

Louisiana Master Farmer Program Operations and Procedures Manual

**Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
Louisiana Cattlemen's Association
Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation**

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this operations and procedures manual is to establish procedures and guidelines for the effective and efficient implementation of the Master Farmer Program in Louisiana.

Master Farmer certification was established under Louisiana law by the Louisiana legislature in 2002 through passage of Section 1. R.S. 3:304 of Act 145 that states "any individual who has received a master farmer certification shall be presumed to be in compliance with state soil and water quality requirements as long as certification is maintained." The Commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry has established rules and regulations setting out the requirements for obtaining certification. This rule establishes state certification requirements for voluntary participation in the Louisiana Master Farmer Program.

II. DEFINITIONS

“Commissioner” means the Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry.

“Department” means the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

“Farm” means all acreage within a watershed owned, operated or managed by an individual or legal entity if the acreage is used for the commercial production and harvesting of any agronomic, agricultural, aquacultural, floricultural, horticultural, silvicultural, or vitacultural product; including but not limited to, beans, cotton, fruits, grains, livestock, nursery stock, sugarcane, timber, crawfish, and vegetables.

“LCA” means the Louisiana Cattlemen’s Association.

“LFBF” means the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation.

“LSU AgCenter” means the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

“Master Cattle Producer Program” means a commodity-specific program designed as a follow-up to the Master Farmer Program consisting of 30 hours of educational sessions covering pasture management, animal health, nutrition, breeding, reproduction, animal handling and financial management.

“Master Farmer” means an individual who has obtained his or her master farmer certification from the commissioner.

“Master Farmer Certification Program” means the requirements established by the LSU AgCenter in consultation with the Department, NRCS and other state and federal agencies that an individual must successfully complete in order to apply for a master farmer certification from the commissioner.

“NRCS” means the United States Department of Agriculture—Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“Presumption of Compliance” means a Master Farmer Program (MFP) participant who completes all three phases of the Master Farmer Certification (MFC) process and is certified by the Commissioner is presumed to be in compliance with state soil and water quality requirements as long as certification is maintained.

“Resource Management System Plan (RMS)” means a comprehensive whole-farm soil and water conservation plan for an individual farm that incorporates conservation practices and best management practices; that meet the standards and specifications of NRCS, the Department, and the affected soil and water conservation district; and is approved by the Department.

“Watershed” means an area of land in Louisiana that drains toward a given point and which has been mapped and identified by a name and 11 digit number in accordance with United States Department of Agriculture and United States Geological Survey protocols.

III. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION

1. An agricultural producer seeking to receive or maintain Louisiana Master Farmer certification under these guidelines must successfully complete all of the requirements established for Master Farmer certification as adopted by the Commissioner in the Rule enabled by R.S. 3:304.
2. In the event a producer is an active part of a farming corporation or partnership, then only one producer representing that partnership or corporation need seek certification. It is, however, allowable for more than one participant in such a partnership or corporation to be certified provided the participant has met all certification requirements. The RMS plan will be developed and implemented on the land that is farmed by the corporation or partnership.

IV. CERTIFICATION PHASES

Phase I is comprised of eight hours of classroom instruction focusing on environmental stewardship, state and federal water quality regulations, commodity-specific conservation practices and USDA conservation program funding.

Phase II requires that Master Farmer participants attend a commodity-specific Model Farm field day. If a participant produces more than one commodity, it is left to their discretion as to which field day they attend. It is however, recommended that they attend the field day that represents the primary commodity they produce. Every effort should be made by the Master Farmer participant to attend Model Farm field days in their watershed. If, however, circumstances dictate that this is not possible, participants may attend Model Farm field days in an adjacent watershed and still receive Phase II credit.

Phase III is the development and implementation of a comprehensive whole farm RMS conservation plan for all lands owned and/or controlled in a given eleven digit watershed. This plan will be developed in cooperation with NRCS and the local soil and water conservation district and will address all resource problems identified for soil, water, air, plants, and animals on the farm.

V. CERTIFICATION PROCESS STEPS FOR THE PARTICIPANT

1. Participant completes Phases I and II. Completion of Phases I and II is documented in the participant's official records by the AgCenter.
2. Participant requests assistance from NRCS and the local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) with RMS plan development for the Master Farmer Program using a standardized form. The standardized form will identify all lands under the operational control of the participant in the watershed(s) where the farm is located. NRCS will assist the participant with determining the appropriate eleven (11) digit watershed number(s).
3. Participant will work with NRCS and the SWCD to develop his or her conservation plan and will provide all information required for the development of the plan, such as soil and litter analysis reports.
4. Participant will voluntarily implement, according to standards and specifications contained in Section IV of the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide, all conservation practices included in the plan as needed to address identified resource problems. NRCS and the SWCD will assist the participant with financial assistance to implement specific conservation practices through USDA conservation programs or other financial assistance programs as appropriate and available. A participant who manages or operates one or more farms for a legal entity in which the individual does not own a controlling interest will be considered to have implemented a resource management system plan if the owner of the farm implements such a plan.
5. When the participant has completed Phases I and II and completed implementation of the resource management system plan for the farm he/she may apply to the Commissioner in writing on a form approved by the Commissioner for Master Farmer Certification. The application must be accompanied by supporting documentation as identified in the Master Farmer Certification Program Rule adopted by the Commissioner. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to obtain and submit the application form to the Commissioner accompanied by the required documentation and statements.
6. The Commissioner, upon verification that the applicant has completed all requirements, will award the applicant the status of Master Farmer and present the applicant with the Master Farmer Certification certificate.

VI. ORGANIZATION

An organizational structure has been established to identify key partners and to facilitate administration of the MFP and the Master Cattle Producer Program (MCP). Responsibilities of each partner agency and organization are identified in a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Signatories to the MOU have mutually agreed to:

1. Meet as requested by other signatories to review progress and discuss business of importance to the successful implementation of the MFP and MCP.
2. Establish a MFP/MCP Executive Board as a decision making body consisting of one executive representative from each signatory entity to the MOU which will meet at least annually to review progress in implementation of the MOU.
3. Establish a MFP/MCP Technical Committee consisting of one technical representative from each signatory entity to the MOU which will meet at least twice a year for the purpose of developing recommendations for establishing yearly Phase I and Phase II workshop schedules, establishing continuing education credited events, reviewing curriculum materials and providing oversight of technical issues related to implementation of the MOU.
4. Establish the leadership role when chairing the MFP/MCP Executive Board and the MFP/MCP Technical Committee on a rotating annual basis. The Chair of the Executive Board and the Technical Committee will rotate from one MOU signatory to the next on January 1 of each year in the following order: AgCenter, NRCS, LCA, LFBF and LDAF.

VII. AGENCY DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The AgCenter will:

1. Coordinate the development and publication of MFP and MCPP curriculum content and lesson plans with partner agencies and organizations.
2. Annually in July, coordinate with partner agencies and organizations for the development of an annual schedule of Phase I and Phase II producer workshops to deliver the MFP and MCPP.
3. Provide and coordinate logistical support for Phase I and Phase II workshops including arrangements for training sites.
4. Produce and provide training materials necessary for participants to complete the MFP and MCPP with the exception of Beef Quality Assurance materials provided by LCA.
5. Provide instructors for those portions of the MFP and MCPP Curriculums the AgCenter agrees to teach.
6. Identify and establish necessary agreements with selected producers for establishment of Model Farms in cooperation with NRCS.
7. Work cooperatively with NRCS in implementing a water quality monitoring program on Model Farms to evaluate effectiveness of specific agricultural Best Management Practices and convey results in statewide educational programs.
8. Coordinate the development of criteria for MFP continuing education credits.
9. Develop a tracking system to monitor the progress of MFP participants through the three phases of the program including certification and completion of continuing education credits.
10. Maintain Master Farmer Program participant records including completion of continuing education credits. If a certified master farmer fails to comply with the annual continuing education requirements identified in the Rule the AgCenter will notify the Commissioner in writing of the failure of the participant to comply.

B. The NRCS will:

1. Provide instructors for those portions of Phase I of the MFP and MCPP curriculums NRCS agrees to teach.
2. Develop and provide curriculum materials to the AgCenter for the NRCS portions of the MFP and MCPP training.
3. Work cooperatively with the AgCenter in implementing a water quality monitoring program on Model Farms to evaluate effectiveness of specific agricultural Best Management Practices.
4. Assist the AgCenter in the annual selection of Model Farms for Phase II field days.
5. Schedule conservation planning and provide technical assistance, at their request, to MFP and MCPP participants and to Model Farm operators.
6. Inform MFP and MCPP participants of any financial assistance available through USDA conservation programs to accelerate implementation of their RMS plans.
7. Certify participants having successfully implemented whole farm RMS conservation plans to LDAF. This certification is only issued by the NRCS state conservationist.
8. Develop and provide to participants necessary standardized record keeping forms for use by certified Louisiana Master Farmers.

