

Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI)
February Regional Teleconference Notes
Feb 24 (SE, SW) and 26 (NE, NW) 2020

Participants

Judi Brown, Dubois County SWCD Executive Director (SW)
Brandy Daggett, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist (NW)
Dan Davis, USDA-NRCS NE Resource Management Specialist (NE)
Don Donovan, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist (SW)
Darlene Fisher, Perry County SWCD Coordinator/Treasurer (SW)
Dana Gadeken, Purdue Extension ANR Educator (SW)
Kathleen Hagan, IDEM Watershed Specialist (SE)
Jessica Hoehn, CCSI Southern Program Manager (SE, SW)
Lisa Holscher, CCSI Director (all)
Amanda Kautz, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist
Kurt Lanzone, Purdue Extension ANR Educator (SW)
Sherm Leichty, USDA-NRCS NE Area Conservationist (NE)
Kim Peterson, Lake County SWCD Supervisor / IASWCD NNW Director (NW)
Marc Roberts, Montgomery SWCD Supervisor / IASWCD Treasurer (NW)
Joe Rorick, CCSI Conservation Agronomist (all)
Melissa Ruschau, Dubois County SWCD Project Technician (SW)
Lee Schnell, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist (SE)
Tim Schwipps, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist (SE)
Hans Schmitz, Purdue Extension ANR Educator (SW)
Sheila Schroeder, CCSI Northern Program Manager (NE, NW)
Austin Pearson, Purdue Extension ANR Educator (NW)
Walt Sell, Purdue Extension Asst. Program Leader for Soil Health (all)
Amanda Studor Bond, IDEM Watershed Specialist (NW)
Mark Thomas, ISDA Resource Specialist (SE)
Kristi Todd, IDEM Watershed Specialist (NE)
Tara Wesseler-Henry, ISDA District Support Specialist (SE)
Robert Zupancic, USDA-NRCS SE Area Grazing Specialist (SE)
Seth Harden, Indiana TNC Upper Wabash River Project Director (NW)

Progressive Farmer

Dan Crummet – one of the writers with Progressive Farmer magazine was working on 2020 story ideas to submit to his editor by Friday, February 28th. He requested ideas and contact information for farmers/landowners who have implemented conservation practice working with NRCS, SWCD, or Watershed Groups. Lisa Holscher put him in contact with Amanda Kautz and a local grower in 2019. Amanda noted that Crummet was very knowledgeable and easy to work with. He also let her review the piece before publication. *Holscher requested additional suggestions to be emailed to her.*

Names and ideas submitted to Crummet included:

1. Lake, Jasper, Newton County SWCD collaboration on Kankakee (Mentioned on call)
2. Parke-Vermillion County SWCD work by tech. Carter Morgan
3. Knox Co SWCD Board Members Mike & Susan Brocksmitth / Vincennes University Student Outreach

4. Decatur County - Roger & Nick Wenning work with newer soil health farmer Kevin Horschman
 5. Indiana CREP Program successes - Julie Harrold, ISDA
 6. Indiana USDA-NRCS support of Purdue University Vole Research
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Selling Conservation

Background

Across the ICP and other conservation partners, there is an acknowledgement that available social science findings can help us become more effective in teaching/talking about soil health principles. The topic of “Selling Conservation” is on the ICP Training Committee’s radar as a supportive training to help staff and supervisors learn to communicate our conservation message using findings from social science research. opportunities with farmers, landowners, and others.

In addition, Indiana TNC has been leading a pilot project in the Big Pine Watershed with Ceres Solutions since 2016 to test a hypothesis that ag retailers are a good conduit to share conservation messaging. They began a partnership with Corteva in 2019. The goal: Help conservation staff develop skill sets common to salesmen or agronomists for private ag companies, that can help conservationists reach mid-late adopters. This program is underway in Iowa and in consideration for Indiana. Corteva is willing to share some of their sales/marketing resources to share with conservation staff.

A December 2019 Hoosier Chapter SWCS training focusing on conservation communications may serve as a springboard for this training.

Discussion

A general consensus of participants was that there was a need for this type of training. Unified messaging and consistency across all counterparts (ICP and other partners) is critical.

More input is needed to develop a delivery system that will fulfill most staff needs and time constraints. This type of training might be:

- incorporated as 1-2 hour, up to ½ day modules into NRCS Area Meetings reaching a wide number of field staff
- rolled out in multiple platforms – SWCD region meetings, IASWCD Annual Conference, Board Meetings
- broken down by messaging to/from specific groups. For example: younger farmers, bankers, landowners, land managers, legislators, etc.

