

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

FY 1999 ANNUAL PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935 (P.L.74-46) established the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Pursuant to Public Law 103-354, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Reorganization Act of 1994, (7 U.S.C. 6962), SCS became NRCS. The mission of NRCS is to provide national leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain the Nation's natural resources and environment.

NRCS Programs

Conservation Operations

The four programs in the Conservation Operations account are the basic activities that support all NRCS programs and activities. **Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)** provides the infrastructure through which NRCS is able to respond to the multitude of conservation needs across the Nation. Through CTA, NRCS provides assistance to conservation districts, develops technical standards and technical guides, conducts resources inventories, and provides assistance to individuals to plan and manage their natural resources. This basic assistance includes assessing natural resource conditions and issues and explaining the USDA programs that are available to address them. This technical assistance helps land users to assess conservation needs, consider alternative courses of action, set goals, and develop conservation plans. CTA also provides assistance in implementing these plans and follow-up assistance to maintain the conservation system and revise it when the operator's situation changes. As a reimbursable activity under CTA, NRCS provides technical assistance to resource managers participating in programs administered by the Farm Service Agency. The **Soil Survey** and the **Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting** programs develop and disseminate basic information on soil resources and seasonal water supplies and provide recommendations for managing these resources. The **Plant Materials** program develops conservation systems using plant materials.

Water Resources Programs

NRCS programs that focus on water resources include **Watershed Surveys and Planning, Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations, and Emergency Watershed Protection**. Water resources activities focus on restoring the health of watersheds through a comprehensive planning approach. These programs assist communities to protect watersheds from damage caused by erosion, floodwater, and sediment, and to conserve and develop water and land resources. Resource concerns addressed include water quality, opportunities for water conservation, wetland and water storage capacity, agricultural drought problems, rural development, municipal and industrial water needs, upstream flood damages, and water needs for fish, wildlife, and forest-based industries. Planning involves assisting local sponsoring organizations to develop plans for small watersheds (not larger than 250,000 acres). Surveys include river basin studies and floodplain management studies. Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations provides technical and financial assistance to local sponsors to install watershed improvement measures. Measures may include land treatment, structural, and non-structural measures. Emergency Watershed Protection provides immediate assistance to reduce threats to life and property in watersheds damaged by severe natural events such as floods, hurricanes, or droughts, and to restore damaged sites to pre-disaster conditions.

Resource Conservation and Development

The Resource Conservation and Development Program provides technical assistance to improve the capability of state and local units of government and local nonprofit organizations to plan, develop, and carry out programs for resource conservation and development.

Financial Assistance Programs (Farm Bill Programs)

Since passage of the 1996 Act, the Secretary of Agriculture has assigned to NRCS the responsibility for administering a number of programs that provide both financial and technical assistance. These include three programs that are primarily single purpose: **Wetlands Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat**

Incentives Program, and Farmland Protection Program. The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** provides technical, financial, and educational assistance to address priority natural resource concerns identified at the local level. NRCS helps participants plan and apply conservation to the land.

More information on NRCS programs can be found in the NRCS Performance Plan.

Only federal employees were involved in the preparation of this performance report.

The following table provides summary information on NRCS's achievement of FY 1999 performance goals.

NRCS PERFORMANCE SUMMARY			
Strategic Goal/ Management Initiative	FY 1999 Performance Goals and Indicators	Estimated Performance	
		Target	Actual
Goal 1: A healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, sustains functioning watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes	Assist producers to plan and apply systems to protect and enhance cropland and grazing lands Resource management systems applied on cropland, 1000 acres	6,000	8,680
	Cropland protected against excessive erosion, 1000 acres	4,000	5,320
	Resource management systems applied on grazing land, 1000 acres	5,800	7,900
	Assist producers to plan and apply systems to protect water against agricultural nonpoint sources of pollution Nutrient management systems applied, 1000 acres	1,100	2,700
	Waste management systems installed, number	9,600	6,170
	Conservation buffers for water quality and wildlife, miles	50,000	73,400
	Assist local sponsors to plan and apply systems to protect watersheds against flood damages Annual flood prevention benefits, 1000 dollars	700,000	914,000
	Assist resource managers to plan and apply systems to protect or enhance wetlands Wetland creation or restoration applied, 1000 acres	230	270
	Assist resource managers to plan and apply systems to protect or enhance habitat for wildlife Wetland habitat management applied, 1000 acres	440	390
	Assist resource managers to enhance forestland health and productivity Forest stand improvement applied (Forestry Incentives Program) (1000 acres)	24.5	20.0
Tree and shrub establishment (Forestry Incentives Program) (1000 acres)	209	82	
Goal 2: Individuals and their neighbors working together as effective and willing stewards of the natural resources on their property and in their communities	Assist people living in communities to describe the conditions of the land and develop plans to address their resource concerns. New locally led action plans developed (Environmental Quality Incentives Program)	200	409

Strategic Goal/ Management Initiative	FY 1999 Performance Goals and Indicators	Performance	
		Target	Actual
Management Initiative 1: Provide high quality customer service	Treat all customers fairly and equitably NRCS offices reporting parity in resource assistance and in financial assistance Minority clients receiving assistance, number	/1 30,000	54,800
	Provide high quality service tailored to customers' needs Customer satisfaction, percentage Program Delivery Service Quality Customers receiving planning and application assistance, number Customers receiving education and information assistance, number Tribes assisted, number	/1 750,000 400,000 100	91% 92% 630,600 397,000 8,348 instances of assistance
Management Initiative 2: Improve quality and usefulness of NRCS information	Make available current soils data in a form that can be used as the foundation for integrated resources assessments for areas that range in scale from a single farm to the Nation Non-Federal lands with soil survey available in digital form, number of surveys Customers accessing or downloading soils data -- STATSGO Downloads/CD Orders SSURGO Downloads/CD Orders	350 1,000 2,000	366 1,212 1,399
	Provide accurate and timely information on water supply for western water resources managers Water supply forecasts issued Water users and managers utilizing information developed by the snow survey and water supply forecasting program, number Water users fully satisfied with usefulness of snow survey and water supply forecasting program information, percent	6,335 15,000 95	6,835 43,800 98
	Develop and transfer plant science technology to help solve natural resource problems New plant releases Customers accessing or downloading plant science information (PLANTS database) Hits on Web Site, million Website users	12 12 400,000	22 20 720,000

/1 A FY 1999 performance goal was not formally established, due to the lack of information for establishing a sound baseline and insufficient measurement data during the transition year to NRCS's new performance measurement system. See the section, Description of Actions and Schedules, for Management Initiative 1 for planned actions.

FY 1999 Transition to the NRCS Performance and Results Measurement System

Fiscal Year 1999 was a transition to an entirely new accountability system for NRCS. One core component of this effort was the development and pilot testing of a new system for measuring agency accomplishments. This system, the Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS), was designed to specifically meet the needs of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 and to ensure that accurate, consistent, and timely performance data will be available to NRCS leaders, managers, partners, and others in the future. This web-based reporting system was implemented on Oct. 1, 1998, at 287 sample counties, statistically selected to represent NRCS's national performance during this FY 1999 transition year. Although data entry for the remainder of counties was phased in during the year, the FY 1999 performance from PRMS described in this Performance Report is based on a statistical expansion of the data from the sample sites. Data from independent sources, e.g. Census of Agriculture, was used to develop expansion factors. The sample size was adequate to produce reliable results at the national level for the combined actions of all agency programs. Because some sample offices experienced telecommunications problems during the transition period, the estimate may actually under-represent performance in some areas, although quantifying this potential gap is not possible at this time. With full implementation in FY 2000, a significant feature of this new system will be the improvement of data quality. Although extensive data quality checks and verification of the FY 1999 sample data and expansion process have been undertaken, this effort still underway. A formal report on data quality assurance and data expansion for the FY 1999 PRMS sample data will be prepared. Additional information on data quality is included in the Revised FY 2000 and FY 2001 Performance Plan.

Goal 1: A healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, sustains functioning watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Healthy and productive cropland sustaining U.S. agriculture and the environment.
- 1.2 Healthy and productive grazing land sustaining U.S. agriculture and the environment.

Key Performance Goal

Assist producers to plan and apply systems to protect and enhance cropland and grazing lands

Resource management systems applied on cropland:

Target: 6,000,000 acres

Actual: 8,680,000 acres

Cropland protected against excessive erosion:

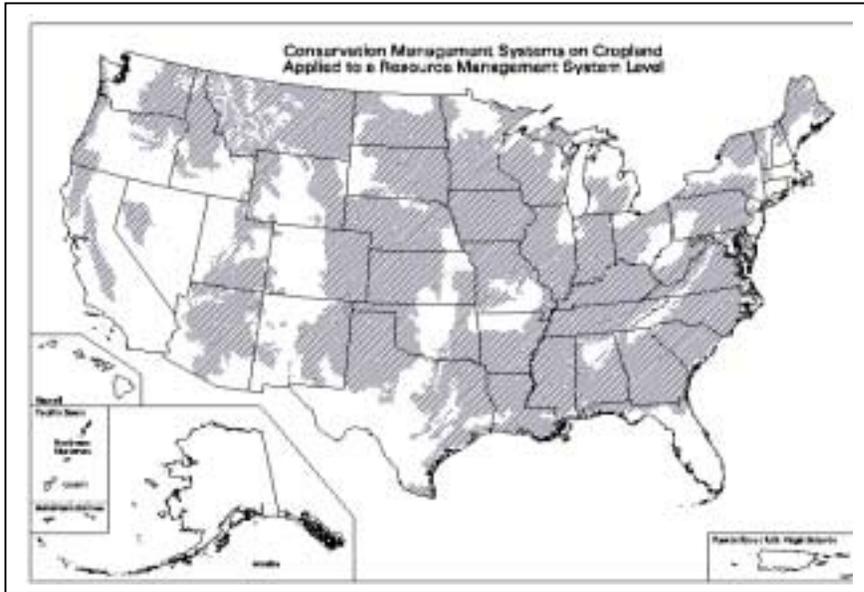
Target: 4,000,000 acres

Actual: 5,320,000 acres

Resource management systems applied on grazing land:

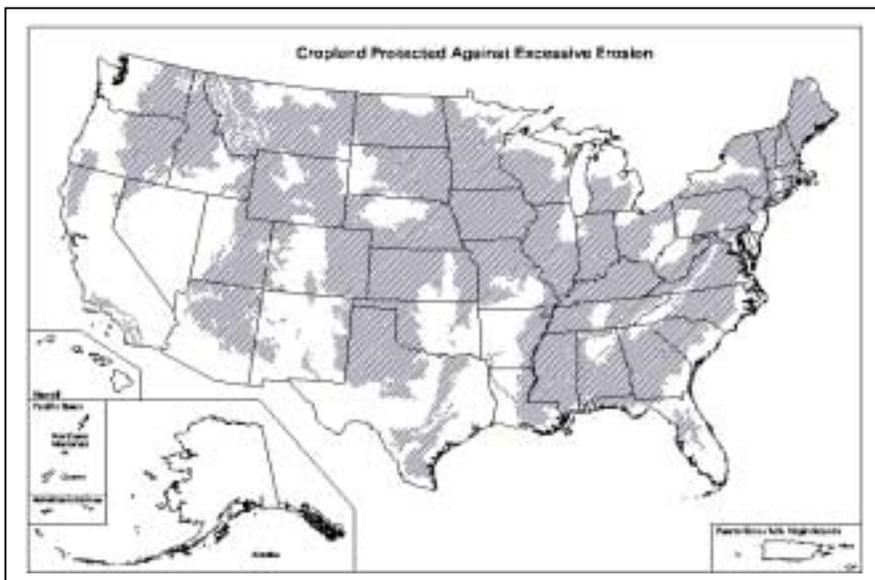
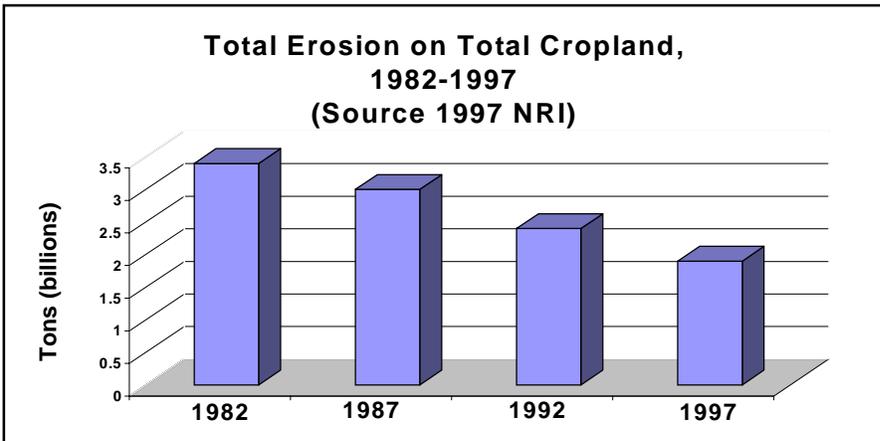
Target: 5,800,000 acres

