State Technical Committee Meeting – 9/12/19

ALL POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS ARE ON THE WEBSITE.

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(There is a 2m blank time from the start of the recording to the beginning of the meeting. You can pause by pressing 8, fast forward by pressing 9 & rewind by pressing 7.)

Attendees: Craig Derickson, Brad Soncksen, Tami Nordman, Sam Kazda, Corey Brubaker, Aaron Hird, Lavaine Moore, Elbert Traylor, Mark Brohman, George Cunningham, Carla McCullough, Dan Ruterbories, Bruce Rieker, Al Juhnke, Burdette Peining, Larry Hudkins, Kent Zimmerman, Sam Radford, Andrew Pierson, Marcia Trompke, Adam Smith, Steve Roth, Jennifer Swanson, Susan France, Kimberli Stine, Scott Gonnerman, Eric Zach, Katie Pekarek, Randy Epperson Tom Schleif; via phone: Ryan Lodge, Annette Sudbeck, Mike McDonald;

WELCOME AND THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE! – Craig Derickson, State Conservationist, NRCS

❖ Lots of good things to cover today.
❖ Explains the reason we have the State Technical Committee
   o Also about the Local Work Group Meetings
❖ FY2020 begins Oct 1
   o Beginning of more new farm bill changes than what we made in 2019
   o 2020 will be NEW
      ▪ CART
      ▪ Emphasis on soil health
      ▪ Source Water
         • Water Quality
         • Irrigation Technology
      ▪ Wildlife
      ▪ Top 10 Practices
❖ Do not have any new instructions yet and probably won’t until after October 1, between December and January.
“HEL COMPLIANCE” – Corey Brubaker, State Conservation Agronomist, NRCS

❖ BACKGROUND:
  o Began in 1985 – Food Security Act
  o Must control erosion on HEL land to remain eligible for farm programs
    ▪ FSA loans and financial assistance programs
    ▪ NRCS and FSA conservation program benefits
  o Federal crop insurance premium subsidies (with 2014 farm bill)
  o On fields determined to be HEL, the following erosion must be controlled
    ▪ Sheet and rill erosion
    ▪ Ephemeral gully erosion
    ▪ Wind erosion
  o Does not include classic gully, streambank, or other erosion

❖ STATE GUIDANCE
  o In the late 1980’s, after the 1985 Food Security Act was passed, NRCS at the state level was allowed to develop “Alternative Conservation Systems” that would meet HEL compliance requirements
  o In Nebraska, ephemeral gullies were required to be controlled to prevent offsite damage

❖ 2015 OIG Review of HEL Compliance in several states
  o Found inconsistencies in how states were addressing HEL Compliance
  o NRCS National Office clarified HEL compliance policy effective Jan. 2, 2017 – required HEL compliance to be implemented uniformly across the nation
  o One item affected Nebraska
    ▪ Ephemeral gullies need to be controlled even if the soil isn’t leaving the field and causing offsite damage.
  o Circular 180-19-2
    ▪ Allow an exemption when it is determined that ephemeral erosion is caused by offsite runoff conditions and not caused by a person’s farming activity.
    ▪ Clarified the criteria related to granting a variance when ephemeral erosion is caused by an abnormal weather event.
      • Must document that precipitation exceeded a 10-year frequency event.

❖ Ephemeral Gully Erosion
  o Can be smoothed / reshaped using tillage
  o Can still cross them with equipment

❖ Original Guidance for Nebraska Compliance Reviews 2017-19
  o The NRCS national office allowed Nebraska 3 years to make the adjustment to the updated HEL compliance policy.
    ▪ If we find ephemeral gullies needing treated, that weren’t required to be treated before, we give producers a variance and they have one year to install necessary practices and will be reviewed again next year.
    ▪ If producers have a lot of work to be completed, we can give them until Dec. 31, 2019 to get all practices installed.
Compliance Review Results

- 2016 represents our results prior to adjusting our compliance review process – 73 variances given; 2.2% were out of compliance
- 2017 – variances jumped to 396 – mainly due to variances given to producers to fix ephemeral gully erosion within one year
- 2018 – 2.3% of tracts out of compliance – not much different than 2016
- Key message – the vast majority of producers that were given a variance, are fixing their ephemeral gullies and remaining in compliance.

Updated Guidance for Nebraska Compliance Reviews 2020 - ??

- Due to the success in giving producers a variance, and a high percentage of producers fixing their ephemerals, we will continue to provide producers with a variance for ephemeral erosion the first year they are reviewed and give them a year to correct the problem.

HOW DO WE PREVENT EPHEMERALS?

- Cover Crops could be planted on the whole field or just in the ephemeral gully areas
- EARTHWORK IS SOMETIMES THE BEST ALTERNATIVE
  - Grassed Waterways
  - Terraces
  - WATER & SEDIMENT CONTROL BASINS

Using EQIP to Help Farmers

- Nebraska NRCS – in 2017, a special fund was set up within our EQIP program to assist producers with HEL land to install practices
- We are continuing to allocate EQIP funding to address ephemeral gully control on HEL cropland.
- WEPP and RUSLE2
  - NRCS currently uses RUSLE2 to determine sheet and rill erosion rates
  - NRCS plans to move to WEPP in 2020 for sheet and rill erosion prediction
    - WEPP will primarily be used for planning
    - RUSLE2 will continue to be used for HEL compliance decisions for sheet and rill erosion

Comments:

Craig: We are going to continue using variance approaches to make sure we are working with farmers who need technical assistance to meet compliance expectations.
Soil Health Defined:

- The continued capacity of the soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans.

Is the Soil Healthy?

- Soil Health is changed through natural processes and over time with management.
- Every Soil has Unique Physical Properties developed by the 5 Soil Forming Factors: **Time, Aspect, Parent Material, Climate, Biology**.
- Soil Function is influenced by biology which is impacted by management. (90% of Soil Function is mediated by soil microbes)
- Supporting the biological activities can improve the Functions of the Soil.

Soil Health Assessment is based on Dynamic Soil Properties

- As the Dynamic Soil Properties change the Soil Functions change
  - **Dynamic Soil Properties**
    - Biological Activity
    - Bulk Density
    - Color
    - Aggregate Stability
    - Structure
  - **Soil Functions**
    - Nutrient cycling
    - Water (infiltration & storage)
    - Filtering and Buffering
    - Physical Stability and Support
    - Habitat for Biological Activity

- A Common problem in Nebraska
  - Tillage Induced
  - Root Restrictive
  - Compaction Layers
  - In many soil types we have farmed the soil’s ability to withstand disturbance out of the top soil!

Root Restrictive Bulk Density

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Texture</th>
<th>Ideal bulk densities for plant growth (grams/cm³)</th>
<th>Bulk densities that affect root growth (grams/cm³)</th>
<th>Bulk densities that restrict root growth (grams/cm³)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sands, loamy sands</td>
<td>&lt; 1.60</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>&gt; 1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy loams, loams</td>
<td>&lt; 1.40</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>&gt; 1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy clay loams, clay loams</td>
<td>&lt; 1.40</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>&gt; 1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silts, silt loams</td>
<td>&lt; 1.40</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>&gt; 1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silt loams, silty clay loams</td>
<td>&lt; 1.40</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>&gt; 1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy clays, silty clays, clay loams</td>
<td>&lt; 1.10</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>&gt; 1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clays (&gt; 45% clay)</td>
<td>&lt; 1.10</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>&gt; 1.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Note: The engineering standard soil bulk density is 1.33
  - Top Soil = 1.43, Plow Pan starts at 1.90, ends at 1.78
  - No Tillage systems **Retain or Sustain** soil structure.
  - Biological Activity **Regenerates** soil structure.
  - Cover Crops can have a HIGHER Rooting Pressure Tolerance
Building Resilient Soil is achieved by taking Step 1 - Implement the Soil Health Principles.

USDA/NRCS Conservation Programs

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - Conservation Practice Incentives
    - Physical Structures and Management Practices
  - Soil Health Management System **Applying the Soil Health Principles**
  - Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
  - Residue and Tillage Management (329)
  - Cover Crops (340) – Field wide or Critical Area
  - Forage and Biomass Planting (512)
  - Prescribed Grazing (528)
  - All Other Supporting Structural Practices...
- 2018 Farm Bill Updates
  - Mandatory Wildlife related funding increased from 5% to 10%
  - Mandatory Livestock related funding decreased from 60% to 50%
  - A Source Water Protection Mandatory funding category was created requiring 10% of total

- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
  - Conservation Stewardship Incentives
  - Management Enhancements
  - Whole Farm Conservation Plans
  - **Enhancing Conservation Management**
    - Cover Crop (340) Activities:
      - Erosion Control, Increase Soil Organic Matter, Minimize Soil Compaction, Utilize Excess Soil Nutrients, Suppress Weeds
    - Conservation Crop Rotation (328) Activities:
      - Reduce Erosion, Increase Soil Organic Matter, Improve Soil Health, Address Soil Compaction, decrease excess nutrients, relieve pest pressure, provide wildlife food, shelter and habitat

