

Vermont Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group

Summary of Meeting #35: Tuesday, January 10, 2022

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

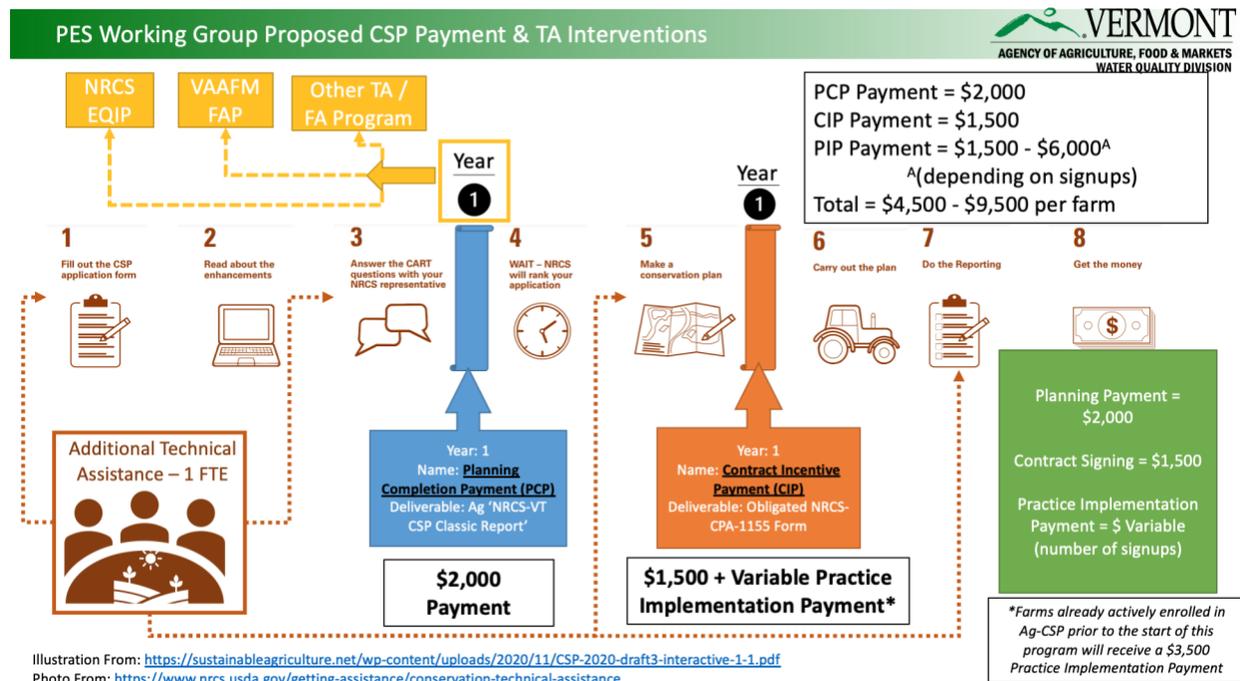
Introduction

The Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Soil Health Working Group held its thirty-fifth and final meeting on Tuesday, January 10, 2022, via Zoom. The objectives of the meeting were to update the full Working Group on pilot development and progress related to drafting the final report and come to agreement on final matters.

Summary of discussion

Stacy Cibula (VHCB & Co-chair) welcomed Working Group members and reminded them stipends are available for members whose time spent during meetings is not otherwise paid for by their employers. She encouraged members to get in touch with her with any questions.

Afterward, Ryan Patch (VAAF) updated the Working Group on the work related to pilot development. He shared the following diagram outlining how the pilot will complement CSP:



One Working Group member asked how farm teams (as mentioned in the Working Group's report) will be set up and coordinated. Mr. Patch outlined that different service providers operate differently, and that the farm team concept is best left up to the approaches taken by individual organizations. State-wide planning takes place at the level of the Vermont Ag Water Quality Partnership, but ultimately local entities and NRCS staff execute service delivery.

Travis Thomason (NRCS-VT) also shared that he expects an additional spring 2023 CSP signup due to incoming federal funds under the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, though the date may be later depending on when the funds arrive.

Then, Working Group members discussed revisions to the final report. Key pieces of substantive feedback from Working Group members were:

- Remove the paragraph outlining the lack of a clear relationship between soil health and water quality, and mention the importance of water quality in the executive summary
- Limit the usage of the terms “ecosystem services” and “payment for ecosystem services” in the report because these terms are related to the commodification of nature and can give the impression that the Working Group is in favor of financial-market-based approaches to conservation

Additionally, after much deliberation, the Working Group agreed to name the pilot program the “Vermont Farmer Ecosystem Stewardship Program.”

Working Group members were encouraged to share any remaining feedback on the report as soon as possible so that AAFM can submit the report by the legislative deadline of January 15, 2023.

Comments from members of the public included encouragement to steer away from the macroeconomic/privatization-focused approach to conservation and embrace participatory democracy, along with an exhortation to value biodiversity as a marker of soil health and ensure that all farmers who are good stewards of soil health earn a living wage.

Working Group members concluded by thanking one another for their hard work and dedication over the past three years.

The meeting was adjourned *sine die* at 2 PM.

Links shared

1. [Meeting recording](#)