

Kentucky State Technical Committee
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Subcommittee Meeting
August 13, 2015 – 9:00 a.m.
Farm Service Agency State Committee Room
Lexington, Kentucky

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 by Deena Wheby, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Assistant State Conservationist. She welcomed everyone and said that while the USDA State Technical Committee used to have a number of subcommittees that they had more recently been operating the subcommittees by inviting the entire State Technical Committee so as not to exclude anyone who had not identified themselves for a subcommittee. Persons interested in the specific topic would come to the “subcommittee” meeting and make up the subcommittee at that time. Today’s meeting is considered that of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Subcommittee. The attendance sheet for this meeting is included at the end of these notes; fourteen persons were present.

She also said that standard operating procedures were published in the Federal Register which require subcommittees to report back to the full committee, and said that this would be done via email by sending today’s meeting summary to the full committee. She reminded the group that the committee is an advisory group that provides recommendations to USDA agencies to help them make technical and programmatic decisions and that their recommendations will be considered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Committee and FSA as they make the final decision on today’s topic. She then turned the meeting over to Faye Brown, FSA Agricultural Program Specialist.

Faye began her presentation by saying that the purpose of this meeting is to provide recommendations for the establishment of zones for the CRP Grassland Program. She said that CRP-Grasslands replaces the rental part of the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP). It will be rental only, no easements. There is no published policy for this program yet. She said that counties not in a zone can still sign up, but zone counties get prioritization in the way of 10 extra scoring points.

Faye then presented information via a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of that presentation is found at the end of these notes.

Through this program, participants limit future use of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices, produce hay, mow, or harvest for seed production (subject to certain restrictions during nesting season.) They may also conduct fire rehabilitation and construct firebreaks. There will be no cost share to establish grass cover (must already be in grass), but does have exceptions. The land does not have to meet cropping history like regular CRP. Forest/woodland is not eligible. Must have and follow a conservation plan.

While the program will not pay to establish cover, it will pay for cross fencing and livestock water development.

Eligibility for participants is basically the same as for CRP. Land must have been owned or operated for at least 12 months prior to close of the enrollment period. Provisions for exceptions as outlined in 2-CRP in the case of death and foreclosure will also apply. Eligible land must be existing grassland that is located in historically dominated grassland area. Provisional offers will allow for the producer to establish grass (at their own cost) on land that is not currently in a grass cover. Non Tree practice expired or expiring CRP would be eligible as well as grassland that has expired from GRP.

The three eligible practices are CP87 Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes, CP88 Permanent Native Grasses and Legumes, and CP42 Pollinator Habitat. The pollinator habitat has been added since

the original information came out, and it looks like it will score well in the ranking. FSA has verbally been told that the nesting season will apply more to haying than grazing, but no written guidance has been received on that yet.

The contract period is 15 years. Rental rates have not been announced yet. Most likely they will be higher than GRP rates were, but will be capped. (Has seen some caps at \$35-40/acre.) Will not pay like CRP. The practices eligible for cost-share (interior cross fence, watering systems) is what will probably be attractive to participants.

The ranking will be national, and FSA expects ranking in November. Application cut-off dates have not been announced.

There are six ranking factors in the national score – F1 Current and Future Use (20 points), F2 Beginning Farmer/ Rancher Underserved Producer (20 points), F3 Maximizing grassland preservation (20 points), F4 Vegetative cover (20 points), F5 Environmental factors (20 points), and F6 Pollinator Habitat (20 points)

The FSA State Committee will meet on August 24, 2015, and will review the recommendations of this CRP subcommittee.

Faye then said that the group needed to talk about the considerations and then identify and rank the counties to be in the zones. Partial counties cannot be in the zone; must be whole counties. The considerations are Wildlife, Water Quality, Grasslands at Risk, and Anticipated Participation.

All counties will be eligible for the program, but those in the zones will get additional priority. Land in zones will get 10 additional points for the offer. State wildlife zones also get 10 additional points.

States have been given an acreage cap for the zones which is 25 percent of the total USDA – National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) hay, pasture, and CRP acres by state. Kentucky is eligible to designate 1,383,688 acres. This number is subject to change once the national office provides the county by county data.

Faye showed a state map for CRP priority zones and provided the attendees several maps including Grass and Mixed Forage Reported on FSA-578, which was the focus of much of the priority zone discussion. A copy of this map is attached, and other maps may be found in the PowerPoint presentation.

She asked the group if there were any questions.

Q: What is relationship with land coming out of CRP? Is this program targeted towards those acres?

A: No. The purpose is to preserve grasslands. CRP land that is expired or expiring is eligible but doesn't get any more ranking points.

Q: Where were the larger GRP areas?

A: The GRP interest was mostly reflective on USDA staff. Monroe County had about 15 of them, more than rest of state combined. There was also some interest in Breckinridge, Mercer, and Bourbon Counties.

Danny Hughes, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) biologist, mentioned that cost share caps will be set for the cross fencing and watering tanks (based on 50 percent cost-share); and that rates won't be as high as GRP, but more than for continuous CRP.

Marcinda Kester, FSA, mentioned that local beekeeper groups in Pulaski County have expressed interested (because of the pollinator practice). It was reiterated that there is no cost-share for establishment.

It was noted that in-state partners may be able to help transition to grassland.

A question was asked to clarify firebreaks and prescribed burning in the program. It was explained that these practices are allowed, but it is anticipated that these will not be cost-shared.

Rental rates are speculated to be higher than GRP rental rates, being based on 75 percent of the grazing value (per the interim rule.) Someone noted that the average NAAS rate is \$27/acre.

The earlier mentioned 1.3 million acre cap is how many acres Kentucky can put in the “zone”. FSA is unsure how many acres Kentucky will be able to enroll or if there will be a cap set for that. It will be a national ranking; unsure if there will be a state cap. Nationally, there is a 2 million acre cap for the program.

The cap is 25 percent of the haying and grazing acres, not the total county acres. (However, whole counties must be entered, but the whole acres don’t count, just the 25 percent of haying and grazing.) FSA does not have these acres by county yet although they expect this to be provided by their national office.

Joe Cain, Kentucky Farm Bureau, said that the program will be interesting for cattlemen. It was said that it is an incentive to make them better managers with rotational grazing, etc. as participants will need to follow the grazing plan.

It was mentioned that the zones don’t have to be contiguous and states can have multiple zones.

Jeff Sole of The Nature Conservancy said native grassland restoration could be used for program participants and could incorporate fire for management to get them interested in restoration. The pollinator practice could also help get landowners interested.

Faye then summarized the discussion of who might be interested in the program – cattlemen, persons restoring and preserving natives, and those interested in pollinators.

Jeff Sole identified that the “blue swath” on the “Grass and Mixed Forage Reported” map does a good job representing the historical barrens of Kentucky.

Brent Harrell, US Fish and Wildlife Service, noted that this is also a focus area for them.

Joe Cain said that for cattle consideration, the Bluegrass Region over to the Knobs (Mercer, Lincoln – also Garrard Counties) would be of interest. (“Outer Bluegrass Knobs”.)

It was mentioned that the State’s (KDFWR) Quail Focus areas overlapped with some of these areas – Mercer County, also Livingston and Hart; with Boyle County to be included in the future.

After more discussion, Faye summarized the areas that had been identified as potential CRP-Grasslands Zones: Historical Barrens, Bluegrass area for cattle, quail focus areas, and the Outer Bluegrass Knobs. The Historical Barrens seemed to be highest priority per the group. Faye said that the group now needed to identify counties and prioritize these counties. (Because of the acreage cap, all may not be included.)

The following counties were identified for the Historical Barrens: Hardin, Hart, Livingston, Meade, and Breckinridge. It was suggested to try to tie these to cattle and quail to these to prioritize.

USFWS said that the rattlesnake-master borer moth that might be listed on the Endangered Species List in this area as well.

The counties were prioritized in the following order: Hardin, Meade, Breckinridge, Grayson, and Hart.

It was pointed out that the “blue counties” on the afore-mentioned map are also where most of cattle are as well.

There was some discussion about crop counties. Crop rental rates are very high and there is probably not enough incentive in this program to entice landowners to leave land in grass for 15 years.

Jack Kuhn, NRCS, said that in GRP, a lot of the bigger farmers didn’t want to participate due to the nesting season restrictions. The group thought that the ability to graze during nesting season (but still not hay) if that is what the rules allow, will help with the concern over nesting season restrictions.

Someone asked about Monroe County as part of the Barrens. It was stated that it is on the edge of Barrens, and there is not much native left. The Barrens come to edge of Simpson and Allen Counties.

It was also noted that local presence is important to push the program. Same for crop reports, how much it’s pushed at local level seems to result in number of reports.

After further discussion, three tiers of priority counties were identified and placed in priority order. This prioritization was done based on the earlier identified groups (Historical Barrens, Livestock, etc.) (Note: A second prioritization process was conducted later and is also found in these notes.)

First tier priority counties (Barrens) in this order:

Hardin, Hart, Livingston, Meade, Breckinridge, Grayson, LaRue, Monroe, Warren, Barren (It was confirmed that the counties in the zones don’t have to be contiguous.)

Second priority in this first group: Christian, Todd, Logan. The question was asked if they will be higher than Mercer/Lincoln/Garrard. Recommendation to make these a third priority. Northern halves would be good to include (but must include entire counties.)

Second area to consider: Bluegrass cattle area and Knobs (discussion – although some of these counties haven’t participated in CRP, part of it is due to lack of cropping history.) Counties in order: Lincoln, Mercer, Boyle, Garrard, Pulaski, Fleming, Mason, Harrison, Marion, Washington, Bourbon, Nicholas

Third area to consider: Christian, Todd, Logan,

There was then discussion of mixing up the counties in order to give priority zones across the state, rather than going straight by the identified areas. This was determined important if the first priority zone took up all the acreage cap and some of those counties, even though part of the first priority area, may not be as high priority as some of the counties in the recommended second priority area.

More discussion was held including that high CRP counties aren’t going to like the low dollar this program offers as they are used to \$100/acre, and this will be much less (perhaps \$25/acre or even less).

It was stated that the average herd size in Kentucky is 30 animals and that more producers are moving toward controlled grazing. A brief discussion was held about EQIP saying it offered being better payment rates for the practices offered in CRP Grasslands, but EQIP does not include a per acre rental rate.

There was a reminder again that the FSA State Committee will make final decision. The group was asked to suggest targeted counties in each region of the state.

After additional discussion, the **final recommendation for this approach** is as follows (in this order):

- Hardin, Meade, Hart, Breckinridge, Grayson, Larue
 - Livingston
- Fleming, Mason, Nicholas, Harrison, Bath
- Pulaski, Lincoln, Garrard, Boyle, Mercer, Washington, Marion
- Christian, Todd, Logan

The recommendation was made to trim from the bottom of each area if needed.

Faye thanked the group for their input.

On a different subject, Danny Hughes, KDFWR, discussed the limits of how much can be mowed in CRP each year. He said that Kentucky has a problem with tree encroachment on grassland. More than 25 percent encroachment can make a CRP participant out of compliance with FSA's requirements. He discussed a potential addition to the current guidance, the option to early mow half prior to nesting season, and then mow other half after August 1 (first half grows back for winter cover). This is another alternative to the current strip mowing (which would still be allowed). He asked for thoughts from the group for this alternative. It was asked if it is allowed to mow half in the spring and half in the fall, will this be a standard option, or just for tree problem? Danny said his recommendation was to make this a standard option on the job sheet.

