

**Ag BMP TAC
Programmatic Subcommittee Meeting**

TIME AND LOCATION

The Programmatic Subcommittee meeting was held at 10am on September 20, 2023, at the Central High School Educational Complex, 2748 Dogtown Rd., Goochland, VA 23063.

ATTENDEES:

Voting Members:

Chair Sara Bottenfield, DCR
Dana Gochenour, Lord Fairfax SWCD
Melissa Allen, John Marshall SWCD
Keith Burgess, Monacan SWCD
Sharon Conner, Hanover Caroline SWCD
Brandon Dillistin, Northern Neck SWCD
Carrie Swanson, VA Cooperative Extension
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Greg Wichelns, Culpeper SWCD
Steven Meeks, VASWCD
Luke Longanecker, VACDE
Brad Copenhaver, VA Agribusiness Council
Martha Moore, VA Farm Bureau
Charlie Newton, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Deanna Fehrer, Piedmont SWCD
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Non-Voting Participants

Blair Gordon, DCR
Debbie Cross, DCR
Stu Blankenship, DCR
Denney Collins, DCR
Christine Watlington, DCR
Ty Smith, Piedmont SWCD

WELCOME

Sara Bottenfield opened the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves. A quorum of 16 voting members was present.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION TAKEN

Subcommittee discussion of matrix items. Sara suggested starting with item 3P.

3P. Wording in Rates Section

Change wording in the “Rates” section of SL-1, FR-1 and FR-3 specs from “eligible approved component costs” to “total eligible costs” to reduce the redundancy in tracking. – As newer staff, it was unclear why

there were two entries needed in Tracking to calculate the cost-share payment for certain practices. After speaking with Jen, she told us it was because of how the spec was worded.

- DCR will remove the duplicative language in Tracking and add an information bubble to provide further clarification. Discussion of not needing the estimated instance cost on the SL-1, FR-3, FR-1. Suggested to make an edit on the general tab of a contract in Tracking, removal of duplicative entry.
- **Sara Bottenfield moved to advance edits in tracking to the TAC, with the caveat that DCR data services staff can make it happen. Greg Wichelns second. Passed unanimously.**

1P. Revisit Participant Cap Methodology

Recommended by TAC in 2022 as follow-up to the VSWC Board directive: The Board directs the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee to review the methodology associated with the participant cap to determine if there should be additional considerations taken into account such as a sliding scale for acreage under production, the number of counties or Districts a producer is operating in, and any other considerations that the TAC may determine are worthwhile to examine.

- Discussion about how many variances over the past few years. Variance numbers have decreased in 2022 and 2023. Was noted that WFA helps with this issue.
- **Greg Wichelns moved the subcommittee does not recommend any changes to the cap methodology for PY25 and maintain the \$300,000 cap. Melissa Allen second. Passed unanimously.**

2P. Carryover Timeline

Base carryover timeline off of final approval date, not program year. Variance projects and WP-4 practices should have a full 48 months due to engineering approval, complex designs, and lack of contractor availability.

- Currently all 2-year projects get two program years to get completed, not two full years (24) months. If approved in April or May and the project is carried over, they only have 13-14 months.
- Need to ensure accountability of the funds, look at the completion dates to see how often this occurs and the need of carryovers.
- **Greg Wichelns moved structural practices that will not be completed by the end of their 4th program year be brought to the attention of DCR's Ag Incentive Program Manager (Sara Bottenfield) by [date TBD by DCR] to be addressed by DCR (AIPM, CDC, Engineering staff) on a case-by-case basis. Dana Gochenour second. Passed unanimously.**

4P. Interest as a Cost

How should interest be handled for large capital outlay projects? With some large construction practices costing over ~\$50,000 and upwards of +\$200,000, producers are having to finance the projects through loans. Can interest for these projects be considered a cost of the project?

- Discussion about DEQ Loans as a viable option with 0% interest. Committee members noted difficulties that are faced when working with this program. DCR will reach out to DEQ to better understand timelines to make the process more efficient. Possibly invite DEQ or VRA to attend a Programmatic meeting.
- **Dana Gochenour moved to table and not pay for loan interest. Matt Kowalski seconded. Adrienne Kotula was not in the room for the vote. Brad Copenhaver and Martha Moore opposed. Motion passed.**

5P. Eligibility Requirement

Proposed that all DCR SWC programs which have the eligibility requirement of having 5 acres of land or larger be changed to the requirement that they have either at least x acres of farmed land or an FSA farm number.

- Discussion involved the need for education for smaller landowners and the question of a cost benefit analysis was raised for spending VACS funds on less than 5 acres. The need for a program or a special pilot could benefit smaller farms. The general sense of the subcommittee was that lowering the 5 acre requirement for VACS or using FSA farm number as an alternative would not address these limitations.
- **Carrie Swanson moved to table changing the acreage in the VACS program as it will not solve this issue. Seconded by Greg Wichelns. Martha Moore and Brad Copenhaver opposed. Motion passed.**

Item received after the deadline:

Remove the acreage requirement from VACS qualifications. While these guidelines are purposeful in intention, they are also serving as method of exclusion for certain demographics of farmers. Financial assistance concerning sustainability measures within Virginia should not be dependent on each farmer's acreage. This suggestion was not received by the submission deadline. If time allows, the TAC may take it up after all other business for the year is complete. Partially addressed by 4P.

- DCR agreed to reach out to the individuals who submitted this suggestion and 5P to get more specifics such as if there are new BMPs that could be added to VACS or are there other programs that could be used meet their needs. The possibility of a pilot program was mentioned.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

ADJOURN

The Programmatic Subcommittee's work for the year is complete. The meeting scheduled for October 10 will be cancelled.

Adjourn 11:45 am