After The Storms

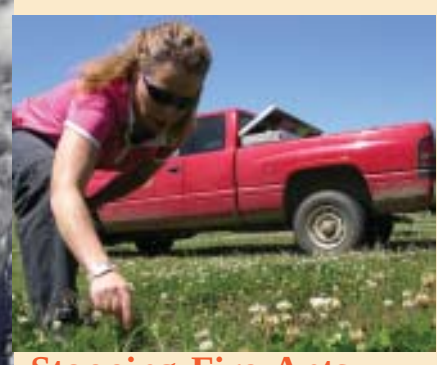
LSU AgCenter Commits To Louisiana's Recovery From Katrina, Rita

Helping Families

Building Better Houses

Rescuing Boats

Sheltering Pets



Stopping Fire Ants

Replanting The Coast

After the Storms

LSU AgCenter Commits To Louisiana's Recovery From Katrina, Rita

A few years ago most Louisianans wouldn't have dreamed their lives could be changed overnight. But that's what happened to hundreds of thousands in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

No one had the expertise to undo the damage, but the people of the LSU AgCenter put their know-how on the front lines almost immediately to help the recovery and rebuilding process begin. In fact, many of those people already were at work before the storms – telling people how to do the most they could to protect what they had from potential danger.

Once the storms hit, our people took to the streets and the fields with information about safe food and shelter, salvaging crops, saving livestock, cleaning up homes, coping with stress, rebuilding lives and much more.

Two years later, our faculty members are still dedicated to seeing that the recovery process continues successfully.

This publication shows just a few of the hundreds of examples of the LSU AgCenter's work related to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and it represents our philosophy of doing the best we can for the people of our state.

We've always worked to make lives better for the people of Louisiana, and we'll continue to do that – no matter what comes our way!

–Tom Merrill

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On The Cover:

Rita was building into an extremely dangerous Category 5 hurricane when a NASA satellite captured this image on Sept. 21, 2005. The storm hit Southwest Louisiana on Sept. 24, 2005, causing more damage to agriculture in the state than Hurricane Katrina. Images are available at NASA (www.nasa.gov).

LSU AgCenter Faculty Take Lead In Assessing Agricultural Damage

Shortly after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Dr. Kurt Guidry and other LSU AgCenter faculty members began to develop assessments of the potential damage caused to the agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries in the state.

Through that work, the LSU AgCenter was able to quickly provide preliminary estimates on losses of revenue resulting from production losses caused by the storms.

These estimates, which totaled nearly $1.6 billion in agricultural economic losses, served a variety of purposes – including helping the state's farmers apply for assistance and giving officials accurate pictures of the overall losses.

Here are some of the estimates of economic losses in various commodity areas caused by the storms.

-Kurt Guidry

Commodity	Hurricane Katrina	Hurricane Rita	Combined
Forestry	$612,866,563	$227,066,661	$839,933,224
Agronomic Crops (rice, sugarcane, cotton, etc.)	$156,018,269	$201,836,360	$357,854,629
Fruits/Nuts/Vegetables/Honey	$32,370,059	$9,581,627	$41,951,686
Livestock and Forage	$23,841,946	$51,738,689	$75,580,644
Fisheries	$142,189,733	$34,090,892	$176,280,625
Wildlife/Recreational	$24,221,407	$16,582,570	$40,803,977
Total Estimated Economic Impact	$1,000,660,068	$590,074,832	$1,590,734,900

More details on these estimates and other information are accessible on the "Agriculture" link on the AgCenter's Disaster Recovery Web site: www.lsuagcenter.com/disasterrecovery.

Experts Help Ag Producers, Forest Landowners Discuss Plans For Recovery

Trying to salvage what could be saved and to minimize the long-term effects of the hurricanes on the agriculture and natural resources of the state became major thrusts of the LSU AgCenter's work after hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Damage to the state's forest resources, rice, sugarcane, crawfish and pastureland reached well into the hundreds of millions. And those are just a few of the crops represented in nearly $1.6 billion in immediate damage seen by the state's ag industries.

To help agricultural producers recover and make plans for the future, the LSU AgCenter conducted a variety of workshops and seminars across the affected areas soon after the storms – and storm recovery continues to be a major topic at many commodity meetings around Louisiana even now.

Some of those workshops focused on how to salvage downed or damaged timber. Others looked at what long-term effects saltwater surge would have on sugarcane and whether the state's rice producers could make a comeback on the flooded land. Still others explored alternatives for cattle producers who had lost livestock, pastures, fences and much of that industry's infrastructure.

Hundreds of workshops focused on those issues and such topics as government disaster assistance programs, more details on recovery operations, successful marketing of existing crops, farm financial management, stress management and much more.

The overriding goals of the efforts for all commodities were similar to those laid out for the forestry task force – "to facilitate salvage efforts to maximize the recovery of timber damaged by the hurricane and to begin the process of renewing the forest."

LSU AgCenter experts were well aware that helping all the state's agricultural industries recover and rebound from the storms' damage played a major part in the state's economic recovery.

–Tom Merrill

LSU AgCenter forestry specialist Dr. Don Reed demonstrates how to properly use a portable sawmill.

Rescuing Cattle

Cattle producers in southeastern, southwestern and south central Louisiana took a devastating hit from hurricanes Katrina and Rita. LSU AgCenter estimates showed that almost 200,000 cattle were being raised in the affected areas. Thousands of those were lost in the storms and even more were left stranded without food or water. LSU AgCenter agents facilitated meetings to discuss feed and hay situations and the status of stranded cattle, as well as leading some of the rescue efforts and coordinating getting much-needed supplies to the area.

LSU AgCenter Instrumental In Hurricane Compensation To Sugarcane Growers

Work by the LSU AgCenter was instrumental in a U.S. Department of Agriculture program that has compensated sugarcane producers with $40 million for losses caused by hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

LSU AgCenter sugarcane expert Dr. Ben Legendre said payments were recently distributed, and he said several individuals in the AgCenter and other agencies worked to provide information that helped farmers.

"This was really a team effort," Legendre said.

Part of the compensation program was dedicated to losses from Hurricane Rita's storm surge that flooded sugarcane fields. The LSU AgCenter, using geographic information systems technology, produced digital maps of the area inundated in seven coastal parishes. These were provided to the federal Farm Service Agency to determine which fields were flooded and to calculate affected acreage so sugarcane farmers could receive payments for their losses.

Willie Cooper, state director of the FSA, said the interagency cooperation involved in administering the program is not unusual in the state.

"Louisiana has the best working relationship of any state in the country when it comes to the agriculture industry – both governmental and non-governmental entities," Cooper said.

Without the LSU AgCenter's help, the compensation process would have taken much longer and would have proceeded "case by case," Cooper said.

Dr. Paul Coreil, vice chancellor for the LSU AgCenter's Extension Service, said the mapping work "is just another example of the AgCenter putting research to work on the ground to help farmers and communities recover from storm damage from Hurricane Rita. Estimating crop damage using computer modeling clearly offers another important hurricane recovery tool."

Legendre said county agents in sugarcane-producing parishes met with individual farmers to determine the exact extent of flooding.

Meanwhile, Maurice Wolcott, a research associate with the LSU AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, who is skilled in geospatial systems, and Thomas Hymel, an AgCenter marine advisory and watershed specialist, compiled maps to show flooding based on GIS, high-resolution elevation data and observational data, such as high water marks and debris lines, collected by the AgCenter and the LSU Hurricane Center.

The work was later fine-tuned from county agents' interviews of farmers who provided information on where flooding occurred in sugarcane fields. Farmer input was needed to help provide flood data at a level of precision needed for the disaster program.

"We did not have a single instance of a producer providing data that didn't fit other corroborating elevation models," Hymel said.

Legendre said LSU AgCenter economists Dr. Mike Salassi and Dr. Kurt Guidry worked on hurricane damage estimates to the 2005 sugarcane crop and arrived at a figure of a total loss of approximately $282 million.

Wolcott said the AgCenter was designated by FSA as the official agency to do the mapping. "It was pretty much a question of which entity had the capability and expertise to do it in a timely manner," Wolcott said.

Both LSU AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant provided funding and resources for the mapping work, Hymel said.

"This is the first time an extension service has ever done the delineation for a USDA disaster program," Hymel said.

Bob Manuel, FSA program specialist, said this project was the first time geographic information system technology had been used for an FSA project.

Designation of the LSU AgCenter for the mapping work was an obvious choice, Manuel said.

"The AgCenter was chosen because they have the knowledge of the sugarcane area and geographic information systems experience," he said. "The arrangement worked out well, and they provided the USDA with critical data."

Wolcott said the work was a rewarding experience. "The sugarcane industry took a major hit, so to be able to help the producers was very satisfying."

Finishing touches are now being made on the map to determine areas flooded by Rita where sugarcane is not grown – from Lafourche Parish to the Texas state line. "When we're done with that, we will have the complete line," Hymel said.

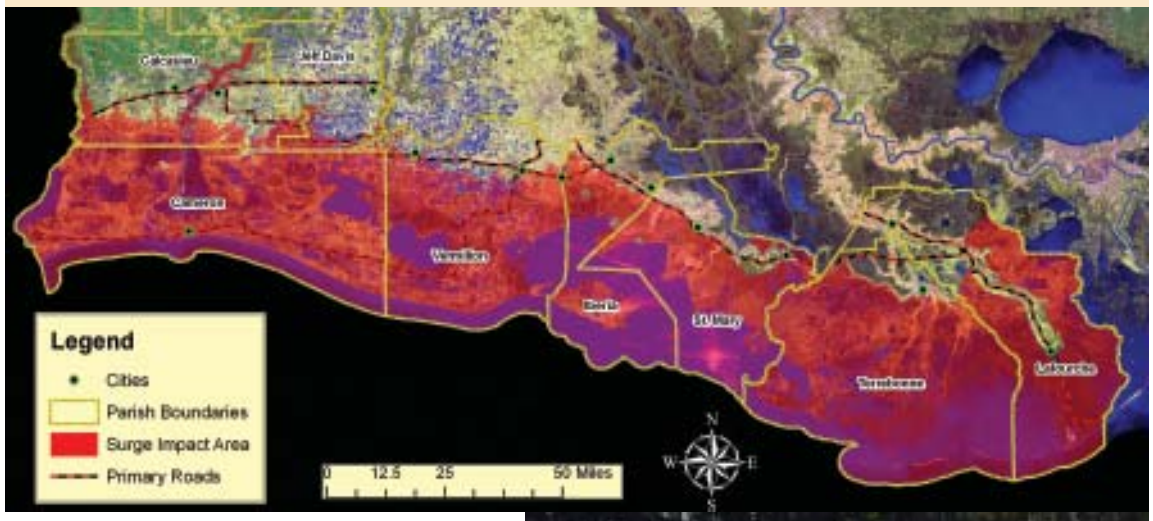
Benefits of the mapping work have gone beyond sugarcane. Using a powerful global positioning system and satellite data, forecast models were made to determine what would happen if specific areas are hit by the surge of a large hurricane such as Rita.

