

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

June 12, 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 March 19, 2025 – Jon Hubbert

- Motion to approve by Sarah Ilzzi, Second by Ryan Smith.
- Unanimous approval of minutes as written.

Agency Updates – General

NRCS – Jon Hubbert

- Continuing to focus on Farm Bill delivery.
- Staffing impacts from Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) 1 and 2, retirements, resignations.
 - Some critical gaps in Archeology and Engineering.
 - Working with Nebraska for assistance with archeology.
 - Agency reorganization or reduction plan has not been released to states yet.

FSA Update – Curt Goettsch

- FSA staffing and office also impacted by the voluntary resignations.
- The Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) was announced and payments have mostly been processed. Iowa leads the nation in payments to producers for this program.
 - Crop reporting is currently underway – one of biggest FSA undertakings.
 - About 50% complete (slightly ahead of schedule) due to good planting conditions.
- CRP signups were held – closed June 6.

Local Workgroup Feedback

- None presented.
- Received producer request for a variation on CRP requirements for windbreaks – will be addressing this request with the producer.
 - Consider a 1-row field windbreak instead of the 2-row requirement.
 - Will be asking for research to support effectiveness of 1-row windbreaks.
- *Question – Kozak: Is education about local workgroups needed, maybe with the districts? There is a lack of understanding or even knowledge of local workgroups.*
 - *Hubbert: Requested feedback is received on watershed priority areas and resource concerns, but not much beyond these.*
 - *Judge: Could plan some outreach to promote local working groups.*
 - *J. Fischer: CDI agreement for strategic planner support was on hold for a bit but now has both planners in place and should be able to move forward scheduling with districts and local workgroups again.*
- *Question – Kozak: You do get some feedback from local working groups on resource concerns?*

- *Hubbert: They respond to help us with ranking pools. Their resource concern priorities and watershed priorities are the two areas we request from every county/SWCD.*
- *Adams: we receive feedback from most of the counties as requested.*
- *Downey: It is a yearly request, so the feedback is not flowing consistently, but they are reviewing.*
- *Hubbert: The feedback from local workgroups about resource concern priorities gets added into the ranking process with all the national targets. It can be hard to address national targets that are obligating the dollars while at the same time addressing locally led.*

Recommendations from the previous meeting

- EQIP Subcommittee – recommendation to add two additional ranking questions worth 15% of the ranking.
 - Only for Monarch fund pool.
 - Approved and adopted on April 30.
- WRE Subcommittee – recommendation to approve the updated Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines.
 - Compatible Use Agreement (CUA) added.
 - Approved and adopted on April 25.

Technical Topics

- No topics presented.
- Jon invites good, science-based information that would help the state and the team to be prepared and informed on topics of interest to be submitted for consideration at an upcoming meeting.
 - 15-minute presentations.
 - Must be science-based.
 - Send topic requests to Jon Hubbert and Keiko Sampson.

Status of Farm Bill Programs

Programs and IRA Report – Sam Adams

- See report (*report attached with agenda*).
 - Correction to report: RCPP section, 5th bullet the 2nd round selections are in 1976, 1896, and 2266.
- NRCS lost our easement restoration stewardship coordinator through the DRP process. Matt Allen, CRP coordinator, will be assisting with easements in addition to his normal CRP duties.
 - Most of his available time will be spent on managing our agreements to do stewardship and restoration activities.
- FY2025 IRA funding has been suspended – we will not be obligating any IRA FY2025 contracts.
 - We are still able to do modifications and work with prior year contracts from FY2023 and FY2024.
 - Only exception is partial land transfers – we cannot do these.
 - A CSP contract encompasses the entire farm or land area and if a producer sells off a piece of land, we are unable to develop a new CSP contract for that specific piece of land with the new customer.
- *Question – Isenhardt: “Farm Bill Programs” – SNAP is one. Does this committee coordinate on food and nutrition programs? Iowa’s Governor wants to focus SNAP on healthy Iowa-grown foods. Is there some way through EQIP or other programs to bring dollars and technical assistance to that?*
 - *Hubbert: Not directly, since we don’t work directly with food and nutrition programs. NRCS works mostly with the conservation title (Title 2) of the Farm Bill, and SNAP falls under the nutrition title of the Farm Bill.*

