

State Technical Committee



Natural Resources Conservation Service

220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor, Somerset, NJ 08873

Meeting Date: Wednesday, June 19, 2019

Meeting Location: Greater Newark Conservancy, Essex County

The New Jersey State Technical Committee meeting on Wednesday, June 19, 2019, convened about 1:45 p.m. at the Greater Newark Conservancy in Essex County following the morning tour. The three urban farms the Committee visited were: Coeur et Sol Urban Farms in East Orange, Ironbound Community Corporation's Down Bottom Farms in Newark, and Greater Newark Conservancy's Hawthorn Avenue Farm in Newark.

Welcome and Introductions

State Conservationist Carrie Lindig opened the meeting, and attendees introduced themselves and the organizations they represented. Robin Dougherty, Executive Director with Greater Newark Conservancy joined the group briefly to extend a welcome to their facility and to explain the work they are doing. Karen Rutberg, Urban Farm Manager with the Conservancy, was with the Committee members throughout the day and led the tour at Hawthorn Farm.

Those present for the Committee meeting were:

Andrew Burnett, NJ Fish and Wildlife
Becky Laboy, Ocean SCD
David Reilly, Cape Atlantic SCD
Cindy Roberts, NJ State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC)
Kelly Steimle, NJ Department of Agriculture
Meredith Taylor, Rutgers University
Karen Rutberg, Greater Newark Conservancy
Chelsea Hernandez, Coeur et Sol Urban Farms LLC

Audrey Ting, Coeur et Sol Urban Farms LLC
Justin Allen, Isles Inc.
Laura Tessieri, North Jersey RC&D
Liz Thompson, NJ Farm Bureau
Diane Gunson, Kingfisher Farm
Jairo Gonzalez, NJ Composting Council
Mitch Mickley, NJ Water Association
Audrey Moore, USEPA Region 2
Kristina Heinemann, USEPA Region 2
Beth Freiday, US Fish and Wildlife
Nancy Coles, USDA-FSA

Joseph Henry, USDA-RD
Carrie Lindig, USDA-NRCS
Christine Hall, USDA-NRCS
Gail Bartok, USDA-NRCS
Gabriel Saldana, USDA-NRCS
Rosalynd Orr, USDA-NRCS
Barbara Phillips, USDA-NRCS
Mark Kearney, Greater Newark Conservancy joined the meeting as it was in progress

The minutes from the April meeting were reviewed. At the April meeting Kristina Heinemann had mentioned EPA had data on plants that absorb contaminants. Kristina will share this information with the committee. The newly re-established Soil Health Focus Group met, and will be meeting again in the coming weeks. The meetings notes were approved as presented.

- April 2, 2019 Meeting Minutes



Reflections on Tour sites visited

Mark Kearney, who farms the Conservancy's Hawthorn Farm, was introduced and he joined the meeting as this discussion started.

Liz Thompson said Farm Bureau can make inquiries about the prohibition of installing the plastic cover on high tunnels on property owned by the school district that was discussed at the Greater Newark Conservancy's Hawthorn Avenue Farm.

Carrie Lindig pointed out that new Farm Bill charges the US Secretary of Agriculture to establish an Office of Urban Ag. The Secretary of Agriculture has assigned this responsibility to NRCS but NRCS is waiting to see if they would get additional funding from the Appropriations Committee for this specialized office before they move forward with establishment.

Joe Henry from USDA-RD says Rural Development has programs for rural areas, but many programs don't hold ag producers to the rural restrictions. There are renewable energy grants available for ag producers, and rural small businesses. He talked with Chelsea about the Value-Added Producer Grant. Value Added Producer Grants are projected to begin accepting applications before September. RD also offers Loan Guarantees that for-profit and non-profit businesses are eligible for, but these are not usually for agriculture. RD sends those requests to FSA. There are some cases where RD can issue loan guarantees in urban areas for local foods initiatives. 1-year leases may present an underwriting issue for loans. Joe had to leave the meeting before it adjourned, but left his business cards, and invited Chelsea and others to contact him with questions, with a promise to pursue getting answers for them.

Nancy Coles said USDA-FSA has loans for farm storage needs, for produce to be moved from point-of-origin to market, and micro-loans for certain uses of farm vehicles. Help with cost of retrieving local produce from various farms for market not available through FSA programs.

2019 Farm Bill Programs Updates

Easement and Financial Programs - Gail Bartok, NRCS

FY19 EQIP

- \$4.9 million received by NJ NRCS. To date, we have spent 66% of our allocation
- 30% spent on livestock; national target is 50%
- 10% National target for wildlife; no way to measure it in NJ

RCPP – EQIP and ACEP contracts underway

- the Nature Conservancy Columbia Dam- approximately \$450K allocation; \$142,000 spent so far on restoration work
- NJ Water Supply Authority Raritan Basin- \$225,000 original allocation, balance left is \$7,000
- NJ Conservation Foundation Black River Greenway- \$100,000 allocation, signup held for 5/3, 4 apps received
- SADC- WRE in Salem County signup held ended 5/24, 1 application received

ACEP

- ALE- NJ received \$3,058,000 for FY19. \$400K obligated for two parcels in Salem. NJ will send \$2.5 million back to NHQ. We expect more projects funded in FY20, after final rules and deed templates are approved
- WRE general = 3 parcels in Sussex, Salem, Hunterdon will use up allocation of \$600,000.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG): Update on 3 current grant opportunities - Christine Hall, NRCS

Three funding opportunities are currently available for Conservation Innovation Grants. NJ has announced a state level CIG competition. We have allocated up to \$150,000 for eligible projects in the priority areas of 1) Urban Ag, 2) Soil Health, 3) Forest Health, and 4) Hydroponics. There is also a national level CIG opportunity with funds available for larger projects in the priority areas that have been identified in that funding opportunity. The third CIG option is On Farm Trials and is a new addition from the 2018 Farm Bill. Information all three funding opportunities is available at www.grants.gov.

The state and national CIGs focusing on urban agricultural spurred a discussion on some of the challenges faced by urban ag. Meredith Taylor shared information with the group relating to the 5-acre rule as part of the right-to-farm. The homeland rule process and 5-acre rule for right to farm, create challenges for sustaining agriculture in urban areas. Meredith stressed that policy framework is important. With continual uncertainty about access to land, there is no sense of permanence for urban ag producers. Year-to-year leases and zoning limitations produce a lot of uncertainty and inhibit investment in developing ag operations. Meredith recommended that those interested in urban ag engage with the NJ Secretary of Agriculture on these issues.

The NJ Dept of Ag and Dept. of Health have rolled out programs for urban ag. There is a need for more to enter the discussion to find some solutions.

Farm Service Agency Program Update CRP, CREP, SAFE Activity, Update on current status of FY19 FSA programs - Nancy Coles, FSA

- FSA Conservation Status Report (PDF, 66 kb)

CRP Update – FSA stopped accepting CRP offers last fall when 2014 FB authority expired.

FSA carefully analyzed the 2018 FB language and determined that a limited signup prioritizing water quality practices in fiscal year 2019 would further conservation goals. This decision made sense for producers, as FSA moves forward to implement the 2018 FB provisions for CRP.

SU52 for both Continuous CRP and CREP began Monday, June 3rd and will conclude on Friday, August 23rd.

The required cropping history period was updated to 4 of the 6 crop years from 2012 through 2017.

Continuous CRP SRRs will be at the rate of 90% of rates effective on 9/28/18. SIP, PIP and management activity payments are not authorized. C/S is authorized for practice establishment.

CREP terms and conditions effective on September 28, 2018 will continue for SU52. SRRs, SIP, PIP and C/S for practice establishment are authorized. Management activity payments are not authorized.

August 23 – Deadline for producers to submit signed offers and for FSA to deliver offers to NRCS.

September 13 – Deadline for NRCS to complete all conservation plans and provide to FSA.

