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Inside This Issue

1

Beginning Farmer Restores Grassland

2

Agencies Share Resources to Manage Irrigation Water

3

Partnership and Perseverance Restores Wetland

4

"Pasture Walk Tour" Features Management Practices

5

RC&D Activities

6

If You Read Just One Book This Summer . . .

NEB NEWS

The Newsletter of the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service

Beginning Farmer Restores Grassland

By: Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

It took seven years, but Deuel County farmer Lesa Franken was ready to give up – give up planting wheat. After years of watching the crop struggle to grow, Franken knew she needed to do something different.

"The best yield I ever got was 10 bushels per acre. It should have never been broken for cropland in the first place," Franken said.

Franken turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Chappell, Neb., for assistance. After visiting with Anita Nein, NRCS Resource Conservationist, Franken decided to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Franken used the program to help her convert 73 acres of wheat ground into a native grass mix developed by Nein. Franken plans to graze cattle on the native grass after it becomes well established.

When Franken applied in 2005 for EQIP she was eligible to receive 90% of the cost of planting a cover crop and the native grass seed. At that time, EQIP provided up to 75% cost share, but since she had been farming for less than 10 years, Franken was eligible for an additional 15% cost share through EQIP's "Beginning Farmer or Rancher" program.

Franken has been pleased with EQIP. She says she would not have been able to make the conversion from cropland to grassland without it.

"This wouldn't have happened without EQIP. I would have just grazed the weeds and hoped that some native grass species would eventually come back. That would have taken years, and may not have happened at all. EQIP helped me get my grass established," Franken said. ♦



Photo by: Joanna Pope, NRCS
NRCS Resource Conservationist Anita Nein (left) helps landowner Lesa Franken identify native grass species on her land recently planted to grass through EQIP.

Helping People Help the Land

Agencies Share Resources to Manage Irrigation Water

By: Joanna Pope, Public Affairs Specialist

With both ground and surface water resources becoming more critical, and as concerns about water shortages mount across the state, there is a unique partnership effort in south central Nebraska helping to better manage irrigation water.

The Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (NRD) and Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) are working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help landowners across the NRD increase their irrigation water management efforts to protect water resources.

This partnership effort has resulted in the creation of a Water Management Specialist position currently filled by Curtis Scheele. Scheele works out of the NRCS office in Holdrege, but divides his time between all three organizations.

Scheele provides conservation and water management information directly from these organizations to landowners applying both ground and surface irrigation water. This information has become extremely valuable during the recent dry years, and where irrigation water supplies are limited.

Scheele's favorite part of the job is working one-on-one with irrigators. Some of the assistance he provides includes measuring the output of wells and calculating their pumping capacity. He also presents at and organizes field demonstrations and sends out a bi-weekly irrigation newsletter to over 200 people during irrigation season.

The partnership between NRCS, the NRD and CNPPID has also created an opportunity for

local college students. To help manage the increased workload during irrigation season, students from the University of Nebraska at Kearney are hired by the NRD as summer interns. The NRD shares the interns with the other partners creating a win-win situation. The students gain valuable career experience, and the agencies are provided with additional help.

The interns, which are also signed up as Earth Team volunteers, assist NRCS with irrigation field demos, measuring well outputs, compliance reviews for programs, building irrigation and wetland GIS inventories, and much more.

Scheele is proud to be a part of this distinctive partnership effort.

“This job is very unique with the partnership and how we all work together – all for the common good of managing water,” Scheele said. ♦



Photo courtesy of the Kearney Hub

NRCS Water Management Specialist Curtis Scheele (left) shows NRD intern and Earth Team volunteer Josh Johnson how to use an ultrasonic flow meter.

Partnership and Perseverance Restores Wetland

By: Matt Glesinger, NRCS Resource Conservationist

When Greeley County farmer Robert Meyer visited the Greeley NRCS office in late 2001, he had a unique problem. A wetland with a no longer functioning tile-drain had created a large gully in his field. Silt had entered the wetland due to erosion, and the area was choked with Reed Canary grass.

