



Department of Agriculture

**Natural Resources Conservation  
Service (NRCS)**

2020 Action Plan

Federal Customer Experience

**US** BY THE PEOPLE  
FOR THE PEOPLE  
WITH THE PEOPLE

# Who are we?

In an effort to address the needs for America's farmers, ranchers, foresters, local communities and employees alike, we have developed the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the Future. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the Future goal is to integrate agency priorities with current and ongoing agency improvement projects.

This collaborative, grass-roots approach emanates from the State and field office ideas and is guided by National Leadership to improve the following:

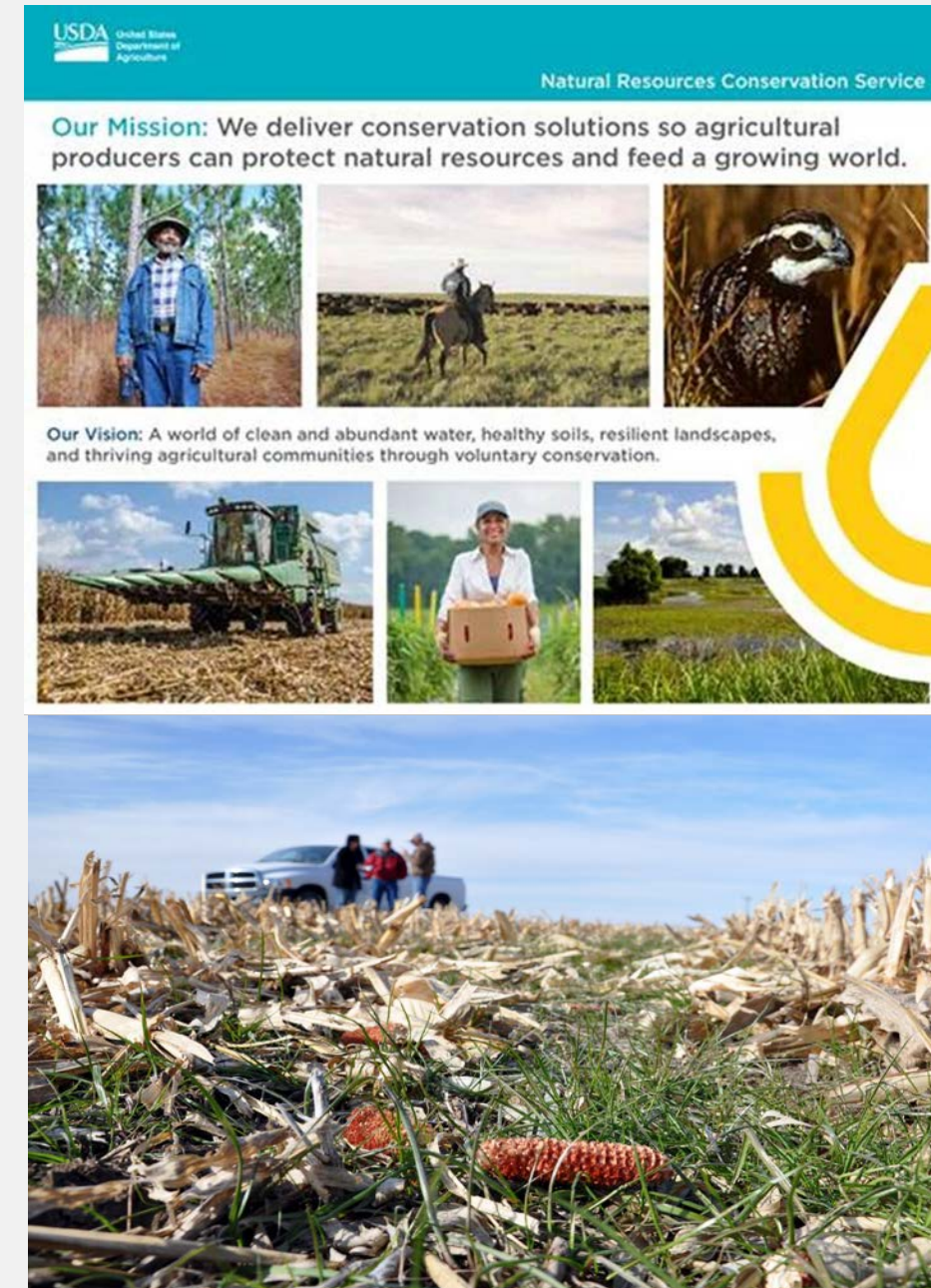
**PEOPLE** - Invest in making sure we have people in place that are well prepared to fulfill our mission, and the changing environment our customers are operating in, now and in the future.

**PROGRAMS** - Improve program delivery and services.

**POLICY AND PROCESS** - Streamline internal policies and processes and provide innovative technical assistance and guidance.

**PARTNERS** - Harness the power of partnership and shareholders.

**PHILOSOPHY** – Being responsive and prepared to address future changes in agriculture and conservation.



USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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

**Our Vision:** A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.

The banner features several images: a farmer in a blue jacket and hat standing in a field; a person riding a horse in a grassy field; a close-up of a bird; a green combine harvester in a field; a woman holding a cardboard box; a woman in a white shirt standing in a field; and a large image of a cornfield with a white pickup truck and people in the background.

# How do we deliver value to the public?

## Occasion

A beginning farmer contacts the NRCS Field office for information and assistance with improving their operation. The farmer is a new livestock producer and has contacted the field office to develop a rotational grazing plan for their operation.

A farmer comes to the office to request an onsite assessment for soil suitability and soil quality for their operation. The NRCS field office helps to download the Web Soil Survey application on his/her phone to review the requested information.

The farmer has identified a concern on their farm. Increased rainfall has caused an increase in erosion of his/her fields. Gullies threaten crop production. NRCS develops the conservation plan and the producer is now ready to move forward with conservation practice implementation using financial and technical assistance.

## High-Impact Service

Conservation Technical Assistance and Inventory of Land Resources - The Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA) provides land users with proven conservation technology and the delivery system needed to achieve the benefits of a healthy and productive landscape.

Survey and Assessments - Web Soil Survey (WSS) provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. It is operated by the NRCS and provides access to the largest natural resource information system in the world. NRCS has soil maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation's counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site is updated and maintained online as the single authoritative source of soil survey information. Web Soil Survey is the most commonly used website within NRCS where the public are able to review data.

Financial Assistance - The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits. The examples of the benefits are: improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against increasing weather volatility.

## Offering or Objective

The primary purposes of CTA are to: reduce soil loss from erosion; improve air, soil and water quality; conserve water; address agricultural waste management issues; reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought; enhance the quality of fish and wildlife habitat; and improve the long term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, and coastal lands.

Soil surveys can be used for site-specific and areawide planning. Onsite investigation is needed in some cases. Soil quality assessments and certain conservation and engineering applications may occur. The data will provide real time information for soil type, tolerance, use, impacts and capacity. The information is used by farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, universities and the general public.

This voluntary conservation program helps producers make conservation work for them. Together, NRCS and producers invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations. Through EQIP, NRCS provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices. Using these practices can create environmental benefits that extend well beyond the farm while improving agricultural operations.

# Where could we improve?

## Steps

### Customer Steps

Name and describe the main steps that a person takes to use the service, left to right, start to finish.

### Service System

Describe the channels, roles, and tools from your agency or partners.

