



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

New Jersey State Technical Committee FY26 LWG Feedback & NRCS Responses June 2, 2026

FY26 LWG Feedback & NRCS Responses by Area

Overall Summary

- This year there were **6 LWG meetings** with 5 in person and 1 survey.
- Meetings were hosted by: Morris SCD, Hunterdon/Somerset-Union SCDs, Ocean SCD, Burlington SCD, Cumberland-Salem/Gloucester SCDs, and DelAtlantic SCD.

Themes Across All Areas

- Soil health & erosion remain top priorities statewide.
- Irrigation backlogs continue for **4th consecutive year**.
- Strong interest in whole-farm, regenerative approaches.
- High Tunnels questioned in South Area for limited conservation value.
- Demand for better practice incentive payment alignment with real NJ costs
- Consistent staffing concerns: engineering & irrigation specialists

NORTH AREA

Mt. Olive (Morris County)

Key Feedback

1. Soil Erosion:

- a. Lack of engineering capacity to design erosion control practices.
- b. Need timely conservation plans—seasonal constraints limit planning.
- c. NRCS erosion practices do not accommodate for innovative/value added farms.
- d. Need to address failing conservation structures (terraces, diversions).

2. Water Quality: Irrigation technology surpasses NRCS/SADC requirements.

3. Soil Health Needs: More support for lime, compaction reduction (gypsum), and soil health practices.

4. Livestock: Expand grazing to mimic NJRCD AMP program, silvopasture, and agroforestry support.

NRCS Responses

1. Soil Erosion

- a. Working with existing staff to increase Engineering Job Approval authority, 45% of staff has less than 5 years of experience, so we expect capacity to grow in the next few years.

- i. NRCS is emphasizing the use of TSPs for capacity, partner agreements, standard designs, etc.
 - b. SADC - 1. SADC now authorizes TA for conservation plans for state cost share. Producers can develop conservation plans with consultants and get paid by SADC. 2. SADC paying SCDs now to develop plans for preserved farms. 3. SCDs can provide plans and pursue several avenues like grants, state funding, etc. for financial resources for planners.
 - c. **Grant fact sheet -**
<https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/documents/publications/planninggrants.pdf>
 - d. Waterways, diversion and terrace rebuilds are eligible for NRCS assistance. Other avenues are available through our partners.
2. **Water Quality** - IWM (Irrigation Water Management 449) standard covers most innovations and energy efficiency and agricultural operation (374) cover innovation (sensors and telemetry). NRCS also has the 442 Sprinkler System variable rate irrigation.
 3. **Soil Health** – Lime and gypsum practices currently available and grazing practices already covered under EQIP, RCD sets their own rate.
 4. **Livestock** – NRCS actively providing outreach and education on silvopasture and agroforestry.

Frenchtown (Hunterdon/Somerset/Union Counties)

Key Feedback

1. **Cover Crop** remains top priority; want maximum funding directed to this practice.
2. **Wildlife Practices:** Concern that converting farmland to wildlife habitat reduces productivity and increases deer/invasive pressures.
 - a. Suggest funding wildlife projects in wetlands/streams instead of taking farmland out of production.
3. **Beginning farmers:** Difficulty establishing crops on depleted soils; desire CC scenarios including soil amendments.
4. **Tile Drainage:** Concern NRCS only treats tile as a supporting practice, not a primary need.

NRCS Responses

1. **Wildlife** - EQIP ranking updated to prioritize private landowners and deprioritize funding to wildlife management areas/publicly owned land.

Acronyms:

ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
 ALE - Agricultural Land Easements
 AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance Program
 CAP – Conservation Activity Plan
 CIG – Conservation Innovation Grant
 CRP – Conservation Reserve Program
 CREP - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
 CSP – Conservation Stewardship Program
 EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program
 HFRP – Healthy Forest Reserve Program
 RCPP – Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 SAFE – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement
 WLFW – Working Lands for Wildlife
 WRE – Wetlands Reserve Easements



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CENTRAL AREA

Columbus (Ocean County) – Online Survey

Key Feedback

1. Strong desire to preserve remaining open space and restore native habitat.
2. Emphasis on water quality improvements.
3. Want increased public awareness of conservation programs.

NRCS Responses

1. Farm and land preservation is the #1 NRCS priority in NJ. Active outreach campaigns underway with municipalities and SADC on ACEP-ALE.

Columbus (Burlington County)

Key Feedback

1. **Cover crop seeding rates:** Prefer seed/acre vs. lbs./acre.
2. **Irrigation drift reduction:** Interest in cost-share for equipment that reduces drift; nozzle replacement questions.
3. **Programs:** Need options for farmers with no irrigation history; desire to adjust irrigation ranking to favor first time applicants.
4. **Practice Requested:** Composting facilities, pollinator hedgerows.

NRCS Responses

1. **Cover Crop** - standard already includes seed/acre options
2. **Programs** - AMA available for operations with no irrigation history
3. **Practices** - NRCS **does fund composting (317) and hedgerow planting (422/442)**

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SOUTH AREA

Woodstown / Vineland (Cumberland/Salem/Gloucester Counties)

Key Feedback

- 1. Resource Concerns:** Soil & water remain top issues (same as FY24–25)
- 2. Practices:**
 - a. Farms applying should address full resource concern suite (whole-farm approach) vs single practice. Farms that have erosion and agriculture runoff should address those resource concerns when applying for conservation programs.
 - b. Need hedgerow maintenance, regenerative agriculture, drone application, grid soil sampling, and pond maintenance.
 - c. Strong objections to High Tunnels—seen as production practices causing runoff.
- 3. Cover Crops:**
 - a. Request no-till requirement after end date.
 - b. Want lower payment rates; allow 3 of 5 years flexibility.
- 4. Programs:**
 - a. Strong request to prioritize preserved farms.
 - b. Concerns about ranking transparency, so producers understand what they need to do to become eligible for programs.
 - c. Deadlines occur too late for growers to complete work before planting season.
 - d. Payment rates are too low and outdated.
 - e. Desire meaningful farmer input into program design.
- 5. Irrigation**
 - a. Severe backlog for irrigation design approvals—an issue recurring since 2023.
 - b. Need more irrigation technical staff.
 - c. Clarification on TSP requirements—local dealers cannot meet PE licensing requirement

NRCS Responses

- 1. Practices**
 - a. High Tunnels were not prioritized under FY26 EQIP, but available (prioritized in AMA only); elimination not allowed due to discrimination concerns.
- 2. Cover Crop** guidelines updated:
 - a. Need to have option available for operation with no access to no-till (increase seeding rates for broadcast).
 - b. Reduced payment rates in FY2026 and implementation flexibility already available (based on hardship like weather, illness, financial, etc.).
 - i. No-till required after certain dates.

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3. Programs:

- a. Preserved farms already receive extra ranking points; cannot discriminate against non-preserved land

DelAtlantic SCD (Vineland)

Key Feedback

1. Need to streamline applications; improve accessibility.
2. Resource and staffing shortages—especially field engineers for erosion control work and irrigation specialists.
3. Lack of awareness of SADC Soil & Water Cost Share.
4. Interest in pond dredging, irrigation, tile drainage, shell planting, habitat restoration, and native vegetation.
5. Aquaculture concerns: oyster bed restoration, shell management.
6. Forestry shortage in South Jersey

NRCS Responses

1. Added new TSP DIA 163 for irrigation design and review; Working with existing staff to increase Engineering Job Approval authority, 45% of staff has less than 5 years of experience, so we expect capacity to grow in the next few years.
2. NRCS is emphasizing the use of TSPs for capacity, partner agreements, standard designs, etc.
3. Forestry support increasing with new certified personnel and training.

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