



United States Department of Agriculture



# USDA Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators

## *Success Stories*

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## **Preface**

The new Departmental Regulation (DR) 9700-001, Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Policy, dated August 3, 2006, emphasizes the importance and role of small farms and beginning farmers and ranchers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the establishment of strategies, systems, and a departmental framework for achieving and maintaining the viability of small farms and beginning farmers and ranchers.

Small farms have been critical to the American society throughout the Nation's history. Today, as historically, the vast majority of all farms in the United States are small. The viability and sustainability of these farms are important to our Nation's economy, to the wise stewardship of our biological and natural resources, and to the leadership and social fabric of rural communities. Their economic contribution is important to the Nation and is especially critical to the thousands of rural communities where they pay taxes and to the thousands of businesses they support.

This publication of success stories was prepared by the USDA Office of Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators. These stories highlight some of the successes that demonstrate the continuing efforts made by USDA to assist the Nation's small farmers and ranchers.

All photos were obtained from the USDA Photo Center Library and do not represent the farmers associated with the stories.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As Director of the USDA, Office of Small Farms Coordination, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all the Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators who worked so diligently to provide input to this publication. These dedicated individuals are essential to the future and viability of America's small family farms.

This publication is another demonstration of their commitment to the Department's efforts to reach out to agricultural and rural communities. These success stories further illustrate that small farms play an important role in the U.S. agricultural sector. Many thanks to the subcommittee members: Kathryn Hill, Office of Communications; Sharon Hestvik, Risk Management Agency; Velma Charles-Shannon and Geraldine Herring, USDA Office of Outreach; and Sharon Colbert and Edgar Lewis, Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

I wish to give special thanks to Cheryl Bailey, Forest Service, Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinator, for coordinating the stories, and Rosannah Taylor, Assistant to the Director, Office of Small Farms Coordination, for coordinating and editing the final document. I deeply appreciate the work of Lisa M. Mason, USDA Office of Outreach, Program Marketing Specialist, who worked closely with the committee on the cover, design, and layout. Also, I wish to thank all the other individuals who contributed to the success stories and helped to make this publication possible.

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## USDA Small Farms and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Coordinators

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### **“Sweet Success” With Sugar Beets:**

**Rocky Norby**, a sugar beet grower in eastern Montana, thought he knew everything there was to know about raising beets. For more than 30 years, he has tended to the region's wind-whipped soil, turning tiny, vulnerable beet seeds into fat, sugar-rich roots. But last year, Norby took a big risk. He decided to make changes to his farming equipment and try a new tilling tactic.

At a meeting, researchers with Agricultural Research Service Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory and agricultural engineer Robert Evans were describing a new tillage system for specialty crops like sugar beets. It not only could boost yields and reduce energy costs, but it also had great potential to enhance soil and water conservation and reduce fertilizer applications. Norby was sold.

The ARS technology, refined by Evans and colleague Bill Iverson, is called strip tilling. Farmers practice it in the Midwest, but it has not caught on in the Northern Plains region for a lack of appropriate equipment and know-how.

The benefits of this technology are extensive, including reduced fuel costs, boosted yields and enhanced soil and water conservation. And, because it encourages more vegetative stubble to be left standing, more soil is locked in place and tender emerging beet plants are shielded from spring windstorms.

"After using the tillage method last year," says Norby, "I got the best sugar beet yields I've ever had." Norby is continuing with the system this year on his family's farm. And as good news about the ARS

technology travels, other area farmers are investing in strip tillage equipment for their operations.

### **Adding Value to Farm Operation Through Conservation: Todd Bushong**

is owner and operator of Bushong Farms, a fifth generation, 2000-acre farm in Hand County, South Dakota. The farm is owned and operated by a family whose ancestors homesteaded in the late 1800s. Bushong Farms is now managed to maximize not only crop, but also wildlife production. "We strongly believe that not only can conservation and wildlife management co-exist with production agriculture, but they can actually add value to our farming operation," said Todd Bushong. "By adding value to our operation through conservation, we also add value to our community by bringing rural economic development from hunting and ag-tourism," stated Bushong.

Bushong has enrolled several parcels of land into the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), implementing practices that complement both his farming and hunting operations. Practices include field windbreaks, farmable wetlands, and marginal pastureland wetland buffer. Bushong also has over 300 acres in the CRP devoted to native grasses, legumes, and forage.

In addition to wildlife habitat, Bushong has noticed decreased salinity and increased yields in cropland adjacent to the wetland buffers. "There are big water quality benefits from no longer cropping and applying fertilizer and pesticides adjacent to the wetlands," he said. "The creek banks that eroded from cattle paths have healed, and plant diversity has returned."



"As a society, we must continue to give agriculture this tool of conservation to use against the population and economic decline of our rural areas," said Todd Bushong. "Conservation is not only an environmental buffer along a stream, but a buffer against the rural economic decay caused by the advancement in agricultural technology."

