



Rice Stewardship

• 2020 ANNUAL REPORT •

**"WHAT IS GOOD FOR RICE, IS GOOD FOR DUCKS.
AND IF IT'S GOOD FOR DUCKS, IT IS GOOD FOR
ALL OF US."**

- Dean Wall, Arkansas Rice Farmer



A Message from Our Leadership

This year has been like no other for our Nation. From record rainfall, swollen river basins, a relentless hurricane season for the Gulf, unprecedented wildfires for the West, and a coronavirus pandemic for us all, 2020 was full of challenges. When faced with challenges you really find out just exactly what you are capable of. Our Nation's farmers, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), conservation partners, and supplychain sponsors have all persevered and are prepared to emerge into 2021 stronger than ever.

Despite challenges, U.S. rice farmers produced an abundant crop across all 6 rice-growing states this past year. And policy efforts have never been more important. USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) provided critical financial aid in both April and September 2020 for producers who continue to face market disruptions and increased costs related to the pandemic. USDA included rice and continues to make other programmatic improvements to CFAP based on stakeholder engagement and public feedback. And USA Rice has continued to lead the way in this critical policy effort.

Legislation to support our Nation's valuable natural resources was also in play in 2020, with passing of both the American Great Outdoors Act, and America's Conservation Enhancement Act. Both bi-partisan Acts secure funding for important federal programs far into the future, like the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and reauthorizes important entities such as the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. Both examples are important to Rice Stewardship.

This year has also marked change throughout USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the foundational partner for Rice Stewardship. Three (3) of our rice-growing states have new State

Conservationists; Chad Kacir (Louisiana), Scott Edwards (Missouri), and Kristy Oates (Texas). They join our veteran State Conservationists Mike Sullivan (Arkansas), Kurt Readus (Mississippi), and Carlos Suarez (California). Furthermore Matt Lohr, the recent Chief of the NRCS, resigned in August 2020. We could not be more proud to have Kevin Norton as acting Chief, with Kevin being an original founder of Rice Stewardship during his tenure as Louisiana's State Conservationist. The changes do not stop at leadership as NRCS launched a new IT system this year called Conservation Desktop with a new planning and application ranking interface called Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART).

Despite challenges Rice Stewardship topped 700,000 acres impacted since program inception in 2013. Rice farmers produced an abundant and healthy crop, NRCS Field Offices remained in operation, Rice Stewardship field staff assured conservation momentum continued, and financial sponsors firmly upheld their commitments. There is no limit to what we can accomplish by bringing together the agricultural industry, individual growers, conservation organizations, federal and state agencies, and supplychain corporations. We are all driven to use our natural resources wisely, provide for people and wildlife, and leave this planet better for the generations who follow. We thank you so much for joining us in this effort and look forward to a progressive year ahead.



Jeff Durand & Al Montna
Rice Stewardship Co-Chairmen

Regional Conservation Partnership

YEAR ONE

PROGRAM 2.0

By: Scott Manley, Ducks Unlimited's
Director of Conservation Programs

Formally known as the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, the recent Farm Bill officially launched the next generation of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Allow us to summarize progress with these new and exciting opportunities and our Rice Stewardship Partnership.

First and foremost, core principals have not changed, as RCPP 2.0 still offers a foundation for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), conservation partners, and rice producers to harness innovation, expand the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary private lands conservation. Rice Stewardship is built upon this same foundation and a mission to conserve working ricelands, water, and wetland wildlife. We applaud the NRCS for their steadfast vision, streamlined program administration, and for providing this conservation platform upon which to build.

Under RCPP 2.0 there are three distinct funding scenarios or arrangements available for lead partners to consider. First, what is now called RCPP Classic, the original structure and format of the program is still in play and still carries the bulk of available funding. The first application period was launched September 2019 and we are excited to report the California Rice Commission was awarded \$5.5M to continue innovative work on waterbird habitat in the Central Valley. The second application period was opened August 2020 with proposals due November 2020. Following these

approximate timelines the second funding scenario called RCPP Renewals was also launched for both 2019 and 2020. As explained by NRCS, Renewals are reserved for the most successful projects to continue compelling approaches to addressing natural resource challenges. We are proud to have been granted two Renewals to date totaling \$7.8M, namely the 2016 Southwest Louisiana Nutrient Management CP 590 and 2017 Mid-South Graduated Water Stewardship. Finally, the third funding scenario is called RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA), which specializes in unique and innovative financial assistance models. The first round of this funding scenario was announced March 2020 with the second planned for early 2021.

In summary, since the initial 2014 RCPP call for proposals, nine (9) individual RCPP awards have been led by a diverse group of partners, including California Rice Commission, Ducks Unlimited, Lower Colorado River Authority, and USA Rice. Two of these projects have been awarded Renewals. Together we have established a tremendous base for rice producers to increase conservation on their farms and a venue for collaboration, innovation, and expansion of private lands conservation. With the progress of RCPP 2.0 we once again applaud the NRCS for their vision and for providing this conservation platform upon which to build. Rice Stewardship looks forward to upholding and continuing RCPP and taking full advantage of all the new and exciting opportunities in the years to come.

RCPP Project Dashboard

2015 NATIONAL RICE STEWARDSHIP PARTNERSHIP - COMPLETE

2015 EXPANSION OF WATERBIRD HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM IN CALIFORNIA - COMPLETE

2015 CONSERVATION IN MICRO-WATERSHEDS OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA - COMPLETE

2016 SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT CONSERVATION PRACTICE 590 - 2019 RENEWAL

2017 LOWER COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY (LCRA) PRAIRIE CONSERVATION RESERVOIR - IN PROGRESS

2017 MID-SOUTH GRADUATED WATER STEWARDSHIP - 2020 RENEWAL

2018 GULF COAST WATER AND WILDLIFE - IN PROGRESS

2018 NORTHEAST LOUISIANA CULTIVATING WATER CONSERVATION - IN PROGRESS

2020 MAXIMIZING WATERBIRD HABITAT IN CALIFORNIA RICELANDS - NEW APPROVAL

Rice Stewardship Recognition

MERLE ANDERS - 2020 FIELD TO MARKET TRUSTED ADVISER HONOREE

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is proud to announce Dr. Merle Anders has been recognized as part of Field to Market's 2020 Trusted Adviser Spotlight Series. Through his role, Dr. Anders works to support rice farmers across Arkansas in scaling their adoption of sustainable practices which improve conservation outcomes. Rice Stewardship partners with advisers like Dr. Anders to improve environmental outcomes and advance sustainable solutions for farmers throughout our value chain. Field to Market recognized Dr. Anders on June 24, 2020 during its annual Plenary and General Assembly Meeting, recognizing his outstanding leadership in implementing innovative approaches to scale conservation agriculture.

