

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

*Among Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)  
Policy Advisory Board (PAB) Member Agencies:*

Agricultural Research Service  
Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service  
Economic Research Service  
Farm Service Agency  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Forest Service  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Rural Development--  
Office of Community Development  
and Rural Utilities Service

Pertaining to:  
Resource Conservation and Development Program

### I. INTRODUCTION

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils help plan and carry out activities that increase conservation of natural resources, support economic development and enhance the environment and standard of living in local communities. Through a formal, competitive process, 315 RC&D Councils have been designated by the Secretary of Agriculture to receive assistance from USDA. A number of newly formed Councils have applications for assistance pending.

### II. PURPOSE

This interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) describes the shared objectives and commitments of the participating USDA Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Policy Advisory Board (PAB) member agencies. The Secretary has delegated administrative responsibility for the RC&D Program to the Natural Resources Conservation Service with the expectation that the full array of USDA programs and services should be brought to bear to assist local RC&D Councils in achieving their goals. This MOU will guide the relationships and benefits to agencies committed to collaborative activities between agency programs and local RC&D Councils. Specifically, these member agencies agree to increase coordination and cooperation within the Department to make their programs and expertise more readily available to RC&D Councils and their associations working on behalf of rural areas and communities. It is recognized that the RC&D Program will serve to further the overall

capacity of member agencies to deliver effective and efficient outreach services through RC&D Councils and will facilitate the development of improved linkages among and between field service units within USDA.

## **II. AUTHORITY**

The USDA RC&D Policy Advisory Board was established by Departmental Regulation No. 1042-76, Resource Conservation & Development Policy Advisory Board.

## **III. BACKGROUND**

The RC&D Program began in 1964 under authority of Section 102 of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962 (Public Law 87-703) as well as other Department authorities. The program was among several USDA-driven efforts to stimulate development in rural areas during the 1960's. Poverty, population declines, and economic stagnation in rural communities was the focus of these efforts. The major thrust of the RC&D Program at that time was to improve natural resource conservation and development and help stabilize the economy of rural areas.

Initially, RC&D Areas were located where economic growth could be stimulated through accelerated land conservation and development efforts. The mission of the program was broadened with provisions in the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 to one of aiding local and State efforts in resource conservation and development. The major objectives of the RC&D Program continued to be improving the effective use and conservation of natural resources in rural areas and communities, but with the inclusion of improving the quality of life for all local residents while protecting and enhancing the environment. Amendments to the law subsequently established that up to 450 RC&D Areas nationwide may be designated by the Secretary.

The RC&D Program was most recently re-authorized in 1996 under the authority of Section 383 of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-127). RC&D Councils are recognized for their continual ability to encourage and improve the capability of Tribal, State and local units of government and local nonprofit organizations in rural areas to plan, develop and carryout programs for resource conservation and development. Efforts are focused on land conservation, water management, community development -- including business, utilities, recreation, housing, health, nutrition, education, transportation and communication, as well as, energy conservation, protection of agricultural land from conversion to other uses, and protection of fish and wildlife habitats.

Although the RC&D Program evolved from a Department-directed effort to one of local responsibility, USDA, through the technical and program support provided by its agencies, remains an essential partner to local RC&D leaders. The USDA RC&D PAB, established by statute, is unique and highly valued both within the Department and by RC&D Councils as vital to ensure efficient and effective assistance by USDA to RC&D

Councils. The PAB provides the platform for connecting priorities of RC&D Councils and national interests of the Department to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of America's rural areas and communities.

#### **IV. SHARED VISION**

The USDA RC&D PAB will be a proactive forum within USDA to develop and demonstrate the capacity to mainstream programming among member agencies to increase the accessibility, relevance and utility of USDA programs. The PAB will provide the policy and institutional framework to overlay programs and other educational, technical and funding assistance for the benefit of rural areas and communities.

By pursuing a shared vision, agencies will benefit by:

- Increased capacity to address both USDA national priorities and local community priorities.
- Increased awareness and utilization by communities of existing USDA programs and outreach resources.
- Linkages between the research and higher education activities within USDA and rural communities.
- Adoption of conservation practices that are linked to community and economic development strategies.
- Established proactive forum within USDA to define policy and outreach strategies in a multi-agency context.
- Successful promotion of the principles of social, economic and environmental wellbeing by:
  - Having a safe, abundant, nutritious food supply.
  - Rapidly disseminating and applying scientific knowledge, technology and education.
  - Conserving natural resources.
  - Diversifying local economies enabling people to make living wages from working lands.
  - Strengthening community capacity (infrastructure, leadership, information, etc.).
  - Maximized efficiency and effectiveness in use of the limited resources of both USDA agencies and RC&D Councils.

#### **V. SHARED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

By focusing on shared roles, our collective efforts will make a difference by:

- Seeking opportunities to join voices with RC&D Councils to identify and to be an advocate for the needs of communities and take collective action to address them.
- Encouraging and acknowledging collaborative planning and priority setting in local USDA program delivery by working with RC&D Councils.
- Providing USDA technical assistance and knowledge to build local RC&D Council capacity for decision and action.
- Finding effective ways to deliver an integrated package of USDA services that are responsive to identified community needs.
- Identifying and building on the successful collaborative efforts of local USDA field staff working with RC&D Councils.
- Recognizing the partnership of USDA with the independent RC&D Councils.

## **VI. SHARED ACTIONS**

We will move toward our shared vision by taking the following actions:

- Disseminate information on USDA programs and initiatives to RC&D Coordinators working with RC&D Councils.
- Encourage shared training opportunities among USDA staff and RC&D Council members.
- Develop PAB web site to share national priorities and the latest in professional information.
- Promote outreach interaction between RC&D Councils and 1890/1862/1994 Universities.
- Conduct workshops or symposia on technology transfer, business development and marketing, and entrepreneurial leadership.
- Participate (PAB members) in State, Regional, and National RC&D Association meetings.
- Develop written agreements between agencies and associations on coordinated assistance, as needed to assist in local planning and projects.

- Encourage PAB member agency staff, through policy direction, to cooperate and interact with RC&D Councils.
- Provide a forum to address barriers to effective and efficient access to USDA programs.
- Create a clearinghouse mechanism for identifying RC&D Council needs for equipment, supplies, and other resources and connect them with sources within USDA.

## **VII. DURATION**

This MOU shall become effective when signed by all parties, and will continue in effect for five (5) years, or until terminated or modified by mutual consent of the parties hereto, or may be terminated by any single party by providing 60 days notice in writing to all other parties involved. Other USDA agencies may be added as appropriate.

## **VIII. IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED AND UNDERSTOOD BY ALL PARTIES THAT --**

- A. All programs or activities conducted under this MOU will be in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions contained in Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-259); and other nondiscrimination statutes, namely, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; and in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7 CFR-15, Subparts A&B), which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.
- B. This MOU is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document. Any endeavor involving reimbursement or contribution of funds between the parties of this MOU will be handled in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and procedures. Such endeavors will be documented in separate agreements, contracts, or leases made in writing by the representatives of the parties and shall be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority. This instrument does not provide such authority. Specifically, this instrument does not establish authority for noncompetitive award to the cooperator of any contract or other agreement. Any contract or agreement for training or other services must fully comply with all applicable requirements for competition.

- C. Nothing in this MOU shall obligate the parties to expend appropriations or to enter into any contract or other obligation.

This MOU in no way restricts the parties from participating in similar activities or arrangements with other Federal, public or private agencies, organizations, or individuals.