

*File - Dist. Mem. of Understanding
Annual & Long Range Plan files*

WORKING TOGETHER

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A Joint Program of Action for
Maintaining and Improving
Working Relations Between
the Soil and Water
Conservation District and the
Soil Conservation Service, USDA

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The Soil Conservation Service
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The National Association of Soil
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I. Preface

Soil and water conservation districts in the United States derive their powers and responsibilities from enabling acts of each of the 50 states and Puerto Rico.

These conservation districts have challenging and ever-widening responsibilities for conservation and development of the nation's soil, water, and related resources. In carrying out this task, they seek and receive assistance and cooperation from many public and private agencies, organizations, and groups.

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is one of the principal sources of federal government assistance to districts. By will of the Congress and direction of the Secretary of Agriculture, the primary function of SCS is to give technical help--through districts--to individuals, groups, and communities who make decisions about the conservation, development, and use of natural resources.

An effective working relationship between districts and SCS, therefore, is of paramount importance. This relationship should be thoroughly understood by district governing bodies, district cooperators, employees of SCS at all levels, other public agencies, and the public in general.

This relationship has been reviewed from time to time by district leaders and SCS representatives. A joint statement was issued first in November 1956. It was updated and reissued in July 1959 under its present title, "Working Together."

This statement has had wide distribution and has proven useful and effective in acquainting members of district governing bodies and employees of SCS and others with their mutual concerns in the conservation movement.

Responsibilities and opportunities for districts are rapidly broadening because of the increasing demands being made upon resources by our growing population and changing requirements of our society. Similarly, SCS has received new assignments and authorities in the conservation and resource development field.

So, although the basic relationship between districts and SCS continues essentially unchanged, an updated "Working Together" is needed as a current guide to district supervisors, directors, and commissioners; SCS employees; and others.

As before, this statement was jointly prepared and approved by representatives of the National Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (NACD) and the national office of the Soil Conservation Service.

This statement, furthermore, has been prepared in full awareness that many other agencies and organizations participate significantly in the work of districts. It is, however, confined to a discussion of the primary elements of efficient working relationships between districts and SCS. It is designed to help both districts and SCS as they work together, and with others, toward common goals in conservation and resource development throughout the United States.

II. Nature of SCS-District Relationships

Communities and state and local governments are asking districts to take on new and broader functions. These include providing assistance in community planning, making orderly changes in land use, multiple use of resources, water-supply development and protection, soil and water management on nonagricultural land, watershed and river-basin planning, reclamation of mined and other disturbed areas, wildlife and recreational improvements, conservation education, and many others.

SCS has new assignments too. In addition to providing help to individual farmers and ranchers in districts, SCS has continued to receive new responsibilities and authorities that embrace more kinds of land and greater numbers of land users. The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, the Great Plains conservation program, and conservation and resource development projects have substantially changed and increased the agency's workload. Responsibilities for assistance in conservation cost sharing and credit programs place heavy requirements on SCS personnel. More recent assignments in rural areas development, technical assistance in rural-fringe areas, areas of rapidly changing land use, antipoverty programs,

water quality and natural beauty programs, and outdoor recreation have further increased the size and scope of SCS responsibilities.

Districts and SCS work together in these newer assignments as they have in the traditional field of conservation planning and application on farms and ranches. As working partners, each looks to the other for assistance in meeting broader needs in soil, water, and related resource conservation. The partnership, indeed, has been strengthened, and the mutual confidence and respect between the partners has been enhanced by the opportunity to work together in wider and more challenging fields.

To continue such an effective relationship, in its ever-changing dimensions, requires maximum cooperation, trust, and communication at all levels. There is and must be a continuing exchange of information and understanding between SCS officials and district leaders at every level. NACD representatives and the SCS Administrator maintain close liaison, as do SCS state conservationists and leaders of state associations of soil and water conservation districts.

In the final analysis, however, the local representative of SCS and the governing body of the individual conservation district do the work. Effective relationships are most significant, therefore, at the district and work unit level. It will be understood that the need for comparable understanding, respect, communication, and harmonious cooperation exists at each level in both organizations.

