

State Technical Committee Meeting

Tuesday, July 28, 2015

10:00 a.m.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Brock Environmental Center, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Attendees: Those in attendance (in person and by phone) were:

Alexander, Ebonie (BFLT), by phone
Bowen, Barbara (NRCS)
Bowles, Betsy (DEQ), by phone
Bricker, Jack (NRCS)
Coffman, Seth (TU), by phone
Crabtree, Gene (NRCS)
Everett, Christy (CBF)
Faught, Becky (NRCS)
Glover, Darryl (DCR), by phone
Gould, Missy Neff (TNC), by phone
Groh, Todd (DOF)
Hawkins, Julie (NRCS)
Horsley, Emily (FSA)
Leapard, Alison (NRCS)
Majette, Kilby (NRCS), by phone
Moore, Gary (DCR), by phone
Schmidt, Alexandra (NRCS)
Wentz, Chad (NRCS)
Wood, Joe (CBF)

Christy Everett opened and gave an introduction of the Chesapeake Bays' Brock Center. Many aspects of the construction of this building (architecture, ventilation, building materials, waste handling) were carefully researched and implemented to result in this being one of the most environmentally-friendly in the world.

Emily Horsley (Farm Service Agency) gave an update on FSA and CRP (Conservation Reserve Program). She mentioned that there is a new state director, Dr. Jewell Harrison. This is the 30th anniversary of CRP, with a special section on the website telling about it. A different producer is begin featured each week for thirty weeks. One of our Virginia producers has been featured this month. For more information, see this link: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/CRPis30>.

General sign-up Dec 1st. can extend for a time. Continuous CRP sign up though usually. 10 or 15 years extended. The end of the fiscal year focuses on continuing contracts, but the new year will bring the

new enrollments. There are 200 new offers on the table. The agency has a newsletter available. The current one can be found at this link:

http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/stonewslettercurrent.pdf.

Older editions can be found at this link:

<http://fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=va&area=home&subject=nele&topic=landing>.

The program continued with a slide presentation by NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, **Julie Hawkins**.

- **RCPP**

- RCPP for Fiscal Year 2015 has 66 pre-approved applications for forestry, a total of all four areas in the state. There are 114 eligible applications that were not able to be funded. For Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) there were 40 pre-approved applications, and 29 eligible but not approved.
- DCR CCA project will focus on stream exclusion through EQIP in Fiscal Year 2016. The draft ranking is still being developed. The NFWF CCA Project focuses on whole farm, watershed-scale conservation in Rockingham County. It is using its stewardship fund to solicit partners to implement this. The TNC CCA Project will focus on EQIP and WRE. Accomac is eligible.
- For RCPP in Fiscal Year 2016 there are 250 pre-proposals for all three funding pools. There are some important dates coming up in the future. September 4 there will be an announcement of selected pre-proposals. And, November 10, full proposal applications are due. \$894,000 is our projected state funding pool allocation.

- **EASMENTS**

- For Fiscal Year 2015, we received 15 ACEP applications requesting \$8.7 million (7 WRE and 8 ALE)
- We have closed these easements: 2 FRPP, 1 GRP and 1 WRP in FY15
- We are in acquisition for 9 easements plus the four for FY15.

- **CSP**

- We pre-approved 34.
- We were not able to fund 53.
- There are a total of 75 renewals for Fiscal Year 2016.
- Remaining CSP 2015 funds are \$13,001.

- **EQIP**

- There are 411 contracts to date.
- There are large backlogs in many fund pools especially in livestock and energy implementation

- Demand is high. For Fiscal Year 2015, 20% of the applications have been funded. This is in contrast to previous years, such as FY14 when 73% of applications were funded.

Becky Faught (NRCS Program Analyst) discussed Programs, and the Programs survey, by continuing with a slide presentation.

- There have been some personnel changes at NRCS
 - Julie Hawkins has selected as the Assistant State Conservationist-Programs.
 - David Kriz has been selected as the Assistant State Conservationist-Water Resources.
- Continuing Resolution- NRCS worked on a Continuing Resolution until March 2015. NRCS Virginia received only 68% of the funding that was received in FY2014. Many fund codes and sub-accounts were left unfunded. Only the first round applications were funded for Cropland, Forestry and Seasonal High Tunnel.
- Programs Survey
 - The Programs team interviewed field staff in the following Service Centers: Verona, Jonesville, Louisa and Quinton.
 - A new method was needed to collect responses for the Local Work Groups. The previous versions had open ended questions that would generate vague answers. This time, questions were structured to generate concrete answers. We needed to hear from our own staff. The old way was by hand, and the new way was electronic, using an online survey tool. There were great ideas from field staff. Responses were voluntary.
 - The survey was broken down into sections. The following are some highlights from this. *See also FY2016 NRCS Programs Survey PowerPoint, in this document.*
 - Resource concerns—top three were water quality degradation, soil erosion, soil quality degradation
 - EQIP—screening, ranking, fund pools and practice payment caps
 - Easements—ACEP (ALE and WRE)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP)
 - Regional Conservation Partnership (RCPP)
 - The response was broken down by who responded, by what area in NRCS, and by what position the respondents held.
 - Because funds are limited, resource concerns must be prioritized. The top three are:
 - Water quality degradation
 - Soil erosion
 - Soil quality degradation
 - 67.6% applications that address resource concerns were identified as the highest priority in the previous sections' questions.
 - What new issues should be in the ranking process for Fiscal Year 2016?
 - Chesapeake Bay
 - O&M
 - High tunnel
 - Do not include barns

