Technical Service Providers

Information for prospective TSPs, interested landowners and NRCS employees in Iowa

TSP Program Purpose

Technical Service Providers (TSPs) are individuals, private businesses, nonprofit organizations and public agencies outside of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that help agricultural producers apply conservation practices on the land.

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the use of TSPs to increase the technical assistance available to landowners, ensuring quality technical assistance at a time when conservation work is at an historic high.

Through the TSP program, producers have the option of obtaining technical assistance from TSPs in addition to traditional assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS). The same high quality standards used by NRCS conservation professionals are available through certified Technical Service Providers.

This brochure offers an overview of the Iowa TSP program, including TSP eligibility, partnering organizations, work and payment agreements, verification, legal responsibilities, and confidentiality of records.

TSP Eligibility

To become a certified TSP, the applicant must log on to the TechReg website, http://techreg.usda.gov/, and follow the instructions for obtaining a USDA user ID account and password.

TSPs meet the same quality standards used by NRCS conservation professionals. A national register contains names, resumes and locations where TSPs are registered to work.

Instructions are available online or through any USDA Service Center. After obtaining level 2 authorization, the TSP application can be completed. A step-by-step instruction guide is provided online at the TechReg website.

An NRCS Technical Service Provider Coordinator will verify applicant qualifications and certify qualified applicants within 60 days of submission of the application. Applicants wishing to work in multiple states must register individually for each state certification. Members of partnering organizations have a streamlined application process.

Exact qualifications vary, depending on selected categories and practices.

To become TSP certified, applicants should log on to http://techreg.usda.gov/

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

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TSP

TSP Partnering Organizations

NRCS partners with professional organizations to facilitate the certification of TSPs. Partnering organizations include but are not limited to:

- American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists
- American Society of Agronomy
- Certified Crop Adviser
- Certified Professional Crop Scientist
- Environmental Management Solutions
- Iowa State University
- The Irrigation Association
- National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants
- Society for Range Management
- The Wildlife Society

Members of partnering organizations have a streamlined TSP application process.

TSP Categories

Names of certified TSPs are placed on the national register which can be accessed on the TechReg website, http://techreg.usda.gov/. The register contains a resume of the qualifications and the individual categories in which the TSP is certified to provide technical service, as well as listing the states where the TSP is registered to work.

Potential TSPs can choose from a multitude of categories in which to be certified, however, not every category or practice is reimbursed through any one Farm Bill program. Each state determines which practices a TSP will be permitted to provide. The categories and practices authorized in Iowa are listed on the TechReg website under TSP Not-To-Exceed Rates.

States are permitted to develop TSP certification criteria that exceed the national minimum standards. This may include obtaining specific state or county licensing, attending general or technical workshops, and/or meeting additional educational requirements such as obtaining yearly continuing education credits.

Examples of Iowa TSP Categories

TSP Certification Category	NRCS Field Office Techical Guide Practices
CNMP (Certified Nutrient Management Planning)	Waste Storage Facility (313) Nutrient Management (590) Sediment Basins (350) Composting Facility (317)
Prescribed Burning	Prescribed Burning (338)
Buffers	Field Borders (386) Filter Strips (393)
Grazing & Forage	Pasture & Hayland Planting (512) Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)

TSP Selection Guidelines

A producer should use the same care in selecting a TSP as in choosing any other contractor. A list of certified TSPs can be found on the TechReg website. The following is a guideline for selecting a TSP:

- It is the producer's responsibility to check references and review qualifications. The producer should take care to ensure that the TSP understands local conditions and concerns.
- Ask for referrals from other producers in the area who have used TSPs. Cost should not be your final criteria for choosing a TSP. Communication skills, experience, and satisfaction of previous clients should also factor into the decision.
- Have a face-to-face interview with more than one TSP.
- Expect the unexpected. Discuss with the TSP how unexpected events will be handled. Ask for specific examples of how the TSP has resolved project problems in the past.
- Discuss which services will be provided by the TSP and which, if any, services will be provided by NRCS or other entity. This includes design, construction/implementation, quality assurance, and final certification.
- Discuss who will coordinate service schedules in order to complete practices in a timely manner. The producer is responsible for obtaining all permits. If the TSP is expected to obtain the appropriate permits, that should be agreed upon well in advance of project implementation or construction.
- While TSP costs may be reimbursed by NRCS, it is the responsibility of the producer to pay the TSP. Work out payment arrangements prior to the start of a project.

To locate a TSP, producers should visit the TechReg website, http://techreg.usda.gov/, or the Iowa NRCS website, http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/

TSP Work and Payment Agreements

After the practice is implemented and the producer and TSP certify the practice is completed, NRCS will provide the producer with a one-time reimbursement payment. Producers will be paid only the amount stipulated in the program contract. This payment is based on the Not-to-Exceed (NTE) rates posted on the TechReg website.

The actual contract reimbursement rates will be determined by NRCS. These rates are based on the type, size, and complexity of the service performed. The producer is responsible for TSP payments that exceed the NTE rate.

TSP Verification

A TSP must be able to demonstrate knowledge of NRCS standards and specifications, down to the county level. Iowa quality assurance procedures for verification of applicants requires the submission of several documents prior to final certification. This includes, but is not limited to, college transcripts, licenses, and training certificates, as well as a narrative documenting knowledge and/or experience down to the county level. Only copies of original documents should be submitted for verification by NRCS and will not be returned to the applicant.

Once certified, TSP names are placed in a national register. The register contains a resume of the TSPs' qualifications and the individual categories in which the TSP is certified to provide technical service, as well as a list of the states and counties where the TSP is registered to work.

TSP

Iowa NRCS Fact Sheet

TSP Legal Responsibilities

TSPs are legally responsible for the technical assistance they provide to the landowner. NRCS is responsible for the technical assistance that the agency provides to the landowner.

The landowner is responsible for meeting regulatory and program requirements as well as obtaining any federal, state, county or local approvals, permits or easements required for the project.

The landowner is responsible for all payments to the TSP. The landowner and the TSP are responsible for ensuring that the work agreement conforms to Iowa Field Office Technical Guide Standards.

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Confidentiality of TSP Records

NRCS is governed by the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act of 1974. The agency cannot share privacy information with TSPs without the participant's permission. The producer must waive the right to privacy in order to authorize release of non-public information to their contracted TSP. The same restrictions and penalties on releasing non-public information that pertain to federal employees also pertain to TSPs. Technical Service Providers may not release any information that reflects on the producer's personal, commercial or financial matters or which causes substantial harm to the competitive position of the producer.

Additional TSP Information

More information is available via the internet:

Iowa NRCS
http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/TSP.html

Iowa Field Office Technical Guide with Practice Standards
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/

Farm Bill Programs
http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/

Obtaining an eGov TSP Account
http://www.egov.usda.gov/

TSP Certification Process and NTE rates
http://techreg.usda.gov/

TSP Locator for Landowners/Producers
http://techreg.usda.gov/

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NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service