



National Association of State Conservation Agencies
In Completion of Requirements of Contribution Agreement # 68-3A75-4-206

Final Report
On the
Evaluation of the Nation's Conservation Delivery System

Submitted November 18, 2005

To

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Executive Summary

The National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) hosted two regional meetings to obtain input from interested parties as part of a NASCA effort to evaluate the nation's conservation delivery system. This project, performed by NASCA under a Contribution Agreement with US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, is a partnership initiative to determine how to improve the conservation delivery system, making it more effective and efficient in achieving results in conserving our natural resources and serving our nation's citizens.

NASCA sought participation by broad national interest groups in listening sessions in Ohio and Utah. Together, 137 invitees participated in the listening sessions, representing a wide range of interests including public sector service providers, local conservation district and local government officials, state and federal agencies, local conservation district and other agency staff, private landowners, agricultural producers, agricultural and commodity organizations, private sector service providers, and non-governmental organizations.

From more than twenty prioritized recommendations, a number of key areas for needed improvement emerged from the two listening sessions. These can be summarized in four categories of recommendations that warrant further and more detailed development. First is to improve flexibility and local decision-making to advance locally-led as a means of accommodating regional and local differences and priorities. Second is to simplify and streamline the delivery process, and make it more "user friendly" to improve participation. The third is to reduce delays and inconsistencies in programs and agencies that slow the process and impede participation. The final area is to better apply technology and human resources in staffing, distribution and training, and improve use of the private sector, to increase capacity to properly deliver conservation services.

Listening sessions also pointed out the need for further work to solicit input from interests that were under-represented at the sessions. NASCA plans additional action to outreach to these groups, such as private sector technical service providers, tribes, and service non-recipients. NASCA also plans additional work within states, and in consultation with partners, together with outreach, to continue to develop recommendations from the listening sessions into more detailed final recommendations by May 2006 for action to improve the conservation delivery system.

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I. Background

In September 2004, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) entered into a Contribution Agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), to perform an evaluation of the nation's delivery system for natural resources conservation. The purpose of this exercise is to identify improvements that can be made in the delivery of conservation services to our nation's landowners, our producers and our communities. (See **Appendix A** for details on this agreement.)

NASCA's overall objective is to prepare recommendations that will make the delivery system more effective and more efficient in putting conservation – in all its forms - on the ground, and to promote innovation in recommended improvements in how services and programs are designed and delivered. NASCA intends that recommendations are developed and shared with all conservation agencies and organizations that contribute to delivery of conservation services and benefits.

NASCA is well-suited to this task because of the important placement and role of its member state conservation agencies within the conservation delivery system, and its strong partnership philosophy and practice. Membership and staff of NASCA appreciate both common interests and differences among states, and strongly support the locally-led principle. At the same time, NASCA is a trusted partner at the national level, and is reaching out to form new partnerships, and to engage new interests in improving the effectiveness of its members' role in the conservation delivery process.

This is not the first time such an evaluation has been performed. This evaluation draws reinforcement from both past and present works. A number of organizations have studied the conservation delivery system, and reports have included important ideas and directions for improvement. These reports include the *2000 Report and Recommendations from the Conservation Delivery Systems Task Force* by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), *A Conservation Initiative for America's Working Lands* by NASCA in 2001, and NRCS reports and plans, such as its 2003 *Natural resources Conservation Service Strategic Plan Update*, and its report, *Streamlining and Cost Savings Initiative*, March 17 – September 15, 2003. Also, other groups have made important contributions, such as the Soil and Water Conservation Society with its 2004 report titled *Realizing the Promise of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002*.

II. Approach and Design

A primary task of this evaluation was to assemble interested persons and organizations, and to collect input and information from a wide array of perspectives about the conservation delivery system. To help develop an approach (both scope and format), NASCA established a national External Advisory Group of invited organizations. NASCA sought participation on the advisory group from a large number of stakeholders.

In addition to its various electronic exchanges, this group met once in Washington, DC (January 2005) to help plan the project. (See **Appendix B** for details on the External Advisory Group.)

A number of important principles as to how the evaluation should be conducted emerged from the work of the External Advisory Group. These include:

- How various interest groups define the “conservation delivery system” itself varies, and an evaluation should be wide in scope and place all things on the table.
- The conservation delivery system has some very positive attributes and accomplishments. This evaluation should not “throw it out”, but should focus on how to improve it.
- The delivery system can be made more effective (e.g., better results, better participation), and more efficient (e.g., better administration, better technical services), and the evaluation should focus on these areas.
- This evaluation should make great effort to hear from all interested parties, including service providers, service recipients, **and** persons and organizations that do not presently participate in or receive conservation programs and services.
- Concerns about the conservation delivery system vary geographically, and the evaluation should accommodate regional differences in its design.
- The External Advisory Group may be useful in identifying who should be invited to participate (i.e., from their organizations) in workshops or meetings.

Based on planning by the External Advisory Group, NASCA determined to host two Listening Sessions at separate locations – Columbus, Ohio and Park City, Utah - on June 8-9 and July 21-22, 2005, respectively. The rationale for

selecting these locations was the need to consider regional differences, and the strong differences (perceived and real) in issues and philosophies between the eastern and western United States. Other differences occur (e.g., north-south), but the limit of two Listening Sessions gave the advantage to an east-west arrangement.

In addition to inviting nominees from the national External Advisory Group, NASCA state representatives identified invitees to the Listening Sessions through their state and local partners and interested organizations. These persons were invited to register for a Listening Session through an on-line registration process. NASCA endeavored to ensure participation from a wide array of interests.

The Listening Sessions were designed to be brief and to the point – each a meeting of two half-days. Sessions were also designed to put the **participants** in charge – to facilitate their voicing issues, ideas and solutions to problems, through productive breakout sessions. In each location, participants were organized into breakout sessions under two different sorting strategies for day one and day two of the Listening Session. For day one, participants self-selected a breakout session based on their **common** affiliations (e.g., all landowners and producers). The Ohio session attendees were grouped into seven affiliate breakout sessions for day one; Utah five. For day two breakout sessions, participants were re-sorted by NASCA into replicate **mixed** groups, each having wide representation from available attendees (see **Appendix C** for details).

The purpose for this grouping strategy was two-fold. First, each common interest grouping shares a common perspective, and grouping these attendees together at the start helped to draw out and properly frame important issues for each group, and to identify their recommended solutions. Second, it was expected that attendees would respond differently when within a mixed group the second day (i.e., including perspectives from **all** attending interest groups), and this dynamic was relied on to help clarify, build consensus for, and prioritize ideas and suggestions raised by day one groups.

NASCA selected facilitators for breakout sessions, and instructed facilitators on the objectives and conduct of the sessions. NASCA put extra effort into getting strong participation by persons who represent **service recipients** – landowners, agricultural producers, and others who receive benefits or services from conservation programs. To that end, NASCA provided a number of scholarships to assist these attendees with expenses for the Listening Sessions.

III. Listening Session Results

Basic information and statistics for each Listening Session are presented in **Appendix C**, including number of attendees, affiliations, and breakout session groupings. A large number of interests were represented in the Listening Sessions, with 137 total attendees selecting from among twenty different types of general affiliations, including public sector service providers, local conservation district and local government officials, state and federal agencies, local conservation district and other agency staff, private landowners and cooperators, agricultural producers, agriculture and commodity organizations, private sector service providers, and non-governmental organizations. (However, Section IV of this report discusses under-representation of some groups.)

On day one, Listening Sessions identified a substantial number of important obstacles to an idealized effective conservation delivery system. Common groupings produced somewhat distinct and specific views on what the obstacles are to more effective delivery. However, a number of obstacles were commonly identified, and bear special attention as to how they formed the basis for key recommended solutions. These commonly identified obstacles can be summarized as:

- Delays in receiving appropriated funds, developing program rules, processing paperwork (contracts, payments) and completing technical assistance services (engineering).
- Overly complex, changing, time-consuming and confusing programs, rules and procedures; process is not user-friendly.
- Inadequate information available/outreach to potential participants.
- Process is program-driven rather than natural resource-driven; program expectations are often unclear.
- Unclear roles of different service providers (agencies, private sector).
- Lack of locally-led; not enough local control and priority setting.
- Lack of flexibility (contracting, priorities, funding decisions).
- Inconsistencies and poor communication within and among partner agencies; regional differences not accommodated.

- Insufficient capacity in providing technical assistance services; lack of stable and adequate funding to support technical assistance; imbalance between financial assistance and technical assistance funding.
- Too little time being spent in the field by agency staff; excessive administrative workload.
- Lack of a reasonable system for accountability and reporting.
- Staff expertise and experience problems due to agency personnel retirement, turnover, and lack of skills and training.
- Shortcomings and inconsistencies in application of Technical Service Providers.
- Premature roll-out of new technology applications; technology should serve participants – *not the other way around*.
- Lack of standardized data collection, planning and procedures.
- Difficulties in communicating (marketing) effectiveness of conservation to the public and policy-makers.
- Agency problems recognizing and responding to a changing clientele.

Regional differences were noted between the obstacles raised by Ohio and Utah attendees. Some of these include:

- Issues associated with management of public lands.
- Variations on landowner liability issues – producer information confidentiality; safe harbor; *strings attached* to federal programs.
- Sources of delays in delivery of conservation services and benefits (e.g., staffing; conflicting programs; private sector capacity).
- Geographic area/distances involved in providing technical assistance services coverage.
- Individual program targets – endangered species; pest species; vegetation; water quality versus water quantity.

With these and other obstacles identified, the day one breakout groups then began to prepare the primary constructive work product of the Listening Sessions - a set of recommendations. While obstacles reflected regional and interest group differences, the affiliate groups shifted to more strategic thinking in developing their recommended solutions. Many recommendations dealt with process, procedures and results. For example, several breakout groups identified **delays** as an obstacle. In developing recommendations, separate landowner and agency staff breakout groups might address a different type of delay, but they might arrive at a similar recommended process change – i.e., more local decision-making authority, program simplification, or deadlines for agency processing.

Lastly, day one affiliate breakout groups were each asked to select their top five recommendations. These were pooled across groups by NASCA into a combined list of priority recommendations for further action on day two (see **Appendix D**).

Day two mixed breakout sessions were each given the task of completing work on this set of pooled recommendations. (See **Appendix C** for specific instructions given to the mixed breakout groups.) After their re-consideration of the pooled set of recommendations, each mixed group breakout session chose the recommendations that attendees agreed were most important, ranking these by points. NASCA combined these rankings by tallying points across all the mixed breakout sessions and reporting the top ranked ten recommendations at each meeting location. **Appendix E** lists the combined and ranked recommendations derived from all mixed groups (day two), with the top ten highlighted. From that list, the final top ten recommendations are summarized in order as follows:

Ohio

1. Locally-led: Keep decision-making local, within a nationally set framework; strengthen the role of local working groups.
2. Redistribute technical and administrative workload between NRCS and Farm Service Agency, respectively, for all programs.
3. Reverse the current trend of “program-driven” conservation, toward more flexible “resource-driven” conservation.
4. Expand the role of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to serve as gateway and clearinghouse for customers, and to perform technical and administrative services.

5. Develop a single working lands conservation program, with resource protection targets and applying aggregated federal, state and local resources.
6. Establish conservation plans as a basic requirement for conservation program payments.
7. Develop a national directive challenging the state partnership level to employ communication and streamlining protocols.
8. Develop common procedures (e.g., one application) and policies at the delivery level for all conservation programs.
9. Create a more customer friendly delivery system, with input from service and benefit recipients.
10. Provide more timely and consistent program information to conservation partners; don't make program changes mid-year.

Utah

1. Streamline and remove inconsistencies from the delivery process; simplify and expedite delivery of services; improve application of Technical Services Provider process.
2. Set working priorities (e.g., ranking) at the local working group level, to improve local participation and meaningfulness.
3. Overcome staffing inadequacies (experience, turnover, shortage) through job sharing, internships, boot camps, correlating training needs with college curricula, diversity, employee mobility, cooperative and contribution agreements, training; eliminate Technical Service Provider process.
4. Create a USDA NRCS "block grant" process to states for distribution of conservation services to meet natural resource priorities.
5. Adequately fund (and implement) a marketing campaign to educate policy-makers, and to promote the conservation partnership based on needs and accomplishments.
6. Maintain same program delivery for two years with a single application process, eliminating constant change in programs; emphasize "resource-driven" rather than "program-driven" process; employ three basic programs – cost share, easements, and entitlement.

7. Develop standard protocols and processes for inventory assessment, planning and monitoring; clarify roles and responsibilities.
8. Focus sufficient resources in the field to be able to deliver services.
9. Ensure adequate funding to accomplish mandates; ensure adequate funding to employ and carry out watershed planning.
10. Dedicate adequate funding for and access to training of NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District employees and officials.

IV. Preliminary Conclusions

The reader may conclude, from the above list and **Appendix E**, that there is overlap to recommendations between the eastern and western Listening Sessions. For example, seven of the top ten recommendations from the Ohio session are captured in whole or in part from among the top ten of the Utah session. Also, while a top recommendation from one session may not be included in the other sessions' top ten ideas, it is generally represented close down the list. Because of this overlap, certain recommendations can be sorted into a more broad set of categories for discussion or implementation purposes:

- Improve flexibility and local decision-making to advance locally-led as a means of accommodating regional and local differences and priorities.
- Simplify and streamline the delivery process, and make it more “user friendly” to improve participation.
- Reduce delays and inconsistencies in programs and agencies that slow the process and impede participation.
- Better apply technology and human resources in staffing, distribution and training, and improve use of the private sector, to increase capacity to properly deliver conservation services.

Secondly, as described above, **regional (geographic) differences** were demonstrated in the two Listening Sessions. These specific differences in concerns and issues are important, and cannot be ignored as a source of frustration with the current delivery system. Fortunately, the solutions recommended tend to be strategic and process-oriented in nature. That is, Listening Sessions established that regional, state, and even local differences should be embraced as a formative part of the delivery system – **not** avoided or ignored.

Recommendations were most strong in favor of promoting greater program flexibility and simplification, and driving decision-making toward the local level as much as possible. This was based on an understanding that differences occur at every scale, and that local decision-making can best accommodate them.

However, Listening Sessions indicated that solutions to improve the conservation delivery system need not be developed piecemeal for each program or each area of the nation with different resource priorities. Rather, solutions to problems arising from regional differences can be found in a combination of recommendations for:

- Greater flexibility at the regional, state and local level.
- Local prioritization of programs, services and funding received.
- Consolidation and simplification of programs and program rules, timetables, requirements and funding.

A third conclusion from the Listening Sessions is that **additional input** is needed by NASCA. Obviously, not all interested parties could attend a Listening Session. Some organizations did not respond to invitations, because of lack of resources or distance from a Listening Session, inability to find representative spokespersons, lack of interest, frustration, NASCA communication methods, or other reasons. Therefore, added effort is needed to obtain input from these and other interest groups.

For example, three interest groups that were under-represented include private sector technical service providers, tribes, and those who choose not to or who cannot receive conservation program benefits and services. Response in these categories to inquiries and invitations was poor, perhaps due in part to NASCA methods. With regard to technical service providers (TSP), Listening Sessions developed recommendations to both **eliminate** and to **improve** TSP application. Obviously, greater participation by private sector TSPs may have resulted in a more clear resolution of that issue. Attendees also noted that outreach to potential conservation program participants and inclusiveness of the delivery system was not fully evaluated at the Listening Sessions.

Some alternate means of obtaining input from these and other under-represented parties and geographic areas is needed to supplement the results from Listening Sessions with vital input from these and other groups. Furthermore, input may be needed based on **other geographic scales** (e.g., national sub-regions, or even *within* states) and about **other issues** not identified by those who did attend.

V. Further Work

Based on the issues identified in the previous section, NASCA plans to perform alternate outreach to obtain input from other interests (e.g., private sector technical service providers, tribes, and non-recipients), geographic scales, and potential omitted issues. This work will be performed under a Phase Two Contribution Agreement for a period through May, 2006, and will build on findings of the two Listening Sessions.

Under Phase Two, NASCA plans to more fully develop specifics for the recommendations reported here (e.g., improved local flexibility and decision-making, program simplification). This work will provide details on specific actions needed to implement these recommendations. These results will be combined with the findings of Phase Two outreach to under-represented interests. Phase Two will also include a national conference in the spring of 2006 to advance more detailed recommendations to improve the conservation delivery system.

NASCA encourages responsible organizations to consider what can be done with regard to implementation of the reported recommendations, while the process for further evaluation continues.

