

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

February 2, 2012
9 AM to 12:00 PM

*FDACS, Division of Plant Industry, Doyle Conner Auditorium,
1911 S.W. 34th Street, Gainesville, FL 32608*

Present: *Carlos Suarez, NRCS; Greg Hendricks, NRCS; Gail Hendricks, NRCS; Odessa Armstrong, NRCS; Ken Morgan, NRCS; Jeff Woods, NRCS, Steve Boetger, NRCS; Roney Gutierrez, NRCS; Dytra Lewis, NRCS; Buzz Eaves, FGLC; Danny Johns, Blue Sky Farms NFGE; Joe Frank, Seminole Tribe; Laurie Turner, FL Citrus Mutual; Alex Johns, Seminole Tribe of Florida; Roel Herrera, Seminole Tribe; Jerry Joiner, Alico Inc; Ray Hodge, Southeast Milk Inc; Mike Thomas, FDEP; Darrell Smith, FDACS-Office of Water Policy; Staci Braswell, Florida Farm Bureau; Mark Luchte, SWFWMD; Jeff Wealton, SWFLMD; Bonnie Stine, Florida Forest Service; Pam Livingston-Way, SJRWMD; Mary Hartney, FFAA; Lynn Max, Florida Organic Growers; Hugh Thomas, Suwannee River Partnership; Curt Willimas, FFBF; Joseph Prenger, FWC; Scott Sanders, FWC; Vince Singleton, SJRWMD; Benita Whalen, SFWMD*

Carlos Suarez, State Conservationist, NRCS, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. He reminded everyone the purpose of this meeting is to discuss implementation of Farm Bill Programs with state and local entities. He reiterated NRCS is a conservation planning agency first and foremost. Farm Bills are tools to help assist in that. He discussed the new Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GOMI) and Longleaf Pine Initiative is being funded by Headquarters, funds will be made available to the states, once the landowner level of interest is determined within the states. NRCS wants to increase outreach to farmers and ranchers who are not aware of the assistance available to them through the Farm Bill conservation programs. He informed them of dates coming up to keep in mind: GLCI Meeting in Orlando, December dates TBD. Southeast NACD Meeting in Sandestin, FL, July dates TBD.

- **Q:** Information does not seem to be distributed to everyone. I found out about this meeting through someone else. Can NRCS do a better job of communicating meetings and events for the partners and producers who may want to participate?
 - o **A:** Thank you for making us aware of your concern. We will put forth a better effort to communicate to our partners about meetings and

events we have scheduled. Please fill out the Sign-in Sheet in the back so we can update our records and ensure we have correct contact information.

Steve Boetger with NRCS presented on the revised Nutrient Practice Standard. It is routinely revised every 4-5 years and is coordinated with USDA objectives, has the latest science and technology with improved clarity. It is revised to make it helpful to producers and more effective. The standard helps growers apply manure and fertilizer to agricultural lands with minimal impact on the environment. The revised standard is shaped by comments received from public and private sectors reviewers. Things that have changed are as follows:

- Supports Emerging Technologies
 - o Precision farming
 - o Enhanced Efficiency Fertilizer Products
 - o Adaptive Nutrient Management
 - o Manure injection (no-til and dry manure)
 - o Requires laboratory proficiency testing programs on soil and manure
 - o Nutrient applications to frozen, snow covered or saturated ground only when approved by NRCS and State Water Quality Authority and with adequate conservation practices.

- Erosion-Flexibility on “T” (GM-190-402)
 - o The 2011 policy and standard documents:
 - Require that wind and water erosion be controlled to “T”
 - However, when erosion is > “T”, exceptions can be made if the site is evaluated for nutrient and soils loss and additional practices are installed, as needed, to protect water quality.

- More Emphasis on Risk Assessments
 - o Erosion Loss (RUSLE2 and WEPS)
 - o Nitrogen Leaching Tool
 - o Phosphorus Risk Assessment (P-Index)

- **Q:** Regarding tissue testing, how will you address getting good soil testing results?
 - o **A:** Testing is done if necessary for crops, which is included in the revised practice standard.

- **Q:** Is there money available to help IFAS?
 - o **A:** We have provided funding opportunities to IFAS in the past, but not for soil testing calibration methods or tools.

Mary Hartney with Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association presented on the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Initiative. This is a new initiative that pays dividends for grower. It uses four key elements that helps/ensures best crops, when used together it is the best way to manage crops.

- The four elements are:
 - o Right Source
 - o Right Rate
 - o Right Time
 - o Right Time

- Long Term Goals:
 - o Establish 4R as a recognizable strategy
 - o Expand Implementation
 - o Increase Awareness

The 4R Manual will be the summary of findings and will be available by March to anyone. Please visit www.4Rstewardship.com and www.nutrientstewardship.org for more information.

Terry Pride with FDACS presented a proposal for EQIP funds for Special Designation of the Tri-County Agricultural Area, to supplement state funding being provided for this project.. In order to reduce the movement of nutrients off farm lands, in the Tri-County Agricultural Area (TCAA) into Lower St. Johns River (LSJR), the growers and agencies (FDACS, FDEP, SJRWMD, NRCS, IFAS) will work together to install and demonstrate water management and nutrient management projects and practices through cost-share funding, education and technical assistance.

This project is intended to be perpetual, to foster ongoing collaboration among partners. While funding amounts for projects and practices may vary from year to year, there will be continued support for farmers to enhance their farming practices and reduced their farm inputs while maintaining or increasing yields.