Mark Ferguson, NRCS State Resource Conservationist said he liked the idea since this is what we battle. Brent Harrel, USFWS, said he was in favor as long as bird nesting season was avoided and ensure there is winter cover.

Danny said that maybe there could be two windows – April through May 15, and then August through September.

Jeff Sole, TNC, agreed that this alternative makes sense. He noted that the Green River CREP bottomland is hard to treat because it stays so wet and asked if those participants can convert to trees instead of grass. FSA responded that there is not the program flexibility to allow for this.

David Chin of Monty's Plant Food asked if this dual-mow alternative will work in both a drought and a wet year. Danny responded that with native grasses, yes, they do pretty well in drought year, and too well in wet year. Faye suggested that maybe the option can be included for well-established stands (perhaps in year 3.)

The subcommittee consensus was to support this recommendation that was brought forth by Danny.

FSA informed the group that they have a new national CREP manager who is looking at all existing CREP agreements. Kentucky has been working off of national guidance that Kentucky CREP is closed since we reached our CREP enrollment cap. The new manager has identified if we consider it closed, there are no new re-enrollments. Because we have occasional acreage losses from the program

(cancellations, etc.), Kentucky should be taking new enrollments. The current agreement doesn't cover that and an amendment is needed for the existing agreement, and it needs to be determined if the state has money to accept new enrollment, or can we come to an agreement to revise the agreement. We are at 98.5 of our cap (1,000 – 1,500 acres under; might be as high as 3,000 acres depending on data looked at). There is a concern that if it's announced for new enrollment, that the interest will be overwhelming. The question was asked about backlog (50K acres of unfunded applications at the time the cap was hit.) All this is yet to be determined. Once it is determined if the state has money, a partner meeting will be held. Other states are in this same situation.

There being no more items for discussion, Deena and Faye thanked the group for their attendance and input. Faye said that the two recommendations for zone prioritization would be provided to the State FSA Committee. Deena said that the meeting notes would be provided to the full State Technical Committee and asked that Faye provide the group with a report of what the FSA State Committee decides on the CRP Grasslands zones.

The meeting adjourned at 10:35.

Attachments:

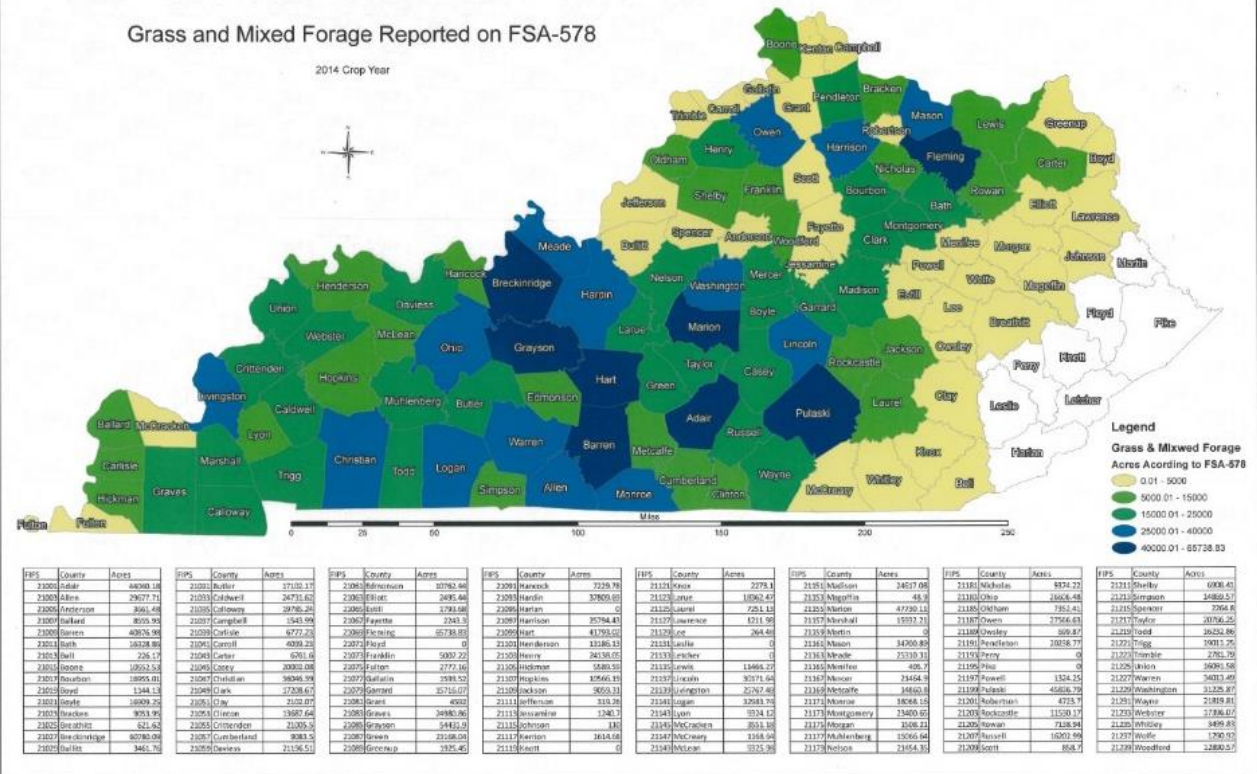
- Attendee List
- Grassed and Mixed Forage Reported on FSA-578 map
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Conservation Reserve Program – Grasslands Fact Sheet (July 2015)

