



## Natural Resources Conservation Service and Climate Change



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The Natural Resources Conservation Service is a mission-oriented agency whose role it is to provide technical and financial assistance to enable people to be better stewards of the air, soil, water, and related natural resources on private agricultural lands. The NRCS provides conservation programs and incentives that potentially mitigate or help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2007, an internal team examined the present structure of air quality, energy and climate change within the framework of the Agency's strategic plan. Recommendations were developed and presented to agency leadership in April, 2008. Climate change was clearly identified as an important Agency cross-cutting activity.

### **Conservation Programs, Benefits and Incentives**

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions and carbon sequestration are achieved as ancillary benefits of the NRCS' current portfolio of beneficial conservation programs. Among these are the Conservation Security Program (CSP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and a developmental grants program, Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). New or revised standards and targets for specific incentives encourage carbon sequestration, reduce direct and indirect use of petroleum-based inputs and GHG emissions reductions <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

### **Climate Change Literacy and Improving Awareness**

The NRCS is developing a curricula devoted to air quality, energy, and climate change to train employees to meet new challenges. NRCS recognizes the inherent links among these three areas and has designed a basic course integrating these three topics that all new employees will be required to take. The basic course should be online and available by fall 2008. In addition, several more advanced discipline-specific courses within each of the three discipline areas of air quality, energy concerns and climate change are being developed and will be available for employees in the coming months.

### **NRCS Climate Change Reference Materials**

NRCS has created a climate change website that describes the relation between the NRCS mission and climate change issues. Conservation practices and NRCS programs that potentially mitigate climate change are described. NRCS also provides a downloadable conservation briefs on related conservation topics including "Opportunities Associated with Managing Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Emissions," as well as an Environmental Credit Trading Information Series available from the NRCS climate change website: [http://soils.usda.gov/survey/global\\_climate\\_change.html](http://soils.usda.gov/survey/global_climate_change.html)

### **Decision Support Tools for Carbon Sequestration and the Emerging Environmental Market**

The CarbOn Management Evaluation Tool – Voluntary Reporting (COMET-VR) is an online interactive management tool providing a simple and reliable method for estimating changes in soil carbon sequestration, fuel, and fertilizer use resulting from changes in land management. <http://www.cometvr.colostate.edu>. COMET-VR uses the soil carbon module of the Century model, a generalized ecosystem simulation model. This and other tools provide producers with unbiased, scientifically-based technical information to help mitigate their greenhouse gas footprint while making informed decisions for their operations. These actions weigh the benefits and costs of participation in voluntary carbon and other environmental credit trading markets as well participation in reporting systems such as the Department of Energy-sponsored 1605(b) Voluntary Greenhouse Gas Reporting Registry.