



August 2012 Summer Issue

Antioch Missionary Baptist Church Practices Good Stewardship of the Land—Lauderdale County	2-3
The Phelps Sisters—Family Farming Is the Best—Claiborne County	4-6
Bayou Pierre River System—A Stewardship Opportunity	7
Last Acre Celebration—Mississippi Soil Survey Program	8-9
Choctaw Tribal Stewardship News	10
Highlighting Neshoba County	11-13
GLCI Conservation Field Day, Leake County	14-15
Bar W Farm, Simpson County Success Story	16-17
Clarke County Absentee Landowner is Not Absent in Stewardship	18
High Tunnels Impress Jasper County Farmer; and Clarke County Field Day—Hasan Family Farm	19
“Miscellaneous News and Pictures	20

The Pearl Preview

Dear Area 2 Conservationists,

As we come to the closing of this fiscal year, I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your dedication and hard work. You made Area 2 look good!



David Brunson
Area Conservationist

We have had an exciting year—amazing conservation field days, seasonal high tunnel tours, pond management field days, grazing land field days, MACD award winners, your success stories put on the USDA Blog, as well as extra efforts put forth to carry out each day with customer service in mind. I am so proud of this Area and can't wait to see what we will do next year!

In this issue of The Pearl Preview, you will find a small selection of your success stories, but there are so many excellent stories to come; they just all couldn't be put in here at one time. We will do another Special Edition in the near future just to get some of them to you (and to the world)! I can't begin to express how happy I am to see these stories and know that my staff in the field is doing such an outstanding job of providing technical assistance to our landowners. The feedback from these stories has been overwhelming. **Did you know that out of the 13 USDA Blog posts written this past fiscal year by NRCS Mississippi, 10 were from Area 2? Great job, Area 2!!** Check out the list below:

- Mississippi Church Restores & Nurtures a Forest with NRCS' Help*
- Mississippi Farmer Grows Operation Just Like His Tomatoes: Successfully*
- Growing a Mississippi Farm Organically*
- Mississippi Farmer Continues Family Conservation Legacy*
- Earth Team Volunteers, Conservationists Bring Tree Lessons to Mississippi Classrooms*
- Natural Resources Conservation Service Helps Landowner Manage Inherited Property*
- Earth Team Volunteers Cleaning Mississippi Lake*
- NRCS Reduces Waste for Mississippi Chicken Farmer*
- High Tunnel Extends Season for Mississippi Small Farmer*
- Natural Resources Conservation Service Provides Assistance to Choctaw Tribe*

Plus, these links were all posted on USDA's Facebook and Twitter accounts amplifying conservation efforts of Area 2! Area 2 has also been represented in either the main story or one of the sidebar stories in all of the NRCS "Conservation Bytes" this year. And this is only the tip of the iceberg! There is so much more to come from out there because I know you are continuing your outstanding efforts!

A special note of gratitude to Kelvin Jackson and Murray Fulton for having their conservation articles published in four different newspapers this past year, an estimated 60 articles published to highlight conservation and NRCS! Kelvin also was responsible for a beginning farmer video! Thank you and congratulations, Kelvin and Murray!!

Again, thank you all for a great year! I'm looking forward to next year!

David Brunson
Area Conservationist

"Helping People Help the Land"
USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Deacon Willie Moseley and Kelvin Jackson are happy about the progress they have made together in reforesting the church's land.

In the early 1920's, the church acquired the 40 acres. They cut some of the big trees and those that were damaged. Around 15 years ago, they cut the rest of it to sell the logs. Nothing was left but chip wood.

Deacon Moseley, a native of Clay County, had previously been involved in NRCS programs, especially Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). When he became a member of this church around the time the rest of the wood was cut, he thought about NRCS then, but nobody in the church knew about any program assistance from NRCS, and were not interested in his ideas. He wasn't in charge back then, so time slowly passed.

Now things are different. He is now Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and is the project person! He started pushing the tree planting program and finally convinced the other deacons to seek the assistance of NRCS, and replanting of the pine plantation. When he presented to the church congregation the fact that if they had replanted the forest 15 to 20 years ago, the trees would now be worth enough to build new additions to their church, they were immediately convinced!

It wasn't long before Deacon Moseley's sister in West Point, MS, saved an ad in the newspaper about assistance available from NRCS. First he thought about the WHIP program, but after contacting Kelvin Jackson and John Daily in Meridian, he decided on the EQIP program.