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
  - Regionally funded, targeted, Conservation Initiative
    - Matching the Conservation Investment of Partners

- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)
  - Regionally funded, targeted, Conservation Initiative
  - Focused use of EQIP funds in to address critical concerns

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program and National Water Quality Initiative areas are a Regional USDA funding source for special EQIP Incentives
  - Matching funds from Conservation Partners
  - Geographically Targeted Areas – NRD, Watershed, Statewide
  - Addressing Priority Resource Concerns
  - 2019 RCPP Application period 9/3-12/3/19

- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)
  - Conservation Planning, Design and Application
    - Voluntary participation
Cover Crop for Wildlife Habitat
- RCPP with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in Hitchcock, Red Willow and Furnas Counties
- Cover Crop & Access Control w/ Loss of Forgone Income - $61.20/ac
- 2017 - 5 contracts, 2018 – 20 contracts, 2019 – 46 contracts
- The concept can now be applied statewide

Program Incentives support is a Learning Curve
- The USDA/NRCS conservation incentives reduce the financial risk of the application of conservation work.
  - EQIP – 3-year contracts with incentive money
    - Representing 50% of the estimated cost of the Conservation Practice
  - CSP – 5-year contracts providing stewardship payments
    - Representing the cost of enhancing the Stewardship Practice
- CTA – Technical Advice offered upon voluntary requests

2017 Census of Agriculture Survey Data
- The Director NASS explained, The Census allows for America to tell the changing story of agriculture by gathering information directly from farmers across the nation and has been conducted since 1840!
- The Census of Agriculture provides the only source of comprehensive agricultural data for every State and county in the nation.
- There was a 74.5% response rate in 2017, nationally.
- The Census provides a key “Measurement of Success”.

Percentages of Harvested Nebraska Cropland by Tillage Practices, 2012 and 2017
- See slides

EQIP Funds Trending - 2013-17
- See slides

Total vs. USDA Conservation Program Cover Crop Acres
- See slide

Incentive and Enhancement Rates
- EQIP – Multi Species Cover Crop Incentive
  - 2017 - $43.63/ac  Max $10,000/person/year
  - 2018 - $44.36/ac  Max $10,000/person/year
  - 2019 – $33.97/ac  Max $7500/person/year
- CSP – Multi Species Cover Crop Enhancement Rate
  - 2017 – Cover crop - $9.70/ac
  - 2018 – Cover crop - $9.86/ac
  - 2019 – Cover crop - $9.44/ac

Nebraska NRCS Soil Health Initiative
- Partnerships remain our central focus.
- Continue to geographically distribute key outreach and educational resources.
- Example: Fund and monitor a network of Demonstration Farms across the state.
- The Goals of the EQIP Demonstration Farms
  - Provide a local source of information to answer common questions
  - Validate Soil Health Management Systems locally via case studies and field days.
  - Focus on outreach, education, training and partnership opportunities
Demonstration Farms – On Farm Research
- A 5-year, field scale, comparison of two Cover Crop Adaptive Management Activities
- A system comparison throughout a 5-year expanded crop rotation
- Randomized and Replicated Plots
- Soil Health Assessments, Soil Lab Analysis and Economic Evaluations
- Opportunity to include partners, including UNL Extension & NE On Farm Research Network.
- 17 In Field Projects – 21 comparisons
  - Cover Crop Vs No Cover Crop (5)
  - Cover crop Mix comparisons (4)
  - Grazed Vs Not Grazed (3)
  - Drilled Vs Broadcast (2)
  - High Carbon Cover Crop vs Low Carbon Cover Crop (2)
  - Nitrogen Study, When and How Much from the Cover Crop(1)
  - Early Termination vs Late Termination (1)
  - Frost Terminated Cover Crop vs Winter Hardy Cover Crop (1)
  - Companion Cover Crop vs Dormant Seeded Cover Crop (1)
  - Monoculture Cover Crop vs Multispecies Cover Crop (1)

QUESTIONS & Comments

Q: Steve - Any specific challenges or benefits to connecting soil health to center pivot irrigation since it is so repetitive each year?
A:
- Rate of change, impacts irrigation and soil health, saves irrigation waters
- Land values are important to people, so taking care of the lands is very important to producers

Q: Kim - Is all of your work on primarily on cropland, or do you plan to work on other land uses?
A:
- Demonstration ranch efforts (rangelands) are beginning. 8-10 ranches, comparing their management side by side treatments. Grazing management.
- Missouri is doing pasture land, soil health management vs. tillage
  - Low soil infiltration rates
- South Dakota infiltration

Q: What I see missing, I’m wondering how you’re incorporating this with red meat. We have a lot of manure and need a lot more. Let’s talk about manure management. I want to increase my soil health and walk into your office, how are you going to incorporate it?
A:
- Nutrient management is a sector we are heavily focused on, it has been identified as the gap. Manure \(\rightarrow\) worth.
- Well document, subject matter experts in it.
- The sentiment has been averse to the conversation. UNL Has categorized farms with manure as a higher ecological function.
- We should eventually do nutrient management and cover crop together as a cost share
- Compost and composted manure, manure for worth
- ??: I fear NRCS and FSA are too program focused, we don’t have enough

Q: Farm Bureau would love to work with producers on this as well. Soil health initiative how does that coincide with the Health soil task force?
A:
- NRCS Nebraska formed a strategic plan
• Sen. Tim Gragert
• National headquarters provides support, so states and producers feel that there is more power behind them, therefore are more receptive to change and productivity
• Any idea what the parameters of the report will look like for January of 2021.
  o UNL, NE Corn growers, UNL Extension round table. We formalized hurdles, communication (central hub of soil health needed in NE), collaboration is kind of a shotgun approach, future research needs for Nebraska
  o Task force is going around and instead of reinventing the wheel, how to adapt it and make it better for Nebraska specifically

PROGRAM UPDATES – Brad Soncksen, Assistant State Conservationist – Programs, NRCS (Highlights)

❖ 2018 FARM BILL “Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018”
  o FY 2019
    ▪ Existing Rules and Mandates
  o FY 2020
    ▪ Phase 1 – Interim Rules
  o FY 2021
    ▪ Phase 2 – Final Rules
  o 2018 Farm Bill Process
    ▪ Incorporate decisions into draft interim regulations
      • Obtain approval from Department and OMB
      • Publish in Federal Register for 60-day comment period
    ▪ Review comments received on interim regulation
    ▪ Prepare final regulation and publish in the Federal Register

❖ ACEP – Funding: $450 million each year ($2.25 billion); increase of $225 million
  o FY19 ACEP-ALE – Implementation
    ▪ ALE (General)
      • Application on 2 parcels
        o 4039 acres
      • Entity holding easement
        o NE Land Trust
      • Final Estimated Federal Cost = $675,010.00
    ▪ RCPP – ALE
      • 3 Applications
        o 348 acres
      • Entities holding easements
        o Little Blue NRD, Tri-Basin NRD and the Upper Big Blue NRD
      • Final Estimated Federal Cost = $472,420.00
  o FY19 ACEP-WRE Implementation
    ▪ Nine offers to purchase – Accepted
      • WRE
        o 7 approved
        o 439.3 acres
        o $2,072,534.00
      • WREP
        o 1 approved
        o 15.6 acres
        o $62,478.00
• **RCPP-WRE**
  - 1 approved
  - 42.0 acres
  - $366,105.00

  - We had 4 applications cancel late in the process which did not allow us to move down our list of applications. These totaled 308 acres for an estimated $975,434.00.

  - **FY2020 ACEP-WRE Compensation**
    - For FY2020 we are going to request an extension of the FY2019 Area Wide Market Analysis (AWMA).
    - Land values are within +/- 10% since the 2019 AWMA was completed.
    - In FY2021, we will be required to obtain a new AWMA.

  - **NEBRASKA AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM – WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENTS (ACEP-WRE) Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC’s) for FY 2020**
    - Not to EXCEED RATE = $4,488.00 for all land uses.
    - Need to Review this with the State Technical Committee before this is approved & finalized.
      - Any changes on the land use or areas that you would like to see changed?
      - Note: No Recommendation for changes. Map and rates as reviewed have been submitted to NHQ for approval.

  - **2019 SPRING FLOODING**
    - **EWP – Floodplain Easement Program**
      - Nebraska received an initial allocation of $5,116,134.00 with a Reserve of $4,348,714.00.
      - We have interest of an estimated amount over $20,000,000.00.
      - Look for interest to increase once we announce official sign-up.
      - Need comments on the ranking program sent to bryan.euse@usda.gov or thomas.schleif@usda.gov by Friday, September 27, 2019.
      - SEE HANDBOUT FOR DRAFT RANKING TOOL
        - Need to have suggestions from the State Technical Committee for any changes.
        - Note: Multiple recommendations were received and incorporated into the final ranking tool documentation for use in FY 2020.

