
State Technical Committee – Agenda



November 4, 2020
10:00 AM - Noon

Mississippi USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

Welcome

Kurt Readus

Farm Service Agency Program Updates

**Bobby Carson
Patty Roberts**

Risk Management Agency Update

Roddrick Bell

Crop Insurance Update
2018 Fam Bill Implementation
Hurricane Insurance Protection-Wind index (HIP-WI)
Prevented Planting Rules Changes and Recommendations

Agricultural Research Service Conservation Research Updates

Martin Locke

National Sedimentation Laboratory, Oxford
Delta Water Management Research Unit, Stoneville

National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research – MSU Update

Drew Gholson

Faculty Hired
Project Highlights

Soils Tools and Technology

James Curtis

Technical Soil Services and Technology
Ecological Site Description (ESD) Data Collection
Soil Health and Environmental Enrichment through Virtual Learning
Land Use Conversions and Interpretations

Delaney Johnson

Ecological Sciences

Rogerick Thompson

MRBI and NWQI completed assessments
Available CAP practices and CAP plans
TSP opportunities

MDEQ

Natalie Segrest

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Jason Keenan

FY20 Accomplishments
Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC) for FY21

Ranking updated to Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART)
Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines (WRCG)

MS NRCS Programs for FY 2021

Clarence Finley

FY 20 Accomplishments
Local Work Group Meetings
CSP Program changes-
 General Program Implementation
EQIP Program changes-
 General Program Implementation
 EQIP Incentives
 High Water Priority Areas
 Source Water Program

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team

Homer Wilkes

Gulf Restoration update

Ron Howard

Closing Comments

Kurt Readus

Presenters:

Kurt Readus, State Conservationist, NRCS
Bobby Carson, State Executive Director, FSA
Patty Roberts, Agriculture Program Specialist, FSA
Roddric Bell, Regional Director, RMA
Dr. Martin Locke, Director, Sediment Laboratory
Dr. Drew Gholson, Assistant Professor & Extension Irrigation Specialist, National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research
James Curtis, Assistant State Soil Scientist, NRCS
Delaney Johnson, State Soil Scientist, NRCS
Rogerick Thompson, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS
Natalie Segrest, MDEQ, Chief, Basin Management and Nonpoint Source Branch, Surface Water Division
Jason Keenan, Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS, Easements
Clarence Finley, Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS, Programs
Ron Howard, Senior Technical Advisor/Natural Resource Specialist, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team, USDA-NRCS
Homer Wilkes, Director, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team, USDA-NRCS

Mississippi State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: 11/4/2020

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Microsoft Teams Live Event

Kurt Readus, State Conservationist, NRCS

The State Technical Committee meeting was called to order. Mr. Readus welcomed the attendees and presenters to the meeting.

Today you will hear from Bobby Carson with FSA, Roddrick Bell with RMA, Drew Gholson with NCAAR, Martin Locke with ARS and members of the NRCS staff. They will be providing updates and changes to technical and financial assistance programs for 2021. We hope that you will be engaged and participate in this virtual platform, this is a first for us. Questions can be asked of each presenter after their presentation in the Q&A section.

Last year was filled with many opportunities to overcome, COVID-19, multiple hurricanes, and the Easter tornados. USDA has been busy assisting the agricultural community and with some innovation, we are continuing to provide much needed assistance.

We are currently working under a continuing resolution until December 12, 2020.

Clarence Finley addressed the attendees to request that participants should mute their microphones. Please enter your questions in the Q&A box. Nick Williams will be monitoring these for the presenters. Please enter your name and affiliation in the chat box to indicate your participation in this meeting. This will allow us to create an attendee list for the meeting.

Mr. Finley introduced Bobby Carson, to the meeting attendees.

Bobby Carson, State Executive Director, FSA

Thanked Mr. Finley and NRCS for allowing him to participate in this meeting. It has been an extremely busy year for FSA, and it's been an extremely difficult year for our staff to not be able to meet with our customers while continuing our daily operations by teleworking. Our staff has done a tremendous job administering our programs in this current environment. Over 560 million dollars has been issued to landowners this year. We are hiring and training managers in our county offices.

Patty Roberts, Agriculture Program Specialist, GIS Division, FSA

The division's staff and their positions were provided to attendees:

Amy Moore and Megan Hogue – Ag Program Specialist

James Smith and Nicholas Hancock – GIS Technology Specialist

The State Technical Committee helps FSA meet conservation program goals by:

- Improved interaction with technical partners
- Increase consistency and success statewide in our program delivery
- Improve customer service to participants that we serve
- Provide updates to our partners for the year

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is one of our main programs. Fiscal year 2020 was a very busy year, we had over 107K acres expiring from CRP in 2020. This was roughly 2,200 contracts statewide set to expire. In these contracts, 14K acres were enrolled in environmental priority practices. These are a priority to FSA, and we enroll these in continuous signups.

In fiscal year 2020 we held CRP signups:

- General SU54: December 9 – February 28
Now includes some SAFE practices acres
- Continuous SU53: Began December 9
Includes FWP and HELI practice acres
- CREP Signup: Began December 9
Mississippi Delta CREP Agreement

Under these signups we had 70 counties that made CRP contract approvals before the September 30th deadline. This was the largest signup we've had in several years.

In FY2020 we enrolled a total of 70,885 acres statewide.

General CRP	57,034 acres
Regular Continuous	12,709 acres
MS Delta CREP	1,142 acres

Mississippi's total enrollment in CRP program as of 10/2020:

General CRP	279,743 acres
Continuous, SAFE	260,817 acres
Farmable Wetlands	11,392 acres
Mississippi Delta CREP	5,084 acres
CRP Grasslands	576 acres
Statewide Total:	557,614 acres

Conservation data in Mississippi:

Farms with CRP	9,382
CRP Contracts	14,199
Ratio of Gen/Cont. acres	53/47
Ratio of Gen/Cont. contracts	43/57

Annual payments are issued after October 1st, and this year we will disperse \$44.3 million dollars in CRP annual rental payments. In Mississippi, the average dollar per acre is \$75.1/ac.

Looking ahead in FY 2021, we hope to have a new program announcement in January for CRP; the Forest Management Incentive (FMI). We hope this will provide some options in the critical areas of our CRP program. Cost share isn't authorized for required management activities, we are hoping the FMI will provide the incentive for participants to be able to comply and complete management activities requirements.

Continuous CRP Signup 55 is underway, it began Oct. 1, 2020. Those acres are accepted without competition throughout the year as opposed to our General CRP signups which are being held annually. These are national competitive programs that are ranked using environmental index factors. In FY 2020, approximately 97% of Mississippi's offers were accepted and were ranked high nationally.

In FY 2021 or expiring contracts include:

77,220 acres expiring (15K continuous)
1,800+ contracts expiring
1,345 farms in 76 counties

We appreciate our partners that help us administer the CRP program and deliver this program to our landowners.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Carson and Ms. Roberts for their continued partnership with NRCS and the collaborative efforts the staff takes to ensure continued program delivery for our farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Mr. Roddrick Bell, Regional Director of RMA.

Roddrick Bell, Regional Director, RMA

The RMA programs are vital throughout our country. We've been able to hire additional staff members and have tools to support their training and provide program delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This has been a very active year for crop insurance. With the numerous storms that have taken place over the last few months, we've been responsible for providing a disaster report of each storm. Several storms impacted Louisiana and Mississippi. We had to explore and find new ways to interact with our customers and I'm proud to see the accomplishments our team has made during this time.

I want to provide to you and overview of our programs, update acreage and liabilities, Farm Bill implementation of hemp, batture land study and the Hurricane Insurance Protection – Wind Index (HIP-WI).

The HIP-WI was introduced in April of this year. In response to the Secretary's desire to move from ad-hoc disaster payments, RMA was tasked with developing a program or policy that would cover hurricane effected states along the east and west coasts and the Gulf of Mexico.

Preventive planting is a program within the crop insurance program, farmers are able to receive payments when they are prevented from planting their crop(s). Last year this was vital for farm survivability. There are expected changes to this program in FY 2021.

Crop Insurance Update-

In 2019, Mississippi had 5.9 million acres insured with a liability of \$1.34 billion.

As of October 19, 2020, Mississippi has approximated 3.9 million acres insured with a liability of \$1.5 billion for the 2020 crop year.

RMA 2018 Farm Bill Implementation-

The 2018 Farm Bill makes several improvements to existing insurance products, speeds creation of numerous new products.

Specialty Crops

- Allows for the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) to offer policies for industrial hemp.
- Hemp insurable under the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP).
- On December 19, 2019, the FCIC Board Approved a standalone Hemp Policy.
The pilot insurance program provided Actual Production History (APH) coverage under 508(h) Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) for eligible producers in certain counties in Alabama, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin.
- Mississippi has not been certified for crop insurance for the 2021 crop year.

Batture Land Study-

RMA accepted a contract from a third party to conduct a study of batture land located south of Vicksburg. This area south of Vicksburg has flooded 8 out of 10 years during crop season. There are thousands of acres of

land in this area. The contractor should have a recommendation by the spring of 2021.

Prevented Planting –

2019 was an extremely wet year with extensive, long term flooding. RMA paid roughly \$135 million in prevented planting claims on 752,000 acres. As of November 1, 2020, RMA has paid roughly \$89 million in prevented planting claims on 592,000 acres. Payments of 135 million were paid out on 752,000 acres

On the national level, we have started a prevented planting task force that has several proposed recommendations:

1) Expand the “1 in 4” requirement nationwide. Acreage must be physically available for planting to be eligible for a PP payment. The “1 in 4” requirement states, the acreage must have been planted to a crop, insured, and harvested (or if not harvested, adjusted for claim purposes due to an insured cause of loss) in at least one out of the previous four years.

2) RMA will add an exception allowing the producer to receive a prevented planting payment on a different crop if they can prove their intent to plant the other crop based on inputs applied or available to apply. Adequate documentation in the form of seed receipts, fertilizer inputs, etc. may be required for payment eligibility.

3) RMA will extend the use of a producer’s intended acreage report to establish eligible prevented planting acres in a new county to 2 consecutive years (instead of just 1 year).

The producer is allowed to establish eligible acres for prevented planting purposes by submitting an intended acreage report to their agent by the sales closing date (or within 10 days of land acquisition, if acquired after the sales closing date). The proposed change will allow the use of the intended acreage report for the first two consecutive crop years, instead of just the first crop year. This will allow for crop rotation to be considered when establishing eligible acres for prevented planting purposes.

4) Allow acreage that is planted with an uninsured second crop following a failure of a first crop within the same crop year to not be subtracted from the prevented planting eligible acreage. Uninsured second crop acres planted following a failed first insured crop on the same acreage in the same crop year will not be subtracted from prevented planting eligible acres. Without the proposed change, both acres of planted insured and planted uninsured acres are required to be subtracted from prevented planting eligible acreage.

Hurricane Insurance Protection – Wind Index (HIP-WI)-

This is a new program; it is an option to add coverage to an already existing MPCl policy. The grower must have an underlying policy for crops to participate. It covers the deductible portion of the MPCl policy not otherwise covered, up to 95% of the crop value. Similar structure to our Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) product and must be selected at sales closing date (SCD). Premium subsidy fixed at 65% (same as for SCO), if a hurricane occurs during insurance period, a payment is made. There is no loss adjustment with this program.

We utilized hurricane data from National Hurricane Center (NHC) designation of a hurricane and part of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Publishes maps/data of hurricane-force wind extents. Generally published within 2 weeks after storm event. NHC data is used by RMA to designate which counties are eligible for HIP-WI payment(s). Any county, or adjacent county with sustained hurricane force winds, are mapped, and automatically triggered. They don’t have to file a claim. When a hurricane passes through an area or adjacent county, the payment is triggered. Premium rates are higher in the coastal regions. Hurricane Zeta will trigger 5 or 6 more counties in MS, due to wind speeds that were recorded in the inland counties.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Dr. Martin Locke.

Martin Locke, Director, National Sedimentation Laboratory, USDA ARS, Oxford, MS

We have two locations involved in ARS conservation research. The National Sedimentation Laboratory, located in Oxford and the Sustainable Water Management Research Unit, located in Stoneville, MS.

Reviewed scientists by name for each research unit location. Update on hires: Amanda Nelson, new hire this year at the USDA ARS, Stoneville location.

Potential hires:

Water quality unit, a Research Leader position will be advertised. Next week we will interview candidates for the hydrologist position at the National Sedimentation Lab. This replaces Dr. J.R. Rigby's position.

At the Sustainable Water Management Research Unit, we are interviewing for plant physiologists and agricultural engineers.

Research we are involved with are cover crops and tillage, soil health, and water use efficiency improvement. Can a suite of conservation management practices provide sustainability in the long term. We are starting long term Agri-ecosystem sustainability research. It is an ARS wide project that has 19 locations across the country that are looking at larger scale, long term sustainability. The idea behind this is to go into farmer's fields and have areas where we are looking at aspirational practices and "business as usual" practices.

In the delta we have two farmer sites we're initiating. In the aspirational practices we're looking at cover crop, no tillage, different irrigation efficiencies and crop rotation. We'll be looking at all aspects of these systems. It will take 1-2 years to get the project going. We'll be looking at: primary productivity, crop production, economics, soil health, water budgets, loss of greenhouse gases and more. This will be monitored for decades.

Regarding surface water storage, we will be looking at protecting irrigation reservoir embankments from wave erosion. How can we find ways to inhibit or prevent erosion and looking at the efficiencies of tail water recovery systems in terms of reducing water use and what effects they might have on impacting the loss of nutrients downstream.

Another study we're engaged in is to look at RUSLE. We are working with another location to do comparisons of RUSLE and WEP and with respect to ephemeral gullies. We'll be looking at ways to assess them and refine how models look at conservation practices.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Drew Gholson.

Drew Gholson, National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research (NCAAR)

Appreciates the opportunity to share and provide updates during this meeting. Discussed staff members and their areas of specialty.

NCAAR is working with ARS, and our partnerships and cooperative agreements with NRCS and MSU, to produce and communicate research aimed at conservation and sustainability of water resources in agriculture. Our overall focus is the development of management systems that increase profitability, conserve water and protect water quality. We utilize faculty at MSU and scientists at ARS for this research. It's important to get this information into the farmers hands to adopt these practices which will protect water and increase their profitability.

We are fully staff and are working on research projects. The water center has a new website and can be accessed at: ncar.msstate.edu. The site has information on personnel, research projects, and extension and outreach

resources.

This year we've implemented the soil moisture sensor showcase. Sensors help save water and increase profitability. I get questioned on what sensor to use. The online platforms vary, and it is difficult to determine the farmer's needs among the various sensor platforms. We had participating companies come in and install various sensors so we can display the hardware and the differences in sensor's telemetry. We also focused on the different services and what is available so the farmer can compare these. They can look at each company that is participating to see the interface. This allows them to go through a trial prior to purchase. This is a great tool for farmers.

We hope to do this showcase each year. We wanted to have a walk through with farmers but had to transition to online due to COVID. We made a series of YouTube videos with each sensor to see how it is installed and the telemetry services each company offers to showcase the sensors. As we develop more, we'll have more videos. These can be found on the outreach areas of our website.

Project highlights:

Cover crops and sensor-based irrigation scheduling effects on corn and soybean production in the Mississippi delta.

Dual thresholds and cover crops for scheduling irrigation. Looking at temperature and soil moisture thresholds and monoculture and mixes of cover crops.

Irrigation systems effects on row crop production. Nutrient use efficiency under narrow row irrigated and dryland production. Row spacing effects on crop productivity under different irrigation systems.

Youth Outreach is new program, we have received funding for five years from Mississippi NRCS - Conservation Delivery Technical Assistance. The main goals are to educate high school youth about sustainable agriculture and encourage them to pursue suitable agricultural careers. An emphasis will be placed on engaging and empowering African American youth. We are recruiting a project coordinator for this program.

In 2016 an Adoption of Water-Conserving Irrigation Practices among Row-Crop Growers in Mississippi was conducted. The results showed us what facilitates the adoption of practices in our program, and what encourages the adoption of the program and practices. The amount of acreage, the more years of education, perception of groundwater problem, and participation in conservation programs are positively associated with practice adoption.

RISER (Row-crop Irrigation Science Extension and Research program) update. Last year we able to get NRCS - CIG project that is looking at innovative water conservation technology in furrow irrigation systems. We help promote and facilitate the adoption of these systems. Research and farm scale demonstrations are taking place. As we develop tools and other research projects, we will update our website with this information.

Question from Roddrick Bell - Is the center doing continuous research using sensors on AWD Rice and other alternative rice production practices?

We are looking at utilizing AWD for rice irrigation, we're looking at automation within AWD. We have sensors on the farm that research shows we can save up to 40% water without hurting yield. We've established good triggers and we've set sensors that once the water reaches a trigger, we can switch on and off fields and utilizing this technology. This has worked well for us this past growing season, this is part of what we're looking at with the CIG technology program, to be able to evaluate that technology.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, James Curtis.

James Curtis, Assistant State Soil Scientist, NRCS

National High-Altitude Photography (NHAP) - We've recently acquired digital historical imagery data. Color infrared leaf off imagery is taken around January early March. Images were on film, and USDA contracted the digital scanning and geo-references of some earlier state-wide acquisitions. 1980 – 1982 imagery is available. Using with our compliance program and FSA can use this data as well. The 1986 NHAP imagery will be contracted out and we hope to have it available to other agencies and the public.

4-Band High-Res Imagery – We have statewide imagery. 4- band high-res imagery leaf-off, is three times better resolution imagery. New data added for: Desoto, Lafayette, Lee, Grenada, Calhoun, and Pontotoc. In Fall 2020 will add: Quitman, Coahoma, Grenada, Monroe, Hinds and Rankin.

Elevation Data – LIDAR

LIDAR has statewide coverage, but a few areas in the southern delta was flooded we will fly these areas this summer. Madison, Rankin, and Simpson counties are scheduled for this year.

Web soil survey refreshed July 1, 2020 with annual data. We updated our program tool for applications (CART) to improve crop commodity index. We anticipate Oct. 1 will remain the annual refresh data date for future updates.

Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD) – Three levels of completion: Provisional, approved and correlated. The entire state of Mississippi has a draft provisional. We have completed draft site keys and are testing site keys, soil - ecological community queries. Two hundred field test plots have been completed. Examples of soil component queries that go into ESDs were reviewed. Once they are completed and correlated, they will be available on web soil survey and EDIT.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Delaney Johnson.

Delaney Johnson, State Soil Scientist, NRCS

We are interested in our next generation and one of our latest programs is with the Piney Woods School. We've started a virtual learning program for these students to become familiar with our work and mission to protect and conserve the environment for the next generation. These programs will take place monthly.

The expected outcomes for this project are to:

Provide a holistic view of the earth's natural resources and their importance for our sustainability.

Teach basic conservation practices and measures and their significance for this generation and the generations to come.

Students are exposed to scientific experts in the field of agricultural sciences to provide them with knowledge for future career development and practical real-world applications.

To further NRCS's Vision - A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.

Land use conversions-

Agricultural land is being converted for non-agricultural uses. We keep track of these conversions to determine what is being taken out of agricultural use. NRI collects updated information on private lands, tracking these changes and the impacts.

The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is used to track private land changes and usage.

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) -

The land evaluation determines current conditions and uses. The site assessment looks at drainage, soil conditions, erosion issues, and other physical features of the property to make more in depth determination on the impacts if the land was taken out of agricultural use. Soils are rated and placed in groups rating on their potential productivity and suitability for specific agricultural uses such as cropland, forest land or grazing. Factors

related to development pressures, non-soil factors related to agricultural use of a site and other public values of a site are considered in the LESA assessment for land conversion. Suitability of soil is the base line and how it will impact surrounding areas.

Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)–

Is intended to minimize the impact federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. Communities utilize federal funds for conversions and changes in land resources. NRCS provides environmental impact determinations on these lands if they were converted.

Dynamic Soil Properties (DSPs) –

Information about how soils change due to management and how those changes impact soil functions are crucial to sustainable soil management on all kinds of lands. This helps us to understand impacts of soil carbon storage or sequestration impacted by these changes. We try to minimize and prevent irreversible changes that would negatively impact the environment.

Future work will include models and procedures that predict soil responses to management changes to help policy makers, land managers, producers, and others who make decisions that protect soil function.

The Soil Change Guide is available as a PDF file to download and print.

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_052295.pdf

Reviewed and thanked NRCS partners for the work they do.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Rogerick Thompson.

Rogerick Thompson- State Resource Conservationist, NRCS

In 2020 our goals were to further streamline the delivery of conservation technical assistance and program delivery.

Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) -

To achieve provisions in the 2017 Farm Bill, CART was created and implemented as a decision support system designed and designated to provide a consistent framework for steps 1-6 of our planning process. CART also identifies vulnerabilities, existing conditions, potential resource concerns, establishing thresholds to document planning criteria achievement. CART also serves as a tool to prioritize applications for program participation.

Assessments are completed via geo spatial layers, planner observation during site visits, landowner input, and through our national approved resource assessment tools.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) –

Premier water quality initiative to accelerate voluntary conservation, promote monitoring and resource assessment, encourage soil health by reducing erosion and nutrient runoff. All of this through implementing management, vegetative and structural practices.

FY2021 NWQI funds request of 9.3 million, to put additional conservation on the ground in excess of our general EQIP funds. We will also pursue the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) for 12-digit HUUS. This opportunity is extended to twelve states, it requires watershed assessments. The main goal is to minimize the contributions of nitrogen and phosphorus into the Gulf of Mexico, promote soil health and the reduction of erosion and nutrient runoff. The 2021 MRBI funds request will be in excess of 35 million.

Technical Service Providers (TSP) -

In 2020 through partnerships with Waggoner Engineering, MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission, and the DEQ sixteen assessments were completed. These are required for us to pursue funding and there must be complete watershed assessments at the 12-digit HUC level. We've recently entered into an agreement with the MS Forestry Commission, they will assist in providing forest management plans to landowners who sign up for our

financial assistance. For those that wish to pursue TSP certification, more information on training opportunities is forthcoming.

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Natalie Segrest.

Natalie Segrest, Chief, Basin Management and Nonpoint Source Branch, Surface Water Division, MDEQ

We have been using a technical application tool that helps us to be better planners and to get them in the hands of partners and the public to make them easy to use. The Basin Management Branch (BMB) planning app has our basin groups and NRCS regions. There are various layers on these areas that are commonly used when we plan collaboratively and represent the most common items that we're asked for by DEQ. For example: monitoring locations, impaired waters locations.

NWQI watershed can be searched by HUC, stream name, address. Background change options include street map, imagery, with links to TMDLs and resources for planning purposes. You can add data from online resources and local resources. We're sharing information that DEQ has, to aid you. Monitoring station site information is noted. We can run these things through our watershed characterization and ranking tool, and we can ask different questions of the data and rank watersheds in a HUC 8. We can rank watersheds against each other within a HUC 10. This is available to you. Access via web - watershed prioritization tool.

<https://msdeq.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=699f456e60924da7a63847c814b2e508>

Mr. Finley introduced the next speaker, Jason Keenan.

Jason Keenan, Assistant State Conservationist Easements, NRCS

1992-2020 Mississippi Easement summary

Enrolled easements	704
Enrolled acres	200,110.42
Closed easements	660
Closed acres	191,937.09
Fully Restored (as of 2020)	179,152.26
Pending restoration	20,958.16

Due to wet weather conditions, restoration has been delayed in the delta area.

In FY2020 we received 199 eligible applications with 28,800 acres offered. Most were WRE applications with \$56,753,000 in requests. We funded eleven WRE, one ALE, two FPE, and three Healthy Forest Reserve Program easements, totaling 12 million with approximately 4,000 acres enrolled.

Some of that funding came from the REP program. We have two in the state; Batture REP and the Tri-state REP, which is shared with Louisiana and Arkansas. We had 18 Batture REP and 42 Tri-state REP applications, we funded one in each. We would like to have more REP dollars come to the state and we'd also like to utilize the regional conservation partnership program to bring more easement dollars to the state.

GARC rates –

Although we have received the draft GARC rates, we see no changes thus far from FY 2020 to FY 2021. We expect the rates to remain the same. Along coastal counties, due to the wide range of land values, we're going to use appraisals

Changes in easement ranking –

We are going from a paper ranking to an electronic ranking. The CART system will now electronically rank. We are making some adjustments, overall, the same weights and values for most of the questions will remain the same. Although this is not finalized, I will discuss with the wetlands and easement subcommittee when we finalize all the

point distributions and questions. We also went from a large point spread from a 3,600-point ranking to 400-point ranking. The distribution of the points between the questions should remain the same, only the point values are different.

Publications are available at our field offices to provide information on wetland easements. You can contact me at Jason.Keenan@usda.gov for a copy or if you have any questions about easements.

Clarence Finley, Assistant State Conservationist Programs, NRCS

FY 2020 Program accomplishments - We were third in the nation in EQIP allocations.

<u>Program</u>	<u>No. of Contracts</u>	<u>Dollars Obligated</u>
EQIP	1,933 contracts	\$ 46,835,882
CSP	158 contracts	\$ 19,238,613
CSP – GCI	78 contracts	\$ 334,940
RCPP – EQIP	1 contract	\$ 1,995

CSP renewals is big program in Mississippi, the program’s funding was greatly reduced in FY 2020. We did allocate over 5 million and anticipate a program funding increase in the FY 2021 budget.

<u>CSP-Renewals</u>	<u>No. of Contracts</u>	<u>Dollars Obligated</u>
Ag Lands	34 contracts	\$ 4,987,751 (includes BF and SD)
NIPF	10 contracts	\$ 387,078 (includes BF and SD)

*** CSP renewals are now competitive and no longer guaranteed*

EQIP Incentive Contracts-

Will be assisting farmers in transitioning from EQIP to CSP. A substantial change is that it does not require the participant to enroll the whole farm, and it allows for an annual payment. Watch for an announcement at the first of the year.

Source water protection-

Is in the 2018 Farm bill and we will focus on tracking compliance with regulations and will allocate 10% of our funds this year towards source water protection. This will be significant impact on Mississippi. We’re coordinating with our ESC staff and regulatory agencies to identify the watersheds we will be addressing.

CSP program changes-

- Increase in payment rates for the adoption of cover crop rotations.
- New supplemental payment for advanced grazing management systems.
- Creating a one-time payment for the development of comprehensive conservation plan.
- Providing a specific support for organic and transitioning to organic production activities.

CSP Changes for FY 2021-

Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CAP) available in CSP

New Enhancement and Bundle Options

E328	Leaving tall crop residue for wildlife
E328M	Diversify Crop rotation with canola or sunflower to benefit pollinators.
E412A	Enhance a grass waterway
E420A	Establish pollinator habitat
E420B	Establish monarch butterfly habitat
E449H	Intermediate IWM-Years 2-5, using soil moisture or water level monitoring
E449I	IWM-Year 1, Retrofit equipment with speed control on sprinkler irrigation system
E511C	Forage testing for improved harvesting methods and hay quality
E666S	Facilitating longleaf pine regeneration and establishment
B000CPL23	Crop Bundle #23-Pheasant and quality management
B000CPL24	Crop Bundle #24-Cropland Soil Health Management System

Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) –

This national initiative is where we focus on watersheds and addressing conservation. This year we hope MRBI and NWQI programs will receive increases in funding due to the work with our partner, DEQ. Thank you for this partnership, the assistance provided is essential for these watershed programs.

NRCS will continue to focus on emergency disaster assistance. We focus on counties that are declared a state or national disaster. Watch our website for release of our program.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)- 11/30/20 is the deadline for RCPP classic application period. We would like to collaborate on these and have opportunities to submit proposals. We have a good success rate for obtaining funding for these projects.

Local workgroup meetings are currently being held, you are welcome to participate, watch our website for meeting details.

We will continue to work with FSA to implement the farmland grazing conservation initiative, this is a high priority for us.

All Mississippi agricultural producers and landowners who wish to be considered for this year's EQIP financial assistance, should apply by 11/20/20.

Homer Wilkes, Director, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team, USDA-NRCS

GCERT updates

Natural Resource Dam Assessment (NRDA) - Upper Pascagoula water quality enhancement project is funded. Two additional watersheds were activated, hope to increase participation rate in areas. NRCS's local DC can provide more info to the public.

RESTORE – USDA has been very active in the RESTORE council. BP provides annual funding, but these projects are very large, and may have to wait for years of funding. Once funded, projects are placed on a funding priority list (FPL). 320 million total funding has been received, FPL 3a - 150 million Louisiana and Alabama received most of this funding. We are in the process of releasing FPL 3b, after public comment period we expect funding of these projects in 2021. We expect three projects to be funded for Mississippi. These projects include, addressing water quality and wildlife habitat resource concerns on agricultural and forestry lands.

We have entered into a new partnership agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for funding. We plan to get a sixteen-million-dollar match from this foundation and with this agreement we will have approximately 32 million dollars for funding opportunities. The state can request these funds for projects that don't get funded under the normal EQIP, or other programs. We thank the NRCS staff and our partners for their continued support and assistance.

Mr. Finley asked meeting participants to enter their name in the chat box, to record their participation in this meeting.

Closing -

Mr. Readus appreciates the presenters and participants and thanked the staff responsible for researching the virtual options available to host this meeting. If you have any questions or follow up from today's meeting you can email me at kurt.readus@usda.gov.

As Delaney was discussing the LESA site during his presentation, John Larson from American Farmland Trust (AFT), which did an excellent presentation on land use and the conversion of lands from agricultural uses, provided us with their website link. I encourage each of you to look at this site.

Farms Under Threat: State of the States www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat

We need to keep our agriculture strong, to feed the increased estimates of our population and to pass lands down to future generations for producing food, fiber, and energy.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.