

Minority Landowner

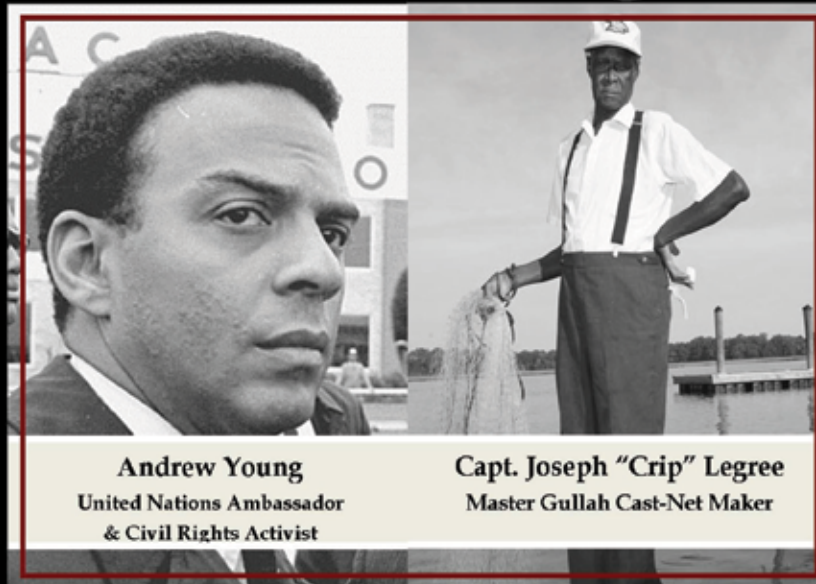
South Carolina Farmer
**ANN PRINGLE
WASHINGTON**

2016 FARMERS OF THE YEAR ISSUE

THE PENN CENTER



1862 Circle Gala



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& Civil Rights Activist

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Formal Attire

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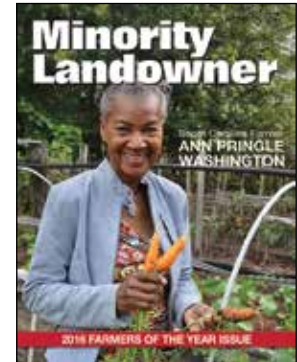
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WHAT IS FARMER-TO-FARMER?

The Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) Program, funded globally by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provides **voluntary technical assistance** to farmers, agribusinesses, and public and private education and extension providers in **developing countries** to promote sustainable improvements in the **agricultural sector**. Winrock International implements F2F in Asia (Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal) and West Africa (Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal). Winrock's F2F programs emphasize agriculture education and training, youth entrepreneurship, and rural development.

HOW DOES F2F WORK?

F2F staff work with host organizations and partners to develop **scopes of work** to target needs and challenges that can be addressed through volunteer assistance.

Winrock draws **qualified U.S. volunteer experts** from agribusinesses, universities, research and extension centers and private farmers to provide technical assistance and training.

Volunteers generally work for two to three weeks in country. USAID funding pays for the volunteer's travel expenses.

F2F WORLDWIDE



16,700+

volunteers fielded in the last 30 years



12,000

local host organizations in 112 developing countries spanning seven regions around the world



\$31M

in volunteer contributions leveraged to development efforts

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

Read more about the program and fill out a volunteer application at winrock.org/volunteer or farmer-to-farmer.org.



“Volunteering gives me an opportunity to interact with different cultures. This is an element of excitement, and that is of value to me as a person. I get a lot of ideas from other countries and other people.

I would strongly encourage anyone with specific skills to go out there, experience it, learn from it, give back, and be happy.”

Dr. Usha Palaniswamy, Winrock F2F volunteer



Victor L. Harris
Registered Forester

We're back! As some who are more in tune with today's expressions than I am would say, "It's been a minute" since our last issue of *Minority Landowner*. From the calls and letters I've received I know you've missed us. No worries, we're back.

Since our last issue, we've been quite active. We've designed and produced landowner engagement and training events in Texas and

South Carolina, in partnership with Texas NRCS and South Carolina NRCS, respectively; partnering with the U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station, we've produced workshops and engaged forest landowners in Mississippi and Georgia; I've had the honor of being a radio guest on a hometown radio station in Georgia, and the added honor of speaking to my hometown community at my old high school; I've presented twice at the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees Outreach and Ag Education Expo; and I've presented in Washington, DC at "Agroforestry Horizons," a meeting held by the USDA National Agroforestry Center.

I've presented at the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Southeast Region Meeting held in Cherokee, North Carolina, and had an outreach Q&A featured in the NACD publication *Forestry Notes*; I was privileged to attend my first meeting of the Winston County Self Help Cooperative in Mississippi; we held two very successful national conferences, one in Houston and one in San Antonio; and we coordinated and led a meeting to lay the foundation for building a Farm Turnaround Team in Louisiana.

It's been a busy and rewarding time. Time in which I've had the great opportunity to see, hear and connect with minority and limited resources farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners across the country, and with the many resource professionals, agencies and organizations who support them.

We keep rolling in 2017. We're currently planning two national conferences, one in Grapevine, Texas outside of Dallas, and the other in Greensboro, North Carolina. Registration is open for the Texas event. I'll also be speaking at the North

American Agroforestry Conference at Virginia Tech in June. And we return to Texas to conduct three additional landowner workshops in partnership with Texas NRCS.

You can say that this issue of *Minority Landowner* is a bridge from the past couple of years to the year ahead. We've combined a distinguished group of farmers over the past two years into our current Farmers of the Year issue. You'll meet producers across America, from Michelle LaFriniere of Homer, Alaska, to Eastover, South Carolina farmer and cover story Ann Pringle Washington. From the east coast to the west coast you'll meet Melvin and Mario Albritton from Chesapeake, Virginia, and Libby Batzel and Ali Levesque of Sebastopol, California.

You'll meet someone representing the youth movement in agriculture, teenager Barry Lee Walker, Jr. of Eutaw, Alabama, and a representative of our most experienced farmers, Betsy Ann Hughes-Eichelberger of Louisville, Mississippi.

We introduce you to the small town of Benavides, Texas with a population of around 1,400, where you'll meet Efa Iris Hinojosa. And travel to meet Jerry Ann Hebron of Detroit, with a metro population of over 4 million.

Travel to Molalla, Oregon where you'll meet Carine Goldin and her goats, known as "The Milking Ladies and Friends." Then travel to Newland and the beautiful mountains of North Carolina to visit the goat farm of Rickie and Shannonrae Mathes.

We're proud that this issue, like its predecessors, reflect the diversity of American agriculture. From the farmers, themselves, to the diverse products they produce, to the diverse agricultural regions of the country, we are a diverse agricultural nation.

So, find yourself a quiet spot, a comfortable place. I hope you'll enjoy meeting and reading the stories of some of the outstanding farmers who represent agriculture in America.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "V. Harris". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Victor L. Harris
minoritylandowner@earthlink.net

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

FARMERS *of the Year*

Melvin and Mario Albritton, Chesapeake, Virginia



Melvin Albritton and his son Mario, come from a long line of African-American farmers who have worked the land in Chesapeake, Virginia for more than 10 generations. Melvin, a Vietnam veteran, acquired his first 25 acres and a 450 International tractor in 1968. Today, Albritton Sutton Albritton (ASA) Farms has expanded to more than 500 acres planted in corn, soybeans, wheat, and specialty crops. Like many long-time producers, the Albrittons want to be good stewards of the land and protect their soil and water resources. Mario serves as chairman of the Virginia Dare Soil & Water Conservation District, and is the first African-American to serve on the board. The duo transitioned to no-till farming about five years ago and worked with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to

install cover crops and enhanced conservation practices that protect wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and improve soil health and water quality. These changes have produced dramatic results, helping them double yields and reduce fertilizer applications. The 2014 Virginia Dare SWCD Clean Water Farm Award recipients actively share their conservation story through numerous outreach activities, including an interactive display that Mario takes on the road to educate Virginia and North Carolina youth about the importance of agriculture.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Virginia
Barbara Bowen, Public Affairs Specialist

Ovidio Atkinson, Harlingen, Texas



For Cameron County farmer and Southmost Soil and Water Conservation District Board member, Ovidio Atkinson, farming has been the way to achieve his family's dreams. And for the soldier turned farmer, his hard work has paid off. After serving in the Navy during the Vietnam War, he started farming on a few hundred leased acres. His hope was to improve his financial situation by increasing the crops and cattle which would give him the ability to send his children to college.

Atkinson used cultivation practices that he learned from his father and grandfather, but these methods were not working so he came to the San Benito NRCS office seeking advice on his land.

NRCS assisted Atkinson Farms with an irrigation pipeline and land leveling to improve irrigation water flow, which has led to increased cotton and grain sorghum yields. On the pastureland, NRCS has provided technical and financial assistance with cross fences and planting of native grasses. The cross fencing helps him rotate the cattle into different pastures, which has led to healthier cattle and better grass production. Atkinson looks forward to continuing his partnership with NRCS so the future generations can enjoy the family farm.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
Osvaldo Longoria Jr.

Libby Batzel and Ali Levesque

Sebastopol, California



Farmers Libby Batzel and Ali Levesque own and operate Beet Generation Farm - a specialty crop farm in Sebastopol, California. Batzel had been interested in farming since high school and did stints working on farms in California. The pair grow more than 25 diverse crops, most are heirloom varieties, that sell well at different farmers' markets. They typically sell six days a week at farmers' markets and have recently incorporated value-added cooked goods, using their own crops, that are extremely popular with customers. In addition, they recently incorporated beehives for pollination, pollinator health, and honey production.

The local NRCS Field Office in Sonoma County started working with Beet Generation Farm a few years ago by helping the farm create a conservation plan. The plan assessed the farm's conservation needs and issues. NRCS helped cost-share on pollinator hedgerows, mulching and cover crops for soil health, and installing a hoop house to extend their growing season and help them grow additional crop varieties.

Batzel and Levesque have become model conservationists and are constantly inquiring about more conservation practices they can incorporate to keep their farm healthy and sustainable.

<http://www.beetgenerationfarm.com/#eatcolor>

Selected by Natural Resources Conservation Service – California
Jonathan Groveman

Joseph Benton, Cheraw, South Carolina



Vet Helping Vets

While visiting my hometown I attended an educational workshop United Farmers USA (UFUSA) had for new and beginning farmers, ranchers, forest landowners and veterans in Darlington, South Carolina and was amazed at the education they were provid-

ing and the support they gave to farmers. Since I've moved back I continue to go to their workshops and asked them if they would have a workshop in Cheraw. I began spreading the word at school, in the community and at the VA Center about the educational workshops UFUSA was having. After a year of educational workshops and training, I began to host small groups for the farmers in my area, who were mostly

veterans, to come together and share ideas, concerns, and difficulties in farming or life in general.

My mentorship was with Hezekiah Gibson. Under his guidance I learned how to operate and care for farm equipment, do fencing, trickle irrigation, and raising cattle. I grow a variety of vegetables and have been amazed at how quickly the seeds went from being planted to actually picking food from my own garden. I come from a family of farmers and never really cared for doing it myself and I am thankful to Hezekiah for continuing to reach out and educate others on retaining ownership of their land and the profitability that comes with it. As my pastor said, "It is not where you go in life, but who you have beside you that matters."

Selected by United Farmers USA
Hezekiah Gibson, President

Frank Bryars, Stockton, Alabama



Frank Bryars took a family farm that had not been functional for many years and has revamped it with the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's EQIP program. He put in new perimeter fencing and 1,500 feet of cross fencing to be able to rotationally graze his commercial herd of cattle. He also put in new water troughs with heavy

use areas underneath them. He amazingly completed a water control structure, or dike, with just a skid-steer, tractor with box blade, and a whole lot of hard work.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Alabama
Summer Stidham

Tyron Chavis, Lamar, South Carolina



Tyron comes from a family of farmers. His grandparents first owned the land that he now farms. His dad inherited the land and they harvest tobacco, soybean, cotton, corn and wheat. In the mid-1970s the family farm was lost due to foreclosure. Tyron's love for farming made him destined to get the family farm back and after renting the land for a year, Tyron purchased the land back in 2009.

Tyron raises Black Angus cattle and has utilized NRCS services through the EQIP program to plant grass. The Marlboro Community Development Corporation gave him a loan to purchase equipment and additional cattle. He harvested half of the hay to feed the cattle. Now he is trying to increase his herd size. Tyron believes the physical labor of raising cattle is different than growing vegetables and that it is imperative you make good decisions and be passionate about what you

do. There are not a lot of black farmers whose land has been handed down, and the younger generations don't want to farm. Preserving the family farm is a part of history. With the sacrifices the generations before him made it is important to him, how it will be carried on after him.

Recently Tyron got involved with Clemson Extension 1890 Research. He is part of a group of local farmers who have organized a co-op designed to help one another.

One of his mentors is Hezekiah Gibson. He has met with him to discuss ideas about livestock and has attended several workshops, the last one was on incorporating a silvopasture system.

Selected by United Farmers USA
Hezekiah Gibson, President



The Cooper sisters, Eleanor Cooper Brown and Yvonne C. Knight-Carter, are continuing a tradition that dates back to their great-grandparents. For almost 150 years, the Cooper family has worked and managed their land adjacent to the Broadaxe Branch stream in Berkeley County, South Carolina.

In its history, the homestead featured a grits mill, grocery store, tobacco-curing barn, and sheltered the vehicle in which their grandfather, Eddie Cooper, drove the community children to school during segregation. Today, they lease their land for hunting and agriculture, but timber is their primary crop.

After Knight-Carter and Brown inherited the land in 2008, a local forestry professional, Alex Singleton, connected

them with Sam Cook, former director of the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation's Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program. Through that program, the sisters began to educate themselves and develop the connections to manage their land.

The sisters are using their land to educate and mentor others about the benefits of sustainable forest management. As their ancestors before them, they want to ensure that future generations benefit from utilizing their knowledge of land management. "The land is a great gift," the sisters agree. "At the same time, it's a great responsibility."

Selected by The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation
Jennie Stephens, Executive Director



Three generations in two states make up the farming operation of the Covarrubias family. It started with Jose Covarrubias Sr. who came from Mexico to the United States in 1957 as part of the Bracero farm worker program. After working for a farmer along the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico, he started his own farm while raising nine children with his wife, Antonia. Three of those children, Armando, Tony, and Jose Jr., now operate not only Covarrubias Family Farm but also Porvenir Farms, J&N Farms, and San Martin Enterprises which is their chile pepper processing operation. The Covarrubias family raises chile peppers, onions, alfalfa, oats, sudan, and corn in both Arrey, New Mexico and Dell City, Texas. Growing these crops in rotations, they promote soil health on their farmland. In conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in both Texas

and New Mexico, they proactively apply many other soil and water conserving practices. They continually work to irrigate crops more efficiently by converting flood irrigation systems to center pivot sprinklers and drip systems. Their onion shed and chile processing plant employ members of about 50 local families and provide summer work for high school students. Armando, Tony, and Jose Jr., along with their wives, are now grooming the next generation of the Covarrubias family who either work full time or during the summer in the plants or on the farms. Jose Sr. passed away in 2013 but his spirit and work ethic live on in the Covarrubias family.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
El Paso Zone Office

Venkat Dasari, Fairfield, California

Venkat Dasari is the owner and operator of a 70 acre English walnut orchard south of Zamora, California. Zamora is in Yolo County in the agriculturally productive Sacramento Valley. Dasari has been a careful steward of his farm's natural resources. He holds an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The practices that he employs in his walnut orchard through this contract are:

1. Cover Crops (improving soil health and water quality)
2. Dust Control on Unpaved Roads (improving air quality)
3. Nutrient Management (protecting water quality)
4. Integrated Pest Management (protecting water quality)
5. Field Border (providing for wildlife habitat)

Dasari also works with NRCS field office personnel to monitor and improve the health of his soils in his orchard. NRCS staff have been out to assess this resource with the soil quality test kit.

