



MAKING CONSERVATION A PRIORITY

# Technical Service Provider Network (TSPN)



IN THIS ISSUE

## TSPN Participates in Feedlot Forums

by Mike Sexton, TSPN President

Mike Sexton, TSPN President, participated in two Feedlot Forums on March 23, 2014. The Iowa Cattlemen's Association hosted the event. The Feedlot Forums were held to help producers with the EPA/DNR process and to introduce members to Technical Service Providers who would be able to assist them with preparing plans and site evaluations.

Justine Stevenson, ICA's government relation and public policy director, says the work-plan agreement made by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in

September 2013 indicates that feedlots that have not been evaluated by DNR will receive one within the next four years.

Mike Sexton reported to the TSPN board that the meetings were a huge success, and there was great interest by producers in using TSPs to evaluate their feedlots and write their DNR plan. Mike suggested that TSPN use these outreach opportunities to share contact information with fellow TSPN members.

TSPN members who are interested in participating in outreach activities are encouraged to contact a board member. Board member contact information is located on page 4.

*TSPN President, Mike Sexton, and TSPN Secretary, Dallas Heikens, provided Iowa producers with information about TSPs at the Feedlot Forum.*



## TSPN to Host 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting

A column break is inserted before and after each column that acts as a sidebar. To insert a column break, press Ctrl+Shift+Enter. Or, on the **Page Layout** tab, in the **Page Setup** group, click **Breaks**, and then click **Column**.

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## TSPN Co-sponsors NRCS Training

To view column breaks, section breaks, and other formatting marks, on the **Home** tab, in the **Paragraph** group, click the paragraph mark icon.

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# Welcome to Our First Newsletter!

by Joe Lally, Board Treasurer

We are approaching our first anniversary of TSPN and believe after our first organizational meeting in 2012 that we are on the right track and making progress on our initial objectives and goals.

- We received our 501C3 tax status on January 31, 2014.
- We have 40 members, representing six states in the upper Midwest. We have engineers, planners, and business memberships. Our goal this year is to achieve 50 memberships with all existing members renewing their memberships.
- We hold monthly board meetings via conference calls. Our volunteer board members are located in four states (Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Missouri).

We will be working on a strategic business plan during our July board meeting. We plan to work on increasing industry awareness of our Network and hope to add to the agricultural community through the Network.



**Kim Slezak**, a TSP Forrester from Nebraska, has agreed to serve as our webmaster and we will be updating that site soon.

**Laura Pepple** has agreed to serve as our Illinois academic and technical advisor to the board. Her work at University of Illinois on CNMP's and Manure issues brings a perspective to the board that will fit well as we move forward.

We held a very successful Conservation Planning Course during April 2014. The post course survey was complimentary to content, field exercises and logistics. We had

a wonderful cadre with a common sense approach that created a real networking atmosphere, which lasted all week.

I am happy to report about \$6,000 in our banking account. That gives us enough room to breathe a little easier as we think about our future activities and network development. It is always easier to think positively when you have some cash in the pocket. I know that is how it works in my house.

Please share this newsletter with other TSP's you know, and suggest they consider joining



*TSPN President, Mike Sexton, and Jay T. Mar, Iowa NRCS State Conservationist, signing an MOU at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual TSPN Meeting*

## TSPN, NRCS MOU HAILED BY WALLACES FARMER

Wallace's Farmer, an online agricultural news magazine, hailed the NRCS, TSPN agreement as a way to use private consulting to help get more conservation on the ground. For the full article, see the [Sept. 13](#) issue.

## News from the Boardroom

by Mike Sexton, Board President

### TSPN INVITED TO TAKE ROUNDTABLE SEAT

TSPN has been invited to have a seat on the Illinois Farm Bureau Legislative Roundtable group. The group meets regularly to discuss issues that affect Illinois farmers. Current issues are nutrient reduction strategies and NRCS Regional Partnership Program. TSPN is also drafting a letter requesting a seat on the NRCS State Technical committee.

