State Technical Committee Meeting –
June 2, 2022

ALL POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS ARE ON THE WEBSITE & the video can be found on our YouTube page.

Attendees:
In-Person - Rob Lawson, Tami Nordman, Brad Soncksen, Carlos Villarreal, Ritch Nelson, Jennifer Prenosil, Nick Streff, Elbert Traylor, John Hansen, Al Juhnke, Jacy Hauge, Burdett Piening, Kent Zimmerman, Tatiana Davila, Dustin Wilcox;
Via phone - Chandler Schmidt;

Welcome and Thank You for Being Here! Introductions

- Brad Soncksen, ASTC-P & Robert Lawson, State Conservationist
  - Went over the Agenda
  - Rob is excited to get the Urban Ag Sub-Committee started
  - First time group setting in 2 years with this hybrid meeting.

FSA – Upland & Migratory Bird Safe Proposals; CRP Signup Update; ECP Payment Scenario Review

- Lavaine Moore, Program Specialist, FSA; Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Program Specialist, FSA; Eric Zach, Program Manager, NE Game & Parks
  - General CRP Signup 58
    - Signup Period:
      - January 31 – March 11, 2022
    - NE Acres offered:
      - 67,209
    - Number of offers:
      - 989
- Total Acres Accepted:
  - 58,936
- Total number offers accepted:
  - 857
  - 87% acceptance rate
- Contracts will be effective 10/1/2022

- Grassland CRP signup 204
  - Signup period:
    - April 4 – May 13, 2022
  - NE Acres offered:
    - 633,169
  - Number of offers:
    - 1,658
  - Total number of offers & acres Accepted:
    - To be announced
  - Contracts will be effective:
    - 10/1/2022

- Continuous CRP Signup 57
  - Signup Period:
    - Ongoing
    - Re-enrollment offers must be submitted by August 5th
  - Effective date:
    - Month following approval, unless deferred.
    - Re-enrollments effective date will be 10/1/2022
    - Crop must be harvested by effective start date
  - Nebraska Current Continuous Numbers

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- Voluntary Termination of CRP Contracts
  - Announced on May 26th, that due to crisis in Ukraine, USDA will send letters to participants with CRP contracts expiring 9/30/2022 that will offer voluntary termination of the contract
    - Full or partial terminations allowed
    - Full annual rental payment will still be issued in the fall
  - Land Prep cannot begin until after the Primary Nesting Season (May 1- July 15)
  - Early termination – refunds waived, and no liquidated damages would apply
    - Letters will not go to those participants with:
      - Accepted General SU58 offers
      - A grassland offer
      - An approved continuous CRP offer
SAFE Partners – Eric Zach & Andy Bishop’s PRESENTATIONS:

- **CP38 UPLAND WILDLIFE SAFE (State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement) – NEW PROPOSAL**
  
  **SAFE PROCESS**
  
  - CRP_966 notice requests new SAFE proposals and revisions of existing SAFE projects
  - State Technical Committee review and recommendations
  - FSA State Committee review, forwards recommended proposals to FSA CEPD (National)
  - Must be submitted to CEPD by June 24, 2022

  **Previous SAFEs**
  
  - Tallgrass Prairie SAFE and Upland Gamebird SAFE
  - Began in 2008
  - Continuous Practice with SIP and PIP
    - 119,324 acres enrolled currently
  - Discontinued when SAFE moved to general signup in 2019-20
    - SAFE moved back into continuous in spring 2021

  **Combining Previous SAFEs**
  
  - Why?
    - Previous SAFE projects addressed:
      - the same resource concern,
      - same habitat type, and
      - Portions of project locations overlapped
  - CRP_966 does not allow multiple projects targeting same resource concern and habitat type

  **Revised SAFE Proposal**
  
  - Upland wildlife habitat priority
  - Enroll 100,000 acres to maintain/improve upland game bird populations:
    - Greater prairie-chicken
    - Northern bobwhite
    - Sharp-tailed grouse
    - Ring-necked pheasant
    - Designed to also provide benefits for grassland songbirds and pollinators (monarchs)

  **UPLAND WILDLIFE SAFE**
  
  - Practices: CP38E-4D Wildlife Habitat and CP38E-12 Food Plots
  - Continuous practices eligible for SIP and PIP, Climate Smart
    - Wildlife biologists develop tailored conservation plans
      - Multiple plantings/cover types
      - Shrub cover optional
      - Field size, location, surrounding habitat, shrub component
  - Management activities valuable in achieving structural and vegetative diversity within CRP fields.
• Summary:
  • Provide flexibility for landowners and wildlife biologists to tailor CRP plantings to meet the needs of target species and the landowner’s goals.
  • Provide 100,000 acres of wildlife habitat
  • Produce 280,060 pheasants over 10 years
  • Provide pollinator habitat, sequester carbon, water, and soil quality
  • Remove 440,000 tons of CO2 (~95,000 cars) over 10 years

  o Migratory Bird, Butterfly & Pollinator SAFE Proposal Overview:
    • Will cover Nebraska
      • 3 States
        o NE, KS, OK (first time in OK)

    • What is a Playa?
      • Rainwater Basin
      • Central Table Playas
      • Southwest Playa

    • Background of Migratory Bird SAFE

    • SAFE Overview
      • Program Details – Consistent w/ original Proposal
        o Signup Process anytime
        o Continuous – CRP
        o Batching Periods
        o Reverse Auction (NEW CONCEPT)
          • Updated Rental Rates:
            • Annual rental amount for the duration of contract determined by landowner
            • County cap NASS irrigated rental rate
            • County floor NASS dryland rental rate
            • Competitive ranking based on offer bid amounts
      • Only 50% offers accepted in each cluster in anyone batching period
      • Continuous sign-up with batching period cut offs
      • Nebraska has 1,172.04 acres enrolled in Migratory Bird SAFE under the SU50 & SU51
      • Ranking higher for greater wetland acres, greater wetland to upland ratio, aquifer condition, and within cluster

        o County based eligibility
          • 39 eligible

        o Added Counties
          • Buffalo
          • Sherman
Selection criteria

- **Full restoration cost covered through Practice Incentive Payment and Practice Establishment Payment**
- **Eligible Land:**
  - Expiring CRP Contracts
- **Contract Duration & Effective Date:**
  - 10-15 yr contracts
  - Practice is a CP38B
- **Size**
  - Eligible Size:
    - No maximum enrollment per offer

Management

- **Mid-Contract Management**
  - Prescribed grazing as outlined in management plan

Buffers

- **Amount of adjacent upland acres:**
  - Limited to acres required to provide a protective buffer to the cropped wetland
  - **Minimum average buffer is 120 feet**

- **June 2022 – New Proposal Requested**
- **Incentives:**
  - Practice Establishment Payment (50%) restoration cost
  - Practice Incentive Payments (PIP) - 50%
  - Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) at 32.5%
- **Target is 25,000 acres.**

Questions

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Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Update

- **What is ECP?**
  - ECP is a cost share program that provides emergency funding and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters.
  - ECP does not compensate participants for damage to non-farmland or buildings, but does assist with restoring the productive agricultural capacity to damaged land

- **1-ECP (Rev.7) was published September 16, 2021**
- Updated guidance and procedure for implementing ECP payment scenarios
- Policy recommends reviewing ECP payment scenarios and descriptions of ECP practices with State Technical Committee.
  - Any suggested changes may be submitted to the national program manager for review and consideration
ECP Practices

- EC1 – Removing Debris From Farmland – Technical Code 500
- EC2 – Grading, Shaping, Releveling, or Similar Measures
- EC3 – Replacing or Repairing Permanent Fences
- EC4 – Restoring Conservation Structures and Other Installations
- EC6 – Drought Emergency Measures
- EC7 – Other Emergency Conservation Measures
- EC8 – Field Windbreaks and Farmstead Shelterbelts Emergency Measures

Why Payment Scenarios?

- Streamlined and straight-forward program implementation
- Reduced opportunity for improper payments
- **SIGNIFICANT** reduction in COF workload
- Improved timeliness of payment processing
- Consistency in payment rates across agencies, states, counties

REVIEW OF PAYMENT SCENARIOS & DESCRIPTIONS

**EC1 – Removing Debris From Farmland – Technical Code 500**

- Available scenarios include:
  - Removal of Trees less than 6 Inches in Diameter
  - Removal of Trees greater than 6 Inches in Diameter
  - Removal and Disposal of Fence
  - Removal and Disposal of Rock or Boulders Heavy Concentrated Debris – Requires Heavy Equipment to Move
  - Light Scattered Debris – Can Be Picked Up By Hand or With Small Equipment
  - Sand Debris Removed Off Site 12-30 Inches
  - Sand Debris Removed Off Site greater than 30 Inches

**EC3 – Replacing or Repairing Permanent Fences – NRCS Technical Code 382**

- Repairs or replaces damage to fences caused by natural damage. Fencing must meet NRCS standards and specifications to be approved for cost share.
- Available scenarios include:
  - Multi Strand Barbed/ Smooth Wire
  - Multi Strand Barbed or Smooth Wire Difficult Terrain
  - Woven Wire
  - Electric

Current Counties Approved for ECP

- Gosper – 4/7/22 Wildfire
- Furnas – 4/7/22 and 4/22/22 Wildfires
- Frontier – 4/22/22 Wildfire
- Red Willow – 4/22/22 Wildfire
- Perkins – 4/22/22 Wildfire
- Thurston – 3/30/22 and 4/23/22 Wildfires
Q: In anticipation of whether it rains or not, if it rains don’t continue to come & we start to see more & more drought pressure. What the protocol will be, or decision-making process will be to able to utilize the CRP acres once past nesting period, but while there are still CRP Grazing & Hay values?

A: Once nesting period is over. The rules for Emergency Haying/Grazing is that your county has to be in a D2 status during the program year. Oct 1, 2021, start Program year 22. County Committees have to review those conditions every month to see if they want to continue w/ haying & grazing. CRP policy is going to look @ drought monitor if the county has hit D2 since Oct 1, 2021, they are eligible for emergency haying/grazing. Unless the County Committee has said no because conditions are better. These counties are listed on a national listing on the conservation web page. Everything is handled @ the local level so you will have to go in & apply for this.

Q: What triggers the eligibility for emergency conservation payments (ECP) like a wildfire, floods, or tornado (how big does it have to be or how much area does it have to cover)?

A: For ECP it is by disaster type. As long as it’s eligible disaster, which is up to the local county committee, they have to request to implement ECP. There is no minimum or maximum, it could be one producer. Wildfires usually has to be started by a natural disaster like lighting, however like in April since we were in a drought, they were started by unknown causes. Since we were in a drought & we can prove there were high winds that day, we were able to approve ECP. It takes a national waiver for that though. County sends request up to State & then that goes to National.

Q: In the ECP scenario rates is there a different payment for historically underserved producers?

A: Yes, normal rate is 75%, however beginning farmer/rancher is 90% rate, but gender is not considered.

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATES

Brad Soncksen, NRCS

- CSP
  - CSP – Nebraska
    - Total Active Contracts as of June 2022
      - Contracts = 1,784
      - Contract Acres = 4,053,180
      - Obligated funds = $119,257,467.00
    - FY 2022 Allocations
      - CSP Classic
        - $12.6 Million
      - CSP Renewal
        - $6.6 Million
      - CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative
        - $50,000.00
    - FY 2022 Applications
      - Classic
        - 1137
        - 129 funded
- **FY 2022 Contracts**
  - Renewal
    - 66
  - GCI
    - 14

- **FY2022 CSP Classic Signup**
  - 129 applications preapproved in 51 offices across all DC administrative areas.
  - Contracting to be completed by July 15.

- **FY2023 CSP Renewal Signup**
  - Application deadline was April 15
  - 265 Applications from 590 eligible participants

- **NE has 23 Fund Pools in FY22**

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**ACEP**

- **FY2022 ACEP – Nebraska**
  - ACEP-WRE Eligible Applications
    - 18 Eligible Applications
    - 2,872.50 Acres
    - Fiscal Year Allocation of Funds
      - $2.1 Million

- **ACEP-WREP**
  - 2 Eligible Applications
  - 138 Acres
  - FY Allocation of Funds
    - $1.14 Million

- **ACEP-ALE**
  - 1
  - 2,350 Acres
  - FY Allocation of Funds
    - $566,308.00

- **Fiscal Year Allocation of Funds**
  - ACEP-WRE/WRP Stewardship Funds - $860,000
    - These funds are for maintenance and repairs of existing WRE and WRP easements.

- **Moving Forward on:**
  - **WRE**
    - 3 applications for 412 acres
      - $1.5 million estimated acquisition costs
      - $377,500.00 estimated restoration costs.
• WRE-WREP
  o 1 application for 77 acres
    • $188,685.00 estimated acquisition costs
    • $47,500.00 estimated restoration costs.

• ALE
  o 1 Application on 3350 Acres
    • Estimated $564,000.00 federal share
      • Field visit completed
      • Drafting deed language

• FY22 EWPP-FPE
  ▪ Applications
    • 21
      o 12 cancelled or found ineligible
  ▪ Acres
    • 5,590
  ▪ Estimated Requested funding
    • $20,313,085.00
  ▪ Offers Accepted
    • 7
      o 1 Pending Offers
      o 1,225 Acres
  ▪ Estimated Funding needed:
    • $4,428,440.00
  ▪ Legal Boundary Surveys underway

• FY 2023 ACEP - NEBRASLA
  ▪ Applications taken year round
  ▪ FY23 Application cut-off October 2022
  ▪ This was for WRE, WRE-WREP, & ALE
  ▪ Using appraisals again in FY23 to determine acquisition costs.

❖ EQIP
  o Nebraska
    ▪ Total Active Contracts as of June 2022
      • 2,474
      • Acres
        o 1.0 Million
      • Obligated funds
        o $79.5 million

  o CORONAVIRUS AGRICULTURAL RELIEF PAYMENTS
    ▪ Eligible Practices
      • 367 Roofs and Covers
      • 430 Irrigation Pipeline
• 443 Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface
• 468 Lined Waterway or Outlet
• 516 Livestock Pipeline
• 575 Trails and Walkways
• 584 Channel Bed Stabilization

- Must have been installed and checked out in CY21
  - December 31, 2022

- Minimum $300 CARP payment to be eligible – per contract item or an aggregate of contract items completed in CY21
  - December 31, 2022

- EQIP Fund Pools FY 2022
  - Source Water Protection – 10%
  - Wildlife Initiative – 10%
  - Historically Underserved – 10%
  - EQIP-CIC = 5%
    - Livestock – 50% (change from 60%)

- FY2022 STATEWIDE FUND POOLS
  - Advanced Cover Crop Initiative
  - NE Great Plains Grassland Initiative
  - Working Lands for Wildlife – Sandhills
  - Seasonal High Tunnel
  - Organic
  - Energy
  - Conservation Activity Plans
  - Animal Feeding Operations
  - Tribal
  - Disaster

- INITIAL FY22 General EQIP Allocation
  - $26.1 Million

- CURRENT FY22 General EQIP Allocation
  - $27.7 Million
  - Increase from April funds assessment
    - Requested 10M, but we got $965,00.00
      - Must be for Historically Underserved, Urban Ag, & Drought type.
  - Increase for Disaster (wildfire)
    - $700,000.00
  - Historically Underserved (10%) = $2.61 million
    - Current Historically Underserved = $3.9 million
  - Source Water Protection (10%) = $2.61 million
    - Current Source Water Protection = $2.2 million
Wildlife (10% combined with NE-GPGI) = $1.41 million
  o Current Wildlife (10% combined with NE-GPGI) = $1.7 million
  o Looking to make the decision on having another Signup period.

Andy Bishop made the comment that the RWBJ, Pheasant Forever, Game & Parks Commission & the Sandhills Task Force working with the ROC, have just mailed out 3000 individual handouts to all landowners with > than 648 acres in the sandhills, highlighting GPGI & the funding opportunities. Did a bunch of press release on it, might be good to do another signup & take advantage of the outreach we did. Might be new interest out there.

