



United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

July 2016

Working With Louisiana's Veterans

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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On the Cover



NRCS has partnered with the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation to reach the veteran population of Louisiana. To find out more about this partnership, see pages 4 and 5.

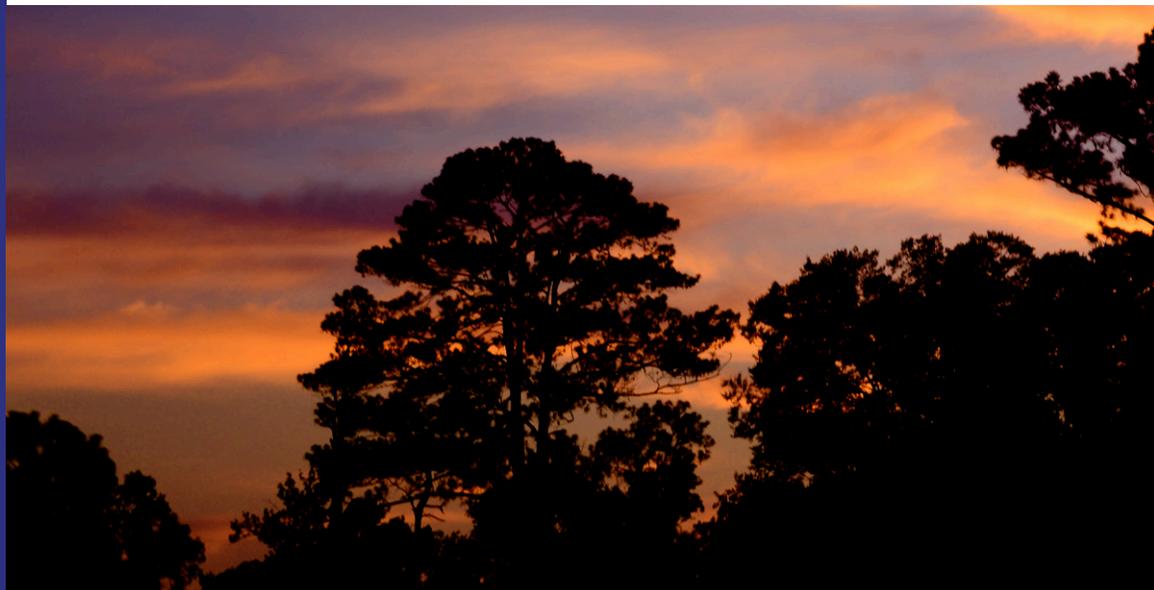
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USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service
3737 Government Street
Alexandria, Louisiana 71302

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

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Notes from the State Conservationist

Remember the song...“Summertime” and the livin’ is easy, so the song says. Well, that may be the case in many other states but, in Louisiana for agricultural producers, both large and small, summertime is anything but easy! This is one of the busiest times of the year for our customers and partners, harvesting crops and preparing for the fall.

July represents all the best aspects of summer. Long days, delicious fresh produce, and getting together with family and friends on the 4th of July to honor and recognize all of those who have bravely served our country. That is why this issue of the Conservation Update is dedicated to all our customers and employees who have served our nation, both at home and abroad.



