

**Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI)
February Regional Teleconference Notes
March 30 (SE, SW) and 25 (NE, NW) 2020**

Participants

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CoVID-19 Partner Updates

NRCS: Only one NRCS staff person is permitted in an office at a time. Area offices can have 2 people in the office at a time, as long as staff are maintaining social distancing. Field visits are still being conducted. Also, other tasks such as collecting signatures and payments are being completed, all while keeping an acceptable social distance. All face-to-face meetings/trainings have been moved to teleconferences or canceled. NRCS continues to move forward with business as best as they can, but it is hard to do. Deadlines and workload have not changed.

Microsoft Teams has been used by some as a means to communicate/meet. MS Teams can be used to host a web meeting and face-to-face meeting and has been working fairly well. It has been used across state and federal agencies, although some but not all ISDA have been able to use it on their computers. If a person does not have MS Teams, they can access it through the website. It has not been tested with Extension.

The Anderson USDA Service Center is on level 3—the physical service center is closed and staff are self-quarantined. (Note – farmers and landowners can still access assistance through other means, including alternate service center locations) Johnson County also had an incident before guidance was given. If NRCS staff is quarantined because of the virus, staff will take administrative leave.

NRCS is receiving weekly update from Roger Kult.

Purdue Extension: Currently ANR Extension is having weekly updates. Each county office may be operating different, but most are teleworking. Some offices are restricting access to the public. On a positive note, outreach was winding down due to the upcoming planting season. Purdue has been reaching out more via social media, distance learning—many events have been delivered via webinars and Facebook live events. Everyone has had to get creative to get information out. There was a great article crafted by Curt Emmanuel, Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator from Boone County. It addresses the CoVID-19 issues of “critical infrastructure” and “essential businesses” as it relates to Food and Agriculture. (Attached)

One idea that has been discussed is to have Zoom meetings with educators as an opportunity to increase communication with local teams across counties. It would be an opportunity to talk more frequently locally.

It was noted that agriculture is an essential industry. There is a template available if farmers/ag professionals need letters. The INPREP website for Extension information for preparedness can be found at <https://extension.purdue.edu/INPREPared/>. Extension is encouraging farmers/producers to incorporate CoVID-19 recommendations into their operations. (i.e. communicate by phone/radio, don't ride in the same cab/vehicle, truck hood is about 6 ft across). Producers/farmers should follow similar guidance as small businesses. What's applicable to small businesses is also applicable to farmers.

One items that Extension is currently focusing on (with a lot of unknowns) is those who want to take the test for pesticide license. OISC has said people are not exempt.

The local educators have been encouraged to check with partners in their county to see how they can partner.

Purdue campus has a call center set up. Things are changing rapidly on campus and Mitch Daniels has been sending out videos with updates. Over 5000 courses have been moved to online in the past two weeks. They are still trying to figure out how research will continue and what critical research is.

SWCD: If, how and where SWCD staff are working varies county by county—some are furloughed, some are teleworking, some reporting to their office and some have not been given very clear direction. Many who are not working in their normal office must find workarounds to complete tasks.

LincPass stations are closed. If you have an expiring LincPass, work closely with your DC/NRCS staff to determine what you need to do to keep computer/network connection.

ISDA: It has been made clear that under no situations should districts be meeting with directors. They are encouraged to host teleconferences.

IDEM: About 95% of IDEM workforce are working from home. Field activities, including water monitoring, have been suspended until the staff are back to the office. IDEM plans on sending out solicitation for FY 21 Section 319 grants on April 1st by email and website. This is a target date and could change due to the current CoVID situation. IDEM is working on a website that will be a central location for work-from-home info for people who need permits, 319 grants, etc.

NACD: From a national perspective, there is a lot of stress and uncertainty. Districts operate very differently from state to state. Many are looking to USDA for guidance. NACD has a page dedicated to CoVID 19 (<https://www.nacdnetwork.org/covid-19/>). NACD is trying to operate as usual. NACD is continuing with technical assistance grants. The DC office is closed, but most already work from home. There is no travel permitted.

