



United States Department of Agriculture

# On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials



*April 2020  
Orientation*



Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

[nrcs.usda.gov/](https://nrcs.usda.gov/)



United States Department of Agriculture

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=stelprdb1045412>



# Conservation Innovation Grants

## New Grantee Guide

March 2020 Edition



# Starting your Project



If you have a fully executed agreement signed by both parties



If you received a pre-award cost letter, do not exceed allowable costs identified in the letter



If you do not yet have a fully executed agreement signed by both parties



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# On-Farm Trials



- Eligibility and Compliance (NRCS Responsibility)
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
    - Incentive payments do not count toward a producer's EQIP payment limitation
    - Adjusted Gross Income waivers may be requested
  - Highly Erodible Lands/Wetland Compliance
  - Environmental Compliance and Cultural Resources
  - Farm Service Agency farm record



# On-Farm Trials



- Technical Assistance and Incentive Payments
  - As proposed in the project and included in the Grant agreement
  - Administered and provided/paid by the Grantee and/or partners
  - Linked to implementation of practices/systems, evaluation, and reporting



# On-Farm Trials



## - Incentive Payments

- Identify producers and send to State On Farm Trials Point of Contact (forthcoming)
- Payments made after eligibility determinations
- Paid by Grantee
- Record keeping and tracking progress
- Reporting back to NRCS
- Payments should be reasonable and justifiable:
  - When making reimbursement requests, Grantee should be able to inform NRCS of the makeup of payments.
  - E.g., "Provided farmers \$500/acre; \$200 for foregone income, \$100 for land rental, \$200 for donated equipment and seed."



# On-Farm Trials



## - Evaluations

- Key component of On-Farm Trials
- Ensure environmental, financial, and social (to the extent possible) impact of implementing innovative approaches are captured and disseminated.
- Follow what was proposed in application as included in Grant agreement



# On-Farm Trials



## Reporting (in addition to progress and financial reports):

- Annual report on Incentive Payments
- Including: Recipient information, amounts, composition of payments, locations, etc.
- Guidance forthcoming



# NRCS Technical Contacts



***Job of NRCS Technical Contact is to provide technical oversight, to ensure project objectives are being met and the project is meeting milestones.***

## Main NRCS Project contact

- ☼ NRCS subject matter experts
- ☼ Detailed review of progress reports
- ☼ Keep in regular contact with grantees
- ☼ “Gateway” to NRCS and USDA
- ☼ Approve project changes
- ☼ Project evaluation during and at conclusion
- ☼ Potential for site visits and routine calls



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# Where to turn for questions

- Methods and progressing toward grant objectives
  - Technical Contact
- Logistics around producer eligibility and compliance
  - NRCS State Office On-Farm Trials POC (information forthcoming)
- Grant administration (1<sup>st</sup> level), coordination, policy, and implementation (evaluations, reporting, etc.)
  - OFT Program Manager: T.J. Wilson ([timothy.wilson2@usda.gov](mailto:timothy.wilson2@usda.gov))
  - General email: [NRCSCIG@USDA.GOV](mailto:NRCSCIG@USDA.GOV)
- Soil Health Demonstration Trials and data standardization
  - Soil Health Division Special Projects Coordinator: Carl Koch ([carl.koch@usda.gov](mailto:carl.koch@usda.gov))
  - General email: [NRCSCIG@USDA.GOV](mailto:NRCSCIG@USDA.GOV)



# OFT Privacy Considerations

- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
  - What can be disclosed under FOIA?
- Personally Identifiable Information (PII)
  - Collecting
  - Protecting
  - Sharing
- Compliance with Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008
  - Cooperator Agreements forthcoming

*Note: Data will be shared with NRCS; But NRCS must comply with Section 1619 producer privacy provisions for all OFT producer information*



# On-Farm Trials



# Questions and Answers



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# OFT: Soil Health Demo. Trials

*On-farm demonstrations of long-term, successful soil health management systems (SHMS) and/or production systems being transitioned to a SHMS, managed by agricultural producers.*



# OFT: Soil Health Demo. Trials

- **NRCS Soil Health Division**
  - Reporting requirements
  - Common evaluation protocols and methods
  - Minimum data
  
- **NRCS Soil and Plant Science Division (SPSD)**
  - Verification of the soil series on which the trial sites(s) is located.



## SHD Illustrated Concept Reporting

- Are separate from required financial and progress reporting done in ezFed Grants
- Designed to give brief project status and overview of accomplishments
- To be used in the development of Congressional Reports due at the end of each FY
- Due by April 20<sup>th</sup> of each project year

# CIG Soil Health Demonstration Trial: Insert Project Title

**Grantee Name:**

**Agreement #:**

**Project Director:**

**Contact Information**

**Phone #:**

**Email:**

**Period Covered by Report:**

**Agreement End Date:**

**Description of Project:**

(write short overview description understandable to general public, include problem statement – why this matters)



insert project photo(s) w. caption(s)



# Project Status



(insert project photo w. caption)

## Highlights, Milestones Reached, Deliverables completed:

- (Highlight 1)
- (Highlight 2)
- (Milestone 1)
- (Deliverable 1)
- ...etc.



(insert project photo w. caption)

## Project Barriers, Additional Assistance Needed, and Comments:

- (Barrier 1)
- (Barrier 2)
- (Assistance Request 1)
- (Comment 1)
- ...etc.

