

Note: The PA task force was split into the following categories; Technical Assistance, Technical Issues, Training needs, Financial Assistance, Publicity & Outreach and Landowner/Client Strategies.

## **Riparian Forest Buffer Task Force**

### **Technical Assistance Committee Recommendations**

#### **1. Technical assistance to ensure successful buffer establishment:**

- a. **Annual visit (in-person) by NRCS each year for the first 5 years**, preferably with landowner present at time of visit. Assessment of tree survival, discussion about maintenance and contractual requirements, identification of invasive plants, and answer questions for landowner.
- b. **Annual visit (in-person) by NRCS/TSP each year of the contract** to assess survival and provide technical guidance for landowner to ensure successful growth and survival of newly established riparian forest. If landowner is not present, follow up via phone call or written communication.
- c. **Improved efficiency for Post Planting Assistance (PPA)** for herbicide application including the following:
  - i. Eliminate of the requirement of landowners to contact FSA to request PPA. Based on the scientific studies on twice yearly herbicide application and tree shelter use (Stroud 2004) and the collective experience of CREP in PA, it is clear that PPA is needed.
  - ii. NRCS to remind landowners (phone call, letter, or postcard) in late winter/early spring each year that the participant is eligible for cost-share on PPA to schedule herbicide application with professional applicator.
  - iii. Eliminate requirement of NRCS to conduct field visit to document that PPA is needed. (See above). Maintain the requirement for NRCS to conduct field visit to document that herbicide application was performed and effective.

#### **2. Technical assistance to ensure successful re-enrollment of existing CREP forested buffers:**

- a. NRCS to provide information to landowner about re-enrollment criteria at least 2 years prior to contract end date.
- b. NRCS to provide field visit with landowner present at least 2 years prior to contract end date to assess tree survival and review requirements and criteria for re-enrollment.

#### **3. Federal and state agency capacity for CREP technical assistance:**

- a. **Assessment of current capacity of NRCS staff to provide technical assistance for CREP**
  - i. Identify constraints and barriers to NRCS delivery of CREP technical assistance.
  - ii. Identify NRCS needs to deliver CREP technical assistance to current contract holders as well as future needs for increased CREP participation.
  - iii. Perform anonymous survey of NRCS field office teams to assess NRCS staff perceptions of barriers to technical assistance delivery, training needs of NRCS staff for CREP, and barriers to landowner adoption of CREP.
- b. **Assessment of current capacity of FSA staff to implement and maintain CREP contracts**

- i. Identify constraints and barriers to FSA delivery of CREP contract assistance.
    - ii. Identify FSA needs to deliver CREP contractual assistance to current contract holders as well as future needs for increased CREP participation.
    - iii. Enable FSA to utilize non-agency staff capacity for CREP contracting through a personnel service agreement
  - c. **“Circuit rider” model for increased capacity** that has been used in other states could be explored for use in PA. This would include a team of professionals that could cover a broad geography to provide technical and contractual assistance for CREP, increase efficiency, reduce need to hire additional FTEs for agencies, reduce the workload for local program specialists that are working with multiple other programs.
  - d. **PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry Service Foresters:**
    - i. Assessment of capacity for and expertise of DCNR service foresters to provide technical assistance for CREP. These professionals are well-suited to provide this assistance as a forestry practice given their technical expertise but need to be enabled to do so by their leadership, given specific goals to achieve (e.g. number of technical assistance visits, acres enrolled, etc.), and provided with training for the agricultural BMPs associated with CP22 (watering systems, crossings, fence, grazing management, herd health, farm economic benefits of CP22).

**4. Riparian forest buffer cost-share programs (non-CREP):**

- a. Identify current programs that are available to streamside landowners to establish riparian forest buffers.
- b. Riparian forest buffer task force to identify how to make this information available to both landowners and conservation professionals that work with landowners on forest buffer establishment.

## Riparian Buffer Task Force Technical Issues Subcommittee Meeting Report

- The technical issues subcommittee teleconference meeting was held on 10/21/2014 from 9:00 am to 10:30 am.

### *Subcommittee members in attendance:*

- 1.) Art Gover
- 2.) Kris Goetz
- 3.) Randy Tinsley
- 4.) Eric Sprague
- 5.) Terry Noto
- 6.) Dave Wise
- 7.) Stephanie Eisenbise
- 8.) Tracey Coulter

### **Technical Issues Identified:**

#### *1. Interactions with landowners*

- It is very important to have the landowner involved in all stages of the buffer planning process. It is a good idea to have someone from NRCS or partner be at the site during and just after planting to go over the maintenance requirements so they know what to look for and what's expected. A yearly technical assistance visit would really help to allow for site specific recommendations and also remind landowners of their maintenance responsibilities.
- We need to have consistency among NRCS and partner groups when reviewing and explaining things with the participant. Participants hear from so many people, so we need to make sure they are clear on who actually is the lead on the project. We need to make sure we are detailed and clear in our communication through all phases of buffer establishment.
- When PA DEP is securing their landowner assurance form couldn't they get the name of the contractor responsible for the herbicide application and contact them to let them know a particular participant is on their list and they would have an incentive to pursue the maintenance procedures.
- Guidelines currently require the participant make a request for maintenance assistance, then there is a field visit required to verify that technical assistance is needed, and an additional visit is required to verify that has been done. It would be very helpful to eliminate so many field visits just to accomplish herbicide application and somehow streamline this process.
- When we send out post cards, emails, and other general information, we need to make sure the local contractors are getting these documents to remind them of upcoming post planting care. We need to ask for permission up front to do this.
- For tree shelter maintenance, point out to the landowner that they should be checking all shelters for issues before any herbicide applications.
- It would be helpful to increase the cost-share amounts for maintenance, particularly for shelter maintenance. Where contractors are going on site, they have a major opportunity

to aid project success. We should consider ways that these visits could be better used to assure project success, including avoiding cost issues that would prevent this. If these contractors could, for example, do shelter maintenance and replanting of dead trees while on site to spray, the benefits would be enormous compared to issues that arise from failed projects.

- The current CREP guidance calls for 6' herbicide strips if trees are planted in rows or 6' diameter spots if not. Present practice is to use 3' diameter spots. Use of 6' spots seems appropriate to several folks. This should be clarified and made consistent.

## 2. Mowing

- Varies by which part of the state you are located in. Northern Pennsylvania has better natural regeneration and mowing tends to not be the best option, however, South-central PA has more mowing due to more weed competition.
- Need to have additional cost-share funding for mowing specifically. If we add additional cost-share specifically for mowing we would need to keep that funding broke out so they know what that funding is for and not have it lumped into the rental payment.
- We need to talk to DEP and let them know that maintenance is a big issue and would they be willing to shift their funding/resources into post-planting care, so finances don't become a barrier to the landowner. We could also back load some of the money in these contracts for the maintenance, perhaps even having some DEP incentives tied to successful establishment at 3 years.
- Currently, stands are considered established after 3 years, we need to encourage maintenance through site specific recommendations given by someone on the ground.
- We need to have someone going out to the field and meeting with the landowner. Not enough services provided by NRCS or other partners from the amount of money being provided by FSA.

## 3. Species Selection/Site Preparation

- Maybe we could offer site prep/planting trainings for contractors and once they have completed the training, indicate on a contractor list which ones have completed the site planting trainings or have a certification.
- Reports will show survival percentages of plantings, we could keep track of that information and put that survival percentage on the contractor list.
- We can always give out landowner phone numbers (as long as you have permission from them) for new producers to contract in order to find a good contractor.
- Containerized versus bare root stock: it seems that survival, rapid growth and other measures do better with containerized trees (1 gal). We wondered if it makes sense to build in incentives for use of containerized stock, especially given poor maintenance trends, weed competition, etc.
- Variable buffer widths; this may need more discussion, but work TNC is doing on the eastern shore of MD and in Wisconsin suggests a uniform 35-foot or even 50-foot riparian buffer may be providing too little buffer in some areas and taking too much ground in others. Buffers that can undulate based on presence of flow lines, soil types, slopes, cover types, etc. can trap where highest concentrations of nutrients are flowing into the creek, and give the farmer back tillable ground where flows are much less concentrated. Since some of this information can be assessed

remotely using GIS layers, not sure it would impose a huge new technical assistance burden or cost.