Actual: 7,900,000 acres

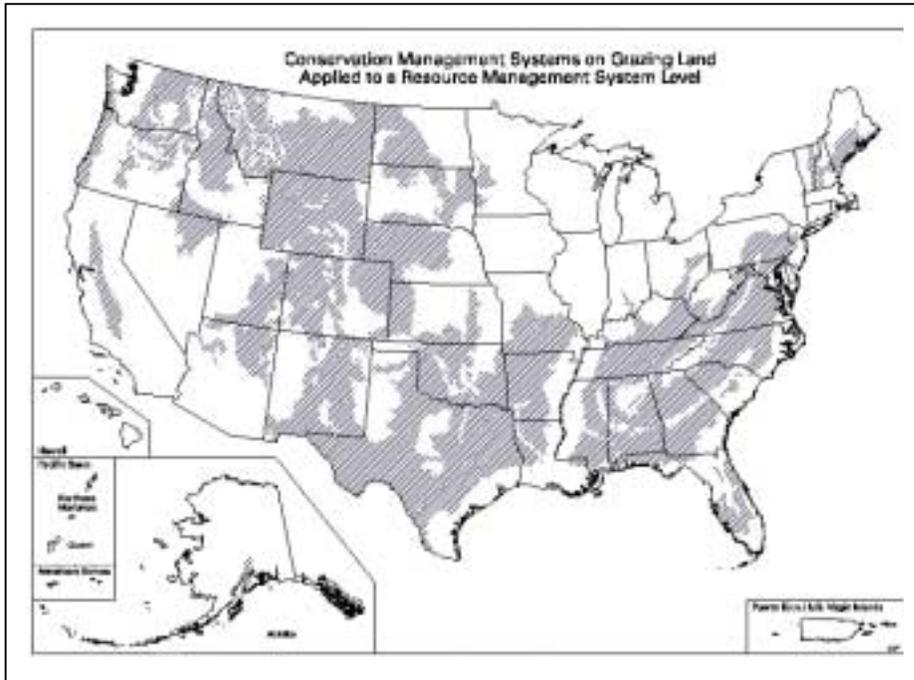


Shaded areas represent 134 Major Land Resource Areas (MLRA) applying 5000 or more acres of Conservation Management Systems to a Resource Management System level on Cropland.

An MLRA is a geographic area that is characterized by a particular pattern of soils, climate, water resources, land uses, and type of farming.



Shaded areas represent 108 Major Land Resource Areas (MLRA) applying 1000 or more acres of Cropland Protected Against Excessive Erosion.



Shaded areas represent 97 Major Land Resource Areas (MLRA) applying 5000 or more acres of Conservation Management Systems to a Resource Management System level on Grazing Land.

An MLRA is a geographic area that is characterized by a particular pattern of soils, climate, water resources, land uses, and type of farming.

1999 Data: The data for these goals were collected through the Agency's new Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS). See the previous section, FY 1999 Transition to the NRCS Performance and Results Measurement System.

Analysis of Results: Actual performance was exceeded for each of the performance indicators, therefore; the performance goal for conservation planning and application was met.

Resource management systems applied on cropland and grazing land: The sample data from PRMS indicate that the targets for the application of resource management systems on both cropland and grazing land were exceeded. Determining reasons for a somewhat higher than projected level of performance is difficult with the limited data available in this transition year. For resource management systems applied to cropland, the most likely explanation is that the performance goal was set too low. The 1996 Farm Bill made significant changes in USDA conservation programs on cropland, resulting in changes in the type and level of assistance available, and consequently, changes in the systems and practices that operators chose to adopt. When FY 1999 goals were finalized, no baseline information for the performance of those new programs existed. In the absence of solid data, performance planners relied on experience from the 1985 Farm Bill compliance provision, which did not require treatment to the resource management system level. In addition, planners may have underestimated the role of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Although the sample data are not a reliable basis for comparison of accomplishments under individual programs, they do suggest that a substantial part of the cropland acres reported for resource management systems are associated with the CRP.

Similarly for grazing land, performance planners may have underestimated the degree to which the progress on grazing lands would be accelerated by the focus of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) on livestock operations. In addition to the EQIP activity, NRCS had been conducting training and other internal efforts to strengthen its capacity to provide assistance on grazing lands under its CTA program. It is possible these efforts are producing results faster than agency managers anticipated are.

Cropland protected against excessive erosion: This measure tracks cultivated and non cultivated cropland that has erosion at twice the tolerable rate (2T) prior to application of conservation treatment and

erosion rates of "T" (tolerable) or less after treatment. Our data indicates that we exceeded the target by more than 25 percent. This is probably at least partly due to targeting of EQIP financial assistance to geographic priority areas having significant erosion problems. Overall, erosion control measures were applied on 9.2 million acres of cropland. However, as noted, only land with the most severe erosion rates is accounted for in the performance measure.

Although no inventory data are available for FY 1999, the National Resources Inventories (NRI) conducted in 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1997 indicate that major progress was made between 1982 and 1997 in reducing the acres of cropland eroding at excessive rates, especially on highly erodible land. Between 1982 and 1997, total erosion from the Nation's cropland was reduced from 3.1 billion tons per year to 1.9 billion tons per year. The 1997 NRI also shows that erosion rates are increasing on some cropland acres, reducing the "net" change in excessively eroding cropland acres. While this seems to corroborate the high level of 1999 performance reported through PRMS, specialized annual inventories during 1995-1997 also indicate that the rate of progress slowed after 1995.

Description of Actions and Schedules: *Cropland protected against excessive erosion.* Further analysis of the transition year data is being conducted to ensure that the data accurately reflects national accomplishments. Additional data quality checks are being implemented in FY 2000 to ensure that data for this measure are correctly calculated and accurately entered in the new reporting system.

All NRCS State level FY 2000 Performance Plans will have a specific goal for each of these performance measures and their FY 2000 Business Plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: Conservation measures are not applied at a uniform rate throughout the year. For example, vegetative practices can be installed only during the growing season, which varies by latitude and year. Practices requiring concrete structures can be installed only in certain temperature ranges. The installation of cropland conservation practices is generally scheduled to avoid the farmer's busy planting and harvesting periods. Several years of PRMS data collection are required to establish expected progress curves for each measure and each region. With that baseline established, managers will be able monitor progress toward goals and take corrective action as appropriate.

The 1995 -1997 trends from the NRI suggest that, at the current rate of investment in erosion control, NRCS may not reach the ambitious strategic erosion goals for FY 2002 in our strategic plan. The share of NRCS resources devoted to erosion will likely decrease in the next few years rather than increase as the demand increases for assistance on other environmental problems.

Program Evaluations: None were completed in FY 1999.

Goal 1: A healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, sustains functioning watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes.

Objective:

1.3 Healthy watersheds providing clean and abundant water supplies for people and the environment.

Key Performance Goals

Assist producers to plan and apply systems to protect water against agricultural nonpoint sources of pollution

Nutrient management systems applied:

Target: 1,100,000 acres

Actual: 2,700,000 acres

Waste management systems installed:

Target: 9,600

Actual: 6,170

Conservation buffers for water quality and wildlife:

