



USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
Mississippi State Technical Committee Meeting
November 8, 2023 - 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Central Mississippi Research & Extension Center (Auditorium)
1320 Seven Springs Road, Raymond, MS 39154

Agenda

Moderator - Earl McMillian

Welcome	Kurt Readus
Rural Development	Dr. Trina George / Nicole Barnes
Farm Service Agency Program	Thaddeus Fairley / Lesle Joi Peavie
Risk Management Agency	Roddrick Bell
Forest Service	Shannon Kelardy
National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research-MSU	Dr. Drew Gholson
Agricultural Research Service	Dr. Martin A. Locke
National Association of Conservation Districts	Pete Hunter
Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team	Ron Howard

Break – 5 minutes

Soils Tools and Technology - NRCS	James Curtis
Ecological Sciences – NRCS	Rogerick Thompson
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality	Natalie Segrest
Engineering – NRCS	Olguy Louis
Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission	Nick Ivy
Easement Programs - NRCS	Jason Keenan
NRCS Programs	Earl McMillian
Q&A / Closing Comments	Kurt Readus / Earl McMillian



Presenters

Kurt Readus, State Conservationist, NRCS
Dr. Trina George, State Director, Rural Development
Nicole Barnes, Deputy State Director, Rural Development
Thaddeus Fairley, Mississippi State Executive Director, FSA
Lesle Joi Peavie, Supervisory Agricultural Program Specialist, FSA
Roddric Bell, Director RMA
Shannon Kelardy, Forest Supervisor, Forest Service
Dr. Drew Gholson, Assistant Professor & Extension Irrigation Specialist; MSU Coordinator National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research
Dr. Martin A. Locke, Director, USDA-ARS, National Sedimentation Laboratory
Pete Hunter, NACD Board Member, Past Chairman MSSWCC
Ron Howard, Acting Director, USDA Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team
James Curtis, State Soil Scientist, NRCS
Rogerick Thompson, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS
Natalie Segrest, MDEQ, Chief, Basin Management and Nonpoint Source Branch Surface Water Division
Olguy Louis, State Conservation Engineer, NRCS
Nick Ivy, Executive Director, MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission
Jason Keenan, Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS, Easements
Earl McMillian, Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS, Programs

At 9:00 a.m., Mr. McMillian, the meeting moderator, opened the meeting and introduced Mr. Readus. Asked that all silence their phones, and advised all onsite the meeting was being recorded. A Q&A session will be held at the end of the meeting.

Welcome

Kurt Readus

It's been three years since we've been able to hold an in-person meeting. Today you'll hear from our technical partners that drive the priorities for the state. We are working under a Continuing Resolution, through 11.17.23. We will continue to assist you to address your resource concerns across the state. The Agencies that are here, we are proud of the partnerships we have working together and welcome and appreciate their continued partnerships.

You'll hear much of what the latest research has brought to us as it relates to conservation assistance across the state. We've received many funds for our programs in fiscal year 2024 and have many conservation innovation grants awarded.

Thanked the staff that assisted with the production of this meeting.

Rural Development

Nicole Barnes

Ms. Barnes brings greetings from State Director, Dr. Trina George, and thanked Mr. Readus for his invitation today. Rural Development (RD) is the economic and community development arm of USDA. Mission to increase the quality of life and economic prosperity in rural areas.



Provide services, such as grants, loans and technical assistance to promote infrastructure in rural areas.

Three program areas and the types of services:

1. Rural business cooperative services.

(Business and Industry Guarantees Loans, Intermediary Relending Program, Rural Business Development Grants, Rural Energy for America Program, Value Added Producer Grants, Cooperative Development Assistance)

2. Rural housing and community facilities.

(Homeownership Loans, Home Repair Loans and Grants, Mutual Self-help Technical Assistance Grants, Multi-family Housing Loans, Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants, Housing Preservation Grants, Community Facilities Loans and Grants)

3. Rural utilities.

(Electric Program, Water and Environmental Programs, Telecommunications and Broadband Programs)

RD obligations overview, over 1 billion provided in rural Mississippi in fiscal year (FY) 2023. Mississippi is fifth in the nation for the distribution of funding and broke two funding records; single family housing and business and cooperative program loans/grants.

Mississippi Fiscal Year 2023 program statistics:

\$1.01 billion total funding obligated to Mississippi communities.

\$276.8 million - Single Family Housing Loans/Grants

\$82.5 million - Multi-Family Housing Loans/Grants

\$28.7 million - Community Facilities Loans/Grants

\$10.5 million - Water & Environmental Infrastructure Loans/Grants

\$77.2 million - Business & Cooperative Programs Loans/Grants

\$42.5 million – Telecommunications Loans/Grants

Housing program, single family programs have direct loans for low income and moderate-income households to purchase or construct housing. There are also multifamily housing programs.

Presidentially declared disaster - Disaster repair grants requirements in Carroll, Humphreys, Jacon, Jasper, Monroe, Montgomery, Panola, Sharkey, and Washington counties. The 62 years of age restriction has been waived, must have very low income, can qualify for up to \$40,675 disaster grant assistance.

Community facility programs -

Funds for community development. Applicant must be public body, non-profit or federally recognized tribe. Low interest loans and grant dollars are available for this program.



Water and environmental programs assist with aging water infrastructure. Must be in a town less than 10K, non-profit, federally recognized tribes and public bodies can qualify.

Two grant opportunities for today's audience.

The Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) helps agricultural producers to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities, and increase producer income.

Funds can be used for planning activities or for working capital expenses related to producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product. Examples include conducting feasibility studies and developing business plans for processing and marketing the proposed value-added product. There is no match for this grant, and it is offered through and awarded through a national competition.

Rural Energy for America Program (REAP)-

Guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements. There is significant funding in this program, applications are accepted quarterly. Available funding in this program includes:

- Loan guarantees on loans up to 75 percent of total eligible project costs.
- Grants for up to 50 percent of total eligible project costs.
- Combined grant and loan guarantee funding up to 75% of total eligible project costs.

USDA Reconnect Program-

Telecommunications program is processed in our national office.

Use funds for construction, improvement, and acquisition of facilities to provide service at a minimum of 25 Mbps (download) and 3 Mbps (upload)

Service area not within incorporated areas greater than 20,000 in pop. (serves as many people as you want, but must be in "rural" areas)

Service area must be underserved (meaning current speeds do not exceed 10/1 Mbps)

Three options:

100% Grant

50% Grant/50% Loan

100% Loan

Rural partners network-

Connects rural communities with federal resources. To expand rural prosperity through job creation, infrastructure development and community improvement.

Mississippi has three community networks in first cohort:

Washington County Economic Alliance Community Network including the counties of Bolivar, Leflore, Sunflower and Washington.

Lake District Partnership Community Network including the counties of Grenada and Yalobusha.



North Delta Planning and Development District Community Network including the counties of Coahoma, Quitman, and Tunica.

You can learn more about participating at rural.gov.

RD has six area offices in MS to assist citizens.

MS Area Office Contacts

Area 1 - Brookhaven Area Office

Phone: 601-833-9321 Fax: 1-844-325-7040

Area 2 - Decatur Area Office

Phone: 601-635-2556 Fax: 1-844-325-7045

Area 3 - Grenada Area Office

Phone: 662-226-4441 Fax: 1-844-325-7047

Area 4 - Hattiesburg Area Office

Phone: 601-261-3293 Fax: 1-844-325-7050

Area 5 - Batesville Area Office

Phone: 662-578-7008 Fax: 1-844-325-7037

Area 6 - Starkville Area Office

Phone: 662-323-8031 Fax: 1-844-325-7037

Dr. Trina George is the state director and for more information visit www.rd.usda.gov/ms

Feel free to contact Nicole Barnes at 601. 863. 3866, Nicole.barnes@usda.gov

Farm Service Agency Program

Lesle Joi Peavie

GIS division staff are:

Lesle Joi Peavie Program Chief

Amy Moore Conservation Program Specialist

Megan Hogue Compliance Program Specialist

Nicholas Hancock GIS Technology Specialist

USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

It is a critical piece of the Department's efforts to support climate-smart agriculture and forestry on working lands. Currently, CRP has more than 667,000 participants that have received payments from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) for their voluntary conservation efforts on



more than 23 million acres of private land.

Since 2021, CRP has grown by 21 percent in terms of acres enrolled, USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pays more than 1.77u billion to America's producers. Over 6 thousand participants on more than 23 million acres in private land.

CRP improvements:

New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive – for CRP general and continuous signups designed to reward participants who implement conservation practices that increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Soil Rental Rate Adjustments – or rate flexibilities, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.

Increasing Payments for Practice Incentives - Our agency increased incentives from 20 percent to 50 percent. This incentive, in addition to cost share payments, for continuous CRP practices is based on establishment.

Increasing Payments for Water Quality Practices Rates – From 10 percent to 20 percent for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.

Establishing a Grassland CRP Minimum Rental Rate – This benefit more than 1,000 counties with rates currently below the \$13 minimum cost share.

MS Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)-

FSA made significant improvements to the CREP that reduce barriers by making the program more accessible to a broader cross-section of agricultural producers and new conservation partners. These program improvements include the flexibility for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance and the ability for FSA to invest in additional, full-time staff devoted to working directly with our CREP partners and program specialists in FSA's state office.

Accomplishments – 6,022 acres with total acres enrolled.
Annual rental payments received \$769,162.

Drought - The U.S. drought monitor indicates the dry conditions that continue across much of the Southern region. Exceptional drought (D4) and extreme drought (D3) was expanded in central and northern Mississippi. Comparing the weekly drought monitor shows increased impact each week.

CRP emergency haying and grazing- Emergency Haying or Grazing of approved cover is allowed in response to a drought, flood, wildlife, or other emergency as determined by DAFP on all practices including CP38 if allowed in the SAFE agreement, outside the PNS. Counties are authorized CRP emergency haying and grazing outside of the PNS on all practices when any part



of the county is in a D2 condition based on the US Drought Monitor.

To allow emergency haying or grazing, the counties must meet one of the following two criteria: Any portion of the county is D2 on the USDA Drought Monitor, or 40 percent loss of forage production. Please note that a modified conservation plan must be completed before implementing emergency haying and grazing.

There are restrictions, especially if participating in other emergency programs.

There are restrictions for counties that have been approved for Livestock Forage Program (LFP) with grazing and haying. For haying, only certain practices are approved to be hayed. For grazing, emergency grazing of all practices during the PNS at 50% of the normal carrying capacity if the county is designated for LFP payments.

FSA offers drought impacted Mississippi farmers and ranchers' immediate disaster assistance through these programs:

Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) – provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters including qualifying drought.

Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) – provides compensation to eligible livestock producers who suffered grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land.

Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) – offers payments to eligible producers for livestock death losses more than normal mortality due to adverse weather. Drought is not an eligible adverse weather event, except when associated with anthrax, a condition that occurs because of drought and directly results in the death of eligible livestock.

Tree Assistance Program (TAP)– helps eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers for qualifying tree, shrub, and vine losses due to natural disasters including excessive wind and qualifying drought.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) – provides emergency relief of losses due to feed or water shortages, disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, which are not adequately addressed by other disaster programs.

Emergency Loan Program – available to producers with agriculture operations located in a county under a primary or contiguous Secretarial Disaster designation. These low interest loans help producers recover from production and physical losses.

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) – provides emergency funding for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate land severely damaged by natural disasters and to implement emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought.



Keeping livestock inventory records are important to participate in these disaster programs. To participate in livestock disaster assistance programs, you'll be required to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must be submit a notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent. For grazing or feed losses, you must submit a notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent and should maintain documentation and receipts. Without documentation, difficult to determine the losses that incurred.

ETP, now we are informing agencies about EC6 drought emergency measures. It is an opportunity for livestock producers, with dried up ponds, to obtain alternate water sources during this drought.

Risk Management Agency

Roddric Bell

Federal Crop insurance program update. We rely on our partnerships to deliver our program to MS producers. MS Summary of crop insurance program update. Soybeans is largest insured crop. Specialty crops include honeybees, and triticale. Have 134 crops insured and we adjust with our farmer's needs.

Pasture range forest program - We have a rainfall index program to aid farmers to subsidize operation costs during droughts.

Hurricane Insurance Protection (HIP-WI) - Tropical Storm Endorsement-

HIP-WI was first available for purchase for the 2020 hurricane season and covers a portion of the deductible of the underlying crop insurance policy when the county, or an adjacent one, is hit with sustained hurricane-force winds from a named hurricane based on data from the National Hurricane Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

RMA has now added the Tropical Storm Option to this endorsement for damage caused by strong weather systems not categorized as hurricanes. The option would cover named tropical storms, as reported by NOAA with maximum sustained winds exceeding 34 knots and precipitation exceeding six inches over a four-day period. Both the wind trigger and precipitation trigger must occur for an indemnity to be paid.

The HIP-WI endorsement, including the new Tropical Storm Option, are available in select counties in Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia.

Shellfish Insurance Program-

The Shellfish crop insurance program provides a yield-based product for containerized oysters commercially produced for the half-shell market. The shellfish program provides coverage against four perils:

- Named storms (hurricanes and nor'easters)
- Excessive heat during a low tide event
- Freeze during a low tide event
- Low salinity caused by excessive rainfall



The program provides coverage for the expected production of oysters to be harvested in the current crop year. Coverage for immature oysters is not available at this time. Producers can elect to increase their insurable price above the published price election with verifiable sales records supporting a higher price election.

