

Vermont NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting

July 15, 2026| 9:30 am – 12:00 pm

In-person: USDA State Office, Colchester

Virtual: Microsoft Teams

NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 21, 2026 (TENTATIVE)

Attendees (Colchester): Travis Thomason (NRCS), Luis Aponte (NRCS), Brandon Carpenter (NRCS), Bob Thompson (NRCS), Angela Hyldburg (NRCS), Stephanie Vasilopoulos (NRCS), Toby Alexander (NRCS), Quentin Melson (NRCS), Wendy Wilton (FSA), Chris Smith (USFWS), Laura DiPietro (VAAFM), Dave Adams (VT/FWD), Marli Rupe (DEC), Lesley-Ann Dupigny (UVM), Michelle Monroe (VACD), Julia King (VACD), and Clara Fernandez Odell (ECNRCD).

Attending (MS Teams): Maggie Payne (NRCS), David Blodgett (NRCS), Katherine Dynarski (NRCS), Sarah Larose (NRCS), Phyllicia Moore (NRCS), Peter Silva (RD), Katherine MacFarland (USDA NAC), Bryan Dore (EPA), Laura Ranker (DEC), Noel Dodge (VFWD), Travis Hart (VFWD), Ben Gabos (VAAFM), Nina Gage (VHCB), Jeff Cook (VFAAFM), Will Eldridge (VFW), Chris Callahan (UVM Extension), Jascha Pick (UVM Extension), Vernon Grubinger (UVM Extension), Rachael Stievater (UVM Extension), Julie Callahan (UVM Extension), Taylor Johnson (CCNRCD), Andie Vellenga, (RNRCD), Sarah Damsell (OCNRCD), Emily Finnegan (CCNRCD), Michael Fernandez (BCCD), Coryn Britton (BCCD), Desiree Robertson-Dubois (AFT), Chris Spencer (AFT), Jim Habana Hafner (AFT), Kate Forrer (VT Woodlands), Nancy LaRowe (NOFA-VT), Emma Eason (VTAA), Erin Rodgers (TU), Holly McClintock (VHCB), Brad Roy (VRWA), Craig Privett (UFLT), and Abe Collins (LCC).

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 - 9:40 am	State Conservationist Welcome and NRCS Update	Travis Thomason
9:40 - 9:50 am	Farm Service Agency Update	Wendy Wilton
9:50 - 9:55 am	Rural Development Update	Peter Silva
9:55 - 10:10 am	Legislative Update	Vermont Congressional Delegation
10:10 - 10:20 am	NRCS Resources Update	Brandon Carpenter
10:20 - 11:00 am	State Tech Subcommittee Reports	Stephanie Vasilopoulos
11:00 - 11:10 am	Vermont FA Spending Plan	Phyllicia Moore
11:10 - 11:15 pm	State Tech Committee 2.0	Luis Aponte
11:15 - 11:55 pm	Partner Updates	Partners
11:55 - 12:00 pm	Wrap-Up	Thomas Thomason

Welcome and NRCS Updates:

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

It's good to see everyone. Here, in person, and virtually. Thanks for your time. We do this quarterly and we have a structure for what we talk about at each of the meetings. This meeting is to talk about all of the feedback that we have gathered in subcommittee meetings, local work groups, and other things. To all of you who have spent so much time to help us get better, thank you so much. We recognize that we can't do this alone. Thank you so much. We are much better when we have partners walking with us through this process and improving federal programs. Thank you so much.

We will have key updates from subcommittee members. The State Technical Committee is statutory. It's part of this process of how NRCS gathers feedback from important folks like everyone in this meeting. We are anxious to talk about some of things that we have heard from you, from your staff throughout the year, and continue to solidify those recommendations for what we are going to do in the coming years.

In our October/November State Technical Meeting we hope to report back on what we accomplished in 2026, how we invested in our programs and report back to you on how we did in adjusting to last year's feedback. That's the process that we are going through.

Just a couple of updates before we get into the meat of everything that we are doing.

NRCS Chief: I want to let you know that we do have a new chief: Chief Colton Buckley. Chief Buckley has been on for about a month and he has changed the mission, vision and the priorities of the agency, so I want to review those with you, so you have an idea of what the next two-and-half or three years will look like as long as he is out there.

NRCS Motto: Our new motto is "Keeping Working Lands in Working Hands". Many of you who have been with us since the nineties are familiar with "Helping People Help the Land". That is no longer our motto. We will get this to you and some links to priorities.

NRCS Mission Statement: Our Mission statement is "We deliver practical, voluntary and locally led conservation solutions that help producers conserve natural resources strengthen agricultural production and keep working lands productive for generations to come". This is the first mission statement I have ever seen at NRCS that says Locally Led Conservation in it, so I really appreciate the nod to locally led conservation.

NRCS: Vision Statement: The new vision statement is "An America where working lands remain productive, resilient, and in the hands of those who steward them."

NRCS Priorities: The new NRCS Priorities are: Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land, Shift to Outcome-Based Conservation and Farmer Empowerment, Recenter Field Engagement and Strengthen Technical Expertise, Expand Wildlife Conservation and Outdoor Access (this one of the new ones), Strengthen Partnerships (what we are doing today) by Streamlining Processes and Accountability, Optimize Mission Delivery by Strengthening Workforce Culture (this is the second new one in addition to last chief's priorities), and Modernize NRCS Infrastructure and Technology.

I share this because it will become very important in future days. When you see opportunities for funding, they are going to align with these priorities.

We are head strong into the great work that we are doing. Our field offices, our partners out in the field are working right now to obligate contracts that producers have been working on. We hope to get that done in the next couple of months and then we get to start the process all over again using the great feedback that you and your teams have provided to us today. Our work is to "Keep Working Lands in Working Hands". I really appreciate you all coming in today.

Farm Service Update:

Wendy Wilton, State Executive Director, FSA Vermont (See presentation slides for details)

- For FSA, over the last year, it's been a year of pumping out payments. Most of the disaster money is out.
- Right now, we are working on crop reporting. In the future, there will be a lot of programs based on crop reporting.
- We put out 54 million dollars for the 2023 and 2024 flood disasters and 2025 drought. Combined with the 30 million dollars of assistance the state of Vermont got, we have distributed over 80 million dollars of support for our producers. The money came very late after the disasters occurred, but we have heard from our producers that year's money helped kickstart this year's production, which was critical.
- We wouldn't have been running SDRP if it wasn't for our great relationship with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. Vermont did it right because we are Vermonticized, right Travis? [laughter]
- There has been 10 million dollars total to date for market support.
- There have been OBBA Program changes.
 - For ARC-PLC in Vermont there were \$1.5 million payments for the 2025 crop year, there is an increase in reference prices, 30 million base acres added nationally and an increased payment limit.
 - For DMC (a form of crop insurance), this year's milk price in January was really poor, so there was about \$2.0 million distributed for dairy support.
 - Changes for 2026:
 - Tier 1: increased from \$5 million to \$6 million
- I want to thank NRCS. There is a real partnership with FSA and NRCS. We need to establish that the producer that NRCS is working with is eligible for USDA support. Part of that is looking at adjusted gross income. We're not getting that information from IRS, so we need to work together.
- There is an application out now for organic certification assistance for both 2025 and 2026.
- There is support out there for small and mid-size meat and poultry processing facilities. This is targeted to existing facilities that are ready to expand.
- We have a lot of system upgrades this year. Crop reporting next year will probably look a lot different. There is a complete overhaul of the system going on right now.

Comments/Questions: None

Rural Development Update:

Peter Silva, State Director, Rural Development Vermont and New Hampshire

- Patrick Suprunowicz is no longer with Rural Development; he is now working with the Small Business Administration. He is trying to head up a division where the Small Business Administration will work more closely with Rural Development. He is still living in New Hampshire. We have less people, but we are not behind and we are doing the best we can.
- Rural Development is going through a major reorganization that will help both Vermont and New Hampshire. I hope to visit Vermont soon.

Comments/Questions:

No update

Legislative Updates

Senator Sanders' Office

No update

Senator Welch's Office

No update

Congresswoman Balint's Office

No update

Comments/Questions: None

NRCS Programs Updates *(See slides for details)*

Brandon Carpenter, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, NRCS Vermont

- Forestry Update (led by Toby Alexander)
 - VT Forestry Technical Note 2 – Trees and Shrubs has been released
 - List of trees and shrubs used on conservation projects in Vermont
 - Agroforestry species list
 - Bioengineering
 - Wildlife
 - Pollinator
 - The Regulated Introduced Plant Species (RIPS) Rule came out in June and that has formalized the quarantine list and established a watchlist for invasive plant species.
 - (FOTG Section 1/Technical Note)

Comments/Questions: None

Wendy Wilton (FSA): Can you give us an example of some of the species on the Agroforestry species list?

Toby Alexander (NRCS): Pawpaw, persimmon, trees like that.

Chris Smith (USFWS): This document [VT Forestry Technical Note 2] is used outside of NRCS channels, whether it's Fish and Wildlife or many of the NGOs that are doing planting projects, in addition to agroforestry. This is the foundational piece for all of that. So, it is extremely important for all of the restoration work.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): This is the kind of work that subcommittees do. We don't do that here at the broader state technical advisory committee because if the state technical committee did that [subcommittee work], we would be here for twelve hours a day for two weeks straight, once a quarter. So, I really appreciate all of those kind words. Lots of folks were involved in developing that document and that's the kind of work we really need to keep going because we are much better when we do this together. Thank you, Toby. I appreciate the updates. Great job!

Resource Concern Evaluation (led by Brandon Carpenter)

- Resource concerns consolidated to 12
- Vermont NRCS will standardize resource concerns to evaluate based on land use beginning in FY2027
 - Based on staff feedback, subcommittees, local, state and federal partners.
 - Streamlined approach – assessments viewed through common lens.
 - Comprehensive assessment.
 - Goal is for program neutral planning.
 - Greater blend between programs and initiatives (EQIP, CSP, RPP, WLFW)

Soil and Water

- We have used the subcommittees to really hone in on what are the priority resource concerns here in Vermont

- Soil and Water (will be the core resources that we are looking at)

- Soil Erosion
- Sheet and Rill Erosion
 - Ephemeral Gullies

Soil Health

- Compaction
- Organic Matter Stability

Water Quality

- Nutrient Runoff
- Sedimentation

Water Quantity

- Plants and Animals
 - Plant Health
 - Invasive Species
 - Health and Vigor
 - Aquatic Health
 - Elevated Water Temperature
 - Terrestrial Habitat
 - Livestock Health
 - Feed and Forage Balance
 - Inadequate Shelter
 - Water Distribution

- Assess additional resource concerns as needed

- Identified as a producer goal
 - Energy Efficiency of Equipment and Facilities

- Air Emissions
 - Noted in the field by planner
 - Program or initiative requirement
 - Easement assessments will include Human Considerations, “Loss of Functions and Values” and “Threat of Conservation”

Payment Schedules

- We had lots of feedback on payment schedules in all of the subcommittees last year. We haven’t heard anything definitive on what payment schedules will look like in FY27.
- All payment schedules are available on a public dashboard.

Comments/Questions:

Marli Rupe (DEC): I am curious as to what the definitions are for “health and vigor of plants”. Is that health and vigor in the field only? Also, what “feed and forage balance” is.

Brandon Carpenter (NRCS): We have an official definition for it in section three of our national resource concern and planning criteria. That specific resource concern would be for in-field conditions.

Feed and Forage balance would be an evaluation of a grazing system. That would be our priority resource concern for pastureland use. Evaluating the number of animal land units on a land base and then the available acreage available for grazing using a grazing spreadsheet.

Will Eldridge (VFW): I have a question about the water temperature study. Can you elaborate on that?

Brandon Carpenter (NRCS): If we were looking at, based on a specific land use, if we were conducting a resource assessment, we would be running our tool or assessing whether or not a resource concern of elevated water temperature existed. So, you would be looking at, potentially, a pasture system with a water feature going through it and then a planner would, based on a set of resource concerns, assess that. Then our planning inventory software would start asking a basic set of questions that would allow us to indicate whether a resource concern was present.

Will Eldridge (VFW): Is there someone I can follow up on this with?

Brandon Carpenter (NRCS): Yes, you can follow up with either myself or Toby Alexander.

NRCS State Technical Subcommittee Reports *(See slides for details)*

Stephanie Vasilopoulos, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (Acting), NRCS Vermont

Today, we’re going to review the State Technical Subcommittee reports. Each of the point-of-contacts that led those subcommittee groups will go through the feedback that was received and then review some of the recommendations for FY27.