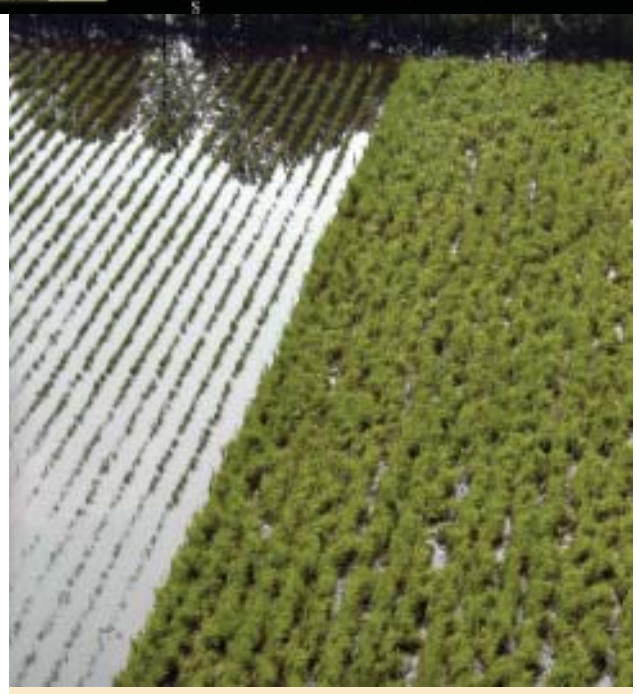
"All of our coastal parishes are vulnerable, and some are more vulnerable than others," Hymel said.

The 9 feet of water pushed ashore by Hurricane Rita in Iberia Parish threatened New Iberia – almost reaching the Lowe's store near U.S. Highway 190.

"The AgCenter was chosen because they have the knowledge of the sugarcane area and geographic information systems experience. The arrangement worked out well, and they provided the USDA with critical data."

– Bob Manuel, FSA program specialist





This flooded field of sugarcane east of Abbeville in Vermilion Parish was just one of many flooded after Hurricane Rita in 2005. Mapping work done by the LSU AgCenter is credited with helping cane farmers obtain disaster payments for areas that were flooded.

The modeling shows an 18-foot flood would put most of the city of New Iberia under water. In Vermilion Parish, a storm with 15 feet of water would flood most of Abbeville. Most of Franklin would be submerged with 10 feet of flooding, he said.

"The National Hurricane Center says this is something that can actually happen with a Category 3 storm," Hymel said.

The computer study also shows that the West Guide Levee of the Atchafalaya Basin would serve as a wall that would worsen flooding in St. Mary Parish, Hymel explained, adding that many levees in the Franklin and Morgan City areas would be overtopped by direct hits from Rita-sized storms.

The maps generated during this work were displayed in several parishes, and the information was used by emergency preparedness planners and people rebuilding their homes or constructing new ones.

"Everywhere we went, they appreciated the new level of knowledge we brought to their parish," Hymel said.

–Bruce Schultz

Dairy Farmers, Researchers Faced Particular Challenges

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita dealt major blows to agricultural commodities across South Louisiana – wiping out entire crops, damaging others, stranding or killing livestock, ruining farmland and much more.

A huge percentage of the state's agricultural producers faced serious challenges after the storms. Those with livestock faced particular issues with getting food and water for animals that had survived the storms. And those in the dairy industry had such challenges coupled with the problems of what to do with their perishable products.

"This was another serious economic blow to the dairy industry, which already had been facing rising costs, stagnant milk prices and increasing economic pressure during the past decade," LSU AgCenter dairy expert Dr. Gary Hay said of the situation.

The state's commercial dairy producers, who are located primarily in the Florida Parishes of Tangipahoa, Washington and St. Helena, were forced to literally dump milk the week after Katrina hit because they were without enough electric power to operate their coolers, and trucks were unable to pick up the milk from farms. Milk processing plants in Southeast Louisiana also were without power and water for a time.

> ***"This was another serious economic blow to the dairy industry."***
> *– Dr. Gary Hay, LSU AgCenter*

The problems weren't limited to the state's commercial producers, however. LSU AgCenter researchers at its Southeast Research Station in Franklinton provided an example of what all producers were facing.

They had hundreds of cows to be milked, storm or no storm. And while many of the station's staff members evacuated, some, including research coordinator Dr. Mike McCormick, stayed behind to do what they could for the hundreds of animals at the research station.

Short on hands to care for animals and facing a critical need for more diesel fuel to run emergency generators, which provided the electric power to run milking equipment and to refrigerate milk during storage, they were like many of the state's commercial dairy producers.

All were left wondering whether fuel trucks to fill the diesel tanks for generators and milk trucks to empty the on-farm storage tanks and take it on for processing would arrive in time.

Not wanting to divert fuel that might go to commercial dairy operations, however, McCormick turned to the other AgCenter research stations to provide fuel when his ran out.

Meanwhile, LSU AgCenter agents Aubrey Posey, Ronnie Bardwell and others worked round-the-clock finding and getting fuel to distraught dairy farmers.

–Rick Bogren & Linda Benedict

Port Sulphur Research Station's Name, Major Work Changed

Hurricane Katrina changed much of the landscape and lives of Plaquemines Parish, and the LSU AgCenter's research station near Port Sulphur was no exception.

Until 2005, the station's primary focus was conducting citrus research, which helped to support the parish's thriving citrus and vegetable industry. The work there eventually resulted in the release of several new citrus cultivars, as well as addressing a variety of other topics such as insect control, freeze damage to citrus and salt intrusion.

On August 29, 2005, however, the station, which is about 35 miles south of New Orleans on a strip of land extending to the Gulf of Mexico, was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

In addition to severe wind damage, the station was inundated by 5-6 feet of salt water. All buildings were destroyed or heavily damaged, all equipment was destroyed, and approximately 75 percent of its citrus trees were killed or damaged and had to be removed.

Much of the LSU AgCenter's Citrus Station was wiped out by Hurricane Katrina.

But new life grew out of the devastation, and the station's efforts were redirected to include topics vital to restoring Louisiana's coast. Along with the new research, the station's name was changed to the Coastal Area Research Station.

Although limited citrus research is continuing, the primary emphasis of the station now is on coastal plants – salt-tolerant plants for marsh and coastal stabilization. Research on Formosan subterranean termites also is another major effort, along with other agronomic and horticulture projects that are back under way.

Like many things in the area, however, the station is operating out of a temporary office trailer and a temporary shop facility until permanent facilities can be constructed.

–Tom Merrill

LSU AgCenter Experts Study Saltwater Contamination In Southwest Louisiana

LSU AgCenter scientists conducted a variety of research in the hope of being able to make recommendations for farmers whose fields were hit with saltwater contamination from Hurricane Rita's storm surge.

"LSU AgCenter faculty worked diligently in the months after the storm to answer the many questions producers had relative to the soil and its suitability for production," said Dr. Steve Linscombe, the LSU AgCenter's regional director for Southwest Louisiana.

Linscombe, who also is in charge of the LSU AgCenter's Rice Research Station, said extensive soil sampling results were analyzed to determine what, if anything, could be done to fields.

"The work being done by the scientists at the Rice Research Station won't answer all the questions, but we'll have a better idea of where we stand," he said in early days after the storm. Researchers at the station and other LSU AgCenter locations had been looking at issues related to salt tolerance of rice even before the storms, since saltwater intrusion along the coastal areas already was a concern.

Researchers conduct experiments to see how salt levels affect the health of rice plants.

Some of the research after Hurricane Rita involved work in a greenhouse at the station to determine how well rice would grow in different soils collected from seven locations in Vermilion Parish. In addition, two products were tested for effectiveness at helping plants overcome high salt levels.

Linscombe said most of the research published before the storms about salt contamination dealt with salt levels in irrigation water rather than the effects of a storm surge. So the LSU AgCenter research after the storms was forging into new areas.

–Bruce Schultz

Fisheries Industries Rebounding But Pace Still Slow

Ice Houses, Boat Lift Make Difference For Commercial Operations

Louisiana offers the best commercial and recreational fishing opportunities found in the continental United States, but the industries have faced plenty of obstacles in recovering from the damage of hurricanes.

One of the greatest obstacles to the rebound of the state's commercial fishing industry was that Katrina and Rita virtually destroyed all the infrastructure. Fueling stations, ice houses and processing facilities were simply washed away. Recreational fishing also saw the loss of boats, docks and other facilities.

Rebuilding all of that is a monumental task, and most agree finding those willing to make huge financial investments in an industry that was in a tenuous financial situation prior to the hurricanes was difficult.

Recreational fishing made somewhat of a comeback in the months after the storms, and there were those who believed Louisiana's commercial fishing industry could be successful again. But significant help was needed to get the recovery started.

That's where LSU AgCenter fisheries agents, their counterparts across the nation and some generous groups and corporations came into play.

Two major turning points in the recovery of the industry came in 2006. One involved the donation of a traveling lift to help get boats repaired and back in the water. The other involved the donation of commercial ice plants to help fishermen preserve their catch.

The first of those events came in March 2006, when the city of Valdez, Alaska, donated the use of a Marine Travelift to the Plaquemines Parish government – after appeals went out from LSU AgCenter agents to their colleagues across the country.

The lift, housed at the Empire shipyard, basically is a hoist on wheels capable of lifting a load of 60 tons. It takes a vessel from the water so it may be placed in the shipyard for repairs and then helps to place the vessel back. Empire had a similar lift before the storms, but that one was damaged by the hurricanes.

"It remains the only game in town," explained Rusty Gaude, fisheries agent for the LSU AgCenter. "It is the only public lift operating in the Plaquemines and St. Bernard area."

The lift has been instrumental in getting hundreds of boats out of the water for repairs and then placing them back into the water to ply their trade, Gaude and others say, pointing out the lift was in use virtually all day long every day for many months.

Gaude was one of many who helped secure the lift and arrange for its 4,000-mile journey from Valdez to Empire. The logistics of moving the lift involved Sea Grant College Program agents from Louisiana, Alaska and Washington; trucking companies Carlise Transportation and Packard Truck Lines; and government officials from several states.

While use of the Travelift was the first major event toward jump-starting the commercial fishing industry, another development that helped contribute to the recovery was the construction of new ice plants in St. Bernard Parish and Cameron Parish.

Having the ability to ice down their catch is one of the vital elements for the commercial fishing industry. To help restore some of the industry's infrastructure that was destroyed by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Shell Oil Co. donated $500,000 to install three industrial ice machines to serve Louisiana fishermen. LSU AgCenter agents were among those working to obtain such vital donations and helping to see the industry rebuild.

A traveling lift carries a repaired ship, the Pat-Al, through a shipyard crowded with rows of boats damaged by the hurricanes. The hoist, a Marine Travelift, was donated to Plaquemines Parish by the citizens of Valdez, Alaska, after desperate pleas from LSU AgCenter agents about the need for such equipment to get the state's fishing industry back on track. The lift had to be dismantled in Alaska, then shipped 4,500 miles and reassembled in Empire, La.

The effort to secure the ice machines was spearheaded by the Louisiana Seafood and Marketing Promotion Board, LSU AgCenter, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation and government officials in Cameron, Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes.

Shell Oil Co. provided $500,000 dollars to be used for the purchase of the three ice machines for the area, and Morris and Associates of Raleigh, N.C., provided the ice machines and the installation.

Each parish was given the resources for a 20-ton ice plant. Plaquemines and St. Bernard agreed to pool their funds and develop one ice station hub for the area.

LSU AgCenter agents Mark Schexnayder of southeastern Louisiana and Kevin Savoie of southwestern Louisiana said the opening of the plants in the summer of 2006 couldn't have come at better times.

"With the beginning of the white shrimp season occurring, this ice will be an important step in the recovery effort of the commercial fishing industry," said Schexnayder when the St. Bernard plant was dedicated in August 2006 – almost a year after Katrina.

Likewise, Savoie said the hope was that the ice machine would have a "trickle down effect" on the Cameron community.