Risk Management Education- In 2023, RMA awarded about \$6.5 million to 22 organizations to educate underserved, small-scale, and organic producers on farm risk management and climate-smart farm practices. The funding from USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) provides assistance through its Risk Management Education (RME) partnerships for organizations, such as nonprofits and land grant universities, to develop training and resources for producers about risk management options. In 2022, RMA awarded \$2.2 million to 16 organizations to educate historically underserved producers, small-scale farmers and others on farm risk management and climate-smart farm practices. Two projects will serve producers in Mississippi.

Other Education initiatives-

Underserved Agent Licensures - Agent/Loss Adjuster Training Program

RMA has established a pilot program to identify, recruit, train, help certify, and help place trained and certified candidates within targeted underserved communities with crop insurance agencies. These representative underserved crop insurance agents and loss adjusters would work and serve the community of their stakeholders.

This pilot will be through a collaboration of 4 partners. Alcorn State University, Intertribal Agriculture Council, Annie's Project and Rural Coalition are partners for this initiative.

Risk Management Agency Navigator Program-

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture will lead the development of a pilot project to strengthen outreach and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers through the development of a cohort of risk management program navigators—program specialist trained by project collaborators to strategically and intentionally engage and serve all participants across the crop insurance sector.

The two-year pilot project features a collaboration with the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) and the Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC).

RMA Ambassador - Dr. Cindy Ayers Elliott – Foot Print Farms is partnering with FSA as a spokesperson to promote our programs to other landowners.

If you need more information on our programs, please contact:

Roddric Bell

roddric.bell@usda.gov

601-965-4771

601-331-4228

www.rma.usda.gov

Forest Service

Shannon Kelardy

Overview of the Forest Service was provided, the Chief of the Forest Service is located in



Washington, D.C.

Have several deputy chief's areas, the first is the National Forest System which I am responsible for in the state of Mississippi. Comprised of State and private forest areas – benefits directly to private landowners.

R& D branch provides information to private and state agencies.
Business operations handles the business side of running the Forest Service.
The International branch assist foreign countries.

There are seven ranger districts in Mississippi, Holly Springs, Tombigbee, Bienville, Delta, Homochitto, Chickasawhay, and DeSoto district.

We are responsible for 1.2 million acres of federal land, with a 200-employee workforce.
We actively manage forest to provide benefits to the public.

Larger programs are timber and prescribed burning programs. We work with landowners and partners to help move the timber throughout our state. We aim to sell over 500 tons of timber annually and attract more timber industry to Mississippi.

Prescribed fire program, we burn over 200K acres on federal land and have seen the technology in this program grow. For example, utilizing drones. Prescribed fire keeps land healthy, benefits soil, trees, and wildlife.

Delta National Forest is the only bottomland national forest in the country. This year, one-half of our workforce went for one week to rehab trails, roads, removed beaver dams, etc., in this forest.

In the Homochitto National Forest, one of the only clear water lakes in MS had giant salvinia, a non-native, invasive species was killing the fish habit. We drained the lake, treated the giant salvinia and have since reopened this lake. It's beautiful now and fishing in the lake has resumed.

State and private tribal portion side of the Forestry service received a 10-million-dollar grant through the Urban Community Forestry program. Much will be administered with the MS Forest Commission. Jackson State University will receive a considerable amount of this funding to help increase access to trees, social and economics it provides to the communities.
There will be other grant recipients that will benefit from this grant funding.

Urban and community forest grants and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding will bring approximately 12 million dollars in additional funding to Mississippi. Most funds will be going through state and federal programs, and grant opportunities through state and private organizations.

**National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research
(NCAAR) -MSU**

Dr. Drew Gholson

Over the last several years, the increase of irrigated agricultural land especially in the Mississippi river alluvial basin has increased causing drawdown of groundwater.

Technological approaches for mitigating groundwater depletion focus on bringing inflows and outflows into balance.

Our center's focus and goals are looking at mitigating groundwater depletion – pulling out more than you're pumping in. Looking at irrigation efficiency, alternate water sources, and increase surface water availability. Which can include methods to decrease the amount of water pumped from an aquifer through the use of:

Irrigation efficiency.

Instream weirs to increase service-water availability.

Tailwater recovery and onsite farm storage.

This can include attempts to increase the recharge to an aquifer, often referred to as Managed Aquifer recharge (MAR), e.g., ASR, PR, and use of Green Space.

Through a cooperative program with MSU, USDA and ARS, we are working together to look at irrigation deficiencies, and sustainability of the Mississippi river. Developing practices, and the dissemination of the practices to be adopted and used.

We have a multi-disciplinary team that covers many areas of expertise, especially with a focus on water. A new research leader will be joining our team in a few weeks.

Research Highlights-

Recommendation for sensor-based irrigation scheduling. Soil sensors are used and trying to hone on the best decisions based on the soil moisture sensors and utilizing irrigation scheduling apps. We compare water use, cost and ease of use.

Understanding cracking clays and understanding how shrink swell soil irrigates. Looking at strategies on how to water these clays differently by separating the water furrows out.

We have a direct comparison between sprinklers and furrow irrigation, looking at the most efficient way to apply the water and its effect on yield.

Another sprinkler system we're looking at is variable rate irrigation based on different soil types. So we can apply the correct amount along the lateral span of a field.

Establishing the water budgets from tailwater recovery system and how it effects how much water is coming in and coming out to get better recommendations for the tailwater recovery systems.

We're looking at cover crops and conservation tillage practices that effect agronomy, soil,



agronomics, water application and we're using sensors to schedule and collecting water quality data coming off the field.

Effects on soil furrow application to see if we can increase soil infiltration with our furrow irrigation application. We have an automation project with pump controls, and the ability to turn them off via cell phones.

Advancing adoption of soil moisture sensors and on farm demonstration program through our county extension offices and working with hands on trainings. These staff members work within their county to bring these practices with hands-on training.

Our website has resources we are developing, fact sheets and how to documents on scientific background, measurement devices, along with how to videos available on our website.

<https://www.ncaar.msstate.edu/outreach>

There is also an online tool to understand irrigation application costs and a flow meter calculator, to assist farmers with water use. We have a new program course, Master Irrigator, with hands on training to tie the financial, education and training together to become equipped on the long-term practices effectively. More information can be found at:

<https://www.ncaar.msstate.edu/outreach/master>

Contact information:

Drew M. Gholson, drew.gholson@msstate.edu
979.255.7018

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Dr. Martin A. Locke

Current ARS research update-

The National Sedimentation Laboratory is involved with water conservation, erosion, soil health, irrigation issues. There are two research units in Mississippi that deal with water conservation research. There is a sustainable water management unit in Stoneville, MS at the water center, we collaborate with them and coordinate our research effort.

Long Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) -

Field scale research that looks at plot scale and smaller field scale projects. Addressing crop productivity, soil health and water conservation. The 21-Gun project assesses effects of tillage, irrigation management and cover crop.

Field scale research, the LTAR project assess aspirational practices such as cover crops, and irrigation management on system sustainability. Several field scale projects are in the MS delta.

National NRCS projects include the CEAP Legacy Sediment -

working with network with other ARS locations across the US to develop modeling and assessment of the sediments.



CEAP Legacy Phosphorus, looks at legacy phosphorus issue in water bodies. In Mississippi we have high phosphorus in our water bodies, we're looking at how to mitigate this for better aquatic health.

An EPA /NRCS project to look at fall flooding and adjusting when flooding might happen. One aspect is to provide habitat for migratory birds and determine other ways nutrients can be processed to retain them and not have them move downstream.

Technology to mitigate crop water stress, runoff and infiltration, nutrient mobility and GHG emissions. By using remote sensing to quantify abiotic stresses in crops, sensors to examine water use and greenhouse gas emissions in crop system. Looking at ways to better utilize furrow irrigation more efficiently and reduce nutrient loss.

Tailwater recovery systems, collaborating with Dr. Gholson.

CEAP Ephemeral Gully Erosion Project helps in modeling and prediction of erosion and development of the models. Looking at watershed models supported by NRCS, and prediction tools such as RUSLE2.

Groundwater Transfer and Injection Pilot projects we are working to help in provide strategies to recharge the aquifer.

Integrated Water Management Modeling Strategies to improve modeling of groundwater in the Delta and provide farmers with a better irrigation source.

National Association of Conservation Districts

Pete Hunter

NACD advocates for Conservation Districts, program policy funding, provides grants and services to Conservation Districts. Locally led with grassroots advocacy and is one of the few organizations where private citizens work with a government agency to get the job done.

NACD does the following:

Advocates for conservation districts with a unified voice on Capitol Hill for conservation programs, policy, and funding.

Communicates the value of conservation districts through our advocacy, programs, convenings, and publications.

Develops conservation leaders through membership, participation on our board, committees, and subcommittees, special programs and events.

Provides grants and services to conservation districts.

Our brand of conservation is locally led, voluntary, incentive-based, nonpartisan, and is inclusive for all lands and people.

NACD is a grassroots organization, member-driven. Comprised of more than 2,900 Conservation Districts through 58 state and territory associations that select 116 NACD Board of Directors members and alternates. We are a private organization that works with government agencies to

get the job done.

We have a unified voice on Capitol Hill to cultivate relationship. In D.C. we discuss the grass roots policy with the legislators and their staffers. The NACD Board of Directors sets policy and elects region chairs (one per region) and the NACD executive board and officers, execute policy and manage the association. Policy is important for understanding how things are to be done.

Policy is important, and we work on policy books, the Farm Bill and appropriations. We discuss the programs and grass roots policy. Currently, NACD does not have a groundwater committee, and mentioned that they are trying to get one established. Mississippi is on top of the curve on groundwater issues and conservation practices to conserve ground water.

Grant funding opportunities with NACD include:

Climate-Smart Commodities Grant Program

Historically Underserved Farmer-to-Farmer Outreach Grant Program

Perimeter Fencing for Feral Swine Grant Program

Outreach and Technical Assistance Grants Program

Urban and Community Conservation Grant Program

Friends of NACD District Grants

District grants are small grants for children education, Mississippi is a participant in this grant. LSU has developed and patented a hog bait to assist with the feral hog problem. It is with EPA and Wildlife for approval.

Last year, NACD was named as a partner in USDA's Climate Smart Commodities Grant program. With funding from this program, NACD through its project partners and network of nearly 3,000 conservation districts will advance grassroots efforts that ensure producers and local communities are prepared to meet growing demand and have access to climate-smart commodity markets. This grant will provide up to \$80 million over 3 years for outreach and technical, financial, and marketing assistance.

Outreaching and technical assistant grants, we work with eligibly, funding is variable, with a 20% match required. Since 2018, \$993,250 has been invested in MACD and four conservation districts in Mississippi through this program.

Urban and Community Conservation (UAC) grants. Since 2016 NACD and NRCS have awarded more than \$7.75 million in UAC grants to conservation districts to fund 182 grant projects. These grants provide up to \$60K to support planning or staffing for technical assistance related to urban and community agricultural conservation. These grants require a 25% match of the overall project total.

Friends of NACD district grants is made possible through member donations to the Friends of NACD. The grants assist with education and outreach programs. No match to these grants.

Soil health champion networks. There are currently nine champions in Mississippi. We share ideas, conduct outreach, and provide information on soil health. For more information contact



beth-mason@nacdn.org.

The Youth Education and Outreach supports stewardship and education programs. There is an annual theme with supporting materials and a photo and poster contests. NACD has an education hub to obtain conservation and educational materials. NACD is a supporter of the NCF-Envirothon.

The 2024 NACD annual meeting will be held in San Diego, CA on February 10, through 14. Visit the NACD website for more information, and all are encouraged to attend.

Contact information for Pete Hunter

paulmhunter69@gmail.com

662.902.7473

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team (GCERT) Ron Howard

Thanked Mr. Readus and NRCS for being a leader in Gulf restorations. The GCERT team was set up in response to the British Petroleum (BP), Deep Water Horizon oil spill which occurred in April 2010. We receive a settlement from BP in 2016, and we are at the halfway point of receiving these restoration funds from this oil spill.

GCERT continues the work started by Dr. Wilkes, our current undersecretary, by working with private landowners and NRCS to plan, improve, and develop restoration plans in the Gulf Coast Region. We rely on NRCS to get the work done along with the Forest Service. We accelerate the implementation of conservation practice with NRCS and Forest service.

There are three funding streams:

- 1) Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA)
- 2) Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act)
- 3) Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF); National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Partnership

Eligibility requirements do differ from the Farm Bill, such as gulf area region or adjusted gross income, and cost share rates to assist the producer.

Close to 80 million in funding has been received. RESTORE projects are in the southern gulf areas of Mississippi. The Forest Service is implementing projects in the gulf areas of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

An Upper Pascagoula River water quality enhance projects on the Okatibbee Creek and Chunky River were funded in 2017 for water quality, nutrient reduction.

Contract distribution by watersheds include:

Upper Sowashee Creek



Dunnagin Creek-Potterhitto Creek
Huckleberry Creek – Chunky River
Witt Creek – Chunky Creek
Dry Branch – Okahatta Creek

Conservation practices in contracts and analysis of the practice details applied were displayed, indicating the number of practices included in contracts, nutrients transported to surface water, nutrients transported to groundwater, pathogens and chemicals transported to surface water, and sediment transported to surface water.

Practice costs, nutrient management analysis and practices applied in each watershed were displayed. Photos of practices were displayed.

The Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program (GCCRP) received 1.5 million. There were 7,968 planned practice acres and 5,789.85 planned restored acres, comprised of 80 contracts towards long-leaf pine habitat.

The RESTORE council activities were provided:

Initial funded Priorities List – approved 12.9.2015

2017 Funded Priorities List: Comprehensive Commitment and Planning Support – approved 1.24.2018

Funded Priorities List 3a – approved 2.12.2020

Funded Priorities List 3b – approved 4.28.2021

Amendment to 2017 Funded Priorities List: Comprehensive Commitment and Planning Support – Public Comment Period – 7.20 (11:59 PM (CST) August 19, 2023

Gulf Spill Restoration, the Mississippi Trustee Implementation Group released its Draft Restoration Plan 4 for public review and comment. We are working on the next restoration plan and are awaiting the development of a final restoration plan. These projects have a combined cost of approximately \$26 million. Watersheds similar to the Upper Pascagoula project are being considered for this new project.

You can contact me at Ron.howard@usda.gov

The meeting provided a 5-minute break for attendees. Chief Cosby's video discussing equity was played during this break.



Soils Tools and Technology - NRCS

James Curtis

The Web Soil Survey (WSS) annual refresh has been updated with new data. It is available on websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/websoilsurvey.aspx

Approximately 83 soil map units were updated, and 53 EDS groupings of soils were updated. We are working on some survey soil updates to make more delineations. The top 10 web survey data use in MS was hydric soil rating, hydric soil group and farmland classification, non-irrigated capability class, dwellings without basements, pH, depth to water table, dwellings with basements, drainage class and cation-exchange capability.

Soil survey reports most used were, map unit description, forestland productivity, engineering properties, hydric soil list.

New project that will be available this year is the 4-Band High-Res (leaf on) imagery. Partnering with DEQ we flew about 1/3 of the state and expect the data to be available in December 2023. Will be on the MARIS website for the general public and we will be able to use in our CD program. It's a large data set, 6-inch imagery and will be a dramatic improvement to 1M-NAIP data. This will be leaf off data.

New Elevation LiDAR data is available, Quality Level 3 for the entire state, which results in more accuracy.

Ecological Sciences – NRCS

Rogerick Thompson

2024 updates were provided. There are 47 Resource Concerns (RC) nationally, 35 are in Mississippi, 12 are nonapplicable. As we meet with landowners, we identify which concerns are present and identify conservation practices that will provide the necessary treatment.

There are 165 National Conservation Practice Standards, 126 are applicable to our state, of which 74 are Engineering, and 52 are Ecological Sciences.

I met with landowners to ask how many would like to extend the growing season, reduce number of hay bales needed, follow soil test recommendations, and exclude livestock until minimum grazing heights are achieved. Many said yes to these and would be interested in Interim practice 810-Annual Forages for Grazing System. The state will gather data from this interim practice to improve the delivery of the practice and it may become a Practice Standard in the future.

Land eligible includes:

Grazing land only with the presence of livestock

Fields in a warm/cool season perennial sod

There are standards and criteria to interim practice 810, based on MSU Extension and NRCS agronomists' recommendations. Including soil amendments based on recommendations for a



current soil test and as recommended by NRCS state guidance, land grant university and research institutes, extension agencies, or agency field trials.

To ensure this practice succeeds in establishing these forage species, we involved Dr. Rocky Lemus and NRCS agronomists. When establishing the methods for success we want to ensure:

Drill/overseeding methods only.

Minimum seeding rates will be required.

Lime at 100% relative neutralizing value.

N-P-K applied per soil test.

Forages will be applied the following season when soil test results recommend greater than 2 tons of lime or when the soil pH is less than 5.8.

Lime recommendation greater than 2 tons of lime must be spread in split applications.

Have more than one grazing cell or pasture to facilitate rotational grazing.

Preparation to identify steps for practice success include the Neutralizing and Screening Standards for Agricultural Liming Materials.

Subpart 3-Bureau of Plant Industry
Chapter 04- Agricultural Liming Materials

Neutralizing and Screening Standards For Agricultural Liming Materials.

100.01 All agricultural liming materials, except marl, offered for sale, sold, or distributed in this state shall have clearly stated in the guarantee, the actual Relative Neutralizing Value (RNV). RNV is an expression of aglime effectiveness based on the combined effect of Calcium Carbonate Equivalent (CCE) and fineness of grind. The RNV is determined by multiplying CCE by a set of factors based on the particle size of the agricultural liming material. The minimum RNV allowed for sale in Mississippi shall be 63%.

Practice certification / payment requirements:

Lime tickets at the 100% RNV. Soil test recommendations are presented at the RNV value at 100% application. We will require the lime application value to be at RNV 100% or its equivalent.

Fertilizer tickets per soil test recommendation.

Seed tickets.

Installation of practice 382 prior to payment, to ensure rotation grazing.

The second interim practice this year is, Amending Soil Properties with Lime, Code 805.

Definition- Adjust the soil pH with lime to change physical and chemical properties of the soil to



achieve a conservation objective. Practice will not pay for the lime product, but the application of the lime.

Land uses – Cropland, pastureland.

Parings – 590- Nutrient Management, 810-Annual Forage Mix ONLY

Requirements- Soil test per each planned land unit, lime tickets, lime RNV certification at 100%

Lime application rates must be based on soil test analysis for the planned cropping/tillage system and follow local Land Grant University (LGU) recommendations. Use soil tests no older than 3 years. Collect, prepare, store, and ship all soil samples following LGU guidance.

Soil test results must provide a recommendation for how much lime and CCE material is needed to adjust the soil pH to the optimum range for the planned cropping system.

Practice code 666, Forest Stand Improvement, is not new but may be planed for thinning purposes to improve forest health, reduce forest pest pressure, and wildlife habitat improvement.

The criteria listed to perform this method of forest stand improvement may be identified by a certified Technical Service Provider or the MS Forest Commission; where silvicultural techniques are identified, desired future conditions regional guidelines or site-specific prescriptions, basal area and follow best management practice predominate.

The program eligibility for this practice:

Pre-commercial thinning

Stands without a first thinning

Thinned to 70-80 basal area per acre

Current management plan where the thinning methods are identified

Forest management plan – CPA 106

Forest stewardship plan - MFC

**Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
(MDEQ)**

Natalie Segrest

Watersheds to waterways and how to link landscape actions and investments with environmental outcomes and integrate environmental results into success stories and reporting.

Data sources and modeling baseline conditions, implementing actions on the ground we look for environmental outcomes. We have programs and fundings to do this, and we look for environmental outcomes in our water bodies. We have tools to estimate these outcomes.

The Nonpoint Source Reduction Estimation Tool (NRET) estimates load reductions and reports reductions at multiple scaled, by practice, or by program. Results are published to a publicly accessible dashboard, and it communicates environmental impacts of NRCS programs. No private data is used, the data is at the HUC 12 scale. The tool allows us to publish this info on a dashboard available on your phone to see what NRCS programs are accomplishing.



Currently we're working on a Nutrient Reduction Estimation Tool, utilizing nutrient sources, nutrient management actions, and BMPs. We are getting the models built and can look by implementation year, program codes, and other criteria to obtain associated outcomes.

Since 2008, MS-NRCS implemented over 46,460 practices. This modeling approach can estimate reductions of 70% of all practices implemented. Those 70 % account for 60% of all the funding.

Statewide Nitrogen and Phosphorus success. NRCS Practices from 2008-2011, saved 3,387,518 lbs. of nitrogen, 1,091,821 lbs. of phosphorus. This is at the statewide scale. We can search the nitrogen load reduction by HUC levels, to determine the estimated load reduced. Also, by practices install over cross funding years.

Working on the sediment load reduction for calendar year 2024 and working with experts for input to refine our data collection. We work together to show environment impacts achieved through the work you do. The future NRCS annual report, could be coupled with environmental outcomes and impacts from their programs.

Engineering and Watershed – NRCS

Olguy Louis

Provided information on the current the staff and plans for future staffing was provided.

Engineering accomplishments this past year:

Completed 90 field surveys for gathering field data to be used in EQIP designs.

Completed 76 EQIP designs.

Completed 125 CTA field visits.

Completed 38 CTA designs.

Watershed updates:

\$461,605.61 for 9 projects (Prequalification)

\$135 million dollars from the bipartisan infrastructure bill towards our watershed operations.

\$8 million dollars specifically for the rehabilitation of our Watershed dams.

\$210 million dollars for non-bipartisan infrastructure bill watershed operations.

Rocky Carter

Long Beach

South Delta Watershed

Others (CDS)

Groundbreaking for Long Beach will be held tomorrow.

Practice Standard changes were discussed.

Agrichemical Handling Facility (309) -Formatting and writing style were updated to meet current agency requirements. Minor revisions were made for clarity and readability purposes and to update citations for existing references. Major changes were made to the Plans and



Specifications to identify needed information and to remove requirements of supplying supporting documentation with plans and specifications.

Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation (371)- The name has been changed from “Farmstead Energy Improvement”. The standard has been rewritten to focus on the energy efficiency criteria, fire and electrical safety, flexibility, and manufacturer’s requirements. The requirement for an ASABE S612 Type 2 energy audit has been revised to allow other assessment methods. Criteria was added to support Prescriptive Upgrades to simplify and streamline implementation of some instances of the practice. Criteria was added for heat and air transfer systems and equipment.

Well Decommissioning (351)- This standard has undergone minimal changes. Changes to the Criteria section include adding “Laws and Regulation,” “Roles and Responsibilities,” “Disinfection,” and “Sealing and Collapsible Formation.” Deleted “Casing Grouted in Place” criterion. Recommends working with our State Geologist on any well decommissions.

Roof Runoff Structure (558)- One purpose was rewritten to remove references to foundation protection since that is not an established resource concern and now just addresses soil erosion. Minor wording changes were made to the Criteria section for clarity and specificity. Changes were made to the Additional Criteria section to Capture Water for Other Uses to address water quality for reuse of captured water and criteria modified for storage of the captured water.

Waste Transfer (634)- Formatting and writing style were updated to meet current agency requirements. Minor revisions were made for clarity and readability purposes. The structural design requirements were updated to align with changes made to the National Engineering Manual. The criteria for reception pit size, pipe clean-outs and pipeline velocity were revised.

Sprinkler System (442)- Updated Tables to meet current industry standards. Modified the Land Slope section to allow for pivot systems that may not meet the slope requirement but meet the run-off and application rate requirements. Added a section for Mobile Drip Irrigation (MDI). MDI is a type of irrigation that is partially sprinkler and partially drip type irrigation and it was decided that MDI criteria is more applicable to the standard.

For more information, contact Olguy Louis, 601.863.3932

Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission (MSWCC)

Nick Ivy

MSWCC has been busy with new items.

We have three main programs.

District Assistance - Assisting with the 82 district’s education programs, technical work, local projects, and programs. Such as CTA, hiring of District Technicians, and planning CRP for FSA.

Water Quality – Non-point source pollution, mainly 319 programs and we work on these types of projects:



Streambank and shoreline protection
Stream crossing
Ponds
Check dams
Cross fencing
Grade stabilization structures

We work to correct issues in the streams and waterways. Currently we have, non-point source pollution programs with eight watersheds across Mississippi and partner with NRCS. We take applications for these projects.

Watershed Rehabilitation- We have a siphon system for watershed lakes when water level needs lowering for maintenance. We use the NRCS rehabilitation program to do an environmental assessment to create a new design and construction when upgrades to the watershed is needed. Currently we are working on 11 Watershed Rehabilitation Program projects for aging dams that are reaching the end of their design life and/or no longer meet federal or state safety criteria or performance standards. We hope to complete these within the next two years.

Dam Pipe Inspections - We utilize a camera to inspect pipes every five years in watershed dams. There is no charge for this inspection.

WFPO program - The WFPO program provides technical and financial assistance to States, local governments, and Tribal organizations to help plan and implement authorized watershed projects for the purpose of:

Flood Prevention
Watershed Protection
Public Recreation
Public Fish and Wildlife
Agricultural Water Management
Municipal and Industrial Water Supply
Water Quality Management

We currently have numerous projects due to increased funding.

Easement Programs - NRCS

Jason Keenan

Programs in Easements for 2024:

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE)
 Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 ACEP-ALE and WRE

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – US Held
 Minority delta wetland easements
 Upper Pearl watershed easements



CRP to easement RCPP conversion were recently approved. Massive boom for RCPP easements within the last two years.

FY 2024 application deadlines:

Sign-up Deadline October 27, 2023

ACEP-ALE

ACEP-WRE

RCPP Upper Pearl

RCPP WRE

ACEP-IRA-WRE November 13, 2023

If an application is on file, we include it in all eligible ranking pools. No need to file additional applications. There may be more announcements coming out this year.

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)-

Tri-State WREP – 1 project in process for 700 acres, expect 2024 enrollment.

Batture WREP – 1 project enrolled for 41 acres for ~\$215,000.

*Need additional Batture cropland offers.

Had large property offered, that was withdrawn, looking for more batture cropland offers. Expect increases for batture cropland funding.

Expect \$15M+ in FY2024 WREP Funding

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)-

Upper Pearl – Leake/Neshoba counties, within 2-mile buffer of Pearl River. Goal is to manage for water quality (i.e., forest habitat and protection)

Project with Wildlife Mississippi

Minority Wetland Easements – Dedicated fund pool for minority landowners in the delta.

Joint project with Arkansas NRCS and KKAC Organization.

We are looking for more of these applications.

Ranking FY 24 - Will rank applications in as many fund pools as eligible. Only change is the delisting of the Louisiana Black bear, will decrease points for FY2024.

Multiple FY24 Ranking Pools:

Statewide

WREP Tri-state



WREP Batture
RCPP – WRE
RCPP – Upper Pearl
Historically Underserved

Due to Louisiana Black Bear de-listing by USFWS, points will decrease for FY2024 for the black bear zone.

Payment rates - Having difficulty on comps with Aquaculture and CRP properties. Will have to appraise those individual offers.

Awaiting changes for FY2024
Expect Rate increases \$100-200

Challenge: Difficulty finding comps for Aquaculture and CRP properties

Easement overview- Drought conditions allowed us to complete 50 projects this year, double what we normally complete.

1992-2023 Easement Summary	
Enrolled Easements	756
Enrolled Acres	210,553.4
Closed Easements	707
Closed Acres	202,936.8
Fully Restored	191,155.7 (as of 2023)
Pending Restoration	19,397.7

Landowner Workshops - Three WRE workshops were held in Cleveland, Onward, and Jackson. Almost 50% overall attendance by minority farmers. The mailer and outreach were successful.

The Easement staff information was provided. Additional staffing expected in the future.

ASTC – Easements – Jason Keenan
Easement Coordinator – Ron McCain
Realty Specialist – Vacant
Program Analyst – Jahmal Burgess
Easement Specialist – Rick Hagar
Easement Field Coordinator – Ben Naron
Easement Soil Con – Jason Makamson
Easement Biologist – Saahirah Walton
Easement Forester – Alec Conrad
Program Assistant -Ariel Hollins
Trust for Tomorrow -Randal Manley, William McRee, and Jacob Miller

NRCS Programs

Earl McMillian

Financial assistance programs are:



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
Urban Agriculture

EQIP –Is a voluntary conservation program that assists producers to make conservation work for them. Together, NRCS and producers invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations.

Eligible program participants receive technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns on their land. Payments are made to participants after conservation practices are implemented and verified, by NRCS staff, meeting our standards and specifications.

Fiscal Year 2023 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Accomplishments:

Total FY 2023 Obligations:	\$69,535,570.76
465 EQIP Classic & Other Initiatives	\$16,529,585.55
76 LFR	\$418,690.60
675 BFR	\$19,217,787.49
380 SDFR	\$9,485,910.72
70 VFR	\$1,260,766.96
142 MRBI	\$16,542,757.01
49 NWQI	\$4,048,358.17
17 SWCP	\$2,031,714.26

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) - Was established in fiscal year 2012 as an initiative delivered jointly with State water quality agencies and the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to address agricultural sources of water pollution, specifically nutrients, sediment, and pathogens in priority watersheds throughout the country.

In FY 2023, NRCS received 4 million in funds to assist with conservation efforts in NWQI. There are currently 9 NWQI watersheds eligible for funding. All NWQI watersheds are scattered throughout the state.

FY 2023 NWQI Watersheds:

Coon Creek
Carmichael Creek
Big Sunflower River – Porter Bayou (2)
North Tippah Creek – Tippah River
Lynn Creek – Homochitto River
Booths Creek – Bayou Pierre
Hudson Creek – Clear Creek

Tilda Bouge – Bear Creek

Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI)- The MRBI was announced in FY 2009 with a primary focus of improving water quality. Focused on restoring wetlands, enhancing wildlife habitat, and sustaining agricultural viability in small watersheds of the Mississippi River Basin. Implementation of MRBI requires a flexible approach tailored to individual watersheds and should support conservation systems composed of practices that avoid, control, and trap sediment and nutrients.

In FY 2015 MRBI was updated to align with the nutrient loss reduction strategies developed by Hypoxia Task Force (HTF) member States. NRCS and partners worked with producers and landowners to implement and show the effectiveness of targeted, voluntary conservation systems in priority watersheds identified as major contributors of nutrients to the Gulf of Mexico.

MRBI and NWQI partners – Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission (MSWCC).

This partnership has resulted in the following:

9 National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) watersheds.

15 Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) watersheds.

Pulling public and private entities together.

Assisting NRCS with conservation efforts totaling over \$20,071,954.37 in the last 6 years for NWQI.

Assisting NRCS with conservation efforts totaling over \$67,899,298.44 in the last 6 years for MRBI.

Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) - A whole government approach to tackling the climate issues, USDA has developed a CSAF strategy that recognizes the important role that agriculture and forestry will play in climate change mitigation and resilience.

The purpose of this targeted EQIP sign-up for CSAF is to prioritize the adoption of conservation practices and systems that mitigate greenhouse gases (GHG) and to ensure the availability of this assistance for socially disadvantaged producers and forest land managers.

Core conservation practices, which will also include CSP enhancements, were selected based on their ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon in the soil. States are allowed to remove any core practices that are not selected in their payment schedules.

EQIP – Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) - EQIP Incentive Contract provisions provide for both incentive practice payments for adopting practices, and annual payments for managing, maintaining, and improving the incentive practices for the duration of the contract.

States determine the EQIP incentive high priority area(s). These are areas with identified priority resource concerns that represent a significant concern in a State or region.

States determine priority resource concern(s). States may identify up to three priority resource concerns for each land use within a given high priority area.

Incentive Contract Length: An appropriate length to achieve the desired conservation benefits; not less than 5 years and not more than 10 years.

Emergency Disaster Assistance- NRCS continues to offer this assistance. We reached out to landowners impacted by two disasters in FY 2023.

Fiscal Year 2024 EQIP sign-up - EQIP Classic including State and National Initiatives

2023 Sign-up Deadline: October 27, 2023

Eligibility Deadline: December 15, 2023

Obligation Deadline: May 31, 2024

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - Encourages producers to address priority resource concerns and improve and conserve the quality and condition of natural resources in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities

CSP Assistance Types:

CSP – Classic

Helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority natural resource concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

CSP – Renewals

During the first half of the fifth year of the existing contract term, NRCS may allow a participant to apply and compete to renew their contract for an additional 5-year period.

CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI)

This program expired in fiscal year 2023 and was not extended under the current continuing resolution. The purpose of the grassland conservation initiative (GCI) is to assist producers in protecting grazing uses, conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources, and achieving related conservation values by conserving eligible land through grassland conservation contracts.

FY 23 CSP Accomplishments –

223 CSP	\$29,662,532.40
8 LRF	\$297,545.00
63 BFR	\$6,908,765.60
49 SDR	\$3,213,669.20
1 CSP-MRBI	\$26,003.00



CSP Annual payments - Participants who elect to receive their CSP Annual Payment in CY 2023 will need to submit CSP documentation prior to November 17, 2023.

Participants who elect to receive their CSP Annual Payment in CY 2024 will need to submit their CSP documentation prior to January 19, 2024.

