

# **SHARING THE COST OF CONSERVATION**

**An Agricultural  
Conservation Policy Project  
by the Soil and Water Conservation Society**

**PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

# Sharing the Cost

## Evaluation of Federal Support for Conserving Working Land

“Sharing the Cost: Evaluation of Federal Spending on Working Land Conservation” is a project of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) undertaken with support from The Joyce Foundation. The objectives are (1) to produce a comprehensive description of current and past federal investment in conservation on privately owned working land and (2) to provide a basis for comparison of federal investment among conservation, environmental, and agricultural programs.

### Preliminary Findings

This paper presents preliminary findings—focused on USDA agricultural conservation budgets—from our analysis. These findings **do not include** spending by the Forest Service or the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service.

### Definitions and Data Sources

We integrated spending across multiple agencies and programs into categories that describe the basic functions of a comprehensive conservation program. The categories we developed are as follows:

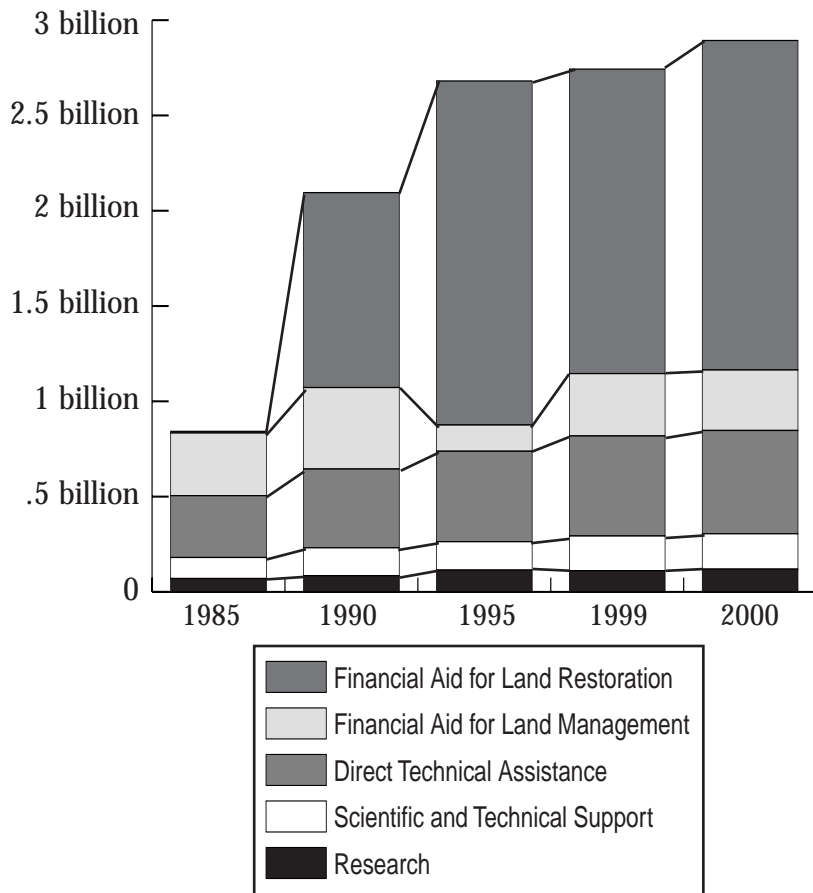
#### Conservation Budget Functional Categories

Research	Basic and applied research that provides the scientific underpinning for effective design, installation, and maintenance of conservation systems.
Scientific and technical support	Translating basic and applied research into specific guidelines, practice standards, and recommendations for conservation systems planning, design, and implementation; transferring that information to technical advisors.
Direct technical assistance	Direct, one-on-one technical advice and assistance to landowners, communities, and units of local government for planning and implementing conservation systems on a site-specific basis.
Land management and treatment	Financial assistance implementing conservation systems and keeping the land in food and fiber production. (e.g., EQIP).
Land restoration and retirement	Financial assistance for taking agricultural land out of food and fiber production and restoring grassland, forest or wetland habitat, with restrictions on economic use of the restored acres. (e.g., CRP, WRP).

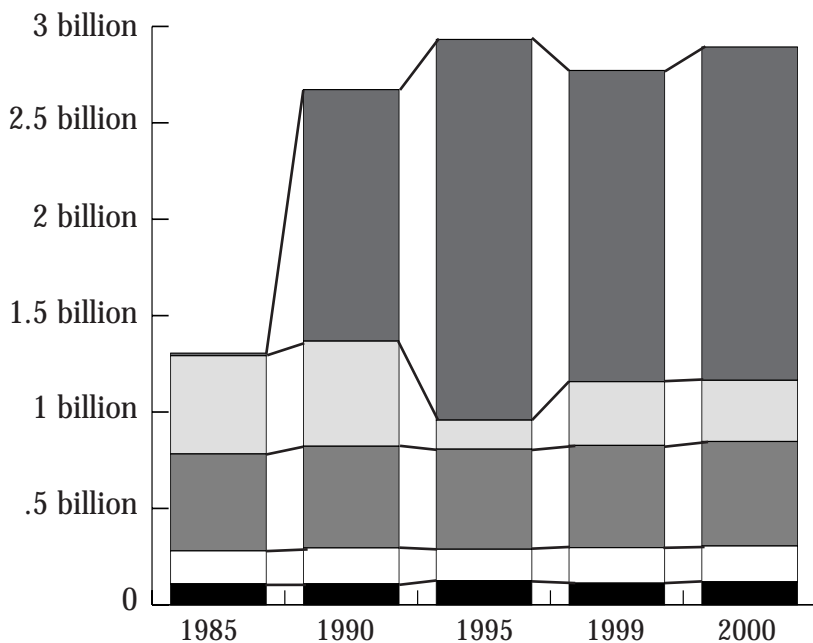
Budget and spending data were drawn from agency explanatory notes for fiscal years 1985, 1990, 1995, 1999, and 2000. Fiscal year 2000 data are estimated expenditures; data for all other fiscal years are actual expenditures.

