

January-April 2013

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Message From R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist

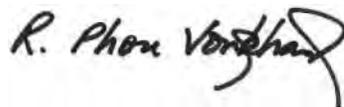


During the January to April 2013 period, NRCS staff continued work related to implementing conservation practices as part of contracts for the second quarter of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013.

Regarding outreach and communications, RI NRCS participated in a total of 21 events which included four open house workshops and four forestry workshops coordinated in cooperation with the RI Conservation Districts where farmers and forest landowners learned about financial and technical assistance available to implement conservation practices in Rhode Island. There were four recruitment events including two at high schools (North Kingstown High School and Ponagansett High School) and two at the University of Rhode Island. NRCS provided a sponsorship, exhibit booth, and speaker at the 10th Annual Land and Water Conservation Summit attended by 300 people. In addition, NRCS scheduled exhibit booths at various events to target multiple audiences. Such events included the Local Food Forum, RI Raised Livestock Annual Meeting, RI Flower Show, Earth Day Party for the Planet at Roger Williams Park Zoo, RI Nursery and Landscaping Association Winter Expo, and Ag Day at the RI State House.

In the second quarter FY 2013, the field staff worked diligently to complete and certify over 225 conservation practices worth well over \$1 million dollars. So far in FY 2013, the field staff ranked and approved over 100 contracts worth over \$2.25 million dollars for conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Agricultural Management Assistance.

Regarding staffing changes, Chris Modisette was promoted to State Resource Conservation and Brunilda Velez was promoted to Assistant State Conservationist for Programs. We offer congratulations to both and a warm welcome from RI NRCS to Brunilda.



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Administration

by Jacqueline Pashnik, Management Analyst

Personnel changes:

- Christopher Modisette was promoted from State Forester to the State Resource Conservationist.
- Brunilda Velez was promoted from District Conservationist in Wisconsin to Assistant State Conservationist for Programs. Her appointment to the position is effective May 20, 2013.

Conservation District Happenings Including Program Funding:

Conservation District - Eastern District (Bristol and Newport Counties)

by Matt Richardson, Acting Eastern District Conservationist

Implementation on existing contracts in the Eastern District this quarter included completion of a total of 49 practices. These include implementation of over 12 acres of brush management for invasive species control; 4,900 feet of fencing for prescribed grazing; 1 acre of pest management; 1 high tunnel; 22 acres of restoration and management of declining habitats; and 1 well. Two Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, two Forest Management Plans, one Irrigation Water Management Plan, and one Nutrient Management Plan were also completed in the quarter.

So far in FY 2013, the Eastern District has completed conservation plans and funded 23 EQIP projects for a total of \$696,659: 22 in Newport County for \$690,983.20 and 1 in Bristol County for \$5,676. In addition, 5 AMA conservation plans were completed and funded for a total of \$15,755: 4 in Newport County for \$12,502 and 1 in Bristol County for \$3,253.



Attendees at the Norman Bird Sanctuary open house observe vegetables grown during the winter months.

NRCS and the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District held an open house workshop on April 6th at the Norman Bird Sanctuary. Attendees of the workshop learned about funding available through AMA, EQIP, and WHIP, and were also given a tour featuring a high tunnel that was installed through EQIP.

Conservation District - Northern District (Providence County)

by Justin Tuthill, Northern District Conservationist

In the second quarter of FY 2013, NRCS Northern District has completed and certified 94 conservation practices totaling \$237,899. These practices include Forest Stand Improvement, Brush Management, and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans.

So far in FY 2013, the Northern District funded 49 applications for a total of \$744,288 which includes 23 applications approved in the second quarter.

NRCS and the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District held an open house on March 26, 2013 at the Chepachet Free Will Baptist Church in Chepachet, RI. The event was well attended with several attendees expressing interest in forestry related conservation programs.

Conservation District - Southern District (Kent and Washington Counties)

by John Richard, Southern District Conservationist

In the second quarter of FY2013, NRCS Southern District completed and certified 89 conservation practices totaling \$746,697. These practices include Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, High Tunnels, Timber Stand Improvement, and Pasture Planting.

To date, the SRICD has completed conservation plans and funded 35 projects for a total of \$763,907 which include 12 EQIP in Kent County for \$57,606, 22 EQIP in Washington County for \$670,884 and 1 WHIP contract in the district for \$35,417.

