Strategic Plan Update
FY2016-2018
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Mission, Vision & Conservation Processes

The agency’s mission statement is *Helping People Help the Land*. NRCS improves the health of our Nation's natural resources while sustaining and enhancing the productivity of American agriculture. We achieve this by providing voluntary assistance through strong partnerships with private landowners, managers, and communities to conserve, protect, restore, and enhance the lands and waters upon which people and the environment depend.

Productive working lands in harmony with a healthy environment.

- Resource Inventory and Assessment
- Technical Assistance and Technology Transfer
- Conservation Implementation
- Produce Lands, Healthy Environment
Message from the Chief

As I travel across the nation I see firsthand how our work is making an impact on the land and in the communities we serve. Through conservation, we’re helping to promote economic growth and prosperity in rural America. We’re fostering a conservation ethic, preserving cultural traditions and protecting livelihoods. We’re ensuring the sustainability of our food and water supply for generations to come.

With ever increasing pressure on natural resources, America’s farmers and ranchers will be challenged to maintain and boost agricultural productivity while conserving natural resources for the future. To do our part, NRCS will focus on four key priorities as a foundation for this work.

1. **Deliver excellent and innovative service.**
   Our hallmark for over 80 years has been our ability to deliver high-quality technical advice and conservation solutions for America’s farmers, ranchers, and communities. NRCS will build upon these successes using both proven and innovative approaches for achieving the best conservation results for our customers and taxpayers.

2. **Strengthen and modernize conservation delivery.**
   NRCS customers are diverse and their agricultural systems and conservation needs are becoming more complex. NRCS will ensure it has the information technology, business operations, and skilled workforce to offer excellent service and timely, relevant, and cost-effective conservation solutions for our customers.

3. **Enhance and expand NRCS’s scientific and technical capabilities.**
   Our conservation science, technical standards, and decision support tools inform and drive on-the-ground solutions. NRCS will improve and expand on its scientific and technical capabilities—including the development, acquisition, dissemination, and use of tools and knowledge—to remain a leader in delivering conservation assistance for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.

4. **Broaden our reach to customers and partners.**
   NRCS has significant experience working with farming, ranching, and private forestry operations to increase conservation adoption. We also have great opportunities to increase conservation access and implementation by identifying new customers, reaching out to new partners, and building local capacity to plan and deliver conservation solutions.

I’m confident we will continue to meet our mission and deliver results for agriculture, for the environment and for the American people we serve.

Jason Weller
Chief, Natural Resource Conservation Service
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<th>Strategic Goal 1</th>
<th>Deliver High-Quality Science and Technology for Voluntary Private Lands Conservation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Conservation tools and technologies are accessible, relevant, and effective. Customers gain tangible value through implementation of conservation plans and systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective 1.1</strong></td>
<td>Enhance conservation planning with science-based tools and information.</td>
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<td><strong>Strategic Initiatives</strong></td>
<td>Deliver high-quality technical support and information for conservation decision making. Improve training, development, and delivery of technical expertise. Develop and use science-based tools for conservation planning. Develop and refresh technical standards to address new and emerging resource concerns. Facilitate and support innovative private-sector opportunities to encourage conservation adoption.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Measures</strong></td>
<td>Technical standards created or revised to ensure inclusion of latest science and technology. 2016: 34 / 2017: 34 / 2018: 34</td>
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<td><strong>Applicable Programs</strong></td>
<td>Conservation Technical Assistance Program (Above State) Soil Survey Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Plant Materials Program</td>
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## Strategic Goal 2

*Promote Productive Working Lands and Healthy Waters*

### Performance Outcomes

- Sustained, productive, working farms and ranches that optimize natural resource benefits.
- Enhanced and sustained quality and quantity of water resources.

### Objective 2.1

Improve soil health.

### Objective 2.2

Enhance and improve water quality and water quantity.

### Objective 2.3

Provide habitat for diverse and important fish and wildlife species.

### Objective 2.4

Improve local air quality and increase carbon sequestration.

### Strategic Initiatives

- Help agricultural producers address and avoid the need for environmental regulations.
- Address national and regional conservation needs and conditions.
- Build resilience in agricultural operations.

### Performance Measures

- **Cropland with conservation to improve soil quality (millions of acres)**
  - CTA, 2016: 5.9 / 2017: 5.9 / 2018: 5.9

- **Non-federal land with conservation to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality (millions of acres)**
  - EQIP, 2016: 1.1 / 2017: 1.1 / 2018: 1.1

- **Land with conservation to improve water quality (millions of acres)**
  - EQIP, 2016: 12 / 2017: 12 / 2018: 12

- **Grazing and forest land with conservation to protect and improve the resource base (millions of acres)**

### Applicable Programs

- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Management Assistance
Strategic Goal 3
Protect and Enhance Productive Agricultural Landscapes

Performance Outcomes
High-quality, productive lands retained in agricultural uses.
Conserved and functioning landscapes.