Target: 50,000 miles

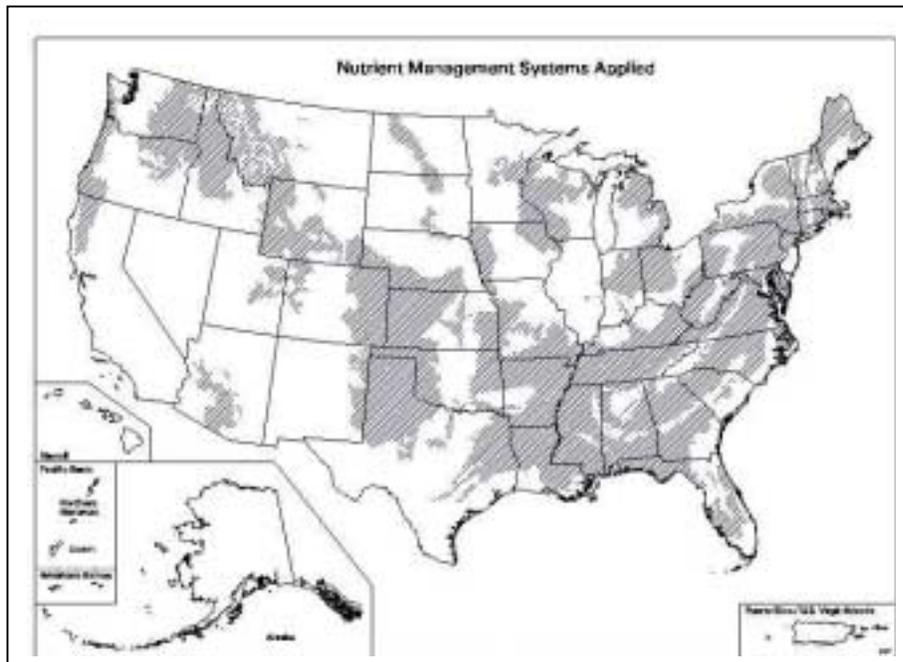
Actual: 73,400 miles

Assist local sponsors to plan and apply systems to protect watersheds against flood damages

Annual flood prevention benefits:

Target: \$ 700,000,000

Actual: \$912,000,000



Shaded areas represent 100 Major Land Resource Areas (MLRA) applying 8000 or more acres of Conservation Management Systems to a Resource Management System level.

An MLRA is a geographic area that is characterized by a particular pattern of soils, climate, water resources, land uses, and type of farming.

1999 Data: The data for three of these indicators were collected through the Agency's new Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS). See the previous section, FY 1999 Transition to the NRCS Performance and Results Measurement System.

The data on flood prevention benefits are reported through a separate, existing system. Data are reported for all projects at the NRCS state office level and were updated during October through November 1999. To compute benefits, the watersheds benefits database relates completed PL 83-566 watershed project measures to actual rainfall events.

Analysis of Results: Although the actual amount of animal waste management systems fell short of the target by approximately one-third, the other targets were greatly exceeded and, therefore, the goal of reducing agricultural nonpoint pollution is considered satisfied. The watershed protection performance goal was also met.

Nutrient management systems: The performance target initially set for nutrient management included only the systems associated with animal agriculture. During the transition year of PRMS, the data element for nutrient management systems did not distinguish between animal and non-animal operations. Performance reported in PRMS is for all types of operations and includes both chemical fertilizers and manure. See "Description of Actions and Schedules" below for an explanation of changes in the reporting item that have been implemented for FY 2000.

Waste management systems. The stated target for animal waste management systems installed was not met, as reported through PRMS. Because FY 99 is the transitional year to the new reporting system, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the difference represents a performance gap or a data collection gap. There are two possible causes of a data collection gap for animal waste management reporting. First, because waste systems are completed in much smaller numbers than most other measures, and because their distribution is highly localized geographically, the sampling methodology, which worked well for most measures, may have resulted in an underestimation for this practice. Second, the conservation partners at the field level, who contribute significantly to this measure, were not fully engaged in performance reporting in FY 1999 due to telecommunications problems experienced at the field service centers. The performance gap is very close to the performance expected from partners as estimated by the Partnership Workload Analysis. There are also two possible causes for an actual performance gap for this measure. First, animal waste management systems are complex and typically take multiple years to complete, resulting in a lag between new planning actions with associated goals, and completed systems. Second, it is possible that weakness in the farm economy reduced producers' ability to implement systems. Waste management systems require a significant investment; undoubtedly many operators chose to defer actions that they would have taken had the prices for their products been higher. During the past 3 years agricultural exports dropped from nearly \$60 billion to less than \$50 billion. Major commodity prices have fallen in each of the past 3 years and are now at 10-year lows. Real farm income is about 15 percent below its 1990 level. The most dramatic fall in prices has occurred in the hog industry, where the need for waste management systems is great.

Conservation buffers. The FY 1999 performance plan noted that the target was based on estimates of acres enrolled in buffer practices under the Conservation Reserve Program continuous signup and did not represent a comprehensive goal for buffer accomplishments. Although buffers are installed under several other NRCS programs, accurate data for those other programs were not available for FY 1998 to serve as a baseline for the goal. The "actual" figure of 73,400 miles reported above is from PRMS. It includes practices established on the land to NRCS standards in FY 1999. The FY 1999 performance plan also noted that preliminary information from PRMS indicated that the goal was likely low, which the final PRMS results confirmed. The FY 2001 and final FY 2000 Performance Plan includes a redefinition of this measure to align with the Secretary's National Buffer Initiative. The Buffer Initiative includes lands contracted for USDA programs that will provide buffer related benefits. In addition to the specific buffer practices established, these other lands credited to the Buffer Initiative in FY 1999 include more than 306,000 miles under the general CRP sign-up, more than 285,000 miles under the continuous sign-up CRP and CREP, and more than 18,300 miles under WRP easements. The cumulative total miles currently credited to the Buffer Initiative equals 720,103 miles or 2,592,368 acres.

Flood Prevention Benefits: Annual flood prevention benefits reported represent an average annual reduction in flood damages on cropland and pastureland and other agricultural benefits and reduction of damages to homes, businesses, utilities, roads and bridges resulting in a given year from all completed watershed protection projects that have been installed with Watershed Protection Program funds during or prior to that year. The indicator includes both the reductions in flood-related damages and the increased benefits that occur on land protected from flooding. NRCS's most recent estimate is that flood prevention measures installed under the PL 83-566 Watershed Program through FY 1999 have produced a total of \$914,000,000 of these types of benefits. Much of the increase in flood reduction benefits were

realized as flood structures operated during such major storm events as Tropical Storm Charlie in Texas early in FY 1999 where the Upper San Marcos River, Martinez Creek and Plum Creek Watershed Projects were particularly effective at reducing flood damages. Watershed structures proved effective during Hurricanes Dennis, Floyd, and Irene in the eastern United States that occurred later in the year. There were also heavy winter rains in the Pacific Northwest, especially the Puget Sound area where watershed projects such as French Creek and Marshland are located.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP). Watershed impairments were also addressed under the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. A goal for EWP accomplishments was not set in the FY 1999 performance plan because funds are not included in the regular budget process but are provided through a supplemental appropriation when emergencies occur. Nearly \$80 million of financial and technical assistance was provided in the aftermath of natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes and other storms to remove debris from streams, repair stream banks and areas of critical erosion. In addition, \$31 million was allocated among eight states for the purchase of floodplain easements. Land easements were purchased from 216 landowners covering nearly 31,000 acres, effectively protecting this land from future economic damages.

Description of Actions and Schedules:

Nutrient management systems. The reporting item for nutrient management systems in PRMS has been modified to distinguish between systems associated with animal operations and non-animal-related operations. Goals for FY 2000 and FY 2001 include systems for both types of operations.