The boom has been on for several years now to establish almond and walnut orchards in California's Central Valley. For the most part, little attention has been paid to the cost to the natural resources of this wonderful agricultural treasure. Dasari is one example to the exception, making sure that he protects the soil, water, air, plant, animal and human resources of his farm.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-California
Phil Hogan, District Conservationist

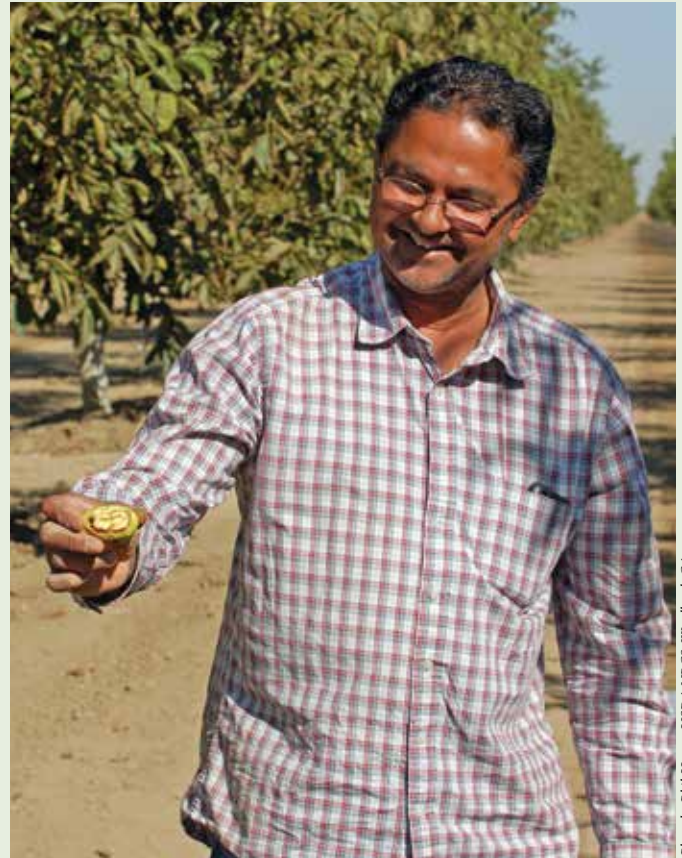


Photo by Phil Hogan, USDA NRCS, Woodland, CA

Venkat Dasari displays the agricultural bounty of his English Walnut orchard in California's southern Sacramento Valley. The implementation of soil health improvement practices such as cover crops will result in sustainable production for many years to come.



Photo by Phil Hogan, USDA NRCS, Woodland, CA

Venkat Dasari (right) listens to USDA NRCS Area I Soil Scientist Jim Komar on the techniques he can use to monitor the health of the soils in his orchard.

L. C. Gladney, Okolona, Mississippi



Born in 1924 in Chickasaw County Mississippi, L.C. Gladney began farming at an early age. He attended school whenever possible, only obtaining a 5th grade education. After serving his country in World War II he returned and married Melvina Pickens and they began their family. Upon the untimely death of his wife in 1966, he began working in manufacturing to supplement his farm income to feed and raise his nine children. He is a man of faith, and is the oldest deacon in his church.

He has experienced the best and worst of farming history. From the drought in 1930, to seeing a state-wide decline in the number of black farm owners and operators, to hopefully witnessing the end of systematic discrimination by the USDA, to experiencing the reward of having his son in-law and grandsons maintaining the family farm.

He continues to be active in farming and can be found daily either in his garden, tending to his cattle, chickens and pigs, or in the hay field. Today Mr. Gladney is a prominent figure in the Chickasaw County farming community. He is a living legend and is always willing to share his knowledge of farming with young folks.

Selected by Mississippi Minority Farmers Alliance
Carolyn Jones

Jerry Ann Hebron, Detroit, Michigan



Since 2008 we have worked to develop the Oakland Avenue Urban Farm which started as a 20 x 20 community garden. Since 2008 we have operated the Oakland Avenue Farmers Market, renovated and opened The Landing which is a community house, and purchased 30 vacant lots and four houses from the Detroit Land Bank. These properties are where we are producing over 66,000 pounds of food, making AfroJam from our fruit production, cultivating and training people for employment opportunities in farming and food related businesses, and cultivating youth employment. We are currently working on a neighborhood farmway which includes incubator food related businesses and an art gallery. We recently submitted another application to the Detroit Land Bank to purchase an additional 20 properties and are awaiting the opportunity to go before the Detroit City Council to demonstrate our need and capacity to development the properties.

Selected by SouthEast Michigan Producers Association (SEMPA) and National Women In Ag Association Michigan Chapter
Cary Junior, General Manager, SEMPA



Carine Goldin was raised in the Savoie region of France in the foothills of the Alps. A family daily staple was French rustic bread and local farmstead cheeses. Carine's growing love of farmstead cheeses was encouraged by her grandmother, a lifelong cheese connoisseur. She came to the United States to go to school, got married and raised two daughters and worked in the corporate world but always dabbled in cheese-making and educating herself in goat husbandry.

Around 2004, Carine followed her dreams and bought five acres in the Willamette Valley of Oregon near Molalla, and two goats. That began her journey as a goat and cheese producer.

Back in France, Carine had been around the cheese making business and pursuing this occupation was a perfect fit. The year 2008 was a defining year, as Carine was milking twelve goats and worked closely with the Oregon State Department of Agriculture to become a licensed commercial cheese producer with a Grade "A" dairy and cheese-making facility. Her licensed cheese business is Goldin Artisan Goat Cheese (<http://www.goldinartisangoatcheese.com>), selling hand crafted traditional farmstead cheese.

Today, Carine's goat herd of 47 head are formally the Milking Ladies and Friends. To meet them visit her webpage

specifically for them at <http://www.goldinartisangoatcheese.com/alpine-goats/>.

"We care for our animals with love and respect. They are very spoiled! And, our land is managed with responsible practices, close to its natural state and with organic applications," says Carine.

Carine says her biggest risk is financial risk primarily due to the cost of feed for her goats. Her five acres does help as she rotates her herd in various pastures throughout the year.

In 2013, Carine began working with USDA agencies obtaining a microloan with Farm Service Agency and a value added grant from Rural Development. These programs have proven very successful for Carine's business. The microloan provided funds for equipment and the value added grant expanded her business which now has two part-time employees who help her milk twice a day and make cheese.

Carine sells her cheese online, at two local farmers markets, and to several restaurants in Portland, Seattle and Chicago. *Congratulations Carine!!!!*

Selected by USDA Risk Management Agency – Spokane Regional Office
Jo Lynne Seufer, Risk Management Specialist

Randall Hildreth, Powder Springs, Georgia



Since 1992 Randall Hildreth has planted over 90,000 seedlings (loblolly pine, longleaf pine and various hardwood species). His primary objectives revolve around first preserving the historical importance of his property and its significance to his family's legacy, secondly gaining a financial return through timber harvesting and wildlife habitat improvement. Hildreth

has a very hands-on approach toward a very intensive forest management strategy. He primarily manages his property to optimize quail, deer and turkey habitat, in conjunction with maximizing economic returns through timber harvesting. Hildreth has an ongoing partnership with a youth special

needs group in Atlanta and works to bring them to his property in Linden, Alabama to connect with the outdoors. In his latest venture he is working with family members to get clear title to 225 acres of heirs' property. He began this process by capitalizing on the opportunity to address several issues simultaneously: site preparation for replanting, capturing a financial return for forest products that have historically been thought of as having little to no value, and being awarded landowner assistance funds for site prep and tree planting from the Natural Resource Conservation Service under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. By utilizing an in-woods chipper in conjunction with a traditional timber sale, he addressed all of these issues.

Selected by Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
Alex Harvey, Sustainable Forestry Program Manager

Mohammed Igbal, Accomac County, Virginia



Mohammed Igbal left Pakistan in 1986 but didn't stray far from his family's farming roots. After initially settling in New York City, he purchased a poultry operation and moved

to Virginia's Eastern Shore in 2005. His wife Rauf worked alongside him in those early days to grow broilers for Tyson Foods in two production houses. Even then, Mohammed was committed to running a clean operation and used his own van to drive his operation's mortality to the rendering plant. A visit to the Accomac Service Center opened the door to NRCS conservation programs, enabling Mohammed to build waste storage and animal mortality facilities on his first two houses. When he added two more in 2010, NRCS helped Mohammed expand the farm's waste storage and install heavy use area protection on all four houses to better manage clean-outs and prevent litter "hotspots" during temporary stacking. Mohammed is recognized as a mentor to new poultry farmers and a leader in his industry, serving on the Delmarva Poultry Industry's Board of Directors since 2008 and receiving their Virginia Outstanding Poultry Grower award in 2015. Now growing for Perdue Farms, Mohammed raises more than 700,000 birds per year and operates a second farm near Snow Hill, Maryland.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Virginia
David Kriz



Efa Carrillo Gonzalez was born before it was acceptable for women to make decisions or even own ranch land in South Texas. She dreamed of owning land one day, and began working from a young age, saving enough money to purchase land. As a head-strong young woman in her 20s, Efa purchased 600 acres in Duval County in the early 1900s. She married Jose Gonzalez, where they created a synergistic approach in their ranching operation.

Efa and Jose's daughter, Efa Iris, reminisces working alongside her parents while growing up, doing ranch and livestock chores, and riding her horse Danger. She learned first-hand the true meaning of determination and hard work with the challenges the family faced in ranching in South Texas.