Objective 3.1
Keep productive agricultural lands in the farming, ranching, and forest landscape.

Objective 3.2
Protect and manage wetland resources to create landscape scale benefits.

Strategic Initiatives
Enroll easements that help sustain agriculture lands and rural communities.

Performance Measures
Land protected by conservation easements
ACEP, 2016: 110,000 acres / 2017, 130,000 acres / 2018: 65,000 acres*

Applicable Programs
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

*Authorized funding declined by 50 percent.
Strategic Goal 4
Support Healthy Watersheds and Diverse Land Use Communities

Performance Outcomes
Economically viable and environmentally healthy rural communities.
Conservation of landscapes.

Objective 4.1
Protect communities and people through rehabilitated watershed structures.

Objective 4.2
Manage landscape-scale natural resource concerns to create enduring solutions

Strategic Initiatives
Restore and sustain benefits to communities and individuals delivered by priority watershed infrastructure.
Cooperate with local sponsors to implement watershed plans to protect, conserve, and restore land and water resources, and achieve community objectives.

Performance Measures

- **Number of watershed rehab supplemental plans authorized**

- **Number of dam rehabilitations to be completed**

- **Land with conservation to improve water quality (millions of acres)**
  Conservation Technical Assistance, 2016: 17.9, 2017: 17.9; 2018: 17.9
  Environmental Quality Incentives Program, 2016: 12, 2017: 12, 2018: 12

Applicable Programs
Watershed Rehabilitation Program

Regional Conservation Partnership Program – Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (PL-566)
## Management Initiative 1

**Increase Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency**

More effective operations that add value to conservation delivery

Greater efficiencies in the delivery of programs and services to customers

### Objective 1.1

**Strengthen and modernize the delivery of products and services.**

- Improve the delivery of services within mission support services: human resources, budget and financial, management, and procurement and property.

- Ensure information technology infrastructures and applications are current, efficient, and support agency business needs.

- Identify and address critical gaps in employee knowledge, skills and abilities.

- Create a climate of accountability and compliance through enhanced internal controls and monitoring.

- Improve environmental and cultural resources compliance procedures.

- Strengthen conservation planning to improve implementation.

- Provide accurate and reliable agency data and analysis of agency programs and services.

#### Performance Measures

- **Contract implementation ratio**
  - 2016: 88 percent / 2017: 89 percent / 2018: 90 percent

- **Conservation quality ratio**
  - 2016: 86 percent / 2017: 87 percent / 2018: 88 percent

### Objective 1.2

**Advance budgeting and financial management capabilities.**

- Improve financial management and budgeting processes through sound principles, standards, and processes.

- Invest in human resources and information technology systems to strengthen and streamline financial management performance.

- Strengthen teams, tools, and processes to improve the agency’s performance and resolve audit findings.

#### Performance Measures

- **Contract implementation ratio**
  - 2016: 88 percent / 2017: 89 percent / 2018: 90 percent

- **Conservation quality ratio**
  - 2016: 86 percent / 2017: 87 percent / 2018: 88 percent
Management Initiative 2
Create a Climate of Inclusion and Foster Diversity So Private Lands Conservation Will Thrive

Performance Outcomes
- Improved EEO performance.
- Positive American Customer Satisfaction Index score.
- Diverse and engaged employees.

Objective 2.1
Expand opportunities to deliver conservation products and services to new and underserved customers.

Strategic Initiatives
- Identify and address barriers that limit program participation.
- Ensure that customers are treated in accordance with USDA’s civil rights policy and applicable legal requirements.
- Develop outreach strategies to reach traditionally underserved stakeholders and partners.
- Promote programmatic efforts, such as Strike Force, to address conservation needs in economically distressed areas.
- Develop and implement a strategic comprehensive communication plan.
- Ensure civil rights are protected and responsibilities and duties comply with Title VI in program delivery.

Performance Measures
- Percent regulatory complaint findings on civil rights reviews
  
  2016: 80 percent / 2017: 90 percent / 2018: 92 percent

- Percent parity in program application and approval rates
  
  2016: 93 percent / 2017: 94 percent / 2018: 96 percent

Objective 2.2
Employ, develop, and retain a highly skilled and diverse workforce.

Strategic Initiatives
- Develop and deploy agency recruitment and employee development strategies.
- Target focused recruitment efforts toward underrepresented populations including women, minorities, people with disabilities, and veterans.
- Ensure civil rights are protected and employees comply with Title VII.
- Ensure that employees are treated in accordance with USDA’s civil rights policy.

Performance Measures
- Contract implementation ratio
  
  2016: 88 percent / 2017: 89 percent / 2018: 90 percent

- Conservation quality ratio
  
  2016: 86 percent / 2017: 87 percent / 2018: 88 percent