September 30 – Deadline for COC or CED to Approve CRP-1 and enter approval in offer software (COLS).

A one-year CRP-1 extension is being offered to existing CRP participants who have expiring contracts of 14 years or less.

FSA will open a CRP General SU in December 2019 and a CRP Grassland SU later.

2020 Farm Bill Programs Topics

The new **CART** (Conservation Assessment and Ranking) **tool** is coming to NRCS this fall. This will alter the way NRCS applications for Farm Bill conservation programs are assessed and ranked. Once we have more information, the Program Subcommittee will be re-convened to discuss the impact of this new tool and make decisions about how the tool should be configured for NJ.

NRCS NJ announced the FY2020 EQIP application period will end August 30. In the past years, the deadline was set in October, but this year it was set for August to facilitate more time to provide conservation plans for program applicants.

The National Water Quality Initiative has been offered in three southern NJ watersheds since 2012. In 2020 the program will require more watershed inventory and data collection and at this time, NJ NRCS is unsure of whether we will continue to offer NWQI in these watersheds. Christine Hall will schedule a meeting with Kathleen Hitchner to discuss the new program and how this will impact NJ participation. The latest Farm Bill added a provision for Source Water Protection requiring that 10% of EQIP be spent in Source Water Protection Areas. New Jersey NRCS with the help of the State Technical Committee will have to identify priority watersheds for drinking water.

Boosting easement applications: Cindy Roberts said that the absence of the new deed template required for the 2018 Farm bill was a problem for SADC. This, and that there was too much delay in the process this year, was prohibitive for SADC and some of the reason why they did not submit any ALE easement applications in FY19.

Conservation Practice Standard Changes

- National Handbook of Conservation Practices (PDF, 139 kb)

Christine Hall noted that standards are reviewed every 5 years. She distributed a copy of the May Notice from the National Handbook of Conservation Practices. She asked Committee members to look through all the standards on the list and consider if they want to review/comment on any of these revised conservation practice standards before NJ adopts them. Kaitlin Farbotnik will send the list of practices to the committee along with a deadline to reply if you want to review/comment. Christine explained that NJ NRCS would like to have these updated by October 1. Additionally, an email will be sent to the Committee with a request for volunteers to review the Nutrient Management Standard and discuss it.

- Nutrient Management – Phosphorus Index and others
- Discussion on the May release of updated Conservation Practice Standards

Open Discussion

Liz Thompson: NJ Farm Bureau reviews issues and sets policy based on input from Farm Bureau members in November. This determines what issues the staff can work on. She urged urban producers present at the meeting to contact County Boards of Agriculture to share concerns. The Board of Ag can take concerns to Farm Bureau at Board of Directors meeting in September for consideration. The staff of Farm Bureau can only work on priorities that are set by Farm Bureau policy.

Chelsea Hernandez asked who she should talk to about zoning? Cindy Roberts suggested the League of Municipalities might help. She said zoning is a big limitation; overlay zones only address vacant lots, and a 200-foot notice is cost prohibitive. In doing overlay zoning, you only have to address the bordering neighbors. Perhaps APA could help; the NJ Planning Association has guidelines. Cindy also recommended setting up more tours at existing operations to increase understanding of what urban ag is. Small scale urban work could have greater impact. Policy to support urban ag is needed.

- Ohio Congresswoman Marcia Fudge has championed the promotion of urban agriculture in Ohio
- Urban Mayors Association – Rosa Diaz formerly ran it
- John S Watson Institute for Public Policy, part of Thomas Edison State University

Jairo Gonzalez announced the US Composting Council Chapter is holding a summit at the EcoComplex in October and he invited members to attend.

Andrew Burnett: Ruffed Grouse season is closed. This species needs habitat, and NJ has none. A newly formed position (Farm Bill Biologist) is now filled and Quail Unlimited partner employee is working from NRCS Columbus field office. He might help with that issue.

Next Meeting Date: November at Somerset State Office

Adjourn