- GIS to determine priority areas
- Ranking is very subjective, and could be an issue in the future
- T&E animal feeding
- Prioritize fund pools into three categories, according to designations
- Category 1 Fund Pools:
 - Golden Warbler
 - Long leaf Pine Initiative (spend it or send it back)
 - National Water Quality Initiative
 - StrikeForce Initiative
- Category 2 Fund Pools:
 - On-farm energy conservations (education was listed as most important for this),
 - Livestock
 - High Tunnel
 - Organic Initiative
 - Beginning Farmer/Disadvantaged Farmer
- Category 3 Fund Pools:
 - aquaculture (throughout the state to perhaps include shrimp)
 - cropland (adding perennials to the rotation)
 - forestry (including Loblolly Pine), caps on dollar amount (no change needed here)
- Additional thoughts on:
 - ACEP (needs to have a simpler process)
 - CStP (increase awareness)
 - RCPP (continue to work with partners to promote the program)
- Conclusion to the Programs Survey: It was good to provide the survey. There were 75 questions. It was grueling, but it reduced red tape. The comments were refreshing. The team is looking at the results. We really appreciate the efforts.

There were no questions on Becky's presentation

Julie Hawkins (NRCS ASTC-Programs) continued with the slide presentation, and discussed drafting EQIP allocation factors.

We need to create a screening tool. Demand is high, and applications need to be prioritized to help manage the workload in the field offices. EQIP does allow a screening process to determine priority for which applications will be ranked.

Examples of low priority contracts are: a contract termination in last three fiscal years, an active contract behind schedule, or not following O&M (low priority, must follow the O&M for the practice lifespan).

We must consider a threshold. The policy allows states to define high priority applications using thresholds. There are 1000 total points. For an example, Virginia will fund only 400 points and above.

Draft screening after field assessment is to be listed as high, medium or low, with specific definitions of and applications. For example, whether or not an applicant is willing to address the concerns.

EQIP allocation process—OIG (Office of Inspector General) report from 2014 identified that states needed to do a better job of allocation process. First there are goals, to optimize environmental benefits. Second, science-based background is needed to address resource concerns.

To get us started, NHQ uses “Resource Concerns” (Soil Erosion, Soil Quality Degradation, Water Quality Degradation, and Degraded Plant Condition) and “Data Source” (*see attached slide entitled “To get us started...NHQ uses” for details on sources*). Julie asked for thoughts, input or questions about this. We are trying to meet the policy.

For the next steps, the forestry and wildlife, cropland, and livestock subcommittees will meet to draft final recommendations. They will deliver the ideas to State Technical Committee on September 22 meeting. The STC makes the final decisions.

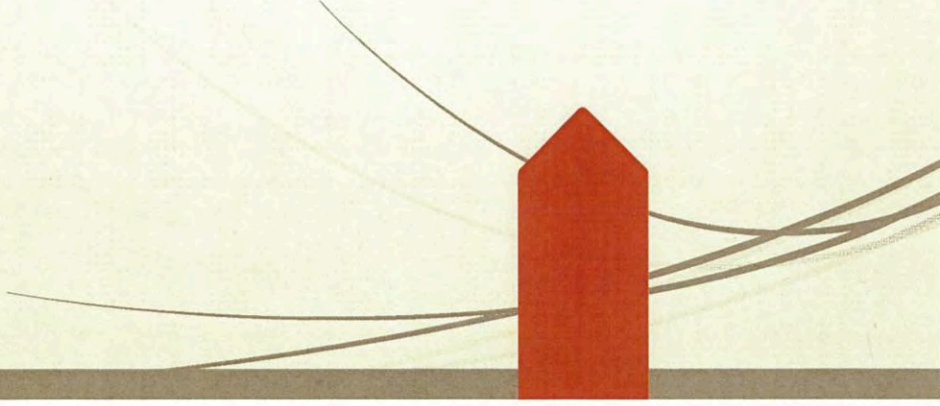
Julie Hawkins thanked those in attendance, both those that have called in, and those who were present. After the meeting concluded, there was a tour of the building.