"Now that there is a steady supply of ice, more fishermen can return to the water, catch fish or shrimp, and as this industry comes back to life, it will provide an opportunity for other jobs in other areas," Savoie said.

The ice situation was just one example of how much damage was done to the infrastructure of commercial fishing. Before Rita, a 60-ton plant was in operation along with several smaller facilities that produced ice for fishermen in the Cameron area. Now, the new 20-ton ice plant is the main provider for the entire industry.

But locals considered the new plant, which came a year after the storm, a great thing – particularly since ice is a necessity for preserving the catch.

"It has been a real blessing," said Leo Dyson, a Cameron Parish fisherman, adding, "Before we had this ice machine, there was a real shortage of ice."

–Craig Gautreaux & Tom Merrill

Keeping Pets Safe

A temporary pet shelter in the LSU AgCenter's Parker Coliseum on campus in Baton Rouge served as the home to more than 1,200 animals for several weeks after Hurricane Katrina struck southeastern Louisiana. Some were brought by pet owners, who themselves were destined for shelters and couldn't take pets along. Others were rescued and brought in. The shelter involved a massive volunteer effort and the donations of tons of pet food, crates and other supplies. The shelter was a joint project of several organizations dedicated to the welfare of animals, including the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association and the Louisiana Animal Control Association. The LSU School of Veterinary Medicine took the lead in caring for the animals, and the LSU AgCenter managed the facility.

4-H'ers Spend Part Of Spring Break Fighting Coastal Erosion

A 4-H Club member places sand around a plant called bitter panicum used in an erosion control project between Constance Beach and Holly Beach. The wooden fencing was installed by the state Department of Natural Resources. A group of 4-H'ers from Calcasieu, Jefferson Davis and Vermilion parishes spent part of their spring break planting marsh grass to aid with erosion control. Megan Shultice, a 4-H Club member from J.H. Williams Middle School, carries a pallet of plants.

More than 85 4-H Club members spent a day of their 2007 spring break at the beach – but, unlike the usual day in the sun, they were busy planting marsh grass to help fight coastal erosion.

The students from 4-H clubs in Calcasieu, Jefferson Davis and Vermilion parishes planted a marsh grass called bitter panicum along a two-mile stretch between Holly Beach and Constance Beach.

The project was funded by Coca-Cola through a grant obtained by the LSU AgCenter, which operates the 4-H youth development program in Louisiana.

The students placed the plants in rows along wooden erosion fencing installed on the beach by the state Department of Natural Resources.

Vermilion Parish high school student Austin Mouton of Erath said he enjoyed spending the day working at the beach.

"It doesn't seem like a lot of work," he said despite the somewhat dreary weather in which the 4-H'ers were working. "It's more like fun, and you get a feeling of pride."

Jared Broussard, an Abbeville High School junior, shoveled scoops of sand out of the beach every few feet. He also said the day at the beach was more fun than work.

"We're having a blast," he said. "We're working to keep the sand, so the Gulf of Mexico doesn't hit Highway 82."

Following behind Broussard was Garrett Nash, a seventh-grader from Linwood School in Lake Charles, who placed grass sprouts in the holes Broussard was digging for the plants. The project was especially meaningful for Nash.

"I live right by here in Sweet Lake," he said.

Like the others, Kane Vest, a sixth-grader from Bell City in Calcasieu Parish, said he understood the importance of "planting to avoid coastal erosion" and that he was getting satisfaction out of the project "because you realize you could be saving homes and the ecology."

LSU AgCenter Vice Chancellor Paul Coreil said what the students were learning about saving the environment was just a part of what they were learning and doing.

"Louisiana 4-H is putting significant emphasis on instilling a strong commitment to community service, character building and leadership development," Coreil said. "Projects like this provide great opportunities for 4-H students to not only improve their environment but also improve their lives and respective communities when they carry these positive life skills with them as future community leaders."

Some of the students were wearing T-shirts with a slogan that borrows from the popular Las Vegas television advertisement: "What happens in the environment, stays in the environment."

The bitter panicum not only was planted by the students it also was grown by students. It was started in the fall and grown in greenhouses at Abbeville High School and J.H. Williams Middle School in Abbeville, LSU AgCenter 4-H agent Shannon Waits said.

Waits also said she was pleased with what she saw among the young people braving strong winds and occasional rain to do the work. "There's some great teamwork going on," she said.

Troy Mouton of Vermilion Parish, a volunteer 4-H leader and a guidance counselor from Dozier Elementary School, said the students came up with the idea of working on an erosion-control project. She also said working on various aspects of the project has expanded the students' opportunity for learning.

"It opened up their eyes, and they can see the impacts of Rita," Mouton said. "We were all hit by the hurricane, but it affected all of us in different ways."

Likewise, Alyssa Watkins, a ninth-grader from Lacassine, said the project started coming to life when 4-H Club members from Jefferson Davis, Calcasieu and Vermilion parishes got together.

"We want to save the coast," she said. "We thought it would be a good service-learning project to come out here and do what we can."

Taking a long-term perspective on their work, Mallory Nicholson from Dolby Elementary in Lake Charles said the project could be important in the future.

"We're planting to block the next hurricanes," Nicholson said.

Mark Shirley, a coastal specialist with the LSU AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant, said the vegetation planted by the students will work in conjunction with fencing installed by the Department of Natural Resources.

"The fencing is already trapping sand," Shirley said. "The bitter panicum we are planting will help hold the sand together and build a sand dune."

–Bruce Schultz

Researcher Looks At Salt Water's Effects On Rice Miner

While many were looking at the harmful effects of the storm surge from Hurricane Rita on Louisiana agriculture, LSU AgCenter entomologist Dr. Boris Castro looked for a potential benefit.

Castro looked for signs on whether the salt water pushed ashore into the rice fields of Southwest Louisiana by the hurricane might weaken the surge of the South American rice leaf miner.

The entomologist said it's possible the rice miner population could have been weakened by the high salinity, but there's no way of knowing exactly what happened, since the insect has only been known to be in the country the past couple of growing seasons.

"We don't know where it over-winters," Castro said, explaining the pest first appeared in 2004 but was not identified until 2005.

The researcher said he was surprised that the amount of damage in Louisiana rice fields increased significantly before the hurricanes in 2005 as compared to 2004, when the pest first appeared but had yet to be identified as the cause of damage.

"As far as control, we still don't have a chemical," Castro said at the time. Methyl parathion had no effect on a Cameron Parish rice field of 230 acres hit by the tiny insect during the 2005 season, Castro said.

The LSU AgCenter plans to conduct studies on biological aspects and behavior of this tiny pest.

–Bruce Schultz

LSU AgCenter entomologist Dr. Linda Hooper-Bui checks for signs of fire ants making a resurgence in New Orleans after the storms.

Faculty Work To Keep Fire Ants Away

Soon after flood waters receded from hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the fall of 2005, a team of LSU AgCenter scientists was on the scene in the Greater New Orleans area and in Southwest Louisiana monitoring how the fire ants fared.

The team, led by LSU AgCenter entomologist Dr. Linda Hooper-Bui, found the invasive ants didn't fare well. Apparently, salt in water kills fire ants.

This finding sparked a research project to determine the relationship of fire ants to flooding, and it launched a major effort in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes to stop the fire ants from returning to this urban area.

In attempts to keep the fire ant populations down in areas where Mother Nature appeared to have helped wipe them out, LSU AgCenter researchers and educators began working on programs designed to show residents how to keep the ants at bay.

One of those, known as FAST Prevention – short for Fire Ant Surge Threat Prevention – was launched in New Orleans and encouraged in other areas. It involved spreading fire ant control products in public areas, working with neighborhood associations on areawide spreading of such products and encouraging individual residents to take similar action if it wasn't being done on a larger scale in their areas.

"The unique circumstances following Hurricane Katrina make it possible for us to severely curtail the repopulation of fire ants in the Greater New Orleans area," said Dr. David Boethel, LSU AgCenter vice chancellor for research, during the launch of the program in New Orleans. "Without intervention now, the fire ant populations could return to previous levels or become an even worse problem than before the hurricanes.

"LSU AgCenter research has shown that areawide management programs, like the FAST program, have been successful."

–Linda Benedict

Hurricanes Didn't Stop Termite Programs

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita did not interfere with the LSU AgCenter's efforts to control Formosan termites in New Orleans French Quarter.

Known as the French Quarter Program, the federally funded pilot test began in 1998 and features various treatments to combat the termites. It is a partnership among the LSU AgCenter, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, the New Orleans Mosquito and Termite Control Board and area pest control applicators.

The only issue was that Hurricane Katrina dislocated many of the employees of the pest control operators involved in the program, according to Dr. Dennis Ring of the LSU AgCenter. That meant the research and outreach program was virtually put on hold for a brief time, but it wasn't affected long term since the French Quarter was not flooded.

Ring said the French Quarter program was reactivated in October 2005 with renewed sampling and inspections.

USDA officials say the program has seen success and could play a critical role after the storms.

"The best evidence we have of success in the French Quarter project comes from the inspection of buildings in the original 15 blocks included in the test area," said Frank Guillot, USDA's national program coordinator for the Formosan Termite Program.

He said inspections of properties in 2003 found 26 percent of the inspected buildings were infested with live termites. Inspection results for 2005 showed only 5 percent of the inspected buildings are infested.

Since termites were found in some areas of the city that flooded, Guillot said continuing the project is important.

"We've found that termites did survive where flooding occurred. We do know that termites are still there, but we won't know for a while how many," he said, stressing the importance of continued testing and work to see if the pests can be driven out.

–Rick Bogren

LSU AgCenter Provides Fish To Control Mosquitoes

The LSU AgCenter provided mosquitofish (Gambusia affinis) to the New Orleans area during the summer of 2006 in an effort to suppress mosquito populations in the many abandoned swimming pools in the city.

Experts estimated New Orleans had more than 6,000 abandoned pools, and each had the potential of being a breeding ground for a multitude of mosquitoes.

Mark Schexnayder of the LSU AgCenter assisted in efforts between Operation Blessing and the New Orleans Mosquito and Termite Control Board to ensure that the mosquito numbers don't get out of hand.

Schexnayder said using the mosquitofish was the idea of Steve Sackett, research entomologist and field superintendent for the New Orleans Mosquito and Termite Control Board.

Sackett said he had used fish before to control mosquitoes in the city but never to this magnitude.

"Before Katrina we would use minnow traps to catch a few fish in drainage ditches to use for this purpose, but with the potential for West Nile virus and other disease problems that we could see from having this many abandoned pools, we had to think bigger," Sackett said.

The combination of resources from the various agencies involved in the project provided what was needed to be successful.

"We've gotten off to a good start with the help of Operation Blessing, which gave us $25,000 to put the fish farm back in operation at the Orleans Parish Prison," Schexnayder said.

Operation Blessing is an international relief organization that has donated money, manpower and equipment to the New Orleans recovery effort.

With this grant in hand, Schexnayder contacted the LSU AgCenter's Aquaculture Research Station in Baton Rouge about donating some mosquitofish, and the result is that Orleans Parish now has the world's largest Gambusia fish breeding facility.

"Dr. [Robert] Romaire and his staff at the Aquaculture Station have been phenomenal in this effort. They have been draining their ponds in Baton Rouge and giving us fish to put in the abandoned swimming pools," Schexnayder said.

Romaire, LSU AgCenter professor and director of the Aquaculture Research Station, said the mosquitofish are a native species found in just about any water body in Louisiana.

"Many of our experimental ponds at the Aquaculture Research Station that are used in catfish research and crawfish research have large populations of mosquitofish. Although they are not part of our targeted research program at the station, they do add the benefit of controlling mosquito populations at the station," Romaire said during the effort.

He said in addition to providing fish to stock the swimming pools, the LSU AgCenter provided mosquitofish breeding stock to the New Orleans Mosquito and Termite Control Board to help in establishing the mosquitofish breeding facility.

–Johnny Morgan

Bailey Richard (left), Kolby Richard (middle) and Larayne Picou (right), 4-H'ers from Cameron Parish, prepare livestock for competition in the 2006 LSU AgCenter Livestock Show. The Richards and Picou said they were happy just to be able to participate after Hurricane Rita devastated much of their home parish in 2005.

Youngsters Press On With Livestock Projects Despite Storms

Hurricane Rita destroyed homes, schools and barns when it ripped through Cameron Parish. It also bruised and battered the hopes of hundreds of 4-H'ers looking forward to showing livestock.

"Livestock means a lot to these kids," said Jake Fontenot, LSU AgCenter 4-H agent in Cameron Parish. "It's a big part of the Cameron Parish 4-H Club."

Although the event was months away, Fontenot said he started getting calls the day after the storm from students and parents asking whether the parish livestock show would still be held in January 2006.

When it appeared the show would have to be canceled because of the storm's devastating effects, Cameron Parish ninth-grader Larayne Picou said she also was devastated by that thought.

"When my dad told me we weren't showing, that had a big effect on me," said Picou, a 4-H Club member who has shown cattle and pigs since she was 9 years old and has always looked forward to parish and state livestock shows.

In the long run, however, Picou didn't have to face those fears. With help from the LSU AgCenter and her neighbors to the north in Calcasieu Parish, Picou and others from Cameron got to participate in a parish livestock show, as well as the district and state shows that year.

For purposes of the shows, the youngsters were granted hardship requests, and deadlines were extended. Calcasieu Parish shared space and judges with 4-H'ers from Cameron and combined their parish livestock shows.

Then the students from Cameron said they were thrilled to be able to participate in the LSU AgCenter's State Livestock Show in February 2006 – although it had been a long road to get there.

Along the way, they shared more than just the space to hold livestock shows, since many also had lost their homes and barns.

"Ninety percent of our kids from southern Cameron Parish don't have anything left," Fontenot said that spring during the show. Picou's family opened their home and barn to fellow 4-H'er and relative Bailey Richard and her family.

"We share feed pens, help each other feed, wash and water." Richard said.

Her family was living in a camper on Picou's family's property.

"It was hard. I was used to being out in the country." Richard said. "We couldn't go outside and ride four-wheelers, and I really missed my horse."

Fontenot estimated about 100 4-H'ers from Cameron Parish participated in the LSU AgCenter's first Livestock Show after the storm – although the parish usually had about 200 4-H'ers compete.

Among those competing was Richard's older brother, Kolby, who also shows cattle and was thankful to be reunited with many of his friends.

"It's the only thing normal we have left to do," Kolby Richard said.

Because of the hardships she endured, Picou says she is a stronger person.

"It makes me want to enjoy life more, because life is too short," Picou said. "It makes me want to enjoy my animals more, because if we wouldn't have taken our cattle, we would have lost them."

–Tobie Blanchard

LSU AgCenter Responds Heroically To Hurricane Disasters

Rusty Gaude's father died August 28, 2005, the day before Hurricane Katrina struck. The next day Gaude, an LSU AgCenter fisheries agent and resident of New Orleans, had to leave his father's remains at a funeral home in Folsom and evacuate, not knowing what was going to happen.

Gaude was back in Louisiana three days later, and he and his brothers buried their father with a plan to hold a proper funeral whenever possible. (It was – six weeks later.)

But despite all of this going on in his personal life, Gaude was back at work the day after he buried his father, helping his fellow workers and clientele in Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes, two of the hardest hit by Katrina.

Gaude is just one example of the dedication and self-sacrifice exhibited by AgCenter employees in the aftermath of the worst hurricane disaster to hit the United States – Katrina and Rita only three weeks apart.

An immediate challenge for Gaude was getting a marine lift to the fishers in the two parishes so they could get their stranded boats off land and back into the water to recover their business. That was accomplished successfully several months later when a boat lift arrived from Alaska. It was donated by the town of Valdez, Alaska, through an effort coordinated by Louisiana, Alaska and Washington's Sea Grant programs.

And that is just one example of vital help provided by AgCenter people in the recovery effort.

"They said they wanted to get back to work," said LSU AgCenter Chancellor Bill Richardson, speaking of the overwhelming response from employees displaced by the hurricanes.

In the immediate aftermath, his primary concern was finding all of them.

"It took nearly 10 days (after Katrina), but we accounted for everyone," he said. The AgCenter has about 1,500 employees around the state including nearly 160 in the Katrina-affected area. None had been injured, but several had lost homes and everything they owned.

"I don't have a house. I'm thankful I have a job," said Carol Jacobsen, holding back tears, as she addressed a group of 40 displaced employees who met with AgCenter administrators on September 16, 2005. She is the secretary in the St. Bernard extension office.

Ramona Gentry's home in Port Sulphur was washed off its foundation. A Plaquemines Parish extension agent, she moved into a FEMA trailer next to the extension office, her days and nights filled with helping the citizens in her parish in the recovery effort.

"We have our administrators to thank for getting those trailers so fast," said Mark Schexnayder, a fisheries agent in Jefferson and Orleans parishes.

Schexnayder, whose home in Metairie miraculously suffered only wind damage and no flood damage, praises the response of AgCenter administrators to the crisis.

"They were there for us. It made all the difference in the world," he said.

The LSU AgCenter's Katrina response was fast and thorough. Employee safety was top priority.

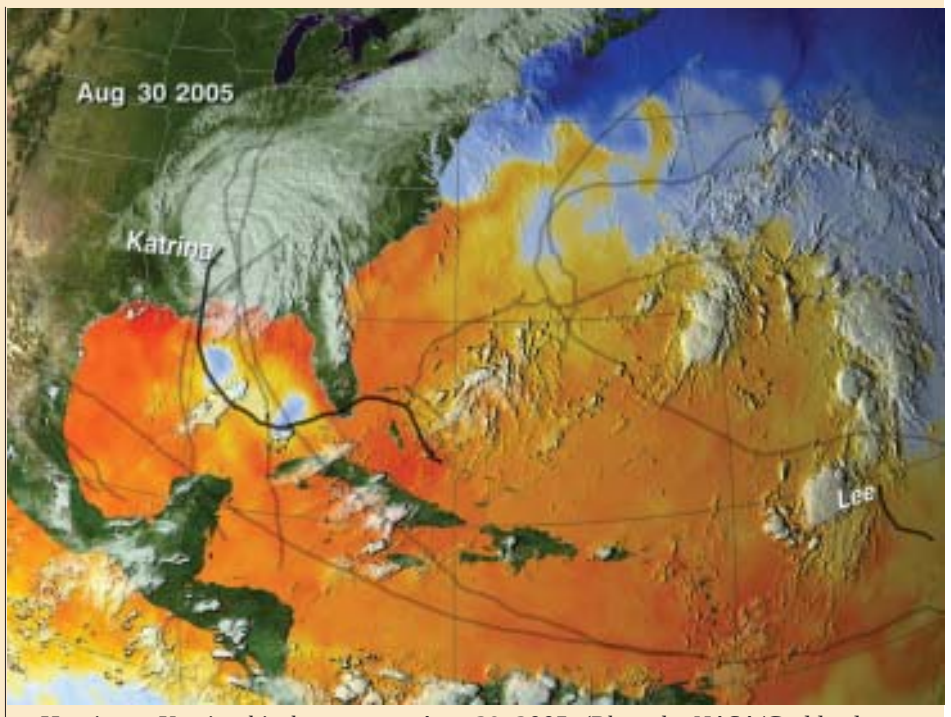
Chancellor Richardson was back at work early on Tuesday, Aug. 30, and had called in the two vice chancellors, David Boethel and Paul Coreil, and several of his staff. He kept his office open to answer calls throughout that next weekend, which included the Labor Day holiday.

Communication was a problem those first few weeks with both phone and cell phone service knocked out in certain areas.

"It was frustrating trying to find out what was happening," Boethel said. In addition to many other crisis-related tasks, Boethel handled requests to use LSU AgCenter property for staging efforts for relief workers and for housing and offices for faculty and students from other LSU schools, including the University of New Orleans, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans.

As vice chancellor for research and director of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, Boethel was especially worried about the people, animals, buildings and projects at the research stations.

The Citrus Research Station, now renamed the Coastal Area Research Station, which sits near the levee north of Port Sulphur, is the closest to the Gulf of Mexico. And it got a lot closer as the ocean surge reached just south of Port Sulphur.



Hurricane Katrina hit the coast on Aug. 29, 2005. (Photo by NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center Scientific Visualization Studio)

One of the research assistants at the station, Joe Alexis Jr., nearly lost his life trying to check on the station the day after Katrina hit. As he neared the levee in his pickup truck, the water started coming over.

"It looked like Niagara Falls," he said. It came so fast his truck was swept up by the current. He managed to climb out and grab hold of a tree, where he clung for about an hour along with some desperate snakes. He then swam to safety at his parents' house not too far away.

The station suffered major damage – more than $2 million – including destruction of citrus, Formosan subterranean termite and vegetable production research projects.

"We had also planted black mangroves to address coastal erosion and restoration," Boethel said.

The Southeast Station in Franklinton, where the state's dairy production research is conducted, had 220 cows to be milked, storm or no storm.

Mike McCormick, station director, hurriedly collected enough data the day before Katrina hit, Sunday, to finish one research project. But by Monday, it was down to him, Doug McKean and Justin Jones to feed and milk all 420 animals at the station. The rest of the staff, including the eight who do the twice-a-day milking, had evacuated.

All dairies have generators for emergencies because it takes electricity to milk cows. But the critical need they all faced, including the Southeast Station, was diesel fuel to operate the generators.

"Next time a storm even enters the Gulf, no matter where it's headed, I'm going to make sure my diesel tanks are full," McCormick said.

Not wanting to take away fuel from the commercial operations, McCormick turned to the other LSU AgCenter research stations to provide fuel when his ran out, and they did. On Thursday, Sept. 1, after the storm hit, Pat Bollich, director of the Central Research Station in Baton Rouge, showed up not only with fuel but with three generators and eight helpers. The group cut trees off fences, fixed equipment and rewired to keep the generators going.

Meanwhile, Aubrey Posey, Ronnie Bardwell and other AgCenter agents, worked round-the-clock finding and getting fuel to distraught dairy farmers.

All over the state, LSU AgCenter people stepped up to serve as demand dictated. For example, Jane Jones, the director of the Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center near Pollock, ran a Red Cross shelter there for evacuees, primarily from St. Bernard Parish. She heroically rallied volunteer support from the local community. At its peak, she saw to the care of nearly 600 people.

"The Red Cross told us this was one of the best-run shelters in the state," said Coreil, who serves as vice chancellor for extension and director of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

Linda Hooper-Bui took time from her fire ant research to organize the first set of volunteers for the rapidly put-together pet shelter at Parker Coliseum. Shannon Bere, who then coordinated the AgCenter's livestock shows, and her crew worked day and night to transform the coliseum from a large-animal facility to one that could handle dogs and cats.

"And some pet ferrets, birds and a few pet snakes," said Bere.

