

AAC Subcommittee Updates

Ag Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting May, 2026

Overview and Objectives

- **Communications Subcommittee**

- Both internal and external messaging
- Outreach & Education

- **Technical Subcommittee**

- Phase 1: Sticky Issues
 - Work with AMT
 - Exchanging information between entities
 - Would include soil health
- Phase 2: Soil Health/Nutrient Management/Technology
 - Work with Ag Workgroup
 - New technologies
 - Profit-driven approach vs Yield-driven approach

- **Governance Subcommittee**: Including protocol for when members are approached with asks to ensure that the AAC is presenting as a unified group (Still needs to convene)

Communications Subcommittee

Connecting with Producers and Policymakers

- **Target Audiences:**
 - Outreach strategy targeting policymakers, producer groups, and researchers.
- **Key Messaging Goals:**
 - Demonstrating the AAC's role as a unique liaison between the agricultural sector and Bay Program leadership.
 - Highlighting "wins" where soil health improved farm viability and profitability.
- **Engagement:**
 - Leveraging events like "Bay in the Balance" for informal relationship building with leadership.

Communications Subcommittee

- **Outreach Materials:**
 - **Brochure:** Created for members to share basic info about the AAC
 - **Business Cards:** Proposed with email address and QR code leading to the committee's web page on CBP website
 - **Presentation Template:** Creating a slide deck for members to use at conferences and meetings
- **Press Release to Increase Awareness of AAC:**
 - Drafted a press release and social media blurbs celebrating the AAC's first year representing farmers in the partnership.

Technical Subcommittee- Soil Health Outcome

- **Historical Context:**

- The proposed "Soil Health Outcome" was not adopted by the partnership due to a rushed timeline and concerns over funding/accountability, not the technical content.

- **BMP Potential:**

- Discussion of developing a "Soil Health BMP" that could stack on top of existing practices to provide additional water quality credit.

- **Path Forward:**

- The subcommittee agreed to continue soil health work regardless of formal outcome status.
- Consider a joint workshop with STAC

Technical Subcommittee- Soil Health Metrics & Benchmarking

- **Soil Health Institute (SHI):**

- Recommended three primary measurements (Organic Carbon, Aggregate Stability, Carbon Mineralization) to provide a comprehensive view of soil health.

- **Cornell Framework:**

- Emphasized the "Production Environment"—benchmarking soils by comparing similar regions, textures, and cropping systems.

- **Standardization:**

- Identified a critical need to standardize tools across states to reduce farmer frustration and enable watershed-wide data aggregation.

Technical Subcommittee- Regional Coalition Models

Collaborative Approaches to Implementation

- **Virginia Soil Health Coalition:**

- Uses a "crowded table" approach with ~50 partners, emphasizing farmer innovation and storytelling via the "For the Soil" podcast.

- **Maryland Healthy Soils Program:**

- **Competitive Fund:** Farmer-led grants (up to \$50k) that support innovation, equipment, and labor.
- **Cover Crop Plus:** Revamped to offer flexibility for innovators, moving beyond traditional rye-only programs.
- **Expansion:** New \$5 million fund for agroforestry projects over five years.

Technical Subcommittee- Regional Coalition Models (cont.)

Pennsylvania:

- **Soil Health Hubs:**

- Small, regional peer-to-peer networks that provide social support for regenerative farmers.

- **Regenerative Research:**

- Penn State is establishing a new Center for Regenerative Agriculture Research on a dedicated 120-acre farm.

- **Innovative Tools:**

- **Nitrogen Tool:** Dr. White's tool calculates economical nitrogen rates; research suggests an average excess application of 48 lbs/acre on corn.
- **Remote Sensing:** Satellite imagery project with USGS to track cover crop acreage and biomass for more accurate Bay model reporting.

Technical Barriers & Data Challenges

- **The Linkage Gap:**

- The primary barrier to developing a Soil Health BMP is the need for a direct, quantitative correlation between soil health improvement and water quality.

- **Reporting Challenges:**

- Practices not meeting strict NRCS standards (e.g., certain fencing) are often excluded from Bay model reporting, leading to undercounting.

- **Actionable Indicators:**

- Aggregate stability and compaction identified as the metrics most directly related to water infiltration and runoff mitigation

Technical Subcommittee: Synthesis and Future Charge

- Soil health is the central point where many desired outcomes converge: increased BMP adoption, improved farm viability, and better nutrient use efficiency.
- **Proposed Technical Charge:**
 - Focus on identifying obstacles to BMP adoption. (Yield-focused vs profit-focused?)
 - Improve cross-state reporting and data verification.
 - Push for collaborative research on the co-benefits of profitability and water quality.