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USDA'S INTERIM FINAL RULE AMENDS COMPOSITION, RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

Notice of 60-day Public Comment Period on Rule Published in Federal Register

WASHINGTON, Dec. 2, 2008—U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Arlen Lancaster today announced the release of the interim final rule for State Technical Committees, which amended requirements regarding the composition and responsibilities of these advisory committees nationwide.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) expands agricultural and forestry involvement in the committees, expands the committees' authority to review local working groups' efforts to address state program priorities, and requires the Secretary of Agriculture to standardize committee operations nationwide.

The State Technical Committee interim final rule is available for public comment and can be found at [USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's](#) (USDA-NRCS) Web site, at the official [government regulation](#) Web site, and at the [Federal Register's](#) Web site.

Public comments must be submitted by Jan. 26, 2009. These comments will be used to revise the interim final rule, which establishes policy for State Technical Committees. USDA will publish a final rule that will address the public comments.

Each state has an advisory State Technical Committee that is chaired by the USDA-NRCS state conservationist. State Technical Committee members include agricultural producers and other Federal, state, Tribal and non-profit organization professionals that represent various disciplines in the soil, water, wetland, plant, forestry and wildlife sciences. The committees meet regularly and advise the state conservationist and other USDA officials on technical considerations related to implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Grasslands Reserve Program, and Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

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The committees also advise the NRCS state conservationists on other technical matters, technical guides, criteria for evaluating projects, cost-share and incentives payment levels, and measures related to achieving a program balance regardless of agricultural sector or farm or ranch size. They can also advise the state conservationists on strategies to reach underserved customers.

The committees also accept recommendations from their subcommittees, including local working groups, as they establish natural resource priorities for the state.

Mailed comments on the interim final rule can be submitted to: Director, Conservation Technical Assistance Programs Division, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Room 6015-S, Washington, D.C. 20250-2890.

Comments can be faxed to (202) 720-2998 and e-mailed to STC2008@wdc.usda.gov. People with disabilities who are interested in submitting comments can contact the USDA Target Center at (202) 720-2600. Comments also can be submitted through the Regulations.gov Web site's public comment feature.

For additional information about State Technical Committees, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/StateTech/>.

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