



Participating in AEM Tier 5B

This document outlines the options for completion of AEM Tier 5B Evaluation including continuing progressive conservation planning.

- Existing Tier 3 (A, B, or C) Conservation Plans on farms may be evaluated annually for effectiveness and to assure they are up to date (note that nutrient management plans and CNMPs should be updated annually). Evaluation may include updating, revising, and/or continuation of Tier 3A progressive planning. Evaluation may occur on an annual basis, but not in the same year that the original plan was developed if time is to be submitted for payment.
- Tier 4 BMP systems/conservation practices addressing Priority Natural Resource Issues & Opportunities identified through the conservation planning process installed on farms through the State Agricultural Nonpoint Source (NPS) Grant Program or USDA Farm Bill Programs can be evaluated for effectiveness and appropriate operation and maintenance.
- There are separate evaluation checklists for evaluation of a conservation plan and evaluation of a BMP system/conservation practice.
- Evaluation of a conservation plan (including continuation of a 3A progressive plan) and a BMP system/conservation practice on a farm may occur in the same year. Multiple BMP systems/conservation practices may be evaluated in any one year.
- Evaluation of a CNMP on a CAFO must be performed by an individual with AEM (CNMP) Certification.
- Evaluation of BMPs on a CAFO must be performed by an individual with appropriate NRCS Job Approval Authority.

Requirements for AEM Tier 5B Evaluation

Meeting or exceeding the following minimum requirements will be the basis for acceptable utilization of state and federal AEM funding.

Tier 5B Evaluation Procedure

Review, Update, and/or Expand a Tier 3A Plan

1. Identify the land unit planned and review the natural resource issues & opportunities, decisions, and recommendations in the plan. Schedule an appointment to meet with the farmer to go over the plan. Make special note of components or issues the farmer has agreed to progressively plan.
2. Meet with the farmer to review and discuss their plan.
 - a) Note any progress made in implementing decisions from the existing plan or conservation program participation not already noted in the plan. Document progress on the NRCS-CPA-68 *Records of Cooperator Decisions and Progress in Application* or similar form in the plan.
 - b) Identify with the farmer any significant changes to the farming operation since the plan was developed that may impact resources and require a plan update. Note – The AEM Tier 1 Questionnaire and appropriate AEM Tier 2 Worksheets can be used to help identify changes

and assess the need for additional planning.

3. Check that the existing plan covers all high priority natural resource issues & opportunities as identified in the plan, or from the farm's *Tier 2 Summary Report*, and identify any missing high priority natural resource issues & opportunities in the updated plan.
4. Discuss with the farmer the decisions/recommendations not implemented from the existing Tier 3 plan. Update the Tier 3 plan to reflect any new high priority concerns, or adjustments to the timetable to implement already planned practices on the NRCS-CPA-68 *Record of Cooperators Decisions and Progress in Application* or similar form. Provide any additional information the farmer may need to help them make decisions to address natural resource issues and opportunities.
5. Plan any additional high priority natural resource issues & opportunities the farmer is now willing to address (progressively plan). Utilize the *Participating in AEM Tier 3A* document and the *Tier 3A Plan Requirements Checklist* to guide your planning.
6. Tier 3B or 3C plans may require detailed revisions, such as adjustment of the manure spreading schedule or adjustment to crop rotations; further revisions of these plans should be done under the supervision of a Certified Planner.
7. Complete the update involving the farmer in the process, gain their approval, and note the review, update, planning of any additional components, and/or evaluation in the assistance notes of the farmer's case file. Provide a copy of the updated plan to the farmer. Also document your accomplishments in any data management system maintained by the District.

Review and Evaluate an Existing BMP System/Conservation Practice

1. Obtain the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard(s) and locate the design for the system or practice(s) to be evaluated.
2. Review the design and any related notes from the practice installation. Determine that the practice design and "as-built" were approved by an individual with the appropriate Job Approval Authority.
3. Conduct an on-site evaluation to observe the condition of the system or practice(s).
 - a) Is the system/practice stable with no signs of erosion, deposition, sloughing, leaks, cracks, dead or lacking vegetation, etc?
 - b) Utilizing the Operation & Maintenance section from the design or practice standard determine if the practice is being properly operated and maintained.
 - c) Determine if the system/practice(s) is properly functioning. Is there evidence of overtopping, concentrated flows, or contaminated water were it does not belong? Check that the capacity (depth, width, & grade) has been maintained.
4. Determine if the practice(s) is addressing the concern for which it was installed (is it solving the problem).
 - a) Utilize the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard to help with this determination. Use the "Criteria" section to check that all significant criteria are being met by the practice.
 - b) Utilize the "Considerations" section to determine if appropriate considerations were addressed.

5. Meet with the farmer and determine if the practice is meeting their expectations. Discuss operation and maintenance activities to help ascertain the farmer's commitment to the practice.
6. Provide the farmer with a written report on the condition of the practice and review it on site.
 - a) Identify any needed adjustments, improvements, changes and provide any information that will assist the farmer in addressing the needs. You may have to remind the farmer they agreed to properly operate and maintain the practice when they accepted cost-sharing.
 - b) Make recommendations for new or additional BMPs if the practice is no longer appropriate, effective, or does not fit the farmer's management scheme.
7. Document the visit in the conservation plan or case file and keep a copy of the report to the farmer. Also document your accomplishments in any data management system maintained by the District

Deliverables Summary – Tier 5B

1. Complete a *Tier 5B Conservation Plan Evaluation Checklist* for each plan evaluated, and/or a *5B BMP Evaluation Checklist* for each BMP system evaluated depending on which is applicable and submit them with your final report to the SWCC.
2. Document each farm that completes Tier 5B on the Final Report Form, and record the time spent in completing each Tier 5B in the Time Log. These forms will be reviewed and approved by your AEA at program close-out, and the Final Report will be submitted with all checklists to the SWCC.