

Vermont State Technical Committee Meeting

April 19, 2023

Hosted hybrid: USDA Office, Colchester and virtually via Microsoft Teams

NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 21, 2023

Attending (Colchester): Travis Thomason (NRCS), Obediah Racicot (NRCS), Bob Thompson (NRCS), Angela Hyldburg (NRCS), John Roberts (FSA), Eileen Powers (FSA), Rebecca Ellis (Senator Welch), Marli Rupe (DEC), Alli Lewis (VAWQP), Dave Adams (VTFWS), Jeff Farber (VACD), Brenda Bergman (TNC).

Attending (MS Teams): Marques Munis (NRCS), Luis Aponte (NRCS), Nathan Hamilton (NRCS), John Van Hoesen (NRCS), Trevor Saylor (NRCS), Heather Wetzstein (NRCS), Marybeth Whitten (NRCS), Sinorakoune Bounmasanonh (NRCS), Julia Grey (NRCS), Sarah Waring (RD), Chris E. Smith (USFWS), David Sagan (USFWS), Karl Honkonen (USFS), Kira Jacobs (EPA Region 1 Drinking Water Program), Bryan Dore (EPA), Liam Fagan (Senator Sanders, DC), Will Stevens (Senator Sanders, VT), Thomas Renner (Congresswoman Balint), Isabella Cady (Congresswomen Balint), Laura Ranker (DEC), Nina Gage (VAAFM), Sonia Howlett (VAAFM), Emma Redel (VAAFM), Travis Hart (VTFWS), William Eldridge (VTFWS), Jill Arace (VACD), Emily Nummer (VACD), Jennifer Byrne (WRJNRCD), Natasha Duarte (Composting Association of Vermont/CAV), Alissa White (American Farmland Trust), Jillian Liner (Audubon VT), Stacy Cibula (VT Housing & Conservation Board), Brad Roy (Vermont Rural Water), Eric Howe (LCBP), Dana Hazen (Redstart), Michael Rooney (Producer, Hill Section Farm), Willie Gibson (Freelance Agronomist/CCA), John Thurgood (Public).

Vermont USDA State Technical Committee Meeting

April 19, 2023 | 9:30 am-12:00 pm

USDA Office, Colchester and MS Teams

Locations: 356 Mountain View Drive, Colchester

MS Teams link: [Click here to join the meeting](#)

For phone only, call 202-650-0123, passcode 246373833#

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 – 9:50 am	State Conservationist Welcome and NRCS Update	Travis Thomason
9:50 – 10:00 am	Farm Service Agency Update	John Roberts
10:00 – 10:10 am	Rural Development Update	Sarah Waring
10:10 – 10:30 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegations
10:30 – 10:45 am	Irrigation Subcommittee Update	Bob Thompson
10:45 – 10:55 am	Break	
10:55 – 11:10 am	Climate Subcommittee Update	John Van Hoesen
11:10 – 11:20 am	Programs Update	Obe Racicot
11:20 – 11:55 am	Partner Updates	
11:55 – 12:00 pm	Wrap-up	Travis Thomason

Welcome and NRCS Updates:

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

Thank you for joining us. Review of the agenda.

Introduction of new NRCS Leadership Team Members

- **Luis Aponte**, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operation (Luis.Aponte@usda.gov)
 - From NRCS Maine, District Conservationist for York and Cumberland Counties
- **Marques Munis**, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy (Marques.Munis@usda.gov)
 - From NRCS New Hampshire, State Program Manager EQIP, AMA, CSP, RCCP and previously NRCS Arizona, District Conservationist
- **Nathan Hamilton**, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (Nathan.Hamilton@usda.gov)
 - From NRCS Kentucky, Area Resource Conservationist for Programs, area 3, previously NRCS VT, DC Rutland Area
- **Trevor Saylor**, Public Affairs Specialist (Trevor.Saylor@usda.gov)

Review of Mission and Vision

Review of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) *(slide presentation attached)*

- Financial Assistance (FA) Projections – funding through conservation programs contracts that go directly to producers.
- IRA funding is on top of the regular funding that is received by NRCS.
- Technical Assistance (TA) Projections – to pay for staff, invest in partners, training, etc.
- IRA goes through 2031, funds expire on September 30, 2031, which is why the funding is “front-loaded”.
- Funding opportunities (NFOs) – Conservation solutions through strategic partnerships with focus on Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF)
 - *USDA NRCS Monthly Conservation Partner Newsletter – Vermont (attached)*
- IRA Funding Disbursement – how the \$20 billion will be spent agency-wide.
- IRA Major Focus Areas: Staffing Capacity, Program Delivery, Partnerships

Recognition of Obe Racicot, Assistant Conservationist for Programs

- Came from outside NRCS and has served in this role for 10 years.
- Has leaned on his staff, they do the work, and he conducts traffic.
- Returning to former agency: [Bureau of Ocean Energy Management](#) (BOEM)

Farm Service Update:

John Roberts, State Executive Director, FSA Vermont

Thank you to Obe for your ten years of service. Good luck and enjoy.

Eileen Powers, Agricultural Program Specialist, FSA Vermont

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Sugarbush Damage Payment Scenarios *(slide presentation attached)*

- Two recent windstorms, July 2022 Microburst Wind Storm and Dec 2022 Winter Storm Elliot.
- Cost sharing with producers to repair their lands back to productive conditions.
- Recent policy change, switch to NRCS payment scenarios, which is projected to save our county offices 35 hours per application. (Review of old process)
 - Franklin Co. up to 77 applications from Winter Storm Elliot, huge time savings
- The current NRCS payment scenarios were based on acreage of damage, which didn't fit for sugarbush damage. Instead received permission to create a payment scenario based on hours to repair damage, that will hopefully be adopted at the national level at some point.
- Cost Share rules: Producers may be eligible for 75% cost share of expenses (90% for Limited

Resource/Beginning producers) for their hours based on a flat rate component.

- Four maple scenarios are proposed after extensive research (*See attachment for full details*)
 1. Maple Orchard Restoration - \$31.89/hour
 2. Maple Orchard Restoration, Heavy Equipment - \$50.85/hour
 3. Maple Infrastructure Labor - \$26.41/hour
 4. Maple Infrastructure Materials - \$0.50/tapExample scenario #1: Producers spends 100 hours to repair damage for total expense of \$3,189; 75% cost share is \$2391.75; 90% cost share is \$2,870.10.
- The bulk of the cost is in labor and not so much in materials.
- Assistance provided by NRCS: Joe Buford, Tom Aiken, Toby Alexander; FSA District Director/maple producer: Ryan Howrigan and family; FSA State Committee Chair/maple producer: Jacques Couture.
- Worked with FSA Chittenden County Executive Director, Larry Parker to compare a scenario priced the old way compared to this new method and the amounts were very similar.

Comments/Questions: None

Rural Development Update:

Sarah Waring, State Director VT/NH

Sarah was unable to join at this time due to unexpected situation that came up.

Legislative Updates

Liam Fagan (Senator Sander's Office)

- Legislative Assistant covering agriculture (and other areas) as of late winter.
- Contact information: Liam_Fagan@sanders.senate.gov (DC)
- Senate in holding pattern, especially for anything that will be a close vote, due to attendance issues, but doesn't expect this to endure.
- Democratic caucus and the President remain committed to a clean debt ceiling increase.
- Senate is also finishing the fiscal year 2024 appropriation season, which includes both programmatic and congressional direct spending requests.
- Programmatic side of Agriculture Committee: Many requests were similar to last year, calling for substantial increase in conservation, technical assistance funding, funding for nutrition programs and number of rural development programs, agricultural marketing service and others.
- Congress usually passes the federal budget in late fall or early winter through a large omnibus spending bill. This year's appropriation season is about a month or so earlier than usual.
- Farm Bill priority submissions and agriculture appropriations were due March 31st.
- We believe the Agriculture Committee is hoping to have a draft of the Farm Bill in very late spring/early summer with the goal of floor action either before or right after August recess.
- Numerous conservation priorities were included in our submissions: protecting the Inflation Reduction Act, conservation funding, updates to CRP, EQIP, CSP, as well as promoting agroforestry and numerous research, extension, and education priorities among some other priorities.
- Working with Senator Welch and team to promote Vermont priorities.

Will Steven (Senator Sander's Office)

- Outreach Representative covering agriculture, forestry, small business, nutrition, and other issues.
- Contact information: Will_Stevens@sanders.senate.gov (VT)
- Based in Vermont and have been with the staff for almost a year and a half.
- Have the privilege of getting out into the field and around the state to visit with farms, farmers, small businesspeople, see projects and bring the information back to the office and work with Liam, who is my policy partner in DC, on many of those issues.

Rebecca Ellis (Senator Welch's Office)

- State Director, work generally on environmental and energy issues.
- Contact information: rebecca_ellis@welch.senate.gov
- Ryan McLaren, Outreach Representative, works broadly on the Farm Bill
- Michelle Monroe, Communications and Outreach Representative, Farm Bill, agriculture issues.
- The team will rotate who will be attending the meetings in person versus online.
- First time with appropriation in the Senate, with interesting process of indicating priorities via letters.
- Farm Bill is a must pass bill and there is a big emphasis on making it bipartisan.
- Most requests and changes are policy orientated.
- Ryan McLaren and Michelle Monroe interviewed many people, including some who are present, regarding priorities and it led to an eighteen page, single spaced, document of requests.
- Priorities include supporting conservation, organics, more funding for technical assistance and staffing. We heard loud and clear that it's hard to get money on the ground if you don't have people to get the money on the ground. All those requests are in the final package.
- Earth Day is Saturday and Senator Welch is working with USDA to hold an event at a farm in Grand Isle that received a Rural Development grant to put in an anaerobic digester. Travis will attend and share about other NRCS work on the farm.

Isabella Cady (Congresswoman Balint's Office)

- District Office Intern (VT)
- Covering for **Thomas Renner, Community Liaison and Constituent Services Representative**
- Asked to share that Congresswoman Balint is dedicated to supporting the work that Senator Sanders' office and Senator Welch's office are doing when it comes to the House, and we are making it a priority to champion Vermont agriculture and the systems that support it.

Thomas Renner (Congresswoman Balint's Office) – (added from later in the meeting)

- Community Liaison and Constituent Services Representative
- Contact information: thomas.renner@mail.house.gov
- Previously worked with Senator Leahy's Office and has worked with some STAC members already.
- The Congresswoman wants to be grounded in what you are looking for her to support in the house and I am happy to help facilitate that for you with the DC office.

Questions/Comments:

Question: *Can you share more about the funding for staffing to have more people on the ground.*

Answer: *Rebecca Ellis (Senator Welch) - There are two needs. The need for USDA/NRCS to have more funding for staffing to provide technical assistance and the need for more funding for partnership agreements. We put in an ask for RCPP funding.*

Comment: *USDA employees are very underpaid and that will make it hard for them to recruit new employees to get the work done, especially with the high cost of living in Vermont. I just want to offer the observation that the pay parity is so disparate between agencies.*

Response: *Rebecca Ellis - I really appreciate you saying that, and I will definitely bring that back.*

Question: *Rebecca Ellis asked for further information from NRCS, FSA and RD (Sarah Waring from RD joined the meeting at this time).*

Response: *Travis (NRCS) – We have had to post engineering positions several times and we're still looking for qualified candidates.*

Response: *John (FSA) – We have continued to struggle filling positions, even offering all the bonuses we are allowed. We are not hopeful that we will get an applicant.*

Response: Sarah (RD) - The way the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) have impacted RD is that many of the programs have received an increased state allocation, or the national office has created separate, independent tracks of programming, like the meat and poultry processing programs and the new rural utility service programs. These are excellent and exciting programs, but when they create a program at the national level, they ask our staff to do the environmental and/or the servicing. So, we have both, an inflation of work at the local level and we have additional work that relates to new programs and RD is in a hiring freeze. As mentioned by others, we have a big challenge in filling our positions due to the pay-scale disparity and because most positions are for loan servicing with underwriting experience and candidates come from banking where they are now able to work remotely. There is a big challenge for some parts of USDA and some parts of our federal agencies where some of us are required to keep people in offices because we are servicing local customers and other agencies can offer the exact same job at the same rate in a metropolitan area or remotely, and they can stay where they want to live somewhere else in the country. We've had six or eight positions opened more than four times because once people realize they must move to Vermont or New Hampshire, they decline the offer. So we are in a double spot, trickiness for us, current hiring freeze plus when we are allowed to hire, it's quite difficult to ask people to move here right now because of the housing costs and pay disparity.

Question: Does Vermont have capacity with Technical Service Providers (TSP) to assist or do we need to ramp up the TSP membership? (State of CT has about 12 TSPs)

Answer: Travis (NRCS) - Similar to CT we have a list of folks on our TSP registry to assist with work and we need more. We have an action plan to try and boost the TSP registry. One challenge is the expense of working with a TSP. The cost of two projects (farmstead waste storage) would be equivalent to one full-time employee. With IRA funds we can balance both options. Through ACT NOW, using CPA, DIA, CEMAs funds to pay TSP to do nutrient management and forest management plans.

Irrigation Sub-Committee Update

Bob Thompson, NRCS State Conservation Engineer

Subcommittee for irrigation including NRCS, UVM Extension, VAAFM, Producer

- Hoped for more producers but learned a lot from the husband-and-wife team who attended.
- Focus is on water source, versus irrigation because that is what producers need.
- Producers shared about the variety of water sources they have at their farm and the concerns with each option:
 - Drill a well – highest risk and expense.
 - Shallow well (20 feet) – medium risk, less expense, seasonal
 - Pond – lowest risk, gather water run-off, likely to always have water.
 - Pumping water from river – at times could be not good for the river.
- Committee focus is on the technical options and not whether the policy would allow.
- There is a white paper with recommendations broken into technical and programmatic questions for the committee to review and then it will come back to the STAC.
- The number one question/request from smaller producers is, please help us with irrigation.
- Challenge when addressing water quantity issues: Do we spend \$40,000 to drill a well to pay for a \$10,000 system.

Questions/Comments:

Question: John Thurgood (Public) - What is the resource concern being addressed with irrigation in Vermont?

Answer: John Van Hoesen/Bob Thompson/Obe Racicot (NRCS) – available water quantity, water source, water source for plants.

Comment: Chris Smith (USFWS) - Not all ponds are created equal. They don't always do well and can create greater resource concerns, like hydrologic and wetland issues.

Comment: Kira Jacobs (EPA Region 1 Drinking Water Program) - Vermont Groundwater Coordinating Committee could be a resource for this subcommittee. Erin Stewart, Hydrogeologist (she/her), VANR | DEC, Drinking Water Groundwater Protection Division | Water Resources Section, 1 National Life Dr. - Davis 4, Montpelier, VT 05620 | (802) 461-6096 | erin.stewart@vermont.gov

Response: NRCS currently has a team member that attends these meetings.

Comment: Jill Arace (VACD) – If there is a pond with an excellent source of water, there is a program with both state and federal funds for fire suppression resources (dry hydrants and pressurized systems). Rural Fire Protection Taskforce

Comment: Laura Ranker (DEC): We do have an upcoming Groundwater Committee meeting that's being organized now. I will speak with Erin Stewart, as we are always looking for agenda topics. If someone wants to drop their name in the chat, I can forward your name onto her and add you to the e-mail contact list so that you get notification of our meetings. We welcome your input.

Response: Travis/Bob – Please add Bob Thompson to the list. Bob.Thompson@usda.gov

BREAK – Wellness Opportunity!

NRCS Programs Update

Obe Racicot, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Overview of the Program Cycle (slide presentation attached)

Special emphasis was made to explain/remind that applications for NRCS programs are accepted year-round. If an application is received after a program cut-off date, they will be included for consideration in the next funding cycle. Please continue to send landowners/producers to our field offices for assistance.

Pre-approval process is underway for many programs, where the applications are reviewed and selected based on a ranking score. We receive an annual allocation for funding (spending limit) and can only approve as many applications as we have annual allocation to fund.

- Total applications selected to date: 275.
- RCPP18 selection is next week, which should add a lot more contracts.
- Largest ever sign-up for CSP-classic! We will be requesting more funding from NHQ this June.
- The next step is managing and getting producers to respond to selected applications to get contracts in place to be 80% obligated by June 30th.
- Total known backlog (as of mid-April): 409 unfunded applications
 - RCPP18 are currently unfunded, as they have not been selected yet.
 - Most unfunded will be deferred and rolled-over to next year (~\$500k CSP-classic, fair amount of EQIP)
 - This will be our future work, and most producers will not have to reapply.

NEW Organic Transition Initiative (OTI) (see slides for details)

- NRCS offering \$75 million through EQIP Technical Assistance (TA) and Financial Assistance (FA)
- This is to turn around a national drop in farms transitioning to organic.
- National EQIP sign-up deadline of June 15, 2023, set by the Chief.
- States are not pre allocated funded but will be awarded based on sign-ups.
- Open to all producers who want to transition to organic (not limited to dairy)
- Brief review of process for producers provided by Heather Wetzstein, Resource Conservationist for Programs
- Organic Management practice (practice code 823) used to create a full resource conservation system plan to transition to organic and other practices can be added to the contract if the

- producers feel they are needed (example: field border to separate from non-organic land)
- TA - \$5 million to education NRCS employees and new hires; FA - \$70 million to producers.

Getting Ready for FY 2024 REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY STAC

- Scheduled Subcommittee meeting dates (*see presentation slide*)
- State Bulletin will be shared: [FY 2024 Financial Assistance Working Groups Schedule](#)
- Continuing/looking to expand the Locally Led proposals.
- RCPP Partner Coordination meeting – TBD
- Encourage partners to attend these subcommittee meetings.
- List of goals for each subcommittee and workgroup (*see presentation slide*)
- Goal to have all decisions for FY 2024 made by September 1, 2023

The Future

- Outgoing – Today is Obe Racicot’s last day after ten years of dedicated service to the agency.
- Incoming – Nathan Hamilton, Acting ASTC for Programs (120-day detail)

Questions/Comments:

Question: John Thurgood (Public) - *Can TSPs write Organic Management Plans?*

Answer: Heather Wetzstein (NRCS) – *There is something called an Organic Management Plan, which is not the same as the new practice code 823, Organic Management. The Organic Management Plan can only be done by a TPS and is more of an inventory of the farm (acreage, land uses, livestock information, manure information, storage, etc.). Whereas the organic management practice, which is done by NRCS is a full resource management system plan where we are looking very specifically at every field, resource concerns on each field and then identifying the practices that can be implemented to meet the national organic program requirements, as well as any additional practice standards that the operator is going to also install through that plan.*

Question: Nina Gage (VTAAFM) – *Is the Organic Management Plan a prerequisite to access the OTI funds?*

Answer: Heather Wetzstein (NRCS) – *No*

Comment/Question: Brenda Bergman (TNC) – *Great acknowledgement of the success of CSP. Do we know why we had a bigger enrollment? Anything we can learn from it going forward?*

Response: Marli Rupe (DEC) – *A plug to the Conservation Districts who did serious outreach efforts.*

Response: Travis Thomason (NRCS) – *Every year we are over-subscribed in EQIP. Last year we requested additional funds for EQIP (\$3.5 million) and were told no because our programs weren’t balanced between CSP and EQIP. So, our #1 goal was to do more CSP. And our teams collectively, Conservation Districts and NRCS did a fantastic job. And because of the success there is a CSP Coordinator position to support the work. More to come during partner updates regarding this success.*

Question: Nina Gage (VTAAFM) – *You mentioned that applications have been pre-selected. Have producers been notified, I'm thinking specifically about barnyard infrastructure under EQIP Classic.*

Answer: Obe Racicot (NRCS) – *State office approves, notifies the field offices of the contracts that have been selected and then they have a certain amount of time to send Notice of Intent letters to producers. Producers then have so many days to sign and return the letters. If they don’t, the contract gets deferred, and we go down the list. The letter should have been sent to producers. Some contracts have been obligated, which means the producer signed them. There’s typically a lag in the process.*

Climate Sub-Committee Update

John Van Hoesen, State GIS Specialist/NRCS State Climate POC

Review of Subcommittee Charge (*see slides*) **REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY STAC**

- Two meetings held so far to strategize the work of the committee.
- Committee members: VACD, UVM, USFWS, Conservation Districts and others
- Reviewed CSAF priority list and where there are gaps/opportunities.
- Primary benefits and co-benefits, grouping and ranking CSAF practices by resource concerns.
- Draft document of Climate Resource Concerns Framework

Questions/Comments: None

Partner Update: VT Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation

Marli Rupe, Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief

RCPP update

- Ranking deadline is this Friday and will have a much better update after that time.
- Incredible learning experience that will benefit any future projects.
- \$10M extension of a prior RCPP Agreement that was completed in 2018
 - \$7M for FA; \$3M for TA
- Hired Kaitlyn Jones in Oct 2022 as RCPP Coordinator
- Priorities - small farms, agronomic, forestry, easements, small wetlands
- Advantages to this RCPP: 100% practice payment; land rental rates; lots of TA with broader opportunities (earlier cover crop, reduce phosphorus)
- Jan 13, 2023, application deadline; 220+ applications (~175 more than expected!)
- Conducted extensive outreach - farmer meetings, specific outreach to TSPs (ag and forestry)
- Hired VACD and Redstart Forestry as planners to help with the project – both have been amazing!
- Workload required screening, which eliminated MFO and LFOs unless grazing.
- Juggling of workload – greatly appreciate help from VACD, Redstart, and Districts who stepped up.
- Planners are adding to Conservation Desktop (CD) and ranking will be done this Friday, 5/21.
- Current agreement allows for about \$900k for ag and \$800K for forestry to be spent this year.
- Next contracting and implementation

Easements

- 13 applications, working with NRCS and Cold Hollow Canada to prioritize.
- Pursuing 2 landowners for wetlands (5 parcels)
- At least 2, possibly 4 for ag/forestry easements

Technical Assistance Enhancements (TA-E)

- Doing water quality monitoring in areas where we did prior RCPP practices and continuing work.
- Providing support for forestry Outreach and Education and watershed planning

Lessons Learned

- There is so much need – forestry interest was huge.
- TA help was critical to assist the process, especially with the smaller farms and forest landowners.
- We need trained people - this process requires a higher level of knowledge than expected.