NE Great Plains Grassland Initiative = $1.2 million
  o Current NE Great Plains Grassland Initiative = $403,000

  o FY20-FY22 Source Water Protection
    - Practices: Only used in Source Water Protection ranking pool
      - Conservation Cover
      - Conservation Crop Rotation
      - Contour Buffer Strips
      - Cover Crop
      - Critical Area Planting
      - Well Decommissioning
      - Groundwater Testing
      - Field Border
      - Riparian Herbaceous Cover
      - Riparian Forest Buffer
      - Filter Strip
      - Grassed Waterway
      - Irrigation Pipeline
      - Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation
      - Sprinkler System
      - Irrigation Water Management
      - Pasture and Hay Planting
      - Range Planting
      - Nutrient Management
      - Pest Management
      - Vegetated Treatment Area
      - Constructed Wetland
      - Wetland Restoration
      - Wetland Enhancement

  o FY 2022 Wildlife Practices: Count towards 10% wildlife requirement
    - 327 - Conservation Cover
    - 390 - Riparian Herbaceous Cover
    - 391 - Riparian Forest Buffer
    - 395 – Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
    - 396 – Aquatic Organism Passage
    - 420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting
    - 422 – Hedgerow Planting
- 472 – Access Control
- 580 – Streambank and Shoreline Protection
- 644 – Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
- 645 – Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- 646 – Shallow Water Development and Mgt
- 647 – Early Successional Habitat Development and Mgt
- 649 – Structures for Wildlife
- 657 – Wetland Restoration
- 658 – Wetland Creation
- 659 - Wetland Enhancement

- Current FY2022 General EQIP Allocation = $27.7 million
  - EQIP – CIC (5%) = $1.3 million
    - Current EQIP – CIC = $1.3 million
  - Advanced Cover Crop Initiative = $300,000.00
    - Current Advanced Cover Crop Initiative = $22,500.00
  - Animal Feeding Operations = $1.0 Million
    - Current Animal Feeding Operations = $915,000.00
  - Disaster = $1.0 Million
    - Current Disaster = $1.9 million
      - Wildfire – Panhandle = $525,642.00.
      - Wildfire – Road 739 = $700,000.00
      - Wildfire – Statewide = $700,000.00

- EQIP-CIC Nebraska FY22 Incentive Practices
  - 328 – Conservation Crop Rotation
  - 329 – Residue and Tillage Management, No Till
  - 338 - Prescribed Burning
  - 340 – Cover Crop
  - 449 - Irrigation Water Management
  - 511 – Forage Harvest Management
  - 528 – Prescribed Grazing
  - 590 – Nutrient Management
  - 595 – Pest Management Conservation System
  - 645 – Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
  - 647 – Early Successional Habitat Development and Management
  - 808 – Soil Carbon Amendment
  - 216- Soil Health Testing

- CURRENT RESULTS:
  - 40 Applications
    - 32 Cropland
      - 19 Approved
        - $945,565.00
    - 7 Rangeland
      - 5 Approved
        - $395,085.00
    - 1 Pasture
      - 1 Approved
        - $12,000.00
FY 2022 Disaster – Wildfires

- Morrill, Scottsbluff, Banner County July 2021 – December 2021 Wildfire Assistance
  - 14 Applications/Contracts
  - $525,642 Obligated

- Road 739 Wildfire Assistance Initiative
  - Allocating $700,000
  - Currently 18 applications
  - Application Batching Periods
    - May 13
    - June 10
    - June 30

- NE Statewide Wildfire Assistance
  - After the 739 fire, decided to open it up Statewide.
  - Application Batching Periods
    - May 13
    - June 10
    - June 30

Current FY2022 General EQIP Allocation = $27.7 million
- Conservation Activity Plans = $200,000.00
  - Current Conservation Activity Plans = $162,000.00
  - Just put out a new cutoff date
- Sandhills Working Lands for Wildlife = $100,000.00
  - Current Sandhills Working Lands for Wildlife = $212,000.00
- High Tunnels = $100,000.00
  - Current High Tunnels = $157,000.00
- Organic = $100,000.00
  - Current Organic = $68,000.00
- Tribal = $100,000.00
  - Current Tribal = $0
- Energy = $25,000.00
  - Current Energy = $0

FY2022 PARTNERSHIP FUND POOLS
- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)
  - 3 Projects
  - Allocation
    - $1,736,349.00
    - Bazile = $751,876.00
      - Current $699,000.00
    - Big Sandy = $368,314.00
      - Current $0
    - Turkey creek = $616,159.00
      - Current $0
• Water Smart (Bureau of Reclamation)
  o 2 Projects
  o Total Allocations = $774,000.00
    ▪ URNRD
      • $250,000.00
    ▪ MRNRD
      • $524,000.00

• Forest Service (Joint Chiefs) LAST YEAR
  o 1 Project
    ▪ UNWNRD, MNNRD, ULNRD
  o Allocation
    ▪ $500,000.00

❖ EQIP WaterSMART
  o A supplement to the Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART Program – Water Conservation and Efficiency Grant
    ▪ F22 WaterSMART Program
    ▪ New FY22 BOR Project: Lower Republican NRD
      • The Lower Republican Natural Resources District in southern Nebraska will install near real-time telemetry equipment on 1,057 irrigation flow meters and other water management sensors for improved on-farm water management and reporting. In addition, the district will install eight solar-powered weather stations to collect evapotranspiration data to inform irrigation scheduling in the area. The project will receive $2,000,000 with a total project cost of $4,360,858.
    ▪ www.usbr.gov/watersmart/weeg/
    ▪ Solicitation for FY2023 EQIP-WSI Priority Areas
      • Water Quantity Concerns (Primary)
      • Proposals due by July 15, 2022

❖ Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program (JCLRP)
  o The intent of the program is to improve the health and resilience of forest landscapes by coordinating eligible activities across land ownerships. Collaboration among FS and NRCS, as well as many local, non-governmental, Tribal, and individual landowner stakeholders.
    ▪ Objectives:
      1) to reduce the risk of wildfire,
      2) to protect water quality and supply,
      3) to improve wildlife habitat for at-risk species.
  o New Proposal Requests for FY2023: Due - August 5, 2022
LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETINGS

- **FY 2022**
  - Meetings completed in February/ March 2022
  - Reports are due to the State Office by April 15, 2022
  - **LOCAL WORK GROUP AGENDA ITEMS:**
    - Priority Resource Concerns
    - Fund Pools - Ranking Tools – Screening Tools
    - Practice Payment Schedule
    - Local issues
  - Your local Work Group Meeting is posted on the NE NRCS website.

- **Practices (see below) and Scenario Requests (see Brad’s slides)**
  - Pumping Plant (533)
  - Cover Crop (340)
  - Watering Facility (614)
  - Livestock Shelter Structure (576)
  - Annual Forages for Grazing (810)
  - Critical Area Planting (342)
  - Filter Strip (393)
  - Prescribed Grazing (528)
  - Heavy Use Area Protection (561)
  - Water Well (642)
  - Structure for Water Control (587)
  - Underground Outlet (620)
  - Nutrient Management (590)

- **Program/Initiative Requests**
  - LWG request (FY23): Request from MNNRD for approval of a NWQI in Long Pine Creek Watershed
    - **Action:** Requests will not be submitted for any new NWQI projects for FY23 in order to focus on the 4 current projects which have significant challenges in meeting treatment goals.

- **NWQI Watershed & Source Water Protection Areas**
  - Bazile Creek Ground Water Management Area
    - Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lewis and Clark NRD, Upper Elkhorn NRD
    - FY 22 FY22
    - Obligations Budget
    - $699,000 $751,876

  - Turkey Creek
    - Lower Big Blue NRD
    - FY 22 FY22
    - Obligations Budget
    - $0.00 $616,159

  - Big Sandy Creek
    - Little Blue NRD
• Wahoo Creek
  o Lower Platte North NRD
    • FY 22 FY22
      Obligations Budget
      $0.00 $368,314
    • Still in Planning Phase
    • Recruiting Producer Interest

  o Request for payment rate adjustments
    • Various requests to increase or decrease FY23 payment rates for 328 Conservation Crop Rotation, 327 Conservation Cover, 340 Cover Crop, 533 Pumping Plant, 620 Underground Outlet
      • Action: Payment rate adjustments under review for FY2023.

  o Request for Payment Caps
    • LWG request (FY23): Recommend payment cap for High Tunnel's be reinstated to limit 1 contract per year per contract participant.
      • Action: Under review for FY23

  o EQIP application and ranking cutoff dates
    • Multiple Recommendations
      • Action: Establish mid November application cutoff and January ranking deadline.

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❖ STAC Urban Ag Sub-Committee

  o Purpose
    • The primary purpose of this new subcommittee will be to foster and promote urban agriculture within the State by supporting urban farmers and partners who are working to develop, implement, and promote new and innovative practices and address natural resource concerns on urban and small-scale farms.
    • This subcommittee will also support the local, regional, and national objectives established under Section 12302 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill).

  o Background
    • The creation of the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill is an impetus for increased public inquiry about programs and services related to urban agriculture across USDA.
    • The promotion of urban agriculture is one of the priorities of the administration, and NRCS conservation programs support this priority at the local level.
For these reasons, State conservationists are encouraged to establish subcommittees focusing on gathering input from stakeholders on planning and implementing urban agricultural conservation.

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, the Secretary was authorized to establish OUAIP with the mission of working department-wide to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices to support urban, suburban, and urban cluster agriculture.

Nationally, a growing urban agricultural economy is emerging to address the needs of underserved and low-income communities.

Urban agriculture is also getting increased attention because of initiatives to create more resilient local and regional food systems and to promote climate smart agriculture practices.

With the immense interest in urban agriculture, it is recommended that each State conservationist establish a subcommittee to assist NRCS with implementation of its conservation programs.

- The responsibilities each subcommittee may include:
  1. Identifying local urban agriculture needs, emerging practices, resource concerns, and potential partnering entities to support urban, small-scale, and innovative production;
  2. Identifying local barriers to successful implementation of conservation strategies by urban, small-scale, and innovative agriculture, especially for new and beginning farmers;
  3. Building a statewide partnership of experts to discuss and examine technical or programmatic topics related to resource concerns and conservation strategies in urban, small-scale, and innovative production;
  4. Evaluating and reviewing ongoing innovations in agriculture production and conservation and extension activities relating to urban and community agriculture, including compost, food waste reduction, and innovative production;
  5. Developing recommendations on outreach strategies that meet the unique and complex conservation issues facing producers in urban environments;
  6. Assessing natural resource priorities for urban agriculture and providing recommendations for conservation practices to help NRCS meet the needs of local urban and small-scale producers;
  7. Advising the State conservationist on policies to improve participation in NRCS conservation programs among urban, innovative, and small-scale producers locally, regionally, and nationally;
  8. Supporting local pilot project missions and deliverables by offering advice and facilitating connections with experts and partners who can lend assistance; and
  9. Providing additional relevant assistance and advice to the State Conservationist.

Q: Are there Guidelines for replacement fencing? Wood fencing over steal fencing? Because of the wildfires are they still going to allow wood or if they will require steal posts.
   A: Depends. ECP – Yes, has to meet NRCS specifications.

Q: Process or timeline of when you will answer the LWG on their recommendations?
   A: Working on them now & our Goal is to have decision on these by Mid-Summer & respond to each one of the LWG. Final decisions will be covered @ September STAC.
“NRCS NE URBAN AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION STRATEGIC PLAN”

Carlos Villarreal, State Soil Scientist, NRCS

❖ Background
  o He is a first generation removed from the farm & has a passion for Urban Ag.
  o USDA
    ▪ 2022-2026 Strategic Plan – Strategic Goal 2:
      • Ensure America’s Agricultural system is Equitable, Resilient, & Prosperous
        o The Office of Urban Agriculture & Innovative Production established under the 2018 Farm Bill.
  o NRCS
    ▪ FY22 Agency Priorities:
      • Expand the conservation tools and support to address the unique needs of URBAN farmers & communities nationwide.
  o NRCS NEBRASKA......
    ▪ Decided to make a permanent STAC Sub-Committee
    ▪ NRCS NE had a lot of questions that needed answers before we could make a committee.

