

Illinois State Technical Committee Meeting
Illinois Soybean Association
1108 Trinity Lane
Bloomington, IL 61704
July 17, 2024 - 9:30 a.m.
A G E N D A

State Conservationist (STC) comments

Tammy Willis

- Tammy opened the meeting with a welcome and introduction to all partners.
- Farm Bill (FB): Tammy stated that the new Farm Bill is not out at this time, and she received information that the farm bill is scheduled to come out later than usual. (talk of up to 2 years extension).
- Illinois NRCS employees are working very hard to ensure all program funds allocated this year will be obligated by the end of this Fiscal Year (FY), September 30, 2024.
- STC went over the FB and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funds received: Tammy stated that NRCS Illinois requested and received an additional million dollars for the Environment Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds. She stated along with the Farm Bill funds, Illinois will receive double the amount of IRA Financial Assistance (FA) and Easement program funds for FY25. All IRA funds must be obligated by the end of this fiscal year and all program contract practices must be implemented and paid for, by the year of 2031.
- Work life balance: Through NRCS wellness program, national NRCS headquarters and Illinois have put together a plan to ensure every employee has and maintains a work/ life balance.
- The STC entertained discussion regarding new State Technical Advisory Committee Members. She explained the process and answered questions.
- The STC mentioned Illinois has received the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. NRCS Illinois leadership team is working on reviewing the results and implementing a corrective action plan to address the survey outcome. This will ensure internal and external customer service is achieved.
- Headquarters priorities: The state conservationist went over some of NRCS National Headquarter and Illinois NRCS priorities; Equity, helping all people, partnership, climate mitigation, opening the urban office in Chicago, IL & hiring and staffing capacity statewide.
- The STC stated that NRCS is in the process of revising the local workgroup at the county level and would like to have a Local Work Group subcommittee on the State Technical Advisory Committee. Eric Gerth, ASTC-Partnership will lead the subcommittee. Please see [*HANDOUT 4 SUB COMMITTEE-HENSHAW & HANDOUT 5- Wildlife Sub-Committee Meeting*](#).
- The STC introduced Corey Lacey, Environmental Policy Manager, from IL Soybean Association, to give an overview of the IL Soybean Association facility and answer questions.

Financial Assistance Programs

Jamie Alderks

- Financial Assistant Program (FAP) provided and overview of the FB and IRA state obligation. Jamie Alderks discussed the following programs:
 - EQIP & Conservation Stewardship Program CSP)
 - Jamie Alderks gave brief updates of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
- Illinois received an additional 3 million dollars for the Farm Bill EQIP Program.
- The EQIP program still has a large backlog in ranking pools and hope to fund them next FY25.
- IRA: There is a push from headquarters to ensure funds are being used for climate smart activity.
- Power BI dashboard (Contracting Status): Weekly updates are refreshed every Monday with obligation amounts and CSP funding.
- CSP: Minimum annual payment, any annual payment that does not meet the minimum will be bumped up to new minimum: \$4k.
Please see [*HANDOUT 3-Financial Assistance Programs Fiscal Year 2024*](#).

Easement Programs

Cindy Johnson for Paula Hingson

- Emergency Watershed Protection Program - Floodplain Easements: Seven applications have been received for fiscal year 2024.
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE) – Four applications totaling \$3.5 million have been received for this fiscal year.
- IRA funding: IL has received six applications for \$1.7 million for this fiscal year.
- Ag land easements:
 - ALE - IRA: One application has been received for fiscal year 2024 for \$100k.
 - ALE Classic: One application has been received for fiscal year 2024 for 124K.
 - RCPP Entity Held Easements - Ten applications have been received for one million dollars for this fiscal year.
- IRA will increase for fiscal year 2025.
 - IL Priority areas will be targeted to receive funding.

Please see [*HANDOUT 3- IL ACEP-WRE-IRA Targe Area Proposal FY24 \(Map\)*](#)

NRCS Partnerships

Eric Gerth

- The Association of Soil & Water Conservation District Agreement is in process. A major focus is reinvigorating the local work group process. Because it is IRA, it is overall for climate smart agriculture.
- There is a national push to reinvigorate the local work groups.

Engineering

Aaron Pryer for Matt Robert

- Conservation evaluation and monitoring 26 & 227 (covering confined livestock practices): They focus on the need to be signed off by a licensed engineer. IL only has three licensed Technical Service Providers (TSP's): Gayle Baker, Matt Wagoner, & Chris West.
- Scan Aarons notes

FSA Updates

Jamie Diebal

- Conservation Division has been extremely busy with programs consisting of Continuous CRP Signup 61, General CRP Signup 62 and Grasslands Signup 206.

General Signup 62

- General Signup 62 concluded March 29, 2024.
- May 30th, FSA received the accepted and rejected list back and Illinois had 431 offers accepted out of the 557 that were submitted (77%).
- This was one of the smallest general signups on record for the nation.
- Very few contracts were expiring this year nationwide.
- Conservation Plans are due from NRCS by August 9th.
- Counties are currently working to get everything finalized and contracts approved by the September 30th deadline.

Continuous Signup 61

- Continuous "Sign Up" is moving along as well.
- This year's Continuous Signup 61 process has looked a bit different than our normal process. The 2018 Farm Bill requires that no more than 27 million acres may be enrolled in CRP nationwide. Current enrollment at the time of opening Continuous Signup was approximately 24.7 million acres.
- Due to nearing the national statutory limitation, the National Office has implemented a batching process to ensure program enrollment levels do not exceed the acreage cap.
- FSA are currently in their 5th batching period with two more scheduled before the end of the fiscal year.
- Up to this point, all eligible offers for continuous Sign Up have been accepted to move forward to CPO development and contract approval.
- The deadline for producers to submit an offer for Sign Up 61 for new or re-enrolled land is close of business Wednesday, July 31st. This will ensure an October 1, 2024, start date.

- Offers received after July 31st will still be accepted but may not have an October 1 start date.
- These dates are all important because NRCS also has a deadline to return Conservation Plans to FSA offices by September 6, 2024. FSA must have all contracts approved by September 30, 2024, deadline.

Grasslands CRP Signup

- Grassland CRP signup 206 was held June 3rd – June 28th.
- Grassland CRP is a working lands conservation program that enables participants to conserve grasslands and provide important conservation benefits for wildlife, soil health and carbon sequestration, all while continuing most grazing and haying practices.
- This is a practice that most utilized in the western states, but Illinois did have 12 offers submitted.
- We currently have 30 active contracts statewide.
- Since this signup just closed it will still be several weeks before the accepted offers list announced.

Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) Update

Trevor Sample

- A workgroup meeting was held 4/2 discussing NLRS policy workgroup survey. We are changing from binder reports to online dashboards but are not taking new members to the workgroup at this time.
- Trevor Sample discussed streambank erosion and phosphorus.
- Additional funding is needed for the Fall Cover Spring Savings Program.
- Megan Dwyer gave updates for soil health practices.
- Michael Woods gave updates for a smarter tactical plan. He wants to lead subgroups over the next year or so.
- We are working with Joan & the extension is on the dashboard discussing how to develop dashboards FSA is hoping all data will be downloadable.
 - Soil & water urban stormwater: The subgroup meeting is tomorrow 7/18. The Extension will be discussing rain scaping programs.
 - Policy work group committee: The committee is reaching out to state & federal agencies to gather spacial data.

Please see [*HANDOUT 6- NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting NLRS Update 7/18/24.*](#)

Compliance Update

Winnie Chen

- Compliance form 1026's are over half completed for this fiscal year.
- Mitigation Bank with Magnolia is established in Will County. Magnolia will be quickly restoring those sites.

State Outreach Update

Jamie Jones

- Jamie Jones discussed the role of outreach and finding new customers. She is in search of feedback on doing things better.
- Jamie is looking for improvement for historically underserved customers, partnerships, etc. NRCS is looking to fit that in whenever possible.
- NRCS will be at state fair this year, outside the IL Department of Agriculture tent.
- Jamie encourages all to attend the IL State Fair and visit the NRCS booth that will be set up there. NRCS does have twitter, and asks to be added at: NRCS/IL
- Jamie Jones is working with Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and training staff.