Waste management systems. An improved business definition for waste management systems was developed and put into PRMS early in FY 1999. The new definition will enable the agency to track progress on the joint USDA-EPA Unified National Strategy for Animal Feeding Operations more precisely. Accomplishments will be monitored closely in FY 2000. Because all NRCS offices will be entering data, it will be possible to compare reported progress among offices for consistency and reasonableness. However, it is possible that the level of financial assistance available from USDA in 2000 will not be adequate to support the goal for systems completed, given the continuing crisis in the farm economy. NRCS will be conducting increased training in waste management to enhance the capability of the conservation partnership to address concerns related to animal agriculture.

Conservation buffers: The performance indicator for buffers has been revised to reflect all agency accomplishments that support the Secretary's Buffer Initiative. For FY 1999, the measure included only buffer practices applied to specific NRCS buffer practice standards. The Secretary's Buffer initiative credits as buffers all lands that will provide buffer-related benefits as a result of establishment to vegetative cover under USDA programs. The acres are counted at the time of program enrollment rather than when the practice is reported as established. In addition, the annual target is now stated in terms of cumulative progress towards the final goal rather than in terms of the level of annual activity.

Flood prevention benefits: During FY 2000 the watersheds database will be converted to a PRMS application in order to improve the quality and timeliness of this performance measure. All NRCS state level FY 2000 performance plans will have a specific goal for each of these performance measures and their FY 2000 business plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance:

Animal waste management systems: In spite of the potential performance gap in FY 1999 for this measure, the FY 2000 target for waste systems has been increased in order to reflect the redirection of resources to support the Clean Water Action Plan and related initiatives associated with animal waste. The FY 2000 budget and new workload analysis estimates of time required to plan and complete systems were used to re-evaluate the FY 2000 goal. These data indicate that the target is feasible.

Conservation buffers: As described above, the performance indicator and goal for buffers have been revised to reflect all agency accomplishments that support the Secretary's Buffer Initiative.

Program Evaluations: In FY 1999, an Oversight and Evaluation review was conducted on assistance to animal feeding operations. The purpose of this review was to evaluate the agency's ability to plan and assist with the implementation of waste management systems as required by the NRCS-EPA Unified National Strategy for Animal Feeding Operations. The findings indicated that many existing waste management plans and nutrient assessments do not meet the standards of NRCS's new Nutrient Management Policy. A management action plan has been developed to identify corrective actions to improve performance in this area. When the action plan is approved by agency leadership, copies of the review and action plan can be obtained from the Director, Operations Management and Oversight Division, 202-720-8388.

An Oversight and Evaluation review was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of operation and maintenance on NRCS-assisted project dams. Projects are designed and built in cooperation with local sponsors. After construction is complete, operation and maintenance is the responsibility of the local sponsors. Proper operation and maintenance is essential to ensure that the project achieves its purpose and remains effective throughout its designed life span. The review found that inadequate operation and maintenance has led to significant deterioration on nearly one-third of the sites reviewed. When the management action plan to address this situation is approved by agency leadership, copies of the review and action plan can be obtained from the Director, Operations Management and Oversight Division, 202-720-8388.

Goal 1: A healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, sustains functioning watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes.

Objectives:

- 1.4 Healthy and productive wetlands sustaining watersheds and wildlife.
- 1.5 High quality habitat on private land supporting the Nation's wildlife heritage.

Key Performance Goals

<p><u>Assist resource managers to plan and apply systems to protect or enhance wetlands</u></p> <p>Wetland creation or restoration applied: Target: 230,000 acres Actual: 270,000 acres</p> <p><u>Assist resource managers to plan and apply systems to protect or enhance habitat for wildlife</u></p> <p>Wetland habitat management applied: Target: 440,000 acre Actual: 390,000 acres</p>

1999 Data: The data for these goals were collected through the Agency's new Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS). See the previous section, FY 1999 Transition to the NRCS Performance and Results Measurement System.

Analysis of Results: The performance goals related to wetlands and wildlife habitat were achieved.

Wetlands created or restored. PRMS sample data indicate the goal for this measure was achieved. The mainstay for wetland creation and restoration is the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Easements on a total of 119,879 acres were recorded in the WRP in FY 1999. The acres reported through PRMS for FY 1999 include creation and restoration activities completed during the year relating to easements recorded in both current and previous years. Additional acres are restored as a result of CRP contracts, easement programs funded by state and local governments, mitigation to comply with program requirements, and voluntary activities by landowners.

Wetland management habitat applied. Although the expanded PRMS data indicate the accomplishments were about 10 percent below the target for this specific indicator, NRCS considers this target to have been achieved. Based on the sample methodology, the actual accomplishment could easily equal or exceed the goal. Data used to compute expansion factors for this measure were less specific than those for most other measures were. This sampling uncertainty will be eliminated with nationwide PRMS implementation in FY 2000. In addition to the data on wetland habitat, data were also collected on upland wildlife habitat management applied. An additional 5,944,000 acres of upland wildlife management was applied during 1999. The 1996 Farm Bill authorized the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to provide increased assistance to landowners who want to enhance habitat on their land.

The recently released 1997 Natural Resources Inventory indicates that, between 1992 and 1997, activities on farmland to protect and enhance wetlands did not occur at a rate adequate to compensate for the conversion of wetlands to non-wetlands. (At the time of this report, NRI data for non-farmland wetlands were not available.) Thus, although the FY 1999 target was met as reported through PRMS and we expect to meet the FY 2000 goal, it is still possible that the FY 2002 strategic goal of a net increase in wetland functions and values will not be met. When drawing comparisons between the NRI estimate and the performance reported in PRMS, several factors must be considered. First, the NRI represents the period 1992 through 1997, and the PRMS data represent FY 1999, capturing the actual implementation of practices. Second, the definitions used in PRMS for reporting acres for this measure are specific to NRCS practice standards for 657 Wetland Restoration, 658 Wetland Creation, and 659 Wetland Enhancement, and do not necessarily align with the sampling process and definitions of the NRI. Continued efforts are underway to assess the accuracy of PRMS reporting and expansion processes for the FY 1999 sample.

Description of Actions and Schedules: All NRCS State level FY 2000 Performance Plans will have a specific goal for each of these performance measures and their FY 2000 Business Plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: Because the performance reported for FY 1999 was based on sample data from a pilot year for the new performance reporting system, the data cannot be used to draw conclusions about current year performance.

