



SCD BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
APRIL 23, 2024
ADDENDUM TO AGENDA
PRESENTED BY DAVID BAIRD

ITEM REQUIRING BOARD ACTION:

LOCAL WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATION

BACKGROUND:

The local workgroup meeting was held in March, and SCD needs to report its recommendations to NRCS by June 28. This is an opportunity for the Board to make recommendations to NRCS on the needs and priorities of landowners in Sussex County. The minutes of the local workgroup meeting are included for your review. Preliminary items for consideration in the SCD recommendations include Cover Crops (improving current policy), Drainage Issues, Deer Damage, and Tax Ditches.

RECOMMENDATION:

See recommendations on the following page.

MOTION:

Moved by _____ and seconded by _____ to approve the recommendations made by the Local Workgroup to NRCS. Motion _____.

**Sussex Conservation District
Local Work Group Meeting
March 26, 2024**

Highlights and Recommendations...

There were 25 people in attendance.

Top resource concerns in Sussex County:

Water quality and water quantity

Field sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss

Ponding and flooding

Drainage issues

Weather resilience

Soil quality limitations

FY2025 EQIP Practices were discussed. The list clearly highlighted the Most Popular Practices, Climate Smart Practices as well as the Popular and Climate Smart practices. There will be funding for a lot of these practices in the next couple of years.

Recommendation: There were no other practices added to the list.

The EQIP/RCPP cover crop program discussed the following recommendations:

The federal planting deadlines are very strictly defined. The SCD cover crop program appears to provide greater flexibility and can consider real time data in decision making, unlike the government programs which may take longer. ***Recommendation: NRCS should provide funding to the Sussex Conservation District to distribute for cover crops. NRCS should consider adjusting the fall planting deadlines.***

Other Cover Crop Recommendations received:

- *Cover Crop payments should be split into two payments. One after planting and the other after destruction. This will help farmers offset the cost of seed in the fall. This could be done by maybe assigning payment. The assignment of payment could also be used on other practices.*
- *The approved cover crop legumes species list should be expanded to include Balansa and Berseem Clover.*
- *Grazing cover crops.*
- *Consider reviewing Maryland's cover crop program that pays on tiers depending on planting method, dates, and species.*

Other Recommendations discussed:

- *More funding for tax ditches to improve the drainage infrastructure in Sussex County.*
- *More funding and practices to address drainage water management. Farmers are experiencing loss of wooded and cropland acres due to ponding and flooding.*
- *Consider whitetail deer damage as pest management – this is a huge issue in Sussex County. White-tailed deer should be considered as nuisance wildlife and managed accordingly. More funding and support are needed to control deer populations and reduce/eliminate crop damage.*

Sussex County Locally Led Workgroup Meeting Minutes March 26, 2024

The meeting was called to order by David Baird, District Coordinator at 9:00 a.m.

Also present were:

Chris Bohinski - NRCS	Liz Warren – DCA
Ziggy Savage – NRCS	Siobhan Kelley – SCD
Rachel Terracina – Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids	David Baird – SCD
Caitlin Sheffer - FSA	Catie Soriano - DNREC
Bryanna Lisiewski – CIB	Brad Ritter - Farmer
Ben Coverdale - DNREC	James Adkins – UD CES
Holly Walker - DNREC	Bobby Gorski – The Land Group
Jay Baxter – Farmer	Maggie Rhodes – Farmer
Patti Webb – DNREC	Debbie Absher – SCD
Richard Wilkins – Farmer	Bobbi Heck – SCD
Jenna Talbot – DNREC	R C Willin - Farmer
Amanda Fabi – SCD	Kate Rohrer – Senator
David Whaley - Farmer	Coons Office

David Baird – District Coordinator

David stated that the purpose of this meeting is to establish what the conservation needs are in Sussex County. This is an opportunity to share what each one of us are doing but most importantly it is an opportunity to discuss what our priorities should be going forward. The information discussed will be used to develop local cost share programs that SCD directly administers as well as provide input to NRCS through their State Technical Committee process which drives a lot of local decisions that are made here in Delaware as far as the use of the program funds coming through NRCS.

Ziggy Savage, District Conservationist

Ziggy stated the Natural Resources Conservation Service is seeking to gather information from local stakeholders regarding any updates that may need to be made to our programs, any payment rates that require reassessment or examination. The NRCS is soliciting feedback that can be conveyed from Sussex County to the State office, and then to the National office to further improve this program's efficacy for the county.

Ziggy discussed LWG feedback and recommendations implemented from previous LWG meetings:

1. Revised Cover Crop Policy in FY24, will be updated again in FY25. Addressing specific

resource concerns as identified in a soil health card.

2. Ag Chemical Handling Facility has been added back to the payment schedule for FY24 and beyond.
3. Drainage Water Management policy broadened to allow for new drainage and additional components in FY24.
4. Additional Climate Smart Practices added to the list for FY24.

Also discussed were the FY 2025 practices that we are currently employing now. Practices highlighted in green are the Most Popular Practices, those highlighted in yellow are Climate Smart Practices and the practices highlighted in blue are Popular and Climate Smart practices.

United States Department of Agriculture

Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Preparation

– Delaware Conservation Practices

Most Popular Practices
Climate Smart Practices
Popular & Climate Smart

317 Composting Facility	394 Firebreak
325 High Tunnel System	395 Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
326 Clearing and Snagging	396 Aquatic Organism Passage
327 Conservation Cover	410 Grade Stabilization Structure
328 Conservation Crop Rotation	412 Grassed waterway
329 Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	420 Wildlife Habitat Planting
336 Soil Carbon Amendment	422 Hedgerow Planting
340 Cover Crop	430 Irrigation Pipeline
342 Critical Area Planting	436 Irrigation Reservoir
345 Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	441 Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation
350 Sediment Basin	442 Sprinkler System
355 Groundwater Testing	449 Irrigation water Management
356 Dike	468 Lined waterway or Outlet
360 Waste Facility Closure	472 Access Control
362 Diversion	484 Mulching
366 Anaerobic Digester	490 Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
367 Roofs and Covers	500 Obstruction Removal
368 Emergency Animal Mortality Management**	511 Forage Harvest Management
372 Combustion System Improvement	512 Forage and Biomass Planting
374 Farmstead energy improvement	516 Livestock Pipeline
378 Pond	528 Prescribed Grazing
380 Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	533 Pumping Plant
382 Fence	554 Drainage Water Management
386 Field Border	558 Roof Runoff Structure
390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover	560 Access Road
391 Riparian Forest Buffer	561 Heavy Use Area Protection
393 Filter Strip	570 Stormwater Runoff Control
	572 Spoil Spreading
	574 Spring Development

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Preparation

– Delaware Conservation Practices

Most Popular Practices
Climate Smart Practices
Popular & Climate Smart

101	DIA-Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan	202	DIA-Edge-of-Field water Quality Monitoring System Installation
102	CPA-Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan	206	CEMA-Feed and Forage Analysis
106	CPA-Forest Management Plan	207	CEMA- Site Assessment and Soil Testing for Contaminants Activity
110	CPA-Grazing Management Plan	209	CEMA- PFAS Testing in Water and Soil
116	CPA-Soil Health Management Plan	216	CEMA- Soil Health Testing
120	DIA-Agricultural Energy Design	217	CEMA-Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management
138	CPA-Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition	218	CEMA-Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment
140	DIA-Transition to Organic Plan	219	CEMA-Prescribed Grazing Conservation Evaluation & Monitoring
144	DIA-Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan	221	CEMA-Soil Organic Carbon Stock Monitoring
148	DIA-Pollinator Habitat Enhancement Plan	222	CEMA-Indigenous Stewardship Methods Evaluation
157	DIA-Nutrient Management	223	CEMA-Forest Management Evaluation Activity
158	DIA-Feed Management	224	CEMA-Aquifer Flow Testing
159	DIA-Grazing Management Design and Implementation Activity	226	CEMA-Site Suitability & Feasibility for Waste Storage Facility
160	DIA-Prescribed Burning Plan	227	CEMA-Evaluation of Existing Waste Storage Facility Components
161	DIA-Pest Management Conservation System	228	CEMA-Agricultural Energy Assessment
162	DIA-Soil Health Management	309	Agrichemical Handling Facility
163	DIA-Irrigation Water Management Design	313	Waste Storage Facility
164	DIA-Improved Management of Drainage Water	314	Brush Management
165	DIA-Forest Management Practice Design	315	Herbaceous Weed Control
199	CPA-Conservation Plan	316	Animal Mortality Facility
201	CEMA-Edge-of-Field water Quality Monitoring Data Collection and Evaluation	317	Composting Facility
202	DIA-Edge-of-Field water Quality Monitoring System Installation		

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Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Preparation

– Delaware Conservation Practices

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317	Composting Facility	394	Firebreak
325	High Tunnel System	395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
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327	Conservation Cover	410	Grade Stabilization Structure
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	412	Grassed waterway
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till	420	Wildlife Habitat Planting
336	Soil Carbon Amendment	422	Hedgerow Planting
340	Cover Crop	430	Irrigation Pipeline
342	Critical Area Planting	436	Irrigation Reservoir
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till	441	Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation
350	Sediment Basin	442	Sprinkler System
355	Groundwater Testing	449	Irrigation water Management
356	Dike	468	Lined waterway or Outlet
360	Waste Facility Closure	472	Access Control
362	Diversion	484	Mulching
366	Anaerobic Digester	490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
367	Roofs and Covers	500	Obstruction Removal
368	Emergency Animal Mortality Management**	511	Forage Harvest Management
372	Combustion System Improvement	512	Forage and Biomass Planting
374	Farmstead energy improvement	516	Livestock Pipeline
378	Pond	528	Prescribed Grazing
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	533	Pumping Plant
382	Fence	554	Drainage Water Management
386	Field Border	558	Roof Runoff Structure
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	560	Access Road
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	561	Heavy Use Area Protection
393	Filter Strip	570	Stormwater Runoff Control
		572	Spoil Spreading
		574	Spring Development

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Ziggy discussed the funding utilized in the county over the last year.

EQIP Contract Obligations by Ranking Pools in Sussex County FY 2023

Row Labels	Sum of Sussex Dollars	Sum of Sussex # Contracts
Beginning Farmer	\$424,401.00	4
Conservation Planning Activities	\$29,141.00	8
Cover Crop/RCPP	\$323,261.00	11
Cropland	\$718,903.00	3
Drainage Water Management	\$0.00	0
EQIP CIC	\$88,404.00	1
Forestry	\$32,606.00	1
Livestock	\$395,659.00	6
On Farm Energy	\$46,907.00	1
Organic Transition	\$13,544.00	1
PHQ Sussex	\$801,638.00	10
Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher	\$549,033.00	5
Urban Ag	\$38,492.00	2
Wildlife	\$227.00	1
IRA-EQIP	\$295,355.00	9
Grand Total	\$3,757,571.00	63

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), Risk Management Agency (RMA) Contract Obligations in Sussex County – FY 2023

Row Labels	Sum of Sussex Dollars	Sum of Sussex # Contracts
AMA	\$78,276.00	2
AMA-RMA	\$55,476.00	4
Grand Total	\$133,752.00	6

David asked if any of these practices need to be prioritized over the others. There were no recommendations to make any changes.

Partner Updates

Patti Webb – DNREC

- For the CREP program, sign up 61 is open and FSA is accepting applications now.
- Working on getting new participant's and re-enrollments for sign up 61.
- Soil rental rates are the same as last year.

Bobby Gorski – The Land Group

- Real estate brokerage company specializing in farms, poultry farms, hunting properties, conservation services.
- Helping individuals navigate programs such as WRE easements, agland preservation easements, CREP, CRP.
- Waterfowl projects, Black Duck

Caitlin Sheffer – FSA

- FSA handles eligibility paperwork for NRCS programs.

Rachel Terracina – Healthy food for Healthy Kids

- Statewide non-profit organization who partners with schools to build school gardens and teach the teachers to use those gardens to have STEM based education lessons about plant growth.
- Partnered with USDA several times, recipient of the Farm to School grant twice.
- Expanding in Kent and Sussex with 10 schools being in Sussex. Would like to work with local partners to implement a new garden program.
- Would like to work with local farmers.

Bryanna Lisiewski – Delaware Center for the Inland Bays

- Working to expand their agricultural program. Whether that involves providing technical assistance or funding.
- Provided support to SCD's cover crop program by contributing \$50,000 in funding.

James Adkins – University of Delaware Extension Office

- Report back to his colleagues regarding cover crops and soil amendments discussion from today's meeting.

Ben Coverdale – DNREC

- Administers a grant called the Clean Water Act Section 319 grant from the EPA.
- Deal with various partners throughout the state and different watersheds throughout the state.
- Partner with the conservation districts in Delaware.
- Fund anything on the ag front from cover crops over to inner city doing stormwater retrofit type projects.

- Submitted a request for proposals for a 319 grant. Solicited for about \$324,000. Received proposals cumulatively over a half million dollars. Will be reviewing and asking questions on some of the proposals.
- Reviewed Governors recommended budget.
 - RC & D funding reduced in the Governor's recommended budget to \$5 million from \$10 million last year.
 - Conservation Cost Share dollars which are historically distributed amongst the three conservation districts has tentatively increased to \$3.2 million from \$1.7 million last year.
 - Tax Ditch budget is set at \$1.5 million. A reduction from \$2.15 million last year.
 - DDA cover crop cost share program for FY 2025 is \$4 million, a decrease from \$5.2 million last year.
 - The Chesapeake Bay Program does some non-federal related type of cost share programs called the Delaware Community Assistance Program that funds smaller scale urban, and homeowner projects as well as grass or forest buffers.
- A transect survey will be completed in each county to document conservation tillage practices such as high residue minimum soil disturbance (this will translate into reportable credits to support various programs, primarily the Chesapeake Bay program).

Richard Wilkins – Farmer

- Discussed the new Farm Bill. There is a push to increase Title 2 baseline to \$17 billion which would mean that in future farm bills, there would be a higher baseline available for more conservation work.
- Currently there is a standoff between competing priorities.

Liz Warren – Delmarva Chicken Association

- Discussed the NFWF grant award that provides cost-share to help chicken growers add green features like pollinator plots and vegetative buffers at little to no cost.

Holly Walker – DNREC – Chesapeake Bay Implementation Program

- Oversee several different grants such as the Chesapeake Implementation Grant, two U.S. Forest Service grants, oversee Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) funding and recently a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant. This NFWF grant will help with buffers and expand our Delaware Community Conservation Assistance Program (DECCAP).
- Our office is in the process of reviewing and ranking the Chesapeake Implementation grant. We will be reaching out to our partners to let them know the final decisions.
- Jenna Talbot is directly overseeing the riparian buffer incentive program.

Kate Rohrer – Senator Coons Office

- Please provide suggestions in real time that can be passed on to our contacts within the ag committees.

Debbie Absher – Director of Agricultural Programs

- Discussed FY 2024 budget along with the funding resources & practices funded.
- Pilot Program – Oyster Aquaculture.
- Special project funds for water quality projects.
- SCD established a goal of 80,000 acres planted in Sussex County. The acres planted exceeded that goal with 88,409 acres total counting other cost share programs.

Sussex Conservation District 2024 Conservation Cost-Share Program

FY 2024 Funding Sources

Funding Source	Earmark	Amount	Admin**	Total Available
DNREC-DWS (Bond Bill)	Countywide BMPS	\$ 736,600	\$ 73,660	\$ 662,940
DNREC - DWS NPS*	Cover Crops (IB/BK/CB)	\$ 100,000	\$ 9,091	\$ 90,909
DNREC-DWS CB Program - MEB	Cover Crops (CB)	\$ 364,540	\$ 33,140	\$ 331,400
DNREC-DWS CB Program	Cover Crops (CB)	\$ 150,000	\$ 13,636	\$ 136,364
Sussex County Council	Cover Crops	\$ 100,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 90,000
DDA	Cover Crops	\$ 3,273,600	\$ 297,600	\$ 2,976,000
NRCS Contribution Agr.	Cover Crops (CB)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
DHSS/DNREC-DWSRF	Cover Crops			\$ -
Carryover		\$ 500,000	\$ -	\$ 500,000
Totals		\$ 5,224,740	\$ 437,127	\$ 4,787,613

FY 2024 Cost-Share Budget

Funding Source	Practices	Potential Amount
All Funding	Cover Crops (All)	\$ 4,615,113
	Poultry HQ BMPs	
	Large Animal Mortality	\$ 70,000
	Water Control Structures	\$ -
	Weed Wiper Bar	\$ -
	PSNT Testing/Soil Samples	\$ 6,000
	Oyster Aquaculture	\$ 75,000
	Spec. Projects	\$ -
	Technical Assistance	\$ 20,000
	Air Seeder Operation Costs	\$ 1,500
	Admin	\$ 437,127
		\$ 5,224,740

Best Management Practice (BMP) Categories

Erosion Control

- Permanent Vegetative Cover Establishment (acres)
- Field Terraces (Ft.)
- Diversions (Ft.)
- Field Windbreak/Hedgerows (Acres)
- Critical Area Plantings (Acres)
- Water and Sediment Control Basins (No.)
- Poultry Windbreaks (Acres)

- Shoreline Stabilization (Ft.)

Animal Waste Systems

- Agriculture Waste Control Systems (No.)
- Roofed Animal Manure Structures (No.)
- Agricultural Composting Facilities (No.)
- Animal Mortality Freezers (units per operation)
- Large Animal Mortality (No.)
- Poultry Incinerators (No.)
- Heavy Use Area Protections (No.)
- Equipment
- Additions to Existing Structures (retrofits, guttering, etc.)
- Access Road
- Roof Runoff Structure

Water Management

- Water Control Structures (No.)

Wildlife Habitat Development

- Wildlife Plantings/Pollinators (Acres)
- Wildlife Ponds (No.)
- Constructed Wetlands (No.)

Invasive Species/Noxious Weed Control

- Weed Wiper Bar (Miles)
- Hand Spraying of Noxious Weeds

Other BMPs

- Planted Cover Crops (Acres)
- Oyster Aquaculture Pilot Program (Inland Bays Only)
- Water Quality Project Design/Implementation

Special Projects

- The Board of Supervisors determines cost-share percentage rates, caps, and allowable practices on a case-by-case basis.

Other Discussion Items:

- Ben Coverdale discussed extending planting dates for cover crop. Early and late dates should be reviewed as well as flexibility in time to report planted cover crop.
- Jay Baxter discussed the impacts of aerial application and the impacts of that seed reaching below the canopy and contacting the soil is a concern. Jay further discussed Maryland's cover crop program regarding various funding levels according to the application method and type of seed. Jay also discussed pest management as it relates to deer damage. Jay made the case that deer should be considered pests and treated as such.

- R C Willin also discussed needing to help people understand the significance of the deer damage to farmers. R C mentioned the biggest threat to his agricultural operation presently is flood damage. The national infrastructure for drainage is seriously compromised. Losing acres and acres of woodland, cropland. He will lose more acres this year to standing water and ponding. They have lost so much of their drainage capability because they do not have the benefit of tax ditches. The need to think outside the box is critical to restore drainage to these areas.
- David Baird discussed the Cover Crop Accelerator Program which is about to launch to examine cover crop programs statewide as a whole and what the cover crop program model should entail. Part of that discussion will include planting dates, incentive payments, and whether there should be some type of tiered payment structure as well. Also, the soil health benefits will be discussed. This stems from the nutrient management commission with the influx of funding that came from DDA and the general assembly in prior years.
- Richard Wilkins presented two varieties of clover to the group. One being Balansa clover and the other being crimson clover. Richard asked for the cover crop program to consider different types of legumes.
- Liz Warren agreed with Jay and RC's concerns with tax ditches and drainage as to what they are seeing on their home farm. Concerned with what the land will look like in the future. Liz asked if anyone is hearing if there is an interest in grazing cover crops.

David Baird thanked everyone for their input and time. David asked if anyone has a thought or idea that they would like to discuss, please reach out to someone at SCD or NRCS.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:03 p.m.