



Conservation News

Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District

Vol. 30, No. 3

Summer 2012

P J Farm – 1st USDA Certified Organic Farm in Harrison County

P J Farm, located in Saucier, is the only USDA Certified Organic Farm that sells vegetables and herbs in the southern three counties of Mississippi. It is owned and operated by Jeff and Pat Scrimsher.

The Scrimshers bought the property in January of 2010. At that time, it had been vacant for about eight years. It had a dilapidated house on it and everywhere you looked it was overgrown with weeds and tall grass and bushes. Jeff and Pat got busy rebuilding the house and clearing the land. They have been busy ever since. By the end of the summer the house was finished, and they moved in.

Two small gardens were their first fall gardens. By the end of 2010 they had added two 10x20 small greenhouses and one 30x80 large greenhouse, and 3 rows of 50 foot tables. By the end of 2011 they have added two 20x54 foot high tunnels that are 16 feet high. The high tunnels were made possible by participating with the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a cost-share program. The gardens have been expanded greatly, with next year's expansion already started.

They have added bee hives for pollination and honey. The chickens are fed organic feed, and are free range. Guinea birds have been added to help bug control. Great Pyrenees guard dogs protect and oversee the whole farm. Jeff and Pat have passed their second year Organic inspection. The record keeping that has to be done is always an ongoing job, but Pat has found that it's just a daily routine.

The Scrimshers have learned to compost, vermicompost, and make their own fertilizer and mulch. They use only material from their own farm to make these items.

There is 1000 feet of irrigation that has been added this year. There are also plans to add grass fed cows for organic beef. They will tell you that the farm has taken on a life of its own. Jeff and Pat would not have it any other way; they love every moment of it. The vegetables are growing in abundance, and the taste is wonderful.

P J Farm organic vegetables and herbs are sold at the Ocean Springs Farmers Market and Ann's Organic Market in Gulfport.



Pat and Jeff Scrimsher of P J Farm, the first USDA Certified Organic Farm in Harrison County.



This high tunnel was made possible through EQIP. P J Farm has organic vegetables and herbs.

Cogongrass-The Battle Is On

Leaves

- Grass grows in dense patches and most early infestations exhibit a circular formation.
- Leaf color is yellowish-green in summer and light brown in winter.
- Leaves are 1/2-1 inch wide, 4-6 feet long, and have finely serrated margins.
- The midrib of the leaf is prominent, whitish, and off-set.
- Because of the short stem, the leaves appear to originate directly from the ground.

Flowers and Seeds

- In spring, plants produce fluffy, plume-like, white seed heads. Seeds are light and numerous (up to 3,000 per plant) and can disperse long distances.
- Seed viability is relatively short-lived and typically need bare ground for germination.

Growth

- Root rhizomes are extremely vigorous and account for much of the competitiveness and exponential growth.
- Rhizomes of cogongrass are white, sharp-pointed, and distinctly segmented.
- Each rhizome can produce a new plant, thus making expansion rapid. The persistence of the root mass allows the plant to easily dominate an infested area. In addition, the rhizomes have allelopathic tendencies that can inhibit growth of other plants.

Controlling and eliminating cogongrass can be a lengthy (more than one chemical application) and costly process. While it quickly degrades wildlife habitat, it also poses a threat to timber resources and human dwellings. Cogongrass burns at extremely high temperatures (up to 842°F) and a fire in dense stands can kill mature trees and threaten nearby structures.

- Remove dead thatch by mowing or burning (use extreme caution) before application to maximize herbicide uptake.
- For infestations near desirable hardwoods, apply a glyphosate solution in spring before flowering begins. Repeated applications may be required in subsequent years.
- In areas with no desirable hardwoods, apply imazapyr solution in late summer through early fall.
- A 10-15 ft. buffer should be treated around the infestation to control the spreading root systems if applying imazaphyr.

The Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District office has forms for cogongrass chemicals from Mississippi Coastal Plains Resource Conservation & Development and Mississippi Department of Agriculture. Contact the District at 831-1647 or stop by our office at 12238 Ashley Drive in Gulfport.

Contact the Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District to report cogongrass infestations at 831-1647.

District Receives MACD South Area Recognition

The Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District was recognized at the recent MS Association of Conservation Districts South Area Meeting in Natchez for their outstanding work in conservation, among 24 counties.

Commissioner Paul McKay received the, "District Commissioner of the Year" award, and the District received the, "Outstanding Woodland Conservation District" award.

All three posters submitted by Harrison County SWCD in the Stewardship Poster Contest won 1st Place in their grade categories. Congratulations to Indya Tanner of Crossroads Elementary; Nik Peterman of Bayou View Middle School, and Dawson Doucet of Bayou View Middle School.

