

Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee

April 15, 2021, via Microsoft Teams

A copy of these meeting notes, presentations and other materials may be found on the web at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ky/technical/stc/>

At 9:00 a.m., NRCS State Conservationist Greg Stone welcomed everyone to the first-ever virtual meeting of the USDA State Technical Committee. He thanked everyone for joining. He reminded the group that as members of the State Technical Committee, they serve as advisors to NRCS and other USDA agencies. He said the purpose of today's meeting was to update the group on USDA-NRCS activities and garner input from them as partners.

He then turned the meeting over to Assistant State Conservationist for Easements Reed Cripps.

Fiscal Year 2020 Program Accomplishments and Updates & FY 2021 Changes

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE), Edge-of-Field Monitoring, Wetland Restoration Monitoring, Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) and the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

Reed informed the group that over the last 28 years, NRCS has helped to preserve 5 million acres in easements nationwide including 2.8 million acres in wetland easements and 1.9 million in agricultural easements. He provided a breakdown by program of number of easements and acres in Kentucky, giving both historic as well as FY 2020 numbers. A map of showing the location of the Kentucky easements may be found in Reed's PowerPoint presentation. He discussed assistance that is being provided by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to deal with beaver problems on easements.

He asked the committee to review and provide any input on the FY 2021 Wetland Reserve Environmental Site Evaluation (ranking) sheet. A copy may be found as an attachment to these meeting notes.

He informed the committee that a private firm has been contracted to perform easement monitoring using drones, and provided several images captured by drones. He thanked partners including US Fish and Wildlife Service; Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources; USDA – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service; and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), for efforts they provide to make WRE successful in Kentucky.

The next topic Reed covered was edge-of-field monitoring. He said that there are five contracts in Kentucky using \$1.9 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding as well as four sites using ACEP dollars. He showed slides of the monitoring equipment and locations and discussed the monitoring effort.

He briefly discussed the wetland restoration monitoring that is being conducted by The Nature Conservancy. He said Tennessee Tech University, Middle Tennessee State University, Murray State University, and University of Missouri were subcontractors on the TNC agreement.

The last two topics Reed covered were the proposed NRCS Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) and the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). Regarding WREP, it was sponsored by TNC and is rolling out this fiscal year. And regarding VPA-HIP, he said it is sponsored by KDFWR will be rolled out this summer.

See attached PowerPoint presentation for specifics on these topics. A copy of the FY 2021 WRE Ranking Sheet may also be found as an attachment to these meeting notes.

Financial Assistance Programs (Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Implementation, ACEP-Ag Land Easements (ALE), EQIP-Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC))

Next, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Deena Wheby gave updates on FY 2020 activities for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) EQIP, Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE). She also discussed changes that were made for FY 2021 in these programs. She echoed Reed's comments that partners have an important role in getting conservation on the ground and thanked them for all they do for NRCS financial assistance programs.

She explained that EQIP was more of a "fix it" problem for resource concerns (soil erosion, animal waste, etc.) and CSP is a program for those that are willing to go above and beyond the minimum NRCS standards. She provided a summary of dollars, number of contracts, and acres for each program. She said that more than \$20.5 million of EQIP and RCPP-EQIP and almost \$6.8 million of CSP had been obligated to over 1,000 participants during fiscal year 2020. (See attached PowerPoint presentation for specifics on these topics.)

She also discussed a new opportunity from the 2018 Farm Bill called EQIP Conservation Incentives Contracts (CIC). She said that EQIP-CIC is a "mash-up" of EQIP and CSP which will allow persons to try out some of the features of CSP without having to put their entire operation into the program. She said that states are still waiting for guidance from the NRCS national office for this program, and if it is offered to farmers in FY 2021 that NRCS will try to keep it as simple as possible. She said NRCS will be seeking input for high priority areas and priority resource concerns for this program for FY 2022.

