

Soil and Water Gazette

Manatee River Soil and Water Conservation District

Fall 2015

A Brief History of the District

The **Manatee River Soil and Water Conservation District (MRSWCD)** was chartered by the State of Florida on April 5, 1945.

The District Board of Supervisors entered into an agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, whereby the USDA/NRCS provides technical information and experienced conservation personnel to the district. Manatee County Government has been and continues to be a strong supporter of the MRSWCD by providing staff and technical assistance.

Supervisors meet regularly on the second Monday night of each month at the Manatee Extension Office in Palmetto.

Board Members

Jennifer Brunty	Chairman
John J. O'Connor, Jr.	Vice-Chairman
Paul Howard	Treasurer
Callon C. (Buddy) Keen, Jr.	Supervisor
Ben King	Supervisor

2015 USDA FARM BILL PROGRAM

Cost Assistance for Conservation Practices

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is now accepting applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and several other programs.

USDA program applications are accepted on a continuous basis. **However, applications must be submitted by December 18, 2015 to be considered for 2016 funds.**

Farms and ranches will be ranked based on environmental benefits, then government **incentive funds** will be allocated based on highest to lowest ranking until available funds run out.

Examples of incentive practices are: reorganize inefficient irrigation systems, irrigation water management, troughs and pipeline for livestock watering, and exotic weed control for Category I pests.

For more information or to receive an application contact the local NRCS office at (941)907-0011 or visit <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/soils>

For further information visit: <http://www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>

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OFFICE STAFF:

Janie Besselman	Administrative Specialist II
Israel Vega	District Conservationist
Vacant	Soil Conservationist
John Noll	Soil Conservation Planner
Gail Somodi	Soil Conservation Supervisor

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

MRSWCD News: For more information on these programs call 907-0011. *If you would like to make a donation to the MRSWCD to help defray the costs of MRSWCD sponsored student programs, please call 907-0011 Ext 101. Any donations would be greatly appreciated.*

Speech Competition

Each middle school and high school participant prepared a 6-8 minute speech on the topic selected by the Association of Florida Conservation Districts, "Hardworking Pollinators-Why Are They Local Heroes?" Bayshore High School student Devan Kreitzer, placed 1st and was awarded \$150. Placing 2nd was Lakewood Ranch High School student Cara Zeveney (\$100), and in 3rd place was Nolan Middle School student John Todd Girman (\$75). Kreitzer went on to win the area competition and placed 3rd at the state level.

Staff hosted 6 participants with the help of 3 volunteers.

Manasota Regional Envirothon

Manatee High School's *Empty Children* team was the Manatee County winner of the Manasota Regional Envirothon. *Empty Children* went on to place 2nd in the aquatics section and 8th overall out of 21 teams at the state competition at Tuscawilla Park in Ocala. The Florida Envirothon competition is a field event for high school students requiring problem solving, teamwork and the application of knowledge in five areas: aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and current environmental issues.



Staff assisted 100 students with the help of 40 volunteers.



Manatee County Land Judging Competition

The 54th annual event allowed students from local 4-H and FFA chapters to compete and show their knowledge of soil science, home site evaluation and conservation practices on a parcel of land. The students compete for the opportunity to represent Manatee County in the state contest, and possibly move on to the national competition held annually. Southeast High School won the senior FFA team division and the junior

FFA team winner was from Buffalo Creek Middle School. One intermediate and two senior 4-H teams also competed. The winning teams went on to compete at the state level. **The team from Buffalo Creek Middle School and intermediate and senior 4-H teams were named state champions!**

Staff assisted 84 students with the help of 6 volunteers.

Manatee Spring Conservation Farm Tour

In the spring of each year the MRSWCD sponsors a Farm Tour of the county and its various farming areas and communities. We take citizens on a guided bus tour through our county to educate participants on the importance of agriculture to our area. Lunch and snacks are provided. **For more information on attending in spring 2016 please call 941-907-0011 x 101.** If you would like your farm to be considered as a stop on the tour please call us.

Staff hosted 103 participants with the help of 3 volunteers.

