

Supporting Statement

CONSERVATION EFFECTS ASSESSMENT PROJECT OMB No. 0535-0245

A. JUSTIFICATION

- 1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.**

The primary function of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is to prepare and issue official State and national estimates of crop and livestock production, disposition, and prices. Auxiliary services such as statistical consultation, data collection, and summary tabulation are performed for other Federal and State agencies on a reimbursable basis. The goal of this NASS information collection is to obtain land management information that will assist the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in assessing environmental benefits associated with implementation of various conservation programs and installation of associated conservation practices.

The 2002 Farm Bill substantially increased funding levels for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), authorized continued funding for other conservation programs, and established new conservation programs. Tracking the environmental benefits of these programs will allow policy-makers and program managers to implement and modify existing programs and design new programs to more effectively and efficiently meet the goals of Congress.

NRCS has been given the responsibility of leading the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), a multi-agency effort to estimate the environmental benefits of conservation practices. A statistical approach utilizing survey sampling and modeling has been adopted to avoid the high costs associated with expanded reporting by NRCS field staff. Benefits will be estimated by applying transport models and other physical process models at sample sites associated with the National Resources Inventory (NRI) sampling frame; this methodology is explained in detail in part B.1 and in the work plan in Attachment J. Benefit measures will initially include soil quality enhancement, erosion reduction, reduction in nutrient and sediment losses from farm fields, soil carbon sequestration, water use efficiency, and reductions in in-stream nutrient and sediment concentrations. Investments are being made in additional model development to address benefits

associated with air quality, wildlife habitat, and reductions in pesticide losses. See Attachment I for a report that further discusses the NRI-CEAP effort, "Measuring Environmental Benefits of Conservation Practices: The Conservation Effects Assessment Project." The watershed assessment studies portion of that document, however, is not a part of this information collection request; it is included only to give an overview of the entire project.

The NRI is a scientifically-based, longitudinal panel survey designed to assess conditions and trends of soil, water, and related resources of the Nation's non-Federal lands. The NRI is conducted for the U.S. Department of Agriculture by NRCS in cooperation with Iowa State University's Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology and provides critical information to address agri-environmental issues at national, regional, and State levels. Data gathered in the NRI are linked to NRCS soil and climate databases. These linked data, along with NRI historical data for 1982 - 2003, form the basis for unique modeling applications and analytical capabilities. The NRI sampling frame will be used for this project because it captures the Nation's agricultural resource base--soils, topography, and climate--which are critical factors in estimating benefits of conservation practices. Also important are the historical and linked data that already exist for each NRI sample site. The assessment of benefits is not possible, however, without augmenting these existing data with additional information on land management, conservation practice adoption, and conservation program participation.

NASS will collaborate with NRCS in the acquisition of this additional information by conducting a survey for a sub-sample of NRI sample units in the contiguous 48 States. The survey will utilize personal interviews to administer a questionnaire that is designed to obtain from farm operators field-specific data associated with the selected NRI sample units. These units are fields that encompass the NRI points and will be defined by enumerators at the time of the interviews. Specific questions are asked about physical characteristics of the field, farming activities, and conservation practices associated with the field. Information regarding participation in conservation programs will be obtained from the local NRCS field office.

CEAP surveys were conducted in 2003 and 2004. The next CEAP survey will be conducted in the fall of 2005 and a similar survey will be conducted in the fall of 2006. Data collection may need to continue through 2007, based on funding. In the later years the scope of the study will broaden to cover additional types of land and a larger suite of conservation practices and effects.

General authority for these data collection activities is granted under U.S. Code Title 7, Section 2204 (Attachment A) which specifies that "The Secretary of Agriculture shall procure and preserve all information concerning agriculture which he can obtain ... by the collection of statistics ... and shall distribute them among agriculturists."

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from the current collection.

Data collected in this survey will be used in conjunction with previously collected data on soils, climate, and cropping history for these NRI points to run and analyze field-level physical process models. The field-level models will provide per-acre estimates such as soil and nutrient savings for specified geo-physical regions of the country; the modeling process discussed below currently utilizes 4,500 regions based upon soils, climate, and geography. The per-acre figures will be applied to administrative data from Performance and Results Measurement System (and similar) data bases that provide specifics on program/practice implementation, i.e., acres of a practice installed during a certain time period. Initial outcomes will be for cultivated cropland and land under CRP contract.

Although the NRI is designed to provide statistical information on natural resources on non-Federal lands, it can also be used as an analytical framework for simulation modeling. Over the last several years, NRCS and Texas A&M University have been developing a system of databases and models built around the National Resources Inventory that can be used to assess the environmental benefits of conservation programs. The primary model that will be used to estimate the reduction in loss of materials from farm fields is the Erosion-Productivity Impact Calculator (EPIC). EPIC is a continuous simulation model that was developed in 1984 to assess the effect of soil erosion on soil productivity. Since then, the model has been expanded and refined to allow simulation of many processes important in agricultural management as well as fate and transport of potential pollutants such as nitrogen, phosphorous, sediment, salt, and pesticides. The performance of the EPIC model has been well documented and has been widely used in policy analysis. For details, refer to www.brc.tamus.edu/epic/appendixes/publications.html.

EPIC operates on a daily time step, integrating daily weather data; soil characteristics; farming operations such as planting, tillage, and nutrient applications; and a plant growth model to simulate the growth and harvest of a crop. All farming operations that take place on the field throughout the year are taken into account. On a daily basis, EPIC tracks the movement of water; the cycling of nitrogen, phosphorus, and carbon; and soil erosion. The drainage area considered by EPIC is generally a homogeneous field-sized area of up to about 250 acres. Model outputs represent pollutant and water movement to the "bottom of the root zone" and "edge of the field." A wide variety of soil, weather, and cropping practice data input options allows simulation of most crops on virtually any soil and climate combination.

The major model components in EPIC are weather simulation, hydrology, erosion-sedimentation, nutrient cycling, pesticide fate, plant growth, soil temperature, tillage, economics, and plant environment control. The EPIC weather simulator was developed so that stochastic daily weather data could be generated for

weather stations from which only monthly average data were available. The soil is modeled as a series of horizontal layers through which water and dissolved materials move and through which plant roots penetrate. The movement of water through the soil after a rainfall is simulated by calculating runoff from the soil surface, percolation through the soil layers, horizontal flow beneath the soil surface, and water table dynamics. Potential evaporation is modeled using input data on solar radiation, air temperature, wind speed, and relative humidity; evaporation from soils and plants are calculated separately. The nitrogen cycle has labile (soluble) and organic portions. The phosphorus cycle has labile, organic, and mineral portions. The carbon cycle is modeled as a series of pools of decomposing organic matter, from still-standing dead plant matter to soil humus. Plant growth is simulated with a basic heat unit system that correlates plant growth with temperature. Accumulated heat units drive potential growth and actual growth is reduced from potential growth by accounting for factors that constrain plant growth such as temperature, solar radiation, soil moisture, soil aeration, labile nitrogen and phosphorus, and soil strength. Sheet, rill, and wind erosion can be estimated using several options. For more information on how EPIC simulates the various processes, see www.brc.tamus.edu/epic/documentation/.

As EPIC is a daily time step model, daily inputs are needed on every activity conducted in the production of a crop. Through experience in working with EPIC and the NRI to produce national level assessments related to resource issues, modelers have developed conventions and techniques for using the more generalized input data available from farmer surveys to realistically simulate material losses from farm fields.

Once the simulation model is constructed, it will be possible to simulate alternative programs to determine if environmental effects goals can be met more efficiently. For example, increased CRP signups may be necessary in some situations to meet water quality goals, while existing conservation plans are adequate in other areas. Proposed conservation programs can be simulated to determine how effective they might be in reducing material losses from farm fields. However, it is outside the scope of this study to simulate behavioral responses on how producers might respond to alternative levels of incentives—that is an economic aspect of program implementation. NRCS is focused on the environmental effects of conservation programs in CEAP.

- 3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.**

Data collection does not currently involve the use of electronic submission of responses or other information technology to reduce burden. This is an area survey; the sample unit is the field encompassing an NRI sample point displayed

on an aerial photograph. The field boundaries are identified during the interview. The survey will collect onsite farm-field level land management data unavailable through remote sensing observation alone; this information cannot be collected on the Web at this time.

Some operator identification information is being obtained from Farm Service Agency (FSA) geospatial data bases, using GIS technologies and coordinate data for the NRI sample sites. As FSA data bases become more available, this technology will be employed to a greater extent.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service cooperates with State departments of agriculture, land grant universities, and other State and Federal agencies to conduct surveys. Wherever possible, surveys meet both State and Federal needs, thus eliminating duplication and minimizing reporting burden on the agricultural industry.

