

# Coming Together FOR A COMMON PURPOSE



*Pete Benjamine,  
USFWS Field  
Supervisor and  
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NRCS State  
Conservationist,  
Sign MOU*

NRCS recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the agency and U.S. Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Ecological Services Field Offices. The MOU sets the framework for each of the MOU signing partners to work closer, to coordinate efforts and strategies for determining the potential effects of NRCS conservation practices on federally listed threatened and endangered species.

Through the coordinated effort, the partners will be able to determine positive and negative effects planned conservation practices have on priority resources, provide recommendations for avoiding adverse effects, identify beneficial effects of planned practices and recognize a management activities need for additional consultation.

Don Riley, NRCS State Biologist, helped facilitate the MOU.

"The practices that we work with landowners to implement are strategic in improving the condition of our natural resources," said Riley. "Through this MOU we will utilize our cooperative conservation partnership to correlate practice implementation to the direct effects they have on priority and endangered resources."

Although each partner has specific objectives in the MOU, the ultimate goal is to work toward implementation of cooperative measures to preserve, protect and restore the natural resources for mutual benefits.

Signed on April 25 in Raleigh, the MOU is just another step NRCS is taking to work through a cooperative partnership to get conservation on the ground.

"It is a five year MOU, but the prospects for building a stronger partnership and enhancing priority resources will go well beyond its scope," said Riley.

Helping People Help the Land



# The UPDATE

North Carolina May - June 2012

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

## A TRANSLATION

Landowner Success

## 150 YEARS OF USDA

Message from the Secretary

## CHANGING PATHS

Mr. Corris Jenkins & Mrs. Francis Bell

## WETLANDS RESERVE

Enhancement Program (WREP)

AND MORE...

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

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If you would like to contribute to The Update, or have questions about this or past editions of The Update, please contact Stuart Lee at 919.873.2107 or Stuart.Lee@nc.usda.gov.



The photos on this page and cover are from three farms in Duplin County.

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# WETLANDS RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced funding for 13 partnership agreements in 12 states, including North Carolina, for high-priority wetland restoration and conservation work. NRCS and a network of partners have nearly \$15 million in financial and technical assistance available for these projects in 2012 and will enter into long-term agreements to deliver additional assistance over the next four years.

"These projects were selected because of their significant contribution towards wetlands restoration, enhancement or protection," Vilsack said. "This partnership effort combines federal resources with the funding and expertise of others needed to improve water quality, prevent flooding and enhance wildlife habitat on more than 16,500 acres of wetlands."

The Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) is a special component of NRCS' Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Through WRP, private landowners can restore and permanently protect wetlands. WREP works differently—partners, such as nongovernmental organizations and state agencies, contribute technical and financial assistance to leverage NRCS' funding. These partners identify special WREP project areas where they plan to focus wetlands restoration and protection efforts.

Private landowners located within awarded areas can work with NRCS and the partner to restore and protect wetlands. Participants retain ownership and access to the land and may be able to generate income from grazing or recreation approved by NRCS.

From extensive restoration in the Florida Everglades to ongoing efforts around the Gulf of Mexico Initiative, USDA is working with state and local governments and private landowners to conserve and protect our nation's natural resources -- helping preserve our land and clean our air and water.

Next month, NRCS celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Wetlands Reserve Program. More than 11,000 of America's private landowners have voluntarily enrolled over 2.3 million acres into the WRP. The cumulative benefits of these wetlands reach well beyond their boundaries to improve watershed health, the vitality of agricultural lands and the aesthetics and economies of local communities.

There is \$500,000 available through WREP in North Carolina. Landowners may apply at their local NRCS office. Learn more about WREP at <http://go.usa.gov/m24> and find out about other NRCS programs and initiatives at <http://go.usa.gov/m22>.

PL-566 Dam and stream restoration project in Area 3; photos by Mike Hinton.



# CHANGING PATHS

...continued

Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

"I had gone to Farm Service Agency for loans and they told me about NRCS and the District," said Corris. "And they've treated me well."

With the help of NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Corris was able to develop a conservation plan and install a dry waste storage facility, which prevents nutrients and pathogens from entering surface water.

"After I made changes, upgrades and got technical assistance, my first flock was the largest ever produced on the operation," said Corris. "My next flock made me Purdue's number one producer, and I've done it five or six times since then."

"It is hard work, but it is worth it if you don't mind the work," said Corris.

Mrs. Francis Bell, a poultry producer in Martin County was working in a sewing factory.

"I knew how to punch a clock, but I didn't know anything about the poultry business," said Francis.

In the late 1980s, Francis' husband Sterling came to her with an interesting proposition that led her away from the dreaded "time clock" and towards becoming a respected poultry producer.

"We bought this farm, and my husband said that he would remodel the one chicken house on the farm if I would agree to run the farm," said Francis. "I said go ahead and remodel it."

Francis did not let the prospects of venturing into the poultry business stand in her way. "I had no fear at all getting into this. I had a service man that gave me advice and a really good neighbor who showed me what to do," said Francis. "And my neighbor only had to tell me once what to do, and before long I was producing more than him."

Working with people in the poultry industry was not the only resource she sought out for advice. Francis also worked with her local NRCS field office and the Martin County SWCD. Through technical assistance from NRCS and participating in Ag-Cost Share through the SWCD, Francis was able to install a dry waste storage facility and a composter.

When asked about working with the local USDA Field Office and the Martin SWCD, she quickly stated, "I would tell, and recommend them to, everyone... they've always come through for me."

