

State Technical Committee



Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Jersey State Technical Committee
 220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor, Somerset, NJ 08873

Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 2, 2019, 10 a.m.
 Meeting Location: NRCS State Office, Somerset, NJ

Welcome & Introductions - Carrie Lindig, NRCS

State Conservationist Carrie Lindig convened the meeting at 10:06 a.m. She noted that a lot has happened since the Committee's November meeting. Congress passed a new Farm Bill, and we had a government shutdown. NRCS has not received the FY2019 budget from OMB yet. Everyone present introduced herself and himself and the organizations they were representing.

Those present included:

Tina Notas, D&R Greenway Trust Bill Angstadt, Growmark, FS Diane Gunson, Producer Kristen Meistrell, NJ Audubon Adrian Hyde, NOFA-NJ Mike Westendorf, RCE Brian Cowden, Trout Scapes Jairo E. Gonzalez, NJ Composting Council Bridgett Hilshey, North Jersey RC&D Laura Tessieri, North Jersey RC&D Kathy Hale, NJ Water Supply Authority Kurt Bond, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever Dave Clapp, SADC Kelly Steimle, NJDA Sharon Petzinger, NJDFW-ENSP	Kristina Heinemann, US EPA Region 2 Audrey Moore, US EPA Region 2 Steve Gould, US EPA Beth Freiday, US Fish & Wildlife Nancy Coles, USDA-FSA Bruce Eklund, USDA-NASS Carrie Lindig, USDA-NRCS Christine Hall, USDA-NRCS Gail Bartok, USDA-NRCS Chad Cherefko, USDA-NRCS Lauren Lapczynski, USDA-NRCS Jill Ott, USDA-NRCS Rosalynd Orr, USDA-NRCS Kaitlin Farbotnik, USDA-NRCS Fran Deficcio, USDA-NRCS	Present for part of the meeting Dave Lamm, USDA-NRCS (for the duration of standards presentation) Helena DeMarco, USDA-NRCS (for the duration of her presentation)
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November Meeting Minutes review and acceptance, Correct minutes as needed - Christine Hall, NRCS

Since the minutes were not available prior to the meeting, recommendations for edits were to be taken at the end of the meeting.

There were no action items from November meeting, but at that November meeting Farm Bureau had asked about NRCS's new erosion prediction tool and how the use of it might impact conservation compliance for producers enrolled in or applying for NRCS conservation programs. Christine explained that the new tool that will replace the current erosion prediction tool (RUSLE2) has not been implemented yet, but that question had been raised and considered by staff at NRCS headquarters in Washington DC.



2019 Farm Bill Programs Update, Update on current status of FY19 NRCS programs - Gail Bartok, NRCS

- [Status of financial programs](#) (PPT, 49 kb)

We are halfway through FY2019. EQIP and AMA funds have been allocated for New Jersey. AMA is being offered only in south Jersey this year. Our allocation for easements has not been received yet, but sign-up for ACEP was announced already and closes April 17th.

EQIP fund pools (such as Conservation Activity Plans (CAPS), Aquaculture, American Black Duck, Bobwhite Quail, High Tunnel, Energy, Organic) are set and applications were due in October. Ranking has been done and contracts are being developed. The intent is to have all contracting done by June 1 to free up NRCS field staff for other field work.

EQIP funding for NWQI and GWWA is available, but if we don't spend this allocation, the funds go back to NHQ. Highest ranked NWQI application for manure management exceeds funds allocated, so we have only one contract in NWQI.

NJ NRCS will offer a State CIG this year. \$150K of our EQIP allocation is available for these grants; maximum award is \$75K, but applicants are bound to a 50/50 match for actual cost of awarded projects.

The EQIP Soil Health Initiative is primarily for multi-species cover crop; other practices can be planned in conjunction with cover crop through the EQIP Initiative. Four applications were awarded for multi-species cover crop for three to five years in same field. Other cover crop activities like single species can be contracted under general EQIP, but the Initiative requires that producers install multi-species cover in the same fields for a minimum of three consecutive years.

Over 300 applications were submitted for FY2019 EQIP, and not all eligible projects could be funded. 110 eligible apps not funded for \$3.7 million.

Bruce Eklund will contact Gail Bartok and Fran Deficcio to learn more about the application and selection process.

Carrie mentioned that there are two additional partner positions that will help promote two wildlife conservation designated funding pools:

1. Pheasants Forever is funding a new biologist position to work from the NRCS office at the USDA Service Center in Columbus. The biologist will work with producers in the Pinelands on Quail habitat projects and south Jersey wetland habitats for American Black Duck. The person will also help promote NRCS conservation programs and initiatives that can help them implement these projects.
2. Indiana University of Pennsylvania is funding a position for PA /NJ position to help promote Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA) habitat. The position will be located in the Hackettstown NRCS Service Center, but will service NJ and PA regional coverage with forest management planning.

The balance of EQIP funding is split between North, Central, South Jersey as informed by the Local Work Groups. Every area has a livestock fund pool, and some have forestry. The new Farm Bill mandates that States spend 50% livestock and 10% wildlife.

Current projects underway through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) were discussed. An Agrichem Facility in south Jersey will use the balance of the Delaware River RCPP-EQIP funds. Two applications in the Raritan Basin will exhaust funding left in that agreement. RCPP Black

River Greenway agreement has an EQIP sign-up open now through May 3.

The Columbia Dam project has multiple partners and the EQIP funds set aside by that agreement will help pay for restoration; instream projects. Work at the site is underway now. Sharon Petzinger asked for a copy of the proposal and information on the Black River Greenway. That will be sent to her by Christine Hall.

New Farm Bills facts: AGI stays same at \$900K; Payment limitation remained the same at \$450K, but payment limits for Organic Initiative was increased to \$140K.

Farm Service Agency Program Update CRP, CREP, SAFE Activity, Update on FSA programs - Nancy Coles, FSA

- [FSA FY2018 report](#) (PDF, 26 kb)

Nancy reviewed information as presented on her report, explaining funds disbursed and programs utilized by NJ producers.

They do not yet have much info on new Farm Bill, but CRP was reauthorized. The program in existence since 1985, has five different types of sign-ups, and helps to prevent soil erosion and prevents loss of wildlife habitat on cropland. The CRP cap will be up to 27 million acres by 2023.

Two new programs will be offered. CLEAR 30 will be available in NJ and provides water protection. Aim is for 30-year contracts; participants will receive rental payments for 30 years. Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) is for the prairie region, and is therefore not something that will be offered in New Jersey.

Dave Clapp asked if Nancy had a sense of when CREP would be open. She could not speculate, but said in past years CREP was announced in May, but that no announcement has been made from HQ on timing so far. Bruce Eklund had questions about the process for the farmers to apply or renew. Nancy said she encourages field to contact farmers with expiring contracts so they can take appropriate action if they want to renew or establish a new contract. She said FSA purchases NASS dryland cash rent data to periodically update the CRP soil rental rates (SRR).

Carrie Lindig asked Dave Clapp if SADC permits preserved farmland to be enrolled in CREP. Dave said both EQIP and CREP can be acceptable programs for preserved parcels when used to address soil and water resource concerns. Typically, for practices that have the potential to take land out of production, like riparian buffers, SADC requests NRCS plan the minimum width to address soil and water concerns to limit potential conflicts with the deed of easement. Dave said SADC implemented a long-term lease that would permit a farmer to apply for conservation programs on SADC-owned lands.

New Opportunities with the 2018 Farm Bill, Discuss the 2018 Farm Bill opportunities for NJ - Carrie Lindig, NRCS

The 2018 Farm Bill was passed in December. Carrie noted that it was the Farm Bill that led to the establishment of the State Technical Committee. No new conservation programs have been added and no programs have been removed through the 2018 Bill, but some have been “tweaked.”

