

MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
November 20, 2023

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:04 AM. Directors P. DeBlock, J. Wright, P. Ruskiewicz, G. Constable and B. Cheney were present along with K. Sumner (SWCD), E. King (SWCD), M. Held (SWCD), E. Schellenberg (CCE), and O. Velez-Juarbe (NRCS.)

2023-11-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Constable seconded, to approve October's Board Meeting Minutes as written. All in favor.

ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS – Some bills were paid and are listed on the Bills for Board Approval.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Bank statements, Account Analyses and collateral agreements were available for review.
- Engagement Letter from PKF O'Connor Davies Accounting Firm.
- Invitation from Cornell Cooperative Extension for the 108th Annual Meeting & Awards Dinner.
- Letter from Sidle Insurance & Risk Management RE: Rising Insurance Premiums.

FINANCIAL REPORTS The October financial report was presented for review. Overall, there are no big surprises when it comes to the financial report. Sumner acknowledged that DeBlock helped King and him prepare the monthly financial report. Sumner noted that the dedicated fund summary for October's receipts is not yet updated, but that it will be. DeBlock questioned whether the no till payments were all received. Sumner and Held explained that they are waiting on some payments from late signees. However, the no till value listed on October's receipts statement is current. Wright commented that his family rented the Esch seeder recently and that it worked very well. Cornell Cooperative Extension, CCE, rented the seeder in August 2023. When Orange County CCE used the seeder last year the rental fee was waived. Sumner wanted to know if OCSWCD will waive their \$156 rental fee for the 2022 seeder?

2023-11-2 Wright made the motion, Constable seconded, to waive Orange County CCE's rental fee for the 2022 seeder which was used in August 2023. All in favor.

Schellenberg remarked at how well the 2022 seeder worked despite the ground being used as a parking lot for the country fair.

2023-11-3 Wright made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to file October's Financial Reports for audit review. All in favor.

BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL

The bills for board approval were presented to the Board and they did not have any questions or concerns.

2023-11-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to pay the bills as presented. All in favor.

GRANT REPORT UPDATE – Sumner highlighted recent grant activity in red ink to bring attention to recent updates. Sumner explained that a lot of the activity is due in part to the new hires. Held is doing a lot of soil testing with various farmers as a part of our grants and AEM contract. Sumner noted the soil testing company recommends that farmers confer with their local CCE agent for crop recommendations once they receive their test results. Per Sumner, the results tend to be generalized. Schellenberg noted that neither he nor Ethan Grundberg, a vegetable specialist at Orange County CCE, have received any emails from farmers asking for crop recommendations. Wright noted that a lot of these farmers make their own choices and take advice from the fertilizer company they work with. Sumner explained that CASH, Cornell Assessment of Soil Health, tests offer a more comprehensive evaluation of what the different soil parameters are. Ideally, the CASH soil testing would occur at the start of the grant to allow time to implement practices such as cover crop planting or adding composting to record any improvements in the soil health. Sumner admits that it is a little unrealistic to expect that to happen in such a short time. Wright recommended that farmers have their soil's phosphorous levels tested. Sumner stated that the test needs to evaluate the parts per million levels of phosphorous to determine if the rates are high. Sumner explained that phosphorous is usually attached to the soil, but when it is high enough it will go into the soil solution. At this point it becomes a ground water issue. Per Sumner, this is the biggest nonpoint water quality issue in Orange County.

INTERAGENCY REPORTS

Schellenberg reported that Orange County CCE applied for a three-year conservation innovation grant. Orange County CCE, Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program, and OCSWCD would collaborate on the grant if approved. Schellenberg believes that he will know by March 2024 if the grant was approved. The grant aims to document soil health while using no till equipment on soybeans, corn, and pumpkins. Schellenberg intends on working with five to ten farms in Orange County. Some of the farms are well known, but Schellenberg wants lesser-known farms to partake. The allocated funds will be used to buy a new no till seeder and I&J roller crimper. The no till seeder costs around \$52,000 and the I&J roller crimper costs \$34,000. Per Schellenberg, OCSWCD would own the I&J roller crimper and no till seeder. Schellenberg justifies our ownership of the equipment since we already have a busy no till rental program, and he would not disrupt our process with having to constantly rent the designated no till seeders.

