

AgWG Meeting Notes

May 10. 2012

Chesapeake Bay Program Office

AgWG

- Minutes; VA moved, Chris seconded-approved
- Suggestion to post last meeting minutes w/ meeting attachments for review and approval
- Verification Principles
 - review of draft principles
 - moving through process of partnership discussion w/ MB and PSC
 - requesting first draft of sector protocols in mid-June for feedback and discuss w/ MB/PSC
 - December timeframe for potential approval of principles and protocols by partnership
 - Winter of 2012-2013 expand communication w/ larger Bay community

AgWG

- Verification process headed under the WQGIT w/ the BMP Verification Steering Committee
 - Early June MB meeting for principles review and approval for PSC
 - September to formalize the verification elements
 - Verification Expert Panel assisting with review process along with the partnership- provide advise and direction
 - Membership recommendations open for WG's to propose to WQGIT- May 25th due to Rich
 - Experts in verification to include wider expertise- governmental, NGO, trading markets
 - Opportunities for briefings w/ WG and partnership

AgWG

- Verification cont. #1
 - Determine level of rigor- sector specific approaches but need to maintain equality of rigor
 - Approach for new implementation as well as historical data currently being utilized in the models
 - Review of current principles from Steering Committee
 - Suggestion to replace credit w/ a modeling term to prevent comparison to NT
 - Verification applies to both annual and structural practices from this point forward
 - Voluntary practices pre-2006 can be rolled into next model calibration
 - Non-standard BMPs would be coming back to the WG for review and approval; can we address these?

AgWG

- Verification cont. #2
 - Changes in the sector can affect the baseline that may not be reflected as quickly in the Ag Census data
 - effective and defensible verification; a difficult task
- Verification #3
 - Establishing a baseline and periodic confirmation
- Verification #4
 - Right balance of implementation and verification applications for resources
- Capture in preamble to build off of existing verification processes in programs; recommended by Bill A.
 - Work from existing structure rather than a new top down approach
 - Differences between states and programs and make adjustments rather than create whole new processes

AgWG

- Verification panel will be providing advise and direction on ensuring that equality
 - VA noted that NEIEN requires a QA/QC project plan that should cover this need- documentation included into larger scope verification plan for review and approval by panel and partnership
- NACD
 - Highlights of the May 1 meeting of partners
 - CEAP scale of data for second survey expected to be at a HUC-8 level and may be imputed to HUC-12- important scale change from last time
 - Report due in fall of 2012
 - Concern with data confidentiality at new scale- aggregation data
 - Concern by New York of limit of farmers time to complete surveys by multiple entities- CEAP could hamper local efforts w/o coordination- seen in New York

AgWG

- NACD cont.
 - Innovative remote sensing potentials such as MD cover crop assessments
 - DE not considering approaches due to existing data
 - Post baseline approaches
 - Spot checks or self-certification
 - Practices
 - Range from all practices to subsets based on targeting
 - Most are agronomic, buffers, fencing
 - Very few structural
 - Functional Equivalents
 - Seeking consistent approaches to determine

AgWG

- NACD cont.
 - Substandard practices
 - how to approach them varied- either bring up to standards or seek separate effectiveness values
- Costs
 - Wide variation of costs by approach
 - Information by per acre; should costs also include livestock numbers vs. only per acre
 - ensure that costs reflect total costs and not just wages of staff
- Time
 - 1 to 2 hours for initial on-farm survey and ½ hour for verifier w/ Howard County
 - Data entry takes 1 hour/farm, large farms could take days

AgWG

- NACD cont.
 - Staff resources
 - Different approaches by states
 - Data collection
 - Protected data for MD, VA, DE, CEAP
 - Non-protected data for PA, WV
 - Question on meaning of the term baseline- what is the current level of implementation and from there check through other means to sample data- need to consider renaming to another term such as tracking of current progress
 - Benefits of trained staff for assisting farmer with needs more than just assessment

AgWG

- NACD cont.
 - Concern with confidentiality of data for voluntary practices as already concerns on cost shared data- NT accounting is a separate verification protocol
- State Perspectives
 - Virginia
 - Priority of NRCS spec BMPs
 - FE needs to be considered for other BMPs- waiting for EPA to define what FE means by BMP to report- EPA recommends AgWG work with partnership to define
 - Established data system for years- concerned that new one-size fits all protocols could negatively impact- do no harm

AgWG

- MD
 - Variability of practices- verification needs to reflect BMP
 - Workload is already full for existing staff- need to train private sector/third-party to implement
 - accountability through multi-level of verification process based on BMP type- spot checks
 - Farm by farm assessments- non-cost share assessments are voluntary
- DE
 - Cost effectiveness of obtaining new BMPs- not for DE
 - How can receive credit in the models- other BMPs outside permitted operations do not obtain sufficient credit to make cost effective of limited resources
 - Apply resources to what results in most gain for the model

AgWG

- WV
 - Same issues as already noted
 - FOIA protection may hamper assessments w/ farmers
 - Funding issue – only one state staff person conducting assessments- plan to hire another position and use existing NMP staff to assist but not enough
 - Need to develop a standardized data spreadsheet for collection of data- NRCS spec vs. FE vs. partial credit

