



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) New Jersey

2022-2027
STRATEGIC PLAN

Welcome to the NRCS New Jersey Strategic Plan



Julie Hawkins
State Conservationist

The New Jersey Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS NJ) is honored and privileged to work alongside the state’s land stewards helping to conserve, maintain, restore, and protect our natural resources. Our mission of ‘helping people help the land’ would not be possible without the authorities and core programs which enable us to offer voluntary technical and financial assistance or the valuable partnerships we’ve formed with our federal, state, and local conservation allies to sustain productive lands and maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems.

Therefore, when we began this journey to develop a strategic plan, we knew incorporating the thoughts and opinions of our employees and partners were necessary to provide the energy and insights critical to meeting our mission. We gathered input from nearly all our employees and many stakeholders.

Together, we have identified three key goals in an effort to achieve our vision:

- **Workforce:** Cultivate and retain a highly skilled, empowered, and diverse workforce unified in our mission and dedicated to promoting a culture of trust.
- **Conservation and Service Delivery:** Deliver intentional, practical, and impactful conservation activities and solutions to reach a diverse customer and land base.
- **Land Base:** Broaden implementation of innovative techniques on non-traditional land bases resulting in greater conservation and preservation for the benefit of New Jersey’s communities.

We thrive on the fact that we play a role in helping farms and our land stewards be sustainable now and into the future. This plan will serve as a clear vision of our priorities and a roadmap for the programs and services we will provide over the next five years (Figure 1).

To succeed in achieving our objectives we have established methodologies for execution, tools to track our progress, and dedicated and responsible NRCS staff committed to reaching our goals.

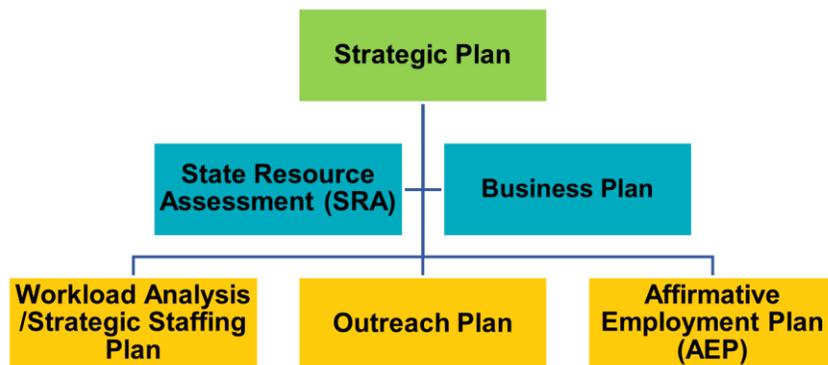


Figure 1: Strategic Plan Influence

We view this strategic plan as a living document that we will continuously evaluate to ensure we remain on course and to track our progress. We are excited to share it with all of you and look forward to celebrating our successes together. Special thanks to each of you, for the important role you played in developing it.

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About NRCS New Jersey

NRCS NJ works hand-in-hand with the people of New Jersey to improve, preserve, and protect their soil, water, and other natural resources. In partnership with farmers and land stewards, we help prevent erosion, improve water quality, promote sustainable agriculture, and sustain an abundant wildlife habitat to ensure we continue to have productive lands that are in harmony with a healthy environment.

We employ a diverse workforce consisting of soil conservationists, soil scientists, agronomists, biologists, engineers, geologists, and resource planners. These experts help provide resources to aid our customers with conservation and preservation. This includes helping them develop conservation plans, create and restore wetlands, restore and manage other natural ecosystems, and advise on stormwater remediation, nutrient and animal waste management, and watershed planning.

As a vital part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), we will update this strategic plan, as necessary, to align with USDA's and national NRCS's strategic plans.

More information can be found on the [NRCS New Jersey website](#).



Our Vision and Commitment to the Future

Our vision for NRCS NJ and the state of New Jersey is aspirational, inspirational, and multifaceted. As an agency, we strive to **'help people help the land.'** We are committed to having a skilled and resilient workforce dedicated to delivering conservation solutions to our diverse landscape, making an impact in the lives of our customers, and touching individuals and communities across New Jersey. We take pride in the stewardship of our state's land.

In the years to come, NRCS NJ will take bold steps to realize the following vision (Figure 2).



Figure 2: NRCS NJ Vision Statements

Center and Office Locations

NRCS NJ employees are located in local Service Centers across the state, the Cape May Plant Materials Center, and the State Office (Figure 3).

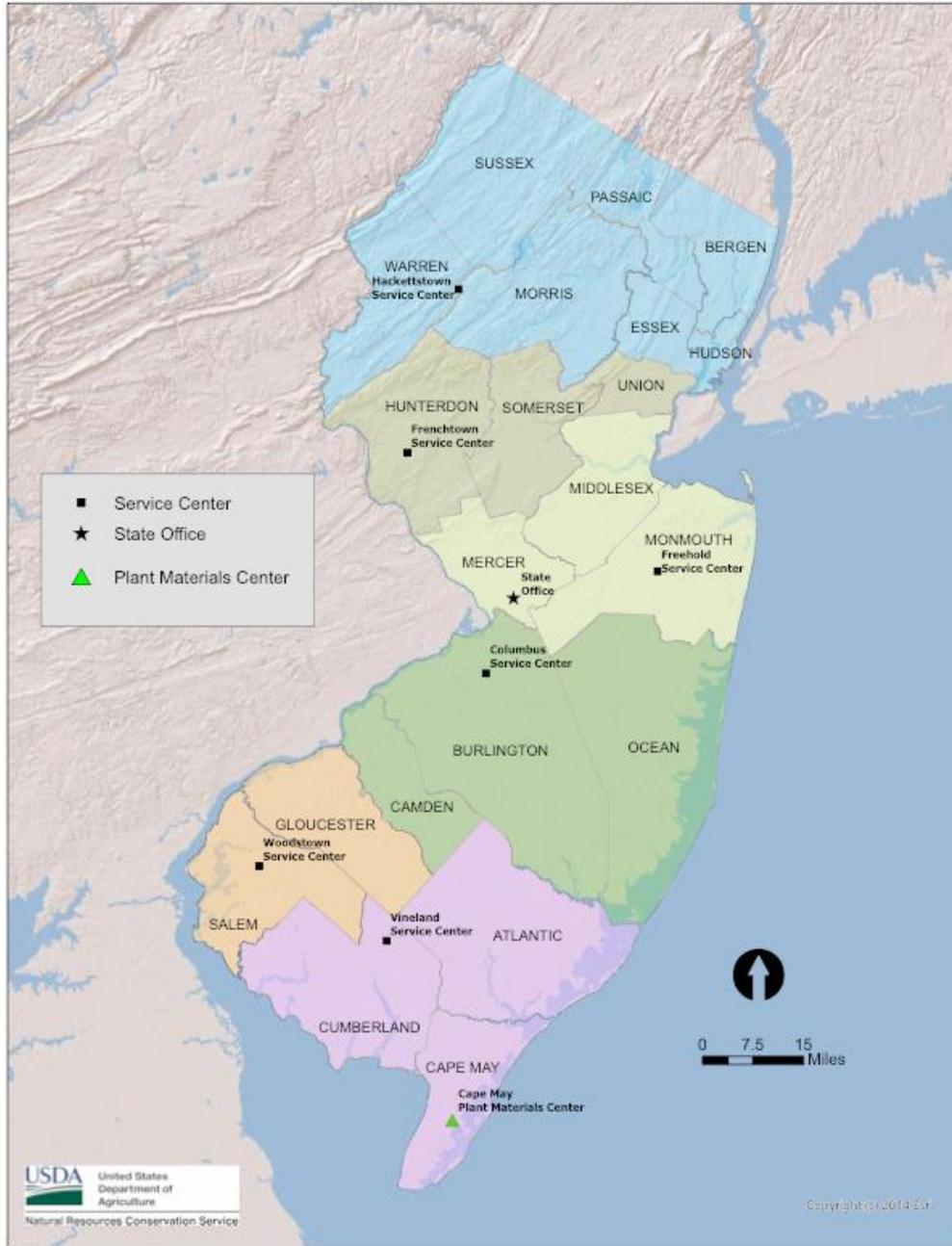


Figure 3: NRCS NJ Center and Office Locations

Environmental Scan

We recognize the importance of analyzing and understanding the internal and external environment we must operate within to achieve our vision. Our environment will continue to change at a rapid pace, from the shifting landscape of New Jersey to our changing agricultural climate. We began developing the strategic plan by conducting an environmental scan with input from our employees, partner employees, partners, and other stakeholders to identify our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). These findings (Figure 4) helped inform the development of our strategic goals, objectives, and strategies.

