

Conservation Agriculture Systems Alliance

Conference Call

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

at 11 a.m. (eastern)

Participants:

Jerry Hatfield, USDA ARS

Randall Reeder, OSU Extension

Bill Kuenstler, USDA NRCS

Karen Scanlon, CTIC

Brian Lindley, No-till on the Plains

Jodi DeJong-Hughes, Regional Extension Educator, Univ of MN Extension

Jason Bergtold, Asst Professor, Ag Economics, Kansas State

Dave Brandt, Ohio No-till Council

Sjoerd Duiker,

Eliav Bitan, National Wildlife Federation

Agenda

- WCCA proposal: Comments from proposal committee (Glen Shaw, Paul Thoroughgood, Don McCabe, Brian Lindley, Bill Kuenstler, Wade Thomason, Jerry Hatfield, Sjoerd Duiker)
- Discussion of cover crop / insurance issue: Led by Eliav Bitan, National Wildlife Federation (see news release below)
- Jason Bergtold request for comments from CASA members
- CASA member updates

WCCA proposal

BL: can we find funding to send CASA representative to 5th WCCA? About \$6,000 needed.

SARE may sponsor travel. Cargill sponsor travel. Sept 25-29, 2011.

JDH: will check with SARE in Minnesota about sponsorship.

Don Reicosky go to WCCA?

KS: read Eliav's statement about RMA meeting in Springfield, Ill.: Cover cropping farmers, consultants and researchers had an interesting first meeting with the RMA regional office in Springfield yesterday. We think it was valuable for them to hear our outstanding success stories with cover crops, and to start thinking of cover crops as a risk-reducing practice. Some employees from that office are leading a national RMA effort to generate new policies on cover crops. We are looking forward to seeing what those new policies are, and applying for funding to continue the conversation and information sharing efforts.

DB: only research RMA used was DC soybeans after wheat. Concluded costs more to insure, so want cover crops terminated before going to head/seed. A lot of discussion about terminating crops on 5 or 6 May, when still have wet weather. Field won't dry out if cc still has a lot of biomass when killed. Meeting was first step in educating RMA with more/better data. Lot of data presented at meeting. About 7 farmers contributed and will send additional information about how cc increase OM, water holding capacity and profit.

BL: mention meeting in DC on July 26? Day-long meeting with briefing of legislators and staffers on cover crops.

DB: RMA trying to determine national policies, when situation is different from Midwest to Plains.

BK: Norm Widman working on bibliography of research on CC. Meeting with RMA to present information in early June.

DB: another meeting planned for August with RMA and others from Springfield meeting.

Jason Bergtold

JB: producing a production guide for conservation systems for southeast U.S. Introductory chapter is history, current trends and future of CT. Need help with What is future of Conservation Systems? Would like to ask CASA – what is future of conservation systems, what will they look like 10 years ahead? Will send out one-page questionnaire for comments/answers from CASA members.

DB: CT will be 60 years old; hope we take it the next step to make it more understood as important for soil health. More no-till, more cover crops, fewer inputs – if we can determine which cover crops can do needed functions in the systems (suppress nematodes, reduce weed problems, etc).

JB: want to go outside research/academic for these comments.

BK: tailoring our cropping systems to address specific problems.

JB: most chapters written, in peer-review stage, then compile guide. Hope to send draft to publisher in September. Plan to offer online for free end 2011 / early 2012. Looking for more sponsors (\$40,000).

Member Update

JH: getting ready for Russian farmer visit this week. Working on improving soil and soil health in upper Midwest; getting data to show more we improve soil more we improve productivity; making cropping systems resilient to climate change. Pushing people in DC that we are degrading soils as evident in variability, don't have stored water or nutrients. Only way to improve productive capacity is to start with soil resource. People begin to get it, but think genetics or adding NPK will take care it.

RR: Field day Aug. 31 – annual Ohio No-till Council field day in west Ohio. July 20-21 field day also. On July 13 and 14, 36 NRCS new employees will spend time on Bill Richards' farm and Dave will talk about cover crops and no-till. Australian farmer tour Aug 23 in Indianapolis, Chicago and Kentucky.

