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*Heart to Heart
... with Hardisty*



 This month the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees meeting was held in Indianapolis. The theme for this 14th annual event was “Crossroads of America: Embracing Challenges, Promoting Change, and Encouraging the Production of Fuel, Food and Fiber.” I was pleased and honored to welcome the attendees this year to our state and to provide support for this national training. Thank you to all of you who were involved in this year’s sessions; with a special thank you to Bennie Clark, our Indiana Black Emphasis Program Manager.

 As a reminder, we are operating under an advisory budget allocation and continuing resolution. Even so, we will stay focused on training for our employees. We have just completed joint CRP training with FSA, and look forward to more training for employees in the months ahead.

 I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a safe and happy holiday season. It is important to take some time for fun and relaxation, and to share this season with your friends and family.

*** * * * Employee Spotlight * * * ***

**Manivong Phengrasmy,
District Conservation**

The spotlight is on Manivong Phengrasmy (Mani for short), Indiana NRCS district conservationist for Benton County.

Q: Mani, let's start at the beginning. By way of introduction, tell us about where you were born and grew up.

A: To start with, I am a native of Laos, a small country (slightly larger than Utah) in Southeast Asia. Laos terrain is mostly rugged mountains, with some plains. Burma, China, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam border the country with the Mekong River forming a large part of the western boundary. In Laos, I graduated from French High School in 1969. I came to the United States in 1971 and obtained a diploma from Central Catholic in Lafayette, Indiana in 1973. After high school, I studied Agricultural Economics at Purdue University and graduated in 1978 with a bachelor's degree. I became a U.S. citizen in 1983. My beautiful wife, Vilayvone, and I have been married now for 22 years, and stay busy with our two sons, Andrew and Peter.



(Pictured above: Mani talks with NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster at the NRCS booth during this year's Future Farmers of America national convention in Indianapolis.)

Q: Was farming a part of your family background?

A: Yes, in Laos my family owned and operated a farm with 200 acres of rice. Farming in Laos is very different than here. Farmers do not have modern equipment, so they plant and harvest the rice by hand. They use no chemicals for weed control and have no irrigation technology. This was

the case on our farm. At our farm, we also harvested a banana, coconut, pineapple, mango, and pomegranate orchard. We planted roses, orchids and tropical flowers, in addition to helping operate a brick factory. We kept busy!

Q: When did you begin your work with NRCS?

A: I started with NRCS in 1983 in Lafayette, Indiana as a soil conservation technician. Then from 1985 to 1990, I worked for NRCS in Franklin, Indiana as a soil conservationist, and then moved to Crown Point in 1990. Since 1995, I have worked in Fowler as Benton County's district conservationist.

Q: You had an opportunity two years ago translating for Laotian farmers in Arkansas. Can you briefly tell us about that experience?

A: During 2004, NRCS asked me if I would like to take an opportunity to go to Arkansas and explain USDA programs to Laotian farmers. I was happy to be involved with that outreach to Laotian farmers of Dardanelle and Waldron, Arkansas where poultry and cattle are the main farming operations. I helped translate from English to Laotian for over 100 farmers so they could understand how the government provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and producers. We gave them specific information on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. It was a joint effort with the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission; and Tyson Foods, Inc., and OK Farms, Inc. helped answer questions related to the business and production aspects of chicken farming. It was a great experience for me to help provide much needed information to those Laotian farmers.

Q: As a former Program Manager for the Asian American/Pacific Islander Emphasis Program, did you have many outreach opportunities to this group of citizens in Indiana?

A: When I was a program manager for the Asian American/Pacific Islander Emphasis Program, it was my pleasure to contact and recruit Asian high school students from various high schools in Indiana. Also, I went to some colleges and universities in Indiana, such as Purdue, Ball State, and Indiana University, for their career days to recruit students for NRCS.

Q: Finally, do you have any words of wisdom to share with our folks?

A: I am happy to share my experience and background with my fellow NRCS employees whenever I can. I have met a lot of wonderful people during the years I have worked for NRCS. NRCS is the best agency to work for, and Indiana is a great state to live in and raise a family!

Hoosier Happenings

Ag Students Roll Out the Green Carpet

Gibson Southern High School students in Southwest Indiana recently got a first hand education in cooperative conservation when they helped install a grass waterway to deal with a major gully on school property.

A roadside ditch along the school parking lot had formed an immense gully over the years with numerous washed out areas. Twenty feet deep and forty feet wide, the ditch had become a hazard. The expense to fix the problem was daunting, but local, state and federal partners stepped in to help.

A local watershed group took the site under their wing and recruited NRCS to provide the engineering layout and design work for the project. A contractor was hired to grade the area to NRCS specifications, using cost-share dollars from an Indiana Department of Environmental Management watershed grant. Gibson Southern students got involved on Columbus Day, when over 100 FFA Club and ag students laid down the erosion control blanket to finish the project.



“Everybody just came forward when they were needed and got it done,” said Linda Powell, the watershed coordinator with the Gibson County Soil and Water Conservation District. Today the site is stable and safe, and adjacent farms are protected from runoff and continued erosion.

Congrats to RC&D Assistant!

Arrow Head Country RC&D Assistant Nancy Manion was one of four individuals honored this fall by the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service as “Friends of Extension.” Nancy was honored partly because she served on the county Extension board during a challenging time. As part of a \$5 million grant for education from the Lilly Foundation, the county Extension needed to use the money to reach as many as possible. Nancy and other board members developed a four-phase program that addressed educational needs of infants to adults.