Efa Iris' mother's passion was never-ending and was passed down to her daughter, where both shared the love of conservation on the land. Her parents managed a modest amount of commercial cattle and distinctly purchased pure Hereford bulls. The family harvested wildlife and used every animal harvested from the land to prepare meals. The land provided the family many benefits throughout the years.

Management of the cattle herd by buying, selling and saving when the times were right, allowed Efa Iris to attend and graduate from college.

Efa Iris and her late husband Mike, came to the USDA NRCS office in April 1976 wanting to learn more about a conservation plan. To this day, they have an active resource management plan and are participating in financial assistance through Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In March 2015, the conservation practices completed were about 300 acres of Rome disking and range planting. A cross fence will be completed later in the year to improve prescribed grazing and use proper grazing strategies with the improvements that have been made on the land.

Efa Iris has also passed the passion that she and her mother shared down to her sons and his daughters. Her granddaughters are strong-hearted in agriculture and successful in raising show animals.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
Jessica Benavides-Paredes and Jorge Gonzalez

Tanya M. Holmes, Cleveland, Ohio



Urban farming is nothing new for agriculture. However, the various innovative ideas have impressed some rural farmers. One farm that has approached urban farming with a newer idea is the Ka-La Healing Garden Center owned and operated by Tanya Holmes.

In the 1970s, the passion Mrs. Holmes held for agriculture and the community was awakened when she assisted her grandmother with a 32-room bed and breakfast house. This bed and breakfast house was unique because it provided shelter for economically challenged individuals in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2010, she took that passion and started the Ka-La Healing Garden Center in inner-city Cleveland.

Tanya received funding in 2014 for a seasonal high tunnel through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The high tunnel allows her to extend

the growing season and to provide fresh produce to needy individuals and families in Cleveland, a city where 55% of the residents live in food deserts.

Mrs. Holmes not only grows fresh vegetables, but also hosts a number of educational workshops for both children and adults on healthy eating and growing food in their own gardens. This garden truly empowers its visitors through this type of personal development and the social networks established between these visitors. In fact, people have noticed a decrease in crime around the garden neighborhood, attributed in part to the pride and sense of ownership people feel as a result of the garden center.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Ohio
Lynette Harmon

Betsy Ann Hughes-Eichelberger, aka, 'Patty', Louisville, Mississippi

Patty became a farmer with her husband, William James Eichelberger, growing a variety of vegetables and cattle for milk and beef, chickens for eggs and meat, and hogs for lard and meat. They used the lard to make lye soap for bathing and washing. Cotton and corn were raised and sold for income. Timber was cut and sold to help with expenses, for firewood and to build a barn and fences.

She acquired loans through what was the Farmers Home Administration to assist with improving the farm and their home. Most difficult in farming was keeping the boll weevils and grass out of the cotton.

Her husband passed in 1959. She continued to farm until sometime in the 1970s at which time she leased the cotton and corn land. Other land was leased to a company for coal rights. Through the Winston County Extension Office during the 1980s, she and her sons grew pimento pepper, okra, cucumbers, and purple hull peas.

She enjoyed farming and hopes that her children will continue to keep the tradition. Her son Clifford Eichelberger uses the pasture land for raising cattle through the Winston County Self- Help Initiative. Grandson Derek Hopkins



grows corn on the land. Most of the children have gardens. Her daughters, Janice Hopkins and Elmetra Patterson, and son-in-law Tommy Hopkins are master gardeners via Mississippi State University and are using the land.

Selected by Winston County Self Help Cooperative
Frank Taylor, Team Leader

Bob Kuang, San Martin, California



Bob Kuang began working with our agency in 2011 when he became a recipient of an Agricultural Water Quality Enhancement Program (AWEP) contract. He recently finished that contract with us, and within the last four years has been very progressive in pursuing other conservation practices that he could install on his farm. Some of the conservation practices he agreed to complete were an irriga-

tion system evaluation, a pollinator habitat evaluation and plan from the Xerces Society, and nutrient and irrigation water management plans. Bob also agreed to allow his farm to be used for a mobile irrigation lab site funded by the local water district and the local conservation district. Bob has shown a marked decrease in the amount of fertilizer he uses to grow a wide variety of Asian vegetables that he supplies to local markets throughout the Bay Area thanks to the training he received from NRCS in nutrient and irrigation water management. He is always willing to participate in workshops and meetings that involve learning more about soil health and integrated pest management, and is always looking for ways to help other growers and expand his business.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – California
Drew Mather and Athena Pratt

Larry Jamison, Walthall County, Mississippi



More than 350 people were on hand in Hattiesburg, Mississippi on March 30-31, 2015 for the annual Small Farmer Conference, sponsored by the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives.

At the Tuesday luncheon wrapping up the two-day conference, Larry Jamison from Walthall County was awarded the Farmer of the Year. Khiquita Lewis, known to her friends as KeKe, from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, was named Woman in Business for 2015. Both Mr. Jamison and Ms. Lewis received \$1,500 checks as part of their award.

This year's Farmer of the Year recipient has been described as not your ordinary farmer. He's more of a scientist of the land because he studies every minute detail about what he is producing. And he's an inventor of his farming equipment.

Larry Jamison farms not 10 miles from Tylertown, Mississippi. He was born in Flora, Mississippi and moved with his family to Jackson when he was five years old.

He graduated from Murray High School, attended Jackson State University, and played football for the Tigers. But his heart was to follow in his father's footsteps and become a tool and die machinist. He attended Hinds Junior College for two years in their machine shop tool and die program. Thereafter, he began his apprenticeship as a tool and die maker before becoming a journeyman. He worked in the automobile, pharmaceutical, and plastics industries. Today besides farming, he works for the oil and gas industry.

He definitely is a machinist, having a three function drill press and lathe from which he designs equipment to improve his farming practices. So far he's created a precision sprayer to attack insects, a garlic planter, a one-row roto-tiller that attaches to his tractor to make replanting a snap, and he's

now working on a machine that will precision-cut his greens prior to bagging.

In 1997, Jamison purchased a 37 acre farm that he's terraced using practices that were first taught in the late 1800s and early 1900s, so that his irrigation pattern is most effective and efficient. His customers come from the local area and all parts of the country when people come home to visit family.

His primary product is elephant ear garlic and he still has a bunch hung on his garage wall from his first crop 18 years ago. Alongside are racks of garlic that will be seed for this year's crop. Larry also grows a loose leaf green that his customers rave about because of the way it cooks in less than half an hour. He also grows carrots, rutabaga, squash, beets and onions.

Larry and his wife have three grown children.

Selected by Mississippi Association of Cooperative

Michelle LaFriniere, Homer, Alaska

Michelle LaFriniere grew up on a farm homestead in northern Minnesota on the White Earth Reservation. Her family had livestock, horses and poultry---the works. They grew the majority of their food and preserved all of it for year-round meals. Michelle's folks believed in organic farming, but to them, it was 'regular old farming' not new high tech organic farming methods of today. Everything was pure and natural with no use ever of any chemicals. Michelle's mother tanned hides and even grew broom corn to make their own brooms!

Michelle has been growing food her entire life and when she was 18 she moved to Alaska looking for a new world. She started commercial fishing four days after she arrived and has never looked back.

Today, Michelle is married to Michael Poole and they have two sons, Micah and Ashton. The kids caught the farming bug early and had their own spaces in the family garden. Recently, their oldest son, Micah, bought a peach farm in Colorado. From May to August the family can be found commercial fishing salmon bound for the Copper River, with the sons skippering their own boats. In September Michelle returns to the sea to fish silver salmon and halibut after the peony harvest.

In 2009, Michelle learned about a Peony Crop Research Program at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. It was during the deep of January darkness and Michelle was feeling the need for a change. She read all she could find and convinced Michael to join her by promising him a Kobota tractor in the deal!



Today, Michelle and Michael run Chilly Root Peony Farm (www.chillyrootpeonyfarm.com) located on the Kenai Peninsula, overlooking the stunning Kachemak Bay. Their peony business complements their 30 plus years commercial fishing in Alaska. And because they are at an elevation of 1495 feet, their peonies blooming time is among the latest in the state. They grow more than 30 different varieties of herbaceous peony.

Michelle is passionate, sharing, "We are Certified Naturally Grown, in being so we exclude the use of artificial chemical additives on the farm, on the plants and in the soil." Michelle adds, "From root to bouquet, we tend our flowers with pure passion. We bring organic, sustainable and natural beauty to the market and hope to leave the Earth better than we found it."

The success of the Chilly Root Peony Farm is giving other farmers in the area the confidence to grow their ideas, expand their expectations and to rekindle their relationship with the good Earth.

