

SOIL AND WATER RESOURCES CONSERVATION ACT OF 1977

(16 U.S.C. §§ 2001-2009, November 18, 1977, as amended)

Overview

The Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) requires that U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs be based on comprehensive and continuing natural resource appraisal. The purpose of Act is to ensure that USDA's conservation programs are responsive to the long-term needs of the Nation.

Congress reauthorized RCA in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, expanding the scope of the appraisal and establishing a schedule of deliverables.

The RCA requires the USDA to:

- Conduct a continuing appraisal of the status, conditions, and trends of the Nation's soil, water and related resources and assess their capability to meet present and future demand; and
- Evaluate current and needed programs, policies, and authorities and develop a national program to provide guidance for all USDA conservation programs and activities.

In response to the Act, USDA will examine agriculture and its current and future impacts on the Nation's natural resources, global climate change, and renewable energy. USDA will use its data and data from other Federal, State, and local agencies and private organizations to adequately assess current conditions and trends and project future natural resource conditions.

Public Participation

Nationwide public stakeholder involvement is a critical component of the RCA process — providing valuable feedback on the effectiveness of existing programs and the need for new initiatives and programs to address changing conditions and natural resource needs.

Deliverables

In January 2011, the National Appraisal, which documents the current status, trends, and future demands on soil, water and related resources will be delivered to Congress.

In January 2012, the National Conservation Program, which evaluates current and needed programs, policies, and authorities and proposes a national soil and water conservation program will be delivered to Congress.

History

- The first RCA (RCA I) Program was delivered to Congress in 1982. The Appraisal addressed key questions related to the availability and condition of land and water resources, considering pressures on the resource base resulting from consumption patterns, agricultural export trends, and population growth. Soil erosion, water table decline, urbanization, and impacts on important habitats were the resource concerns for which alternative scenarios were considered.
- Conservation strategies developed through RCA I were incorporated into the 1985 Farm Bill in the forms of the Conservation Reserve Program, conservation compliance, sodbuster, and swamp buster.
- The second RCA Appraisal and the updated Program delivered to Congress in 1989 built upon the issues addressed in RCA I, establishing erosion and water quality concerns as national priorities.

For more information on RCA, contact:

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