

Conservation Partnership Report

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2018 First Quarter Issue

Helping people help the land



OACD President Jimmy Emmons, Rep. Frank Lucas (R-Ok), NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill, and OCC Executive Director Trey Lam cut a watershed cake to celebrate 80 years of conservation in Oklahoma



Attendees at the Kiamichi CD Soil Health Workshop



Conservationists of the Year, Bruce and Julie Reynolds

Message from NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill



The first few months of 2018 were great for NRCS and the Conservation Partnership. In January, NRCS and the Conservation Partnership hosted a Regional Food Bank Meeting with Congressman Frank Lucas to tell him about the Farm to Food Bank Program. Since January, NRCS Staff has been busy ranking and developing plans for more than 3,998 EQIP applications. In addition, offices received more than 1,282 CSP applications.

February was highlighted by a successful OACD Annual Meeting where numerous speakers talked about the importance of conservation efforts and being active in the legislative process. The OACD meeting also featured a day dedicated to soil health. Producers heard from people across the nation about conservation practices that not keep soil nutrients from depleting but regenerates those soil nutrients as well.

In March the Conservation Partnership participated in the annual NACD Congressional Fly-In in Washington, D.C. We were able to meet face to face with legislators and show them the impacts of conservation efforts in Oklahoma and how federal money is spent. We hope they take the information given to them into consideration as they write the new Farm Bill. Finally, Oklahoma hosted the NRCS National Leadership Team Meeting. The meeting featured a producer panel and showcased the positive partnership NRCS has with its state and local conservation partners. Finally, The WRE team ranked 30 applications that were received during the FY18 signup period.

Message from OCC Executive Director Trey Lam



Enthusiasm and Hope were the theme of Oklahoma Conservation activities the first quarter of 2018. Many times I have heard "Conservation folks seem to have a better attitude these days." Part of the improved spirit comes from stability in State funding and the potential for District Employee raises. An exciting OACD Annual Meeting agenda and the planning of feral hog and soil health events also sparked much of the Conservation Partners renewed optimism.

The time has come for a new era in Oklahoma Conservation. As the calendar turns to 2018 and springtime comes to our state, our thoughts turn to new opportunities to restore Oklahoma's soil and water. The Soil Health Movement has grown exponentially over the last year. The systems approach to stewardship of our soil leads to benefits for the entire ecosystem. The Oklahoma Conservation Partnership is undergoing a transformation as well. Along with the launch of the NRCS team reorganization, Conservation Districts are settling in to the shared services approach to delivering programs. I see a brighter future for Conservation in the coming years. Funding at the State and Federal levels looks to be increasing. Watershed flood control dollars for rehab and new construction appear to be on the way from both the State and Federal legislators. We need to embrace these new opportunities for more Conservation work. Whether we are working to demonstrate new Soil Health practices or construct and rehab flood control dams we need to have faith that as we deliver results the funds will also come for increased staffing numbers and salary.

Message from OACD Director Sarah Blaney



In January, several directors attended the National Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in Nashville, TN. The Oklahoma delegation worked with the south central regional members to successfully pass a resolution stating "NACD supports and advocates for additional funding through the farm bill for tribal and socially disadvantaged farmers/ranchers with education, tools, and services to achieve succession planning in an effort to resolve highly fractionated land issues." The issue of fractionated land is something that OACD has been working with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Natural Resources Conservation District to address for the last few years.

OACD assisted the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma in organizing a round table discussion with farm bill stakeholders in February. This discussion brought together organizations interested in the nutrition, conservation, commodity titles of the farm bill to share how the legislation effects each group and how we can work together to pass a complete farm bill.

At the end of February, OACD held our annual meeting with 378 participants. The conference provided a wealth of information for conservation district directors, employees, and the general public. The first day of the conference focused on the needs of districts with information about local working groups, engaging elected officials, and conservation planning. On the second day of the conference, guest speakers from around the country spoke about grazing land's soil health, holistic management, and pollinators – to name a few.

ONE BIG STORY

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts annual state meeting went off without a hitch. The three day meeting (Feb. 25-27) took place in Oklahoma City.

The state meeting got underway on Sunday with the youth speech contest. The students were asked to give a speech on the subject "Healthy Soils Are Full of Life." There was also a poster contest for younger children where they got to draw a picture based on the same "Healthy Soils Are Full of Life" subject. The winners of the speech and poster contests were announced Sunday afternoon. Sunday ended with a birthday party honoring 80 years of conservation in Oklahoma. Helping celebrate the 80th birthday of conservation in Oklahoma was Representative Frank Lucas (R-OK 3). Rep. Lucas, who chairs the House Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry, spoke to the audience about several topics ranging from his life in agriculture and experience with conservation to his belief that a farm bill will be completed. Rep. Lucas also joined OACD president Jimmy Emmons, NRCS state conservationist Gary O'Neill, and Oklahoma Conservation Commission executive director Trey Lam in cutting the birthday cake which happened to be designed like a watershed.