Dr. Anders has spent his career focused on sustainable agricultural systems. From his time with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in India, to his 15 years as a Rice Systems Agronomist with the University of Arkansas. "We have to work to embed sustainability in the greater farming framework. Whether I'm working with subsistence farmers in Asia and Africa or commercial operations here in the U.S., sustainability is important everywhere," Dr. Anders said when looking back over his multi-national career of over 40 years.

Dr. Anders works closely with industry leaders to guide farmers to more efficient conservation practices. With his vast experience and extensive research insights, Dr. Anders is truly helping to shape tomorrow's farmers, today.

Rice Stewardship is dedicated to connecting farmers with trusted advisers to advance continuous improvements in sustainable outcomes across the food and agriculture value chain. Congratulations to Merle for his accomplishments in delivering sustainable outcomes for U.S. commodity agriculture.



DR. ADAM CHAMBERS OF THE NRCS AIR QUALITY GROUP, AND DR. MERLE ANDERS DISCUSS RICE GROWTH DURING A FARM VISIT.

2020 EXCELLENCE IN CONSERVATION - DR. SCOTT MANLEY

Dr. Scott Manley received an inaugural Ducks Unlimited (DU) Excellence in Conservation Award for his work on the Rice Stewardship Partnership. For the first time in its 83-year history DU distributed their Excellence in Conservation Awards. DU's Conservation Programs Committee (CPC) created the awards to recognize outstanding conservation accomplishments and the staff who made them possible.

Any extraordinary accomplishment that supports DU's conservation mission of filling the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever is eligible for recognition. The inaugural

2020 awards were announced Aug. 20, during the CPC summer meeting.

In just six years of on-the-ground implementation, the Rice Stewardship Partnership has achieved 700,000 acres of conservation impact on ricelands across the three most critical wintering areas for waterfowl.

"I would like to thank the Conservation Programs Committee for recognition of the Rice Stewardship Partnership," said Manley. "This is a partnership that is a great example of what I'd like to see more of in the future for Ducks Unlimited."



JERRY HOLDEN, DU DIRECTOR, SOUTHERN REGION, BUSTER, AND DR. SCOTT MANLEY

Upland Nesting Habitat on

RICELANDS IN CALIFORNIA

By Luke Matthews, California Rice
Commission's Program Manager - Wildlife



The California Rice Commission (CRC) has a long history of leading programs that focus on creating important flooded habitat for waterbirds. While this is still a priority at CRC, we now have an additional focus on utilizing our ricelands to create seasonal upland nesting habitat for waterfowl. This is a major part of our recently awarded \$5.5M Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In fact, we plan to use approximately half of these dollars to create and maintain nesting cover on idled rice fields in the Sacramento Valley. The nesting cover component of our RCPP is designed to provide critical habitat for our local breeding waterfowl species, primarily Mallards and Gadwall, which have been in decline since the 1990s.

This concept to create seasonal upland nesting habitat relies on fallow rice acres and has two key phases. Phase 1 establishes a cover crop on rice acres that may or may not be planted in the following growing season due to water availability, rice markets, or other factors. Phase 2 focuses on maintaining those cover crops undisturbed on fallowed acres through the entire waterfowl nesting season (April – July). Local breeding waterfowl in the rice growing region of California commonly use cover crops as upland nesting habitat. If established across the landscape, these fields could provide a fluctuating base of high-quality nesting

habitat near flooded rice fields which provide excellent brood rearing habitat.

Over the next four to five years, CRC will work with NRCS and our wildlife conservation partners to implement this practice. Ultimately, this practice will provide two main benefits: soil health and nesting habitat. When farmers enroll in Phase 1, they will receive a payment to help offset the costs of planting a cover crop on their rice fields. Once the cover crops are established, they will have the option to terminate and incorporate it as green manure in March before planting their rice crop. Alternatively, a grower can leave the cover in place, on acres that they will not be planting that season and enter Phase 2 where they will be compensated to maintain those fields undisturbed as nesting habitat. Utilizing this strategy, enrolled growers will gain soil health benefits every year and provide nesting habitat benefits on years when they choose not to plant all their rice acres.



**ENROLLED GROWERS WILL GAIN SOIL HEALTH
BENEFITS EVERY YEAR AND PROVIDE NESTING
HABITAT BENEFITS ON YEARS WHEN THEY
CHOOSE NOT TO PLANT ALL THEIR RICE ACRES.**



Gulf Coast Producer Profile



LUCAS, GLENN AND WES SIMON, BOB (LAYING DOWN), AND MARLEY (SEATED)

Simon Partnership

A FAMILY TRADITION

Glenn Simon with his two sons, Lucas and Wes, farm 9,000 acres in Acadia and Vermillion Parishes, Louisiana. A 4th generation farmer, Glenn has led operations for nearly forty years, rotating between rice, crawfish, soybeans and cattle. The Simon Partnership farm is very family oriented. Glenn and his sons do most of the field work while his wife Rhonda runs the office and brings lunch to the men every day. Following the example set by their father, Lucas and Wes plan on continuing the Simon Partnership legacy with their children by working alongside USA Rice, Ducks Unlimited, and NRCS to preserve their land for generations to come.

With what is certainly a large farming operation, water conservation is a key element for the Simons. “Working with Kyle Soileau, Louisiana’s Rice Stewardship coordinator, we have learned a lot through water sampling” said Wes. Multiple relift structures have been installed and surface water is being pulled from local bayous to irrigate crops. Since working ricelands are a wetland filter any irrigation water leaving these fields is greatly improved. “The water we relift from the bayous is milky and the turbidity is extremely high. Once the water has been filtered through the rice it’s clear and the quality is greatly improved” said Wes. The Simons like being able to utilize their natural resources such as surface water to improve farm operations but also to improve the area’s water quality for everyone.

The most challenging part of being a rice producer for the Simon’s is low market prices. With these challenges the Simon’s have adjusted and adapted to new and more efficient operations. Wes mentioned, “The market being down has forced us to make changes that in turn have improved our operations. Some of the changes we made were switching from minimal till to no till. We’ve noticed that tilling less has made crops more productive and has also saved us money”.

While this year has been a challenge to all farmers, by using a commonsense approach to daily activities, Simon Partnership has not slowed one bit. Hard work and utilizing water saving irrigation techniques has helped make what could have been a real tough year actually run very smooth.

“Working with Rice Stewardship has taught us a lot,” Wes commented. “Having a partner that has the same mindset, a conservation mindset, and that truly cares about farmers and helping us to leave the land better than we found it is why we’ve partnered with Rice Stewardship for the long term.”

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Rice and Ducks

IN D.C.

*By Kellis Moss, Ducks Unlimited's Director of Public Policy &
Ben Mosely, USA Rice Vice President of Government Affairs*

Many people wouldn't know it, but rice and ducks have a lot in common. Through the years, we've discovered how rice farmers and conservationists can work together to improve efficiency in farming practices while simultaneously creating waterfowl and other wildlife habitat on working lands – that all starts with the Rice Stewardship Partnership.

In February of 2020, Rice Stewardship partners came together in Washington, DC to meet with each other, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and members of Congress. This included Ducks Unlimited's (DU) state chairs, state policy chairs, senior volunteers and members of the DU Board of Directors. The goal – advocacy at the nation's capital for legislation and administrative actions that promote rice agriculture while also protecting and restoring migratory bird habitat. USA Rice's senior leadership also held its annual fly-in that same week which allowed for joint meetings on both Capitol Hill and at USDA headquarters.

Meetings focused on the work of our partnership, which continues to deliver waterfowl habitat and wildlife conservation along with vitally important support for working rice lands. Communications to both the Hill and USDA included not only lauding the strong relationship between rice and ducks, but also the Rice Stewardship Partnership's many successes. Members also heard updates from officials at USDA's Natural Resources

Conservation Service (NRCS) on implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill conservation title.

Volunteer leaders from both USA Rice and DU spent much of their time highlighting how the partnership helps play an important role in conserving working ricelands, water, and wildlife. From enhancing water quality to providing waterfowl with significant energy supplies across their wintering habitats, the benefits are plentiful. On top of the many mutual benefits to both rice and ducks, leaders also shared quite a few stories about the benefits provided to people in the form of recreational opportunities on these working wetlands.

As always, the partnership's annual congressional luncheon produced a great crowd of Congressional members, staff and supporters. The strong turnout from decision-makers on Capitol Hill is proof that congressional leaders value this collaboration and recognize the policy influence of our members and volunteers. After our annual luncheon, staff and volunteer leadership, including USA Rice President and CEO Betsy Ward and DU CEO Adam Putnam, met to discuss where the partnership has been and where we're headed in the future.

At the culmination of a busy and productive week at our nation's capital, it was clear that influential policymakers understand this partnership is here to stay – and there is a strong desire to help facilitate our mission. What's good for rice – is good for ducks.



A Message from Missouri NRCS

By Scott Edwards, State Conservationist

Change is the word to best describe 2020. Change in our own lives and routines, change in NRCS leadership, and change across the landscape. I have also embraced major change by switching ends of the field with Rice Stewardship, moving from Louisiana's Assistant State Conservationist for Programs to Missouri's new State Conservationist. Rice Stewardship has been the most successful partnership in my career, and I am glad to be part of its geniuses in south Louisiana. And today I am equally proud to be involved on the north end of rice country in the great state of Missouri.

First, a tribute to our past Missouri State Conservationist Mr. J.R. Flores, who served 35 years with the NRCS. J.R. was committed to helping people help the land through locally led cooperative conservation programs. He was a strong supporter of utilizing partnerships to maximize efforts in getting conservation on the ground. He was also committed to making the Rice Stewardship Partnership a multi-state success. J.R. had the honor of being the Dean of State Conservationist. This honor is held by the longest serving State Conservationist in the agency, 15 years straight in North Dakota and Missouri.

On a very somber note, we lost Mrs. Karen Brinkman on May 28th this year. Karen was the Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives and a great

supporter of Rice Stewardship. Her 25-year career was one of understanding leadership, mentoring, supervising and promoting the NRCS mission. Her work involved building partnerships with many related groups such as the Missouri Association of Soil and Water Districts, the Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Cattlemen, and Missouri Farm Bureau to name a few. Karen was a special person that was always moving forward at the speed of light looking for the next partnership. We are all better for knowing her and her conservation legacy will continue in Missouri for many years.

Speaking about change, Mother Teresa said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." Both J.R. and Karen made a lasting impact on the Rice Stewardship Partnership by supporting and adding capacity. My goal is to continue to harness the collective expertise and capacity to make a difference on the ground for producers in Missouri. I am proud to have been a part of Rice Stewardship from the beginning and look forward to future progress as your new Missouri NRCS State Conservationist.



CALEB AND CLAIR BRINKMAN CAREER FUND

To honor Karen Brinkman, close friends Tammy Teeter, Melinda Barch and Sarah Szachnieski have established the Caleb and Clair Brinkman Career Fund. This is an opportunity to support Karen's children and their future. The fund has been set up at the Jonesburg State Bank.

**FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING PLEASE
EMAIL- CALEBANDCLAIRECAREERFUND@GMAIL.COM
OR CALL TAMMY TEETER AT 314-630-0243.**

Delta Producer Profile



DEAN WALL, ARKANSAS RICE FARMER

The Wall Family

FARMING LEGACY IN GREENE COUNTY, AR

Dean Wall along with his brother and partner Steve Wall farm approximately 3,700 acres of rice, soybeans, corn and raise cattle in Greene County, Arkansas. Dean grew up farming with his father in the 1970's but decided to deviate from the family business in order to attend college. After graduation Dean began his career with Arkansas Farm Bureau where he worked for nearly 10 years. By the mid '90's Dean was inspired to return to the family farm, and along with his wife, son and daughter. No one has ever looked back.

Dean and his brother wanted to make sure that the farm made the best use of its natural resources. One of the most crucial resources for any Arkansas farmer is water and the Dean brothers wanted to make sure there was more than enough to go around. In 2018 Dean began working with field staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) and Rice Stewardship. Currently, the farm has three conservation contracts under the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) which will last through 2021. Through the partnership Dean was able to utilize enhancements including shallow water management, nutrient management, integrated pest management, and intermittent flooding of rice fields. Dean does an excellent job documenting the information that is needed to show practice completion. Wanting to be involved in all aspects of the operation, Dean even shares planting plans with the NRCS before the planting season begins each year to ensure all operations are in line.

