



United States Department of Agriculture

## New Jersey State Technical Committee Meeting Thursday, September 23, 2010 NRCS State Office, Somerset NJ

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### Those in attendance:

Tom Drewes, NRCS	Karen Sykes, Forest Service	Evan Madlinger, NRCS
Janice Reid, NRCS	Kristina Heinemann, EPA Region 2	Gail Bartok, NRCS
Maria M. Collazo, NRCS	Dave Clapp, NJDA	Barbara Phillips, NRCS
Paul Hlubik, FSA	Joanna Dillon, NOFA-NJ	Laura Coover, NRCS
Nancy Coles, FSA	Liz Thompson, NJ Farm Bureau	
Howard Henderson, RD	Amy Hansen, NJCF	
Elizabeth Ciuzio, USFWS	Fran Grasso, NRCS	

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am. Tom welcomed everyone and they introduced themselves.

The June meeting minutes were reviewed. A few spelling mistakes were pointed out and noted. The minutes were accepted.

Tom announced that he will be retiring in January, and that he anticipated a smooth transition to whoever the new State Conservationist would be.

Tom updated the committee on the 10 positions NRCS shares on a 50/50 basis with other agencies. Several of these positions are the result of new partnerships, and the positions will help NRCS market some new initiatives and priorities.

Three items were moved from Old Business to the start of the meeting to accommodate the speakers.

1. A slide show on the NJ ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) Floodplain Easement Project was given by Evan Madlinger. Evan provided details of the easement restoration efforts, which were completed in the spring of 2010.
2. CRP, CREP, SAFE: Nancy Coles presented a handout with details highlighting the CRP, CREP, and SAFE programs. There was one offer for the General CRP Signup 39. The one offer did not rank well enough nationally to be enrolled in CRP.

CREP – 148 approved contracts as of August 18, 2010.

NJ SAFE – 15 approved contracts/193.8 ac. enrolled. 9 pending offers/151.6 offered. All three approved SAFE areas now have enrolled acres.

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AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance Program  
AWEP – Agricultural Water Enhancement Program  
CAP – Conservation Activity Plan  
CCPI – Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative  
CIG – Conservation Innovation Grant  
CRP – Conservation Reserve Program  
CREP - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

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EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program  
FRPP – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program  
GRP – Grassland Reserve Program  
HFRP – Healthy Forest Reserve Program  
SAFE – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement  
WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program  
WRP – Wetlands Reserve Program

2011 CRP rental payments are scheduled to be released on Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>. 87% of all payments should be issued without incurring problems. In 2010, a total of \$703,823.98 in payments were made in CRP for rental payments, 50% cost-share, signing incentive, & practice incentive.

3. GRP: Nancy gave the final tallies for 2010 GRP: 6 applications were submitted, 3 withdrew, leaving 3 contracts for a total of \$37,266.00 on a total of 19.2 acres. This dollar amount includes rental payments for 10 years and practice incentives.

Committee Reports

**Programs Subcommittee:** Janice provided an update on subcommittee activities in preparation for the 2011 program year. These included the funding pool recommendations for WHIP, AMA, AWEP and EQIP and the program schedule with ranking and obligation deadlines for FY 2011. No change in pools from last year is recommended except for EQIP, where additional beginning farmer pools will be added for each land use type. This was done as a result of a new screening system that will be used this year to prioritize applications based on the resource concerns that an applicant is willing to address.

She noted the Regional Equity obligation deadline is April 1, 2011, which means we need 90% of our regional equity funds obligated by that time to guarantee we receive the additional regional equity funds. Regional Equity programs are WHIP, EQIP, & FRPP. Our proposed program schedule provides for all funds to be obligated before April 1 except for AMA, which is not a regional equity program.

**Outreach Committee:** Barb reported the next meeting is scheduled for October. Some of the recommendations that were discussed in April have been pursued, including the NRCS 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary display and enhancement of the web-site to be more productive for the employees. Success stories and interviews have been scheduled with two farmers. NRCS local offices have been conducting outreach to find groups that include minority producers.

Old Business

**Program Status:** Janice handed out the FY 2010 Program obligations and payments as of 9/15/10:

Contracts:	Obligations:	Payments:	% Paid	Acres:	Average/Ac
AMA: 17	\$325,338.14	\$63,454.07	19.5%	473.2	\$687.63
AWEP: 11	\$223,816.00	\$0.00	0%	651.0	\$343.80
EQIP: 143	\$5,109,596.14	\$627,473.02	12.3%	15,043.4	\$339.66
WHIP: 25	\$417,068.99	\$69,591.99	16.7%	1,238.1	\$336.86
CSP: 9	\$71,225.00	\$0.00	0%	2468.1	\$28.86

WRP: 3 offers were made and accepted for permanent easements, and additional obligations were made for repairs and improvements on existing easements for a total obligation of \$1,159,568; closings should all be complete by 12/31/2010 and information available as to location and acres (data by county) at our January meeting.

FRPP: 17 parcels accepted for funding with a total obligation of \$8,878,894; closings due by 3/31/2012; information on these applicant's location and acres can be made available after closing.

CIG: 1 State-funded CIG grant awarded for \$75,000 to D&R Greenway Land Trust for a project that will demonstrate the potential of native grass/forb seed mixes as a viable agricultural market for NJ growers.

Janice is hopeful that the national CIG will be announced by November so that the State CIG can be announced in December. She and Tim are planning on having another informational meeting for potential applicants as was done in 2009.

