

Fact Sheet

Salina, Kansas
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Technical Service Provider Assistance - Provider Information

The 2002 Farm Bill amended the 1985 Farm Bill, which authorized use of Technical Service Providers (TSPs), by requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow producers to receive technical assistance by individuals and entities other than the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This provision is designed to ensure NRCS has the capacity to address the significant workload associated with implementing Farm Bill programs. This fact sheet will help you, the TSP, to effectively offer assistance.

What is a TSP?

A TSP is an individual entity (private or nonprofit business) or public agency. TSPs must be competent to perform technical services and have their qualifications certified by NRCS. The TSP will be placed on an approved list and selected by producers.

TSPs provide technical services in most aspects of conservation (including conservation planning, design, layout, installation, and checkout) of approved conservation practices.

All TSPs must perform services according to NRCS conservation practice standards and specifications. Therefore, there is an application process.

Resource assistance for TSPs

NRCS developed an online application and information system called the Technical Service Provider Registry (TechReg). The Web site can be accessed from the internet at the following location: <http://techreg.usda.gov/>.

TechReg is a great source of information that provides detailed instruction for TSPs.

TechReg is designed to make it easy for TSPs to register, start the certification process, and

obtain technical resource information. It contains news for and about TSPs--including the TSP Express, an electronic report prepared by NRCS. There is a help section if problems are encountered with TechReg or an answer is needed. The **Technical Service Providers** section includes the following: (1) a step-by-step guide to using TechReg, (2) certification criteria that includes "Technical Service Categories and Criteria Options for Certification," (3) help in becoming a qualified TSP by working with recommending organizations and our partners, and (4) an online application for becoming a certified TSP. An **Online Resources** section includes NRCS policy, regulations, and other technical material related to TSPs. There is also a list of recommending organizations that can provide help to become a qualified TSP.

NRCS managers utilize TechReg to manage TSP applications for certifications. NRCS has 60 days to review and verify TSP applications. This may include coordinating with other states if a TSP applied for certification in multiple locations.

Applying to become a certified TSP

Individuals must complete the online application in TechReg and will need to obtain an eGov online account. There are several preliminary steps that a potential TSP must complete in order to apply for certification.

These steps include the following:

- Register online for a Level 2 eGov account
- Visit the field office to verify your identity
- NRCS employee activates eGov level2 account of potential TSP
- NRCS employee inputs potential TSP into Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS)--if the potential TSP is not already in SCIMS
- NRCS employee links SCIMS and eGov account

You, as the potential TSP, can now log into TechReg and complete the online application for TSP certification. This will require you to provide information about your qualifications, and select the technical services you wish to provide along with the locations where you want to provide these services. You may return to an incomplete application at any time. You will also sign a certification agreement that indicates your information is accurate and that you will abide by NRCS policy and regulations.

Businesses do not apply for certification. Instead, a certified individual may identify their entity. Prospective clients may look up businesses (as well as individuals) when searching for TSPs. Within 60 days, NRCS will review your application and verify that it meets NRCS requirements for certification. If there is a problem, we will advise you and allow time for you to make corrections. If NRCS approves your application, you will electronically sign a certification agreement with NRCS. This grants you certification and places you on the list of approved TSPs.

Training to satisfy certification requirements

NRCS has Web-based training available including Conservation Planning, Part I (0019); TSP Orientation (000191); and Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide (0149). These courses may be required for certification in several conservation category areas. You may access and register for the courses at <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>. Users should register with their USDA account in order to claim credit for completing them. Recommending organizations also partner with NRCS to offer training that may lead towards NRCS certification in selected practice areas.

NRCS posts training course listings on TechReg and often lists training opportunities in the TSP Express.

Performing work as a TSP

TSPs can be hired to provide assistance in two ways. They are hired directly by the producer or by a contractual arrangement with NRCS. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, Kansas obligated over \$1.3 million for technical services of which 30 percent was for direct producer-hired contacts, and 70 percent was from agency and business contractual arrangements.

TSPs must market their own services to producers for direct hire. They may also respond to NRCS advertisements in [FedBizOpps](#) and [FedGrants](#) for NRCS contracts. Both of these Web sites offer automated notification systems and extensive details about the technical service needed.

Producers can locate certified TSPs listed in TechReg. Certified TSPs agree to a mutually acceptable contract. NRCS shares the cost of technical services with the producer. The maximum amount of this payment depends on the scope of services, extent of the practices involved, and the location for the work. NRCS defines these amounts as National Technical Service Provider Payment Rates (NTSPPR).

NTSPPR, based on NRCS costs for completing the same tasks, are updated annually. If the scope of services costs less than the computed NTSPPR, then the NRCS payment will equal the invoiced amount. If the work costs more, producers must cover the additional costs. TechReg lists the NTSPPR.

Payment for services as a TSP

NRCS contracts and agreements document how payments are made including reporting progress. If you contracted with a producer, you will need to report the work completed and submit an invoice with expenses to the producer. The producer may request that NRCS pay you directly by completing an assignment of payment request. Delays can occur with this payment method since a vendor code (requiring the social security number or the business Tax ID of the vendor) must be established in the NRCS payment system. The vendor code must be

established and entered by the NRCS national headquarters office.

NRCS will make payment within 30 days of receiving a complete payment request package demonstrating that the services provided met all legal, technical, and programmatic requirements. Electronic payments will be made via direct deposit

Who is responsible if something goes wrong or the practices fail?

Your agreement or contract requires that the services you provide comply with all applicable federal, state, tribal, and local laws (as well as USDA standards and specifications). You assume legal responsibility for the technical services you provide including any costs, damages, claims, liabilities, or judgments arising from past, present, or future negligent or wrongful acts or omissions in connection with technical

services you provided. Conservation practices that failed due to no fault of yours or the producer's could be eligible for reapplication in accordance with the appropriate USDA program.

Program participants bear the responsibility for obtaining all approvals, authorities, rights, permits, and easements necessary for implementation, operation, and maintenance of each conservation practice prior to installation. However, TSPs typically work with producers to secure these items.

Technical assistance is available from the NRCS at your local USDA Service Center (listed in the telephone book under United States Government). More information is also available on the Kansas Web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov.