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Who We Are

Inspired by a shared passion for conservation, NRCS collaborates with farmers, ranchers, communities, and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private lands.

Working side-by-side with these customers, we identify natural resource concerns, such as water quality and quantity issues, soil erosion, air quality, wetlands and wildlife habitat, and develop unique conservation plans for restoring and protecting resources. Funds to implement these plans are made available in Farm Bill programs that share the cost of conservation for the benefit of the farm, the watershed, and the community. Conservation easement programs, also in the Farm Bill, provide long-term options.

NRCS helps Nebraska and the Nation balance economic goals with the needs of the environment—ensuring sustainably productive lands that supply food, fiber, forest products, and energy for all citizens.



NRCS assisted Leo Hoehn (center) with converting his cropland to dryland farming to help conserve ground and surface water in the arid Nebraska Panhandle. Water conservation is just one of the many areas NRCS provides assistance to landowners.

Water Wise: NRCS Assists Nebraska Farmers with Improving Irrigation Water Efficiency

Farmers have been using irrigation to grow crops in Nebraska for nearly a century. The Natural Resources Conservation Service is helping bring irrigators into the 21st century by improving irrigation efficiency, which helps increase the water available to all Nebraskans and reduce the cost of growing crops for farmers.

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program* farmers have received assistance to improve their irrigation systems resulting in the following:

- Over 3,000 farmers converted from gravity (furrow) irrigation to center pivot (sprinkler) irrigation on over 300,000 acres. Center pivot irrigation is 25% more efficient than gravity irrigation.
- Over 90 farmers installed sub-surface drip irrigation systems on 3,600 acres, which improved irrigation efficiency by 35%.
- Over 35,000 acres of cropland were converted from irrigated to non-irrigated, which saved over 45 billion gallons of water.
- Irrigation practices installed by Nebraska farmers have reduced the amount of irrigation water applied to cropland by 70 billion gallons in all.
- Reducing the amount of water pumped for irrigation helps conserve groundwater, which over 90% of Nebraskans depend on for their drinking water.
- Irrigation water diverted back into the Platte River is helping restore habitat for the endangered Whooping Crane and Interior Least Tern.
- Irrigation improvements save soil. Center pivot irrigation reduces the amount of tillage farmers do on their fields. Some farmers stop tillage all together, which greatly improves soil quality and health.

* The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a 2008 Farm Bill conservation program that provides natural resources conservation assistance on privately-owned lands.

Flood Control

Issue: Protecting 1.6 million acres from flooding.

What NRCS in Nebraska is doing:

In the 1940s & 50s, Nebraska was plagued by spring flooding. Floods often damaged homes, roads, cropland and towns. In some cases, people were killed by the severe flooding. In 1954, Congress passed Public Law 83-566 – The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act. This act provided citizens the means to take action against the flooding problems threatening their livelihood as well as their lives. PL-566 authorizes NRCS to provide technical and financial assistance in the planning and installation of flood control measures like small dams, grade stabilization structures, and conservation practices like reduced tillage, terraces and waterways. These flood prevention and conservation practices work together throughout a watershed to catch and slow runoff from heavy rains. NRCS and partner agencies have built flood control structures in 55 watershed projects across the state. The 900 flood control structures across Nebraska provide an average annual benefit of \$41 million to over 1.6 million acres.

Program used: (CTA) and (WFPO)



This grade stabilization structure on Turtle Creek in Sarpy County has helped prevented over \$89,000 in flood water damages each year.

Wetland Restoration

Issue: Making wetland restoration compatible with crop production.

What NRCS in Nebraska is doing:

In July 2010, the Rainwater Basin wetland complex (consisting of 21 counties in south central Nebraska) was selected for funding for wetland restoration through the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). The WREP special initiative works with farmers to allow center pivots to cross through wetland easement. The projects associated with the first sign-up will restore over 640 acres of wetlands. The program is on pace to double the applications and acres restored in the Rainwater Basin through WRP/WREP compared to just two years ago. The 12 WREP applications (despite record commodity prices) demonstrates that the pivot crossing initiative included in this WREP Special Initiative is a great fit for the Rainwater Basin, providing a compatible option that allows producers to integrate wetland restoration with production agriculture.

Program used: (WHIP), (WREP) and (WRP)



The Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program special initiative allows center pivots to cross through wetland easements in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin.

Controlling Invasive Plant Species

Issue: Invasive plant species are destroying habitat and reducing flows in rivers.

What NRCS in Nebraska is doing:

All across the state are several highly invasive plant species. If left unchecked, they can quickly overtake an area. To help fight this statewide problem, Nebraska RC&Ds have formed local work groups called Weed Management Areas (WMA). WMAs are made up of several counties that share common invasive plant concerns. NRCS is also partnering with the WMAs and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to provide funding assistance to enhance weed control along rivers and streams that are over appropriated - or are having too much water taken from their in-stream flows. Most of the effort has been in aerial spraying the existing weeds. The funds made available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) can be used by landowners to undertake additional actions to try and keep the weeds from returning.

Program used: (CCPI), (CTA), (EQIP), (WHIP) and (RC&D)



NRCS is working with landowners, and local weed management areas to help control invasive weeds. A helicopter is shown here spraying phragmites, which has choked out habitat along Nebraska's rivers, streams and wetlands.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

is the core approach NRCS has used successfully for over 75 years to reach out to all Nebraska farmers and ranchers. Through CTA America invests in Conservation by investing in Nebraska farmers and ranchers, and the technical assistance they need to care for the 90+% of our land, water and other natural resources that are in their hands.

CTA is simply about helping people. NRCS employees provide conservation options, recommendations, planning, and engineering assistance to individual farmers, ranchers, local governments, and urban landowners. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding through the programs listed below.

Cost Share Programs for Working Lands:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)—assistance for a broad spectrum of conservation practices that promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible national goals.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)—a sub-program of EQIP specific to water conservation and quality through partnered efforts.

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)—a partnered program that uses 6% of EQIP, WHIP and CSP funds for an integrative, focused approach.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)—improves wildlife habitat on private agricultural, forest and Tribal lands.

Easement/Long-Term Programs:

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)—helps keep farm and ranch land in agriculture.

(WRP) Wetlands Reserve Program—restores wetlands and wetland habitat on marginal ag land.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)—helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland and pastureland, and maintain viable ranching operations.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)—pays farmers to plant trees, grass and brush on highly erodible/environmentally sensitive cropland. NRCS provides technical assistance only.

Stewardship:

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)—encourages producers to maintain and improve existing practices.

Nebraska Highlights

Funding was provided to Nebraska farmers to install terraces and underground outlets on crop fields to prevent sheet and rill and ephemeral gully erosion. Irrigation systems were modified to convert inefficient gravity flow and high pressure pivots to more efficient low pressure pivot systems. As a result, water application efficiency was improved a minimum of 20% on all contracted acres. Livestock pipelines were installed as one component of grazing management which provided adequate water supply and improved animal distribution to improve range condition. Producers also modified crop rotations in order to improve soil quality, break pest cycles, and reduce water application to benefit the water quantity and water quality resource concerns. The USDA National Agroforestry Center in Lincoln, a partnership of the Forest Service and NRCS, develops technologies to help producers improve their economics and environmental benefits. Of the 125 conservation practices available to farmers and ranchers in Nebraska in 2011, resources were distributed as follows: 1) reduced sheet-rill and gully erosion; 2) established fencing and brush management for healthy distribution of pants and livestock on rangeland; 3) encouraged the planing of cover crops to protect and build soil health; 5) increased efficiency of irrigation systems to improve water quantity and quality; 6) established tree and grass plantings to improve wildlife habitat.

2011 Farm Bill Program Funding*

NRCS Program	Dollars Obligated	Number of Contracts/Easements
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	\$ 4,780,7544	110
Conservation Stewardship Program	\$ 13,114,512	569
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$ 22,557,331	1,085
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	\$ 1,199,808	3
Grassland Reserve Program	\$ 1,169,010	11
Wetlands Reserve Program	\$ 12,303,169	44
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program	\$ 401,832	43

*The numbers reflect Financial Assistance (FA) that is provided directly to landowners. Technical Assistance (TA) funding was also received by the Agency for professional planning and expertise to help carry out the conservation activities.



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Nebraska in The National Landscape

Nebraska Doesn't Mind Being a Little Different.

Nebraska has a unique system when it comes to conservation districts. Nebraska is the only state in the Nation to have Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) instead of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). NRDs were created in 1972 when 86 SWCDs and other units of government were merged in to 23 NRDs. In 1995, NRCS Nebraska transitioned from a traditional county-based NRCS area structure to alignment along the boundaries of the state's 23 NRDs. NRCS in Nebraska eventually phased out Area Offices and area boundaries and implemented supervisory District Conservationists who supervise all NRCS employees within the NRD. The NRDs are Nebraska NRCS' biggest partner. The NRD/NRCS partnership allows each organization to share staff, resources and funding to help implement more natural resource conservation in Nebraska.

News Flash - Nebraska Isn't Flat!

The Shell Creek Watershed in northeast Nebraska, had some very hilly cropland experiencing severe erosion. In the late 1990s a group of local farmers formed the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG). Farmers were concerned about the high rate of erosion they were seeing and the effect this was having on the entire watershed. One of the practices advocated by the SCWIG was no-till. To help increase the number of acres being planted using no-till, the SCWIG partnered with NRCS. Through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), farmers were offered incentive payments to plant their crops using no-till. There are now over 21,000 no-till acres saving 63,000 tons of soil per year in the Shell Creek Watershed alone.

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NRCS Program	Dollars Obligated	Number of Contracts/Easements
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	\$ 4,780,7544	110
Conservation Stewardship Program	\$ 13,114,512	1,106
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$23,993,138	1,146
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	\$1,120,085	3
Grassland Reserve Program	\$27,375	25
Wetlands Reserve Program	\$22,957,954	84
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program	\$741,180	69

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