

TSP Express

*A report for Technical Service Providers
July 2005 Report No. 7*

USDA Signs Technical Service Provider Agreement With American Forage and Grassland Council



AFGC President Ed Twidwell (left) and NRCS Chief Bruce Knight sign MOU

U.S. Department of Agriculture signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the American Forage and Grassland Council (AFGC) allowing conservation program participants the option to obtain technical assistance for their privately owned grazing and tribal lands from certified technical service providers (TSPs).

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight and AFGC President Ed Twidwell signed the three-year MOU during the AFGC Conference held June 11-15, 2005, in Bloomington, Ill.

The MOU allows AFGC to recommend its members, who must pass a test, to USDA for certification to plan and implement conservation practices on pasture, hayland and grazed cropland. This MOU recognizes that a grassland professional completing AFGC's certified Grassland Professional certification also meets USDA's performance criteria for providing conservation assistance in grazing and forage. The grassland professional's work must meet

USDA's standards and specifications for quality conservation technical assistance.

AFGC is a national scientific and educational organization representing grassland professionals nationwide. The private, non-profit organization is headquartered in Georgetown, Texas.

In addition to AFGC, USDA has signed MOUs with the following 12 organizations: American Society of Agronomy, Society for Range Management, Iowa State University, The Wildlife Society, Society of American Foresters, The Irrigation Association, University of Tennessee, National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants, Environmental Management Solutions, American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists, Association of Consulting Foresters of America and American Fisheries Society.

The MOU allows these organizations to recommend qualified individuals to USDA for certification as TSPs in conservation planning and design, layout, installation and checkout of approved conservation practices.

Technical Service Providers Must Report Accomplishments in the Performance Results System

TSPs must use the Performance Results System (PRS) to report accomplishments regarding their work with USDA producers.

Previously, TSPs reported accomplishments and progress in TechPRS, which was discontinued in June 2005. NRCS discontinued TechPRS to streamline its reporting system and improve accuracy of the reported information.

PRS provides valuable information on TSP activities throughout the nation. The system contains much information, including types of technical services provided, location, who received the service and the date of service. PRS also summarizes past work activities and displays previously entered records.

Public entity TSPs will use PRS to report their own progress using current e-authentication login procedures. NRCS staff will enter the reports for private TSPs. Private entity TSPs must provide the following information to the field office where the land unit is located:

- TSP Name
- Customer Name
- Program
- Location of Work (state, county, conservation district, land tract)
- Identifier
- Land Use
- Practice Name, amount, and units, and
- Service Type (planning, design, installation and checkout)

TSPs sign a certification agreement that stipulates they must keep NRCS informed regarding their activities with USDA producers.

NRCS Holds Information Sessions To Gain Feedback from TSPs

NRCS will hold informational forums nationwide in 2005 to seek comment from TSPs on the effectiveness of the process. All states, the Pacific Basin and the Caribbean Area will conduct these forums.

TSPs are encouraged to attend the forums in their local area and/or states where they are certified.

NRCS Chief Bruce Knight requested the forums nationwide. He said this is an opportune time for the agency to seek input from TSPs since the process began in March 2003. In addition, the TSP final rule was published in the Federal Register in November 2004, providing much needed guidance to TSPs.

NRCS will issue quarterly reports that explain forum results. Scheduled publication dates for the reports are August 2005, December 2005 and April 2006. The agency will attempt to address local concerns locally. National concerns will be addressed at the agency's national headquarters in Washington, D.C.

For more information about your local forum, please contact your state TSP coordinator at <http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>.

Orientation Course for TSPs Being Developed



Prospective TSPs view the TechReg screen during a training session in Illinois.

Have you ever wondered about your role and responsibilities as a TSP? Do you know how to find NRCS technical guides and standards?

NRCS is developing a web-based orientation course that will answer these and many other questions about the TSP process. Estimated time for

course completion ranges between five and seven hours, depending on level of knowledge about the TSP process and the agency.

The course will be mandatory for new TSPs and those seeking certification renewals.

The course will include review questions and a final examination to help NRCS gauge effectiveness. The agency plans to unveil the course in early September 2005. The course will be designed for classroom presentation.

Topics will include:

1. Roles and Responsibilities of the TSP, the Landowner and NRCS
2. Certification Categories and Requirements
3. Contracts and Agreements with NRCS and Landowners
4. Marketing Strategies
5. Technical References and Tools
6. Where to Get Help

TSPs that are comfortable with the process and have a solid knowledge of NRCS can go directly to the final examination. By making this course a prerequisite for certification, NRCS will have an objective measure for “familiarity with NRCS” certification requirement.

Training organizations wishing to adapt this orientation course to meet their needs may contact Ivan Graff at 202-720-5917 or ivan.graff@wdc.usda.gov.

SWCS To Offer NRCS Conservation Planning Course

The Soil and Water Conservation Society, Michigan Chapter, will conduct a training session on Modules 6-8 of NRCS’ Conservation Planning course October 17-21, 2005, in Marshall, Mich.

The one-week course includes classroom and field exercises and training in the conservation planning process. Class size is limited to 16 participants, who must be SWCS members. Participants will receive the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook, the training manual used to instruct participants.

Course prerequisites include at least one year’s experience with conservation practice application in the field and the successful completion of Modules 1-5 of the NRCS’ Conservation Planning course, found online at

<http://www.nedc.nrcs.usda.gov/catalog/consplan.html>. Participants must have USDA e-authentication to get credit for these modules.

The registration deadline is September 20, 2005. The fee is \$300 for current SWCS members and \$375 for non-members. The non-member registration includes the cost of a one-year SWCS membership. Participants are responsible for their own lodging and meals not provided during the training.

For more information about the course, please contact instructor Daniel Kesselring at DFKesselring@aol.com.

NRCS Briefs 1890 Colleges and Universities on TSP Training Opportunities

Representatives from six 1890 colleges and universities learned about TSP training opportunities as part of a Center of Excellence and Engineering Workshop held in June 2005.

Presenters defined a TSP and explained the roles and responsibilities, certification process, among other topics. Presenters also discussed the role of Minority Servicing Institutions in this process as well as the importance of having a diverse pool of TSPs.

Each of the six 1890 colleges and universities house USDA-sponsored centers of excellence and/or accredited agricultural engineering programs supported by NRCS. The colleges and universities are Florida A&M University, Florida; Lincoln University, Missouri; North Carolina A&T University, North Carolina; Langston University, Oklahoma; South Carolina State University, South Carolina and Virginia State University, Virginia.

FIELD FOCUS – Wisconsin



TSP Coordinator Ken Rismeyer (right) answers questions about TSP from a conference participant at the NRCS booth.

NRCS in Wisconsin highlighted the TSP process through presentations and an exhibit at the annual Wisconsin Fertilizer, Aglime and Pest Management Conference and Trade Show in Madison earlier this year. The event attracted 1,600 participants and more than 100 exhibitors.

NRCS in Wisconsin developed an exhibit to explain the process to prospective TSPs.

Ken Rismeyer, State TSP Coordinator and a conference presenter, discussed how to become a certified TSP during the conference and at the NRCS booth. He explained to participants how to navigate the TechReg site and the types of certification, documentation and forms required of TSPs. He also discussed NRCS policies, standards and expectations for TSPs. Rismeyer said many participants expressed interest in the TSP process.

The conference offered diverse technical information, continuing educational credits and business topics.

FIELD FOCUS – Michigan



TSP Joe Luellen (right) confers with landowner William McCarthy of Bryan, Ohio, about his CRP fields.

Joe Luellen of Ann Arbor, Mich., spent his entire 38-year career with the former Soil Conservation Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service in his home state. When he retired in 2003, he knew exactly what he wanted to do—become a certified technical service provider.

Luellen said his second career allows him to do work he absolutely loves and to use his vast experience in soil conservation, soil science and community planning to help farmers and ranchers. He has registered in TechReg, the national TSP on-line registry, in 30 states as a conservation planner, nutrient management planner, and historical preservationist. He even registered as a wetland delineator after he completed training through the Corps of Engineers.

To conduct his work as a TSP, Luellen formed his own company—Joe Servic Assoc. of Ann Arbor. His staff of independent contractors assists him with his TSP work. When he is awarded contracts in other states, Luellen said he works with subcontractors as needed.

Under his first contract as a TSP, Luellen completed mid-year reviews for 93 contracts for the Conservation Reserve Program for the USDA Service Center in Williams County, Ohio. The service center amended his contract and added 89 more contracts for CRP mid-year reviews. His extensive experience in planning and applying conservation practices for natural resource systems are valuable assets, he said.

Luellen said producers sometimes question him about his reasons for becoming a TSP. “I tell them that I was hired by USDA to

do this work and that I use the same standards and specifications that I used when I was an NRCS employee,” he said. That statement tends to reassure those producers who question his decision.

To keep his professional skills honed, Luellen attends conferences held by organizations such as the National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees and the Soil and Water Conservation Society.

Connect to TSP Express Online

TSPs can subscribe to TSP Express on the Internet. The electronic subscription service, which NRCS began in 2003, alerts computer users to these information products and includes a link to view and download.

To subscribe to TSP Express, visit <http://news-source.nrcs.usda.gov>. Enter an e-mail address to receive messages alerting you to these informational products. Select your publications. Click on the “subscribe to selected e-mail lists” bar to submit your selections.

For More Information

For more information on technical service providers, visit the TechReg site at <http://techreg.usda.gov>; write to Angel Figueroa, National TSP Team Leader, Science and Technology Deputy Area, USDA-NRCS, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013; or send an e-mail to Angel.Figueroa@wdc.usda.gov.

State Technical Service Provider Contacts
<http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>

Your Feedback is Needed

This is the seventh issue of TSP Express, a report for TSPs. We are seeking topics for future issues. Please send comments to tspg@nrca.usda.gov.

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