Collaboration Toolkit:
Protecting Drinking Water Sources through Agricultural Conservation Practices

Visit: http://www.sourcewatercollaborative.org/swp-usda/

Goals of Toolkit

- Promote source water protection through agriculture conservation practices
- Facilitate collaboration between source water and USDA state and local leaders, with a focus on Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Programs

5 Easy-to-Follow Steps

The toolkit includes simple steps for identifying common ground, current opportunities, and key contacts and ideas for working with USDA at the state level.

- Step 1 gives a quick overview of key USDA conservation programs that help protect and improve sources of drinking water. Learn the vocabulary NRCS staff use so you're sure to speak their language.
- Step 2 gives tips to help you define what your source water program can offer and includes an infographic that explains the State Conservationist's role and what can be accomplished through collaboration.
- Step 3 links to talking points, draft agenda for first meeting, and key USDA documents to help you take the first steps to action.
- Step 4 lists useful conservation and source water protection resources.
- Step 5 links to key partners who can bring data, technical capabilities, useful state and local perspectives, and links to other key stakeholders.

Current Opportunities to Put Toolkit to Use in Your State

- **NRCS Nutrient Management Conservation Practice Standard 590 – Updated State Standards due to NRCS January 2013**:
    - Consultation with state water quality agencies is required. Some state NRCS offices have provided drafts of the state standards to their state drinking water programs to ensure accurate information, e.g., wellhead setbacks. Contact your State Conservationist's office to request an opportunity to review the draft standard.
        - View Connecticut's conservation practice standard 590 (updated June 2012): http://www.sourcewatercollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/CT_590_2012_Final.pdf
    - This is a critical standard for getting adequate nutrient management on the ground and an opportunity for consideration of drinking water sources. Private landowners and operators receiving funds to develop and implement nutrient management plans or to install animal waste storage structures must comply with the NRCS 590 conservation practice standard.
    - Click here for NRCS nutrient management information: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/crops/npm
- **The 2013 USDA National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)** offers an opportunity to increase installation of conservation practices to address nutrient concerns for drinking water sources in selected watersheds. States can work with NRCS to identify additional watersheds in FY 2013.
    - Coordinate with your state's Clean Water Act Section 319 program, and contact your State Conservationist's office to provide input to watershed selection. Click here to see which watersheds have been selected to date: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=STELPRDB1047761

Upcoming Supplement *(Planned for Early 2013 Release)*

- The current toolkit is designed to help you work with USDA conservation programs at the state level
- Through the Source Water Collaborative's partnership with the National Association of Conservation Districts, the toolkit will be updated with tips for working with conservation districts

See the reverse side of this handout for an infographic that highlights what source water programs and NRCS State Conservationists can bring to a collaborative effort to protect sources of drinking water.

COLLABORATION CAN PROTECT SOURCES OF DRINKING WATER

TOGETHER

- Align our work for mutual program benefits
- Leverage funding
- Include multiple partners
- Measure progress
- Help private landowners and operators, agencies, and partners know they are helping a bigger picture

STATE SOURCE WATER PROGRAM

- Share data and information on delineated source water protection areas, priority contaminants, sources of contamination, and water quality monitoring results
- Provide information and leverage potential funding sources
- Assist with implementation and help target USDA initiatives (e.g., identifying priority areas, potential benefits of conservation practices to drinking water)
- Partner in conducting outreach to private landowners and operators

STATE CONSERVATIONIST

- Implement NRCS conservation programs – technical assistance and funding to private landowners and operators for conservation plans, and cost-share for conservation practices
  - EQIP (water quality initiatives)
  - State 590 conservation practice standards
  - Conservation Stewardship Program
- Funding capacity, and discretion about what to fund
- Agreements with partners (e.g., conservation districts)
- Discretionary technical assistance (e.g. signup workshops for private landowners and operators to help implement a water quality improvement project)

OUR COMMON GROUND

- Voluntary (non-regulatory) programs for private landowners and operators
- Focus on protecting soil, water quality, and health
- Help assure overall health of communities
- Achieve and demonstrate water quality results in priority areas

Note: It's a good idea to find out who USDA NRCS work with in your state. We are using "private landowners and operators" as a general term in this infographic. NRCS may work with a variety of producers - farmers, ranchers, poultry and livestock producers, dairymen, forest landowners, including those who rent land.