

State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Meeting Minutes
March 7, 2024

Welcome – Acting State Conservationist, Leon Tillman

- Leon introduced himself, he's been serving as the acting state conservationist as Kasey Taylor has been on detail (now permanently) at National Headquarters as the Northeast Regional Conservationist.
- His detail will end on March 9th and Jayme Arthurs will be serving as Acting State Conservationist.
- The announcement to permanently fill the state conservationist position is currently out.

State and Agency Updates, Leon Tillman

- NRCS national headquarters hosted listening sessions to support our programmatic work and streamlining of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
 - An improvement team has been established to hear from past participants or had interest in RCPP and consolidated their feedback.
 - Feedback improvements include negotiating, structuring proposals, and conversations for technical and financial support at the state level.
- National headquarters is also streamlining our Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that's had several changes throughout the past couple of Farm Bills.
 - Changes have been made to the payment methodology to clarify and make it simpler to understand and provide flexibility in the payment rates to consider inflation.
 - Increase minimum payments from \$1,500 to \$4,000 to account for operations that have interest in CSP but not able to put up large upfront cost for enhancements and practice implementation.
 - Brooke Jones is serving on the CSP improvements team.
- IRA funding has allowed us to hire more staff. We've had announcements for soil conservationists, natural resource specialists, and engineers, and made selections for some and in the selection process for others.
 - We currently have 36 staff and are hoping to make selections over the next several months to bring us to 44 full-time staff to better meet the increased need/customer demand for applications.
- In support of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, we did a Black Farmers Conference outreach event in October.
 - Working with Delaware State University, FSA, RD, and other financing ag entities attendees consisted of farmers across Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. We provided them with an opportunity to understand how our programs work, how the funding could be leveraged, and to get a better understanding of what services we offer that are applicable on their operations.
 - We also continue to do outreach events across our universities with our partners.
 - The Delaware AG Week and Delmarva Soil Summit also provided an opportunity to promote NRCS services to customers and a recruitment opportunity for those that have a passion and desire to work in agriculture and with our farmers and producers.
- Phragmites Control Action Plan in Chesapeake Bay – Maryland has an agreement that has been obligated with Ducks Unlimited.

- There are two components to the agreement: the establishment of a Chesapeake Bay-wide phragmites control action plan and the implementation of phragmites control in Maryland in the Chesapeake Bay.
- Ducks Unlimited is going to work with their partners across the Chesapeake Bay to identify locations/priority areas for phragmites control.
- We have been implementing EQIP ACT Now as a means to get our dollars out of the door faster. We have identified practices for quicker application and contracting processes so producers can get started sooner to get those practices on the ground.
- We're interested in working with partners through Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). This is a great opportunity for science and research around ways to make our conservation practices more innovative. If you have ideas on how our practice standards can be tailored or adjusted to account for saltwater intrusion, address flooding issues, or any opportunities to meet new and incoming resource needs, this is a great opportunity to address those in the future.
 - Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) - there's been a lot of work and research to look at how planting certain crops and crop varieties can mitigate effects that could lead to using agronomic practices.
- We want to invigorate participation in programs, for more participation especially in CSP and RCPP projects.
- We have a national opportunity through the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Division (OUAIP) for \$6.1 million in competitive grants to support urban ag and innovative production through two categories: planning projects and implementation projects.
 - The announcement for funding is out right now on grant.gov (search the keyword OUAIP) through 11:59 pm on April 9th.
 - Planning projects initiate or expand efforts in urban and suburban areas and can also target food access, education for businesses, startup costs, and issues related to zoning.
 - Implementation projects accelerate existing or emerging models for ag practices that serve farmers and communities, improve food access, support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, and education.
 - There are prerecorded webinars, fact sheets, and frequently asked questions on the grants.gov website to answer any additional questions you may have. If you have additional questions, feel free to work through our state office.

Q: Under EQIP you mentioned there's two initiatives for saltwater intrusion where do you get more information on that.

A: Under the our Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), additional information is located on our state website, ([Delaware | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)) or and national ([USDA](#)) website

Q: What are some of the practices of saltwater intrusion?

A: This where we'd be looking for your help. There's been discussions about planting certain types of vegetation, not thinking about the right species. It may be in the context of planting or buffers, but our species recommendations may need to be adjusted to account for that saltwater intrusion for species that are more resilient and consider that within our practice standards and specifications.

Delaware Poultry Environmental Assessment (EA), Jayme Arthurs

- This EA addresses new and expected resource concerns on new poultry operations. We've been going through this process for almost two years.

- Back in 2016 or 2017, the congressional a partnership staff drafted up language to be included in the 2018 farm bill to address new and expected resource concerns for new poultry producers to apply for financial assistance ahead of their first flock of birds.
- We worked with national headquarters to address how to handle this issue within our farm bill programs, particularly EQIP. We develop an environmental assessment (EA) for an area in Sussex County.
- We have contracted with a private group for the environmental evaluation process, and they provided us with an EA that stated there is no significant impact as a result of this action, which is the best result you can expect when going through the NEPA process. This allowed us to move forward with providing financial assistance to producers in that project area.
- An official announcement will be coming out in the next few weeks and will have a quick application period for producers in that project area.
- We are addressing at the national level, how to address newer expected resource concern projects outside the piloted EA area moving forward.
- Leon and Jayme are working with Kasey as the Northeast Regional Conservationist and national headquarters to determine how we're going to proceed in the near future. We hope to have more information by the next State Technical Committee meeting.

Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices (CSAF), Jayme Arthurs

- The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding allotment, \$10 million, addressed climate change by providing funding and implementing practices already established as part addressing resource concerns to help with climate resiliency, greenhouse gases, and carbon sequestration was built into our CSAF practice list through EQIP.
- We are looking at \$16.5M for FY24 to increase over the next couple years. We are focusing on getting additional practices added to the CSAF list. They are broken down into practice areas; soil health, cover crops, carbon amendment (added this year) and nutrient management.
- This year, they added practices that help with restoring hydric soils for the benefit of storing carbon like wetland restoration projects, grass and tree plantings, and energy. They also added aggregation or irrigation practices this year that are applicable in EQIP and CSP.
- Practices are considered mitigation activities if they're implemented in a certain way.
- Soil testing after the soil carbon amendment is added as a supporting practice to 336 for CSAF.
- Our staff has spent time training and understanding implementing specific practices to use in our planning software and getting the proper credit for it.
- In Delaware, the biggest practice that we use is the composting facility. This would be the first year that we're doing it with IRA funding. Soil carbon amendment is also taking off in Delaware as a full-blown conservation practice standard that's adoptable by all states in the country.

Nanticoke Watershed Project, Ann Baldwin

- We have one project in the planning phase for improvements in the Upper Nanticoke Watershed through our national watershed program to identify and address concerns beyond standard operation maintenance. There are three phases; planning, design, and construction that will take several years.
- We hired a contractor to do the work as we don't have the staff here in the state to complete this planning process anymore. The contractor is developing alternatives to address flooding through hydrologic and hydraulic modeling to look at the various issues and concerns that we raised. They are running environmental and economic analysis and recommendations to keep moving forward.

- The environmental analysis will meet the NEPA requirements and show the project is going to meet the cost benefit ratio.
- We should have the evaluation about the costs and benefits of particular projects they're proposing within the next two to three months. There will be another public meeting to discuss the alternatives and benefits that can be presented to people within the watershed.
- Ann mentioned a sea level rise work group approached us about a potential project last year in the City of New Castle where the preliminary investigation findings report was done and determined that we could possibly have a project there to address the sea level rise.
 - We hired a contractor to go through that initial review process to determine eligibility, purpose, and 20% benefit of ag land or rural communities. The City of New Castle is an eligible sponsor.
 - The next step is to develop a statement of work and cost estimate for the contractor and get it processed through contracting to hire a consultant to begin the planning process.
- As a reminder, watershed funding opportunities are available. If you have any thoughts or ideas, contact us. Information is available on the Delaware NRCS website, [Delaware | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/watershed/).

