

AgWG Meeting

Draft Summary Notes

June 14, 2012

AgWG

- Meeting Minutes: Approved
- MDA Poultry Litter Calculations: handout
 - Requested the MDA work directly with the AgWG's Poultry Litter Subcommittee to review
 - MDA will work with the PLS
- BMP Verification Process
 - Overview of process
 - PA recognizes the need to track and report non-cost shared BMPs; limitations in state resources to implement an extensive verification method
 - PA is currently implementing several approaches to track and verify this information

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- AFT: a complicated diverse approach is being discussed, can we narrow the diversity of approaches?- it is the purpose of the AgWG to determine the bandwidth of approaches
- EPA: the Verification Steering Committee has been developing principles for guidance in this process for the sector workgroups; this information should be used to assist the workgroup in the process
- VA: resources are limited and VA has a QAPP in place that has been approved for a 5 year duration by EPA; VA recommends to utilize the QAPP until modified
- CBC: what does the quality insurance program entail; does it address all of the issues with verification?
- VA: each state QAPP is different; PS and NPS data
- PA: also has a QAPP for PS and NPS data for cost share practices
- EPA: QAPP can be used to reflect portions of the verification process, but would need to be modified to reflect

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- AFT: the value factor of knowing what is still left on the landscape to do; this affects funds and resources
- EPA: it is a state decision to track and report non-cost share practices; some states feel there is more to count and others like DE do not
- PA: we need to count for model calculations and it is cost effective up to a point: Tillage survey example; wish to reflect actual conditions on the landscape for the benefit of the ag community
- NGO: most of the discussion is based on tracking and reporting vs. verification process

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- State Comments
- VA: the state has an approved QAPP and will implement it for verification; have identified areas for improvement such as in cover crops and CNT implementation reporting
- CS program is investing considerable resources in tracking reporting implementation; additional resources have been invested to upgrade the system in the past year- information is reliable
- Understand that some operators have not implemented their practices correctly and are implementing measures to account for this and correct it
- Non-CS project w/ CD's resulted in limited results- only 50% of operators allowed the CD's on the farm; found practices that are not up to the definitions as well as previously counted practices- did not locate significant non-CS practices that met the definitions
- EPA: what is VA considering to use for tracking Non-CS practices?
- VA: is discussing how to approach non-CS practices that do not meet NRCS standards w/ NRCS

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- VA: discussing potential use of farm audits or similar method to resolve non-compliance issues with CS practices; undetermined
- Differences in management levels between dairy operations; some are implementing the requirements and seeking to do more
- WSI: how where CD's selected?- they were selected by state
- WSI: would functional equivalent BMPs be beneficial?- do not know if this would be a significant gain
- NGO: how were BMPs determined if they did not meet standards?
– looking at benefits of the management system implemented by the operator vs. the physical attributes with BMPs such as stream exclusion
- VA: see a need to improve the level of BMP standards knowledge amongst operators and CD staff; diversity of knowledge
- NGO: GIS tracking? – the GIS tracking is much improved for the structural BMPs but the tillage and annual practices are not tracked as well; implementing GIS center pts. for the tracking of these field practices and accounting for overlaps this summer

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- MD: is not planning to change from what has been piloted and tested for verification, and incorporated into the WIPs
- Non-CS or functional equivalent BMPS approach has been developed through several pilots; will plan to implement this method for the state
- Utilizing trained staff from CD's and private consultants to assess operations; verified by trained CD staff using a QAQC process
- Spot checks showing 80% compliance and 20% issues to address
- Statewide training program for verifiers and state CD staff moving forward
- Results are just now coming in for farmer funded assessments in Baltimore Co.- a lot of what-ifs
- What is the length of time the BMPs are valid is still to be determined for some BMPs while others such as Cons. Plans are
- The historic data is an issue and may be harder to resolve than the non-CS data; lack of detailed GIS knowledge of where these practices exist in the counties for past information

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- MD: historic data issues may ring true for most of BMPS except for associated with animal waste management systems; feel that the state has verified these systems with CD staff multiple times
- longevity of the BMP data is to be resolved yet as the assessments are expensive
- Satellite imagery may also be employed in the future to assist with the verification of the data; beginning to develop for cover crops
- Baseline data for the models is critical for accepting verified data; if the data is collected via an accepted verification process- it will need to be accepted by the models
- AFT: is trading involved in the pilots?- yes
- NGO: self certification being used?- see this as being used for status updates in between baseline assessments
- PI: what has been the reaction by the ag community?- have seen a positive response and only two operators have refused to participate

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- MD: the approach to operators by the pilot staff is key
- AFT: sees benefits to operators through a possible trading option is important to provide value back to the operators
- MD: a question exists if the assessment data can be extrapolated to larger areas and accepted
- DE: representatives not available on the phone
- WV: presentation materials
- A voluntary approach to document value of ag non-CS implementation; one position only at this time
- Seeking to develop a database that would be useful for NEIEN reporting
- Farm-by-Farm assessment is being implemented as most confident in the data obtained- dates of implementation obtained by operator since do not have the ability to access NRCS data for the project
- Have started process of reviewing NRCS files to locate and identify the AWMS BMPs through the Cons. Agency and not the DoA

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- WV: finding that CS practices are meeting the NRCS standards, however the non-CS BMPs may not be but should be considered as functional equivalents in the models
- WIP goals do not include the non-CS data so could exceed the TMDL goals if functional equivalents are accepted- could met TMDL goals early if accepted
- Developed reference book to assist in communicating BMPs to operators by staff
- EPA: historic data cleanup is critical to insure adequate capacity in the models to accept new data; important for the AgWG to determine recommendation for functional equivalents
- *WV: do not have the staff to re-verify the verification data being obtained by the staff; already trained and should be accepted as is without re-verification*
- PA: handouts and presentation
- PA: currently implementing the CTIC model with additional aspects to track and report tillage transect survey in 15 counties; first round has been completed and currently implementing QAQC
- PA hopes that obtained data is acceptable based on prior coordination work with the CBPO

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- PA: prior CD pilots indicated that significant non-CS BMPs on the landscape
- Functional equivalent acceptance is critical
- Limited resources are an issue
- BMPs- on farm assessment
 - Pasture management
 - Forest buffers
 - Boots on the ground should be 100% or close for acceptance; expensive
 - Understand that self-certification should have a lower acceptance level
 - Did not understand differences between third party and industry representative
 - See similarities with DMR data from WWTP's

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- PA: the survey method acceptance levels should reflect the CTIC values for tillage transects
- Annual practices should be represented separately from engineered practices in the accepted methods and levels of acceptance
- Recognize the historic data is an issue that needs to be addressed; baseline data needs to be addressed as well since this may influence
- PA has regulatory requirements on all farms in PA
- AFT: acknowledges that by adding additional verification factors to a method there is the ability to improve on a acceptance level; should be reflect in the matrix
- MDA: good job by WV and PA on their review and comments; hope that verification expert panel would include experts on survey verification
- WV: what is the farmer engagement on the survey?- survey is a roadside assessment without contacting the operator
- Cost is approximately 4 cents/A

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- PA: has folia law in PA which requires most data to be disclosed
- WV: is using USDA-FSA maps to collect data and is protected by Farm Bill
- WV: future of rechecks?- addressing survey GIS pts, land uses at pts, maintain pts and have additional ones to continue into the future
- NY: concerned with communications phone link
- Interested in including non-CS BMPS in verification process; influences w/ USC by PA counties as well (Bradford)
- Conducting on-farm assessments as part of state programs- voluntary AEM program
- Process is good at capturing structural BMPs with farms participating in AEM; see a need to capture more practice such as annual and non-structural
- Frequency of contact with operators involved in CS programs is better than those who are not
- 1st tier is the baseline information from operator, 2nd tier is the on-farm assessment – 1 exceeds standards, 2 meets standards, 3 is a NRCS standard equivalent, 4 is not meeting any standard

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- NY: need to develop standard verification protocols for all partners in the state; especially for non-structural annual practices
- Emphasis on training as the factor to the qualification of the individual doing the assessment; do not see a difference in the background of the individual; i.e. third party vs. industry representative
- Include a frequency category should be included for each method
- On-line management tool with a practice lifespan for each practice needs to be developed in NY to assist
- Employ a variety of methods to achieve verification to use limited resources
- On farm assessments are both positive and negative in benefits; farmer time to participate and limited staff resources
- USC paid to develop an on-line management tool for CD's to use and will be available to all counties in NY; relevant to CDs that are outside of the C Bay; rolling it out soon- replacing a CD by CD survey of data method used now
- Trying to clearly define information w/ CD staff through extensive training of staff; hope to utilize for next NEIEN reporting period
- PA: cost of assessments? – not that we are aware of that existing at USC

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- NY: state funding w/ AEM can be used for multiple purposes by CD's, so do not have an accurate /A rate
- The AEM assessment is a 5-8 hour event and could apply CD staff costs to that time; plus the office time to enter data into system
- DE: not available
- Summary of discussions:
 - A diversity of approaches will be needed
 - Difficulty will be in assigning the acceptance values- last item we will fill in with assistance from experts
- EPA: have mixed options on matrix method; concern with external groups weighing in on the final recommendations- how do we communicate with them during the process to prevent concerns, need to build into the process
- ATF: agrees that the acceptance values need to be developed w/ science background
- MDA: sees benefit of having a separate identification of confident in the reported data as reported; and a identification of the effectiveness values

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- Acceptance values approaches
 - EPA does not recommend adjusting effectiveness values vs. number of A's/units accepted
 - PA sees opportunity for considering both approaches to determine the best option
- Luncheon
- DE representatives not available
- Partner Comments
- AFT: need to determine costs as part of the protocol discussion; benefit to include other sector approaches in the discussion-coordination; approaches appear similar to inspire confidence and equality
- CBC: public groups/environmental groups need to be a part of the discussion; consistent across the sectors and states to ensure equality
- EPA sees that some states might take a more rigorous approach than others

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- PI: is the perception that Ag is the primary source of reductions? – Chris does not feel that Ag is viewed as the only source of reductions
- AFT: recommends that appropriate costs are reflected on the matrix-cost/A or unit costs to illustrate the public costs to implement verification
- NGO: cost for BMPs verification varies; annual vs. structural costs
- PI: costs of implementation and resources by states; could hinder the ag community efforts in specific states
- AFT:
- MD: verification begins with the WIP and the costs; should not limit the discussions based on costs and allow all methods to be considered by the states
- MD: consider how many times you will need to approach the operator and the time of the year; timing of assessments is important which may cause limitations
- DE: most items are counted and do not see a need to account for non-CS practices
- WSI: is there a need for better accounting for other data such as tillage? – DE will do some verification as needed but limited resources vs. relative benefits

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- CBC:
 - Frequency and time factor accounted
 - Assessment standards vs. method
 - Alternative to on-farm assessment for verification after the initial assessment
 - Online tool for verification added to matrix
- DE: frequency differs by method so may need a three dimensional approach to the matrix
- EPA suggests focusing on initial verification and include a separate description on the frequency needs to simplify the matrix
- NGO: Measuring WIP Progress includes:(1) plan development by cert. planners (2) plan implementation by operator, (3) plan implementation verification and evaluation by Gov. agencies, (4) reporting effectively implemented BMPs; need to focus on confidence of implementation
- NGO: protocol should guide states in the development of standard BMPs implementation reporting forms, and training operators to complete and submit implementation reporting forms to respective Gov. agency. Followed by onsite visit for verification and evaluation to improve the level of confidence
- NGO: Improved data collection and data base systems to ensure confidence of data quality and reporting of data to CBPO

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- VA: if someone is receiving CS assistance, could potentially use opportunity to assess BMPs that have dropped out of the contractual data systems
- MD: if the BMP is implemented as part of the CS system is different than non-CS; no requirements for non-CS BMP reporting
- Matrix Review
 - AFT moves; VA NRCS seconds
 - EPA wishes to have confidence levels are completed
 - EPA asks that AgWG provides level guidance but does not need to provide actual numbers
 - MD asks if this is consistent for other sectors, will have a better knowledge of this next week
 - Majority approval vote but PA votes no
- AFT requests that other sectors utilize a similar framework as the AgWG is considering for clear and equal rigor
- VA believes that rigor should be obtained but that other sectors may have
- VA motions that the chair communicate with the other sector workgroups to ensure consistency, the same level of rigor; and offer to share the AgWG approach with other workgroups
 - PA seconds
 - All voted in the positive

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- Matrix
 - Categories:
 - VA should accept if verified by trained personnel-combine categories
 - EPA believes that being clear in the categories is important, may all have the same confidence levels
 - NGO suggests that including all methods is important, there are potential differences in the quality of the data or add more QAQC to support certainty
 - AFT sees different cost factors with the methods
 - WSI sees as well different costs; some may have different approaches to me quality
 - WV concern with independent third party with access to FSA maps and privacy of the data collected
 - PA sees differences between programs such as CBP vs. Trading
 - EPA sees this as inventory assessment method for naming the category and noting the options for out years

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- Matrix
 - PA concerned with on-farm inventory-recommend to use On-Farm Assessment vs. inventory
 - CBC asks if this is a total assessment? –could be all or some BMP assessment
 - Self Assessment for second three rows
 - Self assessment with 5-10% spot checks provides higher level of confidence-govt./third party
 - Pa recommends single Record Review category
 - EPA concerned with office records review that assesses implemented vs. planned BMPs- some BMPs are planned such Cons. Plan that have a specific lifespan (i.e. 10yrs.)
 - MD suggests spot checks for compliance checks
 - Review of records that does not have an on the ground assessment; can be accomplished at the office
 - Transects for certain BMPs, determine interval of points for quality of data – rename Statistical Survey for category?
 - MD suggests transect survey, CEAP/NRI, Aerial Imagery, NASS (multiple types of surveys)

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- Matrix
 - PA sees benefit of keeping NASS on the list
 - AFT would like to see open options in each category to allow diversity and values
 - EPA concerned that too many option will lead to complicated matrix
 - Relative values/costs to implement- units or acres?
 - MD suggest to take out relative benefit column
 - Relative cost column should reflect total verification costs
 - On-Farm Assessment- all high costs
 - Self-Assessment- medium (#4) to low
 - Record Review- medium
 - Statistical Survey- transects are low cost
 - CEAP/NRI- high cost
 - NASS- medium
 - Areal imagery – medium 1.75 to 3.22

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- Matrix
 - Data Reliability rename? Confidence? Rigor?
 - On-Farm 1- #5
 - 2-#5
 - 3-#4
 - Self Assessment- 1 #4-5
 - 2- #2 annual, #4 structural
 - 3- (5-10% spot check)# 3
 - 4- #2 annual, #3
 - Office Records- #4
 - On-Farm1-#3-4
 - On Farm 2- #3-4
 - On Farm 3- #3-4
 - Transect- #1-4
 - Statistical Survey # range
 - Imagery- # wide range
 - Adjourn 3:30