

NRCS SC Technical Committee Meeting Minutes – November 28, 2012

NRCS SC STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

*November 28, 2012, 9:30 a.m.
South Carolina Farm Bureau Building
Cayce, SC*

Present: Ann English (STC NRCS), Margie Onstad (SAO, NRCS); Pam Thomas (SSS, NRCS); Evelyn Whitesides (SRC, NRCS), Amy Overstreet (PAS, NRCS) Kellee Melton (ASTC (P), NRCS) ; Reginald Hall (SC NRCS Resource Conservationist); Sabrenna Bryant (SC NRCS PAS); Kevin Campbell (Clemson University Area Livestock and Forage Agent); Joe Cockrell (USFWS); Chanda Cooper (Richland Soil & Water Conservation District); Marc Cribb (SC DNR); Lisa Lord (The Nature Conservancy); Lakeisha Barber (NRCS District Conservationist, York County); Kathy Hensley (Lexington SWCD); Cassandra Rush (Federation of Southern Cooperatives); Bill McMeekin, PE ((SC Farm Bureau); C.W. Senn (York SWCD); James T. Miller (USDA-APHIS); Patrice Moses (SC NRCS); Gary Peters (National Wild Turkey Federation); Angela Yarborough (SC NRCS); Wendy Epps Adams (USDA-NASS); Karen McSwain (Carolina Farm Stewardship Association); Scott Phillips (SC Forestry Commission); Fred Taylor (Lexington SWCD); Charlie Fisher (Richland SWCD); Ebonie Alexander (Black Family Land Trust); Roy Coplon (SC Cattlemen's Association); Darin Steen (Catawba Indian Nation); Wade Cantrell (SCDHEC); Noel Myers (APHIS); Walt McPhail (landowner); Bill Ardrey (ACF); Ben Stuckey (landowner); Jill Epley (SC NRCS)

Opening remarks from Ann English, State Tech Committee Chair/SC NRCS - State Conservationist:

- Welcomed all participants, asked all attendees to introduce themselves and where they worked.
- Announced Chief Dave White will retire after 35 years of service; Jason Weller is Acting.
- 2012 Program accomplishments provided in packet.
- Provided Field Office of the Future handout.
- 2008 Farm Bill expired – list of expired programs provided (about 28); EQIP did not expire, next sign up will be February 15, 2013.
- Addressed agenda
 1. FY 2012 Final Program Obligation
 2. FY 2013 Program Announcements
 3. Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)
 4. Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

Comments from Kellee Melton, SC NRCS - Assistant State Conservationist for Programs:

- State Issue questions for FY2013 EQIP Funding Pools (provided handout)
 - Cropland Funding Pool
 - Forestland Funding Pool
 - Pastureland Funding Pool
 - Animal Waste Funding Pool
 - Historically Underserved Funding Pool
 - Specialty Crop Funding Pool
 - Longleaf Pine Funding Pool

- **FY2012 Final Program Obligations**

1. **EQIP - \$10,608,388**

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - \$10,608,388
- New/Beginning Farmer –\$761,750 covering 43 contracts
- Limited Resource Producer –\$68,492 covering 8 contracts
- Socially Disadvantaged Farmer –\$249,071 covering 26 contracts
- Organic (Certified and Transitioning) – \$63,641 covering 10 contracts
- Seasonal High Tunnel – \$164,334 covering 25 contracts
- Longleaf Initiative – \$1,061,783 covering 70 contracts
- On-Farm Energy – \$9,879 covering 5 contracts
- Animal Waste – \$1,512,878 covering 24 contracts
- Specialty Crops – \$175,193 covering 6 contracts
- Watershed Accounts for Crop, Pasture and Wildlife/Forestry Areas – \$3,484,555 covering 217 contracts
- I-95 Initiative - \$2,338,258 covering 129 contracts
- NWQI –\$388,203 covering 27 contracts
- Drought - \$129,291 covering 7 contracts
- Planning – this account is for the CAPs not related to initiatives. \$201,060 covering 30 contracts
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2. **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) - \$239,374**

- Working Lands for Wildlife – Gopher Tortoise Initiative –\$205,610 covering 4 contracts
- Special Drought Funding - \$33,764 covering 2 contracts.

3. **Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) - \$4,774,067** - There were 660 contracts funded, of that: 37 were Non-Industrial Private Forestland; 14 were Historically Underserved.

4. **Easement Programs**

- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) - \$1,327,754 covering 9 new agreements to purchase.
- Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) – Received 1 application for a permanent easement, but received no easement money from NHQ.

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- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) - \$1,500,000 covering 1 agreement.

- **FY2013 Program Announcements**
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Batching Periods:

October 19, 2012

February 15, 2013

Waiting on Initiative Announcements from NHQ for:

Organic

Seasonal High Tunnel

On Farm Energy

Longleaf Pine

As a reminder, EQIP is a continuous sign up. Applications can be accepted at any time.

- **New to EQIP IN FY2013**

1. Change in National Fencing Policy:

Boundary (perimeter fencing) is eligible for funding for the following conditions:

- HEL cropland converting to pastureland
- Expiring CRP land converting to pastureland (i.e. CRP permanent grass that is expiring and LO wants to convert to pasture)
- Existing grazed cropland (probably has temporary fencing currently) and wants to convert to permanent pasture.

Boundary (perimeter fencing) is ineligible if the primary purpose is to:

- Separate ownership or exclude livestock from transportation networks or residential, commercial or industrial areas.
- Exclude deer, hogs, or other wild animals from cropland

2. Water wells installed for irrigation are eligible if they are used to increase the efficiency of an existing irrigation system.

Eligibility Requirements for water wells:

- Must be a Historically Underserved Participant
- Must have documented Irrigation History 2 of out 5 years.
- Must have existing irrigation “method” that is inefficient.

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- Must be converting to a microirrigation (drip) system. Wells will not be eligible for center pivot or other overhead systems.
- Eligibility is on CURRENTLY irrigated acres only.
- **Other FA Programs**
 1. Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) - Awaiting information from NHQ as to whether there will be a signup in FY 2013.
 2. Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
 - Awaiting information from NHQ as to whether there will be a signup in FY 2013. If so, it will be under: Working Lands for Wildlife
 - Gopher Tortoise Initiative

The Longleaf Pine Initiative will continue to be offered under EQIP.

- **Expired Farm Bill Programs**

- The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) expired with the 2008 Farm Bill.
- NRCS cannot take applications for FY 2013 WRP or GRP, but field offices are keeping track of those landowners that are interested in the program.
- NRCS can continue to work on existing WRP and GRP easements.
- FRPP did not expire with the 2008 Farm Bill. We will continue accepting application for this program.

- **FY 2013 (GARCs)** - Should WRP and GRP be re-authorized for FY 2013, the following GARCs will be used for new enrollments:

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| Geographic Area | Program <i>WRP or GRP</i> | Market Analysis <i>\$/ac</i> | FY 13 GARC <i>\$/ac</i> | FY 12 GARC <i>\$/ac</i> | FY 11 GARC <i>\$/ac</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | | SC | SC | SC |
| | | | | | |
| Cropland /Ag land | <i>WRP</i> | 2913 | 2330 | 2100 | 2200 |
| High Land / Good Timber | <i>WRP</i> | 3144 | 2515 | 2340 | 2440 |
| Low Land / Good Timber | <i>WRP</i> | 2188 | 1750 | 1735 | 1745 |
| High Land / Weak Timber | <i>WRP</i> | 1875 | 1500 | 1395 | 1355 |
| Low Land/ Weak Timber | <i>WRP</i> | 1125 | 900 | 705 | 795 |
| | | | | | |
| Area 1 | <i>GRP</i> | 3475 | 1911 | 2008 | |
| Area 2 | <i>GRP</i> | 3500 | 1925 | 1980 | |
| Area 3 | <i>GRP</i> | 3625 | 1994 | 2035 | |
| Rest of State | <i>GRP</i> | 3533 | 1943 | 2008 | |

Any additional questions or thoughts regarding programs can be directed to Kellee Melton, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, kellee.melton@sc.usda.gov

Comments from Evelyn Whitesides, SC NRCS – State Resource Conservationist

- FY2013 Program Announcements

NEW Conservation Practices:

- ▶ Silvopasture
 - Commercial Thin & plant to introduced or native species
 - ▶ Hedgerow Planting
 - ▶ Residue Management-
 - ▶ No-Till/Strip Till
 - ▶ Mulch Tillage
 - ▶ Herbaceous Weed Control
 - **Biological Control**
 - Mechanical
 - Chemical
- Conservation Activity Plans (CAP)
 - CAPs must meet the minimum CAP planning criteria included in Section III of the FOTG. This criteria is issued annually via National Bulletin. States may not modify this criteria.
 - A CAP will be a single stand alone contract.
 - One CAP per land unit.
 - Multiple CAPs may be approved for the same participant.
 - CAPs developed within 12 months

EQIP CAP Developed

- 102 CNMP
- 104 Nutrient Management Plan
- 106 Forest Management
- 110 Grazing Management— *NEW*
- 114 Integrated Pest Management
- 118 Irrigation Water Management
- 122 Agricultural Energy Management –Headquarters
- 124 Agricultural Energy Management Plan-Landscape
- 130 Drainage Water Management
- 138 Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition
- 142 Fish and Wildlife Habitat—NEW
- 146 Pollinator Habitat Enhancement Plan—NEW

NRCS CAP Deliverables

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- Complete Hardcopy and Electronic copy of the client's plan (Microsoft Word copy).
- Digital Conservation Plan Map with fields, features, and structural practices located.
- Digital Soils Map & Descriptions.
- Completed CPA 52 and appropriate worksheets. Resource assessment results (wind and water erosion, water availability, soil fertility, and others that may be needed)
- Planned practices and the site specific specifications on how each practice will be applied;
- Facilitates transfer to Toolkit.

