



Kansas Highlights

June 2002



FARM BILL 2002

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 is landmark legislation for conservation funding and for focusing on environmental issues. The conservation provisions will assist farmers and ranchers in meeting environmental challenges on their land. This legislation simplifies existing programs and creates new programs to address high priority environmental and production goals. The 2002 Farm Bill enhances the long-term quality of our environment and conservation of our natural resources. *For more information, log on to www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002*

LANE COUNTY TARGETS WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

One day last summer, a woman came into the office asking about no-till farming. Her husband passed away several years ago and she had taken over the decision-making responsibilities of the farm. She had very little experience with the business end of the farm before his death, and the last couple of years had been very difficult for her. Her tenant wanted to switch to a no-till crop rotation and she did not understand the concept, or the extra expenses. It was clear, the problem was poor communication between the tenant and owner, but the issue was discussed with her and she left with a better understanding of no-till farming. Just a couple of hours later, another woman came into the office with questions about the Conservation Reserve Program. She had just recently become widowed and also had very little knowledge about the business end of farming.

After discussing these events at a staff meeting, it was agreed a special effort should be made to reach these female landowners and farm wives to inform them about agriculture issues and the programs offered. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in partnership with the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Lane County Conservation District, and the Walnut Creek Extension District held the first Lane County Women in Agriculture meeting last October.

Although it took time to build interest in the meetings, 13 women were in attendance for each of the last two meetings. These meetings were about conservation buffers, continuous Conservation Reserve Program, while the FSA addressed the loan program and loan deficiency payments. After the meeting, suggestions were made for programs for future meetings. One woman thought the programs were so good, she brought her husband to the last meeting so he could learn a thing or two.

Submitted by Arlen Ricke, District Conservationist, Dighton

FIRST ARK RIVER WATER FESTIVAL

The Finney County Conservation District, in partnership with the Gray and Kearny County Conservation Districts, hosted the first Ark River Water Festival in late May. Over 20 different agencies combined their efforts to provide educational presentations and exhibits for over 1,500 fifth and sixth grade students. The festival is an environmental science workshop that offers a diverse range of activities and is designed to heighten students' awareness about water and other natural resources, as well as to define their role in protecting these resources. Teachers were given the opportunity to gain a wealth of up-to-date

information on the topics presented and learn new innovative approaches to teaching these concepts in their classrooms.

The students were able to attend several different classes throughout the day including a Rain Simulator, Groundflow Model, EnviroScape, Stream Model Trailer, Water Maze, Make Your own Aquifer, Amphibians and Water Quality, Streamlife, Horticulture and Water, Water Safety, Wastewater and You, as well as several different videos on different water topics.

Thanks to all the people, businesses, and agencies that volunteered their time, efforts, and money to make the vision of a water festival in southwest Kansas become a reality. Without their continued support, projects like this would not be available to our communities. *If you are interested in helping with the Second Annual Ark River Water Festival, contact Jennifer Long, NPS Coordinator, Finney County Conservation District, Garden City*

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY'S ENGINEERING OPEN HOUSE

The Steel Ring Engineering Honor Society at Kansas State University (KSU) invited NRCS to participate in their 80th Annual College of Engineering Open House in April. This year's theme was "Endless Possibilities" and was held in conjunction with the all-university open house. Over 10,000 people attended the event, including college students, graduates, future engineering students, and the general public.

Steel Ring offers companies the opportunity to become involved in the Engineering Open House by setting up a display in the engineering complex. Of the many companies that have hired engineering students at KSU, only 8 to 10 are invited each year to participate. NRCS engineers were on hand to talk to the public and explain their role in engineering with our agency. Hundreds of people stopped by the display to visit and also to pick up the flashlights and beetle clips that have the NRCS name and Internet address on them.

Engineers that worked the display included: John Ourada, State Conservation Engineer; Harold Blume, Environmental Engineer; Gary Begnoche, Agricultural Engineer; Ed Radatz and Marty Soffran, Hydraulic Engineers; and Lea Montgomery, Design Engineer. *Submitted by Harold Blume, Environmental Engineer, Salina SO*

THE TALLGRASS LEGACY ALLIANCE

The tallgrass prairie once covered an area from the Flint Hills east through much of the cornbelt. Today, most experts agree, the tall grass prairie only remains on 3 to 5 percent of its original area. By far, the Flint Hills area of Kansas is the largest portion of this remaining acreage, even with all the other states combined!

In order to support the improvement and preservation of these remaining acres of this tallgrass prairie ecosystem, the Tallgrass Legacy Alliance (TLA) was formed. The alliance is composed of ranchers, state and federal organizations, agricultural and environmental organizations, and public agencies. These include: Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas Farm Bureau, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, State Conservation Commission, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, K-State Extension Service, Emporia State University, Kansas Biological Survey, Flint Hills and See-Kan RC&D's, NRCS, Stream & Prairie Research, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Western Resources, Wildlife Management Institute, and the Nature Conservancy.

According to an article in *The Wichita Eagle*, May 8, 2002, "Kansas' own Tallgrass Legacy Alliance is showing how a more positive approach—based on voluntary partnerships and collaboration—can be a win-win solution for everyone involved."

