

Projects . Successes . Partnerships

 **NRCS** Louisiana  
**Conservation Update**  
United States Department of Agriculture . Natural Resources Conservation Service

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July 2011

**Getting an Edge in Farming**  
**Master Farmer Program/EQIP**

**Environmental Investment**  
**Will Reap Big Benefits**  
**Cleaner Water, Reduced Soil Erosion,**  
**Productive Ag Land**

A cooperative partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and  
Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D)

HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

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Water droplets on the leaf of a sugarcane plant on Cecil Ramagos' farm in Iberville Parish. Ramagos is a third generation farmer who recently achieve the status of Certified Master Farmer. See story on pages 4 and 5.



## USDA's Commitment to Equality

USDA believes every farmer and rancher should be treated equally and fairly, and we are committed to resolving all cases involving allegations of past discrimination by individuals.

### Referral Guide for USDA Settlements and Claims Adjudication Process

#### Women and Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers Claims Adjudication Process

If you believe that USDA improperly denied farm loan benefits to you for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000 because you are a female or because you are Hispanic, you may be eligible to apply for compensation. To request a claims package by telephone, call 1-888-508-4429. To request a claims package online, please visit [www.farmerclaims.gov](http://www.farmerclaims.gov)

#### Native American Farmer and Rancher Class Action Settlement (Keepseagle v. Vilsack)

If you are a Native American who was denied a farm loan or loan servicing by the USDA between January 1, 1981, and November 24, 1999, you may be eligible for benefits from a Class Action Settlement. To request a claims package by telephone, call: 1-888-233-5506. To request a claims package online, or for more information, please visit: [www.indianfarmclass.com](http://www.indianfarmclass.com)

#### African American Farmer and Rancher Class Action Settlement (Pigford II)

If you are an African American farmer (a) who submitted a request to file a late claim on or between October 13, 1999, and June 18, 2008, under the 1999 USDA settlement in the earlier class action known as Pigford v. Glickman ("Pigford") and (b) who did not receive a merits determination on your discrimination claim, you may be eligible for benefits from a Class Action Settlement. To hear information by telephone, call 1-866-950-5547 or 1-866-472-7826. To find information online, please visit: [www.blackfarmercase.com](http://www.blackfarmercase.com)

USDA  
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## Notes from the State Conservationist

Many farmers and ranchers have a very personal connection to the land they own or farm. Sometimes the land, farm, or ranch has been passed down from generation to generation. Other times, the dream of owning land or farming has only been recently realized.

The special connection that a farmer or rancher feels with their land leads them to seek ways to protect and conserve its resources. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with agricultural land users every day to identify ways to protect water quality or quantity, reduce soil erosion, enhance wildlife habitat, or improve production levels through precision agriculture practices. We work with ag land users on targeted resource concerns or development of whole farm Resource Management System (RMS) plans.

NRCS' conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Wetlands Reserve Program, as well as other available programs and initiatives, provide financial and technical assistance to land users interested in addressing resource concerns.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can improve, conserve, or protect the natural resources on your agricultural land, contact an NRCS office near you. A directory of offices is included on the back page of this publication.

Kevin D. Norton  
State Conservationist  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Louisiana

### Quote of the Month

**“Agriculture** is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to **real wealth, good morals, and happiness.”**

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington (1787)

The **Conservation Update** is distributed monthly by mail and e-mail.

If you would like to receive monthly issues of the **Conservation Update**, please send your mailing address or e-mail address to:

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# Getting an Edge in Farming

## Iberville Parish Farmer Certified as Master Farmer

### Good for the Farm Good for the Farmer Good for the Environment



Cecil Ramagos, a third generation sugarcane farmer, carries on his family's farming tradition with help from his daughter, Katie; sons Matt, Andy, and Ben; and wife Sally on their 1,479 acre sugarcane farm in Iberville Parish.

In farming it is important to have an "edge." Ramagos' edge is the Master Farmer Program. Cecil Ramagos was certified as a Louisiana Master Farmer in 2011.

"Being a Master Farmer is like having a Gold Card," Ramagos said. "Being a Certified

Master Farmer lets everyone know that you understand the basics of being a good land steward and are utilizing this knowledge on your farming operation. Certified Master Farmers also receive additional points when competing for Environmental Quality Incentives Program financial assistance."

To become a Master Farmer, the farmer must complete a Resource Management System (RMS) plan on their operation. Ramagos worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Lower Delta Soil and Water Conservation District to develop

his RMS plan. His plan addresses crop residue, crop rotation, grade stabilization structures, precision land forming, nutrient and pest management, and field borders.

"The Master Farmer Program allows farmers to understand what they are doing on their farms and makes sure that the right practices are being planned and implemented," said District Conservationist, Jerry Hall.

#### Three Phases of the Master Farmer Program

Certified Master Farmers must complete three phases: Phase I of the program, "Opens your eyes and makes you more mindful of things that get put on the backburner," said Ramagos. In Phase 2, "You can take bits and pieces of what other people are doing on their farms and apply what you learned on your farm." In Phase III, "You receive benefits on your farm from the different conservation practices that have been installed."



If you are interested in the **Master Farmer Program** or development of a **Resource Management System** plan, contact your local NRCS office. A directory of offices is included on the back page of this publication.



The Master Farmer Program began in 2001 as a way for farmers to learn up-to-date, research-based conservation practices in a comprehensive manner. It is a partnership of five agricultural entities – the LSU AgCenter, Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Louisiana Cattlemen’s Association, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF), which has the authority by law through the Commissioner of Agriculture to approve the certification.



# Cecil Ramagos Conservationists

Cecil Ramagos worked with District Conservationist Jerry Hall and the staff at the Addis Field Office to develop an Resource Management System (RMS) plan for his farm.

Ramagos’ RMS plan addresses the following:

**Crop Residue:** Reduces Erosion, Improves Overall Soil Health, Improves Soil Moisture Retention

**Crop Rotation:** Breaks Pest Cycle, Improves Plant Condition

**Grade Stabilization Structures:** Reduces Soil Erosion, Improves Water Quality

**Precision Land Forming:** Reduces Soil Erosion

**Nutrient and Pest Management:** Improves Water Quality, Improves Plant Condition, Improves Air Quality

**Field Borders:** Improves Water Quality, Improves Wildlife Habitat

# ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

## Environmental Investment With Ag Producers Will Reap Big Benefits for Louisiana



### Cleaner Water, Reduced Soil Erosion, Productive Ag Land

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the “workhorse” of USDA’s conservation programs. Delivered through a locally led, priority-setting process with local soil and water conservation districts, EQIP provides a broad array of financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement conservation practices that address local priority resource concerns across all agricultural operations.

So far this year, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has invested more than \$18.2 million in financial and

technical assistance through EQIP to implement conservation practices. NRCS recently committed an additional \$1.29 million to provide technical and financial assistance to producers this year.

Louisiana producers are committed to conserving and protecting Louisiana’s natural resources, and they have invested an additional \$4.3 million this year to implement EQIP conservation practices on their farms and ranches.

The implementation of EQIP conservation practices help agricultural producers to improve water quality and quantity by reducing soil erosion, creating and

enhancing wildlife habitat, and improving, and enhancing non-industrial private forestland. Practices include, but are not limited to, field borders to trap sediment and nutrients in run-off waters, use of erosion control measures to protect livestock heavy use areas, grade stabilization structures to reduce gullies and field erosion, and installation of pumping plants and irrigation pipelines.

Continuous sign-up is available for EQIP, and agricultural producers are encouraged to visit NRCS offices to learn more about EQIP.

#### Top 5 EQIP Practices Implemented in 2011

- Grade Stabilization Structure
- Nutrient Management
- Irrigation Land Leveling
- Heavy Use Area Protection
- Fence



The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers to treat identified soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on eligible land. This program provides technical and financial assistance to eligible agricultural producers.



## Special MRBI-CCPI Projects Approved in Northeast Louisiana

The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service recently announced funding for 19 projects in eight states to help eligible agricultural producers and non-industrial private forestland users in the Mississippi River Basin voluntarily implement conservation practices to improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat while maintaining agricultural productivity. Two projects were approved for Louisiana watersheds. Both projects cross state lines and will be implemented in Arkansas as well as Louisiana.

The approved projects are part of NRCS' Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)-Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI). MRBI-CCPI projects are voluntary and provide financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to address water quality concerns in selected watersheds. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, in partnership with the Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts and Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, will be working in the Bayou Boeuf and Lower Bayou Macon Watersheds.

- The Bayou Boeuf Watershed MRBI-CCPI project area includes portions of Morehouse Parish and West Carroll Parish in Louisiana and portions of Ashley County and Chicot County in Arkansas. This watershed received \$654,623 in fiscal year 2011 funding for this project.
- The Lower Bayou Macon Watershed MRBI-CCPI project area includes portions of West Carroll Parish and East Carroll Parish in Louisiana and Chico County in Arkansas. This watershed received \$447,146 in fiscal year 2011 funding for this project.