### New Business

**Local Work Groups & Soil Conservation Districts:** Tom reported that the 2008 Farm Bill has revitalized the local work group concept. Through a cooperative agreement, NJ Association of Conservation District has agreed to subcontract with three districts to organize and hold local work group meetings.

**WRP Easement Status:** Janice's presented a handout on the new WRP policies regarding geographic rate caps. The first step is the market survey, for which a national template was finally issued. We will be soliciting a new contract for this work as soon as funds are available in 2011. The data from the market survey is used to set our three geographic rate caps for cropland, specialty (irrigated) cropland, and woodland. Our rate caps must be consistent with (within 20% of) our neighboring states; plus any rate over \$5,000 must have an ecological justification submitted by the State Conservationist.

**WHIP State Plan:** Fran informed the committee that the WHIP State Plan will need to be updated and asked for volunteers to assist in this task. She will coordinate with the volunteers and begin to work on the plan.

**2011 Programs:** Janice stated that the NRCS national office indicated "early" release of CCPI, AWEP, CIG, EQIP Organic initiative information and RFPs for 2011. We will keep

**FRPP Soil Waivers:** Janice reported that there is a new policy for parcels that don't meet the minimum criteria for soils. The FRPP statute requires at least 50% of a site to be prime or important soils to qualify for FRPP; but there is a waiver provision for historic, cultural, or priority areas. Under the 2002 farm bill, waivers were granted on a case by case basis. Under the 2008 farm bill, waiver areas must be approved in advance of applications. Areas can be a geographic region or based on other historic or cultural criteria.

Because this is a new concept, and training for FRPP partners is scheduled for October 13, NRCS is recommending a broad geographic region for 2011 – the NJ Highlands area. We can evaluate the results of this after the 2011 sign-up. The committee concurred in this suggestion.

**USDA Biofuels Meeting:** Paul Hlubik announced that there will be a meeting held on Thursday, September 30<sup>th</sup> at the Rutgers EcoComplex. This meeting will be a Community Forum on expanding the U.S. Biofuels Market led by USDA.

### Open Discussion

Amy Hansen mentioned that, by Executive Order, Governor Christie has decertified several boards and commissions including the D&R Canal Commission, which is a volunteer board whose staff is paid through permit fees. No tax dollars fund this Commission. Paul added that the Invasive Species Council is another group to be eliminated.

Tom reminded everyone that the north Jersey soil health meeting is scheduled for November 9 at the ANJEC office. Barb will send the information out via email.

Liz reported that farmer night at the Trenton Thunder was a huge success, with over 500 farmers in attendance. Although it was a rainy day in much of the state, there was no rain during the game and everyone had a great time.

Farm Bureau is also busy setting their legislative agenda and planning the 2010 convention, scheduled for November 15 and 16 in Princeton.

Barb reported for Tim that the PMC field day is coming up on September 29; a notice was emailed and all are invited.

Beth mentioned a new track hoe available for project work from USF&WS.

Maria talked about the current NRCS workload analysis process known as ABC. Data collection will occur in October. The nationwide data will be used to support our budget and hopefully lead to simplification of funds, which would help streamline our programs.

Evan reported that he is working with a potential WRP applicant in north Jersey who only speaks Chinese. He is using the translation skills of one of our CAP employees to provide the technical assistance.

Gail mentioned there is much interest in FSA's new Conservation Loan Program and they are cooperating to get interested applicants eligible. Paul thanked Gail and the rest of the DCs for their cooperation. He brought the committee up-to-date on this program, which provided \$150 million on September 2 to be obligated before September 30. The goal of the program is to get conservation implemented. Applications are not need-based, but based on practices in an approved conservation plan. Funds are available for equipment, such as no-till drills, as well as for building structural measures such as waterways.

Joanna introduced herself as the new NOFA Communications person, and mentioned that the long-awaited Beginning Farmer program will begin at the annual conference in January.

Dave mentioned that the deadline for self-certified plans under the new NJ Ag Waste rule was last week. NJDA has received about 200 low-density plans and a few high-density plans, which means a lot of operations are out of compliance with the rule. NJDA and Rutgers will continue their outreach and training efforts.

Howard and RD have had an extremely busy end of year with ARRA projects. For 2011, RD hopes to refocus efforts on their ag initiatives such as the value added program, and food distribution and food processing opportunities.

Kristina mentioned that EPA is looking at opportunities for local food production in former brownfield areas and could potentially work with RD on some initiatives. She also stated that Region 2 is planning a workgroup meeting with NRCS on October 27 to discuss NRCS programs and cooperative opportunities.

Janice announced that beginning in 2011, Fran would now be the lead programs person for AMA, CSP and WHIP. Janice will continue to be the lead for EQIP and the easement programs.

Karen reported that the state resource assessment and strategies report should be posted on the NJDEP website. Additionally, the Upper Delaware Common Waters group, which includes Sussex and Warren counties, has met three times. They have agreed to develop a NJ-watershed-type effort for forest lands to tackle the issues of stewardship plans, legal fees for donated easements, and forest-land conservation practices.

Paul reported that the FSA office relocated to Hamilton Square, and provided business cards with the new address and phone number. He also reported that FSA was successful in getting a disaster declaration for all 16 agricultural counties in the state due to this summer's dry weather.

The next meeting will be held Thursday, December 16, 2010 @ 10:00 am, at the NRCS State Office.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.