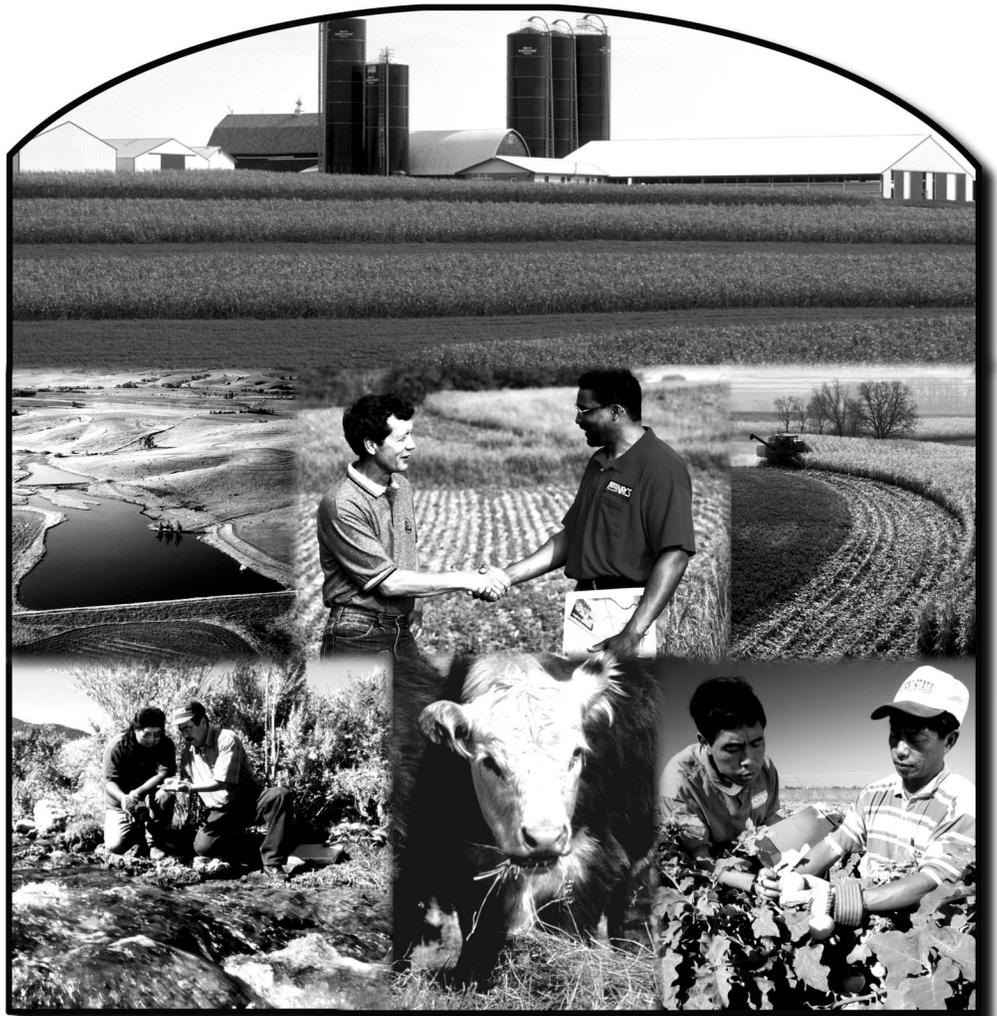


United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service



Strategic and
Performance
Planning
Division

Natural Resources Conservation Service Annual Performance Report Fiscal Year 2002



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Introduction

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 mandated that each agency of the Executive Branch prepare a 5-year Strategic Plan and an Annual Performance Plan and Report. The first revision of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Strategic Plan was completed in Fiscal Year (FY) 2000. This is the fourth NRCS Annual Performance Report.

Most annual performance targets were achieved or exceeded. This progress can be attributed to the hard work and commitment of many people, especially at the field level with support from conservation partners such as farmers and ranchers, the local Conservation Districts, State Conservation Agencies, Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Tribes, and volunteers. Partnership contributions are included in many of the accomplishment data reported throughout the report.

Table 1-1 Natural Resources Conservation Service Performance Summary

Strategic Goal	Performance Objectives and Indicators	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Target	2002 Actual
Goal 1: Enhance natural resource productivity to enable a strong agricultural and natural resource sector.	Objective 1.1 – Maintain, restore, and enhance cropland productivity.					
	Cropland where resource management systems were applied, acres.	8,680,000*	10,200,000	9,470,000	7,768,000	9,600,000
	Cropland where conservation was applied to protect against erosion damage, acres.	5,320,000*	4,100,000	3,470,000	6,756,000	7,123,000
	Objective 1.2 – Maintain, restore, and enhance irrigated land.					
	Irrigated cropland where irrigation water management was improved, acres.	NA	1,251,000	1,246,000	1,049,000	1,900,000
	Objective 1.3 – Maintain, restore, and enhance grazing land productivity.					
	Grazing land where resource management systems were applied, acres.	7,900,000*	10,700,000	11,290,000	10,382,000	11,900,000
	Objective 1.4 – Maintain, restore, and enhance forestland productivity.					
	Forestland where tree and shrub establishment was applied, acres.	NA	640,000	526,000	386,000	483,000
	Forestland where the stand was improved, acres.	NA	390,000	400,000	351,000	397,000

*Fiscal Year 1999 data were collected at 287 PRMS Pilot sites and projected to reflect National accomplishments.

NA - No available data, projections were not made.

NI - Not an indicator for this fiscal year.

NC - Data is not comparable due to a change in units used for measurement.

Table 1-2 Natural Resources Conservation Service Performance Summary

Strategic Goal	Performance Objectives and Indicators	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Target	2002 Actual
Goal 2: Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use to ensure a high quality environment.	Objective 2.1 - Protect farmland from conversion to non-agricultural uses.					
	Counties with Land Evaluation and Site Assessment systems developed, number.	NI	NA	19	50	36
	Group and area plans developed to address farmland protection, non-agricultural effects on water quality, number.	NI	NI	NI	539	569
	Farmland protected from conversion under Farmland Protection Program, acres.	NI	NI	34,900	200	98,500
	Objective 2.2 - Promote sound urban and rural community development.					
	Community development projects completed (RC&D), number.	NI	NI	3,043	2,908	4,145
	Urban and built-up land where erosion control measures were applied, acres.	NI	46,000	70,700	71,500	92,047
	Objective 2.3 - Protect water and air resources from agricultural non-point sources of impairment.					
	Buffers applied annually, acres.	NC	NC	524,000	421,000	581,000
	Agricultural land where systems that reduce potential for nutrient delivery were applied, acres.	2,700,000*	4,400,000	5,400,000	4,630,000	5,500,000
	Agricultural land where pest management was applied, acres.	NA	4,400,000	5,400,000	4,186,000	5,200,000

*Fiscal Year 1999 data were collected at 287 PRMIS Pilot sites and projected to reflect National accomplishments.

NA - No available data, projections were not made.

NI - Not an indicator for this fiscal year.

NC - Data is not comparable due to a change in units used for measurement.

Table 1-3 Natural Resources Conservation Service Performance Summary

Strategic Goal	Performance Objectives and Indicators	1999 Actual		2000 Actual		2001 Actual		2002 Target		2002 Actual	
Goal 2, continued: Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use to ensure a high quality environment.	Objective 2.4 - Enhance animal feeding operations to protect the environment. Waste management systems planned or applied, number.	6,170*	11,000	10,521	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI
	Comprehensive nutrient management plans developed or applied, number.	NI	NI	NI	NI	7,854	8,550				
	Objective 2.5 - Maintain, restore, or enhance wetland ecosystems and fish and wildlife habitat. Wetlands created, restored, or enhanced, acres.	270,000*	290,000	362,000	274,000	376,000					
	Land where measures to improve wildlife were applied, acres.	6,300,000*	12,300,00	11,700,000	7,116,000	12,500,000					
Goal 3: Reduce risks from drought and flooding to protect individual and community health and safety.	Objective 3.1 - Protect upstream watersheds from flood risks. Watershed infrastructure rehabilitation plans, number.	NI	NI	NI	22	18					
	Watershed infrastructure rehabilitation projects installed, number.	NI	NI	0	13	5					
	Watershed plans and surveys, number.	NI	NI	NI	50	33					
	Flood control structures completed, number.	NI	NI	51	115	79					
	Conservation systems applied to address flooding concerns, acres.	NI	1,303,000	3,078,000	2,013,000	4,500,000					

*Fiscal Year 1999 data were collected at 287 PRMS Pilot sites and projected to reflect National accomplishments.

NA - No available data, projections were not made.

NI - Not an indicator for this fiscal year.

NC - Data is not comparable due to a change in units used for measurement.

Table 1-4 Natural Resources Conservation Service Performance Summary

Strategic Goal	Performance Objectives and Indicators	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Target	2002 Actual
Goal 3, continued: Reduce risks from drought and flooding to protect individual and community health and safety.	Objective 3.2 - Protect watersheds from the effects of chronic water shortages and risks from drought. Conservation systems applied to address water supply concerns, acres.	NA	6,500,000	8,620,000	5,427,000	8,500,000
	Water supply forecasts issued to address flooding concerns, number.	6,835	6,875	9,000	9,200	11,411
Goal 4: Deliver high quality services to the public to enable natural resource stewardship.	Objective 4.1 - Deliver services fairly and equitably. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups, who applied a conservation system with NRCs assistance, number.	NI	NI	5,341	NI	
	Minority customers applying a system with assistance from an NRCs-administered financial assistance program.	NI	NI	1,995	NI	
	New NRCs offices established on reservation land.	NI	NI	4	3	1
	Objective 4.2 - Strengthen the conservation delivery system. Customers accessing NRCs technical data electronically: Water users and managers utilizing information developed by the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program.	43,800	55,261	69,300	80,000	157,000

*Fiscal Year 1999 data were collected at 287 PRMS Pilot sites and projected to reflect National accomplishments.

NA - No available data, projections were not made.

NI - Not an indicator for this fiscal year.

NC - Data is not comparable due to a change in units used for measurement.

Table 1-5 Natural Resources Conservation Service Performance Summary

Strategic Goal	Performance Objectives and Indicators	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Target	2002 Actual
Goal 4, continued: Deliver high quality services to the public to enable natural resource stewardship.	Customers accessing or downloading soils data—total number of STATSGO and SSURGO downloads or CD orders.	2,611	11,505	34,700	35,000	50,361
	Customers accessing or downloading plant science information (PLANTS) database, customers.	720,000	745,000	1,230,000	1,250,000	1,800,000
Objective 4.3 - Ensure timely, science-based information and technologies.						
National conservation practice standards reviewed to ensure they are current and reflect best available technology, number.		NI	NI	11	36	36
Soil surveys available in digital form, cumulative number.		704	941	1,080	1380	1,368
Soils mapped or soil surveys updated in the fiscal year, acres.		24,000,000	24,391,000	24,400,000	22,023,000	22,600,000
New plant releases, number.		22	25	24	32	29
Plant materials technology transfer: publications, number.		NI	NI	366	273	333
Plant materials studies evaluated, number.		NI	NI	463	409	444

*Fiscal Year 1999 data were collected at 287 PRMS Pilot sites and projected to reflect National accomplishments.

NA - No available data, projections were not made.

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Natural Resources Conservation Service Mission

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

Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs Assistance

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935 (Public Law 74-46) established the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). The Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, (Public Law 103-354; 7 U.S.C. 6962), renamed the Agency the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Technical Assistance Programs

Conservation Operations

There are four programs in the Conservation Operations account: Conservation Technical Assistance, Soil Survey, Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting, and Plant Materials. These are the basic activities that support all NRCS programs and activities, as well as state and local conservation programs.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) provides the infrastructure through which NRCS is able to respond to the multitude of conservation needs across the Nation. CTA is authorized for conservation planning and application assistance to control soil erosion,

improve water quality, and protect cropland, rangeland, and forestland and wildlife habitat.

Through CTA, 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. This basic assistance includes assessing natural resource conditions and issues and explaining the USDA programs that are available to address them.

Technical assistance helps land users to assess conservation needs, consider alternative courses of action, set goals, and develop conservation plans.

CTA supports the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended in 1990 and 1996. These "Farm Bills" require NRCS to determine compliance with highly erodible land and wetlands conservation provisions of USDA program applicants.

CTA also provides assistance in implementing conservation plans and follow-up assistance to maintain the conservation system and revise it as needed.

NRCS provides technical assistance to resource managers participating in programs administered by the Farm Service Agency, such as the Conservation Reserve Program, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and the Emergency Conservation Program as a reimbursable activity under CTA.

The Soil Survey and the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting programs develop and disseminate basic information on soil resources and seasonal water supplies and provide recommendations for managing these resources.

The Plant Materials program develops plants and plant science technologies for conservation systems.

Water Resources Programs

NRCS water resources programs include: Watershed Surveys and Planning, Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation and Emergency Watershed Protection.

Water resources activities focus on restoring watershed health through a comprehensive planning approach. These programs assist communities to protect watersheds from damage caused by erosion, floodwater, and sediment, and to conserve and develop water and land resources. Resource concerns addressed include water quality, opportunities for water conservation, wetland and water storage capacity, agricultural drought problems, rural development, municipal and industrial water needs, upstream flood damages, and water needs for fish, wildlife, and forest-based industries.

Planning involves assisting local sponsoring organizations develop plans for small watersheds (not larger than 250,000 acres).

Surveys include river basin studies and floodplain management studies.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations provide technical and financial assistance to local sponsors to install watershed improvement measures, including land treatment, structural, and non-structural measures.

Emergency Watershed Protection provides immediate assistance to reduce threats to life and property in watersheds damaged by severe natural events such as floods, hurricanes, or droughts, and to restore damaged sites to pre-disaster conditions.

Resource Conservation and Development

The Resource Conservation and Development Program provides technical assistance to 368 Resource Conservation and Development Councils to plan, develop, and carry out programs for resource conservation and development.

Projects must address land conservation, water management, community development, and land management elements.

Financial Assistance Programs

Farm Bill Programs

Through the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, and the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, the Secretary of Agriculture has assigned NRCS the responsibility for administering a number of programs that provide both financial and technical assistance.

The largest of these, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, provides technical, financial and educational assistance to address multiple-priority natural resource concerns identified at the local level.

Primarily single purpose programs include the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and the Farmland Protection Program.

NRCS also administers the Forestry Incentives Program, which was authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978.

All of these programs help participants plan and apply conservation to the land and provide financial assistance or incentives.

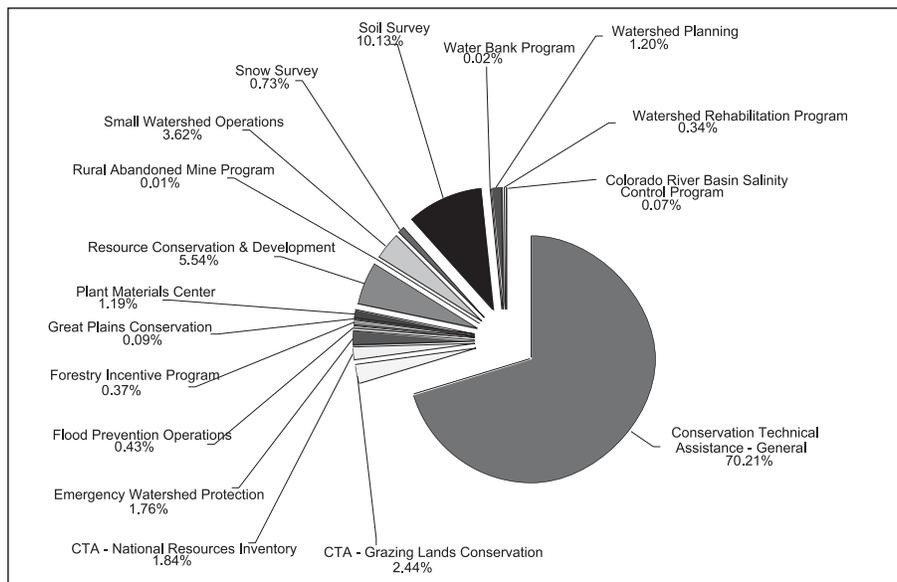
Other

Public Law 95-192, the "Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977" states, "Resource appraisal is basic to effective soil and water conservation (and) a coordinated appraisal and program framework are essential." The most

recent appraisal and report, titled "A Resource Conservation Act Report: Interim Analysis of Conservation Alternatives," presents information gathered during 2000 and 2001. This report discusses results of potential conservation initiatives that address many of the conservation needs.