The Southern Conservation District organized a successful, well attended USDA NRCS outreach event that was held on April 9th 2013 at the Crandall House in Hopkinton. The event was aimed at providing the public with an opportunity to speak with conservation experts as well as SRICD district staff. All of FY 2012's Working Lands for Wildlife – New England cottontail projects are underway!

Local Conservation Highlight - Ocean State Hops

Reprinted from RI Monthly February 2013

Ocean State Hops Founders Balance Day Jobs with Hops Cultivating and Harvesting



Joel Littlefield and Matt Richardson, owners of Ocean State Hops, grow and sell hops used as an ingredient in locally brewed beers.

We've heard of pick-your-own apples and berries, but pick-your-own hops? That's what Ocean State Hops founders **Matt Richardson** and brother-in-law Joel Littlefield have inspired at their family owned Stop and Chop Tree Farm in Exeter. They started out planting a few rhizomes for their own home brewing obsession, but as demand for locally grown hops increased, so did their output. Now some 400 plants climb twelve to eighteen feet high on trellises over a half-acre of land. Newport Storm uses their Chinook variety in their new year-round India Point Ale, and home brewers can purchase them and other Cascade, Newport and Nugget varieties online and at Craft Brews Supplies in Hope Valley. When late August and early September roll around, home brewers sign up to help pick the crops over free pizza and beer, and they get to take home a portion of their yield. "The hops need to be harvested within a very short one- to two-week window," says Richardson. "It's pretty insane around the clock for awhile. Joel and I are out there until 2 a.m. with five, ten or twelve people, cutting the plants down, and the hops are picked off one by one." The labor is the hardest part for the partners, who run Ocean State Hops as a side business.

Richardson works full-time for the USDA in Natural Resources Conservation Service

and Littlefield works for American Power Conversion, so they rely on friends, family and fellow enthusiasts for harvest help. "It's

very labor-intensive, training the plants to grow up the vines, the weeding, harvesting and packing, but it's great to grow something that interests so many people." *oceanstatehops.blogspot.com*

Programs

by Michael Kenyon, Easement Program Manager

Programs Update:

Cuts in federal budgets have taken a toll on many federally funded programs. NRCS-Rhode Island has found creative ways to make the required cuts resulting from the budget sequester without losing ground on our primary objective to help Rhode Island farmers get conservation on the ground.

Rhode Island has obligated \$19,900 or 99.7 percent of available funds in the AMA program for a total of six contracts.

We have obligated \$2.16 million or 85.8 percent of available funds in the EQIP program for a current total of 104 contracts. We requested and were granted an additional \$1.15 million for contracts related to EQIP projects.

We have also obligated \$35,420 or 17.7 percent of available funds in the WHIP program for one contract to work towards protecting the New England cottontail rabbit through habitat creation and enhancement.

Easements:

In our Easement programs, we currently have funding to complete the closing costs for our current WRP easement contracts. At this time we are on hold to sign-up new contracts for this easement program. The FRPP program is going strong. We will be closing on four easements in the coming months, providing permanent protection to approximately 203 acres of farmland. For FY 2013, we received 8 applications for a little over \$5.7 million of FRPP funds on approximately 652 acres. RI recently received its FRPP Regional Equity (RE) in the amount of \$650,000, which was requested earlier. Cooperative Agreements are in the process of being developed for the applications that have been promoted for obligation. In addition, we requested an additional \$1 million for FRPP Cooperative Agreements and hope to be in receipt of those funds within the next couple of months. Rhode Island did not receive an allocation for the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) this fiscal year but work continues to move ahead as allowed to address due diligence activities on 2012 obligations.

Outreach, Communications, and Recruitment

by Walter Marshall, Public Affairs Specialist

During the January-April period, NRCS actively participated in a total of 21 outreach events. Such events included three general open house information workshops coordinated with the RI Conservation Districts and one open house celebrating the opening of the NRCS-Eastern RI Conservation District joint office. The events were targeted to the farming and forestry communities to learn about technical and financial assistance available for conservation efforts. It should be noted that the event held at the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown, RI was particularly well attended since it included a tour of a high tunnel currently used to grow vegetables in the winter months.

