USDA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Neal Smith Federal Building - 210 Walnut Street, Room 693, Des Moines, Iowa

NRCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Conference Room/Microsoft Teams

March 20, 2025
1:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Minutes

Opening Comments – Jon Hubbert

- Welcome and call meeting to order.
- Introduction of attendees

Approval of Minutes from December 19, 2024 – Jon Hubbert

- Motion to approve by Todd Bogenschutz, Second by Sarah Nizzi
- Unanimous approval of minutes as written.

Agency Updates – General

NRCS – Jon Hubbert

- Working with the key goals of the new presidential administration:
  - Decrease of federal workforce.
  - Decrease the federal budget.
- A continuing resolution was approved to provide funding through September 30.
- Farm Bill activities can proceed – work on existing contracts, obligation of new contracts, plan for new contracts.
  - EQIP, CSP, RCPP, ACEP
- New IRA funded contracts are still paused – including producer contracts.
- Agreements that contain IRA funding are still paused.
  - All agreements with IRA funding, BIL, IIJA, and DEI are being reviewed.
  - Iowa had at least 4 agreements that were strictly IRA funded and a few more partially IRA funded.
  - The agreement holder can continue to do work, but we can't make payments.
- Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) and dismissal of probationary staff has impacted NRCS.
- A staffing plan is being worked on starting at the national level down to state level to align with a reduction in workforce.
- Prioritizing Farm Bill delivery – getting contracts out to customers.
  - Likely scaling back on non-mandatory work – if you're asking for assistance to get something done that isn't mandatory, we may have to pause until we receive more direction.
- Travel is very limited currently – only allowed for EWP, SnoTel, active Watershed Ops.

FSA Update – Curt Goettsch

- FSA has also had staffing impacts from the DRP.
- Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) announced on March 18 – applications could be submitted starting March 19.
  - https://www.fsa.usda.gov/resources/programs/emergency-commodity-assistance-program
  - Funded through the continuing resolution that was passed in December 2024.
  - Website gives breakdown by crop and payment rate.

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- Will be based on crop report and the acres they planted of a particular crop that they reported to FSA for 2024.

Questions

- *Ben Lehman:* Do organic acres qualify for ECAP?
  - *Curt Goettsch:* Yes, if they have been reported to FSA on an FSA-578 Report of Acreage form for 2024.
- *Chuck Isenhart:* Is anyone approaching Secretary Naig to ask IDALS to advocate for state funding to fill the gap so important activities can continue?
  - *Jon Hubbert:* We have been in communication with Secretary Naig and IDALS – keeping them informed on where we are with programs and funding.
  - *Jon Hubbert:* Adjustments are likely being made for things within IDALS ability.
  - *Will Myers:* Situation, especially with staffing and resource availability, has been in such a state of fluctuation recently and IDALS' ability to act quickly is somewhat hampered.
  - *Will Myers:* IDALS has heard from Soil and Water Conservation Districts with regards to concerns about impact to deliver technical assistance.

Local Workgroup Feedback

- None presented.
- CDI Spring Regionals were held last week of February into March.
  - Good discussion and feedback from Commissioners, but not much on technical topics.

Technical Topics

- Process for Adding Practice Scenarios for RCPP – Cameron Aker
  - Multi-state RCPP with some practice payment scenarios that have been beneficial to Wisconsin for producers.
  - What would be needed and what steps need to be taken to get these practices reviewed in Iowa and potentially get added as approved practices?
  - Some discussions at the field office and producer level that these practices would help implement restoration projects, especially on stream banks.
  - The practices that have been discussed for potential consideration in Iowa are ones that are approved in Wisconsin.
- Protocol would be to provide recommendations to Eco Sciences division and Programs staff
  - Nicky Williams – Acting SRC
    - Jeff Matthias is filling in for Nicky at this meeting.
  - Jaia Fischer – Acting ASTC- Programs
  - Jessica Downey – Payment schedule manager and Regional Payment Scenario manager
- Some practices being asked about are listed practices in Iowa – these will not need to be adopted as new practices.
- The payment scenarios will need to be looked at since Wisconsin and Iowa are different payment regions.

Status of Farm Bill Programs

Programs and IRA Report – Rubyana Neely

- See report *(report attached with agenda)*
- Updates to the report that was distributed with the agenda:
  - NRCS can obligate NEW Farm Bill contracts selected for FY25 funds.

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- CSP – A record year for applications ranked at 1,363 for a sum of $50 million. Selections were made with the $7 million Farm Bill dollars.

Partnerships update – Scott Cagle

- Agreements and RCPP: IRA = No, Farm Bill = Go.
- New funding opportunities are still undecided because we don't have our budget yet.
- Agreements and grants are being closely reviewed.
  - If you have an agreement or grant with NRCS, it would be wise to read your documents and statement of work to make sure everything is in order.
  - Could experience audits later this year.
- Accruals have been stopped as they are no longer required in agreements by the Grants and Agreements Division.
- Implementing new quarterly visits – either Scott or the Program Manager for your grant/agreement.
  - A tracker has been set up and if something with our grant or agreement is falling behind, you will be contacted to discuss.
- Implementing new quarterly visits – conducted by Scott or other partnership staff.
- *Question – Catherine DeLong:* Are any CIGs currently on hold/being reviewed? Or can we expect payment to continue normally?
  - *Scott Cagle:* If they are Farm Bill funded, payments are proceeding; if they are IRA funded, payments are temporarily paused until the review process is completed.
  - *Scott Cagle:* All agreements are being reviewed by headquarters.
- Question – Sarah Carlson: What about for Partners for Climate Smart?
  - All Climate Smarts agreements have been temporarily put on hold until the review process is completed.

CRP Report – Curt Goettsch

- No CRP signups yet – an announcement will be made by the department and Secretary Rollins when ready.
  - Some requirements in the Farm Bill to hold certain signups, so an opportunity to sign up for CRP should be coming at some point.
- Normal maintenance of existing contracts can be processed.
- ECP payments can proceed – about 23-24 counties had ECP last spring and summer.

<u>Subcommittee Reports</u>

CSP – Cynthia Farmer

- See Report (attached with Agenda).

EQIP – Nick Baumgarten

- See Report (attached with Agenda).
- Subcommittee meeting centered on new Monarch Funding Pool.
- **Recommendation: that the following two questions be used within the "Program Question" category, and that they be worth 15% of the ranking.**
  - **Does the application include practices to establish or improve habitat for Monarch Butterflies according to the Best Management Practices (BMPs)?**
  - **Does the application include at least 2 acres being contracted that meets or exceeds the seeding requirements for the Monarch Habitat Mix in the Native Seeding Calculator?**
  - **Approved by Jon Hubbert (on 4/30/2025) based on STAC and Programs Team feedback.**

ACEP-WRE – Kelsey Fleming

- See report (attached with Agenda).

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- Kelly Smith has stepped down as chair. Kelsy Fleming was nominated and approved by the subcommittee to take on the role.
    - Jon Hubbert subsequently approved the recommendation for Kelsey to be the new chair.
- **Recommendation: approve the updated Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines – added section about CUA (section 6).**
    - **Approved by Jon Hubbert (on 4/25/2025) based on STAC and Programs Team feedback and statute/policy review.**

ACEP-ALE – Ryan Smith

- Subcommittee did not meet.

CRP –Todd Bogenschutz

- Subcommittee did not meet.

SWP – Christina Murphy

- Subcommittee did not meet.
- Christina may have stepped down and no recommendation for replacement.
- Will need to determine new chair.

Urban Ag – Tim Palmer

- Subcommittee did not meet.
- NRCS has hired new Resource Conservationist, Maggie Syversen.
    - Focus will be urban and organic.

Updates From Other Agencies and Committee Members

CDI – Dien Judge

- Made a difficult decision to lay off all grant-funded positions as of Feb 12.
    - Have been able to bring 2 Planners back.
- 9 Spring Regionals were held across the state – good turnout at all meetings.
    - Stoppage of payments and staff reductions were a large part of the conversations.
- Partnership Day was held at the State Capitol on March 11.
- Envirothon will be held April 28.

Chuck Isenhart

- Has started a blog called “Iowa Public Policy Geek”
- IDALS has set March 24-31 as Iowa Ag Week – several events scheduled around the state as part of this.

Guest participation

- None

Closing Comments – Jon

- NRCS will be turning 90 on April 27.

Future Meeting Dates

June 12, 2025

Attendance

In-Person

Jon Hubbert, NRCS
Dien Judge, CDI
Nick Baumgarten, IDNR
Kelsey Fleming, IDNR
Heather Jobst, INHF
Ryan Smith, IWF

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Joan Flecksing, Meskwaki Tribe

Will Myers, IDALS
Cynthia Farmer, Center for Rural Affairs
Jeff Matthias, NRCS

Virtual

Curt Goettsch, FSA
Angela Barker, INSGA
Bruce Barnhart, LICA
Holly Shutt, Ducks Unlimited
Sarah Carlson, PFI
Lincoln Oliver, USFWS
Sean McMahon, IWF
Todd Bogenschutz, IDNR
Ben Lehman, Rodale Institute
Chuck Isenhart, State Representative
Roger Wolf, ISA
Tim Palmer, NACD
Gabrella Elliott, EPA
Jeff Jensen, Trees Forever
Todd Sutphin, ISA
Scott Moats, TNC
Cameron Aker, Trout Unlimited

Rubyana Neely, NRCS
Jessica Downey, NRCS
Scott Cagle, NRCS
Keiko Sampson, NRCS

Dave Petty, Iowa River Ranch
Jeff Lucas, IAWA
Catherine DeLong, ISU Extension
Andrew Diallesandro, USFWS
Wendy Johnson, Climate Land Leaders
Ashley Utt, Pathfinders RC&D
Sarah Nizzi, Xerces Society
Sharyl Bruning, Iowa Farm Bureau
Bryan Whaley, Iowa Cattlemen's Association
Gretta Irwin, Iowa Turkey Organization
William Higgins
Ethan Thies, ISU Extension
Cora Fox, Ducks Unlimited

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