- More standardization among tree and shrub spacings. Planting plans vary substantially (e.g. 20' x 20' spacings, 15' x 15' spacings, etc.). This causes survival rate numbers vary. Larger spacings allowed for easier maintenance and less overall tree/shrubs to re-plant and maintain.
- Expanding buffer width where there is concentration of groundwater flow. Work at Beltsville, MD showed that groundwater flow is not uniform through a riparian buffer and that it tends to concentrate in certain locations. Wider widths in areas of higher concentrated groundwater flow will reduce nitrogen loadings.
- In those few area that has drainage – do not permit surface or sub-surface drainage to bisect the buffer.
- On the outside edge of the buffer, permit a grass buffer of up to 50' (get PSU to evaluate crop GPS monitors) that reduce crop yields. It should be noted that deep rooted grasses will reduce N loading and provide wildlife habitat.
- Look at the potential to add bio-reactors or saturated buffers to the practice standard.

#### 4. Invasive Plants

- Put out fact sheets about the most common invasive plants in the office and on CREP related websites.
- For maintenance spraying, we need to emphasize use of 6-foot spots (squares, which can be calibrated), rather than smaller spots, such as 3- or 4-feet. Strips potentially provide a greater release from competition and increased volunteer woody species, but have proven to also release weeds more problematic than the original vegetation, particularly in old pasture settings where biennial and Canada thistle are often released when the grasses are killed.
- Reed Canary Grass is very difficult to control. Guidance needs to be developed to determine the best ways to manage sites that have Reed Canary Grass issues or sites where the species is present before trees/shrubs are planted.

#### 5. Re-enrollment

- We need to make sure we are communicating clearly with the landowners before re-enrollment time arrives about what is expected. We need to have an early and often policy.
- For buffer re-enrollment, 70% survival rate or 60% survival is a little high even with regeneration. Maybe these percentages could be re-evaluated?
- It would help if we had the flexibility to re-enroll really wet sites of CP22 into CP29 or CP30. They might have not established after multiple plantings or it should have never been a CP22 from the start. We need to make sure we are targeting the right practice for the right landscape.

#### 6. Planner Flexibility

- We need to be more descriptive in our conservation plans narratives/planting plans to make it easier when conducting spot checks to determine survival rates, number of trees originally planted, etc.

7. *Payment Rates*

- We need to update our payments rates to reflect changes in cost that has occurred over time.
- Incentive payments that formerly helped entice enrollments are increasingly covering gaps in cost coverage when cost caps on components are on low side.
- Mobilization fee for post-planting care work on sites under (xx) acres to assure contractor interest/availability.

8. *Tree/Shrub Tubes*

- Stick with 5 foot tubex shelters, or their equivalent for trees and tree-form shrubs. Shorter shelters are prone to deer browse, and shelters without the perforated seam may kill the tree if the shelter is not removed.
- Shrub species selection should be limited to those that grow well in taller shelters, without suckering outside the shelter in the first seasons when herbicide is being applied around the shelters.
- Consider curtailing use of multi-stemmed shrubs (use more tree-form shrubs) if they can't be sheltered or otherwise protected, since this tilts landowners immediately toward insufficient survivorship for re-enrollment when they lose lots of shrubs.

## ***The Training Subcommittee***

(Mike Sherman, Randy Tinsley, Eric Sprague, Craig Highfield, Mike Linsenbigler, Terry Noto, Jim Gillis)

### **Conduct staff trainings to increase FSA\*, NRCS, Partners', Conservation Districts' knowledge of:**

#### **1. Riparian Forest Buffers.** --One type of training on buffers and their importance.

--Another type of practical, hands-on training for the management and maintenance of existing buffers (similar to RC & D "Field Day" trainings of the past). Focus these efforts on original CREP counties or counties with high numbers of expiring contracts or contracts coming up for re-enrollment consideration.