The CEAP survey data are being collected primarily for NRCS. Survey data will be collected from operators of the field where the NRI sample point is located. A field will be identified that encompasses the NRI point. These points are linked to soil type and climate databases already in place. Field-level data for the selected fields containing the NRI points are not available from any other source. Some significant data required to evaluate environmental benefits can be obtained from the NRCS county offices, eliminating the need to collect these data elements from producers.

Data collected for integrated pest management practices will be used by NRCS, NASS, and Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) for the measurement of the benefits of integrated pest management, thus allowing three agencies to acquire the data needed to fulfill their missions with one collection.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities (Item 5 of OMB Form 83-1), describe any methods used to minimize burden.

This information collection will not have a significant economic impact on small entities.

6. Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

Congress and the Office of Management and Budget have indicated that the environmental impacts of conservation programs in the 2002 Farm Bill should be

measured consistently, quantitatively, and credibly for the life of the Farm Bill. It will not be possible to properly track this progress if survey data are not collected annually. Policy-makers and the general public need this information in order to make informed decisions about future conservation programs. Annual collections are necessary to collect sufficient information for the EPIC modeling process to assess environmental benefits. The final report is scheduled for completion in 2007.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with the general information guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5.

There are no special circumstances associated with this information collection.

8. Provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the agency's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8 (d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments.

The Notice soliciting comments was published in the Federal Register on March 21, 2005, on page 13446. One comment was received, which did not require a response. For copies of the notice and e-mailed comment see Attachment B.

Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and record-keeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

Plans for CEAP incorporate three types of peer review and comment: (1) a technical review of the analytical approach by scientists and modelers within and outside of government; (2) a comprehensive review of the analytical approach and results reported in the first annual report by a Science and Policy Advisory Panel consisting of recognized experts in the conservation community who are not directly involved with the project; and, (3) presentation of plans and findings at professional meetings.

In addition to this peer review process, oversight of the project is provided by two groups with interagency representation:

- CEAP Executive Steering Committee, consisting of leaders from NRCS; NASS; FSA; Agricultural Research Service; Economic Research Service; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES); Environmental Protection Agency; and United States Geological Survey; and,
- CEAP Steering Committee and Interagency Advisory Group, consisting of mid-level managers from the participating agencies.

The combination of peer review and oversight is designed to provide policy and technical guidance to those directly implementing CEAP and to assure the scientific credibility and public acceptance of national and watershed assessments of the environmental benefits of conservation practices. (This information collection request is only for the national assessment survey—the watershed assessment study will be handled by another agency.)

NASS conducted a pre-test of the instrument in three States in 2003 and used producer input in the redesign of the questionnaire.

Consultation on the questionnaire was provided by modelers from Texas A&M University and by pest management experts from North Carolina State University and CSREES. Statisticians at Iowa State University working on the NRI also participated in the sample design for CEAP.

FSA records are being utilized to obtain initial operator information, which increases efficiency and lowers burden on respondents.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents.

There are no payments or gifts to respondents.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

All questionnaires include a statement that individual reports are kept confidential. U.S. Code Title 18, Section 1905 and U.S. Code Title 7, Section 2276 (Attachment C) provide for the confidentiality of reported information. All employees of NASS and all enumerators hired and supervised under a cooperative agreement with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) must read the regulations and sign a statement of compliance. (Privacy Impact Statement is in Attachment D.)

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature.

There are no questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form and aggregate the hour burdens in Item 13 of OMB Form 83-I. Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories.

Response burden hours are shown in the table below. The projected response rate was based on the 2004 CEAP survey (see B.2).

Projected 2005 Response Burden Hours								
Conservation Effects Assessment Survey	Sample Size	Response			Non-response			Total Burden Hours
		Estimated Responses	Minutes/Response	Burden Hours	Estimated Count	Minutes/Non-res	Burden Hours	
Advance letter	7,489	7,489	4	499	---	---	---	499
Interview	7,489	5,617	70	6,553	1,872	2	62	6,615
Total	7,489	13,106						7,114

Cost to the public of completing the questionnaire is assumed to be comparable to the hourly rate of those requesting the data. Reporting time of 7,114 hours is multiplied by \$22 per hour for a total cost to the public of \$156,508.

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection of information.

There is no cost burden to respondents.

14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government; provide a description of the method used to estimate cost which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses, and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information.