Antioch Missionary Baptist Church— Good Stewards of the Land

Story and Photos by Judi Craddock

Deacon Willie Moseley had a vision for his church's 40 acres of forestland over 15 years ago. Antioch Missionary Baptist Church located in the Daleville Community, is off the beaten path in Lauderdale County, Mississippi. Dean Moseley, as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for his church, is now in charge of their new project to manage their reforested timber land.

Kelvin Jackson, Supervisory District Conservationist in the Meridian NRCS Office, saw his first opportunity to help a church, a historically underserved entity, harvest timber they owned and reforest the land. Jackson worked diligently with the church body, doing the research to see how they could sign up for EQIP programs. He worked with the Farm Service Agency and read manuals to see how NRCS could help them, based on our program guidelines. He found it was legal due to the members themselves were the governing body, and the church members owned the property and held a deed of ownership.



Church forestland that has been cut and harvested.



Tree planting was done in early January.



Kelvin Jackson (left) stated, "Deacon Moseley (right) and his church are good stewards of the land, and have been great landowners to work with."

After the deed was cleared, and Jackson and Daily walked Deacon Moseley through verification of all the proper documents, they gave him a list of vendors to pick from to contract on the tree planting.

With the list of recommended vendors, Deacon Moseley was able to select the perfect company to clear the land, one that went along with his idea and plan. "Some vendors were just in it for the money. I was able to find one that was more environmentally concerned about doing what is best for the land," stated the Deacon.

The church was also able to sell some of the trees and make enough money to pay for other projects, rather than getting zero! After cutting, spraying and burning, tree planting was completed in late December and early January.

Deacon Moseley stated, "I will tell anybody I can that there are programs out there that can assist them with their land." He recommends NRCS and encourages his church congregation and many others that are historically underserved producers to attend many of our outreach programs as well.

Jackson stated, "These folks are good stewards of the land, and great landowners to work with. They have completed these practices expeditiously!"



Reforestation has begun on the church's 40 acres of forestland.

"If I do anything in this life, I want to leave a legacy," stated Deacon Moseley. With his visions of committed stewardship of the land and devotion to his Lord and church, there is no doubt that he will do just that!



Antioch Missionary Baptist Church.



Antioch Missionary Baptist Church and Cemetery adjacent to land that has just been reforested.



Dora Phelps (above) and Bernice Phelps-Dobbins (below) make perfect partners when it comes to family farming.



The Phelps Sisters—Claiborne County— “Family Farming Is the Best!”

Story and Photos by Judi Craddock

Just stand back and watch two amazing sisters who love beef cattle farming and taking care of their family land! Words cannot express the enthusiasm of Dora Phelps and Bernice Phelps-Dobbins who together own and manage their nearly 100 year-old Phelps Family Farm near Hermanville, MS, in Claiborne County. The two sisters are historically underserved and limited resource farmers with 100 acres of pastureland (formerly in cotton) for raising 54 head of Angus beef cattle.

For over 13 years, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Claiborne County Soil and Water Conservation District have played an important role in providing technical assistance for their beef cattle farming operation and helping them to utilize and benefit from Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) and installing conservation practices on their farm. It is quite obvious, however, that their success is also attributed to their strong character, family closeness, as well as young-at-heart and fun-spirited outlook on life.

The two have utilized almost every conservation practice available from NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) except for tree planting —not yet anyway. The conservation practices the sisters have carried out on the family

farm include cross fencing (3,000 feet); water trough, heavy use area, pipeline, grade stabilization, nutrient management, and pest management.

Patrick Smith, Soil Conservation Technician in the Port Gibson NRCS Field Office, explained, “Our programs sometimes don’t show much benefit for the money spent, but here it does. These producers use our programs the way they were meant to be used, and you can see how much they are benefitting from them. It’s great when you can see where EQIP money is going. And, when these ladies get a contract approved, they jump right on it!”

Below Patrick Smith explains the improved design of a water trough with a wildlife escape structure (close-up shown below at right). These structures help eliminate wildlife mortality such as rodents and other small wildlife, etc., that might fall into the water trough; as well as improve livestock health by keeping the water uncontaminated by drowned animals. Animals that become trapped can swim along the perimeter of the water trough and climb out on the structure

without falling back into the water. Expanded metal grating with 1/2-inch mesh is highly recommended for economical construction of the wildlife escape structure. (Info extracted from “Water for Wildlife” Newsletter.)





