

Urban Ag Subcommittee Meeting

June 27, 2023 @ 1:00 p.m.

[YouTube Recording Link](#)

ATTENDEES:

In-Person – Tim Rinnea, Brach Johnson, Sarah Smith, Megan McGuffey;

Via Teams – Marla Marx, Terri James, Stacie Turnbull, Samuel Wortman, Greg Fripp, Jacob Fritton, John Porter, LaSonya Luther, Tami Nordman.

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. NRCS Programming/Operations
 - a. Urban Soil Health Project
 - i. Currently 350 actively engaged participants, but had 500 signed up.
 1. Asked them to pull soil samples.
 2. Just received those back & started going through them.
 3. Keeping in touch with them once a week.
 4. Some analysis on Campus too for changes in organic matter over time.
 5. Pretty interesting to just look and at the benchmark for what these soils look like that people are growing food in around the state in terms of just organic matter texture, pH, microbial activity.
 6. Soil Health Management Practices
 - a. Participants are deploying a cover crop.
 - i. Buckwheat, Cowpea, & oats
 - ii. Apply compost or bio-char.
 - iii. Some are using no-till or a combination of them all.
 - b. Had a kick-off webinar on how to best management practices for using those things & how we are going to collect data through the project.
 - c. Trying to engage with those participants every one to two weeks through an email distribution.
 - d. Have pictures of all the farms to see the difference in all of them & the diversity.
 - b. NRCS Agency update
 - i. Brach has a new position, no longer the Outreach Coordinator, he is now the Urban Conservationist.
 1. New Outreach Coordinator is Jami Thoene.
 - ii. EQIP Signup cutoff for Ranking purposes in November. Have worked on adding Practices to help the Urban Ag program.
 1. Worked with Corey Brubaker & networked with Kansas on small footprint greenhouse & submitted it as an Interim practice until it can be permanent.
 - a. Find out in July if this will be an interim practice next year.
 - b. Would be 1st in its kind in the U.S.

- i. Looked 100-200 square foot structure that could go on a concrete pad & we could pay for the concrete as a heavy use area protection.
- ii. So could put it on either natural base or concrete pad.
- iii. Looking at \$50.00 to \$80.00 per square foot

2. Other Practices worked on:

- a. Compost facility – Concrete payment
 - i. Submitted to drop the cost.
- b. Irrigation component modifications
 - i. Surface Tape Component
- c. Diversion Practice
 - i. Roof & Gutter Practice

3. In the Greenhouse, we don't have a practice for sprinkler irrigation in the High Tunnel, is you feel like it would be used or should be included as a practice? If we can add or modify a practice, I will definitely try to push for it.

- a. Drip irrigation is really used in Greenhouses.
- b. Absolutely include that for Greenhouses.
- c. Overhead emitters or misters.
 - i. Bench systems are being installed right now that are on timers.

iii. Grant & Agreement update:

- 1. Conservation Collaboration Agreements – Local funding decisions
 - a. Application Cut-Off was May 8, 2023
 - b. Doubled applications.
 - i. 8 or 9 for Urban Ag applications

iv. Farm # updates

- 1. Averaging 10-15 Farm # requests per month since March
- 2. Working with Farm Agency to make this more of an easier/streamlined process.
- 3. Brock explained how the application process works.
- 4. With the EQIP Program we can reimburse the individual the moment the practice is done, but you can get half the payment right when you order the high tunnel & then get 90-days to install & you can get the other half of the payment.

- a. Once you get the farm # & you get regular participation, there are benefits you get for being a beginning farmer, so under 10yrs, there is a separate pool of money & then 25% Financial incentive on the practice to help get started. Beginning Farmers have the opt to get a reduced premium crop insurance for specialty crops. FSA term loans are also really great as well.

3. Outside Community Member

- a. Marla with RD – Value added producer grant.
 - i. Always announced in November & becomes a consistent grant.
 - ii. One of the things I've been trying to do is figure out how much on like these geothermal greenhouses I'm trying to get a number that I can come up with for what kind of energy. If they had to pay for the energy to blow the air around and not utilizing the heat from the ground to do the heat, the building heat, that heat and cool that facility. If I can come up with a number, we could actually do those through our rural energy for America program. So, if anybody has any ideas on how to work that through, I've been.

- b. Food Hub – Emergency Food Logistics, providing food to underserved & rural communities.
 - i. Large gap with infrastructure for those small organizations that need cold storage to be able to accept semis.
 - 1. Found a place to do this near 75th & Q, just moved in December.
 - a. Cold storage, freezer space
 - b. Community food distributions
 - c. Expanding it into community engagement
 - d. Office space side into classrooms.

- c. LaSonya working with black soldier flies for addressing food waste & additional livestock feed.
 - i. Have been able to run one full cycle.

- d. LaSonya suggested using the North Omaha community partners are working on trying to upgrade parks for the young people in the underserved community. Maybe we could use them as Urban settings for young people to learn the urban farming.
 - i. July 2nd at Miami Park in Omaha that could get more community outreach in the underserved areas.
 - ii. Brach did state that he has reached out to & met with Matt Cleveland – Director of Omaha Parks & Recreation & his staff to let him know of some programs & some opportunities that we might be able to collaborate with them.

- e. Farm to School – Sara from NDEE
 - i. July 1st will the 1st allocation of federal funds to schools in eastern NE. They will receive several awards for local food in school. This helps them purchase locally, minimally process or unprocessed products for the school year. Opened it up to 37 counties in eastern Nebraska. Quarterly reimbursement requests. This stems from COVID relief funds.

Q: Will there be more requests than funding will allow?

A: Being this is the first year & more like pilot program we shall see.

Q: Is there enough local food sources for them schools to pull from?

A: Yes, it is an issue as of right now, because we will need to help growers with demand.

Q: Will it eventually reach the Western part of Nebraska? We know that South Dakota & Wyoming do a lot of local foods for schools.

A: With this funding it possible could if we have more funds during the 2nd funding period. Hoping to come out to Scottsbluff & try to get with Wyoming to learn more from them.

Brach stated he will invite himself along so he can help get them funding for the infrastructure.

Q: Can we really stack like that, utilize both Programs?

A: Yes, we can't stack them in NRCS for the same practice, but we can provide assistance to them help the farmers who provide the food to the schools.

MARLA MARX - Been working with local food with folks in the Western part of NE, South Dakota, & Wyoming, so if you need contacts in the meeting in the fall, let me know.

4. Community Committee on local food
 - a. Close to having the city of Lincolns, first master food plan. It must go to the City Council & County Commission first. Hoping this approved by September.
5. Next meeting – proposed date later in September.
6. Adjourn

Q & A:

Geothermal Greenhouses, trying to get help with determining energy utilization rates. – Allen Bright who is trying to get that information.

Q: Would drip systems also include PVC? Compost system that you were talking about, is there anymore information of what that will actually look like if you are trying to build that system?

A: Right now, we do not have anything like that, but certainly if you have something we could take a look to see if we can add that. UNL has some (Sara Browning) really good at composting practice. They have drawings & other handouts to help folks out. Reference her to Backyard Farmer, which is a YouTube Channel.