STC Highlights

• Conducting meet and greet sessions with staff and district partners during a statewide tour to learn more about partnership initiatives and outreach activities in each service area. (Visited NRCS Area II in July and I in August. Area IV meetings will be held Sept. 19-22.)
• Recruiting for new Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives who will play a pivotal role in strengthening existing collaborations and exploring new opportunities for joint initiatives. This manager will supervise the newly hired state Outreach Coordinator.
• Hit a major milestone with ACEP-ALE funding this fiscal year, obligating 4 ACEP-ALE contracts on 1,692 acres for $5.6 million using $4.75 million from an additional Chesapeake Bay allocation.
• Collaborated with VCE to design and host an Advanced Agronomy Education Area at the Aug. 4 Virginia Ag Expo, which featured a soil pit and deep root displays to highlight how soil types can impact yield potential and environmental risk. A Virginia Soil Health Coalition booth also showcased our 4theSoil partnership initiative.
• Coordinated a September 8 day of service at Feed Moore in Richmond as part of USDA’s annual Feds Feed Families summer food drive. The State Conservationist joined representatives from NRCS, FSA and RD in packing prepared food items for distribution to food insecure individuals in Central Virginia.

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs
Field staff are currently managing 2,323 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent $143 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 481,274 acres.

• **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
  Obligated 434 contracts for $23.6 million (88% obligated). Approved 39 applications for $1.67 million and preapproved 33 applications for $571k.

• **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). Obligated 49 CSP Classic contracts for $3.73 million and approved 20 applications for $1.6 million with 36 preapprovals remaining for $3.3 million. Received 136 FY23 CSP Renewal applications.

• **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
  Obligated $857k for 15 RCPP-TNC contracts in Lee, Scott and Russell counties. An Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley RCPP project proposal focusing on easement acquisitions has been selected for funding.
• **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
  Obligated 4 Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) applications on 1,692 acres for $5.6 million, a milestone for Virginia ACEP-ALE. NRCS was able to obligate this level of funding by including $4.75 million in additional money received for the Chesapeake Bay. The team is currently working on 7 ALE acquisitions and 2 Wetland Reserve Easements.

• **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
  Two state CIG proposals focusing on soil health on grazing land and pollinator habitat restoration have been selected for funding. More information on these selections will be made available after the agreements are finalized.

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**Engineering (SCE)**

**Dam Rehabilitation**

• **Beaver Creek 1**
  The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) is overseeing the locally led planning effort and has retained Schnabel Engineering as their consultant. The National Program Manager is reviewing the draft environmental assessment, which is projected to be finalized by late Fall 2022.

• **Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A**
  Pittsylvania County is spearheading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structures. NRCS and the county have signed separate cooperative agreements to obligate the funding. The county is in the process of procuring A&E services for the design, which is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

**EWP**

• NRCS is providing disaster assistance to Buchanan County through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) for a rain event in the Hurley area on August 30 (estimated 6-8 inches). 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 and 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.

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**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 to include conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria, resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide.
• Released Virginia Bulletin 180-22-9, which provides updates to the Virginia Conservation Planning Policy.

• Posted new climate data for Virginia and each county on historic and projected temperatures, precipitation and sea level rise.

• Collaborated with Public Affairs to develop a press release on the financial assistance impacts to Virginia economy.

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:
  o 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.
  o June 22 – Conservation Planning Policy with VA Supplement, Spot Check Policy and NCPP update (72 participants)
  o July 27 – CRP Grasslands Grazing Planning and CRP Re-enrollment Reminders (63 participants)
  o Continuing the RUSLE2@2 office hours help sessions for staff and partners.
  o Continuing the soil health assessment workgroup discussions and soil health outreach meetings to emphasize and evaluate the effectiveness of soil health assessment and outreach/training.

• Scheduled in-the-field JED trainings for the first time in over two years due to COVID training and travel restrictions, focusing on outdoor events and under 50 staff attendees:
  o June 6 and 14 – Delivered CREP partnership trainings at the DCR VACS meetings
  o June 30 – Conducted Business Tools Training
  o July 19 – Delivered the VA NRCS Initial Prescribed Burning Awareness level training
  o August – Provided RUSLE2 field and indoor training at Graves Mtn for SWCD audiences
  o Partnered with VSU and VA Tech to facilitate and conduct a technical JED training at VSU’s grazing demonstration farm, highlighting the successful conversion and establishment of warm season perennial grasses and novel endophyte fescue as part of a grazing system. Classroom instruction supported the field training to emphasize the technical recommendations for conversion and establishment.
  o Helped Dr. Pent plan, coordinate and conduct a JED training at VSU’s Randolph Farm focusing on the conversion of toxic endophyte fescue to native warm season perennials in support of his Conservation Innovation Grant.
  o Partnered with Virginia Tech and a local grazier/grassland mentor who manages a high-level grazing system to conduct a JED training. Enhanced management includes stockpiling and strip grazing tall fescue, establishing and grazing native warm season grasses as part of a CIG deliverable. Participants learned how the native grass stands were established, evaluated soil health and regenerative properties using our assessment tool and then compared soil aggregate stability from soils on the farm.
Customer Service and Outreach

- Announced the formation of a new subcommittee charter for urban agriculture at the state technical committee and asked for volunteers to serve.

- Held first Urban Agriculture Subcommittee in August.

- Planned and moderated a discussion of soil health and nitrogen fertilization interface issues at the quarterly Virginia Soil Health Coalition Meeting, kicking off a strategic initiative to promote enhanced nitrogen fertilizer management with a focus on better crediting N cycling and supply from improved soil health and associated practices.

- Helped edit series of four excellent partner videos highlighting Virginia cover cropping role models.

- Partnered with the VFGC and the National Grazing Lands Coalition to host a pasture walk highlighting use of Working Land for Wildlife Northern Bobwhite Quail Initiative funding to convert to native warm season grasses for grazing. Participants learned about the conversion process and managing livestock on these grasses as well as NRCS technical and financial assistance available to help plan and implement supporting.

- Assembled a team of NRCS staff and partners to plan and deliver demos at the Virginia Ag Expo’s VCE/NRCS Advanced Agronomy Educational Area on Aug 4. At least 150 individuals visited our exhibits, which included a soil pit and deep rooting demos.

- Helped VCE partners plan and conduct the VCE Central Virginia Crops Expo, featuring a NRCS Soil Health and Rainfall Simulator presentation. Attendees included at least 80 farmers and industry representatives.

- Coordinated and planned a pasture walk with Dr. Gabe Pent highlighting establishment and management of NWSG’s in support of a CIG deliverable. Our Area PLB and local DC explained technical assistance and financial assistance potentially available to producers through the WLFW program to establish these forages.

- Also partnered with Dr. Gabe Pent to showcase the native warm season grass species and variety trials at the SVAREC Research Tour in Raphine and share how this state CIG project will benefit farmers across the commonwealth (130 farmer participants).

- Planned and implemented four on-farm twilight meetings for growers to visit test plots in support of enhanced nitrogen management, soil health and education. Partners included VCE, VANTAGE, VSHC and local partners like NRCS.

- Helped plan and host an Innovative Crop Farmer Roundtable at Anthony Beery’s farm in Cumberland.

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

The NRI grazing land field data collection is continuing through September. The LDSI annual local data collection will begin in October.
Soil Survey Update
The Annual Soil Refresh runs from Aug 29 to Sept 16. All 108 soil survey areas around the state will be reviewed and uploaded to the soil warehouse from NASIS. The new data will be posted and available for use on the Web Soil Survey in mid-October. Changes for this year include visible Camp Peary’s soil lines with soil data and tweaks to some national soil interpretations. Water table heights in Virginia Beach soils have also been added to better reflect field situations with surrounding areas.

House Bill 894 workgroup has been meeting to fulfill the state charge for a public prime farmland map. NRCS has this map on Web Soil Survey and is advising the committee.

Public Affairs (PAS)

Communications/Outreach

- **Conservation/STEM Education.** Collaborated with Harvie Elementary School staff to deliver an educational program on agricultural professions for CAMP3401 on July 26. This summer career exploration camp used project-based learning and real-life experiences to introduce rising fifth and sixth graders to various occupations and demonstrate how the required skills are connected to reading and math. The Henricopolis SWCD donated ice cream for a wrap-up activity highlighting the food value chain. Many of the rising sixth graders will attend Fairfield Middle School, where NRCS is already working to support Virginia’s new People’s Garden.

- **Feds Feed Families.** Kicked off state activities for this annual summer food drive with a July 21 gleaning event at Holyoke Farm in Lancaster. A team of 11 volunteers harvested 2,965 pounds of sweet corn for distribution through the Healthy Harvest Food Bank that services the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula and Greater Richmond areas. Also coordinated with Feed More to lock in seven volunteers to package prepared food products on Sept. 8 for distribution to Meals on Wheels and other clients.

- **Minority Farmer Recognition.** Solicited statewide nominations for the Virginia NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee’s 2022 Farmer of the Year award to be presented at the Virginia Small Farm Conference on Nov. 3-4 in Portsmouth. The outreach subcommittee received six strong nominations this year, the highest number submitted since the inception of this recognition effort in 2009.

- **NRCS in the News.** Released a story map on the Fairfield Middle School People’s Garden on July 6 through the state website, Twitter, and GovDelivery. An “Augusta Free Press” article was picked up in the July 7 NRCS national news clips and generated an invitation to appear on the 12About Town noon show on July 29 (https://www.nbc12.com/video/2022/07/29/people-garden-fairfield-middle-school-highlights-community-nutrition/).
Also showcased the strength of our district partnerships in the June 28 Water & Runoff episode of “Virginia Home Grown,” which featured an in-studio interview with Mat Lyons and a pre-recorded segment with Harrisonburg DC Cory Guilliams and Shenandoah SWCD District Manager Megan Dalton at the Hone Quarry Dam.

**Social Media Engagement.** Leveraged state Twitter account to publicize programs, tie ag to current events and implement campaigns like 4theSoil. Posted 12 tweets between June 20 and Sept. 2 that yielded more than **2.7K** impressions. Top tweet: #Throwback Thursday Launch of 4theSoil (**297** impressions).

**Summer Meetings.** Shared information on NRCS programs and services at the Virginia Ag Expo in Port Royal (Aug. 4), Ethnic Crop Production and Marketing workshop in Orange (Aug. 13) and the Nansemond Indian Nation Pow Wow in Suffolk (Aug. 20-21). Staff members networked with many of the more than 2,700 producers, community members and students attending these three outreach events.

**Earth Team Program**
Co-hosted a joint training webinar with VASWCD on July 22 to update district and NRCS staff on recent changes in the process for registering new volunteers and tracking their service. Toni Flax from the national office provided a comprehensive overview of program changes and introduced attendees to the new tracking system to help them understand the rationale behind them. Attendees and registrants received the meeting recording, presentation, and current forms.

Reached out to NRCS and district staff to solicit nominations for 2022 state and national Earth Team awards. Interested districts should use the new nomination form, which requires state conservationist endorsement to be considered for regional and national recognition. The Earth Team Advisory Committee will review submissions and select state winners at the next quarterly meeting in early October.