



United States Department of Agriculture

New Jersey State Technical Committee Minutes of March 10, 2011

Those in attendance:

Amy Hansen, NJCF
Audrey Moore, USEPA Region 2
Brad Smith, The Nature Conservancy
Charles Roohr, SADC
Christine Hall, NRCS
Craig Chianese, NRCS
Dan Mull, NRCS
David Clapp, NJDA
Donald Pettit, NRCS
Elizabeth Ciuzio, USFWS
Fran Grasso, NRCS
Gail Bartok, NRCS
Howard Henderson, RD
Janice Reid, NRCS
Justine Cook, NOFA

Karen Sykes, US Forest Service
Ken Klipstein, NJ Water Supply Authority
Kristina Heineman USEPA Region 2
Lauren Rega, NRCS
Liz Thompson, Farm Bureau
Marie Banasiak, Farm Bureau
MaryBeth Sorrentino, NRCS
Nancy Coles, FSA
Nicole Ciccaglione, NRCS
Paul Hlubik, FSA
Sam Conard, Farmer
Sam Garrison, NJ Forestry Association
Tim Dunne, NRCS
Troy Joshua, NASS

Donald Pettit welcomed everyone at 10:00 a.m. Donald Pettit introduced himself and explained his background prior to New Jersey. Introductions were made.

December meeting minutes were reviewed and accepted with two corrections. Troy Joshua works for NASS not NJAS. Nancy requested the word "funding" be added to the 2nd paragraph under CRP (Old Business). The changes were noted.

NRCS/USDA 2011 Budget Status

Don informed the group that no official budget has been passed by Congress. Another continuing resolution was extended until the 18th, but no final verdict has been reached concerning the FY 2011 budget. NRCS programs that may see potential negative impact are the watershed programs and the RC&D program. Farm bill programs may see an increase in funding. At this time, it is all speculation until the budget is passed.

Paul Hlubik discussed the issues with the FSA programs regarding the FY 2011 budget. Some of their programs are hindered by the continuing resolution. FSA is looking at the differences between the current budget proposals to look at overlapping areas and see the possibilities of what could be impacted. FSA is taking action to move in those directions. Funding for conservation loans may be reduced. All of the agencies and service centers have been proactive in New Jersey at developing efficiencies and should easily adapt to any changes.

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

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

Helping People Help the Land

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Howard Henderson spoke positively that fortunately, Rural Development's agricultural programs are value added programs and funding will likely continue. The housing programs will likely be impacted, but overall, agricultural programs will probably be maintained.

Troy Joshua mentioned that NASS has been working on efficiency. NASS is reducing the number of people in field offices. Data collection using technology and efficiency is becoming more streamlined. Some studies have been cut, namely the studies on aquaculture and sheep and goats. NASS is trying to streamline data through efficiency without cutting studies.

Old Business

CRP, CREP, SAFE

Nancy Coles handed out a status report on CRP, CREP, and SAFE. Nancy reported that the general sign-up for CRP will open on March 14, 2011 and run for 5 weeks (until Friday, April 15, 2011). CRP typically involves large acreage for wildlife habitat practices compared to the Continuous CRP programs, which are typically on smaller acreage. FSA plans to target the 14 retiring CRP contracts for re-signup. Three of the retiring contracts are continuous, but 11 of the contracts are in the general category.

Since 2005, CREP has brought in 158 contracts. Under SAFE, we currently have contracts for 33% of the 300 acres is in the Heritage area, 70% of the 400 acres in the NJ Grassland area, and 31% of the 300 acres in the Raritan-Piedmont area.

FY 2011 CRP Payments issued (does not include cost share) is \$335,026.12.

Nancy asked for input on a seeding mix that needs to be approved nationally for the CP42 Pollinator State Standard. She handed out two seed mixes for Northern New Jersey and Southern New Jersey developed with the help of Tim Dunne. Seeding mixes had to contain a minimum of 9 species of pollinator friendly plants which can include flowers, legumes, shrubs, etc. Trees are not eligible. More than 9 species are encouraged. The northern mix has 17 and the southern mix as 16. Committee needs to endorse the seed mix so that it can be sent for approval.

