



National Association of
Conservation Districts

North Central Region Board Meeting

Embassy Suites by Hilton
2 Convention Center Plaza
St. Charles, MO 63303
January 6 – 7, 2020

Attendees:

Steve Stierwalt, IL
Roger Wenning, IN
Dennis Carney, IA
Jerry Miller, MI
Elaine Brown, MI
Ryan Britt, MO
Ron Willis, MO

Kurt Beckstrom, MN
Kris Swartz, OH, Region Chair
Matt Peart, OH
Monte Osterman, WI
Alex Schmidt, NACD Executive Board
Beth Mason, NACD Region Representative, Recorder

Others in attendance: 19

Monday, January 6

1:00 pm

Welcome and Introductions – Kris Swartz, Region Chair

Guest Speaker: Darrick Steen, Director of Environmental Programs with the Missouri Soybean Association and Missouri Corn Growers Association

“Examining the Healthy Soil and Cleaner Water Nexus” – Are practices that landowners use to improve soil health and conservation also improving water quality? Observations seem to indicate so, but what does the data say? This question and others are the focus of Darrick’s multi-year effort. With support from several partners, Darrick’s team operates a network of paired automated water quality samplers installed on private Missouri farmland. The network of samplers are installed at the edge of fields or at the outlet of conservation practices and generate reliable on-farm water quality data. Collected data is being used to calculate practice effectiveness as well as other useful information used to support sustainable farm management decisions.

Approval of Minutes

Illinois: Motion to approve the region board minutes from the Summer Meeting in Santa Fe, NM

Second

Motion passed unanimously

Region Account Report – Beth Mason, North Central Region Representative

Illinois: Motion to renew North Central Region dues at \$300 per state for 2020 and to continue with 3 region scholarships for the coming year at \$400 each. (Guidelines remain the same and are available upon request)

Second

Motion passed unanimously

Executive Board Report with Q&A – Alex Schmidt, North Central Region Executive Board Member

Break

NACD North Central Region Resolutions

(See *Appendix A* for full resolution information)

Definition of Urban Agriculture (Iowa)

Iowa: Motion for North Central Region support.

Second

Motion passed unanimously

Cost-Share to Replace Tile Intakes with Blind Inlets as a Stand-Alone Practice (Iowa)

Iowa: Motion for North Central Region support.

Second

Motion passed unanimously

Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR) Program Endorsement (Illinois)

Illinois: Motion for North Central Region support.

Second

Illinois presentation/discussion

Motion passed unanimously

Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) and Expanding Pilot ESMC Projects (Minnesota)

Minnesota: Motion for North Central Region support.

Second

Discussion

Motion passed unanimously

Proposed Bylaw Amendment Discussion

Alex Schmidt gives a summary of the proposed bylaw amendments and the task force's recommendations. As a member of the task force, Monte Osterman (WI) gave a presentation on Wisconsin's conservation history to aid in the discussion of the issues at hand concerning the bylaws. The floor was then open up for discussion and Q&A. No formal action was required or made.

State-Level MOAs between Conservation Districts and NRCS – Salvador Salinas, USDA NRCS Acting Central Region Conservationist

Salvador Salinas gave opening comments on this initiative and addressed some concerns that he had heard expressed about the initiative. The floor was then open to questions, comments and feedback.

5:00 pm (approximately)

Meeting was adjourned for the day

Tuesday, January 7

7:30 am

Guest Speaker: Rob Myers, Ph.D., North Central Region – Sustainable Agricultural Resources and Education (SARE) Regional Director of Extension Programs and SARE National Liaison for Cover Crops and Soil Health

“Progress with cover crops in the North Central Region” - Dr. Myers will provide data and insights from two recent national reports, the first being the USDA-SARE report [“Cover Crop Economics”](#) addressing the economic results from national farmer surveys and analysis of management factors affecting cover crop profitability. The second national report was published through the Soil Health Institute and is entitled [“Progress Report: Adoption of Soil Health Systems Based on Data from the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture.”](#) Dr. Myers was the lead author on both reports and will focus on what is happening with cover crops in the North Central Region and in relation to the rest of the U.S.

Break

Partner Updates

- USDA NRCS – Salvador Salinas, Acting Central Region Conservationist
(See *Appendix B* for Salinas’ Talking Points)
After Salinas gave a briefing, each state conservationist in attendance provided comments from their state.
- EPA Region 7 – Jim Gulliford, EPA Region 7 Administrator
- NASCA – John Switzer, Michigan Department of Ag & Rural Development
- NCDEA – Melissa Higbee, Vice President of the National Conservation District Employees Association and Executive Director of Shiawassee Conservation District, MI

Q&A re: Committee and Resource Policy Group (RPG) Reports formally submitted

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was postponed until the region meeting at the NACD Annual Meeting in Las Vegas.

Elections – Alex Schmidt, North Central Region Executive Board Member presiding

- Region Chair
Illinois: Nominated Kris Swartz for Region Chair
Second
Unanimous vote to approve
- Region Vice Chair
Wisconsin: Nominated Kurt Beckstrom for Region Vice Chair
Second
Unanimous vote to approve

Kris Swartz requests a volunteer to take over for him as the North Central Region Representative on the Presidents’ Association. Steve Stierwalt (IL) volunteers.

North Central Region States MOA Discussion

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was postponed until the region meeting at the NACD Annual Meeting in Las Vegas.

Upcoming Meetings

The list of upcoming meetings was reviewed. Ohio volunteered to host the 2021 North Central Region Board meeting. Mason will research dates that won't conflict with any other meeting and provide options for dates at the Las Vegas meeting. Mason will then begin to coordinate with the Executive Director in Ohio for a meeting location.

- 2020 NACD Annual Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada – February 8 – 12
- 2020 NACD Spring Fly-In, Washington, DC – March 25
- 2020 NACD Summer Board Meeting, Bismarck, North Dakota – July 18 – 21
- 2021 NACD North Central Region Winter Board Meeting – dates to be decided, Ohio will host

11:10 am

Missouri: Motion to adjourn

Second

Motion passed unanimously.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION 2020 RESOLUTIONS

Definition of Urban Agriculture (Iowa)

Background

Many factors are converging to result in an increase in urban agriculture. Some of the factors pushing people to urban agriculture include: lack of access to rural acres, reduction of negative environmental impacts by curbing reliance on food and from afar, consumer demand to understand the nutrient value of food they consume, and efforts to protect more acres through diversified crop production. People participating in urban agriculture can be important catalysts to improved soil and water conservation in our cities and towns. However, municipal policies regulating urban agriculture either do not exist, vary widely, or are murky; all of which leads to confusion and lack of support for this growing sector of the food system. An IDALS/USDA definition of urban agriculture would provide guidance to county conservation districts as they develop localized cost-share policies which could serve as one among the many supports it will take for this sector to develop.

An IDALS/USDA definition of urban agriculture could eventually have a significant impact on urban conservation. A definition of urban agriculture will provide a waypoint not only for county conservation districts but also, potentially, for local municipalities as they develop zoning rules and local guidance for urban agricultural practices. An IDALS/USDA definition of urban agriculture would contribute clarity that is uniform across the state and could be a contributor to better regulation of urban agriculture impacting urban conservation, wildlife habitat enhancement, preservation of urban waterways, and enhancement of urban soils. To determine the relevance of existing definitions is a possible starting point. Other processes of gathering relevant input may include speaking with farmers who operate within city limits, city managers or city councilors, and other stakeholders. The context of both small towns and larger cities should be considered and represented in any definition of urban agriculture for Iowa.

Proposed Policy

CDI shall work with IDALS and NACD supports USDA ~~to~~ reviewing existing definitions of urban agriculture on a local to national level for the purposes of business models, planning, zoning, cost share and other relevant issues to create a sustainable definition to insure long term stability of these urban farms.

Current Policy

NACD does not have a formal definition of urban agriculture though has been using the following in its Urban Agriculture Conservation Grant Initiative.

“The phrase covers a broad array of activities. USDA National Agriculture Library defines as “taking the form of backyard, roof-top and balcony gardening, community gardening in vacant lots and parks, roadside urban fringe agriculture and livestock grazing in open space”. Repurposing properties (under-utilized buildings, brownfields, etc) for urban agriculture and conservation practices will also be considered as will innovative projects not mentioned or previously seen in the 2016 and 2017 Reports.”

Cost-Share to Replace Tile Intakes with Blind Inlets as a Stand-Alone Practice (Iowa)

Background

Currently Blind Inlets (620-11) can only receive cost-share through EQIP if they support another practice such as a terrace or grassed waterway. There are significant nutrient loss reductions with blind inlets over standard tile inlets.

Iowa's pothole region has a high load rate for phosphorus as it is attached to eroded soil particles. Drainage intakes are very common in the pothole region, often in excess of ten per square mile. In this region, much of the surface water, along with eroded soil particles with attached phosphorus must pass through an intake and does not go over a stream bank. The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy states that replacing a standard intake with a blind inlet will reduce phosphorus in the water by 11% to 87% with an average reduction of 57%.

Proposed Policy

~~CDI should work with~~ NACD supports NRCS ~~to amending~~ cost-share rules to allow the replacement of existing drainage intakes with blind inlets as a stand-alone practice.

Current Policy

There is no policy specific to replacement of existing drainage intakes. The only policy regarding intakes is as follows.

6.I.20 NACD supports CRP rules be modified to allow a 30-60 foot strip of grass along terrace channels and around terrace intakes for filtering. (01) AO2019/TBR2024

6.I.43 NACD supports the FSA adding lands around culverts and open tile intakes as eligible areas in the CP21 filter strip continuous CRP regardless of how far they physically are from the water body. (06) AO2019/TBR2024

Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (S.T.A.R.) Program Endorsement (Illinois)

Background

As the demand for conservation and sustainability continues to grow, government, industry and agriculture producers alike continue to explore ways to meet this demand. The Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (S.T.A.R.) program was designed to respond to this demand by providing a means for farm operators, ranchers, and landowners to evaluate, measure, and increase their use of conservation practices based on locally identified resource concern goals.

S.T.A.R. is a free tool that not only provides evaluation, but also a measurement of the participant's conservation efforts. Individual fields are assessed using a brief and confidential form. S.T.A.R. assigns points to each management practice, which are summarized and compared to a scale to provide a "S.T.A.R. Rating" of one to five stars. A sample of submitted field evaluations are verified to assure reliability and participants are recognized for their efforts.

Ultimately, the goal of S.T.A.R. is not only to evaluate the use of conservation practices, but also to educate about conservation and encourage changes in management. Potential benefits of S.T.A.R. are numerous and include:

- Raising the profile of conservation districts;

- Increased net farm/ranch income;
- Promoting a positive image of agriculture in the community;
- Inspiring natural resource stewardship;
- And ultimately, contributing to abundant, clean water and healthy soils.

Through increasing interest in S.T.A.R. by potential national partners, S.T.A.R. leadership has learned that to reach local conservation goals, the program needs to be available nation-wide. S.T.A.R. can be adapted to any local resource concerns, and thus can help unite local conservation districts' efforts across the country. An endorsement of the S.T.A.R. program by NACD would encourage states and the 3000 local conservation districts to join S.T.A.R. in enhancing locally driven conservation.

Proposed Policy

NACD endorses Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (S.T.A.R.).

Current Policy

There is no policy on S.T.A.R.

Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) and Expanding Pilot ESMC Projects (Minnesota)

Background

The Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' (MASWCD's) soil health Guiding Principles recognize the benefits of managing soil as an ecosystem. Minnesota's Conservation Districts, along with other districts across the country, continue to promote soil health improvement efforts.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) joined an Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) on June 4, 2019. This Consortium consists of both private companies and non-profit organizations, including the Noble Research Institute.

The Work of the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) and the Ecosystem Services Market Research Consortium (ESMRC) is focused on the research, development, demonstration and deployment of cost-effective, scalable technologies and approaches to launch a market for ecosystems services by 2022.

The ESMC is conducting a pilot test of its integrated ecosystem credit protocol on 50,000 acres of rangeland and farmland in Texas and Oklahoma. This initial test is focused on development of cause and effect assessment from production management practices, led by Noble Research Institute.

While a pilot-scale ESMC project is underway now in parts of Oklahoma and Texas, future pilot projects could take place in other parts of the country including the Upper Midwest region.

Conservation Districts, including Districts in Minnesota, could play a future role in either a pilot project, and/or a broader-scaled effort to develop ESM, by utilizing district technical assistance and communication capacities.

Proposed Policy

NACD, working with the ~~Nobles Foundation~~Noble Research Institute and the Ecosystems Services Market Consortium, ~~should enhance~~supports coordination with State Associations to encourage ESM pilots and activities in ~~in other states~~ including Minnesota.

Current Policy

There is no policy on Ecosystems Service Markets.

NRCS UPDATE
January 6, 2020

- 1) The CSP Interim Final Rule is out and published on Federal Register. Public comments are due by January 13, 2020. Rule can be located on the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <https://www.regulations.gov> and search for Docket ID NRCS-2019-0020.
- 2) The Interim Rule on Domestic Hemp Production is out and published in Federal Register. Public comments were due December 31, 2019.
- 3) The ACEP Interim Rule was published January 6, 2020. Public comments are due by March 6, 2020. A conference call with STCs will be set for early January for an ACEP walk through.
- 4) The EQIP Interim Rule was published December 17, 2019. Public comments are due February 18, 2020. A conference call was held with STCs and Chief Lohr and Associate Chief held a stakeholder meeting on the Rule December 19, 2019.
- 5) Joint FSA and NRCS employee Training on the new CRP was held in Orlando, FL. STCs scheduled and led in-state joint NRCS/FSA training. Expectation is for heavy workloads in several states with respect to CRP applications and planning.
- 6) NRCS has a gap of approximately 1,700 vacancies with respect to the national staffing cap, which was increased by 566 positions. NRCS NHQ Leadership working with Human Resources Division developed a fourpronged hiring approach to place people in those vacant positions. 1) Prioritize hiring in states below 90 percent of their state cap. 2) Identify entry level positions and locations for priority batch advertisement. 3) Use a direct hire authority to recruit and hire onsite at designated universities. 3)
Use the Pathway hire authority to recruit and hire summer interns and Recent Graduates.
- 7) December was an all hands on deck scenario for NRCS to pay CSP participants that wanted CSP payment by December 31, 2019. With few exceptions, this workload was accomplished. Many NRCS employees were called back from their holiday vacations to assure their producers were paid by the 31st deadline. They and partner employees are to be thanked for their dedication and commitment to outstanding customer service.
- 8) The Regional Conservationists in collaboration with the Deputy Chief for Programs and Associate Chief will analyze the NRCS CSP 2019 payment process and effort to make improvements for 2020.
- 9) States soon will receive their Final Allocations.