VI. Building Understanding and Support for Recommendations

On October 25, 2005, NASCA reconvened the national External Advisory Group at a meeting in Washington, DC, to obtain input on how the Listening Sessions were conducted, NASCA interpretation of results, and NASCA plans for further work under Phase Two. In addition to hosting this meeting, NASCA has received written comments. Based on conclusions from the meeting and comments received, NASCA concludes that:

- NASCA's design and planning of the Listening Sessions was in concert with the objectives developed with the assistance of the External Advisory Group.
- Certain aspects of the conservation delivery system that might not have been captured during the Listening Sessions because of under-represented interests can be sought out through Phase Two outreach and development of further details on recommendations.
- The Advisory Group's sense is that NASCA is moving in the right direction regarding the process outlined under Phase Two to obtain additional input from under-represented interests.

- External Advisory Group members (responding) concur with NASCA preliminary conclusions from these sessions, and other efforts (e.g., NACD) seem to reinforce NASCA conclusions.
- Other conclusions might include the need to emphasize the human and social aspects of conservation programs and service delivery (e.g., communication with new customers; cultural aspects).
- NASCA should present detailed recommendations within a framework or vision of what the conservation delivery system should be, and this is critical to a proper understanding of and support for recommendations and the proper roles for participating organizations.
- Building understanding and support among organizations for these recommendations is critical to this effort and to the success of the 2006 conference under Phase Two. NASCA can best make organizations aware of these recommendations and their opportunities to support and implement them by making materials available, by appearing where requested for presentations, and by working with Advisory Group organizations to distribute information to obtain feedback and build support within their organizations.
- The best approach to planning a national conference in 2006 that promotes implementation of supported recommendations is to develop greater detail on recommendations, to distribute information and communicate with participating organizations in advance, and to design the meeting to include a forum for discussion of an implementation strategy.
- The 2006 conference should be designed to allow various organizations to present *their ideas* about implementation of specific recommendations, and to help organizations understand how they can consider specific actions to contribute to achieving recommendations.

VII. Acknowledgements

NASCA acknowledges the strong partnership and cooperation of NRCS under this Contribution Agreement. NASCA also thanks members of the External Advisory Group, and the many individuals and organizations whose invaluable assistance helped to plan and carry out the two Listening Sessions.

NASCA would like to express a special thanks to NASCA members David Hanselmann of Ohio, and Jake Jacobson of Utah, for their tireless work in planning and hosting the Listening Sessions.

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Contribution Agreement 68-3A75-4-206

Appendix B – Invited Participants to External Advisory Group

Appendix C - Listening Sessions – Basic Information

Appendix D – Combined Day-One Top Five Recommendations of Breakout
Session Affiliate Groups

Appendix E – Final Recommendations from Day-Two Mixed Groups

Appendix A

Contribution Agreement 68-3A75-4-206

Purpose of Agreement and Scope of Work

The purpose of this agreement is to provide NRCS with a forum for discussion and analysis of the conservation delivery system, and a final report of recommendations to modernize and streamline that system. Implementation of the recommendations of that report will strengthen the ability of NRCS and their partners to deliver high quality services to landowners and operators to improve natural resource productivity and to maintain a strong agricultural and natural resource sector. It will also serve to streamline program administration.

Period of Agreement

The agreement covers the period from September 13, 2005 through September 30, 2006.

Budget

Total agreement contributions equal \$150,000; 50/50 match each party.

Tasks Performed by NASCA – Plan of Work

1. NASCA will form a Program Committee, membership to be agreed upon by NRCS, to plan the meeting(s). Such Committee is subject to expansion once a location is determined;
2. NASCA will arrange for, plan, and host all necessary Committee meetings and communications;
3. NASCA will lead the development of two 1-1/2 day programs to critically analyze and evaluate the national conservation delivery system including meeting content and session facilitators;
4. NASCA will contract with a professional meeting organizer to handle on-site logistics;
5. NASCA will conduct the conference(s), summarize the findings, and present the final report to NRCS within 90 days of the conference(s).
6. NRCS will be apprised of the progress of the project at 30-day intervals.
7. NASCA will bill NRCS for services rendered and actual expenses on a monthly basis.

Appendix B Invited Participants to External Advisory Group

Norm Berg	Soil and Water Conservation Society
Ray Brownfield	LandPro
Mike Brubaker ^{1a}	Landcare, USA
Tom Christensen ¹	USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Craig Cox	Soil and Water Conservation Society
Betsy Croker	National Corn Growers Association
Gary Cunningham	USDA, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
Robert Dobbs ^a	National Conservation District Employees Association
Rich Duesterhaus ^{1a}	National Association of Conservation Districts
Andrew Gordon ^a	National Association of Resource Development and Conservation Councils
Krysta Harden	National Association of Conservation Districts
Ann Heisenbuttel	National Association of State Foresters
Ron Helinski ¹	Wildlife Management Institute
Myra Hyde ¹	National Association of Conservation Districts
Charlie Ingram	National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
Bart James ¹	Ducks Unlimited
Bobbi Jeanquart ¹	National Association of Resource Development and Conservation Councils
Bruce Knight	USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Stuart Lehman ^a	US Environmental Protection Agency
Joe Martin ¹	American Farm Bureau Federation
Tamara McCann- Theis	National Cattlemens Beef Association
Doug McKalip ^a	USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Don Parrish ^{1a}	American Farm Bureau Federation
Diane Regas	US Environmental Protection Agency
Mary Ann Rozum ^{1a}	USDA, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
Luther Smith ¹	Certified Crop Advisors and others
Johnny Sundstrom	Western Coalition of Conservation Districts
Scott Sutherland	Ducks Unlimited
Charles Whitmore ^{1a}	USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Dana York	USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

¹ Attended January 19, 2005 meeting

^a Attended October 25, 2005 meeting

Appendix C Listening Sessions – Basic Information

Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation	Title	State	Mtg
Larry	Adams	Farm Service Agency	State Director	OH	OHIO
Michael	Allen	IDALS	State Technician 2	IA	OHIO
Adrian	Baber	Arkansas Soil & Water Conservation Commission	Chief	AR	OHIO
Don	Baloun	USDA - NRCS	Assistant State Conservationist	WI	OHIO
Merlin	Bartz	USDA - NRCS	Regional Assistant Chief, Central	DC	OHIO
Terry	Been	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	TX	UTAH
Kristine	Berg	USDA -NRCS	District Conservationist	MT	UTAH
George	Boggs	Whatcom Conservation District	Manager	WA	UTAH
Sara	Braasch	USDA - NRCS	Regional Assistant Chief, West	DC	UTAH
B. Todd	Brace	Ohio Farm Service Agency	Conservation Programs Specialist	OH	OHIO
Michael	Brown	DNREC	District Operations Administrator	DE	OHIO
Ed	Burton	USDA - NRCS	State Conservationist	WY	UTAH
Barbara	Carey	USDA - NRCS	RC&D Coordinator	UT	UTAH
Tim	Carney	USDA - NRCS	Acting AC & DC	CO	UTAH
Thomas	Christensen	USDA - NRCS	Deputy Chief for Programs	DC	OHIO
Mark	Clark	Washington State Conservation Commission	Executive Director	WA	UTAH
Larry	Clemens	The Nature Conservancy	Ag Team Leader	IN	OHIO
Liz	Cline	ODNR - DSWC	Area IV Program Specialist	OH	OHIO
Larry	Cochran	Palouse Conservation District	Supervisor	WA	UTAH
Mary	Combs	USDA - NRCS	State Conservationist	NC	OHIO
Terry	Cosby	USDA - NRCS	State Conservationist	OH	OHIO
Jim	Cox	NASCA	Executive Director	VA	Both
Kevin	Creer	Utah Association of Conservation Districts	Planner/Facilitator	UT	UTAH
Dee	Cummings	USDA - NRCS	Resource Staff Coordinator	UT	UTAH
Lyla	Dettmer	Franklin SWCD	District Manager	ID	UTAH

