

USDA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Neal Smith Federal Building - 210 Walnut Street, Room 693, Des Moines, Iowa
NRCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Conference Room/Microsoft Teams

June 18, 2026
1:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Minutes

Opening Comments – Scott Cagle

- Welcome and call meeting to order.
- Introduction of attendees.
- Approval of minutes from March 19, 2026.
 - No comments or corrections noted by the committee.
 - Minutes were moved for approval by Kelsey Fleming and seconded by Susan Kozak.
 - Minutes were unanimously approved as written.
- Review of recommendations from the March 19, 2026, meeting.
 - ACEP-WRE: Approve the FY26 Iowa ACEP-WRE Geographic Area Rate Gaps (GARC).
 - FY26 Iowa ACEP-WRE GARC approved by State Conservationist on March 19.

Agency Updates – General

NRCS – Scott Cagle

- Jaia Fischer is the acting State Conservationist.
- Colton Buckley was named the new NRCS Chief effective May 18 upon former Chief Audrey Bettencourt's departure.
- Chief Buckley announced new NRCS motto, vision, and mission statements and update the strategic priorities.
 - Motto: Keeping Working Lands in Working Hands
 - Mission: 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.
 - Vision: An America where working lands remain productive, resilient, and in the hands of those who steward them.
 - Strategic Priorities:
 - Preserve and protect agricultural land;
 - Shift to outcome-based conservation and farmer empowerment;
 - Re-center 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; and
 - Modernize NRCS infrastructure and technology.
- Hiring updates
 - 5 District Conservationist (DC) positions were filled (internal hires) in the first round of approved positions.
 - A 2nd round of positions has been approved and announced: 6 DCs, 1 Archaeologist, 1 Compliance Specialist, and 1 Natural Resource Specialist (Easements).
 - The Iowa State Conservationist position has also been announced.
- A June 17 press release announced the upcoming reorganization of the USDA Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area (FPAC) which includes NRCS, FSA, RMA, and FPAC Business Center.
 - <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/reorganization>

- Hillary Olson has been named the Acting State Resource Conservationist for Iowa effective June 29.
- Nicky Williams has been named Acting Assistant State Conservationist-MS effective May 4.
- Amy Fischer continues to be the Acting Assistant State Conservationist-Field Operations (ASTC-FO) for SW Iowa in addition to her role as the ASTC-FO for SE Iowa.

FSA Update – Starlyn Perdue/Curt Goettsch

- No current open positions.
- Recently completed a task force looking at efficiencies across the state and how FSA can continue to administer all programs effectively and efficiently for producers while supporting County Team members.
- State Committee was sworn in the week of June 15 – new members are on board and ready to act.
 - Members from Lyon, Worth, Wapello, Sioux, and Polk Counties.
- Starlyn attended the SSCWQC meeting and summer tour on June 15 and 16.
 - Commented on the opportunity to meet people and see the ways producers are implementing conservation practices across the state.

Local Workgroup Feedback – Jaia Fischer/Dien Judge

- CDI welcomed a new Planning Coordinator, Olivia Ziegler, on May 25.
- Floyd, Dickinson, Marion County meetings are scheduled.
- Worth, Wright, Webster meetings are concluded and plans finalized.

Technical Topics

- None Submitted.

Status of Farm Bill Programs

Programs Report – Rubyana Neely

- See report (*attached*).
- Obligations for all Programs are underway.

Partnerships update – Scott Cagle

- See report (*attached*).

CRP Report – Curt Goettsch

- Three CRP signups have concluded – General, Continuous (2 batches), and Grassland.
- No results on grassland CRP yet as it just concluded.
 - Grassland signup is the smallest in Iowa with about 40-50 submitted offers.
- General and Continuous CRP had 11,643 accepted offers on 185,776 acres.
 - Not all have been approved or contracted.
 - Decrease in overall acreage of 87,000 – about 2700 contracts.
- Signups concluded earlier in 2026 than in recent years due to the cap for acres in the program.
- Local offices are currently busy with crop reporting
- Iowa led nation in Transition Incentive Program – FSA incentivizes landowners with expiring CRP land to partner with and lease to beginning farmers or veteran farmers.
 - Interest in the program exceeded available funds.
- *Question - Johnson: What was the dollar amount for the expiring CRP program?*
 - *Answer – Goettsch: \$9 million.*

Subcommittee Reports

CSP – Cynthia Farmer

- See report (*attached*).
- No recommendations from the subcommittee this quarter.

EQIP – Paige Frautschy

- Did not meet.

ACEP-WRE – Kelsey Fleming

- Did not meet.

ACEP-ALE – Joe McGovern for Ryan Smith

- Discussed criteria, ACEP-ALE leaning towards grassland and how that could benefit grazers in southern Iowa, the Loess Hills, and select regions.
- Funding remains modest but well used.
 - Hoping the new NRCS priority of working lands will mean more funds coming to Iowa.
- The subcommittee wants to invite others, in particular, Iowa Cattlemen's, grazers, and ag producers to join the subcommittee.

CRP – Todd Bogenschutz

- See report (*attached*).
- The Savannah Institute presented a Corn Belt Windbreak project to the subcommittee (*attached with agenda*).

SWP – Christina Murphy

- Did not meet.
- SWP National Bulletin was released later than usual – tight deadline and STAC will not meet again before the deadline.
 - The subcommittee will likely meet to review the current watersheds and determine if any significant changes would need to be made and brought to the attention of NRCS.

Urban Ag –Tim Palmer/Sarah Nizzi

- Did not meet.

Reports from Other Committee Members

IDALS – Susan Kozak

- Received an additional \$3.7 million for the 22 counties above Des Moines called the Great Des Moines Watershed Program.
 - Cover crop announcement to be released soon.
 - Investigating some nutrient management ideas.
 - Possibly expanding the streamside buffer project to this area.
- Matt McDonald, WQI Projects Coordinator, has moved to the Mines and Minerals Bureau.
 - Hoping to backfill this position soon.

LICA – Bruce Barnhart

- A ribbon-cutting and grand opening of the new educational facility at the LICA Farm will be held on June 25.
 - Secretary Naig will be speaking at 10:00am.
 - The facility will be available for anyone involved in conservation to reserve and use.

CDI – Dien Judge

- Registration is open for the CDI Annual Conference on August 25 in Ames, IA.

Guest Participation

- None

Future Meeting Dates

September 17, 2026

Attendance

In-Person

Dien Judge, CDI
Kelsey Fleming, IDNR
Shawn Richmond, Iowa Farm Bureau
Susan Kozak, IDALS
Starlyn Perdue, FSA
Curt Goettsch, FSA

Dustin VandeHoef, Sen. Ernst's Office
Patrick Chase, NRCS
Scott Cagle, NRCS
Rubyana Neely, NRCS
Keiko Sampson, NRCS

Virtual

Dave Petty, Iowa River Ranch
Wendy Johnson, Climate Land Leaders
Ashley Utt, Pathfinders RC&D
Todd Bogenschutz, IDNR
Josh Divan, Pheasants Forever
Paige Frautschy, TNC
Catherine DeLong, ISU
Matt Dvorak, IDNR
Sarah Nizzi, Xerces Society
Adam Kiel, Ag Outcomes
Jeff Jensen, Trees Forever
Ben Porepp, Iowa Soybean Association

Scott Moats, The Nature Conservancy
Emmaly Renshaw, Iowa Valley RC&D
Joe McGovern, INHF
Bruce Barnhart, LICA
Adam Mason, PFI
Kelli Klink, IA Cattlemen's Association
Cameron Aker, Trout Unlimited
Todd Sutphin, ISA
Cynthia Farmer, Center for Rural Affairs
Christina Murphy, WDMWW
Chuck Isenhardt, Dubuque Area Land & Water Legacy
Sara Strassman, Trout Unlimited