

MAY '22



Minnesota
MESSAGE



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Over the past couple of weeks, I had the privilege to speak to and meet participants at our first New Employee Orientation in St. Paul. This was the first time we have had this class in more than two years. I also spoke to a group of more than 400 Pheasants Forever employees at their gathering in Welch, Minnesota. Some of us were able to attend the National Conservation Planning Partners Conference hosted in Bloomington. The reason I am telling you about these events is because they triggered thoughts of appreciation for all the great folks who help our producers get conservation on the ground every day. These gatherings gave me pause and excitement at all the bright young people we have brought into the conservation partnership and NRCS over the past two years. I am also reminded how important it is that we maintain our technical integrity and retain our unique, and often envied, conservation planning system as the core of what we provide to our customers.

This summer will bring lots of opportunity for technical training, as well as plenty of field time with producers to sell conservation systems through our planning processes that best fit their operations. Enjoy the weather, seek the knowledge and skills you need to help our customers, and embrace opportunities to help our farmers and ranchers make meaningful conservation improvements.



THE OFFICE *of the* SECRETARY



A Message from Secretary Vilsack

I had the honor of delivering a commencement speech to the Utah State University Class of 2022 and tomorrow I will speak to the University of Minnesota Crookston 2022 graduating class. One theme of these commencement addresses is resilience. Like every generation, the class of 2022 is walking with us towards a future that is infinitely unpredictable, yet full of possibility. This week, I was reminded of resilience as I cut the tape on the newly re-opened [People's Garden](#). And as I looked out into the audience yesterday, I felt hope in our next generations of young leaders. I see that same hope resides at USDA—in our employees and also in our customers—as we collectively continue to deliver on our mission despite the challenges that arise every day.

There was no playbook for how to navigate the last couple of years. In the midst of unprecedented and challenging circumstances, USDA has continued to be instrumental in feeding, reinvigorating, and rebuilding our nation. Despite all the challenges we are facing, you are seizing and shaping the potential of these investments. You are actively using your professional networks to engage communities and ensure greater likelihood of positive outcomes. You are also seeing opportunity for taking risks, building more efficiency into our work and equally important, doing this in a hybrid environment and reimagining how we work. Resilience is on display at USDA.

Last month the Biden-Harris Administration [rolled out](#) significant investments in rural counties across the United States on our Building a Better America Rural Infrastructure Tour. We [announced](#) major and historic investments—including those authorized through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—that will ultimately safeguard our water supply, lower energy costs, increase energy independence, and protect and help American communities recover from disasters. Ambassador Susan Rice, the Director of the Domestic Policy Council, and I [announced](#) the formation of the [Rural Partners Network](#)—a collaboration between the Federal Government and local governments focused on empowering social and economic well-being in rural communities. In addition to making generational investments in our nation's infrastructure these investments will further environmental justice goals, including the President's [Justice40 Initiative](#), which commits to delivering at least 40 percent of the benefits from federal climate and clean energy investments to underserved communities. With your leadership, experiences, expertise, and guidance investments and partnerships that are a result of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will expand economic opportunities, create jobs, and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans in rural areas.

Hard-work and challenging times take their toll. Remember that this month is [Mental Health Awareness Month](#). Take time to take care of yourselves and to support each other. No matter how tough it may get, find hope. As I told the class of 2022, true resilience, whether in a person, community or nation requires belief and faith in something better and the confidence and capacity to make it happen. Use your knowledge and passion to create a common vision for a better America. Let us use our collective resilience to get past the hurdles to realize our common dreams.

This Public Service Recognition Week I want to thank each and every USDA employee for your commitment to public service and the work you do on behalf of the American people each and every day.

I also want to give a special thanks to every employee at FSIS and APHIS who is working hard to safeguard the U.S. poultry and egg producing industries from the impact of avian influenza on our agricultural markets and trade. Another special thanks to Forest Service employees and specifically our firefighters who are on the frontlines of protecting communities. You all have our support, and we are here to listen, encourage and help you.

USDA is blessed with so much talent and wisdom. This week the President [recognized](#) the 2021 Presidential Rank Award recipients—six from USDA. Join me in congratulating these USDA employees and Mark Williams, a Research Agricultural Engineer with ARS who is a 2022 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America finalist for his work on agricultural runoff. Take some time to read about Mark's work and [vote](#) for him on the Service to America People's Choice Award [webpage](#).

Finally, making USDA a best place to work is a top priority for the Deputy Secretary and me because we want people to love to come to work each day. We also want to recruit and retain top talent from across the nation. This week the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) released the [2021 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey \(FEVS\) Results: Governmentwide Management Report](#). 46% of you responded. USDA leadership and I are taking a close look at USDA's results and look forward to sharing more with you at our next all-employee town hall. The 2022 FEVS administration is just around the corner – it is projected to begin at USDA the week of May 30th. Let us improve on our response rate. Stay tuned for more information soon. My hope and expectation are that we use our employees' feedback to take meaningful action towards improving how we lead and work. Our employees' participation is central to making USDA a best place to work. The more people participate, the better our organization becomes.

At the close of this Public Service Recognition week, I reiterate my sincere thanks to all of you. You continue to rise and do your part to push our nation towards a better future. I am grateful for that service. With much appreciation,

Secretary Vilsack



Secretary Vilsack and Christie Vilsack pose with other USDA employees and volunteers at the new People's Garden in Washington, D.C.

MAY

ASIAN AMERICAN

AND PACIFIC ISLANDER

HERITAGE MONTH

USDA is proud to join the nation in recognizing the Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month, also known as Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month (AAPI). Observed annually in May, AANHPI Heritage Month is a time to reflect upon and celebrate the remarkable role of the AANHPI community in our nation's history.

The Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), the premier organization representing Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) employees in the Federal and District of Columbia governments, is proud to announce the theme for the observance of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May 2022: "Advancing Leaders Through Collaboration". This year's theme is a continuation of the "Advancing Leaders" theme series which began in FY 2021.

This heritage month originated in June 1977, when Representatives Frank Horton of New York and Norman Mineta of California called upon the President to proclaim the first 10 days of May as Asian-Pacific Heritage Week. In October 1978, President Jimmy Carter expanded the observance as an annual celebration; and, 12 years later President George H.W. Bush extended the week-long celebration to a month. The official designation of May as AAPI Heritage Month was signed into law in 1992. The month of May was chosen to observe AAPI for several reasons, including to commemorate the first Japanese who came to the country in May of 1843, and to mark the May 1869 completion of the Transcontinental Railroad which involved the labor of many Chinese immigrants. The AANHPI community is made up of culturally and linguistically - diverse people, representing populations from many countries and islands.

Throughout the month of May, USDA agencies and offices will be hosting events designed to commemorate AANHPI Heritage Month. Your participation and support for these events is highly encouraged!

[2021 Presidential Proclamation on Asian American and Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#)

This May, during Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month, we recognize the history and achievements of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs) across our Nation. In the midst of a difficult year of pain and fear, we reflect on the tradition of leadership, resilience, and courage shown by AANHPI communities, and recommit to the struggle for AANHPI equity.

Asian Americans, and Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders make our Nation more vibrant through diversity of cultures, languages, and religions. There is no single story of the AANHPI experience, but rather a diversity of contributions that enrich America's culture and society and strengthen the United States' role as a global leader. The American story as we know it would be impossible without the strength, contributions, and legacies of AANHPIs who have helped build and unite this country in each successive generation. From laying railroad tracks, tilling fields, and starting businesses, to caring for our loved ones and honorably serving our Nation in uniform, AANHPI communities are deeply rooted in the history of the United States.

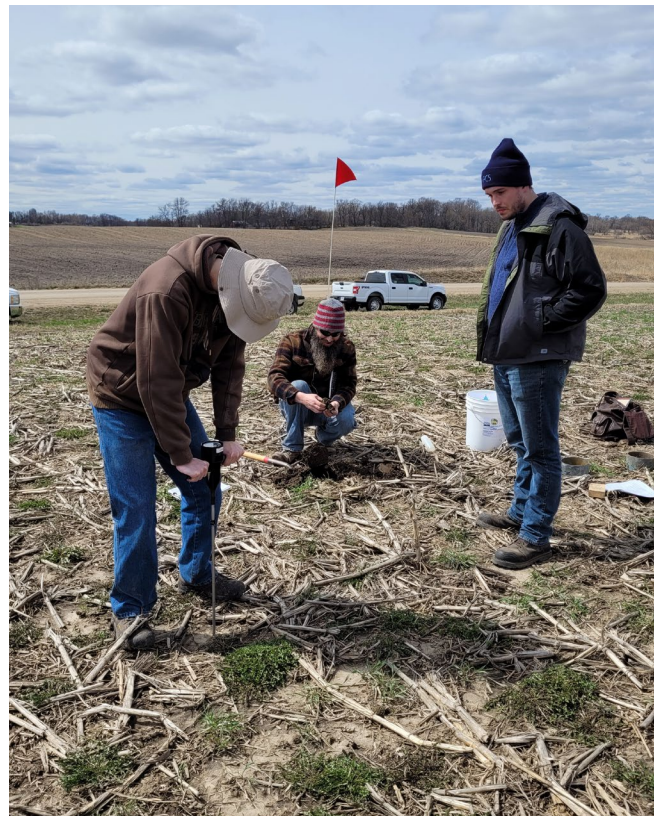
WASECA FIELD STAFF RECEIVE IFSHA TRAINING

Submitted by Shaunna Repking, Acting Assistant State Soil Scientist

On May 4th, NRCS and BWSR staff provided local training to conduct Cropland In-Field Soil Health Assessments in Waseca, MN. The Waseca County SWCD and Waseca Field Office Staff have partnered with local landowners to create a local Soil Health Demo Site through the assistance of a MOSH grant. The MOSH Grant provides funds to Waseca SWCD to analyze soil samples and provide soil health field days to the public. As a part of this grant, Waseca NRCS Staff will perform the Cropland In-Field Soil Health Assessment 2 times per year. This training served as an introduction and refresher for NRCS and SWCD staff to ensure these assessments are completed consistently.



