Outcomes Reporting Guidance for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) statute requires that partners develop and report project conservation outcomes to NRCS. The agency submits this RCPP data to Congress annually to support program funding.

Outcomes are the measurable environmental, economic and social impacts of RCPP project activities. Environmental outcomes reporting is required. Social and economic outcomes reporting are optional.

Environmental Outputs vs. Outcomes

🌱 **Outputs = What we *do***

These are the things we can count right away.

Example:

- How many trees were planted
- How many miles of fence were built
- How many farms got help

➡️ Outputs are like checking off items on a to-do list.

🌿 **Outcomes = What *happens because* we did it**

These are the good changes that happen over time.

Example:

- Cleaner water in rivers
- Healthier soil on farms
- More birds and wildlife returning

➡️ Outcomes are like seeing the garden grow after you plant the seeds.

Strong proposals will discuss the metrics used to identify benchmark conditions that are expected to change and the analysis methods to compute the accumulated impacts of the project.

🧪 **What Are Metrics?**

Metrics are just a fancy word for **ways to measure things**—like how we use a ruler to measure length or a thermometer to measure temperature.

🟡 Before and After (Benchmarks vs. Treated)

Imagine your yard was full of dry, cracked soil. That's the **benchmark**—it means what the land looked like *before* we did anything to help it.

Now imagine you plant trees, add mulch, and use less water. That's the **conservation activity**—what we *did* to help.

After a while, the soil is healthier, the water is cleaner, and birds come back. That's the **treated condition**—what it looks like *after* the changes.

📏 How Do We Measure Difference?

We use **metrics** like:

- How clean is the water now?
- Is the soil holding more moisture?
- Are there more animals living there?

By comparing the "before" (benchmark) and the "after" (treated), we can *measure* the success of our conservation work.

🧁 Simple Example:

It's like baking a cupcake and taking a bite:

- **Before**: You had just flour, eggs, and sugar (not so tasty yet).
- **After**: You have a delicious cupcake.
- The **difference** shows the success of what you did—and that's what metrics help us measure in nature!

🧭 What's a Benchmark?

A **benchmark** is like the "before" picture.
It shows how something looked or worked **before** you made any changes.

🛠️ Why It Matters:

Imagine you're trying to get stronger by doing push-ups.
You did 5 push-ups today. That's your **benchmark**.

Later, you can do 20 push-ups. That's your **outcome**—you got stronger!

But if you never counted the first 5, you wouldn't know how much you improved.

📏 Benchmarks Help Us Know:

- Where we started
- What we changed
- How many things got better

🌱 Farm Example:

Let's say we want cleaner water on a farm.

1. We **test the water** before doing anything → that's the **benchmark**
2. We plant trees and fix the soil
3. Later, we **test the water again** → that shows the **outcome**

Without the first test, we wouldn't know if we made a difference!

🧁 Simple Summary:

You can't know how much you've improved unless you know where you started.

That's why benchmarks are so important—they help us measure real change!

👩‍🌾 What Happens When We Help Nature on Farms?

When farmers take care of the land—like improving soil, planting trees, or protecting water—they're not just helping nature… they're helping **people and communities**, too!

That's where **social and economic outcomes** come in.

🌟 SOCIAL OUTCOMES = Helping People

These are the ways farms help **people live better**.

Examples:

- Cleaner water for towns nearby 🧃
- Safer air and soil for families 👨‍👩‍👧‍👦
- More beautiful places for animals and people 🌻

How we measure (metrics):

- How many people got cleaner water
- Number of nearby schools or homes that benefit
- Surveys showing people feel healthier or happier

💰 ECONOMIC OUTCOMES = Helping Money and Jobs

These are the ways farms help **money stuff**—like jobs and food prices.

Examples:

- Farmers save money by using less water 💧
- Better soil means more crops = more food = more income 🌽
- Jobs for workers who help with conservation 👷

How we measure (metrics):

- How much money farmers saved

- How much more food was grown
- How many jobs were created

Questions to Help Develop Proposal Environmental Outcomes:

- How many farmers need to treat resources concerns (e.g., avoid water cops)?
- How much impact do resource concerns cause (e.g., poor water quality)?
- How was the before impact measured (e.g., water tests)?
- How will the measured effects of resource concerns be analyzed (e.g., water tests)?
- What will the project area treated conditions be (e.g., good water quality)?

Questions to Help Develop Proposal Social Outcomes:

- Do you have data that defines social conditions that can be improved by producers doing conservation work (e.g., university study)?
- How was the data collected analyzed (e.g., behavioral/perception survey)?
- How is the conservation work expected to improve the social conditions (e.g., how did producers doing conservation change community behavior/perceptions)?
- What would the benefits of project area public behavioral/perception change look like (vote against taxing farmers for drinking water reclamation)?

Questions to Help Develop Proposal Economic Outcomes:

- Do you have data that defines economic conditions that can be improved by producers doing conservation work (e.g., local government/university study)?
- How was the data collected analyzed (e.g., county ag production, local spending and tax collection data modeling)?
- How is the conservation work expected to improve the economic conditions (e.g., how will the conservation change local economy)?
- What would the benefits of the project area economic change look like (e.g., higher farm yields, increased harvest employment and equipment upgrades, improved soil health reduced county sediment removal costs)?