



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
International Programs Division
Annual Report FY 2013

November 19, 2013

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has had an international presence and involvement since the 1930s, after the agency was established. NRCS staff regularly participate in international meetings, scientific and technical exchanges, provide short-term and long-term training and technical assistance, provide post disaster recovery assistance, and participate in other international activities. The International Programs Division (IPD) supports the agency's international efforts, responding to request for assistance, identifying candidates to provide technical assistance, facilitating foreign technical staff and officials' visits to NRCS field or headquarters staff, processing official passports and visa requests, and promoting collaboration and joint activities with other international partners.

U.S. Government Initiatives

Feed-the-Future

NRCS continues to support the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the presidential Feed-the-Future¹ (FtF) initiative. NRCS's IPD had been active in the monthly USDA FtF Global Food Security Management Committee (GFSMC) meetings. These meetings abated following the departure of the USDA staff member who was coordinating USDA's broader FtF response. GFSMC meetings are expected to resume once a successor has been appointed. Quarterly meetings for the four FtF-GFS Operational Teams continue, with an active IPD presence. The regional teams, chaired by Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) regional specialists, review and comment on USDA Feed-the-Future reporting and USAID Mission FtF-related reports and activities.

Haiti is the only USDA FtF priority country² where NRCS has been active in fiscal year (FY) 2013 – working on the design and startup of the USAID-funded Haiti Pilot Soil Survey Training Project. Project identification and development began in FY 2012, with final project approval being granted in July 2013.

The Haiti Pilot Soil Survey and Training Project will assist the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture and the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine to develop the capacity to lead and support the development of soils inventory, interpretation, and soils information delivery tools to enhance agricultural productivity and natural resource conservation.



Haiti Pilot Soil Survey Training Orientation

¹ <http://www.feedthefuture.gov/> - USAID is the lead implementing agency for Feed the Future

² Haiti, Kenya, Ghana, Guatemala and Bangladesh are USDA's five FtF priority countries.

In August, 13 Haitian participants traveled to the US under the FAS’s Cochran Fellowship Program. The first 2 days of the study tour, in Washington, DC, were an orientation to FAS, the Cochran Program, and the NRCS and soil survey in the United States. The group then traveled to the National Soil Survey Center in Lincoln, NE, for 1 week of training on soils and soils survey. Five members of the delegation then returned to Haiti while the remaining eight technicians spent an additional 4 days of intensive hands-on training.

Two NRCS technical specialists have been identified to provide on-the-ground guidance and training in Haiti. Their mobilization and the procurement of necessary materials and equipment will begin once the financial arrangements with FAS for FY 2014 are completed.

International Activities

Twenty-six NRCS staff made 29 international trips to 14 countries in FY 2013. The adjacent table lists the trips by country and assignment type. One employee undertook three international assignments: one international meeting and two TDYs to Pakistan. Two employees had two international assignments each: three international meetings and one transborder issues meeting. Twenty staff undertook one international trip each and two began long-term international assignments.

International Travel by Country and Purpose
FY 2013

Total trips ->	1	2	2	10	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	29
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10				Trans											
9				Trans											
8				IM											
7				IM											
6				IM											
5				IM											
4				IM											
3				IM											
2		IM	IM	IM											
1	LT	IM	IM	IM	STE	TDY	IM	IM	LT	IM	TDY	STE	IM	IM	
	Afghanistan	Australia	Brazil	Canada	Colombia	DRC	Germany	Mexico	Micronesia	New Zealand	Pakistan	PRC	Qatar	Russia	

Country	TDY	LT	IM	STE	Trans	Trips
Afghanistan						1
Australia		1				1
Brazil			2			2
Canada			7		3	10
Colombia				1		1
DRC	1					1
Germany			1			1
Mexico			2			2
Micronesia		1				1
New Zealand			1	1		2
Pakistan	3					3
PRC				1		1
Qatar			1			1
Russia			1			1
14	4	2	17	3	3	29

Assignment Type	
TDY	Temporary Duty
LT	Long-term posting
IM	International Meeting
STE	Scientific and Technical Exchange
Trans	Transborder issues meeting

Technical Assistance

Three NRCS employees undertook four TDY assignments during FY 2013. There were three trips to Pakistan in support of USAID/Pakistan and the FAS. An NRCS soil scientist traveled to Pakistan in January and again in April to assist with the design of the new “Improving Soil Fertility Through Extension” project. An NRCS water engineer traveled to Pakistan in support for the U.S.–Pakistan Strategic Dialogue on Water. One



