

# Agriculture Workgroup (AgWG)

## Meeting Minutes

March 16, 2023

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

## Meeting Materials

### Summary of Actions and Decisions

**Decision:** The AgWG approved the [minutes](#) from the February AgWG call.

**Action:** Reach out to Vanessa Van Note ([vannote.vanessa@epa.gov](mailto:vannote.vanessa@epa.gov)) and Jackie Pickford ([pickford.jacqueline@epa.gov](mailto:pickford.jacqueline@epa.gov)) with any questions about the extension of credit durations for select Forestry RI Practices. The AgWG will be asked to vote on the extension of credit durations of RI-9 and RI-10 at the April meeting.

**Action:** Please fill out [this poll](#) to gauge group interest for an in-person meeting by COB Thursday, March 30th.

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## Minutes

10:00 **Welcome, introductions, roll-call, review meeting minutes** – Jeremy Daubert, AgWG Chair.

- Roll-call of the governance body
- Roll-call of the meeting participants- *Please enter name and affiliation under “Participants” or in “Chat” box*
- **Decision:** The AgWG approved the [minutes](#) from the February AgWG call.

### Accounting & Reporting

10:05 **Forestry Resource Improvement Practices: Extension of Select Credit Durations (30 min)** – Vanessa Van Note, EPA.

The BMP Verification Ad-Hoc Action Team (BMPVAHAT) and WQGIT voted to [extend](#) the credit duration of Forest Buffer and Tree Planting practices to 15 years in [August 2021](#). At the Forestry Workgroup (FWG) [February 2023 meeting](#), the FWG determined that *RI-9: Forest Buffer Exclusion Area on Watercourse* and *RI-10: Forest Buffer on Watercourse* practices were functionally equivalent to the Forest Buffer practices included in the recommendation previously approved by the BMPVAHAT. The FWG requests that the credit durations for these practices be extended to 15 years to align with previous decisions made by the partnership on the credit durations of tree practices. Vanessa gave an overview of what these practices are and the discussions with various groups that have occurred to date. The AgWG will be asked to vote on this issue at the April meeting, as the original [RI Practice Definition and Verification Visual Indicators report](#) was developed by the AgWG in 2014, meaning any changes to the credit durations of these practices would require consensus approval from the AgWG.

#### **Discussion**

**Jeremy Daubert (in chat):** [Proposed credit duration for forestry bmps.](#)

**Ken Staver:** What happens after 15 years?

**Vanessa Van Note:** The practices would need to be reverified in the field after 15 years. Currently they have a credit duration of 10 years.

**Ken Staver:** A lot of forest buffers on ag land are overseen by NRCS folks, so there's a channel for checking back on the practices. But when it's done by the land owner, not sure who keeps track of it.

**Vanessa Van Note:** It would go through the state department that is tracking the practice.

**Elizabeth Hoffman (in chat):** Ken, we track them alongside NRCS practices in MD, so we do have the ability to re-verify and have done so for RIs. They're in plan files, in our database, etc.

**Mark Dubin:** The RI practices are distinct and identified separately because they are functionally equivalent on an annual basis. It wasn't designed on a functional basis for the period of the time that we would normally give credit for agency-contracted recurring buffers. RI practices have shorter credit durations because of that.

**Vanessa Van Note:** These RI practices actually had a credit duration of 10 years, so they were equivalent to regular practice of riparian forest buffers. The majority of RI practices are usually less than the CAST BMP equivalent, but not in this case. The CAST BMP of riparian forest buffer was only approved to a 15 year credit duration by the WQGIT in August 2021 because of a recommendation from the FWG that was approved by the BMPVAHAT.

**Ken Staver:** What's the practical advantage of extending this credit duration?

**Vanessa Van Note:** It would give the states more time to be able to verify. There are resource constraints on the state side, so it'd be really beneficial to them. FWG is arguing that if they are functionally equivalent to forest buffers then they should have the same credit durations.

**Elizabeth Hoffman:** If these practices are on the landscape, they aren't being removed. So I think that's why people were comfortable with extending the credit duration.

**Jeff Sweeney:** All the RI practices have half the credit duration as the original BMPs. So are you saying these would not be half the credit duration?

**Vanessa Van Note:** In the 2014 report, the credit duration for RI9 and RI10 was not half - it was 10 years, which is the same as the original BMP. All the other ones were given half the credit duration, but not these.

**Jeff Sweeney:** Why is that?

**Vanessa Van Note:** I'm not sure.

**Jeff Sweeney:** 10 ft buffer. Does the FWG even consider that a buffer?

**Vanessa Van Note:** FWG said narrow forest buffer practices were not functionally equivalent. Only RI-9 and 10.

**Mark Dubin:** I served on the panel that developed the original RI report. The 10 year credit duration seemed more conservative at the time because typically the credit duration was 15 years according to FSA contractual lifespan on buffers. Also another question - there is accounting through remote imagery of buffers. What is the time span for capturing the buffer?

