

Program Description

March 2003

National Natural Resources Conservation Foundation

Introduction

The National Natural Resources Conservation Foundation (NNRCF) was authorized by Congress in the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act of 1996 for the purpose of furthering conservation and assisting the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in its efforts to conserve natural resources on private lands. The Foundation duties as outlined in the legislation are to:

1. Promote innovative solutions to the problems associated with natural resources on private lands, particularly with respect to agriculture, soil erosion, and water use;
2. Promote voluntary partnerships between government and private interests in the conservation of natural resources;
3. Conduct research and undertake educational activities, conduct and support demonstration projects, and make grants to State and local agencies and nonprofit organizations;
4. Provide other leadership and support to address conservation challenges, such as the prevention of excessive soil erosion; the enhancement of soil and water quality; and the protection of wetlands, wildlife habitat, and strategically important farmland subject to urban conversion and fragmentation;
5. Encourage, accept, and administer private gifts of money and real and personal property for the benefit of, or in connection

with, the conservation and related activities and services of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), particularly the NRCS;

6. Undertake, conduct, and encourage educational, technical, and other assistance, and other activities that support the conservation and related programs administered by the USDA, particularly the NRCS, except that the Foundation may not enforce or administer a regulation of the USDA; and
7. Raise private funds to promote the purposes of the Foundation.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) additionally allows the Secretary of Agriculture to authorize the use, license, or transfer of symbols, slogans, and logos of the Foundation.

Establishment of the Foundation

Activities required to establish the Foundation include:

- Appointment of a Board of Trustees;
- Appointment of an Executive Director;
- Development of a constitution;
- Establishment of bylaws;
- Creation of an official seal;
- Securing or obtaining 501(c)(3) status;
- Creation of a business plan and strategic plan; and
- Establishment of mechanisms for receiving and granting funds.

NRCS will work with the Foundation to insure that legislative mandates are met, strategic and high priority natural resources issues are addressed, and cooperative relationships with Federal, state, and private agencies and groups are developed and maintained. NRCS will continually work with the Foundation Board, Executive Director, and staff to ensure the Foundation has data, information, and technical tools to conduct Foundation business.

Appointment of the Board of Trustees

The initial Board of Trustees will be appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. The Federal Register process will be used to accept nominations for the Board. Nominees will be required to provide a resume and a short summary explaining their suitability to serve on the NNRCF Board. Nominations will be sent to the NRCS Chief and forwarded to the Secretary. The Secretary will select nine of the nominees to serve on the first Board. These members will be appointed to one-, two-, or three-year terms. The Secretary will designate one of the members as the chairperson of the Board for a two-year term. Subsequent Board appointments will serve three-year terms with not more than two consecutive three-year terms allowed. The Board will set the tone for the organization and be responsible for securing funds for establishing and carrying out the business of the Foundation. Representation on the Board, as stated in the law, should include 1) individuals with expertise in agricultural conservation policy matters; 2) a representative of private sector organizations with a demonstrable interest in natural resources conservation; 3) a representative of statewide conservation organizations; 4) a representative of conservation districts; 5) a representative of organizations outside the Federal government that are dedicated to natural resources conservation education; and 6) a farmer or rancher. Procedures for filling subsequent vacancies of the Board will be outlined in the Foundation's constitution.

Authority of the Board

The Board may appoint, hire, and discharge the officers and employees of the Foundation. The only exception is the Secretary's appointment of the first Executive Director. The Board may also adopt a constitution and bylaws and engage in other activities necessary to the Foundation, per the authorizing subtitle.

Appointment of the Executive Director

The first Executive Director will be appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. The Federal Register process will be used to accept nominations for the Executive Director's position. Nominees will be required to provide a resume and a short summary explaining their qualifications. Nominations will be sent to the NRCS Chief and forwarded to the Secretary. Procedures for filling a subsequent vacant Executive Director's position will be outlined in the Foundation's constitution. The Executive Director serves under the direction of the Board.

How the NNRCF Works

The Foundation will be self-sustaining. Funding for the Foundation will come from private donations or grants from individuals, corporations, businesses, and nonprofit organizations and agencies. The Foundation will have the authority to enter into cooperative agreements and contracts with Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies and organizations and to grant monies for conservation activities.

The Foundation will work with private and public universities and corporations to encourage research for the development of innovative solutions to natural resource concerns. Innovations may target design, installation, or techniques that protect, conserve, or restore the natural environment; create new methods for traditional modes of farming; or create multifunctionality on single land-use lands to enhance soil and water quality, protect wetlands and wildlife habitat, and protect strategically important land.

The Foundation will act to facilitate the transfer of technologies between the academic and scientific communities and the private and public sectors by supporting demonstration projects and by working with educators to place conservation activities in curricula. The Foundation and NRCS will work to develop a natural resource conservation demonstration center in Beltsville, Maryland, where individuals and groups can view conservation techniques, participate in conservation projects, and interact with conservation professionals.

The Foundation will work with NRCS to identify conservation issues of national significance and provide leadership to solve natural resource problems that may arise. Issues may pertain to resolving conflicts on the urban-rural interface; keeping farms on the edge of urbanization in farming; positioning small and limited resource farmers to compete in the global or local marketplace; and addressing the fragmentation of farmland, wildland, and urban land.

The NNRCF will strive to capture the creativity and flexibility of the private sector, empower private local entities, and link the public and private sectors in contributing to private land conservation.

Grant Funding

Since the Foundation is not yet established, except by law, the mechanism for grant funding will need to be created under the leadership and direction of the Board of Trustees and Executive Director. Announcements for any grant program administered by the Foundation will be published, as required by law.

Volunteers

The NRCS, in partnership with the Foundation, will recruit and share the Earth Team volunteer network to support Foundation sponsored projects and activities. Volunteers can assist in forging new partnerships, organizing educational events, serving as liaisons to individuals and groups, arranging fund-raising events, as well as participating in the traditional activities of Earth Team volunteers.

For More Information

If you need more information about the NNRCF, please contact Doug Lawrence at 202-720-8851 or doug.lawrence@usda.gov. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmland/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmland>

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.