Next meeting: September 22, 2015

State Technical Committee Meeting

CBF's Brock Environmental Center
Virginia Beach, VA

July 27, 2015





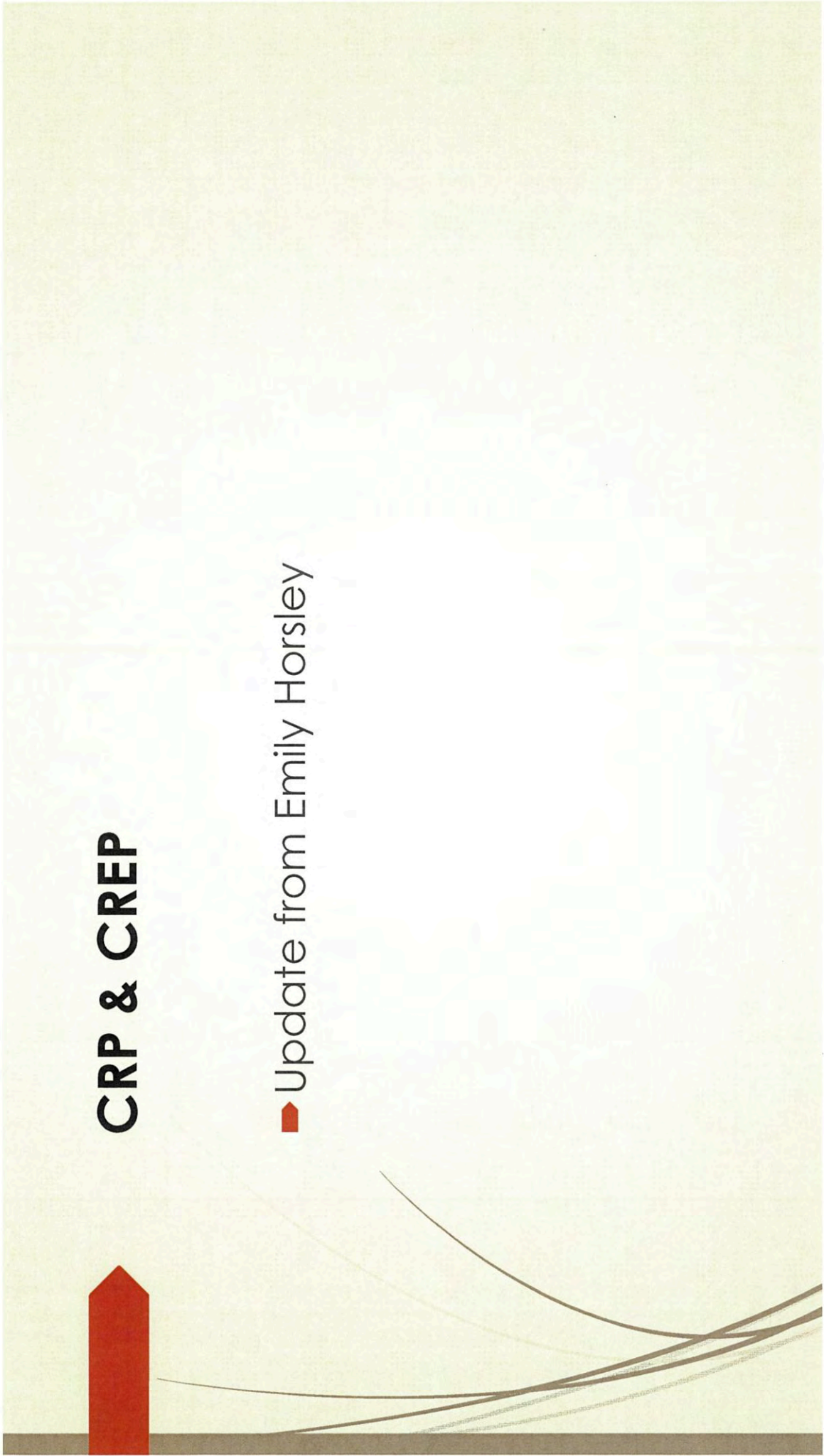
Agenda

- Welcome
- CRP & CREP
- RCPP
- Easements
- EQIP & CSP
- LWG & Online Tool
- Draft EQIP Screening Tool
- Draft Allocation Factors
- Subcommittees



CRP & CREP

► Update from Emily Horsley



An abstract graphic design featuring several thin, dark, curved lines that sweep across a light beige background. A solid, dark horizontal band runs along the bottom edge of the composition.

RCPP – FY15 CCA

- DCR CCA Project (VA, MD, DE)
 - Focus on stream exclusion through EQIP starting in FY16
 - Draft ranking and program guidance under development
 - Next meeting on 8/18/15 to finalize materials for announcement
- NFWF CCA Project (VA, MD, PA)
 - Focus on whole-farm, comprehensive watershed-scale conservation; focus on Rockingham County through EQIP starting in FY16
 - NFWF using its Stewardship Fund to solicit partners to implement
 - Local meeting of NRCS and District staff to develop priority practices, ranking and program guidance
- TNC CCA Project (MD, DE, VA)
 - Focus on priority practices through EQIP and wetland restoration through WRE
 - Currently no funds identified for VA; one county eligible Accomac



RCPP FY16

- FY16 – 250 pre-proposals for all 3 funding pools
 - Virginia is mentioned in 7 pre-proposals across all 3 funding pools
 - States and NHQ teams are in the process of ranking pre-proposals
 - Our projected state funding pool allocation is \$894,000
- Upcoming RCPP dates are:
 - Announcement of selected pre-proposals – September 4, 2015
 - Full proposal applications due – November 10, 2015

Easements

- For FY15, we received 15 ACEP application requesting 8.7 million
 - 7 WRE and 8 ALE
 - We funded the top 2 highest ranked in each of ALE and WRE
 - We have asked for additional ALE funds for the next 2 highest ranked applications
 - We have closed 2 FRPP, 1 GRP and 1 WRP in FY15
 - We are in the acquisition process for 9 easements plus the 4 FY15
 - Annual monitoring is finishing up for all easements (~116)
-
- For FY16, we already have 6 ALE and 4 WRE applications.
 - The ACEP Final Rule is expected to be published in December. We are prohibited from announcing an FY16 batching date until this occurs.

CSP

CSP 2015 Update						
Account Name	# Preapproved	Preapproved Ac	Preapproved \$	Remaining Acres	Pending / Eligible Applications	Pending / Eligible Estimated Cost
LLPI - NIPF (Long Leaf Pine Area)	1	197.8	\$2,065.00	0	0	\$0.00
NIPF General (Forestry)	2	898.4	\$8,202.00		17	\$27,871.00
NIPF Social Disadvantaged (Forestry)	1	48	\$1,000.00	14.2	0	\$0.00
NIPF Beginning Farmer (Forestry)	1	140.3	\$1,000.00		0	\$0.00
Ag Land General (Crop & Livestock)	22	9956.6	\$264,193.00		32	\$168,179.00
Ag Land Begin Farmer (Crop & Livestock)	7	1206.2	\$50,539.00	1374.2	4	\$10,920.00
Totals	34	\$12,447.30	\$326,999.00	\$1,388.40	53	\$206,970.00
Remaining CSP 2015 Funds	\$13,001.00					
FY16 Contract Renewal Applications	75					

Encourage Committee Members to review document submitted by Mark Schonbeck

EQIP

EQIP Budget Allocation

Fund Code	Account Name	Allocated	Contracts	Contract Approval	# Preapproved	Preapproved \$	Remaining	Account Name	Eligible / Pending Applications	Estimated Cost	No Cost
76F 51	Virginia	\$13,550,429.00	418	\$13,418,750.18	6	\$44,644.00	\$87,034.82				
76F 51 BF	Beginning Farmer	\$805,730.45	18	\$805,730.45			\$0.00	Beginning Farmer	73	\$2,547,153.29	15
76F 51 CC	Cropland - Christiansburg	\$69,970.00	3	\$69,970.00			\$0.00	Cropland - Christiansburg	5	\$46,332.00	0
76F 51 CF	Cropland - Farmville	\$246,923.00	5	\$246,923.00			\$0.00	Cropland - Farmville	27	\$291,725.00	5
76F 51 CH	Cropland - Harrisonburg	\$1,078,196.00	25	\$1,078,196.00			\$0.00	Cropland - Harrisonburg	40	\$741,393.00	5
76F 51 CS	Cropland - Smithfield	\$1,989,314.00	76	\$1,989,314.00			\$0.00	Cropland - Smithfield	91	\$2,064,756.60	8
76F 51 FS	Forestry - Statewide	\$905,901.20	76	\$905,901.20			\$0.00	Forestry - Statewide	184	\$1,287,653.91	35
76F 51 2	FY15 Certified Organic	\$17,349.00	1	\$3,955.00	1	\$13,394.00	\$0.00	FY15 Certified Organic	0	\$0.00	0
76F 51 3	FY15 Organic Transition	\$101,416.00	4	\$101,416.00			\$0.00	FY15 Organic Transition	3	\$30,000.00	2
76F 51 5	FY15 Seasonal High Tunnels	\$597,265.88	61	\$597,265.88			\$0.00	FY15 Seasonal High Tunnels	111	\$960,826.00	12
76F 51 GW	Golden Winged-Warbler	\$30,000.00	4	\$30,000.00			\$0.00	Golden Winged-Warbler	0	\$0.00	0
76F 51 AC	Livestock - Christiansburg	\$1,260,652.10	6	\$1,260,652.10			\$0.00	Livestock - Christiansburg	139	\$8,851,669.00	28
76F 51 LF	Livestock - Farmville	\$1,258,640.75	13	\$1,258,640.75			\$0.00	Livestock - Farmville	169	\$7,363,045.70	20
76F 51 LH	Livestock - Harrisonburg	\$1,983,395.10	22	\$1,983,395.10			\$0.00	Livestock - Harrisonburg	164	\$6,017,415.20	35
76F 51 LS	Livestock - Smithfield	\$400,932.00	7	\$400,932.00			\$0.00	Livestock - Smithfield	16	\$283,437.00	9
76F 51 LP	Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$122,620.00	4	\$122,620.00			\$0.00	Long Leaf Pine Initiative	4	\$72,329.00	0
76F 51 FM	NWQI - Fifteen Mile Creek	\$56,208.00	4	\$56,208.00			\$0.00	NWQI - Fifteen Mile Creek	0	\$0.00	0
76F 51 MR	NWQI - Smith Creek - Mountain Run	\$160,909.00	5	\$160,909.00			\$0.00	NWQI - Smith Creek - Mountain Run	0	\$0.00	0
76F 51 WB	NWQI - Smith Creek - War Branch	\$242,850.00	4	\$242,850.00			\$0.00	NWQI - Smith Creek - War Branch	0	\$0.00	0
76F 51 SD	Socially Disadvantaged	\$748,720.00	10	\$748,720.00			\$0.00	Socially Disadvantaged	35	\$1,593,589.90	8
76F 51 SC	Speciality Crop Fund Pool	\$41,030.00	2	\$19,280.00	4	\$21,750.00	\$0.00	Speciality Crop Fund Pool	0	\$0.00	0
76F 51 SF	StrikeForce	\$400,506.00	5	\$400,506.00			\$0.00	StrikeForce	0	\$0.00	0

EQIP Continued

EQIP Budget Allocation											
Fund Code	Account Name	Allocated	Contracts	Contract Approval	# Preapproved	Preapproved \$	Remaining	Account Name	Eligible / Pending Applications	Estimated Cost	No Cost
76F 51 HM	Wildlife - Habitat Maintenance	\$22,453.00	3	\$12,953.00	1	\$9,500.00	\$0.00	Wildlife - Habitat Maintenance	7	\$61,768.00	4
76F 51 HC	Wildlife - Wildlife Habitat Creation	\$500,577.20	53	\$500,577.20			\$0.00	Wildlife - Wildlife Habitat Creation	37	\$179,954.08	14
76F 51 4	FY15 On-Farm Energy	\$0.00	0				\$0.00	FY15 On-Farm Energy	65	\$3,000,140.05	2
76F 51 AQ	Aquaculture	\$0.00	0	\$0.00			\$0.00	Aquaculture	36	\$466,743.00	1
76F 51 CA	CAPS-Conservation Activity Plans	\$0.00	0	\$0.00			\$0.00	CAPS-Conservation Activity Plans	115	\$239,485.00	7
76F 51 EC	FY15 On-Farm Energy CAP	\$0.00	0	\$0.00			\$0.00	FY15 On-Farm Energy CAP	63	\$138,400.00	2
76F 51 IW	Irrigation Water Management	\$0.00	0	\$0.00			\$0.00	Irrigation Water Management	9	\$72,772.00	1
76F 51 SP	Longleaf / Short Leaf Pine - Statewide	\$0.00	0	\$0.00			\$0.00	Longleaf / Short Leaf Pine - Statewide	2	\$1,350.00	1
76F 51 ST	2014 Carryover - Seasonal High Tunnel	\$0.00	0	\$0.00			\$0.00	No Fund Code	37	\$126,581.00	33
76F 51 CD	2014 Carryover - Cropland	\$108,302.00	3	\$108,302.00			\$0.00	Totals	1433	\$36,438,518.73	247
76F 51 FY	2014 Carryover - Forestry	\$39,206.00	3	\$39,206.00			\$0.00				
76F 51 LK	2014 Carryover - Livestock	\$132,357.00	1	\$132,357.00			\$0.00				
76F 51 16009	FY15 CIG State Component	\$0.00	0				\$0.00				
76F 51 16077	FY15 EQIP Reserve	\$148,578.00	14	\$141,970.50			\$6,607.50				
Totals		\$13,550,429.00	411	\$13,418,750.18	6	\$44,644.00	\$6,607.50				

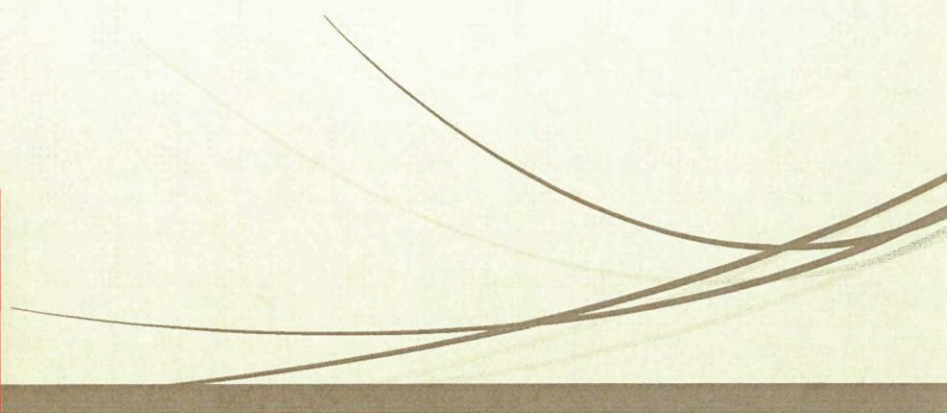
Demand is High

BY	Applications	FA Requested	Allocation	Contracts	% of applications funded
2015	2,075	\$50,043,902	\$13,116,429	414	20%
2014	1,157	\$25,563,205	\$19,966,241	846	73%
2013	1,776	\$32,779,036	\$25,807,444	1240	70%
2012	1,496	\$37,572,361	\$24,579,604	1034	69%
2011	1,504	\$43,684,408	\$29,504,629	1058	70%



LWG & staff Online Questionnaire

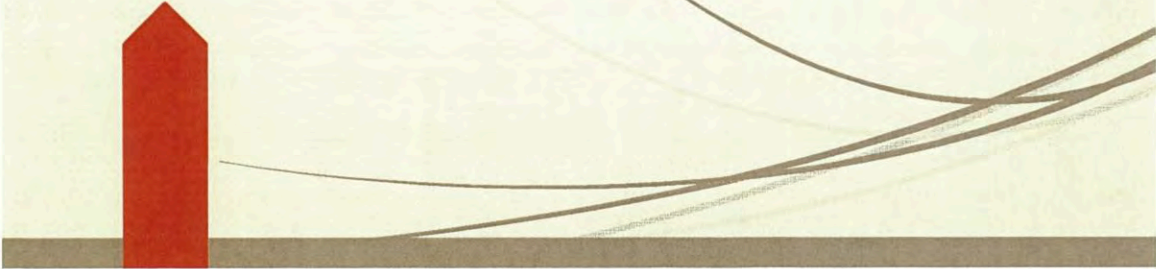
▀ Results & Analysis from Becky Faught



Create a Screening Tool

- **Screening Tools** are permitted by policy (515.72) to:
 1. Manage workload
 2. Determine priority for which applications will be ranked (i.e. high priority will be ranked)

***In FY15, NRCS Field Staff processed 2,075 EQIP applications (ProTracts, 7/10/15) and only funded 414 or 19.95%



Draft Pre-Screening Criteria

- Eligibility – AD-1026, AGI, FTE
- Contract Termination in last 3 FYs – Low Priority
- Active Contract behind schedule – Low Priority
- Active or Completed Contracts – documented proper O&M for all practices installed with program assistance within lifespan; if not – Low Priority



Consider a Threshold

- ▶ Policy at 512.25 allows states to define high priority applications using Thresholds. Thresholds will be based on:
 - ▶ 1. A target level (e.g. Virginia will not fund anything below a ranking score of 400)
 - ❖ National points – 250
 - ❖ State points – 400
 - ❖ Local points – 250
 - ❖ Cost efficiency – 100
 - ▶ 2. A benchmark condition defined for a particular resource concern (meet or exceed)

Draft Screening After Field Assessment

Priority	Definition	Application
High	Land offered has an existing Water Quality Degradation Resource Concern AND a Soil Erosion and a Soil Quality Resource Concern	Applicant agrees to implement practices which will meet or exceed the quality (resource) criteria for all resource concerns identified
Medium	Land offered does not have an existing Water Quality Degradation but DOES HAVE an existing Soil Erosion and Soil Quality Resource Concern	Applicant agrees to implement practices which will meet or exceed the quality (resource) criteria for the Soil Erosion and Soil Quality resource concerns identified
	OR	OR
	Land offered DOES have an existing Water Quality Degradation but DOES NOT HAVE an existing Soil Erosion and Soil Quality Resource Concern	Applicant agrees to implement practices which will meet or exceed the quality (resource) criteria for the Water Quality Degradation resource concerns identified

Draft Screening After Field Assessment Continued...

