NRCS
CALIFORNIA
5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
2020–2025

Addressing the conservation priorities of our California farmers, employees and partners

“Helping People Help the Land”
CALIFORNIA NRCS  Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Mission – Helping People Help the Land

Vision  – Personalizing proven and cutting edge conservation solutions to improve California’s natural resources

Goal 1: Support our valued external and internal stakeholders in service to California’s natural resources

Objective 1 – Focus on our customers to identify and address their conservation needs

Objective 2 – Foster an environment where our employees can succeed

Objective 3 – Collaborate with our partners to meet common conservation goals

Goal 2: Support resilience of agriculture in California through addressing priority resource concerns

Objective 1 – Improve plant and forest health/productivity

Objective 2 – Improve air quality associated with agriculture operations

Objective 3 – Work with agricultural operations to protect surface and groundwater quality

Objective 4 – Work with agricultural operations to enhance surface and groundwater quantity

Objective 5 – Improve soil health

Objective 6 – Enhance habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species
Welcome to the California five-year, 2020-2025 Strategic Plan

I invite you to learn more about the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS is a people focused agency and provides farmers, ranchers, forest landowners and tribal nations with the tools and resources to farm sustainably. This plan encapsulates the priorities of our California farmers, employees and partners.

The agricultural landscapes in our country are changing. Especially here in California and within our agency, where the diversity of our farmers and the crops they grow, is just as important as the diversity of the employees who serve them. We are an agency of inclusion, where we realize that together we are better. As an agency, we are realigning our vision and mission to support resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities.

NRCS delivers conservation solutions with cutting-edge results. This is made possible in collaboration with local resource conservation districts and conservation partners. As we turn a new chapter, we are committed to working closer with traditional and non-traditional organizations. To support historically underserved customers and beginning farmers and ranchers working toward sustainability.

In harnessing the opportunities to achieve our vision, we have identified two key goals:

- The People — Support our valued external (farmers, ranchers, forestland owners, tribal nations and partners) and internal (our employees) stakeholders in implementation and delivery of conservation solutions.

- The Land — Support the resilience of California agricultural landscapes. By working together to identify priority resource concerns for the adoption of voluntary conservation practices.

In closing, we are taking additional steps to meet the challenge of “personalizing” conservation solutions. As a state, we are developing strategic business plans to guide day-to-day operations.

Nowhere else do the partner resources and opportunities exist like they do in California to move conservation agriculture into the future. I humbly invite your comments and questions regarding the content herein. Our NRCS team and I look forward to continuing the dialog with you in service to California land stewardship.

CARLOS SUAREZ
State Conservationist
Objective 1
Focus on our customers to identify and address their conservation needs

**Strategies:**

1. Tailor NRCS services to meet customer needs

**Tactics/Plan Detail:**

1. Complete California-wide customer needs analysis
2. Analyze customer needs to identify “top ten” service priorities
3. Collect customer needs from employees
4. Provide training and support to employees to continue to address customer needs

**Strategies:**

2. Enhance the NRCS customer delivery experience

**Tactics/Plan Detail:**

1. Identify and implement cutting edge methods to exceed customer expectations
2. Identify improvement opportunities from national/regional NRCS scorecards
3. Monitor key dimensions of customer service through focus groups and other available means
4. Offer customers access to NRCS services in their preferred language

**Strategies:**

3. Strengthen and diversify the NRCS client base

**Tactics/Plan Detail:**

1. Train employees to use their local parity data analysis report
2. Use parity report to target local outreach strategies
3. Develop outreach plans for every field office
4. Prioritize program funding for historically underserved customers including those with small acreage
Objective 2  
Foster an environment where our employees can succeed

Strategies:
1. Develop and implement high quality training and mentoring

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Promote a culture of technical excellence in conservation planning
   2. Expand Support Technical Assistance Results (STAR) curriculum to encompass all training subjects
   3. Analyze skills gap using proficiency models of “NRCS of the Future” to create meaningful Individual Development Plans
   4. Implement Conservation Agricultural Mentors Program and continue to support the California/Nevada Mentoring Program

