

STATEMENT OF WORK

NRCS has launched a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) pilot program for FY 2009. The plan provides a 75% cost-share to producers for preparation of conservation plans by qualified, pre-approved, private-sector Technical Service Providers (TSPs). A 90% cost-share is available to historically underserved producers.

We propose to ensure effective participation in CAP program to advance adoption of IPM. Our specific objectives include: create a new national working group composed of Extension, NRCS, state lead agency, EPA, IPM Centers and industry professionals and focusing on CAPs infrastructure development to maximize opportunities for IPM; develop training curriculum for private-sector consultants to qualify as TSPs and to write CAPs; determine realistic cost-share rates to attract the private-sector; create an outreach plan to increase awareness among growers, private sector consultants and IPM professionals; and develop model IPM CAPs and evaluate pilot results and recommend improvements.

This project will directly address goals and priorities of the Center. By recruiting private-sector TSPs, IPM coordinators and other regional, state and Federal agency representatives to our CAPs working group, we will build partnerships to address challenges and opportunities. By developing an outreach plan to increase awareness about CAPs and providing technical assistance for the private sector to create TSPs, we will address communications and training for IPM users. Finally, by gathering input from a diverse group of individuals to create training curricula, we address the Center's broad mission to provide all people related to IPM with appropriate and reliable information so that they can make informed decisions.

CAPs are designed to detail conservation treatment needs for eligible land. Goals include increasing the number of plans and private-sector planners beyond those developed under EQIP and other programs. Approximately \$750 million is available for CAP through FY 2013 through financial assistance funds. In the past, cost-share dollars for private-sector plan development were provided from technical assistance funds, which were limited and reduced funds available for NRCS staff. Financial assistance funds do not have this constraint. Additionally, cost-share for CAPs is not limited to producers with EQIP contracts. Any producer with qualifying acreage in a participating state could apply. Just as 595 Pest Management plans have been required for EQIP incentives, CAPs may be required for access to NRCS technical assistance and cost-share programs in the future.

Integrated Pest Management is one of eleven plan types included in the pilot. In the past, less than 2% of EQIP funds have been used for improvements in pest management. Over the past several years, a number of states have made significant progress in connecting NRCS and IPM professionals, improving mutual understanding of IPM and NRCS programs, developing tools and increasing grower access to and participation in NRCS programs for IPM. We have much to gain by taking advantage of this opportunity to increase the number of growers participating in IPM. An emerging scenario for CAPs, and one we are experiencing this year, is where a grower/packer supplier to WalMart

anticipates a request from this major buyer to document pesticide use and risk reduction. The grower/packer has more than 20 grower suppliers, only a few of which have an IPM program. The grower/packer would like all of its growers to have a professionally prepared plan that identifies opportunities to reduce pesticide use and transition to products that minimize impacts on resource concerns. Prior to CAPs, it might take several years before all growers could secure an EQIP contract including cost-share for plan development and implementation. With CAPs, all these growers might have an opportunity to have a plan prepared prior to the 2010 season.

The following states have elected to offer IPM plan opportunities during the pilot: CA, ME, RI, and WV; however, our goal is to provide training for TSPs in all 50 states to increase the current lack of certified TSPs that threaten the number of states that will sign up for IPM CAP in FY 2010. We face significant challenges to ensure success of the pilot as a learning opportunity to facilitate broad, effective participation. Funding from the Northeastern IPM Center would allow the following processes to occur:

- Identify opportunity for Extension involvement. Currently Extension staff in several states provides IPM technical assistance to growers under formal or informal agreements with NRCS. NRCS makes the cost-share payment to the producer who contracts with a third-party service provider (potentially an Extension office).
- Establish relationships between IPM Institute and other IPM Centers to develop training curriculum and with other potential funding, act as instructors during training workshops in their region. IPM Centers may also serve during the evaluation process by reporting and publicizing success stories in their region.
- Develop realistic estimates for cost-share for specific crops to provide adequate incentives for private-sector TSPs. Attractive payment rates will be critically important to attract private-sector participation.
- Develop web-based and “hands-on” training curriculum to help TSPs/potential TSPs meet the revised TSP qualifications to develop IPM CAPs. The University of Minnesota is willing to offer a specialty training module specifically for IPM CAP writing through the current IPM³ online training program.
- Develop model IPM CAPs and an outreach plan including materials to increase awareness and explain benefits to TSPs, potential TSPs and producers.
- Identify and recruit private-sector consultants to qualify as TSPs and producers to participate in the pilot. There is current interest from consultants in CA and UT to become trained to write IPM CAPs. A current training initiative in WI has shown a broad interest from the private-sector to become certified to write CAPs.
- Evaluate training curriculum by trained TSPs and NRCS TSP team under MOU with NRCS. The TSP team identifies whether or not the IPM Institute has a program in place to train, test and evaluate candidates for competency to provide specific categories of technical services. The technical specialists evaluates and determines if the training program can satisfy knowledge and skills required to plan and/or install conservation practices that comprise those categories.

The following initial outline work plan is proposed for June 2009 through March 2010:

June

1. Develop base funding for and hire a FTE to coordinate the CAPs working group and expenses for conference calls and materials.
2. Identify state NRCS staff responsible for CAPs, recruit to the CAPs working group.
3. Recruit IPM coordinators or their designees from all states that have selected IPM CAPs; invite participation from all states.
4. Recruit producers and TSPs/potential TSPs for the CAPs working group and to participate in the pilot.
5. Recruit representatives from SARE, US EPA Strategic Ag Initiative, state lead agencies, conservation districts, Certified Crop Advisor, National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants, representatives from each IPM Center and others with an interest to benefit.
6. First monthly CAPs working group teleconference.

July

1. Draft sample outline work plans for CAP preparation following the NRCS criteria.
2. Develop realistic cost estimates for private-sector-developed IPM CAPs based on the work plans. Currently rates for IPM CAPs are set at \$1398 per plan vs. up to \$16,000 for Comprehensive Nutrient Management CAPs.
3. Draft sample CAP templates for fruit, vegetable and field crops following the NRCS criteria for the IPM CAP.
4. Draft training curricula for qualifying for TSP status and for developing IPM CAPs, circulate for review/comment.

5. Initiate MOU development with NRCS to provide training.
6. Evaluation of training curriculum.
7. Monthly CAPs working group teleconference.

August

1. Refine and finalize training curricula via iterative drafts.
2. Identify sources of funds to offer IPM CAP training. A submitted grant proposal to the North Central IPM Center may provide funding for training events.
3. Monthly CAPs working group teleconference.

September

1. Draft and refine outreach plan, circulate iterative drafts for review and comment.
2. Develop and provide training events as funding provides.
3. Provide technical assistance to TSPs and producers who are completing plans.
4. Monthly CAPs working group teleconference.

October-November

1. Deliver completed plans to participating producers.
2. Develop and implement online training curriculum through IPM³.
3. Finalize outreach plan.
4. Monthly CAPs working group teleconference.

December-February

1. Monthly CAPs working group teleconference.

March

1. Evaluate and report results.
2. Monthly CAPs working group teleconference.