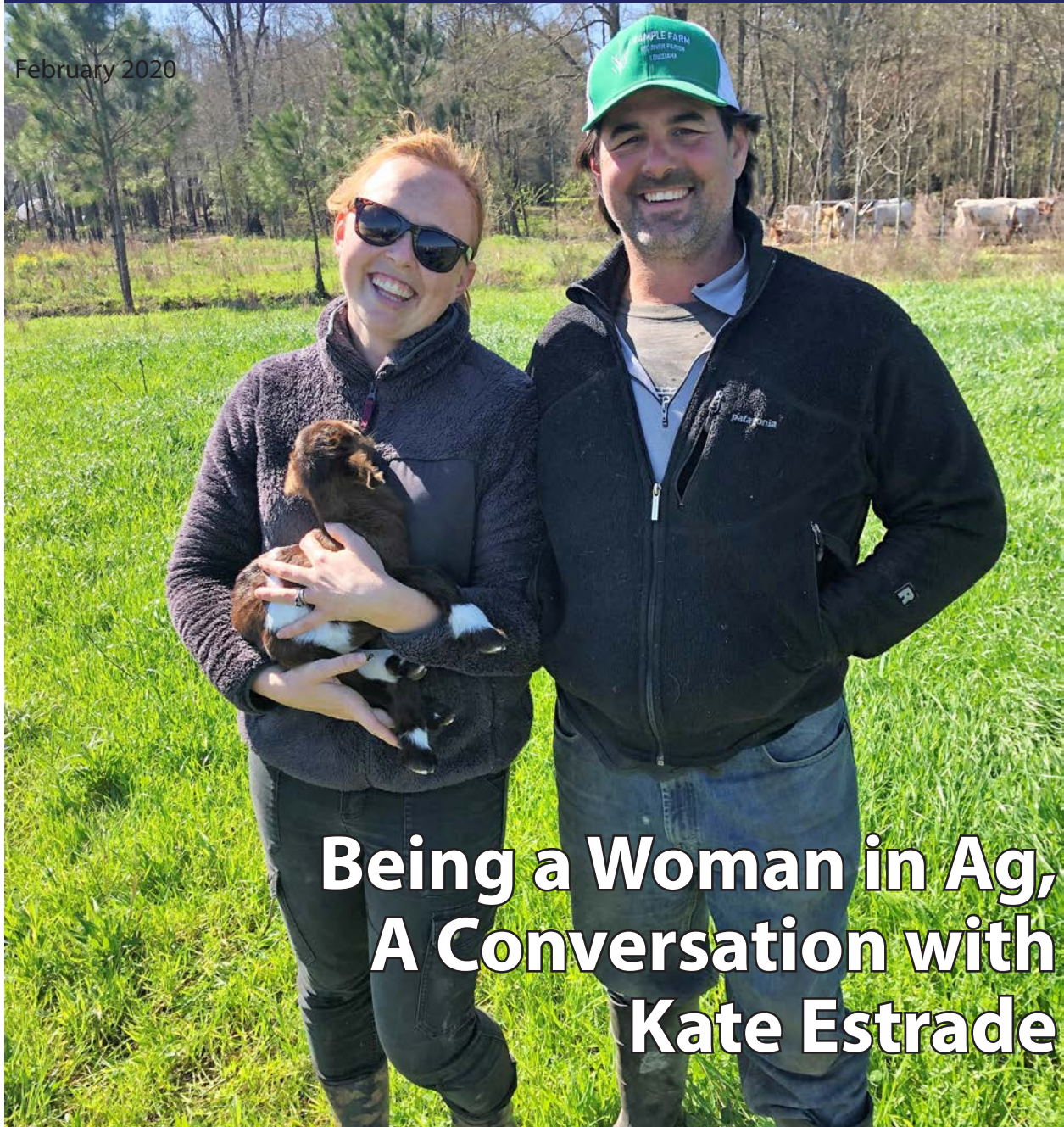




United States Department of Agriculture

Louisiana Conservation Update

February 2020



Being a Woman in Ag, A Conversation with Kate Estrade

Projects • Successes • Partnerships



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

If you would like to receive monthly issues of the Conservation Update, please send your mailing address or e-mail address to:

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NRCS Is Hiring!

NRCS is currently in an unprecedented state of hiring and Louisiana NRCS has an opportunity to hire **5** soil conservation technicians and **6** soil conservationists at various locations throughout the state!

If you or somebody you know is interested in working for NRCS, please call or stop by your local NRCS office to talk to our staff about how to apply and what the job entails.

All NRCS vacancies are posted on www.USAJobs.gov. Please visit that website for more information and instructions on how to apply!



Follow us on Twitter: http://twitter.com/NRCS_Louisiana

Notes from the State Conservationist

With daylight savings time just around the corner on March 8th, we know that longer, sunny days are ahead. They tell me that springtime is beautiful in Louisiana and my wife and I are looking forward to enjoying everything that this time of year has to offer! As we all enjoy our crawfish boils this time of year, we can certainly thank our rice and crawfish farmers who make it possible. We know this time is very busy for all our producers. Hopefully, weather will cooperate, and you all will have an excellent harvest!



We currently have several job openings with NRCS throughout the state. I highly recommend that anyone interested in working in natural resources take a few minutes to check out the job listing on www.usajobs.gov. Right now, we have the ability to hire several soil conservationists and soil conservation technicians and we are looking for the best and brightest. Please encourage anyone interested to check us out on the site.

Also, right now, is the time to sign-up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP-EQIP) in fiscal year 2020. Although this sign-up ends on March 6th we have continued sign-up throughout the year. I encourage you to reach out to your local NRCS office and start the conversation about how we can assist you in your operation.

In this issue of the Conservation Update we feature Kate Estrade, along with her husband, Grant, who own Local Cooling Farms in Washington Parish, Louisiana. Kate and Grant are speakers at the Louisiana Women in Agriculture conference coming up on March 12th and 13th. Please join me at the Randolph Riverfront Center in Alexandria, along with Kate and Grant and many others from across the state and beyond as we meet to learn, grow and connect at LWAG 2020.

I personally look forward to seeing you there!

Chad Kacir
State Conservationist

Soil Conservation Technician

Opening & Closing Date: 1/30/2020 to 4/6/2020
Salary: \$31,208 to \$56,222 per year
Pay scale & grade: GS-04
Full performance level: GS-07
Series: GS-0458
Appointment Type: Permanent
Work schedule: Full-Time
Job Announcement No.: NRCS-20-10713554-DE-LA_SC
Locations: Abbeville, Addis, Jonesville, Lake Charles & Ruston

Soil Conservationist

Opening & Closing Date: 2/5/2020 to 4/6/2020
Salary: \$34,916 to \$68,777
Pay scale & grade: GS-05
Full performance level: GS-09
Series: GS-0457
Appointment type: Permanent
Work schedule: Full-Time
Job Announcement No.: NRCS-20-10717600-DE-LA-SC
Locations: Amite, Crowley, Jonesville, Rayville, Ville Platte & Winnsboro



Being a Woman in Ag, A Conversation

Just south of Bogalusa, Louisiana, in Washington Parish, rests Local Cooling Farms, home to Kate and Grant Estrade. They are first generation farmers, who are passionate about their land and the goats, pigs and cows they raise for meat and the 400 heritage breed egg-laying hens. Working together, Kate and Grant believe in taking care of their soil and providing the highest quality meat and eggs to the customers they serve at surrounding farmers market locations, in the New Orleans area, and from their store, Laughing Buddha Nursery, in Metairie.

Their collaboration with the Bogue Chitto-Pearl River Soil and Water Conservationist District and NRCS began shortly after acquiring the land for the farm. They made a request for Conservation Technical Assistance, and the rest is history.

Kate and Grant will also be featured speakers at the Louisiana Women in Ag (LWAG) conference in Alexandria on March 12th and 13th. Recently, we caught up with Kate and Grant to learn more about Local Cooling Farms, Kate's perspective of being a woman in agriculture, and their partnership with NRCS and the Bogue - Chitto Pearl River SWCD.

How has NRCS assisted you with your operation?

(Kate) We have received the expertise of Stuart Gardner a rangeland management specialist with NRCS, who is so knowledgeable about rotational grazing with a small ruminant cattle combo for our goat/cow operation, and how to best plant and terminate cover crops. Stuart has given us insight about animal husbandry, if our goats and cows nutritional needs are being met by just grazing, how to judge their weight gains, and when to process the meat. NRCS has really helped us make a plan to best utilize our land.

Have you seen a difference in your land since you implemented rotational grazing?

