

Virginia Soil Health Coalition Quarterly Meeting
September 15th, 2022
Meeting Minutes

- I. **Welcome: Dr. Dan Goerlich, Associate Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension**
 - a. The broad impact of VA Cooperative Extension on agriculture across state
 - b. So many partner agencies that are working in this area.
 - c. Important role of Coalition in bringing partners together
 - d. Some additional programming in Extension related to soil health
 - i. Turf and landscape technical programming to help nutrient management plan writers, etc.
 - ii. Soil testing and guidelines for nutrient management plans
 - iii. Golf course planning
 - iv. Septic systems appropriate use- close working relationship with VDH
 - v. Training for/with VA Association of Professional Soil Scientists, etc.
 - vi. Household water quality testing (branched out to testing water sources used to mix with pesticides, insecticides, etc.)
 - vii. Dr. Mark Reiter- specialist on Eastern Shore
 - viii. Dr. Rory Maguire- professor/extension specialist/director of Soil Testing Lab

- II. **Keynote Speaker: Dr. Henry Janzen, Honorary Research Associate, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada: “The Quest for Soil Health”**
 - a. Watch full recording here (begins 11:00 until 1:04:30)

- III. **Update on the Coalition Strategic Planning Process**
 - a. Timeline to date
 - i. Started in April with Due East Partners to evaluate our vision and mission and think through our priorities and strategies for the coming three years. Formed Strategic Planning Committee and convened with Steering Committee
 - ii. May- key informant interviews
 - iii. May- Visioning session to review and refine vision/mission, discuss core values/guiding principles; evaluate roles, core competencies/functions, confirm key priorities
 - iv. June- constituent survey to VSHC network, feedback session during VSHC Quarterly Meeting, refine vision/mission/principles/key questions
 - v. July- Full-day strategy session to: review survey feedback, refine key strategic elements; draft strategies and measurable results; consider roles and who needs to be engaged; outline collaborative and aligned activities; identify additional capacity and resources needed.
 - vi. August- Collaborative Action Planning Meeting, Draft Strategic Roadmap
 - b. Survey key takeaways: Are there any areas of focus you think the Coalition should prioritize in order to improve soil health across Virginia
 - i. Grow the network and partnerships (e.g. engage urban/suburban residents, cost share funding)
 - ii. Awareness and education (farmer education; demonstrate and share what works through farmer field days, show economic benefits of healthy soil)

- iii. Improve soil health
- c. 4 key strategic questions and key takeaways from strategy session for each
 - i. Are we focused on rural, suburban and urban landscapes? If so, how do we prioritize our work?
 - 1. We have messaging and education to share for everyone who manages soil. Every acre counts. Need to focus on education. However, our roots are in agriculture.
 - ii. What organizational structure will best support us moving forward? What would expansion look like?
 - 1. We show up on the ground through partner organizations. Expand and examine makeup of leadership. Opportunity for working groups.
 - iii. How can we authentically embed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into our work in a way that reflects our diverse constituency?
 - 1. Opportunity to bring in others doing this work and build trust. Ties to focus on urban and suburban (while keeping spotlight on ag). Need for a more diverse Coalition.
 - iv. Review and confirm our key roles. Given our key roles, how do we show up to do our work “on the ground”/in communities? What do we do that is different and additive?
 - 1. Navigator, communicator, coordinator, mentor. Coalition to understand the breadth/depth of work and see gaps. Show up on the ground in communities through people doing the work.
 - v. Limiting factor= capacity **
- d. Review the draft strategic roadmap [here](#)
- e. Next steps
 - i. Field testing draft strategic roadmap: If you are interested in helping field test the map/provide feedback, reach out to Mary Sketch Bryant (mksketch2@vt.edu)
 - ii. Defining results/progress indicators
 - iii. Incorporate feedback and work through final refinements of Strategic Roadmap
 - iv. Final approval and adoption November/December 2022

IV. Partner updates (round robin speed updates)

- a. American Farmland Trust: Very pleased to have been recipient of one of USDA Climate Smart Commodity grants focused on beef supply chain. Virginia will be a huge part of that work. Also have Regenerate Virginia report (many Coalition partners supported) available. Hopefully generate discussion.
- b. Common Grain Alliance: In last month have launched a pilot for grain stand at farmers markets in DC to create consumer interest in grains so it incentivizes farmers to consider including them in their farming practices and creates more links to where food comes from.
- c. Department of Conservation and Recreation (Robert Shoemaker): \$200 million in cost share dollars this year and next. Able to leverage some of those dollars as match since they are state funds. Used match on two carbon smart grants for \$110 million total (regional not all coming to Virginia but includes VA).

- d. Luck Ecosystems (Kateri Simon): No real update from Luck Ecosystems, but working on abstract for Environment Virginia and looking for panelists to join on an urban soil health panel. Looking for possible presenter to join who might be able to talk about new normal for alternative ways of managing vegetative landscapes- yards, ornamentals, etc.- use of non-chemical fertilizers and soil restoration organically. Reach out to Kateri if interested.
- e. NCAT Soil for Water (Lee Rinehart): NCAT a recipient of several climate smart projects so excited about work will get to do. Soil for Water project working with VABF and Virginia Tech to strengthen networks and increase outreach of regenerative grazing practices in Virginia through experiential learning, storytelling, capacity building, all focusing on soil health principles and peer learning. Will include field days and listening sessions. Encouraging farmers and partners to join the Soil for Water network across state and nation. Join forum and share experiences and stories (soilforwater.org).
- f. Sustainable Chesapeake (Kristen Hughes Evans): Produced 4 videos with Paul Davis, Clay Lowe, and Jamie Schenk with VSHC partner support, especially Lydia Fitzgerald and Chris Lawrence. Videos focus on cover crops for a purpose. Share with your networks!
- g. Virginia Association of Biological Farming: Have several grants in the works. The NFWF Building Soil Health in VA, Soil for Water, application for a local farm credit grant to do some listening sessions to hear from farmers across state and see how we can help farmers network. Just found out that we also received the CSC as a sub-award under Rodale Institute looking at carbon sequestration practices in southern Piedmont.
- h. Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition: Appreciating ways we get to interface with Soil Health Coalition and work in collaboration to share blog posts, podcasts, etc.
- i. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (Kristen Saacke Blunk): NFWF convening virtually again a series of ag network forum sessions and listening sessions- seeking partners input into building the sessions. Part of this is to inform NFWF as it continues to develop RFPs that fit what is needed on landscape. Second, ISNR RFP on the streets. Looking for new partnership projects also infrastructure projects.
- j. Farmers for Soil Health (National Pork Board, National Soybean Board, National Corn Growers-John Johnson): Received CSC grant for \$90 million under NFWF to work across 20 states including Virginia to pay farmers for cover crops. Cost-share payment and technical assistance and development of digital platform that will allow farmers to market a sustainability score/eco-score to help incentivize in marketplace. Also have another grant with NRCS Cooperative that will make some trainings and technical assistance on cover crops available. VA can take advantage of that in conjunction with MD, etc.

V. Funding update

- a. 17 projects that include VA funded by USDA Climate Smart Commodities partnership
 - i. Coalition partners involved: Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay; Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley; American Farmland Trust; Appalachian Sustainable Development; Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers; Mountains to Bay Grazing Alliance; Virginia Association of Biological Farming; Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; Virginia State University; Virginia Tech.

- ii. This will mean a lot more work tied to soil health happening across state and the need for coordination will be high- role of the Coalition. How can Coalition be the most helpful as a network?
- iii. VSHC was part of a proposal with 11 partnerships across Chesapeake Bay put in by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that did not receive funding from CSC. However, many of partners involved in other grants that did. Committed to funding these pieces of work through other mechanisms.

VI. 4 The Soil Initiative update

- a. A lot of exciting developments! Working to reach diverse audiences and use soil health as a starting point/common ground (urban, suburban, etc.)
- b. New website coming! Reach out with any thoughts/ideas
- c. 27 podcast episodes to date
- d. 4 The Soil blog and communications on going with leadership by Sarah Koth
- e. Take the pledge! You can also sign up this way to receive our bi-weekly emails.
- f. Stay tuned for outreach around World Soil Day in December.

VII. Professional Development Soil Health Training- Fall 2022 Dig & Demo Field Trainings

- a. 8 soil health field trainings for professionals taking place October/November 2022 (part of larger SARE PDP grant received by Virginia Tech and VSU)
- b. Small-group & interactive- limit 30 participants per location
- c. Experience how management can modify soil properties over time
- d. Learn how to assess and compare key soil health indicators in the field
- e. Witness the power of more than a dozen interactive soil health demonstrations
- f. Gain ideas and allies to help enhance your soils-related projects and programs
- g. REGISTER TODAY- SPACE IS LIMITED! www.virginiasoilhealth.org/training

VIII. Additional announcements/opportunities

- a. Check out all upcoming events at www.virginiasoilhealth.org/calendar
- b. Virginia Soil Health Coalition working with VASWCD for their December meeting- stay tuned!