



United States Department of Agriculture

# Louisiana Conservation Update

April 2020



## Second Generation Farmer is Soil Health Innovator

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



**Table of Contents**

**Notes from the State Conservationist.....3**

**Second Generation Farmer is Soil Health Innovator.....4**

**Outreach Corner.....6**

**Program Updates.....7**

**New Mission and Vision Statements.....8**

**On the Cover**



Learn more about 2nd generation farmer and soil health innovator, Jacob Rumbaugh, on pages 4 and 5.

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

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## Notes from the State Conservationist

It has been a little longer than usual since we've published an issue of Conservation Update. I'm sure you noticed this issue was slated to go out in March; exactly when we were learning and adapting to new ways of communication and telework during this time of the Corona virus.

Now, more than ever, communication is vital, to keep information flowing freely we will continue to share conservation success stories highlighting the determination and overcoming spirit of YOU! Our producers, customers, partners, neighbors and friends.

We have experience working together in tough times, whether its hurricanes, flooding or other disasters that limit the ability to do business "as usual." Learning from these past experiences, we are being creative in our work delivery methods. While avoiding face-to-face contact we continue to provide one-on-one customer-specific advice to you through phone calls, email and through the Conservation Client Gateway Portal to help meet your conservation goals.

In fact, NRCS and SWCD field office employees continue to complete field work and provide financial and technical resources to help conserve soil, protect water and provide wildlife habitat. This includes support for the Farm Service Agencies (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup.

In this issue, we meet Jacob Rumbaugh, a 2nd generation cattle and row crop producer in Caddo Parish. Rumbaugh is a member of the Caddo Soil and Water Conservation District Board (SWCD) and works closely with Brian Baiamonte, the NRCS District Conservationist in the Shreveport Field Office. Jacob is known for his unique cover crops and currently is the only producer in Caddo Parish utilizing NRCS financial assistance programs for grazing cover crops.

Be on the look-out for the next issue of Conservation Update. As we continue to highlight the amazing conservation successes of our customers. When I think of Louisiana and its diverse crops and hard-working producers, the word resilience comes to mind. I've never met a more hard-working and caring community. NRCS is here for you and together we will work together to realize more conservation success in the future.

*"A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles."*—  
Christopher Reeve

Chad Kacir  
State Conservationist



## USDA Service Centers are Open for Business by Phone Appointment Only

### *Program Delivery Continues while taking Safety Measures Related to Coronavirus*

USDA is open for business. Our team is continuing to provide the best customer service we can while also prioritizing the health of our employees, the health of our customers, and the health of our partners. USDA's Service Centers are open in Louisiana by phone appointment only. While our program delivery staff will continue to come into to the office, they will be working with our customers by phone, by email, and using other online tools whenever possible.

To learn more about USDA programs and the Department's response to the Coronavirus visit [farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus)



## Second Generation Farmer is Soil

They say farming is a way of life. For some, like Jacob Rumbaugh, who left the farm to pursue other dreams, that way of life always calls to them. A second generation farmer, Jacob left home after high school to attend Texas A & M. After graduating with a degree in engineering and working for eight years in an office, Rumbaugh, decided to go back home and back to the farm.

Rumbaugh began working with the Caddo Soil and Water Conservation District (SCWD) and NRCS just a few short years ago after being approached by the local district conservationist, Brian Baiamonte. Rumbaugh says, "Brian is extremely proactive." After discussing the programs and services available from NRCS, Rumbaugh was sold. Rumbaugh's experience working with the SWCD and NRCS has been so good, that he recently became a board member on the Caddo SWCD.

Rumbaugh is currently farming approximately 2,000 acres in Bossier and Caddo Parishes; half of which is pasture and the other half is in row crops. From November through February, the land used for row crops is planted in cover crops and used for pasture for his stocker operation.

The areas used for pasture are primarily planted with a diverse cover crop mixture for grazing purposes. The acres where soybeans will be grown are planted primarily in turnips and cereal rye with some blue lupens and flax. According to Rumbaugh, the mix that he uses changes somewhat from year to year.

