

*Not able to attribute  
comments to  
specific individuals*

USDA  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

*sponsored*

Listening Session in Perry, Georgia

*on the*

*Conservation Security Program*



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**Georgia**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Logistics

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Georgia sponsored two listening sessions to gather public comments on the *Conservation Security Program*. These listening sessions were held in South Georgia in Tifton at the Rural Development Center on February 10, 2004, and in Middle Georgia in Perry at the USDA Service Center on February 11, 2004. The timeframe for both sessions was 7:00pm – 10:00pm. Twenty-two people were present in Tifton; fifty-three people were present in Perry.

This report provides the transcript from the listening session in Perry, Georgia.

### Acknowledgements

#### USDA NRCS Georgia Personnel

- **Jim Dial**, Assistant State Conservationist for Program Development, **David Lamm**, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, **Mary Ann McQuinn**, State Public Affairs Specialist, and **Ron Brown**, State Outreach Coordinator, organized and coordinated the listening sessions.
- The State Public Affairs Specialist, **Mary Ann McQuinn**, prepared public service announcements and information packets for distribution to the target audience and session participants.

- District Conservationists **Mary Leidner** in Tifton and **Andy Page** in Perry were the primary contacts to the State Office for advertising the meetings and coordinating meeting room availability and setup.
- **David Lamm**, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, delivered an extensive presentation on the *Conservation Security Program* and fielded questions from audiences at both locations.
- **Anthony Burns**, Assistant State Conservationist for Technology, fielded questions from the audiences related to database and technology use.
- **John Glover**, Acting State Conservationist for Georgia, provided overall leadership and support to NRCS staff, to producers and operators, and to all others who attended the listening sessions.

#### Other Recognitions

The Mid-State Conservation Tillage Alliance, **Scott Moore** President, sponsored a barbecue dinner at the Perry location.

Dignitaries from the NRCS Southeast Regional Office and Georgia Farm Bureau were present at the listening session in Tifton.

#### Human Capital Developers

Donna Taylor, President/Senior Associate and staff of the Athens, Georgia-based consulting company Human Capital Developers, provided consulting services that included (a) moderating both listening sessions, (b) recording, compiling,

summarizing, and preparing this written report, and (c) providing an oral report to the NRCS-GA State Office.

Recording and sound equipment was subcontracted through Human Capital Developers and provided by Board Room Audio Visuals of Loganville, Georgia.

## SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY CONCERNS

The following information is an analysis of the primary concerns that producers expressed during the listening session in Perry. For a complete listing of the comments as stated by producers during the listening session, see pages 8 – 16 of this report.

- An ever-present concern of producers/operators was the lack of ultimate control over their land due to the fact that many operators rent or lease farm land. There was much concern about what the penalty might be should they enter the Program and the land changes owners and they [the operators] lose control of the land before the end of their contracts.
- Many producers own or lease land in more than one watershed. They want to be able to participate in the Program even if it means coming in at different times when their specific watershed is selected.
- Producers questioned whether there will be enough money flowing into the *Conservation Security Program* to make it worthwhile for producers to qualify and participate. Factoring of payments, whether current contracts would be vested under a new political administration, and whether limits would be placed on the amount of money producers get if they participate in more than one farm program were the major related concerns.

- A clearer, more precise definition of an agricultural operation is needed.
- Utilizing an internet or web-based sign-up program concerned several producers who pointed out that:
  - The best internet service does not exist in most rural areas and the lines are often slow and sometimes costly to utilize due to no local access numbers in the areas.
  - More time might need to be allowed for completing applications due to slower internet lines in rural areas.
  - TSPs will need to be available to assist some producers.
- Producers expressed concern that only a few producers are knowledgeable enough to take advantage of the Farm Bill programs. They want means devised whereby every producer would be better educated and therefore have the opportunity to participate in the various agricultural programs.
- Many Georgia producers farm land that falls under several farm serial numbers, or that falls under one farm serial number but has multiple owners. Producers would like to see each owner considered separately for contracts.
- Some producers have smaller operations that represent multiple (15+) farm serial numbers over several different counties. Producers would find it

difficult to include all numbers into one plan, but would like for more than one farm serial number to be used in a plan.

- Producers recommended that the priority for selecting states to participate in the CSP should be based on states that have the largest agricultural population, which includes animal and people.
- Producers want to see some type of succession plan put in place to allow the contract to pass from the father to the son if both are involved in the farm operation.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Following are the public comments generated during the listening session in Perry, Georgia. Efforts were made to maintain the integrity and intent of what each participant said by not changing the wording or phrasing of sentences and statements. The only exception is in those cases where a change made a sentence clearer and more easily understood.

