

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

**BETWEEN THE**

**AMERICAN SOCIETY OF AGRONOMY**

**AND THE**

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is made and entered into by and between the American Society of Agronomy's (ASA) Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Program, hereinafter referred to as ASA/CCA, and Certified Professional Agronomist (CPAg), hereinafter referred to as ASA/CPAg, and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service, hereinafter referred to as NRCS.

**I. BACKGROUND**

NRCS is responsible for providing technical assistance to land owners and operators in protecting soil, water, and related resources under the provisions of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, Section 1242 (16 U.S.C. 3842 as amended by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008) and other applicable legislation. This legislation authorizes NRCS to cooperate with various Federal agencies, State and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals in order to carry out its responsibilities and further the conservation mission of NRCS on private lands in a voluntary, scientifically-based manner.

In addition to the technical assistance available from NRCS, USDA conservation program participants have the option of obtaining conservation technical assistance from individuals accepted as Technical Service Providers (TSP) by NRCS.

Section 1242 of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107-171, May 13, 2002 (referred to as the 2002 Farm Bill) and the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 require the Secretary to provide technical assistance under Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 to a program participant "directly, or .... through a payment .... for an approved third party, if available."

Section 1242 also requires the Secretary to establish a system for approving individuals and entities to provide technical assistance to carry out programs under this Title including criteria for the evaluation of providers or potential providers of technical assistance.

ASA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, membership organization headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin. ASA is a scientific and educational membership organization. CCA and CPAg are certification programs of ASA that certifies individuals who meet the standards set by ASA/CCA and ASA/CPAg to provide agronomic advice and recommendations to private landowners and others.

## **II. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this MOU is to establish a general framework for cooperation between ASA and NRCS to recommend ASA/CCA and ASA/CPAg designated individuals for acceptance into the NRCS TSP program. Under this MOU, ASA will recommend qualified individuals to NRCS who meet ASA certification standards, and NRCS will consider such individuals as third party TSPs. It is the intent of both parties that this cooperative effort will be for the mutual benefit of each party, as well as program participants who wish to avail themselves of technical services provided by TSPs.

This MOU recognizes that an individual who has met ASA/CCA or ASA/CPAg standards also meets the following performance proficiencies established and agreed to by both parties for providing conservation assistance in the following areas, provided they have met all other NRCS certification requirements associated with these practices:

- CNMP Plan Development - Land Treatment
- CNMP Plan- Nutrient Management
- Grazing Forages
- Irrigation Water Management
- Land Treatment - Tillage and Erosion
- Land Treatment - Buffers
- Land Treatment - Vegetative Land Stabilization
- Nutrient Management - Organic and Inorganic
- Pest Management
- Conservation Activity Plan - Integrated Pest Management-Herbicide Resistance Weeds
- Conservation Activity Plan - Integrated Pest Management
- Conservation Activity Plan - Nutrient Management
- Conservation Activity Plan - Transition from Irrigated to Dryland Farming and Ranching

## **III. BENEFITS AND INTEREST**

This MOU will benefit NRCS by providing ASA/CCA and ASA/CPAg certificants the opportunity to become accepted by NRCS as a TSP. This, in turn, will assist NRCS in carrying out its mission of providing quality conservation technical assistance to its customers.

This MOU will benefit ASA by providing ASA/CCA and ASA/CPAg certificants the opportunity to become accepted by NRCS as a TSP through recognition of ASA/CCA or ASA/CPAg requirements. NRCS will place ASA certified TSPs on the approved list to provide

technical service to USDA conservation program participants, thereby expanding their scope of services to existing and future clientele.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **A. ASA will:**

- 1. Maintain the requirement for meeting the performance proficiencies or competencies of CCA and CPAg. ASA will make the performance proficiencies or competencies available to NRCS for review and concurrence that NRCS standards are met. ASA will provide NRCS with updates of any changes to their membership criteria within 30 days of implementation.**
- 2. Train, test, and evaluate<sup>1</sup> candidates for competency in the category of technical services that applicants wish to be certified to deliver. Upon request and with agreement of all parties involved, provide NRCS with a list of courses and individuals on a registry used to fulfill continuing education requirements. Provide NRCS with a copy of competencies used for certification.**
- 3. Verify annually that its registrants/certified individuals meet the requirements of the ASA/CCA or ASA/CPAg for the specific category of technical services including an individual's efforts to satisfy continuing education requirements each year to maintain ASA/CCA or ASA/CPAg certification. ASA will provide NRCS with updates of any changes to their certification criteria within 30 days of implementation.**
- 4. Make available to NRCS a registry, as needed, with an agreed-to format of members who have applied to become TSPs and who meet the NRCS criteria for which they are being evaluated including specific conservation practice(s). The registry will contain the following information:**
  - a) Name of individual**
  - b) Company (if applicable)**
  - c) Address**
  - d) Telephone and fax numbers; email address, if applicable**
  - e) Skill area**
  - f) Service area**
  - g) Expiration date of qualification under ASA/CCA or ASA/CPAg**

**ASA is the certifying organization that recommends their members to NRCS.**

---

<sup>1</sup> "Train, test, and evaluate" is defined as the identification or development of approved training curriculums and courses that support the identified proficiencies for the category of technical services applicants and registrants of the third party entity, as well as providing training opportunities for registrants to maintain technical competency in selected areas of technical services, test for proficiency and competency levels, and maintain a system of record of such training (i.e., CEUs, PDUs, etc.).

