

Terms, Concepts, and Processes

Purpose

To provide a clear, consistent, and common definition of terms, concepts, and processes associated with this Project.

Advanced Soil Health Training (ASHT): A series of four, two-day, in-person training sessions targeting advanced soil health practitioners. ASHT Participants will receive classroom and field instruction on improving soil health through the adoption of Climate-Smart Practices. Specifically, they will receive training on soil health properties, soil health principles, Climate-Smart Practice implementation and management, and how to develop a Soil Health Impact Plan (SHIP) and work with peer networks. ASHTs are organized in cohorts, ideally of 25-30 participants, and aligned within AFT's Midwest, Southeast, New York, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Regions. Eight ASHT cohorts are planned for this Project.

ASHT Participant: An individual participating in an ASHT. Participants are paid a \$1,000 participation stipend (for an individual) or participation allowance (for an LLC or business) for each ASHT session they attend, which is intended to cover all expenses associated with their participation (travel, hotel, meals, etc.). If the participant is a government employee (federal, state, or local), they will have their travel expenses covered through a travel reimbursement process and will not be paid for their participation. ASHT Participants are also paid a one-time Stipend of \$1,000 for developing a Soil Health Impact Plan (SHIP). Government employees will not be allowed to receive funding for developing a SHIP unless they have gotten approval from their supervisor to do this on their own time.

Soil Health Impact Plan (SHIP): A roadmap developed by an ASHT participant to create and track a Peer Network of Engaged and Enrolled Producers. If an ASHT participant decides to become a SHA, they will be expected to implement their SHIP.

Soil Health Advisor (SHA): An ASHT participant who adequately completes the ASHT and decides to sign a SHA Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with AFT to attend/listen to a series of Beyond ASHT Webinars. By taking this additional step, a SHA will have the opportunity to receive funds for providing Technical Assistance to Actively Engaged and Enrolled Producers by implementing their SHIP, creating a Peer Network, developing Climate-Smart Commodity (CSC) Plans, and helping Producers enroll in AFT's FA program.

Climate-Smart Commodity (CSC) Plan: A guide to implement a specific Climate-Smart Practice in a specific field of an enrolled or engaged producer's farm. SHAs will work with Producers engaged in their peer networks and/or enrolled in AFT's FA Program to develop CSC Plans that include in-field soil health observations and assessments and outline the measures needed to implement a specific Climate-Smart Practice according to its Conservation Practice Standard. AFT staff will review CSC Plans to ensure their completeness and accuracy.

Peer Network: For this Project, a Peer Network may follow a group model in which a small group of farmers gather a few times a year under the direction, coordination, or leadership of a SHA to exchange information about improving soil health through Climate-Smart Practice adoption. A Peer Network may also follow a one-on-one model in which an SHA and a farmer engage in an in-depth, site-specific exchange of knowledge and expertise about improving soil health through Practice adoption. Thus, a Peer Network for this Project may consist of one or more individual farmers. Regardless of the model chosen or the number of farmers in a Peer Network, the exchange of information or knowledge and expertise must be documented in a SHA's SHIP and Technical Assistance Notes.

Technical Assistance Note (TA Note): A simple, one-page form designed to document basic information about the TA provided by a SHA. The form will include the date the TA was provided, who received the TA, and what kind of TA was provided. The intent is for a SHA to fill out a hard copy of the form during or immediately after providing TA to a Producer. The TA Note will complement, not replace, a SHA's SHIP.

Peer Network Impact: We will collect qualitative and quantitative data captured by interviews and surveys to gauge the broader impacts of the peer networks and the implementation of climate-smart practices. This work will be designed and administered by the Evaluation Workstream for this Project.

Climate-Smart Practices (Practices): A list of agricultural conservation practices that NRCS has designated as mitigating the effects of climate change. A subset of this list will be offered in this Project.



FA Payments will have a Practice-specific dollar amount and a Practice-specific maximum number of acres. The following Practice-specific FA Payments will be offered for this Project:

- Cover Crops: \$80 per acre up to a maximum of 40 acres
- No-Till: \$20 per acre up to a maximum of 150 acres
- Reduced-Till: \$20 per acre up to a maximum of 150 acres
- Cover Crops stacked with No-Till or Reduced Till: \$100 per acre up to a maximum of 30 acres

Enrolled Producers: This term refers to Historically Underserved Producers enrolled in AFT's FA Program.

Three Practices will be offered in the FA program:

- No-Till (CPS 329)
- Reduced-Till (CPS 345)
- Cover Crops (CPS 340)

Three more Practices (in addition to the previous three) will be offered in the TA Program:

- Conservation Crop Rotation (CPS 328)
- Nutrient Management (CPS 590)
- Soil Carbon Amendment – Biochar (CPS 336)

Financial Assistance (FA): FA can be thought of as an incentive to help offset the cost of First-Time Adoption of a Practice. Only eligible HUPs enrolled in a Practice and under contract with AFT will receive FA.

