

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 19, 2026
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 18, 2025.
 - No comments or corrections noted by the committee – Minutes were unanimously approved as written.

Agency Updates – General

NRCS – Jon Hubbert

- Working applications to complete ranking and will start obligating new contracts as quickly as possible.
- Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) has generated a lot of discussion.
 - Eligibility has been a little more of a concern for some planners and producers than anticipated.
- Programs team conducted the annual Programs Roadshow to deliver training across the state March 9-13.
- Budget is solid as the fiscal year mid-point nears.
- All program information is available to move forward with contract obligations.
- Working through some issues with our business tools – should be fully functional soon.
- Question: Stark – Is there a definitive timeline for application selection?
 - Answer: Hubbert/Downey – CSP ranking ends April 3, selections will be made the following week; RCPP and EQIP ranking ends April 24, selections will be made the following week

FSA Update – Starlyn Perdue/Curt Goettsch

- Starlyn asked Curt Goettsch to give the FSA update.
- Farmer Bridge Assistance Program (FBA) – Iowa is either first or second in the nation for payments on FBA.
- Acreage Dig – the Base Acre Review (part of the One Big Beautiful Bill).
 - Once completed on farm records, will be able to work forward with more programs.
 - Will be later this year or next year before completed.

Local Workgroup Feedback – Dien Judge

- There are currently 12 districts in the planning process:

○ Buena Vista	○ Franklin	○ Webster
○ Calhoun	○ Guthrie	○ Worth
○ Cerro Gordo	○ Hancock	○ Wright
○ Dickinson	○ Hardin	○ Marion
- Outlined dates of upcoming planning meetings scheduled.
- Kossuth County feedback:
 - general hesitation to integrate cover crop practices due to uncertain weather conditions.
 - Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge water control structure needs replaced.
- Webster County feedback:
 - Drought concerns.
 - Farmers are reluctant to try new things due to prices and profitability.
 - Increasing cover crop programs – many think tillage needs to be done after cover crops.
 - Need incentives provided by multiple entities.
- Wright County feedback:

- Cover crops being implemented, but not at rate expected.
 - Incentives needed to get farmers to switch conservation practices for nutrient runoff.
- Jon expressed his appreciation for the local workgroups' efforts.

Technical Topics

- Savannah Institute will have an upcoming presentation to the CRP subcommittee.

Status of Farm Bill Programs

Programs Report – Jessica Downey

- See report (*attached with agenda*).
- Ranking Dates:
 - CSP - April
 - EQIP & RCPP – April 24
- Obligation date: August 15.
- Question: Fleming – When is ranking deadline for WRE?
 - Answer: Downey – April 24.
- Question: Stark – Advance payments for historically underserved producer are being awarded on a case-by-case basis. What is the process; is it awarded through the state or office to office?
 - Answer: Downey/Hubbert – The payments being on a case-by-case basis is new and we have not received guidance on how it will be implemented.
- Hubbert: Applications are still being accepted for all programs. Programs are continuous sign up.
 - Ranking and approval of applications will continue as we have funding available.

Partnerships update – Scott Cagle

- See report (*attached with agenda*).
- 20 current RCPP projects (completed and active).
- Still awaiting the release of the new Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).
 - Please arrange a meeting with Scott if you have any project ideas.
- Updates on the Clarke County Water Supply Project.
 - A Plan – Environmental Impact Statement is in the approval process at the national level for publication in the Federal Register.
- Hubbert: the Office of the Chief conducted a preliminary review of 1688 agreements nationwide.
 - No new agreements for FY26.
 - Investigating re-vamping the process for FY27.
 - Will focus on capacity building (boots on the ground) support for farmers and ranchers to get conservation implemented.
 - Congressionally directed spending, Senate-directed municipal projects, Emergency Watershed Program, Watershed Operations, National Conservation Incentive Grants (CIG), and RCPP will be exceptions.
 - A decision on Unfunded Cooperative Agreements (UCAs), like NRCS has with SWCDs and IDALS has not been determined.
 - There is potential for agreement amendment with additional dollars and time for expiring existing agreements, if they are in the Agency's interest, with approval from the Chief.
- Question: McGovern – Did the Iowa Partners for Conservation Agreement get cut off?
 - Answer: Hubbert – Existing agreements are still in place, but we will not be able to solicit for new agreements until FY2027.