A series of four forestry workshops targeted to owners of small forestry acreage of 5 acres or more were offered. Themes included Forestry History and Stewardship; Woodscaping, Forestry Practices, and Your Land; Understanding Forest Resources, Working for a Healthy Forest; and A Well Kept Forest is a Legacy.



There were four educational recruitment events including the URI Summer and Internship Job Fair and URI Spring Career and Job Fair where NRCS staff including John Richard and Walter Marshall informed students about careers with NRCS, summer internship opportunities, and the Federal government application process on USAJOBS.gov. NRCS staff also attended two high school events to inform students about careers in conservation and the Federal government. High schools included North Kingstown High School and Ponagansett High School where over 500 students attended.

There were five general outreach events targeted to potential farmers and forest landowners, conservation partners, and the general public. Such events included the RI Nursery and Landscaping Association's Annual Winter Meeting and Expo on January 16 targeted to the landscaping community and Local Food Forum held at Brown University on February 6 where approximately 300 people including many beginning farmers attended the event. NRCS exhibit booths were held at the Rhode Island Flower Show February 21-24 and URI Green Industries Day on February 22. NRCS was a sponsor and had an exhibit

John Richard, District Conservationist, explains career opportunities with URI students at the URI Summer and Internship Job Fair.

booth at the 10th Annual Land and Water Conservation Summit where NRCS State Biologist Gary Casabona spoke on the New England cottontail rabbit initiative funded under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. The event attracted approximately 300 local conservation partners who assist in marketing NRCS programs to potential clients. NRCS also provided outreach information at the RI Raised Livestock Annual Meeting and trade show targeted to livestock owners throughout the state. To provide general information, NRCS participated in the Earth Day Party for the Planet held at



Governor Chafee speaks to the agriculture community during Agriculture Day at the RI State House.



Mike Kenyon, Easement Program Manager, explains the FRPP program to attendees of the Local Food Forum at Brown University.

Roger Williams Park Zoo where families with children learned about the importance of local conservation efforts to improve water and air quality. Lastly, NRCS participated in the 6th annual RI Coverts Cooperator Class held at the Alton Jones Whispering Pines Conference Center where forest owners learned about the importance of forest stewardship and the generous financial assistance available to improve forest health.

Soils Program

by Jim Turenne, Assistant State Soil Scientist



The URI soil judging team took first place in the individual and fourth place overall at the National Collegiate Soil Judging Competition in Platteville, WI.

Coastal Zone Soil Survey:

Phase III of the RI Coastal Zone Soil survey is on schedule for completion by 2014, the soil staff has completed the re-mapping/digitizing of the coastal soils (dunes, marshes, and beaches) for Narragansett Bay and is currently getting ready for field season to map some coastal lagoons. There are several new

Special Management Areas (SAMPS) in RI where the Coastal Zone Soil Survey may be of use; the Shellfish Management and Shoreline Change SAMPS. The soil staff has also been meeting with the RI TNC to incorporate the subaqueous soil data into their oyster restoration suitability map. A webinar on the RI Freshwater Subaqueous Soil Survey research project was presented to over 100 NRCS employees across the country by Dr. Mark Stolt – the webinar can be viewed at: <http://youtu.be/e-veMaYa4wo>

Technical Soil Services:

It was a busy winter/spring for technical soil services – over 35 on-sites, FRPP requests, Food Security Act, and other requests for soil services were completed.

Congratulations to Dr. Mark Stolt, Professor of Pedology at URI for winning the National Cooperative Soil Survey Cooperator of the Year Award. Mark was recognized for his years of support to the NRCS Soil Survey Program. He will receive the award at the 2013 national conference in Annapolis, MD in June. Also, congratulations to the URI Soil Judging Team for taking 1st place in the individual and 4th place overall at the National Collegiate Soil Judging Competition in Platteville, WI. Nick Kozlowski took the 1st place title, following in the footsteps of Jillian Phillips who won in 2010. Nick will be working with the RI NRCS Soil Survey Program this summer.

Notice to Hispanic and/or Women Farmers or Ranchers

Compensation for Claims of Discrimination

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic, or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation.

This means you may be eligible if:

1. you sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period; and
2. the loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, or approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
3. you believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic, or your being female.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims packet, you can call the Farmer and Rancher Call Center at 1-888-508-4429 or access the following website:
www.farmerclaims.gov

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community.

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

USDA Cannot Provide Legal Advice to You.