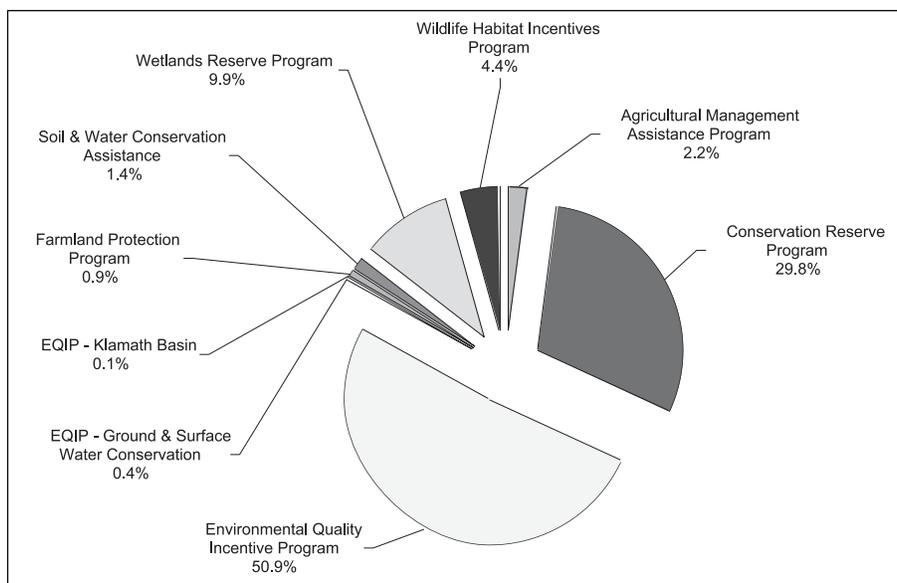
Natural Resources Conservation Service Fiscal Obligations

Figure 1: NRCS FY 2002 Discretionary Funds (percent of total)



Discretionary Funds: NRCS receives appropriations from a variety of legislative sources. While nearly two-thirds of the agency’s funding is authorized by Public Law 74–46, there are a number of smaller appropriations that round out the agency’s capacity to carry out its natural resource conservation mission.

Figure 2: NRCS FY 2002 Mandatory Funds (percent of total)



Mandatory Funds: These funds are associated with cost share programs and are derived from the Commodity Credit Corporation, as directed by Congress. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) represents technical assistance only. The program is administered by the Farm Services Agency, which is responsible for the financial assistance components and rental payments.

Strategic Goal 1: Enhance natural resource productivity to enable a strong agricultural and natural resource sector.

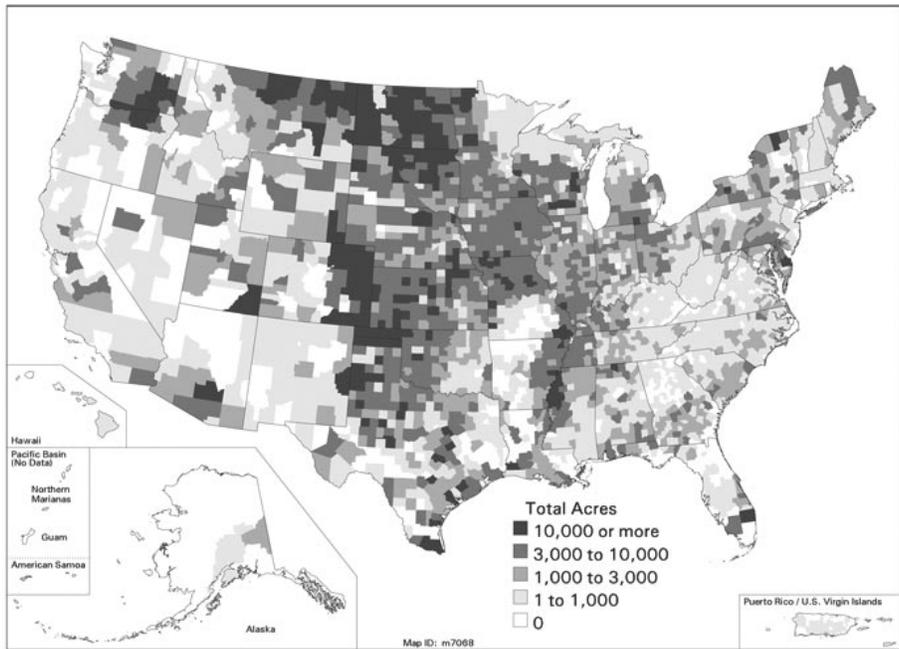
Objective 1.1 – Maintain, restore, and enhance cropland productivity.

Indicator:
Cropland where resource management systems were applied:

Target: 7,768,700 acres
 Actual: 9,600,000 acres

Analysis:
 The target was exceeded by 23 percent. States in the Northern Plains Region led the way with 35 percent of the reported acreage.

Figure 3: RMS Applied on Cropland

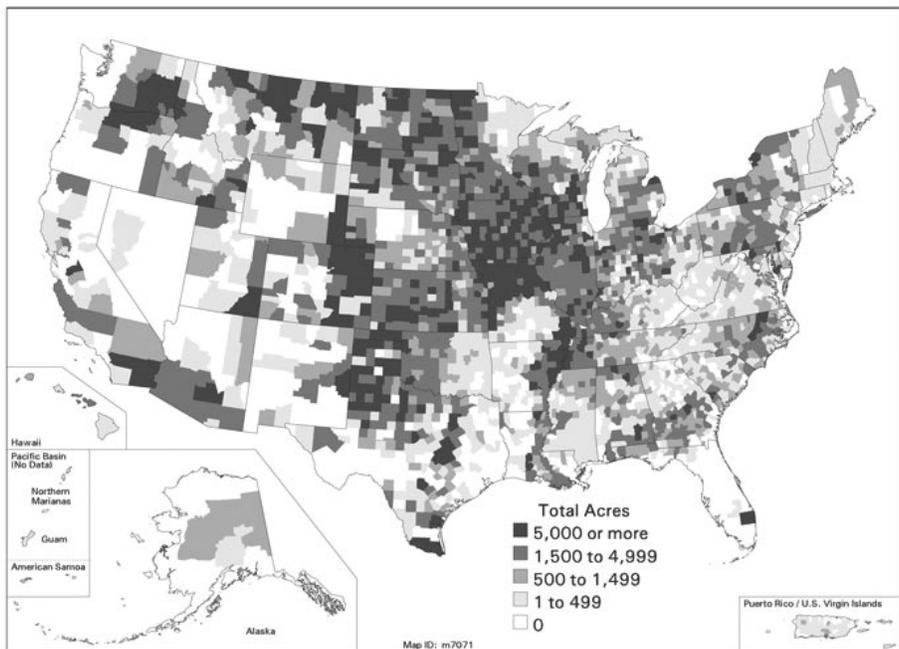


Indicator:
Cropland where conservation was applied to protect against erosion damage:

Target: 6,756,409 acres
 Actual: 7,123,000 acres

Analysis:
 The goal was exceeded. Texas, Iowa, and Missouri led the way, each contributing over half a million acres

Figure 4: Erosion Reduction Applied on Cropland



Objective 1.2 – Maintain, restore, and enhance irrigated land.

Indicator:

Irrigated cropland where irrigation water management was improved:

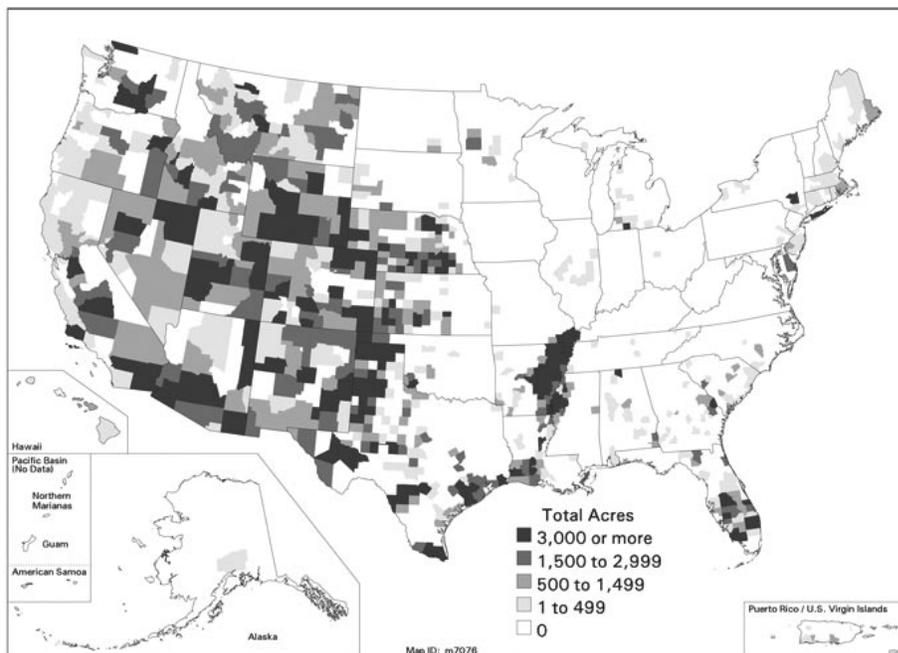
Target: 1,049,873 acres

Actual: 1,900,000 acres

Analysis:

The target was nearly doubled. Lingering drought in some key areas has prompted producers to improve their irrigation efficiency. Texas especially, but also Arkansas, Colorado, Nebraska and Missouri, figured significantly in the demand for improved irrigation.