**Farmers Marketing for Success:** In the Seattle area, the **Songger Cha and Vue Lee** families have been farming and selling at farmers' markets since they first immigrated to the region from Laos in the late 1980s. They became interested in a Risk Management Agency (RMA) Partnership program for Hmong farmers because they wanted to learn more about marketing techniques. At one of the marketing classes in early 2006, they learned to make farm business cards and banners to advertise their farms. Songger Cha has already handed out an entire stack of business cards and, as a result, has received four new orders for wedding flowers. He feels that having a banner makes his family's market stall look better and more organized. He also noticed that some customers come back again because they remember the farm sign and associate the freshness of the produce and the



flowers with the banner. As a result of their participation in the RMA pilot program, the

Vue family also made business cards and a banner for their market booth. They feel that customers like their new farm sign and that it helps their booth attract more attention. Mrs. Vue has started distributing business cards and has already given away her entire supply. She says that having the farm name written makes life easier because she does not have to spell it out every time a customer wants to write her a check.

**Giving Back: A Passion for Education:** With funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA), Washington State University (WSU) Small Farms Program hired **Bee Cha**, as a Hmong Specialist. He became part of a WSU small farms team that was developing and testing new risk management tools with Hmong farm families across Washington State. The partnership also initiated a new partnership with Heritage College in Toppenish to develop pilot programs for the Yakima Tribe. Bee Cha's family first came to Washington from Thailand in 1989. Although he was 15 years old, Cha had never had any formal education. Indeed, he had literally been taught that the world was flat. He enrolled in eighth grade, but had to start completely from the ground up. The next year, he had to enroll in eighth grade all over again. It took him 2 years before he felt comfortable striking up a conversation. After 5 years, he graduated from Sammamish High School in 1994. Bee Cha attended Bellevue Community College for 4 years, and what he learned there turned his world upside down. Among the new ideas and principles that he was exposed to were calculus, Newton's Mechanics, Boyles Law, Gauss Law, and Darwin's Theory of Evolution. He attended WSU and graduated with a bachelor of science degree in chemical engineering in 2004. He then returned to work in his family's market garden near Seattle, Washington.



Bee Cha wanted to find a way to give back to his family, his clan, and the Hmong community. He feels that working on this RMA Partnership with WSU helped him meet his goal of giving something back to his community. In his words, “I love the complex and immense diversity of race, ideas, and morals. Most importantly, I truly believe that it is here that I think I will best serve the Hmong people through education.” He hopes that through the help and expertise available from WSU and the RMA, Hmong farmers can really thrive.

**Farmers’ Mission: Growing Vegetables in Oregon: Solveig Hanson**

is part of a farmer cooperative that markets locally grown farm products to households and institutions in Oregon. Solveig grows an array of vegetables such as green beans, peas, squash, kohlrabis, garlic, sweet corn, and baby corn. Baby corn is either sweet corn or regular field corn that is harvested just when the ear silks. Baby corn ears are approximately 4 inches long and are used in stir fry or can be eaten raw.

Several growers in the cooperative raise vegetables, and others provide such items as baked goods, beef, chickens, eggs, apples, and berries. While Hanson’s farm is not certified organic, she does not use any synthetic chemicals, but instead uses crop rotation and composting to maintain soil fertility. Vegetable scraps are composted along with manure and bedding from a neighboring farmer and the pile is turned regularly. Compost is the only soil amendment used on the farm.

Approximately 200 families in the local area receive produce from the cooperative each week. All items are packed in waxed

boxes that are cleaned, sanitized, and re-used up to 10 times. Each weekly delivery includes a newsletter with a list of items currently available, recipes for those items, and a farmer profile or news from a member farm. Some members pick up their produce at the farm, while others receive home delivery via a refrigerated truck. Members can choose to receive a weekly Farm Share—a share of whatever is ripe on the farm—or they can choose to order weekly from the cooperative’s Web site. The co-op also provides produce to restaurants, institutions, and a grocery store in the area. Finally, Farm Shares are made available to low-income members of the community through sponsorship from local churches, businesses, and individuals.

While very labor-intensive, the operation is showing a profit and is providing fresh foods and produce to citizens of Northeast Oregon.







**National Small Farmer Award:** A Miami County, Missouri, farmer, **Harrison and his wife Dolly McCallop**, who are both active in conservation programs, were selected for the National Small Farmer Award sponsored by the National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees (NOPBNRCSE). The presentation was made at the annual meeting of the NOPBNRCSE in Sacramento, California. The McCallops received a plaque and a silver bowl to commemorate their work in conserving soil and water and for their environmental efforts to promote clean air. The McCallops raise Pinzgauer cattle, feed grains, soybeans, and hay on their 220-acre farm. When they purchased the land, it had severe erosion from wind and water and a history of row cropping. With assistance provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, they installed 1,890 feet of terraces, 3 acres of grass waterways, 1.8 acres of buffer strips, 20 acres of wildlife habitat, and 40 acres of pasture management, and reduced their row cropping system to approximately 65 acres.

Harrison McCallop is also a founding member of the Kansas Black Farmers Association.

**Farmers Save the Birds:** What began as a personal love of the outdoors evolved into a wildlife habitat restoration project for landowners **James and Georgina Matz** of Cameron County, Texas. Matz and his wife have always considered themselves stewards of the environment and own land located near Rio Hondo, Texas, along the Arroyo River in Colorado.

