



Turn-row Credibility Workshop

26-27 October 2016 ▪ Lake Providence, Louisiana

A group of over 40 state, federal, and NGO conservation professionals were part of a recent workshop in northeast Louisiana aimed at strengthening their knowledge and enhancing their on the ground skillset. But the curriculum over the two days had little to do with the “ologies” (you know, entomology, conservation biology, ecology), and everything to do with better understanding the work, obstacles, and decision points that farmers must confront daily as part of production agriculture in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Topics in the workshop ranged from **Advanced Agriculture Terminology** to an **Overview of On-Farm Business Decisions and Factors** to **Conservation Planning Basics** to **A Year in the Life of a Farmer**. Among the speakers heard in the first day’s session were an Agricultural Extension Specialist, NRCS Biologist & Water Quality Specialist, and a Soil and Water Conservation District Representative. Through these experienced instructors, participants were exposed to a variety of issues, terminology, and programs highly relevant to identifying potential approaches to conservation within the context of production agriculture.

But among the suite of the great instructors, participants would all likely agree that the most powerful information, guidance, and sage advice was shared by the workshop’s two Delta farmers, Robbie Howard (East Carroll Parish) and Jay Hardwick (Tensas Parish). These gentlemen shared deep and valuable insight into their farming operations, motivations, and business approaches that influence how they make day in and day out decisions in managing their land. “Conservation cost-share programs should be viewed as opportunities to facilitate shifts in attitudes and actions that shape the land in positive ways, not as means to providing significant sources of income to the farmer,” advised Mr. Hardwick. The opportunity to hear directly from farmers, ask questions, and discuss farming practices with them helped expand the private lands biologists’ and other conservation professionals’ perspectives, and facilitated even more questions and interaction on Day 2, held in the field on Mr. Howard’s East Carroll Parish farm.

Participants began the field portion of the Workshop at the heart of Mr. Howard and his partner’s (son Keith) operation, the office and equipment shed. The group spent quality time under the shed learning about the array of equipment the Howards use on an annual basis to successfully produce the variety of crops grown on their 2,600 acre family farm. The group then moved to several field sites to look at, discuss and ask questions about various tillage methods such as no-till, minimum-till, conventional row-crop agriculture, as well as the purpose and value of cover crops. They also discussed specific crop production techniques such as irrigation methods and variables associated with land form, fertilization and herbicide application, along with considering how to best evaluate and approach incorporation of beneficial habitat conservation practices within a working agricultural landscape. The group ended the day back at the equipment shed for lunch and a demonstration of the NRCS’s mobile Rainfall Simulator that demonstrates the effect of run-off on various soil types and conditions, clearly hi-lighting the benefits of incorporating farming practices that promote the development of organic matter in the soil.

The organizers’ desire is that participants garnered new perspectives and useful insights for working effectively towards better wildlife and natural resource conservation with farmers in the MAV and beyond. Based on attendee estimates, communication and partnership with nearly 350 landowners will be enhanced as a result of what they learned.

The workshop was conceived by the Working Ag Lands Working Group of the LMVJV’s Louisiana-Mississippi Conservation Delivery Network, and generously supported by East Carroll Soil & Water Conservation District, Louisiana Delta Adventures, LSU AgCenter, and the Walton Family Foundation.



Conservation Professionals Connecting with Ag Producers to Achieve Better Conservation



Workshop participants were exposed to the day-to-day realities of ag production by an array of instructors.



Farmers and ag production specialists shared valuable insights and knowledge in the field with workshop attendees.



Lower Mississippi Valley

JOINT VENTURE

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The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture is a self-directed, non-regulatory private, state, federal conservation partnership that exists for the purpose of sustaining bird populations and their habitats within the Lower Mississippi Valley region through implementing and communicating the goals and objectives of relevant national and international bird conservation plans.