While in Natchez, Commissioners and staff were able to take a bus tour of Alcorn State University, Emerald Mound and Old South Winery.



Paul McKay was recognized with the District Commissioner of the Year award at the MACD South Area Summer Meeting in Natchez.



Gary Blair presents the Outstanding Woodland Conservation District award to NRCs Tyree Harrington and Commissioner Greg Crochet.

Jacqueline Broome, DVM - Bowie River Farm

Beth D'Aquila

Jacqueline Broome, DVM, was born and raised in agriculture, with her dad raising cotton for sharecropping and her mom growing up with timber, cattle, and row crops. Dr. Broome grew up on a working cattle ranch with pairs, feedlot, raising silage and producing hay. She graduated veterinary school at Auburn University in 1988.

Dr. Broome has always had horses, and has gotten back into goats, chickens, and a few cows as she has developed Bowie River Farm. She has since added niche species and complimentary species, as the farm has developed.

Hurricane Katrina was a setback but with NRCS assistance, the Bowie River Farm has come back to a point where diversification is starting to show a profit, with a Katahdin hair sheep herd and mixed dairy, meat goat herd.

Predator control is essential. Coyotes and neighbor's dogs, plus vultures would clean the property out in weeks if unchecked. This led to the addition of Pyrenees guard dogs, donkeys, and llamas as sentinels and actual foot soldiers.

Some of the livestock are 'donations', which is a nice word for rescues. In addition to the larger farm species mentioned above, as well as cows and horses, she also raises poultry species and two ratite species, namely emu and ostrich. Ducks, chickens, geese, peacocks, and guineas fill out the roster. Meat, wool (from llamas), milk, eggs, and replacement and starter stock are all produced on the farm.

Fences, heavy use area, pond, watering facility, well, pasture and hayland planting are conservation practices applied to Bowie River Farm through NRCS. She worked closely with NRCS personnel for advice on best management practices.

Bowie River Farm recently held an Agriculture-Outreach Field Day with topics such as Conservation Programs, Conservation Technical Assistance, Disaster Programs, Farm Lending, Record Keeping, Small Farm Loans, Grain Drill, Cogongrass, Equine, and also included a tour of EQIP practices on the farm. Dr. Broome was the featured speaker on Equine, and gave NRCS plenty of credit as she toured the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) practices with the participants.

She has discovered that the llamas clean fence rows and eat cogongrass so they are the primary maintenance crew. By alternating species seasonally in pastures, the parasite loads have been reduced since most worms are species specific and die off without a constant host. The sheep and goats have eradicated iron weed, pig weed, briars and scrub species.

Hay and corn are produced on other properties, both owned and leased, as she finds it cheaper to produce feeds than to buy them. She does buy river grain in bulk to supplement various feeding necessities.

Farming in a mixed agricultural and livestock production operation can be profitable but is also an extremely rewarding venture. Hard work, beauty of being outdoors, health benefits, and the satisfaction of knowing you are providing sustenance as well as a legacy for future generations keep her going.

Because of her DVM degree and agriculture/business background, she has been able to set up sustainable programs in Guatemala, Africa, and other areas which has reinforced her belief in helping others through agriculture. She has a strong will and belief in farming, and that's what gets her going every day. Future plans include herd expansions, purchase of more farmland, and more marketing programs.



Jacqueline Broome, DVM, of Bowie River Farm (center) and Tyree Harrington, NRCS (right) give participants of the Agriculture/Outreach Field Day a tour of EQIP practices on the farm.



Jacqueline Broome, DVM, of Bowie River Farm and Wesley Kerr, NRCS Area Conservationist, tour a heavy use area applied on Bowie River Farm through Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

REDUCE • REUSE • RECYCLE

“Soil to Spoon” Stewardship Poster Contest

Beth D'Aquila

This year’s national Stewardship Poster Contest theme was, “Soil to Spoon”, and challenged students to combine their artistic talents with their knowledge about farming and gardening, and the process in which their food gets to their plate. (hint: not going to the grocery store!) The District received 300 posters and we appreciate our Earth Team Volunteers who helped sort, judge, and write certificates for each student.

