



California

SPRING
2006

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS



California Dairies: *Not Letting Nutrient Opportunities go to 'Waste'*



Plus!

- ~ Seeing Gold in Blueberries
- ~ *Manure May Mean Money*
- ~ Shasta Rancher Doing His Part to Help Fish
- ~ Up Front With Ed Burton | People in the News



with Ed Burton

State Conservationist

It's been great meeting more of you during my field visits around the state. Repeatedly, I see heartwarming examples of dedication and commitment to conservation and our partners. I am just so proud of the work you folks are doing!

California is *leading the Nation* in obligating our program dollars. You put together a team and beat my expectations, bringing us in #2 in the Nation in timeliness, and #1 in the amount of program dollars obligated. This is a **FIRST** in California.

Similarly, the rollout of the 2006 Conservation Security Program was very, very good all around. It was efficient, effective, on-time, and met the expectations of the National office and our partners. And the great efforts on the field level were fully matched and supported—technically, administratively and in communications. It was truly a team effort.

I want to mention too the work being done on the Watershed Restoration EWP in Southern California. That work is now almost 100 percent obligated and fully TWO YEARS ahead of schedule.

All of these successful efforts require a big THANK YOU to our Administrative staff who are doing a superb job with payments, positions, contracts and agreements. It's this work that makes success on our high priority projects possible.

Next, I'd like to talk to you about the Agency's new strategic plan. I suggest you download it and take some time with this

document. It lays out a vision, a healthy lands ethic that will not surprise any of you: One based on the mutually compatible goals of productive and healthy lands and the belief that landowners can and will do the right thing if they have the resources available to do it.

Our new Agency mission statement—**Helping People Help the Land**—is a good description of what we do that came from a District Conservationist. I'd like us all to start using it on all our communications. The Strategic Plan talks about our core goals (soil, water, wildlife) and our venture goals (air quality, energy, protecting farmland) that will build on the past to guide us into the future. In California, the leadership team has begun to implement the Plan. You can expect to be part of a participatory process to achieve the Plan's vision and mission in California.

Finally, I want to remind you all to have a great summer and take time off to spend and enjoy with your *other* family. Thanks again for the job you do.

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On the Cover

On Tour (June 2005): Participants on the WUD-sponsored tour of Stanislaus County dairy farms donned safety gear to visit the California Dairies Plant in Turlock. The plant produces 130 million pounds of milk powder and 75 million pounds of butter annually. Pictured are (left to right) Joe Ramos (WUD), Ray Souza (WUD), NRCS State Conservationist Ed Burton, Vince Furtado (WUD), and NRCS D.C. Mike McElhiney. See articles on page 3. *Photo: Jeff Raifsnider; Design: Jim Cairns*

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Manure May Mean Money



State Conservationist Ed Burton told dairy producers attending a manure management workshop that the Confined Animal Operation Initiative far exceeded his expectations. Photo: Brian Ziegler

By Brian Ziegler

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Dairy producers from throughout the San Joaquin Valley learned how to turn cow manure into profit or to use it to reduce costs during a recent dairy manure management workshop at California State University, Fresno.

“Manure is a great asset, but you have to manage it,” said **Kristin Hughes**, dairies project manager at Sustainable Conservation, a non-profit environmental

organization based in San Francisco that co-sponsored the event.

Dairy producers have an increasing need to do something environmentally and economically sound with the cow manure they produce—65 billion pounds of it in California every year.

Those concerns—along with rising costs for commercial fertilizer—have helped drive innovations in manure management systems that were discussed at the conference.

Participants told dairy operators how they are taking manure, which might otherwise pollute underground and surface waters, and putting it into methane digesters that are used to generate electrical power. “There are 2,200 dairies and 1.5 million milk cows in California,” Hughes says. “The biogas from ten cows can heat one house.”

In Florida, cow manure is being used to make a product called “cowpeat,” an alternative to native peat for potting soil used by nurseries.

Several producers praised the assistance they received from NRCS and its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS is pumping approximately \$10.3 million during 2006 on a shared

cost basis into projects to protect water quality at dairies. “That far exceeded my expectations,” State Conservationist **Ed Burton** told the audience. “It reaffirmed my belief that landowners will go out there and step forward to address water conservation and other conservation issues if they have the opportunity to do so.”

One way dairy farmers can comply with regulations on disposal of nutrients is to have plants consume it. **Tom Barcellos**, of T-Bar Dairy in Tipton, talked of how he does triple cropping—getting three crops in a year from his land. This allows for minimal tillage of his land, thereby burning less fuel and creating less dust.

“An advantage of triple cropping is the tons of grain or forage you get per acre,” he says. “It also means you use more nutrients and lessen the potential for ground-water contamination from percolation through the soil.” Barcellos grew, in succession, wheat, corn and Sudan sorghum.

“I’ve heard the word ‘waste’ a lot here,” said **Art Darling**, Executive Director of Sunshine State Milk Producers in Florida, a speaker at the conference that drew about 100 people. “We should try not to use that term. What we have is a resource.”

Doctorates In Dairy ‘Waste’

Employees get schooled in Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans

By Brian Ziegler

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is making a big push to get California dairy producers to adopt **Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans** (CNMPs) so they’ll be able to better comply with strict regulations dealing with the manure generated in their operations.

To make sure the agency’s employees know how to create these plans, a series of workshops have recently been held to instruct attendees about the technical assistance NRCS provides to dairy producers.

“What we’re teaching here is a way to implement CNMPs and manage it within our workload,” says State Resource

Conservationist **Diane Holcomb**, one of the workshop presenters. Among the topics covered were nutrient management, manure handling, and air quality.

The students also studied how to plan and manage facilities, which included a tour of the dairy operation at California State University, Fresno. “They actually got to see some of the typical problems that a dairy faces,” Holcomb says, “and some of the solutions that our local planners and engineers are recommending for the campus.”

Another topic involved working effectively with dairy producers. Holcomb says this included how to gain and maintain a producer’s interest, what can be done in advance of making a site visit, and to “not point out all the problems that you see, but emphasize more of what their objectives are and how they can make some improvements on how they’re managing.”

She says this training is important because employees have been struggling with what really constitutes a CNMP. “Initially, the process that we rolled out, I think, felt overwhelming to folks. It was taking too much time. There were too many optional worksheets.” She added, “It’s important that they see that it can be done in a streamlined way. It is achievable.”



State Conservation Engineer Charles Davis examines run-off at the Fresno State dairy. Photo: Diane Holcomb

Conservation Planning Helps Ranching Family Reach Goals



The Rickert Family: Their ties to the land go back to Jim's (left) grandparents' days. *Photo: Dave Sanden*

By Dave Sanden

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff

Rickert Agricultural Services grazes 200 organic cow-calf pairs annually on the 2,200-acre Fenwood Ranch. The Landowners, **Jim and Mary Rickert** and son **James**, purchased the ranch in 2003, and requested NRCS assistance in 2004 to develop a conservation plan.

Jim Rickert's link to the land goes back to his grandparents, who were friends of the owners. In 2003, he put the land into a permanent easement with the **Shasta Land Trust** to save it from development and preserve its natural characteristics,

including more than 100 wildlife species and a variety of wildlife habitats.

During the initial planning process, the Rickerts said they wanted to improve the grazing distribution on the property by cross fencing and developing a central solar-powered watering facility. They wanted more control over when the cattle would be accessing parts of the ranch and they wanted to keep them away from the streams. NRCS conducted a resource inventory on the land that documented some erosion issues and the presence of undesirable non-native species on the rangeland, including Star Thistle, Medusahead, and Tree of Heaven.

Working together, the Rickerts and NRCS developed a conservation plan and an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract to help the Rickerts achieve their goals. The Rickerts agreed to implement NRCS prescribed grazing practices to maintain minimum residue levels and begin a rotational grazing pattern over the newly created grazing fields. EQIP cost-sharing and funds from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are enabling the Rickerts to implement their plan's conservation practices.

Conservation Goals

- More efficient grazing
- More grazing control
- Water development
- Control noxious weeds
- Address riparian issues
- Address erosion issues
- Enhance wildlife habitat

Conservation Practices

- Cross fencing
- Rotational grazing
- Brush thinning
- Livestock watering facility
- Wildlife watering facility
- Dam repair
- Spillway enhancement
- Improved access roads
- Conservation easement

Planning Benefits

- More control & versatility
- Flexible grazing system
- Improved access roads
- Wildlife friendly fencing
- Improved habitat for wildlife
- Improved water quality
- Good range management

Tule River Tribe Protects Neighboring Land From Fire

By Brian Ziegler

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Wildfire poses a serious threat to the **Tule River Indian Reservation**, a community of about 1,200 residents, as well as privately-owned land nearby, the Sequoia National Forest, and Giant Sequoia National Monument.

To reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fire occurring in the area, the Tulare County Resource Conservation District worked with the NRCS office in Visalia, to obtain a grant to perform fuel reduction work along the Reservation's northern boundary.

Funds totaling \$215,800 were awarded by the U.S. Forest Service through a program designed to reduce fuel loads on private property bordering public land. The money will be used to remove about 40 tons per acre of woody biomass from 200 acres on the Reservation.

This biomass will either be burned or chipped. The project is also expected to help enhance conditions for giant sequoia tree regeneration.

NRCS had a strong role in helping write the grant, according to Soil Conservationist **Elizabeth Palmer**. "We provided technical specifications on what was needed to create the fuel break and acted as a liaison with other government agencies to coordinate the effort," she said.



USFS's Brent Skaggs (back, far left) presents a check to Tulare County RCD President Tom Daley. Standing next to Daley are Tule River Tribal Administrator Dave Nenna and Joe Williams, NRCS. *Photo: Brian Ziegler*

"The conservation plan has been very helpful in organizing and prioritizing our projects on the ranch. We've been able to implement some great projects and look forward to seeing the benefits from these projects for years to come," says James Rickert.

More than 8,740 feet of new cross fencing has been installed, facilitating rotational grazing that minimizes livestock grazing in riparian and sensitive vernal pools at critical times of the year.

An evaluation of the land revealed that the ranch's clay soils had become extremely rutted causing excessive rill and gully erosion of the road network. Using NRCS access road specifications, 4,566 feet of the dirt road system was regraded and gravelled to reduce erosion.

A dam and a gully will be repaired, and a non-erosive spillway is planned. Critical area plantings and reseeding will be done in the dam and gully areas. A wildlife watering facility connected to the livestock water system is also planned.

The conservation plan provides the Rickerts with more control and versatility in managing their long-term goals. And it enables them to participate in EQIP and many other USDA cost-share programs.



Conservation Planning Pilot Project Shows Good Results

By **Dave Sanden**
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Red Bluff

Photo: Dave Sanden

California had a successful turnout for the recent **Conservation Planning Pilot project**, with as many as 140 customers signed up for conservation planning assistance among the nine participating field offices.

“Planning is the cornerstone of good conservation, and I applaud this effort to return to putting it first in our work with California landowners,” said State Conservationist **Ed Burton**.

California was one of nine states participating in the conservation planning sign-up, a pilot initiative that emphasized the importance of conservation planning to help farmers and ranchers be better prepared to apply for conservation programs and to comply with federal, state, tribal and local environmental regulations.

Field offices in Alturas, Grass Valley, Lancaster, Livermore, Red Bluff, Redding, Tulelake, Ukiah and Woodland participated in the project. There was an average of 18 signups per field office. Redding and Grass Valley offices had the most with 35 and 28, respectively.

“A conservation plan provides a road map towards long-term goals,” said **Bob Bailey**, District Conservationist

in Redding. “Developing a comprehensive conservation plan is also beneficial to landowners who decide to apply for USDA cost-share assistance. With a conservation plan in place, NRCS staff can best assist farmers and ranchers to select the most appropriate conservation programs to meet their goals and objectives.”

By planning before pursuing funding, a number of benefits accrue, helping make everyone’s efforts more effective. The Planning Pilot project was initiated to reintroduce people to the benefits that conservation planning can have for them, their operation, and the environment.

“We’ve got nine plans completed already,” said Bailey. “Five of those have developed into EQIP contracts. We might pick up one more EQIP

contracts if funding becomes available. Altogether, I hope to get at least 30 completed plans out of this.”

“In Medocino County, 18 people with conservation issues along the Russian River and its tributaries signed up for the pilot program,” said **Carol Mandel**, Soil Conservationist in Ukiah. “Many of those people are still recovering from the New Year’s flood and are using the planning the Pilot program offers to prepare for application to future cost-sharing programs.”

The Pilot validated benefits of a conservation planning sign-up, tested alternative ways states conducted a planning sign-up, and tested the feasibility of a national sign-up.

California, Colorado, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas and Wyoming were the pilot states. In California, the sign-up period ran from October 1 to December 31.

USDA Hears Challenges Facing Asian Farmers

By **Brian Ziegler**
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Southeast Asians farming in central California say they’re having difficulty obtaining loans to purchase cropland, and with labor laws that don’t distinguish between large corporations and small scale farmers.

These and other concerns—like expensive workman’s comp premiums and a lack of available cooler facilities to store produce—were voiced to **Vernon Parker**, the first-ever U.S. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Civil Rights, during a recent small farm workshop in Clovis.

Parker was joined by USDA representatives from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management, Rural Development, and Farm Services Agency. Other participants included University of California Cooperative Extension and the Sierra Resource Conservation District.

USDA conducted the workshop, attended by about 50 Asian growers, to hear what challenges they face, to explain the overall department structure, and how each agency can assist.

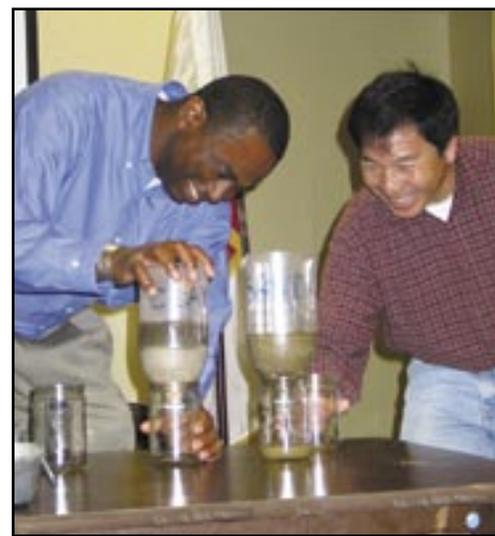
Parker says he wants the Southeast Asian community in California to be successful working with USDA so that the success can be emulated elsewhere.

“You’re so blessed to have people in this state who’ll take the time to tell you about programs and provide interpreters. That doesn’t happen in other states,” Parker said.

Presentations covered a wide variety of topics useful to successfully farm in the Golden State, including crop marketing, weed identification, pesticide safety, labor law compliance, farm loan programs, and crop insurance.

Talks were given by NRCS Area 3 Soil Scientist **Edd Russell** and Fresno Soil Conservationists **Sam Vang** and **Hugo Calvillo**. They lectured on fertilization and irrigation management on small farms. Russell’s presentation included

an experiment involving Parker and an Asian grower who were asked to compare the differences in soil permeability of clay and sand.



Vernon Parker, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Civil Rights (left), and a Southeast Asian grower compare the difference in clay and sand soil permeability. Photo: Brian Ziegler

Butte County Rice Farmer Enthusiastic About CSP

By *Dave Sanden*

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff



Oroville District Conservationist Hue Dang (left) talks with Joshua Sheppard about CSP. Photo: *Dave Sanden*

Joshua Sheppard, who signed up for USDA's new **Conservation Security Program (CSP)** last year, is a Butte County rice farmer whose family has a long history of caring for the land. Joshua's family has been farming along the Feather River in Butte County for four generations, and his grandfather was one of the area's early converts to rice cultivation.

For Sheppard, land stewardship is just part of the job of farming. Like many rice farmers in the area, he has cut way back on field burning after harvesting, choosing instead to reincorporate field residue into the soil in most years. He's also practiced flooding on his fields in the winter since he cut back on burning in the 1990s. "Many farmers in this area are doing flood-ups after harvest now," said Sheppard. "The result is thousands of acres of water habitat for wildlife." Providing water for wildlife costs Sheppard money, but he thinks it is the right thing to do.

Sheppard was able to install a tailwater recovery system by cost-sharing through NRCS' **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**. The system allows him to recycle his irrigation water, saving him money while protecting water quality. Having already cost-shared conservation practices through EQIP, Sheppard was well prepared for California's first CSP sign-up last year. He had a conservation plan and his records were readily available. By documenting his regular farming practices, he was able to enroll 236 acres in CSP, qualifying at the Tier 2 level in the program.

Sheppard first learned about CSP in 2002. He thought it sounded like a great program for farmers. "CSP rewards growers for what they are already doing—caring for the land," he said. "It's recognition that farmers are givers, not just takers."

CSP provides incentives for farmers who want to do more to protect their resources. But Sheppard sees an additional benefit in the increased conservation awareness among participants.

Although the sign-up process takes a little time and effort, Sheppard said that he found the process neither too difficult nor intrusive. "I thought it was a fair assessment of what I'm doing," he said. "I didn't see much downside to applying. I'm glad that I signed up for CSP," Sheppard said. "I know there are a lot of farmers who wish they had."

Sheppard is hoping to graduate to a higher CSP tier. To reach Tier 3 level he will need to address additional natural resource concerns on his land, including air quality, riparian habitat, and wildlife.

Sheppard's advice for producers considering a CSP sign-up? "If you haven't started yet, start immediately. Don't delay. Ask a lot of questions."

In Focus

Area 2's New ASTCFO: Daniel Mountjoy

Daniel Mountjoy became Area 2's new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTCFO) in November 2005. Daniel most recently served as Area 2 Resource Conservationist for six years.

Daniel says about his new position: "I applied for the ASTCFO position because I see the necessity of partnerships in generating conservation accomplishments. Although I will miss some of the technical aspects of conservation, I am looking forward to strengthening our field staffs' ability to deliver conservation and to meet our area's changing needs." Congratulations, Daniel! *Text/Photo: Jeff Ralfsnider*



Youth Workshop Gives Hands-on Experience With Ag & Natural Resources

By *Jenny Gabor*

Soil Conservationist/Madera

High school students from Fresno and Madera counties were exposed to natural resources in a hands-on approach to learning at the **17th Annual Agriculture & Natural Resources Youth Workshop**, held in March. Thirty students, along with parents and advisors, enjoyed the day at Fresno's Scout Island Education Center. Thanks to **Book Gale**, Soil Conservationist (Fresno), we were able to reach out to a large group of home-schooled students.

Presentations were given by various resource management professionals and agencies such as UC Cooperative Extension and the Upper Merced River Watershed. NRCS Soil Scientist **Edd Russell** (Fresno) got the students in a soil pit face-to-face with soil profiles and textures, and **Bruce Champion**, Soil Conservationist (Fresno), spoke on Native American traditions and natural resources.

"The overall purpose of the workshop is for the students to learn that managing our natural resources... is critical in determining our present and future welfare," said **Jenny Gabor**, Soil Conservationist (Madera). Attendees of all ages were taught that conservation and wise use of these resources are key elements in keeping our lands and society productive.

Please visit www.casrm.org for information on the upcoming **California Range & Natural Resources Camp** ("Rangecamp") in Half Moon Bay, June 18-23, 2006.



Soil Conservation Technician Bruce Champion tells a group of students about Miwok Indians and Native American life before California's Gold Rush. Photo: *Jenny Gabor*

First EQIP Funded Digester In California

By **Paul Laustsen**

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Riverside

Milking 2,000 Holsteins twice a day is not easy. Complying with state and federal air and water quality guidelines while trying to generate a profit is nearly impossible. But this is exactly what **Eddie Imsand** started doing when he installed an anaerobic digester on his El Mirage dairy in the High Desert of Southern California.

"We want to be proactive. We want to show our concern for the environment so the public and government officials can see that it can be done," said Imsand.

With these goals in mind, Imsand set out to build an anaerobic digester like the one he first heard about in the late 1970s, while working his father's dairy in San Bernardino.

"It's an excellent way to manage waste," said **Duane Turner**, Imsand's right-hand man. "And it helps us protect air and water quality, reduce air emissions, and produce energy at the same time."

Instead of spreading manure in its natural form directly over agricultural fields, the manure is processed in an enclosed system. The end products are energy, pathogenic-free

humus, and nutrients that are more readily available for plant use.

Nearly all of Imsand's energy needs for his 159-acre dairy are satisfied by processing the manure from his cows. On average, 20,000 gallons of manure are collected each day, and dumped into the dairy digester, which basically acts as an extension of the cow's digestive system. The digester heats up the manure, capturing methane, which fuels a turbine that generates electricity. Keeping this methane from being released to the atmosphere is a big help for air quality.

The digester has produced nearly 1 million kilowatts of energy since coming online in July 2004. "Creating energy is a side benefit. It is the environmental benefits that really make this project a success," said **Rick Aguayo**, NRCS District Conservationist in Victorville.

As the manure is processed, gray water is channeled into a clay-lined holding pond, which prevents groundwater contamination. This water is then mixed with fresh water to irrigate Imsand's alfalfa fields adjacent to the dairy. To ensure the appropriate mixture of nutrient rich water is applied, soils are monitored and adjustments to the mixture are made as necessary. The dried humus is

MEADOWBROOK DAIRY City of La Mirage

- 2,000 dairy cows (Holstein)
- ~20,000 gallons of manure
- 1 dairy digester
- 28-day cycle to process
- 87,000 cubic feet of biogas daily
- 170 kw/day capacity
- Total installed cost: \$800,000 (excluding Imsand's labor)
- EQIP cost share: \$200,000

also used to fertilize the fields, completing a holistic system of waste management.

Enough energy is generated during winter months to supply 100 percent of demand on the dairy, and 80 percent during summer months. Imsand hopes to add another turbine to increase his output and eventually have the ability to sell his energy to Southern California Edison.