"We live in such a beautiful place and I hope by working with the land, other farmers will re-learn how to understand and nurture their own corners of the Earth. Whether it's peonies or strawberries or carrots or llamas, folks are looking for ways to make a life from making a living—rather than making a living and waiting to make a life after," says Michelle.

The peony industry in Alaska is growing as is the membership of their state association, The Alaska Peony Growers Association (<http://www.alaskapeonies.org>). They host an annual conference each January and are working together to bring back the demand for local American grown flowers.

Congratulations Michelle!

Selected by USDA Risk Management Agency – Spokane Regional Office
Jo Lynne Seuffer, Risk Management Specialist

Marcel Law, Andalusia, Alabama



NRCS helped Marcel Law build a hoop house using EQIP funds in 2014. Upon completion of the hoop house he immediately began planting his produce. He used the money he made through his first year of sales to purchase

and build a second hoop house on his own. He is a retired teacher who spent his adult life traveling and teaching at different locations over the world. He met his wife while teaching in Thailand. The couple moved back to Alabama several years ago and he became fascinated with growing Asian plants. He grows and sells many different Asian plants, mostly peppers and eggplants, and markets them to different restaurants in the local area and in Florida. He offers them plants that they may not otherwise have access to.

Selected by NRCS Andalusia Field Office, Josh Elliott, and Covington County SWCD, Patricia B. Gunter

Rickie and Shannonrae Mathes, Newland, North Carolina



Rickie and Shannonrae Mathes are in the midst of transforming their 58-acre Christmas tree farm in the mountains of Avery County, North Carolina into Sh-nanny-gans Goat Farm. With Shannonrae at the helm, the goat farm operation has advanced by leaps and bounds over the past three years, as Shannonrae has identified new income streams and increased her knowledge and network.

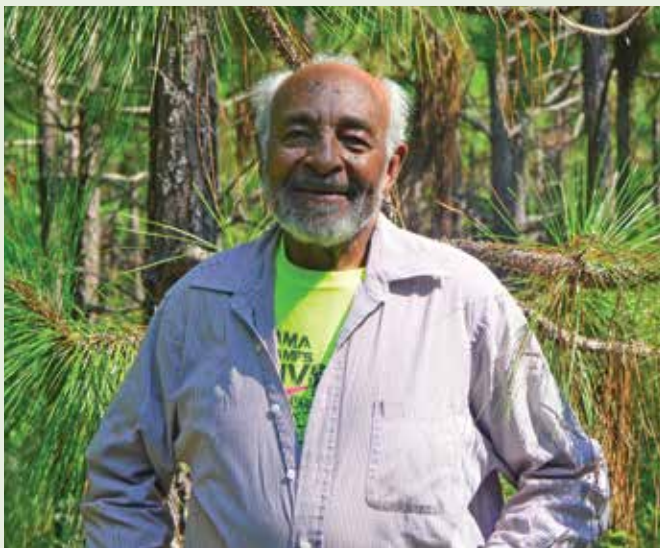
The Matheses have been growing Fraser fir on their land for 35 years, but recognizing that the hard work and physical labor required by the operation cannot be sustained forever, Rickie and Shannonrae began discussing ways to transition the farm. In 2012, Shannonrae purchased her first 16 goats with a small inheritance from her grandmother, and now shepherds over 80 Boer meat goats, which are bred, raised and sold for commercial and breeding purposes. Shannonrae and Rickie are establishing a rotational grazing system for the goats, which saves labor and supplemental feed expenses while improving animal and pasture health.



In January 2015, Shannonrae and Rickie were awarded a grant from WNC Agricultural Options to support their unique and environmentally-friendly land restoration efforts. They rent out their goats to landowners to remove invasive vegetation, a natural, effective, and entertaining alternative to conventional land clearing methods. This spring, Sh-nanny-gans received its meat handler's license and got approval for its packaged meat labels from the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and U.S. Department of Agriculture, and is working with local restaurants to bring their product to consumers. Shannonrae and Rickie also created an essay contest to help get more kids involved in agriculture. Together, Shannonrae and Rickie are making great strides toward their vision of a sustainable family-run farm.

Selected by Conservation Trust for North Carolina
Caitlin Burke

Joseph McKinney, Coosa County, Alabama



Tree Farmer Joseph McKinney of Coosa County, Alabama is far from your average landowner. After a military career, McKinney returned to Coosa County and began working on the family property. By combining his

tremendous work ethic with cost assistance programs and the advice from natural resource professionals he transformed an unmanaged tract of land into a certified TREASURE Forest. As the site of an outreach tour attended by 60 landowners, McKinney graciously shared his property along with his philosophy of making the most out of your property. McKinney currently serves his fellow landowners as a member of the Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee and the Coosa Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council. He is an integral part of these groups providing leadership, and mentoring other landowners concerning wise use of our natural resources. In addition, he is involved in many efforts to educate youth concerning the great outdoors, the adopt a school program and the water festival.

Joseph McKinney serves as a role model for many in Coosa and surrounding counties. Through hard work, diligent effort and accomplishment, he leads by example.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Alabama
Alex Johnson

James Moss, Hempstead, Texas



The Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University selected James Moss as our 2015 Farmer of the Year. Moss is a military veteran who retired from public service to pursue his passion for the land. He and his wife Meoko farm 10 acres of land with a seasonal high tunnel, producing specialty vegetables to sell at the local farmers market. He grows his crops without the aid of synthetic chemicals. He utilizes technology and knowledge gained from attending many conferences and workshops as well as talking with fellow growers. He is always willing to share his knowledge with both new and established growers. For the last two years, he has actively engaged in programs with Extension, such as the Texas Sustainable Strawberry Project and the seasonal high tunnel program. Moss is currently serving as president of the local farmers market group.

Selected by Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University
Billy Lawton

Roy Mills, Appleby, Texas



Roy Mills was born and raised on the farm in Nacogdoches, Texas. In the 1920s, his grandfather purchased 86 acres in the Redland Community. Mills' father (Johnnie Mills) purchase two additional tracts making it a total of 230 acres. The land consists of 150 acres of open land and 80 acres of timber.

Mills took over the farm from his father in 1996 and currently runs a cow-calf operation where he conducts soil testing, fertilization of his pastures, weed control, erosion control and cuts hay for production.

In 2013 Mills became aware of season high tunnels (SHT) through the Nacogdoches County USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Nacogdoches Soil



and Water Conservation District. Later, he signed up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to build a 30' x 72' seasonal high tunnel. In 2014 he planted 450 strawberry plants inside the SHT, which has been very successful. He said that the SHT is similar to cows, "You have to observe it each and every day."

Mills' passion for farming goes far beyond being a landowner, he is also an educator. At Tatum and Nacogdoches Independent School Districts, he was a vocational agriculture teacher for 32 years. Education was important in their family, and Mills is one of the first

African-American students to begin a college career in agricultural studies and he earned numerous degrees at Stephen F. Austin State (SFA) University in Nacogdoches, Texas. He is a Vietnam veteran and his military career began after two years of enrollment at SFA. After serving in the U.S. Army he returned and earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in agriculture and a mid-management certificate from SFA.

In 2004, he became president of the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers community-based organization for Region 3. Currently he works with government agencies and other groups which make him very knowledgeable and resourceful about different programs and practices. All the knowledge and information that he obtained from different agencies and workshops, he shares with the members of the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers during their monthly meetings.

Mills is a lifetime member of Vocational Agriculture Teacher Association of Texas, president of North Redland Cemetery and the Old North Church African-American Cemetery. He is also a member of Texas Organic Growers Association, Nacogdoches County FSA Committee and a member of Johnson Chapel Baptist Church where he serves as a deacon and superintendent of the Sunday School Board.

Mills' education, knowledge, skills and passion for farming are what make him an outstanding farmer and an inspiration to his community.

Selected by USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service – Texas
Willie Holmon, Outreach Specialist/Black Emphasis Program Manager



Lazos Makridis and Bill Mousadakos started Greek Farms, LLC a cow/calf and sheep operation in 2011 in Phelps County, Missouri. Lazos, Bill's father in-law, came to the United States in 1978 from Greece where his family had farmed for over 100 years. Greek Farms is currently comprised of approximately 210 acres of rolling pastures with another 30 acres in woods. Bill attended a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grazing school in 2011 and worked with NRCS and the Phelps County Soil and Water Conservation District to develop a grazing system for the farm. They have since installed cross fencing, water lines and livestock watering tanks to implement the system. Fencing was also installed to exclude livestock from the woods to reduce soil erosion,

and pastures were limed and over-seeded to improve livestock forage.

