

# Conservation Technical Assistance



photo: NRCS Oklahoma

Landowner  
 Richard Boone  
 looking at the  
 conservation  
 plan and lake  
 constructed  
 with Natural  
 Resources  
 Conservation  
 Service  
 technical  
 assistance.

## Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

Conservation Technical Assistance is simply about helping people. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees provide conservation options, recommendations, planning or engineering assistance to individual farmers, ranchers, local governments, or individual city homeowners.

Using this help, landowners apply practices that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance forestland, wetlands, grazing lands and wildlife habitat. Some of this assistance helps individuals or communities restore natural resources after floods, fires, or other natural disasters.

The primary function and strength of this agency - assisting people to make wise land use decisions about their natural resources. Incentives, such as cost-share funds are offered through local, state, or federal programs, help the individual to apply conservation to the land. Natural Resources Conservation Service employees offer these program options to the landowner during the planning process. The outcome of this technical assistance is often measured by the various practices applied to the land. However, the actual number of individuals receiving natural resource planning assistance is much higher than those who receive cost-share funds.

For example, in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), there are three times as many people applying for the program (1,800 in fiscal year 2000) as those who get a funded contract (587 in fiscal year 2000). However, all applications go through a basic conservation planning process in order to determine the cost of the practices, the environmental benefits, discussions with the producer about the options, etc. People not receiving EQIP funds may turn to state or conservation district funds, or choose to install the practice at their own cost, using NRCS help.

## Demands for Technical Assistance

The Natural Resources Conservation Service not only provides technical support to USDA farm programs, but also to Oklahoma's 88 local conservation districts. These local conservation districts are the foundation of the locally led, voluntary conservation partnership, meaning that the local citizens make the decisions for their community. Through local conservation districts, natural resource concerns are identified, prioritized, and addressed. The Natural Resources Conservation Service delivers the technical assistance to private landowners in designing conservation systems, meeting the needs of resources and customers. Natural Resources Conservation Service technical assistance is also provided to assist these local districts in implementing Oklahoma's state conservation cost-share program.

In the last three years, Oklahoma has made a total of \$3.5 million available to conservation district cooperators for conservation measures. These cost-share dollars are available for conservation practices that control soil erosion and improve water quality. Natural Resources Conservation Service employees assist in the planning and installation of these conservation practices in treating the natural resource problems.

Natural Resources Conservation Service's technical assistance is provided in support of other state and federal conservation initiatives including the Partners for Wildlife Program, Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Water Quality Demonstration Projects (319 Program), Conservation Buffer Initiative, and the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board's reclamation efforts for abandoned oil and gas sites. We are also an integral part of the state's water quality efforts related to animal feeding operations. Natural Resources Conservation Service's technical and conservation planning standards are incorporated into laws and regulations for addressing natural resource concerns created by these facilities.

### Accomplishments in 2000

Through the technical assistance provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and local conservation districts, private landowners installed animal waste management systems on 491 farms. These systems are protecting water quality for wildlife, recreation, and human consumption. Resource management systems were implemented on 220,000 acres of cropland, 526,000 acres of grazing lands, and 10,000 acres of forest. These systems are providing sustainable resource protection from erosion and degradation, ensuring continued production of food, fiber, and a quality environment.

### Follow-up for Quality

What doesn't show - the service provided after the conservation practices are installed. No successful business or organization walks away from the customer after the sale. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has that same commitment to follow-up with the landowner after the practices are installed, and we continue to serve our customers.

For example, once an animal waste management system is installed (waste storage facilities, waste utilization, nutrient management, pest management, prescribed grazing, fences, etc.) there is a need for follow-up. Continued discussion and evaluation with the farmer/rancher/producer is needed to determine how the practices are working in protecting the water quality and effective utilization of the nutrients from the waste. This can include water analysis, soil testing, and reviewing rotational grazing practices.

### Partnership Important to Success

Our customers in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Oklahoma's 88 local conservation districts put conservation practices on the land. All districts provide administrative help in local field offices to keep the NRCS technical specialists working in the field with the customer. Some districts employ conservation technicians to supplement the Natural Resources Conservation Service staff. This partnership has been a proven success in locally led voluntary effort for conservation of our natural resources.



photo: NRCS Oklahoma

*David Kaspar, Natural Resources Conservation Service employee, measures a cropland gully caused by flooding. Damage such as this was repaired throughout the county under the Emergency Conservation Program.*



photo: NRCS Oklahoma

*The Natural Resources Conservation Service assisted the City of Tulsa to plan and conduct Erosion and Sediment Control Training Workshops and Tours to reduce non-point source pollution in Tulsa County. The target audience for these workshops included developers, builders, consultants, engineers, government officials, inspectors, utility representatives and contractors, maintenance workers, city planners and university officials. Over 500 participants have attended these workshops.*