The Arroyo River in Colorado is an ancient inland channel of the Rio Grande River which flows through the Rio Grande Valley and empties into the Laguna Madre. It serves as Laguna Madre's largest source of freshwater. The Arroyo Colorado basin consists of about 500,000 acres of flat coastal plains and serves as the primary water source for more than 20 irrigation districts in the region. The Arroyo Colorado is the lifeblood of this highly cultivated area of Texas.

Matz pursued his idea of a wildlife habitat, offering to enroll a small parcel of 9 acres of cropland in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and to establish the parcel as a permanent wildlife habitat. When the land was accepted for CRP enrollment, Matz immediately began working to establish a wildlife refuge. Devoting over 3 months to the effort, Matz successfully planted permanent grasses and woody plants, specifically, native species





including plains bristlegrass, switchgrass, blackwell, sideoats grama, Illinois bundle-flower, maximillian sunflower, mesquite, huisache, and sabal palms.

As a way to share his love of the outdoors and the fruits of his labor, Matz provides free tours of his CRP wildlife habitat to student groups, environmental clubs, and bird-watching organizations.



**“Time to Act” Going to Louisiana:** The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Louisiana has accepted the challenge from “A Time to Act” report by The National Commission on Small Farms and incorporated it into every NRCS program in the State. **Dexter Davis**, a minority farmer and NRCS Earth Team volunteer, worked with Evades Fields, coordinator for the Louisiana Association of Community Based Organizations, to help plan and conduct the informative meeting that involved about 50 minority agricultural producers in northeast Louisiana. The Louisiana Family Farm Technical Assistance Program, LFFTAP-2501 program, administered through Southern University's College of Agricultural, Family, and Consumer Sciences, has evolved into a solid small farmer assistance program. It is through the dedication of farmers like Dexter Davis who contributes to the success in various communities by ensuring that all land users were informed of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and given the opportunity to participate in the cost share program.





**Got Land? Got Vegetables: Clyde Pleasants** and his wife Jean (“Granny”) could not have done it without the help of their family, friends, and neighbors who think the world of them. Here is how this heartwarming story began: One day a few years back, Pleasants was in the country store talking to his friend and neighbor, Tommy Hobgood. He told him he would love to put up more fences, add watering troughs, plant grass, and just fix up the farm for his cows! Hobgood told him, “You need to go and see Warren and Diana at the Soil Conservation office and get you some of that money they’re giving out. Everybody else has and you might as well, too!” So Pleasants went into the National Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Oxford field office in 2004 and asked about assistance to improve his 60+ acres farm to provide water, fencing, and re-seeding of pastures for his 15 cows. He said he had a limited fixed income and could use all the help he could get. He qualified for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).

Pleasants and his neighbors went straight to work. Little by little as the work progressed, more and more neighbors began to adopt this EQIP project. They started in October 2005 and by May 2006, they had completed the well, pasture planting, fences and watering facilities. This was a job well done, under the charge and hard work of his devoted daughter Mamie and ringleader Haywood Faucette (“adopted” son and close neighbor). With neighbors and friends, they all worked tirelessly until the job was completed, and now they have a lot to be proud of. What started out as your typical farm project soon became a labor of love and an example for all in the community.

**Brothers Help Improve the Chesapeake Bay:** In April 2003, the Kauffman brothers of Kauffman Brothers Farm, a family beef cattle and grain operation located in a scenic, rural setting in southern Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, enrolled 24.8 acres of their family farm in the Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). They also enrolled 2.8 additional acres adjacent to their land under lease agreements with the neighboring landowners.

The entire CREP acreage is enrolled in a 15-year contract with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) as a forested riparian buffer. For Kauffman Brothers Farm, this agronomics improvement area included forested stream buffers where native hardwood trees were planted, stream-bank fencing was erected, stabilized livestock stream crossings were installed, a well drilled, pipeline laid, and water troughs strategically placed.

The Kauffman brothers’ goals are to improve herd health by removing the animals from the streams, protect water quality, reduce soil erosion and agricultural runoff, and create a wildlife habitat. Establishing a stream buffer on the streams that flow through their pastures prevents their cattle from entering the stream and its banks, protecting the health of the livestock and the stream ecosystem.





The Kauffman brothers also installed stream-bank fencing to prevent the animals from entering the stream, along with planting permanent native vegetation on the stream banks and in the riparian zone. This procedure will greatly reduce soil loss from the farm and protect herd health.

Through cooperation in CREP, and along with partners involved with the program, the Kauffman Brothers have been able to convert their family farm from a cash grain farming operation to a grassland operation which has a huge overall environmental benefit.

### **A Good Farmer Becomes a Better**

**Farmer: Keith Royston**, a hog and hay farmer in the State of Texas, has a family size operation. The farm is equipped and designed to serve small markets in lower income areas with “top quality hogs.” With the United States’ population increasing daily, quite naturally lower income areas have increased also, mostly with small children and/or people who have migrated to the United States. These families with small children, immigrants, and people on fixed incomes are struggling to meet their needs.

As a minority farmer, Royston received assistance from NRCS, through its Environmental Quality Incentive Program. NRCS also has completed a Waste Nutrient and Management Plan for his hog operation. Other support came from Texas A and M University and Prairie View A and M University, grants, and other information from the USDA Office of Outreach.

Any and all success comes with trials and difficulties. Royston said he can proudly

say, “It has not always been a bright journey. However, in those difficult times - ironically, I gained most of my knowledge and achievements.” Royston said, he will not exchange the experience for anything. It helped him understand what is important, changed his outlook on a personal level, and increased his devotion on a broader scale. Royston says, “I am well acquainted and versed in sanitation standards for operational procedures, and hazard analysis and critical control point regulations for global marketing.”

**Refugees in Oregon Go Organic:** Five families of Meskhetian Turkish refugees who arrived in Portland, Oregon, in late 2005 from Russia received the benefits of a new agriculture project funded by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) Community Outreach Partnership, Mercy Corps’ Northwest Ecumenical Ministries, and Oregon Tilth. RMA provided outreach and training assistance to the immigrant and refugee farmers to help them successfully manage their 5 acres of agriculture land, which includes an



irrigation pond and three certified acres as an organic farm and business operation for optimal risk management.



The Meskhetian Turks are political refugees, and farming is in the blood of the four extended families that encompass “Hayat” (New Life) Farm. These farmers grew produce in Russia for 16 years, and are now farming 5 acres at Malinowski Farm, which is certified organic by Oregon Tilth. The farm is located approximately 6 miles west of downtown Portland near Beaverton. The refugee families hope to make farming a “full-time job” in the future in order to support themselves and their families, and become a part of the region's farming community.

**John Drew/Joe Jennings and Camp CARVER— A Dream Comes True for Two:** Agricultural Resourceful Visionaries Entering Real-life Camp (CARVER) is a dynamic, nonprofit youth day camp located in Kansas City, Kansas. It was founded in 2004 and named in honor of the legendary, scientist, Dr. George Washington Carver. At Camp CARVER, city dwelling youth between the ages of 6-16 are given an opportunity to be exposed to the joys and entrepreneurial benefits of agriculture, farming, and animal science. Youth can participate in organic farming, free range poultry, rabbit production, catfish farming, worm composting, swine management, and goat and honey bee production. Camp CARVER is the result of a collaboration between founders **John F. Drew III** and farmer/landowner **Joe Jennings**. Drew, an Animal Poultry Dairy Science and Industry graduate of Tuskegee University, desired to share the experiences he learned about agriculture from Kansas State University and his alma mater, Tuskegee University. Drew developed a love for animals at a very young age; this love was fostered and encouraged by his parents, John F. Drew and Lois Watson Drew, both elementary school teachers.

Veterinarian Dr. William Swoope, a 1965 Tuskegee Institute graduate, enhanced this love during a visit to health careers day at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School (Kansas). It was at that moment in 1976 that Drew made up his mind to attend Tuskegee and to pursue his dream of becoming a veterinarian. While studying Agriculture and Animal Sciences in his sophomore year at Kansas State University, Drew was able to transfer and to realize his life-long dream of attending Tuskegee University.

After several years, Drew overcame many setbacks in his finances, and physical and mental health, and he received a bachelor of science degree in Animal/ Poultry Dairy Sciences and Industry from Tuskegee in 1993. Although he did not become a veterinarian, he felt that it was part of his life-time mission to give back to the community and to share the values and lessons that others instilled in him.



In 2004, Drew met an extraordinary and fascinating farmer by the name of **Joe Jennings**, a retired U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant. He had retired as a construction trades instructor from Sumner High School and Area Vocational Trade School. Jennings, now 78, had dedicated the better part of his life to instilling the value of hard work, faith, ingenuity, and resourcefulness in young people. One of Jennings many



mottos is “don’t say you got it made unless you know a trade.” After coming to Kansas City from Texas in the early 1960s, Jennings continued to demonstrate his love of farming and gardening by buying vacant lots in the city and raising vegetables and fruits. Jennings, who grew up in the era of segregation, desired to own a farm and searched for over 40 years to make this dream come true. In 2006, he proudly completed paying the note on a 211-acre property in Texas. Jennings also maintains an 8-½-acre organic U-pick subscriber farm in Kansas City, Kansas. Joe Jennings shared Drew’s vision for Camp CARVER and has selflessly donated his 8-½-acre farm, time, resources, knowledge, and finances to make Camp CARVER a reality.

Drew and Jennings were acknowledged for their efforts by receiving an award at the 64th Annual Tuskegee Professional Agriculture Workers Conference on December 4, 2006, in Tuskegee, Alabama.



**Alligators and Other Wildlife Go Shallow:** In 1989, **James Seymour** of Madison Parish, Louisiana, signed a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract agreeing to create a Shallow Water Area for Wildlife. He was so pleased with the results that when the contract expired in 1999, he offered it for reenrollment for an additional 10 years, and the new contract was approved.

Since the land was placed in the CRP, wildlife has increased and new species have established homes in the area. Now the American alligator as well as numerous birds, amphibians, mammals, and other reptiles make the area their home.

