

## Richland County NRCS Local Work Group Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 25, 2016

Clemson Sandhill REC Lakehouse

Present: John Fogle, Chanda Cooper, Carol Roberts, Marc Cribb, Mike Newman, Brandon DuRant, Quinton Epps, Kenny Mullis, Stephen Nix, Mel Jenkins, Charles Davis, Mark Huguley, and Charlie Fisher

Kenny Mullis, RSWCD Chair, explained the purpose of the meeting is to gather information to identify resource concerns in Richland County. This meeting will enable NRCS to help Richland County by prioritizing the pertinent environmental issues including soil erosion, water quality, and animal health concerns.

### Cropland

Charles Davis explained a lot was learned from the 2016 historical rainfall/flood event. Richland County is fairly flat, so drainage and erosion problems are a major concern. Drainage ditches need to be cleaned out and trees removed in order for water to drain off faster. Brandon asked if cover crops would be a good solution. Charles said this would be a good practice for NRCS to cost share since farmers are faced with higher production cost and cannot easily see the value in planting cover crops. It takes time to establish a cover crop and a farmer planting cotton and peanuts would not be able to plant the cover crop until November; it would be hard to establish a crop so late in the year. Changing the mind- set of a farmer is difficult; education is important so farmers will understand the benefits a cover crop can offer. Farmers are also faced with hot temperatures and high humidity here in the Southeast, both of which are the enemy of organic matter.

Brandon led the discussion on fertility and nutrient management. The group discussed variable rate fertilization for nutrient management, which allows for site specific crop management, but in reality there is a lag time between ramping up and down. A better option is grass waterways and terraces for improved water quality. Field grass buffers are important because they stop runoff.

Stephen Nix spoke on behalf of small, diversified and specialty crop growers; the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association offers resources for this audience, including the writing of EQIP Conservation Activity Plans and the provision of one-on-one high tunnel consulting. Two big issues faced by this audience include the storage and marketing of organic grains and the creation of value-added processing facilities. Water availability, wells, and irrigation concern farmers also.

Mike Newman pointed out the NRCS cost share list is out of line with actual cost of materials. Brandon explained the list is regional with several states involved in the pricing. The group recommended raising this issue with the State Conservationist.

In summation the resource priorities for croplands are:

1. Soil Quality
2. Soil Erosion/Buffers
3. Water Quality
4. Wildlife

### Pastures

Climate change, urban encroachment, water runoff, and grass varieties that will hold up to livestock traffic started the discussion. Horses were identified as major contributors to soil and water issues in Richland County. Group members agreed that pond siltation caused by livestock is often more of a concern for farmers than water quality. Grazing management education is needed, and is being provided by the SC Grazing Lands Coalition.

John Fogle, Mel Jenkins, and Mark Huguley spoke up in concern over urban encroachment and its resulting effects on stormwater runoff and downstream flooding and environmental degradation. Inadequate stormwater management structures in developing areas are problematic, and more frequent flooding events are predicted in future due to climate change. Quinton Epps pointed out the legacy effect from past solutions have evolved into environmental problems for today. It is extremely difficult to update problematic laws and regulations; it can take years to make a positive change within government. Several in the group felt like agencies are not farmer friendly and are reluctant to share information, especially with each other.

The group discussed the need to recruit and support a new generation of farmers. Farmland access is a big hurdle for new and beginning farmers to overcome.

Summations for Pastureland resource concerns:

1. Plant Health
2. Water Quality
3. Animal Health

### Forestland

Many farmers have taken their land out of their CRP contract (agreement to take the land out of production for 10 Years) and put the land back into production harvesting the timber on those lands. Reforestation is sorely needed! In the past, fire has played a role in woodlands and is an important factor in healthy forest management. The use of prescribed burning in managing agricultural lands is a common practice; however, this practice has fallen to the wayside due to concerns over litigation. The wild hog issue was discussed and is a national problem. Several group members agreed on the need for stronger reforestation and forest management plans in subdivisions in Richland County.

Summation for Forestland resource concerns:

1. Reforestation
2. Plant Health
3. Water Quality
4. Invasive Species

Brandon explained this data will be submitted to the State NRCS Office. The data will then be compiled to determine the ranking system NRCS will use for its programs.

Submitted by  
Charlie Fisher  
RSWCD Administrative Assistant