



# **U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Technical Service Providers

Customer Satisfaction Survey

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Final Report  
April 2007

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**Introduction**

This report is about customer perceptions of services from the Technical Service Providers of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. This report was produced by CFI Group in collaboration with the University of Michigan. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact CFI Group at 734-930-9090.

**Overview of ACSI Methodology**

ACSI is produced by the University of Michigan in partnership with CFI Group, and the American Society for Quality. The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is the national indicator of customer evaluations of the quality of goods and services available to U.S. residents. It is the only uniform, cross-industry/government measure of Customer Satisfaction. Since 1994, the ACSI has measured Satisfaction, its causes, and its effects, for seven economic sectors, 41 industries and more than 200 private sector companies. ACSI has measured more than 100 programs of federal government agencies since 1999. This allows benchmarking between the public and private sectors and provides information unique to each agency on how its activities that interface with the public affect the Satisfaction of customers. The effects of Satisfaction are estimated, in turn, on specific objectives (such as public trust).

Additional information can be found in the appendices of this report.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the study was developed through a collaborative effort between CFI Group and personnel from the USDA NRCS Technical Service Providers initiative. The questionnaire used is shown in Appendix A in the back of this report.

Appendix B: Respondent Background

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provided respondent sample of customers who used Technical Service Providers. Information about the respondents' organization and responses to other similar questions such as 'Received reimbursement' or 'Contacted field office' can be found in Appendix B.

Appendix C: Attribute Score Tables

Respondents were asked to evaluate items on a 1 to 10 scale. Results to these questions are reported on a scale of 0 to 100 and are included in Appendix C: Attribute Tables. Aggregate scores are included in these tables as well as comparisons of scores by segments, such as organization; received reimbursement and contacted field office.

Appendix D: Verbatims

Verbatim comments from all open-ended responses are included in Appendix D.

**Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted between November 28 and December 22, 2006, by the professional interviewers of Discovery Research Group working under monitored supervision according to specifications from CFI Group. Interviewers used CATI (computer-assisted-telephone-interviewing) terminals programmed for the specific questionnaire. The NRCS provided CFI Group with customer names of those who had used technical assistance through Technical Service Providers. Nearly all of the participants (97%) were agricultural landowners or operators. A total of 250 responses were collected. Respondent cooperation, participation among those who were qualified and successfully contacted was 76.5%. The response rate that also accounts for non-interview events, where a respondent could not be reached (e.g., busy, answering machine, voice mail) was 23.3%.

ACSI Code	Definition	n
U	<b>UNIVERSE OF SAMPLED TELEPHONE NUMBERS</b>	<b>1291</b>
	<b>Interviews</b>	
I	Total completed interviews	250
P	Partial interviews	0
<b>I+P</b>	<b>Total interviews</b>	<b>250</b>
	<b>Eligible cases that are not interviewed (Non-respondents)</b>	
	Break-offs	0
	Refusal, qualified cases	77
RQ	Total qualified cases refusals	77
	<b>Cases of unknown eligibility (Unknown eligibility/No contact—Non-interview)</b>	
	Cases of unknown eligibility (Unknown eligibility/No contact—Non-interview)	847
	Foreign language/hard of hearing	6
<b>UE</b>	<b>Total unknown eligibility</b>	<b>853</b>
	<b>Cases that are not eligible (Non-eligible Respondents)</b>	
	Disconnect/out of service	55
	Computer/FAX	9
	Wrong number	41
	Filter	0
	Other Non-eligible respondent	6
<b>NER</b>	<b>Total Non-eligible Respondents</b>	<b>111</b>
	<b>Quota Filled so respondent not eligible for interview</b>	
	Case of quota-filled subgroup	0
	Scheduled for callback, but subgroup quota filled or interview period ended	0
<b>QF</b>	<b>Total Quota Filled Respondents</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>U</b>	<b>Universe of Sampled Numbers</b>	<b>1291</b>
<b>NER</b>	<b>Less Non-eligible Respondents</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>QF</b>	<b>Less Quota Filled Respondents</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>EU</b>	<b>Universe of Eligible Numbers</b>	<b>1180</b>

<b>COOPERATION RATE (AAPOR (2)) = I/(I+P)+RQ</b>	<b>76.5%</b>
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$e = (I+P+RQ+QF)/(I+P+RQ+QF+NER)$	<b>74.7%</b>
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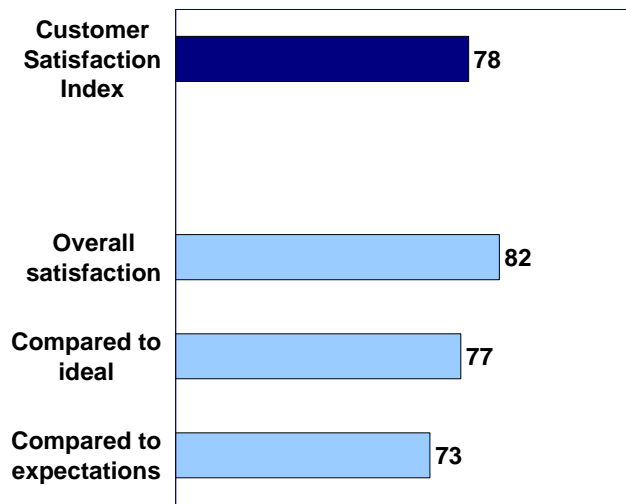
<b>RESPONSE RATE (AAPOR RR(3)) = I+COOP(QF)/(I+P+RQ+QF+NER+e(UE))</b>	<b>23.3%</b>
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**Customer Satisfaction (ACSI)**

The **Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI)** is a weighted average of the three ACSI benchmark questions in the questionnaire in Appendix A. The questions are answered on 1-10 scale and converted to a 0-100 scale for reporting purposes. The three questions measure: Overall Satisfaction; Satisfaction compared to expectations; and Satisfaction compared to an ideal organization. The model assigns the weights to each question in a way that maximizes the ability of the index to predict changes in agency outcomes.