Total estimated cost to Federal government is \$3,612,000. Cost estimate was calculated based on actual costs from surveys conducted in two prior years with adjustments for changes in this year's sample sizes, questionnaire interview time, and procedures. Actual costs for detailed cost categories such as Federal and NASDA salaries, data processing, printing, postage, promotion, travel, training, etc. were adjusted based on average cost unit, e.g., per hour or per sample. The per unit costs were adjusted for inflation. The adjusted per hour or per sample average cost factors were then applied to the 2005 sample sizes and estimated hours. The detailed cost estimates were summed to the total cost estimate.

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-I (reasons for changes in burden).

This is a reinstatement request, so there is no current inventory. The 7,114 hours of burden is a decrease from the previous 10,253 hours due to a smaller sample size for the 2005 CEAP because of reduced funding.

16. **For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.**

There will not be any publication directly from these surveys. Data will be combined with related databases and entered into transport and other physical models. This will be converted to a per acre estimate for regions, then the estimates will be combined with performance reporting data from NRCS to obtain a national estimate of the environmental benefit of conservation practices.

Survey design	Feb - Apr 2005	
Sample selection.....	Feb - Mar 2005	
Questionnaire design	Mar - Jul 2005	
Materials to field offices.....	Aug 2005	
Enumerator Training	Sep 2005	
Mail advance letter	Sep 2005	
Data Collection.....	Mid-Sep - Dec 2005	
Key-entry and edit.....	Oct - Dec 2005	
Analysis.....	Jan - Mar 2006	
Edited data to NRCS	Apr 2006	
Above Tasks repeated	Annual	NRCS Final Report 2007

17. **If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.**

There is no request for approval of non-display of the expiration date.

18. **Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19, “Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions” of OMB Form 83-I.**

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

1. **Describe (including a numerical estimate) the potential respondent universe and any sampling or other respondent selection method to be used. Data on the number of entities (e.g., establishments, State and local government units, households, or persons) in the universe covered by the collection and in the corresponding sample are to be provided in tabular form for the universe as a whole and for each of the strata in the proposed sample. Indicate expected response rates for the collection as a whole. If the collection has been conducted previously, include the actual response rate achieved during the last collection.**

The target population for the NRI-CEAP survey is all land in the 48 contiguous States which is classified by the NRI as “cultivated cropland” or “CRP land.” The sample sites are a sub-sample of the NRI Foundation Sample sites, as described below. The sampling frame can be considered to be all NRI Foundation Sample points classified as cultivated cropland or CRP land, or more basically, as all non-Federal land in the 48 contiguous States, since the NRI is an area sample.

The 2005 NRI-CEAP sample sites are a sub-sample the 2003 Annual NRI sample sites, which are in turn a sub-sample of the NRI Foundation Sample. These three steps are outlined below.

- (1) NRI Foundation Sample - This sample constitutes a two-stage area sample.
 - a. Stratification was developed county-by-county, utilizing the grid of townships and sections of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), where possible. A stratum consists of a 2-mile by 6-mile block of 12 sections. Similar strata were constructed for counties not covered by the PLSS. For some counties, these geographic strata were subdivided by factors such as irrigation and ownership patterns.
 - b. Two-stage area samples were selected within each stratum. The 1st-stage sample unit, or primary sampling unit (PSU), is an area/segment of land. Sampling rates varied across strata, typically being between 2% and 6%. Most PSU's correspond to PLSS quarter-sections and are nominally half-mile squares; some are as small as half-kilometer squares and others as large as a square mile. The NRI Foundation Sample contains 300,000 of these PSU's (segments).
 - c. At the 2nd stage of sampling, one or more sample points were selected within each sample PSU. Three sample points were selected within most PSU's. There are over 800,000 of these sample points in the NRI Foundation Sample. The NRI data base contains site specific information on soils, land cover/use, cropping patterns, and various natural resource issues for each point for 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1997.
- (2) 2003 Annual NRI Sample - The NRI Foundation Sample has been used to select four panels, or sub-samples, of NRI PSU's; we denote these as the Core Panel, the Supplemental Panel P01, the Supplemental Panel P02, and the Supplemental Panel P03. The Core Panel contains about 41,600 PSU's, and Panels P01, P02, and P03 each contain about 32,000 PSU's. The 2003 Annual NRI Sample consists of the Core Panel plus Supplemental Panel P03. The process to select PSU's for each panel was as follows:
 - a. Each PSU in the NRI Foundation Sample was placed into one of 12 categories based upon 1997 NRI information on land use, wetland, and erodibility characteristics of the sample units.
 - b. The Core Panel was selected first. Different sampling rates were assigned to the categories, and different sample sizes were assigned to each State. Selections were made randomly by category within State.

