

Local Working Group

December 5th, 2023, 1-3PM

Meeting Participants: Arthur Wilkins, Milo; Sean O'Donnell, Parkman; Felix Blinn, Brownville; Wendy Russell, Dover-Foxcroft; Gretchen Huettner, Monsoon; Toby Hall, Sangerville; Rod Hamel, Dover-Foxcroft; Ryan Clarke, Sangerville; Jim Ferrante, Maine Forest Service; Sam Brown, Cambridge; Sarah Robinson, Dover-Foxcroft/Sangerville/PCSWCD ED; Beth McEvoy, UMaine Cooperative Extension; Marc Warren, PCSWCD Stream Restoration Project Manager; Carl Bickford, USDA NRCS; Chris Mann, Soil Survey Office Leader; Erin Cocca, NRCS Partner Biologist; Seth Jones, USDA NRCS; Doug Kane, Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife; Omie Dove, FSA.

The Local Working Group meeting was called to order by PCSWCD Board Supervisor and Vice Chair Jim Ferrante at 1:09PM.

The group listened to presentations from Erin Cocca, NRCS Partner Biologist, about Pollinators and NRCS programs aimed at increasing habitat and protections for them. Following Erin's presentation, we heard from Chris Mann, MLRA Project Leader and Soil Survey Office Leader, about their work and resources they can provide producers.

Presentations were followed by a group discussion to collect feedback, needs, updates for Seth to bring back to NRCS to set funding priorities. Looking for recommendations. Seth noted that there will potentially be a new Farm Bill, with potentially new funding opportunities. He asked meeting participants, what are you seeing? What needs to be prioritized for funding? Seth shared the 2024 Overview/Breakdown: 45% Ag Waste, 30% Crop, Forestry 15%, Pasture/Hayland 10%. What's missing? A meeting participant mentioned problems with invasive species, disease, fungus. Not sure what is coming and what do we have for resources? Maine Forest Service can provide aid to landowners. Participants noted that disease and pest issues are on the rise and impacted by shifting climate. UMaine is a resource to help with disease testing. FSA Disaster Programs. MOFGA is a great resource. Erin Cocca mentioned that NRCS funds IPM - Integrated Pest Management practice. Although these plans are specific to blueberry producers, there is potential to have them available to other producers. The plans provide adaptive management and monitoring strategies. It was also shared that MFS has a new position specific to climate and that person will be a big resource to folks statewide.

A participant mentioned that many NRCS practices do not cover the costs associated with taking a field out of production. They used the example of pollinator programs that incorporate much of the

production acreage and cover crop practices. Producers are getting reimbursed for the seed, but not the cost of taking land out of production. Could there be payments to help offset costs associated with land out of production? Pollinator habitat establishment payment to take land out of production? Quality loss payments. Daikon radish plantings counting towards establishing pollinator habitat? Erin noted there is a forgone income rate in EQIP. CRP Program - land entered for 10 years, pays you per acre, not helpful on the small scale.

Composting - what programs are there? Are there programs that encourage on-farm composting? It is a priority for the cropland category to stay well-funded. Cover cropping, mulching, composting. Soil health being a priority. NRCS High Tunnels need to remain a priority. The more a farmer can increase fertility, the better. Programs for increasing fertility. Costs for purchasing mulch and compost. Will NRCS help with composting inputs? Need to look at current cover cropping practices and see if we can broaden the practice. Update the rates, update the cover crop types. Not just the cost of the seed itself, it needs to make up for loss of production, prorated on maturity level.

Cropland - can field drainage be considered for a funding program? Tile? Can't drain wetland. Can other areas be drained? Program for irrigation - not wells, but yes to increasing efficiency of an existing system or new system using existing water sources. State funding available as well. Could change with the new Farm Bill.

Solar arrays - pollinator land potential? Xerces working with some companies to diversify seed. MA has incentives programs. Solar arrays sometimes allow for grazing opportunities.

Forestry - Financial incentives program offered by MFS to offer bridge mats. Seth reported that there may be funding available for access roads.

Meeting adjourned at 3PM.