

CONGRESSMAN JIM BAIRD (R-IN-04)



Biography:

- Born: June 4th, 1945, in Covington, IN
- Education: B.S., Animal Science, (1967) Purdue University; M.S., Animal Science (1969) Purdue University; PhD., Animal Science Monogastric Nutrition (1975) University of Kentucky
- Experience: Farmer, Animal Nutrition Specialist
- Military Experience: Army, (1969-1971)
- Elected to US House in 2018
 - Reelected to the House with 68.21% of the vote in 2022



Committee/ Key Caucus Membership (118th Congress):

- House Committee on Agriculture: *Chairman Subcommittee on Conservation, Research, and Biotechnology; Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry; Subcommittee on Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture, and Horticulture*
- House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology: *Subcommittee on Energy; Subcommittee on Research and Technology*
- House Committee on Foreign Affairs: *Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia; Subcommittee on Africa*

Key Ag Issues:

- Supports expansion of broadband access and rural development
- Agricultural innovation (e.g., gene editing)
- Improvements on restrictions on pesticides
- Reducing input costs for farmers

Correspondence with USDA:

- 2/11/2022 – Herbicide regulation: Wrote expressing support for the use of and opposition to the regulation of dicamba. ECM#8800977 | Closed
- 9/22/2022 – Herbicide regulation: Wrote expressing support for the use of and opposition to the regulation of glyphosate, dicamba, and atrazine. ECM#8800977 | Closed

FSA Hot Topics:

- No hot topics from IN.

NRCS Hot Topics:

New Bill Being Introduced in Indiana - Increased TSP Access Act of 2023

- On May 3, 2023, Chairman Jim Baird (IN-04), Ranking Member Abigail Spanberger (VA-07), and Senators Mike Braun (R-IN), Roger Marshall (R-KS), and Michael Bennet (D-CO) introduced H.R.3036, S.1400 titled, “*The Increased TSP Access Act of 2023.*” If passed, the bill would address Technical Service Provider (TSP) shortages, while modifying the delivery of technical assistance within the Food Security Act of 1985. Some congressional representatives have noted that USDA’s current TSP program has failed to adequately train and certify TSPs and contends that the 2018 Farm Bill included language (Section 2502) allows USDA to approve non-Federal entities to certify TSPs but did not include clear deadlines for USDA to set up its non-Federal certification process and lacked guardrails to ensure that Congressional intent was implemented in a timely manner.

- The *Increased TSP Access Act* would address the perceived TSP shortage by expanding on the framework first envisioned in the 2018 Farm Bill by:
Directing USDA to establish a process to approve non-federal certifying entities within 180 days of enactment. The bill ensures that USDA’s process will allow agricultural retailers, conservation organizations, cooperatives, professional societies, and service providers to become certifying entities. It also puts clear deadlines on USDA to ensure that the agency is responsive in administering the program.
- Directing USDA to establish a streamlined certification process for TSPs who hold appropriate specialty certifications (including certified crop advisors) within 180 days of enactment. This guarantees that applicants with other certifications aren’t burdened with duplicative training, but are still trained in the competencies needed to serve as a TSP.
- Ensuring that TSPs—who are often paid using conservation program dollars—are paid the fair market rate for their services.

Soil Erosion Concerns

- On May 1, 2023, news outlets from central Illinois reported a large dust storm moving across Interstate 55. It ultimately caused a devastating series of accidents that resulted in the loss of several lives and millions of dollars in damage. The cause of this devastation is likely due to over tilled soils resulting in little to no soil cover coupled with dry weather conditions and high winds.
- Since this event was in a neighboring state, we are uncertain if the eroded land involved in this event is enrolled in any USDA programs which would have resulted in an HEL determination. Regardless, this is an opportunity for NRCS to address important soil erosion issues and the importance of having an approved conservation plan that includes a suite of soil health conservation practices to control wind, water, and ephemeral gully erosion.

Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Determination

- It was noted at a few of the recent Farm Bill Listening sessions that our congressional leaders have heard from constituents (our customers) about frustrations related to time delays for NRCS to complete their Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and/or Wetland Compliance (WC) determinations. Data was generated from the Conservation Desktop HELC/WC Tracker, and it currently shows that Indiana has a relatively high number of determinations greater than 1 year old. This issue has been addressed with Indiana Leadership staff and an action plan has been identified and put in to action to address the HEL/WC backlog in Indiana.

