

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information:  
Gary Smith 717-237-2204  
Stacy Mitchell 717-237-2208

DATE: July 23, 2001

## **New NRCS Programs Provide Conservation Assistance to Farmers**

*Harrisburg*—The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for conservation cost-share assistance through the Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) to help farmers voluntarily install conservation practices.

AMA is designed to help farmers in three conservation categories:

- Establishing grazing management systems.
- Regenerating hardwood woodlots from interfering vegetation and deer pressure.
- Converting from conventional farming to certified organic farming.

Cost sharing is available up to 75% for practices such as fencing, livestock watering, and seedings; herbicide treatment and fencing; and practices to meet organic certification requirements (by respective categories). Practices will be installed through 5 to 10-year contracts.

“This is an excellent program for farmers who have not been able to receive assistance through other active conservation programs,” said Robin Heard, NRCS State Conservationist. “Pennsylvania’s farmers are good stewards of the land and we’re happy to be able to help them care for the resources.”

Special priority is being given to landowners with current conservation plans containing eligible practices -- those who have a current prescribed grazing plan developed by 7/1/01 and those with a forest stewardship plan established by the state forester before 7/1/01.

More--

Pennsylvania has received over \$677,000 which will be divided into lots of \$250,000 for grazing contracts, \$250,000 for hardwood regeneration, and over \$177,000 for converting to organic farming. AMA is available in 15 states where participation in federal crop insurance programs is historically low.

“We’re looking forward to being part of this pilot program,” Heard reported. “Its success could bode well for agriculture and the resources in Pennsylvania.”

NRCS field offices will accept applications between July 23 and August 3, 2001. Priority rankings will be completed by August 10 and contracts should be ready for signing around September 7, 2001.

The Soil and Water Conservation Assistance Program (SWCA) is designed to help farmers comply with federal and state environmental laws with changes to cropping systems, grazing management, nutrient management, and irrigation. It is NOT available in designated priority areas such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or Chesapeake Bay Program areas. Pennsylvania received \$134,000 to fund approximately 5 contracts which had been waiting for funding.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the lead agency of the United States Department of Agriculture charged with providing voluntary conservation technical assistance to landowners and managers on private lands. Pennsylvania NRCS works with 66 conservation

More--

3/3/3

7/23/01

Conservation

districts which are local county units of state government under the State Conservation

Commission. Districts lead local efforts to identify conservation needs and set priorities. As

part of the Pennsylvania Conservation Partnership, we work together with other state and federal

agencies and private organizations to protect the resources of Pennsylvania's 28.9 million acres.

---30---

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.