

## 2012 Drought Overview

As drought conditions worsen in Indiana, NRCS has developed a plan to communicate information and resources to keep you informed about programs and services that can benefit you.

As of today, Indiana is the worst hit of the major corn and soybean states. Reports from every corner of the state indicate moderate to severe conditions comparable to the 1988 drought. Combined with days of heat stress, crops are quickly showing signs of failure. Areas in the Northeast and Southwest are the hardest hit and are considered severe. A number of areas in the state have received spotty precipitation (mainly in the Northwest and Southeast), but not enough to significantly improve growing conditions. Some of these areas where rain has fallen have also received high wind and hail damage.

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## Local Office Contact

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<http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/index.html>

## Deferred Grazing

Deferred grazing is the dropping of a paddock or pasture field from the normal use or rotation for use at a later time.

## Pasture or Forage Benefits

Pastures have suffered greatly from the drought this year, and have been grazed down closer than what is healthy and sustainable for the forages. Once adequate moisture has returned, and especially when cool-season forages break the summer drought "dormancy", the plant will need to first rebuild its solar panel then start rebuilding reserves. **If livestock are allowed to start grazing forage too quickly, plant reserves will be reduced even more and the stand will be in jeopardy.** Allowing a longer rest period will allow the plant to recover more from the stressful drought conditions and extra grazing. This rested forage will rebound quicker the next spring because of the restored reserves. Longer rest periods also allow the plant to grow more roots which helps improve plant and soil health.

## Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

NRCS is currently taking applications for special funding to assist producers and landowners affected by drought through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP). The deadline for sign up is **August 24, 2012.**

The WHIP is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. The primary purpose of the WHIP sign up is to protect wildlife habitat by **providing wildlife access to cover and water** during the fall and winter as well as **allow pastures to recover** from the drought. In addition to wildlife concerns, drought stressed crops did not use the applied nitrogen fertilizer, which may now be lost when we do get rain. WHIP can help provide **funding for cover crops** to scavenge these nutrients, to grow winter soil cover, rebuild organic matter and make them available for the next crop. This saves farmers money and protects water quality, along with wildlife benefits. Additional program requirements and information about WHIP is available on the Indiana NRCS website at: [www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/drought.html](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/drought.html) or you can visit your local USDA-NRCS field office to talk with staff.



# NRCS Drought Fact Sheets

## WHIP Deferment Periods

There are two possible deferment periods offered through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP):

- Short Term Deferment - Temporary exclusion of livestock for 90 days in the late summer/fall. This should be initiated by mid September. The short-term deferment has an incentive payment of 29 dollars per acre payable once initiated.
- Long Term Deferment – Temporary exclusion of livestock for 210 days during the fall and winter. This should be initiated by mid September to not push the ending date out too late in the spring. The long-term deferment has an incentive payment of 74 dollars per acre payable once initiated.



## Wildlife Benefits

The accumulated forage provides cover and habitat for wildlife during that period and may also help to increase wildlife diversity.

## Making it Work for Your Farm

The early 90 deferment is a great opportunity to stockpile forage for use later in the winter. Once moisture is adequate, applying some nitrogen will boost yield and quality. Until the short deferment is complete, graze other pastures (if adequate), fall-planted annual forages, crop residues, or feed hay and/or supplements. This forage (deferred and/or other fields) can now be grazed as stockpiled forage. Strip grazing it is the most efficient, allocating only a few days at a time so animals don't waste too much forage; think of it as feeding standing hay. You can easily strip graze using step-in posts, poly-wire and a reel (one of the best grazing tools). You will quickly figure out if you have given too much or too little for the time period you desired and adjust it the next allocation.

The Long Term Deferment is another great opportunity to stockpile some dry matter for early spring grazing. This dry material mixed with the lush, watery green grass early in the spring, is the perfect combination for helping ruminants balance the carbon nitrogen ratio in the animal's rumen and keep them gaining and milking at their potential. You would not need or want the whole farm in either deferment period, but a mix of both with some other pasture or other areas available to graze is part of a well managed grazing plan, with or without an incentive payment.

## Implementing the Practice

This could be one of the easiest practices to accomplish. You may only need to shut a gate and make sure fences are adequate to totally exclude livestock from the field during the required time frame. If only a portion of a larger field is deferred, then temporary fencing will need to be installed that is adequate enough to control the livestock present.

## Enhancing the Area

Deferred acres can be enhanced by the addition of lime or fertilizer. Both should be based upon a recent soil test. This is also an opportunity to frost-seed clover or to drill some annuals into very thin and dormant stands.

