



United States Department of Agriculture

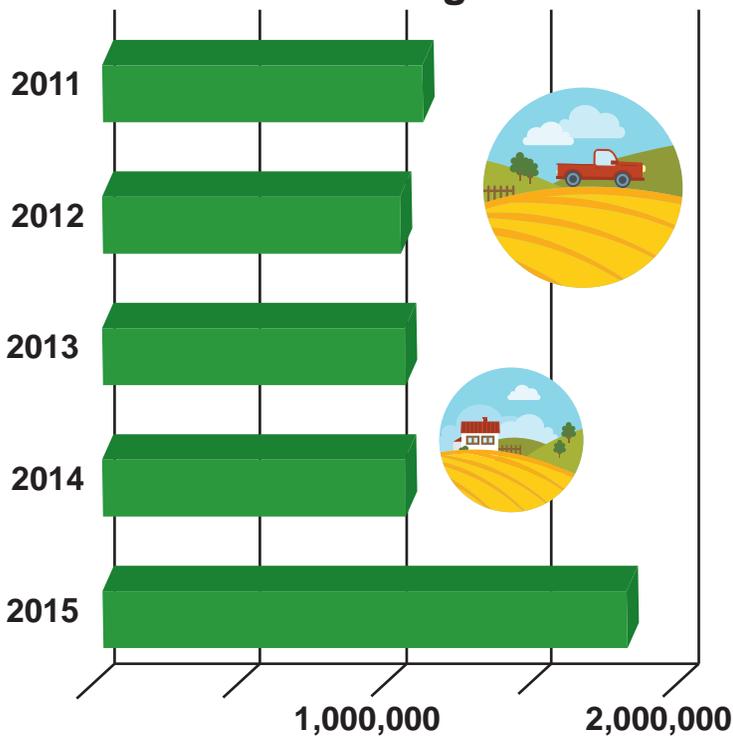
# Natural Resources Conservation Service 2015 Oklahoma Annual Report



The conservation practices NRCS promotes are helping producers prepare for what's ahead. From systems that help improve the health of the soil and water to restoring wetlands and wildlife populations, we're helping people help the land.



## Oklahoma Acres Enrolled in Farm Bill Programs



## TOP 10

Oklahoma's top 10 conservation practices of 2015 by dollars invested.

- 1 Forage, biomass planting
- 2 Brush management
- 3 Irrigation, sprinkler systems
- 4 Cross fencing
- 5 Pond installation
- 6 Water wells
- 7 Range planting
- 8 Crop rotation
- 9 Prescribed grazing
- 10 Cover crops

### Message from NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill



Resilient. This is the word that best defines conservation and the conservation partnership in Oklahoma for 2015. Our first-class flood control infrastructure proved itself resilient and up to the task of protecting lives and property during the wettest year Oklahoma has ever experienced. Crop and rangeland alike demonstrated incredible resiliency as record drought gave way to record rains. Those producers who invested in soil health enjoyed great dividends in the form of healthy crops and livestock, and an improved bottom line while providing offsite benefits in the form of water quality improvements. And our partnership, amidst myriad challenges, remains resilient and committed to getting conservation on the ground.

Extreme conditions, both meteorological and fiscal, will require continued creativity and efficiency to keep the partnership resilient in the days ahead. With a new field office structure in the works, NRCS hopes to do its part by getting trained staff where the work is and maximizing our ability to provide excellent in-field technical assistance along with our suite of financial assistance programs. With the restructure also comes a renewed focus on conservation planning, because getting new conservation on the ground starts with a solid conservation plan.

In 2015, we also expanded our focus beyond the traditional producer to address the needs of a growing group of organic producers as well as those operating in persistent poverty counties. Both the Organic and StrikeForce Initiatives require NRCS staff to broaden the definition of agriculture producer, and in doing so, we unlock new opportunities for growth and partnership.

Looking ahead to 2016, resiliency must continue to be our watchword. We must outweigh the challenges with new and renewed partnerships through efforts such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which allows us to leverage resources of unconventional partners. In 2016, I look forward to seeing even more acres in conservation programs and a further expansion of soil health systems covering our great landscape. Together, I believe we can get there.

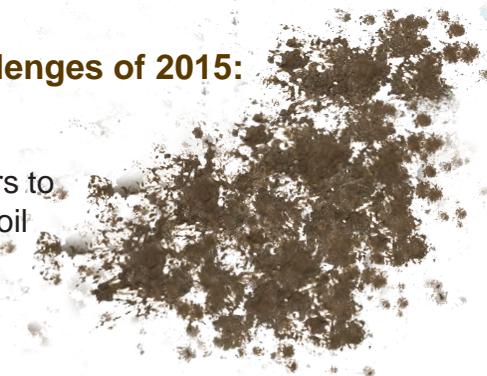


## State of the Soil with State Soil Scientist Steve Alspach

2015 was a year of progress in the health of our soil. After enduring moderate to severe drought over the past four years, we had above average rainfall and many producers reaped the benefits of their investments in soil health. 2016 looks to be off to a good start weather wise, and we look to keep the momentum going with expanded research and more producers joining the soil health movement in Oklahoma.

### BIGGEST soil challenges of 2015:

- Severe drought
- Excessive rain
- Convincing producers to adopt and stick with soil health management



## Focus on Water

From too little to too much, water was a challenge in 2015. Soil health practices are the best way to address both water quality and quantity issues.

Oklahoma is a 2015 national leader in water quality improvement.



No-till, cover crops and prescribed grazing reduce runoff.

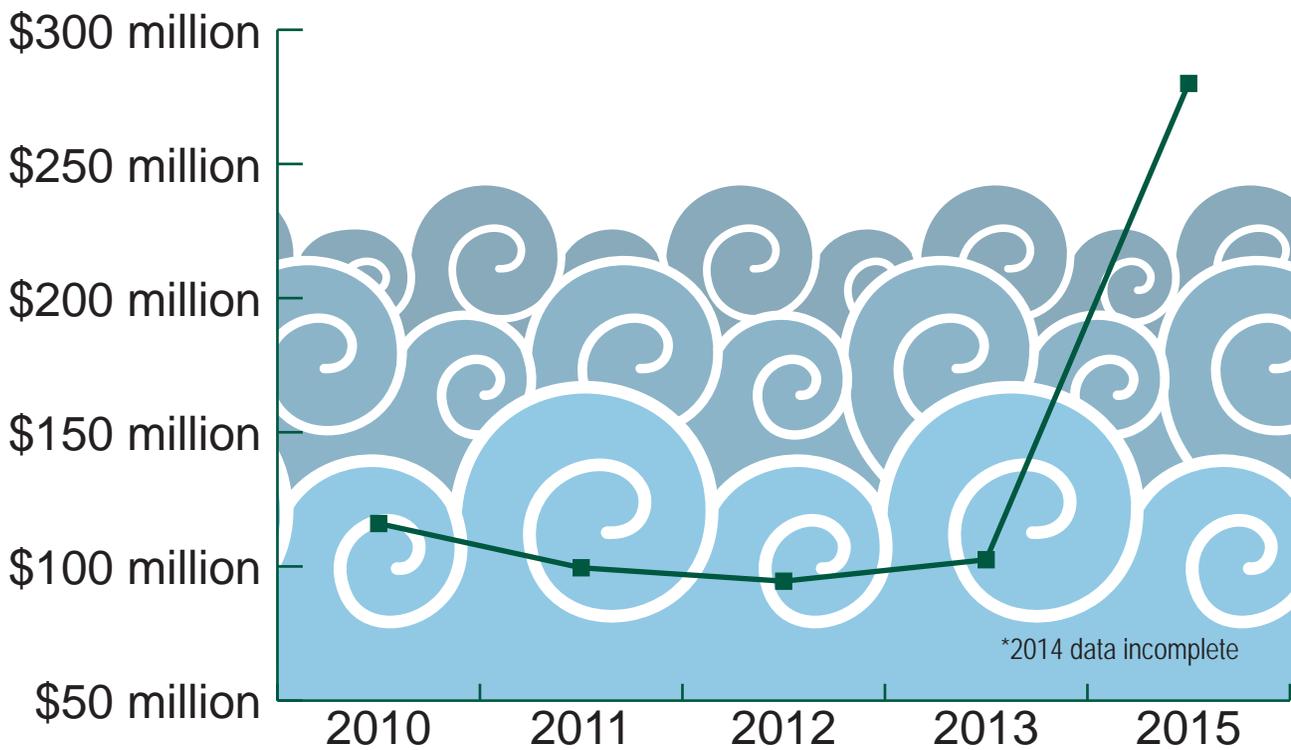


Soil testing and precision nutrient application protects water and wildlife.



Fencing livestock out of streams prevents erosion and reduces bacteria in water.

## Damage Prevented by Flood Control Dams



### Message from OCC Executive Director Trey Lam

2015 saw the worst drought of record end with the wettest year on record in Oklahoma. Our soil health program demonstrated its flexibility as a drought mitigation tool, reducing evaporation and increasing water infiltration and holding capacity while keeping the soil in place and reducing runoff during flooding rain. Severe flooding inflicted damage to over 60 flood control dams that are currently being repaired through the Emergency Watershed Program and the Oklahoma Emergency Fund.

Once again, EPA ranked Oklahoma second in the nation for a fifth year in a row for the reported load reductions of nitrogen and phosphorus contaminants to streams and rivers. Hard work again paid off for our water quality staff and conservation districts with the delisting of three additional streams from the list of impaired streams.

The financial challenges that began last year will increase going forward. The conservation partnership in Oklahoma has never shied away from a challenge. Our predecessors defeated the Dust Bowl, controlled flooding and began to clean up our water with even fewer resources than we have today. I am confident that the district, state and federal partnership will come together and weather this storm.

