

Helping People Help the Land



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

The *UPDATE*

North Carolina July - August 2012

United States Department of Agriculture . Natural Resources Conservation Service . North Carolina

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Employee Spotlight

WARM SEASON GRASSES

To mitigate poultry air emissions

RETIRING AFTER 47 YEARS OF SERVICE

Tommy Cutts retires

BIOMASS CROPS

North Carolina BCAP Project

AND MORE...

A cooperative partnership with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and
North Carolina Division of Soil and Water

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The photos on this page and cover are from three Raleigh Farmers Market - Taken by Stuart Lee.

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Notes from the State Conservationist

Since the Dust Bowl, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) have been working to help land users and landowners conserve their lands, but still allow them to farm their crops.

This year, NRCS and NACD are continuing to deliver voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private lands to create the "field office of the future." This partnership will work to meet our missions now and in the future.

To establish the "field office of the future," both agencies in NC are looking at different aspects of landowners and how they can help them in ways that include, but are not limited to:

- Meet the needs and expectations of customers
- The look and function of field offices in the future
- Focus on resources to get the most from America's conservation investments
- Design the most efficient and effective delivery system at the local level
- Prepare for any potential budget constraints

To ensure that the agencies will be able to reach their missions, state leaders are creating a plan and process with other staff, partners, stakeholders and customers to evaluate the partnerships' strengths and provide proactive recommendations.

NRCS and NACD will continue to work through this process and keep partners, stakeholders, and landowners informed of the process. If you have any questions about the "field office of the future", please contact me at anytime.

J.B. Martin, Jr.
State Conservationist

It's in the Quote...

"The miracle of the seed and the soil is not available by affirmation; it is only available by labor."

--Jim Rohn

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NRCS District Conservationist Chris Childers, a graduate of Western Carolina University and Clemson University, has always enjoyed working and being outside. Growing up, he spent most of his time hunting, hiking, camping and fishing. Upon his graduation with a Masters in Forestry, he wanted to continue his “outdoor” lifestyle by finding a profession that allowed him to work, enjoy and help our natural environment.

Before joining NRCS, Childers spent five years working for a consulting forestry company in Anson County, which lead to a job with Brown Creek Soil and Water Conservation District. After a little over a year, he got a soil conservation technician position with NRCS in the Anson county office. He spent a year there and then became a district conservationist in Cabarrus, Mecklenburg and Gaston County.

As a district conservationist in urban and rural counties, Chris has faced many challenges in his first year as a district conservationist serving this area.

“Gaston is very much like what I experienced working in Anson County,” said Chris. “You have the traditional

GETTING TO KNOW

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

farmers that are really interested and dedicated to conserving our natural resources. However, in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus the dynamics are changing or have already changed because of urbanization.”

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The 4th Annual Feds Feed Families Food Drive is underway in USDA Service Centers throughout the state of North Carolina. Last summer, USDA, nation-wide donated 1.79 million pounds of perishable and non-perishable food through this food drive effort.

FEEDING FAMILIES

4TH ANNUAL FOOD DRIVE

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a proud participant in this year’s USDA Feds Feed Families food drive running now through Friday, August 31. Announced by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, this annual event is designed to help food banks across the nation that are struggling through tough economic times. The fact is, many of our fellow Americans are working hard, but still having trouble making ends meet.

Federal employees can work with farmers and landowners to contribute fresh fruits and vegetables. Federal employees also can collect non-perishable foods to donate to charities. Items to donate include: canned foods (fruits, vegetables, and soups), pastas, boxed foods, beverages, and toiletries.

In 2012, USDA is celebrating its 150th anniversary. When President Abraham Lincoln founded the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1862, he called it “The People’s Department.” Back then, most Americans farmed and lived on farms. Today, with dramatic increases in productivity across the entire agriculture sector, farmers and ranchers account for only a small percentage of our population.

USDA touches the lives of every American, as well as people across the globe. This year’s 4th Annual Feds Feed Families Food Drive will make a difference in the lives of North Carolinians. Contact your local USDA field office today to learn how you can contribute.