Another LSU AgCenter crew – Royce Fontenot, Jeremy Birch and Jay Grymes – set up a portable weather station at the New Orleans airport on Sept. 3 to provide data for the control tower.

"The airport was without reliable weather data because some of the equipment was out of commission," Coreil said. "Thousands of people who flew in and out of that airport those few days, including President Bush, benefited from the AgCenter weather data."

Then, the unthinkable happened. Another fierce hurricane, Rita, came along on Sept. 26 and flattened and flooded the other half of South Louisiana.

And again the AgCenter response was swift and selfless. For example, Andrew Granger, Vermilion Parish agent, pitched in to save cows and distribute donated feed to cattle producers in his area. By night, he had to deal with his own flooded home and his own cattle, also stranded by the storm surge that engulfed pastures.

Right after Rita, just as they did after Katrina, LSU AgCenter people provided aid to victims, met with local governmental bodies and networked with colleagues all over the country to bring much-needed relief to Louisiana.

If there is anything good that can come from this tragedy, it is that the LSU AgCenter is getting more recognition from the media, including the national media, as a valuable source of practical, research-based information. LSU AgCenter faculty members continue to appear regularly in the New Orleans Times-Picayune, for example. Housing specialist Claudette Reichel has been quoted frequently on how to clean mold. Economist Kurt Guidry is recognized as the authority on dollar losses to agriculture. County agent Howard Cormier told the world in an interview on MSNBC about the devastation Rita did to rice farmers.

Every LSU AgCenter employee pitched in, even if spared the storms' direct wrath. They developed educational materials to distribute to evacuees. They assisted at shelters. And they grieved, whether they want to admit it or not, for a New Orleans, a Louisiana, an LSU AgCenter that will never be the same again.

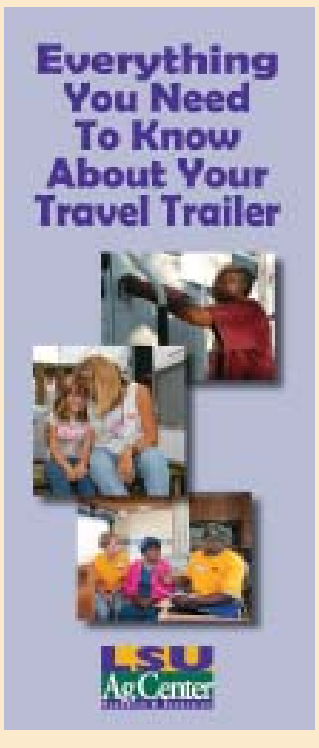
The LSU AgCenter's disaster response efforts continue. Highlights include:

- Expansion of the educational program at LaHouse, which is a showplace for how to build hurricane-resistant homes in Louisiana.
- The building of three more demonstration homes in Cameron, Lake Charles and New Orleans designed to withstand wind, flood and even storm surges specific to each area.
- Recovery task forces in Southwest Louisiana and the New Orleans area. They continue to coordinate volunteer help and work with community leaders. Cynthia Richard, Calcasieu Parish, and Mark Schexnayder, Jefferson Parish, head the task forces.
- Production of fact sheets, publications and information on the LSU AgCenter's Web site (www.lsuagcenter.com) on disaster recovery – everything from how to operate a chain saw to cleaning mold from upholstery.
- Training for child care businesses to get them operational again and new ones started in New Orleans.
- Expansion of coastal plants research. Well before Hurricane Katrina, the LSU AgCenter began applying knowledge learned from agricultural crops to plants that can preserve coastal wetlands. The principal work will be centered at the newly named Coastal Area Research Station in Port Sulphur.
- Fire ant and termite abatement. Scientists moved into hurricane-affected areas right away to study and help prevent the return and expanded presence of these two Louisiana pests.

No one knows what the future will bring. New programs continue to emerge to meet needs including coastal restoration research, research to add value to agricultural products and efforts to assist startup companies through licensing of LSU AgCenter intellectual property.

But one thing's for sure. The LSU AgCenter's mission will stay the same. We're here to serve the people of Louisiana. It's more than a job. It's a way of life.

-Linda Benedict



Experts Provide Tips On Living In 'FEMA Trailers'

The devastation of homes and property brought by hurricanes Katrina and Rita was followed by a phenomenon Louisiana had never seen before – thousands of people living in small trailers across the state.

Dubbed "FEMA trailers" by many, these travel trailers or small trailers sprang up in yards and "trailer villages" across the state. With the new living conditions came questions about health and safety, as well as general concerns about how families could get by in such cramped quarters.

To address some of those concerns, the LSU AgCenter published "Everything You Need To Know About Your Travel Trailer."

Written by LSU AgCenter agent Terry Toombs of the New Orleans metropolitan area, the publication covered a variety of topics including safely using the electrical and gas systems of the trailers, general safety tips and indoor air quality.

More than 30,000 printed copies of the publication were distributed to people living in such trailers. In addition, the information was made available through the LSU AgCenter's Web site and was covered in a variety of meetings that addressed such topics as helping people cope with their new living arrangements.

–Tom Merrill

LaHouse, Other Building Efforts Become Centerpiece

The LSU AgCenter's LaHouse learning center already was under construction before hurricanes Rita and Katrina struck the state.

Known formally as the Louisiana House — Home and Landscape Resource Center, the project already had been designed to showcase smarter, safer and stronger building techniques tailored to Louisiana. Its vision was to demonstrate how homeowners could have more comfort, more quality, more durability, more value, more convenience and better health with less energy use and water use, less pollution, less waste and less damage from natural hazards.

Although it had been in the works for several years, construction of the demonstration home still was under way when the storms struck. As a result, LaHouse became a centerpiece of efforts to educate contractors, homeowners and others about the construction techniques they could employ in rebuilding South Louisiana.

Construction was suspended each Friday for tours that allowed the public to view the building techniques, and a variety of groups were led on special tours.

"We're excited about what's here in LaHouse," LSU AgCenter Chancellor Bill Richardson said while speaking to one group of government officials touring LaHouse. "I wish we didn't have to talk about how important it is to be prepared for storms, but that's certainly part of the reality of what we in Louisiana have to face.

"Building homes strong enough to stand up to a storm is one way to ensure people have a place to go home to after a storm has passed."

As a result of the experiences with the 2005 storms, LSU AgCenter officials also started working on plans for three additional homes to demonstrate stronger, safer and smarter building techniques. Its new Cameron Parish Extension Office, replacing the one wiped out by Rita, will be known as Chenier House and will showcase hurricane resistance and energy efficiency. The LSU AgCenter and its partners also are planning similar demonstration structures in Lake Charles and New Orleans — tailored to the specific conditions of those areas.

"LaHouse is quite an inspiration," FEMA mitigation specialist Roger Farris said during a tour of the facility. "The experts at LSU are really poised to lead us forward in rebuilding Louisiana."

Likewise, during another visit, Douglas Faulkner, acting assistant secretary in the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in the U.S. Department of Energy, had similar praise for the idea of building such structures and the role they could play in the state's recovery.

Such projects allow people "to see how it's working in practice and bridge reality and theory," Faulkner said.

-Tom Merrill

LaHouse
Louisiana House
Home & Landscape Resource Center

Post-hurricane Construction Subject In Variety Of Educational Efforts

"Where we are matters," said building expert Joseph Lstiburek during a seminar after the 2005 hurricanes, stressing, "We need a Louisiana way of dealing with construction."

Lstiburek, a principal of Building Science Corp. of Westford, Mass., and an international expert on moisture-related building problems, led a two-part seminar on designing and building for extreme climates. Sponsored by the LSU AgCenter, the program was held in Baton Rouge.

It was one of many efforts focused on helping thousands of people to rebuild after hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"We want people to learn to build better, safer, stronger buildings," said Dr. Claudette Reichel, a housing specialist with the LSU AgCenter. "We want to show them what works, what doesn't and why."

Douglas Faulkner, acting assistant secretary in the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy in the U.S. Department of Energy, called a seminar in December after the storms "a great idea and visionary concept."

Faulkner said proven disaster mitigation standards work and pointed out buildings constructed in Florida after some of the recent hurricanes have withstood damage from subsequent storms.

"Our goal is to give as much help to as many people as possible — to give consumers information to make good choices," Faulkner said.

Helping consumers make those choices was the focus of a variety of educational efforts that involved seminars, workshops, demonstrations, news articles, videos and other material distributed for consumers after the storms. For example, "Best Building Practices for the Gulf Region" and "Hurricane-resistant Construction" seminars were held in Baton Rouge, Houma, Lafayette, Metairie, Mandeville and Lake Charles.

Participants in the activities ranged from individual homeowners to architects, engineers, interior designers, builders, home inspectors, energy raters, building officials, green and affordable housing advocates, utility companies, insurance company representatives, government officials and university faculty members.

–Rick Bogren

Agents, Specialists Answer Flood Of Mold Questions

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and their aftermath created a flood of questions for LSU AgCenter agents and specialists about mold, particularly in New Orleans, where homes and buildings sat in water and intense heat for several weeks.

The response included putting together and distributing a 32-page booklet "Storm Recovery Guide for Homeowners" and a flyer "Cleaning Flood-Damaged Homes."

But the responses didn't stop there. Meetings were scheduled to provide answers in affected areas, and hundreds of phone calls were fielded to help residents find the information they needed.

Carolyn Leperi, an LSU AgCenter family and consumer sciences agent in St. Bernard Parish, said first she had to dispel fear of "toxic mold," since many homes had black-colorred mold on the walls. The LSU AgCenter also provided printed instructions on safe and effective do-it-yourself cleanup and restoration.

Mary Ritter of Kenner had what she called minimal damage to her home – one room with water damage and several trees knocked down in her yard. But mold was growing in her den. She got help from a group of church volunteers who had come to the New Orleans area from all across the United States.

Ritter had attended several LSU AgCenter workshops – on mold, legal matters and stress – and took away a few storm recovery booklets produced by the LSU AgCenter.

"Boxes of booklets are being scooped up," Ritter said. "I've had comments from friends on how helpful they were. I've had really excellent feedback because of the literature from the workshops."

Along with printed materials and workshops, the LSU AgCenter also established and operated for a time a toll-free Disaster Recovery Hotline to help Louisiana citizens obtain information about recovering from the disasters and damages created by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The hotline provided callers with recorded answers to frequently asked questions concerning disaster recovery 24 hours a day. Callers also had an option to speak with an LSU AgCenter agent during regular business hours.

"It's a wonderful way to get answers," Alexis Navarro, family and consumer sciences agent from Jefferson Parish, said of the telephone hotline. She said a majority of the calls were inquiries about handling mold.

One query was from a woman trying to salvage the marble tops from two tables. Leperi recommended an acid wash with lemon juice and then sealing the marble.

Clothing recommendations included washing with detergents and hanging dry because heat from a clothes dryer would set stains, Leperi said, adding that she was even able to help one caller salvage an heirloom christening gown.

Another caller inquired about saving a fur coat.

Navarro said callers also asked about mold on cookware, china and crystal. And the answer, she said, was that nonporous materials could be cleaned and disinfected to be used again. "Some things are cleanable and salvageable," she said.

Although many questions forcused on mold, agents also covered a variety of other topics related to cleanup and recovery.

–Rick Bogren

LSU AgCenter Operates Disaster Recovery Hotline

The LSU AgCenter operated a toll-free phone system to help Louisiana citizens obtain information about recovering from the disasters and damages created by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The LSU AgCenter Disaster Recovery Hotline came in addition to the LSU AgCenter's extensive offerings on the Web and the work of faculty members in extension offices across the state who were meeting with clientele, organizing public meetings and workshops, making television appearances and much more to provide information people needed in the early days of the recovery.