  - **CSP**
    - **Funding**
      - $700 Million in FY19
      - $723 Million in FY20
      - $750 Million in FY21
      - $800 Million in FY22
      - $1 Billion in FY23

    - **NEBRASKA – Results of 2019 General Signup**
      - Applications = 614
      - New contracts = 225
      - Approx. acres in contracts = 516,000
      - Contract obligations = $22.9M
      - New contracts in 59 counties
      - Counties with highest number of new contracts:
        - Harlan, Lincoln, Nemaha
Popular CSP Activities in 2019
- Prescribed Grazing
- Pest Management
- Cover Crops
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Nutrient Management

Enhancements
- 225 enhancements – 9 new in 2019
- Requests for new enhancements must be made prior to the end of December each year.

2019 Payment Rates (unchanged from 2018)

CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative
- The Agricultural Improvement Act (2018 Farm Bill) authorized NRCS to enroll producers with eligible base acres in GCI contracts from FY2019 – 2023. The GCI assists producers in protecting grazing uses; conserve and improve soil, water and wildlife resources; and achieving related conservation values.
  - Eligible Land
    - Base acres documented as grass, idle, or fallow through the years 2009 – 2017.
    - Must address a resource concern associated with grassland.
  - Applicant Eligibility
    - Must be the operator, owner or other tenant, and must have control of the land and have an interest in the operation where the base acres are located.
  - Payment = $18 /acre/year
  - Contract term = 5 years
  - Applicants can only enroll once during the 5-year farm bill
  - Nebraska 2019 GCI signup
    - 246 contracts
    - 73 different counties
    - $1.5M in obligations
    - Brown, Holt, Lancaster, Lincoln and Thurston have most contracts (>10).

RCPP –
- Provides mandatory funding at $300 million (from $100 million)
  - 50% of available funds for state or multi-state projects
  - 50% of available funds for projects within critical conservation areas
  - Removed National funding pool
- Remains 7% funding contributions from covered programs
- Adds CRP and Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act as covered programs
  - Land enrolled into the new CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative is not eligible
- Agreements can be for longer than 5 years if longer period is necessary to meet the objectives of the program
- A partnership agreement may be renewed for a period not to exceed 5 years.
- Provides ability to renew partnership agreements through an expedited non-competitive process if Secretary determines that a project has met or exceeded the objectives of the project and extension is requested by the partner.

Existing Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects in Nebraska
- Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery – CPNRD & TPNRD
- Regional Grassland Bird & Grazing Enhancement Initiative - NGPC
- Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife – NGPC
- Lower Elkhorn Water and Soil Conservation Project
- Republican Basin Conservation Partnership – LRNRD
Divots in the Pivots – UBBNRD/RWBJV
Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 & 27 – LPNNRD
Papillion Creek Site WP-1 Dam – PMRNRD

RCPP APF Timeline – FY2019
- **September 3, 2019**: Announcement of Program Funding (APF) through grants.gov:
  - Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-RCPP-19-01
  - CFDA #: 10.932, Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- **December 3, 2019**: Applications due by 5:00 p.m. EST
- **September 26, 2019**: Informational webinar, 3:00 p.m. EST
- Once agreements are signed, partnership activities and obligations may begin.

Vision and Goals of the Program
- **Impact**—RCPP applications must propose effective and compelling solutions that address one or more natural resource priorities to help solve natural resource challenges. Partners are responsible for evaluating a project’s impact and results.

- **Partner Contributions**—Partners are responsible for identifying any combination of cash and in-kind value-added contributions to leverage NRCS’s RCPP investments. It is NRCS’s goal that partner contributions at least equal the NRCS investment in an RCPP project. Substantive and sizable partner contributions are given priority consideration as part of the RCPP application evaluation criteria.

- **Partnerships and Management**—Partners must have experience, expertise, and capacity to manage the partnership and project, provide outreach to producers, and quantify the environmental (and when possible, economic and social) outcomes of an RCPP project. RCPP ranking criteria give priority consideration to applicants that meaningfully engage historically underserved farm farmers and ranchers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RCPP Action</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCPP FY 2019 funding announcement released</td>
<td>September 3, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP renewals awards announced</td>
<td>By November 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application period closes</td>
<td>December 3, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCPP review process initiated</td>
<td>December 4, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP Interim Final Rule released</td>
<td>Late 2019/Early 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFA funding announcement released</td>
<td>Soon after IFR release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCPP review process complete</td>
<td>January 15, 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCPP award announcement</td>
<td>Week of March 9, 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>FY 2019 RCPP partnership agreements (including renewals) executed</td>
<td>By mid-June 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Next funding announcement released</td>
<td>July 1, 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFA awards announced</td>
<td>Summer 2020</td>
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EQIP: Environmental Quality Incentives Program –
EQIP Fund Allocations in 2019

