

## February 17,2023 CUMBERLAND AND YORK COUNTY LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETING

### Business Strategy for Fiscal Year 2024

Attendees: Luis Aponte DC York and Cumberland NRCS, Chris Brewer (CCSWCD), Cheyanne Rico (Soil Conservationist NRCS), Jason Lilley (U Maine Ext.), Garrett Jaycee Beaulieu (Soil Conservationist NRCS), Hazel Richard (NRCS), Tom Gordon , Addie Halligan( Maine DEP), Sarah Dudek (Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in ME, Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife),Carol Weymouth (Maine Association of Conservation Districts), Richard Rhames YCSWCD Cooperator, Laurie Thiboutot, (FSA Executive Director for the Cumberland and York County USDA ,Scarborough, ME) , Jill Tibbetts (FSA), John Bliss farmer in Scarborough and CCSWD cooperator , Christie with the Chellie Pingree office for her Maine District Representative, Kira Jacobs ( EPA Source Water Protection Coordinator Region 1 based in Boston, MA.), Claudette Dupee (YCSWCD), Joe a private lands wildlife biologist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Carol Weymouth, Executive Director of the Maine Association of Conservation Districts

The meeting of the Local Work Group was called to order at 1:00 P.M., FEBRUARY 17, 2023 by the LWG Chair Chris Brewer( CCSWCD) . All in attendance and virtual were welcomed to TEAMS Cumberland and York Local Work Group meeting by Chris Brewer, CCSWCD.

Luis Aponte, D.C. of the USDA NRCS Scarborough Field Office, discussed the Conservation Program Results of York and Cumberland County 2022 Recap : 31 NEW contracts : 15 for Cumberland County resulting in 12 for EQIP and 3 for AMA .York County obligated 16 new contracts :14 for EQIP, 1 for AMA and 1 for CSP. Currently there are 81 active EQIP, AMA and CSP applications being prepared for 2024.

Jaycee Beaulieu presented a Power Point Presentation highlighting NRCS national and local conservation projects completed in 2022. Also a discussion of the current information concerning the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). NRCS, nationally, will be receiving \$19.5 billion to address climate mitigation practices. Urban Agriculture and Maine Extension Service was also discussed with the possibility for partnerships with NRCS .

The Farm Bill Programs update noted we are already working in the fifth Year of the 2018 Farm Bill renewal. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program “EQIP” is the largest program with financial assistance targeting environmental benefits and high priority resource concerns on private working lands. The Agricultural Management Assistance “AMA” offers Conservation Practices to mitigate natural disasters. The AMA in recent years has offered High Tunnel and new Irrigation Systems on cropland previously not irrigated. The Conservation Stewardship Program Grasslands Conservation Initiative CSP-GCI targets grassland conservation lands with historical feed grain and silage corn crop history. Scarborough NRCS has one active CSP applications which is a huge program nationwide.

The EQIP RCPP Classic Program formerly was a subchapter of EQIP. RCPP is now a stand-alone program leveraging partnership dollars to purchase more conservation benefits. Scarborough NRCS in addition to the Young Forest RCPP also participates in the Classic Maine Farmland Trust sponsored Conserving Farmland and Marsh Habitat in Maine RCPP targeting Farmlands adjacent to Coastal Marshes covering the entire Maine Coast. The Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont 2022 Trout Unlimited Stream Restoration and Resilience RCPP focus area includes Parsonsfield in York County. The 2022 Sebago Clean Waters Alternative RCPP is currently active.

The 2018 Farm Bill also targets conservation funding opportunities for drinking water sources. A 10% total allocation of EQIP conservation program funds is mandatory nationwide for drinking water source protection areas. Almost all of York and Cumberland Counties are included for FY 2023. There are high priority conservation practices with higher EQIP payments in the Priority Source Watersheds. The Maine Drinking Water Partners in collaboration with the State Technical Committee selected 59 Source Water drinking water sub watersheds in Cumberland and York Counties eligible for the priority practices!

