

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

July 2, 2009

SECRETARY'S MEMORANDUM 1020-002

Implementing the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Memorandum is to support the implementation of the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) of 1977 (Pub. L. 95-192) [16 U.S.C. 2001 et seq.], as amended by section 2804 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Act), Pub. L. 110-246.

Through the RCA, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) appraises the status and trends of soil, water, and related resources on non-Federal lands; assesses their capability to meet present and future demands; evaluates current and needed programs, policies, and authorities; and develops a national conservation program to give direction for USDA soil and water conservation efforts. Section 2804 of the 2008 Act extended the RCA to 2018 and made targeted changes that affect the breadth of information to be acquired or developed through the Appraisal and National Conservation Program. The RCA Appraisal must be delivered to Congress by January 2011, and the National Conservation Program is to be delivered to Congress the following year, by January 2012.

Effective implementation of the RCA is a priority for USDA to bring science-based decisionmaking to the 2012 farm and conservation policy debate and to elevate the nexus between agricultural conservation and renewable energy and climate change priorities. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is delegated the authority for providing national leadership for and administration of the RCA (7 CFR 2.61(a)(8)); however, the process requires substantial collaboration and input across multiple USDA Mission Areas (Natural Resources and Environment (NRE); Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS); Research, Education, and Economics (REE); and Rural Development (RD)).

Because the RCA effort cuts across Mission Areas and the window for completion is narrow, it is essential that USDA Agencies make collaboration and investment in this effort a priority. This memorandum establishes the expectation for Mission Area collaboration and coordination, including assignment of resources that will provide the technical and administrative investment needed to implement the RCA effectively.

2. ACTIONS ORDERED

- a. **RCA Coordination.** An RCA Coordinating Council (Council) is hereby established, chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and composed of the Undersecretary or their designee from the NRE, FFAS, REE, and RD Mission Areas. The Coordinating Council is staffed by an RCA Workgroup chaired and assembled by NRCS, with membership representing each of the agencies expected to collaborate in conducting the RCA.
- b. **Functions.** The Council has responsibility for ensuring effective collaboration and assignment of needed Agency resources to complete preparation of the RCA Appraisal and National Conservation Program by January 2011 and January 2012, respectively. Specific Council functions include serving as the Department-level RCA coordinating body, ensuring effective Agency collaboration, providing guidance to the RCA Workgroup, and ensuring RCA status and direction is broadly communicated within USDA and with inter-departmental counterparts.
- c. **Additional Activities.** USDA Agencies and Offices shall, at the request of the Council, carry out such activities as determined necessary to develop the Appraisal and National Conservation Program.

3. INCIDENTAL TRANSFERS

The Assistant Secretary for Administration and the Director, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, are authorized to approve such transfers of funds, personnel, employment authority, space, records, property, and incidentals as may be necessary to implement the provisions of this Memorandum and as authorized by law.

4. EXISTING DIRECTIVES

Prior delegations of authority, administrative regulations, and other directives not inconsistent with the provisions of this Memorandum shall remain in full force and effect.

5. EFFECTIVE DATE

The provisions of this Memorandum are effective immediately.

6. TERMINATION

This Memorandum shall remain in full force and effect for one year from date of signing.

/s/

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary