

# Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP)

Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Producer Volunteer Mentor Guide

Thank you for your interest in participating in the Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP).

We created CAMP as an employee development tool to help us accomplish our mission of delivering conservation solutions to support producers as they protect natural resources and feed a growing world, and fulfill our vision of a world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.

We are excited to partner with you through CAMP and know that your valuable knowledge and insights related to production agricultural and natural resources will strengthen our employees' knowledge, skills and abilities, helping us to improve our customer engagement and service to producers in the community.

This document is intended to be a brief, handy program user-guide. Please let your state point of contact or local District Conservationist know if you have any questions.

## Contacts and Communications

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### NRCS District Conservationist or State Point of Contact

- The person you should contact to express interest in participating in the program.
- May match you with a participating NRCS employee.

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### Participating NRCS Employee/Mentee

- The NRCS employee(s) whom you will mentor.
- Once the District Conservationist or state point of contact has matched you with a participating NRCS employee, the employee will be your main point of contact.
- The employee is responsible for driving the mentoring relationship and communicating with you to arrange convenient meeting times.

## Your Commitment

- Provide feedback to your local District Conservationist about your mentee's growth and development over the course of the program.
- Engage on your operation with the participating employee(s) 6-12 times per year, for up to 1.5 years. This timeline is a starting point and can be modified based on your availability.
- Help your mentee improve their knowledge and awareness of production agriculture and conservation in your area, based on their needs and interests, and what you think is important for them to know.
- Adhere to the principles in the "Mentor Personal Conduct Agreement" (on p.4).

## Broad Program Learning Goals

We designed this program to give our employees an opportunity to grow their expertise, gain valuable additional experience engaging with producers, and expand their knowledge of production agriculture, all the while enhancing their capacity to provide excellent customer service. With these goals in mind, we identified a set of broad learning and knowledge objectives for this program, which are listed in the table below.

Please note, these objectives are guidelines and not prescriptive: we want to give mentors and employees some areas to focus on, while recognizing that each mentoring relationship is unique and will naturally feature the particular interests and passions of the people involved.

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### **Production agriculture in their local areas**

- Crops and why they're grown there
- Seasonality of crop and livestock production cycles and forest management cycles (e.g., planting, harvesting, etc.)
- Equipment and machinery
- Cultural factors and influences
- Inputs (e.g., chemicals, fertilizers, seed, irrigation, etc.)
- Labor and labor issues
- Cost considerations (e.g., inputs, leases, loans, equipment, contractors, etc.)
- Customer markets and price trends
- Risks (e.g., weather, financial, etc.)
- Environmental policies and regulations
- Stakeholders (e.g., NRCS, FSA, districts, insurance companies, landlords, etc.)

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### **Local resource concerns**

- On-land soil, water, air, plant, animal, human and energy problems (declining ground water, salinity, etc.)
- Causes of on-land problems/resource concerns
- Emerging trends and resource issues

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### **How NRCS and producers address local resource concerns**

- Appropriate practices for the local area and why those practices are used
- Basic costs and benefits of conservation practices
- See existing conservation practices on the land and understand the "story" of the practices
- Ways NRCS employees can help producers overcome barriers to participating in NRCS conservation programs

## Suggested List of Activities

We suggest a list of activities you can do with your mentee to get you started with CAMP. While these activities are basic, we hope they are helpful.

Please note, this program is designed for participating employees to safely and actively learn from producers, like you, through conversation and observation. To help ensure safety, mentees should not actively operate or physically get on equipment or other heavy machinery in the course of their participation in the program. In addition, mentees should not perform physical labor or provide conservation planning services.

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### Ask your mentee about...

- Where they're from
- How long they've been working with NRCS
- Where else they have worked
- What their goals are for the program
- Specific things they'd like to learn about
- What questions they have for you

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### Tell your mentee about...

- What you produce on your operation and why
- How long you've been operating your business
- Your current and future goals for your operation
- How your work changes from season to season
- Production practices you use and why you use some practices instead of others
- Equipment you use, why you use it and when you use it
- How you've adapted to changing technologies and tools
- Conservation practices you use and have used in the past
- Conservation practices you have planned
- Some challenges you're currently facing
- Some challenges you anticipate facing in the future
- Some challenges you've overcome in the past and how you overcame them
- Conservation programs you've participated in

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### Show your mentee...

- The layout of your operation
- Agricultural practices you use
- Equipment you use
- Conservation practices you've implemented
- Places you plan to implement conservation practices

Consider reviewing the program learning goals on the previous page for additional ideas for what you could talk about and do with your mentee.

You might also consider connecting with the local District Conservationist or state point of contact to identify particular things they may want your mentee to learn or do.

## **CAMP Mentor Personal Conduct Agreement**

Volunteer mentors agree to do the following for the duration of their program participation:

- Adhere to the program purpose and guidelines.
- Seek advance District Conservationist or state point of contact advice or approval related to any activities about which they are unsure fall within the scope of the program. Mentee learning activities should focus on conversation and observation. Activities that are specifically out of scope for the program include any activities in which the mentee would be operating heavy machinery, performing physical labor, or providing technical assistance.
- Ensure the safety of their NRCS mentees while they are on their operation or property.
- Not discriminate against any mentee because of race, color, national origin, sex, gender, age, religion, marital status, handicap or sexual preference.
- Not engage in any form of sexual harassment, including making deliberate or repeated unsolicited comments, gestures or physical contact of a sexual nature.
- Not make statements that inherently promote any political party or any candidate for federal, state or local office.
- Conduct themselves professionally and in such a manner as not to discredit themselves or NRCS.
- Communicate to the local District Conservationist any concerns related to NRCS mentee conduct observed while participating in the program.
- Inform the local District Conservationist when no longer willing or able to participate in the program.

## Conservation Agricultural Mentoring Program (CAMP) Lifecycle for Producer Volunteer Mentors