Robert	Dobbs	NCDEA	President	NJ	UTAH
Tomas	Dominguez	USDA - NRCS	Assistant State Conservationist	TX	UTAH
Rich	Duesterhaus	NACD	Director of Government Affairs, NACD	DC	OHIO
Charles	Dupuy	LA Assoc. Conservation Districts	President	LA	UTAH
Cal	Dyke	CJD Farm Consulting, Inc.	President	MI	OHIO
Bob	Eddleman	Marion County SWCD	Vice Chairman	IN	OHIO
Angela	Ehlers	SD Assn of Conservation Districts	Executive Director	SD	UTAH
Morgan	Evans	Conservation Commission	Vice Chairman	ID	UTAH
Dean	Farr	IASWCD	Executive Director	IA	OHIO
Dorothy	Farris	ODNR/DSWC	Program Specialist	OH	OHIO
Ron	Francis	USDA - NRCS	Public Affairs Specialist	UT	UTAH
Don	Gaddie	USDA - NRCS	Area Resource Conservationist	WY	UTAH
John	Garrison	Landowner		MI	OHIO
Chuck	Gay	Utah State University	Associate Vice President	UT	UTAH
Ashley	Gay		Student		OHIO
Christopher	Gibbs	Shelby County SWCD	Supervisor	OH	OHIO
Tim	Gieseke	Minnesota Project	Ag and Env. Policy Specialist	MN	OHIO
Douglas	Gifford	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	OH	OHIO
Sylvia	Gillen	NRCS	State Conservationist	UT	UTAH
Michael	Gonzales	USDA - NRCS	Management Analyst	DC	UTAH
Gerry	Gonzalez	USDA - NRCS	State Resource Conservationist	AZ	UTAH
Andrew	Gordon	National Association of RC&D Councils	Director of Programs	DC	OHIO
Steve	Hall	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	OH	OHIO
David	Hanselmann	ODNR Division of Soil & Water Conservation	Chief	OH	OHIO
Carl	Hansen	Utah State University		UT	UTAH
Wes	Harris	University of Georgia	Special Projects Coordinator	GA	OHIO
Carolyn	Hefner	West Virginia Conservation Agency	Director, Division of Conservation Programs	WV	OHIO
Carlos	Henning	USDA - NRCS	Director, CPTAD	DC	OHIO
Don	Henry	Farm Service Agency	County Executive Director	DE	OHIO
Chris	Herron	Herron Brothers Ptr	Partner	WA	OHIO
Teresa	Hice	North Carolina District Employees Association	President	NC	OHIO

Steve	Higgins	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	SD	UTAH
Scott	Hoese	Hoese Dairy Farm	Owner	MN	OHIO
Ken	Housh	Arkansas Soil & Water Conservation Commission	Land Resource Specialist	AR	UTAH
Gus	Hughbanks	USDA - NRCS	State Conservationist	WA	UTAH
Jim	Inglis	Pheasants Forever	Regional Biologist	OH	OHIO
Charlie	Ingram	NASDA	Director, Legislative Affairs	DC	Both
Constance	Jackson	Ohio Farm Bureau Federation	Vice President, Agricultural Ecology	OH	OHIO
K. N. "Jake"	Jacobson	Utah Dept Ag & Food/SCC	Soil Cons Program Specialist	UT	UTAH
Darrell	Johnson	Shambip SCD	Supervisor	UT	UTAH
Al	Kean	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources	Chief Engineer	MN	OHIO
John	Kellis	USDA - NRCS	RC&D Coordinator	OH	OHIO
Allen	Krizek	MSU Extension	Liaison	MI	OHIO
Bruce	Kroetch	Western R C & D Assoc.	Treasurer	SD	UTAH
Les	Labahn	Randall RC&D Assoc., Inc.	Executive Director	SD	UTAH
Jim	Lake	IN Dept. of Agriculture -Div of Soil Conservation	Assistant Director-District Support	IN	OHIO
Don	Lamb	Farm Service Agency	County Executive Director	OH	OHIO
Mike	Lawless	Mike Lawless Farm	Owner	MI	OHIO
Larry	Leach	Avalon Farms	Farmer	MI	OHIO
Joe	Leichtnam	Western RC&D	1st Vice-President	SD	UTAH
Paul	Leishman	Utah Soil Conservation Commission	Commissioner/producer	UT	UTAH
Michelle	Lohstroh	USDA - NRCS	State Administrative Officer	OH	OHIO
Len	Losh	Len Losh	Consultant	OH	OHIO
Chester	Lowder	NC Farm Bureau	Director of Livestock Programs	NC	OHIO
Howard	Lyle	Hardin SWCD	Nutrient Management Specialist	OH	OHIO
Jeremy	Maestas	USDA - NRCS	Wildlife Biologist	UT	UTAH
Gary	Mathes	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	OH	OHIO
Kelly	McGowan	Nevada Dept. Conservation & Natural Resources	Program Specialist	NV	UTAH
Marilyn	McNitt	Michigan Association of Conservation Districts	Secretary-Treasurer	MI	OHIO
Ned	Meister	Texas Farm Bureau	Director, Commodity and Reg. Activities	TX	UTAH
Carrie - Castille	Mendoza	LSU Agricultural Center	Master Farmer Coordinator	LA	OHIO
Thayne	Mickelson	Utah Dept Ag & Food	Facilitator	UT	UTAH

Luke	Miller	ODNR - Division of Wildlife	Program Administrator	OH	OHIO
David	Mitchem	Mitchem Farms	Owner/Operator	OH	OHIO
Cindy	Moon	NCDEA	Vice-President	IL	OHIO
Billy	Moore	USDA - NRCS	ASTC/Operations	LA	OHIO
Ed	Naranjo	Goshute Tribe	Administrator	UT	UTAH
Jennifer	Nelson	Delaware Department of Natural Resources	Environmental Scientist	DE	OHIO
Gail	Neumeyer	Conservation Districts of Iowa	President	IA	OHIO
Wayne	Newbill	Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts	One-Plan Coordinator	ID	UTAH
Jerry	Nicolescu	Idaho Soil Conservation Commission	Administrator	ID	UTAH
Kenneth	Noonan	USDA - NRCS	Assistant State Conservationist	NE	OHIO
Gary	Oates	West Virginia Assoc. of Conservation Districts	President	WV	OHIO
Doug	Pauley	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	OH	OHIO
Nina	Pekron	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	SD	UTAH
Bruce	Petersen	USDA - NRCS	ASTC(O)	WY	UTAH
Ed	Piar	Piar Farms	Owner	OH	OHIO
Scott	Piggott	Michigan Farm Bureau	Agricultural Ecology Dept. Manager	MI	OHIO
Ben	Pollard	Oklahoma Conservation Commission	Assistant Director	OK	UTAH
Martin	Popelka	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	TX	OHIO
Phil	Rasmussen	Western Region USDA-SARE	Director	UT	UTAH
Marqua	Ratliff	New Mexico SWCC	Commissioner	NM	UTAH
Dick	Reason	Rancher		NV	UTAH
Tia	Rice	Seneca SWCD	DPA	OH	OHIO
Ron	Rohall	Westmoreland Conservation District	Vice-Chairman	PA	OHIO
Jeff	Schick	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	UT	UTAH
John	Sellers, Jr	IASSCC	Chair	IA	OHIO
Denise	Shafer	USDA - NRCS	District Conservationist	OH	OHIO
Steve	Shine	Michigan Department of Agriculture	Conservation Programs Unit Manager	MI	OHIO
Marilyn	Shy	Michigan Assn. of Conservation Districts	Executive Director	MI	OHIO
Reggie	Skains	Darbonne Soil and Water District	Chairman	LA	OHIO
Thomas	Sommer	USDA - NRCS	Lead Partnership Coordinator	DC	Both
Bradley	Spicer	Louisiana Dept. Food & Forestry	Assistant Commissioner	LA	UTAH

Johnny	Sundstrom	Western Coalition of Conservation Districts	Chair	OR	UTAH
Don	Sweeting	Sweeting Farms	Owner/Operator	OH	OHIO
Curtis	Tarver	USDA - NRCS	ASTC-FO	CA	UTAH
Janette	Terry	CO State Conservation Board	for Program Manager	CO	UTAH
Chris	Tippie	USDA - NRCS	ASTC-Operations	IN	OHIO
Paul	Valin	Iowa Dept of Agriculture and Land Stewardship - Division of Soil Conservation	Field Representative	IA	OHIO
David	Vogel	NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation	Director	NC	Both
Michael	Walker	PA State Conservation Commission	Nutrient Management Coordinator	PA	OHIO
Kathy	Weaver	Idaho Soil Conservation Commission	District Operations Manager	ID	UTAH
Gordon	Wenk	Michigan Department of Agriculture	Director	MI	Both
Nels	Werner	Volunteer	Co-President Utah State Association	UT	UTAH
Jeff	Williams	USDA - NRCS	RC&D Coordinator	UT	UTAH
Dana	Williams	Park City, Utah	Mayor	UT	UTAH
Mark	Wilson	Land Stewards, LLC	President	OH	OHIO
Duane	Wood	Wayne SWCD	DPA	OH	OHIO
Stanley	Wood	Utah Soil Conservation Commission	Commissioner/rancher	UT	UTAH
Bryant	Worley	Bryant Worley Farms, Inc.	President/Owner	NC	OHIO
Doug	Zehner	USDA - NRCS	Assistant State Conservationist - Operations	OH	OHIO
Nellie	Zion	Colorado League of RC&D	State Chairman	CO	UTAH