--Can also provide training on matching practices to site conditions, given the ecological/landscape context.

\*be sure to schedule trainings during a time of year when FSA can attend, then adequately advertise it among FSA staff

#### **2. Supporting practices.** Separate type of training on supporting practices/components: stream crossings, watering facilities, streambank

fencing, etc. Cover properly sizing projects to match the landowner's ability and funds, discussing the way reimbursement will work (FSA). Possibly offer training within FSA to help their staff calculate reimbursements consistently across county lines.

#### **3. Other / Similar conservation programs.**

--Increase awareness of CREP-like programs available (through all other sources): CBF "Bucks for Buffers"; DEP streambank fencing; EQIP/CSP/WRP.

--Hold meetings with other agencies to communicate about what other options may be available, then communicate that information to CREP staff (NRCS, Partners, and FSA PTs, to start), possibly even as a Fact Sheet format. Stress ways in which other programs or funding sources might complement CREP, rather than hinder or compete for enrollment.

### **Increased Meetings between Partners, Locally**

Suggest regular meetings in the county field offices to keep staff informed and current on buffer issues. NRCS/Partners and FSA together in a conference room, to cover local workload issues and keep work on track. Maybe have a requirement to provide FSA and NRCS state offices with minutes?

### **Increased Field Training Sessions**

Hold joint field training sessions between partners to review practice/maintenance requirements especially prior to any re-enrollment period. Focus efforts on coordination for contracts up for re-enrollment within the next two years?

### **Regionalized CREP Specialists**

Identify regional individuals that can be relied on to assist those requiring assistance. There are many individuals that have considerable knowledge on specific practices and farming operations. If we can identify those individuals on a list matched with their area of expertise, field staff could then have a valuable resource for dealing with specific issues.

### **Training Materials**

--Develop training materials specific to the programmatic and technical aspects of CREP buffers, to provide consistency and accuracy among the staff. Have separate training materials as needed: some for NRCS/Partners staff, and some for FSA staff.

--Develop and provide field offices with photo examples of good versus not-so-good buffers, for reference at the field office. Show a variety of representative conditions (poor, fair, good).

### **Field Days**

--Groups associated with buffers or supporting practices could host field days with prospective program participants/office personnel. This would provide the opportunity for office staff to hear their message and use it to market the program more effectively.

--Coordinate site visits to existing buffer projects for those folks on the "waiting list" for CREP enrollment, so the potential applicants get to see a current project and interact with an actual CREP participant.

### **Marketing Training**

Many times, the difference between obtaining a signed contract and not is the initial meeting between office staff and the prospective program participant. By training employees to effectively and efficiently market the programs, we can increase enrollment into the program.

We would also like to offer a suggestion for consideration by other subcommittees, since it doesn't really fit under the "training" heading: Maintain a database that describes why CREP contracts aren't eligible for re-enrollment (was it site conditions? Was it participant age? Was it the soil rates?). We believe having this information would help us improve our technical support and outreach efforts.

### *The Training Subcommittee*

(Mike Sherman, Randy Tinsley, Eric Sprague, Craig Highfield, Mike Linsenbigler, Terry Noto, Jim Gillis)

## PA Forest Buffer Task Force

### Financial Incentives Committee notes – 21 October 2014

CREP related items:

1. Evaluate/modify maintenance cost share levels to be consistent with needs for practice establishment.
  - a. Address issue of small sights requiring some type of subsidy. Perhaps a differential rate or a “mobilization fee”. Removing cost barriers for contractors to do maintenance is worth it to protect the initial investment.
2. Evaluate the possibility of having DEP’s cost share distributed after or later in the establishment period to incentivize the maintenance and establishment work.
  - a. Note: conversation originally centered on a delay of the incentive payment but, given that the incentive generally reaches landowners sooner than the DEP payment, focus switched to the DEP cost share.
  - b. While Diane Wilson for DEP was on the committee membership, scheduling limitations prevented her attendance – so, to date, no DEP input was received on this idea.
  - c. Payment could be predicated on/triggered by confirmation that the second or third maintenance visit occurred.
  - d. SIP/PIP could be moved to later years, to incentivize maintenance implementation. This would need to be done in conjunction with practice cap assessment to ensure that no disincentive is created for livestock operations.
3. Evaluate/modify practice rate caps for practices associated with forest buffers (and perhaps all of CREP. Recognizing that some rates may need to be addressed nationally or through an amendment to the CREP Agreement.
  - a. The group wants to recognize that this issue was raised at the last CREP Technical committee meeting and that there is a current dialogue on some issues.
4. Evaluate soil rental rates.
5. Evaluate the possibility of having some of the payment components scale over a broader range of buffer width, perhaps incrementally increasing from 35’ to 100’.
6. Do Equitable Relief provisions or some equivalent apply to CRP?
  - a. Could equitable relief provisions apply if initial project recommendations were inappropriate?
7. We should evaluate urban conservation standards rates to assess applicability.
8. **If a CREP amendment is required to meet our objectives, we should NOT shut down the CREP program.**

Non-CREP issues:

1. EQIP related issues:

- a. We need to addressing maintenance/establishment issues. Can the 645 practice address the needs. Are there issues/concerns with holding a EQIP contract open through the establishment period.
  - b. Is there an opportunity for a “forgone income” payment?
2. Are there opportunities to improve the CSP structure or applicability to forest buffers?
3. There is a severe lack of reliable programmatic support for forest buffer establishment on non-USDA eligible properties.
4. There would be great utility in having a clear, succinct document for landowners which describes the requirements and cost shares available for forest buffers through different programs.

## **Publicity & Outreach**

Objective: Review current and past strategies and outreach materials. Create new innovative strategies outreach materials to promote riparian buffer enrollment and re-enrollment along with promotion of sound conservation practices.

### **Overall Buffer Outreach Campaign**

**Goal: Easily referenced and useable information and data to promote and understand how program works**

**Audience: Local staff and landowners**

#### **1. Fund more outreach messages**

- a. Specific opportunity in D.C.'s FSA Funding pot. Work with partners to fund a joint outreach proposal
- b. Research other funding opportunities

#### **2. Create public campaign for buffers and conservation**

- a. Coordinate with PACD's Conservation Campaign effort
- b. Rebrand and recreate existing successful documents and materials. Update and improve consistency to distribute on state level. Bring in all stakeholders; include target audience focus groups, to review current materials.
- c. create a solid message with one theme to reach various audiences, from large landowners, smaller livestock farmers
- d. Hire professional marketing and outreach firm to research landowner motivation and implement marketing strategies.
- e. Use current successful buffer projects with good maintenance to show positive side of CREP as part of messaging
- f. Design variations of message to reach broadly across to audience segmentation (Small farmers vs large, different types of agriculture, small number of livestock, etc) Look at demographics
- g. Message must be consistent, but allow for localization
- h. Involve all partners in developing new outreach strategy
- i. Keep 1 800 number and boost the message out

#### **3. Website**

- a. Update, Recreate and Monitor
  - i. Bring together partners/stakeholders to discuss web infrastructure with consultant
  - ii. Create web pages consistent with print literature developed and overall campaign
  - iii. Dedicate funds and staff to monitor content and update website at least 2 x annually
  - iv. Create on Webmaster for all things CREP-PACD

#### **1) Other Print/web content**

- a) Create new literature/digital outreach/content for web
  - i. Summary of the financial benefits
  - ii. Summary of landowner responsibilities in maintaining buffers but offer solutions, resources for implementing these tasks. For example, if controlling invasive species is a task, then offer a list of TSPs or contractors they can go for help.
  - iii. Create a question and answer fact sheet/webpage
  - iv. Use all materials in digital and print form. Create consistent look and language. Create editable templates for local NRCS offices to localize for their specific clientele. Provide stock photos and art that can easily be used by local staff
  
- b. Increase Successful Participant Exposure
  - i. Create a series via email or in a publication such as the Lancaster Farming that ties CREP successes to specific individuals for prospective participants to relate. Example: the Pennsylvania Beef Council sends out a monthly e-newsletter that contains a story about the successes of an individual farming operation. The story generally contains successes that the cattle operation has achieved and their commitment to conservation. By associating faces/names with CREP success stories, we can begin to personalize the program allow interested individuals the opportunity to find something in their own operation that can be corrected by taking similar actions of others.
  
- c. Targeted Mailings/Literature
  - i. Create group specific outreach material in an attempt to gain further program participation by identifying needs of specific groups to opportunities provided within the program. An example of this would be to provide a "Cattle and CREP" Factsheet that local individuals could hand out to dairy and beef producers. It would be best if we could take a backyard approach and show what the guy who had 10 cows did and the positive effects they had on the environment instead of focusing on the same pics with 100 dairy cows in a stream. I hear the comment "but I only have XXX cows so it probably is not something I can do" all the time in the county office. We also need to target sportsmen interested in hunting and fishing. Many of these environmentally conscious individuals own the land or know the people who do and could spread the word if provided proper literature that demonstrates the added benefit to game and the environment

**Landowner outreach:**

**Goal: Increase success in new and existing buffers**

**Audience: Landowners**

- 1. Increase interaction with land owners with contracts
  - a) FSA & NRCS offices work together during sign-ups
  - b) Communicate with contract holders face-to-face annually for first five years
  - c) Monitor buffers for problems during visit
  - d) Send maintenance reminder post cards

- e) Ask landowners to send photos of buffer when they report CREP acreages annually
- f) For re-enrollment, perform status reviews in enough time contract holders to correct deficiencies
- g) Communicate the availability of assistance for the issues they require in between visits.
- h) Create Localized Reference Contacts
  - i) Many individuals are more willing to participate when they have the opportunity to discuss program participation with those who have “cut the checks” when it comes to participating in federally funded programs. Each county has a number of participants that believe in the program and have first-hand knowledge of the benefits possible.
- b) Develop Awards Program
  - i) Develop a statewide or regional awards program that identifies participants who strive to make the most out of our environmental investments by going above and beyond to ensure program success. Something as little as a “Certificate of Merit” would give participants something to strive for which in turn would have a beneficial impact on the program itself. If publicized properly, I believe that this would enhance practices on the ground and public perception of the CREP Program. Encourage agencies to recognize individuals at events such as Conservation District Awards Banquets and Extension Banquets. I have read many stories in the Lancaster Farming about “XXX Family Chosen as XXX County Conservation Cooperator of the Year”. The articles then detail the conservation efforts that the family has completed many of which list participation in the CREP Program. We are missing out on a positive media exposure opportunity to have a picture of us standing their presenting them with certificate “thanking them” for their commitment to conservation through the utilization of our programs.

## 2) Incentive programs

- a) Create more programs offering additional financial awards to install buffers. These have proven successful in new enrollments in counties where available.
- b) Set awards at intervals for successful buffers, not only at enrollment. Offer incentive payments for years two, four and six.
- c) Increase FSA cost caps for buffer components to reflect current and future costs. DEP and other incentive programs are paying for the difference in costs and are cutting into the funds for incentive payments.

## 3) Raise the Bar

- a) Make buffers a precondition for getting financing for other BMPs on other competitive farm preservation, EQUIP, DEP GG DCNR- etc., where funding and implementation is based on competitive process.

## 4) Booth Space at Targeted Events

- a) Attend sportsman shows provide literature on conservation programs. One of our main targeted landowner groups.

- b) Smaller events locally can provide space at a minimal expense or sometimes free of charge.
  - c) Staff the booth with the right individuals to talk with prospective program participants.
  - d) Provide an educational experience on programs.
  - e) Provide examples of warm season/ cool season grasses as well as containerized trees in tubes so that we can show proper maintenance to program participants in attendance.
- 5) Update and hand out the Conservation green and white signs
- a) Update signs, make more attractive and list all the partners.

