

**MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE PROGRAM  
(MAEAP) ADVISORY COUNCIL (AC) November 22, 2022**

**1:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.**

Dr. Ron Bates, MSUE

Zoom Meeting/<https://msu.zoom.us/j/92962635402>

Ron Bates began the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

**WELCOME AND ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS**

Laura Campbell welcomed the group and asked for any additional agenda items. Hearing none, no additional agenda items.

Joe Kelpinski introduced new MDARD employees Chad Rogers, ESD Deputy Director, and Dylan Arnett, MAEAP Verifier.

**AROUND THE HORN**

Attendees went around the horn and shared updates.

**SYSTEM COMMITTEE UPDATES**

**CROPPING, FARMSTEAD, LIVESTOCK - JOSH APPLEBY**

Josh Appleby updated the group that the combined A\*Syst has been completed. Working on the printing version, but we have it electronically. There were not any changes suggested last year. This year the committee is gearing up to address the standards and educational questions.

Farmstead and Cropping will be a unified standards committee, however, Livestock will still meet separately. Josh asked if Kevin wanted to update the group.

Kevin Gould reported that they will meet on Tuesday, December 13th.

**FOREST, WETLAND AND HABITAT – JASON DARLING**

Jason Darling reported that the FWH committee met over the summer, with an online hybrid and in-person meeting. The committee did have some new topics to include such as wetland standards. The wetlands training coordinated by Erin Satchell took place and was very informative.

Topics that need some elaboration would be silvo-culture pasture grazing in wetland and forested areas.

The group is considering if it would be a crossover area for livestock in Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat.

Sarah Fronczak will forward a contact with silvo-culture specifications.

Mike Smalligan is available to help MAEAP technicians search, listed in the appendix, as the coordinator.

Ben Schram said there are contacts in the Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat help tool, an additional guide for the assessment.

**MAEAP COMMUNICATIONS WORKGROUP REPORT**

Emily Reinart reported that the workgroup had a project that was launched in 2022, a grant that focused on MAEAP communications.

\$13,500 was awarded, and the workgroup is still doing a financial report. This included paying for field days, logo items, sponsoring ads, etc.

Please look out for a MAEAP Newsletter in December 2022.

If anyone has news to share, with the common goal of environmental stewardship, please forward it to Meredith Smith ([smithm10@michigan.gov](mailto:smithm10@michigan.gov)) to include in the newsletter.

**VERIFICATION UPDATE**

Joe Kelpinski reported that we are compiling the Legislative Annual Report, that is due each year by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

The final numbers for verifications were only 228 new verifications. We have been trending up through 2017 on, then COVID happened, and the numbers have declined. It was a bad year for new verifications.

These numbers are important to our later discussion today.

Michele Seltzer is our MDARD water quality specialist, she will be off the next 6 weeks. Anything regarding WLEB will be split up with Joe, John Switzer, Jim Johnson, and Chad Rogers, who will help fill in the time.

Joe added that the cost share program STRAND grant will put more cost share in the hands of producers.

### **AGRICULTURE CERTAINTY PROGRAMS REVIEW – GARRETT ZUVER**

Laura introduced Garrett Zuver, who is the one in charge of comparing MAEAP and other similar programs. Garrett shared his screen to provide a slideshow. (Attached)

### **MAEAP INCENTIVES/RECRUITMENT DISCUSSION**

- Funds can be used to help underserved farmers, which needs more promotion
- Producers need technical as well as financial assistance, so Conservation District and USDA Service Center teams have an opportunity to work together and form a toolbox of resources, then make sure everyone in the area knows the team is working together and has help available
- Hire a new additional verifier - scheduling verifications and reverifications can be an issue
- The database is causing a lot of headaches by technicians and producers.
- We need to produce data on the economics of implementing practices to help farmers understand costs and benefits of improving soil health and water quality
- We need funding for implementing good practices as a priority for the State
- Anything we can do to overlap MAEAP with other opportunities can help get people into other programs with financial and technical assistance
- The new EQIP program with extended contract periods for some practices (it's sort of CSP-light), should help move folks forward, without putting folks through even more paperwork
- Regarding reverifications, in the past, MDARD has sent out notifications that they are due to lapse their systems, it would be helpful to get those letters sent out again
- Incentive programs only work while they're there – they either need to be funded long-term or there needs to be another incentive besides funding
- Carbon credits would have a value for future reporting and for the program
- Opportunities for implementing practices need to be added for rented land: MFB is working on a pilot program, bringing in non-farming landowners and MAEAP producers that have conservation clauses in their rental agreements
- We need people who can help farmers understand how cost share programs can help and how they can make financial decisions to increase sustainability and do the right thing; MSU has a new farm business management team has done some work on MAEAP and farm management, is there an opportunity to leverage them? MSUE has developed tools regarding evaluating fertilizer costs <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/fertilizer-cost-comparison-tool-field-crops>; what else is needed?
- We need to categorize implementation in terms of precision ag and cost per acre
- Farmers getting advice to reduce and/or better time nitrogen placement can have a profound effect on them – this should be a session at field days/MACD conference (suggested Steve Schaub to present)
- Funding in the district for the last couple practices can provide enough of a jump to get farmers to verification
- Could we create a resource document for incentive and funding for items if farmers run into erosion issues, etc. and for technicians that shows who to go to? Technicians could have a list of support systems to utilize with specializations from members
- The farmer is asking what is in it for me. Am I going to make more money? With high fertilizer prices answering this question is necessary

- Commodities either go into food or into consumers, and that is where the MAEAP program works extremely well – look for outreach/promotion opportunities
- Should there be a legislative mandate where publicly owned rented ground can only be contracted if the renter is MAEAP verified? Some townships already do this, it could be promoted
- Farmers direct marketing their products can currently use the logo if verified in at least two systems and keep it in good standing.
- How do we get commodity groups and buyers to buy into the program and see its value if they cannot ask all of their producers/co-ops to require it?
- Making programs complicated lowers interest and is harder on technicians. It becomes a roadblock. Farmers want it to be simple, flexible, but they do not want to be overburdened by the requirements. Suggested to keep things simple, and perhaps break it down, and rebuild it
- It is tough for the verifiers to help the technicians for various reasons, with new verifications come a 5-year reverification cycle, which may include new owners, new technicians, new verifiers, to all get on the same page quickly
- Pay and benefits for conservation staff is an issue
- Organize a group to talk more frankly, or more open, of things that we see as an issue
- Is there an opportunity to get the MAEAP name out there through Agri-tourism? One mechanism may be to get local governments to encourage participating farms to become MAEAP involved
- Relationships with NRCS are crucial – both for conservation district and MAEAP technicians, and also for farmers because the funding NRCS provides for financial assistance allows the technician to get out on the farm and provide a conservation plan
- Technicians and USDA need to develop relationships locally with farmers, county Farm Bureau, ag/commodity organizations to help spread message
- Communication between technicians and USDA and between all of them and farmers is crucial
- Should we include a bonus program to the technicians with high participation? Competition can create incentives and motivation
- How can we better include young farmers in both the discussion about MAEAP and participation in the program? How can incentive programs for young and beginning farmers be leveraged?

Laura Campbell suggested that if anyone has more thoughts that were not conveyed, please send an email to Laura or Ron.

Laura asked if anyone is willing to host or need some more time to reflect on hosting an AC meeting for FY2023.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Laura asked for any more closing thoughts? Hearing none, meeting adjourned.

#### **ADJOURN**

Meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Heather Casteel