One of the most useful conservation practices for Dean has been the installation of flow meters on irrigation wells. The amount of irrigation water used each year has opened Dean and Steve's eyes to more efficient water management practices. As Dean said, "We wish we had known about how useful these flow meters were years ago. These along with Delta Plastic's PipePlanner has helped with monitoring flow and pinpoint delivery of water in our rice crop". According to Adam Eades, NRCS district conservationist from Greene County, Dean is the first farmer to deploy Alternate Wetting and Drying irrigation in rice under a CSP contract in the county. Inspired by what they have learned from rice irrigation, Dean intends to install soil moisture sensors to add another layer of water conservation with his soybean rotations.

Wall's farm also has participated in the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement (WRICE) Program, where he managed fields for waterfowl habitat and allowed special draw hunts on weekends. Dean was instrumental in helping the Greene County with an Environmental Protection Agency 319 Grant for Poplar Creek watershed. He also works closely with University of Arkansas Rice Research and Extension Station and NRCS to host field days. In 2011 Dean and his brother Steve earned the Farm Family of the Year award.

Dean and Steve Wall show no signs of slowing down in their farming operation, conservation efforts, or desire to encourage others to be good stewards of the land. "What is good for rice, is good for ducks," Dean said. "And if it's good for ducks, it is good for all of us."

RiceTec Renews Commitment

TO RICE STEWARDSHIP

RiceTec, known for their innovation in hybrid rice seed and production technology, has renewed their support for the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership.

“RiceTec and DU are both focused on solutions for producers that lead to greater on-farm profits, and therefore a more sustainable rice industry,” said Dr. Brian Ottis, Director of Supply Management for RiceTec. “We helped support the launch of Rice Stewardship in 2014 and are proud to renew our commitment today with capacity support of \$150,000 through 2022.”

Special funding from RiceTec’s owners, the Royal Family of Liechtenstein and their Liechtenstein Global Trust Foundation, made this next sustainability chapter a reality.

RiceTec’s service areas and DU’s priority conservation landscapes are perfectly aligned across the Gulf Coastal Prairies and the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, two of the most critical wintering areas for waterfowl on the continent. Along the Gulf Coast, rice agriculture provides 42% of the food available to wintering dabbling ducks. RiceTec’s Smart Rice hybrids are the most sustainable rice seed available, producing a better bottom line by increasing yields, escaping disease pressure, and reducing input costs related to irrigation and energy.

“The overall advantage of RiceTec and Rice Stewardship working together is the increased staff capacity and breadth of knowledge for the actual rice producer,” said Dr. Scott Manley, Director of Conservation Programs for DU. “Our focus on conservation planning, energy efficiencies for irrigation



and maximizing participation in Farm Bill conservation programs, provides producers a full spectrum of solutions for conservation and greater profits.”

Both RiceTec and Rice Stewardship are answering the call for innovation in rice agriculture and providing a level of customer support that is second to none. What’s good for rice producers is good for waterfowl, which rely on these critical working wetlands to meet their habitat needs. To date more than 700,000 acres have been positively impacted by Rice Stewardship and close working partners like the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and RiceTec. A special thanks to the owners who understand the great value of working together toward a sustainable U.S. rice industry.

RiceTec Regional Sales Contact List:

D.J. SHIPMAN 870-273-9286 - SOUTHEAST MISSOURI & NORTHEAST ARKANSAS

JEFF REEVES 870-919-6944 - CENTRAL ARKANSAS

JEFF MOSLEY 662-719-1034 - SOUTHEAST ARKANSAS AND MISSISSIPPI

MARK SPILMAN 281-389-3527 - TEXAS AND LOUISIANA



JASON AND DYLAN BENOIT, RICETEC FARMERS IN SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

Nutrient Management Remains Pivotal

By Scott Manley, Ducks Unlimited &
Adam Herges, The Mosaic Company

IN GULF COAST RICE PRODUCTION

Nutrient Management & Gulf Coast Rice Production - By The Numbers

2019 RICE ACRES PLANTED - 500,000

TOTAL RICE STEWARDSHIP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT ACRES - 301,064

PRECISION PRACTICE ACRES FOR P, K, CA - 76,750

ADVANCED PRACTICE ACRES FOR N - 222,800

(TOTAL ACCUMULATED SINCE 2015 AND INCLUDES BASIC PRACTICES. MULTIPLE PRACTICES OFTEN OCCUR ON SAME ACRES.)

Rice Stewardship recognized early on that careful management of crop nutrients has big wins for both rice producers and the environment. Crop nutrients, or fertilizers, represent 25% of the annual input costs to grow rice. The industry's 4R Strategy – Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, and Right Place – captures the agronomic decisions made by producers every time fertilizer is applied. Rice Stewardship strives to assist producers with nutrient management with an eye toward strengthening the overall farm operation and protecting the surrounding environment.

Producers across the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Texas grow a little more than 500,000 acres of rice each year. Challenges are many including shallow coastal prairie soils, an average 5 feet of rain per year, high summer temperatures, and an important second, or ratoon crop, often needed to make ends meet. Under these conditions nutrient management could not be more important.

With 5 years' experience to reflect upon here is what our producers are telling us. For phosphorus, potassium, and several micro-nutrients like zinc, grid soil sampling at the 2.5-acre interval has been a big advantage in determining optimal fertilizer needs for specific areas within a field. This allows for fertilizer application rates within and across fields to be better suited to meet crop needs. Farmers have responded by utilizing "variable rate applications" that follow guidelines provided via grid soil sampling. Here producers are taking the "Right Rate" and

"Right Place" to heart. For nitrogen, producers are using an array of practices from pin-point timing of application, split applications, and pellet coatings slowing nitrogen loss to the atmosphere while improving plant uptake. Here "Right Time" is in play. These and other 4R strategies paired with conservation practices such as reduced tillage for erosion control are proving positive for producers along the Gulf Coast.

Recognizing the momentum that nutrient management has had across Gulf Coast rice production, the NRCS awarded Rice Stewardship with a RCPP Renewal. As explained by the NRCS, RCPP overall seeks the most compelling and innovative projects with robust partnerships that can substantially leverage NRCS investments. Renewals are reserved for the most successful projects that continue to present compelling approaches to addressing natural resource challenges. It's clear from the Rice Stewardship Partnership, our producers, and NRCS – 4R Nutrient Stewardship is here to stay.



