



July 2013

The Annual Meeting of the Alabama Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society was held June 12-14, 2013, in Birmingham, Alabama. The meeting, entitled "Got Soil Health?," convened at the DoubleTree Hotel. The meeting included two half-day sessions on Wednesday and Friday morning and a tour on Thursday where participants viewed conservation practices applied to the land in Jefferson County.



Group toured the Jones Valley Urban Farm in the city of Birmingham

Wednesday afternoon the meeting opened when moderator Perry Oakes introduced the Chapter President Andrew Price. After Andrew welcomed the group, Perry introduced David Lamm, Natural Resources Specialist from the NRCS East National Technology Support Center in Greensboro, NC. His enthusiastic talk about "Understanding Soil Health" allowed the participants to get up close and personal with some soil health experiments he set up.

Dr. Charles Mitchell, Extension Specialist from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) and Professor of Nutrient Management/Soil Science, Agronomy & Soils Department at Auburn University (AU), talked about "Early Agriculture's Effect on Alabama Landscapes."

Dr. Eve Brantley, Water Quality Specialist from ACES and Assistant Professor in the Agronomy & Soils Department at AU talked about the importance of good soil health in her presentation entitled "Low Impact Development (LID) Needs Good Soil Health."

Edwin Marty, Executive Director of the Hampstead Institute in Montgomery, Alabama, talked about Organic Farming.

Thursday dawned very sunny and hot, yet a steady breeze throughout the day kept everyone's spirit upbeat. The group loaded a bus to tour sites in the Jefferson County area pertaining to soil erosion and building/protecting soil health.

The first stop was at Regions Park and the baseball field that was opened in April 2013. The Barons' head groundskeeper talked to the group about the challenges of establishing and maintaining the playing field through the construction process and unpredictable weather.

The second tour stop was at the Hopewell Project Hoop House. This community hoop house uses neighborhood volunteers to till, plant, cultivate, fertilize, water, and harvest the vegetables. The hoop house, built with financial assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), was constructed to allow the community to be involved in growing and eating fresh produce. Dr. Kahn, Tuskegee University Plant Breeder/Horticulturist and an expert in hoop house building and growing, talked to the group about how to maintain a hoop house and various crops suitable inside it.

After the hoop house presentation, the group boarded the bus and traveled to an Interstate-22 project in progress called "Corridor X" to have lunch under a bridge and review soil stabilization. A presentation was given about some of the soil erosion issues that contractors had faced and the methods used to stabilize the site. After the barbeque lunch, the group traveled to the interchange with I-65 that is under construction. From the comfort of their seats and air conditioning, the group viewed some of the issues that the contractors and the Alabama Department of Transportation have faced and their solutions to develop the interchange and protect the environment.

The third site was at an Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Project on Old Dixiana Road in Pinson. The Alabama Department of Labor Inspections Division is supervising the reclamation project. The group stood in the shade to hear the steps needed to bring the site into compliance and then did a walking tour of the site.

The final tour site was at the Jones Valley Urban Farm in the city of Birmingham. The farm's mission is to make their community a healthier place and to educate 10,000 students annually to eat smarter, think healthier and live better. The group was given a tour of the expansive outdoor classroom that included a wide variety of organic produce, cut flowers, and chickens. The site allows individuals a raised bed to grow what they want. The 3 ½ acre community garden, established in 2007, provides fresh produce to the community and area restaurants and uses volunteers to cultivate and harvest the produce.

After the group returned to the hotel, meetings were held by the Certified Crop Advisor and Certified Professional in Erosion and Sediment Control Committees to hear updates related to each program. This was followed by a brief meeting of the IECA SE Chapter.

The highlight of Thursday evening was a Sunshine Suppliers, Inc. sponsored group event at a Baron's Baseball Game which included dinner in the stadium. The attendees had to seek shelter a couple of times from sporadic rain showers, and the Baron's lost, but it did not dampen their spirits. The game and camaraderie was enjoyed by all.

In an early Friday morning session, the Alabama Chapter held a business meeting. Andrew Price, the Outgoing President, called the meeting to order. Executive committee members gave reports.

Three members were presented awards. Randall McDaniel, who organized the meeting, received a certificate for his tireless efforts and successful outcome in supporting the 2013 SWCS AL Chapter annual meeting. Leah Moore Duzy, Treasurer, received a commendation for her support of the chapter for the past three years. Earl Norton received an Outstanding Service Award for his leadership and service in conservation programs in Alabama.

At the end of the business meeting, the Andrew passed the leadership for 2013-2014 to the new President, Gary Banks, of the Alabama Department of Transportation. Gary's first official duty was to present Andrew an engraved gavel to honor his leadership during the past year.

The last break of the meeting, attendees entered their last bids on the items in the silent auction. Some items created heated last minute bidding frenzies. Small trees and bags of raw peanuts were the favorites. The auction earned almost \$300 that will be split among the three students chapters in Alabama universities: Tuskegee University, Alabama A&M, and Auburn University.

The Friday morning session began when Howard Peavey, Senior Agronomist in the Maintenance Bureau of the Alabama Department of Transportation in Montgomery, talked about "Getting Vegetation Established on Challenging Sites." He talked about the different grasses and methods that ALDOT uses to ensure that grassed landscapes are protected and have an esthetically acceptable appearance to the public.

A lively presentation on "Fire Ant Management" was given by Fudd Graham, Research Fellow in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology at Auburn University. The group interacted in the presentation by using devices that tallied their responses to questions and immediately projected the answers. New solutions for fire ant management were shared by the presenter.

The final presentation was about "Precision Application – Is It Ready for Use Outside Agriculture" that was given by Dr. John Fulton, Associate Professor in the Department of Biosystems Engineering, at Auburn University. Benefits of GPS applications and ways to use precision devices on most any kind of vehicle were explored.

At noon the meeting adjourned. Everyone seemed to enjoy the DoubleTree Hotel venue, the 3-day meeting, and the opportunity to network with peers. The next meeting will be in Huntsville, Alabama, in June 2014.

President Andrew Price said, "The meeting was a resounding success. The program was very well planned and the logistics worked perfectly. Randall McDaniel is commended for his thoughtful planning and many thanks to all others on the planning committee that helped put together the details that make the Alabama Chapter SWCS meeting such a showcase event in Alabama year after year. In addition, the membership should also be commended, because without your enthusiastic participation and openness to learn new ideas, this meeting would be a shell of what it has grown to be today."

The meeting's success is also attributed to the sponsors and exhibitors. Sponsors included ACES, AU, EnviroCert International, Inc., IECA - Southeast Chapter, Norton and Associates, Sunshine Supplies, Inc., and The Basic Company (Randy McDaniel). Exhibitors included American Excelsior Corp, EnviroCert International, Inc., Flexamat, Inc., Hanes Geo, and Sunshine Supplies, Inc.