NRCS Program rules are still in development. Carrie explained that the Bill mandates that “the USDA Secretary shall ...” and then the various agencies in the Department are tasked with writing rules to reflect the Bill’s mandates. Once written, these rules are posted in the Federal Register where they will

be open for comment. Until these new rules are finalized, NRCS is operating on the rules issued for the last Farm Bill.

Some of the features of the 2018 Farm Bill include:

- Organic cap has been raised to \$140K
- Regional Cons Partnership Program continues and has its own funding. RCPP does not diminish NJ allocation of other programs, such as EQIP and ACEP.
- Increased allocation for all programs
- Urban and community garden conservation funding area a focus in this farm bill: soil testing funding is available for community gardens. (Kaitlin Farbotnik commented that this may improve chances for recent request for soil tunnel variance to be approved).
- Soil health focus; precision ag and soil testing.
- Mandated direction of funding: 10% wildlife, 10% source water protection, 50% livestock

NRCS will use 10% of allocated money for source water protection. Carrie is waiting for call back from DEP on source water protection opportunities. Kristina Heinemann recommended she go directly to utilities and invite them to come to State Tech Committee meetings. Kathy Hale offered to meet with Carrie and NJWSA's executive director to help get her connected to others who would be willing to work on this portion of program.

Kristina Heinemann and Bill Angstadt also pointed out that the NRCS National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) bulletin has opportunity in the area of water protection. Carrie mentioned that she knew that PA targets their NWQI money in their source water watersheds. Bill Angstadt suggested reaching out to the EPA Region 3 staff, as she may be a resource for exploring how NJ could implement here. Examples were cited of NWQI projects that led to 12 digit HUCs being taken off the TMDL list. Removing watersheds from TMDL lists is difficult in New Jersey because very few watersheds are strictly agriculture and there are other possible contaminant sources. Kristina said that New Jersey's focus of NWQI in same watersheds is an advantage. It was also noted that the William Penn Foundation and the Academy of Natural Sciences are taking on water quality monitoring to show success of efforts in the Delaware River Watershed which include the NWQI focus areas.

NJ NRCS has made some inroads into urban farming via community garden soil testing. Our findings have been that about 20% of sites our soil scientists have tested shouldn't be used for food production. NRCS standards for high tunnels restrict the use of barriers and require the plants be grown in the ground. Kaitlin Farbotnik said a variance request has been prepared asking to permit the installation of a barrier on top of contaminated soil for high tunnel in areas with contaminated soils.

ACTION ITEM:

Kristina Heinemann remarked that EPA has data on what contaminants are absorbed by plants and what are not. Brownfields program has some data on this, as well. She also mentioned a Land Revitalization Program, and she will send Christine Hall relevant web links to share with the Committee.

Christine Hall briefly described coming revisions which replace the requirement for full implementation of CNMP. Under the new Farm Bill, progressive implementation of CNMPs is permitted. We can also address existing resource concerns or expected ones. These changes could be a good thing or a segue to a Pandora's box of issues. Carrie explained the requirement to fully implement a CNMP has been prohibitive for contracting with new or beginning farmers.

State Resource Assessment and Customer Assessment, Solicit feedback on two assessment projects currently underway - Christine Hall and NRCS Leadership Development Program Participants, NRCS

Christine Hall said that PA- and NJ-NRCS have created a Leadership Development Program. Ten employees were selected for this 5-month program. They are working in teams to research, assess and propose solutions for various aspects of agency business. Three of the program participants were at the meeting: Helena DeMarco from NRCS Freehold, Kaitlin Farbotnik from NRCS Somerset, and Rosalynd Orr from NRCS Somerset. Rosalynd and Helena were at the meeting to present the topics their groups are addressing.

Customer Assessment - Rosalynd Orr, NRCS Leadership Program

Presenting on behalf of her team: Dayanna Estades, Peter Hoagland, Michelle Pedano, Gabriel Saldana, Rosalynd Orr

- [Customer Assessment](#) – (PPT, 96 kb)

The team Rosalynd Orr represented are doing a comprehensive assessment of existing Agricultural Operations across the state as well as past and current NRCS Customers. They are looking for gaps in service and doing an inventory of current customers. They are using variety of resources to do their study including the NJ Ag census data, state tax assessment data, and NRCS planning and contracting information. Findings are to be presented to leadership on May 14th.

Rosalynd asked for questions and comments, and asked for any recommendations that would enhance the quality of their research. Carrie reiterated her request, especially hoping to receive data that Committee member might have or know of. Bruce Eklund said information on the NASS website might be helpful, and invited Rosalynd to contact him. He said that you can request specific queries from NASS, but recommended you “get in line!” Because they have limited staffing, such requests may take a while to be fulfilled.

It was mentioned that the DEP land use data might be used to find farm-qualified parcel data and that list cross referenced with tax data to generate lists of potential customers. Tax data does have woodland data. Bruce Eklund added Ag Census is interested in a farm that has woodland, but not interested in woodland without a farm.

Kristina Heinemann asked if there were vendors who might have helpful info. Rosalynd says project deadlines might preclude using a commercial route, but suggested that could be Phase 2. Christine Hall said part of the charge to these teams is to consider/propose how to use this data and develop it so that it can be utilized effectively. Kristina said she hoped Rosalynd would come to a future meeting to present their findings.

ACTION ITEM:

Invite this team back to a future State Technical Committee meeting to share the final customer assessment

New Jersey State Resource Assessment (SRA) - Helena DeMarco, NRCS Leadership Program

Presenting on behalf of her team: Kaitlin Farbotnik, Austin Drager, Heather Smeltz, Michael Yacovelli, Helena DeMarco

- [NJ State Resource Assessment](#) (PPT, 1.8 MB)

Helena provided background on the SRA, and discussed how her team would develop an ongoing

process for SRA and not just gather data for this project. She explained that the team divided up and are working on 20 of the 31 natural resource concerns that were either relevant or that data was available for from the 9 Major Resource Concerns: soil erosion, degraded plant condition, soil quality degradation, inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife, excess/insufficient water, livestock production limitation, water quality degradation, air quality impacts, and inefficient energy use. Helena asked for suggestions from the Committee for resources her group might explore to get a good assessment of resource needs in the listed areas. The committee also gave suggestions for where to look for data for a few of the natural resource concerns that are not currently being addressed by the NJ SRA.

Christine Hall asked Kathy Hale if AWRA had a data set that could be used; Kathy said no comprehensive data set is available. Kristen Meistrell said NFWF may have data on water users. She will email contact info to Christine Hall. Laura Tessieri suggested that NJ Water Supply highlights areas of deficit, and Kathy Hale agreed that some of that data may be helpful. Getting list from DEP for water applications for ag or well drilling was mentioned. Kristina Heinemann has a paper that may be helpful from USGS. She gave a copy to Christine. Kathy Hale commented that EPA/DEP databases have oodles of water quality data. Kristina asked if anyone had contacted Rutgers to see if any related research was underway there. Christine Hall said she had contacted Rick Lathrop to ask if stream data is available. Kristen Meistrell said the New Jersey Invasives Strike Team data might be helpful for this project. Mike Westendorf added that barnyard issues may be a factor in water quality. He followed up with a contact that might be useful for the project.

Carrie noted that these teams may not finish by May 15, but they are gathering data that can be used to assess characteristics of resources in New Jersey. Laura Tessieri would be interested in seeing research done on the impact of soil health on air quality and climate.

North Jersey Soil Health Events & Soil Health Focus Group, Report and discussion on No-till and cover crop workshops. Plans for Soil Health Focus Group - Laura Tessieri, North Jersey RC&D and Kaitlin Farbotnik, NRCS

- [North Jersey RC&D presentation](#) (PPT, 23.0 MB)

North Jersey Resource and Development Council (RC&D) has taken up the charge for promoting soil health in their service area. The organization started working with farmers through their aerial seeding program in 2014. Laura's presentation included a photo of the sign that North Jersey RC&D is installing in areas where cover crop has been seeded, explaining that the signage help raise awareness in the community.

Last year North Jersey RC&D coordinated a No-Till Conference. Held on December 13th in Warren County, they had over 110 attendees. They also assembled a long list of sponsors for the event.

- Partners helped advertise/ County Ag Board meetings/ Post cards in mail were helpful
- Agenda included two keynote speakers (PA farmers) and 5 break-out sessions
- Q and A was well-populated. Attendees stayed to ask questions
- Interest from both organic and conventional farmers to receive more info

The conference was followed up in March with a field day at Tom Myers's farm. This was very well attended and topics were very technical. Three main speakers held the group's interest, and there was a lot of networking at the end of presentations.

Looking forward: The Council is looking into how to introduce livestock into cover crop fields. They are planning a train the trainer in 2020, and a manual will be developed to accompany a workshop/seminar

in 2020. ([Flyer with details, PDF, 183 KB](#))

Kristen Meistrell said she knows two growers from Cumberland County that attended the field day. They said it was great. Christian Bench spoke at a meeting in south Jersey (Audubon hosted) recently.

Kaitlin Farbotnik said that Soil Health Focus Group convened by NJ NRCS is going to be reestablished. Anyone who wants to be part of it should contact [Kaitlin Farbotnik](#) or [Christine Hall](#). She intends for members to be active in planning outreach and workshops. The group will start to meet at end of April or early in May. Ultimately, Kaitlin wants to recruit farmers to participate.

One issue that this focus group may address early on is the decrease in payment rate for cover crop. This will likely impact the aerial seeding program. A request to have rate boosted from \$56 to \$66 has been made, but that will still be a lower rate than what was available in the past. This is not the first time the rate has dropped, but it will present a challenge going forward in 2020.

Laura said that aerial seeding makes it easy to seed large areas, but there are other methods to get the seeding done. North Jersey RC&D is looking into alternate methods through their Conservation Innovation Grant, *Cover Crop Experimentation to Achieve Optimum Soil Health in New Jersey*. Kaitlin pointed out that NJRCD has done an enormous amount of work arranging aerial seeding for area farmers, and it would be great if farmers would pick up the organization of this collaborative effort that RC&D has been doing.

NJRC&D-sponsored grazing trainings to be planned

- One for livestock farmers
- One for NRCS staff and partner staff

ACTION ITEM:

Committee people interested in participating in the soil health focus group should send their contact information to [Kaitlin Farbotnik](#) or [Christine Hall](#) by next Friday.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) - Discuss 2019 grant opportunity - Christine Hall, NRCS

CIGs, offered since 2004, are the only true grant offered by NRCS. NJ will offer a state-level competition this year. The grant requires a 50-50 match, and has a \$75K cap. These grants will need to be obligated by September 30 2019, so look for announcement in May/June. The announcement is currently being drafted. There will be no pre-proposals taken this year.

Potential topics for the grant might include: Urban Ag, Forestry-related topics, Soil Health (economic analysis, equipment, process, etc), fresh water mussels. The Committee was invited to send ideas for resource concerns/innovations the grants may focus on to Christine Hall by Thursday, April 4.

The national CIG has not been announced. That competition specifies selected focuses and is more competitive, but offered up to \$2million last year. Christine said to expect other topics for this year's national grant.

Conservation Practice Standards, Review standards to be updated and determine if committee wants to review/comment on any of them - Christine Hall, Dave Lamm and Kaitlin Farbotnik, NRCS

- [Page 8663 Federal Register](#) (PDF, 227 kb)
- [Conservation Practice Standard](#) (PPT Presentation, 8.7 MB)

A comment period for NRCS Practice Standards has been announced via the Federal Register. Christine Hall explained that NRCS practice standards are provided to ensure quality and uniformity. Standards are based on conservation practices, not program participation. They are intended to be program neutral. All 169 standards have to be reviewed this year according to the new 2018 Farm Bill. April 25 is the last day for comments on standards.

The state technical staff can develop State Standards. These must be based on the national standards. They cannot reduce standard requirements, but they can add to them. (Note: Changing a standard requires a variance.) States can also develop an Interim standard for a new conservation practice; but they have to be approved by NRCS.

