



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service
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**MASSACHUSETTS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

November 21, 2023

9:00am-12:00pm

Meeting Held Virtually

Welcome and Opening Remarks – Dan Wright, NRCS/USDA

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am by Dan Wright, Massachusetts State Conservationist. Dan welcomed everyone and requested attendees enter their information into the Chat.

Minutes from the June 22, 2023, meeting of the State Technical Committee was accepted.

Dan spoke briefly about IRA funding. More to come on official funding numbers.

Farm Bill Programs – Rita Thibodeau, NRCS/USDA

Rita provided details from the Fiscal Year 2024 Financial Assistance Program Division (FAPD) and Easement Program Division (EPD):

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) = \$5,806,000
- EQIP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) = \$9,188,000
- Landscape Conservation Initiative National Water Quality Initiative = \$70,000
- EQIP Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) = \$290,000
- Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) = \$155,000
- Agricultural Management Assistance Program Risk Management Agency (AMA RMA) \$ pending.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) = \$1,400,000
- CSP Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) = \$904,000

FY24 Program/Signup Deadlines:

- CSP – Classic & IRA - Round 1 / AFT RCPP 2311
 - Round 1: 11/3/2023
- EQIP/AMA/RCPP/NWQI / EQIP/AMA/RCPP/NWQI:
 - Round 1: 1/5/2024
 - Round 2: 3/8/2024
 - Round 3: 5/10/2024
- EQIP ACT NOW – all rounds, but do not wait to obligate like classic contracts.

Easements Funding:

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) = \$1,922,068
- Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) = \$756,607
- WRE Stewardship = \$27,425

Easements Deadlines:

- ACEP ALE and WRE application deadline - December 29, 2023
- ACEP IRA application deadline - 11/3/2023
- Ranking Deadline - 12/13/2023
- Selection - 12/22/2023

ACEP IRA applications are sent to National Headquarters for Processing.

There is an expected announcement for RCPP FY 2024 Notice of Funding prior to the end of the calendar year.

State Resource Conservationist – Catherine Magee, NRCS-USDA

Working on identifying top ten Priority Resource Concern Practices for FY2024.

Forestry Scenario Updates:

- 472 Forest/Farm Access Control: forestry boundary marking
- 655 Trail/Landing Location and Marking is ONLY for marking the **landing** perimeter. We are not going to use this scenario for trails.
- Skidder trails will be covered under “Trail Erosion Control w/o vegetation slopes < 35%”
- 560 Access Road can be used to allow for logging trucks to access the landing.

Pest Management Updates (595):

- Insect Exclusion Netting for High Tunnels
- On-Farm Weather Stations and NEWA Network
- Calibrating Spray Equipment
- Insect Lures, Traps and Scouting
- Row Covers and Insect Exclusion Netting

Urban Designation for the state has increased for FY24.

State Soil Scientist, Maggie Payne, NRCS-USDA

Farmland of Local Importance Updates:

- Prime Farmland Designations
 - Prime Farmland = 10%
 - Farmland of Statewide Importance = 14%
 - Unique Farmland = < 1%
- Farmland of Local Importance (FLI) – Land that is locally important for crop production, but not categorized as prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide importance.

Why?

- Easement program eligibility
- State land use regulations
- Land use planning
- MA towns with Farmland of Local Importance designation = 72
- Process for Farmland of Local Importance Determination:
 - Town or Land Trust
 - Verify that the land is not currently classified as prime or unique farmland or farmland of statewide importance.
 - Compile evidence of suitability to produce crops.
 - NRCS
 - Evaluate soil survey map units associated with land.
 - Verify those soil survey map units that meet criteria for FLI.
 - NRCS and Local Municipal Representative
 - Sign document identifying farmland of local importance within the community.
- FLI documents can be found in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG)
- For more information contact Soil Scientist, Al Averill, albert.averill@usda.gov, 413-253-4356.

Forestry and Wildlife Subcommittee, Patrick Conlin

Patrick provided updates from the most recent subcommittee meeting:

- Discussed New Scenarios
- Forestry is represented on the Priority Practice list.
- CSP Payment Increase – use to mitigate RC like invasive plants.
- Program Deadlines
- Field Office Technical Guide updates
- Endangered Species Act – Northern Long Eared Bat
- Hiring a staff forester for NRCS – happy to have a professional Forester involved.
- Hosting a Workshop to encourage more to become TSPs.
- New England Society of Foresters in March meeting – getting time on the agenda to speak and encourage new folks to register.
- Next meeting will be in April.

Soil Health Committee, Kate Parsons, Chair, NRCS-USDA

Kate provided updates from the most recent Soil Health Subcommittee Meeting:

- October 26 – 13-14 members joined.
- Discussed Land use soil health needs and challenges.
- People aren't thinking about it.
- Equipment
- Lack of Knowledge
- Economics
- Reduced Tillage is not easy – need to be creative.

- Discussed draft of payment rate
- Soil health ranking was discussed.
- Payment rates will be shared when they become available.
- Possibility of hosting a Webinar on the Soil Carbon Amendment

Easement Subcommittee, Jamie Pottern, Chair, AFT

- Number of attendees at subcommittee meeting has increased.
- Buzzard Bay case studies were presented.
- MDAR and NRCS gave policy updates.
- Proposed updates to changes
 - Ranking cycle
 - Expand eligibility.
- AFT – hiring for an Easement Specialist

Urban Agriculture Subcommittee, Charline Xu

- First Outreach amount – 40 people
- Next month Charline will have open Office Hours
- NOFA Winter outreach

Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association, Brian Wick, Executive Director

- Founded in 1888
- Today's Mission: "To enhance the Massachusetts cranberry industry through the viability and sustainability of the CCCGA membership"
- Vaccinium Macrocarpon "American Cranberry"
 - Wetland perennial plant
 - One of three native fruits in Massachusetts
 - Grow on low-lying vines in beds layered with sand, peat, gravel, and clay.
 - Acidic soil preference (pH 4 - 4.5)
 - Sandy soils
 - Require adequate fresh water supply.
 - Need cool temperatures in the fall and chilling hours for dormancy.
- ~13,000 Acres in MA
- MA Economic Impact:
 - More than 1,900 jobs directly associated with cranberry farming.
 - Creates ~3,500 jobs in processing and support businesses.

- Totals over 6,300 jobs in MA
- Excess of \$1.7 billion in economic impact annually
- Effects of Climate Change:
 - Disrupts traditional growing season(s)
 - Drastic precipitation patterns (heavy rains and droughts)
 - Impacts the prevalence and behavior of certain pests and diseases.
 - Mild/unpredictable winters
 - More spring frost events
 - Warm and wet fall leads to poor fruit color.
 - Fluctuations in crop yield and quality affect market
 - Adaptive measures to cope with climate change are costly.
 - Rising sea levels pose danger to coastal bogs.
- Need for Renovation:
 - Vines become less productive over time.
 - Hybrid varieties produce 2-3X on same footprint with similar input costs.
 - Older bogs may have outdated infrastructure.
 - Leveling surface, upgrading irrigation and drainage systems improves efficiency and water management.
 - Regular renovation schedule helps maintain the quality and quantity of the crop.
 - Satisfies changing marketplace demands.
 - Helps maintain environmental stewardship by adopting more sustainable practices.
- Need for Sand:
 - Creates ideal growing condition for cranberries.
 - Aids in growth and expansion of vines.
 - Helps control disease, insects, and weeds.
 - Acts as a natural fertilizer.
 - Used for repair of bog infrastructure(s).
 - Necessary for renovation.
- Need for Water Resources:
 - Drought conditions necessitate ample water supply for irrigation, frost protection, and harvest.
 - Frost protection measures require water.
 - Helps efficiency of nutrient delivery.
 - Helps sustain wetland environment and bog ecosystem.

- Supports root development, helps plant withstand stress, and contributes to overall vigor.
 - Wet harvesting (95% of crop) necessitates sufficient water resources.
 - Expand/clean existing water resources.
 - Dig new water resources (tailwater recovery).
- For more information on Cranberries in MA:

Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association

(508) 866-7878

info@cranberries.org

www.cranberries.org

Catherine Magee thanked everyone for participating in the state tech committee meeting and for providing input on NRCS programs. She will send out a survey to attendees to determine the date of the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:35am.

About the State Technical Committee

The State Technical Committee advises the NRCS State Conservationist on the technical guidelines necessary to implement the conservation provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill. Committee membership includes representatives from federal and state agriculture and environmental agencies, agricultural producers, UMass Extension, nonprofit organizations, and agribusiness.

State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public and are held as often as necessary to advise and implement NRCS conservation programs. For information about upcoming meetings, please contact Catherine Magee at the NRCS State Office at 413-253-4365 or catherine.magee@usda.gov. More information and meeting minutes are available on the MA NRCS web site: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/massachusetts/massachusetts-state-technical-committee-0>