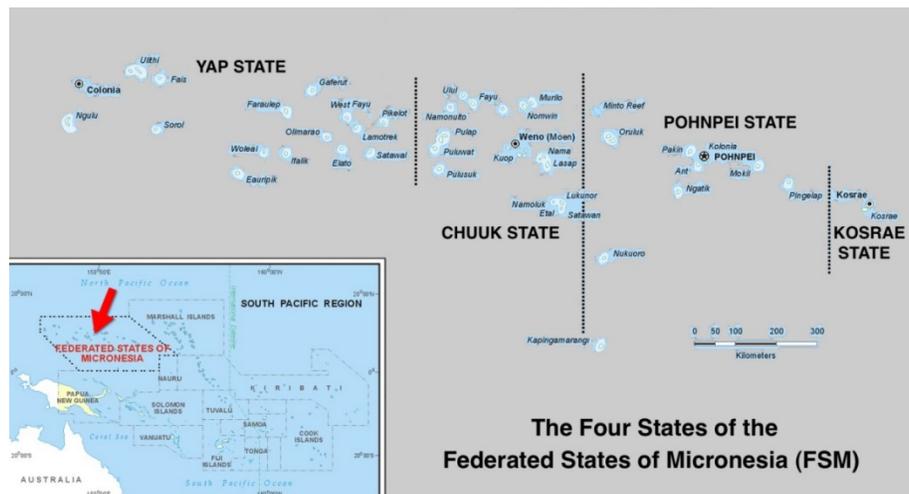
CARPE Soil Sampling Training - DRC

NRCS soil scientist went to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in support of the US Forest Service and the USAID-funded CARPE Project (the Central African Regional Program for the Environment), providing training to local technical staff in soil sample collection for assessing carbon content.

Long-term Technical Assistance

Two NRCS staff began long-term international assignments in 2013. An NRCS soil scientist began a 1-year tour in December as an agriculture advisor with the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) program in Afghanistan. This is his second tour in Afghanistan, the first having been in 2005. This brings the total number NRCS employees serving in Afghanistan at the end of FY 2013 to two; three of the four staff who had been with the PRT program at the beginning of FY 2013 had completed their tours and returned to the United States. NRCS staff have served 67 tours and TDYs in Afghanistan since 2004, with 60 having been tours of 6 months or longer.

In February, one employee began a 3-year posting as a resource conservationist in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), in the South Pacific. Her primary region of responsibility will be Pohnpei State, with the possibility of some technical assistance to partners in Kosrae and Chuuk States.



In addition to working closely with the U.S. Embassy mission, local government, and numerous nonprofit partners, she will be responding to requests for technical assistance or advice from private farmers and partner organizations. One of her first activities was designing and presenting an improved gardening techniques training program for 19 new Peace Corps trainees who would be working with local communities.

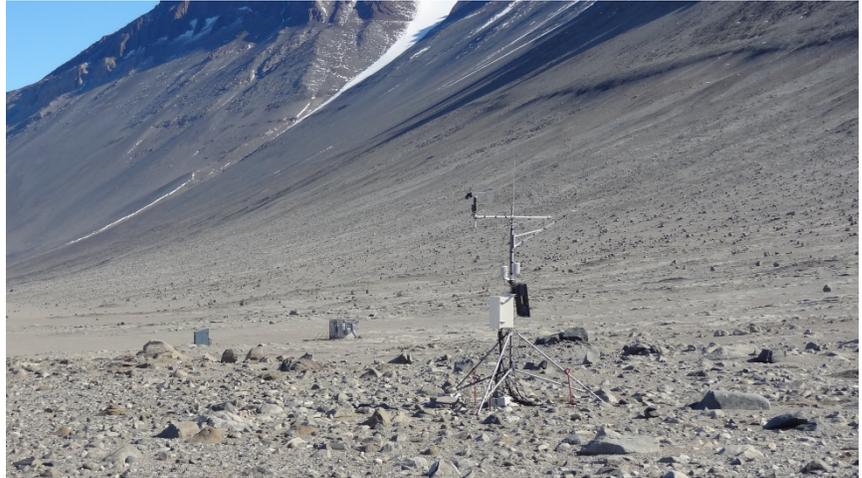


Peace Corps trainees visiting an improved garden plot

Scientific and Technical Exchanges

New Zealand and Antarctica

Three employees participated in Scientific and Technical Exchange (STE) missions. In December 2012, an NRCS soil scientist traveled to New Zealand and the McMurdo Sound region of Antarctica as part of a long-term research collaboration with New Zealand. In Antarctica, data was collected from and maintenance carried out on nine long-term soil-climate stations. This is the 13th year that NRCS staff have been participating in this collaborative effort to better understand the properties and mechanics of cold and frozen desert soils.



