

Photo by Creston Shrum

Lance Tharel, Booneville Plant Materials Center assistant manager, looks at seeds through a microscope.

### Plant Materials

The Booneville Plant Materials Center serves parts of Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. It is part of a national network of plant material centers, providing vegetative solutions to conservation problems.

The Booneville Plant Materials Center works with other agencies and groups to develop and demonstrate vegetative establishment methods. These plantings may consist of a few plants to larger area plantings.

One major project is the evaluation of native grass species establishment on highway rights of way after construction.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Arkansas Conservation Partnership (ACP) prohibit discrimination in all programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

### Emergency Watershed Protection

The Emergency Watershed Protection - Floodplain Easement Program goal is to reduce the recurring cost of flood damage in areas prone to flooding while restoring or protecting fish and wildlife habitat, especially wetland habitat, and the species that use these habitats such as migratory waterfowl and songbirds.

Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easement restoration activities were completed on all easements in FY03. Restoration consists of restoring wetland hydrology and planting native species of hardwood trees. Total EWP Floodplain Easement program accomplishments are 4,165 acres of easements, on 14 easement properties. Total costs for purchase were \$2,734,237; total restoration costs were \$613,529.

### Cost-Share Programs

NRCS provides technical assistance for all 2002 Farm Bill programs.

In addition, many state agencies and non-profit organizations look to NRCS' technical assistance for support of their conservation cost-share programs.

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program

During 2003, more than 4,600 landowners applied for \$76,318,000 in funds for statewide resource-concern areas. Program-funding levels limited funding to 570 applicants, who received a total of \$11,344,000 in funding.

### Wetlands Reserve Program

During 2003, Arkansas funded and contracted 51 WRP easements on 23,000 acres, totaling \$26,000,000.

Interest in WRP increased unfunded to 414 with a projected cost of \$99 million.

### Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

During 2003, about \$585,000 was approved to carry out 90 WHIP contracts. There were 120 applicants requesting about \$718,000 who were not approved for contracts.

### Grazing Lands

This program received its first funds in 2003 resulting in selection of 11 applications for contracts or easements for \$833,600. An additional 13 easement applications requesting over \$2,900,000 were not funded.



Printed on recycled paper.

# Annual Report



## Natural Resources Conservation Service

# 2003

# Technical assistance targets local issues

Natural Resources Conservation Service uses many conservation tools - mostly programs - to accomplish the successes highlighted in this report. Many of these tools, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wetlands Reserve Program, are made available through the conservation provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill.

This annual report of NRCS Arkansas activities describes our accomplishments associated with Farm Bill programs and others.

It is critical to understand the most important resource within the NRCS tool box - technical assistance for local issues - is the day-in, day-out technical assistance we provide to land users within our communities. This most precious of our resources is our people.

Conservation technical assistance is available through the authority of Public Law 74-46, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935.

This assistance is designed to address local natural resource priorities whether cost-sharing or other forms of financial support are available to them. It is free of charge and comes with no strings attached.

Conservation technical assistance is the reason NRCS

draws such committed, professional employees.

I am very proud of the NRCS employees committed to conservation in this, the Natural State, as well as the many partners that assist us, including Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Arkansas Association of Conservation District Employees, Cooperative Extension Service, Arkansas Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, and the Arkansas Forestry Commission.

As you review the accomplishments in this report, it is my desire that you not only see the land and its improvements, but the people - the people in communities large and small throughout this state - that make conservation an attainable goal for all of us.

*Kalven L. Trice*

**Kalven L. Trice**  
State Conservationist



## Plum Bayou -- Conversion from Ground Water to Surface Water

The Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission has defined the protection of Arkansas' aquifers as one of the state's most critical natural resource concerns.

Parts of 11 counties in Eastern Arkansas have been declared Critical Groundwater Decline areas and 20 more counties are under study.

Arkansas has numerous rivers, streams and impoundments. And, on the surface it would seem there would be enough water for irrigation without tapping into underground aquifers. But, that's not the case for many farmers who don't farm along one of these water sources.

Plum Bayou has served farmers in Jefferson, Lonoke and Pulaski counties for years. But, there wasn't enough water to last through the growing season.

In 1979, a group of farmers built a weir to hold additional water in the bayou. Morton's Weir provided suffi-

***"This is the greatest thing that has happened to this farming community."***

-- Luchan Walls

cient water in the early spring, but there was still a shortage during the summer.

The farmers needed another solution and in 1981 turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (called the Soil Conservation Service at the time).

After several public meetings, a plan was developed by NRCS to divert water from the Arkansas River into Plum Bayou.

"The project accesses water from the Arkansas River by using a flood gate in the levee," said Dennis Hackbart, a district technician in the North Little Rock Field Service Center.

"The system involves a weir that holds water in the bayou and a bank of pumps to pump the water upstream of

the weir. The system pumps approximately 26,000 acre feet of water annually," Hackbart said.

The project serves approximately 15,000 acres of irrigated cropland and approximately 20 farming operations in Pulaski and Lonoke counties.

"This is the greatest thing that has happened to this farming community," said Luchan Walls, a farmer and chairman of the Plum Bayou Irrigation District. "We had a lot of doubters when this first came about, but it has proven beneficial for everyone."

To pay for the cost of operating the system, the district levees a flat land improvement tax on irrigable land and charges a per acre foot fee for water pumped.

