



Update on Water Quality

United States Department of Agriculture

Progress Update #2, March 30, 1990

USDA Announces Water Quality Projects

The Department has announced the selection of 37 hydrologic unit areas, 8 demonstration projects, and 39 special projects for addressing water quality concerns. (See the map on the back of this letter.) Representing a national cross-section of nonpoint source problem

treatments, these projects are part of USDA's accelerated water quality effort for the 1990's.

Planning for these new projects is already underway, and we expect all to be fully operational by late summer.

Hydrologic Unit Areas

The 37 hydrologic unit areas are watersheds with identified nonpoint source water quality problems. These initial areas were selected according to the severity of water contamination, kind of contaminant, and feasibility of treatment. With assistance from cooperating agencies, local landowners will apply conservation practices to meet State water quality goals without undue economic hardship.

ES and SCS will jointly administer this part of USDA's Water Quality Program Plan. ASCS will provide cost-sharing for appropriate water quality practices. ES will work with Cooperative Extension in each State to provide local landowners with

information, including specific recommendations on use of nutrients and pesticides and IPM techniques and programs. SCS will provide similar information and in addition will help landowners evaluate problems and select and install water quality practices. ERS will evaluate the cost-effectiveness of alternative management practices and collect data for broader applications. EPA, USGS, and State and local agencies will be involved in both implementation and evaluation.

Plans are to select 37 more hydrologic unit areas for next fiscal year and eventually to target assistance to 275 hydrologic unit areas nationwide.

Demonstration Projects

The eight demonstration projects are primarily educational and technical assistance efforts for showing farmers and ranchers cost-effective new agricultural production techniques and systems that minimize movement of pesticides and nutrients into water supplies. Elements of these systems will include nutrient management, alternative cropping systems, IPM, alternative pest control strategies, appropriate chemical application and disposal techniques, and integration of weather data into farm decisions.

The projects will demonstrate not only that environmental protection and profitable farm production are compatible, but also that agriculture is taking the lead in solving agricultural problems. The goal is to accelerate the adoption of water quality technology that has been developed but that hasn't yet been widely recognized and used.

ES and SCS share leadership for planning and setting up the projects, with assistance from appropriate State and local agencies. ASCS will provide cost-sharing for participating farmers. ARS and the State agricultural experiment stations, using CSRS grants, will provide research support. ERS will cooperate with ASCS, ES, and SCS in evaluating the effectiveness of the projects, both from the viewpoint of individual farmers and for gathering regional and national data. EPA and USGS will help collect and analyze data.

Another eight locations for demonstration projects will be identified next year. Eventually, there will be 24 projects representing different agricultural, soil, and geologic conditions across the country.

Special Projects

The 39 special projects will extend cost-sharing assistance to farmers and ranchers for installing approved water quality practices under the Agricultural Conservation Program. Practices installed will reduce nonpoint pollution stemming from

animal waste, fertilizers, pesticides, and sediment.

ASCS will administer the program. ES and SCS will provide education support and technical assistance to participating farmers and ranchers. All 39 projects have been funded and many are already in operation.

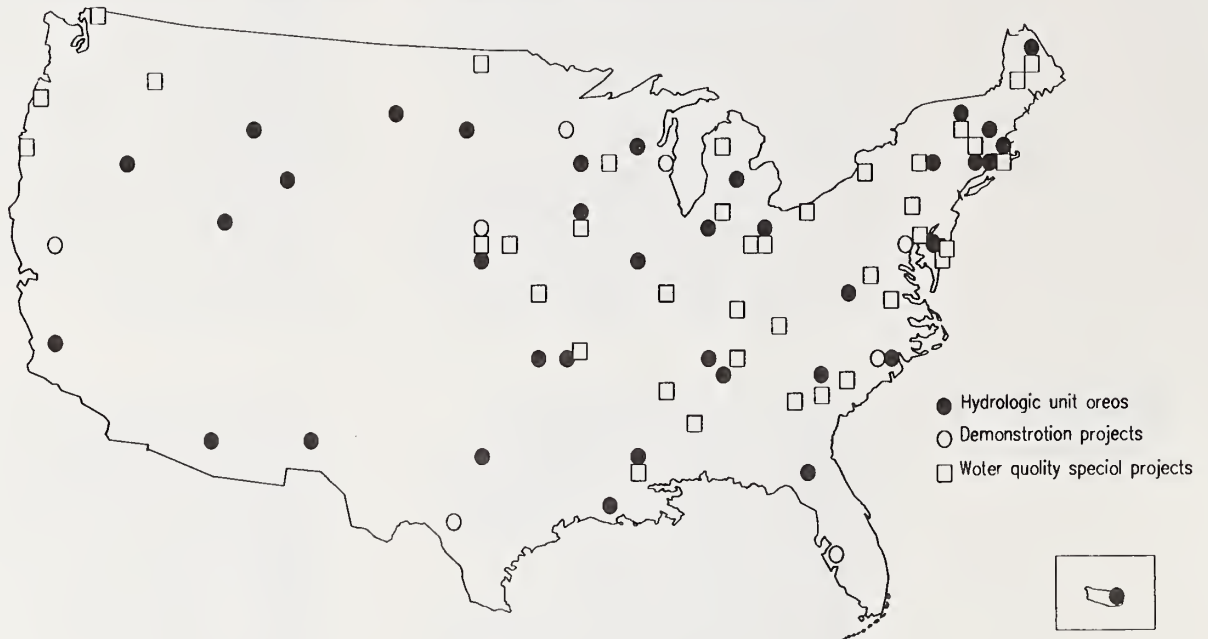
Expectations

Hydrologic unit areas, demonstration projects, and special projects will encourage landowners to respond voluntarily and independently to water quality concerns and farm or ranch management needs. As new technology becomes available, it will be used at existing and new locations.

However, although reductions in pollutant loading can be achieved relatively quickly, it may take years for improvements in water quality—especially groundwater quality—to become evident.

Harry C. Mussman
Chairman, USDA Working Group
on Water Quality

Approximate locations of hydrologic unit areas, demonstration projects, and special projects



For more information on hydrologic unit areas or demonstration projects, contact Pat Calvert, ES, 447-6133, or George Stapleton, SCS, 447-5240. For information on water quality special projects, contact Ray Waggoner, ASCS, 447-5237. This letter may be photocopied for further distribution.

