

# NRCS REPORT

## Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom

---

### ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

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

Field staff are currently managing 2,472 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent \$132,189,728 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 534,426 acres.

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

Virginia's EQIP allocation for FY20 was \$26.1 million. We received 1,395 applications for EQIP Financial Assistance by the February 28<sup>th</sup> application batching cutoff. This is an 18% increase in applications over FY19. This fiscal year 443 contracts were obligated.

Virginia was selected for a Joint Chief's project with the U.S. Forest Service for The North Shenandoah Mountain Restoration Project. This project will provide 3-years of annual funding for livestock practices in the project area.

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

The CSP Classic allocation received was \$6.2 million. NRCS received 377 applications which is a 260% increase in applications over FY19. The number of contracts obligated were 112. In addition to Classic contracts, 23 CSP Renewals were obligated for \$1.2 million.

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

Under the RCPP Program projects 11 contracts were funded for Oyster Bottom Restoration through Aquaculture and 1 contract for Franklin County Dairy Ag and Water Protection. Total funding for the 12 contracts were \$590,894.

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

The ACEP-ALE allocation for FY20 is slightly over 2.1 Million following our request for additional funds. Virginia received 2 eligible entity applications for new Program Agreements (3 Parcel Contracts) during the FY20 sign-up. The applications are for 1,094 acres requesting \$2.1 Million. Applications are being approved for obligation. Concurrently, we are managing various stages of 7 existing prior year enrollments in ACEP-ALE. There were no FY20 ACEP-WRE applications, so we returned the allocated \$250,087.

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

The VDGIF Project is our very first agreement and will provide financial incentives to landowners for providing public access for wildlife -dependent recreation and improving wildlife habitat over a 3-year period. The total award for this project is \$2,998,250.

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

There are 12 total National and State CIG grants that are active for a total of \$9,295,845 in technical assistance funding.

**NRCS REPORT**  
**Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting**  
**September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom**

---

**Engineering (SCE)**

**Dam Rehabilitation**

- **Upper North River 77** – Construction is complete. Contract and administrative closeout of the project is underway.
- **Beaver Creek 1** – This agreement to develop a plan for the rehabilitation of the Beaver Creek 1 dam has been signed and the funds have been obligated. This will be a locally led planning effort with NRCS providing review and approval of the supplemental watershed plan prepared by the sponsor, Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority and their consultant. The planning period will take 18 to 24 months. A virtual pre-meeting with the sponsor and NRCS staff to discuss roles and responsibilities has been held.

**State Resource Conservationist (SRC)**

**Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)**

- Released final revised VA CART FAQs for FY20 (dated 6.23.2020).
- Posted new NRCS Resource Concerns Fact Sheets to the FOTG (Notice 450-20-474).
- Posted new fact sheets to the FOTG (Notice 450-20-476) on novel endophyte fescue planting recommendations as part of a state CIG project.
- Developed a new 2020 VA NRCS State Soil Health Strategic Plan. Coordinated with staff as well as up to a dozen key partners in developing this important document that helps lay out plan of action and priorities for future VA NRCS soil health activities.
- On-going work on developing a Technical Note with specific definition of Soil Health Management Systems (SHMS).
- On-going work on developing a Technical Note on crop rotation diagramming & analysis for use with crop rotation panning and other practices like cover crops.
- On-going work on revising standards for FY21, Wildlife Habitat Planting CPS420 will be a new practice offering.
- On-going work to clean up the organization of the FOTG and the Plant Establishment Guide (PEG).
- On-going work to integrate CEAP SVI data into planning/programs to assist planners where runoff/leaching could be most prevalent on the landscape.
- On-going work with Troy University to develop flow accumulation and stream power index layers to assist planners where concentrated flow is likely to occur and contributing areas for watercourses.
- On-going work to develop Virginia plant field id guides for common pasture grasses and invasive species to assist staff with pasture recommendations.

**Training to Field Staff**

- Released VA Bulletin 180-20-6 on the updated Conservation Planning Certification Policy to align with national policy training requirements.
- NRCS certified conservation planning courses (Basic Soils, Planning Criteria, Assessment Tools, Farm Bill Compliance) that were re-scheduled from March to September due to the

## NRCS REPORT

### Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting

September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom

---

restrictions on trainings/travel with COVID-19 are now undergoing a revision to the training delivery to make these trainings available through a combination of AgLearn courses, recorded presentations, virtual training and assessments. More information to soon follow, coursework will begin in late September and continue through the fall into winter.

- Partnered with VFGC and M2B to help plan, coordinate and promote a virtual Advanced Grazing School which averaged 205 viewers on Zoom and 97 on a live YouTube stream each night of the three-part series.
- At request of VASWCD/DCR, developed plan to provide webinar-based training on erosion assessment, RUSLE2 and prescribed grazing in fall 2020 to replace Graves Mtn. sessions, plus session on cover crops in winter 2021. Webinars will be open to all conservation partners and will be recorded, serving as an educational opportunity for NRCS.