In other news, Schellenberg reminded and encouraged everyone to attend Orange County CCE's 108th Annual Meeting & Awards Dinner on December 4th, 2023. Lastly, Schellenberg updated that the stormwater training series will conclude next Wednesday, 11/29. Schellenberg noted that the series was delayed due in part to the DEC updating the permits and design manuals. Sumner remarked that OCSWCD collaborated with Orange County CCE in 2022 to teach the stormwater training series. Sumner intends on having King and Held attend the stormwater training series sometime next year.

Velez-Juarbe reported that the National Resource Conservation Service, NRCS, gained sixty new contracts in 2022 for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, EQIP, which totaled \$840,742. EQIP was created by NRCS and serves to help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners integrate conservation into working lands. Additionally, Velez-Juarbe received two agreements last year from the Town of Warwick for purchase of development rights requested by two farms. The total amount received from this agreement was \$780,250. Currently, EQIP received thirty-six new applications from Orange County for 2024. The deadline for the applications was November 3, 2023. NRCS is interviewing candidates for a soil conservationist position in their Milbrook and Middletown locations. Velez-Juarbe hopes to have two soil conservationists working in the Middletown office by 2024. Velez-Juarbe noted there is a newly hired soil conservationist at their Highland office which will hopefully allow him to attend more Board of Directors meetings. Sumner clarified to Velez-Juarbe that our office and Board of Directors did not complain about his past attendance history to our meetings. It was in fact the president of the Orange County Farm Bureau who expressed concerns about how often NRCS representatives attended our meetings. Sumner expressed interest in collaborating on engineering projects with NRCS. Sumner alluded to the question of whether to keep paying for the Zoom subscription, which will be addressed later in the meeting, as an option for Velez-Juarbe. Should the Board vote to continue the subscription, Velez-Juarbe has the option to attend meetings virtually.

DeBlock did not have anything to report from FSA. There were no representatives from NYSS & WCC present at the meeting.

STAFF REPORT/OLD & NEW BUSINESS

Held updated the staff on the progress of the soil samples she sends out to Dairy One or Cornell University. Held reiterated that CASH assessment tests are more in depth in comparison to the normal agronomic tests offered by Dairy One. Both the Climate Resilient Funding Round 6, CRF6, and Agriculture Environmental Management, AEM, have supplied the funds for the various soil testings. Held briefed the Board on the current, late, and to be determined participants in the cover crop program. Held provided the Board with exact acreage planted by the farmers and the amount of land unaccounted for. As of today, Hoeffner Farms requested admittance into the cover crop program. Hoeffner Farms planted twenty-two acres on 10/5/23 which was prior to the program's deadline. Held assured the Board that she will visit the farm to document the cover crop's progress.

2023-11-5 Wright made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to approve Hoeffner Farms entering the cover crop program for 22 acres. All in favor.

Additionally, Held ensured that the conservation plans for AEM Tier 3 were completed prior to collecting the applicant's signatures. Held wants the farmer's files concise and finalized for future reference. Held prepared the plan of work for the Agriculture Non-point Source of Round 29 and is waiting on three farmer's signatures. Held will add them to her report for today later. Held reached out to Ben Luskin, Ron Busch, and Brendan Jordan from the state agency to gain more information on receiving a conservation nutrient management planner certification, CNMP. Held informed the Board that trees purchased by the contractor have been delivered to the Walkill Floodplain Bench Project. Additional trees were donated as reported at previous meetings. Held stated that Sumner will discuss the Walkill Floodplain Bench Project in further detail today. Held stated that she is progressing well with towing the various no till seeders and other equipment.

