**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

**2014 Farm Bill Outreach Strategy**

**Background**

NRCS serves as the lead USDA agency that addresses natural resource issues on private lands. The agency provides technical and scientific-based assistance to individual farmers and ranchers in the 50 States and U.S. Territories (Virgin Islands and Pacific Basin).

Outreach is an integral part of the overall delivery of the NRCS programs and services to customers and potential beneficiaries. NRCS will conduct business to ensure that all programs and services are made equally accessible to all customers, with emphasis on the underserved. Outreach allows NRCS to be creative and innovative in the way the agency achieves its mission of ‘HELPING PEOPLE, HELP THE LAND’. NRCS considers outreach as an ongoing informational campaign designed to educate the public and make them aware of who we are and what we do.

NRCS is working in coordination with other USDA and Federal agencies to ensure that we are consistent with our outreach approach to serve Historically Underserved producers in rural and urban America. NRCS will collaborate and work with a variety of Community Based Organizations to include all historically underserved groups Federal agencies and other groups that have a similar interest to ensure that the 2014 Farm Bill and all of its provisions are made available to all that apply and meet the required program eligibility. The 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture will serve as the basis for identifying the historically underserved populations with the most critical conservation needs and assist in targeting outreach program assistance.

**Goal**

To ensure that all of the 2014 Farm Bill NRCS programs and services are made accessible to all customers, fairly and equitably, with emphasis on reaching the underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and landowners including veterans, tribes and tribal members.

**Process**

To effectively accomplish the agency’s outreach goal, NRCS staff must use every tool possible to enlighten and assist agricultural producers attain their natural resource goals. An aging population, advances in agricultural technology, long-standing customs and, traditions require a balance of ‘old school’ with ‘new wave’ approaches to working with the NRCS customers.

At the State level, the agency structure consists of one State Outreach Coordinator to provide advice and recommendations to the State Conservationist on State specific outreach priorities. For Fiscal Year 2015, NRCS, at the national level, is partnering with 12 community-based organizations through cooperative partnership agreements to assist new immigrant farmers, specialty crop farmers, and limited resource and socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers with technical assistance, on-site demonstrations, program awareness, inner-city urban agriculture, land loss prevention, and training opportunities.

As part of this campaign, NRCS is partnering with three tribal entities to conduct face-to-face educational meetings and workshops with tribes and their members to further explain the 2014 Farm Bill programs. These entities will not only assist with identifying barriers within the 2014 Farm Bill that impede tribes and their members from participating, but provide the agency with verifiable data that will assist agency leadership in making sound decisions that will limit major program participation obstructions.

**Key Messages**

NRCS has knowledgeable staffs and strong partners who can assist producers with understanding the changes of the 2014 Farm Bill in order for them to address any barriers that may impede a producer’s or tribes’ participation.

Understanding the 2014 Farm Bill and all of the provisions that may apply to one’s farming operation can be complex and confusing. NRCS is committed to ensuring all customers receive high quality service and the information necessary to fully participate in all of its programs and services.

**Communications**

NRCS has made great strides in using all forms of written, social media, and traditional media to effectively communicate with our historically underserved customers.

NRCS has produced numerous pamphlets, documents, press releases, memorandums, and displays in a variety of languages.  Twenty States have published NRCS information in non-English languages. The most common language is Spanish, but these have also been translated into Russian, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Japanese, Portuguese, and some Tribal languages.

NRCS’s social media presence continues to improve.  YouTube videos have been produced in Spanish and Korean.  The agency also has used its’ Twitter account to post messages in Spanish, and NRCS’s Facebook account can be used for messages in other languages as well.

**Actions**

1. NRCS will send program announcement information to all available minority media outlets for distribution.
2. NRCS will continue to utilize the Agency and State websites to provide up to date, accurate information about programs available and program signup dates so that our constituents are well informed.
3. NRCS will utilize weekly e-newsletters to disseminate information programs and services and other information so that our constituents are well informed.
4. NRCS will communicate with partner groups regularly via email so that can receive targeted updates of important information quickly and uniformly.

**Group Outreach**

1. Partners – NRCS will continue to work with community-based organizations, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and other entities to increase the number of individuals helping to get information out to constituents in a timely fashion.

2. NRCS will collaborate with the 1890, 1994 and Land Grant Universities on ways to expand outreach to historically underserved constituents.

3. Networking Events – NRCS will participate to the extent possible in external meetings, conferences and expos to disseminate program information to historically underserved individuals and groups.

4. NRCS will explore partnering opportunities with the existing professional employee organizations as medians for reaching historically underserved customers.

NRCS will work collaboratively with other USDA agencies to develop materials and host outreach webinar sessions that will provide a consistent and focused message while maximizing multiple distribution channels and audiences. Products will be formatted and refined by agency Public Affairs Staffs.

**Execution**

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| ***Task/Activity*** | ***Action*** | ***Audience(s)*** | ***Frequency/Timeline*** | ***Champion/Lead*** |
| Press Releases | Department-level release focusing on publication of the interim final rules of the 2014 Farm Bill | Public | November, 2014 | NRCS / OC |
| Identify and address potential institutional and systemic barriers that prevent underserved customers from full participation. | Provide info to agency leadership | NRCS Leadership | On-going | Deputy Chief for Programs-Outreach Division |
| Provide implementation strategies to increase the participation in programs and benefits to underserved clientele and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and landowners. | Develop a Pilot Strategy that targets Agriculture Management Assistance Program funds to historically underserved producers. | NRCS Leadership | January 2015 | Deputy Chief for programs-Outreach Division |
| Expand outreach efforts and ensure effective services to all 566 Tribes. | Developed and is implementing a Tribal collaboration campaign to introduce the 2014 Farm Bill. | Tribal leaders from all 566 federally recognized tribes were personally invited to participate in one of the eight strategically timed Farm Bill webinars | March 2015 | Deputy Chief for Programs-Outreach Division |
| Identify demography geographic changes in the 2012 Ag Census Data. | Conduct a National Outreach Gap Analysis compared to the demography changes and trends. Information will be used to determine the need for additional outreach partners to ensure national coverage. | NRCS Leadership | December 2014 | Deputy Chief for programs-Outreach Division |