



Hugh Hammond Bennett (right), first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service.

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Stewardship is Way of Life: Sumner Farms Among Top New Mexico CSP Recipients

Gary Ross, along with New Mexico's other Conservation Security Program (CSP) 2005 recipients, was honored by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service as the state's at a ceremonial contract signing in Fort Sumner, August 18, 2005.

CSP is a voluntary program that rewards landowners for their conservation stewardship and improvements they've made to soil, water, air, energy, plant, and animal life.

Tending the soil while raising top quality milo ...

When Gary Ross chose to focus on production of milo seed he took steps to build one of New Mexico's finest farms and ranches. His operation in Roosevelt, Curry and DeBaca counties includes milo and wheat rotation, alfalfa and wheat rotation, cattle, and some Conservation Reserve Program land.

His main focus is the milo seed production. He alternates rows of male and female plants, planting male plants two rows at a time 10

days apart for the best pollination of the crop. He applies two tons of compost in the spring before planting the milo, takes samples of the compost to determine nutrient value, and finishes off the nutrient recommendations with commercial fertilizers. By sampling each well he monitors salts and nutrients in the water.

It is extremely important to note that Ross takes multiple soil samples on each field each year to get a nutrient recommendation.

Sumner Farm's soil and water quality are significant resource issues

Ross heeds as he identifies and addresses potential risks with ongoing stewardship. Ross takes actions that provide long-term environmental benefits to his land, and maintains and enhances his natural resources.

After the milo is harvested, there is no cultivation of any kind until the next fall when he runs a sweep plow twice with pickers and harrows. He then broadcasts wheat seed and fertilizer together and harrows. During the winter he lightly grazes the wheat and milo stubble, and next spring terminates the wheat and plants directly into the standing wheat stubble with milo again.



East Area Conservationist: Changes Are Staggering



Ken Walker
East Area Conservationist

Looking back over thirty years of working for the Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resources Conservation Service, I am amazed at the changes that have occurred, and the achievements working agricultural lands have made.

As a young range conservationist, I entered the work force in 1974, as a trainee in the Portales Field Office. The workload diversity was a shock to me. I thought as a range conservationist, I would work with ranchers only. My exposure to the irrigated and dryland farming industry was

a new concept. The experienced co-workers helped in my adjustment.

The change from then to now is staggering. Irrigation wells produced 1000-1500 gallons per minute. There was still a lot of surface irrigation, with side roll sprinklers and high pressure pivot sprinklers being the latest in technology. System efficiencies ranged from 35-40 percent on surface systems to 45-60 percent on side roll and pivots. Today, a 600 gallon per minute well is rare, and LEPA (Low Energy, Precise Application) and LESA (Low Energy Spray Application) irrigation systems of 85-90 percent efficiencies are the systems of choice in irrigation.

Conservation tillage methods are the standard now, replacing the clean tilled farms of the 70's. Grazing lands, almost all of which in the 70's practiced continuous yearlong grazing, now more and more embrace some system that incorporates a rest period for pastures to increase production and improve the resource base.

The NRCS has not changed, but the delivery system has evolved. From paper and pencil to computer generated maps

and conservation plans ... from \$25,000 limits to \$450,000 program contracts ... from using 200 foot steel chains and survey levels in checking out practices to GPS units and laser levels ... and from predominately white male to a gender and culturally diverse work force.

We have changed from a partnership that looked to SCS to provide leadership and guidance and survived on a \$1,000 dollar budget to a powerful political force that has put the conservation vision on the front pages of our newspapers, educated our legislators to the extent that millions are appropriated to fight non-native phreatophytes, and entered into contribution agreements with the NRCS to allow employment of 26 Farm Bill employees.


The one thing that hasn't changed is the dedication of the farmers and ranchers to the conservation of the resources they make a living on and the professionalism of the men and women employed by the NRCS. The methods may have changed, but the philosophy of the conservation movement remains the same. I am proud to have been a part of this movement and look forward to the years ahead.

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USDA Seeking Comments for Farm Bill 2007

The United States Department of Agriculture is accepting public comments regarding the development of the 2007 Farm Bill that are received prior to December 30, 2005. The USDA is seeking discussion on the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture in global and domestic markets, challenges facing new farmers and ranchers as they enter agriculture, appropriateness and effectiveness of the distribution of farm program benefits, achievement of conservation and environmental goals, and enhancement of rural economic growth and opportunities to expand agricultural products, markets, and research.

The public is being invited to provide comments on six specific questions based on these policy considerations:

1. How should farm policy be designed to maximize U.S. competitiveness and our country's ability to effectively compete in global markets?

