

# Northeast Symposium Listening Sessions Report

10/17/22 and 10/19/22

## Purpose and Intended Outcomes

*Outcome 1:* To build a roadmap for how to connect resources identified in the Assessment to the users across government, land grants, and farmers.

*Outcome 2:* To identify the primary next steps to accomplish the “low hanging fruit” recommendations and needs outlined in the Assessment.

*Outcome 3:* Answer: “How we can use the data base to identify cross northeast opportunities for Extension/Research/Regulator collaboration”

## Participation

Invitations to participate were sent to Extension Professionals located in the North East ECOP region, Ag Research Professionals found through the NERA, NERCRD, and other channels, Mid Atlantic Vegetable Producers, Agriculture Council of Maine (coalition of all exec directors of ME’s ag sectors), and Regulators from the following agencies: USDA NIFA, NRCS – State conservationists, FSA, Forest Service, Climate Hubs, Northeast State Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA), NOAA SeaGrant, EPA, DEQ (Dept of Environmental Quality)/DEP (Dept of Environmental Protection), National Association of Counties, USDA Rural Development, Tri-societies, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), US Department of the Interior (DOI), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service (NPS), USACE

10/17/22

37 participants including 8 support people (facilitators, note takers, technical support)

10/19/22

28 participants including 6 support people (facilitators, note takers, technical support)

## Structure

Two ninety-minute [Listening Sessions](#) started with a warm welcome from the hosts, Ali Mitchell, Executive Director, NEED, and Rick Rhodes, Executive Director, NERA, followed by a short introduction to the recommendations in the [Ecosystem Services in Working Lands Practice and](#)

[Policy of the U.S. Northeast](#) publication (page 7) by the primary authors, Alicia F. Coleman, University of Massachusetts Amherst and Mario Reinaldo Machado, Gund Institute for Environment, University of Vermont. Following this introduction, participants were randomly assigned to breakout rooms. Each breakout room had a focus on either **Collaborations** or **Outputs/Research** with slightly different questions posed by the room facilitators.

Guiding questions for Collaborations were:

- How can we work together to increase uptake and the value of programs in the database?
- What are the “low hanging fruit” recommendations and/or needs? What needs to be done to move forward on them?
- What opportunities/recommendations are you most excited about? What needs to be done to harness those opportunities?
- Are there other things you’d like to add that we have not covered?

Guiding questions for Outputs/Research were:

- How do you want to use the database/research?
- What are the “low hanging fruit” recommendations and/or needs? What needs to be done to move forward on them?
- What opportunities/recommendations are you most excited about? What needs to be done to harness those opportunities?
- Are there other things you’d like to add that we have not covered?

After the breakout discussions, everyone came back together to review the “Low-Hanging Fruit” recommendations generated during the breakout session.

### “Low-Hanging Fruit” Recommendations

The recommendations centered around six broad areas. Each could be a working group or sub-working group to move forward these recommendations. Recommended guidelines shared are highlighted in orange.

#### APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A common theme across breakout sessions was the need for additional help for those applying for programs. Suggestions ranged from having trained personnel to give 1:1 assistance to applicants and walking them through the application process to building digital resources to help applicants such as creating a common application for all programs, additional databases, artificial intelligence “bots” built into the application that coaches applicants, creating a decision making framework for applicants. The framework could include timing of programs, applications, and field seasons - how can

they be aligned to ensure maximum impact, are they stackable, what are the funding cycles, how can they be connected?



“Be practical”

#### TARGET AUDIENCE

Key takeaways from target audience recommendations included a creating a deeper understanding of producer needs recognizing complex relationships and perceptions as well as engaging the whole family rather than just one segment such as youth.

#### ENHANCE THE COMMUNICATION TO INFORM AND BUILD TRUST

Building trust through listening and understanding of producers' needs, informing them through simplified language (avoid jargon) and processes that are more accessible to lay people at the local level. Create new public-private partnerships to help disseminate information and encourage implementation. Increase awareness of overarching program goals (e.g. carbon capture) to help participants understand why programs are important.



“What efforts are already on the go?”

#### INVESTMENT AND FUNDING

Incentivise producers through a myriad of ways such as basic income payments, monetary rewards for conservation plans and practices, and/or explore pre-financing. Make funds more accessible to producers. Recognize changing economic conditions to create dynamic equal opportunities and approaches. Invest in community level/grassroots programs that help participants identify what is important to them at their level, then tie these important features back into programmatic goals and implementation that resonate with local stakeholders. Increase funding for some programs such as Extension, state and federal agencies, and county Soil and Water Conservation Districts to capture and maintain institutional knowledge for continuity and growth.

#### DEVELOP ADDITIONAL TRAINING

Create cross-sector training & collaboration opportunities. Educate regulators with respect to programming ins and outs. Increase awareness of overarching program goals (e.g. carbon capture) to help participants understand why programs are important.

#### SIMPLIFY

Combine similar programs, create a matrix of programs to show relationships between programs and opportunities within specific geographic areas, simplify language and processes to be more accessible to lay people. ( This is also expressed in APPLICATION ASSISTANCE and ENHANCE THE COMMUNICATION TO INFORM AND BUILD TRUST.) Standardize the CTA request.