NRCS REPORT
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
March 24, 2022 ♦ In-person, Drury Hotel, Glen Allen, VA

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs
Field staff are currently managing 2,081 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent $128 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 469,450 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
  Received and ranked 923 EQIP applications. Applications are currently being evaluated for preapprovals. Secured $2,983,965 of funding for 3 years for Bland, Botetourt, and Wythe counties through the Joint Chiefs Eastern Divide Restoration Project. Received a total EQIP allocation of $25.6 million.

- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic, Renewals & GCI**
  Obligated $5.9 million for 82 CSP renewals on 45,686 acres, a 57% increase in contracts obligated and a 53% increase in acres enrolled over FY21. Funded 13 CSP-GCI contracts for $26,560 (all applications submitted). Mailed 156 FY23 CSP Renewal applications to eligible participants.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
  Currently managing 24 active contracts with total funding of $2.6 million covering 8,230 acres. Actively meeting with partners who are interested in submitting RCPP proposals by April 13, 2022, deadline.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
  Received 3 ALE applications on 1,632 acres and 1 WRE application. Currently 10 ALE acquisitions are in progress.

- **Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP)**
  Virginia NRCS continues to assist DWR with VPA-HIP. The program now has 4 contracts obligated and 16 applications being processed covering 24,161 acres in the Coalfields region of Southwest Virginia.

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
  Currently, finalizing State CIG proposal with $400k available to support the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands.

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Engineering (SCE)

**Dam Rehabilitation**

- **Beaver Creek 1** The planning effort is being locally led by the Sponsor, Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA). RWSA has retained Schnabel Engineering as their consultant. The draft environmental assessment is being reviewed by the NRCS National Water
Management Center for technical adequacy. It is anticipated that a final environmental assessment will be completed by Fall 2022.

- **Cherrystone Creek 1** Funding has been received for the design for the rehabilitation of the structure in accordance with the recommended alternative detailed in the environmental assessment. Pittsylvania County will be the Sponsor for the locally led design process. NRCS is currently working with the County to develop a cooperative agreement for the work. The design process is estimated to take between 18 and 24 months.

**EWP**

NRCS is providing disaster assistance to Buchanan County, Virginia, through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP). The Hurley area of Buchanan County received 6-8 inches of rain (estimated) on Monday, August 30. NRCS and Buchanan County completed damage survey reports (DSRs) for 4 county-identified sites. Funding for 3 eligible sites was received in mid-January 2022. NRCS is currently working with county staff to complete the required documents for the cooperative agreement to implement remedial work. NRCS has been coordinating efforts with Buchanan County and FEMA.

**State Resource Conservationist (SRC)**

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

- Maintaining the Virginia Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) as a repository of information and references including updates to the conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria and resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide (PEG).

**Training to Field Staff**

- COVID-19 training, and travel restrictions challenged the team to forage new opportunities to conducted Joint Employee Development (JED) trainings to strength and expand NRCS and partner employee's knowledge and skills. We continue to utilize SRC webinars in place of traditional in-person meetings which has allowed us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to field staff.

- These training sessions resulted in approximately 1,240 field staff and 1,173 partners being trained in 35 different training opportunities providing the ability to earn 33 contact hours, a few joint-agency webinars include:
  - Prepared a comprehensive RUSLE2 education initiative in response to NRCS field office and DCR partner requests resulting in 6 training webinars for NRCS and SWCD personnel.
  - One day per month set aside to assist area staff and partners with RUSLE2 and cropland agronomy needs.
  - An overview of the different farmer-to-farmer mentoring opportunities in the state to provide field level practitioners the ability to connect with other producers.

**Customer Service and Outreach**

- Help train, coordinate, and facilitate 13 partnership events where over 1,084 participants attended. These outreach events strive to strengthen and expand NRCS partnership activities
to achieve common goals, address critical resource concerns and accelerate conservation.

Highlights include:

- Partnered with the farmer-led Virginia No-Till Alliance (VANTAGE) board in planning the Winter Conferences including arranging farmer speakers and helping moderate the conference where 255 participants heard farmers tell our mission; keep the soil covered, minimize disturbance, etc.

- Partnered with VFGC (Virginia Forage and Grassland Council), VCE (Virginia Cooperative Extension), CBF (Chesapeake Bay Foundation) and the forage industry to plan, coordinate and conduct the 2022 statewide winter forage conferences. This years’ conference series included 4 in person events plus a live stream option where 455 people participated to learn more about The Green Side of Beef: A Defense of Grassland Agriculture.

- Participated in the Virginia Aquaculture Conference with VIMS/VMRC (Virginia Institute of Marine Science/Virginia Marine Resource Commission) where 105 people attended and learned about of restoration program offerings and benefits they provide to the producer as well as water quality in the Chesapeake Bay.

- Assisted with the development and delivery of a presentation regarding NRCS prescribed burn offerings during the annual Virginia Prescribed Burn Council. Resulting in outreach to approximately 85 attendees on how NRCS can assist and contribute to prescribed burning in Virginia.

- Partnered with the Landscape Partnership Learning Network to offer a series of webinars on various aspects of Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG) Forages and Grazing Management for Bobwhite Quail.

- Partnered with the Alliance for Grassland Renewal to provide a virtual training opportunity titled, All Things Fescue, to educate cooperative extension and NRCS personnel in understanding toxic tall fescue and novel endophyte tall fescue varieties.

- Conducted a multi-state technical webinar for NRCS and partners in Maryland including University of Maryland and Maryland Department of Natural Resources on our WLFW program.

- Participated in 10 different soil health events where NRCS organized outreach and training with partners and was a keynote presenter. This included 837 agency staff, partners, industry, and producers learning and sharing together, a key feature of the Virginia Soil Health Initiative. Since the 2013 Soil Health Kickoff event in Virginia, NRCS has helped organize and lead 317 soil health events which were attended by over 27,283 participants and heard the NRCS principles on soil health including two invited presentations at the Delmarva Soil Summit.

- Continue to promote and intensively work with the Soil Health Coalition (VSHC) coordinator to facilitate a structure and function of all soil health activities to boost the effectiveness and impact of key pillars in our soil health strategy in Virginia. This includes the implementation of the innovative and partnership-based outreach grant with Virginia Tech in hiring a new integrated conservation agronomist and farmer mentors. This partnership-oriented approach leverages exciting new strategies in support of climate smart agriculture, water quality improvements and a network of demonstration farms including support of a NHQ Soil Plant Science Division agreement with Virginia Tech evaluating soil health assessments using Dynamic Soil Property (DSP) projects.
Led the planning, coordination, and development of the 2022 Virginia Graziers Planner with team support from VFGC, Extension, NRCS and CBF staff and volunteers to produce 3,500 copies to distribute as an outreach tool to grassland farmers across Virginia.

**State Soil Scientist (SSS)**

**National Resources Inventory Update**
The NRI grazing land field data collection locations have been released and are in the process of being analyzed for data needed to complete. The annual protocol training has not been scheduled yet but should be near the end of April.

**Soil Survey Update**
Ecological Site Descriptions for Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 153 A and B, located on the eastern side of the coastal plain, has begun. The goal for Virginia NRCS is to have consistent vegetative communities for offsite wetland determinations or manipulated wetlands are completed. This project may take up to two years for completion.

Areas of Interest created by Virginia internal and external clients using NRCS soil data this FY.

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

| Report Created: | 3/4/2022 8:10:27 AM |
| Start Date:     | 10/1/2021           |
| End Date:       | 2/28/2022           |
| State/Territory:| Virginia            |
Public Affairs (PAS)

Communications/Outreach

Tribal Outreach. Co-hosted a “first of its kind” Virginia Tribal Summit with USDA’s Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement on March 16-17. This virtual outreach event was designed by and for the commonwealth’s federally recognized tribes with multiple state partners heavily engaged in planning and delivering the requested content for two tracks: Conservation and Knowledge Building and Community Growth and Expansion. State agency representatives delivered presentations on invasive species, shoreline erosion protection, land conservation, broadband and dam safety and floodplain management.

Minority Farmer Recognition. Submitted Virginia grazier Ora Scruggs McCoy for inclusion in Minority Landowner magazine’s 2021 “Farmers of the Year” issue. Media placements for our 2021 Civil Rights Advisory Committee Farmer of the Year included the Times Virginian, Virginia Farming and On the Farm Radio. Virginia Farm Bureau also interviewed her for an episode of the
Real Virginia television program (view the Ora McCoy tribute video on the Virginia NRCS YouTube channel.).

**Urban Ag.** Adapted Virginia success story on Prince William County Schools’ Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction (CCFWR) pilot for a USDA blog posted on Dec. 13. Also collaborating with the city of Richmond to develop a success story/news release on their CCFWR project selected for the second wave of funding for the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production’s cooperative agreements/grants.

**Landmark Achievements.** Coordinated review and clearances of Field to Market January spotlight on Anthony and Trenton Howell that appeared in the group’s newsletter and was promoted via their social media channels. (The duo was named trusted advisers in 2021 and featured in a video introducing that year’s spotlight honorees.)

**Soil Health Partnerships/Networking.** Working with the Virginia Soil Health Coalition to develop an outreach calendar with key dates and messaging for soil health communications and to review/edit a new rainfall simulator video. Collaborated with 4theSoil partners to review World Soils Day announcements and partnership infographics and exhibits.

**Social Media Engagement.** Continued to focus on social media as a tool to publicize programs, tie ag to current events and implement campaigns like 4theSoil. Posted 9 tweets between December 1 and March 10 that yielded 2,140 profile visits. Top tweet: Signups for TNC RCPP projects in the Clinch-Powell watershed (388 impressions).

**Winter Meetings.** Collaborated with VIMS to develop new messaging/signage to promote RCPP aquaculture project at the Virginia Aquaculture Conference on Jan. 7-8. Also helped highlight the benefits of climate-smart agriculture through the 2022 VFGC Virtual Winter Forage Conference on Jan. 18 – 21 and showcase customer-focused conservation at the Virginia No-Till Alliance Winter Conference on Feb. 9.

**Earth Team Program**

Welcomed Maura Christian as the new VASWCD liaison to the Virginia Earth Team Advisory Committee. Coordinated presentations of state Earth Team awards for Hannah Clifford (Outstanding Individual Volunteer) and the Prince William SWCD Water Quality Program (Outstanding Group) during the VASWCD’s Virtual Annual Meeting on Dec. 6. Will also highlight the PWSWCD and forward state conservationist letters and tokens of appreciation to district partners statewide during National Volunteer Week, April 17-23.

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

**Virginia NRCS Personnel Changes**

**Retirements:**
Donna Heidel, Administrative Coordinator, Harrisonburg Area Office, 10/31/2021
Dennis Thompson, Civil Engineering Technician, Farmville Area Office, 12/31/2021
David Kriz, Assistant State Conservationist, Water Resource Operations, 12/31/2021
Upcoming Retirements:
None

Personnel Added:
Nora Sheehan, Archeologist, State Office, 8/30/2021
Michelle Pope, Program Assistant (Farm Bill), State Office, 8/30/2021
Nizhoni LaFrance-Pettigrew, State Program Specialist, State Office, 9/27/2021
Elizabeth Elliot, Natural Resource Specialist, Verona Service Center, 9/27/2021
Christopher Peters, Soil Conservationist, Verona Service Center, 9/27/2021
Richard Fitzgerald, Agronomist, Verona Service Center, 9/27/2021
Bryan Krouse, Civil Engineering Technician, Warsaw Service Center, 10/12/2021
Rosiel Grajales-Cortes, Soil Conservationist, Warrenton Service Center, 10/24/2021
Cameron Bermand, Soil Conservationist, Smithfield, 11/8/2021
Charles Salley, Soil Conservationist, Emporia Service Center, 11/22/2021
William Hoffer, Civil Engineering Technician, Farmville, 12/6/2021
Kelly Burke, District Conservationist, Rustburg Service Center, 1/18/2022
Megan Comfort, Soil Conservationist, Harrisonburg, 2/28/2022
Emily Cook, Soil Conservationist, Bedford Service Center, 2/28/2022
Brody Ellis, Soil Conservationist, Warsaw Service Center, 3/14/2022
Javier Medina Sanchez, Soil Conservationist, Lexington Service Center, 3/14/2022

Personnel Moved:
Brandon Cole, District Conservationist, from Christiansburg to Wytheville Service Center, 11/22/2021
Matt Roberts, from Fredericksburg Service Center (Soil Conservationist) to Christiansburg Service Center, District Conservationist, 3/14/2022
Allison Moore, from Lexington Service Center (Soil Conservationist) to Richmond State Office, Business Tools Coordinator, 3/14/2022

Positions Vacated:
Matthew Salkey, Cartographer, State Office, 7/18/2021
Victoria Steinhoff, Soil Conservation Technician, Bedford Service Center, 11/6/2021
Eva Rondon, Public Affairs Assistant, State Office, 2/14/2022