Plant Materials Program Task Force Report:

An Evaluation of Plant Materials Funding and Operational Relationships Consistent with Available Resources

February 2000
(Revised May 2000)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A national task force was formed in August 1999, to evaluate the NRCS Plant Materials Program. The goal was to examine the current status of the program and provide a business strategy on plant materials operations consistent with available resources.

The task force found:

- Products and services from the program are critical to NRCS' mission.
- Adequate funding is not available to the program to operate effectively.
- $9.4 million is required to sustain the 26 Plant Material Centers. Current funding is only $7.3 million (after offsets).
- Congressional earmarks consisted of $1.3 million in FY99, which represented 14% of total funds. This put additional pressure on limited funds for general operations.
- In the last three years, the number of understaffed Centers has gone from three to eight, and states without the services of a plant materials specialist has gone from three to ten.
- The program is underutilized due to poor coordination and linkages with other segments of the agency.
- The program lacks adequate fiscal and programmatic accountability.
- Approximately 6 centers will have to be closed if the present level of funding continues.
- To adequately address critical agency issues, such as invasive species and nutrient management, annual appropriations for the Plant Materials Program need to be between $15-20 million.

This report has two sections. The first looks at funding issues, and the second provides a strategy for improving program operations.

Three alternatives for dealing with funding issues were identified:

1. Securing additional funds;
2. Supplementing existing funds; and
3. Closing and consolidating of centers.

The pros and cons of alternatives are outlined in the report. The Task Force recommends that financial resources for the Plant Materials Program be increased. If additional funds are not available, the agency must reduce the scale and scope of the program. Recommended criteria for consolidation and closure, if necessary, are included in the report.

In identifying a strategy for improving program operations, a quality improvement team report from 1996 was evaluated. These earlier recommendations were validated and refined into four critical issues for consideration.

The Task Force Report and a briefing was presented to Chief Pearlie Reed on April 12, 2000, and Alternative One was determined to be the appropriate course of action. Dates associated with action items were then adjusted, and editorial revisions were made to the report in May as discussed at the briefing. Major content of the report and its conclusions were not changed.

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INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Plant Materials Program is to develop and transfer plant science technology. The program's primary customers are NRCS field offices, and it is estimated that 70 percent or more of the plant information contained in Field Office Technical Guides is derived from technology produced by the program. Also some Farm Bill programs like CRP, would have been difficult to implement without the technology produced by the Plant Materials program.

Although the program is probably best known for its plant releases, it has also made major contributions through technology development, printed materials, and technology transfer. In 1998, for example, the program produced 336 written documents, made 525 presentations (including 108 training sessions), and had 23 plant releases.

Funds available to the program are inadequate to meet current staffing and operational costs. Action is essential to remedy funding problems. Figure 1 (page 3) illustrates funding relationships in detail. Over the past 5 years, the program has functioned with an overall budget (including reimbursables) ranging from $9.7 million to $10.9 million. Differences among years are related to individual budget components. For example, there was a two-fold increase in program offset between FY95 and FY99. Since FY96, offset has steadily increased by about 1% per year. In FY99, reimbursables were at a 5-year low ($1.6 million). In addition, Congressional Earmarks in the same year had an adverse impact on the program's operations; because in previous years such earmarks were covered from other fund sources.

In recent years, the Plant Materials Program has experienced declining budgets to work on high priority natural resource problems. Year-to-year comparisons of fiscal resources (i.e., using constant dollars with FY 1990 being the base year) show that the FY 1999 budget was 17 percent lower than that of FY 1990 (see Figure 2, page 4).

The combination of increasing offsets, decreasing reimbursables, and Congressional Earmarks had a precipitous effect on the program's ability to function. In FY99 only $6.3 million was available (about $1 million less than in each of the 4 previous fiscal years) to plant centers. This required a crisis-management approach. A few states redirected funds from other sources as a stopgap measure, but most states were unable to do so. The $1 million reduction was mostly absorbed by lower operating budgets (by about $0.2 million) and a reduction in non-recurring maintenance/equipment allocations (by about $0.7 million).

The current level of funding for Plant Materials represents a ten-year low and reflects a steady decline in constant dollars available to the program. During the same period, business costs of operating centers, especially with respect to farm implements and laboratory equipment, have increased at a greater rate than inflation. Plant centers require $9.4 million per year to operate at a minimum level, replace worn-out equipment, and maintain facilities. As noted, offsets and Congressional earmarks have exacerbated the funding problem, reducing available funds by 19 and 14 percent respectively (more than $3 million total) in FY 1999. As a result, the Plant Materials Program has been unable to adequately address some key conservation issues.

Staffing levels in the Plant Materials Program have decreased over the past three years. (See Figures 3 and 4 on pages 5 and 6.) Six centers are insufficiently staffed to develop plant technology, and the shortage of PMSs has reduced technology transfer.

Three funding alternatives are identified in Section I:

1. Secure additional funds.
2. Supplement existing funds through:
   a) offset/earmark relief; and/or
   b) raise the PMC funding portion of the conservation operations appropriation, and/or obtain reimbursement from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) benefiting programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP); and/or
   c) internal redirection of funds within NRCS.
3. Reduce the number of PMCs through consolidation or closure so that remaining centers have adequate resources to operate effectively.

