



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



SUPPORTING AMERICA'S WORKING LANDS



NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE



Supporting America's Working Lands

At the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we have a proud history of supporting America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. For 90 years, we have helped people make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, boost rural economies, increase the competitiveness of American agriculture, and improve the quality of our air, water, soil, and habitat.

As the USDA's primary private lands conservation agency, we generate, manage, and share the data, technology, and standards that enable partners and policymakers to make decisions informed by objective, reliable science.

And through one-on-one, personalized advice, we work voluntarily with producers and communities to find the best solutions to meet their unique conservation and business goals. By doing so, we help ensure the health of our natural resources and the long-term sustainability of American agriculture.

“We’re just stewards. No one really owns the land. Eventually, I’ll be gone and someone else will be in charge of it. By enrolling it in a permanent [wetlands] easement, we can allow this to be present for years to come.”

Mark Magura, Indiana landowner

Photo by Brandon O'Connor, NRCS





NRCS provides the conservation planning and financial assistance necessary for producers to conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources and stay profitable and productive.

America's Working Lands Support Rural Economies

Farmers, ranchers, and foresters are the backbone of America. Shouldering the tremendous responsibility of feeding a rapidly growing Nation, their critical work also provides economic stability across the country side — supporting rural economies and creating jobs in local communities.

Rural America depends on productive working lands to fund local labor. Local jobs include not just agronomists and foresters, but also land improvement contractors, seed suppliers, irrigation specialists, and others. Their stewardship and careful management of these vital landscapes builds resilient local economies with profitable farms and ranches, clean air and water, healthy food, and abundant wildlife.

“We are a business and have to be profitable, so the programs that we utilize with NRCS help us incorporate conservation practices. It’s important to us because we love this land and want to leave it to our children better than we found it.”

Alan Herbert, Louisiana producer





Organic is the fastest growing segment of the U.S. food industry, with demand currently outpacing supply. Urban farms, rapidly increasing in number, provide an entryway for new farmers and build appreciation for farming among all citizens.

America's Working Lands Support Consumer Demand

America's producers are responding to today's increasing consumer demand for organic products and fresh, local food. While rising to meet this new challenge, organic and urban farmers are conserving natural resources, diversifying the agricultural economic sector, and bringing new farmers into agricultural production.

Organic agriculture and NRCS' goals are well aligned. Many USDA Organic requirements, such as soil health and biodiversity, can be addressed using NRCS conservation systems, which reflect these shared goals. Though often small, urban farms can make big impacts, beautifying neighborhoods and strengthening local communities while growing healthy food. Farmers throughout the country are now using high tunnels to meet the demand for fresh, local produce beyond the typical growing season.

"I enjoy operating a farm in an urban area because it allows us to grow food where our community is. We get to personally connect food to consumer."

Eric McClam (right), organic and urban producer in South Carolina

Photo Courtesy of City Roots Organic Farm





The healthiest soils are those with a diversity and abundance of life. Farmers with the healthiest soils nurture that life by creating a diversity of plant life above the soil surface, with year-round ground cover, no tillage, and judicious or no pesticide use.

America's Working Lands Support Healthy Soil

America's vitality is rooted in the soil. Today, private landowners across the country are partnering with NRCS to put soil health practices to work—growing profitable farms, vibrant rural economies, and healthy food and fiber to fuel our Nation today and into the future.

As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. By farming using soil health principles and systems that include no-till, cover cropping, and diverse rotations, more and more producers are increasing their soil's organic matter, reducing the need for expensive inputs, and improving microbial activity — all while harvesting better profits and often better yields.

“Cover crops have helped the fields environment by helping suppress weeds [and they] add organic matter and nutrients to the soil with the legumes. Having [them] has saved our feed bill during dry times and [gives us] a place to put our cows when grass is not available.”

