

NRCS chief promises his help



DAVE WHITE

By LYNN BETTS

THE new chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Dave White, says he'll implement conservation provisions of the farm bill using common sense and in partnership with the farmers, ranchers and forest-land owners whom the agency serves.

A Missouri native, White, 56, learned conservation from the ground up. He began his conservation career with the Soil Conservation Service in 1977, working in Missouri, South Carolina and Montana, as well as in a number of positions at agency headquarters in Washington, D.C.

He also served on the Senate Agriculture Committee, helping craft the Conservation Title for both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills.

White was named the 14th chief of the NRCS on March 24. After his first full week as head of an agency with 12,000 employees and an annual budget of more than \$3 billion, he talked about his goals and priorities.

"I want to build on our legacy of helping future generations enjoy a healthy, productive land; cleaner air and water; abundant wildlife; and a better environment for everyone," White says.

He sees his agency's role as one that helps farmers and ranchers meet environmental challenges and remain economically viable. Specific pressing issues are the creation and conservation of energy, water quality, and help for farmers to deal with issues such as hypoxia, carbon sequestration and global climate change.

"We need to help agriculture mitigate climate change with carbon sequestration, but I see a more intriguing issue in adapting to climate change," White says.

Farm bill conservation programs

White says the Conservation Stewardship Program is the major change in the new farm bill. "The program will now be nationwide, instead of watershed-based, with 12.7 million new acres each year. I'm hoping we can get rules approved soon, with a sign-up later this summer and contracts awarded early this fall," he says.

White envisions new energy opportunities, such as making energy creation an allowable use on Grassland Reserve Program lands.

"Farmland preservation will absolutely be a priority," he says. "Annual funding in the 2008 Farm Bill is nearly double what it was for the 2002 Farm Bill, and it's highly leveraged with local funding."

While he thinks the technology explosion is the biggest change he's seen in his conservation career, White says his agency's challenge now is to harness computer power and make it people-friendly. "We want to streamline our work processes, and have our people spending more time on farms and ranches instead of in the office.

"We will be working hard on a seamless computer system that's used on location, using a laptop or hand-held

Key Points

- Dave White was named the 14th chief of Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- The NRCS chief wants to help farmers conserve resources and remain viable.
- Conservation programs can help farmers adapt to climate change.

computer, with all the information right there that's needed for the job at hand," White says. He's also looking forward to developing plug-and-play inputs that do a better job of synchronizing information with technical service providers from the private sector who assist with NRCS work.

Betts writes from Johnston, Iowa.

BAD NEWS FOR WEEDS.



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