

# 2024 EQIP LOCAL WORKGROUP – TEAMS MEETING

September 25, 2023, Grantsville Library, Grantsville, MD

In attendance at the live meeting at Grantsville Library – Chad Bucklew, Kara Neilson, Slater Hafer, Adam Heavner, Carl Robinette, Adam Miller, Seth Metheny, Craig Zimmermann, Ben Harris, Amanda Paul, and Jeannie Frazee.

In attendance online – Jacob Metcalf, Mona Lee, William Gindlesberger, Steve Young, Reid Boden, Dave Myerberg, and Sarah Llewellyn.

The meeting started at 3:01 p.m. Chad Bucklew updated everyone about staff members in both Allegany County and Garrett County for NRCS, MDA, and FSA.

## **Purpose:**

The purpose of the meeting is to open a discussion to provide input for Farm Bill program delivery. There will not be any voting. Information obtained during the meeting must go to the State Technical Committee by October 6.

During the meeting we hope to determine local resource needs and important proposals for the general plan and order of services.

For FY23, the TEAMS allocation was \$458,767. With the extra allocation from leftover funds from other districts, it brought the total to \$1.134 million. Funded were:

- 3 Livestock (1 Allegany County \$320K, 2 Garrett County \$643K)
- 4 Grazing (1 Allegany County \$54K, 3 Garrett County \$63K)
- 4 Cropland (4 Garrett County \$50K)

## **Funding:**

**ACEP, ALE, WRE** - In addition to EQIP, we have some funding for **Land Easements**. We only have 2 currently. We do few of these.

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** – The focus on this program is enhancements. We have had 18 contracts since 2010 for an approximate \$400,000 contract value. There will be an increased emphasis on CSP in the future. Two-thirds of the contracts for CSP are in Allegany County. This is a pot of money that we have not tapped into as much as we should. We need to focus on Conservation Plans because without a good Conservation Plan, CSP is not possible. Typically, at least one fundamental project does need to be completed first before adding CSP.

**Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)** – For conservation planning. This funds staffing for resource assessments.

**CRP and CREP** - We are in the process of getting a new Farm Bill. Chad Bucklew stated that he has heard that CRP and CREP may not be included in the new bill. This Farm Bill expires September 30, 2023. We use CREP substantially for Riparian Buffers, both grass-legumes and wooded. Often, we cost share with MACS.

**EQIP** – Our primary funding source over the last 15 years. With the last Farm Bill, EQIP has totaled 11 or 12 million in the State of Maryland the last couple years. For our area, that has equated to over a million in funding during that period.

Chad Bucklew showed the group a graphic of funding. We are lagging a little when the State goes up in funding. This is because of the time it has taken to complete the plans in the past. With more staff and funding, we should be able to complete things more quickly.

## **Program Background**

**IRA – Inflation Reduction Act Funding.** Will give Maryland EQIP a baseline of 12 million dollars annually with the additional IRA funds. 2024 – 21 million dollars, 2025 – 28 million dollars, 2026 – 30 million dollars. There will be a 45 million dollar increase statewide over the next three years with IRA funding.

Congress is sending the money to address conservation resource concerns through the voluntary process. If all the money is not used, it will go to regulatory agencies to provide funding to create compliance through regulation.

Moving forward, for our area, funding is not an object. There is no TEAMS allocation process this year because it is expected that every project that is approved can be funded. We don't need to spend much time ranking because there is no competition for funding.

For 2023, the Allegany/Garrett TEAM was 10% of the Maryland total. (\$1.6 million). With added IRA funds, 10% of the Maryland total would be as follows:

- 2024 – \$21.3 million state (\$2.1 million our area)
- 2025 - \$28 million state (\$2.8 million our area)
- 2026 - \$30 million state (\$3.0 million our area)
- \$3.1 million with additional / \$7 million over 3 years

## **ACT NOW**

ACT NOW is a new approach for ranking. There needs to be a certain amount of resource concern. If it reaches the minimum ranking score, it will allow NRCS to immediately approve a ranked application. We will no longer have to wait for applications to be reviewed and pre-approved in a ranking pool. We can have applications obligated within a month of the date received. ACT NOW will be our process of funding until March 2024. A Fund Audit occurs at that time in each state. After the audit, ACT NOW could be continued or there could be a new funding process.

**FY24 EQIP ACT NOW will be utilized for the following ranking pools:**

- IRA
- Cropland (high tunnels)
- Grazing (fence, water)  
Livestock (heavy use, manure storage, fencing, dry stack, lane wear)
- Urban Ag
- Oyster Restoration
- Beginning Farmer (less than 10 yrs or new generation)
- Socially Disadvantaged
- Wildlife (habitat)
- Forestland
- On Farm Energy (reducing energy consumption – pilot program for 2023)
- CPA-DIA-CEMA (Nutrient Management Plan, Forest Stewardship Plan, outside consultant work)

This will cover most of our projects.

**Projects for Allegany/Garrett TEAMS right now:**

Livestock – G1 - \$450,000; G2 - \$400,000; G3 - \$350,000; G4 - \$300,000

Grazing – G1 - \$100,000; G2 - \$100,000; G3 - \$50,000; A1 - \$25,000; A2 - \$25,000

Cropland – (High Tunnels) – 8 HT \$80,000

With the current Farm Bill, there is a maximum of \$450,000 per applicant.

There are a couple projects over \$100K in Forestry and Wildlife. Many projects take a year or two to develop.

**Maple Syrup**

With ACT NOW, we can commit to contracts for energy audits for Maple Syrup production. It would pay for outside consultants to calculate energy costs for a producer's current system. If we complete the contracts and the audits this fall, which will tell us what needs done for improvement of the operation, then we can contract to help the producers get the equipment in the spring. We have an estimated \$300K for Maple Syrup Energy Audits and Improvements.

We have been putting contracts together late in the year. ACT NOW hopes to have the process accelerated. Traditionally, we have been short of our goals. Hopefully, ACT NOW will help us get ahead.

**Today we need:**

1. Input on local resource needs
2. Feedback on prioritization of applications

3. Spreadsheet – Answer the questions presented on the spreadsheet

Please email responses to Chad by noon on Thursday, September 28, due to the possibility of a shutdown. The goal is to submit early because NRCS may be on furlough starting October 1. There is a link to the questions on the email that Chad sent out.

All IRA Funding is geared toward climate smart agricultural practices. It does not include 313 Ag Waste Storage or 561 Heavy Use Protection Areas as core practices. Our strategy going forward is to use Prescribed Grazing or Nutrient Management, which are core practices, to get these areas funded.

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**The Group Picks for the Live Meeting were as follows:**

- Field, Sediment, Nutrient & Pathogen Loss
- Insufficient Energy Use
- Livestock Production Limitation
- Pest Pressure
- Degraded Plantings

Land Use Priorities:

1. Livestock
2. Grazing
3. Forestry
4. Cropland

Ranking of EQIP Categories according to local workgroup needs:

1. Livestock
2. Grazing
3. Forestry
4. Cropland
5. Wildlife
6. Urban
7. Air Quality
8. Oysters

- ❖ ACT NOW Mechanism – Keep It
- ❖ Fund Pools Consolidation into Categories – Neutral
- ❖ AMA/EQIP Sign Up Combined (We get \$300,000 to \$500,000 for high tunnels and water) – Needs Improvement

- ❖ Early Sign Up/Prior to Mid-December – Keep It
- ❖ Multi-application Sign Up Period – Fund more later – Keep It
- ❖ Term Fund Pools – Neutral

Submit answers to essay questions to Chad Bucklew.

The online meeting ended at 3:57 pm due to restrictions with Google Meets.

Amanda Paul commented that they gave such a short amount of time to set the meeting and let everyone know that not everyone knew about the meeting today.

Carl Robinette asked about Prescribed Grazing and CSP. CSP would generate more money for the farmer than Prescribed Grazing, but it takes diligence on the part of a landowner. Chad Bucklew explained that CSP is conceptual rather than concrete. It involves things like mowing hay fields from the center out to protect wildlife.

The live meeting ended at 4:13 p.m.