Figure 5: Total Irrigation Water Management



Objective 1.3 – Maintain, restore and enhance grazing land productivity.

Indicator:

Grazing land where resource management systems were applied:

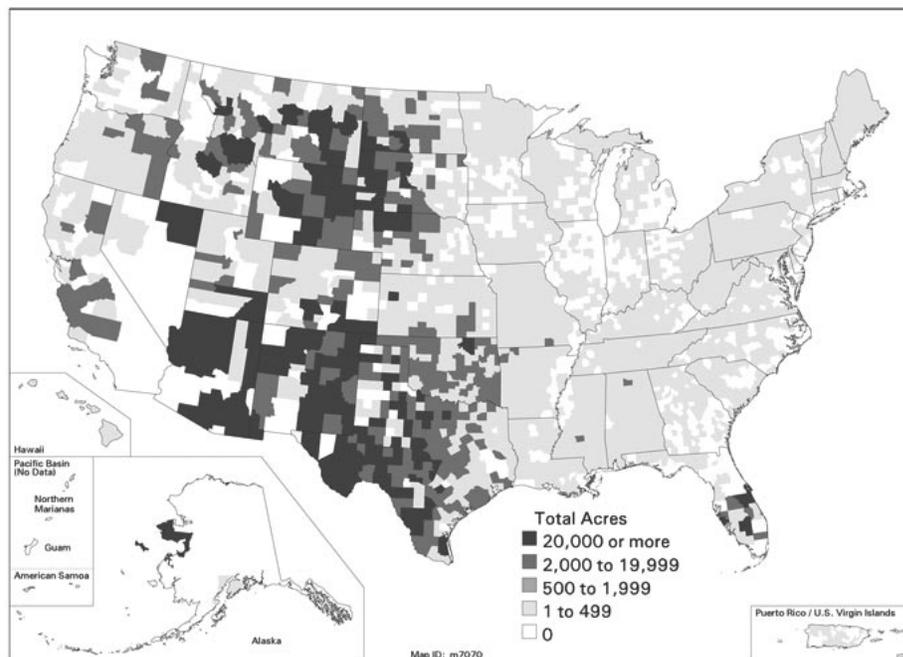
Target: 10,382,458 acres

Actual: 11,900,000 acres

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 14 percent. As might be expected, states with sizable ranching operations such as Texas, New Mexico, Alaska, Montana and Wyoming, account for most of this work.

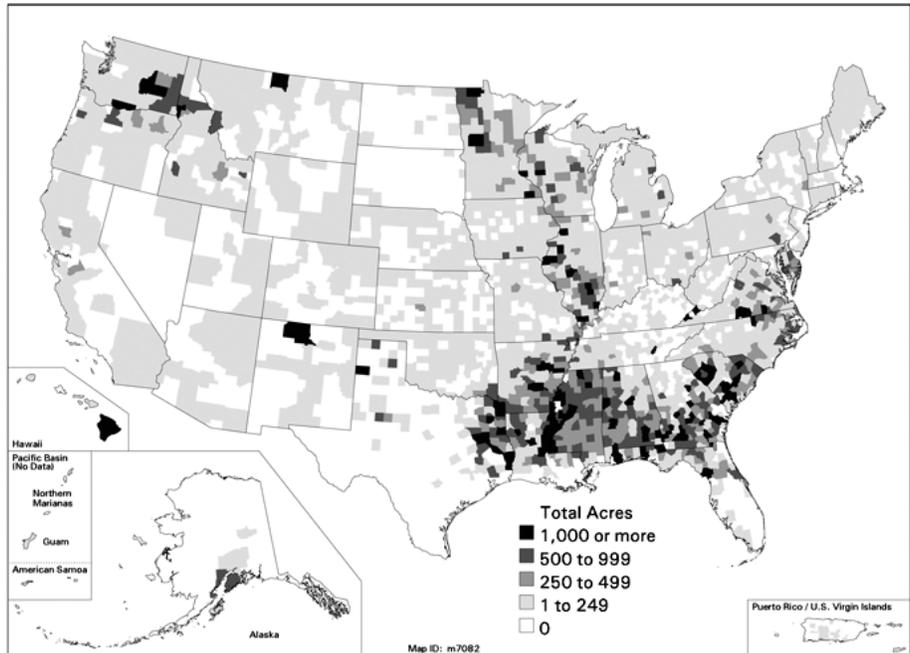
Figure 6: Resource Management Systems Applied on Grazing Land



Objective 1.4 – Maintain, restore and enhance forestland productivity.

Indicator:
Forestland where tree and shrub establishment was applied:
 Target: 386,655 acres
 Actual: 483,000 acres

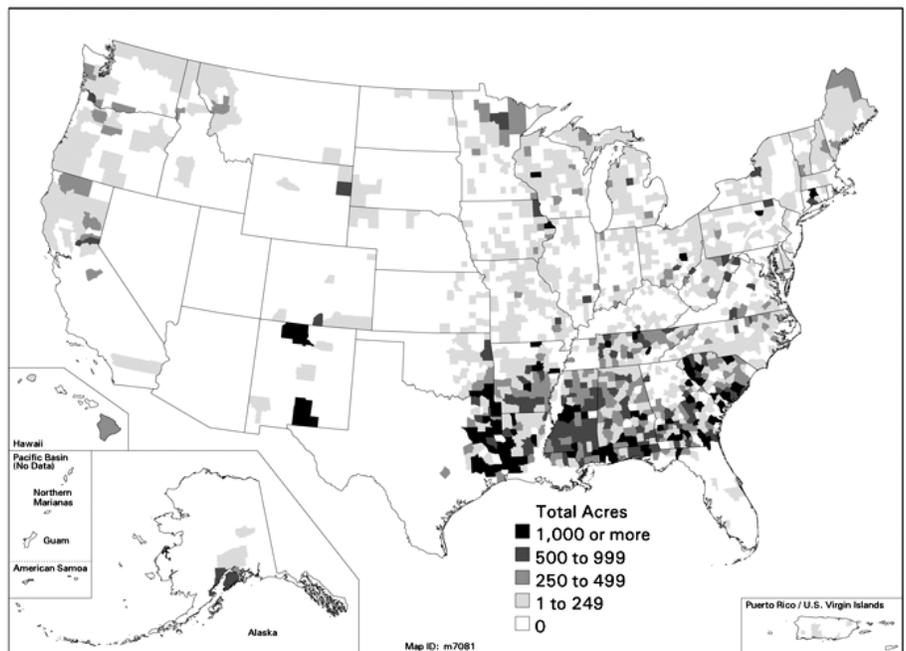
Figure 7: Trees and Shrub Establishment Applied



Indicator:
Forestland where the stand was improved:
 Target: 351,128 acres
 Actual: 397,000 acres

Analysis:
 Both targets were exceeded. Forestry assistance is in particularly high demand in the Southeastern States.

Figure 8: Forest Stand Improvement



There are four objectives and six indicators under Strategic Goal 1, “Enhance natural resource productivity to enable a strong agricultural and natural resource sector.” All targets were met, therefore all of the objectives associated with Strategic Goal 1 were achieved for fiscal year 2002.

Strategic Goal 2: Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use to ensure a high quality environment.

Objective 2.1 – Protect farmland from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Indicator:

Counties with Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) systems developed:

Target: 50

Actual: 36

Analysis:

72 percent of the target was achieved. A considerable effort is underway to increase awareness of the need to preserve prime and unique farmlands. Local governments are encouraged to use the LESA tool to aid in this process.

Indicator:

Group and area plans developed to address farmland protection and non-agricultural effects on water quality:

Target: 539

Actual: 569

Analysis:

The target was exceeded reflecting a high demand for technical assistance in areas of rapid development and sprawl.

Indicator:

Farmland protected from conversion under the Farmland Protection Program:

Target: 200 acres

Actual: 98,500 acres

Analysis:

The target was set based on funds authorized in the initial FY 2002 appropriation. The actual

performance reflects the rapid implementation of the expanded program authorized by the Farm Bill enacted in May 2002.

Objective 2.2 – Promote sound urban and rural community development.

Indicator:

Community Development

Projects completed:

Target: 2,908

Actual: 4,145

Analysis:

This target was exceeded by more than 40 percent. Virtually all RC&D Areas reported completed projects in fiscal year 2002.

Indicator:

Urban and built-up land where erosion control measures were applied:

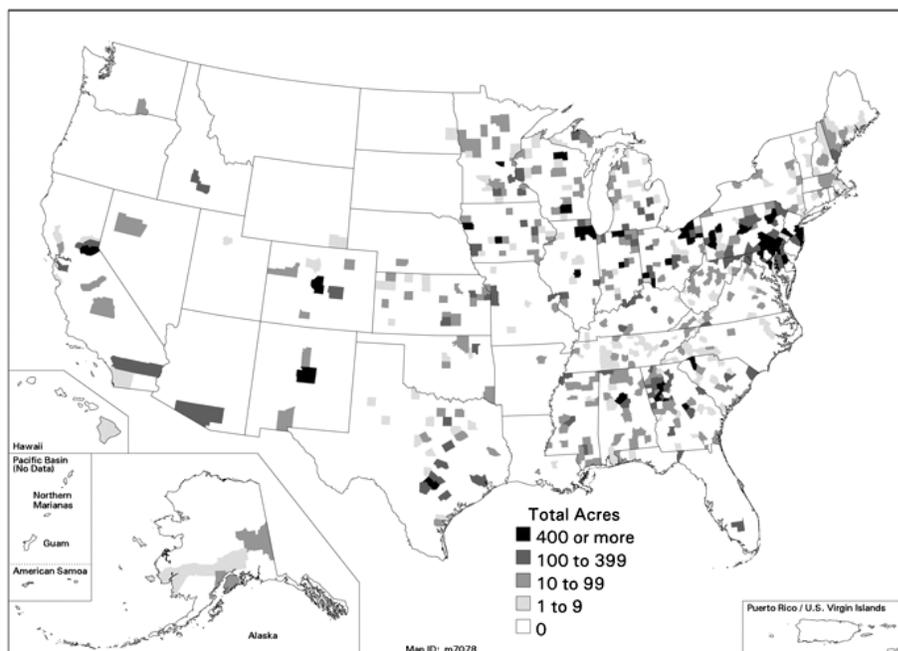
Target: 71,500 acres

Actual: 92,047 acres

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by more than 25 percent. A few states in the East and Southeast Regions accounted for nearly 70 percent of the acreage accomplished.

Figure 9: Erosion Reduction Applied on Urban and Built-up Land



Objective 2.3 – Protect water and air resources from agricultural non-point sources of impairment.

Indicator:

Buffers applied annually:

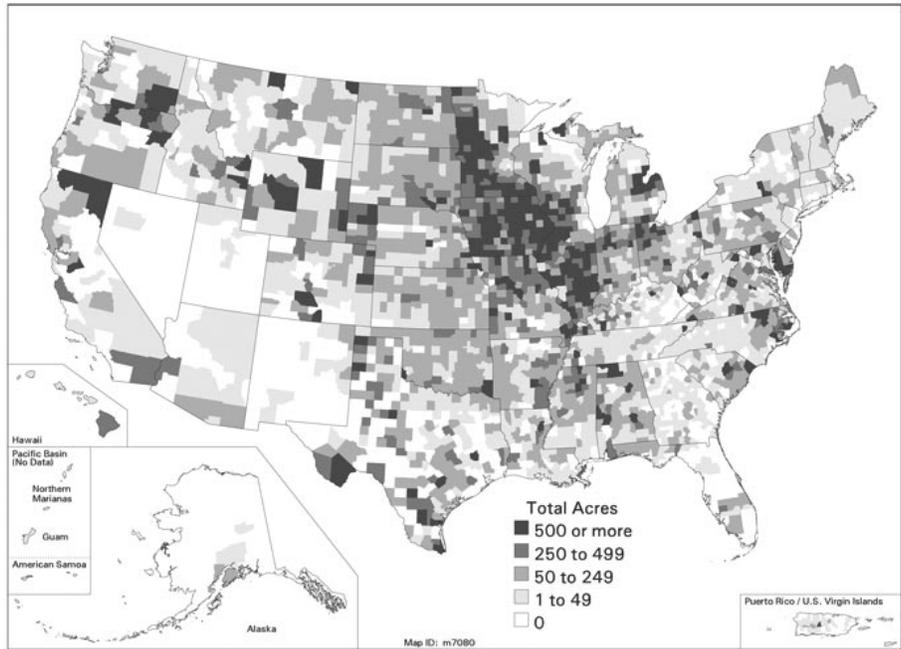
Target: 421,000 acres

Actual: 581,000 acres

Analysis:

The target was exceeded due to a strong effort in the Midwest where more than fifty percent of the conservation buffer practices was reported.

Figure 10: Buffers Applied



Indicator:

Agricultural land where systems that reduce potential for nutrient delivery were applied:

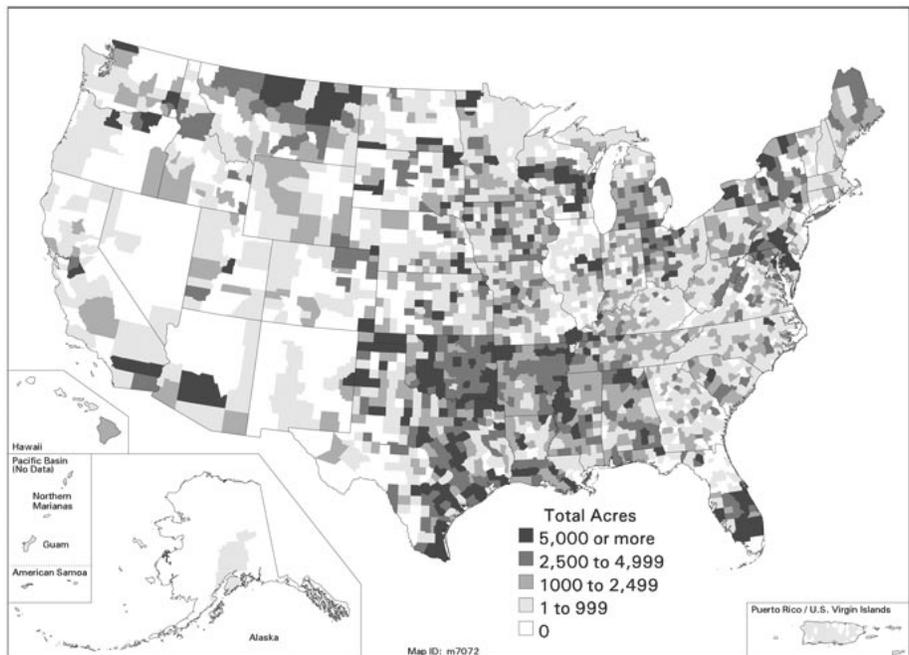
Target: 4,630,000 acres

Actual: 5,500,000 acres

Analysis:

The target was exceeded and acreage was reported in every state. Counties with significant animal feeding operations tended to have the most activity.

Figure 11: Nutrient Management Applied



Indicator:

Agricultural land where pest management was applied:

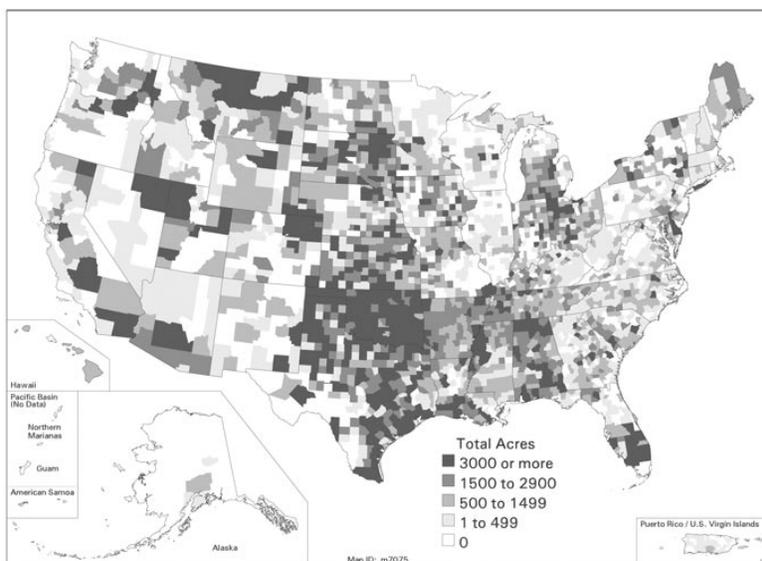
Target: 4,186,000 acres

Actual: 5,200,000 acres

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 24 percent, largely due to significant acreage reported by states in the Northern Plains and South Central Regions.