**THE MOSAIC COMPANY
FOUNDATION**



Foundational Supporter of Rice Stewardship



Keith Latiolais, Rice Specialist



FROM WORKING WITH RICE FARMERS LIKE ROLANDO SANCHEZ FROM ST. LANDRY PARISH (RIGHT) TO HANDS-ON FIELD WORK, SUCH AS CHECKING THE FLOW ON AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM, KEITH IS READY TO HELP RICE FARMERS IN ANY WAY HE CAN.

Rice Stewardship

TRUSTED FIELD STAFF

By: Kyle Soileau,

Rice Stewardship Coordinator for Louisiana

Keith Latiolais is our longest tenured Rice Specialist who came aboard in May 2012. Based out of Ducks Unlimited's South Louisiana Field Office (Lafayette), Keith is one of several seasonal field staff who are the unsung heroes that have made Rice Stewardship a huge success. Keith is a dedicated employee, great decision maker, well respected, and has a great work ethic. He's one of our leaders in the battle to keep rice on the Louisiana landscape.

Keith is a native of Opelousas, Louisiana, and a graduate of Opelousas Catholic High School. Keith later attended the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and earned a degree in Agronomy in 1975. Over the next 36 years Keith worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in various positions such as a Soil Scientist, Soil Conservationist, and District Conservationist. Over his illustrious career Keith significantly contributed to soil, water, and other natural resource conservation efforts on private lands across Louisiana. Keith is recognized as the professor of conservation planning among his NRCS colleagues and conservation partners.

After retirement from NRCS in early 2012, Keith joined DU to help with the very geneses of Rice Stewardship in Louisiana. The first steps remain important today, and that is conservation planning and providing technical assistance to rice producers in central and southwest Louisiana. He is very effective at promoting conservation and encouraging producers to apply for conservation assistance through Farm Bill programs. He takes pride in helping farmers reduce production costs by increasing efficiency. When asked about his successes with Rice Stewardship, Keith said that he is "proud to have helped rice growers gain access to NRCS programs, help them with cash flow and a better bottomline, and better the environment." He has done an exemplary job over the past eight years and we trust he will continue his Rice Stewardship legacy long into the future.

When not working in the rice fields, Keith enjoys hunting, crawfishing, spending time with family, and attending his grandchildren's sporting events. He is also active in the community through his involvement with local water and drainage boards and assistance with youth education events. He can always be relied upon to be a volunteer judge for local soil, forestry, and other youth stewardship contests. Keith is a true trusted advisor to our rice producers and a key player for Rice Stewardship.



