

Rural Water Issues Advisory [8/19/2019]

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Special Single Issue Edition: USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS Chief Tours Delaware Conservation District's Successes:



Matt Lohr @MatthewJLohr · Aug 13

What a fantastic day in Delaware.

National Association of Conservation Districts @NACDco... · Aug 13

NACD is in the field today with @SCD_DE at their Crabs and #Conservation event. @USDA_NRCS Chief @MatthewJLohr thanked those in attendance for being "champions for soil health and districts on the ground."



Last week, the Trump Administration's Chief of NRCS Matt Lohr toured various conservation projects implemented by the Sussex Conservation District (Delaware). District Coordinator David Baird (pictured left of Chief Lohr) introduced the Chief at luncheon attended by local farmers during event. In addition to administering the conservation district, Baird also serves on the board of directors for the Delaware Rural Water Association and the National Rural Water Association. Baird has been educating various policy makers on the potential for further collaboration between the NRCS and the rural water Grassroots Source Water Protection initiative.

NRCS, formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), is an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides technical assistance to farmers and other private landowners and managers to improve, protect, and conserve natural resources on private lands through a cooperative partnership with state and local agencies. NRCS's financial assistance is authorized by the Farm Bill. The most recent Farm Bill made a major change in the "targeting" of the various conservation funding programs within the NRCS.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (i.e. the Farm Bill) requires that 10 percent of conservation funding available to farmers through the NRCS, approximately \$4 billion over the next 10 years, be targeted for source water protection. NRCS implements federal conservation funding programs for farmers and works through state technical committees to prioritize source water protection needs. A [May 6, 2018, NRCS implementation guidance](#) details the new federal source water initiative.

An NRWA delegation including Baird has urged NRCS to consider expanding their initial identification of local priority areas for source water protection to include the source water protection plans developed by the local drinking water utilities (i.e. local governments) under NRWA's Grassroots Source Water Protection initiative. These plans include data (delineations, assessments, and abatement plans) that are often more robust and more closely correlate agricultural activities' impact on local public drinking water quality.

Both NRCS and NRWA's source water protection activities work with community drinking water supplies and farmers to reduce, eliminate or prevent nonpoint source water pollution resulting from farmers' land-use activities from impacting drinking water. A NRCS-NRWA partnership could offer a very unique non-regulatory approach that would be able to: (1) identify the specific agriculture-related conservation activities in drinking water watersheds that have a nexus with drinking water quality of a specific public drinking water supply, (2) facilitate the NRCS funded conservation activities with the farmer and the local government's source water protection plan, and (3) provide the local (governmental) support for the initiative.

The NRWA Grassroots Source Water Protection initiative was first authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill and operates under another USDA agency, the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The NRWA initiative is the only statewide local community-based initiative for developing drinking water source protection plans (in every state). With FSA support, the initiative has completed 202 locally supported and adopted source water protection plans in the last year. In the last 15 years, the initiative has completed 2,111 locally adopted plans (surface and groundwater). Local governments believe that the best plan for protecting water resources is the one that is developed by the local officials who better understand their particular vulnerabilities and drink the water. Every one of the approximately 50,000 U.S. drinking water supplies has a unique set of vulnerabilities and challenges (90% serve less than 10,000 persons).

[National Rural Water Association](http://www.nationalruralwater.org)

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The National Rural Water Association is the country's largest public drinking water and sanitation supply organization with over 30,000 members. Safe drinking water and sanitation are generally recognized as the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.

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