Participants split up into groups to conduct a Cropland In-Field Soil Health Assessment in Waseca, MN. (Photo courtesy Shaunna Repking, NRCS)



Lee Nachreiner, Mark Schaezke, and Chris Engh conduct a Cropland In-Field Soil Health Assessment in Waseca, MN. (Photo courtesy Shaunna Repking, NRCS)



Mallory Malecek and Jordan Welp perform the slump method to assess aggregate stability in Waseca, MN. (Photo courtesy Shaunna Repking, NRCS)

MN CONCRETE COUNCIL PLANT TOUR

Submitted by Mike Krcmarik, State Agricultural Engineer

NRCS staff attended a concrete field day on April 26th to gain understanding of what goes into concrete before it arrives at the farm. Students toured aggregate, precast, and redi mix plant facilities getting a glimpse of the work and coordination required by industry to get a truck of concrete to the job. Minnesota NRCS plans, designs, and inspects thousands of yards of concrete a year on projects to stabilize soil, minimize groundwater contamination, and control runoff. Staff work hard to ensure a long lasting concrete product will be installed while keep ahead of the latest products and methods in the industry.



The Wells Rosemount precast concrete production facility opened in 2016 and currently produces structural members of prestressed concrete including double tees, beams, columns, and stadia. (Photo courtesy Mike Krcmarik, NRCS)



The Wells Rosemount tour guides explain the process of making double tees. (Photo courtesy Mike Krcmarik, NRCS)



Affgregate Industries Empire Plant is a high-capacity sand and gravel operation that manufactures aggregate products for ready mixed concrete, precast concrete and asphalt applications (Photo courtesy Mike Krcmarik, NRCS)

USDA RENEWS PEOPLE'S GARDEN INITIATIVE

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack planted a tree to announce the reopening of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's People's Garden Initiative. People's Gardens across the country will grow fresh, healthy food and support resilient, local food systems; teach people how to garden using conservation practices; nurture habitat for pollinators and wildlife and create greenspace for neighbors. The garden at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. will be joined by 17 flagship gardens located in urban communities nationwide, including in Minneapolis.

"The simple act of planting a garden can have big impacts – from building a more diversified and resilient local food system to empowering communities to come together around healthy food access, climate change, and equity," said Secretary Vilsack, who unveiled the upgraded garden flanking the National Mall. "We're committed to our priorities, and we are leading by example,".

About the Gardens

School gardens, community gardens, urban farms, and small-scale agriculture projects in rural and urban areas can be recognized as a "People's Garden" if they:

- Benefit the community by providing food, green space, wildlife habitat, education space.
- Are a collaborative effort. This can include groups working together with USDA agencies, food banks, Girl Scouts, Master Gardeners, conservation districts, etc.
- Incorporate conservation management practices, such as using native plant species, rain barrels, integrated pest management, xeriscaping.
- Educate the public about sustainable gardening practices and the importance of local, diverse, and resilient food systems providing healthy food for the community.

USDA plans to expand the initiative to other communities later this year, including Minneapolis. More information about the People's Garden in Minneapolis will be available in the coming months.

To watch these gardens grow, visit our People's Garden [Webpage](#) or follow the hashtag #PeoplesGarden on USDA's social media channels.

More Information

USDA originally launched the People's Garden Initiative in 2009. It's named for the "People's Department," former President Abraham Lincoln's nickname for USDA, which was established during his presidency in 1862.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov).



CENTRAL LAKES COLLEGE (CLC) FIELD DAY

Submitted By LaRae Baker and Rashaan Jeffery

Central Lakes College (CLC) through an agreement with MN NRCS provides NRCS staff with an excellent training program called CLC Ag 101. This training in the past has been a one day training in the summer and fall. This spring, the CLC worked with Acting State Agronomist, LaRae Baker, to implement a one day training at the beginning of the growing season. This additional day will allow participants in 2022 to receive hands-on training at the beginning, middle, and end of the growing season. The CLC hosted two single day trainings in May (3rd and 5th) to accommodate 19 new and 14 returning trainees.



The training took place on the Byron Township Project. The project's mission is to design and execute a land management plan that fosters soil health and provides adaptive management options that can be replicated to ultimately balance financial and environmental sustainability.

Topics covered in this spring session were irrigation, technology in agriculture, farm economics, and an opportunity to ride and drive equipment used for tillage and planting. These topics were chosen from pre and post attendance surveys and weather and timing of the training. Topics in the fall typically include cover crops and ride and drive harvest equipment.

A major goal of the partnership is to learn more about conservation practices regarding soil health, particularly through cover crops and grazing. Work continues to be completed on the Byron fields with establishing cover crops and grazing them with cows in the spring or fall depending upon when the forage is there.