Also, Nancy was also involved in a joint venture with a neighboring county for leadership training for young adults. Nancy said, “It was a wonderful test of counties being able to break down barriers and work together as partners.”

Nancy’s involvement in agriculture was another aspect of her award. She and her husband inherited a small farm and are determined to make the right conservation choices for sustaining the land. Her work for NRCS is helping with this goal. Nancy adds, “Extension has always been a valuable partner to NRCS and RC&D, and being able to help them in return has been very fulfilling to me.”

Inch of Soil Posters Available

Looking for an educational tool to explain the importance of protecting soil? Consider the “new” “Inch of Soil” poster that is now available upon request. NRCS revised the popular poster to include special events from 1507 to 2006. The 32” by 25” poster, number NRCS-P1-06, tells the story of the time required to form one inch of soil. Contact the Public Affairs staff at the state office to request a poster or call LANDCARE direct at 1-888-LANDCARE.

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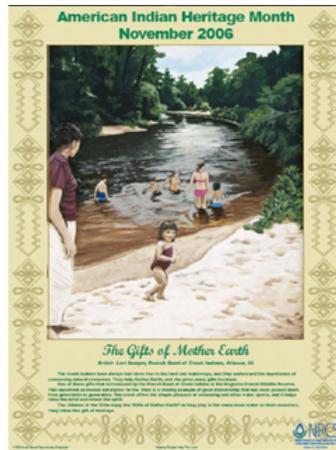
—Special Emphasis—

**November—American Indian/
Alaska Native Emphasis Month**

President George W. Bush declared November as American Indian Heritage Month, a time to honor the generations of American Indians and Alaska Natives who have added to the character of our Nation. In his proclamation he states the following.

“America is blessed by the character and strength of American Indians and Alaska Natives, and our citizens are grateful for the countless ways Native Americans have enriched our country and lifted the spirit of our Nation. We are especially grateful for the Native Americans who have served and continue to serve in our Nation’s military. These brave individuals have risked their lives to protect our citizens, defend our democracy, and spread the blessings of liberty to people around the world.”

NRCS employees at the state office attended a luncheon/training in celebration of the American Indian Heritage Month. Cultural Resources Specialist Stephen Ball and Buster Landin, AI/AN Emphasis Program Manager, provided training and a quiz, which was sent out to all Indiana NRCS employees. Congratulations to Mike Wigginton and Justin Bender who received NRCS caps for the highest quiz scores!



Hoosier Happenings (cont.)

Earth Team Welcomes Area Conservationist Becky Ross

The NW Area has a new Area Conservationist who is making the news. Becky Ross recently received a hearty welcome from the NW Area Earth Team Volunteers (ETV). Ross, an avid supporter of the ETV program, received an NRCS stadium blanket in appreciation for her ongoing support. She has set a challenging goal of 100 percent participation of ETVs in the NW Area for 2007. Last year over 700 Indiana ETVs contributed 15,297 hours. ETV coordinators encourage field offices to utilize volunteers and help Indiana reach 100 percent participation this year. Only seven states achieved this level of participation last year.



(Pictured left to right: NW Area ETV Coordinator Julie McLemore presents Becky Ross with award.)

**LINKS FOR
PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTERS**

Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, *Weekly Updates*:
<http://www.iaswcd.org/WeeklyUpdates06.htm>

ISDA, Division of Soil Conservation, *Cultivating Connections*:
<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/news/index/html>

Purdue University - www.purdue.edu

Indiana Conservation Partnership Strategic Plan Information
<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/icp/index.html>

PERSONNEL UPDATES

Selections:

Christopher Smith, Civil Engineering Technician, Lebanon Technical Services Team, 11-12-06
Jason McKittrick, Agricultural Engineer, Greensburg Technical Services Team, 11-12-06
Trevor Shepard, Agricultural Engineer, Washington Technical Services Team, 11-26-06
Barry Fisher, Soil Conservationist, Indianapolis, 12-24-06

Retirements:

Michael Broadstreet, District Conservationist, Franklin, 12-1-06
John Reynolds, Support Services Specialist, Indianapolis, 1-3-07
Jim Morin, Agricultural Engineer, North Vernon, 1-3-07

Mark Your Calendar

December

12/13/06	Leadership Team Meeting, Indianapolis
12/14/06	Civil Rights Committee Meeting
12/19-21/06	CCA Conference, Indianapolis

January

01/16-18/07	IASWCD Annual Conference, Marriott Downtown, Indianapolis
01/16-18/07	Fort Wayne Farm Show
01/23/07	Conservation Day, Indiana Statehouse and Government Center, Indianapolis, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
01/30/07	NW Area Meeting
01/31/07	SW Area Meeting

February

- 02/06/07 NE Area Meeting
- 02/07/07 SE Area Meeting
- 02/07-08/07 Women in Agriculture Conference, Conner Prairie, Fishers
- 02/27/07 NW Area Meeting
- 02/28/07 SW Area Meeting

March

- 03/06/07 NE Area Meeting
- 03/07/07 SE Area Meeting
- 03/27/07 NW Area Meeting
- 03/28/07 SW Area Meeting

April

- 04/03/07 NE Area Meeting
- 04/04/07 SE Area Meeting
- 04/24/07 NW Area Meeting
- 04/25-26/07 New Beginnings...with 20 Years of Traditions (formerly Camp Gallahue Environmental Education Workshop), Waycross Camp & Conference Center, Brown County. Contact Hoosier Heartland RC&D at www.hhrcd.org or 317-290-3250.
- 04/26/07 SW Area Meeting

Note: For a listing of Natural Resources Education Center workshops, go to www.in.gov/dnr/nrec

Helping People Help the Land