Kaitlin Farbotnik reported that the Integrated Pest Management (595) Standard was originally planned to be split into two separate standards, but after review of the comments from the federal register notice the agency is going to keep one standard. The revised standard is planned to be Pest Management Conservation System (595). The standard will include requirements for Prevention, Avoidance, Monitoring, and Suppression (PAMS) techniques in the general criteria. Mitigation, which is primarily how the current standard works, will be included in additional criteria. Resistance management techniques and requirements will be included under the considerations section of the standard. As part of the review of the standard, a peer review of Tech Note 5: Pest Management in the Conservation Planning Process, Tech Note 9: Preventing or Mitigating Potential Negative Impacts of Pesticides on Pollinators Using Integrated Pest Management and Other Conservation Practices, and the WinPST program was requested. The tech notes dictate how the 595 Standard is planned, so changes to the Tech Notes may change the way we plan the standard or the tools we use to plan the standard.

There have been no new updates on the Nutrient Management (590) standard from the last meeting. A Tree and Shrub selection tool is under review from NJ NRCS specialists. The tool takes the charts from the Tree and Shrub planting guide that was created in 2018 and makes categories like drainage class, suitability for windbreak, shade/sun requirements, and suitability for pollinators filterable so it is easier to select suitable species based on site condition and purpose. Review of the tool will be completed in two weeks and will be posted to the eFOTG under Section IV.

There was a data call to all states requiring six crop rotations to be run through two different soil erosion prediction tools (WEPP and RUSLE2). The differences in soil loss are being analyzed before WEPP is released as the office soil loss tool. In NJ, there was an increase of soil loss when using WEPP versus RUSLE2.

12:30 - Summer Tour Meeting, Discuss June meeting tour options -Christine Hall, NRCS

Christine shared a list of past State Technical Committee tours/meetings

- [Past Meeting locations and topics](#) (PDF, 55 kb)

Ideas mentioned for the 2019 tour included:

- Urban community garden and/or urban agriculture
- Forestry project – Sharon Petzinger might be able to set up mist net to collect some birds passing by
- CIG project – visit a past CIG funded project

If you have any inspiration for a site to visit, please let C Hall know

Dates are typically a Wednesday. June 19th or 26th were discussed as possible dates

Open Discussion, Discussion of upcoming events and other hot topics from attendees - Carrie Lindig, NRCS

Bruce Eklund said the Ag Census is coming out. He brought a publication for partners that will help them encourage farmers to participate in the census. The publication, *Talking About NASS*, explains the purpose of census, and Bruce encouraged Committee members to take a copy or two for their organization. He said the census is mandatory. Surveys by ag specialty are also mandatory.

Sharon Petzinger said we are losing habitat for upland sandpipers, and we may be more reliant on farmers to protect existing habitat. She will confer with Christine Hall to see what NRCS may be able to do to help.

Kelly Steimle asked if Local Work Groups will meet this year. Carrie Lindig said the groups will be convened every other year. These groups will be convened again next year.

Christine Hall mentioned that the Conservation Application Ranking Tool (CART), a new NRCS tool for conservation planners, is coming. Input from our partners may be requested prior to next meeting. Anyone who wants a copy of or a link to the document explaining CART should contact Christine Hall. Kathy Hale asked about the Resources Stewardship Evaluation Tool (RSET). Christine said RSET still exists, but many of the concepts have been built into CART. Carrie explained that CART is intended to merge tools already used by NRCS employees to minimize need for input of data.

Carrie Lindig announced that Chad Cherefko, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations has accepted a new position and is moving to Hawaii in May.

Adjourn – Carrie Lindig, NRCS

The meeting was adjourned at 1:11 p.m.

Post meeting corrections received for November minutes. These corrections were made prior to posting “approved” minutes of the [November 7, 2018 meeting](#) (PDF, 176 kb) to the NJ NRCS website:

- From Nancy Coles: Change Farm Bill FY to “new.”
- From Gail Bartok: Change “Stephanie Moore” to “Stephanie Miller” in two places.