Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

Strategic and Performance
Planning Division

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Accomplishments Report
FY 2003

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

Conservation Leadership

Conservation of private land depends on the efforts of many individuals, groups, and governmental entities working together on common goals. Local leadership and local action—neighbors working together—form the foundation for effective land stewardship. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supports local, State, and national conservation goals through working partnerships with State conservation agencies, local conservation districts, resource conservation and development councils, tribal governments, and community groups.

NRCS employees provide information and technical assistance to private landowners and land users. Because natural resource issues are best addressed on a watershed scale, NRCS also helps community leaders make sound natural resource decisions that protect the local environment and improve their standard of living and quality of life.

What We Achieved

The Nation's conservation efforts on private land ensure a healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, protects watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes.

To effectively achieve these benefits, NRCS focuses on four strategic goals:

- **Enhance the productive capacity of soil and water resources** to enable a strong agricultural and natural resource sector.
- **Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use** to ensure a high-quality environment.
- **Reduce risks from drought and flooding** to protect individual and community health and safety.
- **Deliver high-quality services to the public** to enable natural resource stewardship.

Goal 1: Enhance the productive capacity of soil and water resources.

NRCS helped land producers—

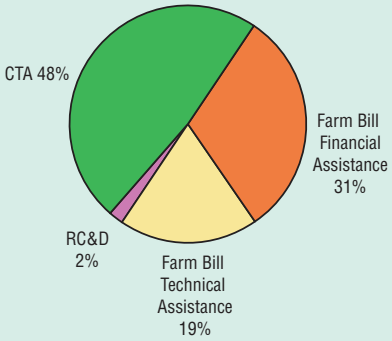
- Plan comprehensive resource management systems on 6.3 million acres of cropland.
- Apply comprehensive resource management systems on 6.7 million acres of cropland.
- Apply selected conservation practices on an additional 4.2 million acres of cropland.
- Apply erosion control measures on 5.9 million acres of cultivated cropland resulting in reducing soil loss by 50.3 million tons.
- Plan comprehensive resource management systems on 11 million acres of grazing land.
- Apply comprehensive resource management systems on 11.9 million acres of grazing land.
- Apply selected conservation practices on an additional 7.9 million acres of grazing land.
- Apply forest stand improvement (weeding and thinning) on 374,000 acres.
- Establish trees and shrubs on 403,000 acres.

Goals

Conservation goals are achieved through a portfolio of NRCS programs. The science-based assistance provided through Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is the basis for all conservation efforts. Incentive-based programs authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill are tools to accelerate application of conservation. Data reflect each program's percentage of the agency's total expenditures devoted to that particular strategic goal.

Source: *FY 2003 Budget and Performance Integration Data from NRCS FY 2005 Agency Estimate.*

Goal 1



Goal 2: Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use.

NRCS helped land managers—

- Apply conservation buffers on 477,000 acres to protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat.
- Create, restore, or enhance wetlands on 334,000 acres.
- Apply wildlife habitat management as a primary or secondary purpose on 11.8 million acres.
- Develop 4,860 comprehensive nutrient management plans and apply 3,237 plans.
- Apply nutrient management on 5 million acres.
- Apply pest management on 4.7 million acres.

NRCS helped communities—

- Protect more than 112,000 acres of productive farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.
- Apply erosion control measures on 85,000 acres of urban and built-up land.
- Complete approximately 4,100 resource conservation and development projects that improve the quality of life, including social, economic, and environmental concerns.

Goal 3: Reduce risks from drought and flooding.

NRCS helped local sponsors—

- Complete construction on 60 flood protection structures.
- Prepare 16 watershed infrastructure rehabilitation plans and rehabilitate 12 flood prevention structures.

NRCS helped land managers—

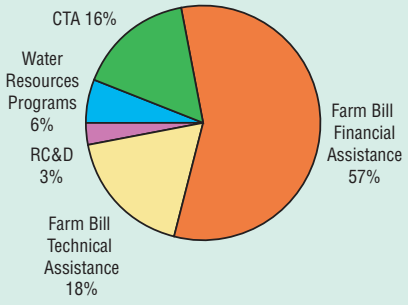
- Apply conservation systems to address flooding concerns on 5.1 million acres.
- Apply conservation systems to address water supply concerns on 9 million acres.
- Improve irrigation water management on 1.9 million acres and conserve 5.8 million acre-inches of water.
- Manage limited Western water supplies effectively. NRCS issued 11,427 water supply forecasts for Federal, State, and local water resource planning purposes. Water users and managers requested water supply data and information 1.56 million times.

Goal 4: Deliver high quality services to the public.

