

Agencies encourage best conservation management practices

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Despite recent precipitation, much of Nebraska is still facing dry conditions. Farmers and ranchers are planning how to best deal with the dry conditions.

Conservation agencies including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Nebraska's natural resources districts are working together with farmers and ranchers as they get ready to hit the fields. Faced with limited water resources, farmers and ranchers are turning to the NRCS and NRDs for expert advice and assistance to conserve water.

"More water can't simply be created, but conservation practices can help improve the moisture holding capacity of the soil, which provides a good defense against drought," said Craig Derickson, state conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Nebraska.

NRCS has the most up-to-date and scientifically based practices for getting conservation on the ground. Cover crops, no-tillage, crop residue management and crop rotation are a few conservation practices that can lessen the impacts of drought.

By not disturbing the soil, no-till farming keeps soil cooler longer reducing evaporation. It also builds up organic matter increasing the soil's ability to hold water. These practices combined with drought tolerant crops, soil moisture probes, flow meters and other water management tools can greatly reduce the impacts of drought.

Some of these practices are available for cost-share through your local NRCS and NRD office. In addition to cost-share, staff is available to provide technical assistance in planning these conservation practices.

In Nebraska, NRDs have local leadership responsibilities for protecting ground water from overuse and pollution, and each district has a plan to protect groundwater. State law has given the districts a variety of regulatory tools to deal with contamination, shortages or user conflicts.

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“NRDs encourage stewardship by providing financial assistance to landowners for water management and best-management practices to protect water,” said Dean Edson, executive director for the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts.

“During wet and dry years the NRDs are working with local producers to conserve and manage groundwater while protecting the economy of rural Nebraska,” said Edson.

Both NRCS and the NRDs encourage farmers and ranchers to visit their local NRCS or NRD office for more information on drought management tools and cost-share that may be available to assist with best management practices. For more information visit www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov or www.nrdnet.org.