

Meeting Minutes  
May 19, 2022  
10:00 AM-12:00 PM  
Agriculture Workgroup Conference Call  
Materials: [Link](#)

### Summary of Actions and Decisions

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

**Action:** Contact Ted Tesler ([ttesler@pa.gov](mailto:ttesler@pa.gov)) with your questions, comments, or suggestions on PA commodity cover crop tracking and reporting.

**Decision:** The AgWG endorsed the proposed changes to the Phase 6 NEIEN appendix for select NRCS practices identified as mapping to Soil and Water Conservation Plans in the Phase 5 NEIEN appendix. These BMPs would shift from “draft” to “release” status. Final approval of changes in the NEIEN appendix will occur in the Watershed Technical Workgroup (WTWG). (*Post meeting note: This does not mean that the topic has been partnership approved. To be officially passed and implemented, it is contingent upon approval of the WTWG.*)

**Action:** Contact Tom Butler ([butler.thomas01@epa.gov](mailto:butler.thomas01@epa.gov)) with any additional questions or feedback on the Phase 7 ag modeling team. There will be continued discussion at the AgWG about the charge and membership of this group in the following months.

### Introduction

- 10:00 **Welcome, introductions, roll-call, review meeting minutes** Workgroup Chair
- Roll-call of the governance body
  - Roll-call of the meeting participants- *Please enter name and affiliation under “Participants” or in “Chat” box*
  - **Announcement:** Welcome [Hunter Landis, VA DCR!](#)
  - **Decision:** The AgWG approved of the [minutes](#) from the April AgWG call.

### Accounting & Reporting

- 10:05 **Rapid Review: CBP decisions related to Cover Crops (5 min)** Loretta Collins  
Loretta Collins, UMD-AgWG Coordinator, provided a quick review of cover crops definition, CBP-approved transect survey methods and CBP-approved verification requirements.

- 10:10 **PA Commodity Cover Crop Tracking & Reporting (25 min)** Ted Tesler  
PA is seeking a means to collect and report annual commodity cover crop information for annual implementation progress scenarios and seeks feedback from AgWG members. Ted Tesler, PA DEP\*, presented on the method PA is considering to calculate commodity cover crop acres from its transect surveys. This included an explanation of the transect method, sources of data used, and the rationale for the calculation process. PA will be seeking AgWG endorsement of this method at a future date.

#### **Discussion**

**Jeff Sweeney (in chat):** The Bay Program definition of a Commodity Cover Crop is "A winter cereal crop planted for harvest in the spring which does not receive nutrient applications in the fall. Any winter cereal crop which did receive applications in the fall is not eligible for nutrient reductions."

How do you know from the surveys if nutrients were applied or not? The model accounts for winter cereals.

**Kelly Shenk:** Since commodity cover crops cannot be fertilized in Fall, how do you verify that with the transect survey? Also, you mentioned the possibility of crediting Fall fertilized commodity cover crops, would that have to be approved as a new BMP by the partnership?

**Ted Tesler:** Currently we have an existing category of traditional cover crops with fall nutrients applied. There is a checkbox in the field recording sheets about the application of manure. Obviously someone could put down an organic fertilizer that wouldn't be known, that's a possibility, but doesn't seem likely. We're dealing with how to better track that right now. Maybe the Bay Program could alter the categories to better capture the categories that we can identify through the transect surveys.

**Jeff Sweeney:** We have commodity cover crops as a land use in the model. It accounts for winter cereals. Those small grains get a small loading rate and that would be reported through all the crop types from the ag census. In order to follow the program definition for winter cover, it should not be receiving nutrients in the fall. With the transect survey, you can't identify that.

**Ted Tesler:** From observations we can see if manure is applied. The inorganic fertilizer is what we're unsure of, but we think that would be much less. All of the winter cereals from the ag census, I'm categorizing as double crops.

**Jeff Sweeney:** I don't think that aligns with our definition of double crops.

**Ted Tesler:** We'll probably have to dive into some of the reference materials that Loretta provided. Don't want to discuss how double crops are derived. But maybe we change that derivation so that we can use the information that we have now to record these.

**Jeff Sweeney:** I have a concern of double counting because the winter cereals are reported through the ag census.

**Ted Tesler:** Right. A lot of that goes back to the double crop and how that's derived.

**Olivia Devereux (in chat):** We have a small grains and grains land use, which receives fertilizer and is not a commodity cover crop.

**Dave Graybill (in chat):** Lots of fertilizer is falling on forage crops in the fall for spring harvest that are called double crops because you want to split your fertilizer applications and manure doesn't add enough nutrients for the tonnage that can be grown per acre and the % protein you can increase in the forage with more nitrogen application.

**Action:** Contact Ted Tesler ([ttesler@pa.gov](mailto:ttesler@pa.gov)) with your questions, comments, or suggestions on PA commodity cover crop tracking and reporting.

