

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Report To
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board
March 10, 2016
Neil Jensen, District Conservationist**



USDA Launches Two New Efforts to Aid Monarch Butterflies and Mitigate Climate Change

Nebraska Landowners have until March 18 to Apply for Funding.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced a new conservation effort that provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers to mitigate the impacts of climate change and provide food and habitat for monarch butterflies. Nebraska farmers and ranchers have until March 18, 2016, to apply for funding.

MONARCH BUTTERFLY

The monarch butterfly, along with other pollinators like honeybees, has seen its population numbers decrease significantly over the past 20 years. This targeted effort by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will invest \$100,000 in Nebraska to help combat the iconic species' decline.

This effort helps them make voluntary improvements that benefit their farming operations while providing habitat for monarchs, honeybees and a wide array of other pollinators.

NRCS will provide technical and financial assistance to help producers' plant milkweed and nectar-rich plants along field borders, in buffers along waterways or around wetlands, in pastures, and other suitable locations. NRCS also helps producers manage their pastures in ways that increase critical populations of milkweed and nectar plants while also improving the health of their rangelands.

These conservation improvements not only benefit butterflies, they also strengthen agricultural operations, support other beneficial insects and wildlife, and improve other natural resources. Appropriate buffer habitats and better rangeland and pasture management practices reduce erosion, increase soil health, inhibit the expansion of invasive species and provide food and habitat for insects and wildlife.

MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

Nebraska farmers and ranchers may also apply for assistance through NRCS to make their operations more resilient against the impacts of climate change. Over \$1.8 million is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for producers to receive assistance to install conservation practices that support soil health, nitrogen management, manure management, grazing management, forestry improvement and energy efficiency.

This investment is expected to accelerate the implementation of core conservation practices that help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners increase carbon content of soils and reduce greenhouse gas emissions associate with food and fiber production.

NRCS accepts EQIP applications from producers on a continuous basis, but to receive this specially designated funding, producers should apply by March 18, 2016. Producers interested in participating should contact their local USDA service center to learn more.



Local Working Group Meeting Planned

Local meeting open to individuals interested in setting natural resources goals for Nebraska.

Local working groups are organized on Natural Resources District (NRD) boundaries. The local working group provides advice/recommendation to the NRCS District Conservationist. The meetings are an open discussion that focus on identifying local natural resource concerns that can be treated with Farm Bill programs and activities.

The local working group meeting within the Papio-Missouri River NRD is scheduled for March 29, 9:00 a.m. to Noon, at the Blair USDA Service Center, 1060 Wilber Street, Blair NE.

The public is encouraged to attend and express their natural resource concerns. Ideas generated from the public will help the U.S. Department of Agriculture tailor their natural resource programs to meet local needs.

The Local Working Group recommends to the NRCS State Conservationist how conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), or the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) would be used most effectively in their area.

Recommendations can include special target areas, cost share rates on conservation programs, which conservation practices should have cost assistance, or how many dollars could be needed.

Typically, Nebraska NRCS obligates anywhere between \$45 million to over \$75 million dollars to farmers and ranchers statewide through NRCS conservation programs. These programs helped landowners and operators make natural resource improvements to their land, water, or wildlife. This funding was allocated according to the priorities set by the Local Working Group.



Jessica Howe has accepted the Soil Conservationist position in Dakota City. Jessica comes from Clayton, New Mexico. She will start on March 21.



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