



NRCS CONSERVATION ACTIVITY PLANS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR IPM

A Guide to Developing an IPM Conservation Activity Plan Program in Your State

For: State IPM Coordinators, Extension staff, public advocates, employees in public agencies, non-profit organizations, conservation districts, University IPM or agriculture specialists, etc.

Overview:

In 2009, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) piloted Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs), a new cost-share program designed to identify opportunities to protect on-farm natural resource concerns. CAPs offers up to 75% of the cost for a private-sector Technical Service Provider (TSP) to prepare a CAP for a farm, and up to 90% for historically underserved producers, including beginning, limited resource or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. Approximately \$750 million is available in the current farm bill through 2013 for CAPs.

CAPs are designed to identify site-specific resource concerns on the entire farm, such as nutrient or pesticide run-off risk to a nearby water body, high drift potential due to sprayer type or nozzle configuration, inefficient water use and more. There are 12 different CAP options, including Integrated Pest Management (IPM), transition to organic, forestry and aquaculture, among others.

Which of the 12 CAPs are offered varies by state. If IPM CAPs are available in your state, growers may apply for funding to hire a TSP to write a plan for their farm. Each state NRCS office prioritizes their resource concerns, e.g., California may focus more on air quality, Wisconsin more on nutrient management. CAPs applications will be ranked and funded based on those priorities.

State IPM Coordinators, Extension staff, crop advisors, growers, conservation professionals and others can help make IPM CAPs a success in your state. This Guide for Developing an IPM CAP Program in Your State provides recommended steps to take in order to develop an IPM CAP program. This is a template that can be modified to fit your state's needs.

Step 1: Request that your state offer IPM CAPs.

Contact your state NRCS office (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html>) to determine if NRCS offers IPM CAPs in your state. If not, express your interest and support for the program. **States must choose by December 18, 2009 which CAPs they will offer.** Mail, email and/or fax a written request to your State Conservationist to offer IPM CAPs.

Step 2: Express your interest and support to NRCS.

Contact your NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) program manager and NRCS State Conservationist to express your support and interest in developing an IPM CAP program in your state. Ask them what they need from you and others to make this happen. You can begin your search for your NRCS contacts here: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html>.

Offer NRCS your help with establishing adequate cost-share rates, developing and hosting training workshops and conducting outreach.

Step 3: Recruit your IPM CAPs “Development Team” and identify responsibilities.

Collaboration among key players will be most effective. Ideally, your team will consist of the NRCS EQIP program manager for your state, Extension specialists, your State IPM Coordinator, crop advisors, growers and/or representatives from grower groups. Consider forming a cooperative agreement with NRCS help pay for conducting outreach, holding training workshops, etc. See the “Additional Considerations” section below for more information.

Step 4: Establish adequate financial assistance.

NRCS offers a 75% cost-share to growers for hiring a TSP to write an IPM CAP for their farm. To ensure your state’s cost-share rates reflect what TSPs actually charge for their services, use the “IPM ONE 2009” spreadsheet and California’s 2009 IPM CAPs payment schedule spreadsheet, both available at www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs/NRCS_Opportunity.htm under “Steps to Developing an IPM CAP Program in Your State.”

Some growers have expressed concern with paying the remaining 25% of the TSP’s fee. To reduce this barrier, Extension or others can apply for grants to pay the balance for growers who use high-risk pesticides and/or have heightened resource concerns on their farms such as numerous water bodies, soil prone to leaching or run-off, etc.

Additionally, recommend to NRCS that funding in other NRCS programs such as the EQIP 595 Pest Management Standard be prioritized to favor growers who already have an IPM CAP. This will provide additional encouragement for growers to invest in an IPM CAP since they will be more likely to receive financial assistance for implementing the plan.

Step 5 and Ongoing: Conduct outreach to growers, TSPs and others.

Outreach to growers and TSPs is critical to a successful IPM CAPs program. Growers and TSPs need to know the economic and environmental benefits of having an IPM CAP. Conduct outreach to these groups describing the program, its benefits, how they can apply for funding and find a TSP, or how they can become certified to write IPM CAPs. In developing outreach targeting crop consultants, refer to the “Guide to Becoming an IPM CAPs-Certified TSP” available at http://www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs/Resources.htm#WG_resources.

Conduct outreach through meeting presentations, newsletters, newspaper and magazine articles, email listserv messages, radio ads, signage and other avenues you have available. For examples of outreach materials, visit the National IPM CAPs Working Group’s Resources webpage at http://www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs/Resources.htm#WG_resources.

Step 6: Evaluation and information sharing.

The National IPM CAPs Working Group offers support and resources to all states developing an IPM CAP program. As you undergo the program development process, please provide the working group with feedback on your experience, suggestions for improvement and any additional resources. We will make these available on the working group's website to help other states beginning the process.

Additional Considerations:

- **Form a cooperative agreement.** By forming a cooperative agreement or memorandum of understanding with the NRCS, you are agreeing to share the workload and financial responsibilities of developing your state's IPM CAPs program. Note in the agreement what is expected of each team member and by when. Indicate the financial assistance NRCS will be providing. A sample cooperative agreement is available at http://www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs/Resources.htm#WG_resources.
- **Plan and host a TSP training workshop.** A shortage of IPM CAPs-certified TSPs can limit the success of your state's IPM CAPs program. The more certified TSPs there are in your area, the more IPM CAPs requests from growers can be filled.

Your development team can provide a training workshop for individuals interested in becoming certified to write IPM CAPs. The National IPM CAPs Working Group is developing a TSP training curriculum, a draft of which is available at http://www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs/TSP_Training.htm; a final version will be posted in coming weeks. Please note that each line item meets a minimum requirement for certifying TSPs and should be retained if you choose to adapt this curriculum to meet additional needs in your state.

Conduct outreach to crop consultants, TSPs and conservation professionals to encourage their participation in the training. Outreach needs to explain the benefits and requirements of becoming an IPM CAPs-certified TSP. You may also contact the National IPM CAPs Working Group to post the workshop information on the TSP Training webpage.

Additional resources such as training recommendations, example training budgets and nationwide training opportunities will be posted to the Working Group's TSP Training site as they become available.

Visit the National IPM CAPs Working Group's website for more information:

www.ipminstitute.org/IPMCAPs

National IPM CAPs Working Group Contact:

Vicki Kalkirtz

IPM Institute of North America, Inc.

4510 Regent St.

Madison WI 53705

608 232-1410

[vkalkirtz@ipminstitute.org]

The National IPM CAPs Working Group is funded by grants from the Northeastern and North Central IPM Centers and coordinated by the IPM Institute of North America, Inc.