

Ag Water Quality Partnership Forum

Meeting Notes

Meeting 2: September 22, 2015, Springfield, IL

Summary

Outreach and Education

- Jennifer Tirey presentation: Ag partners have a robust implementation program which includes 11 roadshow meetings and 7 community college demonstration plots. They are moving away from “awareness” to “action”. CBMP recently hired an association management firm (Frontline Communications) to ensure Outreach and Education continues.
- Gaps include absentee landowners – especially females. It is anticipated that absentee landowners could have excellent BMP acceptance because they are interested in preserving the land for their children and grandchildren. There are 2 categories of absentee landowners: those with farm managers and those without. Farm Managers are a way to transfer BMP information for the former category. A sample lease that includes BMPs could be provided for the latter category.

BMP Tracking

- Warren Goetsch presentation: The AWQPF Tech Subgroup met on Aug 26, 2015. At that meeting, John Lawrence presented Iowa’s Measures of Success Committee process which includes a logic model. The Tech Subgroup decided to adapt this model to Illinois and scheduled a call on Sep 21, 2015 to populate 3 tables. From this conversation, there is an opportunity for NASS survey to gather needed information. Also, they recommend 2011 as a baseline year. (The sources of data to track BMPs in the NLRs are found in the AWQPF Tech Subgroup Aug 26, 2015 conference call summary.)
- Similar to what the Nutrient Monitoring Council (NMC) did, the group looked at the NLRs Fig. 4.2 Priority Watershed map to select watersheds that include existing and future BMPs. This will help the NMC determine where more monitoring is needed. The intent is for the Illinois EPA to be prepared to report to the USEPA. The following watersheds were discussed:
 - L. Springfield*
 - L. Decatur*
 - L. Bloomington
 - Vermilion River (Indian Creek + Vermilion headwaters)
 - N. Fork Vermilion (L. Vermilion)**
 - L. Mauvaise Terre (Jacksonville)
 - Kaskaskia R.
 - Lower Illinois R.

* also named by the NMC ** nearby an NMC-named watershed

Cost sharing and targeting

Shawn Wilcockson, IEPA, was introduced. He is tasked with putting together a working list of producers/landowners to implement strategy. He circulated a list of implementation projects.

Next Steps

- Future possible agenda topic: education for women land owners.
- Invite ag partners to Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (ISPFMRA)'s meeting to present nutrient information.
- Create resources for absentee landowners that don't have farm managers. Determine where these resources will be housed. [Do this either at next meeting, at Ag partner call, or both.]
- Review key conservation programs spreadsheet handed out at the meeting and send comments to Shawn Wilcockson. Discuss in more detail at next meeting.
- IWRC to make a map that shows AWQPF watersheds that overlap with NMC's watersheds and share with both groups. Discuss in more detail at next meeting.

Present at meeting:

Official Representatives or designated representative:

Michael Baise, American Farmland Trust

Randal Fransen, Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (ISPFMRA)

Tom Kelley, IL CCA Board

Dan Schaefer, Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association

Kelly Thompson, AISWCD

Maria Lemke, The Nature Conservancy

Kim Martin (for Sherry Giamanco), FSA

Lauren Lurkins, Illinois Farm Bureau

Jennifer Tirey, IPPA

Eric Gerth, NRCS

Amy Roady, ISA

George Czapar, University of Illinois Extension

Steve Chard (for Philip Nelson), IDA

Warren Goetsch, IDA

Marcia Willhite (for Lisa Bonnett), IEPA

Attendees:

Shawn Wilcockson, IEPA

Amy Walkenbach, IEPA

Trevor Sample, IEPA

Katie Mai, IEPA

Chuck Cawley, IDA

Maggie Soliz, Applied Ecological Services;

Liz Hobart, Growmark

Facilitating: Brian Miller, IWRC; Eliana Brown, IWRC; Katie Hollenbeck, IWRC

BRIAN MILLER: First I would like to remind you about the INLRS. We developed the strategy, it went out for public comment, in Nov-Jan, public comments were incorporated, and the strategy final copy was released in July. It is currently online.

