

TSP Express

A report for certified Technical Service Providers
March 2004 **Report No. 2**



Finding Contract Work Through the Federal Government

Are you seeking contract opportunities with U.S. Department of Agriculture as a technical service provider (TSP)?

Certified TSPs can provide the same conservation technical services as NRCS employees by contracting with USDA or the landowner.

As a certified TSP, you are already listed in TechReg, NRCS web-based registry for technical service providers. Landowners use the

registry to select TSPs to provide technical services.

TechReg, an eGovernment initiative, is designed to improve customer service and make it easier to do business with the government. For more information about the President's Management Initiative, please visit http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budintegration/pma_index.html.

In addition to providing technical services through contracts directly with landowners, TSPs also have two other ways to obtain work through the federal government—Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps) or direct contact with a USDA-NRCS State Office.

Technical service providers can seek opportunities through FedBizOpps for contracts that exceed \$25,000. FedBizOpps allows commercial vendors to search, monitor and retrieve contracting opportunities offered by the entire federal government.

Here are the steps vendors can follow to locate contracting opportunities on FedBizOpps.

1. Visit the FedBizOpps website for work that exceeds \$25,000

- a. Visit <http://fedbizopps.gov/>.
- b. Click on the FedBizOpps VENDORS block at the center of the page.
- c. At the center of the Vendors page, click on the “Select One” box under “Acronym.” Scroll down to USDA and double click on that acronym.
- d. Find Natural Resources Conservation Service among the list of USDA agencies. Double click on “Locations” next to the agency’s name to see an alphabetical list of all NRCS acquisitions offices.
- e. Select an office or offices in the geographic area in which you have interest and you can view the pre-solicitations, solicitations, and contract awards.
- f. Download or print notices of interest to you. The information should contain the name and contact information of the NRCS contracting officer.

2. Contact NRCS state offices directly for contracts up to \$25,000

For contracts up to \$25,000, a vendor must contact the NRCS State Office directly to learn whether any opportunities exist. Please visit the national NRCS website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html> for a list of NRCS state offices.

New Conservation Software Helps Technical Service Providers and Producers

USDA-NRCS’ recently announced partnership with John Deere Ag Management Solutions will provide conservation planning software tools for producers and technical service providers. The tool—called Conservation Plug-In—will enable producers to complete certain activities electronically, similar to e-filing tax returns.

Conservation Plug-In, which will be available in late Fall 2004, allows producers and technical service providers to record farm and field data, schedule conservation practices, report completion of practices, and attach certification documentation. Electronic assistance for developing conservation plans will also be available with the new software.

By using Conservation Plug-In, technical service providers can manage conservation plans and cost-share agreement records for producers using their services. For additional information on Conservation Plug-In, contact Jack Carlson, NRCS Information Technology Center Director, jcarlson@itc.nrcs.usda.gov or phone 970-295-5455.

Verifying Credentials

NRCS is conducting telephone interviews to verify the qualifications of certified technical service providers. The interviews, which will run from February through March 2004, are being conducted by the NRCS National Oversight and Evaluation staff. A verification of qualifications by certification category is being made on a randomly selected number of certified TSPs. Credentials such as licenses, certifications and references listed on the TSP's resume and profile also will be checked.

Evaluating Comments on TSP Interim Final Rule

NRCS is evaluating comments on its TSP Interim Final Rule. The agency is also considering needed operational adjustments to be addressed in final rule publication.

A multidisciplinary working group is evaluating public comments, policy, and guidance issues. After careful consideration of the comments regarding the current provisions of the interim final rule, this group will recommend needed changes to the rule to NRCS Chief Bruce Knight.

A final rule should be available for review and comment in the Federal Register later this year.

NRCS' Role in Training Technical Service Providers

NRCS has established a policy that explains its role in training technical service providers.

NRCS will perform the following tasks pertaining to training:

- Participate in the development and review of TSP training materials
- Involve NRCS specialists and field staff in train-the-trainer activities to ensure that competent instructors are available to train TSPs
- Refrain from using NRCS specialists and field staff as instructors to train TSPs. However, NRCS will provide interim, limited training directly to TSPs until a sufficient number of competent instructors are identified and trained.

For more information about the agency's role in training TSPs, please visit the NRCS Electronic Directives website at <http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov>. Click on the National Bulletins document and scroll down to No. 450-4-3 and click on the number to open. Other NRCS-issued policies and procedures can be found on this website by clicking on other documents, including the General Manual, Handbooks, Technical Notes, and User Guides.

