

# 2003 Rhode Island Natural Resources Conservation Service Highlights



*Serving Rhode Island  
Through Conservation*



*Working hand-in-hand  
with conservation partners  
and Rhode Island's  
farmers and landowners  
to conserve natural resources  
on private lands*



## A message to the people of Rhode Island from Judith M. Doerner

Dear Rhode Islanders,

I proudly present some highlights of the 2003 accomplishments of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to you, as shareholders in Rhode Island's natural resources.

Our successes this year can be attributed to two factors: (1) Rhode Island's private landowners continue to be willing to improve and enhance the stewardship of their land and water resources, and (2) Through the 2002 farm bill, Congress authorized and appropriated significant increases in funding of conservation programs through which cost share and technical assistance were provided to willing landowners to conserve their soil, water, air, plant and animal resources. In Rhode Island, landowners had access to over \$1.4 million more in cost share assistance than in 2002. These funding levels are translating directly into hundreds of acres of improved upland and coastal wildlife habitat, grazing and grasslands, wetlands, irrigation efficiency, and a decreased amount of soil erosion which contributes sediments, nutrients and pesticides to our state's rivers, streams and Narragansett Bay.

These strides are possible because of landowner commitment and assistance received from a broad based conservation partnership consisting of NRCS, Rhode Island conservation districts, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, USDA Farm Services Agency, other State and Federal agencies, land trusts, farm and environmental groups, watershed and neighborhood organizations, the Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Council and a host of others.



**Judith M. Doerner**  
 State Conservationist

## NRCS Mission

*The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Rhode Island is to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment.*

# NRCS, Working for People, Communities, and Resources

*Our Employees Are Our Strength!*

## Who is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)?

NRCS is the lead conservation agency for the United States Department of Agriculture. NRCS conservationists work with private landowners and provide them with technical and financial assistance to sustain and improve the natural resources in Rhode Island. NRCS emphasizes voluntary, science-based, conservation technical assistance partnerships; incentive-based programs; and cooperative problem solving at the community level. NRCS is a non-regulatory agency.

## Who is our workforce?

*Dedicated employees who are:*

- Highly skilled in many scientific and technical fields, including soil science, soil conservation, agronomy, biology, forestry, engineering, geology, hydrology, wetland science, cultural resources, and economics, to name just a few
- Committed to helping landowners conserve resources
- Committed to diversity and the wealth of new ideas that diversity brings



## Who are our clients?

- |                          |                                      |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ Farmers                | ■ Local, State, and Federal agencies | ■ Private landowners     |
| ■ American Indian Tribes | ■ Rural and urban communities        | ■ Conservation Districts |

## Conserving Natural Resources

A foundation of NRCS work in Rhode Island is providing technical assistance to agricultural landusers. This assistance can be in the form of a one-time site visit to provide information on a specific issue. More commonly, it involves long-term efforts to help farmers improve and sustain the natural resources throughout their farm. Through our assistance, farmers install conservation practices that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, enhance forestlands, wetlands, grazing lands and wildlife habitat, and assure the sustainability of their farms.

### Saving Water

George Goulart, owner of Franlart Nursery in Little Compton, received technical assistance from NRCS to replace an existing irrigation mainline. The aging lead and iron pipeline system was replaced with an efficient 3350 foot polyethylene irrigation mainline. Goulart hand waters his plants or uses drip irrigation, dependent upon the type of plant. The installation of the new pipe resulted in a net water savings of 30-40%. Goulart, with the assistance of NRCS's Agriculture Management Assistance (AMA) program, also installed wildlife fencing. Many deer were feasting on his seedlings and the tops of larger bushes and trees, impeding their growth. The fencing proved very successful by keeping all deer at bay.

Goulart and his family were dairy farmers until the mid-eighties, when they accepted the government dairy



buy-out. After the buy-out, the Goularts debated selling the land for a housing development, but decided against that. They could not get farming out of their blood! Instead they turned their 80 acre dairy farm into a nursery. It took a while to establish the nursery but, through perseverance, they now have a very successful nursery business.

George Goulart (middle in photo) received the distinguished *Cooperator of the Year* award from the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District at their annual meeting in November. When George came up to receive the award he immediately addressed his father by saying, "First of all, this award should go to my Dad. He has taught me all I know, and without him, I would not be receiving this award." It was a touching moment for all who were present.