As the Plant Materials Program is critical to NRCS, Alternative 1 is the best long-term solution. However, the team recognizes that more than one alternative could be implemented simultaneously to adequately address the situation.

Section II identifies four interrelated issues to improve program operations:

1. Commitment by management;
2. Accountability;
3. Budget; and
4. Structure/linkages, meeting new challenges, and integration.

In examining these issues, the Task Force considered findings from a 1996 Quality Improvement Team (QIT). These recommendations were refined for consideration by agency leadership. The task force recommends that action be taken to help resolve these critical issues faced by the Plant Materials Program.

Figure 1. Plant Materials Funding Relationships.

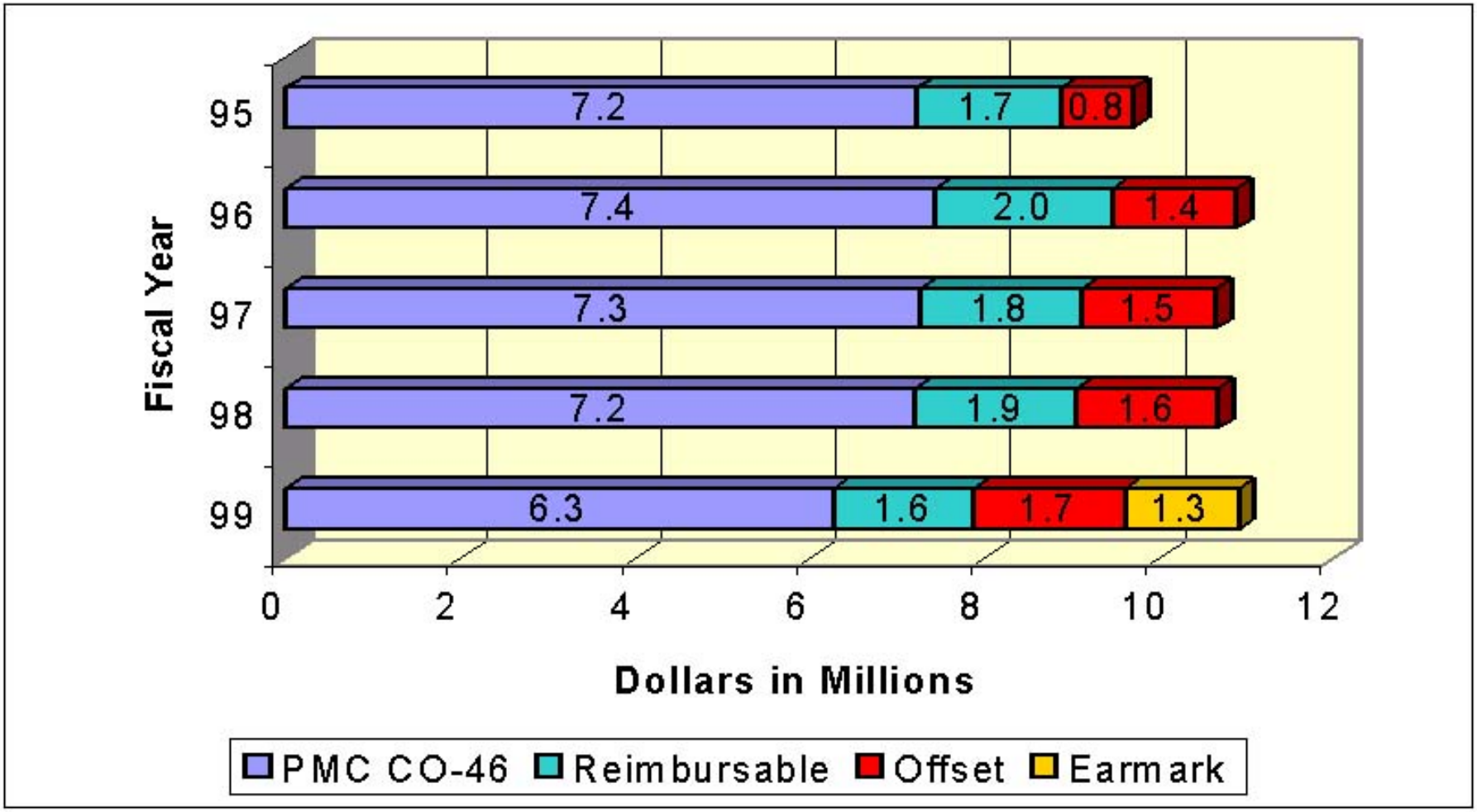


Figure 2. Relative Changes in Operating Resources Available to Plant Materials Program.

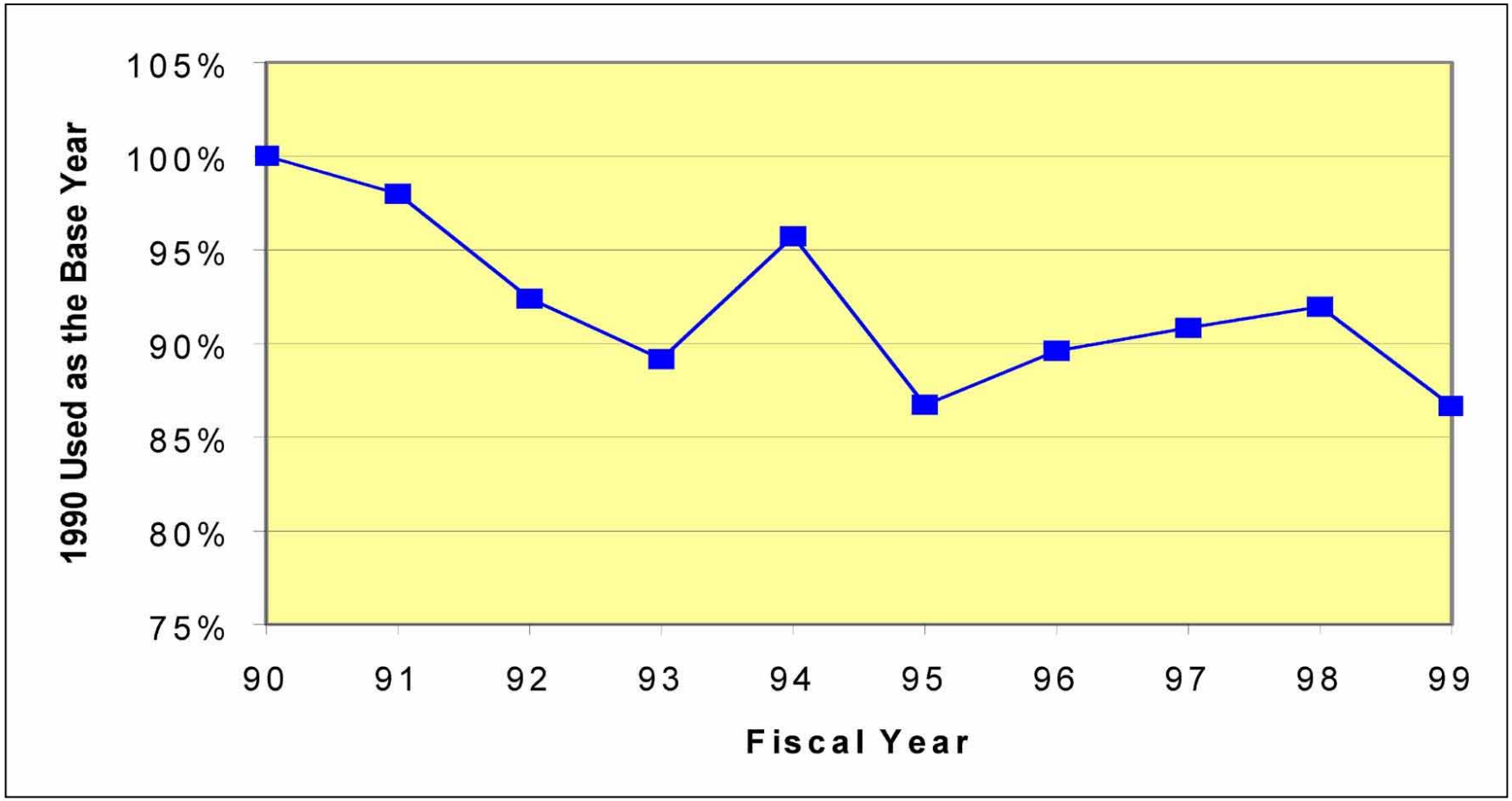


Figure 3. Recent Changes in Plant Materials Center's Staffing.

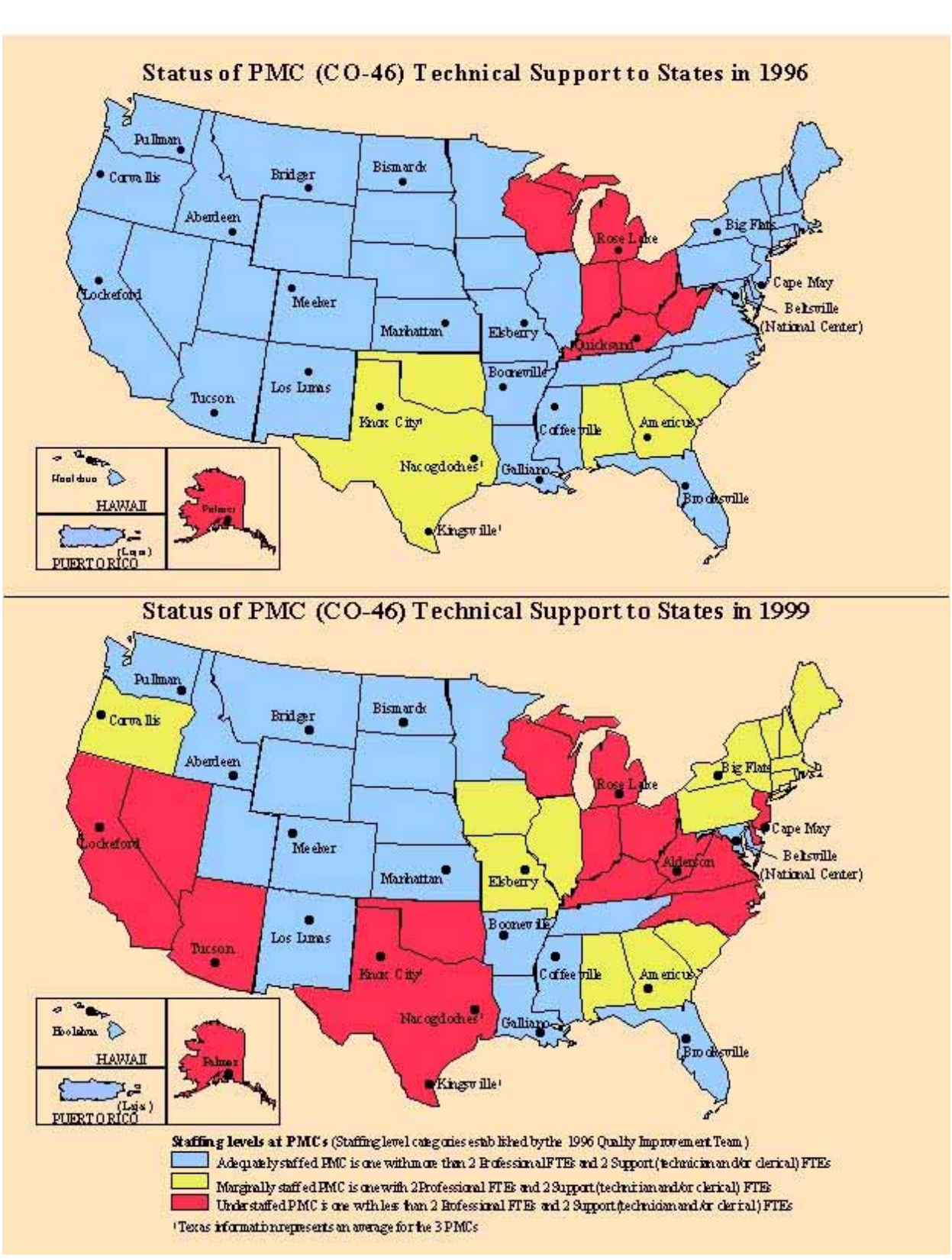
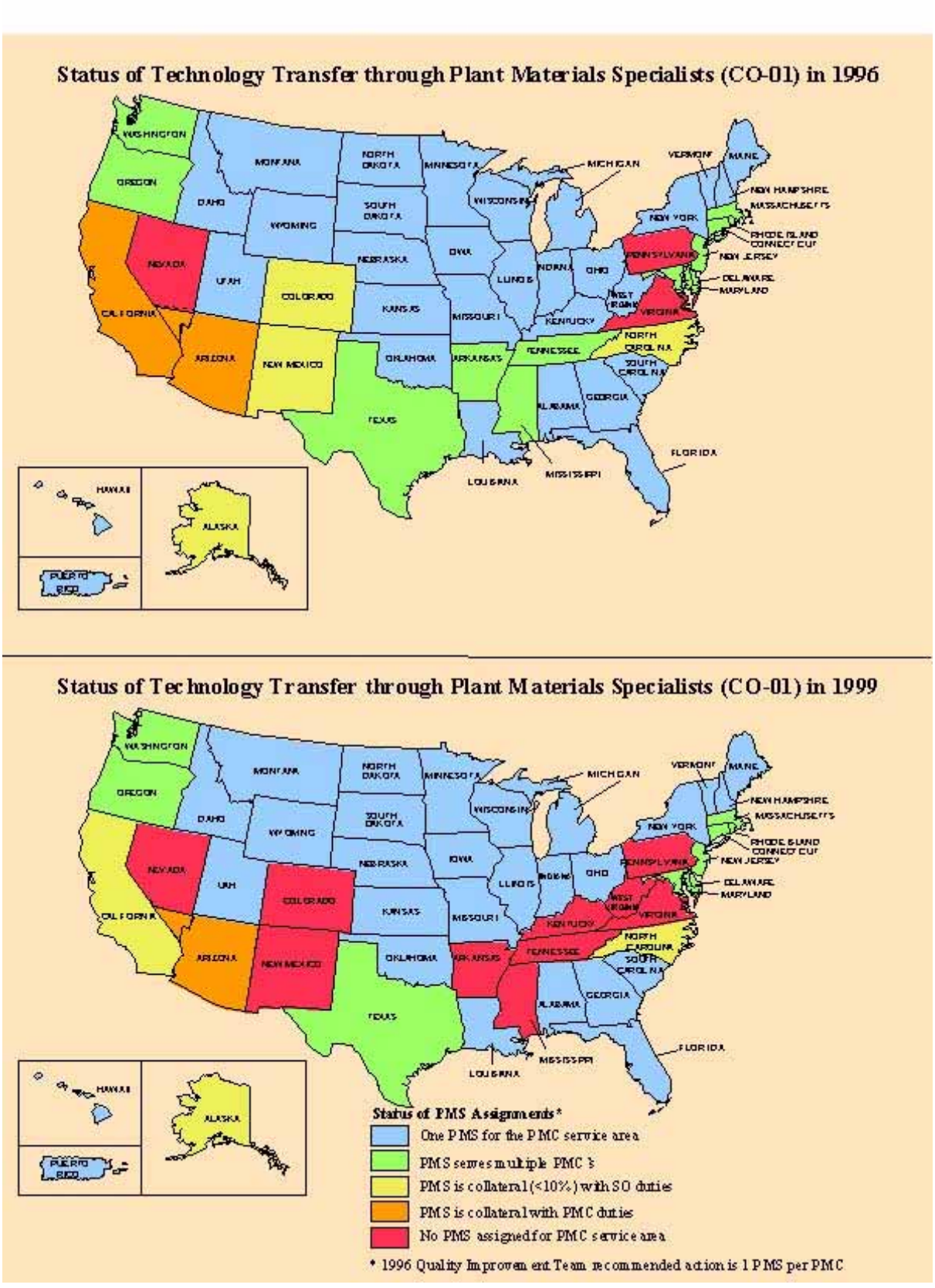