A huge shout out goes to the Ag and Energy team, who guided this course:

Keith Olander, AgCentric Director
Ron Nelson, Farm Manager
Taylor Thompson, Ag Technician
Melody Weber, Administrative Assistant

Cory Detloff, Farm Director
Todd Pollema, Ag Technician
Noah Boelter, Research Analyst
Tammy Rick, Horticulture Technician

For more information check out <https://www.agcentric.org/> and [AgCentric YouTube](#)



NATIONAL WETLANDS MONTH

Submitted by Rashaan Jeffery

National Wetlands Month is celebrated annually, in the month of May. National Wetlands Month was created in 1991 by the Environmental Protection Agency and partners to celebrate the importance of wetlands to the country's ecological, economic, and social health. The EPA's goal was to educate Americans about the value of wetlands as a natural resource



Minnesota's 10.6 million acres of wetlands serve critical functions, such as providing wildlife habitat, filtering pollutants and sediment out of water, and lessening the threat of floods by storing water during snow melt and rain storms. Wetlands cover almost 20% of the state, roughly 10 times more area than lakes and rivers combined, according to Minnesota's Pollution Control Agency.



NATIONAL BEEF MONTH

Submitted by Rashaan Jeffery



Even though we are halfway through the month of May. We can't forget to celebrate National Beef Month. National Beef Month represents a time to celebrate the ranchers and cattle who strive to feed our country and the world. There are more than 900,000 cattle and calf operations across the nation. Fun fact: the U.S. is the largest producer of beef in the world!

In celebration of National Beef Month, we would like to highlight Minnesota's role in the beef industry. Below are the counties with the largest concentrations of beef in Minnesota:

Isanti - Itasca - Goodhue - Murray - Nobles - Pine - Pipestone

According to a research study done by the University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension, Minnesota ranks tenth nationally in beef production, with an annual profit of more than \$2 billion from beef product sales. The study was done throughout 2020 and 2021 with responses from nearly 400 Minnesota cattle producers from 78 of the state's 87 counties.

Joe Armstrong Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) and UMN Extension educator said, "In Minnesota, most beef cattle are owned by a small number of large operations. But most producers still operate within a small farm model." Of the participants in the survey, 44% have less than 50 cows, and 77% have less than 100 cows, which highlights the large role that small farms have in the beef industry.

The study confirmed a complex series of movements in an animal's life before it is processed for consumption. Armstrong said, "We need to focus on how to encourage practices that benefit both the cow-calf and feedlot operations, with the end goal of making Minnesota beef production more economically sustainable for producers while improving environmental sustainability as much as possible."

Ways to celebrate National Beef Month:

Buy Local Beef - It is always a great idea to support local farms when you can, and that includes the meat that you eat.

Learn About a New Marinade or Rub - If you love to cook and grill, challenge yourself and expand your knowledge about the wonderful world of flavor

Barbecue - May isn't just National Beef Month, it is also National Barbecue Month. Get out there and take advantage of the weather while it lasts.

Further reading:

[USDA Economic Research Service - Cattle & Beef Sectors at a Glance](#)

Armstrong, J., et al. (2021). Movement and Management in Minnesota's Beef Industry: Results from a Survey of MN Cow-calf and Feedlot Producers, University of Minnesota Extension.



EMPLOYEE CORNER

NEW EMPLOYEES

Soil Scientist in Preston, MN - Hello everyone my name is Allison Harvey. I grew up near Lake City on a sheep farm and spent summers getting my pigs and other projects ready for the county fair. While I didn't anticipate returning to agriculture, soil science helped me see the light. I earned a degree in Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management with a Soil Science minor at the University of Minnesota while participating on the Soil Judging Team and as a member of Lambda Delta Phi sorority. During undergrad, I worked some incredible internships in Alaska and Wyoming (where I picked up one of my dogs) before going to graduate school at the University of Idaho. My Soil & Land Resources M.S. degree provided the opportunity to study soil moisture regimes across the Pacific Northwest while teaching Pedology and starting a Soil Judging team. Though I appreciate rangelands and mountains, it's nice returning to greener pastures. I've spent these COVID-whirlwind years getting a second dog, writing my Master's thesis, teaching soils and forestry at Paul Smith's College, moving cross-country four (now five!) times, and getting to know the NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in Buffalo, NY this past year. May this be my last big move for a while!



Non-Supervisory DC in Farmington, MN - My name is Lizzy Dawson, and I am excited to join Minnesota NRCS in a few short weeks! I grew up in Green Bay, WI spending many days playing in the woods behind my house, swimming, and avoiding Packer game traffic; I would describe myself as part of the "Packer family" more than I am a fan of the team. I went to North Dakota State University where I earned a bachelor's degree in Crop and Weed Science with an emphasis in Agronomy and a master's degree in Plant Science- Crop Production. I started my career with NRCS as a Pathways Student the summer after my junior year and worked out of three field offices in NE Wisconsin. During my last semester at NDSU I was able to continue my internship out of the Fargo NRCS FO until graduation. After graduating from grad school, I was placed full time in Portage, WI as a Soil Conservationist where I have worked since. My husband, Zach, and I currently live in Baraboo, WI with our 7-month-old son, Oliver. I enjoy traveling, swimming, hiking, exploring new places, making desserts, crafting and spending time with family and friends. We recently went on a family vacation to Disney World and learned that Oliver is an excellent traveler!