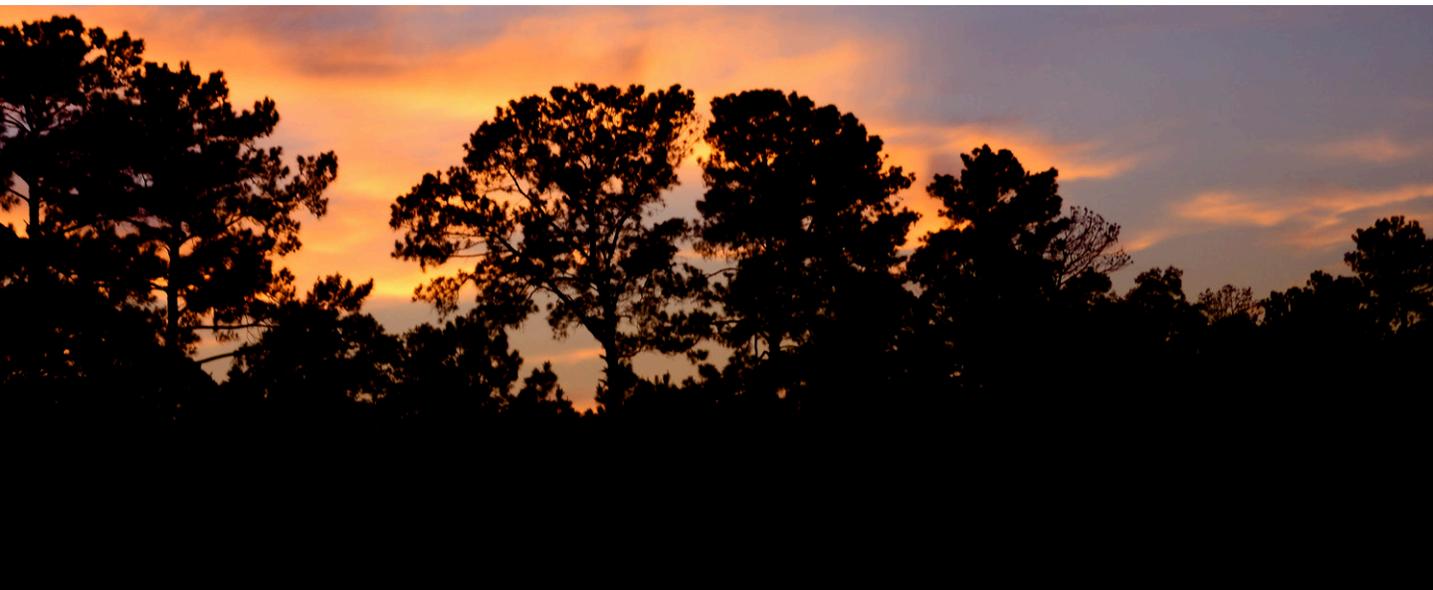
The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offer veterans of the U.S. Armed Services preference for NRCS conservation programs offered in the 2014 Farm Bill. The focus of this outreach is to expand the traditional concept of agriculture to include small and beginning farmers. To educate our returning veterans about going into agriculture as a career choice once returning from active duty. And also, the rewarding and therapeutic aspects of farming the land.

This month I’m pleased to introduce you to some of our NRCS employees who are veterans. I’m also excited to share a new and innovative partnership we have formed with an outstanding organization, The Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation, based in Baton Rouge. Our relationship with this organization has multiplied our outreach efforts to the veteran community ten fold.

Great days are ahead for our agency working alongside organizations like the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation, as well as, individual veterans wanting to begin work in agricultural related fields. If you are not a customer of NRCS, we are eager to work with you. Our mission, “Helping People, Help the Land” is what we are all about. Contact one of our field offices and learn more about how we can help you get started.

We dedicate this issue to all veterans and their families. God bless America!

Kevin D. Norton
State Conservationist



Working with Lou

Included in the 2014 Farm Bill was a provision to ensure current USDA programs and resources were available to help new and beginning farmers. We find that agriculture offers purpose and opportunity, physically as well as psychologically. Through nonprofit partners, NRCS supports veterans in farming. NRCS in Louisiana signed an agreement with the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation (LAFF) in Fiscal Year 2016 that...



Jaye Townsend, Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation



Q&A With Jaye Townsend, LAFF

1. How did the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation get started and why?

Scott Kirkpatrick, Ralph Russo and I had been discussing the challenges with employment for many returning veterans. We decided to form the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation to seek ways to support returning veterans transitioning home. One of the initiatives was a survey to better identify the challenges to employment for returning veterans. The survey highlighted some of the gaps in veteran employment efforts including impediments by mental health issues.

2. How did the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation and NRCS connect?

In looking at employment opportunities, I found a federal grant to support veteran farmers which kicked off a series of meetings regarding the opportunities in the area and the foundation connected with NRCS.

3. What has the partnership meant to the Foundation?

It has highlighted an area of opportunity for veteran employment. It has been difficult at times to find these unique opportunities. Despite a number of job fairs occurring across the state for veterans, many are not responsive to the mental and physical needs of veterans. For some veterans, farming as a full or part-time venture or even a hobby provides a work opportunity that is well suited for them.

4. What has been accomplished through the partnership?

We have been able to spread the word about opportunities with farming and programs available to support veteran farmers. We have been able to tap into a veteran network that is often unaware of many of the programs available to them.

5. What do you see for the future?

I see bigger and better things! I see the continued growth of the veteran network and an increase in the number of veteran farmers.

Louisiana's Veterans

beginning farmers and ranchers, including veterans, who are interested in beginning a farming or ranching career. Many veterans support the development of training opportunities and resources to help beginning and veteran farmers start to gain experience. NRCS began a valuable partnership to provide veterans in Louisiana with these opportunities.

