

Sponsor: NASCA Policy Committee

Title: Urban Agriculture and Assistance for Small Acreage and Urban Landowners

Subject: Proposing actions to improve services to rural and urban small acreage landowners through increased capacity for technical assistance and recognizing relevant standards and specifications for conservation practices.

Supporting material and/or documentation:

Due to changing economic forces, population growth, and urbanization large commercial agriculture and forestry operations are decreasing in many parts of the nation. Thousands of new landowners are purchasing small parcels for residential, agricultural, recreational, and other purposes. Many of these new landowners lack the knowledge or technical expertise to manage natural resources associated with their property causing a cumulative effect in watersheds resulting in degradation of water and soil quality. Small acreage operations are not usually eligible or rank competitively for conservation assistance programs through USDA due to income thresholds, cost effectiveness thresholds, and other criteria. NASCA believes the most efficient method of delivering technical assistance to small acreage landowners is through a close partnership and agreements between NRCS and NASCA members to work with and through the recognized system of conservation districts to distribute and coordinate resources.

Food deserts and food insecurity have become increasingly pressing concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, causing more people to seek locally produced foods or produce their own foods. The conservation partnership should focus on developing training regimens that will better enable our staff members to deliver quality technical assistance to cooperators interested in community gardens, roof-top gardens, backyard gardening, high tunnel production, urban agriculture, and small acreage agricultural production.

Action requested to be taken by NASCA:

The NASCA Board and staff will provide leadership to improve technical assistance services for rural and urban small acreage landowners by:

- Recognizing and raising awareness to the need for increased conservation district capacity to provide technical assistance for urban agricultural production and natural resource concerns.
- Increasing conservation district capacity to provide technical assistance by working with core partners as appropriate.
- Encouraging NASCA members and NRCS State Conservationists to utilize formal agreements to the full extent possible to increase conservation district capacity to provide technical assistance to small acreage and urban landowners.

- Encouraging the National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP) to consider small acreage elements when defining the future of conservation planning, and to broadly communicate training opportunities to the conservation partners.
- Coordinating with our conservation partners to support and promote programs that provide resources for urban and small acreage agriculture and conservation.
- Engaging with the USDA Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee to promote the expansion of field office capacity to provide technical assistance in urban areas.