2nd/3rd Grade Category

- 1st Place: Indya Tanner—Crossroads Elem.
- 2nd Place: Tatiana Fairley—Woolmarket Elem.
- 3rd Place: Brynna Lepre—Woolmarket Elem.
- Honorable: Jacie George—Woolmarket

4th – 6th Grade Category

- 1st Place: Nik Peterman—Bayou View Middle
- 2nd Place: Landon Dedeaux—Delisle Elem.
- 3rd Place: Jonathan Pagan—Bayou View Middle
- Honorable: Carson Reeder—Bayou View Middle

Special Education 2nd – 6th Grade Category

- 1st Place: Dawson Doucet—Bayou View Middle
- 2nd Place: Paislee Hoda—Delisle Elementary
- 3rd Place: Kayla Cuevas—Delisle Elementary
- Honorable: Koby Weise—Woolmarket Elem

Extra congratulations go out to Indya Tanner, Nik Peterman, and Dawson Doucet—all three 1st Place Winners also won 1st Place at the MACD South Area level, having been judged with 24 counties. The three students and their families were invited to attend the MACD South Area Summer Meeting in Natchez to receive their awards. This is the first time that Harrison County has had three South Area winners, so we are very proud of the students for their hard work.



Indya Tanner, Crossroads Elementary, was in Natchez to receive her 1st Place award in the MACD South Area Poster Contest.



Jonathan Pagan, Nik Peterman, and Dawson Doucet of Bayou View Middle School with teacher Ms. Lenoir.



Koby Weise, Tatiana Fairley, Brynna Lepre, and Jacie George of Woolmarket Elementary.



Kayla Cuevas, Landon Dedeaux, and Paislee Hoda of Delisle Elementary.

NRCS Cost –Share Programs

Tyree Harrington

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is a voluntary conservation program administered by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and was reauthorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. It supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, agricultural producers may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land.

EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practice. Persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land may participate in the EQIP program. EQIP activities are carried out according to a plan of operations developed in conjunction with the producer that identifies the appropriate conservation practice or practices to address the resource concerns. These practices are subject to NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) technical standards adapted for local conditions. Practices include watering facilities, heavy use areas, fencing, nutrient management, pest management, pasture and hayland planting, tree planting, transitioning to organic farming, organic farming, high tunnel systems, etc.

Small Farmer Program (SFP) for Mississippi Purpose

The purpose of this initiative is to improve technical service and program participation in all USDA programs through improved outreach efforts to Small Scale Farmers. The target audience is defined as small farmers who have historically not participated in nor ever ranked high enough to be selected for a contract. We must be innovative in allowing small farmers to select practices that are best suited for their particular operations while at the same time low enough in cost to be effective and practical for small farms to implement and maintain.

In developing and implementing this outreach initiative in MS, NRCS technical practices and programs will help break through potential barriers to participation in USDA programs by small farmers.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides technical assistance and cost sharing to restore wildlife habitat. In MS, over 20 different conservation practices are available, ranging from winter water flooding to prescribed burning. Special priority is given to habitat that benefits species of national or state significance, including declining, threatened, and endangered species.

Land eligibility for WHIP includes private agricultural land, non-industrial private forest land, and tribal land.

Everyone interested in participating in USDA programs, must be an eligible producer. You must register your farm through the Farm Services Agency, (FSA) that services your county. If you have not done so, you need to take a copy of your deed and the name and Social Security Number of everyone listed on the deed to FSA. While there you need to complete form CCC 931 Adjusted Gross Income.

Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) is an initiative to improve the health of longleaf pine forests in nine southeast states, including MS. Using an integrated landscape approach, this initiative restores longleaf pine forests on private lands and improves plant and animal habitat.

This collaborative, all-lands approach to conservation will result in cleaner water, improved critical habitat for sensitive species, and an economic resource for the future. Protecting and restoring this important ecosystem will benefit communities and resources across the nation.

Longleaf pine forests in the southeastern United States initially occurred on 90 million acres at the beginning of European settlement. About 3.5 million acres remain today, providing critical habitat for 29 threatened or endangered species. With the Longleaf Pine Restoration Initiative, NRCS will collaborate with other federal agencies as well as state, local and nongovernmental conservation partners to address conservation needs across the longleaf pine range.

The initiative is funded through NRCS's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. Participants agree to carry out a wildlife habitat development plan and NRCS provides cost-share assistance to voluntarily implement conservation practices that maintain, improve or restore longleaf pine ecosystems.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) NRCS has formed a new partnership with the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) called Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) to accelerate wildlife conservation for targeted at-risk or listed species. NRCS is geographically unique; we have a broad delivery system to put conservation on the ground at the local level, across the entire country. With nearly two thirds of all species federally listed as threatened or endangered with populations on private lands, the ability to work with private landowners and target our conservation efforts can have a tremendous impact.