EQIP – National Initiatives $ 4.3 million
- NWQI $ 1.5 million
  - 3 watersheds: Bazile, Wahoo Creek, Big Sandy
- Forestry Service Partnership $ 328,000
  - 3 NRD’s: UNWNRD, MNNRD, ULNRD
- Disaster Relief $2.5 million

EQIP – General $ 24.8 million

EQIP General Distribution
- State Initiatives $ 11.5 million
  - Includes Wildlife 10% & HU 10%
- Balance to LWG Fund Pools $ 13.3 million

Funding: $9.1 Billion (increase of $1.17 billion)
- $1.75 Billion for FY19
- $1.75 Billion for FY20
- $1.8 Billion for FY21
- $1.85 Billion for FY22
- $2.025 Billion for FY23

Proportion of EQIP funding:
- Livestock: 50% (reduced from 60%) of the funds under the program shall be targeted at practices relating to livestock production and grazing management practices
- Wildlife Habitat: At least 10% (increased from 5%) of the funds under the program shall be targeted at practices benefitting wildlife habitat.
  - Clarifies that contracts entered into solely for wildlife practices can be up to 10 years in length

Source Water Protection Program
- Dedicate at least 10 percent of the total funds available for conservation programs (with the exception of CRP), each year, to be used for source water protection.
- STCs working with the State Technical Committee, public water utilities and the State drinking water agency must select initial local priority areas where we can anticipate targeting approximately 10 percent of conservation program funding to benefit source water protection.
- Addresses excessive nutrients, and other impairments of drinking water sources (ground water or surface water).
- Addresses the conservation of water to advance drought mitigation
- Practice incentive payments for this initiative will go to EQIP eligible owners/operators of agricultural land who install conservation practices relating to water quality and quantity.
- States can select up to 10 conservation practices to be eligible for 90% practice payment rate.
- Is geographically located to address a national resource concern in a specific watershed.
- Focus of initiative is the protection of community water systems that is defined by 25 people or more, 15 or more service connections, year-round.
- In Nebraska, 99% of municipalities use ground water as their source of drinking water.
- Groundwater Management Areas – may be eligible if they encompass several community water systems.
Source Water Protection Initiative – Elbert Traylor, NDEE & Sam Radford, NDEE

Objectives of the Source Water Initiative
- Efficient implementation of the initiative
- Maximize impact to achieve measurable results
  - Target funds to the most critical resources
  - Prioritize sufficient area to accommodate available funds
- Coordinate with existing programs
- Achieve multiple agency objectives
- Base criteria on existing defined values (WQ St’d, MCL, Reg. Triggers)
- Prioritize practices with direct impact on resource concern.
- Reward proactive Districts

EQIP Source Water Protection Priorities Criteria for Priority Levels
- SEE HANDOUT

Potential Priority Practices (TBD)
- Reduced nitrogen application
- Nitrogen scavenging cover crops
- Split nitrogen application
- Delayed nitrogen application
- Nitrification inhibitors
- Change crop rotation (CCB to CB)
- Small grain/forage/grass rotation
- Irrigation management
- Integrated pest management
- Split Atrazine application
- Atrazine applied post planting
- Atrazine rate reduction (≥0.5lbs)
- Alternative herbicide
- Buffer strips
- Change crop rotation (CCB to CB)
- Cover crop/small grain/forage

Source Water Sub-Committee Meeting
September 18, 2019 @ Upper Big Blue NRD
10:00 am – 1:00 pm

National Water Quality Initiative
- Wahoo Creek - Saunders
- Bazile Creek – Antelope, Pierce, Knox
- Big Sandy Creek – Little Blue NRD
- Turkey Creek – Lower Big Blue NRD
  - Readiness Phase Project

EQIP LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETINGS –
- Meetings completed in January/February 2019
- LOCAL WORK GROUP AGENDA ITEMS:
  - Priority Resource Concerns
  - Fund Pool - Ranking Tools – Screening Tools
    - Revised ranking process for FY2020 – CART
    - Reduced the number of State Initiatives. (Keep National mandated)
  - Practice Payment Schedule
  - Eastern Red Cedar Policy – 5 Questions
- State EQIP Subcommittee meeting – May 2019
SUMMARY: Priority Resources Concerns

- Soil Erosion
- Water Quality degradation
- Soil Quality Degradation
- Insufficient Water
- Degraded Plants
- Livestock Production Limitation
- Fish and Wildlife
- Excess Water
- Air Quality
- Inefficient Energy

FY2020 EQIP State Policy Decisions

- FY2020 LWG/NRCS Recommended and Approved by STC
  - Revised policy on EQIP payments for Eastern Red Cedar
  - End option for irrigated to dry re-enrollment
  - EQIP application cutoff date - TBD
  - Applications ranked/Preapproved - TBD

- Multiple adjustments to practice scenarios and payment rates
  - Integrated Pest Management (595) – Develop new scenario for a non-atrazine alternative for corn to protect surface water quality and assist with managing herbicide resistance
  - Brush Management (314) – Develop “Ultra Low Density” scenario

- Practice Payment caps
  - Establish $10,000 payment cap for Nutrient Management (590)
  - Establish $80,000 payment cap for Waste Storage Facility (313)
  - Establish $10,000 payment cap for Integrated Pest Mgmt. (595)
  - Retain existing payment caps:
    - (340) Cover Crop - $7,500
    - (329) No Till - $5,000
    - (528) Prescribed Grazing, Adaptive Mgmt. - $15,0000
    - (327) Conservation Cover - $7,500
    - (645) Upland Wildlife Habitat Mgmt. - $7,500

Revised NRCS Policy on Eastern Red Cedar Effective October 1, 2019

- No changes in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide that would unilaterally prevent the use of Eastern redcedar in any portion of the state where it is deemed suitable to the site and will accomplish the purpose of the conservation practice standard according to the design parameters outlined in associated technical documents.

- No changes to EQIP policy for cost-share on eastern redcedar in Vegetative Zone I, essentially the Panhandle portion of the state.

- In Vegetative Zones 2-4 – (the rest of the state) it was decided to continue availability for cost-share under EQIP on eastern redcedar in windbreaks and tree plantings for very specific site conditions and purposes. The specific site conditions and installation purposes approved for eastern redcedar plantings in Zones 2-4 are:
  - To manage snow deposition, reduce energy usage, and provide screening or winter protection for farmsteads.
  - To manage snow deposition to protect public infrastructure (most notably public roadways) in the form of living snow fence in identified problem locations.
• In Vegetative Zones 2-4 – (continued)
  • To provide shelter from winter weather, manage snow deposition and/or address odor control for areas where animals are concentrated including calving areas or in open lots.
  • To help control excessive wind erosion and protect sensitive plants from damage where a higher level of windbreak density is deemed necessary to address the resource concern.

• In Vegetative Zones 2-4, for other windbreak and tree planting purposes that include Eastern redcedar and are not described in the criteria above, EQIP application requests for cost-share under EQIP will be set as a “low priority.”

• Two Nebraska Natural Resources Districts, the Twin Platte NRD and the Upper Loup NRD do not provide cost-share assistance on Eastern redcedar and NRCS intends to honor and support those locally-made decisions. In those NRD’s, EQIP applications that include Eastern redcedar species in the planting will be a low priority in application ranking.

  o EQIP ALLOCATION FORMULA
  ▪ See slides

❖ CART – CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT RANKING TOOL

  ▪ CART Objectives
    • Streamlined Efficient Customer Service
    • Program Neutral Planning
    • Programs Informed by Planning Process
    • Adaptive Learning Software
    • Full Integration with Planning and Program Policy

  ▪ Current Program Rankings
    • Written - National Questions, State Questions, & Locally Led Questions
      o Same questions asked multiple times
      o Non-Applicable questions still had to be answered
    • References: Priority Maps and Priority Practice Matrixes
      o Binder of ranking reference documents
    • Manually tied resource concerns to ranking and contract
      o Had to match manually created NRCS-CPA 52
    • No connection between ranking and the host of assessment tools or Toolkit
    Result:
      o Increased potential for errors
      o Cumbersome
      o Time consuming

  ▪ CART – Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool
    • National Template, State Ranking Pools, & Locally Led Ranking Pools
      o Duplicative questions eliminated
      o Non-Applicable questions will not appear
    • State and Locally Led Ranking Pools
      o Geospatial Conditions – integrates priority maps
      o Applicable Practices – integrates practice reference matrices
    • Connection between Ranking and the Conservation Assessment and CD
      o Working towards auto populated NRCS-CPA52
• **Results:**
  o Decreased potential for errors
  o Ease of use
  o Increased efficiency
  o Increased consistency

- **AERT Correlation to CART**
- **Preparation**
  - Utilize the Locally Led Process for Input
  - Strategic Ranking Pools
  - Review Priorities and Questions
  - Determining Geospatial Supporting Layers