Figure 4. Recent Changes in Plant Materials Specialists.



Section I. Funding shortages in Plant Materials Program

Many of the funding issues have accumulated over several years and now threaten the viability of the program. Action is needed to bring program operations into line with available resources: Either funding needs to increase or some centers need to be closed. The Task Force identified three alternatives for dealing with this issue. The alternatives are discussed below.

ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE #1: SECURE ADDITIONAL FUNDS.

The Plant Materials Program needs additional financial resources (not redirected funds) so that staffing, workload, and infrastructure needs can be met. The Task Force recommends this alternative as the best long-term solution. This alternative would continue providing tools for field offices to meet their customers' needs and in carrying out such programs as Environmental Protection Program, Wetland Reserve Program, Forestry Incentive Program, and national conservation initiatives.

The pros and cons of implementing Alternative 1 are outlined below.

Pros	Cons
1. Better serve field offices and their customers on priority issues by providing tools for "toolbox."	1. Process of getting, USDA, OMB, and Congressional support will take time.
2. Result in the recognition of the agency as a leader in plant science technology development and transfer.	2. More criticism and demands for increased accountability.
3. Goals and mission of the program and agency are advanced.	
4. Raises the level of support with USDA, OMB, and Congress for program.	
5. No adverse effects on other program areas.	

ALTERNATIVE #2: SUPPLEMENT EXISTING FUNDS THROUGH OFFSET/ EARMARK RELIEF; AND/OR RAISE THE PMC FUNDING PORTION OF THE CONSERVATION OPERATIONS APPROPRIATION; AND/OR OBTAIN REIMBURSEMENT FROM THE COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION (CCC) BENEFITING PROGRAMS SUCH AS ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP), WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP), AND CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP); AND/OR INTERNAL REDIRECTION.

From 1996 to 1999 the number of Plant Materials Centers that were understaffed increased from three to eight, and marginally staffed centers increased from three to fourteen. Additionally, there were three states without the services of a Plant Materials Specialist in 1996, and in 1999 there were ten states.

This alternative would direct other, existing program funds to Plant Materials to meet staffing, workload, and infrastructure needs. An effort would be made to accelerate reimbursable agreements that could make up some of the funding shortfall. This alternative provides immediate and essential technology to meet field office needs, especially emerging issues.

The pros and cons of supplementing existing plant materials funds from other sources are identified in the table below.

Pros	Cons
Expand financial resources of the program.	1. Compete with other programs for limited funds.
Advance cutting edge technology to address emerging and priority issues.	2. Inadequate base funding is not addressed.
Provide immediate and essential technology to meet field office needs, especially emerging issues.	3. Level of needed resources may not be met.
Demonstrate and establish commitment by management.	4. Limits ability to develop world class technology.
Continue to develop and transfer plant science technology without interruption.	5. Does not provide for continued funding.
Integrate the plant materials operation with the agency.	6. Hinders the ability of plant materials centers to get involved in long term projects.
Provide an immediate, but short-term, solution.	7. May create resentment toward the program within the agency.
	8. Redirection of funds may be hard to justify.
	9. Establish an undesirable precedent.

ALTERNATIVE #3: REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PLANT MATERIALS CENTERS THROUGH CONSOLIDATION OR CLOSURE.

If additional funds are not provided to support the Plant Materials Program, an option is to reorganize and downsize the program. This will require closure of some centers and movement of personnel to remaining centers. If this alternative is implemented, an evaluation team should be established to determine the final outcome and decide which centers should remain open. The team's analysis would require data on 32 or more criteria to make a final decision. These criteria are identified below.

In theory, by reorganizing and downsizing, remaining centers would operate at a higher level of efficiency because of full staffing and up-to-date infrastructure. Close coordination among centers would be necessary to assure that agency needs are addressed. Accelerated efforts to enter into reimbursable agreements is a component of this alternative and could help mitigate the magnitude of downsizing.

