



Fall 2011



From the President
Drenda Williams

As the 2011 fiscal year comes to a close, I am proud of The Organization's accomplishments. We partnered with Minority Landowner Magazine to provide landowner surveys to minority farmers on how The Organization can better assist our landowners nationwide. In several states, Organization members serve as advisors to the Minorities in Agriculture and Natural Resources and Related Sciences at various colleges and universities. Our efforts support our mission and objectives.

While we have progressed overall, NRCS is going through challenges that have impacted the Organization, and we've had to make some tough decisions. Unfortunately we had to cancel the FY 2011 training conference. However, a task force that includes Past Presidents, Regional Representatives, and Executive Board members from all the employee organizations has been created to recommend alternative training solutions. Their recommendations will help us develop new strategies on how to deliver training with limited financial support. These strategies will provide a new way to deliver training with the same quality as the past training conferences.

The Executive Board is also working to finalize a strategic plan to address the challenges of the past, present and future in order to fulfill its mission and successfully serve its members. Our strategic plan will result in the development of direction, creation of a rationale for decision-making, and a concrete definition of success. Elements of our strategic plan include: confirmation of the mission and vision of The Organization; determination of the core values; and determination of strategic initiatives that are critical to realizing the mission, vision, and core values of The Organization. Once the strategic plan is finalized, an implementation plan will be developed to carry out its initiatives and activities. We are confident that if properly executed, this strategic plan would enable the current Executive board to galvanize the membership, improve The Organization's financial standing, cultivate relevant relationships, and subsequently grow the membership. I will announce the final strategic plan on the "members only" portion of the Organization website.

I am committed to serving each and every one of you and I look forward to continued growth of and within The Organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Drenda Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Drenda Williams
President NOPBNRCSE

Mentoring Employees for Success

By Jolene Lau, Hawaii

The National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees' annual conference has been postponed due to budget considerations. Chief Dave White has requested that employee organizations postpone their annual conferences until later this fiscal year because NRCS has yet to receive its fiscal year 2011 budget. In addition, the federal government is operating under a continued resolution as Congress wrestles with passing budgets for federal departments, including USDA.

After several discussions with NRCS leadership, The Organization's Executive Board felt it was in the best interest of our members to postpone the conference until the agency obtains its budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2011.

This was not an easy decision for the Executive Board. Members of the Executive Board and the Conference Planning Committee have expressed their regrets for any inconvenience a postponement may have caused our members, supporters, speakers and conference participants. We have been proactive and diligent in ensuring that the next planned conference will stay on track. We have contacted speakers and presenters regarding the next steps. We also have made every effort to contact Organization members to inform them of our progress regarding our upcoming conference.

The Executive Board will keep all members informed as we work toward establishing a new date for this year's conference. We will work proactively and professionally with agency leadership as we wait for a budget resolution.

Chief Dave White said in a letter to all the employee organizations that he supports professional development and training. He said he is looking forward to participating in all planned training conferences once Congress has passed USDA's budget for fiscal year 2011.

The President and Executive Board appreciate your patience and understanding in this unfortunate situation. Please visit our Web site at www.nopbnrcse.org and look out for our E-Link for the latest information.

Website Update

By Cara Clark, Illinois

The Organization's main website and the membership website will soon merge as one! After the transfer you will no longer need to worry about going to two different sites (*NOPBNRCSE main website or the Membership websites*). Our website address will remain the same www.nopbnrcse.org.

Members as well as non-members will have access to The Organizations latest news, directories, announcements and other general information. However, members should periodically "login" to view your "Members Only" site. This site will house information specific to the internal affairs of The Organization such as our Constitution and By-laws and Strategic Plan. All web updates will be posted in a timely manner.

Organization Board Member Named State Conservationist

By Sylvia Rainford, NHQ

Keisha Brown Tatem has honed her leadership skills over the years in preparation for major accomplishments. When the State Conservationist position in Arizona was announced, Tatem knew she was ready.