Soil climate station in the Wight Valley, Antarctica

Columbia

In January an NRCS soil scientist traveled to Columbia to participate in a workshop that had been organized by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). The objective of the workshop was the development of a plan of action for determining the influence of soil temperature and moisture regimes on the Oxisols of Llanos region. One of the emphases of the workshop was the use of digital soil mapping (DSM) techniques in combination with legacy data and local tacit knowledge to map major soil properties related to physical and chemical characteristics and soil fertility.



A landscape in the Llanos region of Columbia

China

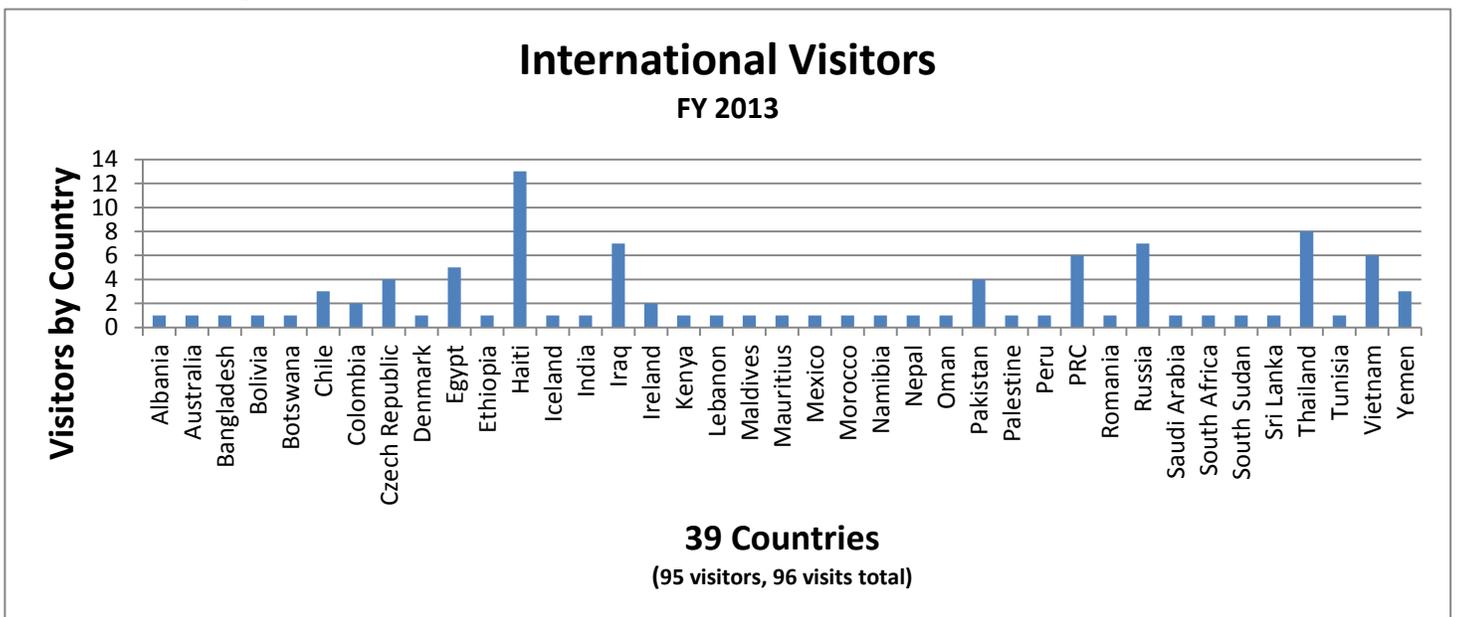
In January, an IPD staff member participated in a three-person U.S. EPA-USDA delegation that traveled to Nanjing, China, to meet with staff of the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection's Nanjing Institute of Environmental Sciences. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss areas of common interest and possible collaboration, and lay the groundwork for the preparation of a new memorandum of understanding to be developed between the EPA, USDA, and NIES.



