NRCS PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS IN DROUGHT AREAS

Nebraska NRCS is available to provide financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers through the Drought Relief Special Initiative. Producers may apply for assistance August 6 - 15, 2012.

The prolonged lack of rainfall combined with excessive heat has resulted in a dramatic reduction in available forage for livestock producers and increased the risk of soil erosion on land without sufficient ground cover. The purpose of this initiative is to offer assistance to farmers and ranchers impacted by the drought.

Conservation practices available to producers through the Drought Relief Special Initiative include: cover crops, critical area planting, fencing, deferred grazing, forage and biomass planting, pipeline, well and pumping stations for livestock water, range planting and more. Interested participants are encouraged to visit their local NRCS field office to learn more about the assistance available.
To assist producers facing extreme drought conditions, USDA announced that it will utilize nearly $16 million in financial and technical assistance to immediately help crop and livestock producers in 19 states cope with the adverse impacts of the historic drought. In addition, USDA will initiate a transfer of $14 million in unobligated program funds into the Emergency Conservation Program. These funds can be used to assist in moving water to livestock in need, providing emergency forage for livestock, and rehabilitating lands severely impacted by the drought. Together these efforts should provide nearly $30 million to producers struggling with drought conditions.

Within the last month, USDA has opened the Conservation Reserve Program to emergency haying and grazing, has lowered the borrower interest rate for emergency loans, and has worked with crop insurance companies to provide more flexibility to farmers. USDA has also announced the following:

- Allowing producers to modify current EQIP contracts to allow for grazing, livestock watering, and other conservation activities to address drought conditions.
- Authorizing haying and grazing of Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement areas in drought-affected areas where haying and grazing is consistent with conservation of wildlife habitat and wetlands.
- Lowering the reduction in the annual rental payment to producers on CRP acres used for emergency haying or grazing from 25 percent to 10 percent in 2012.
- Simplifying the Secretarial disaster designation process and reduced the time it takes to designate counties affected by disasters by 40 percent.
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