# Additional Photos and Update Materials

(attach, link or write additional project materials for Congressional Reporting and project management)

## SHD Minimum Data Set Requirements :

1. [SHD Field Operations Template](#)
2. [Field Operations Template Instructions](#)
3. [SHD Soils Template](#)

\*all text are links to files

## USDA-NRCS Collection and Processing Instructions for Soil Health Tests

This document provides guidance for the basic USDA-NRCS Soil Health Test that is used for:

- Soil Health Management Conservation Activity Plan (116)
- Soil Testing Activity (216)
- Soil Health Demonstration Trials (CIG)

### Supplies

Gather the following materials prior to going to the field:

- 5-gallon bucket
- 1-gallon freezer bags
- Marker and pen
- Straight shovel and trowel or soil knife
- In-Field Soil Health Assessment
- Clipboard
- Submission forms
- Soil maps
- GPS
- Cooler (optional)

### Timing

The optimal sampling time is during the spring before field operations such as tillage, fertilizer or amendment application, or planting.

Soil can also be collected throughout the growing season and after fall harvest providing it is done when the climate is stable and there have not been any recent physical or chemical disturbances.

When the objective is to collect baseline data to monitor a conservation practice, ensure that soil is collected prior to practice installation. Use the same georeferenced locations to monitor practice effects in the future.

### Location

Consider the purpose for sampling prior to coming up with a strategy.

Typical purposes include:

- Making side-by-side comparisons of different soil management systems to determine their relative effects on soil health
- Taking measurements on the same field over time to monitor trends in soil health as affected by management

## AT A GLANCE

### In the Field:

- Use only a straight shovel
- Collect 2" slice from 0-6"
  - 5 subsamples per location
  - 3 locations per CMU
  - 1 composite sample per CMU
  - 4-5 cups per sample<sup>1</sup>
- Georeference locations
- Remove debris, roots, or stones
- Mix sample
- Seal soil in a labeled bag

### After Collection:

- Keep soil in a cool location
- Do not dry
- Seal soil in bag and double bag
- Pack bags into a shipping box
- Ship using 2 or 3-day service
  - Do not ship on a Friday

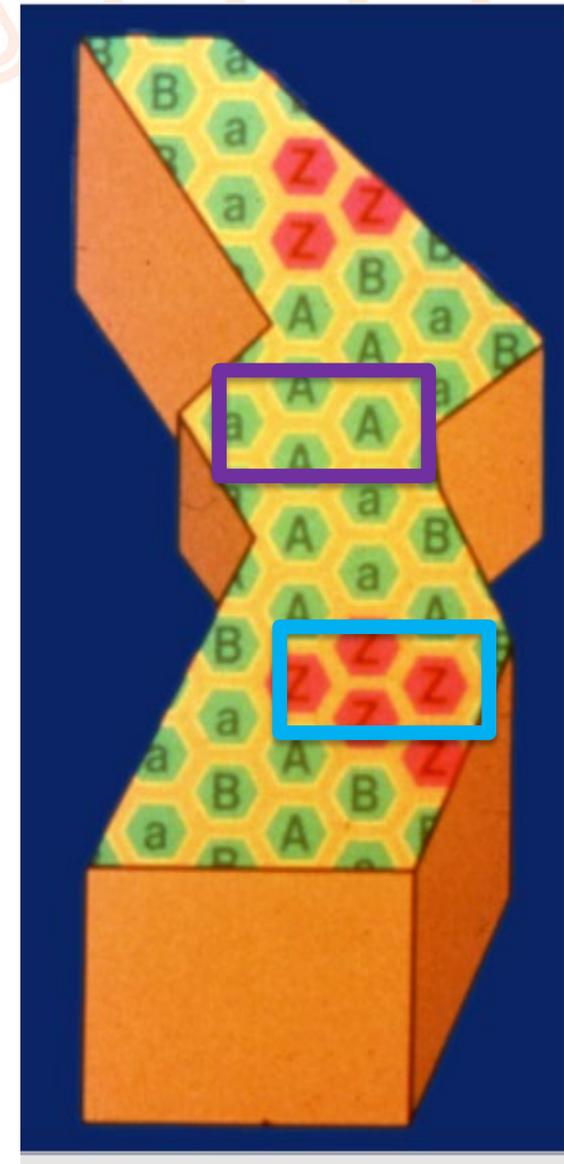
### Laboratory Processing:

- Air dry soil in a cool location
- Sieve through a 2-mm screen<sup>2</sup>
- Send all results for scoring to:  
[SoilHealthTest@usda.gov](mailto:SoilHealthTest@usda.gov)

# Knowing the soil on field trial sites is important

- Soil are mapped by mapunit
- Nearly all mapunits contain multiple components
- Some components may be “different enough” to change soil response to management

**The SPSD is here to help**





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# Backup



# Environmental Compliance and Cultural Resources



- **National Environmental Policy Act**
- **National Historic Preservation Act**
- **Endangered Species Act**
- **Compliance activities must take place prior to any ground disturbance as part of CI&G projects.**

# Environmental Compliance and Cultural Resources

## On-Farm Trials

Project leads will communicate with an NRCS State office Point of Contact.

Projects with ground disturbance activities:

- ✿ NRCS staff must complete a field-level Environmental Evaluation (EE) before installation of practices commences
- ✿ EEs are completed by NRCS state office staff in the relevant project states;
- ✿ The state office staff may, in rare cases, request that the grantee prepare an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement; and
- ✿ The State Office will inform the Grantee when compliance efforts are complete and work in a particular field may begin.

