

## **NRCS SC STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

*November 3, 2011, 9:30 a.m.  
South Carolina Farm Bureau Building  
Cayce, SC*

Present: Ann English (STC NRCS), Evelyn Whitesides (SRC, NRCS), Amy Overstreet (SC NRCS), Kellee Melton (SC NRCS); Bill Chaplin (SCDHEC); Joe Cockrell (USFW); Chanda Cooper (Richland Soil & Water Conservation District); Marc Cribb (SC DNR); Phillip Elliott (FSA); Frances Gibson (United Farmers, USA - Landowner); Stephen Henry (SC NRCS); Kathy Hensley (Lexington Soil & Water); Russell Hubright (SC Forestry Commission); Tres Hyman (SC Chapter of the Association of Consulting Foresters); Joseph J. James (Agri-Tech Producers, LLC.); Yvonne King (Aiken SWCD); Joy Leisen (AmeriCorps VISTA); Lisa Lord (The Nature Conservancy); William O. McMeekin, PE (NRSK, LLC.); Karen McSwain (Carolina Farm Stewardship Association); Kellee Melton (SC NRCS); Dennis Mobley (SC NRCS); Bill Melven (Lexington SWCD); Dennis Mobley (SC NRCS); Patrice Moses (SC NRCS); Meredith B. Murphy (SC DHEC); Gary Peters (National Wild Turkey Federation); Ralph Pitt (Agri-Tech Producers, LLC.); Kenny Mullis (SCACD & Richland SWCD); Mike Prevatte (Aiken SWCD); Britanni Lewis (SC NRCS); Fred Taylor (Lexington SWCD); Evelyn Whitesides (SC NRCS);

### **Opening remarks from Ann English, State Tech Committee Chair/SC NRCS - State Conservationist:**

- Welcomed all participants & introduced new members of her staff (Dennis Mobley, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations & Britanni Lewis, Economist).
- Asked all attendees to introduce themselves and where they worked.
- Informed all that minutes will be recorded and posted on SC NRCS website.
- 2011 was good year SC – implemented/invested \$26M, \$8 in EQIP, \$700,000 organic.
- No organic monies turned back - \$3.8M used toward New & Beginning Farmers, Limited Resource Producers.
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, used \$1.2M for 15,000 acres.
- Proud of work being done here in SC.
- Hispanic & Women's Lawsuit still ongoing; deadline/suspense is 27 Dec 11 to receive application; Amy has info sheet she put together.

### **Comments from Kellee Melton, SC NRCS - Assistant State Conservationist for Programs:**

- FY 2012 Programs Update
  1. Submitted GARC values (Geographic Area Rate Caps) cost per acre offered for Wetland Reserve Program and Grassland Reserve Program.
  2. Market analysis for WRP; GARC value – Cropland \$2100 per acre; Upland \$2340 per acre.
  3. GRP (Grassland Reserve Program) Market Analysis conducted over 3 areas; average rest of state.
  4. 2012 conducted a bit different due to I85 corridor being so narrow; conducted four different Market Analysis in order to spread out; counties \$2008 per acre; area two counties get \$1983 per acre.
  5. GRP easement deed is not as restricted as WRP.

6. HFRP (Healthy Forest Reserve Program) is an easement program specifically for Longleaf Pines Easements, This program has a defined historic range for Longleaf Pine as does the Longleaf Pine Initiative that falls under WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program); define a Longleaf Priority Area for the state; only states and counties inside of priority areas are eligible to apply for LF Initiative.
  7. Nationwide debate; 9 states part of Longleaf Pines Initiative across SE; Longleaf Pines Initiative organizations (state agencies, NGOs, etc.) have debated the historic range of Longleaf Pines Initiative with National Headquarters who is looking to see what historic ranges are, sat down with other organizations and met; SC adjusted lines from 2010 & 2011 – for 2012 taking in a bit of Lancaster Co., McCormick & Greenwood historic range show to come about that far.
  8. This is just draft only been proposed, nothing finalized; Historic range of LF continued to be debated.
- 2012 EQIP signup
    1. Initiatives: (Organic, Energy, Air Quality (*Air Quality not offered in South Carolina*)).
    2. Organic & Energy Seasonal High Tunnels (Hoop Houses) will now be announced as their own initiative – hoop house sign up will take place outside of normal EQIP sign up.
    3. Each initiative will have own sign up announcement.
    4. Applications will be taken continuously but will have a set announced signup for each initiative.
    5. 3 different ranking cut off periods (3 Feb 12, 30 Mar 12 & 1 Jun 12); 3 cycles of applications being looked at; NHQ will in centralizing to ensure states are more consistent on what they are offering; NHQ will establish ranking cutoff.
    6. Energy added to EQIP - will also offer other energy related practices.
    7. Energy audits will be encouraged; necessary to receive financial assistance on some practices.
    8. There will also be forestry practices in EQIP as there have been in the past.

***Question (from Karen McSwain) Will a CAP be offered as financial assist – Yes, a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) payment will be offered to give financial assistance to have an Energy Audit.***

***Floor was opened for questions & or recommendations***

***Question (from Bill Chaplin, SCDHEC): Is there a minimum acreage requirement to apply for GRP?  
– No. There is no minimum acreage requirement. Anyone can apply.***

***Question (from Joe James): Can GRP be used to produce biomass? – No. Grasses that are produced on the easement area are for standard grazing practices only. The production or cultivation of crops, non-perennial forages for human or domestic animal consumption, or seed production is prohibited.***

- Any additional questions or thoughts regarding programs can be directed to Kellee Melton, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, [kellee.melton@sc.usda.gov](mailto:kellee.melton@sc.usda.gov)

### **Comments from Evelyn Whitesides, SC NRCS – State Resource Conservationist**

- Payment Schedules - Lots of changes in EQIP & more to come; Nation charged with regionalizing the EQIP payment schedule.
- 15 Conservation Practices scheduled to be regionalized for FY12; the regions are based on the Economic Research Service Crop Production Regions-South Carolina, Florida, Georgia & Alabama consists of the South East Region – all 4 states will have same price.
- SC goal of regionalizing the payment schedule was to “Keep conservation practices as similar as possible to what we previously offered within the state”.
- Please see the attached sheet for changes to the payment schedule.
- “Organic” regional changes include the following:
  - Cover Crop
    - Added Organic Legume
    - Added Organic Grain
    - Added Organic Mix
  - Forage & Biomass Planting (Former Pasture & Hayland Planting)
    - Added Organic Legume
    - Added Organic Introduced Grass
  - Nutrient Management
    - Added Organic Soil Test
    - Added Manure Analysis, Application, and Soil Test
- Each practice will have separate guidance sheets.
- Info has not been given to District Conservationist to date in process of providing guidance; will meet w/Supervisory District Conservationist within the 2 weeks to discuss.

#### *Floor was opened for questions & or recommendations*

- Address questions or comments to Evelyn Whitesides [evelyn.whitesides@sc.usda.gov](mailto:evelyn.whitesides@sc.usda.gov) .

### **Comments from Joseph J. James – Agri-Tech**

- ATP will develop, sell and use the best processes to facilitate the sustainable use of plant and wood biomass to make a variety of solid & liquid fuels which enhance the world’s environment & quality of life.
- ATP Torrefaction Technology involves heating biomass in a low-oxygen environment to:
  1. Remove water.
  2. Increase energy density.
  3. To make a very brittle & easily ground material, suitable for pulverized coal power plants.
  4. After reaching operating temperature, ATP’s units require no external energy to produce process heat.

- The Market
  1. Annual world coal use is 6.2 billion tons; 63% is used to produce electricity.
  2. Pellet industry has been growing at a 20% annual rate, by 2020; annual pellet demand will increase from 6M to over 40M tons.
  3. Torrefied biomass can easily displace 25% of coal being used & be used in 50% of pellets produced.
  4. Market for torrefaction feedstock to be used in making bio-based products is being determined, but expected to offer higher margins than solid fuel products.
- ATP's Competitive Differentiation
  1. ATP's biggest competitors – EU's companies (Thermya & Topell BV).
  2. Their processes are much more complex & more expensive than ATP's.
  3. Their units require a costly, extra step to pre-dry biomass inputs to 20% or less.
  4. ATP's units operate on a continuous basis, while customer feedback suggests the competitors may only be able to operate on a batch basis.
- ATP is working with EPRI to develop fuel standards & w/IBI to develop biochar.
- ATP's biochars will help retain fertilizers in poor soils, improving water quality, while improving soil productivity.
- ATP's involvement in torrefaction technology is an outgrowth of its non-profit affiliate's work to improve the economies of poor, rural communities in the southeast.
- Biochar Opportunities
  1. Biochar can increase the productivity of poor soils, reduce water & fertilizer run-off & keep ground water purer.
  2. Torrefied plant or wood material may be a good biochar.
  3. EPA's Region 4 office has sponsored a biochar research project, focused on the Southeast.
- Agri-Tech is interested in working with USDA, farmers, forest landowners, researchers, etc. to test and fully explore the potential of growing bio-crops, which it and others can use to make bio-fuels and bio-products. Agri-Tech is also interested in biochar demonstration projects.
- Our non-profit arm, the Corporation for Economic Opportunity (CEO), hosts a farmers market at Brooklyn Baptist Church in West Columbia.
- CEO was successful in winning a national competition to bring a community fruit orchard to Columbia; on Saturday will plant orchard at Owens Field (Approximately 40 trees to be planted).

***Floor was opened for questions & or recommendations:***

***Question (from Frances Gibson, United Farmers): What is the length of time to grow bio-crops before harvesting? – It depends on the crop, but in this region, best harvest time is after the frost.***

***Question (from Bill Melven): What is the best way to apply biochar? - It is best to apply it in a way that it does not blow away. Some have suggested in the form of pellets. Some inject it into the soil. Others might turn it into the soil.***

### **Comments from Fred Broughton - SCDA**

- Represents South Carolina Fruit Vegetable Crop Association; deals with crops that we eat (healthy eating habits).
- 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Southeast Fruit & Vegetable Expo November 29 &30, Myrtle Beach, SC – all fruit & vegetable growers in sc invited to attend
- Exhibitors with latest equipment from production to marketing will be on display.
- Many these fruit and vegetable farmers are interested in HOOP Houses because will help capitalize on local food system for longer grow season.
- Looking for opportunity to work w/NRCS.

### **Closing Comments from Ann English, State Conservationist:**

- Recognized Frances Gibson (United Farmers) for all the support she & Mr. Gibson have given to NRCS in regard to outreach and education with an NRCS plaque.
- Thanked Russell for use of the SC Forestry Commission for use of their facility and also thanked all for taking time out of your schedules to be here.
- Lots of information covered – feel free to contact NRCS with any questions you may have via phone or email.
- Thank Mr. James for coming out as guest speaker.
- Have great week!

The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

The next SC State Technical Committee meeting will held during the month of February 2012, date, time and location to be determined.