

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Report To
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board
December 13, 2012
Neil Jensen, District Conservationist**



**SIGN UP FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAM
DOLLARS UNDERWAY**

With harvest wrapping up across the state the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reminds farmers and ranchers that now is the time to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Those interested in EQIP are encouraged to sign up before Dec. 21, 2012.

EQIP has become the most widely applied conservation program in Nebraska with more than 7.7 million acres under contract. The goal of EQIP is to provide a financial incentive to encourage landowners to protect their natural resources, resulting in cleaner air, water and more wildlife habitat.

For FY 2013 we will continue to have an allocation of EQIP funds to each NRD. Each NRD will receive an FA allocation in four local priority resource concern ranking pool funds based on the resource assessment and other program criteria. The four resource concern funding pools are as follows:

- ✚ Sheet and Rill, Ephemeral, Wind and Organic Matter Depletion (Cropland)
- ✚ Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health, Inadequate Livestock Water (Grassland)
- ✚ Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water (WC)
- ✚ Excessive Plant Pest Pressure

The resource concerns to be addressed by statewide ranking pools for FY13 are:

- Excess Nutrients in Surface and Ground Water
- Excess Pathogens and Chemicals from Manure, Bio-solids, or Compost (AFO)
- Habitat Degradation (Legacy)
- Inadequate Livestock Shelter (Forestry)

TOP WETLAND PROGRAM RESTORES 2.6M ACRES IN 20 YEARS



NRCS celebrates the 20-year anniversary of the Wetlands Reserve Program, the nation's largest federal wetlands conservation effort.

Through WRP, America's farmers and ranchers helped restore over 2.6 million acres of wetlands.



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Our Story

Since its inception, NRCS has worked with farmers, ranchers, and partners to ensure a sustainable, nutritious and abundant food supply, as well as ensure clean water and healthy soil for generations to come.

Over 70 percent of land in the lower 48 states is privately owned, and in Nebraska, over 97% of the land is in private hands. The decisions American landowners make on their land has an immense impact on wildlife habitat and soil and water quality.

For over 75 years, NRCS has provided agricultural producers and private landowners with locally-led assistance to help them implement voluntary conservation practices that protect our state's natural resources while maintaining production and economic opportunities.

In Fiscal Year 2012, Nebraska NRCS issued over 2,000 conservation contracts, surpassing \$82 million in conservation assistance on over 1.5 million acres.

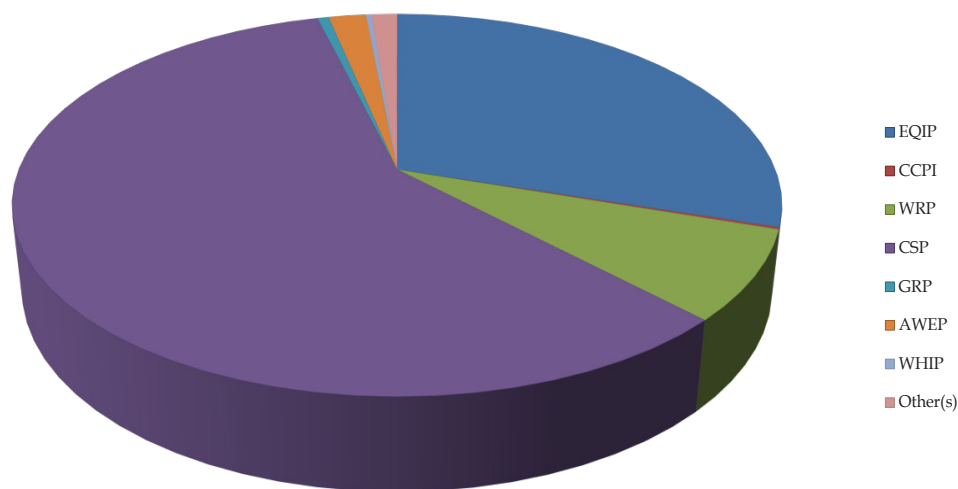
Programmatic Successes

NRCS offers a diverse array of programs that provide practical conservation on privately owned land. NRCS works directly with Nebraska's farmers and ranchers to help them make their operations more profitable and sustainable by designing conservation plans tailor-made for individual farming and ranching operations. Private dollars, coupled with Federal funding provided through the Farm Bill, work together to install conservation practices on Nebraska farm and ranch land. Below is a brief summary of new contracts obligated in FY 2012.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):

463 contracts covering close to 953,000 acres and delivering \$47 million in conservation assistance.

