## 2018 State Cost Share Program Changes

Approximately two years ago, DOC/SWCC began reviewing and restructuring the Kentucky Soil & Water Quality State Cost Share Program. The program has remained essentially the same since its inception in 1995, despite other partner programs and policies changing around it. DOC/SWCC staff partnered with NRCS staff, whom had originally helped to develop the program, to bring it more in line with these programs and policies, and to make it more efficient for conservation district field staff and NRCS technical staff to implement.

### Objectives

DOC/SWCC had three primary objectives when initiating this review:

- It was important for the program to interact with and "speak the same language" as other sister programs so that field staff could easily interpret and work amongst those programs effectively. The other programs include federal EQIP and the Kentucky Ag Water Quality Plans.
- The ability to manipulate the program year to year with regards to the natural resource concern prioritization and/or scoring criteria so that it would not "compete" with those partner programs.
- The need for an updated online application system. The previous system was dated, cumbersome, and unreliable. The focus was on getting a system that would simplify data entry for conservation district staff, have more reliability and transparency with regards to scoring, and that could be easily accessible by district staff for retrieval of historical information if needed (i.e. the ability to retrieve submitted applications for review, printing, etc.).

### New Practice Organization

The most apparent revision to the program is the new practice organization. In recent years, our program has had up to 20 individual "practices" that were eligible for applicants. Within each of these State Cost Share "practices," were NRCS Technical Specifications. Each State Cost Share practice contained anywhere from 4 to 13 of these NRCS specifications. This often complicated the application process, and limited options for applicants.

## New Practice Organization (cont'd)

The new practice organization has essentially broadened our State Cost Share practices to only 6 "practices" or BMPs, with each containing more of the NRCS Technical Specs. These 6 BMPs, or it may be easier to think of them as BMP "categories", closely match those in EQIP and the Kentucky Ag Water Quality Plans. With more of the NRCS specs under each practice category, the technical planner has a wider array of options so that a tailored plan can be developed for each specific operation without having to attempt to mix and match different practices on one application.

The new State Cost Share practices are:

- Livestock: Animal Feeding Operation BMP
- Livestock: Pastureland BMP
- Cropland BMP
- Forestland BMP
- Streambank BMP
- Farmstead BMP
- Kentucky Environmental Grant

## New Policy & Scoring Determination

The Kentucky Soil & Water Quality State Cost Share Program is governed by 416 KAR 1:010. Careful consideration was given to following the requirements of this regulation during the program revision. For that reason, historical policies were reviewed and some were required to be amended. The following list of improvements describes those and the new scoring criteria:

- Scoring is now primarily based on the practices which will be installed. This is the most accurate indicator of the natural resource concern being addressed and will not rely on subjective information as some application field did in the past. Items dictated by regulation will also be included in the scoring process (i.e. Ag District application, watershed designations, etc.)

- In order to comply with 416 KAR 1:010, some practice limitations were required to be amended. Specifically, Streambank Stabilization was reduced from $20,000 to $7,500; and the Winter Heavy Use Feeding Areas were reduced from $15,000 to $7,500. In addition, specific applicant limitations were also reviewed. In order for an applicant to receive $20,000 per program year, one of the six animal waste storage practices must be approved. If one of those six is not approved, then the applicant's annual limit is $7,500. For this program year, each applicant is limited to one application. Each application may only have one of the Practices (categories). For example, an applicant may apply for the *Livestock: Pastureland BMP*. That applicant may then apply for any combination of the NRCS specs under that BMP until the $7,500 limit is reached. The applicant may not apply for *Livestock: Pastureland BMP* and then a *Cropland BMP* on the same application.

- The new online application system now has a GIS component. This greatly simplifies the work of district staff in determining watershed (HUC), watershed special designations, etc. It also provides the ability to map installed practices.

- By request, there is now an applicant screening section on the application. This section may be used to screen applicants that have not complied with program requirements in the past. This is a tool for districts to use for items that cannot be determined by the online system. As we move forward with our current economical climate, programs are receiving less money over time. We want to ensure that our funding is responsibly utilized and that we assist deserving producers.

- Although no final decision has currently been made, it is likely that the program will have more than one cut-off/scoring date per year moving forward. This will allow for a more equitable disbursement of funds, and allow for a more efficient processing of applications by field staff. This program will truly be a continuous sign up moving forward. Any time that an application is received in the district office, that application my be processed and entered into the system when ready.

- Six training events have occurred for conservation district staff during the month of May. Nearly 150 district employees received training on the Program during this time period.  The first cut-off date to enter applications has been set for June 30, 2018.