- c. Supplemental Panel P01 was selected by category within State from those PSU's not selected for the Core Panel.
 - d. Supplemental Panel P02 was then selected from those PSU's not selected for either the Core Panel or Panel P01.
 - e. Supplemental Panel P03 was then selected from those PSU's not selected for either the Core Panel, Panel P01, or Panel P02.
- (3) 2005 NRI-CEAP Sample - The 2003 Annual NRI sample contains 53,415 points classified in 2003 as either cultivated cropland or land in CRP. The 2005 NRI-CEAP sample was selected from the 2003 Annual NRI sample as follows:
- a. Any point in the Core Panel classified as land in CRP was included.
 - b. Based on reduced funding, the cultivated cropland points were selected as follows:
 - i. It was determined which PSU's in the Core Panel contained at least one point classified as cultivated cropland. For each of these PSU's, one point classified as cultivated cropland was selected randomly.
 - ii. Randomization techniques were utilized that eliminated all cropland points for 13 States: Connecticut; Florida; Maine; Massachusetts; Nevada; New Hampshire; New Mexico; North Dakota; Rhode Island; Vermont; West Virginia; Wisconsin; Wyoming.
 - iii. Randomization techniques were utilized that reduced the sample by two-thirds in five States: Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Missouri; Nebraska.
 - iv. Randomization techniques were utilized that reduced the sample by one-half in two States: South Dakota; Texas.
 - v. Randomization techniques were utilized that reduced the sample by one-third in four States: Kansas; Minnesota; North Carolina; Ohio.

A total of 11,382 sample locations have been selected for the 2005 NRI-CEAP survey to collect onsite farm-field level land management data unavailable through remote sensing observation alone. This includes 7,489 sample points previously classified as cultivated cropland and 3,893 sample points classified as land in CRP. As described earlier in A.12, personal interviews will be conducted for the 7,489 cropland samples; approximately 5,617 completed responses are expected from the current operators of the fields where the NRI points are located. Survey data for the 3,893 CRP sample locations will be obtained from administrative records rather than through personal interviews.

The CEAP response rates for 2003 and 2004 were 73.5% and 73.4%, respectively.

2. Describe the procedures for the collection of information including:

- **statistical methodology for stratification and sample selection,**
- **estimation procedure,**
- **degree of accuracy needed for the purpose described in the justification,**
- **unusual problems requiring specialized sampling procedures**

The sample is selected as described above.

An NRI sample point is used to identify a field in order to determine the land use and management; there are other protocols used to determine the natural/inherent factors, for example, soil type and erosion equation factors. The NRI utilizes points as 2nd stage sampling units for several reasons, including the fact that land use and land unit boundaries change frequently in certain parts of the country and, as mentioned above, certain inherent natural factors such as soils do not follow human defined boundaries such as land unit boundaries. The coordinates, latitude and longitude, of the sample points are known based upon digital ortho-photo quadrangle (DOQ) base maps and standards.

The temporal nature of desired results will be handled in several ways: (1) the CEAP survey collects site-specific data for several years and also includes historical NRI data; (2) conservation practices, other agricultural management systems, and acts of nature have long-term effects upon conservation and the environment--the process models that will be used to identify and quantify environmental effects produce results by year and season; and (3) the Annual NRI is utilizing a supplemented panel design, wherein each year's sample includes both a Core Panel (that is observed each year) and a supplemental (or rotating) panel which provides the flexibility to re-visit sample units over the course of this long-term study.

The CEAP surveys are designed to provide base-line agricultural management factors at the national level. These results will be used to determine future sampling needs with the goal of having sufficient data for regional analysis after several years of data collection and analysis. Because of the way that the Annual NRI samples are selected, very sophisticated statistical weighting and estimation procedures have been developed by Iowa State University Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology that allow data aggregation over several survey years.

Part 2 of the survey is the field work. An advance letter and brochure will be sent to the operator of the field associated with the NRI-CEAP sample site in September 2005. NASS field enumerators who will contact them in October will have both aerial photographs and county maps with the location of the sample site delineated and a questionnaire with the operator identified. The questionnaire contains sections that are similar to those used in other surveys to collect field-level chemical and fertilizer applications, production practices, and integrated pest management data; there are additional questions regarding conservation practices. The advance letter and brochure are Attachments E and F, the draft questionnaire is Attachment G, and the respondent booklet is Attachment H.

