

**As Prepared for Delivery**

**Chairman Jack Kingston**  
**House Committee on Appropriations – Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,**  
**Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**  
**USDA Natural Resources and Environment FY 2012 Budget Hearing**  
**Opening Statement**  
**April 5, 2012**

Good morning and welcome. Today is the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee's final budget hearing for fiscal year 2012. We want to welcome Under Secretary Harris Sherman; Mr. Dave White, Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Mr. Mike Young, USDA's budget director, to the subcommittee.

USDA's Natural Resource and Environment mission area includes the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Forest Service. As you know, the Forest Service is under the jurisdiction of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. Today, we will focus on the Natural Resources Conservation Service and its work on behalf of private farm, ranch and forest land conservation.

This year, Congress will provide about \$5.7 billion through mandatory and discretionary programs for private lands conservation. NRCS will manage about \$3.7 billion of that. While this subcommittee does not control the mandatory farm bill conservation program spending, we are uniquely situated to ensure NRCS manages taxpayers' dollars wisely. We also must ensure that NRCS remains connected to the farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. These Americans work the land that feeds and clothes us and provides us fuel for our vehicles and a healthy, bountiful environment.

The President's budget request proposes \$898 million for NRCS operations for fiscal year 2012. This is a decrease of about \$110 million from fiscal year 2010 due to the proposed cancellation of three programs. We will be scrutinizing this request, especially in light of the Congressional Budget Office's announcement that the February 2011 budget deficit was \$223 billion.

I know that discretionary spending is a relatively small portion of the budget crisis this nation faces. But as we begin to develop the fiscal year 2012 agriculture appropriations bill, we simply must be mindful of the federal budget deficit and do our part. I look forward to working with USDA and NRCS on this.

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