

**State Technical Committee Meeting
December 6, 2010
Minutes**

Welcome: Denise Coleman, PA NRCS State Conservationist, welcomed all and went over agenda. Highlights of accomplishments since last meeting (September):

- Released funding for this year
- Counties now in process of ranking applications
- Initial allocations received from NRCS NHQ
 - Approx \$15.5M – Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI)
 - \$9M – Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - \$3.4M – Air Quality
 - \$4M+ – Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
 - \$4M+ – Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)
- Field offices have ranking criteria; have revised some to make add more science-based criteria, curving nitrogen and PH runoff and leaching
- Feed Management
 - \$500,000 in EQIP and \$500,000 in CBWI
 - Want no less than 40 producers signed up
 - Address nutrient problem thru precision feeding before it gets to the bay
 - 3-year initiative -- more lucrative in 1st year and then will taper off
 - Dairy producers up to 5 groups (heifers, milking, dry, etc)
 - Producer decides on how many groups and how many years – payment will be by group. This is separate from CNMP
- Still time to make comments on the resource assessment, which will be incorporated into the 5-year strategic plan

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) 2011 Sign-Up: (Barry Frantz/Katrina Thompson)
Presentation provided as attachment to e-mail

- 2010 CSP numbers
 - 2-years worth of sign-ups completed in one fiscal year
 - Forestland and ag land had a total of 575 contracts (433 on ag, 132 on forest) , with 66,134 ag acres and 31,000 forest acres
- 2011 sign-up ends January 7th, now taking applications
 - Average contract payment just under 24\$ per acre, \$9 forest, \$27 ag
- Low sign-up on forestland in 2010
- Anyone signed up who was eligible got a contract 1st year

Q: any idea of high value crop in ag land sign up (fruits/vegetables/ornamentals)?

A: some fruit in Adams County. Crop rotations are in the conservation management tool. Not sure we can pull specific info, but will check into this.

Q: was there a geographic concentration?

A: CSP map shown for both sign-ups. Not split by forestland but could get that info.

BMP CEAP Presentation: (Robert Broks, Ph.D., Director, Department of Geography, PSU)
Best Management Practices Conservation Effects Assessment Project
Presentation provided as attachment to e-mail

2011 Program Options (AMA, CBWI, EQIP, WHIP): Barry Frantz

- Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) not out yet, expected soon
- Funding summary
 - Over \$29M in cost-share money received this year
 - (Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) -- getting a 1/3 of what was received last year
 - Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is also down
 - Chesapeake Bay is the big increase; 3rd year – the peak year – 2012 will drop back to what we got in 2010
 - EQIP is level
 - More earmarks in Air Quality arena
 - \$750,000 earmarked for Forestry
 - EQIP organic, same amount as last year, national target
- Timelines
 - EQIP/Organic will have longer time line
 - Feed management will stay open for a longer period
- Initiatives
 - Offering energy audit funding, still looking at same suite of practices as before
 - Authorizations go thru end of FY2012
 - Will be revising which programs are good and will be continued
- New activity plan
 - Developed but not able to implement
 - Funding development of CNMP for several year
 - Have nutrient management plan funding option for non-livestock farmer to look at field application – erosion control and nutrient management

Q: are monies going to right places, programs? After discussion on fencing, and in light of CIG, focused on fencing on small dairies, etc.; would like to hear feedback on Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), CCPI, or pairing on specific programs, gaps not being addressed. And P soil saturation issues.

Q: interested in state level CIG to develop new areas.

Q: are these issues rising to surface in other bay states?

A: will put categories in state CIG.

A: MD & DE have discussion about showcase watersheds and narrow practices targeting groups of farmers. WHIP came out with expectations from conservation districts on certain practices.

A: talking with DEP, not specifically on re-targeting. Practices line up on 2011 goals. Having more money go into target areas. CCPI money would be extra to give to other projects.

Q: should we be taking bay CEAP and identifying under targeted areas?

A: not sure bay CEAP is a good area for that. We are manipulating state level criteria so higher ranking goes to those areas, rather than have targeted approaches in different areas. High leaching and high runoff will increase ranking criteria. Also in Conewago are doing detailed soil survey, showing high Ph runoff areas (Pilot). Still have money going to high-priority areas. Looking at 303D list also, and this year looked at local ranking info and sent out to field teams so they are basing decisions on resource information – allowed to target more ranking criteria to meet resource needs.

We look at ranking criteria to focus efforts on, runoff from concentrated animal ops, extreme buffers, partnering with DEP on fencing issues.

Q: CCPI under-utilized, so if targeted issues arise and can pair with CIG would like to hear any feedback. Is this public information for NRCS to say here are areas for under-served?

A: CCPI is good for targeting to under-served areas. Know landowners, have universe of landowners, have partner entity to bring in leveraging (contributions), have monitoring system set up to show impacts. If can limit to practice or geographic areas, this is better. Bring into that the agency is not paying for additional administrative expenses. Idea is to leverage already existing money.

Payment Schedules: Ed Sanders Presentation provided as attachment to e-mail

FY2012 Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) Ranking Form: Hathaway Jones

- GRP subcommittee met
- 1st issue: Old ranking worksheet says ‘grazing land’ so hay operation producers weren’t getting funding. Change was made to grazing and hay operations
- Received just over \$800,000 total, 60% on easements and 40% on rentals. This is flexible depending on applications received
- Other easement programs have \$4M WRP and \$1.2M on HRFPP
- 2nd issue: Cropping rotations could get points on ranking, so change ranking to give points to applicants willing to convert to permanent grass or rental for specific time. Handout for 2012 would incorporate those ideas/changes

Q: wildlife restricted to bird habitat? Could this include pollinators and insects? New WHIP guidelines include pollinators.

A: in PA yes, written to include ground nesting birds/grassland species of concern. This is the way states are treating ranking criteria.

Q: could we include state wildlife action plan? What can and can’t you do from wildlife perspective? Planting certain species?

A: not familiar with wildlife action plan. Currently don’t fund restoration practices thru GRP but could do this thru another program and then apply for GRP. Target GRP funding to put conservation easement on the ground and use other programs, which emphasize pollinator or grassland cover.

Subcommittee Updates:

- Organic (Gwendolyn Crews):
 - Last meeting was June 22nd, communicating via e-mail, spread out all over state
 - Represented by producers, industry and extension
 - Went over organized EQIP ranking form. No specific changes
 - Looked at payment schedule, comments to increase acreage value (foregone income rates)
 - Focused on increasing outreach or transitioning to organic groups
 - RC&D councils have now hired individuals to focus on outreach to local communities. These people can work with specialty individuals in local areas
 - Subcommittee mentioned we have a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) #138, transition to organic plan and have assumed the 138 to be a requirement for EQIP Organic. This (138) is an option to develop transition plan. Not a requirement to participate in EQIP organic initiative. Implementation assistance can be offered through EQIP Organic without having a 138 plan. Do we need Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to apply? Have a limited number of producers signed up for #138 and TSPs to work on product – let Gwendolyn know and will work together

Q: working with inspectors?

A: PA Certified Organic is to develop TSPs and outreach. One issue – potential conflict of interest because they cannot be a consultant. We are working to develop an information sheet showing private industry, extension, NRCS.

- Fish & Wildlife (Barry Isaacs):
 - Last met one year ago, other activities since then
 - June 2010, WRP and GRP subcommittees met
 - Wildlife has many aspects and agencies, therefore a lot of different partners. As a result, emphasis in farm bill and different programs had large meeting in November, non-government organizations, state and federal agencies, consultants/TSPs (forestry and environmental). Results: (handout) – see common cord across different programs – outreach, non-traditional partners, timely information
 - Asking STC to review handout and provide feedback to Susan Burky at susan.burky@pa.usda.gov. The subcommittee will then group summaries and begin to address them

- Feed Management (Jana Malot) (brochure):
 - Doing more outreach, trying to visit non-traditional customers and groups
 - Subcommittee is working with Professional Dairy Management Association to provide outreach to them
 - Members of ARPIS are now coming on board. We have the consultants ready now need producers
 - If anyone is involved with producer organizations please give them NRCS contact information
 - Have had other sessions to bring more TSPs on-line, will now have sit-down meeting to bring them thru the Tech-Reg system/process

- Forestry (Andy Duncan, Bureau of Forestry):
 - Working on details for 2012 CAP #106, Forest Management Plan. In the past, Bureau of Forestry had used forest stewardship plan, which was cost-shared by US Forest Service. Funding now lower, so partnering with NRCS to have details finalized by end of week. Plan combines standards of forest stewardship standards and some NRCS requirements (more sustainable forestry included)
 - Letters to consultants will go out this week, explaining how to become TSP and signing-up.
 - Have \$30,000 for CAPs specifically
 - We have had a year gap without funding for developing stewardship plans. Have landowners who will use that money quickly
 - Had a November training with the Pocono RC&D and Endless Mountains RC&D in the NE and Central areas of state for NRCS and Service Foresters, going over with practices look like and to get them all working together, incorporating management plans and practices
 - With Conservation Stewardship Program, meeting to put together guide for forest landowners educating them about CSP

Q: is TSP training the same as agronomy training?

A: not the same thing, this is forestry oriented, designing plan.

Recommend/suggest that any recommendations developed on plan come before forest stewardship contacts.

- Pasture/Grazing (Jana Malot):
 - PA Grazing Lands Cons Initiative. Had plan of work which included equine problems. Added scenarios to EQIP cost list, high visibility fencing and animal exercise areas, and alternative energy sources
 - No wind projects established/promoted

Other Items:

Q: max acreage in cover crops/no till for CSP? Are parcels treated separately?

A: not in CSP. Payment points something to be newly adopted. Have some capping. All considered one management unit. Don't have to install on all acres. Look at a system, for instance if doing corn nitrogen stock testing, but don't plant as many acres of corn that is o.k., because they are saying they will practice the system in what was planted. If it can't be done, adjustments within contract can be made.

Q: Are penalties for upcoming years applied if plan is not met?

A: In EQIP can make adjustments, but if becomes a pattern then will be looked at. Will be put under low priority after 3 years, if not met.

Q: what was experience with adding protected farms under programs?

A: had this as a local question, which was popular.

Closing: if anyone would like to have a guest speaker put on the agenda let us know.

Upcoming State Technical Committee Meeting Dates:

March 8, 2011

June 15, 2011

September 19, 2011

Upcoming meetings: subcommittees will meet the morning of the meeting, then come before Committee in the afternoon.