

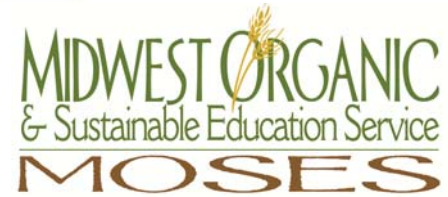
Become a Technical Service Provider!

Help Write NRCS Conservation Activity Plans for Transitioning to Organic Farming



CENTER for
RURAL AFFAIRS
Lyons, NE 68038 Population 963

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized a new type of Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), which allows farmers to receive cost share to help them prepare a plan for transitioning land to organic production. The organic Conservation Activity Plan can be written both for farmers who are new to organic and for those who are adding more land to their existing operation.



The farmer must first apply to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for cost share on this activity. If the application is approved, the farmer can hire a Technical Service Provider (TSP) who will write the plan.



Who can be a Technical Service Provider?

Technical Service Providers are individuals, private businesses, nonprofit organizations and public agencies outside of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These people help farmers and ranchers apply conservation practices on the land. To qualify, they must first be approved by the NRCS.

Technical Service providers offer a needed service to farmers wanting to transition to organic. The activity also provides an employment opportunity for those who qualify. Fees for a Technical Service Provider's services are cost shared by the NRCS in the amount of \$1200-\$1800 or more when negotiated with the farmer.

How do you qualify?

The NRCS website – <http://techreg.usda.gov> – lists all approved Technical Service Providers and the technical areas in which they are approved. TSPs are added to the NRCS list after meeting a variety of educational, experience and training criteria. NRCS online training is available at AgLearn – <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>. Some states require additional classroom training for some topics.

A Technical Service Provider can be approved for one or many different activities including pest management plans, nutrient management plans, grazing plans, and helping farmers implement specific NRCS practices for which they have received cost-share funds. The farmer CANNOT use NRCS funds to pay someone for planning unless that person has gone through the TSP approval process and is specifically listed in a particular state for that activity. Technical Service Provider approval is done state by state, but once you are approved in one state, it is much easier to get approval in adjoining states.

The TSP approval process includes proof of training and/or knowledge of the specific area under which you are requesting to be listed. For the Conservation Activity Plan specific to the Transition to Organic, since it is a very new program, clear criteria for all aspects of the approval process have not been developed yet. Not all states have chosen to include this CAP option for their farmers, although most of the states in the Upper Midwest have approved this.

One of the stumbling blocks to implementing this organic CAP is the lack of certified TSPs in each state. Even if the state you wish to work in does not currently include organic CAPs in their offering, if you get approved as a TSP, NRCS would be more likely to include this activity in the following year. Decisions on whether or not to have specific CAPs or practices are made on a year-to-year basis. The criteria for writing organic CAPs are determined by the National NRCS office.

How do I learn more?

Contact **Wyatt Fraas**, Center for Rural Affairs, 402.254.6893 or wyattf@cfra.org or **Harriet Behar**, Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, harriet@mosesorganic.org. This information was made possible by the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, www.sare.org/ncsare; the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, www.mosesorganic.org; and the Center for Rural Affairs, www.cfra.org.