State Technical Subcommittees’ Feedback

- Purpose: Working groups and subcommittees will be used to assist NRCS with implementing conservation on working lands through financial assistance programs authorized under the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018.

- State Policy: Vermont State Bulletin: SB_VT_440-26-01 FY2026 Program Workgroups
- National Policy: The state conservationist provides state program leadership for establishing state policies, priority resource concerns, and other priorities using recommendations of state technical committees and tribal conservation advisory councils according to the Title 440 Conservation Programs Manual, Part 501 “Locally Led Conservation and Program Delivery” (440 CPM Part 501)

Soils Subcommittee (Led by Maggie Payne)

Feedback

- Improving soils data provided for nutrient management by providing an updated Nitrate Leaching Index. This is in review and we hope it is proposed and put out in the coming year
- Providing support and guidance for soil health sampling (CEMA 216) and the regenerative pilot program
- Soil health lab (SHREC) out of UVM can provide technical support for conducting soil health tests for CEMA 216. They are now on the list for providing that information.
- Suggestion to add criteria to CEMA 216 for Vermont to collect additional soil health information that could be used by farmers to improve and monitor soil health such as collecting samples to a deeper depth than the required eight inches.

Recommendations for FY27

- Priority Resource Concerns - Soil Compaction, Organic Matter depletion, soil organism loss or degradation, aggregate instability. Water quality - Nutrients transported to surface water, nutrients transported to ground water
- Priority Practices - Soil health management, nutrient management
- Priority Area - None

Comments/Questions:

Laura DiPietro (VAAFME): We work with the Geological Survey and they are interested in doing work on the Nitrate Leaching Index based on actual sampling and data and analysis to make sure it works well for what we are seeing in the field, because we take samples at almost all of the farms we go to for groundwater.

Maggie Payne (NRCS): That would be great if you have names of folks that should be included in that [Nitrate Leaching Index] discussion, I can definitely send that on to them.

Laura DiPietro (VAAFME): I will email you. Thanks!

Water Quality Subcommittee (Led by Joe Bondi)

Feedback

- Support TMDL efforts throughout the state, implement water quality and soil conservation practices on working lands
- Current funding seems to be acceptable.
- There was a healthy discussion on highlighting and implementing treatment systems (Phosphorus removal system (782)). Forming a work group to discuss. Dead Creek could be a pilot watershed.

- PFAS testing was also discussed but it was unclear who would actually want to do this practice.

Recommendations for FY27

- Priority Resource Concerns - Water Quality (all), Water Quantity (depletion, irrigation, seeps), Soil concerns, Aquatic (elevated water temps)
- Priority Practices - Current Water Quality practices accepted. Add Road/Trail Closure, practices 101, 102, 110, 116, 157, 159, 161, 162, 163, 164, 336
- Priority Areas - source water protection watersheds, NWQI watersheds, and the Champlain Basin
- WPT - 303(d) ag impaired watersheds; state priority watersheds, source water protection area watersheds

Comments/Questions: None

Small Farms Subcommittee (Led by Cheyanne Rico)

The committee included members from UVM Extension, the Vegetable and Berries Growers Association, the Agency of Agriculture, NRCDs, American Farmland Trust, Interlace Commons, the Intervale, as well as NRCS planners. We don't have a definition of a "small farm", but the current administration did put out a guide for small family farms as it relates to USDA assistance.

For context, 50% of farms in Vermont are less than 75 acres. Around 41 percent are less than 49 acres. Just around 13 percent are less than 9 acres. That is according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

For more context, in FY 25, we had a small farm fund pool that had about two million dollars of funding. That went away in FY26, but in FY26, we rolled out the locally led conservation delivery model in which conservation districts can propose how our EQIP funding is directed. Three of our conservation districts did include small farm proposals and, in FY26, within those three districts, there was two-and-half million dollars in funding requested, so it is anticipated that the statewide request for small farms would be much higher.

Also, in FY26, we have the regenerative pilot program, and so between RPP and these three small farm proposals, those were essentially the only avenues for these farms to receive funding unless they were a beginning farmer. There was no general cropland pool in FY26.

Feedback

- Over half of all operations in Vermont are 75 acres and less according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.
- There was a demand of over \$2.5 million within the 3 locally led small farm fund pools in FY26. Small farms did not rank well in RPP.
- Districts had to choose only 1 locally led priority to submit which may not have included a small farm focus
- Many small farms are organic/transition so we could capture this in that category

Comments/Questions:

Travis Thomason (NRCS): When I first got here, a lot of the producer feedback was that "Travis, NRCS spends a lot of money in Champaign Valley". This was rightfully so, as I believe that water quality is of significant importance. Some of the things that we have tried to do is diversify our portfolio and expand

to the small farms and I think that we did a good job in FY25.

It is always a challenge when there's a new administration. When they change priorities (the executive branch has a responsibility to tier their priorities), it's always a challenge for us when they change the business tool, because, like Cheyenne said, unlike the previous year, we didn't have a specific fund pool that could focus on specific priorities.

There was a shutdown there for about a six-week period. A lot of things changed during that time period and then we came back to work. A lot of new stuff was rolled out with in how we do business and the team did a good job trying to manage through those things.

We saw some unintended consequences with small farms. So, we really appreciate the subcommittee for highlighting this and just know that we do everything we can—policy says the state conservationist should, to every degree possible, adopt the recommendations of the State Technical Advisory Committee.

That concept of “to every degree possible” sometimes is a challenge when those business tools are changing. So, no excuses. We heard the small farm subcommittee recommendations loud and clear, and I know that the team will do everything they can next year to make sure that there are funds available.

Forest and Wildlife Subcommittee (Led by Toby Alexander)

The big concern out of our subcommittee was the payment scenarios. The drop in brush management payments and herbaceous weed treatment, mostly for invasive plant control. Depending on what components you're looking at for some of the difficult rates that we had prior, the drop was 85 to 90 percent of the cost of those practices.

Feedback

- Using Locally Led to help identify priority geographic areas, priorities from new updated Wildlife Action Plan, and other wildlife priorities
- Engage with VTFWD to see if there is a Wildlife Action Plan species or habitat to prioritize
- Concern about Brush Management payments decreasing and cascading effects on other practices
- Perceived that engineering is limiting for stream crossings in the forest. Use their AMP tables for designing. Dave Wilcox from Forest and Parks offered to help streamline the engineering process in Forestland by using their existing AMP guidelines.
- Maintain 10% wildlife funding

Recommendations for FY27

- Priority Resource Concerns- no change
- Priority Practices - Add 314 Brush Management and 666 FSI, 315 HWC, 654 Road Closure, 560 Access Road
- Priority Areas- none, use the locally led process to determine
- Use new Wildlife Action Plan to help set priorities for species/habitat
- Remove statewide question “is the site well suited or not”- not effective
- Fencing to exclude deer from tree plantings and regeneration areas was highlighted as a strong need

Comments/Questions: None

ACEP Subcommittee (Led by Julia Grey)

Feedback

- Simplify statewide GARC regions for upcoming area-wide market analysis.
- Elevate ranking priorities on flood resilience, wetland and riparian area importance, drought resilience, wildlife connectivity, and geographic areas targeting wetland conservation in Lake Champlain Valley, Otter Creek, and downstream of Brandon.
- Involve conservation districts in process to designate locally important soils.
- Consider agreement approach to assist with stewardship workload (WRE/RCPP)

Recommendations for FY27

- Priority Resource Concerns - Flood resilience, drought resilience, forestland threat of development, farm viability, connectivity to conserved lands (wetlands), habitat connectivity
- Priority Practices - long-term protection of land.
- Priority Areas - Otter Creek (wetlands), Lake Champlain Basin, Addison County, “resilient” areas like headwaters that have capacity for flood resiliency and species flow/diversity, hilltop farms with soils that could potentially be locally designated

We are always looking for new members with new perspectives for the ACEP Subcommittee.

Comments/Questions: None

Subject Matter Experts Subcommittee (Led by Stephanie Vasliopoulos)

The subcommittee is typically made up of NRCS employees that have five or more years of experience.

Feedback

- No watershed prioritization needed for CSP
- Leaning into the existing CSP and EQIP resource concern overlap for assessments might be beneficial
- NWQI - add Dead Creek (Addison) and Jewel Brook
- How do we evaluate the severity of the resource concern to fund projects that need it most
- Rankings were hard to predict and going back to land use is preferred. It was hard to find a “home” for small projects, specialized requests, etc.
- Repeat customers outcompete new customers.

Recommendations for FY27

- Priority Resource Concerns - Soil Quality, Concentrated Erosion, Field Sediment/Nutrient Loss, Sheet/Rill Erosion, Storage and Handling of Pollutants, Livestock Production Limitation, Degraded Plant Condition, Pest Management
- Priority Practices - Waste Storage Facility, Brush Management, Grassed WW, Lined WW, Tree Planting, Roof and Covers, Fence, Pasture/Hay Planting, HUAP, Forest Trails and Landings
- Priority Areas - Water source protection, 303(d) Ag impaired watersheds, NWQI watersheds

Comments/Questions:

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Is Subject Matter Expert NRCS only or NRCS and Partner staff?

Stephanie Vasilopoulos (NRCS): It's heavily NRCS, but there may be a few partners.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): That's what I thought. I just wanted to clarify. This is not easy stuff. It takes two years of our process for staff to get familiar with it, but partners are involved in it.

Marli Rupe (DEC): How do you answer the question, "How do we evaluate the severity of the resource concern to fund projects that need it most?"?

Stephanie Vasilopoulos (NRCS): We don't have an answer quite yet. We are trying to see what will come out for fiscal year 27, but I think there could be some evaluation about how ranking questions are worded.

Marli Rupe (DEC): As much as you are willing to engage with partners on that will be really important.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): In years past, we had a lot of ranking pools. This year, when we got back from the shutdown, we were told that we can have five ranked pools, and then we have categories within those ranked pools, and then in each category, application, success rate and, if it sounds weird, it is.

It was hard for us to understand in our business tools how they were evaluated. We did not know how these applications would be evaluated and how they would rank out.

We learned that the more resource concerns that a planner would check off and that they would address, the more points in the system it would give them. There were some unintended consequences in the system that we didn't know existed. So, we've learned that.

We know how it's processed in the system. We assume that if there aren't changes made next year, our plan is to put questions in the system and points so that that will happen. That is our intention. We will figure out how to make it work.

Luis Aponte (NRCS): Additionally, there is a complimentary version of this subcommittee in which we report some of these things out to partners which may be the next slide, so as we develop these things, as we answer these questions, they will be presented to our partners through another subcommittee which is focused on we are making decisions to partners.

Marli Rupe (DEC): It is certainly critical as we are moving into changing regulations.

Working Lands Subcommittee (Led by Stephanie Vasilopoulos)

This subcommittee asked similar questions that the Subject Matter Expert Subcommittee did.

Feedback

- Weather Resilience is a resource concern that we need to understand better from NRCS
- Increased education on how commonly used practices can meet the Terrestrial/Aquatic RC
- Waste Storage Facility remains an important practice for Vermont
- Engineering can be a limiting factor. The 900 series TA funds can help.
- Funding gap for small farms, organic farms, specialty crops
- Recommend data analysis on what gets funded: practices, types of farms, etc.

Recommendations for FY27

- Priority Resource Concerns - Soil Quality, Concentrated Erosion, Field Sediment/Nutrient Loss, Sheet/Rill Erosion, Storage and Handling of Pollutants,

Livestock Production Limitation, Degraded Plant Condition, Aquatic Habitat
•Priority Practices - Waste Storage Facility, Brush Management, Grassed WW, No-till Residue Management, Tree Planting, Roof and Covers, Fence, Pasture/Hay Planting, HUAP, Forest Trails and Landings
•Priority Areas - Designated Source Water Areas, Lake Carmi, Tickle Naked Pond, NWQI watersheds

Comments/Questions:

Local Working Groups Subcommittee (Led by Phyllicia Moore)

These are local working groups that are led primarily by our conservation districts in partnership with NRCS. This is where we get the feedback from the people that these programs are intended to serve. We've broken down the presentation into tiers in regard to the feedback and priority resource concerns that we have received.

Priority Resource Concerns for FY27

Top Tier – Appearing Across Nearly All Local Work Groups:

- Phosphorus reduction and water quality improvement
- Nutrient management
- Soil health and agronomic management
- Flood resilience and floodplain restoration
- Riparian and stream restoration
- Forest health and forest resilience
- Wildlife habitat protection and enhancement
- Drought resilience and water supply concerns
- Compliance with RAPs, AMPs and CAFO requirements
- Engineering and technical assistance backlog concerns
- Outreach to underserved or underrepresented agricultural communities (flower, veggie, orchard, small-scale farms)

Priority Conservation Practices for FY27

Top Tier – Appearing Across 3+ Local Work Groups:

- Grazing management (often paired with pasture improvement and livestock exclusion from waterways)
- Nutrient Management Plans
- Cover crops
- Forest Management Plans (CPA 106)
- High tunnels / Low tunnels (including 325 High Tunnel System and 821 Low Tunnel System)
- CPS 336 (includes references to biochar applications)
- Manure injection
- Waste storage systems (pits and leachate management)
- Farmstead improvements
- Riparian buffer & floodplain restoration

Priority Areas for FY27

Specific Watersheds

- Joe's Brook

- Calendar Brook
- Flood-prone areas in the Lamoille River watershed
- Essex County - Memphremagog, Passumpsic, and Upper Connecticut watersheds

Priority Areas for FY27

General

- Rutland County
- Winooski District Service Area
- Agricultural lands with high phosphorus concerns in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties
- Concerns about development in floodplains and wetlands.
- Village cores and urbanized neighborhoods with contaminated soils
- Heavily forested and contaminated working lands
- Addison County

Other Recommendations for FY27

- NRCS should increase outreach to producers unfamiliar with available programs
- Beginning farmers should continue receiving higher payment rates and targeted support
- Smaller and non-traditional farms may not fit easily into existing funding categories
- Repeatedly unfunded applicants should receive consideration to maintain trust in NRCS
- Technical and engineering requirements may create barriers for some applicants
- Financial assistance should consider both environmental benefit and farm viability
- More payment up front - reimbursement model can create financial stress for landowners
- Incentive Payments are too low esp. for invasive treatment
- Increase local NRCS planning staff and increase coordination with partner organizations
- Aligning CPA/DIA funding decisions for FMPs and NMPs with FPR and VAAFM deadlines
- Multiple engagement channels
- Coordinate multi-partner site visits (NRCS + BCCD + Extension, etc.)
- Year-round outreach and survey collection

Comments/Questions:

Jennifer Byrne (WRNRCD) (from the chat): I would just say that those counties identified themselves as priorities. I am sure every county and watershed would too.

Phylicia Moore (NRCS): Absolutely. I think everybody who provided that would consider themselves priorities. Based on the feedback and the information that was received from the locally led, local working groups, the conservation districts have the opportunity to submit a locally led proposal to address some of the priorities that were identified so that those local voices could be heard within those spaces and within those areas. Stephanie will talk a little bit more about those local fund pools and how to address those priorities within our program areas.

Abe Collins (LCC) (from the chat): LandWEB has participated in the Soils Subcommittee and worked to communicate five plus years of recent focused work in Vermont by Vermont farmers, scientists and institutional partners to implement the technical and scientific tools and systems needed for high-quality soil mapping and monitoring.

Our deep 3D soil mapping work is critical to realizing improvements in locally led conservation, soil health, water quality, drought and flood mitigation, precision agriculture, agricultural yield, reduced input,

and hydrological modeling priorities. Next-generation, accurate, high-resolution soil mapping that is compliant with the norms described in Chapters 5 and 6 of the current edition of the USDA Soil Survey Manual is widely recognized priority for and by farmers, community members and local institutions.

In the Soils Subcommittee meeting, we briefly described current work and forward collaboration planning with Extension, UVM, Conservation Districts and NCSS on digital soil mapping, proximal soil sensing (e.g., electromagnetic induction, Cone Penetrometer measurement), stratified and repeated location GPS soil sampling strategies, deep soil coring and measurement (116 cm +), and soil profile/core horizonation work.

We described our aim and request for the support of NRCS, state agency and legislative partners to support this work and assist us to find appropriate funding. We also brought up the need - widely recognized by soil scientists everywhere - to permanently retire the still locally pervasive but outdated practice of shallow, simple random soil sampling for soils research, as it is not scientifically defensible to claim that we are tracking change in soils that can be ascribed to management when random measurements are taken in different locations at baseline and subsequent monitoring events.

This suggestion was validated by two soil scientists in the meeting. Thanks for your attention to this long comment.

I felt it was important that the record be corrected to include these past contributions and discussions that were part of the Soils Subcommittee, and that we hoped would be conveyed as community and farmer recommendations for the State Technical Committee meeting.

Jennifer Byrne (WRNRCD): Thank you so much for presenting on all of this and on locally led. I'm wondering, in terms of a next step, I wonder if there's some way we could get to a more finalized version of the product where the districts, through potentially NRCC, could coordinate the language that we want to formally submit. Understanding that, like Travis said, the state technical committee responses are taken into account. What's the final language that is being taken into account? Maybe we could get to that together.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Thank you for that. And that's something that I think is always on the top of my mind. I am super interested. I do think you have a really good solid proposal and maybe we can talk more about how you guys do, as a local work group, kind of formalize these broad recommendations of what NRCS can do. Because it is a lot of information that we consume every year.

We do our best to do that, and it would be super helpful, as Jenn points out, I think, to have the districts, whether it be through NRCC or VACD, to say, "Hey, here's our formal recommendation as a group", to say these are the top priorities. So maybe we can talk offline. I'm looking at Michelle and Jenn. Maybe I can connect with you and Claire to figure out "How do we do that in a way that the districts have their voice represented through the local work groups and then go from there?". We'll talk more on that, Jenn.

I think that where we're at is really "what's the next step each year to kind of aggregate local work group feedback and then present that to NRCS and go from there?". Thanks for the feedback, Jenn.

Vermont State Spending Plan (Led by Stephanie Vasilopoulos)

- Purpose: In distributing fiscal year funds in the business tools for obligation in conservation program contracts, state conservationists must develop a state spending plan based on state-designated ranking pools and any desired spending plan categories
- Policy: The state conservationist, with advice from the state technical committee and tribal conservation advisory council, as applicable, must develop a state spending plan to address program and national priorities, natural resource concerns, and priority geographic locations within state or tribal lands. See program-specific subparts for more

guidance. (Title 440 CPM Part 530)

- Financial Assistance Programs Available
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 - Locally Led Proposals
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Agricultural Management Program (AMA)
 - Conservation Innovation Grant (state)
- Vermont 2027 Spending Plan Priorities - EQIP

EQIP Priorities	FY27 Spending Plan (Discretion of National)
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Locally Led Conservation	Up to 50% of EQIP Allocation
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Regenerative Pilot Program	25% (EQIP and CSP)
NWQI	<1%
GWW	<1%
CIG	<1%
Beginning Farmer, Socially Disadvantaged, Wildlife	5%, 5%, 10% respectively of total allocation

CPA/DIA/CEMA	TA Funds
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- CSP Priorities; Agricultural land, Forestland, VT Zone Pools, Organic (8%), Regenerative (25%), Beginning Farmer (5%), Socially Disadvantaged (5%)
- RCPP Priorities; Projects 1865, 2132, and 2311 are wrapping up in FY26. A new NOFO has been announced for new projects in FY27!
- ACEP; ALE, WRE, and Stewardship
- AMA; General (High Tunnel focused)
- CIG; Statewide opportunity
- Other Priorities as determined by the National Office

Comments/Questions: None

NRCS State Technical Committee 2.0 Feedback

Luis Aponte, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives

We are working on some improvement efforts for our state technical committee meetings. The general feedback has been pretty positive. A lot of people enjoy this space. A lot of people look forward to seeing some of the updates that are provided by Resources, Programs, Engineering, and some of the technical work that we are doing and some of the Programs work that we are doing. We are doing pretty good, but that doesn't mean that we can't do better. We can always do better.

We are committed to making this space a productive space for us and our partners to share ideas and to receive feedback that will help us deliver conservation better to producers.

Respondents:

Respondents to the survey included local government partners, federal partners, conservation districts, land grant folks, and NRCS staff. We had a pretty good amount of responses that provided us with a good amount of feedback. It was great to hear from them.

Why You're Here:

The main reason respondents said they attend these meetings **is to promote cohesive delivery of technical assistance to Vermont producers**. Ultimately, that's what we really want to do—provide conservation technical assistance to our producers and landowners in a way in which it feels coordinated and not just partners here and partners there doing the same work. We want to make sure that we're all coordinating and not making duplicative efforts.

A lot of people said they came for **Agency updates**. Fourteen people answered that they want to know how the sauce is made. A lot of the ranking and NRCS-specific things, I think people are interested in hearing about that.

There was a big variety in the reason that people gave for coming to these meeting and that was great to hear. I appreciate everyone providing their two cents.

What's Working Well

- The **Hybrid Structure** is convenient for partners who are not able to make it here in person.
- **Technical Updates** from our Resources staff and our Engineering staff are really critical to the knowledge that our partners are trying to impart to producers.
- **Program Updates** are great because we all want to know what's available for producers and how we can work together and provide conservation to producers.
- Some of the comments include:
 - "I've attended these meetings for a very long time, and they are consistently critical for me to do the best job I can do for the state and producers."
 - "I find these meetings to be some of the most informative at a state-wide level of all that I attend."
 - "The most valuable part of these meetings is the real-time interaction with NRCS with the opportunity to ask questions. This helps partners understand how federal-level decisions are being implemented in Vermont."

Areas of Improvement

- Forty-four percent of respondents stated they do not understand the role of State Technical Committee or could use a refresher. This is an opportunity within one of our meetings to provide [information] on what the role of the State Technical Committee is and where it fits in in the feedback loop. It is something that we will consider in the future.

- More targeted meetings, less agenda items, and more time for partner feedback and discussion. [We can make] adjustments to our agendas so that they are not so packed. These meetings are four times a year, so we want to add as much value as we can from the updates we provide, but we also get that packing something into five or ten minutes could be less informative. The rapid-fire of updates is a little complex for folks, so we want to take that into consideration.
- Some State Technical Committee attendees would like to hear more from the Subcommittees and from Districts who may be doing locally led conservation. We will take this into consideration as we build our agendas in the future.

Comments/Questions:

Travis Thomason (NRCS): If you've hung around me at least for the past few years, [you will know that] I have always wanted to do this survey because I really feel like it will help us get better. If I'm going to use two hours of your time once a quarter, then I want to make sure that we are doing it the right way that's most helpful. So, we really appreciate the feedback. That feedback is hot off of the press. I hadn't actually seen it because we left [the survey] open as late as we could so that you could respond.

We'll take this feedback sincerely and we'll make improvements for the future. If you do have recommendations on the format, please send them to Luis Aponte.

Jennifer Byrne (WRNRCD) (from the chat): Comment re: Local Funding Pools - I just want to put on the record this letter that describes a request for a slight change in how Local Funding pools work in the state, considering the alterations in NRCS tools and ranking categories this year:
<https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/local-funding-pool-2026-letter-to-usda-nrcs>

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Jenn put a comment in the chat about local fund pools. That's something that we started a couple of years ago. Local fund pools, we have been doing it for a while, but a couple of years ago, we really jumped into it, really dedicating a significant amount of money into tiering to local priorities.

I will say it was a challenge last year. Again, back to the way that our business pools are used, where the local fund pools have their own rate pool and when we were told to go to five, in the middle of it all, it was really an adjustment to figure out what that looks like.

So, to Jenn's point, she's given us some recommendations. She sent us this letter a little bit earlier. The reason the note said draft or tentative for local fund pools and the reason we haven't issued a note to Districts saying, "Hey, this is your proposal", it's two things: this Administration wants to be the ones to announce things and so this is a draft right now, and we want to respect that.

We're working with the Chief to roll out what we're looking at. The other thing is that, we don't know what changes are going to be made with the business pools. And so, we're kind of taking a strategic pause to figure out what FY27 is going to look like. Those are tentative. We've told the districts, "Hey, tentatively, this is how we're going to invest in you". We're just kind of at a strategic pause until we figure out what FY27 looks like.

I will tell you that we are way ahead of the game when it comes to preparing for the future fiscal year. When I tell other states, this is where we are in our planning process, they tell me, "Travis, you're crazy because we typically don't get stuff for the fiscal year until after October 1", but if you know me, I hate being reactive and I want to be proactive. There's that balance of trying to figure out each fiscal year. So, my commitment to you is to strengthen locally led, to get better at state technical committee meetings and just know that your feedback is awesomely valuable and I'm going to do everything that I can to work on your recommendations. So, thanks for your feedback for State Tech 2.0.

Partner Updates

Chris Smith (USFWS): The only thing that I will touch on is one of the new NRCS priorities. The wildlife one in particular. That is pretty consistent with what the Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife has seen as well. There has been a push within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to open as much of our land as possible to recreation, including hunting and fishing.

Several of our national fish hatcheries that have land that has not been open are developing hunt/fish plans right now. I just want to point out that some of those administrative priorities are aligning across the different agencies and bureaus of the federal government.

Marli Rupe (DEC): I have a couple of things to provide on behalf of Laura DiPietro who had to leave early. First of all, most of you know that Nina Gage has moved on from the Agricultural Agency to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. They are very lucky to have her. Steve Cash is the new assistant director for the Water Quality Division.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): So, Steve took Nina's place?

Marli Rupe (DEC): Correct. Sonya Howlett has been moved up to supervisor of the Pay for Performance, the CEAP, and the FAP programs. She is going to be out on maternity leave relatively soon, so if you want to talk to her about that catch her soon. Today is the deadline for the pay for performance program sign-up and for the CEAP sign-up. So, if folks don't know that, please let them know.

From DEC, a couple of things: I'm sure most of you are aware that there's a lot going on in CAFO right now. The Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation process. First of all, DEC has always had a CAFO program. So, if everyone is feeling like this is brand new and scary, there always has been a CAFO permit and a CAFO program. The CAFO permit has been updated. There is a new individual permit being sent out for draft right now.

There is a lot of confusion in the farming community about this. Both to NRCS and the other Partners that are in the room and on the call, please help us get the correct information out there and to get the questions from the field that we need.

There will be more coming out as rules are finalized with the legislature in the next year. There are a couple major fears within the ag community and they are very understandable, one of which is that they're suddenly going to have to start doing a whole bunch of things they've never had to do.

We are certainly advising farmers to make sure they look at their LFO and MFO permit language first and see what you're supposed to be doing under that versus the CAFO. A lot of things that I think farmers are concerned about are actually already in their permits. So, work on that.

Make sure that you're aware of what the requirements currently are. And then the other concern is that suddenly you're going to have to get a CAFO permit if there's an inspection and there is a discharge.

I know me saying this isn't going to mean a single thing, but I'm trying to tell you that that is not the intention of DEC to come out and hand you a CAFO permit application the day that a discharge is seen. The goal is very much to help eliminate the discharge. That is always going to be the first priority and to address those things.

So please give feedback to us. And let us know what you're hearing and how you think we can best respond to some of the concerns that are out there.

If NRCS staff or any partners would like some training on what CAFO is in the future, as this finalizes, I'm sure DEC will be happy to provide that.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): We'll take you up on the plan.

Marli Rupe (DEC): My question also relates to some of the other things that are going on. Usually, one of the things that is shared in the State Tech Committee is the dollars that you spent. In looking at the locally led recommendation for the spending plan where 50% is EQIP, obviously, you don't know what your EQIP is going to be for next year. And Travis, I very much recognize what you're saying about being proactive, because if you've already allocated 50% of your EQIP, you're hoping to get more funding.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Yes, and we've seen that in the last two weeks.

Marli Rupe (DEC): Exactly. The challenge though is not knowing the percent. If locally led is 50%, how much is going for non-locally led? And, as we talk about CAFO, as we look at farms that do go into CAFO permits that will need major infrastructure work. It is concerning to see a large amount like that going to the locally led and maybe less available for infrastructure improvements that might be needed for treating direct discharges and for meeting our state regulations.

So, I do know that one of the locally led proposals had a large amount for infrastructure, which is great, but we really would love to know how much of the money was left outside of locally led for EQIP. I do know that sometimes information is hard to share.

It would also be really interesting to know, if at all possible, how many applications for infrastructure were not funded, or what percent were for infrastructure versus agronomic. Those kinds of numbers are very helpful to us at the state level as we decide how we're going to allocate our funds as well. It's really, really critical to our decision making. So, just want to flag that.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Thank you for that, Marli. I will tell you right now that we are not able to share a lot of that information from a number's perspective, just because it has to go up through NRCS and they give us the ability to share that or not.

So, we're hoping that sometime in October, at the October State Tech Committee meeting, that we'll be able to share some of that data because we'll have a fiscal year line of sight. I know the timing is not perfect, but we'll do our best.

Laura Ranker (DEC): Hi, I'm Laura Ranker. I'm with the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Program with DEC. And just two things: recently Celia Larson did a presentation on the drought, and I just want to offer that to NRCS or anyone who's interested in hearing a presentation on the drought report that came out. So that's available to anyone.

As Joe said, we're working on the source water protection watersheds. I was happy to see, in the priority areas, source water identified by some of the subcommittees.

We're currently looking at watersheds and expanding and that type of thing. If there are watersheds like one of the subcommittees specifically identified in some areas, please send that information to us so that we can look at it. We're doing an analysis right now. I just put that out there and Joe is in the process of coordinating a meeting of the committee and we've extended that invitation out to others in the agricultural department and we're trying to get input from a wider group on those priority source water watersheds.

Dave Adams (VFWD): I have a fish and wildlife update. Just want to continue to reiterate the value of our 22-year cooperative agreement that we've had with the USDA/NRCS and the amazing work that we've put on the ground the last several years.

And looking back to this winter, we implemented some really nice cutting projects on some really large projects focusing on the Young Forest Initiative.

A tremendous amount of invasive patrol on the landscape, and just doing a really good job of connecting with the Vermont landowners who own, you know, most of the state out there and providing any guidance to them and technical assistance.

I just want to reiterate how valuable this partnership has been to provide our mission on the ground and to help get priority practices and priority watersheds implemented and stuff like that.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Goes both ways. Yeah, appreciate you. Thanks for all the support.

Noel Dodge (VFWD): I just wanted to add on more of an administrative update from Vermont Fish and Wildlife. My name is Noel Dodge. I'm the private lands and habitat program manager for the department. And you may wonder where that came from. We recently split the lands and habitat program into private lands and habitat and public lands and habitat.

So, I'm the private lands manager and I'm supervising Dave and Travis with their work with NRCS and Tyler a little as well. So, I just wanted to give that update, so everyone at least knew my face and name. So, thanks.

Michelle Monroe (VACD): On the personnel side. Julia King has assumed the duties of the Vermont Agriculture Water Quality Partnership Coordinator and is doing her usual excellent job.

Some of the districts are celebrating anniversaries right around this time. These few years, we're hitting the 80-year mark for many of them. So, Franklin County had its 80th anniversary this week. So, you might want to keep your eyes out, some of those showed up on calendar.

We have a new drone in our hands, so we can resume doing drone work with an NDAA compatible drone. And we have a LIDAR sensor that is coming that is a survey-quality sensor that should be able to get elevation data within about a centimeter. That is what we're expecting in terms of accuracy. We'll have to get it set up and test it first and see how it is. But that's what we're looking at. And we are making that available—historically, we've pretty much focused on doing work for our NRCS and occasionally we've helped FSA with some disaster work—but we are looking to actually make that service available to partners. So, we have an hourly rate for that work. We have, in addition, the LIDAR multi-spectral sensor that can be used for things like vegetative health, invasives, identification, a whole swath of things. So, if you're interested, reach out, we'll be happy to talk about that.

And we've talked quite a bit about the locally led funding pools, so I won't touch on that right now.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): We do want to give the Districts a little bit more opportunity to highlight their priorities and their locally led proposals. It was great last year. I heard a lot of great feedback about it, and we want to do that again. I think we just need to coordinate with the Districts to see what that looks like, but that will be coming, so keep an eye out there.

Lesley-Ann Dupigny (UVM): Everybody keeps looking at me every time the word "drought" comes up, so I thought I could stand up and say something. Morning, everybody. Lesley-Ann Dupigny, Vermont State Climatologist. I just want to give you an update on all of the stuff that's going on, particularly in my office.

There's a drought dashboard being created right now, particularly in partnership with NIDIS, which is the National Integrated Drought Information System. So that should be coming online within a couple of months or so.

If you have any lessons learned, wrap ups, resources or links that you'd love for me to have, send those to me.

I'm also coordinating a meeting with Rocky Bilotta, who's the new Northeast Drought Early Warning Systems coordinator for the Northeast and the Middle Atlantic. I'm having a meeting with him so that everybody can learn what's going on at the regional level in terms of drought planning and what are some of the tools that are coming down the pipe. So, thank you, Wendy, for already answering that e-mail this morning. If anybody else would like to get on that [drought e-mail], please let me know.

Jennifer Byrne (WRNRCD): Hi there, everyone. I just wanted to provide an update from our District about our training program—our farm forest training program. We happily got some private money to continue for the next three years. So, watch this space, this website here, and you can watch a video on there if you want.

What's going to launch pretty much immediately is our AgLearn accountability groups—our peer support network. And so that's something that even NRCS staff would be welcome to join. It would be like a once-a-month type of seminar session.

We are hosting our boot camps, both in Vermont and in the U.S. Virgin Islands once a year. The kickoff really of that is our CEMA 216 soil health training mini-boot camp, September 10th through the 12th at Vermont State University. And I can share information on that.

The only other thing I wanted to share with you all is: August 4th and 5th, our district is hosting the president of the Bank of North Dakota to come teach us about how public banking works for farmers specifically. And so, I'm going to put an invitation in the chat. It's really relevant if you think about risk and disaster resiliency and funding and farmers, so that's all of us, I'm sure.

Jess Rubin (UVM): Thanks everyone for all the amazing work you're doing. I just have a brief announcement from a non-governmental partner, MycoEvolve and Ecological Resilience, and also the UVM ALE department.

This is the last year of a seven-year restoration project at Shelburne Farms. So, I put in the chat a link to a few more events that folks are welcome to attend for free. And, if they don't work for you, we're happy to schedule a time to offer a tour to your team between now and the frost. We'll also have some fact sheets coming out that will be on the UVM extension website and a manual and a publication. Thank you so much.

Abe Collins (LCC): Hi, thanks for everything. I wanted to emphasize a couple things that have been in our work and on our minds. One is improving the water holding capacity of soils and this relates directly to NRCS.

Everyone's familiar with the NRCS fact sheet that says a 1% increase in soil organic matter increases water holding capacity 20 to 25,000 gallons. But that's something that we should probably do a course correction on. The work of Minasny and McBratney out of Australia has showed that that's not the case, that increasing organic matter barely budges the water holding content of soil. So, what becomes relevant is increasing the depth of the sponge, if you will, because it doesn't take much organic matter. That is a widely circulated factoid that can be traced to the origins of where it came from.

So, important as increasing organic matter is, we actually want to be focusing on increasing the depth of structured soil, which Vermont farmers are doing with other partners right now. So that was one thing I wanted to prioritize.

I definitely want to prioritize, as I mentioned in my long comment, 3D deep soil mapping which is ongoing in Vermont and happening with conservation districts, UVM, extension, farmers, and other organizations. And we need it. We all know, everybody who works in soil science knows that we need better soil maps to do better water planning. And then there's one more thing.

So, all of this work is ongoing. We're looking for partnership and funding. We are working with the

Extension, with UVM, and with conservation districts. But I think there's something really big that relates to all things related to water.

To do good water modeling, we need good soil maps. And we know that the USDA soil maps, as profound an accomplishment as they've been, are too coarse to do quality water modeling. So, we know how to update those. In fact, we've been doing it. We're doing electromagnetic induction mapping and deep soil coring and cone penetrometer testing, all these things. But the other piece of it has to do with the curve number.

The curve number is the hydrological modeling basis for everything that the NRCS and most of the other agencies and most academics do for water modeling. The curve number is a non-peer reviewed, empirical statistical shortcut developed and released in 1954 that is the basis for every single water model that we're dealing with, including our phosphorus index, the SWAT model, the APEX model, the farm prep model, and it is at this point in the global hydrology scientific community, widely discredited, and even NRCS hydraulic engineers have said for a long time now, that we need to retire this and we need to move to gridded physical models.

And so, I want to emphasize that: for our phosphorus indices, for all these other models, for the payment for phosphorus farm prep (which is really just apex models), we're using an empirical black box tool that was actually developed for designing ponds in the Midwest in the 50s.

It's being used inappropriately, and it's especially inapplicable when it comes to extreme weather, which is all we're facing these days. So, I want to raise that flag because it is such a priority for us to move to what all top hydrologists, including, of course, Fred Ogden, head of NOAA (he's also the chief scientist for NOAA).

They're saying we need to move to physical gridded models. Farmers in Vermont are doing this and we're doing the requisite foundational work like 3D soil mapping and all the weather station work.

So, I just wanted to plant that flag because this should be a serious conversation amongst all people involved in natural resources management. Especially, the NRCS. And we're available to have this conversation and I really think that it should be a priority conversation, weekly and monthly, ongoing. Thank you.

Luis Aponte (NRCS): Thanks, Abe. Thanks for the feedback and/or as you call them, the raised flags as well.

I think that may be the end of our updates right now. I think we wanted to open it up for some of the questions that you may have had from the start of the meeting as we went through the agenda, or if you have any questions now, or some feedback that you may be interested in providing. So, we just want to open it up. We have about ten minutes.

Michelle Monroe (VACD): I was curious if there's a reason why the small farms aren't ranking as well in RPP and in EQIP. Is it strictly that multiple concerns that a smaller farm just doesn't have as many first concerns, or are there other factors that are causing these health farms to rank pretty poorly?

Brandon Carpenter (NRCS): There is a lot of variability out there. By going from the multiple pool system to the multiple category system, we used to have say there were 100 points that we could divide out. Points as far as answering the questions. By making the multiple categories, you just kept decreasing this range of specific ranking questions.

So, you went to this category and you kept branching down and branching down and branching down and eventually you might get left with a question where you could answer, "Yes, this sounds like a positive resource benefit," but you diluted the value of that down so much that it's only worth 2 points now. Whereas the old system you might have got 50 points based off of that,

That had a lot to do with the variability overall of what we have. So, we hope to level that out with this standard resource concern. That's how we hope to at least level that area. There will be outliers, sure, but I think that should improve there.

The RPP stuff was a little bit more challenging, sort of a full-farm assessment, and you need it to be all resource concerns by the end of the contract. So, I think that that perhaps provided some challenges. But do you have anything to add to that Stephanie?

Stephanie Vasilopoulos (NRCS): Yes, I think hitting that point on the ranking categories and having it be our first year through that, I think we learned a lot of where projects ultimately ended up breaking out.

Michelle Monroe (VACD): Has the national office been open to hearing about how this is working, given that they're saying they're "Keeping working lands and working hands"?

Travis Thomason (NRCS): One hundred percent. There's a lot of feedback that has been given on some of the challenges with business tools and how they're working. They recognize the limitations.

There's that balance of streamlining the work that we're doing and transparency in some of the work that we're doing too. I think it's just an iterative process to figure out what that looks like.

One of the reasons we have this meeting is that we have financial assistance available to a producer, and it's all merit-based. So, a producer has a conservation plan or project they want funded, and our team will go out, assess it, develop a plan, put a proposal together, assess it, and rank it. And ideally, those projects, again, merit-based, that tier to the national priorities, the state priorities, and then local priorities, if you will, if there's a project that addresses all three of those priorities, and when I say state priorities, it's those things that we've talked about today.

So, we develop ranking questions. We weigh ranking questions based on the feedback that you can give us. And then ideally, those projects that address those issues or have the highest-ranking points will be the ones that are elevated and work through the system.

So, local fund pools are a little bit different because we just want to say specifically, "Hey, if it's a local priority, we're just going to compete with each other for those local funds, right?"

So, the big picture of that is taking everything that we've talked about today, getting ranking questions, weighing ranking questions, figuring out what the tool looks like and pushing that button and hoping that at the end of the fiscal year, we've done what you've asked us to do. And sometimes that's harder than it seems. And so, we appreciate your feedback and those questions because it holds us accountable. But that's what we're trying to do—align your priorities: the local level, the state level, to make sure that the projects we're investing in with EQIP, CSP, and ACEP, all tier to those priorities. Sometimes, it gets a little missed and we're trying to do the best we can today.

Michelle Monroe (VACD): I just want to say that I think one of the themes that we have seen with locally led has been strengthening small farms. And that's certainly a priority statewide. I mean, we're Vermont, we have farm to plate, we invest heavily in that. So just to, on the record, reiterate that that is a priority statewide.

Travis Thomason (NRCS): Yes, and I appreciate that. I appreciate that, Michelle.

I do know that you know I'm covering both states: Vermont and New Hampshire. [With] New Hampshire, I shared with them our locally led process and they're super interested, because right now, when their local work groups meet, what they do is, they spend two hours talking about local resource concerns and they have little stickers: red and yellow stickers, and they vote on them and they do it every single year, and folks are just not excited about that.

And so, we do things a little bit differently. We put our money where our mouth is, right? But we're really trying to address those locally led priorities. It is imperfect. It can't be perfect, I'll just say that, but I feel like we're getting better.

Julia King (VACD): You mentioned you're looking at year-round outreach work groups. What does that look like?

Phylicxia Moore (NRCS): Yes, that was some of the feedback. We don't know yet. I mentioned in some of the feedback that that was provided to us that there needed to be space for outreach year-round and having that collection of survey data.

We're still talking about what that looks like. I know that's something that the district managers are also talking about what that could look like. So hopefully we're able to get some of that information. I know as a part of that, Partnerships has talked about what can be reviewed, what can be released as a part of that outreach, that comes into play and how we provide that guidance on what that looks like. So, we're still waiting. It's in development. It's in progress.

Wrap-up

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

Team, thanks so much. It's great to have you here. Appreciate everybody's feedback. I recognize no one needs more meetings. I particularly am not growing fond of more meetings in my life. I recognize this as an important one.

So, please continue to keep your feedback coming to Luis. He'll take it. We'll get better at our meetings. I look forward to a locally led proposal. So NRCS DMs out there will work to get some more information out there. I really appreciate the great support and the great work that the team does out there—both NRCS and all of the partners out there. Dave, earlier you were talking about the long history of the agreement out there. We have many of those and we couldn't do this without them.

So, rock on, and I so appreciate all that you do. We'll see you sometime in October, officially again. So, thanks and have a great rest of your week. We'll talk to you soon. Take care. Thank you.

Future meetings:

- October 21, 2026 (tentative)

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



VT State Technical Committee
Meeting- July 15, 2026

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Welcome! VT State Tech Committee | July 15, 2026

Ground Rules for Hybrid Meetings

■ REMOTE attendees:

- MUTE your microphone in TEAMS
- Attendance: Type your name, title and affiliation into the chat
- Questions: "Raise your hand" or type your question in the chat
- Important reminder: The chat is for questions or comments relevant to the current topic/presentation. Please do not have "side conversations" in the chat

■ IN-PERSON attendees:

- Attendance: Sign in on the attendance sheet
- We are using a video camera, "Poly" which is in the north-central area of the room
 - Talk clearly and look towards the Poly
 - If logged into TEAMS, mute your speaker, microphone, and camera
 - Poly will serve as the speaker, microphone, and camera for the room
 - Please avoid side conversations as the Poly will pick them up and make it difficult for Teams participants to hear and it will distort the recording and transcript
- Questions: Raise your hand or use the chat in Teams



Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 - 9:40 am	Welcome and NRCS Update	Travis Thomason, STC
9:40 - 9:50 am	Farm Service Agency Update	FSA Rep.
9:50 – 9:55 am	Rural Development Update	RD Rep.
9:55 - 10:10 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegation
10:10- 10:20 am	NRCS Resources Update	SRC, NRCS
10:20-11 am	State Tech Subcommittee Reports	Subcommittee POC
11:00- 11:10 am	Vermont FA Spending Plan	ASTC-FO, NRCS
11:10- 11:15 am	State Tech Committee 2.0	ASTC-Partnerships, NRCS
11:15- 11:55 am	Partner Updates	Partners
11:55- 12:00	Wrap-Up	Travis Thomason, NRCS

USDA Vermont State Office
356 Mountain View Drive,
Colchester, VT

MS Teams
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Natural Resources Conservation Service
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State Conservationist Updates

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New NRCS Chief- Colton L. Buckley



Colton L. Buckley serves as the 19th Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the nation's largest private lands conservation agency. NRCS supports American agricultural productivity throughout the United States by helping farmers, ranchers, and private landowners protect and conserve natural resources on private working lands. NRCS employees in the field work side-by-side with producers and partners in every State and territory. Colton is the youngest Chief in NRCS history.

Colton is a distinguished leader in private-lands conservation, most recently appointed by President Donald J. Trump to serve as Associate Chief of NRCS. As Associate Chief, he directed and oversaw the agency's financial and technical assistance programs, management and strategy, science and technology, and soil science and resource assessment deputy areas, in tandem with the partnerships division. Prior to his appointment as Associate Chief, he served as Chief of Staff for NRCS.

Before joining the Trump-Vance Administration, Colton was Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, a national network of nonprofits that work to promote the conservation, development, and sustainable use of natural resources while improving economic conditions in rural America.

Earlier in his career, he was appointed by Texas Governor Rick Perry to the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents, served as an advisor to the Texas Commissioner of Agriculture, and was a rural economic developer supporting agricultural enterprises and small communities.

Raised on his family's cattle ranch outside Gatesville, Texas, and as a lifelong outdoorsman, his work reflects his personal commitment and passion as a firebrand for keeping America's working lands in American working hands.



NRCS Priorities



Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land



Shift to Outcome-Based Conservation and Farmer Empowerment



Recenter Field Engagement and Strengthen Technical Expertise



Expand Wildlife Conservation and Outdoor Access



Strengthen Partnerships by Streamlining Processes and Accountability



Optimize Mission Delivery by Strengthening Workforce Culture



Modernize NRCS Infrastructure and Technology

Vermont Farm Service Agency Farm Program Results and New Programs

NRCS State Technical
Committee meeting,
July 15, 2026

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/vermont>



Vermont Farm Service Agency Disaster Programs

Payments to date
as of July 14, 2026

\$54.3 million to date for 2023 & 2024 flood disasters and 2025 drought

ECAP: \$3.87 million (flooding, excess moisture affecting crop loss, planting)

ECP: \$2.74 million for flooding, 2025 drought in application phase

EFRP: \$48,726

ELAP: \$1.14 million (includes honeybees and water hauling)

LFP: \$1.46 million

LIP: \$60,384 (livestock loss, flood)

NAP: \$1.22 million

TAP: \$6,129

Supplemental Disaster Programs 2024 to date:

SDRP 1: \$8.08 million

SDRP 2: \$245,821

Deadline: August

ELRP: \$35.5 million

Vermont Farm Service Agency Market-based Farm Programs 2025 & 2026

**Total to date for market support
\$10 million**

New, 2026:

Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA)

VT FBA payments: \$3.89 million

Specialty Crop Assistance (ASCF)

VT ASCF payments to date: \$442,879

Prior program in 2025/2026:

**Marketing Assistance Specialty
Crops (MASC)**

\$5.71 million paid in 2025-2026

Vermont Farm Service Agency Farm Program Changes 2026 re: OBBA

OBBA Program changes

ARC-PLC:

VT: \$1.5 million payments for 2025 crop year

Changes for 2026:

- Increase in reference prices
- 30 million base acres added nationally
- Increased payment limit

DMC:

VT: 2023 \$29.2 million, 2024 \$800k, 2025 \$44,613,

2026 to date: \$1.9 million

Changes for 2026:

- Tier 1: increase to 6 million# from 5 million#
- Establish new production history



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Resources Update



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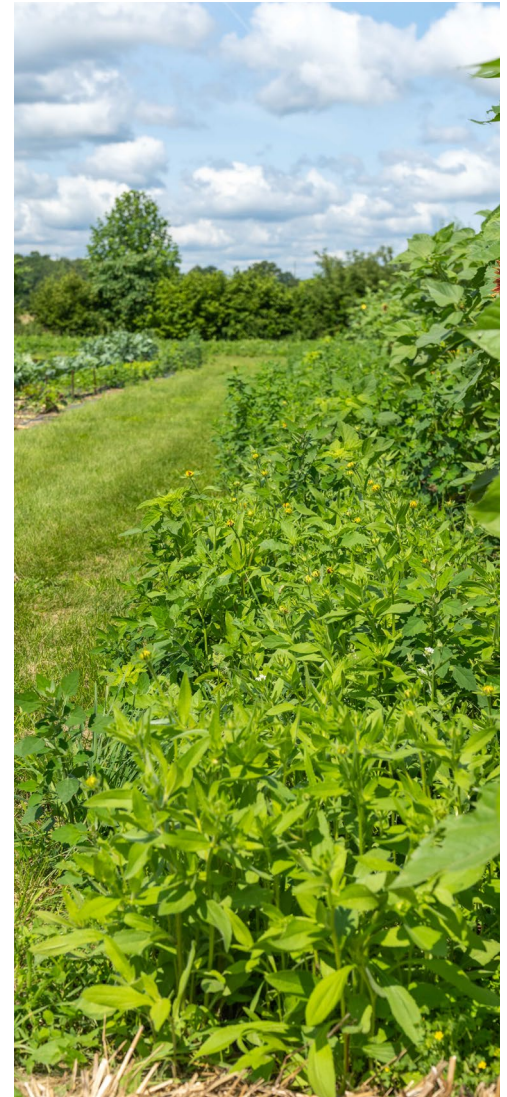
Forestry

- VT Forestry Technical Note 2 – Trees and Shrubs for Conservation
 - List of trees and shrubs used on conservation projects in Vermont.
 - Agroforestry species list
 - Bioengineering
 - Wildlife
 - Pollinator
 - Regulated Introduced Plant Species (RIPS) Rule
 - (FOTG Section 1 / Technical Notes)



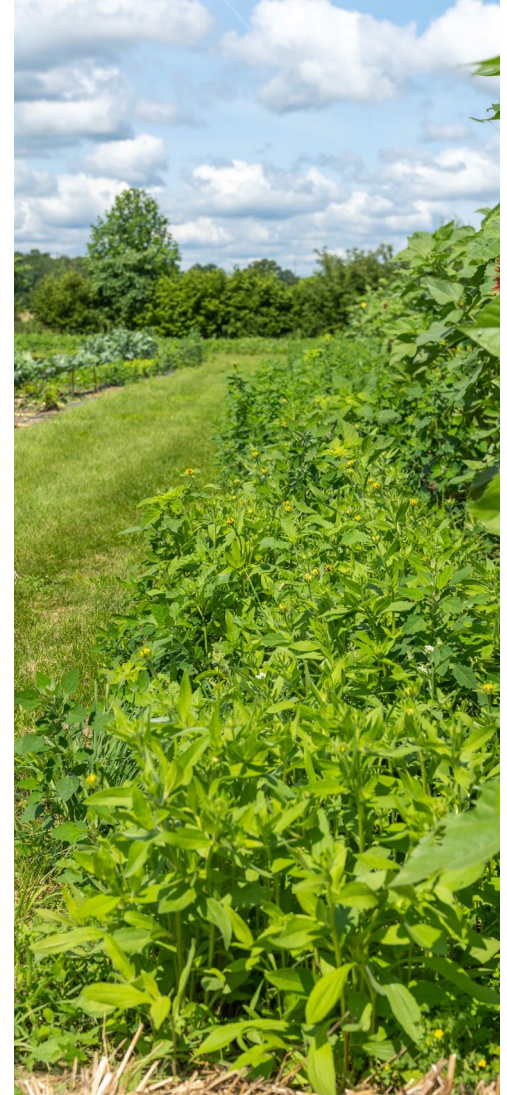
Resource Concern Evaluation

- Resource Concerns consolidated to 12.
- Vermont NRCS will standardize resource concerns to evaluate based on land use beginning in FY 2027.
- Based on staff feedback, subcommittees, local, state and federal partners.
- Streamlined approach - assessments viewed through common lens.
- Comprehensive assessment.
- Goal is for program neutral planning.
- Greater blend between programs and initiatives (EQIP, CSP, RPP, WLFW)



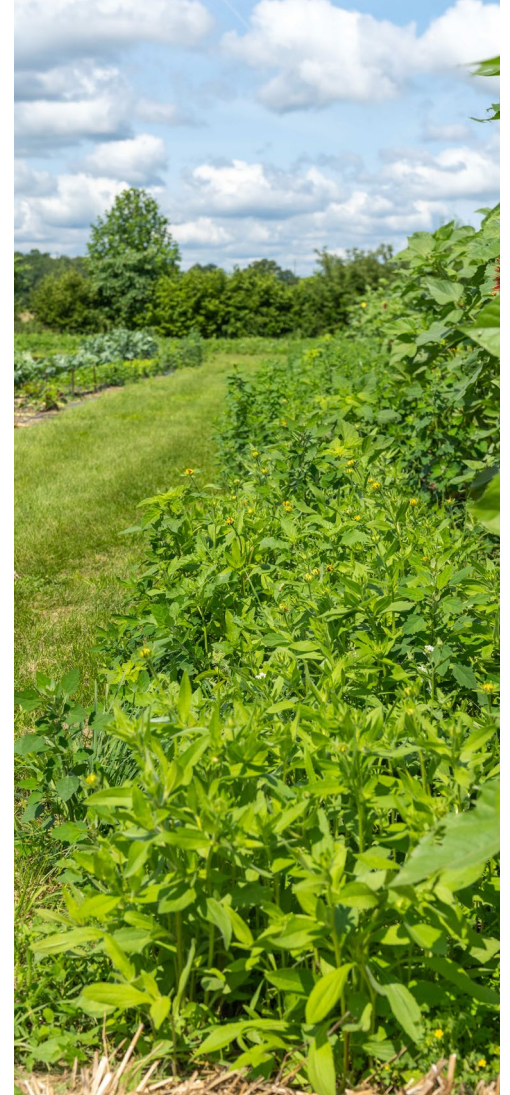
Soil & Water

- Soil Erosion
 - Sheet & Rill Erosion
 - Ephemeral Gullies
- Soil Health
 - Compaction
 - Organic Matter Stability
- Water Quality
 - Nutrient Runoff
 - Sedimentation
- Water Quantity



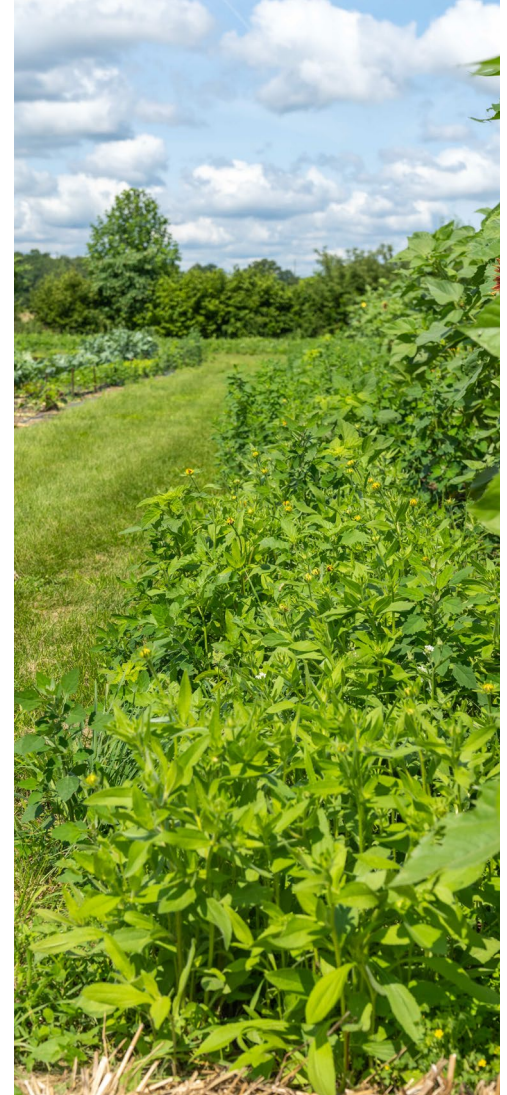
Plants & Animals

- Plant Health
 - Invasive Species
 - Health & Vigor
- Aquatic Habitat
 - Elevated Water Temperature
- Terrestrial Habitat
- Livestock Health
 - Feed & Forage Balance
 - Inadequate Shelter
 - Water Distribution



Resource Concern Evaluation

- Assess additional resource concerns as needed.
 - Identified as a producer goal.
 - Energy Efficiency of Equipment and Facilities
 - Air Emissions
 - Noted in the field by planner.
 - Program or initiative requirement.
 - Easement assessments will include Human Considerations. “Loss of Functions and Values” and “Threat of Conversion”





Payment Schedules

Vermont: Vermont EQIP-1

[RESET](#)[CSV EXPORT](#)

State Name	Cost List Name	Practice Code	Practice Name	Component	Unit	Unit Cost
Vermont	Vermont EQIP-1	101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity	All Livestock Operations with Land Application, Base Cost	No	\$3,449.42
Vermont	Vermont EQIP-1	101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity	HU-All Livestock Operations with Land Application, Base Cost	No	\$4,139.31
Vermont	Vermont EQIP-1	101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity	All Livestock Operations with Land Application, Implementation Cost	AU	\$5.14
Vermont	Vermont EQIP-1	101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity	HU-All Livestock Operations with Land Application, Implementation Cost	AU	\$6.17

Click for [here](#) for NRCS payment schedules website



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State Tech Subcommittee Reports

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State Technical Subcommittees Feedback

- **Purpose:** Working groups and subcommittees will be used to assist NRCS with implementing conservation on working lands through financial assistance programs authorized under the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018. These working groups and subcommittees will identify priority resource concerns, suggest funding levels, establish funding cycles, suggest ranking pools and categories, establish other ranking priorities, and refine the use of the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) for Fiscal Year 2027.
- **State Policy:** Vermont State Bulletin; SB_VT_440-26-01 FY2026 Program Workgroups
- **National Policy:** The state conservationist provides state program leadership for... establishing state policies, priority resource concerns, and other priorities using recommendations of state technical committees and tribal conservation advisory councils according to Title 440 Conservation Programs Manual, Part 501 “Locally Led Conservation and Program Delivery” (440 CPM Part 501).

Soils Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
- Improving soils data provided for nutrient management by providing an updated Nitrate Leaching Index. - Providing support and guidance for soil health sampling (CEMA 216) and the regenerative pilot program - Soil health lab (SHREC) out of UVM can provide technical support for conducting soil health tests for CEMA 216 - Suggestion to add criteria to CEMA 216 for Vermont to collect additional soil health information that could be used by farmers to improve and monitor soil health such as collecting samples to a deeper depth than the required 8 inches	<u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- Soil - Compaction, Organic Matter depletion, soil organism loss or degradation, aggregate instability. Water quality - Nutrients transported to surface water, nutrients transported to ground water <u>Priority Practices</u>- Soil health management, nutrient management <u>Priority Area</u>- None



Water Quality Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
- Support TMDL efforts throughout the state, implement water quality and soil conservation practices on working lands - Current funding seems to be acceptable. - There was a healthy discussion on highlighting and implementing end of tile treatment systems (Phosphorus removal system (782)). Forming a work group to discuss. Dead Creek could be a pilot watershed - PFAS testing was also discussed but it was unclear of who would actually want to do this practice.	<u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- WQ(all), Water Quantity (depletion, irrigation, seeps), Soil concerns, Aquatic (elevated water temps) <u>Priority Practices</u>- Current Wp practices accepted. Add Road/Trail Closure, practices 101, 102, 110, 116, 157, 159, 161, 162, 163, 164, 336 <u>Priority Areas</u>- source water protection watersheds, NWQI watersheds, and the Champlain Basin - WPT- 303(d) ag impaired watersheds; state priority watersheds, source water protection area watersheds

■ POC: Joe Bondi



Small Farms Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
- Over half of all operations in Vermont are 75 acres and less according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. - There was a demand of over \$2.5 million within the 3 locally led small farm fund pools in FY26. Small farms did not rank well in RPP. - Districts had to chose only 1 locally led priority to submit which may not have included a small farm focus - Many small farms are organic/transition so we could capture this in that category	<u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- Plant productivity/health, aggregate stability, nutrients/sediment transported to surface & ground water <u>Priority Practices</u>- High tunnels, low tunnels, cover crop, conservation crop rotation, CPS 336, amending soil properties with lime, microirrigation, grazing management, pasture and hay planting - Recommending a small farm category for each zone or one statewide small farm pool under initiatives. Recommended funding level is to provide \$400,000 per zone

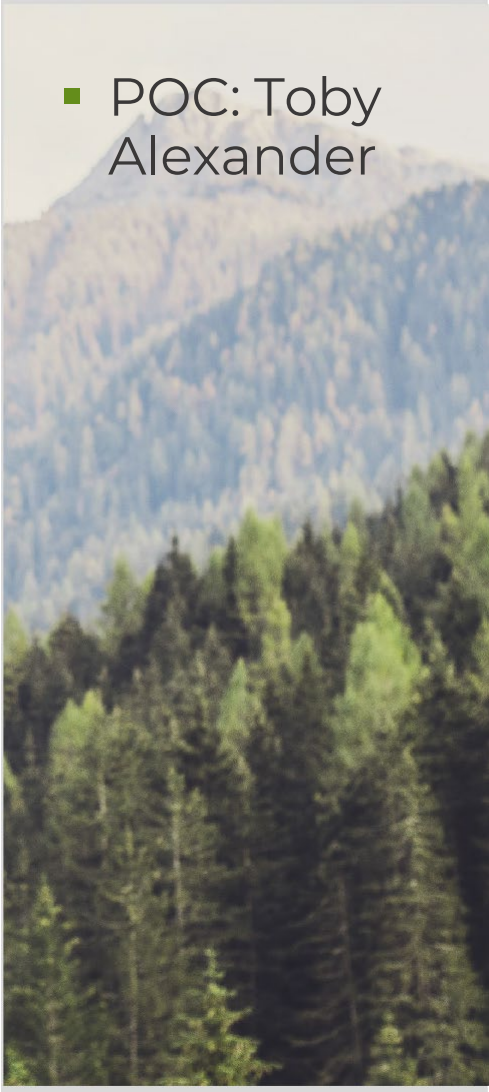
■ POC:
 Cheyanne
 Rico



Forest & Wildlife Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
• Using Locally Led to help identify priority geographic areas, priorities from new updated Wildlife Action Plan, and other wildlife priorities • Engage with VTFWD to see if there is a Wildlife Action Plan species or habitat to prioritize • Concern about Brush Mgmt payments decreasing and cascading effects on other practices • Perceived that engineering is limiting for stream crossings in the forest. Use their AMP tables for designing? • Maintain 10% wildlife funding	• <u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- no change • <u>Priority Practices</u>- Add 314 Brush Mgt and 666 FSI, 315 HWC, 654 Road Closure, 560 Access Road • <u>Priority Areas</u>- none, use the Locally led process to determine • Use new Wildlife Action Plan to help set priorities for species/habitat • Remove statewide question “is the site well suited or not”- not effective • Fencing to exclude deer from tree plantings and regeneration areas was highlighted as a strong need

■ POC: Toby Alexander



ACEP Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
• Simplify statewide GARC regions for upcoming Areawide market analysis • Elevate ranking priorities on flood resilience, wetland and riparian area importance, drought resilience, and wildlife connectivity, and geographic areas targeting wetland conservation in Lake Champlain Valley, Otter Creek, and downstream of Brandon. • Involve conservation districts in process to designate locally important soils. • Consider agreement approach to assist with stewardship workload (WRE/RCPP)	• <u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- Flood resilience, drought resilience, forestland threat of development, farm viability, connectivity to conserved lands (wetlands), habitat connectivity • <u>Priority Practices</u>- long term protection of land • <u>Priority Areas</u>- Otter Creek (wetlands), Lake Champlain Basin, Addison County, “resilient” areas like headwaters that have capacity for flood resiliency and species flow/diversity, hilltop farms with soils that could potentially be locally designated

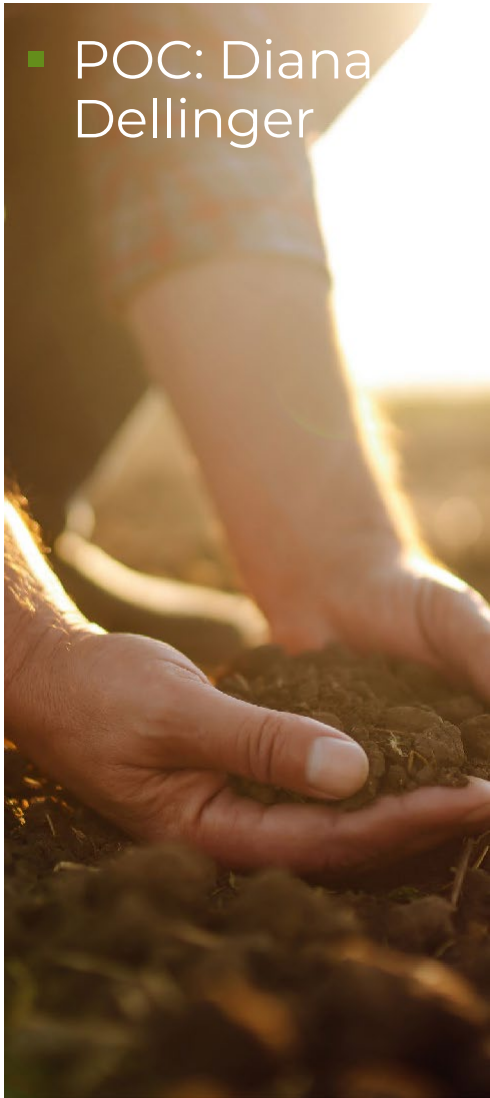
■ POC: Julia Grey



Subject Matter Experts Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
• No watershed prioritization needed for CSP • Leaning into the existing CSP and EQIP resource concern overlap for assessments might be beneficial • NWQI- add Dead Creek (Addison) and Jewel Brook • How do we evaluate the severity of the resource concern to fund projects that need it most • Rankings were hard to predict and going back to land use is preferred. It was hard to find a “home” for small projects, specialized requests, etc. • Repeat customers outcompete new customers.	• <u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- Soil Quality, Concentrated Erosion, Field Sediment/Nutrient Loss, Sheet/Rill Erosion, Storage and Handling of Pollutants, Livestock Production Limitation, Degraded Plant Condition, Pest Mgmt • <u>Priority Practices</u>- Waste Storage Facility, Brush Mgmt, Grassed WW, Lined WW, Tree Planting, Roof and Covers, Fence, Pasture/Hay Planting, HUAP, Forest Trails and Landings • <u>Priority Areas</u>- Water source protection, 303(d) Ag impaired watersheds, NWQI watersheds

■ POC: Diana Dellinger



Working Lands Subcommittee

Feedback	Recommendations for FY27
- Weather Resilience is a resource concern that we need to understand better from NRCS - Increased education on how commonly used practices can meet the Terrestrial/Aquatic RC - Waste Storage Facility remains an important practice for VT - Engineering can be a limiting factor. The 900 series TA funds can help. - Funding gap for small farms, organic farms, specialty crop - Recommend data analysis on what gets funded: practices, types of farms, etc	<u>Priority Resource Concerns</u>- Soil Quality, Concentrated Erosion, Field Sediment/Nutrient Loss, Sheet/Rill Erosion, Storage and Handling of Pollutants, Livestock Production Limitation, Degraded Plant Condition, Aquatic Habitat <u>Priority Practices</u>- Waste Storage Facility, Brush Mgmt, Grassed WW, No-till Residue Mgmt, Tree Planting, Roof and Covers, Fence, Pasture/Hay Planting, HUAP, Forest Trails and Landings <u>Priority Areas</u>- Designated Source Water Areas, Lake Carmi, Tickle Naked Pond, NWQI watersheds

■ POC: Diana Dellinger



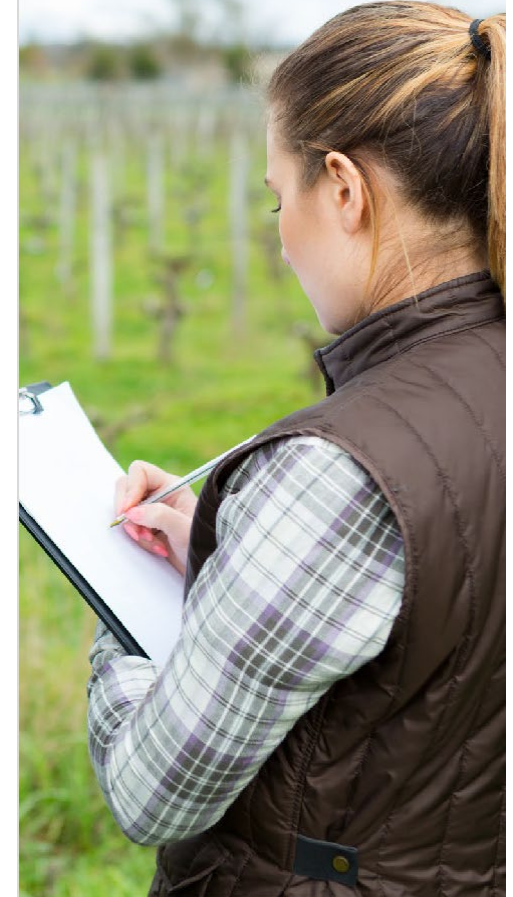
Local Working Groups Subcommittee

Priority Resource Concerns for FY27

Top Tier – Appearing Across Nearly All Local Work Groups:

- Phosphorus reduction & water quality improvement
- Nutrient management
- Soil health & agronomic management
- Flood resilience & floodplain restoration
- Riparian & stream restoration
- Forest health & forest resilience
- Wildlife habitat protection & enhancement
- Drought resilience & water supply concerns
- Compliance with RAPs, AMPs & CAFO requirements
- Engineering & technical assistance backlog concerns
- Outreach to underserved or underrepresented agricultural communities (flower, veggie, orchard, small-scale farms)

■ POC:
Phylicxia
Moore



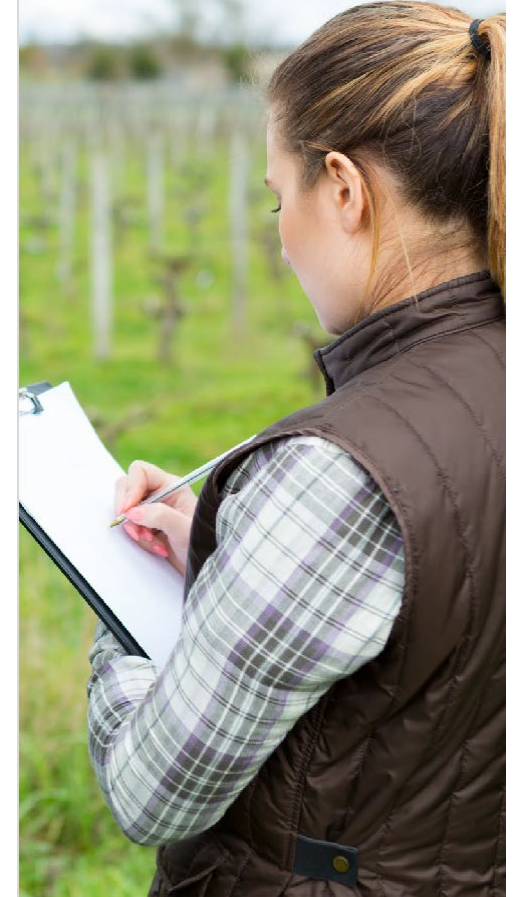
Local Working Groups Subcommittee

Priority Conservation Practices for FY27

Top Tier – Appearing Across 3+ Local Work Groups:

- Grazing management (often paired with pasture improvement and livestock exclusion from waterways)
- Nutrient Management Plans
- Cover crops
- Forest Management Plans (CPA 106)
- High tunnels / Low tunnels (including 325 High Tunnel System and 821 Low Tunnel System)
- CPS 336 (includes references to biochar applications)
- Manure injection
- Waste storage systems (pits and leachate management)
- Farmstead improvements
- Riparian buffer & floodplain restoration

■ POC:
Phylicxia
Moore



Local Working Groups Subcommittee

Priority Areas for FY27 Specific watersheds	Priority Areas for FY27 General
• Joe’s Brook • Calendar Brook • Flood-prone areas in the Lamoille River watershed • Essex County - Memphremagog, Passumpsic, and Upper Connecticut watersheds	• Rutland County • Winooski District Service Area • Agricultural lands with high phosphorus concerns in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties • Concerns about development in floodplains and wetlands. • Village cores and urbanized neighborhoods with contaminated soils • Heavily forested and contaminated working lands • Addison County

■ POC:
 Phyllicxia
 Moore

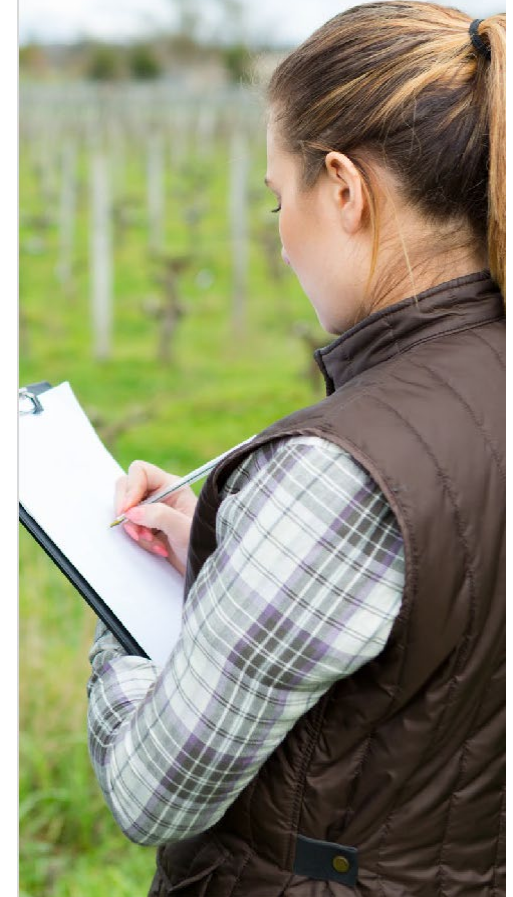


Local Working Groups Subcommittee

Other Recommendations for FY27

- NRCS should increase outreach to producers unfamiliar with available programs
- Beginning farmers should continue receiving higher payment rates and targeted support
- Smaller and nontraditional farms may not fit easily into existing funding categories
- Repeatedly unfunded applicants should receive consideration to maintain trust in NRCS
- Technical and engineering requirements may create barriers for some applicants
- Financial assistance should consider both environmental benefit and farm viability
- More payment up front - reimbursement model can create financial stress for landowners
- Incentive Payments are too low esp. for invasive treatment
- Increase local NRCS planning staff and increase coordination with partner organizations Aligning CPA/DIA funding decisions for FMPs and NMPs with FPR and VAAFM deadlines
- Multiple engagement channels
 - Coordinate multi-partner site visits (NRCS + BCCD + Extension, etc.)
- Year-round outreach and survey collection