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passionate, mission-driven employees dedicated to excellent customer service• Diverse workforce is highly respected and sought-after by customers for their knowledge and expertise• Strong personal relationships with customers• Program variety and financial assistance for customers
Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited staffing and turnover amplify heavy workload and result in knowledge gaps• Barriers to building trust and communicating with customers• Complex, time-consuming, and changing processes, programs, and/or tools• Inadequate urban agriculture guidelines and metrics
Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streamline processes and simplify customer experience• Enhance support for and outreach to smaller, newer customers• Increase in-person and customer-to-customer outreach and education• Enhance and increase technical training and onboarding opportunities
Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing agricultural landscape• Increasing costs of conservation activities• Sufficient funding and financial support• Frequent changes to policy, regulations, rules• Loss of agricultural land to new development and loss of urban agricultural land to investors and redevelopment



Figure 4: SWOT Analysis Summary

Strategic Goal Summary

The 2022-2027 NRCS New Jersey Strategic Plan consists of three primary strategic goals (Table 1). These strategic goals provide broad aims for our state and paint a picture of success. Achieving these goals will get us closer to our vision. Each strategic goal is supported by several objectives which help set specific targets that define the goal's achievement. Further sections provide additional details on each goal and objective and identify measures of our success and strategies to accomplish each objective.

Table 1: Summary of Strategic Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goals	Objectives
<p>Goal #1: Workforce</p> <p>Cultivate and retain a highly skilled, empowered, and diverse workforce unified in our mission and dedicated to promoting a culture of trust.</p>	<p>1.1: Empower employees to feel a sense of ownership and achieve success within their work.</p> <p>1.2: Grow and sustain the technical expertise of the workforce throughout their entire career at NRCS NJ.</p> <p>1.3: Continuously improve and support communication within and between all levels of NRCS NJ to aid with open communication.</p> <p>1.4: Foster workplace culture and work environment of inclusivity, trust, and empowerment.</p>
<p>Goal #2: Conservation & Service Delivery</p> <p>Deliver intentional, practical, and impactful conservation activities and solutions to reach a diverse customer and land base.</p>	<p>2.1: Enhance communications to customers, partners, municipalities, and other stakeholders (e.g., public) to prompt greater recipient action.</p> <p>2.2: Expand and strengthen relationships with partners and customers to achieve shared objectives.</p> <p>2.3: Enhance connections to underserved communities to support participation in conservation programs.</p> <p>2.4: Diversify the types of programs used by customers to bring additional resources to the state.</p> <p>2.5: Provide customers with innovative and holistic/comprehensive conservation activities and solutions aimed at addressing multiple concerns.</p> <p>2.6: Proactively address priority resource concerns (soil and water) to ensure long-term sustainability of those resources for the health and safety of New Jersey.</p>
<p>Goal #3: Land Bases</p> <p>Broaden implementation of innovative techniques on non-traditional land bases resulting in greater conservation and preservation for the benefit of New Jersey's communities.</p>	<p>3.1: Increase forest resiliency and enhance wildlife habitat to conserve and preserve New Jersey's natural resources for future generations.</p> <p>3.2: Expand participation in urban agriculture through improved program delivery and services.</p> <p>3.3: Continuously scan for and adapt to changes in agriculture and new land use opportunities to meet emerging needs.</p>

Strategic Goal #1: Workforce

Cultivate and retain a highly skilled, empowered, and diverse workforce unified in our mission and dedicated to promoting a culture of trust.

Our dedicated, passionate workforce is the heart of NRCS New Jersey and our most valuable resource. We are committed to investing in their future. We will ensure each member of our workforce feels empowered to enact change and be accountable for themselves and their colleagues. We will also invest in our employees' technical growth and career development. We will continuously improve communications, so employees and customers have open lines across the state. Additionally, we will seek out ways to establish and nourish a culture founded on trust, inclusivity, and empowerment.

NRCS NJ Workload Analysis

In 2022, NRCS NJ completed a Workload Analysis, conducting a data-driven analysis of employee and field office workloads. The findings assisted us in creating a strategic staffing plan that meets the needs of our workforce now and in the future. [Find more information about the Analysis.](#)

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs help provide quantifiable measures to evaluate the progress and impact of our goals and objectives. We will incorporate and share these KPIs in our annual business plans to aid in establishing and tracking baselines and targets on an annual basis.