Both projects will help producers implement conservation practices to avoid excess application of nutrients and water on fields; control the amount of nutrient and water runoff from fields into the watershed, and trap nutrients before they leave the field.

Funding for eligible producers for these projects will be through three of NRCS' most popular conservation programs: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

**In Louisiana, applications were accepted for both projects through the Conservation Stewardship Program through July 15, 2011. Applications for both projects through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program will be accepted through July 27, 2011.**

Applications may be obtained and filed with the Natural Resources Conservation Service at the following locations in Louisiana:

**East Carroll Parish**  
Lake Providence NRCS  
USDA Service Center  
406 Lake Street, Suite C  
Lake Providence, Louisiana 71254  
(318) 559-2604, Ext. 3

**West Carroll Parish**  
Oak Grove NRCS  
USDA Service Center  
208 South Constitution Street  
Oak Grove, Louisiana 71263  
(318) 428-9303, Ext. 3

**Morehouse Parish**  
Bastrop NRCS  
USDA Service Center  
9604 Marlatt Street  
Bastrop, Louisiana 71220  
(318) 283-7626, Ext. 3

For more information regarding submitting an application for these special projects in Arkansas, call the Ashley County NRCS office at (870) 853-9881, Ext. 3, or Chicot County NRCS office at (870) 265-2608, Ext. 3.

## Around the State

### Jun 14

#### Pond Soil Investigation Training

On June 14, 2011, the Lake Charles NRCS Field Office hosted pond soil investigation training for NRCS staff. Soil Scientists Mike Lindsay and Mitch Mouton explained how to evaluate soil texture by feel, how to distinguish coarse grained soils from fine grained soils, and how to grade soils using a series of tests. Wendall Meaux, Area Engineer, presented engineering guidelines for conducting soils investigations. The participants conducted soil borings for several different soils unique to the area. With each soil, the team was given the opportunity to apply the information given by Lindsay and Mouton. They conducted the liquid limit evaluation, dilatancy test, plasticity evaluation, ribbon test, and test for dry strength.



### Jul - Aug

#### Feds Feeding Families

Feds Feed Families is a national food drive led by the Office of Personnel Management, the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, and other federal agencies to raise food for Americans struggling with hunger across the country. USDA agencies in Louisiana are participating in the USDA Feds Feed Families national food drive through August 31, 2011. The food collected by USDA Service Centers will be donated to food banks and feeding programs throughout the state. So far, over 750 pounds of food have been collected and donated by USDA agencies in Louisiana.