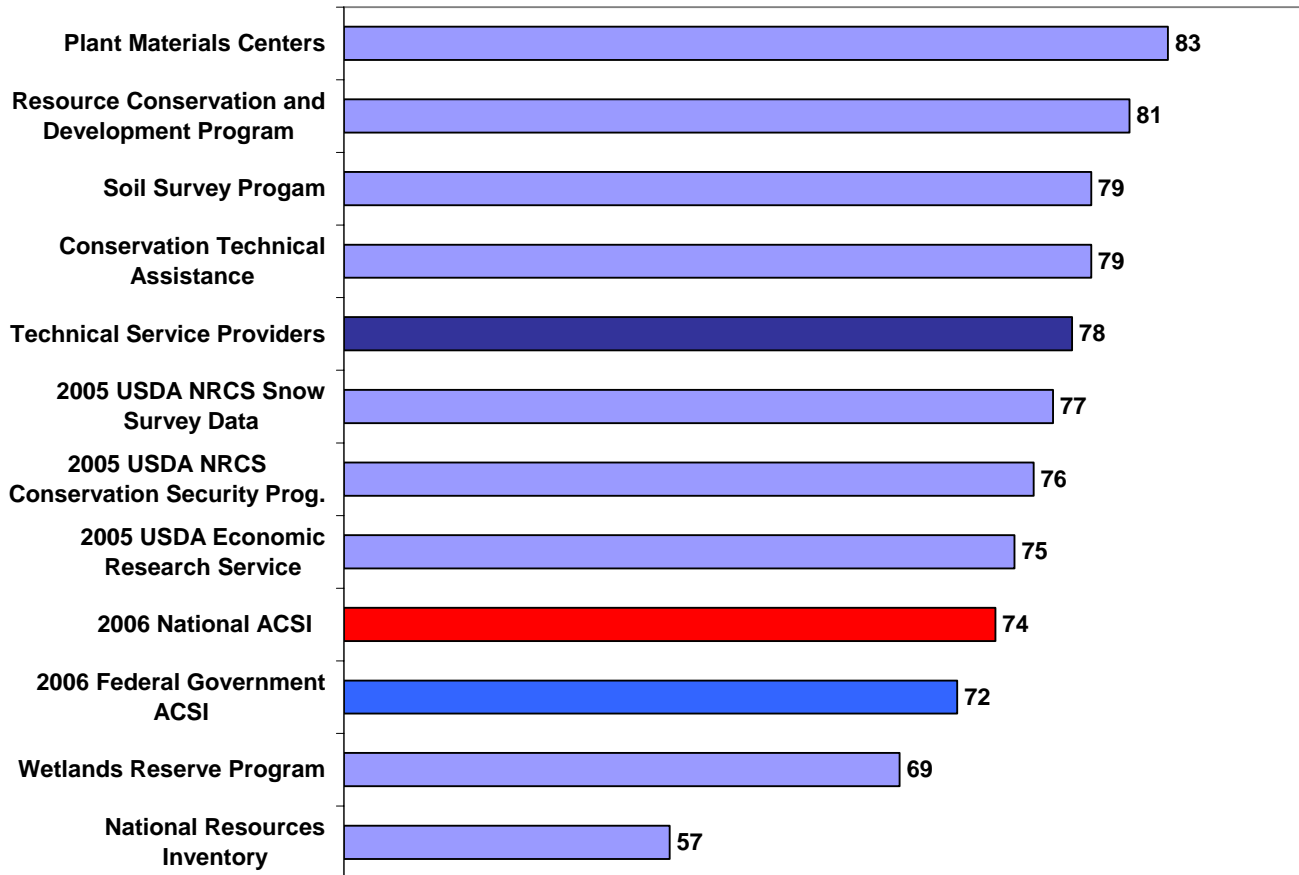
The 2006 Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for the Technical Service Providers is 78 on a 0-100 scale. This score is above the Federal Government’s Customer Satisfaction Index for 2006 (72).

**TSP Customer Satisfaction Index**



N=250

**Satisfaction Benchmarks**



The NRCS Technical Service Providers Customer Satisfaction Index is significantly above the National ACSI and the Federal Government ACSI. Both the four-point and six-point differences are statistically significant at a 90% level of confidence. TSP compares favorably to other NRCS and USDA Satisfaction indices, as the score of 78 is on par with on above most benchmark scores.



### Customer Satisfaction Model

The Technical Service Provider Customer Satisfaction model illustrated on the following page should be viewed as a cause and effect model that moves from left to right. The rectangles are multi-variable components that are measured by survey questions. The numbers in the lower right corners of the rectangles represent the strength of the effect of the component on the left to the one to which the arrow points on the right. These values represent "impacts." The larger the impact value, the more effect the component on the left has on the one on the right.

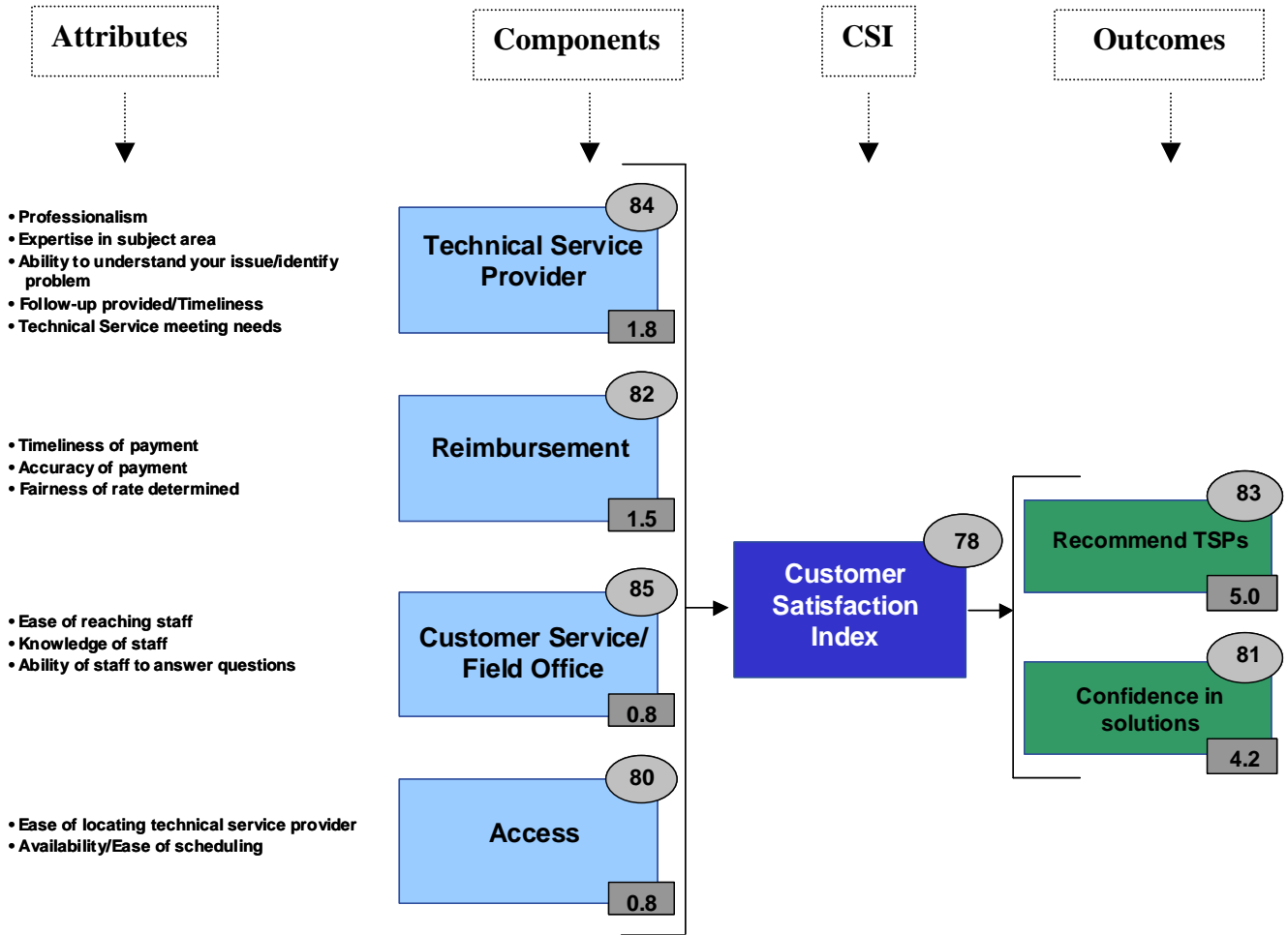
Attribute scores are the mean (average) respondent scores to each individual question that was asked in the survey. Respondents are asked to rate each item on a 1-10 scale with "1" being "poor" and "10" being "excellent." CFI Group converts the mean responses to these items to a 0-100 scale for reporting purposes. It is important to note that these scores are averages, not percentages. The score is best thought of as an index, with "0" meaning "poor" and "100" meaning "excellent."