### **Local Delivery**

**Goal: Increase capacity of NRCS staff and increase enrollment/success**

**Audience: Local Staff**

Much of the previous materials and programs discussed are tools for

- 1) Local staff must buy in to buffers as a BMP
  - a. Develop programs and outreach for Plain Sect farmers
  - b. Knowledge of field office staff should be increased
  - c. Training on ecological benefits of buffers to local staff
  - d. Training on how to approach landowners and sell buffers along as part of whole-farm conservation
  - e. How to package buffers with other practices when speaking with landowners
  - f. Periodic training and updates on what tools, programs and materials are available to help staff understand what services they are providing. Not once and done. All training should be done at least twice a year.

## **Landowner/Client Strategy**

Objective: Closing the gaps between conservation practices, program requirements and landowner goals and objects for their farm.

### **ATTRACTING NEW LANDOWNERS**

1. Successful Participant Exposure - Many CREP participants that have been recognized for the conservation work that they have completed are very proud of the accomplishment and are more than willing to share their story of success with others. Develop means to highlight individuals throughout the state that are willing to discuss their project completion/success with prospective participants. This can be accomplished with print media or via short YouTube video clips that the links can be emailed out and watched prior to enrollment. It is important to focus on small producers. We should take a “backyard” approach and highlight the 10 head beef operations or the farm with 2 horses accessing a small tributary to show that environmental benefit can be achieved on small acreage not just with the 100 cows herds on major streams.
2. Use land records along with GIS stream data to identify and contact landowners with land adjacent to streams. Have staff (with knowledge of the local community) target these landowners. The Staff should have knowledge of cattle/grazing management, fencing, water development, economics and environmental benefits. One-on-one discussion tailored to the producer’s unique situation will probably work best. Need to provide sufficient staff resources to do the job in a timely and professional manner.
3. Develop literature handouts specific to targeted participant groups. Examples could include: cattle producers, horse owners, hunters/hunting clubs, grain farmers, and fishermen/fishing organizations. Potential participants are typically more likely to buy-in to the thought of implementation if they can readily relate to a specific example.
4. Plain sect outreach should keep it simple. Examples of success include CBF work with Amish in Lancaster County. They worked with Bishops. These initial cooperators could act as mentors to other buffer projects.
5. Message to plain sect and other groups should be simple – payment for riparian buffers is a “clear payment” for using private land to produce clean water. Focus away from idling land.
6. Identify private sources of funding for plain sect participants.

### **WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS TO ADDRESS MAINTENANCE**

#### **Information to provide/questions to ask during CREP sign-up**

1. Ask the landowners to consider if their estate is in order to support the financial commitment of installing and maintaining practices
2. Provide program participants a list of common maintenance items required per practice during initial visit/contract signing. List could include approximate cost and examples of where to purchase. Would be useful if the list was broken down by year from establishment.
3. Inventory equipment needed to perform maintenance and consider alternative ways to provide maintenance if equipment is not available.
4. Present maintenance and options. We should spend a little more time when the contract is developed going over maintenance options. TSP should discuss and find maintenance options that fit within the equipment and labor that producer has.

### **Cost/Payment for Maintenance**

1. Evaluate cost of maintenance – suggest changes to reflect current costs. Due to the variety of site conditions and planting it is difficult to come up with a reliable estimate on the annual cost for maintenance. By providing an increase in maintenance rates it provides greater incentive for landowner to maintain the practice. Increasing annual maintenance costs will significantly increase program costs. During the next 5 years about 7,000 acres of RFB will expire. In addition, the WIP call for new enrollment of about 7,000 acres/year over the next 5 years. If we assume that 40,000 acres of RFB (15 year contracts) will be either enrolled or re-enrolled a \$10/acre/year would cost over and additional \$90 million over the next 20 years.
2. Most producers receive their CREP payments in late October. Most forget that there may be some money for maintenance in that annual payment. Providing maintenance money when producers would normally do maintenance along with a reminder letter may help. To address this FSA may also want to consider splitting the payment with half sent in the fall and half in the spring.