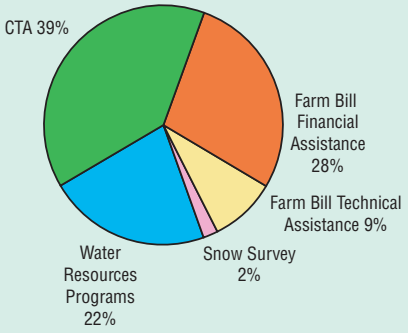
NRCS employees—

- Provided assistance to 3,759,000 farmers, ranchers, and other customers.
- Provided assistance to a total of 305,000 female and minority customers.
- Mapped or updated 22.5 million acres of soils.
- Provided 317 soil surveys in digital format and revised 368 additional surveys in digital format.
- Released 20 new conservation plants for commercial or private use and evaluated 437 plant materials studies.
- Provided data to 1.4 million customers through the PLANTS database website.
- Distributed more than one million publications from the NRCS National Publication Distribution Center/888-LANDCARE.
- Achieved an impressive year for the Earth Team volunteer program with more than one million hours being donated and a 15 percent increase in the number of volunteers.

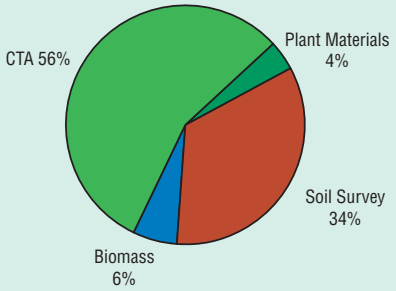
Goal 2



Goal 3



Goal 4



NRCS Programs and Activities

The four Conservation Operations programs (Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), Soil Survey, Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting, and Plant Materials) are the core support for all NRCS programs and activities. CTA provides the infrastructure through which NRCS provides assistance to conservation districts, develops technical standards and technical guides, conducts resources inventories, and provides assistance to individuals and communities to plan and manage their natural resources.

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program provides technical assistance to RC&D councils to plan, develop, and carry out projects that address land conservation, water management, community development, and land management.

NRCS water resources programs focus on restoring the health of watersheds through a comprehensive planning approach. These programs help communities protect their watersheds from damage caused by erosion, floodwater, and sediment, and to conserve and develop water and land resources.

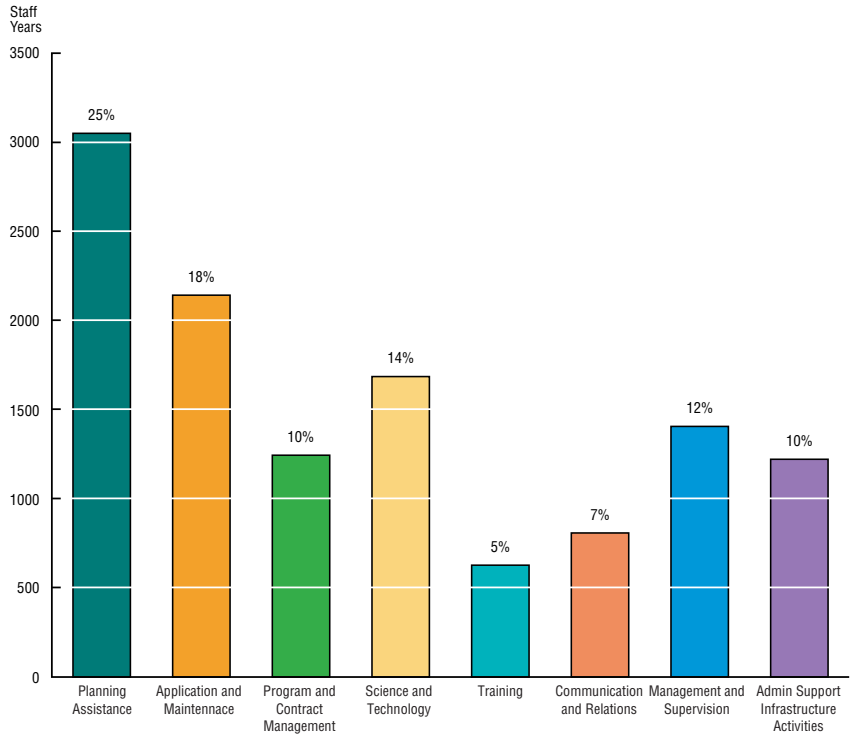
NRCS also is responsible for various Farm Bill voluntary programs, including the Conservation Security Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Wetlands Reserve Program. These programs provide technical, financial, and educational assistance to address single or multiple natural resource concerns identified at the local level. These programs help participants plan and apply conservation to their land.

More Information

Additional information on NRCS programs and services can be found on the Web at **www.nrcs.usda.gov**. Specific information on NRCS' Integrated Accountability System can be found at **www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/accountabilityindex.html**

Activities

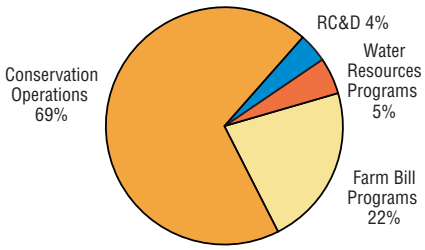
The primary services provided by NRCS field office staffs are assistance in developing conservation plans and in applying and maintaining the conservation practices called for in those plans. NRCS also is responsible for providing science-based resource data, technical tools, and information needed for good stewardship. Data reflect the percentage of total NRCS staff years devoted to each activity.



Source: *NRCS Conservation Information System, Report 1.3*

Staff Years by Program

Data reflect the percentage of total NRCS staff years devoted to each major program category.



Source: *NRCS Conservation Information System, Report 1.1*

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