Sentinel Landscape Project in Indiana

- The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments, and nongovernmental organizations that work with private landowners to advance sustainable land management practices around military installations and ranges. Founded in 2013 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense and Department of the Interior, the partnership’s mission is to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural and forestry economies, and increase climate change resilience.
- The Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape is 3.5 million acres and anchored by four critical DoD installations and ranges which provide a variety of testing and training opportunities for the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, National Guard, as well as federal and state partners. With the primary objective of preserving and protecting military mission readiness, operations, testing and training capabilities, the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape partners are also promoting

60/40 hiring split (60 percent Federal and 40 percent partner) to accomplish the increased IRA workload. NRCS has also centralized IRA agreement funding approvals so that full-time equivalents (FTE) can be estimated during the planning process and adjustments can be made if Federal or partner hiring levels falls short.

Currently, four Pilot Umbrella Agreements are being developed as a new tool in recruiting and leveraging partner support on a national level to work in states at the local level. NRCS will accomplish IRA goals through agreements like these and by taking a realistic and flexible approach that includes creative recruitment, partnerships, and adaptive planning.

Lessons Learned from BIL, ARP, Etc. That Have Influenced These Strategies

NRCS has taken lessons learned from the implementation of similar efforts to develop IRA hiring strategies. NRCS has implemented steps to improve tracking of IRA hirings so we can pinpoint and report our progress. For example, IRA and all other hiring actions are now tagged according to their programmatic focus so that they can be monitored according to mission and program alignment. NRCS has also insured that time charges, agreements, contracts, and other operational items can be aligned to IRA and reported accordingly. NRCS has also collected data directly from the states to identify IRA needs and have processes in place to update and evaluate submitted requests.

Technical Service Providers

Certification Management

Certified Technical Service Providers (TSP) manage their individual or business certification through the electronic NRCS Registry website. The NRCS Registry is the method NRCS producers engage a TSP. TSPs manage their own NRCS certification, including the practices and activities they would like to perform, and the geographic area in which they would like to offer their services. All Certified TSPs must complete two NRCS courses related to the duties of a TSP and utilization of NRCS technical materials; sign an NRCS agreement which outlines the responsibilities of the individual and submit their qualifications to plan and/or design various conservation practices and activities.

Engaging a TSP

NRCS Clients typically engage TSPs to expedite the design and implementation of conservation practices and activities within their conservation plan and associated program contracts. At the client's request, NRCS will enter funding into the Client contract to support TSP utilization to implement said contract. The client then chooses a certified TSP from the NRCS Registry Website. The TSP performs the requested work, NRCS reviews the completed work and approves payment to the client; who pays the TSP.

Range of Activities

There are 188 practices, activities, or recognitions that an individual could seek certification. Each of these 188 items recognize a specific set of certification criteria necessary to provide such service to NRCS producers, although many certification criteria are the same for multiple practices. The certification criteria provide options for education, experience, licensing and/or training to demonstrate technical competency. NRCS National Discipline Leads work collaboratively with TSP Program staff in determining certification criteria allowances.

3rd Party Certifications

NRCS currently recognizes 22 third-party certification programs to demonstrate technical competency. While no one certification program provides the entire range of 188 practices, many meet the criteria for multiple practices. For example, there are 42 practices and activities in NRCS Registry which recognize American Society of Agronomy's Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) and/or Certified Professional Agronomist in their certification criteria.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

NRCS utilizes MOUs with third-party certifying entities to review the current use of the entity's certification within the criteria, explore opportunities to streamline the certification process, provide training, and explore outreach opportunities. Currently, there is an MOU in place between NRCS and the American Society of Agronomy to explore their Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) Program and Land O' Lakes. NRCS is pursuing additional MOUs with the other third-party certifying entities.

TSP Program Changes 2019 – Present

NRCS underwent a restructuring of the TSP program to better address concerns. As part of this restructure, a Continuous Process Improvement process was initiated which included national and state staff as well as Technical Service Providers. These efforts resulted in significant changes within the TSP program over the last few years.

	2019	Present
National Management	2 Staff within EQIP Team Collateral Duty State Coordinators	Moved to Conservation Planning Branch, transitioning to Reestablished TSP Branch with 10 staff & State Liaisons
Certification Timeline	278 TSP applications over 60 days in process (77% of applications). Some as long at two years old.	0 applications over 60 days in process since 2020
Certification System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TechReg • AgLearn IT Security Requirement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented NRCS Registry, currently developing phase 2 improvements. • Eliminated IT Security Requirement in AgLearn
Certification Scope	State by state certification (one state could deny or delay certification another state had already certified)	Nationalized certification
Certification Process	Certification requirements submitted to each state and documentation was external to the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSPs manage their own certification submittals and supporting documentation within Registry. • Streamlined Review Process and put in place review time limits • Made requirements consistent between activities and practices and reduced number of sample plans