C. The LDAF will:

1. Provide instructors for those portions of the Phase I MFP curriculum LDAF agrees to teach.
2. Provide curriculum materials to the AgCenter for the LDAF portions of the MFP.
3. Confer MFP and MCPP certification to qualified participants in consultation with the AgCenter, LCA and NRCS.
4. Provide conservation technical assistance to MFP and MCPP participants for the installation of conservation practices and other agricultural Best Management Practices consistent with program requirements and objectives.

C. The LDAF will (cont'd):

5. Inform MFP and MCPP participants of any financial assistance available through LDAF Section 319 BMP cost-share projects to accelerate implementation of their RMS plans.
6. Maintain permanent records of all certifications conferred by the Commissioner.
7. Implement a process for the required five year review and certification renewal.
8. Conduct site visits to farms that have applied to the Commissioner for Master Farmer Certification for the purpose of verifying proper handling and storage of agriculture chemicals.

D. The LCA will:

1. Provide instructors for the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) portion of the MCPP.
2. Provide curriculum materials to the AgCenter for the BQA portion of the MCPP.
3. Publicize all Phase I and Phase II MFP activities to assure MCPP participants know what they must do to become certified Master Farmers.

VIII. SCHEDULING

A. Training

Annually (in July) the AgCenter will coordinate a formal meeting of all partner agencies and organizations to development an annual schedule for Phase I and Phase II events. This will include dates, times and locations. This schedule will be placed on the websites of the LSU AgCenter, NRCS, LDAF, LFBF and LCA.

IX. CERTIFICATION REVIEW and RENEWAL

Review of an individual's master farmer certification will take place every 5 years as specified in the Master Farmer Certification Rule. A master farmer shall remain certified as a master farmer so long as he or she complies with requirements identified in the Rule.

X. CONTINUING EDUCATION

For certified Louisiana Master Farmers to maintain their certification they must complete six hours of continuing educational credits annually. Examples of continuing education activities include:

- Attend a Master Farmer Model Farm field day with conservation topics discussed for the commodity(s) produced by the participant.
- Attend a specific workshop, training session, or field tour sponsored by the LSU AgCenter, NRCS, LDAF, or LDEQ where environmental concerns or conservation topics are discussed.
- Attend an LSU AgCenter or LDAF pesticide certification and recertification training session.

Each of the above training sessions or field days will count as three credits. The producer is required to complete two sessions per year. Additional credits will be developed on an as needed basis in coordination with the MFP/MCPP Technical Committee. Certified producers will receive notification by mail when a continuing educational credit will be offered in their respective areas.

XI. CANCELLATION OF CERTIFICATION

Certification may be canceled by the Commissioner if the program participant fails to comply with any of the requirements identified in the Master Farmer Certification Rule or if it is determined that the program participant has provided false information resulting in the participant's certification as a master farmer by the Commissioner or is cited by any regulatory agency for water quality or other environmental violations.

The Commissioner may cancel an individual's master farmer certification only after an administrative adjudicatory hearing is held in accordance with the Louisiana Administrative Procedure Act or upon the written request or approval of the individual holding the certification.

XII. RECORDKEEPING REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFIED LOUISIANA MASTER FARMERS

A certified Louisiana Master Farmer must maintain operational and management records concerning the continued implementation and management of the Resource Management System plan. Certified Louisiana Master Farmers must allow review of records for verification by authorized representatives of the NRCS and/or the Department.

XIII. Appendix

Legislation

RS 3:304

Acts 2003, No. 145, §1.

§304. Master Farmer certification

A. The commissioner of agriculture and forestry may certify individuals as master farmers in accordance with this Section. Each individual must successfully complete a master farmer certification program and have implemented an individual comprehensive soil and water conservation plan that meets the standards and specifications of the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the affected soil and water conservation district.

B. The commissioner may adopt rules and regulations setting out the requirements for obtaining a certification. The curriculum shall be established by the Louisiana State University AgCenter. The Louisiana State University AgCenter may consult with other agencies and organizations as needed, including but not limited to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, Louisiana Farm Bureau, the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, and the state soil and water conservation committee. The curriculum shall include but is not limited to the instruction on environmental issues in agriculture, non-point source pollution, best management and conservation practices, soil and water quality monitoring demonstrations, and development and implementation of an individual comprehensive soil and water conservation plan.

C. Any individual who has received a master farmer certification shall be presumed to be in compliance with state soil and water quality requirements as long as certification is maintained. The master farmer certification shall continue as long as the individual actively maintains his specific comprehensive conservation plan in accordance with best management practices.

RS 3:301 - Rule

Chapter 3. Master Farmer Certification

§301. Definitions

“Commissioner” means the Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry.

“Department” means the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

“Farm” means all acreage within a watershed owned, operated or managed by an individual or legal entity if the acreage is used for the commercial production and harvesting of any agronomic, agricultural, aquacultural, floricultural, horticultural, silvicultural, or vitacultural product, including but not limited to, beans, cotton, fruits, grains, livestock, nursery stock, sugarcane, timber, crawfish, catfish, and vegetables.

“LSU AgCenter” means the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

“Master Farmer” means an individual who has obtained his or her master farmer certification from the commissioner.

“NRCS” means the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture.

“Resource Management System Plan” means an individual comprehensive whole-farm soil and water conservation plan for a farm that incorporates best management practices, meets the standards and specifications of NRCS, the Department, and the affected soil and water conservation district, and is approved by the Department.

“Watershed” means an area of land in Louisiana that drains toward a given point and which has been mapped and identified by a name and eleven (11) digit number in accordance with United States Department of Agriculture and United States Geological Survey protocols.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with R.S. 3:304.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Promulgated by the Department of Agriculture & Forestry, Office of the Commissioner, LR 32:794 (May 2006).

§303. Application for Master Farmer Certification

A. The following individuals are eligible to apply to become a master farmer:

1. An individual who owns and operates one or more farms in his own name or through a legal entity in which the individual owns a controlling interest;
2. An individual who operates one or more farms on land leased by him or her;
3. An individual who manages or operates one or more farms for a legal entity in which the individual does not own a controlling interest.

B. An eligible individual may apply to the commissioner for certification as a master farmer if the individual has successfully completed the master farmer curriculum established by the LSU AgCenter, attended a model farm field day sponsored by the LSU AgCenter, and has implemented a resource management system plan for at least one farm.

C. An applicant who manages or operates one or more farms for a legal entity in which the individual does not own a controlling interest will be considered to have implemented a resource management system plan if the owner of the farm implements such a plan.

D. Each application shall be made in writing on a form approved by the commissioner and shall be accompanied by:

1. a document from the LSU AgCenter showing successful completion of the master farmer certification curriculum established by the LSU AgCenter,
2. A document from the LSU AgCenter showing attendance at a model farm field day sponsored by the LSU AgCenter, and
3. A document from NRCS or the department showing that a resource management system plan has been implemented for a farm.
4. A statement by the applicant that he or she agrees to attend at least six hours a year of continuing education approved by the LSU AgCenter or (and) the Department during the time he or she holds a master farmer certification.
5. A statement by the applicant that he or she agrees to develop, implement and maintain, in accordance with these regulations, a resource management system plan for all farms the applicant owns, operates, or manages.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with R.S. 3:304.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Promulgated by the Department of Agriculture, Office of the Commissioner, LR 32:795 (May 2006).

§305. Issuance of Master Farmer Certification

The commissioner or his designee shall review each application for a master farmer certification to determine if the applicant successfully meets the requirements established by La. R. S. 3:304 and these regulations for obtaining a master farmer certification. If the commissioner approves an application the department shall issue a master farmer certification to the applicant.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with R.S. 3:304.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Promulgated by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Office of the commissioner, LR 32:795(May 2006).

§307. Cancellation of Master Farmer Certification

A. A master farmer shall remain certified as a master farmer so long as he or she actively maintains the resource management system plan in accordance with best management practices for each farm owned, operated, or managed by that individual.

B. A master farmer shall be actively maintaining a resource management system plan in accordance with best management practices so long as all of the following requirements are met.

1. The resource management system plan or best management practices incorporated into the plan are utilized and maintained on a consistent basis.

2. The records required by the resource management system plan are maintained as long as the resource management system plan is in effect.

3. Department personnel are allowed to inspect the farm or to review the records as long as the resource management system plan is in effect.

4. A comprehensive review of the resource management system plan with NRCS or the department is completed at least once every five (5) years for the purpose of updating the plan and incorporating new best management practices as may be necessary.

5. Attendance at a minimum of six hours a year of continuing education approved by the LSU AgCenter or (and) the Department.

6. The active development, maintenance, and review, in conjunction with NRCS or the Department, of a resource management plan for all farms owned, operated, or managed by the individual.

C. The commissioner may cancel an individual's master farmer certification for failing to abide by the requirements established by La. R. S. 3:304 and these regulations only after an administrative adjudicatory hearing held in accordance with the Louisiana Administrative Procedure Act, or upon the written request or approval of the individual holding the certification.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with R.S. 3:304.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Promulgated by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Office of the commissioner, LR 32:795 (May 2006).