DB: will be second time hosting NRCS employees for training on conservation. Soil Warrior sponsored field day July 21-22 in Northwest Ohio. Been in 26 different states in last 4 months to talk about cover crops. Aug 16-17 field day at Brandt farm; soil density, soil microbes, soil pits, comparing neighbor conventional farm with no-till/cover crop farm. Planting cover crops for Aug 31 field day and for Farm Science Review (Sept 20-22).

BK: in Dearborn, Mich, meeting on Phosphorus in Lake Erie.

BL: working on Russian tour.

JDH: August 5 strip-till expo in Owatonna, Minn. Sept. 1 compaction field day (soil pits dug, filled, then driven over, then dug again to see compaction). Need names for natural soil pit or discuss compaction.

BL: Paul Jasa, Univ of Nebraska

RR: Randy Taylor, Oklahoma

JDH: Conservation Tillage Conference Feb. 7-8 in Rochester, Minn. Need soil biology speaker.

BL: Kris Nichols, ARS in Mandan

RR: Jim Horrman

JDH: Soil Quality workshop, Sept. 12 in central and southcentral Minn. Randall Reeder and Rafiq Islam and others. Doing tillage research this fall in heavy clay loam soil. Very few people who strip- or no-till in Minnesota. Need help with references and resources for conservation systems.

JB: cover crop research in Kansas; trying to publish article on cover crop economics and put out as extension document; finishing project on alternative biofuel crops and options within cropping systems; starting project looking at carbon/environmental markets to promote more intensive conservation in Midwest. Objectives are to design conservation systems tool (cost budgets, carbon budgets, modeling behind user-friendly interface) and learn from farmers about how they view systems and develop those systems, see how that impacts adoption of conservation and use of information; experiments with farmers to look at adoption of systems of practices (through conservation programs, markets, etc) focus on medium size farms. Pay (400) farmers to attend workshop so can work with them face-to-face. Testing tool developed with farmers. Another project to collect data and model land use and land cover.

SD: continue work on cover crop mixtures, stimulating dairy farmers to use cover crops. Huge interest in vertical tillage in the state. Next week have a clinic on vertical tillage and discuss pros and cons.

EB: RMA preparing to release statements in next 30 days on cover crops that will guide policies for next year. Invited by SARE for full proposal on topic of cover crops and crop insurance. Discussed briefly yesterday and ask group today. 2 issues: not communicating clearly with farmers about issues and RMA does not have data from producers to write good policy.

Meeting focused on eastern corn belt; know we need more information from plains and west. Invite questions or responses.

BL: our issues of a different kind (RMA says don't have enough moisture). Still about education and that RMA thinks one size fits all. Eliav has done lot of good work on this issue.

EB: would like feedback from group on RMA statements and SARE proposal.

Data needed: cover crop fields, yields, what cover crop, how terminated

DB: provided 10 years of yield data with cover crops with date planted and termination.

Next call August 2 @ 11 am (eastern)

Brian Lindley will facilitate

Time -- Winter event

Pros: farmer participation likely higher; piggy back on existing event (national no-till conference)

Cons: weather events prohibit travel; no field trip

Time – Summer event

Pros: field trip possibilities better

Cons: farmer participation lower; weather problems

Susan: will financial considerations help drive decision on time/location?

Dick: build it and they will come. Winter timing will be negative for international audience. If goal is to attract time of year that makes it attractive to those outside US/Canada.

Glen: Canadian producers visiting South America got most value from field trips.

Doyle: CA is not just no-till

What will you take away from today's conversation?

Dick: focus on target audience; desire to make event producer friendly and balanced with science/research community; strong arguments for winter vs summer; consensus to not pair with commodity conference but could pair with no-till conference

Glen: favor summer conference not piggybacked with another event; don't hear consensus on location, need more work that

Doyle: ditto Glen

Susan: look at who attends and what place is easy to get to from there; focus on content being a great draw; farmers come for field trips and would vote for that

Sjoerd: vote for integrating with no-till farmer conference;

April 5 @ 11 am eastern