This partnership uses innovative approaches with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to restore and protect priority habitat areas for seven specific wildlife species to include: New England cottontail, bog turtle, golden-winged warbler, gopher tortoise, greater sage-grouse, lesser prairie-chicken and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. This approach is a paradigm shift for the agency where we will look at species specific conservation on a broad scale.

Working Lands for Wildlife has three primary goals:

- Restore populations of declining wildlife species
- Provide landowners with regulatory certainty
- Strengthen rural economies through productive working lands.

NRCS has committed \$33 million dollars from the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) to share the cost of conservation practices with landowners in the areas known to support one or more of the selected species. WHIP applications within the defined habitat focal areas will receive highest consideration. Producers and landowners can enroll in WHIP on a continuous basis at their local NRCS office.

The gopher tortoise is the target species in MS and an indicator of longleaf pine ecosystem health. Gopher tortoises require deep, well drained soils and an open understory that provides open sunny sites for nesting. Its burrows provide vital habitat and shelter for many endangered species.

For more information and applications on any of these programs, visit www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov or contact the NRCS office at 12238 Ashley Drive, Gulfport, MS. 228-831-0881 ext.3

Long Beach Farmers Market and Radish Festival

Dita McCarthy

The Long Beach Farmers Market, located at 126 Jeff Davis Avenue at Bankhouse Coffee, is a Mississippi Certified Farmers Market open every Saturday 9 am - noon during the summer months and 9 am - 1 pm the rest of the year. The Long Beach Farmers Market regularly features local vendors offering their own foods, including produce, full dairy line of milk and cheeses; eggs; grass-fed beef, lamb, and goat meat; fresh fish; artisanal breads and other baked goods; pickles, jams, and jellies; honey; a large variety of other prepared foods; and soaps and lotions.

The Long Beach Farmers Market and Real Food Gulf Coast are excited to announce plans for their Second Annual Radish Festival, to be held Saturday, November 3, 2012, 9 am - 6 pm, on the Harper McCaughan Town Green in downtown Long Beach.

The Radish Festival is a free community celebration of sustainable farmers, ranchers, and food producers and also pays tribute to Long Beach's history as a truck farming town and the former Radish Capital of the World.

The Radish Festival features offerings from small farmers, fishers, ranchers, and artisanal food producers from throughout South Mississippi. The festival also features cooking demonstrations and free tastings; demonstrations of rural crafts and trades; artisan hand-craft vendors; agricultural, gardening, and historical information booths; and plenty of live music. Special guest speaker this year is Felder Rushing, Mississippi Public Broadcasting's Gestalt Gardener.

Pre-festival events this year include an all day bus tour of local South Mississippi farms on Friday, November 2, followed by a Wine and Local Cheese Tasting at Bankhouse Coffee later that evening. These two events have paid admission.

The organizers of the Radish Festival invite farmers, local food producers, restaurants, hand-crafters, and conservation organizations to participate in the festival. Vendor information is available at our website at www.radishfestival.org. For more information about the farmers market or the Radish Festival, please contact Dita McCarthy at 228.234.8732 or longbeachfarmersmarket@gmail.com.



David Doyle with Coastal Ridge Farm sells fresh produce at the Long Beach Farmers Market.



Mason Gordon of Vinedresser Farms sells organic produce at the Long Beach Farmers Market.

Mississippi Market Ready™ Training

9 a.m.-3 p.m. July 19, Coastal Research and Extension Center Biloxi, MS

Interested in what restaurant chefs and retail managers are looking for in purchasing local produce? In one day, you will receive information about current food policy legislation, how to build relationships and communicate with managers and chefs, proper packaging and labeling to sell, marketing strategies, different pricing structures, and much more to help you get started or build your current operation.

Market Ready™ is a program developed specifically for producers who would like to begin selling to restaurants,

retailers, or institutions. Market Ready™ training is also beneficial to those who already sell to a few local restaurants and retailers and would like to increase this area of their business.

For more information on this free program, contact: McKenzie Crabtree at mlc393@msstate.edu or (256) 206-0492 or Dr. Kim Morgan at morgan@agecon.msstate.edu or (662) 325-0413.

Adopt-A-Stream

Beth D'Aquilla

The MS Wildlife Federation along with the MS Department of Environmental Quality recently held a two-day Adopt-A-Stream workshop in Biloxi. Adopt-A-Stream is a program that promotes environmental stewardship through training workshops, outdoor field activities and by introducing participants to watershed action projects.

The Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District provided scholarships to seven teachers in Harrison County that participated. Beth D'Aquilla went on the field trip to Wolf River at Cable Bridge Road to photograph the teachers in action.



