NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

TSP Express

A report for Technical Service Providers
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TSP Current Developments
Angel Figueroa, TSP Team Leader

In 2007, the TechReg Web site was redesigned to improve navigation, make it more user-friendly, and simplify the certification process. With these goals in mind, the Technical Service Provider (TSP) team worked together to address comments and suggestions from TSPs, design and implement new sections, and update existing pages of the site.

The navigation for the entire Web site was updated to comply with the latest USDA web style guide. Navigation elements along the top, left, and right sides of each page are now similar to these of the USDA Web site in look and feel, providing ease-of-use and a consistent navigational experience for users. A comparison of the old and new TechReg home page is provided below.

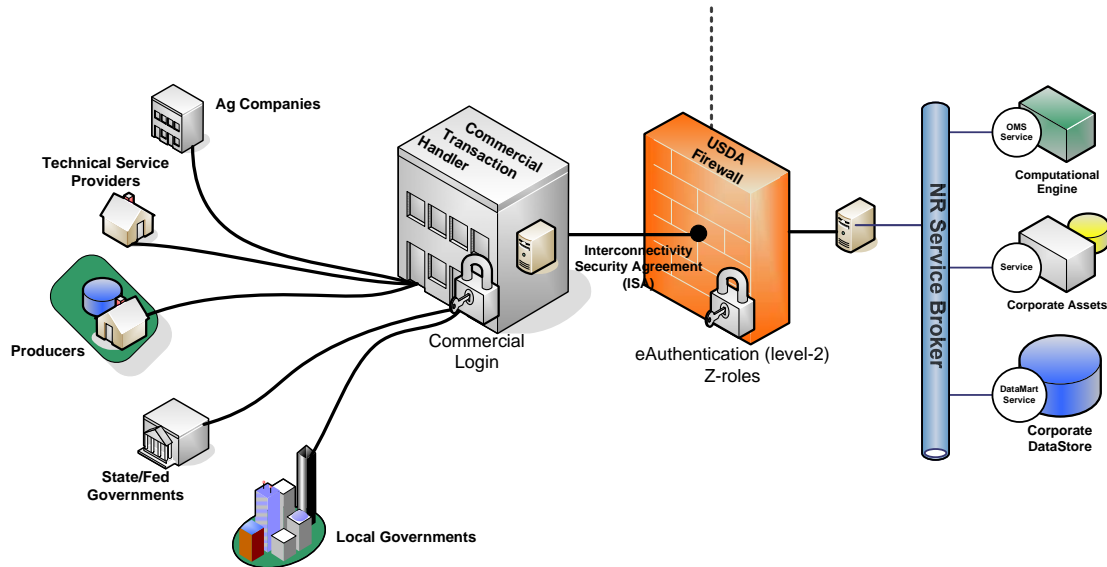Old Site   Revised Site

Located along the right side of the home page, the new 'I Want To' navigation block provides quick links to the main and most frequently accessed areas of the site. Some of these links connect to new sections that provide detailed guidance to TSPs through step-by-step guides, as well as links to additional information and resources. These new Web pages include comprehensive and up-to-date information on becoming a TSP, receiving TSP training, completing a TSP renewal, updating the TSP profile, and registering a business. Within these sections, additional supporting information and links also have been incorporated into the site. Topics include obtaining and maintaining a USDA e-Authentication Level 2 account and training with AgLearn. In addition, drop-down menus that link to state-specific TSP information and resources have been added to the site in multiple locations. Finally, existing pages such as the TSP Profile and the Registry search have been updated.

USDA-NRCS Conservation Transaction Plugin
By: Ken Rojas, CTP Project Manager, USDA-NRCS-ITC, Fort Collins, Colorado

The Conservation Transaction Plugin (CTP) project is being developed by NRCS in concert with partner commercial companies. The concept of the CTP is to have a transactional Software Development Kit incorporated into commercial partner software products. Technical Service Providers (TSPs) or producers can buy this commercial software containing the Plug-In, and through a subscription service and a USDA e-Authentication account, obtain access to authorized folders and records in NRCS/USDA National Conservation Planning (NCP) databases to view and update as necessary.

We currently have three commercial partners who have the necessary Interconnectivity Security Agreements and the server/support infrastructure necessary to provide this access. NRCS has been working with two of these partners recently in a national pilot test of this infrastructure to verify completeness and operation readiness.

We have engaged commercial partners in this effort to increase efficiencies and better serve existing and future TSPs. Service to producers will be greatly enhanced by a more effective infrastructure. The agency will, in the near future, rely on commercial providers to handle the TSP support (essentially all the support outside the USDA firewall). Commercial providers will charge a subscription fee to help offset the costs of handling this support.

