

Extending Outreach to All Customers

The purpose of the outreach training is to educate and train NRCS employees and conservation partners how to conduct and carry-out outreach activities and functions. This course is aimed at assistant state conservationists, public affairs specialists, RC&D coordinators, district conservationists, outreach coordinators, and other NRCS employees and partners engaged in carrying-out outreach.

First, a bit of history related to NRCS outreach.



Hugh Hammond Bennett was and is known as the father of soil conservation. He is also regarded as the founder of the then Soil Erosion Service, which later became the Soil Conservation Service and now as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Did you not know that Mr. Bennett is also recognized as the founder of the USDA Outreach effort and process?



To demonstrate Mr. Bennett's Outreach vision and mission, he worked with cooperative extension agents, the University of Wisconsin, and local farmers, in the Coon Creek Watershed, and developed the nation's first outreach demonstration project, in the 1930's. Mr. Bennett, at that time, worked with "underserved farmers", who knew very little about conservation planning, and USDA programs

William WEBSTER dictionary defines **OUTREACH** as an organized effort to extend services beyond usual limits, as to particular segments of a community.

The NRCS Outreach process is further defined as:

Informing, educating historically underserved customers, and conducting business to ensure that NRCS programs and services are made accessible to all customers--with emphasis on the underserved.

Who are the underserved customers?

Underserved customers are all of those individuals and groups, who heretofore have not received our services nor benefited from USDA or NRCS programs. Historically, the underserved include tribes, minorities, women, the disabled, limited resource farmers/ranchers, and small-scale farmers.

Examples are the members of religious and ethnic groups. Some of these include Amish and Mennonite farmers, Hutterite producers, Mormons, minority

cooperatives, ethnic associations and organizations, and many Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) dedicated to rural sustainable agriculture.

Underserved non-farmers include:

- Members of religious and ethnic groups
- Rural communities
- Urban communities
- Specialty/organic producers

USDA-NRCS Oversight and Evaluation

Authorities

- Secretary's Memorandum 1020-48, Establishment of the Office of Outreach
- Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 USC 2000(d) – 2000 (d)(1)
- Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (P.L. 104- 624, Sec. 2501)
- Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171)
- NRCS National Outreach Policy

NRCS Outreach Policy

Subpart 406.1 Policy

- A. The policy of the Natural Resources Conservation Service mandates that we:
- Conduct outreach to serve a diverse clientele;
 - Inform and educate existing and potential customers about NRCS and USDA conservation programs and services;
 - Incorporate outreach tracking into the existing integrated accountability system; and
 - Provide leadership and guidance to conduct outreach activities and initiatives;
 - Engage partners in the outreach process

U. S. Government – USDA with Oversight and Accountability

- United States Government Accountability Office (GAO)
- USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG)
- U. S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- USDA-NRCS Operations Management Reviews

Oversight and accountability of USDA conservation programs are the responsibilities of the GAO, OIG, OMB, and the NRCS. These agencies, by law

and policy, conduct periodic, untimely and timely audits and investigations, to ensure that USDA programs are administered and implemented according to law and legislation.

A recent Farm Bill outreach program that has undergone a GAO investigation is the “New and Beginning Farmer” provision. The OIG has also conducted several audits of NRCS conservation programs, in recent years.

In addition, NRCS has done and continues to conduct operations management reviews in selected states. The operations management reviews concentrate and focus on fiduciary responsibilities of the office of the chief, and all deputy chief areas. The reviews address and access possible risks that may be encountered by the agency, state-wide and at national headquarters.

The outreach process and compliance to the national outreach policy have been identified as key outreach risks.

Implementation of strong, integrated management control (Internal Control) systems still needed

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular No. A-123, Management’s Responsibility for Internal Control was revised and became effective in FY 2006. The circular requires that agencies and individual Federal managers take systematic and proactive measures to develop and implement appropriate, cost-effective internal controls. USDA agencies have a history of reacting to individual control issues rather than addressing the overall weaknesses of their internal control systems. Some of the internal control weaknesses identified by OIG are specific to individual agencies, while others represent Department-wide weaknesses.

Outreach and Civil Rights

Outreach is not a minority program, a new or separate program, or a Civil Rights program.

Outreach is not a separate program.

Now, this is very true, due to the fact that Hugh Hammond Bennett founded the Outreach program, while our agency was officially being established. Also, during Mr. Bennett’s time, he worked with mostly Caucasian farmers in the implementation of Outreach.

What is the difference between outreach and civil rights?

Civil Rights has to do with the statutes that pertain to employment (Title VII) and program delivery (Title VI).

Civil Rights is the goal.

Civil Rights does not equal Outreach. Civil Rights in program delivery is the goal or objective of the NRCS, particularly as it pertains to underserved groups and producers. These are services we must provide in order to ensure compliance with aforementioned statutes.

Outreach is the process

Outreach is the process, means, manner, or “vehicle” in which Civil Rights is carried-out. One may further distinguish Civil Rights from Outreach by envisioning Civil Rights as a regulatory function and Outreach as an agency service function, for example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) versus NRCS.

Outreach Is Everybody’s Business

At his point, you should be able to explain:

- The origin and basis of Outreach as a program
- Events and legislation that have advanced Outreach to its present status
- That Outreach is a process
- That there is a difference between Outreach and Civil Rights

You will use this background knowledge in the Outreach process during the review and discussion of your individual Outreach posters in class.