

Equine Workgroup
Virginia Department of Forestry
900 Natural Resources Drive, Charlottesville, VA
April 23, 2019 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Kyle Shreve, Virginia Agribusiness Council, Chair – Presiding
Amanda Pennington, DCR
David Bryan, DCR
Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau
Robert Shoemaker, DCR
David Lamb, Virginia Horse Council
Sue Alvis, Virginia Horse Council
Ben Rhoades, Northern VA SWCD
Steven Meeks, VASWCD
Carrie Swanson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Anne Coates, Thomas Jefferson SWCD
Ricky Rash, Piedmont SWCD
Jay Yankey, Prince William SWCD
Sharon Conner, Hanover-Caroline SWCD

Welcome and Introduction

Kyle Shreve called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. The meeting was started late due to an accident on I-64 which delayed several members of the workgroup.

Statement of Purpose and Recent Developments

Kyle Shreve reviewed the workgroup's statement of purpose and timeline for action as designated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Kyle also referenced a communication from Darryl Glover regarding the release of the draft third phase of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and the recommendations for equine operations. Anne Coates asked for background on the origin of the recommendation. Amanda Pennington referenced Darryl's e-mail and stated the language came directly from the WIP as authored by the Administration. A discussion ensued on the language on recommendation 25 included in the draft WIP regarding stocking rates. David Bryan gave the position of DCR and the Administration that any project would need to include a mandatory stocking rate before it could be endorsed by the Administration. Kyle asked Carrie Swanson of Virginia Cooperative Extension if such a recommended stocking rate were possible. Carrie stated that it would be next to impossible to do a blanket stocking rate given all the variables in type of operation and property, topography, etc. The discussion was spirited and the Chair asked that the discussion be put on hold until the appropriate time during the pilot project subcommittee recommendation report.

Report of Definition Subcommittee

Kyle asked Martha Moore of Virginia Farm Bureau to give a report from the Definition Subcommittee's meeting of April 9. The subcommittee was tasked with clarifying the definition in the current VACS program manual to ensure that commercial equine operations qualified for program funding. Martha gave a summary of the group's discussion and went over the draft recommendation distributed to the workgroup.

Amanda Pennington relayed DCR's concerns that use of the word "income" in the distributed version could cause confusion and lead to unintended consequences. Carrie gave the subcommittee's rationale for leaving the term "equine activities" as general as possible to allow for a number of operations to take part without excluding particular operations. Amanda made a motion to amend the draft definition by removing the words "income from" in both underlying term definitions. Upon motion made and properly seconded, the amended definition was approved and recommended to the full TAC for their consideration. That definition is below:

Recommendation 1: Change the Definition of "Agricultural Products" and "Agricultural Production" in the VACS Manual

Agricultural Land: Defined as "land being used in a BONA FIDE program of agricultural management and engaged in the production of agricultural, horticultural or forest products for market. The real estate must consist of a minimum of five contiguous acres and have verifiable gross receipts in excess of \$1,000 per year from the production or sale of agricultural, horticultural or forest products produced on the applicant's agricultural land for each of the past five years.

Agricultural Products: Crops, livestock and livestock products, including but not limited to: field crops, forage, fruits, vegetables, horticultural specialties, cattle, sheep, hogs, goats, horses, poultry, furbearing animals, milk, eggs, and furs, and equine activities that create the need for agriculture best management practices to reduce nonpoint source pollutants.

Agricultural Production: The production for commercial purposes of crops, livestock and livestock products, and includes the processing or retail sales by the producer of crops, livestock or livestock products which are produced on the parcel or in the district. For equine operations, agricultural products include equine activities that create the need for agriculture best management practices to reduce nonpoint source pollutants which are conducted on the parcel or in the district.

The subcommittee had also made two different recommendations regarding a pilot program, but it was agreed to table those recommendations until after the report of the Pilot Program Subcommittee.

Report of Pilot Program Subcommittee

Kyle asked Amanda to give the report of the Pilot Program Subcommittee's meeting held on April 16. The subcommittee was tasked with answering the question of whether a pilot program should be established and what parameters should be set around such a pilot. She reported that the subcommittee had a day long discussion surrounding a pilot project for non-commercial horse operations. The subcommittee recommended establishing a pilot that targeted non-commercial operations that do not qualify for the current VACS program. Kyle asked an operational question about how those operations should be defined. After some discussion, it was decided that the definition mirrored the VACS program. Anne Coates stated this was necessary to prevent participation in both programs. The subcommittee recommended that a committee be established to come up with a formula for distribution of funds to horse operations and a survey be developed for which Soil and Water Districts would participate and how many equine operations would participate. The subcommittee had also recommended a number of general specifications to consider developing on horse operations as a part of the program. The subcommittee had made recommendations that stocking rates should apply to specific specifications in the pilot program, but not as a general requirement to participation in the program.

Kyle brought up each as separate recommendations in case there was dissent to any piece of the program.

Recommendation 2: Establish a pilot program for those equine operations that DO NOT qualify for VACS

A motion made and duly seconded to establish a pilot program separate from the current VACS program for those non-commercial operations that do not qualify for the VACS program. The definition should mirror the VACS definition so that equine operations do not qualify for both programs simultaneously. The motion carried unanimously.

Recommendation 3: Funding for pilot program outside of VACS

Kyle asked for a motion to approve a funding request for such a program. Ricky Rash made the point that a separate funding source may be problematic as then other commodity and livestock groups may want their own carve out as well. A motion was made and duly seconded to recommend that the Soil and Water Conservation Board make a request of the General Assembly for a separate funding source from VACS for the equine pilot project. The motion carried unanimously.

Recommendation 4: Develop a formula for funding distribution and pilot program participants

Amanda Pennington moved and seconded by Martha Moore that DCR should form a workgroup of data experts to create a formula, similar to the VACS program, for funding distribution to the Soil and Water Districts as well as for equine activities. The same motion also contained the recommendation that DCR, in conjunction with the Soil and Water Conservation District Association, develop a survey to gauge interest in the pilot program. Sharon Connor asked if DCR would form this workgroup, the Soil and Water Conservation Board, or the Equine Workgroup. After some discussion, it was decided that DCR should be tasked with forming the workgroup and including those experts that were necessary to develop the formula. The motion carried unanimously.

It was at this time that a question was asked as to how long the Equine workgroup would be needed. Per Darryl's e-mail, the draft WIP called for the workgroup to become a permanent group. However, the question was raised by Amanda of whether that was necessary. Sharon commented that if a pilot program was created, it would likely take several years to get off the ground and the workgroup should at least stay together until that pilot program was established. David commented that more research was needed about how a permanent committee would function and the rules it would follow. For example, would it be a full subcommittee of the TAC? Would it be a separate entity that would send recommendations straight to the full TAC? Kyle agreed with David that more guidance from DCR was needed for the proper procedure. With this in mind, the motion was made by Amanda and seconded by Jay that they Equine Workgroup should remain in existence until at least December 31, 2020 and the workgroup would reserve the right to extend that deadline should more action on the recommended pilot program warrant continuation.

Recommendation 5: Establish funding for a review of carrying capacity rates

It was at this time that Kyle asked for discussion on stocking rate requirements, if any, for the pilot project. Martha stated that while she believed carrying capacity did not make sense as a blanket requirement, there were instances in which they made sense in the form of specifications for certain practices. She also made clear that while she did not necessarily support rate requirements, if the Administration was demanding them, it should be explored in the context of the program. She also believed that Cooperative Extension should be given the proper resources to develop the proper specifications. Carrie reiterated that carrying capacity was complicated due to all the factors that went

into such a recommendation. She gave an example that a horse show barn may not necessarily qualify for VACS under the suggested revised definition. If that facility was eligible for the pilot program, grazing would not be an issue for the barn and a stocking rate would not make sense. It would be difficult for such a facility, often used only a few times a year, to comply with such a stocking rate and would therefore be ineligible for cost share funding. Kyle asked the Horse Council representatives if they had an opinion on the issue. Both Sue Alvis and David Lamb both agreed that carrying capacity relied on many factors including breed of horse, topography and type of operation. They supported the use of such requirements within the context of specifications for certain practices and not as a general requirement for program participation. They also cautioned against horse owners not participating in the program if the requirements were too strict on their operation.

Martha suggested wording on a recommendation for the establishment and funding for a workgroup, lead by VCE, to develop carrying capacity rates for general specifications within the program. Carrie asked for the words “equine activities” included in Martha’s recommendation to be changed to “equine facilities” to more adequately describe the carrying capacity area. Martha agreed to the change and moved the following language as amended:

The Equine Workgroup recommends the Soil and Water Conservation Board establish funding for equine Extension specialists and researchers to conduct a review for the purposes of establishing requirements for carrying capacities for equine facilities necessary to reduce nonpoint source pollution that create the need for agriculture best management practices.

Upon a proper second from Anne, Kyle asked for any further discussion. David and Amanda both restated DCR’s position that a recommendation was necessary for carrying capacity to comply with the program and that the recommendation should come from VCE. Hearing no more discussion, Kyle called the vote and the motion carried without opposition.

Recommendation 6: General Specifications for Full TAC Consideration

Amanda then asked the Chair if the workgroup should recommend the general specifications included in her report to the full TAC for their consideration. Kyle agreed that he was unsure that the workgroup had the authority or the expertise to act on specifications and that a recommendation for the TAC to consider, but not be limited to, those specifications would be in order. Amanda so moved the below general specifications for TAC consideration. The motion was seconded by Steven Meeks and the motion passed unanimously. The general specifications are:

- **General specification recommendations**
 - **Manure management**
 - Composting
 - Should be properly composted before it is applied to fields.
 - Also needs to be properly composted before it can be sold to others for applications.
 - Composting can be considered part of the storage system as well.
 - Handling and storage
 - Appropriate land application
 - Nutrient Management Plans (NMP) requirement if applying on the farm.
 - Animal Waste Management System (AWMS) plan requirement
 - **Loafing lot management**

- Roof runoff management (drip edges, gutters)
- Sacrifice lot
- Rotational paddocks/pasture use
- Smaller version of the dairy loafing lot system
- Simple heavy use area
 - Hardened pad, could be considered full confinement
- Need to consider both the volume of water as well as nutrient runoff.
- Possibly more permeable surfaces
- **Stream exclusion**
 - Buffers
 - Fencing
 - Alternative watering systems
 - Similar to current SL-6
 - Potential maximum carrying capacity requirement, as established by the Extension workgroup, if utilizing rotational grazing and getting payment on temporary and/or permanent cross fence.
- **Pasture management**
 - Rotation grazing plan-pasture management plan
 - Maximum carrying capacity required, as established by the carrying capacity Extension workgroup
 - Seasonal grasses optional
 - Temporary cross fence
 - Over seeding to re-establish
 - No watering source
- **Heavy use areas, travel lanes, gateways, pads around rubermaids, etc. to stabilize areas.**
 - Basically a stabilization practice as a catch all

ADJOURNMENT

Kyle then called for any public comment. Hearing none, he adjourned the meeting at 11:57 a.m.