to help landowners address resource concerns and improve conditions prior to the need for preemptive policy and regulation. Then those good works become the basis for proactive programs and initiatives that solve priority resource issues.

Priority 6: Harness Private Markets

In North Carolina and nationally, NRCS is moving forward by taking our technical capacity, our expertise and the public's trust in us, and exploring ways to harness the private marketplace to incentivize conservation. This can be seen in many of our Conservation Innovation Grants awarded in North Carolina. This process will take us to the next level so that we're not only providing financial assistance and technical assistance, but creating market forces that also incentivize landowners to make wise conservation decisions.

Priority 7: Deepen Strategic Partnerships to Better Leverage Outcomes

And, finally, the seventh priority is to deepen our strategic partnerships to better leverage our outcomes. Core partners, like NACD, state conservation agencies, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts will always be central to our mission and how we deliver conservation.

As we face the future together, I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve North Carolina. I'm here to help and look forward to assisting our agency and our partners do our best.

*Terrance Rudolph
Acting State Conservationist*

ACTING CHIEF JASON WELLER

GETTING TO KNOW OUR ACTING CHIEF

Jason Weller has served as Acting Chief of NRCS since December 2012. As Acting Chief, he oversees programs that help protect the environment, preserve our natural resources, and improve agricultural sustainability through voluntary, private-lands conservation. He leads a staff of 11,500 employees across the country and manages a budget of about \$4 billion.

Before assuming this role, Jason served as NRCS's Acting Associate Chief for Conservation and as Chief of Staff where he worked alongside Chief Dave White and the agency's national and state leaders to plan and implement strategic conservation initiatives and conduct the annual business operations of the agency.

Jason also served as a staff member for the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, the U.S. House Budget Committee, and worked with the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Before coming to Washington, DC, Jason worked for several years with the California State Legislature where he provided fiscal and policy recommendations on a variety of natural resource conservation and environmental protection issues. Jason is a native of northern California. He earned his undergraduate degree from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and a graduate degree in public policy from the University of Michigan.



Jason Weller
Acting Chief



*No-Till on
Paige Farm*

OUTSTANDING CONSERVATIONIST MITCHELL PAIGE IN DUPLIN COUNTY

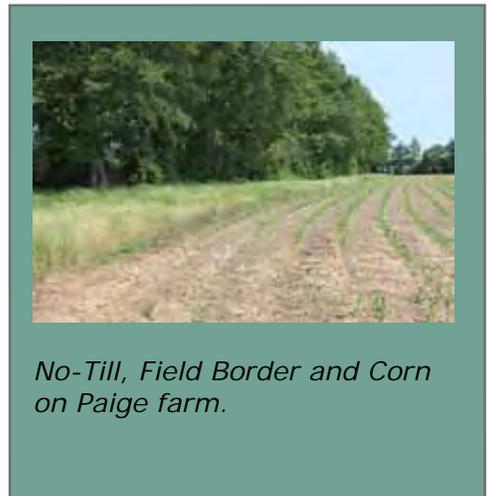
While traveling the landscape of Duplin County in North Carolina you are bound to notice several things. There is an abundance of hog, poultry, and large-scale farming operations. Small farms, once the backcloth standard in this rural county, are becoming more intermittent. For farmer Mitchell Paige, however, his operation has not become an endangered livelihood lost among a milieu of encroaching large-scale farming operations. Mr. Paige's roughly 400-acre operation is thriving and is an example of what other operations, small and large, should strive to replicate.

Mr. Paige, a fourth generation farmer, is keenly aware of the issues that affect his business, including the economy, culture, climate, and natural resources unique to Duplin County. "There are large farms popping up all the time down here, farms where the people who own the land don't live here and have others farm it for them. There are poultry operations being built frequently, as well, but the landowners do not understand the type of land and water we have here," said Paige. "We've been here, lived here, grew up here and it takes a lot more than being a huge landowner to be successful...you've got to know and care about the soil, water, and other resources we have to make it work for your farm and for everyone around you."

Mr. Paige understands that there is a lot more to farming than trying to turn a profit.

"It's important to know the farming business, and how to manage the resources. You also need to know how to make this land and water work for you, and to use it wisely," said Paige.

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*No-Till, Field Border and Corn
on Paige farm.*

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM *THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE*

Paige - Continued From Page 7

Mr. Paige uses his resources prudently. Because of longstanding water quality issues in Duplin County, he has worked with NRCS to adopt management practices that conserve water and help enhance water quality conditions on his farm. How is he doing this? He implements no-till techniques and plants cover crops. He also maintains 20 foot under vegetated boundaries that are not farmed, off-set from ditches and uses an integrated pest management system. Furthermore, he understands that integrating wildlife habitat management into his operation will provide added resource benefits. Mr. Paige is working through the NRCS Longleaf Pine Initiative to restore Longleaf Pine habitats on his lands.

Mr. Paige's voluntary conservation management practices have improved resource conditions on his farm, which help him to stand out. Therefore, when he applied for NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a program that helps producers who are already demonstrating a high level of conservation resource management to further their efforts, he was a prime applicant for the program.

His efforts to improve resources on his farm and for Duplin County will not end. Mr. Paige is leaving a legacy of good farming and conservation practices for the county. In addition, his lands are currently in a state easement program to protect farmland from development.

"I want this land to be here," said Paige. "I want this farm to be an example of what can happen and how it can work when you tend to everything while being aware of the impact farming has on the environment and take appropriate steps to protect it."

In just four years, America's top conservationists have enrolled 50 million acres in USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a program that helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners take conservation to the next level.

CSP is aimed at producers who are already established conservation stewards, helping them to deliver multiple conservation benefits on working lands, including improved water and soil quality and enhanced wildlife habitat.

"Farmers and ranchers throughout the country are making USDA's voluntary Conservation Stewardship Program a major force for conservation," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. "The protection of natural resources through conservation programs such as CSP create outdoor and wildlife recreation opportunities that provide crucial jobs and bolster economic growth in rural American communities."

The land enrolled in CSP totals more than 78,000 square miles, an area larger than Pennsylvania and South Carolina combined, making the program one of the largest voluntary conservation programs for private lands offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Nearly 12.2 million acres, or 18,750 square miles, were enrolled this year.

Eligible landowners and operators in all states and territories can enroll in CSP. NRCS local offices accept CSP applications year round and evaluate applications during announced ranking periods.

A CSP self-screening checklist is available to help producers determine if the program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, stewardship threshold requirements and payment types. It is available from local NRCS offices and on the CSP website: <http://go.usa.gov/g9dx>.

Eligible Lands for CSP;

- Cropland
- Grassland
- Prairie Land
- Improved Pastureland
- Rangeland
- Nonindustrial Private Forest Lands
- Agricultural Land Under the Jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe
- And other Private Agricultural Land (including cropped woodland, marshes, and agricultural land used for the production of livestock) on which Resource Concerns Related to Agricultural Production Could be Addressed.

NC NRCS is now looking for eligible CSP applicants.