Adjacent to the shallow water area are over 200 acres also enrolled in CRP and devoted to hardwood tree planting of saw tooth and water oak. These acres were actually planted using acorn seeds found within 100 yards of the shallow water area.





The CRP contract acres have generated revenue from both the annual rental payments and from leasing hunting rights to individuals. The increased income has made a significant difference to the Seymour farming operation.

The American alligator now enjoys habitat created by CRP Shallow Water Area for Wildlife.

Using acorns, Saw Tooth and Water Oak trees were planted under CRP contract in 1990.

**Okanogan Producers Team Up to Market Crops:** In today's environment of agricultural economic decline, six farm families in Okanogan County, Washington, and a couple of supportive community members came together in 2004 to explore the feasibility of a roadside stand along State Highway 97. The families were **Michael Simon, John and Cindy Bartella, Karen Beller and David Morgan, Watershire Woods, Jim and Sandee Freese, and Norm and Diana Weddle.** They spent a year researching potential locations, competition, and costs, while also expending considerable effort to include the community and to inform them of their hopes to build a locally based, sustainable, direct marketing venture.



The market stand proved to be a marginally viable venture. However, their cooperative efforts caught the eye of another regional organization. Farming and the Environment, a Seattle-based, nonprofit organization, was looking to demonstrate that regional producer marketing and distribution alliances could help keep farming profitable. As a result, the newly formed Okanogan Marketing Association producers agreed to participate in a pilot project and reported that one of their members who may have literally "lost the farm" has been able to survive. Also, as a result of the pilot project, and with the assistance of the community and USDA, the producers were able to locate and market their crops on the west side of Washington State. Crops at the roadside market range from numerous fruits and vegetables to shiitake mushrooms, as well as heirloom apples and garlic seeds.



Originally the six member farms were fruit orchard growers, and the problem of filling produce orders arose. The orchard growers are now planting row crops as well, and there is an opportunity for new beginning farms to enter that age-old and growing occupation: Farming!



**Two Decades of Support Through FSA Farm Loan Programs:** Robert Wellman is the second generation to benefit from the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) farm loan program and succeed. Robert Wellman and his wife Joan began their association with FSA more than 20 years ago when they received funding through the emergency loan program.

At that time the Wellmans were operating land owned by his mother. When drought struck the northern border of Montana, the Wellmans found they were unable to receive credit from a commercial source to continue operation through the disaster. However, they did not stop there. They proceeded to obtain a direct operating loan from FSA to buy 200 head of cattle. Within 10 years, the Wellmans were able to pay back the loan and graduate from the FSA loan program.

According to Robert Wellman, "FSA did us a favor. We didn't want to graduate, but we paid the 30-year loan off in 10 years. They wouldn't let us stay." He was able to graduate to a commercial source that he has been with ever since.

Today, the Wellmans run approximately 1,500 head of cattle and farm 20,000 acres near the Canadian border in Montana.



**Farmer, Researcher, and Partner on Herb Project:** David C. Carman has such a small operation that when he speaks of crops, he is speaking of ginseng and other herbs and some wild flowers. Don't talk to him about acres--he speaks in terms of square feet and scattered patches, both at the edges of and inside wooded areas.

Carman works with the Medicinal Botanicals Program, a joint venture of the Agricultural Research Service's Appalachian Farming Systems Research Center in Beaver, West Virginia, and neighboring Mountain State University. Carman has written a manual on how to grow ginseng. He also recently earned a 2007 Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) farmer grant that will enable him to learn how to grow and propagate two herbs extremely rare in the wild, Virginia snakeroot and false unicorn. Carman fertilizes his herbs with composted wood and leaves from the trees that shade his herb patches. He will grow the herbs side by side in a 5,000-square-foot patch. In 3 years, he will publish a manual on how to grow the two herbs.

SARE is a program of USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service that funds projects and conducts outreach designed to advance farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound, and good for communities through a nationwide research and education grants program.

With all his herbs, Carman prides himself on only using plants that are descendants of herbs native to his southern West Virginia area. He collected a few plants years ago and produces seeds to plant. He distributes both plants and seeds to area farmers and other customers, often giving them away.





**Trucking Sweet Melons and Juicy Peaches to the City: Melvin Bishop**, a Georgia native, is a force with which to be reckoned. After his highly successful administration of the Georgia Chapter of the Black Farmers and Agriculturists Association (BFAA), Melvin Bishop, with the help and assistance of his wife, Annie, started African American Family Farmers, Inc. in 2000.

In June 2004, Melvin Bishop and three other Black farmers made a grueling 14-hour drive from his farm near Eatonton, Georgia, to truck watermelons, cantaloupes, peaches, tomatoes, peppers, collard greens, and sweet corn to a farmers market in a predominantly Black and Latino community in Chicago. "Once they tasted that sweet melon and those juicy peaches, people came back asking for more," he said. We didn't have enough so we planned to bring more on our next trip." And, the word spread from there!"



The African American Family Farmers, Inc., represents about 375 farmers in Georgia and 500 family farmers across the South. A staunch, loyal advocate of Black farmers everywhere, Bishop works tirelessly to help those whom he can. His main mission is to "assist the targeted farmers, improving the effectiveness of our farms to make them more profitable."

