

Irrigated Ag Working Group

Charge from Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee

None at this time

Working Group Members

Dr. Kefy Desta (WSU), Dr. Troy Peters (WSU), Elizabeth Sanchez (Yakama Nation), Jean Mendoza (Friends of Toppenish Creek), Jim Trull (Roza-Sunnyside Joint Board of Control), John Van Wingerden (Port of Sunnyside), Lonna Frans (U.S. Geological Survey), Ralph Fisher (EPA), Ron Cowin (SVID), Stuart Turner (Turner & Co.), Thomas Tebb (Department of Ecology), Ginny Prest (Dept of Ag), Laurie Crowe (South Yakima Conservation District), Dave Fraser (Simplot Agronomist), Scott Stephen (Citizen), Don Jameson (Citizen), Mike Shuttleworth (Citizen), Chelsea Durfey (Citizen), Lino Guerra (Citizen), Doug Simpson (Farmer)

Meetings/Calls Dates

Where: KDNA Granger Conference Room – 121 Sunnyside Avenue, Granger, Washington

When: 2:30 PM – 4:00 PM Thursday, November 21, 2013

Call: (509) 574-2353 - PIN# 2353

Participants

Jim Trull (Chair), Dave Fraser, Don Jameson, Bob Stevens, Stuart Turner, Laurie Crowe, Jean Mendoza, Scott Stephen, Pony Ellingson, Chelsea Durfey, Ginny Prest, Troy Peters, Troy Ross-Havens (Yakima County staff support)

Key Discussion Points

Agenda

1. Review Meeting Notes of October 24th Meeting

No comments were raised with the October 24th meeting notes.

2. Final Review of Irrigated Ag Best Management Practices

The group's discussion started out with a comment made regarding BMPs. Very few BMPs are stand alone, many are used in part or seasonally, and linked to additional BMP(s). In addition, BMPs are site and time specific. A BMP that works for one field might be detrimental to another field, and vice versa. Some fields can change their practices and adopt newly identified BMPs, while other fields can't. An agronomist

present in the group described what was called the rule of the 4 R's: applying the Right nutrient, at the Right rate, during the Right time, and the Right place. In this member's opinion, if you stray from the 4 R's, you are no longer following science, but policy instead.

A dialogue regarding the prioritization of BMPs ensued, which led to the majority of the group expressing that this would not be effective. Each field is operated under different conditions such as crop type, soil type, nutrient conditions, which supports the argument that a BMP with a #1 priority might work great for one field, but could greatly diminish the productivity of another, even within the LYV GWMA boundaries. One member would like to see an effort to reduce or eliminate rill and furrow irrigation, as it mobilizes soluble nitrates.

The comment was made that without proper nutrient and irrigation management, adopting the listed BMPs will not reduce nitrate leaching to groundwater alone. After irrigation and nutrient management have been optimized, the BMPs may provide added benefit. In addition, growers need to start with the basics; soil testing, nutrient requirements, and proposes incentive funds for proper irrigation management which would lead to better yields, reduced water consumption, and reduced nutrient application.

One member added that they were afraid that once the BMP list is publicized, growers might find themselves being heckled by the public on why they are not implementing any or all of the BMPs. These accusations would likely be made without thorough understanding of the intricacies and differences among the wide array of crop conditions present in the LYV GWMA, as each field presents its own challenges.

A concern with wording in some of the BMPs would be misleading if published as is. One particular BMP suggests zero excess nitrates. This is short of reality. Although it is possible to reduce the nitrate loading to groundwater, zero excess is an unrealistic goal. It is important to note that the occasional flushing of salts with water from soils is necessary to maximize total crop nutrient extraction. Also, the term "fertilizer" needs to be explored as it may not be defined to include all nutrient sources such as soil amendments.

The group feels that the deep soil sampling plan will be best used to identify problematic areas, and to assess nutrient levels over time. One member would like to see the matching of cropping systems with cultural patterns and deep soil sampling data, and then reward growers with improved operational practices.

ACTION: Jim will compile all current comments on the BMP database and submit to the consultant.

3. Soil Sample Allocations

Pony reviewed the Soil Sample Allocation technical memorandum with the group. He explained the categorical criteria and matrix data needed for each crop and how a particular crop would be grouped and analyzed through the plan. He explained that the goal of the sample allocation plan is to make sure all crops are proportionately represented by risk, and to eliminate any sampling bias. Originally, the plan called for grouping crop type by rooting depth as one of the grouping categories. The group thought it might be more functional if crops are grouped by crop type instead of rooting depth, which generally correlate strongly.

Pony stated that he will add a crop type block to the sample allocation plan, and perform an additional iteration to see if the crops group into the correlating rooting zone depth as expected. Pony recommended that the group start thinking about how the LYV GWMA soil sampling funds will be best spent.

4. Contact with Landowners Requesting Participants

The group Chair reported that in the opinion of the Roza-Sunnyside Joint Board of Control's lawyer, there is still an issue with participant confidentiality in the deep soil sampling plan. The Chair has contacted County representatives and has not received any direction or response regarding protecting growers from lawsuits during or following data collection from their agricultural lands. It is important to procure the protection from lawsuits as soon as possible, as it directly impacts grower participation recruitment and soil sampling efforts. Relating to data confidentiality, a few group members feel reluctant to permit the USGS to analyze grower data. They expressed concern that once the USGS acquires the data, it would be publicized shortly thereafter.

Jim reported that the Roza-Sunnyside Joint Board of Control can facilitate a newsletter to reach local growers asking for participation, but the data confidentiality issue must be resolved before this outreach is conducted. Jim, backed by the group, feels that grower protection is of very high priority and a keystone to the success of the LYV GWMA project.

Resources Requested

None at this time

Recommendations for GWAC

None at this time

Deliverables/Products Status

None at this time