



Maryland State Technical Committee Minutes

March 17, 2026 9:00 AM

Hybrid Meeting: MD NRCS State and Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

In Person: Alisha Mulkey, Tyler Walker, Maggie Woodward, Amanda Grev, Rob Schnabel, Leon Tillman, Jacob Dieguez, Heydsha Cordero, Sherri DeGraphenreed, Laura Pleasanton, Michael Baker, Dana Rushovich, Julie Devers, Elizabeth Beggins, Genevieve Lister, Suzy Daubert, and Jamare'e Taylor.

Online: Susan Lamb, Lisa Garfield, Liz Warren, Kristin Fisher, Sam Parker, Rick Walls, Andrew Wells, Kevin M Stohlgren, Sarel Cousins, Heather Beaven, Carly Graves, and Jen Nelson.

Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Recap of Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments
3. Changes in Payment Schedules and Practice Standards
4. Regenerative Pilot Program Overview
5. Healthy Soils Program Update
6. Chesapeake Bay Foundation Initiatives
7. Regenerate Maryland Initiative
8. UME Efforts Towards Regenerative Agriculture:
9. Feedback on Meeting Format and Future Collaboration

1. Introductions:

- Participants introduced themselves and their roles.

2. Recap of Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments:

- Leon Tillman provided a detailed recap of the accomplishments, including financial obligations and conservation efforts.
- Highlighted the success in various programs such as CSP, EQIP, and RCPP, and the impact on the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

3. Changes in Payment Schedules and Practice Standards:

- Julie Devers, Susan Lamb, Dana Rushovich, and Michael Baker from NRCS and the state resource team presented updates to conservation practice standards and payment schedules, including opportunities for public input, new management practices, and adjustments to payment scenarios.
- Susan discussed the new payment scenarios and the introduction of base plus implementation cost payment scenarios.



Discussion:

- Flexibility in Payment Scenarios: Participants expressed concerns about the reduction in the number of payment scenarios, which could limit flexibility for different farming situations.
 - Suggestion to work with the state to see where things could mesh together to make up for losses in flexibility.
 - Planning remains key, should reflect the producer's goals, then NRCS will figure out how to fit into payment scenarios
- Support for Portable and Temporary Fencing: There was a positive response to the inclusion of portable and temporary fencing in the payment schedules, but concerns were raised about whether the payment rates would cover all associated costs, such as wrapping and wiring for maintenance.
- Virtual Fencing: Participants were interested in the new payment scenario for virtual fencing but highlighted the need for external or perimeter fencing to ensure livestock containment, suggesting that this should be considered in the payment schedules.
- Alignment with Soil Health Practices: There was a discussion about ensuring that payment schedules align with practices that promote soil health and water infiltration, emphasizing the need for practices that support regenerative agriculture.
 - Suggestion to review priority practice lists for the FY27 program to ensure alignment with soil health and regenerative agriculture practices
- Coordination with State Programs: Concerns were raised about coordinating payment schedules with state programs to ensure that producers are adequately compensated and that there is no duplication of efforts.
- Cost Coverage for Soil Testing: Participants discussed the need for payment rates to cover the true costs of soil health testing, including the logistics of sample collection, storage, and shipping.
 - Potential to have a central area for categorizing, labeling, and storing soil samples to maintain their integrity and reduce costs.

4. Regenerative Pilot Program Overview:

- Leon introduced the Regenerative Pilot Program, focusing on whole farm planning and management practices.
- Discussed the requirement for soil health testing and the list of primary practices.

Discussion:

- Poultry Opportunities: Participants questioned how poultry-house operations fit into the new RPP program, noting the need for land access for soil testing.

5. Healthy Soils Program Update:

- Alicia Mulkey provided an update on the Healthy Soils Program, including the Healthy Soils Competitive Fund and Cover Crop Plus.
- Emphasized the importance of soil health evaluations and collaboration with partners like the Million Acre Challenge.



6. Chesapeake Bay Foundation Initiatives:

- Rob Schnabel presented various initiatives by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, including the Maryland Grazers Network and the Mountains to Bay Grazing Alliance.
- Highlighted the importance of regenerative agriculture and the economic benefits of rotational grazing.

7. Regenerate Maryland and Million Acre Challenge:

- Elizabeth Beggins discussed the Regenerate Maryland initiative by American Farmland Trust, focusing on alignment, visibility, and coordination of regenerative agriculture efforts. Outlined the three-phase approach and the importance of supporting existing programs and partnerships.
- Lisa Garfield outlined the Million Acre Challenge, highlighting the expansion of farmer networks, peer-to-peer support, technical assistance, and soil health testing. Working to build a statewide anonymized soil health dataset and align testing protocols.

8. UME Efforts Towards Regenerative Agriculture:

- Amanda Grev presented an overview of University of Maryland Extension's broad educational programs, including winter meetings, summer field days, hands-on workshops, online resources, and partnerships, emphasizing adaptability to community needs and collaborative opportunities.
- Listed ongoing research areas such as saltwater intrusion, nutrient management, cover crop management, drone applications, beneficial insect studies, and organic pest control, and encouraged participants to reach out for information or collaboration.
- Efforts to centralize event information on the Ag and Food Systems website and through social media pages.

9. Feedback on Meeting Format and Future Collaboration: Suzy solicited feedback on the meeting format, with participants expressing appreciation for partner presentations, cross-promotion, and collaborative information sharing, and discussing the scheduling of future meetings based on emerging topics and program planning.

- Participants agreed that hearing from partners about their work fosters collaboration and helps identify connections and gaps, with suggestions to continue rotating topics and presenters.
- Suzy explained that while previous requirements mandated two meetings per year, future meetings will be scheduled as needed based on hot topics and program planning, with flexibility to include updates from USDA partners when relevant.

Action Items:

- 1. Review Priority Practice List** - NRCS to review the priority practice list for FY27 to ensure alignment with state and partner priorities.



2. **Promote Flexibility in Grazing Systems** - NRCS to advertise the flexibility in planning fencing and water systems- such as grazing cover crops and hydrants on crop fields- to partners and producers.
3. **Set Up Meeting with DLLC** – Suzy to set up a meeting with the DLLC to discuss regenerative ag opportunities for Eastern Shore poultry farmers.

Next Meeting:

- Date and time to be determined.