### **Contractor Availability**

1. Lack of qualified contractors to perform services has definite impact on maintenance activity completion. This often is seen when farmers and CREP participants both have need for contractor help during the same time of year. With our limitations concerning activities during the primary nesting season, this places CREP participants in a position to compete against farmers during the 2 busiest periods in agriculture for application services for which the suppliers have limited equipment. By permitting limited maintenance activities for a longer period in spring and earlier in fall would increase number of contracts able to complete required activities timely.
2. Are TSPs and/or contractors ready and available to assist? – For many contractors/TSPs the mobilization costs for small tracts will be very high. I believe there is an opportunity to bundle multiple contracts and put the bundled contracts out to bid. This will make the work more attractive to contractors and should provide a lower price to the producer/fed. Govt.
3. In many counties, contractor lists should be updated
4. Help inexperienced landowner with selection of maintenance contractor. Refer them to landowners who use contractors to get references or to groups like the woodland owners associations.

### **Maintenance knowledge and performance**

1. Encourage greater participant maintenance involvement outside establishment period to increase awareness of current status of contract acreage. Demonstrate to participants the added value management activities can have by enhancing practice success which leads to decreased compliance issues during re-enrollment years.
2. Identify why maintenance is not being completed at all or in a timely manner – I believe that many of the livestock producers must also rely on off-farm income/jobs. When combined with family obligations the producers have little time and/or resources to do maintenance. This combined with the lack of spot checks reduces maintenance performance.
3. Schedule an office visit or phone call annually to foster communication between landowner and FSA/NRCS to discuss their acreage, review their maintenance plan and discuss questions or issues.
4. Help landowners self select for success – Provide landowner capabilities and requirements checklist for landowner consideration. This can be used for building landowner awareness of responsibilities before buffer is installed and help landowners understand that they may not be able to manage a buffer without help.
5. Require Participant Acreage Photographs Annually – With the current budgetary restraints and staffing levels in most offices, spot checks are very difficult to complete and the effectiveness is limited. If landowners were required to submit photographic evidence on cover present annually,

the agencies would have a better understanding of contracts needing attention. Two pictures would be helpful: shot of majority of field/acreage and the other being a location close up. This would also provide the office the opportunity to discuss grasses present/required maintenance activities regularly with participants and help to identify issues earlier before they get to the stage where it becomes a compliance issue. I am well aware that many would just provide a picture of their best spot but in order to find that spot... they would have to survey the acreage which is what we are looking for anyways. This would increase their awareness as to the current status of their acreage and increase communication with the agencies.

6. Recognition of Success – Develop a statewide or regional awards program that identifies participants that strive to make the most out of our environmental investments by going above and beyond to ensure success. Something as little as a “Certificate of Merit” would give participants something to strive for which in turn would have a beneficial impact on maintenance activities. If publicized properly, I believe that this would enhance practices on the ground and public perception as to the maintenance of CREP acreage.

### **Maintenance Assistance**

1. Landowner Assistance - Develop specialized teams that are familiar with the challenges of merging conservation goals with practical livestock management systems that can provide assistance to conservation planners and program participants. Teams specializing in wildlife and cropland would also be a beneficial resource. Example: a team specializing in cattle operations can give helpful pointers for fencing set-up for effective cattle movement, pasture layout, watering facilities, and walkway concerns.
2. Educational Opportunity - Work with schools to provide local students with an opportunity to assist with maintenance activities for those who are unable to complete the work themselves for a variety of reasons. We have a contract that a teacher has collected multiple years of data on survivability and growth patterns of every tree planted in his buffer (each tree tube and shrub was assigned a number). The work was provided by seniors for a biology project annually. Maintenance activities were provided by the students and the acreage was utilized as an “environmental classroom” for teaching purposes. This is also an opportunity to outreach and attract new participants.
3. Engage volunteer organizations in maintenance and outreach. Organizations that may be interested in becoming “riparian buffer stewards” include scouts, colleges, environmental clubs, FFA or hunter access program.
4. Tools for buffer maintenance may be shared using a system similar to the “Buffer Trailer” used by watershed associations and based at the Chester County Conservation District. The trailer contains tools that a homeowner might not own and borrowing of the trailer is managed by the Chester County CD.