NORTH CAROLINA SPECIAL PROJECT ADDRESSING IRRIGATION AND OTHER CONSERVATION NEEDS

Irrigation efficiency and the need for reliable water sources for productivity on limited resource and socially disadvantaged owned and operated farms is a pressing and urgent priority in rural counties in North Carolina. North Carolina Department of Commerce has divided our state into three tiers. Each tier represents counties that are identified as economically depressed. North Carolina's Coastal Plain region consists of 41 counties. Of the 41 counties, all but five are in tiers one and two with most being in the tier one category for greatest economic distress. Furthermore, the Coastal Plain region has the largest proportion of cropland and is the most ethnically diverse in the state. For these reasons, NRCS identified 23 counties in the Northern Coastal Plain region to be part of a pilot project to focus Farm Bill assistance to address water quality and quantity, and other conservation needs on agricultural lands.



*Top: Irrigation pipeline installed,
Above: Seasonal high tunnel (hoop house)*

Through the pilot program, NRCS will provide technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners and producers in the 23 counties to address water quality and quantity, irrigation efficiency, animal waste management and other conservation needs on agricultural lands. It will also focus on practices that include wells, pumps, pipeline, irrigation equipment and other associated supporting conservation practices. Assistance is also available for high tunnels, Conservation Activity Plans associated with irrigation and energy, pasture practices and animal waste management practices such as mortality composters and waste storage structures.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers the assistance to all landowners who apply under the pilot project; however, due to restricted funding, there is a priority for

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NATIVE WARM SEASON GRASSES TO MITIGATE POULTRY AIR EMISSIONS

Early in the 2012 calendar year, Josh Spencer and Don Riley began working to develop Native Warm Season Grass Hedgerow demonstration sites in NC. The intent of the demonstration sites is to determine whether grasses utilized in Maryland to filter particulate matter from poultry facility exhaust fans will survive in a more southern climate with equally harsh growing conditions. During the process, the objective was to identify and cooperate with a diverse group in order to best demonstrate the utility of the technology. Through assistance from local NRCS staff (Brent Bogue, Carl Kirby, Don Barker and Amanda Schaller) and through cooperation with Sanderson Farms and a generous grass seed donation from ERNST Conservation Seeds, three demonstration sites were established with Timber and Bo-Master switchgrass varieties on May 11, 2012.



*Write-up and image provided by
Josh Spencer, NRCS ECS.*

The goal to achieve diversity across geographic location, management regime, cultural influence and operation size was fully met. The three demonstration sites are all very unique and provide a different perspective on the functionality of the technology. The site in Orange County is a Certified Organic operation. Birds are allowed access outside of the facility and exhaust fan operation is dictated by the grower. A new and beginning farmer owns and operates the Greene County operation. This facility was made fully operational in 2011, which marked the first ever agricultural venture by the grower. The Pitt County site is owned and operated by an Asian-American farmer who has been in agricultural production in the past, with this operation being his first poultry operation in North Carolina. Both the Greene and Pitt County sites are both traditional poultry operations. Overall, operational procedures for these poultry facilities are requirements set forth by Sanderson Farms, and day-to-day operations are carried out by the owners.

NRCS state office and field office staff will continue working with the growers and cooperators to monitor the growth and survival of the plants. As the hedgerows become fully established, it is our hope that we will be able to further develop the effectiveness of the technology through

assessment of potential reductions of particulate matter leaving the farm as a result of the hedgerows.



47 YEARS AND A LOT ACCOMPLISHED

TOMMY CUTTS RETIRES



Tommy Cutts, North Carolina State Engineer, retired after 47 years of working with USDA-NRCS. Tommy joined the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now NRCS, on June 14, 1965, straight out of college from NC State University.

Tommy leaves NRCS just as proud of his working relationships with employees as he is of his accomplishments working with NRCS. Tommy spent hours on end working directly and indirectly throughout the heart of the Swan Quarter project, and after 45 years, the Swan Quarter project was completed last summer. Tommy carries pride in seeing such a large project accomplished and seeing the results of all the hard work everyone put into the project.



Tommy hopes he leaves with a good reputation and as a good example for all employees. When asked why he did not want to work another three years to make it 50 years with NRCS, he said felt that 47 years was long enough. His advice for others who may want to work for the agency is to enjoy what you do. After 47 years of working for NRCS, it seems clear that he enjoyed being an engineer.

Mr. Cutts looks forward to taking vacations, visiting places around NC and possibly exploring Europe. However, he mainly looks forward to spending time with his wife, children and grandchildren. Congratulations, Tommy, we will miss you.