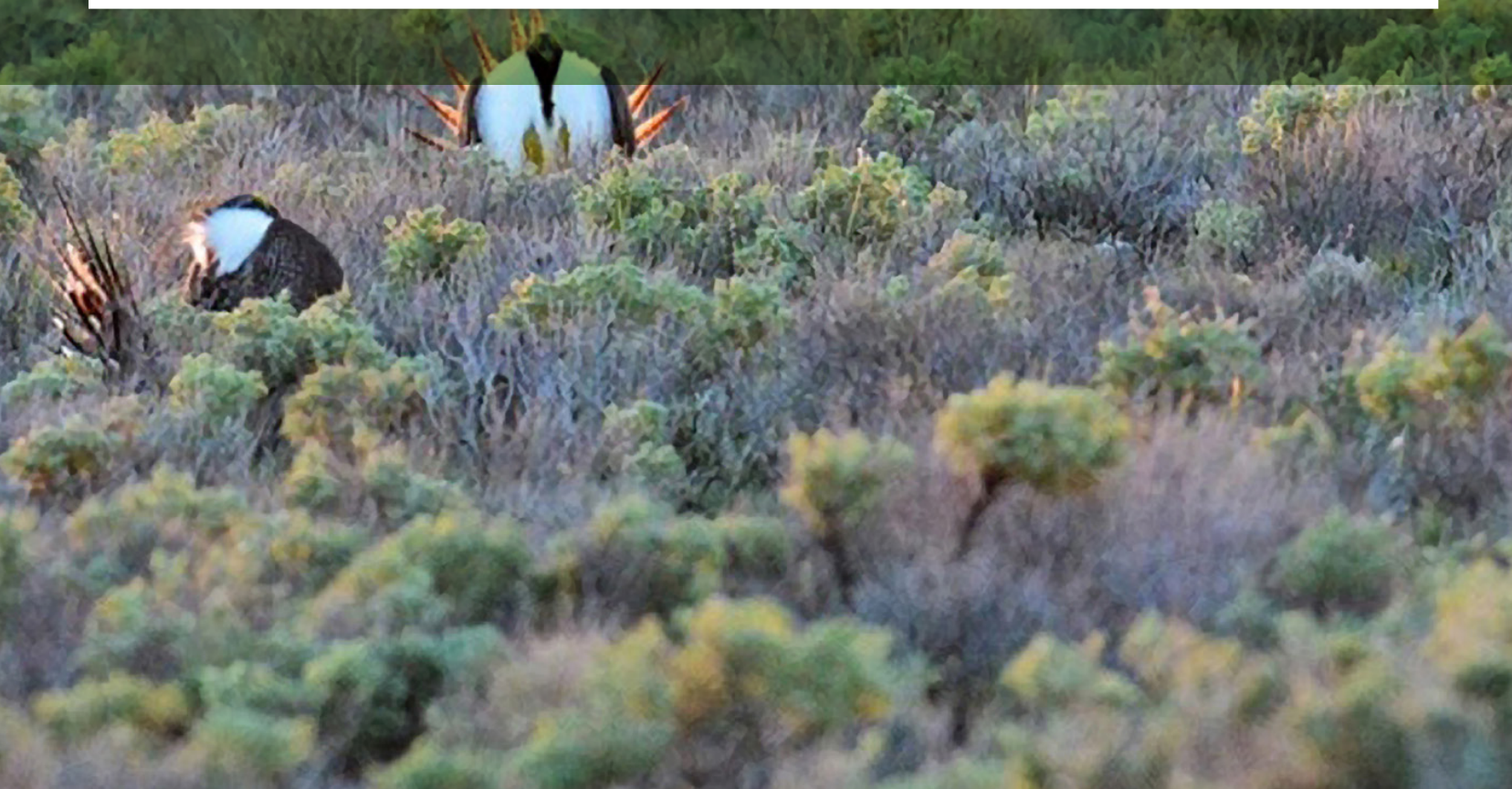
Becki Schroder, Colorado producer

Photo by Joseph Mort, NRCS





Out West, ranchers have restored millions of acres of the sagebrush ecosystem, helping the greater sage-grouse rebound while providing top-notch grazing lands for livestock.



America's Working Lands Support Healthy Ecosystems

Agriculture and wildlife both thrive together through landscape-scale conservation.

Two-thirds of the land in the lower 48 States is privately owned, and these productive working farms, ranches, and forests provide critical ecosystems for wildlife as well as the food and fiber that sustains us all.

