



## **National Association of Conservation Districts**

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January 3, 2017

To NACD State Contacts,

We are contacting you to ask for your help and support in piloting a new recognition program for farmers and ranchers who are trailblazers in the use of a new conservation planning service. You can help us by forwarding this message along with the two attachments – a recognition letter template and a draft news release template – to local conservation districts.

As you may know, NRCS has introduced a new tool for conservation planning called the Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool (RSET). RSET allows farmers and ranchers to assess how they are addressing key natural resources thresholds for water quality and quantity, soil health, air quality and wildlife habitat through their stewardship practices. RSET is built on familiar and scientifically proven tools already used in conservation planning. It provides an excellent summary to help a farmer or rancher set priorities and goals.

Together with a conservation professional, farmers and ranchers who use RSET can develop a conservation plan to help them meet or exceed identified natural resources thresholds. RSET is a key component of the revitalized conservation planning effort envisioned by NRCS, NACD, and our national conservation partners engaged in the National Conservation Planning Partnership. [More information on the tool is available here.](#)

Some of the farmer/rancher cooperators in your state have already used RSET, and we want to recognize them as RSET Trailblazers with the attached letter. We ask you to work with your NRCS state office to identify which conservation districts serve trailblazers and to forward them the attached materials.

In the letter template, there are signature lines for chairs of district boards and district conservationists in the respective districts where RSET has been used. Initially, many of these RSET Trailblazers will be in National Water Quality Initiative watersheds, where RSET was introduced two years ago. As NRCS moves into a full national rollout of RSET in calendar year 2017, the tool will be available to landowners across the country. We hope to recognize those who use RSET throughout 2017 with your help.

In the future, we also expect the recognition program to have some additional levels of recognition that may be at the state and/or national level. Districts can use the attached news release template to draw attention to this recognition program. We ask that you also forward the news release template to local conservation districts.

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The purpose of the RSET Trailblazer Recognition program is twofold – to recognize farmers and ranchers who have used RSET and to encourage its use by others. We believe RSET will open doors of opportunity for future recognition and other public and private benefits. The attached letter template includes the NRCS and NACD letterheads. If local districts would like to use their own letterheads or logos, they may also be inserted.

We hope the RSET Trailblazer Recognition Program will help districts and their cooperators begin many more positive conservation planning conversations.

We believe this effort can best succeed if conservation districts and/or state associations share with NACD when letters of recognition are sent to RSET Trailblazer(s) in your state. Please share a brief email message with Bill and Rich (their email addresses are listed below) when a letter is sent. Also, feel free to contact us with any questions.

Bill Berry, NACD Communications Specialist, at [billnick@charter.net](mailto:billnick@charter.net); or,  
Rich Duesterhaus, NACD Director of Projects and Partnerships, at [rich-duesterhaus@nacdnet.org](mailto:rich-duesterhaus@nacdnet.org)

Thank you for your great work on behalf of America's farmers, ranchers, and other landowners.

Rich Duesterhaus  
NACD