Mr. Stone thanked Reed and Deena for their presentations and then called on Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships Sonya Keith to cover RCPP and FCPs.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) & NRCS EQIP Focused Conservation Projects (FCP)

Before beginning her presentations, Sonya introduced two new members of her staff. First, she said that Justin Pius had recently began working as Kentucky NRCS's public affairs specialist. He came from Department of Defense and is new to NRCS. The second new hire is Steve Beam in the position of watershed planner. She said Steve may be familiar to many committee members as he retired from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

The first topic Sonya discussed was the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). She said she does the upfront part of RCPP and Deena or Reed's staff work on the implementation part, depending on what program the RCPP is using (financial assistance programs or easements).

She said RCPP began in 2014 Farm Bill and works to coordinate with partners to expand on NRCS conservation activities. It is a co-investment program and projects are selected from proposals that are submitted in response to a national announcement for funding. She said that states do technical reviews of the projects, but the final selections and funding levels are done by the NRCS Chief at the national level.

She provided a list of projects noting that some have finished (expired or have run out of funding). This list and other details of Sonya's presentation may be found in the attached PowerPoint slides.

She said that RCPP had major changes as a result of the 2018 Farm Bill. It became a standalone program (doesn't rely on "donor programs" such as EQIP and ACEP), nationally up to \$300 million is available

annually, there is more emphasis on outcomes, and there is more scrutiny and up-front detail required on technical assistance dollars that go to partners. She said that nationally, policy is still being worked on. Although a standalone program, it is expected to look very similar to existing programs (EQIP, ACEP, etc.) and that practices implemented under RCPP still need to meet NRCS standards and specifications.

She mentioned that RCPP is very competitive; nationwide, only 18 projects were selected recently for renewal, and Kentucky was fortunate to have one of those with Grow Appalachia. She said it will be the same project as the original one but must operate under the new rules and requirements.

She said there was an announcement for program funding earlier this fiscal year and proposals were due November 30, 2020. Kentucky had two proposals submitted and we are expecting an announcement of funding is expected soon and states and partners will know if the two were selected for funding.

She said that there is a new RCPP “alternative funding arrangement” (AFA) opportunity and there is a funding announcement out now. Proposals are due May 28, 2021. This AFA is more grant-like, and partners must have the capacity to implement conservation activities. NRCS would only do “inherently governmental” parts of the financial obligation. Partners would do all the financial and technical assistance – what NRCS typically does. Only 15 AFAs will be funded nationally.

She asked if there were any RCPP questions. There being none, she next discussed the NRCS EQIP Focused Conservation Projects (FCPs).

Sonya said that the group has heard FCPs discussed at previous state technical committee meetings. She said NRCS in Kentucky is taking part of the state’s EQIP allocation and putting the money in FCPs which will address specific resource concerns that are identified at the local level. Local work group meetings will be held at least annually where interested persons or groups can present their ideas for local projects (which must be EQIP-eligible). She said partners are integral to the process. The Kentucky leadership team decides which projects will be funded. If you have an idea, attend one of the local work group meetings. You can contact the local NRCS office to find out when local work group meetings are being held. She added that projects should be “focused” in scope and have a clearly identified problem and outcome. She said most projects are expected to be three to five years in length.

She showed a slide of a Kentucky map with the project locations and said that it is an interactive map on the web where you may find additional information about each project. (There is a link to this page in Deena Wheby’s slides.) She said currently there are 13 approved (FY 2020) projects – 10 for water quality/soil erosion, two for wildlife and one for forestry.

She said there will not be any newly funded projects in FY 2021 (the FY 2020 projects will continue to receive funding.) It is anticipated that 11 projects will receive financial assistance in FY 2022. These projects were identified this year and are using FY 2021 as a planning year to be prepared for FY 2022 implementation. Local work groups will meet this year (probably during June and July) to identify new projects for FY 2022 planning and FY 2023 implementation.

It is expected that FCPs will become more competitive in the future and not all submitted projects will be selected for funding. Partner participation in the FCP process is highly encouraged.

NRCS is currently looking at the implementation of existing projects. Not just about dollars and numbers, but what is being done to address the resource concerns outcomes/goals that were identified. She asked if there were any questions, and there were none.

