



Chairman Robert Aderholt

*Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
FY 2017 Budget Hearing
February 26, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

I would like to welcome all of you to today's hearing to review the Natural Resources Conservation Service's FY 2017 budget request. Joining us are Mr. Jason Weller, Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Mr. Mike Young, USDA's Budget Director.

NRCS has requested a total of \$860 million in discretionary funding for its salaries, expenses, programs, and activities for FY 2017, an increase of \$9.5 million over the FY 2016 enacted level. In addition, about \$3.8 billion will be available through the 2014 Farm Bill's mandatory conservation programs to help farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners preserve and protect their land.

As we move through this year's appropriations process, I have set four goals for our Subcommittee. First, to increase oversight, efficiency, and the need for effective outcomes. Second, to keep rural America vibrant. Third, to support American farmers, ranchers, and producers. And fourth, to protect the health of people, plants and animals.

The work that NRCS does to support our nation's producers helps to accomplish several of these goals. NRCS' locally led, science-based, and voluntary approach to conservation has been extremely successful in recent years. The investments we make in farm and conservation programs in the upcoming fiscal year will benefit all Americans, from the farmers and ranchers in the fields to consumers in the U.S. and abroad. It is this Subcommittee's responsibility to ensure that the discretionary funds appropriated, in addition to the mandatory funds provided in the Farm Bill, are adequate to ensure the effective implementation of new and existing conservation programs.

The Subcommittee has been following closely the implementation of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative, for which we provided a \$5 million increase in FY 2016. Chief Weller, I would like to congratulate you and your staff on the successful rollout of phase one of this program, the Conservation Client Gateway. I look forward to getting an update on this program today.

For the past several years, this Subcommittee has been focused on the numerous OIG audits related to NRCS' financial management systems. Effective financial management is enormously

important for ensuring the integrity of NRCS operations and programs, and we appreciate the work you have done to bring NRCS' financial and accounting systems into line with today's transparency and accountability standards. NRCS' funding covers discretionary and mandatory programs totaling an estimated \$4.75 billion. The scale and importance of the programs under your purview make it imperative that you keep working to eliminate the three remaining material weaknesses and eventually gain a clean opinion. Again, I want to thank all of you for being here.

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