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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE RECEIVES TOP HONOR
USDA Agency awarded at California Rice Commission Reception

SACRAMENTO - Top leaders from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) were on hand today to receive the California Rice Commission's Circle of Life Award for their pioneering work to help improve wildlife habitat in the state's rice fields.

The Circle of Life Award recognizes people and organizations that provide outstanding assistance to California rice. This year's honor involves the NRCS' partnership and collaboration with family rice farmers to initiate a California pilot version of the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative Program.

"Conservation is a significant part of California rice farming, and the NRCS is one of our strongest partners," remarked CRC President & CEO Tim Johnson. "We commend Chief Dave White and State Conservationist Ed Burton for working quickly and effectively to establish this program."

In 2011, the California rice growers successfully utilized \$2.7 million in special NRCS funding to launch a new pilot conservation program ideally suited for flooded agricultural lands such as rice. The NRCS, in collaboration with PRBO Conservation Science, Audubon California and other conservation partners, provided planning, technical assistance and outreach to rice farmers to develop conservation practices that are expected to further enhance the value of rice fields as wildlife habitat. CRC helped coordinate and administer the program which was offered on some 100,000 acres of rice and resulted in approximately 70 contracts on about 28,000 acres. All of the funding will go directly to growers participating in the program over a three-year period.

This program will soon be open to most rice areas in the Sacramento Valley. The newest effort is known as the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Program.

California ricelands are home to some 230 wildlife species and provide nearly 60 percent of the food for the seven million ducks and geese that migrate along the Pacific Flyway each winter. More information can be found at calrice.org/Industry+Info/Conservation+Program.htm.