MARCIA WILLHITE: It lives on IEPA website. We can send the link out. It shows the implementation process, but also shows the development process.

ELIANA BROWN: (Shows website): <http://www.epa.illinois.gov/topics/water-quality/watershed-management/excess-nutrients/nutrient-loss-reduction-strategy/index>

If you scroll down you can see all of the committees and meeting dates.

BRIAN MILLER: The committee charge: charged with 1. Steer education and outreach efforts to implement strategy, 2. Track BMP implementation, 3. Coordinate cost sharing and targeting, and develop other tools as needed. Outreach and education – agricultural partners have done a great job developing a program to reach youth in summer road shows. Since last meeting, a lot of road shows. So we have asked Jennifer Tirey to give an update on what has taken place since then.

Outreach and Education

JENNIFER TIREY: As a member of the IL Council on BMP. Several groups make up the CBMP. We assist and encourage adoption of BMPs. KIC, Keep it for the Crop program. Goals – information, awareness, participation, demonstration. The Cover Crop Training Initiative is to provide training education and outreach. We have several specialists. We also have demonstration projects in attempts to do multi-BMPs for a learning opportunity. Demonstration plots in Lincoln Land, Trivoli, Peoria Co., Illinois Central College-cover crop training grant and cover crop herbicide trials. 7 community college plots total. In addition to demonstration projects, we are working to get water testing kits, Water Testing Open House events for farmers to bring in water samples. Collaborations - Vermilion county water sampling project, American Farmland Trust. N-Watch is another component of NREC grant.

DAN SCHAEFER: N-Watch looks at nitrogen application to see how long to go from ammonia to nitrate. It's a descriptive program of what the transformation of nitrogen is in the soil. N tracking program is knowing rates of nitrogen and monitoring dynamics at a field knowing what is going on in the soil.

JENNIFER TIREY: For sentinel site program, you can watch the dynamics of plant-available N.

DAN SCHAEFER: There are 50 N-rate trials in watersheds. We are starting to bring the harvest in. We are looking at fall and spring applications and nitrogen response on those farms. We will continue the process through IFCA and look closer at split application. There will also be an N tracking site. Farmers don't get paid until they get the yield information and do a 2 page survey on what they are thinking and what they are seeing.

JENNIFER TIREY: For the Lake Springfield watershed nutrient management project, the 1st year we were happy with outcome, but for this year we really want to get those producers involved. It is very important and timely because there is funding. There is quite a bit of activity but we can always use more. We are starting the third year. The bus tour brought in new faces. Roadshow Meetings did a

media campaign (print, radio, and online). We talked about town hall meetings, brought in new faces at meetings, had local people come, made connections with local farm bureau representatives, etc. Promotional results had 1,100 attendees from 11 roadshow meetings, and Tele Town Touches reached 93,000. 90% have tried nutrient management, 50% have done so for over 10 years. Over 70% that attended will try a new practice or a combination. CBMP – IL Farm Bureau, IL Corn Growers Assoc., IL Soybean Assoc., IL Pork Producers Assoc., IL Fertilizer and Chemical Assoc., Syngenta, GROWMARK, Monsanto. CBMP hired Frontline Communications (Association Management Firm) to ensure the message continues.

AMY ROADY: IL Soybean Assoc. is continuing to engage and incorporate conversation of different things for people to implement on their own time. It's not just discussion.

LAUREN LURKINS: IL Farm Bureau is incorporating lengthy policy development. We are moving away from the strategy to action and that feeds into policy development.

AMY ROADY: Communications are exploring how the message resonates best. The question is how to keep communication going.

BRIAN MILLER: The tagline is "What's your Strategy?"

MARCIA WILLHITE: The message is out there, but proof is in the implementation. The agriculture groups have done a remarkable job.