III. Agreement on Basic Concepts, Objectives

The starting point in working together is an agreement between the participants as to what they want to achieve and how they intend to work toward their common goals and objectives.

Soil and water conservation districts and SCS believe that:

- a. The conservation and orderly development of resources is urgent now and will become increasingly so as population pressures on the land increase.
- b. Responsibility for initiation and leadership of conservation and resource development should rest with the people in their own communities.
- c. Soil and water conservation districts have proven to be an effective form of local self-government for conservation and resource development.
- d. The responsibility of federal, state, and local government is to help individuals and groups of people do soil and water conservation work they cannot do alone.

- e. Soil and water conservation is the key-stone of resource development.
- f. Effective soil and water conservation combines scientific use and treatment of land in accordance with its needs and capabilities. It recognizes the operating goals of the owner or user and is in harmony with total conservation and resource development requirements of the community, area, or region.
- g. Soil and water conservation includes the multiple use of resources with the objective that all uses contribute to a healthy pleasant environment for people.
- h. Soil and water conservation takes into account all renewable natural resources and their effect on the economic and social welfare of people who live and work in the community, area, or region.
- i. Conservation and resource development is a task that districts and SCS cannot wholly accomplish by themselves. It requires the joint efforts of federal, state, and local agencies and groups in helping local people in districts develop and accomplish their conservation and resource development needs and objectives.

Soil and water conservation districts wanting help from the Department of Agriculture enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary of Agriculture. Assistance from SCS is furnished under a supplemental memorandum covering the working agreement between the district and SCS.

These memorandums, together with various federal statutes, state laws, and USDA regulations and the policies established by state conservation committees, commissions, boards, or councils, identify areas of responsibility. Some of these responsibilities rest either on the district or on SCS. Others are shared jointly.

For a most effective working relationship, the SCS representative and the district governing body should be equally and thoroughly familiar with each other's responsibilities and the applicable agreements, laws, and regulations.

District responsibilities include:

- a. Furnishing effective local leadership in the form of a properly constituted governing body.
- b. Holding regular and special meetings to plan work and to determine community needs for conservation and resource development.
- c. Developing a long-range program that recognizes the interests of all the people in the district and is compatible with the area or regional development plans.
- d. Developing, with help from SCS and other

- agencies, an annual work plan related to the long-range program, stating what will be needed to reach objectives and accomplish work scheduled for the year ahead.
- e. Enlisting needed assistance from whatever source is available.
 - f. Coordinating the several conservation and resource development programs which may operate within the district.
 - g. Determining priorities for SCS and other assistance to individuals, informal groups, public bodies, private organizations, and other district cooperators.
 - h. Supervising employees of the district.
 - i. Managing all funds, facilities, and equipment belonging to the district. SCS employees will not engage in these activities.
 - j. Cooperating with other districts in multidistrict resource activities, such as comprehensive planning, watershed development, river-basin programs, and other resource-development projects.
 - k. Correlating district programs with those of other agencies engaged in resource planning and development, such as planning commissions, economic development districts, sanitary commissions, and conservation commissions.
 - l. Reporting to the public on resource conservation needs and progress and the work of the district.
 - m. Following up with cooperators to insure effectiveness of the program.

Soil Conservation Service responsibilities include:

- a. Furnishing qualified technical help, as available, on the basis of needs outlined by the district.
- b. Locating its staff, insofar as possible, at headquarters mutually satisfactory to the district and SCS and providing such facilities as its employees may require.
- c. Gathering and providing soil survey, water management, and similar basic data for use by the district in making plans and decisions.
- d. Developing a workload analysis for an annual plan of operations for its own staff, after review of the district annual work plan.
- e. Keeping the district governing body informed about SCS work in the district and any new technical or administrative developments that would affect the district program or alter the assistance available from SCS.
- f. Supervising and managing SCS personnel, equipment, and facilities made available to the district by SCS.
- g. Cooperating with other resource agencies assisting the district.

- h. Assisting the district with information and education activities in the community and state.
- i. Helping the district meet demands from municipal governments and other units seeking technical help on land use and related resource problems.