EPA-FAS-NRCS delegation visiting an organic-farming trial plot - Wu Xi, China

International Visitors

NRCS received 96 visitors (one person from Colombia came twice) from 39 countries in FY 2013. The greatest number came from Haiti when 13 Haitian officials and technical staff came

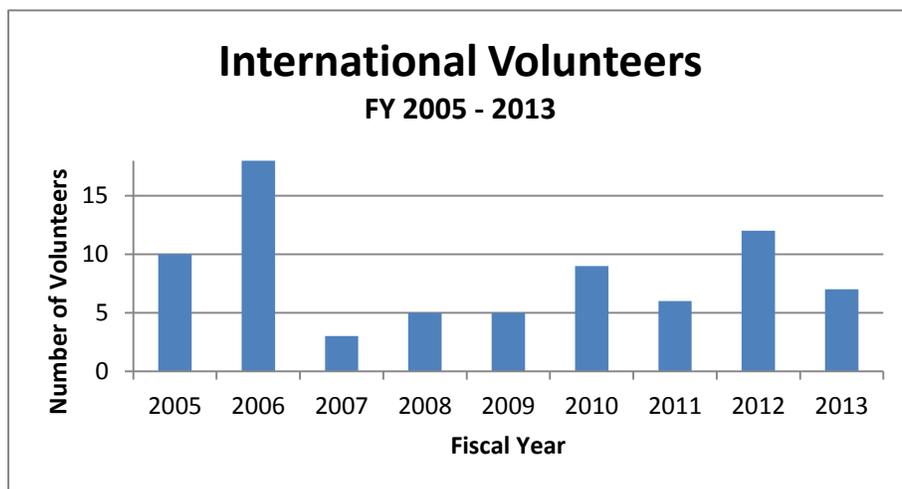


to the U.S. for an orientation on soils survey application and laboratory and field technical training, as part of the Haiti Pilot Soil Survey and Training Project.

Twenty-eight NRCS employees served as main contacts for the visitors. Eight of the 28 were women.

International Volunteers

There were seven international volunteers in FY 2013; one each from Antigua and Barbuda, Malaysia, Serbia and the Ukraine, and three from the Peoples' Republic of China. They averaged 80 volunteer hours with a range from 40 to 120 hours. Most of the international volunteers



were students affiliated with local colleges and universities where NRCS staff had an active on-going interaction. One volunteer, who had come to the United States to learn more about agriculture, was sponsored by a local producer in Ohio.

Other Activities

In November 2012, NRCS Nebraska State Office technical staff provided additional watershed training to the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) prior to their deployment to Afghanistan. The ADT group had also participated in earlier ADT training in Texas, as well as training at other sites in the United States in FY 2012. IPD facilitated the delivery of a software toolkit that FAS had developed for use in Afghanistan – "Satellite Imagery for Agricultural Advisors deployed to Afghanistan in an easy to use format,"³ which was included in the training program.

IPD also arranged the delivery of the satellite imagery toolkit to the NRCS soil scientist who began his 1-year Afghanistan PRT assignment in December. In April, IPD also facilitated the delivery of soil test kits for the advisor to use in providing training to local Afghan agriculture extension agents and high school students. The National Soil Survey Center in Lincoln, NE, had purchased the kits and provided other basic soil testing materials.

³ http://proceedings.esri.com/library/userconf/mug11/papers/tetrault_esri_mug_2011%201206.pdf

Title 280, General Manual, Part 400, “International Conservation Program,” was amended and posted to the eDirectives System in June 2013. This directive presents NRCS policies and procedures to promote, enhance, and strengthen the conservation of natural resources globally.

National Bulletin 280-12-3, “International Assignment Candidates Database,” was posted to the eDirectives System on September 24, 2013, to reannounce the IPD's database of employees who are interested and available for international assignments. The objectives in doing this are to inform employees of the existence of the database, encourage interested individuals to register, and to increase the number of people and the array of technical qualifications represented in the database. The database enables IPD to be able to more quickly identify qualified and interested technical specialists who could be called upon in the event of an international emergency or in response to a request for technical assistance.

Two NRCS International Development Activities newsletters have been prepared and distributed in FY 2013: December 2012 and August 2013. The newsletters focus on NRCS international development activities and are used to reach out and increase awareness of NRCS expertise, in USDA, USAID, Peace Corps, MCC, the World Bank, other international institutions, land-grant universities, and NGOs.

IPD Staff

Lillian Woods, Acting Director

Melvin Westbrook, the former director, retired in July 2013 after 42 years of NRCS service and eight years as the Director for International Programs Division

Herby Bloodworth, Program Analyst

Marita McCree, Program Analyst

LeRoy Duvall, International Program Specialist

Linda Ridsen, Program Assistant