FY24 Conservation Program Information, Justin Ford, Farm Bill Specialist

- FY24 allocations for our different programs for EQIP.
 - EQIP: \$6,503,000.00
 - AMA: \$92,000.00
 - AMA-RMA: \$95,105.00
 - EQIP-IRA: \$10,291,000.00
 - CSP: \$1,200,000.00
 - CSP-IRA: \$775,000.00
- We are nationally mandated to spend 5% of our funds in each socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer.
- Nationally mandated to spend 5% of our funds in EQIP CIC, 50% on livestock practices, and 10% on wildlife practices.
- Fund pools have been adjusted and updated for FY24 . There are some changes from last year.
 - *EQIP*
 - We consolidated cover crop and drainage water management into the cropping fund pool and configured that with different ranking questions to make those a priority.
 - We created Agrichemical Handling Facility this year to make sure we're ranking like practices.
 - Preliminary funds for each of the fund pools will shift to the priority ranking pools as identified in the local workgroup process.
 - On Farm Energy funding can potentially move because IRA funds target a lot of the same practices.
 - These are preliminary, they move throughout the year as we see needs and priorities through our funding as preapprovals and obligations work their way through the process.
 - We are prioritizing IRA funding first so we may not have a list for those funds.
 - *EQIP-CIC (Conservation Incentive Contracts)*
 - Is targeted to one land use, must address at least one of three priority resource concerns, and be within an identified watershed.
 - CIC allows producers to implement elements of CSP on a smaller scale.

- Has separate payment limitations from general EQIP; \$200,000 per person and \$400,000 for joint operations.
 - CIC practices: soil health testing, soil and source testing for nutrient management, predominantly management practices would have a five-year length of time towards CSP. Soil Carbon Amendment is a newly adopted practice.
- *IRA*
 - EQIP-IRA; cropland, energy, wildlife and forestry, and livestock are broken out from the CSAF lists mitigation categories.
 - IRA contracts must have at least one core CSAF practice.
 - We have a set of non-core practices classified as facilitating that have to directly support the core practice to make them eligible for IRA funds set at 5% or approximately \$500,000 for this year. We also keep reserved funds in case there are changes that happen after pre-approval. Our total for IRA for this year is a little over \$10 million.
- *ACT Now*
 - Is not a new program but a tool to immediately approve and obligate a ranked application in the designated ranking pool when eligible application meets or exceeds a state determined ranking score or threshold.
 - This is the first year we're offering ACT Now and are looking at it going into next year.
 - For FY24, we focused on a limited list of planning activities, backlogged projects, and IRA funded practices.
 - For FY25, we will mirror the same thought process but expand the list of planning activities that offer as well as funding practices that generally require a planning activity done first.
 - Our application deadline for ACT Now was December 15, 2023.
 - IRA preliminary funds obligated \$630,000 in cropland, \$2.5M in energy, \$92,000 in high tunnels, and nothing in forestry. We are looking to expand forestry and include wildlife practices. We'll be carrying leftover funds into our general schedule.
 - Deadlines for our different programs
 - EQIP, EQIP-IRA, EQIP-CIC, EQIP-CIC-IRA, AMA
November 17, 2023, March 15, 2024, and May 17, 2024
 - EQIP - Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)
March 8, 2024
 - CSP & CSP-IRA
March 22, 2024
 - CSP Renewals FY25
May 3, 2024
- *EQIP High Priority Practices*
 - States have an opportunity to set up 10 higher quality practices that may receive an increased incentive rate and must meet one of the following criteria:
 - Addresses specific causes of impairment relating to excessive nutrients in ground or surface water.
 - Addresses the conservation of water, to advance drought mitigation and declining aquifers.
 - Meets other environmental priorities and other priority resource concerns identified in habitat or other area restoration plans; or
 - Is geographically targeted to address a natural resource concern in a specific watershed.
 - Under-utilized practice with high potential for conservation benefit, state specific

- Justin provided the list of FY24 High Priority Practices that are the same as last year. The only addition was the 612 Tree Establishment.
- *Source Water Protection*
 - The same map as last year, so no changes.
 - The source water protection list of practices addresses water quality or water quantity and provide an increased payment rate.
 - CSP has additional funding through IRA with the same funding pools as last year and mirrors EQIP.
 - We have to offer a beginning farmer and socially disadvantaged 5% of our overall funding.
 - National Industrial Private Forestland has the same two categories, agland and non-industrial private forestland.
 - Jen Richardson, our program manager for CSP and RCPP will be starting next week and will be able to provide more information at our next STAC meeting.
- *Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)*
 - We are still waiting on the announcements of proposals to come out from headquarters in early spring.
 - If you have any potential RCPP proposal ideas, please send them to Brooke Jones.
- *Payment Schedule*
 - The FY24 Payment Schedule has been completed. All costs are set for the year.
 - In the upcoming months the process will begin for the FY25 Payment Schedule process, please work with your local work group to submit any suggestions.

Q: Why are there three different batches, is there any benefit to being in one versus the other?

A: It is important to be in one through three. If you're in the first batch, you get first priority to the funds that are set there. The second batch date works through anyone that signed up after batch one and those remaining batch one applicants if we still have money remaining. This might be the first year we anticipate getting into a second batch. It is important to try to get in as soon as possible to the most current batch. We also take applications all year long so it's not a situation where there's a limited window for you to apply.

- *Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)*, Elena Stewart
 - Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE) is an NRCS held easement. We purchase the development rights and steward the easement.
 - NRCS pays the property owner for the development rights and pays for restoration. We also pay or some maintenance and stewardship activities.
 - Provide and protect habitat for wetland dependent plants and wildlife and to improve water quality.
 - Currently have four active applications.
 - FY24 Deadlines:
 - March 10th, applications however, we accept applications on a rolling basis
 - March 29th, assess and rank applications
 - May 31st, offers made
 - We are currently trying to do more outreach for this program. We have a WRE Workshop at the Harrington Fire Hall on March 19th at 5:00 pm. Registration at the following link: <https://www.sussexconservation.org/events/wre20240319.html>

- Elena and Emily Palmer, Easement Coordinator will be providing a presentation at the workshop.
- We are trying to incentivize the program to obtain waivers to increase the payment rates to be more competitive with current real estate prices.
- The Geographic Area Rate Caps are established at 95%.
 - New Castle County, \$10,735 per acre for cropland with hydric soils and \$9,215 per acre for woodland with hydric soils.
 - Kent County, \$10,450 per acre for cropland with hydric soils and \$5,035 for woodland with hydric soils.
 - Sussex County, \$13,110 per acre for cropland with hydric soils and \$8,882.50 per acre for woodlands with hydric soils.
- Agricultural Land Easement Program (ALE)
 - An entity held easement program reimbursable at 50% of the appraised easement value.
 - This program protects land for agricultural use.
 - Eligible partners are any state or local government.
 - Currently we only have one entity in Delaware that participates in this program, Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA). They are also a certified entity; they get a more expedited process.
 - Indian tribes and NGOs are also eligible.
 - \$1,354,133 allocation is available.
 - We only received two applications valued at approximately \$649,289. We are going to have to return the remaining funds.
 - Please reach out to Elena, elena.stewart@usda.gov if you have another entity that would be interested in participating in the program.

Q: What does being certified entail?

A: When we're processing their applications, they don't have to go through the internal control process.

Local Work Group (LWG) Information/Reminders, Shantel King

- The Local Work Group is comprised community stakeholders that represent a diverse area or make up of the area that should have an agricultural interest best suited to identify and manage resource concerns.
- This is supposed to be led by the Soil Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) in collaboration with NRCS.
- Announcements are sent out as well as a state bulletin for participation from the counties.
- Anyone can participate; local members of the community that have agricultural interests, local state, federal agencies, organizations, local agribusinesses, and impacted stakeholders that have resource concern issues on their land.
- The LWG meetings are to:
 - Identify the biggest conservation needs in our counties.
 - Prioritize those conservation needs that can be addressed by conservation programs to include federal, state and county financial assistance,
 - Recommending USDA conservation program application and funding criteria and focus of NRCS funding efforts,
 - Assisting NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and,
 - Providing recommendations to the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee based on resource data.

- The culmination of this results in a report that sent back to NRCS with recommendations to the State Technical Advisory Committee in the September meeting. During the spring meeting we review the recommendations from the LWG.
- During the LWG meetings, they talk about how to prioritize each of our land units or resource priorities, looking at the various resource concerns that have been identified and ranking what priorities you want to place those resource concerns for each of the land units that are identified to agricultural lands and forestlands. Once the priorities have been assigned, we develop their fund pools.
 - We use our business tools to rank and assess applications for funding based on priorities set by the LWG of each county.
 - CART then evaluates the applications by assessing existing conditions, the plan, practice effects, resource concern priorities, program priorities, and cost efficiency.
 - At the LWG meeting, you should have copies of the basic ranking questions for the different counties that we would like to have feedback on so we can set the proper and accurate priorities for the counties.

Q: In regard to the ranking questions, the majority of the people sitting around that table don't know what those ranking questions are, can those be provided?

A: Yes, if that's something that's needed for that LWG. Also, that's why we have we have NRCS representation there, the District Conservationist, the NRCS Area Resource Conservationist , and the ASTC Field Operations to explain how that process works and get the necessary feedback to help set the accurate and correct priorities for that state. NRCS staff can be there as a resource, but we are not there to dictate what the questions should be.

- We are looking for ideas and partnerships for Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), and special projects. These will be compiled and added to the conservation needs assessment report for the top ranked conservation needs.

Q: Is there going to be any new guidelines issued because we're just going off last fiscal years.

A: There are no changes, just more of a notification and the dates of the report. We are working on our state bulletin with the dates and information to go out hopefully by the beginning of next week.

Q: Do you ever go back to previous reports and look at what the issues were and what changes have been made or if changes have been made going forward?

A: Yes, the information is utilized. There are several things that are discussed via the state Leadership with regards to reports i.e., our road map success. Some of the challenges are resource concerns or barriers and these are some of the things we look at. Those things are outlined via our action items for the year; like looking at ways to get more information out, what are some barriers to programs, what are we getting from feedback. We're taking the feedback and providing it to the appropriate team to make sure we're addressing some of those issues and then through the STAC meetings, we're responding back and giving you feedback on how we're addressing those questions/concerns. We take those reports very seriously.

- Local Work Group Meetings:
 Kent County, March 20th
 Sussex County, March 26th
 New Castle County, Not set yet

Committee Member Reports

Farm Service Agency (FSA), Lauren Shahan, Delaware Agricultural Program Specialist

- Report attached to the minutes.

Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), Chris Miller/Kyle Hoyd

Chris Miller – Deputy State Forester

- DDA is shorthanded right now, our capacity has not been where we want it to be. We are down 3 Conservation Techs, 1 Stewardship Forester, 1 Service Forester, and 1 Urban Forester
- They are doing some CREP and WRE planning with NRCS as well as making strides figuring out some of the new NRCS stuff like ACT Now and CSP. We strive to find good partners and help to get funding out the door.

Kyle Hoyd – State Forester

- They are really looking for their lands to become, referred to as, the poster child of what working lands could look like for landowners.
- Chris is working with their regional foresters, as well as stewardship forester on a lot of different things that we're going to carry out for simple practices. A lot of those difficult rural practices are geared towards wildlife because that is the target audience here in Delaware, it's no longer industrial forest landowners like it once was.
 - Chris has been tasked and he's doing a fantastic job with essentially coming up and breaking what they referred to as tracks or essentially our management problems alternative.

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC),

- They just closed the request for proposals.
- They had two grants running concurrently.
 - Water quality, more specifically Section 319, problems that did and should be in compliance specifically to boundaries.
 - On the 319-grant side, they had multiple proposals to this particular round. The approximate value that controls about \$540,000 of submissions being advertised to capacity, currently about \$324,000 have been approved.
 - It is a competitive process, so they are convening their review and ranking committee to meet on the 18th of this month . They have basically squared up proposals.
 - They will be reaching out to anybody that didn't submit a proposal but had questions to clarify any positive type of stuff.
- They are in the process, as part of the conditions in order to award grant funds to operate throughout the state in priority watersheds that they have accepted, monitor, and set implementation plan.
 - Currently they have nine different priority watersheds geographically scattered. The land mass can basically cover about 2/3 of the stream where we can implement best management practice projects.
- EPA would like them to update more plans that needs to get to the 10-year threshold with their metrics.

- Right now, they have a consultant that has been hired to update three existing plans, including the Saint Johns River in the Christina Basin, which include four subwatersheds: White Clay Creek, Red Clay Creek, Brandywine Creek, .
- Looking at possibly adding two new watersheds so they can expand the geographic area, Mispillion and Murderkill as their budget allows in the future.
- Drainage program
 - Since it's rained about 2 ½ feet since December 1st, there's obviously a lot of flooding concerns. When they get these phone calls, specifically with drainage, they are working with them and will evaluate those with Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) for any projects to see if there's something they can do for water quality benefits or something where there's a tax ditch and they can look at restoration activities. They may have opportunities for retrofit projects, file extension, bioswales, or possible stormwater retention projects.
 - It will be case by case, but they will work with that program to try to best utilize state funds as their grant is federal with non-federal match.

Kent County Conservation District, Stephanie Walt

- Kent County's LWG meeting is set for March 20th from 2:00 pm to 4:30pm at Loblolly Acres following the Delaware Ag Safety Conference. They are getting ready to send out massive email about it.
- The KCD Board of Supervisors are concerned with the issue of large animal mortality disposal in the state. Currently horses and cows are being disposed of in the landfill. We plan to organize a committee of stakeholders including Chris Brosch from DDA and the Nutrient Management Commission to look at potential alternatives, such as composting or incineration. If anyone is interested, please reach out to Stephanie and she will make sure that you're invited to those stakeholder meetings.

Sussex Conservation District (SCD), Debbie Absher

- SCD will be hosting a WRE (Wetlands Reserve Easement) Workshop March 19th at 5:00 pm at the Harrington Fire Hall.
- The SCD Local Work Group meeting is March 26th at their Shortly Road Office at 9:00 am. If anybody has any questions, just give SCD a call and they can connect you with the information.
- SCD planners are working on EQIP applications. As of the date of this meeting, Sussex County has a total of 210 applications and SCD planners are working on 132 of them. That equates to about 63% of the total applications Sussex being handled by SCD planners.
- They've completed 11 CNMPs.
- SCD held a soil health workshop in January as well as the 2024 Delmarva Soil Summit on February 6-7, 2024.
- They continue to do other outreach and communications through the Outreach and Communication Specialists; she does an excellent job.
- They have completed 64% of their overall agreement and are on pace to have everything spent by the end of it this fiscal year.
- On March 15th through June 3rd, you can start destroying the cover crops.
 - Certification letters went out yesterday with the destruction certification for farmers that might be expecting it.

Rural Water Association, Anita Beckel

- Anita has been working with Dave Baird. He applied for the extra \$228,000 for the cover crops.
- The cover crop program is a 90% cost share. They are going to approach some water systems to see if they will fund the other 10% of the cost.
 - She's not expecting the small mobile home parks or schools to do that, but hoping some of the larger utilities would be interested in helping.

Farm Bureau, Bill Powers

- They will be holding a Safety Compliance Conference on March 20th at Loblolly Acres.
- They did a Risk Management Conference in Harrington last Monday.
- The Farm Bureau right now, all three counties were represented in the Southern Legislative Breakfast.
- Last Monday, New Castle County until it's the county. What County Council plus? State legislative. Next Tuesday, we're doing it in Kent County. Every quarter and that Friday and that Tuesday will be at the Hollywood Diner and Friday will be at June banisters.
- In substance, County legislators, you know the Council meeting.
- We got a lot going on.
- I was brought up a lot of working groups and farmers are saying they don't hear anything back from the LWG meetings and wonder why they are there. Bill stated that whatever is needed, they are here to help.

Nonprofit Organizations, Richard Wilkins (On behalf of the Mid-Atlantic Soybean Association)

- The Mid-Atlantic Soybean Association also represents Maryland Congressman Andy Harris who is the chairman of the Agricultural Appropriations Committee. They advocated with Congressman Harris so strongly for increased dollars for NRCS to be able to get more technicians on your staff.
 - They feel like that's something that's been neglected. NRCS has been adding folks such as communicators and administrative folks but there's a hole there and that hole is actual technicians that can go out into the field to assess the resource concerns and help producers to identify and prioritize.
 - Along with that also is knowledge of how the algorithms work for the for the scoring mechanisms so that farmers, producers, and vendors aren't wasting their time on applying for EQIP or other projects that aren't likely to get funded anyway. Trying to strategically best manage everybody's time .
- Richard hasn't read the appropriations bill that was just passed a couple days ago by the House to see whether we were successful but believes that overall, NRCS has received some additional staff funding and when he visits with Administrator Cosby, it certainly appears the message that field staff in the technical realm is what's really needed.
 - They are happy to have been able to have helped and continue to help in that regard.
- They are looking forward to helping us down the pathway of continuous improvement and trying to get more producers to realize that it's their input that can change direction and help things improve.

First State Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D), Tim Riley

- RC&D was in the farm bills and was funded.

- We used to have coordinators that fell under the NRCS system and many years ago the funding was dropped but they were still able to be written in the farm bill, there's just no funding.
- In Delaware, we had one R&D Council when all of that happened. We still had a bank account with about \$50,000 remaining so, we decided as a Council, Rick Mickowski, President, Tim Riley, Treasurer since 1994, and a few other people in an advisory role are slowly depleting that fund. They have \$5000 mini grants for outdoor classrooms, pollinators, umm these types of things, small backyard ponds, or small project kind of stuff if you're interested.
- Rick retired at the end of February, his last Friday was his last day, and his retirement luncheon was held two days ago. He is going to volunteer his time to stay on the RC&D Council as the Chair and will handle most of the applications and such for those grant programs.

Q: Debbie asked about the poultry freezer issue, are there any updates on that?

A: Jayme replied that in the Nutrient Management Commission meeting Tuesday they have talked about. He doesn't know what the fixed rates are, but they are going to increase their rates for cost share for tipping fees associated with the poultry mortality freezers.

- We have a draft policy here in the state for those folks that have altered mortality freezers. But for whatever reason, you know, obviously tipping fees going up would be the primary one. If they're not going to use them anymore, what are the ramifications as a result of that.
- Freezers are not solely a Delaware issue, it's also in Maryland. We've reached over to them and floated that policy over to them to see what they think that way we're approaching it from both sides of the same mind.
- We were essentially telling folks they need to replace their capacity for freezers with an alternative composter or some other form of composting to handle those mortalities. It really comes down to meeting their CNMP requirements and CAFO permit requirements. They have to handle those mortalities in some form or fashion, but we would not pay for that additional mortality complex, that would be all the on them to do.
- They also have to retain the freezers on the farm in good operating condition in case they were able or wanted to bring it back into production at some point.
- If they chose not to use their composter or mortality freezers anymore, it would make them low priority for any future applications for farm bill programs because they're not operating or maintaining the freezer as it was intended. They have to do something or else they'll be out of line with state law.
- Essentially, we're saying that if you compost your mortality some other way, it treats your mortality some of the way, but we're looking at it as it is an operation maintenance issue, it's a contract issue with those freezers over the lifespan of the remaining time of the contract.
- We included in that policy that essentially because they took federal payment to install that practice and chose not to operate and maintain it, that it would make them a low priority because if somebody wasn't using their manure structure or composter, those individuals would also be a low priority for funding moving forward in the future as well.

Delaware State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
11:00 AM – 2:00 PM
March 7, 2024

Microsoft Teams meeting [Click here to join the meeting](#), Meeting ID: 222 987 487 78, Passcode: eLTcV4 Or call in (audio only), [+1 202-650-0123,,807757565#](#), Phone Conference ID: 807 757 565#

11:00 - 11:10	Welcome	Leon Tillman
11:10 - 11:30	State and Agency Updates	Leon Tillman
11:30 - 12:15	Update on Delaware Poultry Environmental Assessment Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices Update Nanticoke Watershed Project	Jayme Arthurs/Ann Baldwin
12:15 - 12:45	Lunch	
12:45 - 1:00	FY24 Conservation Program Information	Justin Ford
1:00 - 1:15	Local Work Group Information/Reminders	Shantel King
1:15 - 2:00	Committee Member Reports Guest Reports (List of Committee Members are on page #2)	Group

State Technical Committee Members

1. Farm Service Agency
2. U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
3. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4. Food and Nutrition Services
5. National Ag. Statistics Service
6. Environmental Protection Agency
7. State Departments and Agencies within the State
 - Delaware Department of Agriculture
 - Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
8. Delaware Lenape Tribe
9. Delaware Nanticoke Tribe
10. Delaware Association of Conservation Districts
 - New Castle County Conservation District
 - Kent County Conservation District
 - Sussex County Conservation District
11. Delaware Rural Water Association
12. Mid-Atlantic 4R
13. State Cooperative Extension Service and Land Grant Universities in the State
14. Farm Bureau
15. Nonprofit Organizations
16. Agriculture Producers representing the variety of crops and poultry and or livestock raised in the State

Farm Service Agency – Lauren Shahan, State Program Specialist

FY 2024 CRP Enrollment Signup Overview

On November 17, 2023, the President signed the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 which included a 1-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill, reauthorizing CRP through September 30, 2024.

- **Continuous CRP Signup 61**
 - Signup began January 12, 2024
 - Deadline to submit offers is July 31, 2024
 - National office will be processing offers in batches & will notify county offices when offers are accepted. The county offices will then submit the accepted offers to NRCS for Conservation Planning
 - Deadline to request a conservation plan from NRCS is August 7, 2024
 - Deadline to return conservation plans signed to FSA is September 6, 2024
- **CREP Signup 61**
 - Signup began January 12, 2024
 - Deadline to submit offers is July 31, 2024
 - Deadline to request a conservation plan from NRCS is August 7, 2024
 - Deadline to return conservation plans signed to FSA is September 6, 2024
- **General CRP Signup 62**
 - Signup period is March 4, 2024 – March 29, 2024
 - Deadline to complete the conservation plan, obtain signatures on the conservation plan and return it to FSA – August 9, 2024

FY2024 Expiring Contracts

- CRP acres expiring in 2024: 105.27 acres; 19 contracts- All are CREP contracts
 - CP3A – Hardwood Tree Planting – 54.80 acres
 - CP4D – Permanent Wildlife Habitat – 16.7 acres
 - CP9 – Shallow Water Area for Wildlife – 28.71 acres
 - CP21 – Filter Strip – 2.86 acres
 - CP22 – Riparian Buffer – 2.20 acres

Current CRP Data

- CRP payments made FY 2023 – \$488,016; 271 active contracts.
- CRP enrollment acres: 2,878.63
- CRP State Acres Enrolled:

CREP – 2,779 acres enrolled

- Kent – 1,283 acres enrolled
- Sussex – 1,418 acres enrolled
- New Castle – 77 acres enrolled

Non-CREP Continuous – 85.52 acres enrolled

- Kent – 50.13 acres enrolled
- Sussex – 23.59 acres enrolled
- New Castle – 11.80 acres enrolled

General – 14.11 acres enrolled

- Kent – 5.90 acres enrolled
- Sussex – 8.21 acres enrolled
- New Castle – 0.00 acres enrolled

FY 2023 CRP Expiring/Reenrollment Data

- FY 2023 CRP expiring acres: 221.3 acres; 22 Contracts
 - Reenrolled – 11 contracts; 57.1 acres
 - Expired – 10 contracts; 161.4 acres
 - Terminated – 1 contract; 2.8 acres



United States Department of Agriculture



USDA – NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

Thursday, March 7, 2024



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



United States Department of Agriculture

Welcome

Leon Tillman
Acting State Conservationist



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



11:00 – 11:10	Welcome	Leon Tillman
11:10 – 11:30	State and Agency Updates	Leon Tillman
11:30 to 12:15	Delaware Poultry Environmental Assessment, New and Expected Resource Concerns Update, Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices Update Watershed Program Updates	Jayme Arthurs & Ann Baldwin
12:15 to 12:25	Break	
12:25 to 12:45	FY24 Farm Bill Programs Updates	Justin Ford
12:45 to 1:00	Delaware Local Working Group Strategy	Shantel King
1:00 to 2:00	Committee Member Reports Guest Reports	All





United States Department of Agriculture

State and Agency Updates

Leon Tillman
Acting State Conservationist



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

National Updates



- **Congratulations to Kasey Taylor, new NRCS Northeast Regional Conservationist**
 - Acting DE State Conservationist incoming
- **Streamlining Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
 - Improvement team
 - Partner listening session and feedback
- **Streamlining Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**
 - New payment methodology
 - Allows for periodic updates to the rates
 - New, higher minimum annual payment
 - Improvement team



State Updates

- **Hiring/ Staff**

- Soil Conservationists, Natural Resource Specialist, Engineer

- **Advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion**

- Black Farmers Conference
- Outreach and education events to veterans, students, local ag meetings, etc.

- **Phragmites Control Action Plan in Chesapeake Bay – MD Agreement**

- **EQIP obligations for ACT Now**

- **Invigorate Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), & Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) participation**



OUAIP: Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production

Competitive grants (\$6.1 mil) that will support development of urban agriculture and innovative production through two categories:

- Planning Projects
 - Implementation Projects
- **USDA accepting applications on Grants.gov until 11:59 PM Eastern on April 9, 2024.**
 - **Planning Projects initiate or expand efforts of partners in urban and suburban areas and may target areas of food access, education business, start-up costs, and plan development related to zoning, etc.**
 - **Implementation projects accelerate existing and emerging models of agriculture practices that serve farmers and communities. Improve food access, support infrastructure needs, emerging technologies, and educational endeavors**
 - **Pre-recorded webinar, fact sheet, and frequently asked questions on the Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production Grants webpage**





United States Department of Agriculture



Delaware Poultry Environmental Assessment, New & Expected Resource Concerns Update

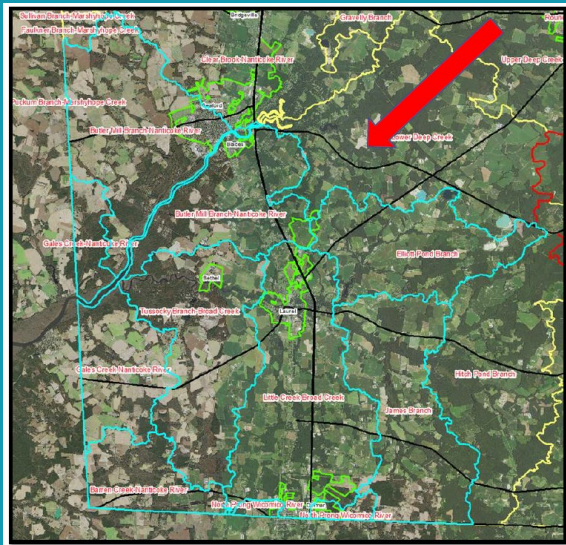
Jayne Arthurs
State Resource Conservationist



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Delaware Poultry Pilot Environmental Document



Purpose: Address New and/or Expected Resource Concerns on New Poultry Farms in Sussex County

- **Finding of No Significant Impact for EA will be posted to the Delaware NRCS Website.**
- **Announcement for application period for the EA project area will be announced in the coming weeks.**
- **Working with NRCS National Headquarters on next steps for new poultry operations outside of the project area.**



United States Department of Agriculture



Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices Update

Jayme Arthurs
State Resource Conservationist



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Climate Resiliency, Adaptation, and Mitigation



Climate-smart agriculture and forestry (CSAF):

- **Sustainably increase agricultural productivity and income by implementing conservation practices.**
- **Is an integrated approach that enables farmers and forest landowners to respond to climate change by reducing or removing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and adapting and building resilience (adaptation).**
- **With support from NRCS and partners, producers and land managers can engage in climate-smart agriculture and forestry conservation practices to adapt to the impacts of climate change, build resiliency, and contribute to solutions that help to limit future climate change.**



Climate Resiliency, Adaptation and Mitigation

- **Soil Health – Reducing emissions and enhancing soil carbon sequestration.**
- **Improved Nitrogen Management – Implementing SMART nutrient management helps reduce nitrous oxide. SMART Nutrient Management includes the 4Rs of nutrient stewardship – the right Source, right Method, right Rate, and right Timing – and emphasizes smart activities to reduce nutrient loss**
- **Improved Livestock Waste Management Systems – Reducing methane emissions from manure.**
- **Enhanced Grazing Land Management – Reducing emissions and building soil carbon stocks in grazing systems.**



Cover Crops

Nutrient Management



Prescribed Grazing

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Climate Resiliency, Adaptation and Mitigation



- **Improved Agroforestry, Forestry and Upland Wildlife Habitat** – Building carbon stocks in perennial biomass and soils.
- **Energy, Combustion and Electricity Efficiency** – Reducing emissions from agricultural operations and infrastructure through energy and fuel efficiency and system and operational improvements.

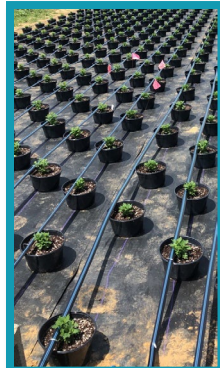
Wetland Restoration



Grass and Tree Planting



Irrigation Systems and Pumping Plants



Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices FY24

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities List for FY2024



Highlighted activities have been added to the list in FY2024.
*Noted activities are added to the list as "provisional".¹⁶

Mitigation Categories ⁽¹⁾	Code	Conservation Practice Standard Name ^{(2) (3)} (practice unit)	Code	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Enhancement Activities
Soil Health	327	Conservation Cover (acres)	E327A	Conservation cover for pollinators and beneficial insects ⁽²⁾
			E327B	Establish Monarch butterfly habitat
	328	Conservation Crop Rotation (acres)	E328A	Resource conserving crop rotation
			E328B	Improved resource conserving crop rotation
			E328E	Soil health crop rotation
			E328F	Modifications to improve soil health and increase soil organic matter
			E328N	Intercropping to improve soil health
			E328O	Perennial grain crop conservation rotation
	329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (acres)	E329A	No till to reduce soil erosion
			E329B	No till to reduce tillage induced particulate matter
			E329C	No till to increase plant-available moisture
			E329D	No till system to increase soil health and soil organic matter content
			E329E	No till to reduce energy
	332	Contour Buffer Strips (acres)		None Available
	336	Soil Carbon Amendment (acres) ⁽⁴⁾		None Available
	340	Cover Crop (acres)	E340A	Cover crop to reduce soil erosion
			E340B	Intensive cover cropping to increase soil health and soil organic matter content
			E340C	Use of multi-species cover crops to improve soil health and increase soil organic matter
			E340D	Intensive orchard/vineyard floor cover cropping to increase soil health
			E340F	Cover crop to minimize soil compaction
			E340G	Cover crop to reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excess soil nutrients
E340H			Cover crop to suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles	
E340I			Using cover crops for biological strip till	
E340J			Cover crop to improve moisture use efficiency and reduce salts	
345			Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (acres)	E345A
	E345B	Reduced tillage to reduce tillage induced particulate matter		
	E345C	Reduced tillage to increase plant-available moisture		
	E345D	Reduced tillage to increase soil health and soil organic matter content		
	E345E	Reduced tillage to reduce energy use		

New practices and associated enhancements:

- 336: Soil Carbon Amendment
- 313 Waste Storage Facility
- 317 Composting Facility
- 367: Roofs and Covers
- 338: Prescribed Burning
- 314: Brush Management
- 315: Herbaceous Weed Treatment
- 383: Fuel Break
- 384: Woody Residue Treatment
- 643: Restoration of Rare and Declining Natural Communities
- 372: Combustion System Improvement
- 430: Irrigation Pipeline
- 441: Microirrigation
- 442: Sprinkler System
- 533: Pumping Plant

Practice are considered a mitigation activity only when implemented in the specified way.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

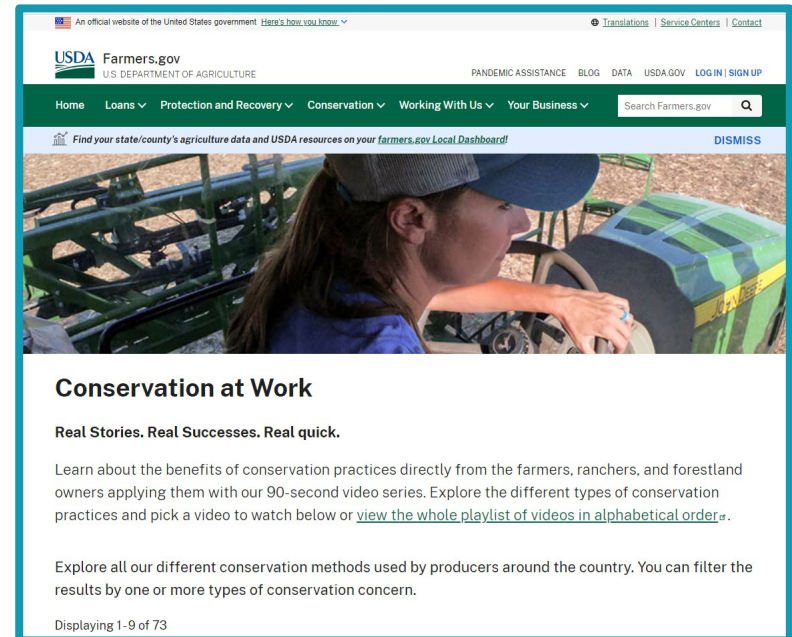


CSAF Practices for Delaware FY2024

- Composting Facility (Vegetative Waste)
- Cover Crops
- Soil Carbon Amendment
- No-Till, Reduced-Till
- Field Borders, Windbreaks, Hedgerows, Tree Plantings
- Nutrient Management
- Irrigation Systems and Management
- Prescribed Grazing, Fencing, Waterers
- Energy Use Reduction

Conservation At Work:

<https://www.farmers.gov/conservation/conservation-at-work>



The screenshot shows the Farmers.gov website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the USDA logo and 'Farmers.gov U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'. Below this is a green navigation menu with links for Home, Loans, Protection and Recovery, Conservation, Working With Us, and Your Business. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a large image of a woman in a blue shirt and cap driving a green tractor. Below the image, the heading 'Conservation at Work' is followed by the tagline 'Real Stories. Real Successes. Real quick.' The text describes a 90-second video series about conservation practices and provides a link to a playlist. At the bottom, it mentions filtering results by conservation concern and shows 'Displaying 1-9 of 73' items.

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





United States Department of Agriculture



Watershed Program Update

Ann Baldwin
State Conservation Engineer



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Watershed Program Updates

Upper Nanticoke Watershed Plan Update

- **Previously Reported**
 - Developing alternatives for addressing flooding based on model.
 - Also evaluating bank erosion and water quality concerns
 - Running environmental and economic analysis
- **Current Work**
 - Continuing to run environmental and economic analysis of project alternatives



Watershed Program Updates

Some Results from Existing Condition Economic Analysis

Damage due to flooding during 2-year and 5-year flood recurrence intervals

Table 3. Expected Annual Flood Damage to Structures and Vehicles, Existing Conditions

Flood Event	Exceedance Probability	24-hr Rainfall Depth (in)	Damages	Contribution to EAD
5-yr	0.2	3.2	\$1,589,066	\$158,907
2-yr	0.5	2.6	\$1,301,871	\$434,774
TOTAL				\$593,681

Table 5. Expected Annual Flood Damages, Existing Conditions Roadways and Bridges

Flood Event	Exceedance Probability	24-hr Rainfall Depth (in)	Damages	Contribution to EAD
5-yr	0.2	3.20	\$2,559,294	\$255,929
2-yr	0.5	2.61	\$1,515,273	\$611,185
TOTAL				\$867,114



Watershed Program Updates

Table 6. Study Area Agricultural Crops

Crop	Acres Planted					Average Acres Planted
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018-2022
Corn	2,935	2,487	2,512	2,779	2,428	2,628
Soybeans	2,220	2,694	2,600	2,290	2,674	2,495
Other Hay	177	194	218	203	179	194
Total	5,331	5,375	5,330	5,271	5,281	5,318

Source: NASS, 2023.



Watershed Program Updates

Next Steps

The project team is developing alternatives for flood reduction and watershed protection. The goal of the project is to identify and evaluate sites where channel stabilization, ecosystem restoration and water quality improvement practices may produce beneficial changes in ecosystem services provided.

As alternatives are developed and evaluated, the team will assess what type of benefits may be present. Benefits may be reported in monetary terms, such as a reduction in existing flood damage. Benefits may also be reported in non-monetary terms, where an alternative helps to protect or restore the functions of natural systems (e.g., reduction in nutrient transport to downstream receiving waters).





Watershed Program Updates

- **Purposes**
 - Flood Prevention
 - Watershed Protection
 - Agricultural Water Management
 - Water Quality Management
 - Public Recreation
 - Public Fish and Wildlife
 - Municipal and Industrial Water Supply
- **20% benefit to ag land or rural communities**
- **Eligible Sponsor**





Watershed Program Updates

Local Sponsor

To be a local sponsor you must be a state agency, a subdivision of the state (which could be a non-profit if it is a part of the state government), a local municipal agency for county/city, or a tribal organization.

Sponsors must have some interest and control in the projects they would be administering and ability to implement operation and maintenance.





United States Department of Agriculture

 **BREAK**
5 minutes



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



United States Department of Agriculture



FY24 Farm Bill Programs Updates and Information

Justin Ford & Elena Stewart
Farm Bill Program Specialist



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

EQIP, AMA, CSP, & IRA funding for FY24

- EQIP: \$6,503,000.00
 - AMA: \$92,000.00
 - AMA-RMA: \$95,105.00
 - EQIP-IRA: \$10,291,000.00
 - CSP: \$1,200,000.00
 - CSP-IRA: \$775,000.00
-
- Nationally mandated to spend 5% of our funds in each:
 - Socially disadvantaged
 - Beginning famer
 - Nationally mandated to spend 5% of our funds in: EQIP CIC
 - Nationally mandated to spend 50% of our funds on livestock practices
 - Nationally mandated to spend 10% of our allocation on wildlife practices



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

EQIP & EQIP-CIC

- Fund pools have been adjusted and updated for FY24 as needed
- Local Work Group input and other needs were analyzed and incorporated



Ranking Pool	Preliminary Funds
Beginning Farmer	\$900,000
Conservation Activity Plans	\$20,000
Cropland	\$827,550
Agrichemical Handling Facility	\$250,000
Forestry	\$75,000
Livestock	\$275,000
On-Farm Energy	\$550,000
Organic Certified/Transitioning	\$5,000
Poultry Headquarters	\$1,500,000
Reserve	\$200,000
Socially Disadvantaged Farmer	\$900,000
Small Farm & Urban Agriculture	\$25,000
Wildlife 10%	\$650,300
EQIP CIC 5%	\$325,150
Total	\$6,503,000

EQIP- Conservation Incentive Contracts

To provide stewardship opportunities for producers through EQIP:

- Based on land use
- Must address at least one Priority Resource Concerns (PRC)
- Within an identified watershed or other area (HPA)

Steppingstone for producers from EQIP to CSP:

- Allows producers to implement elements of CSP on a smaller scale.

Has a separate payment limitation from General EQIP.

- \$200,000.00 per person or legal entity & a \$400,000.00 contract limit for Joint Operations.



FY24 EQIP-CIC practices



Practice Code	Name	Units
216	Soil Health Testing	No.
217	Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management	No.
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	Acres
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till	Acres
340	Cover Crop	Acres
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	Acres
449	Irrigation Water Management	Acres
554	Drainage Water Management	No.
590	Nutrient Management	Acres
595	Pest Management Conservation Systems	Acres
336	Soil Carbon Amendments	Acres



EQIP-IRA & EQIP-CIC-IRA



- **Fund pools are broken out by the CSAF practice's mitigation category**
- **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funded contracts must have at least 1 core CSAF practice. Non-core practices are classified as facilitating and must support the core practice.**

Ranking Pool	Preliminary Funds
Cropland	\$3,962,000.00
Energy	\$2,500,000.00
Wildlife & Forestry	\$1,029,100.00
Livestock	\$2,085,350.00
EQIP-CIC-IRA	\$514,550.00
IRA Reserve	\$200,000.00
Total	\$10,291,000.00



Act Now



- ACT NOW allows NRCS to immediately approve and obligate a ranked application in a designated ranking pool when an eligible application meets or exceeds a State-determined minimum ranking score (Threshold).
- Act Now for FY24 focused on a limited list of Planning Activities, back logged projects, and IRA funded practices.
- Application Deadline was December 15th, 2023.

Ranking Pool	Preliminary Funds	Contracted (Obligated)
EQIP-IRA Cropland	\$3,962,000.00	\$634,602.00
EQIP-IRA Energy	\$2,500,000.00	\$1,538,285.00
EQIP-IRA Forestry	\$1,029,100.00	\$0
EQIP Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs, DIAs, CEMAs)	\$20,000.00	\$18,530.00
AMA High Tunnel	\$92,000.00	\$84,709.00
Total		\$2,276,126.00



Application Deadlines- FY24



EQIP, EQIP-IRA, EQIP-CIC, EQIP-CIC-IRA, AMA

November 17th, 2023

March 15th, 2024

May 17th 2024

EQIP - Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)

March 8th 2024

CSP & CSP-IRA

March 22,2024

CSP Renewals FY25

May 3 2024



EQIP High Priority Practices

States have the opportunity to select up to 10 “High Priority” practices that may receive an increased incentive rate



High Priority Practices



A high priority practice must meet one of the following criteria:

- Addresses specific causes of impairment relating to excessive nutrients in ground or surface water;
- Addresses the conservation of water, to advance drought mitigation and declining aquifers;
- Meets other environmental priorities and other priority resource concerns identified in habitat or other area restoration plans; or
- Is geographically targeted to address a natural resource concern in a specific watershed.
- Under-utilized practice with high potential for conservation benefit , State specific



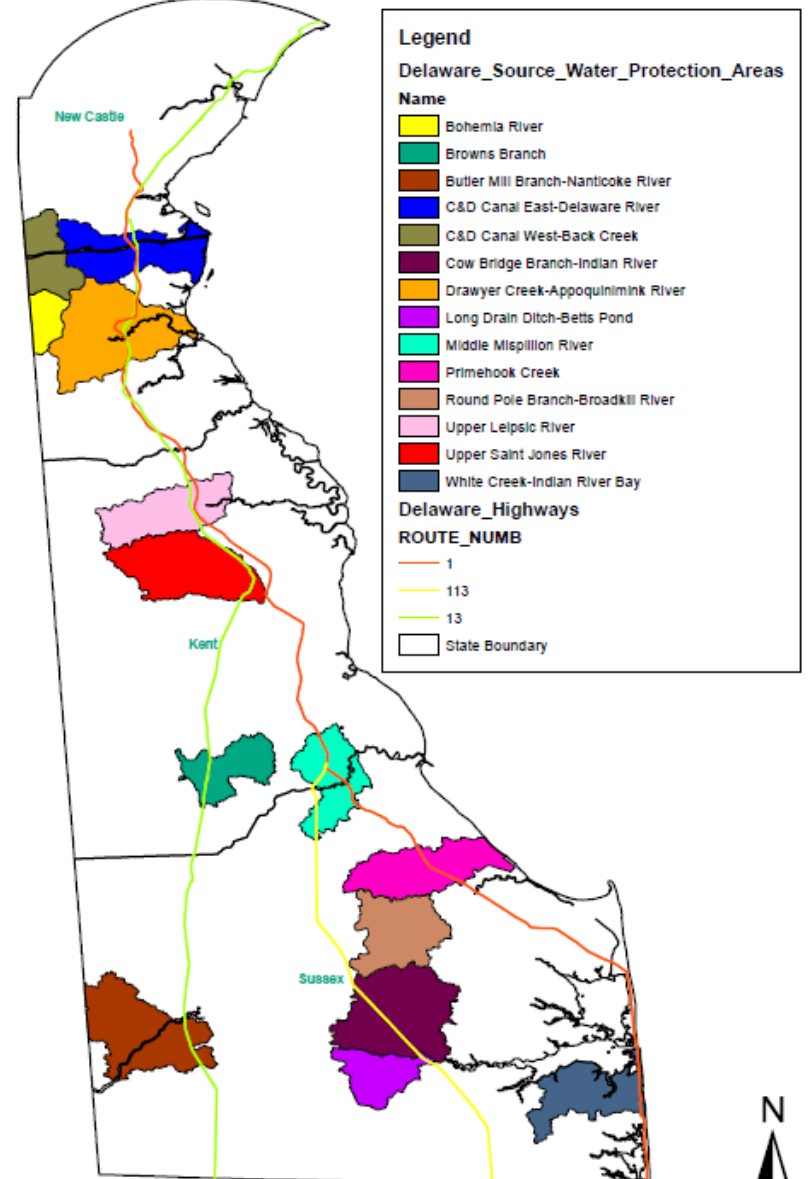
FY24 High Priority Practices

- **329- Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till**
- **390- Riparian Herbaceous Cover**
- **391- Riparian Forest Buffer**
- **393- Filter Strip**
- **605- Denitrifying Bioreactor**
- **604- Saturated Buffer**
- **620- Underground Outlet, Blind Inlet**
- **554- Drainage Water Management**
- **587- Structure for Water Control**
- **612 Tree Establishment**



FY24 Source Water Protection

Delaware FY2023 Source Water Protection Priority Areas



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.





FY24 Source Water Protection Practices



Waste Storage Facility
Animal Mortality Facility Composting Facility
Conservation Cover
Residue & Tillage Management, No-Till
Cover Crop
Critical Area Planting
Residue & Tillage Management, Reduced Till
Ground Water Testing
Waste Facility Closure
Anaerobic Digester
Roofs and Covers
Emergency Animal Mortality Management
Fence
Field Border
Riparian Herbaceous Cover
Riparian Forest Buffer
Filter Strip
Stream Habitat Improvement & Management
Grade Stabilization Structure Grassed Waterway

Irrigation System
Micro irrigation
Sprinkler System
Irrigation Water Management Pasture and Hay
Planting
Prescribed Grazing
Drainage Water Management
Roof Runoff Structure
Access Road
Heavy Use Area Protection
Stream Crossing
Streambank & Shoreline Protection
Structure for Water Control Nutrient Management
Integrated Pest Management
Saturated Buffer
Denitrifying Bioreactor Tree/Shrub Establishment
Waste Transfer
Water & Sediment Control Basin
Shallow Water Development
Constructed Wetland
Wetland Restoration



Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) & CSP IRA

Expected Ranking Pools FY24

Classic Agland

Classic Agland BF

Classic Agland SD

Classic Agland Organic

Classic NIPF

Classic NIPF BF

Classic NIPF SD

Classic Agland-IRA

Classic NIPF-IRA



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

RCPP Classic

Expected announcement for Classic proposals in early spring

If you have an RCPP Classic proposal idea or questions, please contact Brooke Jones



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Payment Schedule

FY24
Final

FY25
Upcoming

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) UPDATES



Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE)

- **NRCS held easement**
- NRCS pays the property owner for the development rights **AND** pays for restoration.
 - Also pays for some maintenance and stewardship activities.
- **Objective:** Provide and protect habitat for wetland dependent plants and wildlife and improve water quality



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE)

- **Currently have 4 active applications**

- **FY24 Deadlines**

- Application 3/10/24
- Assessment and Ranking 3/29/24
- WRE Offers Mailed 5/31/24



- **Outreach – WRE Workshop 3/19**

- Harrington Fire Hall @ 5pm
- Registration: <https://www.sussexconservation.org/events/wre20240319.html>



Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE)



- **FY24 Geographic Area Rate Caps for DE is 95%**

	Market Value - \$ per acre*	95% GARC - Adjusted Value
New Castle County		
Typical Cropland w/ hydric soils	\$ 11,300.00	\$ 10,735.00
Typical Woodland w/ hydric soils	\$ 9,700.00	\$ 9,215.00
Kent County		
Typical Cropland w/ hydric soils	\$ 11,000.00	\$ 10,450.00
Typical Woodland w/ hydric soils	\$ 5,300.00	\$ 5,035.00
Sussex County		
Typical Cropland w/ hydric soils	\$ 13,800.00	\$ 13,110.00
Typical Woodland w/ hydric soils	\$ 9,350.00	\$ 8,882.50

*as determined by average values in AWMA



Agricultural Lands Easement Program (ALE)



- **Entity held easement**
 - Reimbursement Program – 50% of appraised easement value
 - Protects land for agricultural use
- **Eligible Partners:**
 - State or local governments
 - DE Dept. of Agriculture - certified entity
 - Currently NRCS subsidizes a portion of the Agricultural Lands Preservation Program
 - Indian Tribes
 - NGOs
- **\$1,354,133 allocation is available for parcel acquisition in FY24**
 - Currently have 2 active applications valued at ~\$649,289
 - Will have to return remaining funds





United States Department of Agriculture



Delaware Local Working Group Strategy

Shantel King
Assistant State Conservationist-Field Operations



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Local Working Group Strategy



Community stakeholders who represent a diverse makeup of the area. The members should have agricultural interest best suited to identify and resolve local natural resource concerns.



Public Involvement

➤ *Anyone can participate*

➤ **Local, state and federal agencies**

➤ **Agricultural organizations**

➤ **Local agri-businesses**

➤ **Impacted stakeholders**



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

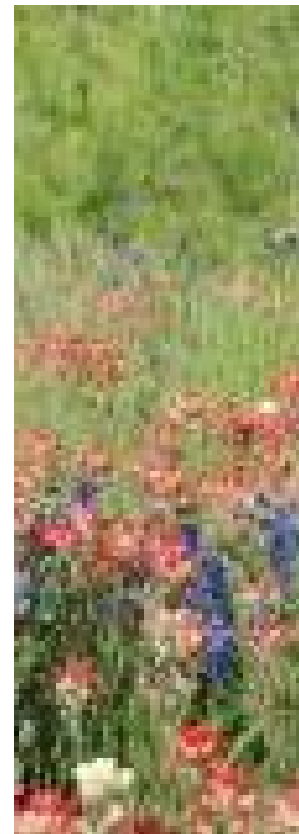
nrcs.usda.gov



Local Work Group Strategy

Convened by local SWCD and NRCS, responsibilities include:

- **Identify the biggest conservation needs in our counties;**
- **Prioritize those conservation needs that can be addressed by conservation programs to include: federal, state and county financial assistance**
- **Recommending USDA conservation program application and funding criteria and focus of NRCS funding efforts**
- **Assisting NRCS with public outreach and information efforts**
- **Providing recommendations to the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee based on resource data.**



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Local Working Group Strategy

Resource Priorities – Agriculture Lands	
<p>Directions: Identify and rank the top 5 resource priorities for Agricultural Lands</p> <p>(agricultural lands include: Cropland, Pasture, Range, Associated Agricultural Land, & Farmstead)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Air Quality Emissions <input type="checkbox"/> Aquatic Habitat <input type="checkbox"/> Concentrated Erosion <input type="checkbox"/> Degraded Plant Condition <input type="checkbox"/> Field Pesticide Loss <input type="checkbox"/> Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Management <input type="checkbox"/> Inefficient Energy Use <input type="checkbox"/> Livestock Production Limitation <input type="checkbox"/> Pest Pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Salt Losses to Water <input type="checkbox"/> Soil Quality Limitations <input type="checkbox"/> Source Water Depletion <input type="checkbox"/> Storage and Handling of Pollutants <input type="checkbox"/> Terrestrial Habitat <input type="checkbox"/> Weather Resilience <input type="checkbox"/> Wind and Water Erosion 	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Air Quality Emissions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Aquatic Habitat <input type="checkbox"/> Concentrated Erosion <input type="checkbox"/> Degraded Plant Condition <input type="checkbox"/> Field Pesticide Loss <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5 Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Management <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3 Inefficient Energy Use <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 Livestock Production Limitation <input type="checkbox"/> Pest Pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Salt Losses to Water <input type="checkbox"/> Soil Quality Limitations <input type="checkbox"/> Source Water Depletion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 Storage and Handling of Pollutants <input type="checkbox"/> Terrestrial Habitat <input type="checkbox"/> Weather Resilience <input type="checkbox"/> Wind and Water Erosion
<p>Access the Resource Concern & Categories tab, "National Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria" and "Resource Concerns Fact Sheets" for information regarding each concern listed below at:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> National Resource Concern List Resource Concerns Fact Sheets </p>	

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



Local Working Group Strategy



Resource Priorities – Forest Lands

Directions: Identify and rank the top 5 resource priorities for Forest Lands

- _____ Air Quality Emissions
- _____ Aquatic Habitat
- _____ Concentrated Erosion
- _____ Degraded Plant Condition
- _____ Field Pesticide Loss
- _____ Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss
- _____ Fire Management
- _____ Inefficient Energy Use
- _____ Livestock Production Limitation
- _____ Pest Pressure
- _____ Salt Losses to Water
- _____ Soil Quality Limitations
- _____ Source Water Depletion
- _____ Storage and Handling of Pollutants
- _____ Terrestrial Habitat
- _____ Weather Resilience
- _____ Wind and Water Erosion

EXAMPLE:

- 4 _____ Air Quality Emissions
- _____ Aquatic Habitat
- _____ Concentrated Erosion
- 3 _____ Degraded Plant Condition
- _____ Field Pesticide Loss
- _____ Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss
- _____ Fire Management
- 5 _____ Inefficient Energy Use
- _____ Livestock Production Limitation
- _____ Pest Pressure
- _____ Salt Losses to Water
- _____ Soil Quality Limitations
- _____ Source Water Depletion
- _____ Storage and Handling of Pollutants
- 1 _____ Terrestrial Habitat
- _____ Weather Resilience
- 2 _____ Wind and Water Erosion

Access the Resource Concern & Categories tab, "National Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria" and "Resource Concerns Fact Sheets" for information regarding each concern listed below at:

[National Resource Concern List](#)

[Resource Concerns Fact Sheets](#)

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov



Local Working Group Strategy

Resource Concern Category	Resource Concern
<i>Wind and water erosion</i>	Sheet and rill erosion
	Wind erosion
<i>Concentrated erosion</i>	Ephemeral gully erosion
	Classic gully erosion
	Bank erosion from streams, shorelines or water conveyance channels
<i>Soil quality limitations</i>	Subsidence
	Compaction
	Organic matter depletion
	Concentration of salts or other chemicals
	Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
<i>Weather resilience</i>	Aggregate instability
	Ponding and flooding
	Seasonal high water table
	Seeps
	Drifted snow
<i>Source water depletion</i>	Naturally available moisture use
	Surface water depletion
	Groundwater depletion
<i>Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss</i>	Inefficient irrigation water use
	Nutrients transported to surface water
	Nutrients transported to groundwater
	Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface water
<i>Field Pesticide loss</i>	Sediment transported to surface water
	Pesticides transported to surface water
<i>Storage and handling of pollutants</i>	Pesticides transported to groundwater
	Nutrients transported to surface water
	Nutrients transported to groundwater
	Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to surface water
<i>Salt losses to water</i>	Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to groundwater
	Salts transported to surface water
<i>Air quality emissions</i>	Salts transported to groundwater
	Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors
	Emissions of greenhouse gases - GHGs
	Emissions of ozone precursors
	Objectionable odor
<i>Pest pressure</i>	Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen
<i>Degraded plant condition</i>	Plant pest pressure
	Plant productivity and health
<i>Fire management</i>	Plant structure and composition
<i>Livestock production limitation</i>	Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation
	Feed and forage balance



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

Local Working Group Strategy

Resource Concern Category	Resource Concern
<i>Livestock production limitation</i>	Inadequate livestock shelter
	Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality and distribution
<i>Terrestrial habitat</i>	Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates
<i>Aquatic habitat</i>	Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms
	Elevated water temperature
<i>Inefficient energy use</i>	Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities
	Energy efficiency of farming/ranching practices and field operations
<i>Long term protection of land</i>	Threat of Conversion
	Loss of functions and values



Local Working Group Strategy

EQIP Ranking Question and Practice List

NRCS uses the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to rank applications for funding. CART evaluates applications by assessing existing conditions, planned practice effects, resource priorities, program priorities and cost efficiency.

Questions:

Does the LWG have any concerns with ranking questions that may be causing barriers?

Are there any conservation practices not offered by NRCS that should be? If so, what resource concern will it address and to what geographical extent should the practice be applied?

Are there any suggestions for improvements of conservation practices offered by Delaware NRCS?

Are there payment rates for practices that need reconsideration?



Local Working Group Strategy

Working Lands for Wildlife

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is not a program - its an approach which brings together diverse partners who are grounded in the belief that wildlife and agriculture have mutual goals. WLFW is used to strategically implement a host of programs to target appropriate resource concerns.

Delaware NRCS is looking for LWG ideas and partnerships to increasing habitat for all species in general and for those at risk or endangered in Delaware.

Questions:

Has the LWG identified an additional need for WLFW projects?

Species identified:

Partners who are interested:

Geographical area of interest:

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov



Local Working Group Strategy

State Conservation Innovation Grant

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that drive innovation in the field of conservation through the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands.

An applicant's CIG funding request must be matched at least 1:1 with non-federal funding. The grantee is also responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully complete the project. CIG applications are accepted from state or local governments, federally-recognized American Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals.

For more information on CIG visit: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/cig-conservation-innovation-grants>

Question:

Has the LWG identified any ideas for State CIG in Delaware?

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

[nrcs.usda.gov](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov)



Local Working Group Strategy

Special Projects

Think of this question as a white board - a place to tell us your ideas for future project that NRCS may be involved with. Projects within your local work group that further the mission of NRCS. NRCS will take these into consideration when implementing programs, funding, and partnerships.

Questions:

Has the LWG identified any special projects?

Are there any emerging conservation issues that NRCS should be aware of?

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service





Local Working Group Strategy



Local Work Group:

Conservation Needs Assessment Report

Rank in order of Priority resources concerns identified in the Conservation needs assessment.						NRCS Funding Required			Recommendation from Local work group
Narrative of Priority Resource Issue	Resource concern categories	Extent	Recommended activities to solve resource concerns	Programs and fund pools that may help treat the identified resource concerns	2023	2024	2025	Identify suggestion for technical, policy, or application selection criteria that should be forward to the State Technical Committee for consideration in addressing the resource concerns.	
					1				
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									





Thank you!

**Thank you to the Districts
scheduling the upcoming LWG
meetings for the Spring!**

Committee Reports



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





1. Farm Service Agency
2. U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
3. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4. Food and Nutrition Services
5. National Ag. Statistics Service
6. Environmental Protection Agency
7. State Departments and Agencies within the State
 - Delaware Department of Agriculture
 - Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
8. Delaware Lenape Tribe
9. Delaware Nanticoke Tribe
10. Delaware Association of Conservation Districts
 - New Castle County Conservation District
 - Kent County Conservation District
 - Sussex County Conservation District
11. Delaware Rural Water Association
12. Mid-Atlantic 4R
13. State Cooperative Extension Service and Land Grant Universities in the State
14. Farm Bureau
15. Nonprofit Organizations
16. Agriculture Producers representing the variety of crops and poultry and or livestock raised in the State



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Guest Reports



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





State Technical Advisory Committee Meetings

Next Meeting dates are:

5/9/24

9/12/24





Wrap-up Questions/Discussion





The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD)."