Greek Farms currently raises 55 Angus or Angus/Hereford cross cattle that they market through the local sale barns. In addition, they raise 100 registered Katahdin sheep that are marketed to other seed stock producers, and sold through local sale barns or to local individuals. Recently, bee hives were added to their property with the intention of selling honey locally. Other future ventures include raising dairy goats with the intention of selling cheese to the local market.

Selected by Phelps County SWCD – Missouri
Kevin Mattson



Almost 49 years ago, Jose Murillo was looking for work on a ranch west of Interstate 10 in the Hill Country near Junction when he came upon a rancher working his cattle. Murillo was 17 years old at the time and needed room and board. Rancher Jim Henry saw potential in the young man and gave him an opportunity. Days turned into years and owners Jim and Ann Wright gave the ranch to the Murillo family upon their passing in 2004. Jose and his wife, Adela, are grateful to own the ranch that gave them their start as a young couple.

Murillo followed in Mr. and Mrs. Wright's footsteps ranching the rocky hills. Over the years, he began to see the decline of little bluestem, sideoats grama, and Hall's panicum. He was forced to burn prickly pear through drought years. He knew he needed some guidance and assistance and that's when he contacted USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The ranch was overgrazed with only a water well at the ranching headquarters. Murillo took the advice from the conservation planner and removed all livestock on his 850 acre ranch. Immediately, they began to work on a conservation plan to outline the resource concerns and conservation practices to achieve the desired outcome of the ranch's capabilities. Using Farm Bill Programs, he was able to improve

his water distribution and grazing management by the use of cross fences and rotating cattle to allow pastures to rest.

Over three growing seasons, Murillo started to see the ranch begin to heal. He kept clearing invasive Ashe juniper, as he always had, which would improve forage production and wildlife habitat.

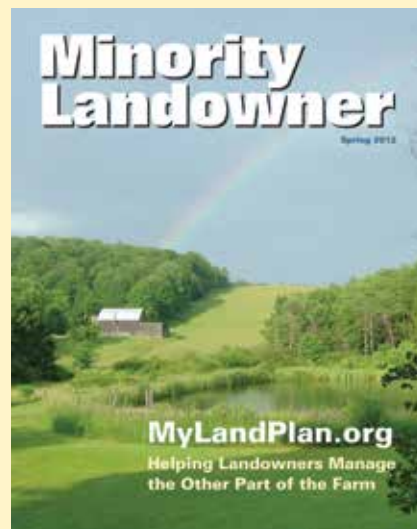
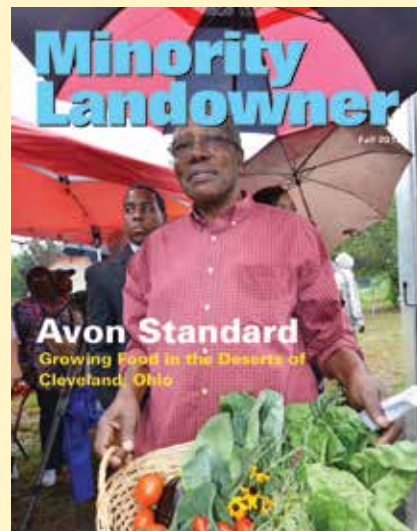
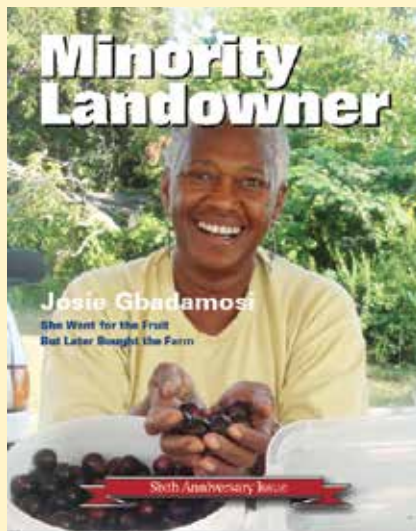
By 2014, Murillo worked with NRCS to find the appropriate stocking rate of cattle and goats while managing for wildlife. He has had the same hunters for more than a decade working together to select proper harvesting rates. Three watering systems have been installed with solar pumps on each well, thousands of feet of fencing, and hundreds of acres of brush cleared. Today the ranch is healthy with vast diversity. Many lessons have been learned and conservation practices have been implemented over the years. The Wrights would be so proud of what the Murillos have transformed the ranch into today.

"Don't be afraid to start at the bottom and work hard. I worked for three dollars a day from sun up to sun down. My wife and I had to work off of the ranch to make ends meet at times," said Murillo. "Continue to learn and don't try to make the land produce more than it is capable of."

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas

Minority Landowner

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The Phelps Sisters, Hermanville, Mississippi



Sisters, Bernice Phelps-Dobbins and Dora M. Phelps are proud owners and managers of The Phelps Family Farm in Hermanville, Mississippi. The farm was purchased in 1926 by their grandfather, Sharper Phelps. During their early years, they helped their father and mother, Lemon and Ella L. Phelps, perform many of the farm tasks associated with producing cotton, potatoes, peanuts, poultry, eggs, swine, and cattle. When they finished high school they chose different paths to follow. Bernice wanted to be a teacher, so she left the farm and attended college earning a bachelor's and master's degree. She returned to help operate the farm and teach math in the local school system. Dora left the south and travelled north to pursue a career. She settled in Waukegan, Illinois where she worked for the Veterans Administra-

tion for over 35 years. Dora moved back to the family farm in 2000.

With the passing of their father, mother and brother, Bernice and Dora now manage the daily activities of the farm. Currently they manage around 75 cows and calves on 105 acres of pastureland and 50 acres of timber. Their chores include fixing fences, putting up hay, feeding cattle in the winter, record keeping, and other daily routines. The Phelps Family Farm is a family business that the Phelps sisters oversee in preparation for the next generation to take over and continue.

Selected by Winston County Self Help Cooperative
Frank Taylor, Team Leader



Nettie Pruett is a dedicated cattlemoan and rancher in the Texas Hill Country. Her ranch has been in the family since 1878. She and her late husband resided on the place since 1994 and raised cattle and goats. She stays busy managing her Brangus cattle operation on 420 acres.

She has demonstrated excellent conservation management practices through the years. In 1987, she worked with Texas Agrilife Extension in a program to control Christ thorn along Spring Creek which is part of the Pedernales Watershed. She has continued to manage the extremely invasive plant with chemical applications. She has an EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) contract with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to mechanically remove Ashe juniper. No need for her to hire a contractor, she does all the work herself.

Nettie is also a pillar of the community. She teaches first and second grade Sunday School classes as well as a lady's bible class through her church. She volunteers her time with Smile Box for children in Nicaragua, delivers birthday cupcakes and presents every month to residents of TriStar Nursing Home, collects food for the local food pantry, and she mentors children at the Fredericksburg Middle School.

She is a member of the Texas Farm Bureau and Gillespie County Agricultural Commodity Association. She attends all local farm and ranch field days as well as local working group meetings to give input on resource concerns and conservation practices.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
Amanda Kirchner



Suki S. Rahul was born in Punjab, India and came to California when he was one month old. He's had an interest in farming and farm equipment since he was very young. His first work was as a migrant worker picking fruit with his mother and father. He always used to dream about being the tractor driver and not the laborer picking fruit. His father purchased 30 acres of peaches where he would help out on weekends and holidays. His father doesn't speak English so Suki has served as translator for his father most of his life. "When I was in the 6th grade my father picked me up from school, we went to a realtor's office and I translated for him as he purchased another 70 acre peach/prune orchard and then took me back at school again," he says.

He went to Chico State as a pre-med major with the goal of becoming a dentist. He was the first child in his family to go to a 4-year college. Working on the farm during harvest and weekends made him realize pre-med was not for him so he switched his major to ag engineering. He graduated from Chico State in 1996 with a Bachelor of Science in ag engineering.

Today Suki farms under several entities, including: Rahul Family Farms with his father and brothers, Golden Valley

Farms with his father and sisters, and Pacific Agribusiness - a management and consulting operation. His operation includes orchards of peaches, prunes, walnuts, almonds and he grows rice and hay. Between the owned and leased land, the family operates on 1,500 – 2,000 acres depending on irrigation water availability. Plus, he manages an additional 1,500 acres of walnuts for various owners.

Suki had one of the very first orchards in Yuba County to enroll in an EQIP contract to convert 70 acres from flood irrigated to micro irrigation in the late 1990s. His father was reluctant to adopt new technology as he didn't think micros could put out enough water compared to flooding his orchards. Suki had to explain to him the benefits of the micro system, the water savings that will be achieved, the direct application of nutrients, and the cost savings. He softened his tone and they were able to get a loan from Farm Credit to put in their share of the funds and completed the project. The first year they saved over 4,000 gallons of diesel fuel and countless hours on the tractors. By the end of the year he converted their original 30 acre block into micro irrigation through an EQIP contract too. Currently all of the land they own has been in an EQIP contract one way or another to convert to micro irrigation, add water flow meters, and implement irrigation water management practices. Suki said, "I do believe if these projects were not available to us when they were we would have lost our family farm."

Suki's shop is a headquarters for the non-English speaking minority Sikh farmers in the area to come to when they have questions about agriculture or the USDA. After seeing his successes with NRCS projects, many of his friends and neighbors wanted to do the same. Suki has helped them fill out their applications and educate them on the various programs available through USDA.

Suki farms with his father, Piara S. Rahul, who is 73 years old and is the first to arrive at the ranch every morning. He hopes he can continue his work ethic and keep farming the land with conservation methods and pass it on to the next generation educating them to use best management practices on the land.

Suki says, "I loving farming, I don't have any hobbies outside of farming. I just love doing it and don't know anything else, I get great enjoyment in seeing the crops grow and watching the harvest. The feeling that the crop is in the barn is a high for me."

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – California
Alan Atkins, NRCS Yuba City

James Arthur Powe, Cheraw, South Carolina



James worked with his Dad on their family's 30 acre farm growing up in Pleasant Grove, South Carolina with 11 siblings where they raised cotton, corn, peanuts and watermelons. He loves farming and at eight years old he was plowing with a mule. He is the only one of his siblings farming and at

84 years young, he has been farming for 70 years. He keeps saying he is going to cut back but has not and states his grandparents were sharecroppers who owned land and lost it.

James does not call himself a big farmer but he raises collards, cabbage, mustard greens, squash, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, butter beans, peas, turnips, kale and okra on a quarter of an acre close to his home. He has not used any USDA agencies in the last 20 years; he grows mostly for himself, others in the community and for exercise. None of his seven children farm and are not interested in farming. He loves to grow and eat fresh vegetables. The only setback is when it doesn't rain and he has to water them. He loves doing it all, and people look to him for fresh vegetables.

When he needs some friendly advice he goes to James Sweeny for consulting about his land and growing vegetables. Since they both are retired they don't have to wait for anyone else. With age comes wisdom.

Selected by United Farmers USA
Hezekiah Gibson, President

Rickie Roddy, Riesel, Texas



Central Texas rancher Rickie Roddy is fulfilling a childhood dream. He bought his first cow when he was 14 years old. By the time he was 19, he had grown his herd to 13 head of cattle.

Roddy grew up on two acres his parents owned near Waco, Texas, but that didn't stop Roddy from raising cattle.

He would talk people into letting him graze empty lots and also lease small tracts of land for his cows.

As a young man, Roddy married and bought a house with 13 acres in McLennan County. He slowly bought neighboring acreage as it became available. Today, he owns more than 300 acres where he runs his herd of 40 cows that are a cross between Angus and Hereford.

Working alongside Jeff Brister, NRCS soil conservationist, Roddy developed a conservation plan to serve as a roadmap toward accomplishing his goals. With the funding assistance from NRCS, Roddy will be able to fulfill all his conservation plans for his land including brush control and Bermuda grass sprigging.

Roddy said everything on the land was old and worn out when he bought it. He has a full time job, but works on his ranch on evenings and weekends repairing fences and barns and clearing out old junk. His kids, ages 21, 12 and 8 enjoy helping every chance they get.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services – Texas
Clete Vanderburg and Jeff Brister

Jesse Sanchez, Firebaugh, California



More than 20 years ago, when Jess Sanchez was an employee of Sano Farms in Firebaugh, California, he asked his boss if he could experiment with cover crops (crops that keep cropland “covered” between the time a “cash crop” is harvested and the next one is planted) to see if they would improve the lower-producing areas of their fields. But his boss said “no.” He didn’t believe cover crops would make a difference. Undaunted, Sanchez continued pitching his idea until his boss finally acquiesced, allowing him to plant cover crops in one field.

After just one season of cover cropping, Sanchez said the next cash crop was a thing of beauty – the crops were uniform, healthy and abundant. Now a partner in the farm-

ing operation with Alan Sano, Sanchez has been able to make building better soil a central theme of the Sano Farms business philosophy.

“If you have the good soils you’re going to grow better products at a lower cost and you are going to help the whole world. You won’t waste fuel and you’ll keep the carbon in the soil,” he said. “I think that the whole world would change for the better if more farmers would try it and see the difference for themselves.”

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – California
Victor Hernandez



The food bank recently had the opportunity to add another growing plot to their program when the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service working with *Minority Landowner Magazine* partnered with the South Plains Food Bank to host a farmer and landowner workshop. A program designed to deliver a conservation education program and

construct a high tunnel at the food bank's orchard location within the city limits of Lubbock.

David Weaver, CEO for South Plains Food Bank said, "We have two farms at the food bank where we grow a variety of crops. The high tunnel NRCS provided in this demonstration will help the food bank extend the growing season for some of the crops and improve our production goals."

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
Quenna Terry

Farmers have a strong sense of pride when it comes to producing high quality nutritious food for America's consumers. Some farmers are even lucky enough to get to meet the people that consume their food. In Lubbock, Texas there is a farm that produces fresh, tasty food on site and provides it to underprivileged residents in a 20 county area.

The South Plains Food Bank uses seasonal high tunnels on their property to extend the growing season for fresh produce to provide to their clients along with other donated food and household items. Established in 1983, they serve over 5,000 people every week. According to a recent study, two-thirds of the South Plains Food Bank clients are minorities.

Elma Carrillo Stockwell, Benavides, Texas



“In Duval County, my property is what you call rough country,” is how Elma Carrillo Stockwell describes her property. The tract of land consists of South Texas mixed brush with half of the soils being shallow and the other half being sandy loam soil with a very diverse landscape. Elma and her late husband, Julian F. Stockwell, both shared a passion for the land. Elma and Julian’s vision became a reality when her father leased them 1,000 acres and in 1978, she inherited the land.

Julian and Elma delighted in managing their Beefmasters cow/calf operation. They would manage their grass and produce hay bales for their livestock to carry the herd through the winter. Their passion for wildlife did not take a back seat either, as they purchased 20 white-tail breed does and brought them in from Webb County. To this day, the hunting lease has been long-term to only one family, who also knows the importance of wildlife management on the ranch.

The Stockwells have worked with the NRCS and the Agua Poquita Soil and Water Conservation District for over 40 years and have implemented a conservation plan for plant

health and management with rotational grazing and stocking density. They have participated in many financial assistance programs to accomplish their conservation goals, including the Agriculture Conservation Program, Long Term Agreement, Great Plains Conservation Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The conservation practices that have been implemented with technical and financial assistance include cross fencing, root plowing, roam disking, range seeding, water wells, water storage facilities and aerial spraying to manage mesquite and control prickly pear.

They worked with many conservation partners including Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). As their involvement in the conservation community grew, Elma served several years on the Duval County Committee for FSA.

Elma and Julian were married for 66 years before his passing, raising two sons and five grandchildren on the ranch. Along with taking part in conservation, Elma raised a family, attended Texas A&I University in Kingsville where she received bachelor’s and master’s degrees, as well as an educational diagnosticians certificate. As an educator for 24 years, Elma is admired in Duval County, and has blazed the way for many women. As her passion continues to ignite conservation in spite of all the challenging elements of South Texas, Elma is proud to see that the love of the land that brought her and her husband together, remains active with their two sons, to maintain the natural resources and family legacy for years to come.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
Jessica Benavides-Paredes and Jorge Gonzalez

Abel Suarez, Sr., San Benito, Texas



Abel Suarez Sr., who is a veteran and is still actively farming at 85 years old, is passing on his conservation legacy to his family as well as to fellow farmers and ranchers in South Texas. Suarez, who started his farm in 1961, had a background

in construction and inspecting. So he sought the assistance of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Southmost Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to improve his land. Suarez heeded the conservation advice from NRCS and the SWCD to improve efficiency by installing larger irrigation pipelines, land leveling, grass planting, soil tests for nutrient management, pest management, and weed control. He has also implemented rotational grazing for his cattle. Through his conservation efforts, Suarez increased his forage production, lowered his input costs, improved soil health, and reduced nutrient runoff. He also saw water savings due to better water distribution across the fields, and less time and labor.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Texas
Os Longoria, Resource Team Leader

William Tucker, Okolona, Mississippi



William Tucker, of Okolona, Mississippi, established Tucker Fresh Produce in 2010. He applied for and participated in a program offered by the United States Department of Agriculture for an experiment, to see if he could harvest tomatoes earlier in the season by growing them in a high tunnel, also known as a hoop house. The theory is that the

high tunnel should extend the growing season about three months, meaning Tucker would have tomatoes six weeks earlier in the season and then have a late crop that extends six weeks into the fall.

