AGRICULTURE COST SHARE PROGRAM

Technical Review Committee

September 3, 2026 – Meeting Minutes

Attendees

TRC Members: John Beck (Chair), Erin Rivers, Abubakarr Mansaray, Alex Jones, Anne Coan, Dewitt Hardee, Brandon King, Rick McSwain, Benjy Strope, Elliot Swain, Elton Wilson, Jamie Bridges, Pete Anderson, Levi Preston (alternate for Rachel Smith)

Guests: Tim Baumgartner, Josh Vetter, Dalton Buchanan, Julie Henshaw, Keith Larick, Lisa Fine, Shelby Kaplan, Sam Allbee, Lorien Deaton, Barbara Bleiweiss, Nicole Warren, Allie Dinwiddie, Aaron Franks, Amy Cook, Porche Spence, Gail Hughes, Frankie Singleton, Darren Layton, Michael Shepherd, Jessica Wilson, John Morrow, Joe Trimnal, Paige Henderson, Caleb Lippard, Brandi Talton, Annette Adams, Shannon Biddy, Daniel McClellan, Christopher Bordeaux, Mikey Woodie, Cole Smith, Steven Ward, Thomas Muphrey, Zachary Hatcher, Lindsay Edwards, Angie Quinn, Jim Burns, Charles Bass III, Bill Thomas, Starr Silvis, Demico Guy, Jane Humphrey, Leanna Staton, James Warner, Payton Roberts, and staff from Wilkes, Lincoln, Davie and Alleghany districts

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Agenda Summary

- Welcome & Introductions
- Biochar BMP Update (Action Item)
- Biochar Cost List Items (Action Item)
- Member Items & Closing Discussion

Meeting Overview

- Biochar BMP Policy Revisions Approved
  TRC adopted final revisions clarifying water-quality purpose, nutrient-management triggers, prohibited feedstocks, testing requirements, and field-specific 590 guidance; unanimous approval.

- Biochar Cost List Adopted
  Committee approved the volumetric (cubic-yard-based) cost structure, including the $160/CY rate and proportional blend and small-area rates; unanimous approval.

Meeting Proceedings

1) Welcome and Introductions

Chair John Beck called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM and confirmed a quorum. He acknowledged the large attendance and emphasized the importance of finalizing the Biochar BMP revisions and cost list recommendations.

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2) Review and Approval of August Meeting Minutes

John Beck held the August meeting minutes for review in October.

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3) Biochar BMP Policy Update

Josh Vetter summarized revisions made since the previous meeting, including:

- Removing direct reference to NRCS CPS 336 for the Soil Carbon Amendment Plan; replacing with a Division-specific plan.
- Adding requirements that all biochar samples be tested by NCDA&CS Waste and Compost Analysis Lab prior to application.
- Clarifying when a nutrient management plan meeting NRCS CPS 590 is required. The new criteria require a 590 plan only for fields receiving biochar, and only when:
  1. The amendment is derived wholly or partly from animal manure feedstock;
  2. Plant-available nutrients in the amendment exceed one-year crop uptake;
  3. Pre-application soil test shows a phosphorus index ≥ 400.
- Removal of language that previously could imply whole-farm nutrient management planning.
- Clarification that all biochar—certified or not—must meet Table 3 testing requirements, and that prohibited feedstocks cannot be used, even if found in sealed or certified materials.

Discussion Points

- Field-specific 590 requirement: Multiple members (Coan, Hardee) stressed ensuring policy language clearly limits 590 plans to the specific field where biochar is applied. Revisions were accepted to clarify this.
- Water quality justification: Members requested strengthening language in the definition section so that soil health benefits are explicitly tied to water quality improvements, consistent with statute.
- Purpose & scope: Questions were raised regarding planning for soil health under ACSP; Vetter and Beck clarified that improvements to soil health directly relate to water quality via infiltration, erosion reduction, nutrient retention, and other mechanisms. Conservation planners may plan activities for soil health, but any contracting of this BMP must demonstrate a water quality benefit.
- Prohibited feedstocks & certification: The discontinuation of the IBI seal (April 2024) means Table 3 testing is now effectively the only active pathway for eligibility. Any material containing prohibited feedstocks is ineligible, regardless of certification.
- Repeat applications: Permitted only when supported by updated testing and documentation showing a need for additional resource-concern-focused application.
- Water-quality data and NC soils: USDA-ARS has conducted relevant research on NC coastal plain and Helene-impacted soils. Additional statewide soil response data is expected through the AMP grant.

Motion

Motion to approve the revised Biochar BMP as presented (with clarified language on water quality, field-specific 590 requirements, and reordered utilization bullets):

- Motion: Dewitt Hardee
- Second: Benjy Strope
- Vote: Unanimous, motion passed.

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4) Biochar Cost List Recommendations

Cost List Presentation – Dalton Buchanan

Buchanan presented detailed supplier data (9 respondents), ARS-supported density conversions, and rationale for moving from per-acre to cubic yard pricing. Key findings:

- Biochar moisture variability makes ton-based pricing unreliable.
- Market is bimodal:

    - Lower band: ~$66–$83 per CY
    - Upper band (including NC producers): ~$200–$250 per CY
- Weighted average (mean) supports a recommended unit rate of $160 per CY, with 75% cost share = $120 per CY.
- Small-area (<10,000 sq ft) rates reflect bagged product pricing, which is significantly higher.
- The market is still developing; future cost list revisions are expected as invoices accumulate.

Discussion

- Timeline for reconsidering rates: TRC members recommended revisiting pricing after one year of invoices to avoid unintended price-floor effects.
- Grant vs. ACSP timeline alignment: Clarification provided that AMP grants require faster implementation than ACSP contracts; this must be communicated to districts.
- Freight assumptions: Costs presented reflect delivered-to-site pricing statewide.
- Modeling & nutrient planning tools: RUSLE2 already supports biochar as an operation. NLEW/PLAT updates are forthcoming.

Motion

Motion to adopt the proposed FY27 Biochar Soil Carbon Amendment cost list additions at the rates presented:

- Motion: Anne Coan
- Second: Rick McSwain
- Vote: Unanimous, motion passed.

These cost items will be incorporated into the FY27 ACSP Cost List for Commission approval.

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5) Member Items

No additional items were raised.

Meeting Adjourned

- The meeting concluded at 2:20 PM.