

TSP Express

*A report for Technical Service Providers
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Arlen Lancaster, Chief Natural Resources Conservation Service



One of the fundamental building blocks of conservation is knowledge. We know that farmers, ranchers, contractors, and homeowners need sound data about the land. To make conservation data as available as possible, we launched the Web Soil Survey to make this data available upon demand through the Internet. Soil survey maps and other information are now available online for more than 95 percent of the Nation's counties. Through this technology, we have distributed more soil survey information to more customers in the last year than was possible with printing and distribution in the last 10 years.

My experience has taught me the value of partnerships, and NRCS' partnership with Technical Service Providers (TSP) reinforces this.

Since 2004, we've worked with more than 2,500 TSPs, and these conservation consultants have provided the Nation with the equivalent of about 775 more staff years working on conservation projects. The demand for TSPs continues to grow, especially in the area of nutrient management plans for livestock operations. The recently proposed EPA rule on concentrated animal feeding operations has established a deadline of July 31, 2007, for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) to apply for permits and have nutrient management plans in place. TSPs will play

a crucial role in helping to meet this demand for Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP).

Additionally, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns recently unveiled the U.S.D.A. 2007 Farm Bill proposals. USDA began preparations for the 2007 Farm Bill in 2005 by conducting 52 farm bill forums across the country. More than 4,000 comments were recorded or collected during forums and via electronic and standard mail.

Highlights of the proposals include:

- Increase conservation funding by \$7.8 billion over 10 years;
- Simplify and consolidate conservation programs;
- Create a new Environmental Quality Incentives Program and a Regional Water Enhancement Program;
- Target nearly \$5 billion in funding to support specialty crop producers; and
- Provide \$250 million to increase direct payments for beginning farmers and ranchers.

The farm bill proposals, forum transcripts, and comments submitted by the public, are available on USDA's Web Site at www.usda.gov/farmbill.

Technical Service Providers have enabled us to respond to the unprecedented demand for technical assistance that the 2002 Farm Bill brought, and TSPs will continue to help put conservation on the land. For that reason, I want to thank you for being an important part of "Helping People Help the Land."



[Helping People Help the Land...](#)

USDA-NRCS Provided \$62.6 Million for Technical Service Providers in Fiscal Year 2006

NRCS provided more than \$62.6 million in fiscal year 2006 to support the use of private businesses, non-profit organizations, tribes, universities and public agencies as TSPs.

NRCS obligated \$33 million (or 56 percent) of the total funds for private-sector TSPs through various conservation programs. Most of the remaining obligations were distributed to state agencies, soil and water conservation districts, non-government organizations, universities, resource conservation and development councils and Tribes. NRCS acquired a total of 15,533 contracts/agreements for fiscal year 2006.

The most common practices planned and applied by TSPs for fiscal year 2006 included pest management, nutrient management, fencing, firebreaks, manure transfer and comprehensive nutrient management plans.

To date, NRCS has more than 1,692 certified TSPs listed in TechReg, its national Internet-based registry. Farmers, ranchers and other landowners seeking conservation technical assistance use TechReg to locate TSPs.

Enhancements to Nutrient Management Software Planned

In an effort to help NRCS field personnel and TSPs respond to requests for Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs), NRCS is working with Purdue University, the University of Missouri and the University of Tennessee to upgrade the Manure Management Planner (MMP) software.

The short-term objective of this project is two-fold. First, NRCS national leadership has learned that the CNMP output is difficult for some producers to understand and use effectively.

To address this concern, and maintain the quality of the plan, MMP software provides an optional abbreviated output that contains only those elements of the plan the producer needs to operate. Some producers will prefer to receive the full output which they will be able to get as well.

The second objective is to speed production time of the CNMP. To accomplish this, the program will automatically connect to other technological tools that are necessary to calculate the manure application rate. This will avoid the present need to re-enter data every time a new run is tried.

The proposed amendments to the Combined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) rule provide tangible benefits to having and using a CNMP. Use of a CNMP is specifically mentioned as a way to claim and gain benefit from the Agricultural Storm Water Exemption (for field application) without the need to have a permit. However, some producers will opt to seek a permit due to the proximity of their production facility to a water body of the U.S. or for some other reason. As a result, EPA is working with NRCS to allow the software to produce a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) for the purpose of a permit application if the producer chooses. When these enhancements are made, the producer will have three options: an abbreviated CNMP, a full CNMP or a NMP.

It is anticipated that the Manure Management Planner software program will contain a simplified input format to increase the use of the program.

Programming is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2007. Presently there are sufficient resources to fully connect 15 states to the new MMP by the end of fiscal year 2007.

Questions about the new MMP can be directed to Mr. John Davis, NRCS Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Division, at 301-504-2225.

NRCS Launches Online TSP Orientation Course

An online TSP Orientation Course has been designed to increase the likelihood that individuals interested in becoming TSP, as well as those who are currently TSPs, have the skills and information needed to achieve their full potential.

Throughout the course, there are online exercises which will guide the learner through the TSP process while explaining registration and certification, de-mystifying payment rates, and examining the consequences of decertification. Upon completion of the course, the learner will be able to:

- Locate technical resources;
- Identify the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet certification categories criteria;
- Complete the TSP Certification process; and
- Understand:
 - what is needed to deliver an acceptable work product;
 - how and when producers are reimbursed for services; and
 - the roles and responsibilities of the NRCS, the producer and the TSP.

This course, along with other courses which may be required for specific certification categories, is located at the NRCS [AgLearn Web Site](#). An individual must be registered on the site prior to accessing the course. A Web site tour is available online to explain the process.

Questions specific to state policy or operations should be referred to the state NRCS [TSP Coordinator](#). Questions or comments about the course content may be directed to [Angel Figueroa](#) of the Technical Service Provider Team.

Technical Service Provider Business Opportunities

TSPs can obtain business through direct contract with producers or direct contract with NRCS. When contracting with producers, TSPs advertise their names to the farming community and NRCS lists their names and contact information on TechReg. The producer then contacts the TSP and hires them for planning, designing, installation, and/or checkout of the conservation practices in their conservation plan.

When contracting with NRCS, TSPs learn of contract opportunities through the NRCS state office contracting officer or by visiting the Fed Biz Opps at <http://www.fbo.gov/> or the Grants.Gov site at <http://www.grants.gov/> and searching by Agency and State. The TSP then submits their proposals and obtains contracts with NRCS to assist producers. Please check these Web Sites periodically and contact your NRCS state office from the directory found in www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Upcoming Training Opportunities

➤ **Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan Development Course**

February 26-28, 2007

Arlington, Texas at the Arlington Hilton

The CNMP Development Course provides the primary educational component of the Iowa State University TSP certification program.

Under a national memorandum of understanding with USDA, individuals certified under this program can be recognized by USDA as TSPs through the Tech Reg system. This three-day course is designed to train individuals in the development of CNMPs. If you have questions about this training, or would like to be added to the mailing list, contact Lara Moody (lmood@iastate.edu). Additional course information and registration information will be posted at the following Web Site: <http://www.abe.iastate.edu/wastemgmt>.

FIELD FOCUS – Montana

Technical Service Providers Implement Fish Friendly Water Conservation Practices in Montana

By Tom Pick, Water Quality Specialist and TSP Coordinator

In Montana's scenic and historic Big Hole and Blackfoot River valleys, several species of native fish are again finding their ancestral homes to be more habitable due to the combined efforts of NRCS, partnering organizations and agencies, landowners, and TSPs.

Montana *arctic grayling* living in the upper Big Hole River are listed as a candidate species under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). NRCS has partnered with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) to aid in the protection and recovery of the *arctic grayling*. To carry out time sensitive and key components of the CCAA, and their own private land conservation plans, USDA program participants have used TSPs to implement 60 fish-friendly, water conservation practices this year. Diversion structures, water control structures, fish passage structures, and water measurement devices are the primary practices being used to address flow alteration and water temperature issues. Kris Berg, NRCS District Conservationist in Dillon, says, "TSPs have done a good job working with landowners to get designs done in a timely manner and have kept us informed of the status of projects. TSPs have helped us to double the amount of work completed in the upper Big Hole.

In tributaries to the Blackfoot River in western Montana, TSPs have overseen the design, installation and certification of 7.5 miles of degraded stream projects over 15 months. The complex projects involved numerous agencies and partner organizations and focused on channel relocation, habitat restoration and enhancement, and extensive vegetative plantings to recover habitat favorable to bull trout and west slope cutthroat trout. Bull trout are listed as a threatened species under the ESA in Montana due in part to siltation and alteration of spawning habitat.

West slope cutthroat trout are currently listed as a Montana species of special concern due to hybridization and habitat loss. Irrigation diversion structures have also been retrofitted with state-of-the-art fish screens to greatly reduce entrainment of native fish species into irrigation ditches.



“I firmly believe that the TSP process can work effectively and help NRCS and landowners get conservation on the ground in a timely manner,” says Craig Engelhard, NRCS ASTC-FO in Missoula.

NRCS staff in both watersheds used innovative approaches in working with TSPs. They packaged the array of needed conservation practices into bundles of practices in contracts to facilitate contracting and administration. In some cases, the average costs of the practice components themselves were also modified to simplify the process for landowners and to incorporate state-of-the-art riparian restoration science. While it is still too soon to tell how well these practices will benefit the long-term survival of our imperiled finny friends, homegrown projects such as these reflect the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of watershed restoration in Montana. These extra efforts benefit landowners and managers, partner organizations, and the NRCS mission of “Helping People Help the Land.”

FIELD FOCUS – Maine

Technical Service Providers Take Engineering Lead in Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) Projects

By: Elaine Tremble, Public Affairs Specialist, Bangor, Maine

NRCS in Maine has been successful in employing TSPs to do the design and oversight on Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program projects...namely the Highland Lake Fish Passage in Westbrook and the Sandy River Fish Passage in Madison.

This Fish Passage Project involved the removal of a dam and preparation of numerous studies, such as endangered and threatened species, flood inundation analysis, cultural resources, and ice jam analysis. The application also included permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Major partners in this project included Madison Electric Works, Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission, Trout Unlimited, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and NRCS.



Representative from Kleinschmidt Associates (left) consults with Maine Dept. of Marine Resource staff person at the Highland Lake Fish Passage site.

The TSP was also contracted by the Maine Department of Marine Resources for the design, layout and checkout on the Highland Lake Fish Passage Wildlife Habitat Incentive Project (WHIP).

A supplemental NRCS Fish Passage Statement of Work was prepared for additional guidance to serve as a comprehensive planning and engineering checklist and assure successful NRCS TSP documentation standards. Project hydrology data collection, inventory and review were also conducted.

FIELD FOCUS – Alabama

Technical Service Providers Assist with Installation of Plasticulture System

By: Julie A. Best, Public Affairs Specialist, Auburn, AL

Small and limited resource farms make up a large portion of the farming operations in Alabama, yet this segment of the farm population has low levels of established measures for conserving soil and protecting groundwater. To encourage limited resource producers to participate in NRCS programs and implement practices that make wise use of natural resources, Alabama established conservation practices called plasticulture with drip irrigation that would appeal to limited resource producers. A TSP who has experience in installing the practice is available to assist producers with installation of the practice.

Eugene Hall is a TSP who works with NRCS through the Federation of Southern Cooperatives located at Epes, Alabama, and the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District. Hall is skilled in the installation of plastic mulch and drip irrigation. Once a limited resource producer gets an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract to assist with the installation of plastic mulch with drip irrigation, Hall is available to guide the producer through the process. The first step requires an on-site visit to determine the feasibility of installing the system. During on-site visits, the TSP will determine the needs of the producer, including solving installation and other problems. Hall explains the process of preparing the land for installation of the plastic. He is available to oversee the installation of the plastic to ensure that problems do not arise as a result of installation mistakes.



Helping People Help the Land...



TSP/Eugene Hall, (left) talks with a producer about the installation of drip irrigation for a plasticulture system.



Landowner, (pictured left) proudly displays the results of vegetables grown with plastic mulch and drip irrigation.

Drip irrigation is an efficient use of water. Only the growing mound is irrigated. Hall says, “When the water soaks into the ground, there are only two places for the water to go; the water may go up on the plastic and back on the plants or the water can be absorbed by the plants. Having the water available directly to the plants is a tremendous advantage to the producer and an efficient use of the water.”

To be competitive in today’s marketplace, produce growers must strive continually for high quality, superior yields and extended production cycles. Plasticulture is a management tool that enables vegetable producers to realize greater returns per acre of land.

With the installation of plastic mulch and drip irrigation, limited resource producers are installing conservation practices that make wise use of natural resources. With proper planning, attention to details, and dedication to all aspects of the plasticulture system, the opportunity exists to increase the profits from land acreage while using efficient production techniques. In Alabama, TSPs are helping limited resource producers make that happen.



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For More Information

For more information on Technical Service Providers, visit the TechReg site at <http://techreg.usda.gov>; write to Angel Figueroa, National Technical Service Provider Team Leader, Science and Technology Deputy Area, USDA-NRCS, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013-2890; phone: 202-720-6731, or e-mail at Angel.Figueroa@wdc.usda.gov.

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

Your Feedback is Needed

This is the ninth issue of TSP Express, a report for technical services providers. We are seeking topics for future issues. Please send comments to tsp@wdc.usda.gov.

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