Bishop has worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture since 1999, traveling to Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Washington, DC.





**Go-Getter Has Fresh Ideas for Hard-wood Seedlings:** Peter Williams, a native of Louisiana, is an intelligent, energetic, and young go-getter who started his hardwood seedling business, Resource One Nursery, with \$150. Working together, Peter Williams his wife Alfreda, and their four children, Cornelius, Nathanael, Alanna, and Jasper, have turned Resource One Nursery into a very successful family business with seedlings planted in Arkansas and Mississippi, as well as Louisiana. Resource One Nursery was named the Small Business Administration's minority service firm of the year in 2001.



A born leader with fresh ideas and new approaches to old problems, Williams uses his intelligence and leadership skills to help his fellow farmers. He involved all segments of the community, including faith-based organizations. Williams is instrumental in organizing, revitalizing, and mobilizing small, minority farmers. With a grand vision, he will lead them into future successes.

At a gathering to discuss their successful farming operations, Jasper Williams, the youngest child, told those in attendance, "They say that money doesn't grow on trees, but for our family, **It Does!!!**"

has traveled to Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Washington, DC. He also played a major role in the very successful small, minority farmer workshop held in Alexandria, Louisiana, in 2004.

**Cattle Roam Free: Grass-Fed Beef Producer:** White Oak Pastures, a regional producer of premium grass-fed beef in Early County, has become the leading grass-fed beef producer in Georgia. **Will Harris**, owner of White Oak Pastures, has always been a cattleman at heart. Harris's family has been in the cattle business for over 140 years, but not until 6 years ago did he change the way his cattle were raised. He started researching the high-end market for beef focusing on those consumers who wanted a local producer who treated animals humanely and with no hormones. Grass-fed beef production met those requirements. And, after 4 four years of preparation, he was able to start selling his ground beef in 2005.



The cattle roam free and graze on 1,000 acres of rich grassland. They are processed in small groups at a facility close to the Harris farm. White Oak Pastures beef is hand-cut, immediately double ground, and then vacuum sealed, making it "fresher than fresh," said Harris. No additives are used.



All-Natural Grass-Fed Ground Beef is distributed through Publix Supermarkets, and White Oak Pastures Tree of Life, which delivers it to frozen food sections of natural foods and health food stores along the Eastern seaboard, from Florida to Maine. Unveiled in May 2003 by the nonprofit Humane Farm Animal Care, and now being used by 47 companies, the “Certified Humane” label assures consumers that White Oak Pastures animals receive a nutritious diet free of antibiotics or hormones and are raised with shelter, resting areas, and space that are sufficient to support natural behavior.

In 2005, Harris received a grant from USDA Rural Development under the Value Added Producer Grant Program to assist him in marketing his beef and for standard operating expenses. He commented that his success would not have progressed to this point if USDA had not believed in his vision and awarded him those funds.



### **Hawaiian Farmers Control Fruit**

**Flies:** You would think Hawaii would be paradise for small farms, with land capable of yielding up to five crops a year. However, the invasion of four exotic fruit flies has forced many farmers to abandon traditional and commercial crop production or resort to weekly sprayings of expensive and harsh pesticides. Neither one is a winning solution for Hawaiian farmers or Hawaii's environment. But a Hawaii Area Wide Fruit Fly Integrated Pest Management (HAW-FLYPM) Program created by USDA's Agricultural Research



Service (ARS), in partnership with the University of Hawaii and the Hawaiian Department of Agriculture, is giving farmers renewed opportunity to harvest a profitable and environmentally friendly crop from even a few acres.

The program depends on monitoring and trapping with insect pheromones that are very specific to the pest fruit flies, along with extensive removal of all unharvested fruit and other biological management techniques.

"ARS showed me how to do the basics; now I'm refining the program," said **Earl**



**Yamamoto**, whose 60-acre farm in in Kamuela, Hawaii, mainly produce peppers and melons. Since getting control of fruit flies with the HAW-FLYPM Program, he has added zucchini and persimmons, which are especially popular and high-value crops in Hawaii.

Many persimmon orchards were abandoned as fruit fly problems grew. But knowing he could control fruit damage without repeated pesticide spraying encouraged Yamamoto to risk planting new trees, and his harvests are increasing.

"We started off very small because I wasn't really sure that I could harvest good fruit. Last year, I harvested well over 2,000 pounds and buyers are grabbing it up as quickly as I harvest," Yamamoto said.

Now, Yamamoto is considering adding blueberries to his crop roster. "We could harvest blueberries all year round here if we don't have fruit flies," he said.

There have been a number of attempts over the years to suppress Hawaiian agriculture's fruit fly pests. The HAW-FLYPM Program is the first to actually work. It is leading to a whole new generation of small farmers in Hawaii.

