

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Report To
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board
May 12, 2016
Neil Jensen, District Conservationist**



Draining/Altering Wetlands Could Cost Producers USDA Program Benefits

USDA reminds producers to check conservation compliance rules before installing tile drainage systems.

Nebraska farmers are urged to talk with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) before draining any wet areas or bringing new land into production.

There has been an increased interest by producers to install tile drainage systems to address soil moisture issues on cropland. It is important to note that producers who receive certain benefits from USDA may be subject to restrictions when tile drainage systems impact wetlands protected by the Food Security Act initially passed in 1985. Those benefits include USDA loans and disaster payments from the Farm Service Agency (FSA); conservation programs from the NRCS; and federal crop insurance premium subsidies.

For growers planning to install a new drainage system, it's a good idea to contact the FSA and sign an AD-1026 form. Then the NRCS will complete a wetland determination to make sure the ground you're installing on isn't a wetland. Wetlands are identified by several characteristics, including hydric soils, hydrophytic (or "water-loving") vegetation, and inundated or saturated hydrology.

Wetlands protected by the Food Security Act can be difficult for producers to identify on their own. Protected wetlands may be small, and may occur in places such as shallow depressions on flat cropland, along a sloped drainage where a side hill seep is present, or along the fringe of a small stream channel, just to name a few examples. The ramifications of altering wetlands can be significant in terms of the potential for losing USDA financial assistance and in the amount of time that it takes to resolve unapproved alterations.

Requests should be submitted to USDA as early as possible since some counties experience a high volume of requests for certified wetland determinations. Often, field data must be collected at times of the year when the ground is not frozen or when tall crops such as corn restrict access to the possible wetland areas.

For more information about wetlands, conservation programs or compliance issues, visit your local NRCS field office.



USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Results

More Than 800,000 Acres Selected Through Highly Competitive Application Rounds

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the enrollment of more than 800,000 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Through CRP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) helps farmers offset the costs of restoring, enhancing and protecting certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and strengthen wildlife habitat. Farmers' and ranchers' participation in CRP continues to provide numerous benefits to our nation, including helping reduce emissions of harmful greenhouse gases and providing resiliency to future weather changes.

A nationwide acreage limit was established for this program in the 2014 Farm Bill, capping the total number of acres that may be enrolled at 24 million for fiscal years 2017 and 2018. As of March 2016, 23.8 million acres were enrolled in CRP, with 1.7 million acres set to expire this fall.

Over three million acres have been offered for enrollment this year across the three main categories within CRP:

- CRP General - 26,000 offers to enroll more than 1.8 million acres
- CRP Grasslands - 4,600 offers to enroll more than 1 million acres
- CRP Continuous - More than 364,000 acres already accepted for 2016

USDA selected offers by weighing environmental factors plus cost, including wildlife enhancement, water quality, soil erosion, enduring benefits, and air quality.

- CRP General - FSA will accept 411,000 acres
- CRP Grasslands - FSA will also accept 101,000 acres. More than 70 percent of these acres are diverse native grasslands under threat of conversion, and more than 97 percent of the acres have a new, veteran or underserved farmer or rancher as a primary producer.

Within the Papio-Missouri River NRD, offer were made in the following categories within CRP; however none were accepted:

- CRP General – 38 offers submitted, 0 accepted
- CRP Grasslands – 4 offers submitted, 0 accepted

To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation or contact a local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.



Dan Gudenkauf, Soil Conservation Technician (SCT) in Tekamah, is being transferred to the Blair Field Office to fill the vacant SCT position in Blair. He will start on May 29.



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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call

(866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.