

PENN SOIL RC&D COUNCIL

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

August 24, 2005

Some of the highlights of the last three months work are listed below:

2006 CONSERVATION TILLAGE CONFERENCE

The Tri-State Tillage conference is scheduled for January 24th, 2006. Jill Clapperton is confirmed as our main speaker, discussing Soil Ecology – how no-till affects living organisms. Jill will speak during both the morning and afternoon sessions. Dave Shearing and Ed Staehr will discuss The Economics of Conservation Tillage. Robert Mullen from Ohio State University will also speak on the topic of Nitrogen on no-till in small grain and corn. The conference will be held at the Radisson hotel in West Middlesex as in the past.

HUNTING AND FISHING MUSEUM

The design package for contracting out the construction of the parking lot was turned over to the Museum Board so that the work could be contracted out. The grant requires construction to be completed by the end of September, 2005. The museum and the County Commissioners who recently acquired part of the parking area have been discussing the merits of paving versus graveling the parking area, and have now decided that they don't want to pave the parking area because they still have some infrastructure to bury through this area. Attention has re-shifted to the improvement of the Boat Launch. There is approximately \$15,000 to spend before the grant expires at the end of September, or the funds will be lost

FRYBURG WATER QUALITY PROJECT

The Washington Township Municipal accepted a proposal from CWM Environmental of Kittanning, PA to carry out the water sampling at a cost of \$3425 and from Curfman Engineering, Inc for engineering and analysis of the data collected from the water samples at a cost of \$8,500. Since the EPA grant contract was only for a one year period expiring at the end of May, 2005, I had to request a one year no cost extension of the project. In response to our request for an extension, The EPA decided to send out someone to conduct a field assessment of the progress of the project and the capability of the project team to complete the project in the manner expected. Dianna and I spent the morning with EPA representative George Walker going over the grant administration and after lunch we met with the Washington Township Municipal Authority project team in Fryburg. The review of our grant administration and the project review in the field went well. A followup letter from George to the EPA grant administrator detailing his findings, and recommending the extension is available for review. Work is continuing on the project.

TIONESTA VISITORS CENTER

Tionesta Borough has awarded the contract for renovations to the Visitor's Center to Remco Construction of Warren, PA and they actually started the construction on August 12th. This project involves two Forest Service Grants and a DCNR grant to renovate the interior and exterior of this converted gas station to a community meeting room and visitor center and to make it handicapped accessible. One of the Forest Service Grants expires August 30th, 2005, so it is anticipated that this grant for Phase I will be completed by the end of this month. We are just waiting for invoices to pay.

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DCED CRAWFORD COUNTY ON-LOT WASTEWATER TREATMENT PROJECT

This project is in the final stages. Crawford County Conservation District completed monitoring the water quality of the water discharged from the five small wetland treatment systems for grey water from Amish households in cooperation with PA DEP. May 24th was the last scheduled sampling date for Crawford CD and then the data was to be analyzed in a final summary report written by Engineer Dick Deiss. Dick Deiss has since retired and sold the firm to Steve Halmi who will assume the role and has agreed to perform the analysis and write the final report for the project. The grant contract expired June 30, 2005 and the closeout report on this \$5000 grant was submitted to DCED.

VENANGO COUNTY ON-LOT WASTEWATER TREATMENT PROJECT

This is essentially part of the same project as the Crawford County on-lot wastewater treatment project. Originally there were to be ten sites in this study. The construction of the four Venango County sites were delayed last year and only completed recently. An onsite meeting was held on August 9th to look at the sites and discuss the sampling procedures. Venango CD will collect the monthly water samples under a contract with the Penn Soil Charitable Trust and funded by a PENNSTEP grant in the amount of \$7,500 which will cover the data collection and the final assessment report.

PROJECT GRASS

One additional project for approximately \$10,000 was completed this quarter in McKean County. Work is continuing throughout the 14 county Northwest Project Grass area to complete these grazing systems funded under the grant.

I am working closely with NW Project Grass to assist them in planning and hosting the 2005 Project Grass State Grazing Conference to be held October 18-19th in Crawford and Venango Counties. The conference will be held at the Days Inn in Meadville. A tentative agenda has been developed for the program and tours of two farms have been scheduled. I will be giving a presentation regarding our value added dairy project and the natural connection to grazing.

FOREST COUNTY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Working in cooperation with Doug Carlson, Forest County Conservation District; Julia McCray, The PA Hunting and Fishing Museum, and Janeal Hedman, USFS, and Penn Soil Council member, we were able to submit an update to the Forest County Action Plan prioritizing projects and requesting additional funding from the U.S. Forest Service under the economic recovery program. We submitted two proposals: the first proposal was for \$120,000 funding to pay for the engineering and architectural design of the main museum complex. The second was for \$10,000 to finish the final phase of the Tionesta Visitor Center. We subsequently received notice that the two requests for funding were approved. We received a \$60,000 grant for the architectural and engineering fees for the final design of the museum. We also received a \$70,500 grant which included \$60,000 for additional architectural and engineering design fees, \$10,000 for Phase III of the Tionesta Visitors Center, and \$500 for Penn Soil administration of the grants. Paperwork has been submitted for Penn Soil RC&D to accept and administer the grants on behalf of the Forest County Action Team.

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VALUE ADDED SMALL SCALE DAIRY PROCESSING PROJECT

I have just received the first edit of videotape we shot at the PASA conference in February and I am working with editing the film to produce a better quality finished product that we can make available to interested parties and use for additional education programs. I wrote an introduction to the video and asked Jack Preston, as the Council Chairman to present the introduction. We videotaped Jack's presentation and it will be added to the beginning of each video as an introduction to Penn Soil RC&D and to the topic of value added dairy processing. Work is continuing on the edits and I hope that it will be completed within the next month or so.

Shortly after the last RC&D Council meeting, I was approached by Alice Sjolander of the French Creek Project about the possibility of providing information and training to local farmers on cheese making. We negotiated an agreement with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council to host two public meetings about value added dairy processing and to provide training to a group of 10-14 farmers in the art of cheese making. We worked with the PA Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) to promote a three day cheese making course at the Macoskey Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Slippery Rock University. We established a value added dairy scholarship fund to assist local farmers within the Penn Soil area and accepted applications for the scholarship. The class was limited to 15 participants due to the hands-on nature of the class, and we provided a \$300 scholarship to six Penn Soil applicants who were able to get registered before the class filled up. The instructor for the class was Peter Dixon, a well known cheese maker and dairy consultant from Vermont. Preliminary discussions are being held with PASA about repeating the class again. Public meetings were held on June 30th at Slippery Rock and on August 4th in Warren County.

The Ag committee and Penn Soil Council members were invited to attend a tour of two value added dairy facilities- Titusville Dairy Plant and the Pot O Gold Dairy in Warren County. The tours were very informative and enjoyable and helped us understand the complexity of running a dairy plant.

I also participated in a meeting at the Munnell Run Farm with Mercer CD Mgr Jim Mondok and Harold Schuller the American sales representative for the Van't Riet dairy processing equipment manufacturing company. Harold is providing some assistance in helping us layout a floor plan and spec equipment for a proposed dairy incubator processing facility. The Munnell Run Farm Foundation has volunteered a building to be used for renovation into a dairy incubator facility and commercial kitchen. Once we know the cost of renovating the building to meet the sanitary and Labor and Industry codes and the equipment we need, we will be able to start preparing grant applications for the dairy incubator facility.

I also had a meeting with State Representative Fred McIlhattan and Elise Stephinson, Western PA Chapter of the Weston Price Foundation regarding our progress in the Value added dairy project. Fred was impressed with our progress to date and suggested that I give a presentation to a group of state and federal legislators from our area if he would set up a meeting to discuss this project. He was optimistic that we could get the funding for the incubator facilities. I agreed to meet with the group and discuss our vision if he would arrange the meeting.

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UPPER ALLEGHENY COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT

Penn Soil RC&D continues to invoice ORA for the monthly stipend to support the position of Upper Allegheny Outreach Coordinator and we continue to receive monthly invoices for 50 percent of the salary and employee related costs to contract the payrolling administration from ORA, as agreed to under our Memorandum of Understanding. To date no funds have changed hands, but Penn Soil is accumulating a larger Accounts Receivable balance than the corresponding Accounts Payable balance related to the position. I checked in with Dan Twombly, ORA's Financial Manager, and he states that Clarion County Economic Development has yet to receive any money from the SBA under their grant. Until some funds come through from SBA to Clarion County EDC, this is likely to remain a paper transaction with ORA using their funds directly to pay for the position.

In the meantime, Deb Lutz and I have collaborated on four Community Roundtable meetings to increase public awareness of the existence of Penn Soil RC&D and the services available to the community. To date, we have held these meetings in Oil City, Clarion, Meadville, and Warren. The meeting included a PowerPoint presentation on Penn Soil RC&D-Who are we and how can we help your community, an overview of the services available through Phil Scrimenti and the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, an introduction to Deb Lutz and the services she can provide through her position as Municipal Outreach Coordinator, a live demonstration of the Grantstation on-line database system, and another PowerPoint presentation on strategies for a community fundraising campaign. The four meetings have collectively attracted about 50-60 people.