### **Marketing Grass-Fed Beef and Other Small-Farm Specialties: Martha**

**Holdridge**, whose organic West Wind Farm in West Virginia has grazing Black Angus cattle, organized the Highlands Pastures Network. It is a growing group of West Virginia farmers who meet monthly. Bill Clapham, a plant physiologist at the ARS Appalachian Farming Systems Research Center in Beaver, West Virginia, regularly attends the group's meetings to share what he and ARS colleagues have learned about raising grass-fed animals and marketing their products. The Highlands Pastures Network includes farmers who raise beef cattle, free-ranging poultry, lambs, and goats on mountainous land that has from 10 to 100 acres of useable pasture.



Some network members are also members of a county group that runs a farmers' market and sells to a resort and restaurants. Holdridge sells to customers in the Washington, D.C., area.

Holdridge rotates her Black Angus cattle to fresh pasture every 1 to 3 days. She markets her beef as "Mountain-Pastured Beef," capitalizing on research that has shown that altitude or elevation--as well as a grass



Holdridge markets her beef as low in fat, calories, and *E. coli* risk--as well as high in beneficial fatty acids, beta carotene, and vitamins A and E. This is based on fatty acid analyses done by Susan Duckett at Clemson University in South Carolina as part of a consortium of ARS and four other universities--West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV; Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA; University of Georgia, Athens, GA; and Clemson University Clemson, South Carolina.

**Through Word-of-Mouth Outreach Technician Helps Limited-Resources Minority Communities: Paul Watkins, Jr.,** is the first and only full-time employee of the Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) whose work focuses on outreach to limited-resources minority communities. Since July 1, 2005, Watkins has worked with AFC staff and partners to conduct workshops in South Arkansas to provide information about outreach efforts and cost share programs.

One of the first outreach meetings was held in the small town of Sparkman, Arkansas. Among the 30 people in attendance was Milton Whitaker, who was interested in signing up for the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). County forester John Cook followed up with Whitaker's request and surveyed his land, resulting in a management plan being written for FLEP and CRP with a riparian buffer. Watkins and other AFC staff worked on site preparations to implement the management plan which included prescribed burning, seedlings, and providing vendor information for contacting planters. Last winter, 16 acres of pine and 13 acres of hardwood seedlings were planted on

Whitaker's land.

In October, Whitaker became one of the first minority landowners certified as a forest steward in Arkansas. According to Watkins, Whitaker is pleased with AFC's efforts to provide him with assistance. Also, through word of mouth, the AFC was contacted by three minority farmers who wanted to do something different with their land. Watkins' goals are to work with the two other minority landowners (Raife and Margree Pickett Jr. and Freddy Jacob) who attended the same outreach meeting and signed up for FLEP. Watkins also wants to continue coordinating outreach efforts with key AFC staff, and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency.





### **Grandfather's Farm Gets New Life:**

**Carlene Johnson** of Halltown, Missouri, entered into a contract with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2003 to improve the grazing system on 160 acres. She is single-handedly running a cow/calf herd of 60 momma cows (She knows them all by name!). She purchased this property from several relatives to reestablish the original farm that her grandfather put together over 50 years ago. It was always a dream of this cocktail waitress to operate the farm that she fondly remembers as a little girl.

Carlene Johnson has repeatedly expressed to the NRCS staff in Mt. Vernon that the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is the "only" reason that she has been able to realize this dream. When she purchased the property, it had dilapidated fences, leaking ponds, and overgrazed pastures.

In the first 2 years of her EQIP contract, Carlene drilled a new well, installed 2,000 feet of underground waterlines, installed 3 watering facilities, and built several miles of fencing.

A much-needed fertilization program and interseeding legumes gave her more grass than she knows what to do with. Quail habitat establishment and fencing off ponds and creeks are next on the EQIP agenda to address wildlife concerns. Judging from her workaholic attitude, her immense love for the land, and her dedication to making this an efficient cattle operation, this "can do" woman will be successful. Johnson is quick to let everyone know that the EQIP program is the tool that made it all possible.

### **Llama Farmer, Now Compliance**

**Farmer: Alan Jorgensen**, is a llama farmer and newcomer to Whatcom County, Washington, who violated Critical Area Ordinance Laws. He had conducted grading and filling of his land upslope from a headwater reach of Deer Creek, a significant fish-bearing stream which is home to chum and Coho salmon, resident native trout, steelhead, and lamprey. Jorgensen received an Order to Correct from the county, and he was referred to the Water Conservation District (WCD) to develop a small farm plan.





WCD was aided by NRCS in mapping the property and in making recommendations. This upper headwater of each of Deer Creek had been completely cleared of trees, and cattle had been run through it for years.

With the landowner's consent, the property was referred to the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA). The NSEA applied for funds to improve the stream, as well as a tributary that flows through the llama pastures.

Both the tributary and Deer Creek are fenced, in compliance with the computer-aided design. A filter strip has been established next to the tributary which will remain until a tree and shrub establishment can begin.

Other improvements and ongoing management practices make this farm a good model. All llama manure is picked up and composted. Rotational grazing is practiced. Pastures are kept in good condition through mowing. The landowners seem to be pleased with the outcome of the plan and the restoration of their stream.