AgWG

- PA
 - Cost effectiveness of process- 40K farms, 4M acres, considerable resources required to go to all
 - Not enough staff and funding to support large scale verification
 - State regulations and permitted operations is focus for implementation
 - Model credit important to focusing of efforts
 - Cost share vs. non-cost share BMPs- have been verifying C/S data since 1985 but non-cost shared needs a different approach- not the same
 - Differences between structural vs. annual BMPs- different verification standards for either
 - Issue with FOIA protection of data

AgWG

- PA cont.
 - Majority of funding goes towards technical staff
 - Conducting transect survey for lower Bay watershed for tillage data- CTIC Plus for annual practice assessment
- New York
 - USC sole collectors of Ag data- NEIEN data
 - Ag Environmental Management Program- 5 tier approach w/ on-farm assessment at 2nd tier w/ worksheets
 - Level 1 exceeds NRCS standards and level 4 needs attention
 - Demonstrate the level of practices and management over time w/ GIS data points
 - Data protected by state law- not yet challenged
 - High labor- on 95% of farms in watershed

AgWG

- New York cont.
 - Funding supported by federal and state- considerable resources to support
 - Reflective of New York conditions- concerned that model does not represent local conditions- need to work with CBP on for future
 - Need to involve other partners such as NRCS to ensure data is consistent- information is available from partners but not in the state database
 - Reassess farms every three years as goal, potential w/ funding- not currently implementing at this time
 - Non-cost shared practices and annual management practices can be captured- more work needed
 - AEMP assessment is voluntary except for CAFO operations- required to receive any state/federal C/S funding
 - Benefits realized by farmers varies widely from none to considerable
 - Can convert AEMP level ratings to BMP effectiveness?- not considered in the program setup but can demonstrate risk of water quality impacts from management system

AgWG

- CBC
 - States should make known their needs to improve verification- staff, technologies, data collection- to the CBC for assistance
 - What is the role of CBC in this effort- EPA sees CBC as a partner in the process along with other federal entities
- Dana
 - C/S data in models has been verified- concerned with other forms of data collection such as surveys with the quality of the data
 - Variation in the understanding of definition of BMPs- found wide variations amongst landowners
- WS
 - Agree with variation of understandings
 - Need to create a year 1 baseline with qualified personnel
 - Can use surveys in out years w/ farmer based on baseline
 - Implement an improvement plan along w/ assessment
 - Provide quantitative estimate of compliance w/ loads- more confidence w/ reductions vs. baseline

AgWG

- WS cont.
 - Reassessments being done and all but 2 have implemented a fair portion of their improvement plan over 2-3 years
 - Concerns on double-counting is an issue between multiple programs
- MASWCD
 - Farm Stewardship assessments being done w/ voluntary participation for certification- encourage them to use the MD NTT tool, 36 farms assessed thus far in total
 - Non-governmental process for certification
 - Potential of assessments be counted towards baseline of NT programs- database of software could incorporate the TMDL and allow transition for NT- expand database to allow for non-Bay model practices
 - Comment by PA that Bay model reflects a lump parameter scale and not farm or field level scale
- Fred
 - Importance to improve the model and measure the implementation of WIPs and the TMDL- one component, need clear definitions of practices

AgWG

- Fred cont.
 - Issues with differences in scale and areas of the watershed raised- each practice some minimum criteria or definition is needed to be accepted into the models Bay wide
 - Mechanism for evaluation or measure to what extent a practice has been implemented and impacts- all using the same effectiveness values that may or may not be realized

-

AgWG

- Verification Concept
 - Discussion of potential options for approaches
 - C/S practices likely have sufficient verification now, may need to consider improvements where needed (plans vs. structural)
 - C/S no longer under contract will need consideration for verification to continue to report to models
 - Non-C/S not under contract and will need consideration for verification to report
 - Same level of expectations should be made for any BMP reported for credit in the models- PA does not support this premise
 - VA likes approach which will allow a state to implement multiple approaches at one time depending on the practice, and allows other states to make their own decision
 - EPA likes the ability to allow a diversity of approaches and varies the credit associated- difficult aspect is to develop the values that can be defensible

AgWG

- Verification Concept cont.
 - How to assign confidence values- discussed using existing survey results as a reference
 - Suggestion that the verification panel could assist with the reference data- correlate with local examples
 - CEAP 1 is an example of 95% confidence
 - VA feels digestion of concept needs to be done by the states with their staff to fully comment on the concept
 - Need to include the verification discussions in the BMP panels to consider if the effectiveness values need to be adjusted for improved confidence in data
 - PA feels likewise that states need to discuss the concept
 - Recommend that AgWG reconvene on this issue after the states can provide their comments

AgWG

- Verification Concept cont.
 - Have states identify their options for approaches and associated practices prior to June 14th AgWG meeting
 - AgWG will meet on June 14th to review state responses and modify concept approaches where needed
 - Consider development of confidence levels based on which approaches are identified
 - Add another column on concept for credit values beyond confidence levels
 - AgWG will send out request to states that will pertain to request and timeline for response- first draft summary of approach (1st fuzzy)

AgWG

- Chesapeake Commons
 - Presentation and consideration of options
 - EPA requested workgroup consider this data privacy issue for June 14th