

FIELD OFFICE TECHNICAL GUIDE

SECTION III

Part C

HUMAN and SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

FLORIDA

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Refer to Section II for Cultural Resource Information



Human Considerations

Introduction

In accordance to the General Manual, Part 401, Subpart C, “Human considerations must be taken into account during the planning process.” These considerations include both economic (land use, capital, labor, management level, risk, profitability) and social (client well being, community well being, environmental justice) factors. Cultural resources are also included in “human” considerations because they represent an integral part of our national heritage.

Human considerations have an influence on the decisions that determine the conservation practices planned, the scope of the area treated and levels of treatment applied.

All human considerations are evaluated in both short-term and long-term periods. Short-term refers to installation period and long-term refers to the effects during the life span of the practice or conservation management system.

Economic Considerations

When evaluating economic considerations, basic economic information should be collected and analyzed by the conservation planner however, the planner is not required to collect specific financial information from clients. The planner only uses financial information that the client freely offers. Financial information for evaluating economic considerations may include crop or livestock budgets, prices received reports and/or custom machinery costs. NRCS employees shall treat volunteered “client data” and “financial” information as strictly confidential.

Economic considerations can be summarized into six categories: land use, capital, labor, management level, risk and profitability. Economic effects are not always quantified in dollars. Resources may be valued in non-monetary units such as hours, tons and animal units.

Land Use

The potential for livestock and crop enterprises and applicability of certain conservation practices are directly related to the nature of the land resources available and the current land use or operation. Proper land use can be determined by soil type, fertility level and/or native or naturalized vegetation. Land in its native state may be enhanced to better meet landowner(s) objectives with conservation practices such as brush management, prescribed burning, surface water management or irrigation. Introduction of new and improved plant species, nutrient management and irrigation water management may increase production per acre and agricultural land values.

Capital

Capital consists of liquid assets including cash such as balances in checking and/or savings accounts, but it also includes illiquid assets including breeding livestock, machinery, buildings, land and any other assets that can be bought and sold. Capital is needed to purchase, rent and/or lease assets for the agricultural enterprise and for family living and other personal expenditures. In the short term, which is the installation phase of the conservation practice(s), capital represents the landowner's ability to implement, operate and/or maintain farm or ranch improvements including conservation practices. However in the long term, which is the lifespan of the conservation practice(s), the practice itself may be considered capital, especially if it is a structural practice.

Labor

Labor includes the landowner, his/her family, hired help or other trained workers. In most cases, the landowner and other family members provide all or a large part of the labor used on most farms and ranches. When new enterprises and/or conservation practices are introduced, labor requirements may increase. Labor is measured in units of time including hours and/or wages.

Management Level

Management is defined as the authority to identify, analyze and choose alternatives for the agricultural operation. Management level refers to the ability to plan, organize, coordinate, control, staff, and supervise his/her farm enterprise. Management level is measured in qualitative terms directly related to the managers' knowledge and skill to adequately install, operate and maintain whole farm conservation plan(s) and/or individual conservation practices.

Profitability

Profitability is a measure of how efficient the operation is in using its resources to produce a profit or net farm income. Conservation practices such as irrigation water management and prescribed grazing may contribute to the efficiency of the operation. Profitability can be defined in quantitative or qualitative terms. When accurate cost data is available, profitability may be defined in quantitative units, such as dollars. However, when defined in qualitative terms profitability means the ability to achieve an economic profit.

Risk

There are many forms of risk associated with an agricultural operation including production, price and financial risks. However, when defining risk associated with conservation planning, it can be the exposure to a loss and/or damage of the landowners' resources. This exposure to risk can affect crop, livestock and/or wildlife yields, cash flow and other resources. Risk should be measured in terms of income variability.

Social Considerations

Social considerations are evaluated by NRCS to meet the requirements of law, executive orders, administrative decisions and directives. These social evaluations are required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the NRCS rule for "Compliance with NEPA" (7 CFR 650), which applies to all NRCS-assisted activities. According to this rule, "a wide range of environmental data together with social and economic information must be considered in determining whether a proposed action is a major Federal action significantly affecting the human environment."

Three social considerations must be evaluated when developing a conservation plan including client well being, community well being and environmental justice.

Public Health and Safety

Client Well Being

Client well being represents the current social, cultural and economic situation of the client.

Community Well Being

Because farmers and/or ranchers are members of adjacent communities, their activities may affect the social, environmental and economic well being of the community. The link between farm/ranch and their community is particularly important in rural communities where economic prosperity is dependent on natural resource protection and a healthy environment. Alternatives should be reevaluated if the community may be adversely affected by a recommended activity and/or conservation practice(s).

Refer to the Economic and Social (+H) Considerations Helpsheet in the FOTG for additional information and guidance.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, issued February 11, 1994, requires each Federal agency to make environmental justice a part of its mission. Agencies must identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations, low-income populations, and Indian Tribes. Environmental Justice, as defined by USDA Departmental Regulation (DR 5600-002), issued on December 15, 1997, means that, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on, are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by, government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment.

Environmental Justice was first introduced as a way to contest actions, such as the disposal of known toxins or industrial waste in poor communities resulting in soil contamination and water quality degradation affecting the community's health and safety. It also eliminating any barriers to Environmental Justice provides a way to change or make the difference in the lives of those who could be or have been adversely impacted by environmental effects resulting from government actions.

Environmental Justice must be taken into account in all NRCS activities. Determination of whether a particular program or activity raises an environmental justice issue depends on an evaluation of all circumstances. NRCS should consider whether the adverse effect is appreciably more severe or greater in magnitude than the adverse effect that would be suffered by the non-minority population and/or non-low-income population.

Refer to the Environmental Justice Helpsheet in the FOTG for additional information and guidance.