Future plans include clearing more of the thick brush around fields to improve grazing areas.



Pictured above is one of four water sources on the farm that serves 54 head of very healthy cattle (a few shown at left).



Above, the two sisters demonstrate their expert driving abilities of farm equipment used on the farm. Bernice prefers the yellow front lifter, and Dora really enjoys her 4-wheeler as well as red tractor. These two have way too much fun on this farm, just saying!



Above: District Clerk Glenda Thornton and Soil Conservation Technician Patrick Smith enjoy their time with Bernice Phelps (middle) as she explains that she has lived here all her life, and is still trying to make a country woman out of her sister, Dora!



Dora Phelps (left), originally from Hermanville, lived 45 years in Illinois working at the VA Hospital. Her mother who owned the farm was very ill, so Dora retired and returned “home” to care for her until her death in 1992.

Bernice, who only lives 4 miles away down the road, was the only family here. A former teacher, she has lived close by all her life; so together they began managing the farm as pastureland. Her son helps twice a week, but they mainly handle the farm themselves.

By word of mouth, they heard about technical assistance available from NRCS back in the mid-90’s.

Dora Phelps recently broke her ankle riding her 4-wheeler (suspected of actually doing wheelies) across the farm. She has healed now and is back in the saddle again.



*Not everybody has their OWN tractor, but these two ladies do! Bernice Dobbins (left) is the one and ONLY driver of her yellow tractor; and Dora Phelps (right) is the exclusive driver of her red tractor! **Impostors beware!***

Since they first sought assistance from NRCS, the Phelps have implemented three EQIP contracts (2004, 2011, and 2012); and they will soon sign up for more grazing practices.

The Phelps were preparing their farm for hosting the Winston County’s Self Help Beef Cattle Field Day, a workshop and outreach meeting that will provide local producers self-help information. The farm is certainly a show place for other producers to see what can be done to improve their own land and benefit from NRCS programs.

In 2004, 3,000 feet of cross fencing was installed. The field was a muddy mess from heavy use, but EQIP practices along with two hay rings have solved the problem.





State Watershed Restoration Projects— Bayou Pierre Watershed Enhancement Group

On April 26, 2012, several state and federal agencies, stakeholders, representatives from two universities, and landowners came together to form the Bayou Pierre Watershed Enhancement Group. The main objective of this first meeting was to come up with a long-term healing process to save the Bayou—conservation projects; funding and support needed to improve water quality, landowner property values (including timber, livestock and crops); and wildlife within the watershed. Support for improved habitat of the bayou darter and population monitoring are needed for this endangered species found only in Mississippi and more specific, the Bayou Pierre Watershed.



Bill Russell welcomed the group and presented “The NRCS and the Bayou Pierre River Watershed,” regarding the severe erosion problems in the watershed.

Severe erosion has caused most of the problems, as well as absentee landowners, leading to failure of roads and bridges. Several landowners voiced their perspectives on why things hadn’t been accomplished in the past and what needs to be done now to correct the situation. The formation of this group will hopefully lead to recognition by those who are in power and can allocate funds and grants to help landowners with erosion concerns.

The meeting was very informative and productive with over 50 people attending including representatives from Tulane and University of Southern Mississippi; Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries & Parks; USDA-NRCS; Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality; EPA; Army Corps of Engineers; The Nature Conservancy; Interagency (Federal, State, County and NGO’s), County Soil and Water Conservation Commissions (Copiah and Claiborne); Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission; and National Park Service.



A smaller group representing the general body of the enhancement group will meet again later in the summer to identify needs and funding sources, as well as to propose a plan of action for a specific model project(s). A general meeting of the entire group will meet again in the fall.

For more details and slide presentations given regarding this meeting and the Bayou Darter, click on the following website: <http://www.fws.gov/mississippiES/Special%20Issue%20Bayou%20Darter.html>



Daniel Drennen with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, hopes that the group will come up with strategies for projects and funding sources.