Project types and cost-share items that will be considered for funding include:

- Projects
 - o Drip Irrigation
 - o Overhead irrigation
 - o Enhanced seepage irrigation
 - o Tailwater recovery
 - o Regional water reuse
 - o Regional wet detention
 - o Irridrain
- Practices/Equipment
 - o Banding equipment
 - o Soil Moisture sensors
 - o Pump upgrades with soil moisture sensors

Initial funding for the TCAA-WMP is being provided by the SJRWMD (\$1.5 million) and the FDEP (\$3 million or more). While this funding level is significant, growing state agency and water management district budget constraints make continued funding at this level unlikely and the types of projects contemplated are costly. In order to accomplish the partnership objective, sustained funding is needed. Approximately 50 farmers could participate over time. Eight to ten farmers so far have indicated their intent to submit funding proposals in the first year of the initiative.

Current funding under the TCAA-WMP is directed primarily toward projects and practices that are not funded under EQIP. This proposal is for targeted funding to assist TCAA farmers in implementing EQIP-approved practices, which will complement and enhance the effectiveness of the projects and practices that receive state and SJRWMD funding. The availability of targeted federal funding will encourage farmers to develop conservation plans to be eligible for cost share.

- **Q:** Will Producers have to sign a “Notice of Intent”?
 - o **A:** Yes, however, they also have to be enrolled in Best Management Practice. Conservation Planning is the goal

- **Q:** What conservation practices or outreach efforts can be funded under EQIP?
 - o **A:** Land leveling, irrigation system, 4R implementation, water control structures and outreach to local farmers to encourage them to apply for EQIP.

- **Q:** Any monitoring stations on these farms?
 - o **A:** We would be willing to work with NRCS to identify monitoring stations to help measure outcomes achieved in the project area.

- **Comment:** Incentives should be provided to get farmers involved. Help give farmers projections of what could be if they did “xyz” or had help with “xyz”.

Roney Gutierrez of NRCS gave an update on the Easement-Based Program. Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is the largest program. It includes Farm & Ranchland Protection Programs (FRPP) and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). The process of WRP is: apply for funding by the deadline, acquire funds, plan and design, construction, monitoring and managing the land. There will be about 100,000 acres restored from now until 2015. WRP goal is to restore wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Jeff Woods with NRCS gave an update on Financial Assistance Programs.

- \$20.7 million in FY 2012 EQIP funding allocated to Florida
 - o \$14.8 million in General Funds
 - o \$5.9 million for Northern Everglades Watershed

- National Program Initiatives
 - o Energy
 - o Organic
 - Certified Producers
 - Transitioning Producers
 - o Seasonal High Tunnel

- Gulf of Mexico Initiative – GOMI
 - Two Florida watersheds were approved for funding
 - Escambia River, which is shared with Alabama
 - Suwannee River
 - Primary resource concerns to be addressed are:
 - Water quality and quantity
 - Erosion Control
 - Wildlife Habitat Control
 - Sign-up for GOMI ends March 1

- CIG is a funding opportunity under the EQIP. One new component under CIG solicits new conservation approaches and technologies related to water quality credit trading systems
 - \$10 million available nationally
 - \$5 million designated to Chesapeake Bay
 - Applications are due March 2nd

- AWEP, CCPI & HFRP
 - No new projects funded for Fiscal Year 2012
 - Appropriated funds will be used to help close out prior year contracts

- WHIP funding has been reduced nationally; however, no decision has been made on how FY12 funds will be used.
 - CRP sign-up just announced this week; it is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). However, NRCS does provide technical assistance to landowners participating in CRP throughout the development of conservation plans and practice installation. The sign-up opens March 12 and ends April 16.

- **Q:** What is the timing on 1-3 projects each state must select 12 digit watershed?
 - **A:** Currently we are awaiting further guidance from National Headquarters (NHQ) on the EQIP National Water Quality Initiative

- **Q:** What are the determining factors for the three National Program Initiatives, Organic, Energy and Seasonal High Tunnel? Is it political?

- **A:** We have no indications that the decisions on these initiatives were political. The Office of the Secretary is looking at more support with Energy conservation and assistance to Organic producers. They support healthier choices at schools and want to assist producers to conserve on energy at their headquarter facilities and on the landscapes. They want more organic producers to participate in programs. Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative is from Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan. Any seasonal crop grown in the ground can be grown in a Seasonal High Tunnel System.
- **Q:** Is GOMI special funding or out of the total \$20.7 million for EQIP?
 - **A:** It is Special Funding. The GOMI sign-up ends March 1, 2012.
- **Q:** How does the regionalization of the payment schedule impact Florida?
 - **A:** There will be loses and gains in Florida as a result of the change in how the payment schedule is developed. Some practice payment rates will increase and some will decrease or stay the same.
- **Q:** Can you give an example of some of the practice were the payment rate changed due to the regional approach for the payment schedule?
 - **A:** IPM, Brush Management, Nutrient Management, etc.
- **Q:** Everything is based on scientific, but how do you fund research to help farmers from a practical standpoint?
 - **A:** Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a funding opportunity under EQIP for applicants to introduce new conservation approaches and innovative technologies that may assist farmers, when the demonstrated conservation approaches and technologies are adopted by the agency.

In closing, Carlos thanked everyone for their attendance and reminded the committee members that NRCS is open to and appreciates the input they provide in deliverance from Farm Bill Conservation programs in Florida. The meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting: No date was set; it will be scheduled at a later time.