The project was partially funded by a grant from the California Energy Commission and a cost-share agreement from NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).



Gully Workshop participants stake down a pole drain made from live cut willow at San Gregorio State Beach. Photo: Meredith Manning, Mid-Peninsula Regional Open-Space District

By **Jim Kjelgaard**

Ag Engineer/Half Moon Bay

The Half Moon Bay Local Partnership Office worked with state and local partners to hold a gully bio-engineering workshop at the San Mateo County Farm Bureau Services Building and San Gregorio State Beach in March.

'Fixing Gullies With Willows' Workshop Teaches Repair & Erosion Control Techniques

Participants learned and applied techniques to repair gullies with native plant materials.

The workshop morning consisted of talks and video presentations that illustrated the use of bio-engineering gully repair techniques that primarily use willow cuttings. During the afternoon, participants applied their newly learned techniques to repair gullies at San Gregorio State Beach.

Several hundred willow saplings, harvested by local conservationists, provided materials for constructing pole drains, facines, woven sediment catchers, and planting stakes.

Willows are a preferred species for erosion control because they are native to the region, are fast growing, and can be used in a variety of configurations to provide soil stability on eroding areas.

These plant materials are placed within the sides and bottoms of the treated gullies. Observation and photographic points are established to monitor the success of the techniques over the next few years.

Workshop participants included university students, Mid-Peninsula Regional Open-Space District, California State Parks, and private land-owners. Everyone is looking forward to monitoring the results of this year's workshop in anticipation of future workshops addressing gully erosion and repair.

The partners who organized the workshop included NRCS District Conservationist **Jim Howard** and Ag Engineer **Jim Kjelgaard** of the Half Moon Bay Local Partnership Office; RCD Board President **Rich Allen** of the San Mateo Resource Conservation District; San Mateo County Farm Bureau Water Quality Specialist **Tim Frahm**; the **Pescadero Conservation Alliance**; and **California State Parks and Beach**.

Farm Day In The City: Students Learn About Our Limited Resources

By Carol Rush
Soil Conservationist/Bakersfield



Kern County school children learn about erosion from Bakersfield Soil Conservationists Carol Rush (left) and Daniel Meyer. Their lesson was given at *Farm Day in the City*, an educational event sponsored by the Kern County Farm Bureau. Photo: Brian Ziegler

Farm Day in the City has been sponsored by the Farm Bureau since 1985. At the event, students participate in activities, demonstrations, and question and answer periods. This year, conservationists began each 20-minute session by introducing the six main natural resources in need of protection for future generations: Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals, and Human concerns (SWAPAH).

This is the third consecutive year that the Bakersfield Service Center, along with the Northwest Kern RCD, have participated in the Farm Bureau program. They intend to continue participating in future *Farm Day* events, and visit individual classrooms upon request.

A student exclaimed excitedly, "I know, I know," attempting to answer a question about natural resources. In March, **Daniel Meyer, Raul Ramirez, and Carol Rush**, Soil Conservationists from the NRCS Bakersfield Field Office, were helping students learn more about natural resources. They were taking part in *Farm Day in the City*, an annual event hosted by the Kern County Farm Bureau.

Also assisting at the NRCS booth were **Christine Aguirre** and **James Booth** with the Northwest Kern Resource Conservation District, and Earth Team volunteer **Roland Levins**.

The NRCS team presented activities such as the Air Quality Puzzle, the Soil Texture Triangle and a Q&A session about trees.

People—in the— News

Area 2 Welcomes New Employees

By Jeff Raifsnider
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Salinas

Agricultural Engineer **Jim Kjelgaard** began duties in Half Moon Bay in November 2005. Jim comes to NRCS California from Texas A&M University, where he worked as a Post-Doctorate Researcher.

Jim Howard began duties as District Conservationist in Half Moon Bay in July 2005. He worked as the U.S. Forest Service's Watershed Restoration Supervisor in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Agricultural Engineer **Desideria Ramirez** entered the NRCS Career Intern Program (CIP) in June 2005. Desi's first assignment was in Somis, then transferred to the Salinas Area Office in February 2006.

Robert LaFleur began duties as District Conservationist in the Salinas Service Center in January 2006. Robert comes to NRCS California from the Department of the Army's Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta, Ga., where he served as Regional Forester.



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1) Ag Engineer Jim Kjelgaard (left) and D.C. Jim Howard, Half Moon Bay. Photo: Jeff Raifsnider

2) Desi Ramirez, Engineer, Salinas AO. Photo: Samara Iodice

3) Robert LaFleur, D.C., Salinas. Photo: Jeff Raifsnider

Nielsen Named Area 3 Mentor Of The Year

By Brian Ziegler
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Madera District Conservationist **Don Nielsen** has been named the recipient of Area 3's first annual Frank Menezes Outstanding Mentor award. Nielsen, honored for his work mentoring new NRCS employees, received the award during a mentor conference in Fresno.

"I consider this person a friend and a mentor," said Assistant State Conservation

for Field Operations **Curtis Tarver**, who presented Nielsen with the award.

Tarver noted that Nielsen spends quality time working with many new employees doing career development, talking about professional goals, and helping them navigate through the agency. "I believe this person doesn't do it for recognition, but because of a commitment to individuals like you and me," he said.

The award is named for the late **Frank Menezes**, who was a District Conservationist in Fresno. Nielsen said the people who knew Menezes knew what

a great person and mentor he was. "We can pay tribute to him by being mentors as well," he added.

The mentor program pairs new NRCS employees with less than two years' experience with the agency with veteran workers.