Last Acre Celebration—To Usher in the Next Generation of the MISSISSIPPI SOIL SURVEY PROGRAM—*Photos by Judi Craddock and Justin Fritscher*



A Milestone for Mississippi's National Cooperative Soil Survey

A special day in the history of Mississippi's Soil Survey Program was held in a "Last Acre Celebration" on May 8, 2012, at the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Museum Ethnicity Center in Jackson. The event—well attended by a vast variety of speakers, retired as well as current soil scientists; national office, state and federal representatives; USDA and university professors, MACD and other partners—commemorated the completion of the initial Mississippi Soil Survey. The last acre mapped was in Greene County in 2011, ending with a total of 30,020,454 acres mapped, a 114-year cooperative effort.

Shown in top group photo are current and past soil scientists, university liaison partners, and national and state office representatives (NRCS).

Shown in the middle photo are Area Conservationist Wesley Kerr; State Soil Scientist Delaney Johnson; (behind him is Assistant State Soil Scientist James Curtis; Christopher Hatcher, MLRA Project Leader, Meridian; Area 3 Soil Scientist Ralph Thornton; Jerome Langlinais, MLRA Project Leader, Loxley, AL; and Dr. William Kingery, Soil Survey Liaison/Professor, MSU/MAFES and President PSCAM.



In the bottom photo, Al Garner, Acting State Conservationist, gives a welcome and opening remarks. Seated left to right are Delaney Johnson who was Master of Ceremonies; Dr. William Kingery; and Charles Love, Acting Director of NRCS Soil Survey Division.



Dr. William Kingery, Soil Survey Liaison /Professor, MSU/MAFES



Rosie Thomas, Acting Forest Supervisor, U. S. Forest Service



A beautiful plaque was presented to the group to commemorate the event.



Left: Dr. Laschunda Anderson, Assistant Professor, Department of Agriculture, Alcorn State University;

Right: Retired State Soil Scientist David Jones; and Christopher Hatcher, MLRA Soil Survey Office Leader, Meridian.



Charles Love, Acting Director, Soil Survey Division, NRCS, Washington, DC



Paul McKay, Chairman, Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission



Standing: Dr. David Petry, and NRCS Retiree Rex Davis seated

Choctaw Stewardship News— “Self-Determination”

By Timothy Oakes

The Schools of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians are an example of self-determination and educational assistance. Hundreds of students enjoy the opportunity to learn at the Wetlands Discovery Outdoor Learning Center in Conehatta, MS,; and how they are connected by use of culturally significant plants, animals, insects and humans that use wetlands. Many of us forget about how this opportunity was accomplished.

Since its introduction by President Richard Nixon, Public Law 93-638, or the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, as it is referred to, gave the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians opportunity to exercise its right of self-governance. A few years ago the MBCI entered into a contract with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to assist in the development of this wetland.

The MBCI Schools recognized an opportunity to work with Tim Oakes, Tribal Liaison with the NRCS Mississippi Choctaw Field Office; Jim McAdory of MSU Extension Service, and other MBCI Departments on the development of the curriculum for the outdoor classrooms.



Leslie Burger and Wetland Wildlife



Students Study Cultural Arts and learn about Culturally Significant Plants from Martha Ferguson MBCI.



Native Story telling with Ronald Gibson—Tribal School Grades 1-4, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, were taught culturally significant plants and native and cultural arts; and wetland wildlife as well as cultural resources. Planting of swamp cane was also demonstrated to the students.



Several hundred Choctaw elementary students participated in the “Wetland Discover Outdoor Classroom” on the Conehatta reservation. The classroom is complete with a nature trail and boardwalk through a natural and enhanced wetland area. Animals, reptiles, entomology, rabbit stick throwing, storytelling, and Smokey Bear were all a part of the outdoor classroom!



Pictured above is Mrs. Jennifer Fortenberry's Homeroom class, although all fourth graders participated.

“GO GARDENS”—from *Neshoba County Conservation News*— **Story and Photos Courtesy of Neshoba County SWCD**

The Neshoba County Soil and Water Conservation District celebrated the beginning of the spring growing season with Neshoba Central's fourth grade students on March 19. The Neshoba County SWCD received a matching grant from the MACD to construct 3 mobile container gardens, called “Go Gardens,” to be given to Neshoba Central's fourth grade science classes. Jeff Wilson with the Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission Office in Jackson, spoke with over 200 fourth grade students about container gardens and the importance of growing your own food. Each container garden holds 3 to 4 containers so that each of the ten science classes will have a container. There will be a competition between the classes on which has the best plants. They will be planting yellow crook-neck squash and will be experimenting with and without different fertilizer types. The gardens were built by the Neshoba County Future Farmers of America and were modified, with the assistance of NRCS, so that water runoff will drain into a bucket and can be reused to teach water conservation. The Neshoba County SWCD would like to thank MACD, MSWCC, FFA, NRCS, and the Neshoba Central School District for their participation in this program.



