

Oklahoma USDA State Technical Committee Meeting
Held via Teams platform
March 23, 2021
9:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Gary O’Neill, NRCS State Conservationist, welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. This is the second virtual State Technical Committee (STAC) meeting we’ve had. Hopefully will have face to face soon. We want to place an emphasis on sharing information with other agencies.

Agency Reports

Risk Management Agency (RMA), James Bellmon:

Continuing to work 100 percent telework. Any issues or concerns with policy reach out to your agent or insurance company or if you need to you can call our main line at 405-879-2700 or email us at rsook.usda.gov. In 2020 we had a little over 17,000 policies that were serviced by approved insurance providers, that was on 6.9 million acres, paid out a little over \$100,000,000 for 2020. Oklahoma’s biggest concern for losses was SW Oklahoma and the panhandle. Talked about the rain we’ve been getting along the Kansas line. Most of small grains are fair to good condition, should see improvement on grasses with the warm weather. This is written agreement season, which is, requests that are done to ensure crops or other types of practices that are not insurable counties. We have done over 400 since February 1st and over 600 in 2021; over 20% were completed for crop or other type of practices in Oklahoma.

Rural Development (RD), Vicky Edwards:

We are also on maximum telework. Here is an update on each of the program areas. On the 50 percent grant for ag producers, co-ops, and ag producer groups, applications due by May 6. Rural Energy for America Program, applications are needed. Discussed renewable energy products. Water and Environmental Program obligated 32 million and some change in loan funds. Allocations are in for FY 2021. Discussed how much in grant funds etc. Community facilities program in 2020 received 289K in local funds. FY 21 so far, we have obligated 1 million and some change in grants. Single family housing obligated 32 direct loans. There were eight 504 repair grants. Discussed Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) - grants to help independent agriculture producers that add value to their products. On the 50% grant for Ag Producers, Cooperatives, and Ag Producer groups for working capital or planning purposes - \$76 million available nationwide, application due May 6th. Discussed REAP-Rural Energy for America Program. Funds are in and applications are needed. REAP offers a 25% grant for energy efficiency improvements or renewable energy project. For profit businesses and ag producers are eligible. For Water and Environmental Programs in FY2020 we obligated \$32,784,000 loan, \$9,176,000 grant and \$525,000 guaranteed. In FY2021 we were given an allocation of \$21,085,000 loan, \$6,111,000 grant and \$852,000 guaranteed. We will fully utilize our allocation and obtain additional funding from the National Office. For our community facilities programs FY20 we obligated \$289,600 loans, \$9,064,000 grant and \$289,600 guaranteed. In FY21 we have received our allocation and this year we have obligated \$1,404,200 in grants and anticipate using all our allocation for the loans, grants and the guaranteed funds. On our single-family housing program in FY21 we have obligated 32 direct loans funded with an average loan size of \$122,855 for a total of \$3,931,000. We have obligated 6, 504 repair loans totaling \$40,344 and obligated 8 504 repair grants totaling \$52,254.

National Ag Statistics Service (NASS) Troy Marshall:

We are also at maximum telework, maximize data collection efforts to be done over the phone. The data collection center in Oklahoma City are working from home as well. We’ve seen an increase in response. Improved matched response rate. Working out well. Jim mentioned crop weather - at highest quality for wheat conditions. Changing an in-person survey to over the phone even though it is land based. We will spread out the data collection survey - March 1st- April 22nd and come back in June to collect data. Moving along well even with alternative data collection services.

- Electa Hare-Redcorn- in chat- Intertribal Agriculture Council, EOK Region- would like to get some training, have some regional conversations about NASS and how to collaborate for numbers reflective of tribal and individual AI/AN Ag producers. Please drop contact information in the chat box when you have a moment.
- To Which Troy replied 405-415-8850 troy.marshall@usda.gov

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Sherry Hunt:

Stillwater location received new funding related to barley research. Hydraulic funding research unit is seeing new base funding as well related to research along the Missouri River basin related to dam and levee failure and will be working with University of Missouri. They have an inner-agency agreement with NRCS to begin looking at Dam Monitoring, inspection, guidance, development outreach related to dams. With the new base funding we will add another scientist at the research center in Stillwater. Talked about job advertisements for 10 termed appointments. One-year funding guaranteed maybe up to four years. Working with the OK NRCS state office for construction of the Research Station's Dam. Having to get documentation for the dam since it is considered a historical site. Also working on an easement with OSU for a small piece of property before the construction. Mentioned the selection for Climate hub director.

- Sherry added in chat: I should have mentioned that some of the funds I have received through the interagency agreement with NRCS will be used to work closing with Oklahoma State University. In addition, the Oklahoma NRCS and the ARS HERU in Stillwater are co-sponsoring a team of eight sr. design capstone students from OSU Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering Dept. on a project related to dam and reservoir monitoring.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) El Reno- Pat Starks:

Things are going well at the Research Lab in El Reno; we are on maximized telework but have kept employees on site for animal care. We also received a base increase in allocations for the climate hub that is in our shop. Currently without a Climate Hub Director, interviewing people. Continue to work as part of the long term Agrow Eco System Research Network, what we call Eltar, headed up by NRCS. Those two programs keep us busy. We are in the middle of rewriting our 5-year project plan that incorporates those 2 incentives. That plan goes to area office in April and we will see what they decide on that. Everything is going well despite the pandemic.

Oklahoma Conservation Commission- Greg Kloxin:

Discussed current tele-work conditions. Soil health program report, Jimmy Emmons is now an employee of the Conservation Commission. He will be working as the agency soil health mentoring coordinator on point as our General Mills soil health mentoring program. Going to work in specific counties with new soil health people and across the state with other soil health people in conjunction with OSU to look at crop data that combines with soil health. They will be collecting additional soil health information from producers. OSU to develop hard data on economic benefits of soil health. Non-point source - NPS success stories google it! Pandemic has pushed learning programs, pushing education through different means, most have been done remotely. Starting to begin more focus on poultry with a "poultry neighbors" project. Working with GRDA to plan and implement practices. Secured \$500,000 in state funds already, have applied for more. Will promote some corrections for misconceptions. Our flood control project has started beginning above Elk City and a pilot program has started to repair metal pipes in dams and will continue as well. Feral Hog Pilot Project, partnership through NRCS, getting off the ground but very slow with restrictions from COVID. Electric traps are out for bid, 10 for each in Cotton, Tillman, Jackson, Harmon and Kay counties. We don't have authorization yet for Beckham, Roger Mills, Osage and Pawnee county. Currently advertising for coordinator.

- In Chat: The EPA link to the Nonpoint Source success stories.
https://ofmpub.epa.gov/apex/grts/f?p=109:191:::NO:::RESOURCESRESULTS_ir

Oklahoma Department of Ag, Food, and Forestry: Scott Huff:

Our headquarters in OKC is still closed. Discussed staffing and offices are still fully functioning depending on position. Renewed effort on genetic program that has been in the works for over 30 years now. Offer different

variety of trees (covering Pine) that is beneficial for the eastern half of the state. Protect surface water the best we can, in the last report we had a 91.7 percent compliance. Fire season was not bad this year. Rain has helped a lot.

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) Josh Richardson:

In the last year Russ Horton has moved to Wildlife Assistant Chief and I have replaced him as the Private land Supervisor. There were 173 technical assistance visits during 2020 covering 103,000 acres. We have 47 ODWC WHIP projects have been approved for cost- share funding. A total of 109 development projects have been reviewed in 2020. Fully staffed now across the state. Looking forward to a new year and getting back to a new normal.

OSU Extension - Randy Taylor

OSU currently plans to be fully open for students with the fall semester. OSU Extension is currently holding educational meetings for groups of 50 or fewer as long as CDC guidelines are followed. Events with more than 50 attendees are required to obtain a waiver from administration and have a management plan for larger crowds in place. Plans are currently in place for the Lahoma Field Day on May 14 and the State Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference on August 5-6, 2021 in OKC.

Staffing at the local level remains well-staffed with a couple vacancies. We do have 10 educators working two counties due to funding restrictions. Discussed high priority positions. Excited to work with Gilbert Guerrero on Beginning Farmer and Rancher outreach programs.