Figure 12: Pest Management Applied



Objective 2.4 – Enhance animal feeding operations to protect the environment.

Indicator:

Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans developed or applied:

Target: 7,854

Actual: 8,550

Analysis:

The performance target was achieved. Performance coincides with concentrations of hog and poultry producers and dairy farms.

Figure 13: CNMP Developed

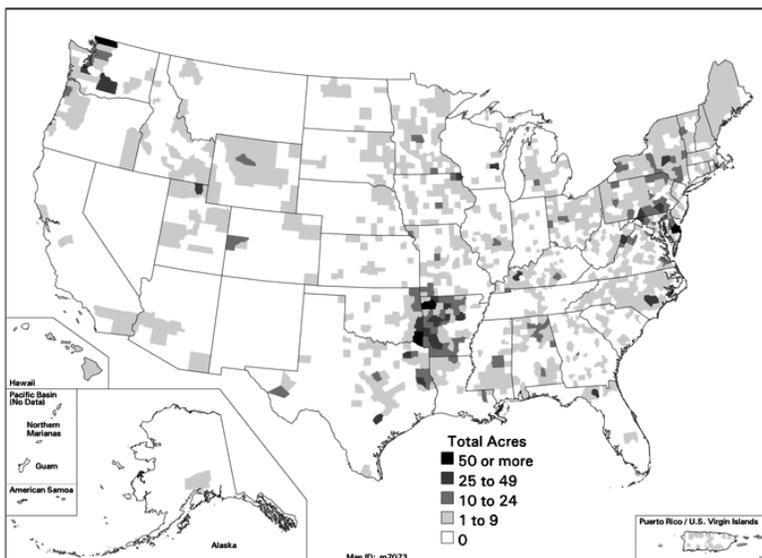
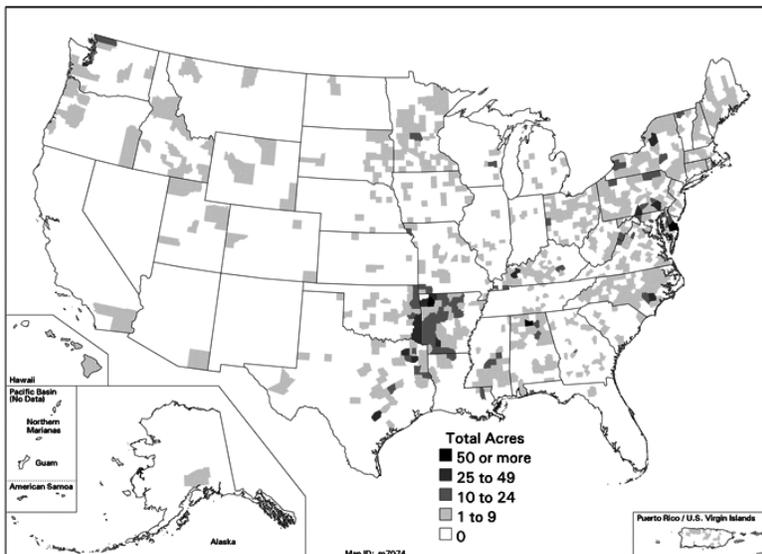


Figure 14: CNMP Applied

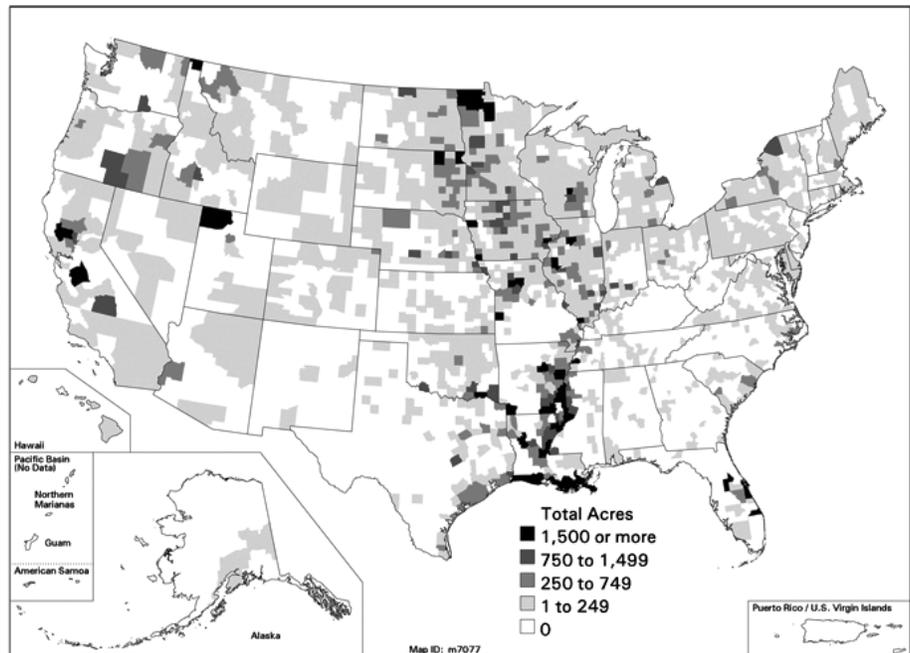


Objective 2.5 – Maintain, restore or enhance wetland ecosystems and fish and wildlife habitat.

Indicator:
Wetlands created, restored or enhanced:
 Target: 274,000 acres
 Actual: 376,000 acres

Analysis:
 Target was exceeded by 37 percent. This result can be attributed to an aggressive wetlands protection program in the State of Louisiana, which led the way in acreage. It should also be noted that every state contributed to this indicator.

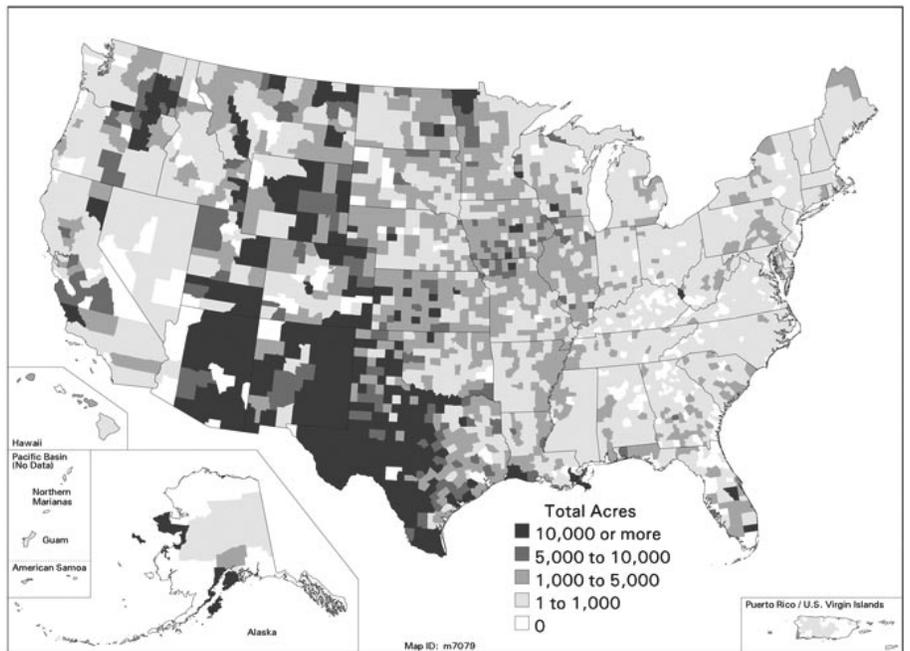
Figure 15: Wetlands Created, Restored, or Enhanced



Indicator:
Land where measures to improve wildlife were applied:
 Target: 7,116,000 acres
 Actual: 12,500,000 acres

Analysis:
 The target was exceeded by more than 75 percent. This application correlates with areas where large ranches are following prescribed grazing practices.

