

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs

Field staff are currently managing 2,160 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent 112 Million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 455,000 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**

Virginia's Initial EQIP allocation for FY20 is 25.7 Million. We received 1,395 applications for EQIP Financial Assistance by the February 28th application batching cutoff. This is an 18% increase in applications over FY19. Staff are currently assessing applicant resource concerns in the new CART (Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool). Ranking tools are under development in CART and will be released shortly so that applications can be ranked by the May 1st deadline.

The public comment period for comments on the EQIP interim rule closed on February 18th. The agency is working on addressing comments and drafting the EQIP final rule.

- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic & Renewals**

The FY20 application period for CSP-Classic was announced in February and is open through May 29th. To date, NRCS staff have entered 165 applications.

CSP-Classic contract holders were eligible to compete for a contract renewal through March 20th. NRCS staff are processing rankings for existing CSP contract holders from 2014, 2015 and 2016 through April 24th. Renewals are no longer guaranteed and those that are unfunded will be eligible to compete in the CSP-Classic application batching period.

- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP-GCI) Grassland Conservation Initiative**

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) authorized NRCS to provide financial assistance to producers to protect grazing uses; conserve and improve soil, water, and wildlife resources; and achieve related conservation values at an annual rate of \$18 per acre on eligible base acres. Two sign-up periods were held, resulting in 89 contracts.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

18 Farm Bill RCPP - Reviewed, evaluated and scored 3 RCPP proposals in January for the FY19 announcement of program funding. Announcement for RCPP awards is expecting during April.

2014 Farm Bill RCPP - Application periods for existing projects with TNC (RCPP-HFRP), VCE (RCPP-EQIP-Franklin County Dairies) and VMRC (RCPP-EQIP-Aquaculture) projects are open.

The RCPP-Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFAs) announcement of program funding is open through May 18th. An AFA is an innovative project where the partner handles all of the

NRCS REPORT

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting

April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

Financial Assistance to producers. NRCS is responsible for the inherently governmental activities, such as Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Compliance (HEL/WC) NEPA compliance, Eligibility, etc.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**

The ACEP allocation for FY20 is 1.2 Million. Virginia received 3 entity applications (4 parcels) during the FY20 signup which ended March 10th. The applications are for 1,094 acres requesting 2.1 Million. Applications are being evaluated and ranked. Concurrently, we are managing various stages of 7 existing prior year enrollments in ACEP-ALE.

- **Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP)**

NRCS Awarded a VPA-HIP grant of more than 2.9 Million to Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). The DGIF is one of 27 recipients in 27 states receiving awards through this competitive grant program that offers funding to state and tribal governments to expand or improve public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation. DGIF will focus its efforts in the Coalfields region of Southwest Virginia to not only expand the acres in its existing Public Access Lands for Sportsmen (PALS) program but also encompass a wider variety of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities and provide incentive payments to landowners for wildlife conservation activities and public access to parcels that offer new opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping or wildlife-dependent recreation.

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

The national FY20 CIG On-Farm Trials (OFT) notice of funding is open now through May 11th. On-Farm Trials funding is designed to offer, through partners, technical and financial assistance to producers to help compensate for any risks associated with implementation of new conservation practices, systems and approaches. NRCS is seeking proposals that address at least one of the following four On-Farm Trial main priorities: Irrigation Management Technologies, Precision Agriculture Technologies and Strategies, Management Technologies and Strategies, and Soil Health Demonstration Trials.

Following the last VASWCD meeting, NRCS funded four of five partner submissions in the Classic CIG category. These multi-state projects focus on accelerating adoption of conservation practices. The 2019 award recipients include:

- **Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (TN, VA) - \$882,922**
Bee-friendly beef: Integrating native wildflowers into Southeastern grazing systems
- **American Forest Foundation (MD, PA, VA, WV) - \$700,000**
Piloting the Family Forest Carbon Program in the Central Appalachian Region
- **Appalachian Sustainable Development (KY, NC, OH, TN, VA, WV) - \$386,539**
Increasing Landscape-scale Adoption of Agroforestry Systems in Central Appalachia through Market-based Incentives
- **University of Kentucky (KY, VA) - \$361,674**
Ecological and Economic Benefits of Resource Conservation on Horse Farms

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

Engineering (SCE)

Dam Rehabilitation

- **Upper North River 77** – The winter shutdown for the project was extended until March 30. Work is anticipated to begin on March 30 with installation of the piezometers. Other major items of work remaining include final site grading, road surfacing, topsoiling and seeding. The embankment earthfill is complete. The contractor anticipates completing the project during the week of April 20. Sponsor has requested "no cost time extension" to extend this agreement to 10/30/2020.
- **Cherrystone Creek 1** – The Final Plan-Environmental Assessment for Cherrystone Creek 1 project, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, is complete, and the Plan was signed and authorized by the Chief on January 28, 2020.
- **Cherrystone Creek 2A** – The Final Plan-Environmental Assessment for Cherrystone Creek 2A project, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, is complete, and the Plan was signed and authorized by the Chief on December 30, 2019.
- **Johns Creek No. 1** – The Final Plan-Environmental Assessment for Johns Creek 1 was signed and authorized by the Chief of NRCS on November 25, 2019.
- **Beaver Creek 1** – The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority has submitted an application for funding for planning.

State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)

Continue to provide quality technical materials to maintain a highly knowledgeable staff and expand our outreach and information to our clientele. This includes maintaining our technical tools and conservation practice standards available to partners and TSPs on the FOTG.

- Completed review and migration of 'old' Section IV of our Conservation Practices Standards to the 'new' folder which aligns with new national tool Conservation Practice Documents- Documents Management System (CPD-DMS).
- Updated and revised Virginia Conservation Practice Standards/Implementation Requirements of nationally revised standards from FY19.
- Developed and posted new/updated National Planning Criteria and Assessment Tools, Wetland Compliance Tools, VA Plant Establishment Guide, Shelterbelts for Livestock Shade Technical Note, VA Wildlife Habitat Guides, and Pasture Condition Score Sheets.
- Continue to expand the use of the Geoportal to provide technical tools and geospatial products for planners including new wetland layer an imagery.
- Updated the Conservation Desktop (CD) User Manual, and the CD V3R1/Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) V1 Lesson Plans on the Shared Drives of all NRCS servers in Virginia including helpful videos.

NRCS REPORT

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting

April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

- Created new CART folder on SharePoint and posted guide sheets, state level guidance, newly created resource tool to assist planners in determining assessment questions per land use/resource concern in CART and updating FAQ's.

Training to Field Staff

Conducted Joint Employee Development (JED) trainings and other technical training for staff to strength and expand NRCS and partner employee's knowledge and skills including continuing education credits required to maintain NRCS Planner Certification. These training sessions resulted in approximately 1091 field staff and 1132 partners being training at 32 different training opportunities. See included SRC Training/Outreach Calendar for a full report of all activities but some highlights include:

- October JED – Overview of CART Assessments and new Resource Concerns/Planning Criteria
- November Joint Agency Training (NRCS and FSA) – Update new Farm Bill highlights with CRP
- November JED – Conservation Desktop 2.3 training
- January JED – VFGC Winter Forage Conference
- March and April Webinar – Continued discussion and open dialogue on new resource assessment updates and integration with CART
- March Compliance Training – FY2020 FSA Compliance Reviewers training
- Conducted 1-day (office and field) training session for 15 Area 1 Soil and Water Conservation District staff on grazing plan preparation. It included using Web-Soil Survey and VA-GRAZE, grazing plan preparation and organization, and field work needed to prepare a grazing plan. It also included a grazing 101 training for some folks with little field experience.
- Assisted Greensboro Tech Center staff in hosting three-day Regional NRCS Agronomist Conference at Richmond SO. Prepped and conducted slideshow presentation on VA Agriculture as well as soil health field tour to Keenbell Farm.
- Led a working group session in Area 1 reviewing the planning and implementation of loafing lot management systems and outlined solutions to improve consistency relating to land use designation, assessment tool evaluation and proposed conservation practice solutions.
- At request of Area IV, assisted with planning, registration, and implementation of March 12 Area IV JED at David Hula's Renwood Farms.

Customer Service and Outreach

Helped train, coordinate, and facilitate 34 NRCS and partnership outreach/training events where over 2,247 participants attended. These training/outreach events strive to strengthen and expand NRCS partnership activities to achieve common goals. See included SRC Training/Outreach Calendar for a full report of all activities but some larger outreach events include:

- Met with USACE, DEQ, VMRC to coordinate wetland/permit issues. We have a better understanding of each agencies authorities and established good lines of communication with regard to wetlands and permits.
- Participated in the Mountains to the Bay Grazing Alliance representing VA NRCS in this regional coalition of members to further expand our services and achieve common goals across the Bay Watershed.

NRCS REPORT

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting

April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

- Participated in the steering committee for the Applied Forage system Specialist research and extension needs assessment for Southside Virginia at the SPAREC in Blackstone, VA
- Invited to become formal advisor to VA Crop Production Association.
- Helped plan two educational sessions on soil health for VACPA 2020 educational event, including recruitment of speakers and write up of presentations and speaker bios.
- Helped plan elements of 2019 Farm to Table Conf. in Weyers Cave, including selection of award recipients & panelists plus continued financial support from SARE for NRCS registrations. Served as moderator for two sessions & as presenter of Soil Health award.
- VANTAGE Harrisonburg Winter Conference 2020 – Helped finalize selection of topics and speakers, which includes highlighting results from two completed state CIGs; leading the selection and prep of presentation for NT Champion Award.
- Provided training to 12 USDA-NRCS grassland technical specialists on the Alliance for Grassland Renewal, and how USDA-NRCS programs and technical assistance can be used at the state and local level to address resource concerns and assist farmers in transitioning toxic endophyte fescue to novel endophyte fescue.
- Partnered with the VFGC, VA Tech, and Virginia Cooperative Extension to plan, organize and conduct the 2020 VFGC Winter Forage Conferences with the theme of *Thinking Strategically: The Role of Hay in Today's Grazing System*.
- Met with FSA Chief and District Directors to promote communication between FSA and NRCS specifically regarding HEL/WC compliance issues.
- Participated with Sweet Briar College Sustainability Committee as the college continues to focus on bringing back the farm and providing students with diverse opportunities in agriculture education with their history as an agricultural school for women.
- Provided a presentation about the Technical and Financial Assistance Available to Producers for Novel Fescue Conversion.
- Collaborated with the VFGC, VCE and the CBF to plan, coordinate and conduct an Advanced Grazing School.
- Partnered with VFGC, Extension and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to plan and conduct a 1-day, intensive grazing school.
- Coordinated the 2020 VA Grazier Development team for the photo and text content of this year's planner, oversaw the editing and review and approved for printing and distribution of 4,000 Grazier Planners to field staff and clients.

Held 9 different soil health events where NRCS organized with partners and was a keynote presenter. This represented over 742 agency staff, partner staff, industry and producers, a key feature of the VA Soil Health Initiative of training everyone at the same time. Since the 2013 Soil Health Kickoff event in Virginia, NRCS has helped organize and lead 269 soil health events which were attended by over 22,605 participants which heard the NRCS principles on Soil Health including the rainfall simulator demonstrations. See included SRC Training/Outreach Calendar for a full report of all activities.

- Playing key role in on-going coordination efforts to find new opportunities, partnerships, funding for enhanced soil health activities involving NRCS, VA Tech/VCE, DCR, USDA-ARS, VA Governor's Office Staff, environmental NGOs, etc.
- Assisted Chesapeake Bay Funders Network with field visit to Keenbell Farm to discuss soil health implementation challenges and opportunities.

NRCS REPORT

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

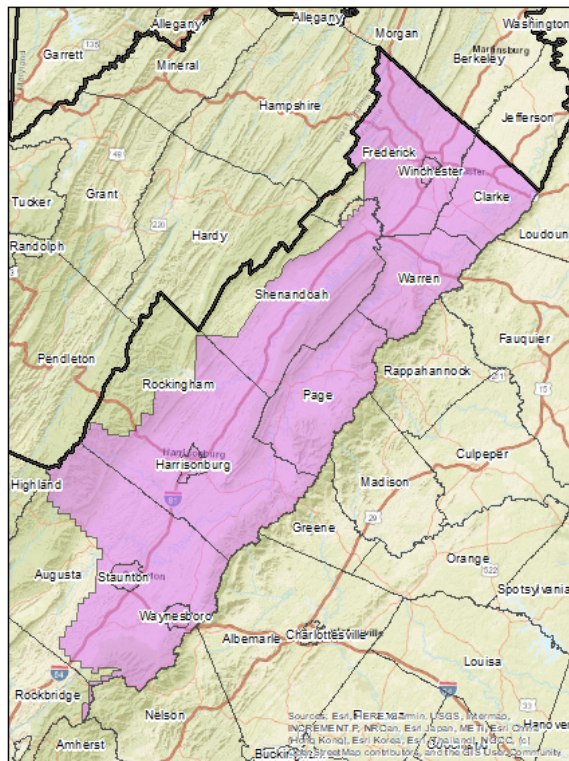
- Provided information on what makes for successful soil health implementation to office of U.S. Congresswoman Spanberger.
- Accepted invitation to collaborate with Common Grain Alliance, VA non-profit dedicated to enhancing market opportunities for local sustainably grown grains. Provided letter of support for SARE grant application.
- Assisting with coordination and planning of new “VA Soil Health Coalition” NFWF grant with implementation starting March 1.
- Attended and helped carry out first small-scale Shenandoah Valley farmer discussion session (“No-till Chat ‘N Chew Meetings”) to kick off VANTAGE’s implementation of NFWF grant.
- Helped set up and lead first implementation planning meeting to coordinate partner efforts for NFWF-funded VA Tech state-wide soil health promotion project.

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

LiDAR acquisition

Below will be flown for new QL2 lidar next fall.