A component score in the ovals in the upper right corners is the weighted average of the individual attribute ratings given by each respondent to the questions presented in the survey. A score is a relative measure of performance for a component, as given for a particular set of respondents. In the model illustrated on the following page, scores for attributes such as 'Ease of reaching staff', 'Knowledge of staff' and 'Ability to answer questions' are combined to create the component score for 'Customer Service/Field Office.'

Impacts (shown in the rectangles) should be read as the effect on the subsequent component if the initial driver (component) were to be improved or decreased by five points. For example, if the score for Customer Service/Field Office increased by five points (85 to 90), Customer Satisfaction would increase by the amount of its impact, 0.8 points, (from 78 to 78.8). If the driver increases by less than or more than five points, the resulting change in the subsequent component would be the corresponding fraction of the original impact. Impacts are additive. Thus, if multiple areas were to each improve by five points the related improvement in Satisfaction will be the sum of the impacts. Likewise, Customer Satisfaction impacts outcome behaviors such as Recommending TSP and having Confidence in the solutions provided by TSP. The impact Satisfaction has on each of these outcomes is shown in the rectangle on that particular outcome. Thus, if Customer Satisfaction were to increase by five points from 78 to 83, the resulting outcomes would increase by the amount of their impact. In the case of recommending TSPs, a five-point increase in Satisfaction would increase the likelihood of Recommending TSPs by five points and the Confidence in solutions by 4.2 points.

The NRCS Technical Service Providers can use the scores (in ovals) and impacts (in rectangles) from the model shown on the next page to target areas for improvement that will have the greatest leverage on Customer Satisfaction. As with scores, impacts are also relative to one another. A low impact does not mean a component is unimportant. Rather, it means that a five-point change in that one component is unlikely to result in much improvement in Satisfaction at this time. Therefore, components with higher impacts are generally recommended for improvement first, especially if scores are lower for those components.

**USDA NRCS Technical Service Providers Customer Satisfaction Model**



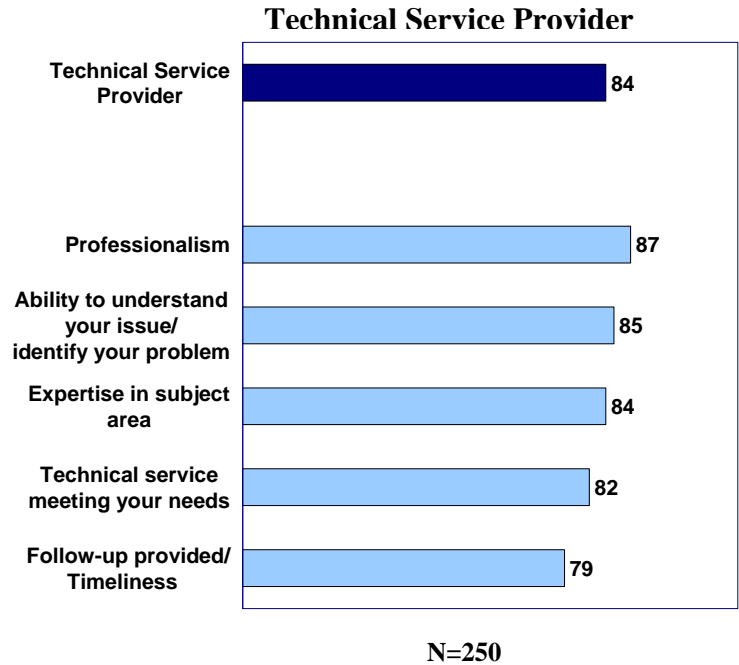
N = 250

**Drivers of Customer Satisfaction**

**Technical Service Provider**

*Impact 1.8*

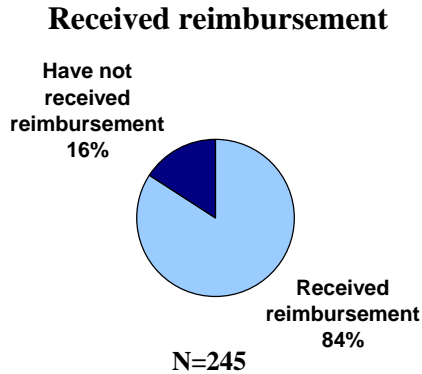
Of all areas that were measured, Technical Service Provider has the greatest impact on Customer Satisfaction. Respondents gave positive ratings to the Technical Service Providers overall. They found the Technical Service Providers to be professional and demonstrating subject area expertise. The Technical Service Providers were able to understand the issues of the respondents and provide technical service that met the customers’ needs. Timeliness/follow-up may be an opportunity to improve performance among Technical Service Providers, as it was the lowest scoring item (79) in the area of Technical Service Provider.



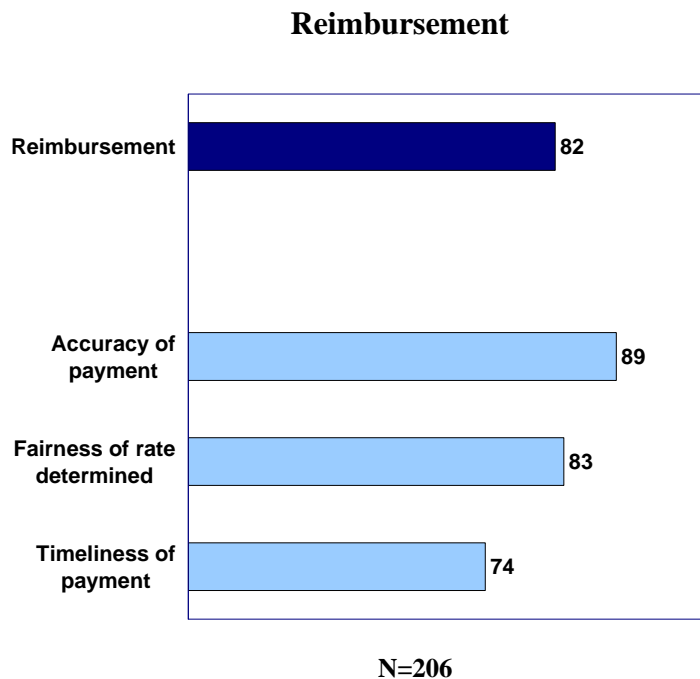
## Reimbursement

### Impact 1.5

A majority of the respondents had received a reimbursement, as 84% indicated they had received one.



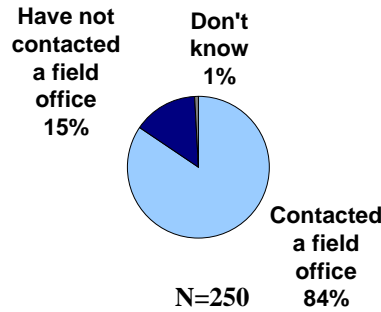
Reimbursement is also a key driver of Customer Satisfaction with an impact of 1.5. Respondents felt that the payments were accurate and fair. However, the timeliness of payments could be an opportunity for improvement as timeliness of payment (74) was the lowest scoring Reimbursement item.



