



NEWS RELEASE

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Agriculture**

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For Immediate Release

GRAZING CONSERVATION PRACTICES GET MORE COST-SHARE

BISMARCK, ND, May 5, 2003—North Dakota's grassland resource continues to be under stress from ongoing drought. "Though some areas of the state have received some rain, the overall statewide conditions are still pretty dry," said NRCS State Conservationist Tom Jewett. In response to this drought threat, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is adding resource management incentives through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to assist livestock producers in addressing the long-term impacts caused by drought.

Jewett announced NRCS will adjust cost-share rates for grazing practices. In an attempt to help producers move to a more sustainable operation, cost-share for fencing to implement grazing systems, spring developments, tanks, pipelines, and wells will be increased from 60 percent to 75 percent under EQIP. Incentives may also be available for those livestock producers wishing to change their grazing management strategy by implementing a prescribed grazing system.

"Feedback from our local county offices was that this action would be extremely useful to producers trying to cope with drought losses," Jewett said.

This spring, NRCS grazing land specialists are recommending that livestock producers delay spring grazing on drought-stressed pastures allowing grassland plants to gain enough leaf area to become self-sustaining.

How soon the grasses will be ready depends upon soil moisture and the health of the plant's root system. "Plants that were healthy with deep root systems will respond quicker than plants that have been weakened by prolonged overgrazing and drought," said Jeff Printz, NRCS State Rangeland Management Specialist. According to Printz, recovery time will vary from ranch to ranch, depending on past grazing management practices. "Our experiences have shown that producers who are practicing good grazing management in the past will be better able to withstand the current dry conditions with quicker recovery when the drought breaks," added Printz.

Even with the additional EQIP cost-share, grazing land specialists worry that ranchers will hold off making improvements because of financial constraints due to last year's drought. The next 30 days will be critical for assessing the condition and production capacity of the grasslands.

For more information on EQIP, contact your local NRCS office located in the USDA Service Center.

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