

11 Feb 2025 Q2 Mtg Minutes

Wednesday, February 12, 2025 12:08 PM

Opening remarks were delivered by:

[Trevor Hunt](#) (Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, USDA-NRCS) &
[Keith Kloubec](#) (Acting State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS)

[Garrett Morris](#) | Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, USDA-NRCS

(PowerPoint Presentation)

Programs Update

Fiscal Year 2025 Financial Assistance Allocation

- \$138.8 million allocated to TN-NRCS this fiscal year.
 - 10% increase in funding from FY2024 (\$126 m)
 - Includes both funds from the Farm Bill and from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 - \$79 million is IRA – as of date of presentation – all frozen and under review
 - The IRA funds are now available for use in EQIP and CSP; however, grants and agreements remain under review
 - We will continue to provide good quality customer service & updates as we ensure we are in compliance with the new Administration's stated objectives
 - EQIP \$80.3 million
 - \$32.9 million in Farm Bill funding
 - \$47.3 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding
 - Current EQIP Preapprovals using the [ACT NOW](#) funding approach to fast track the following fund pools:
 - \$457k
 - [CPA, DIA, CEMA](#) fund pool
 - [CPA, DIA, CEMA](#) Forest Management fund pool
 - High Tunnel System fund pool
 - Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher fund pool
 - Urban fund pool
 - Act Now allows customers to get preapproved and begin contracting process earlier in the fiscal year
 - \$18.5 m preapproved so far for all of EQIP
 - Soil Health fund pools tended to be very competitive – to ensure equitable opportunity, funds were allocated to each area of TN-NRCS (4)
 - Hurricane Helene [Disaster Assistance](#) through [EQIP](#)
 - Announcement released November 2024
 - 14 Counties in East TN – Carter, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Green, Hamlin, Hancock, Hawkins, Jefferson, Johnson, Sevier, Sullivan, Unicom, Washington
 - Sign-Up Deadline was December 20, 2024
 - \$1.4 million budgeted with option for additional funds
 - Applicable practices may include: Access Control (472), Channel Bed Stabilization (584), Clearing & Snagging (326), Critical Area Planting (342), Fencing (382), Grade Stabilization Structure (410), Grassed Waterway (412), Lined Waterway or Outlet (468), Mulching (484), Obstruction Removal (500), Pasture & Hay Planting (512), Riparian Forest Buffer (391), Stream Crossing (578), Streambank & Shoreline Protection (580), Tree / Shrub Establishment (612), Tree Shrub Site Preparation (490), Woody Residue Treatment (384)
 - Disaster Payment Adjustments for existing contracts are underway
 - [Program flexibilities for those impacted](#)
 - [RCPP](#) \$17.9 million
 - \$6.01 million in Farm Bill funding
 - \$11.93 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding
 - \$1.6 million PreApproved with ACT NOW
 - A newer program experiencing large growth in TN
 - RCPP has a lot of flexibilities and possibilities
 - Partners can choose priority resource concerns for themselves
 - West TN Field and Forest Partnership – all of TN-NRCS Area 1 (between the TN River and the Mississippi River)
 - No existing contracts yet but there will be
 - Aquarium in Chattanooga
 - [Devin Ross](#) is RCPP Coordinator for the state—and is working on expanding opportunities
 - Partners choose eligibility requirements:
 - Project area
 - Resource concerns
 - Conservation practices
 - CSP \$31.5 million
 - \$14.3 million in Farm Bill funding
 - \$17.2 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding
 - Funds were allocated by area

- Current CSP PreApprovals using the [ACT NOW](#) funding approach to fast track the following fund pools:
 - \$2.24 million
- ACEP \$9.1 million
 - \$5.85 million in Farm Bill funding
 - \$3.25 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding
 - FY2025 Applications:
 - [Wetland Reserve Easement](#) - 11
 - [Agricultural Land Easement](#) - 1
 - Approximately \$1 million will be spent on agreements to account for the increasing cost of restoration
 - Not all applications will move forward – realty factors: ownership difficulties, family disputes etc.
- Urban Agriculture
 - \$1 million—a 400% increase since FY2023
 - EQIP Farm Bill (FB) funds \$500k
 - EQIP IRA funds \$500k
 - Both fund pools target cities and urban areas statewide (e.g. Nashville, Memphis, Knoxville, Chattanooga, etc.)
 - The Urban Agriculture Fund Pools should not be viewed as a limiting factor.
 - There are more fund pools that can be applicable to supporting urban agriculture.
 - For example, a total of \$5 million was allocated (contracted) to High Tunnel Systems (325) last fiscal year
 - Program Deadlines for this Fiscal Year
 - September 30 2024 – ACEP Sign Up Announcement Issued
 - October 11 2024 – EQIP, CSP, RCPP Sign Up Announcements Issued
 - November 15 2024 – EQIP, CSP, RCPP & ACEP Application Deadline
 - January 24 2025 – EQIP, CSP, RCPP ACT NOW PreApprovals begin
 - March 3 2025 – EQIP, RCPP PreApprovals
 - March 31 2025 – CSP PreApprovals
 - May 30 2025 50% Obligation Goal
 - June 30 2025 100% Obligation Goal

Questions? No Questions

Presentation Concluded

Jason McAfee | Acting State Resource Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

(No PowerPoint presentation)

Brief comments

Jason is Acting for Linda Ortiz while she is on maternity leave. She will return in April.

There are many changes and moving parts going into the new year.

New State Forester started last week – Garrett McFall

From TN, UT Graduate, transferred from CA-NRCS, will be working with partners and forestry sub-committee

Thanks to Colby Sharp for serving as Acting State Forester – forestry sub-committee

Another acting – Max Cox – Grazing Specialist – acting for a few more months – grazing sub-committee

Huge task of updating CPS – about 30 revisions that were long overdue – updated & sent out in October 2024... some issues with eFOTG having broken links (even within the standard itself)... a fix will be underway soon. Thank you for your patience

24:00

Jamie Quarfeld | State Urban Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

(PowerPoint Presentation)

Brief Introduction to new State Urban Conservationist

Overview of academic and professional background

31:36 End Urban Presentation

31:48

Sarah Smith | Conservation Program Specialist, USDA-FSA

Farm Service Agency Update

(No PowerPoint)

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

FSA still has no authority to accept new CRP offers – currently in a holding pattern

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)

2 counties are still doing clean up from December tornado

18 counties are still working through ECP applications pertaining to May storms

14 counties are still accepting applications from those impacted by Hurricane Helene – they have until

June 1st to apply – these applications did receive a waiver on site inspections for EC1, EC2, EC3 practices

TA is still required for EC4—currently only 1 request for EC4

As of last week, 316 applications for hurricane (more than all of the fy24 disasters combined)

Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)

June 1st deadline for Hurricane Helene – only 3 counties out of 14 have submitted applications but more are expected

34:28 FSA updates concluded

[Sam Marshall](#) | TN Department of Agriculture (TDA) Division of Land & Water Stewardship

Sam was scheduled as the next speaker but he was double booked.

Trevor opened the discussion for partners...

[Shane Harrington](#) – Introduced himself as the new Forest Health Sustainability Leader for TN

Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry

Previously worked with TX Forest Service and worked closely with NRCS.

Has recently discussed reconvening the USDA-NRCS Forest Sub-Committee with TN Forestry Association (Candace Dinviddie, Greg Pate).

Q: Only payments to landowners funded via IRA funds are interrupted by the recent Executive Orders, not Farm Bill funds, correct?

A: Yes (Garrett Morris) -- We did not discuss agreements but partner agreements funded by the Farm Bill are currently paused for review.

No further updates

38:41 – Keith Kloubec (Acting State Conservationist) encouraged participants to reach out to [Trevor Hunt](#) (Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, USDA-NRCS) about anything not covered today that you would like to hear about

Trevor Hunt asked everyone to save May 13th to their calendars for the next STAC meeting for Q3.

END RECORDING AT 39:30