- *Hubbert: We can research and work back with Mr. Isenhardt. Other USDA agencies are charged with delivery of the nutrition title of the Farm Bill.*
- *Adams: There are EQIP fund pools for specialty ag producers – basically anything that is not corn, soybeans, or wheat. We do help specialty ag producers through the EQIP program.*
- *Hubbert: for NRCS our assistance is tied to conservation aspects. FSA has farm loans and other programs for specialty crop producers.*
- *Goettsch: FSA offers the Noninsured Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for non-covered commodities (non-insurable crops).*
- *Johnson: Does the IDALS Choose Iowa program address this?*
- *Kozak: Choose Iowa is an Iowa Legislature funded program that helps with local foods and producers. The Choose Iowa program provides a means for Iowa producers to market their products with the Choose Iowa stamp.*

Partnerships update – Scott Cagle

- See report (sent via email).
- There is a possibility of a new Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), but no date set for release. It is just being considered.
- Iowa has 22 RCPPs that we are the lead state on. There are other projects that Iowa is not the lead state on and Scott is unsure of the status of all of those.
- If anyone would like to meet with Scott to discuss current or potential RCPPs, please reach out and he will be happy to meet with you.

CRP Report – Curt Goettsch

- General CRP sign up (sign up 64) was completed on June 6.
- Continuous CRP signup (sign up 63) – first batching period was completed June 6.
 - A second batching period was announced June 5.
 - No dates have been announced yet but have been instructed to continue taking continuous offers.
 - The initial notice instructed FSA to take continuous sign-ups through July 31.
 - The second batching period will likely be announced when the accepted status of the first batching period is announced.
- Grasslands CRP announcement expected soon.
 - Pasture and rangeland – not a lot in Iowa, but there is some.
- Over 10,000 expiring contracts this year.
 - Good interest in re-enrollment, but no numbers until this fall (October or November).
- *Question – Papanicolaou: Has CRP participation been steady?*
 - *Goettsch: In general CRP participation is steady in Iowa over the last 3-4 years. Iowa has about 103,000 CRP contracts totaling about 1.6 million acres.*

Subcommittee Reports

CSP – Cynthia Farmer

- Did not meet.

EQIP – Nick Baumgarten

- See Report (attached with Agenda).
- **Recommendation: identify interested people to step into the role of Chair for the EQIP subcommittee. If interested, please reach out to Jon Hubbert, Nick Baumgarten, or Sam Adams.**
- *Hubbert: Thank you to Nick for your leadership as the chair on the subcommittee.*

ACEP-WRE – Kelsey Fleming

- Did not meet.

ACEP-ALE – Ryan Smith

- Subcommittee did not meet.

CRP –Todd Bogenschutz

- Subcommittee did not meet.
- The committee has been holding steady since there has not been a new Farm Bill and there have been no changes to CRP.

SWP – Christina Murphy

- See report (attached with Agenda).
- **Recommendation: Add one watershed for Osceola Rural Water System North which finished its plan this past year and have wells that are highly susceptible to agricultural runoff. This watershed is a total of 33,226 and allows Iowa to remain under the 20% area limit.**
 - **SWP list of priority watersheds attached with these minutes**
- *Adams and Hubbert: source water protection statutory requirements for EQIP are 10% funding and 20% area. This is the 20% area limit as stated in the recommendation.*
- Currently at about 19% area.
- **Recommendation: Add Marty Braster as Co-Chair.**
- *Hubbert: Thank you to Christina for your leadership as the chair of the subcommittee.*

Urban Ag – Sarah Nizzi for Tim Palmer

- Subcommittee did not meet.

Updates From Other Agencies and Committee Members

Christina Murphy

- Nitrate levels in Des Moines River and Racoon River are over 17 mg/L – near-record or record highs in the area.
 - Central Iowa Water Works will be banning all irrigation/outdoor usage so the nitrate standard can be met with water treatment.
- Christina invites everyone to work with water utilities to solve this problem and reach out to Christina if you would like to be involved.

IDALS – Susan Kozak

- NFACT Tool
 - ISU received funding from the Iowa Legislature to research and develop a new tool to replace the MRTN (Maximum Return to Nitrogen).
 - *Are there any updates regarding NRCS adoption of NFACT?*
 - *Chase: NRCS is beginning to evaluate, but it hasn't been presented to any of the STAC subcommittees. NRCS is working toward incorporating into the NRCS standard, but likely won't be for this year but for the following year.*
 - *Kozak: There would be a gap year where MRTN is not supported by NFACT hasn't been adopted – is there a plan in place?*
 - *Chase: NRCS has reached out to ISU and are waiting for a response to see if it would be supported for 2026. If not, NRCS will have to pivot quickly.*

Question - Isenhardt: Can a representative from Iowa Food System Coalition be invited to join the Urban Ag Subcommittee?

- *Hubbert: Will defer to members of the Urban Ag Subcommittee for follow up. Please provide the name of an individual that would be appropriate.*

- Reached out to Urban Ag Subcommittee and Chris Schwartz, Executive Director, Iowa Food Systems Coalition on June 23.

- Hubbert: The Urban Ag Subcommittee also encompasses Small-scale agriculture as well.

Question – Johnson: Can STAC members still contact Nick Baumgarten as the EQIP Subcommittee Chair for practice adoption suggestions?

- Baumgarten: Yes, Nick is still Acting Chair for the EQIP Subcommittee
- Hubbert: Please include Sam Adams (sam.adams@usda.gov) as well.

Guest participation

- None

Closing Comments – Jon

- Thank you everyone for attending.

Future Meeting Dates

September 18, 2025

Attendance

In-Person

Jon Hubbert, NRCS

Dien Judge, CDI

Nick Baumgarten, IDNR

Kelsey Fleming, IDNR

Ryan Smith, IWF

Sarah Nizzi, Xerces Society

Sam Adams, NRCS

Will Myers, IDALS

Rubyana Neely, NRCS

Jessica Downey, NRCS

Scott Cagle, NRCS

Keiko Sampson, NRCS

Susan Kozak, IDALS

Regan Davis, CDI

Jaia Fischer, NRCS

Patrick Chase, NRCS

Joe McGovern, INHF

Virtual

Curt Goettsch, FSA

Angela Barker, INSGA

Bruce Barnhart, LICA

Holly Shutt, Ducks Unlimited

Sean McMahon, IWF

Todd Bogenschutz, IDNR

Ben Lehman, Rodale Institute

Jeff Jensen, Trees Forever

Todd Sutphin, ISA

Scott Moats, TNC

Cameron Aker, Trout Unlimited

Marty Braster, Regional Rural Water Association

Sharyl Bruning, IFBF

Jay Harmon, ISU Extension

Jimmy Emmons, NRCS Assistant Chief

Christina Murphy, IA Association of Water Agencies

Joe McClure, ISA

Dave Petty, Iowa River Ranch

Andrew Diallesandro, USFWS

Wendy Johnson, Climate Land Leaders

Ashley Utt, Pathfinders RC&D

Chuck Isenhardt, Dubuque Area Land & Water Legacy

Sally Worley, PFI

Cynthia Farmer, Center for Rural Affairs

Josh Divan, PF

Jamie Benning, ISU

Matt Dvorak, DNR

Ben Porepp, Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance

Dustin Vandehoef, Senator Ernst's Office

Thanos Papanicolaou, NLAE

Mark Heckman, Iowa Renewable Fuels Association

Paige Frautschy, TNC