2016 Manatee River SWCD Events

February 4	Envirothon
February 25	MRSWCD Land Judging
March 11	Farm Tour



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service Corner

Welcome New District Conservationist Israel Vega

Israel Vega has worked as both a Soil and District Conservationist in different states and diverse topographies including the Midwest, the coastal plain in North Carolina, the mountains in the center of Puerto Rico, and now in our office. His Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Technology in Agriculture from the University of Puerto Rico has given him an edge in the application of conservation practices to protect and conserve water, soil, and other natural resources. Vega said, "I'm looking forward to working with individuals, cooperating agencies, state and local governments to achieve mutual natural resource goals on agricultural lands."

Statistics 2015 (Oct 2014-Sept 2015)

Customers assisted	5722
Students assisted through educational events/classroom visits	613
Adult education through farm tours and training	321

2015 Conservation Planning (Acres) (Jan 1, 2015-Oct 1, 2015)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other programs	6,673
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Services Provided

Natural Resource Information. NRCS access to recent and historical aerial maps, topography maps, and soil maps.

USDA Soil Survey Distribution. Soil surveys used for development and crops are available. Soil survey information for many areas may now be found online at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/> Please contact us if you would like assistance.

Develop Conservation Plans on land used for agriculture. The plans recommend Best Management Practices for protecting resources.

Available Programs

Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and others. Call for information 941-907-0011.

Partnerships Work to Protect and Conserve Resources-Jones Potato Farm

Jones Potato Farm has been farming in Manatee County since 1987, they are currently growing 2100 ac of potatoes, 700 acres of green beans and 250 acres of citrus. We had a conversation recently with Alan Jones about some technologies they are applying that protect and conserve resources with the help of partnerships.

Not long ago, Jones brought together Dennis Coleman of Crop Production Services and SST (Site Specific Technologies) Software to implement precision nutrient management on his potato crop. After their plans were hatched and honed, they presented the project to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) for incentive consideration.

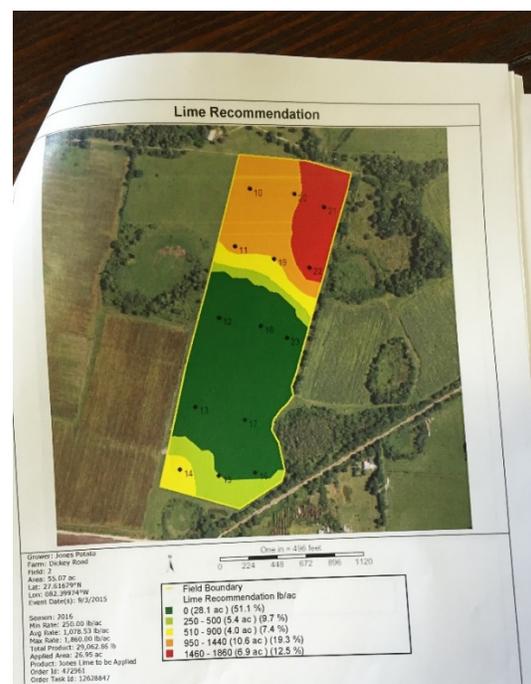
To remain viable in farming today Jones said, "Don't be satisfied with the norm, always look to improve your game." Jones added, "It is up to us as farmers, to develop the Best Management Practices (BMPs) of the future."

Through precision nutrient management, water quality can be maintained/improved, while maintaining productivity. "We can conserve natural resources with fewer inputs while feeding the nation and keeping productivity high," said Jones.