- **Understanding Plan Assessment Points**
  - Plan Assessment points by ranking pool:
    o Plan Assessment points come from evaluating the Program Neutral Conservation Plan
    o Only resource concerns which are identified by the ranking pool will garner plan assessment points
    o Only practices on land uses which are identified by the ranking pool will garner plan assessment points

- **CART assists planners to analyze resource data captured in the inventory and compare against the threshold to determine if planning criteria is met. Planner override will be allowed.**

- **Multi-Ranking Pool Evaluation**
  - A Plan Assessment is made up of multiple practices which may be eligible under multiple ranking pools.
  - CART will allow consideration for funding under all applicable ranking pools
    o Participants may be considered for funding in as many ranking pools as are applicable
    o Plans may receive funding from multiple ranking pools
    o CART will assure a practice is not funded twice on the same land unit by separate funding sources

- **Summary**
  - Each Ranking Pool will be customized by the program manager after incorporating locally led input.
  - Customizable aspects include:
    o Geographic Extent of Ranking Pool
    o Filtering subdivisions of funding within a Ranking Pool
    o Selection of Land Uses
    o Selection and Weighting of Resource Concerns
    o Selection of Conservation Practices
    o Weighting between 5 Ranking Weights
    o Applicability Questions or Geometry
    o Pool Resource Priority Questions and Geometry
    o Pool Programmatic Priority Questions and Geometry
QUESTIONS & Comment

Q: Row vs cover crops and till vs no till within 75% on EWP
   A: We haven’t thought about that, but we can look into something if it’s able to be considered.

Q: Eric: Is there any project area on Missouri or Platte River?
   A: We are still considering, we haven’t completely decided if it is going to go statewide (would need rankings edited) but we are currently only looking at the Eastern 1/3 of the state.

We will take ranking comments until September 27th, because we would like to get them out to the field staff to start the applications. There is a lot of interest in this programming.

Q: What was the potential amount of funding for the draft source water?
   A: The 2018 Farm Bill mandates 10% of program funds be targeted to practices benefiting source water protection. For Nebraska that equates to approximately $2.9 million/yr. EQIP, $2.2 million/yr. CSP, and $400,000.00/yr. ACEP. The 10% requirement is National so individual State obligations could be more, or less than 10%.

Q: Andy: Physical data transpires to political product
   A: I think it is just an interpretation of data and assumptions.

Q: Marcia: Past allocations should be factored in somehow. If 1 NRD has received (2 mil) last year and they get $2 mil this year, there needs to be proof that getting that much made a difference compared to other NRDs who may only get $30k.
   A: There is a manual adjustment column that is available in the formula to make these types of adjustments.

Q: You have 3 resource concerns that you didn’t generate information for. (We don’t have good datasets)
   A: Excess water
      Air quality
      o Inadequate habitat (WIN)
         ▪ Since 2009, there is a whole set of aerial images that you could use for excess water. There are many maps available
         ▪ Eric: Some LWG have funds set aside for fish and wildlife and habitat. It isn’t that it isn’t being spent, it’s that not everyone has the same tools and priorities

CRP & ECP UPDATE – Lavaine Moore, Program Specialist, FSA

❖ Still working under the 2014 Farm Bill.
   o 5400 acres
   o 64 acres
     ▪ Have till Sept 30 to back out if they choose not to
   o National Call today
     ▪ General sign up in the first part of December
     ▪ Soil rates will be determined on November 1
ECP
- 4500-5000
- $90 Million out there
- Still taking application on the SE part of Nebraska because of the flooding.

**QUESTIONS & Comments**

**Q:** Any discussion about the rates, because cash rents really have not come down?

**A:** County committees will be looking at that. CRP will be capped at $300.00.
- 2018 soil rental rates, 2019 will be released soon, and we will compare those to the NASS data
- There is a large seminar (Wells Fargo), and one of the reasons rates haven’t come down, is because our property taxes are so high. That may be something to point out in those discussions.
  - CRP will be capped at $300
  - General sign up will be reduced to or prorated to 85%, where continuous was at 90%

- All of our grants on the environmental trust website

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**WRAP UP & QUESTIONS – Brad Soncksen, ASTC-P, NRCS**

Please send any further questions or comments to Tami Nordman @ tami.nordman@usda.gov

**FUTURE 2019 MEETINGS:**

December 5th, 2019 UNL Extension Office (444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE)

**FUTURE 2020 MEETINGS: (Location TBD)**

March 5, 2020
June 4, 2020
September 10, 2020
December 3, 2020