Closing centers would be a major undertaking with a variety advantages and disadvantages. These are identified below.

Pros	Cons
1. Provides short-term stability in technology development and transfer and a reduction in facility maintenance costs.	Increased operational costs at remaining PMCs.
2. Provides an incentive and opportunity for a comprehensive evaluation of the program.	Perception that fewer centers need less funding.
3. Remaining centers would receive a larger percentage of program funding.	Potential for political backlash in some areas.
4. Threat of downsizing would galvanize support for program.	Reduce the ability of NRCS to address emerging and priority issues.
5. Eliminate centers with low production potential.	Expectation from management of future closings and additional downsizing.
	Service to some areas and states would likely be eliminated.

CRITERIA FOR DOWNSIZING THE NUMBER OF PLANT CENTERS

If it becomes necessary to downsize the number of plant centers, several factors will bear upon the decision. Criteria that were identified are shown in the table below. The list is **NOT** presented in any order of priority, and individual items should not be regarded as co-equal in importance.

CRITERIA FOR DOWNSIZING
1. Number of technical publications over last 3 years
2. Current PMC staffing
3. Cost ratio per technology product
4. Partnership support/participation
5. Number of plant releases last 5 & 10 years and number expected in next 2 years
6. Geographic location—ease & feasibility of serving area from other centers
7. Available high tech. infrastructure
8. Center capability to produce
9. Number of field offices serviced annually in last 5 years
10. Control of land (owned/leased)
11. Projected maintenance costs
12. Number of active efforts dealing with agency priorities
13. Outreach efforts and work with underserved populations
14. Number and dollars of reimbursables earned in last 5 years
15. Resource needs (such as acres with invasive species)
16. Number of ag clients in service area + % underserved population
17. Other services output (example--labs)
18. Presence of PMS in service area
19. Number of technology transfer products, i.e. training
20. Estimated cost to modernize center and acquire updated equipment
21. History of success and State Conservationist support
22. Product benefits over last 5 years
23. Current business plan in place
24. Functioning state advisory committee and technical committee
25. Projected cost of closing
26. Employee turnover in last 5 years
27. Opportunity to link with and/or currently addressing emerging issues
28. Cost of maintaining foundation seed and/or plants
29. Strategic centers/low production move excess to these centers
30. Number of field days
31. Commercial growers depending on center's foundation seed
32. Cooperative efforts with land grant institutions, experiment stations, and ARS

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE

The Task Force recognized that many factors relate to funding difficulties in the Plant Materials Program. Action from upper management is required because most plant centers are severely under funded.

To address this issue, the Task Force recommends Alternative 1:

EXPAND FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF PROGRAM (i.e., MATCH STAFFING, WORKLOAD, INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS BY SECURING ADDITIONAL FUNDS)

Section II. Strategy for improving program operations

Although funding difficulties discussed in Section I (page 7) represent the major challenge now facing the Plant Materials Program, there are other elements that relate to effective program operation. The Task Force identified the primary factors that impact the program, and it examined necessary changes for greater program efficiency. These are discussed and presented as four interrelated topics below.

The Task Force determined that a comprehensive evaluation of the program would be helpful, but that much of the groundwork was available from the Quality Improvement Team Report (1996). The Task Force identified key issues which can be used in conjunction with the 1996 QIT Report as the strategic business plan.

COMMITMENT BY MANAGEMENT

ISSUE: There seems to be wide variability in the level of NRCS commitment to the Plant Materials Program.

BACKGROUND: Considerable variability exists among the 26 Plant Materials Centers with respect to work accomplishments and product quality. There are PMCs that have an excellent program because they have good state leadership, support, and interest; while some PMCs lack adequate guidance from management.

The programs in states which follow the current Plant Materials Manual guidelines tend to optimize outputs. In states that accomplish less, it seems state office staff does not understand the importance of the Plant Materials Program, and so it is not properly utilized. This variability hurts product delivery, customer satisfaction, and credibility.

Also, in states that do not have Plant Materials Centers, there is a perception of a lack of plant materials support for their programs. Indeed, a full 20 percent of states do not have support from a Plant Materials Specialist. There also are several dysfunctional Plant Materials advisory and technical committees that must be revived to achieve the mission of the program. The situation is further complicated in that the Plant Materials Program is only one of several programs whose mission or principal function is to develop and transfer technology.

The Plant Materials Program needs to be included in the national and regional strategic plans. The Task Force developed a series of recommended actions as outlined in the following table.