- ✓ Improve or maintain average scores on Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) items and indices compared to prior year.
- ✓ Increase or maintain amount of formal and informal employee recognition compared to prior year.
- ✓ All employees have the opportunity to receive the training and resources needed to successfully perform their job and grow in their position.

Objectives & Strategies

Table 2: Goal #1 Objectives & Strategies

Objectives	Strategies
1.1: Empower employees to feel a sense of ownership and achieve success within their work.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Encourage employees to take the lead on project development and ideation to increase the sense of trust in the workplace.2. Provide employees with information about and opportunities for special projects, stretch assignments, and other developmental activities (e.g., networking) to grow within their positions.3. Solicit employee feedback on current training curricula to identify and prioritize post-training application opportunities to apply and reinforce learning.4. Redesign current training curricula to create additional post-training application opportunities and resources (e.g., job aids) that compliment and reinforce learning.5. Incorporate expectations about the application and communication of knowledge and skills gained through training into the on-boarding process and IDPs.6. Provide leadership and supervisors with appropriate training and resources to empower employees and provide support during and after on-boarding.

Objectives	Strategies
<p>1.2: Grow and sustain the technical expertise of the workforce throughout their entire career at NRCS NJ.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Expand practice of providing employees with tailored duties, expectations, and recommended training specific to their role and assignments. 8. Regularly update and distribute the internal point-of-contact (POC) list and maintain a dynamic organizational chart. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assemble a task force to facilitate knowledge sharing and create a pipeline for continuous knowledge transfer within the organization. 2. Leverage task force to support knowledge transfer (e.g., between employees, partners) on projects where staffing continuity cannot be maintained. 3. Implement opportunities (e.g., peer-to-peer training, peer shadowing) to facilitate knowledge sharing and development beyond formal training. 4. Create and promote a mentoring program to facilitate knowledge transfer and support personal and professional growth. 5. Seek employee feedback on what foundational training opportunities are needed to succeed in their role. 6. Increase the focus of technical training on the application of new technology and holistic and innovative conservation activities and solutions. 7. Refresh and/or develop an annual training plan(s) to ensure all relevant employees' technical expertise is kept up to date.
<p>1.3: Continuously improve and support communication within and between all levels of NRCS NJ to aid with open communication.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refresh email templates and implement resources (e.g., job aid) to transform leadership email communication to share the why and how around decisions. 2. Establish virtual meet-and-greet sessions to connect leaders and staff across the state. 3. Establish recurring meetings and/or listening sessions with field office employees to solicit feedback and identify and address issues or concerns.
<p>1.4: Foster workplace culture and work environment of inclusivity, trust, and empowerment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build sustained leadership commitment to inclusivity through information sharing and identifying and providing safe spaces for employees to share feedback and ask questions. 2. Increase formal employee recognition opportunities and provide supervisors with resources to support just-in-time recognition. 3. Expand internal connection points that cultivate trust and encourage collaboration and organizational belonging. 4. Support an on-boarding "buddy" program and provide resources (e.g., training, job aid) to encourage pairing amongst tenured and new employees. 5. Hold an NRCS NJ Town Hall to review identified concerns and any action steps planned to address concerns. 6. Highlight employee shout-outs and accomplishments and feature employee spotlights in JERS-E-NEWS. 7. Review and analyze FEVS results annually to identify areas for improvement to employee engagement and workplace culture. 8. Identify opportunities to streamline internal program and service delivery processes to support efficiency and create space for increased employee engagement.

Strategic Goal #2: Conservation & Service Delivery

Deliver intentional, practical, and impactful conservation activities and solutions to reach a diverse customer and land base.

We will strive to enhance and expand the vital connections we have with our partners, customers, and other stakeholders. We will seek out ways to improve our communications to be more timely, impactful, and clear to maximize understanding of and participation in NRCS New Jersey programs. Furthermore, we are determined to reach beyond current boundaries to be inclusive of and have a positive impact on all of New Jersey's communities, diversifying our customers and programs. We are also committed to changing as the landscape in our state continues to evolve, bringing innovative, holistic, and science-driven strategies to those in need.

NRCS NJ State Resource Assessment (SRA)

In 2022, NRCS NJ completed an SRA, providing State Leadership with guidance on resource objectives. The findings outlined in the SRA will support funding and priority area decisions.

[Find more information about the SRA.](#)

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs help provide quantifiable measures to evaluate the progress and impact of our goals and objectives. We will incorporate and share these KPIs in our annual business plans to aid in establishing and tracking baselines and targets on an annual basis.

- ✓ Increase participation and funding of socially disadvantaged and limited resource customers in programs.
- ✓ Increase new customer participation rate from underserved communities annually.
- ✓ Increase the number of active participants in the State Technical Committee (STC) and STC subcommittees to include underrepresented groups and non-traditional customer groups.
- ✓ Improve customer feedback satisfaction annually.
- ✓ Increase number of customer-to-customer opportunities facilitated by NRCS NJ.
- ✓ Improve interdisciplinary approach to conservation problem solving, where all disciplines (e.g., planners, engineers, soil scientists, biologists) operate as one team to provide comprehensive and impactful technical solutions.
- ✓ Increase in outreach and collaboration on projects to re-invigorate and strengthen partnerships.
- ✓ Ensure all new employees have the opportunity to receive the training needed to obtain conservation planner certification within three years of onboarding.
- ✓ Increase number of planned activities that address priority resource concerns (soil and water) in areas where NRCS NJ can make the largest impact.

Objectives & Strategies

Table 3: Goal #2 Objectives & Strategies

Objectives	Strategies
<p>2.1: Enhance communications to customers, partners, municipalities, and other stakeholders (e.g., public) to prompt greater recipient action.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tailor communications based on audience to convey complex concepts more clearly and concisely. 2. Communicate clear and timely messages that provide compelling calls to action with a clear path forward and that highlight inspiring customer and partner success stories. 3. Continuously assess effectiveness and accessibility of current communication tools. 4. Develop a process to communicate applicable leadership changes or reorganizations to necessary partners, stakeholders, and customers. 5. Identify opportunities to streamline and simplify the customer experience (e.g., program descriptions, paperwork, application process, website utility).
<p>2.2: Expand and strengthen relationships with partners and customers to achieve shared objectives.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prioritize face-to-face interactions with customers to support development of and nurturing of personal relationships. 2. Provide training and tools to employees that facilitate the development of stronger personal relationships with partners and customers. 3. Provide recommendations for POCs within NRCS NJ to customers. 4. Promote and facilitate customer-to-customer outreach by connecting customers with similar projects and sharing success stories. 5. Seek new partnerships with other conservation agencies and groups. 6. Identify additional opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships (e.g., meet annually to report on progress, solicit feedback, address concerns). 7. Identify and facilitate additional cross-training opportunities for partners so they are better able to directly assist customers. 8. Sustain an internal team dedicated to collaborating with partners and other stakeholders on conservation plan delivery for preserved farms.
<p>2.3: Enhance connections to underserved communities to support participation in conservation programs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create committee tasked with identifying underserved communities and their needs. 2. Develop tailored communications to reach underserved communities, detailing how NRCS NJ can help and what we can offer them. 3. Dedicate resources to make connections with people or groups within underserved communities. 4. Communicate the value and reward of participation in programs for underserved communities. 5. Evaluate customer demographics to ensure equitable participation.
<p>2.4: Diversify the types of programs used by customers to bring additional resources to the state.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage customers to use the full scope of the Farm Bill (e.g., use of programs in addition to EQIP or ACEP, use of watershed programs). 2. Target outreach to convey the variety and benefits of all NRCS NJ programs. 3. Provide training and resources to employees on the full range of programs. 4. Conduct comprehensive planning processes that support customers in using the full range of programs. 5. Encourage customers to use NRCS watershed programs to evaluate and address watershed issues (e.g., water quality, water quantity, erosion, habitat improvement). 6. Perform watershed studies alongside partners to guide resource treatment. 7. Proactively identify the funding needed in programs to address resource concerns (i.e., targeted conservation delivery).

Objectives	Strategies
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2.5: Provide customers with innovative and holistic/comprehensive conservation activities and solutions aimed at addressing multiple concerns.

