



# TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDER NETWORK MAKING CONSERVATION A PRIORITY

## Notes from the President

*by Jason Olmstead*  
**TSPN President**



In the past year, we have seen many changes in the US agricultural community. Weather, economics, global trends, and regulations have forced us to stay on our toes. For most Technical Service Providers (TSP) this has meant spending more hours talking with producers, developing plans, keeping up with changes to planning criteria, rising costs, and the showing producers the value of conservation.

Just in the last few months, TSP's have seen some updates to the USDA-NRCS websites. The biggest changes coming to the AgLearn+ and the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (EFTOG). The EFTOG received some much-needed updates and now seems more stable and user-friendly. AgLearn+ though has had some growing pains. NRCS still in the process of transferring data from prior October 2017 from the old system. Anything completed after October 2017 should be in the new system. Therefore, if you login and your old courses are not there give it some time. AgLearn promise they will be there. However, any courses you took in the old system will not have printable certificates available in the new system.

Some of you may have heard talk from NRCS or a fellow TSPN member of a new "TechReg" platform coming. It is still in development and testing according to NRCS and hopefully will be available later this year. It has been in need of an upgrade and we at TSPN got a first look at a draft of the new site at our annual meeting in September. The changes look promising and we look forward to seeing the coming changes.

One of the hot topics of the year was the CAP Harmonization to ensure more consistency, clarity and efficiency for NRCS personnel as well as Technical Service Providers. We would like to thank all the TSP's and agency staff that took the time to review and comment on the proposed changes. With all the comments submitted by TSP's and agency staff. NRCS has pushed back the implementation timeline of the CAP Harmonization until FY2020 for now. They hope to have the documents finalized and ready for public review the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019.

As we look into the future of agriculture and conservation in our changing society, we must keep up with these changes. TSPN is committed to making conservation a priority by leveraging our connections with NRCS to keep our membership up to date with changes that effect producers and Technical Service Providers.

January Newsletter 2019



## 2018 TSPN Annual Meeting

*by Joe Lally*

**Executive Director**

**TSP-03-2472 ; CCA - 33422**



Technical Service Providers Network (TSPN) held it's Annual Meeting on September 7, 2018 at the Radisson Hotel in Ames, Iowa. Our annual meeting was well attended by both membership and supporting NRCS staff from Iowa and Nebraska. A short synopsis of the agenda is copied below for your review. We try to deliver content, along with knowledgeable speakers who actually are physically and intellectually involved in applied research, enterprise economics, and sustainability. While speakers can have single focus in their daily work, we can find ways to connect the dots to what we as TSP's need to know to do our work with farmers.

**Jamie Benning-ISU** – Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy – update

**Mark Licht- ISU** – Forecasting and Assessment of Cropping Systems

**Dennis Godar – TSPN President** - TSPN Annual meeting and Board Reorganization

**John Hubbert – Iowa Assistant State Conservationist** – Programs – Review of current year

**Tim Pilkowski – National TSP Team – Regional Certifier** – TSP Program – Future Opportunities

**Donna Brandt – U of Missouri, Research Specialist** – Soil Health, Soil Functions, Measurements

**Bill Reynolds – TSP-Reyco** – Forestry CAP's from a TSP perspective

**Andrew Hart – Wisconsin NRCS** – Forestry CAP's from NRCS perspective

**David Archer – PhD Economist** – USDA ARS – Conservation Management – What's It's Value

We were especially pleased to gain the networking and interaction from speakers travelling from Wisconsin, Missouri, Washington, D.C., California, and Dr. Archer's remote presentation from North Dakota. Iowa State University staff were very generous with their time, and helpful in our understanding of their important on-going work. **THANK YOU**

We now have a new board member from California, Dr. Doug Williams (see his newsletter article in this issue). Doug has agreed to help TSPN in education, training and to promote TSPN to potential TSP memberships in the western region of the US. Welcome Dr. Doug Williams !! I'd like to close this article by saying **THANK YOU** to our Board of Directors, all volunteers, who meet monthly via conference calls and who share the passion for TSP work. We're committed to serving our membership in any way we can that improves our partnership efforts with USDA-NRCS in communication with all stakeholders, quality assurance in planning, and delivering conservation to the landowners we call clients.



## 2019 TSPN Board

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**TSPN Board L-R:** Jeff Koops, Doug Williams, Dallas Heikens (Past President), Jason Olmstead, Dennis Godar, Joe Schultz and Joe Lally (Executive Director)



*by Dennis J Godar  
Past President*



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## Challenges for a New Year

As we begin a new year, I pause to consider a few of our accomplishments as an organization and also challenges for the new year. TSPN has come a long way since the first TSPN meeting back in 2013. TSPN has benefited from volunteer members of our Board of Directors over the years and their efforts have provided a strong foundation.

One milestone was establishing an Executive Director position, which is capably filled by Mr. Joe Lally. Another highlight was completion of a McKnight funded project that surveyed ag retailers, farmers and landowners to identify perceived barriers to delivery of conservation related services by ag-retailers. Also, TSPN representatives have traveled to Washington, DC three times to discuss policy issues and areas of concern for TSPs. TSPN has a voice and we have established an ongoing dialog with the national TSP team as well as several states that we work in.

### **A few of our continuing challenges for the New Year in my view are:**

- Grow our membership, the lifeblood of any organization.
- Deliver on our stated goals: to provide training opportunities and support for our members.
- Communicate with our TSPN members and NRCS through our newsletters, meetings, e-mails, surveys and the TSPN web-site (soon to be updated).

### **Tennessee Training Opportunity**

On November 13, 2018, our Executive Director, Joe Lally and I attended the Tennessee State Technical Committee Meeting in Murfreesboro Tennessee to represent TSPN. The State Technical Meeting was very informative, including an address from Tennessee's new State Conservationist, Mr. Sheldon Hightower.

After the STC meeting, Joe & I met with Danny Jones, TN-TSPN coordinator and Pat Turman, TN State Agronomist to discuss possible training topics of relevance for TSP's. We identified several areas of training that TSPs need and have requested in response to our surveys. The topics range from conservation training tools, including MMP, RUSLE-2, WIN-PST, to specific conservation activity plans including CNMP, NMP, IPM, Forestry & Grazing. Also, certification issues and tech-reg continue to be of paramount interest for TSPs, especially when it is time to recertify.

We are proposing to provide a 3 to 4-day training conference with concurrent sessions and breakout sessions for specific CAP plans. TSPN has been invited to bid on a forthcoming RFP to sponsor a training conference in 2019.

Stay tuned for dates and training topics if TSPN is successful winning a contract to sponsor and manage this training event. Many thanks are due to Joe Lally for spearheading this effort! I look forward to assisting Joe, Jason and the TSPN Board in this endeavor as "Past President".

**In closing,** I would like to thank everyone for supporting TSPN these last two years. I have enjoyed serving as TSPN President and am encouraged by our members that our efforts are worthwhile. I believe TSPN will continue to grow and become increasingly relevant to TSPs for training, education & serving as a liaison between TSPs and NRCS.



*by Dr. Doug Williams, P.E.  
At-Large Board Member*



## A View from California

Technical Service Providers (TSP's) in California comprise a diverse group – with over 50 professionals certified in California having performed almost 1300 conservation activity plans (CAP's) since 2005 on subjects including comprehensive nutrient management plans, forest management plans, pest management plans, energy audits, conservation plans supporting organic transition, and pollinator habitat management.

California's agriculture is very diverse. According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)<sup>1</sup>, California's agricultural abundance includes more than 400 commodities. Over a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts are grown in California. California is the leading US state for cash farm receipts, accounting for over 13 percent of the nation's total agricultural value. The top producing commodities for 2017 include:

- Dairy Products, Milk — \$6.56 billion
- Grapes — \$5.79 billion
- Almonds — \$5.60 billion
- Strawberries — \$3.10 billion
- Cattle and Calves — \$2.53 billion
- Lettuce — \$2.41 billion
- Walnuts — \$1.59 billion
- Tomatoes — \$1.05 billion
- Pistachios — \$1.01 billion
- Broilers — \$939 million

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2018 saw both good and bad things happening in California agriculture – good things such as high production in many categories – milk, almonds, grapes, see above; and bad things such as droughts lowering water supplies especially groundwater and devastating wildfires, the worst in history. California's recent drought and long dry season make it more susceptible to fire. In the past two years, uncontained wildfires have devastated over [7.3 million acres of land](#) in the golden state. That is about the size of Connecticut and New Jersey combined!<sup>2</sup> The majority of the 2017-2018 fires were contained within the forests and non-agricultural land, but a number of rangelands, cannabis farms, dairy farms, citrus groves, avocado orchards, and vineyards were affected, making an impact on growers and California's [\\$50 billion](#) agricultural industry. One example of these fire damages includes grapes which are vulnerable to smoke damage because of their permeable skin. Depending on fire intensity, length of smoke exposure and stage of vine growth, unharvested grapes can take on smoky, ashy, or bitter characteristics. Consumers find this "smoke taint" unappealing. Another example is the affect of fire on rangeland and pastures. The wildfires had an impact on the region's farms and ranches, burning buildings and the grazing land for dairy cows, cattle, horses, and other livestock. Butte County, where the 2018 Camp Fire raged, [suffered rangeland losses of 30,000 to 40,000](#) acres, displaced animals, and destroyed pens, corrals, barns and more.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/statistics/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.dirt-to-dinner.com/california-megafires-and-the-effects-on-agriculture/>



*by Tim Pilkowski  
National TSP Team  
Regional Certifier*

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## **NRCS Technical Service Provider Program Update**

### **TSP Certification Criteria Update**

Several changes were made to the TSP Certification and Development Criteria for Fiscal Year 2019 Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs). This is in part due to an effort to have more consistency across all the CAPs and to better align the plans more with the NRCS Conservation Planning process. Changes were made to:

1. Standardize Development and Certification Criteria in a consistent manner across all CAPs
2. Ensure consistency of products developed in the private sector to mimic those being developed internally by NRCS staff
3. Improve quality assurance of “acceptance” reviews at the field office level
4. Allow for more technological innovation and adoption from the private sector
5. Allow more opportunity for Conservation Activity Designs (CADs) and Conservation Activity Evaluations (CAEs)

Some of the more specific changes and training added to Certification Criteria include:

1. Number of sample plans required and specific training courses to be able to quantify knowledge of specific agency documents and processes. (2) sample plans are now required to be reviewed for all CAPs applied for.
2. Training course such as Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) training was added to address “knowledge of FOTG”.
3. “Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series modules 1-2” (S&T Training Library): No. 1: Primer on NRCS Environmental compliance and No.2: Documenting the Environmental Evaluation on the NRCS-CPA-52

For more information on CAPs and changes to Criteria, visit the TSP Website, or TechReg. For specific requirements within your State, visit your States FOTG website.

TSP Website:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/technical/tsp/>

TechReg: <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/>

### **Conservation Planning**

NRCS is placing a greater priority on conservation planning by initiating a robust training program for employees and partners to ensure competency in our workforce over the next five years. This is a product from several key partners, known as the National Conservation Planning Partnership, engaging with NRCS to determine thresholds of certification for apprentice planners, certified planners, and master planners.

Please visit the [eDirectives website](https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=42771.wba) and look up General Manual 180, Part 409 for details. Direct link to the policy is below.

<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=42771.wba>



USDA  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Research Service

# Cover Crop Chart



GROWTH CYCLE	PLANT ARCHITECTURE	RELATIVE WATER USE
A = Annual	∩ = Upright	● = Low
B = Biennial	* = Upright-Spreading	●● = Medium
P = Perennial	≡ = Prostrate	●●● = High

COOL			WARM						
--GRASS--		BROADLEAF						--GRASS--	
A ● ∩ ANNUAL FESCUE									A ● ∩ BROWNTOP MILLET
A ● ∩ BARLEY								A ● ∩ AMARANTH	A ● ∩ FOXTAIL MILLET
----- LEGUME -----									
A ●● ∩ OAT	A/B ● ∩ CAMELINA	A/P ● ∩ MUSTARD	A ●● ≡ BALANSA CLOVER	A ● * CHICKPEA	A/P ● ∩ MEDIC	A ● * COWPEA	A ● * CLUSTER BEAN	A ● ∩ BUCKWHEAT	A ●● ∩ PEARL MILLET
A ● ∩ SPELT	A ● ∩ PHACELIA	A/B ● ∩ CANOLA	A ●● ∩ BERSEEM CLOVER	A ● ∩ PEA	A ● ∩ LUPIN	A/P ● ∩ LABLAB	A/P ● ∩ JACK BEAN	A ●● ∩ QUINOA	A ●● ∩ PROSO MILLET
A ●● ∩ WHEAT	A ●● ∩ FLAX	A ●● ∩ RADISH	A ●● ∩ CRIMSON CLOVER	A ● * LENTIL	A ●● ∩ FABA BEAN	A/P ● ∩ FENUGREEK	A ● ∩ VELVET BEAN	P ●● ∩ CHICORY	A ●● ∩ GRAIN SORGHUM
A ●●● ∩ CEREAL RYE	A ●● ∩ KALE	B ●●● ∩ TURNIP	B/P ●● ∩ RED CLOVER	A/P ●● ∩ LESPEDEZA	A/B ●● ∩ SWEET CLOVER	A/P ● ∩ PIGEONPEA	A ●● ∩ MUNG BEAN	A ●●● ∩ CUCURBITA	A ●● ∩ SUDAN GRASS
A ●●● ∩ TRITICALE	A ●● ∩ SPINACH	B ●●● ∩ BEET	P ●● ∩ WHITE CLOVER	P ●● ∩ BIRDSFOOT TREFOIL	P ●●● ∩ ALFALFA	A ●● ∩ PARTRIDGE PEA	A ●● ∩ SOYBEAN	A ●●● ∩ SAFFLOWER	A ●● ∩ TEFF
P ● ∩ SALINE TOLERANT	A/B ●●● ∩ CHARD	A/B ●●● ∩ CARROT	P ●● ∩ KURA CLOVER	A/B ●● ∩ VETCH	P ●●● ∩ SAINFOIN	A ●● ∩ SUNNHEMP	A/P ●●● ∩ PEANUT	A ●●● ∩ SUNFLOWER	A ●●● ∩ CORN

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The Cover Crop Chart above is produced and distributed courtesy of the staff at the Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory at Mandan, ND.