Understanding NRCS's Field Office Technical Guide

A new training course, "Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide," is available through the National Employee Development Center (NEDC) website at <http://www.nedc.nrcs.usda.gov/>. The online course provides a thorough introduction and understanding of how the FOTG is organized and how to access its resources. All TSPs, as well as new NRCS field office employees, will be required to complete the course and pass it with a correct score of at least 80 percent.

Certified TSPs should take the course as soon as possible and add the certificate of completion to their certification documents. The course may take several hours to complete, depending on one's previous knowledge of the FOTG.

Editor's Note – TSP will feature information on training opportunities in each report. Below is the feature for this issue:

Hands-On Training on Nutrient Management

The University of Tennessee (UT) offers a three-day training session on all aspects of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP). Participants learn about CNMP development by working through a sample CNMP on an actual dairy farm in Tennessee. To become a certified CNMP TSP, the participant must complete an exam and one actual plan that must be reviewed by a board of experts consisting of UT and NRCS representatives.

Participants must also complete all the NRCS training required by NRCS 180-General Manual (GM), Part 409. This policy establishes the minimum standards for providers of conservation technical assistance associated with CNMPs. Completion of all phases of the program provides the basis for certification in the following CNMP Plan Development categories noted on TechReg: Land Treatment; Manure and Wastewater Storage and Handling; Nutrient Management; and Total Plan. UT maintains a registry of certified CNMP providers and ensures that all continuing education requirements are current.

Originally, this program was designed to train a cadre of TSPs to develop CNMPs for Tennessee producers. The program's scope expanded nationally when USDA and UT signed a Memorandum of Understanding in April 2003. This means that UT certified CNMP providers can do this work nationally if they comply with state and local regulations where the work is being done.

Additional information on the UT CNMP Certification Program can be found at <http://techreg.usda.gov> or <http://wastemgmt.ag.utk.edu/cnmpcertification.htm>.

Funding Distribution for Technical Service Providers; Fiscal 2004 Funding

NRCS obligated more than \$23.9 million in Fiscal Year 2003 to ensure landowners received the technical assistance necessary to help them reach their conservation goals. NRCS obligated these funds through various agreements and contracts. Dollars dedicated to a contract or agreement will be paid once the technical services are completed.

Fiscal Year 2003 Funding for Technical Service Providers

Technical Service Provider Category	Fiscal 2003 Funds Obligated (\$)
Conservation Districts	9,485,280.27
Private Sector	7,831,235.90
State Agencies	5,058,401.48
Non-Governmental Organizations	637,171.00
Universities	433,047.00
Resource Conservation and Development	325,300.00
Indian Tribes	127,990.00
Local Governments	1,884.00
TOTAL	23,900,309.65

Fiscal Year 2004 Funding for Technical Service Providers

Funds for Fiscal 2004 are almost double last year's obligated funds. NRCS expects to invest \$40 million into its technical service provider process this fiscal year.

FIELD FOCUS – MINNESOTA



From left to right – Hugh Rieger, Itasca County farmer, and Mike Oja, district conservationist for Itasca County, shake hands while TSP Quintin Legler looks on.

NRCS in Minnesota completed its first conservation project using a private technical service provider. Itasca County landowner Hugh Rieger worked with a private TSP to plan and complete 25 acres of forestland improvements.

Rieger is a participant in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). His EQIP contract includes two forestry practices, 150 acres of tree planting, and 100 acres of chemical site preparation for reforestation. He owns and operates one of the largest logging companies in Northern Minnesota.

Rieger became interested in using a TSP after he received a letter from Mike Oja, his local district conservationist, alerting him to this new opportunity. There were two TSPs certified to provide forestry conservation practices where Rieger farms in Itasca County.

To date, Minnesota has 105 certified TSPs statewide. Three hundred and thirty approved EQIP participants opted to use TSPs in 2003. "We are working to expand the private sector TSP market across the state in order to meet the growing demands for conservation technical assistance," said Paul Flynn, State TSP Coordinator.

For More Information

For more information on technical service providers, visit the TechReg site at <http://techreg.usda.gov>; write to Technical Service Provider Group, Conservation Engineering Division, USDA-NRCS, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013; or send an e-mail to tspg@nrcs.usda.gov.

National Technical Service Provider Contact
Gary Gross, 202-720-4719

State Technical Service Provider Contacts
<http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>

Your Feedback is Needed

This is the second issue of TSP Express, a report for certified TSPs. We are seeking topics for future issues. Please send comments to tspg@nrcs.usda.gov.

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