Appendix C

Listening Sessions – Basic Information (*continued*)

Breakout Session Affiliation Categories – Day One

Ohio – 7 breakout groupings

- Landowners and agricultural producers
- Conservation district and county/parish officials
- County/parish non-federal employees
- Local level federal agency employees
- State and national level federal agency staff
- State agency staff/officials
- Non-governmental organizations

Utah – 5 breakout groupings

- Landowners and agricultural producers
- Conservation district and county officials/employees
- Local level federal agency employees
- State and national level federal agency staff
- State agency staff/officials

Breakout Session Mixed Groups Structure and Instructions – Day Two

Ohio – 4 mixed groups

Utah – 5 mixed groups

Mixed breakout group instructions (day two):

- Review and reconsider a combined list of recommendations from the preceding day's effort by like-affiliate breakout groups (a combined list of each group's top five recommendations).
- Identify any clarifying statements that should be appended to any recommendation, to make sure that all in the mixed group can agree on what the recommendation means, who must take action, what must be accomplished, timeframes, etc.
- Reach a consensus on which recommendations are most important, feasible and meaningful (i.e., ranking by points).
- Identify any idea that might have been overlooked in developing recommendations, and add to the list if by consensus agreed upon.

Appendix D
Combined Day-One Top Five Recommendations of Breakout Session
Affiliate Groups

National Association of State Conservation Agencies
Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project
Columbus, Ohio
June 8, 2005

1. Develop a national directive challenging states to employ communication protocols and streamlining protocols (streamline paperwork & time things take; make programs user friendly).
2. Allow agency personnel flexibility to make programs work. (Use common sense.)
3. Diversify conservation funding by adding Interior or EPA as a funding source in addition to USDA.
4. Expand role of SWCD to serve as gateway and clearinghouse for customers and to perform administrative and technical services that would free NRCS technical staff to spend more time in the field.
5. SWCD's should work with NACD, NASCA and other conservation agencies to fully fund "the conservation delivery system."
6. CTA should fully fund the field office technical assistance workload. Separate technical assistance dollars from program funding (FA).
7. Provide a better balance of conservation technical assistance dollars to program dollars (FA).
8. Redistribute technical and administrative responsibilities of NRCS and FSA, so NRCS does technical work and FSA does Admin/Fiscal work for all programs.
9. Create a more "customer-friendly" delivery system (e.g. give producers input on the look/readability of CNMPS, software, rules etc.)
10. Core conservation partners should have timely and consistent information and guidelines with regard to programs and practices. Don't make program changes mid-year.

11. Don't make software changes mid-year.
12. Broaden the scope of contribution agreement work items for SWCD's.
13. Use good salesmanship practices – don't try to sell the whole product line at once, sell it through progressive planning, selling one/two pollution priority practices at a time.
14. Cross train on programs and policy among SWCD, NRCS, FSA, Extension, TSPs contractors, and lenders at state/regional/other levels as appropriate.
15. Reverse the current trend of "program-driven conservation", and move to more flexible "resource-driven conservation."
16. Improve program delivery by fully testing and evaluating programs and software technology before initiating new programs.
17. Provide more advance notice/lead time before conservation programs are implemented so all partners can staff up, plan, organize and establish multi-year strategies and funding.
18. To respond to the loss of the current/technically-sound staff that is retiring, add additional staff and provide the staff with more timely, in-depth technical training, through traditional and non-traditional training opportunities as well as follow-up workshops to increase retention of knowledge gained.
19. Update & simplify technical fact sheets to reach a broader customer base, and to provide wider reaching education on agricultural issues.
20. Develop a single, overriding working lands program with resource targets and aggregated local, state, federal financial resources (working lands include CSP, WRP, WHIP).
21. Develop common procedures and policies at delivery level for all conservation programs (national, state, 319, etc.), one application, one conservation plan, provide outreach programs, provide program assistance to landowners to help sign up & qualify for conservation programs.
22. Reduce number of programs and increase flexibility (in response to a diverse clientele).

23. Establish conservation plans as a basic requirement for program payments. Ranking criteria would establish tangible measurement goals (303d de-listing, critical habitat designations, and endangered species de-listing).
24. Conduct comprehensive analysis of TSP program to determine more efficient use of funding and improved contracting procedures.
25. Assure expertise crosses agency boundaries with USDA agencies following common standards for on the ground conservation and practice effectiveness.
26. Provide adequate administrative staffing so technical staff does not have to do so much administrative work.
27. Hold a partnership discussion about how to deliver technical assistance with private providers, and decide what the mix of technical assistance should look like.
28. Update the partnership roles and responsibilities.
29. NRCS in Washington should use the Conservation Delivery System recommendations and information to improve how the system works.
30. Deliver all or some of the conservation programs in the Farm Bill through a block grant system to the states.
31. Use other agencies/organizations to sell and implement conservation programs, develop business plans to outline specific tasks partners will provide, and provide needed training to partner agencies/organizations.
32. Keep decision making local (don't just give locally-led lip service), set framework nationally, but implement with local decisions, hold more cross-training/meetings, strengthen local work groups and use to implement all conservation programs, decide locally or collectively what we want for our community, train local conservation staff more broadly (customer service, listening), and provide comprehensive conservation planning training.
33. Update and maintain integrity of NRS field office technical guide, use interim standard process to keep technical standards on cutting edge.
34. Develop conservation and commodity Farm Bill programs that complement each other.

Appendix D (continued)
Combined Day-One Top Five Recommendations of Breakout Session
Affiliate Groups

National Association of State Conservation Agencies
Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project
Park City, Utah
July 21, 2005

1. National ranking won't work. Local/state workgroups need to set ranking priority. If their plans are implemented, participation will result.
2. State Technical Committee should set calendar for schedule of application and funding dates. District Conservationists should employ prior planning. Do ranking criteria and batching before money has arrived.
3. Communicate to District Conservationists and producers to exercise waiver process to shorten project implementation time frame.
4. Emphasize communication with elected officials at all levels to support funding for conservation. Encourage interagency cooperation.
5. Improve NRCS Internal Communication so that feedback flows up and down all levels.
 - a. Evaluate and apply information technologies.
 - b. Web system: make opportunities for staff to evaluate, feedback programs, forms, etc., anonymously.
 - c. Response forms need comments section, not just numbers.
 - d. Improve timeliness of program information, heads up information on draft changes before producers find out.
6. Implement consistent and accepted interagency and producer friendly planning process, such as the "Idaho One" model.
7. Adequately fund a marketing campaign to promote the partners and partnership based on our needs and accomplishments
 - a. Including easily recognized slogans, etc.
 - b. Model impacts of conservation practices and put into laymen's terms.
8. Adequate funding for the partnership.
 - a. Fund all mandates.