Pictured above is MSWCC's Jeff Wilson discussing container garden's with over 200 fourth grade students at Neshoba Central Elementary.

Neshoba County Students Participate in Soil & Water Conservation Carnival



Pictured is Mike Lilly, ACES Farm Bill Resource Specialist from NRCS; and Billy Kingery, Soils Professor at Mississippi State University, explaining the different soil types to one of the local groups of Neshoba County students.



The Neshoba County Soil & Water Conservation District hosted their 18th Annual Conservation Carnival at the Neshoba County Coliseum April 12 -13, 2012. Approximately 440 fifth grade students from Neshoba Central, Philadelphia and Union Schools took part in this year's carnival. The purpose of the carnival was to educate our youth of tomorrow on the importance of our natural resources and what they can do to preserve it. Nine educational stations were set-up and students rotated through all stations.



Local agencies participated in the carnival educating students on various subjects such as:
Forestry—Bill Kitchens, Brad Chapman, Jackie McKee and Ronald Adcock with the MS Forestry Commission.
Non-point Pollution—Susan Shedd with the MS Soil & Water Conservation Commission (MS&WCC).
Wildlife—Gordon Adkins and Tyler Norman with the MS Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks.
Water Safety—Mark Dean and Scott Payne from the Corps of Engineer.



Incredible Journey with a Molecule—Lee Smith and Jeff Wilson with the MS&WCC.

Soils—Billy Kingery and Mike Lilly with MSU and NRCS.

Recycling—Daniel Stewart from MS Dept. of Environmental Quality.

The Importance of Water—Margaret White with the MS Extension Service.

ATV Safety—Trey Pope with the MS Farm Bureau Federation.



NESHOBA COUNTY SWCD SHOWS IMPORTANCE OF BACKYARD CONSERVATION

—*Story and Photos Submitted by Erica Fortenberry*

The Neshoba County Soil and Water Conservation District, along with the help of the Natural Resource Conservation Service, has installed a raised vegetable garden to emphasize the importance of Backyard Conservation. Their purpose is to demonstrate that no matter how large or small the amount of land you have, you can still grow a garden.

The USDA Service Center, located at 511 East Lawn Drive, has literature available regarding Backyard Conservation and other various topics such as: Backyard Ponds, Composting, Nutrient Management, Mulching, Pest Management, Terracing, Tree Planting, Wetlands, Wildlife Habitats and Water Conservation.

The Neshoba SWCD and NRCS would like to invite everyone to come by and pick up literature on any of these practices they may be interested in!



Neshoba NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Bill Stalcup, ACES Technician Joe Risher, and Neshoba Soil Conservationist Russell Singleton are constructing the raised vegetable bed (in the rain!).



Neshoba County District Clerk Erica Fortenberry plants vegetables in the District's new raised vegetable garden bed.

The final product—Neshoba County's newly planted vegetable garden to emphasize Backyard Conservation!



GRAZING LAND CONSERVATION FIELD DAY

DR. JIM ANDERSON'S RANCH JUNE 21, 2012, CARTHAGE, MS *Story and Photos Courtesy of Leake and Neshoba Counties Soil and Water Conservation Districts*



Above: Attendees listened to a number of topics including pasture management, weed control, herd health, and USDA-NRCS programs such as EQIP and GLCI that can help them improve their grazing land and cattle operations.

The Leake County Grazing Land Conservation Field Day was mostly like any other, but was also unique. The Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Committee, Leake County and Neshoba County Soil and Water Conservation Districts partnered with the Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission to produce this successful field day that drew nearly 200 participants in 90 plus degree heat to this event. Pertinent topics such as pasture management, herd health, weed control, USDA-NRCS conservation practices, and programs eligibility were delivered to what seemed to be a group hungry for information.



Above: Ricky Goldman, holding a native weed in his hand, demonstrates to the tour group one of the weed species that should be controlled in a well managed pasture.

There were also sales representatives with supplies, viewing of heavy farm equipment by local dealers, various conservation practice demonstrations, as well as tours of the farm owned by Dr. Jim Anderson of Carthage, Mississippi. The event ended with a barbecue dinner prepared by the Neshoba County SWCD.