Strategies:
2. Leverage technology and related operational support tools

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Provide employees tools and training specific to each position
   2. With Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) identify and share tips and best practices to save effort/time as indicated by Workload Cycle Time Study data
   3. Recognize employees who develop cutting edge technology
   4. Utilize Teams as a one-stop shop
   5. Utilize all communication means to reduce time lost to travel

Strategies:
3. Attract, engage, and support our NRCS employees

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Identify specific knowledge/skills/abilities needed for future hires
   2. Charge the Civil Rights Advisory Committee to complete an employee parity analysis and target recruitment to fill gaps
   3. Identify improvement opportunities from the California specific Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
   4. Analyze composite exit interviews data
Objective 3
Collaborate with our partners to meet common conservation goals

Strategies:
1. Continue to align NRCS efforts with those of partners

Tactics/Plan Detail:
1. Identify and coordinate common conservation goals
2. Map NRCS and partner programs and services to those common resource goals
3. Actively monitor the contributions of our joint efforts

Strategies:
2. Share innovative tools and best practices to maximize conservation benefit

Tactics/Plan Detail:
1. Identify and apply best practices gained via partner and NRCS funded projects
2. Work with partners to identify and implement cutting edge science-based knowledge
3. Work with Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) to incorporate American Indian Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into NRCS conservation practice standards where applicable

Strategies:
3. Strengthen and diversify NRCS's partner base and increase work with Tribal Nations

Tactics/Plan Detail:
1. Increase conservation planning on Tribal lands
2. Partner to increase capacity of local Resource Conservation Districts
3. Identify and engage non-traditional partners such as community organizations and urban farmers
Objective 1
Improve plant and forest health/productivity

Strategies:

1. Reduce catastrophic impacts of wildfire

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Identify and prioritize forestry cooperative treatment areas and financial assistance
   2. Prioritize forestry treatment work in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)
   3. Prioritize initiative to reduce bark beetle impact
   4. Mobilize teams to address the aftermath of wildfires
   5. Create an emergency fund pool with rapid funding mechanism

Strategies:

2. Reduce invasive plant and pest pressure

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Reduce conifer encroachment in oak woodlands
   2. Utilize easement programs in protecting oak savannahs and woodlands
   3. Focus NRCS efforts on high priority invasive pests in California

Strategies:

3. Improve plant health on agricultural land

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Maintain and restore ecological function for targeted plant communities
   2. Increase carrying capacity of grazing lands
   3. Incorporate American Indian Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into NRCS conservation practice standards where applicable
Objective 2
Improve air quality associated with agriculture operations

Strategies:
1. Address ozone and particulate matter in nonattainment areas

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Plan and implement air quality projects in accordance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards
   2. Increase number of conservation plans with ozone/particulate matter as a resource concern

Strategies:
2. Maximize emissions reductions through NRCS air quality projects

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Ensure customers’ projects provide emissions reduction ahead of regulatory deadlines
   2. Share emissions reductions best practices with our customers and partners

Strategies:
3. Support customers in achieving greenhouse gas net zero emissions

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Increase the number of conservation plans that address greenhouse gases (GHG)
   2. Reduce GHG emission sources and increase GHG sinks
   3. Coordinate with partners to collect data on GHG emissions reduction
Objective 3
Work with agricultural operations to protect surface and groundwater quality

Strategies:
1. Reduce nutrient discharge

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Prioritize projects in animal feeding operation/confined animal feeding operation (AFO/CAFO) with higher leaching potential soils or targeted groundwater basins
   2. Prioritize funding for projects in impaired watersheds due to nutrients

Strategies:
2. Improve water quality for salmonid stream biological function

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Identify and prioritize watersheds contributing to degraded salmonid habitat
   2. Implement conservation practices to prevent contamination of surface waters

Strategies:
3. Identify and reduce other agricultural impacts to surface and groundwater sources

   Tactics/Plan Detail:
   1. Prioritize funding for projects in impaired watersheds
   2. Prioritize funding for projects in groundwater basins identified by the NRCS Source Water Protection Program (SWP), the National Water Quality Initiative and the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) 2019 Basin Prioritization
Objective 4
Work with agricultural operations to enhance surface and groundwater quantity