1. Extend NRCS NJ technology, tools, and conservation activities and solutions beyond single-impact or practice implementations.
2. Encourage employees to offer multiple practice options, when available, to provide customers with more flexibility to take advantage of holistic solutions (e.g., conservation technical assistance (CTA) urban grants).
3. Leverage employee technical expertise to educate and communicate with customers about the benefits of innovative and holistic solutions.
4. Provide training and resources to employees to support them in building consultative relationships with customers, rather than transactional.

2.6: Proactively address priority resource concerns (soil and water) to ensure long-term sustainability of those resources for the health and safety of New Jersey.

1. Increase outreach to local communities and the people within those communities in most critical need.
2. Leverage planning tools and science-based approaches to target resource concerns to the areas where we can make the biggest impact (e.g., watersheds).
3. Target outreach within service areas for soil and water resource concerns.
4. Communicate with relevant communities and customers prior to formal announcements.
5. Engage partners in our targeted outreach efforts to address New Jersey’s priority resource concerns.



Strategic Goal #3: Land Bases

Broaden implementation of innovative techniques on non-traditional land bases resulting in greater conservation and preservation for the benefit of New Jersey’s communities.

To fully meet our vision for the future, we must continue to expand beyond our traditional agricultural land base. This includes increasing our focus on conserving and preserving our forestland, urban land, and wildlife habitats. We will support our employees to promote and prioritize our resources to increase forest resiliency and enhance wildlife habitat. We will also actively seek out opportunities to expand our urban agriculture footprint. Additionally, we will maintain awareness of emerging needs and opportunities to further broaden our efforts in these and other areas.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs help provide quantifiable measures to evaluate the progress and impact of our goals and objectives. We will incorporate and share these KPIs in our annual business plans to aid in establishing and tracking baselines and targets on an annual basis.

- ✓ Increase urban farmer program participation by 5% annually (25% increase in 5 years).
- ✓ Increase diversity in urban agriculture to reduce food deserts.
- ✓ Expand use of non-traditional and innovative techniques and programs.
- ✓ Increase number of planned activities and acres conserved and preserved on non-traditional land bases (e.g., forestland) to diversify conservation activities and solutions.
- ✓ Increase in number of contracts and/or funding that supports forest resiliency and wildlife habitats.
- ✓ Increase wildlife habitat practice implementation.
- ✓ Increase in outreach to re-invigorate preservation partnerships.
- ✓ Increase in employee awareness of emerging conservation needs.
- ✓ Increase in merged preservation efforts on traditional and non-traditional land.

Objectives & Strategies

Table 4: Goal #3 Objectives & Strategies

Objectives	Strategies
3.1: Increase forest resiliency and enhance wildlife habitat to conserve and preserve New Jersey’s natural resources for future generations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Promote the utilization of all authorities and programs to customers in support of forest resiliency and wildlife habitat.2. Prioritize funding of contracts directly supporting forest resiliency and critical wildlife habitat.3. Provide employees with training and resources on opportunities to promote forest resiliency and wildlife habitat to customers.

Objectives	Strategies
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3.2: Expand participation in urban agriculture through improved program delivery and services.

1. Expand financial and technical assistance to urban agriculture customers.
2. Update and implement an outreach plan to increase participation and education on urban agriculture for customers and employees.
3. Assess the use of and adapt program delivery and services (e.g., practice standards, payment schedules) on non-traditional land bases.
4. Identify new and existing partner agencies to collaborate and facilitate program delivery in our urban communities.
5. Leverage the urban conservationist role to build strong connections with partners and attract new participants.

3.3: Continuously scan for and adapt to changes in agriculture and new land use opportunities to meet emerging needs.

1. Encourage staff to participate in workshops, field days, working groups, and professional organizations to understand emerging conservation ideas for application to New Jersey’s changing agricultural climate.
2. Use innovative or creative planning tools and science-based approaches to identify emerging needs (e.g., food security initiatives).
3. Collaborate with conservation partners to build effective strategies (e.g., funding, joint ventures) to preserve farmland and forestland from emerging development threats (e.g., new development, warehouses).



Continuous Plan Improvements

This plan will help guide NRCS New Jersey toward achieving our vision and long-term goals. It provides a framework to drive decision-making, change, and action planning, and should also evolve as we put strategies into action and accomplish our goals. This necessitates continuous review and improvement to continue to meet the needs of our employees, customers, and communities. We are committed to implementing the following three-phased process to continuously plan, manage, monitor, and improve our programs and initiatives (Figure 6).