Jimmy Emmons & Rep. Frank Lucas celebrating 80 years of conservation

On Monday, the state meeting kicked off with a general session featuring Texas lobbyist Todd Kercheval. Kercheval urged everyone to be engaged in the legislative process. He drove home the point that getting to know your legislators is the best way push the message of conservation and to get the necessary changes enacted. Monday also featured several breakout sessions and business meetings throughout the day. At lunch, NRCS Regional Conservationist Kevin Wickey gave an agency update and NACD's Michael Crowder also addressed the programs his organization is working on. Monday's lunch also featured the NRCS and OACD service awards, announcement of the first ever Conservation Leadership Class, and the Friends of Blue Thumb grant award winners. A busy Monday concluded with a legislative reception where state House Majority Leader Mike Sanders (R-Kingfisher) was honored as the Legislator of the Year for his work championing the conservation agenda.



Jimmy Emmons & OACD Legislator of the Year Rep. Mike Sanders (R-Kingfisher)

Tuesday started off with the swearing in of the new OACD board members by Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice James Winchester. The day featured mostly general sessions focusing on regenerative agriculture and how to rebuild soil health. Speakers came from across the country to share their tips and experience with regenerative agriculture. The day ended with a presentation on the Farm to Food Bank program and the vision of the program going forward.

For more information on the State Meeting, and to view the various presentations, visit www.okconservation.org.

NORTHWEST OKLAHOMA



Rep. Frank Lucas speaks at KNID AgriFest in Enid

Farm shows and trade shows happen frequently across Oklahoma. But very rarely does the same show feature a local U.S. congressman and a sitting U.S. Senator. Congressman Frank Lucas and Senator James Inhofe, both Republicans, spoke at events during KNID AgriFest in Enid on January 12th.

Congressman Lucas spoke to sorghum growers during their annual meeting. He gave updates on 2018 Farm Bill discussions and also spoke about the recent tax cuts.

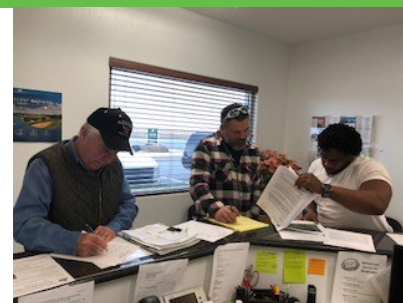
Senator Inhofe spoke the AFR legislative breakfast along with other state ag leaders. Senator Inhofe spoke mostly on the Northwest Oklahoma Complex fires from 2017 and a piece of bi-partisan legislation he is working on so rural residents can be better served by federal programs following a disaster.



Sen. James Inhofe speaks at KNID AgriFest in Enid

NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA

Wagoner County and Muskogee County conservation districts hosted a pair of successful meet and greets with local producers in January. Thirty-one people attended the Muskogee County meet and greet January 16th and 17th. Twenty-three people attended the Wagoner County meet and greet January 25th and 26th. Combined 39 farmers and ranchers filled out questionnaires about their operation detailing their predominant crop or type of livestock, natural resource concerns, and demographics. Out of the 39 producers who filled out surveys, 36 said they are willing to receive free assistance identifying resources and planning conservation practices. Most were already aware of the work that the local conservation districts and NRCS perform. The meet and greets allowed producers to meet the people that can help them achieve their conservation goals and, in turn, help them achieve their overall production goals.



Wagoner Co DC Kevin Vaughn helping producers

SOUTHWEST OKLAHOMA



NRCS Soil Scientist Clay Salisbury at a recent field day in Eakly, OK

North, South, and West Caddo Conservation Districts, co-hosted an Introductory Soil Health Field Day on March 29th near Eakly. Thirty-six people gathered to learn about the basics of Soil Health, Simple Soil Health assessment and tools, and the basics of incorporating cover crops into no-till systems.

Clay Salisbury, NRCS Soil Scientist, opened the discussion by describing the five principles of soil health, and how each principle related to soil function, quality, and resiliency. Blane Stacy, OCC Soil Health Educator, discussed how a diverse plant mix with many types of root systems can break compaction layers, anchor the sandy soil present at the field, and provide food for the biological community in the soil.

