

# People, Partnerships, and Communities

The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.

USDA Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

Social  
Sciences  
Team

## Barriers and Strategies for Small-Scale Producers

As a conservation planner, you can address physical obstacles such as climatic conditions, erosion, water quality, and archaeological sites by utilizing available resources such as the Field Office Technical Guide, Engineering Handbook, and other technical materials. When you encounter barriers that are social, organizational, or economically oriented in natural resources, the technical materials are not as plentiful. This fact sheet provides a list of barriers and strategies that, although not exhaustive, provide social science based information to assist you as you work with limited resource groups. This fact sheet can serve as a checklist as you attempt to establish contacts and work with small farmers. The barriers and strategies are organized in the following categories: (1) Identification, (2) Community Contacts, (3) Communication, (4) Economics, and (5) Organizational. Each category presents barriers and strategies to overcome these barriers.

### Identification Barrier

- Field staffs do not always have statistical profiles, names, and locations of small farmers.

### Identification Strategies

- Summarize the number of farmers and the amount of acreage per county by race, sex, and Hispanic origin. The NRIA and Social Science Team have developed special sites where you can download such information in several formats.

Go to <http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/customdata/> or <http://waterhome.tamu.edu/nrcsdata/> to see this type of Information) [6]

- The National Agriculture Statistical Service (NASS) has Agriculture Census data for 1997 –see [www.nass.usda.gov/census/](http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/)
- Other field service center representatives may have lists of small scale producers
- Contact your State Social Sciences Coordinator or your State Office Outreach Coordinator for assistance
- Acquire or develop a directory of small farmers for your county (all counties may not have a directory)
- Contact land grant institutions (1890, 1862, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), 1994 American Indian Colleges and Universities), and community-based organizations and nonprofit organizations.
- Identify the characteristics of individual farmers and their communities to help you better market programs and services through community leaders/contacts, television, radio, newspaper, local grower associations, school associations, and/or other formal and informal organizations.

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## Community Contacts Barrier

- Some small farmers operate in separate groups that are not part of the communities' mainstream activities.
- NRCS field staffs often times are not highly visible within the small farming community.

### *Community Contact Strategies*

- Field staffs should try to get on agendas and speak about conservation issues at meetings attended by small farmers and farm owners e.g., local small farmer meetings, non-profit groups, civic meetings, church meetings, festivals, etc.
- Personally visit, telephone or send e-mail messages to small farmers to inquire about the type of assistance they desire, if any.
- Start a local newsgroup on the Internet
- Post information at areas where small farmers congregate; e.g., restaurants, farm auctions, slaughterhouse, grain depot, etc.
- Field staff should take small farmers along on field visits.
- Establish a conservation library independently or as part of the county or university library system.
- Use farmers as local experts on conservation as they are accessible, respected, trustworthy and familiar with local resource conditions. One way to do this is to develop a directory of who's doing what in conservation and provide a way for interested farmers to make direct contact with those doing the work.
- Make presentations on conservation and the environment at local schools, community colleges, or universities.
- Establish a volunteer program using people from small farmer communities.



## Communications Barriers

- Communication networks are often times formal and agency-based rather than informal and community-based.
- Communication methods oftentimes overlook the need for "one-on-one" service delivery.
- Written communication is often filled with jargon.
- Many demonstration sites, workshops, conferences do not highlight low-cost technologies that address the local customs, values, and environment of the small farm and ranch community.

### *Communications Strategies*

- Utilize informal communication networks such as community leaders, schools, and neighborhood and community associations.
- Develop and use a "farmer-to-farmer" network to promote information on conservation programs, services, and assistance so small-scale farmers can evaluate the benefits of conservation for their own operation.
- Whenever possible, outreach should be personalized by using a one on-one assistance in the delivery of services. This may include helping farmers to complete application forms and simplifying and "de-jargoning" written communication.
- Develop a local newsletter that identifies opportunities for conservation applications. Brochures, newsletters, fact sheets should be written for sixth grade reading competencies.
- Videos, photos, displays are usually well received by farmers as opposed to written text. As much as possible, dramatize natural resource conditions that are out of line through different mediums and under different conditions (e.g., dump 10 tons of soil in the mall parking lot).
- Have several leaders in the small farmer community "proof read" any type of written or visual information for appropriateness, understandability, completeness, and clarity. Consider their comments carefully and act to implement their suggestions.

- ❑ Work with local leaders to set up demonstration sites, conferences, workshops, and tours within the local area, emphasizing common resource problems that emphasize low-cost technologies and that also reflect the local customs and physical environment.
- ❑ Accumulate case studies and farmer testimonials on the benefits of using conservation measures. As part of this effort, provide farmers with a contact point – telephone number or e-mail address – so local farmers can make direct contact with those providing the testimonial.
- ❑ Target all decision makers with information (husbands, wives, children, farm workers) and provide target information to different categories of farmers – absentee owners, part-time farmers, farmers growing specific products, etc.
- ❑ Field office staff should strive to be informational brokers on existing national, state, and county policies, tax laws, and programs. This information can assist farmers understand: the cost of contracting for conservation services, the ramifications of purchasing conservation-oriented equipment, and the financial benefits of applying conservation measures.
- ❑ Support or help establish an equipment loan program in the District.
- ❑ Recommend practices that are consistent with local equipment inventories of small-scale producers.

## Economic Barrier

- Financial resources for cost-sharing and upfront funds are limited.

## Economic Strategies

- ❑ Work with local foundations, organizations such as the Heifer Project International, Southern Federation of Cooperatives, and Wildlife Foundation to pool available funds.
- ❑ Work with all USDA agencies to determine if loans and grants are available and applicable for small-scale farmers and ranchers.
- ❑ Field staffs need to offer a full range of practices to small farmers which include low-cost practices.
  - q Field staff should meet regularly with bankers and lending organizations to demonstrate the short and long-term benefits of applying conservation practices, the conservation programs available to community farmers, and eligibility requirements of those programs.

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## Organizational Barriers

- ❑ USDA agencies do not effectively communicate with each other concerning the type of tools and methods that can be used in the delivery of services.
- ❑ Small farmers do not always understand the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies at the Field Service Center.
- ❑ Small farmers usually do not have a voice in locally led activities.
- ❑ Small farmers are typically not well represented at the District board level.

## Organizational Strategy

- ❑ Field staff can “cross-check” with other USDA agencies as well as local community organizations and associations to ensure that communication and delivery of services are “streamlined”.
- ❑ Field Service centers can develop fact sheets, charts, and/or maps that clearly display the different roles and responsibilities of different entities.
- ❑ Partner with leaders in local grower and other producer associations and work with them to encourage participation of small farmers in locally led activities.
- ❑ Work with District boards to ensure that small farmers are represented at the district level