

## Pennsylvania State Technical Advisory Meeting Minutes

April 19, 2007

Participants: John Ayers, Penn State University; Joel Rotz, PA Farm Bureau; Jeff Nogan, PA Cattlemen's Association; Ed Rajotte, Penn State University; Derek Smith, US Army Corps of Engineers; Bob Gibson; Johan Berger; Chrystal Fetzer, USDA, FSA; Charles Van Auken, PA Equine Council; Mike Pruss, Pennsylvania Game Commission; Dave Day; Ed White, USDA, NRCS; Doug Goodlander; Kelly O'Neill, Chesapeake Bay Foundation; Tim Emenhesier, USDA, NRCS; Brian Jackson, Environmental Defense; Ed Sanders, USDA, NRCS; David Biddinger, Penn State University; Fred Suffian, Environmental Protection Agency; N. Alan Bair, Penn State University; Gerald Whiteside; Jim Stieheler; Bill Foose, USDA, FSA; Barry Isaacs, USDA, NRCS; Noel Soto, USDA, NRCS; Joe Lebrew; Shon Robbins, Pheasants Forever; Mike Lester; Adam Smith, Fish and Wildlife Service; Mark Goodson, USDA, NRCS; Martha Joseph, USDA, NRCS; Barry Frantz, USDA, NRCS; Craig Derickson, USDA, NRCS; Kelly Ireland, USDA, NRCS) and Kimberly Fritz, USDA, NRCS.

Welcome and Introductions: Barry Frantz began the meeting at approximately 9:05 am on April 19, 2007 with an introduction of Craig Derickson, State Conservationist. Craig welcomed everyone and explained the meeting's agenda. Farm Bill Discussions, Arlen Lancaster, NRCS Chief's visit to Lancaster County discussing key provisions to the streamlining and funding of the Farm Bill, Ed Sanders, USDA-NRCS, highlighting funding of prior year's contracts, and promoting efficiency; Development of Conservation Plans before producers seek financial assistances, discussion of streamlining NRCS program delivery. Bill Foose, USDA - FSA, discussion of CRP and CREP progress reports. Martha Joseph, USDA - NRCS easements (WRP/FRPP) program update, and Kelly Ireland, USDA, NRCS Conservation Security Program update.

Farm Services Agency: Bill Foose provided a handout (FILE COPY) explaining the current CRP/CREP mid contract activities including new options to use disking and herbicide treatments. FSA County offices are reviewing soil rental rate to determine if current rates are accurate. It is not expected that rates will change much in Pennsylvania, and any changes would affect new CRP contracts, not established CREP rates. Pennsylvania currently has 175, 000 acres enrolled in CREP. FSA is still enrolling CP22 in the 20 counties in the original Chesapeake Bay CREP. Remaining 23 counties in expansion 23 counties in Chesapeake Bay CREP and in the 16 Ohio River Watershed CREP can accept applications for all eligible practices. Landowners have enrolled enough acres to buffer 1,200 miles of stream. CRP (not CREP) enrollment is declining as rates aren't high enough to interest landowners in long-term contracts.

Mike Pruss discussed the management of practices to ensure CRP/CREP is reaching wildlife habitat goals for grassland dependent species. A discussion among the participants began about the use of herbicides and the insect populations.

Bill Foose announced that the Under Secretary of Agriculture announced plans to allow states to develop State specific proposals for the new CP38 wildlife practice (SAFE). Pennsylvania can enroll

5,200 acres for this State specific practice. Mike Pruss and the Game Commission are taking the lead to develop the proposal. Program funding for the SAFE proposal will not be available until January 2008. 50% cost-share, sign-up incentive and regular CRP rental rates will be available with initial funding. Foose said he was hopeful that existing CRP/CREP would be reauthorized and funded with the new Farm Bill. Early releases from CRP/CREP programs without penalty were being considered. Early release for corn production was not offered.

Natural Resources Conservation Service: Ed Sanders presented an overview of 2007 NRCS Incentive Programs; he circulated a handout outlining his presentation (FILE COPY). USDA's new Farm Bill proposal would streamline NRCS program delivery and combine the current separate incentive programs (AMA, EQIP, WHIP) into a single consolidated program. Also NRCS is in the process of implementing a new practice payment rate schedule that will replace old style cost lists. NRCS will calculate total practice costs based on average costs including categories not previously considered. This will give producers a more complete picture of the installation costs. Incentive payments can then be made on costs allowed by the current program rules. The two percentage tiers (50%/75%) will be dropped in favor of a single level, to be determined.

Martha Joseph presented an update on PA easement programs. Pennsylvania is first in number of Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) easements nationwide and second in number of acres in FRPP easements nationwide. Signup deadline for 2007 funding is April 27. NRCS will be revising its FRPP State Plan for 2008; comments and recommendations welcome. Handouts provided (FILE COPY). Working with partners especially US Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited to increase participation in Wetland Reserve Program (WRP); and have about doubled applications this year. No funding for Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) new signups at this point. USDA's proposal for new Farm Bill would combine FRPP, GRP and Healthy Forest Reserve Program into a new working lands easement program, and combine WRP and EWP easements into a non-working lands easement program (5 easement programs merged into 2). Appraisals done for FRPP, GRP and WRP easements must meet federal standards ("Yellow Book").

Kelly Ireland gave an update on CSP activity in PA. No funding for new contracts in 2007. Contract modifications were allowed. Most modifications moved participants from one tier to another. Most movements were Tier 2 to Tier 3. Modifications were for additional monies on existing contracts. 2007 payments were capped at the same rate for 2006 payments. Currently PA has 335 CSP contracts in six watersheds.

Participant Discussion and Input: Suggestions included splitting CSP funds 50/50 between a watershed-targeted allocation and a county allocation, to be able to offer the program to more farmers. IPM Specialty Crops: better and more funding, and expand support to a broader range of specialty crops. In the IPM option, focus ranking consideration factors on IPM and reduce level of consideration for structural practices such as Agrichemical Handling Facilities. Better benefits for competitive resources for small-acre operators; better publications of cost lists, and program signup deadlines to cooperating agencies, organizations and potential participants. Organize/rekindle a

wildlife subcommittee from within the State Technical Committee to develop practices and program options for wildlife for 2008 (request by PGC). Organize a Core Conservation Practices Planning Committee to implement a Core 4 conservation practices approach. Small Projects option has been a good addition for 2007. Look at possible solutions to nutrient surplus/imbalance problem, such as solid/liquid separation, incineration, composting. MONITORING: Any information on results of conservation programs? CEAP Conservation Evaluation and Assessment Program is doing some sampling. DEP watershed plans include some information on changes in water quality indicators. Create a program analysis, measure what progress NRCS is making with programs. OUTREACH: Educate the public about opportunities. Hold more outreach meetings, have the Conservation Districts assist with outreach. Identify processes/timelines better to the public. Working with consultants who work with farmers may be an effective way to get information to farmers. CBF offered a suggestion with the former publication CBF circulated with resources including program delivery options available from all agencies and organizations. Require farmer/producer insight of conservation programs at local/county. Statewide farmer/producer input through State Technical Committee. Discussion of whole farm enrollment in CREP, how extensive this is, landowner's right to enroll, impact on tenant farmers losing access to farmland.

Conclusion: Craig Derickson and Barry Frantz thanked all for coming and the many suggestions. Meeting concluded at 12:00 p.m. Next meeting date was not announced.