Attendees

Name	Representing
Jeffery Sole	The Nature Conservancy
David Chinn	Monty's Plant Food
Joe Cain	Kentucky Farm Bureau
Don Dott	Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
Danny Hughes	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Brent Harrell	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Dan Figert	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Deena Wheby	USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
Jack Kuhn	USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
Mark Ferguson	USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
Marcinda Kester	USDA – Farm Service Agency
Faye Brown	USDA – Farm Service Agency
Gidget Cropper	USDA – Farm Service Agency

Grass and Mixed Forage Reported on FSA-578

2014 Crop Year



FIPS	County	Acres	FIPS	County	Acres	FIPS	County	Acres	FIPS	County	Acres	FIPS	County	Acres	FIPS	County	Acres
23000	Adair	48009.18	21003	Butler	37130.11	23006	Bethesda	10790.48	23093	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23001	Albion	29077.71	21033	Caldwell	24731.62	23007	Bethesda	10790.48	23093	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23002	Anderson	3661.48	21035	Callaway	28786.20	23008	Boonville	1791.98	23099	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23003	Boonville	8016.95	21037	Camden	1541.99	23009	Boonville	1791.98	23101	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23004	Boonville	40026.98	21038	Cassate	9777.35	23010	Boonville	1791.98	23102	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23005	Bath	18328.89	21041	Cassate	9777.35	23011	Boonville	1791.98	23103	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23006	Bell	226.17	21043	Carter	6261.0	23012	Boonville	1791.98	23104	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23007	Benton	10911.55	21045	Cassate	9777.35	23013	Boonville	1791.98	23105	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23008	Beverly	18955.81	21047	Chickasaw	38946.59	23014	Boonville	1791.98	23106	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23009	Boyer	1344.13	21049	Clark	17038.67	23015	Boonville	1791.98	23107	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23010	Boyer	18009.25	21051	Clay	2102.07	23016	Boonville	1791.98	23108	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23011	Boyer	8763.95	21053	Crittenden	13887.64	23017	Boonville	1791.98	23109	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23012	Brazos	621.62	21055	Crittenden	13887.64	23018	Boonville	1791.98	23110	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23013	Brazos	80780.08	21057	Cumbeerland	3083.5	23019	Boonville	1791.98	23111	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
23014	Bullitt	3465.75	21059	Dawson	21136.51	23020	Boonville	1791.98	23112	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08
						23021	Boonville	1791.98	23113	Marion	2329.78	21125	Boone	2279.8	21051	Madison	24071.08