Figure 16: Wildlife Management Applied



Strategic Goal 2, “Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use to ensure a high quality environment,” has five objectives and eleven performance indicators. Targets were achieved on all but one of the indicators.

Strategic Goal 3: Reduce risks from drought and flooding to protect individual and community health and safety.

Objective 3.1 – Protect upstream watersheds from flood risks.

Indicator:
Watershed infrastructure rehabilitation plans developed:

Target: 22
Actual: 18

Indicator:
Watershed infrastructure rehabilitation plans installed:

Target: 13
Actual: 5

Analysis:

Environmental reviews, contracting requirements and funding uncertainties contributed to delays in completing the planning and construction of these projects. By the end of fiscal year 2003, virtually all of these projects will have been completed.

Indicator:
Watershed plans and surveys approved:

Target: 50
Actual: 33

Analysis:

66 percent of the target was achieved. Some plans require complex coordination and review before an approving authority can grant approval.

Indicator:
Flood control structures completed:

Target: 115
Actual: 79

Analysis:

69 percent of the target was achieved. Several factors affect completion of construction work. These include the availability of federal and local funds, the contracting and bidding process, weather, and unanticipated situations that occur during the actual construction.

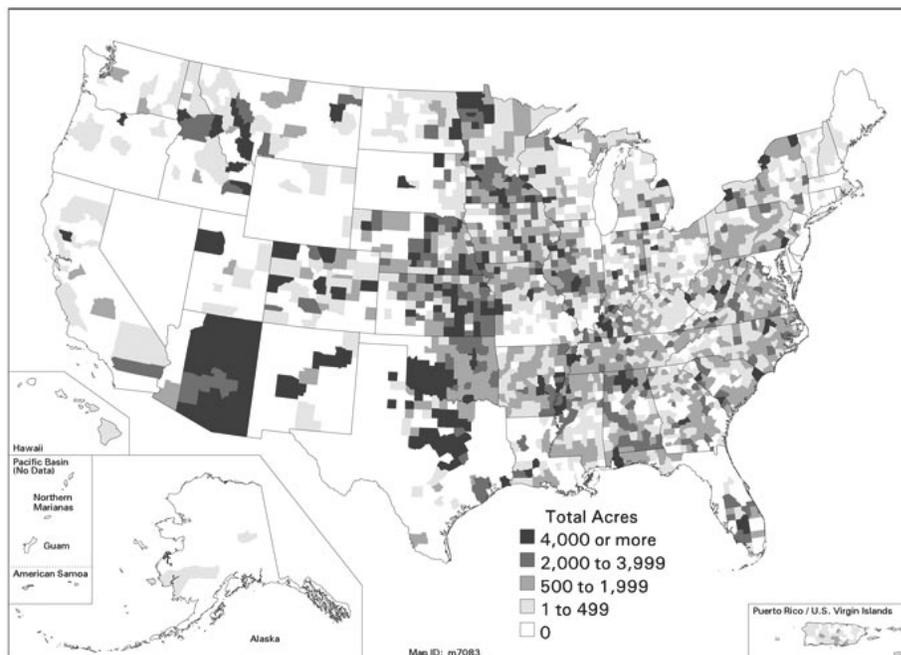
Indicator:
Conservation systems applied to address flooding concerns:

Target: 2,013,000
Actual: 4,500,000

Analysis:

Reported performance was more than twice the goal. State totals ranged as high as nearly one million acres, and all but two states contributed to the result.

Figure 17: Conservation Systems Applied to Address Flooding Concerns



Objective 3.2 – Protect watersheds from the effects of chronic water shortages and risks from drought.

Indicator:

Conservation systems applied to address water supply concerns:

Target: 5,427,000 acres

Actual: 8,500,000 acres

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 56 percent. Nearly 60 percent of the result was accomplished by farmers and ranchers in the Northern Plains and South Central Regions. Acres reported in Montana and Nebraska were 14 percent of the national total.

Indicator:

Water supply forecasts issued:

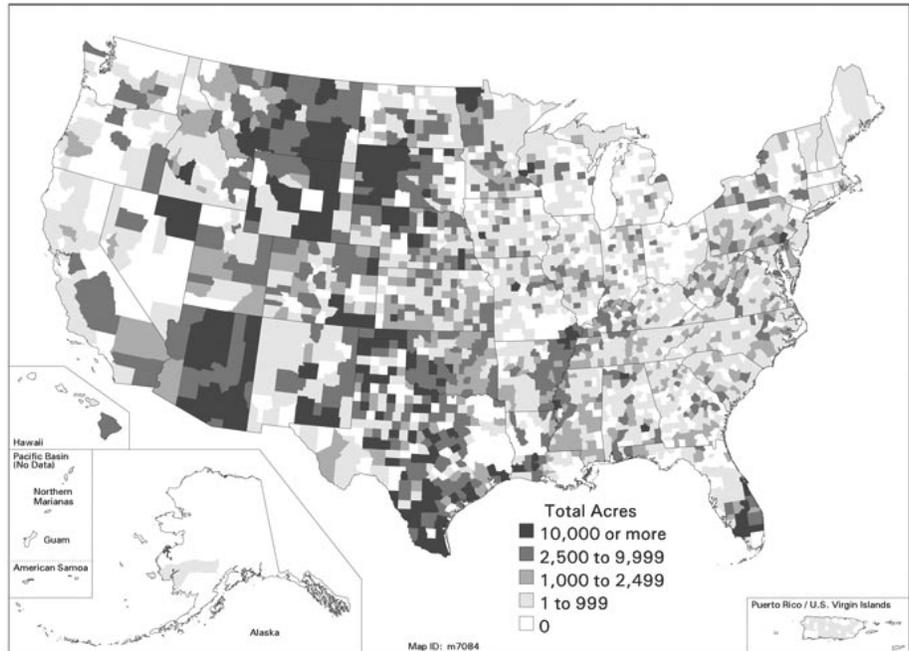
Target: 9,200

Actual: 11,411

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 24 percent.

Figure 18: Conservation Systems Applied to Address Water Supply Concerns



There are two objectives and seven performance indicators for Strategic Goal 3, “Reduce risks from drought and flooding to protect individual and community health and safety.” Due to the reasons stated in the preceding analyses, only three performance targets were achieved.

Strategic Goal 4: Deliver high quality services to the public to enable natural resource stewardship.

Objective 4.1 – Deliver services fairly and equitably.

Indicator:

New NRCS offices established on reservation land:

Target: 3

Actual: 1

Analysis:

33 percent of the target was achieved. Circumstances beyond the control of NRCS delayed the opening of offices in Washington and New Mexico.

Objective 4.2 – Strengthen the conservation delivery system.

Indicator:

Water users and managers utilizing information developed by the snow survey and water supply forecasting program:

Target: 80,000

Actual: 157,542

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 96 percent, largely due to persistent drought conditions in many of the areas served by the NRCS Water and Climate Center.

Indicator:

Customers accessing or downloading soils data—total

number of STATSGO and SSURGO downloads or compact disc orders:

Target: 35,000

Actual: 50,361

Analysis:

The target was greatly exceeded, due to increased demand for this information and improvements made to the accessibility and tracking features of the database.

Indicator:

Customers accessing or downloading plant science information (PLANTS) database:

Target: 1,250,000

Actual: 1,880,200

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 50 percent. Once again the popularity of this database and the ever increasing growth in internet use has been difficult to predict.

Objective 4.3 – Ensure timely science-based information technologies.

Indicator:

National conservation practice standards reviewed to ensure they are current and reflect best available technology:

Target: 36

Actual: 36

Analysis:

Performance equaled the target.

Indicator:

Soil surveys available in digital form, cumulative number:

Target: 1,380

Actual: 1,368

Analysis:

Ninety-nine percent of the target was achieved.

Indicator:

Soils mapped or soil surveys updated in the fiscal year:

Target: 22,023,000 acres

Actual: 22,633,208 acres

Analysis:

The target was met. Soil survey information is critical to the planning and application of conservation treatments used to solve soil and water conservation problems.

Indicator:

New plant releases:

Target: 32

Actual: 29

Analysis:

91 percent of the target was achieved. Final approvals and clearances can delay an official plant release.

Indicator:

Plant materials technology transfer publications:

Target: 273

Actual: 333

Analysis:

The target was exceeded by 22 percent.

Indicator:
Plant materials studies
evaluated:
Target: 409
Actual: 444

Analysis:
The target was exceeded by eight percent.

