

## **State Technical Committee Meeting – September 27, 2018**

**Jill Howard – NRCS** - facilitated the meeting

**Mary Podoll, State Conservationist – NRCS** - gave update on Farm Bill and FPAC (Farm Production and Conservation)

Farm Bill - Mary talked about the conservation title. She said too much time in the office ranking and we need to have field office back in the field.. We have a good staff at state office working to keep things under control to take stress off of the field offices.

**Brad Thykeson – FSA** - noted that October 14 is the initial kick off date for FPAC. No employees will be asked to move.

RD is now under its own agency under the Secretary.

Mary feels it is going very well and the changes are coming along well.

Brad anticipates this to take place by the end of the FY. House and senate will have to figure out the differences.

Mary said we are not preparing for a shutdown in October.

Introductions were made of everyone attending the meeting.

**Aaron Krauter (Senior Policy Advisor for Senator Heitkamp)** - talked about the farm bill being a 5 year product. Senator Heitkamp is on the committee. Issues percolating are Title 1 relating to increased costs of cotton and has to be worked out. There is broad support. SNAP requirement will be worked out hopefully during the month of October.

Howard Buffet was in North Dakota 10 days ago. He is a conservationist and was impressed with what NRCS and NDSU has done.

**Todd Hagel** - NRCS – FY19 Program Discussion (see presentation) – EQIP funds – wrapping up the FY, we are in good shape. Todd complimented his staff on a great job a successful year.

He explained in detail the budget for FY 18 and discussed the numbers that went out at the county level. He said we do not have a big backlog of applications.

Todd asked for input on FY19 funding pools for EQIP. (materials were emailed prior to the meeting)

CSP – 10 percent of all cropland and rangeland acres in ND are enrolled in CSP. Todd explained that CSP is: doing good things for the natural resources and then doing an enhancement to make things better.

Talked about CSP signup numbers and applications and how much we funded. Explained renewal contracts and went over numbers of contracts renewed.

Waterbank program. This is not a farm bill program. It works quick and producers really like it. We only get small allocation for this program. North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota are in this program and North Dakota gets most of the funding. Well received program in State. It is a 10-year program with annual rental fee. Much of the land is in Devils Lake where there is flooding. As long as we can demonstrate a need, we can expect to receive funding.

WRE – went over number of easements, acres enrolled and total dollars. Total dollars do include restoration. Question was asked if producers retain grazing rights. Todd said last year 50 percent retained grazing rights.

Upcoming changes in 2019 will be adding a couple practices: fire breaks and irrigation land leveling. Input was asked of the group regarding FY19.

Discussed upcoming EQIP changes for FY 2019. All of these practices have had a cap on them but we have decided not to have cap on them. We have caps and SD and MN do not. She explained why they took caps off and we will see how it goes this year.

NWQI – seasonal high tunnel and honey bee pollinator. We have to have them all contracted by January 21, 2019. We will have a short time to get them all ranked.

ACEP 2019 – talked about what we did in 2018 and what we are looking to in 2019. Showed budget numbers. Tracy said they added in new water management and irrigation and these will go under ACEP. Some special project examples would be cover crops, trees, livestock. We would target a resource concern that needs funding. He explained special funding.

Question was asked: Do you see resource concerns in ND that we aren't helping producers address?

Todd stated that this is an ever-changing target.

Mary said we are working on partners on Red River Valley. Red River Basin Commission brought in a proposal. We did a Collaborate Grant.

Question: Will we have flex on moving money? Mary said in that general fund, if we have no applications in certain areas, we can start to move funds.

RANKING CRITERIA – Went over ranking sheet. This is used to rank applications in ND. Mary pointed out how much farm land we are losing each year. Farm land protection easements would give producers options to keep their farm land. This ranking criteria will be emailed to everyone and we will accept comments until next Friday, October 5.

WRE RANKING – it is designed to look at wetlands and the wetlands you are looking at restoring. Same form that has been used since 2014. WRE Environmental Ranking Worksheet will be posted out on our home page. This application is geared to prairie potholes, so we have some in West River and East River.

ALE Ranking Sheet, WRE Ranking Sheet and GARC - we use this to do market analysis in every county in State. Explains market value to land owner and how we come up with that.

### **MARY PODOLL - NRCS** – Reorganization (see presentation)

North Dakota has not had any re-structure since 1984. Now, we do not have capacity of hiring. We are trying to get help on the ground for producers to manage their operations to protect their natural resources. ND Leadership Team and Mary talked about values and providing technical assistance. We want to build our internal house. We want to build our partnerships and build our technical assistance. FPAC would be a better way of distributing workload. Currently, because of hiring freeze, employees have been required to take Acting positions and leave their positions. This is not sustainable.

Discussed re-structure values. We do not have time to do the important things we use to do because of lack of staff. Now we are Just able to get the basics done. There will be no forced moves and no loss of grade.

Framework – talked about the framework of NRCS and how the structure has changed. Addition of responsibilities from 1930's to present. Pointing out that we have more responsibilities and now not being able to fill positions. Support staff is limited. We need to get our responsibilities and our missions balanced

She showed the current traditional model. Several states have done a “modified” Traditional Model. Indiana did something a little different, had a technical team and it has worked very well. She explained areas would be called zones and we would have hub offices. We would have one District Conservationist in each field office. We do not plan to close field offices.

Regarding the State Office, we did put a limit on number of support staff that leadership can have. We want a structure that ideally is 90 percent field staff.

Power point shows leadership team and phone numbers. Comments are welcome and we will present to headquarters.

She explained the location map and talked about why they came up with office locations and zones.

North Dakota has one of the highest numbers of eligible retirees. This restructure will allow the more experienced and newer employees to be closer in location to help more experienced employees train new employees and pass on experience.

There is a big focus on rural development. Question was asked if we have any economist looking at resources in smaller cities for employees. Mary said it is being looked at along with jobs for spouses and schools.

Question was asked: How are we going to make space accommodations for employees? Mary explained it will be an agreement between agencies and we are going to make the system work for us. HQ and Leadership will have an agreement that we need enough space in this transaction.

Jill will get the email inbox to everyone to submit questions and comments that will go to Mary anonymously.

**Brad Thykeson – FSA** - He has been working with Mary on the FPAC and he is in agreement with upcoming changes and getting offices a little more centralized.

We cannot close offices. We will not tell people they have to move.

**Jay Hochalter - FSA** - (see presentation) gave update and background on CRP. Talked about signup results and current enrollment and expirations. Brought updates on previous State Technical Committee Action.

Explained 2018 Livestock Forage Program and explained livestock program map.

Looking at paying out 67 million dollars in CRP.

Brad Thykeson – If we want to work with producers, we have to start stretching our bounds. We have to get the message to producer that they can enhance their land. There was discussion on tiling land and other options and restrictions producers have.

Brad sees we are losing our trees. Not seeing a lot of renovation of new trees. We need to educate the public on necessity of restoration of trees. We need to get some incentives out there for farmers to plant trees.

Mary closed meeting.