The National Association of Conservation Districts on

Conservation Technical Assistance

The USDA Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program is the lifeblood of conservation in the United States. Through NRCS and its local, state, and national partners, CTA helps landowners become better stewards of their natural resources by assisting them with resource assessment, practical design, planning, and monitoring of conservation practices.

CTA makes conservation planning possible

For any landowner to participate in a farm bill or other federal voluntary conservation program, they must first have a conservation plan developed by a certified conservation planner. **The majority of NRCS conservation plans are paid for with CTA funding.**

Conservation plans are living documents developed **confidentially and one-on-one** between a local conservation technician and a landowner. These plans include recommendations for **site-specific conservation practices** and are **tailor-made** to meet a landowner's specific conservation needs and stewardship goals.

With conservation plans, farmers and ranchers can weave the right conservation practices into a system capable of achieving **greater outcomes** than any single practice could accomplish on its own. Together the right conservation practices produce on-farm results – like higher yields and more efficient use of inputs – and off-farm public benefits – such as clean water, safe air, and healthy plant and animal populations.

CTA infuses critical resources into the voluntary conservation delivery system

CTA provided resources to **train and employ** more than 10,000 NRCS technicians and specialists, plus upwards of 50,000 more conservation-related jobs at the state and local level in 2016. Unlike many other federal agencies, NRCS does not have a "salaries and expenses" account, so it funds a large portion of its staff through the CTA program.

CTA allows NRCS to **procure field office space, vehicles, computers, and equipment** to strengthen delivery of on-the-ground conservation across the country.

The CTA program also makes **contribution and cooperative agreements between NRCS and conservation districts and state associations possible.** These agreements with NRCS help conservation districts deliver practical, site-specific solutions based on sound science and proven research directly to landowners.

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Robust funding for CTA ensures that America's landowners have the technical assistance they need to keep our nation's soils healthy, our water clean, and our wildlife abundant. If funding for CTA were eliminated or severely reduced, it would drastically hinder the ability of conservation districts and our partners to deliver conservation assistance in communities nationwide.

What can I do to prevent cuts to CTA?

Because Congress holds the purse strings, it is critical that you and your conservation district articulate the value of CTA to your elected representatives over the phone, in letters, and face-to-face.

In the past, Congress has shown its support of voluntary conservation by maintaining or increasing funding for USDA's Conservation Operations account (which houses CTA) through the annual appropriations process, **but we can't stand by idly. There's too much at stake.**

Use the fast facts below to communicate to your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and of course your elected representatives, the many benefits CTA helps provide the American taxpayer. **NACD has requested that Congress fund the Conservation Operations account at $865 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018.**

The primary conservation benefits of CTA are:

- Reduced soil loss from erosion
- Improved water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management
- Reduced potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought
- Enhanced quality of fish and wildlife habitat
- Improved long-term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, coastal lands, and developed and/or developing lands

These benefits are possible because CTA supports conservation planning, which increases the voluntary adoption of the:

- Right conservation systems
- Right system integration and implementation into the landscape
- Right amount/extent of inputs and practices