## Improving Water Quality

The Bellucci Farm project is another example of the technical assistance NRCS provided in 2003. NRCS designed and oversaw the installation of a heavy use area protection facility to serve as a concrete loafing area for the 100 hogs on this farm. The concrete pad prevents the hogs from wallowing in the mud and causing water quality problems and enables the farmer to scrape and clean the area prior to rainfall events. The hogs are completely contained in the area; half the area is roofed to protect the hogs from inclement weather. The farm utilizes furrowing pens that contain computerized heating controls and ventilation systems. The waste collected from the furrowing operation is pumped into a disposal system where it is pumped periodically by a waste hauler. Other planned practices on the Bellucci Farm include; a waste storage facility, a waste treatment strip and a roof run-off management system. These practices will be installed in the near future and will further enhance the farmer's ability to effectively manage the hog manure and prevent water quality degradation. The farm is located in the town of Foster and encompasses eight acres.



## Preserving Farmlands

### Protecting Land and Water Quality

Craig Totten, former-chef-turned-organic-farmer and owner of the Greenview Farm in South Kingstown, knows how precious farmland is in Rhode Island. The South Kingstown Land Trust and the Town of South Kingstown, through the Town's Open Space Bond Fund and the USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), bought the development rights to the Greenview Farm this year, hence, all are now assured that the 13 acre Greenview Farm will forever be protected as farmland. By selling the development rights to his farm, Totten is financially able to continue to farm and grow his organic vegetables. The Greenview Farm is in a water supply wellhead protection area. Thus, in addition to protecting the land and its scenic vistas from development, Totten is helping to protect water quality.

Totten established the Greenview Farm six years ago, has five acres in production, and plans to add more acres next year. He grows everything from the common to the exotic. Totten credits his healthy crops to the well-drained soils on his farm and the quality of the water. He said, "It drains and holds moisture. That's the

secret. The better the soil, the easier your job is." Totten does not sell wholesale items; instead, customers purchase harvest shares for 21 weeks and are entitled to a weekly combination of vegetables that are picked fresh every week. This practice, commonly known as Community Supported Agriculture, lets Totten plan and budget his operation in an economically sustainable manner, while the community benefits by being able to buy fresh local organically grown vegetables.



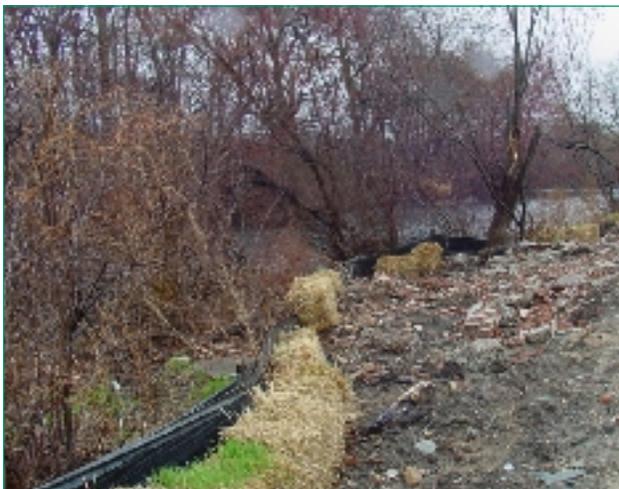
## Restoring Wildlife Habitats

### Riverside Mills - Partnering Makes Things Happen!

NRCS was nominated by the American Heritage Rivers Program as the Federal “champion” agency to implement the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Restoration Initiative. In 2003, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the University of Rhode Island completed a wetland restoration plan for the watershed, identifying over 300 potential wetland and riparian restoration sites. To kick off these efforts, the Riverside Mills Riparian Restoration Project was selected by NRCS for funding through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

The Riverside Mills project represents a unique opportunity to restore important riverine habitat and support urban river revitalization. The project is located at historic Riverside Mills in Olneyville and is in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the State. The mill site was once an active woolen mill, dating back to 1863. In the twentieth century the mill complex fell into disuse as the manufacturing sector declined in New England. Like many urban rivers, the industrial legacy of this site resulted in significant soil contamination. The site is now being cleaned-up by the Army Corps of Engineers and US EPA.

