

Natural Resources Conservation Service 2015 Arkansas Annual Report

Dear Friends of Arkansas Conservation,

We are pleased to present to you our 2015 annual report. We have much to celebrate because 2015 was another banner year for conservation in Arkansas. More than \$133 million in financial assistance was obligated this year through Farm Bill conservation programs by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helping producers implement conservation practices and systems addressing natural resource concerns. Even more impressive, we re-committed to and enhanced technical assistance addressing producer needs such as soil health on grazing lands and cropland as well as irrigation water management on cropland.

Thanks to the extra efforts of NRCS employees and conservation partners, we continued to manage very heavy workloads in many counties servicing existing Farm Bill contracts, providing conservation planning assistance and processing new Farm Bill requests. Working together with dedication, hard work, and extra effort allowed us to deliver the best possible service and “uncommon results” that I sincerely appreciate!

We’re moving toward a more sustainable workload with some reductions in financial assistance while increasing capacity by adding NRCS staff and utilizing partner agreements.



(left to right) Mike Sullivan, state conservationist, meets with Ellis Bell, a St. Francis County landowner, and Corey Cornelious, St. Francis County district conservationist.

We’ve continued to add field positions, including program support specialists providing contract management assistance and allowing our conservationists more time for conservation planning and technical assistance in the field. We also entered into new agreements with the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) to enhance technical assistance addressing irrigation water management, water quality and conservation planning in northeast Arkansas, watershed coordination in 319 watersheds, training for conservation district employees, and watershed and drainage district assistance.

We have great support from the Arkansas Conservation Partnership - ANRC, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD),

Arkansas Association of Conservation District Employees, Arkansas Forestry Commission, Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc., University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas - Pine Bluff and many others working together to enhance conservation assistance.

Recently, we completed an economic impact study of FY 2015 NRCS assistance in the Arkansas. The summary of financial and technical assistance showed NRCS invested \$161 million, generating 1,657 full and part-time jobs. This equates to income of \$92 million to state residents and contributes \$150 million of value added to the state economy above and beyond federal assistance provided.

As we look to the future, we’ll continue to deliver excellent service related to the Farm Bill programs. This includes making improvements where needed while we acquire more staff and provide training to maintain a highly skilled workforce with more emphasis on conservation planning and technical assistance. It also includes collaboration with conservation partners to meet the needs of Arkansas producers. Working together, we’ll help Arkansas producers get conservation on the ground better and quicker than ever before!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Michael E. Sullivan".



Enhanced Technical Assistance, Planning and Training

Conference, Training Highlight Soil Health - With assistance from NRCS, farmers and ranchers across Arkansas are using cover crops to protect soil – their most valuable asset, especially with many facing drought conditions. In recent years, drought and pests have become the main driving force behind Arkansas’s increased interest in cover crops. Previous cover crops were grown primarily on Highly Erodible Land soils and soils severely impacted by wind erosion. Farmers across Arkansas and from across the country participated in the Southern Agricultural Cover Crops, Soil Health and Water Management Conference October 28 - 29 in Jonesboro. The conference, co-sponsored by NRCS and the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, was designed to assist farmers learn how to successfully adopt a cover crop management system, improve soil health and water management on their operations. More than 225 people attended the annual event. Arkansas NRCS field staff also participated in a Soil Health & Sustainability training course in Helena-West Helena. A growing number of Arkansas farmers are using soil health management systems to improve the health and function of their soil — and NRCS is working hand-in-hand with these producers through our technical and financial assistance programs and services to help ensure their success.



