

The First 100 Days

The Effective DC

DEVELOPING AN AREA/COMMUNITY PLAN

This essay was written by a State Conservationist in the Midwest. He started giving it to all his new District Conservationists and it's since been passed along across the country. Many of you may have seen this already.

Becoming a district conservationist at a new location brings many new responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities that can lead to a very rewarding experience; for it is your new office staff that delivers nearly all the assistance NRCS has to offer to the customer. The customer in this case is the public. This, of course, means all people and not just farmers and ranchers, although they are some of the most important.

One of the responsibilities critical to the success and certainly the effectiveness of a district conservationist is that of public relations. The job of the DC is far more than just being a good technician. Remember, your effectiveness is based on how well you can and do work with and through people -- this includes individuals, groups, communities, and other agencies.

How successful you are in handling this public relations job can very well depend on what you do or don't do the first 100 days you are in that position.

One of the first things you must realize as you begin this job is that it's up to you to go to key people. Don't wait for them to contact you. You, at this point, have far more to gain.

The following list of people and organizations show some of the very important people a new DC should consider giving top priority to in the first 100 days:

1. Conservation district board members – visit their farm, ranch, or business. Know something about their operations before the visit.
2. County executive director of Farm Service Agency (FSA) and district director of Rural Development (RD), and County Agent.
3. County FSA committee chair – meet with committee.
4. County board of commissioners and county engineer.
5. State and Federal legislators.
6. Newspaper editor and staff reporters.
7. Radio and television station managers
8. Local Chamber of Commerce
9. All vocational agriculture instructors.
10. Planning commission executive directors for both cities and county.
11. Farm organization presidents such as Farm Bureau and American Agricultural Movement.
12. Banks – their farm or agricultural representatives.

I agree this does seem like an overwhelming job at first; but keep in mind, your first contact may be a very brief “get-acquainted” stop. If possible, take something with you, or at least, leave your name and phone number.

Now – most important! After each contact, list their names, phone numbers, and address in a readily accessible place for you and the district secretary. Follow-up is now the KEY to getting these important people on the “conservation team.” As information comes along in various forms that might be of interest to them, pass it along by phone, mail, or a personal contact. The secretary can be a big help here.

Last but not least, encourage the conservation district board to routinely invite outside guests, and always invite by mail and phone all the agencies we work closely with – especially those covered by the USDA memorandum of understanding.

Conclusion: If this job of public relations is handled properly, your success is almost guaranteed. The effort will pay off in getting conservation on the land and solid support for a complete soil and water conservation program.