**Customer Service/Field Office**  
*Impact 0.8*

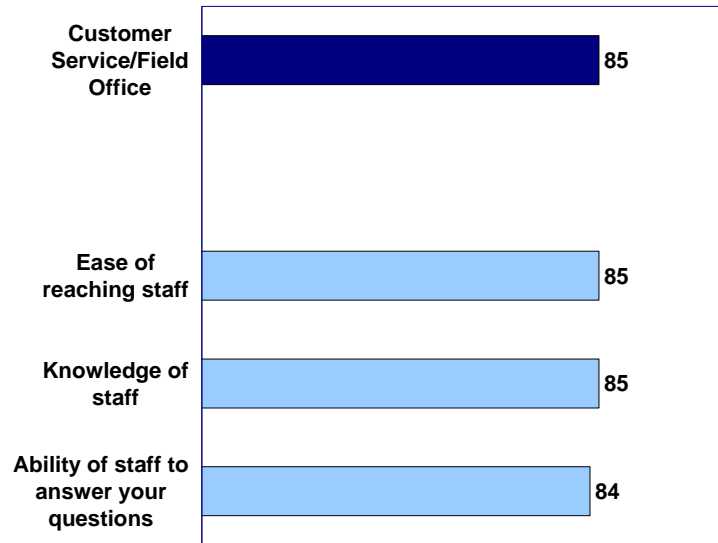
Most of the respondents (84%) indicated they had contacted a field office regarding an issue or to seek information.

**Contacted a field office regarding an issue or to seek information**



With an impact of 0.8, Customer Service/Field Office has a moderate effect on Customer Satisfaction. Respondents found the staff to be easy to reach. The staff proved to be knowledgeable and able to answer respondents' questions. All of these items scored in the mid 80s.

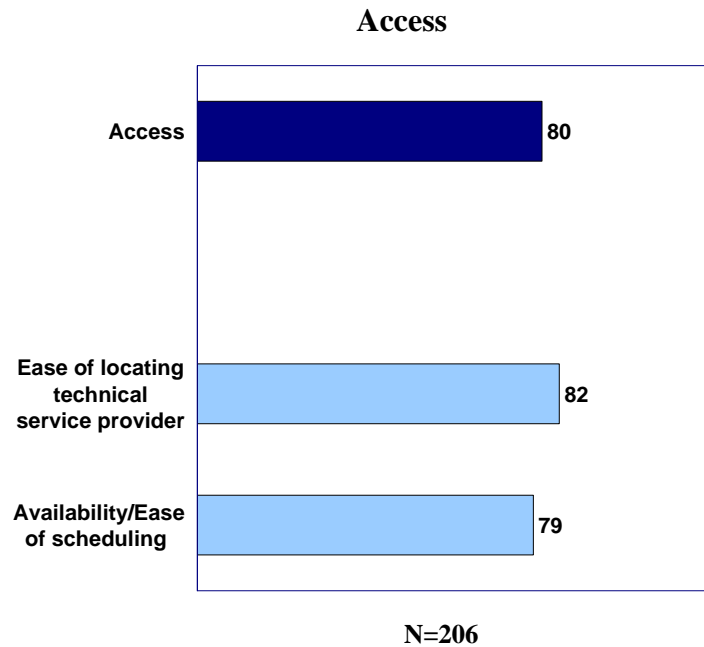
**Customer Service/Field Office**



N=211

**Access to TSP**  
***Impact 0.8***

The access to the Technical Service Providers also is a driver of Customer Satisfaction with a modest impact on Satisfaction of 0.8. The ease of locating a technical service provider received a score of 82, indicating that while there may be some room for improvement, this is not an issue for most respondents. The ease of scheduling a Technical Service Provider scored slightly lower (79). While Access (80) is the lowest scoring area in the TSP model relative to other areas, given its lower impact compared to other areas, it should not be a first priority.



**Outcomes of Customer Satisfaction****Likelihood to recommend**

Respondents, for the most part, were willing to recommend Technical Service Providers to others with a score of 83. Satisfaction had a high impact on the likelihood to recommend TSP with an impact of 5.0. Thus for every point increase in Satisfaction a subsequent point increase in likelihood to recommend will result.

**Confidence in solutions**

Respondents also expressed confidence in the solutions provided by the TSP with a score of 81. The likelihood to have confidence in the solutions provided by the TSP was highly impacted by Customer Satisfaction with an impact of 4.2.

**Open-ended comments**

Respondents were asked to provide an open-ended comment to the question (Q21) 'How could the USDA Technical Service Providers better serve the needs of its customers?' The complete set of responses is included in Appendix D with responses coded by themes. As would be expected with a Satisfaction score of 78, the most common response was a positive comment or no changes needed. However, some of the respondents expressed concerns or identified specific areas for improvement. Of those areas where respondents had concerns 'availability of staff/staffing levels', 'cost/money/payments', 'paperwork' and 'timeliness in responding' were among the most mentioned themes. While 'information/knowledge' was also a theme among the commonly mentioned verbatims, note that overall respondents gave positive ratings (mid 80s) to both the expertise of TSPs and knowledge of field office staff.

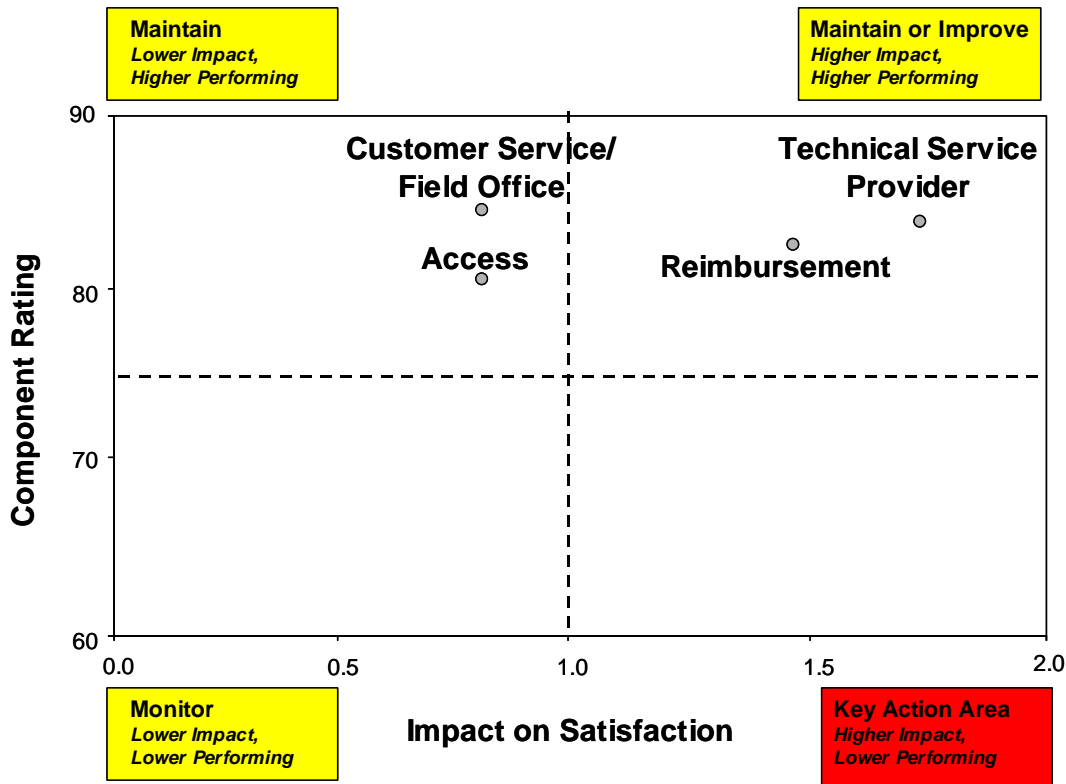
**Summary and Recommendations**

With a Customer Satisfaction Index of 78, TSP customers are mostly satisfied with the services they receive. The Satisfaction Index for Technical Service Providers outscored the Federal Government average by 6 points. Satisfaction with TSP also compared favorably to other NRCS Satisfaction measures.

