Today’s agenda

- Public Comments (10 mins)
- *Soil Health Programs: Five Case Studies of State Programs to Improve Soil Health*: Harry Huntley, Harry Hughes Center for AgroEcology (25 mins)
- *Review of Incentive Concepts for Maryland Healthy Soils Program*: Alisha Mulkey, MDA (30 mins)
- Roundtable (45 mins)
- Committee Announcements (5 mins)
Public Comment
Harry Huntley, Policy Research Specialist

Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology
Current Progress

- Hard and thoughtful work of deciding WHAT practices to incentivize as first priority
- Initial considerations included under Committee Options are both practice and programmatic in nature
  - Updated based on January-March discussions and debriefs
  - Circulated to all
- Now, discuss HOW to incentivize
- Take a step back to consider pieces as whole
- Agroforestry practices included today too
Important Reminders

- Farm sustainability, environmentally and economically, is positive for all
- Evolving program will be key contribution of ag sector towards state’s climate change goals (GGRA)
- Inclusive process design
- Mindful of:
  - Department’s capacity (staff and authority) to administer program
  - Funding
  - Producer interest and access
- Today’s goal is initial discussion among members, not final decisions
Options to discuss today

1. Traditional cost-share
2. Bundled practice cost-share
3. Conservation Buffer Initiative
4. Cover Crops
5. Equipment financing
6. State certification program
7. Technical Assistance support
8. Competitive grants
9. Small farm conservation
1. Traditional Cost-Share

- Use the expanded authority of the MACS Capital program to cost-share for practice adoption

Advantages:

- Well-defined program authority, capacity, and funding
- Widely recognized program
- Most priority practices already eligible for funding (excl. conservation tillage, NM, IPM, crop rotation)

Disadvantages:

- A la carte menu
- Funding is better suited for structural practices rather than annual practices
- Eligibility can limit small farm participation
2. Bundled Practice Cost-Share

- Establish 2-3 practice suite implemented over contract duration

- Advantages:
  - Custom bundles could better address soil health principles and be designed for operation size and type
  - Similar to federal programs (e.g. CSP)

- Disadvantages:
  - Could compete with federal programs and limit field eligibility
  - No current MDA program authority
  - No funding available, but competitive grant proposal - recent Million Acre Challenge award
3. Conservation Buffer Initiative

- Expand FY21 pilot program to address additional marginal lands with focus on saltwater impacted lands

- Advantages:
  - Broad applicability of NRCS’ Conservation Cover standard
  - Successful FY21 pilot for riparian buffers
  - Strong carbon sequestration potential and technical resources

- Disadvantages:
  - Limited geographic focus
  - May not address other marginal lands targeted through CREP
  - No current program authority for easements beyond agland preservation
4. Cover Crops

- Expand traditional program based on SHAC recommendations (mixes, planting season, etc.)

Advantages:
- Well-defined program authority, capacity, and funding
- Widely recognized program
- Annual program evaluation

Disadvantages:
- Set budget would require trade-offs among existing program incentives
- Program funding support closely tied to water quality (i.e., fall planting focus)
- Does not address smaller producers (< 5 acres) or non-fall planted covers
5. Equipment Financing

- Promote LILAC opportunity and/or expand Income Tax Subtraction of conservation equipment to include roller crimper, small operation equipment needs, etc.

- Advantages:
  - Administrative structure and authority are existing. Program eligibility can be modified
  - Addresses technical assistance
  - Complements existing equipment rental, equipment share programs

- Disadvantages:
  - None
6. State certification program

- Create branded farmer certification program to advance greater market opportunity (e.g. supply premiums) or other appealing outcomes (e.g. NM audits, priority program access, etc.)

- Advantages:
  - Innovative, holistic approach
  - Flexible
  - Existing evaluation tool - Nutrient Tracking Tool - being updated for carbon component

- Disadvantages:
  - Program design and drivers in earliest stages
  - Lacks financial incentive

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7. Technical Assistance support

- Build state’s Soil Health Management Plan (SHMP) capacity via Technical Service Provider network. The SHMP is enabling document for holistic mindset, inclusive of soil health evaluations

  - Advantages:
    - Can engage producers early to build soil health mindset (whole-farm decision making)
    - Increases technical assistance in the state
    - Flexible
    - Strong state coalition opportunity

  - Disadvantages:
    - Technical Service Provider certification is reliant on NRCS process and timing

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8. Competitive grants

- Create competitive grant program to fund practice adoption. Evaluation and ranking criteria could be developed with SHAC.

- Advantages:
  - Innovative, holistic opportunity
  - Selection criteria could include outcomes/performance achieved by practice implementation
  - Flexible
  - Could also employ Nutrient Tracking Tool or other metrics
  - Continued (potential) role for SHAC

- Disadvantages:
  - No funding, but competitive grant proposal or other state sources

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Compare to California’s Healthy Soils program
9. Small Farm conservation

- Establish dedicated assistance and protocol for small farm operations to complement existing programs

- Advantages:
  - Creates committed program for growing producer group
  - Flexible

- Disadvantages:
  - Less MDA experience and funding, but competitive grant proposal and viable state partners

Evaluation Metrics*

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Dawn Bradley,
Cover Crop Program Administrator

Maryland Department of Agriculture
Cover Crop Program
FY22
Change and highlights
Program Outline

- Incentives for early planting
  - $10/ac incentive for planting aerially into standing corn by September 10
  - $10/ac incentive for planting using incorporated method by October 10

- Continuing with Delayed Termination incentive
  - $10/ac to delay kill down until after May 1
  - Maximum 500 acres per application
New Program Changes FY22

- Base payment increased to $45/ac for all planting methods
- Aerial and Aerial ground continue to receive an additional $5 which will then bring them to $50/ac
- 2 new incentives
  - $10/ac incentive for planting rye or
  - $10/ac incentive for planting a multispecies cover crop
Roundtable Rules

- Today’s goal is initial discussion among members, not final decisions
  - Ultimately, collect SHAC member evaluations for each incentive option
  - Return to memos for recommendations within context of favored incentive options
- Preferences
- MDA willing to do the hard work!
- Jack of all trades, masters of none - how to balance a robust set of programs with focused energy
Roundtable  
45 minutes
Committee Announcements

5 minutes