**Wisconsin's Governor Appoints Susan LeVan to Consortium on Biobased Industries:** Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle recognized **Susan LeVan**, Total Management Unit Program Manager, for her 2006 service to the State of Wisconsin as a member of the Governor's Consortium on Biobased Industries. Governor Doyle appointed this consortium to make suggestions on how best to support the development of renewable fuels energy and biobased products in Wisconsin. The consortium was to recommend strategies that would create sustained competitive advantages for Wisconsin businesses. Based on their experience and knowledge in this rapidly developing field, the consortium brought together farmers, foresters, ethanol manufacturers, energy experts, researchers, and entrepreneurs to help position Wisconsin to be a leader in this emerging bio-economy.

Governor Doyle wants Wisconsin to be the first State in the Nation to produce ethanol from woody biomass. Of particular importance is the Governor's goal of having three of the State's university campuses off-grid by 2010, which means they will be producing enough energy on their own to be completely energy independent, with a strong focus on renewable fuels.





## Ecological Balance for Mountain

**Ranches:** Fred Otley's ranch was in trouble. Like many of his neighbors, Otley keeps cattle on his land on Steens Mountain in southeastern Oregon. But in the 1990s, an environmental movement threatened to evict cattle from 500,000 acres of mountain land that included the ranch he had run for decades.

Otley was sure ranching could be compatible with ecological harmony but he lacked the data to prove it. To get the logistical support they needed to protect their land, he and several local ranchers called on Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists in the Range and Meadow Forage Management Research Unit at Burns, Oregon. At the time, we had lots of documentation on forage production but nothing on the ecological impacts of grazing," Otley said. "When ARS produced credible data, that really started breaking down barriers between the ranchers and the environmentalists he said."



The scientists working with Oregon State University found that a major cause of erosion and forage scarcity was an abundance of a native juniper tree. Before settlers had moved into the area and cultivated the land, frequent wildfires had kept it in check, but post-settlement conditions favored juniper growth to the exclusion of other native plants.



That trees could be the *cause* of an environmental problem seemed improvable to many environmentalists, but ARS research on juniper-induced land damage conducted on Otley's land changed their minds. Further studies with ARS researchers at Boise, Idaho, showed that cutting and burning juniper increased plant diversity, wildlife habitat, ground cover, and reduced erosion and runoff. As a result, local land-preservation strategies underwent a paradigm shift, and the environmentalists' opposition to juniper-management projects on Federal land decreased significantly.

Otley and other ranchers were allowed to keep their land and their cattle. Today, his cattle graze on the lush native grasses that have replaced the juniper that once threatened to replace them.





**Family Life Is Getting a Little Better in Orange County:** **Martin Rodriguez** left his native Mexico and moved to New York City nearly 16 years ago, working construction jobs and making deliveries to support his family. Then about a year ago, he joined the New Farmer Development Program, a joint project of New York City's Greenmarket Program and Cornell University Cooperative Extension designed to help and encourage Hispanic immigrants to farm in the region.

Rodriguez now commutes 2 hours each way from his home in Brooklyn to the 6-acre farm he now runs in Orange County, New York, in the fertile Hudson Valley. There, he produces lettuce, brussels sprouts, tomatoes, peppers, chilies, tomatillos, and Mexican herbs rarely found north of the Rio Grande, much less north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Each day, Rodriguez brings the harvested produce into the city to sell at farmers' markets in East Harlem, Jackson Heights, and Sunset Park. His wife arranges the produce for sale and explains to customers how to use it; his daughters and nieces help translate the Spanish language.

In addition, with the help of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), the Rodriguez family's life is getting a little better. The long commute in the wee hours of the morning and then again late in the day is even more difficult. As a farmer participating in both the SFMNP and the FMNP (administered by the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets), Rodriguez plans to use the money he earns for payment on the land he is currently renting to farm in Orange County, New York.





### **Sustainable Agriculture: Living Together--Trees, Forage, and Livestock:**

Sustainable agriculture is being promoted in North Alabama in the midst of urban sprawl. The North Alabama Risk Management Education Program for Limited Resource and Underserved Agricultural Producers and the Forestry Department's Silvopasture project at Alabama A&M University have joined hands to provide education and technical assistance to producers interested in developing farm plans that promote sustainable agriculture.

It all began with one farmer, **Donald E. Outland**, of Madison County, Alabama, with a 10-acre tract of farmland that had remained idle for many years. The land had been overtaken with brush and trees, but had not succumbed to development, as did the surrounding property. To improve the land, the owner chose an integrated farming approach which consisted of raising meat goats and planting trees - an approach known as silvopasture. The approach combines trees with forage and livestock production. The trees are managed for high-value saw logs and at the same time provide shade and shelter for livestock and forage, reducing stress and sometimes increasing forage production.

It also all began with one telephone call to Alabama's A&M University's Risk Management Project staff, requesting technical assistance. The project then partnered with the Forestry Department to provide the requested and much-needed assistance. With little start-up capital, but equipped with appropriate technical assistance, Outland has since established perimeter fencing and purchased his first set of goats.

This story is an example of the many significant contributions the USDA Risk Management Agency's Community Outreach Project is making in underserved communities in North Alabama.

It is also a good example of how this project is pivotal and instrumental in assisting small and limited-resource farmers, and it identifies economically viable alternative enterprises which promote sustainable agricultural practices.



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