

State Technical Committees serve in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on the implementation of the natural resource conservation provisions of Farm Bill legislation.

The statute authorizing State Technical Committees is found in **7 CFR §610.24**.

NRCS policy on State Technical Committees is found in **440 General Manual 501 Subpart C**

(<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/RollupViewer.aspx?hid=17101>)

Following is a summary of the USDA policy:

Committees are intended to include members from a wide variety of natural resource and agricultural interests, such as agricultural producers, owners and operators of nonindustrial private forest land, American Indian Tribes, agricultural and environmental organizations, and other professionals who represent a variety of interests and disciplines in the soil, water, wetlands, plant, and wildlife sciences.

The Committee is chaired by the NRCS State Conservationist in each State, and the State Conservationist determines who will be offered representation on the Committee. Individuals or groups wanting to participate as members on a State Technical Committee may submit requests to the State Conservationist explaining their interest and relevant credentials.

The Committees meet regularly at times determined by the State Conservationist to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to the State Conservationist, who strongly considers their advice. It is the responsibility of the State Technical Committee to:

- (1) Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
- (2) Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
- (3) Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.
- (4) Recommend State and national program policy based on resource data.
- (5) Review activities of the local working groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
- (6) Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.
- (7) Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

The role of the State Technical Committee is advisory in nature, and the Committee will have no implementation or enforcement authority. Members may be polled, but voting on issues is not appropriate. The NRCS reserves the authority to accept or reject the committee's recommendations. However, the State Conservationist will give strong consideration to the State Technical Committee's recommendations.

In some situations, specialized subcommittees composed of State Technical Committee members may be needed to analyze and refine specific issues. The State Conservationist may assemble certain committee members, including members of local working groups and other experts to discuss, examine, and focus on a particular technical or programmatic topic, or combination of such.

Specialized subcommittees are open to the public and may seek public participation, but they are not required to do so. Recommendations of specialized subcommittees will be presented in general sessions of State Technical Committees, where the public is notified and invited to attend.

NRCS policy on Local Working Groups is found in 440 General Manual 501 Subpart B

Following is a summary of the USDA policy:

Local working groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs. It is the responsibility of the local working group to:

- (1) Ensure that a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input.
- (2) Utilize the conservation needs assessment to help identify program funding needs and conservation practices.
- (3) Identify priority resource concerns and identify, as appropriate, high-priority areas needing assistance.
- (4) Recommend USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units), and payment rates.
- (5) Participate in multicounty coordination where program funding and priority area proposals cross county boundaries.
- (6) Assist NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.
- (7) Recommend State and national program policy to the State Technical Committee based on resource data.
- (8) Utilize the conservation needs assessment to identify priority resource concerns that can be addressed by USDA programs.
- (9) Forward recommendations to the NRCS designated conservationist or Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Executive Director, as appropriate.
- (10) Adhere to standard operating procedures identified in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 501, Subpart B, Section 501.14.

Local working group membership should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community. Membership should include agricultural producers representing the variety of crops, livestock, and poultry raised within the local area; owners of nonindustrial private forest land, as appropriate; representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations; and representatives of governmental agencies carrying out agricultural and natural resource conservation programs and activities.

Membership of the USDA local working group may include but is not limited to Federal, State, county, Tribal, or local government representatives. Examples of potential members include—

- (1) NRCS designated conservationist.
- (2) Members of conservation district boards or equivalent.
- (3) Members of the county FSA committee.
- (4) FSA county executive director or designee.
- (5) Cooperative extension (board members or manager).
- (6) State or local elected or appointed officials.
- (7) Other Federal and State government representatives.
- (8) Representatives of American Indian and Alaskan Native governments.

Local working groups provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for USDA conservation activities and programs. Local working groups are normally chaired by the appropriate soil and water conservation district (SWCD). In the event the SWCD is unable or unwilling to chair the local working group, NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist) is responsible for those duties.

The local working group should meet at least once each year at a time and place designated by the chairperson, unless otherwise agreed to by the members of the local working group. Other meetings may be held at the discretion of the chairperson.

Local working group meetings are open to the public and notification must be published at least 14 calendar days prior to the meeting in one or more newspapers, including recommended Tribal publications, to attain the appropriate circulation.

The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. Local working group recommendations are to be submitted to State Technical Committee chairperson, the district conservationist (or designated conservationist), or both (as appropriate) within 14 calendar days after a meeting.