The Nature Conservancy: All TNC offices are closed and staff on working from home. This was originally considered for an 8-week period but may be revised.

Sheila and Jessica will work on compiling which SWCDs are working, where they are working, if they have temporary email/phone numbers, etc. DSS, IDEA directors may already have collected some of this information. It will be good to compile this information to get an idea of what's going on state-wide.

A few things to be cognizant of and/or consider when scheduling virtual meetings:

- Not everyone has home internet/bandwidth that is capable of video conferencing.
- Many will likely be "teleconferenced out"
- Send out PPT/documents ahead of web conference for those who are calling in a do not have the ability to share screens.
- Schedule at off peak times to avoid overloading circuits (i.e. 1:10 PM instead of 1:00 PM or 3:35 PM instead of 3:30 PM)

List of Resources/Websites from Partners:

- [ISDH: https://coronavirus.in.gov/2400.htm](https://coronavirus.in.gov/2400.htm)
 - [Purdue Extension: https://extension.purdue.edu/label/44](https://extension.purdue.edu/label/44)
 - [IDEM: https://www.in.gov/idem/7196.htm](https://www.in.gov/idem/7196.htm)
 - [USDA: https://www.farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://www.farmers.gov/coronavirus)
 - [ISDA: https://www.in.gov/isda/3555.htm](https://www.in.gov/isda/3555.htm)
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Partner support – Open discussion of what can be helpful as partners adjust – socially and mentally... not just work.

There is a great article by Scott Eblin shared by Stephanie McLain in the teleconference. The article can be found at <https://www.govexec.com/management/2020/03/crisis-leadership-playbook/164005/> . The article discussed how long-term planning has been thrown out the window. Now we need to look at things more in the line of 30 days out. What are the things we can do in the next two weeks? What are things we can start working / planning so that we can continue to have focus. The article also spoke to the importance of increasing communication, adding touch points so people don't feel isolated.

Now would be a great time to build relationship with local radio stations if you haven't already. Radio may be a great alternative to getting information out to the public. Some folks are already doing this.

Another great idea for post CoVID, is to work with local movie theater to get an add for cost-share and project promotion in front of the movie theater.

Work From Home Tips:

- Stay in a routine, not on a schedule...especially if you are working from home with kids.
- Be mindful of how many people are in a house needing to use internet (spouse, kids doing e-learning, etc.)
- Get up and take frequent walks

Core Cover Crops training postponement, potential

The April 15 and 16 Core Trainings are postponed. It is clear that these trainings are wanted and needed. The training committee is looking at new and/or revised ways to share that information. What does a training like that look like? Is it entirely remote? Is it hybrid? If restrictions are lifted, do we get together?

General consensus is to postpone and hold a face-to-face training. Having the in-person training is the preferred and most effective delivery method.

Other discussion:

- Trainings may not be the same in the future. Maybe we need to focus on what can be provided online.
- If we do video-based trainings, consider filming in smaller, 8-10-minute segments. This would have a better impact for both farmer outreach and trainings.

Things that we can use and would be helpful:

- GOOD side-by-side pictures (cover crop vs. no cover crop; tillage vs. no-till, etc.)
- Sites to pull samples for soil health demos. Healthy soil and unhealthy soil. If you are unsure as to if a site would be a good candidate, connect with Stephanie McLain (stephanie.mclain@usda.gov) or a member of the are soil health teams. If you have a good site to collect samples, contact Stephanie.

Other resources:

- Purdue Soil Health Education Website with videos and hands on activities
<https://www.asec.purdue.edu/soilhealth/>
- Cornell has several courses for free, including a soil health course.
- Extension has drones. Feel free to reach out to get some aerial imagery.
- Bill Field's CoVID-19 editorials
<https://extension.purdue.edu/INPREPared/editorials-about-covid-19-and-its-impact-on-production-agriculture/>