Technical Service Provider Assistance

Fact Sheet   *Provider Information*

610.98 Technical Service Provider Assistance Provider Fact Sheet

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service   **March 2009**

The 2002 Farm Bill amended the 1985 Farm Bill, which authorized use of technical service providers (TSPs), by requiring the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow producers to receive technical assistance by individuals and entities other than NRCS. This provision is designed to ensure NRCS has the capacity to address the significant workload associated with implementing Farm Bill programs. This fact sheet will help you the TSP to effectively offer assistance.

What is a TSP?

A Technical Service Provider is an individual entity (private or nonprofit business), or public agency. TSPs must be competent to perform technical services and their qualifications certified by NRCS. The TSP will be placed on an approved list and selected by producers or selected by NRCS through a procurement contract, contribution agreement or cooperative agreement.

TSPs provide technical services in most aspects of conservation, including conservation planning, design, layout, installation, and check-out of approved conservation practices.

All TSPs must perform services according to NRCS conservation practice standards and specifications. Therefore, there is an application process.

Resource Assistance for TSPs

NRCS developed an online application and information system called Technical Service Provider Registry (TechReg). The Web site can be accessed from the internet at the following location: http://techreg.usda.gov.

TechReg is a great source of information that provides detailed instruction for TSPs

TechReg is designed to make it easy for TSPs to register, start the certification process, and obtain technical resource information. It contains **news** for and about TSPs including the TSP Express, a newsletter prepared by NRCS. There is a **help** section if you encounter problems with TechReg or just want to find an answer. The **resource** section includes: (1) step-by-step guide to using TechReg, details about categories of conservation practices; (2) criteria that qualifies a TSP to be certified; (3) help in becoming a qualified TSP; and (4) an online application for becoming a certified TSP. Finally, there is a section of **online resources**. It includes NRCS policy, regulations, and other technical material related to TSP. There is also a list of partner organizations that can help you become qualified as a TSP.

NRCS managers utilize TechReg to manage TSP applications for certifications. NRCS has 60 days to review and verify TSP applications. This may include coordinating with other states if a TSP applied for certification in multiple locations.

Applying to become a certified TSP

Individuals must complete the on-line application in TechReg. You will need to obtain an eGov online account. There are several preliminary steps that a potential TSP must complete in order to apply for certification. These steps include:

- Visit the field office to get eGov level2 account.
- NRCS employee certifies eGov level2 account of potential TSP.
- NRCS employee inputs potential TSP into SCIMS (if they are not already in SCIMS).
- NRCS employee links SCIMS and eGov account.

The potential TSP can now log into TechReg and complete the on-line application for TSP certification. This will require you to provide information about your qualifications, and select the technical services you wish to provide along with the locations where you want to provide these services. You may return to an incomplete application at any time. You will also

sign a certification agreement that indicates your information is accurate and that you will abide by NRCS policy and regulations.

Businesses do not apply for certification. Instead, a certified individual may identify their entity. Prospective clients may look-up businesses as well as individuals when searching for TSPs. NRCS will review your application and verify that it meets NRCS requirements for certification within 60 days. If there is a problem, we will advise you and allow time for you to make corrections. If NRCS approves your application, you will electronically sign a Certification Agreement with NRCS. This grants you certification and places you on the list of approved TSPs.

Training to satisfy certification requirements

NRCS have web-based training available including Conservation Planning - Part I (0019) and Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide (0149). These courses may be required for certification in several conservation category areas. You may access and register for the courses at: http://elearning.sc.egov.usda.gov/. Users should register with their USDA account in order to claim credit for completing them.

Recommending organizations also partner with NRCS to offer training that may lead towards NRCS certification in selected practice areas.

NRCS plans to post training course listings on TechReg and often lists training opportunities in the TSP Express. NRCS will launch a TSP Orientation Course by the end of FY 05.

Performing Work as a TSP

TSPs can be hired to provide assistance in two ways. They are hired directly by the producer or by a contractual arrangement with NRCS. In FY 04, NRCS obligated $48.6 million for technical services of which 20 percent was for direct producer-hired contacts and 80 percent from agency contractual arrangements.

TSPs must market their own services to producers for direct hire. They may also respond to NRCS advertisements in FedBizOpps (http://www.fbo.gov) and FedGrants (http://www.fedgrants.gov) for NRCS contracts. Both of these websites offer automated notification systems and extensive details about the technical service needed.

Producers can locate certified TSPs listed in TechReg. Certified TSPs agree to a mutually acceptable contract. NRCS shares the cost of technical services with the producer. The maximum amount of this payment depends on the scope of services, extent of the practices involved, and the location for the work. NRCS defines these amounts as "Technical Service Payment Rates" (TSPR).

TSPRs, based on "fair and reasonable rates" for completing the same tasks, are updated annually on October 1. If the scope of services cost less than the computed TSPR, then NRCS' payment will equal the invoiced amount. If the work costs more, producers must cover the additional costs. TechReg lists TSPRs.

Payment for Services as a TSP

NRCS contracts and agreements document how payments are made including reporting progress. If you contracted with a producer, you will need to report the work completed and submit an invoice with expenses to the producer. The producer may request that NRCS pay you directly by completing an assignment of payment request. Delays can occur with this payment method since a vendor code (requiring the social security number or business tax id of the vendor) must be established in the NRCS payment system. The vendor code must be established and entered by the NRCS national headquarters office.

NRCS will make payment within thirty days of receiving a complete payment request package demonstrating that the services provided met all legal, technical, and programmatic requirements. Electronic payments will be made to via direct deposit.

Who is responsible if something goes wrong or the practices fail?

Your agreement or contract requires that the services you provide comply with all applicable Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws; as well as USDA standards and specifications. You assume legal responsibility for the technical services you provide including any costs, damages, claims, liabilities, or judgments arising from past, present, or future negligent or wrongful acts or omissions in connection with technical services you provided. Conservation practices that failed due to no fault of yours or the producer could be eligible for reapplication in accordance with the appropriate

USDA program.

Program participants bear the responsibility for obtaining all approvals, authorities, rights, permits, and easements necessary for implementation, operation, and maintenance of each conservation practice prior to installation. However, TSPs typically work with producers to secure these items.

For more information please contact your local USDA Service Center.