Both Mr. Corris Jenkins and Mrs. Francis Bell are stellar examples of what you can accomplish when you've set your goals, have determination and are not afraid of following a new path.



Image: Francis Bell and her husband Sterling.



## Notes from the State Conservationist

May is National Wetlands Month, providing us a great opportunity for us to talk about what wetlands are and why they are important—and how NRCS contributes to their conservation.

As you probably know, wetlands are among the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to tropical rainforests and coral reefs in the number and diversity of species they support.

While wetlands only occupy about 5 percent of the continental U.S. land surface, up to one-half of all North American bird species feed or nest in wetlands, more than one-third of federally listed species rely on them and they are home to nearly one-third of our plant species. As they provide important migratory bird feeding grounds, wildlife and fish habitat, and marine nurseries.

Wetlands protect and improve surface water quality and groundwater recharge. They provide flood protection, mitigating storm damage. Wetlands sequester carbon and help improve air quality. And they provide recreational opportunities for hunters, fishermen and others.

Yet in the continental U.S., we have lost over 50 percent of an estimated pre-Columbian 220 million wetland acres; some states have lost over 90 percent of their wetland acreage. Wetland restoration is integral to preserving American natural resources.

Over 70 percent of U.S. land is in private hands, making these lands the key to a nationwide strategy to restore wetlands—and that's where NRCS' Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) comes in. WRP is how NRCS helps private landowners voluntarily restore, protect and enhance wetlands.

In the past 20 years, NRCS has worked with landowners to voluntarily enroll over 2.3 million acres of wetlands and associated habitats on private lands through WRP.

And I know that this incredible work could not be accomplished without our partners, landowners and employees, who have put in so much effort to protect America's wetlands.

J.B. Martin Jr.  
State Conservationist

## It's in the Quote...

*Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps.*

--Henry David Thoreau



*The Update is distributed by email and published on our North Carolina website at [www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov). Limited print copies are available by request by emailing [Stuart.Lee@nc.usda.gov](mailto:Stuart.Lee@nc.usda.gov) or calling 919.873.2107.*





## TRANSLATING

### CONSERVATION IN DUPLIN

On February 14, 2012, in Duplin County, District Conservationist Amanda Schaller led North Carolina's first English-to-Vietnamese translation for technical services between the agency and a Vietnamese producer.

"Though Mr. Vu speaks some English, it isn't fluent enough to have effective communication about the management of his operation and technical practices that we are proposing he incorporate into his conservation plan," said Schaller. "I worked with the state office to find a translator to help us communicate conservation objectives and the assistance opportunities available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program."

Quan Quan, with the NRCS West National Technical Service Center (WNTSC), speaks Vietnamese, and through an agreement with the WNTSC came down from his Maryland duty station to help transcend the language barriers.

"This was a unique opportunity for Duplin Soil and Water Conservation District, NRCS and the Asian community in this county," said Schaller. "This opens a door for the agency and the District to reach a growing population of Asian farmers in our community."

Image: Quan, VU and Schaller review conservation plan.

## USDA 150 YEARS

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY



In 2012, USDA will commemorate and celebrate the 150th anniversary of our founding in 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an Act of Congress establishing the United States Department of Agriculture.

Two and a half years later, in what would be his final annual message to the Congress, Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department." At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms, compared with about two percent today. But through our work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation and a host of issues, USDA still fulfills Lincoln's vision -- touching the lives of every American, every day.

As we commemorate 150 years of accomplishments, USDA is learning from past experiences and looking to the future. In the years to come, we must help address the changing needs of agriculture and rural America. We must continue to help provide a safe, ample food supply for our nation and the world.

Over the course of the year, I hope that Americans will acknowledge and join in our commemoration of 150 years of USDA. It is a great time to learn about our contributions to the strength and health of this nation, and to see how we can continue to partner with Americans working to provide a better life for their families.

Secretary Tom Vilsack



### Historic Photos

Tobacco looping, near Wilson, NC, July 1938. Photos taken from Conservation and Development

Department, Travel and Tourism Division, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.



## CHANGING PATHS & NOT LOOKING BACK

It can be tough for anyone to examine their life and make a drastic switch. However, when you have a calling to follow a new path, hard work and determination will make it a success.

Two stellar examples of successfully changing paths can be seen in two different poultry producers in Martin County: Mr. Corris Jenkins and Mrs. Francis Bell. Both were on very different career paths, but with faith, determination and hard work both have become well respected in their industry.

Corris Jenkins, though raised on a farm, started working as a school mentor in his local school district, but in 2004 he had the opportunity to do something different.

"This farm was for sale and I wanted to take it and do something with it," said Corris. "I knew that this poultry operation had been shut down twice for underperforming, but I didn't care about what it was, I wanted to do something with it."

He bought the operation, and between 2004 and 2006 he continued to work in the schools, farm and raise chickens.

"I had no equipment when I started other than a 1979 Chevrolet Truck," said Corris. "I didn't have a tractor, and didn't know anything about the chicken business -- or cleaning out a poultry house. There were big litter piles behind both houses and both houses needed upgrades. I didn't know about the rules or regulations, but none of that stopped me."

His determination led to success. To move forward, he worked hard. Corris worked with the integrator to learn about the rules and regulations for the business, and the upgrades that needed to be made to the houses. He also worked with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Martin County



Top: Corris Jenkins on his farm. Above: Dry stack installed on Corris Jenkins' farm through EQIP.

Continued on page 6...