



# The Delta View—Area 4 Newsletter

USDA, NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE, GREENWOOD AREA OFFICE

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## From the Desk of Kevin Kennedy, Acting State Conservationist

My primary responsibility as Area Conservationist in the Mississippi Delta is to oversee the daily operations of the field offices in implementing the various NRCS programs. As the Acting State Conservationist, my responsibilities include the oversight of NRCS statewide. In these positions, my priority is getting the landowners the resources and technical guidance they need in order to conserve their natural resources. In an environment where the government is constantly cutting funds, we (NRCS) have to position ourselves here in the state, to obligate funds quickly and apply practices so that as other states turn back unobligated funds, the state can move quickly to get contracts ready. The strength of NRCS in Mississippi is our employees. With all the talk of furloughs in the government, my staff never slows into a discussion on speculations, they just work.



NRCS in the Delta and Mississippi prides itself with the partnerships we have developed with all local, state, and federal entities. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has worked to spend millions of dollars in the last couple of years through such programs as the Mississippi River Basin Initiative, Agriculture Water Enhancement Program, and the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative through partners submitting proposals for these funds. The coalition of partnerships in Mississippi has helped the state to treat our natural resources in a way that would not be possible without partnerships.

NRCS in the Mississippi Delta is steadily looking for new funding sources to help landowners and operators in the Delta treat their resource needs. This year, we were able to obligate over 25 million dollars in the Mississippi Delta treating our Natural Resource concerns. The biggest resource concern that we are facing now in the Delta is the depletion of the Mississippi Alluvial Aquifer. With an increasing demand for irrigation water, we have to be smarter with our water usage in the Delta. Conservation of our ground water is an area where partnerships are playing a big role. The producers now have various local, state, and federal agencies to work with for the common cause of stopping the water table from dropping.

Current projects underway to benefit waterfowl and wildlife habitat is the implementation of newly enrolled WRP acres. Also, included is the implementation of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. One important feature about NRCS's conservation programs is that we plan wildlife measures on almost every practice we implement. For example, pads and pipes for irrigation water and sediment control are also used to hold winter water for migrating waterfowl. Pollinator habitat is planned on Irrigation Storage Reservoirs.

Long term goals for conservation in the Delta are exciting. There is no limit for the conservation efforts in the Delta thanks to a strong partnership of agencies. Of course, our water depletion will be at the top of our priority list. The thing that is so unique about the Mississippi Delta is that the practices that conserve water also prevent nutrients from entering our streams, promotes wildlife, saves landowners money, and treats the Gulf Hypoxia problems. NRCS has come a long way with our program strategies to treat more than one resource concern with a single practice. Back to the topic of conservation partners, our working relations are a must to ensure the conservation of our natural resources and the abundance of water. As a federal agency, it is our goal to assist landowners with the technical and financial assistance to address the concerns of the Mississippi Delta.

Kevin Kennedy has been employed with Natural Resources Conservation Service since 1983. A native of Smithville, MS, he has worked 25 of his 30 years in the Mississippi Delta. Kevin has held several positions within the agency including Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist, Resource Conservationist, Area Conservationist, and Acting State Conservationist. He graduated from Mississippi State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture Extension and Education. Kevin is married to Bobbie Kennedy of Charleston. They have 2 daughters, Hannah and Chelsey, and one granddaughter, Annalyn.

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# Delta MACD Area Summer Meeting

Sunflower County Soil and Water Conservation District hosted the Summer Meeting on June 20, 2013, at the B.B. King Museum in Indianola. The local SWCD Commissioners and several local sponsors provided a delicious steak supper for all the guests. The meal was catered by Gary Lott. A PowerPoint presentation highlighted several of the local projects under construction in the county. Don Underwood, Director of the Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission, Pete Hunter of Coahoma County and MACD 2<sup>nd</sup> VP, presented the program concerning the depletion of the Mississippi Alluvial Aquifer and the need to educate our landowners concerning the use of flow meters. Mr. Terry Maxwell, Sunflower County Chairman, and MACD Delta Director, served as the Master of Ceremonies and presented awards to several well deserving individuals. He also recognized Sandy McKay, Delta Area MSWCC representative who retired June 30, 2013.



Terry Maxwell presents Sandy McKay a silver platter for her service to Area 4.



Trinity Long accepts the Area 4 NRCS Employee Award from Fred Childs.



Mona Hagar was presented with the Area 4 SWCD Employee Award by Fred Childs.



Tom Tollison of Backwater Break Timber Co., Inc. (Leflore County), was awarded the Wildlife Conservationist Award.



Holmes County won the Area 4 Forestry Award. Accepting the award is Clerk, Megan Bloodworth from Fred Childs.



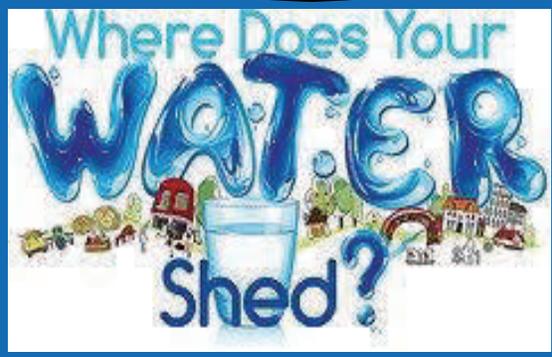
Chris Talley, Quitman County, won the Delta Area Cropland Conservationist Award.

### Essay Winners

- 9th-10th Will Owens-Warren
- 11th-12th Allen Johnston-Yazoo

### Poster Winners

- K-1st Luke McArthur - Quitman
- 2nd-3rd I'niya Camile Thomas -Yazoo
- 4th-6th Ben Boggan - Yazoo
- 10th-12th Sarah Margaret Chicorelli - Coahoma



Quitman County, Luke McArthur K-1<sup>st</sup>



Tallahatchie County is included in the North Area MACD and attended the Summer meeting in Verona, MS on July 9.