Grazing Management in Arkansas: Another Successful Year - Arkansas’s grazing lands specialists more than doubled their trainings offered to field office employees in 2015. Nearly 700 producers and employees learned about grazing management and soil health and the affects they have on the water cycle. Demonstrations using a rainfall

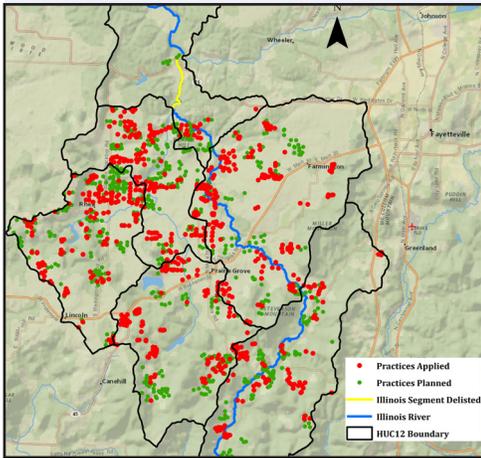


simulator showed the importance of vegetation on soil and the filtration rates on several types of ground cover. Staff gave 17 presentations to producers focusing on grazing management and its relationship to soil health. Other courses included Pasture Ecology I and II and Building Partnerships with Livestock Producers. In addition, Arkansas Grazing Lands Specialists collaborated with the engineering discipline and University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service to host Livestock Watering Trainings and multiple Native Warm Season Grass trainings. Grazing lands specialists also wrote 12 articles in 2015 that were published in the Arkansas Cattle Business magazine. The magazine is provided to approximately 7,000 producers each month.

NRCS, Partners Promote Irrigation Water Management - Arkansas NRCS and the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service have teamed up to hire an Irrigation Education Area Specialist to help producers better manage their irrigation water. Mike Hamilton moved from his position as the Poinsett County Extension Agent to work in the Jonesboro NRCS Technical Service Center, side by side with NRCS employees. NRCS promotes a systems approach to irrigation which includes efficiently delivering irrigation water, tail-water recovery systems for capturing runoff during the entire year and planning to effectively manage the water. Irrigation water management is the central hub of this system of conservation practices. Producers in Arkansas currently have Environmental Quality Incentives Program contracts for 561 Irrigation Water Management Plans. Many of them have yet to be developed, and most have not yet been implemented. Hamilton is an expert in the use of computerized hole selection including expertise in both PHAUCET and PipePlanner software. Hamilton is working with producers to develop these IWM plans. Within a week of starting, Hamilton was contacted by several growers in the White River Valley area seeking help to design a furrow irrigation system for about 20,000 acres of farmland. Sizing holes for polypipe results in about 3 inches of water saved per acre. The result of this work was approximately 5,000 acre feet of water saved. NRCS has also signed an agreement with the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission to hire five people to help develop Irrigation Water Management Plans. State Conservationist Mike Sullivan said, “This is a great example of how NRCS can partner with other agencies to help solve our natural resource problems.”



Successes



Strong Conservation Partnership, Landscape Initiative Result in Delisting - Five years into an 8-year Environmental Quality Incentives Program initiative to improve water quality of the Illinois River Sub-Basin and Eucha-Spavinaw Lake Watershed (IRWI) progress is being realized with a portion of the river in Arkansas being removed from the state's 2014 Clean Water Act section 303(d) impaired waters list. Since the IRWI began in 2011, NRCS has funded 538 contracts totaling more than \$15.5 million to apply conservation practices on 43,681 acres in Arkansas. The 1,315,673 acre initiative includes 576,517 acres in Benton and Washington counties in Arkansas and 739,156 acres in Oklahoma. Work by the NRCS and our partners, such as the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission; Illinois River Watershed Partnership; the Washington and Benton county conservation districts; and landowners in six sub-watersheds in the IRWI project area contributed to the delisting.

Small Family Farmer Utilizes EQIP and StrikeForce Initiative to Build Farming Operations and Mentor other Minority Farmers on the Benefits of NRCS Programs - Strong family values with an appreciation and respect for the land are the keys to Abraham Carpenter Jr.'s success in Grady, Ark. He and his family own and operate Carpenter's Produce, which services farmers markets all over Arkansas. He grows more than 1,200 acres of produce each year including squash, greens, purple hull peas, watermelon, cantaloupe, green beans, okra and other alternative crops. He has installed wells to address water concerns, underground pipelines, organic farming and drip irrigation to limit the effect of soil erosion and conservation tillage. He has participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for over 20 years and the Conservation Stewardship Program since 2012 to enhance energy, water quality, water quantity and soil quality, and recently became a participant in the USDA StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative. He believes partnership is a vital tool for any successful farming operation.



