

Chairman Robert Aderholt
FY 2014 Budget Hearing
USDA Natural Resources and Environment Mission Area
Opening Statement As Prepared
April 24, 2013

I would like to welcome Ms. Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment; Mr. Jason Weller, Acting Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); and Mr. Mike Young, USDA's Budget Director, to the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee.

We convene today to review NRCS's fiscal year 2014 budget request. NRCS requests a total of \$808 million in discretionary funding for its salaries, expenses and activities. In addition, more than \$3.1 billion will be available to farmers, ranchers and private landowners through the farm bill's mandatory conservation programs to help them preserve, protect and enhance their land.

The cooperative work of NRCS and individual farm and ranch families to conserve and maintain productive lands is usually unrecognized. The science-based, locally led and voluntary approach to conservation on these lands is an incredible legacy that arose out of the terrible Dust Bowl years. Even if we don't realize it, all Americans have benefited from it. This legacy is worth defending.

But part of the legacy is the integrity of NRCS's operations and programs. This Subcommittee has been concerned for several years with the agency's management of its programs and financial systems. We hope to hear today that the agency is on a better track.

In order to maintain support for the agency, its programs and locally led conservation and to pass on this great legacy to the next generation, it is necessary that we have the highest level of confidence in NRCS's systems, science and staff.