2008 EQIP Interim Final Rule

- ▶ *Technical Service Provider (TSP)* means an individual, private-sector entity, or public agency certified by NRCS to provide technical services to program participants, in lieu of or on behalf of NRCS.”

*Conservation Activity Plans must be developed by certified TSPs

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

Under CIG, EQIP funds are used to award [competitive grants](#) to:

- State or local unit of government
- Non-governmental organizations
- Federally-recognized Indian tribes
- Private Business
- Individuals.

National Component

- Approximately \$25 Million
- Maximum award amount not to exceed \$1 million
- Set aside 10% applications from Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers or Ranchers, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.
- Two phase proposal process: Usually announced in Fall
- Projects 1-3 years in duration
- EQIP eligibility component

State Component

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The intent of the State Component is to provide flexibility to NRCS State Conservationists to target CIG funds to individual producers and smaller organizations that may possess promising innovations, but may not compete well on the larger scale of the national grants competition.

State Conservationists will determine the funding level for state competitions, with individual grants not to exceed \$75,000.

Possible CIG Topics

- Water Resources
- Soil Resources
- Air Quality
- Grazing Land
- Forest Health
- Wildlife Habitat
- Organics
- On-farm Energy Efficiency
- Nutrient Management
- Water Management

Funded National Projects

- Clemson University-Enhance Soil Properties and Reduce Energy & Pests while optimizing Farm Profits \$352K
- City Roots, LLC \$52K-Converting No till on a Functioning For-Profit Urban Vegetable Farm

Funded State Projects

- Clemson University –Demonstration of Innovative Interseeding Platform to Reduce Nutrient Inputs while Enhancing Farm Profitability in South Carolina \$75K
- Bell Farms- Economic & Agronomic Benefits of the Extension of Fresh Produce Growing Season through the conversion of abandoned or old existing commercial chicken houses to a climate controlled Growing Chamber \$20K
- Orangeburg County Soil & Water Conservation District- Service to positive soil health, wildlife enhancement and to landowner managers through custom conservation land treatment \$73K

Recommendations to State Conservationist

- Should we offer a State Component of CIG this FY?
- Should we add, eliminate, or change topics?
- Should certain application topics rank higher?

Any additional questions or thoughts regarding CAP or CIG can be directed to Evelyn Whitesides, State Resource Conservationist, evelyn.whitesides@sc.usda.gov

Comments from Stephen Henry, Assistant State Conservation Engineer

- FY2013 Program Announcements
- 351 – Well Decommissioning

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- Requires a licensed well driller
- May have SCDHEC reporting requirements
- 374-Farmstead Energy Improvement
 - Both NRCS and RD offer assistance in Farm Energy... it would be prudent to evaluate to see which agency can offer the most effective assistance... or if both can
 - Implementation of an Energy Audit that meets ASABE S612
 - 20 Scenarios offered
 - Lighting
 - CFL
 - LED
 - Linear Fluorescent
 - Ventilation
 - Exhaust Fan Replacement
 - Greenhouse Ventilation
 - Plate cooler
 - Scroll compressor
 - Variable Speed Drive
 - Motor replacement
 - Heating
 - Insulation
 - Building Sealant
 - Grain Drying
- 367 – Roofs and Covers
- 468 – Lined Waterway and Outlet
- 521a – Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane
- 632- Solid / Liquid Waste Separation Facility
- 635 – Vegetated Treatment Area
- 638 – Water Harvesting Catchment

Any additional questions or thoughts can be directed to Stephen Henry, Assistant State Conservation Engineer, Stephen.henry@sc.usda.gov

Comments from C.W. Senn, Jr.

- Specifications for High Tensile (Electric) Fence in code 382 for South Carolina.

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- Been in business of building high tensile fence and selling material nearly 20 years.
- Noticed that pull post or pull brace assemblies are required at least every 660 feet.
- Researched requirements for several states (WV, NC, GA, FL, AL, TN & SC)
- Requirement for brace assemblies or pull post at this distance does nothing but add to cost of fence.
- Suggest after review of Cod 382, that South Carolina adopt requirement from W. VA; if code must require a max distance for pull or brace assemblies, recommend 5280 feet.

Jill Epley, NRCS, Resource Conservationist:

- *Request to increase the length between permanent electric fence braces is valid. There are discrepancies between the fence drawing specifications and the fencing job sheet.*
- *The South Carolina 382-Fence Standards and Specifications are being updated at this time.*
- *Further clarification will be added for installation of permanent electric fence and temporary electric fence.*
- *Confident that a reasonable specification can be developed that will satisfy NRCS standards and specifications and provide a more sensible and cost efficient requirement for electric fencing installation.*
- *Has reviewed W. Virginia fence specifications and will provide information to Mr. Senn for his review. Appreciates Mr. Senn's expertise and advice in helping develop the electric fence specifications for South Carolina & looks forward to working with him.*

Closing Comments from Ann English, State Conservationist:

- Thanks for attending; will address any questions and concerns.
- Have great week!

The meeting was adjourned at 11:17 a.m.

The next SC State Technical Committee meeting date, time and location to be determined.