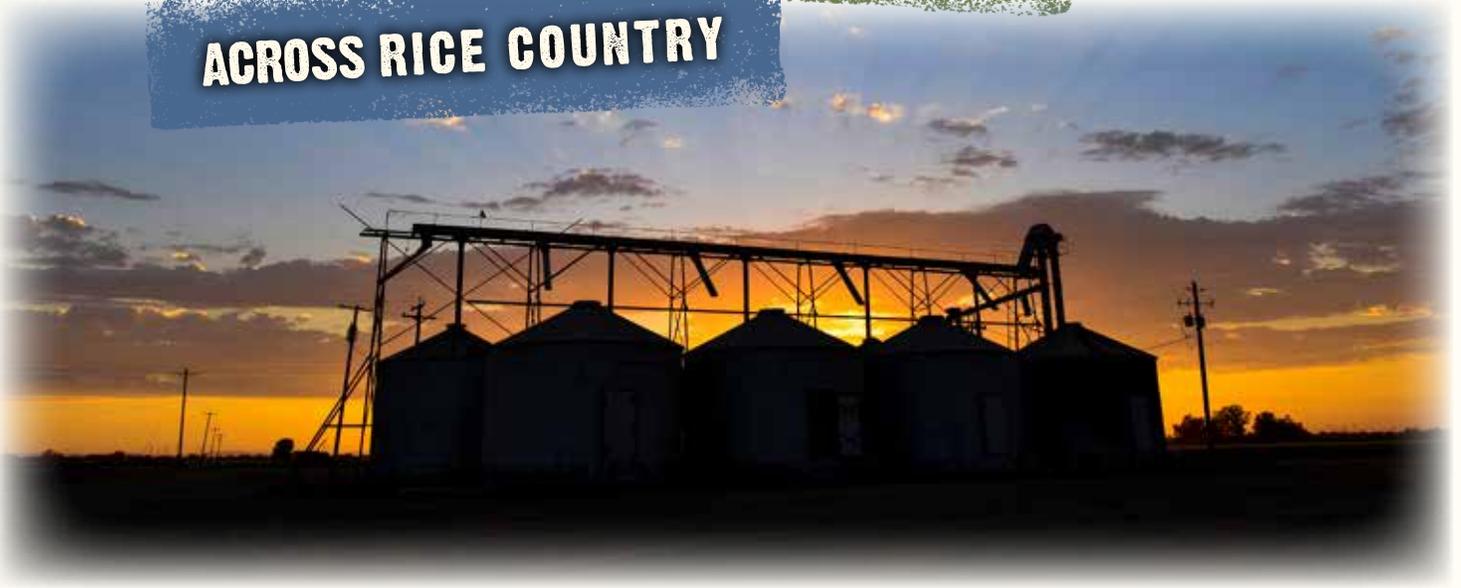
Entergy Offers

By Lana Lovich

Entergy eTech Program Manager

AGRICULTURE eTECH PROGRAM

ACROSS RICE COUNTRY



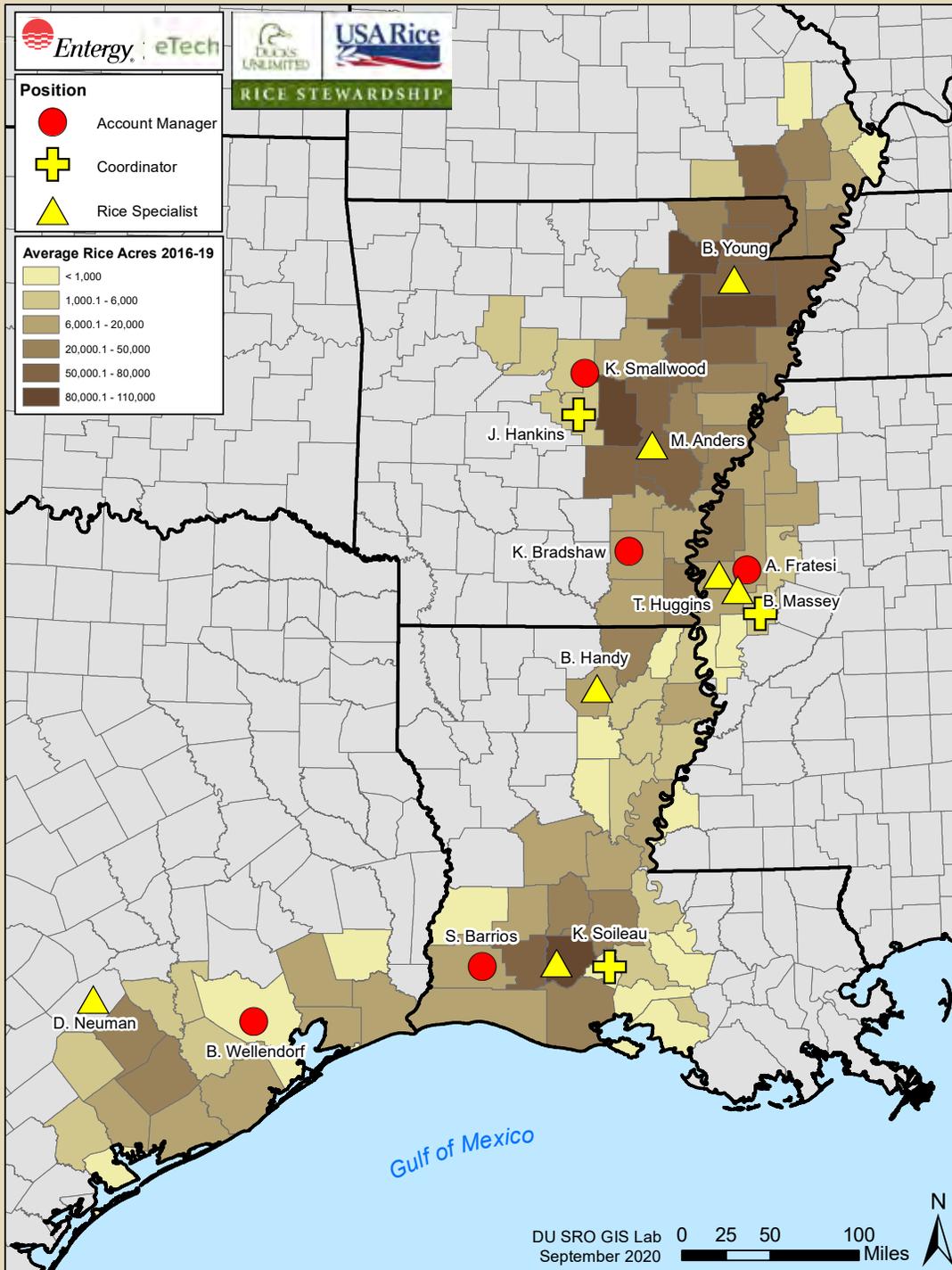
Entergy and Rice Stewardship share a big common goal, helping agricultural producers with their operations, with an eye toward improving their bottom-line. As the largest electric power production and retail distribution company across the rice-growing regions of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Gulf Coast, Entergy is a natural partner for Rice Stewardship and improving on-farm production and efficiency. In this year's annual report, we want to pave a path for more producer participants in Entergy's Agriculture eTech Program. Let us summarize our program offerings, and importantly, lead you to contacts who can help further explore opportunities on your farm.

Converting from diesel-powered to electric pumps to operate irrigation systems is one important way producers can lower operating costs, save money, and reduce on-farm management headaches. Entergy offers an array of technical and financial assistance to rice producers within our four-state service territory of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Notably, Entergy now has a streamlined process for well conversions and new well installations. Dedicated local field representatives will provide a no-cost onsite consultation and no-obligation cost estimate. We also provide producers an estimate of potential operational savings.

Producers have demonstrated keen interest in financial support for electric line extensions (lines, poles and transformers) serving both new irrigation wells and

diesel-to-electric pump conversions. However, electric line extensions may also be available for grain bins, cotton gins, or other facilities needing fuel or power source conversions. Program policies differ by state. For example, in Arkansas line extensions for the first quarter mile are provided to producers at no cost. In Louisiana, Entergy will cover the cost of the line extension up to four times the amount of the estimated annual revenue. For line extensions beyond the revenue justification credit, producers have options to pay the remaining cost upfront or through a charge added to their monthly bill. Many producers combine multiple wells into a single project to maximize line extension credits which makes larger projects feasible. Additionally, producers now have the capability to complete online service requests such as seasonal power turn on/turn off.

To best serve producers and their various needs, and to navigate state-by-state programmatic details, Entergy has dedicated field representatives stationed from northeast Arkansas to south Texas (See Contact Map and Information on Next Page). The Rice Stewardship team also stands ready to connect rice producers to Entergy-led programs as well as other conservation programs such as those led by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. We at Entergy are proud to be partnering with Rice Stewardship and committed to supporting livelihoods of agriculture producers across rice country.



Entergy Regional Field Representatives

KEITH SMALLWOOD 501-326-0200 - NORTH ARKANSAS

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Rice Stewardship Partnership and

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ON-FARM CONSERVATION PRACTICE ADOPTION

Agricultural conservation programs have long sought to help farmers with production goals, operational efficiencies, and natural resource conservation. Since 2013, USA Rice, Ducks Unlimited, NRCS, and many supply chain partners have worked with rice producers to manage irrigation water, crop nutrients, and wetland wildlife habitat through voluntary incentive-based conservation practices. However, it is not all that often that conservation program managers circle back and ask enrolled participants about their experiences and their intentions to adopt such conservation practices into the future.

The Rice Stewardship Partnership (RSP) along with researchers at the University of Arkansas' Division of Agriculture launched this study to understand how conservation practices in irrigation water management (IWM), nutrient management (NM), and wildlife habitat management (WHM) impacted participating producers. To kickstart the project, researchers met with partnership staff, NRCS, and a steering committee composed of leading rice producers, to create a shared vision of the project, and how to best accomplish the objectives. That shared vision was to: (1) broadly explore producers' motivations and barriers to conservation program enrollment, and various IWM, NM, and WHM practices; and (2) specifically gauge producers' intentions to continue or adopt these practices into the

future. To address these objectives, researchers went directly to 50 participants composing the first cohort of RSP conservation contracts, and through conversational interviews, asked these farmers about their operation's history, previous farming practices, their experience with IWM, NM, and WHM, and finally, their intention to continue or adopt their trialed agricultural conservation practices into the future.

Irrigation water management resonated well with many producers in the first cohort who cited benefits of financial assistance in purchasing and installing pump automation, telematics, and irrigation poly-pipe. Additionally, producers who tested innovative irrigation methods such as that of alternate wetting and drying (AWD), row rice, and multiple inlet irrigation found practices to be a little complex, with trial and error, but ultimately advantageous in water savings. For producers employing poly-pipe, programs like Pipe Planner and Phaucet were advantageous for more efficient irrigation, but this practice warranted more technical assistance than other IWM practices. To no surprise, the primary complaint with IWM was record keeping for rainfall, irrigation times, and energy use, with no obvious advantages to doing so. Advanced practices in IWM, although beneficial for on-farm efficiency, were also complex, and the initial incentives for infrastructure was often not enough to sustain long-term upkeep of innovative technologies such as soil moisture sensors, surge valve controllers, and pump automation. Despite complexities and learning curves 84% of participants said they would continue IWM practices on equal or more acres as compared to their RSP conservation contract.

Nutrient management was the most favorable and progressive practice for participants in the first cohort. Producers noted compatibility with current on-farm operations and additional knowledge to maximize nutrient inputs. Financial benefits such as cost savings were not at the forefront for most participants, rather the advantage of producing a more uniform crop was prominent throughout the interviews. Practices under the 4R's of nutrient stewardship such as basic soil testing, grid sampling, and variable rate applications were deemed compatible,



advantageous, and clearly visible within farm operations. Participants also valued technical assistance to help overlay soil test results with yield maps. Challenges noted were difficulty in taking soil samples due to wet weather and availability of variable rate application equipment and services when time was of the essence. Of the forty-five participants enrolled in NM 87% intend to continue with 53% moving to whole-farm adoption (Fig. 2).

Holding shallow water for WHM was compatible with producer operations, as many cited winter flooding for personal or leased waterfowl hunting opportunities, and for crawfish production in south Louisiana. The most frequently identified advantage was the ability to flood more acres with added financial assistance. Participants also identified advantages in winter weed suppression by holding water throughout the winter months. Wildlife benefits were common as well, and not just migratory waterfowl, as some participants cited other wetland dependent species such as bald eagles, shorebirds, snakes, and even alligators making their homes in rice fields. Although the WHM was compatible, many participants also identified complexities in flood dates, often citing fall dates interfering with field preparation, or ratoon harvest in more southern latitudes, and spring dates interfering with planting operations. Of the participants in WHM 81% intend to continue these practices on the same or more acres in the future. Again, the financial incentive was deemed important to assure more acres are managed into the future.

So, what are the most important lessons learned from this first group of 50 Rice Stewardship participants? Interviews revealed that future RSP programs should continue pushing innovative methodologies that increase on-farm efficiency in IWM (and related energy use) and NM, which together make up 50% of the annual production costs for an acre of rice, and also have room for environmental gains. Participants generally viewed these suites of practices as being advantageous, compatible, and simple enough to implement. Although a lot of emphasis is placed on financial assistance, RSP staff should not overlook the power of technical assistance, as many producers appeared to be very close with their RSP staff contacts and valued their perspectives when using new, and sometimes unknown methodologies. Agricultural producers may rarely reach out and ask for help but will rarely turn away another trained set of eyes to study their operation. Proactive technical assistance is important. Financial backing will be needed to significantly expand wildlife habitat acres. Lastly, technical assistance needs to be readily available for measuring and reporting the on-farm impacts of conservation practices to show how increased adoption can accrue even greater efficiencies, environmental gains, and trends to a better bottom line over time.

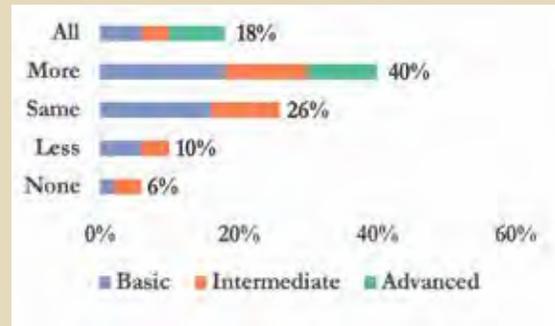


Figure 1. Producer intentions to adopt irrigation water management practices compared to their conservation contract.

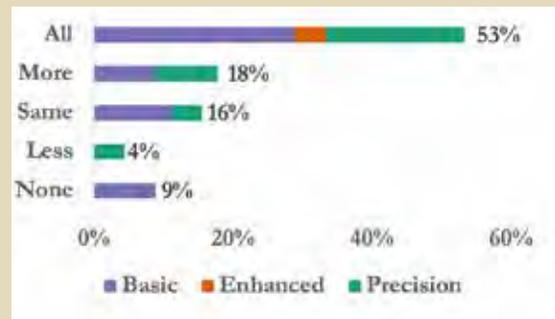


Figure 2. Producer intentions to adopt nutrient management practices compared to their conservation contract.

