**Conewago Creek Initiative
BMP Team Meeting**

**December 15, 2010**

**Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resources Center**

 **Minutes**

**Attending:**

Mike Hubler, DCCD
Joe Russo, ZedX
Jeremy Zidek, ZedX
Mikel Williams, NRCS-DC
Mike Snyder, NRCS-Lebanon
Matt Royer, Penn State/TCCCA
Larry Baum, DCCD
Stephanie Butler, LebCCD
Mark Chegwidden, LebCCD
David Krone, DCCD
Jason Innerst, DCCD
Kevin Lutz, LanCCD
Susan Marquart, NRCS
Kelly O’Neill, CBF
Sarah Dinh, Extension-Lan
Genny Christ, Extension-Cumb
Jim Baird, AFT
Susan Parry, Capital RC&D
Mark Myers, NRCS-Lan
Carl Rohr, PA DEP
Rick Kepner, NRCS-Dauphin
Kristen Saacke Blunk, Penn State

**Farm Surveys**

Mike Hubler described process and share examples of data collected.

 Survey assessed ‘what’s there’ – and what needs to be there. Personal contact with all farmers was the way to accomplish it.

* 1. 266 operations (84% of what we anticipated to have) – well over 90% of farm operations in WS have been contacted and surveyed.
	2. Letter went to each farm operations/landowners that we knew of in early Feb 2010. Upcoming TMDL, upcoming PA WIP and said “opp for ag community to record what they’d done already.” – CDs would contact them in mid-Feb to schedule survey. Voluntary – didn’t have to participate. No resistance to the survey. All were willing to participate. Two educational outreach meetings planned (then 3), Londonderry, Conewago, and Conoy townships – with fairly good response.
	3. Started doing the surveys in early March 2010. Gave landowner options for participating – OR if they had an operator working their farm ground, they could defer to operator. (Most deferred).
	4. Dauphin Co was done by May, Lancaster Co by June, Lebanon by Oct. 15. Total surveys: 109 Dauphin; Lancaster 60; Lebanon 54.
	5. ZedX compiled all info in Excel spreadsheet format, allows Districts to sort and prioritize.

Dauphin County priorities:

* + 1. Those who requested tech assistance
		2. Those who don’t have a conservation plan – or have one that is dated and needs revision.
		3. Operations that don’t have a NMP or MMP – and to assist them in the development of what suits their needs. (Lebanon Co third priority
		4. Anybody else.

Lebanon and Lancaster Counties following these priorities as well. For second priority, Lebanon prioritizes those farms with resource concerns over those without resource concerns. For Lancaster, second priority is broken down into those farms with (1) cropland and (2) grass/pasture, with cropland being first priority because of erosion potential.

**Timelines for Outreach**

NRCS has placed $500K in the Conewago through CBWI. At this point $300K tied to applications, therefore $200K remaining. National deadline of July 1 to obligate funds. Expect NRCS to assess where it is at by end of February 2011. $200 K is waiting for applications, first come first serve. Outreach to farmers requesting TA should be completed by March 2011 to meet deadlines.

All conservation plans for farms with resource concerns should be completed by Sept. 30, 2011.

Private TSP planning work must be completed by June 30, 2011 because this is when grant expires. Conservation plans w/o resource concerns: Could these be done by TSPs with $$ Districts have for contracting with TSPs? But, would private TSPs be interested if no resource concerns need to be addressed…. Farmers who do not want to work with govt should also be funneled to TSPs.

**Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and Section 319**

The Conewago Creek Watershed Restoration Plan (WIP) was completed in 2006, and identifies 129 priority projects. Most of these sites address stream bank and riparian corridor restoration, and agricultural BMPs. When Section 319 NPS Program funds are being discussed it is in connection with the properties/priorities defined within the WIP to help meet the TMDL (phosphorus/sediment) load reduction goals. Matt mentioned that Tetratech, an EPA contractor, work is focused on identifying the non-agricultural priorities – which is essential to balancing out the agricultural and stream restoration expectations. The local watershed group is focused on stream restoration, while conservation districts are working on both agricultural and stream restoration BMPs and projects. DEP biologist watershed assessments looked at macroinvertebrates – and they looked at adjoining land uses – which is how they determined that the impairments were due to agricultural and other sources. Substantial data is coming out of NRCS. About 90+ of the 129 projects are streamside restoration practices (buffers, etc). S. 319 $ funded stream bank restoration work and agricultural BMP implementation continues. Couple them with CREP program to fund forested buffer work, pairing resources – similar to how the conservation district is utilizing both S. 319 and USDA-EQIP funding. If a landowner has a priority project site that deals with the stream – then additional funding mechanisms may be possible.

Creativity in matching funding sources between state and federal programs is becoming more common. The Dauphin County CD S. 319 grant has expanded from its initial focus on two impaired subwatersheds to the entire watershed in all 3 Counties. The DEP NPS Program is open to ideas for the use of 319 resources to address existing water quality impairments and implement the WIP priorities.

The DCCD requires a minimum landowner cost share for S. 319 funded projects. The DCCD Board of Directors believes there must be some level of investment and buy-in by the farmer. The S.319 Program does not have a cost-share ceiling, but uses existing county conservation district policy to establish limits for practices. There are currently two open S. 319 grants with the DCCD: One expires on 9/30/11, while the second also does but can be extended further based on need.