■ POC:
Phylicxia
Moore





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Vermont Proposed Spending Plan- FY27

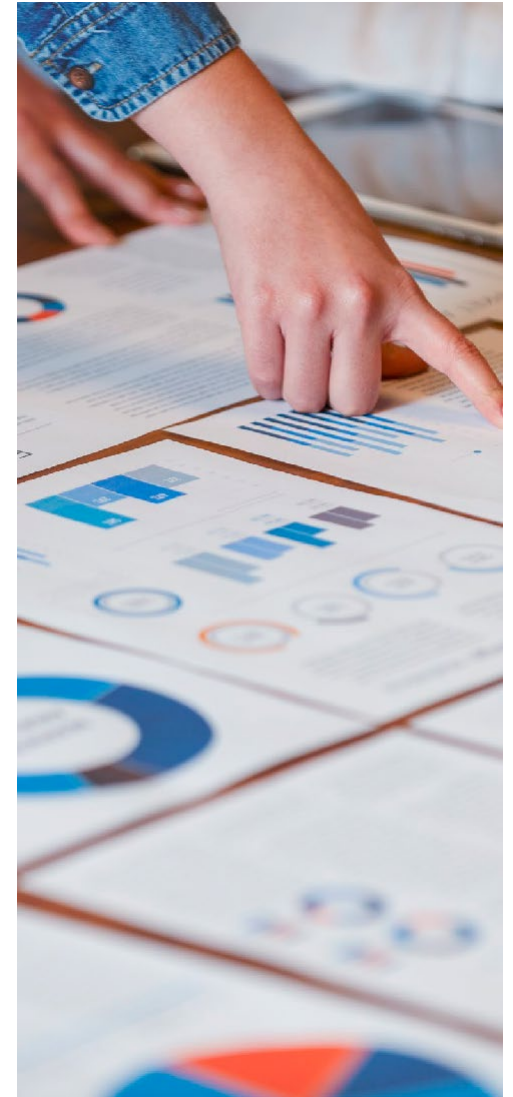
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VT State Spending Plan

- Purpose: In distributing fiscal year funds in the business tools for obligation in conservation program contracts, state conservationists must develop a state spending plan based on state-designated ranking pools and any desired spending plan categories
- Policy: The state conservationist, with advice from the state technical committee and tribal conservation advisory council, as applicable, must develop a state spending plan to address program and national priorities, natural resource concerns, and priority geographic locations within state or tribal lands. See program-specific subparts for more guidance. (Title 440 CPM Part 530)

Vermont FY27 Spending Plan

- Financial Assistance Programs Available
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 - Locally Led Proposals
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Agricultural Management Program (AMA)
 - Conservation Innovation Grant (state)



VT 2027 Spending Plan Priorities- EQIP

EQIP Priorities	FY27 Spending Plan (Discretion of National)
Locally Led Conservation	Up to 50% of EQIP Allocation
Regenerative Pilot Program	25?% (EQIP and CSP)
NWQI	<1%
GWW	<1%
CIG	<1%
Beginning Farmer, Socially Disadvantaged, Wildlife	5%, 5%, 10% respectively of total allocation
CPA/DIA/CEMA	TA Funds

Locally Led Proposal	Proposed FY27 Target
Franklin Water Quality Improvements on Farms	\$ 4,000,000.00
Caledonia Ridge to Valley Resilience: Slowing the Flow	\$ 300,000.00
Essex Working Forests for Wood and Wildlife	\$ 150,000.00
Lamoille Soil Health for Water Quality and Flood Resiliency	\$ 500,000.00
Winooski Clean Water, Healthy Soils through Grazing Management	\$ 800,000.00
Grand Isle Soil Health	\$ 750,000.00
Windham Vitalize Vermont's Forests	\$ 900,000.00
Rutland Diversified Working Lands	\$ 300,000.00
Bennington Agroforestry	\$ 400,000.00
Orleans Water Quality, Soil Health, and Invasive Species	\$ 100,000.00
Otter Creek Localy Led	\$ 250,000.00

VT 2027 Spending Plan Priorities

- CSP Priorities; Agland, Forestland, VT Zone Pools, Organic (8%), Regenerative (25?%), Beginning Farmer (5%), Socially Disadvantaged (5%)
- RCPP Priorities; Projects 1865, 2132, and 2311 are wrapping up in FY26. A new NOFO has been announced for new projects in FY27!
- ACEP; ALE, WRE, and Stewardship
- AMA; General (High Tunnel focused)
- CIG; Statewide opportunity
- Other Priorities as determined by the National Office



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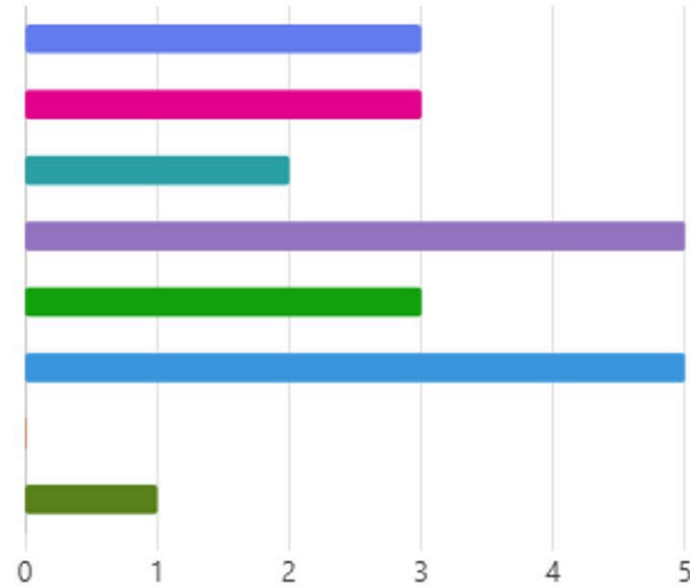


NRCS-VT State Technical Committee (STC) Feedback Results

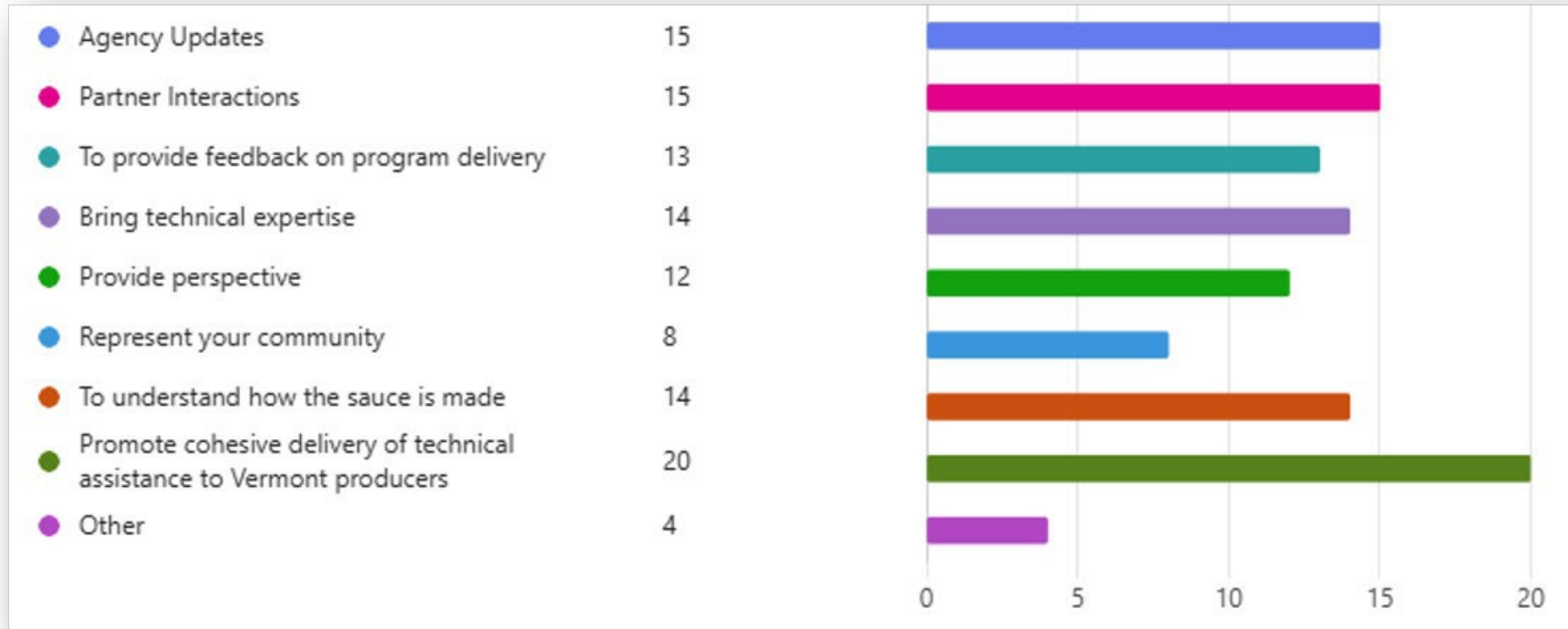
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Respondents

NRCS Staff	3
Federal Government	3
Conservation District	2
Local Government	5
Non-Profit	3
College/Land Grant	5
Producer/Participant	0
Other	1



Why You're Here



What's Working Well

- Hybrid Structure
- Technical Updates
- Program Updates

"I've attended these meetings for a very long time, and they are consistently critical for me to do the best job I can do for the state and producers."

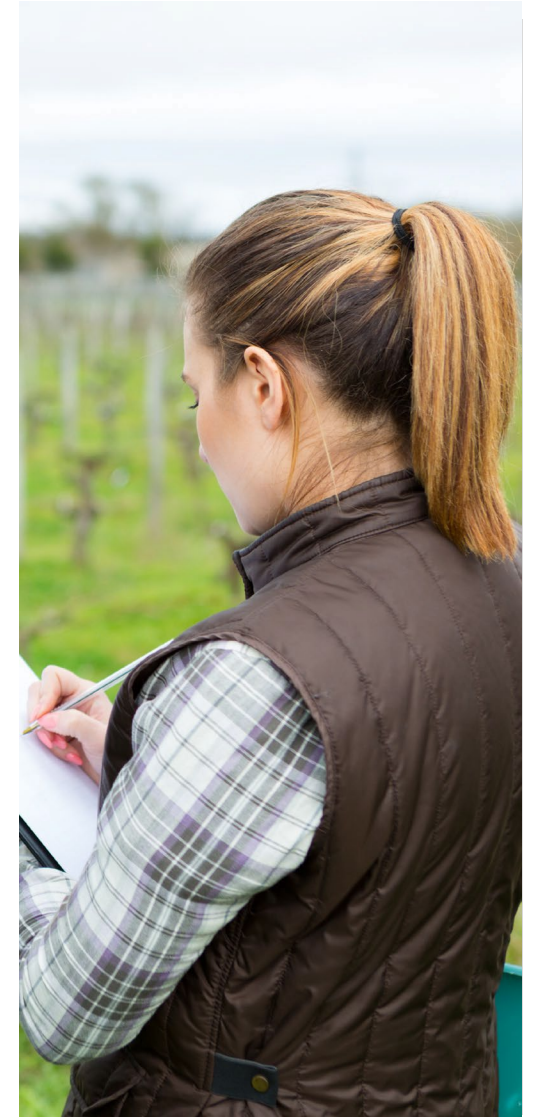
"I find these meetings to be some of the most informative at a state-wide level of all that I attend."

"The most valuable part of these meetings is the real-time interaction with NRCS with the opportunity to ask questions. This helps partners understand how federal level decisions are being implemented in Vermont."



Areas of Improvement

- 44% of respondents stated they do not understand the role of STC or could use a refresher
- More targeted meetings, less agenda items, and more time for partner feedback and discussion
- Some STC attendees would like to hear more from the Subcommittees and Districts





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Luis Aponte
ASTC-Partnerships and Initiatives
NRCS-Vermont
Luis.Aponte@usda.gov

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Thank you!

Next meeting: TBD