## Contact Our Offices

| Parish           | Field Office    | Soil and Water Conservation District | Address  | Telephone              |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Acadia           | Crowley         | Acadia SWCD                          | 157 Cherokee Drive, Suite C, Crowley, LA 70526             | (337) 783-5823, ext. 3 |
| Allen            | Oberlin         | Allen SWCD                           | 309 North 1st Street, Suite 1, Oberlin, LA 70655           | (337) 639-4850, ext. 3 |
| Ascension        | Donaldsonville  | Lower Delta SWCD and New River SWCD  | 2274 Highway 70, Suite C, Donaldsonville, LA 70346         | (225) 473-7638, ext. 3 |
| Assumption       | Donaldsonville  | Lower Delta SWCD                     | 2274 Highway 70, Suite C, Donaldsonville, LA 70346         | (225) 473-7638, ext. 3 |
| Avoyelles        | Marksville      | Avoyelles SWCD                       | 313 North Monroe Street, Suite 4, Marksville, LA 71351     | (318) 253-9445, ext. 3 |
| Beauregard       | DeRidder        | Calcasieu SWCD                       | 597 Mahlon Street, Suite B, DeRidder, LA 70634             | (337) 463-8555, ext. 3 |
| Bienville        | Minden          | Saline SWCD                          | 216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055                            | (318) 377-3950, ext. 3 |
| Bossier          | Benton          | Bodcau SWCD                          | 200 Burt Boulevard, Suite 101, Benton, LA 71006-4901       | (318) 965-2185, ext. 3 |
| Caddo            | Shreveport      | Caddo SWCD                           | 1402 Hawn Avenue, Shreveport, LA 71107                     | (318) 676-3461, ext. 3 |
| Calcasieu        | Lake Charles    | Gulf Coast SWCD                      | 1400 Highway 14, Suite B, Lake Charles, LA 70601           | (337) 436-5020         |
| Caldwell         | Columbia        | Boeuf and Dugdemona SWCD             | 7128 Highway 165 South, Suite 2, Columbia, LA 71418        | (318) 649-2651, ext. 3 |
| Cameron          | Lake Charles    | Gulf Coast SWCD                      | 1400 Highway 14, Suite B, Lake Charles, LA 70601           | (337) 436-5020         |
| Catahoula        | Jonesville      | Catahoula SWCD                       | 3545 4th Street, Jonesville, LA 71343                      | (318) 339-4239, ext. 3 |
| Claiborne        | Minden          | D'Arbonne SWCD                       | 216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055                            | (318) 377-3950, ext. 3 |
| Concordia        | Ferriday        | Tensas-Concordia SWCD                | 8331 Highway 84, Ferriday, LA 71334                        | (318) 757-8366, ext. 3 |
| DeSoto           | Mansfield       | DeSoto SWCD                          | 211 Washington Avenue, Mansfield, LA 71052                 | (318) 872-4949, ext. 3 |
| East Baton Rouge | Denham Springs  | Capital SWCD                         | 2191 Tower Drive, Denham Springs, LA 70726                 | (225) 664-1430, ext. 3 |
| East Carroll     | Lake Providence | East Carroll SWCD                    | 406 Lake Street, Suite C, Lake Providence, LA 71254        | (318) 559-2604, ext. 3 |
| East Feliciana   | Clinton         | Feliciana SWCD                       | 9752 Plank Road South, Clinton, LA 70722                   | (225) 683-5496         |
| Evangeline       | Ville Platte    | Evangeline SWCD                      | 205 Court Street, Ville Platte, LA 70586                   | (337) 369-6602, ext. 3 |
| Franklin         | Winnsboro       | Northeast SWCD                       | 616 Riser Road, Winnsboro, LA 71295                        | (318) 435-6743, ext. 3 |
| Grant            | Colfax          | Grant SWCD                           | 510 Main Street, Colfax, LA 71417                          | (318) 627-9903, ext. 3 |
| Iberia           | New Iberia      | Iberia SWCD                          | 2617 Northside Road, Suite 600, New Iberia, LA 70563       | (337) 369-6623, ext. 3 |
| Iberville        | Addis           | Lower Delta SWCD                     | 7747 Highway 1 South, Addis, LA 70710                      | (225) 687-2184, ext. 3 |
| Jackson          | Ruston          | Dugdemona SWCD                       | 1803 Trade Drive, Ruston, LA 71270                         | (318) 255-3136, ext. 3 |
| Jefferson        | Boutte          | Crescent SWCD                        | 14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039                      | (985) 758-2162, ext. 3 |
| Jefferson Davis  | Jennings        | Jefferson Davis SWCD                 | 2003 Port Drive, Jennings, LA 70546                        | (337) 824-0975         |
| Lafayette        | Lafayette       | Lafayette SWCD                       | 905 Jefferson Street, Suite 310, Lafayette, LA 70501-7913  | (337) 262-6601         |
| LaFourche        | Thibodaux       | LaFourche-Terrebonne SWCD            | 143 Laura Drive, Thibodaux, LA 70301                       | (985) 447-3871, ext. 3 |
| LaSalle          | Jonesville      | LaSalle SWCD                         | 3545 4th Street, Jonesville, LA 71343                      | (318) 339-4239, ext. 3 |
| Lincoln          | Ruston          | D'Arbonne SWCD                       | 1803 Trade Drive, Ruston, LA 71270                         | (318) 255-3136, ext. 3 |
| Livingston       | Denham Springs  | Capital SWCD                         | 2191 Tower Drive, Denham Springs, LA 70726                 | (225) 664-1430, ext. 3 |