A TSP will have the same access to conservation planning information as the District Conservationist who uses the NRCS Customer Service Toolkit software. The TSP can check out a customer folder from the NCP and have it locked. TSPs will be able to make conservation practice changes, and in some cases, changes to the planning area, and then check the folder back in. There will be limitations to this activity since some planning units may be tied to a contract and those areas can only be modified by the District Conservationist.

A primary impetus for the plugin has been the projected increase in the development of comprehensive nutrient management plans, resulting from an anticipated Environmental Protection Agency regulation dealing with animal feeding operations and concentrated animal feeding operations.

State TSP coordinators have been briefed on the plugin project and the pilot effort. The pilot effort is expected to be completed this

summer. After the pilot evaluation and revision period, this infrastructure will be available for TSP use nationwide. We continue to explore technologies that will provide TSP access to the wealth of resource data available to agency personnel. Look for more to come.

TSP Payment Rate Developments
By: David Buland, Economist, National Technology Support Center-Central, Fort Worth, Texas

The TSP Payment Rates available on the TechReg website have been updated to reflect 2008 prices. The address for the site is http://techreg.sc.egov.usda.gov/NTE/TSPNTE2. The 2008 TSP Payment Rates are 3.5% higher than the 2007 TSP Payment Rates, mirroring the general 3.5% federal employees pay increase.

The new website and updated NRCS TSP Handbook changed payment terminology from "Not-to Exceed Rates" to "TSP Payment Rates." The term "Payment Rates" is now implemented for all payments made by NRCS to farmers. Clients are responsible for the cost difference between NRCS reimbursement and the actual TSP charge. NRCS has no role in the client's contract with the TSP.

The updated NRCS TSP Handbook also allows State Supplemental Rates (STSPPR) to be developed by states based on the following criteria:

(1) local conditions result in workload time estimates that are 10 percent more or less than indicated by National program rates to plan, design, install, and checkout a conservation practice;
(2) a State conservation practice does not exist in the National TSP payment rates; and
(3) a TSP payment rate is needed for a system of conservation practices.

When developing a single STSPPR for a system of conservation practices, justification, and documentation will follow the same process used in the TSP Payment Rate Exceptions Procedure for a single conservation practice. The STSPPR can be found on the national TechReg website in the National TSP Payment Rates

database. States can then use the STSPPR in the same manner as they use the regular National Rates. See Chapters 610.42 and 610.43 in the updated TSP Handbook.

The updated NRCS TSP Handbook is available at on the NRCS Directives system at http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewRollUp.aspx?id=74.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Unveils Conservation Campaign Honoring Landowners

NRCS recently unveiled a national conservation campaign called "Conservation. Our Purpose, Our Passion." Eight landowners and their families nationwide were honored for stellar conservation achievements as part of the campaign. They hail from Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Washington State. The campaign's educational materials include a 5-minute video, Web site, exhibits, and a brochure.

NRCS employees work with many partners throughout the United States to help accomplish the agency's mission of helping people help the land. Because of significant contributions of partners such as soil and water conservation districts, other federal agencies, state and local governments, and volunteers, NRCS can honor these landowners for conserving natural resources on private lands.

For more information about this campaign, please visit the "Conservation...Our Purpose, Our Passion" national campaign page http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/ourpurpose/index.html.

FIELD FOCUS – Iowa

TSP Educational Event Held
By: Judy Martinson, Soil Conservationist, NRCS, Des Moines, Iowa

Seventy Technical Service Providers (TSPs) and agricultural professionals attended a recent TSP college educational event in Omaha, Nebraska on March 11-13, 2008. The Heartland Regional Water Animal Manure Management Team, a Midwestern regional group focusing on promoting regional dialog about water quality issues, hosted the event. The workshop provided training on topics related to comprehensive nutrient management planning, nutrient management planning, and manure management planning. Subject matter such as alternative manure treatment systems, feed management, and development of comprehensive nutrient management plans were discussed. Hands-on experience with software tools such as RUSLE2 and the Purdue Planner were also provided to participants.

The instructors were Dr. Robert Burns of Iowa State University; Joe Lally, Iowa Technical Service Provider; and Mike Sexton, Iowa Technical Service Provider. Judy Martinson, Iowa NRCS TSP Coordinator, opened the event by providing participants with updates on the TSP Initiative, registration, certification, and verification process.

The Heartland Regional Water Animal Manure Management Team hopes to host the TSP college workshop annually, as an important addition to its other TSP and agriculture related educational offerings. Recent events hosted by the group include a workshop covering the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit and a fall agency meeting. For additional information visit their website at http://www.heartlandwq.iastate.edu/.

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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 eleventh 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.