



Maryland State Technical Committee Minutes

November 18, 2024 9:00 AM

Welcome and Introductions- Suzy Daubert, State Conservationist

Subcommittee Updates- Suzy Daubert, State Conservationist

Looking to reinvigorate subcommittees to meet outside of regular meetings and report back to committee. Ask is to meet at least once before next state tech meeting.

- Watersheds subcommittee, led by Jacob Dieguez
- Outreach and Education committee, led by Genevieve Lister
- Forestry subcommittee, led by Steve Strano
- Urban Ag subcommittee, led by Sharlyn Handcock
- Wildlife subcommittee, led by Julie Devers
- Nutrient Management subcommittee, led by Dana Rushovich
- Grazing subcommittee, led by Susan Lamb

Farm Bill Programs- Fiscal Year 2024 Review and Fiscal Year 2025 Rollout

Agricultural Management Assistance and Conservation Stewardship Program - Sharlyn Handcock, AMA & CSP Program Manager

See attached slides.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Mikel Williams, EQIP Program Manager

See attached slides.

Discussion:

- Soil Carbon Amendment- What does it include? Uses compost and/or biochar to improve soil health.
- Satellite storage- what is it? Storage structure on farm that isn't producing manure so they can take manure from other farms, store it, and use it on their fields
- Totals for mandated funding. NRCS nationwide is required to meet or exceed a portion of funding for specific purposes. Maryland's contributions toward those mandates in FY24 were:
 - 64% Livestock
 - 27% Beginning Farmer
 - 7% Socially Disadvantaged
 - 8% Wildlife
- Grazing and livestock- why are they in separate pools? Ensure funding is distributed equitably among priorities. Livestock funding generally goes to manure management practices.
- Are there plans to provide cost-share for electric mobile machines? Under the Combustion System Improvement practice (372) our FY25 list includes six payment scenarios for



different sizes of "Combustion Engine to Electric Motor" conversion for engines that do not propel vehicles (stationary or portable). There are two size scenarios for "Tractor Replacement" for reducing emissions, and the old tractor will still need to be certified as inoperable.

- Are funds available for farmers that want to reduce pesticide use but not go completely organic? Yes, we provide financial assistance for pest management under multiple practices and activities. Pest Management Conservation (595) pays to implement mitigation activities to reduce pesticide losses and typically results in less use. We also have options for precision pesticide application.
- How are the application deadlines set? State or Federal? Conservation partners would be happy to help get the word out if they have the info in time. Suggest having state tech meeting early in the season so there's time to share.
 - Most deadlines are established in-state. We set dates earlier this year than in the past to help with contract management, so state tech meeting timing is off. We plan to have a state tech meeting before the beginning the next fiscal year to provide more time
- Which program funds are already available? All listed are available except air quality and organic transition initiative.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Suzy Daubert, State Conservationist

See attached slides.

Discussion:

- Ag Land Easements (ALE)- Language in the current NRCS easement deed template has been identified as an unfunded commitment by the Maryland Attorney General, which is not compatible with our primary partner in the program MALPH. For FY25, we have a partner offering ALE through an RCPP agreement.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program- Suzy Daubert, State Conservationist

See attached slides.

Discussion:

- RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangement projects – They are slow getting started in Maryland, but across the country applications for AFAs are increasing. In discussions on using this program with the MDA cover crops program in the future.
- Cover crops- We will be offering a special EQIP sign-up for MDA cover crop participants with late-termination dates. Will rank applications that MDA already has. Will pay based on our payment rates. Suggest holding workshops in areas where these producers are located.
- Outreach opportunity- Need outreach in Little Pipe Creek and Pretty Boy watershed for participation in the National Water Quality Initiative. Available practices are focused on improving WQ and pay 90% payment rate.

New Technologies

Updates to Agronomic Practices- Dana Rushovich, State Agronomist

See attached slides.



Discussion:

- The use of practice 336 Soil Carbon Amendment has increased on Maryland cropland.
 - Mostly using poultry litter compost, also some spent mushroom compost from PA
- Pest management - slug issues with planting green- there are not clear thresholds for slug management, but best practices for mitigating slug problems
- Use of drones for crop management practices- NRCS doesn't pay specifically for drone use, but it can be used to implement certain aspects of practices- cover crop seed planting, pest scouting, mapping for VR nutrient application
- Is there interest in training a large language model AI farmer assistant to take all the information on sustainable farming? The current system of providing information to farmers is overwhelming for farmers to distill the information to a point of implementing them on their farms.
 - Conservation Innovation Grants may be a good fit.

Program Information Outreach Tool Pilot, CIBO, Laura Satkowski

See attached slides.

Discussion:

- New project funded through MD NRCS as a tool to help planners identify programs available to producers. Will include NRCS and MDA programs and can include geographic limitations.
- Hope that as farmers update NM plans, planners can offer available programs to farmers. Addresses issue for new producers of having to call many people and explaining objectives multiple times.
- This is a pilot and will be tweaked as needed.

Scoping Poultry Manure Storage Retrofits, Phil King, State Soil Scientist and Jacob Dieguez, State Conservation Engineer

- Seeking feedback to better understand the cost/benefit and parameters for retrofitting existing manure storage facilities with concrete floors.
- Storage facilities on the shore have compacted clay floors, requests to replace clay floors with concrete floors. What resource concern are we addressing? Is it part of operation and maintenance requirements?
- Many facilities are out of their practice lifespan but were built to last much longer.
- Underneath the clay pad should exist geotextile poly barrier – over time heavy equipment can tear out the poly layer.
- Facilities with poly barrier failure represent a resource concern. Need to identify these in field and document. Area Engineering will have to visit, inspect, and make determination.
- Possibility to partner with MDE who have already visited sites and may have info to help prioritize site visit list, so planners don't have to visit all sites.

Animal Mortality Facility – Adopting Dehydration – Jacob Dieguez, State Conservation Engineer

See attached slides.

- Thermal Dehydration is a newer, nationally (NRCS) approved application scenario under CPS-316, Animal Mortality.



- Before offering to producers in Maryland, need to receive MDA/State Veterinarian approval of disposal treatment method.
- Meeting with MDA personnel on November 22 to discuss steps ahead with goal of achieving MDA approval.

Member Updates

Truphena Choti, Afrithrive.- supports beginning farmers. Gap between info we provide and what farmers are consuming. Often funding opportunities are not reaching farmers who need them.

- Develop a relationship with local service centers
- NRCS is not the first stop for producers, FSA is record holder, Extension helps with beginning farmer business plans, Districts can help with local permitting.

Peter- AI chat bots can be helpful for grant-writing