



**Science
Societies**

New agreements streamline technical service provider certification process

CCAs, CPSS's now qualified to provide NRCS services

By Dan Linehan, American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America

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The American Society of Agronomy and Soil Science Society of America have partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to streamline the process for CCAs and CPSS's to address the shortage of NRCS technical service providers (TSPs).

Agreements signed Oct. 23, 2024 by NRCS and the Societies allow CCAs and CPSS's to become technical service providers by virtue of their credentials.

Ultimately, the public benefits with increased water quality and soil health when producers can take full advantage of NRCS programs.

“These agreements streamline the TSP program requirements by recognizing the expertise of Certified Crop Advisers and Certified Professional Soil Scientists while meeting NRCS standards,”

says Luther Smith, the Societies' Chief Administrative Officer. "They should help expand the delivery of technical assistance to farmers and landowners through existing business relationships."

"The 2018 farm bill provided NRCS the opportunity to streamline the technical service provider certification process," says Astrid Martinez, Director of the Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division of NRCS. "A great example of this streamlining is recognizing the standards upheld with the American Society of Agronomy and the Soil Science Society of America. With these organizations' in-depth certification requirements, NRCS knows this collaboration will produce well-qualified TSPs. This partnership will increase the availability of experienced technical assistance to producers across the nation."



On Oct. 23, 2024, the American Society of Agronomy and Soil Science Society of America and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) signed agreements that allow CCAs and CPSS's to become technical service providers (TSPs) by virtue of their credentials. From l to r: Astrid Martinez, Director of the Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division at NRCS; Michael Watson, National TSP Branch Chief; and Jim Cudahy, CEO of the Societies.

Certified Crop Advisers and Certified Professional Soil Scientists have already been tested on their expertise in agronomic and soil science principles and practices. In addition to experience requirements, CCAs must pass two comprehensive exams, one of which is a local exam based on conditions in their region. Both exams cover the management of critical areas: crops, nutrients, pests, soil, and water.

Finally, these certified professionals must take continuing education to maintain their certification. In the case of CCAs, there is a 40-credit requirement every two years, including credits in each category.

These agreements have the potential to greatly expand the ranks of technical service providers. There are more than 12,000 CCAs and more than CPSS's compared with about 1,100 technical service providers.

Dennis Godar, a CCA and CPAg and Midwest independent consultant specializing in nutrient management plans, has been a technical service provider for decades.

“This is going to recognize a lot of the educational and training requirements that CCAs already have and use every day when they’re working with farmers,”

he says. “They don’t have to go back to square one to prove to NRCS what they have.”

In addition to tapping the expertise of certified professionals, the agreement also takes advantage of the trusting partnerships between certified professionals and their producers.

Shawn Wallace, a CCA working in New York State, says he speaks to his producer clients frequently about a wide variety of topics, including upcoming crop rotations or the latest issues in the field.

For example, Wallace often works with dairy industry clients to prepare nutrient management plans, which could position him to take advantage of NRCS nutrient management programs.

Nick Cuchetti, a CCA based in Missouri, says this partnership comes at a critical time.

"With the significant funding for conservation programs under the Inflation Reduction Act, we're seeing an unprecedented amount of money flowing into the hands of farmers and landowners to implement regenerative practices," he says. "This move will ensure that we capitalize on the available resources to drive real, meaningful change on the ground."

"We're excited about the agreement's potential to link farmers across the country with the resources they need to make informed, sustainable decisions," says Jim Cudahy, the Societies' CEO.

Under the agreements, a certified professional who applies to become a technical service provider will be required to attend one training session to orient themselves to NRCS programs and practices.

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