

Healthy Soils Task Force (HSTF) Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)

Thursday, May 21, 2020

Conducted through Zoom

Hosted by Chairman Keith Berns

Members Present:

Jerry Allemann, Richard Bartek, Keith Berns, Hannah Birge, Bob Bettger, Ron Bolze, Senator Tim Gragert, Lisa Lunz, Mike McDonald, Nate Pflueger, Charles Shapiro, Senator Julie Slama, Jeff Steffen, Steve Tucker, Ray Ward, Steve Wellman and Greg Whitmore

Staff and Audience Attending:

Steve Roth, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Kristi Block, Nebraska Grain and Feed Association; Aaron Hird, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Laura Field, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Edison McDonald, GC Resolve; Alex Brechbill, staff, Senator Gragert; Alan Moeller, Nebraska Elder Climatology Legacy; Heidi Borg, staff, Senator Slama; Ansley Fellers, Nebraska Farm Bureau; Andrew Pierson, Audubon Nebraska; Boone McAfee, Nebraska Corn Board; Kim Davis, staff, Senator Gragert; Clay Govier, Nebraska Soybean Board; Dean Edson, Nebraska Association of Resource Districts; and Keith Byerly, Soil Health Partnership

Meeting was called to order at 8:31 a.m. CDT.

Chairman Keith Berns stated that the Zoom meeting was being conducted in accordance with [Executive Order 20-03](#) issued by Governor Pete Ricketts on March 17, 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and was being operated under the Open Meetings Act. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is available upon request.

Berns also noted that a Public Meeting Notice was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on May 9, 2020. An affidavit of the notice is available for review upon request.

The minutes from March 12, 2020, meeting were accepted by acclamation.

The agenda was accepted as previously presented.

The financial report, as compiled by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's Finance and Accounting staff, was the same as presented at the March 12, 2020, meeting so no action was necessary.

Type of Expense	Amount
Meeting Notices	\$ 30.54
State Vehicle Rental	\$ 54.05
Mileage	\$ 1,570.79
Misc. Travel	\$ 18.25
Grand Total	\$ 1,673.63

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Writing Committee Members Mike McDonald, Hannah Birge, Alan Moeller and Aaron Hird, gave an overview of the DRAFT of the Task Force Report that had been presented to Task Force members previous to the meeting.

The four committee members said that the document was a draft compiled from the research, information and comments presented by Task Force members and advisors at previous meetings. They emphasized that the document was intended as a starting point from which a more detailed and complete report could be written.

Chairman Berns then presented meeting attendees with specific areas of the draft document starting with the definition of soil health:

Soil health is the capacity of the soil to function as a dynamic living ecosystem that nourishes plants, sustains animals and people, and improves the environment¹. A soil becomes healthier when organic matter levels are increasing (carbon sequestration), water infiltration rates are improving (reducing erosion, runoff and flooding), and the soil biological life is diverse and abundant.

Berns then presented what the committee had comprised as the Initiative that would be contained in the report:

The Initiative--“Nebraska Soil and Water Matters”

The HSTF proposes an Initiative that would be a visible, coordinated, highly publicized statewide campaign within Nebraska to protect and enhance the health of its soils by increasing awareness and adoption of soil health principles by producers. The theme of the Initiative is “Nebraska Soil and Water Matters” and stresses the importance of soil health and the ties between soil health and water quality. In compliance with Legislative Intent, participation in the Initiative is proposed to be achieved through voluntary partnerships and participation with producers, key stakeholders and the public. While there will be many complexities to the adoption of soil health management principles and practices, the Initiative considers all farmers, ranchers and landowners as potential participants and all other interested and concerned parties as potential stakeholders.

Berns said committee members felt that the title of the initiative could be a possible tool to be used to promote the overall work compiled in the report.

Berns reviewed Initiative goals that were identified in the draft document.

- 1. Create a Nebraska Soil Health and Water Quality Score Card**
- 2. Establish a Nebraska Soil and Water Hub**
- 3. Establish Nebraska Soil and Water Regional Research and Systems Demonstration Centers**
- 4. Recruit \$50,000,000 in outside additional soil health funding and incentives for Nebraska over the next 10 years**
- 5. Nebraska Leads the nation in soil health education, adoption, and awareness**

Berns opened the floor to discussion on the draft document starting with comments from each Task Force member. He then took comments from other meeting attendees.

The primary points of discussion focused on the amount of emphasis needed on water quality and the tone in which producers were presented in regards to currently implementing conservation practices.

Some members felt that the statute that created the Healthy Soils Task Force gave a directive to focus primarily, if not exclusive, on healthy soils. Others commented that water quality is closely tied to healthy soils and should be one of the features in the final report.

Some Task Force members felt some of the language of the document presented a negative picture of Nebraska producers overall and that the language could be changed to put a more positive light on those producers currently implementing healthy soils best practices.

Following the discussion, Berns entertained a motion to give the Writing and Reading Committees approval to proceed in the current direction as presented in the draft document with the intent to make alterations as suggested in the discussion.

Ray Ward so moved. The motion was seconded by Jeff Steffan.

The vote on the motion was as follows:

Aye:

Jerry Allemann, Richard Bartek, Keith Berns, Bob Bettger, Ron Bolze, Nate Pflueger, Charles Shapiro, Jeff Steffen, Steve Tucker, Ray Ward, Steve Wellman and Greg Whitmore

Nay: Lisa Lunz and Mike McDonald

Abstained: none

Absent: Hannah Birge

Motion carried.

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Berns requested volunteers from the Task Force who would assist the Writing and Reading Committees in re-framing some of the initial language in the report and expand on what had been written so far. Steve Tucker and Lisa Lunz agreed to assist in those roles.

Berns instructed the Writing Committee to get as much revising and writing done as possible to have a framework of the report ready to present to the Task Force in the next six weeks.

Berns said he would begin looking for dates in mid-July for the next Task Force meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m. CDT.