The group also heard from State Conservationist **Ed Burton**, who talked about advancement opportunities. "Somewhere between 25 and 35 percent of our organization is going to turn over in the next five years," he said. "That creates a tremendous amount of opportunity."

Round the State



Outstanding, Don: Madera District Conservationist Don Nielsen (right) receives an Outstanding Mentor award from Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations Curtis Tarver. See article on page 8. Photo: Brian Ziegler



Orvis Ranch Celebration: NRCsers Ed Burton (left), State Conservationist, and Anita Brown (right), Public Affairs Director, chat with Orvis family members Bruce (background, left) and his son in May.

Attendees celebrated a permanent easement that Bruce and wife Roma Orvis signed that ensures 2,500 acres will remain undeveloped, while continuing to allow agricultural production on their land.

Funding came through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and other conservation partners, including the state Department of Conservation Farmland Conservancy Program, and a grant from the Great Valley Center.

Orvis Ranch was also part of the just-finished Northern Stanislaus County Soil Survey, which is currently available in draft hard copy. By the end of 2006, it will be accessible on the new Web soil survey at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>. Photo: Sue Southard

Shasta Valley Rancher Doing His Part To Help Fish

By Dave Sanden
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff

Salmon populations have declined in the Klamath River and throughout the Northwest in recent decades as a result of human-induced and natural factors. For many years, concerned farmers and ranchers and conservation districts in Shasta and Scott valleys have been working to reverse this trend in a variety of ways, including installation of fish screens and improvement of spawning habitat.

The landowners have already done a lot to help the fish, but many say that to do more on their own would be cost-prohibitive. Some have turned to the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for assistance and have participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which provides cost-share and technical assistance for conservation practices that will conserve water and help the fish.

Bill Micke, a rancher who raises cattle near Montague, is a good example. His 70-acre ranch is located along the Shasta River, and he wanted to conserve water by making his pasture irrigation system more efficient. He applied to NRCS for EQIP funding, and through EQIP he qualified for 75 percent cost sharing for installation of a surface and subsurface irrigation system to replace his more traditional method of flood irrigation using a system of leaky ditches.

NRCS not only provided a financial incentive, but also design and technical assistance for the project. Micke is very pleased with the results, and he says that he's saving a lot of water since the new system was installed. "I would say that I use less than half of the water I did before," said Micke. "If you total that up over a year, that's about a 4 million-gallon savings in one year of irrigation."

That is 4 million gallons more water that stays in the river to benefit the fish. And because Micke's water diversion is just upstream from Aruja Dam, the extra water may have an even greater impact.

An upcoming project at Aruja Dam, funded through NRCS' Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and other sources, will soon remove a barrier to upstream fish migration, opening up an additional spawning habitat.

Using less water hasn't hurt Micke's cattle operation. He says the new irrigation system has actually improved it significantly and is saving time and money.



"I'm saving more water than I ever thought possible. It's unbelievable," says rancher Bill Micke. Photo: Dave Sanden

"I used to irrigate 24 hours a day for 6 days per week during irrigation season," said Micke. "Now, I only need to do it for 8 hours a day, and only 5 days per week. And my power costs are way down."

"Bill is saving about 1,590 gallons per minute with the new system," said **Tom Benson**, the NRCS engineer for the project. "And because of the more even water distribution, his fields are greener than they've ever been before," Benson added.

The surface and subsurface pipelines have improved Micke's management through improved control. He can now control the rate, amount and timing of irrigation water to minimize soil erosion and control water loss from runoff and deep percolation.

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Picayune Rancheria Shores Up Trampled Wetland

By **Brian Ziegler**

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Cattle continuing to trample a wetland area on Picayune Rancheria land have prompted the Chukchansi Indians to seek help from NRCS about how best to handle the situation.

NRCS Engineer **Dave Krietemeyer** and Soil Scientist **Edd Russell** met with Chukchansi Water Quality Technician **Helen George** to study the site and offer technical advice.

The wetland and an adjacent livestock watering pond are located on 75 acres of tribal land near Oakhurst.

“There are extensive bare areas near the edges of the pond,” Krietemeyer says. “Hoof traffic from cattle has prevented vegetation from establishing.” Gullies, soil erosion, and very little in the way of vegetation growing in wet or moist ground were also noted, as was a concrete weir in the watering pond’s emergency spillway needing repair.

Krietemeyer advised the Tribe to remove small trees growing on the pond’s earthen dam and keep an eye on the bigger ones. “Larger trees on a dam present a possible conduit for water to leak through the dam, especially if the tree dies.” When a tree dies its roots shrink and decompose, leaving an opening for water to leak through.

NRCS recommended that the Tribe fence the wetland off from cattle, fill the



Picayune Rancheria’s Helen George points out a livestock watering pond to NRCS Soil Scientist Edd Russell (left) and Engineer Dave Krietemeyer. Photo: Brian Ziegler

gullies with soil, re-seed the bare areas, and possibly pipe water from the watering pond to a trough in a drier area where the vegetation and soil wouldn’t be damaged as much by cattle.



Viewing a portion of a cattle ranch opened to grazing are (from left) State Conservationist Ed Burton, Coarsegold RCD Directors Larry Ballew and Tom Wheeler, and Assistant State Conservationist Curtis Tarver. Photo: Brian Ziegler

By **Brian Ziegler**

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Imagine you’re a cattle rancher with large stands of trees on your property. The trees occupy prime grazing land and pose a threat from wildfire. Some you’d like to keep while others you’d like to remove altogether. When you cut one down, it sometimes sends shoots back up.