Sam Conard posed the question about the potential problem with milkweed being in the mix. Tim Dunne responded that the species mix should be proposed with guidance. Planners will need to be aware of planting near hayland. Milkweed can be taken out of the planting mix for those areas. Technical guidance and fact sheets will need to be distributed with the seed mix for planters. Not all species will need to be included in the mix, but they will need to meet specific requirements regarding bloom onset and other requirements.

Nancy expressed the purpose of the CP42 is for diversity of the pollinator species. It can be implemented on large acreage or a minimum of half an acre. They prefer block plantings, but can be in strips at least 20 feet wide. The average rental rate for NJ SAFE is about the same as general sign-up rates. SAFE is not competitive and is based on a first come first serve basis; once the acreage limit is reached, they are done. The committee approved the species list.

GRP

FY 2011 GRP available funding is \$207,595. There were 8 eligible applications that completed ranking. FSA will be developing contracts soon. For existing GRP contracts, 2011 payments issued have been \$27,275.

WRP Easement Acquisition Status

Janice reported that we had 3 WRP easements funded in 2010. Two closed on December 28, 2010; one for 326.57 acres in Atlantic County where restoration was completed under an earlier

agreement; and the other for 22.95 acres in Hunterdon County. Restoration there will begin in 2012. The third application requested a delay of the closing.

WRP has about \$1.2 million this year with applications now being reviewed at the local offices.

Our 2011 Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC), done by region (North, Central, South), were submitted for approval at the same amounts as last year. They were not approved; we need to provide additional justification of the habitat needs. This should be completed shortly so that we can make offers to landowners.

Results of our “How’re We Doing” questionnaire

Janice Reid reported the results from the “How’re we doing?” questionnaire. Janice commented that it was nice to see that everyone views the work positively. Comments were made that more work with landowners should be done offseason. To the best of their ability, contracting and planning is done in the fall and winter to not interfere with planting.

Donald Pettit thanked everyone for the positive feedback and for their dedication and commitment. Don expressed that the report is important to help NRCS work to simplify processes for landowners and for employees. There is a national streamlining initiative to try to get employees into the field to improve efficiencies by producing better computer programs to reduce the time spent entering information. Don expressed that NRCS takes this very seriously and it helps dictate the way we do business.

New Business

CRP/CREP/SAFE Outreach

Paul Hlubik expressed concern regarding outreach for conservation programs. FSA has a very small staff in New Jersey. The public relations person covering NJ covers 16 states and is based out of Ohio. Maintaining a public presence and attending meetings are important outreach opportunities for most FSA programs. However, outreach for CRP/CREP/SAFE is a separate challenge. Somehow, they need to work with partnerships to encourage participation in the programs. Previous outreach efforts for SAFE were successful. CREP is the success story with the most potential.

Potential ideas that Paul discussed were to hold a media campaign, hold local meetings with producers, and establish a mobile conservation team. Paul suggested that NRCS and FSA employees work together when applicants come in the office, so both technical and administrative questions could be answered. Paul Hlubik is looking for ideas and commitments from the partnership.

A concern was mentioned about conservation programs/practices in correlation to the state Farmland Preservation program. Some practices are perceived to be contradictory to the farmland preservation deed. Charles Roohr will work with Dave Clapp and Tim Dunne on developing guidelines for determining what practices are eligible and not eligible and under what conditions.

Don Pettit suggested the idea of having an educational tour to educate the members of the state technical committee on conservation practices. There could be significant benefit for non NRCS groups to understand installed practices and operations.

