

# Hoosier Headlines

Issue 80

February 2020

2016 All Employee Meeting Group Photo

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## Heart to Heart with RAYNOR

I'm looking forward to spending time with my NRCS family and our incredible partnership employees at our upcoming All Employee Partnership meeting on May 14th. We anticipate 350 people attending, this will be a great opportunity to highlight the past accomplishments of the Indiana Conservation Partnership and say "thank you" for all that you've done. Make sure to mark your calendars and keep an eye out for email updates.



*Jerry Raynor,  
Indiana State Conservationist*

I'd like to thank everyone that assisted with this year's IASWCD Annual Conference exhibit. With Conservation Client Gateway (CCG) as our main focus, our exhibit provided an opportunity for landowners to sign up for CCG during the conference. In only ten hours our staff was able to assist 15 landowners with their CCG account. This was an excellent showing and has opened up additional opportunities for future events. Special thanks to Jennifer Chen for spearheading this event and all of the NRCS staff that assisted with the booth.

Our farmers are dedicated to feeding a growing world population. This dedication is equaled only by their commitment to protecting the land that makes it possible. Farmers across the country live by this commitment every day. As stewards of a healthy planet, they care for the soil, their animals and the crops that provide us food, fuel and clothes. March 24th is National Ag Day, a time when producers, agricultural associations, corporations, universities, government agencies and countless others across America gather to recognize and celebrate the abundance provided by American agriculture. Join us in celebrating Ag Day by telling our conservation stories and helping spread NRCS' goal of "helping people help the land."

This year we were honored to have one of our Earth Team Volunteer groups win the FY19 National Partnership award. This prestigious award is presented by the National NRCS Office to the most effective volunteer partnership that demonstrates shared leadership among the partnering organization, NRCS employees and Earth Team volunteers. This year's national partnership award goes to the Indiana Conservation Partnership for their collaborative efforts in completing county tillage transects. The Indiana Conservation Partnership competed against groups from all 50 states and demonstrated the extraordinary efforts that volunteer conservation partnerships are capable of accomplishing. This group was presented their award at this year's NACD National Conference.

## Sign Up

Sign up to receive information on specific Indiana NRCS topics directly to your e-mail! Simply click on the [GovDelivery](#) link, provide your e-mail address, and pick the Indiana topics you'd like to learn more about.

Need help signing up? No problem! Contact Kris Vance at: [kris.vance@usda.gov](mailto:kris.vance@usda.gov) for assistance or to learn more about GovDelivery.

# Employee Spotlight

## RUSS SPARKS, SE Farm Bill Program Support Specialist

**Q: As one of the newest NRCS employees, please help us get to know you better. Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

I grew up on a family farm near Shirley, Indiana, and still help when I can. We currently have about 1,200 acres of corn and soybeans, and about 50 head of cattle. We've also raised hogs and goats. We are proud to have received the Hoosier Homestead Award for over 100 years of family farm ownership.

Agriculture has always been a part of my life. I showed hogs for 10 years in 4-H and was in FFA for 4 years. Going to Purdue for a degree in agriculture seemed like a no-brainer. I graduated in 2016 with a degree in Agronomic Business and Marketing.

**Q: How did you become interested in conservation?**

Coming from a farming background, conserving our natural resources for the future has always been important to me. I didn't really consider conservation as a career choice until I graduated from college and realized that selling equipment, seed, or other ag-related products didn't really interest me. Conservation seems like a better way to make a lasting impact and leave me with something to look back on with pride.

**Q: Where did you work and what did you do before coming to Indiana NRCS?**

I was fortunate to work for the Shelby County Soil and Water Conservation District as a resource specialist for nearly three years before joining NRCS. I focused on CRP, HEL determinations, and reviewing stormwater pollution prevention plans for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.



*Russ Sparks,  
Farm Bill Program Support Specialist*

**Q: How did your past work experience prepare you for your current position with NRCS?**

As a member of the Indiana Conservation Partnership, I was able to learn about USDA programs and business tools before joining NRCS. While my role is more administrative than technical, the experience should make for a smooth transition into my new role as a Farm Bill Program Specialist. I've also had the chance to work with some of our producers in Rush and Shelby counties, improving my customer service abilities.

**Q: What are you looking forward to most in your position?**

In the short term, I'm looking forward to meeting everyone and building relationships. In the long term, I'm looking forward to the years ahead with endless possibilities.

**Q: When you aren't working for NRCS, what do you like to do in your spare time?**

I enjoy reading, writing, and gaming. I also spend a lot of time keeping up with geopolitics and current affairs.

**Q: Do you have any professional or personal goals for 2020?**

My goal is to become an apprentice conservation planner this year. I think that I want to move into a planning focused role in the future, and would like to get a head start on it.

*Welcome to Indiana  
NRCS, Russ!*

# Southeast Day of Giving Thanks

Submitted by Casie Auxier, SE Area Field Office Assistant

The SE Area NRCS employees along with Partnership staff met on December 11, 2019, for an Area Appreciation Meeting at the Jennings County Fairgrounds in North Vernon. The theme of the meeting was "A Day of Giving Thanks" for all the work that has been completed in 2019 by partnership staff.

Darrell Nicholson, Area Conservationist, provided a lunch for all present and the area staff served the meal.

At the beginning of the meeting each employee received a piece of blue paper to anonymously wrote down any concerns they might have for fiscal year 2020 and the yellow sheet to give shout-outs to other employees or situations that have brought a smile to their face this past year. Seventy shout-outs were given, and forty-eight concerns were discussed.

Overall, the meeting was greatly appreciated and enjoyed by those who attended.



SE Area Office staff serve food to all of the partnership employees. (left to right): Ben Zuercher, Karen Hauer, Shasta Woodard, Casie Auxier, and Denise Held.



Southeast NRCS staff enjoying their "Day of Giving" meal and networking with partnership staff.

## Kudos to...

**Congratulations to Sara Day, Candace Kindt, Arelys Ortiz, and Thomas Perkins** on earning their Indiana Certified Planner designations. - Submitted by **Jennifer Chen, Resource Specialist**.

**Brian Musser, District Conservationist** in the Decatur Field Office for all his work in developing the SW Soil Health trailer request form. This form will allow NRCS offices and SWCDs to request the use of the trailer with direct submission to the soil health team. With all of his normal busy workload, Brian was willing to assist another team with his ability. - Submitted by **Don Donovan, SW Soil Health Team Leader**.

**Jennifer Chen, Resources Specialist**, for providing Conservation Desktop training to the northwest area employees. She came when she wasn't feeling well and did a great job. We are thankful for her expertise. - Submitted by **Danielle Waldschmidt, NW Area Conservationist**

## Voluntary Leave Transfer Program

Under the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP), a covered employee may donate annual leave directly to another employee who has a personal or family medical emergency and who has exhausted his or her available paid leave. There is no limit on the amount of donated annual leave a leave recipient may receive from the leave donor(s). However, any unused donated leave must be returned to the leave donor(s) when the medical emergency ends. An employee may participate concurrently in both the VLTP and the Voluntary Leave Bank Program, if available.

To donate leave, please follow the steps below:

- Leave donations are submitted through WebTA
- From the employee main menu select "Leave Donations"
- From LTP Donations select "Add Donation"
- Click on "Search LTP Account"
- Type in leave recipient's name and hit "Search"
- Hit "Select"
- Type of leave is automatically shown as 61-Donated Annual Leave
- Input the number of hours you wish to donate
- Search accounting that is associated with your division/section
- Hit "Save"

For more information about the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program or how to request leave, please contact your supervisor.

# Retiree Roundup

Submitted by Jane Hardisty, SCS/NRCS Retirees State Representative

We would like to highlight our newest retirees every issue with a photo of them in the field. This month we are excited to have more new retirees joining the retiree family. At this time they include Becky Fletcher, Fred Glover, Mike Wigginton, Amy Lybarger and we have always considered Karen Faith as part of the NRCS family. We wish them the best in retirement and their next adventures.



*Top left: Fred Glover  
Top center: Mike Wigginton  
Top right: Amy Lybarger  
Bottom left: Karen Faith  
Bottom right: Becky Fletcher*

## Partnership Websites

IN Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Bi-Weekly Updates: <http://iaswcd.org/news/newsletter/>

IN Conservation Partnership: <http://icp.iaswcd.org>

IN Dept. of Environmental Management: [www.in.gov/idem](http://www.in.gov/idem)

IN Dept. of Natural Resources: [www.in.gov/dnr](http://www.in.gov/dnr)

IN State Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation: <http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/>

Purdue Cooperative Extension Service: <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/>

USDA Farm Service Agency: [www.in.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.in.fsa.usda.gov)

# Personnel Updates

## SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jason Conner, District Conservationist at Fowler; effective 3-1-20.  
 Warren Hammac, District Conservationist at Petersburg; effective 3-1-20.  
 Daniel Porter, Administrative Assistant at Indianapolis; effective 2-2-20.  
 Thomas Blakeslee, Administrative Assistant at Vincennes; effective 2-2-20.  
 William Sparks, Farm Bill Program Assistant at Greensburg; effective 1-19-20.  
 Cheri Worley, Farm Bill Program Assistant at Greencastle; effective 1-5-20

## TRANSFER

Denise Held, Transfer to Department of Navy; effective January 19, 2020.

## RESIGNATION

Candice Kindt, Resignation; effective January 18, 2020.

## Indiana NRCS Historical Photo - 2016 All Employee Meeting



Members of the Indiana Conservation Partnership are preparing to feed all 350+ attendees during the 2016 All Employee Meeting.

Please mark your calendars and join us on May 14, 2020 at the Hendricks County Fairgrounds for the 2020 All Employee Meeting where we will celebrate the great conservation partnership we have in Indiana.

## Mark Your Calenders

### FEBRUARY

- 18: Area Conservationist Meeting
- 19: Leadership Team Meeting
- 20: Supervisor Training
- 25: Northwest Area Meeting
- 26: Southwest Area Meeting
- 27: IFEC Meeting
- 28: Black History Month Luncheon

### MARCH

- 3: Northeast Area Meeting
- 4: SAC/FAC Meeting

### MARCH Continued

- 11: Southeast Area Meeting
- 17: State Soil Conservation Board Meeting
- 18: Leadership Team Meeting
- 24: Northwest Area Meeting
- 25: Southwest Area Meeting

### APRIL

- 1: SAC/FAC Meeting
- 7: Northeast Area Meeting
- 8: Southeast Area Meeting
- 15: Leadership Team Meeting