

USDA-NRCS Maine State Technical Committee (STTC) Meeting

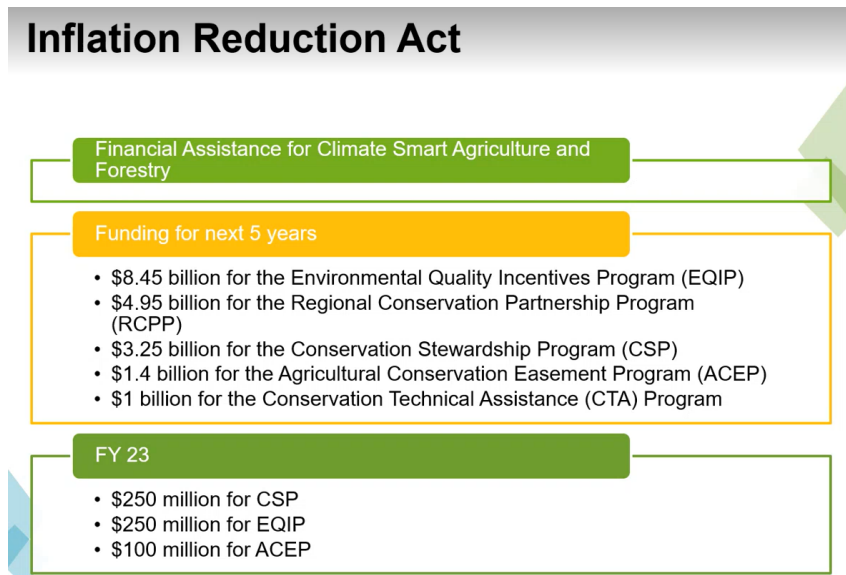
12/7/2022

Overall Key Points:

- Maine FY22 obligation overview by program (EQIP, CSP, RCPP and AMA)
- FY23 initial advisory allocations
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

Welcome and NRCS Briefing:

Welcome was made by Matt Walker (ME NRCS State Conservationist). Discussed Maine FY22 obligations. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) had a total of 278 contracts obligated at \$3,164,600 in statewide fund pools. For EQIP local pools there were 107 total contracts for a final obligation of \$6,859,131. In EQIP for National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) there was a total of 9 contracts for \$1,391,196 and for EQIP underserved groups 166 total contracts for \$4,160,414. In the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) \$3,430,828 was obligated for a total of 6 contracts. In the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program 61 contracts were obligated at \$1,148,898 and in AMA underserved groups 39 contracts for a total of \$555,446. For the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) renewals there were 5 contracts total at \$74,509. In CSP Classic there were 29 contracts with a final obligation of \$586,554. Went over FY23 initial advisory allocations: AMA=\$675,000, CSP=\$2,000,000 and EQIP \$9,500,000. Matt Walker gave an overview on IRA funding for NRCS nationwide:



Mentioned local working group meetings and urged people to participate. Also commented on Maine NRCS goal of expanding partnership positions and went over new NRCS team members and promotions.

Maine Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) Briefing:

Carol Weymouth (MACD Executive Director) mentioned that currently, Maine soil and water conservation districts (SWCD) have hosted or will soon host local working group meetings in each county. These meetings are open to the public and provided valuable recommendations for each USDA-NRCS office as they plan for addressing future resource concerns. The resulting reports from the local working groups provide information and recommendations to the state technical committee. The MACDs role includes aiding and assisting districts plus representing them at the national and state level, offering input specific to Maine or the Northeast. MACD shares prioritized conservation concerns, technical assistance needs and outreach for available resources. The MACD Executive Director mentioned to meeting participants to reach out or visit their local SWCD and to check out their programs and workshops.

Programs updates by Susan Arrants Assistant State Conservationist for Programs:

Review of FY2023 Program Initial Allocations:

- ACEP: \$620,657
 - ACEP-ALE: \$271,907
 - ACEP-WRE: \$348,750
- AMA: \$675,000
- CSP: \$2,000,00
 - CSP-Classic: \$1,000,000
 - CSP-Organic: \$2,000,000 Note: any surplus must be returned
 - CSP-Renewal: \$800,000
- EQIP: \$10,531,284
 - EQIP NWQI: \$978,284 Note: any surplus must be returned
 - EQIP General: \$9,553,000

National Initiatives and State Initiatives:

- National Initiatives
 - EQIP Organic Initiative-Certified and Transition
 - EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative
 - EQIP Water Quality Initiative-Sheepscot River watershed-Augusta FO and CrossLake watershed-Ft. Kent FO
 - EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts (EQIP CIC)
- State Initiatives
 - EQIP Urban Agriculture
 - EQIP Climate Smart Agriculture

- EQIP Aquatic Organism Passage
- EQIP Conservation Planning Activities
 - We will no longer be contracting Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs)
 - This category includes the new Conservation Planning Activity (CPA), Design and Implementation Activity (DIA), and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity (CEMA) options.
- EQIP Deer Wintering Yard
- EQIP New England Pollinator Partnership Project
- EQIP Water Conservation/Irrigation

Program Fund Pools for FY2023 will be:

- AMA:
 - Irrigation (both micro and sprinkler)
 - High Tunnel
- CSP Classic:
 - Ag Land traditional
 - Ag Land BF
 - Ag Land SD
 - Ag Land Organic
 - Non-Industrial Private Forestland (NIPF) traditional
 - NIPF BF
 - NIPF SD
- CSP Renewal (option for active 2018 CSP contracts):
 - Ag Land traditional
 - Ag Land BF
 - Ag Land SD
 - Ag Land Organic
 - Non-Industrial Private Forestland (NIPF) traditional
 - NIPF BF
 - NIPF SD

- EQIP:
 - Statewide pools:
 - Aquatic Organism Passage
 - Beginning Farmer-focus on soil health
 - Conservation Planning Activities (formerly CAPS)
 - Deer Wintering Yard
 - National Water Quality Initiative (Augusta and Ft. Kent FO's only)
 - New England Pollinator Partnership Project
 - OnFarm Energy (to include Energy CAPs)
 - Organic (Certified and Transitioning, to include Transition to OrganicCAPs)
 - Socially Disadvantaged
 - Tribal Projects
 - Climate Smart Agriculture
 - Water Conservation/Irrigation
 - Urban Agriculture
 - Local fund pool options:
 - Ag Waste
 - Cropland
 - Forestry
 - Local High Tunnel
 - Pasture
 - Wildlife
 - Unique Local Priority

EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts (EQIP CIC):

- Delivered as a separate fund pool through EQIP General, not as a separate program
- Must set aside 5% of EQIP General allocation
 - For Maine, this will be \$ 477,650 for FY2023
- High priority area will be statewide
- Relevant land use will be Pasture
- Priority Resource Concerns:
 - Degraded Plant Condition
 - Concentrated Erosion
 - Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen loss
- 2 core Practices (paid as an annual payment similar to CSP)
 - 528-Prescribed Grazing

- 590-Nutrient Management
- Supporting practices as applicable

Application batching period deadlines:

- ACEP-Agricultural Land Easement and ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement: November 17, 2022
- AMA general, CSP general, EQIP general and RCPP: August 26, 2022
- 2nd application period for conservation planning activities, February 24, 2023

Coronavirus Agricultural Relief Payments (CARP)

- Option for an additional payment for 8 nationally identified practices-7 of which are offered in Maine

Practice Code	Practice Name
325	High Tunnel
367	Roofs and Covers
430	Irrigation Pipeline
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface NOT OFFERED IN MAINE
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet
516	Livestock Pipeline
575	Trails and Walkways
584	Channel Bed Stabilization

- Available to EQIP participants only that have or will complete the identified practice(s) between 1/1/2021 and 12/31/2022.
 - The completion deadline was extended to the end of December 2022 by NRCS National Headquarters. The same rules apply, just the completion date was changed.
- Not a rule of thumb, but specifically calculated on a case-by-case basis. Calculation factors include year of obligation, scenario, extent applied and the contracted payment rate for the practice scenario
- CARPs can be provided, as applicable, for active, completed and expired contracts. Not available for cancelled or terminated contracts

Input/Concurrence needed from STTC members:

- For 2023 ACEP-WRE permanent easements: Use of individual appraisals instead of developing a Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) based on an Area-wide Market Analysis?
 - Very few, if any, ACEP-WRE eligible applicants received
 - AWMA's are very expensive to obtain; Individual appraisals are more cost effective

Subcommittee Reports:

Wildlife-Joseph Roy:

- Made a recommendation to add a state wildlife fund pool
 - Some offices have local wildlife pools but not ubiquitous across state

Irrigation- George McLaughlin

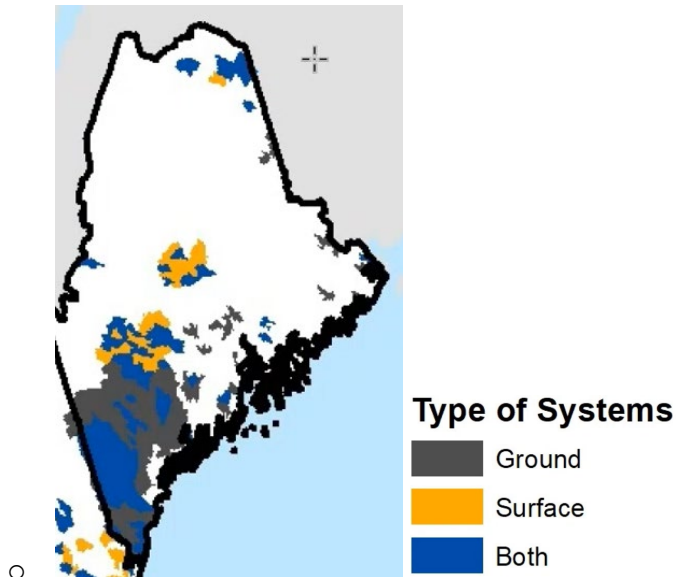
- Submitted a letter to Matt Walker regarding irrigation cost concerns, technical support, and AMA funding caps
 - Response from Matt Walker indicated that the irrigation cost and staffing concerns would be considered for FY23

Forestry-Michael Richard

- New subcommittee
- Question from meeting participant Felix on TA funding availability
 - Answered by Susan Arrants: Have not received the EQIP technical assistance dollars yet in the system that we use to manage the contracts. I will be sending out a request to the DCs to tell me how much they'll need for their contracts this year.

Source Water Protection-Kira Jacobs

- Shared map on priority water supplies



- Recommendation from committee
 - To develop a Source Water Protection factsheet for Maine
 - VT and NH have one developed
 - Committee wants to help Maine NRCS with development of factsheet

Urban Agriculture-Chris Brewer

- Committee planning to build a list of vendors/contractors for urban ag. BMPs like raised beds, flower beds etc.
- The state conservationist and his staff are exploring waivers for urban ag. producers who are in near proximity to urban areas.
- Exploring ways to better market the program
 - thinking about coming up with some conservation packages that NRCS could use

- Committee has an information request on how to work with nonprofit organizations that manage urban community gardens on land owned by cities

Maine DACF State Soil Scientist-Matthew Boucher:

Matthew Boucher mentioned goals to find ways to advance the actual adoption of soil health practices and create financial and technical infrastructure to support the implementation of them. Wants to work with producers to identify what those sociocultural barriers are to adopting a practice and seeing what the DACF can do to mitigate those barriers and help producers overcome them. Brought attention to the [Cover Crop Decision Tool \(northeastcovercrops.com\)](http://northeastcovercrops.com) which would help producers select cover crops for their specific situation. Currently trying to spread the word and bring more attention to the tool. As the Maine State Soil Scientist Mathew provides technical assistance as well as managing the Maine Healthy Soils Program. Biggest focus at this time is the development of the Maine Healthy Soils Program and to apply for grants for funding. The broad overview and goal of the Maine Healthy Soils Program is to provide financial and technical infrastructure to support the adoption of healthy soils practices.

STTC Feedback, Agenda Items for next meeting, wrap up- Tony Jenkins (ME NRCS State Resource Conservationist):

- Item suggestions
 - Next meeting discusses planning activities
 - More information on IRA
- Next meeting will be in March and date will be announced