We also held a four session grantwriting seminar in Clarion during the month of July that was presented via telephone by Cindy Adams, CEO of Grantstation that was well received and attended by about 15 people each session.

CHANDLER'S VALLEY DAM

In cooperation with Penn Soil RC&D, NRCS completed a design for repairing the erosion around the dam abutments caused by the flooding of spring/summer, 2004. This structure built across Jackson Run in Warren County by the WPA during the 1930's needs about \$10,000 worth of construction to make necessary repairs stabilizing this historic structure and to prevent a re-occurrence. I will be working with the Chandler's Valley Community Association to try to secure the necessary funding to complete the project.

On behalf of the local citizens group, I completed an application for a \$10,250 DCED Community Revitalization grant through State Representative Kathy Rapp's office. Kathy wrote a very supportive letter of the project to DCED and was optimistic that she would probably be able to get at least 50% of the project funds. She has contacted me and suggested that we should contact Senator Mary Jo White's office to get \$5000 from each office. I faxed a copy of the letter of support and the DCED application to Senator White's office and received a call back stating that our application expired at the end of June and telling us we would need to send in a new application for this Fiscal year. We will resubmit a new application within the next week or so.

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BOLLINGER ENTERPRISES INC. (BEI) HANDWASH SYSTEM AT CHAPMAN ST PARK

BEI's food concession operation at Chapman State Park (CSP) is licensed by the PA Department of Agriculture, requiring proper food handling procedures and equipment to ensure public safety. They are limited in what they can sell to the public because of the basic and primitive utility infrastructure at the concession stand. The hand wash station will enable them to meet Department of Agriculture requirements for compliance as a public eating place. This hand wash station will also enable them to offer more choices of food for consumption by the public enhancing Chapman State Park's ability to serve the recreating public. BEi has a ten year contract for the food concession at the park, commencing in 2004, so the useful life of the hand wash station would be over this time period.

BEI's mission is to develop and provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The CSP Concession has provided a unique employment experience that has been well received by employees with disabilities working there. Non-disabled concession managers are always present offering work skills training to employees with disabilities. The concession operation is seasonal, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, offering full and part time employment to eight people. Some private funding has been raised to support the project, but its continuation is contingent on revenues from the retail sales of food and boat rentals to cover wages and other operational costs. The hand wash station funded by the Penn Soil program will help achieve the economic viability of the CSP Concession Stand Employment Project.

The Council accepted this project estimated at a cost of \$3500 and directed me to make a recommendation on how to fund the project. After reviewing the budget and discussing a philosophy on funding projects with the Chairman of the Penn Soil Charitable Trust, LeRoy Gross, I have a recommendation for the Council. I contacted State Representative Kathy Rapp and inquired whether she would be willing to cosponsor this project with Penn Soil in time for BEI to be fully operational for next summer. I suggested that Penn Soil could provide the first \$1000 toward the project and asked if she would support a DCED grant for the remaining \$2500 to purchase the handwashing station. She said that she would agree to sponsor the application to DCED. Penn Soil RC&D currently has \$1000 available in our current year budget that was earmarked for projects. We can either escrow that \$1000 to the Trust for the project or request that the trust consider allocating the \$1000 dollars from the Trust Account. As a last resort, if the Council escrows the \$1000 from this years budget and includes the remaining \$750 in next years budget, the Council and the Trust could split the cost of \$3500 if the DCED grant does not materialize by next April. This would allow us to make a solid commitment to complete this small, but worthwhile project.

BIODIESEL PROJECT

In July, I assisted Penn Soil RC&D in modifying our original grant proposal under a new notice of funding availability offered by DEP under the Energy harvest Program. We used the original grant proposal to request \$69,956 of state funding to demonstrate the feasibility of local production of biodiesel fuel from waste vegetable oil. I discussed the proposal with a DEP representative to see how we could improve the proposal that was not funded last year and feel like I have a significantly stronger application this year. I have also found several new options for assistance in carrying out the project with Slippery Rock University and Penn State University.

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DRY HYDRANTS

Penn Soil is administering the Statewide Grant of \$ 284,000 to install a minimum of 40 new dry hydrants in each council across the state. A total of 328 dry hydrant kits have been purchased and distributed to the nine RC&D's in PA to date. Seventeen hydrant installations have been reported completed as of this date. Penn Soil RC&D has the most (6) installed and reported complete of any of the nine RC&D's in PA. Progress has been less than I hoped for this year with all the field office workload responsibilities and the volunteer nature of the projects combining to slow completion. I know of several projects that are completed, but the local sponsors don't seem to be in too big a hurry to claim their expenses and earn a rebate, so I don't include them as a completed project.

Respectfully submitted,

Wesley W. Ramsey
RC&D Coordinator