You can’t decide what species to remove, how much should be pruned, and whether controlling them with chemicals is better than

Coarsegold RCD Puts The Power Of Partnerships To Work

using machines. Answers to these questions may be soon coming.

The Coarsegold Resource Conservation District (Coarsegold RCD), working in conjunction with NRCS and the University of California Cooperative Extension Service, is conducting a study at a ranch near North Fork, to determine the best way to control multi-stemmed plants such as live oak trees.

“The reason for the study is to figure out how much of a canopy should be removed, how many limbs can be cut off, and what kinds of treatments you should use to treat the sprouts with,” says Coarsegold RCD President **Tom Wheeler**.

Areas of the ranch that have been opened up to grazing were shown to State Conservationist **Ed Burton** during a recent tour sponsored by the District. The tour focused on what the District has accomplished through its partnerships, of which NRCS is a vital part.

“Our objective was to familiarize Ed Burton with the activities that we’ve done and what we’ve accomplished with our partnerships,” says **Larry Ballew**, a Coarsegold RCD director. “I think he was very impressed with what he saw.”

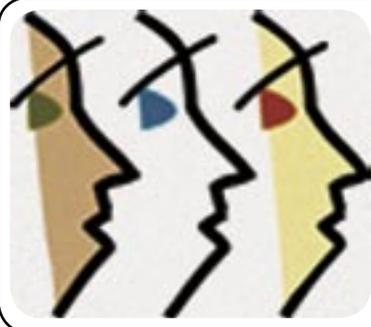
The tour included viewing portions of a 370-mile fuel break the District helped create as well as some of the 30,000 acres

of land in eastern Madera County where the fuel load has been modified.

The work was accomplished through several different projects and with additional help from the Madera County Fire Safe Council, California Department of Fish and Game, Pacific Gas & Electric Company, U.S. Forest Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and others.

“What the District hopes he [Burton] walks away with is the awesome partnerships it has,” says Madera District Conservationist **Don Nielsen**, “and the fact that it’s able to get conservation on the ground, sometimes even without money.”

An example of that is the innovative approach the District is taking to preventing forest fires. Together with the North Fork Community Development Council, the District is working with an Oregon company that is interested in building a power plant that will collect hazardous brush from private land and burn it to generate electricity. Landowners can get rid of this material at no cost and the electricity generated by the power station will be sold to Southern California Edison. The site chosen for the plant is the closed lumber mill in North Fork. Ballew estimates it will employ 70 people and provide enough electricity to power 20,000 homes.



CIVIL RIGHTS CORNER

By Cori Calvert
California Civil Rights
Committee Chair

The California NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) has been busy these past few months. Here are a few quick notes to let you know what we're planning. For more information, please visit the NRCS Web site at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/equalopp/crac.html.

The CRAC has a new and improved look! Beginning this year, the committee will be comprised of both **CRAC members** and **Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs)**. The new collaboration will help us assist NRCS employees with their civil rights issues in a more effective manner.

Do you want to become involved in civil rights? On September 30, 2006, there will be three positions opening on the committee to represent Area 1, Area 2, and Area 3. If you are a full-time permanent employee in those areas and are interested, please keep on the lookout for an announcement to be distributed this summer. Committee members spend 5 percent of their time providing advice and assistance to the State Conservationist as they serve a three-year term.

The CRAC is getting California ready for a **National Civil Rights Compliance Review** in August. A checklist for field offices will be distributed in the next few months to help prepare for the review. The checklist will cover topics such as Title VI, Title VII, and handicap accessibility.

California Advisor Cites Envirothon Successes

Advisor Sheri Harris and her Arlington High School Envirothon Team at the 2005 Canon Envirothon at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Mo. *Photo courtesy of Canon Envirothon*



By Sharon Boyce
Soil Conservation Technician/Merced

Sheri Harris, advisor for two Envirothon teams from Arlington High School in Riverside, is a major proponent of the California and Canon Envirothon programs. "The Envirothon provides to the students an invaluable service by role modeling what a professional natural resources management person should be," Harris says. "They utilize the teaching strategy of a 'guide by the side' to facilitate the School-to-Careers component in guiding some of our brightest and best of this generation into the natural resources field."

Many of Harris' students have gone on to attend Princeton, Yale, West Point, and other top colleges, while majoring in environmental sciences. She credits many of her students' successes to their involvement in the Envirothon program.

Harris says that many of these students were not originally planning on careers in science, or even the natural or environmental sciences, yet ultimately changed their major focus of study.

Harris' students again competed with students from all over California at April's event at Mount Hermon, in the Santa Cruz mountains. The winning team will represent California at the Canon Envirothon to be held in Winnipeg, Canada, in July 2006.



Visalia Soil Conservationist Chu Yang (right) dispenses information about NRCS at a blueberry field day in Parlier. *Photo: Brian Ziegler*

By Brian Ziegler
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Fresno

A little more than 10 years ago, you'd have a hard time finding blueberries growing anywhere in California's San Joaquin Valley. Many farmers thought the fruit couldn't survive the Valley's heat. But thanks to the health hype surrounding blueberries and, consequently, their high prices, more farmers have taken on the expensive, labor-intensive methods needed to grow them.

Now, more than 2,000 acres of blueberries are grown in California, with the vast majority of them in the San Joaquin Valley. And if Visalia Soil Conservationist **Chu Yang** has his way, blueberries in April may become the norm.

Dominating the early blueberry market is a goal of Yang and University of California Farm Advisor **Manuel Jimenez**, who together are conducting research on blueberries at the UC

Seeing Gold In Blueberries

Kearney Research and Extension Center in Parlier. The local season begins in early May, but some farmers in Tulare County have found ways to harvest them in April.

