

Agricultural Innovations Group
First Meeting June 12, 2013
14 Attendees

1. Review of Focus Group Meetings and Agricultural Working Group (AWG)

Facilitators supplied overview of work done with stakeholders through focus group meetings and the AWG during the past 10 months. The work was funded by EPA, NRCS, GMCR, and High Meadows Fund. There were approximately 20 focus group meetings held during the fall of 2012. Stakeholders at the focus group meetings developed a long list of ideas to reduce phosphorus pollution from the agricultural sector.

The AWG met 6 times in 2013. The AWG evaluated the ideas generated during the focus group meetings and made a series of recommendations including farm certification with the AAPs, livestock exclusion, smart buffers, and others. The AWG is still working on nutrient management planning.

Recommendations and meetings minutes are all available on line
<http://www.emcenter.org/lake-champlain-phosphorous-pollution-initiative/>

A primary distinction between the AWG and the Agricultural Innovations Group (AIG) besides the cross-sector representation is the time line. The work of the AWG focuses on imperatives that need to be implemented more quickly with benefits to be seen sooner rather than later. In many cases, the recommendations are concrete and specific programs that can be adopted into the TMDL Implementation Plan.

AIG is able to focus on a broader range of potential ideas, a longer time horizon, and has the opportunity to be more creative and innovative.

The AIG is a forward thinking group. The aim and focus is not a rehash about what has or hasn't happened in the past but to create a better future.

The group was asked to look out over a 5 or 10 year time span and imagine what changes would be good for water quality and beneficial to sustainability of agriculture—not necessarily limiting themselves at this time by focusing on what is financially or politically possible – although those issues may be important to look at down the road. There may be ideas that are not be practical to do now but they may be steps that can be taken to make it easier to go down that path later.

2. Purpose and Intention of the Agricultural Innovations Group

What is the vision and unifying interest for this group? What can this group accomplish? Participants suggested the following:

- A) The goal is to explore ways to reduce the phosphorous in the lake.
- B) I am here to explore a broader vision concerning the health of the Lake
- C) I'd like to see a way to help Ag become sustainable and non-polluting, dairy in particular because dairy is 80% of the Ag sector and if we do this, we can positively impact the lake.
- D) A larger vision to support the ag industry in Vermont because we can't replace Ag land with developed land, that would increase the phosphorus entering the Lake
- E) A non-polluting Ag sector is a goal, although some felt this characterization read in a negative way and there were more positive statements to capture the same sentiment
- F) I view this as a pathway to returning to a time where the Ag sector is viewed as an asset and not a liability to communities.

The group agreed that ultimately, its purpose is to make Vermont agriculture economically and environmentally sustainable.

3. Developing a Work Plan

Our goal today is to generate a long list of ideas. Over time we will explore the most promising ideas and determine the ones the group is interested in working on. Discussion of how many ideas would be discussed and when will the group end the discussion.

Participant comment: *I would prefer that we do not, at this time, put limits on the conversation. If we do that, it then we constrain the conversation and that is not a good thing to do at the outset. I don't see there is an end to work like this, its hard to envision, three ideas walk away that is not really effective.*

Group used sticky notes as an aid to generate ideas, scope the parameters of discussion, and determine avenues of convergence on ideas that members think are important and can improve water quality and lead to sustainable agriculture. The ideas generated will be sent to each member in a separate document.

Discussion on strategic planning for the future of Vermont ag at the Agency of Agriculture level. Agency views its role as primarily regulatory but it also

participates in strategic planning both with other state agencies and agricultural non-governmental organizations.

Farm to plate is a program that has elements of cross-sector conversations within the initiative – they look at things like how to get small processors into the market place.

Discussion on whether tools such as causal loop or mind mapping or systems mapping would be of any benefit in helping the group narrow their focus or determine which issues they wanted to tackle. The facilitators agreed to research some of these tools to determine whether to utilize them or work with the group to narrow the focus. The facilitators will also develop a draft work plan for the group to review.

Next Meeting: Set for July 15th in the morning. Details to follow.