

Lee County Producer Dr. Mildred Barnes Griggs honored as NOPBNRCSE Small Farmer of the Year

Lee County producer Dr. Mildred Barnes Griggs, a retired college professor and dean, has been recognized as the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE) Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year for 2018. A Marianna native, she was honored during NOPBNRCSE's annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 1.

Dr. Griggs operates a small fruit and vegetable farm and participates in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the StrikeForce Initiative. Through EQIP, she has installed two seasonal high tunnels to extend the growing season for her vegetable crops, an irrigation well, drip irrigation, and cover crops to address water quality, water quantity, soil erosion and soil health. In addition, she owns and operates a 150-acre loblolly pine tree farm. She has a Forest Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) plan for improved soil health and biological suppression of brush, weeds and invasive species in her pine crop.

"Dr. Griggs's commitment to conservation and community service is why she was recognized as the recipient of the National Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year Award," said Erica Westbrook, acting assistant state conservationist for management and strategy and president of the Arkansas Chapter of NOPBNRCSE. "Not only is she addressing resource concerns on her farm, she has made it a mission to help other small and beginning farmers."

She has worked to increase the number of minority farmers in Lee County by helping introduce Delta area youth to careers in agriculture, in alternative crop production, and careers with USDA. She regularly demonstrates EQIP practices on her farm to other producers. She also assists other small farmers locate markets to sell their produce, especially local schools Farm to School programs.

"I want to congratulate Dr. Griggs on winning the Small Farmer of the Year award in recognition of her conservation efforts and community involvement," said Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist Mike Sullivan. "She is a shining example of what a small farmer and a good steward to the land can do with a conservation plan and technical assistance from NRCS to help make their operation successful."

The Small Farmer of the Year award is named for Lloyd E. Wright, a retired USDA NRCS employee. He is a founder of NOPBNRCSE and served two terms as the first president of the Organization.