



Kansas Technical Committee Meeting Minutes May 30, 2019

Meeting with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Kansas Technical Committee (KTC) opened at 9:00 a.m. with Karen A. Woodrich, State Conservationist for Kansas NRCS, moderating.

Introductions

Karen A. Woodrich, State Conservationist

- Currently we have a tentative date of September 12, 2019 for a second KTC Meeting (*this will be changed due to known conflict with KS State Fair Meetings)
- PowerPoint presentation which covered the following topics:
 - Understanding what the State Technical Committee's purpose is for Kansas.
 - Personnel Changes that have occurred in Kansas.
 - Workload and Cycle Time Study.
 - Minor changes proposed to State Technical Committee, Healthy Forest Reserve Program, the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, Watershed Protection, and the Technical Service Provider Assistance provisions to name a few.
 - New 2018 Farm Bill (FB) and the Environmental Quality Initiative Program (EQIP):
 - Expands (EQIP) by addressing new, expected and identified resource concerns; by adapting to and mitigating against, increasing weather volatility, drought resilience.
 - Several new amended definitions for categories like the Veteran & Beginning Farmers/Ranchers.
 - Requires that NRCS notify eligible producers of the option for advance payment and the producer's decision.
 - No significant changes for how Programs operate fiscal year (FY) 2019. In FY 2020, we will see more changes starting October 1 and further into the year. FY19 policy and guidance stayed the same as last year.
 - New FB allows States the option to designate up to 10 high priority practices for increased payments to address:
 - Excess nutrients in ground surface water
 - Drought mitigation/declining aquifers
 - Other environmental priorities, or
 - Targeted watershed
 - Reduced livestock funding target to 50%.
 - Increased wildlife funding to 10%.

- Expands eligibility for water conservation and irrigation system efficiency for certain entities and provides authority for the Secretary to waive Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) and payment limitations.
- Organic production payment limitation changes from 2019 through 2023.
- Allows for progressive implantation of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP).
- Authorized EQIP (general) funding levels: EQIP is projected to increase over the life of the Farm Bill.
- Established the option for Conservation Incentive Contracts in State identified priority areas.
- Streamlining and coordination with Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).
- Adds community colleges as a potential project participant for Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG).
- CIG On-farm Conservation Innovation Trials requiring at least a 3-year agreement.
- New 2018 FB and CSP:
 - Streamlining CSP under the same Chapter as EQIP.
 - Coordination with EQIP.
 - No longer an acre-based program. It will be based on dollar funding like EQIP.
 - \$18/acre national average removed
 - Projected funding level projected to increase over the next 5 years.
 - There is now a CSP Grasslands Conservation initiative.
 - Eligible land includes cropland for which base acres have been maintained at \$18 per acre for a five-year contract with no renewals.
- New 2018 FB and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):
 - RCPP is now a stand-alone program
 - Encourage flexible and streamlined delivery of conservation assistant through partnership agreements
 - Talk with our staff about any ideas you might have for RCPP projects you may want to build.
 - Funding levels for FY 2019 through 2023 = \$300,000,000/year with no donor programs
 - Several new and amended definitions
- Source Water Protection Update:
 - Provides increases incentives related to water quality and quantity to protect drinking water.

Joel A. Willhoft, Resource Conservationist and EQIP Program Manager

Presented a PowerPoint presentation which covered the following:

- FY18 EQIP Accomplishment review

- Question: Was most of Anderson Creek Wildfire Initiative for fences?
 - Joel: Most was for dead trees, grazing land practices, cross fences, and water facilities. But predominantly it was for cedar tree and carcass removal
- Status of 2019 EQIP
 - Currently have over 1,900 applications for over \$50 million in funding requests.
- FY19 projections including additional funds requested.
 - Question: What can you tell us about the National Water Quality Initiative?
 - 319 plan watersheds with the EPA and we coordinate with other partners in this program. We have 2 watersheds in KS that have identified impairments like Mud Creek in Marion County which has a biological impairment. There is also Solider Creek, which is addressing a sedimentation impairment.
 - Question: Regarding the extra funds requested, where does that come from? Is it from other States that don't use their funds
 - Joel: Yes, and from left over funds from contracts completed, cancelled, etc.
 - Question: Regarding sedimentation above federal reservoirs, what kinds of practices are involved with that, typically?
 - Joel: Mostly those that address soil erosion,
 - Question: Can these amounts be broken down by actual practices for all this money?
 - Joel: Yes, we can put that together just email myself or Sharonté.
- 2020 EQIP Update
 - Significant changes with the implementation of Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) replacing the currently used 4-tiered ranking system in ProTracts.
 - Question: Current ranking categories and so on will be eliminated?
 - Joel: Within the ranking categories are sub-accounts. We will develop new funding pools based on criteria – the same or new, but they can become significantly different. But again, it is still in the process of being developed. But it will change the way we have thought about ranking things in the past.
 - Question: How will that effect RCPP?
 - Joel: New projects will fall under CART.
 - Shift our thinking to work with the new CART program as to what exactly our resource concerns are, and what we need to be doing for effective conservation. We want to avoid duplicity.
 - Question: What is NRCS's sense of CART – concerns?
 - Joel: As an agency we are mainly concerned about all the possible unknowns. We will be getting new tools to operate in a new environment. We are optimistic despite the learning curve we are facing. Business will be different in 2020 but our conservation

needs, and our resource concerns are not changing. The unknowns are how we will process putting that conservation on the ground. Until we are given new direction, we will continue to use the existing processes.

