

Projects . Successes . Partnerships

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

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March 2011



**High Tunnel Pilot Project
Helps Farmers Get Jump Start on Planting**

Locally Led Conservation Works!

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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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is conducting a three-year high tunnel, or hoop house, pilot project. Rapides Parish farmer Rodney Verzwylt shares his success with readers. See story on pages 4 and 5.



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Notes from the State Conservationist

This issue of **Conservation Update** features a pilot project designed to help farmers extend the growing season for vegetables and other specialty crops—the high tunnel initiative. The pilot is offered under the **Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative**, a USDA effort to connect farmers and consumers, strengthen local and regional food production, increase the use of sustainable agricultural practices, and promote consumption of fresh, local food. During the three-year pilot—which began in 2010—NRCS is providing financial assistance to eligible agricultural producers for seasonal high tunnels to determine their effectiveness in conserving water, reducing pesticide use, maintaining vital soil nutrients, and increasing crop yields. A Rapides Parish farmer who has had success with his high tunnel shares information about his crops on page 5.



Across Louisiana, NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation Districts are currently hosting locally led conservation meetings to identify local resource concerns. Using information gathered at these meetings, NRCS will prepare a list of priority resource concerns which will help guide conservation activities across the state. During one recent locally led conservation meeting, farmers asked for information on irrigation efficiency programs. In short order, a workshop was scheduled, and farmers received training on an NRCS-designed irrigation efficiency program—PHAUCET. To find out more about PHAUCET, go to page 7, read the article, then call your local NRCS office for more information.

I encourage you to attend a locally led meeting in your area. If you cannot attend a meeting, contact your local NRCS office and schedule an appointment to discuss your resource concerns. Our staff of professional conservationists are available to help you develop and implement a conservation plan tailored to meet your individual conservation needs. Contact information for our 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

**“Before anything else,
preparation is the
key to success.”**

Alexander Graham Bell
Scientist, inventor, engineer and innovator

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Spring planting ...
February 22, 2011

High tunnels are structures that modify the growing climate, allowing for tender, sensitive, and specialty crops like certain varieties of vegetables, herbs, berries, and others to grow where they otherwise may not. High tunnels are constructed of metal or plastic bow frames at least six feet in height and covered with a single layer of polyethylene.

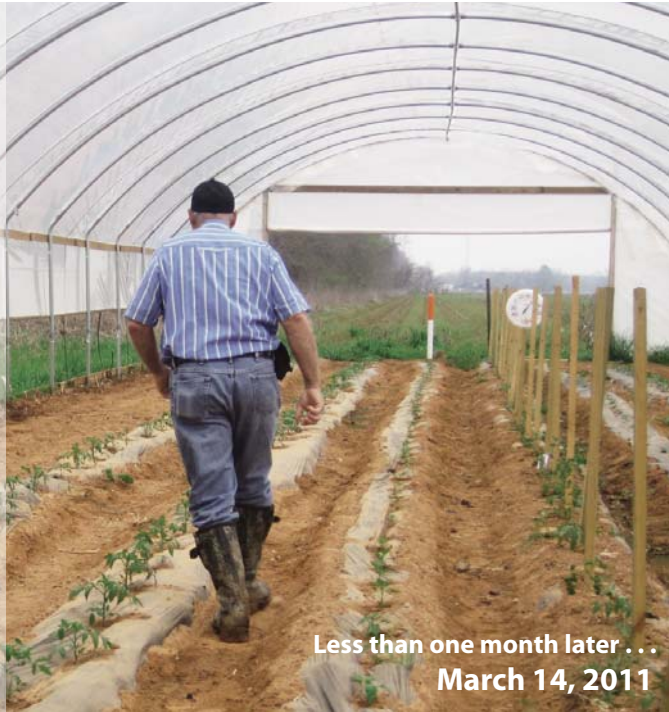
NRCS Conducts High Tunnel Pilot Project

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is conducting a three-year high tunnel, or hoop house, pilot project. The project started in FY 2010. Through this pilot project, agricultural producers can apply to receive financial and technical assistance to help NRCS test the conservation benefits and effects of high tunnels in practical, real-world situations. The high tunnel pilot study will help determine possible conservation benefits.

Applications are accepted on a continuous basis; however, each fiscal year has funding pool cut-off dates. This year's cut-off date was March 11.

High tunnels improve plant, water and soil quality, as well as pest and nutrient management. High tunnels can lengthen the time frame for local marketing of produce, which increases sustainability while lowering energy and transportation inputs. An extended growing season and steady income may offer advantages to small, limited resource, and organic farmers. They can also assist producers transitioning to specialty crops.





More Information

NRCS Plant Materials Program Community Garden Guide

www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/mipmcot9407.pdf

The University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture High Tunnels Manual

www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/hightunnels.html

HighTunnels.org - www.hightunnels.org

Less than one month later . . .
March 14, 2011

Rapides Parish Farmer Gets 6-Week Jump on Planting Vegetable Crop

Early February brought ice storms and bitter cold weather to Rapides Parish, Louisiana. However, by February 22, one local farmer was already planting tomatoes and bell peppers—thanks to high tunnel technology.

On February 22, the temperature outside was a comfortable 69 degrees, but inside Rodney Verzwylt's high tunnel, or hoop house, the temperature was knocking on 90's door. While cold snaps that would harm tender, young vegetable plants were still in

the weather forecast, Verzwylt was able to get a head start on his spring vegetable crop and plant over 260 plants.

