

Districts do more than link NRCS with their neighbors and with local priorities for soil and water conservation. They support conservation work with district programs—often funded by county and state conservation agency



partners—and with their own technical and support staff.

**R**C&D councils are also locally organized. They receive technical and financial assistance from USDA, partnering with NRCS in cooperation with other USDA agencies. Local people create and organize their own RC&D areas, define and set their own goals, and work with a broad range of public and private entities to achieve their objectives. They work to improve their economy and the environment through the conservation, development, and sustainable use of their resources, both natural and human. RC&D projects provide practical solutions for community development, land conservation, environmental enhancement, and water management. RC&D councils in partnership

with USDA help make communities better places to live.

**E**arth Team volunteers work in NRCS offices and on agency and partnership projects. They work on the land and in conservation education programs in schools and communities across the Nation. In 2003, more than 43,000 volunteers contributed over one million hours of service. The Earth Team is an opportunity for Americans to share their commitment to service and land

stewardship.

NRCS partners with other USDA agencies on resource inventories and to coordinate research and programs, develop conservation technology, and provide information and outreach. NRCS also works closely with other Federal agencies on resource conservation issues.



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# AN INTRODUCTION

# THE NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



## THE NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the primary Federal agency that works with private landowners to help them protect their natural resources.



NRCS conservationists spend most of their time on America's working land—cropland, pasture, rangeland, and forest land—the predominant use of private land in this country. They work in close cooperation with conservation districts through field offices that serve nearly every county in the Nation as well as the Caribbean and Pacific Basin Areas.

The agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based conservation technical assistance; partnerships; incentive-based programs; and cooperative problem-solving at the community level.

## OUR PEOPLE

The strength of the Natural Resources Conservation Service is its workforce—some 11,200 as of 2003. Most NRCS employees work in USDA's network of local offices, including those in the Caribbean and the Pacific Basin Areas. The rest are at state, regional, and national offices, providing technology, policy, and administrative support.

NRCS's dedicated employees are:

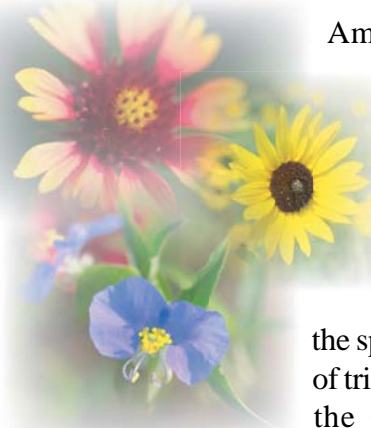
- ◆ Highly skilled in many scientific and technical specialties, including soil science, soil conservation, agronomy, biology, range conservation, forestry, engineering, geology, hydrology, wetland science, cultural resources, and economics, to name a few.
- ◆ Committed to customer service—helping landowners and managers conserve resources.
- ◆ Committed to diversity—gender, race, physical ability, culture, ethnicity, and the mix of new ideas that flow from such richness.

## OUR CLIENTS

We serve all people who live and work on the land. The majority of our

technical assistance is to help farmers and ranchers develop conservation systems uniquely suited to their land and individual needs

Rural and urban communities seek our help in curbing erosion, conserving and protecting water, enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, and solving other resource problems. Local, state, and Federal agencies, policymakers, and special-use districts also rely on NRCS expertise.



American Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, and other native groups work with NRCS on a variety of initiatives that include resource inventories and the adaptation of our conservation programs to fit the special needs of their people and of tribal lands. And countries around the globe seek NRCS technical advice in building their own conservation delivery systems and in coping with severe natural resource problems.

## OUR PARTNERS

Conservation is the work of many—no one can do it alone. The Natural Resources Conservation Service relies on many partners to help set conservation goals, work with people on the land, and provide services. Our partners are from both

the public and private sector and include conservation districts; resource conservation and development (RC&D) councils; local communities; state and Federal agencies; NRCS Earth Team volunteers; agricultural, conservation, and environmental groups; agribusiness; and professional societies.

America's conservation districts—about 3,000 in all—are the heart of the conservation delivery system and serve as the “bridge of trust” between NRCS and the private landowner. These units of local government, organized by citizens under state law, operate on the premise that local people know the most about local needs. NRCS and districts are bound together by mutual conservation objectives as well as by legislation and formal agreements between state governors and the Secretary of Agriculture.