- In Chat: Laura McIver- Randy, what are the dates for the Women in Ag Conference planned for August?
- Randy Taylor- The current plan is: State Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference August 5-6, 2021 at the Champion Conference Center/Hilton Garden Inn Hotel 803 S Meridian Ave, Oklahoma City, OK 73108

US Fish and Wildlife Service: John Hendrix

Rotating schedule in office, but at maximum telework. Discussed staffing and openings. Brian Fuller is a new addition, covers the eastern part of the state and Doug Schoeling covers the western part of the state. We were able to have a monthly approval to meet with landowners. Last year in 2020 we had about \$525,000 that we put to the ground, \$50,000 we ran through the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and they in turn pushed that out to the different Prescribe Burn Associations that requested funds to buy burn equipment. Provided \$175,000 to ODWC for their private lands program and \$50,000 Lesser Prairie Chicken Habitat in Western Oklahoma. Our 2 Private Lands Partner Biologists put \$300,000 themselves to different partnerships across the state.

Environmental Protection Agency- Randall Rush:

Our new Administrator Michael Regan started a month ago. David Gray is the acting Regional Administrator for Dallas. Discussed that there were nearly 90 Oklahoma success stories due to their partnership with OCC and NRCS. Here in Region 6 some of our State Partners were interested in developing MOU's with us. New Mexico Farm Bureau and New Mexico Ag have shown the most interest.

- Randy Rush in chat (repeated link): The EPA link to the Nonpoint Source success stories. https://ofmpub.epa.gov/apex/grts/f?p=109:191:::NO:::RESOURCESRESULTS_ir
- Greg Kloxin replied in chat: Thanks for posting the EPA NPS success stories link! OK's tremendous success in NPS management is made possible by the strength of partnership and funding from our EPA partners in Region 6.
- Electa Hare-Redcorn asked in chat: Thank you! May we have a link to learn and share about the practice priorities/ funding that Greg mentioned in his presentation?
- Greg Kloxin replied in chat: HI, Electa! If you were referring to OCC's locally led cost share program, I encourage you to contact the program lead Taylor Marshall (405-521-6711 or taylor.marshall@conservation.ok.gov), or have your producers contact their local conservation district office.

- Electa Hare-Redcorn replied in chat: That is really good information. Doing my best, as we all are- to take notes and be a conduit of the information. The local NRCS admin mentioned they were sky-high in cost share work right now- so I wanted to understand if there is a way we can assist or learn more about how that works!
- Marla Peeks in chat: Gary, could we possibly get a paragraph from each presenter? It's going so fast. Appears that everyone is reading from notes today. it would be appreciated. thanks.

USDA Langston Liaison: Shalonda Guy:

I am the USDA liaison for the whole state of Oklahoma, here to assist our USDA agencies and our local state agencies and provide outreach to our communities, farmers, ranchers, individuals. Started position in September 2020, great working and meeting everyone. I am here as a resource for any outreach activities, I understand we are limited in our ability to work with the public due to COVID. I am here to help with your outreach programs and provide information to the public. I am meeting with individuals using social distancing so if anyone needs assistance with person to person contact please reach out. The 1890 & 1990 National Scholarship Programs are well underway. There will be a list of students uploaded into the Share Point site for agencies to review and begin making selections. This information will be available March 31st.

- Shalonda Guy in chat: Shalonda Guy, USDA Liaison Telephone: 202-536-6441 shalonda.guy@usda.gov

Noble Research Institute: Amy Hays:

Am serving as the Health Education manager at Noble. 50 percent open during COVID, with limited capacity farm visits. Noble has re-focused on regenerative producers who are doing livestock production. Our focus is not just Ok and TX but nationwide on regenerative agriculture through the livestock arena. Programming wise there have been no public events in person and we continued doing online events up to the end of the year. Later this year we might be able to open back up programming to producers locally here and continue in the virtual environment as we are able.

