

RICE STEWARDSHIP

2016

*Annual Report*





WHEN THE FARM AND RANCH  
GATES CLOSE TO CONSERVATION  
OUR MISSION IS UNACHIEVABLE.

*- Dale Hall,  
CEO Ducks Unlimited*

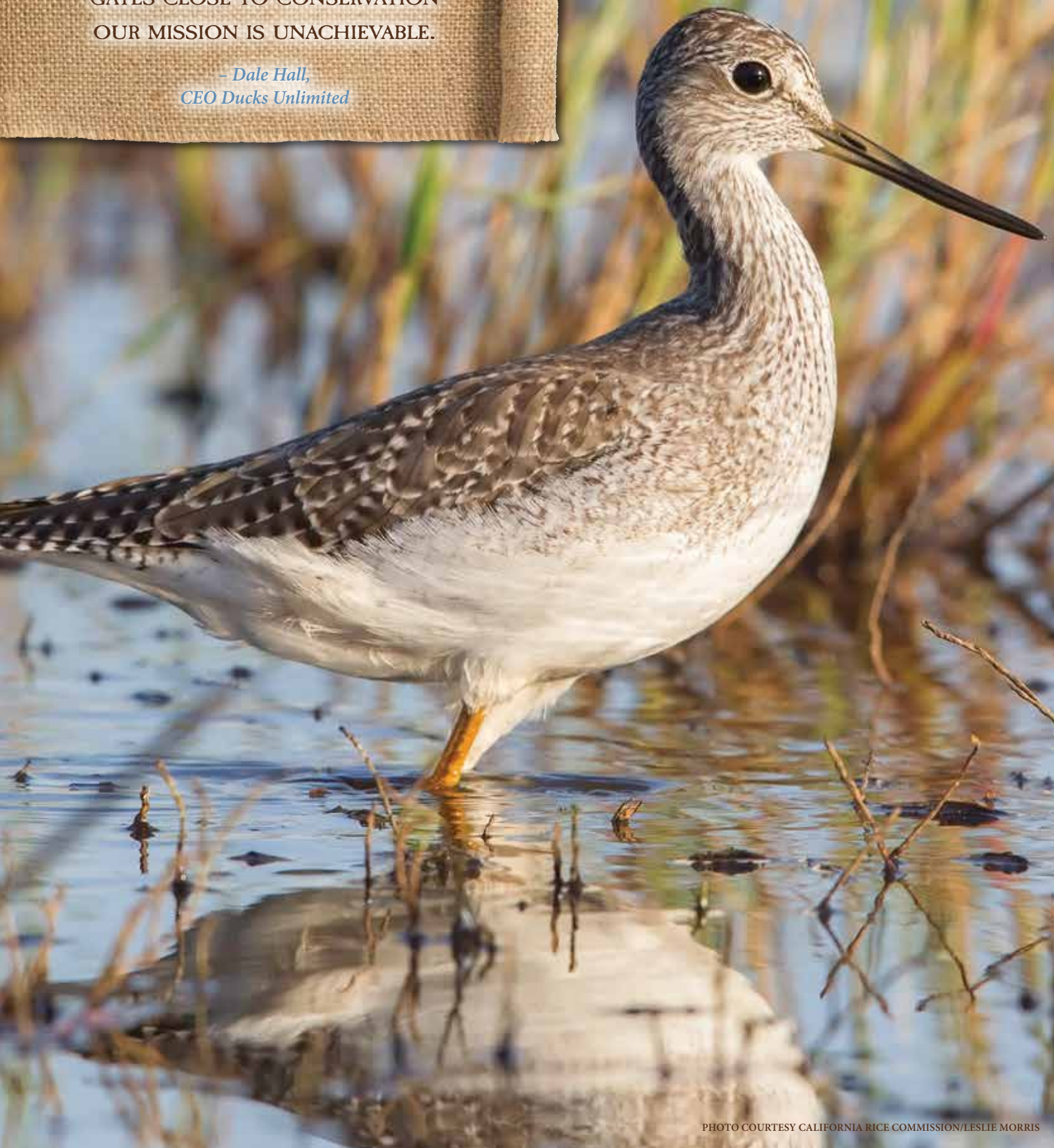


PHOTO COURTESY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION/LESLIE MORRIS





# A Message

## FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

**M**uch progress has been made toward sustaining the future of rice farming in the U.S. since the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership was formalized. Here in our first Rice Stewardship annual report, you will find more details on our progress, including implementation of our national and several state-specific Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) proposals, securing critical financial support from the Mosaic Company and the Walmart Foundation, and development of a new irrigation-storage reservoir in the Texas Mid-coast rice growing region to provide water for farmers and others in drought years.

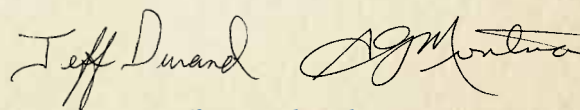
We have worked together to educate policy makers on the importance of rice agriculture to the environment, including its critical role in supporting millions of migratory birds. We can tell you with certainty, when a conservation group and an agricultural group walk into an office on Capitol Hill together, people take notice.

The impressive nature of our unique partnership is reflected in the success of our RCPP proposals. Under this innovative new program led by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), our partnership secured \$10 million from NRCS, one of the largest sums awarded in the first round. Equally as impressive, we brought together more than 40 partners from all segments of the ag and conservation sectors to provide match and support for the program. As we deliver the work supported by this program, it has become more apparent than ever that each state, and in some cases county, is different in its needs for partnership capacity. We view it as our job to work with NRCS and rice growers to facilitate conservation planning, implementation of practices and development of financial assistance applications.

We are also keeping an eye on water in all six rice-growing states. While California and Texas have been dealing with significant droughts and the subsequent impacts to the working wetlands provided by rice, it's important for us not to have a false sense of security in the lower Mississippi River Valley. There is a genuine need for planning and proper stewardship of water resources across the country, and as rice growers and wetland managers, we are on the front lines.

Know that we are working diligently to maintain and promote policies and programs that drive funding and technical support to rice growers across the country. These programs and resulting conservation practices evolve over time and must be adapted to local situations. For example, California and Texas have unprecedented population growth and corresponding competition for water supplies. Here both policies to protect agriculture water and conservation practices to foster its efficient use are critical. Groundwater supplies for rice are threatened in Arkansas and Mississippi, making development of surface water supplies and increased efficiencies in field irrigation the keys to recovery. In southwest Louisiana, the Mermentau River has water quality challenges which are addressed with better nutrient management.

The momentum initially surrounding the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership has certainly grown. New opportunities for collaboration continue to develop. What's good for rice is good for ducks, and working wetlands are equally good for people. Rest assured, we will maintain focus on working together to conserve three critical natural resources in North America: working ricelands, water and wetland wildlife.



*Jeff Durand & Al Montna*  
Rice Stewardship Co-Chairmen



# NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE'S REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

## *A Foundation for Conservation in Ricelands*

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the RCPP is a partner-driven, locally led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's NRCS to welcome both old and new partners to the conservation mission, harness innovation, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary private lands conservation. This "create your own" initiative is a perfect fit for the Rice Stewardship Partnership's conservation efforts and has provided a solid foundation from which we continue to grow.

Our first RCPP project, awarded in January 2015, is called "Rice Stewardship Partnership – Sustaining the Future of Rice." The overall goal of the project was to further demonstrate how rice agricultural systems were working wetlands where producers grow food for a hungry world while improving water-use efficiency and water quality and providing critical wetland habitat. This system-wide approach could be maximized by more hands-on conservation planning and practice implementation, and that is exactly what we are busy doing today.

From an NRCS standpoint, the project is delivered in two phases, the Environmental Quality Incentive

Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). These two programs are the workhorses of NRCS's working agricultural lands projects. RCPP application periods for EQIP in all six rice-growing states are completed, and more than 200 projects are underway. The states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi have heightened focus on irrigation water management (IWM), where a suite of tools and practices (flow meters, pump automation, water level sensors) increase water-use efficiencies, thus decreasing the amount of water needed to grow a bumper crop. California and Texas, where times of drought remind us all how precious water is, are emphasizing efficiencies in water transport by applying practices such as underground pipelines. Missouri is focused on minimum and no-till practices and winter water management to increase soil health and water quality and to provide waterfowl habitat. The CSP portion of our national RCPP program opens for sign-up in fall 2017. In the true spirit of RCPP, each state is leading a partner-driven, locally led approach to conservation in rice agriculture.



PHOTO COURTESY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION/BRIAN BAER





PHOTO COURTESY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION/BRIAN BAER



## WALMART FOUNDATION SUPPORTING RICE GROWERS

The Walmart Foundation recently joined the ranks as a Ducks Unlimited major sponsor with a \$1-million grant for our Rice Stewardship work in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and along the Gulf Coast. In late 2014, DU secured \$10 million from the NRCS through its RCPP. The majority of the RCPP program funding is dedicated to financial assistance for producers who implement conservation practices on their lands through Farm Bill programs.

DU will serve as the “boots-on-the-ground” delivery mechanism to provide professional advice to interested landowners. However, only 10 percent of the RCPP funding is dedicated to this role. There are also no RCPP funds to promote conservation efforts to a broader, historically underserved population or to scale conservation practices beyond those currently funded by scarce federal dollars. These are the two areas where the Walmart Foundation’s grant will have the most impact.

Walmart Foundation funding will be used primarily for technical assistance to and

## THE RCPP DIFFERENCE

RCPP is a 5-year, \$1.2-billion USDA commitment. Its focus on public-private partnership provides private companies, local communities and other non-government partners a way to invest in resilient landscapes and clean water, and promotes tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism, outdoor recreation, and other industries.

“RCPP puts our partners in the driver’s seat for advancing conservation with private lands agriculture producers,” said Kevin Norton, USDA NRCS State Conservationist in Louisiana. “Projects are led locally and demonstrate the value of strong public-private partnerships working hand-in-hand with agriculture and forest producers that deliver solutions to tough natural resource challenges.”

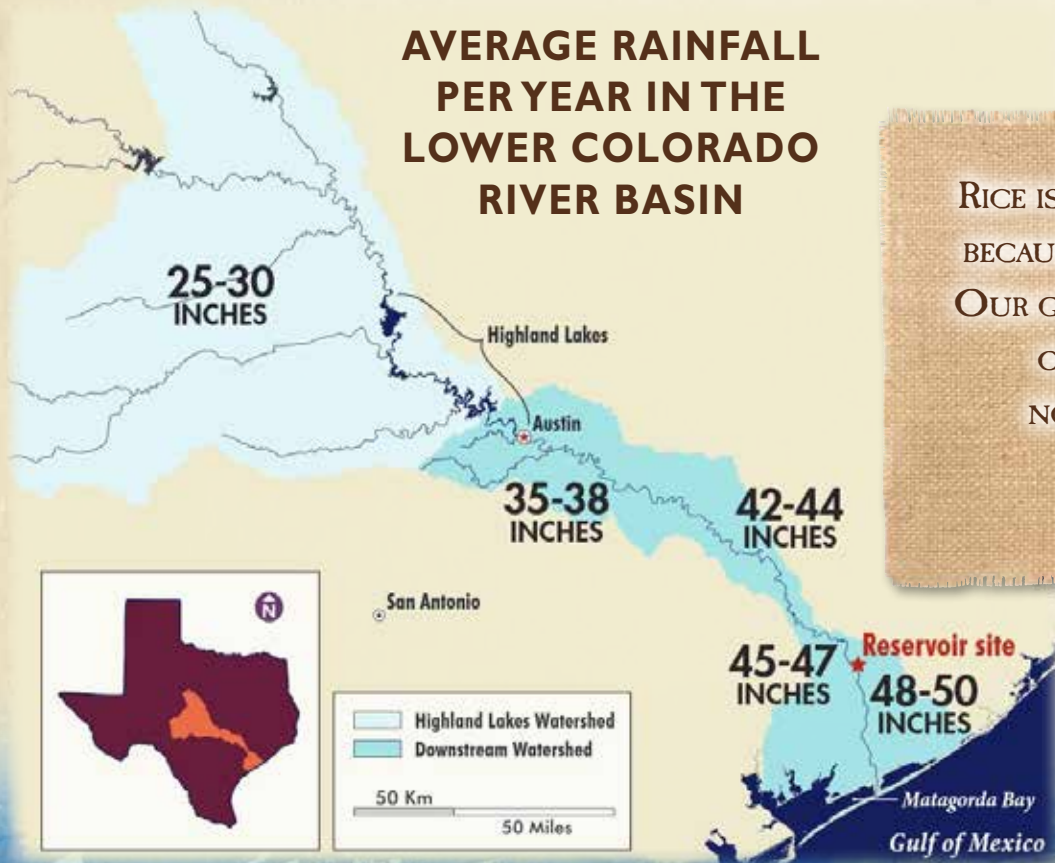
More than 600 pre-proposals were submitted for the first round of RCPP funding in 2014. Of those, just over 200 were invited to submit full proposals. With so many strong project proposals, the project selection process was extremely competitive. The USA Rice-DU Rice Stewardship Partnership was successful in securing \$10 million in RCPP funding for our national proposal and participated in or led several more successful regional proposals. The innovative program has provided a solid foundation from which our Rice Stewardship Partnership can continue to grow.

training for farm owners, operators and workers. Conservation projects on ricelands will also improve rural economies by using locally sourced contractors and supplies.

“I think it’s apparent from their generous gift that the Walmart Foundation is dedicated to enhancing the sustainability of the global food supply chain,” DU Director of Development Chris Cole said. “The positive impacts our Rice Stewardship efforts have on local communities transfer down the line to everyone through improved water management, more secure food supplies and enhanced environmental quality.”



## AVERAGE RAINFALL PER YEAR IN THE LOWER COLORADO RIVER BASIN



RICE IS DISAPPEARING IN TEXAS  
BECAUSE OF A LACK OF WATER.  
OUR GOAL IS TO INCREASE RICE  
ON THE LANDSCAPE,  
NOT JUST SUSTAIN IT.

— Kirby Brown  
*Ducks Unlimited*

### FLORIDA RESERVOIR

The Lane City reservoir  
will be about twice the size  
of this reservoir in Florida.



# New Water Source

## COMING TO TEXAS COAST

With severe drought gripping the state, most rice producers along the Texas Mid-coast, where waterfowl are heavily dependent on rice lands for wintering habitat, were cut off from Highland Lakes water after the 2011 growing season. They remained cut off between 2012-2015.

Recognizing the importance of rice agriculture to the coastal prairies economy and ecosystem as well as to waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited advocated for reasonable conservation measures across all uses. We also saw the critical need for collaborative solutions to provide more water for Lower Colorado River Basin users.

One proposed solution was the construction of an off-channel reservoir closer to the coast, where it rains more. Providing stored water closer to the needs also avoids the evaporation and seepage loss of moving water all the way from the Highland Lakes.

We are proud to report that the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) has begun construction on such a reservoir near Lane City in Wharton County. USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited supported the reservoir plan and are providing assistance on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program proposal LCRA will submit to help fund construction of a second off-channel reservoir near Eagle Lake.

The Lane City Reservoir is the first significant new reservoir in the lower Colorado River basin in decades and a key component in the LCRA's commitment to add 100,000 acre-feet of firm water to the region's water supply. Firm water is always available for use, even during severe droughts. Rice producers purchase interruptible

water, which can be curtailed or cut off during droughts, and was for four years.

"This reservoir is just off the Colorado River, more than 220 river miles downstream of the Highland Lakes. When flows in the river are high, we'll be able to pump out some of that water and hold it in the reservoir until it's needed by customers in this area. This reservoir will be able to hold up to 40,000 acre-feet at a time," LCRA Executive Vice President of Water John Hofmann said. "Over the last year, we've had enough rain downstream of Austin to fill and refill this reservoir more than six times."

The Lane City reservoir will store water in the lower basin and reduce demands on the Highland Lakes. The reservoir can meet a variety of needs, including downstream industrial needs, agriculture and the environment.

"Unlike other lakes, this purpose-built water supply reservoir will not be a recreational lake," Ducks Unlimited Conservation Specialist Kirby Brown explained. "It will be filled, used and refilled to provide the water supplies our basin needs to support lives and livelihoods up and down the river."

When the reservoir goes on line in 2018, it will change how LCRA manages water in the Highland Lakes and benefit everyone in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

"Upstream water customers win because there will be reduced demand on the Highland Lakes, and downstream customers win because they will have reliable water sourced right here in Wharton County," Brown said.





# *Rice and Ducks*

## IN WASHINGTON, D.C.



When most people hear “rice farming,” they immediately think of iconic images of tractors in a field, harvesters at work, or water being pumped onto a crop – certainly not Capitol Hill.

In reality, what’s happening in rice fields hundreds or even thousands of miles from Washington is shaping the agriculture and conservation policy discussion for future generations of both farmers and waterfowlers. The D.C.-based staffs for USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited are working hard on behalf of the Rice Stewardship Partnership to advocate for policies that are good for rice and therefore good for ducks. When explaining the unique nature of the Partnership to members of

Congress and the administration, our message is quick to get attention and carries a great deal of weight on behalf of both organizations.

Since the Partnership was formed, members have met during USA Rice’s annual Government Affairs Conference in Washington every February and jointly hosted 200+ members of Congress and their staff, administration officials, and partner organizations for a “Rice and Ducks Luncheon” on Capitol Hill. The popular event draws in new faces to network and allows USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited members to interface with congressional offices and share our powerful message. The Partnership also takes the opportunity to invite staff







RSP CO-CHAIR JEFF DURAND  
(RIGHT) EXPLAINS TO USDA NRCS  
CHIEF WELLER HOW HIS CSP  
CONTRACT INCREASED HIS LAND'S  
SUSTAINABILITY AND HIS YIELDS.

from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other D.C.-based experts to brief them on policy changes and potential funding opportunities. Our members meet with their legislators separately and together to drive home the importance of the work we do and to maintain relationships over the years.

Aside from these important relationship-building events, the Partnership submits comments on conservation program draft rules, letters of support for potential program changes, and of course, shares concerns when necessary. Most recently, the Partnership has been involved in providing recommendations to the Natural Resources Conservation Service regarding the Conservation Stewardship Program to ensure that it remains an effective program for rice farmers. Because of our

reputations and willingness to work toward common ground and greatest benefit, a number of rice-specific enhancements have been submitted on our behalf, and the rice industry and the Partnership are strongly advocating for them.

With development of the next Farm Bill just around the corner, we need each other now more than ever. USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited have strong, trustworthy reputations in our nation's capital. While independently our organizations may be involved in some controversial legislative issues, together we work in a bipartisan, multi-interest fashion to accomplish our goals for the greater good of agricultural and conservation industries. Those accomplishments translate directly into sustaining working ricelands, water and wetland wildlife for generations to come.



# CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION LEADS CONSERVATION EFFORTS

## *in The Central Valley*

Beginning in spring of 2015, the California Rice Commission (CRC) began leading the implementation of a \$7-million RCPP proposal to place projects on the ground over the next 3-5 years for the benefit of waterbirds dependent upon the Pacific Flyway. This California Rice RCPP Project is titled “Expansion of Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Programs on Central Valley Agricultural Lands” and includes eight partners: The Nature Conservancy, Audubon California, Point Blue Conservation Science, Delta Waterfowl, California Waterfowl Association, Central Valley Joint Venture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Northern California Water Association.

This project builds upon the highly successful Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Program (WHEP)

that the NRCS has supported with approximately \$15 million in conservation program funding since 2011. The successful outcomes of WHEP are documented in the CRC’s November 2014 publication titled, “Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Program, Bird-friendly Farming in California Rice Fields” (<http://calrice.org/WaterbirdReport>). This report, authored by three highly respected conservation organizations, includes an insightful finding about the cost-effectiveness of WHEP: “*Estimates suggest that, at current costs, an annual payment program similar to WHEP could conceivably be run for hundreds of years and still cost less than permanently acquiring and restoring the same amount of land.*”

*“The USA Rice – Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership applauds the long-term conservation commitment that CRC has demonstrated over the years,” said Scott Manley, Director of Conservation Programs for DU’s rice industry efforts. “In many ways, if you want to see what the future holds for challenges and opportunities in the rice industry – look west to California.”*



California Rice

PHOTO COURTESY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION/BRIAN BAER



## THE CALIFORNIA RICE RCPP PROJECT STRIVES TO ACCOMPLISH THREE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OVER THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS:

1. Invest approximately \$6 million of NRCS funding directly into on-the-ground projects designed to enhance the ecological value of California ricelands for waterbirds.
2. Deploy at least \$1.2 million in private partner match funding to install uniquely designed conservation strategies benefitting waterbirds in rice systems through an innovative approach called BirdReturns (<http://birdreturns.org>).
3. Develop a new approach to encourage significant numbers of California rice growers to use cover crops in rice systems to substantially increase acreages of high-quality upland nesting cover for ducks and other birds when water shortages impact the number of acres that can ultimately be planted in a given year.

In addition to the essential NRCS funding, all of the above objectives are also being supported by at least \$2.5-million in support and technical expertise provided by the eight partners over the course of the project.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE:

- Nearly 13,000 acres enrolled by NRCS in the first year supported by \$1.3 million of RCPP funding.
- An additional 6,500 acres of intensively managed spring 2016 habitat projects supported by more than \$220,000 of partner funding.
- Completed the first year of a multi-year effort to critically assess the value of cover crops for nesting birds in California.
- The new California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation ([CalRiceWaterBirds.org](http://CalRiceWaterBirds.org)), an industry-led effort to receive donations and efficiently invest them into real, quantifiable waterbird habitat, is now fully established and putting fully tax-deductible contributions to work in the Sacramento Valley to enhance critical waterbird habitats within the Pacific Flyway.





# GROWING GENERATIONS OF CENTRAL VALLEY FARMERS

*Leo LaGrande*  
*Maxwell, California*

**F**ourth generation farmer/rancher Leo LaGrande works with his two brothers to farm rice, livestock, almonds and walnuts in California's famed Central Valley. Rice growers in California face unique challenges with more regulatory pressure and more immediate and severe shortages of both groundwater and surface water for irrigation.

"Rice farmers here have to be twice as cognizant of the practices we're using to conserve water and improve water quality," Leo said. "We're constantly adapting to stay compliant with laws, maintain our production levels, and be good environmental stewards of our land."

Leo has been involved with the Rice Stewardship Partnership since its initiation. "The Partnership is a great opportunity for USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited to collaborate for common interests that benefit both working lands and conservation," he explained. "It took vision on the part of both organizations' leaders to bring this vital process together."

One of the biggest benefits of the Partnership from Leo's perspective is the ability to better tell the story of U.S. rice producers. Through relationships gained in the

conservation industry, more Americans are beginning to understand the importance of the rice industry in the U.S., not only for waterfowl, but also for water quality and quantity concerns and for the people that depend on rice for their livelihoods and as a staple in their diet.

Leo's greatest motivation for putting conservation practices into effect on his farm is his family. In addition to the family's enjoyment of hunting and shared waterfowling passion, both of his children are looking into agricultural careers.

"It's our responsibility to leave the land from a production and a conservation standpoint better than it was given to us for our future generations to enjoy," he explained.

Leo's daughter, Lauren, is majoring in Agricultural Science at Oregon State University with intentions to return to the farm as the fifth generation of LaGrande to care for the land. His son, Laine, is a freshman at Fresno State studying Agricultural Business and a member of an agricultural fraternity. Their appreciation of nature and working lands conservation stems from the example set by their father and the time they've spent together hunting waterfowl.



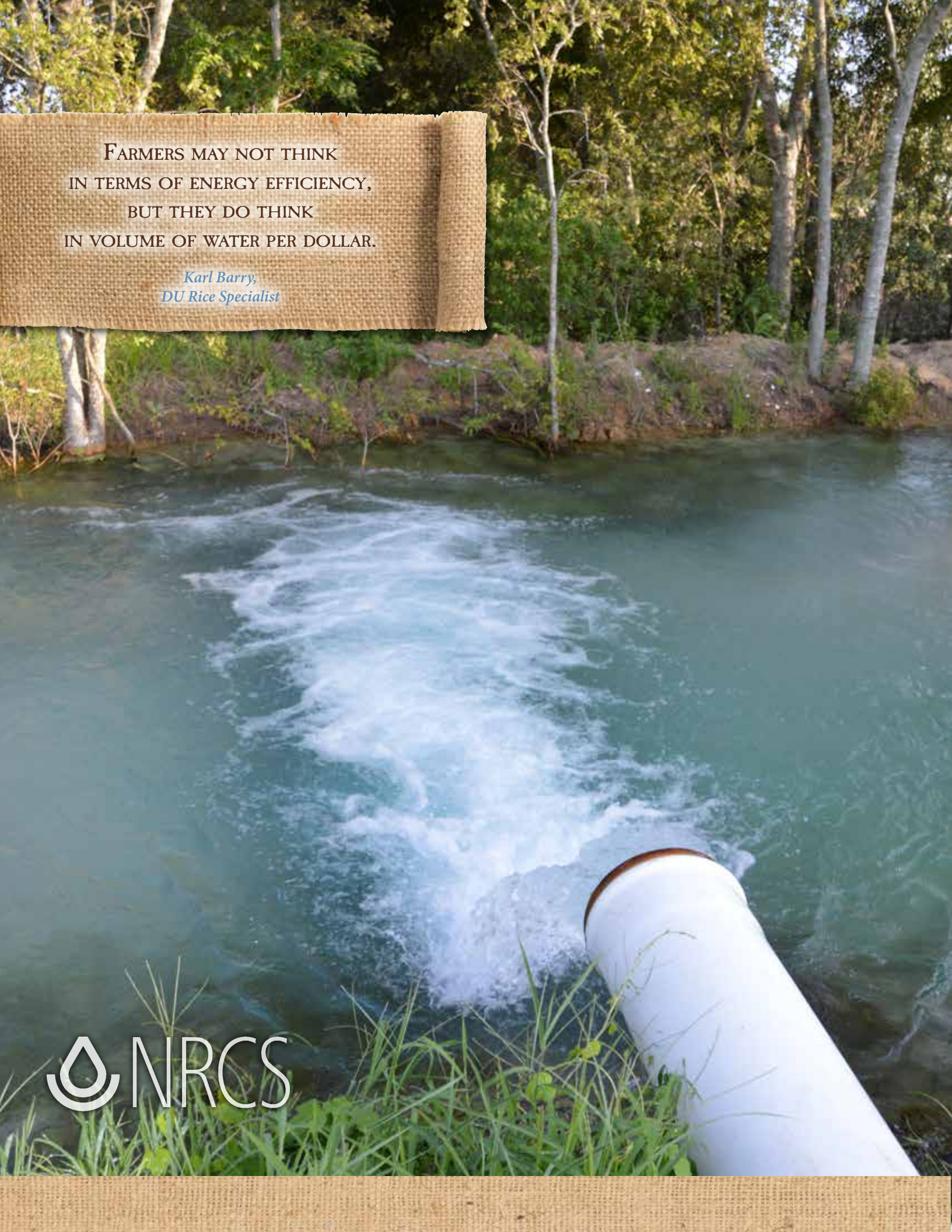


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FROM A PRODUCTION  
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TO ENJOY.