- b. Ensure enough funding for the development of RMS/watershed plans to make sure plans and needs come prior to program guidance.
- 9. Focus sufficient funding and staff in the field to be able to do conservation planning and deliver programs.
- 10. Dedicate adequate funding for and access to training (programmatic and technical assistance) for NRCS and CD employees/officials.
 - a. Communicate better with local partners. Be more proactive.
 - b. Take advantage of modern media and tools.
- 11. Streamline and expedite installation/approval/eligibility/payment process.
 - a. Utilize Technical Service Providers better
 - b. Utilize flexible payment process, such as Washington's revolving loan program, for your state to expedite the payment process.
 - c. Simplify and standardize paperwork for state, local, and federal programs, i.e. application/monitoring/payment/etc.
 - d. Develop procedures for resolving interstate and state/federal inconsistencies in standards, regulations, and programs.
- 12. Partnership needs to address all resource concerns including coastal, urban, developing lands, public lands, etc.
 - a. Expand NRCS purview to include all resources.
- 13. Eliminate constant change in programs (i.e., new ranking forms/timelines each year – top driven, not locally-led).
 - a. Policy: National and state offices need to keep program delivery basically the same at least two years with ultimately one application process for all programs.
 - b. Law: Emphasis resource-driven, not program driven. Three producer/customer assistance programs could address the issues: easements, cost-share, and conservation entitlement.
- 14. Streamline/consolidate programs—one easement program, one financial assistance program—to increase field time and results.
- 15. Combine federal programs to create a more general conservation program.
- 16. Staffing – Overcome lack of experience/leadership due to retirement, coupled with current lack of staff to fully support workload: job share (impending retiree and trainee); boot camp; internships; correlate training

- needs with college curriculums; mobility/flexibility opportunities; diversity; eliminate TSP because they are not meeting standards, keep cooperative agreements and contribution agreements, keep money in NRCS staffing budget; training – allow for learning curve to allow effective delivery.
17. Improve application of technology and training – Improve technical competent savvy, do not roll-out new technology before it is ready, make sure equipment is available to support technology.
 - a. Adequately field-test new technology (internally-developed programs) before you send it to the field offices.
 - b. Eliminate mandated dates for roll-outs.
 - c. Enhance e-government opportunities.
 18. Streamlining Administrative Process
 - a. Timeliness in getting approval by contracting officer – more opportunities to grant variances (waivers) once tentatively approved for funding.
 - b. Improve timeliness of program payments.
 19. Develop standardized protocols and processes for inventory assessment, planning, and monitoring. Establish interagency Memoranda of Understanding, clarify roles and responsibilities and funding stream.
 20. Institutionalize training of all partners, especially NRCS and conservation districts, on the art and science of conservation planning process. Strengthen expertise in all necessary disciplines.
 21. Develop and implement a safe harbor or similar assurances for landowners.
 22. Create a USDA-NRCS “block grant” for conservation to states for state to distribute for natural resource priorities.
 23. Streamline getting conservation on the ground (one-page contract). Adhere to set (agency) deadlines to reply to producers for action.
 24. Increase numbers, training, and compensation of employees by reversing financial and technical assistance funding ratio.
 25. Simplify program rules and regulations and allow greater state/local decisions.

Appendix E
Final Recommendations from Day-Two Mixed Groups

National Association of State Conservation Agencies
Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project
Columbus, Ohio
June 8 & 9, 2005

1. **Keep decision making local (don't just give locally-led lip service), set framework nationally, but implement with local decisions, hold more cross-training/meetings, strengthen local work groups and use to implement all conservation programs, decide locally and collectively what we want for our community, train local conservation staff one broadly (customer service, listening) provide comprehensive conservation planning training.**
 - a. Strengthen/reinforce making locally
 - b. When used well it works great
 - c. Local Control
 - d. Actual local control
 - e. Have a national framework used by local leaders to fit local issues
 - f. Example- EQIP meeting. Local work group comes up with items – state conservationist accepts (need to know up-front if there are sideboards rather than after the fact)
 - g. Utilize local priorities
 - h. Framework changes happen @ beginning (fed shouldn't trump local & state "after the fact")
 - i. Emphasize use of local work groups - if recommendation is in tech guide, then recommendation should be approved.
 - j. When EQIP went back to more progressive planning oriented
 - k. CREP
 - l. Local work groups

2. **Redistribute technical and administrative responsibilities of NRCS and FSA so NRCS does technical work and FSA does Admin/Fiscal work for ALL programs.**
 - a. For CEP have NRCS do eligibility
 - b. As is
 - c. Top level leaders need to get together and discuss this
 - d. Redistribute technical & administrative responsibilities of NRCS & FSA so NRCS does technical work & FSA does admin/fiscal work for ALL programs
 - e. Admin should mean administrative functions (not check writing) NOT program administration

- f. Different agencies place different priorities on same task
 - g. Accountability between agencies (FSA & NRCS) should be enhanced
 - h. Tech people not trained for Admin/Fiscal & now can't do tech work
 - i. Added NRCS workload with no more money for people
3. **Reverse the current trend of “program-driven conservation” and move to more flexible “resource-driven conservation.”**
- a. The program is managing us, not us managing the program
 - b. Has to be a new balance between reporting and application of conservation
 - c. Get local priorities into this
 - d. Don't look at program; first look at land-user resources needs. Should not have to manipulate system to address resource concern.
 - e. Major focus on resource protection/enhancement, not accomplishing program goals.
 - f. Example – CREP
 - g. To address local resources
 - h. Would not get to defining FSA/NRCS responsibility
4. **Expand role of SWCD to serve as gateway and clearinghouse for customers and to perform administrative and technical services that would free NRCS technical staff to spend more time in the field.**
- a. This is happening in Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and other states
 - b. Channel additional money through SWCDs (SWCDS need to watch building of infrastructure) [Perhaps a voucher for work to SWCD]
 - c. Standardized processes will help
 - d. Staff resources need to be focused on local resource concerns
 - e. Expand role of SWCD to serve as gateway & clearinghouse for customers and to perform administrative & technical series that would free NRCS technical staff to spend more time in the field.
 - f. District is hub of wheel with spokes being different agencies and partners
 - g. Clearinghouse means they serve as PR and understands flow and can point clients in the right direction – explain process.
 - h. Helping with data entry
 - i. Direct technical help in field with NRCS providing guidance
 - j. Different from administrative functions of FSA (see #8). Means first contact admin needs for clients
 - k. Reference #28
 - l. Would spread out responsibility and free up NRCS for technical work
 - m. Improve communication - Would help tear down walls and avoid turf battles

5. **Develop a single, overriding working lands program with resource targets and aggregated local, state, federal financial resources (working lands include CSP, WRP, WHIP).**
 - a. Develop and complete...
 - b. Working lands include CSP or CRP???
 - c. Includes CRP
 - d. One set of rules/regulations to simplify
 - e. Redefinition of working lands needed; includes forestry, front yards, roadsides etc.
 - f. Have a stakeholder discussion on working lands – maybe there is no need to limit in this way
 - g. Develop a single program
 - h. Develop a single over-riding working lands program with resource targets & aggregated local, federal, state financial resources
 - i. Have a conservation plan
 - j. Would facilitate interagency collaboration
 - k. Consistent standards recognized by NGOs contributing resources
 - l. Begin with USDA
 - m. Eliminate competition among programs and place them in a pool of resources

6. **Establish conservation plans as a basic requirement for program payments. Ranking criteria would establish tangible measurement goals (303d de-listing, critical habitat designations, and endangered species de-listing).**
 - a. Meaningful plans developed with the providers input
 - b. Require producers to implement basic conservation plan to be eligible for program payments
 - c. Establish conservation plans as a basic requirement for program payments. Ranking criteria would establish tangible measurement goals
 - d. Incorporate concepts of #13 (progressive planning)
 - e. Allows flexibility to incorporate any program & allow for incremental improvements over time.
 - f. Matches \$ and assistance to most urgent needs first
 - g. Resource based plan with tools to meet needs
 - h. Conducted through CTA program & some local/state assistance
 - i. Helps meet needs of people who want technical assistance, but not cost-share money

7. **Develop a national directive challenging states to employ communication protocols and streamlining protocols (streamline paperwork & time things take; make programs user friendly).**
 - a. Recognition of personal intangible services

- b. Accountability system needs to include all the intangible services (reporting)
 - c. Use an Adobe Form system for producers to use and fill out
 - d. Standardize business practices
 - e. Pilot the use of value stream mapping to assess program delivery with input from all stakeholders (not much cost) see also notes for #9
 - f. Develop a national directive
 - g. Reduce complexity
 - h. Give freedom to allow field staff to do it – with rationale and good reasons documented
- 8. Develop common procedures and policies at delivery level for all conservation programs (national, state, 319, etc.) one application, one conservation plan, provide outreach programs, provide program assistance to landowners to help sign up & qualify for conservation programs.**
- a. This could also include accountability and measurement
 - b. One stop shop
 - c. One application
 - d. One direct deposit form for all USDA programs
 - e. System for a local coordinator to direct customers to applicable program/services
 - f. Develop common procedures and policies
 - g. Programs should have common implementation criteria
 - h. Reference #10 – includes both NRCS & FSA
 - i. Necessary /benefit to accomplishing 20 & 23
 - j. Reduce complexity
 - k. Place period after conservation plan & delete the rest (more concise)
 - l. Will simplify for producer and will increase participation
 - m. Decisions made based on plan (resource need) rather than program sign-ups
- 9. Create a more “customer-friendly” delivery system (e.g. give producers input on the look/readability of CNMPS, software, rules etc.)**
- a. Have a use friendly questionnaire to tell USDA what is working and what is not
 - b. Use focus groups, have them analyze and give feedback
 - c. Standardize business processes – agencies should all agree to systems processes and reporting
 - d. Create a national nutrient mgt. software package that can accommodate state/local data/information with producer input
 - e. Better understand and know demographics of clients & potential clients (not one-size fits all; e.g. small acres, female owners)