The hotline provided both live and recorded answers to questions on such issues as avoiding mold hazards, what to do about home and garden damage, personal finances in the wake of the storms, food and water safety, and issues related to fisheries, crops and livestock losses.

"By establishing this toll-free hotline, we hoped to be able to better connect citizens to valuable hurricane recovery information," LSU AgCenter Chancellor Bill Richardson said in announcing the service.

The LSU AgCenter's Web site also carried extensive information on those topics and others, but the hotline was instituted because officials were aware many people didn't have ready access to the Internet. In addition, hundreds of thousands of publications on those topics also were printed and distributed in the affected areas.

–Tom Merrill

Volunteers, Donors Make A Difference With Help From LSU AgCenter

Volunteers started springing into action almost immediately after each of the hurricanes in 2005 – and the LSU AgCenter was among the agencies and groups working to coordinate the efforts.

Directing donors and volunteers to projects that can help people repair their lives, rebuild their communities and restart the economy of areas devastated by the storms continue to be a thrust of the LSU AgCenter's work almost two years after those storms.

From an emergency pet shelter set up immediately after Katrina to rescuing cattle stranded by the hurricanes' storm surges, the LSU AgCenter was there leading volunteers and spurring donations.

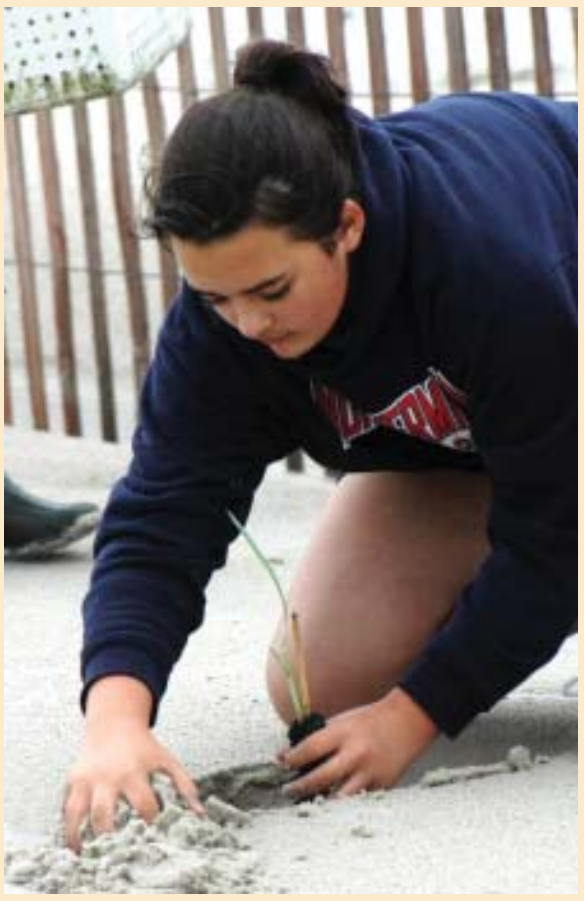
The volunteers have included thousands of college students on breaks, company executives, families and many more who wanted to participate in the area's rebuilding. They've helped to simply pick up trash. They've worked on rebuilding greenhouses, docks and other infrastructure of small businesses. They've planted marsh grass to protect the fragile coastline from future storms. They've helped to restore parks and playgrounds – and much more.

The donations from individuals and companies also have been as broad. Those have ranged from commercial ice houses designed to restart Louisiana's fishing industry to much smaller, but personally significant, items like shoe boxes filled with household items or school supplies and toys for those who had lost everything.

All the projects and donations coordinated by the LSU AgCenter can't possibly be named within the scope of a publication such as this one, but there have been hundreds, possibly even thousands, both large and small.

No matter the size of the project or the donation, however, the LSU AgCenter directed its long-term experience in encouraging volunteers to make a difference to a clear purpose-helping the people of Louisiana rebuild their lives and their communities, with a little help from friends and neighbors everywhere.

–Tom Merrill



A volunteer puts in a plant as part of a coastal restoration project.

Volunteers Share 'Measure' Of Friendship

Imagine trying to bake your favorite cookies only to discover that your measuring utensils were gone – or trying to measure the height of your child or grandchild without a ruler.

That's the dilemma many South Louisiana residents found themselves facing as they tried to piece their lives back together after hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

To help some of those facing that dilemma, a volunteer organization affiliated with the LSU AgCenter collected some of the most-used household items and distributed them to hurricane victims in a program known as " Measure of Friendship."

"It's just so hard for us to imagine the effect of losing everything," said Dr. Karen Overstreet, an LSU AgCenter specialist who served as adviser to the volunteer group known as the Louisiana Volunteers for Family and Community. "We can visualize losing the big things, but it's reaching for the little things that are no longer there that may be the final straw."

Since the Louisiana Volunteers for Family and Community, known as LVFC, for short, had many members in coastal areas of the state, some of those members knew just what it felt like to lose everything and be displaced. Others wanted to find a way to let them know they cared.

"Many members across the state already had volunteered their time and resources to help local relief efforts, but they wanted to do more," Overstreet said. "But since space was at a premium for families living in temporary trailers or staying with family and friends, they knew what they gave had to be easy to store."

Based on those considerations, they came up with the idea for a campaign dubbed a "Measure of Friendship." In that effort, volunteers from around the state collected common measuring items such as rulers, tape measures, measuring cups, measuring spoons and so forth. They packed the items in plastic shoe box-size containers and passed them along to volunteers in the affected areas – who worked to distribute them to those who had lost virtually everything and were trying to start anew.

Louisiana Volunteers for Family and Community members from St. Bernard Parish definitely know what it's like to lose everything, but they joined their counterparts from across the state in working to distribute "Measure of Friendship" boxes to Hurricane Katrina victims in the area. LSU AgCenter agent Carolyn Leperi , at left, joined others in a volunteer organization member's FEMA trailer to review boxes being distributed in their area.

Overstreet said the project provided a way for the volunteer organization's members to connect with others in need and also brought home what it meant to lose everything.

"The volunteers who put these boxes together still talk about how much it helped them to realize what losing everything really meant," she said. "They still can't imagine things they use every day not being there."

The LSU AgCenter specialist said the measuring utensils had particular meaning for women, who make up the majority of the volunteer organization that once was known as Extension Homemakers.

"Women could identify with the measuring utensils, since many have favorites that they use frequently," she explained. "Many make certain foods such as biscuits so often that they don't even think about it. The proper measuring cup is just always in the flour. So thinking about not having such common items was an eye opener for some."

Overstreet also said the overall meaning of the project really wasn't in what was donated but rather in what was learned.

"Although measuring utensils may not be tremendously important compared to other needs, a 'measure of friendship' was a good way to bring together those wanting to help with those still recovering – in a way that was meaningful to those involved," she explained. "Some who were getting tired of hearing about the hurricanes a year after they had occurred realized just how stressful the situation still was.

"One lady commented, 'I never thought about not having stuff. There's always just a drawer full of things collected through the years. But then it hit me. That would all be gone.'"

–Tom Merrill

Master Gardeners Help New Orleans City Park Recover

It was four months after Hurricane Katrina, but the flowers were finally beginning to bloom again in New Orleans City Park – thanks to some LSU AgCenter Master Gardeners.

As soon as the ground became dry enough, LSU AgCenter horticulture agent Karen Blackburn of Orleans Parish started rounding up the troops – specially training LSU AgCenter volunteers – to see what could be done to bring the Botanical Garden back to life.

"We started to pull out dead plants and set in new plants as soon as it was possible to get into the park," Blackburn said, adding, "One thing that slowed us down a little was that we had to wait for the soil to dry out."

The Master Gardeners in the area volunteered their time in an effort to set out new plants and to help in the overall cleanup of the park.

Karen Hall, an Orleans Parish Master Gardener, said they were trying to have at least a few members go to work in the park at least once a week during the early times of the recovery. And some of their work was on display that first holiday season after the storm, when the park's annual Celebration in the Oaks went on.

Blackburn said there was a great deal more work to be done, but she stressed the effort donated by the Master Gardeners was invaluable.

"Under ordinary circumstances, Master Gardeners volunteer their time on various projects," Blackburn said. "But since the storm, they have really come through in a major way."

Louisiana Master Gardeners Karen Hall, at left, and Mary Biundo, at right, were among those who worked with LSU AgCenter horticulture agent Karen Blackburn of Orleans Parish, center, at New Orleans' City Park. Blackburn said she and the Master Gardeners started helping to restore the park's botanical gardens as soon as the "ground was dry" after the storms.

The Louisiana Master Gardener program is overseen by the LSU AgCenter. Master Gardeners are an all-volunteer group, who have completed horticultural training provided by the AgCenter and who, in exchange, have committed to donating at least 40 hours of service to their communities.

The program now is offered in 19 Louisiana parishes – although the 1,500 or more participating volunteers come from a much wider area of 42 parishes, according to Bob Souvestre, coordinator of the Master Gardener program for the LSU AgCenter.

-Johnny Morgan

Student Volunteer Takes On Recovery Work Full Time

Amanda Hardesty, the recovery volunteer coordinator with the LSU AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant program, center, checks signals with one of the many volunteers who were helping to restore plants in New Orleans City Park in December 2006. That event was one of the kickoff activities that coincided with the Restoring America's Estuaries national conference held in the city.

When LSU AgCenter Hurricane Recovery Coordinator Mark Schexnayder hosted a group of volunteers from Ohio State University in December 2005, he had no idea one of them would soon become a co-worker.

But that's the way it turned out when Amanda Hardesty took on the task of volunteer coordinator with Louisiana Sea Grant and settled into sharing office space with other LSU AgCenter personnel in Jefferson Parish early in 2006.

Hardesty was one of 30 students who spent the week of Dec. 11-17, 2005, in Louisiana helping some of the businesses in the area get back up and running after Hurricane Katrina.

Schexnayder said he didn't know what to say when Hardesty said she wanted to come down and begin working with the volunteer groups.

" I knew we needed the help, and even though she is paid by LSU Sea Grant, she is definitely a part of the LSU AgCenter team," Schexnayder said, adding, "She is doing a great job, which takes some of the pressure off me."

Hardesty said she was in her last semester in college when she came down to help out. After seeing the amount of devastation the storm caused, she said she knew she had to do more.

Since that time, she's helped to coordinate the work of thousands of volunteers in the area, who have helped rebuild local businesses, clean up public parks and much more.

-Johnny Morgan

New Orleans Soil Testing

Will the grass come back, and how long will it be before vegetable gardens can be planted were some of the questions on the minds of LSU AgCenter faculty members who started testing soil in the New Orleans metropolitan area shortly after it dried out following the 2005 hurricanes. Horticulturists, volunteers and others crisscrossed the area taking soil samples and making notes of what they saw in October 2005. In the end, they determined soil contamination in Jefferson and Orleans parishes from flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina was not as serious as originally feared. They also said the initial tests indicated no need for special preparations to the soils prior to planting and no danger for individuals digging or planting in the soil. Some even expressed hope that many of the plants and trees subjected to floodwaters could survive in the long term.

4-H'ers Reach Out With 'Boxes Of Hope' For Hurricane Victims

Don't give up was the message from one state's 4-H'er to those in Louisiana who were affected by the recent hurricanes.

The message was part of North Carolina 4-H's Helpful Hands, Healing Hearts campaign. 4-H'ers from across North Carolina collected school supplies, toiletries and stuffed animals for victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The items were packed into "Boxes of Hope" that arrived in Louisiana in mid-October 2005.

Two 18-wheelers brought more than 2,500 boxes to Baton Rouge – where 4-H'ers and LSU AgCenter agents received them and distributed them to affected areas.

Among those helping was one Livingston Parish 4-H'er took time from his afternoon to help load the boxes when they arrived in Baton Rouge.

"I want to help these people," said Daniel Wendt, who was then a sixth-grader at Southside Junior High.

Many of the boxes were headed to 4-H'ers who were affected by the storms, but with so many boxes, the campaign reached many more young people.

Baton Rouge 4-H'ers Tina Mouch, at left, and Katee Craig from St. Joseph's Academy pick up some of the "Boxes of Hope" to be distributed to those affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"It's not just for 4-H'ers; that's the starting point," said Trey Williams, who served as director of the Louisiana 4-H Foundation at the time. "It's bigger than 4-H. We're out to reach every youth we can."

For example, the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Ascension Parish was still housing nearly 300 young evacuees in the fall of 2005. LSU AgCenter 4-H agent Michelle Shahan immediately loaded up 300 boxes to take back to the shelter.

"This will let them know that people care," Shahan said.

North Carolina 4-H moved into action after a 4-H'er saw a news image of a 4-H stuffed bear in the rubble of a home.

"It goes to show you that one person can make a difference," Williams said.

North Carolina 4-H'ers weren't the only ones who opened their hearts to Louisiana hurricane victims. 4-H members from 46 states also donated to the Louisiana 4-H Foundation's hurricane relief effort, and 4-H'ers from across Louisiana participated in a variety of efforts to help those affected by the storms.

"It really shows that even though we are miles apart and in different states that we do have a common bond and that 4-H and the 4-H clover is that," Williams said.

-Tobie Blanchard

Louisiana 4-H'ers Reach Out To Evacuees

Louisiana 4-H'ers did all they could to help victims of the 2005 hurricanes find at least some bits of relief and sparks of hope.

One example was in Union Parish – where 4-H'ers volunteered at the Farmerville Recreation Center, which was housing South Louisianians who took refuge from Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath there.

Carol Remy, an LSU AgCenter 4-H agent in Union Parish, said the 4-H'ers helped with tasks such as organizing donated supplies, entertaining and visiting with youth and cooking "goodies" to bring to the evacuees.

"This has been a good learning experience for our 4-H'ers," Remy said. "It has reinforced the good character traits they have been learning as members of 4-H."

Union Parish was just one example of hundreds. 4-H'ers and other volunteers also helped out with relief efforts at the Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center in Pollock, which was housing evacuees.

In another example, 4-H Club members from Beauregard, East Feliciana, East Carroll, Iberia, Madison and Natchitoches parishes filled hundreds of nylon drawstring bags with useful items to give to evacuees. The bags contained such essentials as toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, combs, brushes, hand sanitizer, hand lotion, deodorant, phone cards, small games or toys, stationery and pens and pencils.

At the River Center in Baton Rouge, state 4-H staff of both the LSU AgCenter and Southern University Ag Center, plus 4-H agents, associates, junior leaders and adult volunteers in East Baton Rouge and West Baton Rouge parishes developed a children's program they conducted each Saturday morning while the River Center was serving as a shelter. Activities included crafts, games that build teamwork skills and special activities for youngsters.

The Louisiana 4-H Foundation also set up a fund for hurricane relief and an address where letters of caring and encouragement could be sent. The fund's purposes were to provide assistance for LSU AgCenter Extension agents who lost their homes and/or belongings, to provide materials and assistance for "dislocated/relocated" 4-H members, to provide essentials for evacuees at the Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center, and, if necessary, to restore facilities, equipment and supplies for the 2006 4-H summer camping program at the Grant Walker facility.

-Tom Merrill

The Baton Rouge River Center served as a temporary home to a fluctuating population of approximately 6,000 people for many weeks after the storms. Concern for all the evacuees – but particularly the 2,500 or so children there at any given time – prompted 4-H agents and others from the LSU AgCenter and Southern University Ag Center to work on ideas for worthwhile activities that would help displaced families and children pass the time.

4-H'ers Allison Braswell and Alaysia James, both of Farmerville, sort stuffed animals donated at a relief center and shelter for Hurricane Katrina's evacuees who took refuge there. The girls were like many 4-H'ers across the state who helped with relief efforts.

LSU AgCenter's Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center Houses Hurricane Evacuees

In the days and weeks after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the LSU AgCenter's Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center served as a temporary home to more than a thousand people who passed through its gates.

The facility, ordinarily used as a summer camp for 4-H Club members, first became a Red Cross shelter for Hurricane Katrina evacuees when it opened Aug. 28, 2005, just hours before that storm slammed southeastern Louisiana. But its use didn't end there. It also housed LSU AgCenter employees displaced by Hurricane Rita a few weeks later and served as a base for workers from other areas who were helping to restore utilities after the storms.

" I'd say we had about 800 or so people who came through during the three weeks or so that we were serving as a shelter after Katrina," said Jane Jones, who served as Grant Walker's director for the LSU AgCenter. "There were just so many people coming and going that it was impossible to come up with an exact count.

"I can say that there were times when we had every one of our 602 beds full and even more people than that."

The center served as a temporary shelter for Katrina evacuees for approximately three weeks before they were able to move on to more permanent arrangements. But almost as soon as that ended, Rita hit, and the center once again opened its doors to about 50-60 people with no place else to go. Finally, later in the fall, it also served as the base for about 300 electrical linemen brought in to help utilities restore power in affected areas.

"We had a couple of people who wound up staying here all the way to Christmas that year," Jones said.

As for those who sought shelter after Katrina, the LSU AgCenter's staff members and volunteers literally served as their lifeline.

"Most of the Katrina evacuees arrived on buses with just the clothes on their backs, and the buses didn't move after they got here," Jones said, explaining the 4-H center is located in a rural area east of Pollock. " So we took on trying to get them clothes, doing laundry and helping them to get around."

"Since parents had to try to take care of things, we tried to provide day care and after-school care basically around the clock," Jones explained. "We also helped kids with their homework."

That fall marked about the fifth time the Grant Walker 4-H Center had been used as an evacuation shelter, according to Dr. Paul Coreil, LSU AgCenter vice chancellor and director of extension, who said serving as a shelter fits well with the LSU AgCenter's goals targeted toward helping Louisiana residents.

"This is just one excellent example of what the LSU AgCenter is doing to provide immediate relief to victims of the hurricanes," Coreil said at the time. "We are dedicated to helping people overcome this catastrophe."

The LSU AgCenter also opened one of the buildings at the facility as an activity center for children, worked to provide child care and helped get school-age children enrolled in the parish's school system.

LSU AgCenter entomologist Patty Beckley and Troy, 4, toss a basketball in the arts and crafts building at Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center. Beckley took a break from treating fire ant mounds at the camp to play with Troy, an evacuee from Hurricane Katrina.

Hammerstone brothers Wiley, 3, Anthony, 10, and J.J., 8, play in the arts and crafts building at Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center after fleeing Hurricane Katrina from Picayune, Mississippi.

Debbie Bairnsfather, an LSU AgCenter regional 4-H coordinator, helped get the activity center up and going.

"The positive and supportive environment that has been offered for youth through having a 'safe' area has benefited them as well as made LSU AgCenter personnel more aware of the situations facing these displaced citizens – young and old," Bairnsfather said.

"It tugs at your heart to see these youth suffering and not knowing what the future holds for them," she added. "But at least, through providing this opportunity, we can help to make this difficult time somewhat more bearable and let the youth and adults know that we do care about them."

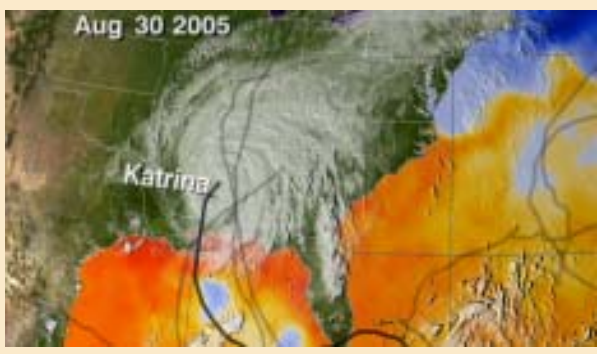
Brothers Tyrone and Walter Nelson were among those at the shelter in the days around Hurricane Katrina. They escaped with their family from St. Bernard Parish before the storm hit – leaving when the evacuation orders came out.

"At first, we thought the hurricane would just pass over us, but it didn't, and we had to leave. We came here, and it's wonderful. It's quiet, and the people are nice," 17-year-old Walter said.

Tyrone, 22, who is deaf and had to use sign language to communicate, agreed that the LSU AgCenter, Red Cross and others were doing their best to help families like theirs.

"It's a great place," Tyrone Nelson signed. "It's not home, but it's OK."

-Denise Coolman & Tom Merrill



Agents Work To Help St. Bernard Students Find 'Release'

LSU AgCenter 4-H agents worked with students in St. Bernard Parish to help them find things to do and ways to take their minds off the devastation all around them.

For the students in the St. Bernard Unified School, Hurricane Katrina devastated their community, and many things in their lives remain uncertain.

In one of the many educational and entertaining activities LSU AgCenter 4-H agents are providing for the St. Bernard youngsters – and for other youngsters affected by the hurricanes in various areas across the state – a group of fourth graders could be seen working on an experiment.

The youngsters decorated 2-liter plastic bottles to look like rockets. Then, working in pairs, they funneled a few cups of water into each of their "bottle rockets" and pumped air into the bottles.

After the air caused pressure to build up within the bottles, youngsters pulled a small u-shaped hook release, and, with a pop and a whiz, the bottles soared through the air.

Officials say the release of pressure from the rockets is similar to the type of release they hope these activities bring to the pressures and heartaches felt by the students trying to live in the midst of the hurricane's aftermath.

Making "bottle rockets" not only gave St. Bernard youngsters a way to have a little fun, it also taught them scientific principles.

"The kids really have no place, nothing really to do when they leave us. There are really no places for them to play," said Wayne Warner, principal of the St. Bernard Unified School. "There is nothing organized that they can belong to."

The after-school program allows students to participate in a variety of activities while giving parents peace of mind that their kids are somewhere safe. And the LSU AgCenter's 4-H youth development program has become an instrumental part of the after-school activities.

On the afternoon that 4-H leaders were shooting plastic bottle rockets with third and fourth graders, the activities weren't just about the fun. The students also were learning about the effects of air pressure, as well as getting real-life practice at measuring distances and angles.

"We've tried to do some things that are fun with them to expand their horizons scholastically without them knowing about it," said Wayne Burgess, LSU AgCenter 4-H agent in St. Bernard Parish.

Burgess and fellow LSU AgCenter 4-H agent Lauren Faust worked at the school three days a week last year. They offered the students nutrition lessons, games and exercises. They also were comforting and familiar faces for the youngsters.

"They need this time to release some of their stress," Burgess said. "The hard part is, they are in school all day long, and a lot of them are going home to a pile of rubble – or they are living in FEMA trailers that are too small."

-Johnny Morgan

Communicating Vital Information To The Public

Working with other faculty members and colleagues across the country, the members of the LSU AgCenter Communications team worked in the aftermath of both storms to convey vital information to the public.

Two years later that work is still an ongoing task.

Hundreds of news releases and thousands of pages of printed material later, each day brings more to be done.