### Pain Points

Describe the highest priority problems to solve

	1: Before interacting with service	2: During main interaction	3: Secondary service interaction
<b>Customer Steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The producer identifies concerns for their operation.</li> <li>The producer contacts the Field Office for initial consultation.</li> <li>The producer works with NRCS personnel to complete a resource assessment for their operation.</li> <li>The producer works with NRCS personnel to develop a conservation plan for their operation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The producer will use the conservation plan to make decisions for practice implementation.</li> <li>The producer decides to request financial assistance; they will complete an application and all necessary supporting documents.</li> <li>The producer is selected for financial assistance.</li> <li>Once under contract, the producer will complete all conservation practices based on practice standards and specifications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The producer will implement the conservation practices based on the schedule of operations.</li> <li>The producer will contact the office requesting payment for implemented practices.</li> <li>The producer will work with the NRCS personnel for onsite verification for completed practices.</li> <li>The producer will work with NRCS personnel for annual operation and maintenance requirements.</li> <li>Producers who were not selected for funding who opt to implement practices without NRCS funding may request assistance with practice implementation</li> </ul>
<b>Service System</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NRCS personnel will work with the producer for their operation.</li> <li>NRCS personnel will complete a site visit and resource inventory in preparation for the producer meeting.</li> <li>NRCS personnel will work with the producer on the farm to capture all needs identified during the assessment.</li> <li>NRCS personnel works with the producer to develop the conservation plan and alternatives for the operation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NRCS personnel takes the conservation plan and works to complete program application and ranking requirements.</li> <li>NRCS personnel ranks all applications and will select the approved applications based on priority ranking criteria.</li> <li>NRCS personnel will issue notifications for selected and or deferred applications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The NRCS personnel works with selected producers to implement conservation practices.</li> <li>NRCS will receive a payment notification request from the producer and will complete practice certification and payment submittal.</li> <li>NRCS will conduct annual practice spot checks for all active contracts and engage with the participant to assess the conservation practice and system delivery. (follow-up/feedback)</li> </ul>
<b>Pain Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NRCS staff available at the time of producer need</li> <li>Temporary Acting Personnel with minimal knowledge of local conditions.</li> <li>New/untrained staff</li> <li>New customers will need to establish records and determine eligibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weather delays for practice implementation</li> <li>Market prices impacting practice implementation.</li> <li>Complex program evaluation and ranking criteria.</li> <li>Multiple levels of reviews for contract ranking and funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple level reviews for payment certification.</li> <li>Follow-up requirements for producers non-compliance.</li> </ul>



# What will we do?

## Purpose

*Why did your agency undertake this project?  
What does it hope to achieve, in specific performance indicators, if possible.*

*What is the problem?*

Repetitive information requests combined with the lack of business tools connectivity has created anxiety within the Agency.

*Desired future state?*

Reduce repetitive requests for information where streamlining of current program policy is completed to increase workload efficiencies. Improve the internal processes for programmatic decisions to increase program efficiency and quality assurance with the certainty our customers deserve and expect.

*Any measurable indicators and targets?*

A decrease in time from program application to contractual funding.

A decrease in the number of applications per producer.

## Approach

*Describe the timeline and work plan to achieve that purpose. If this is an ongoing initiative, describe your progress.*

*Process, methods, and expertise?*

The Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) is a program-neutral, efficient conservation planning and application evaluation tool to facilitate conservation delivery. The new tool is intended to help producers and conservation staff establish and maintain an ongoing discussion about how to achieve producer land and water stewardship goals. It will modernize and streamline NRCS' conservation planning and program delivery, reduce workload on field staff, and improves the customer experience by creating an efficient conservation planning and application evaluation process. We have 23 field users testing CART workflows. The team has supported four releases which have been pushed to the field offices with two more releases planned through the end of the year. These users provide input and feedback to continue to make the tools more efficient and effective planning tools. Through these efforts the following has been achieved:

- 4786 field users are using CART
- 92,3976 assessments have been completed
- 72,343,225 million acres have been assessed to date which is 216% of the average acres planned per FY
- 112,540 rankings have been completed (one assessment can be ranked for multiple applicable ranking pools)

## Resources

*Describe the stakeholders involved, financial and human capital dedicated to the work, and any partners contributing to the work.*

*Who is responsible?*

NRCS Chief and Agency Senior Leaders.

*Who is contributing to the project?*

N/A

*Optional: estimated budget allocated to the work?*

N/A

# What are we proud of this year?

## Service Improvement

*Who is the user and what was the problem? If you have baseline statistics, include (ex. "34% of users dropped off on this page, or "call volume on this made up 20% of our calls)*

We developed a series of short videos describing common conservation practices for producers that could be shared through social media channels where many of our customers engage with our organization.

The project was born from a deliverable suggested by the NRCS of the Future effort (Deliverable #39), which called for a video for every conservation practice, and an idea from the farmers.gov team, which requested videos about conservation practices for the website.

The series is called *Conservation at Work*, [hosted on YouTube](#) and *farmers.gov* to staff and producers. Phase one of the series is comprised of 27 videos, including [an intro](#) to the series. Videos are on a variety of topics ranging from Aquatic Organism Passage, to Brush management, to Conservation Crop Rotation.