"I plan to add cucumbers to the mix in mid-April," said Verzwylt. "I will be taking tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers to market in mid-May—about six weeks ahead of everyone else." Verzwylt sells his vegetables through a local roadside vegetable stand and to friends and neighbors.

He also enjoys them himself. "My vegetables are bigger and better than everyone else's," says Verzwylt with a smile.

This crop is Verzwylt's second high tunnel crop. The high tunnel was constructed in September 2010, and during winter months, he harvested mustard greens, cauliflower, carrots, radishes, kale and broccoli from the high tunnel.



To qualify to participate in the high tunnel pilot project, the applicant must: be an agricultural producer; install the high tunnel(s) on cultivated land which includes existing gardens, irrigated hayland and irrigated pasture; and have raised or sold \$1,000 worth of agricultural products.

During the pilot project, successful applicants will receive about 75 percent of the cost of one or more high tunnel system(s) and related costs. Beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers can receive about 90 percent of the costs.

Rodney Verzwylt Conservationist

The high tunnel pilot project is offered through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Organic Initiative.

Upcoming Events

Party for the Planet Earth Fair

April 16, 2011
Alexandria Zoo
Alexandria, LA

Baton Rouge Earth Fair

April 17, 2011
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

National Volunteer Week

April 10-16, 2011

Earth Day

April 22, 2011

Around the State



Feb 17

Louisiana Tech University Career Day - On February 17, 2011, Area Conservationist Marlin Jordan and District Conservationist Brian Wade (Ruston) staffed an exhibit at Louisiana Tech University's Career Day. They spoke to approximately 25 students about job opportunities with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Feb 18

Grambling State University Career Day - On February 18, 2011, District Conservationist Brian Wade (Ruston) and Student Intern Nicole Jenkins staffed an exhibit at Grambling State University's Career Day. They spoke to approximately 25 students about job opportunities with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.



Locally Led Conservation



Locally-led conservation is based on the principle that local people make the best decisions for their own communities.

In Louisiana, the locally led conservation movement began in 1938 with the establishment of the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee. The State Legislature authorized the committee to work with local farmers to establish local conservation districts. Today, Louisiana's 44 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) work day-to-day with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through a locally led process.

During February and March, locally led conservation meetings are being conducted throughout Louisiana. Residents of local communities are invited to attend the locally led meetings and identify resource concerns.

If you are interested in attending a locally led meeting in your area, contact your local NRCS office. See the back page of this issue of Conservation Update for contact information.



Record Attendance at St. Mary Parish Locally Led Meeting

On February 24, the Franklin Field Office hosted a locally led conservation meeting to gather resource concerns from St. Mary Parish residents. A record number of attendees heard from a host of guest speakers, including Louisiana State Representative Sam Jones offering information about the new legislature and how it may affect the farming community; Parish President Paul Naquin speaking about road improvements and issues during harvest season; and Helena Fertilizer Company providing information on precision agriculture and conducting a question and answer session on precision agriculture benefits. The presentations were followed by a brainstorming session to generate a list of parish resource concerns. Participating farmers requested copies of the list of concerns and information on how NRCS can help with each issue.

Capital RC&D Helps Improve Home Fire Safety for Elderly Residents in St. Helena Parish

A grant was released March 1, 2011, to rural fire departments in St. Helena Parish, by the Capital Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council in Hammond, to address home fire safety.



The grant will be used to purchase 100 home fire smoke detectors for use in the rural areas of the parish, serving low income elderly residents, states Ray Marler, St. Helena Capital RC&D Council representative.

Rita Allen, a St. Helena Parish rural fire department chief, states the parish council on aging will provide the fire chiefs names and address of elderly residents that are in need. The fire chiefs will follow up and install the smoke detectors in their homes.

RC&D
Getting Things Done

Locally Led Conservation - Louisiana

Locally Led Meeting Identifies Training Need for Farmers

Parish farmer's equipment shed. This workshop was requested at Morehouse Parish's locally led meeting held in February 2011. Locally led meeting attendees requested an informal "beginners" training session that could lead to more intense technical assistance on individual farmer's operations.

PHAUCET Irrigation Efficiency Program Training

A workshop demonstrating the use of an irrigation efficiency program—PHAUCET—was recently hosted at a Morehouse

The workshop began at 9:00 a.m. with introductions by James Shivers, acting District Conservationist. Biff Handy, Area 1 Engineer, presented a general description of the PHAUCET program, including several working scenarios of

different field irrigation sets. All attendees requested a copy of the program for their individual use.

This workshop was so well-received by local farmers, an additional workshop has been planned for the near future in Morehouse Parish.

If you are interested in attending this workshop, contact the Bastrop NRCS office at (318) 283-7626, extension 3.

PHAUCET Irrigation Efficiency Program

The **PHAUCET (Pipe Hole and Universal Crown Evaluation Tool)** program was designed by NRCS to calculate existing irrigation system performance and define alternatives for improving irrigation efficiency.

The **PHAUCET** program assists farmers determine the sizes of the holes in the polypipe that best distribute the available water. The program also helps farmers improve timeliness of watering fields having different row lengths.

To find out more about **PHAUCET**, contact your nearest NRCS office. Contact information is included on the back page of this **Conservation Update**.

Addressing Resource Concerns



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) 369-6620, 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	111 North Main Street, Suite 2, 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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