



Presenter

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Climate-Smart Workforce: USDA Field Staff's Readiness to Support Climate Adaptation

US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field staff are in a unique position to support agricultural land managers to adapt to climate change. However, there is substantial variation among field staff in knowledge and understanding about climate change, use of climate-related resources, and willingness to consider climate change in their service delivery. In order to provide professional development opportunities that support the capacity of diverse USDA field staff to respond to climate-related threats, a baseline of these factors must first be established. To this end, two surveys instruments were designed to capture information about NRCS and FSA field staff, specifically: (a) the level of knowledge about climate change that field staff possess, (b) use of and familiarity with various climate and weather resources and tools by field staff, and (c) the degree to which field staff are willing, comfortable, and confident supporting farmers to address climate-related risks. Over 8,000 NRCS and 10,000 FSA employees were targeted for the survey. In total, 4,621 FSA employees and 1,893 NRCS employees responded to the survey, resulting in response rates of 43% and 22%, respectively. While the survey was administered nationally, this presentation will include results from field staff in North and South Carolina (n=172), as well as a comparison of these two states to the national sample. Results can inform the Climate Hubs and other organizations that provide climate-related scientific support surrounding climate change by identifying gaps in knowledge and resource use, the receptiveness of USDA field staff to this kind of information, and opportunities to support professional development.