



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service
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January 9, 2014

MASSACHUSETTS TECHNICAL GUIDE NOTICE NO. MA-268

TO: All holders of Field Office Technical Guide, Sections I, III & IV

Purpose: To transmit notice of updated Cost Data and Conservation Practice documents.

Effective Date: This notice is effective upon receipt.

Explanation of Changes: Cost data for Fiscal Year 2015 and new/revised conservation practice standards have been added to the electronic Field Office Technical Guide as follows:

COST DATA

- **Fiscal Year 2015 Cost Data** for eligible conservation practices in NRCS financial assistance programs EQIP and AMA have been added to Section I.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITY PLANS

- **Agricultural Energy Management Plan (Code 128)**—The agency combined the two previous energy plan practices (“Headquarters” and “Landscape”) into one comprehensive energy management plan.
- **Organic Transition Plan (Code 138)**—The criteria for this Conservation Activity Plan have been updated such that new plans will align more closely with the Organic System Plan (OSP) that farmers submit for certification. OSPs are required by the USDA AMS National Organic Program.
- **IPM Herbicide Resistance Plan (Code 154)**—The criteria for this Conservation Activity Plan have been updated; this CAP is being offered for the first time in Massachusetts in FY2015.

CONSERVATION PRACTICES

- **Building Envelope Improvement (Code 672)**-- This national standard, used to modify or retrofit the building envelope of an existing agricultural structure, has been updated with a statement of work and a network diagram for scoping environmental compliance.
- **Brush Management (Code 314)**—The specification guide for controlling Barberry has been updated as well as the jobsheet.
- **Combustion System Improvement (Code 372)**--This national standard, used to improve the air quality and energy efficiency of agricultural combustion systems, has been updated with a statement of work and a network diagram for scoping environmental compliance.

- **Farmstead Energy Improvement (Code 374)**—This practice has been updated with a network diagram for scoping environmental compliance.
- **Contour Farming (Code 330)**—The agency revised the definition to emphasize proper alignments and revised the general criteria for maximum row grade to 4 percent based upon RUSLE2 technology.
- **Cover Crop (Code 340)**—The agency deleted two purposes, (1) promote biological nitrogen fixation and reduce energy use, and (2) increase biodiversity, as the two purposes are captured in the criteria in the general criteria and the criteria for the other purposes. Edited the criteria to improve clarity and understanding of the standard. Added additional criteria to address the need to terminate cover crops within the NRCS cover Crop Termination Guidelines. Provided additional criteria for haying and grazing cover crops. The Massachusetts Specification Guide and Jobsheet have also been updated.
- **Deep Tillage (Code 324)**—The agency deleted the purpose to reduce concentration of soil contaminants that inhibit plant growth because there is no technology to describe the level of neither contamination nor an acceptable dilution factor.
- **Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (Code 647)**—A Massachusetts jobsheet has been created that provides guidance on establishing cutback borders along forested edges.
- **Fence (Code 382)**—The agency elevated the wildlife consideration to the level of criteria. Only the updated conservation practice standard is being released at this time. An updated specification guide and jobsheets will be forthcoming.
- **Filter Strip (Code 393)**—The agency added a few additional considerations for species selection for native plant communities and organic operation considerations.
- **Groundwater Testing (Code 355)**-- The agency changed the title from “Well Water Testing” to “Groundwater Testing,” to reflect that this practice can be used to test groundwater from both wells and springs. The agency also modified conditions where practice applies and removed items from criteria operation and maintenance.
- **Land Smoothing (Code 466)**—The agency: revised the definition; added a cultural resource inventory and assessment to Considerations; added a plan for Operations and Maintenance; and added references.
- **Mulching (Code 484)**—The agency deleted the purposes: 1) to moderate soil temperature and; 2) to suppress weeds as these do not address a resource concern. “Condition where practice applies” was modified to remove this practice from being used for weed control for production agriculture.
- **Obstruction Removal (Code 500)**--The definition was edited to add “works of improvement” and “debris,” while “landscape features” was eliminated. To the conditions where practice applies, two statements were added: “public safety and infrastructure” and “does not apply to aquatic environments.” The Criteria section was updated to include safety and environmental concerns, and more detail for stabilization of the site after removal work. Considerations were added related to recycling, dust suppression, erosion and sediment control, working in environmentally sensitive areas, and safety and wildlife habitat. Minimum requirements for plan and specification content were added; minimum

requirements for O&M plans were added; and additional references were added.

- **Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (Code 329)**—The agency changed the practice name. No-Till is inclusive of direct seed and strip till. A purpose was changed to address all sizes of tillage-induced particulate emissions. In addition, criteria were added to not allow full width tillage, and the maximum allowable “Soil Tillage Intensity Rating” value was reduced from 30 to 20.
- **Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (Code 345)**—The agency changed the practice name from “Mulch Till” to “Reduced Till”. A purpose was changed to address all sizes of tillage-induced particulate emissions, and a criterion was added to establish a maximum allowable “Soil Tillage Intensity Rating” value of 80.
- **Seasonal High Tunnel Systems for Crops (Code 798)**—The approved product list for high tunnel structures has been updated.
- **Stripcropping (Code 585)**—The agency revised the definition to stress alternating strips of erosion susceptible crops.
- **Structures for Wildlife (Code 649)**—This is a new national conservation practice standard with a 5-year lifespan. Prior to this new national conservation practice standard, there existed no minimum requirements for applying fish and wildlife structures or retrofitting existing structures as needed to improve management and conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and to achieve their intended purpose. This standard provides for retrofitting existing structures, such as the installation of wildlife escape ramps to existing water troughs and retrofitting existing fencing to allow for safe passage by wildlife. A Massachusetts jobsheet for brush piles has been created.
- **Terrace (Code 600)**—The agency clearly defined pressure flow and gravity flow, added tractive stress references, updated the operation and maintenance section, and added references.
- **Trails and Walkways (Code 575)**—The agency incorporated Trails and Walkways (Code 568) into Animal Trails and Walkways (Code 575) under the name Trails and Walkways (Code 575). These standards were combined into one because many of the criteria are very similar. The practice name, definition, purpose, and conditions where practice applies were modified accordingly. The agency clarified references to supporting practices.
- **Water Well (Code 642)**—The agency changed the criteria to clarify that domestic use and irrigation wells must follow consensus standards, grouting, and sealing with a water-tight seal required in annulus of the casing, clarified suitable filter pack materials, removed numerical limit on intake velocity through screens, and added a statement to emphasize all wells must be developed. The paragraph on well performance testing after completion was moved from criteria to considerations.

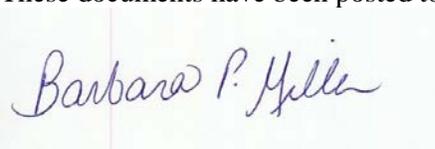
TOOLS

- **All habitat assessment tools currently located in “Section VI –Tools” have been updated.**
- **Bog Turtle Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide**
- **New England Cottontail Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide**
- **Fish Passage/Stream Improvement Habitat Appraisal**
- **Grassland Habitat Appraisal**

- **Mid-Late Successional Forest Habitat Appraisal**
- **Pollinator Habitat Assessment**
- **Riparian Habitat Assessment**
- **Shrubland Habitat Appraisal**
- **Stream Visual Assessment Protocol Version 2**
- **Wetland Habitat Appraisal**
- **Young Forest Habitat Appraisal**

Filing Instructions. Insert this notice in front of Section I of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).
File the updated documents in the appropriate Section of the FOTG.

These documents have been posted to the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG).

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara P. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned on a light blue rectangular background.

Barbara P. Miller
State Resource Conservationist/ASTC Farm Bill Programs

Attachments

DIST: All Employees
S.O. Official MA FOTG
John Lebeaux, Commissioner, MDAR
Gerard Kennedy, Director, Conservation and Technical Assistance, MDAR