**Vanessa Van Note:** I think there is disagreement about when that time period actually is, which goes back to "Proposed Credit Duration for Forestry BMP" recommendation. They grouped the land use imagery within that because they felt confident that after 15 years the trees would be captured by the land use. That's why they chose 15 years as the credit duration.

***See agenda item below for additional discussion on this topic.***

**Action:** Reach out to Vanessa Van Note ([vannote.vanessa@epa.gov](mailto:vannote.vanessa@epa.gov)) and Jackie Pickford ([pickford.jacqueline@epa.gov](mailto:pickford.jacqueline@epa.gov)) with any questions about the extension of credit durations for select Forestry RI Practices. The AgWG will be asked to vote on this at the April meeting.

10:35 **USDA Surveys and the Census of Agriculture (25 min)** – Tony Dorn, USDA-NASS.

In light of the completion of the 2022 Census of Agriculture, Tony Dorn of the USDA- National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) presented background on NASS Surveys, including agrochemical surveys and the Census of Agriculture.

### **Discussion**

**Mark Dubin:** Deadline for census?

**Tony Dorn:** Official deadline was February 6th.

**Helen Golimowski (in chat):** Will the updates to Quick Stats allow queries to be run at the county scale?

**Tony Dorn:** Same data will be available with new modernization. Working on a new enhanced query system.

**Jeremy Daubert:** So it will be the same data, just easier to utilize and find.

**Tom Butler:** For chem use survey, there was a slide where you said you alternated vegetables and grains with an asterisk for fertilizer. Do you capture fertilizer with that?

**Tony Dorn:** It rotates two years on and two years off. For fruits and vegetables, it was included in 2022 and 2023, but not in 2020 and 2021.

**Tom Butler:** For those surveys, it doesn't cover all the states in the watershed? Just PA, NY and VA?

**Tony Dorn:** Yes, for vegetables and fruit.

**Jeremy Daubert:** Do you know the response rate this year?

**Tony Dorn:** Not yet.

**Mark Dubin:** I know you have to have a minimum number of responses to report in an area for privacy concerns. What are the reportable scales you have for fertilizer data across the different categories? I'm assuming it's not by county, but probably state or regional.

**Tony Dorn:** In the annual program, it's reported at the state level when we're able to publish the data.

**Paul Bredwell (in chat):** What does NASS consider a good response rate? What was response rate in 2017 for census of ag?

**Tony Dorn:** A few years ago we were at 80%. Last census that value went down some. We aim for 60-70%.

**Tom Butler:** Does NASS develop the survey questions? What advice would you give for creating questions regarding fertilizer if we wanted to do that at the state level?

**Tony Dorn:** We have a format that we solicit input on. Working with ERS to determine what data and questions may be needed. Annual program with ARMS is more flexible with what data we can collect and the questions.

**Tom Butler:** To determine acres of spring harvest of winter crops, is there a specific question that we might look at for NASS?

**Tony Dorn:** Most are based on the calendar year. Number of acres harvested in a certain year, like 2023. We don't tend to go across years.

## **Data & Modeling**

11:00 **Agricultural Data Inputs (15 min)** - Tom Butler, EPA.

Tom provided an update on the Phase 7 Agricultural Modeling Team (AMT) and their [March](#) meeting. Additionally, he reviewed the recent Fertilizer Expert Group meeting that took place March 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Discussion**

**Nick Hepfl:** Is that data able to be teased out into the Chesapeake Bay region and correlated to that in a way?

**Tom Butler:** The short answer is yes. We take data from AAPFCO and the ag census to tease out the amount of fertilizer for the CB watershed and then distribute that down to the county level based on crop need.

**Auston Smith:** Is the fertilizer expert group being discontinued in June or July or will they continue to help out in a non-formalized way past then?

**Tom Butler:** It depends on the team members and what they are willing to do. We want expertise in the AMT so we anticipate some members from the fertilizer expert group to come to the AMT on an ad-hoc basis. It's unlikely that the group itself will exist in its formal structure after this summer.

## **Accounting & Reporting**

11:15 **Crediting NRCS Soil & Water Conservation Plan Practices Update (5 min)** – Tom Butler, EPA.

Due to a lack of responses for volunteers to form an Expert Panel Evaluation Group (EPEG), we will alter course on the investigation into S&W Conservation Plan crediting. This will entail CBPO staff examining potential updates connecting NRCS practices and Chesapeake Bay Program approved BMPs.

