**Local Work Group Meeting Notes**

**NRCS Report**

* Cost share ratio - Usually provide up to 70% to 80% of the total cost of everything but with inflation, as of now it’s closer to 60%.
* Underserved categories - social disadvantaged. Minorities, new/beginning farmer,
* Funding is based on resource concerns
* Application turnaround - Applications are accepted year around, October starts the new fiscal year
* Funding Pools
  + General funding pools – crop, forest, energy, pasture, animal waste, planning
  + Local funding pool – long leaf pine initiative: those in the right geographic area with an eligible application are almost always approved.

NRCS PROGRAMS

* EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Program) is an incentive program designed to encourage people to implement good conservation practices like stacking sheds and cover crops
* CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program) – 5-year contract to encourage stewardship
* CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) – through FSA, 10-year contract
* CEP (Conservation Easement Program) – a partnership program, wetlands reserve program

NRCS 2021 Expenditure Report

* 2021 EQIP funding for Lexington: 21 contracts
* Total EQIP funding allocate to Lexington: $784,356.05
* **Top Funding Categories** 
  1. Poultry/Animal Waste – 4 contracts, $267,152
     + there are a lot of chicken houses in Lexington County, the waste is stored in stacking sheds.
     + 2 Main Concerns of Animal Operations**:** Litter/manure that is produced and the animals that die
     + if this is just left on the ground it can get into the ground water, surface water and produce an unpleasant smell
  2. On-Farm Energy – 3 contracts, $195,229
  3. Long Leaf Pine – 6 contracts, $160,488.05
* **Other Funded Categories:** 
  + Pasture – 2 contracts, $65, 689
  + Crops – 1 contract, $51,962
  + Socially Disadvantaged – 1 contract, $24,358
  + Energy Plans – 2 contracts, $ 14,950
  + New & Beginning Farmer – 1 contract, $2, 281
  + Planning – 1 contract, $2, 247

**Local Work Group Process**

* The Farm Bill governs how the USDA agencies run, it’s a 5-year Bill, the next one will be discussed in 2023
  + dictates that every county has a Local Work Group meeting every year, conservation is supposed to be locally led
* LWG have to meet and be attended by stakeholders and farmers, the feedback is then given to NRCS where it is used to decided what should be funded
* Local conservation districtsand NCPP (National Conservation Planning Partnership) have been working to reinvigorate the LWG process

**Resource Concerns Discussion**

Pasture

1. Management
   * Rotational grazing, grazing plans – warm weather and cool weather plans, farmers will have to buy less feed
   * Appropriate number of animals per area
   * Compaction
   * Access to water
2. Fencing
   * Rebuilding fencing, Cross fencing for grazing management
   * Deer/hog fencing
   * NRCS doesn’t pay for perimeter fencing
3. Vegetation health
   * Denuded areas – feed/water areas

Cropland

1. Soil Health
   * Different soil types/land uses/needs across county
   * Programs or plants put in place that will benefit the piedmont will be ineffective in the sandhills
2. Erosion
   * protection of crop soil, cover crops, water usage, flood areas
3. Water quality/quantity/irrigation efficiency
4. Additional Concerns
   * Loss of cropland due to conversion to urban use – solar farms
     + No definitive data on the long effects of solar farming on the land and ground water, or safe disposal methods for panels no longer in use
     + Hard to talk someone out of using the land for solar panels when they can make 10x as much per acre compared to using the land for crops
   * Deer/hog fencing
   * Input costs

Forest

1. Plant Productivity
   * Tree planting initiatives need more flexibility with tree species selection where longleaf is not ideal.
   * Hard to get funding to get Loblolly established. There have been some changes in CRP so there is some more availability for Loblolly but those who plant Longleaf are automatically funding while those who chose Loblolly are put into the pool with everyone else in the state that’s doing forestry that’s not Longleaf.
2. Forest Health
   * Invasive species and pests
   * Deer eating/tearing up saplings
3. Land conversion

Animal Waste/Poultry

1. Waste collection and containment
   * Surface water contamination/protection
2. Water Quality – ground water contamination
3. Erosion
4. Additional Concerns
   * Access to manure as fertilizer, prohibitive regulations on composting,
     + Composting goes hand in hand with mortality; dead animals are either burned or buried.
     + Composting if done properly reduces what goes into the landfills, there is not enough landfill space as is
     + Composting is an advantage for farmers, because it’s way for them the utilize the crop waste or litter for their own land or sell it.
     + GA and NC do not have such prohibitive composting regulations

* Oder
* Land application – permitting; runoff, loading areas, access roads
  + Energy efficiency

CPS

* Carbon sequestration (non-longleaf)

New Farm Bill

* Forestation for temperature control and air quality
* Fragmentation/inheritance /land preservation
* Wildlife – feral hogs, deer
* Agricultural and environmental education