

Definitions of Key Outreach Concepts

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I. Outreach

According to the NRCS Outreach Division¹:

Outreach is a way of conducting business to ensure that underserved individuals and groups throughout the United States and its territories are made aware of, understand and have a working knowledge of USDA programs and services. Outreach will ensure that these programs and services are equitable and made accessible to all.

II. Underserved Customers

The NRCS Outreach Division¹ defines underserved customers as:

Individuals and groups who have not participated in or have received limited benefits from USDA or NRCS programs which may improve their quality of life and/or the environment.

Examples of historically underserved are farmers/ranchers and landowners/operators with limited resources, minority groups (including American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Aleuts), women, and the physically challenged. Underserved farmers may also include small farmers, organic farmers, and other farmers with nontraditional production practices. Underserved non-farmers may be members of religious and ethnic groups, and rural and urban communities which can benefit from USDA-NRCS programs and technical assistance.

III. Outreach Strategy

An Outreach Strategy details the actions each NRCS-SWCD field office will take to ensure that all customers have equal access to USDA programs and assistance. At a minimum, Outreach Strategies should:

1. Identify groups of customers who may be underserved.
2. Document the economic, social and cultural characteristics, and the resource concerns of underserved customers.
3. State the goals/objectives for the outreach initiative.
4. Identify actions that will be taken to achieve goals/objectives.
5. Identify resources that will be committed to the effort.
6. Identify ways in which progress will be measured.

Based on what is appropriate for the service area, Outreach Strategies can target farmers, non-farmers, rural communities, and urban communities.

IV. Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers

According to 180-GM, Issue 5, Part 406,

Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers (LRF) is a term used to describe those farmers who, when compared to other farmers and farm operations in a given geographic area, such as a state, county, or project area, have distinct disadvantages in obtaining U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Program assistance. The LRF designation is for agency use in diversity programs and is not for general information.

LRFs have one or more of the following characteristics/:

- a) Gross farm sales average \$40,000 or less in each of the last 3 years and there is no non-farm income.
- b) Total household net income, farm and non-farm, is 75 percent or less of the non-metropolitan median income level for the state or county.
- c) Lack of access to capital, labor, or equipment.
- d) Farm or ranch size is significantly smaller than average size.
- e) Social, cultural, customs or language barriers, minimal awareness of USDA programs, limited management skills, the level of formal education is below the county average or undereducated, and are less likely to take business risks and adopt new technology.

The Technical Note “Process for Identifying Limited Resource Farmers and Ranchers” describes how to identify individual producers as LRF. Contact the State Outreach Coordinators or the Social Sciences Institute for a copy of this publication. It is also on this web site (the Social Sciences Home Page: <http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/socsciinstitute>)

V. Socially Disadvantaged Persons

While some farmers may aptly be described as “socially disadvantaged,” this term is also useful for characterizing potentially underserved non-*farm* people and communities.

Socially disadvantaged persons are defined by USDAⁱⁱ as:

A group whose members have been subject to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudices because of their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities. Socially disadvantaged groups consist of women, African-Americans, Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asians and Pacific Islanders.

National, state and regional census data includes information about the racial, ethnic and gender characteristics of residents. Contact the State Outreach Coordinators for assistance.

VI. Disadvantaged Communities and Groups

Certain project areas (e.g., counties, municipalities or watersheds) may be characterized as “disadvantaged” based on the economic characteristics of the residents.

According to Circular No. 4 of the National Watersheds Manualⁱⁱⁱ, disadvantaged communities and groups have the following characteristic:

1. Average value of *property* is less than 75 percent of state average values.

In addition, either of the following characteristics is present:

2. The average *per capita income* for the last three years is less than 75 percent of the national average.

OR

3. Current *unemployment* is twice the national average for the past three years.

The 1990 U.S. Population and Housing Census (and occasionally, other state and regional surveys) can indicate the extent to which people with these economic characteristics live in a county or project area. Census data also provides information about the ethnic, racial and gender make-up of service areas. In some cases, census data can be used with the TIGER geographic system to show the location of targeted populations. Before doing your own analysis, determine if census data has already been reviewed for your area of interest by inquiring with RC&D, Cooperative Extension, local colleges or universities, and regional or county planning agencies. The State Outreach Coordinators are also available to provide assistance.

ⁱ USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Services. “Program Outreach Division.” Undated.

ⁱⁱ United States Department of Agriculture. “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman on Program Delivery and Customer Service at USDA.” December 10, 1996.

ⁱⁱⁱ USDA-Soil Conservation Service. “Circular No. 4.” National Watersheds Manual. September 30, 1988.