

Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee
September 6, 2012
Meeting Summary

A meeting of the USDA State Technical Committee was held on Thursday, September 6, 2012. The meeting began at 9:30 a.m. and was held in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conference room located at 771 Corporate Drive, Lexington, Kentucky. A copy of the [agenda](#) is attached to this meeting summary.

NRCS State Conservationist Karen Woodrich opened the meeting by welcoming the group, especially the new attendees. She asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Ms. Woodrich made a presentation regarding the NRCS Field Office of the Future. She discussed NRCS's challenge to develop a strategic plan to address the reality of shrinking budgets in the most common-sense areas within NRCS's operations. She talked about the current field work unit structure vs. the field office of the future, emphasizing the need for technical staff to get back to planning and spending more of their time providing technical services to customers. She spoke about embracing new technologies and making plans to be able to absorb budget cuts. She briefly covered the agency's Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) effort which has goals to simply conservation deliver, streamline business processes, and ensure science-based assistance. She said that NRCS currently has 54 field offices and 21 work units, but in the field office of the future, could operate with fewer work units. She ended her presentation with a discussion about the fiscal year (FY) 2012 budget and how it compared to FY 2011 (was 12 percent less), and what is known about the fiscal year 2013 budget (proposed 6 percent cut over FT 12 levels). Following her presentation, questions were entertained regarding office locations (with or without Conservation District offices), budget, and staffing. More details may be found in Ms. Woodrich's PowerPoint presentation entitled "[Field Office of the Future](#)".

Ms. Woodrich told the group about upcoming meetings i.e. The Hispanic and Women Farmers Claims Process on October 9th in Mayfield and on October 11th in Shelbyville. Information sheets were available and the State Technical Committee attendees were asked to share this information.

Marcinda Kester, Farm Programs Chief for the Farm Service Agency (FSA), discussed the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Emergency Haying and Grazing. FSA would like to thank the Technical Committee for their prompt responses in regards to CRP and emergency haying and grazing. The comments were appreciated and were reviewed by the FSA State Committee. Currently we have 67 counties approved for Emergency Haying and Grazing. Haying ended August 31st. Grazing was approved initially through the end of September, however, the Secretary announced last week the grazing would be extended through the end of November. Producers are not required to reapply and any producer that has not previously applied can now apply for Emergency Grazing.

Also, in regards to the drought, we have 17 counties that have applied for Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Drought. Of the 17 counties 5 have been funded, however, the other counties are currently holding a sign and we expect to get funding in the next month.

Jack Kuhn, Assistant State Conservationist, provided an overview of accomplishments for the Kentucky NRCS easement business line. Jack reported that Kentucky obligated nearly \$20 million of financial assistance funds to Kentucky landowners for farmland, forestland and grassland easements in FY 2012. Of this, \$15 million was for WRP, almost double the FY 2011 amount. Jack also reported that WRP easement acreage enrollment was 4,400 acres, up 175 percent from last year.

Jack distributed several draft documents concerning compatible use agreements for WRP. He provided an overview of the Compatible Use Agreement (CUA) purpose and asked those interested to review and comment by October 3, 2012. More details may be found in Jack's PowerPoint presentation entitled, "[Easement Updates](#)".

Kate Little, Resource Conservationist, discussed the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 overview. In FY 2012 Kentucky received \$13.2 million dollars in EQIP financial assistance funding to provide landusers across the State the opportunity to implement environmental practices that would have a positive impact on our natural resource concerns. These funds were allocated according to national guidance throughout state and national initiatives in order to best serve such groups as Historically Underserved participants, Organic producers and Forestry producers. Funds were also set aside for certain geographical regions with environmental concerns across the state. At the time of this presentation NRCS had obligated 929 EQIP contracts for a total of \$12.6 million dollars.

In FY 2012 Kentucky received \$27,000 in WHIP financial assistance funding. This funding was to be used to improve habitat for the Golden Winged Warbler found in the eastern region of the state. This initiative was referred to as the Working Lands for Wildlife National Initiative. One contract was obligated in this initiative. All pending WHIP applications taken prior to November 2012 were moved and funded under the EQIP Wildlife Initiative for 2012. There were 54 EQIP wildlife applications approved for a total of \$301,000. These are applications that would have normally been funded under WHIP.

The information above is described in more detail in the "[Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\) and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program \(WHIP\)](#)" PowerPoint presentation posted on the Kentucky NRCS website. The numbers in the synopsis above and in the presentation are rounded figures available at the time this presentation was developed and are not considered official and are not releasable for any reason other than this presentation.

Marcia Kelly, Resource Conservationist, gave an overview of the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications and contracts for fiscal year 2012, with maps showing counties that

had applications and a map showing counties that received contracts. Kentucky received a total of 57 contracts for approximately 26,250 acres.

CSP 2013 has a TENTATIVE application cut-off date of December 21, 2012, depending upon when national guidance is received. There is a possibility of a second sign up period, but this has not been confirmed.

New Farm Bill may implement some changes to the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. NRCS is waiting for FY 13 guidance from National Headquarters. More information may be found in Marcia's PowerPoint presentation entitled, "[Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\) and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program \(FRPP\)](#)."

Deena Wheby, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, discussed what is known and planned for fiscal year 2013. She said that everyone is hopeful for a new Farm Bill in 2012. Both the Senate and the House versions have strong support for EQIP. There will likely be consolidations and streamlining of some conservation programs, as well as opportunities for new partnerships and more leveraging in the new Farm Bill. There are not expected to be a lot of changes to the Conservation Title, however we may see the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) get rolled into EQIP, with a certain percentage of EQIP being designated for wildlife habitat activities. Veterans may become part of the agency's Historically Underserved group.

Deena discussed some of the agency's efforts regarding consistency and streamlining, including more consistent ranking period cut-off dates, and regionalization of payments schedules for all of NRCS's practices. She said that a group of field staff had recently provided input on how to make EQIP better for 2013 for both agency staff and customers. Their suggestions included both technical as well as administrative improvements. Deena discussed the number of ranking areas currently in Kentucky and asked if the State Technical Committee would be interested in providing input via an EQIP subcommittee regarding ranking periods, pooling areas, state initiatives, etc., for FY 2013. In response to several attendees indicating yes, she said a meeting will be scheduled following three sessions of upcoming program training from the national office. Please see the PowerPoint entitled "[FY 13 Program Expectations](#)" for more detailed information.

Bobby Bradley, Resource Conservationist, gave a brief overview of the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Program. CIG is a voluntary program designed to encourage the development of innovative approaches and technologies to target environmental enhancement and protection (soil, water, plant, air, animal and energy). There are two components associated with CIG: a national component and a state component. Kentucky was awarded 4 grants from the 2012 national pool of grant competition. All were multi-state awardees to include as few as 3 states and as many as 20 state including Kentucky.

For the State Component, the Kentucky NRCS State Conservationist awarded two grants for projects submitted by the University of Kentucky. These two projects are to: (1) demonstrate the potential environmental and economic use of switchgrass following biomass production, and (2)

the development of tools for grassed waterway design and corn nitrogen recommendations.. The state component is designed to target the respective state resource concerns. Although Bobby's PowerPoint was not available during the meeting, it may be reviewed on the NRCS webpage. The name of the presentation is "[State and National Conservation Innovation Grants \(CIGs\)](#)."

Jerry Adams, Forestry/Technology Coordinator, discussed the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) with the group and its impact on NRCS staff and partners. A short video message by NRCS Chief David White regarding CDSI and its impacts was played for the group.

A summary of the video: "Conservation Desktop" (CD) will be the tool NRCS conservation planners will use for all planning functions in the future. Most, if not all, of the current tools used by NRCS for resource assessment (such as RUSLE2, WinPST, KYGraze, etc.) will be integrated into the CD, providing increased efficiency and functionality. NRCS will begin testing February 2013 for some pilot states with full rollout nationwide August 2013. CDSI also includes plans for a "Mobile Planner" which will allow NRCS staff to take conservation planning information to the field where they can interact with producers on site, then return to the office and the information will transfer to their workstation. Several mobile devices are being tested at this time and are expected to arrive for field office use sometime in 2014. This will allow NRCS staff to spend more time in the field where they're needed most. Also, planned as a component of CDSI is the "Client Gateway". This tool will allow NRCS clients full access to their conservation plans, contract information, applications, etc. on a 24 hour basis. More information may be found in the presentation, "[Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative](#)".

Randy Smallwood, State Agronomist, reported on the Kentucky (590) Nutrient Management Standard Update. Phosphorus Index work with input from UK, ARS, KYDOC, and KYDOW is ongoing. The group has decided that the phosphorus threshold is set at 800 for Kentucky. The Nitrogen Leaching Index work has begun with Tibor Horvath, NRCS Nutrient Management Specialist, taking lead and asking for initial input from UK and ARS. The committee has asked the KY Ag Water Quality Authority to determine proper manure application setbacks for liquid and solid manure.

Randy also discussed the Cover Crop Update. He reported 1.1 million dollars of EQIP cover crops covering over 17,000 acres is planned for 2012. He also provided an explanation of benefits of a good cover crop. Randy added that UK has had concerns with Kentucky NRCS cover crop choices in the past. Past UK cover crop concerns is that wheat or barley should not be used to deter Hessian Fly pest problems in wheat for grain. He reported that the current cover crop concern is that the Risk Management Agency (Crop Insurance) wants NRCS to change EQIP cover crop kill date requirements to a growth stage. RMA does not like the current method of listing a date. The main issue is, if the cover crop forms a seed head, they do not want to insure the soybeans which follow the cover crop. Kentucky NRCS will change cover crop guidance that aligns with RMA's policy.

Randy said that we will have an opportunity to pay a (344) residue management practice for Soil Health, which delays killing the cover crop up to the maximum allowed by RMA.

Randy concluded his report with an update about NRCS's move to Regional Payment schedules. The update is as follows:

- In 2011, 10 practices were reviewed regionally and a payment schedule was developed for those 10 practices.
- Randy Smallwood and Coleman Gusler represent KY on the Appalachian region team.
- All practices need the payment schedule developed for 2013.
- Work must be completed by November 1, 2012.

More details regarding Randy's presentation may be found in his PowerPoint presentation entitled, "[Nutrient Management 590 Standard, Cover Crops and Payment Schedules.](#)"

Karen asked the group if anyone had anything to report.

Dawn Riley informed the group that the 2012 Kentucky Agricultural Summit will be held November 8th and 9th in Louisville. This year's Summit is entitled, "Farming – The Next Generation." She passed out brochures for the meeting. Information for this meeting may be found on the web at <http://www.kyagsummit.com/>.

Tim Hughes mentioned that the Energy and Environment Cabinet (EEC) is inviting organizations across the Commonwealth to apply for a grant under the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Environmental Mitigation Projects program. This program stems from a settlement consent decree between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and TVA that funds the program \$11.5 million over a five-year period. EEC will accept and review applications for a variety of projects and programs that advance energy conservation, efficiency and renewable generation in the Commonwealth. He will send out the grant information to the State Technical Committee. (It may be found at <http://energy.ky.gov/Pages/TVAGrantProcess.aspx>)

Karen announced that future State Technical Committee meeting dates have been set for February 14, June 13, and October 17, 2013. Unless otherwise notified or posted, the meetings will begin at 9:30 a.m. eastern time.

Presentations from this meeting are hyperlinked in this document, but also may be found on the NRCS website at

http://www.ky.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/StTechComm/StTechComm_SEPT2012.html

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

Attachments:

- Meeting Agenda