Teachers participating in the recent Adopt-A-Stream workshop on a field trip to Wolf River.



The District sponsored seven teachers from Harrison County to participate in Adopt-A-Stream. (l-r) Mary Lawson, St. Patrick High; Renee Wynn, D'Iberville Elem.; Belinda Ellzy, Lyman Elem.; Janie Fore, Crossroads Elem.; Meredith Broussard, D'Iberville Middle School; Andrea Germany, Crossroads Elem.; Sabrina Harris, Crossroads Elementary.

Out and About the County

Dan Longino

Cogongrass, cogongrass, we can't let a newsletter go out without reminding landowners about this invasive weed. With the current budget problems, non-farm landowners have less financial assistance to purchase weed herbicides, but now is the best time of year to try to control infestations on your property.

We've had clogged highways from traffic blockages but this summer might see the first blocked channels as boats and whatever will float converge on Deer Island in early July. Best wishes to Biloxi and DMR and all the newly planted vegetation on west Deer Island.

The gopher frog ponds seem to be settling well into the landscape. Some spot like the Oceans Springs yacht club could probably develop a small fleet of catamarans and kayaks for rent year-round. Sponsor some races around the newly popular Deer Island.

I've always wished that the Desoto National Forest had some more small developed "bowl" ponds where fishermen could use the national forest as often as hunters. Random wishes include the Dupont railroad paved enough to figure in hurricane evacuation and barge traffic on the lower Wolf river and extending O'Neal Road east into Woolmarket and toward Jackson County for more East-West access.

Teachers Environmental Education

Lenora Haynes

The Southeast MS Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) and William Carey University sponsored the 2012 Teachers Environmental Education Workshops at William Carey University, Hattiesburg campus on June 11 - 12. A total of 26 teachers from across southeast Mississippi participated in the workshops.

The Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District provided scholarships for teachers in Harrison County to attend, with four teachers participating. The workshops provided teachers the opportunity to become proficient on the subjects: Projects Food, Land and People; Flying Wild; and Project Learning Tree.

Each teacher received activity workbooks, guide books, notebooks and other classroom materials pertaining to the workshops subject matter. These materials are teaching tools that will assist the teachers with their classroom instructions.

In the end we conserve only what we love, love only what we understand, and understand only what we are taught.



Cogongrass Sprayer

A 20-gallon cogongrass sprayer is available to Harrison County landowners courtesy of the District. To lease the sprayer, a lease agreement and refundable equipment deposit must be in the District office prior to use. Rental fee is \$5 per day. Please contact the District office for more details, schedule use or to report infestations of cogongrass, at 831-1647.



Seed Grain Drill

A 7-foot seed grain drill is available to Harrison County Landowners. To lease the grain drill, a lease agreement and refundable equipment deposit must be in the District office prior to use. Rental fee is \$5 per acre based on acre meter reading plus \$10 per day. Please contact the District office at 831-1647 for further details and to schedule use.

Conservation Districts have been involved in delivering locally driven conservation across America for more than 70 years. Among other things, Districts help: implement farm, ranch, and forestland conservation practices to protect soil productivity, water quality, air quality and wildlife habitat; conserve and restore wetlands; protect groundwater resources; assist communities and homeowners to plant trees and other vegetation; guide developers in controlling soil erosion; and provide technical expertise to landowners to identify, apply for, and participate in conservation programs.

Creole Tomatoes Stuffed with Shrimp Salad

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1 lb. | Mississippi Gulf Fresh Shrimp, boiled, peeled and chopped |
| 1/2 bunch | green onions, minced |
| 3 tbsp. | capers |
| 1/3 cup | spicy mayonnaise |
| 1 tbsp | lemon juice |
| | Fresh ground pepper |
| 4 | large ripe tomatoes, tops cut off and all pulp removed |

Combine all ingredients except tomatoes, folding together thoroughly. Chill for at least 1 hour to marry flavors. Stuff each tomato with equal amounts of shrimp salad.

ConservationNews

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Commissioners

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- Robert Johnson, Member

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- Paul Drake, DVM

Staff Assisting the District

- Beth D'Aquilla, Editor & District Coordinator
- Tyree Harrington, District Conservationist
- Dan T. Longino, Field Technician

The Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District holds a regular monthly board meeting on the first Thursday of each month. This meeting is open to the public and held at the District Office, 12238 Ashley Dr., Gulfport, at 11:30 a.m. This board meets to administer the program of soil and water conservation in Harrison County. An equal opportunity employer.

Visit the Harrison County
 Soil and Water Conservation
 District website at
<http://hcsxcd.co.harrison.ms.us>