Below: NRCS Grazing Land Specialist Walter Jackson (with microphone) and Dr. Jim Anderson (right front) discuss the features and success of the farm's gravity-fed irrigation system supplied from a nearby farm pond.



Above: Retired NRCS District Conservationist Carl Mason (left); and his son and daughter-in-law enjoy the GLCI tour and learning proper grazing techniques. They are interested in raising goats on their farm.



Above: Dr. Jim Anderson (middle of the crowd) discussed herd health and care on one of the tour stops.

Continued from Page 14

Guest speaker Dr. James Davis, Grazing Expert, Murray State University in Kentucky, presented significant information regarding grazing land. Kelvin Jackson, NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist in Lauderdale County, explained USDA-NRCS programs and eligibility. Walter Jackson, NRCS Grazing Land Specialist, Jackson State Office, explained all conservation practices dealing with grazing lands. Weed control information was presented by Ricky Goldman, Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, MSU.

It should be noted that during his overview of the farm and discussion on herd health, Dr. Anderson stated more than once to the audience that all of the improvements to his farm in making it what it is today would not have been possible without the assistance of NRCS programs.

The following group of random shots are a courtesy of Russell Singleton, Soil Conservationist in Philadelphia, MS.

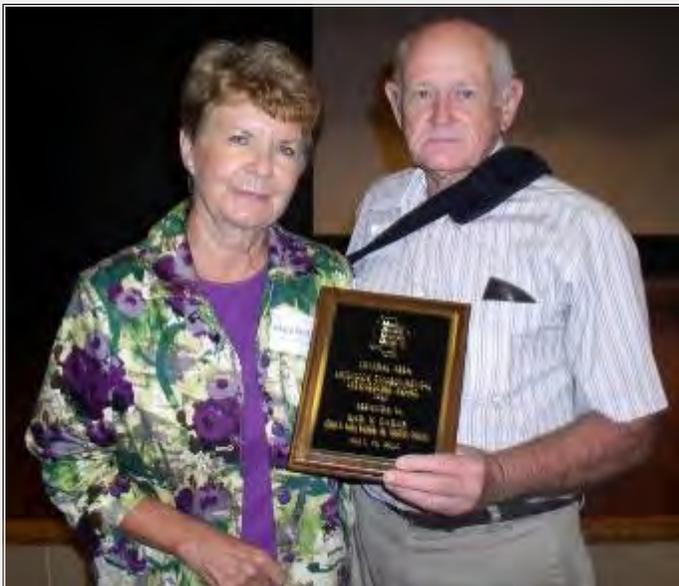


A pond on Dr. Anderson's farm is used as a water facility to "gravity-feed" the cattle. He grows his own corn to supplement their food. An intricate irrigation system has also been installed throughout the pastures.



Bar W Farm—Simpson County Success Story—

Story and Photos Submitted by Edith Wallace



Jerry N. (Ned) and Mary Walker were recipients of the MACD Livestock Environmental Stewardship Award for 2012.

Jerry N. (Ned) and Mary Walker knew from the very beginning of their lives together that they wanted to buy a farm and experience life as livestock producers. They soon purchased 225 acres of prime farmland and rented an additional 60 acres located in the Old Pearl Community along the Pearl River in Simpson County.

Having undertaken the responsibility of raising registered cattle, they determined that the commercial beef master cattle worked best for them.

Using personal funds and monies received from the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Walkers were able to establish several conservation practices on their land (see examples below).

On two additional fields (not shown), the Walkers had two heavy use area protection practices installed. The first one consisted of dividing the fields with cross-fencing and watering facility to make the most of its use. Another 30'x30' pad was constructed of concrete with an additional 10 feet of gravel and geo-textile placed around the sides to keep the cattle from bogging. This made it easier to collect the manure and apply it to the most needed areas of pasture.

They also have a field that contained a large dug-out pond that leaked. The pond was filled in and another stock pond was dug. The field was then planted to UF-Riata Byhalia grass.

Another field included a stock pond and berm installed to carry water from other property around the field. A total of eight fields benefitted from cost-share programs used to assist the Walkers in applying lime and fertilizer to their farm based upon a soils test.