Progress at Work: LakeView Farms Incorporates Conservation Practices - Christina Spencer says her 300-acre cattle farm is a work in progress. But, others might say it is progress at work. Spencer, along with her husband, Gary, raises registered Black Angus cattle outside of Powhatan in Lawrence County. For the past 8 years, she has worked with NRCS to improve her pastures and prescribed grazing system. With a diverse landscape of rolling hills, forest, bottom land and a lake, the primary areas addressed were feed and forage for domestic animals; health and vigor of plants; and sheet and rill erosion. These resource concerns have been addressed through four Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts. A fifth EQIP application is in the planning stages to address erosion and other issues. Through the Conservation Stewardship Program, she is enhancing her conservation work with retrofitting watering facilities for wildlife to escape and implementing grazing management to improve wildlife. With nearly 100 acres of forest, Christina is fencing cattle out of the woodlands to improve wildlife habitat.



Volunteer Program Named Best in Nation - Earth Team volunteers in Arkansas furthered the NRCS mission by assisting with field work, education and outreach and technical and program support. Arkansas has more than 702 Earth Team volunteers who worked 15,549 volunteer hours in FY15, equaling \$358,716 in salary savings. The Earth Team program won three national NRCS awards – The Arkansas NRCS Earth Team program won The Chief's Cup for excellence in leadership support, innovation, training, service and achievements in the Earth Team volunteer program; the National Association of Conservation Districts/NRCS Earth Team Partnership award was presented to the Buffalo Conservation District in Marshall for the most effective Earth Team Volunteer Program in a conservation district and most effective partnership between an outside organization and Earth Team volunteers; and the Chief's Field Award was presented to Marshall Field Service Center in Marshall for the most effective and dynamic use of Earth Team volunteers.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals.

It provides financial and technical assistance to install or implement structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land.

The majority of general EQIP funds provided to Arkansas are used to support priority resource concerns identified by conservation districts through local work groups.

Arkansas farmers received more than \$43.8 million in

EQIP financial assistance in FY15, funding 1,833 applications. This financial assistance will help install conservation practices to reduce soil erosion, use water more efficiently and improve grazing land, wildlife habitat and water quality on more than 252,385 acres.

The top practices (by the number in contracts) in 2015 are: fence, heavy use area protection, watering facility, livestock pipeline, forage and biomass planting, irrigation water management, nutrient management, irrigation pipeline, structure for water control and prescribed burning.

EQIP Sub Account	Contracts	Acres Treated	Obligations
Beginning Farmer/Rancher	40	4,155.70	\$1,420,438.12
Feral Swine Pilot Project	59	31,590.10	\$296,407.92
Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration Project	83	11,380.60	\$1,432,688.97
High Tunnel System	49	1,190.80	\$438,393.32
Illinois River (Eucha/Spavinaw)	73	3,553.70	\$2,127,643.80
Limited Resource	8	726.30	\$146,818.70
Locally Led	978	131,156.30	\$19,867,245.07
Mississippi River Basin Initiative	138	25,025.55	\$6,701,346.65
National Water Quality Initiative	19	3,122.97	\$562,214.00
On-Farm Energy	118	4,263.80	\$3,805,308.83
On-Farm Energy CAPS	33	1,564.90	\$66,722.57
Organic Certified	2	22.30	\$60,341.00
Organic Transition	9	453.10	\$53,310.43
Planning	22	13,999.60	\$65,101.00
Socially Disadvantaged	28	1,571.90	\$926,061.34
State	55	7,757.00	\$1,933,667.34
Strike Force Initiative	104	8,917.10	\$3,494,700.36
Wildlife 5%	15	1,933.30	\$461,051.62
TOTAL	1,833	252,385.02	\$43,859,461.04

Data Source: ProTracts - 10/9/2015

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Arkansas NRCS enrolled seven easements totaling 6,785.6 acres of wetlands through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE). Obligations in FY15 totaled more than

\$18.3 million. The voluntary programs offer landowners the opportunity to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. Arkansas ranks third in the nation in the number of acres enrolled with more than 235,000.