#### **Customer Service and Outreach**

- Coordinating with VA Tech, NRCS NHQ, and VA NRCS to establish two partnership agreements that will use competitive grant as well as VA NRCS funds to establish an innovative partnership staffing strategy and embedded “Integrated Conservation Agronomy” (ICA) staff.
- Coordinating with Pheasants Forever/Qual Forever and NRCS NHQ to bring on additional Private Lands Biologists to support state wildlife action plan and Farm Bill programs.
- Sent to the State Technical Committee for review and comment updated state wetland conservation compliance policy on determining scope and effect of drainage systems.
- Updated the Virginia Food Security Act Compliance web page to better provide transparent customer communications.
- On-going work to revise state instructions for employees on Conservation Compliance.
- Issued new conservation compliance notification letters to provide more clear and consciese information to clients.
- Sent to the State Technical Committee the issuance of the final rule for Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation - 7 CFR Part 12.
- On-going work to update sections of the Boots on Ground publication with public affairs showcasing VA NRCS value added to the Commonwealth.
- Coordinated inter-agency training with FSA-NRCS leadership (compliance related issues).
- Reviewed draft portable fence standard for DCR meeting to discuss adopting for VA BMP program.
- Wrote and submitted a producer testimonial article to the Alliance for Grassland Renewal highlighting the successful conversion of toxic endophyte fescue to novel endophyte fescue by Kevin Moyers on Twilight Farms.
- Provided direct support to VA State University to develop a pasture renovation and grazing management plan to support a major demonstration project in development at Randolph Farm by the request of the Dean.
- Participated on a VIMs ZOOM panel discussion on Farmland Resiliency for At-Risk Coastal farmlands. Reviewed and provided comments for their final document. Resulting in partner agencies, landowners/producers, and VIMs being more aware of how NRCS and FSA programs and conservation practices could be utilized to assist in providing some alternatives to producers whose cropland is no longer productive do to saltwater-intrusion on traditionally productive farmland.

# NRCS REPORT

## Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom

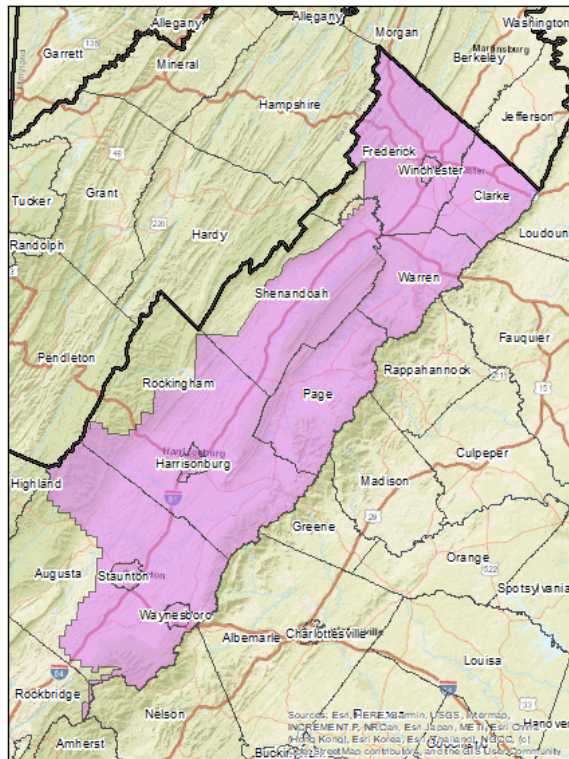
- At request of DCR, providing in-depth recommendations on design of possible new state BMP promoting soil health.
- Established VA NRCS Soil Health Team for improved internal coordination; hosted first meeting via MS Teams focused on soil health/dynamic soil properties project discussion.
- Worked with partners on various aspects of implementing new “VA Soil Health Coalition” NFWF grant, including planning meetings and discussion of counting carbon credits for BMPs.
- At request of Richmond Dept of Parks & Rec (DPR), discussed opportunities for training to urban farmers on future grant funded DPR programs.
- Forwarded to VA NRCS Public Affairs new Common Grain Alliance video on soil health featuring VA soil health champion Daniel Austin for posting & publicizing.
- Provided quick response, in-depth discussion, and letter of collaboration on short deadline to Dr. Atalay of VA State Univ (VSU) for soil health research proposal.

### State Soil Scientist (SSS)

#### LiDAR acquisition

Below will be flown for new QL2 lidar next fall in cooperation with FEMA, NFS, and USGS.


VA\_NorthernShenandoah\_2020\_D20



0 5 10 20 30 40 Miles



#### Legend

 VA\_NorthernShenandoah\_UTM17\_2020\_DPA

# NRCS REPORT

## Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom

### National Resources Inventory update

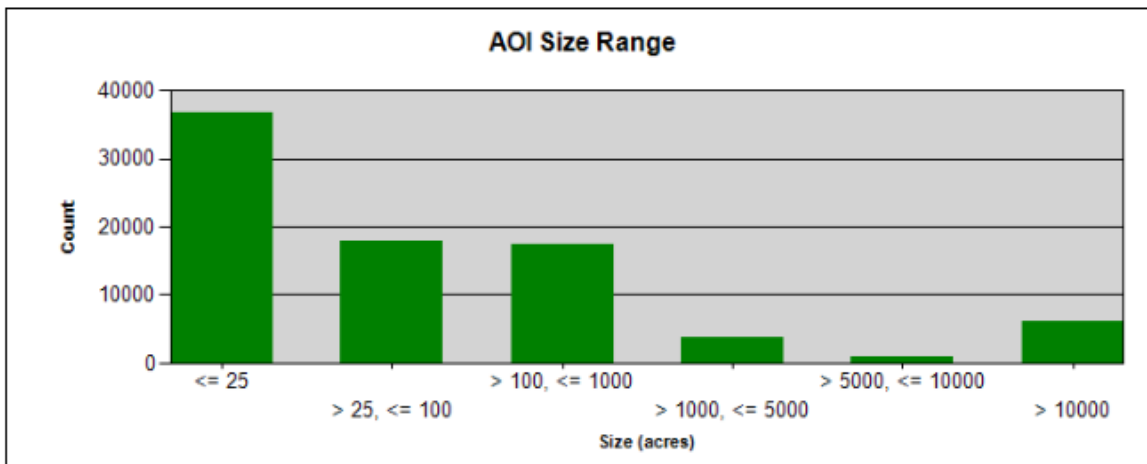
- NRI Grazing land data collection is finished across the state for FY20's collection period.
- NRI Local Data collection has just begun for the year of FY19, which will wrap up in January.
- 2017 NRI data summaries will be published this early Fall for use by planners.

### Soil Survey Update

- Multiple Technical team and Management team meetings with Virginia's MLRA project leaders for soil survey update projects occurring in the state in FY21.
- Multiple quality assurance reviews are ongoing during the end of FY20.
- 82,692 separate Area of Interests (AOI) were made in Virginia on the Web Soil Survey, stretching the NRCS customer base very far and wide.

### **Web Soil Survey AOI Size Range**

Report Created: 9/17/2020 12:12:13 PM  
Start Date: 10/1/2019  
End Date: 8/31/2020  
State/Territory: Virginia



Size Range (acres)	Count
<= 25	36844
> 25, <= 100	17784
> 100, <= 1000	17504
> 1000, <= 5000	3709
> 5000, <= 10000	849
> 10000	6002
<b>Total:</b>	<b>82692</b>

**NRCS REPORT**  
**Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting**  
**September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom**

---

**Public Affairs (PAS)**

**Outreach/Public Affairs**

**Minority Farmer Recognition.** Soliciting statewide nominations for the Virginia NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee's 2020 Farmer of the Year normally presented at Virginia Small Farm Conference. Also received shipment of *Minority Landowner* magazine's 2019 "Farmers of the Year" issue featuring NRCS nominees Calvin T. McGhee, Jr., and Calvin T. McGhee, III from Louisa. Copies will be made available to interested staff, partners and committee members.

**Smith Creek Showcase Watershed.** Finalizing preparations for an Oct. 2 ceremony to celebrate 10 years of collaborative conservation in Rockingham and Shenandoah counties. The Shenandoah Valley and Lord Fairfax SWCDs will be honored guests and among the dedicated partners who will be recognized for their contributions to improving water quality in this targeted watershed. Special thanks to the SVSWCD for their assistance with event set up, staffing and refreshments.

**Urban Ag.** Developed a custom distribution list to notify Virginia schools, food banks, markets and local government contacts about two new urban ag grant announcements [Urban Ag and Innovative Production and Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CCFWR) pilot grant projects]. NRCS will reach out to Prince William County, the first Virginia CCFWR grant recipient, to develop a joint news release once the agreement is finalized.

**Small and Nontraditional Farmers.** Collaborated with VSU Small Farm Outreach Program staff to provide updates on NRCS programs and services during USDA Information Sessions on July 30 (Christiansburg area) and Sept. 10 (Strasburg). Another virtual session for Courtland, Dinwiddie and Emporia landowners is planned for Sept. 24.

**NRCS in the News.** Showcased Pamplin City farmer and Navy Lt. Daniel Longwell in an Independence Day feature heavily promoted on farmers.gov, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. NRCS also released the story locally and in Maryland and Pennsylvania. (Longwell and wife Joaquina are Pennsylvania natives and Daniel works at the Patuxent Naval Air Station in Maryland.) The couple is working with Farmville staff to realize their goals of raising/growing most of their food, selling the surplus at farmers markets and making the property a haven for small game.

**Social Media Engagement.** Placed three Virginia photos on the national map for the FPAC #Plant2020 campaign to showcase agriculture as an essential industry and the producers who were moving forward with spring planting during a global pandemic. Featured producers were Paul Davis of New Kent; John and Cappie Montgomery's Fleur-De-Lis, LLC, in Henrico County; and an anonymous Mennonite farmer in Rockingham County.

**Summer Meetings.** Coordinated NRCS representation and assisted with presentation development for an Aug. 7 Virginia Community Prosperity Summit on *Building Community Resilience*. USDA's Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement hosted the program in collaboration with the Regional Rural Development Centers and Virginia State University to help develop a more holistic approach to fostering economic development in the communities we serve. Presenters provided information on programs/tools available through USDA and its partners and discussed next steps to help rural and underserved communities tackle some of their most pressing issues.

**NRCS REPORT**  
**Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting**  
**September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom**

---

**Earth Team Program**

Reached out to NRCS and district staff to solicit nominations for 2020 state and national Earth Team awards. While COVID has severely limited service opportunities this year, we still hope to recognize district and NRCS offices that have found creative workarounds to keep volunteers on the job in the field. The Earth Team Advisory Committee will review submissions and select state winners at their next quarterly meeting on October 6.

---

**Admin (ASTC-M&S)**

**VA NRCS Personnel Changes**

***Pathways Conversions:***

Stephanie Johansen, Christiansburg, going to Wytheville, 8/2/20  
Cassidy Williams, Christiansburg, 8/2/20  
Charles Gregory, Lawrenceville, 8/16/20

***Retirements:*** none since 6/1/2020

***Positions Vacated/Moved:***

Debbie Bullock, District Conservationist, Warsaw, 5/22/2020—moved to State Office 5/26/2020, as State Program Specialist  
Harvey Baker, District Conservationist, Emporia, 6/5/20—moved to Lawrenceville FO 6/8/2020  
Kelley Smith, District Conservationist, Bedford, 6/20/20—moved to Chatham FO 6/22/2020  
Jeffrey Barr, District Conservationist, Warrenton, 6/20/20  
Matthew Wescott, Soil Conservationist, Courtland, 6/20/20  
Phillip Davis, Area Resource Conservationist, Harrisonburg, 6/24/20  
Derek Hancock, District Conservationist, Farmville, 7/3/20—moved to Bonsack FO 7/6/2020  
Rachel Loveday, District Conservationist, Amelia, 7/3/20—moved to Farmville AO FO 7/6/2020, as Area Resource Conservationist  
Austin Shenk, Soil Conservation, Chatham, 7/18/20—moved to Harrisonburg 7/20/2020  
Leticia Holder, Easement Specialist, State Office, 7/18/20—moved within the State Office 7/20/2020, as Realty Specialist  
Alan Hawkins, Soil Engineering Technician, Harrisonburg FO, 7/18/20—moved to Harrisonburg AO 7/20/2020, as Soil Conservationist Technician  
Jim Jarvis, Soil Conservationist, Rustburg, 8/15/20—moved to Bedford FO 8/17/2020, as DC  
Telicia Berry, Soil Conservationist, Hanover, 8/15/20—moved to Amelia FO 8/17/2020, as DC  
Peggy Shaw-McBee, District Conservationist, Quinton, 8/29/20—moved to Warrenton FO 8/31/2020  
Lucia Kossler, District Conservationist, Fredericksburg, 8/29/20—moved to Warsaw FO 8/31/2020  
Brad Carter, Soil Conservationist, Accomac, 8/29/20

***Personnel Added:***

Lydia Fitzgerald, Soil Conservationist, Harrisonburg FO, 1/21/2020  
Edwin Martinez Martinez, Ph.D., Virginia State Conservationist, Richmond State Office, 9/14/2020  
Corey Bray, Soil Conservation Technician, Culpeper FO, 6/8/2020

## **NRCS REPORT**

### **Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting**

**September 29, 2020 ♦ Zoom**

---

Meredeth Miller, Soil Conservation Technician, Smithfield, 6/22/2020  
Susan Keheley, Soil Conservation Technician, Wytheville FO, 6/22/2020  
Brittany Owens, Administrative Coordinator, Christiansburg AO, 6/22/2020  
Jacob Ogle, Soil Conservationist Technician, Christiansburg, 7/6/2020  
Maili Page, Soil Conservationist Technician, Strasburg FO, 7/6/2020  
Joey Davis, District Conservationist, Emporia FO, 7/20/2020  
Emily Bock, Civil Engineer, Christiansburg AO, 8/31/2020  
Aneka Collins, Administrative Coordinator, Farmville AO, 8/31/2020