Greg thanked the presenters and noted that a total of more than \$40 million in financial assistance had been provided to landusers in FY 2020. He thanked all the partners who have helped with that. He said in addition to the financial assistance, that the agency also provided a great deal of technical assistance in the way of agronomists, engineers, planners, and other experts to make conservation on the land

possible. Moving to the topic of technical assistance, he introduced Jennifer Walser, acting state resource conservationist, to make the next presentation.

Field Office Technical Guide Update

NRCS State Business Tools Coordinator and Acting State Resource Conservationist Jennifer Walser discussed the changes to the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). She said it is found in the same place but has a new layout. She went over what is found in the five sections of the FOTG. For anyone who uses any of NRCS tools, they are in the Ecological Sciences Tools folder in Section IV of the FOTG. See slides as to what is in each section.

Jennifer said that there have been changes to a national formatting of Section IV. Moved state data tables from Standards into Guidance Documents. All conservation practice standards in section IV are being reviewed at a national level. The Federal Register gives opportunity to comment on the national revisions. Kentucky will be updating state standards and job sheets over the next two years. She noted that “job sheets” have had a title change and are now called “Implementation Requirement” or “IR”.

Greg introduced Scott Schneider, Kentucky NRCS’s new state conservation engineer. Scott introduced himself saying that he previously worked for NRCS in Oklahoma. Greg mentioned that Scott has already had the opportunity to work on some watershed and EWP issues and is happy to have him on board.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

The next topic on the agenda was Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGs), a competitive opportunity that uses EQIP to support the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands. Through creative problem solving and innovation, CIG partners work to address water quality, air quality, soil health and wildlife habitat challenges, all while improving agricultural operations. CIG offers both a national level and state level opportunities.

Greg called on NRCS State Soil Scientist Steve Blanford to discuss two state-level CIGs with which he is involved.

Interseeding of Cover Crops into Standing Cash Crops

The first one is interseeding cover crops into standing cash crops. Steve said the idea came from issues identified by farmers when discussing the use of cover crops (timing, equipment, etc.) NRCS did a CIG request for proposals on this topic and received several responses. The one that was selected came from the Soil Health Partnership (under the umbrella of National Corn Growers.) It also included TNC as a partner and is taking place in the Lower Green River and Salt River watersheds where there are big landowners with a low cover crop adoption rate. He said the project is working on putting interseeders on highboys and combines. This will require no additional manpower or additional trips across the field.

Preliminary sampling was to begin in 2020 to establish a baseline. Due to weather and other factors, this has been extended for one year, and the baseline is being assessed now. The plan is to interseed this fall. Steve said he has seen some of this already in practice and it seems to be working well. He said that this project has great partners as well as great landowners (two in each watershed.)

Evaluating Small Mammal Populations and their Response to Cover Crop Management

The second CIG that Steve discussed was vole damage associated with soil health management systems. He said soil health activities (such as cover crops and crop residue) are creating an environment for small mammals which are causing damage. He shared a story about a long-time no-tiller who had to till a soybean crop that had great vole damage.

Like the first CIG that he discussed, a request for proposal was published and a project from the UK Department of Forestry and Natural Resources was accepted. He said that a graduate student was hired to do some of the field work. The project title is, "Evaluating Small Mammal Populations and their Response to Cover Crop Management". The project has three objectives: (1) to assess cover crop termination dates, (2) look at field borders as possible population sites, and (3) estimate damage caused by small mammals on soybean fields.

The study area is a farm in Glendale in Hardin County. The crew scouted the farm and selected trapping sites based on damage. He said that they have trapped a variety of small mammals (prairie vole, deer mouse, field mouse, and white-footed mouse). The mice appear to be a bigger issue than the voles. He said the study had captured and tagged the small mammals. When they are recaptured, it shows how they have moved throughout the field. They captured approximately 650 individuals – close to 2,500 total.

Regarding cover crop termination, three different termination dates were looked at – four and two weeks before planting, and the week of planting. Termination four weeks prior to planting was found to be statistically significant. The project is set to conclude in Fall 2021. UK will produce a video and a publication through the extension service to provide the findings of this CIG project.

Maple Syrup CIGs

Greg then introduced NRCS State Biologist Casey Shrader to discuss two other State CIGs. Casey said that CIGs are funded for purposes of gathering some type of technical product that can be integrated into NRCS technical standards, or program guidance, or some other type of product – something that is not ordinarily created by NRCS. Casey said he has not been intimately involved with these projects and provided contact information for each of the projects so the committee could contact the project leads directly with questions.

He said that maple syrup production was a topic of interest for Kentucky; specifically how we can help forest landowners who want to pursue maple syrup production. A CIG request for proposals was published, and from the responses, two projects were selected for funding.

Economic Analysis of Maple Syrup Production Potential in Kentucky

The first project is titled "Economic Analysis of Maple Syrup Production Potential in Kentucky", and is led by Dr. Thomas Ochuodho from the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry and Natural Resources.

Casey said that the project is to conduct an analysis of maple syrup production potential in Kentucky. They started by using production data from other maple syrup producing states. Based on the relationship between maple trees from USDA and sap production, among other factors, the project estimated syrup production potential in Kentucky by county. Using four current producers the researchers measured the amount of energy used to determine efficiency. They have only completed 6 of 12 planned producer visits due to weather, mechanical failures and other significant events. The remaining producer visits will take place during the next tapping season (January-March 2022).

They have started analyzing this limited dataset to determine initial costs and required stand densities. The next step is to create a model for the sap evaporation energy efficiency analysis. The project will also conduct a cost-benefit analysis and an expenditure budget for a maple syrup enterprise will be created. Questions may be addressed to Dr. Ochuodho at thomas.ochuodho@uky.edu.

Maple Syrup Management Practices

The second project Casey highlighted is titled, “Informing Management Practices Through Understanding the Effects of Species and Tree Characteristics on Maple Sap Volume and Sugar Content” and is led by Dr. John Lhotka from the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. The project is in its second year.

In January 2021, the second season of data collection began by tapping and assembling collection systems for the study trees monitored during the first season. Temperature loggers were established at each site concurrently with tapping of the site’s trees. They have measured/collected sap volumes and are collecting sap samples for sugar content analysis. They also monitor the collection systems.

The next step will be to end data collection with the first sighting of bud break and remove collection systems. Sap collection supplies will be sanitized and stored. During summer 2021, they will gather additional tree biometric data, including tree height, crown width, and base to live crown. They will also gather additional data on each tap hole from both sample years (e.g., tap hole height above ground and tap hole aspect). They plan to collect sap volume and sap sugar content data on study trees in winter 2022. Questions may be addressed to Dr. Lhotka at john.lhotka@uky.edu

Casey concluded his CIG remarks by saying that NRCS would like the CIG sponsors to present their full report to NRCS leadership and/or the state technical committee after the projects are completed. Casey’s PowerPoint presentation may be found attached to these meeting notes. There being no questions, Mr. Stone thanked Casey for his report noting that Casey wasn’t the original NRCS lead on these projects.

Solicit Areas of Interest for FY 2022 CIGs

After the presentation on the four state CIGs, Jennifer Walser asked the group if they had any suggestions for area of interest for FY 2022 state CIGs. Greg asked the question, “are there questions we need answers to in order to further conservation in Kentucky?” He mentioned that anyone can submit a proposal for a national CIG, and that this discussion was to solicit ideas for future state CIGs.

Steve Coleman said that irrigation was an area of interest, including how to expand with better water management. Greg asked if there is a particular thing we don’t know – CIGs are more about what we don’t know. The response was “application, timing, sustainability, helping beginning efforts, and to develop a tool to better time irrigation.” Jennifer noted that NRCS has an Irrigation Water Management standard that helps with timing, amount, etc. and asked if there is other technology out there that we should be looking at. Mr. Coleman said that (UK Research and Education Center at) Princeton was doing some research but didn’t know if we are getting what we need and if it is coming fast enough.

State Conservation Engineer Scott Schneider said Oklahoma and Texas had help purchase soil sensors that helped a person determine moisture in the ground at any particular time (on their cell phone). (Note: Not mentioned during the meeting, but NRCS in Kentucky does offer these sensors through the IWM practice under EQIP and have contracted several.)

Mr. Coleman said they are looking for more user-friendly things to assist those that irrigate.

Jennifer asked if there are any other topics of interest from the group that we should be considering as well?

Jeff Rice mentioned that he thought irrigation technology is important in the future as it will result in increased yields, more efficient nitrogen use, etc.

Jennifer asked what new and innovative things are we missing? What practice standards are we missing the boat on? There are things in the national standard that could be applied in Kentucky, if there is interest in Kentucky.

Laura Knoth asked if there any CIGs anywhere on the carbon capture conversation? How farmers can participate in carbon banks?

Jennifer said she is aware of several in California – on pasture – putting it out there to see how it is applicable to the rest of the country. There is an interim practice standard. Definitely something NRCS is looking at.

Reed Cripps mentioned that there is a soil health agreement with UK (not a CIG) looking at the sequestration of carbon and cover crops. Brad Lee is the UK point of contact.

Someone said we are going to see a lot more interest and funding in the area of carbon sequestration and more information on how we do that and how it benefits resources and the landowners and impact. Said we need to be prepared when these programs become available. There are private ones now, maybe federal ones later.

Jennifer said she is aware of a tool from Colorado State University that looks at how our practices offset greenhouse gases.

Tim Hughes, Kentucky Department of Agriculture, said they have an interest in exploring options for distillers' grain. He acknowledged that this is probably outside of NRCS scope but was asking if there was anything that the partners could do.

Greg thanked Tim for the topic suggestion and said that he has talked with his technical team about it and will take it under advisement for CIG, but not limited to CIG. Looking at natural resource concerns from stillage. Tim said he knows some other states have an interest as well. Laura Knoth, Kentucky Corn Growers, commented in the chat that she gets regular calls from distilleries looking for assistance with use of their stillage.

Greg thanked everyone for their input and said he appreciates the opportunity for the conversation, that he always learns a lot.

In the chat box, Jennifer shared a link to the NRCS CIG Project Search page.

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ciglanding/national/programs/financial/cig/cigsearch/>

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Management Practices

Next on the agenda was NRCS State Biologist Casey Shrader who spoke about CRP management practices.

Casey said that the “mid-contract management” term has changed and is now just called “management”. Also, as with each new farm bill, some of the rules have changed. He reminded the group that CRP is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and NRCS provides the technical assistance.

Each year NRCS and FSA are required to look at the activities NRCS recommends. He said that it used to be that there was some sort of required management for every practice, but the last farm bill said that all practices don't need management activities; states can determine for which practices management activities are required. Management options include activities such as disking, prescribed burning, herbicide application, etc.

Casey showed the current list of practices and management options and said that it had been developed with several partners. He said they came up with a method for each practice to determine what, if any, management options were needed for each practice. The group determined that not all practices in Kentucky required a management option.

He asked the committee to review the list to help determine if a management activity is needed for the CRP practices in Kentucky. The list may be found as an attachment to these meeting notes, as well as on slide 70 of the attached presentations file. He asked that the committee provide any recommended changes to either him at casey.shrader@usda.gov or to Kellie Samuels of FSA at kellie.samuels@usda.gov by April 30, 2021. He said that so far this list seems to be working out well and there hasn't been any negative feedback but is open to hearing the committee's thoughts.

He asked if there were any questions and received none.

Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

Sonya informed the committee that a new national office has been stood up recently. It is called the "Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production" (OUAIP) and she will serve as Kentucky's point of contact. Authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, OUAIP is not an NRCS program, but rather it is USDA-wide; however, NRCS will be the lead agency. The purpose is to focus on needs of urban farmers and to help with food insecurity issues. NRCS already does a lot with urban agriculture with high tunnels, wildlife and pollinator habitat, etc. A goal is to take what we can implement in an urban setting – scalable, or whole new ideas to do urban work.

