

NEBRASKA STAC MEETING MINUTES

June 13, 2024
1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Virtually

[YOUTUBE RECORDING LINK](#)

ATTENDEES - Rob Lawson, Tami Nordman, Fred Stevens, John Mayberger, Conor Ward, Lisa Berkeypile, Carlos Villarreal, Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Julie Breuer, Julee Patzel, Katie Hickle, Trevor Johnson, Kent Zimmerman, Al Juhnke, Nick Streff, Nolan Lemna, Patrick Lechner, Shawn McVey, Roger Yerdon, Burdette Piening, Larry Hudkins, Elbert Traylor, Ritch Nelson; **VIA TEAMS & PHONE:** Andy Biship, Brad Lubben, Bruce McIntosh, Chandler Schmidt, Ray Chittaranjan, Michael Chodornek, Ricardo Chona, Crystal Powers, Curt Becker, Cydney Calhoun, David Potter, David Schroeter, Debbie, Gabriel DuPree, Dustin Wilcox, Ele Nugent, Steve Fairbairn, Jennifer Swanson, Jessica Russell, John Hansen, Kalee Olson, Finn Kennison, Kira Cooney, Kole Pederson, Matt Smith, Cathie Mills, Misha Mazurkewyczm, Mike, Mary Reece, Daniel Ross, Jami Thoene, Tyler Goeschel, Dustin Wilcox, Elizabeth Gray, Bill Gresham, Rachael Whitehair, Becky Potmesil, Bill Armbrust, Paula Sue Steffen, Roy Stoltenberg, Shelly Trojen.

FUTURE Meetings: *1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352*

❖ SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

❖ DECEMBER 5, 2024

 **WELCOME & OPENING COMMENTS:** *Robert Lawson - NRCS State Conservationist*

- Welcome to our new building for those in person.
- NRCS in NE is working on obligations for EQIP & CSP.
- Working on our status reviews for the Food Security Act.
- Pathway students start here soon (20 across the state)
- Lots of Partner Activities taking place this week.
- NE NRCS Staffing update:
 - NE NRCS has gained 12 new employees in a year
 - 11 different technical training for our 649 employees happening this year.

2022 Census of Agriculture Findings: *Nicholas Streff, Acting Chief – NASS*

- **See slides. Important highlights listed below.**
 - Conducted every 5 years.
 - History of the Censes
 - NASS has not always done the Censes, use to be the Census Bureau.
 - Took over after 1997 Census
 - Most complete data that NASS has.
 - State by State & see the same tables, the same state & County level data that is out there.
 - Publish data by congressional districts, watersheds, and zip codes.
 - Only place Demographic Data is published.
 - 24 pages long
 - Many Producers operate across county lines. The Census data is placed in the county with the highest value of sales as reported by the operator.
 - Hoping to Test the question for the next census – “What is the speed of your internet?” not just if they have internet.
 - **NASS will do special tabulations for you if there is something you would like to see.**

Q: All the metrics is there a Geospatial component that can be downloaded from NASS? Average farm size can we download & have a shape file that can compare with practices?

A: Shape file not 100%, but on the geological side we do create quite a few maps. All data can be downloaded.

- Farm definition is interesting when thinking of \$1,000 in 1974 vs \$1,000 today.

SOIL HEALTH OUTREACH UPDATE: *Carlos Villarreal, State Soil Scientist – NRCS*


- **See slides. Important highlights listed below.**
 - Aaron Hird our State Soil Health Specialist took another position in the Agency.
 - New Soil Health Trailer is a rolling billboard to show case USDA NRCS.
 - Reviewed the setup & what all the trailer holds.
 - Here to ask if you have a need or would like to showcase this trailer somewhere.

Q: Has the UNL Extension reached out?

A: Yes, we have done a couple of field days with them.

Q: Where is this trailer located? What kind of timeframe do you think to devote to this trailer?

A: Here in Lincoln, but able to go anywhere. 30 minutes to 1.5hrs.

 **FSA REVIEW:** Jana Ingwerson-Laws – Programs Specialist – FSA

- **SEE SLIDES & HANDOUT attached. HIGHLIGHTED Points below.**
 - **Going through the Cost Shared document, that is why the FSA State Committee is also on line.**
- Continuous CRP Signup 61
 - Different right now, because we are near our nation-wide cap & so we are having to do batching periods.
 - **Batching Period Ends July 12**

The following are the FY 2024 continuous CRP deadlines.

Date	Action
July 31, 2024	Deadline for producers to submit an offer for new or re-enrolled land or combination of new or re-enrolled land for continuous CRP signup 61.
August 7, 2024	Deadline for producers to request a conservation plan from NRCS. County Office deadline to enter the status in COLS as “Submit for Plan” for continuous CRP signup 61. Note: FSA must provide offers to NRCS within 5 workdays of receiving the submitted offer from the producer.
September 6, 2024	Deadline for NRCS or TSP to complete the conservation plan, sign, and obtain signatures of all signatories on CRP-1, and return the conservation plan to FSA.
September 30, 2024	Deadline for COC or CED to approve CRP-1’s and load CRP-1 approvals in COLS.

- NE Grassland CRP Signup 206
 - Announced June 3rd
 - Signup dates: June 3rd – June 28, 2024
- **Review of FY2024 CRP and CLEAR30 Cost Share Dockets**
 - CRP pays 50%
 - CLEAR30 pays 75%
 - Reviewed CRP Proposed Increased Rates
 - 327/ No-Till Drill – went up to \$28.50
 - 95% of these correlates to something the NRCS uses for EQIP, but the drilling one would be an example of something we could use in the future. Just finding things in NE are different than NRCS regional components that have available.
 - NRCS is going down so that is why we recommended FSA’s way.
- ECP in NE
 - Counties approved
 - Lincoln – Valentines Day Fire
 - Custer – Betty’s Way Fire 2/26
 - Lincoln – Betty’s Way Fire 2/26
 - Logan – Stapleton Fire 2/26
 - Howard – 4/26 Tornado
 - Greeley – 4/26 Tornado
 - Written approval must be granted by FSA prior to restoration work starting.

- There is a 25% advance payment available on all practices upon application approval.

Q: Do we know the timeline for the grasslands CRP internally between NRCS & FSA?

A: Not yet, typically we do. It will be interim conservation plans.

Q: Is there a reason as to why wetland restoration creation enhancement price went up? Is it because there is more demand for it or is it just a higher priority in the plans?

A: If we are doing it in a particular contract, it is driving the price of fuel because we are moving dirt & the cost of equipment. That is what is costing more than it did a couple of years ago.

Q: Out of Money for Water wells? Seward County, been trying to get water wells & water systems on CRP grazing for five years and being told there is no money & keep getting rejected? – Larry Hudkins


A: Grassland CRP? If you do go into Grasslands CRP, you can get cost-share, or if you have acres for things like water developments, water facilities and pipelines, then we do have money for that. We have a lot of requests come in, but you have to be on a contract with CRP Grassland Acres. There is money for cost-share, but NRCS has to go out & determine there is a resource concern, and that cost-share is needed. GRP is not eligible. If it is not FSA & it is NRCS then it is probably through EQIP & that usually does run out of money.

Q: General turn around time for an ECP application.

A: It varies on workload for that office.

Q: Did you have any snow removal applications last fall?

A: Was announced last fall, but it got pulled back & at this time we are not doing it, but waiting on National. Having meetings the program has been hard to implement & a lot of concerns. Continuing to evaluate the policy before they release it again. At this time we are at a pause.

 **NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATE:** *John Mayberger - NRCS ASTC-Programs, Fred Stevens - NRCS Programs Specialist*

- **SEE SLIDES. HIGHLIGHTED Points below.**
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 - Reviewed Eligible & approved Practices.
 - Reviewed Final Estimated Allocations.
 - Thresholds
- **FY24 CSP Classic Signup** (See Slides)
 - Rankings are due November 8, 2024
- State Wildlife Initiative
 - **Special initiative to provide funding in areas affected by Wildfires. Currently have approved applications totaling \$1.3M.**
 - Applications were approved in Custer, Lincoln, and Logan Counties
 - **They include funding for:**
 - 340 Cover Crop
 - 528 Prescribed Grazing – Livestock Deferment on Grazing Lands
 - 484 Mulching

- **LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETINGS:**
 - **Dates, times and locations are available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-state/nebraska/technical-committee**
 - **NEXT LWG MEETINGS WILL OCCUR IN 2025**
 - **RCPP PROGRAM UPDATE**
 - **NEW Projects approved for funding for FY24**
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Q: For IRA, you said there was a big difference in the last year vs this year with estimated allocations. Is this because there is more increase in interest or is there more applications coming in?

A: It was the allocation that we got was the biggest change, because it was an intentional ramp but as it was supposed to increase every year, but it was more drastic than we thought it was going to be.

Q: So in other words, you ran out of funds in IRA & then went to the regular EQIP or how did you determine where the funds go? What was the threshold for IRA?

A: We did this year. We started off trying to obligate our IRA funds. We had \$29 million and that's why we did the act now process, which is to take applications as first come, first serve, but they have to be above certain threshold. If they were above a certain threshold and they qualify for the IRA, meaning they only had IRA type practices, climate smart practices, then we went ahead and funded those. And then once, once we had those nearly obligated and we're like 98-99%, then we went and went into our general fund pools. So, all the applications that did not qualify for IRA but would qualify in our general fund pools, those were ranked and then approved, based on which ranking pool they're in from highest to lowest and the highest ones gets funded first and then the second highest until we run out of money.

Threshold ranking was 30.

Q: What can be done to get more money toward livestock watering systems? What percentage of our funds are dedicated to livestock?

A: We can look into several things, but one is a separate fund pool for the livestock water systems. Local Working Groups have a say in what their priorities are. At least 50% of our fund go towards livestock. This could be something that ECP could cover if it is designated as a drought area.

Q: Is the 3405 – Expanding Soil Health Through Carbon Markets in RCPP, ready to go?

A: As of right now it is still pending – the lead partner & NRCS are still working on the program partnership agreement. The funding has been approved but still working on getting the agreement finalized.

Q: AFA – Who is eligible to be the local sponsor for that?

A: Any group who works with, units of government are eligible, Organizations that have effectively dealt with producers, however most of the work will be done through them & not through our Field Offices, so will need to be capable of the capacity.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR USING ACEP-IRA FUNDS:

Shawn McVey, Easement Coordinator & Roger Yerdon, Easement Program Manager - NRCS

- **See slides. Important highlights listed below.**
- *ACEP Review -FY24*
 - *Changed the application cut-off this year to be different from CSP/EQIP.*
 - *Change in the reimbursement this year:*
 - We went to 90% of the appraised value of the easement, so prior to that in Nebraska we had a 90% of the eastern value in the West, 85% in the central region at 80% in the eastern to a 10% reduction or 90% of appraised value across the state this year.
 - *NEW Nebraska 2025 IRA priority Areas*
 - *Ephemeral Wetlands are a national IRA ACEP-WRE priority. Playas are an ephemeral wetland and Nebraska is proposing 4 Playa regions for IRA-ACEP-WRE where our playas are common: Central, Rainwater Basin, SW Playas, and Todd Valley.*
 - *We circulated this proposal through the easement subcommittee. **Comments are due by July 12th, 2024.***
 - *Grasslands under high threat of conversion are a national IRA ACEP-ALE priority. Nebraska is proposing 9 Native Grassland Types for IRA-ACEP-ALE/GSS as shown on the map.*
 - *We circulated this proposal through the easement subcommittee. **Comments are due by July 12th, 2024.***
 - *ACEP-ALE-GSS*
 - *We received Farm Bill funding for all 5 GSS applications. No IRA funding was received this year. The 2024 GSS parcels are in Dawes, Sheridan, and Thomas counties.*
 - *All ALE/GSS older than 2022 have been closed and recorded.*
 - *EWPP-FPE*
 - *The 2 pending easements are delayed over changes in legal insurable access to the easement, and legal boundary survey work.*

PARTNER UPDATES:

- **Katie Hickel, NDEE**
 - Last fall won TA from EPA for generation of nonpoint source emergency mitigation plans. Plan has yet to be created but our TA should start in July.
 - **Katie Pekarek, has taken a new position. Will be looking to hire a new coordinator.**
 - **New staff Cydney Calhoun will be the new 401 Coordinator.**
- **Crystal Powers, UNL**
 - **5 State Agreement between NRCS & UNL to extend the two programs below across the Ogallala Aquifer Region.**
 - **Testing Ag Performance Solutions (TAPS) Competition**

- Please reach out to Chris Proctor with Department of Agronomy, if you have any questions or want to get involved.
 - Master Iggigator Programs
 - Please reach out to Crystal Powers if you have any questions or want to get involved.
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WRAP UP

- Personnel updates for NRCS
 - Conor Ward – New position: Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships
 - Scott Inglsbe – New State Public Affairs Officer