### **PERRY, GEORGIA**

#### **Questions of Concern:**

1. If water sheds are to be prioritized, are you also considering prioritizing aquifer recharge areas within watersheds? The Piedmont demarcation line between the Piedmont and Coastal Plains is one of the largest aquifer recharge areas in Southeast. Is it going to be considered or just areas within the watershed?
2. Can a producer move between tiers? If a producer signs up and is meeting the qualifications for a part of the farm but in a year's time the producer meets all of the qualifications, can he move from one tier to another within the same contract?
3. Is the contract vested? If a producer gets two years into a five year contract and Ted Kennedy writes a Farm Bill, is the contract vested or is the original contract out the window?

4. If the maximum amount that a producer gets on Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 is \$10,000 on a five-year contract, will the producer get \$10,000 per year or just \$2,000 per year for five years?
  
5. In going from Tier 1 to Tier 2 and a producer puts in land that is owned in Tier 1 and in Tier 2 he has to go to rented land, what will be the penalty if the land is lost before the five years are up? What should the penalty be or should there be a penalty? Suggested course of action from producers: If the loss of land is caused by something beyond the control of the operator it would be forgiven; would also be good if the operator could continue the contract at his choosing, but if he denied it there would not have to be a payback to the previous estate.
  
6. The screening process of utilizing a web-based or fill-out-the-form type of screening to determine eligibility, is this something producers would be comfortable with? Are producers familiar enough with conservation terminology and expectations? Answer from producers: Depends on how simple the software program is designed. Keep the program simple and clear. TSPs will need to be available to assist some producers. With internet sign-up it's important to remember that some producers have DSL and others have "damn slow lines" so anything factored in regarding the length of time it will take would probably need to be extended because most rural areas don't have the best internet service.

7. Intensification or enhancement practices: In those counties or watersheds that are not chosen as a part of the initial cadre, can those producers start preparing themselves by doing all the practices and getting beefed up on the programs and come in at a Tier 2 or Tier 3 when their watershed comes into the program?
8. Not having any idea how watersheds in the state are ranked, how could operators find those rankings?
9. The real incentive to participate is financial and the funds are somewhat limited. What figures are being talked about per acre? Are you talking in terms of CRP or something more?
10. Define the priorities of NRCS concerning the CSP? Is soil and water quality the two major goals?
11. Concerning watershed issues, if this is the major criteria for picking a region of the state? In Georgia, watershed issues are likely more important as it pertains to water and soil quality than in Colorado or Wyoming because of the density of human and animal population. Will this be considered in making the decision?
12. How many contracts will be possible for the State of Georgia?

13. Will the money available through this program put limitations on other government programs that a producer might be eligible for?
14. Leveraging CSP and cooperative agreements between groups of growers in an area to address problems: provide examples of how to leverage CSP.
15. If a group of growers got together in a cooperative fashion and decided to enhance the amount of organic matter by increasing the amount of cover crop, and if the cooperative covered an entire area in a watershed, would each of those growers be considered separately or the fact that they were working together to accomplish the goal add weight to their application?
16. A lot of these farms have one farm number but may have 15-25 different tracts. Wasn't there something mentioned at one time about doing this by tract versus full farm number? That would be a separate farm because a lot of the tracts are completely different entities by themselves as far as land location but are still under one farm number for FSA purposes.
17. What if some producers have land in two different watersheds? First year one of their watersheds is under a rule and they get in; the next year a watershed they're farming in comes available, can they get into the Program in two different watersheds?

18. At some point during the life of the program would every producer have the opportunity to participate?

19. Factoring: Assuming there is only \$41 million and the money is assigned by watershed and lets assume that the one that gets picked gets \$50,000. Is that \$50T, once it's assigned, going to be subject to a factor and everyone who applies gets some of it, or is it going to be given on the highest priority and if there are five people then the \$50T is split up if they are all at the same level, or is that going to be factored among those? What will happen? We want to encourage those who have been using conservation practices to continue and those who haven't been doing much to do more, but when you get to factoring sometimes a producer winds up with almost nothing.

20. Will livestock be given priority over, say, row crop farming?

21. Will there be a right of successor in interest to someone who comes along behind the operator who originally leased the farm? If an operator had the contract for two years and a lease on the farm for two years and someone else comes along and leases it for two years, but the contract was for five years, can the new lessee be a successor in interest as long as they continue at the same level?