King presented her findings on the various prices and potential learning opportunities regarding QuickBooks. King spoke with a representative from Intuit QuickBooks' training website who explained that their introductory course is a two-day webinar taught by a live instructor. The class costs \$599.95 and includes a 200-page PDF manual, one free test voucher, test prep materials, and a practice test at no extra cost. Additionally, King mentioned that a fellow office manager at Sullivan County SWCD stated that QuickBooks Desktop's annual is \$549, adding QuickBooks Payroll is an additional \$500, and the monthly employee usage fee is typically \$5 each. Following Ben Luskin's advice, I began filling out the Frank Bratt scholarship located on the NYS Conservation District Employees' Association's, NYCDEA, website. The Frank Bratt scholarship offers \$50-\$500 for individuals who are interested in furthering their education to benefit the district's function or for conservation related topics. The deadline for the scholarship is December 1st, with the next submission date on March 1st, 2024. Although there are currently no in person QuickBooks introductory classes available, King made connections with neighboring organizations who will alert her if they hear of any available opportunities. Most recently, King and Sumner devoted a large amount of time to compiling the end of month financial reports. As a proactive measure, King created Excel spreadsheets of the checkbook, receipts, and disbursements in the hopes to reduce arithmetic error and reinforce the importance of record keeping. King continues to educate herself further in the tasks of being the office manager as well as a field technician in preparation for the future.

Wright addressed King and informed her that the Board would be willing to pay for the training and materials needed for the transition to QuickBooks. DeBlock and Wright encouraged King to keep researching and to apply for any available scholarships. Sumner is supportive of King's current progress and wants her to learn even more of the office's current bookkeeping prior to switching to QuickBooks. Sumner believes that it is in the office's best interest

for King to know more of the current system prior to the numerous end of year reports due by February 15, 2024. Afterwards, King can contact the professional in Middletown who previously trained the former office manager to help implement QuickBooks. DeBlock is confident that once King understands QuickBooks that she can train Held.

Sumner began his report by thanking Wright and Ruszkiewicz for their efforts as members of the Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board, in helping OCSWCD receive \$7,000 from the AFPB budget. Those funds will be allocated towards the ongoing tree planting component of the Wallkill Floodplain Bench project. Sumner provided invoices to the County planning department to ensure that all the necessary steps are taken within the given timeframe. Sumner intends on moving to the next phase of the project next year so long as there are no issues with our funding requests from the County. Sumner wants the construction plans and bid documents ready by early next year. Sumner explained that contractors need to know ahead of time whether they are needed for projects or not. For this reason, it is unwise to wait until May 2024 to submit construction plans for a summer project. This would limit the number of proposals we receive since contractors will be committed to other projects already. Sumner believes that the most critical part of the project, where the tributaries enter the river, is completed. Sumner assured Wright that the project is fully permitted for construction along the northside of the river next year. Per Sumner, the initial plan laid out by the engineers proposed that the project would continue to the New Jersey state line. Sumner admits that there is a lot of work that needs to be done before we reach the New Jersey state line. Per Sumner, the Board needs to decide whether we want to keep this as a priority project. Sumner recommended that we avoid an extended pause in construction. If the Board endorses maintaining a priority on the benching work beyond Phase 4, then Sumner feels that he should be working on the permits, designs, environmental and archaeological studies for phase five now. Sumner requested feedback from the Board since this undertaking would be time consuming.

Sumner informed the Board that there are several funding sources potentially available for this project. In Sumner's opinion, he does not think that we have had a better opportunity for funding. It is noteworthy that every complete project proposal in the water management track of CRF 7 received funding. Out of the seven CRF rounds, OCSWCD received funding three times for the floodplain bench project. Sumner noted that the next round of CRF will come out early next year. Sumner reported that proposals will be due for the next round by April or May 2024. Sumner explained that we should begin discussions with affected landowners moving upstream as soon as possible. Per Sumner, permits and studies are not necessarily needed prior to applying. Once again, Sumner asked the Board for their opinion on whether he is allocating too much time and funding to the floodplain bench project. Sumner stressed that we need to be cognizant of how much we want to take on and formalize our approach for the next action.

