

## Southern PLN Conference Call- February 5, 2016- 10am

- **Opening of Meeting and Welcome Remarks-** Billy Lawton, Southern PLN Chair- 10:00am
- **Roll Call-** Melissa Stewart, Southern PLN Secretary
  - Alabama- Uma Karki
  - Florida- Marty Main, Saqib Mukhtar
  - Georgia- Todd Hurt
  - Kentucky- Gary Palmer
  - Louisiana- Dawn Mellion-Patin
  - Oklahoma- Ross Love, Randy Taylor
  - Texas- Billy Lawton, Travis Miller
  - Virginia- Bobby Grisso
  - West Virginia- Melissa Stewart
  - Bianca Moebius-Cline PhD- Soil Health Division
- **Minutes** from previous meeting approved
- **Old Business- started but continued after Bianca presentation**
  - PLN Representatives-
    - Leadership Committee PLC Atlanta
- **Plan of Work**
  - Lacked impact or Outcomes
  - Looking shallow and weak
  - Feb 18<sup>th</sup>- Discuss Plan of Work
    - Strengthen outcomes- will report back
- **Committee Updates**
  - Southeast/North Central- Grisso
    - March 29<sup>th</sup> Joint Meeting
    - Focus on agencies
    - Tech transfer & outreach components of grants
- **Soil Health Division- Bianca Moebius-Cline PhD**
  - Accomplishments
    - Have hired most people by now
    - Brief Background- updates of where the program stands now
  - Slides
    - Challenges
      - Building Healthier Soils
    - Poor Soil Health
      - Compaction
      - Lack of aggregation
      - Not large enough root zone
    - Downward spiral of soil degradation
    - Soil Health
      - Opportunity and challenge
      - Conventional Ag to New Conventional Ag

- Our Win-win Opportunities
- Soil Health Campaign
  - Innovative Farmers
  - Increase awareness effectively
  - Demand for soil health testing
  - Constructive and positive approach
  - Managing the biota
- Underground Livestock (Foodweb)
- 4 Principles of Soil Health Management
  - Do not disturb
  - Mix it up
  - Discover the cover
  - Tap into roots
- Changing degradation spiral to regenerative spiral
- Geographically Specific Management Challenges
- Soil Health Division Staff
  - Only one based in DC
    - Team Leader
    - Specialist
    - Communications
  - Regional Team Leaders
    - Central
    - Northeast
    - Southeast
    - West
  - Regional Health Specialists (12)
    - Contacts: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/>
- Backgrounds
  - Goals of the Soil Division
    - Soil Health Training
    - Soil Health Assessment
    - Soil Health Management Planning
    - Soil Health Management Systems Implementation
    - Observation, Adaptation
- Assessments- Concerns?
  - What will our team do?
    - Reach out to local and regional partners to assess the needs on the ground
  - Soil Health Assessment Initiative
    - Haney:
      - Concerns Expressed
      - Evaluate sampling assessments
      - Possibly add more assessment
      - Standardize methods

- Outcome based thresholds
  - Meeting at end of February to start discussions
  - Labs wanting to assess
    - Inform labs of indicators and methods to move forward
    - Processes in place to continue to standardize methods
  - Framework of Soil Health Assessments
    - Pick indicators that give information they don't have
  - Cost share on practices
    - Case Study
  - Compaction Issue
    - Whole system approach
  - Collaborations
- Questions?
  - Randy:
    - Share slides with faculty
    - Workshop in February
      - Pulled together group and will let us know how it goes
      - Who will be at workshops in February?
        - Southeast
          - Hardy; suggestion of two other individuals
          - Tony- TX
          - UGA-?
        - 30 people around the table for discussions
        - Follow up meetings
  - Travis:
    - Key Scientists
      - Has been a lack of communication
      - Testing procedures
    - Reluctance to adopt these practices
      - Due to lack of communication
    - NRCS and Land Grant Universities need to get on the same page
  - Gary:
    - Southern Cover Crop Conference NC in July
    - Sending producers and farmers
    - Willing to reach out if needed to make connection
    - Dennis Chessman
      - Soil Testing background
      - Working very closely in KY
        - February Lexington Meeting on cover crops and forages
  - Bobby:
    - Send us a link to webinar
    -

- Quantification of Soil Health
  - Wayne Honeycut
    - In science and tech division
    - Allow for on farm research not only demo
  - ARS
    - Only research within NRCS on soil health
  - On farm research
    - What can be counted as match?
- Billy:
  - Targeted information to 1890's as well
  - Email Billy with information to share
- Bobby:
  - Provide Bianca with the directory word document for her to use
- **Old Business- Continued....**
  - Todd Hurt
    - Professional Development
    - Pass the hat to Mark McCann from VT
    - Funding for this project?
      - Willingness to share classroom
        - Standards/Need of certificates
        - Set priorities
    - Plans of Work
      - Not very cross pollinated
    - Action Item
      - Encourage development online
    - Funding and sharing up to the Directors level
      - Online class development
      - Pass along to next group
    - eXtension- 182 titles that vary in content standard
      - Pick from these as to what could be utilized
    - Gary:
      - Good move to get program and staff development
      - Would like to see better continuity for the program
    - Travis:
      - Great to have ability to use Regional Training Programs
    - How do we start the conversation at the Directors Level?
      - An example or two would go a long way
    - Could this be a component of eXtension?
      - 180 classrooms
      - Would be a step toward a more unified system
    - Example from Georgia
      - Weed class- 6/7 modules
      - Requirements of All ANR Agents
      - Over 12 modules

- Do a module a month
    - How will this be done?
      - Kim Lewis- Associate Dean
        - Funding ran out
    - Write up suggestion and move forward
      - Agenda Item
        - Look into modules and send to director
        - Spend time on this in August
  - Robert Burns Update
    - After a successful submission of a pre-proposal to the NRCS RCPP this past summer, the team was invited to submit a full proposal, which was completed in November, 2015. Awards were supposed to have been announced in January 2016, but that has been delayed, tentatively until sometime later this month (Feb 2015). That proposal involved four core states (AR, KY, MO, and TN) as well as Extension Specialists from an additional 6 states (AL, GA, MS, NC, SC, and VA) in a technical capacity. The overall project continues to focus on solutions that will impact the entire tall fescue-belt, but in the short run, guidance from Washington DC suggested that the initial proposal be scaled back somewhat to involve a more limited number of core states.
    - The work described within that proposal includes addressing some applied management knowledge gaps, but in the context of highly visible demonstration projects. In addition, demonstration projects on producer farms were also included. Collectively, this combination of intensive and on-farm demos will serve as a platform for an integrated, comprehensive outreach effort that will include ANR agent in-service trainings, producer field days, supporting technical materials (print and video formats), and will culminate in the development of a region-wide forage curriculum. That curriculum will educate producers on the 'whys' and the 'hows' of integrated summer forage production within a tall fescue system. Forage and allied specialists from all 10 project states will work together to develop this curriculum to ensure that it is adapted to each state and to all states within the fescue belt. The curriculum and its delivery will be designed to ensure that it can continue well beyond the life of the grant itself.
    - At this point, we are waiting in final word regarding the proposal before taking any other steps on this effort.
  - NRCS Conference Calls
    - One today
    - Still one way communication
    - Varies across state
      - More of an antagonistic attitude
    - KY- huge strides have been made and they are starting to change their tune a little
      - There have been numerous meetings with the state conservationist
        - A difficult personality was replaced and a new individual brought in that is working better with others

- Request email of the upcoming meeting and attendees and who was invited
    - Billy will request information
  - TX and VA not having a warm reception to date from NRCS
- August Meeting- TN 22<sup>nd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>
- Meeting Adjourned by Billy
  - 11:11am