SUB-ISSUE I: Increase commitment by management to utilize and link the Plant Materials Program to other programs in the agency. Increase participation by and guidance to program managers to utilize the Plant Materials Program assets.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Send a letter to all employees reiterating the need for Plant technology to solve conservation problems.	The Plant Materials Program will be integrated into all operations and its importance will be understood and supported by all line managers.	Chief/Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	February 2001	
2. Develop national policy to require a PMC advisory committee meeting. (a) Hold an annual meeting to discuss NRCS program needs and technology delivery.	Involvement of STCs in Plant Materials Program. Program coordination and integration.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology Regional and State Conser-vationists	October 2000 Annually	
3. Implement remaining 1996 QIT report recommendations.	More effective utilization of Plant Materials Program in the agency.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	September 2002	
4. The National Plant Materials Advisory Committee will be reestablished as a matter of national policy and made a viable part of the planning activities of the program. A State Conservationist from each region should be a member, as well as other agencies, NACD, and private entities.	Create a partnership of understanding and commitment to utilizing Plant Materials Program in addressing natural resources issues and concerns.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	December 2000	
5. Establish two field Plant Materials Coordinator positions to provide consistency and coordination.	Program consistency, avoid duplicative efforts, and more effective use of resources.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	October 2000	
6. Make PM a part of the technology work group in their regions.	Integrate Plant Materials Program into regional technology activities.	Regional Con-servationists	November 2000	
7. Evaluate the technical support given by the program and issue directives requiring all states to have access to a Plant Materials Specialist.	Assure technology transfer of plant materials across the agency.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	February 2001	

SUB-ISSUE II: Increase awareness that the Plant Materials Program is mission critical

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Include PMC's in implementing all plant-related initiatives, such as native species, AFO/CAFO, buffers, carbon sequestration, invasive species, and urban conservation.	Integrate plant materials into ongoing and emerging issues.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology Deputy Chief Programs State Conservationists	Ongoing	
2. Develop an educational brochure about the program and its relevance to NRCS program development needs and program delivery	Inform management and the general public on the value and benefits of the Plant Materials Program.	Director, Conservation Communications Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	May 2001	
3. Publish an annual report of activities for each PMC.	Inform STCs and principal staff on what is being accomplished.	State Conservationists	Annual	

ACCOUNTABILITY

ISSUE: There is inconsistent accountability within the Plant Materials Program. Specifically, there are concerns regarding program implementation and fund integrity.

BACKGROUND: The integrity of the Plant Materials Program is being adversely impacted by the current levels of accountability. The effects of this situation are evident in customer service, fund utilization, and product quality. NRCS plant science activities should be well coordinated nationally as well as be responsive to local needs for plant technology. This is best achieved by assuring simple and clear lines of accountability.

Program budget offsets are necessary in order for NRCS to carry out management and administrative operations at all levels. However, there is concern that offsets (19 percent) and Congressional earmarks (14 percent) at the national level are affecting the Plant Materials Program inequitably. These offsets and earmarks reduced the Plant Materials budget by approximately $3 million in FY 99.

In order to have a successful program, some states supplement PMCs with other funds. However, many PMCs are charged excessive offsets by the state; up to 33 percent of the PMCs overall budget. This erodes the PMCs ability to maintain infrastructure, replace farm equipment, and perform their mission.

The Task Force identified six sub issues and associated actions and outcomes as described below.

SUB-ISSUE I: Establish a better accountability program for Plant Materials.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
Develop a continuous quality evaluation plan to evaluate the success of a PMC and PMS. The plan will include criteria for technology development/ transfer, coordination, and management of resources.	Will insure program accountability and quality products.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	September 2000	

SUB-ISSUE II: Develop guidance for program offsets and fund accountability.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
Develop fund accountability protocol at all levels for CO-46 operations and incorporate it into the NRCS General Manual. This should cover guidance for calculating offset and overhead amounts and rules for how CO-46 funds can be expended.	Offset and overhead amounts will be more uniform throughout NRCS and will be in accordance with what is allowed by law, rules, and regulations.	Deputy Chiefs for Management and Science & Technology	January 2001	

SUB-ISSUE III: Establish clear performance measures.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
Develop a consistent performance business plan for each Plant Materials Center.	Increased efficiency and effectiveness to implement the agency mission.	State Conser-vationists	October 2000	

SUB-ISSUE IV: Recognize the Plant Materials Program as an integral part of the mainstream functions.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
Incorporate program into agency's strategic and business plans.	Plant Materials will become a mainstream NRCS program and will have identified responsibilities in assisting with the accomplishment of agency goals.	Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability	October 2000	

SUB-ISSUE V: Develop a process to assess customer needs and satisfaction.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
Develop a process of assessing customer (internal and external) satisfaction with the products of the Plant Materials Program.	High priority needs of the agency and its customers will be met.	Deputy Chiefs for Strategic Planning and Accountability and Science & Technology	April 2001	

SUB-ISSUE VI: Provide guidance for the consistent operation of the Plant Materials Program.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
Fast track the review and distribution of the National Plant Materials Manual.	Consistency in Plant Materials Center operations and increased accountability.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	July 2000	

BUDGET

ISSUE: Plant science activities in NRCS are not adequately funded. As the agency positions itself to address new and emerging natural resources issues, Plant Materials must be a participant in resolving these issues.

BACKGROUND: The key role of the Plant Materials Program is to support the delivery process through research and product development. In order for the agency to reach world class status in Plant Materials technology, and to address new and emerging issues such as carbon sequestration, AFOs, and invasive species, the program's funding must be substantially increased. While the agency primarily functions to deliver technology to its clients, less than one percent of the NRCS budget now goes to support plant technology development.

