Ag BMP TAC Cover Crop/Nutrient Management Sub-Committee Meeting

October 3, 2019

VA Farm Bureau

12580 West Creek Parkway, Richmond, VA 23238

Opening

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am by Sub-Committee Co-Chair Robert Waring.

Members in Attendance

Robert Waring, Co-Chair, DCR
Steph Drzal, Co-Chair, DCR
Ben Rowe, Vice Chair, VA Farm Bureau
Spencer Yager, VA SWCD Employees Association
Beck Stanley, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Jim Riddell, Producer
Amanda McCullen, Culpeper SWCD
Amy Walker, DCR
Blair Gordon, DCR
Scott Ambler, DCR

Members not in Attendance

Alston Horn, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Allyson Ponn, Lord Fairfax SWCD
Jim Tate, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Tim Sexton, DCR
Glenn Dye, Producer
Keith Burgess, Monacan SWCD
Carl Thiel-Goin, DCR

Guest

Roland Owens, DCR - Conservation Data Program Manager
Jaclyn Friedman, DCR - Governor Office Fellow

Opening and Housekeeping

Robert Waring opened the meeting. Ben Rowe reviewed housekeeping items and welcomed everyone to the Farm Bureau Building. Members introduced themselves.

Approval of the Minutes

Minutes from the September 5, 2019 meeting were reviewed, the minutes were approved as submitted, 6:0:0

Introduction of Governor's Office Fellow

Ms. Jaclyn Friedman provided an introduction of the program she is working on with SEAS. The program includes shoreline stabilization verification to assist with reporting nutrient and sediment loss reductions.

Update on incorporating the USLE into the Ag BMP Tracking Program

Roland Owens provided a brief history of the CEF and how soil loss is incorporated into the values and ranking. CEF does well comparing like practices and can compare other practices to each other based on data entered.

Last TAC cycle the subcommittee requested the USLE be added to the Tracking program. Roland provided an update on the process and what would be needed to move forward this year to include the USLE in Tracking for FY21. Funding would need to be found to incorporate the update and the indices and values used to run the USLE.

For the rainfall erosivity index, we should be able to pull this from existing data. The soil erodibility factor, k, is already available; could create a weighted average based on soil types found in the field. Slope length will be the hardest component. In Tracking, elevation data is on 30 meter pixels, the elevation differences may be difficult to pull with the 30 meter resolution. The data for better resolution would be extremely large, server space and program functionality would be an issue. Could look at predominate soil types and the associated slopes and use those values. While not perfect, this would be a conservative approach that would provide a relative slope.

The Subcommittee began discussion regarding the data entry for contracts, instances by Tract or by field. For data entry by Tract, how would the process described work? Roland mentioned it would be a question on how accurate the District would want their CEF values. Could digitize similar fields together and get a more accurate CEF. Districts could override the auto-generated values if they chose to run the RUSLE2. Can also use erosion values from nutrient management plans, if they are available.

Another factor is based on cropping rotation and cover. Could utilize the measure already in Tracking for previous crop. This measure is known when producers come in for sign-up.

Conservation factor, would probably not be utilized. There is very little terracing, etc, across the state to make this effective.

In order to move forward, the Subcommittee would need to take action to proceed with having this change added to the Tracking program. This would be a portion of the larger updating of the CEF process, this portion would hopefully be considered a priority and put in place by 2021. This would require digitizing field boundaries, which would change work load.

Cover Crop Subcommittee motioned for the Universal Soil Loss Equation to be added to the Ag BMP Tracking program to be implemented for the 2021 program year; motion was approved 6:0:0.

Review of the Nutrient Management Recommendations to be presented to the TAC

Co-Chair, Steph Drzal, reviewed specification changes that would be presented to the TAC, items needing to be discussed from the matrix were addressed:

For the NM-1A, NM-5N, and NM-5P, included specialty crops and could add turf, a change to match the SL-8. There was discussion regarding plans for produce and turf, adding those types of operations to the NM-1A. The Subcommittee reviewed the specification.

The subcommittee motioned to add specialty crops and turf to the NM-1A, NM-5N, and NM-5P specification, in addition to the changes previously made; the motion passed 6:0:0.

For the NM-3C if the PSNT shows there is no need for nutrients, there would be a payment for the PSNT testing. Several independent labs were contacted to review private rates. The subcommittee discussed the regions of the state conducting large numbers of the PSNTs. The subcommittee discussed collecting additional information regarding the use of labs for PSNT testing and costs around the state before changing the rates.

The subcommittee motioned to pay for the PSNT for manure applications when the application rate would be zero, excluding biosolids, to the NM-3C specifications; the motion passed 6:0:0.

The subcommittee motioned to Table Item 10N; the motion passed 6:0:0.

Review of the Matrix of Cover Crop Recommendations presented to the TAC on August 14, 2019

Co-Chair, Robert Waring, reviewed items from the Cover Crop Matrix that were presented to the full TAC:

2C. Tabled; A number of the matrix items were considered to be similar and/or duplicative, 2C, 3C, and 7C; Item 7C will be used to move the topic forward

3C. Tabled; A number of the matrix items were considered to be similar and/or duplicative, 2C, 3C, and 7C; Item 7C will be used to move the topic forward

5C. The sub-committee previously motioned to remove 'pure' from the specification and insert 2 bu/ac planted to meet the minimum requirement for the rye cover crop. There needs to be a conversation with the EPA to ensure this change would not have negative impacts on rye cover crop acres counted for the Bay Model. The subcommittee will refrain from a vote at the TAC on the removal of 'pure'.

The sub-committee will move forward with the previous motion to increase the early bonus payment by $5.00, for a rate of $30 dollars, and increase the rye bonus payment by $2.00, for a rate of $10.00; to further increase the incentive to plant cover crops early, with an added incentive for rye cover crop.

10C. Add Dura to the list of rye cultivars in the Ag BMP Manual. The variety is a winter hardy, indeterminate growth, tetraploid rye and could be listed in the small table in the Ag BMP Manual as it would be covered under item 4. ii 'OR, any other indeterminate growth tetraploid rye cultivar'.

The subcommittee will move forward with the addition of 'dura' and the increase to the early bonus payment by $5.00, for a rate of $30 dollars, and increase to the rye bonus payment by $2.00, for a rate of $10.00 within the SL-8B specification; motion passed 6:0:0.

6C. Tabled, with the large number of acres that are broadcast, the incentive may not increase drilled acreages from broadcast acres enough to create a separate incentive.

11C. Tabled, The current language in the manual for the SL-1 has 3 lifespans with varied payment rates.

12C. Strike the last sentence from the SL-3, C. Rates, paragraph 1. The first four sentences explain the rates and that the 'state cost-share payment, alone or when combined with any other cost-share program, will not exceed 75% of the total eligible costs'. This would allow for piggy-backing with other funding sources such as NRCS, for the practice and components as long as the cost-share did not exceed 75%. The last sentence could limit piggy-backing on components of the practice.

Subcommittee approved to strike the last sentence from the SL-3, C. Rates, paragraph 1; motion passed 6:0:0.

Due to research needs to assist with addressing a number of the recommendations, the co-chair Robert Waring went over conversations with Thomason and others. It has been recommended that several topics, such as fall applications of nutrient, seeding rates, and others be addressed in later cycles after research has been conducted. Extension may be moving forward with studying seeding rates, 8C, to assist with reducing the rates which several agree may be high. Cost of rye seeding continues to increase, if seeding rates could be reduced and still achieve the same nutrient scavenging rates. There have also been test plots conducted regarding that spring biomass may be a good indicator for nutrient uptake due to the increased uptake in the spring. Research is on-going. For 7C, more research would be required as well, although it was noted that even with research this item may not be accepted.

The subcommittee motioned to Table 7C and 8C due to the need for additional research to support any recommendations that may come forward; motion passed 6:0:0.

For Item 9C, information has not been provided regarding planting dates previously submitted. It seems unlikely this information will come in time to make a recommendation for this cycle.

The subcommittee motioned to Table 9C due to the need for additional information; motion passed 6:0:0.

8C. The Co-Chair, Robert Waring, discussed a conversation with Dr. Thomason regarding seeding rates. The EPA does not establish the seeding rates for cover crop, the state does. While 2 bushels/acre is a high seeding rate, it is what the state proposed and what is currently accepted. Virginia Tech would probably be able to assist with research on seeding rates, the state would need the research to back up any request for a reduction in the current cover crop seeding rates. Until then, a current fix to the problem of cost and seeding rates of rye would be to increase the cost share assistance for the increasing cost of rye seed.

The Subcommittee motioned to request the Agency work with Virginia Tech on researching a reduced seeding rate for rye that would still be effective for nutrient uptake and sediment control. The motion was approved 6:0:0.

The co-chair, Robert Waring, and Blair Gordon brought the SL-8H rates back up to the subcommittee. Due to EAN processes, the standard rate for the SL-8B processes lower than the SL-8H. The Early planting date cannot be extended, only the standard planting date can be extended with a rate of $15 while the SL-8H extended planting dates have a rate of $20.00. The Subcommittee has been asked to review the rate for the standard planting dates, to increase the rate to $20.00. There was concern discussed regarding the rate increases and how it will effect Districts with low allocations in low cost share years.

The Subcommittee motioned to increase the standard planting rate to $20.00 to alleviate the disparity between the SL-8B standard planting dates and the SL-8H standard planting dates; The motion was approved 6:0:0.

1C. Introduction of the SL-8 specification changes. The Subcommittee can review before the next meeting in November, the item can be brought before the November TAC and voted on during the December TAC. The Subcommittee would like to see the ability to harvest, change the spec to a no-fallow, and would reduce the rate to $15.00. The changes will be made and sent back out to the full Subcommittee in November.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the combined subcommittee will be on November7, 10:00 am, at the USDA Service Center – Orange, VA, 325 B North Madison Rd, Orange, VA 22960

Public Comment

The Public Comment period was opened, there being no public comment, the public comment period was closed.

Meeting Adjourned 12:30 pm