The Walkers are partial to spring calving, January and February, so they can minimize the amount of feed it takes per calf. For winter grazing, they plant a combination of wheat, oats, ryegrass and clover; therefore, they use some grazing for cows as they calve. They have this flexibility to graze calves on winter grazing until they reach 1,000 to 1,100 pounds, precondition or sell at weaning. They raise high quality hay so their mama cows only get Bermuda grass hay.



Right: This field was very wet and did not drain at all. The field was broken up and tilled, drainage ditches were installed to divert water into the creek, a culvert was installed to prevent erosion, Sumrall 007 Bermuda grass was sprigged, and cross-fencing was built.

Another field (not shown) contained very wet areas from another landowner's property draining onto this field. A drainage ditch was constructed due to runoff to divert water around the field, and a stock pond was dug.

(continued on next page)



In another field, a pond was constructed for soil erosion, cross-fencing was built, water lines installed, and concrete heavy use area protection with water troughs installed (*shown at left*). The field was planted in fescue.

The Walkers use the services of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Simpson County Soil and Water Conservation District to provide environmental benefits in helping promote their cattle operation through programs sponsored by their offices. They strongly depend upon NRCS and Simpson County SWCD for their technical assistance and recommendations.

As members of the Simpson County Cattleman's Association and the Mississippi Cattleman's Association, the Walkers enjoy working the booth they sponsor at the Mississippi State Fair. This enables them to meet and converse with other cattle producers throughout the county and state to discover their understanding of the cattle industry. They also attend meetings sponsored by these associations where knowledgeable speakers of the cattle industry relate their expertise. These meetings have helped the Walkers in their cattle operation tremendously.

The Walkers have also taken advantage of the experience of the Simpson County Agent and services provided by the Mississippi State Extension Service in learning more about what grasses will adapt best for the soils in their area. Attending field days and Expos like the one held recently in Smith County has also made it possible for them to learn more innovative ideas on the cattle industry.



Field shown above was grown up in weeds and briars. For two seasons this field was cultivated and sprayed to kill weeds, afterwards Sumrall 007 Bermuda grass was planted.

On another note, the Walkers won the MACD Livestock Environmental Stewardship Award for 2012 which they received at the Central Area MACD Summer Meeting in July.

From a personal perspective, the Walkers think the cattle industry will always be here. They strive to raise better quality beef for the people to choose. "We believe there will always be small cattle farms as well as the larger ones; but it's all about taking care of your cattle and land so it can be handed down to your children and grandchildren," stated Mr. Walker. "It's a farm life, not just a job," he added. "You have to love cattle, people you deal with, and friends you meet and enjoy talking about cattle."

Clarke County's Absentee Landowner Has Heart for Good Stewardship of the Land—

Story by Judi Craddock, Photos by Kelvin Jackson



Supervisory District Conservationist Kelvin Jackson (left) and Mrs. Jessie Abrams-Hall.

Born in Enterprise, Mississippi, Mrs. Jessie Abrams-Hall now lives in the suburbs of Sacramento, California. Although 2,000 miles away, she still keeps conservation in mind when it comes to taking care of her forestland back “home” in Clarke County, thanks to Kelvin Jackson and his staff at the Quitman NRCS Office.

With all her family gone from the Enterprise area, she moved to San Francisco, California; then to Sacramento in 1996 where she recently retired after 32 years as a parole officer.

In 1979 she purchased a 163-acre tract of recently clearcut timber land. In addition, she owns 80 acres of property that was part of a tract of 640 acres that was previously owned by her great-grandfather who purchased the land at 10 percent interest on payments. Mrs. Abrams-Hall has also purchased 26 acres which was part of a 40-acre tract once owned by her grandfather after Interstate 59 was built.

After finding out about NRCS assistance available from a county forester, Jackson had the opportunity to meet Mrs. Abrams-Hall in 2000 when she and her son came and looked at aerial photos of her land. They discussed possible improvements that could be made including prescribed burning, installation of fire lanes, and the resulting benefits of increased growth of timber as well as wildlife enhancement. In the meantime, she aggressively learned everything she could about forestry and the market too.

When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, Mrs. Abrams-Hall lost several acres of timber whereby she qualified for the Downed Timber program. Timber was removed and prescribed burning and installation of fire lanes was carried out. Two years later she received assistance under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) with more fire lanes and prescribed burning.



Devastation from the 2011 killer tornado—a loss of over 50 acres of 30 year-old pine plantation.