## 10:35 **Proposed Changes to NEIEN Appendix (25 min)**

Leon Tillman

Leon Tillman, NRCS, returned to the AgWG, following a February discussion, with answers to posed questions regarding a proposal to change the current NEIEN\* appendix to accommodate a broader array of NRCS practices that can be reported by jurisdictions for annual BMP implementation progress.

### **Discussion**

**Kathy Boomer (in chat):** It's concerning to assume that artificial drainage is part of a conservation plan. Most of the current (arguably rampant) tile installations follow conventional protocols, essentially lowering the water table by more than a meter below the land surface. Conservation drainage practices designed to maximize terrestrial water storage and crop production (also for benefits to soil and watershed health as well as climate resiliency) are installed on less than 10% of our croplands.

**Kathy Boomer:** We have a collective tendency to overlook potential impacts of artificial drainage on soil and watershed health.

**Leon Tillman:** Understood. NRCS has science based recommendations. Subsurface drainage is used as a part of the conservation system, rather than stand alone, as a way to move water and/or address issues tied to that surface water.

**Kathy Boomer:** The science community is behind in putting those pieces together but there's enough evidence to be mindful of that challenge.

**Jeff Sweeney:** Regarding the history of how everything got changed to draft, a decision was made so that we didn't double count the acres in the components of a conservation plan. A letter was sent to the states that they need to report as comprehensive acres instead of individual components so that we don't overreport or over credit the BMPs.

**Leon Tillman:** In Phase 6, it doesn't count for all of the practices within the conservation plan receiving the reduction credits based on the crosswalk from NEIEN to CAST reduction efficiencies?

**Jeff Sweeney:** The assumption is that everything that is done outside of conservation tillage is part of the benefit of a conservation plan. Only the conservation plan acres are supposed to be reported. The conservation plan efficiency accommodates all of the BMPs that make up that practice.

**Leon Tillman:** Some of the practices that are credited differently than conservation plans are cover crops, filter strips, and riparian buffers. They have a different CAST BMP name that allows for different nutrient/sediment efficiency. The purpose for this proposal is for some of these practices to get a different nutrient/sediment reduction efficiency for practices that are implemented beyond just a sediment reduction.

**Jeff Sweeney:** We can pull out these practices to give them a different nutrient credit. They would just have to go through an expert panel process and go through protocols as a new BMP.

**Kelly Shenk:** What would that process be to make that change? A panel to reassess the conservation plan practice and what that efficiency would be if you take out beyond tillage and CC as separate BMPs to report?

**Jeff Sweeney:** Yes, that's correct.

**Kelly Shenk:** Is that factored into this process?

**Leon Tillman:** No, that would be a separate/next step.

**Loretta Collins (in chat):** For clarification- The AgWG can endorse the change that Leon is proposing today. Ultimately, the Watershed Technical Workgroup finalizes changes to NEIEN (National Environmental Information Exchange Network) Appendix.

**Jeremy Daubert:** Do we have a motion to endorse the proposed decision?

**Clint Gill:** Motion to endorse.

**Ted Tesler:** I second. WTWG will want to know what the efficiency will be on this practice. Push to consolidate conservation practice on farms to cover all the smaller practices that make up the larger practice.

**Leon Tillman:** Individual practices may not be the best way forward. But maybe creating a separate bucket for some of the individual practices.

**Kelly Shenk (in chat):** I like the stones in buckets analogy and NRCS expertise to help quantify efficiency of some of the key practices.

**Mark Dubin:** Might want to look at the [EP report for agricultural drainage management](#) to see how they are credited.

**Kathy Boomer (in chat):** I don't get to vote but agree 100% that we need to move toward identifying where and under what climate conditions a practice will most likely provide the targeted benefits, if properly installed (even if in small steps).

**Decision:** The AgWG endorsed the proposed changes to the Phase 6 NEIEN appendix for select NRCS practices identified as mapping to Soil and Water Conservation Plans in the Phase 5 NEIEN appendix. These BMPs would shift from “draft” to “release” status. Final approval of changes in the NEIEN appendix will occur in the Watershed Technical Workgroup (WTWG). (**Post meeting note:** *This does not mean that the topic has been partnership approved. To be officially passed and implemented, it is contingent upon approval of the WTWG.*)

## **CBP Assignments/Data & Modeling**

### 11:05 **Moving Forward: Addressing Ag Inputs in Phase 7 (45 min)**

Tom Butler

Tom Butler, EPA, reviewed a draft charge for the AgWG’s role in Phase 7 Watershed Model development and asked for AgWG feedback in preparation for a larger discussion and tentative approval of the charge at the June 16 AgWG meeting.

#### **Discussion**

**Kathy Boomer:** RUSLE model isn't a reliable approach for evaluating fields to waterways. With increasing availability of high resolution data, do you still have that concern?

**Tom Butler:** The LUWG can answer that better. I think for it to be useful we would have to look at RUSLE in relative proportions.

**Kathy Boomer (in chat):** Recommend pushing modeling group to develop gully erosion risk analysis rather than focusing primarily on RUSLE assumptions.

**Leon Tillman:** Are you looking for SPARROW modeling expertise as a whole or just USGS representation?

**Tom Butler:** USGS as a whole, not limiting it to that model.

**Leon Tillman:** USDA-ARS (ag research service) might be able to share some data that might be useful for the modeling side. Also, any consideration to economists in how they can evaluate benefits and how it pertains to modeling?

**Tom Butler:** Not yet, but we can consider it.

**Ted Tesler:** Anticipated size for the group?

**Tom Butler:** Around 20 people.

**Kathy Boomer:** What are the expectations for workload between meetings?

**Tom Butler:** I don't know that I could answer that at this point.

**Greg Albrecht:** Do you have a sense for program staff available to support the group and panel members?

**Tom Butler:** We expect to have a coordinator, chair, and a staffer.

**Kelly Shenk:** Will this result in less of the ag modeling discussions at the AgWG level? Will we have more time to focus on implementation?

**Tom Butler:** I expect it will.

**Loretta Collins:** We're hoping the ag modeling team (AMT) will give the AgWG space to talk about implementation. We'll still have AMT monthly updates so the process is transparent.

**Jeremy Daubert:** What is the time/length expectation for the group?

**Tom Butler:** Oct 2022 - 2026, with monthly meetings. All 20 people wouldn't be at every meeting, so we would stagger participation.

**Kathy Braiser (in chat):** How do you anticipate leadership being decided?

**Tom Butler:** We're open to take suggestions/nominations for leadership positions. We anticipate ~20 hours a month for the chair. The nomination will be reviewed by the AgWG as well.

**Kelly Shenk:** A challenge in ag is that there are a lot of experts in the subject but they don't have a lot of time. A workshop could help lessen the time commitment and could be useful in soliciting information or broader expertise. Just a suggestion.

**Action:** Contact Tom Butler ([butler.thomas01@epa.gov](mailto:butler.thomas01@epa.gov)) with any additional questions or feedback on the Phase 7 ag modeling team. There will be continued discussion at the AgWG about the charge and membership of this group in the following months.

11:50 **New Business & Announcements (5 min)**

- **2022 Chesapeake Community Research Symposium – June 6<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup>**
  - Will highlight the progress that has been made toward restoring the Chesapeake Bay and enhancing coastal community resilience, as well as address future challenges to maintaining this progress in the face of our changing human and natural environment.
  - Location: Crown Plaza Hotel, Annapolis, MD. Hybrid event (virtual and in-person options).
  - More info [here](#).
- **Additional USDA Funding**
  - USDA announced additional [\\$22.5 million in conservation assistance for Bay region](#).
- **Animal Mortality Expert Panel Technical Appendix**
  - Most recent draft technical appendix available [here](#)- CBPO working through revisions based on feedback. Date for next WTWG discussion TBD.
  - Contact Jeremy Hanson ([hansonj@chesapeake.org](mailto:hansonj@chesapeake.org)) with questions/comments.
- **EPA/USDA Task Force**
  - EPA and USDA are creating a task force for crediting ag conservation practices. Working closely with states and ag community to come up with solutions to maintain integrity of accounting tools of the Bay program while protecting the privacy of farmers. Will report back to AgWG in future on charge of group and other details.

11:55 **Review of Action and Decision Items (5 min)**

12:00 **Adjourn**

**Next Meeting:**

**Thursday, June 16 [EXTENDED]: 10AM-3PM, Call-in Zoom**

**\*Common Abbreviations**

AgWG- [Agriculture Workgroup](#)

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](#)

CBW- Chesapeake Bay Watershed

CRC- [Chesapeake Research Consortium](#)

EPA- Environmental Protection Agency

NEIEN- National Environmental Information Exchange Network

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

PA DEP- Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

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

WTWG- [Watershed Technical Workgroup](#)

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*

## **Participants**

Jackie Pickford, CRC

Loretta Collins, UMD

Jeremy Daubert, VT

Kathy Braiser, PSU

Clint Gill, DDA

Greg Albrecht, NY

Ted Tessler, PA DEP

Seth Mullins, VA DCR

Cindy Shreve, WVCA

Marel King, CBC

Kelly Shenk, EPA

Leon Tillman, NRCS

Dave Graybill, Farm Bureau

Jenna Schueler, CBF

Paul Bredwell, US Poultry and Egg

RO Britt, Smithfield Foods

Emily Dekar, USC

Tim Rosen, ShoreRivers

Matt Royer, Penn State

Olivia Devereux, Devereux Consulting

Elizabeth Hoffman, MDA

Karl Blankenship, Bay Journal

Kristen Saacke Blunk, Headwaters LLC

Tom Butler, EPA

Gary Felton, UMD

Matt Monroe, WV

Kristen Hughes Evans, Sustainable Chesapeake

Hunter Landis, DCR

Jeremy Hanson, CRC-CBPO

Kathy Boomer, STAC/FFAR

Vanessa Van Note, EPA

Jeff Sweeney, EPA

Jeff Hill, YCCD

Cassie Davis, NYSDEC

Ruth Cassily, UMD-CBPO

Clare Sevcik, DNREC