Representing Tallahatchie County at the North Area meeting in Verona, MS, were from left to right: Clerk Tiffany Franklin, Area 1 SWCD Employee Award; Jimbo Burkhalter, Commissioner; Mike "Catfish" Flautt, Area 1 Wildlife Conservationist Award; Ernest Brasher, Chairman SWCD; and District Conservationist Christy Robinson, Area 1 NRCS Employee Award Winner.

These winners will proceed to the next round of judging and statewide winners will be presented at the MACD winter meeting in Jackson in January 2014.

## Earth Team Volunteer Employed by MSWCC

Story By Christy Robinson Photo By Tiffany Franklin



Chelsey Gazaway, MSWCC Delta Representative

A former Earth Team Volunteer and MACD Scholarship Winner has been named the newest field representative for the Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission in Jackson.

Chelsey Gazaway will serve 12 delta counties; Tunica, Coahoma, Quitman, Tallahatchie, Leflore, Bolivar, Sunflower, Holmes, Humphreys, Washington, Sharkey, and Issaquena; plus Carroll and Montgomery. Chelsey will be stationed at the Charleston Field Office. She has been working since July 1. She fills the vacancy left by Sandy McKay. She completed several weeks of training in Jackson and is now working with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in her respective area. Her supervisor is Brad Shedd. Chelsey will be available to assist districts with Commissioner Meetings, field days, educational events, Emergency Action Plans for watershed dams, and teacher workshops. She has been to some offices and looks forward to meeting with more district employees and field office staff.

Chelsey holds a bachelors degree in Elementary Education from the University of Mississippi and is married to Andrew Gazaway. They live near Enid, MS. She enjoys arts and crafts and spending time with her niece. She is the daughter of Kevin and Bobbie Kennedy.

## Congressional Staff Visits Produced Educational Opportunities



**Kevin Kennedy, Acting State Conservationist, NRCS-USDA speaks with Washington and Jackson Staff regarding Delta conservation improvements.**

More than 20 key staff persons from Mississippi Congressional offices, the Office of the Governor, and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor visited the Mississippi Delta on August 19–21 to focus on several high priority issues which face the economy of the Delta region. Farm conservation initiatives, agricultural production economic issues, irrigation water supply challenges, cultural and heritage tourism in the Delta, improved access to healthcare, navigation and flood control in the Lower Mississippi River and Tributaries area, and opportunities to strengthen higher education offerings in the Mississippi Delta, combined to fill the 2 day agenda for the visit by Congressional and Executive Branch Staff.

"The people gathered in the Mississippi Delta for this tour this week are impact players and this was one of

the most effective meetings between Delta leaders and Congressional and Executive staff members that I have ever participated in. The entire group from Washington and Jackson were heavily engaged in dialogue with farmers, businessmen, bankers, State and Federal agency representatives, and others covering a wide range of challenges that face the Mississippi Delta," stated Gibb Steele, the Delta Council President from Washington County.

*"People gathered in the Mississippi Delta.."*

On behalf of Delta Council, special thanks should be extended to Pete Hunter, Jason Krutz, Karen Matthews, Roger Stollie, Luther Brown, Kent Parrish, and the entire Burkes Hunting Club family, who made the Congressional and Executive Branch tour productive and enjoyable, as an educational experience for local participants and the Washington and Jackson guests.

## NRCS Accepting Applications for Key Conservation Programs

JACKSON, Aug 13, 2013 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications to help producers improve water and air quality, build healthier soil, improve grazing and forest lands, conserve energy, enhance organic operations, and achieve other environmental benefits.

NRCS has directed more millions of dollars in financial assistance for fiscal 2014 to help Mississippi producers implement conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Interested producers should visit their local NRCS service center for information on EQIP sign-up periods.

"The Environmental Quality Incentives Program offers farmers, ranchers and forestland managers a variety of options to conserve natural resources while boosting production on their lands," acting State Conservationist Kevin Kennedy said. "This conservation investment helps improve environmental health and the economy of Mississippi rural communities."

EQIP provides financial assistance for a variety of conservation activities, such as irrigation water management, reduced tillage, field buffers, rotational grazing systems and much more. The deadline for the next signup period in Mississippi is November 1st. Applications for the second and third signup periods are due by Jan. 17, 2014 and April 18, 2014.

Additionally, NRCS offers special initiatives through EQIP, including: On-Farm Energy Initiative: helps producers conserve energy on their operations. Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative: helps producers install high tunnels designed to extend the growing season into the cold months, increase productivity, keep plants at a steady temperature and conserve water and energy. Organic Initiative: helps producers to install conservation practices on certified organic operations or those working toward organic certification.

To participate in EQIP, an applicant must be an individual, entity or joint operation that meets EQIP eligibility criteria. Applicants can sign up at their local NRCS service center.

For more information about EQIP or other technical or financial assistance programs offered by NRCS, please contact your local service center: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrns>



## Coahoma County Small Farmer Uses EQIP For Successful Farming

Story and Photo Submitted by Coahoma County SWCD

Carl Gordon, a retired firefighter and native resident of Coahoma County, has turned his passion for gardening into a favorite pastime. Gordon enjoyed gardening before retiring, but now it's on a much larger scale. Just about anyone you ask here in this part of the Delta knows about "Carl's tomatoes", as well as his many other fruits and vegetables. His peaches, and especially his tomatoes, are always favorites at local farmers markets.