(Kate) The pasture part of our land was originally row crops for decades and then it was fallow. The soil here was rock hard, clay pan, and there was really nothing positive as far as soil health or diversity. We are running the goats through and then having the pigs on the pasture - all that manure and trampling, in addition to planting cover crops, has made a real difference. Now we see dung beetles and piles of worm castings. It is really exciting to watch this soil that was so dead, regenerate through grazing animals and cover crops.

When did you begin to see the results of rotational grazing and cover crops?

(Kate) In the first year of grazing, we noticed a huge difference! And we also saw wildlife returning to the area. Our cool season cover crops are wheat and rye and we also plant beans and some clover. The warmer season mix is Sorghum sudangrass and we are going to try some forage corn, clay peas and sunflowers.

We do not have a no till drill, so what we do is use our animals to help us. When we seed the pasture, we have the layer flock eat it down more than we normally would, so we have this blank canvas to hand broadcast the cover crop seed. And in the woods we have the pigs root everything up, and then we'll spread corn everywhere so they have to hunt for it, then we go back and spread cover crop seed, so as the pigs are looking for the corn their hoofs are stomping all the seed in the soil. We end up with a higher germination rate, because the seed is really connecting with the soil. It's fun to be able to use our animals to help in the process of planting cover crops.

Local Cooling Farms is growing and successful, what do you attribute to its success?

(Kate) It is a win-win because we are focusing on animal health that in turn regenerates soil health. We know our customers, and that is so important, it is sacred. Feeding families and interacting



with Kate Estrade

with them is special. Our customer base has grown so much that I am away from the farm Monday through Thursday until about 9 p.m. I am setting up and delivering to our hubs after work. I don't complain because I love connecting with our customers.

What does it mean to you to be a woman in agriculture?

(Kate) I feel like it is a privilege to be more connected to the natural world and to raise our animals with dignity and respect. I believe it is a privilege to sell our food directly to customers. I get to raise healthy food and then meet the people who are cooking it for their families, it's really an honor. Turns out I'm a huge animal lover and I don't think that is incongruous with raising meat. I think we have this covenant with them to treat the animals well, raise them right and then provide nutritious food for customers.

Do you find it hard to be a woman in agriculture?

(Kate) Grant and I started Local Cooling Farms together, we created this business we are in together. I've never felt like anyone was telling me "you can't do this" but, farming in general, is hard. I really feel privileged to be able to farm. I'm doing what I'm meant to be doing, and I'm the best version of myself. In some ways, I feel like there is nothing more meaningful or important, and for me I don't want to do anything else.

The Louisiana Women in Agriculture Conference is coming up. How important is it to have a community of women who are involved in agriculture and understand and support each other?

(Kate) I think sometimes the image of farming can be more masculine. But I think that women bring unique qualities to agriculture. Farming is hard, like when you lose an animal, or have weeks or months of terrible weather, having other women who just get it and you don't have to explain farming challenges, is huge. For me, losing an animal is the hardest aspect of

farming and nobody understands more than a fellow female livestock producer.

What would you say to women involved in agriculture who are thinking about attending this year's conference? What can they expect to hear?

(Kate) Grant and I are going to present a break-out session at this year's conference on a topic that is very close to our hearts. We provide eggs, pork, some beef and seasonally goat meat at our store, Laughing Buddha Nursery, and through market hubs. What we've found is that we sell more of our own products when we also offer vegetables, dairy, chicken and, now, we even do fermented vegetables and bread from small producers. Our talk is going to be about how we leveraged our small acreage by teaming up with other farmers and selling each other's products. It's all about relationships; with your fellow farmers, vendors and neighbors. Being cooperative makes your business more sustainable.

Would you encourage other producers to reach out to their local USDA/NRCS office?

(Kate) Each parish and area of the state has technical experts who can help you and answer questions. There are so many programs available for all types of producers. The conservation technical assistance has been really helpful for our operation. I highly recommend that producers contact their local SWCD and NRCS office to investigate the programs and assistance available.

Outreach Corner

Submitted by: Dexter Sapp, Project Specialist, Rapides SWCD

I was one of over 750 people in attendance at the 29th Annual Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) Conference that took place at the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock, Arkansas in January. Louisiana was well represented at the conference with approximately 70 producers in attendance. Each year the conference offers attendees from a 13-state region, covering 2,000 miles across, the opportunity to gather engage and learn through a series of short courses, breakout sessions and tours. Some of the mini-courses and concurrent general sessions covered such topics as How to Make Your Own 300-Year-Old Apple Tree, Year-Round Hoop house Vegetable Production, Growing Food, People and Community, Ecological Poultry Production, Veterans Succeeding in Agriculture, Heirs, Property and Land Preservation just to name a few.

There were five special events at the conference consisting of a mixer, poster display, seed swap and book Signing. The poster display on "Soil Your Undies" was truly an eye-catcher.

While there were five excellent field trips only could be chosen, so I chose Field Trip #3 - The Farm at Barefoot Bend – Vertical Integration at the Farm. The Farm at Barefoot Bend is a sustainable farm owned and operated by U.S Army veteran Damon Helton and his family. It is a 165-acre parcel of timber, specialty crops raised under high tunnels, pasture-raised animals, and hemp production. Specialty crops produced on the farm include tomatoes, okra, peas and peppers, all grown in high tunnels. Due to wet field conditions at the time of the tour, the chartered bus was not able to take us to the farm at Barefoot Bend instead we had to meet off site at a local country market in Saline County Arkansas for the presentation from the farm owner.

The highlights of the tour were the presentations by NRCS employees. NRCS' Jeremy Huff and the Saline County NRCS staff did a demonstration with the rainfall simulator for soil health, and they had tools on hand that were used in electric fence construction. But what caught my attention was the presentation on tire tanks for livestock watering facilities. The NRCS technician had a cut-away section of a tire tank that was made from

a used skidder tire and each tour member was given a handout about the tire tank conservation practice which NRCS provides the financial assistance for. Some key points about the unique tire tank is that the tires should be a minimum of 24 inches tall for cattle, but 30 inches or more is preferred. Combine tires work well and are easier to cut than thicker skidder/excavation tires. For goats and sheep no tire over 19 inches should be used.



Although the wet site conditions at the Barefoot Bend Farm prevented the tour group from going to the farm, the offsite presentations by the farm owner and the NRCS staff were very enlightening.

Upcoming Events

March 14, 2020 Louisiana Farmer Veterans Coalition Chapter Formation Meeting

The Farmer Veterans Coalition would like to set up a Louisiana Chapter. A chapter formation meeting will be held on Saturday, March 14, 2020, at 10:00 am at the George M. Simmon, Jr., American Legion Post 3 located at 3215 Rapides Avenue in Alexandria, Louisiana. In addition

to forming a new Chapter, there will be guest speakers offering services to the ag community in the morning. Lunch will be provided. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Kirk Garber at 318-473-7964 or by e-mail at kirk.garber@usda.gov



Upcoming Events



March 12 & 13, 2020
Randolph Riverfront Center - Alexandria, Louisiana

2020 Keynote Speakers



Courtney DeHoff
Television host, Keynote speaker,
Emcee, Cowgirl



Amanda Radkee
Author, Editor, Keynote speaker



Jolene Brown
Professional Speaker, Author,
Family Business Consultant



Mike Strain, DVM
Commissioner - Louisiana
Department of Agriculture & Forestry



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Thursday:

Tours & Evening Reception

Friday:

Expo, Speakers, & Workshops

Register for the conference or become a partner @ LouisianaWomenInAG.com



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Roy O Martin
Since 1923



**United States
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Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Employees



Kristopher Davis was recently selected as the new assistant state conservationist for field operations for NRCs in Alexandria, Louisiana. In this position, Kris will oversee the NRCs field offices in the southern part of Louisiana.

Kris has a B.S. in Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries and a M.S. in Wildlife from Louisiana State University (LSU). Upon graduation, Kris worked for LSU and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries before joining NRCs 16 years ago. During his time with NRCs, he spent nine years as a wildlife biologist in south Louisiana and for the past seven years, he has served as the district conservationist in Opelousas, Louisiana.



Jacqueline Jones was recently selected as the new planning engineer on the Water Resources Planning Staff for NRCs in Lafayette, Louisiana. In this position, she will primarily work on planning coastal restoration projects.

Jackie was born and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana. She graduated from Louisiana State University with a degree in Biological Engineering. After graduating, she went to work the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and worked there until she took the job with NRCs.



Gabriel Bufkin was recently selected as a new design engineer for NRCs in Denham Springs, Louisiana. In his new role with NRCs, Gabe will primarily be designing coastal restoration projects.

Gabe was born and raised in Vicksburg, Mississippi. He earned an Associate's Degree from Hinds Community College and a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from Mississippi State University. After graduation, Gabe was selected for the position with NRCs.

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www.la.nrcs.usda.gov

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