

INFORMATION SHEET: Technical Service Provider (TSP) Program

Program Purpose

NRCS has established a national program for certifying individuals and organizations to provide additional technical assistance needed for the 2002 Farm Bill programs. NRCS will implement this Technical Service Provider (TSP) program in accordance with the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107-171. Through this initiative, USDA program participants will have the option of obtaining conservation technical assistance from individuals certified as TSPs, in addition to the technical assistance traditionally available from NRCS and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

To help address the Farm Bill workload, USDA may also establish cooperative agreements or contracts with non-Federal entities to assist in providing technical assistance necessary to develop and implement the Farm Bill programs.

All technical assistance provided by TSPs must meet NRCS standards and policy as found in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and other related guidance.

Eligibility

The private sector, non-profit organizations, and public agencies are all eligible to provide direct technical assistance and deliver conservation activities. To ensure high quality service, all TSPs must be certified by NRCS prior to providing assistance for USDA programs.

Criteria for Certification

Certification is available in a number of technical assistance categories. Being certified in a category means that the TSP can provide technical assistance for an identified set of NRCS conservation practices associated with that category. For each technical assistance category, there is a set of national certification criteria (e.g. educational requirements, experience in the field, references, etc.). TSP certification is valid for a three-year period. TSPs are responsible for meeting all the training or other certification criteria at their own expense, and assume liability for work they perform.

Examples of national TSP categories are as follows:

<u>TSP Certification Category</u>	<u>TSP May Provide Tech. Asst. For FOTG Practices:</u>
1. Buffers	Field Borders (FOTG 386), Filter Strips (FOTG 393), Hedgerow Planting (FOTG 422)
2. Pest Management	Pest Management (FOTG 595)
3. Prescribed Burning	Prescribed Burning (FOTG 338), Firebreak (FOTG 394)

Current Status

An Interim Final Rule for the TSP program was posted on the Federal Register on November 19, 2002. Although this Interim Final Rule is open for public comment until March 19, 2003 (extended from the original February deadline), those interested in becoming a TSP can start the application process for certification beginning March 1, 2003. The TSP Final Rule is expected in the spring of 2003. All information provided should be considered tentative until the Final Rule is released. There are still a number of issues to be resolved, such as amount and methods of payment to TSPs.

Interim Guidance: Applying for TSP Certification

At this time, all applications for TSP certification must be made on-line through the Internet. The following interim guidance is provided:

- (1) Go to the NRCS **TechReg** web site (<http://techreg.usda.gov>) to learn about the TSP program. This site contains the following links:
 - A **TSP Locator** link that will be used to advertise certified TSPs to USDA program participants.
 - A **TSP Roadmap** link that highlights the major steps to becoming a TSP.
 - A link **to Details on technical service categories and national certification criteria.**
- (2) Review the national certification categories and criteria. Additional information specific to Michigan will be released soon for categories that reference state criteria. Identify those technical assistance categories for which you are qualified and desire TSP certification.
- (3) Get an eGov account (ID and password). To acquire an eGov account, you should either: (1) mail or fax a notarized **USDA Registration Form To Request Electronic Access Code** (Form AD-2016) to the NRCS field service center office in your county with a letter requesting an eGov account, or (2) visit the NRCS field service center office in your county and request assistance. NRCS staff will see to it that your request is processed. A letter will be sent to you with your temporary eGov ID. Within 7 days, under a separate cover letter, you will be mailed a temporary eGov password. You should then use your temporary ID and password to activate your account and select a permanent ID and password. This is done at:
<https://activate.sc.egov.usda.gov/Activate>
- (4) Login to the NRCS **TechReg** website and use the **Apply Online** link (an eGov ID and password are required) to apply to TSP certification. During this on-line application process, you will review the terms and conditions of the TSP agreement, complete your background profile with your qualifications, select certification categories and locations, and complete an electronic signature.

For More Information

This information sheet is intended as an overview only to supplement the information available through the Internet. The following sources of information should be used as needed:

Farm Bill Programs:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/index.html>

TSP Interim Final Rule: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/tsp_rule.html

The TSP Certification Process: <http://techreg.usda.gov>

Getting an eGov Account: <http://www.egov.usda.gov/>

To Obtain an AD-2016 Form:

http://forms.sc.egov.usda.gov/eforms/Help/register_content.html

MI FOTG with Practice Standards: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>

For supplemental TSP information related to Michigan, you may check the web site: www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov or contact Kevin Wickey, Assistant State Conservationist for Technology, USDA-NRCS, 3001 Coolidge Rd., Suite 250, East Lansing, MI 48823-6321; (517) 324-5270.

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