## **PERRY, GEORGIA**

### **General Comments**

1. I would strongly recommend that if the Flint River basin could have good residue cover crops in that basin, it would surely help the water and air quality.
2. Factoring of payments raises concern: Whatever payments are figured into this should be set for the life of the contract. Without that it would be difficult for a producer to make a sound financial decision on something that might be.
3. The definition of agricultural operations: There are some large farmers in this room but there are some smaller ones that represent 15 different farm serial numbers over three different counties. There is a need for a more concrete definition of what an operation is. I would hate to have to pull these 15 into one plan. It would be impossible to do because of lease agreements, control of the land, and other things. Would also like to see it allowed that more than one farm serial number is used in a plan. Farm serial numbers will have to be recognized in this area anyway, but you should not require all due to a multitude of issues. It's just not feasible to do. Note: No suggestion was given by producer as to what would be a fair medium.
4. If farms were individually owned and are under one farm serial number it would be simpler, but in our case we have one fairly large operation that is under one farm serial number that is owned by multiple owners and part of it is rented land.

To move to a Tier 3 under that one operation if it could read “the land that is owned and controlled by operator.”

5. The only sure way to demonstrate control of a parcel of land is to own it.
6. In selecting states to participate in CSP, prioritize the areas of the country that have the most agricultural population which includes animal and row-crop farming and poultry farming. Priorities should be where the animals and people are.
7. The issue of rental ground in the State of Georgia and length of contract is a concern and could be an obstacle for folks to move beyond a Tier 1 type of payment into a Tier 2 or 3. Some kind of consideration should be given regarding this.
8. A major criticism of farm program payments, especially among the people who are ignorant, is that those programs are utilized by a very small percentage of the farm population. I would like to see them made available to every producer so that every producer’s watershed is chosen thus eliminating situations where a very good steward is not allowed to participate in the program.
9. When there is one farm serial number and 50% of the land is owned and 50% is rented, the policy should read: “that under that one farm serial number if the

producer or owner were to put everything he had in, the farm would be treated as one operation and the rented land would stand alone.

10. Observation: This program was designed to reward the person who had been doing these practices. If the man cannot document his conservation practices then the man who had been documenting his practices would be the one who would be the most rewarded.
11. If there is not enough money to fund everyone in the agricultural counties within the watershed should be prioritized versus giving money to places like the City of Atlanta. This program is designed for agricultural counties and not urban areas where whatever you do on a farm is not going to enhance the environment because of the pollution involved in the major cities.
12. Will there be a right of successor in interest to someone who comes along behind the operator who originally leased the farm? Someone that's not performing well can be brought up to a higher standard and more importantly, tax payer money has already been spent trying to get the ground built up and if we're 3 or 4 years into the contract, we don't want it to back up.
13. If there is a father-son partnership and the son is just coming into the operation and they both are working under one farm contract, then based on my understanding of the information, those two people will get one payment. I'd like

to see the policy allow it to be on a per farmer basis. If the father and son are partners then they both would be eligible in order to enhance younger farmers to come on-stream, because the father will retire one day.

14. The best way to get information to producers about meetings of this type is through one-on-one contact with the District Conservationists and the Cooperative Extension Service.

## **PERRY, GEORGIA ATTENDEES**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
1. David Muse	478-987-3386	SWCD
2. Chip Fue	478-987-2940	SWCD
3. Bruce Triplett		
4. Richard Johnson		Perry, Ga
5. Bruce Stripune		UGA
6. Gary Dawson	478-892-3263	Hawkinsville, Ga
7. James Warrenton		
8. Rodney Dawson	478-783-3413	
9. Barry Martin	478-892-4939	Hawkinsville, Ga
10. Fred Powers	478-967-2500	Hawkinsville, Ga
11. Peter Morton	478-892-3154	Hawkinsville, Ga
12. Chuck Johnson		Marshallville, Ga
13. Butch Jonischkies	478-472-8132	
14. Alvin Cainman	478-987-7036	Perry, Ga
15. James Gaston	229-924-7460	Americus, Ga
16. Robert Thompson	478-987-9749	Perry, Ga
17. Bobby Culpepper	478-847-3514	Reynolds, Ga
18. Dewey Maxwell	478-245-5055	Macon, Ga
19. Davy Barnett	478-934-8682	NRCS
20. Billy Sauder	229-268-4503	
21. Chuck Ellis	229-268-4171	
22. Donney Swartzentruber	478-472-6961	
23. Bryant Bledsoe	478-214-1172	
24. Sidney Bledsoe	478-214-2329	
25. Keith Culpepper	478-953-8791	
26. Terry McGants		
27. Kevin Harrison		
28. David Reed		

29. Jeff Reed
  30. Leo Perfect
  31. Stewart Bloodworth
  32. Joe Napier
  33. Scott Moore
  34. Buddy Hobbs
  35. Ryan Hobbs
  36. Adam Hobbs
  37. Kenneth Hardy
  38. Willie Cape
  39. Larry Stephens
  40. Terrel Hudson
  41. Eddie Green
  42. Jim Willis
  43. Clay Ward
  44. Tracy Crawford
  45. Mary Branch
  46. Elmer Hershberger
  47. Andy Page
  48. Mary Ann McQuinn
  49. John Glover
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