Compared to states such as Michigan that harvest high volumes of blueberries, California is a minor producer in the overall blueberry market. But California is competitive in the early season. In early May, Valley farmers can fetch up to \$20 for a dozen half-pint containers.

Though the prices are attractive, blueberries are tough to grow in the San Joaquin Valley. Start-up costs are more than \$10,000 an acre. Yang says his research shows that farmers must acidify the soil and irrigation water, and they must add expensive wood mulch to keep the plants moist.

And harvesting is labor-intensive. The berries don't ripen all at once, so farm workers, who must handpick the fruit, visit the berry bushes multiple times.

The search for better varieties and farming techniques led as many as 150 farmers, nursery owners, gardeners, and researchers to a public blueberry tasting at the research center earlier this year. There, they saw more than 50 varieties of blueberries, which are touted for their high levels of antioxidants, substances that may help fight a host of illnesses, including cancer and heart disease.

ViewPoint



By Donna Burcher

Administrative Assistant/Dorris
Photos courtesy of Donna Burcher

The vacant lot adjacent to the Ore-Cal office in Dorris, a small rural town with a population of 850, had been full of rocks and debris for years. Then, the **Ore-Cal RC&D** adopted the project in 2003 to create a community garden. The RC&D brought together over 150 motivated citizens and students to develop the site.

During early stages of the process, community assessment meetings were held monthly. On a hot August day last summer,

The Dorris Garden Project: Expanding Community Involvement Beyond Watching Corn Grow

in the semi-shade of the town's tallest flag pole, a group that had awoken at dawn manually raked and removed rocks from the garden. This "Rock 'n' Rake Party" later received national coverage on the show *Sunday Morning*.

Another aspect of the project was to create Dorris' first mural (pictured at bottom right), which was painted on a wall on Main Street, next to the garden. Locally renowned artists choose a scene depicting Main Street circa 1908.

An annual "Harvest Dinner" promotes the garden and its bountiful production. Auction items, donations and the sales of produce helped raise funds for tools and other supplies to develop the water system and plots. Enough funds were successfully raised at the first annual Harvest Dinner to cover the complete cost of creating the mural.

Many items, such as plants, seeds, tools, and even the sprinkler systems, have all been donated for the project. Local students and community mentors built, painted and erected the Dorris Community Garden sign in front.



Today, this Western-themed garden with its 17 wagon-wheel shaped plots (shown above) are filled and maintained by local community members of all ages. Some of those involved include **FFA students; Junior Cheerleaders and their families; Master Gardeners in California and Oregon; NRCS; and Ore-Cal council members.** Frequently, tourists traveling on Highway 97 will stop at the garden. Many will walk through and even take some time to sit and enjoy the fruits of this proud community's "Labor of Love."

HR Personnel Actions

Name	Position	Action	Grade	Location	Date
Jennifer Anderson	Soil Scntst	Conv to CC Appt	GS-7	Chico	02/05/06
Joseph Lule	Ag Engr	Career Cond Appt	GS-9	Bakersfield	02/05/06
Christoph. Renado	Ag Engr	Career Cond Appt	GS-9	Eureka	03/05/06
Alania Frazier	Soil Scntst	Conv to CC Appt	GS-7	Arcata	04/02/06
Kevin Carpenter	Soil Consvst	Conv to CC Appt	GS-9	El Centro	04/02/06
Sabrina Fierro	Area Adm Asst	Career Appt	GS-7	Salinas AO	04/18/06
Sabrina Calwell	Con Spclst	Conv to CIP from AZ	GS-9	Davis	04/30/06
Alan Forkey	ASTC-Programs	Promotion	GS-13	Davis	03/05/06
Bruce Lindsay	Soil Scntst	Promotion	GS-12	Templeton	03/05/06
Andrew Conlin	Soil Scntst	Promotion	GS-11	Chico	03/19/06
Sue Malone	Soil Scntst	Promotion from OR	GS-12	Sonora	03/19/06
Azizur Rahman	Agronomist	Promotion from MT	GS-12	Fresno	03/19/06
Cydean Gillespie	Dist Consvst	Promotion	GS-12	El Centro	04/02/06
Cori Calvert	Dist Consvst	Promotion	GS-11	Escondido	04/02/06
Dennis Frommelt	Gardener	Promotion from BLM	WG-8	Lockefort	04/02/06
Valerie Bullard	Soil Scntst	Promotion	GS-9	Concord	04/02/06
Carolyn Jones	Ag Engr	Promotion	GS-11	Napa	04/16/06
Erin O'Farrell	Ag Engr	Promotion	GS-11	Ukiah	04/30/06
Anita Brown	Pub Aff Spclst	Reassignment	GS-13	Davis	02/19/06
Kay Joy Barge	RC&D Coord	Reassignment	GS-12	High Sierra	03/05/06
Marilyn Bravo	Area Adm Asst	Transfer from DOD	GS-7	Riverside	04/16/06
David Rose	Area Res Consvst	Reassignment	GS-12	Red Bluff AO	04/16/06
Terry Hall	Res Consvst	Transfer to SD	GS-11	Hollister	04/30/06
Steven Cameron	Dist Consvst	Retirement	GS-12	El Centro	03/03/06
Terry Parsons	Soil Consvst	Resignation	GS-11	Tulelake	03/04/06
Reina O'Beck	Pub Aff Spclst	Resignation	GS-9	Davis	03/31/06
Diane Ferguson	Contract Spclst	Resignation	GS-11	Davis	04/15/06
Gerald Progner	Dist Consvst	Retirement	GS-12	Mariposa	04/29/06