The groups visited two fields where Salisbury dug a series of holes in the soil to show the benefits of soil health practices on fields where different crops were grown and different soil health practices were used. Stacy explained that soil health systems are designed to mimic a native prairie, with continuous cover, a diversity of plants with living roots throughout the year, minimal disturbance, and wise use of livestock, will all work together to rebuild soil organic matter, soil stability, and nutrients.

A lively discussion followed with many producers relating successes and failures with their respective operations using cover crops.

Story submitted by Blane Stacy, OCC Soil Health Educator

SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA



OACD Pres. Jimmy Emmons at the Kiamichi CD Soil Health Workshop

Great speakers, great topics and wonderful weather set the mood for the Kiamichi Conservation District's Soil Health Workshop. The Kiamichi Conservation District, OACD, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service successfully sponsored and hosted the first soil health and cover crops Workshop in Choctaw Co. The educational event was held on March 16 at the Charlie Seimer Farm located in Frogville, OK, SE of Hugo, OK. The event, part of OACD's "Oklahoma Healthy Soils" project, was attended by 50 farmers and ranchers interested in improving their soils and extending their grazing season.

"Improving the health of our soils and putting more dollars back in the pockets of our farmers and ranchers, was the main topic of the workshop," said Scott Pace, District Conservationist with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service in Hugo, OK. Field day topics included cover crops for southeast Oklahoma, looking at some 2017 cover crop plantings, adaptive grazing management and year-round grazing plus much more.

Speakers included OACD President Jimmy Emmons, Steve Alspach with NRCS, OACD Executive Director Sarah Blaney and Brett Peshek with Green Cover Seeds. More information on the "Oklahoma Healthy Soils" project can be found at www.okconservation.org/healthysouls.

Story submitted by Scott Pace, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist in Hugo, OK

CENTRAL OKLAHOMA



Joe Buford and Chris Best speaking to attendees

As part of the recognition and celebration of Black History month, the Oklahoma County NRCS office partnered with the National Women in Agriculture Association (NWIAA) and other USDA agencies to host a Winter Agriculture Workshop in Oklahoma City on February 14th. The mission of NWIAA is “To save lives and eliminate poverty by increasing the availability of fresh locally grown foods while expanding economic opportunities.”

Over 35 people attended the workshop. The USDA Team (NRCS, FSA, RD, and NASS) focused on USDA programs that can assist current and potential USDA customers. Other topics discussed were urban agriculture, tips for extending your growing season, organic farming, Farm Bill Programs, and agriculture

college scholarships.

To learn more about how NWIAA is “Growing Character, Health, and Income from the Ground Up” please visit their website at www.nwiaa.org. Special thanks to Tammy Steele, NWIAA Executive Director, and the Oklahoma County NRCS Office for presenting and hosting this impactful event.

Story submitted by Joe D. Buford, OK NRCS BEPM

UPCOMING EVENTS

April and May (Various Dates) Feral Hog Outreach Meetings

- Check with local Conservation Districts for more information

April and May (Various Dates) Outdoor Classrooms and Natural Resources Field Days

- Check with local Conservation Districts for more information

4/4-4/5 OCWLA 27th Annual Conference

- Wes Watkins Center in Stillwater

4/12 Conservation Day at the State Capitol

- Starting at 8 AM in the Capitol Rotunda

4/19-4/21 Oklahoma City Farm Show

- Bennett Event Center at State Fair Park in OKC

4/20 Deadline to sign up for 2018 RCPP financial assistance

4/25 NRCS/Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council Workshop

- 9:30 AM-3 PM at the Kiowa-Caddo Technology Center in Fort Cobb

4/26 Southeast District Land Judging Contest

- The contest will begin at approximately 9 AM and be held near Holdenville

4/30-5/6 Stewardship Week

- The theme for Stewardship Week is “Watersheds: Our Water, Our Home”

5/1-5/3 National Land & Range Judging Contest

5/4 63rd Soil Stewardship/Legislative Breakfast in Wagoner

- 7:00 AM at First United Methodist Church of Wagoner

CONSERVATION PARTNERS



Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

100 USDA, Suite 206

Stillwater, OK 74074

405-742-1204

www.nrcs.usda.gov

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Oklahoma Conservation Commission

2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 200

Oklahoma City, OK 73105

405-521-2384

www.conservation.ok.gov



Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

P.O. Box 2775

Oklahoma City, OK 73101

www.okconservation.org

**Story ideas and pictures for future issues may be submitted to Chris Cox.*

Email: christopher.cox@conservation.ok.gov