

Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division Data and Information Team Update

Our Data Sources

Overview

As part of the REAP Division functions, the Data and Information Team continues to work towards the following objectives:

1. Providing a solid and consistent source of information for external NRCS data requests.
2. Issuing regular summary analysis reports.
3. Developing special reports as needed to address high priority topics of interest.
4. Providing “off-the shelf” analysis and data.

This issue will provide:

- A brief overview of data sources
- A description of types of data available based on complexity of analysis
- A refresher of data request process
- A high level matrix summarizing database contents and data elements

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NRCS is a science-based agency. As such, we collect, develop, analyze and maintain large amounts of data. The Agency relies on a number of key databases. Though each one has its own purpose and function, some of the databases have overlapping functions.

In processing a majority of data requests, the Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division (REAPD) Data and Information Team works primarily with three key operational databases; ProTracts, the National Easements Staging Tool (NEST) and the Foundation Financial Information System (FFIS). In addition to these datasets, the team also works with Agency data stewards for the National Conservation Planning (NCP) database. Other research databases are developed and maintained by Soil Survey and Resource Assessment (SSRA). REAP cooperates with database managers in SSRA to develop data used in research.

Following are brief highlights and insights of each system based on our experience to date.

PROTRACTS

ProTracts is the Agency’s primary software application for managing several financial assistance programs. The application is used to help manage the ranking and funding of applications and to carry out the contract development process. ProTracts contains data for the Environmental Quality Incentives, Agricultural Water Enhancement, Agricultural Management Assistance , Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Programs.

The application was also used to manage the Ground and Surface Water Conservation and Klamath Basin Programs along with the Conservation Security Program.

Our data are captured at the end of each quarter and include basic performance, i.e. number of applications, contracts and acres. Other data specific to the participant are available through the link to the Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS) that contains demographic information for each customer. We continue to use the most recent quarter’s data to answer requests until the next quarter’s data are available.

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National Easement Staging Tool (NEST)

NEST is a national database that is used to store easement program data that is input and maintained by NRCS staffs throughout the country. Data that includes basic descriptive information on easements is collected and can be summarized.

Information in NEST includes the number and types of easement agreements or contracts, as well as associated acres. Geographic data fields including latitude and longitude, hydrologic unit number and congressional district are also included. Similar to ProTracts data, data from NEST are developed and provided to REAP quarterly by the Easement Programs Division (EPD).

Foundation Financial Information System (FFIS)

FFIS is NRCS' official accounting system and it is designed to meet stringent budget and funds control needs as well as to carry out complex accounting and reporting functions. All financial activity for agency program funds is recorded and monitored in FFIS.

FFIS contains details about all NRCS financial transactions. Financial Management Specialists at the national and state levels typically have access to this system. Data entered into the system may be queried by budget analysts. Key outputs from FFIS are funds obligated or expended. Data from FFIS represent the official financial transactions of the Agency. Any discrepancies with other databases will require additional research and follow-up for resolution.

What Data are Available

The matrix on the next page provides an idea of the types of information in each dataset. The **National Conservation Plan Database (NCP)** is not covered in this fact sheet, but it includes performance data generated during the conservation planning and contract development processes. It is a major source of NRCS' performance data and is shown for comparison.

Matrix Highlights

Protracts - financial, geographic and performance, but limited programs

NEST - performance and geographic, but no financial

FFIS - all financial for all programs, but limited geographic breakdown below state

NCP - performance for all programs, but no financial

(What Data are Available - Continued from page 2)

Matrix View of Data Availability by Database

Database	Financial Information			Performance Information				Geographic Information				Other		
	Allocations	Obligations	Expenditures	Practice Performance	Number of Applications	Number of Contracts/Agreements	Resource Concern	Latitude/Longitude	Congressional District	County	Hydrologic Unit	Data on ALL Programs	RSNO	Special Initiative
ProTracts	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
NEST	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
FFIS	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red	Yellow
NCP	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow

Key

Green	Data Available
Yellow	Partial Data
Red	No Data

What We Can Provide

Readily Accessible Data

Summary, state-level data for fiscal year 2010 farm bill programs are readily available on the NRCS homepage. Quarterly summary state-level data for all programs and initiatives are available for fiscal year 2010 and fiscal 2011 on the Accountability tab on the My.NRCS intranet. NRCS employees may use these data to answer stakeholder questions without going through the formal data request process as long as the data are properly cited.

These data include:

- Dollars obligated by fund or program
- Number of applications ranked
- Number of contracts obligated
- Acres in contracts or easements

Moderately Accessible Data

The data snapshots that we use to develop state-level aggregations generally contain data at lower levels of granularity such as county, congressional district, or practice. These data are accessible, but require special queries using Microsoft Access or SAS.

(What We Can Provide - Continued from page 3)

More Analysis than Data

The REAP Division has to work closely with the Resource Assessment Division (RAD), Financial Management Division and Program Managers to respond to questions involving funds, agreements, easements or contracts such as:

- A special initiative that is a subset of major program funds
- A special initiative AND a particular hydrologic unit
- A particular resource concern or land use
- Detailed Easement data, and or
- Cumulative or historical data

Whether the request is straightforward or complex, the REAP Data Team will work across databases and with data stewards and other technical experts to provide the most accurate and timely response!

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Stay tuned for data and information updates in future issues!

Help the Data Team to Help You

One way to make sure that the Data Team provides the best and most accurate responses to your questions is for you to provide as much context as possible.

To guide your thought process, we have developed a few basic questions that you can answer for each submission.

Who needs the data; who will be the ultimate recipient of the information?

What is the **intent**; what question(s) are you trying to answer?

What specific **data element(s)** do you need?

When do you need the data?

Send an email to the central mailbox at REAPDataTeam@wdc.usda.gov.

All team members have access to this mailbox, plus this helps us to log and track your request.

Our team will send you an email to let you know that we've received your request and we'll call you to clarify any outstanding questions.

As we process the request, we will confer with data stewards and program managers to make sure that we are correctly interpreting the numbers

Once done, we'll provide the response to you for initial review and comment. When we've addressed your questions, we'll send you a completed request with an indication that it is final.

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