A million “thank yous” to Obe and the DCs (Sarah, Marybeth, Phyllicia and Dave) for their patience with our lack of experience in all of this and their willingness to take on such a major workload. So grateful for all their help - NRCS staff are amazing!

Questions/Comments:

Comment: *Travis (NRCS) – The agency is gathering feedback on our RCPP program and ways to improve it. NHQ has invited all RCPP partners to provide feedback. Or to the congressional delegation.*

Response: *Marli Rupe (DEC) – Participated in a listening session held by the congressional delegation for feedback on RCPP and felt very lucky on how things are in Vermont. Other states are not as fortunate.*

Partner Update: VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

Nina Gage, Agricultural Water Quality Program Coordinator

Sonia Howlett, Water Quality Specialist

BMP and EQIP Assist Update

- Just passed our annual rolling deadline Best Management Practice (BMP)
- EQIP Assist applications are available at any point in time for farms implementing production area and improvements through EQIP.
- We offer organic reimbursement for the cost of certification through a partnership with USDA. [Organic Certification Cost Share Program | Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets](#)
- RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangement - Vermont Pay for Performance Program
 - 56 active participants: 46 participants in 2-year participation agreements, 10 new participants
- Recently provided notice of award for a *Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Agreement* – increasing grazing land technical assistance capacities, 4 different project awards

CSP Assist

- VAAFM and other members of the Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group have been meeting for the last 3 years and decided to focus on filling gaps where funds were under-utilized and get more TA & FA on the ground.
- A farmer group recommended that the working group utilize the \$1 million appropriated by the state legislature to support CSP.
- The Working Group agreed and recommended that the VAAFM use the pilot funds to supplement enrollment in CSP for the first year of enrollment or retroactively for the early adopters that already have contracts.
- The Vermont Farmer Ecosystem Stewardship Program = CSP Assist
- This is for Ag land contracts (not forest land)
- Coordinating with Brandon Carpenter, NRCS
- Built an application for the State CSP Assist, with a waiver for the 1619 restriction.
- Current or new CSP applicants complete the CSP application and a 1-page waiver/authorization to release information to the VAAFM.
- Existing participant: one-time payment of \$3500; New applicants/renewals: \$2000 payment; Under contract with NRCS: flat rate of \$1500-\$7500 (depending on number of applicants)
- 61 applicants so far (~40 existing, waivers for 28 to give supplemental payment)
- 57 new applicants so far (33 waivers received)
- NRCS CSP-IRA cutoff date: April 21, 2023
- Deadline for supplemental payments: Friday, May 8th

Questions/Comments:

Comment: *Jennifer Byrne (WRJNRCD) – The payment is not for conservation planning, but for CSP assessment*

Response: *Sonia Howlett (VAAGFM) - Correct*

Feedback: *Jennifer Byrne (WRJNRCD) – At future STC meetings, can we plan for Conservation Districts chairing Local Working Groups (LWG) to have standing time on the agenda as subcommittees of this*

committee? It would be great to also have our LWG dates listed on the subcommittee list for cross promotion.

Action item: Add the Local Working Group dates to the subcommittee list for cross promotion.

Update: Kira Jacobs (EPA) - The Northeast Mid Atlantic Forests and Water Partnership is happening! We are meeting May 17-18 in New Jersey in case you want to attend our first in-person meeting. It is free to attend! For more information, please contact me, Kira Jacobs, EPA Region 1 Source Water Protection Coordinator, 617-918-1817 or jacobs.kira@epa.gov. NACD is awaiting official word on their successful USFS Landscape Scale Restoration grant (\$600,000) to support Forests and Water project from Maine to Ohio to West Virginia. The project was ranked very high on the Forest Service landscape scale restoration grant application.

Update: Karl Honkonen (US Forest Service) - Funding for this forest and water partnership is imminent. We're working with the grantee to get funds awarded, but we can't announce it yet. Other items from the Forest Service:

- **Women in the Woods** – In partnership with VT FPR, working with women landowners to provide educational opportunities, demonstration forests and tools for the women landowners to better manage their forest lands. It's an ongoing project.
- There are two new projects that I'm working on in Vermont that came to the Vermont Woodlands Association:
 - **Climate Smart Family Forests in Vermont.** Funding directed through Senator Sanders Office to help educate forest landowners on some climate smart forestry practices.
 - The development of **new markets for wood products in Vermont**, funding through Senator Sanders Office. This is a project with the Northern Forest Center, which is based in Concord, NH, but covers the entire northern region and is specific to new wood product initiatives in Vermont.

Update: Jennifer Byrne (WRJNRCD) – In April we launched a grant that we received from the Extension Risk Management Education, passed through RMA funds. It's to increase enrollment in whole farm and micro farm insurance to producers in Vermont (and New Hampshire.) We're primarily focused on utilizing our Farm team framework to you know increase capacity of these farms to sign up for these crop insurance programs.

Wrap-up

Travis Thomason, STC NRCS VT

Next meeting is June 21st, same location. We are working on dates for Fiscal Year 2024 and will share those at the next meeting. Plenty of opportunities and plenty of challenges. Thank you all for joining us. Obe, we are going to miss you. Thank you so much.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm

Future meeting:

June 21, 2023, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm



United States Department of Agriculture

Vermont State Technical Committee Agenda April 19, 2023, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm

USDA Vermont State Office
356 Mountain View Drive, Colchester, VT

MS Teams

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Or call in (audio only)

[+1 202-650-0123,,246373833#](#) United States, Washington DC

Phone Conference ID: 246 373 833#

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 – 9:50 am	State Conservationist Welcome and NRCS Update	Travis Thomason
9:50 – 10:00 am	Farm Service Agency Update	John Roberts
10:00 – 10:10 am	Rural Development Update	Sarah Waring
10:10 – 10:30 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegations
10:30 – 10:45 am	Irrigation Subcommittee Update	Bob Thompson
10:45 – 10:55 am	Break	
10:55 – 11:10 am	Climate Subcommittee Update	John Van Hoesen
11:10 – 11:20 am	Programs Update	Obe Racicot
11:20 – 11:55 am	Partner Updates	
11:55 – 12:00 pm	Wrap-up	Travis Thomason

**Next scheduled State Technical Committee Meeting:
June 21, 2023**

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Vermont State Office
356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105
Colchester, VT 05446
Voice 802-951-6796 Fax 855-794-3677

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



United States Department of Agriculture



USDA NRCS Vermont

Travis L. Thomason – State Conservationist

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

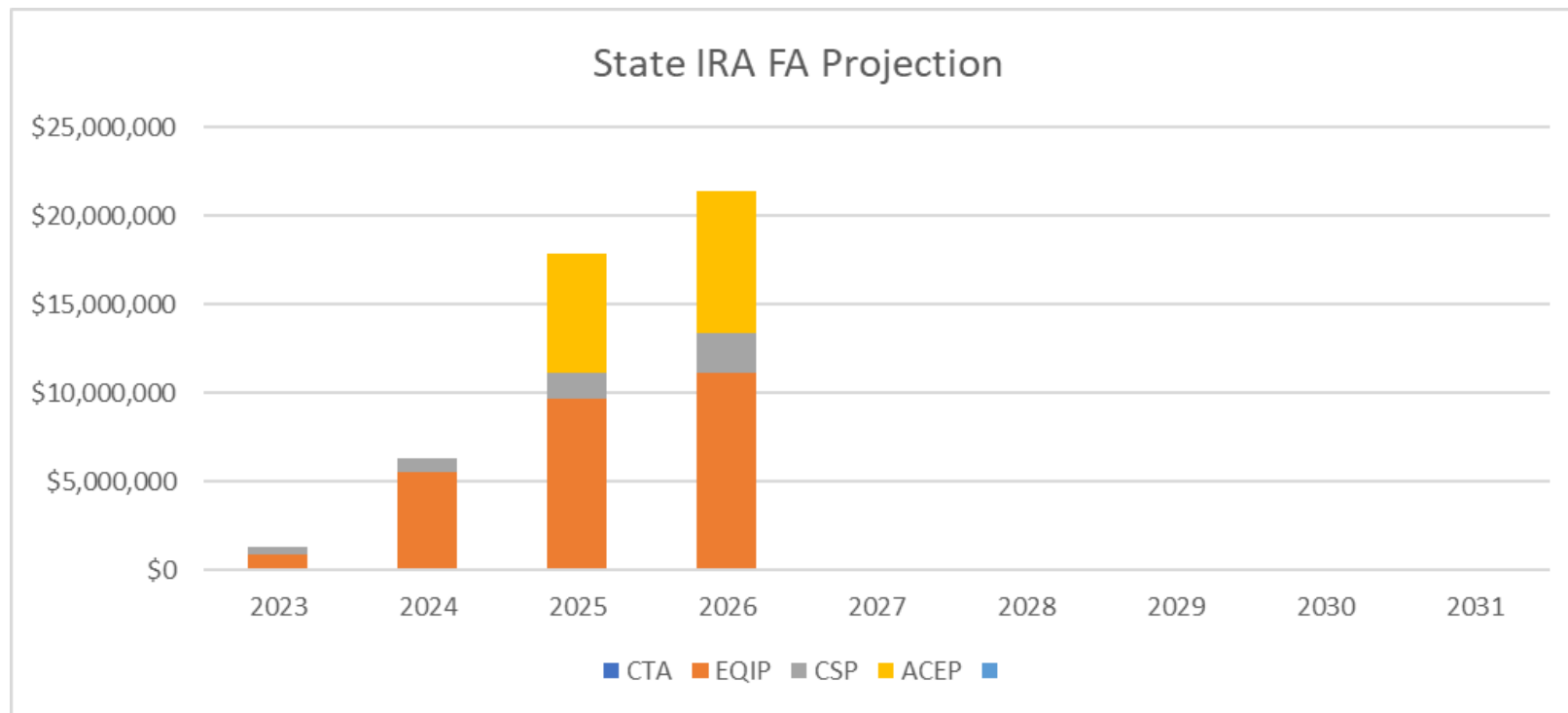
Mission

*We deliver
conservation solutions
so
agricultural producers can
conserve natural resources
and
feed a growing world.*

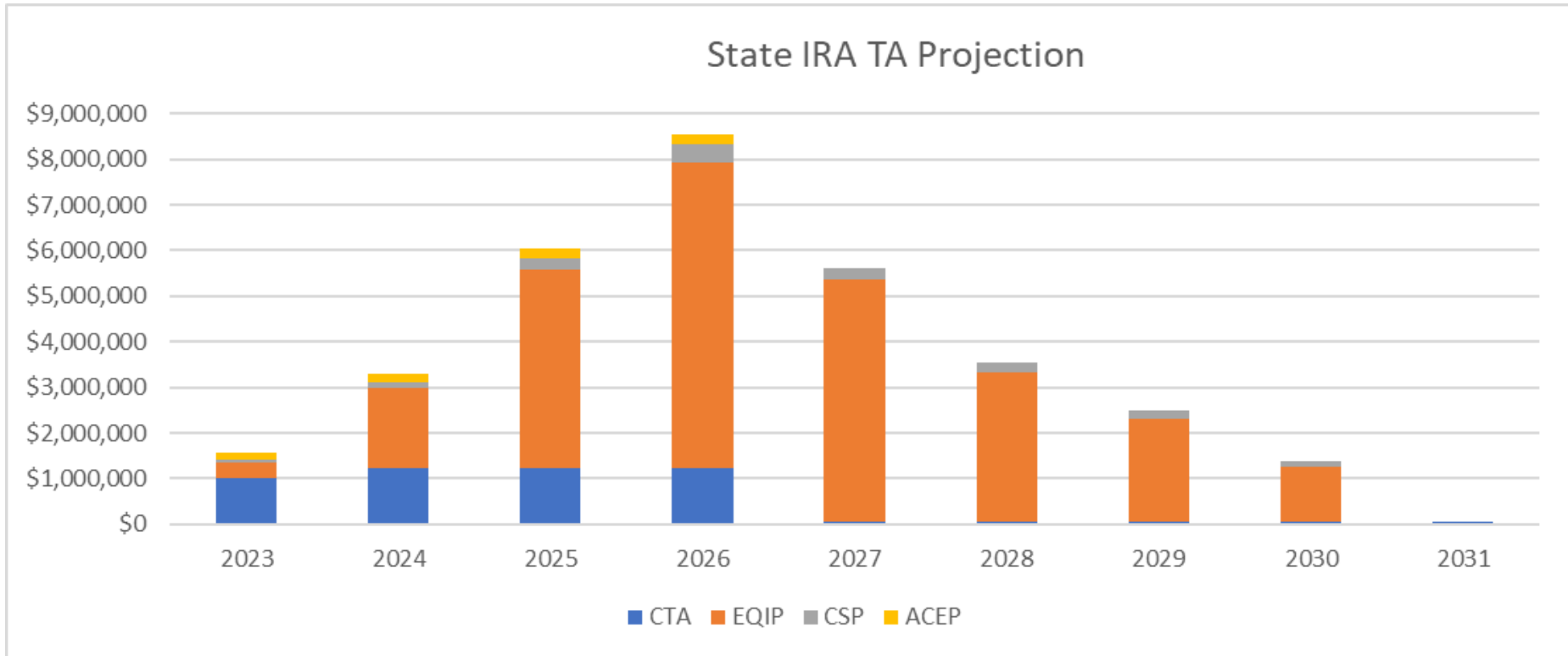
Vision

*Resilient lands
with
clean and abundant water,
healthy soils,
and
thriving agricultural
communities.*

Vermont IRA Data – FA*



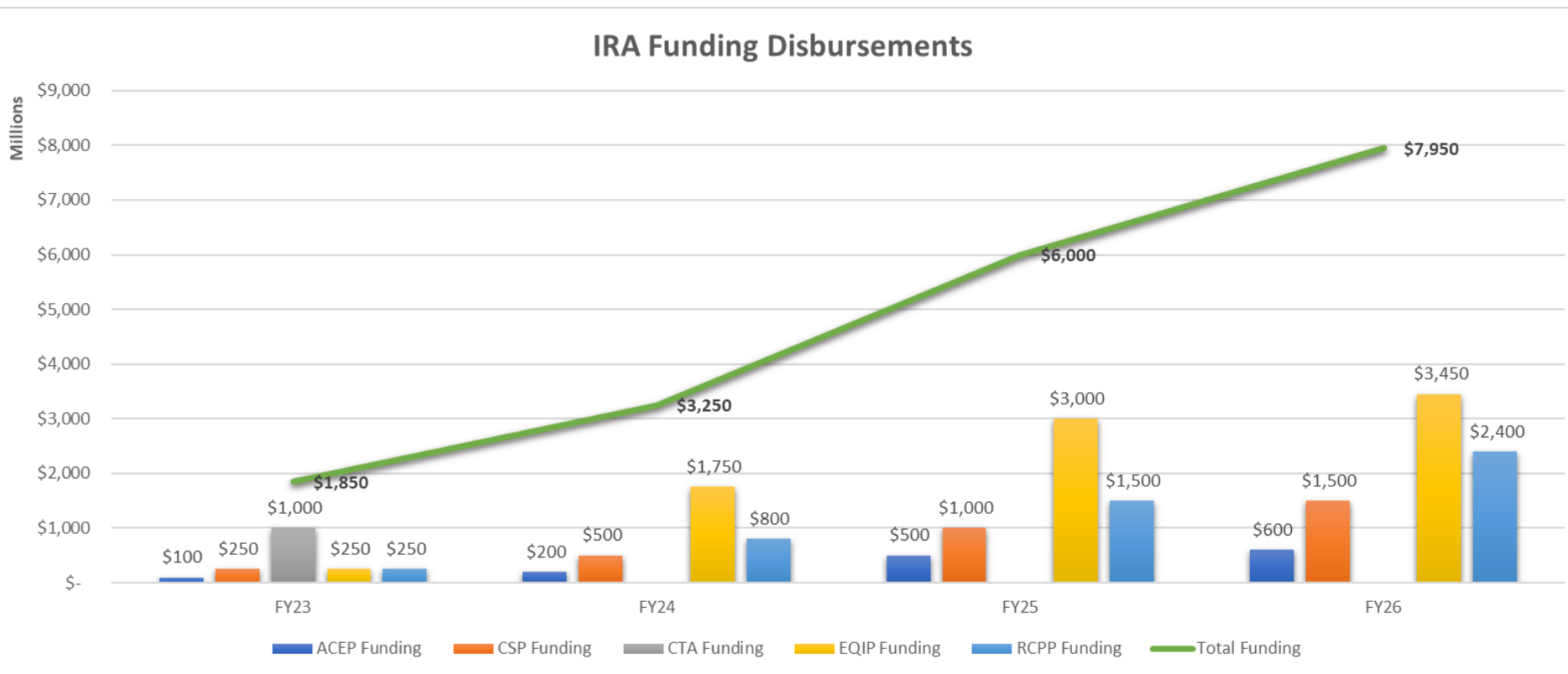
Vermont IRA Data – TA*



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov

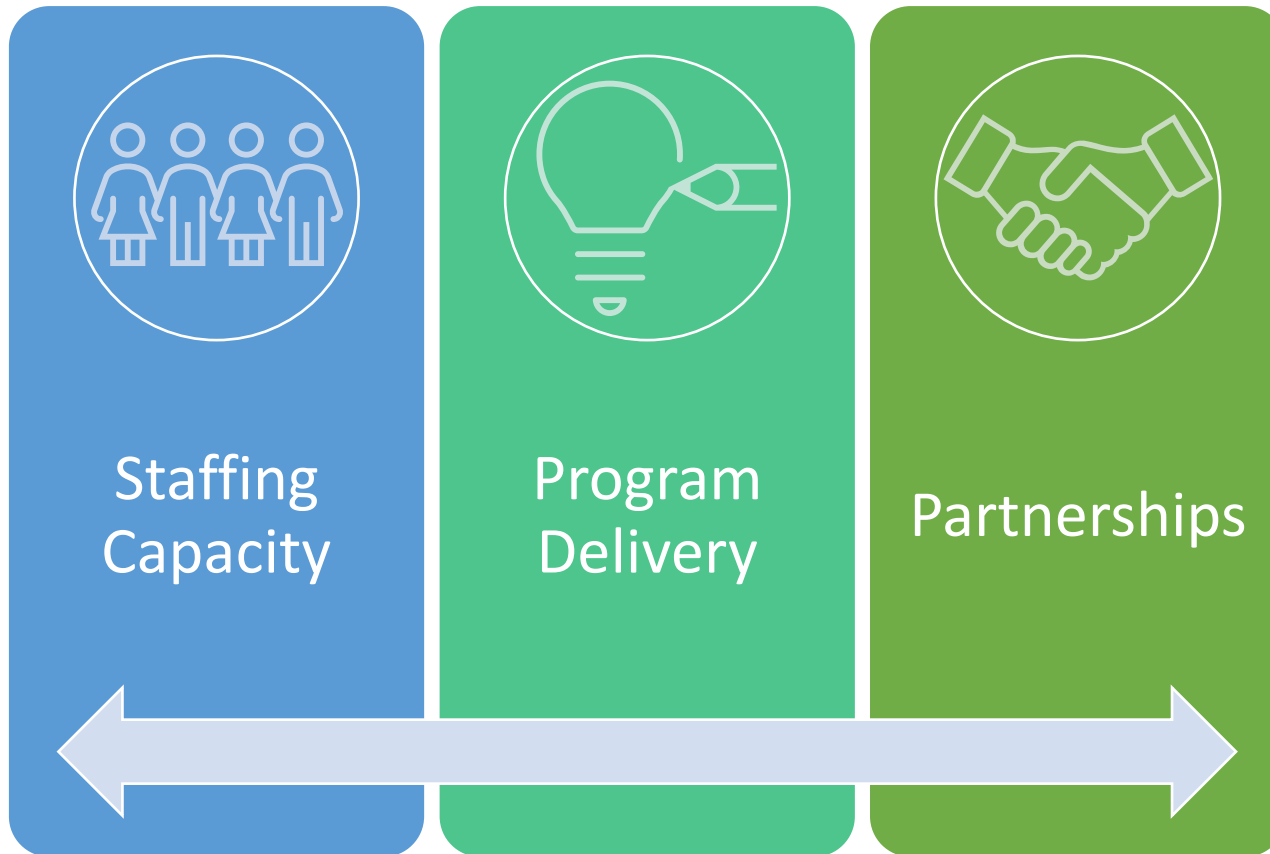
IRA Funding Disbursements



*CTA Funds Not Given Disbursement Schedule—Assume FY23 Full Amount

*Funds Expire
Sept 30, 2031

IRA Major Focus Areas for Success





USDA NRCS Monthly Conservation Partner Newsletter - Vermont

Date: April 2023

A. Funding opportunities, RFPs announced:

- **NRCS Announces \$75 Million to Assist Producers Transitioning to Organic Production** - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced details about its \$75 million investment in conservation assistance for producers transitioning to organic production. As part of the multi-agency, [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will dedicate financial and technical assistance to a new organic management standard and partner with new organic technical experts to increase staff capacity and expertise. [Read more for details about assistance for producers transitioning to organic and the notice of funding to hire organic technical experts.](#)
- **Conservation Solutions through Strategic Partnerships** - The *Conservation Solutions through Strategic Partnerships* is a funding opportunity that can be found on [grants.gov](#). The closing date for applications is **May 27, 2023**. NRCS Vermont is seeking support from and opportunities to partner with like-minded natural resource conservation partners. The overall intent of this solicitation is to seek conservation partners to provide technical services for activities related to conservation delivery assistance identified in Section A of this announcement. NRCS anticipates the amount of funding available for support of this program in FY2023 will be up to \$1,500,000. Agreements awarded pursuant to this NFO may be between one and five years in duration. This notice identifies the objectives, eligibility criteria, and application instructions. Applications will be screened for completeness and compliance with provisions of this notice.
- **Vermont NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants** - The *Vermont NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants* (CIG) NFO can be found on [grants.gov](#). The closing date for applications is **May 8, 2023**. NRCS is announcing the availability of CIG State Program funding to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applications are accepted from eligible entities (Section C) for projects carried out in the state of Vermont. A total of up to \$1,000,000 is available for the Vermont CIG competition in FY 2023. All non-federal entities (NFE) and individuals are invited to apply, with the sole exception of federal agencies. Projects may be between one and three years in duration. The maximum award amount for a single award in FY 2023 is \$200,000.
- **Equity in Conservation Outreach** - *Equity in Conservation Outreach* is a national NFO. Application requirements can be found on [grants.gov](#). The closing date for applications is **April 27, 2023**. USDA is seeking applications for projects that will improve outreach to underserved producers and underserved communities about conservation programs and services and opportunities for students to pursue careers in agriculture, natural resources, and related sciences. NRCS is offering up to \$70 million in cooperative agreements with entities for two-year projects that encourage participation in NRCS programs, especially in underserved communities and among urban and small-scale producers.
- **Urban Agriculture and Innovation** - USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production [Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements](#): applications due in [grants.gov](#) on **June 15, 2023**.
- **NRCS accepts [EQIP](#), [CSP](#), [ACEP](#), and [AMA](#) applications year-round. Contact your local service center or visit [Farmers.gov](#) to learn more and apply for assistance.**

B. Upcoming events (training, workshops, etc.):

- The next session of the **State Technical Advisory Committee** is set for **April 19, 2023**, at 9:30 am. The agenda is posted on the events page of the [website](#). A notice was sent by [GovDelivery](#) providing information on the meeting. For more information, visit the [State Technical Committee webpage](#) or contact Angela Hyldborg, Executive Assistant at angela.hylsburg@usda.gov.

C. News, media coverage, press releases:

- **USDA Invests \$12 million in Cooperative Agreements for Conservation on Grazing Lands and Support for Farmers and Ranchers, with three (3) Vermont organizations receiving funding.** University of Vermont (UVM), Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (AAFM), and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association (VGFA), all received separate funding for grazing-related projects in Vermont. In total, USDA invested in 49 projects that will expand access to conservation technical assistance for livestock producers and increase the use of conservation practices on grazing lands across the country. Specific information about the investments can be found by visiting the [announcement webpage](#).
- **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Investments in NRCS Conservation Programs** - IRA assistance is now available through Natural Resources Conservation Service's oversubscribed conservation programs for agricultural producers. NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs year-round, but for fiscal year 2023 funding, producers interested in the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) or [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) should apply by their [state's ranking dates](#) to be considered for funding in the current cycle. Funding is provided through a competitive process and will include an opportunity to address the unmet demand from producers who have previously sought funding for climate-smart conservation activities. For the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#), [Agricultural Land Easements](#) or [Wetland Reserve Easements](#), applications for IRA funding can be submitted continuously throughout the year. [Learn more from our Feb. 13, 2023, news release](#).

D. Key staffing updates:

- **Luis Aponte** joins the team as the **Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations** (temporarily replacing Wynea Buford). Luis can be reached via email at Luis.Aponte@usda.gov.
- **Marques Munis** joins the team as the **Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy** (temporarily replacing Justin Tuthill). Marques can be reached via email at Marques.Munis@usda.gov.
- Obe Racicot's last day with NRCS Vermont is April 19, 2023. Obe has been with NRCS for 10 years in Vermont as the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs. Obe will be missed and leaves a strong legacy of excellence in financial assistance and easement programs.
- **Nathan Hamilton** joins the team as the **Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs** (temporarily replacing Obe Racicot). Nathan can be reached via email at Nathan.Hamilton@usda.gov
- **Trevor Saylor** has permanently joined the NRCS Vermont as the new **State Public Affairs Specialist** in Colchester. Trevor started on April 10th, 2023, and can be reached at Trevor.Saylor@usda.gov. Please reach out to Trevor for any communications or public affairs related items.

E. Other:



ECP Maple Sugarbush Damage Payment Scenarios

Created and Proposed by VT FSA State Office, March 2023



Background

- Triggering events: July 2022 Microburst Wind Storm, Franklin County, and Winter Storm Elliott, December 23, 2022
- Latest policy changes to running ECP include the requirement to use Payment Scenarios developed at the National and Regional levels, but no scenario adequately addresses cost sharing on restoring sugarbush to productive condition
- Cost Share rules: Producers may be eligible for 75% cost share of expenses (90% for Limited Resource producers) for their hours based on a flat rate component
- Four maple scenarios are proposed

Payment Scenarios

Development



NRCS Data Collection

- NRCS collects extensive data on everything it takes to complete various projects in 4 major categories:
 - Materials
 - Equipment
 - Labor
 - Mobilization
- Scenarios are built with these components based on 'typical' project scopes
 - For example, when a situation requires removal of obstructions, these are a few of the scenarios they have built:
 - Removal and disposal of trees and brush up to 6" in diameter
 - Removal and disposal of trees and brush over 6" in diameter
 - Removal and disposal of heavy scattered debris
 - Removal and disposal of light scattered debris
 - Each scenario has a selection of the materials, equipment, labor and mobilization that it will take to remove obstructions on land so that the land is restored to productive condition

Vermont Maple Scenarios

(1) Maple Orchard Restoration \$31.89/hour

- Scenario Unit is hours
- Components include equipment and labor
- Equipment: ATV, chainsaw
- Labor: General labor

(2) Maple Orchard Restoration, Heavy Equipment \$50.85/hour

- Scenario Unit is hours
- Components include equipment, labor and mobilization
- Equipment: ATV, chainsaw, log skidder, hydraulic excavator
- Labor: General labor, Equipment Operators, Light, and Equipment Operators, Heavy
- Mobilization: getting required equipment to the site

Vermont Maple Scenarios

(3) Maple Infrastructure Labor \$26.41/hour

- Scenario Unit is hours
- Component includes labor
- Labor: General labor

(4) Maple Infrastructure Materials \$0.50/tap

- Scenario Unit is taps
- Components include materials
- Producer would have to report how many taps they had to make repairs to
- Use of 'materials' includes an expectation of product lifespan and producer's responsibility to maintain the materials cost shared on for that lifespan
- Potentially complicated when a producer leases land



Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

April 19, 2023

VT State Technical Committee



NRCS Programs Update



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Where are we?



2023 ranking dates

- ACEP WRE – 2/10/2023 ☒
- ACEP-ALE – 2/10/2023 ☒
- AMA-General – 11/18/2022 ☒
- CSP-Classic – 10/21/2022 ☒
- EQIP-General – 11/18/2022 ☒
- CSP-IRA – 4/21/2023
- EQIP-IRA – 4/21/2023
- RCPP-EQIP – 11/18/2022 ☒
- RCPP18 – 1/13/2023 ☒

Program applications are accepted on a continuous basis



Where are we?



Contracts selected to date:

- AMA – 3 contracts - \$128,000
- EQIP-Classic – 228 contracts - \$9.4 million
- CSP-Classic – 34 contracts - \$1.1 million
- CSP-IRA – Selections pending
- EQIP-IRA – Selections pending
- RCPP-EQIP – 3 contracts - \$75,000
- RCPP18 – Selections pending
- ACEP-WRE – Selections pending
- ACEP-ALE – 7 parcels - \$1.8 million

Total selected to date: 275 contracts selected

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



Where are we?



Known “backlog” (currently unfunded applications)

- AMA – 2 applications - \$75,000
- EQIP-Classic – 129 applications - \$8.3 million
- CSP-Classic – 26 applications - \$500,000
- CSP-IRA – unknown applications – unknown cost
- EQIP-IRA – 2 applications – unknown cost
- RCPP-EQIP – 0 applications - \$0
- RCPP18 – 247 applications
- ACEP-WRE – 5 parcels pending
- ACEP-ALE – 5 parcels pending

Total known backlog to date: 409 unfunded applications

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



NEW Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)

- **Purpose:** OTI provides funding to support producers transitioning to organic production by providing both FA and TA to producers to implement conservation practices that support organic production and support diverse and equitable food systems.
- **USDA Departmental initiative** – farms transitioning to organic are down 78% since 2008 – this is not the same as the National Organic Initiative (NOI), which has been offered for many years in VT
- **NRCS offering \$75 million through EQIP TA and FA**
- **Offers a new practice for organic management (CPS 823)**
- **EQIP sign-up no later than June 15, 2023 as per Chief**

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



NEW Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)

Organic Transition Initiative Practices	
Practice Code	Core Practice
823	Organic Management
Practice Code	Facilitating Practices and Activities
138	Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition (CPA)
140	Transition to Organic Design (DIA)
327	Conservation Cover
328	Conservation Crop Rotation
340	Cover Crop
386	Field Border
590	Nutrient Management

Getting Ready for FY 2024



- **May 1 – Soils Subcommittee**
- **May 12 – Climate Subcommittee**
- **June 2 – Locally Led Proposals due**
- **June 8 – Urban and Small Scale Agriculture subcommittee**
- **June 15 – Forestry and Wildlife**
- **July 10 – Working Lands subcommittee (EQIP/CSP/AMA)**
- **July 25 – ACEP subcommittee**
- **TBD – RCPP Partner Coordination Meeting**

Getting Ready for FY 2024



Goals of each subcommittee and workgroup include:

- **Identify State priority resource concerns**
- **Identify State priority conservation practices**
- **Identify State priority geographic areas**
- **Identify other State priorities**
- **Recommend Statewide ranking pools**
- **Provide input into the State spending plan**
- **Recommend screening/prioritization to manage workload**
- **Advise on coordination of technical assistance**
- **Document input on delivering financial assistance to best provide equity to all customer**



The future

- **Incoming:**
Nathan Hamilton,
Acting ASTC-Programs,
120-day detail
- **Outgoing:**
Obediah Racicot,
ASTC-Programs,
38 State Technical Committees
hosted since 2013





QUESTIONS



NRCS STC Climate Subcommittee

Subcommittee Charge

- Review and comment on priority list of Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List.
- Offer recommendations and rationale for pursuing additional or different CSAF activities in (FY24 – 26).
- Identify potential areas of additional investment in NRCS and Partners to support CSAF activities.
- Provide summary of recommendations by July 2023.

NRCS STC Climate Subcommittee

Summary of Activity

- Initial introduction/overview/feedback meeting (3/10/23).
- Developed a resource concern framework to help prioritize CSAF practices and identify gaps/opportunities.
- Organized CSAF practices using framework by primary benefit and any additional co-benefits.
- **Next Steps:** Develop a draft 2024 priority list based on framework ranking and share with subcommittee for another round of refinement.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List^[1] FY2023



Climate Change Mitigation Practice Categories	Code	Conservation Practice Standard Name ^[2] (units)	CSP Enhancement Code	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Bundle and Enhancement Activity
Soil Health	327	Conservation Cover (acres)	B000BFF1	Buffer Bundle#1*
			B000CPL24	Cropland soil health management system*
			B000CPL25	Climate smart advanced soil health*
	328	Conservation Crop Rotation (acres)	E327A	Conservation cover for pollinators and beneficial insects
			E327B	Establish Monarch butterfly habitat
			E328A	Resource conserving crop rotation
			E328B	Improved resource conserving crop rotation
			E328E	Soil health crop rotation
			E328F	Modifications to improve soil health and increase soil organic matter
	329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (acres)	E328G	Crop rotation on recently converted CRP grass/legume cover for soil organic matter improvement
			E328N	Intercropping to improve soil health
			E328O	Perennial grain crop conservation rotation
			E329A	No till to reduce soil erosion
			E329B	No till to reduce tillage induced particulate matter
			E329C	No till to increase plant-available moisture
	332	Contour Buffer Strips (acres)	E329D	No till system to increase soil health and soil organic matter content
			E329E	No till to reduce energy
	340	Cover Crop (acres)	None Available	
			E340A	Cover crop to reduce soil erosion
			E340B	Intensive cover cropping to increase soil health and soil organic matter content
			E340C	Use of multi-species cover crops to improve soil health and increase soil organic matter
			E340D	Intensive orchard/vineyard floor cover cropping to increase soil health
			E340F	Cover crop to minimize soil compaction
			E340G	Cover crop to reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excess soil nutrients
			E340H	Cover crop to suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles
			E340I	Using cover crops for biological strip till
			E345A	Reduced tillage to reduce soil erosion
	345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (acres)	E345B	Reduced tillage to reduce tillage induced particulate matter
			E345C	Reduced tillage to increase plant-available moisture
			E345D	Reduced tillage to increase soil health and soil organic matter content
			E345E	Reduced tillage to reduce energy use
			E386A	Enhanced field borders to reduce soil erosion along the edge(s) of a field
	386	Field Border (acres)	E386B	Enhanced field borders to increase carbon storage along the edge(s) of the field
			E386C	Enhanced field borders to decrease particulate emissions along the edge(s) of the field
			E386D	Enhanced field borders to increase food for pollinators along the edge(s) of a field
			E386E	Enhanced field borders to increase wildlife food and habitat along the edge(s) of a field
	393	Filter Strips (acres)	E393A	Extend existing filter strip to reduce water quality impacts
			E412A	Enhance a grassed waterway
	484	Mulching (acres)	E484A	Mulching to improve soil health
			E484B	Reduce particulate matter emissions by using orchard or vineyard generated woody materials as mulch
			E484C	Reduce particulate matter emissions by using orchard or vineyard generated woody materials as mulch
	585	Stripcropping (acres)	None Available	
	601	Vegetative Barriers (feet)		
	603	Herbaceous Wind Barriers (feet)		

NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee - Climate Subcommittee

Climate Resource Concerns Framework

Summary

This **draft** framework is an attempt to identify broad categories that can be used to: (1) group and then prioritize CSAF practices and (2) identify gaps and opportunities for proposing new or additional practices.

Reduce Emissions		Sequestration	
- GHG Emissions - Particulate Emissions		↑ Soil OM (sequestration) ↑ Aggregate Stability ↑ Soil Organism Habitat ↑ Manure Management ↓ Erosion ↑ Improve Soil Health	
Existing CSAF Practices	Proposed Practices	Existing CSAF Practices	Proposed Practices

Improve Forest Productivity/Health		Improve Energy Efficiency	
↑ Plant Structure & Composition ↑ Carbon Sequestration ↓ Plant Pest Pressure		↑ Efficiency of Equipment & Facilities ↑ Efficiency of Farming Practices & Field Operations	
Existing CSAF Practices	Proposed Practices	Existing CSAF Practices	Proposed Practices