ACEP	Obligations
Wetlands Reserve Easements	\$15,198,883
Wetlands Reserve Easement Restoration	\$3,184,079
TOTAL	\$18,382,962

Data Source: NEST - 10/1/2015 and FMFI - 9/30/2015

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) encourages agricultural and forestry producers to undertake additional conservation activities to improve and maintain the existing conservation on their land. The program provides financial and technical assistance to conserve and enhance soil, water, air and related natural resources.

In FY15, 673 new contracts were developed enrolling 582,223.6 acres. The contracts will provide more than \$13.4 million in financial assistance to participants over the five-year contract agreements.

Total CSP payments for existing contracts were more than \$57.6 million.

CSP	Contracts	Acres Treated	Obligations
Agricultural Lands - Beginning Farmer	57	45,948.50	\$1,018,963
Agricultural Lands - General	501	484,023.50	\$11,857,179
Agricultural Lands - Socially Disadvantaged	37	9,933.00	\$283,929
Forestland - Beginning Farmer	7	952.00	\$7,741
Forestland - General	66	41,018.20	\$244,495
Forestland - Socially Disadvantaged	5	348.40	\$5,000
New FY15 Contract Totals	673	582,223.60	\$13,417,307
Payments in FY15 for Previous Years Contracts			\$57,659,773
TOTAL			\$71,077,080

Data Source: ProTracts - 10/9/2015



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance through partnership agreements and Farm Bill programs.

RCPP encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales.

Projects in Arkansas will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural and natural resource goals from addressing water quality degradation, groundwater declines,

and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife on irrigated cropland in the Bayou Meto Lower Arkansas region; reducing nutrient and sediment load entering the Red River; improving water quality in the Illinois River Watershed so that all waters meet their designated uses; and assisting rice producers address water quantity, water quality, and wildlife habitat across 380,000 acres in Arkansas, Mississippi, California, Louisiana, Missouri and Texas.

The top five practices (by the number in contracts) in 2015 are: nutrient management, irrigation water management, irrigation pipeline, irrigation land leveling and cover crop.

RCPP Project	Contracts	Acres Treated	Obligations
Illinois River Watershed	3	10	\$57,503
Bayou Meto - Lower Arkansas	2	825	\$518,086
Red River	1	118	\$111,883
TOTAL	6	953	\$687,472