Nebraska NRCS FY 2012 Conservation Assistance



Breakdown of USDA Farm Bill Program Funding Allocations for Nebraska in Fiscal Year 2012. Graph by USDA-NRCS

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):

1,410 contracts covering over 525,000 acres and delivering \$25.3 million in conservation assistance.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP):

29 contracts covering 4,125 acres and delivering \$6.4 million in conservation assistance.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP):

57 contracts covering 6,033 acres and delivering over \$1.6 million in conservation assistance.

NRCS provided over 2,000 conservation contracts in FY 2012, delivering over \$82 million in conservation assistance on over 1.5 million acres to local land owners and producers.

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI):

62 contracts covering over 14,240 acres and delivering \$144,637 in conservation assistance.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP):

60 contracts covering 15,800 acres and delivering \$479,156 in conservation assistance.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP):

23 contracts covering 22,500 acres and \$231,309 in assistance.

Conservation Successes

Recognizing the recent changes in our State's resource concerns, Nebraska NRCS offered conservation initiatives and programs tailored specifically to improve water quality and help landowners recover from the historic floods of 2011.

The *National Water Quality Initiative* (NWQI) is helping producers residing within the Holmes-Creek Conestoga, Outlet Big Indian, Cottonwood Creek and Upper Cub Creek Watersheds address local resource concerns.

Over \$775,000 has been allocated to help farmers and ranchers improve water quality and aquatic habitats on 4,590 acres in these watersheds with impaired streams.

Through the *Emergency Watershed Protection Program* (EWP), NRCS worked with landowners along tributaries of the Missouri River to mitigate soil erosion and stabilize the existing stream bank and channel following the severe flooding events in 2011.

Targeting State Resource Concerns with Initiatives

NRCS initiatives allow producers to implement conservation practices that will address critical resource concerns, through locally-led efforts, while maintaining productive lands and enhancing economic opportunities. These initiatives help Nebraskans reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by natural disasters.

OGALLALA AQUIFER INITIATIVE:

The Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI) is designed to reduce the quantity of water removed from the aquifer, improve water quality using conservation practices and enhance the economic viability of OAI-area cropland. NRCS contracted with 125 agricultural producers on over 12,000 acres in developing \$4.3 million in water-saving practices such as installing more efficient irrigation methods or converting irrigated cropland to dryland. This is a true working lands initiative--allowing producers to both conserve ground water and grow agricultural products.

NATURAL LEGACY SPECIAL

INITIATIVE: NRCS dedicated funds available through EQIP to address resource concerns on lands located in Biologically Unique Landscapes (BUL's) as outlined in the state's Nebraska Natural Legacy Project. The "Natural Legacy Special Initiative" in EQIP targeted wildlife and plant species determined to be at-risk or declining and improve the habitat

available where they are located. In 2012, 18 contracts were approved for over \$500,000 in funding on 26,000 acres. Most of the projects were designed on native prairie sites where brush management, prescribed burning, and rest from grazing were used to reduce invasive plant species while infrastructure such as fence and watering facilities were installed to improve grazing management by livestock.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITY PLAN:

Over \$1 million in financial assistance has been allocated to 195 land owners for the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), and supporting practices, on over 15,000 acres. These plans help farmers develop comprehensive nutrient management plans for animal feeding operations.

ON-FARM ENERGY INITIATIVE:

NRCS has allocated \$11,461 in financial assistance to help local land owners and producers identify ways to conserve energy on their farms and provide financial assistance to implement various measures to conserve energy.

ORGANIC INITIATIVE: NRCS continues to offer financial and technical assistance to certified organic producers, those who want to make the transition to organic production, and producers who sell less than \$5,000 in organic products annually. In FY 2012, NRCS provided over \$71,000 in organic production assistance to growers on 740 acres.

SEASONAL HIGH TUNNEL

INITIATIVE: Through this initiative, 14 local producers have received \$83,315 in financial assistance. These monies will help improve plant and soil quality, reduce nutrient and pesticide transport, and reduce energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce. This emphasis on local production and distribution will help strengthen the local economy and ensure the viability of small farms.

Together, these programs and incentives protect Nebraska's natural resources and enhance agricultural land. For more information, please visit your local USDA Service Center, check us out on the web at www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov, or follow us on Twitter at @NebraskaNRCS.



NRCS staff consults with a producer about soil health and conservation.

Photo by USDA-NRCS



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