Each year, Tucker plants two crops of hoop house tomatoes. He plants a spring crop and a fall crop. He plants 500 plants each crop. He always has a healthy harvest of tomatoes. Each year his plan proves to be successful as he is still picking and selling fresh tomatoes at Thanksgiving. William has produced a bumper crop of tomatoes for the past six years. He sells the tomatoes at the local Farmers Market and has become a staple in the community. People come from far and near to purchase "Mr. Tucker's" tomatoes. In April of 2016, the local Minority Farmers Alliance toured his farm and held a Gardening 101 class for the community.

He is a proud member of the Mississippi Farmers Alliance of Okolona, Mississippi. William's philosophy is "I count it a great joy to be a good steward of the land."

Selected by Tucker Fresh Produce



Living in Yuba City in 2008, Bee Vue left a job and consistent paycheck he'd had for nine years to farm and open a roadside produce stand. He knew it would not be an easy transition. "There would be years the farm will be profitable while in other years the loss may be more than the profit," Vue said. But he took the risk.

Vue got involved with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) after a visit from Soil Conservationist Pa Kou Yang at his roadside stand. Yang invited Vue to a local NRCS workshop. "We worked with Vue to develop a conservation plan tailored to his specific needs," Yang said. "An

essential part of the plan was implementing a high tunnel."

Through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Vue developed a conservation plan that included a high tunnel, mulching, cover crops and crop rotations. The purpose of Vue's conservation plan is to conserve the farm's natural resources and maximize operating efficiency.

Vue is an example to other Hmong farmers who are returning to their farm roots.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-California
Victor Hernandez

Barry Lee Walker, Jr., Eutaw, Alabama



Barry Lee Walker, Jr. was born October 24, 2000 as the second child of Mr. and Mrs. Barry Lee Walker, Sr. Barry, Jr. grew up on 54 acres of land in Eutaw, Alabama. As a child he loved animals and had a strong desire to care for them. In 2015 along with other students of Christ Temple Academy, he joined the 4-H Club and participated in the beef cattle program. In February 2016 he became the caretaker of over 80 goats and now almost 1,100 chickens. After school, where he is a junior, he comes home daily and takes care of the management of the chickens and goats on his family farm. Not only does he take care of the animals, he also participates in row cropping. Barry is a very smart and intelligent young man who takes pride in his work while loving every minute of his job. He has attended several of the small ruminant workshops at Alabama A&M University. He is young but takes his responsibility to heart.

Selected by Hale County Alabama Cooperative Extension

Wallace Family Farm, Huntsville, Alabama



I would like to submit the Wallace Family Farm. Willie and Virginia Wallace are the proud parents of six children. The Wallaces purchased their 80 acres of land in 1968. The Wallaces are still looking for new practices, education, and innovative ways that will further enhance their farm. The farm consists of a cow/calf operation of registered Simmental Angus stock. Manuel Wallace has been literally on the farm working since his retirement a few years ago. Manuel can be found attending many small farmer workshops, tours, and/or presentations that will help him make improvements to the family farm. The Wallaces have taken advantage of many of the different cost share programs that are offered through the

USDA NRCS and the Soil and Water Conservation District. The Wallace Farm carries several generations of pride. The family is one of most cooperative producers that we have worked with. It is a pleasure to work with people who care so much about the preservation and conservation of their farm. The farm has been worked for many years. Plans are being made to see that the farm will continue to operate even better.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Alabama
Joyce A. Lane



Ann Pringle Washington is a great example of a small farmer. She, along with her husband Richard, worked with the South Carolina NRCS and Richland County Soil and Water Conservation District to develop a farm management plan to help expand their small farm through a naturalistic approach, free of pesticides and using primarily compost as a fertilizer. Her progressive and innovative approach has grown her small farm into an oasis of fresh produce, preserved and shared throughout the year.

The Washingtons received financial assistance through the EQIP program for a season high tunnel, micro-irrigation and mulch, and the deactivation of a well. In addition, the Washingtons have constructed, from their own funding, two

“keyhole gardens,” a new farming concept adapted in many dry regions which grows plants in a circular, raised garden bed.

Also, as the volunteer president of the Eastover/Lower Richland Business Association, her vision is to educate her community through outreach events, such as the Richland County 2014 Farm Expo, which promoted locally grown produce and active lifestyles in Richland County. The South Carolina NRCS salutes her for her conservation passion and the legacy that she wants to pass down to future generations.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – South Carolina
Sabrenna Bryant, Public Affairs Specialist

Jesse Ray Wheeler, Brundidge, Alabama



In addition to receiving the Pike County Farm City Conservationist of the Year (2015) award, Jesse Ray Wheeler has been actively farming for over 25 years. He is currently working on more than 135 acres of pasture and hayland. He also has 75 brood cows and three poultry houses. With this in mind it is easy to see that he has a diverse farming operation and also is dedicated to the preservation and conservation of our soil and water resources. He has implemented cover crops, sediment basins, and underground outlets to help in conservation as well as improve productivity. His cooperative work with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has been very beneficial to both the landowner and the land itself. It is because of this and his continued hard work that make him a Farmer of the Year.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service-Alabama
Pike/Bullcock County Field Office



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Rocky Ybanez Sr. and Rocky Ybanez Jr., Orange Grove, Texas



Rocky Ybanez Sr. and his son, Rocky Ybanez Jr., have been active in reclaiming their family ranch in southwestern Live Oak County. Rocky Sr. can recall hearing stories of his grandparents plowing with mules when he was a child. Their grandpa started implementing terracing and conventional farming techniques to produce corn, cotton and haygrazer in

the late 1950s. They also were very active in cattle production. Crossbred cattle were raised on the ranch, but it wasn't until the 1980s before Registered Brahmans were introduced. Later they transitioned to Black Baldies.

Due to extreme drought conditions in 2012, the ranch was forced to sell their herd. Today the ranch has diversified into commercial deer breeding and hunting operations. This management decision was an opportunity to reevaluate the goals and objectives of the ranch. Rocky Sr. explains, "We wanted to reclaim parts of the ranch to balance forage and brush species for both livestock and wildlife. We turned to our local NRCS for advice." With the help of NRCS technical and financial assistance, Rocky and his son have conducted over 100 acres of roller chopping, and 100 acres of root plowing and those acres are to be seeded.

Selected by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Texas
James Demoin

Khiquita "Kee Kee" Young, Copiah County, Mississippi



Khiquita Young received the Woman in Business Award at the 2015 Small Farmer and Woman in Business Conference, sponsored by the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives. More than 350 people attended the conference in Hattiesburg.

The mother of twin teenage girls, she was recognized for the work she has done helping the elderly learn that they can grow food in raised beds and container gardens and for reaching out to other women sharing her experiences.

She was born in Jackson, Mississippi. She is the oldest of two siblings and is the proud mother of four amazing children—two sons, Calvin II and Cordarrly, and twin 18-year old daughters—Hope and Faith.

She is a 1990 graduate of Lanier High School and in 2007 received her Bachelor's Degree in Theology Christian Counseling at New Foundation Theological Bible College. In 2013, Young attended Southern University Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Institute.

She is the owner of K's Farm and Ranch in rural Copiah County near Crystal Springs and has farmed for the past three years. She operates the 38 acre farm with her daughters who are finishing their senior year in high school. On the family-owned land, Kee Kee puts into practice tools that she has learned. She uses raised beds, container gardening, and small hoop houses. She sells herbs, strawberries, and farm-fresh eggs, as well as meat rabbits, hair sheep, and chickens, and one daughter milks goats and produces goat milk soaps and lotions.

Rep. Bennie Thompson recognized her for her work establishing Independent Survival Living, a non-profit organization that helps stroke victims and the elderly to grow fruits and vegetables and be self-sufficient in a very limited space.

She also gives back to other women in farming and serves as the National Women in Ag chairwoman for the southwestern part of Mississippi.

A video of Khiquita Young will be posted on the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives' website—www.mississippiassociation.coop.

Selected by Mississippi Association of Cooperatives



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