"Figures from the water district show estimated yearly cost per acre to operate and maintain a well in the Plum Bayou area is \$58.54 per year," Walls said. "But, farmers pumping water from the bayou pay about \$28.78 per year."

## Introduction

More than 250 NRCS employees serve all 75 Arkansas counties from 62 field service centers throughout the state.

NRCS offices are led by district conservationists, with NRCS and partner staff members of agronomists, biologists, foresters, resource and soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, soil conservation and engineering technicians, water management specialists and administrative support specialists. These employees work with private landowners to preserve and maintain the natural resources of Arkansas.

## Earth Team

In Arkansas, 897 Earth Team Volunteers donated 11,046 hours to help NRCS accomplish the successes outlined in this report.

Seventy-six percent of NRCS field service centers in Arkansas have an active volunteer program. Nationwide, Earth Team Volunteers contributed more than one million hours of service. They are an invaluable asset to the NRCS.

In fiscal year 2003, Arkansas' Earth Team Volunteers built and installed 300 Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes, presented conservation education programs for schools and youth programs, and conducted water quality monitoring tests and posted the results in a global database.

Volunteers also helped with field days, fairs, state and area forestry contests, the Arkansas Envirothon, USDA Fight Against Hunger, Earth Day, Arbor Day, Soil Stewardship Week, and Farm Safety Day Camp activities.

## Small Watershed Program

NRCS uses the Small Watershed Program to reduce flooding problems; develop erosion control and run-off management plans; help landowners control erosion; improve water quality; and conserve irrigation water.

During 2003, NRCS provided \$403,221 in financial assistance to develop new and modify existing long-term contracts in the Little Red River and Buffalo River tributaries watershed projects. NRCS also provided \$482,859 for construction of segments of the Poinsett Watershed channel.

## Soil Surveys

Modern soil surveys are available for 68 of the 75 counties in Arkansas.

Digital soil maps are available for 37 counties and will be available for 11 additional counties by the end of 2004.

Plans are also being developed to make revised and updated soil surveys available on CD-ROM.

## Grazing Lands

Grazing lands technical assistance addresses one of Arkansas' important resources. NRCS has four full-time grazing lands specialists on staff and another 56 employees who spend more than half of their time providing assistance to grazing operations.

Partnerships are very important tools used to promote graz-

ing lands activities. The Arkansas Grazing Lands Advisory Committee continues to provide leadership and direction to the grazing lands programs. AGLAC's membership includes the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts, Arkansas Forage and Grassland Council, Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau.

In 2003, AGLAC, in cooperation with NRCS and the Cooperative Extension Service, conducted more than 25 workshops, field days and other presentations around the state. More than 600 landowners and ranchers attended the workshops.

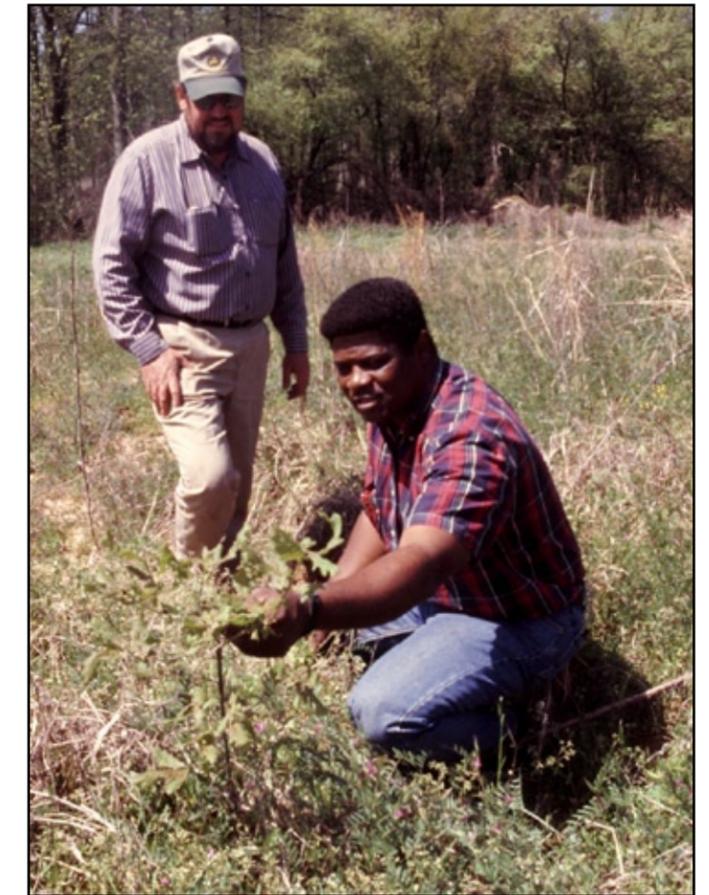


Photo by Creston Shrum

**Level Foote, Jefferson County district conservationist, and Mark Sheppard, a Jefferson County farmer, inspect trees planted as a filter strip along one of his fields.**

## Resource Conservation & Development

NRCS worked with the seven RC&D councils to increase and expand funding for rural development programs. Arkansas, being predominately a rural state, relies on volunteer fire departments for residential fire protection.

More than 720 volunteer fire departments from across the state are participating in the Rural Fire Protection Program and have a master fire plan. Of these, 248 fire departments have lowered their insurance ratings since 1996. More than 230,000 residential homes have benefited. Current insurance premium savings are estimated at approximately \$34 million annually.