# Trend in USDA Conservation Spending

## USDA Conservation Budget (Nominal Dollars)



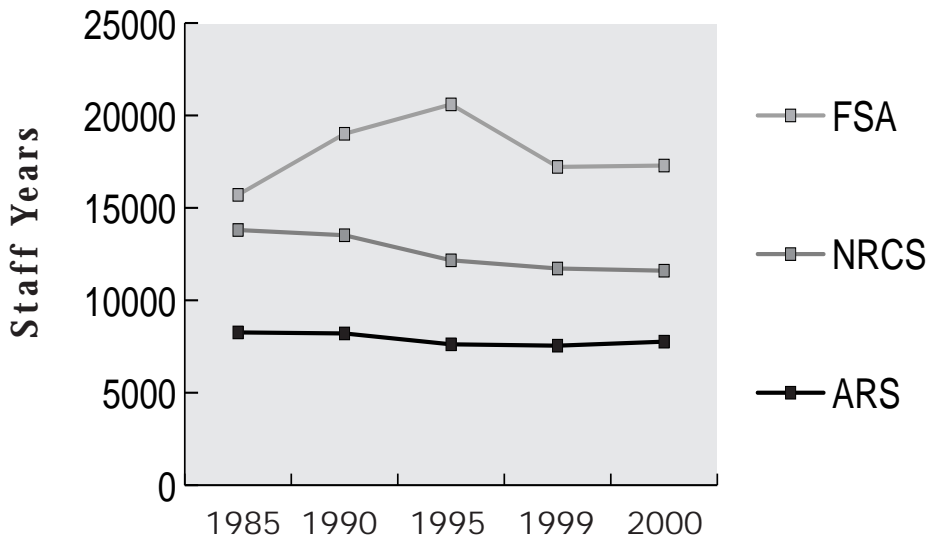
## USDA Conservation Budget (2000 Constant Dollars)



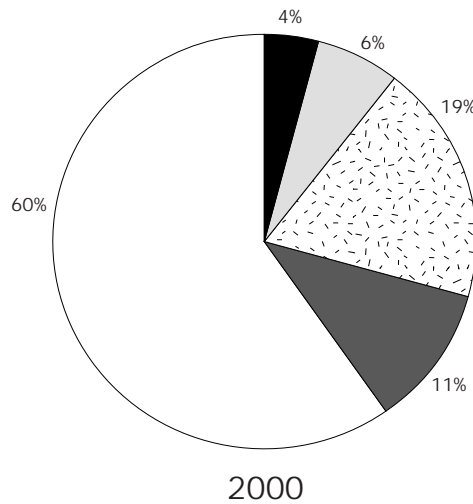
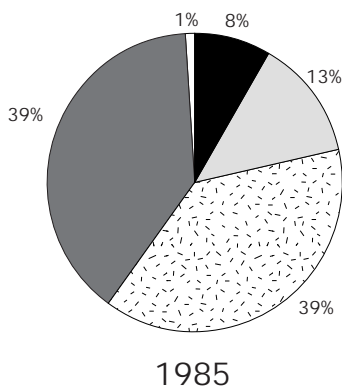
- USDA conservation spending—in nominal dollars—increased 243 percent from 1985 to 2000. Even in constant dollars, conservation spending increased by 123 percent.
- A single program—the Conservation Reserve Program—accounted for 80 percent of the increased conservation spending.
- Financial assistance for land restoration and retirement, in constant dollars, increased from \$13 million in 1985 to \$1.76 billion in 2000—an increase of 12,000 percent.
- Financial assistance for land management and treatment, in constant dollars, declined from \$509 million in 1985 to \$317 million in 2000—a decrease of 38 percent.
- Investment in research, scientific and technical support, and direct technical assistance was flat—increasing in constant dollars by about 8 percent.
  - Research—10 percent increase.
  - Scientific and technical support—9 percent increase.
  - Direct technical assistance—8 percent increase.

## Trend in USDA Staff

### USDA Staff Years by Agency



- Capacity to support research, scientific and technical support, and direct technical assistance declined, despite a slight increase in spending.
- NRCS and ARS staff available to support research, scientific and technical support, and direct technical assistance declined.
  - NRCS—cut 2,201 staff years (-16 percent).
  - ARS—cut 500 staff years (-6 percent).
- FSA staff available to support programming increased between 1985 and 1995, then declined between 1995 and 2000. The net: an increase of 1,586 staff years since 1985.



- Financial Aid for Land Restoration
- Financial Aid for Land Management
- Direct Technical Assistance
- Scientific and Technical Support
- Research

## Trend in Emphasis

- In 1985, 60 percent of the conservation budget was spent on scientific and technical assistance—40 percent on financial assistance.
- In 2000, 29 percent of the conservation budget was spent on scientific and technical assistance—71 percent on financial assistance.
- In 1985, 97 percent of the conservation financial assistance budget was spent on land management and treatment and 3 percent on land restoration and retirement.
- In 2000, 15 percent of the conservation financial assistance budget was spent on land management and treatment and 85 percent on land restoration and retirement.
- The proportion of spending allocated among research, scientific and technical support, and direct technical assistance has remained constant.