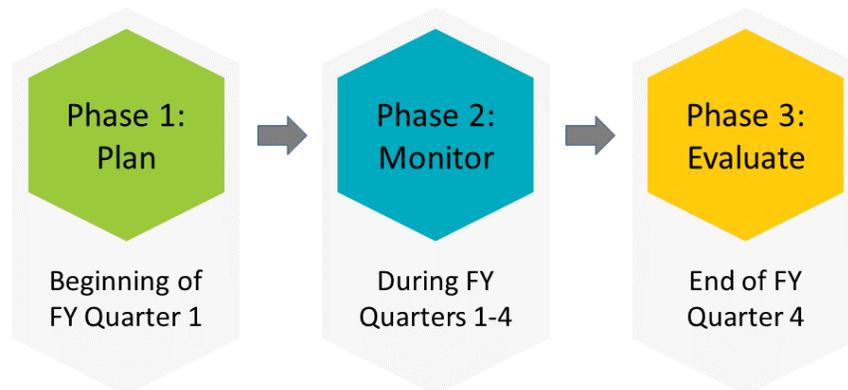


Figure 6: Continuous Improvement Process

Phase 1 – Plan: At the start of each Fiscal Year (FY), we will reexamine the current state of NRCS New Jersey by reviewing previous years' evaluation outcomes, reassessing our strengths, opportunities, threats, and weaknesses, and revalidating our vision and strategic goals. We will refine the objectives, KPIs, and strategies, as needed.

Phase 2 – Monitor: As we implement the strategies in this plan, we will regularly monitor and track our progress against our KPIs. We will leverage key data sources, such as workload analyses, strategic staffing plans, annual business plans, FEVS results, individual performance plans, and program reports. We are committed to reviewing this data regularly, briefing key stakeholders throughout the FY.

Phase 3 – Evaluate: At the end of the FY, we will assess our progress in achieving our goals. This annual review will inform refinements and iterations we make in Phase 1 to our objectives, KPIs, and strategies. We will answer some of the following questions:

- Which goals, objectives, and strategies are no longer relevant?
- Which strategies have we completed? Which are incomplete?
- Do we have sufficient plans defined to deliver on incomplete strategies? If not, what can we implement to drive progress?
- Which KPIs are no longer effective for measuring progress? If we did not meet KPI targets, how can we improve?

Appendices

Key Terms

- **ACEP:** Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
- **EQIP:** Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- **Forest Resiliency:** Ability of New Jersey's forests to be less susceptible and more adaptable to disturbances and stressors.
- **Holistic/Comprehensive Conservation Activities and Solutions:** Activities and solutions that impact the entire ecosystem and multiple resource concerns, instead of single-impact practices.
- **Land Steward:** Person dedicated to supervising or taking care of a property (e.g., maintaining soils and vegetation; conserving the property's natural resources).
- **Preservation:** Protection of New Jersey's land from use (e.g., buildings, objects, landscapes).

Thank You for Your Input

We would like to give special thanks to our employees. Their input and dedication throughout the strategic planning process has been instrumental in the development and implementation of this strategic plan. We would also like to recognize our partners and stakeholders below for their participation and contribution to this strategic plan. Current and future collaboration will continue to be vital in our success over the next five years!

- Center for Environmental Transformation – Camden
- D&R Greenway Land Trust, Inc.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Greater Newark Conservancy
- Groundwork Elizabeth
- GrowNYC
- Hunterdon Land Trust
- Ironbound Community Corporation
- Isles, Inc.
- Technical Service Providers
- New Jersey Association of Conservation Districts (NJACD)
- New Jersey Audubon
- New Jersey Conservation Foundation
- New Jersey County Agriculture Development Boards (CADB)
- New Jersey County Boards of Agriculture
- New Jersey Department of Agriculture
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Division of Dam Safety
- NJDEP, Division of Fish & Wildlife, Endangered and Nongame Species Program
- New Jersey Farm Bureau
- New Jersey Forest Service
- New Jersey Forestry Association
- New Jersey Soil Conservation Districts (SCD)
- New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC)
- North Jersey Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey
- Ridge and Valley Forest Management
- Rutgers Cooperative Extension
- Rutgers Master Gardener Program
- Trout Scapes River Restoration
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Urban Agriculture Cooperative