As part of the WHIP project, a 2 acre area between a bike path currently under construction and the river is being restored to flood plain wetland forest and riparian buffer habitat. An aging stone floodwall that forms the hardened edge of the river channel will be removed, resulting in 300 feet of streambank restoration. Approximately 10 acres of riparian corridor and wildlife habitat will directly benefit from the project. The design and permitting is anticipated to be complete this winter and restoration component installation will begin in the Spring of 2004.



*Riparian Restoration Area*



*Stream Bank Restoration Area*

The project represents a unique significant opportunity to demonstrate the benefits that can result from enhancing and restoring riverine habitats in a severely economically disadvantaged community. Redevelopment efforts along the Woonasquatucket are working in concert with river habitat restoration projects such as this one. Along with NRCS’s role in restoring habitat conditions at Riverside Mills, our partners are working to redevelop the site as a public park for passive recreation. Plans are underway to build a greenway and bike path along the river to reconnect communities in the watershed and provide socio-economic and recreational opportunities.

NRCS and our partners intend to make the Riverside Mills restoration a local and national showcase of how we can restore riverine habitats to our Nation’s most ecologically degraded and economically challenged urban rivers. If we can do it at Riverside Mills, we should be able to accomplish river restoration throughout our watersheds.

# Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Happenings!

The RC&D program is administered by NRCS and helps people in communities plan and carry out activities that increase the conservation of natural resources, support economic development, and enhance the environment and standard of living. Here are two examples of what your RC&D is doing for people, communities, and resources.

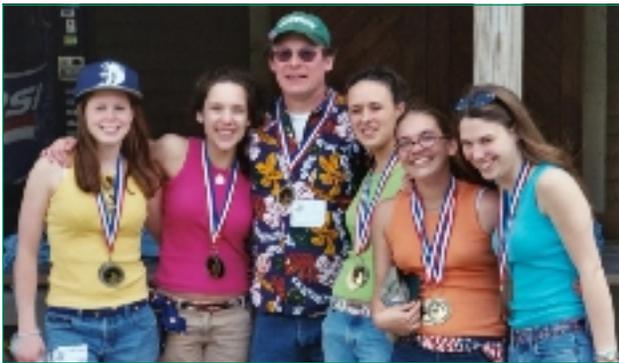
## Natural Resource Education

The Envirothon is an international natural resource education program for high school-aged students. The Rhode Island Envirothon celebrated its tenth year in May. The teams consist of five students each who prepare all year for a one-day competition held annually each May. Teams are tested in five disciplines: aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife and a special topic each year. The winning team this year represented the Wheeler School in Providence (see photo on right). The five winning Rhode Island team members were



offered paid internships for the summer, working with leading environmental state and Federal agencies, including NRCS. Aaron Beaudette (middle in photo above) worked for NRCS this summer.

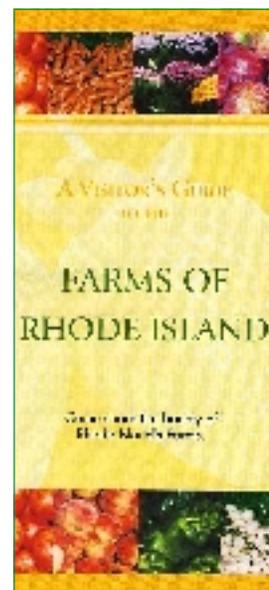
The Rhode Island RC&D program is pleased to announce that, beginning soon, the Rhode Island Envirothon will become a stand alone non-profit-entity with many partners, including RC&D. The RC&D starts a project like the Environthon, and when the project can operate sustainable it does. Go Envirothon !



## Promoting “Locally Grown”

The Rhode Island RC&D Council received a grant from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing to create the Rhode Island Harvest Guide. The guide is a shopping and recreational tool to help locate and promote the benefits of purchasing “locally grown” produce, meats, dairy goods and other products and services. It also enhances the connection between the consumers and the farmers and helps connect the people back to the land. Besides listing where to buy local produce and products, the guide lists special seasonal activities, such as hayrides, harvest festivals, pick-your-own, corn mazes and other recreational activities. In addition, the guide includes a freshness chart indicating when fresh produce is ripe and ready for picking.

Farm stands and farmers’ markets are listed alphabetically by the cities and towns in which they are located and the specialty product that they produce. The guide includes 102 retail farm stands, 28 pick-your-own operations, 15 orchards, 14 herb farms, 10 certified organic farms, 4 vineyards and 17 farmers’ markets, as well as their hours of operation. The guide serves as an advertising tool for Rhode Island farmers.



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