5. Inform individuals seeking certification/accreditations from ASA that they must meet all requirements necessary for technical services, including entering into a TSP Certification Agreement with NRCS in order to provide technical services under this MOU.
6. Notify NRCS of any concerns or problems that may affect the organization's recommendation concerning the individual's certification, re-certification, certification renewal, or technical service delivery.
7. Remove individuals from the registry provided to NRCS who:
  - do not maintain their requirements for ASA/CCA or ASA/CPAg registration/certification; and/or
  - are found to be providing substandard assistance from its registry and immediately notify the individuals and NRCS.

Within 30 days of suspension or decertification, ASA will notify NRCS.

8. Notify members when technical and programmatic materials are available from NRCS to ensure that the highest quality of conservation assistance is available.

**B. NRCS will:**

1. Advise the ASA of the performance proficiencies an individual will need to possess in order to qualify for TSP designation for each of the technical services identified in this MOU.
2. Review the performance proficiencies of ASA to determine minimum criteria necessary to perform work as a TSP at the beginning of this MOU and for 5 years thereafter. Ensure that ASA standards for certifying their individual members meet NRCS criteria for technical services covered by this MOU.
3. Provide ASA with access to current program information and appropriate technical reference documents for use by TSPs. Such documents will include manuals and standards and specifications for appropriate conservation practices. Links will be provided through the TechReg Web site at <http://techreg.usda.gov/>.
4. Assist in training opportunities for ASA members, and serve as a training resource when available.
5. Consult with ASA in possible decertification issues and complaints. Remove TSPs from the approved list through the decertification process if NRCS determines that the TSP has failed to meet the terms and conditions of their Certification Agreement.

6. Notify ASA within 30 days of the date when individuals are removed from the approved list through the NRCS decertification process.
7. Terminate this agreement with ASA if concerns or problems with its accreditation program, recommendations for certification, or other requirements under the agreement arise.

C. It is agreed upon that both parties will:

Communicate at least annually or as requested by either party to review progress and discuss methods of improving this process.

## **V. GENERAL PROVISIONS**

- A. This MOU takes effect upon the signature of the parties and will remain in effect for 5 years from the date of execution. This MOU may be renewed or amended upon written request of either party and the subsequent written concurrences of the other. Either party, in writing, may terminate this MOU with a 30-day written notice to the other.
- B. Changes within the scope of this MOU will be made by the issuance of a fully executed agreement by all participating program officials prior to any changes occurring.
- C. This MOU is not intended to and does not create any right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity, by a party against the United States, its agencies, its officers, or any person.
- D. Termination of this agreement will not affect individuals accepted as TSPs by NRCS. TSPs will continue to be listed on the approved TSP list in accordance with the terms and conditions of their certification until their renewal.
- E. The parties and their respective officers will handle their own activities and utilize their own resources, including expenditures of their own funds, in pursuing the purposes of this MOU. Each party will carry out its separate activities in a coordinated and mutually beneficial manner.
- F. All activities under this agreement will be in compliance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-690, Title V, Subtitle D).
- G. In accordance with NRCS Property Management Regulation, Temporary Regulation A-2, "The program or activities conducted under this Memorandum of Understanding will be in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions contained in Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-259); and other nondiscrimination statutes: namely, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. They will also be in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7 CFR 15, subparts A and

B), which provide that no person in the United States will on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any agency hereof."

- H. The parties and their respective officers will be responsible for its own tasks and results thereof and will not be responsible for the acts of the other party and their results thereof. Each party therefore agrees that it will assume all risk and liability to itself, its agents, or employees for any injury to persons or property resulting in any manner from the conduct of its agents or employees under this MOU, and for any loss, cost, damage, or expense resulting at any time from failure to exercise proper precautions of, or by itself or its own agents or employees, while occupying or visiting the projects under and pursuant to this MOU. The Federal Government's liability will be governed by the provisions of the Federal Tort Claims Act (28 USC 2671-80).
- I. This MOU is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document. Any endeavor, including specific work projects or activities where there is to be reimbursement or contribution of funds between the parties to this instrument, will be handled in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and procedures including those for Government procurement and printing. Such endeavors and work plans will be made in writing in a separate and independent agreement by representatives of the participating programs, authorized by appropriate statutory authority. This MOU does not provide such authority. Specifically, this MOU does not establish authority for noncompetitive award to the cooperator of any contract or other agreement. Negotiation, execution, and administration of each such agreement must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations.
- J. Any contract or agreement for training or other services must fully comply with all applicable requirements for competition.

## VI. CONTACTS

### A. The American Society of Agronomy:

ASA/CCA and ASA/CPAg:  
Luther Smith, CAE  
Director, Certification and Licensing Programs  
5585 Guilford Road  
Madison, Wisconsin 53711  
Telephone: (608) 268-4977  
Fax: (608) 273-2081  
[lsmith@sciencesocieties.org](mailto:lsmith@sciencesocieties.org)

### B. Natural Resources Conservation Service:

Dwayne Howard  
Technical Service Providers Team Leader  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250  
Telephone: (202) 720-6731  
Fax: (202) 720-5334  
[dwayne.howard@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:dwayne.howard@wdc.usda.gov)

Anthony J. Kramer  
Deputy Chief for Programs  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250  
Telephone: (202) 720-4527

## VI. AUTHORITY


NRCS enters into this agreement under the authority of the Food Security Act of 1985, Section 1242. 16 U.S.C. 3842.

**VII. APPROVAL**

The undersigned parties hereby agree to the terms and conditions specified above.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ellen Bergfeld  
CEO, American Society of Agronomy

9/23/11  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dave White  
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

9-13-11  
Date