



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service
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MASSACHUSETTS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES

November 29, 2022

9:00am – 11:30

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 and informed everyone that the meeting was being recorded.

Dan thanked the members who participated in the new subcommittee meetings.

Dan announced the receipt of FY 2023 budget. Still waiting to receive some of the appropriation in dollars to spend. Since there is a budget outline to work from, program signup periods will be rolled out earlier this year.

Advisory amounts for IRA funding of ~20 billion dollars over the next four years.

- \$8.4 billion – EQIP
- \$2.2 billion – CSP
- \$4.9 billion – RCPP
- \$1.4 billion – ACEP
- \$1 billion – CTA

There are indications that the IRA funds will go toward addressing climate smart agriculture, farming, and climate activities.

IRA public comment period deadline December 21, 2022 [USDA Requests Public Input on Implementation of Inflation Reduction Act Funding.](#)

MA is working to increase staffing numbers to 54 full time employees.

Minutes from the July 21, 2022, meeting of the State Technical Committee were accepted.

Farm Bill Programs – Rita Thibodeau, NRCS/USDA

Rita Thibodeau gave an overview of FY 2023 initial allocations:

- EQIP - \$5.8 million
- AMA - \$155,000
- AMA RMA – \$0.00
- CSP - \$1.5 million
 - Renewals - \$300,000

- Classic Allocation - \$1,000,000
- Organic Allocation - \$200,000

Available allocations for RCPP and Easement programs.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Allocations:

RCPP EQIP:

- RCPP Ground Based Water Quality - \$99,239
- RCPP Collaborative for Private Forestland - \$945,688

ALE:

- RCPP Connecting the CT River Easement - \$665,000

Conservation Easement Programs

- ALE - \$1,922,068
- WRE - \$756,607
- WRE Stewardship - \$14,751

Rita shared national application and obligation deadlines:

CSP Renewals:

- Application Deadline - 3/17/22
- Obligation Deadline - 12/16/22

CSP Classic:

- Application Deadline - 10/21/22
- Obligation Deadline - 1/20/23

ACEP ALE & WRE:

- Application Deadline - 12/30/22
- Obligation Deadline - 9/1/23

EQIP / AMA / RCPP 1734:

- Application Deadline Round #1 – 2/17/23
- Application Deadline Round #2 – 5/19/23
- Obligation Deadline – 6/30/23

State Resource Conservationist - Catherine Magee, USDA/NRCS

MA is adopting new conservation practices in FY 2023, four of which are interim practices. Interim conservation practice standards are issued for a period not to exceed three years. The three-year policy allows for adequate time to review and evaluate a new technology or procedure.

New Practices for FY 2023 *Any practice beginning with an 8 is an interim practice:

- Raised Beds (812)
- Low Tunnel Systems (821)
- Annual Forages for Grazing Systems (810)
- Amending Soil Properties with Lime (805)
- Forest Farming (379)
- Alley Cropping (311)

High Priority Practices (MA - 10) – 90% Payment Rate

Source Water Priority Watersheds – ~100 Practices – 90% Payment Rate

Geography Specific Cost List Adjustments – National will be allowing adjustments to the cost lists based on geography for FY 2023.

Subcommittees

MA is trying to recruit volunteers for easement, soil health, fruit/vegetable crops, and livestock subcommittees. There currently aren't enough members to hold a productive meeting. Contact Catherine if you have any interest in volunteering for any of the subcommittees.

Forestry & Wildlife Subcommittee - Patrick Conlin, FWE

Pat summarized first subcommittee meeting held on 11/14/22.

Areas of discussion:

- reducing barriers to accessing assistance
- forestry in backyard habitat
- lack of contractors and bids for particular practices
- interconnectivity of projects to enhance the subcommittee members' collective efforts in specific areas

Goals:

- to map out collective efforts in the state
- highlight opportunities to collaborate
- identify some of the gaps in assistance

Urban Agriculture Subcommittee, Jack Loomis, NRCS

Jack summarized subcommittee meeting held on 11/15/22.

- Discussed urban agriculture in MA, which is mostly run in industrial or residential areas – less conventional agriculture
- Discussed topics related specifically to Urban agriculture
 - Raised Beds
 - Low Tunnels
- How can we best assist these urban farmers?
- What areas are eligible for conservation programs?
- Assistance for flower farmers

MA Farm Bureau – Karen Schwalbe, Executive Director

Karen introduced herself as the new MA Farm Bureau Director

MA Farm Bureau's priorities in the next year:

- Provide statewide access to information on business and technical assistance
- PFAS – will affect farmers across the state
- The forever chemical issues

- Labor issues – one of the biggest inputs to cost production
- Climate change and erratic weather patterns

Partner Updates

Interlace Commons – Meghan Giroux, Executive Director

Meghan introduced herself as the Executive Director of Interlace Commons, an agroforestry education and research group that serves farmers in the northeastern United States.

Goals:

- Disassemble barriers:
 - getting more services to farmers
 - address shortage of technical service providers who are trained in conservation practices
- Working on research and education grant for MA
 - Setting up 3 pilot demonstration sites for training farmers and conservation planners on forest conversion, alley cropping, and multistory cropping.

MACD - Michael Leff

Offered an invitation to attend MACD annual meeting to be held on 11/30/22, 3:00-5:00

AFT – Nathan L'Etoile

Announced 2 new positions, Implementation Specialists, to assist NRCS with critical contracts, helping producers with their contracts and assisting district offices where needed.

Hired 3 conservation planners within RCPP that covers the four western New England states, including MA.

UMASS Extension- Clem Clay

Clem announced first Urban Ag Educator will be starting in January.

Catherine Magee thanked everyone for participating in the state tech committee meeting and for providing input on NRCS programs.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 am.

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/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ma/technical/stc/?cid=nrcs144p2_013981