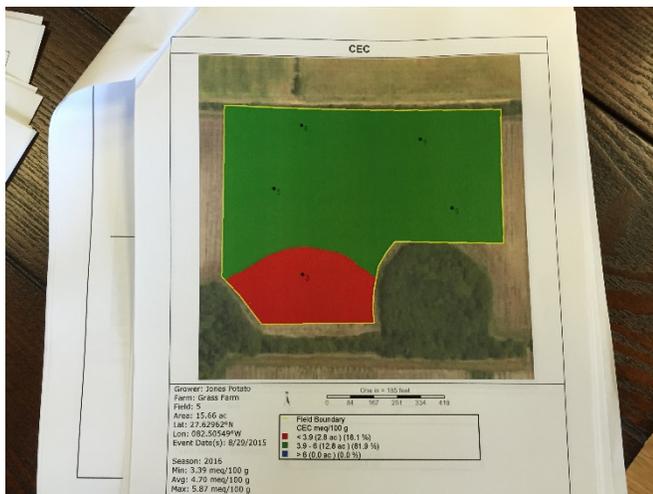
Using precision nutrient management for the potato crop, one soil sample represents about 2.5 acres, whereas with conventional soil testing one sample would be representative of about 20 acres. More soil

samples are required and samples are taken before each growing season. The main nutrients they take into account for potatoes are calcium, magnesium, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. With variable rate fertilizer application, soil sampling (and lab analysis) is performed for each field, then site-specific maps of the soils nutrients of interest are created. An algorithm is used to develop a site specific nutrient prescription map. Lastly, the prescription map is used to control and variable rate fertilizer applicator. The banding of fertilizer instead of broadcast application, allows one to apply about 15% less fertilizer.

In the 55 acre field boundary shown below, 28.1 acres did not need lime applied this season.



Continued



Where the soil cation exchange capacity (CEC) rates are low (<4) organic fertilizers such as humics, iron humates, and compost are applied to these areas.

Applying phosphorus only where needed, will have a positive impact on water quality.

It is too early to tell what the impacts will be on his potato crop yields. Applying less fertilizer to the crops saves the farmer money and also helps to retain and improve water quality, benefiting all of us.

Another project involves center pivots, not a common form of irrigation here in Manatee County. Pivots are now installed on all of the Jones Potato Farm locations in Manatee County with the exception of the newest farm on Grass Road. Jones installed the first center pivot on his own to test the feasibility. Since additional pivots have been installed with the help of incentives from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), >50% in water savings has been

documented. Studies were done by University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, supported by SWFWMD comparing water use with seepage irrigation vs. pivot. A poster with study results can be viewed here: <http://hos.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/faculty/gdliu/PotatoWaterSavings.pdf>

Jones Potato Farm has had several NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) contracts over the years to address resource concerns by implementing the following practices, irrigation water management, prescribed burning for wildlife habitat, integrated pest management, fence, brush management, and a portion of the center pivot project.

“Programs like SWFWMD FARMS (Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems) program are creating change through cost share programs. It’s a great program because we all have skin in the game,” said Jones. Jones noted that there are quality professionals from various agencies in our community and that they will work to get an answer for you. Often, the answers to the question are solved by working together. Jones feels education on all sides, farmer, business personnel and agencies is key.

Jones Potato Farm has partnered with multiple agencies and encourages and welcomes tours and field trips. Jones Potato Farm has a partnership with Sarasota County Schools' Farm to School Program, supplying red potatoes. The farm has been a stop on the Manatee River Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored spring farm tour.

Manatee River Soil and Water Conservation District

1303 17th St. W.
Palmetto, FL 34221

Phone: (941)907-0011
Fax (Toll Free): 1(855)464-1961

Soils Unit/Extension website.
<http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/soils/>
MRWCD website. This site is under construction.
<http://www.manateeriverswcd.com>

Farm City Week November 12 – November 20

For more information contact

Samantha Kennedy/County Extension Director at 722-4524

- Nov 9** MRSWCD Speech Contest: Topic-Why Do We All Need Trees? Pre-registration required. Rules posted: <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/soils>
- Nov 12** Ag Venture
- Nov 14** Beef Workshop and Prospect Show
- Nov 17** Kiwanis Luncheon/Agriculturalist of the Year
- Nov 19** Agriculture Hall of Fame Luncheon
- Nov 20** Farm Tour

The **Prospect Beef Show** educates the youth of Manatee County on their beef projects in areas such as the industry, proper animal care, show techniques and how to prepare their animals for a show. This show is provided to the youth of Manatee County through sponsorships. If you are interested in being a sponsor or **for more information** contact Extension Agent Christa Kirby 722-4524 or visit <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/agriculture/livestock/>