Strategic Goal 4, “Deliver high quality services to the public to enable natural resource stewardship,” has three objectives and ten performance indicators. Eighty percent of the targets were achieved.

Assessment of the Fiscal Year 2002 Data

The purpose of the annual performance report is to emphasize organizational and managerial accountability for program execution and results.

In fiscal year 2000, the Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS) was fully implemented at the field office level. Nearly 1.6 million records were entered into PRMS during fiscal year 2001.

NRCS has invested in Web-based information technology for field offices. Late in fiscal year 2001, NRCS initiated several improvements to the reporting system. This was prompted by user feedback and recommendations from a PRMS review, conducted by the agency’s oversight and evaluation staff. This review included on-site visits to 67 offices across the country. Major steps have been taken to link the PRMS with the agency’s time and attendance reporting system.

At the end of fiscal year 2002, NRCS conducted a thorough review targeting verification and validation, and corrections were coordinated with state and county level offices. As a part of this process each State Conservationist provided written certification that performance data reported within his or her state were accurate.

NRCS is continuing efforts to improve the timeliness and quality of PRMS operations and data. Tools have been added to

aid in identifying and correcting erroneous entries. PRMS reports are monitored on almost a daily basis. A summary report is presented at the Chief’s weekly staff meeting. Formal quarterly reports are prepared and reviewed at all levels. We are committed to producing high quality performance data in order to achieve our legislated mandates including the Government Performance and Results Act and the President’s Management Agenda.

During 2002, NRCS introduced an intensive training course for state level program managers. The NRCS Integrated Accountability System (IAS), including PRMS, was a key component of this training. Additionally, we have made great strides integrating fiscal and performance data in a Conservation Information System rolled out late in FY 2002. Steps such as these will ensure that we meet GPRA requirements. NRCS is also fully integrated into the U.S. Department of Agriculture GPRA process, and has contributed to the Department’s Strategic Plan, Annual Performance Plan, and Annual Performance Report.

Work is underway to develop additional reporting tools to allow tailoring performance reporting at a local level, and for means and methods to measure performance outcomes.

Fiscal Year 2003 Performance

The fiscal year 2003 Performance Plan reflects some changes in performance goals and indicators that resulted from the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

The current Strategic Plan identifies four strategic goals and 14 strategic objectives. Performance indicators and targets are established to measure progress towards the strategic goals and objectives. NRCS relies more

on a locally led “bottom up” approach in establishing the targets. This is done to achieve a balanced distribution of target shares across the various indicators and among NRCS offices. Progress towards these targets to date is summarized in Table 2 on the following page.

Program Evaluations

NRCS conducts internal reviews and evaluations through a national Oversight and Evaluation

Staff. The following reviews were conducted in fiscal year 2002

- National Resources Inventory (NRI)
- AMA in Connecticut
- Conservation Systems in MLRA 105
- Strengthening Technology Delivery
- Technical Assistance Costs of Conservation Practices
- WHIP Program Assessment
- Farmland Protection Program (FPP) Program Assessment

Table 2: FY 2003 Performance

Performance Indicator	FY 2003 goal	Mid-year goal	Progress to date	Mid-Year progress percent
RMS Planned on Cropland	6,623,000	2,580,000	2,582,000	100.1
RMS Applied on Cropland	7,131,000	2,480,000	2,858,000	115.2
RMS Planned on Grazed Land	8,412,000	2,864,000	3,548,000	123.9
RMS Applied on Grazed Land	10,661,000	3,248,000	5,137,000	158.1
Erosion Reduction Applied on Cropland	6,746,000	2,432,000	2,256,000	92.7
Nutrient Management Applied	5,165,000	1,940,000	1,773,000	91.4
CNMP Developed	5,567	2,164	1,960	90.6
CNMP Applied	3,682	1,311	1,124	85.7
Pest Management Applied	4,451,000	1,540,000	1,774,000	115.1
Total Irrigation Water Management	1,621,000	597,000	643,000	107.7
Wetlands Creation, Restoration, or Enhancement	268,000	97,000	152,000	155.5
Erosion Reduction Applied on Urban and Built-up Land	74,000	30,000	22,000	72.6
Wildlife Habitat Management Applied	8,002,000	2,616,000	6,188,000	236.5
Buffers Applied	449,000	173,000	186,000	107.1
Forest Stand Improvement	322,000	122,000	144,000	118.5
Trees and Shrub Establishment Applied	342,000	155,000	169,000	109.4
Conservation Systems Applied to Address Flooding Concerns	2,651,000	1,045,000	1,952,000	186.8
Conservation Systems Applied to Address Water Supply Concerns	6,236,000	2,039,000	3,654,000	179.2
Group and Area-wide Plans that Address Farmland Protection against Conversion or Non-Ag effects on Water Quality	458	175	70	40.0
Soil Survey Mapping or Updating	21,132,000	9,135,000	6,810,000	74.6
Progressive Planning on Cropland	4,937,000	2,192,000	1,870,000	85.3
Progressive Planning on Grazed Land	10,318,000	4,611,000	2,796,000	60.6
Land Benefited on Cropland	TBD	TBD	1,456,000	NA
Land Benefited on Grazed Land	TBD	TBD	3,644,000	NA

The advent of the Farm Bill has caused NRCS to reevaluate many of the Management Actions identified in prior reviews. New procedures are being developed that take advantage of the findings and management actions agreed to by the agency from prior reviews. Implementation of the new policies and procedures will be evaluated during 2003 and beyond.

Program Assessment Rating Tool

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) introduced the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) as an integral part of the President's Management Agenda. This accountability tool seeks to determine the strengths and weaknesses of federal programs.

During FY 2002 two NRCS programs were evaluated. The Farmland Protection Program (FPP) was rated highly in the areas of Purpose, Planning and Management; however, scored only 42 percent for Results/Accountability. OMB concluded that Results were not demonstrated and new measures were needed. Since the evaluation, NRCS has promulgated revised regulations that require an analysis of a project's strategic contribution towards conservation of agricultural land and influence on urban development in a given geographic area. Moreover, the NRCS and USDA have initiated an effort with the American Farmland Trust and universities aimed at improving performance measures that are outcome based.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) was also evaluated. This program scored well on Purpose and Management, 71 percent on Planning but 33 percent on Results/Accountability. In 2003 NRCS is conducting an internal, in-depth review and working towards the development of outcome-based performance measures and targets.

Common Performance Measures

Another administration initiative is Common Performance Measures. During FY 2002 three NRCS programs were selected for this interagency review. In the area of Flood Damage Reduction the Small Watershed Program was compared with the Corps of Engineers and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs. Criteria were established for selecting a sample of projects that were then used to derive net benefits per dollar invested for the median project in the sample. The results showed the following values: Corps of Engineers 65 cents/dollar, FEMA 39 cents/dollar and NRCS 19 cents/dollar. NRCS maintains that the Small Watershed Program is a multi-purpose program, that often benefits areas other than flood damage reduction. This has been especially true over the past 15 years. Given the criteria that sample projects had to substantially reduce flood damage and have been totally completed within the last five years, the

NRCS projects selected for the evaluation were severely restricted.

The second program area involving NRCS was Wetlands Conservation. Here the NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was considered along with programs from the Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The common measure selected by OMB was the acres of wetlands improved or protected per \$1 million in total costs. OMB concluded that the Fish and Wildlife Service programs appeared to be most cost effective but did not release the actual values, noting the data can only be considered preliminary and do not address possible qualitative differences in wetlands or other factors. OMB intends to continue the evaluation in FY 2003.

Finally, OMB attempted to evaluate programs aimed at reducing Non-Point Source Pollution (NPSP). Programs selected were NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EPA's Non-Point Source (section 319) grants program and the Farm Services Agency's Conservation Reserve Program. The measure for these programs was nutrient reduction, typically nitrogen or phosphorus, in a liter of sampled water, and the program dollars spent by the agency to reduce the concentration of the nutrient. Only EPA

was able to derive data, but it was deemed unreliable for providing nationwide program results. The three agencies have been directed by OMB to improve data collection efforts in order to follow through with the evaluations and comparisons.

Management Challenges

The Government Accounting Office's January 2003 update of Major Management Challenges and Program Risks for the United States Department of Agriculture did not include any challenges that are unique to Natural Resources Conservation Service.

High-Risk Areas

The General Accounting Office's January 2003 update of its High-Risk series did not identify any high-risk areas unique to the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The recently introduced High-Risk Area regarding Federal Real Property is being addressed at the departmental level.

Report Preparation

Only federal employees were involved in the preparation of this Annual Report.