Jointly, the district and SCS should:

- a. Review, at least annually, the memorandum of understanding, the supplemental memorandum, and any other agreements between the district and SCS or USDA.
- b. Meet regularly together and with other cooperating agencies to review requests for assistance and to consider opportunities for program development and work improvement.
- c. Cooperate in developing the district's annual work plan so that SCS assistance can be efficiently and advantageously allocated to that part for which SCS assistance is required.
- d. Review other programs, proposed or in operation, that may help facilitate or have an impact on the district program and the SCS workload in the district.

IV. Programs and Plans

Two activities involving district-SCS relationships warrant special consideration. One is the development and continuing use of the district's long-range program and objectives. The other is the process of annual work planning to carry out these objectives. These are the heart of a successful action program of conservation and resource development.

The long-range program is highly significant to the district, SCS, and other cooperating agencies.

Its purpose is to identify present and future needs and opportunities for the conservation and development of natural resources within the district. It serves as a practical guide for the planning and accomplishment of work by the district, its cooperators, and all agencies whose assistance is enlisted. It outlines what needs to be done and how work is to be carried on and when the various objectives or goals within it are expected to be accomplished.

The long-range program provides the district with a pattern to follow for the ongoing, year-by-year actions required to carry out its responsibilities. At the same time, it enables SCS to plan ahead for the kind and amount of help that will be needed.

In recent years, many districts have updated their programs and have broadened the scope of

these documents to include conservation and development of land, water, and related resources for nonagricultural as well as agricultural purposes. These updated programs also furnish a framework for assistance to communities, watersheds, regions, and governmental units in planning and carrying out a wide variety of resource developments. SCS authorities are broad enough to assist districts in many ways but districts will need to enlist the aid of other groups and agencies as well to achieve their objectives.

All public agencies--local, state, and federal--with responsibilities for the conservation and development of land, water, wildlife, forests, and open space; for highway or road planning, construction, and maintenance; for industrial and urban expansion; and for agricultural development should be invited to participate actively in district program development. Representatives of these agencies, of local organizations, news media, and local educators should be invited by the district to its meetings when topics of mutual interest are to be considered.

Once formulated, the long-range program should be an active, live document, reviewed periodically, and kept current. SCS staff members and others assisting the district should be fully acquainted with the program and use it as a guide for their own annual work planning.

The annual work plan outlines the current year's steps to be taken toward the goals and objectives of the long-range program. The district's annual work plan is an indispensable blueprint for all who are involved in conservation and resource development in the district. For this reason, the plan must be brief, realistic, and readable. It should be based on:

- a. An inventory of resource potentials and conservation needs in the district.
- b. The objectives indicated by the long-range program.
- c. A realistic appraisal of assistance available to the district in the year or period ahead to carry out a part of its long-range program.

This is the district's own plan--not that of SCS or other public agency and should be so identified and used. Once developed, however, the district work plan makes it possible for SCS to develop its own annual plan of operations and thus properly plan for its assistance to the district

The district work plan gives the governing body and SCS and other agencies a basis for determining the conservation workload for the year. It determines what equipment, materials,

and other resources will be needed to achieve goals. It helps SCS set goals for its own work. It helps the district determine priorities and make assignment of responsibilities to its own employees, to SCS, and to other agencies. It provides a basis for budget development, work schedules, and the like for the district, SCS, and other cooperating agencies.

The district governing body and the local representative of SCS should, in this process, jointly identify the annual workload in prospect for SCS assistance in the district. This should include:

1. An estimate of the work to be done as a result of decisions by the district governing body concerning:
 - a. The conservation work that district cooperators plan to do in the year ahead with SCS assistance on farm and nonfarm land.
 - b. The number of landholders, groups, community bodies, planning commissions, and others likely to become cooperators in the year ahead.
 - c. The priority of assistance to cooperators to be provided by SCS.
 - d. The group enterprises (or facilities) that should be assisted with planning and application during the year ahead by SCS.
 - e. Any items of work to be performed on watershed or conservation and resource development projects in the application, planning, operations, or maintenance stage by SCS.
 - f. Shifts in emphasis on conservation work to keep the program in balance.
2. An estimate of the next year's soil survey work in the district, including the acreage to be surveyed to meet the needs of cooperators, Farmers Home Administration borrowers, and others, along with special surveys for areas undergoing rapid changes in land use.
3. An estimate, made in cooperation with the county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation committee, of the amount and type of technical assistance needed from SCS and others for the cost sharing on conservation practices.
4. An estimate, also in cooperation with the county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation committee, of work to be done by SCS in connection with any cropland adjustment or land retirement programs.

The district work plan, finally, provides goals against which the governing body, SCS, and other agencies can measure accomplishments and attainment of current objectives. Progress toward meeting current goals should be checked monthly at meetings of the district governing body with further plans and adjustments made as necessary.

V. Reporting and Communicating

The district and SCS, along with others, can work effectively in reporting to cooperators, to the public in general, and to key persons in local, state, and federal government, on the problems, progress, and objectives of the district. Many districts find periodic newsletters an effective means of keeping in touch with cooperators and community leaders. SCS can help by providing information about its work in the district for such newsletters.

SCS, along with other groups and agencies, such as the Cooperative Extension Service, can help the district with tours, demonstrations, field days, farm-city activities, soil stewardship observances, and similar educational efforts.

The district, local SCS staff, and others are encouraged to carry forward a continuing program of reporting to the public through newspapers, radio, and television. This is especially important when districts begin to serve community-wide needs of people who could not otherwise be reached as individual cooperators. The residents of urban and suburban areas and small towns in or near a district have a stake in the progress of the district program. They, as well as rural residents, need to be informed through appropriate information media, meetings, tours, and other means, about soil and water conditions and conservation and resource development objectives in the district.

Both SCS and the district have responsibility, which they exercise in cooperation with other agencies, for obtaining understanding and recognition of resource conservation in the educational curriculum at all levels.

The district is expected to make an annual report to the public and to the Secretary of Agriculture on the progress resulting from USDA assistance. Many districts publish and distribute their reports, making possible a wider dissemination of facts about their program. SCS can help provide factual information relating to SCS work for these reports.

The district and SCS must make continuing effort to see that all agencies and groups who contribute to the advancement of the district program get full recognition. This is essential to good working relationships and should be kept in mind in preparing materials for the press, for talks, and for any other communications.

"Working Together" is more than a slogan. It is the only way conservation and resource

development work can be done well enough and in time to insure the continued well being of our country.

In "The Future of Districts" a special committee on district outlook identified in America the need for organized legal bodies to:

"1. Represent all the people and all community interests in ascertaining conservation needs and responding to their desires. To accomplish this, these bodies would need broad and diverse leadership, representative of agriculture, business, industry, recreation, and community interests, and would need to utilize all means of ascertaining and informing public opinion, such as referenda, public hearings, community meetings, educational programs, advisory committees, and similar devices.

"2. Develop conservation and resource development programs for all of the people. Such programs should be based on thorough investigation and analysis of natural resource problems and opportunities. They should be comprehensive in nature, should aim at the multiple-purpose development and use of resources, and should provide for the active and coordinated participation of all interests and agencies concerned with natural resource affairs.

"3. Involve all the people through appropriate representation in the decision-making process relating to natural resource conservation and development. The full participation by citizens should be the goal, such participation to be accomplished through elections, hearings, referenda on major issues, and other techniques appropriate to the particular state and local governmental structure. Close cooperation with general governments such as states, counties, cities, and townships -- and their agencies -- would be a key element in this process.

"4. Accept and carry out responsibilities, including the expenditures of local, state, and federal financial allocations on behalf of all the people, in connection with resource programs and projects. This would mean securing and exercising powers needed to accomplish the conservation tasks that face the nation.

"In the opinion of the Committee, soil and water conservation districts should become these bodies. Such a policy, we believe, holds the most promise for organizing an effective and enlightened natural resource conservation and development program for America, a program in which local self-government is realized to the highest possible degree."