Images Provided by Dan Wing – Top left: Retirement Cake, Middle: JB Martin presents Tommy with recognition, Bottom: Office celebration, Right: Mr. and Mrs. Cutts.



BIOMASS CROPS IN NORTH CAROLINA

On June 13, 2012, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the creation of a new Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) project in North Carolina. BCAP will help producers increase the production of renewable, home-grown fuels, reduce America's reliance on foreign oil, as well as create jobs and diversify the agriculture economy.

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) is administering the NC BCAP program, which will be able to help farmers and forest land owners with start-up costs of planting new energy crops.

The goal of the BCAP project in NC is to grow 4,000 acres of Freedom Giant Miscanthus and switch grass to support the availability of biomass. Farmers and forest land owners sign up voluntarily with FSA. NC farmers can sign up for the BCAP program until September 14, 2012.

Project Continued...

limited resource and socially disadvantaged applicants who apply. All applicants will receive 90% or 75% of the installation of conservation practices, depending on what applicant type the farmer is. NRCS will be taking applications for the pilot project until July 25, 2012. Sign-up for EQIP is continuous throughout the year. All producers/farmers interested in soil, water and air quality, and conservation should not wait on special projects or initiatives to develop a conservation plan and apply for programs. Contact your local field office today to get involved in Farm Bill programs and conservation.

Hugh Hammond Bennett understood that our natural resources are the foundation of our entire economy – not just the farm economy. About 52 % of all land in the U.S. is used for agriculture. And while less than 2 % of Americans are employed by direct agriculture production, there is a big ripple effect across economic sectors from the farm and throughout the Nation.

Our investments in conservation through this pilot project on working lands in North Carolina help to ensure that our farmers in economically depressed areas can stay in business and continue to provide food, feed, fiber and bio-energy more sustainably. By working with landowners, NRCS helps conserve and enhance our state's vital natural resources and save energy.

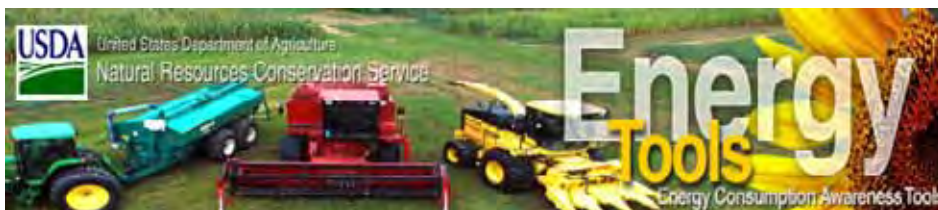
So, how does Chris work to create a cohesive Farm Bill program that works across such vibrant boundaries?

"We are seeing growth in small scale and non-traditional farms in this area, and many of these producers are new to working with USDA and Farm Bill programs, which also makes it harder to find these landowners," said Chris. "I'm working with a network of new partners and organizations to find and outreach to these individuals. By doing so, I'm able to build a greater working relationship with key partners and individuals...and build a conservation program that crosses landscapes and traditional and non-traditional land uses."

Childers is finding a balance between rural and urban conservation issues and utilizing the programs to address the variety of needs for the people his area.

"I would like to double the participation in Farm Bill programs that we had this past year. My biggest goal is to continue to meet county leaders and partners, and let these folks know the benefits of what is being done through conservation in each of their counties," said Chris. "So often, in these urbanizing counties, the local focus is urban conservation issues, but I want to show them how and where resource conservation fits into the mix and can solve soil erosion and water quality in both urban and rural settings."

As for his future goals, Chris would like to work with NRCS utilizing his forestry background. In addition, Childers is looking forward to marrying his fiancée, Amanda Urban, a customer service manager at Harris Teeter, in late October.



NRCS has developed four energy tools designed to increase energy awareness in agriculture and to help farmers and ranchers identify where they can reduce their energy costs. The results generated by these tools are estimates based on NRCS models and are illustrative of the magnitude of savings. Please contact your local NRCS office for additional assistance. The Energy Estimator are, Animal Housing, Irrigation, Energy, Nitrogen, Tillage, Grain Drying and a self assessment tool, which will help producers calculate the estimated energy and cost savings for the use of high efficiency equipment and energy conservation practices.

The results generated by these tools are estimates based on models and help to determine conservation alternatives to save energy and money on the farm.

To learn more about these tools, visit the USDA Energy Tools Website at <http://energytools.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.