Agronomist in Austin, MN - Hello all! I am excited to transition into this new agronomist roll! I grew up in central MN on my family's farm before attending college at UW-River Falls where I got my degree in crop and soil science with minors in sustainable agriculture and ag business. I earned my CCA status officially in September of 2021, and I am happy to be able to continue to use my education and previous experiences in industry in this new roll. I have been a soil conservationist in the Austin FO since September of 2021 and have been truly enjoying getting to know everybody and learning how NRCS works. Outside of work I am almost always with my fiancé, whether it be working on tractors or enjoying southern MN weather



State Office Public Affairs Intern - Hi! My name is Adelaide Mathison. I'm an agricultural communications senior at Oklahoma State University. I am originally from the north-central area of Washington State. I grew up surrounded by agriculture and developed a passion for natural resource conservation through FFA. I'm excited to learn more about NRCS and meet new people. I'm also excited to come to Minnesota and see all the new sights.

Soil Conservationist in Glencoe MN - Dominic (Dom) Christensen grew up in Saint Michael, Minnesota. He attended the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and studied Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management, with an emphasis in soil science and water resources. Dom was a soil science teaching assistant for the basic soil science class for several semesters and spent time on the soil judging team. Dom continued his education at the University of Minnesota and received his Master's in Applied Plant Sciences; his thesis research focused on developing better roadside turfgrass mixtures for the state of Minnesota. He also has experience in water monitoring with the DNR and the USGS across Minnesota. Dom enjoys hiking, identifying plants, canoeing in the Boundary Waters, gardening, playing hockey, traveling and making pilgrimages (the Holy Land, Rome, etc), and playing cribbage. Dom is excited to begin a career with the USDA NRCS in Glencoe. Dom is also happily getting married this summer on July 1st to his fiancé, Megan Coffman, (whose father Tom worked as a soil conservationist for over 30 years).





EMPLOYEE CORNER

NEW EMPLOYEES CONT'D



State Soil Health Specialist- Hi, my name is Stephanie McLain and I'm the new Soil Health Specialist for Minnesota. Prior to this return to my home state, I was the Indiana State Soil Health Specialist for nearly five years. I've had the amazing opportunity to work for NRCS in multiple states during my 20-year career, in which I gained invaluable experience and formed meaningful relationships across the country. Out of college, I worked for RCRCA in Redwood Falls and then worked for a summer at the Pipestone National Monument before starting my NRCS career in Newport, Vermont as a Soil Conservationist. Later I moved to Watertown, South Dakota and in 2006, I was able to return home to Minnesota where I served as a District Conservationist for 11 years in St. Peter and Worthington. After a brief time in Lincoln, Nebraska as the State Conservation Planning Specialist, I finally landed my dream job in Indiana. What better way to put the icing on the cake than to have my dream job in my home state? I can't wait to get out to the field offices and in the fields to meet the NRCS employees, partners and farmers that are moving soil health forward in the state.



Left: New Employee Orientation May 10-11th in the state office; Right: New Employee Orientation group photo

PHOTO SUBMISSIONS



Soils truck rigged with flat bed and the old giddings.



The SW Area meeting was held Tuesday may 3rd in Marshall. Topics included a quiz on wetland compliance, Mark Gutierrez with the Soil Health Coalition, best practices for public speaking and outreach as well Shannon Gegner talking about her experience with MARL and her trip to Ecuador. Lunch was provided by Area Office staff and it was great to have everyone together in the SW .



SW area meeting May 3rd group photo

CONGRATULATIONS!

These individuals have earned their Conservation Planner designations and/or certifications.

- Kara Fairchild, Madison Field Office
- Christopher Nelson, Olmsted SWCD
- Sara Reagan, Clarkfield Field Office
- Lindsey Zeitler, Freeborn SWCD
- Matthew Lundberg, Farmington Field Office



LINCOLN COUNTY TOUR - PHOTO JOURNAL

4/20/2022 – Eduardo, Gatlin, Maggie

Members of the Marshall Customer Service Team were able to take some time away from the assessments of CSP and the obligations of EQIP on an overcast Wednesday morning in Lincoln County. The goal: to see some conservation in action across the diverse landscape of and near the Buffalo Ridge. The tour helped keep Marshall Team’s eyes acclimated to all the different ways our work impacts the landscapes in manners which promotes environmental quality and sustainability. This resulted in observing conservation of both the past and present, ranging from a successful restored wetland to a future prescribed grazing plan.

CRP Restored Wetland

Geese, ducks, and other birds swam and frolicked in the cattails at this CRP restored wetland site. The wetland was brought back to life by a ‘water control structure’ that either blocks or opens the current drain tile - controlling the water level of the pond. Remarkably this project required no dirt-work: only a native grass seeding and the structure, which at the time of implementation a few years ago costed around \$800.



Hendricks Invasive Species Control



On the border of Minnesota and South Dakota is Lake Hendricks, headwaters of the La qui Parle River. Recently the lake’s been thrown out-of-funk by an invasive species: carp. To address the issue, the Lake Hendricks Improvement Association installed a “fish barrier” beneath Kiwanis Bridge. The grates are lowered while the carp are spawning downstream... preventing their return into Lake Hendrix after their romantic time in the Lac qui Parle River.

