

# Agriculture Workgroup (AgWG)

April 18th, 2019

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

## AgWG Meeting Minutes

### Summary of Actions and Decisions:

**Decision:** The AgWG approved the meeting minutes from the March 21<sup>st</sup> Face-to-Face Meeting.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #1: Potential AgWG contribution of synthesis/ aggregation of common needs across watershed before WIP III finalization for reasonable assurance of implementation.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #2: Send additional comments on the training of TSPs to be considered in conversation with NRCS to Allie Wagner ([wagner.alexandra@epa.gov](mailto:wagner.alexandra@epa.gov)) or Loretta Collins ([lcollins@chesapeakebay.net](mailto:lcollins@chesapeakebay.net)) by COB next Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #2: Continue conversation about training technicians in the field.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #3: May need to initiate conversations at a higher level. This piggybacks on the previous action item to convene a group to discuss tracking, reporting, and verification.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #4: Continue conversation and communication in the AgWG related to state strategies for providing assistance.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #4: Potentially draft and send a letter to FSA from the AgWG encouraging CREP to reopen.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #4: Allie Wagner, Loretta Collins, and Sally Claggett will work together to develop the numerical effect of the CREP halt.

**Action:** Ag Directive Commitment #5: Continue conversation and invite states to talk to the AgWG about what they are currently initiating to provide technical training for the growing job market.

**Action:** The Cropland Irrigation Expert Panel will consider the feedback provided from Delaware. The Panel Report will be brought back to the AgWG during the May 16<sup>th</sup> conference call where the expert panel will ask for approval of the recommendation report with additional feedback considered.

### Workgroup Areas of Focus

**Accounting & Reporting • Implementation • Innovation**

**Data & Modeling • CBP Assignments**

**Welcome, introductions, roll-call, review meeting minutes**

Workgroup Chairs

- Roll-call of the governance body
- Roll-call of the meeting participants
- **Decision:** The AgWG approved the meeting minutes from the March 21<sup>st</sup> Face-to-Face Meeting.

## **CBP Assignments**

### **Moving Forward: Ag TA and Conservation Practice Implementation (45 min)**

All

A discussion regarding next steps in regards to the Oct 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 charge to the AgWG from the CBP Management Board regarding the CBP Executive Council's [\*Directive in Support of Agricultural Technical Assistance and Conservation Practice Implementation\*](#). This serves as a follow-up to the AgWG November 2018 action item:

**ACTION (NOV 2018):** The AgWG is asked to review the [CBP Management Board's Discussion Draft](#) regarding the [CEC Agricultural Technical Assistance Directive](#) document to allow for a constructive conversation in January 2019.

- Loretta Collins: We need to report back to the Management Board and a plan moving forward after our June meeting.
- Kristen Saacke-Blunk: Would NRCS be able to provide feedback in this conversation?
  - Barry Frantz: Now that states have their WIPs out, this is the appropriate time to discuss identified gaps and what capacity NRCS has to fill those gaps.
  - Kristen Saacke-Blunk: Has NRCS had time to look through this as an agency respond?
  - Barry Frantz: We have not analyzed our own capacity in relation to the Ag directive because we're not sure which way the states are going to go.
- Frank Schneider: Most states agreed that EPA and NRCS need to do a better job of communicating priorities and outcomes that align better.
  - Jason Keppler: Outside of the WIP process, has NRCS undertaken a workload analysis across the nation to address their own gaps?
  - Barry Frantz: I would call it a national workforce analysis looking at available money and number of people it can support. The focus was finding the most efficient way to spread it out across the country, not directly filling gaps.

### **Directive Commitment 1:**

- Kristen Saacke-Blunk: It seems like there should be a plan to address this before the WIPs are finalized. Additionally, specific skillsets are a gap between states. It would be nice to know if WIPs identify specific personnel needs with a measurable gap. We could compare that information to the Bay Commission's idea of needs to get reach WIP goals. If it's not addressed before they are finalized, we can't add bandwidth into the WIPs.
  - Marel King: I know PA provides a number of people needed and dollars needed, but I'm not sure if there is a breakdown of the skills needed.
- Loretta Collins: Is anyone opposed to digging into this further across state lines? We still have to figure out who would do this analysis.
  - Marel King: Having information of types and training levels necessary would help inform the training and certification piece later. Who? Where? What skill level?
- Jason Keppler: If states were to identify potential gaps in resources, where would that funding come from? Would there be commitment from EPA or NRCS to help close that gap?
  - Barry Frantz: Not a commitment, but I'm certainly willing to see those gaps and perhaps provide resources if our priorities align.

- Kristen Saacke-Blunk: If there was a way to identify the gaps well, it could provide an impetus for funders to target grant funded projects. I think there are opportunities to think more creatively about both individual state and cross state needs.
- **Action:** Potential AgWG contribution of synthesis/ aggregation of common needs across watershed before WIP III finalization for reasonable assurance of implementation.

#### Directive Commitment 2:

- Greg Albrecht: In New York we currently have substantial state funding. We value continual education and training, but when we have started to see that causing TSP or soil and water districts from collaborating. There is a sweet spot between training requirements for TSP and reimbursements for their work.
  - Barry Frantz: If consultants are going through the TSP with hope of contractual payments for a farmer, there are many factors that must align (EQIP, available money from consultant and NRCS). This is just training, not a guaranteed contract after.
  - Greg Albrecht: My comments were about long standing TSPs
  - Barry Frantz: I'll check with our TSP team and see if they're doing anything that will relieve some of the issues.
- Jeff Hill: At the local level in PA, training to maintain is putting undue pressure on the Districts to keep the certification we've had for 7-10 years. We have to take time out of our schedule to train up when it isn't necessary for state standards in PA. We can get by on the training we already have, and it doesn't seem worth it to maintain the certification anymore. This is mostly on the conservation planning side. It appears on some level to be tied together, more likely on the cert for conservation planning.
  - Jill Whitcomb: We also need to do a better job of utilizing the private sector. It seems we can't continue to rely on ourselves and may have to ensure private industry folks have similar certifications to assist us.
- **Action:** Send additional comments on the training of TSPs to be considered in conversation with NRCS to Allie Wagner ([wagner.alexandra@epa.gov](mailto:wagner.alexandra@epa.gov)) or Loretta Collins ([lcollins@chesapeakebay.net](mailto:lcollins@chesapeakebay.net)) by COB next Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup>.
- **Action:** Continue conversation about training technicians in the field.

#### Directive Commitment 3:

- Barry Frantz: I prefer to focus on the TA part, not the data and tracking issue. It was a tremendous help to have 50% cost share for many projects in PA, it did not just help NRCS but everyone involved. If we don't have that cost share, we will lose contracts and less practices will be put on the ground.
  - Jeff Hill: That's huge and exactly right. I second what Barry said.
- Sally Claggett: I wonder if some of these need to be given back to EPA for them to facilitate actions within USDA. Since the executive order, EPA and USDA were supposed to be aligned. It needs to be understood at a higher level that these investments are important.
  - Loretta Collins: That is an option, we can come back with the response that this is an issue that needs to be addressed at a higher authority than ours.

- Barry: I don't anticipate NRCS getting more money, we'd be happy to keep our current funding. There are ways we can work together to be more efficient.
  - Jeff Hill: Going back to education and outreach, in the past 6-9 months there has been an uptick in private industry interested in funding. There has also been more conservation district staff spending time fixing issues that private consultants cause. It seems that many private sector people don't have the same level of knowledge, which leads to damage in the long run.
- **Action:** May need to initiate conversations at a higher level. This piggybacks on the previous action item to convene a group to discuss tracking, reporting, and verification.

#### Directive Commitment 4:

- Barry Frantz: From the NRCS side, this needs to be handled at the state level. I think all of the states know the most important practices. If farmers don't want to do implement, it doesn't matter how high priority the practice is. Maybe working with the Farm Bureau would be helpful to get farmers to sign up.
  - Greg Albrecht: I think it's practical to work at the state level with already existing relationships. I do think this is a national issue as well.
  - Loretta Collins: If there is opportunity to find priorities across the entire Bay Watershed, we could have some options through the Bay Program.
- Ken Staver: The main issue is the CREP program shutdown. It's a national issue that no new buffers can be enrolled or re-enrolled.
  - Jason Keppler: The flagship program to implement riparian buffers is CREP and it needs to be a supportive program if the Partnership is serious about their commitment.
  - Barry Frantz: That's something to communicate with Farm Service or at the undersecretary level.
  - Sally Claggett: The Chesapeake Bay Foundation already sent a letter encouraging CREP to re-open. If the AgWG or a jurisdiction wants to send a letter, maybe it will open sooner.
  - Ken Staver: Is there a quick way to add up WIP practices under CREP?
    - Sally Claggett: I did a quick look and it's almost 2,000 miles a year of new buffers and about 150,000 acres for ag forest buffers.
  - Matt Monroe: In WV, our WIP is heavily dependent on the CREP program.
- **Action:** Conversation and communication in the AgWG related to state strategies for providing assistance.
- **Action:** Potentially draft and send a letter to FSA from the AgWG encouraging CREP to reopen.
- **Action:** Allie Wagner, Loretta Collins, and Sally Claggett will work together to develop the numerical effect of the CREP halt.

#### Directive Commitment 5:

- Jason Keppler: Aside from documenting opportunities states offer, I'm not sure there's an action item other than identifying some cross pollination. Each state may have unique opportunities.

- Kristen Saacke-Blunk: When we did a region wide survey on technical assistance, everybody had interest in the two-year programs. When you look at the education of the workforce, many are requiring 4-year degrees.
  - Loretta Collins: We can potentially get a synthesis of what's working, and we can continue conversation at a later date.
- **Action:** Continue conversation and invite states to talk to the AgWG about what they are currently initiating to provide technical training for the growing job market.