— *Leo LaGrande*







FARMERS MAY NOT THINK  
IN TERMS OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY,  
BUT THEY DO THINK  
IN VOLUME OF WATER PER DOLLAR.

*Karl Barry,  
DU Rice Specialist*





# *A Message* FROM THE LOUISIANA NRCS



Surface water pumped onto a rice field (left bottle) is visibly cleaner when released three weeks later (right bottle).

The mission of the NRCS, “Helping People, Help the Land” is as critical today as it ever was, and working with our conservation partners is key to making that happen. Working shoulder-to-shoulder with organizations like USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited we can accomplish much more than we could alone. Together we engage Louisiana landowners by providing technical assistance and guidance as well as administrative support to achieve superior results on thousands of acres of Louisiana land each year.

The RCPP is an NRCS conservation program that furthers the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water and wildlife. It encourages partners to collaborate and work cooperatively with producers.

One of the 2015 Louisiana RCPP efforts led by Ducks Unlimited is titled, “Rice Stewardship Program – Southwest Louisiana.” This project addresses water quality with additional resource concerns of water management and wildlife habitat through innovative ranking systems and conservation planning.

“Bottom line, the Rice Stewardship Partnership has the ability to expand the conservation planning capability of NRCS, and that will ultimately benefit Louisiana rice producers,” said Kevin Norton, NRCS State Conservationist. “The people and programs of USA Rice and Ducks Unlimited are making a tremendous difference in the lives of Louisiana rice farmers, and ultimately, we all benefit from that.”

PHOTOS: ©NRCS



Staff from DU and NRCS prepare to perform a pumping plant efficiency test which will help the producer increase water conservation and profitability.



Staff monitor fuel usage during a pumping plant efficiency test.



# FARMING IN THE MISSISSIPPI ALLUVIAL VALLEY

*Rance Daniels  
Rives, Missouri*

Rance is a third generation farmer. Both of his grandfathers and his dad cared for the land before him. Now he grows rice, soybeans and wildlife habitat on his 2,700-acre farm in the Missouri Bootheel.

“We have been implementing conservation practices for a long time,” Rance explained. “Conservation is especially important for me as a farmer. If I don’t take care of the land I have, I might be able to make a living off it, but my kids and grandkids won’t be able to.”

As a testament to that mindset, Rance’s family was named Dunklin County Farm Family of the Year in 2015. All of their acres are precision leveled. They have participated in programs with the Missouri Department of Conservation and Ducks Unlimited that provided



## THE DANIELS FAMILY

Robin, Taylor, Rance (front)  
Emma and Chase (back) all  
work the farm together.



financial assistance in exchange for conservation practices, and they have participated in EQIP and CSP through the NRCS to improve their farm.

With a deep understanding that what isn't protected is lost, Rance accepted a position on the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership committee when it was formed. Though he was familiar with Ducks Unlimited and engaged in USA Rice, Rance gained a wider view of conservation on working lands through his engagement in the Partnership.

"I knew what Ducks Unlimited did initially, but I didn't have the big picture. I thought DU was only focused on taking marginal lands out of production and restoring it to waterfowl habitat, but they are equally as focused on implementing best management practices on working lands. Being a part of the Partnership has given me a much broader picture of how things trickle down from ideas to practices on the ground," he explained.

With six rice producers and six Ducks Unlimited representatives from across the country on the Rice Stewardship Partnership committee, the participants are able to see a more holistic view of conservation benefits. "There's more than a monetary side to conservation benefits," Rance explained. "As a farmer, sitting on the

Partnership committee broadened my point of view. Some practices benefit the land or the environment more than my bottom line, but my family lives in that environment, and I hope to pass the land on to my children. So benefits aren't always directly putting dollars in your pocket, but they are no less important."

The Daniels family has witnessed firsthand the impact of their on-farm conservation practices. "Not only waterfowl but also bald eagles and many other birds have really shown up in this area since we started implementing conservation in rice lands in the Bootheel," he said. "It's important for all the people that enjoy them, not just the waterfowl hunters. It's critical for society as a whole to have conservation of working lands."

As he has watched this ground-breaking partnership of a commodity and conservation group grow and develop, Rance sees no bounds to what we can accomplish. You could hear the pride and excitement in his voice when he said, "RCPP is great, and we're seeing so many companies and people wanting to get involved with what we're doing, but I think the sky is the limit as to what we can accomplish for both groups, for working lands conservation and waterfowl habitat."



PHOTO COURTESY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION/LESLIE MORRIS



# Mosaic Supports

## RICE STEWARDSHIP EFFORTS

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLANNING  
HAS THE POTENTIAL TO HAVE  
A BIG IMPACT ON THE FARM.

— Steve Hefner,  
Missouri NRCS

The Mosaic Company and The Mosaic Company Foundation are committed to promoting on-farm best practices that improve 4R nutrient stewardship (right nutrient source, right rate, right place, right time), conserve wildlife habitat, and help farmers stay productive and profitable. To achieve these goals, Mosaic has provided key funding for two of Ducks Unlimited's agricultural programs at both ends of the Mississippi Flyway.

"The Mosaic Company Foundation's support of the Western Winter Wheat Initiative in Canada has helped breeding waterfowl find adequate nesting cover while helping farmers improve their bottom lines," said Ducks Unlimited Director of Development Shawn Battison. "Mosaic's most recent grant supports the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership's efforts to improve rice agriculture efficiencies and sustainability in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley."

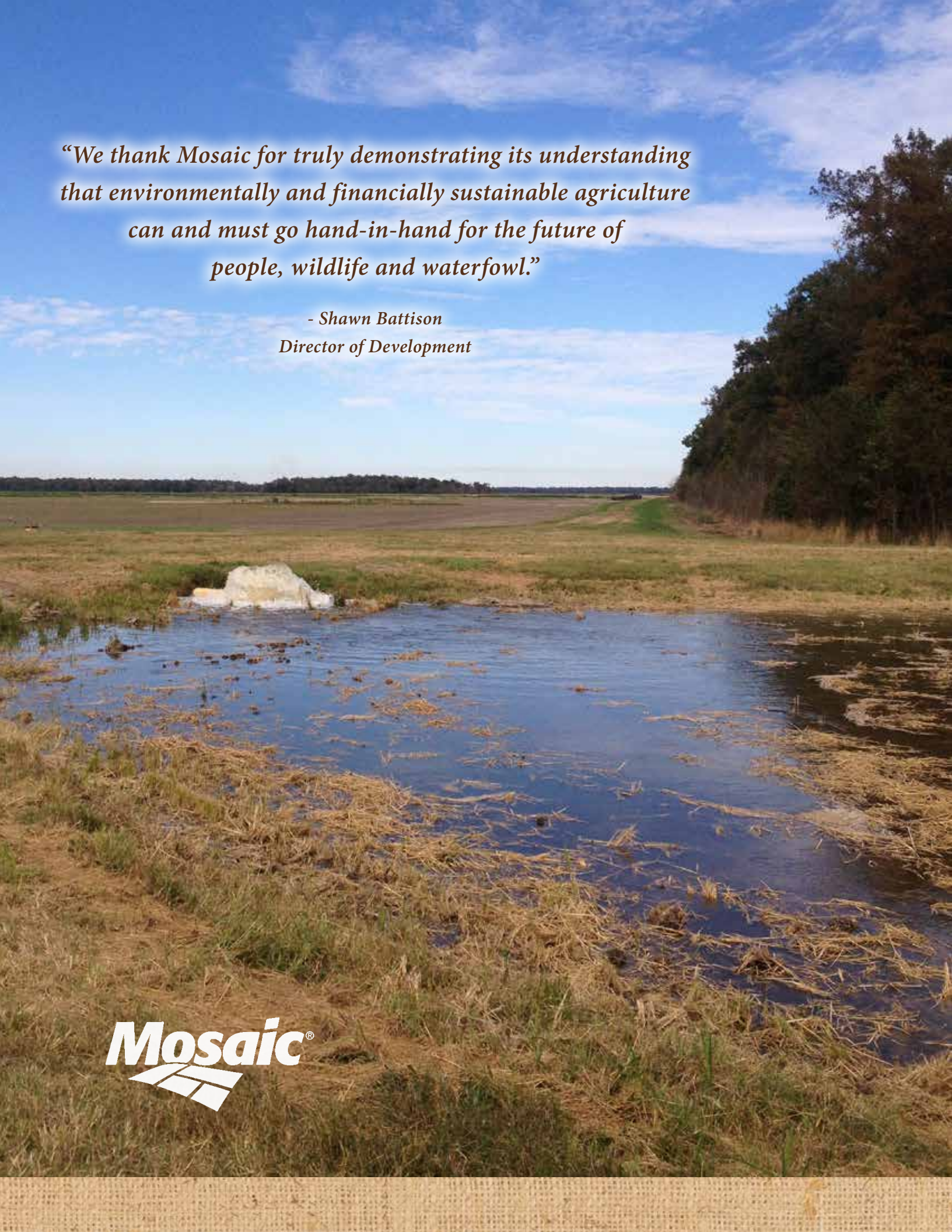
As one of the world's largest producers and marketers of concentrated phosphate and potash

crop nutrients, Mosaic's interest in the program stems from a desire to promote 4R nutrient stewardship at the producer level. On-farm improvements and management practices can greatly reduce the level of nutrients lost to the Mississippi River.

"The Mosaic Company Foundation is proud to partner with Ducks Unlimited in multiple geographies across North America," said Ben Pratt, Vice President – Public Affairs at The Mosaic Company. "Helping farmers strengthen their nutrient stewardship practices and conserve habitats will improve agricultural sustainability while still meeting the growing global demand for food."

Even with our Partnership's successes and momentum to date, several needs remain to establish a complete program in sustainability. Mosaic's support will build strength in ongoing advocacy, policy and on-the-ground conservation, and allow us to elevate nutrient management practices and strategies.





*“We thank Mosaic for truly demonstrating its understanding  
that environmentally and financially sustainable agriculture  
can and must go hand-in-hand for the future of  
people, wildlife and waterfowl.”*

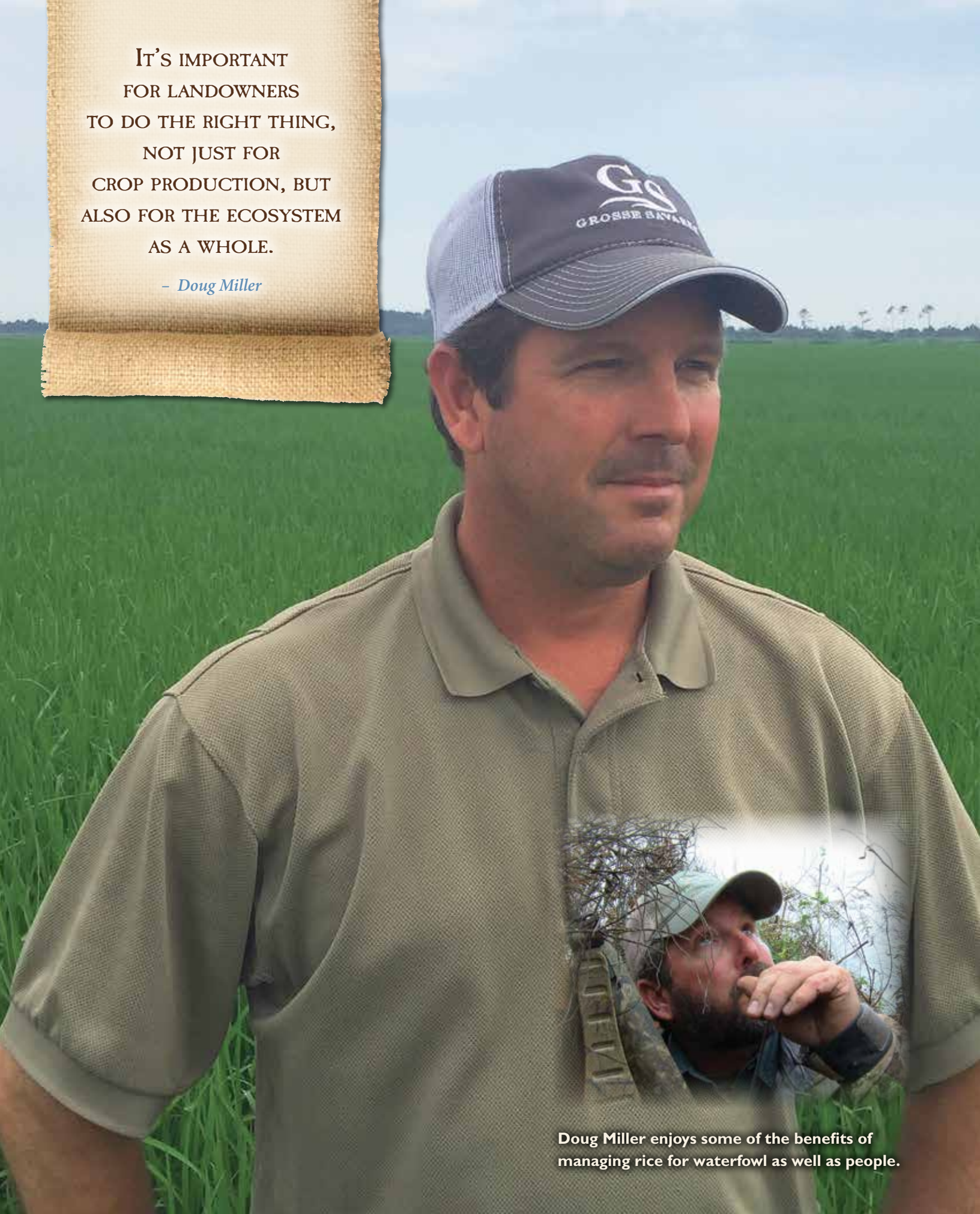
*- Shawn Battison  
Director of Development*





IT'S IMPORTANT  
FOR LANDOWNERS  
TO DO THE RIGHT THING,  
NOT JUST FOR  
CROP PRODUCTION, BUT  
ALSO FOR THE ECOSYSTEM  
AS A WHOLE.

- Doug Miller



Doug Miller enjoys some of the benefits of managing rice for waterfowl as well as people.



# GROWING RICE ON THE GULF COAST

*Doug Miller*

*Lake Charles, Louisiana*

**D**oug Miller is a prime example of how ducks and rice go together naturally. He manages nearly 80,000 acres of coastal prairie, agricultural lands and marsh for the family-owned Sweet Lake Land and Oil Company and oversees the hunting and fishing operations of the Grosse Savanne Lodge. With a degree in wildlife management and previous experience working for the Louisiana Department of Ag and Forestry and the NRCS, Doug's entire career has been land management oriented.

When the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership was formalized, Doug was asked to serve as a member because of his experience optimizing rice lands for waterfowl habitat. Recognizing the perfect fit of the two organizations and the importance of putting forth one unified voice to promote sound conservation practices on working lands, he accepted. Doug feels his involvement has benefited his operations by expanding the network of producers and managers he interacts with across the country.

"No matter what differences there are in various places where people grow rice and manage habitat for waterfowl, we're all facing many of the same challenges," Doug said. "There are some really great ideas evolving out of this Partnership, and I think it's important for managers to stay abreast of what's going on."

Given his public agency background, Doug is also pleased with the Partnership's approach to delivering on some of those ideas. "Those agencies are the connection with private landowners," he explained. "When the Partnership formed, USA Rice and DU had some really outstanding concepts that came together, but without NRCS I don't think the programs would actually have

made it to the producers. Having those agencies involved has been the key to getting conservation on the ground."

Doug's love of waterfowl has been with him all of his 46 years. "I was literally in diapers the first time Dad took me hunting," he said. But over the years, he has come to enjoy creating waterfowl habitat as much as reaping the benefits of it in the blind. "I've had the opportunity to try different techniques to manage rice for waterfowl, many of which I've learned from other parts of the country through the Partnership," Doug said. As Chairman of the Gulf Coast Soil and Water Conservation District, he can pass that knowledge on to other land managers in his area.

"It's important for landowners to do the right thing, not just for crop production, but also for the ecosystem as a whole. When you're managing a resource that's continent wide, you have to have private landowners engaged. Without private landowners, large scale conservation doesn't really exist," he explained.

Maximizing habitat is not just about waterfowl for Doug and Sweet Lake. They have created an ecotourism division in the lodge that takes bird watchers out to enjoy the more than 400 species of birds that the rice fields attract. Recognizing the rapid disappearance of ag lands and wetlands in his area and many others, Doug's goal is to protect what remains and restore some of what's been lost for generations to come, and he sees the Rice Stewardship Partnership as a way to get that done.

"The thing I really like about the Partnership is that it makes things happen," Doug said. "You can go to a lot of meetings where people present issues and discuss things, but when we meet, the staff immediately starts working on how they can implement ideas to address the issues on the table."



# Where THE WHITE-FRONTS ARE

For the last 30 years, the number of white-fronted geese in the Mississippi Flyway has grown. Better known as speckled-belly geese or specks, the geese are often seen in rice fields. Whether the increase in goose numbers in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV) is due to population growth, changing distribution, or both is uncertain. To answer that question, the University of Arkansas–Division of Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited, Canadian Wildlife Service, and US Geological Survey–Alaska Science Center partnered on a satellite telemetry study. The study was led by University of Arkansas Graduate Research Assistant Ryan Askren and Professor Douglas Osborne.

Marking and tracking individuals allowed the researchers to follow them on their migration, determining where and when they were moving. It also helped them identify which winter habitats the geese preferred.

“During 2013 – 2014, we deployed 21 GPS satellite transmitters during breeding season in Alaska and Nunavut, and two in Arkansas and Louisiana,” Askren explained. “We also obtained location data from four transmitters deployed on white-fronts in Alaska during the 2014 breeding season.”

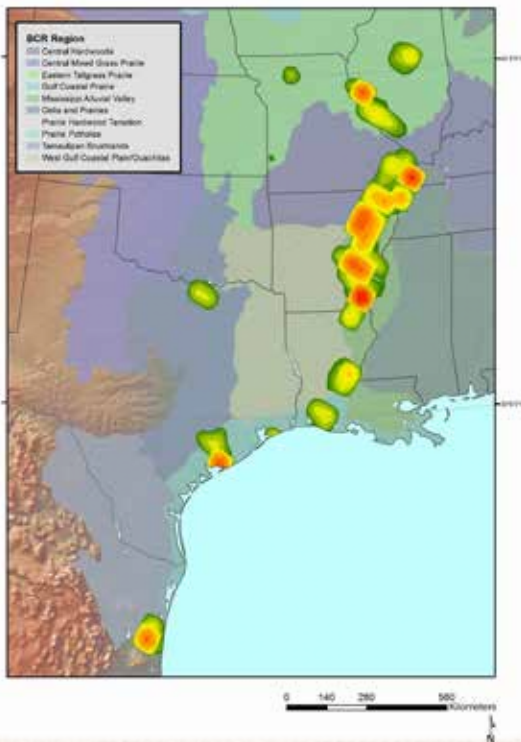
Fourteen of the 21 transmitter-marked geese survived to reach the wintering grounds, of which 12 spent time in the MAV, and nine of those spent the entire wintering period in Arkansas. During the first winter, nearly 49% of all white-front locations were in rice fields, and 47% of locations occurred in rice fields in the second winter. Furthering the evidence of the importance of rice agriculture to wintering geese, discrete choice modeling suggested a strong selection for rice during October/November. As time progressed, selection for rice declined through late winter. That decline could have a number of explanations.