Role of State Technical Committee in the New Farm Bill

Don Pettit reviewed the purpose of the State Technical Committee; to advise the State Conservationist and help him make decisions on programs by providing local input from diverse sources. The State Technical Committee determines the state resource concerns and provides

input to standards and specifications. An important facet is the relationship between the State Technical Committee and the working groups. Under the new farm bill local working groups are considered a sub-committee. It puts the State Technical Committee in a position of monitoring the local work groups.

Several groups are invited to participate in the State Technical Committee Meetings, including USDA agencies, the Forest Service, Cooperative Extension Service, Association of Districts. Groups and/or individuals can become members by sending a letter expressing their interest and background.

Any recommendations coming from subcommittees need to be discussed at the STC meetings because the STC meetings are the public meetings.

Meetings can be also be requested by organizations if they feel it is appropriate. To do so, they should contact Don Pettit.

Janice mentioned how the programs subcommittee established the formula for resource concerns. The Resource concerns were weighted based on their relative importance in the State. The subcommittee had input on that formula. The subcommittee used statistical reports to determine the values.

WHIP State plan 2011-2015

Fran handed out copies of the new Plan and reported on the changes. The subcommittee met in February to discuss changes. They added a paragraph at the beginning of the plan stating what the plan is addressing. They added national priorities and added a habitat priority (woodland habitat). A section on species benefited was added under each habitat priority. The 'practices to be emphasized' list is a list of practices that could typically be used, but does not mean that they have to offer all of the practices on the list.

The State plan gives the broad guidance for how we should frame the WHIP plan in NJ. There are six habitat priorities. There are seven listed on the state fact sheet. The national guidance is broad. Guidance is more specific on the state level. The plan is the basis for setting up the program.

Status of 2011 program obligations

Janice reported on the status of the 2011 program obligations. The contracting workload should be finished before the planting season starts. WHIP funds are at 99% obligated; we requested additional funds to fund six more applicants. AMA is 66% obligated; however, there will only be 2 contracts with the small amount of funding available.

EQIP is at 55% obligated. Some of the funding was earmarked for the air quality initiative. The organic initiative deadlines are set by the national office; no funds have yet been obligated. Additionally, we are waiting on several large contracts that need to be sent to the national level for approval.

FRPP decisions have been made, but have not been able to obligate the funds. The national template needed to be revised; we can sign no agreements until the revised template is received from headquarters.

NJ CIG Peer Review Panel

The CIG deadline is Friday. Janice is looking for volunteers to be on the review panel. Contact Janice if interested. Janice will review applications to make sure all required documentation is in the plans. In order to be on review panel, all members must sign a confidentiality agreement.

Once signed, the proposals can be sent for review. Review will be done in March, then the peer review panel will meet to make their recommendations to Don for funding.

Cost Recovery Policy

Don Pettit discussed the cost recovery policy. Occasionally, action needs to be made on contracts that have not followed the requirements as set forth in the contract. Cancellation is a mutual agreement in the best interest of both parties. Termination is an adverse reaction from the agency based on ineligibility, land ownership changes, etc. The goal is to be as consistent and fair as possible when making the decision on how to end the contract agreement. In either case, there are options: 1) NRCS can ask for the money to be returned, 2) NRCS can ask for the money returned with interest, or 3) NRCS can request liquidation damages, which is a flat 10% of the value of the contract for costs such as technical assistance. There are certain conditions under which a cancellation can be approved such as a death or major illness, severe financial distress, natural disaster, or with input from the state technical committee.

Don reported that in 2010, we had about 700 contracts. Of that 700, 9 were terminated, 5 of them were terminated with no cost recovery, 4 were terminated with cost recovery. Cost recovery is an appealable action. One contract had the cost recovery waived based on appeal. One had the cost reduced based on request for reconsideration. The other two were either not appealed or were not adjusted. Ultimately the State Conservationist makes the call on what contracts are cancelled or terminated and what action is taken. Don Pettit stressed that the guidelines should be uniform throughout the state.

