

#### **USDA SUPPORTS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF:**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as a member of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, endorses "International Year of the Reef (IYOR) 2008". USDA continues to work together with our local partners to utilize voluntary conservation practices that demonstrate improved stewardship of agricultural lands and provide secondary benefits for near-shore marine environments.

#### **HOW USDA PROGRAMS HAVE BENEFITED CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEMS:**

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service works closely with local farmers and land-owners, providing technical assistance and helping identify and implement conservation practices to reduce runoff of surface water and associated nutrients and pesticides impacting near-shore coral reef ecosystems. Examples of conservation practices include: cover crops, pest management, residue management, conservation crop rotation, contour farming, irrigation water management, riparian buffers, field borders, waste utilization, and nutrient management.

Through the 2002 Farm Bill, NRCS made available \$30 million for application to land-based conservation efforts within the Pacific Islands Area through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP is a voluntary program providing assistance to farmers and ranchers who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. Through EQIP, NRCS provides assistance to agricultural producers in promoting agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals, optimizing environmental benefits, and helping farmers and ranchers meet federal, state, tribal, and local environmental requirements. In the Pacific Islands, NRCS obligated 369 EQIP contracts from FY 2004-2006, targeting over 63,000 acres (255 square kilometers) for land-based conservation treatment.

During this time, NRCS estimates that over 105,000 tons (95,254 kilograms) of soil erosion was prevented through implementation of Farm Bill programs, nearly half of which would likely have been transported as sediment to Pacific Island coral reef ecosystems. Practices utilized and installed by private landowners include water diversions, vegetative barriers, cover crops, hillside ditching, grassed waterways, mulching, conservation cover, terracing, and critical area planting. Along with management practices such as nutrient and pest management, these efforts demonstrate improved stewardship of the health and quality of agricultural soils and provide secondary benefits for the near-shore marine environments.

## BACKGROUND ON IYOR:

Ten years ago, 1997 was declared the International Year of the Reef (IYOR). The first IYOR campaign was initiated in response to the increasing threats and loss of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, like mangroves and sea grasses. IYOR 97 was a global effort to increase awareness and understanding of coral reefs, and support conservation, research and management efforts.

Ten years after IYOR 97, there continues to be an urgent need to increase awareness and understanding of coral reefs, their connectivity to land-based activities and to further conserve valuable coral reefs and associated ecosystems. Because of this need, the International Coral Reef Initiative designated 2008 as the **International Year of the Reef** (IYOR 2008).

IYOR 2008 will:

- \* Strengthen awareness about the ecological, economic, social and cultural value of coral reefs and associated ecosystems
- \* Improve understanding of the critical threats to coral reefs and generate both practical and innovative solutions to reduce these threats
- \* Generate urgent action at all levels to develop and implement effective management strategies for conservation and sustainable use of these ecosystems.

To learn more about IYOR link to [www.iyor.org](http://www.iyor.org) <<http://www.iyor.org/>>