❖ Central Regional NRCS offices sent a survey to all central states from TX to ND, asking about Urban Ag.
  o PURPOSE: Answers were all over the board....
    ▪ How is NE servicing Urban Ag producers?
      • Assigned responsibility to existing staff & local FO
      • Hired new NRCS staff specifically to service urban producers
      • Through agreements w/ conservation partners (SWCD, extension, etc.)
      • Rely on partners not under an agreement
      • Strategy for servicing urban farmers is still being developed
      • Other
    ▪ Are those in NE responsible for providing urban producers assistance properly trained & equipped?
      • Highly Trained
      • Moderately Trained
      • Additional Training needed
    ▪ Select the top 4 NRCS conservation practices/activities being requested by urban producers
      • High Tunnel System (325)
      • Cover Crop (340)
      • Irrigation System, Micro Irrigation (441)
      • Nutrient Management (590)
      • Pollinator plantings was the most requested “OTHER”
    ▪ Are there obstacles for planning any of the above selected conservation practices/activities for urban producers?
      • YES
Questions that need Answers

- How are we servicing urban ag customers?
- Can we identify conservation assistance barriers?
- What is urban agriculture & conservation?
- What are our expectations for ourselves, our customers, & our partners?

NRCS NE URBAN AGRICULTURE & CONSERVATION STRATEGIC PLAN

- **Oct. 2021** – Formed a committee to write the plan
  - Geographical and technical representation
- **Nov. 2021/Jan. 2022** – Hosted four planning sessions
- **Jan. 2022/Mar. 2022** – Leadership and STC Review
- **Apr. 2022** – Approval from Leadership and STC

- Next Steps
  - Present to STAC & Partners
  - Develop Annual Business Plan

- **OUR MUST HAVES**
  - Inclusion
    - Micro gardeners
    - Large Urban farms
  - Science-based
    - Include our technical science base systems
  - Multicultural
    - Understand the diversity in our areas
  - Service
    - Don’t want customers leaving without getting what they asked for.
  - Interdisciplinary

- **MISSION STATEMENT**
  - Growing Conservation Opportunities for Every Nebraskan

WHAT IS URBAN AG & CONSERVATION:

- Cultivation, procession, and direct to consumer purchasing of agriculture commodities produced within a short range of local & regional cities, towns, and villages
  - Address food shortages, food desserts, low-access and low-income
  - Production methods vary from micro to large-scale operations
- Application of management systems to address resource concerns within urban settings.

- **FIVE KEY ELEMENTS**
  - Partnerships, Cooperation, & Inclusion
    - Recruitment of an internal and external team of staff/subject matter experts to lead the urban conservation campaign.
    - Support innovation and demonstration projects that expand our capacity to deliver or improve urban conservation assistance.
    - Recognize monitoring methods to measure success in urban areas
- **Technical Assistance**
  - Develop an understanding of resource concerns and planning criteria for urban land uses and projects.
  - Improve availability and access of resources
    - Technical Guides
    - Assistance portal (virtual kiosk)

- **Financial Assistance**
  - Host eligibility and urban scenario discussions with Farm Service Agency (FSA)
    - Discuss local municipal barriers to providing FA
    - How to obtain a farm number
    - Who has jurisdiction
    - Types of leases
  - Urban Agriculture and Conservation—Program Initiatives

- **Employee development & internal communication**
  - Urban SME’s & professionals Roster
  - Urban Agriculture Training Curriculum
  - How to Assist/Working effectively with Urban & Small Farm producers

- **Outreach & Education**
  - Improve NRCS’s availability, access, & reputation w/ urban agriculture & conservation customers.
  - Build confidence w/ our constituents as the leading conservation agency who supports all conservation interests.

**Q:** What is the definition of Urban Ag? What if they are not in city limits? How are folks getting access to this?

**A:** Great question, doing a lot of research on this, as there is another state that involves the word “small farm”. Don’t have a geographical area limitation, but more like resource concerns right now. Agro tourism crops for food security. Our goal is to address the resource concerns like food security. If they have a tract # through FSA.

**Q:** Is it the garden @ large or will it be each individual farmer?

**A:** Farmer has to have a farm # & a Tract # through the FSA & has control of the area through the length of the contract.

**Q:** So, if we have an empty lot next to our house can we go into FSA & get that approved?

**A:** Yes, it has to be eligible or capable of producing a crop. FSA has done some updates on their software.

**Q:** Could this help those who are trying to get access to land, or can we help them find available land if they want to try & build a sustainable urban ag farm? This is a great thing.

**A:** This is the kind of input we need to be looking at.
Q: Could this transfer to not just crops but into livestock options or do you see this as more crop focused? Like FFA or 4-H kids in the city, turning lots into show barns? Chickens for food or eggs, there are a lot of people who raise chickens in the city limits what do they do with the litter? Same with rabbits?

A: We don’t know but that does fall into Nutrient Management planning. Manure for Soil.

Q: When you think about other cities like Chicago where they are using vertical integration in their apartments to grow lettuce & market that. With that you can’t put a farm # on that, so how does that fit into this program?

A: We have seen examples of roof top agriculture, so those are discussions we need to have with FSA & how we are going to resolve these problems with solutions to help our customers.

Q: Was this committee and planning session only NRCS employees?
A: Originally yes, did strategic planning. We did identify that we will have outside experts who will help guide us through this as well as the committee.

Q: Will we have fliers from other programs or agencies?
A: Yes, Don’t want to be intimidating to the small farmer.

Need to find people who have more expertise & get their help.
A: We have an agreement with City Sprouts in Omaha, who has been helping us with this as they have a large footprint in that communities. They are allowing us the opportunity to shadow them & learn from what they have already gone through.

Q: How & who should folks contract to join the sub-committee?
A: Please email Tami Nordman at tami.nordman@usda.gov by June 30, 2022.

SOURCE WATER PROTECTION FOR CONSERVATIONISTS: OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE 2018 FARM BILL AND BEYOND

➢ Tatiana Davila, Hydrogeologist, NDEE (Introduced herself)

❖ OUTLINE:
  o Source Water Protection and Wellhead Protection – What are they?
  o Plans, Plans, Plans
  o 2018 Farm Bill Source Water Protection Initiative
  o Nitrates in Nebraska
  o Agronomic Data from Lower Niobrara NRD
  o Nitrates and Human Health
  o Opportunities for Collaboration
  o Announcements

❖ TD Roles
  o Source Water Protection Program
    ▪ Source Water –
      • any water above or below the surface that may be used currently or in the future for drinking water supply.
• Source Water Grant Program
  • 200k annually for small public water systems (serving under 10,000 customers)
  • Projects to protect source water
  • Plans to protect source water
  • 2-year grants

○ Wellhead Protection Program
  ▪ LB 1161 in 1998 – Wellhead Protection Act
  ▪ Funded under NE 15% set-aside of federal Clean Drinking Water Act
  ▪ Sets up a process for public water systems to use if they choose to develop and implement a Wellhead Protection Plan
  ▪ NDEE assists communities to establish an appropriate area
  ▪ A plan provides a snapshot of the water system, complete with a contaminant inventory, emergency plans, mitigation recommendations, and best management practices

• Elements of a Wellhead Protection Map
  • Groundwater flow is modeled by NDEE and/or a consultant depending on the project.
  • Boundaries are recommended by NDEE based on the model. Final boundary is decided by the city.
  • Time of travel paths indicate flow direction and velocity of a hypothetical contaminant once entered into the aquifer based on regional hydrogeology.
  • The boundary delineation and approval by NDEE does NOT provide regulatory authority. A community must establish and adopt controls and/or a zoning overlay to regulate the area.

• Plans for Water Quality
  • Delineate the Wellhead Protection Area
  • Potential Contaminant Source Inventory
  • Contaminant Source Management
  • Emergency & Contingency Planning
  • Public Education & Participation

• Drinking Water Protection Management Plans
  • Meet EPA’s alternative to a 9-element watershed plan requirement
  • Model a 50-yr time-of-travel based on numerical groundwater modeling.
  • Implement a community-based planning process
  • Develop a strong implementable I&E program
  • Ability to double as a state approved WHP plan.

• WHY ARE THESE PLANS SO IMPORTANT?
  • ID Cause/source of impairment
  • Clear watershed goal, how will the projects make advancements to ward goal?
  • Schedule and milestones to guide implementation.
  • Proposed management measures explanation of how measures will affect goal.
  • Description and process of water quality results monitoring.
    ○ LONG TERM IMPLEMENTATION OF PRACTICES AND PROTECTION OF RESOURCES
• Longer grant terms, more funding....

○ URBAN CONSERVATION FUNDING
  • Bioswales
  • Fertilizer management
  • Enhanced infiltration (soil amendment)
  • Irrigation management
  • Low impact landscaping
  • Porous pavement
  • Rain gardens
  • Rainwater harvesting
  • Constructed wetlands
  • Grass seeding
  • Riparian restoration
  • Habitat improvement

○ LIMITATIONS OF PLANS
  • Wellhead Protection Plans are only a snapshot of a system
  • Many WHP areas are outside of a community’s corporate limits or extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and they have no regulatory zoning authority (County must have zoning)
  • This requires a voluntary effort by communities and producers/landowners in surrounding areas
  • Small communities often lack resources and expert knowledge to promote BMPs or incentive programs
  • Many individuals don’t know what resources are available through these plans.
  • OPPORTUNITY ALERT!

○ Source Water Protection Initiative (from 2018 FB)
  • Wellhead Protection Areas – High Priority
  • NRD GMA Quantity Mgmt Areas – Medium Priority
  • NRD GMA Phase II or higher – Medium Priority

○ Land use in Wellhead Protection Areas
  • Payments for this initiative go to owners/operators of agricultural land who install conservation practices.
  • How can I (WHP/SWP programs) support YOUR work?

○ 2020 Cost Share Applications
  • 186 producers applied for the SWP program
  • Funded 50 applications in 36 counties for $2.3 million; on 8074 acres

  • Irrigation practices – on 28 contracts
    • Irrigation water management – 28
    • Conversion of flood irrigation to sprinkler – 18
    • Conversion of flood irrigation to subsurface drip – 4
    • Conversion of irrigated cropland to dryland – 20

  • Other practices
    • Cover crops – 15
- Nutrient management – 13
- Pest Management – 2

- How much $ and how many acres within Wellhead Protection areas are receiving SWPI funds?

- Nitrate in Nebraska
  - Primary contaminant in drinking water:
    - Nitrate Nitrogen
  
  - Clearinghouse shows herbicide & nitrate sample results
  - Communities in the dark purple/red areas are faced with high costs of treatment/siting new wells/connecting to other communities for clean water.

- Phase II information
  - Online form
  - Reported yearly

  - Filtered data
    - Dismiss the extremes
    - Dismiss any information regarded as “outside realistic farming parameters”
  
  - Analyzed to produce various comparison
  - Used in Nitrogen certification classes, presented to local crop consultants and Ag lenders.

  - 2015-2017 LNNRD Phase II Crop Reporting Data
    - Represents 190,000 corn acres
    - % of corn fields over or under UNL recommendation
      - In 2015 thru 2018, 73% of corn fields had Nitrogen applied over the UNL recommended amount
      - Down from 91% in 2013

- Nebraska towns pay millions to fight nitrates as water bills go up
  - Millions spent to mitigate water contamination; taxes increasing
  - Small communities disproportionately impacted; few resources to address the problem

- Nitrate and Human Health
  - Regulatory limits of nitrate in drinking water are set for infant development of methemoglobinemia, not for other health outcomes
  
  - Numerous scientific studies have looked at the relationship of nitrate in drinking water on human health
  - High concentration of nitrate in drinking water have been linked to adverse health outcomes

  - Strongest links:
    - Minor health ailments
    - Methemoglobinemia
    - Preterm birth issues
    - Birth defects
• Adult Health Issues:
  o Increased Heart rate
  o Nausea
  o Headaches
  o Abdominal cramps
  o Alzheimer’s
  o Diabetes
  o Parkinson’s Disease
  o Adult Cancers
    ▪ Colorectal cancer
    ▪ Thyroid disease
    ▪ Kidney cancer
    ▪ Bladder cancer
    ▪ Non-Hodgkin lymphoma
  • Most Vulnerable Populations
    • Pregnant women & their fetus
    • Young infants (<6m of age)
    • Children
    • People w/ oxygen transport or delivery conditions like anemia, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, sepsis, and presence of other structural hemoglobin variants
    • People with high nitrate in their well water.

• Pediatric cancers
  ▪ Incidence of pediatric cancers in NE are among the five highest in the U.S.
  ▪ Spatial relationship between NO3 concentration & incidence of pediatric cancers at the watershed level
  ▪ Suggesting different agricultural activities across the state might compromise the health of the pediatric population in regards to central nervous system tumors.
  ▪ Data from 2003-2014 & reported as age-adjusted incidence rates of childhood cancer per 1 million:
    • U.S. – 173.7
    o NE 183.2

• Unexpected Costs
  ▪ Moving
  ▪ Financial burden
  ▪ Higher rates of bankruptcy
  ▪ Wisconsin study
    • $250,000.00 – $1.5 billion in medical expenditures
    • $1.3-$6.5 billion in lost productivity

• What you do matters!
  ▪ Nebraska Drinking Water Campaign
    • Unified effort to educate the public, provide resources, and amplify the work already being done
• Target at-risk populations (for Public Health)
• Target vulnerable communities (shallow water table, sandy soils, irrigated farmland)
• Empower Nebraska communities with science-driven solutions
• Educate about ag opportunities (improve yields, increase infiltration, increase farmer profits, reduce inputs)
• Campaign Focuses:
  o Education: K-12 Curriculum development around Nebraska-specific phenomena
  o Communication: Statewide awareness campaign including apps, informational tools, citizen science projects, and more
  o Community events: interactive events to be held across the state to engage with communities about their water, health, and soils

▪ Ways to get involved/ work together
  • Join the Statewide Drinking Water Campaign
  • Form a Drinking Water Quality / Water Quality Subcommittee of STAC
  • Seek out and take Communication Trainings
  • Collaborative Education and Outreach Opportunities
    o Soil Health / Urban Conservation
    o Drinking Water Quality / Public Health
    o Target audiences: water operators, landowners/producers, urban farmers

❖ IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT:
  o NDEE in partnership with UNL Extension Office has recently hired a Source Water Protection Educator.
    ▪ Lauren Nagengast
      • July 1, 2022
      • 50/50 working for both NDEE & UNL Extension
      • Background
        o From Bloomfield, NE
        o Rural Health Advocacy & policy
        o Focus on improving health access to rural areas
        o Background in Public Health
        o Has worked with Nitrates in the past

Q: How are clean water & drinking water state revolving funds leveraged with source water protection in Nebraska?

A: All of the drinking water programs are both funded by the 15% set aside from the state safe drinking water act (SFR money), so very heavily.

Q: Appears most of the conservation practices for SWP are water quantity focused. How do we move the needle to more conservation practice uses for quality? How can CWSRF and DWSRF assist in this effort? Need to see more focus on water quality than water quantity.
A: The conservation practices that we listed were specifically for water quality. SFR funds are already helping with the 15% & the # source. The community of Syracuse & Beatrice for land acquisition for water protection of quality. This should be a way to help do that.

Q: Does your data and information show Nebraska land use management in 2022 as a whole is trending in positive direction for SWP concerns as compared to past management that may have led to issues? We lead the nation in No-Till acres harvested, for instance, and can we at least suggest we are moving in the right direction?

A: Absolutely, I think with the lower Niobrara data we are moving the needle. Producers are doing better with efficiency than they have in years past. We do have reason to be hopeful & can always do better.

______________________________________________________________________________

PARTNER UPDATES:

Nick S. – NASS doing a Conservation Practice Adoption Motivations survey (CPAMS) sent out to 1,204 Nebraska Farmers and Ranchers. Targets two groups confined livestock operations/practices, along with Cropping practices. Will be doing Data collections on this from late June until end of July. Next year grazing & forest versions of this survey. They are a lengthy survey.

Carlos – Will send out the Urban Ag strategic plan fact sheet that will be on our website, with these meeting minutes. Reminder to send Tami your nominations.

Tim – Joint Chiefs Program. Trying to decide if want to go after it again & have been grateful to be doing it for 6 years. Trying to decide if there is more work to do in three more years.

__________________________________________________________________________________

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

FUTURE 2022 MEETINGS: (LOCATION TO BE DETERMINED)

- September 8
- December 1