### **Discussion**

**Mark Dubin:** Will the results come back to the AgWG for consideration?

**Tom Butler:** Yes that's the goal. Maybe we can carve out a monthly update for him to present on status.

**Ken Staver:** My worry is that we're splitting a practice or going to a finer scale here while folks in the AMT are pushing for simplification. Not sure how that will play out.

**Tom Butler:** Good point, not sure how that will play out. The AMT has discussed simplifying inputs, while this would be focused on the specific BMPs. It's up to the partnership to decide which way they want to go.

**Jim Riddell:** Will the lifespan for some of the practices be discussed and come back to the group?

**Tom Butler:** Most likely yes, we will definitely be looking into that but I can't say for sure if any changes will be made.

**Leon Tillman:** Federal crediting task force will also be taking on credit durations. Ken, to your point of simplification, the STAC meeting last week discussed the monitoring and modeling of ag BMPs and some of that focused on looking at grouping or suites of practices.

**Kristen Saacke Blunk (in chat):** I think it would be very helpful to the AgWG to hear from Austin regularly on the status of building the crosswalk. This has always been a valuable cross-sector learning and discovery process and it would benefit from being aired here regularly to help lift all of our understanding on the importance.

11:20 **Additional discussion time for Resource Improvement Practices (25 min)** – Tom Butler, EPA.

Extra time was given to the group to bring up further concerns or questions from our earlier presentation on forestry resource improvement credit durations if necessary.

### **Discussion**

**Ken Staver:** One practice said exclusion. Is this stream fencing for livestock or strictly row crops?

**Jeff Sweeney:** I think it's livestock exclusion fences.

**Elizabeth Hoffman:** I don't think it's exclusion of animals, that is RI-4 and 5. I think exclusion means application of nutrients.

**Ken Staver:** Usually when you see exclusion there are animals involved. But the definition here says converted cropland, so I was confused.

**Elizabeth Hoffman:** Language with RI practices can be confusing. But RI-9 and 10 map to forest buffers and RI-4a, 4b,5,6 are exclusion buffers with a fence. They just happen to both use the word exclusion.

**Jeff Sweeney:** In the model if you establish a forest buffer it takes land out of crops and puts it into forest. If you have a fence there, that is an additional benefit.

**Elizabeth Hoffman:** The pairing that is important to highlight is that it's nutrient exclusion in the wording of the RI description. But I can see why that is confusing.

**Jeff Sweeney:** Yeah, I don't understand that.

**Jackie Pickford (in chat):** If it is helpful, the [original RI report](#) includes all the definitions of RI practices.

*Post-meeting clarification from Vanessa:*

"The "nutrient exclusion area" is the buffer itself, not the exclusion from the stream (no fencing). The full name of the practice (RI-9,10) is Forest Nutrient Exclusion Area **or** Buffer on Watercourse. In the practice criteria on page 19 it states, "to create a forested nutrient exclusion area or buffer...".

After re-reading the practice information on page 19-20 in the original RI report, it seems that the key difference between RI-09 and RI-10 is the buffer/nutrient exclusion area width. RI-09 = 10-34 ft; RI-10 = 35+ ft.

It is important to note, from page 6, that one of the visual indicator requirements for RI practices is that Nutrient Exclusion Areas (buffers) that are less than CBP buffer width (<35') will receive only a "land use change" credit. So, RI-09 will only receive a land use change credit, not a nutrient reduction efficiency. The FWG proposal that extended credit durations from 10-15 years chose 15 due to the land use imagery capturing a larger majority of trees at 15 years, which impacts only the land use change portion of the practice (field verification still has to occur for the nutrient efficiency, which does not apply to RI-09)."

#### 11:45 **New Business & Announcements (5 min)**

- **In person AgWG meeting.**
  - **Action:** Please fill out [this poll](#) to gauge group interest for an in-person meeting by COB Thursday, March 30th.
- **Chesapeake Research Consortium (CRC) Roundtable: Implementing clean water solutions for agriculture in Pennsylvania. March 15<sup>th</sup> 12 – 1 PM.** Virtual.
  - In 2016, 2019, and 2022, leaders from Pennsylvania's agricultural and environmental communities participated in a series of "Pennsylvania in the Balance" conferences. In the early years, participants generated creative new ideas to position agriculture in the state as a solution for clean water. Convened by the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, *PA in Balance 2022* marked the latest in a series of these conferences aimed at providing a forum where motivated leaders in agriculture and the environment work collaboratively to identify new, innovative solutions that can help ensure thriving, productive agriculture while meeting water quality goals for Pennsylvania's local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

- [Registration/Website.](#)
- **Conservation Drainage Network Annual Meeting. April 4 - 6, 2023.** Hybrid.
  - Theme: ADVANCING IMPLEMENTATION. The 2023 meeting is being designed differently than the previous spring meetings. Specifically, it focuses on substantially advancing implementation of conservation drainage. Not just how to better do conservation drainage, but how to get more of it done.
  - [Meeting program](#) and [Website.](#)
  - **Registration:** Click [here.](#)
- **Cover crop BMP verification hybrid method**
  - Present AgWG approved [cover crop survey hybrid method](#) to WTWG for update to verification protocols (date pending).
- **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund**
  - [Small Watershed Grants \(SWG\) Program](#), delivered in partnership with EPA and the CBP partnership, NFWF is soliciting proposals for projects within the Chesapeake Bay watershed that promote voluntary, community-based efforts to protect and restore the diverse and vital habitats of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributary rivers and streams.
  - [Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense Grants \(WILD\) Program](#), delivered in partnership with FWS, NFWF is soliciting proposals for projects that conserve, steward, and enhance fish and wildlife habitats and related conservation values in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
  - Soliciting proposals until **Thursday, April 20, 2023.**
- **Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum.** October 18th, 2023.
  - Binghamton University, in Binghamton NY. More information to come.
- **Other Announcements?** - send to Jackie Pickford (Pickford.Jacqueline@epa.gov) for inclusion in "Recap" email.

11:50 **Review of Action and Decision Items (10 min)**

12:00 **Adjourn**

## **Next Meeting**

**Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup>: 10AM-12PM, Call-in Zoom**

## **Participants**

Jackie Pickford, CRC  
 Tom Butler, EPA-CBPO  
 Jeremy Daubert, VT  
 Kathy Braiser, PSU  
 Clint Gill, DE  
 Elizabeth Hoffman, MD  
 Matt Monroe, WV  
 Jeff Sweeney, EPA  
 Jeff Hill, YCCD  
 Leon Tillman, NRCS  
 Jenna Schueler, CBF

Paul Bredwell, US Poultry and Egg Association  
 RO Britt, Smithfield Foods  
 Emily Dekar, USC  
 Jim Riddell, VA Cattleman Association  
 Nick Hepfl, HRG  
 Mark Dubin, UME/CBPO  
 Cindy Shreve, WV  
 Cassie Davis, NYS DEC  
 Helen Golimowski, Devereux Consulting  
 Auston Smith-EPA  
 Hunter Landis, DCR

Marel King, Chesapeake Bay Commission  
Kristen Saacke Blunk, Headwaters LLC  
Seth Mullins VA DCR  
Leah Martino EPA R3  
Karl Blankenship, Bay Journal  
Vanessa Van Note, EPA  
Tony Dorn, USDA-NASS

Jess Rigelman, J7 LLC  
Kate Bresaw, PA DEP  
Mark Nardi  
Scott Heidel, PA DEP  
Carlington Wallace  
Evin Fitzpatrick, CVFF

**\*\*Common Acronyms**

AgWG- [Agriculture Workgroup](#)

AMT- [Agricultural Modeling Team](#) (Phase 7)

ARMS - (USDA) [Agricultural Resource Management Survey](#)

BMP- Best Management Practice

BMPVAHAT- [BMP Verification Ad Hoc Action Team](#)

CAST- [Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool](#) (user interface for the CBP Watershed Model)

CBP- [Chesapeake Bay Program](#)

CBPO- Chesapeake Bay Program Office (houses EPA, federal partners, and various contractors and grantees working towards CBP goals)

CBW- Chesapeake Bay Watershed

CRC- [Chesapeake Research Consortium](#)

DPF – Dairy Precision Feeding

EPA- [United States] Environmental Protection Agency

EPEG – Expert Panel Exploratory Group

ERS - (USDA) [Economic Research Service](#)

FWS – [United States] Fish and Wildlife Service

MUN – Milk Urea Nitrogen

NEIEN- National Environmental Information Exchange Network

NFWF- [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#)

PA DEP- Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

PSC – [Principals' Advisory Committee](#) (CBP)

PSU- Penn State University

STAC- [Scientific & Technical Advisory Committee](#)

SWG – Small Watershed Grants Program

TMDL- Total Maximum Daily Load

WILD - Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense Grants Program

WQGIT- [Water Quality Goal Implementation Team](#)

WTWG- [Watershed Technical Workgroup](#)

UMD- University of Maryland

USDA-ARS- United States Department of Agriculture-*Agricultural Research Service*

USDA-NASS- United States Department of Agriculture-*National Agricultural Statistics Service* USDA-NRCS- United States Department of Agriculture-*Natural Resources Conservation Service*