"Jacob uses a more diverse mix with his cover crops and is always trying those odd things like the flax and the blue lupens. Nobody else in Caddo Parish has used NRCS financial assistance programs for grazing cover crops," stated Baiamonte.

Rumbaugh explains, "Not only are we concerned with having cover, we are also even more concerned with having forage for the cattle."

How does grazing cattle on a cover crop change the whole dynamic of just planting a cover crop on row crop land? Rumbaugh is quick to say, "For us, there really are two reasons. The first being economic. Having the stocker operation in the winter months, more than covers the cost of the seed for the cover crops. In addition, I am generating a living on ground that normally is only generating an income four months out of the year when it is planted in row crops." He goes on to say, "Diversity is the second reason. The bacteria that is being added to the soil by having the cattle on it in addition to the diversity in cover crops, is greatly improving the health of soil."

This is Rumbaugh's fourth year to plant cover crops for cattle to graze for the stocker operation. The first year, he planted 200 acres and he has slowly increased the acreage to around 750 acres this year.

Rachel Stout-Evans, a resource soil scientist with NRCS, completed a baseline soil health assessment last year and will come back each year for several years to monitor the improvements to the soil in Rumbaugh's fields.



# Health Innovator

Planting the cover crops was an easy decision after receiving financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. "Receiving financial assistance through NRCS programs allows the farmer to take a little more of a risk when trying new conservation practices, like cover crops," stated Baiamonte.

There are more and more farmers planting cover crops to improve soil health, but only a few are grazing cattle on those cover crops and even fewer are irrigating their cover crops. Rumbaugh typically plants in September when it is very hot with little to no rain. Because there isn't much growth in the spring, he plants early in the fall and sometimes needs to irrigate. Irrigation gives them the jump start that they need.

When spring planting begins for the row crops, Rumbaugh doesn't build rows, instead he strip-tills on flat land. Rumbaugh feels that strip tilling is a compromise between no-till and conventional tillage and it works great with his cover crops.

This soil health assessment and other soil tests that Rumbaugh uses, help him make decisions that are important to his farm. In fact, his engineering background has proven useful to his farming operation. Rumbaugh states, "Data is how we farm. We have to know everything we are doing. The margins are very tight right now in farming. I try a lot of new things and I try a lot of different things. At the end of the day, I have to have some data to know that I am headed in the right direction."



To learn more about the technical and financial assistance NRCS provides, please visit your local NRCS office or visit [www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov).

# Outreach Corner

*Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Project Specialist, Rapides SWCD*

Chuck Hixson, Senior Farm Loan Officer and Acting County Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency in Ruston was one of the featured presenters at a recent Campti Field of Dreams sponsored class. Through an outreach agreement that NRCS has with the Campti Field of Dreams Organization, the organization's Executive Director Donna Isaacs chose to incorporate a 15-week Spring 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Farmer Education Class into the joint agreement.

Collaboration began with the City of Ruston in October 2017 when Mayor Walker welcomed NRCS and participants to the first of many outreach events to share financial and technical information with farmers and other interested parties. The Sustainable Agriculture Farmer Education Class held in the conference room of the City's public works building from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. on Tuesdays is a continuation of Mayor Walker's commitment to fostering a thriving local food system through partnerships.

According to Donna Isaacs, the Sustainable Ag Education course will teach participants how to grow organically with a major emphasis on developing ecological system and nurturing the biodiversity required for successful vegetable and livestock production with minimum external inputs. In addition to the classes, the students have gone on conservation field tours not only in north Louisiana, but they got the opportunity to visit the Polyface Farm in Swope, Virginia, that is run by the world-renowned American farmer, lecturer and author Joel Salatin and his family.

For the February 18th class, Donna wanted to inform the students about the USDA technical and financial assistance programs that are available to get the students growing. FSA's Chuck Hixson gave a presentation that covered such topics as the role the of the agency, Disaster Assistance Programs, Farm Ownership and Operating Loans, loans targeting Underserved and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, Micro Loans, Youth Loans, Farm Ownership Loans, Direct and Guaranteed Loans.

I gave the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) presentation in which I covered such topics as the role of NRCS, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program, EQIP Organic Initiative, Advanced Payment Option, and I showed some photos of some of the EQIP practices that have been installed on various producers property.

There is a slow movement from conventional to sustainable agriculture and beyond to regenerative agriculture. This comes as the realization that human health and wellbeing are inextricably tied to soil health. Building soil is not just good for the environment; it is also good for the farmer and good for the local economy. Back to Your Roots 2020 is focused on this triple bottom line. BTYR2020 will look at cultural food ways and the ways in which rebuilding the local food system can have a positive impact on Louisiana's rural economies, as well as the health and wellbeing of its people. The conference will include two 2-Day Masters Series and multiple breakout sessions and panel discussions.



# Program Updates

## USDA Seeks Public Comment on More Revised Conservation Practice Standards

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is seeking public comment on proposed revisions to 49 national conservation practice standards through a posting in the Federal Register. The proposed revisions posted this week with the public comment period closing April 23, 2020.

The 49 updated national conservation practice standards include:

- 12 agronomic practices for water quality and erosion control
- Two aquaculture practices
- Three forestry practices
- Six practices affecting waterways
- Five drainage-related practices
- Seven livestock-related practices
- Eight water conservation practices
- Three farm traffic-related practices

The 2018 Farm Bill required NRCS to review all 169 existing national conservation practices to seek opportunities to increase flexibility and incorporate new technologies to help the nation's farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners better protect natural resources on their working lands.

"NRCS is committed to efficiently and effectively implementing the Farm Bill and delivering on our promise to America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners," Chad Kacir, State Conservationist in Louisiana said. "We are taking a close look at our conservation practice standards to make sure they make sense – both for farmers and for natural resources."

As part of its review, NRCS wanted to ensure, as much as possible, that the standards used to carry out the conservation practices are relevant to local agricultural, forestry and natural resource needs, including specialty crops, native and managed pollinators, bioenergy crop production and forestry. NRCS plans to seek public comment on additional conservation practice standards through the Federal Register process throughout 2020.

Improvements to the 49 revised conservation practice standards include expanding and updating their scope to incorporate new technology and increasing flexibility, enhancing water conservation practices such as irrigation, and addressing wildlife issues.

NRCS's conservation practices offer guidelines for planning, installing, operating and maintaining conservation practices used by farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners nationwide.

NRCS helps the nation's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners plan and carry out conservation practices to protect natural resources on their operations. Farm Bill conservation programs such as the

Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program help producers cover the costs to plan and implement these conservation practices.

### Submitting Comments

NRCS is encouraging agricultural producers, landowners, organizations, tribes and others that use its conservation practices to comment on these revised conservation practice standards. NRCS will use public comments to further enhance its conservation practice standards. NRCS sought the public's input for 13 other conservation practice standards in October 2019. This followed the March 11, 2019, announcement that the agency was commencing review of the practice standards in the National Handbook of Conservation Practices.

Copies of the proposed revisions to the 49 conservation practice standards are available through <http://regulations.gov> by accessing docket number NRCS-2020-0001. The proposed revised standards can also be downloaded or printed here.

When submitting comments, please include the volume, date and page number of this issue of the Federal Register. Comments can be submitted using several methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and search for docket number NRCS-2020-0001. Follow instructions for submitting comments.
- Mail or Hand Delivery: Mr. Bill Reck, National Environmental Engineer, Conservation Engineering Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS, 1400 Independence Ave., South Building, Room 6136, Washington, D.C. 20250.

For more information on how NRCS is implementing the 2018 Farm Bill, visit NRCS's Federal Register Notices webpage or [farmers.gov/farmbill](http://farmers.gov/farmbill).

**Our Mission:** We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.



**Our Vision:** A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.



NRCS recently refocused our mission and vision statements to better capture and communicate who we are, what we do and why it's important. Our previous mission statement, "Helping People, Help the Land," will still be the NRCS motto and will continue to be embedded into the culture of our agency. Our mission and vision statements serve as the foundation for our work and help guide our efforts when faced with competing demands, exciting challenges and new opportunities that stem from complex Farm Bills and fluctuating industry needs.

Visit our web site at:  
[www.la.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov)

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