Urban Conservation Subcommittee Formation

PURPOSE
The purpose of this document is to provide information to State Technical Committee members and assist them with their recommendation to NRCS in the formation of a Urban Conservation Subcommittee.

BACKGROUND
State Technical Committees (STCs) serve in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the implementation of the natural resources conservation provisions of Farm Bill legislation. Committees meet regularly to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to appropriate USDA officials, who strongly consider their advice.

The 2018 Farm Bill established the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP) to better focus on the needs of urban farmers. NRCS leads the USDA-wide office, which includes representatives from other USDA agencies like Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Urban agriculture plays an important role in growing fresh and healthy food where grocery stores are scarce, provides jobs and beautifies neighborhoods. Urban agriculture includes the cultivation, processing and distribution of agricultural products in urban and suburban areas. Community gardens; rooftop farms; hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities; and vertical production are all examples of urban agriculture. Small towns may also be included.

The Caribbean Area imports 85-95% of consumable goods including food and agriculture supplies. Due to our insular location, these goods are typically much more costly than in the continental United States, resulting in increased costs to install conservation practices or to farm in general. Although there has been increased interest in the general population to start farming, prices and climatic conditions are a big risk for new farmers, especially since most of the population falls below the poverty line.

The Caribbean Area contains urban areas that are highly populated that could provide opportunities to increase production in the Caribbean. However these systems have some technical and programatic complexities that may need additional planning and discussion among stakeholders to ensure that Caribbean producers can use USDA assistance efficiently.

With this in mind, **NRCS recommends that Caribbean Area STCs add an Urban Subcommittee that can provide recommendations for urban agriculture implementation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.**

The Subcommittee will be tasked with identifying barriers that may be unique to the Caribbean Region; Identify ways to outreach and explain NRCS programs and their differences (Grants, Environmental Quality Incentives Program); and Identify ways to increase participation and provide technical and programmatic support capacity for grant programs.

DECISION SUPPORT
As the Local State Technical Committee member:
1. Do you agree with forming an Urban Subcommittee?
2. Do you have any candidate recommendations for this subcommittee?