Data Source: ProTracts - 10/9/2015

FY 15 Financial Assistance by Program and County

County	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	Conservation Stewardship Program	Conservation Security Program	Wetland Reserve Easements	Total FY15 Financial Assistance
ARKANSAS	\$1,724,734	\$9,594,141	\$36,106	\$4,524,617	\$15,879,598
ASHLEY	\$149,638	\$1,137,189			\$1,286,827
BAXTER	\$397,205	\$65,553			\$462,758
BENTON	\$1,734,052				\$1,734,052
BOONE	\$341,870	\$16,086			\$357,956
BRADLEY	\$125,275	\$6,703			\$131,978
CALHOUN	\$57,559	\$19,029			\$76,588
CARROLL	\$566,992	\$18,489			\$585,481
CHICOT	\$461,873	\$3,129,267			\$3,591,140
CLARK	\$90,695	\$2,811			\$93,506
CLAY	\$391,792	\$1,439,147			\$1,830,939
CLEBURNE	\$507,803	\$30,717			\$538,520
CLEVELAND	\$386,835	\$15,294			\$402,129
COLUMBIA	\$271,550	\$30,807			\$302,357
CONWAY	\$730,142	\$252,217			\$982,359
CRAIGHEAD	\$965,387	\$3,342,387			\$4,307,774
CRAWFORD	\$9,275	\$24,191			\$33,466
CRITTENDEN	\$507,849	\$913,387			\$1,421,236
CROSS	\$862,688	\$3,889,444			\$4,752,132
DALLAS	\$76,658				\$76,658
DESHA	\$522,417	\$6,717,329			\$7,239,746
DREW	\$372,651	\$1,530,134			\$1,902,784
FAULKNER	\$651,311	\$116,616		\$883,560	\$1,651,487
FRANKLIN	\$752,950				\$752,950
FULTON	\$1,096,503	\$35,949			\$1,132,452
GARLAND	\$40,136	\$12,361			\$52,497
GRANT	\$100,106				\$100,106
GREENE	\$761,391	\$1,470,484			\$2,231,875
HEMPSTEAD	\$440,838	\$4,046			\$444,884
HOT SPRING	\$87,611				\$87,611
HOWARD	\$744,128				\$744,128
INDEPENDENCE	\$409,778	\$873,622		\$3,213,378	\$4,496,778
IZARD	\$1,294,614	\$88,375			\$1,382,989
JACKSON	\$1,524,853	\$3,594,101			\$5,118,954
JEFFERSON	\$2,424,096	\$5,810,270	\$108,243		\$8,342,609
JOHNSON	\$998,981	\$21,321			\$1,020,302
LAFAYETTE	\$487,115	\$470,138			\$957,253
LAWRENCE	\$329,521	\$4,635,030			\$4,964,551

Continued on Page 6

Data Source: FMML - 9/30/2015

FY 15 Financial Assistance by Program and County (continued)

County	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	Conservation Stewardship Program	Conservation Security Program	Wetland Reserve Easements	Total FY15 Financial Assistance
LEE	\$654,334	\$1,923,922			\$2,578,256
LINCOLN	\$763,982	\$4,076,783			\$4,840,765
LITTLE RIVER	\$232,423				\$232,423
LOGAN	\$1,638,554	\$66,451			\$1,705,005
LONOKE	\$1,652,556	\$2,434,787	\$40,471		\$4,127,814
MADISON	\$609,875	\$21,359			\$631,234
MARION	\$259,057	\$167,826			\$426,883
MILLER	\$126,299	\$200,951			\$327,250
MISSISSIPPI	\$455,168	\$1,070,438			\$1,525,606
MONROE	\$318,034	\$1,488,933			\$1,806,967
MONTGOMERY	\$354,163				\$354,163
NEVADA	\$128,392	\$22,291			\$150,683
NEWTON	\$170,285	\$1,359			\$171,644
OUACHITA	\$111,429	\$5,873			\$117,302
PERRY	\$533,542	\$74,254			\$607,796
PHILLIPS	\$391,708	\$2,358,879			\$2,750,587
PIKE	\$259,392	\$42,284			\$301,676
POINSETT	\$493,906	\$1,543,903			\$2,037,809
POLK	\$493,486	\$15,715			\$509,201
POPE	\$766,405	\$44,987			\$811,392
PRAIRIE	\$976,131	\$1,726,122		\$6,017,620	\$8,719,873
PULASKI	\$499,460	\$212,597			\$712,057
RANDOLPH	\$347,533	\$596,027			\$943,560
SALINE	\$33,615				\$33,615
SCOTT	\$100,566				\$100,566
SEARCY	\$991,933	\$190,378			\$1,182,311
SEBASTIAN	\$97,836				\$97,836
SEVIER	\$524,284	\$42,323			\$566,607
SHARP	\$540,948	\$201,365			\$742,313
ST. FRANCIS	\$1,228,871	\$2,521,369			\$3,750,240
STONE	\$447,223	\$122,310			\$569,533
UNION	\$115,532	\$48,599			\$164,131
VAN BUREN	\$462,255	\$41,572			\$503,827
WASHINGTON	\$1,702,611				\$1,702,611
WHITE	\$852,533	\$200,783			\$1,053,316
WOODRUFF	\$307,518	\$222,781		\$3,743,787	\$4,274,086
YELL	\$1,129,815	\$83,224			\$1,213,039
Grand Total	\$44,170,526	\$71,077,080	\$184,820	\$18,382,962	\$133,815,388