Intertribal Agriculture Council: Electa Hare-Redcorn: In Chat: Intertribal Agriculture Council Technical Assistance Programming. Through collaboration between the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Tribal Relations and the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the Technical Assistance Centers were established to increase access and use of USDA programs and services by Indian producers and Tribes. By working to streamline existing programs and assisting producers with the application process, our goal is to build a more functional relationship between the USDA and Indian Country and play a role in the evolution of those programs over time.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) - Joy Alspach: At the State Office we are at 25 percent staff, county offices are at 50 percent. Working on appointment basis. Update of FSA payments that have been issued throughout the year. 20 million for CRP, has dropped a little bit over the last few years. County offices are working really well this year with all the different programs. Overview of programs in the US: Oklahoma enrollment data general and continuous signup, at 547, 426.95 acres for both types of CRP; \$33 average rental rate per acre; payments are \$20, 751, 430 with 49 counties with current CRP contracts. The sign-up deadline was extended with no end date. There are 153,000 acres that will expire this year. Last couple of years have been a decrease in people re-enrolling in CRP and we think it is due to the low rental rate. Total offered acres for general signups 98,010 as of March 16. Last enrollment they had over 200,000 offered acres but about 50% became contracted. Discussed average rental rates, the further east you go the rent increases. Discussed haying and grazing historical data. 2020 was high with producers doing haying and grazing. Higher percentages of Haying/Grazing during drought years but the high numbers in 2020 is due to Farmers and Ranchers being in their last year of the contract. CRP Grassland acres signups; there have been 3 so far with varying numbers but they expect the 4th to have high acres enrolled due to speaking to landowners about the program and what their options are with it. Grassland Rental Rates are low in the panhandle and increase as you go east in the state. The new SAFE proposal was approved.

We need help in promoting the program because it's fairly new and offices have been very busy. Moved to general CRP sign up.

Tree Assistance Program (TAP)-provides disaster assistance to eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers. Eligible Cause of Loss includes plant disease, tornadoes, drought, freeze, high winds, fire etc. To be considered an eligible loss; trees, bushes, or vines must have reached mortality above and below ground as a result of natural disaster. Stand must have sustained a mortality loss in excess of 15%, after adjustment for normal mortality. Normal mortality for all trees in Oklahoma is set at 3%. The reason it isn't broken down by species in Oklahoma is because we haven't had a lot of interest in TAP but there are situations where we work with the producers, we just don't have a lot of orchards here. Participants are required to replant/ rehabilitate only the qualifying trees and must be completed within 12 months from the date the application was approved for payment. All must be complete and actual cost receipts provided before payment can be issued. Applicants may not receive TAP benefits and benefits under any other disaster program for the same loss. Requirements for TAP: Limited to a cumulative total of 1,000 acres annually, FSA-578 required for program participation and they have 90 days after the disaster even or the date of loss is apparent.

CRP Sub-committee- If you would like to join please email me at joy.alspach@usda.gov

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Gary O'Neill:

President Biden has issued an executive order on tackling the Climate Crisis. The USDA has a posting in federal register out on March 16. They are asking for input on Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Approach; Biofuels, bioproducts and renewable energy; Catastrophic wildfire, how can we better provide assistance and how to manage it when it happens; and meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities through USDA's climate strategy. Public input closes on April 29, 2021. Great opportunity to provide feedback on climate issues. The work we've done on soil health, really aligns us, to show a positive impact related to cover crops and tillage on those issues.

On March 9th, Connie sent out an email with a link to show there were several National Practice Standards updated or changed. You have an opportunity to review those and all comments are due April 8th. If you didn't receive the email you can contact Connie at connie.fitzpatrick@usda.gov

- Pat Starks, ARS: We have one of the few Climate Hubs located in El Reno, OK. It would be good if our Ag Agencies could interact with the Climate Hub as we move forward.
- Gary O'Neill: I think that could be a huge resource and a great partner so we can address some of the things that were highlighted in the executive order.

New and Beginning Farmer/Ranch Assistance Outreach Plan: Gilbert Guerrero, NRCS:

I am the lead for this program here in Oklahoma and I have been working with all the other agencies and partners as well. We have been able to have a couple of virtual meetings in the last couple months. A lot of people calling about beginning farmers program wanting to participate. We have reached out to all our partners who have come to the table and developed a plan that was approved yesterday at the Food & Agricultural Council meeting. It will be posted on the OK NRCS website along with a business plan that we will be working off of, handout, a calendar that New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers will have access to the information about what is coming up from our partners. So, any of our partners that have meeting dates or information to get out to New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers don't hesitate to contact Gilbert or if you want USDA to speak at your event let him know. We plan to have four meetings a year, scattered around the state, starting in (hopefully) August or September. We have asked our partners to help sponsor the events and those who cannot attend the events in person to assist with providing information and sharing the event through their network. We are hoping to bring in new landowners and producers to these events. We have received a lot of emails and phone calls from farmers wanting to start a cattle business and have heard from a lot of veterans, wanting to discuss green houses and farmer's markets. One hundred and sixty acres is the largest he has been contacted with down to 5 acres that

they just want to do some hoop-houses to produce for their local farmer's market. We will start sending out meeting notes and information. And we want to make our webpage like a one-stop shop for all their information needs.

- Steve (Guest) in chat asked: Is the New and Beginning Farmer Program cost share assistance a grant or loan?
- Gilbert verbally replied: Right now, there are not any grants available, all of those are targeted towards agencies and 501c3's and other groups like that. There are some available through FSA though, you can go and talk with them but through NRCS we don't have anything available, unless you are a tribal organization you can apply for RCPP. The best thing to do is contact your local office, and we are the point of contacts to give that information to our local field offices who do the work involved in the application process.
- Joy Alspach replied in chat: Farm Loans has Beginning Farmer Loans available. FSA Cost Share through CRP Conservation Reserve Program and ECP Emergency Conservation Program offers 90% to Beginning Farmer and Ranchers Socially Disadvantaged and Limited Resource Producers.
- Steven replied in chat: Thank you.
- Gary verbally commented further: From NRCS, when a producer comes in, they can self-certify that they are a Beginning Farmer or Rancher or Veteran. That puts them into a different fund pool and gives them additional opportunities as well as the cost share rate is higher as well. We don't have specific grants, but we do have opportunities with-in our programs. We do want to get that information out to people, so they are aware of what is available from the NRCS for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers and Veterans.
- If you would like to see the BFR Approved Plan for 2021 you can email connie.fitzpatrick@usda.gov to get the advance copy or wait till it is up on our OK NRCS website.

Farmed Wetland Hydrology Indicators: Steve Alspach, NRCS:

Would like to discuss Hydrology Indicators that we use to identify farmed wetlands. As the NRCS, we primarily do Wetland compliance for eligibility in USDA programs. We are required to have these indicators published in our field office tech guide, this is something that our national office is requiring each state to do, as these haven't been required in the past. Farmed wetlands in GIS database goes back to about 2006, with a small impact in OK. We receive a couple hundred requests per year compared with other state that receive 6,000- 10,000 requests a year. Three types of wetlands, but we are only focused on the food security act only. Discussed the Food Security Act came out in 1985. Have been some changes with each Farm Bill over the years. Wetland protection policy: Identify wetlands when providing assistance, protect wetland functions by avoiding and minimizing impacts. Navigable Waters Protection Rule (NWPR) does not alter the wetland conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985. Updated policy and guidance for the wetland and highly erodible land conservation policy. Discussed Final rule for Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. Proposing to adopt the national hydrology indicators for the identification of farmed wetland list, we don't have a lot of these in Oklahoma, partly because we do not a lot high of water tables, especially in the western part of the state. Farmed Wetland Definition: experience inundation for 15 consecutive days or more during the growing season or 10% of the growing season. NRCS is requesting the state technical committee members input on proposed Local Hydrology Indicators for the identification of Farmed Wetlands that are NOT playas, pocosins, or potholes. We will have a link that shows what they are, the different definitions and where the rules can be found. NRCS recommends adopting the National Indicators like surface water, drift deposits, water stained leaves, surface soil cracks etc. National FW hydrology indicators are applicable throughout Oklahoma. For more information: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/pia/programs/farmbill/cc/> and <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/farmbill/?cid=nrcseprd1542016>

- Gary verbal comment: Something we wanted to share but it has minimal impact in Oklahoma. We have done 14 delineations in the last 15 years.
- Steve verbally replied: 15 years and 14 delineations averaging 1.1 acres, so not a huge impact here in the state of Oklahoma. The geomorphology and the way our land lays, doesn't provide a lot of opportunity for

farmed wetlands. If they did a surface drain back in the 70's it took away all the hydrology and it won't support a partially manipulated hydrology.

Watershed Project update: Chris Stoner, NRCS:

As always in OK watersheds are very active. Seven dams are currently in planning: 5 in-house with 2 contracted out, three dams are currently being designed: 1 in-house with 2 contracted out, five dams are awaiting construction, including ARS's Field Station Lake and Upper Elk 23 D and one dam is currently under construction in Logan county, hopefully it will be completed early this summer. Watershed Operations: two new dams are currently in planning (contracted out), one new dam is currently in design (in house), two dams being decommissioned (1 under construction and one contracted out for the design) both have severe gypsum issues running underneath the dams causing safety issues and 10 Remedial repairs for CMP (Corrugated Metal Pipe) issues. If a dam has not reached its 50-year life and there is a deficiency or a problem, then they can be repaired with 100% federal funding. New CMP Pilot Project: Corrugated Metal Pipe, 439 dams out of 2107 dams have metal components in OK (built between 1948-1977). Over 100 repairs to dams have been made by sponsors or OCC. There are still a lot out there that need work, this is not normal operation and maintenance. Trey Lam has been able to work with the National office and secure funds for the pilot program. CMP Pilot details: Funding for Evaluation and Repairs for 50 dams over 50-years old; selected dams in 20 different watersheds, covered by 14 Conservation Districts, in all 3 NRCS administrative zones. \$2.5 million for construction (65/35 cost share with sponsor); \$0.5 million for administration, design work, inspection, etc. Funding received in October 2020, need to have wrapped up by October 2022. We have done field reviews within COVID protocols. Reports on 40 dams: 12 need no action, 16 need additional evaluation and 12 are ready for designs. Our goal is to develop best repair alternatives for the remaining OK dams as well as using this data for others across the country.

EQIP Conservation Incentives Contract (CIC): Stacy Riley, NRCS:

In the 2018 Farm Bill, there is a new program EQIP conservation incentive contract. Rules have been published in federal register. NRCS is in process of writing our policy and guidance to give to field staff to implement the program. Purpose is to provide stewardship opportunities, based on land use, must address at least one priority resource concern and it must be identified as a high priority area. This is a steppingstone for our producers to go from our classic EQIP program into our Stewardship program. Do not have to enroll entire operation, just select one land use, and enroll those acres. Major features are you can attain additional levels of conservation by providing two types of incentive practice payments: payments for adopting practices paid right away or payments for managing, maintain, and improving the incentive practices paid once a year only. EQIP CIC has payment limitations of \$200,000 payment for entire contract length. The field staff will work with individual customers, do a field evaluation assessment. We plan with them; we understand what they are trying to do. There is an application process, they still must meet basic eligibility requirements. Then we will do ranking and selection followed by approval for funding. This is a new program that will become available. NRCS must establish priority areas and resource concerns: there can be multiple areas within the state. Identify, inside that high priority area, at least, up to three priority concerns. There are the same 18 Resource Concern's we have had for about a year now. Within the high priority area, we need to identify the land uses we want to treat. As well as the practices and enhancements that will address that priority resource concern. Anticipate this program going live in 2021 and will be available nationwide this year. NRCS recommends making the whole state our priority area, for land use doing crops and our main priority concern being Soil Quality Limitations. Because this is new and unknown, with everything not quite finalized, we could go ahead and do this in our whole state with our crop land. With the good work we are already showing that is available in the soil health arena, with partners we already have, we believe we can get this going with our local customers, field staff and partners and have it be successful in 2021. This program comes out of existing EQIP allocation. We are open to any suggestions.

- Amy Hays in chat: Stacy, how does crop cover grazing areas? Those counties that crop animals?
Verbally: Thinking back about a previous slide, everybody must be eligible, so if we choose crop, how would that affect our grazing counties that animal crop?

- Stacy Riley verbally replied: What we are thinking about this year, since it is still brand-new, we don't even have the final policy and guidance, they are asking us to go ahead and start identifying. We originally had a plan to be a bit more robust in our first year but with it still being unknown we have dialed it back. We are not looking at offering the CIC to any land use but crop land so the grazing/ pasture range would not be eligible in 2021. We fully anticipate it being more robust and having more opportunities for our grazing / pasture range in 2022. That is where we are at because of the unknowns involved with how this is going to work. We are afraid with the late rollout that we will have difficulty getting our landowners and producers to sign up. That is our intent.
- Amy Hays replied verbally: For sake of just questioning, crop, can that be winter wheat that is used as a feed crop or does it have to be human consumption or a supply chain crop?
- Stacy replies verbally: If it meets that definition of crop land, which is something that is planted to an annual crop, that will still meet the intent. Then we would have to work with the customer to see if it was eligible with the planning and developing the objectives, do our further assessment.
- Gary comment verbally: I just want to add that these contracts come from our existing EQIP allocations, they don't receive separate funding. We must carve out money, that we were using for something else, to do these new contracts for 2021.
- Stacy also commented verbally: I am sure we will discuss this more as a committee, as the policy is further developed and sent to us. We have an opportunity to make things awesome but with all the information we don't know how amazing we can make it. That is why we are leaning towards simplicity for 2021. We do have some great ideas within the technical leadership on NRCS of things we want to try but with my years at NRCS I have learned to wait for the final policy. Feel free to contact me with any comments or concerns.

Final Farm Bill Rule Published Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Stacy Riley, NRCS: ACEP rules have been published. Purpose is to provide assistance to landowners to help conserve and protect agricultural lands and wetlands by directly acquiring or assisting the purchase of conservation easements on private or Tribal lands. This program is split into 2 components: Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE). ALE: we provide matching funds to an eligible entity to put a permanent easement on a piece of land so that it stays agricultural land for the duration of the perpetual or maximum duration. WRE is targeted to protect and restore wetlands by purchasing an easement with a private landowner. ACEP highlights, clarified and defined some definitions for beginning farmers, eligible land etc. It's now required in WRE and ALE ranking to consider CRP-transition incentive program at a higher priority.

Feral Swine Eradication Project Update: Steve Glasgow, NRCS:

At the last State Technical Committee meeting NRCS had opened up a 2nd round for grant proposals for area partners to apply for the two new areas opened up one being the Osage/ Pawnee County Area next to the existing area of Kay County that was funded being last year, the 2nd project area being Roger Mills/Beckham County that extend that section of the Red River area of the project area up to the state line. It was awarded to OCC. As Greg Kloxin stated earlier, we are in the process of developing agreements with OCC so they can hopefully begin work on that later this summer. These are joint projects, the NRCS funds go to the partner and they coordinate with the APHIS groups and the trappers in these project areas to educate, conduct damage assessments, trapping and baiting done, monitoring etc.

- Gary verbally added: The exciting thing is we were funded for two more projects that expand the existing projects which gives us a great opportunity to learn more about how to deal with feral hogs here in Oklahoma through these 2 pilot projects that were a part of the Farm Bill.
- Trey Lam verbally commented: OETA will be doing a story on the feral hog grant program. We had a chance yesterday to meet with Steve Shaw from OETA and the report will air on Friday March 26th and throughout the weekend. It will include a producer from Garvin County talking about feral hog damage in his corn/ soybean/ wheat grazing production system. A big component of that is assessing the damage, the only way to really measure it is to get out into the field. So, our partners that are working in these

areas, who know landowners/ producers who have damage, have them contact their conservation district or APHIS so we can get out there to assess the damage and begin to track that. The real key is to reduce the damage the feral hogs are doing. We are ready to roll on this, it has just taken us a while because of COVID. Everything is being ordered from traps to vehicles, to getting staff in place. We are ready to go.

- Marla Peek asked in chat: Had heard there were issues with landowners not wanting to participate in Kay County area because they had people hog hunting on their property? True? details? thanks.
- Melissa Shackford asked in chat: Are there some outreach materials related to the feral swine eradication project?
- Steve Glasgow replied in chat to Melissa: Existing project outreach through local conservation districts and OCC. COVID has hindered somewhat. Also refer to NRCS programs website for project area overviews:
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmland/?cid=nrcseprd1461219>
New projects will be forthcoming
- Steve Glasgow replied in chat to Marla: I don't know anything about the hunting issue in Kay county, but we knew there could be some issues. I hear more from landowners wanting to get rid of them.

USDA NRCS Western Governors' Association Liaison: Heidi Ramsey:

Introduced herself as the liaison to the Western Governors' Association, but she also serves as the NRCS State Watershed Programs position in Colorado as well. The Western Governors' Association (WGA) is made up of 22 governors of all the western states and territories. Mission is to address important policy and governance issues in the west, to advance the role of the western states in the federal system. Acts as a center of innovation and promotes shared development of solution to regional problems. Strategies include develop and communicate regional policy, conduct research and disseminate finding, build public understanding, etc. WGA has 9 focuses that also fall under our mission for NRCS. WGA was a vital partner in the success of the Sage Grouse Initiative. WGA helps get conservation on the ground. WGA has strong involvement in invasive species control at the federal, state, and local levels. Discussed Invasive Species Data Mobilization Campaign which has USGS as a main partner. You can listen to podcast from WGA to learn more about what the governors are working on. Link to the website <https://westgov.org> Heidi Ramsey, NRCS Western Governors' Association Liaison, State Watershed Programs Manager, Cell – 720-595-5875, Heidi.Ramsey@usda.gov

- Gary O'Neill verbally answering Marla's chat question on feral hogs: It is a volunteer program and we know we won't get every landowner to participate, we think most will want to eradicate those feral hogs, but others have other ideas. It seems like I have heard Scott talk of issues related to that.

NRCS - Gary O'Neill:

Announcements from NRCS: We are hiring. The agency was approved for 1500 new positions, with direct hire authority which gives us the ability to streamline the process. They are all entry level positions, most are soil conservationists, our bread and butter positions we utilize in the field for planning and working with landowners. Also engineering positions, some specialized disciplines like forestry, biologist and those kinds of positions. We have been able to get 22 of those positions in Oklahoma - some are advertised, and some are yet to come. If you know someone who will be graduating or that is looking for these kinds of jobs let them know. We currently have an acting chief, Terry Cosby, until they appoint a new chief. Kevin Norton will be retiring in early May from the agency.

Question and comments

- Electa Hare-Redcorn speaking verbally: Introducing herself with Intertribal Ag Council of Eastern Oklahoma region. I just came back to this position on March 1st. I am reaching out for Vickie Edwards contact information from RD for the website. I have had a hard time finding a way to email her or reach out. If she is still on the line, I would love to have her contact information.

- Vickie replied verbally: I will put that into the chat for you. In Chat: Here is my contact information: vickie.edwards@usda.gov phone: 405-742-1013

Stacy Riley: Gary I just want everyone to know that the NRCS PowerPoints that were presented are now pdf-ed and will be sent out along with the ACEP final rule to everyone that is on our email contact list.

- Trey Lam in chat: OCC is receiving several concerns with marijuana grow farms. The issues are water quality and sewage along with land clearing.
- Stacy: On the NRCS side of Medical Marijuana or Hemp. There is still a very significant process between what we can do on the federal side vs state law. Hemp we must work around because its been in the Farm Bill and if they have a USDA plan, we can provide customer service and financial assistance for Hemp. When it comes to Medical Marijuana NRCS cannot provide technical support because it is a violation of federal law.
- Randy Taylor in chat: Trey Lam any questions or concerns about herbicide drift?
- Trey Lam in chat: The main concern is the landowners probably don't have a traditional understanding of natural resources and soil and water in Oklahoma, so there is an education process. Need to provide assistance on better land management.
- Gary O'Neil replies verbally: That is good information, because we all must deal with that Let people know it is something that has been brought up and it is something to be thinking about.

Gary O'Neill: We are planning to have a State Technical Committee meeting virtually every quarter, hopefully we can meet face to face soon.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.