### TSPN PLANS TRIP TO WASHINGTON, DC TO PROMOTE TSP INTERESTS

TSPN board members are planning a trip to Washington, DC in late July to meet with NRCS officials and members of congress to discuss opportunities and challenges for

TSPs. The TSPN delegates also hope to move one step closer in the quest to become a certifying organization for NRCS.

### OTHER NEWS OF INTEREST

- TSPN applied for a McKnight Foundation grant to enable TSPN to publicize our network and promote TSP skills in water and conservation practices. This would be a collaborative effort with agricultural retailers in Iowa.
- As a result of TSPN outreach, Iowa Cattleman's Association is now providing a list of TSPN members to their membership and recommending they use TSPs.



## TSPN CO-SPONSORS TRAINING EVENT



## Field Exercises

Conservation Planning, Part II requires field and classroom exercises.



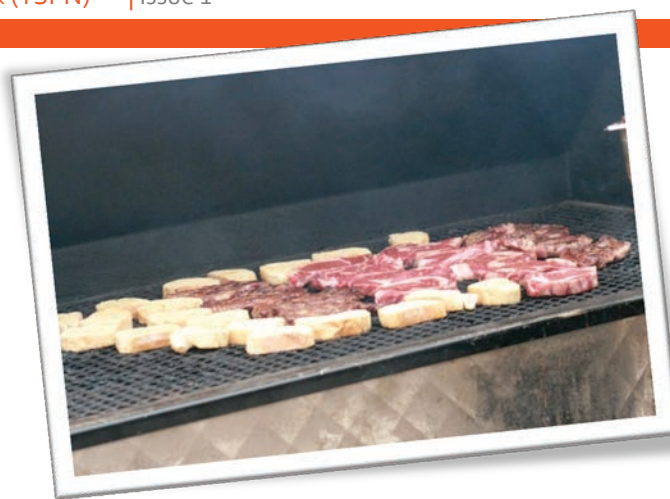
## Classroom Exercises

Classroom exercises incorporate some fun

into what is always a very intensive week of training.

## TSPN BOARD CONTACT LIST

Mike Sexton	<a href="mailto:twinlakeenviro.com">twinlakeenviro.com</a>
Joe Lally	<a href="mailto:jotbud1@gmail.com">jotbud1@gmail.com</a>
Donna Jolley	<a href="mailto:djolley@iowatelecom.net">djolley@iowatelecom.net</a>
Dallas Heikens	<a href="mailto:dallas.heikens@jacobson-westergard.com">dallas.heikens@jacobson-westergard.com</a>
Joe Schultz	<a href="mailto:joe.schultz@gdsassociates.com">joe.schultz@gdsassociates.com</a>
Dennis Godar	<a href="mailto:Godar@manplan.net">Godar@manplan.net</a>
Bill Killin	<a href="mailto:Bkillin42@hotmail.com">Bkillin42@hotmail.com</a>
NRCS Liaison	<a href="mailto:Judy.Martinson@ia.usda.gov">Judy.Martinson@ia.usda.gov</a>



*Intense training requires intense nutrients to maintain the student's energy levels. Joe Lally, TSPN Treasurer, made sure the participants had plenty to eat at every meal.*

## TSPN Co-Sponsors Conservation Training

by Judy Martinson, Iowa NRCS TSP Coordinator and TSPN Liaison

TSPN and Heartland Regional Water Quality Initiative played host at the Boulders Conference Center to thirty participants from around the nation who attended conservation planning training in Denison this spring. The course, Conservation Planning, Part II, is a required course for TSPs who certify in CAP CNMP (102) and is very helpful to planners of other disciplines who aspire for a better understanding of NRCS planning methodologies.

Judy Martinson, Iowa NRCS Technical Service Provider Coordinator, Renee Hancock, the Nebraska NRCS Technical Service Provider Coordinator, co-facilitated the weeklong course with Joe Lally, who represented Heartland Regional Water Quality Initiative. Mike Sexton, TSPN Board President, provided an outstanding presentation on cultural resources, succinctly explaining the sites he has encountered during his years as a TSP. Joe Lally, as always, developed menus that delighted the senses and made everyone wish they had brought larger sized jeans for the drive home. Seventeen instructors from agricultural, educational, state, and conservation organizations served as trainers

for the week-long course.

This course, based on NRCS conservation planning policy, emphasizes the conservation planning process; developing quality, complete plans on the entire unit; consideration of ecological, economic, and social concerns; on-site assistance; the effects and impacts of planned actions on-site and off-site; and partnership involvement.

Iowa is one of the few States that offers this required course in conservation planning, and the only State that has offered the course on a regular basis. Joe Lally, TSPN board treasurer, summed up the importance of the course when he explained to the *Denison Review* "...most importantly, students who complete the course and achieve certification increase the span of help available to farms that need conservation assistance."



## Upfront & Personal with a NRCS Review

by Dallas Heikens, TSP Engineer



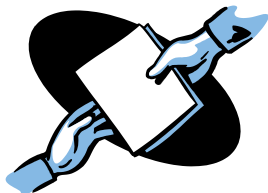
I am usually not the argumentative type (well, my family might disagree), and more often than not, I welcome feedback on projects I submit for review. Just tell me what you are looking for and I will do it the way you want to see it. Therefore, when I heard that the NRCS was going to start reviewing projects receiving EQIP Funds, I was in favor of receiving a little feedback. I didn't know if anyone had ever looked at the 313 Waste Storage Facility plans and specs I had submitted in the past. Did I expect the bloody mess I got in return after the review? Not really. Was some of it a little "nitpicky"? Maybe. Was it a learning experience? Definitely! Will I be a lot smarter the next time around? For sure!

I mean, the Statement of Work (often referred to as a "SOW") does outline what the deliverables (requirements) are for each job, so in theory it should be pretty easy just to run down that list and make sure each thing is addressed. Part of the problem for me was I that I made assumptions in addressing some of the deliverables that I thought were... how do

I say this ... self-explanatory. For example, if I am designing a slab on grade, is the analysis of the geology and soil mechanics really all that important? If there aren't any real environmental concerns, do I really need to state that there are no real concerns? And if I am lining up my new slab with the edge of an existing building, do I really need to spell that out? The answer to that question is: **Yes, Yes and Yes!** *You know what they say about "assuming"!*

Just so we're clear, I also got some praise for some good things that I did in the design. But I thought it might be helpful to other TSPs to highlight a few key points to remember when preparing the deliverables. Some of these tips are quite easy and just get overlooked; other tips are just a good reminder of where to find the information:

- **Geology and Soil Mechanics** – Here is the link to determine which job class your project is considered and what the requirements are. [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1193432.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1193432.pdf)
- **Structural, Mechanical, and Appurtenances** – computations must be included with the submittal. If using standard drawings, make a statement referencing that and computations would be available upon request.
- **IA-5 Pollution Control Construction Specification** is to be included on all projects. [http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/IA/IA-05\\_Feb2011.pdf](http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/IA/IA-05_Feb2011.pdf)
- **Itemized Cost Estimate** needs to be included.
- **Animal waste storage numbers** must be estimated from Animal Waste Storage Handbook Ch. 4 numbers, unless site specific numbers are provided for that particular site. Here is the link for Ch. 4. Site. <http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=31475.wba>
- Provide an anticipated **work schedule**.
- **All design documentation should be shown as checked**. Add a note that states who designed and who checked the project.
- Put the **Engineering job class** on the drawings. The engineering job class can be found in the National Engineering Manual (NEM) Part 501.07
- The **IA NRCS website** has a very useful TSP website <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/technical/cp/tsp/> and has an engineering page with loads of useful information. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/technical/engineering/>



## Understanding the NRCS Review Process

by Judy Martinson, Iowa NRCS TSP Coordinator

Although Dallas was not sure if her work had previously been reviewed, TSP policy states that all TSPs work is subject to review. Iowa NRCS is currently updating our review process to ensure that our Spot Checks and Quality Assurance Reviews include TSP work as well as NRCS work. As Dallas states in the above article, understanding the Statement of

Work is critical in completing a successful NRCS review. Quality Assurance Reviews and spot checks determine if the technical service provided meets policy, procedures, standards, specifications, and other requirements. In the case that a deficiency is found, NRCS will document the deficiencies found and notify the TSP and participant of the deficiency and specify necessary corrective action to remediate the deficiency within a reasonable period of time. Failure to correct the deficiency in the time frame set by NRCS may trigger the decertification process. If the technical services are a part of a program contract, rules in regard to non-compliance of the program contract will be followed. Failure to correct the deficiencies puts the producer at risk of losing his/her reimbursement of service or even being asked to repay any monies he/she has received through program funding.

Continued on page 5

NRCS has two types of reviews – Quality Assurance Reviews and Spot Checks. In Iowa, one county per year completes a Quality Assurance Review. Randomly selected practices and plans are selected and reviewed, including those completed by TSPs. **All NRCS offices perform Spots Checks on a regular basis.** NRCS policy defines the percentage of Spot Checks completed on TSP work. This policy is located in the General Manual Part 450, Section 407 (C), subpart C – Spot Checking. As noted in the policy, failure to correct noted deficiencies can result in TSP decertification.

### ***Subpart C - Spot Checking***

#### ***407.20 Procedure***

##### ***F. Spot Checks of Completed Conservation Practices or Practice Components Completed by TSPs.***

*(1) For the first 3 years after certification (excluding renewals) or recertification of the TSP, a spot check will be performed for at least 10 percent of the conservation practice and practice components. For a TSP where the number of installations of a conservation practice or practice component exceeds 50 in a given year, only 5 are required to have a spot check.*

*(2) After the first 3 years of certification or recertification of the TSP, a spot check will be performed on at least 5 percent of the conservation practice or practice components. For a TSP where the number of installations of a particular type of conservation practice or practice components exceeds 100 in a given year, only 5 are required to have a spot check.*

*(3) STCs and Directors, Pacific Islands and Caribbean Areas, will ensure that the sample of an individual TSP's work is a representative cross section by geographic area, size of projects, and complexity of projects.*

*(4) The person performing the spot check may expand the sample as necessary to determine the scope of any problems or deficiencies. The expanded sample may be extended to include installations completed in previous years.*

##### ***K. Follow-up***

*(1) Prompt and thorough follow-up of spot-checking reports is essential. If the checker questions need and practicability, he or she is to discuss the findings and opinions with the appropriate line officer. STC and Directors, Pacific Islands and Caribbean Areas will ensure that line officers report annually the status of spot checking to the STC within 90 days after the end of the spot-check year. Deficiencies are to be described in detail, and a follow-up report is required each 60 days until all follow-up action has been completed.*

*(2) If performance of the practice has been certified, and significant errors in quantities certified are found, the office responsible for making cost-sharing payments and the participant are to be informed immediately. If a practice does not meet specifications, the District Conservationist is to take action immediately to assist the participant in making necessary modifications to meet specifications.*

*(3) The program participant and the TSP will be notified in writing of the deficiencies and corrective actions needed. A reasonable time period will be specified for the corrective action needed. For TSP assisted practices, failure to correct the deficiency within the specified time period may trigger the TSP decertification process by the STC as per the causes for decertification specified in the TSP Handbook, Part 610, Section 610.26.*

*(4) When corrective measures have been taken, a final check is to be made and the case closed. If corrective work is not done, the agency providing cost sharing is to be given the information and take further action in accordance with program regulations.*