**Strategies:**

1. Increase efficient use of surface water while maintaining ecological function

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   
   1. Improve irrigation efficiency in identified basins
   2. Use irrigation water management to improve surface water use

**Strategies:**

2. Reduce groundwater depletion in basins

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   
   1. Prioritize funding for projects in groundwater basins identified by the NRCS Source Water Protection Program (SWP), the National Water Quality Initiative and the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) 2019 Basin Prioritization
   2. Improve irrigation efficiency in prioritized basins
   3. Implement conservation practices that result in groundwater recharge

**Strategies:**

3. Identify other means to enhance surface and groundwater quantity

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   
   1. Increase participation in watershed scale programs such as the National Water Quality Initiative and the NRCS Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (WFPO)
   2. Provide training on NRCS’ role in watershed assessments and planning
   3. Partner with the California Department of Conservation and local Resource Conservation Districts to expand watershed planning in priority areas
   4. Explore alternative water sources for agricultural use

Support resilience of agriculture in California through addressing priority resource concerns
Objective 5
Improve soil health

**Support resilience of agriculture in California through addressing priority resource concerns**

**Strategies:**
1. Integrate soil health into the conservation planning process

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   1. Train employees and delegate job approval authority (JAA) for soil health practices
   2. Equip field offices with soil health assessment tools
   3. Standardize use of soil health field assessment tool to evaluate alternative conservation practices

2. Integrate soil health into program delivery

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   1. Establish priority areas with partners to focus program funding
   2. Implement conservation practices that increase organic matter content
   3. Utilize easement programs to protect sensitive agricultural lands

3. Promote soil health benefits and methods to customers and partners

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   1. Implement Healthy Soils Demonstration Projects with California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF), University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), and California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD)
   2. Incorporate American Indian Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into NRCS conservation practice standards where applicable
Objective 6
Enhance habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species

Strategies:

1. Enhance terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   1. Train employees on wildlife species, habitats, and conservation practices
   2. Increase conservation planning addressing terrestrial wildlife and invertebrates
   3. Implement conservation practices that best address the habitat needs for prioritized species/guilds and at-risk species

Strategies:

2. Enhance aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   1. Train employees on wildlife species, habitats, and conservation practices
   2. Increase conservation planning addressing aquatic habitat
   3. Implement conservation practices that best address the habitat needs for prioritized species or guilds and at-risk species

Strategies:

3. Collaborate with partners to enhance wildlife habitat

   **Tactics/Plan Detail:**
   1. Coordinate with partners to increase wildlife enhancement projects
   2. Train employees and partners on wildlife conservation practices
   3. Incorporate American Indian Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into NRCS conservation practice standards where applicable
“Helping People Help the Land”

*Special Thanks to the Following Partner Organizations for Providing Feedback*

- Almond Board
- American Forest Foundation
- Audubon
- Big Pine Paiute
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
- California Department of Food and Agriculture
- California Department of Natural Resources
- California Farm Bureau Federation
- California Garlic and Onion Research Board
- California Land Trusts
- California Leafy Greens Research Program
- California Native Plant Society
- California Pork Producers Association
- California Rangeland Conservation Coalition
- California Rice Commission
- California Sheep Commission
- California Tomato Growers Association
- California Waterfowl Association
- California Wool Growers Association
- Center for Land Based Learning
- Citrus Research Board
- Ducks Unlimited
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Farmer Veteran Coalition
- Glenn County Resource Conservation District
- Intertribal Agriculture Council
- Manzanita Band of the Kumeyaay Nation
- The Nature Conservancy
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- National Onion Association
- Pacific Egg and Poultry Association
- Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians
- Pauma Band of Luiseno Indians
- Point Blue Conservation Science
- Public Policy Institute of California
- State Water Resources Control Board
- SWRCB Nonpoint
- The Watershed Center
- Tolowa Dee-Ni’ Nation
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries
- USDA Climate Hub
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- Wildlife Conservation Board
- Wintun Environmental Protection Agency
- The XERCES Society
- Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation
- Yolo RCD
- Yurok Tribe
“The NRCS cadre of outstanding men and women will continue to support California’s diverse agricultural landscape into the future.”

— Carlos Suarez, State Conservationist