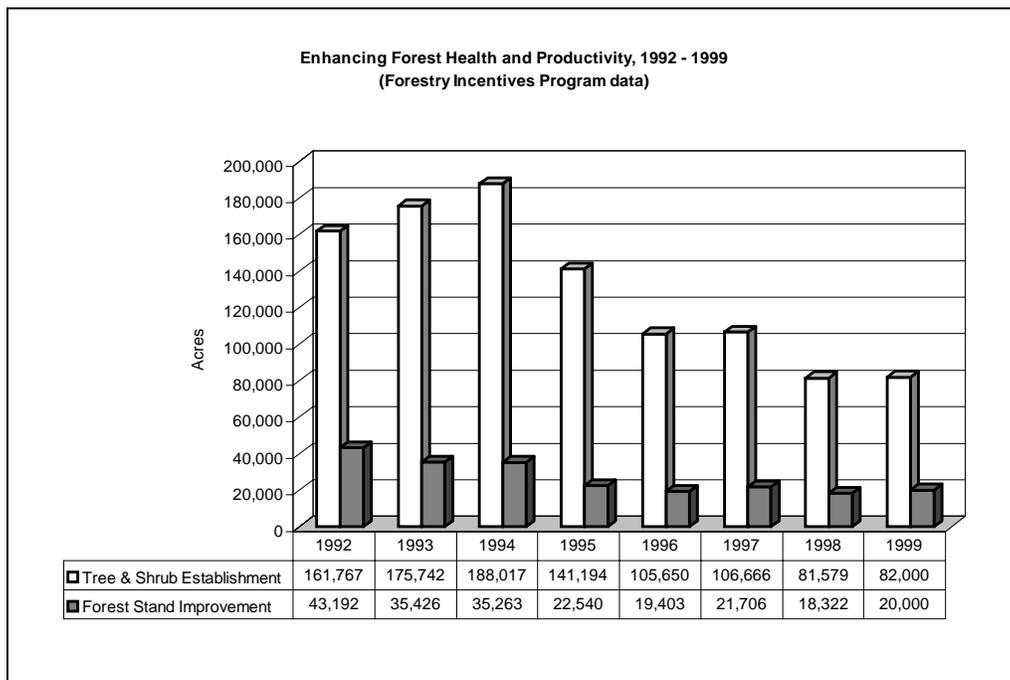
Program Evaluations: In FY 1999, three reviews were conducted of technical and administrative activities related to wetland protection. A review on easement management was conducted to evaluate effectiveness of easement program administration and implementation. The review found some cases in which documentation of easement management, monitoring, and enforcement was insufficient to determine whether environmental values and federal interests are being protected. A review of wetland restoration activities found that the technical content of some restoration plans and subsequent quality control are inadequate to meet NRCS standards. A review of the implementation of wetlands flexibility provisions found some instances of deficiencies in use of minimal effects and mitigation procedures. Management action plans have been prepared to correct all these deficiencies. When the action plans are approved by agency leadership, copies of the reviews and action plans can be obtained from the Director, Operations Management and Oversight Division, 202-720-8388.

Goal 1: A healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, sustains functioning watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes.

Key Performance Goal

<u>Assist resource managers to enhance forestland health and productivity</u>	
Forest stand improvement applied (Forestry Incentives Program):	
Target:	24,500 acres
Actual:	20,000 acres
Tree and shrub establishment (Forestry Incentives Program):	
Target:	209,000 acres
Actual:	82,000 acres

1999 Data: The data to support this performance measure is collected from NRCS state Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) managers using internal progress reporting platforms and from Soil Conservation Service Progress Accounting Report System (SPARS) reports to ascertain payment disbursements. Data reflects performance based on accomplishments made on the landscape regardless of fiscal year of fund source and obligation. In addition, performance information for forestry improvement activities for all programs was captured through the Performance and Results Measurement System.



Analysis of Results: Although the actual results fell short of the targets for FIP, the assistance provided and reported related to “enhanced forestland health and productivity” was substantial and this goal is considered achieved.

During FY 1999, over 106,000 acres were treated using the Forestry Incentives Program (FIP). FIP provided assistance to 5,128 participants. The FY 1999 appropriation included an increase above the previous years' funding level. The additional funds were to address restoration needs resulting from wildfires and other disasters in FY 1998. The targets were based on the assumption that all practices

assisted with funds appropriated to the program in FY 1999 would be installed in FY 1999. Not all acres funded in FY 1999 could be planted in that year, however, due to the limited availability of desired seedlings. In addition, the agency and OMB could not resolve questions relating to Congress' intent for use of the emergency funds in time to take full advantage of the planting season in some states.

NRCS assists landowners with forestry measures using programs other than FIP. In some cases, cost sharing is provided through state or local sources. Some landowners prefer to carry out work without cost sharing and seek only technical assistance. The PRMS database includes a full accounting of all forestry work performed on private lands in which NRCS was involved. National PRMS sample data indicate that over 158,000 acres of forest stand improvement and 319,000 acres of tree and shrub establishment were applied in FY 1999.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: During FY 2000, a major tree planting effort is anticipated in many areas, especially the South. From the FY 1999 FIP funds, a \$1 million reserve was retained for future assistance, primarily to address tree planting needs for fire disaster recovery in Florida. The FIP participants and prospective participants who postponed tree-planting activities in 1999 due to a shortage of seedlings for preferred species will install practices in FY 2000. For FY 2000 and 2001, agency performance goals for the two forestry measures include accomplishments under all agency programs, not just FIP. This is being done to better account for the agency's outputs and outcomes on the Nation's forestlands, as well as to provide better accountability for the forestry activities across all agency programs. NRCS state level FY 2000 performance plans will have a specific goal for each of these performance measures, and their FY 2000 business plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved.

Program Evaluations: None were conducted during FY 1999.

Goal 2: Individuals and their neighbors working together as effective and willing stewards of the natural resources on their property and in their communities.

Objective: 2.1. A strong and effective grassroots conservation partnership across the United States and its territories, commonwealths, and affiliated governments.

Key Performance Goal

Assist people living in communities to describe the conditions of the land and develop plans to address their resource concerns.

New locally led action plans developed (Environmental Quality Incentives Program)

Target: 200

Actual: 409

1999 Data: The source of data for this indicator is the NRCS On-line Proposal System and NRCS state office reports to the national program manager for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In future years, data for this indicator will be reported through PRMS.

Analysis of Results: Actual performance on the indicator exceeded the target and the performance goal was achieved.

Results indicate that local interest in working together to protect and enhance the local environment remains high and that people believe many problems remain to be addressed. The number of EQIP proposals was used as a surrogate for "locally led action." These proposals reflect locally based efforts in assessing and prioritizing resource concerns. To more fully report the extent of locally led conservation efforts; this performance indicator has been revised for FY 2000, as explained in the following section.

Description of Actions and Schedules: This indicator has been redefined for FY 2000 and subsequent years. Efforts towards accomplishing “locally led conservation” will be reported through PRMS under a performance measure for “Area Wide and Group Planning.” The measure will not be limited to EQIP. Other programs, especially Conservation Technical Assistance and the RC&D program, support grassroots partnerships. All NRCS state level FY 2000 performance plans will have a specific goal for each of these performance measures and their FY 2000 business plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved. EQIP is a significant program for which NRCS has responsibility; we will continue to track accomplishments in terms of priority areas, participation, and conservation measures accomplished by the program.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: This indicator has been redefined for FY 2000. Data to gauge current year progress on the revised measure will not be available until after the end of the first quarter.

Program Evaluations: No reviews of locally led planning were conducted in FY 1999.

Management Initiative 1: Provide high quality customer service

Key Performance Goal

Treat all customers fairly and equitably

NRCS offices reporting parity in resource assistance and in financial assistance

Target: 100 percent

Actual: Not available

Minority clients receiving assistance, number

Target: 30,000

Actual: 54,800

Tribes Assisted

Target: 100 (distinct tribes)

Actual: 8,348 instances of assistance

1999 Data: The data for these goals were collected through the Agency’s new Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS). See the previous section, FY 1999 Transition to the NRCS Performance and Results Measurement System.