From the Louisiana black bear to the Oregon chub, and from the sage grouse to the New England cottontail, many species have rebounded and recovered largely because of the conservation work by producers on private lands. NRCS uses a science-based, targeted approach to guide producers on how to best manage ecosystems to maximize beneficial outcomes, both for wildlife and agricultural operations.

**“Sustainable forestry practices
recommended by NRCS are
benefiting our personal lives
as well as wildlife.”**

Natalie Love, Pennsylvania producer





Agriculture is a major user of ground and surface water in the United States. By implementing efficient irrigation systems and other water management practices, producers increase the supply of both food and water.

America's Working Lands Support Clean Water

Farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners recognize water as our Nation's most precious resource. Every day, new producers are stepping up to work hand-in-hand with NRCS to implement systems that conserve water and keep valuable nutrients on the field and out of local waterways.

Many producers have joined their friends and neighbors in landscape-scale efforts to minimize agricultural impacts and improve water quality throughout watersheds. By improving soil health and adopting a systems approach to conservation across the landscape, these targeted efforts have resulted in an ever growing list of streams restored in working agricultural land.

“We educate people on the water and storm water on land, how important it is to somebody in Miami for flood control, for flood protection, for aquifer recharge, for wildlife habitat – all those things that they might not understand.”

Matt Pearce, eighth-generation cattle rancher in Florida

Photo courtesy of Matt Pearce





Across the country, producers are using soil health principles to increase water infiltration, and improve wildlife and pollinator habitat — all while harvesting better profits and often better crop yields.

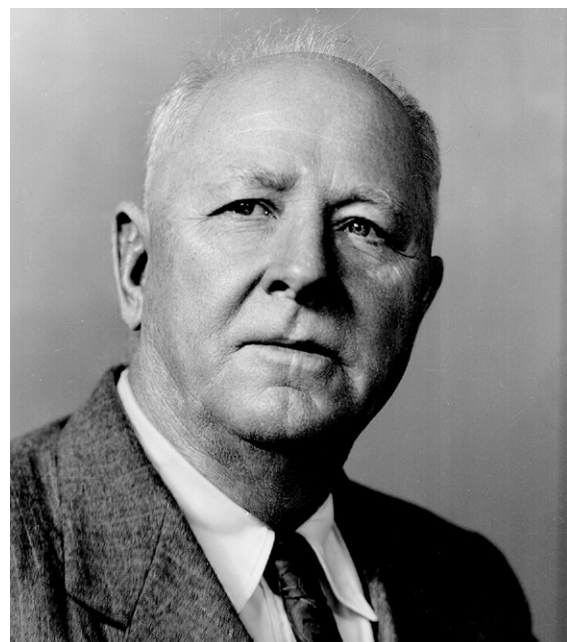
America's Working Lands Support Clean Air

Thanks to the success of voluntary conservation and air quality assessment tools, many producers are discovering that the techniques that increase soil and crop resiliency are the same techniques that reduce carbon and nitrous oxide emissions—creating a win-win for private landowners and their communities.

Many of these conservation-minded producers who are located in strong rural and urban land interfaces are also working with NRCS to implement moisture-management techniques and windbreaks that help minimize or diffuse dust and odors associated with livestock production.

