

Chairman Jack Kingston
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and
Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Natural Resources and Environment Budget Hearing for FY 2013
Opening Statement
March 7, 2012

Good morning. I would like to welcome Harris Sherman, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, and Dave White, Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, to the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee.

Nearly 70 percent of the land in the United States, exclusive of Alaska, is held in private ownership by millions of individuals. Fifty percent of the United States – 907 million acres – is cropland, pastureland and rangeland owned and managed by farmers and ranchers and their families.

The work of NRCS and individual farm and ranch families to conserve and maintain these productive lands is typically unrecognized and unheralded. We don't want to get to a point where we forget the tragedy of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s before Americans understand the importance of keeping productive topsoil and a productive agricultural sector in place.

Fortunately, the devastation of that era produced a remarkable federal, state and local partnership for delivering conservation assistance to farmers and ranchers. The concept was that NRCS would deliver technical and financial assistance for conservation, while state governments and local conservation districts would connect with individual landowners and set local priorities. From the beginning, it was a cooperative approach. The partnership remains the preeminent model for intergovernmental cooperation and is admired around the world.

Today, the Subcommittee will review how this cooperative approach is working in light of current funding constraints and management challenges. We also will consider whether the President's budget request provides sufficient and appropriate resources for NRCS to help meet the needs of the farmers and ranchers in their stewardship efforts.

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