

Grant to fund looking at energy efficiency in ag

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The Nebraska Energy Office was awarded up to \$186,195 by the U.S. Department of Energy to establish a partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension to accelerate the use of energy efficiency and emerging energy technologies for homes, business, farms and ranches.

Several pilot projects are involved:

Develop the methodology for an energy and efficiency rating system for irrigation system components modeled after the ENERGY STAR® rating system and increase the awareness of the benefits of purchasing energy efficient systems for agricultural purposes.

Expand the Nebraska Agricultural Water Management Network's proven water and energy savings functions and extend technical assistance and the pioneering efforts.

Supplement current training and education on the recently adopted 2009 International Energy Conservation Code and residential weatherization assistance through innovative education methods across Nebraska.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, only three projects were selected from 20 states submitting proposals.

"Energy efficiency ratings for irrigation system components would be a first," said Ginger Willson, Director of the Nebraska Energy Office. "There are ENERGY STAR® ratings for appliances, homes and systems, but nothing to help the nation's farmers," she said. "Growing up on a Nebraska farm, I know first-hand that reducing energy use can make an agricultural operation more profitable. The Energy Office worked with UNL Extension on agricultural energy projects in the 1980s."

Nebraska ranks first nationally in total irrigated acres with approximately nine million acres. Irrigation is primarily from groundwater and requires submerged wells and a large power source

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to pump the water.

Currently, more than 50% of these systems use electricity and the number is rising. Irrigation pumping is a large expense for the producers and is also a large peak electrical load that occurs at peak air conditioning time during the summer.

“Expansion of the successful Agricultural Water Management Network will help more farmers adopt irrigation management tools that reduce water pumped and energy used,” said Suat Irmak, soil and water resources engineering specialist of University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

One acre-inch less water pumped saves the equivalent of 2.5 gallons of diesel fuel on average in Nebraska.

“Farmers participating in the NAWMN program have documented an average savings of 260 acre-inches of water and the equivalent of 650 gallons of diesel fuel on a quarter section pivot.” Irmak said.