

Oklahoma USDA State Technical Committee Meeting
Held via Teams platform
March 22, 2022
8:30 am – 11:20 am

NRCS Acting State Conservationist, James Wood II

Jamey introduced himself. He is currently the acting State Conservationist for Gary O'Neill who is serving in a leadership role for our National Headquarters on a detail. He will be coming back at the end of April. Jamey has worked in Oklahoma for 30 years, to further my career for the last 2 ½ years he has been working for a National Team. He is a native Oklahoman, growing up in Spiro. Today is National Ag Day. We want to honor those who are on the ground producing our feed and fiber and feed stock for us. There are a few who have joined us that are in that actual capacity and many us who are supporting those who do the work on the ground. Be sure to thank those producers out there. I would like to give an opportunity to my fellow USDA leaders to introduce themselves, we have a couple of new executive directors.

Janlyn Hannah-FSA - Steve Kouplen is the new State Executive Director. He has been with FSA since Feb 14. He is from the Beggs area and representing Eastern Oklahoma for us. He has been a great asset to us, and we are happy to have him.

Vickie Edwards-RD: Kenneth Korn, is the new Executive Director for Rural Development. Mr. Korn was formally the city manager for Anadarko. He joined us last week on March 14. We are excited to have our State Director and we look forward to working with him.

Kenneth Corn- New State Director of R&D – I'm sorry I am joining by phone call this morning, due to a previous engagement. I am looking forward to working with everybody and it is exciting to get a chance to be involved in building the rural part of our state. I grew up in Howe, OK, not far from Spiro.

Agency Reports

Rural Development- Vickie Edwards

We are currently at maximum telework but will be phasing back to the office starting April 25th- May 27th. For our program updates we have a couple of business programs ongoing. The Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program will provide grants to eligible processors to expand their capacity. Funds can be used to build new or expand and update existing processing facilities, equipment, working capital such as insuring compliance with packing and labeling requirements, upholding occupational or safety requirements, food safety modification, workforce recruitment, training and retention, or cost associated with becoming an inspection facility. The maximum grant amount is \$25,000,000 or 20% of the total project cost, whichever is less, no minimum award amount. Eligible applicants include sole proprietor business or other entities that want to or do engage in meat and poultry processing. Subject to Federal, State and Tribal inspections programs. Applications are due by April 11th and must be submitted through [Home | GRANTS.GOV](#). The other program is the Value-Added Producer Grant Program. The notice was published on March 1st, 2022. This grant helps producers generate new products, create marketing opportunities, and increase their income through value added activities. Eligible applicants include independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmer or rancher co-ops, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures. Funding may be used for planning activities or working capitol expenses related to producing and marketing of value-added agricultural products. A total of \$19.75 million is available this fiscal year. Electronic applications will be accepted via [Home | GRANTS.GOV](#) until April 25th, and paper application must be mailed to the state office and must be post marked and sent overnight by May 2nd. They can also be delivered in person or emailed to the RD field offices by close of business May 2nd. In our Community Programs we have the Emergency Rural Healthcare Grant Program. Eligible applicants include public bodies, community-based non-profits and federally recognized tribes. The majority of applicants for this program have been healthcare authorities. The minimum grant is \$25,000 the maximum is \$1 million. It must be used to support healthcare services, nutritional assistance through food banks or food distribution facilities. A few of the funded projects are ambulances, upgrade of wireless infrastructure to support increased tele-health service technology, payroll for employees administering the vaccine or testing for COVID, radiology equipment upgrades, and laboratory diagnostic machines. Some projects coming are emergency room remodels, constructing a mental health clinic, family clinic modifications, miscellaneous medical supplies and equipment, refrigeration units, a medical vacuum system, reimbursement for lost revenue due to the pandemic and a food bank expansion. We are taking applications until all funds are exhausted, as of now, we are well funded. [Home | GRANTS.GOV](#)

National Ag Statistics Service (NASS) Troy Marshall

Wrapping up data collection for March Ag and we will have the results on March 31st. A couple of surveys that are ongoing in the field is our (ARMS3) Agriculture Resource Management Survey. We are looking at prices and economics of production based off of different crop & livestock ventures. We partnered with ERS to collect the data. Our land-based survey is usual done in June, in the field, but will continue to be over the phone. We are prescreening that right now. FSA and other strong partners help point us to the producers. A few new surveys we are still collecting on, an Ag Forestry

Survey, the sample size just isn't huge in Oklahoma. A big one going on right now is the Cash Rents Survey. FSA does use this survey for CRP rate calculations, thank you for supporting that as well. We are partnering with OSU Dept. of Ag Economics collecting on two surveys. The cow/calf survey looks at production and what it takes. Also, a Bio-Security survey. Data is coming in, we appreciate the support, and we are excited to see the results. The results will help our extension agents assist our producers plan specifically with bio security. A note on the bio security, only 2 or 3 other universities got approved for that survey so Oklahoma will be one of the only states to have that kind of data to use, not only for research but for out in the field. Staff are still in full telework, trying to get back to the office however some of our regional offices are going to stay remote as most of the staff took that as an option. We are going to get our call center back in place and should start in May. Going to get back to face to face with our field numerators, but right now we are still very limited.

NRCS Acting State Conservationist, James Wood II

NRCS is not fully in office just yet, but we are getting back. The good news is, this goes for FSA as well, our field offices have unlocked their doors and clients don't have to make appointments to go into the offices anymore.

Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), Trey Lam

This is the legislative time for state agencies, there are several bills that have conservation impacts. The Healthy Soils Program Bill, about 20 states have passed a healthy soils bill, ours would be similar to New Mexico and other states around us; this puts soils on the same level as our water quality program. Also, Nutrient Management Planning for Poultry Industry, one on Hemp Production and Carbon Sequestration where Conservation Commission and Districts would be involved in verifying hemp production practices that sequester carbon. That will have some funding for OSU to do research on how much carbon is actually sequestered from Hemp. We also have a bill to reauthorize the State Cost Share Program, it is a small percentage of the gross production tax. Should be through the Senate today and ready for the Governor's signature. It is a big program for our agency and local conservation districts. Another bill is the Oklahoma Farmland Wealth Preservation Act, which deals with underserved landowners, fraternization of title and heirs for land that can be a hindrance in getting assistance in both federal and state programs. We have a request in for more appropriations to continue funding for flood control dams as well as a raise for our district staff that work in USDA service centers. We have an opportunity on GIS for the state to fully fund it. Interestingly, the state has never funded that program though we have had it for a couple of decades. They are doing the training and development for the next generation of 911 service for the state. We are working with county commissioners on unpaved roads training program, where they work with OSU and other experts on how to better maintain unpaved roads and ditches to solve erosion problems and run-off/ water quality problems. Also, mine reclamation, to fund a state program to solve all types of abandoned mines, like sand, rock and other type of mining so that the conservation commission can come in and assist private landowners reclaim the land and reduce health and safety hazards. A few other projects on going at the agency, we are continuing to work with the USDA APHIS and NRCS partnership on the Feral Hog Project using electronic traps in southwestern Oklahoma and Kay, Osage, and Pawnee counties. It is very successful and working great together. The Poultry Regional Conservation Partnership Program Grant in Eastern Oklahoma has been a challenge getting together with producers due to COVID and now due to the Avian Flu in the migratory birds which is causing a bio security issue. It's a great program and we continue to work with the poultry integrators and all the different State and Federal agencies. US Fish and Wildlife have begun a new program, one of the 1st in the nation, to pay for prescribed burning. It started with equipment, but we are now able to pay for the prescribed burn. A project with General Mills around central Oklahoma near Enid where they source a lot of their wheat. They want to see better soil health and regenerative practices. A potential new partnership is with the new Pandemic Center for human and animal labs here in Stillwater. Where they look at healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy animals and healthy humans and how they all tie together. The Corrugated Metal Pipe (CMP) repair program is progressing well, work has begun. Appreciate the USDA Watershed Program being able to assist with this program. Hopefully this will expand across the nation through federal appropriations and legislation to make it a national program. We are close to completing Elk City creek (Upper Elk #23) dam and when it is done, we will start on Wilburton City Lake water supply in eastern Oklahoma. We are hiring a State Health Coordinator to run the program, as well as a Urban Conservationist through partnership with NRCS in Tulsa. On conservation planning we are working with NRCS, Chickasaw Nation on putting a Conservation Planner in the Chickasaw Nation. Conservation Day at the Capitol is on April 7th, would love to have everyone there so we can talk natural resource conservation to our legislators. The National Land and Range Judging contest is back in person this May. It is a great partnership between NRCS, OSU, FSA and all the different USDA agencies in the first week May. This Friday in Wagoner County, Coweta area, we are having a watershed field day where we will look at the Katashan Bottom on flood control structures and channels.

NRCS Acting State Conservationist, James Wood II

NRCS does have similar agreements with the Muscogee-Creek Nation, Cherokee Nation and Choctaw Nation for conservation planner positions. It's a great opportunity for more "boots on the ground" by partnering up and joining with folks.

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), Kyle Johnson

Staffing changes to OWDC, our Wetlands and WHIP biologist resigned, and our Southwest Region biologist transferred to that position, so the Southwest Region position is waiting to be filled so we can get back to five biologists on staff. The State Wildlife Habitat Improvement Cost Share Program has had a big change to digital applications only from landowners. Currently we have 64 applications for consideration, it's about 30 less than last year. While we use license dollars for the program, we appreciate the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners money that goes through the program as well. In all, our private lands team completed 190 technical assistance visits in Spring of '21 and we funded 68 habitat improvement projects. We also completed a private lands survey in the spring of '21 where we received feedback from approximately 1600 landowners. An article on that survey will be in the spring Your Side of the Fence Newsletter available in April. [Outdoor Oklahoma Journal | Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation \(wildlifedepartment.com\)](#) Lastly ODWC has rebranding going on, with new colors and logo and agency letter heads.

Oklahoma Land Access Program (ODWC-OLAP), Jeff Davis

I want to give a quick update on OLAP, Oklahoma Land Access Program, has leased 90,000 acres of private land for hunting access. We are doing some new programs in coordination with Quails Forever called Corners for Conservation. It is where we lease agriculture corners and is mostly in the panhandle. We have also started doing some Playa preservation in the panhandle on private lands. We have a technician starting in the Woodward area to help implement that. In Northwest Oklahoma we are doing prescribed burning programs, primarily Woods County. We are trying to expand access for close to home enrollment, especially on CRP.

Oklahoma State University (OSU)-Thomas Coon

We have hired a new department head for Animal and Food Sciences, Dr Richard Coffee. Interviews underway for the department head for Plant and Soil Sciences. Dr Shrum, the new OSU President, has stated we are a land grant institution, we have a presence in every county, we need to make that work well for the whole university. We have priorities: health, energy, agriculture, and aerospace engineering; across all of those we need STEM education. Searching for a new Provost, Chief Officer over all the academic programs. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenzas (HPAI), we are watching that closely and pushing the information out to small flock owners and others, working with ODAFF. Currently renewing our Extension County Agreements. Extension Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) held a large animal training session for OK Army Reserve to be prepared for worst case scenarios.

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Doug Schoeling

Updated on prescribed burn funds that OCC is paying landowners, 49 have signed up, eight burns are completed to our knowledge, \$13,000 remaining funds from the \$90,000 we have obligated, in 12 different counties. Reimbursing landowners \$10 per acre, must be a member of their prescribed burn association in their county, still taking applications.

- Question from Robert Perez,- Are there any restrictions on it being any county in the state? What is the end date to this program? Does it have to be this burning season or can it be next year?
- Answer Doug- It will roll into next year, the county doesn't matter as long as they are a member of the prescribed burn association in Oklahoma, we can pay them for those acres. It is a 5-year grant, but we want to use all the funds asap, so we can request more funds for next year.

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF)-JanLee Rowlett

Happy National Ag Day, we will celebrate on Thursday at the Capital. We have a strong focus on all disease issues across the state like HPAI and African Swine Flu. We make sure people have the latest information as it gets closer to Oklahoma. We are having weekly calls with USDA in other states to be prepared. Discussed the drought across the state and making preparations in case it doesn't improve.

Offices of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE), Sholanda Guy

We want to thank all USDA agencies who are participating in 1890 and 1994 land grant institutions scholarship programs, selections are ongoing. April 30th Langston University will host the Goat Field Day in person, registration is open now. Any questions about internships or programs please reach out, and if you have any that you want students to be aware of let me know.

Nature Conservancy, Katie Gillies

The ACEP-ALE easement, the Sealy property in Woods County, will be closing soon and we are excited about that. We will be placing another application in ACEP-ALE in Osage County and a RCPP for some easement work up in the Flint Hills and this project would be in Kay County.

Farm Service Agency (FSA), Kimberly Schneider & Steven Kouplen

Steve- New SED for FSA. Look forward to meeting everyone in person.

Kimberly- In FY21 FSA distributed \$35,120,627,706 in payments to producers across the state. In FY22 so far \$8,873,134,107 has been distributed. For CRP 49 counties with 628,527 acres enrolled in general and continuous, at an average rental rate of \$28. Sixteen so in FY22 where we have paid just over \$14 million. On CRP expiring acres Oklahoma has a significant number of contracts expiring in 2022 due to the increased enrollment number over the last few years. Average rental rates for CRP go from \$11-\$53 depending on the county. The Conservation Priority Area (CPA) was reduced last year due to the limit of 25% of the total cropland acres for our state. A benefit of CRP is the ability to periodically hay or graze the land, for both emergency & non-emergency. [Emergency Haying and Grazing \(usda.gov\)](#) All non-emergency haying and grazing must be approved before beginning. Emergency haying & Grazing is not allowed during primary nesting season, May 1st – July 1st. On Grassland CRP acres for signup #201- 13,545 ac; #202- 20,112 ac;

#203- 203,000 ac; #204 begins April 4th-May 13th. New approved SAFE Area had no activity in FY21 but are receiving phone calls about it this FY. If anyone would like to be on the CRP subcommittee email zane.fleming@usda.gov or kimberly.schneider@usda.gov. Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) in FY21 Oklahoma producers recovering from multiple disasters received \$2,327,545 for 2018 & 2019 tornados, 2019 floods, 2020 severe storms, 2020 wildfires. Three disaster types are being administered across the state, severe storms, floods, and wildfires. Each of those is for one county each. Due to the weather this spring we will be adding 2 more counties and we are anticipating adding tornados and extra counties on wildfires.

- Question- Robert Perez- Asking which species of birds is included in the ground nesting CPA area.
- Answer- Kimberly- Northern Bobwhite and the Cassin Sparrow
- Someone commenting- Should include Monarch Butterflies as well.
- Answer Kimberly- These are the 2 new species added.

NRCS Reports

Natural Resource Conservation Service Oklahoma 2022 Wetland Restoration Criteria & Guidelines (WRCG) Stacy Riley

Our priority areas are 1. Playa Lakes Joint Venture Area (the West half of Oklahoma) 2. Neosho Bottoms (the Northeast corner of Oklahoma) 3. Adjacent to existing WRP/WRE 4. To Wildlife Refuge Area 5. To State Wildlife Management Area. Aren't looking at changing these in 2023. Different land types are farmed or converted Wetlands, Crop or Grasslands flooded by overflow of a closed basin lake or pothole, Riparian Areas, Lands in CRP, Wetlands restored or protected, Hydric Soil Minor Components & Problematic Hydric Soils, Other eligible lands adjacent lands. Will be sent to the ACEP Subcommittee for review to make sure we are on target. These will be our WRE priorities for FY23.

Climate-Smart Commodities- James Wood II

We have over \$1 billion available for partnership pilot projects, this is a unique opportunity to get climate-smart commodities to producers. It will provide technical and financial assistance lasting from 1-5 years. Climate-Smart is defined as an agricultural commodity that is produced using farming, ranching or forestry practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon. Long list of example practices is on the website.

<https://www.usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities> First funding pool is due May 6th, 2022, proposals from \$5 million to \$100 million. This funding pool should include large-scale pilot projects focused on greenhouse gas benefits and include a cross-section of production agriculture, including small and/or underserved producers. Second funding pool is due June 10th, 2022, proposals from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999. This funding pool is limited to particularly innovative pilot projects with an emphasis on enrollment of small and/or underserved producers with monitoring, reporting, & verification from minority-serving institutions. While NRCS will be administering the agreements, we will not provide technical assistance or the administration of the distribution of the funds to producers, that will be by the grantee. The FAQs on the Climate-Smart Commodities web page has many good answers already to many questions. Get your proposals in, this is a great and unique opportunity.

Payment Rate Schedules- Stacy Riley

2022 State Payment Schedules | NRCS (usda.gov)

The updating for the payment rate schedules is ongoing now for 2023. The Conservation Programs that get different pay rates are ACEP, CSP, CSP-GCI, EQIP, & RCPP. Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) cover both Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) and Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) and these program rules are different from the other listed programs. What impacts our producers the most and has the most flexibility is Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Conservation Stewardship Program – Grassland Conservation Initiative (CSP-GCI) is established by the Farm Bill, and it's regulated for payments through that. Principles of Least-Cost: What payment rate can we offer a producer to install the practice? By law we have certain criteria we have to follow when we are developing a payment rate with-in the different programs. Some of the things we have to account for is materials, equipment for installation, labor, mobilization, acquisition of technical knowledge, and foregone income. These factors go into how we establish payment rates for different conservation practices. Then we evaluate what it will take to ensure adaption of that practice. By law we have to set a cost rate for the general public from 50-75% of what is the average cost to install that practice in each category. Historically we have a list of practices that are least likely to be adopted or the cost is prohibitive to the producer, so we raise those to the maximum level of 75%. We can not offer across the board 75% cost rate for every practice because it would not meet the principle of the least cost alternative. We have a list of several different practices through the years and some of the examples are (GSS) grade stabilization structures are 75% because they are complex systems that benefit the land and producer well when installed as well as grassy water ways (GWW). Prescribed Burn was increased due to the adaptation rate just a couple of years ago. Anything in the soil health suite is also high-cost rate to potentially change that management style. We are now developing regional scenarios. Our region is with Texas in the Southern Plains. There is an economic analysis done on the cost to install a particular practice and then there are scenarios under each practice. For example, 314- Brush Management- we have multiple scenarios available. We try to find the one to fit our customers needs, either it is mechanical or chemical and then is it spot treat or whole area. We are establishing what we want for our 2023 scenarios

to be available so later we can set the cost rates for those categories. We are evaluating what has been done, what is available, what is not, and what we have historically not used in the past 3 years. Our engineering team and ecological science team are going through what is available in the region and within the nation. One thing we are focused on is looking at opportunities for small scale farming to have some different scenarios available to them so they can economically adopt our conservation practices and participate in our programs. Even as small as a one acre farm, some say it is urban farming, but it could be both. Could be in an urban setting or it could be on a ranch, and they need a different practice for a small area to grow their own personal food. Please let us know if you hear of a practice not being adopted because of the cost being prohibitive, there are a few things we can do and some we can not change. We know the input costs have greatly increased in the last couple of years and we couldn't do anything for 2022 but we could possibly change some of the rates with a review of the components for the 2023 pay schedule. We are always looking at supply and demand issues when input cost makes certain products go up in cost. In 2021 we were able to raise some of our pay rates though we don't know if we can do it again. We don't have any real options within Oklahoma to increase the payment rate for existing established payment rates from before. Visit the above link to see what we did for 2020, 2021 and 2022. We usually release the rates to the public after August 1st, so that after Oct 1st the rates are available. If you want to be a part of the Payment Rate Subcommittee, please email me at stacy.riley@usda.gov.

Urban Agriculture- James Wood II

[Urban Agriculture | NRCS \(usda.gov\)](#)

Urban Agriculture doesn't have an official definition yet for NRCS or all of USDA. Due to the nature of its ability to be described in multiple ways. As Stacy discussed, urban agriculture is not just a city thing, it is any small farm, like turning your backyard into a garden or your flower beds into vegetable and fruit beds or even a 10-acre hobby farm so a small producer can grow their own meat and veggies. We would love to have you serve on this subcommittee, it's a new and upcoming program we are excited about. USDA made an Inaugural Federal Advisory Committee on Urban Agriculture and one of the individuals serving on that committee is from Oklahoma and a member of the Choctaw Nation, Kaben Smallwood. Aquaponics is his area of interest and there will be a national conference next fall on that topic in Oklahoma City. If you are interested in any subcommittee, please reach out and we will get you on the list. USDA NRCS has joined with OSU extension, Langston University, ODAFF, Cattleman's Foundation, ONIE Project and Veteran Farmers Coalition to create the New and Beginning Farmers Coalition. There is a list of activities and events as well. [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers | NRCS Oklahoma \(usda.gov\)](#). Here is the USDA link as well. [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers | Farmers.gov](#)

NRCS Priorities 2022

NRCS has established our priorities for 2022

- Ensure equity in the delivery and implementation of all NRCS programs and services.
- Increase assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry to support producers in mitigating climate change and building resiliency across their operations.
- Expand conservation tools and support to address the unique needs of urban farmers and communities nationwide.
- Leverage innovative partnerships to expand NRCS's ability to get conservation on the ground effectively and efficiently.

Direct Hire

We have requested for direct hire authority so if you know of any individuals, especially those who are graduating in May, have them get in touch with us. We filled almost 30 positions last year and are looking to fill more this year. All vacancy announcements are posted on <https://www.usajobs.gov/>

NRCS of the Future State Conservationist Group <https://www.farmers.gov/conservation/conservation-at-work/all>

Real stories. Real successes. Real quick. These videos provide a great opportunity to showcase our programs and they are 1-2 minutes long but provide great information. Forty videos are currently available.

Our Mission: We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.

Our Vision: A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation

NRCS Priorities (2021-2022)

1. **1.Ensure equity in the delivery and implementation of all NRCS programs and services.**
 - a. Review and modify programs, practices, and policies to address historic and structural barriers that have limited access and support for historically underserved customers.
 - b. Commit to a comprehensive delivery of technical service and clear, simple and effective communications to all customers to ensure we are reaching historically underserved producers.

- c. Invest in training, program outreach and partnerships to expand access to NRCS assistance for historically underserved producers.
- 2. **2. Increase assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry to support producers in mitigating climate change and building resiliency across their operations.**
 - a. Support farmers, ranchers, and forest owners in utilizing NRCS tools and programs to adapt to and address climate vulnerabilities that threaten the viability of agricultural operations and communities.
 - b. Integrate Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry into the planning process for conservation program delivery.
 - c. Improve science and technology for understanding, measuring, and tracking climate-related impacts and outcomes of NRCS practices and programs.
- 3. **Expand conservation tools and support to address the unique needs of urban farmers and communities nationwide.**
 - a. Continue to build out the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production within NRCS to increase assistance for urban producers and communities.
 - b. Review conservation policies, practices and activities to adopt and customize to support urban agriculture.
- 4. **Cultivate a complete and diverse workforce that has the right tools, technologies, and training to uphold the scientific integrity of NRCS.**
 - a. Advance recruitment and hiring practices that attract diverse, quality talent and support an inclusive culture.
 - b. Engage partners and stakeholders to ensure that the agency's conservation delivery model meets the needs of customers to address existing and emerging resource concerns.
 - c. Develop and effectively deliver timely training resources to meet the immediate and long-term needs for new and emerging focus areas and technology.
- 5. **Leverage innovative partnerships to expand NRCS's ability to get conservation on the ground effectively and efficiently.**
 - a. Develop a strategy to identify innovative partners and how their resources can further advance the agency's mission delivery mechanisms.
 - b. Support strategic partnerships to accelerate innovation and conservation results.

No questions. Meeting dismissed at 11:20 a.m.