Third-Party Certification	Certification requirements had little to no consistency and varied on the use of third-party certification acceptance.	Third-party certifications acknowledged for a majority of certification requirements.
Practices and Activities	Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs)	Realigned CAPs to Conservation Planning Activities (CPA), Design and Implementation Activities (DIA) to better align with practices and activities, certification requirements and actual costs of TSPs.
Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA)	Did not exist	Allow for additional support activities needed to support plans and designs which may be performed by qualified individuals

1. Organizational Capacity for Equity
2. Equity Toolkits
3. Equity and Inclusion Data
4. Equity and Inclusion Partnerships
5. Operationalize Equity

Fiscal Year 2023

- Ensure all States have an Equity strategy to target IRA opportunities through implementation of the Checklist and Annual Reporting Criteria for NRCS State Outreach Plans – Equity Section.
- Identification of program barriers/inequities, and annual reporting on actions to remove barriers and remediate inequities.
- Identification of underserved communities and/or individuals not currently engaged with NRCS assistance to advance equity in program opportunities, and annual reporting on activities or assistance to newly engage those identified.
- Collaborate with partners, stakeholders, underserved community representatives, and Tribal representatives at the decision-making level to ensure inclusion in the planning, financing, and development of IRA implementation.
- Require all NRCS programs, grants, agreements, and contracting units to be equitable in their outreach and acquisition strategies.
- Release *Equity Toolkits* and guidance for decision-making support to:
 - integrate Equity principles into decision-making processes to align institutional equity into the work and practices of NRCS,
 - develop decisions that promote advancement of equity, and
 - prevent decisions that may create or perpetuate inequities.
- Collaborate with Climate Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP) Workgroup to target programs to support communities susceptible to climate impacts.
- Link with “vulnerable communities” as identified under CCAP. Workgroup is determining appropriate datasets to define/delineate those communities.

Fiscal Year 2024 and beyond

- Strengthen NRCS’ ability to fulfill its equity mission by promoting sound management, strong governance, and persistent dedication and commitment to advancing equity by inclusion of elements such as the agency’s program policies, procedures, and practices.
- Increase participants in Technical Service Provider (TSP) Program dedicated to providing assistance to underserved communities and individuals.
- Evaluate TSP program regulations and guidance to identify inconsistent implementation or excessive administrative burden. Propose policy and customer solutions that increase access.
- Emphasize availability to TSP participants of Equity and Inclusion training modules for partners and stakeholders.
- Establish goals at National and State levels to increase TSP Program participation of providers dedicated to delivering conservation technical assistance for HU producers.
- Implement strategic data planning and develop data-driven measurements toward advancement of Equity through changes in program policies and procedures.
- Develop *Continuous Improvement Plan for Data-Driven Equity* to establish appropriate data governance for the data and tools NRCS needs to form decisions for change, deploy resources, track progress, evaluate effectiveness, and address gaps in capacity.
- Develop *Equity and Inclusion Data Catalog* inclusive of NRCS, FPAC, USDA, and external datasets and tools to ensure understanding and access of equity data is centralized and consistent across agency functions and for staff at all levels.
- Utilize available datasets to target and expand equity outreach efforts.

- Increasing knowledge around the availability of CEMA 221 and building capacity to conduct the assessment will contribute to NRCS and the Department’s broader strategy to measure, monitor, report on, and verify soil carbon, including on land enrolled in NRCS conservation programs.
- EQIP will provide a financial incentive to individual producers for the implementation of CEMA 221, however there is not much other incentive to conduct the activity, though it will have a meaningful result from an NRCS and USDA perspective to advance Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry.
 - This activity does not provide results that can be directly translated to changes in management on a producers’ operation or provide some other immediate and obvious benefit.
 - Outreach and education for producers is needed to learn the benefits and gain insights into the stewardship aspects of completing CEMA 221. The NFO provides funding for this outreach and education which is outside of NRCS’ current capacity.
 - Additionally, the incentive to conduct CEMA 221 does not provide funding sufficient for a TSP or other individual to become qualified and equipped to conduct CEMA 221 at the request of the producer; it provides an incentive for the test and the labor only.
 - The NFO was needed to ensure that there are qualified individuals capable of servicing producers interested in CEMA 221 who have reason to become equipped to do so.
 - NRCS has had limited success in implementing CPAs, DIAs, and CEMAs without some form of outreach or education for producers.
 - Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) and forestry plans have had success because there are Local or State requirements for these activities to be completed and there were already sufficient private sector individuals capable of providing the services to producers, and there were not sufficient “free” public resources providing these services.
 - For other activities, a market-place incentive or demand to implement a CPA, DIA, or CEMA is absent without education and outreach to the producer and the development of TSPs and/or qualified individuals who can assist once a producer becomes interested; this can be seen in some of the other activities such as the development of grazing plans.
- Applicants for the NFO were required to provide a plan to include outreach to underserved communities; specifically, each proposal must have a strategy to reach equity in historically underserved communities.