**Discussion of Barriers**

Lancaster County: Farmers are willing to participate in programs, but right now it is a financial issue with tough economy (cost share). Could CBF Buffer Bonus help in this regard?

There are plain sect in watershed who have shown willingness to participate in programs.

Poor dairy economy is presently a barrier.

Buffer maintenance obligations a barrier, several landowners have expressed this. Matt/TCCCA working on a maintenance program where corporate contributions could supplement CREP cost share to allow for full service contractor maintenance, with minimal contribution by landowner (i.e., $30/ac).

Many farmers in watershed did work in 1980s under earlier Bay Program dollars, and feel they are done. However, some practices are past lifespan and need replaced/restored (i.e. terraces that were done 20 or 30 years ago – but were done under tillage – so shortened lifespan because of sediments).

Some of the hold ups ARE education. What can be done? What can Penn State do?

For some of them – it’s going to require US EPA intervention. WE offer the money now – but it may require the regulation to make folks do it.

Lebanon Co had several sign up for CBWI/EQIP. Barriers include:

* + - 1. EDUCATION: Some don’t understand the issues.
			2. MONEY: Some have financial constraints.
			3. TIME/ENERGY: Some are concerned with streamside areas that will not install buffers because of the maintenance problems – and flooding. Maintaining trees and fence is a hassle.
			4. LEGACY: Farmers have been asked to improve operations for a long time – and their impacts are attributed. They’ve heard it – and yet the STP have not upgraded (and ‘can buy credits to keep doing what they’re doing’, stormwater from Harrisburg). Farmers should only have to do so much.
			5. GOV’T/REGULATORY ADVERSE: I’m a regulated farm – I don’t need to anything more than I have to.
				1. If there is a serious resource problem there – then it would be sent to DEP for enforcement. Leb doesn’t have E&S enforcement.
				2. Or COULD hand off to TSP.

TSP could possibly offer MORE than a conservation plan.

TSPs probably can’t get in either

Peer-to-peer approach

Inviting farmer to place where there are things working. – traditionally watch what their neighbor does.

Compliance workshop, CREP workshop - things that RC&D or Extension educators can offer.

Waiting for DEP to come up with the Manure Management Manual FINAL – to get everyone in line with compliance. We’re in a holding pattern until this information. DCCD has obligation to help farmers meet it. Expecting major changes.

**Outreach and Education**

What can Penn State do? Bay Program Days in the mid-to-late 1980s – and helped DEP with general education – plus the Manure Management Manual Development – because Agronomy and Soil Science helped. With 102 and now 91/new MMM, need help with promoting to the farmers of the need to meet baseline compliance. We would all be better off.

Use Lancaster Farming. Farmers read this. Sarah has done a good job with timely articles and highlighting the Conewago project.

 Baseline are not near as tenuous as Act 38. Looking at just the critical problems. May have an impact – to simply get a baseline. Yet farmers feel like they’ve been picked on – and are tired of it.

It is hard to do outreach on MMM before it is final and we don’t know exactly what it says. Also better to wait for MMM and do joint education on 102/91/MMM.

However, there are things farmers can be doing now to get themselves prepared to meet compliance, things that make sense for better farm operations overall. Genny—Keep your records. Do the manure analysis. Be prepared. Be ready for what’s coming next - so best thing – soil tests, manure analysis, records. MMM will have details – but skeleton of the plan. Even without MMM details, we know for sure we need to balance the crop needs, and we need soil and manure analysis. This is a message we could be getting out now to farmers in the watershed.

Key organizations to work with: Farm Bureau; Crop consultants – already on the farm. Get them telling the farmer that they need this. Reach out to state reps (Hickernel, Gingrich, Swanger). Involve them in messaging.

**Innovative Practices**

1. Subsurfer. Now new prototype ready to go, and will be in Delmarva in January 2011 for field tests. Potential Conewago test drive in January as well (weather??) By March, should be in watershed for use by farmers.
2. Dean Hively/Cover Crops. Would like a good map of the corn for grain v. corn for silage; photos at waste height of fields with cover crops. Interest is in fields over 40 ac—there may not be that many in watershed. Need to sit down with Districts and figure out exactly what his needs are.
3. Dairy Discussion Group. Great group and great discussions Sarah and Genny have going, just a very small group. How to increase enrollment? Offer free manure analysis to attendees, as well as free lunch. CBF has some funds that could go toward this and will check into this. Matt to hand out flyers door to door in advance of meeting.

**Technical Update**

From Joe Russo of ZedX: Working with NRCS to bring their definition of the practices into the system. First standard definitions – for defining practices for the Conewago. RUSSL 2 – in terms of the modeling – pre-set defined practices – scenarios by crop management zones, 39,000 nationwide – 3000 done in the Conewago. Picked it as a standard because of what they’re doing. Feedback from group was they don’t know what would be MORE comprehensive than that. ZedX is halfway through the PREDICT – and a functional model that mimics what you’re seeing in the Bay. Working with Barry Evans.

AFT – CCAs needed a map with streets/roads/and outline of the watershed. To determine whether they are in the watershed.

**Next Meeting**

Matt will work with Mike to schedule next meeting in February. BMP Team will begin meeting once every two months in 2011.