Gordon started out with 60 tomato plants and now has over 200. Each plant is supported by a homemade sturdy metal cage built by Gordon that keeps the plant upright in the face of strong winds. His plants grow four-to-five feet tall with each branch holding 40-50 tomatoes. In addition to Gordon's tomatoes, he also has five varieties of peaches and apples. He grows watermelons that are twice as sweet as regular melons and an old-time favorite species of cantaloupe.

Location is one of the secrets to Gordon producing such good tasting fruits and vegetables. It is somewhat in an isolated area away from other areas where products require the use of various chemicals. Another key factor to Gordon's successful produce is irrigation. Gordon worked with the local NRCS field office in Coahoma County and under the EQIP Small Farmer Program (2011), a well and underground irrigation system was installed, providing irrigation to his produce operations.

## Tallahatchie County Host Teacher's Workshop

The Tallahatchie County SWCD hosted 27 teachers from surrounding counties on June 6, 2013. The Conservation Workshop was one of four hosted by the Grenada County SWCD. Four stops included Uncle Bam's Farm, an



an agritourism host farm and vegetable produce farm. While there the teachers learned about NRCS and SWCD programs. They toured the seasonal high tunnel and learned about vegetable marketing, and made rain barrels to take to their school campuses. The second tour stop was held at the Kengro plant east of Charleston. The Kengro plant is responsible for the production of kenaf and production of products made from kenaf. The teachers learned about the process from start to finished product. Kenaf is used as an oil absorbent material used on oil fields, assists in oil spill clean ups and is currently being marketed for pet care products such as chips and mats for reptiles and a kitty litter product. Kengro is owned by Ernest Brasher, SWCD Chairman, and family.

# Warren County Organic Farmer Teaches with a Green Thumb

**Story and Photo by Raymond Joyner,  
Supervisory District Conservationist,  
Vicksburg Field Office**

Robert Short has used organic practices on his farm for years, long before the natural food movement became trendy.

"Organic – we never heard of it," the Mississippi farmer said. "This is what my grandfather did 60 years ago. We couldn't afford to buy fertilizer, so we cleaned out the chicken houses and spread it across the fields each year."

"I decided I would take my old years and teach young people how to feed themselves."

Short still uses horse manure today and refrains from pesticides.

"We do well without having to add a bunch of things to our land," he said of his four acres studded with lavish row crops. He

grows sweet potatoes, cucumbers, corn, tomatoes, eggplant, melons, cantaloupe, okra and beans.

He also uses crop rotation and many other environmentally friendly practices prescribed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Short is transitioning to a USDA certified organic farmer. Although he said he hasn't used commercial fertilizers in six years, to become certified, he has to develop an organic farming plan and grow

organically for three years before gaining the certification.

"We're working with Mr. Short on that plan right now," said Raymond Joyner, a supervisory district conservationist with NRCS.

Short is an NRCS customer, participating in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). A well-funded through EQIP, helped his produce survive the drought that left most of the state without any precipitation for any months.

In late July, he was harvesting tasty butterbeans and watermelons – so tasty he also has contracted with



Robert Short (right) shows off some of the butter beans grown on his four-acre farm. His granddaughter, cousin and daughter help him raise vegetables at his transitioning to organic farm.

NRCS to erect a game fence to keep out the hungry deer and rabbits.

Gardening is an integral part of the Short family. His grandchildren, children, neighbors and friends all work in the garden, learning his "green thumb" as well as how to cultivate the earth.

"We live off this land," he said, noting they go to the grocery store for few items. One of his favorite dishes from his garden is squash, which he cooks down with peppers, rosemary and butter. His daughter said she makes a good squash dish.

His granddaughter, Camiren, helped him pick one recent Wednesday. Her favorite item to pick is butter beans, she said. "I always try to get young people involved," Short said.

Environmental education is important to him, and today, youngsters are not exposed enough to the outdoors and agriculture, he said. "I decided I would take my old years and teach young people how to feed themselves."

