



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NEWS RELEASE

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USDA announces Web Soil Survey

Internet-based system allows users access to soil survey information

Massachusetts farmers, conservationists, engineering firms, and city planners now have quick and easy access to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's national soils information. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has launched the **Web Soil Survey** website, which will provide secure public access to soils data that contributes to every aspect of public and private land use and development.

"Until now soil survey maps, which help landowners and land use professionals make informed land use decisions, were only available in printed form," said Cecil B. Currin, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "Posting soil survey information on-line is one more step in our effort to make information more accessible to the citizens we serve."

To view the Web Soil Survey website go to <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Soil surveys began in 1899 as part of the nation's earliest conservation efforts. Known as the National Cooperative Soil Survey, it has evolved into a partnership of state and federal agencies working together to collect, classify, interpret and provide soils information.

The Web Soil Survey website has been designed with three easy to use features – Define, View and Explore – and operates much like websites that provide driving directions. When users visit the web soil survey, they are asked to "Define" a geographic area of interest by selecting a state and county or just by highlighting an area. Once a location has been defined and displayed on the screen, the user has the choice to print the map and related information, save it to their hard drive or download the data for use in a geographic information system (GIS).

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The user can also "Explore" the designated location for specific information on soil suitability in relationship to usage. This flexibility provides an opportunity to build a customized report that addresses the user's individual needs. Information can be delivered in a variety of formats, including print, CD, DVD or other media.

Prior to the site's launch all soil survey maps were printed and bound into soil survey books that were free to the public at local USDA Service Centers, NRCS field offices and public libraries. The once familiar soil survey publications will be phased out slowly and the federal government's initiative of electronic government information (eGov) will replace the printed publications through the use of this site.

Currently, NRCS has soils maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation's counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site will be updated and maintained as the single authoritative source of soil survey information.

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