Sumner felt that OCSWCD could be doing more proactive outreach with other farming sectors besides the Black Dirt region in Pine Island, NY. Sumner is surprised and encouraged by the amount of funding available in NYS for farm projects. Sumner suggested that since there are a lot of beef farms in the county, it would be useful to be able to consider manure storage facilities as future projects. However, Sumner noted that the advance planning requirements before being able to apply for manure storage projects are very comprehensive. For example, Sumner knows of a farmer that wants a compost bedded pack barn for his beef cows, but first he needs to have a comprehensive nutrient management plan done. DeBlock expressed support for this project idea since Held mentioned her interest in receiving her CNMP today. Additionally, DeBlock asked whether Held can help monitor the existing grants, thereby giving Sumner more time to devote to other projects. Eventually, Held will assume more responsibility of finding more projects on her own to develop.

Furthermore, given available funding sources, Sumner suggested that the Board keep in mind the option of hiring new support staff, such as an office assistant, in the future. This would allow King to take on even more responsibilities of a field technician to help Sumner and Held on projects. The Board briefly discussed the risk of investing time and training in a new hire, but agreed that it could be beneficial. Overall, Sumner affirmed that it is a decision that should be discussed and voted on by the Board.

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Wright and DeBlock shared their support for continuing work on the floodplain bench project. Per Wright, the floodplain bench project has been a great success. Wright stated that the county has been overall very supportive of this whole project too. Constable shared a similar sentiment and wants Sumner to continue the project given the growing momentum.

Additionally, Sumner reported that the four projects within the Round 29 Ag Non-Point Source grant have been approved, as well as the three irrigation management projects through CRF 7. Also, the AEM contract that starts next year has \$200,000 in it for projects. Sumner expressed the challenge of how we want to approach the allocation of that money. Sumner stated that the third CRF grant supporting the bench project provided \$300,000 in NYS funds. Sumner stated that we can pull funds from other accounts if need be.

Wright asked Sumner if he knew of any updates with the culvert pipe lowering under Pulaski Highway requested by farmers in the Black Dirt region of Pine Island. Sumner informed the Board that he has not heard of any updates for months, but that another landowner inquired about having a culvert pipe lowered under County Route 1 by Merritt's Island. Sumner advised him to be patient given the extended amount of time that has passed since the Pulaski Highway proposal was initially requested. Cheney reported that ever since Travis Ewald, who was working on the culvert pipe project, left the Department of Public Works (DPW), the department is occupied with finding his replacement. Sumner last heard that the DPW was dissatisfied with the engineering study OCSWCD funded so they commissioned another consulting firm to study the situation.

Sumner reminded the Board that the AEM Round 18 is a two-year, non-competitive grant which continues to increase the amount of money that can be requested. The current funding cap for implementation projects is set at \$200,000. Sumner wants to discuss with the Board their recommendation for allocating the AEM Round 18 funds. Sumner noted that we were able to submit the round 18 request for funding without specifying the projects to be funded. Projects need to be identified by May, 2024. Sumner hopes to allocate funds towards replanting certain areas of the floodplain where it is needed. Sumner explained that they have planted what the DEC recommended based on the current species in the area. This includes silver maples, red maples, willows, etc. Recently, after several permit revisions, the DEC broadened the list of available choices. Sumner stated that tulip and sweet gum trees are among the species donated to OCSWCD this past year. Although not all the donated tree species are listed on the DEC's revision list, they are native and adaptable to the area so expected to be allowable for planting. Schellenberg suggested that Sumner plant poplars since he read that they are very hardy and can be a nurse crop for willows.

Sumner relayed to the Board that Orange County CCE contacted OCSWCD for assistance in implementing a grant to build wash racks at their 4H park in Otisville. Orange County CCE specifically wanted help preparing a materials list and technical information. The grant is offering \$50,000 and Sumner described it as being like the grant former Senator Metzger and DASNY provided. Sumner recommended that Orange County CCE consult with a project engineer since the project will exist at a public facility. Sumner referred them to a project engineer in Port Jervis that he worked with in the past. Sumner reported that Orange County CCE is considering installing a septic tank and periodically emptying it. They do not intend on installing a leach field on the grounds. Another reason Sumner feels that Orange County CCE should work with a project engineer is because they plan to build a roof over the wash racks. Held researched local wash rack projects and found one in Saratoga County that required approval from the health department. Saratoga's SWCD stated that the health department required that the water supply hoses did not reach the ground. This was to further reduce the risk of any polluted water getting into the water supply. Sumner believes that the wash racks will source their water from the same well the fairground uses. Due to Saratoga County's experience, Sumner advised Orange County CCE to fully explore what permitting they may be required to address. If the Port Jervis engineer cannot provide full design assistance, Sumner told CCE he is willing to discuss design assistance from OCSWCD, but a PE would still be required so details of any such arrangement will require considerable discussion.

Additionally, Sumner informed the Board of Directors that that Zylstra grazing project's system, which is funded by our local cost share program, is complete. Sumner is satisfied with the progress he witnessed on his previous site visits. Sumner noted that there is still \$7,000 left to earn from what was allocated to them. Sumner asked the Board if they can approve issuing the payment of \$7,000, pending favorable final field inspection. Sumner promised that he will list the check on the December bills, but would like to have permission to issue payment to the farm before the next meeting.

2023-11-6 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to approve the final payment on the Zylstra grazing project. All in favor.

Sumner asked the Board for their opinion on whether to keep the monthly Zoom membership or not. Sumner stated that the membership is beneficial should a Board member be unable to attend the meeting in person. Cheney mentioned that Zoom offers free forty-minute sessions for nonmembers. Cheney explained that when the first meeting runs out of time, then a second invitation to a forty-minute session can be sent. Held suggested to the Board that since we already pay for Microsoft Teams, we should use the video conference feature they provide. Several members of the Board agreed to cancel the Zoom subscription and do a trial run of the Microsoft Teams video calls for December's meeting. *The Board decided not to call a motion for this decision*

Sumner announced to the Board that the three CRF7 projects, Shuback, Crist Brothers, and Wright Family Farms, were all funded. The Wright irrigation project was approved for funding from NRCS in 2018, but has not progressed. Sumner noted that Ben Luskin suggested that combining funds could be possible. Velez-Juarbe advised that so long as the funds are not coming from the same source, i.e., both federal, then they can be combined for implementation. Doing so would require approval of any design by the NRCS Engineering division. Sumner stated that Wright has a design from the vendor, and he believes our private sector engineer could review that design and sign off for a reasonable fee. Since time is money, this approach might be preferable to waiting for NRCS's engineering staff to have time to review the vendor design. Sumner noted that he is still waiting to hear from NRCS for the Touw design he submitted to them for review in January 2023. Per Sumner, OCSWCD will receive guidance on submitting the work plan for the three irrigation projects from NYSSWCC soon.

Sumner requested that the Board wait until the end of the meeting to conduct the employee appraisals for confidentiality purposes and so that our guests may leave.

