INTRODUCTION TO THE SOURCES OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Historically, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided the vast majority of engineering technical assistance (TA) to implement the engineering practices included in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program contracts. The 2002 Farm Bill included a significant increase in financial assistance to accelerate conservation practice implementation. The quantity of TA necessary to keep pace with the accelerated conservation practice implementation far exceeds the capacity of the current NRCS workforce. Recognizing this gap in TA capacity, the framers of the 2002 Farm Bill included statutory provisions for Technical Service Providers (TSP) to deliver TA to USDA Farm Bill Program participants. As a result of these new opportunities, there are now four different sources for the delivery of engineering TA to USDA program participants as listed below.

Source 1. The NRCS provides the engineering TA through its own workforce.

Source 2. The NRCS provides the engineering TA through an engineering firm hired by NRCS through an Architect-Engineer (A&E) Services contract.

Source 3. The USDA program participant hires a certified TSP engineer and pays the engineer using TA funds (Technical Service Payment Rates (TSPR)) from their USDA program contract [also known as the Participant Selection Process].

Source 4. The USDA program participant hires a non-NRCS engineer and pays them using their own funds.

The roles and responsibilities of the USDA program participant, NRCS, and the engineering TA provider are different for each of the four sources listed above. A fact sheet has been developed for each source. The purpose of these fact sheets is to ensure effective and efficient delivery of engineering TA, regardless of the source, through a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for all parties involved. The fact sheet for each source includes a description of roles and responsibilities along with an identification of the rules and/or policy that govern the activities.

Important Note

Whichever source is selected for providing the engineering TA, that source is expected to complete all the steps necessary to implement the engineering practice according to NRCS practice standards or state requirements where applicable. These steps include surveys, investigations, design, construction drawings, layout, construction inspection, checkout, and certification. For example, if a program participant hires a certified TSP engineer and pays the engineer using TA funds (TSPR) in their USDA program contract, that TSP engineer must do all the steps. The NRCS will NOT perform the construction inspection (quality assurance) for other sources. This ensures that the engineer responsible in charge of the design is also the engineer to evaluate and approve any changes that may be needed during construction. Thus, responsibility and liability clearly remain with one party.

List of Acronyms

A&E -	Architect-Engineer
CNMP -	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
CO -	Contracting Officer
COTR -	Contracting Officer Technical Representative
EQIP -	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
NEM -	National Engineering Manual
NRCS -	Natural Resources Conservation Service
PE -	Professional Engineer
PRS -	Performance Results System
SCE -	State Conservation Engineer
SOW -	Statement of Work
TA -	Technical Assistance
TechReg -	Technical Service Provider Registry
TSP -	Technical Service Provider
TSPR -	Technical Service Payment Rates (formerly Not-To-Exceed Rates)
USDA -	United States Department of Agriculture
WRP -	Wetlands Reserve Program