CRP Report – Curt Goettsch

- Continuous sign up began February 12.
 - Batching will occur to avoid going over the national cap of 27 million CRP acres.
 - Batch 1 will end March 20; County Offices will have through March 27 to work with producers on offers.

- Will continue to take offers through July 31 unless acres get too close to the national cap.
- General sign up began March 9 and runs through April 17.
- Transition Incentive Program (TIP) was reauthorized.
 - For land that is expiring from CRP.
 - If the land is going to be farmed or grazed by a beginning farmer or beginning rancher, the landowner who was receiving CRP payment can receive an additional 2 years of that CRP payment if they have a 5-year lease with a beginning farmer or rancher.
 - Open from March 16 – August 14.
- Grassland sign up expected to be announced later this spring.
 - Not much in Iowa
- 14,400 contracts on 273,000 acres expire September 30.
 - This affects workload as much of the workload is re-enrollment.
- Question: Frautschy – Any idea how many contracts will be re-enrolled?
 - Answer: Goettsch – Do not want to speculate. A lot of contracts are “in the field practices” – not whole field enrollment. These practices usually experience high re-enrollment. Rental rate caps likely impact re-enrollments.
- Question: McGovern – Was a date provided for the Grassland announcement?
 - Answer: Goettsch – has not been announced yet.
- Comment: Bogenschutz: – When the Pollinator Practice came on board, it likely caused a surge in enrollments.
 - Response: Goettsch – CRP Pollinator (CP42) was added to Continuous CRP in 2014 or 2015.
- Comment: Hubbert – Good news - A recent report indicated that Monarch butterfly overwintering in Mexico showed a 64% increase in the size of the area.

Subcommittee Reports

CSP – Cynthia Farmer

- Did not meet this quarter.
- Comment: Neely – There will be 5 ranking pools, 1 Agland pool for each area (NW, NE, SE, SW Iowa) and 1 national Non-Industrial Private Forestland

EQIP – Paige Frautschy

- See report (*attached with agenda*).
- Committee voted in favor of recommending that EQIP continue to support organic and specialty ag.
- No formal recommendations to present to the State Conservationist.
- Guests representing the World Wildlife Fund presented some recommendations to develop marginal cropland to sustainable grazing.
 - See one-pager included with EQIP subcommittee report (*attached with agenda*).
- Question: Heckman - There has been a lot of talk that tilling should occur after cover crops are put in place in northern areas. Are there funding or policy programs to incentivize strip tilling or strip till applications and equipment instead of actual tillage?
 - Answer: Hubbert – RPP includes residue management strip till and no till as eligible practices and can be funded through EQIP or CSP as part of RPP. It can also be a standalone practice outside of RPP. Funding is dependent on how it ranks in comparison to other contracts or applications competing in the same category. From a ranking perspective, it would likely rank higher in RPP.
 - Answer: Myers – No till and strip till qualify for statewide WQI funding.
 - Answer: Downey/Hubbert – higher probability for funding if in Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI), Water Quality Initiative (WQI), or Source Water Protection (SWP)
- Question: Stark – Is there funding allocated in RPP for the required soil health testing?
 - Answer: Hubbert – Soil health testing is a specific practice that is covered within the RPP.
- Question: Stark – What will happen with the soil health test data? Will it be used as an advocacy piece for continuation of the RPP or regenerative agriculture?

- Answer: Hubbert – The data will not be collected by USDA – it will belong to the operator/landowner.
- Comment: Petty – Moving marginal land out of row crops and getting more grass on this land, will reduce erosion and improve water quality. It will also improve wildlife habitat. If there was a way to stack programs together and increase incentives, it could encourage more producers to do this. There is a project in SW Iowa that is getting results, if this project could be expanded statewide, there could be benefits.
 - Response: Hubbert – SW Iowa project referenced was part of an RCPP and funding would become an issue if attempted statewide. Jon also provided comments on the 50% livestock requirement for EQIP.
- Question: Stark – Is there a list of RCPP partners to contact if there is interest in developing an RCPP project?
 - Answer: Cagle – The website is a little out of date, but NRCS does not share the names of partners.
- Comment: Whaley – On a national level, there been a considerable amount of movement and conversations around CRP. Specifically related to grazing opportunities.

ACEP-WRE – Kelsey Fleming

- See report (*attached with agenda*).
- Recommendation: Approve the FY26 Iowa ACEP-WRE Geographic Area Rate Gaps (GARC).
- Hubbert opened discussion on approving GARC rates – no comments were brought forward.
 - Adoption of the FY26 Iowa ACEP-WRE GARC approved by State Conservationist.

ACEP-ALE – Joe McGovern for Ryan Smith

- Did not meet

CRP – Todd Bogenschutz

- See report (*attached with agenda*).
- WWF presented to CRP subcommittee on helping transition marginal cropland into sustainable grazing land.

SWP – Christina Murphy

- Did not meet.

Urban Ag –Tim Palmer/Sarah Nizzi

- Did not meet

Reports from Other Committee Members

INHF - Joe McGovern

- RCPP 3030 has just been finalized.
 - Partnership between INHF, DNR, and TNC.
 - Helping producers restore grasslands.
 - This RCPP is an Alternate Funding Arrangement (AFA).
- Thank you to Iowa NRCS staff for working through the agreement.

IDALS – Will Myers

- State Cost Share
 - Doing well on the fiscal year – structural practices are down due to losing the fall construction season during the 2025 shutdown.
 - Record sign up in management practices such as cover crops.
 - Consecutive record years of cost share project completion.
- State FY27 – Water Quality Initiatives (WQI) statewide program for cover crops and no till and strip till first time users.
 - Usually announced early May.
- Staffing
 - Filling vacant positions, 27 summer intern positions, and 45 contract technician positions.
 - 4 new technician positions in the North Raccoon and Middle Cedar watersheds – currently in the selection process.
- Actively responding to legislative inquiries.

ISU Extension – Catherine DeLong

- Recruiting for Educational Landowner Program.
 - <https://naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/programs/landowner-education>
 - Landowners learn about soil health, reduced tillage, cover crops and perennials.
 - Open to any landowners willing to come to 5 in-person meetings in Ames in June and July.
 - Applications close on April 10.

Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative (CAAFI)/Idaho National Laboratory (INL) – Tim Hughes

- Developed state profiles listing the ag, academic, agency, and industry leadership for each state.
- <https://www.caaifi.org/state-initiatives>
- Please provide feedback on any information that needs to be updated for Iowa.
- Please reach out if CAAFI or INL can assist as a technical resource looking at any type of crop conversion to biofuel, especially SAP.

Trout Unlimited – Sara Strassman

- Requesting information on the RCPP NOFO – Scott Cagle to follow up.

Guest Participation

- None

Future Meeting Dates

June 18, 2026

Attendance

In-Person

Jon Hubbert, NRCS
 Dien Judge, CDI
 Kelsey Fleming, IDNR
 Joe McGovern, INHF
 Bryan Whaley, IA Cattlemen's Association

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

Virtual

Curt Goettsch, FSA
 Angela Barker, INSGA
 Dave Petty, Iowa River Ranch
 Wendy Johnson, Climate Land Leaders
 Ashley Utt, Pathfinders RC&D
 Todd Bogenschutz, IDNR
 Josh Divan, Pheasants Forever
 Mark Heckman, Iowa Renewable Fuels Association
 Matt Dvorak, IDNR
 Jeff Lucas, IAWA
 Sharyl Bruning, IFBF
 David Flewelling, Flewelling Earthmoving Inc
 Bruce Barnhart, LICA
 Tim Hughes, Idaho National Laboratory
 Adam Mason, PFI
 Kelli Klink, IA Cattlemen's Association
 Will Myers, IDALS
 Lincoln Oliver, USFWS

Paige Frautschy, TNC
 Joan Flecksing, Meskwaki Tribe
 Dan Paulsen, NRCS
 Catherine DeLong, ISU
 Vince Sitmann, IDALS
 Lisa Stark, Iowa Valley RC&D
 Starlyn Perdue, FSA

 Todd Sutphin, ISA
 Cynthia Farmer, Center for Rural Affairs
 Christina Murphy, WDMWW
 Gabriel DuPree, EPA
 Olivia Flannery, WFAN
 Chuck Isenhardt, Dubuque Area Land & Water Legacy
 Andrew Diallesandro, USFWS
 Sara Strassman, Trout Unlimited
 Tommy Hexter, Iowa Food System Coalition