



## NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance Program Helps Put Conservation on the Ground

### What is Conservation Technical Assistance?

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program has been the central activity of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) since it was established in 1935. NRCS field staff help landowners and farm operators plan and implement soil and water conservation and water quality practices.



NRCS also provides voluntary conservation technical assistance to communities, units of state and local government, and other Federal agencies in planning and implementing conservation systems. This assistance is for planning and implementing conservation practices that address natural resource issues throughout Colorado. It helps people voluntarily conserve, improve, and sustain natural resources.

CTA is the help NRCS and its partners provide to land users to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources and to help land users make sound natural resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands.

### The Benefits of CTA

The NRCS offers technical assistance for planning and implementing natural resource solutions to:

- Maintain and improve private lands and their management
- Implement better land management technologies
- Reduce erosion
- Improve soil health and productivity
- Improve water quantity and quality
- Improve and conserve wetlands
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat and restore natural ecosystems
- Improve air quality
- Improve pasture health
- Improve woodlands
- Address other natural resource issues

## **CTA helps with Conservation Planning**

Most technical assistance provided by NRCS leads to the voluntary development of a conservation plan - a resource assessment of the land that allows the client to determine the opportunities for using the resources under their care and how they may achieve their goals. A successful plan helps client achieve their objectives while, at the same time, meet his or her responsibility to care for the land. NRCS works to assist each client to achieve a sustainable system that contributes to healthy bottom lines as well as healthy ecosystems, landscapes, and watersheds.

NRCS helps decision makers with the conservation planning process ranging from site-specific plans for individuals to more complex community, watershed, or area-wide plans for groups of land managers. Conservation technical assistance furnished by NRCS includes conservation planning and practice/system application, technical consultations, and assistance in the technical phases of USDA and State cost-share programs.

Based on the conservation plans developed, NRCS and its partners provide the guidance and assistance needed to design, layout and install approved conservation practices. There are over 167 approved conservation practices designed to fit both the resource needs and the land users objectives. Practices may range from simple management activities such as irrigation water management using state-of-the-art monitoring tools to complex structural practices such as animal waste management systems or innovative irrigation devices.

## **CTA Program Products**

CTA Program products may include:

- New technologies and conservation practices to address emerging challenges that result from greater scientific understanding as well as an increasing number of Federal, State, and local laws and policies on environmental quality that place new requirements on landowners and land-users
- Inventory and evaluation of soil, water, animal, plant, air, and other resources to help landowners and managers make land use, environmental, and conservation treatment decisions and help them in applying and maintaining conservation practices
- Design, layout, and evaluation of over 167 potential conservation practices. The land user, in consultation with NRCS technical specialists and conservationists, determines which practices are best-suited to his or her individual situation

- Development of suites of practices including management alternatives and cultural practices needed to ensure all resource issues are addressed and treated at the appropriate level of conservation
- Area-wide, community or watershed plans, supported by local stakeholders, which identify high priority resource concerns and which identify the methods used to address the concerns and the source of potential funding
- Educational and informational workshops and tours highlighting local conservation activities

**CTA program objectives are:**

- To assist individual land users, communities, conservation districts, and other units of State and local government and Federal agencies to meet their goals for resource stewardship and assist individuals to comply with State and local requirements. NRCS assistance to individuals is provided through conservation districts in accordance with the memorandum of understanding signed by the Secretary of Agriculture, the governor of the state, and the conservation district. Assistance is provided to land users voluntarily applying conservation and to those who must comply with local or State laws and regulations.
- To assist agricultural producers to comply with the Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and wetland (Swampbuster) provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act as amended by the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (16 U.S.C. 3801 et. seq.) and the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 and wetlands requirements of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. NRCS makes HEL and wetland determinations and helps land users develop and implement conservation plans to comply with the law.
- To provide technical assistance to participants in USDA cost-share and conservation incentive programs. (Assistance is funded on a reimbursable basis from the CCC.)
- To collect, analyze, interpret, display, and disseminate information about the condition and trends of the Nation's soil and other natural resources so that people can make good decisions about resource use and about public policies for resource conservation.
- To develop effective science-based technologies for natural resource assessment, management, and conservation.

## Summary

The working relationships that landowners and communities have with their local NRCS staff are unique. One-on-one help through flexible, voluntary programs occurs every day in local NRCS offices across the country. It is the way NRCS does business, and it works.

All requests for technical assistance through the CTA Program are prioritized by NRCS and the local conservation district to ensure that assistance is provided in a fair and equitable manner. **This program does not include financial assistance**; however, through the CTA Program, clients may develop conservation plans, which may serve as a springboard for them to enter into financial assistance and easement conservation programs provided by other Federal, State, and local programs. There are no fees or charges to the land user for this service.

If you need more information about CTA or want to develop a conservation plan, please contact your local USDA NRCS Service Center, or your local conservation district. You may also visit our website at [www.co.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov).