



Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon, Governor • Kip A. Stetzler, Acting Director

## DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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### MEMORANDUM

2011-014

DATE: October 27, 2010

TO: All Soil and Water Conservation Districts

FROM: <sup>KS</sup>Ken Struempf, District Operations Section  
Soil and Water Conservation Program

SUBJECT: **Cost-Share Practice Comparison Index**

On June 4, 2010, the Soil and Water Conservation Program (SWCP) workgroup reviewed the development of a cost-share index to determine the effort required to successfully implement a given cost-share practice, relative to other cost-share practices and to ensure that cost-share is delivered as efficiently as possible across the state. The workgroup concluded that this data set has the potential to provide a foundation for the development of future indices, such as measuring the environmental benefits of the program's practices, and thereby fulfilling various strategic goals of the program.

Benefits of the cost-share index in particular include:

- Indicates which practices are the most complex.
- Indicates which practices have a positive cost/benefit ratio.
- Discloses district efficiencies.
- Serves as a guide to making decisions.

The SWCP workgroup recognized that district staff are the individuals positioned to most accurately determine this index and should be the primary source of data. The workgroup further remarked that the diversity of job functions should be accounted for in the polling process, as some districts have staff fulfilling both technical and office support functions. Additionally, the suggestions on the index included years of district experience and a measure of the level of assistance provided by Natural Resources Conservation Service for each individual practice to further support and refine the districts' scoring system.

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As discussed by the workgroup, program staff has worked with several pilot districts to determine the best method of populating this data set. Interaction with the pilot districts proved highly valuable, as the scoring system was modified several times at the request of the districts to better facilitate an accurate, user-friendly, and equitable index. In addition, the spreadsheet for you to complete shows an average practice comparison completed by the pilot districts for your reference.

Instructions for filling out the cost-share practice comparison index are provided as an attachment to this memo. The districts will be receiving their individual index spreadsheets via email within the next week. Districts will only score practices they have implemented within the last five years. If your district would like an opportunity to participate in the cost-share practice comparison index, please fill out and email the spreadsheets to Jennifer Johnson at [jennifer.johnson@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:jennifer.johnson@dnr.mo.gov) by **November 15, 2010**. The program has provided training to the district coordinators on the cost-share practice comparison index to be able to assist the district with questions.

KS:jjd

Attachments

## **Instructions for Completing the Cost-Share Practice Comparison Index**

One spreadsheet should be completed for each position type (Program Specialist and Technician), per district. If there are multiple managers and/or technicians in an office, the employees should feel free to combine resources and work on scoring these spreadsheets as a team. **At the bottom of the spreadsheet under “Signature of Employee(s) Contributing to this Comparison” please provide the names of the individuals who contributed to the index.** It should be stressed that the cost-share index is purposely designed to be subjective, as the program is not looking for a particular score, but a score that best represents the effort taken to implement cost-share practices in each of the districts.

### **Practice**

The first column delineates the practice codes for the practices that will be scored. Only practices that have been implemented in the last five years in the district will appear on the worksheets.

### **Name**

The second column provides the full name of the practice.

### **State Average Size of Practice (5 years)/Average Number of Practices**

The Technician spreadsheet’s third column provides the state average size of each practice over five years. This column is designed to give the districts a basic frame of reference for scoring each practice. The Program Specialist spreadsheet’s third column provides the average number of practices over five years.

### **Units of Measure**

The fourth column provides the units of measure. The Technician’s spreadsheet will have the practices measured in “acres,” “each,” “feet,” and “linear feet,” respectively.

The Program Specialist’s spreadsheet will have units of measure in “practices” only.

### **Practice Comparison Example**

The fifth column is a scoring example to assist the districts. These numbers are derived from the practice comparison data collected from the pilot districts.

### **Practice Comparison**

This is where the district has the opportunity to score each practice. The reference point for a Technician is a DSL-1 on 200 acres. The reference point for a Program Specialist is 10 DSL-1 practices. The districts will use these numbers as a baseline to perform a comparative analysis of other practices. The district should think of what it takes to implement a DSL-1 on 200 acres from the Technical perspective and what it takes to implement 10 practices of a DSL-1 from the administrative perspective. If a practice is easier than a DSL-1, the acreage and practice comparison will be higher as the district has the ability to complete the simpler practice on more acreage based on the assumption that the expertise, awareness and time spent on the practice is reduced. Likewise, if a practice is more difficult than a DSL-1, the acreage and practice comparison will be lower as the district has the ability to complete the more difficult practice on less acreage based on the assumption that expertise, awareness, and time are increased.

Districts should consider the following when providing a practice comparison score:

- Technical and/or Administrative Expertise - the amount of training and level of knowledge necessary to implement each practice.
- Landowner Awareness - this could include educating the landowner on practices and selling the practices to landowners in the community. Since a relatively high acreage score is used as a reference point (200 acres or 10 practices), to facilitate the potential for higher and lower scores, the district should also think about how many landowners would typically be served on the acreage scored.
- Time taken to Implement - the time it takes to implement a particular practice.

#### EXAMPLE 1:

##### District Technician:

A District Technician determines that a DSL-2 is slightly easier than a DSL-1 based on the practice comparison parameters. The district decides that they can implement a DSL-2 on 225 acres in the same amount of time and with the same level of expertise and landowner awareness as a DSL-1 on 200 acres.

Conversely, a District Technician determines that a grazing system is much more difficult, in fact four times harder than a DSL-1; therefore, they ascribe a score of 50 to the DSP-3. In other words, the district decides they can implement a 50 acre grazing system in the same amount of time and with the same expertise and landowner awareness required to implement 200 acres of a DSL-1.

##### Program Specialist:

A Program Specialist determines that implementing 10 DSL-1 practices is essentially the same as implementing 10 DSL-2 practices from the administrative perspective; therefore, the manager ascribes the DSL-2 practice with a score of 10; equivalent to the administrative reference score of a DSL-1.

Conversely, a Program Specialist determines that implementing a DSP-3 is more difficult than implementing a DSL-1. Therefore, the manager ascribes a score of 8. In other words, the Specialist can implement 8 DSP-3 practices in the same amount of time and with the same expertise and landowner awareness required to implement 10 DSL-1 practices.

## EXAMPLE 2:

### District Technician:

Let's think in terms of each. The county above ascribes a score of 20 to a N351. At first glance, you may wonder why the N351 is scored so low. But, the N351 practice is measured in "each" instead of "acres." Therefore, the district determines that they can design 20 "each" N351 practices in the same amount of time it takes to design 200 acres of a DSL-1 while factoring in landowner awareness and expertise in addition to time.

### Program Specialist:

Conversely, the Program Specialist determines that they can perform 12 N351 practices in the same amount of time it takes to perform 10 DSL-1 practices while factoring in landowner awareness and expertise in addition to time.

### **Years of Technical/Administrative Experience**

Each district should score their level of experience implementing cost-share practices. The choices are < 2 years (less than 2 years) and >2 years (greater than 2 years).

### **Does Size of Practice Make a Difference?**

Mark yes or no accordingly to indicate if the practice makes a difference during implementation.

### **Available Assistance from NRCS**

Each district should choose one of the following, to reflect the level of assistance provided by NRCS.

- None: NRCS is not involved with the practice.
- Low: Districts do majority of the work, NRCS signs off on the project.
- Medium: Districts and NRCS work as a team in the field.
- High: NRCS does majority of the work, district involved very little.

The bottom of the spreadsheet requests that the individual report whether they perform job duties outside the realm of their expertise (ex. Does a Technician perform administrative work and does a Program Specialist perform technical work?)

Administrative work related to cost-share practices includes, but is not necessarily limited to: Entering contracts into MoSWIMS, obtaining signatures on contracts, managing funds, gathering receipts, entering data, scanning and filing.

Technician work related to cost-share practices includes, but is not necessarily limited to: Meeting NRCS specifications and standards, meeting commission policy, and calculating fertilizer worksheets.

In addition to these instructions, there is a quick reference guide located at the bottom of the spreadsheets. If you have questions while filling out the cost-share practice comparison spreadsheet, please contact your District Coordinator.

Example County Technician Worksheet (*the values in bold and italics are the fields your district will complete*)

[illegible]

Does this position also perform administrative work?

If so, please explain:

Signature of Employee(s) Contributing to this Comparison:

\*200 acres is the reference point to perform comparative analyses of other practices

**Benefits of the Index:**

1. Indicate which practices are the most complex.
2. Point out which practices have positive cost/benefit ratio.
3. Help reveal district efficiencies.
4. Serve as a guide to making decisions (example: expand cost-share practices? Eliminate practices?)

**Parameters to consider when scoring the practice comparison:**

1. Technical and Administrative Expertise.
2. Landowner Awareness
3. Time taken to implement practices.

**Definition of technical work experience:**

< 2 years means that the technical experience in the office on a particular practice is **less** than 2 years.

> 2 years means that the technical experience in the office on a particular practice is **greater** than 2 years.

**Does size of practice make a difference:**

Some technicians have expressed that designing 20 acres of a DSL-1 is similar to designing 2 acres of a DSL-1.

In other words the size of the practices does not make much of a difference. However, some practices will obviously require more attention, the greater the acreage. Therefore, we are asking the districts to tell us if the size of each practice makes a difference.

**Definitions of low/med/high when recording available assistance from NRCS:**

none: NRCS is not involved with the practice.

low: Districts do majority of the work, NRCS signs off on the project.

medium: Districts and NRCS work as a team in the field.

high: NRCS does majority of the work, district involved very little.

**Reference point:**

The reference point is a DSL-1 on 200 acres. Use this baseline to perform a comparative analysis of other practices.

The district should think of what it takes to implement a DSL-1 on 200 acres.

**Things to remember:**

The district may be working (for example) with 10 landowners on 20 acre tracts.

Think of how much time, expertise, and landowner education it will take to implement this practice....got it? OK now you will look at other practices you have completed in your county. Are they easier? more complex? Do they take more or less time to design/implement?

If a practice is easier than a DSL-1, the acreage comparison will be higher as you will be able to complete the simpler practice

on more acreage based on the assumption that the expertise, awareness and time spent on the practice are reduced.

Likewise, if a practice is more difficult than a DSL-1, the acreage comparison will be lower as you will be able to complete the more difficult practice on less acreage based on the assumption that expertise, awareness, and time are increased.

**EXAMPLE 1:**

A district technician determines that a DSL-2 is slightly easier than a DSL-1 based on the practice comparison parameters. The district decides that they can implement a DSL-2 on 225 acres in the same amount of time and with the same level of expertise and landowner awareness as a DSL-1 on 200 acres.

Conversely, a district technician determines that a grazing system is much more difficult, in fact 4 times harder than a DSL-1, therefore they ascribe a score of 50 to the DSP-3. In other words, the district decides they can implement a 50 acre grazing system in the same amount of time and with the same expertise and landowner awareness required to implement 200 acres of a DSL-1.

**EXAMPLE 2:**

Let's think in terms of each. The county above ascribes a score of 20 to the well decommissioning practice (N351). At first glance you may wonder why the N351 is scored so low. But, the N351 practice is measured in "each" instead of "acres." Therefore the district determines that they can design 20 "each" N351 practices in the same amount of time it takes to design 200 acres of a DSL-1 while factoring in landowner awareness and expertise in addition to time.