

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE
United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
AND
Charlotte Soil and Water Conservation District

I. PURPOSE

This Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is entered into between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Charlotte Soil and Water Conservation District (Conservation District).

The NRCS and Conservation District (the Parties) have common objectives of delivering technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers, forest stewards, and other entities to voluntarily protect, restore, and enhance the productivity of American agricultural lands. The Parties recognize the importance of natural resources, the wise use and management of these natural resources, and, as appropriate, the protection and/or development of these natural resources. This agreement is made and entered into with the objectives of:

- Continuing to support the delivery of excellent and innovative customer service;
- Recognizing conservation planning as foundational to our work, and working together to meet the conservation planning assistance needs of our cooperators/customers;
- Strengthening and modernizing conservation delivery to optimize efficiency and effectiveness;
- Broadening our outreach to existing and new customers and partners;
- Supporting science-based decision making as close to the resource issue/opportunity as possible;
- Encouraging a voluntary approach as the primary means of accomplishing conservation goals; and
- Using sound approaches to strengthen each Party and its role in the delivery of soil, water, and related natural resource conservation across the nation.

II. STATEMENT OF MUTUAL BENEFIT

In conjunction with the NRCS, the Conservation District coordinates and implements locally led conservation plans using their connections to Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments; private resources; and the public. The Parties agree to facilitate cooperation, collaboration, and agreement between agencies, landowners, and other stakeholders; develop comprehensive conservation plans; and bring those plans to the attention of landowners and others within the district.

In addition, the Parties recognize the importance of working together to broaden strategic assessment and planning authority under the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of soil, water, and related natural resources. The Parties further recognize that natural resources are finite and under increasing pressure from a variety of impacts. Soil, water, air, plants, animals, and energy are all addressed under the programs, initiatives, and partnership efforts of the Parties.

In order to deliver the necessary technical and financial assistance to enable locally led, voluntary conservation, the Parties agree to adhere to the principles, roles, and responsibilities outlined in this

section of the MOA. This MOA does not affect or modify existing regulations or agency responsibilities and authorities. Moreover, this MOA does not commit either part to activities beyond the scope of its respective mission and statutory authorities.

III. IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT:

The NRCS and Conservation District share a rich history of collaborating to deliver comprehensive technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers, forest stewards, and other entities to voluntarily protect, restore, and enhance natural resources.

The Parties agree that locally led, voluntary conservation must be driven by natural resource conservation needs, rather than by programs. Its primary focus is to identify natural resource concerns, along with related economic and social concerns. Locally led conservation consists of a series of activities and phases that involve community stakeholders in natural resource planning, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results. Local Working Groups provide an opportunity for the Conservation District and community stakeholders to advise NRCS on local natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities.

The Parties agree to the use of science-based decision-making to address local natural resource issues. Implementation of sound conservation plans and practices will strengthen each party, as well as their roles in the delivery of soil and water conservation.

Any information furnished to NRCS under this agreement is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552). Activities performed under this agreement may involve access to confidential and potentially sensitive information about governmental and landowner issues. The term "confidential information" means proprietary information or data of a personal nature about an individual, or information or data submitted by or pertaining to an organization. This information must not be disclosed without the prior written consent of NRCS. See Appendix A, "ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR PROTECTION OF PRIVACY OF PERSONAL AND GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION RELATING TO NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PROGRAMS." The signatory agrees to abide by these requirements as a condition of receiving access to such information.

Conservation District personnel will follow the rules and procedures of disclosure set forth in the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. Section 552a, and implementing regulations and policies with respect to systems of records determined to be subject to the Privacy Act. The Partner's personnel must also comply with privacy of personal information relating to natural resources conservation programs in accordance with section 1244 of Title II of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171).

This MOA takes effect upon the signature of the Parties and shall remain in effect until mutually modified or terminated. This MOA may be extended or amended upon written request of either Party and the subsequent written concurrence of the other. Either of the Parties may terminate this MOA with a 60-day written notice to the other.

This MOA is not intended to, and does not create any right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity, by any party against the United States, its agencies, its officers, or any person.

