

**State Technical Committee Meeting
September 19, 2011
Minutes**

Welcome: Denise Coleman, PA NRCS State Conservationist, welcomed all.

- Meeting start time set for the afternoon to allow for travel.
- Agenda notices and handouts provided in advance to allow review by members.

Purpose of State Technical Committee (Denise Coleman):

- In the 1990 Farm Bill Congress stated the need for State Technical Committee.
 - NRCS State Conservationist chairs advisory committee.
 - Committee is to provide advice on field office technical guidance.
 - 1996 Farm Bill and 2008 Farm Bill focus has become programmatic. Obtaining advice from constituents and those within state on how to run, rank and prioritize applications within state.
 - Committee is always open to advice.
 - Purpose is for the members to help us.
- Current initiatives (feed management and organic growers).
 - Interested in dialogue. Hoping subcommittee setup and advance notices will give all something to comment on.
- Guest speaker for meetings, topic will be pertinent to state issues (to get back to science-based focus). If you have ideas for topics we would welcome those ideas.

Conewago Soils Project (Tony Buda and Patrick Drohan, PSU):

Enhancing Soils Info on Environmentally Wet landscapes. Nutrient issues on wet landscapes. Power Point Presentation.

Overview of FY 11 Programs, Barry Frantz, NRCS: PowerPoint presentation and handouts.

FY11 CSP:

- Not funded annually by dollars, given by acres.
- An enhancement program, doing more than the minimum required.

Comment (Denise): NRCS Chief wants more focus on Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Not all producers are ready for CSP. Want better and more enticing payments for forest stewards, to get more sign-ups.

Asking Committee for ideas and recommendations to improve program. Would appreciate ideas within the next 2 to 3 months. Katrina Thompson's contact info on handout.

Comment: don't rely on TSPs for specialty crops; currently not a specialty crop sub-committee.

ACTION ITEM: Work on developing subcommittee.

Q: can we correlate CSP with nutrient trading? Avenue to promote there might be return on investment.

A: could be a way, if there is a market for it. Collecting outflow, if could find customer to buy credits.

FY2012 Program Update: Barry Frantz

- PowerPoint presentation and handouts.
- Golden-Winged Warbler – forest species in decline. Goal is to manage habitat and protect it before it gets listed as endangered or threatened species. Could manage with Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds.
- O&E Committee Study - want consistency with practice standards and how policy/resource concerns are met. Recommending automated system, geographic cost list table.

Q: limited to 8 scenarios per practice? -- will be winners and losers.

A: want typical scenario in region, gets local before contracting. Not 100% conclusive.

A: too soon to tell, is a challenge and workload; an annual process. These 15 practices are for 2012 contracts. With new scenarios and practices will be able to address this.

Comment: with multi-state region, could be putting producers in significant disadvantages; potential for disparity. Also, has national put goal as to what cost tables should be hitting?

A: what does it cost to do practices? Need to identify and describe typical scenario. Program-wise we don't talk about percents. EQIP is between 50% and 75%.of average costs.

Q: are other states having subcommittees? Maybe they should meet.

A: each payment scenario may have a payment specification.

Q: does any tracking mechanism track program costs versus what is paid out?

A: no, we work with area engineers who design with contractors. They have ideas of what rate is when they work with the farmer.

New Energy Practices (Poultry Incinerator/Renewable Energy): Noel Soto, NRCS

- New technology that reduces the volume of spent poultry litter by about 90%
- The ash generated is easily transported/spread and since it is rich in P, Ca, K may be used as animal feed in the future.
- CIG demonstration showed a 90% reduction in propane fuel cost.
- 2011 PA NRCS CIGs -- 9 applications and PA selected 4 (one for heating with biomass for a nursery, one with Rodale fro composting, 2 with PSU (odor control and use of vegetable oil to move tractors).

Easement Programs Update: Hathaway Jones, NRCS (handouts)

- 2011:
 - Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) – obligated over \$4M ag easements and 2,400 acres, 3 cooperative agreements
 - Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) – obligated 3 easements, one was not finalized. Two for \$500,000, 142 acres, permanent easements.

- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) (Indiana bat habitat) – no obligations yet. Working on getting first four applications thru system. Still in appraisal phase. Had about 30 applications all together.
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – obligated over \$7M for easements, ½ for bog turtle projects, total of 1,900 acres obligated, out of that 350 acres for bog turtle initiative. Obligated \$1M for restoration projects that go with 2010 easements. Finishing up last minute details.
- 2012:
 - FRPP – not much change, keeping ranking form.
 - GRP – hoping for more funding for 2012. Have a backlog of applications. Changed ranking to focus on ‘grassland’. Added ranking points to put into permanent hay or pasture.
 - HFRP –
 - WRP – revising some forms. Clarify ranking form, eligibility classifications clarified. Ranking form – changed screening questions. Wanted more info from landowner of intent of enrolling and type of acreage proposing to enroll. Disclosure worksheet for every landowner who applies.

CREP Update and Discussion: Chrystal Fetzer, FSA

- Have PA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) amendments to ship 25,000 acres from Ohio back to Chesapeake Bay counties. 19,000+ acres open. Still waiting for finalizing.
- Delaware River proposal affects 7 counties (Delaware, Pike, Bucks, Monroe, Lehigh, Northampton, and Montgomery) not in Chesapeake Bay.
- Re-enrollment up for over 24,000 acres expiring. Reenrollment very low. Contracts start October 1st.
- Safe state acres for wildlife enhancement – vernal pools for wildlife, native grassland, 5200 acres initial. Slashed down to 2,600 acres due to low activity and interest.

BCAP Update: Chrystal Fetzer

- PA involved in Project Area #5 (includes Mercer, Erie, and Crawford Counties)
- Giant Miscanthus. Received allocation just under \$1M,. 800 acres for allocations. Get annual rental contract land payment for up to 5 years. Sign up closes this Friday. Based on \$803 per acre. Rental rate came from national office for those 3 counties, based on 3 predominant SRRs.

Subcommittee Reports

- Feed Management (Kelly O’Neill) – handouts – exceeded goal with 51 farms under contract.

Q: once we have reduction data, NRCS Chief looking for items for congressional testimony. Have avenues to publish data.

A: will get anecdotal data on individual farms.

- Forestry (Andy Duncan) – (handouts) – 2 successful trainings in PA for TSPs, one coming up in Greensburg. May have one in Clarion later in the year.
 - MOU between Bureau of Forestry and NRCS reached agreement. Waiting in forestry legal department.
 - Sept 29 next Forest Stewardship Committee meeting near State College. Discussion on agro-forestry.

Conservation Dialogue: PA's Producers Informing the Next Farm Bill Conservation Title (Kristen Saacke Blunk, PSU): PowerPoint and handouts.

Upcoming State Technical Committee Meeting Dates:

January 23, 2012

April 17, 2012

July 18, 2012

October 25, 2012

Upcoming meetings: subcommittees will meet the morning of the meeting then come before Committee in the afternoon.