Pasture: Buffalo Ridge Grazing Plan

Morgan Kauth -Area Grazing Specialist- gave the team an overview of a grazing plan that will be implemented this year. The project consists of 235 acres that will be rotationally grazed to improve soil health on pastures directly situated on top of the Buffalo Ridge. The Buffalo Ridge consists of a 60-mile-long expanse of rolling hills that cuts across southwest Minnesota. The goal of the project is to help the landowner get better use of his pastures while restoring ecological biodiversity. Fencing and watering systems will be put in place to help promote herd health.



CRP, Tree Planting

Selfie taken at reenrolled CRP site. Where team member Randy Kraus assisted in planting the trees on the site back in 2004 and 2005. This was somewhat of a partner project – A Minnesota DNR forester designed the plan: species, rows, spacing... In 2004 over 26,000 trees . Randy recalls, “it took two people a little over 3 days to plant”. The second planting in 2005 involved 3,600 trees. Tree species include: Green Ash, Silver Maple, Common Hackberry, Bur Oak, Ponderosa pine, Red Cedar, Sanbar Willow, Dogwoods, Common Chokecherry, American Plum, Black Walnut, and Blackhills Spruce.



Fen

About 3 miles southeast of the town of Verdi, the team got to visit a site where a “calcareous fen” is located. These rare wetlands consist of peaty soils high in organic matter with high calcium carbonate deposits and niche plant species. It is estimated that there are about 4,000 of these habitats scattered across the state, remnants of glacial activity. Retired Lincoln County District Conservationist Dennis Johnson tipped the team over to the site, mostly overlooked except for a few locals who are aware of its existence. For some (Eddie) this was the highlight of the tour as a wet spot on a hill, isn’t something you see every day.

Lastly, a successful tour and meeting would not be complete for Marshall Team without some lunch! They stopped at Legacy Bistro in Lake Benton, a dine-in restaurant known for bistro style coffee, breakfasts, and lunches. A Team Meeting was conducted to go over the three counties’ progress in programs, as well as Southwest Area updates... Soon after, lunch was served. This concluded the tour, so the afternoon had the team disperse back to their respective offices to continue making progress on the upcoming deadlines – with new knowledge in mind.





EMPLOYEE INNOVATION PORTAL



A new tool called the [Employee Innovation Portal](#)—aims to empower employees to share staff-developed, ready-to-use tools and in the works ideas and view a library of proven process improvements and innovations.

NRCS Leadership has spent the past few months deep diving into data and responses from the 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) released this spring. The survey (66.7% participation rate) shows that 61 percent of staff felt encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.

Employee performance and meaningful recognition, along with increased transparency and improved communication throughout the chain of command were the top concerns.

This online portal will house employees' innovative ideas from all levels of the agency without the need for supervisory approval before submittal. Innovations—changes made to an existing method, product, or idea—that are currently in use to maximize efficiency and improve the customer experience are ideal.

Innovations are not just technology related. They can also work to improve and impact every aspect of our agency. An innovation could be a new and successful way of running a Local Work Group meeting, an automated spreadsheet that helps calculate material quantities for an engineering practice, a new field data collection tool, a partnership database, or a conservation planning farm inventory checklist, to name a few.

This new [tool](#) will enable employees to contribute their bold ideas and proven methods for success to build a more sustainable and resilient NRCS.

If you have any questions, please contact: [Christine Hall](#), National Innovation Leader, Office of the Chief, (732) 569-5383

FPAC ROUNDUP



May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Proactively maintaining our health and wellness (be it emotional, psychological, or social) is key to a happy and productive life. Sometimes when we're overly busy or life is unpredictable, it's easy to let our health and wellness slide. It's important to be consistent and maintain healthy habits everyday. HRD has a great [Worklife and Wellness webpage](#) packed with helpful resources. Whether it's learning to cope with COVID, developing new ways to nourish your mind, body and spirit, fostering a mentally healthy workplace culture, or integrating meditation and mindfulness into your routine, there's something for everyone. Oftentimes, the hardest part is just taking that first step. To access [mental health awareness month activities available to FPAC employees](#), visit [myFPAC](#).

FPAC Training & Events

[The Intersection of Social Media and Civil Rights – June 2, 2022](#)

[Event Management Symposium - June 14, 2022](#)

[Cultivating an Inclusive Workplace Through Gender Equity - June 28, 2022](#)

Happy Birthday USDA and FSA!

This month, we celebrate two important birthdays – FSA turned 89, and USDA turns 160! (It's a great reason to eat cake or your favorite pastry in celebration!) That's a lot of years spent supporting our Nation's agricultural community with the critical programs and services they need to provide America's food, fuel, and fiber. When you stop to think about where agriculture was 160 years ago, the state of farming and ranching today with all of the technological advancements is nothing short of miraculous. Your work (YOU) plays a major role in supporting the evolution, and we need to always think about how we make agriculture stronger for our communities, families, and country. FSA colleagues and team Happy Birthday! Thank you for all of your continued hard work and commitment to taking care of our farmers and ranchers. You are always there whenever and wherever they need us. Happy birthday and many more!

PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS

UNTIL NEXT TIME

Submitted by LaRae Baker 5/2/2022

NRCS has been my work home for almost 19 years. There have been times when I have felt the need to stretch my skills and learn and experience something new.

I completed a short detail in 2006 in Maryland. I assisted 3 counties with different stages of conservation planning. It was interesting to learn how NRCS and SWCD can vary from state to state. I got to see the home of Francis Scott Key. I spent some afternoons with a friend of mine her family visiting her grandpa with dementia living in a nursing home. My family met me one weekend for a trip to DC and Baltimore. It was a great experience on and off the clock.



High Tunnels in OH. Photo credit: LaRae Baker



Birthplace of Francis Scott Key. Photo credit: LaRae Baker

April 2020, I had the opportunity to work for the national ecological sciences division under Dana Ashford-Kornburger on a detail to write a national technical note on high tunnels. I was invited to join in many regional and national calls during COVID which was very interesting. I learned the processes of creating and having a document reviewed at that level. I got to present, confer, and advise others across the nation on our national high tunnel standard. I still get calls requesting assistance on the high tunnel subject. I was invited to help on the team reviewing national agronomic standards that year. It was an amazing opportunity bringing field perspective to the group and learning more about the process.

This past winter I was once again feeling that need to learn something new. I talked to my supervisors about going on a detail. I think of details as a form of continuing education training. I received this opportunity to be acting Minnesota State Agronomist in January. I now have a deeper understanding of the NRCS 590 standard. I gained experience exercising the skills it takes to work NRCS partners. I helped with some trainings MN staff will attend later this summer.

I would encourage those of you interested in learning more about different parts of NRCS to talk to your supervisor about potentially applying for a detail. It is a great networking opportunity in addition to developing or honing a new set of skills. I have felt honored to serve Minnesota NRCS staff. I appreciated the Minnesota and Ohio state office staff for working together to make this detail happen. Thank you to all who have made me feel part of the Minnesota team.

Submitted by Shannon Carpenter,

Hello, my name is Shannon Carpenter. I want to tell you a little about myself and my NRCS career to show other NRCS employees the advancement potential the agency offers. In my case, I started at NRCS as a SCEP student in the summer of 2001 in Morris, Minnesota. I received an agronomy degree with an emphasis in soils from the University of Minnesota at Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota spring of 2002. Upon graduation, I became a full time Soil Conservationist with training locations in Marshall and Thief River Falls. While there I completed many hours of on-the-job training and gained the foundational knowledge of the NRCS Conservation Planning process. In 2004 I became the DC in Milaca and the Tribal Liaison to the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, where writing CNMP's, and assisting the Tribe with seven generation planning efforts were a few of the highlights. I contribute my success as a DC to the relationships/partnerships built with other local, state, and federal agency partners, community leaders, and fellow NRCS colleagues. Ten years later I advanced to State Water Quality Specialist/State TSP Coordinator writing and updating technical materials for conservation practice standards to support FO staff and producers in conservation planning and program delivery.

When I started, I set a goal to be the "State Agronomist" in Minnesota. On May 22nd, I started on what was my 21st anniversary with the agency, as the "Agronomist" on the National Water Quality and Quantity Technical Team based out of Portland, OR. The WQQT scope is to provide nationwide support in:

- WQ Technology Development – Software, WQ
- Technology Training,
- Technical Training in my area of expertise

NRCS employees are blessed to be surrounded by many GREAT people. With that I want to say THANK YOU to everyone who has supported me over the years. I can't say goodbye, but I will say until next time! Since, I have gone to a National Technical Team with direct responsibilities to support technology development and training to all States, our paths may cross again!

My husband (Ryan) and I will continue to farm in the Anoka Sand Plain along with our two daughters (Claire-13 and Georgia-10), a chocolate lab (Daisy), three COVID born cats (Ariel, Oliver, and Fluffy), an old, crabby cat (Emma) and coming soon two horses (Danny and Hope).

I ATE GUINEA PIG



Submitted by Shannon Gegner

I know the title of this has caught you off guard but hang with me, I'm going to tell you about the adventure that I had in Ecuador. To start this story off I need to tell you about the amazing program through the University of Minnesota extension and SMSU Marshall called the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership (MARL) Program. The program is an intensive 2-year program that brings together people from all around the state of Minnesota with a common passion for agriculture and rural living. I was accepted into this program after an application and interview process. The other members of my cohort consisted of farmers, local government, universities, private sector and public sector. You become very close with the members of your cohort as you complete in-state seminars, a national seminar in DC and a study abroad seminar which took us to Ecuador.