Sumner asked the Board for their opinion on the engagement letter received from PFK O'Connor Davies, LLP. Cheney questioned when we last renewed our contract with them. Per Sumner, the renewal occurred three years ago. Cheney does not believe that we would run into any issues from the State Comptroller's office if we looked at other firms. Sumner reported that an accounting firm OCSWCD previously used in Middletown no longer offers municipal audits. Per Sumner, OCSWCD would have to go out on the open market to solicit proposals from various firms. DeBlock mentioned that PFK O'Connor Davies, LLP did reduce their rates after our complaint. Cheney asked whether OCSWCD has a procurement policy to which Sumner confirmed that we do. Our policy allows for procuring professional services without seeking multiple proposals up to \$50,000 per year. Sumner assured the Board that our annual payments to our engineering consultants are nowhere near \$50,000. Sumner and DeBlock admitted that it would be nice for PFK O'Connor Davies, LLP to send us the same auditor every year instead of a new one so that the individual would know our system.

2023-11-7 DeBlock made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to renew our contract with PFK O'Connor Davies, LLP. All in favor

Lastly, the Board discussed the updates concerning the Chester Ag Center. According to Sumner, the county has a contractor selected and is actively working on the designs for the new pumps. Per Cheney, the funding needs to be allocated by 12/31/23 and spent by 2025. Sumner mentioned a somewhat related topic of a landowner in the Black

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Dirt who owns property that he does not farm, yet he wants to get approved for purchase of development rights, PDR, and continue to own the property. This makes little sense to the Board since Black Dirt has little development value. The landowner claims that some of the land on Chester Ag Center was approved for PDR. Per Velez-Juarbe, he knows that NRCS would have the information of the easement holder for the Chester Ag Center. All the Board members shared an interest in learning more about the easement holder and how the difference between the full market value and the residual ag value of the land was determined. This approval occurred before Velez-Juarbe worked at NRCS, but he promised the Board that he will bring any information he finds to the meeting in December.

2023-11-8 DeBlock made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to enter the executive session to discuss the employment history of a particular person. All in favor

2023-11-9 On a motion by Constable, seconded by DeBlock, the Board came out of Executive Session at 11AM. All in favor.

2023-11-10 DeBlock made the motion to grant 'covid leave' to King for 24 hours (10/18, 19 and 20), and to Sumner for 4 hours (10/11, 12 and 13). The motion was seconded by Cheney. All in favor.

2023-11-11 Performance appraisals of King and Held, conducted by Sumner, were reviewed by the Board. Ruskiewicz made the motion, seconded by Constable, to accept both appraisals. All in favor.

The Board then conducted an appraisal of Sumner's performance.

Next meeting date: December 18th

ADJOURNMENT

2023-11-12 Cheney made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:20AM, seconded by DeBlock. All in favor.

Minutes Prepared By:

Emily King, Secretary to the Board

November, 2023

Wallkill Flood Projects –

Floodplain Bench Phase 4 South – All bulk excavation activities and herbaceous seedings have been completed. Remaining work includes tree planting (ongoing), road repair including drainage measures, and removal of clay stockpiles.

I have contacted the County Surveyor to request assistance with an ‘as-built’ survey and he indicates they can assist. I am waiting to stake the limits of the proposed Conservation Easement before asking them to schedule the survey work.

The AFPB had some funds left in their budget that needed to be spent or they would be returned to the County. John Wright requested some of the funds be assigned to the Floodplain Bench project. The request was approved for \$7,000. These funds will be applied to tree planting materials.

Floodplain Bench Phase 4 North – It appears that our request for the County to fund most of Phase 4 North construction costs will be formally approved. I would like to get detailed construction plan documents (enhancing the Design Plans prepared by our consultants) and bid documents prepared by early 2024 if possible. We need to do soil test pits before finalizing the Construction Plan. We are waiting for the corn to be picked off the Phase 4 North area.

Phase 5 – If our intention is to continue to progress the Floodplain Bench project upstream towards NJ, we would need to initiate studies, design work and permitting and identify funding options. CRF Round 8 could be an option for funding. I would like to discuss this at the meeting.

Carbon Farming Project – Two projects, DeBuck Controlled Drainage and Southway Compost Facility, need to be completed before the end of the year.

