



## Note from the Coordinator

Congratulations on your participation in the Louisiana Master Farmer Program. As a participant, you will continue to receive the Master Farmer newsletter, which updates issues related to the Master Farmer Program. This edition contains information on:

- Certified Master Farmers
- Updates on Phases I, II, and III
- Upcoming Training Dates
- Continuing Education
- Farm Bill Overview
- EQIP Incentives
- Master Cattle Producers to Become Certified Master Farmers
- Thanks to Louisiana Land Bank
- New NRCS State Conservationist Kevin D. Norton
- Industry Support for Master Farmers
- CCA Participation
- Master Farmer List Serve

As you progress through the program, you will receive certificates of completion for all three phases of the program:

- Phase I – 8-hour Environmental Stewardship Training
- Phase II – Model Farm Field Day
- Phase III – Development and implementation of a farm-specific comprehensive conservation plan

The program began just over five years ago with the first training session in Vermilion Parish. To date, more than 2,200 producers are enrolled, and the number of participants grows daily. As a Louisiana Master Farmer participant, you are viewed as a leader in the agricultural community through your continued environmental stewardship efforts.

I am very pleased to announce that 52 new certified Master Farmers were recognized at the Louisiana Farm Bureau Convention

held in New Orleans this past July. To date, 65 producers successfully completed all three phases of the program and have been certified by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the LSU AgCenter. These producers not only have worked diligently to learn about conservation but also have implemented scientifically based conservation practices using comprehensive conservation plans in their own farming operations to address specific resource concerns. The producers recognized included:

Allen Schriefer ..... Abbeville  
 Angela Hebert ..... Sunset  
 Angelia Murphy ..... Marion  
 Anthony Rozas ..... Ville Platte  
 B.M. Boudreaux ..... Abbeville  
 Benson Langlais ..... New Iberia  
 Clay Robertson ..... Alexandria  
 Clifton Vining III ..... Pioneer  
 Dale Reed ..... Ville Platte  
 Dana Shuff ..... Colfax  
 Daniel Durand ..... St. Martinville  
 David Dean Lavergne ..... Kinder  
 Dennis Courtright ..... Colfax  
 Dezere Richard ..... Bell City  
 Don Price ..... Winnfield  
 Dwyer Griffin ..... Abbeville  
 Edgar Durand ..... St. Martinville  
 Floyd Wayne Medlin ..... Stonewall  
 Gary Lirette ..... Marthaville  
 George Sagrera ..... Perry  
 Gregory Durand ..... New Iberia  
 Jack Wimberly ..... Hall Summit  
 Jay Bailey ..... Tallulah  
 Jeffery Durand ..... St. Martinville  
 Jim Paul Dupont ..... Bell City  
 Jimmy Windham ..... Coushatta  
 John Lance Harris ..... Alexandria  
 John Tilton III ..... Port Allen  
 Josh Romero ..... New Iberia  
 Larry K. Sayes ..... Vick  
 Larry Miller ..... Kentwood  
 Leo LeBlanc ..... Port Allen  
 Leslie Boudreaux, Jr. .... Franklinton  
 Louis Wittie ..... Hammond  
 Mark Sagrera ..... Abbeville  
 Martha Jean Rogers ..... Grand Cane  
 Michael Hundley ..... Branch

Nolan Romero ..... New Iberia  
 Patricia Avery ..... Bernice  
 Paula Courtright ..... Colfax  
 Richard Price ..... Sicily Island  
 Roger Wilson ..... Coushatta  
 Roy Robert ..... West Monroe  
 Roylee Hebert ..... Sunset  
 Sara Meadows ..... Merryville  
 Shane Romero ..... New Iberia  
 Shannon Mendenhall ..... Elm Grove  
 Sheila Wittie ..... Hammond  
 Sherrill Sagrera ..... Abbeville  
 Theresia Strahan ..... Belmont  
 Tommy Roberson ..... Oak Grove  
 William Eric Unkel ..... Kinder

Each producer was awarded a plaque and an official Certified Louisiana Master Farmer sign.

Many of last year's certified Master Farmers attended the conference. In 2006, 13 producers were certified.

Craig Adam ..... Kaplan  
 Thomas Batchelor ..... Ringgold  
 John Boudreaux ..... Abbeville  
 Jess E. Crosier ..... Cade  
 Ernest Girouard ..... Kaplan  
 Harvey Gonsolin ..... New Iberia  
 George Hains ..... Rayne  
 Howard Hardie ..... Jonesville  
 Kenneth Lahaye ..... Ville Platte  
 Hank Schumaker ..... Hussar  
 Robert Thevis ..... Simmesport  
 Russell Wiggers ..... Winnsboro  
 Scott Wiggers, Jr. .... Winnsboro

Additionally, I would like to thank our congressional delegation for their continuation of funding efforts to enhance the Master Farmer Program.

Because of the importance of environmental issues to Louisiana producers, we are constantly trying to make this the best program possible. If you have any ideas to share with us, please let us know. I look forward to your continued participation. Thank you for your continued support of Louisiana environmental stewardship efforts.

*Carrie Castille*  
Master Farmer Program Coordinator

## Program Update

**PHASE I:** Since the program's inception in 2001, approximately 2,300 agricultural producers from around the state have completed Phase I of the program. This phase is the environmental stewardship component of the program, where topics such as Water Quality, Best Management Practices, and Coastal Issues are discussed. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) also includes information regarding local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and USDA programming to assist in implementing specific practices. Specifically, since July 2006, 27 new producers have participated in this phase of the program. The trainings, historically, have been offered around the state in specific parishes who requested them. Currently, we are offering this training through Distance Education at various sites around the state. This will be offered twice per year, once in the spring and once in the fall. The current schedule is listed below with contact information regarding this training. A producer must attend the 1st four hours and then select either the second or third date, depending on what commodity is produced. If multiple commodities are produced, then the producer can choose which session he/she wants to attend. Specific details will also be posted on the Master Farmer web site as they become available at [www.lsuagcenter.com/masterfarmer](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/masterfarmer).

### DATE:

March 5, 2008 – first four hours

March 6, 2008 – second four hours (agronomic crops)

March 7, 2008 – second four hours (cattle)

### TIME:

1:00-4:30 p.m.

1:00-4:30 p.m.

1:00-4:30 p.m.

### LOCATIONS:

Red River Research Station, Bossier City

Dean Lee Research Station, Alexandria

Acadia Parish Extension Office, Crowley

Macon Ridge Research Station, Winnsboro

St. Tammany Parish Extension Office, Covington

Contact: Donna Morgan @ 318-613-9278, [DSMorgan@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:DSMorgan@agcenter.lsu.edu).

**PHASE II:** Completing this phase consists of attending a "model farm" tour and field day or other approved LSU AgCenter field day where conservation and BMPs are discussed. To date, more than 750 producers have completed this phase, with just over 280 completing this last year. Twelve field days were held at farms all over the state, representing commodities such as cattle, rice, crawfish, cotton, corn, and sugarcane. Additional field days are being scheduled for the coming year and will be posted on the Master Farmer web site as soon as details are available.

**PHASE III:** This phase consists of requesting, developing, and implanting a comprehensive conservation plan (Resource Management System) through NRCS. Many variables determine how long it takes to complete this phase. Some of these include the size of the operation, whether the land is rented or owned, finances, and farming goals. Currently, there are 65 certified Master Farmer producers who have completed all phases, including implementing this RMS plan. In order to request this plan, a producer must contact the local NRCS office and/or fill out a request form. That will give NRCS and the LSU AgCenter personnel permission to begin the development of this plan and work towards assisting the producer in becoming certified.

Contact: Ernest Girouard@337-788-7547, [egirouard@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:egirouard@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Earlier this year, Donna Morgan and Dr. Ernest Girouard became certified conservation planners (Level I) by NRCS. This certification is done through educational workshops and training, as well as using GIS technology to assist in developing comprehensive conservation plans. These plans will be developed for producers enrolled in the Master Farmer Program who want to become certified. Previously, the LSU AgCenter and NRCS have worked together to offer Phase I and II to producers across the state. By having these additional certified planners available, the AgCenter can now assist in Phase III, therefore supporting NRCS's effort in certifying as many producers as possible. Donna and Ernest will be working with the local district conservationists and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in this effort.

## Master Farmer Program List Serve

As the program progresses and updates become available, the Master Farmer Program would like to provide information to you through electronic media using an electronic newsletter and a producer listserv. This will allow us to provide you with timely information and program updates, such as upcoming events and policy updates. Eventually, we plan to have all newsletters and updates offered electronically. If you would like to receive this information electronically, please send an email to Kathryn Toups at [ktoups@agctr.lsu.edu](mailto:ktoups@agctr.lsu.edu) requesting to be added to the listserv.

We also welcome the opportunity for you to request information you would like to have addressed or showcased in our newsletter. Please feel free to send these suggestions to Kathryn Toups at the above email address.