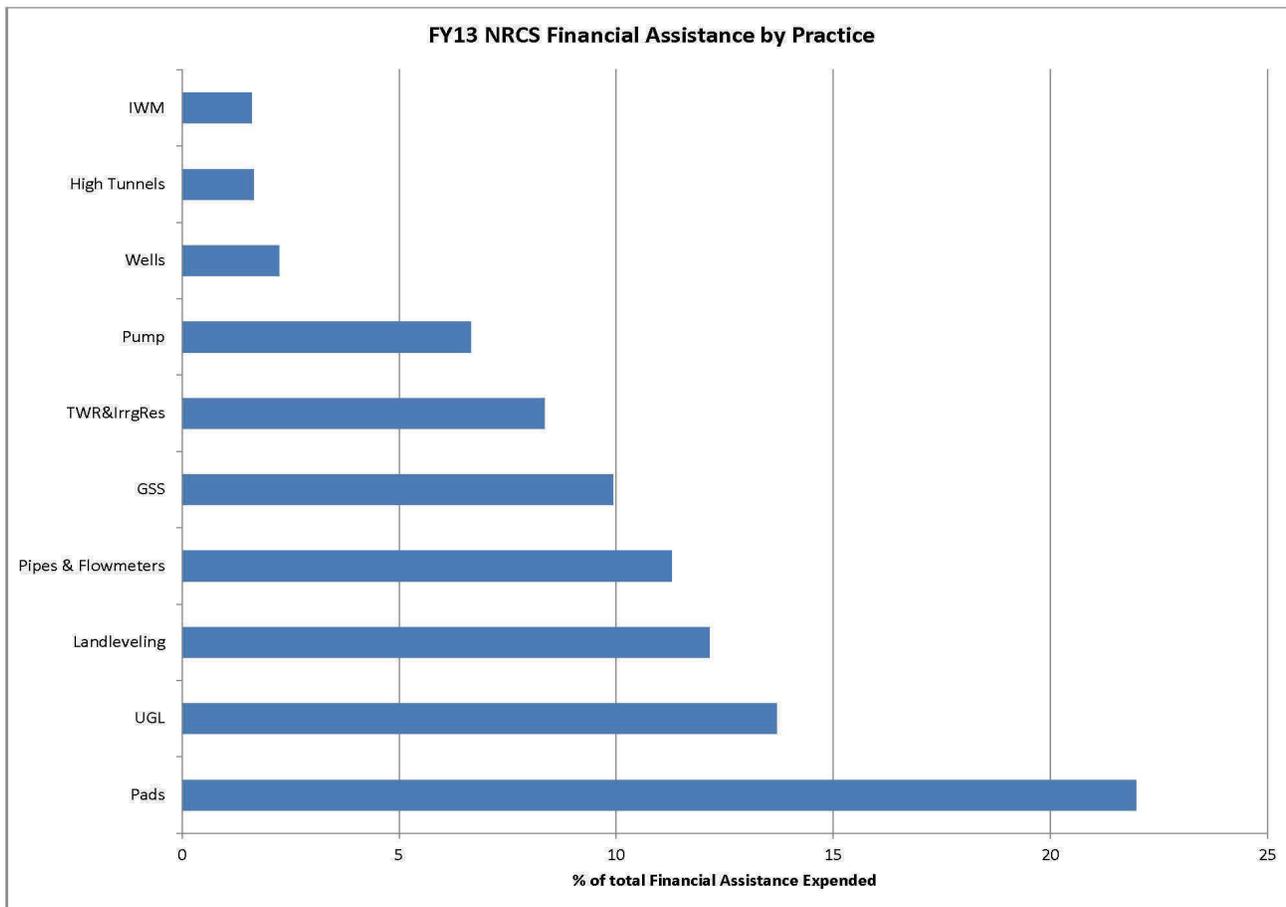
Short said today's youth are interested in organic. "I find the younger people are more interested in organic food," he said. "The news of being obese is scary to them. That's the question they're asking now."

Short wasn't always a farmer. He lived in Jackson from the 1970s to the 1990s, and he returned to Flowers to take care of his aging mother. While living with her on the same land his ancestors had worked, he began taking advantage of the rich soil.

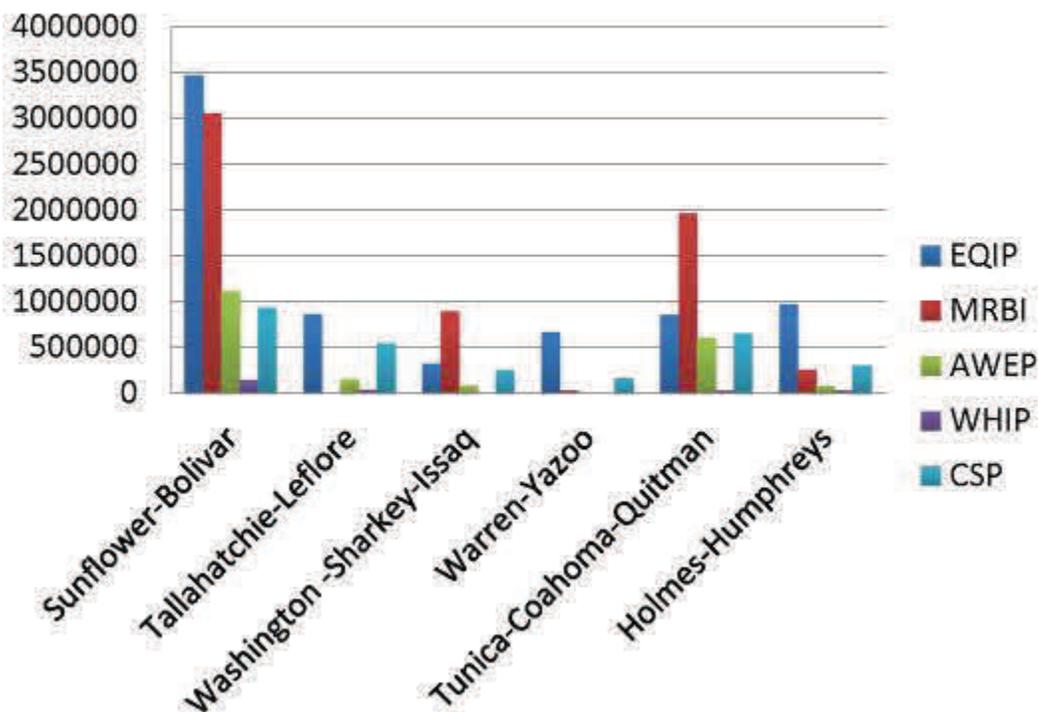
# What Do EQIP Funds Pay For?

For Delta Counties in AREA 4

Prepared by Area Engineer Paul Rodrigue



## Area 4 Funds Obligated



## North Delta Produce Growers Association Hosts USDA Officials



Photo By: Jeanine May From Left to Right: Trina George, Rural Development State Director; Carolyn Parker, Director of the Office of Advocacy and Outreach, Vernita Dore, SC USDA RD State Director, Karis Gutter, Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services; Christy Robinson, Acting Area Conservationist, Greenwood; Doc Davis, Director of the North Delta Producer Growers Assn.; Dr. Gregory Parham, Assistant Secretary for Administration; Mike Sullivan, FSA State Director; Kurt Readus, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs; Kathy Respass, Soil Conservationist, Marks Field Office; and Chauncey Newsome, NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist, Clarksdale.



Percy Baldwin, Packing Shed employee shows off some of the purple hull peas ready to be shipped to Kroger and Walmart stores.



