

March 17, 2023



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

2023 Virtual Conservation District and PA Agency Ag Meeting  
Doug Wolfgang, Executive Secretary

**PA Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP)**

- As of March 13, 2023, sixty-one districts have signed delegation agreements. A few other districts have approved the delegation and are awaiting signatures.
- SCC has developed a webpage on the PDA website where they plan to keep updated ACAP information and webinar recordings. The webpage currently has the ACAP Guidelines, SCC BMP List and a draft ACAP Application. Also posted are all the past recorded webinars.
- On January 24, 2023, SCC Board approved the Setback Requirements Policy effective January 1, 2024. Any application submitted on or after January 1, 2024, must adhere to the approved policy. This policy is for projects that include Waste Storage Facilities and Heavy Use Area Protections and states that if these BMP are included in the application and a buffer is included in a plan as a BMP, that buffer must be an average of 35 feet. There is also the ability for the applicant to submit a waiver included in the policy.
- On January 26, 2023, SCC, Department of Labor and Industry, NRCS and Lancaster County Conservation District hosted a Prevailing Wage Webinar. This webinar was well attended with 131 attendees. This webinar was aimed to answer any lingering questions that districts had about administering projects consistent with prevailing wage laws. This webinar will also be posted on the SCC's ACAP webpage.
- Upcoming Webinars for District Managers on Wednesday, April 12, 2023 @ 9:00 am.
- The ACAP Advisory Workgroup reviews draft documents and provides input on new policies in the program. The ACAP Advisory Workgroup was very key in the development of the Setback Policy and will now move forward in discussions about Bidding policies.
- The ACAP Center Subcommittee continues to discuss the Center and the expansion of Boot Camp Trainings. Jennifer Fetter of Penn State will be spearheading the development of the Center, which includes laying out the framework and building staff capacity. SCC plans to meet with Penn State to discuss the needs of State Engineering as well as other outputs.
- The ACAP Technical Assistance Workgroup advises on the task of Trainings for Technical Assistance as well as technical support across the state. This group met on February 22<sup>nd</sup> to discuss engineering, RFPs, Job Approval Authority, Certifications for BMPs and Admin Training. With the development of the Center starting to take shape, SCC anticipates this group to reconvene to discuss the actual needs for districts state-wide on a more regular basis.

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- The Commission staff encourages counties to consider farms preserved through permanent conservation easement as a factor when awarding ACAP and other ag bmp funds. Preserved farms are ideal for additional conservation investments.
- Press event to “kick-off” ACAP being held on the Stahlnecker Farm in Lycoming County on March 30, 2023, at 1:00 pm.

#### **Nutrient Management and Odor Management Planning Program**

- Most county conservation have signed new delegation agreement or are in the process. Two CDs dropped delegation this round, thus resulting on 55 districts having delegation.
- The Commission staff are working on several compliance and enforcement cases.
- The Commission staff continue with the Regulation revision process for NM, and certification programs (NM, OM, H&B).
- Provided Continuing education courses remotely.
- The SCC started the next round of NM certification training.
- The SCC hosted CD regional roundtables on NM and OM.
- Pennsylvania is a national leader in nutrient management and the standard-bearer for other state laws. To date, 1,268 farms totaling 267,985 acres are subject to an approved NMP.

#### **Conservation Excellence Grant Program**

- Total funding allocated to the seven county conservation districts as of July 11, 2022, is \$11.367 million. These allocations include \$7.875 million in state funding and \$2.308 million from a DEP sub-grant as part of DEP’s *Chesapeake Bay Implementation Grant Program* for expansion of the CEG Program in Tier 2 counties identified in the Chesapeake Bay Phase III WIP. EPA has also awarded an IJA-MEB Grant, October 1, 2022, in the amount of \$798,333.00.
- A total of 161 applications have been received and 131 of those applications have been approved for funding. 60 projects have been completed with many more to be completed before June 30, 2023. Once funding has been awarded to contracts, the grantees have two years to complete their projects. Over \$9.2 million in program funds have been committed to grant projects by conservation districts and over \$3.0 million in payments to farmers for BMP implementation have been completed.
- Public-Private Partnership – Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT) has been engaged in a \$1.154 million grant agreement since January 1, 2021, for a project to develop a public-private partnership model that will utilize CEG’s financial bundling (grants, tax credits and loans) for the implementation of best management practices mirroring the CEG Program in Salisbury Township, Lancaster County. LFT is currently working with 5 project sites to complete design or construction activities of BMPs. LFT anticipates expanding its funding support to four more project sites with match from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation before completion of the grant agreement.

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### **Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP)**

- Each year the SCC reviews REAP program and welcomes input from partners on how to improve the program. The changes range from minor revisions related to administration to major changes that address what is eligible for credits. Commission staff presented proposed changes to the commission at the March meeting, including, performance upgrade kits, which would enable a farmer to replace the existing row units on no-till planters with precision upgrades; use of drone for planting cover crops; revise minimum standard for multi-species cover crop to include minimum seeding rate for broadleaf species; and prioritize multi-species cover crops.
- The REAP program is overprescribed and vastly successful, with \$13 million in available credits each year for a total of \$140 million in credits benefiting roughly 3,500 farmers.

### **Dirt and Gravel Low Volume Roads Program**

- Winter workshops continue every Thursday, eleven workshops have been conducted with seven more to go.
- First Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QAQC) was just completed last week with 18 more to come - all of which are scheduled.
- Five-year delegation agreements were approved by commission and are getting form approval by OGC and will get out to districts shortly. Hoping for quick turnaround
- Getting ready for the new allocations which will be presented to the commission in May. Allocations should be consistent with current FY.

### **Miscellaneous Updates**

- Conservation District Fund Allocation Program (CDFAP) line remains at increased level in the Governor's proposed FY 23/24 budget. All other program areas related to the SCC are secure in the proposed budget.
- The Agri-Link Low Interest Loan program for conservation practices subsidized five loans so far this year, totaling \$961,700.
- SCC received word that \$4 million is being awarded from EPA as part of the Most Effective Basin (MEB) Infrastructure funding. Commission will decide how funds are spent. Ideas include a potential increase to the Conservation Excellence Grant (CEG) program and/or a soil health and regenerative farm program, per Sustainable Ag Act (below).
- The Sustainable Agriculture Act has been in existence since 2001. It would enable the commission to appoint a board and award grants for sustainable ag practices, including cover crops, no-till, precision conservation, other "regenerative ag" practices that benefit soil health, improve water quality, and help farms build resiliency against extreme weather events.
- The USDA-EPA task force for crediting BMPs has been appointed, with PA's representatives including Frank Schneider, SCC, Kate Bresaw, DEP, Nick Hepfl, HRG, Gordon Hoover, Lancaster Farmland Trust, and Bill Beam, farmer.

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- Clean Water Procurement program guideline public comment period ended. The program, provided under Clean Streams Fund, empowers PennVEST to directly buy verified sediment or nutrient reductions that count towards meeting Chesapeake Bay TMDL goals.
- Commission staff will take part in a regional National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) meeting this spring, with focus on Lake Erie and water quality in the Great Lakes Region.
- Commission staff joined Minnesota and Indiana in presenting on a nationwide webinar conducted by American Farmland Trust, related to conservation programs and soil health, on March 13, 2023.
- Commission staff are finalizing (through PDA) the administration's priorities for the 2023 federal Farm Bill, with emphasis on programs under the Conservation Title.
- Department of Agriculture Spotted Lanternfly funding is available to conservation districts, with a deadline of April 7 to apply. [Pennsylvania Bulletin \(pacodeandbulletin.gov\)](https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov)