

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

March 30, 2016
10 AM to 2:00 PM

*FDACS, Division of Plant Industry, Doyle Conner Auditorium,
1911 S.W. 34th Street, Gainesville, FL 32608*

Present: *Russell Morgan, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Jeff Woods, NRCS; Tony Harvey, NRCS; Roney Gutierrez, NRCS; Jason Bird, NRCS; Joseph Prenger, Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission (FFWC); Georganne Wiltse, NRCS; Nathan Fikkert, NRCS; Annie Dziergowski, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS); Jerry Joiner, Joiner Consulting, Inc.; Cliff Starling, Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS); Sammy Starling, Starling Farm; Dr. David Wright, UF; Cynthia Holloway, FAMU; Tony Grossman, Florida Forest Service; Jessica Bertine, NRCS; Mike Thomas, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP); David Glassner, FDEP; Craig Metz, EnSave; Ann Bowens, NRCS; Charlene Richburg, Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD); Mac Finlayson, Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD); Jean Reddick, Wealth Watchers; Linda Jackson, Wealth Watchers; Kiana Harper, Wealth Watchers; Patricia Green-Powell, FAMU; Carrie Davis, Wealth Watchers; Joel Love, University of Florida Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences (UF-IFAS); Darrell Smith, Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD); Hugh Thomas, FDACS; Janet Wright, Farm Service Agency; Frankie Hall, Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF); Caroline Evans, Rural Development (RD); Ray Hodge, Southeast Milk, Inc.; Mark Asleson, Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC) and Dytra Lewis, NRCS.*

Russell Morgan, State Conservationist, NRCS, opened the meeting with a cheery welcome, allowing the guests to introduce themselves. Meeting started.

Roney Gutierrez, ASTC for Easements, NRCS, provided Agriculture Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Updates. Roney can be reached by phone at 352-338-9502 or by mail Roney.Gutierrez@fl.usda.gov.

- RCPP Update:
 - 2014-2015 4 projects: 4 approved in Florida using EQIP, CSP, HFRP & ACEP funds.
 - 2015-2016 Projects: 3 approved in Florida using EQIP, CSP & ACEP funds.
 - RCPP Website:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>
- ACEP Update:
 - In FY 2016 for the eighth consecutive year, Florida received the largest NRCS Easements program funding allocation in the nation.

- Due to extremely high rainfall during construction season, only one easement has been restored thus far.
- Q. Are the easements perpetual?
 - A. Yes. However, for ACEP-WRE there are also 30 year easements; these only pay 75% of fair market value.

Nathan Fikkert, Conservation Programs Specialist, NRCS, provided a Financial Assistance Programs update. He can be reached by phone at 352-338-9539 or by email at Nathan.Fikkert@fl.usda.gov.

- Please refer to the presentation.
- Q. Can the 60% be used on the operation itself or can it be used in other livestock areas?
 - A. Depends on the funds and other issues. Will have to be assessed.
- Q. Is the Northern Everglades part of the Everglades?
 - A. For program availability and implementation purpose, it involves 16 counties
- Q. How is the 12M divvied up between other sub-accounts?
 - A. We take into consideration the priority resource concerns and the type of agriculture operations the applications are comprised of in determining how the funds are allocated to the subaccounts. Also, there are mandated funding percentages that we have to maintain for EQIP funds agency wide, such as, 60% of EQIP funds made available to assist livestock operations.
 - Comment from Ray Hodge, with Dairy producers struggling right now and in the near future, they won't likely have the resources necessary to enter into conservation projects with EQIP as they have in recent years.

Craig Metz, President and CEO of EnSave, Inc., presented on Farm Energy & Water Efficiency Realization (FEWER); Rationale for Utilizing Technical Service Providers. He can be reached by phone at 800-732-1399 or email craigm@ensave.com.

- Please refer to the presentation for more details regarding the topics presented.

Ann Bowens (NRCS), Janet Wright (FSA) and Caroline Evans (RD), discussed the StrikeForce Initiative. Please see the included packet for their contact information.

- NRCS, FSA & RD are working together to identify ways to address resource concerns of the each 36 counties that have been designated as Strikeforce counties; that means counties that are at or below poverty level.
- Identifying our partners and stakeholders and potential partners and becoming a part of organizations that are currently providing assistance to StrikeForce counties in the state. The makeup of our partners include: the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), IFAS, Local agencies, and local health department, Regional Planning Council, Water Management Districts, Rural Area Opportunity Organizations, Career Source Representatives, DOT, State Department of Agriculture and North Florida Economic Development Partnership.

- A strong relationship has been developed with each organization by sharing information about our programs and well as grant opportunities.
- We coordinate and communicate with our partners and stakeholders much of what is currently being done to address beginning farmers/ranchers, limited resource farmers, and socially disadvantaged landowners.
- Producers/Farmers in those 36 counties still have to go through the normal application process but will get priority points to help improve their competitiveness in the application evaluation process.
- Additional EQIP funds will be made available to producers in the 36 StrikeForce counties to assist historically underserved groups and initiatives:
 - Beginning Farmers and Ranchers (cropland & grazing lands)
 - Socially Disadvantage Farmers (cropland & grazing lands)
 - Native American Indians (grazing lands)
 - Seasonal High Tunnels
 - Long Leaf Pine Initiative
- The StrikeForce Initiative is also being used in conjunction with REDI – Rural Economic Development Initiative. The website for REDI is <http://www.floridajobs.org/business-growth-and-partnerships/rural-and-economic-development-initiative/redi-message-from-the-governor/we-are-redi>

Joel Love, UF-IFAS BMP Education Outreach Coordinator, & Dr. Wright, UF, Sod-based Rotation Cropping Program in Sensitive Springsheds. Please see the included packet for their contact information.

- Please refer to the presentation for more details regarding the topics presented.
- Q. Area Georgia farmers are going away from it?
 - A. Not sure, but if they are going away from it, it would be due to infrastructure and equipment cost. EQIP programs do not pay for equipment.
- Q. Environmental benefits are great, but what about dollar wise?
 - A. Rotation has to be continuous, that is how you see the benefits.
- Q. If your application is associated with livestock, will it make you eligible for EQIP programs?
 - A. Yes, it is eligible to participate as an eligible agriculture related operation type. However, the applicant and land still needs to meet the basic EQIP eligibility requirements, such as, AGI, HEL/Wetland compliance, etc.

Mark Asleson, FWC Regional Biologist, presented on Effectiveness and Efficiency of Treating Invasive Species. He can be reached by phone at 352-732-1225 or by email at Mark.Asleson@MyFWC.com.

- Please refer to the presentation for more details regarding the topics presented.

In closing, Russell thanked everyone for coming out. The meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting: TBD