Respondents found the Technical Service Providers to be professional and able to understand their issues or identify their problems. The Technical Service Providers were mostly viewed as having subject area expertise and provided technical service that met the customers’ needs. While the rating for timeliness was fairly strong (79), there may be an opportunity to improve the follow-up and timeliness in dealing with customers. The Technical Service Providers and the Reimbursement that customers received were the two areas that had the most impact on Customer Satisfaction. A majority of the respondents (84%) had received a reimbursement from NRCS. Customers thought the reimbursements were accurate and the rates were determined fairly. However, the timeliness of payment (74) may be an opportunity for improvement.

Most respondents (84%) had contacted a field office regarding an issue or to seek information. Customer service received high scores. Respondents felt that the staff was easy to reach, knowledgeable, and able to answer their questions. The Access to the Technical Service Providers scored solidly; for the most part, respondents did not have issues with locating a TSP or scheduling an appointment with them.

To improve Customer Satisfaction, CFI Group recommends focusing on high impact low performing items first. While there are no key action areas (low performing and high impact) identified in the chart below, TSP can still leverage high impact areas.





By focusing on further improving on already high-performing areas with high impacts, TSP can increase Customer Satisfaction. This would be the high-impact areas of Technical Service Provider and Reimbursement. In particular, Technical Service Providers providing better follow-up and responding in a timelier manner should be priorities. For Reimbursement, customers would like to see timelier payments.

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## **APPENDIX A : SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

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## USDA NRCS – Technical Service Providers Customer Satisfaction Survey

### Verify Respondent

Intro1. Hello. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has hired my company, [Data Collection Company], to call on their behalf to conduct a brief survey about their Technical Service Providers. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. May I please speak with \_\_\_\_\_?

#### **WAIT FOR RESPONSE**

1. Correct Person on Phone **(GO TO INTRO)**
2. Not correct person, but Person is available **(HOLD UNTIL RESPONDENT ANSWERS AND READ BELOW)**

Intro2. Hello. The Technical Service Providers of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has hired my company, [Data Collection Company], to call on their behalf. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. **(GO TO INTRO)**

1. If Person not available **(Schedule a call back)**
2. If No Such Person **“Thank you and have a nice day!”**
3. Refusal/Hung Up

### Intro

#### **IF SPEAKING WITH CORRECT PERSON CONTINUE BELOW**

The **Technical Service Providers** of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would like your feedback about them to ensure that they deliver the services that meet your needs.

Intro3. ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS FROM THE NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)?

1. Yes (Skip to Intro 4)
2. No/Don't Know (IF NO/DON'T KNOW PLEASE READ BELOW **IN BOLD**)

**The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers several programs in order to provide technical assistance and financial incentives to enable owners and managers of privately owned land to make sound natural resource decisions and to promote conservation.**

**Specifically, Technical Service Providers:**

**The 2002 Farm Bill expanded the availability of technical assistance to producers by encouraging the use of technical service providers (TSPs) to assist USDA in delivering conservation technical services. Producers entering into farm bill agreements with USDA go to the TechReg web site and select their TSP to assist them in completing the conservation practices on their contract. USDA reimburses producers up to a not-to-exceed rate that is based on the cost to the government to provide the same service. TSPs extend the reach of NRCS' technical assistance at times when the demand for these services exceeds our human resources and producers receive assistance when they need it without longer waits.**

Intro4. We ask on behalf of the **Technical Service Providers** for your participation in a short survey that asks about your Satisfaction with the services it provides.

This survey will take approximately 8-10 minutes of your time. This survey is authorized by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget Control No. 1505-0191.

(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: IF THE RESPONDENT HAS ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY PLEASE RECORD THE NATURE OF THEIR QUESTION AND HAVE THEM CONTACT MAGGIE RHODES)

Just to confirm, you have used technical assistance through Technical Service Providers of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)?

1. Yes (Continue)
2. No (Terminate)
3. Don't Know (Terminate)

Intro5. Is now a good time?

1. Yes (Continue)
2. No "Can we schedule a time that is more convenient for you?"

(For all questions, please include choices 98 = Don't Know and 99 = Refused/Hung Up)

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### Demographics

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Demo1. Which of the following best describes you or your organization?

1. Agricultural landowner/operator
2. Urban/suburban landowner/operator
3. Private business/industry non-agricultural
4. Tribal government/group
5. Other (Specify)

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### Access

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Please think about the technical service provider who you worked with. On a scale from "1" to "10," where "1" is "poor" and "10" is "excellent," please rate the following ...

- Q1. Ease of locating technical service provider
- Q2. Availability/Ease of scheduling technical service provider

---

### Customer Service/Field Office

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Q3. Have you contacted a field office regarding an issue or to seek information?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Know

Please think about the Field Office that you had contact with. On a scale from "1" to "10," where "1" is "poor" and "10" is "excellent," please rate the Field Office on the following:

- Q4. Ease of reaching staff
- Q5. Knowledge of staff
- Q6. Ability of staff to answer your questions

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#### Technical Service Provider

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Please think about the technical service provider who worked with you. On a scale from "1" to "10," where "1" is "poor" and "10" is "excellent," please rate the technical service provider on the following:

- Q7. Professionalism
- Q8. Expertise in subject area
- Q9. Ability to understand your issue/identify your problem
- Q10. Follow-up provided/Timeliness of providing technical service
- Q11. Technical service delivered/provided meeting your needs

---

#### Reimbursement

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- Q12. Did you receive a reimbursement from NRCS?
  - 1. Yes
  - 2. No

If Q12=YES, then ask ...

Think about the reimbursement you received through the NRCS Technical Service Providers. On a scale from "1" to "10," where "1" is "poor" and "10" is "excellent," please rate the following:

- Q13. Timeliness of payment
- Q14. Accuracy of payment
- Q15. Fairness of rate determined

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#### ACSI Benchmark Questions

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- Q16. First, please consider all your experiences to date with the Technical Service Providers from NRCS. Using a 10-point scale on which "1" means "Very dissatisfied" and "10" means "Very satisfied," how satisfied are you with the USDA NRCS Technical Service Providers?
- Q17. To what extent has the Technical Service Providers from NRCS fallen short of your expectations or exceeded your expectations? Please use a 10-point scale on which "1" now means "Falls short of your expectations" and "10" means "Exceeds your expectations."
- Q18. Forget about the Technical Service Providers from NRCS for a moment. Now, imagine the ideal technical service provider. How well do Technical Service Providers from NRCS compare with that ideal? Please use a 10-point scale on which "1" means "Not very close to the ideal" and "10" means "Very close to the ideal."

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**Outcomes**

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- Q19. How likely would you be to recommend Technical Service Providers from NRCS to others? Please use a scale from 1 to 10, where “1” means “not very likely” and “10” means “very likely.”
- Q20. How confident are you in the solutions that were provided by the Technical Service Provider? Please use a scale from 1 to 10, where “1” means “not very confident” and “10” means “very confident.”

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**Open-End**

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- Q21. How could USDA NRCS Technical Service Providers better serve the needs of its customers?

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**Closing**

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The Technical Service Providers of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) would like to thank you for your time and participation today. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.



**APPENDIX B: CUSTOMER BACKGROUND/  
NON-MODELED QUESTIONS**

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	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
<b>Organization</b>	
Agricultural landowner/operator	97%
Urban/suburban landowner/operator	1%
Private business/industry non-agricultural	1%
Tribal government/group	1%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	
<b>250</b>	
<b>Contacted a field office regarding an issue or to seek information</b>	
Yes	84%
No	15%
Don't know	1%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	
<b>250</b>	
<b>Received a reimbursement from NRCS</b>	
Yes	84%
No	16%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	
<b>245</b>	

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## **APPENDIX C: ATTRIBUTE TABLES**

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### Attribute Table - Aggregate

	Score	Total Impact
<b>Access</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Ease of locating technical service provider	82	
Availability/Ease of scheduling technical service provider	79	
<b>Customer Service/Field Office</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Ease of reaching staff	85	
Knowledge of staff	85	
Ability of staff to answer your questions	84	
<b>Technical Service Provider</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Professionalism	87	
Expertise in subject area	84	
Ability to understand your issue/identify your problem	85	
Follow-up provided/Timeliness of providing technical service	79	
Technical service delivered/provided meeting your needs	82	
<b>Reimbursement</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Timeliness of payment	74	
Accuracy of payment	89	
Fairness of rate determined	83	
<b>Customer Satisfaction Index</b>	<b>78</b>	
Overall satisfaction	82	
Compared to expectations	73	
Compared to ideal	77	
<b>Likelihood to recommend TSPs</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>5.0</b>
Likelihood to recommend TSPs	83	
<b>Confidence in the solutions provided by the TSPs</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>4.2</b>
Confidence in the solutions provided by the TSPs	81	
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>250</b>	

**Attribute Table – Contacted a field office versus did not contact**

	<b>Contacted a field office</b>	<b>Did not contact a field office</b>	<b>Significant Difference</b>
<b>Access</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>77</b>	
Ease of locating technical service provider	83	77	
Availability/Ease of scheduling technical service provider	79	77	
<b>Customer Service/Field Office</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>--</b>	
Ease of reaching staff	85	--	
Knowledge of staff	85	--	
Ability of staff to answer your questions	84	--	
<b>Technical Service Provider</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>83</b>	
Professionalism	88	84	
Expertise in subject area	84	82	
Ability to understand your issue/identify your problem	85	83	
Follow-up provided/Timeliness of providing technical service	79	80	
Technical service delivered/provided meeting your needs	82	83	
<b>Reimbursement</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>87</b>	
Timeliness of payment	73	79	
Accuracy of payment	89	95	
Fairness of rate determined	82	86	
<b>Customer Satisfaction Index</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>	
Overall satisfaction	82	83	
Compared to expectations	73	72	
Compared to ideal	77	74	
<b>Likelihood to recommend TSPs</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>79</b>	
Likelihood to recommend TSPs	83	79	
<b>Confidence in the solutions provided by the TSPs</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>81</b>	
Confidence in the solutions provided by the TSPs	81	81	
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>37</b>	

*No significant differences noted.*



**Attribute Table – Received a reimbursement versus did not receive**

	Received a reimbursement	Did not receive a reimbursement	Significant Difference
<b>Access</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>80</b>	
Ease of locating technical service provider	82	84	
Availability/Ease of scheduling technical service provider	80	77	
<b>Customer Service/Field Office</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>86</b>	
Ease of reaching staff	84	87	
Knowledge of staff	85	86	
Ability of staff to answer your questions	83	86	
<b>Technical Service Provider</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>82</b>	
Professionalism	88	87	
Expertise in subject area	84	83	
Ability to understand your issue/identify your problem	85	84	
Follow-up provided/Timeliness of providing technical service	79	77	
Technical service delivered/provided meeting your needs	83	78	
<b>Reimbursement</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>--</b>	
Timeliness of payment	74	--	
Accuracy of payment	89	--	
Fairness of rate determined	83	--	
<b>Customer Satisfaction Index</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>	
Overall satisfaction	82	80	
Compared to expectations	74	73	
Compared to ideal	77	77	
<b>Likelihood to recommend TSPs</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>85</b>	
Likelihood to recommend TSPs	83	85	
<b>Confidence in the solutions provided by the TSPs</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>80</b>	
Confidence in the solutions provided by the TSPs	81	80	
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>39</b>	

*No significant differences noted.*

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## **APPENDIX D: VERBATIM COMMENTS**

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**Q.21 How could USDA NRCS Technical Service Providers better serve the needs of its customers?****Availability of staffing/Staffing levels (24 comments)**

*Be more available. Have more providers.*

*Being more reachable. They seem to be short-staffed.*

*Have a bigger staff.*

*Have more reps.*

*Have more service providers. They are overwhelmed with work.*

*Have more staff.*

*Have more tech service providers.*

*I know they are busy and upon occasion they took awhile to contact me but for the most part there have been no problems.*

*If they weren't so overworked.*

*It was better when they had more fieldpeople to help more with the fieldwork. Now it's mostly paperwork to where they don't have the time to come to the field to see firsthand what's going on and help with what needs to be done.*

*Little more staff. They do a good job overall. More money.*

*More employees. It is hard to get a hold of someone.*

*More staff available.*

*More staff.*

*More technicians.*

*Probably have more staff on hand.*

*Seems like they are overworked, need more help, more trained assistance.*

*They need better management so they can get their work done in a timely manner. They are understaffed or whatever. It took two months to get them out here.*

*They need more staff according to them. They don't have enough time to handle all the people and different programs.*

*The way they are doing things is very good. The worst thing they could do is to cut staff. It's great that we can go in and talk face-to-face with them.*

*They are hard to get a hold of.*

*They are overworked and it takes forever to get it done. It's not their fault.*

*They need to be easier to get a hold of.*

*They need to make him available.*

**Awareness of program/initiative (3 comments)**

*Advertise more. Let more people know they are out there.*

*In our county, they're pretty good. Make the possible users more aware of the programs offered.*

*Keep the knowledge out there. Be more timely in public relations.*

**Budget/Funding (4 comments)**

*Get a bigger budget. They need to look at the land better before they tell you what to do.*

*Have more funding available.*

*Have more money to work with.*

*They are doing all right. The funding is the biggest thing.*

**Coordination with other agencies (2 comments)**

*Better coordination within other agencies involved.*

*Consistency between the regulatory commission and the field office.*

**Costs/Money/Payment (20 comments)**

*For what they do they are way overpriced. It is mostly paperwork. They basically do what I have been doing for myself for years and they get paid for it.*

*I don't have enough money.*

*I do not think it is an individual thing. There needs to be a built-in cost increase from the time the work is done. They were very nice and knowledgeable. The percentages didn't come out to what they said they would be. It now costs more to have the work done now from them from the time we signed up.*

*I felt like they were overcharging.*

*I think they were excellent but the reimbursement should be a higher rate. The amount I was reimbursed was very low.*

*I think they need to be open to the financial. We just don't have unlimited funding out here to apply to these issues. If the government wants us to not contaminate ground water and want us to have 6-month winter storage, we will need financial help to do that. At the same time there needs to be a certain amount of flexibility for us to apply these projects. It is too much cost for the application of these projects. They seem they don't want to hear our side of it, don't want to listen to our concerns about our money situation or what works. They have a mindset of how it should be engineered but they are not out here to see what they are talking about.*