2. How should farm policy address any unintended consequences and ensure that such consequences do not discourage new farmers and the next generation of farmers from entering production agriculture?
3. How should farm policy be designed to effectively and fairly distribute assistance to producers?
4. How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?
5. How can Federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas?
6. How should agricultural product development, marketing and research-related issues be addressed in the next farm bill?

Notice of these questions was published in the June 17, 2005 Federal Register, and comments are

being accepted at Farm Bill Forums held across the country. The Forums are being announced as they are scheduled. Comments may also be submitted electronically via the Internet at the USDA home page (<http://www.usda.gov>) by selecting "Farm Bill Forums," by email to FarmBill@usda.gov, or by mail to Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, Farm Bill, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3355.



Farm Bill Initiative Offers Hometown Help

With the recent funding increases through the 2002 Farm Bill, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) experienced larger and larger conservation planning workloads. To put it plainly, NRCS personnel were finding it difficult to keep up with the conservation planning demands. Then, in a stellar example of cooperative conservation, 25 Farm Bill specialists were hired by the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts.

Dean Bruce and Melanie Neal in Portales are two of these much welcomed employees.

Bruce was raised in Melrose, New Mexico, and earned a degree in animal science from New Mexico State University. He worked for the Farm Service agency in Farwell, Texas for a period and started as a Farm Bill specialist in Portales in November 2003. He moved up to Farm Bill conservationist in 2004 and specializes in assisting local dairies with environmental compliance issues. He has completed Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP), administers existing Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)



Above: Dean Bruce. Below: Melanie Neal

contracts on dairies, and determines needs on dairy EQIP applications.

“Dean is a virtual computer genius,” said Joe Whitehead, Portales district conservationist. “He assist with ArcGIS mapping, completes downloads, and produces maps.”

In addition to deftly making his way around dairies and the computer, Bruce assists field office staff with conservation practice planning, design, and check-out.

Melanie Neal was raised in Portales and received a degree in general agriculture from Eastern New Mexico University. She started as a Farm Bill specialist in Portales in September 2004.

Neal has completed literally hundreds of farm reconstitutions to keep local farmers in compliance with Farm Bill provisions, and keeps up with a heavy computer workload. Reconstitutions are the modification of records when the configuration of a farm changes through sale or some other event. She assists producers with EQIP applications for new contracts, checks out completed conservation practices, and assists with conservation compliance spot checks.

It has been two years since the New Mexico NRCS and New Mexico Department of Agriculture entered into a new agreement aimed at improving the delivery of the USDA Farm Bill programs to clients. These two agencies, with the backing of the New Mexico legislators, combined forces to hire Farm Bill employees in communities across New Mexico.

These employees quickly became an indispensable part of the NRCS Field Office operations. They took on technician and administrative tasks that were being done by conservation planners. They began building geographic information system plan maps, processing applications, and servicing contracts. As a result NRCS conservation planners were freed up to perform those critical functions in the field necessary to get conservation on the ground.

From July 2004 to April 2005 New Mexico's Farm Bill specialists have processed 3479 applications while servicing 4254 contracts. It was urgent that NRCS receive this help, and the New Mexico state legislature, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, and New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts definitely rose to the occasion. As a result of this partnership New Mexico

farmers and ranchers are receiving higher quality technical service, the effectiveness of federal dollars has been doubled, more farmers and ranchers are being served and receiving cost-share funds, small communities received some quality employment opportunities, and local people found a doorway into an agricultural career.

And it is people like Dean Bruce and Melanie Neal that are helping New Mexico farmers and ranchers, their neighbors, succeed and enhance the environment of our land. New Mexico's Farm Bill Employee Initiative is an effort that all parties have ample cause to be proud of. It is an example of cooperative conservation at its best.



PMC Releases Restoration Guidance

Years of Experience Available to Help Conservationists

The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center (PMC) has produced two flyers which discuss guidelines related to the restoration of riparian areas in the Southwest. “Guidelines for Planning Riparian Restoration in the Southwest” presents a number of concerns that must be addressed when developing riparian restoration projects as well as responses or solutions to these potential problems.

The problems described in the flyer are commonly faced during riparian restoration and include

- extreme depth to ground water and severe water table fluctuation,
- revegetation limitations due to soil salinity and/or soil texture extremes,
- loss of planting stock from the scouring action of flood flows,
- eradication of woody invasive species and the removal of the resulting biomass,
- identifying the appropriate plant community – woody riparian versus wet meadow,
- effect of weed competition on revegetation,
- advance planning for plant materials production and stock type decisions,
- planting methods for riparian sites,
- watering of planted containerized stock,

- protection and maintenance of revegetated sites, and
- the desired landscape objectives.

These concerns and the potential responses are based on two decades of riparian revegetation experience by the Plant Materials Center. The Center is always exploring new issues with demonstration plantings that can impact the success of revegetation efforts, and believes that others can learn from this trial experience.