BRIAN MILLER: What are some outreach and education gaps? We wanted to reach out to absentee land owners (through farm managers). How do you get them engaged and how do they learn? What are action items we might do? Women's circles are a gap that we won't get to today. Do you have ongoing activities that are addressing this audience?

MICHAEL BAISE: The challenge for us is how do you find absentee land owners without going to the courthouse? It's a labor intensive activity. In Indiana, there is database that tells where the parcel is located and where they reside. I'm not aware of anything like this in Illinois where you can look at property ownership.

RANDY FRANSEN: We have strong record of a push for conservation.

BRIAN MILLER: So here is an action item - have agriculture partner speakers.

RANDY FRANSEN: We are always looking for good programming for the management side of our industry. Continuing education requirements for management and dynamic speakers makes a lot of sense. We have 120 members attend. Every manager has 50-60 land owners.

WARREN GOETSCH: An average member manages 10,000-15,000 acres. How accepting do you think absentee land owners is to the adoption of BMPs?

RANDY FRANSEN: Excellent acceptance based on farm preservation. They are highly adaptive and very curious. Yes, we are trying to make money on that farm, but also preserve it for children and

grandchildren. There has been terracing on farm because farm managers have suggested and land owners have done it, even though it takes a few years.

MICHAEL BAISE: I don't think they are necessarily interested in getting top dollar, but the asset itself, or the quality of the asset itself is where the interest is. They want to leave the land better than where they found it.

RANDY FRANSEN: We do have a newsletter that goes out as well.

WARREN GOETSCH: Does extension do programming?

RANDY FRANSEN: We have speakers, we have classwork, we have ethics training but it is geared towards appraisal.

JENNIFER TIREY: Do land managers do leases?

RANDY FRANSEN: Yes, land managers sign leases on behalf of farm managers.

AMY ROADY: What are other benefits of practices that farmers can adopt? Habitat, water, etc.?

JENNIFER TIREY: I was thinking small soil tests.

RANDY FRANSEN: I would challenge anyone to find a professionally managed farm that hadn't had a soil test within the last 4 years.

LAUREN LURKINS: Lease templates can come up with additional things.

BRIAN MILLER: Some farms have farm managers in the loop and other absentee land owners do not have a farm manager in the loop.

BRIAN MILLER: Does extension do training for absentee landowners?

GEORGE CZAPAR: Nothing that is really organized.

MICHAEL BAISE: There's a group called Chicago Farmers. Their interest is communicating about farmland, etc. so they would be interesting to reach out to. It would be interesting to find out about demographics.

WARREN GOETSCH: What poses the biggest challenge? 1. Convincing the absentee land owner, or 2. Convincing the operator.

RANDY FRANSEN: If the land owner wants to employ conservation on the farm, there is a good chance that will happen. And the land owner finds out about conservation through education!

BRIAN MILLER: So the question is how did land owner who doesn't have farm manager get educated?

RANDY FRANSEN: Miles of buffer strips doesn't show immediate economic payback. Decisions are made through economics. They learn about programs by being in touch with local resource people. Farmers are relied on heavily as resource people.

AMY ROADY: Survey to find out where to get info. Local contact first – NRCS local branch, etc.

BRIAN MILLER: What about crop advisors?

TOM KELLEY: To my knowledge, none are absentee land owners.

AWQPF Tech Subcommittee Update

BRIAN MILLER: The other charge to committee was to track BMP implementation so we formed a tech subgroup. So Warren will give us an update.

WARREN GOETSCH: You see the tech subgroup's charge on the PowerPoint. Part of the strategy is every other year to communicate activities to the USEPA. We'll try to show all the incredible work being done and somehow be able to document and report back. How might we track implementation parameters? John Lawrence came to our first meeting and did a nice job of showing us how Iowa looks at outcome vs. outputs. We might not see documentable water quality outcomes immediately that demonstrate that we are making progress even though we are. The Iowa model shows the idea of human inputs to land to water. To get water quality improvement, you might have to change ideas first. The ultimate is results in water quality improvement. Survey work can measure people's feelings about things. We then came up with tables and filled them in.

BRIAN MILLER: We came up with a tech subcommittee. We had homework and a conference call to go over it. The outcome is shown on the screen. This one is Land Measures. The left side is BMP practices within the strategy. The first 5 are fertilizer reduction strategies. The existing NASS survey can provide a lot of data and IFCA might be able to too.

WARREN GOETSCH: It is an ongoing effort. We need to come up with the best survey possible and then target one or more of the priority watersheds or go statewide and then we need to come up with a funding source.

MARCIA WILLHITE: What is the cost range?

WARREN GOETSCH: \$25,000 or less for statewide estimates. For a HUC 8, 10x that probably.

JENNIFER TIREY: Where will the money be sent and if it is federal or state, will the information be FOIAable?

LAUREN LURKINS: What about partners?

WARREN GOETSCH: The partner can make a direct payment to NASS.

MARCIA WILLHITE: Is there a level of consensus on the survey?

WARREN GOETSCH: Do we want to make inferences on priority areas or statewide? You'd have to have 400-500 responses for whatever unit it is.

BRIAN MILLER: If all you want is a statewide average, you only need 450 responses, but for a HUC level, you need 450 multiplied by 8 or 10 or so.

MARCIA WILLHITE: We need to know specificity.

JENNIFER TIREY: We should keep in mind that multiple years equal multiple years of funding. Better to start simple and sustain it.

WARREN GOETSCH: They were doing both, statewide and two of the sub areas. And every other year, they would repeat and show a new sub area. We would repeat within 2 years and can do statewide and do something below that as well.

MICHAEL BAISE: What are you surveying?

BRIAN MILLER: Adoption of practices. What is the adoption rate of these practices now and after we implement, has the adoption rates of practices gone up?

WARREN GOETSCH: We can depend on existing databases and tie them back to what we want to pursue. For some others, we don't have in NRCS or FSA database, so NASS would give us a better idea.

MICHAEL BAISE: Cover crop adoption goes up and down. Sometimes it works and other times, it doesn't.

LAUREN LURKINS: Depends on weather patterns.

MICHAEL BAISE: And price of commodities...demand for land.

MARCIA WILLHITE: Every state gets to figure it out for themselves, the way of telling the story, if we want to put efforts into so this is the story that we are telling. Right now, our information is fragmented. We cannot tell a complete story in a particular watershed or statewide.

MICHAEL BAISE: Do we have a timeline for implementation?

MARCIA WILLHITE: The strategy articulates an ultimate goal. We want to set a goal of percentages 10 years from now.

BRIAN MILLER: There are two classes of ways of getting data. There isn't a hard data source. For cover crops, FSA and NASS survey will add questions about tile drainage For other things like wetlands and bioreactors and buffers, its cost sharing and can be captured by FSA and IDNR. Adding survey questions will give additional information. What are answers to questions that we cannot get otherwise should that be added to NASS?

WARREN GOETSCH: FSA data, not that you cost share the practice, you will report as a part of.

RANDY FRANSEN: CSP can't cost share actual enhancements.

MICHAEL BAISE: How geographically specific can you track fertilizer sales?

LAUREN LURKINS: SSI shows timing and type of product within watershed a little bit more refined based on software.

JENNIFER TIREY: Delivery vs. billing based on the year.

LAUREN LURKINS: Are we talking about a standalone or existing survey?

WARREN GOETSCH: Standalone.

LAUREN LURKINS: We want to tell the best story.

AMY ROADY: Look at producer survey responses to make sure the right people are filling it out.

JENNIFER TIREY: We all have to agree on who we want to ask and what we want to ask.

WARREN GOETSCH: After a period of time, we did a reassessment and led us to look at nitrogen and phosphorus. It is an important addition that was made! After a decade, consider the possibility of the science assessment to bring into one comprehensive report. You want some level of load reduction you can document along with water quality improvements as well.