General notes:

Southeast

- Prefer is for modules or shorter segments, not full day trainings.
- Consider different trainings about talking to different groups.
- Consider incorporating into existing meetings. Can get wide staff attendance at NRCS Area meetings but reaching SWCD board meetings helps ensure reaching SWCD Staff, NRCS Staff, ISDA Staff SWCD Supervisors, Watershed Coordinators, and often Extension Educators. Would need to be *short* modules, perhaps on tape.
- Concern about attendance at some field days. More precise targeting and messaging to a specific demographic, such as younger farmers, seems to be more successful.

Southwest

- Key is having a unified message across all counterparts for a unified “sales approach”
- Understand that talking to different age groups will be different, just as talking to farmers vs. bankers vs. landowners, etc.
- Help on targeting, working with people more likely to adopt out of mid-late adopters
- Particularly important to include non-technical staff on reaching these groups and people who “walk in the door”
- *Farmer led* “We don’t spend enough time asking farmers what they want.”
- Short and sweet trainings and/or webinars.

Northeast

- Breaking down communications into particular groups (farmers, landowners, bankers, etc) could be useful.
- Preference is for in-person, interactive, whole day (not 10-2) training. But not in 2020.
- If only 1-2 hours might fit into Area meetings, but agenda fills up quickly
- Same trainings should be held across all partners

Northwest

- Ag retailers can provide opportunity to improve how we (conservation groups) communicate with late adopters rather than innovators.
- Consider multiple platforms: Region meeting breakouts, IASWCD Annual Conference, District Visits. Consider social media as an outlet, also.
- Consider differences between newer staff members and more seasoned staff who may have more “tricks up their sleeve” when working with local farmers.
- NRCS Area Meetings could be an outlet for this training.
- Watershed Leadership Academy might be good platform for some of this training.
- Training should be “hands-on” and interactive

Note – must take care that staff don’t feel too comfortable on selling conservation, coming off as salespeople, and hurting the reputation of conservation partners.

Trainings

1. Attendance

Background

Because of a significant number of “no-shows” at some 2018 and 2019 CCSI-SARE Trainings, consideration is being given to charging for trainings in the future – but that is not a CCSI preference. “No-shows” = funds not available for other uses. Help is needed to convey to registrants that if they sign up to attend a training, they are expected to attend or give reasonable notification that they will not be able to attend.

Discussion

- Be very clear on effects cancelling will have on available program funding – some think trainings are sponsored.
- Report to supervisors and/or process sign-up through supervisors
- “Either expecting a call from your supervisor if you don’t show or having to eat your costs is acceptable.”

2. *Presentation and Media Skill Training*

Regional teleconference participants were surveyed on 1) the value of continuing Presentation and Media Skills Training, and 2) If there was still a need, moving it to an every-other-year format because of the number who had already attended.

Take-away: There is still a need for the training. It still has value. OK to move to every-other year. May want to reconsider trainer/training formats.

Other

1. *CCSI Website*

Website ccsin.org has been updated and relaunched.

- Soil Health Events Calendar may be filtered to show ALL events or just Soil Health Trainings
- Event Registration page currently lists all Soil Health Trainings, with links to Pre-register. All pre-registrants will be updated when dates/locations are finalized to see if they are still able to attend.
- A Donations page will go live to help with new revenue streams.
- Newsletter will be integrated into the website.
- *Please advise of bugs and/or other issues.*

2. *Soil Health Trailer*

Southwest Soil Health Team spent 3 years procuring a soil health trailer which arrived August 2019. It may be requested for Soil Health Events. Trailer is equipped with a rainfall simulator/50 gal water tank, solar panel, video screen and GoPro camera. May be operated inside or outside.

- Protocol has been developed for using the trailer. For right now, one of the SW Soil Health Team is required to be with it at an event.
- Request form is available through Don Donovan don.donovan@usda.gov or Tom Blakeslee, SW Area Office Thomas.blakeslee@usda.gov Form includes basic information: when and what the event is for.
- *Allow ample lead time* – because meetings are held every six weeks and because of time/labor to pull samples. Please understand that because of location and need for SW Soil Health Team staff to be present, requests outside of the SW area will be closely scrutinized.
- Still ironing out details of non-NRCS truck pulling trailer.
- Trainings for trailer operation scheduled on March 11th in Greencastle and March 19th (cancelled) in Petersburg.