



Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

Conserve Resources for Their Intended Purpose

The charge: Develop a Performance Plan for the \$650 Million Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program.

The CTA Program is the heart and soul of the work the NRCS does with private ranchers and farmers, as well as with local, state, and tribal governments to conserve our soil. Air and water quality are also important results for this important program.

The CTA Program was being seen as a slush fund by Congress because of the lack of defined purpose and documented performance. Thus, Congress had begun to earmark their critical dollars for projects outside of the CTA program. NRCS was doing great work and achieving impressive results, but Congress and OMB were unaware of NRCS' achievements. NRCS needed help telling their story of success and value.

The OMB applied the Program Assessment and Review Tool (PART) to the CTA program in 2003, the program received the dreaded "failed to perform" score. Although CTA received high marks for a well-managed program, because there were no meaningful performance measures doomed the score. This exacerbated the impression that the all-important CTA Program was without purpose or impact.

Results:

Weidner helped NRCS set the record straight and in turn the agency was able to forestall further erosion of the fund.

Further, the development of a Family of Measures, including results, outputs, demand and efficiency measures ensured that further review of the program would produce improved scores on the PART.



NRCS Chief Knight approved the plan for the President's budget. With the development of the Performance Plan, CTA now clearly demonstrates the value it provides to Congress and to the American people.

Project Description

Weidner enabled NRCS to:

- Identify issues and trends that will have a major impact on the program and customers for the next two to five years
- Development of an inventory of the services customers receive from the CTA Program. This step was critical to NRCS' ability to tell stakeholders, including Congress, what the CTA Program delivers to customers.
- Delineate and group services by common purpose into four activities. The activities were organized around the CTA major customer groups — farmers and ranchers, and other government jurisdictions — as well as the research and technology transfer efforts.
- Develop a statement of purpose and a Family of Measures. The results are measurable impacts on soil, air, water, wildlife, and customers.