LAFF and Dexter Sapp, NRCS

1. How does StrikeForce fit into working with veteran organizations like the Louisiana Armed Forces Federation?

Here in Louisiana, through the USDA StrikeForce Initiative, NRCS utilizes grassroots organizations such as the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation to promote participation in NRCS programs and services to veterans. Through a series of surveys, agricultural mentors, partnership networks, veterans mini-conferences and veteran farmer workshops, NRCS is reaching a new audience.

2. What has this partnership meant for NRCS?

This partnership has allowed NRCS to have a closer working relationship with a nontraditional clientele.

3. What has been accomplished through the partnership?

NRCS has been providing technical assistance to Richland Parish disabled veteran, Ken Gibson and his wife, Stella, who is also a veteran, to help them become eligible to receive financial assistance through our programs.

NRCS participated with LAFF in the "Eat, Meet and Learn Crawfish Workshop in Vermilion Parish. NRCS also participated in the LAFF/USDA Agricultural Research Service hosted Beekeeping Workshop during National Pollinator Week.

NRCS was also invited to participate in the Louisiana Public Broadcasting's, "Louisiana Public Square - Veterans Coming Home" along with Jaye Townsend. Kevin Norton, State Conservationist for Louisiana was a member of the panel and was able to introduce NRCS programs and services to the audience.

4. What do you see for the future?

I see a continued working relationship with the veteran population with the hopes that more veterans will take an active role in agriculture. One veteran may not be able to feed the world, but he/she may be able to feed themselves and perhaps even a community.



Dexter Sapp, StrikeForce Coordinator for NRCS in Louisiana





Louisiana StrikeForce Update

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator

Louisiana NRCS was one of eight states recently invited to attend the Cleveland, Ohio Seasonal High Tunnel (SHT) Meeting and Tour. Chris Coreil, State Agronomist for Louisiana NRCS and Dexter Sapp, Louisiana NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator attended the meeting and tour.



For the past 15 years, Cleveland's grass roots urban agriculture movement has grown steadily. Today urban agriculture contributes to meeting the nutritional needs of residents, improving neighborhoods and increasing employment opportunities in the city.

During the meeting the participants were given a recap of the Cleveland SHT Project from 2012 thru 2016. Meeting participants visited the Ohio City farm which is one of the largest contiguous urban farms in the United States at nearly six acres. This farm provides fresh, local and healthy food to Cleveland's underserved residents, boosts the local food economy and educates the community about the importance of a complete food system.

Afterwards the group met with Ohio's first high tunnel contract holder, Avon Standard at his urban farm. The highlight of the tour was when the group got to assist with

constructing a SHT on a lot in a Cleveland neighborhood.



Since 2012, 95 Seasonal High Tunnels have been constructed or are scheduled for installation in Cleveland neighborhoods for a total of \$449,440 in NRCS funding.

With the help of partners such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (who also helped with the Cleveland SHT Initiative), Louisiana NRCS hopes to implement the same type of Urban Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative in the Baton Rouge and New Orleans area.

Around the State

In honor of America's Independence Day, we would like to take this opportunity to recognize those NRCS and soil and water conservation district employees who have served our country proudly and are working tirelessly to get conservation on the ground across Louisiana. Thank you for your service!



Troy Mallach is the State Biologist for NRCS at the State Office in Alexandria, Louisiana. He served in the Louisiana Army National Guard for eight years as a Sergeant. He served in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, Ft. Gordon, Georgia and Ft. Hood, Texas. He was activated for Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and trained at Ft. Hood in preparation for deployment to Iraq. The ground offensive in Iraq ended quickly and his brigade was not deployed. He was activated again after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and provided security during established curfews in Morgan City, Louisiana.

Kirk Garber is a Program Liaison for NRCS at the Field Office Support Center in Alexandria, Louisiana. He served in the U.S. Air Force, the Illinois Army National Guard, Louisiana Army National Guard and the Louisiana Air National Guard. He enlisted as an Airman Basic and his current rank is Major. Garber served 21 years before he retired. He was stationed in Las Vegas, Nevada, South Korea, Phoenix, Arizona, Germany, Peoria, Illinois and New Orleans, Louisiana. He was an F-4, F-15 and F-16 Crew Chief, UH-60 Crew Chief, Tank Platoon Leader, Tank Company Executive Officer, and Military Intelligence Analyst.