The Department of Agriculture and Conservation District and their respective agencies and offices will handle their own activities and utilize their own resources, including the expenditure of their own funds, in pursuing these objectives. Each party will carry out its separate activities in a coordinated and mutually beneficial manner.

Nothing in this MOA shall obligate either the Department of Agriculture or Conservation District to obligate or transfer any funds. Specific work projects or activities that involve the transfer of funds, services, or property among the various agencies and offices of the Department of Agriculture and Conservation District will require execution of separate agreements and be contingent upon the availability of appropriated funds. Such activities must be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority. This MOA does not provide such authority. Negotiation, execution, and administration of each such agreement must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations.

All activities and programs conducted under this MOA shall be in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions contained in Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-250); and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. Also, they will be in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7 CFR Part 15, subpart A), which provide that no person in the United State shall on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of an applicant or recipient receiving federal financial assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any Agency thereof.

All activities conducted under this MOA shall be in compliance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-690, Title V, Subtitle D).

IV. SIGNATURES

**USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION
SERVICE**

Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist

Date

**CHARLOTTE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION
DISTRICT**

WENDY WHITE, CHAIRMAN
MIKE ELFENBEIN CO-CHAIR

Date

01/18/2022

APPENDIX A

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR PROTECTION OF PRIVACY OF PERSONAL AND GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION RELATING TO NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PROGRAMS

I. Purpose and Background

The purpose of this Acknowledgment of Section 1619 compliance (hereinafter, "Acknowledgment") is to require acknowledgment by Charlotte Soil and Water Conservation District (hereinafter, the "Conservation Cooperator") of the requirements of 7 USC 8791 (Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill)), which prohibits disclosure of certain information by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its cooperators. The Conservation Cooperator assists USDA in the delivery of conservation-related services (for example, services that sustain agricultural productivity, improve environmental quality, reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters) or with monitoring, assessing, or evaluating of conservation benefits from USDA conservation programs under a Federal agreement. Those individuals or organizations (governmental or nongovernmental) that assist USDA with providing conservation-related services are known as Conservation Cooperators.

II. NRCS Conservation Cooperator

As a Conservation Cooperator, the Conservation Cooperator is authorized access to otherwise-protected agricultural information. Such protected information must be strictly limited to only that information necessary for the Conservation Cooperator to provide conservation related services or to perform monitoring, assessing, or evaluating of conservation benefits (as specified in the agreement between NRCS and the Conservation Cooperator). Disclosure to the Conservation Cooperator can include receiving the protected information either 1) directly from USDA; 2) directly from the producer or owner as part of the process required to enable a producer or owner to participate in a USDA program; or 3) in another manner with the producer's permission.

III. Section 1619 of the 2008 Farm Bill

Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 hereinafter, "section 1619" provides that USDA, or any "contractor or cooperator" of USDA, "shall not disclose—(A) information provided by an agricultural producer or owner of agricultural land concerning the agricultural operation, farming or conservation practices, or the land itself, in order to participate in the programs of the Department; or (B) geospatial information otherwise maintained by the Secretary about agricultural land or operations for which information described in subparagraph (A) is provided." USDA may disclose protected information to a USDA cooperator when such cooperator is "providing technical or financial assistance with respect to the agricultural operation, agricultural land, or farming or conservation practices" if USDA determines that the protected information will not be subsequently disclosed, except in accordance with the exceptions contained in Section 1619. The Conservation Cooperator is a "contractor or cooperator" of USDA within the meaning of Section 1619. Accordingly, the Conservation Cooperator may not subsequently disclose any information protected by section 1619. By entering the agreement that references this Acknowledgment, the Conservation Cooperator is certifying future compliance with the statutory obligations under Section 1619.