Data Source: FMFI - 9/30/2015

NRCS FY15 Financial Assistance by Congressional District

Congressional District 1

County	Total FY15 Financial Assistance
ARKANSAS	\$15,879,598
BAXTER	\$462,758
CHICOT	\$3,591,140
CLAY	\$1,830,939
CLEBURNE	\$538,520
CRAIGHEAD	\$4,307,774
CRITTENDEN	\$1,421,236
CROSS	\$4,752,132
DESHA	\$7,239,746
FULTON	\$1,132,452
GREENE	\$2,231,875
INDEPENDENCE	\$4,496,778
IZARD	\$1,382,989
JACKSON	\$5,118,954
JEFFERSON	\$2,085,652
LAWRENCE	\$4,964,551
LEE	\$2,578,256
LINCOLN	\$4,840,765
LONOKE	\$4,127,814
MISSISSIPPI	\$1,525,606
MONROE	\$1,806,967
PHILLIPS	\$2,750,587
POINSETT	\$2,037,809
PRAIRIE	\$8,719,873
RANDOLPH	\$943,560
SEARCY	\$118,231
SHARP	\$742,313
ST. FRANCIS	\$3,750,240
STONE	\$569,533
WOODRUFF	\$4,274,086
TOTAL	\$100,222,735

Congressional District 2

County	Total FY15 Financial Assistance
CONWAY	\$982,359
FAULKNER	\$1,651,487
PERRY	\$607,796
PULASKI	\$712,057
SALINE	\$33,615
VAN BUREN	\$503,827
WHITE	\$1,053,316
TOTAL	\$5,544,455

Congressional District 3

County	Total FY15 Financial Assistance
BENTON	\$1,734,052
BOONE	\$357,956
CARROLL	\$585,481
CRAWFORD	\$16,733
MARION	\$426,883
NEWTON	\$85,822
POPE	\$811,392
SEARCY	\$1,064,080
SEBASTIAN	\$48,918
WASHINGTON	\$1,702,611
TOTAL	\$6,833,928

Congressional District 4

County	Total FY15 Financial Assistance
ASHLEY	\$1,286,827
BRADLEY	\$131,978
CALHOUN	\$76,588
CLARK	\$93,506
CLEVELAND	\$402,129
COLUMBIA	\$302,357
CRAWFORD	\$16,733
DALLAS	\$76,658
DREW	\$1,902,784
FRANKLIN	\$752,950
GARLAND	\$52,497
GRANT	\$100,106
HEMPSTEAD	\$444,884
HOT SPRING	\$87,611
HOWARD	\$744,128
JEFFERSON	\$6,256,957
JOHNSON	\$1,020,302
LAFAYETTE	\$957,253
LITTLE RIVER	\$232,423
LOGAN	\$1,705,005
MADISON	\$631,234
MILLER	\$327,250
MONTGOMERY	\$354,163
NEVADA	\$150,683
NEWTON	\$85,822
OUACHITA	\$117,302
PIKE	\$301,676
POLK	\$509,201
SCOTT	\$100,566
SEBASTIAN	\$48,918
SEVIER	\$566,607
UNION	\$164,131
YELL	\$1,213,039
TOTAL	\$21,214,269



Data Source: FMMI - 9/30/2015

Includes: Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Conservation Security Program and Wetland Reserve Easements

Figures in blue denote counties with 2 Congressional Districts