

On: 2006 Conservation Effects Assessment Project

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SURVEY PROVIDES REPORT CARD FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

(Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 11, 2006) Many factors contribute to the loss or destruction of farmland, some of which are controllable. Farming practices that can improve water, soil and air quality, as well as enhance wildlife habitat across the country are available -- at a cost. To help American farmers adopt these practices, the 2002 Farm Bill provided millions of dollars in cost-sharing aid.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) partners with farmers and ranchers to promote conservation practices through cost-sharing programs. But are these conservation programs effective? Are they actually helping to improve water, soil and air quality? Are they improving wildlife habitats across the country? To help answer these questions, the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), in partnership with NRCS and the Farm Service Agency (FSA), will begin conducting the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) in mid-October.

"Most people acknowledge the advantages of conservation programs," says Nathan Crisp, Director of NASS's Louisiana Field Office. "The problem lies in that we must have quantitative data to measure the environmental benefits provided by these programs." Crisp continues, "Funding was provided for these programs in the 2002 Farm Bill, and CEAP provides us with the data needed to assess their effectiveness. If producers want Congress to continue supporting these and similar programs in future farm bills, they have to be able to prove that the programs work."

The Louisiana Field Office will conduct CEAP to gather information on the use of field level management practices designed to promote conservation of soil and water resources on 130 sampled fields in Louisiana. Nationwide, 6,032 cropland fields have been selected for this study. The information obtained from this study will be combined with other reports and with climate and soil information from other sources to create a more complete picture of environmental and conservation management conditions in Louisiana and across the nation. The data will also be used to estimate the benefits derived from conservation programs.

NASS works with farmers and ranchers to provide meaningful, accurate, and objective statistics that help keep U.S. agriculture informed. "By participating in CEAP, farmers and ranchers have an opportunity to ensure that conservation programs will continue to keep America's working lands healthy and productive into the future," Crisp said.

"We are required by law to keep individual reports confidential," Crisp continued. "We take that responsibility very seriously. Your individual data are only used in combination with other responses in the database. We will not disclose any data about an individual operation."

All agricultural statistics published by NASS are available at www.usda.gov/nass/. For more information, call 1-800-256-4485.

- 30 -