

Francis, Ronald - Salt Lake City, UT

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## UTAH PRAIRIE DOG HABITAT CREDITS EXCHANGE FEATURED AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The 12th National Mitigation & Ecosystem Banking Conference was held last week in Salt Lake City and NRCS, as a national sponsor, invited Utah NRCS to participate in the conference by making a concurrent session presentation on the Utah Prairie Dog Habitat Credits Exchange, and by hosting an exhibit on NRCS market-based strategic efforts. Sally Collins, director of USDA's new Ecosystem Services and Markets office, was also on hand to make a presentation and to explain expanded efforts by USDA in ecosystem marketing services.

The concurrent session presentation was made by Mark Petersen, environmental issues coordinator for Utah Farm Bureau, one of the partners with NRCS and Environmental Defense Fund on the Utah Prairie Dog Habitat Credits Exchange. An NRCS CIG grant and other funding is supporting this three-year test in Cedar City to see if a credit exchange system will allow farmers to help with the recovery of the Utah Prairie Dog, listed as a threatened species. The system operates similar to a recovery credit trading system where impacts on the species can be offset by funding conservation and management actions on private lands elsewhere. The



accompanying photo shows Petersen (left) and Elise Boeke, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, visiting at the NRCS exhibit with conference participant Bill Wright of River Works.

The exhibit, seen by some 300 attendees, reinforced the NRCS business plan strategy to "facilitate the growth of market-based opportunities that encourage business and industry to invest in conservation on private lands." In addition to a panel explaining the Utah Prairie Dog program, the exhibit also featured efforts by the NRCS National Technical Center in Oregon, to develop a Nutrient Trading Tool. This web-based, user-friendly tool will allow farmers to calculate nutrient savings (in carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus or sediment) using climate, soils, and agronomic data. It is currently being tested in the

Chesapeake Bay area, Ohio and Colorado. It is anticipated that farmers will have the nutrient reduction information necessary to participate in water quality credit trading when a market is available.

The new USDA office of Ecosystem Services and Markets headed by Collins, includes NRCS staffer Carl Lucero, who is coordinating the NRCS development of the Nutrient Trading Tool and other employee guidelines in the environmental services markets area. The office is charged with establishing guidance on how to measure, record, and verify a process that will help build a unified, transparent market system. Collins said they would be looking at carbon sequestration first and water quality second. To learn more about the new office, see the USDA news release at [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/lut/p/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_2KD?contentidonly=true&contentid=2008/12/0307.xml](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/lut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_2KD?contentidonly=true&contentid=2008/12/0307.xml).

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