AEM Round 17 – This 2-year contract ends at the end of 2023. We will be turning staff time funds back. Four farm projects were to be funded through the Implementation portion of this contract. Two were completed (Dean Ford Streambank Stabilization and O’Dell Manure Shed construction). Two have not been completed and it is unclear if they will be before the end of the year (P. Ewanciw barnyard improvements, M. Hoyt barnyard improvements).

AEM Round 18 – This 2-year contract starts 1/1/2024. In addition to staff time funding, we requested \$200,000 in the Implementation portion of the contract. We have until May , 2024 to specify the projects.

CRF Round 7 – All three of our Irrigation Water Management proposals were funded (Crist Orchards, Shuback Sod Farm, Wright Family Farm). We need to be cognizant of the local match we committed to for these projects.

Annual Audit – We received ‘Engagement Letter’ from PKF O’Connor Davies, LLP. Do we want to consider other firms, or stay with this firm that the County uses?

Other – We were asked by Cornell CCE O.C. for assistance with design of wash rack for 4-H park. We have done some research and met with CCE staff. We anticipate the project will require permits/approvals at least from the Town and will probably require a PE sign-off. This is an ongoing conversation which we will continue to report to Board about.

Provided PDR Soils Evaluation assistance to the Town of Wallkill.

We conducted a pond site evaluation including review of deep soil test pits for Querner Family Farm in New Hampton.

LCSP – The Zylstra Grazing System project we are cost-sharing through the LCSP, is completed but I have not had a chance to do a final inspection and collect bills. I would like to request Board approval to pay the remaining funds for this project, about \$7,000, pending favorable final field inspection, so the participant doesn't have to wait until December Board meeting for approval of his final payment.

I would like to do Employee Appraisal reviews with the Board at the end of the meeting.

Emily King

November 20th, 2023

To the board of directors,

Since our last meeting, I have dedicated time to reaching out to people of various backgrounds for information regarding QuickBooks. I spoke with a representative from Intuit QuickBooks' training website who explained that their introductory course is a two-day webinar taught by a live instructor. The class costs \$599.95 and includes a 200-page PDF manual, one free test voucher, test prep materials, and a practice test at no extra cost.

Additionally, I spoke to the office manager at Sullivan County SWCD, Lisa Schick, to gauge her opinion on QuickBooks. Lisa thoroughly enjoys using QuickBooks and notes that it takes her only a few minutes to calculate payroll. She stated that the QuickBooks Desktop annual subscription is \$549, adding QuickBooks Payroll is an additional \$500, and the monthly employee usage fee is typically \$5 each. Lisa noted that the yearly fees includes a 1-800 free helpline to address any issues and the newest version of QuickBooks Desktop.

Following Ben Luskin's advice, I began filling out the Frank Bratt scholarship located on the NYS Conservation District Employees' Association's, NYCDEA, website. The Frank Bratt scholarship offers \$50-\$500 for individuals who are interested in furthering their education to benefit the district's function or for conservation related topics. The deadline for the scholarship is December 1st, with the next submission date on March 1st, 2024.

I contacted Cornell Cooperative Extension to see if they knew of any QuickBooks training courses. Unfortunately, they do not know of any available courses, but they will contact me if they do. The NYCDEA sent an email last week that they uploaded course materials for the 2010 version of QuickBooks on the district wide shared drive. Additionally, they listed contact information of clerks with QuickBooks expertise. I emailed the clerks about any classes available, but they had none to offer.

Kevin and I worked together this past week on the end of the month financial reports. We pored over the checkbook, receipts, disbursements, and payroll for days. Albeit stressful, this experience helped me learn more about reconciling the various ledgers and the importance of keeping a detailed log. Speaking of which, I created Excel spreadsheets of the checkbook, receipts, and disbursements in the hopes to reduce arithmetic error and reinforce the importance of record keeping. I will continue to update the physical ledgers and checkbook in the meantime.