## Innovation

### **Cropland Irrigation Expert Panel Report Discussion (30 min)**

Tim Sexton, VA DCR and panel chair, presented the recommendation report to the AgWG on March 21<sup>st</sup> for approval. Consensus could not be reached, resulting in the following action item:

**ACTION (MAR 2019):** The AgWG accepts the request from DE for further time to provide feedback on the Cropland Irrigation Expert Panel Report by the April 18<sup>th</sup> AgWG Conference Call. The Expert Panel will ask for approval of the recommendation report on April 18<sup>th</sup> with additional feedback considered.

Links to CBP program protocols:

- [BMP Expert Panel Protocol](#)
- [WQGIT Governance Protocol](#)
- [CBP Governance Protocol](#)

Delaware was given an opportunity to provide an overview of feedback submitted to the Expert Panel. Next steps regarding approval of the report were also discussed.

- Chris Brosch: We submitted a letter and edited track changes document to Tim Sexton, we have not yet reached out to the panel. We also showed some new research and information that the panel can consider. I worked with Amy Shoer to develop these comments, she provided comments on the report and updated some of her unpublished work as well.
- Jason Keppler: What are the next steps?
- Tim Sexton: I appreciate Chris getting it to us on Monday. I have read the letter and skimmed through the edited report. I had a conference call yesterday with Jeremy and Loretta to discuss next steps. We will be addressing each of the comments with the panel and will get that out for everyone to see a week prior to the May AgWG conference call.
- Kristen Saacke-Blunk: As a point of order, I'm grateful for the panel's flexibility with addressing these comments after the deadline. How do we make sure this does not happen again? We have deadlines for a reason and to respect everyone's time.
- Jason Keppler: The jurisdictions have been working on putting WIPs together, and we didn't spend as much time as we should have in reviewing. Delaying a decision ultimately will not affect the outcome of the report. It was important to come to consensus here at the AgWG before punting it up the chain.

- Kristen Saacke-Blunk: I appreciate the way that this has been moved forward, but I don't want it to be the new precedent.
- Tim Sexton: We haven't had our call with the expert panel members yet, and they may not be as willing to review all of this as we were.
- Loretta Collins: We've let the panel know there has been feedback, what their response will be is unknown. To the point of extending deadlines, with all due respect to WIPs being top priority, a formal request to the panel or AgWG chair for an extension would have been helpful for logistics. Since we heard radio silence, it was assumed that there would not be more time needed.
- Frank Coale: Is the panel going to post the comments received or the responses so we can see how specific comments were dealt with?
  - Tim Sexton: Yes, comments will be posted as an appendix in the report.
- **Action:** The Cropland Irrigation Expert Panel will consider the feedback provided from Delaware. The Panel Report will be brought back to the AgWG during the May 16<sup>th</sup> conference call where the expert panel will ask for approval of the recommendation report with additional feedback considered.

#### **New Business & Announcements (20 min)**

- June 19 & 20 Face-to-Face in Rockingham County VA in collaboration with NFWF
  - NFWF Regional Ag Networking Forum June 18 & 19
- Expert Panel Update: Agricultural Ditch Management
- February Follow-up- [CAST cost optimization tool](#)
  - The Visualization Interface for Chesapeake Optimization (VICO) is available for beta testing: <http://cloudfish.chesapeakebay.net:3838/vico/>. Daniel Kaufman introduced the tool to the [WQGIT](#) on April 8<sup>th</sup>. More info to follow.
- [Issue Paper](#): WQGIT-endorsed direction for focused research on BMP resiliency to climate change presented at WQGIT on April 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Next meeting:** Thursday, May 16<sup>th</sup> 10 AM- 12 PM Conference Call

#### Meeting Participants:

Jason Keppler	MDA
Matt Monroe	WV DA
Loretta Collins	UMD
Allie Wagner	CRC
Chris Brosch	DDA
Clint Gill	DDA
Greg Albrecht	NYS Dept. of Ag & Markets
Frank Schneider	PA State Conservation Commission
Tim Sexton	VA DCR
Seth Mullins	VA DCR
Marel King	CBC

Jeff Hill	LCCD
Kristen Saacke-Blunk	Headwaters, LLC
Jennifer Shuler	Bell & Evans Poultry
Dave Graybill	PA Farm Bureau
Barry Frantz	USDA
Paul Bredwell	U.S Poultry and Egg
Jeremy Daubert	VT
Emily Dekar	USC
Dr. Gurpal Toor	UMD
Frank Coale	UMD
Ken Staver	UMD
Gary Felton	UMD
Gary Flory	VA DEQ
Jeremy Hanson	VT
Mark Dubin	UMD
Sally Claggett	USFS
Rachel Felver	The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Ron Ohrel	American Dairy Association North East