Analysis of Results: Although there were some shortcomings and limitations regarding the data for the indicators under this goal; NRCS feels that the performance goal has been achieved.

Offices reporting parity: For the FY 1999 transition year to PRMS, the number of offices providing parity in service delivery could not be determined for the Nation because only sample offices reported data. This performance measure cannot be expanded from a statistical sample. For the sample sites, minority customers made up about 4 percent of all potential customers (based on data in the Census of Agriculture) and about 4 percent of all customers actually served.

Minority clients receiving assistance: The target for “minority clients receiving assistance” was exceeded. The target was set, however, on the basis of available data for FY 1997. Those data were known to be incomplete. The number of minority clients reported served slightly exceeds the number reported earlier in the 1990s. Because budget constraints have reduced the number of NRCS staff since that time, the data indicate that NRCS has made a real increase in the proportion of resources directed to assisting groups who were traditionally under served. Although the annual goal was exceeded, the number of minority customers is only an interim measure. This will be revised when data are available to measure performance against reliable data on the customer base for every service area. PRMS provides a vehicle to track performance against a reliable baseline in every office consistently from year to year. See the Description of Actions and Schedules below.

Tribes assisted: Although data on assistance to tribal governments is available in PRMS, the number of unique tribes assisted could not be determined from FY 1999 sample data. NRCS did provide technical assistance to American Indian customers on over 8,000 instances during FY 1999. See the next section "Description of Actions and Schedules" for further clarification,

Description of Actions and Schedules: The nationwide implementation of PRMS for FY 2000 will allow the generation of parity information for all offices. In FY 2000, state offices will be provided an option to record assistance by specific tribe if desired. Continued analysis of FY1999 parity information from the sample sites will be conducted to refine the performance measure. A PRMS data quality assurance strategy is being implemented in FY 2000 that will ensure all offices verify that service is provided on a non-discriminatory basis. All NRCS state level FY 2000 performance plans will have a specific goal for each of these performance measures and their FY 2000 business plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: The FY 1999 data does not suggest major modifications to the existing goals in the FY 2000 performance plan. Expanded outreach efforts are ongoing to ensure that members of minority groups are aware of NRCS programs and have opportunities to participate.

Program Evaluations: No evaluations related to these goals were completed in FY 1999.

Management Initiative 1: Provide high quality customer service

Key Performance Goal

<p><u>Provide high quality service tailored to customers' needs</u></p> <p>Customer satisfaction, percentage--</p> <p>Producers satisfied with program delivery: Target: 93% Actual: 91%</p> <p>Producers satisfied with service quality: Target: 94% Actual: 92%</p> <p>Customers receiving planning and application assistance Target: 750,000 Actual: 630,000</p> <p>Customers receiving education and information assistance Target: 400,000 Actual: 397,000</p>
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1999 Data: The data for customer satisfaction are based on the Service Center Modernization Initiative (SCMI) annual customer survey. This survey had over 5,000 respondents, representing the producer customers of USDA Service Centers. The results represent satisfaction with total Service Center program delivery and service quality and are not specific to NRCS. The data for customers receiving assistance were collected through NRCS's new Performance and Results Measurement System (PRMS). See the previous section, FY 1999 Transition to the NRCS Performance and Results Measurement System.

Analysis of Results: The actual results reported for the indicators are slightly below the targets; nevertheless NRCS feels that it is meeting the performance goal.

Customer satisfaction. A target for customer satisfaction was not included in the FY 1999 performance plan because baseline data were not available. Because USDA has set a goal of providing seamless

service in the Service Centers, the only survey conducted in FY 1999 was conducted by the Service Center Modernization Initiative. The survey indicates no statistical difference from the previous survey (1997) in the level of producer satisfaction with Service Center program delivery and service quality. Completion of business process reengineering projects and acquisition of the required information technology infrastructure is necessary before significant increases in customer service can be expected.

Customers receiving assistance. The measure *customers receiving planning and application assistance* refers to clients who receive technical assistance in the planning and application of conservation systems on a specific operating unit or geographic area. The performance reported is 16 percent less than the target. Because FY 99 is the transitional year to the new reporting system, it is not possible to say with certainty whether the difference represents a performance gap or a data collection gap. Several issues may have contributed to a data collection gap for this measure. First, because of telecommunications problems in this transitional year, there may have been under-reporting for some items. Under-reporting is likely to be greatest for this indicator, which required more frequent entry than any other indicators. Second, differences in definitions between PRMS and the previous performance measurement system might have created some confusion. On the other hand, the difference between the target and reported performance may be a performance gap resulting from a too-ambitious goal. In this regard, lower performance could result from the decreasing NRCS workforce and the increasing time required servicing each customer. These time increases per customer result from the amount of administrative time required to manage 1996 farm bill programs, the increasing effort spent on more complex systems such as animal waste systems, and the increasing complexity of rules and regulations that producers must consider in managing their operations.

The number of customers receiving education and information assistance in FY 1999 is derived from PRMS data by estimating the type of assistance received. The target was met. Education and information services generally take less time per customer than planning and application assistance. In future years, additional information estimated and reported through the state offices will be included in the setting and reporting for this measure.

Description of Actions and Schedules: Additional field level training will be conducted during FY 2000 on PRMS and other accountability data collection systems. This and other quality assurance efforts during 2000 will ensure that definition issues are resolved for all performance measures. No other specific actions are planned for the PRMS-collected items. All NRCS state level FY 2000 performance plans will have a specific goal for each of the customer assistance performance measures and their FY 2000 business plans will identify specific actions required to ensure the goals are achieved.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: Because the performance reported for FY 1999 was based on sample data from a pilot year for the new performance reporting system, NRCS does not plan to make major adjustments to goals until after nationwide PRMS implementation in FY 2000.

Program Evaluations: *Service quality-timeliness of service:* An evaluation of the processing of Environmental Quality Incentives Program was conducted to determine if there are systemic problems that delay processing of applications. The review led to development of actions, which are underway to streamline the EQIP process. When the action plans are approved by agency leadership, copies of the reviews and action plans can be obtained from the Director, Operations Management and Oversight Division, 202-720-8388.

Management Initiative 2: Improve quality and usefulness of NRCS information

Key Performance Goal

Make available current soils data in a form that can be used as the foundation for integrated resources assessments for areas that range in scale from a single farm to the Nation

Non-Federal lands with soil survey available in digital form, number of surveys

Target: 350

Actual: 366

Customers accessing or downloading soils data –

STATSGO Downloads/CD Orders

Target: 1,000

Actual: 1,212

SSURGO Downloads/CD Orders

Target: 2,000

Actual: 1,399

1999 Data: *Soil surveys in digital form:* STATSGO (State Soil Geographic Database) is NRCS's digital geographic database of generalized soils information designed for national, regional, state, and multi-county level resource planning. SSURGO (Soil Survey Geographic Database) is NRCS's digital geographic database for local soils information, and is designed to assist land managers at the farm, community, and county level. Soil surveys are digitized and certified to NRCS standards by seven NRCS digitizing units across the United States. The digital surveys are reported as certified in the National Soil Information System (NASIS), Soil Survey Schedule database through a Web application, and are then forwarded to the NRCS National Cartographic and Geospatial Center at Fort Worth, Texas. The digital surveys are spot checked for accuracy and completeness and are then archived and made available for public distribution on the National SSURGO Database Data Access Web site. The date of completion is recorded in the Soil Survey schedule database. The URL for the National SSURGO Database Data Access is http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/ssur_data.html.