So, a little bit about myself; my name is Shannon Gegner I am an area program specialist out of Redwood falls MN I work for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which is an agency within the USDA. I live in Redwood Falls with my husband Jamie and two sons Wayland and Roland. I am what I like to call an Ag advocate, I didn't grow up on a farm, I didn't really grow up in agriculture but when I got a job with NRCS and started working with producers I knew that agriculture was my calling. I am trained in conservation, along with my degree in Soils having the ability to assist Ag producers in conservation is the perfect fit. My leadership 'journey', which is difficult for me to even say, has been a long one. I struggle calling myself a leader or being thought of as a leader especially since I am an extreme introvert. Through this program I have learned about my emotional intelligence, my leadership style and have learned to push myself in my leadership as well as mentally and physically out of my comfort zone.

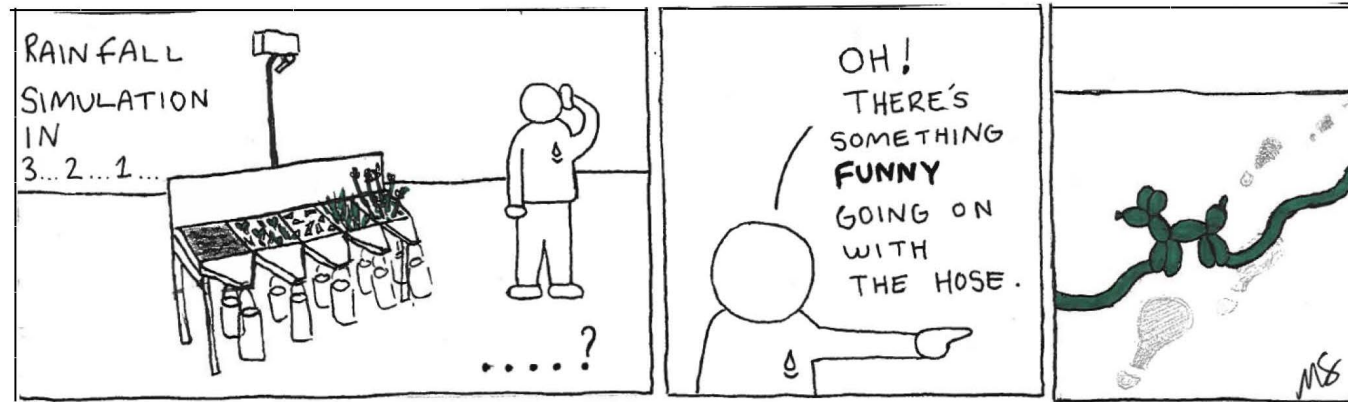


Now the trip itself; we flew out of MSP in the cities and had a layover in Atlanta before flying to Quito Ecuador. Our total travel day length was roughly 13 hours. Quito, actually all of Ecuador, is in the same time zone as Minnesota so that was very helpful for staying in contact with my family while I was on travel. The trip lasted from March 30th through April 8th and encompassed a wide geographical area of Ecuador. The itinerary covered farm, industrial, cultural and foodie visits. There was also time left to explore various communities as well as take in some of the outdoor activities. The areas of Ecuador we visited were simply beautiful- I feel so fortunate to have been able to travel to this country and will always take the experiences that I have had there with me forever. Some interesting things that flowed through the whole trip was; you can't flush TP down the toilets in Ecuador, don't drink the water unless it's from bottles, you have to pay to use most public toilets, they eat A LOT of plantains (they still don't sound good to me..) and there is a plethora of fresh local fruits and vegetables to enjoy.

We arrived in Quito, Ecuador in early evening and took a drive in a bus to Otavalo where we spent the next three days. Otavalo sits at an elevation of 8,300 feet as compared to where I live in Minnesota at 1,043 feet. Day one in Otavalo started with me trying papaya for the first time, which was delicious, at our hotel provided breakfast. A bus ride through the mountains led us to a beautiful, female ran, avocado farm where they grow, harvest, and sell fresh avocados. There they also produce extra virgin avocado oil. The plantation was quite vast, they graft their own trees on site and utilize organic practices. We were able to try a house made avocado margarita and the many varieties of avocado oils. The afternoon was spent as a large-scale sugar cane production operation and processing facility. The sugarcane is very labor intensive, being planted and harvested by hand. We were provided a tour of the sugar cane processing facility. This trip was meant to push you mentally... oh boy did this plant ever do that. It was a plant build in the 1960's that runs on steam which is generated by the pulp of the sugar cane. There were numerous safety hazards; pressure releases shooting everywhere, giant crushers completely open and right next to the cat walk we were on, no waivers were ever signed and they stated that the plant was 'automated' but when alarms would go off the men working there would have to climb up pipes to manually open and close the valves.. Scarry was an understatement and pushed me out of the comfort zone. Interesting was that the sugar produced at that plant stays in Ecuador.

To read the rest of the story go to: [PAS SharePoint](#)





"CLOWNERY"

Comic by Maggie Syversen

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Brenna Greer, PH.D.
Author & Historian



Memorial Day is often considered the unofficial beginning of summer. Parades take place, the grill is dusted off for the first time. Actually, it is more than that. Memorial Day is in remembrance of soldiers who fell in combat risking their lives for their country. It is about gratitude.

"Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy forget in time that men have died to win them."

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt