

SPECIAL STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

May 18, 2023 @ 2:00 p.m.

[Teams Recording link](#)

ATTENDEES: In Person - Brad Soncksen, Conor Ward, Tami Nordman, Rob Lawson, John Mayberger;
Via Teams – Andy Bishop, Buffalo Bruce, Burdette Piening, Crystal Powers, Curt Becker, David Potter, David Schroeter, Dean Edson, Dustin Wilcox, Ele Nugent, Jennifer Prennosil, Rich Walters, Craig Romary, Shelly Kelly, Sarah Starostka, Tim Kalkowski, Elbert Traylor, Britt Weiser, Will Inselman, Roger Yerdon, Randy Zach, Kent Zimmerman, Mary Reece, Al Juhnke, John Hansen, Caro Cordova, Erica Gnuse, Allen Gehring, Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Jim Macy, Brach Johnson, Kate Hansen, Katie Pekarik, Kendall Bonenberger, Kole Pederson, Kyle Hauschild, Wesley March, Tim Kalkowski, Steve Goans, Hilary Maricle, Misha Mazurkewycz, Lavaine Moore, Neil Moseman, Mark Porath, Rachel Herpel;
Via Phone - Mike Crosley.

Welcome & Introductions

- The purpose of this meeting
 - Latest of where we stand for FY23 signup
 - Opportunity to give us some feedback before the STAC on June 8, 2023
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FY23 Inflation Reduction Act Implementation (IRA) in Nebraska

- What is IRA?
 - WHO IS IT FOR?
 - Focus on Climate Change Mitigation
 - Mitigation Activities reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve carbon storage.
 - IRA does not create any NEW programs – gives additional funds to expand existing climate efforts.
 - ALL FY23 FUNDS MUST BE SPENT BY **9-30-2031**
 - Contact Local NRCS at your local service center.
 - Continuous Sign-up
- FY2023 IRA Implementation in NE
 - EQUIP-IRA
 - \$2.4 Million Allocation
 - 280 Applications
 - CSP-IRA
 - \$4.7 Million Allocation
 - 75 Applications
 - ACEP-IRA
 - TBD Allocation
 - 4 WRE & 4 ALE-GSS

- FY23 IRA Implementation in NE
 - Potential Policy Modifications
 - Revise payment CAPS (remove all caps or raise caps)
 - Increase payment rates (max all at 75%/90% or practice/scenario specific increases)
 - Consider revising application, ranking, and obligation deadlines.
 - Revise policy on restricting applications for management practices that an applicant has previously implemented unless the applicant will achieve a higher level of conservation benefit. (i.e. allow new applications for cover crops and no-till even when the producer has previously applied these practices.)
 - Remove some of the “low priority” criteria. (i.e. current cover crop criteria that requires that a new resource concern must be addressed to avoid “low priority” designation.)
 - Staffing considerations.

- How to go about allocating the new funds from IRA?
 - Fund allocations can be gone over at June, State Technical Meeting.
 - Since IRA is handled separately from the Farm Bill funds.
 - It will be different from the resource concerns.
 - Resource based allocation formula from EQIP General, that distributes the funds & put them into funding pools, but will need some tweaking.
 - Reviewed at June State Technical Committee Meeting & finalized in September Meeting.
 - If you have any suggestions on this or where we need to target the IRA funds.

Open Discussion – IRA recommendations for FY2024

- Jim Macy
 - Climate Pollution Reduction Act with EPA
 - Supportive of looking at Cover Crops on land & how many participants are currently doing that.
 - Statistics to where Producers/Landowners are now with regards to these types of Land Management Practices & then look for the future of maybe incentive goals?

- Tim Kalkowski
 - What can we do in NE & be in the forefront to protect our Natural Resources?
 - With the drought
 - Water facilities & Cross fencing being used to continue with grazing lands.
 - Cover Crops are key – interceding into different fields.
 - Payment for deferred grazing or stocking rates?
 - Wheat is going to be short.
 - Riparian buffers would be beneficial to Climate SMART
 - Payments/Points or Credits for folks that want to do educational tours on their farms?
 - Think we have a story in NE that we need to tell.

- NE Grazingland is doing a tour on June 27, 2023, in SE Nebraska, all about the Urban & Rural Connection. End the day with panel discussion.

 - Shelly Kelly
 - Biggest concern about all these dollars, although very excited that we are getting them in NE, with this Climate SMART focus, we are missing out on other natural resource concerns in this state.
 - Is there something we can do with the Gen EQIP/ CSP Classic to prioritize those practices that aren't prioritize with IRA money. Eastern Red Cedar & Grazingland concerns.

 - Kate Hansen – Really exciting for the state.
 - Work with producers that are frustrated with not getting approved for CSP/EQIP the first time, can we reach out to those folks who have not been able to get previously into the program to let them know that they might have a new shot?
 - Is FSA going to help spread the word & help to reach out to those people as well?

 - Kendall Bonenberger – Carbon Credit verifier
 - Reaching out to DOE & Treasury with regards to eligibility for 45Q credits with regards to the Sequestration of Carbon Dioxide?
 - Our company is submitting a proposal to DOE for preapproval for carbon sequestration as far as manure application. Working with DOE & Treasury as far as eligibility.
 - Is NRCS going to do something similar or if that was going to be eligible as far as tax credit or if that was deemed double dipping?
 - Would a producer who is enrolled in EQIP be eligible for 45Q?
 - The more outreach we do is better off producers are going to be.

 - John Hansen
 - Outreach is really important to help with the basics, get talking points or bullet points that can be distributed. Whether or not the word will get out to farmers in time is a concern.
 - Bringing in all this additional funding, how much of that will go through the STAC for review & can we prioritize where the money goes?

 - Andy Bishop
 - Congratulations that this a game changer for conservation and our partnerships.
 - We have staff that can help with the outreach.
 - ACEP Easements are going to be a huge push for more information.
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End of Meeting @ 3:00 p.m.

After meeting emailed comment:

Kalee Olson –

- Instead of/in addition to new applications, can NRCS focus on previously unfunded applications already in the system to fast track applications that are eligible for IRA funding?
- Is FSA promoting IRA funding opportunities? Is there a way to target producers when they come in to file acreage reports or sign-up for CRP?
- Wildlife and habitat groups have access to conservation-minded producers that may be invested in easements, but not working lands conservation. This may be an untapped audience for CSP/EQIP.
- Instead of asking producers to individually make appointments with NRCS, could staff host special walk-in sign-up days that are widely publicized like an event? Or coordinate with partners during field days this summer to get sign-ups from an already captive audience?
- Can NRCS be more prominent with its messaging about this unique opportunity? There's no mention of it on the website. I doubt producers understand the sense of urgency there is to get these funds out. "If you have even *thought* about trying a new conservation practice, now is the time to seek assistance."
- Will Nebraska implement ActNow continuous signup for EQIP funds? This was a pilot program in Iowa that is now available to all states.