As Dallas noted, TSPs must complete **all** deliverable products as mandated in the practice statement of work. **There is no allowance for assumptions or for TSPs to make professional decisions as to whether or not the deliverable is actually needed for a particular practice or design.** If the deliverable is identified in the SOW, it must be completed and delivered. Furthermore, TSPs are always bound by their certification agreement – regardless of whether or not the producer is under contract with NRCS. For example, Iowa NRCS does not reimburse producers for completing the design phase of a waste management system (313). A TSP may assume that he/she does not need to meet NRCS standards and specifications as the producer is not receiving funding for this part of the process. This would be an incorrect assumption. If the producer is a program participant who will receive funding for the implementation of the design – and many Iowa producers do receive funding for implementation – the TSP is required to meet all applicable standards and specifications **AND must** provide all SOW deliverables to the NRCS and the producer.

A pre-design conference and pre-construction conference is required per NRCS Engineering policy. Having all stakeholders and decision-makers together at the very beginning is critical for success of the project. This also allows everyone to hear the same information at the same time in regards to roles and responsibilities. Not only does everyone then understand what is expected of them during each phase of the project, the TSP and the producer will also learn how to respond to any unexpected issues that may arise during design or construction of the project. If you have further questions about Iowa engineering Statements of Work or pre-design/pre-construction meetings, please contact Allen Gehring, Iowa State Engineer, at 515-323-2220 or [Allen.Gehring@ia.usda.gov](mailto:Allen.Gehring@ia.usda.gov).

# Come Join Us for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual TSPN Meeting!



## Comfort Suites

11167 Hickman Rd.

Urbandale, IA

September 5th, 2014

9:00 am – 4:00 pm



## Tentative Topics Include:

- ✓ TSP Opportunities through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program
  - ✓ **Important Vote on bylaws change**
- ✓ From Battlefield to Farm Fields – The Future of Unmanned Drones in Farming
  - ✓ The Benton/Tama Strategy Initiative
  - ✓ International export/import opportunities for producers
  - ✓ **Updates on important new NRCS policy and procedures**
- ✓ Training on CAP Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition
  - ✓ Election of New Officers



Pass it along! Non-Members can enjoy the training and meal for a very reasonable \$75.00 - **or join TSPN for \$100.00 and get the**

## In Partnership with:



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## TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDER NETWORK

### MAKING CONSERVATION A PRIORITY

### 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL MEETING & TRAINING EVENT

September 5, 2014

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

#### **Comfort Suites at Living History Farms**

11167 Hickman Rd.

Urbandale, IA 50322

September 5th, 2014

[MAP/ DIRECTIONS](#)



Plant the Seeds  
of Sustainable  
Agriculture



**Join us** in support of Technical Service Providers, enjoy lunch and a beverage, network with fellow TSPs, learn more about the organization, and enjoy an outstanding training opportunity. This year's tentative training topics include new TSPN partnership opportunities, the future of unmanned drones in agriculture, updates in NRCS policy in procedures and other important TSP topics of interest. Special low rates are available for hotel accommodations (reserve by August 30.)

*The deadline for registering for this event is September 1<sup>st</sup>.*

#### **Make check payable to:**

Technical Service  
Providers Network  
809 Wheeler Street  
Suite 6  
Ames, Iowa 50010

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **TSP#** \_\_\_\_\_

Category	Cost	Quantity	Total
<b>TSPN Members:</b> .....	<b>Free</b>	_____	_____
TSPN Individual Membership (includes meal).....	\$100.00	_____	_____
TSPN Corporate Membership (includes 2 meals).....	\$200.00	_____	_____
Additional Corporate Meals...(ea).....	\$ 15.00	_____	_____
TSPN Non-Member (includes meal).....	\$ 75.00	_____	_____
<b>TOTAL</b> .....		_____	_____