

Arroyo Colorado Ag Workgroup Meeting  
Cameron Co. AgriLife Extension Conference Room  
February 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 – 11:00 am

Welcome and Introductions

Ashley facilitated the meeting with Ronnie's assistance. Ashley started by having everyone introduce themselves.

Update on Ag Activities

Programs, Soil Testing Campaign, etc. – Ashley Gregory

Ashley discussed the soil testing campaign and the kickoff Soil Health event held October 16, 2014 at the Weslaco Extension office. Their 42 attendees at the workshop. This was followed by a mail campaign, 1500 postcards were distributed, about 150-200 were returned. We need all TSSWCB, NRCS, FSA and CEA's to review the list so we can update the list for future mail outs.

The soil testing campaign was extended until the end of March due to all of the rain in the last 3-4 months to give producers enough time to collect their samples. To date, we have the lowest numbers of soil samples collected in several years.

319 WQMPs – Ronnie Ramirez

Current 319 project had a total of \$315,000 with a goal to write 21 new WQMP's for producers. To date they have completed 26 WQMP's on 1,063 acre and spent \$276,000 and have a balance of \$38,000 for additional plans- Ronnie is currently waiting for 3 WQMP's to be certified that will zero out the funding. The TSSWCB was able to acquire an additional \$ 95,000 to develop additional WQMP's in the AC watershed. The 3 most popular practices applied for by producers are; Pasture planting, Irrigation pipeline and Land leveling.

Under the 1310 project, Ronnie has been conducting outreach activities to commodity groups by giving presentations about TSSWCB and NRCS programs. He has presented to the Farm Bureau, South TX Association of Conservation Districts and the Sugar Cane Growers.

Sugar Cane Aphid, hot topic issue-

The aphid was identified last year by Dr. Villanueva and his staff. These aphids were causing a big problem for Sorghum Producers, especially the dry land farmers in Willacy Co. As the aphid would reproduce it would secrete a substance that would foul the harvesting equipment. Dr.

Villanueva and Danielle Sekula were able to alert the producers to the threat of the aphid to their crops and that enabled the producers to apply the proper pesticides to eliminate the aphids and save their sorghum crop for the year. Because of their efforts to identify and notify the producers about the aphid in the RGV, Dr. Villanueva's team was recognized at the 2015 Cotton and Grain Producers Pre Plant meeting in January in Mercedes, TX

#### Announcement of RCPP Grant

TWRI was awarded the grant. We are still wanting on guidance as to how the money will be distributed to current NRCS programs. Dr. Wagner will send us that information as soon as receives it and is able to review the guidelines/guidance that accompanies the grant. We hope to have an update soon

#### Ongoing Modeling Issues – Jaime Flores

SWAT model is complete, the model team is reviewing all BMP's and future scenarios to include in SWAT before making final run of the model. TIAER is still working to fine tune the CW QWL 2 model on the tidal segment. The team is planning to have the modelers present the preliminary results at the April meeting and the final results in July.

#### Update Planning Document

Jaime distributed a copy of the Update Plan that will be used as we develop Phase II of the ACWP and gave a description of the update and how it will be used.

#### AG Workgroup discussion;

Review current Accomplishments (# of WQMP's and total acreage under WQMP's and compare to original goals in the ACWPP. How do we translate that to New goals for Phase II of the ACWP? How many active BMPs by subwatershed? Hopefully the model will provide us with hotspots in sub watersheds so we can target specific BMP's to address the pollutant in that particular SW.

#### Need input from group on contents of Ag section

Ronnie stated that there are a handful of BMP's that would be implemented except that these BMP's are not listed in the Arroyo Plan approved list of practices. An example of this would be; Precision Laser land forming. This BMP could be utilized by dry land farmers in Willacy Co. to

reduce soil erosion and allow the track/parcel to better retain precipitation when they receive it. They are currently 20,000 acre in this portion of the watershed that could potentially adopt this BMP. The WG feels that this would provide loading reductions from this section of the watershed. Ashley Wendt stated that if the workgroup identified this an additional BMP's that are not currently on the AC approved list but feel that they can reduce pollutant loadings and will be adopted, the WG can petition the TSSWCB to have these BMP's to add them to the list. The ACWP and NRCS want to include Soil Health-No Till/Cover Crop as a management measure. Healthy Soil has been proven to keep nutrients on and in the Ag fields. It is also the only approved method that the EPA recognizes as an effective method to control NPS Ag runoff. Currently, we are struggling to determine how many acres in the watershed we would like to include as using Soil Health as a BMP. We know that conventional farming practices are almost exclusively used in Hidalgo and Cameron Co and that most conventional farmers site the high cost to switch from conventional farming to no till as the main reason for not wanting to try the practice. What percentage of acres to we want to include in the model and Update? 50,000-75,000 for the entire watershed. What would be a realistic number that we can hope to actually achieve in the next 10-15 years.

Review which maps need to be update and new maps/images

Land use map-Jaime has asked the GIS team at IRNR to prepare a current draft of the Arroyo land use map. We will have the draft ready for the April WG meetings. Are there any other maps that you would like to see updated?

Jaime has solicited quotes for a no till seed drill in an effort to put together a grant proposal to purchase a seed drill that can be used by smaller producers to plant cover crops and pastures. How can we expect local farmers to implement our suggested practices without the means/implements to do so? The WG members did mention 3-4 farmers that do own no till drills but they do not rent/lease them out to anyone. They use them to plant their own pastures. The WG agreed that it would be a good idea and there is a need that the drill could fill in the watershed but had the following questions; where would it be kept, would we charge a fee, would NRCS personnel actually do the planting or would we just let a farmer take the implement to use on his own? Brad suggested that we ask some of the rental places, (Hertz rental) if they might have one in their stores in the Midwest and if they might be able to bring them down if we request them to do so to enable some farmers to rent the equipment if needed until we find a suitable funding source that we submit a grant of this nature.