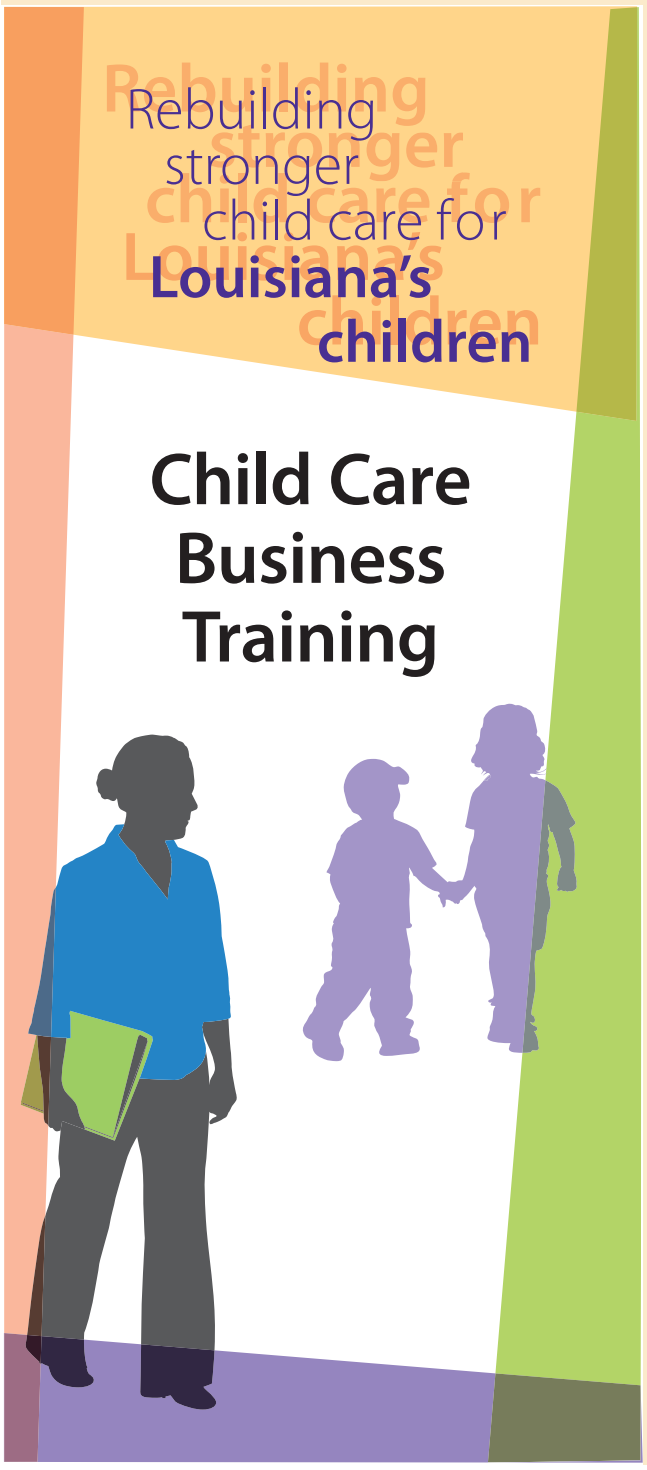
With topics ranging from cleaning up mold to dealing with the stress of a new home and from salvaging crops to preparing for the next potential storm, the team has been responsible for more than 200 print or broadcast news releases related to the storms over the past couple of years – and nearly 150 of those came in just the first four months.

It also was responsible for arranging hundreds of radio and television appearances for LSU AgCenter experts on media outlets across the state and the nation, for helping to plan a full-featured storm recovery Web site and for the printing and distribution of approximately 175,000 copies of a comprehensive Storm Recovery Guide.

"All of this is part of our quest to make lives better for citizens of Louisiana," said Frankie Gould, director of communications and public relations for the LSU AgCenter. "Our purpose is to get the expertise and knowledge of the LSU AgCenter out to the public, and people certainly needed that after the storms.

"We certainly hope the thousands of news stories in papers across Louisiana, the meetings, the fact sheets, the Web site and all the other things we did helped in some way."

-Tom Merrill



Child Care Business Training Available Through LSU AgCenter

Educational materials and training were made available this spring for current and potential child care operators in eight of the parishes most severely affected by the 2005 hurricanes.

The training, which focuses on the business operations of child care facilities, is provided under a partnership between the LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Department of Social Services.

The program is just an example of the many ways LSU AgCenter personnel have been involved in trying to help people rebuild their businesses and their lives.

"Child care plays a critical role in the infrastructure of rebuilding, because parents need quality child care programs for their children so they can go to work," explains LSU AgCenter child care specialist Cheri Gioe. "That's why we want to provide those who are in the business or those who are considering it with the best possible information."

Known as the Louisiana Child Care Recovery Entrepreneurship and Training Program or LACRET, for short, the program involves an eight-week series of classes designed to provide potential or current family day care providers and child care center owners or directors with research-based information to assist in operating a quality child care program in Louisiana.

It is targeted to helping such facilities rebuild or rebound in Cameron, Calcasieu, Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Tammany and Washington parishes.

The series of workshops in the LACRET program is adapted from the Kauffman Foundation's First Step FastTrac child care business training curriculum and covers budgeting, policies and procedures, legal issues, state licensing, staffing, needs assessments, business planning and marketing.

The program is the result of a $1 million contract between the LSU AgCenter and the state Department of Social Services. It is funded by federal Social Service Block Grant funds that were awarded to Louisiana to support the rebuilding efforts of child care following the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The workshops are free of charge to participants. Those who complete the educational series also qualify to receive a variety of other free administrative and curriculum resources.

-Tom Merrill

LSU AgCenter Partners With Others To Help Displaced Students Cope With Changes

LSU AgCenter agents in seven South Louisiana parishes began intensively working with other agencies last summer on a project designed to help displaced students meet their ongoing needs.

The effort, known as the Partnership for Prevention Education, is targeted toward Louisiana residents affected by the hurricanes.

Dr. Pam Hodson, LSU AgCenter regional director for the southeastern Louisiana parishes involved in the project, said the AgCenter's goal for this partnership is to help students and their families receive the assistance they need to cope with being displaced from their homes or otherwise affected by the storms.

"One area we hope to address though this collaboration is post-traumatic stress," Hodson said.

The partners in the project are the American Red Cross, the Capital Area Human Services District, the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps and the LSU AgCenter. It is targeted toward residents in the Capital Area Human Services District – the parishes of Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge and West Feliciana.

"We have the information, and we can help the Capital Area Human Services District get into the schools where we're already set up with our 4-H youth development program," Hodson said, adding, "This will save them a few steps toward helping those who are in the most need.

"What we want to do is make it easier for these people who are displaced and/or in need of services to get in touch with the right people quicker," Hodson said.

LSU AgCenter family development specialist Dr. Becky White said part of this program will involve prevention education and life skills education for youth.

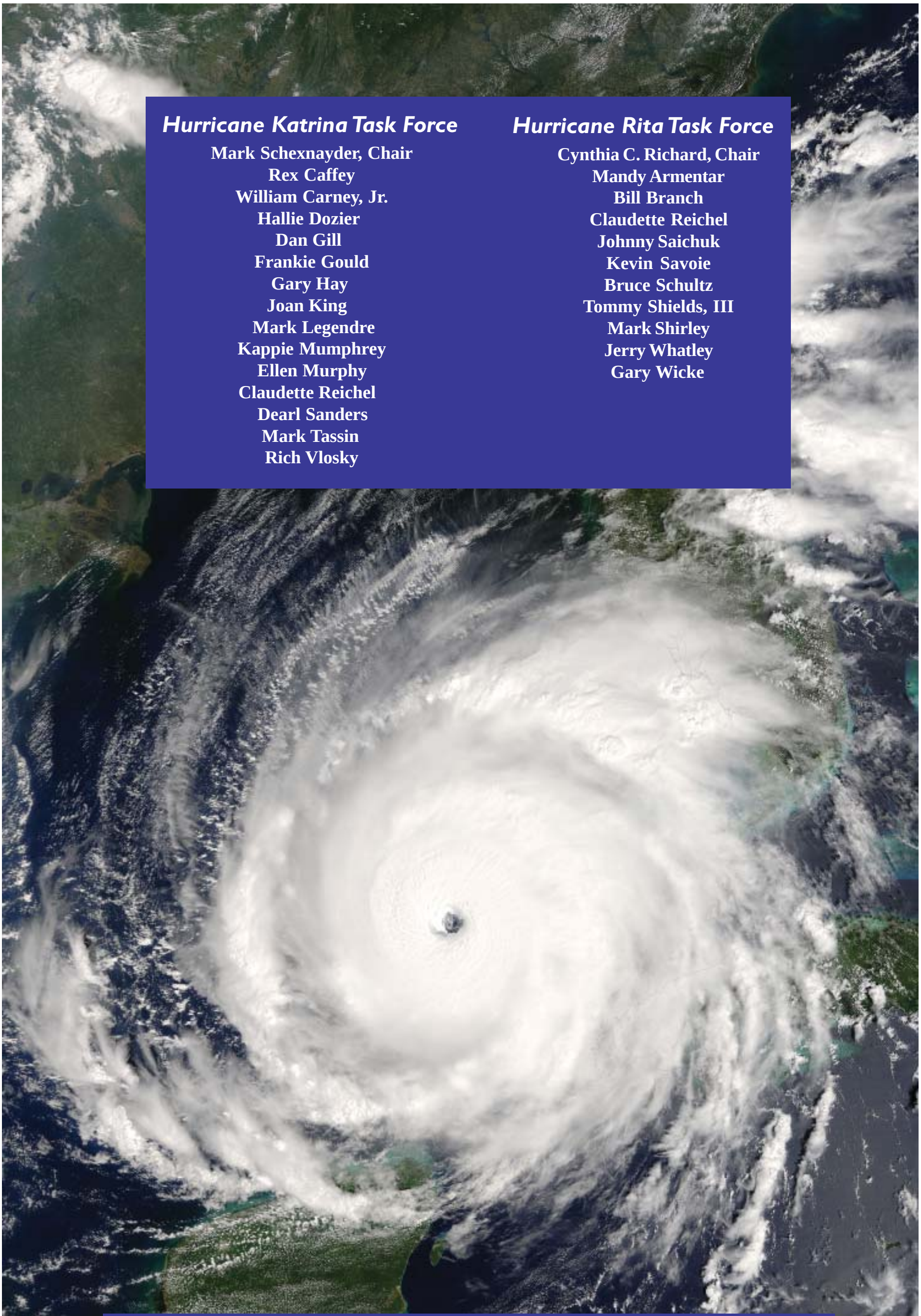
"The LSU AgCenter will be using our 4-H agents to help these partnering agencies get into the schools where 4-H is already recognized and teach the young people about money and how to make it work for them and their families, so they can have quality of life," White said.

Dr. Debra Davis, assistant director of the LSU AgCenter's Organization Development and Evaluation unit, gives instructions to participants at the Partnership for Prevention Education training session July 21, 2006, at the AgCenter's Extension Office in West Baton Rouge Parish. The partnership of various agencies from the area is seeking ways to help students in the seven parishes of the Capital Area Human Services District who are trying to cope with the many issues related to Hurricane Katrina's devastation.

Nadia Edwards, a social worker with Capital Area Human Service District, said the collaborative program is designed to bring help to displaced students but that the assistance is not limited to evacuees.

"Any student who is experiencing a problem such as anger management, conduct disorder, poor socialization skills and other problems can benefit from this partnership," she said.

-Johnny Morgan



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