Submitted by Bob Love, RC&D Coordinator, See-Kan RC&D, Chanute

EARTH DAY AROUND THE STATE

Students across the state were entertained at several different annual Earth Day events in April. In southern Kansas, 85 Harper County third graders from Anthony and Harper were entertained at the Anthony Lake. Students were encouraged to bring a litter free lunch in honor of Earth Day and each was given an Earth Day T-shirt provided by the Harper County Conservation District and the Sunflower RC&D.

In Ellis County, the fairgrounds was transformed into a look of the past and a glimpse of the future at the annual Earth Day Fair. *Buzz Lightyear, Woody, Jessie, Mrs. Litterbug*, and two dinosaurs greeted the 300 third grade students. Seniors from the Community Involvement classes at Hays High School organized the two-day event. Students received a Lacebark elm tree seedling and a "goody" bag.

In each of these events, students learned about the environment through hands-on activities at different learning stations, including soil, water, energy, animals, recycling, and composting. Several individuals and agency personnel made presentations.



NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Chris Hoskinson uses the rainfall simulator to teach students about ground cover and erosion.



Jennifer Braun, Rooks County Conservation District Manager, discusses the importance of disposing household batteries properly with Sacred Heart Grade School students.

The Rooks County Conservation District celebrated Earth Day by providing two water quality programs. Students at Sacred Heart Grade School, Plainville, participated in a household battery disposal project. District Manager, Jennifer Braun, presented a challenge to the students to help keep groundwater pollution free. She gave a Power Point presentation to students about groundwater and then talked to the kids about properly disposing of household batteries to prevent mercury and cadmium from polluting water sources. A battery collection was held for two weeks. The students collected over 200 batteries. The program made such an impact that the teachers asked if the collection could continue as a year-round project.

The second event was "Green Thumb 101." This targeted gardeners in the county and brought the subject of backyard conservation to their attention. K-State Extension provided a slide show and presentation about *xeriscaping* (landscaping with water conservation in mind). The Rooks County Conservation District is also working to establish a garden club. Both of these

projects were funded in part by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Section 319 grant provided by Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Articles submitted by Greg Bauer, District Conservationist, Anthony and Jan Klaus, Office Assistant, Hays AO

PARTNERS PLANTING TREES

A continuous Conservation Reserve Program Living Snow Fence was planted for landowner, Rick Shaw in Decatur County with the help of several conservation partners. NRCS provided technical assistance in designing the windbreak and helped to place the soil on the weed barrier. The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) prepared the site and watered in all of the trees, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) planted the trees, provided the tree planter and weed barrier machine, and sold the weed barrier to the landowner. The Decatur County Conservation District assisted the landowner in ordering the trees.



NRCS teamed up with KDOT, KDWP, Decatur County Conservation District and the landowner to put in a living snow fence in Decatur County.

In the end, 7,760 feet of weed barrier was installed along with 687 red cedar trees and 393 shrubs. A major feature of living snow fences is the multiple benefits they provide for permanent and high-quality wildlife habitat, environmental beautification, and protection for livestock.

Submitted by Jan Klaus, Office Assistant, Hays AO

ABILENE 4TH & 5TH GRADERS ENJOY WATER FESTIVAL

Students at Abilene's Garfield School were treated on April 18 to the second annual "Clean Water Festival." The festival was coordinated and funded by the Dickinson County Water Improvement Program and the Dickinson County Conservation District. Each student, teacher, presenter, and volunteer received a T-shirt with the Clean Water Festival logo. Volunteers from several government and non-profit agencies presented ten water-related, educational activities to the school's 225 students.

Activities and presenters included:

- ◆ Edible Aquifer - Dickinson County Health Department and Museum of Independent Telephony
- ◆ EnviroScape and Adventures of Little Drip Video - Dickinson County Conservation District
- ◆ Incredible Journey - Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education
- ◆ Desdemona's Splash CD Game - Dickinson County Water Improvement Program
- ◆ Puddle Pictures Game - Abilene Parks and Recreation
- ◆ Water Treatment & Supply - Abilene Public Works and Hutchinson Public Works
- ◆ Streambank Trailer - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- ◆ Groundwater Simulator - Dickinson County Health Department
- ◆ Kitchen Chemistry - Environmental Protection Agency

Check out the water improvement program website at www.ikansas.com/~water, for more information and photos. *For more information, contact David Gurss, Project Administrator, Abilene, 785-263-9914*



UPCOMING CONSERVATION EVENTS

July 29 – 31 - Grant Writing III Workshop – Colby, KS

August 14 - 16 - State Association for Kansas RC&D Councils, Colby

August 21 - Cover Your Acres Field Day – McDonald, KS

August 27 – 29 - Rangeland Management Introductory School – Thomas and Logan counties

◆ Kansas Highlights is issued BI-monthly. For more information on how to submit a story, and comments about Kansas Highlights, contact Sheila Forrester, NRCS Visual Information Specialist, at 785-823-4572, or at sheila.forrester@ks.nrcs.usda.gov.

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