- Question: The change from 60% to 50% for livestock. Can funds be moved with the STC's discretion if there are funds available?
 - Joel: Yes, she can choose to do so depending on need.

Chad G. Volkman, Cartographer and CART Coordinator

PowerPoint Presentation on Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART)

- NRCS has a 9-step planning process and there are currently over 70 tools we use, and we can't get all the information joined together. With CART, it minimizes that and makes the backside data accessible.
- CART is designed to streamline efficient customer service, program neutral planning, programs informed by planning process, adaptive learning software, full integration with planning and program policy.
- Overview with the presentation slides of screen shots and the steps a planner would take in CART.
 - Question: What process is in place for maintenance of contracts?
 - Answer: It is stated in the contract that while a practice is under contract – it must be maintained.
 - Question: Are the points assigned determined on national or State level for practices?
 - Chad: It starts on a national level, but it is the goal to be at a State level. Points will vary based on resource concern.
 - Question: Is the system smart enough to determine that a crop, for example, doesn't produce high residue?
 - Chad: It will fall to the FO planners to do a field visit to assess it accurately to rate it correctly.
 - Question: Does CART integrate all USDA Agencies to get history of the land?
 - Chad: Not currently, but that is in the future versions.
 - Question: In ranking, how does CART look at vulnerability?
 - Chad: CART will look at that, but it is dependent on the Program Manager and STC's decision of how much weight to put on a category like vulnerability.
 - Question: What is the geographical reach of a resource priority?
 - Chad: Basically, the same as it is now.
 - Question: Does the tool affect funds allocated to pools?
 - Chad: The tool itself doesn't. That is up the STC and so on for what is funded and what is not.
 - Question: Can multiple scenarios be run?
 - Chad: Yes, on the same ground you can run multiple scenarios to see what is going to be the best

Dean Krehbiel, State Resource Conservationist

- National Bulletin (NB) review about source water protection and protecting drinking water.
- Kansas is pretty much in compliance with the NB directive but as we move forward into 2020, we will want to explore how much more we can do to meet or exceed the source water protection effort.
 - Question: What data sets are we using?
 - Dean: We have several sets available but would like to sit with other groups like the water office to get even more and include multiple partners and others to get as much data as we can to really address those areas/issues which may have slipped under the radar in the past.

Lynn E. Thurlow, Resource Conservationist, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) Programs Manager

PowerPoint presentation for ACEP/WRE Update:

ACEP

- Proposed changes to percentiles for 2020 to 75% versus 90% on sensitive or declining native prairie or grassland types, opening the door for more people to score and rank in ACEP programs and provide protection of highly sensitive natural resources.
- Kansas State doesn't support ACEP financially so reduction would allow better participation for those who may not meet the 90% never broke ground requirement.
- There are changes coming to this in the 2018 Farm Bill regarding matching funds and where that must fall for such things as surveys, closing costs, etc. But this is speculative right now until the final rules are written.

WRE

- Ranking worksheets will remain the same for FY19
- Changes with Farm Bill 2018 will be different based on the new laws established by National headquarters.
- Recommendations on Priority areas – maintain playa wetland regions as a priority area
- No changes nationally from the 1 to 1 ratio for eligible lands to adjacent lands ratio from 2014 to 2018 FB but the STC can provide a waiver.
- Area wide market analysis will be used more than individual appraisals
- Average size of 106 acres and 60-90 % would be cropland and be it the floodplains or playa region. Use FSA to determine cropland definition. And use individual appraisals for those who fail to meet these criteria's
- A company has been hired to do the Area Wide Market Analysis (AWMA) for 2020 ACEP and rates for the Geographical Area Rate Caps (GARC)
- Management of Easements:
 - Compatible Use Applications (CUA) are available to land owners to manage the easement. Existing templates for personal use. They are not however,

recommending Reserved Rights Grazing Area (RRGA) for FY20 because there has been zero interest in it.

- Most compatible uses are granted for 5 years unless we find they are not in compliance with some portion of the agreement.
- Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program:
 - Provides partners opportunities through technical assistance (TA) or financial assistance (FA) to restore, purchase, or manage current easements. Proposals are due by June 14, 2019. Need to work with NRCS State Office staff to develop a proposal.

Paul Gallagher, Risk Management Assessment (RMA)

PowerPoint presentation on Prevented Planting & Cover Crops

- Overview of crop insurance, types of payments.
- Prevented planting information for claiming due to such things as the recent floods; rates and schedules.
- We are incorporating 2018 FB into the provisions that are coming out in the next couple of months and will continue to incorporate the new FB into all provisions.

Trevor Ahring, Ground Water Management – District 3 (GMD 3)

- July 24/25, 2019 there is a Summer Irrigation Tour
- PowerPoint presentation on results from Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) funded project: Mobile Drip on Inner Tower Spans
 - Results of all studies lead us to encourage NRCS to incorporate Mobile Drip Inner spans (MDI) into the EQIP program for those who are interested in water savings.
 - Question: Can't nozzles be built to emit less?
 - Trevor: They can, but it takes only one grain of sand to clog them
 - Question: Have they fixed the issue with not being able to reverse a drip line when it comes to reversing the pivot
 - Trevor: Our production participant did not have an issue based on where they had placed the drip tape, and crop type.
 - Question: Was the loss of runoff into streams considered?
 - Trevor: Not really, because this area of the State is dry and typically has low producing wells, so we didn't want to have run off.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.