- f. Value knowledge of work groups, remember best decisions are made locally
 - g. Refer to #4 – “one-stop-shopping” districts have step-up
 - h. Seek input from other partners
10. **Core conservation partners should have timely and consistent information and guidelines with regard to programs and practices. Don't make program changes mid-year.**
- a. Software for CSP was not ready for role out of program
 - b. Developer of software does not understand the customer
 - c. The majority of the farmers are 'baby-boomers' or older. Not in-tune with computer usage direction
11. Broaden the scope of contribution agreement work items for SWCD's.
- a. Broaden the scope of contribution agreement work items for SWCDS and other resource partners
 - b. Use 'CD – Conservation District' term for SWCD
 - c. Find a way to give priority to those that just want help not necessarily money, not cost share planning
 - d. Broaden the scope of contribution agreements work items for SWCDS
 - e. Related for #4
 - f. Way to leverage money
 - g. Carefully done in relation to the TSP program
 - h. Look beyond TSP funds for funding opportunities
 - i. Reference #24 - analysis is important to success
12. Provide a better balance of conservation technical assistance dollars to program dollars (FA).
- a. Tell us what is in the black box...how do they allocate the TA
 - b. Provide better balance of CTA money to program money
 - c. Use TA money for people who want technical assistance, not necessarily cost-share
 - d. What we really mean is technical assistance, NOT CTA
13. To respond to the loss of the current/technically-sound staff that is retiring, add additional staff and provide the staff with timelier, in-depth technical training through traditional and non-traditional training opportunities as well as follow-up workshops to increase retention of knowledge gained.
- a. Plan ahead
 - b. This impacts NRCS & SWCDS
 - c. Need additional money to hire trainees – fully fund technical assistance
 - d. Can't get money on the land without people
 - e. Don't want to lose expertise
 - f. Look internally at what we can do to get more people on the land

14. Allow agency personnel flexibility to make programs work. (Use common sense.)
15. Provide adequate administrative staffing so technical staff does not have to do so much administrative work.
 - a. Admin work has increased
 - b. Staffing is a problem
 - c. Admin can come from SWCDs, FSA, & other levels of NRCS
 - d. A concern about a loss in tech skills by NRCS Field Staff
16. CTA should fully fund the field office technical assistance workload. Separate technical assistance dollars from program funding. (FA)
 - a. OMB requires direct charge without understanding impact on program implementation.
17. Use other agencies/organizations to sell and implement conservation programs, develop business plans to outline specific tasks partners will provide, and provide needed training to partner agencies/organizations.
 - a. Use other agencies/organizations to write conservation plans, and help sell...
 - b. Example – WHIP money in KY – DNR implements
 - c. Example – Wetland to do – perhaps DV could do, Pheasants forever...they not only implement but help ‘sell’ programs
 - d. Example – DV is doing engineering design in several states. This is an outreach effort as well, not just implementation.
18. Provide more advance notice/lead time before conservation programs are implemented so can staff up, plan, organize and establish multi-year strategies and funding.
 - a. Allowing ‘carryover’ so money is not wasted or lost
 - b. CREP
 - c. Multi-year implementation plans, so money is not lost or wasted
19. Diversify conservation funding by adding Interior or EPA as a funding source in addition to USDA.
20. Cross train on programs and policy among SWCD, NRCS, FSA, Extensions, TSPs contractors, and lenders at state/regional/other levels as appropriate.
 - a. Keep people in the loop, staff in other agencies may also be able to help sell or train people
 - b. Standardized business processes may help

21. Reduce number of programs and increase the flexibility (in response to a diverse clientele).
 - a. Turbo resource program
22. Hold a partnership discussion about how to deliver technical assistance with private providers, and decide what the mix of technical assistance should look like.
23. Improve program delivery by fully testing and evaluating programs and software technology before initiating new programs.
24. SWCD's should work with NACD, NASCA and other conservation agencies to fully fund "the conservation delivery system."
 - a. Political process – SWCDs lobby other stakeholders as well NASDA, NASCA & other 'coalition members'
 - b. Much has to be done at the local level(state & county, as well as national)
 - c. Show representatives & staffs conservation on the land (can involve others in this)
25. Conduct comprehensive analysis of TSP program to determine more efficient use of funding and improved contracting procedures.
26. Use good salesmanship practices – don't try to sell the whole product line at once, sell it through progressive planning, selling one/two pollution priority practices at a time.
27. Update the partnership roles and responsibilities.
28. NRCS in Washington should use the Conservation Delivery System recommendations and information to improve how the system works.
29. Update and maintain integrity of NRS filed office technical guide, use interim standard process to keep tech standards on cutting edge.
30. Deliver all or some of the conservation programs in the Farm Bill through a block grant system to the states
31. Develop conservation and commodity Farm Bill programs that complement each other.
32. Update & simplify technical fact sheets to reach a broader customer base, and to provide wider reaching education on agricultural issues.

33. Assure expertise crosses agency boundaries with USDA agencies following common standards for on the ground conservation and practice effectiveness.
34. Don't make software changes mid-year.

On the second day, participants were given an opportunity to fill in any gaps noted from the recommendations from the first day. If accepted by consensus of their second day workgroup, they would then submit those ideas for further consideration by the entire group of attendees. Those approved "second day" offerings are listed below (no priority):

- Develop a single resource driven conservation program where partnership staff works with the land-user to inventory resource concerns. Help the land-user develop a conservation plan in accordance with the technical guide, and then fund implementation from a "conservation fund" available to the staff and SWCD to administer.
- Outreach was listed in this listening session, but our group feels that this was not addressed during these two days. Many people we may serve/work with were not present to address conservation delivery. The question of, "Is this system properly inclusive?" was not answered as per your (NASCA) letter.
- Need to have employees who have the life experience (agricultural experience) to do job. (Should there be more intensive interning?)
- Walk-A-Mile-In-My-Boots program
- Also need to understand urban issues – urban funding is a challenge
- Education efforts/outreach of supervisors, staff & customers
- New employee understanding of history, system dynamics & partnerships is lacking
- Understanding of core mission, priorities and agreement on who is the customer – what should we be doing?

Appendix E (continued)
Final Recommendations from Day-Two Mixed Groups

National Association of State Conservation Agencies
Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project
Park City, Utah
July 21 & 22, 2005

- 1. Streamline and expedite installation/approval/eligibility/payment process.**
 - a. Utilize Technical Service Providers better
 - b. Utilize flexible payment process, such as Washington's revolving loan program, for your state to expedite the payment process
 - c. Simplify and standardize paperwork for state, local, and federal programs, i.e. application/monitoring/payment/etc.
 - d. Develop procedures for resolving interstate and state/federal inconsistencies in standards, regulations, and programs.
 - e. Utilize Technical Service Providers better through cooperative agreements.
 - f. Develop procedures for resolving interstate and state/federal inconsistencies in standards, regulations, and programs.
 - g. Programmatic decisions need to be driven at state level.
 - h. Not so much "command and control" by District Conservationist
 - i. Don't imply adding another system actually streamlines system.
 - j. Conservation Security Program – insisting on watershed basis may impact cross-state issues.
 - k. Tribal procedure inconsistencies.
 - l. Simplify process.
 - m. Timeliness in getting approval by contracting officer – more opportunities to grant variances (equals waivers) once tentatively approved for funding.
 - n. Improve timeliness of program payments.
 - o. Streamline getting conservation on the ground (one-page contract). Adhere to set deadlines to reply to producers for action.
 - p. Simplify program rules and regulations and allow greater state/local decisions.

- 2. National ranking won't work. Local/state workgroups need to set ranking priority. If their plans are implemented, participation will result.**
 - a. National ranking process won't work. Local/state workgroups need maximum flexibility to set priorities and criteria.
 - b. National ranking – is that the same as "criteria" or "guidance"?
 - c. National needs to look at state concerns and provide flexibility to address.

