# Vermont Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group

DRAFT Summary of Meeting #19: January 4, 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 nineteenth meeting on January 4, 2021. The objectives of the meeting were for the group to discuss valuation of ecosystem services, discuss program design in detail, receive an overview of first quarter 2022 activities from the UVM team, and brainstorm edge of field and whole farm approaches within a PES program or set of programs.

## 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.

* Ben Dube shared further draft findings of the ecosystem services valuation study. The presentation and discussion focused on various ecosystem benefits for agricultural land, such as flood mitigation, soil health, soil carbon capture, and nutrient mitigation, along with the advantages of practice-vs. outcome-based programs.
* Jon Winsten shared preliminary results of his survey on program design options from the December 21 meeting, 6 of which have been received so far. The questions focused on eligibility and requirements to enroll the whole farm or only individual fields, quantification of soil health based on soil measurement, payments based on relative improvements or absolute thresholds, and monitoring and verification.
* Alissa White provided an update on first quarter activities by the UVM team. Reports for the various tasks are available at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>. Activities for 2022 include further developing proposals for costing based on Ben Dube and Jon Winsten’s work, a soil health survey for farmers to elicit minimum and preferred levels of payments, and hosting a focus group for farmers to provide input.
* Working group members discussed edge of field and whole farm approaches to payments, which involves looking at non-agricultural environment on farms, such as woods and wetlands. The approaches are also intended to capture the uniqueness of Vermont’s farms. Insights included studying biomass burning and whether it can be a viable solution, learning from farmers already employing good practices (e.g., protecting wetlands and creating pollinator strips) without incentives, considering habitat-types and incorporating species-by-species programs into payment structures, and incentivizing cross-landscape and farm-to-farm approaches. Several working group members stressed the need to be able to sell programs to farmers and landowners in a simple way and the advantage of complementing existing programs.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 PM.