She applied for the position and was selected this summer. Her selection elevated her to becoming Arizona's first female African-American State Conservationist and the third in the nation. The other two female African-American state conservationists are South Carolina's State Conservationist Ann English and Lillian Woods, who served as West Virginia's State Conservationist several years ago.



The Virginia native is no stranger to leadership. As the current parliamentarian for The Organization, Tatem serves on its Executive Board and ensures the board follows proper parliamentary procedures during its meetings. She is a Lifetime member of The Organization.

During the past 15 years, Tatem has held leadership positions in various high-profile organizations. Her career with NRCS has been just as impressive. She served as district conservationist in Virginia and Florida; Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in southeastern Pennsylvania and as acting State Conservationist in South Carolina in 2010. Recently, she was selected for the USDA Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program.

Prior to her selection as state conservationist in Arizona, she served as a Natural Resources Specialist on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program team in National Headquarters. In that position, she had direct involvement in the daily operations of NRCS's largest conservation program and worked with other team members to ensure its success.

During her career, Tatem sought out co-lateral assignments to improve agency operations and program delivery, including the state advisory teams for Civil Rights and the Field Office Technical Guide, National Audit Strategy Team, National Workforce Planning Core Team and USDA/Bureau of Indian Affairs Land Committee. She has earned numerous honors and awards for her outstanding performance and leadership.

Let's Hear All About It!

Would you like to share highlights about your NOPBNRCSE Chapter? Do you have an important announcement regarding your NOPB committee? If there is something you'd like to share with Organization members and friends, please let us help you. Send your updates and highlights to news.nopbnrcse@gmail.com for inclusion in the next scheduled eLink. Updates are accepted continuously.

A Tribute to an African-American Pioneer:

First Black Soil Conservationist

By Sylvia Rainford, NHQ

John M. Jones of Bahama, North Carolina, accomplished a major milestone during his life when he became the first Black soil conservationist hired in North Carolina. He is among the early African-American soil conservationists hired by the Soil Conservation Service nationwide.

Jones' life story is intriguing and inspiring. He graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Agriculture from North Carolina A&T State University in 1938. After graduation, he worked as a principal at Rocky Knoll School, a Rosenwald three-room school in Durham County, NC. In addition to being the principal, he also taught the 5th, 6th and 7th grades at the school for seven months each year. The Julius Rosenwald Fund was created to improve the quality of public education for African Americans in the South in the early 20th century. Tuskegee Institute administered the fund at the time.

Jones eventually left his job as a principal and worked at Fort Bragg. While employed at Fort Bragg, he saw a notice for a soil conservationist position with the Soil Conservation Service. After he applied for the soil conservationist position, he received a telegram from Washington, D.C. asking him to go to an interview at the agency's regional office in Spartanburg, SC. He was later offered a position at the Brown Creek Conservation District in Wadesboro, NC, home of SCS's first Chief Hugh Hammond Bennett.

The Brown Creek Soil Conservation District was the first district organized in the nation. Jones said he knew Chief Bennett and saw him several times when Bennett visited his North Carolina home.

SCS hired graduates, like Jones, from 1890 schools to work with black landowners. However, his office was not located with the other SCS field staff. He shared an office with the black extension agent and he was only allowed to work with black farmers. He also worked two days a week in Richmond County.

Jones interrupted his professional career to serve in the Army Air Corps in World War II after he was drafted. After completing his military service, he attended graduate school for only one quarter because of financial reasons. He returned to his soil conservationist position in Wadesboro and remained there for 20 years. He then transferred to Fayetteville, NC where he received a certificate of merit in 1970 for superior performance. He retired in 1973 as a soil conservationist.

"We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Mr. Jones -- more than many of us will ever know. Our collective thanks for everything he endured for all present and future SCS/NRCS Black employees," said Bill Hunt, Retired MN NRCS State Conservationist, Past Nat'l President, and Life Member of The Organization.

Jones, 96, passed away this spring in his home state. He is survived by Mattie, his wife of 67 years, and a son and daughter. The Organization salutes a true pioneer.