Priority	Definition	Application
Low	The land offered in the application has existing Water Quality Resource Concerns	Applicant is unwilling to address the Water Quality concerns with the application
	OR	OR
	The land offered in the application has existing Soil Quality and Soil Erosion Resource Concerns	Applicant is unwilling to address the Soil Quality and Soil Erosion Resource Concerns with the application

EQIP Allocation Process

NRCS shall ensure identified resource concerns are the primary factor for allocation of EQIP funding to optimize the environmental benefit of EQIP funds. The following factors must be used:

1. Goals, objectives, and solutions, quantified where possible, to optimize environmental benefits
2. Science-based background data to illustrate the nature and extent of natural resource concerns

To get us started...NHQ uses

Resource Concern	Data Source
Soil Erosion	HEL and non-HEL <u>cropland</u> acres eroding > T (2010 NRI)
Soil Quality Degradation	<u>Cropland</u> acres with Soil Organic Carbon declining at > 100 lbs/ac/year (NRI CEAP)
Water Quality Degradation	<u>Pastureland</u> acres with moderate or greater soil vulnerability for runoff or leaching (SSURGO data for CEAP)
Degraded Plant Condition	<u>Pastureland</u> - 25% rule of thumb for degraded pasture condition (NRI, 2010) <u>Forestland</u> – private forestland with either insect or disease mortality risk defined as >25% of trees expected to die within 15 years (USFS 2012 LANDFIRE)



NEXT Steps

- ▶ Subcommittee work
 - ▶ Forestry and wildlife
 - ▶ Cropland
 - ▶ Livestock
- ▶ Deliver ideas to State Technical Committee at September 22nd meeting
- ▶ STC makes final decisions based on recommendations from all sources



FY2016 NRCS Programs Survey

FY2016 Programs Survey: Background

FY2015 brought about many exciting changes for the Program team.

- Julie Hawkins was selected as the Assistant State Conservationist-Programs.
- David Kriz was selected as the Assistant State Conservationist-Water Resource Operations.

FY2015 was a challenging year for Program funding.

- NRCS operated on a Continuing Resolution until March 2015.
- NRCS Virginia received only 68% of the funding received in FY2014.
- Many Fund Codes/Sub-Accounts were left unfunded.
- Only 1st-round applications were funded for Cropland, Forestry, and Seasonal High Tunnel.

NRCS Virginia Programs team set out to interview field staff in the following Service Centers: Verona, Jonesville, Louisa, and Quinton.

A new method to collect LWG responses was needed.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Background

NRCS Virginia Program Team reviewed and revised the Local Working Group questionnaire from previous fiscal years.

- Previous questions were open-ended and vague, making it difficult to answer important questions.
- LWG responses did not necessarily reflect the views of NRCS field staff, who are essential assets and conservation experts. No such avenue to collect field staff input had previously been used.
- The previous questionnaires were in a document format and responses were sent in for compilation in many different forms:
 - PDF images of hand-written responses emailed
 - Hard copies of hand-written or typed responses mailed
 - Typed responses emailed
- The task of combining responses was tedious and made the responses hard to organize.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Background

Service Center visits yielded so many great ideas. It became evident that field staff should provide the information that would serve as the **driving force** in FY2016 Programs decisions.

In an effort to capture LWG responses and field staff responses, an online survey tool was chosen. It was important to develop a tool that would provide **data**, that could then translate into **information**.

Task at Hand

Each Service Center was required to convene LWG meetings and collect a unified response from each LWG for submission.

Each field-level employee was asked to submit personal responses to the same questionnaire to provide input on FY2016 Programs. Responses were voluntary.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Background

The FY2016 Program Survey was divided into the following sections:

Resource Concerns

- Sub-Resource Concerns

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools
 - Screening Criteria
 - Ranking Tools
 - Fund Pools
 - Mandatory Fund Pools with Nationally-Assigned Funding
 - Mandatory Fund Pools with State-Designated Funding
 - State Priority Fund Pools with State-Designated Funding
- Practice Payment Caps

Easements (ACEP: ALE and WRE)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP)

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Background

Who Responded?

Local Working Group	41	27.7%
Internal NRCS Employee	89	60.1%
State Technical Committee Member	7	4.7%
Other	11	7.4%

Area I (Harrisonburg)	24	16.1%
Area II (Christiansburg)	31	20.8%
Area III (Farmville)	41	27.5%
Area IV (Smithfield)	32	21.5%
State Office (Richmond)	15	10.1%
Other	6	4%

From Where?

District Conservationist	34	35.1%
Soil Conservationist	26	26.8%
Soil Conservation Technician	9	9.3%
Civil Engineer	3	3.1%
Civil Engineering Technician	1	1%
Assistant State Conservationist-Field Operations	1	1%
Area Administrative Coordinator	0	0%
Area Resource Conservationist	3	3.1%
Soil Resource Specialist	1	1%
Program Manager	7	7.2%
Other	12	12.4%

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

Resource Concerns

With the potential for continued limited funding it became clear that Virginia NRCS needed to clearly prioritize which applications should receive funding.

By obtaining feedback on priority Resource Concerns and the Sub-Resource Concerns within each SWAPA + H+ E category, the Programs Team can begin to develop screening and ranking criteria based on critical need for conservation.

So...what was the most important Resource Concern?

