

**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
State Technical Committee  
Meeting Agenda  
September 26, 2023  
8:00 – 12:00**

**Hilton Garden Inn Temple  
1749 Scott Blvd., Temple, Texas**

|             |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8:00-8:30   | Registration                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                        |
| 8:30-8:40   | Welcome – Announcements – Overview of Meeting                                                      | Charles Kneuper                                                                                                                        |
| 8:40-8:50   | Agency Updates<br>Natural Resources Conservation Service, State Conservationist                    | Kristy Oates                                                                                                                           |
| 8:50-9:00   | Farm Service Agency, Executive Officer                                                             | Eddie Trevino                                                                                                                          |
| 9:00-9:20   | Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act updates<br>NRCS                                              | Stacy Riley                                                                                                                            |
| 9:20-9:40   | FSA                                                                                                | Josh Coleman; Becky Weaver                                                                                                             |
| 9:40-10:00  | Break                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                        |
| 10:00-10:30 | Subcommittee Reports<br>Agronomy<br>Easement<br>Irrigation<br>Urban<br>Water Resources<br>Wildlife | Committee Representatives<br>Fred Schrank<br>Stacy Riley<br>Keith Sides<br>Wilma Tichelaar<br>Kyle Wright; Aaron Hoff<br>Cyndee Watson |
| 10:30-10:45 | Open Discussion<br>Overview                                                                        | Charles Kneuper                                                                                                                        |
| 10:45-11:45 | Comments and open discussion                                                                       | All                                                                                                                                    |
| 11:45-12:00 | Closing comments/Adjourn                                                                           | Kristy Oates                                                                                                                           |

**\*\* Written agenda item comments are encouraged.  
Agenda is subject to minor adjustments.**

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Charles Kneuper, State Resource Conservationist, called the State Technical Committee (STC) to order at 8:35 a.m. on September 26, 2023, in Temple, Texas.

Present for the meeting were 46 STC members along with several Texas NRCS staff.

### **Agency Updates:**

Kristy Oates, State Conservationist Texas NRCS:

- Texas has obligated over \$200 million in Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) programs alone (does not include Watershed and Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding).
  - Anticipates FY24 funding to be similar to FY23, but with an increase in IRA.
  - Requested help in spreading the word on NRCS financial assistance opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and forestland stewards through partner networks.
- Thanked the STC for input provided during the May meeting on climate smart mitigation activities and expects an updated list of FY 24 Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activities List to be released soon.
- NRCS is **HIRING!** In Texas and across the nation. Please point any interested individuals to us, and all vacancies are posted on USAjobs. Anticipates pathways announcements to be posted in October.
- NRCS Fundamentals of Conservation & Sustainability in Agriculture Certification (new)- targeted towards high school students, [ICEV](#) testing platform is where the certification can be found. Goal is to prepare students for a career in conservation.

Joshua Coleman, Outreach Coordinator Texas FSA:

- Increased participation in disaster programs
  - Drought, wildfire, extreme weather
- 237 counties eligible for assistance for emergency livestock forage program, honeybee recovery, drought insurance/relief.
  - Signups ended July 14, 2023—currently calculating payments.
  - Emergency relief program (2022 losses) has \$3.7 million approved to assist.
  - ELRP 2022
    - To be eligible the producer had to have suffered grazing losses and county had to be listed as D2, D3 or D4.
  - Rice production program
    - Additional funding up to \$250 million
    - \$0.286 per pound from losses in 2022

### **Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act updates:**

Stacy Riley, Assistant State Conservationist-Programs Texas NRCS

- Announced she has taken the position in Texas permanently.
- Texas has over 10,000 active financial assistance contracts with farmers, ranchers, and forest stewards. Provided \$98.5 million in payments in FY 23 for direct conservation on the ground.
- Four new 2023 RCPP Agreements include:
  - Prairie Grasslands Conservation in Central Texas (GRIP) (land management)
  - Nueces Watershed Additive Conservation Partnership (entity held easements)
  - Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape (land management, and entity held easements)
  - Drought Resilience Incentive Program (DRIP) (land management)

- There are six (6) other agreements that will be active in FY 24 in addition to the new ones mentioned.
- Provided update on current dollars spent in each program so far in FY23. Requesting input on fund pools for FY 24. She presented a list of current fund pools. Explained some are national, and some are in-state. Recommended consistency with the available pools but looking for opportunities to improve them.
  - **2024 Fund Pools**
    - Listed practices for FY 24 Source Water Protection (SWP) fund pool, subcommittee met and confirmed practices should remain. Priority practices get the highest available payment in the designated SWP areas to encourage their application.
    - Texas can identify up to 10 High Priority conservation practices to encourage of their adoption because they provide a high level of environmental impact. Seeking input on identifying practices for this year.
  - **2024 Water Smart**
    - Two (2) more water smart geographical areas have been proposed and are pending a national decision.
  - **2024 WRE GARC (Geographic Area Rate Cap)**
    - Through easement subcommittee meetings, the 2024 GARC was set at \$5000 per acre.
    - Appraisal required; payment is for fair market value but not to exceed the GARC.
    - The easement subcommittee provided input on state geographic priority areas for the Agriculture Conservation Easements Programs
  - **2024 proposed sign up deadlines:**
    - EQIP: November 3, 2023
    - CSP: January 26, 2024
    - ACEP: December 8, 2023 (ALE general and ALE GSS, WRE, WREP)
    - RCPP: TBD by lead partners

Joshua Coleman, Outreach Coordinator Texas FSA:

- Becky Weaver is acting Conservation Division Chief for Jeff Dudensing.
- Provided program updates, CRP, grasslands CRP (gave a ppt with numbers).
  - General CRP sign up 60: 190,000+ acres accepted in Texas (May)
  - Grasslands CRP sign up 205: more than 144,000 acres accepted in Texas.
- IRA: Assistance for distressed borrowers, increasing land, capital and market access program, discrimination financial assistance program (deadline to apply extended).
  - Cash flow-based assistance
  - Extraordinary measure assistance
  - Discrimination financial assistance program
    - Deadline extended until Jan 13, 2024
    - Deadline to request records from FSA extended to Nov 3
    - Analytic Acquisitions is assisting in this effort.
- Urban County Committees extending urban hubs in Texas to include Houston.

### **Subcommittee reports:**

Agronomy: recommended to keep pay rates at 75% and HU at 90% levels

Easements: Recommended \$5,000 GRAC limit for 2024. Texas has submitted two ACEP-IRA state priority proposals to NHQ and waiting for final decision.

Irrigation: On topic of combustion system improvement, results in destruction of private property; tabling for now due to state regulations. For small acre drip irrigation, recommend to not adopt scenario until more data is obtained.

Water Resources: Provided update on National Water Quality (NWQI) and SWPA submissions to NHQ. Discussed concerns with solar development, erosion issues associated with development. Recommended working with solar developers to address local concerns by installing best management practices.

Wildlife: Partners have funding to host trainings. Discussed training potential for zuni bowls which were recommended in May 2023 STC meeting. Asked for clarification and communication regarding practices available for wildlife fund pool.

**Open discussion:**

Rob Hughes, Texas Forestry Association

- Requested that National Wild Turkey Federal (NWTF) forester in East Texas be moved further south to help with the Longleaf pine initiative. Waiting for renewal of the national agreement to advertise the position in a new location. Hoping to see prescribed burning on the new Climate Smart mitigation activities list.

J.C. Essler, AFO/CAFO subcommittee chair

- Requests that energy smart equipment be considered under EQIP.

Tim Siegmund, Texas Parks and Wildlife

- Asked about number of open positions with Texas NRCS
  - Kristy responded: currently have 664 full time NRCS employees, last year (2022) there were 715. Currently there are approximately 150 positions which may be filled as interns, field, zone, and state staff positions.

Next STC will be in mid-year FY24 (April/May). Agencies will provide information and request feedback and recommendations for the summer/fall 2024 STC (August/September).

There being no additional comments or discussion, meeting adjourned at 10:25 a.m.