

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE - MINNESOTA

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- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a part of the USDA, is the primary federal agency that works with private landowners to help them protect their natural resources.
- NRCS focuses on working lands

- NRCS emphasizes:

- Voluntary
- Science based
- Incentive based conservation technical and financial assistance
- Locally led

- Locally Led Conservation

- In conjunction with SWCD's and other partners
- Landowner involvement in all phases
- Decisions at the lowest level possible

- NRCS has over 330 employees servicing every county in the state located in USDA Ag. Service Centers with Farm Service Agency, Rural Development and SWCD's
- We work in cooperation with the 91 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts providing one-on-one assistance to landowners with the conservation of natural resources.



- How Does NRCS Provide Assistance –
 - In cooperation with SWCD's and other partners
 - Technical Assistance (TA) – landowner requests assistance at the county field office
 - Financial Assistance (FA) – landowner may also request funding to implement conservation practices
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 - Cost sharing
 - Incentive payments
 - Easement payments

2005 Fiscal Year (Oct 04 – Sept 05)

- Technical Assistance \$29.5 million
 - For employees, support and Technical Service Providers
 - Most expansive conservation delivery system of trained specialists in the state
- Financial Assistance \$43 million
 - Payments to landowners to implement conservation practices

- Conservation Operations – Technical Assistance (CO-01)
 - FY05 - \$12.3 million
 - Assistance to landowners to identify problems, propose solutions and complete a conservation plan
 - Direct support to local SWCD's

- Conservation Operations – Soil Survey (CO-02)
 - FY05 \$2.5 million
 - Over 1 million acres per year of soil mapping initial and update
 - 49 counties certified digital data
 - 8 soil scientists providing technical soil services

Farm Bill Programs –

- The 2002 Farm Bill has brought a tremendous amount of financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) to producers in the state
 - MN received the 3rd largest allocation in the USA!
- Through the vast array of programs and locally led conservation all natural resource concerns and **ALL** parts of the state have benefited.

- Farm Bill Programs (cont.)
- Cooperate with other federal and state agencies
 - Work a lot with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on all aspects of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
 - NRCS provides technical assistance
 - FSA provides program management and handling of the funds

- Farm Bill Programs (cont.)
 - Open to all who are eligible
 - Locally led process – local work groups
 - State Technical Committee
 - Landowners, agencies, groups, non-profits
 - Provide input and recommendations to NRCS
 - Meet quarterly – Next meeting March 15, 2005 in St. Cloud

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - Provides technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices
 - Focused on at least one of the four National priorities –
 - Water Quality
 - Air Quality
 - Soil Quality
 - Wildlife Habitat

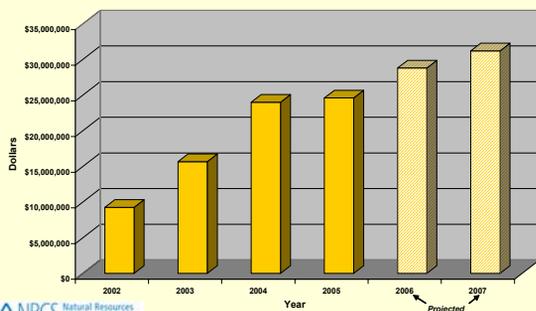
EQIP (cont.)

- Contracts have been approved in every SWCD with high quality applications – for 2004 – 89 of 91 SWCD's received funding for producer contracts. Lake and Ramsey SWCD's did not have any EQIP applications in 2004.
- 1725 contracts were approved for nearly \$24 million in 2004.

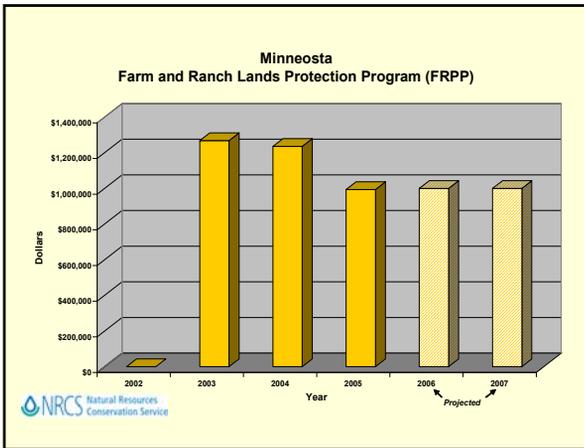
EQIP (cont.)

- \$269,000 was the average allocation per SWCD
- Allocations ranged from \$1,156,000 for Stearns SWCD to \$57,000 for Cook SWCD.

Minnesota
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Funding



- Conservation Security Program (CSP)
 - New program in 2004
 - Provides payments to producers for maintaining and increasing their conservation practices
 - 2004 – Blue Earth Watershed
 - 2005 – Red Lake, Redeye, Redwood, Sauk River and the Root River



NRCS has a long history of cooperating with state, local and other federal agencies and organizations:

Soil Surveys – FY05 - \$330,000 from LCMR and Counties

Feedlot technical assistance through LCMR – early 1990's

NRCS Cooperation (cont.)

Habitat Corridors Partnership – over 5 years \$1.1 million of LCMR will leverage \$40 million of NRCS \$'s

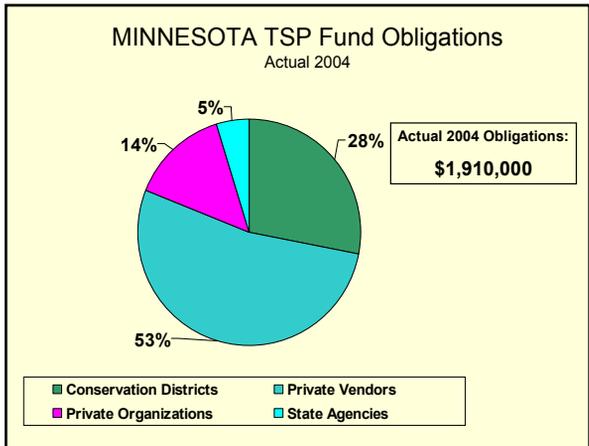
Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) - \$1.2 million of RIM with \$15 million of Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

NRCS Cooperation (cont.)

Buffer Initiative – increase technical assistance with help from DNR and Pheasants Forever

Minnesota's Clean Water Legacy – NRCS a full partner from the beginning

NRCS has utilized Technical Service Provider (TSP) funds to provide technical assistance (TA) to implement high priority practices through Farm Bill Programs. These practices are those that we do not have the capability or capacity to provide TA in a timely fashion.



- Challenges to NRCS assisting landowners

- Unfunded backlog

- There are always more applicants than funding
- \$60 million backlog in Wetlands Reserve Program
- Unlimited backlog in Environmental Quality Incentives Program – 2 month signup yielded \$25 million in applications - \$100's millions needed
- Conservation Security Program – 8,000 farmers eligible in MN each year based on the National schedule – not enough funding for all quality applicants

- Challenges (cont.)

- Lack of enough technical assistance

- Shortage of appropriated funds for employees
- Not as timely of service as landowners request
- Handle walk-in traffic primarily not as much outreach and promotion

QUESTIONS???