A national federal advisory committee is being established, as well as 10 FSA urban and suburban county committees. The federal advisory committee will have 12 members from various backgrounds. The county committees will be similar to existing FSA county committees but will not replace them; they will be additional committees. There will be 5-year pilot projects in 10 locations. So far five committee locations have been established (one each in Oregon, New Mexico, Ohio, Virginia, and Pennsylvania) with five more to be established in FY 2021. Factors that are considered when selecting the locations include existing green infrastructure projects, innovative community gardens, residential garden upward trends, farm to table projects, economic distress, number of food pantries, free and reduced lunch numbers, and more. Even if an area does not have an Urban County Committee, urban services are still available. Urban or innovated ideas or concerns should be brought forward at the NRCS Local Work Group meetings, or State Technical Committee meetings.

There will be some competitive grant funding opportunities with this new office. Last year the funds were very limited (about \$4 million). Those that can apply for the grants are nonprofit organizations, local or Tribal governments, and schools that serve any of the grades K-12 in areas of the United States. Those that cannot apply include individuals such as a farmer or gardener, for-profit organizations and small businesses, and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) including extension programs. There is also an opportunity for community compost and food waste reduction cooperative agreements. Local governments can apply for these. The same group as noted above are not allowed to apply for these agreements.

Last year's 23 grant recipients were selected from hundreds of applications. The FY 2021 opportunities are expected to be announced as funding and timing permits. It is expected that there will be a funding announcement every year. Sonya's PowerPoint presentation contains a slide showing the three types of opportunities that were available in FY 2020. The website for the OUAIP is www.farmers.gov/urban

Sonya said this is new and we are still receiving information. She asked if there were any questions. The question was asked if there is a definition for urban/suburban yet. Sonya responded that it is still being worked on and when there is one, she will share it. While there isn't an urban/suburban definition yet,

for the last round of funding, to apply for an Office of Urban Ag/Innovation Production Grant projects must target areas with 2500 or greater residents. This information was supplied in the TEAMS chat for the meeting. She also shared this link: <https://www.farmers.gov/manage/urban/opportunities>

Irrigation Assistance

Greg introduced the next topic of irrigation assistance saying this is a topic he has been hearing about since he got to Kentucky two years ago. He appreciates the farmers who have talked to him about this.

He set the stage for the discussion by saying that NRCS already has conservation measures for existing irrigation systems. Last year, NRCS funded three applications that have those practices in them, and for EQIP, NRCS has funding pool for just for irrigation assistance. People who want to improve conservation of water compete against like folks. Last year, NRCS funded all three requests received in this funding pool; this year there were no irrigation applications. NRCS offers assistance for upgrading or making systems more efficient. That said, it is part of the law, that we can't buy new equipment for ground that has not been irrigated previously. We may not do that.

NRCS funding is limited. There is just so much money allocated to the state each year. For EQIP, 50 percent must go to livestock, and 10 percent must go to wildlife. Remaining 40 percent goes to forest, crop, high tunnels, soil health, etc., including irrigation. As we do more of one thing, we will do less of another.

Greg then asked Jeff Rice if he wants to talk about this or has someone else to talk about it. There was no response and it appeared that Jeff was no longer on the call. He then asked if anyone else want to say anything; that he was happy to hear the groups comments.

Steve Coleman said that for the last seven years, Kentucky Farm Bureau has led the water management discussion not just about irrigation, but water management in general. He understood the limitation of NRCS to develop new resources for irrigation and they had tried to work in the farm bill discussions to expand that authority. He said farmers need the expertise to lead them in irrigation, noting that some used their own money during last drought and didn't hit the right spots. There have been several irrigation projects through the Governor's Office of Ag Policy. He said that Alabama had a partnership with Farm Bureau. He asked if the irrigation fund pool was a state pool or a national one.

Greg acknowledged the Alabama partnership saying that it was an innovative way to do some irrigation through Public Law 566. He said that he has a copy of their 250-page project plan that that PL-566 is a serious undertaking and Kentucky doesn't currently have staff to do that. He asked Deena to address the fund pool question.

Deena briefly explained how EQIP fund pools work – that there are fund pools for crop, pasture, high tunnels, manure management, irrigation, and others. The thought behind the multiple resource concern based and/or geographical based pools is that “neighbor competes against neighbor” for like needs. She said the irrigation fund pool was a Kentucky commitment. She reminded everyone of the statutory requirements placed on irrigation work – that the land must already have been irrigated two out of the last five years (with some exception for droughts), that the work must result in a conservation/reduction of water, and that no new land can be brought under irrigation because of that waster savings. She also reiterated that no applications were received for the irrigation fund account this year. She added that a number of contracts contain microirrigation and are mostly found in high tunnel system contracts and for other vegetable production contracts.

