

CUMBERLAND SALEM & GLOUCESTER SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

2025 LOCAL WORKING GROUP

SUMMARY REPORT

Gloucester Soil Conservation District and Cumberland Salem Conservation District conducted a joint in-person meeting to determine the communities' Natural Resource Concerns. This meeting was held at the Ware Building. Participants from the agricultural community in Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties as well as state and local representatives of USDA NRCS, USDA FSA, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, State Board of Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited and SADC met to discuss and prioritize local resource concerns. The meeting had 27 participants.

Meeting attendees were given several handouts: Agenda, "Local Working Group" Fact Sheet, Summary of 2024 LWG Resource Concerns and 2024 LWG Comments.

The 2024 top two local Resource Concerns - Water Resource Concerns and Soil Resource Concerns - remain as the top two local Resource Concerns for 2025.

During the February 12, 2025 meeting, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, Evan Madlinger, gave a slide presentation to the group summarizing the State Programs and State Totals for areas of interest in the 3 county community. The presentation also discussed several key Resource Concerns and Comments brought up at the 2024 LWG Meeting.

Throughout the presentation, multiple slides resulted in group discussions. All comments generated by meeting attendees are listed below.

Resource Concerns, Cost Share and Technical Assistance Specific Concerns:

Comments carried over from 2024 -

- Backlogs for Irrigation Practices are huge. Producers wait and wait for irrigation designs. Producers interested in irrigation cost share desperately need to install irrigation on their fields. Instead, they continue to suffer reduced yields while waiting for designs. This is an ongoing issue, year after year. *****When queried, 5 out of the 5 producers in the room who have worked with NRCS on irrigation projects have dealt with this issue.*****
- NRCS needs more Irrigation Technical Support Staff to address issue of backlog. *****This discussion point resulted in the recommendation to have local irrigation dealers become Technical Service Providers (TSPs)*****
- Farmers aren't qualifying / ranking for programs that are actually needed on local farms. Current Ranking System is too complicated and needs to be improved.
- NRCS Cost Share Programs need to understand the timeliness of farmer funds and interest rates. The contract process is currently so long a farmer secures a loan for his portion of the project and is already making monthly payment (including interest) before the project is finally authorized by NRCS to start.
- Deadlines for applying for programs and awarding contracts needs to be earlier or process needs to be faster. Current deadlines do not give producers time to implement practices and complete projects prior to start of growing season
- Producers can typically install a similar, more efficient project for less money than their portion of an NRCS design. NRCS designed practices are VERY expensive. *****Cost of individual line items is outdated (four plus years behind current costs)*****
- Significant priority/additional ranking points should be given to Preserved Farmland – Preserved Farmland increases the lifespan of an implemented practice which should be recognized with additional ranking points.
- High Tunnels are not effective Conservation Practices – these practices are not needed in this area and actually lead to concentrated runoff (which increases soil erosion). The funds used for High Tunnels would be better utilized for other locally important practices. *****Meeting attendants would like to see this practice reduced or eliminated in area*****
- Cover Crop Program needs to include a “No-Till” incentive. Current program

requirements (70% growth of cover crop for payment) lead to farmers plowing existing crop residue to plant cover crop too late in season and cover crop does not provide stabilization for winter. ****A No-Till planting method should be required for all plantings past a reasonable date****

- Winter wheat and other small grains which function as cover crops should be eligible for an incentive payment.
- Innovative Conservation Programs for implementing new practices such as drones for spraying/cover crop seeding, & variable rate fertilizer and lime application should be pursued.
- Energy Efficiency Cost Share Practices such as electric forklifts instead of propane fueled forklifts should be added.
- Cost Share Practice to replace diesel irrigation pumps with electric irrigation pumps. This practice needs to consider additional components required for conversion. Could they be included in cost share?
- Programs/Practices that stress Irrigation Efficiency are extremely important, especially in the tri-county area
- Tillage or specifically No-Till needs to be included and given priority in ranking process. ****This practice addresses several Resource Concerns in this area****
- Ideas or programs shared with NRCS never turn into actual Conservation Practices for Cost Sharing
- State Technical Committee Meetings are not discussing or enacting programs addressing Resource Concerns. The meetings only report on program statistics.

2025 Comments -

- Programs need more farmer-input into practicality – farmer knowledge would help programs be more applicable to local level concerns
- Drought led to significant issues with planting, harvesting and yields. Contracts need to address these sort of unpredictable delays.
- Maintenance of on-farm irrigation ponds is a necessity. Producers sometimes have

problems with other regulatory agencies when doing this maintenance item. Could NRCS offer guidance or oversight? Possibly include ongoing necessary maintenance as a practice in the Farm Conservation Plan?

- NJDEP Resilient Environments and Landscapes (REAL): does NRCS have Conservation Practices or cost-share programs that could help producers follow these rules if implemented? Could practices be included in Conservation Plans?
- High priority practices differ greatly across the state. Is it possible for NRCS New Jersey to split the funding between North & South?
- Funding limits restrict practices for large farms (large farms reach their maximum funding limit quickly). Is it possible to factor in 'acreage farmed' into equation so larger farms have a higher funding limit?

LWG participants appreciate the opportunity to help guide future NRCS programs and would like to see SADC increase their input into Programs & Guidance for producers. It was extremely informative to have Ducks Unlimited participation in the LWG. DU Representative Ben Langey discussed several Wetlands Restoration programs and funding opportunities available.

The LWG participants greatly appreciate the NRCS-NJ State Office representation that participated in the 2025 Local Work Group Meeting. Evan Madlinger and Fran DeFiccio were able to show participants the changes NRCS has implemented to address the items discussed at the 2024 LWG session and address participants' new concerns at this meeting. LWG participants would like to extend an invitation to NRCS State Office personnel to visit their farms and continue the discussions from the 2025 LWG.

LWG participants are very interested in implementing the best possible management practices to increase their yields while protecting the environment and assuring the future productivity of the farmland in this area. Participants are hopeful NRCS will use the information gathered to guide the future programs to better address the current Resource Concerns in the Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem County areas.