Downloads- The national STATSGO database has been available to the public for many years via compact discs (CDs) from the National Cartographic and Geospatial Center. SSURGO digitizing was initiated in FY 1995. Both STATSGO and SSURGO certified soil surveys have been available through Web access for the past several years. The National STATSGO database access is http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/stat_data.html. Both STATSGO and SSURGO have hot links with the National Soil Data Access Facility (<http://www.statlab.iastate.edu/soils/nsdaf/main.html>). The number of orders and downloads are tracked by the NRCS National Cartographic and Geospatial Center. The separate indicators for STATSGO and SSURGO will be combined into a single indicator in the revised FY 2000 performance plan.

Analysis of Results: The goal of making current soils data available in a usable format was achieved.

Soil surveys in digital form: The target was slightly exceeded. This is attributed to the number of surveys in the production pipeline, and to the maturity of the NRCS digitizing unit infrastructure, which was established in the spring of 1998.

Downloads/CD orders: STATSGO data downloads and CD orders exceeded the target; however, SSURGO data requests fell short of the target goals. Demand for the data is highly unpredictable from year to year; however, some explanations can be offered. STATSGO data has been available for many years and has been well publicized. On the other hand, SSURGO certified surveys through Web access is relatively new. The total number of certified digital soil surveys has increased from 14 at the end of fiscal year 1995 to 704 at the end of fiscal year 1999. As the number of SSURGO products increases over the next few years and as GIS applications increase, demand and access will likely increase for SSURGO certified soil surveys.

Description of Actions and Schedules: *STATSGO and SSURGO Downloads/CD orders:* Based on the 1999 results, adjustments will be made to the FY 2000 goal for STATSGO Download/CD orders and SSURGO Download/CD orders.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: In FY 2000, 196 new soil survey areas will be funded and added to the production pipeline. A goal of 325 additional soil surveys will be certified and made available in FY 2000. The data collection system for tracking this information is well established.

Program Evaluations: No program evaluations were conducted on FY 1999.

Key Performance Goals

Provide accurate and timely information on water supply for western water resources managers

Water supply forecasts issued:

Target: 6,335

Actual: 6,835

Water users and managers utilizing information developed by the snow survey and water supply forecasting program:

Target: 15,000

Actual: 43,800

Water users fully satisfied with usefulness of snow survey and water supply forecasting program information:

Target: 95 percent

Actual: 98 percent

1999 Data: The number of water supply forecasts is based on records of internal activities conducted at the NRCS Water and Climate Center in Portland, Oregon. Data on users of program information is based on the number of web page accesses for the Water Supply Forecasts and snow telemetry (SNOTEL) data reports. Web statistics show the basic distribution of users as follows: Commercial - 42 percent, Other – 41 percent, Government - 9 percent, and Educational - 7 percent. Customer satisfaction data is collected through questionnaires that ask for customer satisfaction with the products generated. Annual results are available early each calendar year.

Analysis of Results: The indicators show that the performance goal was achieved.

The number of forecasts issued increased in response to the extreme La Nina climate conditions that dominated the West during Water Year 1999. Several special forecasts were run for users in the Southwest, where snow pack and stream flow conditions were well below average, and in the Pacific Northwest, where record high late season snow packs were observed in most of the northern Cascades.

The number of users increased because the media accessed the SNOTEL and Water Supply web pages much more often during the past water year than in previous years. A major part of the reported increase in users results from the accessibility of the data over the Internet. At the time the goal was set, data were available only for the users requesting hard copy. Customers now have immediate access to material previously sent via the post office. Water supply products are downloaded and transmitted to a wide variety of users worldwide.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: FY 2000 targets have been adjusted based on the above analysis. Approximately 900 visits were logged to the Water Supply Forecast web page, and 1,761 visits were logged to the SNOTEL web page during October 1999. These should increase significantly (approximately 4,000 for Water Supply Forecasts and 4,500 for SNOTEL), starting in January 2000 when regularly scheduled Water Supply Forecasts are issued. NRCS expects a 25 percent increase in activity

if La Nina conditions continue. Water supply assessments will become part of the National Drought Monitor web page, making a wider variety of water users aware of the weather and climate data available from NRCS.

Program Evaluations: None were completed in FY 1999.

Key Performance Goal

<u>Develop and transfer plant science technology to help solve natural resource problems</u>	
New plant releases	
Target:	12
Actual:	22
Customers accessing or downloading plant science information (PLANTS database)	
Hits on Web Site	
Target:	12,000,000
Actual:	20,000,000
Website users	
Target:	400,000
Actual:	720,000

1999 Data: The data for new plant releases were obtained as the plants were analyzed and approved for release. Observations included plant performance characteristics such as forage and seed production, plant phenology, and areas of adaptation. Plant Materials Center managers and specialists summarized information on "Notice of Release" documents for final agency approval.

The data on the number of customers accessing plant information is collected through the PLANTS website and associated database. This project employs software that tracks the numbers of times each Web page is accessed, provides a list of general domain names that utilize the site, and documents the number of user sessions by date.

Analysis of Results: The performance goal was met.

The goal for plant releases was significantly exceeded. This occurred because one Plant Materials Center had an above-average year, producing 12 releases. Normally releases require several years of evaluation. In this case, however, the releases were source-identified releases, which have a shorter release time.

The actual results on the PLANTS web site are greater than the target for a number of reasons. The increase in popularity of this site during 1999 is attributed to (1) the increase in Internet users nationwide, and an increased number of links to the site, (2) NRCS's own increase in web site access during 1999, (3) the popularity of the enhancements to the data and the interface to access this data, and (4) PLANTS has become a de facto standard for basic plant information for numerous agencies such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Farm Services Agency and the Department of the Army.

Current Fiscal Year (2000) Performance: For plant releases, targets are adjusted annually due to the variable nature of plant releases. Development of a release usually takes several years and can be affected by weather, poor seed or harvest. A target of 16 plant releases has been established for FY 2000.

PLANTS user sessions for October pro rated on an annual basis would be approximately 800,000. This trend is not expected to continue, as organizational users are now importing PLANTS information into

their own information systems, rather than continuing to rely on the NRCS site to meet their growing needs. For example, USFS transfers PLANTS data into its Natural Resources Information System that is then used within the National Forest System. As new modules are integrated, new customer niches are integrated. In the future, minor increases in overall users are expected. These modules are expected to focus on specific NRCS needs.

Program Evaluations: None were completed in FY 1999.