Partner Reports

Open floor

- Greg Goodwin of IL Corn Association is filling in for Megan Dwyer. IL Corn would like to see more funding pulled into state for traditional programs. They would like to see things simplified and less complicated.
- ADM Re:generations - Illinois Program signup is now underway. It can be stacked with federal & state programs.
- American Farmland Trust has been working with existing partnerships, as well as looking for new watersheds to help address some goals in the nutrient loss reduction strategy.
 - RCPP is a multi-state project.
- Dean Farr shared Crystal Lake updates below:
 - University of extension Wisconsin requested Dean to help plan next health week. The goal is to broaden the audience and add more farmers.

- Dean Farr will be reaching out to the University of IL for speakers.
- Dean asked to add advocacy for more funding for Soil & Water District.

Ricard Lyons shared that Illinois Association Drainage Districts (IADD) only meets once as an organization. The biggest concerns right now are that the only concerns are regarding NLR. Forty wetland acres will be added, which may offer tile to avoid regulation. IADD has been working with Iowa state, looking at tile drainage as far as preferential flow. The question posed with whether the Will Sacket Ruling will affect wetland banks?

- Trenton Radar state the Director retired Monday; the new director is James Jennings.
- Staci Zuber announced upcoming Field Days. There are three left this summer, August 8/8, 8/9, and 9/5.
- Field Talk with be at the Farm Progress site in Decatur as well as Field Demonstrations.
- Walt Lynn discussed that the Fields of Sendonaw are having a meeting 9/23/24. Jonathon Lundgren is doing a project called Thousand Farms. Twenty-four sites were visited in southern IL. Walt asks that consideration is given to having Soil& Water and NRCS at the state fair with the Rainfall Simulator.
- Amelia Creek discussed that there is one field day coming up for the Farm Bureau. The question was raised as to whether the NRCS is changing soil classification at the national level? She asks if there are any details of discussions, please share. Tammy Willis, STC will connect Ron Collman, Soil Scientist, NRCS with Amelia for updates.
- Katie Kauzlarich from Pheasants Forever Quails Forever encourages all to check out events on social media for workshops, etc.
- Joanne Cox with Extensions asks that updates are scanned. She spoke about Agronomy day, Organic Systems Trial Field Day, Crop Scouting Competition, Crop Physiology, Insect Management Field Day, I-Farm on Campus being the farm of the future. The only site chosen in the nation is IL Energy Farm Site Day. For more information on this subject matter, please visit Illinois.Edu.
- The Conservation Drainage Network Meeting in IL next year “National Conference 3/31/25-4/3/25”.
- Mike Redmer from US Fish & Wildlife states there are fifteen projects they are hoping to close in next six to eight weeks.
- Thanks was given to Eric Gerth, NRCS & Paula Hingson, NRCS, for initiating conversations which led to two additional agreements from two agencies.
- Don Kahl, Department of Natural Resources, wildlife, just rapped up upland bird surveys. The early returns look like the quail population is up this year. Regarding the EQIP Bobwhite Initiative, they are hoping it gets people in the door wanting to talk about quail. Regarding Ag Lease acres, it is leased out to farmers and revisions are underway to that program to make it more wildlife friendly, encouraging cover crops on those state sites. Positive gains have been made.
- Modifications to lease length of agreements have been made, agreements have been updated from four to five-year agreements.
- Justin Ramsey with IL Department of Natural Resources state there are expectations of additional funding.
- Colton Ashe is working through contracts for RCPP.
- Please see [*HANDOUT 1- Extension Updates*](#) from this meeting.

Closing Comments

Tammy Willis

- Next IL State Technical Committee Meeting will be at the state office in Champaign on November 6TH.
- POWER BI: Tammy Willis, STC, gave a quick overview on the Power BI Tool. She encourages people to go on the website to see NRCS Illinois program progress, the funds allocated per programs, funds obligated, number of applications received, contracts received within the state and additional information. She shared the Power BI website is open to the public. She gave the website address and welcomed partners to call her if anyone had any questions at 217-353-6600.