The second flyer presents “Guidelines for Planting Dormant Pole Cuttings in Riparian Areas of the Southwest - The Pole Cutting Solution” is based on two decades of technology development at the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center.

The topics addressed include the advantages of use dormant pole cuttings as a revegetation stock type, characteristics of the pole cuttings which influence successful riparian restoration, site factors which affect the establishment of pole cuttings, and methods of planting pole cuttings and maintaining the revegetated site. This flyer addresses the lessons learned, and helps those contemplating a pole planting to consider the many issues which can affect the ultimate success of a riparian restoration project.

If you wish copies of these flyers for your own use or for distribution to interested groups, please contact the Plant Materials Center at (505-865-4684).



Field Test Conclusion Favorable: *Carbon Sequestering Estimation Tool Easily Usable*

A field test by individuals involved in crop production, livestock grazing, and conservation planning from six states concluded that a web-based carbon sequestering estimation tool is easily usable by farmers and ranches with no training needed. The states involved were Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, Texas, and Wyoming. Last spring Natural Resources Conservation Service's Chief Bruce Knight announced the availability of the Voluntary Reporting of Greenhouse Gases-Carbon Management Evaluation Tool (COMET-VR) to help farmers and ranchers report the effectiveness of various methods for agricultural soil carbon sequestration.

"Some power companies are taking preemptive steps in carbon credit trading by contracting with farmers for carbon sequestration," said John Gleim, NRCS New Mexico assistant state conservationist for programs. "While policies and technology are still developing, USDA in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy now has a tool that can help farmers and ranchers make decisions about good conservation practices that help with carbon sequestration."

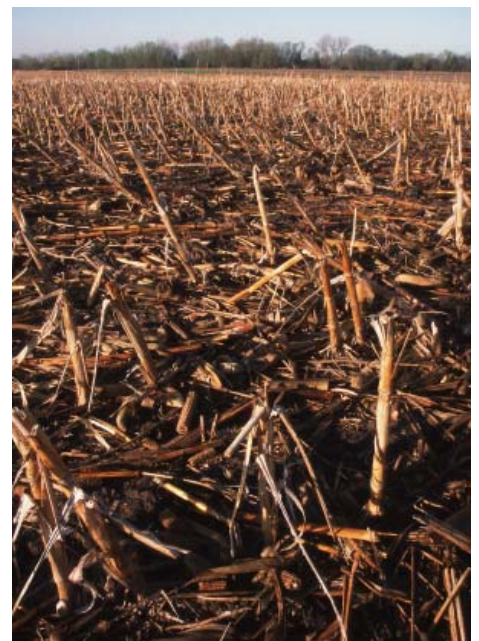
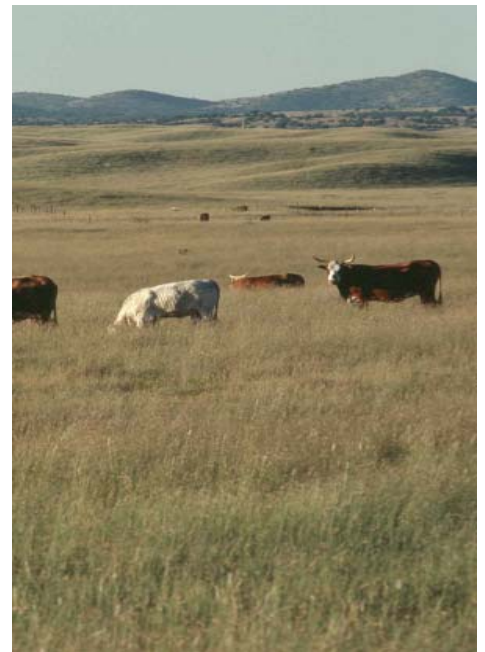
The increase in plants and plant materials can decrease carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, a process that is referred to as carbon

sequestration. Crops and other plants take up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. As these plants die and decompose some of their carbon is retained in the soil. Carbon accumulation in agricultural soils can be greatly improved by various conservation practices such as no-till farming, crop rotation, and plantings of perennial grasses. In fact, no-till, strip till, mulch till, and grazing management practices can create what are called carbon sinks.

Carbon sequestration is seen as a partial solution to global warming in that fossil fuel combustion produces 98.5 percent of the most prevalent greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide. How power companies can act to minimize the greenhouse effect is an evolving debate but one issue on the table is carbon credit trading which would allow landowners using conservation practices to sell carbon credits to companies that exceed emission standards.

While carbon credit trading could be the primary goal, there are other benefits of carbon sequestering. It can benefit soil and water quality, reduce soil erosion, and increase a farmer's or rancher's production.

If you wish to access COMET-VR and obtain additional information the website is <http://cometvr.colostate.edu/>



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