Cumberland and York Counties drinking water Source Watershed Eligible 2023 “Wp” Higher EQIP Payment Rate Practices include (all scenarios):

Cover Crop (340)

Grassed Waterway (412)

Lined Waterway or Outlet (468)

Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345)

Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (329)

Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) resource concern. The geographic extent is statewide.

The Priority Resource Concerns identified as important and submitted for 2023 Priority Practice consideration includes agricultural waste management, erosion and sediment control, nutrient management, soil health and water quality. The predominant land uses include Forest and Cropland. Priority EQIP Practices in Cumberland and York County targeting the 2023 Source Water Protection sub watersheds may include Cover Crop, Grassed Waterway, Lined Waterway or Outlet, Waste Storage Facility, Roof Runoff Structure, Heavy Use Area Protection and Stream Crossing.

The soil health resource concern importance aligns with the water source priority practices. It is noted that outreach is essential to network, engage and promote Soil Health Practice adoption. Historically in Cumberland and York Counties farm equipment limitations exist for reduced and no tillage practices. Climate change ecosystem adaptation was discussed as an emerging Resource Concern.

Luis Aponte D.C. presented the 2023/2024 EQIP Program Delivery Schedule, Statewide Funding Pools, Initiatives and CAPS snapshot. The EQIP set aside categories for FY2023 were reviewed. There are State Initiatives for Beginning Farmer, Conservation Planning Activity (formerly CAPS), Conservation Innovation Grant, Irrigation, On Farm Energy, Organic, Pollinator, Reserve, Socially Disadvantaged and Tribal. .

The 2024 LWG Funding Pools and Allocation percentages for Cumberland/York were discussed and 2024 set aside appear in graph form herewith. It was approved by the majority.

**Fund Pools:** The Cumberland & York County Local Work Group has decided to allocate the available local funding pool EQIP funds as follows for the 2024 Application Evaluation and Ranking Periods.

<b>Resource Fund Pool</b>	<b>% of Local Allocated Funding Fiscal Year 2024</b>
Agricultural Waste	<b>60</b>
Cropland & Soil Health	<b>5</b>
Forestry	<b>20</b>
Pasture	<b>2</b>
Wildlife	<b>13</b>

After much discussion the 2024 Local Resource Questions and Points were approved as attached.

The 2023/2024 EQIP Delivery Narrative was reviewed and will receive minor edits including high priority for Soil Health and Drinking Water Source Protection Resource Concerns. Needs for the future were discussed and listed: Forestry Easements, Forestry Management Plans, Soil Health and Aqua Culture. Greater emphasis and outreach to Land Trusts may enable more conservation program delivery.

Chris Brewer, CCSWCD, spoke on projects that the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District have been working on this past year and their assessment of the future for them, conservation and working with NRCS. Working and operating in local ecological focused areas at the beginning of the habitat program is always beneficial for high value fish and wildlife habitats.

Chris Brewer, CCSWCD, also lead the discussion on the new Urban Ag Program. He mentioned the previous years of testing and the results the District is compiling regarding lead in the urban areas. South Portland and Windham have also expressed interest in joining the Urban Ag programs. The grant programs include food access and community gardens through non profits.

Kira Jacobs, EPA Region One, zooming the LWG Meeting offered a Regional Conservation update of the 13 Northeast states and District of Columbia on Source Water Protection and protecting drinking water supplies. She would like to see at least 10% of the York and Cumberland County conservation dollars directed at water protection issues. She is also the chair of the source Water Protection Committee for the State Technical Committee so is always looking for support. The water quality ranking question was spotlighted on the question relating to drinking water which is usually referred as the groundwater protection area or wellhead protection area not the buffer.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and supporting the LWG for 2024 decisions!

Meeting adjourned 3 P.M.

Respectively submitted,

Hazel Richard