Open Discussion

Troy Joshua handed out the new 2010 publication on fruit and vegetable ranking statistics. Normally we are ranked number 2 in blueberries, but this year we dropped to number 4. The renewable energy project was published. 139 producers participate in on-farm renewable energy. New Jersey has the highest solar panel cost installation in the nation at around \$113,000. Troy also has children's coloring/activity books that are available with statistics about New Jersey. Send Troy an email if you would like to receive the coloring book in your area. Steve Peterson has relocated to Florida. His replacement is John Gibbons, who will be coming to State Technical Committee meetings in the future.

Paul Hlubik spoke on behalf of all USDA agencies for Secretary Vilsack. Secretary Vilsack feels very strongly that we would like to close the chapter on any negative history that we have had with discrimination. The administration and the Department of Justice have decided to be very proactive. They set up a process to move forward so that claimants can get up to 50,000 if they felt they were discriminated against and can document their discrimination. The number to call is **888-508-4429**. Recommend that individuals call the phone number for advice.

Liz Thompson reported that the farm bureau is in the midst of hosting educational programs for electricity rates (working with Rutgers and RC&D) on how they can reduce energy costs. They held two forums already, one in South Jersey and another in Central. Another one is slated to be held in Hunterdon.

Amy Hanson requested info on the status of the soil health committee and asked if NRCS will be involved in setting standards for the soil health bill that just passed. Tim Dunne responded that NRCS is involved and Dave Lamm is a committee member.

Kristina Heineman discussed compliance with the oil spill prevention control and counter measure (SPCC) program. She is unsure how many farmers in NJ are affected. A fair amount of outreach has already been done. If there is an opportunity, someone can come speak about the requirements. There is plenty more information that can be sent out. An exemption has already been sent and should be finalized soon.

Kristina also reported that the pesticide general permit has been extended to October 31st, 2011. During April 9th to October, permits will not be required.

There was a pesticide education grant that went to Rutgers to explore the ideas of implementing IPM based tools to reduce pesticide in cranberries.

Beth Ciuzio mentioned a workshop that was done last week to spark interest in the Wetland Reserve Program, hosted by the South Jersey Land and Water Trust. There is a real interest in the Oldman's Creek watershed. About 30 people attended. In terms of WRP, we received 7 potential contacts. Hopefully more contracts will come from the event.

Dave Clapp reported that only 278 animal waste management plans have been submitted under the state's Animal Waste Management requirements. Dave stressed that if an opportunity is available to remind livestock producers that they should at least be following the basic requirements of the rule. They are now required to be following the basic requirements. They have already received some issues from the DEP hotline, and all further issues will now be forward to them to resolve.

Howard Henderson discussed installation cost factors of the renewable energy program. New regulations will be coming out the end of the month to simplify the application process for small \$ applications. The emphasis is on new technology, less of an emphasis on grain dryers. Renewable energy program is for small businesses and agricultural producers. The rural area definition no longer applies to agricultural producers; if you are an agricultural producer, you no longer have to meet the rural designation.

Howard Henderson also mentioned the value added producer grant program. New regulations were issued last month simplifying the rules. If you add value to the crop you can get grant assistance; however proposals compete nationally.

Justine Cook thanked NRCS for the support with their conference held in January. Justine sends monthly e-blasts to around 300 organic farmers. Send Justine information if you would like it to be added into the monthly e-blast.

Sam Garrison announced that this year is the international year of the forest and there will be activities to celebrate forests. The NJ Forest Service is now putting together a program to celebrate the event. One of the major continuing issues with forests in NJ is the debate on the appropriate management of forests based on different interests. Sam recommended an educational one hour DVD that tells the story of what a forest can do for us and what a forest needs if we want them to produce and be sustainable over time. Copies of the DVD are available for a small cost.

Christine mentioned that there will be a pollinator workshop at the Rutgers Snyder Farm on Thursday April 21 from 9-4. More information can be found on the North Jersey RC & D website or the [NJ NRCS website](#).

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on June 8th, at 10:00 a.m. in the Somerset State Office.