Around the State



Ronnie Hebert is a 319 Technician for the Acadia Soil and Water Conservation District in Crowley, Louisiana. Hebert served as an E-5 Sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps. Hebert served as a Unit Diary Clerk for H&S Company 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division in Hoa, South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Although not currently farming, Hebert farmed in Vermilion Parish for 28 years until Hurricane Rita.

Freddie Johnson is the Office Automation Assistant for NRCS at the Thibodaux Watershed Office in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Johnson served in the U.S. Army for 20 years, before retiring with rank of Staff Sergeant. Johnson began his military career in 1988 at Ft. Benning, Georgia. He began as an Infantry Soldier with two tours in Germany and two at Ft. Benning, Georgia. In 1998, he graduated from the Total Army Instructors Course and travelled around the world training over 50,000 soldiers while assigned to the Army's elite training team, the New Equipment Training Team. In 2002, Johnson was selected to go to Recruiting School for the Army. He served as a recruiter in Memphis, Tennessee for 6 years before retiring.



John Jurgensen is the State Engineer for NRCS at the State Office in Alexandria, Louisiana. Jurgensen served eight years in the Louisiana Army National Guard as an E-5 Sergeant. He was in the 527th Engineering Battalion Combat Heavy in Ruston, Marksville and Bossier City and in the 225th Engineering Group in Alexandria. Jurgensen was deployed to Guatemala, the Bahamas, Italy, Saudi Arabia and finally in Iraq as part of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Samantha Jackson is a Program Assistant on the Water Resources Planning Staff for NRCS at the State Office in Alexandria, Louisiana. Jackson has been in the Army Reserves for 12 1/2 years and is still a member. She is an E-6 Staff Sergeant. She originally joined as a mechanic and repaired vehicles from HUMVEs to 5Tons. Now, she is a water treatment specialist and supervises the water purification and distribution process. She was deployed to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn.



Mellowdee Tibbs is an Administrative Support Assistant for NRCS at the State Office in Alexandria, Louisiana. She served in the U.S. Army as a Sergeant First Class. She was stationed in Georgia, Korea, Colorado, Wisconsin and Hawaii. During her military career, she primarily worked in Human Resources.

Mark Norman is a Soil Conservation Technician for NRCS in the Oberlin Field Office. He served in the U.S. Army as a Staff Sergeant for 8 years. He spent time in Alaska, New York, Texas and Louisiana. In addition, Norman spent two year-long deployments in Afghanistan and one year-long deployment in Iraq. In addition to working for NRCS, Norman currently grows and sells cut flowers (tuberose).



Around the State



Adam Malcomb is a Soil Conservation Technician for NRCS in the Leesville Field Office. Malcomb served in the U.S. Army for 4 1/2 years stateside. His occupational specialty was Mental Health Specialist. He functioned as a health counselor for soldiers and their family members. He was the military equivalent to Assistant Manager of the Department of Behavioral Health on Ft. Polk and periodically served as Manager of Social Services. As a hobby, Malcomb keeps honey bees.

David Morris is a Soil Conservation Technician for NRCS in the Ferriday Field Office. Morris served in the U.S. Air Force as an Airman E-4 (Buck Sergeant) at Frances E Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. He was a Nuclear Weapons and Explosive Ordinance Specialist.



Windsor McDuffie is the Secretary for both the Engineering and Water Resources Planning Staff at the State Office in Alexandria, Louisiana. McDuffie served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 9 1/2 years as an Embarkation-Logistics NCO, an Ammunition Technician and a Drill Instructor. He was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, 29 Palms, California, Beaufort, South Carolina and Parris Island, South Carolina, and Iraq during Operation Desert Shield/Storm. After leaving the Marines, McDuffie served two years in the Louisiana National Guard in Monroe, Louisiana.



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Upcoming Events

August 31, 2016

LSU AgCenter Sweet Potato Research Station Field Day

The LSU AgCenter is hosting a field day at the Sweet Potato Research Station In Chase, Louisiana on August 31, 2016. For more information, please contact Tara Smith at 318-435-2903 or by e-mail at tsmith@agcenter.lsu.edu

September 7 - 8, 2016

LACD Coastal Resources Committee Annual Meeting

The LACD Coastal Resources Committee annual meeting will be in St. Mary Parish on September 7 - 8, 2016. For more information, please contact Mitzi Dohrman at 337-893-5664 Ext. 3.

September 15, 2016

LSU AgCenter Northeast Beef/Forage Field Day

The LSU AgCenter is hosting the Northeast Beef/Forage Field Day at Goldmine Plantation on September 15, 2016. Please contact Keith Collins at 318-728-3216 for more information.

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