| Madison          | Tallulah        | Madison SWCD                         | 1900 Crothers Drive, Tallulah, LA 71282                    | (318) 574-4158, ext. 3 |
| Morehouse        | Bastrop         | Morehouse SWCD                       | 9604 Marlatt Street, Bastrop, LA 71220                     | (318) 283-7626, ext. 3 |
| Natchitoches     | Natchitoches    | Natchitoches SWCD                    | 6949 Louisiana Highway 1 Bypass, Natchitoches, LA 71457    | (318) 357-8366, ext. 3 |
| Orleans          | Boutte          | Crescent SWCD                        | 14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039                      | (985) 758-2162, ext. 3 |
| Ouachita         | Monroe          | D'Arbonne/Boeuf River SWCD           | 2410 Old Sterlington Road, Suite B, Monroe, LA 71203-2668  | (318) 343-4467, ext. 3 |
| Plaquemines      | Boutte          | Plaquemines SWCD                     | 14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039                      | (985) 758-2162, ext. 3 |
| Pointe Coupee    | New Roads       | Upper Delta SWCD                     | 180 East Main Street, New Roads, LA 70760                  | (225) 638-7746, ext. 3 |
| Rapides          | Alexandria      | Rapides SWCD                         | 3734 Government Street, Building C, Alexandria, LA 71303   | (318) 473-7856, ext. 3 |
| Red River        | Coushatta       | Red River SWCD                       | 1311 Ringgold Avenue, Coushatta, LA 71019                  | (318) 932-4352, ext. 3 |
| Richland         | Rayville        | Boeuf River SWCD                     | 141 Industrial Loop, Rayville, LA 71269                    | (318) 728-4451, ext. 3 |
| Sabine           | Many            | Sabine SWCD                          | 290 Pico Street, Many, LA 71449-3077                       | (318) 256-3491         |
| St. Bernard      | Boutte          | Crescent SWCD                        | 14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039                      | (985) 758-2162, ext. 3 |
| St. Charles      | Boutte          | Crescent SWCD                        | 14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039                      | (985) 758-2162, ext. 3 |
| St. Helena       | Amite           | Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD           | 805 West Oak Street, Suite 1, Amite, LA 70422-2820         | (985) 748-8751         |
| St. James        | Donaldsonville  | Lower Delta SWCD and New River SWCD  | 2274 Highway 70, Suite C, Donaldsonville, LA 70346         | (225) 473-7638, ext. 3 |
| St. John         | Boutte          | Crescent SWCD                        | 14246 US Highway 90, Boutte, LA 70039                      | (985) 758-2162, ext. 3 |
| St. Landry       | Opelousas       | St. Landry SWCD                      | 5832 I-49 North Service Road, Opelousas, LA 70570          | (337) 942-2530, ext. 3 |
| St. Martin       | Lafayette       | St. Martin SWCD                      | 905 Jefferson Street, Suite 310, Lafayette, LA 70501-7913  | (337) 262-6601         |
| St. Mary         | Franklin        | St. Mary SWCD                        | 500 Main Street, Franklin, LA 70538                        | (337) 828-1461, ext. 3 |
| St. Tammany      | Franklinton     | Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD        | 1111 Washington Street, Franklinton, LA 70438              | (985) 839-5688, ext. 3 |
| Tangipahoa       | Amite           | Tangipahoa-St. Helena SWCD           | 805 West Oak Street, Suite 1, Amite, LA 70422-2820         | (985) 748-8751         |
| Tensas           | St. Joseph      | Tensas-Concordia SWCD                | 1223 Plank Road, St. Joseph, LA 71366                      | (318) 766-3502, ext. 3 |
| Terrebonne       | Thibodaux       | LaFourche-Terrebonne SWCD            | 143 Laura Drive, Thibodaux, LA 70301                       | (985) 447-3871, ext. 3 |
| Union            | Farmerville     | D'Arbonne SWCD                       | 604 East Water Street, Farmerville, LA 71241               | (318) 368-8021         |
| Vermilion        | Abbeville       | Vermilion SWCD                       | 3221 Veterans Memorial Drive, Suite H, Abbeville, LA 70510 | (337) 893-5664, ext. 3 |
| Vernon           | Leesville       | Calcasieu SWCD                       | 1100-C South Third Street, Leesville, LA 71446             | (337) 239-2193         |
| Washington       | Franklinton     | Bogue Chitto-Pearl River SWCD        | 1111 Washington Street, Franklinton, LA 70438              | (985) 839-5688, ext. 3 |
| Webster          | Minden          | Dorcheat SWCD                        | 216B Broadway, Minden, LA 71055                            | (318) 377-3950, ext. 3 |
| West Baton Rouge | Addis           | Upper Delta SWCD                     | 7747 Highway 1, South, Addis, LA 70710                     | (225) 687-2184, ext. 3 |
| West Carroll     | Oak Grove       | West Carroll SWCD                    | 208 South Constitution Street, Oak Grove, LA 71263         | (318) 428-9303, ext. 3 |
| West Feliciana   | Clinton         | Feliciana SWCD                       | 9752 Plank Road South, Clinton, LA 70722                   | (225) 683-5496         |
| Winn             | Natchitoches    | Dugdemona SWCD                       | 6949 Louisiana Highway 1 Bypass, Natchitoches, LA 71457    | (318) 357-8366, ext. 3 |

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