STC Highlights

- Reviewed three of five Equity Conservation Cooperative Agreements involving Virginia. Supporting implementation of finalized Africulture project through joint outreach to include a Juneteenth event.
- Unveiled Virginia People’s Garden at Fairfield Middle School in Henrico County on June 1. More funding will be available for other sites to help support resilient local food systems.
- Hired new Outreach Coordinator who will start work on July 5 and finalized new Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives position, which will be advertised in the near future.
- Attended the May 19 Prince William SWCD board meeting to make an in-person presentation of the SE Region and National Earth Team Group Volunteer awards.
- Celebrated Earth Day (April 22) in the Shenandoah Valley with Under Secretary Bonnie and FSA State Executive Director Dr. Ronald Howell. The trip included stops to network with partners and producers at the Lexington Service Center and Farmer Focus poultry processing plant.

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

**EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs**
Field staff are currently managing 2,200 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent $135 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 467,580 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
  Preapproved 463 applications for $25 million. Obligated 283 contracts for $15.6 million (58% obligated). Applications at the approved status are 52 for $3.1 million. Received an additional allocation of $1 million to fund applications in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

- **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). Preapproved 103 CSP Classic applications for $8.57 million. Received 136 FY23 CSP Renewal applications. Received an additional allocation of $500k to fund applications in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
  Currently managing 22 active contracts with total funding of $2.6 million covering 8,210 acres. Reviewed and evaluated 4 RCPP project proposals. Selections will be made by our National Office soon. Preapproved 15 RCPP-TNC project applications in Lee, Scott and Russell counties.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
  Received and rank 4 Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) applications on 1,692 acres with funding requests of $5.6 million. Currently 7 ALE acquisitions and 2 Wetland Reserve Easements restorations 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 SW Virginia.
Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
Received 3 proposals for soil health on grazing land and pollinator habitat restoration priority topics. Selections have been made and will be announced soon. The maximum award for each topic is $200,000.

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 revised based on comments received from the NRCS National Water Management Center. It is anticipated that a final environmental assessment will be completed by Fall 2022.
- Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A
Pittsylvania County will be the Sponsor for the locally led design process for the design for the rehabilitation of the structures. NRCS and the County have signed separate cooperative agreements to obligate the funding. The design process is estimated to take between 18 and 24 months. The County is in the process of procuring A&E services for the design.

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. The EWP agreement was finalized on March 15, 2022. Buchanan County is currently working through the engineering design, permitting and scheduling for the approved sites.

State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)
Continue to maintain the Virginia Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) as a repository of technical resources and references including conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria and resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide (PEG).
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-22-500 National Technical Note Seed Quality

Training to Field Staff
- Continue the use of SRC webinars in place of tradition in-person meetings allowing us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to field staff:
  - April 13 – DOF Forest Health, Pests and Pathogens – 75 participants
  - April 27 – Overview of FOTG and Ecological Science SharePoint – 65 participants
  - May 4 – NRCS/DOF programs and procedures – 73 participants
  - June 8 – Native Warm Season Grass CIG Overview – 57 participants
  - June 15 – Urban Agriculture & Forestry – 110 participants
    Joint agency urban ag and forestry webinar to highlight partner efforts (VCE, VSU, SWCD, DOF, FSA) which complement NRCS urban ag offerings.
NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
June 22, 2022
Zoom

- Continuing the RUSLE@2 office hours help sessions for staff
- Continuing the soil health assessment workgroup and soil health outreach meetings to evaluate and implement greater emphasis on soil health assessment and outreach/training.

- For the first time in over two years due to COVID training and travel restrictions, we have scheduled in-the-field JED trainings, keeping under 50 staff and all outdoor events:
  - April JEDs – Pasture Condition Score Assessment & Grazing Training
  - May JEDs – Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Tool Training
  - Continue conducting soil health & basic cropland agronomy training/farm visits for field staff

- 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 where our staff was able to attend to earn 2.0 contact hours to maintain their conservation planner certification.

- 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. Upon completion, participants were given a 30 minute, pre-made presentation they are able to present in their counties. 50 NRCS employees attended earning 2.0 contact hours toward maintaining their conservation planner certification.

- Conducted a multi-state technical webinar for NRCS and partners in Maryland including Univ. of MD and MD Dept of Natural Resources on our WLFW program and the lessons learned as they begin using this program in MD.

Customer Service and Outreach

- Presented to the VA Prescribed Fire Council on NRCS prescribed fire program offerings and assistance for 100+ participants.

- Partnered with NatGLC, VFGC, VA Tech, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, VCE and American Farmland Trust to coordinate and conduct the Basic Grazing School for 25 producers to attend and learn the principles of grazing and pasture management, and how that relates to building system productivity and soil health while producing healthy and safe livestock product in support of our nation’s food supply. Those attending managed a combined 3,030 acres of pastureland, 1,275 acres of hay land, and 1,020 head of various types of livestock.

- Worked with VCE, SWCD, local farmers, VSHC, and industry to host a Twilight Soil Health Event in Halifax County that featured rainfall simulator presentation, a soil pit, cover crop plots, and extensive presentations by Daniel Austin, a farmer mentor. Total of 35 attendees, including 27 farmers.

- Attended and served as a panelist at a Soil Health Coalition sponsored Earth Day event in Blacksburg, VA to answer questions about agriculture and soil health

- Served as invited speaker at Valley Grazing & Soil Health Ag Production Field Day, presenting soil health demonstrations and discussing cover crops. Approx. 150 participants at event.


State Soil Scientist (SSS)

National Resources Inventory Update
The NRI grazing land field data collection locations have been released and the training has happened. Field data collection is ongoing this summer.

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. MLRA ESD’s the piedmont and northern piedmont are also in draft form.

56,318 unique Areas of Interest (AOI) were created in Virginia this fiscal year so far by internal and external clients that use NRCS’s soils database in Web Soil Survey for free.

**Public Affairs (PAS)**

**Communications/Outreach**

**Expanding Engagement.** Instituted a new forward-looking events calendar and tracking system to help increase NRCS visibility at statewide meetings/conferences and build relationships with organizations that touch or represent underserved communities. This record of projected activities will help state leadership ensure a level of participation commensurate with the engagement opportunity and more fully document efforts undertaken statewide.

**NRCS in the News.** Highlighted climate-smart ag practices and ongoing studies to address saltwater intrusion on cropland in “Keeping the Farm” column prepared for June 14 issue of *Delmarva Farmer*.

**Social Media Engagement.** Leveraged state Twitter account to publicize programs, tie ag to current events and implement campaigns like 4theSoil. Posted 19 tweets between April 16 and June 17 that yielded more than 255 engagements. Top tweet: NRCS Birthday (735 impressions).

**Spring Meetings.** Shared information on NRCS programs and services at an April 19 USDA Information Session for producers in Loudon and Fauquier counties and at VSU’s “Boots to Roots2: Down on the Farm” veteran farmers field day on May 24. Participation was good despite the inclement weather at Randolph Farm with approximately 95 attendees.

**Earth Team Program**

Recognized SE Region and National Earth Team award winners Hannah Clifford (Fredericksburg) and the Prince William SWCD Water Quality Program (Warrenton) during a national ceremony held virtually on April 21. Publicized the accomplishments through a news release targeted to Northern Virginia media. Collaborating with VASWCD to schedule joint training on requirements for registering volunteers/groups and recording their hours in the new Volunteer Tracking System.