

Virginia Agricultural BMP Advisory Committee
Albemarle County Office Building
1600 5th St Extended Room B
9:30 A.M., February 28, 2008 – Summary

Attendees:

Darrell Marshall	VDACS	Gary Moore	DCR
David Kindig	DCR	Libby Norris	CBF
Don Wells	VASWCD Area III	Jim Tate	H/C SWC
Stephanie Martin	DCR	Ken Carter	NRCS
Sharyl Walker	NRCS	Craig Brann	VACDE
Don Drake	VASWCD Area I	Debbie Cross	DCR
Mark Hollberg	DCR	Todd Groh	VDOF
Mark Puckett	DGIF	Keith Seward	VASWCD Area VI
Betsy Bowles	DEQ	Jacob Powell	DCR
Barry Hughes	DCR		

The meeting began at 9:30 AM with introductions. Gary Moore led and facilitated the discussion that followed. A summary of discussion topics and the significant conclusions are summarized as follows:

The summary of the December 13, 2007 committee meeting was reviewed, and approved with corrections. The committee did discuss the NRCS Average Cost List and the importance of having the list available for SWCDs at the beginning of the Cost Share Program Year, July 1. The TAC requested that Jack Frye, Division Director make a request to Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist, to have the Average Cost List available for distribution before July 1 of each year. DCR should discuss with districts the need for maintaining consistent cost list throughout the program year during the spring round of cost share program trainings.

OLD BUSINESS

Wetland Mitigation/Restoration - Gary Moore presented the language revised by Ryan Brown, Debbie Cross, Gary Moore and Libby Norris to be included in the State Environmental Law Compliance section of the BMP manual. The TAC recommended inclusion into the 2009 Program Year Manual.

Letters to Mark Palmer & Monacan SWCD - Gary Moore distributed and the TAC reviewed a copy of the letter sent to address the concerns raised by the Piedmont SWCD and the Monacan SWCD.

Review of the Program of Work – Gary Moore presented to the TAC two new requests from SWCDs for review. Both requests were received within the last three days. The committee decided to develop a “Time Frame” for issues and suggestions to be addressed. The committee discussed and agreed that the following language will be distributed by allDistrict email and included in the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share BMP Manual in the Program Schedule page. “Suggestions for program changes are welcome at any time. The TAC will approve its Program of Work for the upcoming Program Year at the August Meeting. Suggestions submitted after July 31st may not receive consideration in that Program Year.” Three dates will be added to the Program Schedule page; July 31st – Last date to submit suggestions & issues for consideration for Program Year 20xx, August – TAC sets Program of Work for the upcoming year, April – Final Approval of 20xx Program Year changes.

Chowan Basin SWCD – Suggested development of a practice for Split Application of Nitrogen on Cotton. The TAC decided this issue would be added to the Program of Work for next year and a

Virginia Tech Cotton Specialist and local AG. Ext agent would be asked to assist the subcommittee when it considers this issue.

It was noted that the TAC has not had regular attendance from VT Extension. The TAC asked Gary to call Mr. Jim Riddell and ask if a regular attendee could be designated.

Headwaters SWCD - Letter dated 2/27/08 asked the TAC to consider 3 Suggestions.

1. Change the EAN to cover early planting dates
2. Add the SL8-H as an eligible practice covered by the EAN
3. Insert a harvest date of May 15 into the SL-8H Practice

The TAC decided these issues will be added to the Program of Work for next year and will provide the Headwaters SWCD time at the August Meeting for a presentation. The TAC will invite a Virginia Tech Extension Grains Specialist to attend and assist the committee.

NM-1 – Gary Moore distributed the NM-1 Practice specifications that have been converted to the new legal format and revised to reflect flat rate payment language for nutrient management plans. The new language that will be included in the NM-1 for the 2009 Program Year reads:

1. The Cost Share rate is \$2.00 per acre per year (a maximum of \$6/acre over the life of a three-year contract) for all acres on a tract that receive only commercial fertilizer, or a combination of imported animal manure and commercial fertilizer. Hay and pasture fields are eligible for cost share with a combination of imported animal manure and commercial fertilizer only. The source of the manure must be from a farm within Virginia
2. The Cost Share rate is \$3.00 per acre per year (a maximum of \$9/acre over the life of a three-year contract) for all acres on a tract. Eligible acres include cropland, hay, or pasture fields that receive the participant's on-farm generated animal manure, or a combination of the participant's on-farm generated manure and commercial fertilizer.

State "CSP" Committee Update – Craig Brann reported that the committee is being formed and will be meeting soon. An item for the committee to address is the concept of "Continuing Conservation" for cost share practices which are priority practices that are past the designated lifespan - Continuous No Till (SL-15A) and Grazing Land Protection (SL-6) might be good practices to look at first. These practices have been installed according to standards and specs and are addressing a water quality need.

Revise the requirement for an NRCS Conservation Plan – current language in the 2008 Program Manual reads: *Financial assistance for practice requests must be authorized for conservation plan implementation. A conservation plan and all stages of the planning process must be in place prior to district payment of an approved completed practice. As a minimum, conservation plans must at least reduce soil erosion to a level equivalent to that achieved by an approved Alternative Conservation System (ACS) for that region. The development of plans that provide more erosion control than an ACS or addresses additional water quality issues are always encouraged. Where NRCS has technical responsibility for the planned practice, conservation plans must meet all NRCS policies and must be documented using the approved NRCS software and all conservation practices contained in the plan will meet NRCS standards and specifications.*

The committee discussed the requirement for NRCS conservation plans to be written using the Toolkit software program as a concern for SWCDs that will not/are not co-located with NRCS. One of the issues to be investigated during the Tracking Program modernization study was the double entry of data for participants in both the Tracking Program and Toolkit - creating a workload issue. At the current time, there is no solution to this problem through the Tracking Program and Toolkit communicating with each other. USDA/NRCS is in the developmental stage of a "Conservation Plug In" that in the future will provide a way for Technical Service Providers, SWCDs, etc. to develop Conservation plans in a non co-located environment. There is no estimated date for its availability. The SWCDs in Virginia are also in the process of resolving office rent issues to remain co-located and IT support cost payments to NRCS for computers and peripherals. These issues, in addition to the workload of double entry into the Tracking program and Toolkit have brought this situation to the TAC Committee. Ken Cater, NRCS cautioned the committee that removing this language from the manual might jeopardize coverage of the NRCS State Engineer's license covering the practices within the Ag BMP Cost Share Program and require amendments of an MOU with DCR and SWCDs. This change might increase the paperwork required to meet environmental regulations from other Federal/State Agencies. Ken clarified that NRCS will provide 1 CCE compliant computer to any SWCD that wants one. It is believed that NRCS will be charging \$3,000 per year for hardware, software, licensing, IT support and refresh for each CCE compliant computer that they support. Don Wells suggested that a committee of VASWCD Operations Committee, DCR and NRCS be organized to address this significant issue with VASWCD taking the lead.

Update on CXI Final Report - Stephanie Martin reported that CXI has provided their final report. It is available on the VASWCD Website for download. DCR has created a steering committee made up of DCR staff Mark Meador, Karl Huber, Roland Owens, Gary Moore, Stephanie Martin, NRCS Ken Carter, VASWCD JC Berger, and VACDE Gavin Sanderlin. There is approximately \$400,000 remaining to implement modernization of the Ag BMP Tracking Program. The steering committee endorsed the core components recommended by the CXI study. The next steps involve the inclusion of the Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA) for guidance and approval of next steps. The goal is to have a product ready for the 2010 Program Year, July 1, 2009. Additional funding sources will probably be necessary to fully implement the recommendations. Barry Hughes suggested requesting Tobacco Commission funds as a source of additional funding to complete the project. Another source might be additional WQIA interest.

NEW BUSINESS

WP-4B – Needs Determination Worksheet subcommittee – Gary Moore discussed the need for the development of a Needs Determination Worksheet for the WP-4B Practice (Loafing Lot Management System). Ken Carter stated that NRCS has developed worksheets for EQIP that may be helpful. The committee members are: Ken Carter, Gary Moore, Darryl Marshall, Wayne Turley, and the Virginia Tech Dairy Specialist. Mark Hollberg will recommend a representative from his area to serve on the committee.

Revision of existing SL-8B & SL-8C drought harvesting exception - Gary Moore reviewed with the committee the current drought declaration of the Governor and the President which have a harvesting impact on 2008 Program Year SL8-B and SL-8C practices. The committee re-affirmed that both practices do not allow for conversion to the SL-8H practice and SWCDs are prohibited from offering that option. Language will be added to the 2009 Program Manual that instructs SWCDs to address each participant on a case-by-case basis **or** establish a procedure of requiring participants to request in writing authorization to harvest. Gary will send out Administrative guidance to the SWCDs and

instruct them to document both in the Tracking Program and in the comment section of the application form – “Harvested”.

CREP – Deadline for CREP contract is March 15, 2008 unless Congress resolves the 2008 Farm Bill and the President supports or another continuing resolution goes into effect.

Agency Updates

DGIF - Mark Puckett discussed that the Quail Plan 2 is in place. The new DGIF Director is Bob Duncan, a long time DGIF employee. The agency is dealing with budget cuts and the effects on staffing. The Hound Hunting legislation has been a significant issue for his agency. Mark will provide listing of Biologists by areas for CDC and SWCDs for service.

DOF – Todd Groh highlighted a new publication on Hardwood Planting. Fires have exhausted the agencies budget very early in the year. Todd reported that there is funding available in the RT – Reforestation of Timberlands Program. The program is for pine plantings.

NRCS – Ken Carter reported that letters on the computer support will be arriving this week. NRCS will also be changing their signup policy to a continuous signup for EQIP and WHIP. This will generate a waiting list and possible a way to leverage for more funding. Due to budget reductions – vacant and advertised positions are frozen until March 15, 2008.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation – Libby Norris gave an update on the mechanism for dedicated funding that is moving forward in the legislative session. The partnership has been working with the patrons Landes and Whipple. A Farmers to the Bay Trip is scheduled soon to make up for a past weather cancelled trip. Libby requested that updates to the Ag Cost Share BMP manual reflect corrections to the Advisory Committee members and inclusion of their email and telephone contact information.

VASWCD – Don Wells reported that the Attorney General SWCD representation legislation (HB 119) passed the House and Senate. He also announced that proposed budget cuts could amount to approximately \$8 thousand per SWCD.

DCR – Stephanie Martin highlighted the three upcoming Marketing Initiative Workshops.

Dave Kindig reviewed the commitment to get 80% of cropland covered by 2010. He is looking for changes to the nutrient management practices to increase participation. Dave discussed the Litter Transport Program and the need to show interest in the program. Currently there is a shortage of litter available. Participants that have been turned away from the NRCS litter transport program can participate in DCR’s program.

DEQ – Betsy Bowles informed the committee about the current NOIRA on poultry litter intended regulatory action to address end users. A technical advisory committee will be established with the end product requiring State Water Board approval.

Concerns for the floor - None

Next meeting date – April 16, 2008, Albemarle County Office Building, Room B

Meeting Adjourned