“Decline in both use and selection across the wintering period may be a sign of depletion of left over or unharvested rice grains as winter progresses, a response to hunting pressure, or an increasing availability of non-agriculture forage items on the landscape,” Askren explained.

Askren anticipates completing this project in December and is currently preparing a manuscript regarding migration timing and distribution for the *Journal of Wildlife Management*.







(Above) Transmitters allowed researchers to follow geese on their migration, determining where and when they were moving and helping them identify which winter habitats the geese preferred.

(Left) Locations of 14 transmitter-marked greater white-fronted geese during winters (2014-2016) displayed over relevant Bird Conservation Regions. Red indicates highest use.



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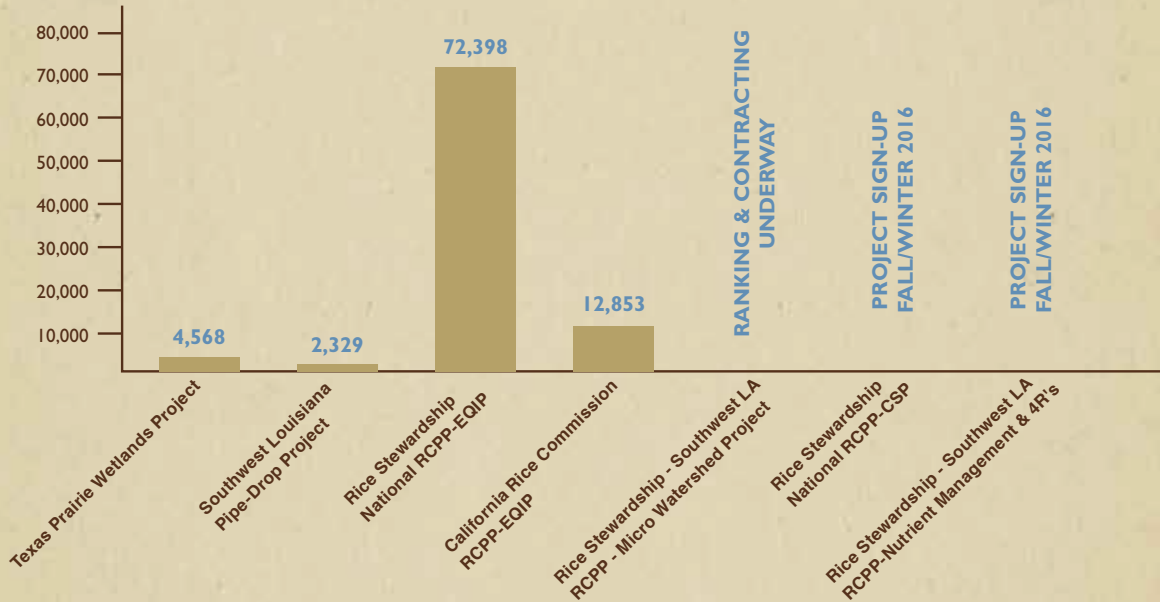


# FINANCIALS

## RICE ACRES IMPACTED

July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016

**TOTAL ACRES = 92,148**



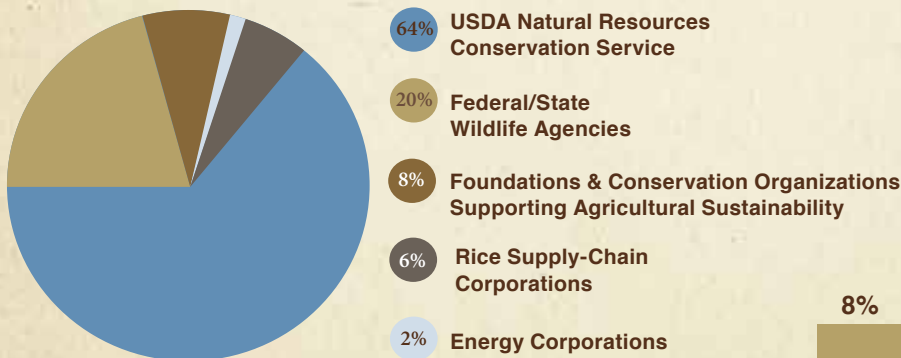
RCPP = Regional Conservation Partnership Program EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentive Program CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

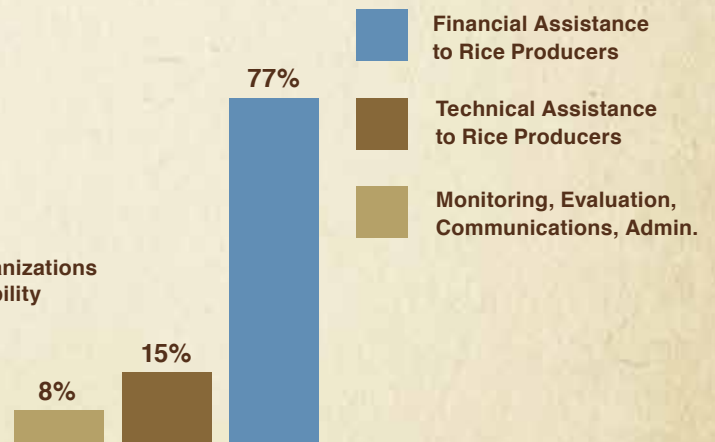
(July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016)

**\$8.3 MILLION**

### SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND REVENUE:



## WHERE THE MONEY GOES

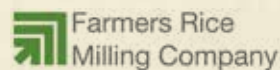


Financial reporting does not include in-kind contributions of time and talent.



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*A special thanks to Bob and Kim Spoerl for their financial support.*





*We sincerely appreciate the time and talent offered by so many  
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The Rice Foundation  
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USA Rice Council  
USA Rice Farmers  
USA Rice Merchants' Assn.  
USA Rice Millers' Assn.  
Yellow Rails and Rice Festival



THE THING  
I REALLY LIKE ABOUT  
THE PARTNERSHIP  
IS THAT IT  
MAKES THINGS  
HAPPEN.

*- Doug Miller,  
Louisiana rice farmer*







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