*It needs to be an equal percentage disbursement.*

*Make sure that the funding is there for our projects. That is the problem. They don't know if the funding is available.*

*Money.*

*More assistance. More money.*

*More cost-share.*

*More funding.*

*More money.*

*Pay more money.*

*Provide more funds, larger amounts in cost sharing.*

*The provider knew that I was getting money so the technical provider I used charged me more money that I thought he would.*

*There are problems that can be resolved through using more common sense rather than standards and specifications that don't necessarily meet the problem. A lot of times hands-on and experience is worth more than just a degree. The payment, my son and I are in the equip program and the electronic payment does not give you any way of knowing that you have received your payment unless you look it up on the computer. They should have a way of letting me know out of courtesy that the payment has been completed. When you got a bill and you expect the money to be there and they should take care of their end of the deal.*

*They could pay us more.*

*They could reimburse us for the cost of the tech service provider. As of about 13 months ago, they did away with the cost sharing reimbursements. We thought they were going to add it back in a couple of months ago but they never did. The tech service providers are too costly for the landowners to afford on our own. The Illinois Department of Agriculture wants everything to be designed by a tech service provider and so to get anything done is just too costly on our own. If they are going to force us to use the tech service providers they should share the cost.*

*We need to update the cost/share percentages more often. Increase funding to match costs over time. There are some people that are really good and some that really shouldn't be there most of the people in our office are really good. There needs to be a means of looking at the people that aren't doing anything and replace them.*

### **Delivery of services/Engineering (8 comments)**

*Do a better job of soil sampling. They need to choose a standard soil sample technique.*

*Engineering in little sooner.*

*Get it out of the private hands and have the NRCS do the engineering.*

*I think they need to check their list to see if people actually willing to provide the service. I have a very hard time getting someone to do it. They need to be sure the tech service providers have a goal of protecting the natural resources and not a goal of simply satisfying the minimum requirements. I wonder about the training. Are they adequately trained?*

*To listen to the farmer who works with it a little closer because they work on the project more and not so much the engineer.*

*Train these technical providers before they turn them loose on us. If they even knew what a farm was, it would help. I got some college kids that were good at pushing numbers but did not have a clue as to what we were trying to do.*

*They don't need to require some of the things that they do from the TSPs. Some of the engineering requirements are not necessary. I really don't feel the TSPs are needed to begin with.*

*When they do a project, they need to make sure they are on the same page as the engineers they need to communicate better with each other.*

### **Follow-up provided (5 comments)**

*Better follow-up. After the project is approved come out and help get it going.*

*I guess the guy that I dealt with I had a problem with. He just didn't follow up on anything. I would send him things and he would lose and I would have to re-send them. But the manager was excellent. He had to leave and his underling is the one that was not very responsible.*

*More follow-up contact.*

*The quicker turnaround when contacting someone about a problem.*

*We really don't have an NRCS in our county. We have to go to a different county. They should also follow-up with us on calls and visit us. The NRCS cannot rely on water services. They need to do it themselves.*

### **Information/Knowledge (20 comments)**

*Be more informed about the issues being asked by the customers.*

*By having the staff be understand the programs before they offer them to us.*

*Get more meeting on management and money available. More information so we know what's going on.*

*Give more info about the changes they want made so that the farmer can better educate themselves. Sometimes it seems like trial-and-error but sometimes it seems as though they fall short in the info department. It would be nice to see other similar operations that have been completed to use as a reference.*

*Have information more available for research.*

*Have more information available.*

*Have the programs intact so that the farmers' questions can be answered. It seems that the programs they have sure just pieced together, they get halfway through explaining things and then they change.*

*I think in better communication of the programs; then a lot of work is done to qualify and then thrown out on a technicality.*

*Let the farmer owner know more about the available options. Keep them more informed.*



*Little better explanation.*

*Make sure we know what programs are available to us.*

*Maybe have a reference line or a web site to go to.*

*Maybe work a little harder toward making programs that are available. Getting that information out to the public.*

*More knowledge.*

*Need to have better knowledge.*

*They are okay. A deposit into our account. They do not tell you and I don't know where the money comes from.*

*They can do a better job of explaining the rules (and) regulations up front before contracts are signed.*

*They could explain the program accurately that they are representing. I felt like the program I signed up for wasn't explained very well to me.*

*They need to get the information on the programs prior to instigation of the program.*

*They need to have knowledge on the subject area. Knowledge of the farm bill and its application.*

### **Paperwork (12 comments)**

*I have no complaints. It depends on who your technician is. Sometimes there is a lot of paperwork that is not necessary. Their sign up date is six weeks earlier than usual which is good. It helps us get all our paperwork done.*

*I think a little less paperwork.*

*I think it will all be ok if they all learn what the programs are. What I went through was a learning experience for all of us. The paperwork is horrendous. There is nothing that comes to me after the money is deposited. There is no paperwork. I get no statement to show that the money was deposited. I think there should be some statement mailed to me. The program was great.*

*I think our county does a good job so I don't have an answer. They could get rid of a lot of the paperwork.*

*If they had less paperwork, it would really help.*

*Less paperwork and they need to speed the process up.*

*Not so much paperwork, red tape.*

*Not to make it so complicated and less paperwork and when you get the government involved it get ridiculous.*

*Probably less red tape and detail. Sometimes they get carried away. The little stuff that is not that important. The paper work is too long when they do that.*

*Reduce the amount of paperwork we have to fill out.*

*They can reduce paperwork. They can put paperwork in understandable language. Estimates are off. Sometimes you're contacted by them and they don't give you enough time to get information gathered. One incident, I am on direct deposit. They are in same office as farm service office. They had all information they needed at farm service but ncrs would not go right next door to get info. They made me come to the office. Need to make it easier for us.*

*They need to make the paperwork faster.*

### **State/Local Issues (5 comments)**

*If it rains, it works. If it doesn't, it does not work. NRCS on the state-level could work better. Nothing more.*

*Part of the problem in New Mexico. They are tied together but need to be separate. They have procedures that the NRCS has and they are tied to the environmental department and they need to be separate. I have been burdened with the expense and not been helped. We need to some way remove the NRCS policies from the environmental procedures.*

*They need to be a general locality.*

*We need an engineer for our projects and we don't have one here. Our work group areas have conflicting issues not conflicting but different issues. [Name deleted] is a horrible administrator for our state NRCS. It's hard to work with other farming that has different issues and the points system we use is confusing.*

*We usually have local workgroups where we bring suggestions, etc. I would say customize more of the programs to the local regions.*

### **Timeliness in responding (12 comments)**

*A little more timely. They could redo their estimates. If more than one person working on a project be on the same page as the co-worker.*

*A more rapid response to rule problems. When a situation doesn't fit the rulebook.*

*Be more timely. They give you no ideal of the direct deposit and what it is for.*

*Deliver more prompt responses. They need to be more timely. Obtain more knowledge in the application processes.*

*I guess get the information in a timely fashion. I have noticed that the field office doesn't give the tech service provider enough info to get started.*

*I would say timeless or speed.*

*More timely. Just be faster.*

*Mostly by responding quickly. Be more prompt with deadlines. One of the biggest things would be to not have to go through four or five layers of management. Not having to wait for quarterly meetings to get answers and things done.*

*Speed things up. Some of the specifications that have to be followed should be lowered to be more cost effective.*

*There was no problem at all with the technical provider. It was the NRCS was slow. They need to be more efficient and timely in their responses. Time. It takes longer that it should. Nothing else.*

### **Timeliness of payment (6 comments)**

*It took a while to get the payment.*

*I would say provide payment in a more timely manner. Be more realistic what they can offer or stick with what they initially offer.*

*More timely payment.*

*When you tell us how much they are going to pay, they should follow through with the payment.*

*Timeliness of payment.*

*Whenever you deal with the government, the payment is really slow. Pay better in a timely fashion. I had wait two or three months to get my money.*

### **Turnover of employees (2 comments)**

*A little more on the job longevity. Too much turnover.*

*Quit switching people around. Have the same person come back.*

### **Working one-on-one/on-site (10 comments)**

*Listen more to what we want instead of just doing what they want.*

*Make the programs better suit the individual needs of the customers.*

*Maybe they could have done an 'on-site' inspection of the land instead of just looking at the numbers. That's my biggest complaint. There are issues that I had but they never did inspect the property in person.*

*Meet more one-on-one basis with individuals.*

*Talk to us one-on-one, face-to-face, and leave out all the technical stuff.*

*They could better understand if they come out and work with us more.*

*They need the ability to meet more often with the landowner.*

*When you're dealing with customers, I don't want to deal with the government. I don't understand farmers where they are coming from. That is a good one. Education is the key. Another good thing is having tours.*

*Work closer to customers they work with.*

*Work with the farmer with his needs and not the government.*

**No changes/Good job/Positive Comments (94 comments)**

*(They) were excellent.*

*Around here they are up front and easy to contact. I can't say anything bad about them.*

*Do a good job.*

*Do a very good job.*

*Good question. I don't know. I was very satisfied with them.*

*I am satisfied with what they are doing. Treat me with courtesy and are nice to deal with.*

*I am very pleased with them.*

*I can't think of anyway. Very satisfied.*

*I can't think of anything. I don't know.*

*I can't think of much. They do a good job.*

*I do not know. They are fine.*

*I don't have a comment.*

*I don't have any ideas.*

*I don't know at this time.*

*I don't know at this time. Very satisfied.*

*I don't know of any.*

*I don't know of any. They are taking care of us.*

*I don't know off-hand.*

*I don't know right now.*

*I don't know what else they could do. They are okay.*

*I don't know. (9)*

*I don't know. I have not dealt with them very much.*

*I don't know. Maybe come out more often keep in better contact.*

*I don't know. They are doing okay.*

*I don't know. They are fire.*

*I don't know. They do pretty good the way it is.*

*I don't know. They have been very adequate for me.*

*I don't know. You have received great service from them.*

*I don't think they can. They are always available and get back to you. They are probably as good as they are going to get.*

*I know not, really. No, I was happy with my work with them.*

*I think for the number of families we have you can't do much better. They're doing pretty well. Our office is covering 3-4 times the families they were.*

*I'm not sure. I only talked to them a time or two.*

*I'm not sure. They do a good job.*

*I think they are doing a good job. (2)*

*I think they are doing fine as is.*

*I think they are excellent. They do not need to do anything.*

*I think they are pretty good.*

*I think they do a good job.*

*I think they do a pretty good job the way it is.*

*I really do not have any problems. I was satisfied.*

*I really don't know how they could do a better job. To me they are excellent.*

*I really don't know.*

*I really don't know. I'm satisfied.*

*I really don't know. They couldn't do any better than they do around here. Maybe advertise to let the people know availability of programs and help they can give.*

*I think we are well satisfied with what they are doing now.*

*I'd say it's satisfactory.*

*It's all good.*

*It's hard to say. We have always had good responses from them.*

*Keep doing as they are doing.*

*Keep doing what they are doing.*

*No answer for that one.*

*No, not at this time.*

*No not really. No, they are all right.*

*No, they do good around here.*

*No. (5)*

*No. We have worked with one for over two years and have had no problems.*

*None.*

*Not at this time. (2)*

*Not at this time. Years past, they weren't staffed well enough but now they are.*

*Not off the top of my head. It is typical government. Some things get made into a bigger issue that they really are. Some things could be more simplified than what they are.*

*Not sure. (2)*

*Nothing at this time.*

*Nothing really. I am satisfied.*

*Nothing.*

*Nothing. They do a good job. Supply the needed of us.*

*Pretty good right now, I guess.*

*That I don't know. They exceeded my expectations.*

*There is a better way. They are doing good.*

*They're doing a fine job. They are nice people to work with. They are levelheaded and polite.*

*They are doing a good job. I don't know how they could improve anymore.*

*They are doing a great job.*

*They can continue what they are doing. They are doing a very good job.*

*They did a good job and I think they will do better.*

*They did a pretty good job.*

*They did a very nice job for me. No complaints.*

*They did an excellent job.*

*They do a good job the way it is.*

*They do everything they are supposed to do.*

*Very satisfied.*

### **Other (23 comments)**

*A little more simplify how to go about understanding them.*

*Change some of the laws. Example for a filter strip, I have a good cover on mine and I have to kill it to put a new one on.*

*I have no ideas. They could have updated my conservation plans.*

*I think it would go back to the qualifying points to get into certain programs. I had a problem getting enough points into a certain program because I didn't have any cattle so I had to pay 50%. If I had cows they would have paid 90%. This is for the erosion of the ground and I can't understand why cows should make any difference.*

*I think that if they were not selling a product, not affiliated with a company that sold agricultural products that would make it better.*

*In my case, I told you I rent all my ground. Just a little more flexibility for land renter. If someone wanted to build a golf course, flexibility on that. In my case, I have to have for 3-5 years. Substitute other ground instead of paying back or paying a penalty.*

*Keep them in the county.*

*My son said milk should be served at the meetings. They're dealing with farmers but they never serve milk. Have meetings closer to home. I don't think anything else.*

*Offer different programs, like not geared just to poultry. Expand to produce.*

*Some of the people that I have been working with are. They make too much out of nothing. For the mark of service provided.*

*Some of the rules on some of the programs are a little out there but that is not our people's fault. On the TSP program, if you are a straight farmer is pretty cut and dry but if you have both cattle and farming it makes it very difficult to qualify.*

*The only problem we had was the representative we were working with was called to Iraq and so they gave us another one. The lady that took over had to research my information all over and that slowed things down a little.*

*The people that hire them.*

*The representatives could (do) more out of office. Politics has a lot to do with they operate. There are a lot of questions they could handle but are afraid to.*

*The whole thing wrong with the federal government is that they are more interested in who is donating to the X campaign funds. The way is to put a ceiling on the amount that any one organization can get in a set amount of time.*

*There are a couple of people that could use more experience.*

*Their policy on the dirt and clay has change to the worst. Instead of it being two grand, it is now 99,000.*

*They could be more organized.*

*They need to be in tune with their customers instead of just trying to make a dollar off of it. They need to know their business well enough that the NRCS doesn't have to follow behind and do all of their work. I don't think the TSP program is a very good program. I don't think they are very conservation-minded.*

*They need to have more options and choices. More representatives to choose from.*

*They should listen more to the ideas that the landowners have.*

*Treat each project with its own merit. Instead of following one guideline.*

*Well, I don't really know. I think maybe to have some meetings to let people know what they are doing. I really don't know to be truthful. They put in the paper what they are doing. I have been really pleased with them.*