### Contact Information:

- Dr. Carrie Castille, Master Farmer Program Coordinator, Baton Rouge, (225)578-2906
- Donna Morgan, Master Farmer Program, Alexandria, (318)613-9278
- Dr. Ernest Girouard, Master Farmer Program, Crowley, (337)852-3986
- Steve Carmichael, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, (318)473-7774

## Continuing Education

With 13 producers certified in 2006 and 52 certified in 2007, the number of participants completing the Master Farmer Program is growing substantially every year. To become certified, a producer must complete all three phases of the program (in no particular order), and the certifying agencies must sign off on this completion. Once the producer receives final certification from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, he or she must also complete six hours of continuing education credits (CECs) per year to maintain certification.

The CECs are made up of from a list of trainings, field days, workshops and specific conferences that are tailored to conservation efforts in some way. This can be through discussion of topics such as pest management, nutrient management, conservation tillage, water quality and other best management practices. Below is a list of approved events that will be available for producers to attend and receive credits. Each function will count for approximately three credits, therefore requiring producers to attend a minimum of two events per year. A producer must verify his or her attendance by signing a sign-up sheet that will be available at all functions.

- LSU AgCenter parish production meetings (individual parishes)
- Commodity Conferences at annual Farm Bureau Convention, New Orleans
- Dean Lee Research & Extension Row Crop Field Day, Alexandria
- Rice Research Station Field Day, Crowley
- Northeast Row-Crop Field Day, St. Joe
- Forage and Grassland Council Forage Tour (various locations around state)
- Sugarcane Field Day, St. Gabriel
- Conservation Tillage Conference (alternates between Houston, Texas, & Tunica, Miss.)
- Annual Louisiana Conservation District meetings (various locations around state)
- Annual Cattlemen's Association Meeting (various locations around state)
- Grass Land Coalition Initiative tours (various locations around state)
- Annual Louisiana Master Farmer Alumni Meeting/Banquet, Alexandria
- Bio-fuels/alternative energy meeting (to be determined)
- Farm Bill conference/meeting (to be determined)
- Master Farmer Model Farm tours (various locations around state)
- NRCS Soil Quality Workshops (various locations around state)

In addition to these listed, other specific workshops and trainings may become available during the year. The specific dates, times and locations will be mailed to all Master Farmer participants who are certified, or who have completed Phases I and II and are currently working on completing Phase III. Specific details will also be posted on the Master Farmer Web site as they become available at [www.lsuagcenter.com/masterfarmer](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/masterfarmer).

## EQIP Incentives

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is continuing to award special points during the ranking process on all applications under the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) where the applicant is participating in the Louisiana Master Farmer Program (MFP). Under EQIP, NRCS determines which applications will be funded based on a ranking process. After all applications have been ranked, the ranking score for each eligible application is placed on a list with the highest ranking score at the top of the list. Eligible applications are funded starting at the top of the list and working down until all applications have been funded or until all funds have been obligated.

For each eligible application, where the applicant is participating in the Louisiana MFP, the application will receive 60 additional points. Producers who are participating in the Louisiana MFP have a better chance of being able to obtain financial assistance under EQIP because the program promotes the environmental benefits resulting from voluntarily addressing the resources of concern.

## Additional NRCS Information:

The EQIP ranking process is a method of evaluating the benchmark resource concerns present on the participants' operations and the treatment benefits that will be applied through EQIP. Three elements make up a portion (percentage) of a participant's total Ranking Score: cost efficiency, state issues and national issues. Cost efficiency takes into consideration the benefits of the planned conservation practices, the practice cost and the lifespan of the benefits. State issues and national issues take into consideration treatment of specific targeted resources. These issues are presented in the form of questions. Within state issues is a question: "Is the applicant currently participating in the Master Farmer Program? (Includes Master Farmer, Cattleman, Dairyman, etc.) (Reference the LSU Ag Center Participant List)." If the answer to this question is Yes, the participant receives 60 additional points in this portion of the total ranking score.

Contact: Ernest Girouard @ 337-788-7547,  
[egirouard@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:egirouard@agcenter.lsu.edu)

## New Sponsor – Louisiana Land Bank

Louisiana Land Bank recently gave its official support and sponsorship to the Louisiana Master Farmer Program. Because the program represents all aspects of agricultural conservation, it's important to show producers that the lending industry is supporting this environmental stewardship program. Thank you again to Louisiana Land Bank.

## U.S. House of Representatives Passes Farm Bill

On July 27, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives passed their version of the Farm Bill – H.R. 2419 – with a vote of 231-191. The bill maintains the current farm bill framework with several notable changes. It increases the loan rate for raw sugar by ½ cent per pound and the wheat loan rate to \$2.94 per bushel. It also increases the target prices for soybeans to \$6.10 and for wheat to \$4.15 per bushel while decreasing the target price for cotton by 2.4 cents per pound. A new program to purchase surplus sugar for ethanol and a 4-cents-per-pound upland cotton payment for domestic textile mills are also provisions of the bill. Far East price quotes will replace European price quotes to determine the AWP of cotton, and sugar producers receive some protection from imports with 85% of the domestic sugar market allocated to U.S. producers. Less favorable for farmers, the bill tightens the adjusted gross income limit to \$1 million for all program eligibility, including conservation programs, directly attributing all program benefits to a producer's social security number. It also eliminates the three-entity eligibility rule. However, the bill does provide some offset for producers with a \$20,000 increase in the limit for direct payments and elimination of the payment limit on marketing loan gains.

Conservation is an important part of the House bill and it includes several enhancements to current conservation programs. For working farmland, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is increased each year to \$2 billion in 2012 for soil, air and water conservation projects. EQIP eligibility is expanded for projects providing technical services for fruit and vegetable producers, and organic certification and transition expenses qualify for EQIP. Livestock producers continue to receive 60% of EQIP funding, and applications that promote forest management and energy conservation are new EQIP priorities. Of significant importance in the EQIP application evaluation process, a new priority is given to state, regional and local concerns, and applications from

similar agricultural operations will now be considered together.

For the Conservation Security Program (CSP), the House bill replaces the three-tiered structure of payments with annual conservation stewardship enhancement payments for qualifying conservation practices performed on working farm lands. A downside of the House plan is that the CSP program does not permit any additional signup until 2012. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) that provides up to a 75% cost share for landowners to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat is extended as in current law.

The framework of land retirement programs is also maintained in the House bill. The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) that provides payments to landowners to restore, enhance and protect wetlands retired from agricultural production is renewed with eligibility for an additional 1.33 million acres. The WRP changes in 2006 that reduced WRP payments and participation are repealed and fair market value of land will be used in WRP land appraisals. WRP is provided with a five-year, \$1.9 billion budget authority in the House bill.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for converting highly erodible and environmentally sensitive cropland to vegetative cover in exchange for annual rental payments is extended with 39.2 million acres authorized for enrollment through 2012. A new provision allows CRP contracts to be modified if the CRP land is transferred to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer after being contracted.

The House bill increases land and watershed protection programs. The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) that provides up to 50% of the fair market easement value to landowners who agree not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses receives annual increases with \$280 million provided in 2012. The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), which provides payments to landowners for restoring and enhancing grasslands, is extended and may enroll an additional 1.34 million acres

over the next five years. The Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program (SWRP) for rehabilitation of small watershed projects, including but not limited to dam restoration, is funded at \$200 million over five years. A new Regional Water Enhancement Program (RWEPP) is funded at \$60 million per year for cooperative agreements between producers or non-federal government entities for projects to improve regional water quality in certain regions that include the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) that provide funding for tests, research and implementation of solutions to air quality problems are available to state and local governments, non-profits and individuals with \$150 million over 5 years provided. Fruit, vegetable and organic producers are eligible for outreach grants under the CIG program. A few other conservation programs are mentioned in the House bill, but they are limited to the Chesapeake Bay.

The House Farm Bill imposes similar payment limitations on conservation programs as those imposed on commodity programs. The House bill imposes a fiscal-year payment limit of \$60,000 for any conservation program and a maximum payment limit of \$125,000 for all conservation payments received by an individual. Benefits received under the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) are excluded from the conservation program payment limitations, but adjusted gross income eligibility does apply. Conservation payments will be attributed to an individual's social security number, and eligibility to receive any conservation payment is limited to individuals with an adjusted gross income limit of \$1 million if 66.6% of their income is agriculture-related. Otherwise, the maximum adjusted gross income to receive any conservation payment is \$500,000.

The Senate has yet to formally release their Farm Bill proposal, but Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Harkin is expected to increase conservation program spending in the Senate Farm Bill proposal.

## Master Cattlemen Should Consider Certification in the Master Farmer Program

To date, 516 have graduated from the Master Cattlemen Program (MCP). Part of your requirements to become a certified MCP was to complete eight hours of training on environmental stewardship in addition to other trainings you participated in. By completing these eight hours, you also completed one-third of the requirements to become a certified Master Farmer (MF). The MF certification is somewhat different than the MCP certification because it focuses almost entirely on environmental protection using management practices on your farm that reduce polluted runoff from entering creeks, rills or streams.