VA_NorthernShenandoah_2020_D20

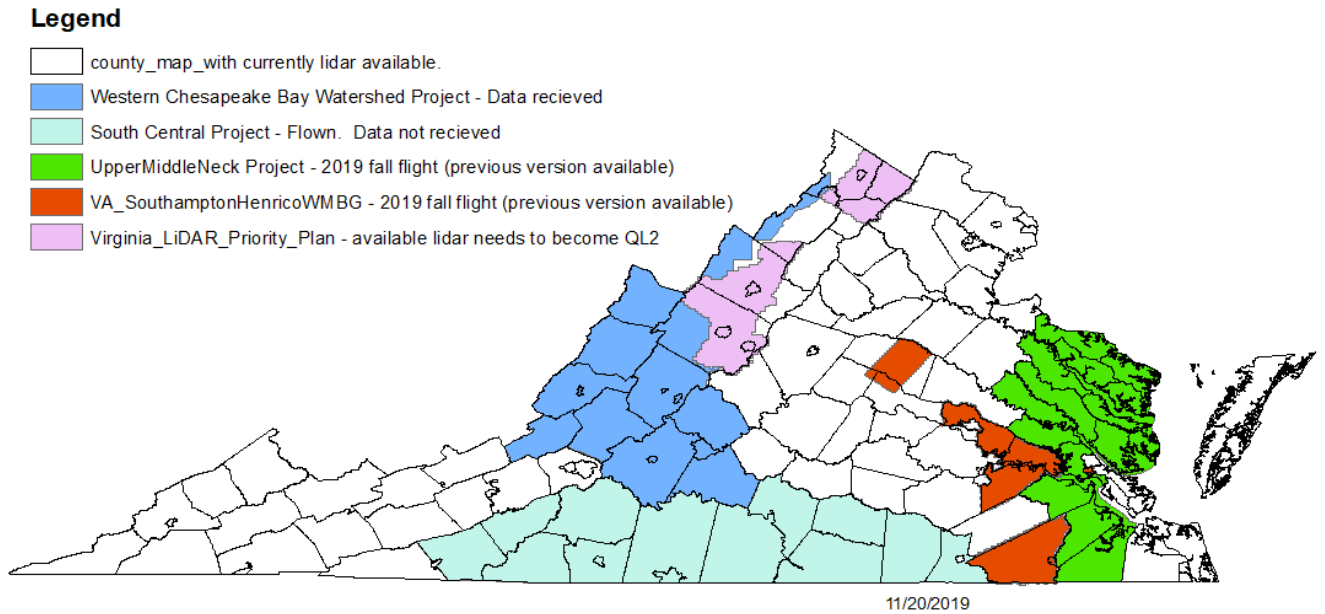


Legend

VA_NorthernShenandoah_UTM17_2020_DPA

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

The orange and green areas below have been flown and are currently going through quality assurance.



Public Affairs (PAS)

Outreach/Public Affairs

COVID-19. Disseminating updates on the status of Virginia NRCS service centers via the state website, social media (Twitter) and on-site signage. Focus of messaging is on continuity of operations through phone, email, farmer.gov and Conservation Client Gateway. Staff are conducting business remotely when possible and making field visits using social distancing protocols.

Legislative Outreach. Worked with Ducks Unlimited to provide a Feb. 8 tour of selected 7th district farms and forestland for Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger. Provided program fact sheets and reference materials highlighting district participation stats and value-added services to highlight NRCS programs and practices in action.

Native American Outreach. Provided overview presentations on NRCS programs and tribal outreach during March 12 training event for Our Growers, Inc., held in Fredericksburg. The group will be conducting targeted outreach to Native Americans and other historically underserved groups for an existing grant project focused in Virginia; Maryland; Washington, D.C; Delaware; Pennsylvania; New Jersey and New York. Also developing new instructional handouts with detailed information on invasive plants, species discovered on field edges/roadsides, and native shrub, grass and wildflower recommendations for the Pamunkey reservation.

CSP. Debuted "Virginia CSP Champions" video series at the State Technical Committee meeting on Feb. 27. Virginia NRCS developed these products to help field staff communicate the many

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
April 14, 2020 ♦ Teleconference

benefits of this often-misunderstood program. The series features four distinctly different operations and producers who have all chosen to make participation in the Conservation Stewardship Program a part of their business plans. View these testimonials on the Virginia NRCS YouTube channel: [Beef](#), [Dairy](#), [Forest](#) and [Crop](#).

Minority Farmer Recognition. Submitted Virginia graziers Calvin T. McGhee, Jr., and Calvin T. McGhee, III, for inclusion in *Minority Landowner* magazine's "Farmers of the Year" issue. (The father-son team were selected as the 2019 Civil Rights Advisory Committee Farmers of the Year.)

Winter Meetings. Networked and shared program information with 2,200+ attendees of 6 major farm shows: Farm Bureau Meeting, Farm to Table Conference, Virginia Biological Farming Conference, Virginia Forage and Grassland Council Winter Forage Conferences, Virginia Farm Show and Virginia No-Till Alliance Conference.

Earth Team Program

Coordinated with VASWCD and the Eastern Shore SWCD to present the NACD/NRCS National Award to the Virginia Dare SWCD at the Area VI Spring Meeting on March 5. Also plan to highlight the VDSWCD and the Henrico Area Water Quality Samplers (district-nominated state award winners) in daily spotlights during National Volunteer Week, April 19-25.