In FY99 the Plant Materials Program had an overall CO-46 budget of $9.02 million with $6.30 million available for center operations. Currently there is an estimated need for $15 - $20 million per year for PMCs, assuming that centers will be participants in priority issues. The difference between available and needed funds means that many high priority issues will not receive adequate attention.

Plant Materials Centers have the opportunity to work cooperatively with other institutes and centers within the agency. Specialization in these organizations has sometimes prevented effective coordination and cooperation. There are also occasions when it may be possible to use PMCs instead of contracting out for services. This issue extends beyond insufficient program funds. It also involves identifying a process to determine funding needs and accomplish plant science functions.

Sub-issues are outlined below with the assumption that Alternative 1 will be selected.

SUB-ISSUE I: Establish a process to determine actual fiscal needs for the PM Program.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Develop a process to adequately capture PMC workload, funding, and staffing needs.	More accurate alignment of funding and staffing needs for PMC activities.	Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability	September 2000	

SUB-ISSUE II: Increase program funds.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Develop a budget proposal to bring Plant Materials funding in line with identified workload and agency priorities.	Sufficient funds to PMCs to accomplish mission.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	July 2000	

SUB-ISSUE II (cont.): Increase program funds.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
2. Seek USDA and OMB support for increased funding based on a workload analysis.	Increase of CO-46 funds.	Chief	July 2000	

SUB-ISSUE III: Coordinate activities with Institutes, centers, and outside sources to avoid duplication.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Assess the capability of PMCs before contracting to outside sources.	PMCs will be performing more work that previously went to outside sources.	Deputy for Science & Technology	Ongoing	

STRUCTURE AND LINKAGES, MEETING NEW CHALLENGES, PROGRAM INTEGRATION

ISSUE: A significant hurdle for the Plant Materials Program is the lack of understanding and recognition of its role in the agency because of limited linkage between nationally identified priority issues and the program.

BACKGROUND:
The program is an integral part of the technical support to the agency's field delivery system, including vegetative solutions for landowners' needs. However, it must be vertically and horizontally integrated throughout the agency and Department by including it in all strategic and business plans. The Plant Materials Program should be making significant contributions to the following emerging issues:

- Buffer Initiative
- Invasive Species Initiative
- Carbon Sequestration
- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan Implementation (AFO/CAFO)
- Wildlife and Wetland Habitat

STRUCTURE AND LINKAGES: It is paramount that the Plant Materials Program establish a fundamental organizational structure to assure it becomes fully incorporated in the NRCS processes used to determine agency priorities. This structure will improve coordination, increase technical quality, reduce duplication, and ensure the program focuses on priority issues. An operational link to NRCS national institutes, centers of excellence, and Ft. Collins Information Technology Center is imperative.

MEETING NEW CHALLENGES: The Plant Materials Program must be recognized as a key player in emerging resource management issues facing our nation. No other agency is better organized to meet these new challenges nor do they have a delivery system to provide technical assistance. Some Plant Material Centers have been unable to respond to new challenges for a variety of reasons, including lack of resources and staff, inadequate funding, poor integration, and dysfunctional advisory committees.

INTERGRATION: The Plant Materials Program must be integrated into our field delivery system because there is a widespread perception that the program is separate from the agency. PMCs must become directly involved in assuring that balance is achieved between technology development and transfer, training, research, and accountability. Involvement of all stakeholders to establish program priorities (internal and external) must also occur.

Three sub-issues are outlined below.

SUB-ISSUE I: Improve the understanding, recognition, and importance of the program's role in the agency's mission.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Establish a temporary (3 year) Resource Specialist position located in the field to develop and carry out a marketing strategy for the PM program processes. (Note: Consider contracting out.)	Greater understanding and visibility for the program thereby making needed resources available. Improved integration of PM program into NRCS technical assistance delivery system. Integration with Institutes, Centers, and Ft. Collins ITC. Enhanced understanding of program benefits by partners and customers.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	October 2000	
2. Develop and implement a marketing plan for visibility and an education strategy for technology transfer.	Same as above	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	September 2003	
3. Place high priority on training field personnel on the PM program.	Greater utilization of plant materials technology in solving resource concerns. Increased input from field to Plant Materials Program.	State Conser-vationists NEDC	Ongoing	

SUB-ISSUE II: Increase linkages between the program and Institutes, Centers, and Ft. Collins ITC

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. National Plant Materials Leader will be a member of the technology consortium.	Focus program priorities. Strengthen technology coordination. Improve program coordination. Reduce potential duplication.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology	June 2000	

SUB-ISSUE III: Increase training to meet emerging issues.

Recommended Actions:	Expected Outcome:	Who:	Completion Date:	Progress:
1. Technical team working in concert with needs of the Plant Materials Program .	Highly trained technical personnel able to provide cutting edge technical assistance to the field. Expand areas of technical assistance. More projects focused on high priority resource issues. Research and technology development oriented to specific customer (internal and external) needs.	Deputy Chief for Science & Technology; State Conser-vationists	Ongoing	

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When a collection of brilliant minds, hearts, and talents come together…expect a masterpiece.