Steve said their group could better broadcast the availability of this opportunity.

Covered Winter Feeding Areas

Greg introduced Kentucky NRCS State Grazing Specialist Adam Jones to talk about covered winter feeding areas which NRCS is now offering through EQIP.

Adam started his presentation explaining why we wanted to address winter feeding. He said there are a number of resource concerns associated with winter feeding including compaction; erosion; nutrients, pathogens and chemicals transported to surface and ground waters; plant pest pressure; and feed and forage imbalance. He spoke about how NRCS determines if resource concerns exist and the various technical tools that NRCS uses.

He said that the covered winter feeding areas that NRCS offers is a suite of practices intended to protect pastures from winter feeding damage, and to create positive conditions for their cattle. He said that some operations may have to change some of their management techniques and that this opportunity is probably not for everybody. However, it will provide an option for a landowner to protect his land during the winter. Carrying capacity will be one aspect that will be focused on and will be derived from the NRCS KY GRAZE tool.

Adam stressed that all operations applying for a covered winter feeding area will require a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP). NRCS or TSP can write the plan by working with the landowner. The plan will include a grazing system as well as a nutrient management system to improve fertility on their grazing land. It will not be just one practice but will look at the entire operation. How the manure will be managed, how animals will move, how water will be provided, etc. will be included in the plan.

Adam mentioned alternatives that producers can consider if they determine a covered winter feeding area does not fit their operation. These included stockpiling forages and bale grazing.

More details may be found in Adam's PowerPoint which is attached to these meeting notes. Adam said he welcomes any conversations. He may be reached at adam.jones2@usda.gov

Greg thanked Adam for his presentation and said he understands NRCS is offering something that they haven't offered in a while and know that there is room for abuse. NRCS will look at these closely as they are implemented and managed. He acknowledged that they are not for everyone but is one tool in a large toolbox.

Closing Comments

Greg closed the meeting by thanking everyone who attended and took part in today's meeting. He said conservation is a group activity. It takes partnerships and he is thrilled to be a part of that conservation community in Kentucky. He said he has been meeting virtually with conservation districts during the pandemic. He said future generations need to be able to farm and feed the future world. He believes the only way to meet future needs is to take care of natural resources and that conservation is about taking a long view. He acknowledged landusers need to make a living today, but they also need to prepare for future generations to be able to use the land.

He concluded with a thank you to the group for spending their day with NRCS to share in that conservation conversation. He said if anyone wished to continue the dialog, to contact him or his staff.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Attachments:

- Agenda
- Attendee List (may not be complete as it was taken from a virtual meeting snapshot)
- Presentations
- ACEP-WRE Ranking Sheet
- CRP Management Options

Questions or comments may be sent to presenters at the following email addresses:

Greg Stone – greg.stone@usda.gov

Reed Cripps – reed.cripps@usda.gov

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Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee		
April 15, 2021 9:00 a.m.		
Due to COVID-19, the meeting will be conducted virtually. The call-in information was in the emailed invitation and is on the next page.		
9:00 a.m.	Welcome	Greg Stone NRCS State Conservationist
9:15 a.m.	Fiscal Year 2020 Program Accomplishments and Updates & FY 2021 Changes	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACEP – WRE and WRP • FY 2021 ACEP – WRE, FPE, HFRP Ranking Criteria 	Reed Cripps NRCS Assistant State Conservationist
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EQIP, CSP, RCPP Implementation, ACEP-ALE • EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) 	Deena Wheby NRCS Assistant State Conservationist
10:15 a.m.	Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)	Sonya Keith NRCS Assistant State Conservationist
NRCS EQIP Focused Conservation Projects		
10:45 a.m.	Field Office Technical Guide Update Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)	Jennifer Walser Acting State Resource Conservationist
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on FY 2019 State CIGs 	Steve Blanford NRCS State Soil Scientist Casey Shrader State Biologist Jennifer Walser
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit areas of interest for FY 2022 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Management Practices 	Casey Shrader
11:15 a.m.	Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production	Sonya Keith
11:30 a.m.	Irrigation Assistance	Greg Stone
11:45 a.m.	Covered Winter Feeding Areas	Adam Jones NRCS State Grazing Specialist
12:00 p.m.	Comments/Announcements from Group	Group
	Wrap Up	Greg Stone

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Microsoft Teams Meeting – April 15, 2021 beginning at 9:00 a.m.