- d. Congress has final say on how money is spent, so as budget conscious let's make sure we address needs.
 - e. States need to have more final say with producer involvement. Focus on resource concerns.
 - f. National guidelines okay, but need meaningful local influence give greatest weight to local input
- 3. Staffing – Overcome lack of experience/leadership due to retirement, coupled with current lack of staff to fully support workload: job share (impending retiree and trainee); boot camp; internships; correlate training needs with college curriculums; mobility/flexibility opportunities; diversity; eliminate TSP because they are not meeting standards, keep cooperative agreements and contribution agreements, keep money in NRCS staffing budget to help with obstacle; training – allow for learning curve to allow effective delivery,**
- a. The transition time between exit/enter staff loses too much.
 - b. Technical Service Provider misses whole goal which is to get conservation on the ground.
 - c. Like cooperative agreement and contribution agreement –they work better than Technical Service Provider.
- 4. Create a USDA-NRCS “block grant” for conservation to states for state to distribute for natural resource priorities.**
- a. Gets closer to locally-led.
 - b. Don't have capacity or authority in every state.
 - c. Political considerations.
 - d. Needs to go to conservation or natural resource agency directed to conservation of natural resources.
 - e. Funds should be directed to an existing consideration agency/organization/entity.
 - f. Ensure that Natural Resources Conservation Service technical assistance and financial assistance support will continue.
- 5. Adequately fund a marketing campaign to promote the partners and partnership based on our needs and accomplishments**
- a. Including easily recognized slogans, etc.
 - b. Model impacts of conservation practices and put into laymen's terms.
 - c. Emphasize communication with elected officials at all levels to support funding for conservation. Encourage interagency cooperation
 - d. “Model” – highlight success stories and quantify predictable outcomes.

- e. Simplified and easily recordable reporting system.
- f. Maintain identity of each partner
- g. Include RC&D

6. Eliminate constant change in programs (i.e., new ranking forms/timelines each year – top driven, not locally-led).

- a. Policy: National and state offices needs to keep program delivery basically the same at least two years with ultimately, one application process for all programs.
- b. Law: Emphasis resource-driven, not program driven. Three producer/customer assistance programs could address the issues: easements, cost-share, and conservation entitlement.
- c. Should be locally led, not top driven
- d. Constant program change keeps staff in office, not allowing them to get to the field.
- e. Consolidating programs could jeopardize political support bases and funding dollars.
- f. Programs need to be inclusive of several ecosystems/issues.
- g. Simplify, maybe not combine.
- h. Savings in state, area, and field office by not constant training for new rankings could be tremendous and focused on the ground.

7. Develop standardized protocols and processes for inventory assessment, planning, and monitoring. Establish interagency Memorandum of Understanding; clarify roles and responsibilities and funding stream.

- a. Federal agencies need to talk to each other, including Tribal lands.
- b. “Planning” may be confusing. Basic inventory tools are what should be emphasized.
- c. For collaborative planning and implementation on local, regional, and national levels.
- d. Agree with standardized protocols. Question value of Memorandum of Understanding.

8. Focus sufficient funding and staff in the field to be able to do conservation planning and deliver programs.

- a. Focus current resources, re-allocated to field.
- b. Funding implies “financial assistance” dollars, but what we need is more “people” dollars.
- c. Sufficient technical funds need to be provided to catch up/keep addressing backlog of projects funded.

9. Adequate funding for the partnership.

- a. Fund all mandates.
- b. Ensure enough funding for the development of RMS/watershed plans to make sure plans and needs come prior to program guidance.
- c. Fund all local, state, and federal mandates.
- d. Consider “area” in addition to watershed, ecological based as example.
- e. Treating rangelands also treats watersheds.
- f. Adequate resource assessments area completed and ongoing.

10. Dedicate adequate funding for and access to training (programmatic and technical assistance) for NRCS and CD employees/officials.

- a. Communicate better with local partners. Be more proactive.
- b. Take advantage of modern media and tools.

11. Implement consistent and accepted interagency and producer friendly planning process, such as the “Idaho One” model.

- a. More emphasis on producer inputting.
- b. Resource self assessment process prior to application
- c. Emphasis is on one-stop shopping and producer friendly “Idaho One Plan” not endorsed.

12. Partnership needs to address all resource concerns including coastal, urban, developing lands, public lands, etc.

- a. Expand NRCS purview to include all resources.
- b. Give more legislative support if do so.
- c. Nobody addressing developing lands.
- d. If states can prioritize, then these could be addressed. Locally-led as well as emerging national issues, example: Mississippi hypoxia.
- e. Include RC&D in this.
- f. All partners, not just Natural Resources Conservation Service drop “a” qualifier.

13. Streamline/consolidate programs—one easement program, one financial assistance program—to increase field time and results.

- a. Constant program change keeps staff in office, not allowing them to get to the field.
- b. Consolidating programs could jeopardize political support bases and funding dollars.
- c. Programs need to be inclusive of several ecosystems/issues.
- d. Simplify, maybe not combine.

- e. Savings in state, area, and field office by not constant training for new rankings could be tremendous and focused on the ground.
 - f. Increase numbers, training, and compensation of employees by reversing financial and technical assistance funding ratio.
14. Institutionalize training of all partners, especially NRCS and conservation districts, on the art and science of conservation planning process. Strengthen expertise in all necessary disciplines.
15. Emphasize communication with elected officials at all levels to support funding for conservation. Encourage interagency cooperation.
- a. Should include state conservationists – they should be able to interact with Congressionals.
 - b. Producers need to take larger role.
 - c. Interagency cooperation key to success.
16. Improve application of technology and training – Improve technical competent savvy, do not roll-out new technology before ready, make sure equipment is available to support technology.
- a. Adequately field-test new technology (internally-developed programs) before you send it to the field offices.
 - b. Eliminate mandated dates for roll-outs.
 - c. Enhance e-government opportunities.
 - d. Mandated roll-out dates – don't eliminate but make flexible realistic
17. Increase numbers, training, and compensation of employees by reversing financial and technical assistance funding ratio.
- a. How should we use CTA dollars?
 - b. Trying to “buy” our way to conservation and losing sight of working with producers.
 - c. Beans/widgets are hard to count for technical assistance.
 - d. Congress doesn't recognize value of technical assistance and the inflation factor.
 - e. Mandated technical assistance ratios maybe not total.
 - f. Mandated technical assistance ratios difficult.
 - g. Political considerations.
 - h. Farmers still need cash for financial assistance.
 - i. Formulas need to better balance financial assistance/technical assistance not total reversal
18. Simplify program rules and regulations and allow greater state/local decisions.

19. Streamline getting conservation on the ground (one-page contract). Adhere to set deadlines to reply to producers for action.
 - a. Government doesn't "streamline" need to totally re-vamp.

20. Improve NRCS Internal Communication so that feedback flows up and down all levels.
 - a. Evaluate and apply information technologies.
 - b. Web system: make opportunities for staff to evaluate, feedback programs, forms, etc., anonymously.
 - c. Response forms need comments section, not just numbers.
 - d. Improve timeliness of program information heads up information on draft changes before producers find out.

21. State Technical Committee should set calendar for schedule of application and funding dates. District Conservationists should employ prior planning. Do ranking criteria and batching before money has arrived.
 - a. Beyond role of technical committee.

22. Communicate to District Conservationists and producers to exercise waiver process to shorten project implementation time frame.
 - a. Band-aid that does not fix problem
 - b. To also accelerate cultural resources review.

23. Streamlining Administrative Process
 - a. Timeliness in getting approval by contracting officer – more opportunities to grant variances (equals waivers) once tentatively approved for funding.
 - b. Improve timeliness of program payments.
 - c. Develop procedures for resolving interstate and state/federal inconsistencies in standards, regulations, and programs.
 - d. Programmatic decisions need to be driven at state level.
 - e. Not so much "command and control" by District Conservationist
 - f. Don't imply adding another system actually streamlines system.
 - g. Conservation Security Program – insisting on watershed basis may impact cross-state issues.

24. Develop and implement a safe harbor or similar assurances for landowners.
 - a. ESA issues.
 - b. Clean Water Act.
 - c. Regulatory issues.
 - d. As it applies to conservation delivery system and issues.

25. Combine federal programs to create a more general conservation program.
 - a. Perhaps should look beyond USDA.

On the second day, participants were given an opportunity to fill in any gaps noted from the recommendations from the first day. If accepted by consensus of their second day workgroup, they would then submit those ideas for further consideration by the entire group of attendees. None were added.