



Fact Sheet:



Natural Resources and the Environment

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Blueprint for Stronger Service is key to building a modern and efficient service organization that is closely in tune with the long-term vitality of rural America and the success of American agriculture. The plan takes a realistic view of the needs of American agriculture in a challenging budget climate, and lays out USDA's plans to modernize and accelerate service delivery while improving the customer experience through use of innovative technologies and business solutions. Ultimately, these improvements will help producers and businesses continue to drive America's economy and respond to 21st century agricultural challenges.

USDA is proud of our work and partnership with America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities. Today, American agriculture is a bright spot in the nation's economy, with record income and exports. Over three years as USDA has made record investments in rural America, unemployment in rural America has fallen faster than in other parts of the country. During that same time, USDA has also looked closely at the way it does business. A Blueprint for Stronger Service helps to preserve this success and the USDA investments that helped to make them possible in the long term.

Over the past three years, USDA's Natural Resources and the Environment (NRE) Mission Area has worked hard to do more with less. To manage current and future budget challenges, and to ensure critical investments in rural America continue, NRE took a variety of steps to cut costs and improve services, including:

- Cut travel, printing, and supplies budgets;
- Since 2002, NRE has reduced its staff years 1,445;
- Increased staff efficiency by 40 percent in installing conservation practices between 2003 and 2011, as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided technical assistance to twice as many farmers and ranchers in 2011 than 2005;
- NRCS implemented a streamlining effort in 2009 to reduce duplicative efforts and improve consistency of database information, enabling field staff to spend more time with clients, saving time and money for the agency and its customers; and
- In 2011, the U.S. Forest Service saved \$79 million through negotiation, reverse auction, changes in contract type, and decisions to discontinue some services and supplies. In 2010, in an effort to create new public-private partnerships and encourage volunteerism on public lands, Forest Service entered into more than 8,000 grants and agreements with partners who contributed about 40 percent toward the value of the projects.

A Blueprint for Stronger Service details a list of recommendations: 133 recommendations affirm processes already in place, 27 serve as initial improvements, and others are aimed at longer-term improvements. The initial improvement recommendations include the following:

- Consolidate more than 700 cell phone plans into about 10;
- Standardize civil rights training and purchases of cyber security products;
- Ensure more efficient and effective service to our employees by moving toward more centralized civil rights, human resource, procurement, and property management functions, creating millions of

dollars in efficiencies without sacrificing the quality of our work.

Budget reductions, staff attrition and increased workload also necessitated a review of USDA facilities, offices and lab operations across the country. As part of the Blueprint for Stronger Service, NRE plans:

- To close 24 NRCS soil survey offices in 21 states; more than 2,800 NRCS offices remain throughout the United States. In many cases, improved technology has reduced the need for these brick and mortar facilities.

The list below details the states and corresponding cities and counties where NRCS offices will be closed.

1. Alaska: Palmer, Mantanuska-Susitna County
2. Arkansas: Little Rock, Pulaski County
3. California: Carson, Los Angeles County
4. Idaho: Boise, Adam County
5. Indiana: Plymouth, Marshall County
6. Iowa: Fairfield, Jefferson County
7. Kansas: Salina, Saline County
8. Kentucky: Frankfort, Franklin County; Lexington, Fayette County;
9. Louisiana: Opelousas, St. Landry County
10. Maine: Presque Isle, Aroostook County
11. Michigan: Marquette, Marquette County
12. Missouri: Dexter, Stoddard County
13. Nebraska: Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff County
14. Nevada: Ely, White Pine County; Reno, Washoe County
15. New York: Binghamton, Broome County
16. North Dakota: Bismarck, Burleigh County
17. Pennsylvania: Mercer, Mercer County
18. South Carolina: Bishopville, Lee County
19. Virginia: Richmond, Richmond City; Roanoke, Roanoke City
20. Washington: Spokane Valley, Spokane County
21. West Virginia: Huntington, Cabell County

As we move forward, USDA will continue to find ways to modernize its services, improve the customer experience, and ensure a successful, sustainable future for rural America.