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

Resource Concerns

1	Water Quality Degradation
2	Soil Erosion
3	Soil Quality Degradation
4	Degraded Plant Condition
5	Excess/Insufficient Water
6	Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife
7	Livestock Production Limitation
8	Energy Inefficient Use
9	Air Quality

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

Resource Concerns: Top 3 Sub-Resource Concerns

Water Quality Degradation

1. Excess Nutrients in Surface and Ground Waters
2. Excessive Sediments in Surface Waters
3. Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-Solids, or Compost Applications

Soil Erosion

1. Sheet, Rill, and Wind Erosion
2. Concentrated Flow Erosion
3. Excessive Bank Erosion from Streams, Shorelines, or Water Conveyance Channels

Soil Quality Degradation

1. Organic Matter Depletion
2. Compaction

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

Resource Concerns: Final Comments

No common threads were evident in the “Additional Comments” questions of the survey.

No sub-resource concerns were overwhelmingly suggested to be added to FY2016.

Many respondents felt that NRCS was not technically experienced enough to provide technical assistance to address Inefficient Energy Use.

There was a lack of interest in implementing Human Resource Concerns in NRCS Programs in FY2016.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

A screening tool should be used to give priority to applications (High, Medium, and Low) for:

managing workload.	55	27.9%
priority Resource Concern(s).	100	69%
Historically Underserved (Socially Disadvantaged/New and Beginning Farmers).	36	24.8%
new Farm Bill program participants.	40	27.6%
lowering priority of prior EQIP participants.	17	11.7%
applicants whose existing contract(s) is not on schedule.	46	31.7%
exclusion of participants who have had a contract Cancelled recently.	39	26.9%
exclusion of participants who have had a contract Terminated recently.	68	46.9%
applicants existing/previous contract(s) history of operation & maintenance for the lifespan of the practice(s).	36	24.8%
Do not use a screening tool/Not needed.	21	14.5%
Other	10	6.9%

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Ranking tools should take into account:

applicants whose previous contract(s) has demonstrated excellent O&M.	70	48.3%
applicants whose previous contract(s) is currently not on schedule.	70	48.3%
applicants who demonstrate a willingness to complete practices in an expedited manner.	62	42.8%
applications that address Resource Concerns that were identified as the highest priority in the previous section's questions.	98	67.6%
applications that contain practices with longer lifespans.	23	15.9%
applications that include land on which there is a "founded" Agricultural Stewardship Act complaint.	32	22.1%
Other	8	5.5%

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

What new State or Local issues should be considered in the ranking process for FY2016?

- Anything with a positive impact on the Chesapeake Bay
- Previous installed practices and the O&M with those practices
- High Tunnels should get all the money
- Projects with funding support from partner agencies
- No barns of any kind
- Use GIS to overlap Resource Concern layers to determine priority areas
- Ranking is currently **VERY** subjective and could be an issue in the future

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

What new State or Local issues should be considered in the ranking process for FY2016? (Cont.)

- T&E hits should have greater points
- Need to find a collaborative way to reduce the impact of small non-permitted dairies on water quality without putting them out of business
- Animal feeding should be given priority
- Promote the effects of a conservation system
- Requirements for participants completing projects on rented land should be more stringent
- Woodland exclusion from livestock to protect resource of timber/wildlife/stream bank protection

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Fund Pools can be **prioritized** into 3 categories:

1. Mandatory Fund Pools with Nationally-Assigned Funding
2. Mandatory Fund Pools with State-Designated Funding
3. State Priority Fund Pools with State-Designated Funding

1. States are given *earmarked* funds and those funds must be used only for the originally intended purpose. States cannot change the fund amount or reallocate the funds to other fund pools.
2. States must offer these fund pools, but the amount allotted is determined by the states.
3. States may choose to use remaining funds for state priorities. National Headquarters does not mandate these to be offered and does not designate funding levels.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Category 1 Fund Pools

Fund Pool	FY2013 Allocation	FY2014 Allocation	FY2015 Allocation
Golden-Winged Warbler Initiative	--	\$45,681	\$31,746
Longleaf Pine Initiative	\$181,515	\$79,972	\$122,620
National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)	\$479,139	\$311,902	\$369,000
NWQI – Mountain Run	\$176,920	\$47,628	\$123,000*
NWQI – War Branch	\$143,258	\$93,495	\$123,000*
NWQI – Fifteen Mile Creek	\$158,961	\$170,778	\$123,000*
StrikeForce Initiative	\$769,449	\$682,038	\$290,000

*NWQI Sub-Account amounts are subject to change as contract approvals are finalized

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

NWQI: How should funding be split amongst the three watersheds?

Equally amongst the three watersheds	65	44.8%
Put all resources into one 12-digit HUC	12	8.3%
By AgCensus data	27	18.6%
By T&E impaction	27	18.6%
Using workload analysis data	34	23.4%
Other	19	13.1%

Other watersheds to consider:

Southern Rivers/Albemarle Sound, Pigg River, Rappahannock, other 303(d) impaired watersheds, Willis, Slate, Appomattox, and many more.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

StrikeForce: What other ways can Virginia NRCS support and enhance the StrikeForce Initiative Offerings?

