

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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Dr. Kenneth M. Brooks
644 Old Eaglemount Road
Port Townsend, Washington 98368

Dear Dr. Brooks:

For more than 70 years the Natural Resources Conservation Service has been working on a voluntary basis with private landowners throughout the country to implement conservation practices on the nation's working lands. This voluntary approach is at the heart of our agency's success, nurturing a stewardship ethic that spans agricultural sectors, geographic boundaries, cultures, and generations.

While some agencies have pursued a regulatory approach to implement environmental protection measures, I believe our locally-led, voluntary approach is more effective for a number of reasons, including:

1. Experience demonstrates that landowners who voluntarily participate in our programs are more likely request and implement additional conservation practices after their initial experience with our conservationists;
2. Our cost-share programs require landowners to share part of the financial cost of conservation practice implementation. Therefore, they're invested in the practices they implement;
3. Landowners who recognize natural resource problems on their land are fully vested in solving their problems as a practical business matter, as a real estate value proposition; and as part of their family stewardship value set;
4. Once sold on the value of conservation, landowners tend to manage and monitor the effectiveness of conservation practices far more efficiently and effectively than any monitoring effort we could implement for that purpose; and
5. No regulatory approach could foster the type of trust and partnerships required to solve complex natural resource issues day-in, day-out through the years.

Helping People Help the Land

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

The voluntary approach works whether we are looking at a 10,000 acre ranch, or a lifestyle residential acreage. By engaging the landowner in identifying the problems and developing solutions, we have seen a broad variety of resource issues successfully addressed.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is an example of a financial assistance program that helps defray the costs and risks of implementing conservation systems for farmers and ranchers. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is available to non-farmers, and has been used extensively in low-density residential developments.

As you're aware, natural resource issues continue to evolve and to challenge those of us who are in the business of working with landowners to solve those problems. And while the regulatory "stick" may coerce some landowners to address a particular problem today, I believe our voluntary "carrot" gives them a reason to be part of the solution - today and well into the future. Fortunately, we have 70-plus years of success to validate that assertion.

It's obvious that I'm sold on the value of voluntary conservation, but more importantly, so are thousands of our customers.

If I may be of any further assistance to you, please let me know.

Sincerely,

R. L. "GUS" HUGHBANKS
State Conservationist