IV. Responsibilities

A. The Conservation Cooperator certifies that:

1. It acknowledges and understands that the Conservation Cooperator is legally bound by Federal statute to comply with the provisions of Section 1619 and that the Conservation Cooperator will not subsequently disclose information protected by section 1619 to any individual or organization that is not directly covered by this Acknowledgment. Any such subsequent disclosure of the protected information (except as permitted under Section 1619) will be considered a violation of Section 1619. The Conservation Cooperator will be held responsible should disclosure of the protected information occur.
2. Acceptance of the agreement referencing this Acknowledgment legally binds every owner, manager, supervisor, employee, contractor, agent, and representative of the Conservation Cooperator to comply with the provisions in Section 1619. The Conservation Cooperator must consult with USDA prior to providing protected information to an entity or individual outside of the Conservation Cooperator and as necessary to implement the program to ensure that such release is permissible.
3. The Conservation Cooperator will use the protected information only to perform work that is directly connected to conservation related services or perform monitoring, assessing, or evaluating conservation benefits, as specified in the agreement between NRCS and the Conservation Cooperator (hereinafter, "the Work"). Use of the protected information to perform work that is not directly connected to the Work is expressly prohibited.
4. The Conservation Cooperator must internally restrict access to the protected information to only those individuals who have a demonstrated need to know the protected information in order to perform the Work.
5. The provisions in Section 1619 are continuing obligations. Even when the Conservation Cooperator is no longer a Conservation Cooperator, or when individuals currently affiliated with the Conservation Cooperator become no longer so affiliated, every person having been provided access to the protected information will continue to be legally bound to comply with the provisions of this Acknowledgment.
6. The Conservation Cooperator must notify all managers, supervisors, employees, contractors, agents, and representatives about this Acknowledgment and the requirements of Section 1619. For the duration of this Acknowledgment, notifications about the existence of this Acknowledgment must be made to those individuals who are new to the organization and periodic notifications must be sent throughout the organization (as well as to all contractors and agents) to remind all about the ongoing and continuing requirements.
7. When the Conservation Cooperator is unsure whether particular information is covered or protected by Section 1619, the Conservation Cooperator must consult with USDA to determine whether the information must be withheld.
8. This Acknowledgment is nontransferable and may not be bought, sold, traded, assigned, extended to, or given free of charge to any other individual or organization not directly covered by this Acknowledgment.

9. Use of the protected information for any purpose is expressly prohibited when an individual or organization is no longer a Conservation Cooperator. When the Conservation Cooperator is no longer a Conservation Cooperator, any protected information provided under this Acknowledgment must be immediately destroyed or returned to USDA. The Conservation Cooperator must provide to USDA written certification that the protected information (paper copy, electronic copy, or both) has been properly destroyed, removed from any electronic storage media, or both.
10. The State's "sunshine law," "open records act" or other version of the Freedom of Information Act is superseded by section 1619 under the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Accordingly, information protected from disclosure by section 1619 must not be released under such State laws.

V. Protected Information

- A. An example of the type of information prohibited by disclosure under Section 1619 includes, but is **not limited to**, the following:
 1. State identification and county number (where reported and where located).
 2. Producer or landowner name, business full address, phone number, Social Security Number, and similar personal identifying information.
 3. Farm, tract, field, and contract numbers.
 4. Production shares and share of acres for each Farm Serial Number (FSN) field.
 5. Acreage information, including crop codes.
 6. All attributes for Common Land Units (CLUs) in USDA's Geospatial Information System
 7. Any photographic, map, or geospatial data that, when combined with other maps, can be used to identify a landowner.
 8. Location of conservation practices.
- B. Section 1619 allows disclosure of "payment information (including payment information and the names and addresses of recipients of payments) under any Department program *that is otherwise authorized by law*" (emphasis added). The names and payment information of producers generally may be provided to the public; however, the Conservation Cooperator shall consult with USDA if there is any uncertainty as to the provision of such information.
- C. Section 1619 also allows disclosure of otherwise protected information if "the information has been transformed into a statistical or aggregate form without naming any—(i) individual owner, operator, or producer; or (ii) specific data gathering cite." The Conservation Cooperator must consult with USDA as to whether specific information falls within this exception prior to relying on this exception.

VI. Violations

The Conservation Cooperator will be held responsible for violations of this Acknowledgment and

Section 1619. A violation of this Acknowledgment by the Conservation Cooperator may result in action by USDA, including termination of the underlying Federal agreement.

VII. Effective Period

This Acknowledgment will be in effect on the date of the final signature of the underlying agreement and continues until USDA notifies the Conservation Cooperator that the Acknowledgment is no longer required based on changes in applicable Federal law.