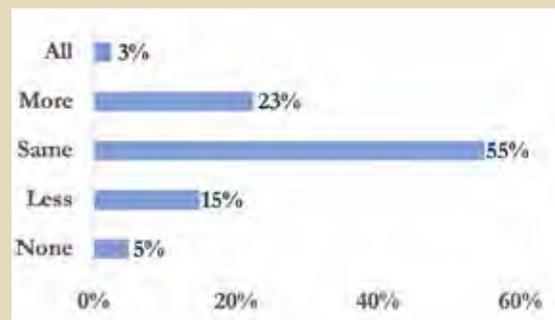


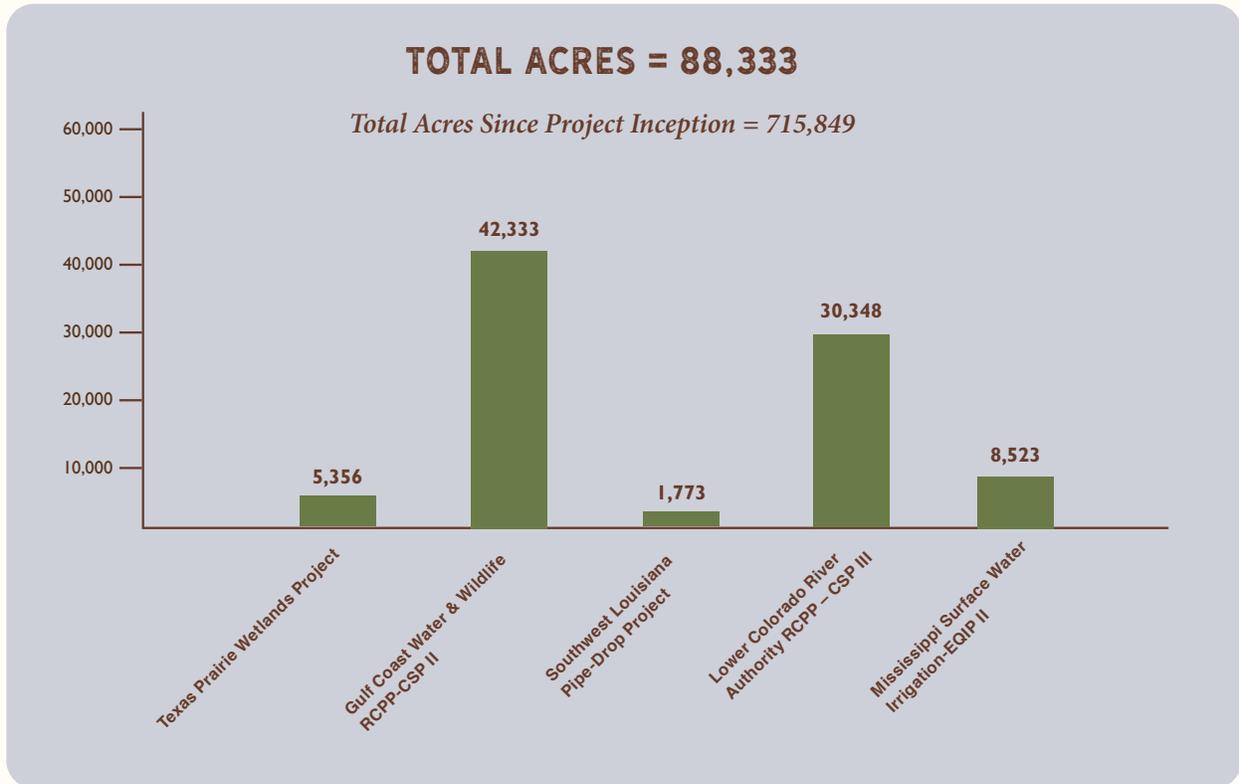
Figure 3. Producer intentions to adopt wildlife habitat management practices compared to their conservation contract.

Financials

2019 - 2020

RICE ACRES IMPACTED

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020



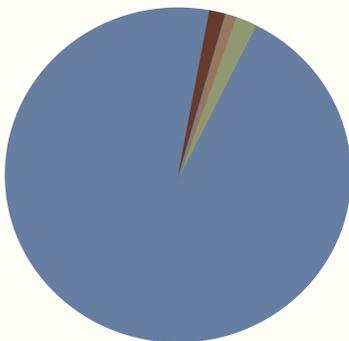
RCPP = Regional Conservation Partnership Program EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentive Program CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

(July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

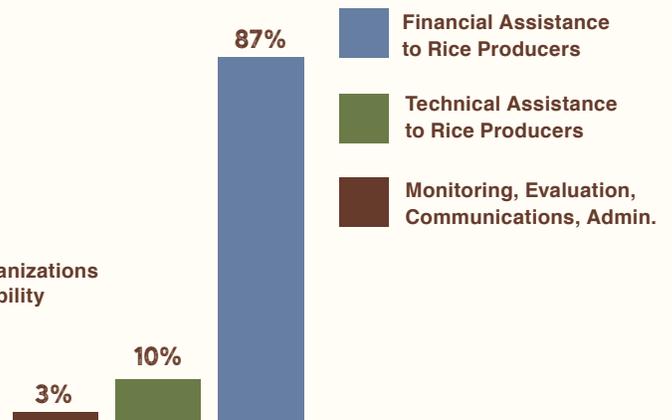
\$19 MILLION

SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND REVENUE:



- 89% USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- 4% Federal/State Wildlife Agencies
- 2% Foundations & Conservation Organizations Supporting Agricultural Sustainability
- 5% Rice Supply-Chain Corporations

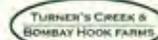
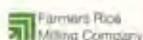
WHERE THE MONEY GOES



Financial reporting does not include in-kind contributions of time and talent.

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**WE SINCERELY APPRECIATE THE TIME AND TALENT OFFERED BY SO MANY IN-KIND SUPPORTERS,
WITHOUT WHOM, RICE STEWARDSHIP COULD NOT BE SUCH A SUCCESS.**

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Arkansas Farm Bureau
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Arkansas Rice Federation
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Bay City Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture
Bunge North America
California Rice Commission
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Central Valley Joint Venture
Chambers Liberty County Navigation
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Texas A&M Wintermann Rice Research Station
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
Texas Rice Producers - CWIC
Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group
Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board
Texas Water Resources Institute
The Climate Trust
The Landscape Flux Group
The Rice Foundation
Unilever
USA Rice Council
USA Rice Farmers
USA Rice Merchants' Assn.
USA Rice Millers' Assn.
Wharton County SWCD
White River Irrigation District
Yellow Rails and Rice Festival*



Nestlé PURINA

"FARM FAMILIES LIKE THE WAGNERS IN MISSISSIPPI, AND MANY OTHERS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, WANT TO LEAVE THE LAND A BETTER PLACE THAN THEY FOUND IT. NESTLÉ PURINA AND DUCKS UNLIMITED SHARE THAT SAME MISSION. NESTLÉ PURINA IS PROUD TO SUPPORT FARM FAMILIES THROUGH PROGRAMS LIKE THE RICE STEWARDSHIP PARTNERSHIP. THROUGH THESE PROGRAMS, PURINA, DU, AND MANY OTHER PARTNERS ARE WORKING CLOSELY WITH FARMERS TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP ACHIEVE OUR SHARED OBJECTIVE OF GROWING CROPS IN A HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE WAY".

Diane Herndon, Senior Manager, Sustainability North America, Purina



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