Mrs. Jessie Abrams-Hall is very happy with her relationship with the Quitman NRCS office staff, and highly recommends them to anyone who needs their assistance.

Unfortunately, last year's killer tornado (2011) that hit Jasper and Clarke Counties (killing six people), Mrs. Abrams-Hall lost 50 acres of her beautiful 30-year-old stand of loblolly pine plantation when the tornado traveled across her property. NRCS was able to approve cost-share assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for reforestation. Her application was recently approved and contract activities will begin in September with getting the land ready for tree planting to follow.

Mrs. Abrams-Hall may be an “absentee” landowner in one way, but when it comes to getting things done to care for her land, she is right here in heart and spirit! She stated, “I have received excellent help from Kelvin Jackson and his staff.”

High Tunnel in Lauderdale and Clarke Counties Makes a Hit with Jasper County Farmer—

Submitted by Cory Ware

Jasper County landowner Chester Bradley was very interested in building a high tunnel to extend his growing season on his farm, so he contacted Cory Ware in the NRCS Bay Springs Field Office to see about possibly visiting a few producers who already had high tunnels. Soon a tour was arranged with Kelvin Jackson, Supervisory District Conservationist for Lauderdale and Clarke Counties, to view two high tunnels— one each in Lauderdale and Clarke Counties. After Mr. Bradley visited with the owners of these high tunnels along with NRCS officials, he was very impressed with the productivity and purpose of this practice. He is on the way to owning one himself now!



Mrs. Robinson in Clarke County explains her seasonal high tunnel system to Chester Bradley and others.



Installation of irrigation system—tilling up the soil initially, followed by laying rows of plastic mesh and soaker tape for water.



Results of irrigation system—plants are growing evenly and healthy with a longer growing season; and both water and energy are conserved.



Small Ruminants (Goats) & Organic Vegetable Gardening Field Day—Hasan’s Family Farm Clarke County, Shubuta, MS

Submitted by Kelvin Jackson

On Tuesday, May 1, 2012, late on a warm, sunny afternoon in small town Shubuta, MS, the Hasan Family hosted a Small Ruminants (goats) and Organic Vegetable Gardening Field Day on their family farm. The informative event was coordinated by the Winston County Self-Help Cooperative, with cooperation from the Mississippi Extension Service and USDA-NRCS.



Allen McReynolds with Alcorn State University Extension Program.

Approximately 30 attendees were given tips on organic gardening by Nadir Hasan; and conventional gardening by Allen McReynolds; as well as given up-to-date information on best management practices for goats and sheep by Dr. Ann Branch. Kelvin Jackson enlightened the group on USDA-NRCS conservation (EQIP) practices available and how to go about getting technical and financial assistance.

The field day was a very successful learning event for the small town where friends, neighbors and interested small farmers came together to obtain information that would hopefully help them farm more productively on their own land.



Dr. Ann Branch with Alcorn State University Extension Program.

NEW AREA 2 EARTH TEAM VOLUNTEER

Calla Kingery is the newest Area 2 Earth Team Volunteer. Calla, daughter of Dr. William Kingery, is currently a senior at Truman State University where she is studying Political Science. While on summer break, she is volunteering. One of her short term goals upon graduation is to become accepted into the Peace Corps. We welcome Calla to the Area 2 Team! *Photo courtesy of Mike Lilly.*



Above left: Calla is shown measuring the pH of a soil sample. **Left:** Calla is assisting Mike Lilly while he conducts a soil investigation for a pond site. *Photos courtesy of Mike Lilly.*

Right: Dr. William Kingery and his daughter, Calla, are examining grass species at Mississippi State University's student farm. *Photo courtesy of Mike Lilly.*



Mike Lilly, ACES Employee, provides soils training to students at Hinds Community College. Photo courtesy of Lynn Porter.



Above: An enthusiastic participant in soils training at Hinds CC. *Photo courtesy of Lynn Porter.*



Dr. Bill Kingery provides soils training to students at Hinds Community College. Photo courtesy of Lynn Porter.

Newsletter Edited and Published by
Judi Craddock, NOWCC, ACES
Employee

USDA-NRCS

311 Airport Road
Pearl, MS 39208

Phone: 601-965-4559, Ext. 239

Fax: 601-965-5734

Website: www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov

Email: judith.craddock@ms.usda.gov

David Brunson, Area Conservationist

Kurt Readus, Acting State Conservationist