- Increase funding
- Market to the desired audience
- Community gardens and home production of vegetables
- Encourage Farmers Markets
- Increase offerings to poverty-stricken producers
- Urban agriculture would be a good start
- Support processing of agriculture products into caned and frozen food sources via community and home canning
- Work with NGOs that focus on agriculture land use, air quality, and soil health

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Category 2 Fund Pools

Fund Pool	FY2013 Allocation	FY2014 Allocation	FY2015 Allocation
Energy Conservation	\$467,980	\$1,136,303	--
On-Farm Energy CAPs	\$467,980	\$95,300	--
On-Farm Energy (Projects)	--	\$1,041,003	--
Livestock	\$5,827,747	\$9,373,973	\$5,359,111
Area I - Harrisonburg	\$910,493	\$2,931,056	\$2,488,309
Area II - Christiansburg	\$2,893,935	\$2,587,276	\$1,180,138
Area III - Farmville	\$1,945,222	\$3,610,751	\$1,288,372
Area IV - Smithfield	\$78,097	\$244,890	\$402,292
Seasonal High Tunnel	\$428,055	\$512,293	\$608,524
Organic Initiative	\$40,372	\$123,884	--
Beginning Farmer/Socially Disadvantaged	\$1,568,803	\$1,272,343	\$1,441,390
Beginning Farmer	\$105,419	\$853,718	\$689,320
Socially Disadvantaged	\$476,501	\$418,625	\$752,070
Wildlife Habitat	\$581,920	\$352,833	\$554,372
Wildlife - Habitat Maintenance	\$105,419	\$114,622	\$22,529
Wildlife - Habitat Creation	\$476,501	\$238,211	\$531,843

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Energy: What changes are needed for on-farm energy conservation?

- EDUCATION!
- NRCS should assist with the energy improvements, not with the plan
- NRCS should assist with the plan, not with the energy improvements
- Try working with Rural Development to make funds go farther
- NRCS does not have enough experience with these types of plans or projects to provide ideas for change

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Livestock: What changes or recommendations could further improve livestock offerings?

- Farms will continuous expansion should not be eligible for these funds
- Give greater emphasis to contracts that include creek fence and water quality improvement
- Remove production practices such as feed barns and feed pads
- Provide more points for wider riparian buffers
- Give ranking points to applicants with partner financial support to further promote many resource concerns in a system approach

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

[EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools](#)

Category 3 Fund Pools

Fund Pool	FY2013 Allocation	FY2014 Allocation	FY2015 Allocation
Aquaculture	\$895,517	\$118,635	--
Cropland	\$2,060,158	\$3,221,436	\$3,419,852
Area I - Harrisonburg	\$247,534	\$1,225,491	\$1,083,062
Area II - Christiansburg	\$74,875	\$32,844	\$69,970
Area III - Farmville	\$306,342	\$221,634	\$188,266
Area IV - Smithfield	\$1,431,407	\$1,741,467	\$2,078,554
Forestry	\$906,508	\$1,092,305	\$934,859
State Conservation Innovation Grants	\$406,641	\$224,923	--

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Aquaculture

Should Virginia NRCS continue to offer aquaculture as a state priority?

Yes	90	62.1%
No	48	33.1%
Other	7	4.8%

Should Virginia NRCS consider other types of aquaculture practices in other regions of the state (e.g. shrimp, fish)?

Yes	78	53.8%
No	60	41.4%
Other	7	4.8%

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Cropland

The majority agreed with the current cropland fund code, which prioritizes adding perennials to the rotation over cover crops to improve soil quality.

Only 50.3% feel Virginia NRCS should fund a participant already doing one level C who chooses to implement a different level C Nutrient Management.

The majority do **not** want to offer cover crop practices for up to 5 years.

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Forestry

Should Virginia NRCS continue to fund loblolly pine establishment?

Yes	69	47.6%
No	24	16.6%
Not Sure/No Opinion	40	27.6%
Other	12	8.3%

Other Forestry considerations:

- We should not subsidize the forestry industry
- Send EQIP funding to VDOF and let them administer the forestry funds instead of NRCS
- More focus on long term hardwood management
- Create community cluster stands to ensure that small landowners can enjoy the benefits of managed forestry

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

EQIP: Screening Criteria, Ranking Tools, and Fund Pools

Practice Payment Caps

The survey results indicate that none of the current caps should be increased, decreased, or removed.

The survey results indicate that no additional practice payment caps should be implemented.



"What about multiple
Waste Storage Facilities?"

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

[ACEP, CStP, and RCPP](#)

ACEP: What can NRCS and the conservation partnership do at both the State and Local levels to increase interest and participation in easement programs?

- Simplify/speed up the process
- Outreach
- NRCS should not be in the easement business
- NRCS should develop partnerships with non-profit organizations, local governments, or other entities that can possibly provide matching funds for conservation easements

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

ACEP, CStP, and RCPP

CStP: How can Virginia NRCS improve the interest and enrollment of Virginia producers into this program?

- Increase awareness
- Provide greater incentives
- It is time to look at the CStP program and see if conservation funds would be better spent in other conservation programs such as EQIP
- Consider dropping the additional Virginia rules/guidelines from the CSP enhancement activities that make the enhancements difficult to carry out on most farm operations

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

ACEP, CStP, and RCPP

RCPP: How can Virginia NRCS improve the interest and enrollment of Virginia producers into this program?

- Continue to work with partners to promote the program
- The program application process is cumbersome and complicated
- Promote via press releases and the State Technical Committee
- Partner communication with one another and including one another on outreach events

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Sections

[Additional Comments](#)

- This is a good thing that you are doing, people need to be heard and included in the decision making process
- This survey was grueling....it took much longer than I expected
- Eliminate payment for cover crop, conservation crop rotation, and deep tillage
- Quit subsidizing the loblolly pine industry
- NRCS can't be everything to everyone; need to streamline practices, reduce red tape involved with signing up, and increase funds for outreach and field staff
- With more applications and limits in funding it seems that we may need to go back to prioritizing a resource concern-giving every pot a tiny amount spread all over does not seem to address a particular resource concern as much as it makes it fair to participants

NRCS Programs

FY2016 Programs Survey: Looking Forward

Soooooooooooo.....

Any questions?



NRCS Programs