After discussing his options, the Greeley NRCS field office suggested Meyer enroll his wetland into the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Meyer agreed to sign up, but since the field was difficult to access with farm equipment, he wanted the entire field enrolled into WRP.

This request presented some additional challenges. WRP only allows a certain amount of upland acres (acres not considered part of the actual wetland) to be enrolled into the program. Due to this additional challenge, it would take over five years and a team of federal, state and local agencies to get the wetland restored.

A team consisting of NRCS Soil Scientist Bob Rayer (now in Col.), NRCS Civil Engineering Technician Joe Dush, NRCS Resource Conservationists Matt Glesinger and Bill Gilg, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Kirk Schroder and Nebraska Game and Parks Biologist Laurel Badura was formed to assist Meyer restore his wetland.



Photo by: Matt Glesinger, NRCS

This Greeley County wetland was restored through the Wetlands Reserve Program with a cooperative effort from state, federal and local agencies.

The WRP application was ranked, and a plan was developed. An exemption to the upland acres was granted by NRCS State Conservationist Steve Chick. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the local Pheasants Forever chapter offered funds for a land use payment on the remaining 15 acres.

Restoration began in May 2006. Over 9,500 cubic yards of soil were excavated from the wetland and used to repair the gully created by the tile drain. The tile was sealed. A cover crop was seeded using equipment and seed from the local Pheasants Forever chapter. The final restoration practice was completed in April 2007.

This spring the area received over 12 inches of rain. When Matt Glesinger completed a recent field visit he saw the wetland was functioning as designed. Ducks were enjoying the shallow water area. Several different shorebirds were seen. Prairie chickens and a hen pheasant flew out of the newly seeded upland.

Over five years had passed since Robert Meyer had made his initial visit to the NRCS office. But in the end, through the cooperation of many individuals, agencies and organizations, Meyer's goals had been realized with the restoration of this unique wetland. ♦

“Pasture Walk Tour” Features Management Practices

By: Joyce Reicks, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician

About 70 producers attended the “Pasture Walk Tour” on Aug. 2 in Stanton County. Speakers at the tour included, Dana Larsen, NRCS State Range Specialist; Dennis Bauer, Northeast Research and Extension Interim Director; Terry Gompert, Extension Educator; Bruce Ofe, Antelope County Weed Control; Loyd Molacek, Stanton County Weed Control; and Ted Poeschl, Stanton NRCS Technician.

The first site toured featured an expired Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) field that had several improvements installed such as cross fences, watering facilities, pipeline, grass seeding, and a center pivot. The second site compared two management systems across the fence from each other. It showed how paddock size, pasture monitoring, stocking rate, and the placement of fence, pipeline and tank can affect the health of a pasture. On the last site leafy spurge control - both biological and chemical - was discussed, along with grass rotation and utilization.

All three sites obtained funding for improvements through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Lower Elkhorn NRD. The NRD also supplied refreshments and food for attendees. ♦



Photo by: Robin Sutherland, NRCS

Bruce Ofe with Antelope County Weed Control speaks about biological control of leafy spurge during the “Pasture Walk Tour”.

Upcoming Events

August 22
Whirlwind No-Till Expo
9 a.m.
Brian and Keith Berns' farm
Bladen, Neb.

For more information contact the No-Till on the Plains at (888) 330-5142 or visit www.notill.org.

August 28
Tree Planting and Care Workshop
5:30 - 8 p.m.
Nielsen Communications
Inman, Neb.

For more information call Jason Severe (402) 336-3796 ext. 3, or Steve Rasmussen (402) 370-4024.

Sept. 14
State Wildlife Grant Program
Application Deadline

An application and related materials are available at <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/programs/grants/>.

October 5-7
Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Nebraska State 4-H Camp
Halsey, Neb.

For more information visit www.NebraskaBOW.com

RC&D Activities

PrairieLand RC&D Tire Collection Event Grows

Over the past five years Al Mittan, Coordinator for the PrairieLand RC&D in Madison, Neb., estimates that its tire collection events have resulted in over 1,000 tons of used tires being collected for recycling.

