

ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES for ENGINEERING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE to USDA PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE SOURCES

Historically, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided the vast majority of engineering technical assistance to implement the engineering practices included in USDA program contracts. The 2002 Farm Bill included a significant increase in financial assistance to accelerate conservation practice implementation. The quantity of technical assistance necessary to keep pace with the accelerated conservation practice implementation far exceeds the capacity of the current NRCS workforce. Recognizing this gap in technical assistance capacity, the framers of the 2002 Farm Bill included statutory provisions for Technical Service Providers (TSP) to deliver technical assistance to USDA Farm Bill Program participants. As a result of these new opportunities, there are now five different sources for the delivery of engineering technical assistance to USDA Program Participants as listed below.

- Source 1. NRCS provides the engineering technical assistance through its own workforce.
- Source 2. NRCS provides the engineering technical assistance through an engineering firm hired by NRCS through an Architect-Engineer (A&E) Services contract.
- Source 3. USDA Program Participant hires a certified TSP engineer certified in an appropriate category through TechReg and Program Participant receives Technical Assistance funds (Not To Exceed Rates) in their USDA Program contract [also known as Participant Selection Process].
- Source 4. USDA Program Participant hires a non-NRCS engineer and pays them using their own funds.
- Source 5. NRCS provides engineering technical assistance through a Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) Engineer or a Conservation District (CD) Engineer or CD Specialist as part of the NRCS-MDA Engineering Technical Assistance Contribution Agreement. MDA Engineer approves the design and As-Built construction drawings.

The roles and responsibilities of the USDA Program Participant, the engineering technical assistance provider, and NRCS are different for each of the five sources listed above. A fact sheet has been developed for each source. The purpose of these fact sheets is to ensure effective and efficient delivery of engineering technical assistance, regardless of the source, through a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for all parties involved. The fact sheet for each source includes a description of roles and responsibilities along with an identification of the rules and/or policy that govern the activities.

Important Note

Whichever source is selected for providing the engineering technical assistance, that source is expected to complete all the steps necessary to implement the engineering practice. These steps include surveys, investigations, design, construction drawings, layout, construction inspection, checkout, and certification, as appropriate. For example, if a program participant hires a certified TSP engineer and pays the engineer using Technical Assistance funds (Not To Exceed rates) in their USDA Program contract, that TSP engineer must do all the steps. NRCS will NOT perform the construction inspection (quality assurance) for other sources. This ensures that the engineer in responsible charge of the design is also the engineer to evaluate and approve any changes that may be needed during construction. Thus, responsibility and liability clearly remain with one party.