**Local Work Group Partners Meeting - Feb 19, 2025**

**NRCS Process Feedback**

**Small Group Priority Concern: INVASIVE SPECIES**

***Programing:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, do you have any general conservation program recommendations?*

* Expand soil testing; help farms transition to crops in wetter conditions, or practices that suit wetter conditions (as opposed to ditching, draining)
* No response
* Discuss long-term goals early on; reduce the needs for contract modifications; use of specialist early in planning

***Operations:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, do you have any general operational recommendations for NRCS conservation planning?*

* Flow chart for applicants with a calendar of special dates/deadlines
* Remove much of the financial assistance and move back towards a technical extension model with employees with deep technical knowledge; that would require less administration and better pay/longer terms employee investment and the ability to have less book/college educated employees; **more farmers helping farmers**
* Apply for multiple programs at once by customer can be confusings

***NRCS Research:*** *Are there any specific conservation research topics that should be invested in for future years?*

* Soil succession for ag field retirement or conversion to diversified crops; what amendments or practices can farms use to “re-wild” mono crop fields; wool pellets, carbon sources, coppices woody invasives
* No response
* Fire practices – brush rust

***NRCS Payments*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, what conservation program payment amount recommendations do you have? Do you know of an NRCS payment rate that is too low?*

* No response – 2
* There are many high tunnel, light mechanical, brush rust, well spring dup

***NRCS Investments:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS and with other programs, what current investments (projects or state-wide fund pools) are working well and are gathering long-term data needs that NRCS should continue to invest in moving forward?*

* Local pool for invasives species needs to continue to be meaningful since the problem itself requires a multi-year treatment solution
* No response
* With increased food prices we should prioritize reducing food cost for everyone

***NRCS Tools:*** *Can you think of any science-based conservation technologies needed that we don’t currently use well or have access to?*

* Measuring stable carbon in soils; estimating at field scale; there is a “field rover” that can do this; we could pay farmers to sequester carbon in a meaningful way
* Less tools and technology; stop trying to compensate for lack of technical knowledge with more fancy tools; more extension-type of education for employees who specialize in agricultural subsets; more siloed technical experts who specialize in one topic
* AI tools and spacial analysis tools

**Small Group Priority Concern: STREAMS & RIVERS WATER QUALITY**

***Programing:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, do you have any general conservation program recommendations?*

* No response
* More money for CSP
* Scale down to make funding/aid accessible to smaller farms- ones that may not have as heavy of resource concerns; incentivize small farms
* More focus on soil and water conservation practices, more coordination with partners (which practices are a better fit for other programs); fewer practices
* Pay faster for finished contracts; increase per acre payouts; lower barriers to entry for prospective program participants
* Increased public outreach and education to better inform the general public about issues impacting water quality other than the Coventry landfill
* Allow for VT-scale practices that support natural functions, practices such as grassed waterways without over engineering; more focus on field practices; **simplify everything!**

***Operations:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, do you have any general operational recommendations for NRCS conservation planning?*

* No response - 3
* Field office workload, more people or work prioritized differently
* Less time between contract and implementation; turn around is far too long for a business
* Directing customers to other partners when it makes sense; having NRCDs serve at first POC, more streamlined practices, improving functionality of platforms like CD, ensuring all offices have high-speed internet
* Use Conservation Action Plan to ID practices for partners to do outreach where NRCS or NRCD has capacity to support

***NRCS Research:*** *Are there any specific conservation research topics that should be invested in for future years?*

* Spatial analysis to identify opportunities to trap runoff/pollutants on croplands
* Raise the height that hay is cut
* Field management- liming, wood ash
* Phosphorus reduction numbers for each relevant practice that all partners can accept
* Raise the Blade; direct seeding woody species
* Climate change & flood resiliency
* More hay land practices; use acceptable model to ID potential traps and to control practice location and access, in the field to see if practices makes sense for WQ and farmer mgmt

***NRCS Payments*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, what conservation program payment amount recommendations do you have? Do you know of an NRCS payment rate that is too low?*

* Payments too low, not timely
* Farm roads, any engineered practice, fence
* More money!
* Invasive plant treatment payment rate is way too low (needs to be double the current rates)
* Per acre riparian buffer, doesn’t adequately cover project costs, doesn’t take into account the likelihood of success or effectiveness of alternate practices
* Strategic wood addition implementation work isn’t fully funded through NRCS
* No response

***NRCS Investments:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS and with other programs, what current investments (projects or state-wide fund pools) are working well and are gathering long-term data needs that NRCS should continue to invest in moving forward?*

* No response - 3
* The whole “community scale / urban ag” pool = small scale food = extremely competitive (high tunnels, irrigation, low tunnels, etc)
* RCPP, soil and water quality–related agronomic practices
* NMPs in conjunction with water quality monitoring
* Need to increase transition of farmers to CSP

***NRCS Tools:*** *Can you think of any science-based conservation technologies needed that we don’t currently use well or have access to?*

* Drone imagery to help farmers assess production, cost/benefit analysis in creation of buffers vs crop loss
* No response – 5
* NRCS to capture data to support phosphorus tracking for forest roads or stream crossings.

**Small Group Priority Concern: ADAPTING TO CLIMATE INSTABILITY**

***Programing:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, do you have any general conservation program recommendations?*

* Example - flexibility on contract items based on climate instability; digestible public education and outreach; advanced payments for farmers (any farmer beyond beginners); greater support for applicants – walk through the process (customer service) – this also falls in operations
* Targeted audience for climate instability; climate resilient crops; improved irrigation/drainage systems
* More advanced payments

***Operations:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, do you have any general operational recommendations for NRCS conservation planning?*

* Administrative efficiencies, staff capacity limits
* Good partnerships so that multiple organizations are not competing for similar audience and funds; streamline workflow efficiency through determining which organizations tackle specific initiatives
* No response

***NRCS Research:*** *Are there any specific conservation research topics that should be invested in for future years?*

* Invasive species in forestlands; high tunnel automation (funded in NH)
* Climate resilient crops; climate-controlled storage facilities?
* High tunnel automation – automated roll up sides, ridge vent & ventilation fans (based on pest management/plant productivity)

***NRCS Payments*** *Based on your experience with NRCS, what conservation program payment amount recommendations do you have? Do you know of an NRCS payment rate that is too low?*

* No response; no comment (not well versed to comment) - 2
* Practice for land work prep for high tunnel; land work mostly HT more expensive

***NRCS Investments:*** *Based on your experience with NRCS and with other programs, what current investments (projects or state-wide fund pools) are working well and are gathering long-term data needs that NRCS should continue to invest in moving forward?*

* No response - 2
* Lakeshore restoration seems to be a viable investment

***NRCS Tools:*** *Can you think of any science-based conservation technologies needed that we don’t currently use well or have access to?*

* No response
* I agree with precision agriculture technologies but it seems that there are private companies that can do this (or are doing this) with farmers
* Financial tools (money talks), how much money are spend on fertilizer via cover crop, manure injection, carbon soil amendment

**Small Group Priority Concern: SUSTAINING LOCAL FARMING WHILE PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES - NO SHEETS**