# Vermont Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group

DRAFT Summary of Meeting #18: December 21, 2021

More detailed information, including presentation slides and the meeting recording can be found at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>

## Introduction

The Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Soil Health Working Group held its eighteenth meeting on December 21, 2021. The objectives of the meeting were for the group to hear an update on work from the technical service provider to the Working Group and give input to inform some of their research tasks, including the development of a farmer survey regarding PES program options, an ecosystem services valuation study, and discussion of a starting point “straw man” program design option. The group also reflected further on the program design options that had been posed in previous meetings.

## Summary of discussion

The UVM technical services team provided an update on several tasks. More detail is available in the slides posted at the website above.

* Noah El-Naboulsi is continuing to consult with stakeholders on the development of a farmer survey, with focus on understanding what practices farmers are currently implementing, their current enrollment in state and federal programs, barriers to participating in programs, and what kind of payments and payment structures would work for them in a PES program
* Ben Dube shared draft findings of the ecosystem services valuation study. The study used two approaches to estimate valuation: based on practices and based on soil health improvements. (For detailed review of these findings see slides.)
* The Working Group reflected on takeaways from the review of PES Programs that Chris Bonasia, Noah, and Lindsey Ruhl with the UVM team conducted, as well as discussed further the “Observed Metrics Approach” that Scott Magnan developed. A key aspect of discussion was on how to combine and consider observational methods with methods like the CASH test.
* Jon Winsten shared a proposed “straw man” program design to elicit Working Group input on key program design decisions. Key questions included whether individual fields could be enrolled or whether a whole farm must be enrolled, what tools to use to quantify soil health scores, and how to structure payments (including whether to emphasize payments for improved soil health, or being above a baseline soil health, or a combination — the “combination” variation was included in the straw man proposal that Jon put forward.)

The draft products of the UVM technical team and these proposals can be viewed in more detail in the slides at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 PM.