First-Time Adoption: This term only applies to HUPs who enroll in AFT's FA Program. When a HUP adopts a Practice, it must be new to the acreage enrolled. A key question to ask the Producer is: has the acreage to be enrolled ever received public funding (federal or state) for the Practice to be adopted? If the answer is no, then the acreage may be enrolled and receive FA for that Practice, for example, cover crops. If the answer is yes, then the acreage is not eligible to receive FA for cover crops. If the acreage has received public funding for another practice, say no-till, but not for cover crops, then the acreage could be enrolled and receive FA for cover crops.

FA Payment: Only HUPs enrolling in one of the three eligible Practices and raising corn, soybeans, wheat, or cotton are eligible to receive an FA Payment through this Project. For an FA Payment to be issued, it must be linked to a fully executed contract between AFT and the Enrolled Producer, an implemented and verified Practice, and Practice data uploaded through AFT's app to the USDA Workbook. All the previous steps must occur within one year of an executed contract. FA Payments will be for one year and for one Practice or two stacked Practices.

Historically Underserved Producers (HUPs): This Project will use [NRCS's HUP definition](#), which includes four groups of farmers: Beginning Farmers; Socially Disadvantaged Farmers; Veteran Farmers; and Limited Resource Farmers. In addition, Women Farmers will be considered Historically Underserved for this Project, even though they are not covered by the NRCS definition.

- **Beginning Farmers** – Producers who have not operated a farm or who have operated a farm for not more than 10 consecutive years, and who will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm.
- **Socially Disadvantaged Farmers** – Producers who identify as a member of a socially disadvantaged group. Socially disadvantaged groups include the following:
 - African American
 - Spanish American
 - American Indian
 - Asian
- **Veteran Farmers** – Producers who have served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve component thereof, and:
 - Have operated a farm for not more than 10 years; or
 - First obtained veteran status during the most recent 10-year period.
- **Limited Resource Farmers** – Producers who have a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four (for 2024 this was equal to or less than \$30,000/year) OR less than 50% of county median household income, which is specific for each county in the US. County-specific data can be found [here](#). The self-determination tool used by NRCS to determine a Limited Resource Farmer can be found [here](#).
- **Women Farmers** – For this Project, women are recognized as a stand-alone HUP category.

Note: Producers will self-identify as Historically Underserved; (i.e., a status check will not be required to grant HUP status).

Technical Assistance (TA): Generally speaking, TA is defined as the exchange of knowledge, skill, and expertise related to technical subject matter. This Project will explicitly add the principle of “participation” to the previous definition. In other words, individuals and groups will “participate” in a two-way exchange of information where someone “provides”, and someone “receives” TA focused on improving soil health through Practice adoption. SHAs will provide TA and Producers will receive TA. This give and take of TA, so to speak, will serve as the basis for determining the TA compensation amounts for SHAs, Enrolled Producers, and Engaged Producers. All TA compensation will be provided in the form of either a Participation Stipend or Allowance (PSA).

Participation Stipend/Allowance (PSA): This combination term refers to TA compensation. Participation Stipends will be provided to private individuals for participating in ASHTs, and for providing TA as SHAs. Participation Stipends will also be provided to Enrolled Producers and to Actively Engaged Producers who are linked to “participation” in TA through a peer network, tied to the production of corn, soybeans, wheat, or cotton, and documented in the SHIP and the TA Notes. Producers raising something other than corn, soybeans, wheat, or cotton may participate in a peer network but are not eligible to receive a PSA. Individuals representing government agencies (federal, state, or local), academic institutions, private businesses, or non-profits will receive an allowance for participating in ASHTs, however, they will not receive a Participation Stipend for providing TA, nor will they be eligible to become a SHA. For accounting and auditing purposes, it’s important to use the term PSA and not cost reimbursement or simply payment.

Non-Historically Underserved Producer (non-HUP): This term is primarily used when contrasting with a Historically Underserved Producer.

Engagement: This Project recognizes two levels, or degrees, of engagement, Active and Passive.

- **Active Engagement** refers to the direct, meaningful, and consistent engagement between a SHA and a Producer focused on improving soil health through Practice adoption. TA compensation to SHAs and Producers will be based on Active Engagement. Examples of Active Engagement include, but are not limited to, implementing and maintaining a SHIP; participating in a peer network, participating in the development of a CSC Plan; advising and assisting Enrolled Producers with Practice enrollment, implementation, verification, and reporting; and participating in Practice

verification and reporting. Active Engagement must be tracked and documented by SHAs in Soil Health Impact Plans (SHIPs) and TA Notes which is a simple tracking sheet developed by AFT and provided to SHAs. Producers actively engaged will be referred to as Engaged Producers or just Producers, historically underserved or not.

- **Passive Engagement** refers to the indirect, casual, and occasional engagement between a SHA and a Producer. It may also refer to a single, Project-related action by a Producer. For example, opening an email newsletter, clicking on a website, or attending a group event. Passive Engagement may be estimated or documented by a sign-in sheet. Passively engaged Producers will be tracked in the aggregate and not have a specific reference.

Practice Verification: A process that determines whether a Practice has been implemented according to its NRCS Standard. Here are all [national NRCS Conservation Practice Standards](#), which are then adapted by each state. SHAs will provide initial Practice verification with AFT staff conducting a 25% spot check.



Supported by USDA agreement #NR233A750004G016. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.