

Vermont Soil Health and Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group

Meeting #12: June 23, 2021 12:30 – 2:30 PM

<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>

Join Zoom Meeting

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Agenda

12:20 **Open zoom meeting and hellos**

12:30 **Welcome from Co-Chairs, introductions, review agenda**

12:35 **Programmatic questions to consider**

See attached document summarizing key programmatic considerations.

- Is focusing primarily on reducing flooding/increasing drought resilience and reducing GHG emissions/sequestering carbon, while ensuring WQ is not harmed (though not a benefit paid for) the right focus of our discussion for the fall?
- Q&A and discussion

1:00 **Review of components of soil health proposed to measure and the ecosystem services they would provide**

See table of key metrics and services.

Are these the right metrics to use to provide the services we are focusing on?

- Organic matter
- Aggregate stability
- Bulk density (hard to measure but can serve as proxy for infiltration)
- GHG emissions from soil surface
- Q&A and discussion
 - Is there a small subgroup of the WG that would like to work on this matrix further?

1:30 **Discussion of soil unit and pricing issues**

- Discussion of key questions resulting from Economics Task Group's efforts
 - Do we agree to retain a consultant to help develop soil unit and pricing for that soil unit?
 - Is there a small subgroup of the WG that would like to engage with this consultant over the summer?

1:45 **Planning for summer activities**

Possible activities:

- a. Interested WG members finalize the soil health elements and ecosystem services draft document/matrix.
- b. Retain a consultant to develop the soil unit and pricing for that soil unit with WG interested members advice from time to time and bring recommendations and options to the WG in September.

- c. Retain a consultant to advance the elements of a soil health program as we have been considering, with WG interested members advice from time to time, with the intent of delivering a general framework with options for September.
- d. Interested WG members with the agencies review the various NRCS and AAFM practices relevant to us and our work, the scoring, the practices we might want to add to the list or increase funding for, and the scale of the impact (temporal and spatial) that could result (with a focus on those that improve soil health and address GHGs, such as agroforestry practices).
- e. Consider if and how to address above ground, whole-farm greenhouse gas emissions, landscape-scale practices (forested riparian buffers, agroforestry, wetlands preservation, etc.) and biodiversity issues in the Fall and into 2022 and any necessary legislative changes to our WG charge.
- f. Interested WG members develop a practical, specific approach for engaging farmers when the WG is ready with clear ideas and options to engage so that we can implement quickly and efficiently when ready, including any specific consulting help that might be needed (i.e., surveys, etc.).

2:05

Next steps: Structure and goals for fall WG activities

- a. How frequently, how, and where should we meet to get our work done come September?
 - i. Similar to now: biweekly via zoom
 - ii. More like 2019: monthly or less frequently in person, for longer
 - iii. Mixed approach: face-to-face every 2 months, with 2 zoom meetings in between
- b. Would members be open to a longer meeting in early fall to hear in detail about the related research being doing in the state on many of our issues or is it better to do this via webinars?
 - i. Prefer one longer face-to-face day of presentations
 - ii. Series of zoom webinars
- c. The goal will be to: 1) advance our work on a kind of program: on what, for whom, and how; 2) engage with farmers for feedback on these concepts; 3) connect with the Vermont Climate Council Ag and Ecosystems Subcommittee; 4) develop an interim report for the Legislature by 31 December 2021; 5) have a clear work plan for 2022 including any technical consulting help needed and how we might consider any forwarded recommendations from the Vermont Climate Council and address whole farm biodiversity and GHGs.
 - Quick feedback: anything missing or incorrect here?

2:15

Public Comment

2:30

Adjourn