Finally, when time permits, I educate myself further on the responsibilities and tasks of a field technician. I often review and take notes from presentations available on the Soil & Water Conservation Committee's shared drive. Otherwise, I have found informative videos from Cornell University. I have asked Kevin to forward me any materials he recommends that will further improve my performance as office manager. Please do not hesitate to ask me further questions regarding my progress either in person or via email. Thank you for your time.

Employee Report as of Nov 17th 2023 – MCH, Field Technician

Soil sampling continues, but is dwindling for the season. So far we have received 1 comprehensive soil health analysis from Cornell and many results in terms of agronomic testing from DairyOne.

Observing cover crops for local cost sharing payments continues, but is also dwindling as the cold season rapidly approaches. We've had a few late planters who we're waiting to see if their seed even comes up. Updates for cover crop management plans continue as more information is received with visits to the farms and evaluations of cover crop growth.

So far, this is the cover crop update:

Local Cost Share Funds:

- Alex Ronne: 30 acres (planted, certified, & paid for 30 ac)
- Tom Owens 100 ac (applied for 300 ac) (planted, certified, & paid for 100ac)

- R&G Produce: 30 ac (applied for 100 ac, only planted 30ac) – payment pending approval

- Michael O'Dell: 90 (approved for up to 100 ac, applied for 140 ac) – pending SWCD certification

Late Signup:

Mark Hoyt: 7 ac

Troy Vellenga: 14 ac

- **Applied and approved but have not planted/gotten in contact:**
 - Curtis Johnson – 60 ac (hasn't answered phone or email)
 - Mike Miedema – 40 ac (pulled out)
 - John King – 7 ac (more than likely won't plant)
 - R&G – 70 ac (out of their original 100 ac)
 - Michael O'Dell – 10 ac (out of original 100 ac)

If we exclude the variables of King and Johnson, this leaves us 120 ac of unclaimed cover crop payment. 120 unclaimed -21ac late signup = 99 ac unclaimed cover crop payment.

Climate Resilient Funding Round 6:

Russell Smiley: 18 ac (out of avg 15ac/ year) – planted and paid (-3)

Alex Kocot: 118 ac (out of avg 200ac/ year) – certified, payment pending approval (+82)

Phil Johnson: 145 ac (out of avg 150 ac/ year) – certified, payment pending approval (+5)

Bob Stap: Did not plant (out of avg 15 ac / year) (+15)

Jason Touw: 17 ac (out of avg 20ac / year) – pending SWCD certification / photos (+3)*

*Uncertain as I haven't picked up the seeder yet to calculate total acreage, but the last time I spoke to him he told me 17ac

According to the yearly average allocations: $82ac+5ac+-3ac+15ac+3ac = 102$ ac unclaimed cover crop payment for CRF6

I have given my best shot at making sure conservation implementation plans are 'complete' in terms of what the funding guidelines require for each plan. The two that I have looked over, both for farmers in our Ag Non Point Source Funding round 29 (coming in 2024), have either been signed by their recipients or sent out for signatures for their recipients.

As far as applying to other grants, we successfully completed the plan of work submittal for ag non point source round 29 and have collected three of four landowner / conservation district contract signatures. All signed agreements will be collected for board approval /signatures then sent to Ben Luskin as they become available.

I have been learning how to move equipment little by little and have not hit any mailboxes or trashcans yet.

I am starting the dive into conservation nutrient management planner certification. I don't know exactly what this entails yet, but I have been in correspondence with Ben and hopefully soon will be in correspondence with Ron Bush and Brendan Jordan about getting the ball rolling with that. We have a few farmers who need a management plan from a certified planner in order to keep all the ducks in a row with funding requirements, and this seems like a good opportunity to expand the district's abilities and become more efficient.

More so in Kevin's lane, the Wallkill Floodplain Bench Project is beginning to plant trees, and updates are being made as we observe the progress. The first shipment of 113 red maples was delivered Thursday 11/16/2023 in addition to the 100+ we had donated.