The MF program is entirely voluntary but potentially has great current and future significance to both the cattle industry and all agricultural enterprises. Participation in the MF program and completion to certification is more than just doing the right thing for the environment. As more and more agricultural producers in Louisiana participate and become certified in the MF program, it demonstrates to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that the agricultural industries of this state are committed and passionate about protecting the environment in a cost-effective manner. When regulatory agencies see commitment from various groups, they understand that voluntary programs really do work and that the agricultural industries as a whole are doing all that is scientifically and economically possible to achieve the goals of the 1972 Clean Water Act.

This note is to encourage you to consider completing the remaining two-thirds of the MF program as many of your counterparts are doing, or have already done, around the state. The remaining two phases of the program require no more classroom training. Phase II is a field day at a Cattle Model farm. There are several of these in different parts of the state, and we set up these events at least once a year but more often if need demands. This phase is much like other field days you may have attended in the past. The group goes to a participating cattle farm where field viewing and more detailed explanations of BMPs or management techniques are discussed. It gives you the opportunity to speak directly with cattlemen who have gone through the program and implemented management plans or structures recommended by NRCS. It also allows producers to interact with other cattlemen who are in the process of or considering completing the MF certification.

The last phase is basically done at your own pace. It involves meeting with your local NRCS conservationist and having an evaluation of your operation. If certain potential pollution sources are found, you work directly with the NRCS conservationist to develop a cost-effective strategy to address those issues. If the solutions cost money, NRCS can work with you to provide financial assistance through various programs. Furthermore, once you have developed a plan, you do not have to implement any suggested practices or structures until you are ready. You could implement all at one time or take a few years to implement others. Don't forget, the program is totally voluntary, so even if a plan to address the concerns is drafted, you could, if you choose, not implement any of the suggestions; however, you would not attain the program certification.

## Industry Support for Master Farmer

Since its inception in 2001, the program has received a tremendous amount of support from commodity groups, agencies and industry throughout Louisiana. In addition to the EQIP incentives, we are now looking to industry to support producers enrolled in Master Farmer through chemical, equipment and fertilizer discounts. Several major companies have been contacted and have expressed an interest in this type of incentive. If you would like to support the Louisiana Master Farmer Program, please feel free to contact Dr. Carrie Castille at [ccastille@agctr.lsu.edu](mailto:ccastille@agctr.lsu.edu).

## CCA Participation

In 2007, the Certified Crop Advisors (CCA) organization began supporting and participating in the Louisiana Master Farmer Program. This is being done through giving continuing education credits (CEUs) for attendance at Phase I and Phase II trainings and field days. Agriculture industry personnel can sign up at these Master Farmer events and receive credits toward the requirements for certification. Specific information can be accessed at the CCA Web site at [www.louisianacca.org](http://www.louisianacca.org) or by contacting John Fontaine at 337-277-1668.

## New NRCS State Conservationist

Kevin D. Norton has been selected as the new state conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Louisiana. Kevin was raised in south central Oklahoma in a diverse agriculture setting. He graduated from Oklahoma State University in 1981 with a bachelor of science degree in rangeland management.

Over the past 26 years, Kevin has served in a number of positions in NRCS at the field area and state level. For the past nine years he has been the assistant state conservationist for programs in Oklahoma, providing leadership for implementation of Farm Bill-related financial and technical assistance programs with a combined budget exceeding \$40 million per year in financial assistance. In addition, he has coordinated the Oklahoma State Technical Committee, consisting of more than 60 diverse conservation agencies, organizations, universities, agricultural producers and tribes.

Throughout his career, Kevin has worked to strengthen traditional partnerships and build new partnerships in support of NRCS's work in natural resource conservation. Kevin has served NRCS at the national level on many teams.

Kevin's vast experience will greatly benefit the Louisiana Master Farmer Program. He will work diligently to continue the excellent progress of the program. Kevin will support and further enhance NRCS's role in the Master Farmer Program by assisting Master Farmer Program participants to develop resource management system conservation plans in Phase III of the program.

Kevin and his wife Cheri have four children.

LSU AgCenter  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Post Office Box 25100  
Baton Rouge, LA 70894-5100



# LOUISIANA MASTER FARMER

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- Louisiana Association of Conservation Districts
- Louisiana Cattlemen's Association
- Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
- Louisiana Department of Natural Resources
- Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry
- Louisiana Rice Growers Association
- Louisiana Soybean Association
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Potash & Phosphate Institute
- USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

Contributing Authors:  
Donna Morgan  
Ernest Girouard  
Brian Leblanc  
Kathryn Touts

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**Louisiana State University Agricultural Center**  
William B. Richardson, Chancellor  
**Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station**  
David J. Boethel, Vice Chancellor and Director  
**Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service**  
Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director

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