Left to Right: Soil Conservationist Kathy Respass, MS Public Affairs Specialist Jeannine May, Executive Administrative Assistant Kay Armstrong, and Acting Area Conservationist Christy Robinson

## Bolivar County Review

Story and Photos by Christy Robinson, NRCS and Trey Cooke, Delta Wildlife

The NRCS Quality Assurance Reviews were conducted in Bolivar and Tunica County. Seen above is the team visiting with Bolivar County EQIP participant Jerry Evans. L-R Resource

Conservationist Mary Williams, Bolivar Soil Conservationist Jason Makamson, State Conservation Engineer Scott Culberson, NRCS Agronomist Walter Jackson, Area 4 Agricultural Engineer Paul Rodrigue, Jerry Evans, NRCS State Forester Alan Holditch, Bolivar District Conservationist Trinity Long, Area 4 Soil Scientist Curtis Godfrey, Area 4 Resource Conservationist Rick Hagar, State Agricultural Engineer Scott Coleman, and Bolivar Soil Conservation Technician Mark Gresham. Mr. Evans installed a Tailwater Recovery System that includes the Delta Pit and the Irrigation Storage Reservoir.



The Evans 2012 AWEPP Socially Disadvantaged contract consisted of the Irrigation Storage Reservoir with 13 ac-ft storage and Delta Tailwater Pit with 87 ac-ft storage, 3 Flowmeters, 23,087 ft. Dike, 139.5 acres Land Leveling, 8 Structures for Water Control, and Critical Area Stabilization, two Pumping Plants, 4738' Irrigation Pipeline, Early Successional Habitat on 2.5 ac., one Grade Stabilization Structure, and Drainage Water Management.

Jason Makamson, Soil Conservationist for Bolivar County says, "With 100 acre feet of storage, Mr. Evans will be able to meet the seasonal needs of 100 acres of furrow irrigated soybeans or 50 acres of rice. Underground lines have been installed on all six adjacent fields to give the producer the flexibility to utilize surface water on the whole farm."



This project is a common practice across the delta landscape. Landowners are taking marginal cropland to develop surface water reservoirs. All tail water is returned to the pit and pumped into the reservoir and returned to the irrigation system. Rainfall is captured during winter months and used to pump onto cropland. This conservation practice reduces the heavy demand on pumping ground water from the Mississippi Alluvial Aquifer.

## Pete Hunter Receives 2012 MACD Cropland Conservationist Award

Story and Photo Submitted by Coahoma County SWCD

Pete Hunter, a local landowner and producer in Coahoma County has been farming for the past 40 years and he is well abreast of the concerns and issues regarding water conservation. Hunter received the 2012 Delta and statewide Cropland Conservationist Award from the Mississippi Association of Conservation Districts (MACD). This award recognizes row crop producers for outstanding accomplishments in the application and promotion of conservation practices on cropland, with special emphasis placed on conservation tillage and residue management.

With the assistance of NRCS technical assistance, and several other government agencies, he built an extensive tailwater recovery system, installed weirs and overfall pipes, dug a 20-acre reservoir for irrigation and implemented variable-rate fertilizer applications across the farms. Hunter was also featured in the *2012 Conservation In Action Tour*, demonstrating his tail water recovery system.

Hunter serves as a Commissioner of the Coahoma County Soil & Water Conservation District and is also 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the Mississippi Association of Conservation District Board. In addition, Hunter serves on a Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality taskforce that focuses on declining aquifer levels in the Delta.



At left, Pete Hunter addressed the MACD North Area Meeting. Pictured above is Pete in front of a 20 Acre reservoir that holds 150 ac-ft. of water and provides surface water irrigation for Stovall Farms, Coahoma County.



## Yazoo County Cattle Farmer Seeks Assistance Through NRCS

**Story and Photo by Taharga Hart, Soil Conservationist, Yazoo County**

Mr. Y. T. Gray grew up on a family farm in Yazoo County located near Old Dover Road. His parents gave him a heifer calf when he was about 13 or 14 years old. The heifer produced a number of calves that would later help with the financing of a college education at Mississippi Vocational College where he earned a B.S. Degree in Business Education.

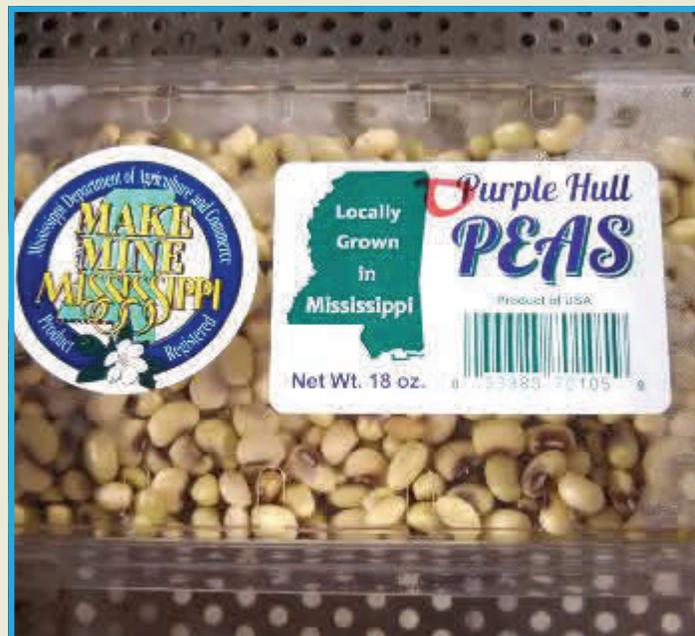
He began his professional career with the Memphis City Schools. Five years later he was accepted at Mississippi State University and earned a master degree in guidance education. He accepted a counseling position with the Saginaw Public School District in Saginaw Michigan. He continued his education with an Education Specialist Degree at Central Michigan University as well as a doctoral in Pupil Personnel Services at Michigan State University. Mr. Gray remained with the Saginaw School District for 35 years and retired as an administrator in 2006. His wife retired also.

He has two children that have completed their graduate studies and are employed. Throughout his life, Mr. Gray has always had an interest in farming. He is not ready to retire to the rocking chair. He came back home and purchased some land in the eastern part of Yazoo County with the intention of getting into the cattle business. He contacted the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office for assistance. Once the property was looked at, some recommendations were made. With 90% of the place being in one big open

pasture with one small pond, we looked at the possibility of installing a cross fence and making two small pastures and reworking existing pond and constructing a new pond to have water in both pastures.

By doing this, he could graze one pasture and let the grass grow in the other. We refer to this as "controlled or prescribed grazing". We also recommended doing a soil test to see what nutrients he may need to get maximum results. Looking further, we discovered a place that was eroding with gullies forming. We suggested that a pipe be installed to control this. We discussed the Environmental Quality Incentive Program to assist with his problems. EQIP is designed to help farmers and landowners with these type problems on a cost sharing basis.

Mr. Gray applied for assistance and was approved. With managing his herd this past summer and timely rains, he was able to take cows off one pasture for a while and get a cutting of good quality hay. Next year he would like to do another cross fence and add another pond to manage his grazing even more. He has applied for more assistance when funds are available.



Purple Hull Peas are packaged at the Alcorn State University Marks Vegetable Processing Facility for distribution to Walmart stores and Kroger franchises. Local farmers bring produce to the location in Quitman County where they are processed and kept in cold storage until pallets are shipped out on semi-trucks. For more information contact Percy Baldwin at 662-326-2531

## Delta Farmer Works with NRCS to Eliminate Nutrient Runoff

By Justin Fritscher, NRCS



*Adron Belk shows a drainage ditch on his Sunflower County farm. This is part of a larger system to conserve water and improve water quality.*

About a year ago, Adron Belk was studying real estate at the University of Mississippi. Now, he's farming some 2,700 acres in the Mississippi Delta. Was he surprised? "Not really," the 22-year-old said. He was born and raised in a farming family. He loves farming. And plus, the bachelor's degree in real estate is helpful when it comes to finding the right land to cultivate.

Belk farms in the Delta, where his fields are located near the Sunflower and Yalobusha rivers. The proximity of his land to these tributaries of the Mississippi River means his farming operation could have an impact on the health of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

But Belk is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to make sure no pollutants, fertilizers or sediments runoff his fields and into natural water bodies.

"I'm in support of anything that is better for the land," Belk said. "Farmers like us live off the land, and we have to take care of it."

Called the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), this toolbox of cost-share programs reduces agriculture's impact on water quality. MRBI is one of the NRCS' landscape initiatives that targets conservation practices to regions to have a positive outcome.

Pollutants, fertilizers and sediments that are washed from farms can degrade water quality, causing oxygen to be depleted from the water, among other environmental problems.

This initiative works with farmers like Belk to trap pollutants and prevent them from entering natural water bodies.

Belk implemented a tailwater recovery system on 280 acres, meaning he used levees, canals and a storage pond to separate his property from the watershed. This allows for water on his farm to stay on his farm. Water from rain and irrigation is collected by a network of ditches and pumped into an 18-acre storage pond.

When it comes time to irrigate, Belk is able to use the water from the pond to water his crops.

Levees keep water from leaving the site, allowing his farm to operate on its own separate water system.

"The tailwater ditch gives the suspended sediments time to settle, reducing the nutrients that enter Porter Bayou," NRCS Soil Conservationist Trinity Long said. "The finer sediments are pumped into the irrigation storage pond and given even a longer time to settle. Trapping these nutrients before they enter Porter Bayou has a positive effect on the Sunflower River where endangered freshwater mussels live."

Not only does this stop pollutants and fertilizers from leaving Belk's property, but it also minimizes his reliance on underground water sources for irrigation. This system saves 35.3 million gallons of water per year.

The Delta has seen alarming drops in its aquifers, so this tailwater recovery system not only improves water quality but increases water quantity. Implementing these cost-share practices also improved his farming operation. Through MRBI, Belk was able to bring his farm to precision level ground, allowing him to farm it more effectively.

Precision level farming also allows Belk to better irrigate and remove water from the land. Getting water off the land when in excess is just as important to farmers as is watering crops, Belk said.

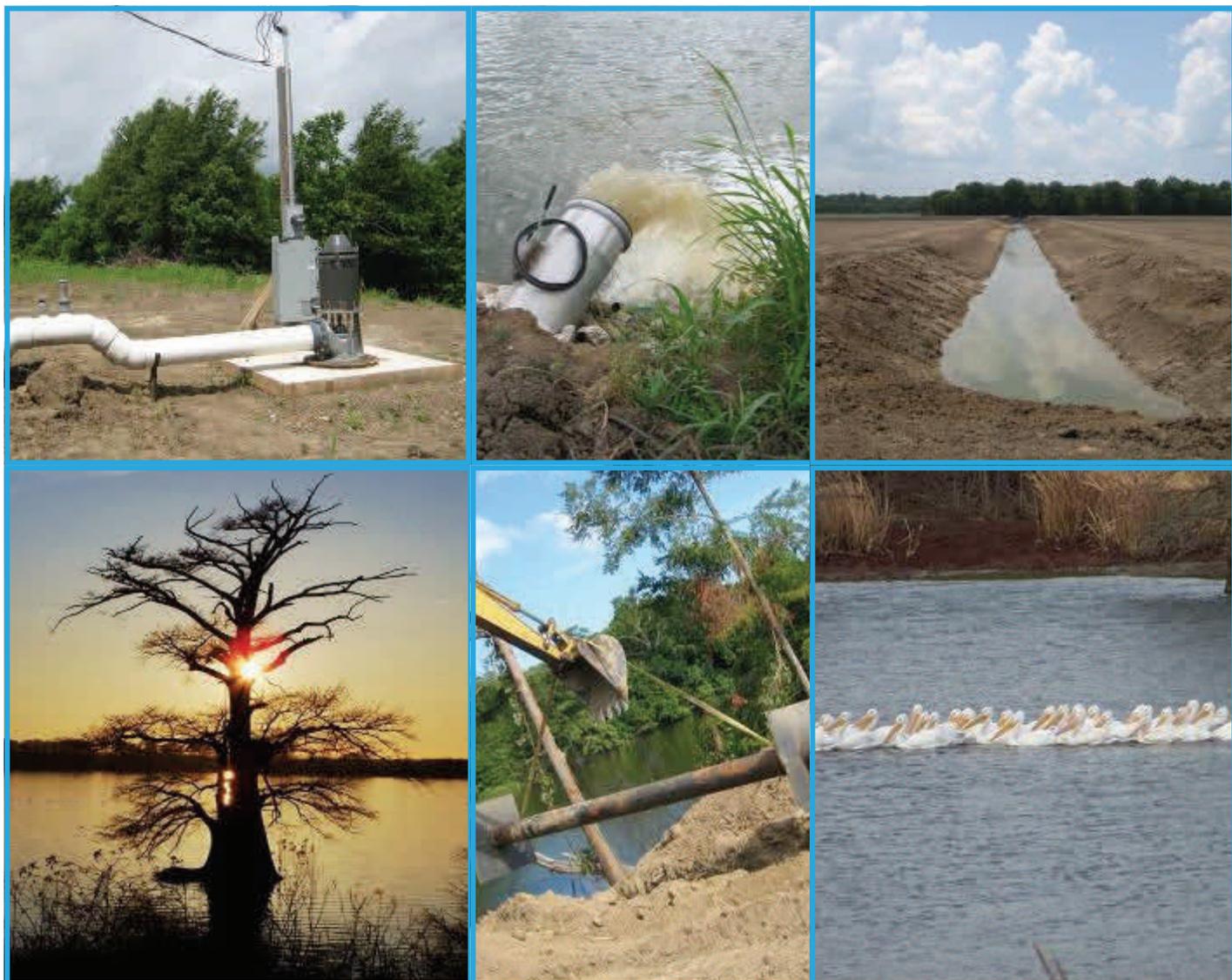
"This is a great example of how the NRCS and a farmer can help the environment and work with the farmer to increase production and efficiency," Long said.

### Partnerships Increase Conservation Success

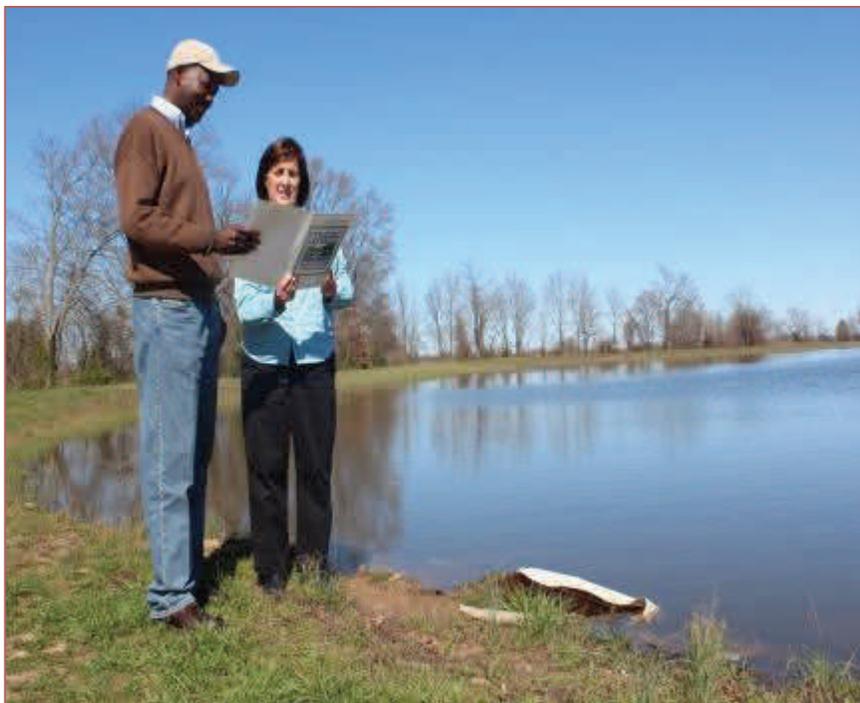
The impacts of MRBI are part of a larger strategy to reduce nutrients by different state and federal agencies as well as non-governmental organizations and landowners. The Nutrient Reduction Plan has enabled Mississippi to leverage various program funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, including MRBI, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and 319 funding.



**Washington County Photos Submitted by Soil Conservationist Blake New**



## Coming Home to Quitman County



Carl Handy discusses his conservation plan with Kathy Respass, NRCS, Quitman County, Marks Field Office

**By Justin Fritscher, NRCS Mississippi**

Carl Handy learned to farm on a cluster of fields in Quitman County, Miss. Then a boy, his father showed him how to work the land – and care for it.

Although Handy sought big city life after finishing college, he has found himself back where he began. An insurance agent by trade, he still maintains a 140-acre farm, where he grows mostly soybeans, wheat and sorghum.

