

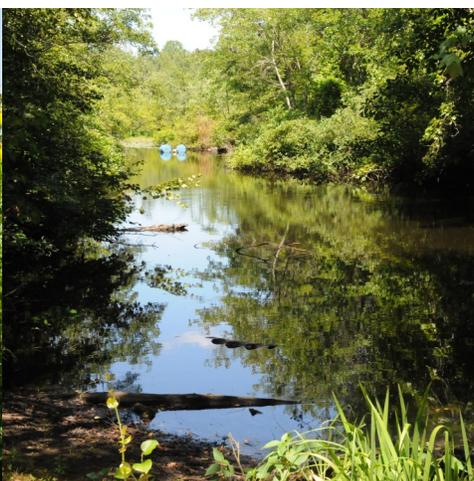


United States Department of Agriculture



DELAWARE STRATEGIC PLAN

2020-2025



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a customer-focused agency that provides farmers, forest landowners and tribes with the tools and resources to farm sustainably. This strategic plan is representative of the priorities of Delaware farmers, employees and partners.

Our vision is to deliver proven and cutting-edge conservation solutions to improve Delaware's natural resources. To achieve this, we have identified and developed actionable strategies to reach two key goals:

- The People — Support our valued external and internal stakeholders in service to Delaware's natural resources.
- The Land — Support resilience of agricultural in Delaware through addressing priority resource concerns.

We are taking additional steps to meet the challenge of customizing conservation solutions for all. We are increasing our commitment to work closely with traditional and non-traditional organizations to strengthen support for historically underserved customers working toward sustainability. As a state, we have an ongoing effort to improve our day to day operations for increased productivity.

Successful implementation of the Delaware NRCS strategic plan is possible with full collaboration and support from the Delaware conservation partnership.

We 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 Delaware land stewardship.

Yours in Conservation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kasey L. Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

KASEY L. TAYLOR
State Conservationist

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Mission: We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.

Vision: Delivering proven and cutting-edge conservation solutions to improve Delaware's natural resources.



Goal 1

Support our valued external and internal stakeholders in service to Delaware's natural resources.

Objective 1

Focus on our customers to identify and address their conservation needs

Strategy One

Tailor NRCS services to meet customer needs

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Complete Delaware-wide customer needs analysis
 - a. Hold listening sessions to gather input and feedback on the implementation year of the 2018 Farm Bill. Listening sessions can be held virtually in the form of “town hall” meetings or in person (while adhering to the social distance criteria) to facilitate information transfer.
 - i. The Delaware Employee Advisory Committee (DEAC) will assist with developing the meeting format, panelist and questions to engage our customers.
 - b. Develop a focused customer group using a wide/diverse range of farmers to pinpoint needs of customers.
2. Analyze customer needs to identify “top ten” service priorities
3. Collect customer needs from our reports and data set (IDEA) that has compiled information for conservation practices applied at the landscape scale and review with employees
4. Provide training and support to employees to continue to address customer needs



Strategy Two

Enhance the NRCS customer delivery experience

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Identify and implement cutting edge methods to exceed customer expectations
 - a. The feedback gathered from the listening session (s) will be compiled into a report that will provide core tasks and projects that will be prioritized and implemented over the life of the Farm Bill.
 2. Identify improvement opportunities from national/regional NRCS scorecards
 3. Monitor key dimensions of customer service through focus groups and other available means
 - a. Enhance and maintain local work group meetings on an annual basis to ensure grass roots involvement.
 - b. Local input gathered from staff in field office on an ongoing basis
 4. Offer customers access to NRCS services in their preferred language. We will work with our NASS State Statistician to compile the analytics for the state and to ensure we have the materials translated and available for all offices.
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Strategy Three

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 identified in the state recruitment plan
3. Develop deliverables for every field office that will align to the state outreach plan
4. Prioritize program funding for historically underserved customers



Objective 2

Foster an environment where our employees can succeed

Strategy One

Develop and implement high quality training and mentoring

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Promote a culture of technical excellence in conservation planning
 2. Expand Technical Assistance curriculum to encompass all training subjects
 - a. Delaware will roll-out the formal Conservation Ag Mentoring Program (CAMP) in the State. The program will be announced in FY21. CAMP is intended for any employee that is providing technical assistance and support to our customers. While the initial focus was on NRCS personnel, the program can be expanded to include NRCS and Conservation District staff.
 - b. Upon completion of the training, the employee's knowledge, skills and abilities will be assessed to look at the potential to increase job approval authority, technical approval authority and planner certification levels for the employees in the state.
 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 Delaware Mentoring Program
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Strategy Two

Leverage technology and related operational support tools

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Provide employees tools and training specific to each position
2. 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 Microsoft Office as a one-stop shop
5. Utilize all communication means to reduce time lost to travel



Strategy Three

Attract, engage, and support our NRCS employees

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Identify specific knowledge/skills/abilities needed for future hires
 - a. Work toward developing a multi-state leadership development program that accentuates employee development.
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 Delaware specific Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
4. Charge the Delaware Employee Advisory Committee with working with the Leadership Team to develop annual employee meetings to inform and support our employees.
5. Identify creative and meaningful ways to reward employees for extra effort, special projects or other extraordinary work.



Objective 3

Collaborate with our partners to meet common conservation goals

Strategy One

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 and document conservation outcomes
 4. Expand the conservation partnership in the state to include non-traditional partners. The core conservation partnership includes the following: NRCS, FSA, RD, DACD, DDA, DNREC, Universities (DSU/UD) and Extension Service .
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Strategy Two

Share innovative tools and best practices to maximize conservation benefits

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 Delaware Conservation Partners to leverage funding to increase voluntary conservation in the state.
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Strategy Three

Strengthen and diversify NRCS's partner base and increase work with Urban Agriculture

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Increase conservation planning on Urban Agriculture lands
2. Identify and engage non-traditional partners such as community organizations and urban farmers
3. Work with partners to assess urban needs, develop comprehensive online site for urban resources and develop urban farmer training program.



Goal 2

Support resilience of agriculture in Delaware through addressing priority resource concerns.

Objective 1

Reduce non-point source pollutants

Strategy One

Adaptive management strategies for impacted acres in the state

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Develop and implement conservation plans to document and expand geographic information systems (GIS) to evaluate environmental impacts.
 - a. This will include the state level review of drought or flooding areas effected by climate extremes.

Objective 2

Improve air quality associated with agriculture operations

Strategy One

Reduction of emissions such as particulate matter and greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to air quality impairment.

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Plan and implement air quality projects in accordance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards

Strategy Two

Support customers in reducing greenhouse emissions

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Educate staff and partners on planning of practices to reduce particulate matter and GHG emissions
2. Educate customers on importance of particulate matter and GHG reduction in agriculture.
3. Coordinate with partners to collect data on particulate matter and GHG emissions reduction



Objective 3

Work with agricultural operations to protect surface and groundwater quality and quantity

Strategy One

Reduce nutrient discharge

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Prioritize projects in animal feeding operation/confined animal feeding operation (AFO/CAFO) with higher leaching potential soils, run-off or targeted source water protection areas
 2. Prioritize funding for projects in impaired watersheds due to nutrients
 3. Work with partners to identify and implement innovative conservation practices which reduce nutrient discharge.
 4. Prioritize conservation measures which meet state WIP and TMDL goals.
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Strategy Two

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) and the National Water Quality Initiative



Objective 4

Improve soil health

Strategy One

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
 4. Implement the state soil health strategy to increase soil sustainability as outlined in the Delaware Soil Health Plan [Delaware Soil Health Strategy](#)
 5. Develop a strategy to address saltwater intrusion
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Strategy Two

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 and improve dynamic soil properties on grazing and crop lands
 3. Implement conservation practices that reduces compaction and promotes soil organisms
 4. Utilize easement programs to protect sensitive agricultural lands
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Strategy Three

Promote soil health benefits and methods to customers and partners

Tactics/Plan Detail

1. Implement Healthy Soils Demonstration Projects with Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), Delaware Farm Bureau (DFB), University of Delaware and Delaware State University to build on the efforts that are currently being completed with Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD)



Objective 5

Enhance habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species

Strategy One

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 species of greatest conservation need and at-risk species
-

Strategy Two

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 species of greatest conservation need or at-risk species
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Strategy Three

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