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Acronym List:

ACEP: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
 ACEP – ALE: ACEP – Agricultural Land Easement
 ACEP – WRE: ACEP – Wetland Reserve Easement
 RCPP: Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 CIG: Conservation Innovation Grant
 CSP: Conservation Stewardship Program
 CRP: Conservation Reserve Program
 EQIP: Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 EQIP-CIC: EQIP Conservation Incentive Contract
 FPE: Floodplain Easement
 HFRP: Healthy Forests Reserve Program
 WRP: Wetlands Reserve Program

State Technical Committee Meeting Attendees via Teams - April 15, 2021	
Name	Representing
Greg Stone	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Paulette Akers	Kentucky Division of Conservation
Glynn Beck	Kentucky Geological Survey
Becky Thompson	Kentucky Cattleman's Association
Dale Booth	Kentucky Division of Water
Brooke Gentile	Organic Association of Kentucky
Danna Baxley	The Nature Conservancy
David Chinn	Monty's Plant Food
David Cooke	Grow Appalachia
Hannah Devine	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Cliff Drouet	US DOI Office of Surface Mining
Eric Gracey	University of Kentucky Forestry
Jennifer Farmer	USDA - Farm Service Agency
Dan Figert	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Hank Graddy	WH Graddy & Associates
Harold Duckworth	TASK, Inc.
Brent Harrel	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Henry Duncan	Kentucky Woodland Owners Association
Brandon Howard	Kentucky Division of Forestry
Tim Hughes	Kentucky Department of Agriculture
Jacob Muller	University of Kentucky - Forestry
James Barrett	Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD)
Kirk Pomper	Kentucky State University
Jamie Guffey	Kentucky Poultry Federation
Steve Kull	Kentucky Division of Forestry
Laura Knoth	Kentucky Corn Growers Association
Mark Walden	Grow Appalachia
Mary Carol Wagner	Northern Kentucky Water District
Doug McLaren	Kentucky Woodland Owners Association
Ed McQueen	Kentucky Farm Bureau
Joni Nelson	Kentucky State University
Thomas O. Ochuodho	University of Kentucky - Forestry
Stefanie Osterman	Kentucky State University
Jonah Price	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Ray Harvey	USDA - US Forest Service
Tyler Reagan	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
James Roe	Kentucky Division of Conservation
Kellie Samuels	USDA - Farm Service Agency
Ray Smith	University of Kentucky
Pam Snyder	Kentucky Division of Forestry
Laura F. Stephenson	University of Kentucky
Steve Coleman	KACD and Kentucky Farm Bureau Water Management Group
Stewart, Jacob N	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Ed Thompson	USDA 1890 Program Liaison Office of Advocacy & Outreach
Tod Griffin	Kentucky Retail Federation
Traci Vaught	USDA - Rural Development
Ward Wilson	Kentucky Waterways Alliance
John Webb	Kentucky Division of Water
Zach Luttrell	The Nature Conservancy
Jeff Rice	Kentucky Conservation Commission
Ben Koostra	Limestone & Cooper
Meredith Scales	Kentucky Dairy Development Council
Craig Wood	University of Kentucky - Extension
Steve Blanford	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Reed Cripps	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Christi Hicks	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Adam Jones	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Justin Pius	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Sonya Keith	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Steve Beam	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Christy Morgan	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Tony Nott	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Scott Schneider	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Casey Shrader	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Joe Wagner	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Jennifer Walsler	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Deena Wheby	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Plus 15 others who called in by phone or were shown as "unknown user"	