**“If we take care
of the land, it will
take care of us.”**

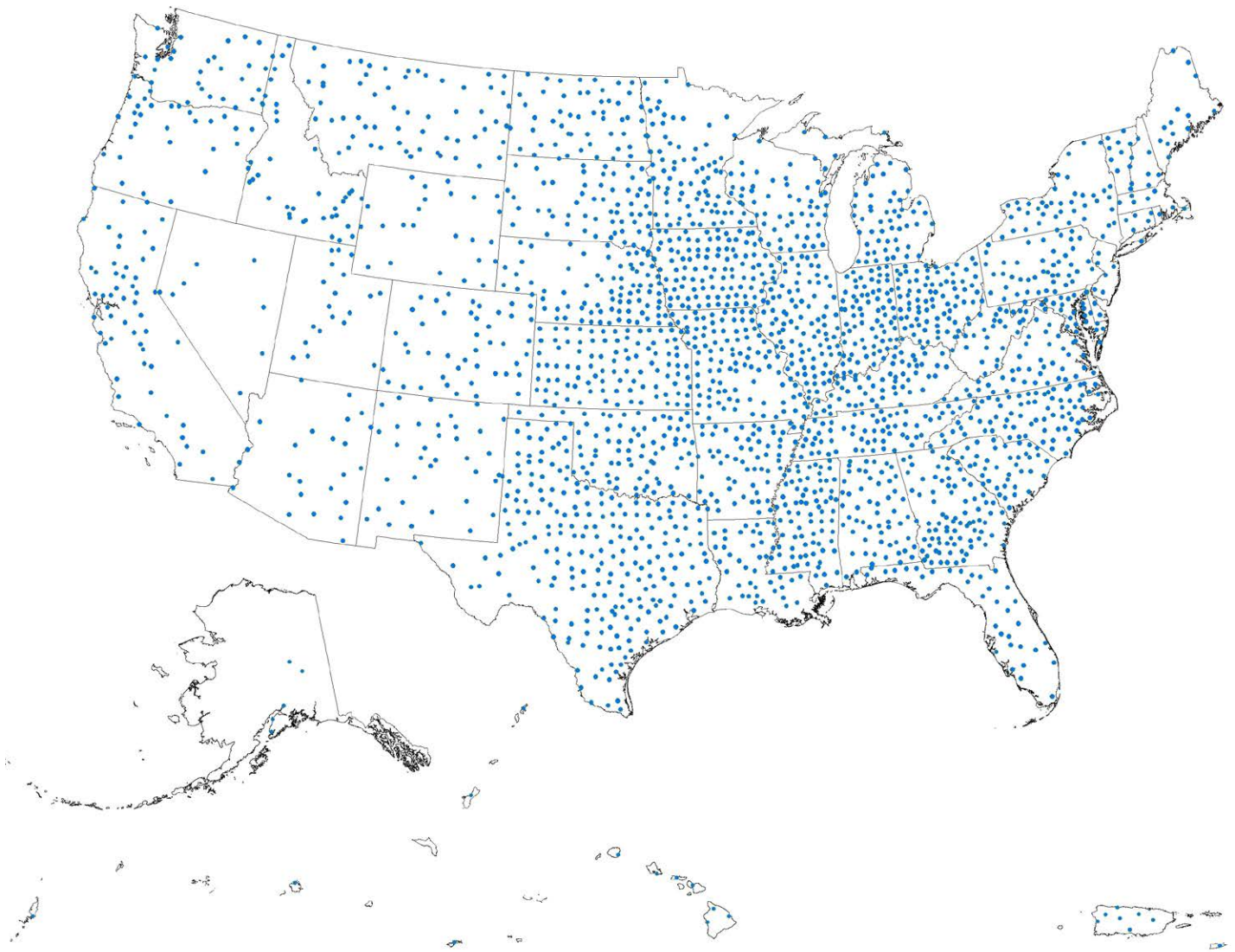
Hugh Hammond Bennett, Father of Soil Conservation





Get Started With NRCS

Do you farm or ranch and want to make improvements to the land that you own or lease?



NRCS Offices Across the Country

NRCS was born out of troubled times — the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s. Dust storms ravaged the Nation's farmland, stripping away millions of tons of topsoil and carrying it all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. What originally began as the USDA Soil Conservation Service in 1935 is now known as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, a name change that highlights our broader mission of natural resource conservation.

Today, through voluntary conservation programs, NRCS helps producers, soil and water conservation districts, and other partners protect and conserve natural resources on private lands throughout the United States.

NRCS employees provide the conservation planning assistance necessary for producers—in every State and territory—to conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. This locally led, science-based approach offers producers voluntary conservation solutions that enhance their environment and commercial viability.

Find Your Local Service Center:
nrcs.usda.gov

Helping People Help the Land

Each day, NRCS employees help people help the land by:

- Adhering to sound science principles;
- Using proven technical tools for on-the-ground application;
- Providing personalized advice and financial assistance to landowners and producers;
- Developing locally led conservation solutions with partners;
- Supporting innovation in agriculture, conservation, and economic markets; and
- Investing in people—helping America's farmers and ranchers to be profitable and productive.