During Part 2 of the survey, information regarding producers and their conservation plans will be collected at NRCS offices. NRCS has complete plan histories and the data will be pulled from their records rather than being asked of producers.

Specifications for the data collection procedures are provided in further detail in NRCS's "Work Plan for the National Assessment Component of the Conservation Effects Assessment Project," Attachment J. This work plan covers the scope of the project, the national assessment, data collection, questionnaire, modeling, validation, calibration, and statistical analysis. It is currently in technical review and is expected to be finished by September 2005.

NASS State Statistical Office staff will receive training on the survey from Headquarters and NRCS. A survey administration manual will be provided to them detailing all aspects of the survey, especially the data collection and editing process. Field enumerators in each State will be given in-depth training and will be provided with an interviewer's manual.

Estimates of benefit of conservation practices and programs will be made by inputting survey data into process models. This will be converted to a per acre estimate for regions, then the estimates will be combined with performance reporting data from NRCS to obtain a national estimate of the environmental benefit of conservation practices.

- 3. Describe methods to maximize response rates and to deal with issues of non-response. The accuracy and reliability of information collected must be shown to be adequate for intended uses. For collections based on sampling a special justification must be provided for any collection that will not yield "reliable" data that can be generalized to the universe studied.**

NASS plans to send a letter (Attachment E) and brochure (Attachment F) to respondents prior to data collection to inform them of survey selection and to outline the benefits of the survey results. In addition, the color brochures will be available at USDA county offices and at agricultural fairs and seminars. Drop-in ads and radio scripts will be provided to the media and NASS State Statistical Offices.

NASS utilizes several data collection procedures to maximize response rates, including the rule that they make three attempts to contact the operator. Specialized training in refusal conversion has been given to enumerators; at the State training workshops, sessions are devoted to role playing for refusal conversion. Enumerators have been provided information about the value and use of the data being requested. NRCS personnel will be attending enumerator workshops to provide specific background and uses of the data and to address enumerator concerns.

Conservation plan data will be collected from NRCS offices for non-respondents so that some useable information about conservation plans will be available for all samples.

- 4. Describe any tests of procedures or methods to be undertaken.**

Procedures for identification of operators of selected NRI points were developed in conjunction with FSA county offices. The questionnaire was redesigned and pretested in 2004. Minor modifications to the 2005 questionnaire are based upon preliminary data review and evaluation of the survey by field enumerators and NASS State office personnel.

5. Provide the name and telephone number of individuals consulted on statistical aspects of the design and the name of the agency unit, contractor(s), or other person(s) who will actually collect and/or analyze the information for the agency.

Specifications, sample design, and survey design were developed by Bob Kellogg, NRCS, (301)504-2294 and Jeff Goebel, NRCS, (301)504-2341. These were reviewed by the NASS Survey Administration Branch, Census and Survey Division; Branch Chief is Doug Kleweno, (202)720-2248.

Data collection is carried out by NASS State Statistical Offices; Deputy Administrator for Field Operations is Joe Reilly, (202)720-8220.

The NASS survey statistician in Headquarters for this survey is Kathy Broussard, (202)720-3598 in the Environmental and Economic Surveys Section of the Survey Administration Branch, Census and Survey Division. She is responsible for coordination of sampling, questionnaires, data collection, data processing, and SSO support.

The NASS commodity statistician in Headquarters is Liana Cuffman, (202)690-0392 in the Environmental and Demographics Section of the Environmental, Economics, and Demographics Branch, Statistics Division. She is responsible for the analysis and delivery of the final edited data file to NRCS.

List of Attachments

- A - General Duties of Secretary U.S. Code Title 7, Section 2204(a)
- B - Published Federal Register Notice
- C - Citations for Confidentiality:
 - Food Security Act of 1985, U.S. Code Title 7, Section 2276
 - Disclosure of Information, U.S. Code Title 18, Section 1905
- D - Privacy Impact Assessment
- E - Advance letter
- F - Publicity Brochure
- G - CEAP Questionnaire
- H - Respondent Booklet
- I - NRCS article, “Measuring Environmental Benefits of Conservation Practices: The Conservation Effects Assessment Project”
- J - NRCS paper, “Work Plan for the National Assessment Component of the Conservation Effects Assessment Project”