

TSP Express

A report for Technical Service Providers
Spring 2009 Report No. 12

Dave White is appointed as Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service



Dave White was named Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on March 24, 2009. He began his 32-year career with NRCS as a conservation aid in Missouri. Subsequently, he has served the Agency in South Carolina, Montana, and its Washington, D.C. headquarters. As Chief, he leads 12,000 employees and manages a budget in excess of \$3 billion.

From 2002 to 2008, Mr. White was assigned as the NRCS State Conservationist in Montana. For much of 2007 and 2008, he was also detailed to Senator Tom Harkin's Capitol Hill office, where he helped the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry craft the Conservation Title of the 2008 Farm Bill.

His earlier jobs in the Washington, D.C. area include two details to the staff of Senator Richard Lugar, in support of agriculture committee work on energy and alternative fuels and the 2002 Farm Bill, and a tour as Director of Communications for the White House Task Force for Livable Communities.

Mr. White is an honors graduate of the University of Missouri, where he studied agriculture. He and his wife have a grown son and daughter.

New Technical Service Provider Payment Rates

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (FCEA) of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) directs NRCS to consider NRCS, market, and procurement cost data when establishing technical service payment rates (TSPR). The Technical Service Provider (TSP) Interim Final Rule provides the following direction:

“(2) Establishing TSP payment rates.

(i) NRCS will establish guidelines to analyze the local pricing information using a standardized method.

(ii) The State Conservationist will establish TSP payment rates in each State for the various categories of technical services. The State Conservationist will determine the rates according to local NRCS cost data, procurement data, and market data.

(iii) NRCS at the National Office will review and approve State payment rates to ensure consistency where similar resource conditions and agricultural operations exist. Payment rates may vary to some degree between or within States due to differences in State laws, the cost of doing business, competition, and other variables.”

Formerly, TSPRs were only based on the local NRCS cost for providing a technical service. The intent of the new rule is to change the rate setting methodology to reflect local market rates. State Conservationists must evaluate new TSPRs using an interim spreadsheet system, while they wait for a Web-based application to calculate the rates, which should be available by the end of the calendar year. Market data must be gathered from local service providers and TSPs; procurement data must be gathered using NRCS contracts and agreements. All three methods, where available, will be utilized in making a TSPR determination. It is understood that local markets may not have rates developed for all practices, and that the rates may vary across the State depending on local conditions and availability of services.

The inclusive cost analysis process for the new fiscal year (FY) 2009 TSPRs provides a reliable source for determining cost of conservation practices. It is expected that the new rates will enhance participation of TSPs in NRCS programs.

New Guidance on TSP Certification Requirements

The 2008 Farm Bill also directs NRCS to establish national TSP certification criteria, and to develop an approval process for additional requirements at the State level. The purpose of the approval process is to only establish State requirements when absolutely necessary. However, State law supersedes any NRCS requirements.

Barriers to TSP Implementation

We continue to hear that TSPs are frustrated when they return to TechReg after several months to discover that their passwords have expired. Security protocols expire passwords after a certain period of inactivity. Instead of prompting for a new password, the system locks users out and requires Help Desk assistance, a time consuming process.

Contact the Help Desk using the link on the TechReg Web site (<http://techreg.usda.gov/>) and ask for a new temporary password. To avoid renewing passwords, TSPs should use their password monthly.



New Conservation Activity Plans Provide Work for TSPs

The 2008 Farm Bill provides authority to NRCS for practice payments through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which include:

“conservation activities involving the development of plans appropriate for the eligible land of the producer, including – comprehensive nutrient management planning; and
other plans that the Secretary determines would further the purposes of the program...”

For approved conservation practices, the Statute allows EQIP payments for up to a maximum percentage of 75 percent of the estimated incurred costs for practice implementation, for the development of a conservation activity plan (up to 90 percent for Historically Underserved producers).

NRCS Chief White has approved the use of 12 types of conservation activity plans on a pilot basis, which States may offer through EQIP during FY 2009. For State-selected conservation activity plans of the 12 approved types, EQIP payments will only be made to producers for TSP plan development. The TechReg Web site now includes TSP category requirements for the 12 types of approved conservation activity plans.

Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan – Written
Forest Management Plan – Written
Grazing Management Plan – Written
Integrated Pest Management Plan – Written
Irrigation Water Management Plan – Written
Agricultural Energy Management Plan – Written
Comprehensive Air Quality Management Plan – Written
Drainage Water Management Plan – Written
Conservation Plan Supporting Transition from Irrigation to Dry-land Farming Plan – Written
Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition – Written
Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Plan – Written

The conservation activity plans are being implemented as a pilot program during FY 2009. State Conservationists may consult with partners to choose conservation activity plans. Access the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) for information on which conservation activity plans were chosen by your State Conservationist. To access the FOTG, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/> and choose your State; then navigate to Section III, which will appear on the left of your State FOTG main page. In Section III, the conservation activity plan link will list available plans for your State.

Visit <http://techreg.usda.gov/> or contact your State Conservationist for more information on conservation activity plans and certification.

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For More Information

For more information on TSPs, visit the TechReg Web site at <http://techreg.usda.gov>; or write to Angel Figueroa, National TSP Team Leader, Science and Technology Deputy Area, USDA-NRCS, Post Office Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013-2890; telephone: (202) 720-6731, or e-mail at Angel.Figueroa@wdc.usda.gov.

State TSP Contacts

<http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>

Your Feedback is Needed

This is the twelfth issue of “TSP Express, a report for TSPs.” We are seeking topics for future issues. Please send comments to tsp@wdc.usda.gov.

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