BRIAN MILLER: On the PowerPoint is the baseline year list. We have to have a baseline year. What are our starting conditions? The Policy Working Group met a month ago and is shooting for 2011 for a baseline year plus or minus a year or two depending on what data was available. Frequency and timing of data was reviewed and the year 2011 plus or minus a year or two depending on data set availability was determined to be an acceptable practice. That is the recommendation. It's important because where do we start counting?

LAUREN LURKINS: Why 2011?

MARCIA WILLHITE: Thought from Policy Working Group was that the last year the science assessment of current conditions was 2011. So begin our implementation we have 2011.

GEORGE CZAPAR: Why not average a few years?

MARCIA WILLHITE: That's another option. Not necessarily helpful to have a range in some situations.

BRIAN MILLER: Some practices accumulate over year so it makes averages tough for the accumulation practices.

Coordinate Cost Share and Targeting – Brian Miller

BRIAN MILLER: The NMC has a job to measure what it is that we are actually measuring in the water. When that group met, they determined it was difficult to focus on all at the same time. They want to be in the same watersheds that the BMPs are going in. So what are the 5-6 watersheds that you would want to focus on? For this group, where are you focusing your BMP implementation with producers, etc.

JENNIFER TIREY: Springfield, Decatur, Bloomington.

AMY ROADY: Southern and western Illinois.

JENNIFER TIREY: Indian Creek, Lake Vermillion.

ERIC GERTH: Danville.

LAUREN LURKINS: Lake Vermillion is the supply in Danville – North Fork Vermillion.

LAUREN LURKINS: Vermillion River/Indian Creek – Vermillion headwaters.

JENNIFER TIREY: Lake Mauvaise Terre.

AMY ROADY: Kaskaskia.

MICHAEL BAISE: Jacksonville (Mauvaise Terre).

ERIC GERTH: Lower Illinois River - Clear Creek.

MICHAEL BAISE: AFT is working in the Upper Macoupin Creek watershed and has an invited RCPP proposal to the NRCS to employ conservation cropping system BMPs to improve water quality. IL NRCS is also considering it for residual MRBI funds.

BRIAN MILLER: The Nutrient Monitoring Council trying to cover agricultural watersheds and urban watersheds.

ERIC GERTH: MRBI but no longer being funded. Crow Creek and Clear creek over Marshall Putnam County.

GEORGE CZAPAR: Overlay 8 superstations on next maps and include priority watersheds.

Coordinate cost share and targeting - Shawn Wilcockson

AW: Shawn is on contract with agency to implement strategy to create implementation framework. Shawn knows issues and acronyms.

SHAWN WILCOCKSON: I'm tasked with where to direct attention to put together a working list of producers/landowners to implement strategy. Now we have interest, where are we going to guide landowners? (SW handed out a spreadsheet of key conservation programs available in Illinois.)

JENNIFER TIREY: How far will this list be shared?

SHAWN WILCOCKSON: Among the group, to help document and tell a better story.

RANDY FRANSEN: Sent electronically?

SHAWN WILCOCKSON: Yes. Here are the tools in the toolbox, where are they available? Do you see anything off the bat that was missed?

LAUREN LURKINS: I only see state level? Are you interested in seeing other level?

SHAWN WILCOCKSON: Definitely. Where is that effort, where is outreach taking place, where is the BMP happening?

LAUREN LURKINS: Break it out like a directory. Like one living document. Our people can benefit from that.

SHAWN WILCOCKSON: These are grant cycles. With the farm bill, MRBI, larger initiative, that type of delivery system is more beneficial there. This document was more to facilitate conversation. These programs may overlap or work independently. NGRECC is putting together handout, but it is more statewide.

BRIAN MILLER: So send comments on this to you Shawn?

SHAWN WILCOCKSON: Yes. My task on this was to compile known programs in the toolbox.

ELIANA BROWN: We are setting up the next meetings for a whole year based on a query for you to let me know when your standing meetings are.

BRIAN MILLER: Thank you!