In the past, tire rims would not be accepted at these collection events. After Mittan noticed a need for this service, he decided to expand the tire collection events and start accepting rims along with the tires. He made arrangements for a salvage crew to deal with the rims and told them they could sell all of the metal they collected for scrap.

“They were overwhelmed with the amount of rims collected. I never dreamed it would be so successful, but I think we have brought in around 60 tons of rims over the past two seasons,” Mittan said. ♦



Photo by: Al Mittan, NRCS

The village of Platte Center built the above rim crushing machine from the money they collected from last year's tire rim scrap metal. The money they collect this year will help the village buy tools and equipment for the community.

Loup Basin Technology Center Open for Business

The Loup Basin RC&D saw one of its projects come to completion last month. The Loup Basin Technology Center held a ribbon cutting ceremony on July 13 in Ord, Neb. The Tech Center offers state-of-the-art presentation equipment, laptop computers, satellite downlink, video conferencing, wireless Internet access and more.

The Tech Center is located at the Valley County Fairgrounds. It is an ideal environment for continuing education, college coursework, computer training and video conferencing. Governor Heineman and other dignitaries were present and spoke at the event. ♦



Governor Heineman (red tie) attended the Loup Basin Technology Center's Grand Opening.

If You Read Just One Book This Summer . . .

By: Joanna Pope, unofficial book reviewer

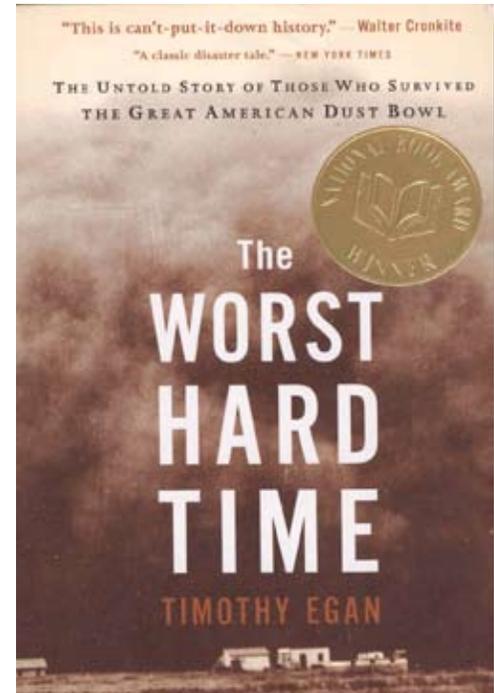
(This is the opinion of the writer and not an endorsement by NRCS)

“The Worst Hard Time” was recommended to me by one of our Earth Team volunteers. She picked up the book in passing at an airport, but quickly became engrossed in the heart wrenching stories about the Dust Bowl. As soon as she finished the book she shared it with me. I also couldn’t put it down.

“The Worst Hard Time” not only talks about the Dust Bowl, but also features a lively account of what Hugh Hammond Bennett was like as a person. He was a passionate, persuasive man, who single-handedly gained approval to form the first “soil conservation districts”, which eventually evolved into the modern-day Natural Resources Conservation Service. The book features a great story about that day. The skies literally turned black over Congress. It was dust from the Great Plains blowing into Washington, D.C. The funding for the “Soil Erosion Service” was approved immediately.

Although most of the book features farmers and ranchers from Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas, the Republican River Valley near Red Cloud, Neb., is featured in a few chapters. These chapters contain excerpts from a Nebraska farmer’s diary. His farm was near Inavale, and his story is one of the most heartbreaking.

This book leaves you with more questions than answers, but I think they’re questions worth contemplating. It also makes you proud to work for NRCS. ♦



NEB NEWS - The newsletter for the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service is issued quarterly. For more information on how to submit a story, comments about NEB NEWS, or to unsubscribe, contact Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, at (402) 437-4123, or at joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov. If you have a story idea, feel free to contact her at the number above.

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