



## MAKING CONSERVATION A PRIORITY

by: Joe Schultz, TSPN Secretary

September 8th marked TSPN's 6th Annual Conference and Business Meeting. The beautiful Iowa day found roughly 45 individuals including TSPs from as far away as Vermont and Tennessee and many State and National NRCS representatives. Thanks to Jason Olmstead, we also had 8 people watching on Skype throughout the day.

The first speaker, Danny Jones, NRCS-TSP Coordinator for Tennessee, presented the State's success in recruiting and engaging TSPs. The second speaker, Dr. Chris Hay of the Iowa Soybean Association, spoke of edge-of-field practices that reduce nitrogen losses to water courses.

Next on the docket were Iowa NRCS representatives Marty Adkins and Kevin Kuhn providing an update on the status of Conservation Planning and the renewed emphasis on gaining partnership support. Clearly, the combined efforts will result in better and more complete farm conservation efforts.

After lunch, Tim Pilkowski from the National NRCS TSP Team spoke on the status of the overall Natural Resource Conservation Service. Most notably, Tim spoke on the employee caps being mandated on the agency and the recognition by the agency that TSPs will become a more critical and crucial partner in engaging farmers in conservation programs.

The next speaker was Dr. James Green. Dr. Green provided an overview of the CAP 110 Grazing Management Plan. As a TSP himself, he spoke on the difficulty of getting enough projects to sustain the business and make the

## TSPN Annual Meeting



TSPN Board and Executive Director

TSP certification worthwhile.

The final speaker was Stan Buman of Agren, Inc. Stan presented his company's Soil Conservation software and how to use the various features of soil calculator for addressing soil health.

The final order of business was the TSPN Annual Business Meeting. Approximately 25 TSPs were in attendance. The treasurer's report showed a positive balance and recent uptick in membership activity.

The main order of business was the election of a new board member. Nominations were received for Al Van Groew, a TSP engineer from Minnesota, and Angelica Hopp of Anez Consulting in Minnesota. After a closed ballot, Angelica Hopp was elected as the new board member of TSPN. Angelica is an experienced TSP, having authored over 50 CAP plans. She recognizes issues with the volumes of plans needing written by a limited number of TSPs.

## Technical Service Provider Network (TSPN)

She also looks forward to using TSPN as a voice to better coordinate TSP's and NRCS Agency Staff with producers. Please Welcome Angelica to TSPN and the TSPN board.

During the board re-organization of officers, President Dennis Godar then open nominations for officers positions on the board. Dennis agreed to continue as President for the remaining year of his 2-year term, Jason Olmstead was vice-president and president-elect, Joe Schultz will remain as secretary, Jeff Koops will remain as treasurer, and Dallas Heikens will remain as past-president. With the business meeting completed, a motion to adjourn was offered and the 6th Annual TSPN Conference and Business Meeting was called to a close.

## TSPN Goes to Washington D.C

TSPN President Dennis Godar and Executive Director Joe Lally have been invited to visit with Jimmy Bramblett, Deputy Chief of Programs at USDA-NRCS, and the national TSP team in Washington D.C. On the docket are discussions about how to forge additional NRCS-TSPN relationships.

Look for a report about the visit in the next TSPN Newsletter.

# TSPN Outreach Survey Results



Dennis Godar

**by:** Dennis Godar,  
President, Technical Service  
Providers Network

Earlier this year the TSPN board decided to contact members and potential members to gather information and feedback about TSP issues. We sent out a link to the 8 question survey to all of the 1200+ TSPs listed in TechReg.

We were encouraged by the 20% response rate (253 respondents) as well as the good ideas and positive responses we received.

We have learned a few things from our outreach survey:

1. TSPN has an opportunity to increase our membership numbers to become more effective advocates for TSP.
2. We can reach more of our members and potential members by doing a better job getting our newsletters and communications out to TSPs.
3. TSPs are expressing a need improved access to NRCS training
4. TSPs would like to improve dialog with NRCS to improve efficiencies of NRCS and private sector working together.

I hope TSPN can accomplish some of these goals and I ask for your help in doing this. Become a member if you are not already and help make TSPN a nationwide organization that can advocate for TSPs, be a partner in training for TSPs, and promote our common conservation goals with NRCS and landowners.

Following is the list of questions and a summary of the responses we received:

**Q1: How familiar are you with Technical Service Providers Network?**

- 46 current members
- 39 familiar but have not joined yet
- 144 have not heard of TSPN
- 4 no longer TSPN
- 18 not interested

**Q2: TSPN has published 4 newsletters; on our website (TSP-Network.org) and also electronic copies sent by email. Have you received our newsletters?**

- 27 received by email
- 3 downloaded from website
- 176 have not received the newsletters
- 75 requested to be added to the email list
- 8 not interested

**Q3: Would like to receive more information about TSPN?**

- 74 yes, by email
- 93 yes, send a brochure

**Q4: Our website is at TSP-Network.org. We are planning to add a page that lists our individual members and business members. Would you like to have your current TSP information (from TechReg) listed on the TSPN website?**

- 167 yes
- 59 no

**Q5: We are interested in learning about the work you do. Please check the appropriate categories for your TSP business:**

- 26 full-time TSP
- 11 full-time TSP with employees
- 27 work with company with more than one TSP
- 162 work with a company that does other business as well as TSP work

**Q6: TSPN is an association that wants to support our membership and expand our membership. Please list one, two, or three services that you would like to have TSPN provide:**

Had 100 respondents with 173 suggestions; it is a challenge to summarize 173 individual responses, and every suggestion is important. Here are the top 10 areas by subject category:

- Help with NRCS-TSP communication issues
- Help with TSP certification and recertification issues
- Advocate for TSPs with marketing, networking, business and payment issues
- Expand TSPN to include forester TSPs and forestry issues
- Provide more access to required TSP training
- CNMPs and NMP issues
- TechReg issues
- CAP plan reviews and quality control issues
- Work with states' technical committees to improve dialog with NRCS and conservation stakeholders
- Partner with other associations such as American Association of Agronomy, Society of American Foresters, American Forage & Grassland Council, etc.

**Q7: Many of our TSPN members are in Iowa and surrounding states; consequently, our annual meetings have been held in Iowa. Would you be interested to attend TSPN meetings or training events if held closer to your area?**

- 120 yes
- 77 no
- 83 suggestions for venues around the country

**Q8: One last question! Please make some suggestions for TSP training events that TSPN may be able to help provide:**

Had 81 respondents with 151 suggestions. Here are the top 5 training suggestions by subject matter:

- CAP plan templates, expectations, review process
- Forestry topics
- Grazing topics
- Certification issues, navigating Tech Reg
- CNMPs & NMPs



## McKnight Foundation Grant:

*What are the “barriers” to ag retailers offering conservation services?*

by: Joe Lally,  
Executive Director, Technical Service Providers Network

This grant was received in the fall of 2014, and completed in May of 2017. Phase 1 was an interview with 15 general managers of ag input and service providers from across Iowa. Most were full service companies who offer inputs through grain marketing services. Phases 2 and 3 were farmers and absentee landowners who agreed to attend a meeting to discuss the same topics as the managers in the previous group. An advisory committee to laid out the foundation of our poll and validated that our questions provided answers to certain topics, as well as protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

### Key Findings:

1. Farmers are not asking the Ag Retailers to assist with conservation planning.
2. Ag Retailers are not comfortable having these conversations for fear of losing the farm customer.
3. A lack of cost-benefit information inhibits a good discussion about the advantages of conservation and where the practices could fit into the whole farm business plan.

As we review the final report, I would make a couple anecdotal observations: farmers are very private and tend to view conservation as a personal decision. Several times we heard comments like “how can we get help to prioritize conservation based on impact and cost?”

The full report can be accessed at the Technical Service Providers Network (TSPN) by clicking on the link: <http://tsp-network.org/twp/resources-links/> and then click on McKnight Foundation Grant.

## TSPN BOARD CONTACT LIST

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Executive Director	Joe Lally	lally@tsp-network.org	712.263.9729

## TSPN Annual Meeting Agenda Sept. 8, 2017 (see meeting recap on page 1)

9:00 - 9:15 am	Registration	
9:15 - 9:30 am	Welcome	Dennis Godar - TSPN President Joe Lally - Executive Director
9:30 - 10:15 am	Tech Reg updates, Certification issues	Danny Jones, TSP coordinator, TN
10:15 - 11:00 am	“Nitrogen Reduction Practices: Overview, Relative Performance, and Economic Considerations” (CEUs applied for)	Dr. Chris Hay - Iowa Soybean Association
11:00 - 11:20 am	IA NRCS-TSP issues Conservation Planning	Marty Adkins/Kevin Kuhn - Iowa NRCS
11:20 - 11:45 am	TSPN Member/TSP Survey Summary of Results -	Dennis Godar - TSPN President
11:45 am - 12:10 pm	Lunch Buffet	(Included with membership dues)
12:10 - 12:30 pm	Luncheon speakers: The Beginning of TSPN - why, how, when	Judy Martinson, Resource Conservationist
12:30 - 1:00 pm	TSP Program, Future opportunities State by State differences	Tim Pilkowski, Regional Certifier, Technical Service Provider Team
1:00 - 1:30 pm	NRCS TSPN Questions & TSP Issues	Panel: Tim Pilkowski, Danny Jones IA NRCS (to be determined)
1:30 - 2:45 pm	CAP-110, Grazing Management Plans, (CEUs applied for)	Dr. James Green, Jr., PhD Grassland Agronomist, (video link)
2:45 - 3:30 pm	Conservation Analyzer, Image Data tool for conservation practices. (CEU's applied for)	Stan Buman, Agren, Inc
3:30 - 4:15 pm	TSPN Annual Meeting 1. Special election-board members 2. Treasurers Report - Membership update 3. Membership drive	
4:15 - 4:30 p.m.	Board Reorganization	TSPN Board and TSP Liaisons



## Don't Treat Your Soil Like Dirt: Take the 1% Challenge

by: Kurt Simon,  
Iowa NRCS State Conservationist

Many of the benefits from improving soil health don't happen overnight. They build over time, as farmers consistently implement soil health practices like no-till, cover crops and crop rotations. But there is a way to monitor progress: measuring the amount of organic matter in your soil.

First conceived by the late District Conservationist Brad Harrison from Adel, **The 1% Challenge** encourages farmers to commit to a long-term plan to increase their soil's organic matter by 1 percent. Soil organic matter is decomposed plant and animal material in your soil. This material gives your soil good tilth, a dark color, better water holding capacity, improved water infiltration rates, and contributes to overall soil fertility. It also happens to be a very good indicator of improved soil health.

### *How much will it take to increase my soil organic matter by 1%?*

Soil organic matter is increased through substantial increases in organic materials, like roots, residue, compost and manure in the soil. Only 10% of the organic material added each year actually remains in the soil. Because of this, building a 1% organic matter increase will require 200,000 pounds of material, or the equivalent of 167 round bales of cornstalks per acre.

### *Sound impossible? It's not!*

Depending on your original organic matter levels, soil types and crop rotations, it is possible to increase organic matter at an average rate of 0.1% per acre per year

through no-till farming and planting a mixed cover crop each fall. After 10 years, that's a 1% increase.

### *Why is it worth it?*

While each operation's expenses are unique, we have put together these estimates to illustrate the economic impact of improving soil organic matter:

- Each year, 1% of soil organic matter per acre releases \$15.70 worth of nutrients.
- Eliminating tillage will save approximately \$3.50 in fuel costs per acre per year.
- Utilizing cover crops may reduce the need for herbicides by about \$16.20 per acre per year.
- An average increase of 5 bu./acre in soybean yields following cover crops can earn an additional \$50 per acre per year.

Based on these calculations, in an average year of a corn/soybean rotation, your bottom line could improve by more than \$60 per acre. PLUS, this significant increase in organic matter can hold 9/10" of plant-available water, reducing the potential for erosion due to runoff by 15%.

### *So, how do you get started?*

Establish a baseline by completing a routine soil test with an organic matter calculation. In addition, conduct a soil health assessment in your field by recording soil temperatures, counting earthworms, calculating water infiltration rates, and testing for compaction. We also recommend having a certified lab conduct a soil health analysis, such as the Haney test or the Cornell Soil Health Test.



The next step is to develop a soil health management plan, and that's where NRCS can help. After discussing your goals and evaluating your current operation plan, we can recommend the types of practices and changes in management that will help you improve soil health and build organic matter.

And finally, monitor and document your progress each year. Items to record include crops planted, fertilizer and pesticides applied, weed pressure, yield and soil health assessments results (temperature, earthworm counts, infiltration rates, etc.). In year 4 or 5, conduct another soil test battery. Did your soil organic matter increase by a half percent? If so, you are on the right track. If not, take time to evaluate your management (NRCS can help) and make adjustments if necessary.

Interested in taking **The 1% Challenge**? You can find more resources, fact sheets and soil assessment worksheets on the Iowa NRCS website at [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov).



TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDER NETWORK  
MAKING CONSERVATION A PRIORITY

## *Presidents Award*

*presented to*

*Judy Martinson*

*"In recognition of your leadership and commitment to the ideals established by USDA-NRCS for quality and comprehensive trained TSP's and for your unwavering support of the Technical Service Providers Network, we are presenting this first-ever Presidents Award in your honor with sincere appreciation and gratitude."*

*-The Board of Directors and Membership*



United States Department of Agriculture

October 11, 2017

Dear TSPN Board of Directors and Membership,

I wanted to take a moment to extend my most sincere thanks to the Technical Service Provider Network (TSPN) for choosing me as your first Presidential Award recipient. As I realized that Dallas was presenting me with an award, I was so completely overwhelmed with emotions that I was unable to find the appropriate words to properly thank TSPN for the honor you bestowed upon me. I felt pleased, honored and humbled at the ceremony and I continue to be touched by your thoughtfulness each time I look at this award.

I wish there was a way to reach out to each of you individually and tell you how much my decade as the Iowa Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Technical Service Provider (TSP) Coordinator meant to me. The highlight of that period are my memories of working with you to establish the TSPN. I am so very proud of the growth of the organization and your dedication to education and conservation. I saw the pride you took in TSPN's role in delivering comprehensive conservation training to Technical Service Providers. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to play a role in the development of quality training strategies for conservation planning.

To the extent that I was honored at your annual meeting for of my leadership and commitment to the ideals established by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/NRCS to develop a skilled workforce of Technical Service Providers, all I can say is that you motivated me to strive for excellence in my work. You deserved the best and I tried very hard to give you my best every day.

Thank you again for the honor you gave to me with this award. As I move toward the end of my NRCS career, this award will continue to motivate me in whatever opportunities I encounter during the next chapter of my life. I can only hope that this next chapter brings me as much joy as I found in being your NRCS Technical Service Provider Coordinator.

Sincerely and Gratefully Yours,

*Judy Martinson*

Judy Martinson  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Resource Conservationist



*Dallas Heikens presents Judy Martinson with the TSPN Presidents Award at the 2017 TSPN Annual Meeting*



## 2017 TSPN Meeting Highlights



Danny Jones during his presentation



Chris Hay speaks during the ISA Presentation



Tim Pilkowski speaks with the TSPN banner in the background



Small group networking during the Annual Meeting



### Do you recognize this TSP?

Send your guesses to Joe Lally at [jotbud1@gmail.com](mailto:jotbud1@gmail.com).

The winner will get \$25 off their current membership dues! Good luck!

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