“I knew I would always come back,” said Handy, who lived in Lake Charles, La., Atlanta and Chicago. He worked selling insurance for large companies. He now operates his own insurance office in Marks and his northern Delta farm. “I already knew the basic stuff, but I was able to come back and fine-tune those skills.”

The decision to farm was easy for him, he said. And the assistance he received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) made it even easier.

Soil Conservationists in Handy’s local USDA Service Center showed him the ropes of conservation practices, and how making these changes not only improves his operation but is good for the environment, too.

Most recently, Handy signed up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), allowing him to choose the conservation practices that best suited his needs.

“It’s very personalized,” Soil Conservationist Kathy Respass said. “It allows a landowner to choose what they want to invest in.”

Through CSP, Handy is able to improve water quality, provide habitat for wildlife and lower his operational costs. He holds water on his ponds during winter, creating an ideal habitat for migratory birds. “Mr. Handy allows his ponds to collect water during the winter, making it perfect for ducks,” Respass said. “I visited with him in February before he began to prepare for planting, and I saw that many ducks were enjoying the flooded fields.”

Also, as part of CSP, he tests the tissues of plants to gauge the amount of fertilizers needed, and he completes an annual survey for pests, enabling him to control insects with the appropriate amount of pesticide. Reducing fertilizers and pesticides also has benefits for David Bayou, a small waterway that cuts through his farm and feeds the Coldwater River, which eventually flows into the Mississippi River. Not only do these actions

reduce the amount of fertilizers and pesticides that could harm the environment, they also cut back on his costs. “It is important to control your use of fertilizers and pesticides,” he said.

Handy learned of CSP through networking with other farmers and his frequent visits to his local USDA Service Center. Eight years ago, Handy enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and he is actually working on another FOIP application for

***“I do this because I love it.”***

next year.

Handy said he plans to continue his relationship with NRCS. He has expanded his farm to about 150 acres – about half of which he leases from country legend Charley Pride. The other land is where he was raised, and when he is working the farm, he can still see his childhood home.

Applying for financial assistance does take time though, he said. “The programs are tremendously helpful, but you have to set aside some time to complete the application.” But it’s definitely worth it, he said. “Working with NRCS has been a wonderful experience,” he said of Respass, Supervisory District Conservationist Chauncey Newsome and other office staff. NRCS helps him make a career out of his favorite past-time. “I do this because I love it,” he said.

# Delta View Photo Gallery



Washington County Soil Erosion Project



Rip rap installed to control erosion in Washington County



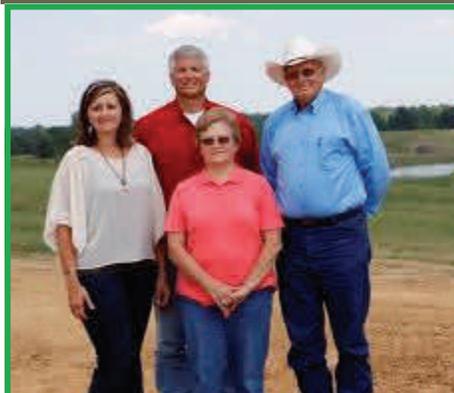
Construction Phase of a Tailwater Recovery Delta Pit and Irrigation Storage Reservoir Project in Leflore County



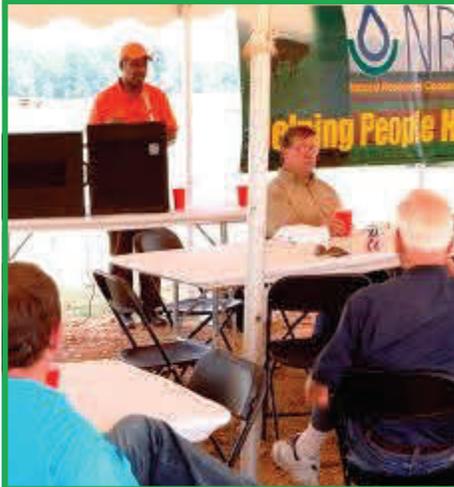
Scenes from Washington County. Photos submitted by Soil Conservationist Blake New.



## James Cattle Company Hosted GLCI Pasture Field Day



The Delta Area held it's first GLCI pasture field day on September 5 at the James Cattle Company in Northeast Tallahatchie County. Top left photo is Stacy and Greg James and Martha Fay and Terry James, owners. Guest speakers included Jimmy Ray Parish, Pennington Seed; Jane Parish, MSU Beef Specialist; Jeff Stewart, MDAC Ag Theft Bureau; NRCS Agronomist Walter Jackson, and Rocky Lemus, MSU Forage Specialist. The field day provided information on fall grazing varieties, meeting the nutritional needs of the herd, NRCS programs available to cattlemen, awareness of Ag related theft and brand registration and also integrated hay and grazing management strategies.



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**Quitman County SWCD  
 Commissioner Serves  
 30 years**

At the Quitman County Wildlife Supper in February 2013, H.D. Wiggs was recognized for his 30 years of service to the Quitman County Soil and Water Conservation District. He is pictured with Kevin Kennedy, Area Conservationist, Greenwood.



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Fred Childs presented awards at the Delta Summer Meeting to the following: (left to right) Chauncey Newsome, accepted for cropland, Jeanine Hughes, Coahoma SWCD and Yazoo SWCD Ellen Davis, and Taharga Hart, Soil Conservationist Yazoo accepted awards for poster contest winners.



Irrigation Storage Reservoir installation on the John Bush farm in Leflore County, 12 acre reservoir, 15 feet deep that provides 96 acre feet of surface water for irrigation.



GSS (Rock Chute) installed by Itta Bena Plantation III in West Leflore County draining into Lake Henry near MVSU. Financial assistance was provided through NRCS EQIP Program through the Leflore County Field Office.

