



AGRICULTURE COST SHARE PROGRAM

Technical Review Committee

April 22, 2026 – Meeting Minutes



April 22, 2026 – Meeting Minutes

Attendees

TRC Members: John Beck, Benjy Strobe, Anne Coan, Rick McSwain, Starla Harwood, Rachel Smith, Dewitt Hardee, Rodney Wright, Abubakarr Mansaray, Erin Rivers, Jim Kjelgaard, Alex Jones, Pete Anderson.

Guests: David Williams, Bryan Evans, Teresa Furr, Julie Henshaw, Lorien Deaton, Samantha Allbee, Alexandra Dinwiddie, Shelby Kaplan, Michael Shepherd, Bill Moss, Reger Toledo, Porche Spence, Josh Vetter, Taryn Thompson, Lisa, Fine, Levi Preston, Robert Moore.

Agenda Summary

- Welcome and Introductions
- Approval of February Meeting Minutes
- Grassed Waterway Policy Update – Subsurface Drains and Wetland Guidance
- ACSP Maintenance Period Survey Results and Discussion
- Member Items

Decisions

- Approved the February 18, 2026, meeting minutes (with a minor grammatical correction to Item #4).
- Approved updates to the ACSP Grassed Waterway BMP policy to explicitly allow incorporation of subsurface drains (NRCS Practice Code 606) under specified conditions and adopt revised wetland compliance language.

Actions & Follow-ups

- Staff will compile committee comments and prepare maintenance period scenario options (e.g., mixed approach, reimplementation cap, practice specific changes) for a follow-up discussion. An interim May meeting may be scheduled prior to the June TRC meeting.
 - The approved revision to the Grassed Waterway BMP policy will be presented at the May Soil & Water Conservation Commission meeting.
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Meeting Proceedings

1) Welcome and Introductions

- Meeting called to order at **1:31 PM**; recording initiated. Chair **John Beck** previewed the agenda and noted time allocation for the survey results discussion.

2) Approval of February Meeting Minutes

- One grammatical correction (removal of a redundant word in Item #4) was accepted. Motion to approve by Benjy Strobe; seconded by Anne Coan; approved unanimously via voice vote.

3) Grassed Waterway Policy Update – Subsurface Drains & Wetland Guidance

- Background: The ACSP Grassed Waterway definition and policy have been under review to clarify when subsurface drains (NRCS 606) may be incorporated to improve vegetation establishment and waterway function.
- **Key policy elements presented (slides):**
 - Subsurface drains may be included where needed to address prolonged low flows, high water tables, or seepage conditions that hinder vegetation establishment/maintenance.
 - Design and installation must meet applicable Job Approval Authority (JAA) and NRCS standards, including references in the National Engineering Handbook (NEH 210-650-H); identify existing drain tile; animal guards required on all outlets.
 - Wetland compliance wording (April update): “Subsurface drainage systems may not be used to drain or convert wetlands and must comply with all applicable provisions of the Food Security Act (FSA). USDA participants are responsible for coordinating certification of compliance with the local Farm

Service Agency (FSA) to ensure all wetland related requirements are met before beginning any subsurface drainage work.”

- **Discussion highlights (transcript):**

- Clarified that AD-1026 certification is expected whenever drainage is installed, modified, or maintained, even when prior determinations exist; prior converted wetlands typically proceed via desk review unless scope & effect indicates expansion beyond prior systems.
- FSA process: AD-1026 filed at FSA; NRCS/Soil Scientist is alerted via the compliance system to review and determine whether field visit is needed; desk approvals occur when determinations are in place and no changes trigger additional review.
- Committee acknowledged potential timeline impacts where new determinations/field reviews are required, but framed AD-1026 as a participant protection (safety-net) to avoid Farm Bill compliance issues.

- **Motion & Vote:** Motion by Benjy Strope to adopt the updated wording and policy additions; second by Dewitt/Delmon Hardee; approved by voice vote.

4) ACSP Maintenance Period Survey Results and Discussion

- **Survey overview:** Presented by Samantha Allbee. 96 responses across 57 counties (65 district staff; 31 directors). Group and individual surveys captured perceived benefits, concerns, and options regarding maintenance periods for six BMPs: Critical Area Planting, Cropland Conversion to Grass, Diversion, Field Border, Filter Strip, Grassed Waterway.
- **Group themes:**
 - **Benefits:** Increased participation; reduced burden; shorter commitments fit reality (land ownership changes).
 - **Concerns:** Reduced long term environmental benefits; funding/efficiency; lower commitment/behavioral risk.
 - **Alternatives:** Tiered cost share/incentives; re-enrollment restrictions; more monitoring/spot checks.

- **Individual survey (selected findings):**
 - Overall sentiment: **~63.5%** favor moving **some BMPs to 5-year** (either select BMPs (37.5%) or 5-year with **10-year reimplementation cap** (26%)), vs. **~22.9%** favoring to **keep 10-year**.
 - Regional differences observed (Coastal Plain favoring 10 years; Mountains favoring 5-year with cap; Piedmont favoring 5 years on select BMPs).
 - By development context: Urban districts strongly favor 5-year; rural/transitioning more selective or capped approaches.
 - By BMP: **CAP, Filter Strip, Field Border**—majority support for 5-year; **Cropland Conversion, Grassed Waterway, Diversion**—majority support to retain 10-year given hydrologic/structural risk and longevity needs.

- **Committee discussion:**
 - **Local flexibility** is favored, but desire for statewide guardrails to protect conservation investments.
 - **Risk lens:** Concentrated flow practices (Grassed Waterway, Diversion) carry higher failure risk if maintenance lapses—could become sediment sources—suggesting caution about shortening periods for those BMPs. Vegetative BMPs take time to establish for water quality benefits to build.
 - **NSW Reporting:** Several water bodies in NC have nutrient-related impairments and reducing the maintenance period of vegetative practices (Cropland Conversion to Grass/Trees) may lessen the overall achievement of nutrient loss reductions at a watershed scale. Some vegetative practices are included in annual NSW reporting, and nitrogen and phosphorus loss-risk tracking methodologies for agriculture in these watersheds may need to take reduced maintenance periods into account. Agriculture in these watersheds must continue meeting required reductions of nitrogen loss or phosphorus loss risk or the sector could face additional regulations.
 - **Cost share considerations:** Suggestions for differential rates (e.g., incentivize 10-year or reduce rate for 5-year) noted, with reminder of statutory caps (75%, or 90% for qualifying applicants) that could limit certain incentive structures without rule changes.
 - **Contracting realities:** In rapidly developing areas with year-to-year leases, 10-year commitments can prevent good projects; discussion about

successor responsibility and whether contract language or compliance policy could better address ownership changes (e.g., repayment responsibility when land is sold). This topic will be sent to the Cost Share Committee for consideration.

- **Possible approaches:** Maintain status quo; adopt mixed approach (shorten for vegetative/diffuse flow BMPs, retain 10-year for engineered/hydrologic BMPs); adopt 5-year with 10-year reimplementation cap; or gather more data/analysis before final decision.
- **Next steps:** Staff will synthesize comments and develop 3–4 scenario options for an interim May discussion, so the TRC can provide direction prior to June DIP approvals.

5) Member Items

- No separate items outside the broader discussion.

Meeting Adjourned

- **3:33 PM.**