Fiscal Year 2023 CSP Sign-Up -

CSP Renewals

Application Deadline: April 28, 2023

Assessment and Ranking Deadline: November 3, 2023

Obligation Deadline: 12.29.2023

CSP-Classic

2023-1 Sign-up Deadline: October 27, 2023

Obligation Deadline: June 28, 2024

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) - Signed into law by President Biden in August 2022.

The IRA provides NRCS with \$19.5 billion in additional funds for its existing conservation programs:

\$8.45 billion Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

\$4.95 billion Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

\$3.25 billion Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

\$1.4 billion Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

\$1 billion Conservation Technical Assistance

The IRA does not create any new programs. It gives NRCS additional funds to expand its existing climate efforts and satisfy unmet demand.

IRA funds begin in fiscal year 2023; all IRA funds must be spent by September 30, 2031.

IRA funding-

IRA-CSP funding:

79 IRA-CSP	\$10,264,844.00
------------	-----------------

34 BFR	\$4,543,491.00
--------	----------------

27 SDFR	\$2,875,891.00
---------	----------------

IRA-EQIP funding:

147 IRA-EQIP	\$5,280,858.00
--------------	----------------

14 LRF	\$351,606.98
--------	--------------

71 BFR	\$1,993,541.79
--------	----------------

53 SDFR	\$1,410,512.60
---------	----------------

The IRA focuses on mitigation and directs NRCS to use the additional funds specifically for climate change mitigation. Mitigation activities reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve carbon storage.

FY24 list of NRCS climate-smart mitigation activities: nrcs.usda.gov/mitigation-activities.pdf

NRCS is continually evaluating mitigation activities and IRA implementation approach and will update them as appropriate. Federal Register notice (Nov. 21, 2022). That notice closed on December 21. NRCS utilized initial feedback for fiscal year 2023 and will continue to identify and adopt additional changes based on that public feedback in fiscal year 2024 and in future years.

Applying for programs in FY 24 – NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs year-round. Producers interested in EQIP or CSP should apply by their state’s ranking dates to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Funding is provided through a competitive process. ACEP applications for the current IRA funding cycle must be submitted by October 27, 2023, for the first funding round. NRCS plans to roll out the next RCPP funding opportunity in early spring, which will include IRA funds for fiscal year 2024.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – This program promotes coordination of NRCS activities with partners that offer value added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Partners apply to NRCS for RCPP project awards. Once projects are selected, NRCS works with partners to set aside a certain pool of funding for an awarded project. Producers, landowners, and partners then enter into producer contracts and supplemental agreements with NRCS to carry out agreed to conservation activities.

RCPP FY 2023 obligations - 24 contracts - \$2,215,000 – 5,249.10 acres.

RCPP – What is the point?

Impact-Proposals are effective and compelling solutions that address one or more natural resource priorities.

Partner contributions-Cash and in-kind value added to leverage NRCS RCPP investment. NRCS’ goal is that partner contributions are at least equal the NRCS investment in a RCPP project.

Partner contributions are given priority in application evaluation criteria.

Innovation- Innovative conservation approaches or technologies, build new partnerships, take advantage of program flexibilities to deliver conservation solutions.

Partnerships and management-Partners must have experience, expertise and be capable to manage the partnership and project, provide outreach to producers, and quantify the environmental outcomes of an RCPP project. RCPP ranking gives preference to applicants that meaningfully engage historically underserved farmers and ranchers.

Eligible RCPP Partners – Agricultural or silvicultural producer association(s), state or unit of local government, Indian tribal government, a farmer cooperative, water district, irrigation district, rural water district or association, or other organization with specific water delivery authority to producers on agricultural land, a municipal water or wastewater treatment entity, an



institution of higher education, an organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers.

Establishment of Urban Agricultural Subcommittee- In FY 2023, States are charged with creating an Urban Agriculture Subcommittee to assist NRCS with implementation of its conservation program.

Role of Subcommittee:

Primary advisor regarding urban agriculture conservation.

Reports to NRCS Mississippi State Technical Committee chaired by the State Conservationist.

Responsibility of the Subcommittee:

Identify local urban ag needs, emerging practices, resource concerns and potential partners.

Identify barriers to implementation of conservation strategies on urban and small-scale operations.

Develop recommendations for outreach strategies.

Provide additional assistance or advice as requested.

For more information on how to become a member of the Urban Agriculture Subcommittee please contact Earl McMillian at edward.mcmillian@usda.gov.

Q&A / Closing Comments

Kurt Readus / Earl McMillian

Question from online meeting chat-

Q- Is practice code 558 roof run off structure the same as water catchment system?

A- They are not the same practice. Please follow up with Olguy Louis after the meeting for more details.

Questions from onsite attendees:

Q- Is there any way you can post the deadlines for EQIP and CSP on your USDA/MS website?

A- They are posted on the USDA/NRCS website.

Q- The Urban Ag subcommittee, is only for Hinds Co, urban COC is only for the City of Jackson? Is that correct?

A – The state of Mississippi was blessed to have an urban service center named from the Secretary. The urban county office committee will service the Hinds County area, but the city that was named from the Secretary, was Jackson, Mississippi. That is an FSA function, the county committee. NRCS operates through our State Technical Committee and our urban subcommittee governs what we do with urban agriculture. I hope that answers your question.

Question from online meeting chat-

Q -Is it possible to develop mechanisms to create and tailor practices and approaches towards the need of smaller scale farmers and producers?

A – Yes, we have funds set aside for urban and small-scale farms, related to specialty crops.



Mr. Readus thanked Mr. McMillian for moderating the meeting and closed the meeting with the following information.

Urban conservation is available statewide, although the Secretary's designation of Jackson for a service center is to provide walk-in, local service. We have hired four Urban Ag. Conservationist, one per area, to provide the special assistance that you need.

Mississippi has had a robust outreach program for some time, we are seeing the benefits of that and received over ten thousand applications for our programs last year. Many people complain that they have been waiting for funding, as you know through our programs, we fund environmental benefit. It's best that you work with that local service center and look at that conservation plan to see what you can implement in your operation to help your chances of being funding become greater. On a yearly average, we fund about 25% of our applications. Hopefully with the infusion of the IRA funds, we will be able to meet many of the unmet demands in the state.

IRA funds have increased from 5 million last year to around 20 million for FY 24 and we expect to address more resource concerns in our programs. Especially with the infusion in RCPP. The fact that we have partners, sending in proposals and getting funded, will also assist landowners across the state.

We can't do the work we do alone, and I want to thank the technical agencies and non-governmental organization that help get this work done across the landscape. Helping to put conservation on the ground at this hour. We want to continue to do that in an environmentally friendly way, as well as helping to promote production on these agricultural lands. I think our products are a point of national security. We want to increase the economic wealth of our landowners.

Thanks to those that attended, safe travels home, if you have further questions, you can reach us by phone, or email, this information is on our website. Today's presentations will be posted to our website.

Meeting ended at 12:17 PM